

EASTERN NATIONAL

Enthusiasts Guild

IN A PICKLE WITH 1300

The recent discussions on 434 took me back to the 1960s, when I spent two summers as a 'student' conductor at Brentwood depot. What follows is a rambling anecdote, in which, as it happens, 434 (in its post-1964 guise, 1300) makes a guest appearance. That's my excuse and I promise it won't happen again!

Turning arrangements at terminals were always officially specified, and there were periodic reminders on the depot notice board to this effect. At Brentwood Station for example, the correct procedure was to turn right into Crescent Road, right into Milton Road, right into Victoria Road, then left, back onto Warley Hill. The notices usually included a little hand-drawn map, and the one below gives the general idea for those unfamiliar with the area. For buses on layover, there was a one-bus stand in Victoria Road, not far from a small, pickled-onion bottling plant. Back then, layovers were quite generous, with anything up to half an hour being allowed, and those spent at Victoria Road were distinctly pungent.

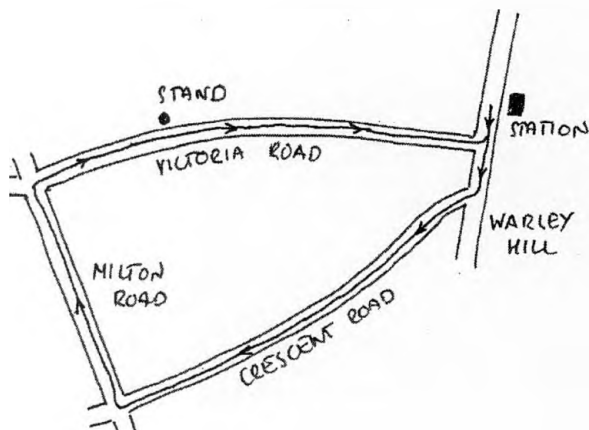
Despite the official instructions, drivers often did a U-turn in Warley Hill, and the 1950s picture postcard opposite shows the road

layout which permitted this. Today, in a Dart, this manoeuvre would be a doddle, thanks to power-steering and other mod-cons, but, in the 1960s, how easy was it in a 'tram' (LS or MW saloon) or 'conker-box' (KSW) with no power steering, manual gearbox and an incredibly heavy clutch? Answer: not easy. Skill and strength were required to achieve a full-lock turn across a moderately busy road on a rising gradient, and against an adverse camber. But, most drivers possessed these attributes, and like many official instructions, the specified turning arrangements were routinely ignored.

There was however, one duty on which the instruction was invariably obeyed, since ignoring it could lead to repercussions. I don't recall the duty number, but let us say it was BL.11 (Brentwood Local 11). The relevant lines on the duty card went something like this (I've omitted stand and running times, car mileage, etc. for clarity's sake):

SD 12	07 34	BSN TO EHN	265
	07 57	EHN TO BSN	265
		PICK UP KEN	
	08 20	BSN TO CGN	260

Translated into English, this told you to take SD 12 (the running number: single-deck car 12) and do the 07.34 265 from Brentwood Station to East Horndon (Halfway House); then do the 07.57 back to the Station; pick up Ken Taylor, the Brentwood Locals schedule compiler; then do the 08.20 260 to Coxtie Green. Ken lived halfway down Milton Road, and thus had the unique privilege of drawing up the duty schedules that enabled him to get to and from work each day.





Station Parade and Kings Road, Brentwood

No. 2102

Brentwood in the 1950s, looking down Warley Hill: Kings Road ahead; "Essex Arms" near right; Station beyond; Crescent Road on extreme left by phone box; Victoria Road just beyond, with Westminster Bank on the corner. 1938 L5G 269 (GPU 419) is in the Station Parade lay-by. 269 lasted until 1959. Apart from the buildings in the middle distance which have been replaced by office blocks, the area is not greatly changed today.

Commercial view

The routine was always the same on BL.11: At the moment you turned into Milton Road, Ken would materialise on his doorstep as if by magic, dressed in an old-fashioned, double-breasted suit. He would board, bid 'good morning' to the crew, and settle in the same seat, halfway down the bus on the nearside, to read his newspaper. It was considered extremely bad form to engage him in chit-chat en route, or to ask to see his staff pass, and no-one ever did. As no stand time was allocated at this time of the day, you proceeded direct to the station to take up the Coptie Green. Ken would then alight at the North Road stop in Ongar Road, from whence he walked the short distance to the depot.

Now, to 1300, which had been transferred to Brentwood from Chelmsford, a year previous. One day, Ron, my regular driver and I had an early-turn duty that finished around mid-afternoon. Again, I forget the

precise number, but we will call it BL.7. What I remember of the last few lines is below.

SD 4	13 44	BLE TO BSN	261
	14 26	BSN TO BD (SHOW O.TB)	261
		HOC TO DUTY BL.30	
	14 30	WALK TO GAR S/OFF	
	14 46	FINISH	

You've probably got the hang of duty card decoding by now, so I will add a few wrinkles: on BL.7, you had SD 4, with which to do the 13.44 261 from Blackmore to the Station, followed by the 14.26 261 to the High Street, but with blinds set to Ongar *Two Brewers*. At the High Street, you had to 'hand over car' (a bus was always a 'car' on ENOC) to the crew on duty BL.30; then walk to the depot (time allowed: 6 minutes), sign-off (10 minutes) and finish.

Any 261 or 266 was a saloon working because of the 'low bridge' in Doddington Road - a gantry which carried telegraph cables to and from a GPO transmitter. On this particular day, car SD 4 happened to be 1300, and as previously mentioned, this bus was unpopular. When drivers were faced with having to drive something they didn't like, it was not unknown for a more desirable vehicle to be taken "by mistake". In single deck terms, this would usually be a 'luxury' - an MW DP; for double-decks, 2510 was the vehicle of almost universal choice. But Ron never broke the rules, so that day we were stuck with 1300, warts and all.

Thus, 14.15 hrs found the three of us at Brentwood Station, and with Ken safely ensconced at his desk three miles away by now, there was no need to adhere to the official turning instructions. However, we had 10 minutes layover, and to avoid blocking the Station stop, Ron made for the pickle-reeked stand in Victoria Road. As he swung 1300 out of Milton Road, he had to stand on the brakes due to an oncoming car, and they locked on for some reason. The bus was now straddling the junction and immovable. Ron tried forward and reverse gears, and stamping on the pedals, but we stayed put, amid protesting noises from the back. Moreover, acrid, asbestos fumes began drifting out from beneath the rear wheel arches.

It was clear that all was not well, so I was despatched to the phone box at the corner of Crescent Road to summon help (note for younger readers: in those days, the mobile phone was just a twinkle in Mr Nokia's eye). There was the usual, slightly wearied reception: "What car have you got? ... hmm ... well, stay where you are (not difficult, given the circumstances), and someone will be down shortly". Back then, the engineering department tended to think that everything would run a darn sight smoother if only crews didn't insist on taking buses out in service and in the process, muck them up.

In the fullness of time, 2754 PU, the Commer service van (the only ex-Moore Bros. vehicle ever to be based at BD) arrived with two fitters. After poking around underneath with

the aid of a torch and a Birmingham screwdriver, they pronounced 1300 to be officially unfit for service, so Ron and I would have to seek advice from the depot. Once more, I ran to the phone box, where instructions to return to base by any suitable means were received. We left the fitters to it, and caught a 252 to the High Street.

Meanwhile, back at North Road, Ken had not been resting on his laurels, not that he ever had time to. He had already phoned Dave, the manager of the ENOC enquiry office in the High Street. Dave sent one of the girls down to the 261 stop to tell the crew on duty BL30 to WALK TO GAR, and pick up the spare car. The 14.26 261 was now very late, so, unbenownst to passengers waiting at the Station, it was rejigged to start from Ingrave Road.

Crisis over, Ken returned to solving his daily puzzle - how to cover 30-odd duties with only 20-odd crews - all quite normal then, due to acute staff shortages. For Ron and I, there was just the paperwork ... he had to complete an 'Occurrence Report' or a 'Lost Mileage Report', or maybe both. I had to fill out an expense form to reclaim my telephone pennies (dipping into the cashbag for incidental expenses was not permitted). Then, there were the overtime dockets, with the promise of some unexpected extra pay to look forward to.

Ron went home to Ilford for his tea. I went to the canteen, to await news of my afternoon's 'gobble' (overtime) from Ken. Last but not least, 1300 eventually limped in, looking slightly the worse for wear. It went straight over the pits to a lukewarm welcome from the duty fitter, and no doubt, he had forms to complete too. ENOC, being an old Tilling company, seemed to have a form for every conceivable purpose. It was a way of life.

As it happens, it was the fitters who had the last laugh (they usually did). Not long after, they managed to get 1300 transferred back to Chelmsford on some pretext, and 1354, an infinitely more rateable motor, arrived from Clacton in its place.

David Harman (N90734)