

Lincolnshire RCC memories

Various short stories from Alan M Watkins

It was a funny old Tilling-BTC company for many years using non-standard blinds and doing all sorts of curious things in curious places.

There was the instruction pasted inside the lid of every conductors box: "Have you made sure you have sufficient transfer waybills for your duty?"

Good question for a company that frequently swapped up and down crews in the middle of nowhere and which made people get on different buses to get home.

The poor old Service 2 from Lincoln to Sleaford via Cranwell a good example with everything a through fare but: "Passengers for Cranwell change cars at Cranwell Lane end" or "Passengers from Cranwell travel on Sleaford car and change at Cranwell Lane End."

Anyone trying to get from Sleaford to Lincoln on Saturday and Sunday on the 9.10 p.m. Service 2 were advised: "Lincoln passengers change cars at Cranwell Church."

So while they all affectionally (mostly) just called it Road Car they certainly had to keep up to speed with the timetable arrangements.

The 4.5 p.m. NSSu warned passengers that travellers on Service 4 to RAF Scampton would be set down "at the Scampton Guard Room instead of the normal bus stop."

Service 4a advised that although a departure time of 6.59 a.m. to Lincoln was shown at Nettleham (Green) "no passengers may be picked up at 6.59 a.m. for Lincoln". The solution to that locally was that everyone got on at Trott's Corner instead of The Green. Local knowledge.

Service 10B 6.30 p.m. out of Lincoln said Alford on the front but it was lying as it was really going to Mablethorpe and thus: "Passengers for Alford change cars at Maltby Corner." Okay, the timetable "sword" did say "This car proceeds to Mablethorpe, arriving 8.56 p.m." But the Duty Card still said: "SHOW ALFORD". Confusing or what?

The 50C Grimsby to Marshchapel at 7.5 a.m completely disappears out of a return but that is because it operated the 8.10 a.m. Marshchapel to Grimsby duplicate.

And although through tickets were issued on the WO 9.30 a.m. Mablethorpe-Grimsby and it said SHOW GRIMSBY it was actually only going as far North Somercotes from where it doubled back as a duplicate to the 9.5 a.m. ex Grimsby (WO duplicate). Confusing? It certainly was. So they all tramped on to the 9.15 a.m. Louth-Grimsby Service 50B. Not a lot happened at North Somercotes but that was certainly a Wednesday event. Transfer Waybill job par excellence.

And what about the mystery of the disappearing bus service? Dear old service 14 Horncastle to Louth (a lovely ride) via Belchford (prettier than the name) and Scamblesby. On Wednesdays and Saturdays a bus trundled out from Horncastle through the hamlet of Fulletby and brought such as there were back into Horncastle at 11.37 am.

Aaargh - there's no return journey. But study the timetable carefully and the secret is revealed.

4.7 pm Horncastle to Louth: "On Wednesdays and Saturdays the Relief Car to this journey proceeds via Fulletby." So there was a happy ending and they all got home!

Spare a thought for the residents of Moorby, a tiny hamlet and a bus width only lane from Wood Enderby on the 15 from Horncastle to Boston via Mareham le Fen. They didn't actually manage to get the name of their village in the main timetable nor the times when it arrived or departed but local knowledge knew that on Wed and Sat the Relief Car to the 10.10 and 2.10 to Boston and the 12.10 and 5.35 ex Boston "will proceed via Moorby."

The Horncastle Duty Card for the Service Bus says: "ENSURE YOU HAVE NO MOORBY PASSENGERS ON YOUR VEHICLE."

Quite.

Just before kick off I used to say: "Anyone for Moorby needs to be on the bus behind." I don't remember any takers so I think they were pretty well trained.

If one escaped it was okay because the LRCC instruction was: "Duplicate Vehicles must never overtake the Service Vehicle except in case of breakdown."

The 15, by the way, went past the depot of Goslings of Mareham le Fen. One of their conductor girls was a Saturday early traveller from Scrivelsby and, as was the practice of the time with anyone "badged", was entitled to a free ride.

Some more random thoughts on operations

Let me introduce Pedants Corner and put on an Inspector Hat as a bit of fun re this fascinating company.

The 61 went to Spilsby but there were no deckers on it in my time at the Road Car and it had no scheduled shorts to Spilsby in my time either, so a photo of a decker showing that really should be saying 61A, I think, one of three routes which wandered gently through a huge number of villages between Louth and Boston. In my time it was almost exclusively "trams" plus the few remaining Bristol L's but the only scheduled DD operation was on the 61A and were operated by Boston. There was pre Beeching some lowbridge problems on all three routes.

However Boston garage operated deckers between Boston and Spilsby on the 61A (a lovely little place by the way and largely unspoiled). as follows in my time:

7 a.m Boston-Spilsby (M-F, saloon Saturday)

8 a.m. Spilsby-Boston which then went on to Service 59 Boston-Spalding via Gosberton Duplicated by another Boston DD in School Term by Boston from Stickney at 8.25ish from Stickney Church. not duplicated when the Schools were up

The "daily return" of this was the 3.45 (M-F School Terms only) in which you duplicated the Boston saloon to Louth as far as Spilsby and then came back dead and (as I recall) spent the rest of the evening on the Boston Town Services.

The other decker workings between Boston and Spilsby that I recall were: 1.30 Wednesday and Saturday Boston-Spilsby and the 2.55 return.

The 4.45 SO Boston-Spilsby and the 5.45 (cinema bus return).

The 11 p.m. SO after a riotous night out in Boston to Stickford (not Stickney) which continued 20 minutes or so to Spilsby if required (and the Duty Card said "SHOW SPILSBY").

If they all got off by Stickford or shortly afterwards you found somewhere to turn round and went back "Lights Out" like the proverbial bat out of hell to Boston. If there was a Spilsby "spoilsport" I'm afraid you had to go there.

Louth - the other operators of the 61/A/B - never had deckers on these routes for the very good reason that they only had two double deckers both of which were committed to Service 50 Louth to Grimsby aside from some very late night "get the lads home" sorties to RAF Manby as was.

Retford never had any deckers - far too many VERY "low bridges" for even the lowest lowbridge. Throughout its existence Retford was saloon only.

Here is a Gainsborough DD working, a totally unguessable LRCC "diagram" of my time.

Sign on 7.15 a.m

Service 102 7.30 Gainsborough-Lincoln 8.40

8.50 Lincoln-Scunthorpe 1030 Service 103 (which was to give the Scunny crew a break as they'd be on early doors on Steelworks)

Several runs back and forth on 122 on Scunthorpe-Yaddletorpe X Roads (which gave the Scunny town boys and girls a break)

Back home on the 101 1.5 pm Scunthorpe-Gainsborough.

Sign Off

Going back to buses LRCC was pretty much a basket case under BTC or anyone else and I would claim it was pretty much unique and with pretty much unique demands, particularly post war and well into the early 60's. Only Scunthorpe, the largest depot, made serious money and that was fraught with traffic problems. In my time there were 15 double deckers on the road on a SUNDAY morning by 5 a.m. with the earliest Sunday sign on 4.15 am to serve the avaricious steel works of the time. You took the first shift in and you took the overnight shift home with a healthy (?) fug of Woodbines and Players Weights upstairs on both occasions.

But the public services (non steelworks) did not start up on a Sunday until around 11/12/1 so what did you do? It was a spreadover so you dumped the bus and went home. The LRCC canteen did not open until about 1 pm on a Sunday so you could not repair to that.

You COULD repair to the greasy spoon steelworks canteen for a big mug of tea and a suitably greasy spoon breakfast if you fancied same swimming in lard at that hour. It was either very cheap or free (Lysaghts was free) and you qualified because both driver and conductor would have their "badge" on their lapel. It was an inter-union agreement I believe.

Even if it was your Rest Day on Saturday (unlikely) you couldn't go out on the town with a 4.15 Sunday morning sign on. I used to cycle in from the "Avenue Vivian" B&B where I stayed and where Mrs Withers took pity on me when I first tried to book a room with her (VACANCIES in the window and all it seemed cheap) until I noticed a notice which read: ABSOLUTELY NO ONE READMITTED AFTER 10 P.M.

"I need to come in after Midnight" I said. Mrs Withers said: "Who do you work for?"

"I'm a conductor for the Road Car" I said. Mrs Withers softened a little. "My son in law is a driver at Grimsby" she said. "You can have your own key."

Yaay!!!!!!

Avenue Vivian has a sort of exotic ring I think. The truth was that you needed to replace the "x" with an "r". It was the centre for the "Ladies of the Night" serving the needs of the steelworks at that time and all conductors on that route, including this conductor, were well aware of the bloke on the outside seat sitting next to a lady who appeared sometimes, as my late Mother would have said, "Mutton dressed as Lamb".

"Two to Avenue Vivian" please. Rarely did they know the correct money which was either 1/8d or 1/10d at the time but I'd already set the Setright Speed. You got to know most of the Ladies of the Night because they travelled in as well.

On the way in to John Brown's Works as a youngster I fell seriously in love with a beautiful girl but I was too timid to do anything about it. If she survives she will be as old as me but why would she go for a LRCC conductor?

Yes it is a ramble but my defence is that it is a ramble through Britain's social history OF THE TIME which unless you were there you could not experience.

Skegness seafront operations

The union had an agreement that in the event of (undefined) "steady rain" the open toppers would come off and closed tops put on the routes instead. LRCC fought against this for quite a while until one of the Shop Stewards invoked an early use of Elf and Safety involving the "dangerous condition of slippery and wet stairs" which apparently tipped the balance or so it was claimed at the time.

Like all such agreements the practicalities were somewhat different. Certainly in my time at Skegness they did do substitutes on wet days but the depot, in high season, worked to absolute maximum capacity and "spare" vehicles were few and far between.

This led to a number of....errr....incidents like a Mablethorpe decker being hijacked during layover and sent out to replace an open topper. The Mablethorpe crew returned from their break in the canteen to discover that they did not have a bus! On at least one occasion it was replaced by a K5G working in from Boston as a duplicate. What happened to the Boston crew I cannot say.

If the "steady rain" occurred late in the afternoon a further solution was to commandeer a decker from Horncastle (they had at least one spare after about 4 p.m. I think) and offer double time for a Horncastle driver to go dead to Skegness and sit in the canteen until the sea front services had finished with it.- occasionally Boston were encouraged to do this as well.

Neither Horncastle or Boston drivers knew the Skegness locals (nor did Lincoln). Just reminded me - halcyon days.

There was nothing in the Union agreement about a howling gale coming off the sea at Skegness (unfortunately).

Local agreement at Skegness was for the conductor to report "dangerously wet stairs" to the on duty Shop Steward. I did not personally because it was my experience that if there was pouring rain there were a marked lack of people who wanted to go upstairs on an open topper. But still.....

Union agreements gone but not forgotten perhaps?

The fact that a SEA FRONT SERVICE needs a radiator blind should tell everyone on this group all they need to know about Skeggy.

Nightmare! I do not think I have ever been so cold in my life.

continued . . .

Another Road Car story

Grimsby depot were credited with calling Bristol LS buses "trams" because they had one of the first of them at the same time that BTC were still operating the Grimsby-Immingham Electric Tramway in its death throes complete with one and only central headlight. (Later Service 44 Road Car).

While we are on conducting nightmares the Road Car had several of their own although of modest size. One was Skegness to Butlin's Camp both scheduled and meeting trains/excursions (not scheduled). A couple of miles down the road with a double decker seating up to 70. 6d adult, 3d child in my time.

The trick was to do the downstairs only and then stand at the foot of the stairs and block anyone getting off until they had handed over the money. You could end up with a Setright roll trailing out of the door - I rang off my tickets but it was a well-known local "fiddle" for some at the time not to ring quite all of them.....they just wanted to go on holiday. Bugger the ticket. Lots of "overs" if you wanted...

Then there were the Scunthorpe steelworks services (when steel still mattered in Britain) whose complex rotas were pretty near 24/7 (the 3.45 am sign on a Sunday morning for Road Ca was pure magic) and so you had to carry five, six and seven day weekly tickets all day long because for someone that seven day might start on a Wednesday. You could never remember the fares for any of them and had to look them up every time.

Out of Scunthorpe the fare table (inherited from Enterprise and Silver Dawn) entered a world of its country own with stage points in remote countryside such as "Hilltop Stile" and, my personal favourite, "Three Dead Trees". I digress as ever.

More thoughts on Road Car

The Road Car is a special interest of mine and, despite being one of the smallest members of the Tilling/BTC group, they covered one of the biggest areas - despite much of that being sparse rural communities. But against this they had the intensive almost 24/7 Scunthorpe steelworks and town services - around half of the entire fleet was based at Scunthorpe - and of course a very intensive and busy summer to cope with at Skegness. They probably covered more RAF Stations than most people in the aftermath of the War and that led to huge traffic peaks as well. Then you had the little rural but important garages at places like Horncastle and Louth both operating in areas where there were often more sheep than people and certainly far more cabbages than people (and still is the case).

The perception of Lincolnshire is a predominantly flat dull landscape and yet the old market towns of Spilsby and bustling Boston and beautiful Lincoln (set on the Lincoln "Edge" which is not at all flat). And then the Wolds which is up hill and down dale in some spectacularly beautiful and largely unspoiled countryside even today.

The countryside can be bleak and I've always found it amusing that you find stage points in the Road Car faretable that you rarely find elsewhere - such gems as "Three Dead Trees" (you have to hope they didn't get chopped down) or "Hill top Stile No 139". There WASN'T anything else. Or sometimes simply: "Lane to Archers Farm" or simply "Farm Cottage". Of course when it was raining there was no protection for hardy would be passengers - Lincolnshire folk often call their rain "daggers" and I certainly experienced some of it.

The Walcot buses would have been familiar with all these small - and not so small communities. One of the biggest villages then was Metherringham (lovely place) which used to have a huge flush of wild primroses each Spring which was a joy to look out for. Of course outsiders gave themselves away by asking for Metherringham whereas everyone knows it's simply called Meg.

Walcot's little fleet ventured to lots of places - on Thursday and Saturday one vehicle went to Horncastle and back and on Wednesday and Saturday they made an important contribution from this remoteness to take people into Boston on the 8 group of routes which also saw Boston buses venture into the area as well.

The nightmare that Road Car had were "massive" peak journeys on key routes and then sparse traffic throughout much of the day before another massive peak at school time and going home time. Some examples off the top of my head are the 4 p.m. Louth-Grimsby Service 50 on Louth Market Day which required FOUR double deckers (Louth only had two double deckers and both of them for this route) or the 4 p.m. Lincoln Service 1 on the Grantham Road which required four double deckers and a saloon. It must have been a total nightmare to organise but it was organised very well indeed although I suspect that Road Car were the largest users of "spreadover" shifts in the group. Only Scunthorpe, had standard early, middle, late stuff but even they had to resort to "spread overs" for Sunday morning steelworks stuff - sign on at 4.15 a.m, work fairly intensively for two to three hours and then go home till 2 p.m. A number of the Road Car Traffic Managers were promoted on to much higher things in the Tilling/BTC management set up and I often wonder whether their ability to meet this challenge played a part in their promotions - "he's passed the Road Car test".

And another tale

Another little nightmare with a problem that could not be solved was the Road Car Service 24 Grantham-Stamford. This three times a day run of nearly an hour and a half was a double deck service. On School Days the 7.25 a.m. required a second double decker from Grantham which diverted off the main route to serve four additional communities. This then returned dead to Grantham - there was nothing else for it to do.

If you were the service bus crew this was a doddle:

Sign On 7.10 a.m.

DEAD to Bus Station

7.25 a.m. 24 Grantham-Stamford (NOT Swayfield) 8.50

(Busy for obvious reasons but mostly returns and weeklies/school passes)

(Chance to meet up with the Barton boys and girls in the Willow Cafe before:

10.20 Stamford-Grantham 11.45 (DIVERT to Swayfield)

(A gentle stroll through rural England with plenty of time to admire the views - so dead sometimes that you had to drop to 20 mph not to be ahead of time)

Yaaaay - free in Grantham until

1.30 Grantham-Stamford 2.55 (DIVERT to Swayfield just in case you had picked anyone up in the first place.)

Not a lot happening on this one either usually but 2.55 is the key time here. At around the same time as we arrived at Stamford a completely empty double decker was setting out from Grantham to provide the Schooldays duplicate for our next trip which was:

4.05 Stamford-Grantham 5.30 - more weeklies/school passes.

Leave Car on Stamford stand. Walk to depot and:

SIGN OFF.

Walk to depot? You must be joking. Your duplicate knows the rules - and comes alongside with engine running because they ARE running in. They are not leaving their bus for anyone.

The afternoon dead car to Stamford and duplicate to Grantham was normally an overtime job offered to the early crews on the Grantham town services in that particular week for anyone who fancied extending their 6 a.m-ish start. So there was a dead car complete Grantham-Stamford circuit, one of them on overtime. Okay, makes perfect economic sense. What a nightmare!

You left your car on the stand for the last run of the night:

6.5 to Stamford and 8.5 return (and, no, not a lot happened on those either) which was part of G28 duty which commenced:

2.45 p.m. SIGN ON

Dead Car to Lincoln

4 p.m. Service 1 duplicate Lincoln-Grantham 5.27

T/O vehicle on Stamford stand

6.5 Service 24 Grantham-Stamford 7.30 (Not via Swayfield)

8.5 Service 24 Stamford-Grantham 9.30 (Not via Swayfield)

Dead to Town Centre Bus Stand

9.39 Service 32 to Tennyson Avenue (the arriving Service 32A at 9.38 p.m vehicle hurtled back to the depot with the lights out). A couple of roundabouts on the 32 before operating the final 28 of the night Tennyson Avenue to LRCC Depot (Garage was on the Grantham blinds but easier to keep TOWN SERVICE up) at 10.47 arrive Garage 11.03

SIGN OFF

I digress as ever but that's how it was.