

TRANSPORTS OF DELIGHT

Memoirs of a Bus Anorak: 1940 to 2009, by the Revd. Terry Challis

Chapter 15: 'Enfield and District'

At the end of the last chapter I had just been to Suffolk to look at a group of country parishes with a view to becoming the new incumbent. As I mentioned I did not think that this was the right move for me or the family. However a few days before we went to Suffolk, the Vicar of Enfield telephoned to ask whether I would be interested in looking at a parish of which he was the Patron, in the Enfield Area. I promised that I would do so if the Suffolk enquiries were not positive.

Our transport arrangements to and from Suffolk were, as ever, complicated but practical. A friend of ours, Jean, took us all to Suffolk so that all four of us could see the area. Having toured the area and seen the Archdeacon, Jean took June and the children back to Birmingham and I stayed on in Suffolk to meet the nine Churchwardens involved. I then stayed overnight at my brother's home in Debenham.

These arrangements worked very well and the next morning my nephew took me to Stowmarket to catch a train to Liverpool Street. Not having positive feelings about the Suffolk parishes, I took advantage of being at Liverpool Street to have a quick look around the parish at Enfield, St. James' Enfield Highway. Research had revealed that there were two stations convenient for the Parish. Southbury is one and is on the loop that runs from Seven Sisters to Waltham Cross via Turkey Street. The other station is Brimsdown on the Lea Valley Line, the main line from Liverpool Street to Cambridge. There are, of course direct services to both these stations from Liverpool Street and I chose to go to Brimsdown.

St. James' Church is about twenty minutes' walk from Brimsdown Station, straight up Green Street. I had only walked a few yards when my transport antennae were alerted by the sight of a rather scruffy Routemaster of Enfield Garage (E) setting out on a journey on the 135, a rather circuitous route to Carterhatch via Enfield Town. Transport-wise, at least, this parish already had a lot to offer! As a result of this exploratory visit to Enfield Highway, I met the Churchwardens and in September 1980 I was inducted as the new Vicar of the Parish.

St. James' Vicarage is on the Hertford Road (A1010), a very busy main road that runs parallel to the main Cambridge Road (A10) which forms the western parish boundary. At that time four bus routes ran along the Hertford Road. These were the 107 (Brimsdown to Edgware), 121 (Enfield Lock to Turnpike Lane), 135 (already detailed) and 279 (Hammond Street or Waltham Cross to Manor House or Smithfield). The 135 and 279 were worked by Routemasters while the 107 and 121 were operated by Daimler Fleetline DMSs of the B20 type. The 107 and the 135 were worked by Enfield Garage. The 121 was worked entirely by Enfield every day except Saturdays when Palmers Green Garage (AD) put out some buses on it. This meant that occasionally the Volvo B10M based Cumulo bus put in an appearance on the Hertford Road. The 279 was operated by Enfield and Edmonton (EM). All but the 279 went via Enfield Town. In some ways I was living in a bus anorak's paradise: I never thought that I would ever live in a house which was on a busy route worked by Routemasters.

The Parish of St. James' Enfield Highway is a very large and busy parish so there was little time to engage in purely transport pastimes but Church business and family life meant that there were plenty of opportunities to travel and I always kept my 'transport eyes' open.

I sometimes had to visit London Diocesan Church House in Causton Street near Pimlico on the Victoria Line. At that time, June's mother was living at Blackpool so sometimes June and the children would travel north from Euston, which is also on the Victoria Line. There were various ways of reaching the Victoria Line from Enfield Highway. One was to go by British Rail from Brimsdown to Tottenham Hale or from Southbury to Seven Sisters, but the trains on both of these lines only ran very half hour and both stations involved a walk of about twenty minutes.

Another way was to travel on the 279 to Seven Sisters; nearly all of 279s went to Seven Sisters so that there was usually only a wait of a few minutes for a bus. Most southbound 279s only went as far as Manor House, with one bus about every fifteen minutes going to Smithfield where it turned at the old trolleybus turning circle, the 279 being the replacement for the 679 trolleybus. If I had business in the City of London, I would wait patiently for a Smithfield bus. I always enjoyed the long ride into the City. The advantage of the 279 over the train was that, although it was slower, I did not have a twenty minute walk to the station as the bus ran past the Vicarage. The other way to the Victoria Line was by car to Tottenham Hale which was favourite if I or the family were coming home in the evening, however this depended on getting a parking space at Tottenham Hale.

I mentioned that the first Routemaster that I saw (on the 135) was a rather scruffy Enfield bus. I was to discover that most Enfield Routemasters were rather scruffy, whereas the Edmonton ones were usually very smart. I learnt from an organist at Enfield Crematorium, who had a relation who worked at Edmonton Garage, that the personnel there were quite critical of the way that Enfield turned out their Routemasters. The Enfield DMSs were always perfectly presentable. It may be that as Enfield had only a few Routemasters they were not seen as not being very important in the whole scheme of things, although the 279 was by far the busiest route that Enfield garage worked.

Looking back I realise that, in transport terms at least, the years that I was the Vicar of St. James' Enfield Highway (1980 to 1989) were very eventful ones. I will try to record the main events as accurately I can, bearing in mind that over twenty years has elapsed between now and then.

First of all we must look at what happened to the 279 route. For some of its history this service was extended beyond Waltham Cross to Hammond Street in Hertfordshire. I well remember returning in the car from a Saturday afternoon drive with the family and seeing over the hedgerows the red tops of a couple of Routemasters, we discovered that they were waiting at the Hammond Street terminus which was a world away from the southern terminus at Smithfield!

For a while Edmonton Garage had some ex-Green Line RCLs which London Transport had bought back from London Country. They were painted red (of course) and the twin headlights were replaced with the normal single type. The enclosed platform was retained but the electrically powered doors were removed. However they retained the Green Line seats: this made them the most comfortable service buses around! They were allocated to Edmonton and Stamford Hill Garages for the 149, Liverpool Street to Ponders End (Enfield) Garage. This was the replacement for the 649 trolleybus route. However from time to time the RCLs strayed onto the 279 and on one occasion I was fortunate enough to ride on one. I believe that they were the only long Routemasters to run on the Hertford Road services. Edmonton Garage was closed in February 1986. It was situated at the

end of Tramway Avenue, and, as the name of the road suggests, it had begun life as a Tram Depot and had later become a trolleybus garage.

One big change on the 279 came in 1987 when the route was converted to one-person operation and the Routemasters were replaced by Metrobuses. A week or so before the change-over one Saturday afternoon my son, Jonathan and I made the pilgrimage to Smithfield on a Routemaster and watched the bus turn at the old trolleybus turning circle. We then made our way home to Enfield Highway on the same Routemaster. I sometimes say, in a light-hearted way, that the removal of the Routemasters from outside the Vicarage was God's way of telling me that it was time to leave this parish! Perhaps surprisingly, the changeover to one-person-operation seemed to go quite smoothly. It is quite amazing to consider how long and busy some of these old trolleybus and other London suburban routes are. They are mile after mile of busy town service conditions and although many of them have been changed there are still some fairly long ones such as the 149 (London Bridge to Edmonton), and the 279 still runs from Manor House to Waltham Cross. There are no country sections to give the drivers a bit of a relief and chance to make up time. Before leaving the 279 route, for the sake of completeness mention must be of the 279A, a Sunday only variation which ran to Liverpool Street Station for Petticoat Lane Market; this service was abandoned in 1992.

Around this time the then government's policy of putting London bus routes out to tender was being introduced. This produced a certain amount of 'déjà vu' as far as I was concerned, as I found myself back in Eastern National territory - ENOC had won had won a couple of local tenders. These were for part of the revised 107 service and a new service, the 359. The 107 was divided into two and the Enfield end re-numbered 307 to run from Brimsdown Station to Barnet 'Arkley Hotel'. It was worked by ENOC from September 1986 using Bristol VRTs, initially from a somewhat distant Brentwood depot. A newly established ENOC garage at Ponders End opened in January 1987, initially just for the 359, the 107 transferring in once building work had been completed. This provided additional interest for Jonathan and me as it was now possible to travel to Enfield Town in something other than a Metrobus or Daimler DMS Fleetline. In fact the VRTs soon became our firm favourites.

The other route that Eastern National gained was the 359, a replacement for the Hammond Street section of the 279 that ran from Manor House to Hammond Street. However the beginning of the operation of this route was not straightforward as London Country North East ran it for the first three months (from October 1986) using an assortment of Leyland Atlanteans, as ENOC were not ready to do so. Some had been new to London Country and had Park Royal bodies while others had Alexander bodies with 'panoramic' windows, ex-Glasgow (Strathclyde PTE). When ENOC began running the 359 in January 1987, they used Bristol VRTs, including some bought from Milton Keynes Citybus (ex United Counties).

Eastern National also gained one of the very first tendered routes in 1985, the W9, which ran on the other side of Enfield. With this contract, ENOC found work for their rare Bedford YMQS midi-buses with Wadham Stringer bodies. They had also won the contract for the 193 at Hornchurch but that was of course outside my local area.

There were other interesting transport operations and developments on the edge of the parish and, indeed, a little further afield. The London Country service from Enfield to Hertford, the 310, travelled along the along the Cambridge Road (A10), operated by Roe-bodied Leyland Olympians from Hertford Garage. The London Country connection with Enfield is of historical interest because in the days of the

London Trolleybus services, Enfield was the only place where trolleybuses met up with Country area vehicles apart from Green Line coaches. *[My good friend Ted Relton has since pointed out that there were several places where this happened. Working clockwise from Enfield, Ted recalls the following: Waltham Cross, Dartford, Croydon, Kingston and Uxbridge].*

However towards the end of our time in Enfield, London Northern re-introduced a service to Hertford via the Hertford Road numbered 311 and operated by Potters Bar Garage with Metrobuses. Along with the 311, London Northern also introduced the 311A along the Hertford Road to Harlow. June and I liked Harlow as a shopping centre so one Saturday afternoon the Challis Family had an expedition to Harlow on the 311A. Unfortunately our afternoon out was not a complete success as the bus (a Metrobus) which we intended to get back to Enfield on was declared a failure at Harlow Bus Station and we had to wait an hour for the next bus!

The Cambridge Road was also served by two LT routes. These were the 217 from Turnpike Lane to Waltham Cross and the 217B, Enfield to Upshire. The 217B is interesting because in the first round of route tendering (1986), this route was won by Sampson Coaches and worked by blue and grey ex-London Transport DMS double-deckers. It has always amazed me that other operators were able to make good use of the DMS class of buses long after LT sold them while they were still relatively new buses.

Having said that about the DMS class of London buses, their successors were without doubt a great success. I refer, of course to the Metrobuses and Titans. In the Enfield area, Metrobuses became the standard vehicle at all the local garages. The nearest Titans were on the 34 (Leytonstone to Barnet Church) worked by Walthamstow and Palmers Green Garages. The 34 passed through Edmonton on the North Circular Road on its East to West (and return!) journeys across North London. I well remember a Saturday afternoon journey on the 34 on a Titan with a full capacity load of about ninety passengers. The Titan and its driver coped remarkably well with the situation. As a purely casual observer I cannot remember seeing a failed Titan. The only Metrobus that I observed as a failure was the one already mentioned at Harlow.

On the Southern edge of the Parish, along Southbury Road, ran the 313 from Potters Bar to Chingford. In the first round of tendering this route was won by London Country North East but following a strike in 1988, the route was reassigned by LT to Grey-Green, who used single-deckers. Grey-Green also won the 125 (Finchley Central to Winchmore Hill, extended to Enfield on Sundays), on which they used ex-Greater Manchester Northern Counties bodied Leyland Atlanteans, later replaced by East Lancs bodied Scania's. Grey Green came in for some humorous and satirical comment on the Radio 4 programme 'The News Quiz' and elsewhere in the national media because many of their buses were painted orange and white although they were labelled 'Grey-Green'! That is they were in 'Orange Luxury' livery. In due course, a grey and green livery was adopted!

On the private hire front, the coach firm that St. James' Church traditionally used was Golden Boy Coaches of Roydon (now Hoddesdon), who had (and still have) a good reputation for service. The one occasion that I personally hired a coach was for the ordination of one of the curates at Christ Church North Finchley, not a great distance from Enfield Highway.

The coach supplied for the journey was an 'X' (suffix) registered late Plaxton Supreme bodied (with the flat back) Leyland Tiger. The driver explained that it was one of only six Tigers fitted with pneumocyclic gear-boxes as opposed to the more common hydracyclic version. What was interesting to me was that the driver

drove the coach in a similar way to a coach fitted with a manual gear-box: he took time when changing gear and let the revs die down between changes. Interestingly, Golden Boy provided the same coach for the members of the congregation who made the long journey from Enfield for my induction as the Vicar of Astley Bridge in Bolton in 1989.

The other coach firm of interest in the area was Davian Coaches of Brimsdown. They ran a fleet of elderly black and white buses and coaches. This firm had a number of school swimming contracts on which they used, among other vehicles, the most interesting bus in the fleet which was an ex-East Kent AEC Regent V with a Park Royal half-cab body.

One final point on the bus front is about the Eastern National 251 service (Wood Green to Southend). In Chapter 3 of these Memoirs I mentioned that my first job at Eastern National was to copy graphs of service 251 Car (vehicle) and Crew workings. My last sighting of a 251 bus was at Tottenham in the late 1980s and it was on its way to Southend; by now Wood Green Garage had closed and the service ran to/from Walthamstow Central. The bus was a VRT driven by an Afro-Caribbean driver complete with dreadlocks and a Rastafarian hat! Times had changed: but much to my surprise the service was still running! *[It had another decade to go, running for the last time on May 6th, 2000].*

In 1988 it became clear that, for family reasons, the time had come to leave Enfield Highway. I was invited to become the Vicar of Astley Bridge in Bolton and we made the move North between Christmas and New Year in 1988. Thus we began life in a completely new parish, a completely new part of the country and a completely new transport scene. I will write about this in the next chapter.

Edited by Richard Delahoy who adds that the Cumulo bus was based on a Volvo Citybus chassis fitted with an experimental Flygmotor Cumlo, an hydraulic pump/energy accumulator fitted between the gearbox and the differential that was used to brake the vehicle and store the energy generated, which was then released to accelerate away. It was leased to LT as C1 (C101CUL) and ran from Palmers Green from July 1986 to September 1987 before being returned to Volvo. Fitted with a more conventional ZF gearbox, it then passed initially to J McMenemy (A1) of Ardrossan, then on to Black Prince, Leeds where it worked between 1989 and late 2000. Then it passed to Redline Travel in Lancashire and finally settled in Kingston upon Hull, in the fleet of Lords, registered as C179RBV and still current at the time of writing. [Thanks to Ian Smith's www.countrybus.org and the "JSP" Flickr site for much of this info].

And a follow-on comment from Bob Beaumont, who worked for Eastern National at that time:

"It was I who at that time set up the Enfield Outstation for the W9 as my last but one big task at EN. I spent a day looking round for a place, Pickfords were not interested and nothing came up on the industrial sites. I then noticed that the London Borough of Enfield were running Bedford school buses, so I went to their huge depot in Carterhatch Lane and found that they were willing to help with fuel, cleaning and running repairs, with servicing to be done at BD [Brentwood EN depot].

I also had to go to the Nat West Bank and arrange for drivers to have night safe bags and paying-in books. The drivers were given an extra 15 minutes at the end of their duty, to pay direct into the bank night safe.

I think LT wanted rid of the service because of the small vehicle size and the

running time which I think was just over 35 mins with a half-hourly off peak frequency, giving a lot of stand time and hence inefficient duties. If I remember correctly, LT drivers did only one trip and back to garage, whereas EN drivers did two or three and changed over in the town centre. EN used the small auto Bedfords which were not well liked in Essex".

Richard Delahoy adds: The contemporary Eastern National Enthusiasts Group news-sheets recorded that the new depot (more properly an outstation) started work on July 13, 1985 with an allocation of 5 Bedfords 1051-4/7, for a pvr of 4, all carrying "ED" depot plates. Subsequently the operations were moved into the new Ponders End depot, does anyone have the date for the last day of operation from Enfield?

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