

Summer 1975.

By Chris Stewart.

Two of us from Brentwood School (both called Chris) were regular visitors to Brentwood depot in 1974/75 during our sixth form lunch breaks and sometimes during school holidays, noting down the daily vehicle output and gradually getting to know the Duty Inspectors Ray, Teddy and George. There was a strict demarcation line beyond which we didn't dare set foot, that being the depot building itself which was the province of the Mechanical Superintendent, but we became accepted and even encouraged within those constraints. In due course we were introduced to a true gentleman by the name of Ken Taylor, a former City Coach Co and Westcliff man who was responsible for the 'local' schedules (there being an equivalent job for the 'Main Road', the 151/251 Wood Green to Southend/Canvey services). We learnt a lot about 'car workings' from Ken (and I've still got handwritten copies of one or two charts). When we were in our final year at School in 1975 it was at his suggestion that we wrote to the Traffic Manager, enquiring if there was any possibility of employment by Eastern National during the summer. Our approach was dealt with by Bob Beaumont, one of the TM's senior assistants, and we were each offered a temporary job to undertake passenger loadings. We didn't then know of Bob's lifelong interest in buses, nor his membership (number 3) of the then ENEG to which we also belonged, but we'll be forever grateful to him for the chance of a summer being paid to ride round the county, often on some of the less usual services.



picture above: Bishops Stortford depot's 1308 (203 MHK) of 1959 waits at Thaxted on 6 August 1975 before returning to its home town. Today, Stephenson's of Essex provide this link with their hourly route 6 (Saffron Walden-Stansted-Bishop's Stortford) in addition to which Viceroy maintain a Thursdays-only 318.

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I recall being told to report at Wickford Station on my first Monday morning to Inspector Jim Holt, who had been seconded to assist Bob out on the road. Having identified me (largely by an R.E.V.Gomm NBC badge on my blazer!) he ran through a set of instructions, gave me a list of routes and journeys to be surveyed together with an NBC Travel Pass. I already had a set of timetables and at some early stage I was given a set of fare tables for the whole company. He might have accompanied me on my first trip – I can't recall, and have long since lost the list – but after that the other Chris and I were pretty much on our own, going to Head Office in New Writtle Street every Friday to collect our week's wages and the following week's duties (as well as chatting to the Schedules department staff and also occasionally looking round the back to see what vehicles were of interest). Chris and I crossed paths from time to time, but worked completely independently.

This was all long before NBC's Market Analysis Project (MAP) and also of course well before electronic ticketing made accurate data collection possible by downloading from the ticket machine. This was pure Setright era, and in essence the job was to record the origin and destination of each passenger's journey on a particular working. Many of these, sadly, were marginal trips and locations which subsequently succumbed to 'rationalisation' but others managed to justify their continued existence. Some were for other reasons - amongst these was the Jubilee Road diversion in Rayleigh of the 22/22A, which had upset some of the residents who didn't want buses passing down their road.

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By collating actual information for the three stops involved the Company won the right to retain the revised route, albeit that on more than one occasion buses crossed at the wrong moment thereby preventing a quick hop from one side of the road to the other. Bob was always proud of the fact that he won the day on every such case in which he was involved.

Living near Shenfield Station meant Chelmsford was readily accessible by 351 (mostly Nationals and VRs then), while Brentwood was a short distance away by any local route or 151/251 (all FLF) and the 151 also gave direct connection to Basildon. A few days of morning starts from Colchester meant catching the 0723 (or thereabouts) train – usually loco-hauled, which was a bonus! – whilst Maldon, Bishop's Stortford and Braintree were easily reached once in Chelmsford. I did one round trip from Basildon to London (King's Cross) and back on a lightly-used 400 (on a VR) and I think another on 1606 (BNO 107B, former dual purpose RELH) but the majority of journeys under scrutiny were obviously less urban in nature.

I spent a few days in Basildon; most of this was to assess 'out of town' routes to Langdon Hills and elsewhere, although subsequent expansion of the 'New Town' has since brought some of these closer to the built-up area. One exception I can recall was a lunchtime Basildon Industrial Site trip (a fairly new N-reg VR) and there may well have been others as there were still a lot of odd factory workings.

Much of the time, not surprisingly, I was on Bristol MW or RE saloons although on one occasion I managed to get a Bristol LD5G rather than an MW allocated to a Colchester-Rowhedge trip. The other Chris persuaded someone at Colchester depot to put the unique LDL 2510 (236 LNO) on an East Mersea journey, but not without some adverse reaction from the crew! South Woodham Ferrers 'country town' was just in its infancy, and the 36 from Chelmsford had been extended to a new turning circle at the end of Victoria Road (where the buses-only lane now is) – I did one or more trips there (by Lodekka) to see what the usage was. There were still a few LDs and the FSs to be found at Southend, but the Jubilee Road 22/22A counts involved FLFs almost exclusively – except for one evening peak Southend Transport lowbridge PHI-reg PD3 (which I travelled on for more than the intended distance!). I had an FLF (2729) one Saturday morning from Colchester to Langham and a couple more from Bishop's Stortford (to Henham, and the 'short' afternoon Great Dunmow 70 with member Peter Carr conducting).



picture: On 6 August 1975, Braintree's MW5G 1312 (207 MHK) has reversed in next to Lindsell School after arriving from Braintree (single fare 43p) on the former Hicks route 15. The 315 was a sporadic service on certain days of the week only, and today operates on Thursdays only (a Panther Travel ECC contract). Lindsell is also served by Hedingham 16. **Chris Stewart.**

Leyland Nationals were yet to attain their eventual numbers and most were to be found on inter-urban workings, the likes of which didn't need to be under the spotlight at that time. Other journeys I can readily recall were to Thaxted, Lindsell, Moreton, Hatfield Heath, Harlow, Bulphan, Stratford St Mary, Langham, Dedham and the former Moore's route via Nounsley, all on MWs of various descriptions ('trams' to the crews – a term which appears to have been applied originally by those at EN and United Counties to the first LSs, with their dual door layout and central front foglight). RELs took me to Tilbury Ferry (40) and another to East Tilbury Bata Factory (an odd works journey which came off a Brentwood-West Horndon 265, if I recall correctly). I did the Fridays-only 263 from Brentwood to St Vincent's Hamlet once, albeit that the driver could have named the 17 regulars on it and this was probably a 'bonus' from Bob.

On an RE it was relatively easy to perch at the front to record numbers, but not so on the much narrower entrance of an MW; sitting a few rows back hindered the operation somewhat and not being able to talk to the driver seemed less appealing, although there were an odd few drivers who were slightly cold anyway (no doubt because they saw this, rightly of course, as presaging possible 'cuts') and with whom I adopted a lower profile. Others, though, were extremely welcoming (more so if I changed the blinds for them!) and I recall some entertaining meal breaks in the canteens at Brentwood, Basildon, Bishop's Stortford and Chelmsford. In those days they stayed open very late in the main depots, one trip I covered being the 2300 Chelmsford to Brentwood when we were still in the canteen until about twenty past eleven before hammering back in Brentwood's pioneer REL, 1500 (CVW 8546), the driver well aware that there would be nobody on it and that he would be back in Brentwood on time.

The NBC travel pass also came in useful during two weeks' holiday in Devon and on London Country, albeit if I recall correctly it was a very innocuous piece of pink paper, which was nevertheless recognised even on Plymouth City Transport Joint Services. We were going to go into East Kent territory on one day off, but only got as far as Gravesend for reasons which now elude me.

I went on to a polytechnic course in September 1975 and a career in surveying, but was very pleased to meet up with Bob again 25 years later through the Omnibus Society and to rekindle his interest in EBEG. Working for him that summer was a fascinating insight to the workings of EN, which still retained its Tilling character and independence despite the advent of the NBC. Within a few years much of this was destined to change forever.



picture above: Former 'dual purpose' MW5G 1409 (1257 EV) has performed a reversing manoeuvre beyond St Vincent's Hamlet, waiting to return (albeit empty of passengers) to Brentwood on the second Friday-only journey on the 263. For some years Bordabus provided a service after Eastern National withdrew the 263 in 1981, after which Tuesday and Fridays only Thamesway Village Link 22 provided the only service along this road until this too was discontinued in 2001. **Chris Stewart.**



upper picture: One of the original coach conversion MW6Gs, Bishop's Stortford-allocated 1436 (OO 9544) had been modified with panelled-in roof lights but still retained the original destination displays under the front windows when seen at Matching Green on 11 September 1975. The link to Harlow is now provided by Regal Busways 47 and 147 (one journey each, Wednesdays only) while Epping Forest Community Transport SB06 gives one journey a day to and from Epping. **Chris Stewart.**



lower picture: Brentwood's 1446 (BNO 116B), one of the second generation coach conversion MW6Gs, has worked from its home town on a 265 and is about to continue from Bulphan to Orsett as a short lunchtime 257 (the main route of which was Basildon-Orsett, except on Saturdays when the 265 ran through). Reversing across this junction unaided would not now be recommended, but indeed it is surprising just how many such manoeuvres were commonplace in 1975. **Chris Stewart.**