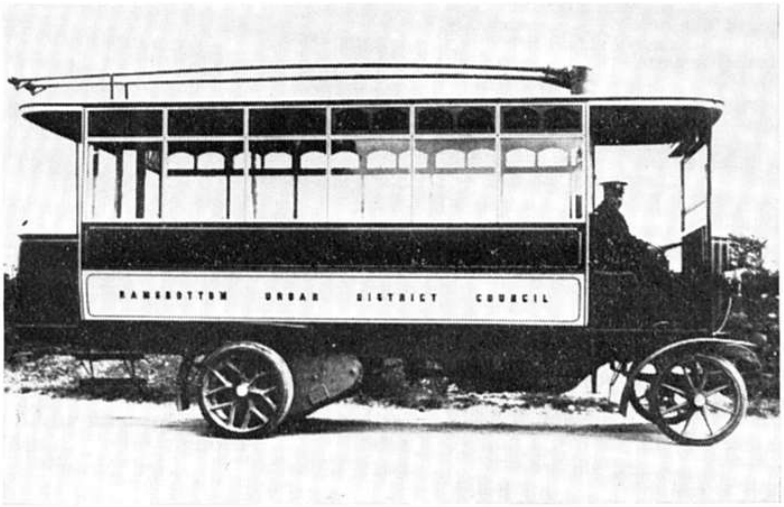

RAMSBOTTOM—Trolleybus Pioneer

by M. EVANS

Photos: Courtesy of R. B. Parr

RAMSBOTTOM is a small Lancashire town with a population of about 16,000. The principal industries are cotton-weaving, calico-printing and rope-making. It is situated between Rawtenstall and Bury and is one of the few bus-operating Urban Districts. Peel Tower and Grants Tower overlook the place, the latter being dedicated to the Grant Brothers, benefactors to the town, who appear as Cherryble Brothers in 'Nicholas Nickleby'.

Of special significance to the public transport enthusiast is the fact that trolleybuses were pioneered in Ramsbottom. The trackless system appears to have been inaugurated because plans to construct a tramway came to nought. Tramway powers were, in fact, obtained in 1903 to put down track, amounting to twenty chains double and seventy-eight chains single. When it was realised, however, that the tramway project could not be fulfilled, the Council applied, in 1912, for trolleybus powers and a shed was built in Stubbins Lane in 1913 at a cost of £1,898. Operation commenced in August of the same year, Ramsbottom being the first railless traction system independent of tramway operation in the country, and the only one in North Lancashire. One route was constructed, Holcombe Brook to Edenfield.

The installation had cost £13,350 (£3,000 more than the original estimate) and it was calculated that an average income of £68 per week would be required to make the system pay. Some delay in the delivery of the cars was experienced in July, 1913, but the Council was able to secure a promise that two would be in Ramsbottom before the end of August.

The actual Board of Trade Inspection, carried out by Major Druitt and Mr. Potter, took place on 21st August, 1913. The route was traversed from Ramsbottom station to Edenfield and from this point to Holcombe Brook. Those present included Councillor Wilkinson, the Chairman of the U.D.C., J. B. Hamilton of Leeds Corporation Tramways, the Consulting Engineer, Mr. Jenkins, Manager of the Bury Corporation Tramways and representatives from the Post and Telephone Department, Rawtenstall Tramways, R.E.T. Construction Company and Clough Smith. Mr. Wyld, the Manager, drove the first car and Corporation employees were also carried. A second car was tried as well. A good part of an hour was given over to the examination of the wires and various parts of the equipment. All went well and the system was found to be generally satisfactory. Brakes were tested on both cars. The actual route was three-and-a-half miles in length, with a gradient descent from Edenfield into Stubbins, hence the special precautions taken over the brakes.

A fare of 3d was charged from Holcombe Brook to Edenfield, with a 1d for any four quarter mile stages and ½d for each two stages. The service was half-hourly.

In December, 1913 an effort was made to arrange with Trackless Trolley Limited to send a Cedes-Stoll car to Ramsbottom for a free trial. This does not appear to have taken place however.

Power was supplied from a special station adjoining the depot.

It was not long before the neighbouring local authorities began to cast a watchful eye on Ramsbottom as, at that time, Dundee, Aberdare, Bradford, Leeds, Stockport and Keighley were either already in the trolleybus field or had proposals in that direction. Evidence also seems to suggest that the possibility of interrunning Ramsbottom's trolleybuses with the tramways of both Bury and Rawtenstall was not ruled out. Indeed, the first vehicles carried under-running trollies to permit them to operate in conjunction with trams, if necessary. Incidentally, although Manchester did not introduce trolleybuses until March, 1938, suggestions were made to run them as early as 1908 and one of the advantages of trolley vehicle operation was stated to be the interrunning possibilities.

The Ramsbottom trolleybus held the municipal transport field until the early 1920's. The same year as

(Heading photo), an early Ramsbottom trolleybus. The two designs of spokes are worthy of note—the larger and stronger types being on the rear wheels. (Left), the crowd seems to suggest that the photo was taken shortly after the opening of the system.