

THE END OF THE AMOS ERA

By Alan Osborne

The bus service of Amos, Belchamp St. Paul running into Sudbury ceased after Tuesday 31 December 2002 and here we pay tribute to this long established operator.

Mr. Daniel Amos, the grandfather of the present owner started the family carrier business in 1902 with a horse and cart. Later a convertible vehicle was acquired which could carry both goods and passengers, but not at the same time !

In the early 1920's, Mr. James Amos used a 14-seater Chevrolet on the bus service into Sudbury. A Saturday service to Halstead commenced in March 1938 as a summer only shopping facility. It was suspended in September 1938, but was reinstated during the war running on Tuesdays. In 1948 a third service to Bury St. Edmunds for the Wednesday market was started. In 1962 the Tuesday Halstead journey was revised to instead work into Sudbury.

The Market Hill terminal in the Suffolk town was changed to the new Bus Station in 1969. In the following year the Bury service was withdrawn leaving just the Ovington - Sudbury service running on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays along a different route each day. Around this time the ownership passed to W. G. Amos, trading as J. Amos & Son. The bus timetable (see below) then remained the same for almost thirty years. Changes were eventually made from 8 August 2000, when the Tuesday service was cut back to start from Belchamp St. Paul and the route revised so as to omit Borley. In addition, the Saturday afternoon working then ceased. It remained in this form to the end.

The Amos fleet usually numbered about four vehicles; in addition to the bus service, school contracts and local private hires and excursions were undertaken. Bedford vehicles were generally favoured with the most long lived and notable Amos vehicle being J VX 307, a Bedford OWB fitted with 32-seat utility style Duple bodywork. It joined the fleet in November 1944 and lasted for almost twenty years during which time it went through no less than three sets of seats. In later years a minibus sufficed for the Sudbury service. Bell punch tickets have always been used, suitably altered by hand when the fares increased. Sometimes sister-in-law Kathy Kemp would act as unpaid conductor, also collecting her own £3 return fare.

It was announced in the summer that the business would cease at the end of 2002. The school runs finished at the end of the school term in July, thus ending a contract that had been held since 1932. During August a start was made to dispose of the coach fleet. Bus operations were then maintained with the sole remaining vehicle, Dodge minibus D457YPN.

The author was present in Sudbury on Saturday 28 December to witness the last ever departure to Ovington. Incidentally some of the timings on the inward run, Ovington dep. 9.30 a.m., passing Tilbury 9.35 a.m. and Great Yeldham 9.40 a.m. had remained unchanged for over fifty four years.

The very last journey on 31 December 2002, proudly driven by Billy Amos, now 80 years old, was festooned with balloons to mark the business having completed its century. We all wish him a long, happy and well earned retirement.

I am most grateful to Nigel Turner for his valued help with this article.

Ovington –Sudbury (timetable dated 1.4.74)

	Tues	Thurs	Sat	Sat		Tues	Thurs	Sat	Sat
Ovington, Green	09:40	13:00	09:30	13:30	Sudbury, Bus station	11:45	16:30	12:00	16:30
Tilbury court	09:45		09:35	13:35	Borley green	11:55	16:40		
Great Yeldham			09:40	13:40	Foxearth School	12:05		12:15	16:45
Little yeldham church			09:45	13:45	Pentlow, Forge	12:15		12:25	16:55
Belchamp st paul, Green	09:55	13:05	10:00	14:00	Belchamp, Otten		16:50		
Belchamp, Otten		13:10			Belchamp st paul, Green	12:20	16:55	12:30	17:00
Pentlow, Forge	10:00		10:05	14:05	Little yeldham church			12:45	17:15
Foxearth school	10:10		10:15	14:15	Great Yeldham			12:50	17:20
Borley green	10:20	13:20			Tilbury court	12:30		12:55	17:25
Sudbury, Bus station	10:30	13:30	10:30	14:30	Ovington, Green	12:35	17:00	13:00	17:30

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Some memories of Amos of Belchamp St Paul (near Sudbury)

Contributed by Alan A Watkins.

First, some thoughts prompted by a photo of Bedford OWB J VX307.

This vehicle was new to Amos, Belchamp St Paul, with wooden seats in November 1944 (I was two at the time) and this was a priority vehicle authorised and supplied by the then Ministry of War to an operator in the wilds of nowhere who accidentally became important in Whitehall because they were major contractors during World War Two firstly in the building of the makeshift airfields for the Spitfires of Essex and Suffolk and were major transporters of staff to and from and of those who constructed them. Priority applicants.

This is Betty, named after the daughter Mr and Mrs Amos lost to pneumonia in 1943 aged three or four I think and she perpetuated that name through the more peaceful post war lanes in this wonderfully rural part of the world (and it still is) until the early 60's by which time she had, through war and peace, clocked up over a million miles "without much trouble" which is going some in that rural enclave.

I cannot remember who he sold it to but I do know he regretted selling "her" late into his life. When I first met Bill Amos (1970ish I think) he took me up the stairs of the garage to

the loft where was a complete set of spare seats for Betty and headlamps and a spare gearbox and various other bits and pieces.

"I wish I'd never sold her. Bloody stupid thing to do" he said and there were tears in his eyes which I didn't understand at the time but do now.

All her "spare parts" were still up in the loft but sadly, by then, she was no longer there.

To and fro airfields in the war years, to and fro Sudbury (and Bury St Edmunds) on stage work in more peaceful times.

Mr and Mrs Amos were an absolutely delightful couple. Aside from the three or four buses he had a couple of tipper lorries mostly used for sugar beet work. One of them was a Leyland Comet (can't remember the other one).

The company was started by his father with horse drawn carrier services into Sudbury and I have his original headed notepaper which proclaims "Laundelettes For Hire" with a 191 date for you to fill in.

I also have an invoice from Bill's dad to Premier Travel confirming that he would provide a coach on a hiring in extra - "the charge I will leave to you". Yeah, right.

Both Mr and Mrs Amos a joy to deal with. Lovely honest country folk. They used Bell Punch stock tickets but I printed their first and last titled tickets headed AMOS COACHES. He kept driving into his 80's.

Anyway Bill DID regret selling Betty and I would claim to have seen the tears in his eyes to prove it.

Poor old girl. Over a million miles in that part of the world is going some!

It is just a piece of machinery of course.....

And more recollections:

Sadly the OWB was not a survivor [the PSVC publication PF6 has it as withdrawn 6/64, to Fontenay Fruit Farms, Wickham Bishops (non-PSV)]. Billy did try to buy her back several years after she was sold but by then she had gone for scrap - something for which he appeared not to have forgiven himself.

The company started as JW Amos (Billy's father) as a horse drawn carrier into Sudbury (mainly the market days of Wednesday and Saturday) and that remained the basis of their stage carriage operations to the very end. Before the last war there was also a Wednesday only service to Bury St Edmunds (again for market day) but that ceased sometime in the middle 1950's I believe. The steady income right to the end was school contracts which required two or three vehicles and the timings of the stage services were such that these could be fitted in "around" the stage services.

After the death of Billy's father, at some age in the 60's, the company became W.G Amos (T/A Amos Coaches). There were also two lorries which did occasional local haulage work mostly for the farms but which were at their busiest in the Sugar Beet season transporting loads to both Felsted and Kings Lynn. They also held a couple of modest summer excursion licences to such as Clacton & Walton, Southend (for the Illuminations plus an Excursion Licence to Ipswich Town FC).

The pace in the Belchamps (Otten and Walter as well as St Paul) was, and remains,

slow. Billy did all the maintenance work, the repairs, while his wife at the time I came to know them did all the "office work". There was then a shop at Belchamp St Paul (almost opposite the garage which overlooked the Village Green) but she had for some years done her shopping in Sudbury on "market days", going in on the bus and taking the fares (as did the wife of Mr Jolly of Norton working into Bury St Edmunds). Otherwise it was always "one person operated". They used Bell Punch stock tickets until I began to supply them with their first ever titled tickets. They ordered about once every six months in very small quantities.

I used to deliver to them because it was a lovely excuse for an afternoon out in a beautiful and remote part of the world. With variations the stage route to Sudbury (which operated about four days a week) variously served the two "other" Belchamps, Ovington, Tilbury juxta Clare, Borley. Much of the route and variations were almost single track in places with some tortuous hairpin bends en route to the Belchamps. You won't find much out there now but it was extremely peaceful when I knew it - the drone of a working tractor somewhere was about the only thing that impeded upon the peace. A few muddy roads sometime in the Winter as tractors proceeded from field to field without observing the then non-existent health and safety directive to clean your wheels first. In those days if there was a bloody great lump of mud in the road you just steered round it. That was then.

Both were very active in the local community. He was the churchwarden for many years (as his father had been) and Mrs A was a member of the "Flower Committee" who did the arrangements. She was a most charming and thoughtful lady. Billy told me one afternoon that the most money the firm had ever made was during the war years - the construction of the airfield and then contract services to places like RAF Shepherds Grove (near Bury) which was the "paperwork" headquarters of that region of East Anglia and which needed civilian clerks in some numbers. Mrs A thoughtfully observed how ironic it was that the War destroyed some but benefitted others. In the time that I knew them all the "staff" were part time - either retired folk or agricultural workers making a few quid on the side by driving as and when required. For several years after the war they also had work transporting former German prisoners of war to and from the "Land Settlements", mostly to work on local farms. Premier Travel had similar work at Abingdon diverting some Tuesday journeys to the "Land Settlement" on Service 13 from Linton to Saffron Walden.

It really is an age gone forever. As I've recalled before Mrs A rang me one day with a ticket order and politely asked if I could make the fares on my punch tickets larger "because our driver who does Sudbury has difficulty in making out the fares". I obliged, upped the point size and did them in bold. Whatever the eyesight problems they never hit anything so far as I know. Into the 50's they also had a Vauxhall car which doubled as a taxi if needed.

They had their local private hire work - the Sunday School outings, the WI trips. Throughout the war years and into the middle 60's they also got "hired in", primarily by Premier Travel for summer reliefs on Service 5 (Birmingham-Clacton) or to help with things like the annual outing of the Haverhill Co-operative Society Ltd (a day at the seaside like Walton on Naze, Clacton or Southend) which, in the days of low capacity vehicles, often required 30 or more. Another regular source of income in the "Golden Age" of buses in East Anglia were duplicates to and from London Kings X on the two services via Thaxted operated by the splendidly named Barnabas Kingston Jennings (BK Jennings) of Ashen which is just down the road through the twisty lanes. There was also occasional work for Mr Chinery of Corona Coaches at Acton. I am sure "Betty" would have appeared on all of these at some stage or another in her life.

Amos was a real "country bus" which I just caught the end of. It really was the end of an era and I think I was conscious of that. Billy simply retired - there was no one to take it over and I imagine they made such little profit that no one would have been interested in buying the business. Obviously they made enough to live on (the school contracts probably guaranteed

that) but I got the impression that they led a very simple existence and had done all their lives. At the time I knew them they certainly hadn't then got around to acquiring a television and I can't imagine they felt a pressing need to do so. Very few used the bus service to Sudbury after the late 50's/middle 60's and as the years passed they got older and older and eventually left this mortal coil and waited by the roadside no more.

And, by then, even the farmworkers had their own cars and could go to Sudbury (or further) as and when they liked. Today the last remnants of the Amos service is a Wednesday there and back trip to Sudbury by the Braintree District Council "shopper bus". It is fully wheelchair accessible - which poor old "Betty" was certainly not - and the Council proudly claim that the driver is willing to help with pushchairs and carrying shopping but that was always the case with Mr or Mrs Amos and their drivers as well. The difference, I suppose, is that you didn't need to say it in those days.

The Amos "garage" was a huge wooden barn like structure (and, for all I know, it may well have originally been just that) with the spare parts "loft" upstairs. In between school contracts buses were often just left in the road by the village green (no parking restrictions then, or now, so far as I know) and such road users as materialized just circumnavigated them. In those days it was the "Small Society" and Billy Amos and his forbears, including "Betty", were an intrinsic part of that fabric.