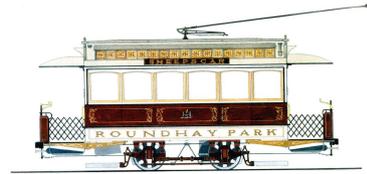


# LEEDS TRANSPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWS SHEET 201

JUNE 2020



## **JIM SOPER** 18 April 1934 - 29 March 2020

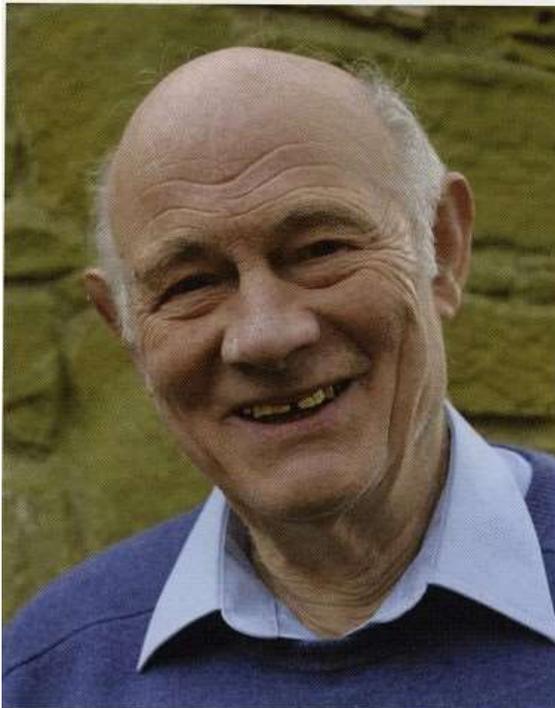
James Soper Dipl.T.P., Dipl. Arch. – Jim - who has died at the age of 85, was the archivist for our Society and author of its many books, notably his monumental five-volume history of Leeds Transport (with a sixth volume in preparation), the Postcard book and the ones on Leeds Transport in Colour and Leeds Pubs and Cinemas by Tram in the 1950s. But he was more than an author – he was a leading light in the restoration of the Leeds tower car and 399 and a skilled woodworker on horse tram 107, all of which are now resident at the National Tramway Museum at Crich.

Back in the Middleton Railway's early days, Jim was one of the group moving the Leeds trams from Swingate Depot to Parkside for preservation. Subsequently, he worked in Robinson & Birdsell's field at Parkside on the overhead lines tower tram after the LTHS had purchased it from the (then) Middleton Railway Preservation Society. That car's restoration was completed off site before it went to Crich.

Jim was born in April 1934, the son of a garage proprietor. Living first in Alwoodley, then Meanwood, he noted at an early age the changeover from trolley poles to bow collectors on the Meanwood tram route. After the family moved to Chapeltown, he had a grandstand

view of trams on Harrogate Road passing his bedroom window. He attended Chapeltown Council School and then Leeds Grammar School, travelling daily by tram. He served a mechanical engineering apprenticeship at his father's premises but, after National Service, enrolled with the Leeds School of Architecture, qualifying in 1962 and subsequently gained a diploma in Town Planning. He worked as an architect in Pontefract, Harrogate and Leeds, retiring in 1999.

These skills and interests lead to him designing (and providing much of the physical labour for) the Bowes-Lyon Bridge at Crich using York Stone setts which he acquired from Leeds and took to Derbyshire in the back of his Morris 1000 traveller. He also masterminded the design and reconstruction of the Red Lion pub at the Crich museum, doing much of the hard manual work himself. He brought most of the faience (tile) work from the facade back to Leeds where he repaired it in his garage at home. Serving a term as President of the Tramway Museum Society he was their architectural adviser. He also designed the



Burnley Tramways Offices reconstruction and the workshop extension at Crich.

Jim's early interest in trams led him to record the later years of the Leeds tramways in great photographic detail, both still and cine. He was part of the team which founded the Leeds and District Transport News (now the Metro Transport News) and was a founder and lifelong member of LTHS.

Jim was a man of few words but many skills, held in great regard by all who knew him, both in the tramway preservation movement and in the architectural profession.

Just before Christmas Jim suffered a major stroke and was admitted to Leeds General Infirmary, later being transferred to Harrogate District Hospital. He recovered only partially, being unable to speak or eat although fully alert. He was discharged to a nursing home in Castleford, where he died peacefully in his sleep on 29 March. A devoted family man, he is survived by his wife Valerie, brother Bob, two daughters Gillian and Helen and three grandchildren. Because of the Coronavirus pandemic, only a minimal funeral ceremony could be held, on

15 April. A fuller celebration of Jim's life will be organised when restrictions are lifted. IMD, JMH

Until my dad (Bernard Donald) died, I hadn't realised how much he valued Jim's friendship and engineering mind. Many times in the 70s and 80s Dad and Jim would meet up to figure out how a tram part needed to be mended to enable it to go back on a tram!

And meetings, particularly the Tramway Museum Society AGM in Matlock, would see me, Helen, Gillian and our mums, Valerie and Margaret, left to amuse ourselves while Jim and my Dad spent their time talking trams!

When Jim started writing his history of Leeds Transport, Dad became a proof reader and somehow ended up with boxes of the first print stacked around our house - presume it was the same at Jim's house? Jim always had a smile to give and a warm welcome, which I was particularly grateful for when Dad died. I felt I'd still got a tram connection, and my Dad, through Jim. Christine Clark