

Tramway treasury

Fifty years ago, virtually every tramway in Britain had been ripped up. **Barry McLoughlin** visits a world-leading museum that is keeping tramway heritage alive

SITTING ON the top deck of a gently-swaying tramcar, trundling along a cobbled street next to a grand, balustraded red-brick pub, you could be travelling through an industrial town in the Fifties. This, however, is the 21st century – and at the foot of a sheer rock face in a former quarry on the edge of the Peak District.

Crich Tramway Village not only celebrates this most sedate and civilised form of transport; it also provides an evocative microcosm of urban life in the first half of the 20th century.

A trip on a vintage tram climbing to the Glory Mine terminus about a mile away takes you on a journey through Britain's industrial and social heritage... in the heart of Derbyshire's glorious Derwent Valley.

The village is the home of the National Tramway Museum – an Accredited Museum with an internationally acclaimed vintage tram fleet, as well as vast collections of photographs and archive materials.

Members of the Tramway Museum Society have built the entire museum – one of the finest of its kind in the world – from scratch by converting the derelict quarry. An independent educational charity, the society was founded 61 years ago to collect preserve and demonstrate Britain's tramway heritage.

Despite being only six miles from Matlock and eight from the M1, it's not the most accessible of national museums, but well worth the effort – and it's an effort that

Chronicling Crich

When the Tramway Museum Society was founded in 1955, tramways in Britain were on their last legs. In 1959 enthusiasts took the first steps to setting up a national tramway museum in the UK. After scouring the country for possible sites, they leased, and later bought, the former limestone quarry at Crich where mineral railways had operated for more than 100 years. Tracklaying began and accommodation was provided for the fleet of trams that were to be preserved and restored.

The museum opened to the public in 1961, and a horse-drawn service using Sheffield tram No 15 was launched in June 1963, but the main aim had always been to operate electric trams.

Poles and overhead wiring were put up in early 1964 and the first run under electric power took place in June that year along 300 yards of track.

It was always intended as a place where trams could run and do the job for which they were designed, rather than as a showcase for static vehicles. So in 1967 the TMS agreed to develop a streetscape around the tramway.

The museum's first extravaganza in 1968 attracted 20,000 visitors.

As the National Tramway Museum developed over the following half-century, it attracted a broad and varied range of preserved tramcars.

The original short electric line from Town End has been extended several times: to Cliffside in 1965, to Cabin Crossing two years later, to Wakebridge in 1968, and finally to an elevated terminus at Glory Mine in 1978, with panoramic views of the surrounding countryside. In 1988 the Bowes-Lyon Bridge was opened, in 1997 the museum achieved Designation status, and the 2000s saw a raft of new facilities.

Built in 1903, popular four-wheel London County Council tram No 106 glides along the cobbled village street after a two-year overhaul



more than 70,000 people make every year. From the main Town End terminus, the tram travels to stops at the bandstand and Victoria Park, Wakebridge for the three-acre Woodland Walk, Sculpture Trail and lead mines display, and finally Glory Mine with a walk to the Crich Memorial Stand.

The tramway was so evocative of its era that the museum was used to film the opening sequence of the classic 1969 film adaptation of D H Lawrence's *Women in Love*.

The excellence of Crich (pronounced 'Cryche') has been recognised with a series of awards, royal patronage – its



From top right: A line-up of gleaming tramcars in the Great Exhibition Hall; The First World War 'battle bus', arriving from the London Transport Museum (*Choice*, October), stands alongside a wedding party enjoying their big day. The Red Lion pub is on the right; Heading for Hammersmith? Open-top London United tram No 159 has a full complement of passengers at Crich.

Left: The sheer face of the former limestone quarry dominates the background behind a Blackpool 'Boat' tram – the 'Tower' on the destination board is the giveaway...





Glasgow Corporation tram No 1068, dating from 1919, passes Barnett's sweet shop - en route to Paisley West!; The award-winning Bowes-Lyon Bridge is one of the landmarks of the tramway village. Centre-entrance car No 331 negotiates the points during an event to celebrate London's trams; Sheffield's No 510, approaching Town End terminus, was decked out in a special livery to mark the city's Last Tram Week in 1960, when the vehicle was only ten years old



The trams

Crich has an incredible collection of more than 70 historic vehicles, comprehensively illustrating the evolution of the British tramcar. The majority are double-deckers - including some open-toppers - built between 1900 and 1930, but some were constructed after the Second World War and show how the British tram industry might have developed.

Most of the collection can be seen carrying visitors up and down the mile-long track, on display in the Great Exhibition Hall and the depots, or being worked on in the workshop.

Several trams are on loan to other museums and locations or in storage awaiting restoration.

Former Blackpool cars make up one of the biggest contingents in the fleet, along with cities such as London, Leeds, Sheffield, and Glasgow. The oldest electric vehicle is Blackpool 'conduit car' No 4, which worked on the world's first electric street tramway when it opened in the resort in 1885. The oldest vehicle is an 1873 horse tram from Oporto, in Portugal.

Other overseas locations are represented by trams from South Africa, Berlin, Prague and New York. The 1969 Berlin car has been converted into an 'access tram' to allow less able-bodied visitors to travel over the line.

As a long-time resident of Blackpool, I was particularly interested to see some of the vehicles that once ran in the resort, before they were replaced by new 'supertrams' with the launch of its £100m light rail system in 2012.

They include tram No 166 which, with its sister No 165, was used by the BBC as an outside broadcast unit to film the famous autumn Illuminations. It has now been restored to its original guise as a Blackpool 'toastrack' tram, which was used for circular tours in the resort.

My favourite, however, is the Blackpool 'Balloon' double-decker, an art deco-styled 'streamliner' from when the resort's fleet was modernised in the mid-Thirties, on display in the exhibition hall.

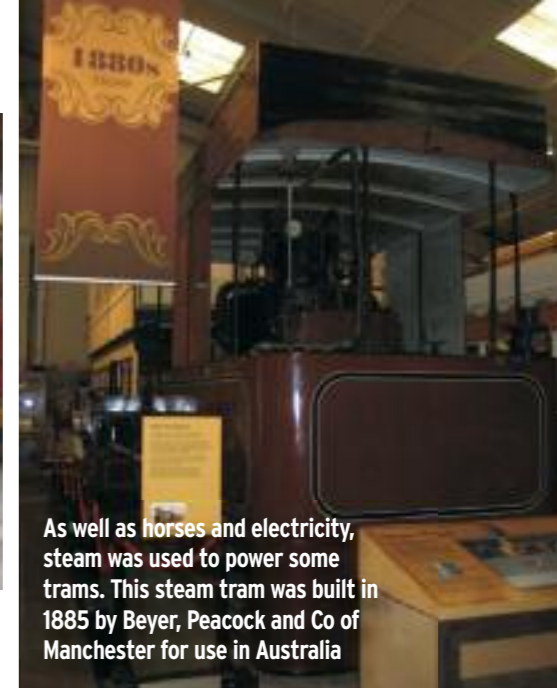
Doyenne of the fleet is Southampton No 45, dating from 1903, which was bought by enthusiasts for £10 in 1948 (£315 today) and launched the whole tramway preservation movement.

Liverpool tram No 869 is in a green and white livery, and is affectionately known as the Green Goddess. It was often used for one-day tram driving courses for members of the public, but is presently out of service undergoing overhaul.

London tram No 106, built in April 1903, escaped the scrapyards, and London County Council Tramways Trust began its restoration in 1970; it was launched at Crich 13 years later. The tram has since covered more than 10,000 miles in passenger service.



This diminutive 'steeple cab' electric locomotive ran in Blackpool from 1927 to 1963, and used to haul coal wagons on the resort's tramway. It arrived at Crich in 1966 and is still in regular use as a shunting and works car



As well as horses and electricity, steam was used to power some trams. This steam tram was built in 1885 by Beyer, Peacock and Co of Manchester for use in Australia



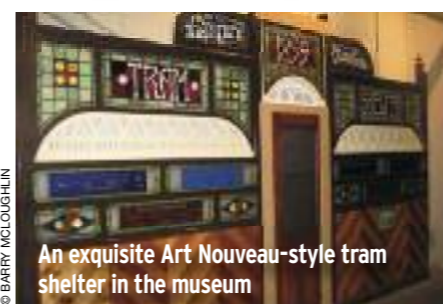
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Inside the engineering workshops, from the viewing gallery



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The top deck of Leeds tram No 399



© BARRY MCLOUGHLIN

An exquisite Art Nouveau-style tram shelter in the museum



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Leeds tram No 399 prepares for the return journey from Glory Mine



One of the newer vehicles in the collection, Blackpool 'Jubilee' No 762 (1982), the last double-deck tram built for service in Britain, is a big hit with younger visitors, though not so popular in the workshops...



The 'access tram' with marketing manager Amanda Thomas

Undercover attractions

Century of Trams

The core of the collection is the 'Century of Trams' display in the Great Exhibition Hall, comprising an absorbing journey through 100 years of tramway development, from 1860, taking in horse, steam and electric trams.

With funding from the Wolfson Foundation and Derbyshire Economic Partnership, the exhibition now features new interpretive panels and audio to represent each decade of the timeline.

Two archive film shows are projected on to the windows of two of the trams in the hall. The footage of Blackpool's trams features some of the earliest archive film the museum holds; the second film tracks the last days of the tramway systems from the Fifties and how the museum came to be the home of these vintage vehicles.

Stephenson Discovery Centre

Built in the 1800s, the two-storey Stephenson Workshop stands in the heart of the museum. It was originally used as a smithy and wagon works for George Stephenson's metre-gauge mineral railway to transport limestone from what was then Crich Cliff Quarry to kilns at Ambergate. With money from the HLF, the building has been fully restored and is now home to a new learning centre on the ground floor and the discovery centre on the first floor.

Officially opened in summer 2011, the centre is a vibrant interactive space where visitors can explore what there is to do at Crich, its history and how overcrowding in expanding towns and cities paved the way for the introduction of trams to Britain in the 1800s.

Workshop Viewing Gallery

Now connected to the Stephenson Discovery Centre by a glass bridge link, the Workshop Viewing Gallery gives visitors the chance to watch the museum's workshop staff restoring trams and keeping the operating fleet in tip-top condition. The exhibition on the gallery explores the history of how trams were made.



Coachbuilder Richard Stead, who is in charge of the trams' bodywork, at work on a tramcar interior



Rolling stock engineer Peter Bird with London County Council Tramways No 1 that is being restored at a cost of more than £400,000

patron is the Duke of Gloucester – and grants for specific development projects.

Even more remarkable is that it remains an independent charity relying solely on private finance for its core funding and receives no public support towards its running costs. The 'gate' income has been supplemented by grants from sources such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, but it still relies heavily on voluntary contributions from members of the Tramway Museum Society.

It also co-operates closely with other tramway museums, such as Beamish Living Museum of the North in County Durham and the Heaton Park tramway in Manchester.

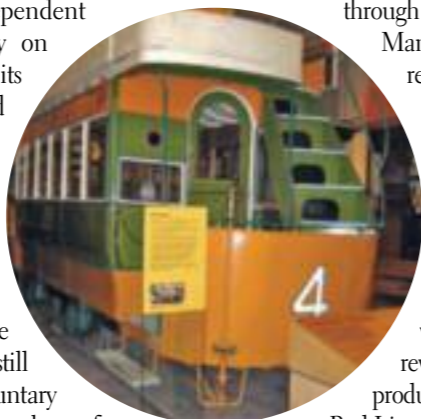
Crich has a core of about 25 paid employees aided by around 200 volunteers.

In an effort to broaden its appeal, Crich has tried to locate its trams in their social and historical context, with its track running through a recreated village street.

Many buildings were rescued from towns and cities across the UK; the façade of the Derby Assembly Rooms came to Crich after a fire, for example. The street scene features a gift and book shop, which has been revamped to include local products, a sweet shop, the Red Lion pub and the Eagle Press

– a museum dedicated to letterpress printing. Once a working pub in Stoke-on-Trent, the Red Lion was rescued from demolition and rebuilt brick by brick at Crich.

The street 'furniture' includes the Bundy Clock at Town End, the Exhibition Hall windows, rescued from Doncaster tram depot, and the Tardis-style police phone box. The streetscape provides an atmospheric backdrop to showcase the tram collection and also comes to life during themed period events. The



Inset: The tiny tramcar that started it all in Blackpool... tram No 4 originally gained its power from a conduit between the rails but overhead lines were introduced in 1898 after sand kept filling the slot

Clippie Girls...

To mark the centenary of the First World War, Crich is staging a temporary exhibition, Tramway Tommies and Clippie Girls, which looks at how the recruitment of men for the forces left many tramways short of staff. For the first time, women took on active roles in an industry that had previously been male-dominated. The display features a conductress uniform and ticket machines, plus photographs and many other mementoes of the era, including oral testimony.