

Some thoughts on scheduling and memories of Lincolnshire RCC

Posted to the Ceased Bus Operators Google Group in 2016 by George Rayner and reproduced here with his permission.

Some of this content also appeared subsequently in Classic Bus Magazine, as various short stories: *South of the Humber* (issue 162, Lincolnshire RCC); *Getting you home – Hull* (190 – Hull CT); *In praise of the Lodekka* (194 – Lincs RCC); *The road to Hell?* (202 – Lincs RCC).

Discussions on-line [in the Ceased Bus Operators Google group, now defunct] have really emphasised how varied were the methods used by the different bus companies to achieve the same thing - making sure that the right bus was in the right place at the right time (and going in the right direction, which wasn't always straightforward).

This meant substantially differing experiences for the crews. One interesting aspect of terminology is the different (usually informal) names for conductors - e.g. 'connies' on Hull Corporation Transport, but 'clippies' on East Yorkshire, also based in Hull; 'duckies' in Lincolnshire, 'guards' in Glasgow. And I am sure there are many more. Conductors carried their ticket machine and spare tickets in a box in Hull, but in a tin in Lincolnshire. Also interesting is that there was not similar variety in the names given to drivers. Maybe because they were not generally in such close contact with the public.

Hull Corporation

As for scheduling, I worked for three bus companies at various times and each had a very different way of approaching this. At Hull Corporation Transport, I started as a conductor in 1966, before graduating to driver when I was old enough (21 in those days). A number, followed by a letter (e.g. 73G) meant you took over a regular service bus, usually on stand in the coach station (the official name for what everybody called Bus Station). A letter followed by a number (called a 'card') entailed taking a bus out of the garage to do specials for e.g. works or schools, or bingo, or extras at peak times. For instance, M73 would be morning peak, T73 teatime peak and Z73 late on.

I still have the notebook in which I copied my schedules. One day, doing Duty 409, I booked on at 04.50 at Central Garage and took a bus out to do 73H from 05.00 to 09.10, leaving the bus in the coach station. Break (called 'Relief') was until 10.10, when I took over 73L until 13.30. Book off 13.40. This would be a very heavy day, being on the extremely busy 63/73 group of routes to Boothferry Estate for about 9 return journeys (called 'runs' in Hull).

A probably less taxing, certainly more varied, day was Duty 656. I booked on at 15.50 at Central Garage and at 16.00, took out a bus on Card T38. This started by running light to Gypsyville to do an outer circle Service 10 to Marfleet (this would be an extra, as the basic service was OMO (not OPO as Hull Corporation crews were exclusively male - seems impossible to believe these days!). Then run light to Saltend Oil refinery and do a works special 93 into the City Centre. This must have been for office workers, as the main workforce worked the three-shift system. Return the bus to Central Garage at 18.11. Time for a cuppa, before taking over 15J at 18.33, for one run on a 15C/17C circular to Orchard Park Estate. Relief from 19.33 to 20.50, before taking out a bus from Central Garage on Card Z3. Run light to Mayfair Bingo to do a bingo special 17A to Orchard Park. Bingo was a real craze then and 5 or 6 buses were needed! Some crews perfected the art of always being last in the queue of waiting buses, as quite often they wouldn't be needed and could just saunter back to the garage. From Orchard Park, run light to the coach station, to do an extra on service 17A to Orchard Park at 22.42 (pubs closed at 22.30 in those days). Run light to Cottingham Road Garage, where I booked off at 23.37.

Lincolnshire RCC

Lincolnshire Road Car was very different. Based at Scunthorpe in 1970/71, I could be working on busy town services, or steelwork specials, doing short country trips to surrounding villages, often along narrow, winding lanes, with only a conductress for company, who would sit knitting. Or longer trunk routes of around 2 hours to places like Lincoln, Grimsby or Doncaster. The duty sheets told you what route you were on, rather than having a card system.

Some days, this could involve driving 5 or 6 different buses on as many different routes. This could be especially challenging (or enjoyably varied, depending on how you looked at it, as there were unbelievably diverse types of bus in terms of handling and performance, given that they were all the same make - Bristols, e.g. crash box Lodekkas, MWs, LSSs, SCs with backwards gearboxes, semi auto RE and VR, supposedly synchro LHs. Even buses of the same type could be different. I remember one FLF that had a really fast gear change, while the next in numerical order would refuse to change gear unless given a really long time to think about it. You only found out each vehicle's type or individual idiosyncrasies when you first climbed into the cab - which could be really entertaining for the passengers.

A duty example is Duty 45. Clock on at 08.25 (using a time clock rather than reporting to the depot inspector as at Hull). Take over an SC4LK in the bus station to do 7 return trips on Service 222/223 to Collum Avenue at Ashby Market. Leave the bus on the stand at 13.04. Then take a Bristol MW to do a school extra on Service 213 to Dewsbury Avenue. Run light to the Flixborough Works (which blew up a couple of years later) and do an un-numbered works special into Scunthorpe at 15.47. Leave the bus in the depot (actually an open area that was part of the bus station, as we didn't have a garage). At 17.10, take a Lodekka from the parking area (at last the conductress would have to climb some stairs) and do a trip to Crowle, about 10 miles distant. Run light back to Scunthorpe, booking off at 18.30.

London Transport

London Transport was different again. I was based at Mortlake Garage during 1973. This was a small garage by LT standards, only having two main routes, 9 to Liverpool Street (although most of ours turned round at Aldwych, leaving Dalston Garage to do most of the Liverpool Street to Hammersmith journeys. Running routes in overlapping sections was a common practice on LT, used to stop holdups in one place affecting the whole route, mainly. Also 33 from Kensington Royal Albert Hall to Hounslow Bus Station. 33s didn't run on Sundays. Instead, Service 73 was extended from Hammersmith to Hounslow, meaning a journey of about 2 hours from Stoke Newington. We contributed to that. Another difference on Sundays was that in the morning, the Service 9 became 9A and diverted at St Paul's Cathedral to run to Aldgate for Petticoat Lane Market.

All of the buses were Routemasters. We had both the AEC version, mainly on the 33, and the Leyland version, mainly on the 9. There was some difference in the steering, with Leylands being a bit heavier and the automatic gearchange on the Leyland being a little harder to do smoothly. But compared to Lincolnshire, these differences were minimal. Nevertheless, LT didn't expect you to have to cope with driving two different vehicles in one day! Most duties spent the full day on one bus. Or to have to remember more than one route. You spent almost all of your time on either the 9 or the 33.

Thus, Duty 1 booked on at 05.24 and took out M21 (identified by the metal plate that the scheduler had attached to the bus). This started with a return journey on Service 9 to Liverpool Street, followed by one to Aldwych. Break was from 09.55 to 11.01, during which M21 would have been returning from Aldwych, (crewed by staff doing one of the few bits and pieces duties), so it would have been one of the occasions when I had to drive more than one bus on a shift. So I took over M75 at 11.01 for one return journey to Aldwych, returning at 12.42 and booking off at 12.52.

I was normally on the 9, but did a rest day on the 33 on Duty 26. I booked on at 12.57 and started with a short walk across the railway bridge to the Lower Richmond Road where I waited with the conductor at the bus stop until M75 came along (the duty sheet had a or b next to the time to show direction of travel and hence which side of the road to stand on). Then a couple of return journeys backwards and forwards, including short workings that stopped at Richmond or Hammersmith, until 15.20, before a walk back to the garage. A rather speedy break, because due back at the bus stop at 16.07 to do two and a half return trips, leaving the bus in the hands of a new crew at 20.48. Book off at 21.03.

Thoughts on some of the differences

On both Hull Corporation and London Transport, you generally worked the same shift each day during the week, unless covering rest days, with a different one if working Saturday or Sunday. You also had a regular mate. This was good if you got on together, but less so if you didn't. But if so, you could request a change and most people managed to find a kindred spirit, with whom they became a bosom buddy. The Lincolnshire approach to variety also encompassed doing a different duty each

day and having a different mate each week. Drivers went down the duty list; conductors went up.

Which working scenario did I prefer? Well, none really - I thoroughly enjoyed them all. The variety of routes and buses on Lincolnshire was great. Being on one route all the time at LT might seem monotonous, but the routes themselves were so interesting, going through central London, past so many famous places - especially the 9 and the routes were quite long, so you never had to do a huge number of return trips in a duty. My least favourite routes were the short, heavy intensity ones - e.g. the Number 70 in Hull. This was 15 minutes each way along the very busy Hessle Road to Dairycoates. Most duties on the 70 were just on that route all day, so you ended up doing 15 or 16 return trips! I remember one Saturday when I literally had to go and lie down in a darkened room at the end of a day on the 70. But some crews preferred being on a short route that they could get to know really well and volunteered to be on the rota that did most of these.

As for having a regular mate or not - I had a couple who I really became good friends with and getting to know how each other undeniably makes for effective teamwork. On the other hand, having a different mate each week is a great way to get to know many of your colleagues.

After my time as an itinerant bus worker I went to university and moved on to a career that I suppose was 'going up in the world'. But I've always missed working on the buses and look back very fondly on my time doing that.

Thoughts on scheduling

Operators had different ways of dealing with spreadovers too. On Lincolnshire, you didn't get paid for the 3 or 4 hours between the two parts of your shift. I didn't mind too much because I lived only a 10-minute walk from the depot and often went home for a kip. But even better on London Transport, where you were on full pay all the way through. Also on LT, there was a passenger bonus - driver and conductor got a share of the fare of each passenger (almost all paid in cash in those days). The amount for each passenger was miniscule, but it mounted up over the week, given the high number of passengers carried on routes such as the number 9 and both practices made an appreciable contribution to the wage packet. I think the aim of the passenger bonus was to make crews less likely to try to skive, or leave passengers behind. No spreadovers on Hull Corporation while I was there. I seem to remember that they tried to bring them in, which caused a strike.

Prompted by Alan Watkins' memories of Road Car [see separate entries], they match my own memories from when I drove at Scunthorpe depot in 1970/71! My favourite Fare Stage was one that just said 'Tree with moss on side'.

When I first arrived in Scunthorpe, I was amazed at how many very early starts there were. But of course it was to get to an outer part of Scunthorpe, or one of the surrounding villagers, to get the 6 am shift to their jobs. The nice part of that was that we then had about 20 minutes to wait for those finishing at 6 am to board and we used to go into the canteen for hot cakes warm (rolls to southerners), dripping

with melted butter and a huge mug of tea. There was a very close relationship between the bus people and the steelworkers. They let us join their social club, which was a good place for a weekend night out.

I remember the challenge of having to find my way around the routes when I first arrived. Although I came from Hull, only about 20 miles away, this was before the Humber Bridge and this part of Lincolnshire was an exotic, unexplored wilderness for most Hullensians. (It's just occurred to me that I must be one of the few people to have driven the bus on both sides of the Humber Ferry - Service 50 from Bus Station to Pier when on Hull Corporation Transport; 110/111 Scunthorpe to New Holland for Road Car). Anyway, so at first after joining Road Car there was much reliance on the more experienced conductors to avoid getting lost. Or, if the conductor was equally clueless, there were always the passengers.

As Scunthorpe was a bit of a boom town at the time, there were many newcomers on the buses, so the passengers were never phased by having to direct the driver - providing there were any on board - not always guaranteed on some of the more rural routes. Getting directions was of course, more challenging on a Lodekka than a VR or saloon. I can still remember turning round in my seat at junctions and peering into the lower saloon to see the conductor surreptitiously using hand signals to show which way to turn. Of course new drivers did get a couple of days route learning, but that still left many routes unexplored or only shakily remembered, when you first had to steer the bus around them.

There was a once weekly route (130) to Gainsborough (a market special). It took a much more circuitous route than the regular main road 101. Because it was so infrequent you only got to do it once in a blue moon and because it was so circuitous, it was impossible to remember the route from one time to another. Luckily, a lady caught it each week just outside Scunthorpe, who used to go all the way to Gainsborough, then back on the return journey two or three hours later (the spreadover break took place in Gainsborough). She accepted the unofficial job of directing the driver and said she couldn't remember the last time when this had not been necessary. Whenever I was on 'Gainsborough Markets', I prayed that she wouldn't be ill or something, but thankfully, she was always there.

I remember the first time I did the 155 from Scunthorpe to Goole. This was on a SC4LK and for some of the outward journey, there were no passengers on board. The conductor was also new to the route and we found our way by using a road map alongside his fare table. We found our way to Goole alright, but this made us too complacent and on the return journey we dispensed with the road map. Unfortunately, this meant I missed a crucial turning. About 5 miles further down the road, our sole passenger looked up from her book and enquired where the 'ell we were. I had to reverse into a field gateway and retrace our steps and thereafter the young lady kept a close eye on our progress. This put us somewhat behind schedule and resulted in what must be one of the few occasions when this route moved at more than 25 mph! At least the correct route was cemented in my memory after this.

Another time, I did a 150 out to Whitton for the first time. This was really out in the wilds, overlooking the junction of the Trent and the Humber (another SC4LK route).

We used to do short workings to places just outside Scunthorpe, but hardly ever all the way to Whitton, because this was done by an outstation. The outstation crew was on holiday, so Scunthorpe crews stood in. On Saturday, it was my turn. All went well - again using the road map and fare stage strategy. But again on the return journey, with no passengers yet on board, instead of turning off to go through Alkborough village as I should have done, I blundered on along the main road. On a bend, it was possible to see up the village's main street and I was amazed to see about 10 people haring along the street towards us. This was a massive load by this route's standards and I pulled in to wait for them. Thankfully, they were quite cheerful when they got on and said that the normal crew had warned them to watch out for the bus missing the village turning during their holidays. At least after that I always remembered on the rare occasions when I got out as far as Alkborough.

Another memory is of the regular practice that we had when doing one of the morning runs from Scunthorpe to Lincoln on Service 103. On arrival at Lincoln, we then did a short working back out to Ingham village, about 30 minutes out. We then had 20 minutes, before returning to Lincoln. We spent this in a cottage, where an elderly lady would give us tea and biscuits. She would give us a shopping list, some money and a basket, which we would take back to Lincoln. There, during our official break, we'd do the shopping in the Fine Fare supermarket next to the bus station. Then, on the return journey to Scunthorpe, the lady would be waiting at her door for the conductor to drop off her basket and change.

Last year [2015], I was in Lincoln, visiting my daughter, who is at university there. I noticed that the Stagecoach route to Scunthorpe is still 103 and I had a nostalgic trip on it. The bus came flying into the bus station about 10 minutes late, hurriedly whizzed off towards Scunthorpe and sped through Ingham with an urgency that we had never matched in our day. It certainly brought home the truth of saying that it couldn't happen like that anymore! Great times. Great memories!

I was also reminded of the procedure on the long, round the villages routes (104 and 106) from Scunthorpe to Doncaster, that took over two hours (there was a '126 Express' that took the direct road - but if you went at over 25 mph you ran early). On Sundays, you went all the way to Doncaster on the 104/106, but on most weekday trips, the arrangement was to meet the bus coming the other way at the village of Haxey, about halfway there. You also met the bus from Gainsborough (105, I think). The passengers from that got on the 104/106, in whichever direction they wanted to travel onwards. But the passengers stayed on the 104/106 and the crews swapped over.

Nowadays, living in Surrey, where it is not uncommon for there to be no driver to take over a bus on changeover, it raises the question of what we would have done if the bus coming the other way didn't turn up. Couldn't really just carry on to Doncaster, or dump the passengers in the middle of nowhere. No mobile phones or radio then of course. I suppose it would have been find the nearest public phone box and pass the problem onto the powers that be at base. Thankfully, it never happened - at least not when I was on the route.

In pictures

I should also add some pictures to illustrate my memories, taken during my time on Road Car. They illustrate the variety of routes, or at least, termini. See next pages.



The VR (1904; JVL 619H) is at Byrd Road and the FS (2533; CVL 410D) at High Leys Road - both on busy 20 mins there; 20 mins back Scunthorpe town services.

1904 is now preserved and immaculately restored by Richard Belton of the Lincolnshire Vintage Vehicle Society. In 2018, I travelled back to Scunthorpe and he not only let me have a drive in 1904, but took a photo of me in the driving seat at the same spot as the one taken in 1971, as seen in the picture right lower, courtesy of Richard Belton.



The picture of LH 1660; JVL 614G shows one of the Lincolnshire middle-of-nowhere termini. Not the actual 136 terminus at Grimsby, but a short working at Kirmington. Probably not so deserted nowadays, as Humberside Airport has grown up just down the lane. The head that can be seen just behind the driver's seat is the conductress - having a passenger on board at this stage of our journey back to Scunthorpe would have been a completely new experience.

Another regular Lincolnshire memory illustrated here - the bus not having the destination you were going to on its blind. We chose 'Lincolnshire', rather than 'Service', our other option, as it was marginally more informative, as we were not expecting to leave the county (I was confident of not getting lost on this one, unlike some of my exploits described earlier.)

The LHs were my least favourite bus. In spite of being quite new, they had incredibly heavy steering and some of them could suddenly produce an alarming steering wheel vibration without warning. I've never known that on any other type of bus. I would much rather have had an MW, which was actually more usual for this duty.





The rear view is of my favourite bus, LD6G 2345;PBE 124, which was in prime condition while I was there. It is pictured at New Holland, awaiting passengers from the Humber Ferry. 2345 spent most of its time on the 110/111 Scunthorpe-New Holland service while I was at Road Car. I much preferred the original LDs to the FS type - they were more chunky. Sadly, everything in this picture has now ceased - 2345; New Holland Railway Station, the Humber Ferry and of course, Lincolnshire Road Car. All of the pictures were taken in 1971, copyright George Rayner.