

Alan Watkins recalls Bury St Edmunds

It was not unusual in school holiday time (and in about the last two weeks before Christmas) for Premier Travel's "market day" service to Bury from Haverhill to be three well loaded double-deckers. On one memorable occasion for this old chap they consisted entirely of the unique Premier Travel "County Class" Daimlers HVE 401-403 all of which spent the vast majority of their life at Haverhill because Haverhill had to have lowbridge deckers only.

The third HVE had to be hijacked back from a Pye contract where it normally rested all day in New Square, Cambridge occasionally being hijacked by Chrishall either for a duplicate or a failed bus.

Bury was an extraordinary place for buses on market days. Chambers of Bures could operate their scheduled double deck route (Colchester-Bury St Edmunds via Lavenham) with around four deckers at most but had twice that number to cover duplicates.

Their "through the lanes" routes to other places on market days often required saloon duplication as well.

It was not just Bury St Edmunds. The Premier Service 58 (Haverhill-Braintree via Finchingfield) Wednesday Only was comfortably coped with by a 35-seat saloon for most of the year (and an OB in January and February) but come the schools rising for the Summer became a double deck route. C.R. Pyman of Stambourne on their Wednesday route to Braintree happily accommodated the traffic with their "Mark One" SB except during the summer school hols when that had to be duplicated by their other vehicle (total fleet:2) - an elderly OB. And again just before Christmas sometimes.

As a teenager, several centuries ago now, Bury St Edmunds was my place of pilgrimage for buses and in particular the independents - again mostly during the school holidays. I was part of the increased traffic I guess and later conducted and/or drove some of it. The one constant was the dreadful state of the vehicles of Goldsmiths of Sicklesmere whose vehicles were universally in a dreadful state even by a definition of "dreadful state" of the 50's or 60's and which eventually saw them off.

Pulled off Angel Hill once driving a Lancet III relief en route to Haverhill at about the same time as a Goldsmith's decker started out a few yards away. I have no idea where it was heading for as they didn't usually bother with destination blinds (along with lots of other things) but there was an enormous explosion like a bomb going off and the front nearside tyre blew itself to pieces and it collapsed in a sort of lop-sided way. I just high tailed out of it.

Here is another (interesting?) thing about Chambers - even on Saturday/cinema nights they did no late work at all (aside from what was out on the road on private hire) - every stage vehicle of Chambers was back in the garage by 10 p.m.

I first met Jack Mulley on Angel Hill while conducting for Premier Travel. My driver once worked for him. Broad Suffolk accent, roll top jersey covered in grease/oil. Seemed an affable chap to me although a bit sort of unkempt I thought in a decision of the time. (I was only a kid and Mum had told me to try and always be smart in my dress - please don't laugh).

Wandering back to the PT double decker my driver opined: "You would never know he was a millionaire would you?" I didn't and wouldn't or that at one time he owned two Rolls Royces. Being out on the road with buses was a serious learning curve for this kid.

There is also an article in the Commercial Motor archive about parking problems in Bury: <http://archive.commercialmotor.com/article/12th-august-1966/52/the-battle-of-the-market-bus>