

Eastern Counties jottings

Another story from Alan M Watkins with added material from Tony Dale

Tony Dale starts us off:

The original 15 service (Norwich - Downham Market) was mainly worked by Watton outstation (of Norwich), but obviously Downham Market (outstation of Lynn) had some input on this route. I only worked it as its original route number on a Norwich working, back in 1965, empty to Hingham for 0800? or thereabouts. Then duplicate the Watton service into Norwich. In 1981/2, in OMO days, I worked from Watton outstation on the 828, Norwich direct, the successor to the 15. I noted that Downham worked into Watton on a Friday, market day, and through to Carbrooke. The last remainder of one of ECOC's trunk routes. In 1965, I had a chance to go to Watton, as a conductor. I wonder how life would have turned out if I had gone?

Alan picks up the thread:

Nice memories - perhaps ECOC's longest run (not sure) was the 46 Wednesday Kings Lynn-Norwich which went round about 25 or 26 different villages! Often three vehicles it was a one journey duty with overtime!! The Lynn buses got to do a few duplicates, if required, out along some of part of the run in to Norwich which was covered by other routes as well (so the Lynn lot didn't get lost!).

The 27 and it's variants from Norwich was another very long route.

Tony continues:

Another on the same subject. I don't remember the 46, but by its number it was obviously a Lynn area route. My only contribution was in NBC days with the 438, one of the variants of the 434 (Norwich - Lynn). This, from memory, seemed to cover all the villages from Swaffham to Lynn, many times doubling back on itself and criss- crossing the A47. It ended up cutting towards the A10 through North Runcton. I was advised by old hands that this involved opening a gate across the road. I thought this to be a "wind-up", but no, I had to climb out and open this farm gate!

Longest route that I recall from a '50s ECOC time table was a Sunday 34, from Lynn to Yarmouth, via Norwich and direct along the A47 to Yarmouth, but I stand to be corrected. The 27 brings back happy memories, albeit later on My first Outstation posting in 1981 was to New Buckenham, which of course was the mid point, or thereabouts, on the old 27. The old shed that accomodated a Lodekka or two was still extant, but appeared vulnerable to a finger push!

We still had a Saturday remnant of old days, when our middle turn, which started at New Buckenham at 1030, ran to Norwich for 1136, then nominally returned to New Buckenham for 1230 before going to Thetford as an 840. I say nominally as it was not unknown to show 840, Thetford from Norwich, confusing all but the regulars! Then we carried on into Bury, returned with a 902?, I think, to Stow Upland, then back to Bury, then finally back to Thetford as a 300 via everywhere! Eventually back to New Buckenham, where we still had a surprise for the novice. Thorpe Rd schedules had us exchanging with the New Buckenham late turn, the 536 to South Lopham, he taking the Thetford departure through to Norwich, whilst our middle proceeded to South Lopham, and empty back to garage.

Someone, I think I know who, but will not name him, worked out that if the 5 36 from Norwich went like h**l, he could go right to Lopham, then return , again going like the clappers, and be reasonably right time into Norwich. This enabled the middle to finish about an hour early. The down side was depositing any Norwich bound passengers, assured by the timetable that the Thtford to Norwich was a through route, at New Buckenham green with the laconic, "don't worry, the Norwich will be here soon"!

And Alan responds:

I had forgotten about the 34 and I am sure you are therefore correct. The NBC Lynn-Norwich diversion sounds to me as if it predominantly followed the old 46 of blessed memory - it criss- crossed, it did everything. I don't remember the farm gate but I do remember that one the villages (cannot remember which) was a dead end and had only one turning point and that was a farmyard.

Much of the time the 46 was a Lynn decker (it was a Lynn turn as you surmise) which left Lynn at 9 a.m. from memory. You didn't get back to Lynn till something short of 10 p.m. During the school holidays and in the last couple of Wednesdays before Christmas it regularly had two saloon duplicates and there would be a queue waiting to back round into the farmyard. I remember "signalling" my driver back while attempting to avoid walking in the numerous "cow pats" splattered about.

I don't know who devised the Cromer schedules (Norwich again, perhaps?) but there was on the 36 Cromer-Hunstanton turns on Cromer arrival which involved you changing to a saloon at Cromer setting off for Yarmouth on the back road (23?) and then swinging with a Yarmouth crew near the windmill at Horsey outside the Vicarage because that was the only place two saloons could meet without completely blocking the road while transfer waybills were....errr...transferred. What the Vicar thought of having his drive blocked by an L5G several times a day I do not know!

Of bizarre duties there is a wonderful Premier Travel duty well before my time which had a Haverhill crew being paid 15 and a quarter hours each for three hours driving/conducting, the rest being spent getting between Haverhill-Saffron Walden and vice versa by a combination of Eastern Counties buses and the long gone branch lines.

Tony continues:

Remember the 23 and the 36 from my holidays at Sheringham. I don't know why I never rode up the coast to Hunstanton, I guess Norwich attracted me more. However, I remember the 23 from Cromer, but seem to associate it with Bedford OBs. Is this possible? By the way, the 16 from Cromer to Sheringham via Pretty Corner is also in my memory as OB operation in the mid 50s. Did Cromer have some then? As I write this, service 24 comes to mind from Cromer. Where did this run?

Alan again:

Yes OB's did turn up on the 23 from time to time because apart from a few "holidaymaker journeys" early and late (basically) it did not do a lot in the way of traffic - there's nothing out there and last time I drove the road there still wasn't.. It depended on the day as well - if it was pouring rain all day you could probably have run the whole thing with an OB. The local traffic was very small - mostly shopping into Cromer in my time. And then a bit at the other end shopping into Yarmouth. But Cromer folks didn't shop at Yarmouth and vice-versa.

The Pretty Corner 16 was usually an OB although in 1950 when I holidayed there a pre-war G or J could sometimes turn up (complete with the old "tin bible") slogging up Beeston Hill with a very fine sound! Pretty Corner is as beautiful and peaceful as ever. I was there not long ago.

I haven't got my timetable but I think the 24 was the Overstrand service but I could be wrong. Old age lets me down sometimes! I'll check it out when I get a chance and let you know. The 36 was a route which did well, even in the Winter, because it was the only link for all those coastal villages. In the winter you could be splashing through the sea at Salthouse because High Tides could flood the road quite easily over the sand dunes. Some tight corners at Stiffkey (as you will know, bor, pronounced Stewkey, that's how you knew the crockles, like that owd boi what arsked for Ymondham when he orta bin arskin for Windham). Or them they didn't know that Costessy is Cossy. Or that Potter Heigham that ain't, bor, it's Potta Ham.

Mind you, until I worked at the other end of Britain I didn't know that Launceston was pronounced Lansen by many locals so I can't talk!

The one that threw me the most was when I worked for Premier and picked up some old folk (in their 70s/80s at the time, those who had to be physically heaved aboard, none of this low floor nonsense) who insisted on buying a ticket to Gumster. That was the old local pronunciation for Godmanchester!

36 still going (Norfolk Green). Green buses at Stiffkey, Salthouse, imagine that!

And Tony concludes:

Again I rise to your memories! After my last post, I thought the 23 was Blakeney to Mundesley, maybe! I remember Stewkey from the Samfrey, and the Rev Davidson, How many know of him? Bet you do! Sharp bends! I remember coming along the straight from Blakeney, towards Wells, on a Gilera 197! That cottage door on the right hander in the village got awfully close. Glad my rider had his wits about him! Yes, now Norfolk Green territory, my son had a chance to work for them a couple of years ago, but turned it down. I remember driving down to my parents, about 1993, when they left us, and seeing Green through the remnants of the 468 through Middleton towards Fakenham. Seem to be my type of company! Regret I have not been to Pretty Corner for about five years now. Must revisit to kindle old memories. Do remember the old 52 to Aylmerton?