

Clandestine Operations.

Alan Tebbit BEM.

Further Recollections of a Former Chelmsford Bus Man.

When I worked in the traffic department of Eastern Nationals' head office, the Traffic Manager was a Mr. Robert Hanley. For some reason he had a sort of vendetta against one of the small local operators, namely Sorrell and Wells of Hatfield Peveral. They were a fairly low budget outfit, their depot being the unmade car park of "The Swan" public house. One of their claims to fame was that they were once prosecuted by The Essex Rivers Authority for "illegal extraction of water", as they would park their vehicles in the ford at Terling, in order to wash them. They re-invented themselves in early 1965 as Wells Continental Tours, with a brace of Ford Thames with Duple Trooper bodies, in different liveries. At that time, I was the junior clerk in the road service licencing department, under the Traffic Assistant, Eric Farage, and his number two, F. R. (Bob) Beaumont.

One morning, one of the schedules clerks, Ray Boreham, entered our office, with a copy of the local paper, The Essex Chronicle. An avid football fan, Ray had read the match report from Chelmsford City's last game, but what caught his eye was the last paragraph. It gave details of an important match coming up, away to Yeovil Town, and stated that the supporters club were running a coach to the match, and gave details of the departure time, and fare. This surely constituted an advertisement for an unlicensed operation. Obviously, the supporters club were hiring in a coach, and if they had advertised it on club premises, for club members only, it would be all right, but in a newspaper, available to the general public, that was another matter entirely!

The Chelmsford City ground was directly opposite head office, so, having acquired the fare from petty cash, I walked out of the back gate, and around the block, so no one would know that I had come out of the offices. I went into the football club office and paid for the trip to Yeovil. I was not a supporters' club member, nor ever have been. The receptionist gave me a receipt for the fare and told me to show it to the steward on the coach on the morning of the match. What I now held in my hand was effectively a "ticket for travel". Back in the office, around the block, and in through the back gate, it was decided that as I bought the ticket, then I should travel to Yeovil on the following Saturday. It would be a nice day out for me, but I would not be paid, so that there could be no suggestion that I was connected with Eastern National. However, I would be expected to submit a full report, on drivers' hours etc, on my return. On no condition was I to enter the Yeovil Town football club premises, and not watch the match from any other vantage point. And so, on the following Saturday morning, I joined the football fans, boarding one of Wells' Fords for the away trip.

As soon as we got to Yeovil, I slipped away from the crowd, to enjoy the delights of the Somerset town, mingling back with the others, as they made their way back to the coach. Thus, I had used the journey as an Express Service passenger, paying a fare less than the accumulated Eastern National and Royal Blue licensed services between the two points. I had not travelled to the venue that the coach was hired for, and I was not a bona-fide member of the club that had hired the vehicle. We had Wells bang to rights!

Another episode involving Wells' operations turned out to be quite amusing, at least for some of us. The TM, Bob Hanley, lived on the Baddow Road, on the outskirts of town. Back then, before the construction of the Baddow by-pass, the A130 trunk road passed Bobs' door. Every morning, as he had breakfast, a lightly loaded Wells' coach would go past. Thinking that they were running an illegal bus service, we arranged observation. We had two minivans in use by our mobile inspectors KEV 656/7C. They had been delivered in BMC grey, but, for some obscure reason, 657 had been painted black. This is a factor in the story. One morning, the infamous mobile inspector, Jim Holt, and his driver, sat in the black van, outside of the Hanley home, and set off in pursuit of Wells' vehicle. They went for mile after mile towards Southend, and the fact that, despite many chances, they failed to overtake, aroused the suspicion of one of the passengers.

At Rawreth, Bedloes Corner, our little convoy turned off on quieter roads towards Rochford. A short while later the minivan driver was aware of a large black car approaching from the rear, with its' lights flashing. All police vehicles were black back then, and our heroes pulled over to let the boys in blue pass. Suddenly they were forced to a halt, with one cop car in front, and one behind, the van doors were wrenched open, and the pair dragged from within. It turned out that Wells had a contract with Her Majesty's Prison, Chelmsford, to transport trustee prisoners to work at the vast Hawkwell Nurseries. A warder on the coach had used his "walkie talkie radio" to report that they were being tailed by a van, "disguised as a police vehicle", the passenger wearing an imitation police uniform. He feared that they intended to assist one, or more, of the prisoners to escape! Luckily, with legal lettering on the van, and "Holy" in a recognisable bus company uniform, his explanation was accepted by the officers, and released without charge.

In October 1984, Wells Continental Tours sold out to Fords of Althorne, and I wondered, did I play a part in their demise? I do hope not, because I am sure that they meant no harm!

The Output Department

Alan Tebbit BEM.

More Recollections of a Former Eastern National Driver.

As a child there was nothing I liked more than going to work with Dad. He was a bus driver at Eastern Nationals' Chelmsford depot. I got to know most of the drivers and conductors/conductresses, and the fearsome inspectors. Then there were the greasy mechanics, and the fuel fillers, and the man who operated the "Essex" bus wash. But I could never worked out the function of three men, who always seemed to be hanging about the depot. They weren't drivers, or conductors, they weren't bus washers, or fuel fillers, or mechanics. Alf Hutchins always wore a brown warehouse coat, Eddie Stuart wore an old and grubby drivers' uniform, and Doug Taylor wore a navy blue boiler suit. All three sported uniform caps. Just what did they do? The mystery was solved one Saturday afternoon. Dad took me with him whilst he did a bit of overtime on "work as required". With his clippie we went to the Inspector for instructions. "See output for a bus, and go dead to Wethersfield Air Base, to bring back a load from the open day" he said. Off we went to ask Doug Taylor for a bus, and he told Dad to take 1294 (MPU 17, Bristol K5G L55R), and he took a tag with that number, and hung in onto a huge pegboard, under the heading Private Hire. So, the three guys were "Output", and they allocated buses.



Picture Chelmsford's 1281 was a fairly standard 1947 K5G which just scraped in to the 1964 renumbering (as 2210), being withdrawn two months later in October 1964. Seen here leaving Chelmsford Bus Station (under the watchful eye of the conductor), 'School Service Relief' nevertheless seems an unlikely combination and probably indicative of its general passenger duties outside school times. In the background, an MW coach waits on the London service from Halstead direction as a suburban electric unit stands in the 'down' platform of Chelmsford station. **Caption Chris Stewart, picture EBEG collection.**

When I became a conductor, aged nearly 19, and more so when I became a driver, I learnt to treat these fellows with respect. If you upset them, you could end up with a cold bus in the winter, or one with a heavy throttle or steering, or a dodgy gearchange. When on very early turns in winter, I would park my bike at the top of the depot, and observe their ritual. Eddie would have a long length of stiff wire, with a loop at the end. Old diesel soaked rags were tied to the loop, and would be burning. Alf nimbly jumped up into the cab, whilst Eddie would lean into the engine bay, and set the fuel rack, then, while he held the burning rags to the air intake, Alf would hit the starter button, until the 5-cylinder Gardner engine struggled into life. This was repeated on nearly every bus, until the depot was filled with acrid exhaust fumes. No health and safety, or Euro 6, in those days. They would then stand by the output board, and allocate the buses as drivers started their shifts. They would then have a breather, until the peak hour buses started returning, and they would supervise parking.

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At the end of summer, when seasonal express services ceased, and the excursion and tours programme was trimmed, the coach rota drivers had to be found jobs. There was tree lopping, or bus stop painting, and Jock Cameron would head off with the tour publicity bus. At the end of the 1973 season there was a vacancy for an output driver, Doug Taylor having been made up to Inspector. I was given the job (better than tree-logging), and joined the team of Derek Clements and Ray Shawcross; Eddie and Alf having retired. The local traffic superintendent, Arthur Allen, assured me that as it was only a 40-hour week, I could make up my wages with overtime on the road. How right he was. By Christmas, both Derek and Ray had been promoted, and not replaced. I worked from 0430 until 1830, or later, from Monday to Saturday, and 0630 to 0930 on Sunday for weeks.

Generally everything went smoothly, but there were some incidents. One evening, the SD depot driver of the 1833 to Southend, struck the rail bridge with a Scottish VR, and had to have a replacement. All of my dock replacement vehicles were out on loan, so having loaned him a VR, I travelled to Southend, then, having forced him out of the cab, I brought the bus home. The next morning I had a very irate Derek Ball, (SD Output) screaming down the phone that he was short of buses. "I'm not" I said, and hung up.



Picture. Alan talks about an incident with a Scottish VR striking Duke Street bridge. In this photo from Chris Stewart's slide collection Chelmsford depot's 3018 (SMS 44H) negotiates it safely but the bridge bears witness to numerous other mishaps. New in 1970 and exchanged for an FLF in September 1971, 3018 was the longest-serving of these 15 former Alexander (Midland) VRs and lasted with EN until September 1987. It passed to Boardman and Wilson of Eccles after withdrawal but was only used for a fairly short time. **Chris Stewart.**

The omo-spreadover drivers at CF all had their favourite duties, and would change amongst themselves. Dave Badcocks' shift ended on the 1657 hrs service 51B to Molrams Lane. This delayed his drinking time in the Plough, so knowing that we were at peak requirement, he would find a defect with his bus, and thus avoid his last trip. He became known as the 5 o'clock shadow. One evening I happened to have a spare MW, and it was 1300 (1858 F), the worst bus in the depot. I labelled it up as a 51B, parked it in the middle of the garage, and leaned nonchalantly in front of it. Sure enough, at 1655 an MW drove into the garage, and headed to be faced in, as a defective bus, but Dave noticed me, and 1300 displaying 51B, and with a very rude gesture, he headed out onto the road!

One afternoon I was short of an FLF for the 1600 service 152 to Grays. I had persuaded the driver, George Anagastopolis (Anag) to take an LD for his school run, but he was adamant that he was not taking a five-pot to Grays. Where could I conjure up a fluff in half an hour? Whilst pondering this, I went into the mechanical superintendent's office, to decide which buses needed to be parked on the pits for the following days routine maintenance. As I was leaving he casually mentioned that 2861 was ready to be collected from Central Works. In an imitation of Roger Bannister, I raced along Viaduct Road, and through Central Park, scattering small children, ducks, and courting couples, into Central Works, and leaped into the cab of a gleaming 2861, smelling of fresh paint, and roared off along the road. By 1559 hours I was winding up Grays 152 on the blind, and the situation was saved!

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