

Essex Bus Magazine Extra

Historical features special issue

Issue 3 Spring 2023



Essex Bus Enthusiasts Group

www.essexbus.org.uk



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As we have commented previously, our late member **Frank Church** didn't take many colour shots but there is a rich variety in the few that he did.

Here's one of his last such pictures, a Chelmsford scene showing the Eastern National fleet in transition, at least so far as liveries and fleetnames were concerned.

The location is unmistakably the forecourt of the bus station/depot in Chelmsford, taken whilst buses still loaded up on the far side away from the main pedestrian area. There we see Halstead allocated 2735, its crew chatting whilst a passenger boards from the roadway, before heading back to its home depot town on the 311. In Halstead buses terminated either at the Old Station Yard, just a few yards downhill from the small depot there, or continued on to Churchill Avenue, on the north of the town along the Sudbury Road (later diverted to Colne Road). Halstead railway station had closed to passengers at the end of 1961 but the yard remained the bus terminus until March 1984, the same month that Halstead bus depot closed; it was demolished and replaced by a Sainsbury's supermarket, while the railway yard was redeveloped for housing.

But back to liveries: 2735 is in traditional Tilling style, with an upper cream band as well as the one over the lower deck windows, both edged in black. Doubtless it will be displaying the underlined style gold fleetname on both sides (see the previous edition of Extra for EN fleetname styles). Centre of the picture 2837 shows the transitional style as the NBC corporate image started to be introduced. The upper cream band is painted out, the black lining has gone and the middle band is overpainted in white, but the green remains in Tilling style and shade. The fleetname has disappeared from the lower side panels but has not been replaced, in contrast to the RWC/D example in the background, with a small Eastern National across the top of the radiator cowl. It would not be long before NBC poppy green would sweep away the traditional styles. Thankfully EN's double deckers all retained a white band and black mudguards through the NBC era, unlike say Crosville, who painted everything green.

2837's appearance on town service 56 is somewhat unusual, since the bus was allocated to Southend (SD) at the time but must be on loan to CF and is fitted with a CF destination blind. The RWC/D registered bus behind will follow a broadly similar path north westwards from the bus station on the 44A/B to the Melbourne Estate. Just edging into the right of the shot is an unidentified 15xx series Bristol RELL bus on the 11 from Southend.

The slide is undated, but we can narrow the range down to late 1972/early 1973, partly by the transitional livery styles but also since 2837 was only allocated to SD from 5/72 to 3/73 and gained an overall advert livery by February 1973. The deckers are all Bristol FLF Lodekkas.



Essex Bus Magazine Extra from the Essex Bus Enthusiasts Group

Issue 3

Spring 2023

Introduction

Welcome to this third edition of **Essex Bus Magazine Extra**, an occasional series brought free to members to offer some in-depth historical articles that we don't have room for in our monthly magazine. This issue has very generously been funded by Keith Shayshutt. You can read more about Keith on pages 2 & 3.

We plan to publish two Extras each year, subject to funding; we already have sponsors for 2023 and 2024. We hope you will enjoy this extra magazine and will find the range of articles interesting and stimulating, covering a range of eras, operators and parts of Essex.

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Front cover: Following our article on Eastern National's Walton depot in the previous EBM Extra, we have a follow up with the experiences of a driver there in the 1970s and 1980s, Peter Dimmick. Hence this shot of 1451 is particularly appropriate and like so many pictures, there's a story to tell.

First, the bus. OWC 183D was new in 1966, not to EN but to Tillings Transport, then under EN's control, hence the Essex registration. It was a Bristol MW6G with ECW C34F body for tour work. Numbered T313, it was transferred to EN in March 1968, becoming 393. Last used in the summer season 1973, it was then rebuilt by Marshalls of Cambridge in December 1974 for bus work, numbered 1451 as seen here, with a small destination box fitted in the front dome, bus seats replacing the coach ones, so now B43F, and NBC bus livery applied. When delicensed for disposal at the end of October 1979 it was the penultimate MW in service with EN. It went for scrap.

Then the route and the people. **Andrew Colebourne**, who took the photo, recalls that this was the Summer Sunday afternoon journey of route 105, seen on 16 August 1978. 1451 was the regular 105 bus outstationed at WN at that time, with a regular driver. If memory serves, the couple in the picture were regular passengers and they ran the first aid hut on the beach near the old lifeboat station.

Essex Bus Magazine Extra is published by the Essex Bus Enthusiasts Group

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Views expressed in EBM do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Essex Bus Enthusiasts Group or members of its committee. Every effort is made to ensure accuracy, but the Group cannot accept responsibility for any errors published.

I grew up in Essex, born in Grays, and subsequently lived in Romford, Chelmsford, Hockley, Colchester and finally Witham. My dad was in the police and it was common practise in those days to move around every couple of years.

My interest in buses was formed in my early years (Romford I'm told but I can't remember that) and I became a member of ENEG as soon as I was old enough in the 1960s. We moved to Witham in 1965 and I retained my place at school in Colchester which meant a 45-minute bus ride each way every day on service 53. It was usually a Chelmsford (CF) Bristol FLF with a Kelvedon (KN) crew in the morning but always a Guy on the way home. I had six years of this enjoyment until leaving school in July 1971 – it was even a Guy on my last day! The Guys had come from Moores Bros, taken over by EN in 1963, as featured in the February magazine (EBM 706).

Below: the final Guy Arab, 2019 (582 AOO), one of a pair ordered by Moores but delivered to EN after the takeover, entering Witham along Newland Street. **Keith Shayshutt.**



Work beckoned and an approach to EN led to me being taken on as a schedules clerk. I joined the schedules office in September that year under the watchful eye of Charlie English and Terry Smith. What a fantastic grounding that was in how to compile schedules very professionally. I tended to work on those for SD, HH & CY depots but also including 151/251 which were very difficult to construct. It was soon 1974 and I moved to CF depot as a Traffic Assistant. Towards the end of that year the Traffic Manager, Bob Hanley, called me into his office and offered me a place on the NBC Senior Management Training Scheme, as that year NBC were looking for three applicants from inside the industry rather than directly from University. I said yes, and in December I was posted to Midland Red in Birmingham for two years. It was an excellent course especially gaining my PSV licence and being allowed to drive on service (which I did nearly every evening after the 'day job').



Those two years also quickly passed and I was posted to Trent in Derby as Assistant to the Traffic Manager, later taking over as District Traffic Superintendent at Derby depot. I enjoyed that job but NBC wanted me to move on and suggested I applied for an Area Manager's job at National Welsh. I duly got the position and moved to Cwmbran in 1983. Life in South Wales was different but hugely enjoyable.

An opportunity arose in 1985 to move back to Trent as District Manager Nottingham. This position was to prepare for deregulation and a whole new world opened up in determining which services were commercial and submitting tenders for those that were not. In 1989 the Wellglade Group, the parent company of Trent, took over Bartons and I was put in as Traffic Manager. Bartons at that time was haemorrhaging cash and there was a lot to do in a very short space of time. My former EN scheduling skills really came to

the fore here. I stayed with Wellglade ending up as Head of Development before retirement in 2014.

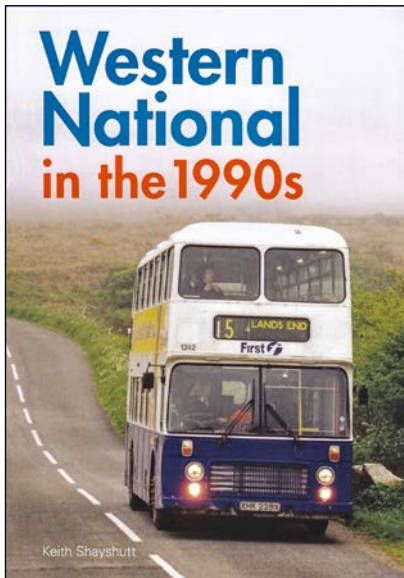
I now have time to indulge in my passion for buses, writing (bus) books, still doing a bit of part time driving and ever adding to the photo collection.

I am proud to have been a member of ENEG/EBEG from the early days but I wish I hadn't let my membership lapse for a few years before rejoining so I can't claim continuous membership from the 1960s.

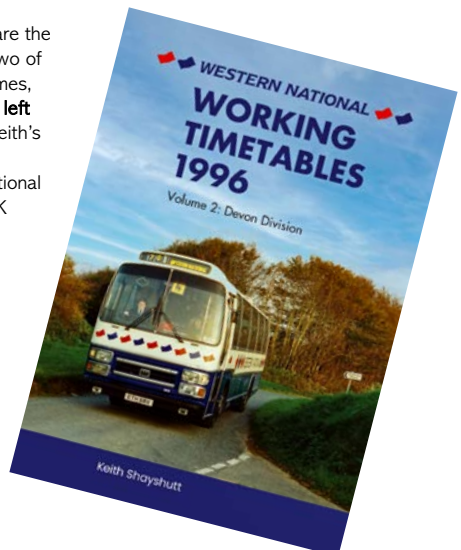
Keith has published the following books, all of which are still available:

- Loughborough's Buses – the deregulated years - £9.99
- Western National in the 1990s - £19.50
- North Devon's Buses from the 1960s - £21.50
- All Change – the story of Cornwall's buses in the 21st century - £22.50
- Western National Working Timetables 1996 – Vol 1 Cornwall - £23.50
- Western National Working Timetables 1996 – Vol 2 Devon - £18.00 (just published).

Copies can be obtained direct from Keith post free - e-mail him at keith.shayshutt1@gmail.com for details - with payment by PayPal, bank transfer or cheque. They are also available on eBay and Amazon and from MDS Books.



Illustrated are the covers of two of those volumes, that on the **left** featuring Keith's shot of ex Eastern National 3123 (XHK 228X) captured in Zennor, Cornwall in misty weather in May 2000.



Working at Walton

Peter Dimmick

In Extra issue 2 we took a look at Eastern National's small depot at Walton-on-Naze. But depots are more than the buildings and the buses, they are about the people who worked there and those who used the buses. Here's Peter Dimmick's story of his life on the buses.

In July of 1974 after a six-month period of illness I applied for the first job to come along and became a bus conductor at the Eastern National depot at Walton-on-the-Naze, little knowing that it would be very nearly 30 years later that I would make my escape. At that time bus crews only did the Walton to Clacton and Jaywick route 107/8/9 and both the Walton to Colchester and Walton to Harwich routes were done exclusively by One Man Operation. Doing only one route meant that we got to know a large number of regulars and a lot of their idiosyncrasies and for me this enhanced the job no end.

The front office at Walton which is now the bike shop Revved Up was then an Eastern National coach office. A rather colourful young lady worked there and on occasions whilst having a meal break in the rear rest room we heard streams of exceedingly colourful language from her, to which someone would comment "someone's upset Carol then"! There was another coach office and left luggage at the old Clacton bus station. The man that worked there was rather impatient. I was there one day when a lady was having difficulty finding her left luggage ticket in her handbag when he snatched her bag, turned it upside-down and shook out the entire contents on the counter. He then quickly grabbed the ticket and triumphantly waved it in the air, saying "here we are" and disappeared to find the item whilst the startled woman retrieved the contents of her bag. This I gather was a fairly common occurrence.

In the early days it was quite common to pick up a lot of people on the way into Clacton and as there was a Butlin's Holiday Camp on the way out to Jaywick, we could have quite a load from Clacton for Butlin's and for Jaywick. There

were very many times we were fully loaded coming back to Clacton and again when we left for Walton. The holiday season was completely manic and we often left more behind than we carried. There was always a huge sigh of relief when Butlin's closed at the end of the season. I remember one occasion when a passenger got off and went into Butlin's before I could take his fare. I jumped off the bus, pushed past the man on the gate and took the fare and issued a ticket inside the camp! I must have been very keen back then.

When circumstances allowed, we would try to pinch a couple of minutes on the way back from Jaywick to Clacton and as we entered the bus station, I would yank the doors open, leap off and have the tea ready on the table by the time my driver got there. My regular driver John was a little hard of hearing having previously worked as a fireman on steam engines. On one occasion after we had had a cup of tea I needed to go to the loo on the way out and when I came out I found that the bus had gone without me. It appeared that not only did John not hear bells when I pressed them but he also heard bells when I *hadn't* pressed them. Fortunately, another driver saw my predicament and we chased after my bus in a single decker and managed to catch him up several stops down the road. This was not the only time I got left behind!

Left: Peter with FLF 2806 (BVX 682B).



Another time at Clacton bus station I came across a couple of perplexed fitters from the garage who had brought a huge ladder down to repair a couple of the bus station outside lights. They had gone to have a cup of tea before starting and had come out to find their bus and ladder missing. It transpired that a driver had mistakenly taken the wrong bus and managed to complete a circuit of the Burrs estate without noticing that all his passengers were having to negotiate this huge ladder that was filling the gangway!

On rare occasions I used to do double shifts if someone was taken ill. This was from 07.18 to 23.35 with no break between shifts. It didn't seem to bother me.

Any time that the Walton vehicles needed to be refuelled or serviced we used to swap vehicles at Clacton. We would park our vehicle in the centre of the bus station and were allocated a new one. One time I failed to spot two passengers in the front seat of the upper deck and left them on the parked vehicle. They realised that something was wrong when after a short trip to the garage they proceeded through the bus wash!

We had many memorable passengers but no-one more notable than Gypsy John. The first time I spoke to him I was having difficulty getting a fare from another passenger. John was a very big man with a badly scarred face and hands like dinner plates. He came over and put a huge fist under this man's chin and said quietly "either you pay the fare or you get off". The man paid instantly. John lived in a chalet at Jaywick Sands and was living off the proceeds of a Birmingham bank job in the 1960s. He was an East Ender and was brought up on a fairground and when big enough he became a fairground pugilist (bare knuckle fighter). He told me he learnt not to lose many fights because his dad used to beat him up if he did. He was always smartly dressed and always wore a neckerchief. He came into Clacton every day and drank eighteen pints of Abbots. I never saw him the worse for drink and he always sucked imperial mints before getting on the bus because he thought it bad form to be smelling of drink. He would not tolerate any disrespect to bus staff. I got to know him quite well and he told me that his sister had been murdered, his brother was on the run for murder and he himself had served life in Parkhurst. His wife was a small blonde bombshell called Ada. She sadly developed cancer and died. I can tell you a lot more about John.

We had quite a lot of property left on buses. The best items I handed in were a pram and a lawnmower! My friend Simon handed in a cloth bag which was later found to contain quite a lot of money. The police were informed but it remained unclaimed after the requisite 6 months and it was returned to the driver handing it in and Simon was the lucky recipient.

I am not sure of the year but in the early 1980s conductors were abolished and if you couldn't pass the driving test you were out of a job [Clacton lost its last crew buses in summer 1980, except on the summer open toppers]. I was sent to the driving school at Chelmsford to learn to drive a bus. The buses used there were Bristol VR double deckers [the LFS/F batch, 9016-21] with semi-automatic gearboxes. The Eastern National driving instructor I was assigned to was a bully and a very ignorant man. He just shouted at everyone, which was not conducive to good driving. He also got his words wrong and said things like "tonight I'm going to watch a viveo and sit on my patia". One day we had a new trainee who was a stocky muscular guy. The instructor was quite a big man but when he started shouting at the new trainee, the trainee stopped the bus, got out and came round and lifted the instructor right off his feet. He said very quietly "I've been in the army for 16 years and I've been driving 26-ton missile launchers. I have never been spoken to like that then and I'm not being spoken to like that now". He then threw him onto the seat and walked off. We didn't see him again. The instructor was quite subdued after that and fortunately I managed to pass.



Left: drivers and conductors had to display their licence badge, issued by the Traffic Commissioner, green edged for conductors and red for drivers; these are Peter's badges. FF denotes the Eastern Traffic Area. The font changed over time, the driver one represents the final style. Conductor badges were abolished in 1980 and drivers' in 1986.

For a good many years we had no phone in our rest room at Walton and if a bus wouldn't start or for any other problems we had to walk several hundred yards down to a phone box. After the coach office at the front closed it became a beach shop and they had a phone in there. During the summer months lots of cars were parked on our forecourt, sometimes not leaving space for us. One day I decided to call the police to try to get a car removed and went to the shop to call them. The owner Ernie said I could use their phone, so I called the police and was reading out the registration number of the offending car when Ernie shouted "that's my car". Ernie did not have a sense of humour and didn't see the funny side of me reporting him on his own phone!

We had six regular inspectors each with their own idiosyncrasies. Les was easily flustered and when pushed would lose his temper. Another driver stopped his bus by a phone box and pretending to be Irish, phoned the inspector to enquire if he could bring his donkey on the bus. True to form Les lost the plot and a lot of expletives were heard from the vicinity of the inspector's office.

Another inspector was Ted who lived in a bungalow next to the Walton garage. Finishing a late shift a tad early one night we decided to turn off the engine coming round the corner to the garage so that we wouldn't be heard by Ted – and very nearly crashed with no power steering! Lesson learned.

I eventually became the Union Representative at Walton and one of my good ideas was 'WASPS'. Every week they had to send over a cleaner to Walton from Clacton to clean the garage and rest room. Instead, we made a roster and did all the cleaning ourselves including sweeping out the vehicles, washing the garage floor and tidying the rest room. We were paid the amount of money that was saved by not having to send over anyone. Try as I might I cannot remember what WASPS stood for apart from Walton.....

Another of our regulars was Betty. She was a small Irish woman who you annoyed at your peril. She went to bingo every week in Clacton and caught the last bus home. She was usually haranguing the inspector in his tiny office whilst waiting. One evening I told them both I needed to go upstairs to the paying in room but instead ran to my bus and drove out of the bus station. I just did a very short trip round the town before going back to the bus station. The ashen faced inspector said "thank Christ you came back, she went absolutely bonkers." Betty was also an extremely nosey person. On the last bus on one occasion, she was the only passenger. On the way between Clacton and Walton we had to cross Holland marshes where there are no street lights or houses. With no other vehicle or any light in sight (I couldn't resist it) I suddenly swerved and hooted and shouted out "you bloody idiot". Betty spent the next 5 minutes staring out the back of the bus!

One time some vile stinking effluent was spread on a field on the Holland marshes. It stank for weeks and you got to know the exact spot when you would smell it. I had an irate woman one day who had come up from the back of the bus five times to have a go at me. Just before "that field" I saw her on the way back up to me to have another go. I turned away from her and surreptitiously made a farting noise and said "I do beg your pardon" just as we got to the awful smell. She immediately went to the back of the bus and didn't bother me again! I never saw her again. Maybe she avoided the driver with the horrendous guts.

Eventually they closed Walton depot and we all had to go to Clacton. Life was never the same after that. I do, however, remember driving to Maldon one dark night with lashing rain. At Heybridge we had to turn off to go through a small estate [Oak Rd/Wood Rd] before coming back to the main road. I only had one passenger on board who was asleep at the back. Somehow, I missed the turning into the estate so I decided to turn in where I should have come out and go the wrong way through the estate so I could at least see if anyone was waiting. As I was driving the wrong way this guy at the back woke up and started shouting "Stop the bus, stop the bus. I've got to get off." I stopped and opened the doors and as he stepped off and disappeared into the darkness and lashing rain I heard him say "I wanted Maldon", I thought I haven't got there yet! I proceeded to Maldon and on the return I journey spotted this saturated figure plodding towards Maldon.



Left: A fleet of 25 Mercedes L608D minibuses were introduced at Clacton and Walton in May 1986, offering increased frequencies and allowing buses to finally access Frinton south of the railway line. In summer that year, Peter poses with 0201 (C201 HJN) outside Walton depot. Note the white on red destination blind, explained below.

Right: another of the CoastLine branded minibuses, 0221 (C221 HJN) displays the rarely seen WN depot code plate as a group of elderly ladies queue up to board in Clacton. Six were based at WN initially, 0219 to 0224.

Richard Delahoy collection.



Initially we didn't want the Mercedes minibuses but got used to them and I quite enjoyed driving them and the varied routes they introduced, such as into Frinton. Later we received the larger 709D versions and they were not bad to drive either.

I recall one minibus that was called the 'Hoppa bus' which was apparently built to an Eastern National specification. As Union rep, I looked it over and made a long list of modifications that would be useful to make it suitable for us, and sent that list to the local Area Manager but he went mad, how dare I criticise the bus! However, it was my job as Union rep to provide an honest opinion.

I liked driving the Leyland Nationals, a lovely bus so long as you remembered to watch the long rear overhang, but they could be a bit of a handful in slippery conditions such as on compacted snow. I remember one occasion where I braked but slid instead, ending up just a fag paper's thickness away from a parked car. We had an early Leyland National that didn't have an anti-roll bar on the front axle and if you went hard round a roundabout rather too fast it was possible to ground the front corner! Bristol REs were also notorious in the wet when it was easy to experience a loss of steering.

I also found the Dennis Darts, introduced towards the end of my time with the company, to be good buses. I also managed to do a couple of coach outings using Leyland Tiger coaches 1130 & 1132 (C130/2 HJN, with Plaxton Paramount 3200 bodies). Thinking back to earlier days, we also had a coach (DP) that had been converted to bus work which the staff nicknamed as 'Concorde' - this was 1608 (GVW 978H), a Bristol RELH with semi-auto gearbox. As enough years have now passed, I can confess that I was once conducting on it and we were on a dead run back to depot, so the driver suggested that I have a drive. I was doing OK but then we were flagged down by an Inspector! Thankfully he didn't realise that I wasn't qualified to drive the bus!

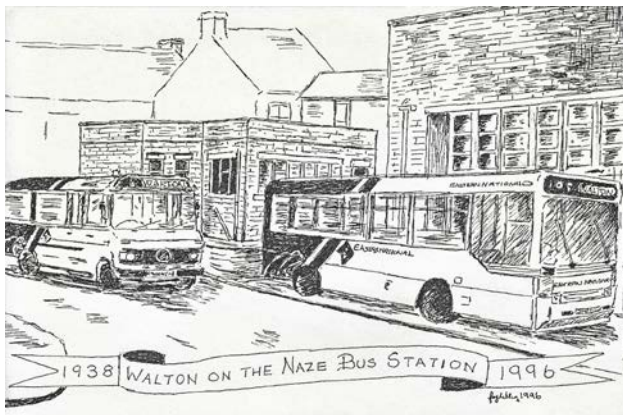
CoastLine branding - "More buses, more often, calling at more places"

The pictures above show the coloured destination blinds that the minibuses used. The colours were:

1/1A	Yellow	Great Clacton and Point Clear
2	Brown	Jaywick Sands
8/9/10	Red	Holland and Walton
11/12	Blue	Bockings Elm
13/14	Orange	Great Clacton and Burrsville
15/16	Green	Holland.



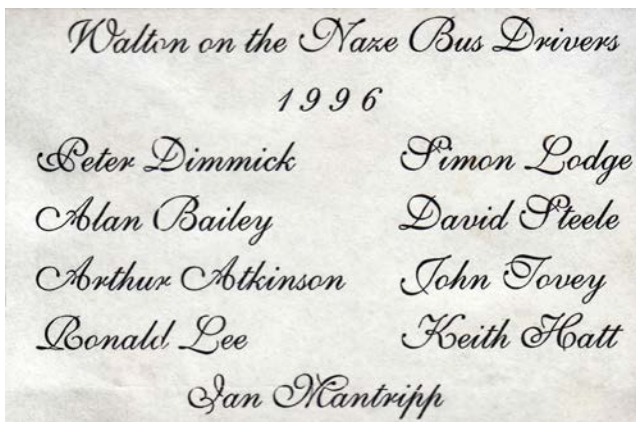
They replaced the traditional routes 101, 108/9, 110, 111, 112, 113/4 and 116, with higher frequencies.



Left: this attractive sketch was drawn to mark the closure of Walton depot in May 1996 and commemorate the final group of nine drivers based there. A copy was presented to each of the drivers. The end of an era.

I became the Union Representative for Clacton and represented people on disciplinaries amongst other things. It was never the same with the running times cut to such an extent that you virtually had to speed to stay on time. On one occasion I was threatened with dismissal because I refused to drive an unroadworthy vehicle. I stood my ground and was begrudgingly given another vehicle but I decided that after 29½ years it was time to move on and I left First at the end of 2003.

I then embarked on a complete career change, working for Thames Coastguard, rising to become Watch Officer for an area from Southwold in Suffolk down to Reculver Towers between Herne Bay and Margate on the north Kent coast. This includes 631 miles of coastline and tidal rivers and 3,500 square nautical miles of sea. Quite a change from my life 'on the buses'!



Eastern National Limited
Deficiency Note
To Mr. Dimmick
Date 16.10.95

You are hereby advised that the undermentioned discrepancy dated _____ has come to light.

a. Error in cast	_____	short
b. Error in calculation	_____	short
c. Tickets/Vouchers not handed in	_____	short
d. Continuity	_____	short
e. _____	<u>0 1</u>	short
Total Shortage		<u>0 1</u>

You are also instructed that you are required to pay in this amount to the Cash Clerk within 48 hours.

If you wish to query any of the above shortages, you are at liberty to inspect your documents at the Traffic Audit Office at any time during normal office hours.

G Wilson
Company Secretary

No. 30367

EASTERN NATIONAL



Conductors and driver-operators were required to account for every last penny of the fares collected, as recorded on their ticket machine. But here's one penny that Peter never settled up! Any driver 'shorts' would be advised by a form like this, saying how much the paying in was short by and with a tear-off slip to submit with the amount due.

The coin attached to this slip is a Canadian one cent, rather similar in size and feel to a British 1p, found in Peter's paying in back in 1993.

Are the company's accounts are still carrying a 1p difference after all these years?!

Received: The deficiency note is numbered (right)

Time _____ a.m./p.m.
Date _____
Signature _____

No. 30367

EASTERN NATIONAL

EN Form 5500
(3/70)

When Great Yarmouth Helped Out

Richard Delahoy

Late deliveries of new vehicles, shortages of spare parts, the need to withdraw life-expired buses and a desire to accelerate the move to one-man operation of buses in the early 1970s sometimes meant that operators found themselves in difficulties as they waited for new buses to arrive, as described in EBM Extra 2. Colchester Corporation Transport faced that situation in the autumn of 1973 and turned to fellow municipality Great Yarmouth Corporation for help. Yarmouth were able to loan some Willowbrook bodied AEC Swifts that had only been delivered the year before, to tide Colchester over until five Bristol RELs, 19-23, were finally delivered in December 1973. In total five different Swifts were used, 70/1/2/4/8, all with matching PEX 1xxK registrations, with three hired at any one time. The hires lasted from mid-September to just before Christmas and in this shot by **Andrew Harvey-Adams**,



left, 78 is leaving Colchester bus station for Shrub End in October 1973.

In addition to the Yarmouth vehicles, Colchester also hired Southend's short Leopards, 206/7, one at a time, and a pair of Bristol MW buses from Hedingham & District (L71/2).

This wasn't the first time that Colchester had borrowed Yarmouth buses, as in 1971 four AEC Reliances with Pennine bodies were on loan, in that case whilst Colchester prepared for service the

half-dozen ex Salford City Transport Reliance/ Weymann buses that they had bought from SELNEC PTE (successor to Salford) to progress the move to OMO on some quieter routes.

No sooner than the Swifts had gone back home, three were heading south again for four weeks in January 1974, to Southend. This time it was 74/7/8 and they were used on Southend local routes to free up Daimler Fleetlines which were hired to City banks and insurance companies to get staff to work in London during a rail strike. Swindon Corporation also assisted, loaning two Leyland PD2As and a Leopard. **Right**, **Richard Delahoy's** shot shows Gt Yarmouth 74 in Southchurch Road on the 62, on 25 January 1974.



Through the lens of **Michael Dryhurst**, we take an evocative look at some bus operations in Saffron Walden in the early 1960s.

Located in the north-west corner of Essex, Saffron Walden was something of a border town in bus terms, not unlike Sudbury and Bury St Edmunds, on the fringes of the large territorial companies like Eastern National, where a selection of different operators ran in from various outlying villages and towns. Saffron Walden couldn't claim the variety of those other two towns but did see a range of operators. The Omnibus Society's 1955 booklet listing independent operators in the Eastern Traffic Area recorded Griffin, F C Moore (Viceroy), Premier Travel and Wiffen's Coaches, plus Eastern National and Eastern Counties (running south and north away from the town respectively). Griffin and Wiffen's only had single services but there were eleven Premier Travel local services plus an express to London Kings Cross. Viceroy were the only operator based in the town and had seven routes into the town plus one other. A later list from 1971 still includes four independent operators but Griffin had been replaced by Dons Coaches of Dunmow. Today Saffron Walden is still served by one major operator, Stagecoach, with service 7 to Cambridge (as successor to Eastern Counties) but Eastern National are long gone from the town and services are in the hands of Central Connect, Stephensons, Myalls and Arrow Taxis, almost all supported by the County Council. Interestingly, a number of services are still 'market day' ones, running Tuesday only or Tuesday and Thursday. Local operator Viceroy sadly folded in 2019 after a somewhat chequered regulatory history.

We'll take another look at Premier Travel's operations in Essex in the next issue of EBM Extra.

All the photos are by **Michael Dryhurst**; captions by Richard Delahoy with many thanks to Ian Sharpe and Nigel Turner for their help (but any mistakes are entirely Richard's).

First, **below**, a well-loaded SHK 517 (Eastern National 342, allocated to BS - Bishops Stortford) taken, we think, in either Common Hill or Ashdon Road in Saffron Walden on the 304, successor to the 13C, in July 1962. We discussed the six variations on the number 13 in EBM Extra issue 1, the route number and its suffixes covering a variety of routes in the area between Bishop's Stortford and Saffron Walden.

At the time of these photos, 'Elsenham' was only seen as a destination for one journey a week, the 5.15pm from Saffron Walden on Tuesdays, although services 302 & 338 also served the village. The bus itself is a Bristol LWL5G with a 39 seat, rear entrance ECW body. New in 1951 as 4128, it became 342 in 1954 and 1130 ten years later; it was withdrawn in 1965 and passed to a contractor.





Above: Here's another Bristol/ECW combination, this time a K6B with highbridge body, new to Bristol Tramways & Carriage Company in 1948, LAE 301. It passed in 1962 to A. E., W. I. & P. L. Harris of Mill Road, Cambridge, who traded as Progressive Coaches. Parked on Common Hill that July, it is likely to have been on contract work as Progressive didn't run stage services to Saffron Walden. We think the livery is light green/cream, as used on their coaches, although other double deckers in their fleet were dark green and white. The bus was withdrawn in 1964.

Below: Also on Common Hill is MNO 901, a classic Bedford OB / Duple C29F, new September 1947 to Wiffen's Coaches of Finchingfield and sold to George Edward Griffin, 'The Garage', Debden in May 1956. G.E. Griffin was one of the less well-known stage operators of Essex. Born in Debden on March 18th, 1905, where his father was a baker, he was described as a "Baker & Bus Driver" in 1939. The sole stage operation was Debden Green (later Debden 'Plough') to Saffron Walden on Tuesdays and Saturdays. The service passed to Dons of Dunmow in June 1970. George Griffin passed away on October 8th, 1976. The coach was withdrawn in May 1966.





Above: Pausing on Common Hill between trips on the Saffron Walden Town Service is Premier Travel's DCK 218, a former Ribble 'White Lady' - Leyland Titan PD2/3 with East Lancs lowbridge coach style bodywork seating 53. Premier Travel acquired it in 1962 and ran it until July 1970. It was one of ten in their fleet; sister DCK 219 is preserved in Ribble livery but wasn't one of those operated by Premier Travel.

Below: At the depot of Viceroy Coaches (F. C. Moore Ltd) in Bridge Street, in the heart of the town centre, another classic Bedford OB/Duple, with a Perkins diesel engine, TMV 8 is seen right; Viceroy ran it from 1958 to 1966. Contrasting is FTB 11, a wartime Leyland Titan TD7 bodied by Northern Coachbuilders in 1941 for Leigh (Lancashire) Corporation, which Viceroy owned from 1956 to 1964. Amazingly, it survives and is under restoration at the Museum of Transport in Greater Manchester.

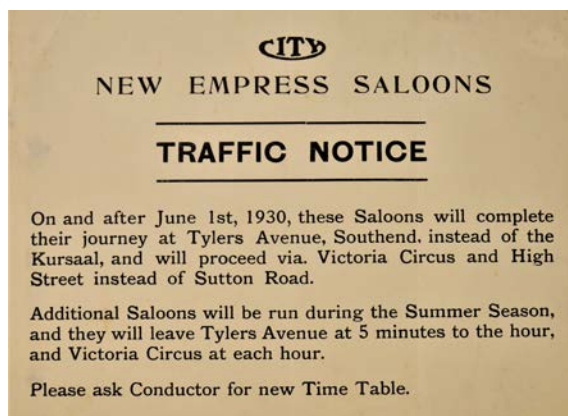


Tyler's Avenue - the Story of a Bus Depot

Richard Delahoy

Tucked away in a side road off Southend's bustling High Street - and possessing absolutely no architectural merit whatsoever! - Eastern National's small depot and terminus in Tyler's Avenue was nevertheless an important contributor to the busy and famous 251 service to London's Wood Green. This is the story of the depot through the days of Service Saloons, City Coach Company, Westcliff Motor Services and finally Eastern National.

A small depot/terminus was first established in Tyler's Avenue by Service Saloons Ltd in 1928 at Hancock's Yard, on the south side of the road near to its eastern end, for their service to Brentwood, with two journeys extended on to Kings Cross. This put them in direct competition with Arthur Young's New Empress Saloons (a business acquired by the City Motor Omnibus Company in 1931) and also from July 1928 with Westcliff Motor Services' route to Brentwood and Wood Green. The brief history of the Service Saloons operation is complicated and outside the scope of this story, other than to record that they were soon in financial difficulties. As a result, their operations ceased and in 1930 the freehold of the garage was bought by City, who moved the terminus of the New Empress London service from the Borough Garage in Old Southend Road, opposite the Kursaal, to Tyler's Avenue from 1 June 1930. This took place before the 1930 Road Traffic Act came into force in April 1931, creating a national licencing system, and Southend Council's Watch Committee duly approved the move to Tyler's Avenue provided buses did not stand in the road - no doubt concerned about access to the fire station. (To tie up some loose ends, New Empress, under City ownership, traded under the City name for the Southend service until after the sale of City's London bus route 536 to London Transport in 1934. New Empress changed their name to the more familiar City Coach Company Ltd in March 1936; meanwhile Westcliff had sold their Wood Green service to City in January 1935).



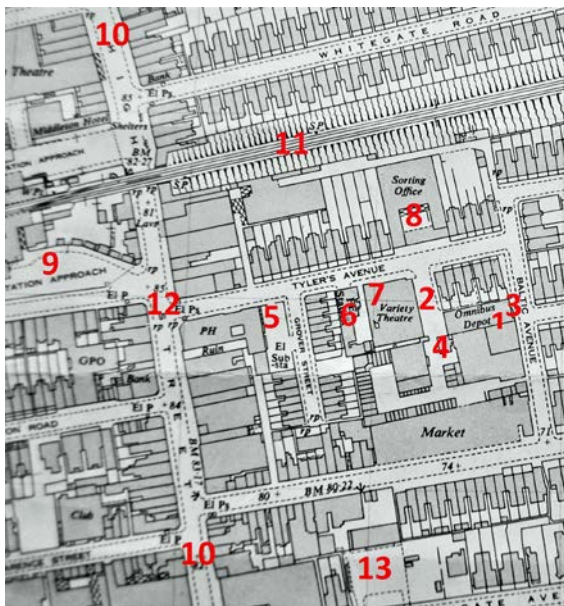
Thus the City service, running from Southend through to Wood Green every 15 minutes and half-hourly on to Kentish Town, had its own terminal point and local garage within a reasonable distance from the seafront. By contrast, most other bus services terminated at the town's hub of Victoria Circus, adjacent to the LNER rail station (today's Southend Victoria). EN and Borough's services used the station forecourt, 6/11/12 to Chelmsford, 19/A to Clacton and 70 to Grays. Local services of Westcliff, Benfleet & District and others used Victoria Avenue (plus Broadway Market from 1943 and London Road from 1949). And Corporation trams and (from 1925) trolleybuses also congregated here - hence the local nick-name 'Cobweb Corner'.

Whilst this was good for shoppers and workers, Victoria Circus is a half-a-mile from the nearest point on the seafront at the Pier which attracted day trippers. City thus had an advantage in getting closer to the seafront, albeit that Tyler's Avenue was in a rather obscure location and certainly not in sight of the sea! Indeed, it was a half-mile walk to the Kursaal, Southend's premier amusement park, but a shorter walk to the Pier.

I've not been able to trace what building(s) were previously on the site occupied by the garage, before Service Saloons acquired the site, although they may have been for Hancock Bros Ltd, removal contractor, which is listed there in the Kelly's street directories for at least 1927/8/9. From a schedule of City properties (presumably compiled as part of the sale to the BTC), the site was listed as "Bus station, office, maintenance etc. Garage 4,800 sq. ft. House (let to employee)". As noted in the introduction, the building was quite nondescript. In City days pre-war their name was carried above both the doorways, as seen on the following pages, but after the left hand doorway was raised in 1946 to accommodate double deckers the names were removed. Initially buses entered and left the site via the entrance to Hancock's Yard in Tyler's Avenue itself, picking up in the Yard.

Some handwritten notes found at The Bus Archive which I think were made by Derek Giles take up the story: 'The terminus was very cramped. Vehicles used to back into the garage and come forward to wait on the west side of the yard. About 1946 this was reversed and coaches backed out of the garage, waiting on the east side. But, particularly in the Summer months, congestion was acute and in 1948, just in time for the August Bank Holiday traffic, an entrance was made in the back of the Garage, from Baltic Avenue, and a one-way system instituted, vehicles setting down in Baltic Avenue [photos show a bus stop flag there] and picking up in the yard'.

Hence the depot had two different levels. Former EN driver and EBEG member until his death last year, Mick Parsons recalled "If you looked inside the shed door below the clock there was an inspector's hut. The shed was in two areas with the through road on the left [north side] up a slight bank. If the inspector wanted to swap a bus over he used to reverse a bus into the right-hand area which was level and was a no through road which ended at a wall at the far end [backing onto Baltic Avenue] with a set of white railings all along the way. In between the two areas there was a drop of something like six to eight feet [where the left-hand area sloped down to the entrance from Baltic Avenue]. I think that you could fit three or four buses in the right-hand area, I also seem to remember a boarded over pit there. There was always a Southend Inspector on duty".



This extract from the 1952 Ordnance Survey map shows the key locations:

- 1 The garage building
- 2 Hancock's Yard
- 3 Entrance from Baltic Ave, 1948 onwards
- 4 Cottage Café
- 5 Westcliff coach terminus, 1933-36
- 6 Fire station
- 7 Theatre/cinema
- 8 Post Office Sorting Office
- 9 Central Station forecourt (south side)
- 10 Southend High St, running north-south
- 11 Railway line (ex LTSR)
- 12 Location of the photo of a City bus as used in the March 2023 EBM
- 13 Site of the current Southend Travel Centre

Buses approached the terminus down Southend High Street, having set down at

Victoria Circus, turning left into Tyler's Avenue. That scene was perfectly captured in the photo by the Southend Borough Engineers Department that we included in our March 2023 issue (EBM 707), in the *Spot the Difference* feature. Later, in March 1959, that was altered as shown in this traffic notice, presumably due to Baltic Avenue

becoming a one-way street northbound.

EASTERN NATIONAL **Service 251.** **ROUTE DIVERSION IN SOUTHEND**
Commencing SUNDAY, 15th MARCH, 1959

INWARD JOURNEYS
Vehicles will continue down HIGH STREET and turn left into YORK ROAD where Passengers will be set down

OUTWARD JOURNEYS
NO CHANGE — Vehicles will start from the Garage in TYLER'S AVENUE and follow existing route

Printed at THE SOUTHEND PRESS, NEW WESTLY STREET, CHALMERSIDE. Phone 3027 or 3100. (JANES AND TUCKER)

Passengers boarded buses in Hancock's Yard which was not part of the formal depot area and gave access to premises to

the south, backing onto the market in York Road. In latter days, buses heading for Wood Green loaded on the west side, alongside the cinema building, whilst short workings such as for Rayleigh, Carpenters Arms or Wickford stood on the east side alongside the houses there, with passengers having to board in the roadway.



The splendid photo **above** was taken in wartime (note the masked headlights and white tipped mudguards) and clearly shows the City name over both doorways, before that on the left was raised to fit double deckers. The bus is one of City's famous LT class Leyland Tigers, in this case TS7T model LT7 (CUL 801) with its original straight-waisted Beadle B43R body, new in 1936. It was rebodied by Heaver to FB43C in 1947 and passed to Westcliff in 1952 but was withdrawn in January 1954 and hence never received an EN series fleet number.

A B Cross collection, S L Poole

Most important of the buildings in Hancock's Yard was of course the Cottage Café, frequented by bus crews between trips as well as passengers. It features in a number of photos but is boarded up in the shot above. **Below**, it is clearly visible on the left, adjacent to the depot buildings. The photographer is standing in Tyler's Avenue, looking into Hancock's Yard with the now closed Regal Theatre on the right. All-Leyland Titan PD2/12 1134 (FJN 203) is ready for the full run through to Wood Green, which it will reach nearly three hours later. It was one of six deckers on order when City sold out. 29 August 1958, **John Boylett**, courtesy of **John Kaye**, via sct61.org.uk



The Wood Green service was exceptionally busy on Bank Holidays and summer weekends, requiring considerable ad-hoc duplication to cater for the day-tripper market in addition to the scheduled duplicates and short workings which didn't appear in the public timetables. We told the story of one such day, Easter Monday, April 14, 1952, in our December 2020 issue (EBM 680) in the article *Moving the Crowds*. Queues for the last bus at 9.25 pm often extended right up Tyler's Avenue to the High Street and sometimes zig zagged round the lanes in York Road Market!

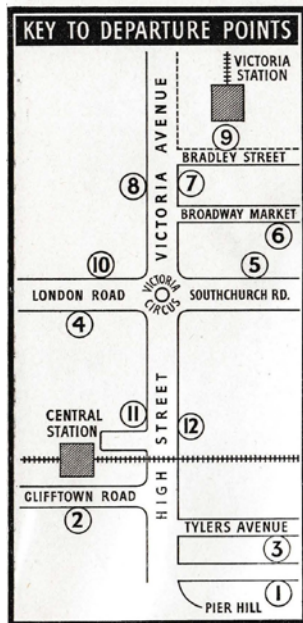
City sold out to the State in 1952. The company and that famous route were placed under the control of Westcliff Motor Services. In 1955 when Westcliff, EN and Hicks routes had adopted a common numbering system, it became 251, which is how many of us remember it. Apart from the change of name and livery, nothing much changed at Tyler's Avenue. The vehicle types were updated, City's post-war double deckers being supplemented by Eastern National and Hicks Leyland PD1s in green, some carrying City fleetnames. These gave way to Bristol Lodekka LD models as they started to enter the EN fleet, then from 1960 came the longer FLF model with 70 seats. Prototype LDL 1541 / 2510 (236 LNO, 'Big Bertha') also worked on the 251 service and was a frequent visitor to Tyler's Avenue, although allocated to Brentwood. The heavy loadings on the 251 dictated the use of the highest capacity buses in the fleet.

We've not been able to trace any lists of the buses formally allocated to Tyler's Avenue in EN days, but they came under the main Southend (SD) depot based at London Road for maintenance purposes. When the EN (and Westcliff & Hicks) fleet was renumbered in 1954, depot allocation plates were introduced - initially these were coloured circles or triangles, Tyler's Avenue being a light blue circle. In 1958 these were superseded by plates with two-letter codes, initially of silver letters on black but from 1964 with a red background. Code TA was nominally allocated to the depot but we don't believe this was ever carried on buses (we certainly have not seen any photographic evidence) and was soon withdrawn in favour of using the SD code of the parent depot. We'd welcome any clarification on this point.

Meanwhile, service changes saw the Rayleigh/Wickford short workings given the number 250 (via Rettendon Turnpike) to distinguish them from the main 251 service (via Shotgate) from 17 September 1961. A more fundamental change, part of a large package of revisions, saw half of the 251 service diverted between Southend and Billericay to run via Hadleigh, Pitsea and Basildon New Town as the 151, from 19 April 1964. We've never actually seen a photo of a 151 at Tyler's Avenue, did anyone record it in the short period before closure?

Below, the depot building's visible behind Bristol LS 379 (later 1205, FJN 163) with higher-backed seats and dual door bodywork, the bus now marked up as in at the front and out at the back (initially the flow was the opposite way round) as it stands at the 'short working' stop. It has arrived from Wickford and carries Westcliff fleetnames and is in green. The building to the left housed the bus office, at the end of a row of terraced houses. **RD collection**





No.	POINT	SERVICES
1	PIER HILL	6, 6A, 17, Express Service "D"
2	CLIFF TOWN ROAD	6, 6A, 17
3	TYLER'S AVENUE	251
4	VICTORIA CIRCUS (LONDON ROAD)	1, 2, 2A, 2B, 3, 25, 25A, 25B, 28A, 29A
5	VICTORIA CIRCUS (SOUTHCHURCH ROAD)	5, 5A, 25A, 61, 61A, 61B, 61C, 62, 63B, 64, 66
6	VICTORIA CIRCUS (BROADWAY MARKET)	4, 4A, 4B, 7, 8, 8A, 9B, 10, 12, 13, 13A, 18
7	VICTORIA CIRCUS (VICTORIA AVENUE)	5, 5A, 9, 9A
8	VICTORIA CIRCUS (VICTORIA AVENUE)	9, 9A, 28B, 29, 63A, 251
9	VICTORIA STATION	2, 2B, 11, 14, 19, 19A, 66
10	VICTORIA CIRCUS (LONDON ROAD)	25A, 25B
11	CENTRAL STATION	9, 9A, 25B, 61, 61A, 61B, 61C, 62, 64
12	CENTRAL STATION	9, 9A, 25B

For context, **above** is a diagrammatic map of the town centre stops in 1955, as shown on a departure poster.

Below, exiting the garage building prior to loading up is Eastern National's 3987 (later 1115, MPU 48), an ECW-bodied Leyland PD1 from 1947 that was drafted in on loan to Westcliff to bolster the double deck allocation for what was to become the 251, standardising on Leyland Titans as City had. Like the LS opposite, it was in Tilling green livery. Note the "City Route" sticker in the front window and "On Hire to Westcliff Motor Services" notice in the side window. **Omnibus Society**.





Above, LD21 (FJN 202) is in full City livery of brown and ivory but was delivered new to Westcliff in April 1952, having been ordered before the takeover. Sister LD22 is seen a few pages earlier in the EN livery which all six of these handsome buses later carried. Here the driver has just stopped at the alighting stop in Baltic Avenue to let passengers off and is now swinging hard right to go up the ramp into the depot. The road here is now a one-way street in the opposite direction, hence the later rerouting in March 1959 shown on the traffic notice illustrated earlier. **Omnibus Society, Roy Marshall.**

Other notable buildings and users

Tyler's Avenue not only housed the bus garage but also the town's main postal sorting office and fire station, as well as a somewhat unsuccessful theatre/cinema. The latter opened in August 1920 as the Arcadia Theatre, variously becoming the Ambassadors' Theatre, Regal Cinema and Regal Theatre. Post-war it was well in decline, despite presenting nude reviews, sometime featuring the famous Phyllis Dixey, and it closed permanently in October 1954. It was then used as a warehouse until demolished in August 1963.

In the 1930s Westcliff Motor Services' coaches were also to be found in the road, as in September 1932 Westcliff acquired a lease on a car park site adjacent to Grover Street and from the 1933 season used it as the terminus for its coach services from London. These were express services, unlike the stopping local bus route that City ran, and only picked up in London at Victoria, Walthamstow, Holloway, Dalston and Islington (in the 1960s these services morphed into the X10 and later 400 routes many readers will be familiar with). In addition in 1933/4 there were seasonal services from Barnet and Enfield. Use of this site off Tyler's Avenue enabled Westcliff to keep its established Pier Hill Coach Station for excursions and tours more typically used by local residents rather than day trippers. Westcliff continued to use the site in Tyler's Avenue until 1936 but from the 1937 timetable the terminus was moved to Pier Hill. It should be stressed that Westcliff's site in Tyler's Avenue was not the same location as the City garage.

Some London coach operators also had licenced express services to Southend that terminated at Hancock's Yard in the 1930s, beyond the scope of this article.

Additionally, Rochford & District Motor Services also used Hancock's Yard as a terminus from the start of their services in December 1928 until some time in 1931 when a co-ordinated timetable was agreed with rival Westcliff MS and the terminus moved to Victoria Circus.

Closer to the High Street, at number 4 Tyler's Avenue, premises were used variously by Southend-on-Sea Char-a-banc & Motor Transport Co, Carrimore Motor Service Co, and W O Mitchell, trading as Mitchells Motor Coaches and the Barling and Waking Motor Service, in the 1920s and prior to the 1930 Act taking effect.

The end for Tyler's Avenue depot and terminus came in 1964. Eastern National were served with a compulsory purchase order by the Council. The other bus terminals in the town - Pier Hill (Grove Terrace and the EN coach station), Central Station and Victoria Circus/Station, were not suitable for the additional buses on 151 and 251 and so EN agreed with Southend Council to acquire a section of the Seaway car park, in the north west corner alongside Chancellor Road and Herbert Grove, for a new terminus, nearer to the seafront. Loading platforms, a crew rest room and inspector's office were constructed and the 151/251 transferred there from Tyler's Avenue from 31 July 1964; the short workings which had become service 250 were withdrawn and replaced by services 20 from Victoria Station and 22 from Central Station. Seaway also later became the terminus of the X10 and other express services, and for the short-lived summer limited stop services 311, 411, 419 & 446, but its life was short as it was replaced by the new Southend Central Bus Station in May 1974.

The depot itself was closed and the vehicles transferred to SD, where a specific group of vehicles were kept for 151/251, at least until July 1966. The buildings were demolished by the end of the year. A similar fate affected the fire station (replaced by a new station in Sutton Road, still in use today) and the former cinema. The whole site was turned into a car park and remains so to this day (what a waste!), although when plans were being debated for the revamp of the 1974-built Central Bus Station, consideration was given to using the Tyler's Avenue car park site for a drive in, reverse off bus station with 11 stands. Today you can park your car exactly where a Gnu, Tiger, PD1, CV, PD2, LD or FLF once stood and recall the heady days of the Wood Green route.

Sources consulted: *The Westcliff-on-Sea Motor Services Ltd, A Company History*, and unpublished research notes by Peter F Clark; various timetables; ENEG news-sheets for 1964; uncatalogued files in the Derek Giles collection at The Bus Archive; *Westcliff on Sea Motor Services, an Outline History* by Alan Osborne and Jim Young; *Almost A Century - the Story of Southend on Sea Fire Brigade 1877-1974*, Arthur J Gayner; *Southend's Palaces of the Silver Screen*, Roy Dilley; PSV Circle Fleet Histories PF4 & PF14.

Below: The scene today - and a tribute. In 2012 a commemorative road run was held over the 251 route. Most buses started from Seaway but we persuaded Paul Ashman to bring this bus to Tylers Avenue to pose outside the former exit, with appropriate destination display. The old depot and Hancock's Yard were to the right of the bus and the houses in Baltic Avenue can be seen behind the bus (as seen in the picture of FJN 202 on the previous page).

The bus is Ensign 729 (Y329 FJN), an Alexander bodied Dennis Dart, painted in City Coach Company style. At this time, Ensign operated the Brentwood to Shenfield & Hutton service 81 so the livery represented a commemorative 'what might have been'. Subsequently the service has passed to NIBS who continue to run it today.

Richard Delahoy. There are two more pictures from that commemorative 251 road run on the rear cover.



The Dawn of the Low Floor Bus

Richard Delahoy

It's now 30 years since the first wheelchair accessible low floor buses entered service in the UK. This is the story of the first ten in Essex, part funded by the County Council.

Following developments in continental Europe, in 1992 the Merseyside PTE brought over four existing left-hand drive city buses to examine and then put a toe in the water by ordering a Neoplan, followed up by a dozen more, Merseybus thus becoming the first operator of low-floor buses in Britain. Tayside followed on soon after with a Scania/East Lancs MaxCi, appropriately registered L3 LOW, entering service in September 1993. Much better known in the early development of such buses was the London Buses fleet of 68, on Scania N113 and Dennis Lance SLF chassis. Wrights of Ballymena developed their Pathfinder 320 body for these, in slightly different versions as the two chassis had different front door widths and overhangs, that on the Lance shortened to meet LT's specification. Incidentally, the '320' in the body name represents the floor height above the road in millimetres. With kneeling suspension, that could be reduced to just 250mm at stops.

In his book *The Wright Way*, Jack Kernohan, Wright's Sales Director, recalls that Dennis only became involved because Volvo, who were Wrights' preferred partner at the time, declined the opportunity as they felt the market was not ready to bear the additional cost and complexity of a low-floor product. Dennis too were lukewarm until London Transport joined the project and this led to the order for 38, spread amongst Centrewest (14), London United (10) and Metroline (14). Go-Ahead company Tynemouth & District also took 5 as a demonstration project for the Tyne & Wear PTE, with up to £227,000 of Government funding.

Volvo also took tentative steps of their own with a right-hand drive version of the B10L bodied by their Swedish subsidiary Saffle, which ran for Mainline in Sheffield, L456 JCK. Much of the design work was however undertaken at Leyland, by then owned by Volvo. There were also five subsequent Volvo demonstrators built in 1995 with Alexander (Belfast) bodies, then a number of production models for various operators, outside the scope of this article.

There was a significant cost premium for the early low-floor buses of around 15%, aside from their greater complexity and lower seating capacity, and at the time, there was perceived to be a very limited market for wheelchair accessible buses outside of the major city authorities. Hence commercial orders were very unlikely, so Essex CC stepped in to set up a demonstration project, part funding the purchase of ten buses by three operators, becoming the first shire authority to fund low-floor buses. It was reported that ECC provided £54,000 towards the cost of each bus.

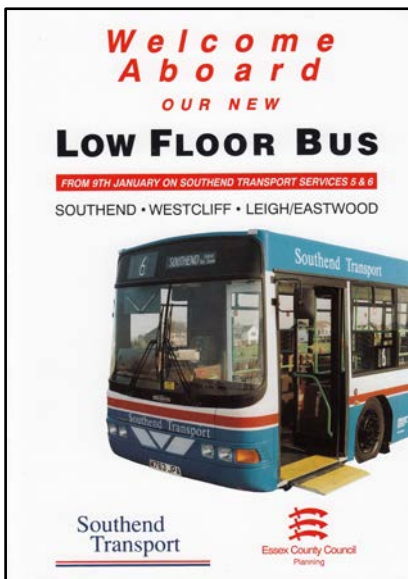
The three operators selected by Essex to participate were County Bus (spun out of the former London Country North East business), Hedingham Omnibuses and Southend Transport, and it is likely that the orders were placed around the end of 1993. County Bus had borrowed the example that was displayed at the Coach & Bus '93 Show at the NEC, using it on 17 November 1993 for route trials. This was the first built for London United, presumably their LLW1, ODZ 8901.



Left: demonstrating its low floor credentials and route 502 branding at the North Weald Rally on 25 June 1995, County Bus ELW266, M266 VPU.

All photos by Richard Delahoy except as noted.

Group member Robert MacGregor who, together with his father Donald, then ran Hedingham Omnibuses, recalls: "I remember Hedingham buying the 2 low floor Dennis Lances back in 1994. Essex CC had an opportunity to support the purchase of 10. We were offered 2, which cost £128,000 each, a substantial amount in 1994. ECC were prepared to pay a large grant for each, so they dumped £100,000 in our bank account (you don't forget that!)".



Incidentally, Southend Transport were able to be included and the vehicles used wholly on routes within the town because Southend was part of the Essex CC administrative area at the time, the town (now city) not gaining Unitary Council status until 1998.

The Essex buses were delivered in November and December 1994 and comprised:

County Bus & Coach	ELW 266-269, M266 - 269 VPU
Hedingham Omnibuses	L211/212, M211 - 212 WHJ
Southend Transport	761 - 764, M761 - 764 JPA.

All were Dennis Lance SLF / Wright Pathfinder 320, the County and Hedingham ones with 40 seats but Southend's had one seat less as the seat on the offside immediately behind the driver was omitted. They all had powered ramps at the entrance and two wheelchair bays, one on each side. Those could cause problems - Robert MacGregor again: "Once the mechanical low floor plate got stuck in the out position and Wrights flew in technicians from Berlin* to Stansted Airport then on to Hedingham to fix it. We were always wary after that. A manually operated low floor ramp in future was a better choice. Aside from that, they were reliable and popular with the drivers and looked great".

(* The ramps were made in Germany).

Another one of our members, Matthew Evans, a Southend Transport driver, similarly recalls a ramp sticking in the out position whilst the bus was on display at the North Weald rally. Luckily S&M Coaches' wrecker was also on display there and they came to the rescue with a hammer, then cheekily submitted a recovery bill to ST! Matthew also found them good buses to drive but commented that their width and length was a problem on some routes, such as in Albion Road, Glenwood Avenue and Hainault Avenue in Westcliff on the 6.

One aspect of the design challenged some drivers. The body was quite high built and shorter drivers found difficulty in reaching the winding gear to change the destination and route number blinds, these being a long way above the cab floor. Southend Transport's solution was to build portable wooden steps, carried in the cab, although it's not clear how long these were used for, Matthew doesn't recall them from his days driving these buses.

The Guildford registrations of Southend's quartet reflected where the company was then controlled from as part of the London Country group within British Bus. There were also five for other parts of that group, two for London & Country (M517/8 KPA) and three for Guildford & West Surrey (M519/20 KPA, N527 SPA) all for route 408, Guildford to East Croydon, with £250,000 of funding from Surrey County Council and some financial assistance from London Regional Transport. In total, including a development chassis, 106 Lance SLFs were built, 66 bodied by Wrights and 40 by Berkhof.

Right: Southend 764 at Temple Sutton, Cluny Square on 6 May 1995.



The agreement with Essex was that the buses were to be used on specified routes for the first two years of their service lives and were to remain in service in Essex for a further eight years. First on the road were County's four, starting on 26 November 1994, in Townlink route branding for route 502, Harlow to Romford. The other six all went into traffic on 9 January 1995, Heddingham's pair on the 90/90A, Witham - Maldon and Southend's on the 5, Southend - Leigh and 6/6B, Southend - Eastwood. All carried special yellow notices about the funding, but these were rather wordy instead of eye-catching and it's questionable how many passengers actually noticed them - although they did of course notice the somewhat revolutionary interiors and the lack of an entrance step. Whilst

designed for carrying wheelchairs, the main beneficiaries were parents with children in buggies. Frustratingly for me, when my two daughters came along soon afterwards, the Southend buses weren't on any of my local routes!

In Southend, the route networks were still quite unstable at this time, in the aftermath of the 'bus war', and there were frequent changes to Southend Transport's services, so that only four months after starting on the 5, 6 & 6B, the first change occurred, and the buses moved from route to route in May, September and December 1995 and again the following May. The latter marked a watershed in local services, with a territorial agreement between Southend Transport and Thamesway that finally brought a greater degree of stability to the network. At that point, the four buses were used two each on the 6/61/69 and 62/62A. Indeed, by the time the first two years in service had passed, I'd photographed them on routes 3, 4A, 5, 5A, 6, 6B, 7C, 12A, 12B, 13, 21, 23A, 62A, 63 & 65! Their fleet numbers also changed over time, to LSL1-4, then 0001-4, then 3381-4 under Arriva.

You might be wondering why Eastern National, by then part of the Badgerline group, didn't participate. Robin Orbell, Group member and at that time Managing Director of EN, takes up the story. "There were a number of reasons why EN didn't take up the offer of funding. We were in the process of consolidating the Colchester operation, the economics of which were based on low running cost smaller vehicles, and in 1994 were taking delivery of 20 [step entrance] Dennis Darts and looking to upgrade the minibus fleet. There was no requirement at the time for full size single deckers, indeed the first such buses since the Lynxes in 1988 were not delivered until 1997.

"EN considered that a whole route needed to be converted so that passengers would be confident that a low floor bus would arrive, to allow full evaluation the benefits of the type. Part funding for three buses was on offer, as I recall, but there was no route with a PVR of 3 where conventional single decks were required".

EN/Thamesway took their first low floors - Dart SLFs - in 1996/8, Thamesway took delivery of 701, and then Essex Buses took 702-11 in Thamesway livery and then 712-721 in First Barbie colours split between EN (712-6) and Thamesway (717-21). The first, 701 (N701 CPU) came in January 1996 after being exhibited at the Coach & Bus Show '95 and was the

prototype Dart SLF although it didn't have a wheelchair space or ramp.

Left: Another rally appearance, Southend, 2 June 1996, Heddingham L212 showing its original registration of M212 WHJ. The yellow notice in the windscreen is the ECC poster about these buses.

Above: extract from ECC promotional leaflet.

LOW FLOOR BUSES

mean 21st Century engineering to give

- One low step access
- 'Kneeling' front suspension to give even lower front step
- Wheelchair accessible with powered ramp
- Wide aisles for easy movement
- Superb heating and ventilation efficiency
- Unbeatable ride comfort



Essex County Council
Planning



Right: the entrance detail of Southend 764 on its first day in service. Note the absence of a seat behind the driver, in contrast to the other Essex examples. The ramp is deployed and the driver stretches to reach the destination winding gear.



And **left**, one of the wooden steps that Southend produced to help out shorter drivers! We are not sure how long they remained in use though. (Photo by **Roy Turner**, a former ST Inspector and Driving Instructor).

Our late member Andy Meadows, a former bus driver but by then himself a wheelchair user, tried out all three operators' services and wrote about his experiences in *Buses* magazine, March 1995. He concluded: "The low-floor bus improves bus travel for many existing and new passengers and provides travel opportunities for over half a million wheelchair users. Essex County Council is to be commended for introducing this type of vehicle. Ten vehicles is however only the tip of a very large iceberg and the big bus groups must lead the way in investing in this type of bus".

Below: an interior view of Southend 762 highlights that the main beneficiaries of the step free entrance were mothers with buggies.



The Lance SLF, at 11.6m long on full size wheels (so with significant wheelarch intrusion, especially at the front, as the photo shows) proved not to be exactly what the industry was looking for, but Dennis went on to develop the vastly more successful Dart SLF, whilst those who wanted a heavyweight low floor were satisfied by Scania and later Volvo, plus others. The cost premium dropped significantly as mass production ramped up and the low floor bus gained widespread acceptance within the industry, ahead of the legislation mandating the use today of such buses.

So what of the Essex ten? As low floor buses became more commonplace there was less need to keep the Lances to specific routes/workings. The Hedingham pair served out a full life in that fleet. There was however one hiccup. In 1999 it was discovered at an annual MoT test that the vehicle identities had been mixed up when new, so that their documentation didn't match the registrations. It was decided to retain the fleet numbers, so L211 became M212 WHJ and L212, M211 WHJ, confusing many enthusiasts, not least your author! L211 was withdrawn in October 2012, being written off after hitting a lorry on the dead mileage from Sible Hedingham to operate the 418 in Saffron Walden and passed to scrap dealer Sackers of Great Blakenham.

L212 (the L prefix was dropped in December 2013) was luckier and in July 2014 passed to Panther Travel where it was smartly repainted by Mardens and reregistered BIG 7793. After running for Panther it was offered for sale towards the end of 2018 and was subsequently sold for preservation, reverting (we think) to its original registration. Does anyone know the current status of this bus?



Above: in later life, Hedingham L212, now with registration M211 WHJ, passes through Earls Colne on the 88 from Colchester to Halstead, a route jointly operated with First, on 1 February, 2008. We were there that day for the launch by author Michael Yelton of our book about Blackwells of Earls Colne - the route and operator that Hedingham & District took over in 1965. We still have a few copies of the book for sale!

Below: County Bus ELW267 on 8 March 1997 in the layover area at Romford station. The company was by now owned by Cowie and the West Midlands logo has been removed from the front panel.



The County Bus quartet got split up. County Bus itself had been sold to West Midlands Travel in October 1994, just before the Lances arrived, but was sold on to Cowie plc at the end of February 1996 and hence became part of Arriva The Shires & Essex in due course, being renumbered 3376-9. They received Arriva corporate livery, with branding for the 500/2 services. Three, 3376-8, moved on to Luton and then Aylesbury depots. Whilst at the latter depot, 3376 was destroyed by fire on 6 September 2004 and the remains sold to ASM, Aylesbury for scrap.

3377/8 were then withdrawn by Arriva around the end of 2008 and sold to Ensign in February 2009, passing straight on to Galleon Travel (Trustybus), where they were repainted red, yellow and blue. Following the liquidation of the original Galleon Travel company, they passed to Centrebus in August 2009, who established a Harlow operation and numbered the buses 767/8. They ended their lives with two of the Barnsley breakers, 3377 going to Hardwicks by the end of 2012, whilst 3378 was taken by Ripley in January 2011.



These two photos by **Mike A Penn** show former County Bus M268 VPU on service C3, **above** with Trustybus in Harlow bus station on 21 April 2009 and **right** in Waltham Cross on 21 May 2010 as repainted after Centrebus took over those operations. It looks good for a 14/15-year-old bus, in its last years in service.



The final one of the County Bus quartet, 3379, was transferred to Arriva Southend in February 1999, joining the four already there and hence still satisfying the terms of the ECC funding. It is seen **below** at The Renown terminus in Shoebury on 20 March 2004, with rather understated route branding for services 7/8. It suffered some fire damage in November 2003 but was repaired, only to suffer a much more serious engine bay fire whilst on service 9 on 31 December 2007, leading to its withdrawal and sale for scrap. Whilst on the subject of fires, one had also afflicted Southend's 3381 and it was off the road from winter 2003 to June 2004 before returning to service at Southend.



At Southend, the company was renamed Arriva Southend Ltd in 1998. 3381-3 were transferred away within the Arriva group in July 2004 to Arriva North West & Wales, numbered 2395-7 there, based at Bootle. All three were sold on to the Stafford Bus Centre dealership in October 2009 (3381) or January 2010 (3382/3). Nothing more is known of 3381 but the other two were sold on to Heartlands Travel (Tamworth Coach & Bus), with 3382 being briefly reregistered to 520 MWX, but both only lasted a few months with that operator and had been withdrawn by the end of 2010/start of 2011 and presumably went for scrap.

The final Southend one, 3384, moved more locally to Arriva Kent & Sussex at Tunbridge Wells in May 2008. It passed to Ensign in June 2010 and then on to a preservationist. It was displayed at a rally at the Great Yeldham museum in May 2013 as shown on the next page, in as withdrawn condition with Arriva names crudely painted out in red, as was their custom at the time with withdrawn buses. We don't think it has appeared in public subsequently but it remains in existence, stored in a private compound off the A1245 and not visible from the road.

LOW FLOOR BUSES

*open up bus travel
for many more
people
'No Problem'*

■ Totally accessible
travel for everyone

So of the ten pioneering buses, two survive in preservation - M211 WHJ and M764 JPA - albeit neither on the road, and two were lost to fires, with the other six ending up in scrapyards. But they had a decent life in Essex and achieved their objective of opening up the market for low-floor, wheelchair accessible buses, as extolled in the promotional leaflet (extract **left**).

With thanks to the PSV Circle (Steve Curl), Ian Ransom, Matthew Evans, Robert MacGregor, Robin Orbell, Bus Lists On The Web and *Buses* magazine for help/information with this feature.



Southend's 3379 (ex County Bus) suffered two fires in service.

Left, being towed away from Central Bus Station on 22 November 2003.

It was then repaired and returned to service - until . . .

it suffered a more serious fire coming into Southend just over 4 years later on 31 December 2007, as seen here by **Matthew Evans**, still smoking and with the fire brigade still in attendance. It's at the stop by Norman Harris House in Queensway. Not surprisingly, it never ran again and went for scrap.



But one of Southend's original four survives, albeit unrestored. It appeared at the Great Yeldham museum site at a rally on 19 May 2013, showing its condition as withdrawn by Arriva from Tunbridge Wells and sale to Ensign.

We don't think it has appeared in public since but hopefully will one day be restored to its original, bright Southend Transport colours.

Matthew Evans

The illustration of the cover of *Bus & Coach Preservation* magazine in January's EBM, featuring the restored ex-Ribble full-front Leyland PD3 KCK 869, brought back memories of the trio that Southend Transport ran. Photos by the author except as noted.

In the 1970s deliveries of new buses were often late, sometimes seriously so, throwing fleet replacement plans into disarray, with the old buses due for replacement wearing out. At that time buses required a Certificate of Fitness (CoF), initially for 7 years when new, then for progressively shorter periods at the discretion of the relevant Ministry Vehicle Examiner. It was not always worth the effort of repairing and recertifying an older bus for a relatively short period pending delivery of its replacement, so sometimes hires were used to fill the gap.

Southend had ordered Fleetlines 386-97 in 1972 with a view to replacing time-expired Lowlanders but delivery was late - they had been expected in mid-1974. Despite this, Southend also continued to hire buses out to other operators, eg Lowlanders to Alder Valley in 1974/5 and PD3s to London Transport at Croydon in 1975/6 (and elsewhere later), plus ad-hoc short term loans, eg for the Lesney Toys staff buses at Rochford and to Osbornes of Tollesbury. To bridge the gap, arrangements were made with Ensign Bus for the loan of three double deckers, to be painted into Southend livery but still owned by Ensign. The buses selected were from the large batch of 105 Burlingham bodied Leyland Titan PD3/4s that Ribble had bought in 1957/8. Mechanically they were obviously very familiar to Southend staff, with 20 Titans still in the fleet at that time but had two differences - they were fully fronted and had front entrances with sliding doors. Southend's only other front entrance, front engine buses were the remaining Leyland Lowlanders, with half cabs and folding doors.

The buses chosen were given Southend numbers 317-9 (previously used for AEC Bridgemasters withdrawn in 1972), registered KCK 879, LCK 739 and KCK 920 respectively, ex Ribble 1533/76/59. There were originally planned to be four, not three, and a fleet list Southend Transport issued in June 1974 listed 320 (LCK 747), but that never entered service. Indeed, it never passed to Ensign, the PSV Circle recording that it was not withdrawn by Ribble until 1976, when it was sold to Norths, the Sherburn-in-Elmet dealer that September.

Below: In course of preparation, the future 319 has Southend destination boxes fitted but has yet to be repainted. Its new fleetnumber is chalked in the window ahead of the 'bacon-slicer' door. The ex-Nottingham PD2 alongside was there for conversion to a plybus. 7 March 1974. **Photos by Richard Delahoy except where credited.**





Left: Did either of these withdrawn Lowlanders donate their destination boxes to the Ribble trio? 330/324 dumped at the works and being cannibalised, 22 September 1973. The picture was taken through a gap in the fence around the Works, hence a much less than perfect composition with the roof not in shot!

The Ribble buses were delivered to Southend in as withdrawn condition, in Ribble livery. Southend's works at Tickfield Road fitted the standard Southend 3-part destination screens, removed from scrap buses dumped at the works, and Ensign had them painted in Southend colours. The first sightings of them were in mid-December 1973, indeed I photographed what was to become 318 at the Works on 16 December.

The first to enter service was 317 in April 1974. 319 followed in August and finally 318 in November (so 11 months after the first sighting!). The sliding doors were a novelty and the control valves were designed to move

the door reasonably quickly at first, then slowing down as the door approached the front pillar and closed gently against it. However, one exhibited the opposite characteristics, moving slowly at first and then hitting the pillar with a thump! Not good for anyone boarding at the last minute or putting their hands in the way.

The buses were employed on a variety of Southend routes, always crew operated. John Lidstone, writing in *Preserved Bus* magazine in December 2000 recalled them being "More troublesome individually than all those bought new put together, they limped through a short career punctuated by frequent pit stops and unending complaints from crews and passengers alike".

Below: Now resplendent in Southend colours, 317 stands on Central Station forecourt on 17 May 1974 for the short run to Westcliff, Plough on the 62, whilst an Eastern National Lodekka waits behind. This terminus would be replaced by the new bus station off York Road 2 days later.





Left: In weak winter sunshine on 28 December 1974, 318 loads in the new Central Bus Station for Leigh on the 25A. It replaced the previous terminals at Seaway, Pier Hill and Central rail station.

With the delivery of the first 6 of the Fleetline order in November 1975, 386-90/3 (JTD 386-90/3P), the Titans' job was over and they were returned to Ensign in November 1975. But that was not the end for them, as all three were exported to Hong Kong, where they became driver training buses T7/5/6 respectively in the CMB (China Motor Bus) fleet. **Alan Osborne** photographed all three there in 1986; his shot of T7 (ex Southend 317) appears **below**.

Why 'bacon slicers'? Well, the sliding doors reminded people of the machines on the counters of old-fashioned grocers' shops (think Arkwright's Stores in *Open All Hours*), in the days before cooked meats were sold pre-packed.

These weren't Southend's only 1970s hires from Ensign, later using a quartet of ex-Nottingham Atlanteans, which ran in Nottingham colours as Southend 321-4 in 1979, again pending delivery of new Fleetlines, a story we may return to in a subsequent issue. There were also various ad-hoc or sporadic loans, too numerous to mention here.

Much later, there was a further Ribble connection, when during the 'bus war' with Thamesway, Southend Transport bought four former Ribble highbridge Bristol VRs, 401-4 (LHG 440/1/7/8T) in 1992. We illustrated one on the rear cover of last July's issue (EBM 699), in Ribble livery with ST colours on the front.



Other Ribble PD3s ran in the area as staff buses from the Lesney Toys factory at Rochford (at least KCK 863, LCK 745/66) and another was used as a promotional bus for Tom Caxton Beer and later, Robinson's Barley Water (LCK 746), often to be found stored for Ensign in Southend's London Road garage.

It had passed to Ensign via Norths in 1973. During 1975 and part of 1976 it was used by the British Athletics team for the European Games and the British Commonwealth Games. It was then painted by Southend Transport for Ensign in support of the Great British Athletic Team at the 1976 Summer Olympics in Montreal, being exported to Canada. The livery of red, white and blue with a Union Jack over the destination area and images of torch bearing athletes on both sides was chosen after a competition was organised in 1976 by the TV Times magazine, won by the Walmsley family, who were given a free trip to Montreal.

Whilst the bus was there it was driven by Southend Driver Instructor Brian Moxham. Our member Paul Bateson adds: "I met him in Montreal and I was made very welcome which gave me the opportunity to take several pictures and ride on the bus. I even was given a complimentary ticket to the Olympic Games! Sadly, Brian passed away a few years later.

"The bus was auctioned off after the games but subsequently ended up with a company selling car parts in Ville de Sainte Catherine, Quebec. It was used as a store shed and a short while after photographing it in 2004 the bus was scrapped".

So four ex-Ribble buses that once were to be found together in Southend Transport's London Road garage ended their lives across the globe, three in Hong Kong and one in Canada. Not a bad record!

Right: We don't know the identity of the photographer but their reflection was caught as they recorded this inscription on the rear of LCK 746 before it was shipped to Canada.

Below: Taken on 26 July 1976 at the depot of Murray Hill, a prominent coach company in Montreal, with local registration reg AP 2009.

Paul Bateson



Confused.com? These Passengers Were!

Some tales from bus crews*

John Large: I worked service 400 into Southend Seaway from London Victoria. Because our pickup stand was next to the one that Standerwick used I often arrived at Seaway with passengers wanting Blackpool on the vehicle. This was mainly due to the yard men at Victoria inadvertently putting passengers on the bus while I was on my break.

Phil Covington: I arrived at Walton-on-the-Naze once on a National Express service 084 and a passenger asked me if it was Walton-on-Thames, as the coach had never taken that long before. I had the same thing happen at Stratford, a passenger asked me if I could point them in the right direction for Shakespeare's house.

Stephen Rose: I arrived at Southend Seaway one Sunday from Kings Cross, 400 service, with a standing load. As my punters were alighting an Asian chap asked me to get his cases? What cases I asked. He replied, the ones I placed at the back of the bus for you to load. Sorry mate, I said, no boot on this vehicle, it's the engine! This was with a Bristol VR. He had five cases in all, one for each family member. This was when we parked alongside the mainline station at Kings Cross. I don't remember him getting his cases returned! He was about to start a week's holiday at Southend.

* As recounted in the Facebook Group Eastern National Remembered, collated by Richard Delahoy.

**SOUTHEND-ON-SEA
LONDON KINGS CROSS**
via BASILDON,
ROMFORD,
GANTS HILL,
LEYTON,
DALSTON,
AND
ISLINGTON

**CITY
400**

OUR BUSES ON THE 400 ARE HAVING
A NEW LOOK WITH CHANGED COLOURS
AND ARE BEING RE-ROUTED TO SERVE
LAINDON CENTRE AND LAINDON WEST.

Commencing Sunday 16th October, 1983

Pick up a leaflet
at Company's
local offices.

EASTERN NATIONAL ➤

Rear Cover Pictures - the 251 Running Day

As noted in the Tyler's Avenue article, in 2012 a commemorative road run was organised over the route of the 251, Southend to Wood Green. **Upper**, as a prelude, Craig Mara's Bristol LDL 2510 (236 LNO) was used for a test run on 8 April in dry conditions. The former Wood Green depot and bus station had long since been demolished and redeveloped with flats now on the site (appropriately named Omnibus House) but 2510 was posted in Redvers Road, the side street that used to give access to the depot's rear entrance. It has since become a one-way street with a bus stand, as exemplified by Arriva London DW326 (LJ60 AXH) on the 123 to Ilford. 2510's painstaking restoration continues at the Canvey Island Transport Museum.

Lower, the actual day of the run, 29 April, was rather wet! The run included a break at the Walthamstow Pumphouse Museum, only just off the line of the 251 route, since it was not possible to stop at Wood Green itself. At the Museum two fine EN Lodekkas were posed together, FLF 2849 (NTW 942C) and doyen of the LDs, 2400 (XVX 19), both also from the Canvey Island Transport Museum. My favourite buses! Both pictures **Richard Delahoy**

The road run was repeated in 2013.

What's in a name?

Richard Delahoy

In the previous Extra we looked at some variety in Eastern National fleetname transfers. But **Frank Church** didn't just record EN names, he captured a host of other operators in glorious colour in the 1950s/1960s, as we showcase here.

Ashdown's Luxury Coaches of Danbury featured on page 1 of our first EBM Extra, with a black & white shot of their Bristol K5G/Duple, JPU 640, new to Moores of Kelvedon and passing to Ashdown's in 1958. This is almost certainly on that vehicle. They had run the "Rodney Bus Service" from Little Baddow (the Admiral Rodney Inn and General's Arms) to Chelmsford. That service was sold to Eastern National in 1937 and Ashdown's continued as coach and contract operators until 1963.



Jennings Coaches was established around 1924 in Ashen, a small village in north Essex between Sudbury and Haverhill, by one Barnabas Kingston Jennings, running local services and, from 1930, a service to London. Ultimately the business passed to Hedingham Omnibuses in 1984. We have the full story in our Fact File series, available free as a pdf file - just e-mail us to request a copy. The raised waist rail (in dark blue) in this picture suggests this must be one of the pair of Leyland/MCW Olympics, early underfloor-engined single deckers, either KOC 233 (a former demonstrator) or SPU 985 (bought new in 1951).



Most fleetnames were either transfers or signwritten directly onto the bodywork but here Biss Brothers have used metal letters screwed on. They were based just over the western Essex border at Bishop's Stortford, being set up in 1950 to acquire the established business of H Monk. They ran some local bus services as well as the usual coach activities. The history is too complicated to summarise here, but they



were finally taken over by First in 1999 and the coach operations sold on. The bus part was renamed Airport Buses and still exists as a dormant subsidiary of First Essex Buses.

This style of fleetname and blue livery will seem familiar to those who knew Hicks Bros. of Braintree. They sold out to the Government (British Transport Commission) in 1950 and were managed by Eastern National until fully merged into EN in 1955. But Hicks had a coaching operation at Clacton and this was separated off into a new company, Cansdall Coaches (Clacton) Ltd and was not part of the sale. It lasted until a sale to Staines



Crusader Coaches in the late 1960s.

Clacton featured as the destination for various London based coach operators. Empire's Best ran a thrice-daily service from Waterloo, Kings Cross and north London from the late 1920s. In 1960 they sold out to Banfields. The route ceased in March 1979.



Our final picture is really self-explanatory, but we should add that this is the style used by SCT from 1939 (they were green before then) until 1964 when it was modified to drop the large fleetname and alter the proportions of blue and cream. The bus is PD3 312.





ESSEX BUS MAGAZINE EXTRA Issue 3 Spring 2023
Reporting the Essex bus scene since 1964