

Another Premier Travel tale with added Corona (Coaches, that is)

Another short story from Alan M Watkins

On Premier routes 7/28/29/38, all of them either feeders or through routes to London Kings Cross, you not only picked up on the roadside but sometimes had pre-booked passengers through the local agent (Village shop, pub, whatever) - the duplicate of which was already in the system with the company from the agent. PT in the timetable said: "Tickets will be issued on the vehicles if accommodation is available".

So anyone presenting a paper ticket on the inward journey to London waved the return ticket to me (whether Day or Period) and sat down. Anyone boarding at the roadside got a standard Insert Setright.

On the outward journey back to Rural England any presenting at the door at Kings Cross got the standard Insert Setright (or the cancelled return) but anyone presenting a paper ticket (whether day or period) that became invalid by that journey (last use) got their paper ticket collected in (and attached to your waybill) and a no value Exchange Ticket issued to keep the record straight. That did not matter whether it was a paper single or a completed return.

If anyone got on at the wayside (or Kings Cross) wanting a PERIOD RETURN (which the Insert Setrights couldn't cope with) I carried a book of paper tickets and wrote out their period return by hand with two carbon copies (white top copy, yellow second copy, blue third copy). If an agent had issued in such a way the top copy went to the passenger, the yellow went to Premier Travel (for what passed for "charting" in those days) and the third copy remained in the agents book so he could challenge any commission disputes.

If I issued a paper Period Return (and I did once for a family party of eight going from Kings X to the Thurlows one Easter - I believe we were nearly at Epping before they got the paperwork but no matter as I think I said: "Okay I will come back to you" - they kept the top copy and BOTH the other two copies were attached to the Waybill. And, no, I didn't get the agent's two per cent commission.

In due course that family of eight would have had their Period Returns collected in by the "returning" conductor/driver and got eight no value Exchange Tickets - no value tickets had to match up with what was attached to the waybill.

Corona Coaches, Acton, Sudbury, Suffolk on their 1930 started London Kings X-Stowmarket had a different system. They had a London driver for the morning departure at 9 a.m. (Charlie Gilson for many years who lived in Pentonville Road which was probably handy). Anyone handing in an Agent ticket had it looked at by Charlie but anyone presenting at the door "on chance" was allowed to board but got no ticket at all because Charlie had no Insert Setright nor a paper book.

Corona's route was semi-stage between Stowmarket and Chelmsford but express between Kings X and Chelmsford (to protect Rose Brothers Chelmsford - Kings X who also used insert setrights) and only boarding allowed at timetabled points from Kings X beyond Chelmsford and only alighting allowed to Kings X from those who had boarded at timetabled points prior to Chelmsford. Out in the wilds Corona could pick up at the roadside beyond Halstead basically when the "stage route" kicked in. Kings X-to Halstead restriction was to protect Eastern National's B Service as it was in those days. Charlie did have a small waybill where he wrote where he picked up "no ticket" passengers (Romford, Brentwood, Ingatestone whatever) because he had to get out of the cab and open the bleedin' door. He also had to write down their stated destination.

He got his conductor (usually Mr Radcliffe or someone covering for him on a day off) at the refreshment stop at Widford (White Horse) just outside Chelmsford. The conductor swung with Charlie off the up 8.30 a.m. Stowmarket (Barnard's Garage)-London Kings Cross. He abandoned that vehicle and walked across the road and "conducted" Charlie between Widford and Stowmarket. This was usually one vehicle but at busy times could be one or two duplicates. He was responsible for covering them all. The refreshment - or wee wee break if you want - was ten minutes officially. He then looked at the waybill (s) and was responsible for collecting all those between Chelmsford and Halstead. Corona had a rule on this route that no duplicate was to overtake the service bus so that Mr R could get all his fares in.

If it was one bus only he could do it on the road comfortably but if there were duplicates the two duplicates would make an unscheduled stop on the road if necessary to enable him to board the vehicles behind. In general I would think that was fairly rare – most originators out of Kings X were prebooked by Agents (hence the duplicates) and turn up on the day casuals while not unknown were quite rare.

But it did happen. I remember driving an OB (can't remember which one) one Friday night at Christmas on Service 29. Kings X-Barnadiston Church theoretically but only beyond Haverhill as far as your last passenger. But Premier Travel instruction: SHOW BARNADISTON.

Anyway young couple with child in tow turned up at the door and said:
"Do you go to a place called Ashdon?"

"Yes I do" I replied. Visible relief on faces of couple as they clambered aboard.

Reached over to the passenger seat on the OB to reclaim my Insert Setright and ticket rack (none of this sophisticated mounted ticket machine nonsense and before anyone asks you can't drive an OB wearing an Insert Setright ticket machine because it interferes with the steering wheel).

."Where in Ashdon do you want?" I asked (as there were distinct fare stages between The Bonnett public house and the Rose and Crown, a good five minutes apart).

"I don't know" said the lady. "My sister's husband has had a terrible accident at work which is why we are going there. We've never been to Ashdon. We don't even know where it is. "

LOL! (but I didn't).

"All I know," lady said, "is that they live in a cottage which is quite close to where the village windmill is. Their cottage is whitewashed and there are not any other houses around them. We honestly don't know where we are going. She just told me to get the Premier bus to Ashdon,"

Okay. Ashdon (Bonnett) it is then.

"You will tell us when to get off won't you?"

"I'll try I said."

Anyway shortly after the turn in the lane up to Ashdon windmill (which is still there) I espied a whitewashed cottage and stopped outside it. Gone eight o'clock I think.

I suggested they might try this as a possible location. Door of cottage opened almost as I stopped and lady (and sister) embraced on the doorstep.

Job done I think.

Local knowledge. Happy Days as well. Different World I think.