

## 556 HISTORY

556 was delivered new to The Thames Valley Traction Company in August 1951 and entered service at Reading garage where it remained until January 1958 when it was transferred to Newbury. It remained at Newbury until September 1960 when it was sold for further service with United Welsh retaining its Thames Valley fleet number 556.

After six years' service, 556 was sold to Welsh independent Precelley Motors of Clynderwen in Carmarthenshire in October 1966. They operated 556 for two years before passing it on to nearby Jones Motor Services of Login in September 1968. 556 spent a further 10 years in service with Jones Motor Services (a total service life of almost 28 years) before being withdrawn circa May 1978 and sold to a preservationist. Prior to 1982, 556 had been acquired by a farmer in Sussex (Haywards Heath, Uckfield, Burgess Hill area) who disposed of the seats and kept chickens in it. In September 1982, 556 was acquired from this Sussex farmer by Ward Jones of High Wycombe and restoration commenced.

A Thames Valley enthusiast acquired 556 from Ward, following which Ward continued to restore 556 on his behalf. The Bristol gearbox as fitted to 556 needs plenty of driving time to become accomplished. And the new owner found this a barrier to full mastery and enjoyment so he reluctantly decided to return 556 to Ward. He can be proud that the restoration work carried out during his ownership then enabled 556 to be rallied by several other owners for nearly 20 years before it was laid up in the early 2000s for a period of 14 years. When TV&GWOT obtained agreement to take 556 on loan in early 2015, we were able to drive her back from Worcestershire with only minor fuel issues at the start of the journey.



556 at Newbury. © Paul Lacey Collection



556 with shiny paintwork after initial restoration. © Colin Billington Collection



556 at TV&GWOT's Didcot running day with 446. © Colin Billington

## SIGNIFICANCE OF 556

With 556, TV&GWOT will have three former Thames Valley Traction Company vehicles in its permanent collection, the others being 152 (M09324) our 1927 Tilling-Stevens B9 Express and 1946 Bristol K6A 446 (DBL154). The special significance of 556 is that:

- It was Thames Valley's first 30ft long vehicle.
- It is the oldest surviving former Thames Valley Bristol single deck bus.
- It is the oldest preserved Bristol LL with its original body.
- 556 is contemporary with and complementary to 446.

TV&GWOT is committed to holding 556 along with 152 and 446 within the charitable trust in perpetuity, ensuring that it will be kept in the Thames Valley and available for use at public running days and heritage events. The presence of 556 within our vehicle collection alongside our extensive archive and photographic collection has consolidated TV&GWOT's position as the authoritative custodian of the heritage of The Thames Valley Traction Company. This gives a major boost to the Trust in pursuing its charitable objectives in relation

to educating the public in the history of road passenger transport and increasing access to the historic vehicles which provide the experience of bygone travel.

## 556 RESTORATION PROGRAMME

Since 556 has been on loan, TV&GWOT initially carried out significant work to bring it to the condition required for use in service at public events. This enabled us to use 556 for the ensuing five years safely and successfully. Bearing in mind that its original restoration was undertaken almost 40 years ago, a new restoration programme is now needed to bring 556 up to the high standard that TV&GWOT is recognised for and give it many decades of further operational potential to help the Trust meet its charitable, educational objectives and give many thousands of passengers the experience of bus travel in the Thames Valley in the post-war Britain of the 1950s and '60s.



*Offside panel edge cover mouldings separating due to hidden deterioration of timer in body pillar*



*Rear offside upper corner with body filler separation – remove filler & reshape corner.*



*Rear nearside lower corner – remove filler & reshape corner*



*Nearside lower panel damage Phase 2*

From a detailed examination of both chassis and body, the work required is defined below. As in all projects of this type there is significant uncertainty concerning the condition of covered structural elements and other timber and steel parts. Therefore the work of higher immediate priority is covered in Phase 1 and the current appeal covers this scope. Work to be carried out as soon as further funding allows is listed under Phase 2. Work to be primarily carried out by volunteers is annotated (V) and that by specialist contractors (C).

### Phase 1

- Chassis and running units generally sound, but require external stripping and repainting for long term corrosion protection (V).
- Reconditioning/repair of road springs (C).
- Investigation of governor and throttle linkage to cure occasional racing (C).
- Rewiring of internal bell and lighting circuits (V).

- Replacement of rotten timber inserts in aluminium body pillars along offside - a major task involving removal of all side panels and probably windows and window pans to gain access at least to the waist rail. (C/V).
- Replacement of offside lower aluminium body panels (C).
- Re-shaping or replacement of lower rear corners, re-shaping of rear corner domes (C).
- External repaint, application of transfers (V).

#### Phase 2

- Removal of dented nearside lower body panels and inspection/replacement of timber framing as necessary (C).
- Replacement of nearside lower aluminium body panels (C).
- Replacement of front steel dash panel (C).
- Renewal of lower section of cab door pillar (C).
- Sourcing of original pattern seats, re-trimming, painting of seat frames and fitting (C/V).
- Replacement of rubber window gaskets(C).
- External repaint (nearside and front), application of transfers (V).
- New rubber mudguards to rear wheel arches & lifeguards below side panels (V/C).

Work to date and other standing and running costs have been funded from the Trust's general income from events, but the work now envisaged and ongoing future costs require the new funding being raised through this appeal.

**We have a limited window of opportunity in which to raise the funds to restore 556 to its former glory.**

**[Please help.](#)**