

## **OLD LADY RETURNS HOME**

A part of Exeter's transport heritage has just returned home after a long trip from Northampton where she had lived since 1965. We refer to a former Exeter Corporation single-deck bus, new to the City on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1929. One of three Maudslay buses purchased that year, this was an attempt to provide some alternative routes to those run by the trams. Also purchased for the same reason were two vehicles of Leyland and two of Bristol manufacture, all seven vehicles having virtually identical bodywork constructed by the Northern Counties Motor & Engineering Company of Wigan.

The Maudslay, registered FJ6154, that has just returned began life running on short journeys between Bedford Circus to St Matthew's Vicarage at the start of Topsham Road. Another circular service ran from the Theatre Royal via Iddesleigh Road and Belmont Road, very difficult to imagine in today's congested streets. The Maudslay could also be found working the Paul Street to Okehampton Street service via Exe Bridge, later extended to the bottom of Redhills. All these services were soon to be modified or extended to other places where the trams could not reach.

Robert Crawley, Chairman of the West Country Historic Omnibus & Transport Trust, which has been instrumental in the return of the bus, explained that Exeter City Council must have been pleased with the performance of the Maudslays, for they ordered six more in 1930 and a further one in 1931 before embarking on double-deck buses. During the war some of them were converted to ambulances but FJ6154 (fleet number 5) was sold in January 1939 to Mr Gorman, a local scrap metal merchant. Before he had time to cut it up, along came a local farmer who could see an instant use for it as a temporary home. The bus features two passenger doors, one at the front and another at the rear, enabling its 32 seats to be split into two separate compartments, in those days provided for the pleasure of smokers and non-smokers alike. The bus was moved to Woodwater Lane, then very much in the countryside just beyond Heavitree, and placed roughly where the Walter Daw School is now situated. Here the Arden family lived in it for a while and subsequently they acquired more superior accommodation and the bus was moved to Haldon where Mr Arden, a keen aeroplane enthusiast, had a small landing strip. By all accounts it was repainted silver and used as a 'beacon' for aircraft and a rest room between aero acrobatics. Had it not been for the temporary accommodation, this vehicle might easily have been broken up and history taken a completely different course.

By 1960 it had been moved into a barn and almost forgotten, the interior becoming a dry place to store hay. In Northampton a company called Yorks Coaches, that had originally started out running vehicles of Maudslay manufacture, were keen to acquire a historic example of the Coventry built chassis. The York family scoured the country making enquiries as to the possibility of one still being in existence. News of this reached Exeter and a deal was struck with Mr Arden who released the Maudslay to its new owners in October 1965. It could not have gone to a better home as Yorks towed the bus 222 miles to their workshops and embarked on a serious restoration project, bringing the bus back to almost original condition, with things like a missing exhaust

system having to be cobbled together using modern pipework and a little ingenuity. They also fitted some tables and quality seats in red vinyl so that it could be used for promotional work, as well as repainting it in their own blue livery. Yorks Coaches is today owned by the Moseley Group and it was through them that WHOTT has been able to negotiate a release back to the westcountry, generously helped by a Friend of the Trust who has put up the purchase money.

Robert Crawley explained that this is a hugely important addition to the WHOTT collection. It not only provides Exeter with the return of part of its heritage but the vehicle itself can be classed of National importance too. I am delighted that WHOTT has been able to be part of this acquisition and it is intended to complete the restoration as faithfully as possible by replacing the seating and repainting the exterior to as near original as possible. A target date of May 2013 has been set for completion, using volunteering skills. Anybody who has any photographs or recollections of Exeter's earliest buses, or indeed would like to know more about the project, can contact WHOTT on 01395-567795 or through its website [info@busmuseum.org.uk](mailto:info@busmuseum.org.uk)