



KEEPING TIME WITH HOOK'S HISTORY: THE STORY OF HOOK'S LEYLAND CLOCK

It was at a Hook Focus brainstorming session that the idea of a feature on the Hook Clock began. Reactions were many and varied. What Clock? Where was it? Why has it gone? What did it look like?

Initial research showed that knowledge of the Clock within our community varied from significant to none at all but some described it as a Hook Legend and that led us to believe that this feature would be a welcome idea. And so, in true Focus tradition, the straws were drawn and one man took up the reins...

In the 1930's the A30 was the only route between London and the South West. The M3 was not built until the 1970's so all the traffic came through Hook, a far smaller village community than the Hook we know today. Traffic levels were a fraction of the current level on the M3 and A30. Main roads such as the A30 were dominated by goods vehicles many of which were made by Leyland Motors, a British company founded in the north-west, which was a dominant manufacturer in the days when motor vehicle factories in South-East Asia were not even being contemplated.

In 1931 Leyland Motors decided to place seven advertising clocks by the roadside in key locations across the country to promote their brand to all passing drivers. What better spot than on the A30 outside The Shack Cafe in the days before the delights of motorway service areas and when pubs were all male places that did not sell food. The transport cafe was king and The Shack was a well known stopping point. Grinding up the hill from the Crooked Billet to the centre of Hook was the welcoming sight of The Shack on the left with the Leyland Clock and its slogan "For All Time" standing in front of it. A regular driver knew the next chance to overtake anyone, large or small, would not be until Nateley Scures and took the chance to leave the queue of traffic.



So in 1931 a Leyland Clock was installed outside The Shack with highly reliable British clockwork mechanism by well known manufacturer Gillett and Brand to make sure that it kept good time. Just imagine an advertising clock on such a visible site that was slow or had stopped! The mechanism needed winding once a week through a hole about two thirds of the way up the column and a complex system of rods then took the drive to the back of the clock face. It seems that it never went wrong.

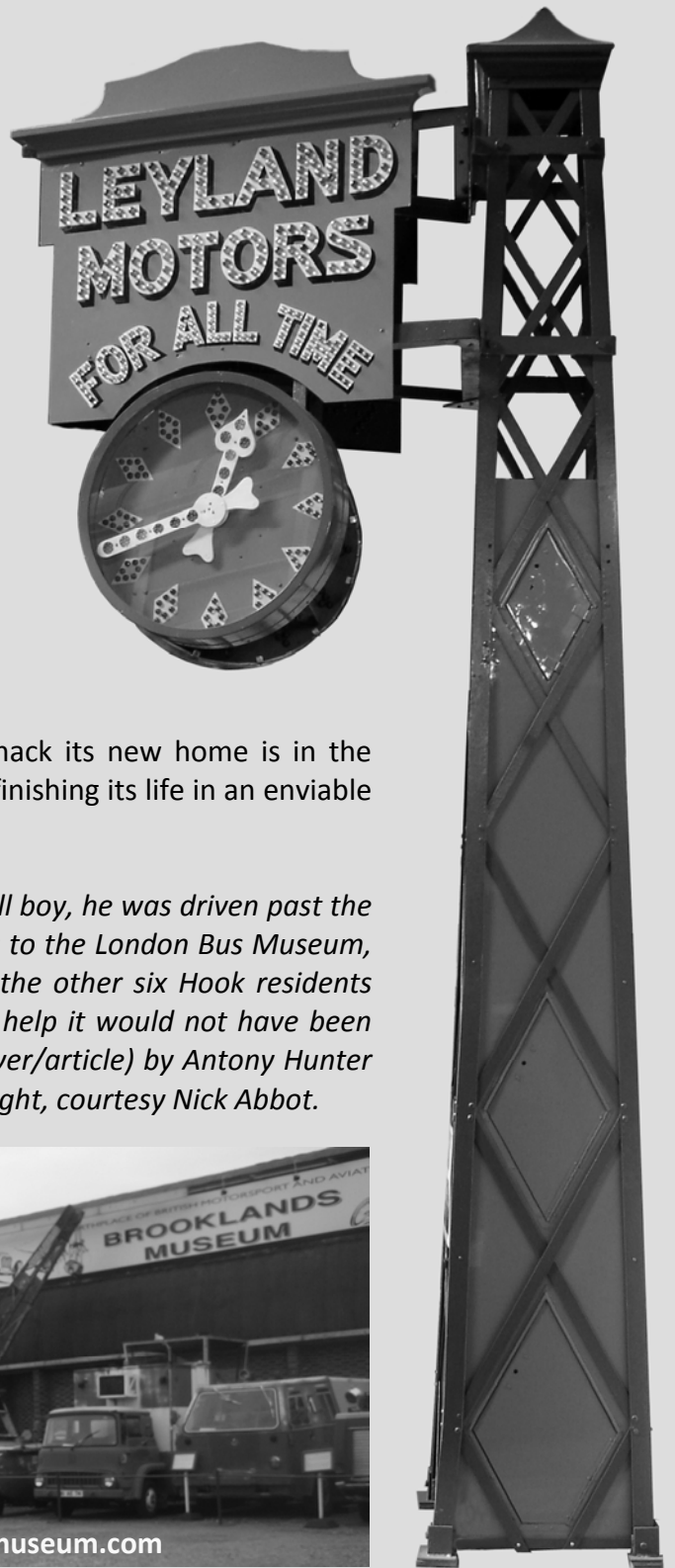


As with all the other Leyland clocks a reliable local guardian was responsible for winding it once a week and making sure it was set to the correct time and for many years this was Jack Bennett, a member of the Wall family whose funfair is still based by The Shack. Most of the people responsible to Leyland for winding their clock were paid for their time and the going rate in the 1930's seems to have been two pounds a year which looks very little but converted into current money represented an hourly rate about 30% above present day average earnings. This high rate of pay reflected the responsibility involved.

Driving up the hill the Leyland clock was a particularly impressive sight at night because headlights lit up the reflecting surfaces on the hands and dial and there was no mistaking the Leyland brand. Current highway standards might not permit a clock like this with reflecting surfaces to stand just by the side of the road and be so very visible as it could be regarded as a distraction to drivers.

Suddenly, in the early 1960's and without any warning the clock was removed. There is no documented record of the reason so I have had to piece together the various bits of information I have been able to collect. Competition from South-East Asia, mergers and industrial difficulties in the motor industry in those years caused Leyland Motors to lose enthusiasm for their seven roadside clocks all of which were removed from their sites at about the same time as the Hook clock.

For many years the large key to wind it up hung in the shed on the Wall family site but the clock was removed and disposed of as scrap by Leyland and it was over 10 years before it was found, without the clockwork mechanism. It was rescued by an enthusiast and restored by volunteers at the Cobham Bus Museum, who also converted it to electric power. The London Bus Museum, where it is on display, is now part of the Brooklands Motor Museum near Weybridge. Standing amongst a beautiful collection of restored vintage London Transport Leyland buses the clock is still an impressive sight and the clock face and hands reflect the flash of a camera in the same way that they reflected headlights in days gone by. The Leyland Motors slogan is proudly displayed on the clock itself but although the keyhole in the supporting column still exists there is no mechanism to wind!



Although "our" clock has gone from outside The Shack its new home is in the building right next to the Brooklands Concorde so it is finishing its life in an enviable location!

Researched and written by Antony Hunter. As a small boy, he was driven past the clock on many occasions in the 1950s. Grateful thanks to the London Bus Museum, the Wall family, Barry Deller, The Crooked Billet and the other six Hook residents who supplied essential information. Without all their help it would not have been possible to write this story. Accompanying photos (cover/article) by Antony Hunter (exceptions, Shack Café photo (unknown); and photo, right, courtesy Nick Abbot.



Visitor information: www.londonbusmuseum.com