

TRANSPORTS OF DELIGHT

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

Chapter 7: Relationships With Eastern National Renewed: 1965

My year at the Bernard Gilpin Society at Durham came to an end in June 1965 and the next part of my theological education at St. Aidan's College Birkenhead was due to begin in September. In the meantime it was essential that I should get some seasonal work in order to remain financially solvent. The logical thing was to try to do something that was both seasonal and enjoyable. I therefore applied to the Clacton Garage of Eastern National as a seasonal conductor.

My application was successful and on the first Monday of my vacation I joined the conductors' training course at Clacton Bus Station. The course lasted one week and began with an arithmetic test, which I passed. We then went on to learn how to use the Setright Speed ticket machine and how to fill in the way-bill. We were also taught how to read time-tables and fare-tables. Of course this was not difficult for me having worked as a schedules clerk. I had also had some experience of fare-tables as the whole of the traffic office at Chelmsford had done overtime preparing new fare-tables each time there was a fare-revision (increase!). In those days they had to be submitted to the Traffic Commissioner for approval.

We were told that way-bills should be filled in at every fare-stage which seems amazing today and was very optimistic then. We were also taught how to make out transfer way-bills and transfer tickets. These were used if it was necessary to transfer passengers from one bus to another. This would happen as the result of an accident or when a duplicate journey was cut short when there were not enough passengers to justify two buses. They would also be used when another crew were due to take over a bus en-route: such as on services 19,19A and 53. Fortunately, I never had to issue a transfer way-bill or transfer tickets. I cannot remember issuing them on the Clacton Town services where the changeover was at the bus station. Perhaps I should have done! I imagine such practices became redundant on buses years ago! I seem to remember that a short time was allocated to route learning.

After a week of training, we were sent out on to the road. However, it was not as brutal as it may sound, as the first week was spent with a senior conductor who acted as a tutor. I was placed with Reg Turner whose regular driver was Reg Old. They were a bus crew of great experience and I could not have hoped for a better introduction to the practical work of being a bus conductor. Reg Turner was a dry "old stick" with an understated sense of humour. Reg Old had a certain authority but was also a very pleasant and supportive driver. They were a great team. I was fortunate enough to work some overtime with Reg Old later on in the summer.

Our first journey was a works service to a factory at Beaumont near Great Oakley and our bus was a Bristol K5G of the ONO batch with, of course, an ECW low-bridge body. After dropping off our passengers at Beaumont, we ran "dead" (light) to Great Oakley to work a peak hour journey to Clacton on service 106. This was a busy journey and as it was Monday morning, it involved the issue of some weekly tickets [these were card tickets issued by inserting them into a slot on the front of the ticket machine, then running off the appropriate value ticket, which printed onto the card rather than the ticket roll].

Reg followed me around the bus to make sure that I was issuing the tickets correctly and giving the right change. After all it was his shift and he would have been responsible for any shortage of money when it came to paying in. The rest of the week was spent on the usual round of shifts on regular rota and we worked on routes to Walton and Colchester as well as some more local services.

It was an enjoyable week and, by the end of it, I must have passed the test as Reg let me run the bus more or less by myself. There were other advantages of spending one's first five days with a regular crew. They introduced me to the secrets of Clacton Garage in Castle Road, the Canteen at the bus station and the process of paying-in.

On the Saturday of this week I was out on the road by myself, or rather with my regular driver, Harry Lau, who was a friend whom I had met through the local church. He was an Asian and a very fast driver. We had asked to be put together as a crew. On occasions, when working on Service 111, Harry would stop off at Coppins Green, buy some fish and chips, wedge them next to the engine in the cab to keep them warm and eat them in the rest room at the bus station. After about one month, Harry decided that it was time for him to move on and I was put with another driver. I cannot remember his name but we got on well together and worked as a crew for the next two months. However, on overtime it was not unusual to have to work with a different driver.

At this point I should explain that in those days there were three rotas at Clacton Garage during the summer season. There was a One Man Operator (OMO) rota, the Regular crew rota and the Seasonal rota. The OMO men mainly operated the Point Clear (101A), St. Osyth Beach (101B) and Burrsville Circular services, although in the winter months they worked further afield. The Regular crews covered mainly the longer distance services and the Seasonal crews the town services. However, there was a certain amount of overlapping and seasonal crews were asked to do overtime on all services. Indeed on the evening of my first Saturday on the road, I worked a service to Walton on an FLF.

On the Seasonal Rota nearly every service we worked ended up at Jaywick Sands: indeed, on some duties we were there every hour! This was not as bad as it sounds as there was a cafe at the terminus that was well-tuned to ministering to the needs of thirsty bus-men and women on a five minute (or less) turn-round. The main services that we covered were the 110 (Holland to Jaywick via the Main Road and Clacton Hospital), the 111 (Holland to Wargrave Road), 112 (Holland to Jaywick via the sea front) and the 121 (Highfield Park Caravan Camp to Jaywick). All of these services operated via Clacton Bus Station and took one hour for a round trip. The tightest timings were on the 110 which had only a two minute turn round at each end and was a busy route. This pattern of services provided six buses each hour between Clacton and Jaywick although the 110 did not go via Pier Avenue. The Pier stop was the busiest for picking up passengers for Butlin's Holiday Camp.

Most of the vehicles were early post-war Bristol K5Gs with low-bridge bodies. One that I remember well was 2247 (ON052) which was the regular performer on the 110. She (2247) was a particularly smooth running bus for a K5G and the only rattles were from the front destination equipment which was a common cause of interior noise in those days.

However, my experience of new vehicles in 2009 is not much better! I am convinced that in new buses it is because they do not have bulk-heads to help hold them together. Towards the end of the RM days on the 11 in London, I travelled downstairs on a "short" Routemaster and the body was as "tight as a nut": no rattles at all. Returning to 2247, I was interested to discover that it was one of

the K5Gs loaned to London Transport when new and that it operated from Catford (TL) Garage.

The 112 Sea Front service was operated by open-toppers. These were Leyland PD1s which had been converted from covered top vehicles by Eastern National. One of them was an ex-City example with a Beadle body while the other one was an ex-Hicks vehicle with Leyland body. Both had started their lives as low-bridge buses. The conversion work was a fine testimony to the expertise of the Eastern National engineering department. They were 59 seaters. When the weather was wet or very cold, the open-toppers were replaced by normal closed-top buses if possible.

My eldest brother had, by this time, transferred from Hadleigh Garage to Clacton and was an OMO driver. However at times the OMO drivers worked overtime on double-deckers. He once commented that "the Leylands" were too fast for the sea front. What was needed was something that would just "jog along"! I think that he was right.

As already mentioned, seasonal crews were sometimes asked to work overtime, usually half of a shift, on the regular rota. I cannot remember working any further afield than Walton-on-Naze as a conductor, but most overtime seemed to be on town services and the Point Clear (101A) and St. Osyth Beach (101B) roads. Both of these services were operated by single-deckers, Bristol LSs and MWs.

Two incidents come to mind. First, on the last service to St. Osyth Beach one night, we had over 60 passengers on a 45 seater LS simply because we could not leave them behind! The regulation number of standing passengers at that time was eight. I believe it was five on London Transport.

Second, one evening, on a late Point Clear service, we were "jumped" on the outskirts of Clacton, on a very dark St. Osyth Main Road, by two "flying squad" inspectors from outside of the area. There was, presumably, a third one in a car somewhere as there were not many other buses around at that time of night. Whether it was a targeted inspection on me or not, I do not know! Any way they found nothing wrong and went on their way. Perhaps the object of their inspection was the crew who should have been working the shift, bearing in mind that we were on overtime.

We were warned about a number of practices for which there was no excuse. One was the issuing of "two-star tickets", that is tickets with no value on them but just two stars. If these were found on a bus that you had been working on, you would be looked at very closely. Another was a warning about running early. The explanation was simple. There are a hundred reasons for late running, but none for running early!

Turning to the fleet in the Clacton area at that time, I have already mentioned the vehicles on the town services. The OMO vehicles were Bristol LSs and MWs. If my memory serves me right, Bristol FLFs had been introduced and were used mainly on the Walton services along with Bristol LD Lodekkas. The Walton road always had the best buses.

Although there were some Lodekkas at Clacton, all the regular vehicles on the Town Services, apart from the open-toppers, were of the low bridge type. The upstairs was not easy for passengers and the person at the gangway end of the four passenger seat often had to hold on tight! This was not the case for passengers on the back seat which was tucked away from the gangway over the platform. Low bridge vehicles had one advantage for conductors. The view of the platform in the mirror looking back down the gangway at the platform was

excellent, better than on a high-bridge bus. It was therefore possible to "ring off" the bus (give the driver the starting signal) from the front of the bus upstairs. However, I am sure that such practices were not encouraged and in the event of a platform accident, the conductor would have been to blame. Having said that, I am sure that few conductors did not "yield to this temptation" when under pressure.

Another practice that was possible with half-cab vehicles was to "ring off" by giving a couple of sharp taps with a half-a-crown (12.5p) coin or a two shilling (10p) piece on the driver's bulk-head window. This, again, was not a safe practice but a very tempting one. With the advent of the front entrance (FLF) Lodekkas, the driver could see the platform and often started when he could see that it was safe to do so. However, it was often advisable to give a tap on the small window on the drivers cab. Of course, when working on open-toppers the conductor could simply look over the side and see what was going on "down below" and "ring off" by giving the driver a couple of sharp taps on the driver's cab roof with his or her heel! This was another practice that was not recommended.

For some reason, at this time, the Clacton EN Area never had many Bristol KSWs. One of the last (WNO) batch of KSWs was at Walton garage. Six of the WNOs and three of the VNO batch (VNO 858-860), the latter for the 322 service (Braintree to London), had "staggered" seating upstairs. This was a device to try to allocate the correct and fair amount of seating to each passenger on the bench seats upstairs. It did that, but it was very difficult for passengers to get in and out, and it did not help in the collection of fares.

I think that the Massey Brothers solution to this problem was more successful. The later Southend Corporation buses had two x two seats upstairs with generous leg-room between them. This seemed quite successful to me.

These days (2009) low-bridge buses are often spoken of and written about as though travelling on them was something from the "dark ages". The impression is given that they were little more than cattle trucks. The fact of the matter is that for people who lived in places like Essex they were the norm. Until the advent of the Bristol "Lodekka" and later the Dennis Loline, the AEC Bridgemaster and the Leyland (Albion) Lowlander, low bridge buses were the only way of providing an extra twenty (20) seats over those provided by single-deckers and cope with low bridges of which there are many. Low bridge buses served us well: for many of us, high-bridge buses were unusual and appeared top heavy!

Walton garage had four double-deckers allocated to it, including the Lodekka I referred to in Chapter 3. Walton garage worked on the 107 Clacton to Walton route and also had some turns on the 105 from Walton to Colchester. Clacton also worked on the 105 as part of a long round trip: that is Clacton to Walton (107), Walton to Colchester and return (105) and then Walton to Clacton (107). Other garages that worked into Clacton were Dovercourt (104/106) and Colchester (19,19A and 53).

There was also an out-station that worked into Clacton, or rather, for most of its existence, its vehicle worked into Clacton. This was Ipswich. I do not know the dates when this sequence of events happened, but the general history was something like this. Traditionally an Eastern National double-decker was out-stationed at the Eastern Counties Ipswich Garage with an Eastern National crew. For years this crew worked the Ipswich end of service 123 (Clacton to Ipswich). The 123 was a long, 29 mile route, which made its way from Clacton to Ipswich by way of Thorpe-le-Soken, Tendring, Mistley, Manningtree, Brantham and Holbrook. This was in no way a direct route and the running time was one hour and forty-five minutes. What happened was that the Ipswich crew worked towards Clacton and

changed over with a Clacton crew when they met. The second part of the Ipswich crew duty read something like this:-

DD1	6.25pm Car to Stand	
6.30pm	Towards Clacton: change over	123
CN Car	Return to Ipswich	123
8.30pm	Towards Clacton: change over	123
DD1	Return to Ipswich	123
10.15pm	Car to Garage	
10.20pm	Sign Off	
10.30pm	Finish.	

The arrangement was not quite as unorganised as it might seem, as the Ipswich and Clacton crews knew where the change-over point was on each particular journey [looking the timetable of the period, the 6.30pm and 8.30pm journeys from each end passed in Mistley] . They did not just drive until they met one another! I imagine that these change-overs were occasions when it was necessary to write up a transfer way-bill and leave it on the bus for the next conductor. On rest days and holidays, Eastern Counties provided the crew. The bus, which was out-stationed at Ipswich, was an early post-war Bristol K5G. At some time in the early 1960s, it was decided that the Ipswich crew should work through to Clacton on the evening journeys. This meant, of course, that the Clacton crews would work through to Ipswich. My brother told me that the first time that the Ipswich crew worked through to Clacton, all the crews at Clacton Bus Station turned out to cheer them in! Some years later, the 123 became a joint service with Eastern Counties taking on the responsibility for the Ipswich allocation.

After three interesting and enjoyable months, my time as a conductor at Clacton Garage came to an end. It was time for me to move to Birkenhead for the next part of my training for ordination. However, this period in my life proved to be very interesting both from a theological point of view and an "omnibological" point of view. It also turned out to be the saddest period in my life.

The Eastern National Enthusiasts Group had been founded in 1964 - although Terry was unaware of us when working at Clacton - and from the Group news-sheets of the period, we can piece together the allocation at CN (including Dovercourt - DT) for the middle of his stint there, August 1965:

Double deck (38):

Bristol K:	2219, 2233, 2234, 2235, 2237, 2247, 2248, 2256
Bristol KS/KSW:	2301, 2323, 2338, 2339, 2354, 2358, 2360, 2370, 2381, 2384, 2385
Bristol LD Lodekka:	2422, 2423, 2504, 2506, 2509
Bristol FLF Lodekka:	2750, 2754, 2757, 2758, 2800, 2801, 2830, 2833, 2834
Open top Leyland PD1:	2101, 2105, 2110, 2112, 2113

Single deck bus (19):

Bristol LS bus:	1219, 1225, 1242
Bristol MW bus/DP:	1302, 1304, 1305, 1306, 1307, 1308, 1312, 1313, 1317, 1319, 1323, 1324, 1327, 1400, 1424

Coaches (14):

Commer Avenger:	101
Bristol LS:	316, 318, 326
Bristol MW:	337, 340, 341, 345, 346, 367, 378
Bristol RELH coach/DP:	400, 401, 1606

(Edited by Richard Delahoy)

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