

John Forrester

Former Chairman of LUPTS and the Electric Railway Society

John Forrester was a transport enthusiast whose professional expertise as an electrical engineer allowed him to become an expert in the development of electric railways worldwide, an interest he shared through his long-standing chairmanship of the Electric Railway Society. He died from the effects of pancreatic cancer in The Royal Liverpool University Hospital during the early morning of Saturday 26 January 2013 at the age of 57.



John could be notoriously camera shy, so good pictures of him are hard to find. This group photograph – Ian McLaughlin, John, Chris Knowles and Tom Kane – was taken outside the All Nations pub in Madeley on 1 July 1979 and captures him in typically laid-back style. *David Ventry*



A LUPTS trip to the Great Central Railway on 15 May 1976, very shortly before John graduated. From left: David Philips, Pete Sagar, Tom Kane, Jean Atkinson, Alan Atkinson, Richard Pearson, Ian McLaughlin, Dave Ventry, John, Phil Johnson (who died 18 January 1983) and Jonathan Cadwallader. *David Ventry*

John was born in Liverpool on 10 May 1955, the younger of two children of the marriage of Herbert (Bert) and Ann Forrester. Bert had inherited a small chain of grocer's shops in the Liverpool area but decided later in life to be ordained into the Church of England. When John was 11, his father was appointed curate at St Nicholas' Church, Brighton-le-Sands, Crosby. John moved from the Bluecoat School, Liverpool to Waterloo Grammar School, Crosby, a school which he continued to attend after the Reverend Forrester was given his first substantive appointment, St Philip's Church, Fairfield, Liverpool. He obtained a place at Liverpool University to study Physics in 1973 and went on to obtain a BSc (Hons) degree.

He spent his entire working career with Standard Telephones and Cables and its successors, initially as a graduate engineering trainee based at STC's site in Greenwich. He became involved with marine optical fibre telephone development and installation. This took him for two years to STC Australia to work on the US-Australia Transpacific Cable and then to assist with the Australia-South Africa cable across the Indian Ocean. Returning to the UK, John became one of two worldwide experts on undersea optical repeater devices. His work continued to take him across the world for many years, culminating with a major telephone system installation in China in the late 1990s. STC was taken over by Nortel plc in 1991, becoming Alcatel Limited in the late 1990s. With operations at Greenwich contracting, John officially retired from the company in November 2005, a few months after his 50th birthday, but continued to work as a contractor until 2008.



The battle of the sideburns: John (right of group, in brown jacket) loses out to Alan Atkinson (left), whilst Andrew Wither looks on. The location is Rose Hill on the occasion of the LUPTS Mancunian railtour on 28 February 1976. *David Ventry*



The battle of the flares (difficult to work out who the winner – or should that be 'loser' – is this time). From left: John, Tom Kane, Ian McLaughlin, Ian Winfieldale (behind camera), Jonathan Cadwallader, Andy Babbs (also behind camera) and Richard Pearson. The occasion is a LUPTS trip to the Crich Tramway Museum on 29 April 1978. *Rob McCaffery*

John had an interest in transport, particularly railways, from an early age, with the large attic of the vicarage in Fairfield giving him the opportunity to build, no doubt with the help of his father, a large model railway. On arrival at Liverpool University, he joined the Public Transport Society (LUPTS), along with his school friend Tom Kane, who was studying medicine. They both made significant contributions to LUPTS during their student days and for many years afterwards. John was Journal Editor and Photographic Competition Secretary during the 1974/1975 academic year and was elected chairman for the following year, his final year as a student. He was one of the three committee members – along with Dave Ventry (Secretary) and Jonathan Cadwallader (Treasurer) – who planned and ran The Mancunian railtour on 28 February 1976. This dmu tour, which covered many of the branch lines around Manchester, was highly acclaimed but made a loss of £181.64½, although a certain amount of creative accounting managed to reduce the amount significantly.



Tom Kane writes: “[The left picture] ... was on the occasion of my premarital drinking tour of Greater Manchester, outside the appropriately named Oddfellows Call in Shaw, with John appearing to lean on a signpost, and how I would most like to remember him, cheerfully waiting for the next time I’d pay for a pint. ... [and on the right] ... John, in the suit he denied he owned, with his godson ... The next time he was to meet Matthew was to educate him in the delights of Harvey’s bitter in the Royal Oak in Borough some 24 years later, apparently approving of the outcome of his spiritual guidance!” *Tom Kane (both images)*

He was knowledgeable about the London and North Western Railway and its technical achievements from his schooldays but developed his particular expertise into the fields of the history and development of electric railways, giving talks to LUPTS and many other societies over the years. He was an expert on the history and development of railway electrification, particularly the Mersey Railway, and used his global travel to widen his knowledge of electric railways around the world. On moving to London he joined the Electric Railway Society, to which he devoted a significant amount of time in the face of an ageing membership profile. He became its Chairman in 1992, a position which he held until he had to stand down because of ill health in October 2012.



With other LUPTS members, John took part in a number of European holidays looking at various aspects of transport. Here, in East Berlin on 24 August 1991, he and Jonathan Cadwallader admire the shrapnel damage inflicted by the allies to a railway viaduct over 55 years earlier, and still not repaired. *Charles Roberts/Online Transport Archive*



The closest you were ever likely to get to a posed shot of John, amongst a group of LUPTS members having lunch at a pub in Settle during the now traditional Christmas week day out on 29 December 2003. For the equivalent event on 27 December 2012, and although noticeably frailer, John was able to join the group for a trip to St Helens and back before he needed to go home for a rest. It was to be his last gricing trip. *Charles Roberts*

Away from work and his societies, John was quite a private person. He enjoyed his cricket, playing it competitively at school and university and running the STC works team until a knee injury forced him to retire from bowling. He was a keen supporter of Liverpool Football Club, inheriting one of the family’s long-held season tickets after the deaths of his sister Ann and father Bert in December 2004 and February 2006 respectively. Thereafter, he would visit his widowed mother in Childwall, Liverpool and take in the home league games, regularly bemoaning the club’s position in comparison with the heyday he remembered. His mother Ann died in December 2010.

John received the cancer diagnosis on 29 October 2012 and had the difficult task of ringing people to tell them the news. He left his house in Eltham to return to the family home in Childwall the following month, in order to receive treatment at the Linda McCartney Centre at The Royal. Sadly, this was ineffective and he declined noticeably and rapidly. He met up for Sunday lunch with a group of LUPTS members on 6 January 2013 and was on good form, but was admitted to hospital with an infection the following day and died three weeks later, just 89 days after his initial diagnosis.

Fellow railtour organiser, and former LUPTS president, Jonathan Cadwallader posted the following announcement on the LUPTS mailing list a few hours after John's death: "There is plenty to remember John by. His trademark sideburns; the dry and sometimes cutting, though never malicious, wit; the occasional bout of absent mindedness; the dedication to the societies in which he was involved; his prodigious knowledge of railways, especially electric ones and above all, his companionship." John never married, his closest relatives being a small number of first cousins.

CHARLES ROBERTS

I have been lost in memories of a very old friend, **writes Tom Kane**. Memories including meeting John for the first time, aged 11, in the art room at Waterloo Grammar School – he'd moved from the Bluecoat because his father was the new curate at Brighton-le-Sands – and discovering a kindred railway modeller with a surprising knowledge even then of the LNWR and its works. Of a couple of years later, after the Revd Forrester had taken up his parish in Wavertree, spending a day in the attic of the vicarage in Balmoral Road laying OO track on his new model railway (which I suspect Herbert Forrester was equally involved in). Of dragging John round Leeds the week before starting at Liverpool University in the search for anatomy books, then walking the full length of the Middleton railway. Of sitting in the Carnarvon Castle drinking Higsons bitter on Thursdays, slowly discouraging other customers from staying. Of being gently educated on a great manner of railway subjects in the process. Of a friend who would willingly in later years join me, with or without [fellow LUPTS members] Dave Ventry or Ian McLaughlin, to discuss the minutiae of life in pubs in London. Of as recently as last autumn, sitting at the back of an Electric Railway Society meeting in King's Cross, listening to a deeply erudite description of archive photographs acquired from Liverpool City Engineers' Dept, and unexpectedly being asked to help with the history of the dock branches of the LNWR. And of the phone call before Christmas, when having told me of his diagnosis, the wry comment that he now had a cast-iron excuse not to be re-elected Chairman of the ERS.

John Herbert Forrester, telecommunications engineer and historian of electric railways; born Liverpool, 10 May 1955; died Liverpool, 26 January 2013