

TRANSPORTS OF DELIGHT

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

Chapter 4 : The Eastern National Years : 1956 To 1959

In the last term of my fifth year at Westcliff High School, I had the usual interview with the careers' master, Mr Harden, who also happened to be my Latin master. Interestingly, I cannot remember ever being told that if you stayed on to the sixth form there was the possibility of going to university. Anyway, I was determined to leave school and, if possible, work in the transport industry, preferably with Eastern National. As a result, Mr Harden arranged for me to have an interview with Mr. Frank Bryan, the Traffic Manager of Eastern National. This interview duly took place at the Southend Offices of Eastern National. Mr Bryan was, of course, based at the New Writtle Street Head Office of Eastern National, in Chelmsford.

I cannot remember exactly what I said at this interview but I must have said something about an interest in schedules and timetables. (Incidentally in my high school years I had 'run' an imaginary bus called 'South Essex' complete with timetables for local and long-distance services. I had worked out the vehicle workings and so on, and also had a fleet list! I did not tell Mr Bryan about this!). Anyway, at the beginning of September 1956 I reported to the Eastern National Head Office at New Writtle Street, Chelmsford.

The journey to Chelmsford involved two buses. The No. 1 from Hadleigh to Rayleigh, worked by Southend Corporation, and then a No.11, worked by Southend Garage, or 11A (the Direct Service), worked by Chelmsford Garage, from Rayleigh to Chelmsford. I travelled on the 7.21am from Hadleigh and caught the 7.55am (11) or the 8am (11A) from Rayleigh. Fortunately on the first day that I started work, I was given a Privilege Ticket which gave me free travel to and from work and half-fare at other times. During holidays we were given free Privilege Tickets for the duration of the holiday. It all seems a bit mean compared with the concessions that bus company employees receive these days!

Bus-wise the journey from Hadleigh to Rayleigh was usually by an AEC Regent III, although on occasions it was an AEC Regent I or a Daimler CVA6 or CVD6. A year or so later, Leyland PD2s from the second batch (287 - 298) appeared on the No. 1 service as they had slightly lower bodies than the first batch and were thus able to work under Hockley Railway Bridge on Service 7 to which the No 1 vehicles changed at Rayleigh. All, of course, had the standard (for Southend Corporation) Massey low-bridge body. (Although a batch of PD2/20s with Weymann Orion bodies - 299-304 - appeared later on this route). The journey from Rayleigh to Chelmsford was, invariably, by Bristol KSW5G. Lodekkas had not yet graduated to these workings. The Chelmsford buses always seemed to be better turned out than the Southend ones: no doubt it had something to do with being nearer Head Office. However the Southend buses always seemed faster than buses at most EN Garages except Hadleigh! The Chief Engineer probably kept a close eye on how well the engines of the Chelmsford vehicles were governed. And the Southend vehicles probably had a harder life than those at most other garages.

On the first day at work I soon discovered that there were a number of other young people employed at EN Head Office who travelled on the Service 11/11A from Battlesbridge and Rettendon and we travelled together on the 11A service.

In the evenings there were buses from Chelmsford to Rayleigh (and onwards to Southend) at 5.35pm (11A), worked by Southend Garage, and 5.40pm (11), worked by Chelmsford Garage. Perhaps I should explain that the normal service, No.11, travelled via East Hanningfield and usually left Chelmsford at forty minutes past each hour whereas the 11A travelled direct via the Main Road from Howe Green to Rettendon "Bell". At that time, the Service 11A was a relatively new innovation and there were only two or three journeys each day. Service 11 was hourly.

I reported for work on my first day at New Writtle Street and was given my payroll number which was T49: 'T' stood for traffic. All office staff had to sign in everyday at a machine. I cannot remember if we had to sign out. My starting pay at the age of sixteen was £3.10 shillings (£3.50p) for a five and a half day week. The Traffic Department was under the immediate control of the Traffic Assistant Mr. Hanley. His own section seemed to deal with policy matters and fares. There was also the licensing section under Mr. Farage and the Publicity Section under Mr. Spindler.

I was introduced to the Schedules Section in the Traffic Office. My interest in Schedules must have been apparent to Mr. Bryan the Traffic Manager. The head of the Schedules Section was Charlie English and there were six other members of the section each of whom had responsibilities for one garage or a group of garages: Ron Holmes for Chelmsford, Chris Gibbs for Clacton, Dovercourt and Walton, Stan Chamberlain for Colchester and West Mersea, Geoff Goodwin for Braintree and Halstead, Ray Hodges for the 251 and John Hales for Brentwood Locals. I cannot remember who was responsible for Maldon and Bishops Stortford. Sometime later we were joined by Ken Branch who lived in Basildon and after a while took charge of the, at that time, rapidly expanding Basildon Garage.

My first job was to assist Ray Hodges and copy Service 251 car (vehicle) and crew "horizontal" graphs. I soon got the hang of how to read them and found them very interesting. The journeys that each car and crew worked could be clearly seen and it was also possible to see where there were gaps into which extra journeys could be fitted. I later worked with vertical, or "up and down", graphs as a timing clerk at British Railways.

Service 251 was treated as an entity in itself. The "cars" used to work it were divided between the three garages involved: that is Southend Tylers Avenue, Brentwood and Wood Green. This meant that some vehicles did not return to their own garage each night and that crews worked vehicles from other garages. I cannot remember how many vehicles were allocated to this long (47 miles) and intense (every 15 minutes) service but the service vehicles alone must have accounted for 24.

There were also many duplicate vehicles scheduled. And there were some not shown on the main graphs: my eldest brother, who was at Hadleigh Garage by this time, told me of a 251 duplicate that he had worked from Wickford to Rayleigh with a Bedford/Beadle chassis-less single-decker. His main comment was that the cab was very hot on a summer's day! I also remember overhearing some of the hierarchy in the Traffic and Schedules Section discussing workings on which these vehicles could be used as the Chief Engineer had pointed out that they were more economical fuel-wise - they had by now been fitted with Gardner 4LK engines. This may have been during the Suez Crisis when oil supplies we were disrupted.

Back to the 251, I am not sure which vehicles were working this service at the time but I do know that some of the "City" Leyland PD1s had been moved to Hadleigh Garage as I had travelled on a Roberts-bodied one on Service 3. Bristol Lodekkas were introduced in large numbers commencing with the DHK (suffix)

LD5Gs in 1955. After a relatively short time, it became clear that these 5LW engined vehicles were not suitable for this long and demanding route and Bristol engined LD6Bs were introduced as they became available. However the six Leyland bodied PD2/12s which had been ordered by "City" remained on the 251 taking their turn alongside the Lodekkas.

After some months it must have become clear that I had an aptitude for schedules and I was allowed to do the schedules for some small garages for Bank Holiday workings. Besides drawing the graphs and planning the car and crew workings, the schedules clerks also had to write up the crew workings so that the crews could take them on the road and work the relevant journeys. They were a bit like this: if my memory serves me right! :-

Maldon Garage: Tuesdays and Fridays						
Car no.	Time	From	To	Service	Running time mins	Stand time mins
	7.00 am	Sign on				10
MN3	7.10 am	Car to Stand				
	7.15 am	Maldon	Chelmsford	31	43	2
	8.00 am	Chelmsford	Maldon	31	43	2
	8.45 am	Maldon	Chelmsford	31	43	2
	9.30 am	Chelmsford	Maldon	31	43	2
	10.13 am	Park bus for 10.15 am service 31				
	10.15 am	Off duty				
	11.10 am	On duty, take over bus				
MN5	11.15 am	Maldon	Burnham on Crouch	91	48	7
	12.10 pm	Burnham on Crouch	Maldon	91	48	
	12.58 pm	Car to Garage				2
	1.00 pm	Spare duty				35
SD12	1.35 pm	Car to Stand				
	1.40 pm	Maldon	Goldhanger	95	19	1
	2.00 pm	Goldhanger	Maldon via Heybridge Basin	94	24	
	2.24 pm	Park bus				
	2.45 pm	Maldon	Heybridge Basin	94	12	3
	3.00 pm	Heybridge Basin	Maldon	94	12	

	3.12 pm	Park bus for service 96 to Woodham Ferrers			
	3.12 pm	Sign off			10
	3.22 pm	Off duty.			

This is as near as my memory will allow me to replicate a typical duty. These duties were written up on "Banda" spirit duplicator ink-sheets. It was a messy process. The permanent duties were typed for longevity and clarity. There was also a column on each duty which showed the mileage covered by each journey. At the bottom of the duty sheet there was a summary of the hours worked, spread-over and total mileage. When a Maldon crew took over a car from another garage on services 19/19A it was shown as SD Car (Southend), CN Car (Clacton) or CO Car (Colchester). Maldon Garage itself put out one car onto the 19/19A Services and worked Maldon to Southend and Maldon to Colchester. Southend crews usually worked Southend to Colchester and back. Colchester crews worked Colchester to Southend and back and also Colchester to Clacton and return. Thus, Colchester crews were the only ones that worked the whole length of the routes. The Southend crews had a 12 minute turn-round at Colchester having worked from Southend for 2 hours and 23minutes and Colchester had 4(!) minutes at Southend after a journey of the same length. Clacton crews only worked the 19and 19A between Clacton and Colchester. All four garages put out cars on these routes.

The reason that I have given an example from Maldon Garage is because after a year or so I was given responsibility for Maldon and Bishops Stortford Garages under the supervision of Charlie English. Both were interesting in their own way. Both had services that worked into Chelmsford: Maldon on the 31 and the 37 (via Woodham Walter) and Bishops Stortford on the 58. Maldon usually put out a Lodekka and two Bristol KSWs on the 31 and an L5G on the 37 (which only ran on Wednesdays, Fridays & Saturdays). Maldon also worked routes to Braintree (335) and Bradwell-on-Sea and Burnham-on-Crouch.

It was at the time that the Bradwell Nuclear Power Station was being built and on Saturdays the Maldon Bradwell (92) late night service was duplicated by a double-decker: the service car was a Bristol SC one-person operated vehicle. We found out this piece of interesting information purely by chance. The duplicate car was never officially scheduled. This is a good example of the relationship between the schedules section at Chelmsford. Almost all communication was by company post, the relevant District Traffic Superintendent or an occasional telephone call. The District Traffic Superintendents jealously guarded their kingdoms. There were four District Traffic Superintendents at that time: one at Chelmsford, Clacton who covered Dovercourt, Colchester and Halstead as well, Southend with whom we had little to do, and one who had responsibility for the rest of the garages which were mainly in the rural area (such as Maldon and Bishops Stortford).

The impression that I got was that it would not be appropriate for a lowly schedules clerk to be involved too closely with the garage for which he prepared the schedules. I do not think that it would have been considered a good use of manpower and company resources to allow us to spend a day visiting the garages with which we were concerned and, perhaps, riding on some of the routes involved. In other organisations it would probably be regarded as of good educational value and an encouragement to the workers.

The fact is that most of the schedules clerks only saw the garages with which they were concerned in their own time when passing through the town concerned. While I knew Maldon and its environs, I never visited Bishops Stortford. Looking back with the benefit hindsight, and a certain amount of maturity and experience,

I can see that it would have been all too easy for an outsider from Head Office to upset the delicate balance that existed between the management and the trade unions. However, it would have done no harm if we had been given a pass for the day and told to go and ride on some of the routes worked by the garage for which we were responsible incognito. There is also the fact that Eastern National was run on very frugal lines: operationally and engineering-wise. Having said that, I have no doubt that it made a profit and you rarely saw one of its buses a failure on the road!

Bishops Stortford Garage also worked routes some way from home. The main routes were the 58 (to Chelmsford, on which it put out KSWs), the 301 (Bishops Stortford to Saffron Walden) and the 338 (Bishops Stortford to Thaxted). The 338 was a railway replacement service to cover the closure of the Elsenham to Thaxted branch line [it was introduced as the 38 on 15/9/52 and renumbered to 338 in 1955 and then to 302 in 1968; today, Village Link services 5 and 7 cover the route]. There were also forays to the south and east of Bishops Stortford to places like Dunmow (310 duplicates), to Ongar (33A) and to Harlow on the 46 and 47. The 46 also operated to Chelmsford. Most of these services were operated by one person operators using Bristol SC buses.

I do not feel qualified to write about other garages and so I will conclude this chapter in a subsequent issue with some further reflections and anecdotes which I hope are interesting.

(Edited by Richard Delahoy)

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