

# Golden anniversary

Will Dalrymple recounts the early days of the IRTE, and the efforts of its charismatic founder G Mackenzie Junner

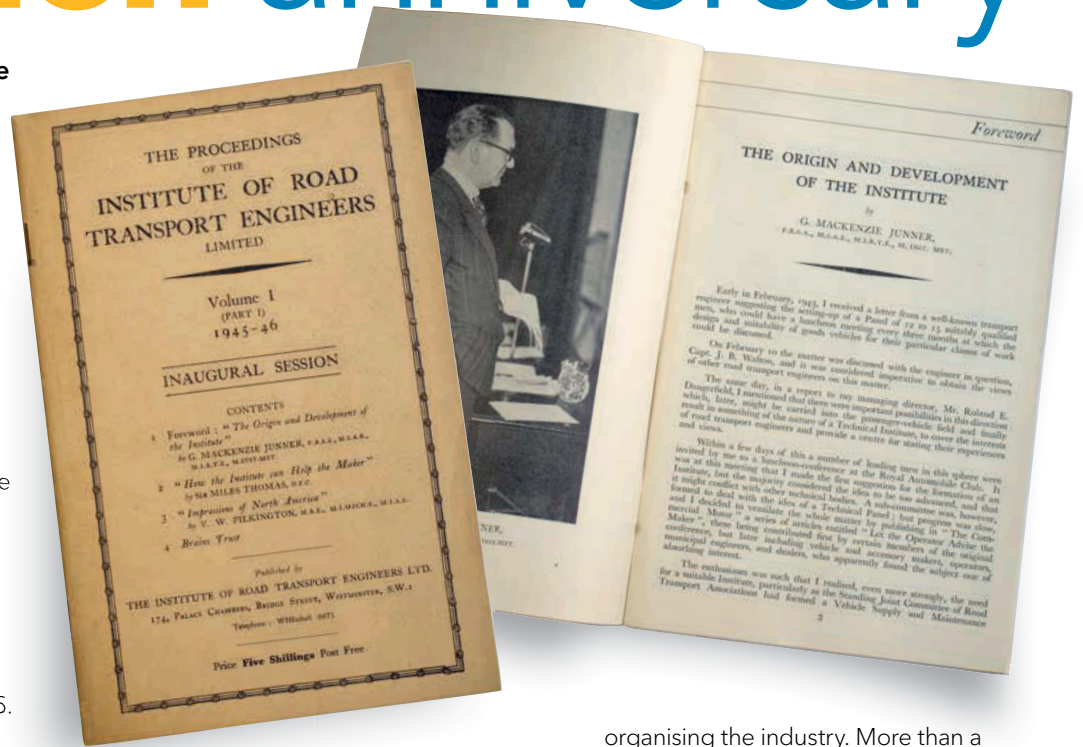
Sunday 28 April marked 75 years exactly since more than 200 potential members met to discuss formation of the Institute of Road Transport Engineers at an enthusiastic 'luncheon-conference'. That meeting appointed a formation committee, whose work culminated in incorporation of the IRTE a year later in May 1945.

The roots of this public campaign extended back into the previous year. In a contemporary account, IRTE founder and first president G Mackenzie Junner credited the idea to a letter he had received in February 1943 from 'a well-known transport engineer' (one Capt JB Walton) to set up a regular meeting of '12 to 15 suitably qualified men' to discuss 'the design and suitability of goods vehicles for their particular classes of work'. Junner stated

that he immediately appreciated that such a gathering could also be extended to passenger-carrying vehicles, "and finally result in something of the nature of a Technical Institute, to cover the interests of road transport engineers and provide a centre for stating their experiences and views". He set to work campaigning to have his vision realised.

It was not Junner's first foray in

organising the industry. More than a decade before, in 1932, he helped found the British Road Federation, an industry association centred around road users, vehicle manufacturers and infrastructure groups. He also formed the Long-Distance Road Haulage Committee, a forerunner of today's RHA. "A mixture of Scottish caniness and impatience of disorder led him to recognise the industry's need for organisation," read a description of Junner in news of his



1944

1954

1964

1974



**“...We hope at not too late a date generally to raise the standard of road transport operation. There is ample scope for improvement, even on 1938 standards...”**

Carlton Roberts

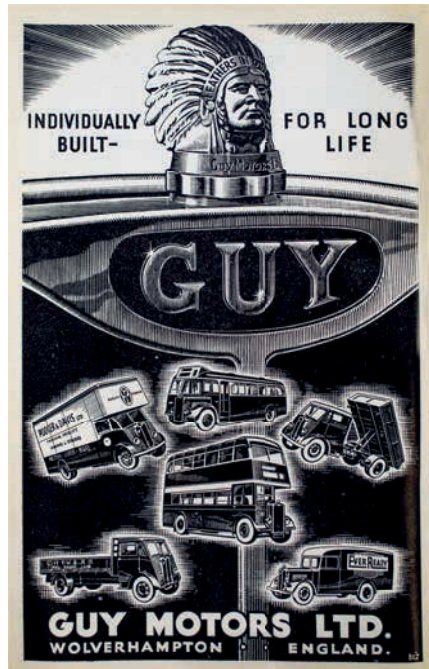
retirement in 1959, published unsigned in *The Commercial Motor*.

That description was quite possibly written by Junner himself, because, since the late 1920s, Junner’s day job was as its editor, an influential position that brought great access to the entire road transport industry. For example, when he felt that early progress to found the IRTE was proceeding too slowly, he ‘decided to ventilate the whole matter’ by publishing a series of articles in the journal entitled ‘Let the Operator Advise the Maker’. These helped change hearts and minds.

Junner first joined the journal in 1913 as a sub-editor, following a stint in engineering at coachbuilder AEC. During the war he served as a motorcyclist, and then returned to the magazine, initially as assistant editor. He remained there through the war (he did not serve in the armed forces, probably because of his age; by 1939 he was in his late 40s).

**RECONSTRUCTION**

A March 1946 lecture given by another IRTE founding member, Carlton Roberts, and recorded in its proceedings (which also featured vivid advertising, above), conveys the prevailing mood of the time. He writes: “During the war years, road transport engineers – especially those left to battle on the home front – have had to use all their ingenuity, patience and powers of improvisation to overcome the many difficulties with which they have been faced ... Now that



the war is over, our minds are becoming attuned to a post-war outlook. We have visions of new machines and new premises and, with these two visions materialising, we hope at not too late a date generally to raise the standard of road transport operation. There is ample scope for improvement, even on 1938 standards ... It will be true to say that the general average standard of maintenance even before the war, was not so high as it should have been. There was a tendency, when things went wrong, to blame the manufacturer ... Every effort should be made to ascertain the real cause of failures before we

become resigned to the happy notion that it is someone else’s fault.”

After Junner died in 1980, his obituary in *The Commercial Motor* described the IRTE as Junner’s ‘consuming interest’ in the years after the war, even though he continued to edit that journal for another 17 years. Junner’s passion can be glimpsed in his own account of founding the IRTE, probably written in 1946 or 1947. He writes: “Since [May 1945] its membership, value and prestige have grown rapidly and steadily, until it has taken its rightful place as one of the truly representative bodies of the road transport industry.” **TE**

