

# Roland Williams

## *“The Bus Doctor”*

Roland Williams was a life-long transport enthusiast who developed his interest into a career in the bus industry before developing his own business restoring and maintaining historic buses, based at the Scottish Vintage Bus Museum (SVBM). He died on 7 March 2011 at the age of just 48 after a long illness.

Roland was born in Wirral on 25 November 1962, the elder child of Bob and Jean Williams. He attended Heswall County Primary School before moving on to Calday Grange Grammar, during which time he pursued his interest in transport, particularly buses, and where he was also a member of the Air Training Corps. In October 1981, he started at the University of Liverpool, where he studied Engineering Science. Through Bob, Roland inherited a love of all things mechanical and even before he was able to drive owned an ex-Cheshire County Council meals-on-wheels Bedford HA van. It was his pride and joy at the time and, once he'd got his licence, he used it for camping holidays all over the country, including separate trips to both John o' Groats and Land's End. On arrival at Liverpool University he joined the Public Transport Society (LUPTS) and one night, over a few drinks in the Students' Union bar, the conversation turned to bus preservation. Roland said he'd like a manageable preservation project, at which point he was advised that the Society had found an ex-Crosville Bristol SC (SSG668: 241SFM) in a scrapyard in North Wales. Very shortly afterwards Roland, assisted by Alan Roberts, a friend from Calday days who was also at the University, and his father Bob, bought the vehicle and brought it to the Wirral. Restoration progressed relatively quickly, to the extent that LUPTS was able to use the vehicle for student trips during Roland's final year as a student. He served as LUPTS Secretary and Chairman before he graduated in the summer of 1984.



Roland (left), with his dad Bob and Alan Roberts, at the West Float, Birkenhead having just brought ex-Crosville Bristol SC SSG668 (241SFM) back from a North Wales scrapyard for restoration on 13 March 1982.



Roland, wearing the Depot Engineer's workshop coat that spawned the nickname "The Bus Doctor", in Musselburgh depot in 1994, not long before he left Eastern Scottish for pastures new at Eastern Counties. *Roland Williams*

During one of his summer vacations, he worked in the technical office of Crosville Motor Services in Chester, which was his first job in the bus industry. On leaving university, he obtained a post as Technical Assistant with Scottish Omnibuses (Eastern Scottish) at their Marine Works in Portobello, Edinburgh and moved to Scotland which was to be his home for the remainder of his life, for all but two years. In Scotland, he became an active member of a group of preservationists based at Pathhead, Midlothian, which later moved to Whitburn where the SVBM was established. On the employment front, Roland gained promotion to Engineering Supervisor for the newly established minibus operation running out of New Street Depot in Edinburgh, and later became Depot Engineer at Musselburgh, close to his home by Musselburgh Harbour. At New Street and Musselburgh, he always stood out in his pristine white coat, usually matched by a pair of shiny shoes, leading to the nickname "The Bus Doctor". It was while at New Street that he met his first wife, Lesley, who worked as a minibus inspector. They got married in August 1991 at a wedding that is still talked about today by those able to remember the events of the day, or indeed those of the night before.

Roland left Eastern Scottish in October 1994 to take up a post as Fleet Engineer for Eastern Counties in Norwich, a part of the country where the family had relatives. By this time, Eastern Scottish had been through a management buyout phase and been sold on to GRT Holdings of Aberdeen. Almost coincident with Roland's move, GRT bought Eastern Counties so the change of employer effectively became an internal transfer. (Both companies have now lost their identities in the FirstGroup empire.) Living with Lesley in a bungalow in the village of Thorpe St Andrew, things initially seemed to be working out well in Norfolk, but a change of Chief Engineer put paid to that and Roland felt he was being increasingly sidelined at work. An offer of a job overseeing Health and Safety issues in First's companies in Essex and East Anglia would have taken Roland away from what he was interested in, so he elected to take redundancy in June 1996, with an uncertain future.



A reminder of home. Roland's father Bob, whilst on police duty one day, spied the seat from Bebington railway station in a skip and rescued it. Roland later assembled it at Thorpe St Andrew (seen here on 7 April 1995) and later at Saline.



Roland (right) negotiates a deal with the legendary East Anglian-based scrap dealer Ben Jordan at Coltishall on 8 April 1995, while colleague Neville from Eastern Counties looks on.

Interviews for jobs in bus engineering management jobs elsewhere in the country, field service engineering and even teaching in further education led to nothing, but an initially temporary lifeline came through his former contacts at the SBVM, particularly Jasper Pettie. The SVBM had by this stage moved to a former Royal Navy storage site at Lathalmond near Dunfermline and grant money had been obtained to restore certain vehicles. Would Roland and Lesley be interested in doing a few weeks work at Lathalmond? From that initial offer emerged "The Bus Doctors", Roland's business (and initially Lesley's – they subsequently split as domestic and business partners) restoring and maintaining historic buses, the trading name harking back to Roland's New Street nickname. Roland and Lesley initially lived on-site at the Lathalmond base, eventually taking out a lease on "Shed 22", which was converted for use as a trim and panel repair shop.



Roland (right) with the co-owners of ex-Blackburn Guy Arab III ACB904 – Ian Parry (left) and Charles Roberts – at Lathalmond on 16 May 2009, which was to prove the only occasion that the three owners were united together with their vehicle after they bought it.



Roland gives ACB904's steering box the pressure clean it deserves at Lathalmond on 4 August 2006.

Many vehicles passed through the Bus Doctors' care, with Roland working alongside other restorers such as Tam and Ian Logie, Matt Divers and Andy Crockett. Initially there was the ex-McGill's Guy Arab III (GVD47) and subsequently others such as Mark Telfer's open-top VR (LFS288F), Mike Walker's Queen Mary Bristol L (NAE3) and Julian Patterson's VR (LFS303F). Roland also oversaw the maintenance of the Stagecoach heritage fleet, which was by this time housed at Lathalmond, and was on call for Brian Souter personally when vehicles were required for special events. It was fitting that two of the fleet took people from the Museum to Dunfermline Crematorium on the day Roland's funeral. Showing business acumen rather than sentiment, Roland sold the Bristol SC to Carter's Coaches of Ipswich in July 1998 after 16 years of ownership, later buying a Plaxton-bodied Bedford J2 mini-coach (VFU864J) from Dunsmore's of Larkhall with the intention of using it for wedding hires, although restoration was incomplete when his illness took hold. He also had a share in ex-Blackburn Guy Arab III recovery vehicle ACB904, the plan being that, once restored, he would use it in connection with Bus Doctor's business, whilst making the vehicle available to the other owners for shows etc. Although still some way off completion, the two surviving owners have undertaken to complete the project.

He found the ideal match with his partner Jan, living in a bungalow in Saline, Fife, surrounded by land on which Jan kept her horses, dogs and occasional other animals. With Dave Hoare's Chepstow Classic Buses, he took an active role in running shuttle bus services at events such as Glastonbury and the Fairford Air Show. He resurrected the Running Day at SVBM, overseeing the event with almost military precision to ensure that buses departed on time on each of the five routes. He was also latterly able to return to his involvement with the air cadets, helping out at the Kinross Air

Training Corps. A keen photographer, he was recently able to seek out material for a forthcoming Ian Allan book 'Crosville in Colour' which will feature a number of his pictures and contain a dedication to him.



The 2007 Glastonbury team at the Showground in Shepton Mallet on 26 June 2007, the last year that Roland was able to participate. Back: Gordon McGregor, Graham Fraser; front: Charles Roberts, Keith Gascoine, Jim Methven, Roland Williams, Dave Forrest.



When camping in "House" (an ex-West Yorkshire Bristol VR), which was used for drivers' accommodation at Glastonbury, the shaving mirror was of a rather rudimentary kind usually found on the outside of a bus.

On 27 April 2008, he fell outside the bungalow and what might have been an innocuous incident turned out to be the first indication of a cyst on the surface of the brain. In spite of a number of operations, radio- and chemotherapy, this ultimately turned out to be incurable. Initially there were encouraging signs of recovery but he found himself gradually able to do less and less as time went by. His final months were spent at home in Saline with views down towards the Forth Road Bridge. People will remember Roland as someone who lived a full and busy life and came to the fore as a natural organiser. Former LUPTS President Jonathan Cadwallader remembers him as "a great friend to all that knew him, a memorable character full of life whose enthusiasm for things mechanical spilled over to others." He is survived by his wife Jan, who he married at a private ceremony at home in November 2010. Although geographically distant from the rest of his immediate family, he was close to his mother Jean, his sister Barbara, brother-in-law Ian, and niece and nephew Laura and Dave. Sadly, his father Bob, who had done so much to foster Roland's interest in transport engineering, had died in 1989 at the early age of 53, not long after retiring from the police force, and was unable to see all that Roland went on to achieve.

**CHARLES ROBERTS**

*Roland William Williams, transport engineer and vehicle restorer; born Clatterbridge, Wirral, 25 November 1962; married 1991 Lesley Stimpson, 2010 Janice Owen; died Saline, Fife, 7 March 2011*