

Grey-Green driving memories, 1971 - Brian Barrett

I was introduced to Tom McLachlan by John Wilson at a Traffic Court hearing in 1964 and bumped into him again in 1971 at a trade event in London. We had quite a long chat and when he found out I spent most weekends at East Bergholt mentioned he was short of drivers for their new Ipswich to Glasgow service, which was already requiring extensive duplication, and would I be interested in a bit of weekend driving work.

So it was that on Friday 6 August 1971, I left Barnsley at about 4.00pm, parked my Yorkshire Traction Ford Escort in the Eastern Counties Garage at Ipswich and walked down to Grey Green's Ipswich Coach Station for 7.15pm. I then travelled passenger to Stowmarket where my coach and co-driver, Jim McPhillips were waiting. This was EMD 604J, a Bristol LHL6L with Plaxton C51F bodywork, new in June 1971. My share of the driving was from the Motorstop Cafe Grantham to Washington Birtley Services and from Edinburgh to Glasgow Buchanan Street. After fuelling and cleaning the coach we went off to the lodge at 268, Renfrew Street (also used by Yorkshire Traction) for bed and breakfast courtesy of Mrs McLay. After a welcome cup of tea we returned to collect our coach at 4.30 where I handled the chart and Jim handled the luggage, a skilled job as the coach was fully booked. Three coaches journeyed up but four were required for the return journey, one being hired in from Evan Evans. This trip I drove from Edinburgh to Washington-Birtley and from Grantham to Bury St Edmunds. For our trouble we received £1.30 in tips and 25p for carrying a dog. Freddie Clark, the regular service driver returned me to Ipswich and I had a few hours sleep before driving back to Barnsley. The LHL, a fairly rare coach and one of two delivered to Grey Green in 1971 was a very nimble performer provided you made full use of the gearbox and kept the revs up, well able to hold its own against Grey Green's Leopards which were booked for the route..

The following Friday, awaiting Jim and myself was WLO 574G, a Leyland Leopard PSU3/4R with Plaxton C51F body new in January 1969. Tips came to £4.85 and apart from torrential rain which flooded the A1 at Catterick, it was a pleasant return trip.

The next Friday we were surprised to be directed towards ROC11G a Bedford VAM 70 with Duple C45F of Kyles of Kelso new to Stockland Garage of Birmingham in April 1969 This was supplied as a replacement for a Grey Green VAM which had broken down at Berwick with a private party. The journey to Glasgow was uneventful and we found that the return trip was to be accomplished in WLT 584G, a Bedford VAM 70 with Plaxton C45F body new to Grey Green and also delivered in April 1969, which was the coach that had broken down at Berwick. However on arrival at Edinburgh we found that we were 8 seats overcharted, mainly due to the provision of a 45 seater as against a 51 seater, and I had to contact Eastern Scottish, Grey Green's joint operator to arrange an additional coach without a driver.. This duly materialised in the form of XB 103A AFS 103B an AEC Reliance with Alexander DP38F body but delivered as a coach in April 1964. Jim and myself drove the whole way back alternating between the Bedford and the AEC which, although governed to 50mph seemed capable of maintaining that speed uphill as well as on the level.

For each round trip pay was £14.25 (£3.75 per day basic plus £1 for driving on a service run), plus £1.50 night out money and 20p for coach cleaning. I only drove this for three weeks as by that time Tom had sorted out his rota and I didn't want to push my luck with Yorkshire Traction. This was a shame as I enjoyed Jim's company and his anecdotal tales of Grey Green Tom McClachan was highly regarded and very considerate of his drivers but the Ewer family were disliked for being arrogant and breakers of promises. For instance, the Glasgow service was agreed conditional on new Leopards being the vehicles used; neither Jim nor myself minded what we drove but some of the regular drivers refused to go without a Leopard, hence Tom's driver shortage.

Nevertheless Happy Days,

[from an e-mail by Brian Barrett, May 2021]