

Rippingale of Gestingthorpe

Another story from Alan M Watkins

Here is a glimpse into the world of the rural bus operator.

One such was Harry Rippingale (known locally as Bluffy for reasons I do not know) whose small business was based in the remote village of Gestingthorpe which is still remote on the Essex/Suffolk border but it is sort of famous without most people knowing it.

Bluffy had three or four buses operating into Sudbury and a route into Braintree (the latter probably Wednesday or Saturday or both) and for a while a coal delivery business in the locality. In the 50s he sold the bus services to Corona and retired.

Bluffy mostly drove the services through the villages (including the Belchamps) into Sudbury. He was a quite delightful old chap who insisted on calling most people "my dear".

The late John Cunningham of the (then) Ticket and Fare Collection Society (now the TTS) once regaled me with a wonderful story of a trip on a Rippingale bus.

By the side of Bluffy was a large pudding bowl into which passengers dropped their money. No tickets were issued.

He did however carry a rack of stock Bell Punch tickets. It was, of course, illegal to take money for a stage service without issuing a ticket and the Traffic Commissioners (Cambridge, at the time) did spot checks. Bluffy always knew when these spot checks were likely as his wife's sister worked in the Traffic Commissioners office which was somewhat useful.

In "at risk" times he would issue tickets but then carefully collect them in on the return journey and replace them on the rack so that they might be re-used again in "at risk" times.

As the Traffic Commissioners staff worked to the "granted" licences they only boarded the buses according to the timetable lodged and approved by them, thereby missing all the regular journeys that Rippingales buses operated that were not licenced but were well known locally. The actual timetable bore little relation to the licences granted by the Commissioners.

When Corona took over and operated to the "licences" in the first few weeks they were deluged with complaints from all those expecting journeys and times which were not on the licences.

The fame of Gestingthorpe?

Childhood home of one Captain Oates: "I am going outside. I may be some time....."
(see under Scott of the Antarctic)

There is a plaque to him in Gestingthorpe Church. Bluffy is in the churchyard.