

# Alan Atkinson

*Headteacher, former LUPTS President and Furness Railway expert*



Alan as he's remembered fondly by LUPTS members, camera at the ready. The occasion was the 2012 bus tour and the venue is the Museum of Transport in Manchester. Appropriately, Alan is leaning against the preserved SHMD Atkinson double decker. *Chris Poole*

Alan Atkinson had a lifelong active interest in transport from his earliest days growing up in Millom, right through to his working retirement in charge of the team of Travelling Ticket Inspectors on the Severn Valley Railway. He was born in Ulverston, Lancashire in 1948 and was already interested in transport by the time he went to school. Giving the eulogy at Alan's funeral, school friend David Hughes remembered how Alan used to lead a ritual lunchtime walk from school to the railway to view the 12:18 Millom to London train, sometimes being rewarded by the sight of a named locomotive. Always top of the class, Alan was destined to achieve and took up a place at the University of Liverpool in 1966 to study Physics. It was at University where he first met his wife-to-be Jean and, getting married in 1973, they enjoyed over 40 years of marriage.

Alan was aware of LUPTS before he moved to Liverpool, his attention being drawn to it by reports of early railtours and the preservation of ex-Liverpool tramcar 869. His arrival in Liverpool coincided with the ambitious Wirral and Mersey Special railtour of 22 October 1966, a tour he wrote about in the 1976 Journal, along with some of his early LUPTS memories.

"I came up to the University in October 1966 and having dutifully read the Students' Handbook before my arrival, I paid my membership and joined LUPTS at the Freshers Conference. I had never been a member of a

transport society before (they do not abound in the remote corner of north west England whence I had come) and here was a thriving society who had run two railtours and had preserved a tram.

"I got off to a rather bad start at LUPTS meetings, being late for the first one due to misguided loyalty to the Physics department and missing the second one altogether through misreading the 24 hour clock and turning up two hours late. Despite my lack of contact with the Society, I did manage to discover that LUPTS was organising a rail tour which was to run within the next few weeks. A rail tour was something novel to me – my railway activities prior to leaving home had been confined to "spotting" and photographing the local scene – and so it was with some indecision that I paid my £2 and booked my ticket. At the time, £2 seemed a lot of money to spend on riding round on a train all day and not going anywhere in particular." His article concludes: "... it had been an excellent day – my first railtour and I still think one of the best."



A picture of Alan as a child in Millom, which refutes the belief that he was born with his distinctive sideburns. *Atkinson family collection*



Bradford, on the occasion of the LUPTS trolleybus tour on 15 March 1970, where the Society hired this ex-St Helens vehicle for a trip round the system. Alan is third from right at the rear. Also pictured are Ray Shill, Alan Murray-Rust, Steve Poole, Tom White, Steve Glancey and Chris Moyes. *Howard Piltz/Alan Atkinson Collection*

In fact LUPTS was going through one of its intermittent crisis periods and Alan quickly took on an active role in the Society. He was Secretary in 1969/1970 and Chairman in 1970/1971. He was also Journal Editor on a number of occasions, often writing many of the articles himself. As well as the railtour article referred to above, for the 1976 edition he also wrote pieces on 'The Electric Railways of Greater Manchester' and 'The Bellamy Cars', illustrating his all round interest in, and knowledge of, transport. Tongue-in-cheek, he bemoaned the fact that he was editor again: "Yet again, I seem to have foolishly volunteered to edit the journal. Looking back, I did it in 1968, 1972 and 1974 –

can't anyone else edit Journals?" He was also actively involved in the production of the two industrial railway booklets (*Register of industrial locomotives: South Lancashire and North Cheshire* and *The Locomotives of Peckett and Sons*) which Ian Young compiled in 1968/1969 and which helped LUPTS finances significantly.



Ironically, these two photographs, which accompanied the obituary of John Forrester earlier in 2013, also show Alan. He is on the left of the first picture, taken at Rose Hill on the occasion of the LUPTS Mancunian railtour on 28 February 1976. Centre rear on the second picture taken at Loughborough on 15 May 1976, the picture also features (second and third from right) Phil Johnson (d 18 January 1983) and John Forrester (d 26 January 2013). Both pictures by David Ventry

When formed in 1958, LUPTS had elected Dr Allan Patmore of the Geography department as its first president. In 1973, Dr Patmore moved to Hull University to take up a professorship and Alan was elected LUPTS president in his place at the agm on 17 May 1973. He had followed his Physics degree with a Postgraduate Certificate in Education in 1971 but remained in Liverpool as he followed his chosen career in the teaching profession. He was firstly at St Margaret's CE High School in Aigburth, then at St Hilda's CE High School in Sefton Park and later, as Head of Science, at New Heys Comprehensive School. During this time, Alan and Jean were almost ever present at Thursday evening LUPTS meetings until they left the Merseyside area to live in Hagley near Stourbridge in 1985, and Jonathan Cadwallader took over as president. Alan gave many talks to LUPTS over the years, both in his student days and subsequently. The database records 22 such presentations but there were certainly more during the periods for which minute books have never come to light. Amongst his regular topics were railway architecture and he was a particular aficionado of the signal or gable end finial. He also spoke about the Furness Railway, with particular reference to his home town of Millom, and his expertise in this subject eventually led to the publication of his acclaimed book *Millom: a Cumberland iron town and its railways* (Cumbrian Railways Association, 2012), which was published less than a year before he died.



The post-exam day out at the end of the 1981/82 academic year was on 12 June 1982. This was Alan's 34th birthday, or "934th" if Jonathan Cadwallader's commemorative blind was to be believed. Alan fails in his attempt to lift the front wheels of the preserved ex-Liverpool PD2 off the ground at Blaenau Ffestiniog. Jonathan Cadwallader



Alan and Jean played major roles in organising the LUPTS 25th anniversary event on 18 June 1983 and are seen here posing alongside 'Sir Drefaldwyn' which was about to take the special charter train back to Llanfair Caereinion from Welshpool. There had been a convivial buffet lunch in Llanfair Caereinion attended by over 60 people. Many of the participants had travelled from Liverpool in preserved Ribble PD3 1775, with an evening stop in Gobowen on the way back north. Charles Roberts/Online Transport Archive



On 25 June 1983, a well-supported trip to the Bala Lake and Tal-y-Llyn Railways required the hiring of two minibuses. On the return journey, a stop was made in Corwen where Alan and Jean are seen in the company of Dave Lockyer and others. David Ventry

In his presidential capacity, he was required to conduct the elections at each agm, a task which was often made difficult by the nomination of spurious candidates. In his own inimitable way, Dave Parker recalls particularly the 1983 agm, which featured the candidatures of Dr Who, Wilf "Gasmask" Grimshaw and Guy the Gorilla. Alan ensured that matters were given the necessary decorum as he asked that "Messrs Who, Grimshaw and Gorilla please leave the room" while a fair election was conducted. None of these candidates was successful.

Alan and Jean frequently returned to participate in LUPTS activities, particularly for Bus Tours when they would habitually take the rear seats on the lower deck of the tour vehicle. Writing shortly after Alan's death, Keith Nason –

who, along with Chris Poole, was grateful for Alan's professional advice as they entered the teaching profession – remarked that “The downstairs at the back of the bus (on the LUPTS Tour) will never be the same.”

Alan was Deputy Head at Britannia High School in Rowley Regis from 1985 until 1998, then Headteacher until 2001. Steve Poole, who was a contemporary of Alan's at the University of Liverpool and latterly lived nearby in the West Midlands, recalls that in his last couple of years at Britannia, the local TV news reporters would sometimes find the need to obtain a view of some issue in education and would go and interview him. Later that evening, slumped in front of the television, Steve would suddenly realise that it was Alan on the screen, “...and he wasn't speaking about railways!” Alan moved on to work for the Local Education Authority until he retired at the end of 2004.

An active retirement saw him volunteer at the nearby Severn Valley Railway where he took up duty as a Travelling Ticket Inspector (TTI). Such were his natural leadership and skills at organising, that he quickly rose to head up the team of volunteer TTIs on the railway and it was fitting that nearly 70 of them turned up in full uniform at his funeral. He was also involved with the running of the Rowley Regis Railway Society and the Hagley Historical and Field Society. He was a keen member of the Letter Box Study Group, and could often be seen admiring the detail of a rare pillar box he'd just spotted. He was also an officer of the Cumbrian Railways Association and editor of their newsletter *Lakes Express*. In addition, he was a member of Online Transport Archive, spreading the word about its aims and activities in the Midlands. Images from his own extensive collection of slides have been included in several books – some pictures taken leaning out of the window of his erstwhile student digs just off Smithdown Road – including one title which was being finished just as news of his death came through.



Inside the now closed Tom Varley Todber Museum of Steam in Gisburn on the occasion of a visit during the 1983 LUPTS bus tour. Alan poses with David Richards (left) – aka Dr Who, Wilf “Gasmask” Grimshaw and Guy the Gorilla – and Ian Winfieldale, who isn't really that short. *Jonathan Cadwallader*



A TTI is never off duty. Even on the occasion of his own 60th birthday celebration on the Severn Valley Railway on 8 June 2008, Alan feels the urge to check and punch the tickets of guests Richard Pearson and Andrew Wither. *Charles Roberts/Online Transport Archive*

Following news of his death after a short illness on 31 August 2013 at the age of 65, many former LUPTS members gave their own personal tributes. From former LUPTS President Jonathan Cadwallader, who succeeded Alan in that role: “We will all have memories of a man of generous spirit, blessed with a quick wit, who had a tremendous knowledge of railways, particularly of his native Furness region. It goes without saying that he will be very sadly missed and our deepest sympathies go to Jean.” From Keith Nason: “We have lost a very friendly and welcoming man who had a great sense of humour.” Chris Poole expressed many people's views very eloquently:

“As a fellow teacher I had several conversations with him about my profession which I will remember with some fondness. Alan and Jean have always been a “fixture” of 'bus tour weekends for me and they will be just that little bit less anticipated for his absence. ... [LUPTS] has always been something of a haven, away from the sorts of backbiting and points scoring that exist in other walks of life ... Whether it is in the nature of transport enthusiasts, or just a happy accident of the ones that happened to join LUPTS, there has always been sincere and uncomplicated friendship and camaraderie here. It seems to me that, in Alan and John F this year (and Roly not so long before them, of course) we have lost friends that genuinely embody that outlook.”

**CHARLES ROBERTS**

with thanks to Jean Atkinson, Steve Poole and Jonathan Cadwallader

*Alan Atkinson, headteacher and transport enthusiast; born Ulverston, Lancashire 12 June 1948; married Jean 28 April 1973; died Worcester, 31 August 2013*

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