

Essex Bus Magazine Extra

Historical features special issue

Issue 6 Spring 2024



Essex Bus Enthusiasts Group

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From The Archives: Coach Touring, 1920s Style

The so-called "all-weather" coach was popular in the early days of the coach touring business.

The concept was to offer comfortable armchair seats with side glazing but open to the fresh air in good weather. Come more inclement conditions, a hood could be extended over the coach to keep the passengers protected. Quite just how watertight and draughtproof these were, is not recorded!

To sell the concept to the presumably wealthy potential clients, the Globe Travel Company of Bush House in London WC2 had some attractive folders, 12" x 7", made up with these illustrations of the open and enclosed configurations of the latest **Westcliff Motor Services** tourers. The specific vehicle cannot be identified but is likely to be one of HJ 7088-90, ADC 417/London Lorries C20D of 1927. Westcliff were early pioneers of extended tours. Perhaps this was used for the 16 days English Lakes and Scotland Tour, 26 guineas (£27/6/0 then, today about £1,400). The style of fleetname seen here was only used briefly by Westcliff.

The photos are reproduced courtesy of our friends at **The Bus Archive** and were found in the Derek Giles collection.



Essex Bus Magazine Extra from the Essex Bus Enthusiasts Group

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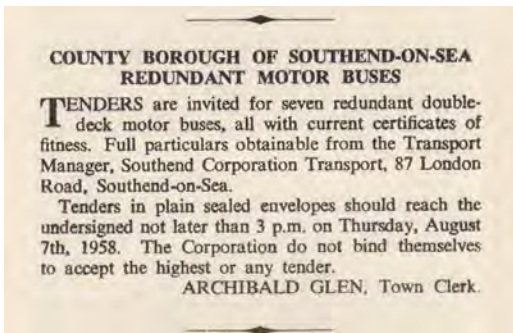
Introduction

We plan to publish two Extras each year, subject to funding; we already have sponsors for 2024 and into 2025. We are extremely grateful to **Ian Barlex** for sponsoring this issue; you can read more from Ian on pages 2 & 3. In fact, 2024 will see three Extras, having already celebrated 60 years of publishing with the January *extra* Extra! The aim is to showcase great photos and feature articles spanning a number of eras of bus history across the county; this issue starts in the late 1920s, right through to the second decade of this century. We hope you will find the range of articles interesting and stimulating. Work is already under way on Extra 7, which will be published at the end of September.

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Front cover: one of our feature articles looks at the second exchange of NBC FLFs for SBG VRTs. An indirect consequence was the transfer to Eastern National of LFS 292F (EN's 3043). After sale by EN it became L104 with Hedingham Omnibuses and **Robert Appleton** photographed it in Colchester Bus Station on 18 September 1987.



Left: advert from the trade press. This notice appeared in July 1958, seeking bids for seven redundant buses. They were AEC Regents 208/9 and Daimler CWs 221/3/5/8/9 and all went to Essebridge Autos of Rayleigh, who sold them on to scrap dealers. In happier days, but towards the end of their lives, Michael Dryhurst had photographed 208 & 228 whilst still in service, see photo feature on pages 21-23.

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I am very pleased to sponsor this edition of EBM Extra, for two reasons – firstly to mark my seventieth year; and more importantly as a thank you from an ordinary member to the EBEG team who have done such a great job to bring the superb EBM and EBM Extras to us every month over the years. I have tried here to provide a few words about my own background, plus my interests in Essex buses, and some of their connections with other areas of great bus interest for me.

I was born and raised in Barking, last bastion of the London RT bus, and indeed grew up on the route of service 62, the last to see those vehicles (I actually managed to be on the very last RT operated journey, after camping out at Barking, on 7 April 1979). In my (almost) seventy years, I have never strayed far residentially, only to Chadwell Heath, and now Goodmayes.

My interest in buses started after I passed the eleven plus and found myself headed for Barking Abbey Grammar School, situated next door to Barking Bus Garage. Having made myself a friend who was already interested in buses, this sparked my enthusiasm for the industry that took over my life from then onwards. My friend originated from Scotland, and there were two early effects of our new joint interest. Firstly, we would sit outside Barking Garage each day after school, watching the evening peak runout. The source of greatest excitement was always to see the one bus of the day on route 23C that must have had the longest ever London ultimate blind display – “Creekmouth, Power Station via Long Reach Road, Remploy Works”.

Secondly, and rather more adventurously, come the school holidays, we started to travel on the overnight coaches up to Scotland to stay with his relatives and ride around on the buses of the Lothians and beyond (there were not the same travel restrictions on unaccompanied juveniles then as there are now). Recent material in EBM about the bus exchanges between Eastern National and the Scottish Bus Group has struck a particular chord with me, as I have travelled on many of those buses, both FLFs and VRs, in Essex and in Scotland.

My passion for Scottish buses had soon extended to the buses and coaches of East Anglia, and so far as Essex is concerned, initially the A131 corridor, which I regularly travelled up and down as the passenger of my uncle, who worked in Chelmsford during the week but lived in Bury St Edmunds. These journeys brought to my attention the delights of ENOC garages at Chelmsford, Braintree and Halstead; and the array of fascinating independents who could be seen en route, including the likes of Hedingham, Chambers, Theobalds and Goldsmiths. Perhaps my other greatest area of interest was the Isle of Wight, destination for many family holidays in my formative years; with no car, this meant lots of opportunities for rides on Southern Vectis, and in particular the Bristol RE, without any question my personal favourite class of vehicle.

I left school at 18 having obtained a position on the Traffic Administration Training Scheme at London Transport, and of course soon found lots of colleagues with similar interests, particularly in the Bus Traffic and Schedules offices; and many lifelong friendships were made in that early period at work.

Further specific Essex interest came with one of those work friends who lived (he still does, and is also an EBEG member) in Epping. Since then, I have keenly followed the myriads of operator and service changes in the Epping, Ongar and Loughton area, the likes of Ward's of Epping, Webb's, Blue Triangle, Imperial, West's, Bonner's, SM Travel, Olympian, Stephenson's, Central Connect, Vectare, to name but some; and, of course, the larger operators too. Probably my greatest regret is that I did not start taking photographs until the late 1980s; I just never had a camera until then. I have certainly tried to make up for lost time, but will sadly never have a photographic record of some of the great trips I made, whether to the Highlands and Islands, the Isle of Wight, or out in Essex and East Anglia. As I moved up the professional ladder and left LT for large consulting businesses, work commitments and overseas assignments interfered with my availability to spend so much time out looking at buses, but the other area that was close at hand and could often be accommodated in the time available was of course the London/Essex border to the east of home, and Thurrock, with Lakeside as an obvious hub.

With the restrictions on my time, I looked to the societies and their excellent publications to keep me up to date, and have been a long-time member of the Omnibus Society, PSV Circle, LOTS, EBEG and several others. I always felt grateful for the hard work of those who provided all of this information that dropped on to my mat every month and vowed to play my part in later life. Once I had set up my own consultancy practice in 2007, I was able to become more active; I spent some years as a Director of the Omnibus Society, and nowadays, having retired from professional life, I am busier than ever editing the Society's monthly Scottish and Eastern & Southern Bulletins.



Above: mentioned earlier is my keen interest in operators in the Epping Ongar and Loughton area, including one that rarely featured in EBN - Bonners of Ongar. Here is an ex-London Country Leyland National in 1991, at its usual resting place in Ongar. This bus, LPB 217P, was delivered new as SNB217 and spent time all over South Essex - at Grays Garage when first used in service; acquired by Southend Transport in December 1989 but not operated by them; to Bonners in June 1990; and after Bonners at Associated Coachways of Harlow.

It was the regular bus on the 381 during the period that Bonners ran that service (2/4/91 to 6/9/92). The 381 connected Coopersale Common to Epping and had a very complex history after London Country gave it up in August 1971, being operated by no fewer than six different independents until County Bus (successors to London Country) regained it in August 1995. Ian Taylor told the full story as part of his article *Some Independent Bus Routes in West Essex* in Essex Bus News issue 407 (March 1998 - the 381 story is on pages 17/8). He also wrote about Bonners and many more in *Declaring Independents* in the London Bus Magazine No.133 (Autumn 2005), published by LOTS. Today the route is part of Vectare service 31 and is extended to Harlow.

Below: My long-time interest in the Isle of Wight has seen me become a keen supporter of their excellent bus museum, and I recently provided financial assistance for the interior restoration of their lovely Duple Commander bodied Bristol RESH, KDL 885F. For me, this coach has a connection with Essex, in that only nine examples were built, of which four of the remaining eight were delivered to ENOC (the other four went to Hants & Dorset). My picture shows the coach in 2021 after restoration, with the new seats clearly visible. Both **Ian Barlex**



Scottish Exchange - part 2

In EBM Extra 4 last autumn, we told the story of the 15 Eastern National FLFs that migrated north in 1971 and the like number of Alexander Midland VRTs that came to Essex. In part two of the story, we look at the much bigger exchanges early in 1973.

As explained in part one, we've not been able to establish who initiated that 1971 exchange, but National Bus Company (NBC) papers at The Bus Archive help to shed light on the subsequent transactions that eliminated the Bristol VR from the Scottish Bus Group (SBG) fleets. It is well known that the SBG were not enamoured with the VR, and at the time did not have a significant demand for double deck OMO. The 15 that EN acquired had in fact been the newest ones that any SBG companies had. The rest of the SBG VR fleet comprised:

Company	Total	Fleet nos	Registrations	New	Type
Central SMT	20	BN357-76	NGM 157-76G	1969	VRTSL6G, 30', 77 seats
Eastern	25	AA280-304	LFS 280-304F	1968	VRTLL6G, 33', 83 seats
Scottish	10	AA305-14	OSF 305-14G	1969	VRTSL6G, 30', 77 seats
Western SMT	39	B2236-74	NAG 587-92G, NCS 435-7G, OCS 575-91H, NAG 583-6G, OCS 592-600H	1969/70	VRTSL6G, 30', 75 seats
Total	94				

It appears that EN had in fact discussed the possibility of taking 20 of the Eastern Scottish VRTLLs before instead arranging the swap with Alexander Midland that was covered in part 1. It is also stated that Central SMT had looked at an exchange with Southdown for the entire ex-Brighton Hove & District FLF fleet (20 buses dating from 1965-7) but again, that didn't come off.

By 1972 the SBG's dissatisfaction reached a peak and, seemingly unilaterally, Western SMT approached dealer S&N Motors to offer theirs for sale. Alan Millar has recorded (*Buses*, January 1975 and much more recently in *Britain's Buses Vol.7*) that China Motor Bus considered them (but took the fifty ex London XA class Atlanteans instead in 1973), but in the event only three VRs were sold by the dealer, two to Osborne's of Tollesbury for service work - see feature article on pages 11 to 15 - and a third went to a West Midlands property developer, Richardsons, for promotional purposes; it has survived and is today preserved in Western colours once again. At this stage, the SBG headquarters stepped in and the engineering director, Roddie MacKenzie, instructed the operating companies not to act, pending discussion of a wider deal with NBC. His NBC counterpart, George McKay (head of technical services) briefed the NBC Operations and Finance Committee on 21 November 1972 that "The Scottish Bus Group would consider the exchange of Bristol FLF vehicles for Bristol VRT vehicles" and that MacKenzie "has promised not to dispose of the vehicles to any dealers until he has confirmation from me that we do not require them".

McKay obtained a list from Bristol Commercial Vehicles of the last (ie newest) 100 FLFs built with manual gear-boxes, all from the 236th Sanction of 1967/8 (perhaps he should have just asked the PSV Circle . . .), as the SBG didn't want semi-automatic gearboxes. This sanction ran to the end of Lodekka production and included 144 with semi-auto boxes (Eastern National had 53, Mansfield District/Midland General/Notts & Derby 39, Hants & Dorset/Wilts & Dorset 32 and Crosville 20) which thus stayed in England and Wales. One hundred was obviously a good round figure, as SBG only actually had 91 VRs left to exchange. The list of the last 100 was not wholly useful anyway as it included 53 semi-autos, so a revised list was generated, totalling 93 buses that were still in England [why 93, not 91, is not clear – NBC were obviously confused, as the letter to operating companies refers to 95 buses and a later list to 101 buses!]:

Bristol Omnibus	2	United Auto	20
Brighton Hove & District	7	Eastern Counties	44
United Counties	4	Southern Vectis	3
Thames Valley	13	Total	93

McKay then wrote to the chief engineers of the respective NBC companies to find out the mileages and book values of the buses, in order to discuss terms with the SBG. Some of the replies were not wholly enthusiastic about the ideal

Bristol Omnibus' General Manager E W A Butcher put his reservations on paper: "Perhaps I could mention that, having had some experience of early Bristol VR vehicles, I am not too happy with the proposal . . . and would be glad to know . . . whether Companies will have some say in the matter". ECOC were more supportive "we would take a considerable number of these Bristol VRTs" but wisely asked to know more about the mechanical condition of the VRTs, gearbox and axle ratios and destination indicators. As history shows, the operating companies got **no** say and were simply told by NBC HQ to comply!

Even this supposedly final list was complicated, as the two Bristol OC ones were part of the Bristol Joint Services fleet and hence part owned by the City Council, were in overall advert liveries **and** had the wrong engines, as we'll see later, and the United ones were in the course of being transferred to Northern General (a former BET Group company with no history of operating FLFs) in exchange for Daimler Fleetlines (again, a totally non-standard type in the United fleet, but needed for OMO conversions). Therefore even this was not the final list, as explained below.

By 20 December, McKay was able to update the NBC Operations and Finance Committee that agreement had been reached for the exchange. The FLFs would be valued at an average of £3,750 each and the VRs at £4,750, hence NBC would need to pay SBG £91,000 to balance the books (£1,000 per bus). The exchange was to be in strict numerical chassis number order (eg the company with the lowest numbered FLF chassis would receive the lowest numbered VR, irrespective of the need within each NBC company for more buses suitable for one-man operation), although there were a couple of exceptions to this rule as a result of the Bristol engine saga explained in the next paragraph. In a telling paragraph of his memo, McKay advised:

"I suggest that we list the 93 buses in order of chassis numbers, and exchange one for one on that basis. **There will be a element of luck for both parties on conditions etc**" (our emphasis). Some might say that "misfortune" would have been more appropriate than "luck" for some of the VR recipients!

And so the physical exchange started. But even then, there was a hiccup or two. NBC was not aware that the United Counties buses had Bristol BVW engines - which were not acceptable to the SBG - and UCOC duly sent bus 738 to Eastern Scottish, where it briefly entered service (as evidenced by tickets found in it on its return to England) before the rogue engine was discovered and it was hastily returned to England. The corresponding VR remained at Northampton, before going on to Southdown. The UCOC examples were then replaced by one from Southdown (as successor to BH&D) and three from ECOC. Likewise, it was agreed that the two Bristol OC ones would be replaced by another two Thames Valley ones.

Below: here is one of the ex-Southdown-BH&D buses, KPM 90E, now in service in Edinburgh as Eastern Scottish AA970, on 17 October 1979. The destination gear remains in Tilling standard T style, six and a half years after it moved north, so presumably it remained like this for its whole life in Scotland. **Richard Delahoy**



The other hiccup concerned the Northern/United batch. One VR received from Scotland, Central SMT NGM 174G, was repainted at Northern's Bensham Works - into Sunderland District dark blue, as verified by a photo that surfaced on Facebook last year - assuming that it was to stay within the Northern Group, rather than going on to United Auto. The PSV Circle record that its lower panels were then painted red, before it was returned to Central! It ended up with Eastern Counties.

The whole process became rather protracted: the effective date for the transfer was set as 21 December 1972 but the first physical exchanges didn't take place until February 1973 and the last were not completed until over a year later, in April 1974. The final ones included six of the Alder Valley examples - that company was suffering from a serious shortage of mechanical staff and the buses may have been off the road awaiting repair; some of the Northern (ex-United) ones were also amongst the 1974 swaps. Or perhaps some of the SBG VRs were in poor condition and required repairs. The deal was that the VRs had to be driven to the exchange point and there is an apocryphal tale that one of the Western SMT ones was defective and towed close to the changeover point and then coasted in!

So let's get to the detail of the EN part of the story

You may be forgiven for wondering at this stage where Eastern National fit in this story, as they didn't send any more FLFs to Scotland. You will have noted that Eastern Counties were due to receive by far the largest share of the VRs, as they had many of the newest FLFs - indeed, Eastern Counties had only bought their first FLFs in 1966. Hence it was arranged within the NBC that ten VRs would pass to Lincolnshire and six to Eastern National, in exchange for older FLFs from those companies. The Lincolnshire ones dated from 1962 (1), 1963 (2), 1965 (5) and 1966 (2), whilst all the EN examples were 1965 built. Thus ECOC ended up with 30 VRs and a slightly worse age profile for their remaining FLFs (as compared to the pre-exchange position).

Below: one of the 46 Eastern Counties FLFs sent to Scotland, ONG 351F, became Western SMT 2416 and in this shot from 8 October 1975 retains its English side-by-side destination gear for now. The clippie is boarding, having supervised the bus reversing off the stand in the Anderstown Cross bus station in Glasgow. **Richard Delahoy**



The disposition of VRs amongst the NBC companies was:

Company	Initial	Final	Company	Initial	Final
Alder Valley (successor to Thames Valley)	14	14	Lincolnshire	-	10
Eastern Counties (note 1)	46	30	Southern Vectis	3	3
Eastern National	-	6	United Auto	9	20
Northern General (note 2)	11	-	Total	91	91
Southdown (successor to BH&D)	8	8			

- (1) 16 of the initial allocation were then further swapped within the NBC, as explained above.
- (2) These 11 were then transferred to United Auto in exchange for Fleetlines previously sent there.

The EN vehicles involved were:

FLFs to ECOC, October/November 1973:

Some initially ran for ECOC in EN green but all were in NBC red by early 1974.

EN number	Registration	ECOC number
2830	KNO 953C	FLF425
2836	LWC 662C	FLF426
2839	LWC 665C	FLF427
2840	LWC 666C	FLF428
2846	MXV 883C	FLF423
2847	MXV 884C	FLF424

Below: the former Eastern National 2836 is now resplendent in NBC poppy red, thankfully with a white band and black mudguards, as Eastern Counties FLF426, seen in the old - and very bleak! - Bishop's Road bus station in Peterborough on 28 September 1975. **Richard Delahoy**



VRTs to EN:

Registration	EN number	(ECOC number)	SBG number	Type
LFS 287F	3042	(VR315)	Eastern Scottish AA287	VRTLL6G
LFS 292F	3043	(VR314)	Eastern Scottish AA292	VRTLL6G
LFS 295F	3044	(VR313)	Eastern Scottish AA295	VRTLL6G
NAG 583G	3045	(VR335)	Western SMT B2246	VRTSL6G
NAG 586G	3046	(VR334)	Western SMT B2262	VRTSL6G
OCS 576H	3047	(VR336)	Western SMT B2265	VRTSL6G

As can be seen, the EN fleet numbers fitted in after Series 2 VR 3041 (PWC 516M) and were then followed by the last four Series 2 models, 3048-51 (JNO 189-92N). ECOC had allocated fleet numbers in their series as shown above but did not operate them.

Financially, the book value of the acquired VRs was £21,000 but the older FLFs were only valued at £12,853 (as per EN's Board Minutes of December 1973) so presumably EN had to pay the difference, £8,147, to ECOC.

In a similar situation to the 15 ex-Alexander Midland VRs, EN had to down-seat the VRs to 70 to comply with their Union agreement, the 33 footers losing no less than 13 seats to become H42/28F - this included removing the bench seat for five at the rear of the lower deck, being replaced with a handrail. The shorter, ex Western ones, were altered to the EN standard of H39/31F.

Destination blind displays were of course to the standard SBG hexagonal style; the three ex-Eastern Scottish buses 3042-4 had theirs rebuilt to a non-standard version with the numbers underneath the destination, by removing the SBG winding gear and inverting the whole unit, so that the blinds could be changed from the cab, a necessity for OMO work. The other three, 3045-7, retained the SBG display which could already be changed without the driver leaving their cab. All were repainted into standard NBC green/white although 3043 ran briefly in Eastern Scottish green. Initially they were allocated to Chelmsford (3042-4), Hadleigh (3045/6) and Wood Green (3047) but they moved around a bit, some having long spells at Southend, Hadleigh and Canvey, also Braintree and Basildon. 3042 had a long spell off the road with major accident damage sustained whilst on service 400 (Southend to Kings Cross), there is a picture of it at Central Works with the entire front of the body removed including the staircase. It was delicensed in October 1974 and didn't return to service until August 1975. Presumably its book value was too high to consider scrapping it.

Below: in the newly opened Central Bus Station (unfinished - note incomplete paving) on 26 May 1974, 3042 has just arrived from London on the 400 with trippers for a day out at the seaside. Southend Transport Traffic Superintendent Derek Giles addresses the passengers with his trademark megaphone! **Richard Delahoy**





Above: near the end of its life, 3045, allocated to Harwich (DT), stands outside its home depot on 11 June 1983. It looks somewhat battered and the destination box masking is incomplete, allowing two (or at least one and a half) displays to be shown. Note the “Entrance” and “Exit” signs on the step riser in the doorway, presumably there since the bus had been new to Western SMT in 1969. **Robert Appleton**

Withdrawals started in October 1981 when 3043 was sold to Hedingham & District, being repainted into their red and cream livery by EN as shown on the front cover. As L104 it lasted with them until March 1989. 3042 was next, withdrawn in December 1981 and sold to fellow NBC subsidiary South Wales Transport for further service use, fleet number 899 (later 904); it ran there until early in 1986. Then in April 1982, 3044/6 were sold to Crosville (along with most of the ex-Alexander Midland VRs, as explained in part one of this feature); 3044 was only used for spares, but 3046 entered service in Wales as DVG563. By now the last two, 3045/7, were regarded as “pool” vehicles, used to cover for vehicle shortages at various depots. 3047 was also one of three EN VRs that were loaned to Eastern Counties at Norwich from the end of December 1983 until May 1984 - somewhat ironic, in that it had reached the EN fleet via ECOC in the first place! As pool vehicles 3045/7 lasted three years, although both were eventually given permanent allocations. 3045's career was cut short prematurely after an electrical fire in October 1984 and it didn't run again, although it was not formally withdrawn until September 1985, after it had been cannibalised and then scrapped at Central Works. It had spent long periods at Harwich (DT) depot and had eventually been permanently allocated there, then replaced by 3047. Thus it fell to 3047 to be the last of the Scottish VRs in service with EN, along with ex-Alexander examples 3018/9, all three being finally delicensed in April 1985. 3047 was then withdrawn that July and sold to South Midland (fleet number 576, later 802).

Even this was not to be the end of the Scottish connection, as EN had taken six more 33-footers from Southdown in October 1980, but only to use as driver trainers:

Registration	EN number	Southdown no.	SBG number	Type
LFS 282F	9016	542	Eastern Scottish AA282	VRTLL6G
LFS 289F	9017	543	Eastern Scottish AA289	VRTLL6G
LFS 297F	9018	545	Eastern Scottish AA297	VRTLL6G
LFS 298F	9019	546	Eastern Scottish AA298	VRTLL6G
LFS 299F	9020	547	Eastern Scottish AA299	VRTLL6G
LFS 300F	9021	548	Eastern Scottish AA300	VRTLL6G

Southdown had received eight VRs in the exchange and was the only NBC company to get all 33-footers. With EN, they were repainted into the dark blue training bus livery and were withdrawn in dribs and drabs between 1982 and 1987. And so it was that 9021 was the final ex-Scottish Bus Group VR in the EN fleet, being withdrawn in December 1987. One is illustrated in the article by David Edwards on page 16 - the bus he passed his test in.

Sources/further reading:

NBC papers at The Bus Archive, various dates

Eastern National Board minutes 13/12/73 at The Bus Archive

PSV Circle publication M6, January 1975

The cross-border Bristol exchange, Alan Millar, Britain's Buses Vol.7, 2022

ENEG/EBEG news-sheets and Essex Bus News, various dates

Bus Lists On The Web <https://www.bustlistsontheweb.co.uk/>

Bristol Commercial Vehicles Enthusiasts - Lodekkas, <https://bcv.robsly.com/lodekka.html>.

Below: another ENOC FLF with ECOC - 2846, now FLF423, Wellington Road, Great Yarmouth, 21 July 1981. The logo to the left of the fleetname was to mark ECOC's 50th anniversary. **Robert Appleton.**



Updates to Part 1 of the story (EBM Extra 4, Autumn 2023)

Alexander Midland VR MRT11 (SMS 41H) photographed in Sterling (page 8) was based at Bannockburn depot (B^N) rather than Balfron (B) as captioned. It's therefore very ironic that it was allocated to Basildon (BN) on arrival in Essex! Thanks to Steve Sellars for identifying this correction.

Osborne's VR Variety

As recorded in the previous article, when Western SMT unilaterally put their Bristol VRT fleet up for sale, Osborne's of Tollesbury were the perhaps surprising purchaser of two. They went on to buy two more unique Bristol VRs, of the VRL (strictly VRX) rather than VRT variety. Subsequently another Scottish VR joined the fleet, so perhaps Osborne's can claim to have operated the most varied VR fleet anywhere. Then in the mid 1990s, three more standard series 3 VRs came and lasted into the Heddingham era.

Osborne's had a history of judicious second-hand purchases of quite new double deckers, buying AEC Bridgmaster demonstrators 80 WMH and 2211 MK and AEC Renown demonstrator 8071 ML, so the purchase of two reasonably new VRs was perhaps in character, although they had not previously operated any Bristol vehicles or any with Gardner engines (other than a solitary Guy Arab). Presumably the price was right!

A few months later the two original 33' long VRX demonstrators also made the trip to Tollesbury. These were unique buses, when Bristol broke away from the convention set by the Leyland Atlantean and Daimler Fleetline by putting the engine longitudinally at the rear offside, rather than transversely across the back. This offered a more straightforward transmission line but was rendered unviable for bus use by the Government's standard specifications under the 25% New Bus Grant, which only allowed transverse engines. Hence Bristol hastily altered the design to the more familiar VRT style - rather too hastily as it turned out, which is why the SBG were so dis-satisfied with theirs. The only production VRLs were the 30 superb Standerwick double deck motorway coaches and export orders for 25 from Johannesburg and Pretoria in South Africa.

Below: NAG 588G was one of the two VRTs purchased from Western SMT, through Scottish dealer S&N Motors, moving to Essex in January 1973. The other was OCS 581H. NAG, Osborne's 26, is seen in the coach park at Maldon's Promenade Park on 17 June 1978, laying over between trips on the Tollesbury to Maldon service. It appears to still be in Western SMT dark red. Alongside is a coach from Thornes of Rayleigh. **Richard Delahoy**



One of the demonstrator pair, HHW 933D, had a relatively short life with Osborne's and was withdrawn in May 1979, but the other three VRs lasted to the mid 1980s, as shown in the table below. They were joined in 1980 by another 33' example, the former Tayside OSR 191R with dual door Alexander body, which remained in the fleet right up to the Hedingham takeover of Osborne's in February 1997, although it was not used by Hedingham. Finally, three series 3 VRTs came in summer 1995 and all passed to Hedingham.

Registration	Fleet no	Original owner	Acquired	Withdrawn	Type	Notes
NAG 588G	26	Western SMT	1/73	12/84	VRTSL6G/ECW	
OCS 581H	27	Western SMT	1/73	12/84	VRTSL6G/ECW	
GGM 431D	29	Bristol Comm Vehs	10/73	10/86	VRX6G/ECW	1
HHW 933D	30	Bristol Comm Vehs	10/73	5/79	VRX6G/ECW	1
OSR 191R	11	Tayside	11/80	2/97	VRTLL6G/Alexander	
CJH 115V	12	Alder Valley	8/95	7/06 (4)	VRTSL6G/ECW	2
CJH 141V	27	Alder Valley	8/95	3/08 (4)	VRTSL6G/ECW	2
BHJ 368S	18	Alder Valley	9/95	1/04 (4)	VRTSL6G/ECW	3

Notes:

- 1) Bristol demonstrator, owned by Bristol Commercial Vehicles, later Bristol Omnibus Company, operated initially by Central SMT (GGM) and Mansfield District (HHW)
- 2) Acquired from Stephenson's Coaches
- 3) Acquired from Brentwood Coaches, originally registered VPF 282S, later HIL 9273
- 4) Withdrawal dates are after operation with Hedingham Omnibuses.

It had been hoped that GGM 431D would be preserved and on withdrawal it passed to Viv Carter and then on to Northern Bus, but neither could source the unique parts required for it and, regrettably, it was scrapped. Thankfully though the VRL chassis layout is still represented in preservation by former Standewick LRN 60J.

Below: the Bristol demonstrator that worked for Central SMT - hence the Scottish style destination display - GGM 431D is in the layover area of Colchester bus station on 5 February 1974, having arrived on Osborne's service 2 from Tollesbury via Birch and Shrub End. It is flanked by buses of two other local independents, Norfolks of Nayland (ex City of Oxford AEC Reliance 759 KFC) and Wents of Boxted (Bedford SB1/Yeates 47 UNU). **Richard Delahoy**





Above: the other demonstrator, HHW 933D, had Tilling style T shape scrolls. After their demonstration duties, both had entered the fleet of the Bristol Omnibus Company where they received the cream and green OMO bus livery, but saw little use. It appears that Osborne's simply repainted the green areas red on acquisition. The panel behind the front wheel still bears faint traces of the Bristol scroll fleetname. The photo was taken on 12 May 1974 at a rally in Ipswich. **Richard Delahoy**

Below: the unusual engine position of the VRLs is more obvious in this rear nearside view by **Dale Tringham** of GGM after repainting into the then current Osborne's livery. It is turning onto the B1026 at the Old Kings Head near Great Wigborough on 27 July 1979.



Inside Story - Gary Sharpe

Group member Gary Sharpe worked for Osborne's as a mechanic from June 1974 until their sale to Hedingham and we asked him for his memories of their eight Bristol VRs:

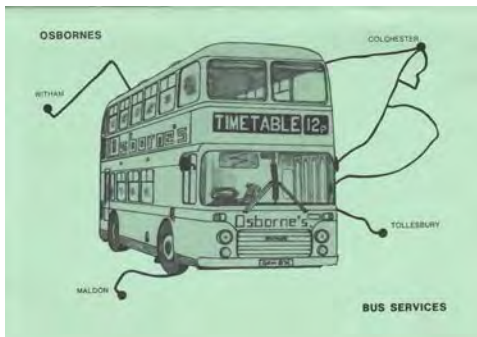
"How Osborne's came to know about the sale by S&N Motors of the first two VRs I do not know, however, Osborne's were never frightened to try anything different and the high capacity was always a draw, schools then being heavily loaded. Lowheight was another advantage, not actually needed, but very handy on the country lanes. The two were in a shocking state on arrival I was told, and when I started with the company 18 months later that was still evident, as a lot of ongoing attention was needed to improve them beyond MOT fitness.

"We learned over the years that Scottish municipal vehicles were well kept, but SBG didn't seem to know what a grease gun was! Although we had the usual (extensive) problems that everyone suffered with with early VRs, on the whole they gave reasonable service. They were very nice to drive, if a little heavy on the steering. When time came for disposal, NAG went to the Rattlesden Flying Club (near Bury St. Edmunds) where its engine and gearbox, mounted on a lorry, became a glider winch, apparently semi-autos are very good for this - it was pictured on page 4 of EBN 627, July 2016. OCS was sold to Eagles and Crawford of Mold in Wales, they collected it and we all kept our fingers crossed for such a long journey. The following day they phoned to say it had run perfectly all the way and were very pleased with the bus. We were both astounded and mightily relieved!

"Turning to the VRLs, firstly they had VRX6G on the chassis plate, as prototypes. I am not sure if Osborne's knew how different they were, but 80 seats was not to be refused, they were much better built than the VRTs, but doomed by the Bus Grant. In my view the model could have been perfected as their only real problem was weakness in the framing around the engine. This led to a strange tendency to seize engines by breaking the crankcase webs holding the crankshaft. Suffice to say the cost of new 'bottom ends' for a Gardner was very expensive. HHW had standard Tilling gearing with a top speed in excess of 60mph, most likely the indirect cause of its downfall and although we learned how to improve matters over time, it was on the third engine when it seized again and enough was enough. It was broken up on site by a scrap dealer, although Joe Osborne said later he regretted doing so.

"Not so badly affected by this, GGM, which had a top speed of 45mph, did get through at least one engine, so for the rest of its life only the driving instructor and the fitters drove it, which kept it going. It sheared in half an important part of the frame, so the engine and box came out to make repairs, at the same time the gearbox was stripped for overhaul. I was on 2 weeks holiday at the time, on return George Osborne asked me if I would mind rebuilding it as the fitter who began the job had been sacked for a serious misdemeanour. Once reassembled, I realised the housing joining the engine to the gearbox box was missing. George thought it had been stolen as revenge for sacking the fitter and we searched all the ditches etc on the way to where he lived, to no avail. The part was unique to the two VRXs, Ribble's VRLs were different, and so GGM had to be scrapped. It was initially bought by Viv Carter for preservation and I towed it to his premises, he looked into having a new part cast, but the cost was enormous. As noted above, it then went to Northern Bus but was scrapped by them.

Below: Bristol VRs featured on the covers of some of Osborne's' timetable booklets, these date from 1974 (left) and 1982 (right). The side-on drawing was still in use for the rear of the 1987 and 1994 booklets, long after the two prototype VRXs had been withdrawn. The drawings were by local enthusiast Geoff Mills.





Left: CJH 141V was one of three former Alder Valley VRTs operated by Osborne's from 1995 and passing on to Hedingham when the business was sold. It is seen here in New Road, Tollesbury, just outside the depot, carrying the trade-mark maroon central band. The depot was closed in July 2016 and has since been demolished. The bus is now preserved.

Gary Sharpe

"The three Mark III VRs were, as all of their type, much better vehicles, the third one (BHI) was acquired in a hurry after an unexpected contract gain and used in Brentwood Coaches livery until the half term when it was painted and in true Osborne style never received the maroon band! I must mention the other VR, OSR 191R, this was a cracking machine and served the company well, Joe Osborne commenting 'I made a mistake buying that, I should have bought three not just one!'"

Below: here's OSR 191R posed just outside Tollesbury. Joe should have bought more! **Gary Sharpe.**
There were more photos of Osborne's VRs and other vehicles of theirs in EBM 694, February 2022.



Member 306, David Edwards has had a life-long interest in buses and is well-known as the owner of the superbly restored Bristol REL/ECW bus, 1516 (FWC 439H). Here he tells his story of working for Eastern National, now First Essex Buses.

I should start by saying that buses have always been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. My late father, Roy Lewis Edwards, was a conductor with both Moore's and Eastern National at Kelvedon and the original Silver End (an outstation of Braintree) and the later re-incarnation when Kelvedon operations moved there in 1974. However, his employment wasn't continuous as he left several times to pursue other occupations but ended up returning when these didn't work out for various reasons.

I left school in the spring of 1976 just as the well-remembered long hot summer of that year began, prior to that I had been lucky enough to have an interview with Geoff Dodson, Operations Manager for National Travel South East at Kelvedon depot as a Junior Traffic Clerk, a grand title that was given for an office junior, i.e. the office "sprog" and general dogsbody! I remember I finished school on the Friday afternoon and started on the following Monday morning, no holiday or "gap time" in those days. Unfortunately, the job was for the busy summer season only and come September I was laid off.

After a short period of unemployment over the winter of '76/'77 in which I was given several awful factory jobs to try out, I secured an interview with R (Bob) Hanley, EN's Traffic Manager for the position of - Junior Traffic Clerk (I), based at Head Office New Writtle Street, with the possibility of progressing to becoming a Junior Schedules Clerk if and when a position became vacant, although this never materialised. I started on 7th February 1977 in the general section of the traffic department under the supervision of Peter Dodson (no relation to Geoff). I spent time working in all the various sections, fares, publicity, licensing and schedules too, as well as being involved with the "Traffic Action Plan" of 1980 which was EN's answer to the countrywide NBC Market Analysis Project.

Learning to drive

By 1981 I was getting "itchy feet" and decided I wanted to move on and follow in the footsteps of several previous members of the traffic department who had left to go "on the road". After persuading the management I wished to do this (and much to the disappointment and alarm of my parents), I was allowed to attend the driver training school during the spring of 1982, whilst taking this time "off" as my annual holiday. I duly passed my PSV test with the company examiner, Chief Driving Instructor Len Morse, who seemed to take a shine to me (although he was always suspicious of any member of HO traffic staff and treated them as internal "spies" who had been seconded to the school to see how it was being run!). By this time EN had become 100% one-man operation (OMO as it was known) and the PSV test I passed was Class 1A "Double-deck, Automatic" only - I had my training and test on Bristol VRTLL 9018 (LFS 297F), pictured **below** at Southend depot in this photo by **Brian Pask**.



However, there was a batch of manual vehicles still on the fleet - the 12xx class Bedford YMT coaches - as well as the 4 Bristol LHs based at Colchester that always seemed to be forgotten. Therefore, the following week I had to take a second test to drive these, Class 2 "Manual single deck". For some reason, known only to my Instructor, Peter Cannon from Basildon, I spent most of that week in and around the Ilford area, passing the test in Bedford YMT 1202 (BNO 688T). On receiving my paper licence from the Traffic Commissioners, I felt somewhat disappointed that it wasn't the coveted Class 1 "All Types" that had been the case with all drivers up until the introduction of 100% OMO.

Right and below: the coveted PSV driver licence and badge - in pre-computerisation days, licences were issued on A5 sized forms, hand-written. For pictures of the LH and YMT vehicles, which this licence permitted David to drive, see the back cover.



To Silver End

Upon successful completion of this I was then allowed to take a further two weeks holiday, which had been booked already (a "Fly-drive" holiday to the West Coast of the USA) and upon return I started work as an OMO driver based at Silver End depot (SE), the position having become available due to Driver Tony Mason having been "made-up" (as it was termed) to Inspector at Maldon depot. I was now working with some of the drivers I had grown up with and a proportion of which knew and had worked with my father and knew me from my younger days or working at Head Office.

The first job I was given at SE? To take Bristol LH 1103 from SE to Central Works for preparation for sale to Heddingham Omnibuses. 1103 had been allocated to SE for short while as this was immediately after the period of both the Pope and President Ronald Reagan's recent visits to the UK, buses had been sent to London for use by the Metropolitan Police, consequently many vehicles had been relicensed and allocated to different depots to cover for the shortfall. This was the only occasion I drove an LH in Company service, but that manual class 2 test was a necessary requirement as we had Bedford YMTs allocated to SE. Little did I know I would get to drive the same LH many times in later years when it came into preservation.

Several happy years passed at SE but in 1988 the management buyout team that now owned the privatised Eastern National and were always looking for ways to save money and make a profit through property sales, decided that SE depot was to close in the August of that year. I had the dubious privilege of driving the last ever service bus into SE, the 2305 Service 53 from CR to SE with VR 3055 (LJN 650P, always a favourite) arriving just before midnight on the 7 August 1988. Operations transferred to both Braintree (most work) and Colchester (all of service 53 plus a small proportion of the Witham town service 337). Staff were split between Chelmsford (5), Colchester (3 only) and the majority to Braintree, although a handful also took redundancy.

Right: that last bus into Silver End.

The Eastern Traffic Area
Terrington House
13-15 Hills Road
Cambridge CB2 1NP

Licence No. **F 128382**

THIS LICENCE is issued by the TRAFFIC COMMISSIONERS for the EASTERN TRAFFIC AREA and authorises:—

DAVID ERNEST EDWARDS
70 VALENTINE WAY
SILVER END
WITHAM ESSEX
CM8 3RX

Badge No. **FF25618**
Date of Taking Effect **5th MAY 1988**

The Traffic Commissioners
27/11/87 NM
For the Eastern Area

*Strike out the words which follow if not appropriate
to drive a public service vehicle* of the type or types shown in the schedule below.
Road Traffic Act 1960

Licence to Drive a Public Service Vehicle

Schedule Type or types of public service vehicles which the licensee is licensed to drive.

— **AM type of PSV with automatic transmission**
& AM single-deck —

This licence is valid for a period of three years and will expire on **4th MAY 1991**....

Signature of licensee (See Note 1) **David Edwards**
(in ink)

Notes

1. The licensee must sign this licence in ink in the space provided above immediately on receiving it; but must not write anything else on it.
2. The licensee must notify the Traffic Commissioners of any change of address within 7 days of such change.
3. This licence does not absolve the licensee from the obligation to obtain a licence to drive under Part III of the Act of 1972. The latter licence has a plastic wallet in which this licence when folded can conveniently be kept.
4. Any inquiries regarding this licence should be addressed to the Traffic Commissioners at the address given at the top.

PSV 30

[Over]



To Colchester via Braintree

I went to Braintree (BE) and it was a pleasant and friendly place to work with great characters some of whom had been there for many years including the noted preservationist Anthony (Tony) Langley and at least three of the future (AJN) 825 Preservation Group. There were also a few of the former Halstead depot staff there who had been transferred when that location closed including another future preservationist John Day, current owner of VR 3107 (UAR 597W). BE had a variety of different types of vehicle allocated with a predominance of Leyland Nationals including the Mk.2 variant.

Around the end of 1990 I was once again getting the urge to do something different and the lure of the four day week at Colchester with its increased earning potential (CR was the only depot to operate to a four day week) and large allocation of VRs to drive, proved too much and I applied to Ken Mead, CR Depot Operations Manager, for a transfer which duly took place in February 1991 and I joined my three old colleagues who had transferred less than three years earlier. Ironically just over a year later BE depot was downgraded to minibus operation and several of my former colleagues from there then joined me at CR being transferred by the company with the reduction of work at BE and service 70 moving to CR.

Enthusiasts outside of the industry looked at the introduction of minibuses and the bus war that followed with Colchester Borough Transport (CBT) in 1993 as an exciting time, and although there was an element of this amongst staff, it was also a troubled time, with drivers who had always been friends from both companies now pitted against each other, animosity (and rightly so) from CBT staff and a large intake of new staff who were keen to give "the opposition" a bashing. Route, timetable and schedule changes were happening every six weeks (or less) as the Badgerline controlled management sought to be the dominant operator in the town. However, overtime opportunities were greatly increased and at that time money was no object.

Then the Chelmsford dispute occurred with 105 drivers being sacked overnight, morale throughout the company was affected. After minibuses had been introduced with drivers working on different (lower) payrates and to differing terms and conditions and with route timings reduced (it was perceived a minibus with its lower capacity could operate a route faster than a conventional bus) the job changed and no longer seemed to have the relaxed atmosphere it once did. However, the differing pay rates didn't last for long (and neither did the minibuses!) and although we now once again have a fleetwide set of terms and conditions, they are far different from what went before.

If all that wasn't enough there was also the CR depot fire of Christmas 1994, when around a dozen buses were lost, to be replaced by a motley collection of second-hand and loaned stock from within the Badgerline Group. The fire was apparently started by a vagrant spending Christmas "living" in Leyland Olympian 4020 (C420 HJN) who had started a fire inside the bus to keep warm! Rumours have always circulated that the fire was an arson attack by one or more of the sacked CF drivers. As far as I know no one was ever charged or prosecuted in connection with the fire.



Left: one of the buses transferred in after the Colchester fire was 3225, AYG 850S, seen entering the bus station, in Yorkshire Rider livery (and with Leeds advert) but with EN names. It was one of ten Bristol VRs so acquired.
Travel Lens Photographic

NightRider

In 2006/7 I volunteered to operate the "NightRider" service in Colchester. This route was introduced to run a circular service around the town between 2345 and 0315 on Friday and Saturday nights predominantly to take late night club goers home. Initially it had operated on other nights too and was at first two different routes. I had my own special rota line (still 4-day) where I worked a normal late shift on a Tuesday and Thursday (Monday and Wednesday were rest days), then on Friday I would be spare from 1800 until 2230, followed by an hour's break, then operate Service 999 (as it was numbered) from midnight until sign off at 0350.

On a Saturday the duty would consist of a complete first half doing the first part of what at that time was the ECC evening service 78 (North Station - Brightlingsea), break again from about 2235, then the NightRider until 0350. Sunday was the third rota'd rest day, but I usually volunteered to work it and got a late duty after having the regulatory 8hrs 30mins minimum break, so I always said I worked twice on a Sunday! The Nightrider operation was interesting to say the least, but I think it is best to shroud in secrecy what actually happened on some occasions, as per the Official Secrets Act, file not to be opened to the public for 50 years! I was allowed to choose which vehicle I used on NightRider, the proviso being not to use a double decker, however I managed to have a Northern Counties Volvo Olympian on at least one occasion! I always liked the Dennis Lances, 1506 (P506 MNO, 67006 as it had by then become) being a particular favourite so it was this I chose whenever possible.

Leaflet **above** courtesy of **Geoff Toon**.

Coming up to date

Since just before the COVID pandemic struck I had been virtually on permanent loan to Chelmsford depot as they have always struggled to get staff and cover work particularly at weekends. I spent the majority of 2022 working at CF. In that time I operated a variety of all routes including the X30 (Southend-Stansted Airport) with the new Scania/E400 double-deck coaches, nice buses. Now back at Colchester I'm pleased to be part of the new X20 team, working to Stansted Airport from Colchester.

So, to the present day, now into my 47th year of continuous employment. I've seen numerous changes to the management and structure of the different incarnations of the company from international level (Firstgroup plc) down to local level (now for the second time First East of England), all of which we are told are for the greater good and in the name of efficiency. Hundreds of people have come and gone and sometimes returned, both at management level and as fellow colleagues (I wonder how I manage to remember all the names), but I'm still here, the last remaining member of the former SE depot staff.

Above right: David receiving his latest long-service award from First Essex Managing Director Piers Marlow.



The ultimate drivers' bus?

We asked David which bus, over his near 50-year career, was the best - not from an enthusiasts' point of view, but as one to spend 7 hours or more a day in the driving cab of. His answer might surprise you . . .

"I have always had an affinity with Bristol/ECW but by the time I became a driver only the remaining REs and VR fleet were left. I have mentioned Leyland Nationals at BE and the numerous VR allocation at CR as one of my reasons for transferring there. I liked both types, the LN had been designed as a drivers' bus with cab ergonomics to the fore, so you'd think an Olympian, somewhat of an amalgamation of the two would be the best, but no, I preferred a VR! Olympian performance improved when it became a Volvo but at the expense of cab design which was cramped (and the ex Glasgow Alexander ON's were awful all round).

"Also stated is my liking for the Dennis Lance, quick, warm and with a very spacious cab. I was also quite taken by the step entrance Dart, the Alexander Dash bodied batch being very solid buses. Latterly I've had a preference for the Volvo B7TL, but not so for its saloon counterpart the B7RLE, although the revised "Mkl" version was an improvement. I think the best all-rounder to have in service with a spacious cab, everything close to hand as well ease of driving, an automatic gearbox but with "holds", has to be the Scania L94UB with Wright Solar body, the YS03ZKA-M batch being the absolute best. Everything produced since is fitted with too many built-in design safety features which frankly are a hinderance to doing the job".

Below: David's favourite drivers' bus. Scania L94UB/Wright Solar 62410 (YS03 ZKF) approaches Colchester North Station in the evening peak for commuter service 15, on 22 June 2011. It was one of five delivered new on loan to First Hampshire & Dorset for use on the X53 Jurassic Coast service, pending delivery of new deckers there. Whilst there it was allocated number 62410 in the First corporate scheme (the batch was 62406-10).

They moved to Essex in spring 2004 and had been nominally allocated numbers 676/7/9-81 in the First Essex scheme but never carried those numbers and instead retained the corporate scheme numbers. The others of the batch new to Essex, 678/82-7, meanwhile became 65686-92 when Essex implemented the corporate scheme in March 2004, creating one of a number of anomalies in the national scheme. **Richard Delahoy**



Dryhurst on Southend Corporation Transport

Here's a further selection of Michael Dryhurst's classic photos, this time taking a look at Southend. The pictures are undated but were probably taken between August 1956 and August 1957.

Below: Southend operated trams from 1901 until 1942, and experimented with early motor buses in 1914-16, before turning to trolleybuses from 1925, initially to supplement the tram network but then to expand into newer housing areas. Motor buses returned in March 1931 in the shape of seven single deck AEC Regals with English Electric bodies, 150-6 (later 200-6, JN 820-6) but they did not enter service until July 1932, as Southend initially failed to secure road service licences to use them, having not fully appreciated the restrictions that the newly enacted 1930 Transport Act brought in. The last trolleybus route extension was in 1935 and although Southend continued to replace its trackless fleet after then, it turned to its first double deck motor buses in September 1937 with the delivery of a quartet of AEC Regents, like the Regals with bodies by English Electric. They were initially for a new route from Southend Central (LMS) station to Shoebury Common, via the seafront. They had lowbridge bodies to fit under the Central Station railway bridge in the High Street and ran directly to the seafront via Pier Hill, unlike the trolleybuses and trams.

Numbered 157-60 initially (JN 9527-30), they were quite quickly renumbered 207-10 (with the Regals as 200-6) to clear the 1xx number series for trolleybuses. In practice, the highest number the trolleybuses reached was only 152 and that not until 1950, but it was neater to keep separate sequences. They were also Southend's first buses with diesel (as opposed to petrol) engines; the Regals were re-engined to Gardner 5LWs around the same time. All initially carried the green and cream livery that Southend used until the late 1930s before adopting the more familiar blue and cream that 208 displays in this photo.

Near the end of its life - 208 was withdrawn in 1956 along with the other three original Regents - the bus is standing on the forecourt of Southend Victoria Station, the former LNER terminus. Alongside is an Eastern National LD Lodekka, whilst one of the half-dozen Weymann bodied Leyland PD2s new in 1956 stands in Victoria Avenue.





Daimler CWA6s: Southend received no less than 18 utility Daimlers during the war; these two came in 1945 with Brush bodies (others were by Duple) and are seen at Victoria Circus. 228 **above** (BHG 777) is in original condition, whereas 226 **below** (BHG 775) has received fixed front windows upstairs. Withdrawn in 7/58 & 8/57 respectively.





Another of the wartime utilities, **above**, 232 (BHJ 806) was one of six (230-5) that were rebodied by Massey in 1952, remaining in service in Southend until 1963/5. 232 is on a short working on a former trolleybus service. **Below**, 259 (EHJ 443) was one of six AEC Regent IIIs, also with Massey bodies, new in 1950, withdrawn 1965/6.



The Colours of Network Colchester

In EBM Extra issue 2 (Autumn 2022) we told the story of Network Colchester – the TGM business set up to take over Arriva's operations in the town (now a city) in 2004, before ending up back in the Arriva fold in 2008 when Arriva bought the entire TGM Group.

The pictures we used in the previous article showcased the attractive white/blue/yellow Network Colchester livery. But acquisitions both under TGM and into the second Arriva era resulted in a rag tag assortment of other colours on buses in the town, as illustrated over the next few pages.



Below: Transfers from elsewhere within the TGM Group were sometimes obvious, with old fleetnames still in place. From the North East Classic Buses fleet came HX51 LSN. TGM had bought six of these, five for Burtons at Haverhill (all of which later ran in Colchester) and this one for Classic of Annfield Plain. A Caetano bodied Dart, it was seen turning into Osborne Street on 5 April 2008.



Left: From another part of the TGM empire, Wiltax of New Haw, Surrey, came T131/3 AUA, DAF DB250s with Plaxton bodies that had been new to Capital Logistics. T133 was caught in the yard at the Magdalen Street depot on 29 January 2008; it later received Network Colchester colours.

Both Richard Delahoy



In Arriva days, three short Dart SLFs with Caetano Nimbus bodies were operated for some years. **Above:** RX07 KPJ, bearing Arriva fleetnumber 1563, is in a reasonable approximation of the Colchester livery but without names, whereas **below** HX04 HUK, 1565, is in Nexus (Tyne & Wear PTE) grey and red but has a Colchester fleetname. 1563 leaving the Osborne Street Bus Station, 1565 in St John's Street, 28 October 2014. **Both Robert Appleton.**





Above: After the takeover buses initially ran in Arriva colours but with Network names. K124 TCP, still showing its old Arriva number 4339, an Ikarus bodied DAF SB220. Colchester Bus Station, 21 March 2006. **Richard Delahoy**

Below, H804RWJ was a Scania N113DRB/Northern Counties, new to Liverline, Liverpool but later operated by Excel at Stansted, whose lighter blue colours it carries. Queen St, 19 July 2010. **Robert Appleton**





Two very attractive liveries for the 133, Colchester - Braintree - Stansted. **Above**, as “airport by bus” were a batch of Scania Omnicities including YN53 GGP, in Braintree Bus Park (as it was then) on 3 June 2012. **Richard Delahoy** They were replaced by Volvo B7RLE/Wrights displaced from the Kent Fastrack system. GN07 AVF at Colchester Bus Station (Stanwell Street) on 10 April 2014, branded as “sxconnect”. **Robert Appleton.**



The Dawn of Preservation

Photos by John Rugg

Basildon hosted two of the preservation movement's earliest rallies of historic vehicles. John Rugg was there with his camera on 23 August 1959 to record some of the entrants.

Eighteen historic commercials took part in a road run from the Essex Carriers depot at Tarpots (South Benfleet) to Commercial Vehicle Repairs' yard on the Nevendon Industrial Estate on Cranes Close in Basildon; a further entrant had magneto trouble (a curse of early petrol engined vehicles) and arrived on a lorry. Some of the entrants had taken part in Southend Carnival the previous day. There were two driving tests and the vehicles were judged and afterwards gave rides to local children.

Only four psvs were present, three illustrated here; the fourth was an ex-Jersey Motor Transport Leyland PLSC3 Lion.

A further rally was held the following year, on 11 September 1960, we have a copy of the programme in our archives but no photos.

Below: GW 713 is a Gilford 1680T with Weymann coach body, presented here in the livery of the famous express service operator, Hillman's Saloon Coaches. Hillman's established a frequent service in the late 1920s/early 1930s from east London to Brentwood and Chelmsford and with journeys onwards to Colchester and latterly, Clacton, Ipswich, Norwich, Yarmouth and Southwold. The services within London passed to LT in 1934 and the longer distance operations to Eastern National, Eastern Counties and Grey-Green. The Bow to Chelmsford service became EN service 10, later 30 (this is a very simplified explanation of a complicated story!).

Hillman's were major users of Gilford coaches but this one was in fact new to Ealing Direct Coaches of London W5 in 1931 and never ran for Hillman's but is shown in their dark blue livery with fictitious fleet number 89. By 1961 it had gained Valliant livery and after the death of its owner, Prince Marshall, ended up in the Science Museum store at Wroughton, near Swindon. Prince's son Seb, a well-known expert restorer, took control of it in 2009 and has since been undertaking a painstaking reconstruction of it. It appeared at the April 2022 Brooklands Gathering in a partly restored condition.





Above: DUF 179 is a 1937 Leyland TS7 with Harrington coach body, new as Southdown 1179. Like the other two vehicles illustrated here, this coach is still with us, having been part of the Ensign Bus hire fleet since 2012 and debuting with them at the annual running day in December 2013. It is now part of the Newman family collection.

Below: newest bus at the 1959 rally was this magnificent 1939 AEC Renown/Northern Counties CBC 921, Leicester City Transport 329, today preserved at the Abbey Pumping Station Museum in Leicester. At the time of the rally, it was in the care of Michael Dryhurst of the Vintage Passenger Vehicle Society.



In EBM Extra 4 (Autumn 2023) we told the story of the Eastern National Bristol RELs that ended their lives in Northern Ireland. But there was nearly a much earlier Ulster connection.

Thanks to a handwritten note uncovered by Paul Savage, we can reveal that seven EN Bristol LS buses might have gone to the Province in 1965/66. Paul explains: "Back in 1965, the Ulster Transport Authority was in the process of passing some unremunerative routes in the Lurgan area to new company, Sureline Coaches. The process was being delayed as Sureline was finding it difficult to obtain buses". The note, part of which is reproduced **below**, records contacts that had been made with English and Welsh operators who might have suitable single deck vehicles available.

Info. passed to
Somerville 17/11.

Surplus Buses with other Cos

ENOC (Chelmsford 56151)

(Gardner 5 cyl)

J. Wilson states that 45-seat Bristol LS buses 1953 and early 1954 are at present being retained for Xmas P.O. work, and will be available possibly after that date. There are seven of these at Maldon & Southend. If price was right they could be sold now, and other vehicles obtained for the work. Contact Chief Engineer at Chelmsford

Headed "Surplus Buses at other Cos", it records a conversation with J Wilson (presumably John Wilson) who states "that 45-seat Bristol LS buses 1953 and early 1954 are at present being retained for Xmas P.O. [Post Office] work, and will be available possibly after that date. There are seven of these at Maldon & Southend. If price was right, they could be sold now, and other vehicles obtained for the work. Contact Chief Engineer at Chelmsford".

Someone has annotated the note to explain that they have Gardner 5-cylinder engines. I wonder if that counted against them? The note is undated but a further annotation top right says "Info. passed to Somerville 17/11", which dates it to November 1965.

So what buses did EN have spare? The LS fleet had not been converted for OMO at that stage and the earliest ones were being withdrawn. In November 1965 there were indeed seven delicensed, 1208-14 (WVX 443/6/7/4/5, YPU 138/9). All seven were relicensed in December for use by the Post Office to carry Christmas mail and parcels (a story we told in December 2018, issue 656) but were then withdrawn and were sold to Eastern Counties early in 1966, where they became LM923-9 (along with 1215-9/23, LM930, 918-22).

The other potential sources identified in this note were London Transport (5, altered to 2, GS Guy Specials - GS16 & GS73), Western Welsh (up to 5 Leyland Tiger Cubs) and East Midland ("15 in one block", Tiger Cubs from the batch R324-45, with Saunders-Roe bodies). In the event, Sureline didn't buy from any of those sources but instead took an assortment of buses, including one with an Essex connection. Their starting fleet of seven thus comprised:

Ex London Transport AEC Regal IVs LUC 201/17 (RF1/17), from the initial batch of private hire coaches - the former came from Simmonds, Letchworth, the latter from Lodge, High Easter; MLL 799 (another ex LT bus, RF262, one of the original series of Green Line coaches) from Hanaghan, Leicester; Tiger Cubs FCH 24 and GRC 136 ex Trent; and AEC Regal IVs JSF 150/3 ex Eastern Scottish, with Alexander coach bodies.

So the solitary Essex connection was LUC 217, which had been the first service bus to be bought by Lodges. Withdrawn by LT at the end of 1962, it passed to dealer PVS (Ilford) and on to Simmonds of Letchworth, who sold it to Lodges in December 1964. It only ran for Lodges for eleven months, before sale to Sureline in April 1966, where it ran for three years.

With many thanks to Paul Savage for unearthing this fascinating snippet of bus history.

Below: WVX 445 in Norwich, ex EN 1212 but now Eastern Counties LM927. **Richard Delahoy collection**



Interestingly, two of the LSs had earlier been hired to Southend Corporation, from 29/7/65 until 30/9/65, and were fitted for one-man operation by Southend.

The pair were EN's 1208/12, WVX 443/5, which Southend numbered as 120/1 by the simple expedient of painting out the last digit of the EN numbers! It's not obvious why Southend needed two extra OMO saloons for those two months, possibly to cover mileage that EN couldn't due to their staff shortages.

Right, Paul Bateson drove and photographed 1208 (Southend 120) at North Shoebury on the 4A on 7 September 1965. Above the side fleetname is a paper sticker "On Hire to Southend Corporation Transport".



Tail-piece

The notes above record that East Midland were disposing of their remaining 15 Saunders-Roe bodied Tiger Cubs, from a batch that had once numbered 25 examples. There's a further Irish connection, as six of these had earlier gone to the County Donegal Railways bus undertaking. The CDR had ceased all rail operations at the end of 1959, replacing their services with buses from 1 January 1960. Initially they used buses hired from the Irish State company CIE, P class Leyland Tigers, but by 1965 decided to buy their own buses, to avoid the high hire charges from CIE. The half-dozen East Midland Tiger Cubs were ORR 321/2/31-3/9 and they were repainted in the CDR's attractive half red/half cream livery.

But even here there was a (very tenuous) Bristol LS connection. For the CDR timetable book featured a line drawing of a single deck bus on its cover - and this was clearly based much more on the initial prototype Bristol LS body NHU 2 after it had its destination display modified, with drooping corners to the windscreen and a clear ECW outline, than to the Saro body! **Right:** LS or Tiger Cub??

And as for further tenuous links in this story, Eastern National actually operated two ex-East Midland Tiger Cubs. This came about in April 1971 when EN needed more OMO-capable buses but couldn't find any surplus Bristol LSs amongst NBC companies - Thames Valley, experiencing a severe vehicle shortage, had cornered the market. Ironically, some years earlier, EN had disposed of many then surplus LSs. So East Midland's R368/9, YAL 368/9, with Metro-Cammell bodies, were acquired, despite being totally non-standard in the EN fleet. They were numbered 1000/1 (in the series previously reserved in the 1964 scheme for Bristol SCs but never actually used), painted in EN livery and allocated to Southend, where they were normally to be found on routes 10/12 through Rochford and Canewdon to Wallasea Island and Paglesham. Subsequently both were delicensed from September / October 1971, before later running from Maldon (1000) and Clacton (1001). 1000 was subsequently transferred briefly to Clacton but both were delicensed and then withdrawn from there in November 1972.

The 1000 number series was later resurrected for five Ford R1014s with Duple bus bodies (1000-4, MAR 775-9P) and ten Bedford YMQS/Wadham Stringer midi-buses (1050-9, TJN 973-82W), after an earlier idea that 10xx would be a Leyland series, with Leyland Nationals numbered from 1002 onwards (of course, they became the 17xx, 18xx and 19xx series instead).

The picture **below** shows 1001 in Clacton Bus Station, photographer not known.



Rear Cover Pictures

In *My Life On The Buses* (pages 16-20) David Edwards mentions the two types of buses with manual gearboxes (ie with a clutch pedal) that he drove for Eastern National, for which he needed to take a supplementary test as his standard licence only covered automatic and semi-automatic vehicles. So to conclude this issue of EBM Extra, we have pictures of both types, albeit taken before he became a driver.

Rear Cover Top: EN took a quartet of Bristol LH6Ls with ECW bodies in 1977, 1100-3 (UVX 4-7S), but they only lasted five years with the company, being sold to Heddingham Omnibuses (as their L111-4) in summer 1982. Subsequently UVX 7S passed into preservation and has been outshopped in traditional Tilling green and cream, a livery it never carried with EN, having always been in NBC leaf green, as a “what might have been”. On 18 April 1979, sister 1100 was leaving Colchester bus station on the 87 to Dedham. VR 3003 (CPU 982G) on the 74 to Clacton is in the shadows of the multi-storey car park (later demolished).

Rear Cover Bottom: a total of eighteen Bedford YMTs were acquired in 1978/9 and again only had a five year life with EN. They had been ordered by National Travel (South East) but were diverted to EN as part of the reorganisation of NT(SE) that saw the Essex based coach operations returned to EN in late 1978, along with twenty Bristol RELH coaches.

The Duple bodies of 1200-17 were to dual-purpose configuration, with 53 coach seats but with bus grant compliant power doors and fitted with cab doors and ticket machine stands. Typically they were used on weekdays on bus services and on summer express services at weekends, and on private hires. Here Brentwood allocated 1209 (BNO 695T) is on the forecourt of Halstead depot on 20 April 1980, on the occasion of a Group tour of EN depots. Halstead was one of EN's smaller depots, with an allocation of just nine vehicles at that time (YMT 1206, RELL 1544, Leyland Nationals 1759/82, 1924, FLFs 2817/52 & VRs 3058/9) for a pvr of eight. Opened in 1938, it closed in March 1984, being demolished shortly afterwards; today a Sainsburys supermarket stands on the site. Both pictures **Richard Delahoy**

This page: and here is Halstead depot in earlier years. This undated and uncredited shot appeared on Facebook and nicely shows the depot offices. The building followed the designs set out by H J Starkey, the Tilling Group Chief Architect and Surveyor, and examples of this style of architecture could be found all over England and Wales. A Bristol L type stands on the forecourt, poster displays advertise the company's services and a flag is flying from the flagpole. Two doors down is the familiar façade of F W Woolworth & Co Ltd (but no flag has been hoisted on their flagpole!). There was a short feature on Halstead depot in the March 2014 EBN (issue 599).





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