

Essex Bus Magazine Extra

Historical features special issue

Issue 7 Autumn 2024



Essex Bus Enthusiasts Group

www.essexbus.org.uk



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From the Colour Archives - 50 Years Ago

Opening of Southend Central Bus Station



Was this really 50 years ago? Sadly, yes, how time flies!

Our sponsor for this issue, William Morrison, recalls travelling to work from Wickford to Prittlewell on the wonderful semi-automatic gearbox Bristol FLF6LXs on the 251. Here is one (Wood Green's 2917, AEV 811F), but on a much more unusual working on the 400, Southend to Kings Cross, by then usually the preserve of one-man operated Bristol VRs. The picture was taken on 26 May 1974, just a week after Southend Central Bus Station had opened - you can see that pavement works are not yet complete. A sister bus sits behind, genuinely on the 251 to Wood Green. **Richard Delahoy**

Central Bus Station opened on 19 May 1974 and was located off York Road and replaced the former termini at Central Rail Station (on the north side forecourt, just off the High Street), Pier Hill and Seaway (the latter having replaced Tyler's Avenue ten years earlier, as described in EBM Extra 3, Spring 2023). Most cross-town services also served it (some in one direction only, because of one-way streets, and not the core Canvey-Shoebury 3 at all). Buses still used parts of Southend High Street at this stage as it was not fully pedestrianized (and still isn't quite today), and the bridge taking what is now Chichester Road under the railway line hadn't been built either.

Today the modern Travel Centre still occupies the same site but with a significantly different layout/buildings and on-road stops in Chichester Road.

Victoria Bus Station, inside the Eastern National garage in London Road, continued to be used and a small number of services still terminated there - 2B, 11, 14, 15, 15A & 19 - so Southend failed then to achieve the ideal position of having a single point served by all buses.

Essex Bus Magazine Extra from the Essex Bus Enthusiasts Group

Issue 7

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Introduction

EBM Extra is an occasional series devoted entirely to historical features that we don't have room for in the main monthly magazine. Each issue aims to cover a broad range of eras, operators and places, all related to Essex.

We plan to publish two Extras each year, subject to funding; we already have sponsors for 2025 but need further sponsors for 2026/7 - we would welcome any offers, either for a whole issue or as a contribution to one (currently each issue of EBM costs about £670, including postage to members). All articles in this magazine were written by Richard Delahoy, except where noted.

We are extremely grateful to **William Morrison** for sponsoring this issue; you can read more from William on pages 2 & 3. We hope you will enjoy this Extra magazine and will find the range of articles interesting and stimulating. This latest issue includes stories of two very different but both temporary Eastern National depots, from very different eras, amongst other historical stories covering a range of different eras in the history of the bus industry.

Contents

IFC	From the Colour Archives	19	Before Hedingham - Aubrey Letch
2	This Issue's Sponsor	24	EN's Walthamstow Depot
4	Vange Depot - Basildon before Cherrydown	29	Trivia Corner - A Missing Number
14	Another Scottish "exchange" - PD2s for RT3s	30	Stephensons' variety
18	John's Day Out in 1993 - All Day for £1		

Front cover: one of the major articles in this issue looks at a north Essex independent that ran for many years in relative obscurity until taken over by a dynamic new owner with ambitious plans. We are referring to the business of Aubrey Letch of Sible Hedingham, bought by Donald MacGregor in 1960 and transformed over many years into today's Hedingham Omnibuses (part of Go Ahead Group).

The Letch fleet included a small number of double-deckers, one being LJ 9405, a 1934 built Leyland TD3 with Brush body. Seen here - in what we believe is the only known colour shot of a bus with Letch - it is standing outside The Bell in Castle Hedingham in April 1957. The bus stop remains there to this day.

The bus had an interesting history, being new to Hants & Dorset as A132, fitted with a torque converter automatic gearbox. This was removed in August 1946, the bus being fitted with a conventional gearbox and clutch; earlier, the Brush body had been overhauled by ECW in April 1945. Renumbered 974, it was withdrawn in November 1950, passing to Letch in June 1951 where it doubled the size of the double decker fleet. It was withdrawn in September 1958 and replaced by the first of two Crossley deckers. See pages 19 to 23 for the Letch story.

Geoffrey Morant, courtesy of The Transport Library

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This Issue's Sponsor

William Morrison

I was born in St John's Hospital Chelmsford, but have lived all my life in Wickford. My interest in buses must have started with shopping trips with my parents to Southend-on-Sea or Romford market on a Saturday. This would have been on a Bristol LD or a Leyland PD, on Service 251 (Southend – London Wood Green). When I was a teenager, I was allowed to travel to Wood Green where you could purchase a Red Rover ticket from the Underground station for travel on London Transport red buses all day. I would leave Wickford on the first bus and arrive home at 11.30pm!

I joined the Eastern National Enthusiasts Group around 1965 to keep up with the news [William is member 131 - we now only have six members with lower numbers].



Above: William recalls Saturday trips to Southend on Bristol LDs on the 251, like 268 GVW (then numbered 1497, later 2466) seen in Rayleigh High Street outside the Spread Eagle pub en route to Southend on 9 February 1959. **Frank Church**



When I left school my first job was very local, but after a year the office moved to West Road, Westcliff, this involved a bus journey to Prittlewell on the 251, now operated by Bristol FLFs. In 1967/68 a batch of semi-automatic FLF's were delivered and were the main allocation on the 251, these became my favourite buses [see picture inside front cover]. Brentwood depot would operate my journey in the morning and I soon got to know all the 'main road' crews.

After the NBC was formed, they introduced a ticket that was accepted across all their south eastern subsidiaries, called a Wanderbus ticket and cost only £2.97. I could now use this ticket on the Green Line services meaning that I was able to travel further in a day, once even reaching Bristol. As the Setright ticket machines only went up to 99p the conductor had to issue 3 x 99p tickets, marked 'Special'.

In 1988 I successfully applied for an office job with Ensign Bus Company, this involved driving to Purfleet every day and many traffic jams, but I settled in and loved the job. This was when London Pride was at its peak, any Metroliner available was bought and most were converted to open-top. One day I was asked to conduct on the Docklands and Greenwich tour, aboard Daimler CSG6-30 UJF 182, Fleet No 182, this was a new venture and involved a trip on the Woolwich ferry, but all ran smoothly. Next, I was asked to spend a day as a pavement conductor at Coventry Street (near Piccadilly Circus), which was our main stop for the sightseeing tour, this involved issuing tickets and collecting cash from the customers and dispatching buses every few minutes. This job was quite hard for a novice but I completed it without incident.

Right: Ensign 182 in Regent Street on 2 April 1994, with one of the many Metroliners behind.

Mike Harris



During my period of employment we gained more LRT tender awards, which meant new MCW Metrobuses were bought to cover this work. After a few years the local services were sold to CNT Holdings in Hong Kong, the depot moved to Dagenham, and later the rest of the operation moved to Rainham. After ten years the sightseeing operation was also sold on and I decided to leave the company. I then started a job in Shotgate, local to me, that lasted for 15 years, taking me up to retirement.

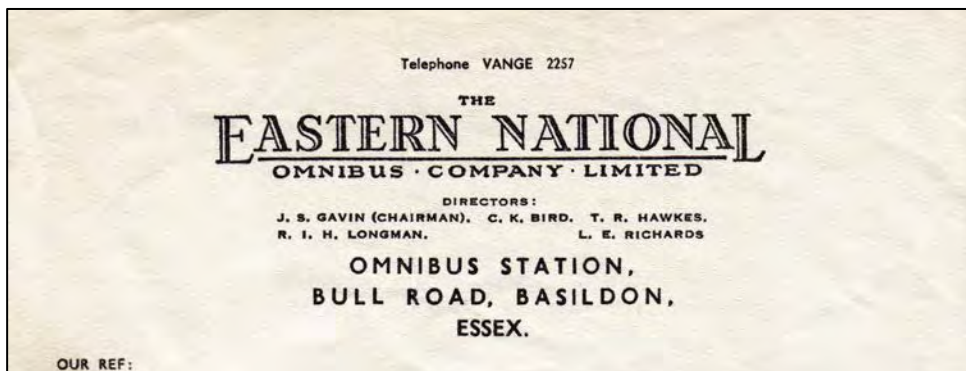
During my nearly 60 years membership with ENEG/EBEG I have been on the Committee for a while and hosted meetings at Wickford Cricket Club. Now retired I enjoy using my bus pass, and can frequently be found utilising my local, near 24-hour, X10 bus route.

Right: recalling the MCW Metrobuses that Ensign bought for LRT services, one, 292 (F292 MHJ) was preserved by Ensign and is now part of the Newman Family collection. It was seen in Brentwood High Street on the Heritage Running Day on 1 December 2018.

Richard Delahoy



Eastern National operated buses (and a few coaches) from temporary premises in Vange from 1951 to 1961 as Basildon New Town began to be developed, pending the establishment of a permanent depot in the new town centre - the location that First still operate from today. In some earlier issues of Essex Bus News we've touched on part of the story, this feature adds some new information and previously unpublished photos, and memories of the eleven year life of the depot, which grew from just three buses to over forty, rising to sixty when the new Cherrydown premises opened.



Above: letterhead for the grandly named "omnibus station" - in reality, just a temporary depot, not a bus station.

Right: EN advert from a late 1950s street map

The late **Roy Hawkes** recalled: "As a young lad living just a mile away from the Bull Road Depot during the war years and after, if my memory serves me right, the depot site was previously a coal yard. A Mr Robert Greaves was our then local coal merchant who operated from there, the stock of coal being stored under a large canopy, which remained when the coal merchant pulled out. EN later parked their buses under this canopy [other sources quote the site as being a timber yard].

"A stone's throw from the depot was the bus stop known as Gales Corner, where the Westcliff-on-Sea AEC Regents would stop whilst on the 2A route to Romford. The local operator Campbells of Pitsea would also stop at this bus stop before turning into Bull Road and passing the then coal (timber) yard on route to Rectory Road, Post Office, at Old Basildon. The driver would then lay over before commencing his return journey".

[At this time the 2A continued north up Timberlog Lane and out to join the A127 at Nevendon. The southern part of Timberlog Lane, from The Barge pub on the A13, has since become part of Clay Hill Road, as explained later].

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Head Office: NEW WRITTLE STREET, CHELMSFORD
Telephone: Chelmsford 3431

Vange Depot - A Timeline

4/1/49	Basildon designated New Town.
9/50	EN's General Manager reported on preliminary discussions about locations for a permanent bus station and depot. Discussions/meetings took place over the next four years as various sites were discussed.
18/9/51	EN Board meeting approved purchase of land and buildings in Bull Road, Vange from Robert Greaves & Sons, Victoria Timber Yard (builders merchants).
30/9/51	Three vehicles worked from Vange on Grays area EN services retained after Phase 1 of London Transport exchange. Five crews based there. Operations used vacant concrete plot on side of premises. Vange depot under control of Southend.
2/1/52	Phase 2 of London Transport transfer. Open ended shed now in use as garage, with adjacent timber office building added at front.
17/2/52	Westcliff-on-Sea Motor Services take over City Coach Company.
4/1/53	EN Timetable. BASILDON Bull Road, Vange (Tel Vange 2257) in list of Depots. City services numbered 251 to 261.
29/3/53	City 258 (Laindon circular) on Westcliff-on-Sea licence worked from Vange, also locals 257 and 259.
23/8/53	Westcliff-on-Sea introduce new service W84 (Grays - Pitsea - Basildon, Whitmore Way) operated from Vange.
11/53	Vange allocation now 8.
14/2/54	Westcliff-on-Sea introduce new local service W44 from Pitsea Station to Whitmore Way, Quendon Road.
18/7/54	Eastern National fleet renumbering, new garage codes introduced. Basildon - yellow circle. (Southend area)
9/54	Allocation now 21.
12/1/55	Application started to transfer Westcliff-on-Sea road service licences to EN.
21/8/55	EN service renumbering, Basildon scheme, W44 and W84 become 244 and 248.
19/2/56	EN takes over Campbell, Pitsea. Pressure to house more vehicles. Allocation now 31.
1/10/56	Land occupied on left side at rear of 'The Bull'.
21/11/56	Estimate for clearance of land and levelling of site to be suitable for occupation.
22/11/56	One day token strike at Bull Road depot over working conditions (see page 12).
10/57	Further area of railway land at rear leased from BTC (British Transport Commission). Hastily cleared and used as unsurfaced yard.
2/58	Basildon allocated BN garage code.
4/5/58	Service 244 reached Basildon Town Centre.
7/58	Allocation now 41.
22/10/58	Notification to sell Bull Road garage to Basildon Development Corporation.
1/59	Agreement finally reached between Basildon Development Corporation and EN for the acquisition by EN of the site in Cherrydown to be used for the new (permanent) Basildon depot, in exchange for the existing site at Bull Road. EN to transfer 14,000 sq ft of land at Bull Road and to acquire 39,640 sq ft at Cherrydown, EN paying £2,750 to the BDC.
9/2/59	Opening of rented bungalow at 125, Timberlog Lane as temporary office. Also used as overflow staff rest room.
11/59	Addressing the EN Basildon Social Club's first annual dinner, EN General Manager Mr L J Quilter notes that the Vange depot now houses 44 buses and 60 crews.
5/60	EN take possession of the new site in Cherrydown. Contract let for the construction of the new Basildon depot at a cost of £69,596 (about £1.3m in today's money).
23/12/60	Last EN press advert in Basildon Standard quoting the 125 Timberlog Lane address.
1/1/61	Timberlog Lane office vacated.
10/2/61	Bull Road site sold to Basildon Development Corporation.
28/2/61	Rear of Bull Hotel parking area vacated.
27/3/61	Part of new Cherrydown garage in use. Bull Road canteen moved to Cherrydown for use as temporary office.

30/3/61	Last EN press advert in Basildon Standard featuring the Bull Road address.
5/4/61	Bull Road depot demolition completed, final vestiges removed.
8/4/61	First EN press advert in Basildon Standard featuring the Cherrydown address.
10/61	Bull Road south easterly realignment opened, with Timberlog Lane joining at a T junction.
18/10/61	Official opening of Cherrydown, Basildon new office and depot, allocation 60.
7/11/61	New Bull pub opened, 50 yards east of previous pub, demolition of which was started.
1963	Ful length of Bull Road renamed Clay Hill Road. The new Bull pub was at number 469; it was subsequently demolished and the site is now occupied by a block of flats.

As noted in the timeline, initially EN had a public office at the depot itself. However, as the depot expanded alternative accommodation was found by renting a former bungalow just round the corner, at 125 Timberlog Lane. The last reference to Bull Road as the office appeared as part of an EN advert in the Basildon Standard, 14/2/59:

• BOOK YOUR SEAT IN ADVANCE •

THE EASTERN NATIONAL OMNIBUS CO., LTD., Bull Road, Vange, BASILDON.
Phone 2257. Mr D. G. JEAKINS, High Road, LAINDON. Phone 2114.
Mr. E. R. F. MILLS Whitmore Way West, BASILDON NEW TOWN. Phone 20796.
Mr. S. C. JONES Broadway Newsagency, High Road, PITSEA. Phone 3231.

The following week's advert instead directed enquirers to the new office at what was described as a temporary office:

Free Brochures, giving details of time tables and Period Return Fares, may be obtained from the Company's Offices and Agents

• BOOK YOUR SEAT IN ADVANCE •

The Eastern National Omnibus Co. Ltd. Temporary Booking & Enquiry Office: 125 Timberlog Lane, Gales Corner (Phone Vange 2257). Mr. D. G. Jeakins, High Road, Laindon (Phone 2114). Messrs. Adcock, 4 The Broadway, Pitsea (Phone 3021). Mr. E. R. F. Mills, Whitmore Way West, Basildon New Town (Phone 20796). "Eye" Hairdressers, Broadway, Pitsea (Phone 3152).

Alan Osborne recalls: "As a young lad I often cycled from our weekend family bungalow in Wickford to the Bull Road garage in Vange, the premises have always held a particular fascination for me. The whole area around Bull Lane (now Clay Hill Road) has since been redeveloped and remodelled, such that the sole remaining landmark is the railway bridge.

My interest has latterly been stimulated when I was given copies of a set of photos from the collection of Group member and Laindon resident John Rugg (as identified in the captions below). Despite extensive enquiries the origin of these has not been established. The photograph on page 10 is clearly a posed shot with all vehicles neatly parked with their destination displays set to 'Eastern National Private Hire Service'. That they carry BN garage code plates (introduced 1958) and since at that time the site was soon to be vacated, they are probably reference shots.

I have now created a detailed timeline of events (see above) and a sketch map of the area (see page 9).

Photos from the Derek Giles collection used with this article have recently started to be made available by The Bus Archive, initially 4,000 views from the early 1950s. These can be viewed and prints purchased via www.thetransportlibrary.co.uk.

Use the search box, starting with the word "Giles". Captions include the location and date (but beware there are a few obvious – and some less obvious – caption errors at present). The operator is listed as that current when each photo was taken, so for example most City pictures are listed under Westcliff, some Campbells under Eastern National, and so on. The easiest way to search is by his name and an operator or place name, eg "Giles Southend" will produce 818 matches, refining that to "Giles Southend Corporation" will reduce the list to 427 pictures. "Giles Basildon" finds 32 matches, including shots of buses in service in the developing New Town.

Right:

An undated shot shows the entrance on the right, the rudimentary offices and depot building, repurposed from the previous occupant. Centre can be seen a shop and then at the left, the Bull pub, giving its name to this road. In the early days, the only service passing directly in front of the garage was that of rival Campbells of Pitsea, a route which became EN service 233. Other routes passed close by.

Basildon Heritage

**Left:**

A closer view of the depot offices. Note the advertising boards in the window of what passed for the local enquiry and booking office and the timetable cases.

As can be seen, the covered area was open to the elements at both ends. **John Rugg.**

**Right:**

This further shot, taken from the yard and looking in the opposite direction to the previous shot, emphasises the somewhat desolate conditions that the staff had to work in.

Gerry Ward collection, courtesy John Rugg.





Derek Giles made various visits to Bull Road. **Above**, on 14 February 1954, 3928 (LPU 618, a Beadle bodied Bedford OB bus of 1947) stands outside the depot, ahead of Bristol K 3742 (FPU 522). The board in the foreground is for Keystones, Builders & Decorators, of Victoria House (to the right of the depot entrance).

Below, the crew of KTW 242 (Bedford OB/Mulliner of 1946) take a break opposite the depot on 10 May 1953. The bus still carries its former City number, B29; it was renumbered as EN 179 in July 1954. Opposite, a Bristol L "Queen Mary" coach (probably 4101, later 325, PTW 104) is parked with a board advertising trips.

Both: Photographer **Derek S Giles**, copyright **The Bus Archive**, references DG02_02902 & DG02_02396 resp.





Above: a view from the yard, looking the opposite way to the middle picture on page 7. This shot and that below emphasise the somewhat desolate conditions that the staff had to work in (see feature on the strike on page 12).

Below: the view referred to on page 6, clearly a posed shot with all vehicles neatly parked with their destination displays set to 'Eastern National Private Hire Service'. This shows the parking area to the rear of the Bull Hotel, which can be seen in the left background. Pairs of Bristol L, K and LD types form the front row. Both **Gerry Ward collection, courtesy John Rugg.**





Above: the acquisition of Campbells in 1956 added pressure on space. Former Campbells MTW 843, now EN 003, alongside the depot building on 19 February 1956, the actual day of the takeover. It is an Albion CX13 with Allweather body, new in 1948. It already carries its new EN fleet number plate and yellow circle depot allocation plate. Photographer **Derek S Giles**, copyright The Bus Archive, reference DG02-04616.

Below: following the expansion of the depot, the public enquiry office was relocated to a rented bungalow just round the corner at 125 Timberlog Lane, photographed by **Frank Church** on 24 May 1959.



One Day Strike of Vange Garage on Thursday November 22nd, 1956

Conditions at the temporary depot were far from ideal and this led to at least one dispute. John Rugg compiled the following notes at the time:

"The strike of about 100 busmen was because of dissatisfaction with general working conditions. No vehicles left the depot, and the crews appear to have spent the day standing around a brazier made from an oil drum!



The worst affected area was the heavily populated district around Whitmore Way. Here the 244 is the only route serving the district, and the strike meant a long walk for many City workers to Vange or Pitsea Station. The only "foreign" route which runs near the district is the 2A. It is understood that early morning journeys on this route, operating from Southend and Hadleigh, refused to pick up and set down passengers between the Vange and Nevendon neighbourhoods, but normal service was later resumed. It is also understood that vehicles operating from Chelmsford on route 34 terminated at Basildon Marconi's Factory instead of at Pitsea Station for some, if not all, of the day, and also that the service was reduced in frequency to about one-third of normal workings.

In Laindon the shortage of buses was less severe as quite a proportion of early morning journeys are operated by Brentwood vehicles. Throughout the day however the High Road was served only by the 53 route every hour, operated by Chelmsford, Colchester and Clacton, and occasionally by the 260 route operated by Brentwood. In the evening rush hour, Brentwood vehicles once again came to the rescue. The only route which did not operate was the 258, apart from one odd journey at 4.35 pm. All trains arriving from London had at least one, and sometimes two, vehicles to meet them providing a passenger service to Brentwood, Billericay and duplicates to the Fortune-of-War. After 7.0 pm however, Laindon Station terminus was deserted apart from one vehicle on route 260 which arrived at 7.57 pm and departed 16 minutes later.

School journeys were also affected and certain journeys on other routes, normally operated by Vange, were cancelled. These included: -

Route 53. 6.20 am Rookery Corner - Laindon (Fortune-of-War); 8.0 am, 9.0 am, 10.0 am, 12 noon and 5.25 pm Grays (War Memorial) - Billericay; 7.35 am, 4.5 pm, 4.20 pm Grays (War Memorial) - Laindon (Fortune-of-War); 6.43 am Laindon (Fortune-of-War) - Tilbury Ferry; 8.16 am (double duplication), 4.20 pm (duplicate) Laindon (Fortune-of-War)- Grays (War Memorial); 8.55 am, 9.55 am, 12.55 pm Billericay - Grays (War Memorial).

Route 40. 8.0 am Tilbury Ferry - Brentwood (Yorkshire Grey), 9.5 am Brentwood (Yorkshire Grey) - Grays (War Memorial).

Route 246. 6.42 am Laindon (Fortune-of-War) - East Tilbury (Bata Shoe Factory), 5.10 pm East Tilbury (Bata Shoe Factory) - Laindon (Fortune-of-War).



Photos - Basildon Standard



The end: **Bob Beaumont** captured this scene of the old depot being demolished in 1961.

Sources and further reading:

I am very grateful to Kevin Jennings, Ken Porter and Jo Clark of the Basildon Heritage Centre for helpful discussions and for providing access to local Basildon newspapers and maps which proved most useful to clarify events. As this article was finalised, the sad news reached us of the untimely death of Kevin Jennings in August. I also gleaned many helpful snippets from the meetings at The Green Centre, Pitsea Hall Lane through the personal recollections of long term Pitsea residents. I also have to thank John Rugg and Chris Stewart for helpful discussions. Especial thanks to Richard Delahoy for re-vamping my collection of notes and photographs into the finished article, and for the supply of additional information/material.

Essex Bus News - issues 569, Sept 2011 (*Cherrydown 50*), 576, April 2012 (*Sixty Years in Basildon*), 594-6, October/November/December 2013 (*More on Bull Road, Vange*).

Buses in Basildon - David Domin, Omnibus Society, 1970

EN and Tilling Group records at The Bus Archive

EN timetable leaflets and books, various dates

Passenger Transport, November 1961 (*Keeping pace with Basildon's growth*)

Basildon Standard, various dates

Message Board thread on www.sct61.org.uk

Basildon, Peter Lucas, Phillimore, 1991

Britain in Old Photographs, Basildon, Marion Hill, Sutton Publishing, 1999

Memories of Basildon, Jim Reeves, Tempus Publishing, 2006

Lost Basildon, Lisa Homer, Amberley, 2019

Campbells of Pitsea - Fact File 3, Alan Osborne, EBEG, 2002.

Research by Chris Stewart, Richard Delahoy, John Taylor, John Rugg, Derek Giles, Roy Hawkes, Terry Clark.

Road names

It should be mentioned that the development of the New Town saw many changes to the road layout and to road names, meaning that some of the roads referred to here are on different alignments now to the position in the 1950s. Most significantly, the name Bull Road has disappeared completely, being incorporated into Clay Hill Road. The latter also took over the southern section of Timberlog Lane, between the former Bull Road junction and The Barge pub on London Road (A13). At its western end (towards the nascent town centre), Clay Hill Road also absorbed part of Honeypot Lane.

Another Scottish “exchange” - PD2s for RT3s

In EBM Extras 4 & 6 we told the story of the swap of English FLFs for Scottish VRTs, but there was an earlier instance of buses migrating south from Scotland with Essex buses heading north.

In 1966 Southend Transport was looking to increase the proportion of mileage operated by one-man buses. The OMO fleet then comprised four Albion Aberdonians (200-2/5) and four Leyland Leopards (30' long 206/7 and a pair of 36 footers 208/9, on order and delivered in March 1966). The buses to be replaced were lowbridge Leyland PD2s. In the normal way, the PD2s would have been sold and single-deckers sourced separately, but a deal was struck with Millburn Motors whereby the five Titans were part exchanged for five Leyland Royal Tiger Worldmasters that Millburns had bought from Glasgow Corporation. Southend also had to pay £3,750 for the buses; arguably the dealer got the better side of the deal, given that the Worldmasters were only two or three years newer than the deckers. Millburn Motors were Leyland and Albion dealers and traded in both new and second-hand commercials; headquartered in Glasgow, they had branch offices in Aberdeen, Dundee, Carlisle and Preston.

The Worldmaster was a relatively unusual chassis on the home market with sales of less than fifty, but in export markets it was hugely successful - export sales ran from 1954 to 1979 by which time more than 20,000 had been built, making it Leyland's most successful bus chassis ever, beating the Atlantean and Leopard. Glasgow took 30 in 1956/7 with Weymann body frames that were finished in Glasgow's Coplawhill Works as B40D buses, subsequently converted to B44F in 1960/1. Halifax Corporation had 9 and there were half a dozen built for coach operators.

They were a somewhat unusual purchase for Southend, a dramatic contrast to the lightweight Albion Aberdonians. Leyland Tiger Cubs would have been far more suitable, but presumably none were available on the second-hand market at this time. Indeed, writing of the Worldmaster in *The Leyland Bus*, Doug Jack described them as “over engineered for normal domestic requirements”.

The heavyweight model had a semi-automatic gearbox, a first for Southend, with a substantial pedestal style air change selector. Being located close to the OMO cash tray, it was not unusual to find drivers fishing out coins that had dropped into the selector, jamming it! Writing on the excellent sct61.org.uk web site, driver Doug Nicholson recalls “I once spent 20 minutes at Ashingdon Schools having come from the Dome caravan site with almost a full load when a 2/- piece dropped in when the bus was in neutral. A lady with a tail comb eventually came to my rescue and I was able to complete the trip into Southend; all very embarrassing”.

They started to arrive in Southend in February in Glasgow livery and were repainted into Southend colours, including painting over the external cab doors, which were fixed in the closed position. They retained the Glasgow destination indicators, and blinds had to be made up specially for use in Southend (there's more on this in EBM 678). Often to be found on the Waking routes 4/4A/4B, they could be used on a variety of other work too. They were heavy buses for the time - 7 tons 9 cwt - and had the large O680 Leyland engine, so were fast, but thirsty. By contrast, the Aberdonians weighed only 5 tons 2 cwt and even the Weymann PD2s were lighter, at 6 tons 17 cwt.

They lasted in Southend until 1972 when they were effectively rendered surplus and all went for scrap except for 213, which was bought by Southend Stadium and down seated to 20 to use to transport greyhounds from the kennels in Canewdon to the Stadium in Grainger Road; it was sold to a dealer for scrap in July 1975.

The exchange: **from Southend** - Leyland PD2/20, Weymann (lightweight) L30/28R, new September 1954

Fleet	Registration	Sold by Millburns to
281	HJN 841	H Wray & Sons (Ideal Service), Hoyle Mill, Barnsley
283	HJN 843	Cunningham's Bus Service Ltd, Paisley
284	HJN 844	Bamber Bridge Motor Services, Bamber Bridge, Preston
285	HJN 845	Cunningham's Bus Service Ltd, Paisley
286	HJN 846	McNeill, Shotts, later Shotts Transport Ltd, Shotts, North Lanarkshire

To Southend - Leyland RT3/1,
Weymann/GCT B44F, new 1956/7

Glasgow	Southend	Registration	To service	Withdrawn
LS6	210	FYS 677	3/66	9/72
LS7	211	FYS 678	3/66	10/72
LS8	212	FYS 679	3/66	3/72
LS15	213	FYS 686	3/66	10/72
LS1	214	FYS 672	4/66	6/72

There was much later to be a Glasgow/Southend connection when Southend Transport bought 11 Leyland Nationals that had been new to the Greater Glasgow PTE; they came to Southend in 1991 from Blackpool Transport who'd bought them in 1987. Ten of the eleven ran in Southend and one was later rebuilt with a DAF engine and upgraded interior. That one was withdrawn in 1998, the others between 1993 and 1997.

And finally, on a trivia note, there was one fleet in which ex Southend PD2s and a Glasgow Worldmaster could be found together - Paton Bros. of Renfrew Ferry. In the early 1970s they operated ex Southend 292, 302/4 and ex Glasgow LS5; indeed, there is a picture on Flickr showing 292 and LS5 together in the depot yard. They would also have encountered the pair of PD2s with Cunninghams, who jointly ran the intensive Paisley - Renfrew Ferry service.



Left: FYS 679, the future Southend 212, has just arrived at the depot on 8 February 1966; a Lancashire trade plate in the window, with Leopard 206 behind.

Below: about to depart the depot on its long journey north on 17 March 1966, Southend 283, HJN 843. It is running on the Corporation's trade plate 075 HJ.

Both **Paul Bateson**





Sold on: 283 with Cunningham's, 17 June 1966; 281 with Ideal Service, 19 August 1966. Both **Paul Bateson**





Twilight of their careers:

Above: 210, FYS 677, at the windy Pier Hill terminus in Southend, alongside the Palace Hotel (now the Park Inn Palace) with the side of the long-lamented Ritz cinema on the left, on Monday 20 March 1972. It is about to do an evening peak short working to Eastwood, Woodcutters Arms on the 29. It has lost its Leyland badge on the front but gained a pay as you enter sign. I'd cycled here after school to get the photo!

Below: at Southend Stadium, greyhound bus FYS 686 (ex Southend 213) waits its next canine load on 16 March 1974. I only took two photos of it in this use, both with another vehicle alongside, so apologies for the ex London County Council (Inner London Education Authority) Dennis Triton former school bus MUL 616 partly blocking the view. Both **Richard Delahoy**



John's Day Out in 1993 - All Day for £1

Member John Rugg has always enjoyed days out by service bus from his home in Laindon and we've published some of his itineraries over the years. Digging back into the archives, here's a trip he made over thirty years ago, on Saturday 6 March 1993, on Southend Transport buses/coaches, using a £1 day rover ticket - a real bargain!

At this time the "bus war" between Southend Transport and Thamesway was at its height, with Southend operating to Basildon and Billericay and contesting various routes within the Southend area, including the 20 to Hullbridge, which John sampled. He managed to bag every vehicle type (open toppers excepted - it was March after all) in Southend's then very varied fleet of 117 buses and 17 coaches. He started from Basildon at 0833 and got back there at 1907, with only short breaks between rides. We think he probably used Thamesway buses to get from home to Basildon bus station and back,

that much is not recorded. The picture **above** shows one of the ten ST vehicles John travelled on, in this case 404 (LHG 444T), one of four full-height VRs that Southend acquired from Ribble. By now smartly repainted into ST livery, it was seen on 3 April 1993 in Nobles Green Road, Eastwood. **Richard Delahoy**



Ser.	Dep.	From	To	Bus	Type
50	0833	Basildon Bus Station	Billericay Queens Park	263	Leyland Olympian
50	0907	Billericay Queens Park	Southend Bus Station	263	Leyland Olympian
3	1100	Southend Bus Station	Canvey, the Haystack	404	Bristol VR (full height)
3A	1222	Canvey, the Haystack	Thundersley, Kenneth Rd	725	Leyland National
1	1257	Thundersley, Kenneth Rd	Rayleigh Rail Station	242	Leyland Fleetline
20	1315	Rayleigh Rail Station	Hullbridge, the Anchor	353	Bristol VR
20	1334	Hullbridge, the Anchor	Southend Bus Station	353	Bristol VR
12	1442	Southend Bus Station	Canewdon, Loftmans Cnr	784	Leyland National
12	1523	Canewdon, Loftmans Cnr	Southend Bus Station	784	Leyland National
4A	1605	Southend Bus Station	Shoebury, East Beach	234	Leyland Fleetline
8A	1652	Shoebury, East Beach	Southend Bus Station	284	Leyland Olympian
63	1735	Southend Bus Station	Temple Sutton	112	AEC Routemaster
63	1749	Temple Sutton	Southend Bus Station	112	AEC Routemaster
X1	1830	Southend Bus Station	Basildon Bus Station	559	Leyland Tiger

Assuming all the buses ran to time, that was 8 hours 37 minutes of travelling, the longest stint being the 1 hour 40 minute ride from Billericay to Southend, via Basildon, Wickford and Rayleigh, interestingly in the newest bus that John rode in that day. The oldest was the Routemaster, of course!

Before Hedingham - Aubrey Letch

Donald MacGregor set up Hedingham & District Omnibuses in June 1960 to take over the established business of Aubrey Letch of Sible Hedingham, but relatively little has been written about Letch's operations.

Recently I was working my way through a large collection of old trade magazines and chanced upon an article looking at the challenges faced by businesses like Letch's, written by an economist - Donald MacGregor BSc (Econ). It was one of a number of articles he wrote at the time about smaller bus and coach operators. Donald was working for the London Brick Company where he was responsible for a fleet of over 600 lorries and 25 staff buses; he had also worked briefly for Eastern National before he took his degree. At the time of writing the article about Letch ("The Will To Survive"), it's likely he already had plans to acquire a bus business. Whatever, less than three months after the article was published in the 16 March 1960 issue of *Passenger Transport*, he had agreed a deal to buy the business. Interestingly, he'd also contributed an article to the same journal in December 1959, looking at bus operations in Haverhill. Was he also evaluating one of the operators there as a potential purchase?

The Letch business had followed the traditional path of so many country bus proprietors in the years after the Great War. There were many servicemen who'd learnt about motor vehicle driving and maintenance during their war service, and plenty of war surplus chassis being sold off cheaply. So in 1920, with some help from his parents, Aubrey Ernest Letch started a coach hire business from his parents' house in High Street Green in Sible Hedingham. His initial vehicle was a Buick, HK 7649, with a 1916 truck body which was fitted with 14 bus seats for market day services. He followed a familiar path, establishing various bus routes in the free for all of the 1920s and then gaining licences for them when the 1930 Road Traffic Act came into effect and virtually froze the status quo. Expansion was often by acquisition, since gaining new licences was difficult, the Act giving protection to existing operators. Hence in 1935 he took over the business and services of P W Fitch of nearby Castle Hedingham. Private hire work continued, along with some licenced excursions. At some point, probably around 1947, Letch's business moved to the site in Sible Hedingham still occupied by Hedingham (part of the Go-Ahead Group) today, as explained in EBM 723, July 2024.

When the Omnibus Society published a survey of independent operator stage services in April 1955, Letch was recorded as having four services (referred to by their Traffic Area Office reference numbers):

F/R 369/1 Sible Hedingham - Braintree, Wednesdays

F/R 369/2 Sible Hedingham - Sudbury, Thursdays

F/R 369/4 Great Yeldham - Braintree, Weekdays

F/R 369/5 Sible Hedingham - Sudbury, Thursdays & Saturdays.

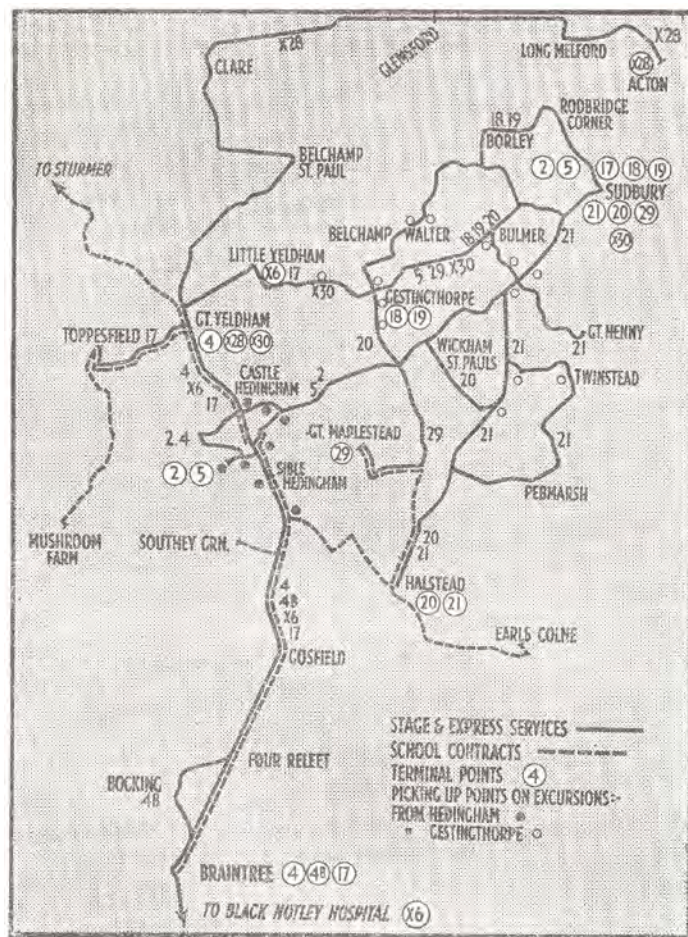
He was able to expand further with the collapse of Corona Coaches in August 1959, taking over various routes in the Gestingthorpe area that had previously been worked by Harry Rippingale until he had sold out to Corona in May 1956.

At some stage, almost certainly by now, possibly as early as 1957, Donald MacGregor was assisting him with some of the paperwork and Traffic Court appearances, and became aware that Aubrey was in ill-health and looking to retire. Indeed, writing in *A Country Busman*, John Hibbs noted how on Corona's collapse, when he arranged the transfer of the ex Rippingale licences, Aubrey Letch was "himself in the course of selling to Donal [sic] MacGregor". So, with the help of a £3,000 loan from the Westminster Bank, guaranteed by DRM's father, he was able to buy the business, completing the deal on 4 June 1960. At the time of that deal, the active fleet comprised eight vehicles:

3 x Bedford OB/Duple	L12/3/6	FTM 367, BSD 139, GJH 766
1 x Bedford SB/Duple	L14	TVW 388
1 x Commer Q4/Thurgood	L18	KNK 751
1 x AEC/Beadle rebuild	L19	NKT 940
2 x Crossley DD42 double-deckers	L17/20	DJY 966/961.

It is thought that only L17/20 actually carried their allotted fleetnumbers. Within a year of the takeover, five of the eight had been sold, as Donald MacGregor moved to heavyweight vehicles and away from thirsty Bedford petrol engines - a story we'll tell in a follow-up article on the early days of Hedingham and District.

The OBs, despite being coach seated, were used as one-man operated buses. Interestingly, Mr Letch had tried to acquire a larger OMO bus that Halifax Corporation were selling, but was frustrated by bureaucracy - despite being licenced as an OMO bus in the Yorkshire Traffic Area, the Certifying Officer for the Eastern Area refused to approve it, so the idea had to be dropped (the bus was almost certainly Halifax 263, BCP 538, a 1949 AEC Regal with Roe body converted to front entrance - it was one of 14 such conversions).



The route network comprising 13 services at the time of the takeover is shown in this map, from the first timetable book published after the takeover. Like an earlier, undated version, the booklet was produced for the business for free by Globe Advertising, funded by selling adverts within it. Over the 12 pages of the first issue, plus covers, there are 11 adverts for various local businesses, plus mentions of Letch's private hire and excursion services. Previously Letch had simply used duplicated foolscap sheets. These were undated, but then in those days of strict licencing, routes and times rarely changed for years on end.

Those "L" numbers

Letch had no need of fleet numbers, but when Donald MacGregor took over, he decided to number the fleet and apply small metal plates, perhaps to give something of a big bus company feel to the business (justified of course by the subsequent expansion). He allocated numbers to the vehicles taken over, but also retrospectively gave dummy numbers to

vehicles withdrawn years ago, not quite back to the very earliest buses and coaches, but starting with the post-war fleet. (We're not sure if there is any record of the vehicles owned from 1920 through to the mid 1940s). He prefixed the numbers with L - for Letch - and this was to be a trademark for the Hedingham fleet for very many years, reaching L443 before the scheme ceased at the beginning of 2014.

Hence the initial Hedingham fleet numbers started at L12 (and omitted L15, which had been withdrawn prior to the takeover). Outline details of the earlier fleet (given dummy numbers L1 - L11) can be found in Geoff Mills' *30 Years of Service* book, see the list of sources below.

The early Letch livery was blue and cream, but when he bought a Bedford SB from Meggs of Halsted (see picture on page 23) it was in two shades of brown and apparently he then decided to paint the rest of the fleet to match but we don't how many actually received the brown livery. The Crossley deckers certainly didn't.

Bureaucracy rules

Earlier we mentioned how Donald MacGregor had started out helping with what today are called the “back office” tasks. Small operators often struggled with the rigid bureaucracy of the bus industry and in particular, the detailed annual statistical returns demanded by the Ministry of Transport (I can sympathise, as even today, operators are required to submit an annual PSV Stats return, which asks for data in a format that small operators don’t collect and appears to have little actual benefit compared to the work involved).

Aubrey had clearly had various run-ins with officialdom, as cuttings from the Suffolk and Essex Free Press reveal - in July 1951 he was fined £5 with ten guineas (£10/10/0) costs for failing to submit his return on time; it was his fourth such offence, out of nine convictions in all! So it was sad to read the headline only four months later “Bus owner in court again”, with the Chairman of Hedingham Magistrates saying “It is difficult to understand your mentality. You have been convicted previously for similar offences and I have been on the Bench and given you advice”. The fine was again £5, plus costs of £6/13/6 this time. The Ministry had eventually received the return on 1 October. Clearly Donald MacGregor’s subsequent help with paperwork was welcomed!

In a future EBM Extra, we’ll take a look at the early years of the Hedingham business and how Donald MacGregor expanded and transformed Letch’s inheritance.

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Very many thanks to Nigel Turner for much information and for checking the article, to Alan Osborne for the loan of timetables and to Robert MacGregor for memories of his father - a true busman.

Below: DF 8013 was a Leyland Tiger TS3, seen here in Sudbury Market Hill. Note the starting handle! It appears it was something of a “ringer” in that whilst it carries registration DF 8013 (of a Leyland TS2 new to Black & White with Leyland coach body), it is believed to actually be ex West Yorks RCC WX 5922 with a United or Roe bus body. How the registration came to be swapped is not known! Letch operated it from 1947 to 1951.

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Above: HUP 275 was a 1947 Dennis Lancet with a Duple coach body, new to Bluebird of Middlesbrough. Nominally numbered L15 by Donald MacGregor, it had been withdrawn before the takeover was completed. It is alongside one of FEV 180 & 182, ECW bodied Leyland TD5s of Blackwells of Earls Colne. **Frank Church**, 31 July 1958.

Below: The classic Bedford OB/Duple was the staple fayre for so many smaller operators and Letch was no different. BSD 139 was one of those that transferred to Heddingham, as its L13, but was withdrawn five months after the takeover. Braintree Bus Park, 2 August 1958. **Frank Church**.





Above: Pride of the fleet was TVW 388, Letch's "big Bedford", an SB model with 33 seat Duple body, in the duo brown livery. It had been new in 1952 to G W Meggs of Halstead and passed to Letch in 1955, becoming L14 in the Hedingham fleet. Its petrol engine gave a very smooth ride but was too expensive to run and Donald MacGregor passed it on to a dealer in June 1961. **Frank Church**, 31 July 1958.

Below: The double deck fleet was updated with two 1947 Crossley DD42s from Plymouth City Transport. First was DJY 966, acquired via a dealer in July 1958, freshly repainted into blue & cream when **Frank Church** found it on the last day of that month. It was joined in December 1959 by sister DJY 961, which had gone first to Cheek, Kenton (Elms Coaches) before moving to Essex. Both were sold to Wesley, Stoke Goldington, in 3/62 (961) & 6/63 (966).



From 1986 to 1992, Eastern National and later Thamesway operated over 30 buses from a Council yard in Walthamstow. This is that story.

The London Regional Transport Act 1984 directed the formation of an Authority (LRT) separated from Greater London Council control and bus services in the Capital to be subject to competitive tender. Eastern National submitted a bid and in April 1985 was awarded routes 193 and W9, the latter being based at the Transport Depot of London Borough of Enfield. School route 145A from the second tranche of tenders was also initially based there.

Route 275, from the second tranche of tenders, was also awarded to EN, in Spring 1986. My friend Malcolm Gilloch, who worked for London Borough of Waltham Forest at the time, informed me that this prompted his boss John R Bonser, the Controller of Transport and Works to offer accommodation at their Low Hall Depot in South Access Road, which was at the far end of a road off Markhouse Road adjacent to Walthamstow Marshes. John was a great enthusiast himself (rail & bus) and had hosted an Omnibus Society visit to Low Hall Depot in 1976. However, shortly after the agreement for 10 vehicles for the 275 route to be based there, Eastern National was awarded routes 20, 167 and 206 from the third tranche of tenders which would then require over 30 buses to be based there after transfer of the 145A from Enfield.



Although the site was extensive with a variety of buildings erected at various times, a fleet of Ford R series buses with various styles of Marshall bodies was operated for school work together with a large number of vans and lorries for Council tasks and so certain relocations had to occur to make space. To further complicate matters, control of the local Council changed from a supportive Conservative administration to a more hostile Labour one, meaning some facilities initially expected were denied to EN. Two portacabins were vacated to allow their use for EN and parking re-arranged to enable the EN fleet to be accommodated. A bay of the pits was allocated for safety inspections and routine servicing of buses by Council staff under supervision of an EN fitter. Buses that required major work were driven or towed to EN garages for attention.

The base opened on 24 May 1986 with an allocation of 32 buses, which comprised Leyland Nationals 1779/80/9/91, 1800-3/25/6/58/82, 1915 and Bristol VRs 3096, 3100-2/4/5/7/9/10/3/5/6/8/9/21/3-6; the allocation varied a little over time. All were tachograph fitted at LRT's insistence, to provide accurate mileage data (tachos were not required for drivers hours). Buses carried a striking new green and yellow livery, lettered as 'Citybus - running in London for London Regional Transport' and incorporating a stylised London skyline graphic. Initially REL 1548 was also based there as a temporary office but had been moved to Chelmsford by late October.

Below: the initial allocation included 1779 (PEV 691R) seen at Loughton station on the 167. **Alan Osborne**



EN had only been given 13 weeks' notice by LRT to get the routes and depot set up (to match the notice period given to the London Buses staff at Loughton garage, which was being closed). The new depot needed 75 drivers but were well short of that total at the start. There were some inevitable teething problems, as we reported in news sheet 267 (June 1986) "during the first few weeks of operation certain difficulties have been apparent in the operation of these services, chiefly resulting from a shortage of drivers. Details of certain temporary service reductions affecting services 20, 206 and 275 were published on June 16th, although the Company hope that full service will be restored by the end of June" - see leaflet **right**. Drivers were loaned from other depots, with four hired Maidstone & District Mercedes L608D minibuses being used to ferry staff to and from Walthamstow (C213/8/20/1 EKG); two were subsequently operated from Brentwood depot on LRT service 193 when it was converted to minibus operation but all had returned to M&D by mid-October.

The challenges of setting up a new depot in such a short timescale meant that the start date for the other two tender wins by EN, of the 359 & 307, was put back with LRT's agreement, with EN operating a reduced timetable on the 307 (out of Enfield) and London Country North East running the 359 on a short-term basis, until EN were able to establish a further London depot at Ponders End, a story beyond the scope of this article.

In March 1989 service 206 was withdrawn and EN gained new minibus services W13/W14 branded as 'Woodford Hoppa', with Walthamstow receiving Mercedes minibuses O253-6/8-60 (L709D) and the longer O800-4 (L811D), replacing Leyland Nationals. School bus 235 was also gained at this time, replacing part of the former 206.

Malcolm Gilloch had been relocated, much to his chagrin, from one of the portacabins, and was able to take some photos within the Depot. The spartan facilities can be gauged from these photos – the giant heap of road salt in the background of the shot **below** of 1820 (VNO 743S) had previously been protected from the elements by an open shed but this had fallen down. By this time, 1990, Eastern National had become part of Badgerline Group and the southern part separated into Thamesway. Buses had lost their original London branding, and vinyls covered the previous fleetname whilst repainting into Thamesway yellow/brown livery was in progress.





Above: the second of **Malcolm Gilloch's** photos captures three VRs by the salt mountain. Left to right we see 3123 (XHK 228X), WW allocated but blinded up for Ponders End route 359 (and with a broken offside windscreen wiper), 3116 (XHK 221X), WW allocated and used on the 275, and finally Ponders End's 3216 (FRP 907T), one of 19 VRs that EN bought from United Counties to stock Ponders End. It's not clear why it is parked at WW.

The beginning of the end for Walthamstow depot came in the Autumn of 1991 when LRT announced that routes 20, 167, 235 (school bus) and 275 had been awarded to Grey-Green on re-tender. Thamesway then suffered a shortage of staff as many left in September, mainly for Capital Citybus, and LRT requested Grey-Green to provide emergency cover. So, on Sundays 22 and 29 September and Monday to Saturday evenings from 23 September to 5 October, Grey-Green operated journeys displaying 'on hire to Thamesway' as shown in the photograph below. Grey-Green took over the routes permanently from 7 March 1992. Of the minibus routes, from 23 November 1991 W13 was lost to County Bus but Thamesway gained routes W11/W12 from London Forest, with no change to the overall minibus allocation.



Right: Grey-Green 913 (H913 XYT) at Claybury Broadway on the Sunday only extension of the 275, working on hire to Thamesway as shown by the window sticker, September 1991. It is a Volvo B10M / East Lancs.

R J Waterhouse





Left: the minibus allocation included 0804 (F804 RHK), a Mercedes-Benz 811D with Reeve Burgess Beaver body, seen here at Leytonstone station on the W13, with Woodford Hoppa branding.

Alan Osborne.

The final allocation, as at February 1992, comprised 38 buses: Minibuses 0253-6/58-60, 0800-4, Leyland Nationals 1801/3/10/20/2/3/6/36/82/94, 1905/11/20 and Bristol VRs 3101/5/8/10/3/5/6/8-20/2/5/6.

So WW's relatively brief life ceased after operations on 6 March 1992, with the continuing minibus services W11/2/4 moved to Ponders End depot.

Additional information from contemporary news sheets, Group publication *EN & Thamesway in London* (by Alan Osborne - copies still available from the sales officer) and the splendid and highly revealing *Privatising London's Buses* by Roger Torode (Capital Transport).

Memories of helping out at WW

Martin Farmer was one of many existing EN drivers called in from other depots to help get Walthamstow depot started. "I was a driver at Basildon at the time. A message came down from Head Office that drivers were wanted at the new Walthamstow Depot. The message was sent to depots at Basildon, Braintree, Chelmsford, Hadleigh and Southend. At BN names of the volunteers were put in a hat; I think they wanted six and my name was one of those drawn and we started in May 1986 for six weeks. Our mode of transport to/from Basildon was a loaned Mercedes 608 from Maidstone and District. The first day at the depot was an eye opener as we were sharing an open yard with vehicles from Waltham Forest Council, the wash was mainly for Council vehicles and did not clean the buses very well. Our first day was route learning in the Mercedes; we also had to learn the Wayfarer 1 ticket machine. Emergency tickets were bell punch tickets in a small rack. The office and rest room were portacabins. We either did late or early shifts. There were a number of London Transport drivers who came to the company after being made redundant when Loughton LT garage closed, they were not impressed with Walthamstow depot after working for LT!

"Passengers were different too, being used to LT buses so, when they got on a VR they tripped up the step, and getting off hit their heads on the mirror. I remember I was at Debden Station on route 20 when an LT inspector appeared - he examined the bus and myself to see the condition of the bus and how the driver presented himself (clean, tidy and in uniform). On another day I pulled up at Woodford Green where three scruffy men were waiting. As they got on they showed me their badges, they were silver badge inspectors; one went downstairs and two upstairs to check the bus.

"We were there for six weeks until the staff situation improved. We were paid from the time we left Basildon to the time we got back to Basildon. To get drivers down from the depot to Walthamstow to take over buses on the road we had an Austin Princess car as a shuttle. Later old London taxis were used.

"The whole operation seemed a far cry from what we were used to at our own Eastern National depots. I even remember having to sweep out a bus before taking it out for service. Then there were the pensioners at Debden who always tried to get on the bus before their passes became valid at 0900 - the so-called "twerlies".

"Then the following year 1987 I was back on LRT contracts for the 307, operating out of Brentwood depot for six months until Ponders End depot became established, but that's a story for another day".

We have been there before . . .

The establishment of Eastern National's depot in the yard of the London Borough of Waltham Forest was not the first time that (former) Eastern National buses had been based there, as in 1976 the Authority bought six Bristol LS buses from Eastern National, for their school bus fleet. The Group was lucky enough to be able to arrange a visit there on the afternoon of Saturday 10 April 1976 to see not just the LSs but also the rest of the varied fleet of the London Borough of Waltham Forest. These comprised a mix of lightweight buses bought new and various second-hand acquisitions, including many ex-London Transport RT class AEC Regents, an ex-Bristol OC Bristol K6B and a pair of AEC Regent Vs, new to the West Bridgford UDC that was taken over by Nottingham City Transport.



These pictures are all by **Richard Delahoy**

Left: the six LSs were the former EN 1229-31, 1242/4/5. Here is 30 ENO (1230, now LBWF 3330) about to take our party for a ride. It looks very smart in the dark red and off-white livery, enhanced by a dark green band.

Below left: the most modern second-hand deckers were the pair of West Bridgford AEC Regent V/East Lancs, 639/40 UVO of 1964. Note the green painted wings.

Below right: contrasting was LHY 937, a Bristol K6B - new to Bristol Joint Services in April 1950, although it was immediately transferred to Country services and then in January 1954 to Gloucester City services. It has been in preservation since 1978 and was based at the Castle Point Transport Museum at one stage.



Trivia Corner - A Missing Number

Eastern National route numbers ran from 1 upwards (1 being Chelmsford to Danbury and Maldon), dating back to the period before EN was formed out of the National Omnibus & Transport Company, although until after the Second World War, service numbers were not shown on buses - a topic we plan to explore in a future article. Numbers were allocated sequentially as new routes were started. But, until the mass renumbering of 1955 described in EBM Extra issue 1, one number was missing, at least from the public service lists. That was 34, as the extract from a contemporary timetable (June 1949) shows. So was there a 34 and if so, why wasn't it listed?

30	Halstead—Colne	Engaine—Pebmarsh	...	...	Thursdays & Saturdays
31	Grays—Tilbury	...	...	...	Daily
32	Grays—Orsett—Stanford-le-Hope	...	...	...	Daily
32a	Grays—Nutberry Corner	...	...	...	Daily
32b	Grays—Blackshott's Lane (Fairway)	...	...	...	Daily
33	Braintree—Earl's Colne—Gt. Mapiestead	...	...	...	Weekdays
35	Grays—Shell Haven—Coryton	...	...	...	Daily
37a	Grays—Chadwell St. Mary, Tilbury Ferry	...	...	...	Daily
37b	Tilbury—Chadwell St. Mary	...	...	...	Weekdays

I stumbled upon the answer purely by chance, whilst looking through some old copies of Notices & Proceedings - the official record of the work of the Licencing Authority (as the Traffic Commissioners were then called) who licenced all bus and coach services under the rules set by the 1930 Road Traffic Act. I was searching N&P for something completely different, but the following extract from the 25 April 1949 issue (# 482) caught my eye:

F./R.20/115 (477).—The Eastern National Omnibus Co. Ltd., New Writtle Street, Chelmsford, a service of stage carriages between Colchester (Cattle Market) and Langham (Martin's Farm) (Ser. 34), as follows:—

- (1) Route:—(a) North Hill, Mile End, then direct to Langham; (b) Old Heath, The Bell, Old Heath Road, Wimpole Road, Magdalen Street to the Hythe, thence main Ipswich Road to Gun Hill. Return same routes.
- (2) Time and fare tables as deposited.
- (3) The service is restricted to the conveyance of bona fide employees of Brigadier Harter and/or Major Baird for fruit picking.

Period of operation:—During the fruit picking season. Date of expiry:—30th June, 1951.

The entry recorded the renewal of a service licence and the wording reflects the arcane and highly restrictive procedures that were followed for service licencing. The reference relates to the Eastern Traffic Area (F.), road service licencing (/R - as opposed to goods vehicles), the master number for the operator (20 - denoting Eastern National), the sequential number allocated to each service licence (115) and finally the number of the issue of N&P that the relevant application had appeared in (477). The licence had originally been granted back in May 1933 (following operation in 1932 under a Short Period Licence) and must have been renewed regularly since then.

Of interest is that the service was to start from Colchester Cattle Market in Middleborough, not the St John's Bus Park terminus of the country routes, and was to be restricted to "bona fide" employees (were there also irregular employees?) who were going fruit picking for two farmers, Brigadier Harter and Major Baird. The bus(es) could only run during the fruit picking season, thankfully the bureaucrats of the Traffic Area Office didn't attempt to define that more precisely, although they had when first granted back in 1933 ("1st June to 14th August"). Presumably the restrictions were to protect against abstraction from services run by other operators to Langham. Licences were normally only granted for two or three years, hence the expiry date of June 1951. Whether EN sought renewal then I don't know, not having the requisite N&Ps to hand to check.

As mentioned, EN subsequently instituted a major renumbering to accommodate the Southend Co-ordination Agreement and the incorporation of the former Westcliff, City and Hicks services, for example the original number 1 became the 31, with 30 added to the old Chelmsford area routes. So in 1955, 34 came into use for a public service for the first time, being the old 4 (Chelmsford - Galleywood - Billericay) renumbered. As to how often the original 34 ran and for how many fruit picking seasons, we are none the wiser.

The observant will notice that 36 is also missing from the extract above. This was initially Grays - Rainham - Romford, transferred to London Transport in August 1933, then reused for Stanford-Le-Hope to Corringham on the takeover of Stanford Motors in 1935; it was abandoned in October 1939. Of such trivia is our hobby made!

Stephensons' Variety

Today Stephensons of Essex (and the associated NIBS company) have a highly standardised fleet, mostly ADL E200s for saloons and Scania for double-deckers. Here we look back to some vehicles operated before and during the move to low-floor buses. All pictures **Richard Delahoy**.



Volvo B10M contrasts. Above: 233, M233 TBV, with Alexander PS body upseated to B61F (3 + 2 seating), Chichester Road, Southend, 11 June 2005. On fleet from May 2005 to August 2016.

Below: Van Hool bodied 133, CIW 7633, Rochford, 21 June 2008. On fleet February 2008 to August 2009.





Ex London Olympians.

Above: following the collapse of Phoenix Student Travel in October 2003, 13 former LT Olympian/ECW joined the fleet. They were usually employed on schools services but 882, C82 CHM, was at Fossetts Park, Southend on 28 February 2009 on local service 61. This bus was withdrawn in February 2010.

Below: one, 896, C106 CHM, received this overall advert livery for Tesco. Pictured in Rochford depot yard on 18 June 2006, it will work an ECC contract from Southend to Thurrock College at Socketts Heath, before working Tesco free bus services during college hours. At the time, these were Canvey to Tesco Pitsea Mon/Weds/Fri and a local circular route to Tesco Barking on Tues/Thurs. Both supermarket routes offered multiple trips rather than the usual solitary journey each way. With free buses also being operated for Asda, care had to be taken not to schedule this bus on those duties! The bus was withdrawn in March 2009.





Northern Counties Olympians.

Above: East Yorkshire Motor Services provided a useful source of well-maintained Leyland Olympians, with 16 such buses bought in 2007/8. 856, H156 BKH, was one of the shorter (standard length) models seating 76, others were longer wheelbase 85 seaters, all ideal for school services. Freshly repainted, I took 856 out on the morning of 27 September 2008 for publicity photos, posed here on a quiet road leading to Paglesham. They mostly lasted in the fleet until 2014-16.

Below: a newer, Volvo example was 807, P167 BTV, acquired in June 2011 from the failed Yellow Star Travel (Burtons Coaches) of Haverhill which gave Stephensons their base in that town and seen there on 23 August 2011. The bus had been new to Derby City Transport in 1996 and ran for Stephensons until August 2013. Volvo Olympians were fine, reliable buses but fell foul of the move to low floor accessible buses.





Above: and so we move into the low floor era, the first such decker for Stephensons being an East Lancs bodied Dennis Trident 815, V415 KMY. A one-off in the fleet, it had been a 1999 delivery to Metrobus as a dual door bus for London tendered services. With Stephensons it was generally based at Maldon (where it was seen on 21 June 2008) for use on the Dengie Connections network, principally on D3, Southminster to Plume School at Maldon but also used on D5 (South Woodham to Burnham) and positioning trips. It was the only Dennis Trident owned and was a very thirsty bus, also full height so not suitable for many of Stephensons routes. It was withdrawn at the beginning of 2013 and the fleet went on to standardise on Scania for double-deckers, but now also with five ADL E40Ds since Scania are no longer available.



Left: Dennis Darts became the mainstay of the single deck fleet from 2003 onwards. Here is the first, 413, EU03 CFX (later renumbered 403) in Maldon High Street on 16 June 2007. One of a pair bought specifically and route branded for the 90, Maldon to Witham, the Blackwater Link. That route has since been restocked a number of times with new, larger buses. All Darts have now been withdrawn but the successor model, the E200 comprises almost the whole of the present single deck fleet.

Rear cover pictures: long Olympians

Top: a number of ex Lothian long wheelbase Volvo Olympians were operated, numbered in the 9xx series for high-capacity buses. Alexander bodied L962 MSC was Stephensons 962, posed in the Rochford depot yard on 21 June 2008, blinded up for one of the routes to St Peters School (since renamed Ormiston Rivers Academy) in Burnham on Crouch. It remained on the fleet until August 2015.

Bottom: a pair of tri-axle 12m long Leyland Olympians joined the fleet with the acquisition of Fargo Coachlines in 2007. L808 SNO was allocated Stephensons number 998, having originally been FS 6392 with Citybus in Hong Kong. It is also Alexander bodied, a 100-seater. Photographed in the former Fargo yard which became Stephensons' Witham depot, on 21 June 2008. The bus was withdrawn in August 2010.



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