

SPRIT OF BRITISH TRAMS A CONCISE HISTORY

Robin Jones

The world's first streetcar line was in New York which began operating in 1832. However, it was an American, George Train, who opened Britain's first true permanent street tramway, in Birkenhead on 30 August 1860. The Edwardian era saw a mass explosion in the building and electrifying of tram routes in towns and cities throughout Britain, and by 1910, there were more than 300 tramways, nearly half of them opened in the first decade of the twentieth century. By 1914, the combined London area tram operators comprised the largest tram network in Europe. However, the First World War called a halt to the expansion of tramways, as tens of thousands of drivers, conductors and other staff joined the armed forces.

The writing on the wall for trams had by then begun to appear, with only five new lines opening during 1910-13. The motor omnibus had begun to arrive and offered far greater flexibility, especially in places where tram routes had been found to be unprofitable. The 1930s marked the start of a mass abandonment of tramways as road traffic increased.

Around the beginning of the 1950s trams became the target of preservationists, and today major historic collections are held at the Crich Tramway Village, the Beamish Open Air Museum and the Seaton Tramway to name but three. Commercial trams have also made a major comeback in Britain's cities. Worsening road congestion following soaring levels of car ownership saw planners look again at the tram concept, and draw up several light rail schemes. Far from being an anachronism, such developments suggest that street trams may well have been ahead of their time.

Expert Robin Jones re-tells the story of Britain's trams. In more than 60 images and with a sharp and incisive text, *Spirit of British Trams* is the ideal brief guide, in Halsgrove's new collectible, pocket-size format.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

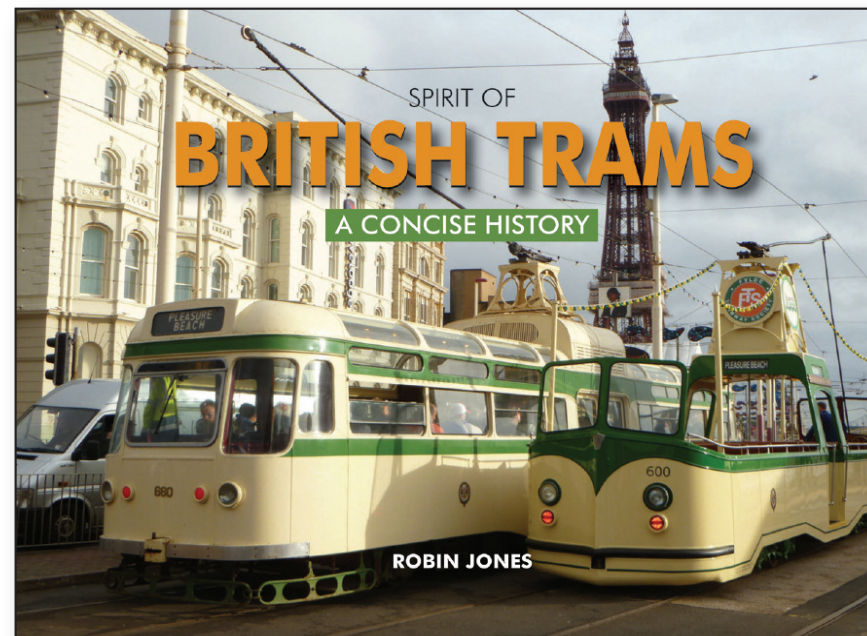
A graduate of the University of Central England, Robin Jones, founding editor of *Heritage Railway* magazine, was a news editor and chief investigative reporter at the *Birmingham Evening Mail*, and over the years has produced several books and special publications, along with historical features for numerous other newspapers and periodicals. He has been interested in railways from a very early age, when his elder brother Stewart took him trainspotting at Widney Manor Station in Solihull at the age of four; at the end of the British Railways steam age.

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SPIRIT OF BRITISH TRAMS



Belfast double decker No 357, was manufactured in 1930 and is now an exhibit inside the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum. The Belfast Corporation Tramways lines were electrified in 1905 and the last tram ran in 1954.



Blackpool 1925-built balloon car No 712, where it now carries its original fleet number 249, stands at Crich alongside London Passenger Transport Board Car 1, constructed in 1932.



Magnus Volks' Electric Railway was both the first electric railway and electric tramway in Britain, and is still giving sterling service along Brighton's eastern sea front.



Old soldier: unrestored Leamington & Warwick Tramways Car 1 was built in 1881 and is now exhibited inside Crich's exhibition hall.
Opposite: Leeds 399 dates from 1925: was the second passenger tram to arrive at Crich, although it was not restored until 1991.



Example of a double-page spread.



The Heaton Park Tramway's award-winning restored Manchester Carriage and Tramways Company Eades patent reversible horse tram No L53, unique among surviving trams in that it uses the horses' own power to turn the body of the tram round on its underframe when reaching the end of the tracks.



The Seaton Tramway gives birdwatchers unrivalled views of the River Axe estuary. Car 11, built in 2005 and based on design elements from Plymouth and Blackburn tramcars, heads towards Colyford.