

TRANSPORTS OF DELIGHT

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

Chapter 6: The Railway Years Plus: 1959 To 1965

In September 1959 I reported for work at the Central Timing and Diagram Department at Liverpool Street Station in London. At a stroke my travel costs to and from work were dramatically reduced, although I was now travelling 70 miles (each way) from Clacton to London each day and not simply to Chelmsford. This department was responsible for all the schedules and timetables for the Great Eastern Line of British Railways. Looking back, it was an interesting and dramatic time of change for the Great Eastern and for the railways in general. Electrification of the 'Jazz' services (to Enfield and Chingford) was proceeding apace and diesel engines had already made their appearance mainly in the form of Brush Type 2s (31s) and English Electric Type 4s (40s). The story was that the Great Eastern was to become the first entirely diesel and electric railway on the system and by and large it did. However some steam locos (B1s) survived for a while after they had officially been banished elsewhere.

Anyway, I began work in a supernumerary position and was given odd jobs of a schedules type to do. The only graphs used were of the 'up and down' type for timetable purposes. The engine, loco-men and guard workings were in written form which seemed strange to me as I had been used to graphs which gave an over-view of a whole depot. However I soon discovered that many diagram clerks could remember, with amazing accuracy, men and loco workings for various depots which, looking back, was incredible.

The department was divided into two main sections: permanent timetables and diagrams, and special traffic timing and diagrams. Eventually I was put into the Special Traffic section and was fortunate to diagram steam engines before they disappeared and also to produce Bank Holiday timetables for the steam-hauled (N7) 'Jazz' services, and became responsible for the timing of some engineering trains, light-engines and breakdown trains.

The environment at British Railways was very different to that at Eastern National. In many ways it was far more relaxed and less paternalistic. Presumably this was because we were working in a relatively small part of a larger organisation. However, we worked just as hard and seemed to have wider responsibilities. For instance, we used the telephone a lot and did not have to go through a senior member of staff to contact a depot or another line such as the Midland Region at Crewe or Derby. It was an interesting and enjoyable period in my life.

But what about my bus interests at this time? In 1960, I began courting my first wife, Margaret, and she began to train as a radiographer at Kings College Hospital, near Camberwell Green. This resulted in many journeys to various and largely unknown parts of London. The main bus services used were the 35 and 40. The 35 passed Liverpool Street on its way to Clapham via Camberwell Green and although the 40 went via Aldgate, it was sometimes useful to us as it also went onto Herne Hill.

These routes were worked by RTs and RTLs from Camberwell (Q), Leyton (T) and Poplar (PR) garages. At this time my interest in London Transport was becoming wider and perhaps more mature as I was very interested in which garages worked

which routes. It was particularly interesting that some routes were worked by more than one garage. This is something that does not seem to happen these days. The other routes which I used regularly were the 9 and 11 which started at Liverpool Street outside the old Broad Street Station. These were worked by RTWs from Dalston Garage (D) and these buses soon became my all time favourite London Transport vehicles. However, I gather that they were not all that popular with the drivers. Apparently the steering was very heavy: a complaint often made about Leylands by drivers who had experience of Bristols and AECs.

That is enough of London for the time-being: let us return to Essex and more specifically Clacton-on-Sea. My family's connections with the area went back to our first family holiday after the Second World War. That was in 1946. Although only fifty miles from Hadleigh, Clacton was a different world. For instance, unlike Southend the sea did not disappear when the tide went out! For our first two holidays, we rented a chalet at Jaywick Sands which at that time resembled a Wild West Town! A family friend, when visiting us there, said that he half expected to see the Sheriff striding along the main street!

We were a big family and in those days there was no family car. There were nine of us altogether although I am not sure whether we all went on every holiday. I was the youngest member of the family. The transport situation was solved by my father hiring a taxi from Holmes and Smiths of Southend. I remember that one year it was a Daimler Limousine which took six or seven of us. The two eldest brothers were left to endure service 19/19A from Southend to Clacton!

The bus interest in the early post-war years was another revelation for a very young enthusiast. The bus service from Jaywick to Clacton consisted of various routes which went on to Holland-on-Sea and Magdalen Green. These provided a reasonable service between the two points. However, it was usually very busy and was operated by a motley collection of elderly Leyland TD1 Titans and PLSC3 Lions. Some of these buses had been re-bodied and some had 5LW engines but, as a boy, such details were irrelevant. Pre-war Bristol J and L single-deckers and K type double-deckers were modern buses as far as we were concerned. The post-war Bristols, which were few in number, operated the longer distance services. However, in view of the fact that these holidays were made only a year or two after the Second World War it was, perhaps, amazing that we had bus services at all and the buses, although past their best, were well turned out.

An important memory of Jaywick is that it is the first place that I experienced and enjoyed an ice-cream. In 1946 the Morocco Ball Room at Jaywick, rather miraculously at the time, had a good supply of Walls 3d. (old pence) bricks.

After a couple of years at Jaywick, my parents discovered Holland-on-Sea on the other side of Clacton. This was more up-market and more refined and our family holidays were taken there. From 1948 we went to Holland and, as we went back there year after year, we could observe the development of the Promenade and the related bus services. As time went by the 112 service terminus moved from Kings Avenue to York Road and eventually to Fernwood Avenue. In time, these services were operated by AEC and Bristol open-top double-deckers from Brighton and Hove, which seemed to be the source of open-toppers for most Tilling Companies at that time. However, later on, one or two of the Southend (ex-Westcliff) GO5Gs appeared in Clacton (JN8570 etc).

I record this family history to give some background to my Clacton connections which lasted until 1972. In the period of 1959 to 1964, I observed the operations of Eastern National from a distance but rarely used their services. But there was plenty of other bus interest in Clacton at the time. For instance, there were no less than four Express Coach Services between Clacton and London. Eastern

National operated Express Service A to London Victoria from Jaywick Sands via Clacton with mainly Bristol LS and MW coaches. However, on summer Saturdays, quite understandably, what ever coaches could run did run!

Grey-Green ran an express service from Clacton to London King's Cross on which some journeys started and terminated at Walton-on-Naze. This service was operated mainly by Leylands of one sort or another such as Harrington bodied Royal Tigers and Tiger Cubs as well as Bedfords. Grey Green had a reputation for speed and the saying was that you could spot a Grey Green Leyland from a distance because of the smoke coming out of the exhaust: this was especially true on the faster sections of the A12 and A133.

Another company operated from Jaywick and Clacton to London but to King's Cross and not Victoria; this was, to give it its traditional title, **Sutton's Crossley Coaches**. This was a Clacton family-run business. I cannot remember it having any Crossleys but it may have done at one time. I do remember it having half-cab AECs, Maudsleys and Leylands. It later purchased AEC Reliances and Leyland Royal Tigers, and, when times got harder, Ford Thames. As far as I can remember all the coaches had Duple bodies. My own favourites were the Royal Tigers with Duple Ambassador bodies. Sutton's coaches were always immaculately turned out.

The other company that operated between Clacton and London was **Empires Best** which was later taken over by **Banfield Coaches** in 1960. I think its terminus in London was in North London. In the Banfield days the usual vehicles on this service were Leyland Tiger Cubs with Duple bodies. However, later in the 1960s, the regular vehicle that Empires Best operated was a Leyland Leopard with Willowbrook dual-purpose body in the traditional Empire's Best blue livery. They used Warwick Castle Coach Station on Old Road in Clacton. This coach station was also used by **Premier Travel** of Cambridge as the terminus of their long coach service from Blackpool via Birmingham. This was a joint service with **Yelloway**, although I cannot ever remember seeing any of their vehicles in Clacton. Premier Travel's contribution to the coach scene were Harrington bodied AEC Reliances and, later, Alexander Y-type bodied Reliances.

My main connection with the bus industry at this time was as a customer. I was involved with a couple of church youth groups and I hired coaches for visits and outing. I usually used Sutton's Coaches. On one occasion for a visit to London, they provided an AEC Reliance. On another occasion, for a visit to Flatford Mill, at my request, a Leyland Royal Tiger was provided.

There was another coach operator in Clacton which, like Sutton's, was also a family firm. This was **Barnes Coaches** whose garage and filling station was opposite the Baptist Church in Pier Avenue. Barnes ran a fleet of Bedford petrol-engined OBs and SBs, all of which had Duple bodies. The Baptist Church mainly used Barnes Coaches for their outings although, I can remember going to Coventry Cathedral in Sutton's Ford on one of their outings.

At that time, the Baptist Church was the cause of a coach crossing the famous Frinton railway crossing gates nightly for one week of the year. This was when the church hired a coach for its members to attend the Frinton Bible Convention. In those days, it was not permitted for a public service vehicle to cross the railway lines and go into Frinton itself unless it was taking its passengers to a function in the town. For instance, it was not allowed for a Sunday School outing or a women's group outing to go to Frinton. Eastern National services stopped on the main road side of the gates: the stop was known as Frinton Gates. This situation lasted until the introduction of the Mercedes mini-buses in the 1980s which were, presumably, thought to be of a suitable size. There was one other interesting

thing about Barnes Coaches: they ran a Sunday service to Tendring Hospital for which they had a stage carriage licence.

In September 1964 I left British Railways to train for the ministry of the Church of England. The first year was spent at a pre-theological college at Durham. This was a completely new part of the country for me but unfortunately, the course was demanding and there was not a lot of time to spend observing the transport scene. However, walks across the city to the Cathedral or University were full of interest with such delights as the vehicles from United Auto, Durham District, Northern General and Sunderland & District to be observed. There were also independent operators around but they did not come to our side of Durham.

Demands on my time did not allow for much travel by bus, but I do remember a visit to Newcastle on a United Lodekka as being of note. But the really interesting journeys were those to a placement at an approved school at Newton Aycliffe just north of Darlington. The Newcastle to Darlington service was operated jointly by United Auto and Northern General. United usually put out Bristol FLFs and the usual Northern contribution was front-entrance Routemasters. As our time at the school was flexible, my colleague and I could never be sure of what bus we would travel on. However, more often than not it was a Routemaster: they were fine vehicles indeed.

While I was at Durham, I took part in an Omnibus Society visit to Hartlepool Corporation. This was something of a happy coincidence as I had met the General Manager, John Sheppard, through Derek Giles. I think that John was the Traffic Superintendent at Southend Corporation when Derek was a schedules clerk there. I remember that I met John one morning on the bus on the way to Westcliff High School and had a very interesting journey to school. Anyway, I cannot remember much about the Omnibus Society visit except that we went to Stockton via the Transporter Bridge on the Hartlepool Corporation bus that we used for the tour.

For me the most memorable result of the visit was the fact that John took pity on an Essex-man far from home and invited me to spend an afternoon in Hartlepool. I gratefully accepted and was treated to a personal tour of the Hartlepool Corporation Transport system and buses. The first one-person operator buses had recently been delivered. They were Strachans bodied dual-door Leyland Leopards. John always pronounced Strachans as 'Strawns'. I remember that at the time he said that he wished that they could have bought ECW bodied vehicles. A year or two later, the restrictions that prevented Bristol chassis and ECW bodies being sold to non-BTC companies were removed and the next batch of vehicles were Leopards with ECW bodies. We also discussed London Transport vehicles for which he had a high regard: he considered them well designed, reliable and with a good working life. I was very grateful to John and his wife for their generous hospitality to me which made my visit a very enjoyable one. It is sad that he died at a relatively young age.

One other transport matter of interest happened during this period. In 1964 I had to go to Birkenhead for an interview regarding a place at St. Aidan's Theological College. It was to be a weekend visit so I took advantage of my employment at British Railways and travelled on a privilege ticket. I opted to go on the sleeping car service to Birkenhead. Because of the electrification of the West Coast main line, the sleeper to Birkenhead was departing from Marylebone. In the event, the full train left London behind an ex-LNER V2 and, having had some sleep, the Birkenhead portion of the train (about four coaches) arrived at the erstwhile Birkenhead Woodside behind a Stanier Class 4 Tank. I had a successful interview and returned home via the Liverpool to Euston service which was and still is the usual way to travel from Birkenhead to London.

In the next chapter I resume my relationship with Eastern National.

(Edited by Richard Delahoy)

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