

Essex Bus Magazine Extra

Historical features special issue

Issue 8 Spring 2025



Essex Bus Enthusiasts Group

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From the Colour Archives



Colchester Corporation ran a very traditional fleet for many years, standardising by the 1960s on 27' long double deckers with rear open platforms, AEC Regents to 1959 and Leyland Titans from 1960. That was to change as the decade progressed. A Leyland Atlantean demonstrator, KTD 551C, was tried out for just over a week in summer 1966. It clearly impressed, as orders followed and Colchester took delivery of 45-7 (WEV 745-7F) in 1967, then 48/9 (YWC 648/9G) and then 50-4 (AVX 50-4G) in 1968, all with rather box-like Massey bodies on PDR1/1 chassis. Despite trying a second Atlantean demonstrator in 1969, MTF 665G, the fleet then switched to single deckers, initially with second-hand AEC Reliances (see EBM Extra 4, Autumn 2023) and then Bristol RELs, before switching back to Atlanteans (by now the AN68 version) from 1976.

The early Atlanteans were all initially used crew operated but were converted to OMO (one man operation, as it was called then) in the latter part of 1969. They lasted in the fleet until seven were withdrawn in 1980 (45-7/51-4), although 46 then became a driver trainer (later renumbered 96 and sold for scrap in 1988). No more were withdrawn until 1985 (50) and 1986 (49). Meanwhile, 48 was converted to open top in 1979 and remained in the fleet into the deregulation era, finally succumbing in 1988, replaced by the open topping of a later ECW bodied Atlantean, 55 (JHK 495N).

And so to the picture, taken in July 1971. The bus now carries a yellow "Please pay on entry" sign and the driver can be seen taking fares. Note the very old-fashioned gold script style fleetnumber transfers. The location is Magdalen Street, just before (west of) St. Botolph's Station (now Colchester Town). The buildings on the right of the photo are still there while those on the left were in the process of demolition to be replaced by St. Botolph's roundabout. The area used to be called Plough Corner, after the Plough public house where some out-of-town independent buses terminated. The bus will turn right into Military Road on its way to Old Heath, Speedwell Road. The 6A ran half-hourly from Head Street, supplemented by the 6, also half-hourly during the daytime, which crossed the town centre to Home Farm on Straight Road. Thanks to Phil Covington and Alan Skinner for notes on the precise location. **Richard Delahoy**

Essex Bus Magazine Extra from the Essex Bus Enthusiasts Group

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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 2025/6 but need further sponsors for 2027 - 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 **Robert Appleton** for sponsoring this issue; you can read more from Robert on pages 2 & 3.

We hope you will enjoy this Extra magazine and will find the range of articles interesting and stimulating. In this latest issue we look back to the transformation of the nascent Heddingham & District business over the first eighteen years, the sometimes convoluted and confusing saga of rebodied buses in the Southend Corporation fleet, one of Eastern National's more obscure operating bases (Dunmow), the challenge of recruiting staff in the 1960s, the efficient scheduling of City Coach Company buses on the "main road", an early minibus operation in Harlow, another Scottish connection with Essex bus operators, a family snap with a bus connection, a look at a destination blind listing and finally a look back over the last 30 years of services linking Southend with Stansted Airport. So plenty of different operators, eras and topics.

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Front cover: a major feature in this issue looks at the early years of Heddingham & District. The double deck fleet was always quite small in those days, but included L65, THW 746, a Bristol Lodekka LD6B, seen here entering Colchester Bus Station in April 1971. Acquired from the Bristol Omnibus Co in August 1969, it lasted just over two years with Heddingham. When it was withdrawn in December 1971 it was – at that time – the last decker in the fleet, as we explain on pages 4 – 12. **Geoffrey Morant, courtesy of The Transport Library, ref GMABC-132.**

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This Issue's Sponsor

Robert Appleton

Growing up in Mistley, Essex, I was fortunate to live in a village served by both Eastern National and Eastern Counties. For example, in 1969 Eastern National operated service 70 Harwich - Colchester, and Eastern Counties operated service 221 East Bergholt or Ipswich - Colchester. In addition both operators worked two services jointly: 123 Clacton - Ipswich, 212 Harwich - Ipswich.

Whilst my Dad's family came from Colchester, Mum's family came from Haughley near Stowmarket in Suffolk. We were living in Mistley, because Dad had left his job at Wood's in Colchester for a job as an engineering draughtsman at British Xylonite Plastics at Brantham in Suffolk. Mum's family had moved to Mistley when her Father obtained the job of caretaker at Manningtree Secondary School.

In September 1965 I started travelling by bus from Mistley to attend Colchester Royal Grammar School on Eastern Counties service 221. The buses were Bristol LD5G with ECW H33/27RD bodies from East Bergholt outstation. I was fascinated by the combined Bristol and ECW builder's plate on the rear platform. It was this that started my interest in buses. In school holidays I often cycled from Mistley to East Bergholt outstation to view the buses there. Once the drivers and conductors there knew of my interest in buses, they passed on information to me.

I started taking black and white photos of buses with a very cheap camera, the results were not good. My Dad was a keen amateur photographer, and he obtained a secondhand Exacta 35mm camera for me in 1969. Now I could save my pocket money to buy Agfachrome colour slide film, and the results started to improve.

Below: Eastern Counties LKD212 (VVF 212) Bristol LD5G with ECW H33/27RD body new in 1958. In Harwich Road, Mistley, working from East Bergholt outstation on 14.00 Colchester - Ipswich 221, October 1969

Robert Appleton



In July 1972 I started working for Norwich Union Insurance in Ipswich. Now I was travelling on 07.45 Mistley – Ipswich 221 worked by a Bristol LD5G or FS5G from East Bergholt outstation. The journey home was 17.45 Ipswich – Mistley 221 worked by Ipswich depot, usually with a Bristol LH6P/ECW B45F.

In the insurance industry, if you wanted to progress your career it was necessary to move around the country to broaden your experience. Thus in September 1978 I moved to work at Norwich Union in Watford. Visits home to Mistley meant that I had time to see what was happening with Eastern Counties in the Ipswich area, and Eastern National in north-east Essex. Harwich depot was good for photography, with buses on layover parked on Harwich Station Approach outside the depot. For Eastern Counties it was not just East Bergholt outstation, now the vehicle duties at all the Ipswich area outstations interested me.

In September 1983 I moved again, to Norwich Union in Manchester. What a contrast to Watford. Manchester was full of the orange double-deckers of Greater Manchester Transport, the operating arm of Greater Manchester PTE.

All this changed with deregulation and privatisation, but at the same time Greater Manchester PTE was looking to improve public transport by introducing the Metrolink tram system, which opened in April 1992. Norwich Union was part of a consortium of insurers providing insurance for the construction and operation of the Metrolink system. This involved the electric trams running on streets in Manchester city centre, sharing space with pedestrians and other road users. Thus a motor insurance policy was required to meet the requirements of the Road Traffic Act 1930. Norwich Union insured motorcycles, cars, goods vehicles, buses and coaches, but this was the first time that we issued a motor insurance policy covering 26 Metrolink trams!

My visits home were now less frequent, but Essex Bus News kept me up to date with buses in Essex. Harwich depot was still interesting, with its allocation of Bristol VRT, Leyland Olympians, later Volvo Olympians, to operate services 103/104 Harwich – Colchester. The situation in Suffolk was not so good, with First Bus withdrawing many rural routes, and closing all the outstations, including East Bergholt on 24 October 1998.

It was not just the bus industry that was changing, so was the insurance industry. Norwich Union merged with CGU, which had been a merger of Commercial Union and General Accident, to become Aviva. Despite all these changes, there was still a job for me in Manchester. However, when yet another reorganisation took place in December 2012 I was able to retire. I had completed just over forty years' service with Norwich Union.

Retirement enabled a move back to Essex, to Kirby Cross, just in time to witness First Essex close Harwich depot on 30 November 2013! So a lot less photographic opportunities at Harwich now. Bus spotting now involves a lot more travel. How fortunate I was to grow up in Mistley. 55 years ago in 1970 Bristol LD, FS, FLF, LS, MW, LH, RESL, RELL, could all be seen in Mistley, courtesy of Eastern Counties and Eastern National.

Below: Eastern National's Harwich depot in July 1992, from left to right, Bristol VRT 3076 (KOO 794V), Leyland Olympians 4007 (C407 HJN), plus 4021 (C421 HJN) in the depot, and Bristol VRT 3109 (UAR 599W).

Robert Appleton



Hedingham & District – the early years

In the previous EBM Extra (Autumn 2024) we looked at the business established by Aubrey Letch at Sible Hedingham and how he sold it to the young Donald MacGregor in June 1960. This is the story of the early years of the renamed Hedingham & District Omnibuses.

The acquired 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.

An early step was to upgrade the single deck fleet. Writing in *Buses 'Seventy*, Mr MacGregor talked about the challenges of being an omnibus proprietor and explained "There was an immediate need for an additional saloon and it was the purchase of this machine which probably has had more influence on our entire operations than we might admit. The intention was to obtain a Leyland PS1 single decker, but the only machine which was available at the time was a Bristol L saloon. This was purchased rather reluctantly, but gave such good service that a second machine was added a few months later. Both of these replaced a similar number of petrol-engined Bedfords. Besides improving fuel figures they were more robust for the extra contracts we had started".

Those first two Bristol Ls were L21/2 (LHT 915 & KHW 641), ex Bristol Omnibus and with rear-entrance ECW bodies, replacing OBs L12/3. They were to be the first of very many Bristols operated over the years! We don't have room here for a complete fleet list (see the various books published by Geoff Mills) but suffice to say that in the period covered by this article - up to March 1978 - Hedingham bought 11 Bristol Ls, 14 Bristol LS buses/coaches and 4 MWs and an LD double decker, along with smaller numbers of Leyland Royal Tigers (2), Tiger Cubs (3), PD2 Titans (2), AEC Regal IVs (2), Reliances (5) and a Regent V, not counting the buses acquired on the takeover of Blackwells in 1965. (Subsequently they bought more Bristols - FLFs, VRs, LHs, RELs - after 1977).

An early change was to replace the two Crossley double deckers L17/20, withdrawn in 1963/2 respectively and replaced by an ex-Ribble Leyland PD2, L26 (CCK 657) and ex-East Midland PD2 L32 (KRR 71).

Below: L22, acquired in November 1960, was one of the first pair of Bristols in the fleet, in Halstead, entering the High Street from Bridge Street at the start of service 21 from Halstead, Bull to Sudbury Market Hill. **Bob Beaumont**



Work at this time was roughly 50% stage services, 20% schools, 20% works contracts and 10% private hire (from the article "Improving a small bus business", *Bus & Coach*, November 1961). Expanding stage operations was difficult, if not impossible, due to the restrictive rules under the 1930 Road Traffic Act, but new contracts were won, such as for the US Airforce at Wethersfield Air Base. An opportunity to expand stage work came with the takeover of the two bus services of Blackwells Motor Services in October 1965, bringing Hedingham onto the Halstead to Colchester route 88, shared with Eastern National, and adding four vehicles to the fleet (two Leyland PD2 deckers and two AEC coaches, a Regal IV and a Reliance - all familiar types). Hedingham took on a lease of the Blackwell's yard as an additional operating centre, using the site until 1971. There was not to be another takeover until July 1973, when Hedingham, along with EN, took over the infrequent Colchester to Great Bromley service of Vines Coaches, but no vehicles were acquired. This was a slightly curious decision, given that the route ran to the east of Colchester, a long way from Hedingham's base.

We recorded last time that Letch's livery had been blue and cream, but how he was moving to two shades of brown. The use of brown ceased, Mr MacGregor favouring blue and cream "because [he] had always liked the Sheffield Corporation colours and because he felt that there were already too many red or green buses in the area" (also from the *Bus & Coach* article). We don't have an exact date for when this policy changed away from blue, but in our November 1965 News Sheet we recorded that a revised coach livery of red and cream "has been in use for several months". It was then applied to the bus fleet as well, giving the livery that most of us are very familiar with. Evidently the change was because blue did not weather well. It appears that the ex East Midland Royal Tiger buses, L34/5 (MRR 301/4), acquired at the end of 1964/beginning of 1965 were the last to receive the blue livery. From 1973 the fleetname was changed from Hedingham & District to the more familiar Hedingham Omnibuses.

Few colour pictures exist of the blue and cream era but we have traced this pair. **Upper** is one of the two ex East Midland all-Leyland Royal Tiger buses, L34, on Market Hill at Sudbury outside the Black Boy pub/hotel. The pair lasted until summer 1967; Hedingham then moved on to lighter-weight Leyland Tiger Cubs and AEC Reliances. **Copyright Bus Archive**



Lower we have another former East Midland all-Leyland bus, L32 (KRR 71), bought in May 1963. The location is unmistakably Braintree Bus Park, with an EN MW and FLF in the background as the bus waits to return to Hedingham on service 4, whether Castle or Sible is not clarified on the destination blind. The number blind also shows four and a half!! **Copyright Bus Archive,**

photographer Robin Hannay.





1962 and seen **above** on a trip to its birthplace, the ECW works at Lowestoft. **Bob Beaumont**

Contract work grew in the 1960s, including a non-psv operation for the Holloway Group with a factory at Glemsford, for which a pair of Bristol LWLs with full front coach bodies were acquired (L36/7, OHY 997/3) in 1965. With the acquisition of these and the four vehicles from Blackwells, there was a major expansion in the fleet, which rose to 19 vehicles in 1965, having grown from 7 at the end of 1960. They joined existing "Queen Mary" coach L30, NAE 2, acquired in October



An interesting development in summer 1966 was the hiring of two double deckers with crews to operate on Eastern National town services in Chelmsford, to help alleviate EN's chronic staff shortage at that time. The same happened on Saturdays in high summer in 1967.

Left: on Chelmsford town service 48, Chignall Estate – Town Centre – Springfield Park Estate, on hire to EN, here is KRR 71 again. **Bob Beaumont**

Right: also used in Chelmsford for EN with a Hedingham crew, former South Wales AEC Regent V L50, MCY 419, is at the Hedingham depot but blinded up for a trip on EN 44, which mostly ran from Oaklands Park (Moulsham Drive) to the bus station but with limited extensions on to the Woodhall Estate. **Bob Beaumont**





Above: another way that Heddingham could support Eastern National in the busy summer Saturday peaks was the provision of coaches for seasonal express services. Here L64, TWL 59, is in Basildon bus station, although lacking the requisite "on hire" notices (perhaps it was just arriving to pick up service here), and also lacking fleetnames. It had been acquired in March 1969, ex Thames Valley, a Bristol LS6B / ECW. **Ian Sharpe collection**

Below: Bristol LSs were also operated in bus form and here we see part of what would become L40, FJN 163, one of the first pair of LS buses to be acquired in 1965 (the other was L39, FJN 162). Both came from Eastern National but had started life in the Westcliff fleet. It sits alongside L25, PPE 462, an AEC Regal IV with classic Burlingham Seagull body, acquired in 1961 and remaining in the fleet until 1966, dating this picture to 1965. **Bob Beaumont**





Underfloor engined Bristol saloons were ideal for Hedingham's largely rural operations and came to dominate the fleet from 1968 to 1972, with eighteen owned in total (not all at the same time). The first arrived in 1965 but 1968 saw a big influx of six buses, giving nine in the fleet at that time. This rose to twelve in 1969, dropping to eleven in 1970/1, then ten in 1972, before the last left the fleet in 1973/4/5. Some were ex Eastern National (3) but others came from United Auto (6), West Yorkshire (8, a mix of LS and MW models) and Thames Valley (1).

Above: ex United L57, PHN 847, a Bristol LS in Colchester Bus Station on 27 July 1970, on the former Blackwell's service to Halstead, co-ordinated with EN/First Essex 88, as it remains to this day. **Paul Bateson**

Lower: ex West Yorkshire L67, RWW 979, a Bristol LS in Sudbury Bus Station (which replaced the Market Hill stops). Service 5 ran to Sible Hedingham (latterly with some extensions to Braintree) and declined over the years, by 1974 only running Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday with fewer journeys each day than in its heyday.

Geoffrey Morant, courtesy of The Transport Library



One particularly interesting second-hand acquisition in October 1967 was a 36' long AEC Reliance with Plaxton bus body seating 55 - L53 (652 GVA) - by far the largest single decker in the fleet at that time. It was sold on to Colchester Corporation as their number 55 in mid-1970, as illustrated in EBM Extra issue 4, Autumn 2023.

The first brand new vehicles - for the coach fleet - were a pair of Bedford VAM5s new in 1966/7 (L45/51, OVW 550D, TWC 739E). But then there was a major change in policy for the bus fleet starting in 1972 with a switch to brand new lightweight Bedford saloons. The Government New Bus Grant scheme was a major factor in this change. Introduced in 1968, the bus grant initially allowed operators to claim an up-front 25% grant towards the cost of new buses which met an approved specification, in a move to increase the use of one-man operated buses (as OPO - one person operation - was then referred to). It was increased to 50% in 1971 but was later phased out between 1980 and 1984 after the Conservatives had gained power in June 1979. Hedingham took advantage of the 50% grant and the first grant-aided purchase was L74 (SVW 774K) in April 1972, a Willowbrook bodied Bedford YRQ with dual purpose seats that could also be used on coaching duties. With one exception - discussed below - all fleet acquisitions up to the end date of this article, March 1978, were then Bedfords with a mix of Willowbrook, Marshall and Duple bus bodies or Plaxton coach bodies, reaching fleet number L88 (REV 188R). More were to follow from 1978 but there was also a move back to heavyweight chassis bought new (Leyland Leopards and later Tigers) and judicious purchases of second-hand vehicles. Most unusual of the Bedford buses was L81 (YNO 481L) which had the only Marshall Camair body fitted to a Bedford (it was not built in great numbers on other chassis either).

Below: the first grant-aided Bedford, L74, blinded up for the Sudbury - Halstead - Earls Colne 9. **Bob Beaumont**



Indeed, by 1972, the fleet was entirely single deck and remained so until 1978, the last two deckers to be withdrawn being L50 (MCY 419), an AEC Regent V in July 1971 and L65 (THW 746 - see cover), a Bristol LD6B at the end of 1971. Deckers entered the fleet again from June 1978, but are beyond the timeline of this article.

The one exception to the Bedford policy of the 1970s was L84 (RGV 284N), a Leyland Leopard with 55-seat Willowbrook body. This impressive bus was described by Geoff Mills as a "truly remarkable vehicle" [perhaps a tad over the top!] which he characterised as "a self-donated special treat which was for many years the exclusive allocation of the proprietor D R MacGregor and maintained in superb condition interior and exterior". It was regularly rallied by the company and subsequently went into preservation and is currently with Black Cat Travel of Harmston, just south of Lincoln, fully licensed as a psv and used for wedding hires and the like (picture in issue 692, December 2021).



The two outliers in the early/mid 1970s fleet, if they can be described as such.

Above, L81, YNO 481L, the Bedford YRT with 53 seat Marshall Camair body featuring cantrail windows for the benefit of standing passengers (or to admire the grandeur of the railway viaduct at Chappel on the 88 route - with 32 spans over its 1,060' length, it is a Grade 2 listed structure). This journey seen departing Colchester Bus Station certainly seems to have attracted a good load. **Bob Beaumont**

Below: Donald McGregor's pride and joy, Willowbrook bodied Leyland Leopard L84, RGV 284N (one of two vehicles new in 1974/5 which were registered in Ipswich rather than Chelmsford). Seen here at one of its very many rally entries over the years, in this case the Southend Bus Rally on 7 June 1981. **Robert Appleton**



At the end of the period covered by this review, there was an important change in the status of the business. From 1960 Donald MacGregor had run the business as a partnership with his wife. When the Blackwells operations had been acquired in 1965, a limited company, Blackwell's Motor Services Ltd, had been formed to facilitate the takeover and it was that company that Mr MacGregor had acquired. In May 1976 the company name was changed to Hedingham and District Omnibuses Ltd and in March 1978 the partnership business was transferred to the limited company at a valuation of £51,298. That's a convenient end point for this instalment of the Hedingham story, with the fleet standing 15 strong (L74-88), all Bedfords except for L84 and all bought new. The fleet would never achieve such a high degree of standardisation again!

The fleet as at March 1978. Note how the last two digits of the registration numbers matched the fleet numbers (with one exception):

L74	SVW 774K	Bedford	YRQ	Willowbrook	DP45F
L75	TTW 675K	Bedford	YRQ	Plaxton	C45F
L76	STW 771K	Bedford	YRQ	Marshall	DP45F
L77	VWC 477L	Bedford	YRQ	Marshall	B45F
L78	WTW 778L	Bedford	YRQ	Willowbrook	B49F
L79	YTW 779L	Bedford	YRQ	Willowbrook	B49F
L80	NPU 80M	Bedford	YRQ	Plaxton	C45F
L81	YNO 481L	Bedford	YRT	Marshall Camair	B53F
L82	OOO 882M	Bedford	YRQ	Willowbrook	B49F
L83	PPU 783M	Bedford	YRQ	Willowbrook	B47F
L84	RGV 284N	Leyland	PSU3B/4R	Willowbrook	B55F
L85	GPV 685N	Bedford	YRQ	Willowbrook	B47F
L86	KHJ 786P	Bedford	YRQ	Willowbrook	B47F
L87	PHK 387R	Bedford	YRQ	Duple	B47F
L88	REV 188R	Bedford	YLQ	Duple	B47F

Below: typical of that highly standardised, modern fleet was L77, VWC 477L, a Bedford YRQ with Marshall 45-seat body. Sudbury Bus Station is again the location, Saturday 2 April 1988. **Robert Appleton.**



Moving with the times: examples of Hedingham publicity from 1962, 1964 and 1974.

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Further reading/sources:

Hedingham Omnibuses 1960-1985, 25 Years of Public Service, G R Mills
Hedingham Omnibuses 30 Years of Service, G R Mills
Blackwells of Earls Colne, Michael Yelton, EBEG (copies still available from our Sales Officer)
Bus & Coach November 1961, *Improving a small bus business*, John Aldridge
Buses 'Seventy, *The Omnibus Proprietor*, D R MacGregor, Ian Allan.

Southend body swaps

Southend Corporation Transport had a history of rebodging vehicles, back to tramway days, where trucks and bogies were put under new or heavily rebuilt bodies. In passing, this calls into question what a tram takes its identity from - the trucks/running gear or the body, or both? Throw in some renumbering, sometimes allied to creative accounting (passing off what were really new trams, for which no authority existed, as rebuilds) and it's easy to get confused!

No trolleybuses were rebodied whilst in Southend (although 116 was rebodied *before* Southend bought it from AEC) but Sunbeams 130-8 were rebodied after their sale to Doncaster Corporation in 1954, receiving new Roe bodies which in turn were transferred to new Daimler CVG6s in 1962/3 as Doncaster abandoned its trolleys.

More recently, in the 1980s five L registered Daimler Fleetlines received new Northern Counties bodies and Q registrations (374-7/9, becoming 306-10) and two Leyland Leopard chassis received new Berkhof coach bodies (as 254/5 - a story to be told in my forthcoming book on the Southend X1 service). And after sale by Southend, Leopard coaches 203/4 received new Willowbrook bus bodies whilst with Brighton Transport.

Most of this body swapping activity is well recorded but there remain some frustrating gaps in records and some mysteries. This article looks at the events of the early 1950s that are still not fully understood - and probably never will be, with the passage of time.

The first post-war rebodies were of six wartime Daimler CWA6s that had been new in 1945 with Duple utility bodies, 230-5. In 1952 these were removed and Massey fitted new lowbridge bodies. Southend had actually wanted to rebody twelve, but the Ministry of Transport only sanctioned the necessary loan for six to be done. It is likely that the six not rebodied were the remaining ones with Duple bodies, 218-23, whereas the Brush bodied ones, 224-9, were presumably in better condition. In rebodied form, most lasted until 1965, whereas the 1943-5 deliveries that retained their original bodies, 218-29, had all been withdrawn by the end of 1958, so the scheme would seem to have been worthwhile.

With the plans for a Coordination Scheme with Eastern National/Westcliff Motor Services progressing, closure of the trolleybus system was decided upon in October 1952 (and fully achieved two years later) and Southend thus needed an influx of motor buses. By now London Transport were disposing of their wartime Daimler CW D class buses, which would be a perfect mechanical fit in the Southend fleet. They were being sold by the well-known Leeds dealer Norths. Southend wanted 18 for their chassis, to be rebodied by Massey. They took six in summer 1953 and then seven more early in 1954, but Norths' stock was exhausted and so only 13 came south, not the desired 18. The bodies ordered for the other five were instead fitted to brand new Leyland PD2 chassis, 276-80.



Picture left (previous page): it's 2 August 1953 and already three Daimler chassis are under preparation at the Corporation bus/trolleybus depot. Centre is GLX 913, to become Southend 263, but the ones in front and behind of it can't be identified. In the background are ex-Leeds AEC Regent 249, which last ran in the 1949/50 financial year but wasn't scrapped until April 1955, and Dodge 2, then still in service (although it's thought they only saw occasional use). **Photographer Derek S Giles, copyright The Bus Archive, ref DG02_02605**

Now comes some confusion. Southend only wanted the chassis, but at least some came to Southend complete and their bodies were removed by the Corporation. Some were photographed in Southend with just their cabs and part of the lower saloon in place, yet there are also scrapyards shots of complete ex D class bodies intact in Southend, complete with cabs.

Piecing together the available information, creating a timeline and studying photos, I've come to the conclusion that the first batch of six possibly came to Southend as complete vehicles, then having most of their bodies removed, leaving just the cab remaining, although one (263) also had the lower side panels more or less intact as well. Others seem to have had the lower deck side panels removed. At least three buses can be positively identified as they were photographed in August and September 1953 in Southend (263/6/8). Supporting this hypothesis, in the background to one September 1953 photo are two bodies, removed from the chassis, which appear to be ex D class buses, with the between decks panelling still intact but the roofs removed, whilst another picture taken on the same day appears to show the rear of a body off a D class bus, intact, so possibly Southend did remove those bodies but broke them up on site almost immediately after acquisition?

The Corporation then overhauled the chassis and mechanical components (at an estimated cost of £150 per bus) before despatching them to Massey's factory in Wigan to be bodied. The chassis went north between 5 November 1953 and 4 January 1954 - but did they retain their original cabs, for Massey to remove, or did Southend first strip them to bare chassis? We have no way of knowing! That batch of six were then returned to Southend between 23 February 1954 and 6 April 1954, entering service in April and June 1954.

Below: almost six weeks later, again in the depot yard, and we have the chassis of HGC 286 (to become Southend 268) with just the cab left from its old London utility body. Behind on the left are what appear to be two bodies removed from the LT Daimlers, being dismantled on site. Alongside them sits the body of an ex London STL class AEC Regent, the roofbox identifying it as what we believe is STL1919. It's already been removed from its chassis, as described later in this article. **Photographer Derek S Giles, copyright The Bus Archive, ref DG02_02660**



Then there was a slight pause before we come to the other seven. As noted above, the stock of ex London Daimlers was now almost exhausted and Southend were only able to obtain seven, which LT had sold to Norths in January and February 1954. In fact, the seven included the final pair sold by LT (D95/228, Southend 274/5). But there is strong evidence that these came to Southend with their bodies intact (contrary to PSV Circle records). The Corporation had a yard in Shoebury, just south of Elm Road and west of the bridge over the railway, which was used in the early 1950s for storing scrap buses and trolleybuses. (Today a factory stands there, as part of the Towerfield Road industrial estate). A number of pictures exist of trolleybuses dumped there but also the complete bodies of at least five ex LT D class Daimlers (and the three STLs, described below), one even still displaying its Merton garage destination blind. Given that the complete vehicles and bodies (minus chassis) were stored in rows, it is likely that there were actually seven D class bodies there but not all were easily visible.

The presumption therefore is that the second batch of seven were delivered to Southend complete and the Corporation removed the bodies, overhauled the chassis and sent them to Masseys. Their dates of despatch to Wigan are not marked on their record cards, but they returned with their new bodies between 28 April 1954 and 1 June 1954, when the final pair arrived. All entered service in July 1954. So why did Southend buy the second batch complete rather than with most of the body removed? In April 1953, Norths were advertising complete Ds for £450 but bare chassis (with engine/gearbox) at £375. Southend had no use for the bodies, which they later sold for scrap, but perhaps Norths were too busy to remove the bodies and only wanted to sell complete buses? Again, we will never know. The alternative possibility, but one that I've discounted, is that all the buses came complete and Southend removed part or all of the bodies, but the evidence doesn't seem to support that hypothesis.

What the Council minutes do reveal is the cost - the first 6 chassis were £300 each, the other 7 at £350 each (somewhat less than North's advertised prices). The Massey bodies were £1,975 each. "Conversion costs" were reported as an average of £442 each for the first six and an estimated £500 for the others. Presumably this covered the costs of body removal where required and mechanical overhaul to enable the buses to gain fresh certificates of fitness.

As a small aside, how were the bodies transported from the Corporation's works in London Road over the four miles to the Shoebury yard? One minor puzzle is also the seemingly random order of the registrations of these 13 buses - they are clearly not in order of registration numbers, nor chassis numbers, nor Massey body numbers, nor the order of delivery to Southend from Massey. About the only other possibility is that they represent the order that the chassis were first received in Southend, for which records don't exist.

Below: the finished product! 264 (HGC 276) of the first batch, on 29 May 1955. This is an interesting shot as it was taken on one of the two Sunday journeys on the 9/9A that were extended beyond the Eastwoodbury Willson Road terminus to Cockethurst Corner where the picture was taken, to take church goers to/from St Laurence Church. **Photographer Derek S Giles, copyright The Bus Archive, ref DG02_04004**



The ex-London Daimlers:

Registration	LT number	SCT number	Chassis number	Massey body no	Original body
GLX 913	D27	263	11845	2131	Duple
HGC 276	D149	264	12486	2132	Duple
HGF 952	D275	265	12903	2128	PRV
HGF 918	D241	266	12869	2127	PRV
HGF 923	D246	267	12874	2129	PRV
HGC 286	D159	268	12525	2130	Duple
HGF 879	D202	269	12830	2128	PRV
GYE 60	D71	270	12086	2134	Brush
HGC 263	D136	271	12465	2135	Duple
GXV 783	D52	272	11989	2137	Brush
GXV 784	D53	273	11990	2139	Brush
GYE 100	D95	274	12145	2126	Brush
HGF 905	D228	275	12856	2133	PRV

263 is of course preserved, now in the Newman family collection.

The STLs

And so to another mystery. It appears that in 1953 Southend also bought three ex London STL type AEC Regents, complete, from Norths. The confusion starts as there is no reference whatsoever in the Passenger Transport Committee minutes to these vehicles - no authority to purchase and hence no indication of what they were intended for. It has been suggested that their bodies were being considered for transfer to some existing Southend buses, as reported by the PSV Circle in September 1953. It is unclear which Southend buses might have been candidates for rebodding and the possibility seems unlikely, given the age of the Chiswick built LT bodies and the fact that most STL withdrawals were down to poor body condition. With the chassis dating from 1934-7, it also seems unlikely that these were considered better than any of the existing Southend Regents. (The nine second-hand Regents bought in 1946, 242-50, had all been withdrawn and sold by March 1952 - except for the chassis of one, 249, onto which was dumped the body of FOP 340 in 1955, as described below - so they were not the potential candidates).

Below: body removal in progress. Former London STL 524 has its body jacked off the chassis in the Southend depot yard on 13 September 1953. To the left is what appears to be the body off one of the D class Daimlers, with two chassis separating them. **Photographer Derek S Giles, copyright The Bus Archive, ref DG02_02659**



What is known is that the bodies were removed in Southend - see the picture on the previous page of one of these in progress. The web site Ian's Bus Stop (<http://busspotter.com/>) has histories of all the STLs and many other London classes, and identifies three buses as coming to Southend - STL524 (AYV 672), STL731 (BLH 789) and STL1919 (DLU 290). The PSV Circle recorded those three bodies at the Shoebury dump in 1954. So what became of their chassis? Ian's Bus Stop records them as being fitted with van/pantechicon bodies and used respectively by Furniture Express of London EC4 (body fitted by Marshall of Southend), Talent Furniture of Rayleigh and Tartan Arrow Service, also London E4 (body fitted by Bender of South Benfleet). How this came about is unclear - municipalities were not generally expected to indulge in trading activities, but it would appear that the Corporation sold the chassis to private firms. Was that always the intention, or simply an expedient way of disposing of them? Again, another mystery we will never unravel. Since the Council minutes don't record their purchase, there is no record of the disposal either.

It is possible that Southend removed the seats from STL bodies to reseat with upholstered seats some of the unrebodied utilities. It's likely that 218/9/21-3 had already been converted before the STLs came but 225-9 were reported in April 1952 as still having wooden slatted seats, so would be candidates, but that is pure speculation. What has been recorded by the PSV Circle is that AEC Regal 204 received ex STL seats in 1955/6.

So what became of the bodies in the Shoebury yard? By October 1954 [shortly before the final trolleybus withdrawals] there were reported to be ten complete trolleybuses, the three STL bodies and "about six" of the Daimler bodies there. The Passenger Transport Committee resolved to seek tenders and on 23/11/54 accepted a bid of £850 for "14 vehicles and scrap bus bodies". Disposal records show that trolleybuses 113/4/9-21, 144-52 were all sold for scrap to Harris of Saffron Walden in November 1954 so it would appear that Harris also dealt with the D and STL bodies, probably breaking them up on site. Perhaps the trolleybuses were also broken up on site, although it would have been possible for them to be towed elsewhere for dismantling.



Above: the Shoebury Corporation yard, undated but possibly c. April 1954. Trolleybuses 121, 113 and 150 are prominent, with others behind them. Centre are two STL bodies, then trolleybus 144 and two of the ex London Daimler bodies - there are more out of shot. The third STL (with the roofbox body) is hidden from view by 150. **Richard Delahoy collection.**

To return to the realms of proven fact, there is one more bus body exchange to record. In 1955 Southend bought seven more utility bodied Daimler CWs, this time from Eastern National, who had acquired them as a result of the 1951 purchase of Benfleet & District/Canvey & District by Westcliff Motor Services, whose fleet was subsequently absorbed into EN's. Five entered service in closed top, highbridge form with Southend as 242-6. Of the other two, the body of one, FOP 416, was transferred to the chassis of the seventh, FOP 340, becoming 247 and entering service along with the other five. The redundant original body off 247 was then placed on the chassis of an elderly second-hand Southend Regent, 249 (UG 1032) and disposed of. What happened to the chassis of FOP 416 is not known, presumably it was dismantled. Five of Daimlers then went on to be converted to open top in 1956/7 (242/4-7) and lasted until the 1970 season; the other was withdrawn in 1957 (243) still in closed top form.

Whilst Southend knew that from the 1956 season, they would require open top buses for their share of the seafront routes under the Coordination Scheme, these Daimlers were in fact bought as a stop-gap for town services (in closed top form) after Leyland had advised the Corporation that there was a potential 14-month wait for new PD2 chassis that had been ordered, leaving Southend short of buses in summer 1955.

Finally, whilst strictly not rebodysing but instead extensive conversions of existing bodies, we need to mention AEC Regals 203/4 of 1931, rebuilt by SCT in 1955/6, and the seven ex-Royal Canadian Air Force Dodge single deckers, of which six were converted to buses (but only four actually entered service with SCT). The seventh was actually rebodied - but altered to a crew cab and fitted with a tanker body for sewer flushing duties! The story of the Dodges is particularly complicated and one I hope to tell in EBM Extra one day.



Left: to conclude, here is 247 (FOP 340) fitted with the Duple body removed from FOP 416, replacing the original (but nearly identical) Park Royal one. The picture is undated but the bus looks resplendent fresh from repaint and the body shop records say it was painted (once only in closed top form) in July 1955,

entering service on the 30th of that month. It was converted to open top in April 1956.

The ex Benfleet/Canvey, Westcliff and EN buses (all but one of which had been new to Birmingham City Transport, hence the FOP registrations - the exception was 246, Essex registered JYW 451, that had been new directly to Benfleet & District) were generally used on the ex-trolleybus town circular routes - being highbridge, they had limited route availability. A couple covered over 25,000 miles on town work in 1955/early 1956 but four of the others only ran between 12,000 and 18,000 miles each in closed top form, reflecting their limited operation. By comparison, other Southend buses tended to average around 40,000 miles per annum. But they acted as a useful stopgap whilst waiting for Leyland to produce the ordered PD2 chassis and of course then had long, albeit relatively easy, lives in open top form.

These fourth-hand buses took the fleetnumbers 242-7 that had been used for earlier pre-loved buses.

Photo by R F Mack, RD collection.

Sources: PSV Circle Fleet History and contemporary News Sheets, photos (some dated, some not), SCT vehicle record cards, the book *London's Utility Buses* by Ken Blacker. Thanks to John Kaye (via David Lang of sct61.org) for info from PSV Circle News Sheets and to Brian Ashley (who saw the buses in 1953) for reviewing the text.

Let Brian have the last word: "The disposal yard at Elm Road, Shoeburyness has always held a nostalgic interest for me, as I recall having cycled down there from Westcliff with my cousin, who was also a bus enthusiast, to witness the withdrawn trolleybuses and ex-LT bus bodies after we were told that the withdrawn trolleybuses were dumped down there. We both would have been about 12 years old at the time, but unfortunately, I didn't take any photos, so I can't recall which vehicles were there".



Before, during and after! The rebodding of some of the 1972 batch of Daimler Fleetlines:

These four shots all depict what started out as 377, GHJ 377L and ended up as 306, Q475 MEV, a Northern Counties bodied Daimler CRL6-33 new in December 1972.

Top: in service with its original body. Eastwood, Kent Elms Corner, 4 February 1979.



Shades of 1953! With its top deck removed, the chassis retains its windscreen and some lower deck panelling, which were removed later to enable the chassis to be reconditioned and upgraded.

Tickfield Road works, 3 December 1983.



And outside the works on the same day, here's the erstwhile top deck, which was later cut up on site.

Pictures Richard Delahoy (top three), Chris Hilditch (lower).



Fast forward to October 1984 and the chassis has been rebodied with Northern Counties' latest version of their body, unusually fitted with tinted windows. This is 306 as received, seen at the London Road depot before registration and fitting fleetnames. It was then exhibited at the Canvey Museum rally on 14 October.

EN's Dunmow outstation - with thanks to Nigel Turner

Eastern National based buses at a small number of outstations over the years, some taken over from other operators. Dunmow was one such example, as we recount here.

EN inherited the North Street base in Dunmow as a result of the takeover of Hicks Bros of Braintree. Hicks had established a small garage in the village c.1928 and during the 1930s three buses were based there. Postwar the allocation dropped to one or two buses, for the Dunmow to Chelmsford service. The site was actually owned by the Hicks family and leased to the bus company. It had space for more vehicles, and papers from 1948 refer to part being rented to another operator (one possibility being Hoys Coaches – can anyone elaborate?). On the sale of Hicks to the British Transport Commission, the family's coaching interests and the Dunmow site were transferred to the newly formed Cansdall Coaches, with the BTC-owned Hicks paying a rent of £52 pa.

Meanwhile, Dons Coaches had been established in 1949 by Don Hale and E Smith from a garage in Takeley, and in 1953 they took on a lease of part of the North Street Dunmow site, subsequently buying it. The Hicks bus remained based there and when in 1955 Hicks was absorbed into Eastern National, it became an outstation for EN, under the control of Braintree depot as before, working what had become the 33, Dunmow to Chelmsford (the service had nominally been 21 in Hicks' days, then briefly EN 321, before changing to 33 in 1955). It was under threat of closure in 1965 as a result of service changes that April, but was reprieved and briefly worked on the 70 (Bishop's Stortford - Braintree - Colchester - Harwich, incorporating the 51 and 310) but was back on the 33 from December 1965 and now a sub depot of Chelmsford rather than Braintree. The regular allocation then was an FLF decker, with two crews based there, but from October 1977 the allocation changed to a Bristol VR (often 3033) and one duty became OMO, whilst the other was still a driver and conductor. By September 1979 it had become a Leyland National and at some point all one man operated.

Dons bought a site in Parsonage Down in Dunmow in 1973 and eventually built a new depot there, with the EN outstation moving to that site during 1978. The old North Street site was demolished and redeveloped for housing. Eventually the EN outstation was closed on 8 October 2007, having latterly used Leyland Olympian 34815 on school route 509 (ex 619) and the 33, the last driver, Richard Wright, moving to Chelmsford depot.

Most of the information has come from the researches of **Nigel Turner** to whom we are most grateful. He would welcome any further info, please contact the Editor in the first instance.

Our photo **below** of the North Street premises dates sometime between June 1969 and June 1970, as that was the only period that Dons owned the coach on the right inside the building, being WXP 726, a Bedford SB1 / Duple. The EN bus is FLF 2850, NTW 943C, blinded up for the 33 to Chelmsford. **Ian Sharpe collection**



Another Scottish connection - via Blackpool

In previous Extras we've looked at the great FLF for Scottish VR exchange, and then last time at the Southend PD2s that went north in exchange for Glasgow Worldmasters. But there was a later Glasgow to Southend connection, albeit one way, not an exchange

Southend Transport started to expand their bus fleet from 1988 as competition with Eastern National and latterly Thamesway grew and developed into the "bus war". Initially Southend bought second-hand Routemasters, then Leyland Nationals and latterly Bristol VRs, plus a few Olympians. The Leyland Nationals were all the shorter, 10.3m version mark 1 models and initially were an assortment of former London Country examples, followed by Welsh examples from Cardiff City and Crosville Wales.

Meanwhile, in Glasgow, Strathclyde PTE had bought a batch of 20 Leyland Nationals in 1979, GGE 156-75T (LN1-20). At the end of 1987/start of 1988, 11 of these were sold to Blackpool Transport as their 156/8/61/2/4-7/70/2/4 (matching the registrations). Withdrawn three years later, all 11 were snapped up by Southend Transport, gaining fleetnumbers 716-26 in registration number order. Repainted into Southend livery, they were used on a wide variety of routes as the "war" intensified. That is except for 720 (GGE 164T) which never entered service and its fleetnumber was later reused by another National (LPB 206P).



Left: before Southend (1): Greater Glasgow LN6, GGE 161T, at Croftfoot, Glasgow on 15 March 1980. It became Southend 718. **Murdoch Currie** (via Steve Sellars).



Left: before Southend (2): Blackpool 172, GGE 172T, Cleveleys bus station, 30 April 1988. It went on to be Southend 725. This and the following photos all **Richard Delahoy** except as noted.



Above: Southend 721, GGE 165T, at the Archer Avenue stop in Newington Avenue, Southchurch on service 6, which competed with Thamesway's minibus operated 29B, on 8 June 1992.

Withdrawals started in April 1993, shortly before the sale of Southend Transport to British Bus and the subsequent outbreak of peace, with a major scaling back of Southend's over-extended bus operations. The ex-Strathclyde buses were progressively withdrawn between 1995 and 1997, except for one that was to have a different fate. 724 was taken out of service and Southend's workshops proceeded to upgrade it in what was dubbed a "Mark 3" conversion – the interior was modernised with DIPTAC features, a DAF engine was fitted, the roof heating pod was removed and the livery was altered with more white. It was re-registered PJI 3745 and renumbered 745 (having been nominally numbered 752 whilst the rebuild was in progress) and it re-entered service in November 1992. It was possibly seen as a prototype for further such modernisations but any thoughts of that were overtaken by the British Bus takeover in June 1993 and no others were converted, British Bus having its own established "Greenway" conversion project in conjunction with East Lancs.

745 lasted on after the others were withdrawn and later carried an overall advert livery for the South East Essex College. By the end of April 1997 it had become the only Leyland National left in the fleet (although some ex-Colchester National 2s were to come later), lasting into the Arriva era and being finally withdrawn in October 1998. It however remained in the area as it was sold to Supreme Coaches (Abridge Enterprises) of Hadleigh and lasted with them until 2004.

One of the ex-Strathclyde/Blackpool/Southend ones went into preservation in 2001 with M Roulston of Glasgow, GGE 156T (Southend 717), being photographed in 2004 at "Bus World, Hillingdon" and then in 2011 in Beith, but it is thought that it was subsequently scrapped. One Strathclyde example does survive in preservation, GGE 173T (LN18), at the Bridgeton Depot of the Glasgow Vintage Vehicle Trust, nearing completion of its restoration, but it's not a Southend one. And one Southend National has survived, 713 (LPB 218P), one of the former London Country ones, although it has not been on the road for some years now.

Thanks to **Steve Sellars** for his help with this article.



Above: after its "Mark 3" conversion, the renumbered 745 received a dateless registration, PJI 3745, and this special livery with blue upswept at the rear and two thin red lines below the windows. Despite the destination display, the bus was actually parked in the dead-end section of London Road at Victoria Circus, Southend at the stop used by the competing TV Taxis business. The date is 21 November 1992 and the bus was being shown off to the public, the conversion and upgraded interior having only just been completed.

Below: it later carried an overall advert livery but lost that in favour of the then standard Southend livery around the end of 1997, being photographed in Central Bus Station on service 5 to Eastwood Rise. **John Boylett**



DRT, 1970s style

DRT - Demand Responsive Transport - is today's industry fad but whilst the technology behind it is relatively new, the concept certainly isn't. This is the story of a 1970s Essex scheme in Harlow.

James Whiting (of Capital Transport fame) wrote about his impressions of the service in the LOTS (London Omnibus Traction Society) monthly News Sheet, *The London Bus*, in September 1974 (issue 121). We can do no better than to quote his contemporaneous account, with grateful thanks to LOTS, so here's an edited version:

"An experimental Dial-a-Ride service sponsored jointly by Harlow District Council, Harlow Development Corporation, Essex County Council and the Department of the Environment's Transport & Road Research Laboratory, started operation between Harlow bus station and Old Harlow (Hobbs Cross Road) on 31st August [1974]. The result of nearly four years' research and planning, the service uses five minibuses, two of which are spares, and is the biggest to be introduced in Europe so far. Because of the national application of the experience to be gained from the experiment, 50% of the service's operational losses - which are estimated at £35,000 in the first year - will be met by the DoE. The other 50% will be divided equally between the other three parties involved.

The Pick-Me-Up service, as it is known locally, will run for an initial period of two years, subject to review after one year, and London Country are acting as agents in operating it. Pick-Me-Up buses leave Harlow bus station for Old Harlow at 20-minute intervals between 7am and 7pm and hourly between 7pm and 11.30pm. No service operates on Sundays or bank holidays. Bookings are taken by a 'despatcher' in the Pick-Me-Up control office at the bus station. To be certain of a bus, an intending passenger has to give 45 minutes notice of his planned journey, although in most cases 30 minutes notice is adequate. The despatcher can be contacted by telephone from home or from any of 13 freephones - ten within Old Harlow, two at Harlow Town station and one at the Stow shopping centre. Before setting off from each terminus the driver is given a list of bookings by radio and with the aid of a special map he plans his route, to pick-up and set down his passengers. The size of the minibuses enables them to travel down most of the narrow streets in Old Harlow and so most passengers can be transported to or from their front door. The 10p flat fare is paid into a Bell Punch farebox on entry and the driver asks each person's destination; pensioners pay a reduced flat fare of 5p and children 8p.

The driver of the bus I had travelled on had been on Green Line work prior to his transfer to the Pick-Me-Up service and he found his new job "very restful" compared to weaving his way through London traffic. The seven drivers trained for the service were selected mainly on the basis of seniority and an extra allowance is payable.

It is estimated that for each 10p received from passengers, 45p will have to be spent to provide the service. If Dial-a-Ride becomes a common feature in local public transport it should however be possible to charge a higher flat fare - 10p is a low price to pay for the service provided, especially when it is remembered that the flat fare on Harlow's conventional bus services is 8p with a 1p peak-hour surcharge".



Left: FT3 at Harlow bus station, on the first day. Note the map on the dash board.
Richard Delahoy

As explained, the route was a mix of semi timetabled, fixed route sections and flexible dial a ride service and could be hailed on demand anywhere in Old Harlow. As well as booking by phone, intending passengers could submit a pre-paid postcard, either by post or by handing it in on the bus. As the leaflet said "However, you must leave time for confirmation of your booking to be sent to you".

The five vehicles were 16-seater Dormobile bodied Ford Transits, FT1-5, VPF 121/2M, XPE 123-5N. Due to the losses incurred, at the end of the two-year trial, the service was converted to a fixed route from 4 September 1976, still using the Transits, but they were replaced from 2 April 1977 by BN class Bristol LHSs and the route numbered 809.

They weren't the NBC's first foray into demand responsive transit, as West Yorkshire had run their experimental Harrogate "Chauffeur Coach" service in Harrogate for six months in 1972/3, using hired Transits, and there had been trials in Abingdon, Carterton, Maidstone and Eastbourne. And of course, in London, LT introduced a similar "Dial-a-bus" service in Hampstead Garden Suburb in October 1974.

Further reading: Buses magazine (October 1974), LOTS monthly TLBs (available to download from the LOTS publications archive at www.ltsv.com/lots/publication_list.php), Omnibus Magazine issue 293 (Nov/Dec 1974) and books *London Country* by John Glover (pp 52/3) and *London Country* by Laurie Akehurst and Dave Stewart (p 64).

Blind spot

Bob Williamson



Here's another photoprint of a destination blind from our resident expert and



blind collector, Bob Williamson. This one is from Eastern National's Braintree depot, identified as "List no. 19/1" and printed by Norbury Brothers in September 1964. It was probably produced as a consequence of the major service revisions that took place across Essex in April that year.

Note how most entries are in alphabetical order except where the opposite terminals of some services would be too far apart on the blind, hence Skitts Hill appears immediately after Bailey Bridge Road (opposite ends of Braintree town service 312, where the blinds needed changing every 20 minutes or so), likewise Ebenezer Close (in Witham) is followed by Witham [Howbridge Estate] out of alphabetical order, for Witham town service 353. There are a couple of other examples.

Note also the Witham [Direct] display, for certain journeys on the 335, Braintree - Witham - Maldon (now covered by Stephensons 38/A and 90) which ran direct via the B1018 rather than through Silver End. The timetable shows there were similar direct journeys in the opposite direction, towards Braintree, but for whatever reason, these didn't merit a specific destination display - I wonder why?

[illegible]

The challenge of dealing with staff shortages in the 1960s.

In the mid-sixties, the Eastern National Omnibus Company were encountering their worst ever staffing problems. A massive recruitment drive was launched, targeting the unemployment blackspots of north England and Scotland. The company bought a large house, The Towers, in Springfield Road, Chelmsford, which had been converted into a staff hostel by the Marconi company. It was intended that any recruits from up north could be accommodated in The Towers until they could be housed by the Council, and their families could join them. It was not overly successful.



As part of the campaign, life size pictures of this CF crew, with their "modern" bus, appeared on advertising hoardings in the target areas. The FLF, 2765 (VWC 65) was chosen as the latest bus repainted, and the crew, driver George Lee and conductress Jeanne Cuncliffe, were renowned for their smart appearance. The location was Chignal Corner, to the west of Chelmsford. The photos were taken, I believe, by the company's publicity officer, Don Merritt.

Among those that came south were Gerald Betts, Tom Cassidy and George Blackett, from the north east, John Creed, Jim and Pat Hughes from Yorkshire, Tom Beveridge and Ian Saddler from Cumberland, and Rod McKenzie from Scotland. The hostel was often used as overnight accommodation for Black and White drivers on Eastlander (service 183) duplicates.

(This feature first appeared on our Facebook page in September 2017).

Another approach was the hiring of buses with crews from Hedingham & District, as explained and illustrated in that feature on pages 4 - 12.



Every picture tells a story

I recently arranged the scanning of the colour slides that my late father Norman took in the 1950s and 1960s. He had no interest in public transport (beyond the model railway bought for me before I was even born!) but I was intrigued by this shot showing me and my younger brother Stuart, because of the coach photo-bombing the background. Dad didn't record the location but I had a hunch that it was in Finchingfield. The timbered building to the right of the coach has a fuel pump outside, and the wide (closed) gate to the left and the high building behind suggested to me that it might have been the depot for the operator. I didn't recognise the livery.

To find out more, I turned to fellow EBEG member **Nigel Turner** as the fount of all bus knowledge in that part of north Essex, and discovered an interesting story. The picture had been taken on 14 August 1964, and Nigel takes up the story.

"Would that every picture was so easy to identify!

The house is "Sunnyside", The Green, Finchingfield CM7 4JX and was bought by Alfred Wiffen in 1913. By the following year he was running a carriers service to the "Horse & Groom" Braintree three times a week. At some point the house was split into two, or may have always been so. One half (No.2) was sold in 1999 but Eunice Wilks-Wiffen remained at "No.1" until her death two or three years ago.

The original bus garage was accessed to the right of the house but later expansion saw the opening up of an entrance to the left [hence the wide gate and garage building behind].

The date of the photo is very relevant to me as a couple of weeks later the OB became my regular school bus when I started to go to Braintree County High School. It is SEV 777 which was new to Wiffens. You can distinguish it from the other OB in the fleet at that time because of the additional cant windows. It was particularly favoured by Gladys Wilks-Wiffen as it was smaller than the more modern vehicles in the fleet. She had got her PSV licence several decades earlier and wasn't that happy driving the later coaches.

After withdrawal in the mid 1970s SEV 777 went to Sworders of Walkern. It then went "up north" for several decades but was bought by Brentwood Coaches who restored it. As far as I know they still have it.

Fun Fact - The third (and current) wife of well-known actor Nigel Havers is known by the name Georgiana. However she was born Rita Eileen Webb, eldest grandchild of Chris and Gladys Wilks-Wiffen. I didn't know her because she went to a Saffron Walden school, however I knew her sister Andrea well because, like me, she rode on SEV 777 to school. Occasionally their mother Eileen would drive if they were really struggling for staff".

So there we are - a random family snap with a transport connection. Apologies for the quality of the picture (at least I'm in long trousers!) but I thought the story was worth sharing.



Southend to Stansted, 30 years of progress

For the modern history feature in this Extra, we look back at the development of the Southend - Chelmsford - Stansted Airport service over the past thirty years.

Successively marketed as Venturer, Diamond Service, Southend-Stansted Flyer, Aircoach, From Pier to Air and now Essex Airlink, the route has enjoyed dedicated vehicles to a superior specification (mostly). The through service to Stansted started in May 1995 when the existing stopping services 11 (Southend to Chelmsford) and 33 (Chelmsford to Bishop's Stortford via Stansted) were merged to become the 33 (all stops) and 33X (limited stops) as the Venturer service, with a batch of seven dual-purpose seated Leyland Tigers with Duple Dominant bus bodies (1001-7), sourced from Yorkshire Rider.

Three years later, in March 1998, the service was converted to low floor operation with a dedicated batch of five brand new bus seated Dennis Darts (712-6), now branded as the Diamond service. From June 2000 there was a split, with Diamond only running the Southend to Chelmsford section and 33 reinstated for the northern leg. We noted at the time that the Diamond route designation in fact covered no less than eight different route variations (see EBN 435, July 2000)! Then in December 2004, the service was extended to Stansted again and renumbered X30 (as it remains today). Six new Plaxton Cheetah bodied Mercedes Vario coaches (56004-9) were ordered for the new service, now running 24-hours daily, but until they were ready, various other coaches were borrowed from First North West.

As demand increased, the 33-seater Cheetahs proved too small and were replaced in summer 2008 by five Plaxton Panther bodied Volvo B9Rs (20801-5) with 44 seats and wheelchair accessibility, the service now being branded as Aircoach. Two were later repainted into a new blue and white livery for Aircoach, before the coaches were removed and replaced towards the end of 2016 by seven new Enviro 200 MMC buses, with 36 high backed seats and luggage racks (67165-71). They were in a silver and blue-green livery with the strapline "From Pier to Air". To provide greater seating capacity on peak journeys, they were joined in spring 2018 by a pair of coach seated Volvo B7TL / Wrights deckers (37985/6) released from Green Line duties elsewhere.

And so to bring us up to date, X30 was restocked early in 2020 with the seven superb Scania N250UD deckers with coach seated ADL Enviro 400 MMC bodies, introducing a new livery of two shades of blue and the familiar Airlink branding; they remain on the service today, with the frequency having been increased to half-hourly in 2024.

The photos here, by **Richard Delahoy**, show the progression of the dedicated fleets for this prestige service.

Below: Venturer branded 1007, A668 KUM, ex Yorkshire Rider, Southend Central Bus Station, 14 May 1995.





Above: next came the Diamond Service with low-floor Darts, including 712, R712 DJN, also in Southend Central Bus Station, 14 March 1998. The route “number” was a purple diamond logo stuck on the blind box glass.

Below: the low floor accessibility was initially lost and seating capacity reduced when the Darts were replaced by Plaxton Cheetah bodied Mercedes-Benz Varios, like 56007, EY54 BRV, pulling away from the Rayleigh Rail Station stop on its way to Southend on 16 September 2006.





Above: pending the next iteration of the service, three coaches were loaned from First Rail Support, including this impressive tri-axle Volvo B12 / Plaxton Excalibur, 20203, T703 JLD, from August 2007, to provide extra capacity on X30. They had been new to First Berks Bucks for the Heathrow RailAir service and ran on X30 for around a year, as well as undertaking rail replacement and private hire. Chelmsford bus station, 20 October 2007.

Below: replacements for the 33-seat Varios were a batch of five 44-seat Volvo B9R / Plaxton Panther coaches new in summer 2008, fitted with toilets and a wheelchair lift. Almost at the end of its journey from Stansted, 20805, YN08 OWV, was caught leaving the Deeping underpass in Southend. Deeping was subsequently closed and buses now approach along Chichester Road like the Dart in the background. These coaches introduced the stansted aircoach branding, applied in an adaptation of First's willow leaf corporate livery. 18 October 2008.





Above: as back up for the new fleet, a Volvo B10M / Plaxton Premiere was transferred to Essex from First West Yorkshire in February 2008, 20463, X193 HFB. Later that year it received aircoach branding as seen here in the new Southend Travel Centre (on the same site as the old Central Bus Station) on 25 April 2009. Unlike the other coaches, it was not wheelchair accessible. It lasted in the service fleet until converted to a driver trainer in May 2015.

Below: an attractive new blue and white livery, based on First's urban livery, still branded as Aircoach (now capitalised), was introduced on the Plaxton Panthers, with 20801, YN08 OWO, seen here being the first, in November 2012. 20802 followed in February 2013 but the other three coaches remained in white. All five coaches were transferred to First Devon & Cornwall, at the end of 2016 (20802-5) or May 2017 (20801). Southend Travel Centre, 26 December 2012.



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Rear cover top: Late in 2016 there was arguably a further downgrade for X30, with a batch of Alexander Dennis E20D / Enviro 200 MMCs introduced onto it and the new Basildon X10. With only 36 seats (mostly high backed bus seats) they reduced capacity but speeded up boarding times and could carry standing passengers. The branding now became this silver and blue-green livery with the strapline "From Pier to Air" as seen on 67168, YY66 PBX, in Southend Travel Centre 9 December 2016 when new. They were mainly replaced by the current Scania deckers in 2020.

Rear cover lower: to give extra capacity on busy trips, the Enviros were supported by a pair of Volvo B9TL / Wrightbus deckers made surplus by the withdrawal of the Green Line Windsor service previously run by First Berkshire. They entered service in Essex in March 2018 and 37985, BJ11 XGV, was seen passing Southend Victoria Station the following month, on 14 April 2018. After the Scania deckers came, 37985/6 were repainted into heritage liveries (Westcliff Motor Services and EN double deck coach respectively) for use on local services from Hadleigh depot.



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