

The London Services of Premier Travel

Another story from Alan M Watkins

The main service to London Kings Cross was the daily Service 38 starting from Thurlow which was acquired from Burgoin on that takeover. It worked as a stage service as far as Saffron Walden and then became an Express setting down additionally at Woodford and Leyton. It returned each evening at 6.15 p.m.

It had an 8 am duplicate from Haverhill to Saffron Walden for the locals and schoolchildren which worked back from Saffron Walden at 10 am.

Additional journeys at weekends saw Kings Cross services from Stradishall Aerodrome and from Cowlinge (pronounced Culling, locally). The last Saturday/Sunday journey was the 9 p.m. from Kings Cross arriving at Thurlow at 12.10 am and on Sunday extended to Cowlinge arriving 12.25 am. The service went via Haverhill, both the Bumpsteads, Hempstead and Radwinter.

There was also a feeder to this on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays: Service 29 which operated from Kedington and the Wrattings via Castle Camps and Ashdon which arrived at Walden at the same time as the 38. If the Service 29 passengers could be accommodated then only bus worked through. Otherwise both did. Same rules as for the 7/28 listed below.

Both these services were 99 per cent operated by Haverhill with the occasional duplicate provided by Chrishall or Harston but that was rare.

In addition there were stage only shorts between Haverhill and Walden on Service 38 and WFS shorts on the 29 to and from Camps End (Spindleberry Cottage, which is still there and is literally the end of the road at Camps End, thereafter it peters out into a farm track). These Camps End journeys were normally an OB but I did do it more than once with one of the HVE's.

Service 7/28 operated on Fridays and Sundays only. Service 7 came from Weeden, Service 28 from Draytons of Barley. Between them they served umpteen villages in a somewhat roundabout route for both of them.

One situation may amuse some of you. There are a group of villages called the Pelhams which consist of Furneaux Pelham, Stocking Pelham and Brent Pelham. Service 7 did the first two and Service 28 did Brent Pelham.

At one point, close to Brent Pelham, these two buses passed each other going in opposite directions!

Their next and most important meeting point was not in the timetable. This took place on the forecourt of the Jubilee Transport Cafe at Puckeridge. At which point the passengers were amalgamated and one bus went through to Kings Cross. The procedure was repeated in the evening.

The problem was that you could prebook on all these services (and many did) but you could also just hail the bus, so numbers were always a bit of guesswork. The conductor or driver if it was omo issued Singles and Day Returns from his Insert Setright but if it was a Period Return you had to write it out and clip the copies to your waybill for charting later. If you were presented with a paper period return you collected it in and issued them with a no value Exchange Ticket.

Normally Daily Orders specified which 7/28 should work through but if there were too many passengers you had to ring Chrishall depot (I can still remember it: it was 226) and tell them you were going through as obviously they then had to cover anything else they previously had in store for you on the assumption that you WOULDN'T be going through!

There was one further Sunday up journey on 7/28 leaving at around 6.30ish on both routes and again the same mix'n'match took place at the Jubilee Cafe. There was no return journey on either route on Sunday evening. The scheduled arrival in Kings Cross was 8.55 pm.

The schedulers among you will note that such a vehicle (or vehicles) is then ideally placed to operate any down duplicates at 9 p.m. on either Service 29 or Service 38! And so they sometimes did.

There were three further services to Kings Cross which were true Express, one of which was the oddest of all.

Service 30 was a Forces Leave service which left RAF Upwood on both Fridays and Saturdays at 12 noon (arriving Kings X at 3 pm) and returning at 11 p.m. on Sunday night (Upwood 2 am) and Service 32 leaving RAF Stradishall at 12 noon on Fridays and Saturdays and returning at 10.30 pm (Stradishall about 1.30 am).

Tickets for these were sold in advance at the respective camps on the previous Thursday so the exact accommodation requirements were known.

In practice, if the loading was above about 30, Premier used to put on a double decker because most of these lads could be humping great big kit bags about.

Premier had a tiny depot (ex Gills) at Godmanchester with an allocation that rarely exceeded five. All the Upwood Aero Forces Leave services were covered mostly by Haverhill (occasionally Chrishall or Harston) but never by Godmanchester who did however serve it by stage services.

The weirdest of all, perhaps, was Express Service 35 which operated between July and September from Clacton to London Kings X. There was only one journey each Saturday which left Clacton at 2 pm and was scheduled to arrive in London at 5.50.

Premier purchased this service from Mr W.H. Thorne who owned - and made most of his money - from The Warwick Castle Coach Station in Pier Avenue, Clacton.

Why one journey? Originally this was a package "circular" with the Down Journey being made by Paddle Steamer and the return being made by coach! The Paddle Steamer had gone by the time Premier bought the licence but, again for the schedulers, this was also a useful positioning journey for vehicles coming off Service 5 Birmingham-Clacton who could carry what few passengers there ever were (a 29 seater coped adequately all the time) but made a few pence on the way to Kings Cross to again be a down duplicate if required.

In the same way that an up journey duplicate or service bus from Clacton to Birmingham Service 5 was readily on hand to operate Express Service 31's Sunday night return at 10.15 p.m. from Birmingham to RAF Upwood where it arrived at around 2.15 a.m.

I have one Daily Orders where the driver worked a 7 a.m. Northampton-Clacton on Service 5, operated the Service 35 at 2 p.m. to London and was a duplicate at 9 p.m. from Kings Cross to Haverhill, arrival about 11.50 p.m. That was a long day!

My favourite duty remains PT3 (Premier Travel, Cambridge):

Sign On 7.45 am

Dead Car to Market Hill, Haverhill

8.00 Relief to Thurlow-London to Saffron Walden 8.48

(If insufficient seats to London Kings Cross continue to London after phoning Garage from De Barr's Shop)

If continuing to London please phone garage upon arrival at Kings Cross and await instructions.

If not continuing to London leave vehicle on Saffron Walden Common.

If not continuing to London await Eastern National bus at 9.11 to Audley End Station and return to Haverhill by train.

If not continued to London catch 2.45 pm train from Haverhill and await Eastern National bus to Saffron Walden. Walk to Common and work 4 pm Saffron Walden-Haverhill.

Car to garage. Sign Off.

If held in London work 6.15 Kings Cross relief as directed. Car to garage, sign off.

If held in London pay on this duty to be 15 and a quarter hours."

I'm not sure but I don't think they do that sort of stuff these days.