

# AUTOCAR

No. 1

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The Newsletter of the  
1903 North Eastern Railway  
Petrol Electric Autocar Trust

# The North Eastern Railway 1903 Petrol Electric Autocar Trust

**Registered Charity No: 1105829**  
**Company Registration No: 05171008**  
**www.electrictautocar.co.uk**

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**Membership**  
**Secretary**            Vacant

**Newsletter**  
**Editor**                Vacant

**Letters**  
**We welcome your comments, contributions and suggestions.**  
**Please post to the secretary.**

## **Front Cover Photo**

**Autocar 3170 with trailer coach in tow at Poppleton Junction, York, in 1923. 3170 lost its NER red and cream livery after its rebuild in July 1923 and was repainted in LNER brown livery and renumbered 3170Y.**  
*Photo courtesy of the Ken Hoole Study Centre.*

## Meet The Team

Once Stephen Middleton had purchased the autocar body and placed it on an accommodation underframe for transport on rails, he formed a charitable trust to restore, operate and interpret this unique pioneer. Trustees were Stephen himself (Chairman), Marcus Woodcock (Secretary), Ian Douglas (treasurer), and Qiuying Ren, Stephens wife. Each brings experience to the team. Stephen has won eight awards for the restoration and operation of vintage carriages. Marcus is an accomplished craftsman, helping with Stephen's coaches and now completing his teak LNER brake third. Ian was in the RAF and latterly scoured the world for parts to keep the memorial flight going. He is an active volunteer and treasurer on the autocar's home base, The Embsay and Bolton Abbey Steam Railway. Qiuying was a teacher and latterly was responsible for cultural exchanges between the National Railway Museum, Locomotion and the Heritage Railway association when a team from the Chinese state owned Beijing Railway Museum visited. She looks forward to encouraging interpretation to those people you would not normally find on today's heritage railways.

## We Need You

We welcome your contribution as members and if you are willing and active there will be considerable restoration work to do in the near future.

Right now we need individuals who can help with the following:

Website design and updates.

Newsletter design and editing.

Archive and record keeping.

Education Officer

Membership Secretary.

Project Leader.

If you can think of a task not here that you think you could usefully do, please let us know

## Discovered, again, and again

I saw my first North Eastern Railway petrol electric autocar as a four year old in 1961. Then I saw another two years later. OK, I admit it, they were HO and N gauge models built by my late father who at that time was working on the railway. Both were painted crimson and cream and their images stuck with me. Some years later I was pleased to see another model, this time in O gauge on the late Dr Scott's layout.

A few years ago a friend of mine invited me to his house. After dinner he showed me several slides, one of which showed little more than a giant hedge. However, just visible was a wooden window frame. "I bet you



*Photo courtesy of Ken Hoole Study Centre*

don't know what that is" he said, I instantly recognised it as the front of a petrol electric railcar. "Where is it? What is it doing there? That has to be preserved!" I said.

The next weekend I went to the small village of Keldholme near Kirkby-Moorside where my friend had photographed it, not far from the North Yorkshire Moors Railway. I toured up and down the country lanes until I saw an overgrown mound set back a couple of fields from the road. That was it! It was on land belonging to Ravenswick estates so I went to the

nearby estate office to ask permission to take a closer look, No problem. The structure was protected by a corrugated iron roof and a veranda and looked like a cricket pavilion. The staff referred to it as “The old caravan” Although it had been cut in two to facilitate delivery, its condition appeared to be very good with no signs of rot. It was raised off the ground by several North Eastern Railway headstocks that must have been supplied when bought from the railway. They kept the rot at bay It was clearly worth saving, the body being in far better condition than some of the carriages I have already restored.

I returned to the estate office where I asked if the “caravan” was for sale? Landowner James Holt was very courteous but reluctant to sell as I believe he felt that while a structure was on the land he may get permission to replace it with a house. I stated that when he was ready to sell I would pay him £1000 to compensate for any inconvenience caused by removal. Every few months I checked progress with his secretary and at Christmas I sent a card, reminding him of my offer.

Three years later James Holt sent me a letter, accepting my offer and asking me to remove at my convenience. Brilliant! But how easy would it be to remove it across those fields?

Next issue .....Removal and a new home.

Note: In “Railway Magazine” dated November 1972 there is an article about this autocar by Ken Hoole. He attributes its discovery to the North Eastern Coach Group. This group is kindly donating their Autocoach to run with the autocar.

## Progress

Fundraising has begun for the restoration of the North Eastern Railway petrol electric autocar. It has taken three years to decide how it is to be restored, assess the feasibility of powering it again and start the process of obtaining quotations for work. As the forerunner of today’s modern trains and the first non-steam railcar it is older than many famous steam locomotives including the Great Western Railway’s record breaking steam engine “*City of Truro*”.

Money is needed as balance funding against any possible grants we may win from the likes of PRISM and the heritage lottery fund. In addition, should we be unsuccessful in attracting major grants, the restoration of the autocar as an observation saloon can be financed, (In 1930 the London and North Eastern Railway seriously considered this conversion and the trust has the plans). This would allow it to run, earning income and taking a slower route to eventual powered operation. However we feel optimistic that, despite the Olympic games, we can make a very strong case for funding.

To do all remedial woodwork including joining the two halves together, repair one end and rebuild the heavily converted other end will cost around £5200.

We have located many suitable authentic parts of the period including correct underframe with Fox pattern bogies and one heavy sprung Fox pattern bogie required to carry the traction motors and the weight of the engine and generator above. To obtain, transport, clean and fit these parts will cost £7800. This does not account for any remedial works that may be required.

## The Power Unit

It is no longer practical to run a petrol engine railcar on today's railways. Following discussion we intend having a new or nearly new diesel generator above 200HP, Cummins is the likely model. A railway engineering company was approached to come up with a feasibility study, route to approval and quotation for the mechanical works. It feels that the job is technically quite straightforward and is optimistic. Traction motors are to be donated, four in all giving us two spares. If we use a new engine, it will be lighter and smaller than the last of the original engines fitted, an ex WD 225HP 6cyl petrol engine. We could consider displaying an early petrol generator similar to the one fitted in 1903 as there appears to be sufficient room. This will be a good opportunity to interpret such power units over the past 100 years.

## The Trailer Coach

Photos show that the autocar ran with a trailer car to increase passenger capacity. The LNER used the autocar with an ordinary clerestory coach of a type that was often converted into an autococh, a coach that has controls so a steam locomotive can push or pull it, the locomotive being controlled from a drivers compartment within the coach. To make the autocar financially viable in today's operation on heritage railway lines, finding an autococh would be a useful, authentic addition.

The good news is that such a coach exists at Levisham on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway, NER 3453 was saved in 1971 thanks to the foresight of the North Eastern Railway coach group. Built in York in 1904 as a diagram 14 Third it was converted in 1906 to a dia 106 Driving trailer. The control equipment was removed in 1921 and the coach ended its days in departmental service as a mobile office, renumbered DE 320180. The group generously agreed to pass the Autococh to us when we are ready to begin work on it. Estimates are being prepared for its restoration. The engineering company believes it possible to refit control gear so that the two car unit may be operated without the need for the powered autocar to "run round". It will in effect be a 1904 built diesel electric multiple unit and very useful on today's heritage railways.

Our front cover shows Autocar 3170 coupled to a clerestory coach and gives a good impression of what the 3170/3453 set would look like.

If you wish to see this unique set operate again for the first time in 90 years, do please become a member. A years membership costs £8.00. You will receive a quarterly newsletter and have opportunity to help restore this rare survivor. Please contact,

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Above; From the archive, a quiet spell at York for an autocar in the early 1900's.  
Below; 3170 moved to Embsay in 2003 and was placed on an accommodation under-frame from a Gresley carriage. Seen here repainted in its original NER red and cream colours for publicity purposes. *Photo S Middleton*

