

2548 Restoration Report 2006

By Rob Handford

2006 has seen a fair amount of progress on the detailed restoration of BCT Guy Arab No 2548.

Due to the warm weather through the autumn of 2005, priming and first undercoat of the exterior was completed in December, after which it became very cold during January and February. We cocooned ourselves within the bus, along with a small heater, where work centred on preparing to refit the ceiling panel over the platform, after the wiring, which was routed above this panel to the rear lights, had all been replaced.

It is amazing how carrying out one supposedly simple task can lead to a whole host of other jobs being necessary. Before the panel could go back up, some small sections of leather-cloth over the staircase had to be replaced. These had been applied to the rounded section 'bump' panel that a tall person would hit their head on if they weren't watching what they were doing! The ceiling panel overlapped the lower end of the leather-cloth. Unfortunately, it was found that the upper edge was sandwiched between the upper saloon floor and the banister. Therefore, the banister had to come out. Once this was done, all the old leather-cloth and glue was removed from around the staircase, new cloth cut and glued into place. The plywood-ceiling panel could then go back up. This had been made some years ago as the original was very rotten around the edges, and had been refitted previously, before the decision was made to rewire the whole bus. Whilst down, it was given some extra coats of cream undercoat and flatted down ready for topcoats. Once this was up, the repainted edge mouldings and light fitting could go back.

Downstairs all window frames were stripped of paint and the window pillars were stripped of old leather-cloth and glue. The window glazing rubbers, which are in good condition, were fettled up and then the long-winded and fiddly job of painting all the frames with three undercoats and two gloss coats was carried out. This job lasted through to October.

Full dismantling of the offside rear wheel-arch, luggage rack and under-stairs area was carried out and a new wheel-arch seat support made up from sheet steel on the panel bender at Tower Farm by Tony Niblett and Mick Evans.

With two or three people working inside the bus it was decided to spread out from the main task of restoring the lower deck and start on stripping the rear of the upper saloon whilst the banister and rear seat were out of the way. Old leather-cloth and glue on the bulkhead structure panels was removed and three window frames stripped back to bare metal by our newest member, Chris Ash. Leather-cloth and glue was also removed from the wooden banister panel.

Simultaneously, Robert Day took the rear and side route number boxes home and stripped them down. The parts were then transferred to my utility for painting prior to return to Robert for re-assembly. Suitable number blinds in good condition were selected for fitting, including some 1958 linen ones in the original style carried by 2548.

Once the weather warmed the museum in spring, work started on the job of repainting the lower saloon ceiling panels prior to refitting. The flat panels had been stripped back to bare wood but the original paint on the aluminium coving panels on which the lights are mounted was in good enough condition to be flatted down prior to repainting. Our good friend and former BCT/WMPTE/WMT coach painter Don Green assisted us in the task. He applied several coats of oil primer, undercoat and gloss with most of the flattening down between coats being carried out by Justin Price and me. I took the light blocks and wooden mouldings back

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home and repainted them in my utility room over the summer (The bus is being restored to 1960's livery, so at that time ceiling woodwork was painted white rather than varnished). At the same time I applied several coats of varnish to the decorative wood facia panels from the lower saloon front bulkhead. These are now ready for final application of transfers, refitting and top coat varnish

Towards the end of summer the number box compartments were prepared to receive the renovated boxes. The rear compartment was pretty well ready but required fitting of the window glass. The side one had been painted previously but needed the door re-assembling with renovated hinge, new leather-cloth, Perspex window and light fittings and then rewiring. The external window glass was also replaced and new glazing rubber fitted. The job was completed with new door stay chains to original pattern, renovated bump stops and door seals made up to original specification using foam rubber string and leather-cloth.

During the autumn, following replacement of more leather-cloth, which it would not be possible to fit subsequently, the prepared ceiling panels were gradually refitted and the new wiring connected to the light fittings. Thus we were able to have full illumination within the lower deck for the first time in many years. The window pillars have now had new leather-cloth fitted and the ceiling has a full complement of wood mouldings, all affixed with new screws, so it is ready for its final gloss coat when the warmer weather returns in the spring.

Another painstaking job being carried out since summer has been the straightening of all the battered radiator tube cooling fins so that they will look tidy and function properly once more. Steve Draper carried out brazed repairs to the radiator top and bottom tank tube-plates and then Mick Evans sealed them to the cleaned-up tanks with new gasket material. Unfortunately, due to years of corrosion, a couple of studs holding the tube plates to the tanks broke away during re-assembly and Mick has kindly offered to carry out the repairs. Once this is done, rebuilding of the radiator can commence.

Jobs carried out over the last few weeks have included final cleaning up of the lower saloon panelling below window level, filling of screw holes and painting with two-pack epoxy adhesion enhancing paint, to which the BCT pattern moquette will eventually be applied. Steve Draper has completed welded repairs to the framework around the offside rear wheel-arch and he is now in the process of drilling holes in all the re-manufactured components for that section, ready for solid riveting. The base of the conductor's box compartment has been carefully removed to allow access to the framework for assessment prior to shot blasting and painting. Fortunately, no nasty surprises were found!

Work in the New Year will be concentrated on riveting of the rear wheel-arches and floor sub-frame and welded repairs to the lower saloon step riser. Once this is done, the long-awaited re-boarding of the lower saloon floor can take place. The aim for 2007 is to complete restoration of the lower saloon and start work in earnest on the top deck – all being well!