

Tebbit's Tales.

More Recollections of a Former Busman.

Alan Tebbit, BEM.

In my time at Eastern National's CF Duke Street depot, I met some characters. There was Jack (Starchy) Miles, so nicknamed because he always wore starched collars on his gleaming white shirts, he had razor edged creases in his trousers, and the parade ground shine of his shoes. Maurice Burgess was another smartly turned out driver, very quietly spoken, and his words produced with a public-school enunciation. I always felt that he should have been a clergyman, rather than a bus driver. There is a connection, I suppose, a vicar seeks to make his parishioners into God fearing people, whereas a bus driver will put the fear of god into anybody. Working with Maurice was problematic, because he had sensitive hearing. Known as Nobell Maurice, woe betide any conductor who rang the offending article. This was no problem on FLFs, as there was a bell and buzzer push on the platform, plus it was normal to ring off by tapping a coin on the cab window. On Ks and LDs, the platform, and stair head, only had a bell, so we had to move into the saloon to buzz off from stops, or to get him to stop when required.

If ever a bus was spotted parked up between stops, it was a safe bet that Charlie and Peggy Willsher would be seen by the platform, continuing some domestic dispute that neither would give up. When OMO became inevitable, Peggy retired, and Charlie became quite a reformed character, much calmer. Another driver that I tried to avoid was Alf (Fairy) Fairchild. Early shifts were dreadful, harsh braking and acceleration, with every left turn marked by the rear wheel mounting the kerb. Then would come meal break, and a visit to the Railway Tavern for his medicine. On the rest of the shift, you couldn't wish for a better driver.

Arthur Byford was a strange conductor, you never knew what to expect. He would take his dinner, and a chair, into the gent's toilet, setting his plate on the wash basin. I dreaded working with him, he was so unpredictable. We did a dinner time workers bus one day, from the Hoffman's factory to Melbourne Farm Estate. We waited whilst they ate lunch, and then took them back to the factory. Having no desire to listen to Arthur's inane chatter, I went for a long walk, returning at departure time. I leapt up onto the driver's seat of the LD, and wished I hadn't. The driver's seat had been wound right up, and pushed fully forward, making a minimal gap between seat and wheel. The pain in my nether regions was intense, and through my tears I could see Arthur was well pleased with his efforts. Later in the day we were on service 43, with an FLF, and returning towards town, I pulled out of the stop at Broomfield Parade, and almost immediately got the stop signal. I had to pull up at traffic lights, and looked around to see why I had received the bell. Arthur was pointing at the red light, indicating that it meant STOP. He repeated this at every red light for the rest of the trip.

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Hedingham L26 (CCK 657) on stand-by in CF depot, with a pair of Bristol Ks in the mid-1960s. Now this is really another story and we will tell it in a future issue of EBN.

Alan Tebbit.

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One character was Nobby Clarke, no one ever knew his real name. As well as being a driver on the spreadover rota, roughly 4-hours on, 4-hours break, 4-hours on, covering both peaks, Nobby was also landlord of the Leather Bottle Inn at Pleshey, although I suspect that his wife, Daphne, was really the boss at the pub. I always worried about Nobby's intake of alcohol for a bus driver. One morning I was on the 0610 to Pleshey, and half way between Gt. Waltham and the village, I spotted headlights approaching. There could only be one person on that road at that hour of the day. I pulled my bus, brightly lit double decker, in against the verge, and waited. An Austin A55 car raced past me, our Nobby. Later in the day I mentioned it, and he had not even seen me. On one occasion Daphne asked him to borrow a crate of light ales from one of the Ridley pubs en route. Having finished his first half, Nobby wandered into The Ship, had a pint, and headed home. Realising that he had forgotten the crate of ale, he stopped at The Kings Arms, Broomfield. A quick pint, and he was on his way again. Approaching The Beehive at Gt. Waltham he remembered the reason for his mission, and called in for a pint, or two. By then it was time to return for his shift, and the light ales never reached Pleshey. One Saturday I had a private hire, Nobby's pub beano to Yarmouth, in my favourite coach, RE 1410 (YHK 727 F). We stopped at a layby near Bungay, with the normal facilities, a hedge, ladies to the left, gents to the right. Trestle tables were set up for the buffet, and crates of ale appeared. There were a few Stock ales, my favourite, and I asked Nobby whose they were. It seemed they were mine, and I had to point out to him that it was best if I remained sober. We left Yarmouth at the statutory time of 6pm, and by 1945 we were in The Crown Inn, at Ufford, north of Ipswich. This was in pre-tachograph days, my log book recorded that I arrived back in CF depot by 2330, the anticipated time. In fact, we wished the staff at The Crown a fond farewell at midnight.

But of all the characters I worked with, Monty Filby heads the list. Monty was larger than life. He only worked "lates", spending his mornings shovelling malt for Rideleys brewery, a tough job; he was small, but very, very strong. Part Romany, it was impossible to get him into uniform, he always wore a neckerchief, in Badgerline days, when ties became compulsory, the company relented, and issued him the female neck scarf, which he wore as a cravat. I recall our superintendent, Gerry Neville, phoning down to the inspectors one day, to complain that Filby looks like he should be on the Cop at Anfield, he was wearing a red and white striped polo shirt. I worked the 2010 service 30 to Bow one night with him. It must have been a Saturday, because we had FLF2848, a fast bus. On week-nights we would take an MW. At Forest Gate he let a Mini out of a side turning, and they then drove very slowly, holding us up. In the wide road near Stratford fire station, Monty tried to overtake. The Mini speeded up and soon we were in a situation where we had a choice, to either hit a Greenline RCL head on, or put the Mini on the path. Boy, did that car bounce! On arrival at Bow, the Mini turned up, and the occupants, two youths were not happy. Monty laughed at their protest, until one of them called him a very rude name. He grabbed them by the shirt fronts, lifted them clear of the ground, and cracked their heads together. He instantly calmed down, and we walked off to get our tea in the canteen of Bow Road police station. Suitably refreshed, we prepared to leave, and, almost as an afterthought, Monty mentioned the two guys, unconscious near our bus. A copper went off to find his helmet, and we strolled back to Tomlins Grove, but our adversaries had departed. On another occasion, I was working with him on a 351 to Wood Green on semi-auto FLF 2889, which had a removable cab window for driving tuition. Naturally, we availed ourselves of the opportunity of a chat on the long journey. Whilst at the traffic lights at Gates Corner, a Jaguar pulled up alongside, and Monty noticed that the young lady passenger was giving a very intimate relaxing massage to the driver. He felt that I should be informed of this fact, I was upstairs at the time, and so the entire bus full was made aware, in not too polite language. Later still, in OPO days, I met Monty in Corporation Road, we were both on 44Bs. Hard packed snow was on the road, and Monty opened his cab window, and urged me to look at his trick. With the handbrake on, effective on the front wheel, he selected gear, and spun the back wheels, fast enough to melt the snow. What a great bloke!



FLF 2889 late in life on the 44B, passing the multi storey car park/retail market in Chelmsford. **Chris Stewart/EBEG collection.**

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Tebbit's Tales. Another recollection from Alan Tebbit, BEM

Nicky's Hundred Hour Weeks.

During the late 1950s, when the benefit system was less robust than today, the only way a man could support his family was by working excessive hours. At that time Eastern National was still on a 6-day week (6 x 6hr 40min shifts), and it was not unusual for drivers and conductors to work double shifts. So, who was Nicky, and how did he work over a hundred hours for a few weeks? Nicholas Hickey was a driver at CF depot, a dapper little Irishman, who lived with his young family at Brook Hill, Little Waltham, and was always willing for a bit of overtime. He was pleased when he was offered a period of 7-day weeks, more pleased when he was told that he would carry no passengers, and delighted when he learnt that he would be working from home.

At that time, Little Waltham straddled the main A131 trunk road, no by-pass then. At the lower end of the village a bridge spanned the River Chelmer. It had been built in the time of much less, and lighter traffic, and was beginning to weaken under the weight of modern day vehicles. It had to be replaced, causing the trunk road to be closed for some length of time. The diversion route was not really suitable for large lorries and buses, but the Nationals main concern was that it took the buses away from potential customers in north Broomfield, and most of Little Waltham. The villagers were up in arms because they were denied access to some important facilities, viz, the doctors' surgery, Amoses bakers shop, and the One Bell public house. As a result of this, a bailey type footbridge was placed across the river, and this proved to be the bus company's salvation.

The road closure was planned for the early hours of one morning and, late on the preceding evening, two doubledeck buses appeared in the village, one each from BE and CF, and parked on the pub forecourts, their drivers returning passenger to their respective depots. By the arrival of the first service buses the next day, both buses were parked with their backs to the now deserted bridge, with their destination indicators set for the onward journey, courtesy of Nicky. Having seen both sets of passengers and crews safely across the bridge, and on their way, Nicky's main function came into play.

It was a simple task, (or it was to the man who sat in an office, and planned it), he climbed into the cab of the bus on the Braintree side, and reversed the entire length of the village, and where the road widened by the butchers shop, he did a three point turn, reversed back to the bridge, and reset the destination indicator. Then he crossed the stream, reversed the other bus to the One Bell, effected a several point turn, and reversed back to the bridge, and more blind setting. This was repeated every half hour throughout the day. Luckily this was done at the height of summer, meaning long hours of daylight, the last buses at night being left facing the bridge until after dawn. Sundays was a later start, with only an hourly service. This was all on vehicles with no power steering. All too soon, the new bridge was open, and Nicky joined the queue for overtime again!



I haven't got a contemporary photo but this is taken at Ash Tree Corner, just south of the by-pass described by Alan. The by-pass is just beyond the 50mph sign.

Here is former Bournemouth T277 BPR, now with Lodge's of Good Easter operating the Chelmer Valley School contract on 1 July 2016.

John Salmon