BOOK REVIEW - by the Editor

“The Leaving of Liverpool” is a detailed record of the city’s tramway abandonment programme. Ideal “lockdown” reading, it’s written and researched by transport authors Martin Jenkins and Charles Roberts and published by LRTA. Softback, with 18 maps and plans, over 450 small pictures, over 125 large (half page) pictures plus over 90 colour images all squeezed into 232 pages.

This book covers the sad demise of the Liverpool Tramway system between 1945 to 1957. Many of the pictures have never been published before and show us streetscapes of the 1940s and 50s. There are personal anecdotes, here are two quotations: “One enthusiast saw car 544 in Church Street and deserted his girlfriend to have a ride on it” (admittedly car 544 was unique and 40 years old then) and this one gave me my best laugh in ten months of lockdown, it nearly made me cry with laughter: “Local tramway enthusiast, Walter Purdey, who had a choice turn of phrase laced with frequent expletives, was riding on a “liner” (type of tram) and it broke down in Dale Street. Telling the driver he could repair the car, he began to dismantle the controller. After a few minutes, he stood back, looked at the driver and said “The f------g thing’s bust” and walked off leaving the platform with a half dismantled controller. No wonder Hatton Garden (the tram HQ) was wary of some of the tram enthusiasts”.

The book also quotes from trusted written records of enthusiasts now in the hands of OTC, for example, “The transport department has no room for museum pieces” — referring to a tram made in 1910. The book has maps and plans of trackwork, leaflets and much more.

It’s just not another tram book, there’s so much to see in the background. As an example, look at this picture of Vauxhall Road, Liverpool. Note the ornamental bridges connecting one part of Tate and Lyle to another, completely exuberant architecture, money no object, it’s even got a rose window, serving no purpose. Can you imagine this today? Of course not, it has to be the cheapest. And there are two ornamental bridges! Note the nice clear route number on the front of the tram. (Picture by Norman Forbes).

As you read the book, the story gets sadder and sadder as the number of routes diminished, with no apparent reason, the Corporation in 1949 claimed a saving of £216,000 and yet fuel tax increases were going to be £216,000 by 1951. The book highlights a number of fires, either at the tram depot or on trams. There’s even a story of a tram being on fire, damped down, and pushed back to the works! In the 1950’s there were power cuts and pictures of rows of trams just stopped in Dale Street and William Brown Street. What a calamity!

The book is only available from LRTA publications for the sum of £36.00 inc. P&P, 38 Wolseley Road, Sale, M33 7AU.