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JOHN PATTINSON THOMAS

1878-1974

It was with very deep regret, and a very real sense of loss, that the Society learned of the death of J.P. Thomas, its oldest and one of its most distinguished and long-standing members. Mr. Thomas died peacefully at his home in Woking on Friday 6th September 1974, at the age of 96.

With someone who had such a long, varied and important career as "J.P." (as he was known to all his friends and associates), it is extremely hard to select those aspects which will prove to have been those having the most influence on posterity - but it is quite safe to say that the impact of his achievements during his long association with transport in London has had a permanent effect, and that the London Underground as we know it today was very largely modelled into a coherent system by a team of which JP was a leading member.

John Pattinson Thomas was born on the 8th June 1878, and served a seven-year apprenticeship with Clarke Chapman, general electrical and mechanical engineers on Tyneside - the firm in which Charles, later Lord, Parsons, the originator of the turbo-generator, was a partner until he left to found the famous Parsons works at Heaton. While an apprentice, JP was studying at the Durham College of Science, taking an electrical engineers' course, and at the conclusion, of both the course and the apprenticeship, he was offered a post with the British Thomson-Houston Company. At this time, BTH were the United Kingdom agents for the American General Electric Company.

Thomas was appointed by BTH to the staff of their Resident Engineer at the Chiswick works of the London United Electric Tramways Company, and thus he started, still in the nineteenth century, his connection with public transport in London.

At the time BTH held the contract for equipping the London United's new power station and supplying a hundred double-deck electric trams - the first in London. Some months after JP's appointment, and while serving as his Assistant, the BTH Resident Engineer at Chiswick was forced to resign through ill-health, and Thomas was then appointed to his post. All the work was completed by November 1900, but the Board of Trade would not pass the system for operation because there was a voltage drop in the lines at the Kew end which, it was feared, would affect the instruments in Kew Observatory as well as causing electrolysis and fusing in water mains and sewers. This presented Thomas with the first of his major problems - which was solved by the design and installation of boosters, enabling the service, originally scheduled to commence in October 1900, to begin during the Spring of 1901.

Once the tramway was in operation, the British Thomson-Houston Co Limited appointed J.P. Thomas as London Resident Engineer, responsible for the equipment of rolling stock on the Central London Railway, which had opened in 1900, and this was his first direct connection with the Underground. Here a much more difficult problem was met in a very short time, when complaints from the public flooded in to the CLR about the vibration caused by their trains. The Board of Trade and BTH jointly set up an investigating committee, of which Thomas was a member, and experiments were carried out in an attempt to lessen the annoyance. It was proved that the trouble was caused by the excessive axle loading of the locomotives, which had very heavy, gearless, motors which were practically unsprung. First of all, geared tramway type motors were fitted to certain of the locos, which reduced the axle load from 12 to 9 tons; this resulted in an improvement, but it was not enough. Therefore, temporary alterations were made to four passenger cars, converting them to motor cars fitted with Sprague motor controllers built by the GEC in Schenectady. Placed one at each end

of a train, with axle loads reduced to  $6\frac{1}{2}$  tons, these cars provided the means of running two experimental trains - and thus proved that multiple units were the answer. Sixty-four new motor cars were built for the Central London, and there were no more complaints.

The BoT/BIH Committee made its Report early in 1902, and as London Resident Engineer for the Company, J.P. Thomas next supervised the contract for the electrification of the Great Northern and City Line from Finsbury Park to Moorgate. This contract included current rails, power station, 77 cars and the lighting of the system. At this time it was intended that the line should be connected to the Great Northern suburban system which would be electrified to give a through service to Wood Green and Muswell Hill. Money ran out, however, the line was eventually bought by the Metropolitan, and the main line connection is only now (1974) under construction.

In the meantime there had arrived in London, in 1900, the team that Thomas himself called "The Seven from Chicago" - a group of dedicated public transport men headed by Charles Tyson Yerkes which within a few years took over, completed and electrified all the London Underground Railways they could lay hands on, thereby rescuing a number of half-finished schemes which had run out of funds, and so making one of the greatest-ever single improvements to public transport in the capital.

While working on the GN&C, Thomas was telephoned by J.R. Chapman, General Manager and Chief Engineer of the Yerkes Group, who asked him to join the Group as Signal Engineer to the Metropolitan District Railway Company, with the responsibility of converting the District from manual to automatic signalling. The offer being accepted, J.P. began his direct employment with the Underground. The task of resignalling being completed, he transferred to the tube lines, then in a state of near completion, to supervise the organisation of the lines. He was the first superintendent of the Baker Street and Waterloo Railway in 1905, at the age of 26 - and many were the amusing stories he could tell of the early days of the Bakerloo (as it soon became).

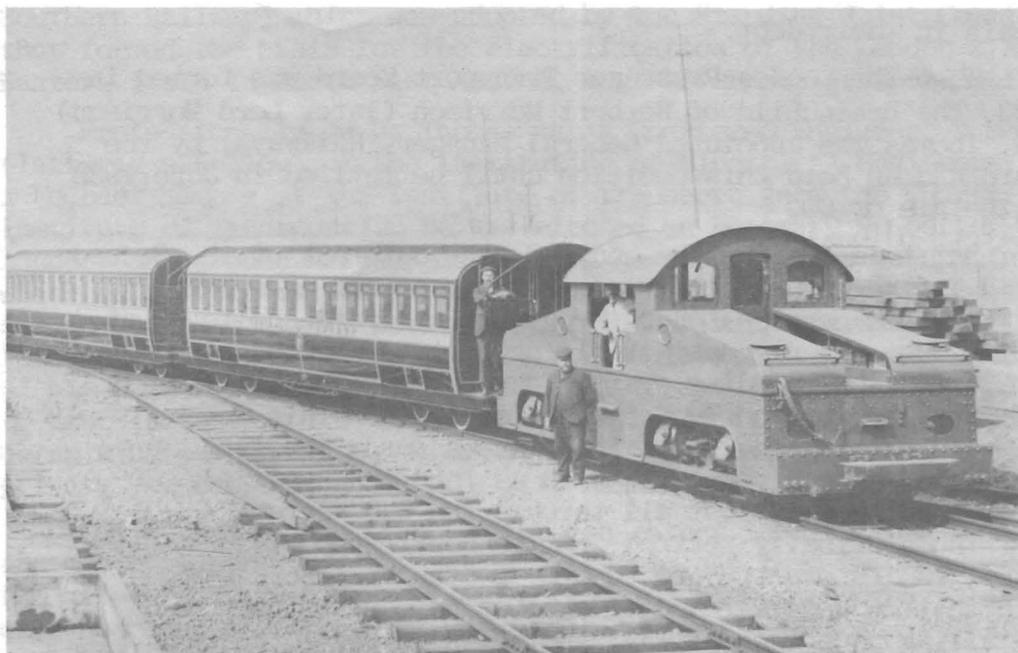
From then on, J.P. Thomas' career was a steady progression



Photo

J.P. Thomas at his desk

London Transport



Photo

P.R.Davis Collection

One of the Central London Railway locomotives which caused all the vibration trouble; it is seen here shortly after the line opened in 1900 with two of the CLR passenger cars, four of which were made into temporary motor cars to test the multiple-unit theory

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up the ladder of well-deserved success and promotion. In 1915 he was appointed General Superintendent of the London General Omnibus Company, and in 1920 became Assistant Operating Manager of both the LGOC omnibus system and the Underground lines. This dual post lasted until 1922, when he was made Operating Manager of the London Underground Railways. It is from this period that his best-known general publication dates - "Handling London's Underground Traffic"(1928). And it was at this time too that his long and close association with Lord Ashfield and Frank Pick entered its most fruitful period. Together over many years (JP is on record as having had a daily meeting with Ashfield for over 40 years) these three men created a transport system of such efficiency and good taste that London will always

remain in their debt.

When the London Passenger Transport Board was formed in 1933, the brainchild of Herbert Morrison (later Lord Morrison) J.P. Thomas was appointed General Manager, Railways, by the Board and he held this position until he retired in June 1938 at the age of 60.

But this was not the end. On the outbreak of the Second World War he was recalled from retirement and made Chief Officer to supervise London Transport air-raid shelters, at a time when a very considerable proportion of London's population was spending every night on the tube station platforms or in other underground shelters. This was by no means an easy task, and in JP's own words involved many "new below-ground problems" such as food and hygiene. After holding this post all through the war years, J.P. Thomas finally retired from London Transport in 1945. In its own tribute to him, London Transport has said that he always found time to spend part of each day travelling upon the railway, and he is on record as saying that he counted it a wasted day if he did not produce one new idea. It was this alertness of his mind, coupled with a remarkable capacity for looking ahead, which made him always so thoroughly master of his job.

Always concerned about the stagnation associated with retirement, Mr. Thomas made sure that it did not affect him, and in this he was phenomenally successful. Freed from the ties of his working life, he was able to take up the private consultancy side of his profession, and he accepted appointments in this capacity in a number of overseas cities, including Havana, Lisbon, Kingston, Auckland and Istanbul, and only a few years ago he was in Italy to see and study the Milan system.

From 1933, when it was set up, to his retirement in 1938, J.P. Thomas was Chairman of the Traffic Advisory Committee of the Standing Joint Committee of the LPTB and the main line companies - his re-election every year to the chairmanship being a great tribute to his ability from his main line colleagues. In this position he was involved in all the many schemes of works and improvements which were carried out in the London Transport area both by the LPTB and the main line companies; it was a joint report by Mr. Thomas and Mr. E.C. Cox (former Traffic Manager of the

Southern Railway) which was adopted by the Standing Joint Committee that formed the basis for the electrification of the London & North Eastern lines in North East London, e.g. Liverpool Street-Shenfield.

Professionally, J.P. Thomas was a Chartered Engineer, a Member (latterly a Fellow) of the Institution of Electrical Engineers, and a Founder Member of the Institute of Transport (now the Chartered Institute of Transport). He was elected an Honorary Member of The London Underground Railway Society in November 1963 - an appointment which he greatly valued and has been valued equally by the Society - for he has been a very active member, contributing a number of most interesting papers to the Society for publication. On the occasion of his 90th Birthday in 1968, the Society made a small presentation to him - a gesture for which he was exceptionally appreciative, being kind enough to say in a letter to the Chairman after the private presentation that this gift was "an unforgettable kindness".

This leads us to consider the man rather than the engineer and administrator. It is probably true to say that he inspired the greatest respect in all who worked for him, worked with him, were associated professionally with him - and indeed all who knew him. He was a real gentleman, of a kind rarely found today, and to his friends he was unfailingly loyal, and had the greatest possible capacity for inspiring loyalty and affection in them in return. Right up to very recent days he was a regular and prolific correspondent, writing letters which were lengthy and always full of information and humour; his memory was remarkable, and he always recalled people in their most favourable light, having no trace of malice in him.

As a man, an engineer and an architect of London's transport system, he was truly great; his passing leaves a gap which can never be filled.

The funeral took place at 16.00 on Wednesday 11th September 1974, at St. John's Crematorium, Woking. Mr. Thomas leaves a wife, three daughters and a son, to whom the Society's condolences have been conveyed by the President.

## A FURTHER NOTE ON THE CHARING CROSS RENAMING

About the middle of the week of 9th September, a double royal (40" x 25") poster announcing the renaming of Charing Cross station appeared throughout the system.

Designed in the so-called Letterpress style it has however, most probably been printed by lithography. The appearance is most striking for two reasons, the more obvious being the orange lettering reversed-out of a black background, with title and bar and circle symbol in white, but more subtly because the entire copy (with the exception of the printer's note) is set in Johnston.

This sort of poster is too often set with only the title in Johnston and the rest commonly in Gil Sans or sometimes a more modern typeface.

On the subject of station renaming, some information has come to light recently which might help to settle the problem of exactly when a station name is considered to have been changed officially. An extended note on this will appear in a forthcoming issue of the Journal.

(See p 129, September issue, for the original note on this subject - Ed.).

## APPOINTMENT OF JOHN DAY TO SYON PARK POST

It is with great pleasure that we have heard that John R. Day of LT's Press Office has been appointed Manager of the London Transport Collection of Historic Vehicles at Syon Park.

John is a very well-known transport author, having written seventeen books and is an acknowledged authority on bus and rail matters. He joined LT in 1957 from the staff of the Railway Gazette, and will now be moving to the Publicity Office.

The Society is particularly pleased by this news, as John represented LT at the Society's Inaugural Meeting in 1961, and has been a good friend ever since. We wish him great success in his new post.