

WIRRAL TRANSPORT USER

The Newsletter of the Wirral Transport Users Association

ANGUS TILSTON MBE

Angus Tilston MBE, co-founder and long-standing committee member of the *Wirral Transport Users Association*, died in August aged 86. Angus was a man of many talents and great diligence which he applied to his wide-ranging interests. In his role as a committee member of the WTUA, he contributed to and edited the *Wirral Transport User* news sheet, organised coach trips to places of transport interest and represented the society on the *Liverpool John Lennon Airport Consultative Committee*. In the 70s, he was responsible for setting up the *Bebington Rail Action Group* to fight against the proposed closure of most of the stations on the Rock Ferry to Chester line.

The trips he organised ranged from preserved railways in the Lake District to the narrow gauge railways of Wales. They were always well-researched beforehand to include good eating and drinking establishments at each coach stop. To those of us who participated in his coach trips, Angus gave us wonderful days to remember with great affection.

Others will remember him for his interest in film-making; he filmed the changing Merseyside scene for over 60 years. He also collected historic films



of the area made by others and, together with those of his own, formed an archive which he exhibited at many screenings and which provided the basis for his publication of a catalogue of local history videos. He received his MBE for services to historic-film making.

Whatever he turned to, it was his natural ability to organise that really showed through. He will be greatly missed.

Compiled with extracts taken from a note written by Graham Kay of Swan Moviemakers.

P.S. For the past 39 years, Angus presented his annual Transport Show to a large and appreciative audience. This year on Friday 15th November at 7:30pm, Swan Moviemakers will present the 40th show dedicated to his memory at Bebington's Civic Centre. For further details, see poster on last page.

Angus as remembered by John Ryan (chair of the WTUA)

In the 1970s, because Angus was known for his organisational skills within the *Lever* empire at Port Sunlight, a Wirral councillor told him of a proposed scheme to close all the wayside stations south of Rock Ferry except Bromborough and Hooton. Despite the new Liverpool Loop, the eastern branch of the Wirral electrified lines was planned to continue no further than Rock Ferry. Angus quickly arranged a public meeting at a school in Bromborough which he chaired. As a result, the *Bebington Rail Action Group* (BRAG) was formed. Objections to the closure plan were collected from interested parties and the public to use as ammunition by this pressure group.

At this time, I was a liaison engineer in the British Rail (Liverpool) Civil Engineers Department as part of a very large team building the new underground railways in Liverpool and Birkenhead (the Liverpool Loop, Moorfields to Central link and Birkenhead Burrowing Junction). I joined BRAG, purely as an advisor, keeping a low profile as I was a BR employee.

Eventually, the group was successful in getting the closure plan scrapped. So BRAG was closed down in May 1985 but not before, still under Angus' chairmanship, a nearly-unanimous decision was made not to terminate activities. After much discussion, the *Wirral Transport Users Association* was

formed, with interests extending to bus, ferry and, yes, private transport, civic 'problems', etc., plus air as the then-named Liverpool Airport grew. This much-enlarged focus meant that we met more frequently. Coach trips to sites of transport interest were organised- even a 'long-weekend' in France after *Eurostar* opened (1995).

After many years as chairman, Angus asked me if I would become chairman. I had retired from BR in 1993 and I became 'chair' around about 2005, a position I still hold. In the 30+ years of the WTUA's existence, we have been fortunate to have seen the gradual improvement of the whole railways scene with massive investments in its infrastructure. On the Wirral, this has resulted in extension of electrification to Chester and Ellesmere Port with associated improved timings of services. Major refurbishment of stations has been done which has resulted in improved disabled access by the installation of lifts, enclosed waiting room spaces and the provision of bikes for hire. A new station has been built at Bromborough Rake. Investment continues with the planned introduction of new trains due in 2020. This has necessitated extensive works to relevel station platforms.

Angus must have been amazed at how things have progressed from his days at BRAG!

JMR – October 2019

Reflections on a Remarkable Man

I first met Angus when he was 18 and I was 17, when we sat together in the Accounts Department of *Lever Brothers* in Port Sunlight. Angus was a fiery ginger-headed lad, rather quiet,

but determined. That young man went on to blossom and emerge as the man we all knew – Angus Tilston MBE.

Angus gained a silver medal in ballroom dancing. I guess not many of

you will know that he met his wife Ena at one of the regular ballroom dances he went to in Hulme Hall, Port Sunlight. He was also a reasonable tennis player and together with my late wife Anne we spent many evenings playing tennis together at Bebington Park. We discovered we had a mutual interest in photography and we joined the Port Sunlight Photographic Club.

Angus had an old 9.5 cine camera and so we set about making a film which we had the courage to show at Bebington Meyer Hall to an audience of 150+. At the time Angus lived at Swan Hill in Birkenhead and I had a photograph of a swan, hence the formation of *Swan Moviemakers* which is still going strong some 63 years later with membership of close on 30.

He was posted to Germany to complete his National Service. Whilst in Germany, he gained his qualification as a Management Accountant. He also learned to speak German which we were able to use on his return to form an association which organised holidays by coach to Austria. We expanded this over the next four years with the intention to go professional and open an office in New Ferry.

The travel agency idea was knocked on the head when his wife Ena announced she was pregnant with Nicola and furthermore pointed out we had very good jobs and prospects with *Lever Brothers*. Not to be outdone, we took a timeshare in an apartment in Malta which we developed and eventually owned. This was before timeshares were common practice. After about five years we sold it to the son of the then President of Malta.

Angus carried on with his employment with *Unilever* (as it is now called) working in the Home Sales division (apart from a short period on loan to

Lever Brothers Ghana Ltd, where on completion of his contract a football match was staged in his honour).

Whilst in full employment, Angus went on to explore and develop his interest, knowledge and authority in archival film. His collection is now one of the most significant and important private collections in the North-West.

On retirement, he formed his own company which he called *Pleasures Past* and in time went on to produce and make some 30 films depicting life in and around the Merseyside area spanning the past 60 years of history. These films have given enormous pleasure to many countywide.

Angus' contribution to film services was recognised and together with his late wife Ena and daughter Nicola he went to Buckingham Palace to receive his MBE from Prince Charles.



Angus had wide interests and he became president of the *United Kingdom 9.5 Association* as well as a committee member and founder member of *Wirral Transport Users Association*.

Angus will be remembered for making use of his hobbies to give enormous pleasure to many and, above all, remembered as a gentleman.

With thanks to Peter Jones.

RAILWAY NOTES and JOTTINGS

It appears that 'Pacers' – those love-to-hate busses on rails – will still be running around Manchester in the early months of 2020. South Yorkshire has also been given a similar warning!

On the Wrexham-Bidston line, class 150 units are to be replaced by 153s at this year's winter timetable change. Class 153s have longer dwell-times; they have small end-doors unlike the 'suburban' 150s (1/3 and 2/3 door locations). Running in pairs *Transport for Wales* say performance will still be ok. *Wrexham-Bidston Rail Users Association* (WBRUA)'s John Allcock doubts this. WBRUA and *Wrexham Maelor Council* were two of the organisations not told of this change! Discovered by the 'back-door', they are up in arms about it. The 150s will be kept for South Wales.

Northern's new class 331/0 EMUs (electric multiple units) can now be seen on Lime Street to Blackpool services. They replace older and slower-accelerating class 319 units. However, the operator will withdraw them as they will now keep and upgrade the 'swift' class 323s – already often seen in Lime Street. Also, *West Midlands'* 323s will now be coming north when new trains replace them around Birmingham. This will enable *Northern* to run standard 3-car off-peak and 6-car peak services without resort to more than minor platform extension work.

Meanwhile, preparation of *Merseyrail* stations for the new trains continues. On Wirral, work has just finished on Chester platform 7 and also on the down-side platform (travelling towards Hooton) of Green Lane.

Improved Wirral stations-- under the government's 'Access for All' scheme, Meols is being fitted with new lifts which connect by walkways with the existing footbridge (see pics).



Completion is planned for November. The WTUA committee is pushing for works to improve access to Spital station also under this scheme. This station is busy and has a well-used car park but access to the platforms is only by stairs - it is desperately in need of two-lift access. However, there is work being done at the station- its car park is being extended.

Class 195's have started running on the Chester-Leeds via Calder Valley service. This route is slower than the through route between Chester and Leeds but provides access to a different set of stations which include Manchester Victoria, Rochdale, Hebden Bridge and Bradford. The new trains should be faster but will they be able to change the timetable? After a slow start and little publicity, patronage seems to be increasing. This comes at a time when *Northern's* future is in question.

The new service from Liverpool Lime St to Chester via the Halton Curve is loading well and cheaper than the *Merseyrail* alternative (via Birkenhead).

Chester Station needs to be improved

Chester station urgently needs its passenger-handling capacity to be expanded in order to cope with the current and projected increased number of services. It is the 8th busiest station in the North West and, compared to Welsh stations, is 2nd only to Cardiff.

Its long-established services are: *Merseyrail* to Liverpool with a peak service every 15 mins; *Virgin* to London and North Wales; North Wales coast locals; and Chester to Manchester Piccadilly via Warrington and Northwich. New services introduced this year are: Chester to Liverpool via the newly reinstated bidirectional-working Halton Curve link; and the Chester to Leeds service via Manchester Victoria and Bradford. The latter has seen the introduction of new fast class 195 trains (see pic) from October 20th. For a through journey to Leeds this is about half an hour slower than the route via Manchester Piccadilly (which involves a change).



Traffic on both new services is building and there are ambitions by *Transport for Wales* for all the former routes to be extended beyond Chester to Wrexham. Doubling the frequency of services to half-hourly on the Chester-

Northwich-Altrincham line has been proposed by *Northern* but has been refused probably because it would cause pathing problems at Mickle Trafford junction.

The east side of Chester station also has pathing restrictions. An island platform could be built in the former goods yard with a footbridge linking it to the rest of the station. Another footbridge linking with the Hoole side or to the Hoole road bridge would ease pedestrian access from the north side of Chester. It would also ease the load on the existing footbridge from the (only) station entrance which is often overcrowded and would avoid the current detour via steps and maybe also the narrow pavement on the Hoole road bridge. For many years, various groups and politicians have proposed that this bridge be rebuilt for safety reasons. Combining both plans may be possible. *Cheshire West and Chester Council* and local Rail User Groups support the need for improvements. *Transport for Wales* also needs to improve capacity on the south end of the Chester-Wrexham line which is currently a single track, to support their ambitions for increased services.



View of the station from Hoole road bridge showing the former goods yard on the left. This is where an island platform could be located to increase train capacity. It would need extension of the existing footbridge. Extra footbridge(s) could be constructed for access from Hoole and/or Hoole road bridge.

FERRIES

In 2013, *Mersey Ferries* decided to reduce its ferry fleet from three to two vessels. They considered that their services could be successfully supported with just two vessels and so decommissioned the ROYAL DAFFODIL which had been plagued with mechanical problems. The redundant vessel was berthed in Birkenhead Docks to await its fate, which has caused its condition to gradually deteriorate. Eventually it was sold to a company who intend to refurbish it and promote it as a leisure attraction in Liverpool's Canning Dock. In May of this year she was towed to the *Carmet Marine Services* shipyard to have her engines removed to allow more space for her new leisure owner's plan (see pic). It is not yet known when she will be moved to her new berth at Canning Dock.



ROYAL DAFFODIL (whose original name was OVERCHURCH) was built at Cammell Laird in 1962, the other two vessels, ROYAL IRIS of the MERSEY (originally MOUNTWOOD) and SNOWDROP (originally WOODCHURCH) having been built on the River Dart in 1959. The last two mentioned will remain in service until a new vessel or vessels are built and ready in about three years' time.

28/10/19

COMMITTEE DETAILS	
Chairman & Rail Matters:	
Deputy Chairman & Chester Area Sec:	
Secretary:	VACANT – volunteer required!
Membership Sec:	
Treasurer:	
Friends of the Ferries:	
General Members:	
Editorial Team:	

The **WTUA's website** is at www.wirraltua.org.uk As well as giving information about the WTUA, it contains photos and movies of previous trips and copies of previous *Wirral Transport Users*.

Photos of Prototype Class 777 in Pacific Road Sheds (Birkenhead) taken in Autumn 2018.

The new class 777s units will start to replace those of the current Merseyrail fleet in 2020. The first has just started dynamic testing in Germany. The trains are made up of 4 articulated cars and can be doubled up for busy periods. The car door openings do not have a fixed doorstep but feature a horizontal sliding floor plate under each doorway which moves out towards and level with the station platform before the doors open. This enables step-free transfer between coach and platform thus providing easy entry for passengers with luggage and bicycles and unassisted access for most disabled passengers.



For more information on these trains (including a short movie of the sliding floor plate), see <http://www.wirraltua.org.uk/html/news.html>.

40th Anniversary
TRANSPORT
FILM SHOW

**... by Swan Movie Makers, Wirral
in tribute to the late Angus Tilston MBE**



Friday 15th November at 7.30pm
Bebington Suite
Bebington Civic Centre
Civic Way, Bebington, CH63 7PN

Tickets £6 available from James Chalmers
0151 336 4253
(email: james.chalmers@btinternet.com)
or pay at the door