

Tebbit's Tribulations! Recollections of a Former EN Bus Driver. Alan Tebbit, BEM.

When I started at CF depot in 1966, we had a mixed bag of depot inspectors (regulators). All of them were time served men, with a wealth of experience, no one had to ask roadstaff to do anything that they could not do themselves, and enjoyed the respect of the drivers and conductors. Albert Everett was renowned for pacing the forecourt, eyeing the rail bridge, and willing the town service buses to appear. In the early mornings he would peruse the sign on sheet, he knew all of his staff, and would have back up standing by for his regular fail to make it on timers. Reg Card, always smartly turned out, would be the quiet one, just giving a withering look and a shrug of the shoulders to any usurpers. Johnny Dines was the baby of the team, and had a habit of putting his mouth into gear, before his brain was organised. Fred King used to assist the others, never quick to see solutions.

But to me, the main man was Eric George Calver, known to everyone as Sonny. Nothing would phase him, he seemed to thrive under pressure, and in those times of staff shortages, there was plenty of that. He did not suffer fools gladly, and had no time for bad manners, if you wanted his attention, then you asked politely. His reposts were legendary. I recall a bloke one day who asked "Oi John, when's the next bus to Billericay?". Sonny wanted to know how matey knew his name was John, and received the reply that it had been a guess. "So", said Sonny, "guess when the next bus is, and try and get it right this time". He was a veteran of many carnival days, when the whole town was shut down, and schedules went out of the window. Our new superintendent, Arthur Allen, was running around in circles whilst Sonny was calmly setting crews off again after the carnival and the boss asked what else he could do to help. Sonny's instant retort was that the best help you could give was to **** off home. When I was a conductor, nearing the end of a long day, a passenger tended a five pound note for a ninepence fare. I gave him 3 pennies, and took a shilling piece out of a five pound bag, which I then handed to the passenger. When the gentleman complained to Sonny, he thought about it for a few seconds, and then suggested that he now had enough change for the next 95 journeys. Brilliant!

I knew the better side of him. When my wife thought that she had miscarried, Sonny had me home instantly, my work covered, and somehow failed to tell the wages department that I had not completed my shift. On an earlier occasion, I had as a regular conductress, a young lady to whom, may we say, I was romantically inclined, and our Sunday shift had an 0715 start. The conductor started on spare for the first half of the shift, whilst the driver took a coach to Colchester, to work the Margate express X34, back to Chelmsford, and hand over to the service driver. Having ascertained, by phone, that my mate was awake, I signed her on, and set off for Colchester. On my return, I discovered that she had failed to appear, and tried to remove the signature from the sheet. Sonny was aware of what had occurred, and gave me a lecture on relationships over employment, but took no further action, realising that I had learnt my lesson. If you were fair with Sonny, then he would be fair with you.

My favourite Sonny moment came on the forecourt one afternoon, when a builders van drove up, and stopped close to our hero. They were obviously lost, on their way to head office to do some work, and the driver shouted, "Hey, , , New Writtle Street". Sonny pointed out that this was not their destination, and the impolite driver bawled out "How do I get there". There was a pause, then came the classic reply. "I could tell you, but it would be a waste of time. When you get there, you will see a sign saying New Writtle Street", and here he marked out in the air, an oblong about the size of the sign. He then pointed to the end of the forecourt, and said, "Down there is a sign 14 foot high, with 2 foot high letters, saying BUSES ONLY. If you couldn't see that", and here he marked out the little sign again, and shook his head. End of conversation. Working with a character like that was amazing".



Eastern
National 3066
Bristol VRT
ECW UVX 3S at
Chelmsford
Bus Station
awaiting
service 313 to
Halstead
during 1980.
The vehicle
was allocated
to HD depot
(Halstead).
Paul Harvey.

EBN634p13

Tebbit's Tales. The first of an occasional series by Alan R. Tebbit, BEM.

Jim Holt, Mobile Inspector.

In his article in EBN620, Chris Stewart refers to his meeting with Jim Holt. "Jungle Jim" was the most feared employee at Eastern National at that time. The whispered warning "Holty's about" would strike fear into the heart of even the most honest of conductors; but I recall an evening in 1967 when we got one over on him.

It was one of the very rare occasions that the crew was Tebbit R. and Tebbit A. I didn't often work with my Dad. We were operating the 2000 hours service 32 Ongar to Chelmsford via the main road. This was normally a KSW or LD road (open backs) but we had a fluff (FLF with front doors) for some reason.

It was dark and, from the brightly lit interior, I had little idea what was outside. I was aware that we were waiting for time at Cooksmill Green, half way on the Fox and Hounds car park, and I noted the lights of an LD pulling up opposite us. This would have been the 2005 ex Chelmsford. From the darkness of his cab, Dad noticed a figure drop off the LDs platform and scuttle across the road. Obviously, his intention was to jump onto the rear platform of our bus, but, of course, we didn't have one! It being time to go, we set off.

The first I knew that something was up was when the doors flew open. Holty had used the outside button and was now running as fast as he could. When he judged that he had matched the speed of the bus, he leapt sideways intending to land on the moving platform (so that's why we called them "Jumpers"!). As his feet left the ground, Dad hit the brakes for a fleeting moment. Jim looked like a ballet dancer jetteing through the air, but then, in a scene reminiscent of a Tom & Jerry cartoon, he splattered into the stationary bulkhead, his hat and glasses scattering in different directions.

"Good evening, Inspector" I said, "Welcome aboard" and received a very unpleasant reply. Surprisingly, we heard no more about it but, for some time after, we treated J. Holt, Esq. with kid gloves!



Eastern National LD5G 2425 (884 CEV) of 1955 waits at Ongar (Two Brewers) before returning to Chelmsford on the 32. Behind the Thames Trader on the right are three coaches, some or all probably belonging to Ongar Coaches. 2425 was withdrawn in 1972.

With thanks to Chris Stewart.

Photo: **EBEG collection.**

EBN621p4

They Are Coming to Get You!

Alan Tebbit BEM

In a recent conversation on Facebook, the subject of 505s came up. Form EN505a was a disciplinary notice. It was sent to any member of staff who had been reported for a misdemeanour, either by a company official, or a member of the public. The front of the form detailed the offence, whilst there was a space on the reverse for the perpetrator to reply to the charge, prior to a disciplinary hearing. During my 30 years of service, I only received three 505s, all due to errors by inspectors. *[Errors or victimisation? – Ed.]*

The first occasion was when I was being used as a guinea-pig by the traffic office at CF depot. There was an agreement with the union that omo drivers were at the back of the queue when overtime, or rest day work was given out. With only a small omo rota, which I had just joined, there was only a slim chance of omo work being available, and all crew drivers had to be accommodated first. One Friday I was called into the traffic office to be told that there were no driving jobs available for my Saturday rest day. However, there was a conductor duty available, I was of course trained in fare collection, if I was willing to risk the wrath of the union, who had not ruled for this scenario. The duty involved a service 11 to Southend, and having parked in the layover area at London Road depot, my driver and I headed for the canteen for a cuppa, and a chat with the locals. On our return, he went to spend a penny, whilst I drove the bus onto the departure bay. The duty inspector, I believe it was a Mr. Wakefield, booked the "conductor" for driving a company vehicle whilst unqualified.

The second time involved mobile inspector Graham Lynch. I was operating a service 56 journey to North Springfield, in the evening peak. I left Chelmsford bus station a minute late, with a Bristol RE on this busy trip. I was surprised when Lynchie jumped me in Lawn Lane, and booked me for running early. I disputed this, and refused to sign his report sheet. The 505 stated that I was 8 minutes early on the 1720 departure, and failed to sign for the offence. I refused to fill in the reverse, but went to the Superintendent's office with a copy of a recently issued traffic notice, stating that the 1720 service 56 had been advanced to 1710, and would run 10 minutes earlier throughout. Maybe Inspector Lynch should have updated his timetable!

Lastly, I was booked for alleged timewasting on Duke Street forecourt, whilst transferring passengers between Highwayman services. I had just arrived from Great Yarmouth. Inspector Mrs. Lilly had observed me from her car, allegedly parked near the viaducts, making several unnecessary trips between my vehicle (Leyland Tiger 1121) and the inspectors office! 1121 was the allocated vehicle for the day, but when Mrs Lilly "saw" it at Chelmsford, it was parked over a maintenance pit at Colchester, with a leaking radiator, whilst I completed the journey with one of the 45xx double deck Olympians, difficult to confuse with a single deck Tiger. Did she have fantastic eyesight, or a vivid imagination?



Not quite the appropriate blind, but the correct bus! Just note the gleaming paintwork on both vehicles. A spotless Walton garage on 24.08.86.

Andrew Colebourne.

ENB645p14

Tickets Please!

Alan 'Tebzy' Tebbit

At the end of the main season, Eastern National's coach drivers were found alternative jobs for the winter, tree lopping, bus stop painting, etc. In 1973 I was asked to join the output team of Derek Clements and Ray Shawcross at Chelmsford (CF) depot. This entailed opening up the garage in the morning, shunting buses around to their correct stands, and allocating them for service. It was a three-man rota, consisting of two early shifts, 0430 until 1230, and one late, 1200 to 2000. Saturdays were one early and one late, with Sunday only one duty 0630 until 1430. This was all paid at crew driver rate, and, as third man, I had the chance of service, or private hire work on Saturdays, and overtime on the road on weekdays. Within a fortnight, Derek had been promoted to Inspector, so just the two of us on output, but that was okay. A month later, Ray was also promoted, leaving me on my own. 0430 to 2000 for 6 days of the week, and 0630 to 1430 on Sundays, or 101 hours per week. As OMO was on the rise, no one was prepared to volunteer for output at crew rate. The management suggested that they would make output an extra duty for the Inspectors and promoted me. They then advertised output at OMO rate and got three volunteers. I was left as a reluctant Inspector, a job that I didn't want, or seek.

There was one aspect of inspecting that I did enjoy, and that was road checking, away from the office. The main weapon in an Inspector's armoury is the element of surprise. Once you had checked a bus, and got off, the driver would give the 'thumbs down' to the next bus he met, warning the crew that trouble was ahead. Mobile inspectors had the advantage of a car and driver, they could merely go onto another road, and just pop up. A foot Inspector had no such advantage. My training was carried out under the guidance of an old hand, Frederick King. He taught me to plan my day, always work in a big circle, and never go down a cul-de-sac, where you would have to double back. On my day out with him we went via Danbury, Maldon, Wickham Bishop's, Witham and Braintree and back to Chelmsford, always moving forward around the circle.

On one day out on my own, I followed that advice. Leaving the depot, I made my way up to Melbourne Estate, 44B, short walk, 44A, short walk and a 48 off of Chignall Estate. Alighting on Roxwell Road, I knew that the 48 would be past the bus station, before my next capture departed. The 0900 service 58 to Bishop's Stortford (BS crew) took me to Boyton Cross. I was viewed with some suspicion when I got off there, I had no transport, and the next bus would not appear for ages, about an hour and a half. I could almost hear the conductor's thoughts, "I bet he's got a bit of stuff to visit". A brisk walk took me to the edge of Roxwell village, and a stroll along to Elm Farm, to hide behind a tree, and await the 0915 ex Chelmsford service 46 going to Harlow. I had time to fill in most of my checking sheet before the bus appeared. I knew that it would be MW CF1356, with driver Bob Vinall, with my dad's old Setright E104. I also knew that he would greet me with "How the **** did you get here?" and he didn't disappoint me. He expected me to leave him at Willingale, where he would wait for the Chelmsford bound 46, but I

stayed with him. When I asked him to drop me at Fyfield post office, he realised that I would be catching the service 33A from Leaden Roding to Ongar at 0955., still circling. A quick scoot across the road at Ongar Four Wantz and I was on a 32, heading towards Chelmsford with Dave Mayle. The 32/A provided an hourly service between the two towns in those days. I dropped off at Norton Heath, knowing that Dave would give the thumbs down when he met the 1005 ex Chelmsford at Cooksmill Green. Was I down a cul-de-sac? No chance.

I was now feeling peckish, so an all-day breakfast at the Norton Cafe was in order. I took a window seat, and shortly a Bristol MW DP passed slowly, the driver scanning the hedgerows for an elusive inspector. My appetite satisfied, and a bit of exercise was necessary, so a brisk walk to Nine Ashes saw me waiting for that same MW DP heading back to Chelmsford as a 32A. I can't remember the driver's name, but he let himself, and Dave Mayle, down by stating that he had expected to see me ages ago. A short ride into Blackmore, and then headed to Brentwood on a 260. From Wilson's Corner a 351 took me to Shenfield Crossways, and a short stroll to Shenfield Station, to hide in a shop doorway before a 251 picked me up.

Here occurred the most bizarre happening of the day. Near the back, downstairs, was a most attractive 30 something lady, frantically searching for her ticket. I left her searching as I checked upstairs, and when I returned, she waved her ticket triumphantly. What had happened? Had she actually found her ticket, or had the conductor also found her attractive, and had planned to give her a free ride, ringing her off a ticket while my back was turned? Whatever, she now had a valid ticket, so all was well. She asked me what would have happened if she hadn't found the ticket, and in a flippant mood, I suggested that I would call around to her place to punish her. Imagine my surprise when, as she was alighting, she handed me a slip of paper, with her address and telephone number. I wonder, over 50 years later, if she is still waiting for a call, or a knock at the door.

From Billericay, I jumped a 152 to Galleywood Eagle, and via 41A and 44A to the bus station, a whole circle completed, and the element of surprise maintained. My protests to management finally bore fruit, and I was returned to driving in time for the 1974 coaching season, and every time I received a thumbs down, and then picked up a jumper, I would think, "don't go down cul-de-sacs".

Below: In his article, Tebzy mentions both Bristol MW / ECW 1356 (MOO 177) and Shenfield Station, and here is the former, preserved, at the latter, on the Shenfield School Model Railway Exhibition shuttle service on 21 September 2013, being driven by Group member Chris Stewart. **Adam Kelleher**

