

Born to be a Busman?

More Recollections of a Former Chelmsford Busman.

Alan Tebbit BEM.

I think I was born to be a busman. I entered this world on 5 September 1947, a Friday I have been told, the fourth child of Robin and Eileen Tebbit. In those pre-National Health days, I was delivered at home, 39 The Green, Chelmsford. My late father, my hero, was employed as a, recently promoted, bus driver with the Eastern National Omnibus Company. He had met my mother when she over-rode the stage on a 14B bus, on her way home from work. Her defraudment of ½ p from the bus company, caused the handsome young conductor to admonish her severely.

At last, he had noticed her!

When I was growing up, Eastern National road staff were on a six day, 40-hour week, (6x 6hr 40min shifts). Not a day past that he did not work at least an extra half a shift, or sometimes a double, to provide for his little family. When not at work he would go out locally cleaning windows, or tending his two allotments, to give his family fresh produce, and sell the residue for a few pence. To see him I would venture to the bus depot, and ride his bus, filled with pride that the man propelling this magnificent machine, was my Dad. By the time I was five, my ears were tuned to the sound of those five-cylinder Gardners, and knew to the second when his left leg would go up and down, and he would move that big lever.

Very occasionally, he would be home for Sunday lunch, and after the meal, I would listen to his tales. Sometimes they would be barrack room tales from the war, he never talked of his conflict with the enemy, the trauma was still too raw. But I relished his bus stories. One involved a journey back from Romford. Service 10, the ex-Hillmans route from Chelmsford to Bow was not allowed to carry local passengers in the LPTB area, so the first set down point was Kavanaghs Road, Brentwood. A gentleman complained that the idle conductor had not come around for the fares until Brook Street. What he had failed to note was the famous London smog that night, and that the "idle" conductor had walked in the gutter from Romford to Maylands while the driver followed a newspaper tied to his mates back! Also, when on the Bow Road, the Vicar of Margaretting was on the bus, and both Dad and his driver were aware that they would have to stop at Church Lane. Dad was in position, on the steps of the single decker, prepared to ring the bell, and slide open the door. The reverend gentleman was in the rear seat, and suddenly struck dad violently with his walking cane. "Next stop, my man!". Incensed, Dad, a confirmed atheist, flung the offending article out of the door, telling the cleric, "I am not of thy flock, padre, smote me not with thy staff". He, surprisingly, heard no more of the incident, but those of you who know me will realise where my wit and sarcasm come from.



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Turning into Romford Road, Stratford past Young & Marten Ltd's Builder's Merchants when two years old, 1947 Leyland PD1/ECW 3987 (MPU 48) is on its way from Bow to Chelmsford on the former Hillman's route, albeit incorrectly showing 10A (which was Chelmsford-Brentwood) rather than 10. Sadly, most of the buildings in this view have gone (Young & Marten's site now being occupied by the Ibis Hotel) although the domed hall in the distance remains. Eastern National had 18 such Leylands (one of which, MPU 52, survives at the Canvey Island Transport Museum) as part of a batch of 150 which the Tilling Group bought to speed up vehicle replacement after World War II. The subject of our photo, renumbered 1115 in 1954, was disposed of in 1963 to Syd Twell (dealer) of Ingham but saw further use with Scott of Owston Ferry (between Scunthorpe and Gainsborough). Meanwhile the 10 and 10A became the 30 and 30A under the 1955 route renumbering scheme, the 30 surviving (by then only two-hourly beyond Ilford) until 1968 when it was completely re-routed beyond Romford via the Eastern Avenue to Wood Green as the 351.

Alan B Cross.

One of my favourite stories concerns the last days before WW2. He was on the Tilbury road then, the straight line across Essex, from Tilbury Ferry to Clacton or Harwich. He and his driver, Fred Fisk, one of the old hands, were on their way back from Harwich towards Manningtree, the old AEC Regal seemed to be struggling a bit on a slight gradient, until, as it topped the brow of the hill, it pattered to a halt, and silence reigned. Contemplating a long walk in the gathering dusk, to find one of the very rare houses with a telephone, he went around to the front to ascertain what was wrong. Fred had just finished tamping tobacco into his pipe, and slowly applied a flaming match to the bowl, and drew in the smoke. "Wrong?" he asked, then spread his arm out to encompass the view of a fiery autumn sun reflected in the still waters of the River Stour. "Taint nuffing wrong, , , , but aint that a lovely sight?". One of the joys of bus work!

On an amusing note, although he was in lodgings in Moulsham Street when he started with the company, his home was in the Metropolitan area. Consequently, he gained conductors badge N 6969. One of the managers reported him every time he travelled on Dad's bus, for wearing his badge upside down. To realise the folly of this, try turning this page upside down. He gave the company 32 years service and enjoyed nearly every minute of it, so that's where I get it from. Bless you dad. RIP



picture this page 3062 (EV1752), seen here at Colchester en route to Chelmsford and Tilbury Ferry, was one of a pair of AEC Regals with Strachan C28R bodywork delivered in 1931. It passed to the Ministry of Transport in June 1940 (for the War Department) but was seemingly re-purchased in 1943, seeing experimental use in connection with gas producer trials before disposal in 1946/47. [from the **J F Higham collection**].

Captions of both photographs and research by **Chris Stewart**.

The Trials of an Elder Tebbit.

Alan Tebbit BEM.

My father was an Eastern National bus driver, and my greatest pleasure as a child, was to go out on his bus. One afternoon, when I was nine, he took me with him, while he did 4 hours' overtime on the pump. He didn't fill the buses, but drove them to the pump, then parked them again after the garage man had put diesel in. To keep me out of harms' way, he put me in the cab of a brand new, as yet unlicensed, bus. I was mystified by this vehicle. All recent deliveries of saloons had been underfloor engined LS models, but here was a new bus with the engine at the front, but where the bonnet and wings should be, there was a mirror image cab. It was a Bristol SC4LK, 35-seater, and Dad told me it was destined to be a one-man bus, whatever that might be. There were two Bristol SC4LKs at CF. ie 436/9 (606/9 JPU) with 447 (9572 F) as back up. I soon found out that it meant that the driver would also take the fares, without a conductor on the bus. Having four children to feed and clothe, Dad was always willing to boost his earnings, in between shifts he would go out window cleaning, and he now had a chance to increase his wages, because driving a one-man bus meant an increment of 15%. Alf Attwood, Francis Wilkinson, Ivan Hatley and Robin Tebbit all put their names forward.



Alan hasn't got a picture of an SC with ENOC, but here is 448 (9573 F) with Thomas Brothers in Lampeter, still in company livery.

Alan Tebbit.

The Transport & General Workers Union were vehemently opposed to the new buses, taking away jobs. This was an illogical argument, as the company were short of staff, and had recruitment difficulties, so no one would be made redundant. It was not until years later that I discovered the extent of verbal abuse, and threats of violence, that those first four OMO drivers were subjected to. In addition, the union made sure that the OMO drivers did not enjoy good working practises. If an OMO driver was on his two-week holiday, he would only receive crew wages. If one of them went sick, the shift would be offered to a crew, rather than allow the OMO men to split that duty into two overtime pieces. OMO drivers could only be offered additional duties (rest day or overtime) after all the crews had been accommodated.

CF depot was on a 6-day week at that time (6 x 6hr 40min duties), and the 4 line OMO rota contained 4 x Mon-Fri, 3 x Sat and 1 x Sunday duties, so little chance of overtime if crews took all that was available. The union insisted that they should be confined to lightly trafficked routes, (with only 35 seats that was obvious), and would not be allowed on town services. It was not until the early 70s, with the arrival of the Leyland Nationals, that OMO (or OPO as it now was), got a foothold on town routes.

Their main road was the 46 to Harlow New Town, meandering through Roxwell, Willingale, Fyfield, Moreton, and the Matchings (Green & Tye). Duty 1 consisted of a 50B to Terling, and then the 0915 to Harlow, returning from there at 1230. Duty 3 operated the 1440 as far as Matching Green, then changed over with a BS driver, duty 4 did the 1805, with a similar changeover. BS operated one full length journey in the morning, returning about mid-day. Shorts to Willingale or Fyfield were operated in the peaks by crew buses, with 2230 to Willingale on Saturdays. The other OMO routes were 32/A to Ongar or Blackmore, 35 to West & South Hanningfield, 50/A/B Flacks Green & Terling, 54 to Danbury Common, and a 58 to Leaden Roding, continuing to Dunmow as a 33A, with a dinner times works from Marconis to Woodhall Estate, and an odd little route 38 to Mill Beach via Hatfield Peverel.

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The 46 was Dads favourite road, he soon made many friends among his passengers. The editor of the Harlow Citizen newspaper travelled the route one day, and wrote in his column, "he was more than a driver, he was a friend, light porter, agony uncle, baby sitter and tour guide". I was with him one Saturday when he stopped outside of a cottage near High Laver, and made me get off to retrieve a shopping bag from the gatepost. It contained a shopping list and some cash. The resident had broken her leg, and could not get out. We did the shopping in Harlow, and there was a slight delay on the return trip, whilst Dad put the shopping away, and made a cup of tea for the patient.

The stockman at Elms Farm, between Roxwell and Shellow Bowells, would bring his cows in for milking just as the 0928 bus was due, and would stand on the bus steps while Dad slowly drove the animals along the road, occasionally putting his head out of the cab door, to chivvy a slowcoach along. At Christmas time the nearside cab door would often open, and some produce would be left as a thank you. There always seemed time to spare.

Nowadays OPO is universally accepted, very few passengers remember the good old clippies, the inevitable march of progress. I suppose there are still some old militants out there who will condemn those original one man drivers for taking jobs away, but would the industry have survived under the old ways? Who knows!

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