

Essex Bus Magazine Extra

Historical features special issue

Issue 10 Spring 2026



Essex Bus Enthusiasts Group

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From the Colour Archives



All change in Southend town centre!

This almost timeless scene was about to be swept away when **Paul Bateson** photographed Eastern National 2417, 209 BPU, on August 24th, 1969. The bus, an early Bristol Lodekka LD with 6-cylinder Bristol engine, had been new to Southend depot in 1955 and as far as we can tell, remained at SD for its entire life, being withdrawn in December 1971. Originally numbered 1448, it would have started life on the busy ex-City Coach Co 251 service to Wood Green but is now working out its life on town service 28 to Southchurch Eastern Avenue, over part of a former trolleybus route. The passing point box has been painted out but otherwise the bus is largely as delivered fourteen years earlier. The advert recalls one of the two principal bookshops in Southend, Grindley's in Leigh Broadway. The other was Bobin's Books, in the Victoria Plaza whose entrance is partly visible behind the front of the bus, and both sadly missed.

The shops behind the bus are at the top (south) end of Victoria Avenue, between the Victoria Circus junction and Broadway Market, terminus for some local bus routes such as the 4 group to Wakering. Taylor's Furnishing has a street level shop behind the bus and extends at first floor level over many of the other shops. At the Victoria Circus corner, in front of the bus, was Garons banqueting suite with its prominent clock. In the 1930s, Westcliff Motor Services had their offices at the first-floor level here.

But look at the very left of the picture and signs are there of the impending demolition of everything seen here – construction was under way for Southend's new inner ring road, Queensway, cutting off the town centre from Southend Victoria Station. The crane seen on the left is part of the construction (or was it demolition?) of the new town centre. The buildings here and at the west end of Southchurch Road, including the quirky Victoria and Talza arcades, were swept away to be replaced by the new multi-storey Hammerson Shopping Centre (named after the developers), widely regarded as a concrete monstrosity, completely devoid of the character of the old shops. Today it has been roofed in and is promoted as the Victoria Plaza. Such is progress.

Essex Bus Magazine Extra from the Essex Bus Enthusiasts Group

Issue 10

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Introduction

EBM Extra is an occasional series devoted entirely to historical features that we don't have room for in the main monthly magazine. Each issue aims to cover a broad range of eras, operators and places, all related to Essex.

We plan to publish two Extras each year, subject to funding; we already have sponsors for 2026 & 2027 but would welcome further offers, either for a whole issue or as a contribution to one for 2028 (currently each issue of EBM costs about £600, including postage to members). This issue has been generously sponsored by Bob Williamson, to whom we extend our grateful thanks. You can read more about Bob on page 2. All articles in this magazine were written by **Richard Delahoy**, except where noted.

We hope you will enjoy this Extra magazine and will find the range of articles interesting and stimulating. This latest issue is a bit of a Lodekka-fest, with the cover/inside front cover, a look at the transition to the NBC livery and then Brian Barrett's memories of driving and conducting Lodekkas. We look back at one of EN's smaller depots, Halstead, more buses in unusual guises, shine a spotlight on two early 1950s special operations by Victoria Coaches of Leigh on Sea, an early park & ride experiment in Colchester, a lost name from the turn of the century and a conundrum for bus conductors in Southend. Hopefully there is something for everyone. Enjoy!

Contents

IFC	From the Colour Archives	16	Buses in unusual guises
2	This Issue's Sponsor	20	The lost names of deregulation - 2: Town & Country
4	A livery in transition	26	Blind spot
7	Modern history - Viceroy follow up / Solo farewell	27	"Standing room only!"
8	All in a day's work – the 251	28	Park & Ride in Colchester – first time round
12	Around the EN depots - Halstead	30	V is for Victoria Coaches, Leigh on Sea

Front cover: a livery in transition. As explained more fully in the article on page 4, there was a brief period in 1972 immediately before the application of NBC style fleetnames when some EN buses carried this hybrid livery, with the top cream band overpainted green, the lower one painted white (with no black lining out) and a coach style fleetname on the front cowl (only). Bristol FLF 2740, EOO 582, loads in Essex Street at Southend on 26 August 1972. This was a temporary stop in place as part of the final (at the time) redevelopment of Southend Victoria Circus, pending the opening of the Deeping underpass. **Richard Delahoy**

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This Issue's Sponsor - Bob Williamson

Bob explains his introduction to a life-long interest in buses and his passion for bus blinds. We've featured a number of his blind listings in EBN/EBM over the years, and there's another two in this issue, on page 26.

Living near Barnet in the mid to late 1950s caused my initial interest in buses to be London Transport ones (particularly trolleybuses on the local 609/645) and on being bought a 1957 Ian Allan ABC the realisation was that there were many thousands of London buses alone – no, I didn't see them all!

However, in 1957 a holiday at Angmering-on-Sea (between Worthing and Littlehampton) was an introduction to the outstanding Southdown Motor Services fleet and was the cause of an interest in destination blinds (or 'screens' as Southdown called them). Most buses had the large and informative 41" x 14" display. A 107 would arrive from Worthing and then go out as a 9A towards Littlehampton. This meant that the conductor had to get up on the front of the bus and wind through a comprehensive survey of Sussex villages and towns to get to the correct display (you didn't see THAT in Birmingham or London).

Awareness of Southend Corporation was in the 1950s when a visit was made to an aunt in Belfairs via the LTSR to Leigh-on-Sea Station. A Bristol K swept down the slope, stopped and crawled up the other slope back to the main road and was followed by a superb blue and cream double decker. This was the one we required but only being a short journey we all sat on the lower deck long seats. I was at the end by the platform and was immediately fascinated by the extra large rear destination boxes. There were handles, winding key holes and glass viewing holes all protruding out over the staircase. All depending on where I was living at the time, many visits were made to Southend from the mid-1960s onwards - the fleet never failed to impress.

My first knowledge of the existence of Eastern National was during a visit to Wood Green with Grandparents in about 1958 when I asked, "what is that green bus doing here?" I was told that it was a City Coaches bus to Southend. Not very accurate as it had been EN 251 for about six years, but at least it was a start. The first proper introduction to Eastern National was in 1959 when the family holiday was two weeks at Holland-on-Sea which was by train to Clacton Station, where a Bristol L5G was outside with (to me) an enormous set of front and rear 48" wide blinds. Such a minor incident was to have far reaching consequences in terms of bus and coach interest. Subsequent holidays for the next seven years were at Holland-on-Sea so knowledge grew of the EN company and many trips were taken in the area, such as to Colchester (by the 19) and Ipswich (by the 123). Instead of the beach, countless hours were spent (or invested) at the Bus Station. Working from the timetable a bus would arrive or depart or run through every two minutes and there were always several parked in the centre of the yard. Through the kindness (and interest) of inspectors I was able to start copying the contents of the very varied blinds on temporarily out of

service buses and this was the start of the accumulation of extensive records of blinds.



Left: an example of a 48" wide blind on Bristol K ONO 71 (1338, later 2266) in Clacton Bus Station. The driver had to change the lengthy, heavy front passing point/number blind from inside the cab, a tiring job!

EBEG collection

School was attended in Hornsey (London, N 8) and involved a change of bus at Wood Green (very handy for the Trolleybus depot and the EN depot). An (almost) daily visit was made to one of the depots although after November 1961 when the trolleybuses were replaced by buses, the EN depot was visited more frequently. (Exploits here were recounted in an edition of 'Classic Bus' some years ago).

On leaving school my first employment was with the Port of London Authority at the small London Dock (Western) near Tower Bridge – not the extensive Royal Docks downstream. After a while I started in their Estates department and, on leaving in 1971, a position was secured with The Green Shield Trading Stamp Co., which was in the early stages of setting up Argos Stores. Only a few years later Green Shield Stamps was on the wane and redundancy came with twenty-five other people in the Property & Estates department.

A few exams were completed at this time and, on leaving, a job with a Michelin Tyres subsidiary was noticed in the 'Estates Gazette'. The interview was successful and with several changes of locations was to last 28 years. However, it was soon apparent that I knew far more about property law and procedures than the manager to whom I was answerable. 'So what' one might say, but the positive nature of this was that he just let me get on with the extremely diverse property matters regarding the 500 or so premises owned or leased. This meant extensive travelling all over England and Wales (not Scotland as Scottish Law is very different) so, after the site visit or meeting the rest of the day was mine! All depending on where the job was located, a considerable number of bus and coach operators, bus stations, bus garages and scrapyards were visited, all of which could never have been achieved in a purely office job. Wherever the day or days out were taken the work was always done first and the objective then (apart from photographing and collecting up tickets) was to acquire as many blinds as possible.

Many operators were very helpful and were only too pleased to be rid of what they considered rubbish (!) but most came from multiple visits to the Yorkshire scrapyards resulting in several hundred blinds being rescued which a large percentage of are no doubt in preserved vehicles and collections today.

Early retirement in 2002 (redundant again) was welcomed and saw the start of a long programme of listing and photographing collections of blinds ranging from private individuals with just a handful of blinds, to extensive accumulations owned by museums and collectors. This is a continuing activity and, to date, around 17,000 have been photographed from short London Transport number blinds to some very long and very heavy South Wales Transport destinations.

Despite redundancies and other personal matters, the words 'fortunate' and 'privileged' come to mind to sum up the experiences enjoyed, the like of which no-one will ever see again.

Bryan Everitt

In the previous issue of EBM Extra we included a short tribute to Bryan Everitt, author of the definitive history of Moore's of Kelvedon which he published in 1998, and are grateful to David Edwards for providing more useful information.

He explains: "Bryan's connection to Moore's (and buses) was due to his father - Hubert Everitt - being Moore's Chief Traffic Clerk. Inside the front cover of Bryan's book there is a dedication to him, and on page 121, a photo of Hubert at his desk. The family lived next door to Roslyn Garage in a company owned house, "The Grotto" which passed to ENOC with the sale of the business and in due course became part of NBC subsidiary Omnibus Estates portfolio.

"Bryan didn't work for Moore's or within the bus industry but eventually held a senior management position in Marconi's based at New Street Chelmsford. He lived with his wife Kathleen in a smart bungalow in Broomfield for many years. He was a keen enthusiast and whenever we met would always ask me what was happening and particularly wanted to know what "the National" were doing with the former Moore's routes! He was instrumental in organising several day trips involving both the former Moore's preserved Guy Arab - 373 WPU - and my own RE (as a Kelvedon based vehicle) to commemorate several notable Moore's anniversaries. Bryan sadly died in a care home also in Broomfield in May 2016".

A livery in transition

How EN moved from the traditional Tilling Group livery to the NBC standard in 1972.

From about the mid-1960s many bus operators moved to simplify their liveries, usually to reduce repaint time and cost and to simplify repairs to body damage, but also in some cases to present a more modern image. This could include a new fleetname style - think Crosville and Ribble for example, with traditional transfers replaced by a larger, more modern and prominent style - see picture on the next page. But Eastern National steadfastly stuck to their traditional styles of Tilling green and cream, with two cream bands on double deckers (one on saloons), lined in black, and with the well-established gold underlined fleetname transfers on the lower panels. That classic style is nicely illustrated by the shot of 2417 on the inside front cover Colour Archives feature. One change was forced on EN with the deletion by ECW of the mouldings for an upper cream band, affecting EN deliveries from 2852 onwards.

But the coming of the NBC Corporate Identity in 1972 was to end individuality across NBC's fleets, being announced on 10 April 1972 at the General Managers' Conference. It was followed up by the launch of the detailed and highly specific Design Manual, with NBC's Chief Marketing Officer Ron Whitehouse setting out the approach in a letter from NBC HQ to General Managers on 19 July 1972 and then followed up by the issued of the actual printed manual. He added that "The desire is to see the symbol and corporate lettering applied to fleets within three months".

It is fair to say that a number of variations from the standard emerged, not always officially sanctioned, but this article looks at the short-lived transition from the traditional to corporate blandness (or insert here your take on the NBC corporate image!).

The transition was partly due to confusion and uncertainty as the NBC plans emerged. So from about July 1972 six FLFs appeared from standard repaints with the upper cream band omitted and the coach style fleetname comprising equal height sloping block capitals applied in a forward position on the remaining cream band (with no black lining), instead of the underlined version on the lower panels. Does anyone have pictures of this version? It applied to 2708/30/7/8/50/2/68 at least.

Then a campaign change started around July/August 1972 on vehicles not yet due for repaint. The work involved painting out the upper cream band in Tilling green and changing the lower band to white (again with no black lining), the traditional side fleetnames removed and replaced by the small coach style but now on the front cowl only, above the radiator grille. By early September many had been done, including LDs, FLFs and VRs. Similar action was taken with the single deck fleet. Our cover photo shows this style, on 2740 seen on 26 August that year.

By around October supplies of the new NBC style fleetname and double N logo in white were available and being applied on the lower panels of deckers and *above* the windows on saloons, in a forward position, on the Tilling green livery as well as repaints into NBC leaf green. The design manual was very specific on the positioning of the new lettering/logo but EN Chief Engineer Rodney Hawkins managed to adapt this a little to avoid the lettering being applied across panel joins (where it was thought to be vulnerable to being damaged in the bus wash). Indeed, his subterfuge went unnoticed for quite some time, even to the extent of the NBC's 1973 Annual Report proudly including a picture of EN's Fred Brewster applying the transfers to a new Leyland National – but not quite in the approved position! The names on the front were removed, and wheels painted light grey. Legal lettering was applied in new style grey transfers and grey later spread to the other external notices, all of which were previously in yellow. FLF 2742 may have been the first full repaint into the NBC "leaf" green colours, in August 1972; of course,

new deliveries also came in that style, much derided at the time and initially at least, not as hard wearing as the Tilling colours.

Left: showing the short-lived application of the coach style fleetname on the cream band of a service bus, from about October 1971, in this case an unidentified Bristol RELL. This facilitated placing adverts on the side panels where the fleetname had been previously.

Frank Church



Right: this was how the use of NBC names looked on buses still in Tilling green. Note also the grey wheels. CVW 855G, 1501, in the newly opened Southend Central Bus Station on 26 May 1974.

Richard Delahoy



Left: as mentioned in the text, Crosville was one operator to seek a modernised livery ahead of the NBC edict. The new, large fleetname in a modern lower-case font first appeared on their 100 Seddon Pennine saloons. Then with the take-

over of part of North Western Road Car, in 1972 vehicles in that fleet were repainted in apple green rather than the traditional Tilling green, and the style was also applied to repaints of the native Crosville fleet, including Lodekka DLG946, 928 CFM, seen here outside the Butlins holiday camp at Pwllheli on 25 May 1972. With the single cream band and black wings, I think it presented a very attractive and modern image – but sadly swiftly overtaken by the NBC Headquarters imposing the standard corporate identity. Also, equally sadly, standards at Crosville later slipped with the introduction of spray painting, all-over green including mudguards and wings and no white relief!

With thanks to Bill Barlow of the Crosville Enthusiasts Club for info on this livery change – as he comments “We were hoping to see the entire fleet reliveried in apple green in due course, but that dream was shattered by the advent of NBC corporate livery”. **Richard Delahoy**

Right: and here is the application of the interim name on the front cowl of Bristol FS 2538, 61 PPU, at Southend depot on 16 September 1972, showing one of the various unofficial adaptations of the name!
Richard Delahoy



Below: our final picture shows the full application of the NBC livery on brand new Bristol VR 3039, PWC 514M, in the rear yard at Kelvedon depot on 28 April 1974, newly allocated there and not yet fitted with depot plates. We presume that the fleetnames were fitted by ECW before delivery, as the T of National is directly on top of a panel joint, against Rodney Hawkins' desired spacing.

Behind 3039 is Bristol LD 2513, 1857 F, of Colchester depot which has worked a journey on the 53 terminating at Kelvedon. The depot was at this time shared between EN and National Travel South East. That arrangement was not to last and Silver End depot was reopened in October 1974 for EN's buses, gaining SE depot plates in place of KN ones. EBN issue 635, March 2017, has an interesting article by Keith Shayshutt looking at the detailed allocation and vehicle workings at this time (copy available on request as a pdf file).

Richard Delahoy



Sources: ENEG newsheets; Chris Stewart's book *EN Lodekkas* and other notes; and <https://nationalbusmanual.com/>, dubbed *A project to reissue the NBC's iconic Corporate Identity Manual, 1972-1976*.

Modern history – Viceroy follow up / Solo farewell

In the previous Extra (Autumn 2025) we looked at Viceroy Coaches and saw that their principal bus route was Saffron Walden – Wimbish – Thaxted – Great Dunmow, a route they gave up unexpectedly in December 1969.

Eastern National took up the route and linked it to the existing 33 to give a through service to Chelmsford. Subsequently it has gone through various iterations and has long since ceased to be commercial. Today the route is covered by the 313/314, Essex County Council tendered services run by Stephenson's of Essex since September 2013. Compared to the infrequent service of 4 to 6 journeys a day, today this deeply rural service astonishingly has an hourly frequency (but not many passengers, based on my limited experience of using it), aided in part we presume by Section 106 funding from the developers of major new housing estates at both ends of the route.

At the time of writing it was usually worked by ADL E200s, including the newest 25 plate examples, but previously had seen Optare Solos like the one seen below. First entering the fleet in 2007, at one stage Stephenson's operated a significant fleet of Solos but the final one in public service, 328, was withdrawn on 30 July last year. There are now no longer any Solos with Arriva Harlow or Lodges and we think the only one left with an Essex operator is Acme's YK07 BFM (although Angie's Tours of Lowestoft CNO7 KZH still appears on rail replacement, as illustrated in the March 2026 EBM), unless you know otherwise? And so another chapter of bus history draws to a close.

Below: pictured in Dunmow High Street on the 314 was Stephenson's 323, EU07 FVN, on a dull 16 August 2022. Passing is another scene from the past – Arriva operated service 133, Braintree to Stansted Airport, with the rear of Wright Streetlite 4323, SK68 TWU. That route was abandoned in June 2025 and taken up by Central Connect as the 333. **Richard Delahoy**



In another follow up, **David Lang**, webmaster of the excellent sct61.org.uk site, advises that the Viceroy picture at the top of page 16 of OTW 427 was by **John Boylett**, one of seven he took on a visit on 5th July 1959, whilst on page 17, the shot of UNO 408 was taken by John at Ascot Races on 21st July 1962.

One of the Group's earliest members, Brian Barrett worked as a student conductor and later driver, at Brentwood and Southend depots, in 1964/5/6. Here are his memories of those heady days working the "Main Road", the erstwhile City Coach Company Wood Green to Southend route, numbered 251 by Eastern National, with some thoughts on the Bristol Lodekkas used on that service.

My conducting career at Brentwood covered the Summers of 1964 (on Main Road) and 1965 (Locals). By those dates, the 251 Group was mainly FLF with the occasional LD whilst the double deck element of the local rota was mainly LD shared between 5Gs and 6Bs, the latter displaced from Main Road duties.

My basic rate of pay as a conductor was just under £11 per week (equivalent to £195 today). Saturday was generally the busiest day and my busiest shift was early shift B40 on Saturday 5th September after which I paid in £31/0/9d (= £550). I was fortunate to have Doug Brown as my regular driver but as he had better things to do with his time than work overtime, I worked with most of the Main Road drivers, most of whom had done at least twenty years and some approaching forty years. They represented professional busmen at their best with tremendous pride in the job they were doing.

The conductor and the Lodekka

At WG, SD and BD, drivers and conductors were permanently paired and went round the rota together, with drivers having an unofficial right of veto. A non-career conductor, such as a student or a lady who thought it a good idea to keep an eye on her driver husband tended to be avoided. However, the right team made the job much easier with the driver understanding the need for restrained driving to allow the conductor to collect a surge of short distance fares whilst the conductor understood when the priority was to keep the bus moving and assisted, for example, by helping passengers on and off with pushchairs and always being near a bell when the bus was at a bus stop. Good career conductors earned respect from the driving grade in general by their competence and many subsequently became one-man operators.

Most conductors enjoyed the Lodekka as it made their twin responsibilities of fare collection and keeping the bus moving easier. Its big advantage was the central upstairs gangway which made fare collection quicker and the conductor's view of the platform was not impeded by passengers seeking to reach a seat. Of great assistance to both conductor and driver was the location and nature of the bells. ECW always provided a generous number of bells, two in each saloon, enabling the conductor to start the bus from anywhere within it. The most popular bell was under the conductor's locker where it could be operated without impeding passenger flow but on FLFs some conductors preferred using the buzzer on the front bulkhead where you were in the way of passengers coming from or going to the upper deck. The TVX FLFs (1571-90, later 2700-19) were equipped with duplicated pushes at the top of the staircase, a bell with a decal reading 'For Conductor's use only' and a buzzer presumably for use by passengers. Although this assisted drivers who knew that a starting bell signal was given by the conductor from a location where they were well placed to observe the platform, it again meant that the conductor had to impede passenger flow to use it. This was not a feature of any subsequent FLF batches.

In 1964, after the introduction of the 151, Brentwood Main Road rota had 25 Monday to Friday duties and five pieces of overtime, worth around 3 to 4 hours each. Early round trips generally went towards Southend first whilst later generally went towards Wood Green. The overtime pieces comprised return trips to Gants Hill, where off peak 151 trips terminated, or a trip to Southend. Generally, crews operated the same duty for a week.

A typical early was B4 as described below for 31st July 1964, the first day of operation to Southend Seaway (after Tylers Avenue garage/terminal was closed):

0554	Sign On		
0609	Brentwood – Southend Seaway	251	1602 SD
	Paid Meal Break		
0834	Southend Seaway – Wood Green	151	1598 SD
1138	Wood Green – Brentwood	151	1597 WG
1305	Sign Off (Takings £20/12/3d, equivalent to about £360 today).		

A typical late was B21 as described below for 5th October 1964:

1702	Sign On		
1718	Brentwood – Wood Green	251	2790 SD
	Paid Meal Break		
1908	Wood Green – Southend Seaway	151	2782 SD
2204	Southend Seaway – Brentwood	151	2782 SD
2353	Sign Off (Takings £13/11/1d).		

A typical overtime piece was OT 2 as operated on Thursday 13th August 1964:

1052	Sign On		
1108	Brentwood - Gants Hill	151	2733 SD
1201	Gants Hill – Brentwood	151	2733 SD
1248	Brentwood – Gants Hill	151	2730 BD
1341	Gants Hill _ Brentwood	151	2730 BD
1435	Sign Off (Takings £6/16/11d).		

Below: during his first summer at Brentwood Brian conducted this FLF, 1630 of Southend depot, seen in Billericay on 16 July 1964. A week after the photo was taken, on

Wednesday 23 July 1964 Brian conducted 1630 on the 1108 from Brentwood to Gants Hill and the 1201 from Gants Hill to Brentwood. He later drove it at Southend as 2756, on service 22.

Bob Campen collection



The driver and the Lodekka

To most drivers, first and foremost driving was just a job popular with those that didn't like an office environment or being closely supervised. Bristol buses generally were a joy to drive with light steering, clutch and brake pedals and an organ type accelerator pedal. The rake of the steering wheel made for a more comfortable driving position than its K type predecessor, which more than compensated for the reduced nearside visibility occasioned by the radiator cowl. Older drivers appreciated that the cab was lower than on the K types which made getting in and out easier.

Few could discern any difference between Bristol and Gardner engined examples, with a similar pause between gear engagement being necessary; this reduced on cold engines as the revs died away quicker. For four speed Lodekkas, it was normal to start in second gear reaching maximum revs in each gear before making an upward change. Such was the flexibility of the 5LW engine that it was possible to start in third gear and remain in that gear while operating town services. Five speed gearboxes followed the same technique although many drivers did not use fifth gear at all and some stops on hills required a first gear start to avoid excessive clutch judder.

Drivers were keen to reduce the amount of time spent stationary and quickly noted that the forward entrance FLFs did not allow as rapid entry and exit as the rear entrance. However, braking for a stop nudged the passenger in the direction of the door akin to walking downhill. Another advantage was the close supervision of the platform area, increasingly important in an era when the standards of conducting were declining rapidly. There was a reluctance to report a vehicle defect, probably because it took time to fill in the form and, in the case of 251 group pool vehicles, mechanics were reluctant to remedy the defects on the buses from foreign garages. The need for brake adjustment was the most common running fault, followed by slipping clutches on FLFs.

All double deck deliveries until 2742 followed the cab interior layout first used in postwar K and L types, which left a lot to be desired. With the electrical switches and the starter awkwardly located behind the driver to his right side, this was a considerable discouragement to communicating to other drivers by flashing headlamps. The horn and dipswitch were on a stalk to the right of the steering wheel, while the speedometer gave a rough indication of speed but did not function below 10mph. The engine stop was on the driver's nearside but rarely seemed to work so drivers usually resorted to placing the bus in gear and then lifting the clutch. For FLFs, also on the driver's nearside were the door controls. Doors were opened by the driver when the vehicle came to a stop and closed on receipt of the starting signal from the conductor.

The change in the cab layout from 2742 was the first major change for Bristol double deckers since the introduction of the K family and was long overdue. The instrument panel was updated with an electric speedometer and sensibly located controls mounted in front of the driver. A new switch box incorporating the exterior lights, headlamp flasher and windscreen wipers, as well as the starter button was to the right of the driver just in front of a London Transport style self-cancelling flashing indicator. By leaving the headlamp switch in the on position, the headlamp could be flashed by flicking the sidelight switch up and down. On these buses headlamp flashing became very popular and hand signalling very rare.

The only other subsequent modification of note was the introduction of a new lighter gear selector from 2780 and a different arrangement of the lower deck front bulkhead to give the driver of wider angle of view of the platform commencing with 2808 (illustrated below) but also present on 2793, delivered 7 months earlier.



Left: laying over at the Southend Seaway terminus before pulling forward onto the departure stand to return to London as a 251 is Wood Green's 2808, FWC 426B, one of the Bristol engine FLFs (it was later re-engined to a Gardner 6LW in October 1977). New to Chelmsford

depot, it was allocated to WG from November 1965 to November 1967, then transferring to Clacton. Brian drove this particular bus once during his 1966 spell working at SD, on 14 September on the 1416 Basildon to Southend service 151. **Derrick Rudland, Richard Delahoy collection**

This article is an abridged and edited version of two much longer pieces written by Brian Barrett, *Eastern National and the Bristol Lodekka* and *251 Reminiscences 1952-1966*. Copies of both full articles, plus a supplementary account of Brian's time with *Crosville 1968-69* are available as a pdf file – e-mail the EBM Extra Editor if you'd like a copy.

Driving experience

In Summer 1966, I started as a driver at Southend. Here crews operated a 6-hour 40-minute day six days per week with a different duty every day, arranged as a week of earlies followed by a week of lates. Every few weeks an early turn on Friday followed by Saturday and Sunday rest days returning to a late turn on Monday gave a long weekend off. There were also split shifts over both peaks with a break in the middle but apart from those covered by crews who worked permanently on split shifts, these duties were split into two overtime pieces. Additional payments and enhanced payments boosted the payable hours figure but these were so complex that most crews relied on the wages clerk to get the calculations right.

2803 was the first Lodekka that I drove when, after completing three days of route learning at 1700, I was offered the 1720 service 2 to Grays and the 1918 return on Wednesday July 27. Generally regular FLF operation in 1966 was confined to 2/2A, 3/3A, 11, 19/19A, 22/22A/22B, 151/251, although they also appeared on 15 and 235 plus 25/25A on Sundays to relieve the usual KSW fleet. LD6B were usually to be seen on 6/6A, 16/17, 21/28 and occasionally on 9B and 14, whilst the small LD5G fleet and the FS5G were generally only seen out at peak times or on 25/25A if serviceable KSWs were in short supply.

My regular conductor was a student friend of mine, Jim Young (who sadly succumbed to Covid in 2021). We shared a flat in Westcliff and spent a very enjoyable and profitable summer. Thanks to Jim, my exposure to the many truly appalling non-career conductors at the depot, mainly other students, was minimised and we contrived to maintain high standards. At the time there was a chronic shortage of both drivers and conductors and overtime was plentiful. During my best paid week I worked 103.04 hours which became 151.30 with allowances, for a total of £46/0/6d (about £755 in today's money), substantially more than I was being paid as an Assistant Traffic Manager at Yorkshire Traction six years later!

My last day as a SD driver was Saturday September 17th 1966 and a pleasant surprise was to be taken off my rostered duty of 386 which had started at 1624 to operate 440 which finished with the last bus from Wood Green to Southend as detailed below:

1748	Sign On		
1818	Southend Seaway-Wood Green	251	2790 SD
	Paid Meal break		
2146	Wood Green-Southend Victoria Circus	251	2791 SD
0033	Sign Off.		

I returned to SD in October 1967 and Dave Crowley the Driving Instructor let me have a go in 2884, then in use as the 'driver familiarisation' bus as he was currently training all drivers on its characteristics, specifically the semi-automatic transmission. Opinion was sharply divided between senior drivers who thought it unnecessary and an erosion of their professional skills, and younger drivers who revelled in the ease with which gear changing could be made and couldn't care less about professional skills. In all other respects the handling was identical to other F series Lodekkas. Dave's view was that semi-automatic gears would be very useful in encouraging conductors to transfer to the driving grade but otherwise a waste of money on a solitary batch of crew operated double deckers and so it proved to be.

The 251 was a very pleasant day out for a driver with easy timings virtually unchanged since 1930 and limited but predictable congestion at the London approaches, for which crews made appropriate allowance by judicious early running. Indeed it was rare for a traditional five-minute comfort stop (for SD and WG crews only) not to be taken at Brentwood. It was technically undemanding for drivers with good quality roads and, at night, street lighting for most of the journey.

[References to fleet numbers are as carried by the respective buses at the time; the fleet was renumbered in August 1964. Depot codes are the standard Eastern National ones, viz BD Brentwood, SD Southend and WG Wood Green].

Brian then went on to join the Tilling Group as a Senior Management Trainee in 1967 and was appointed Assistant Traffic Manager at Yorkshire Traction in July 1970. After time at the University of Newcastle and as Assistant Director of the Bradford Bus Study, he joined Midland Red as Chief Planning and Development Officer, before taking up the same role at NBC regional level. After a period as Director of the Market Analysis Project, Brian was made Group Marketing Manager and subsequently Director of Marketing. A change of direction saw him appointed Marketing Director of Trusthouse Forte Catering and later the same role in Forte Hotels. Finally, he was appointed Chief Executive of Virgin Rail before retiring in January 1999.

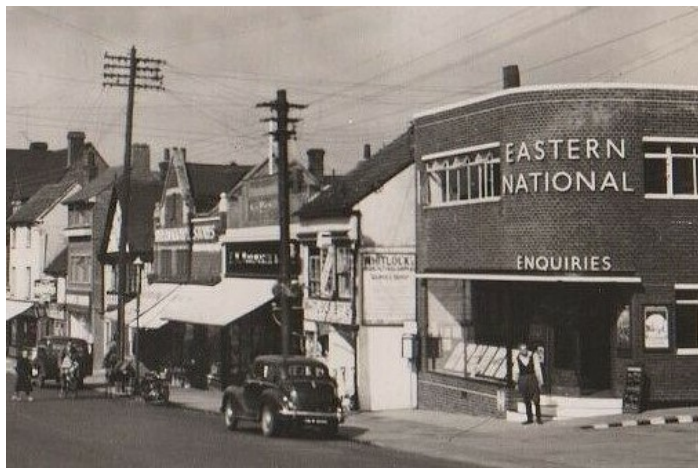
Around the EN depots - Halstead

With First withdrawing from serving Halstead in summer 2025 (ECC contract journeys on routes 88 & 370 aside), it seems appropriate to shine the spotlight on the small depot that Eastern National maintained in the High Street there from 1938 to 1984.

The National Omnibus & Transport Co had actually started to serve Halstead as long ago as 1920, with a service from Colchester, numbered 18. This involved outstationing a bus in the town, a common approach at the time to developing new services. A 1929 timetable shows journeys departing from Halstead at 0800 and 0830, both before the first arrival from Colchester; there was also a curious departure at 0635 from Halstead to Castle Hedingham, numbered 22, which doesn't appear to have had a corresponding return working. On the split of National into its regional companies, these became Eastern National services.

We have no information about where in Halstead National/EN garaged these buses and would welcome more details, but the bus terminus was at the Bull Hotel, so it is reasonable to assume that's where the buses were based initially. Two important acquisitions in 1933 then helped shape EN's future in Halstead, firstly the business of T W H Griffiths, who competed with EN on the 18. Then in December 1933 A Akers' *Bird Motor Service*, who ran to Braintree and an express route from the Hedinghams to London, was purchased. That acquisition included Akers' depot in Rosemary Lane, giving EN their first permanent base in the town. It duly appeared in the listing of depots in timetable books, phone Halstead 47. Rosemary Lane is just one street away from the Butler Road terminus/car park used by some services in more recent years, and close by the erstwhile LNER railway station, from whose forecourt buses ran from about 1931, even after the closure of the station to passengers at the end of 1961 (freight lingered on until April 1965), the stop being described as "Old Station Yard" right up to 1984.

We don't have any details or photos of the Rosemary Lane premises and presumably they were too small for all EN's operations, because in 1938 EN built a brand-new depot on the west side of the High Street and that's the focus of this article. The depot was built to the designs of the Tilling Group's Chief Architect, H J Starkey and had to accommodate the upward slope of the High Street. At the left-hand end was a two-storey office block with an enquiry/parcels office prominent on the High Street. The rest of the depot comprised covered accommodation plus an open rear yard. The phone number Halstead 47 was retained (later becoming 2487). Facilities were fairly limited, with two pits (according to a July 1940 plan) for mechanical inspections and, if memories are correct, latterly a bus wash, a free-standing affair that had to be manually pushed around each vehicle and seemed to make the operator wetter than the buses. As well as the usual complement of drivers, conductors and office staff, there was a GSO (Garage Service Operator) - ie cleaner/filler/shunter, latterly Colin Pretty - and a day cleaner. The depot was under the control of the Traffic Superintendent at Braintree (Peter Beardwell in the late 1970s), who also controlled Silver End. Robert Richardson recalls Jackie in the travel shop, who used to make spelling mistakes on her posters in the windows so that when people came in to tell her, she could sell them a holiday or excursion!



Left: a commercial postcard shows how the EN depot occupied a prominent position on the High Street, a couple of doors up from the local Woolworths store.

Our allocation lists generally only go back to the early 1960s, but here is a typical example from summer 1964, coinciding with the renumbering of the fleet into the series that many of us are familiar with. The bus allocation comprised:

Bristol K	2	2243/59	
Bristol LD Lodekka	5	2461/3/90, 2505/36	
Bristol FLF Lodekka	2	2716/63	
Bristol MW OMO bus	6	1311/20/2/37/8/61	(1337/8 had the unique "Grimsby" style
Bristol MW crew op.	<u>1</u>	1407	entrance described in EBM's 700/1/2).
Total	16	for a peak vehicle requirement of 15.	

In addition, a number of coaches were based at Halstead for extended tours. Hence the summer 1964 allocation included 7 coaches:

Bristol LL coach	1	204
Bristol LS coach	2	308/9
Bristol MW coach	3	347/50/7
Bristol MW DP	<u>1</u>	1415
Total	7	

The coach fleet was reduced in the winter, for example, in December 1964 it only comprised three, 321, 1415/28.



Above: capturing the atmosphere of the depot in 1972, we can see through the depot building to the rear yard. On the forecourt is a Bristol MW coach – a number of the touring fleet were based here but spent much of their time away on tour – whilst inside we see a dual purpose (coach seating in a bus shell body) MW, a Bristol RELL and the rear of an FLF with its rear emergency door open – probably having the interior cleaned. **Peter Carr**

By the mid-1970s the allocation had reduced significantly, the coach work now part of National Travel South East and worked out of Kelvedon. Taking spring 1977 as an example, there were just eight vehicles based at HD, for a pvr of 8, comprising:

Bristol RELL	1	1544
Leyland National	3	1757/9/82
Bristol FLF Lodekka	2	2789, 2876
Bristol VR	<u>2</u>	3058/9
Total	8	

In terms of the work covered, the following routes were operated at that time (with 88 also worked by Colchester and Harwich depots, 311 also by Braintree and Chelmsford depots, and 325 also by Braintree):

Route	Mon-Fri	Sats	Suns
88	LN, RE, VRT	VRT	RE, LN
89	RE, VRT		
310	LN, FLF	LN	
311	LN, FLF, VRT	RE, LN, FLF, VRT	RE, LN
312	LN, FLF	LN, FLF	
313	LN, FLF	LN, FLF, RE	
322	RE	LN	
323	RE, LN	RE	
324	RE		
325	LN	RE	
328	RE	LN	

One particularly unusual operation was the Countrycar service. Using a 7 seat Peugeot 504 estate car numbered 1150 (RLX 168W), this service started in November 1981, financed by Braintree District Council, serving deeply rural settlements on a timetabled, fixed route basis and in some cases replacing big bus routes. The “bus” was



allocated to Braintree depot but operated routes from the Halstead depot forecourt on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Left: an inside view reveals VRs 3059 and 3048, the latter parked close to the fuel pump. **Robin Jenkinson**

Right: Countrycar 1150 on Halstead's forecourt on 15 February 1983. The occasion was a visit by the NBC Chairman, Lord Shepherd, to EN where he opened the new Basildon enquiry office and visited Chelmsford (depot and Central Works) before coming to Halstead to see this new way of serving rural communities. L-R Lord Shepherd, driver Ken Ardley and Charles Mercer (EN General Manager). **Richard Delahoy**





Above: a month to closure and **Terry Clark** was on hand to record the depot, with a VR just visible parked by the fuel pump. **Right:** not much had changed, vehicles aside, from this undated shot from Facebook, probably taken in the 1950s with a Bristol L type saloon alongside advertising boards. The picture was first used in EBM Extra 6 but is worth repeating here, in the absence of many shots showing the buildings.

One particularly noteworthy allocation was of FLF 2942 as a one-man operated bus for the 88, from May 1974 to January 1976.

With declining traffic/passenger numbers, sadly the depot closed after operations on Saturday, March 3rd 1984. The final allocation (February 1984 list) comprised 10 buses for a pvr of 9, and one coach:

Leyland Nationals 1782, 1926;
 Bristol RELs 1524/44;
 Leyland Tiger DP 1119;
 Bristol VRs 3048/58/9/66, 3118; and Bristol RELH coach 1409.



The last service to be operated by the depot was the 2235 hrs from Chelmsford, which was operated by 3058. That journey terminated at Old Station Yard, and the vehicle then briefly returned to the depot before being driven to Braintree (Bus Park). Other vehicles operating in service from Halstead during the last day were 1524, 1762 CF, 1902 BE, 1932 BE (which operated the final service 322 journey), 3048, 3066 and 3128 BE. Halstead's allocation was then moved to Braintree and Colchester, and buses now had a new timing point in the High Street instead of Old Station Yard.

Demolition followed quickly and a Sainsburys shop was built on the old garage site. Today just memories remain.

Thanks to Robert Richardson, David Edwards, David Smith, Alan Tebbit, Phil Covington and Chris Stewart for their memories of HD and also to *The Years Between* series of books for historical info; allocation lists are from EBEG newsheets and official company lists. The initial story of Countrycar was covered in *Buses* magazine, February 1982 edition.

Buses in unusual guises

Sometimes buses are converted for other uses after their passenger carrying careers are over. Here we present three Eastern National examples, only one of which actually ran for EN in passenger service.



Above: We start with BWT 782, seen here in the yard at the back of Colchester depot in 1961. It was a Bristol JO with Eastern Coachworks body, new in 1937 to the West Yorkshire Road Car Co. They converted it to be a mobile office at the beginning of 1951 but as well as using it themselves, it was loaned out to other operators, so for example it was used at Kings Cross in 1953/4 by London Coastal Coaches. Eastern National had it from February to June 1961. The then new Colchester Bus Station (the one most of us remember with varying degrees of fondness) had opened on 26 February 1961 so presumably the EN office there wasn't quite ready in time. We don't know if it was used anywhere else after Colchester, but by September 1963 it was in a scrapyard in Barnsley.

Bob Beaumont

Opposite page top: this photo is not of the best quality but is full of interest! NJ 5978 was a Dennis Lance II with Tilling H30/26R body new to Brighton Hove & District in 1935. It passed, along with five sisters, NJ 5974-7/9, to Westcliff Motor Services in December 1949, having received a Gardner 5LW engine in 1943 and an AEC radiator at an unknown date. Although there is no record that we have traced that shows it operating as an open topper with Westcliff, it was converted at some stage, possibly only when it was transferred to the ancillary fleet in August 1952 as a tree lopper. (NJ 5976 is the only one of this batch that we know ran as an open topper for Westcliff). As such, it passed to EN in 1955 and lasted until the end of 1958, going for scrap in February 1959.

And so to the photo, by **Michael Dryhurst**. The location is Chelmsford bus station and the bus is running on a trade plate which can just be seen hanging from the offside side light. The notice in the windscreen presumably reads "Not licensed". Look closely, and you can see two ladders extending from the upper deck, up the wall and the feet and legs of two workmen, perhaps repairing the Eastern National sign on the wall of this corner of the depot and bus station building. Working at height safety rules didn't apply then!



Below: From our trio of vehicles, this is the only vehicle that ran in passenger service with EN. EBD 238 was a Bristol L coach with full fronted ECW Queen Mary style body, new to United Counties in 1950. In 1958 it passed to EN, numbered 007 (in the period when EN started numbering acquired single deckers from 001 upwards under the 1954-1964 scheme, initially for the saloons acquired with the takeover of Campbells of Pitsea; second-hand double deckers were numbered 1001 up). In 1962 it was taken into Central Works and extensively rebuilt as a stores lorry, as seen here in **Bob Beaumont's** shot. It was used to transport parts to depots and was painted pale green and cream. It lasted until May 1971, being sold to the Eastern National Preservation Group, who painted in yellow and used it as a support vehicle for some years before it was scrapped.





Above: here is EBD 238 after acquisition by the ENPG (**upper pic**), in the yard at the rear of Canvey depot on 16 February 1974, then still an operational depot but where the ENPG were allowed use of part of the premises. Today of course it is the Canvey Island Transport Museum.

The lorry was then part restored and painted bright yellow, as seen here on 31 May 1975 (**lower pic**), passing Southend Pier en route to Southchurch Park to assist in the setting up for the Southend Bus Rally that took place the following day. There's also a pic of it in yellow in April 1975 in EBM732 (February 2026). **Both Richard Delahoy**

Other examples of buses in new guises, again which never ran in service for EN, include GBE 846, the highbridge Bristol K converted to a mobile cinema/display bus for holiday tours (see EBNs 645/6) and NFW 649 & OFW 796, the pair of Bristol SCs converted to driver trainers (see EBM Extra 2); all three came from Lincolnshire RCC. Another conversion that didn't run as a bus for EN was JVX 555, the mobile uniform store adaptation of an ex Moores Guy Arab/Strachan, which was in a semi-derelict state when EN took over Moores (also featured in EBM Extra 2).

Turning to the *Buses in unusual guises* feature in the previous Extra, **Paul Creighton** has provided the following additional information.

The Colchester Lathe Company had a number of demonstration vehicles over the years. Whilst AEC Reliance WXR 221 was, as far as I know, the only one to be actually built on a PSV chassis, the others certainly looked very much like buses or coaches. WXR 221 was substantially rebuilt later in its life with Colchester Lathe (possibly due to the road failure in Finland) which led to its appearance being drastically altered. I have no subsequent history for the vehicle; it went some time between 1968 and 1985.

I know nothing of the three (probable) exhibition vehicles which preceded WXR 221, nor numbers 5 and 6, if they existed. However, 7 ROO and 8 ROO were two Thames Trader lorry chassis (not the purpose-built PSV version) with what looked remarkably like (but weren't) Thurgood coach bodies. **Gary Sharpe** has supplied the photo **below**, in this case of 7 ROO after it had gone to the associated Richmond Machine Tool Company of Leeds.



The final exhibition unit **right** was a Ford D 13-tonner (incorrectly recorded as a R192 by the PSV Circle at one stage) OPU 686M, with a very bus-like body. Sadly the two indifferent photos I took aren't great for reproduction - the light was not kind on the occasion that I took the photos and I never saw it again - but one is worth reproducing here for its rarity value.

Paul Creighton.



The lost names of deregulation - 2:

Town & Country Travel

Operating from 1999 until 2006, Town & Country Travel added some colour to the Thurrock bus scene with a fleet of around 25 vehicles at its height.

After an early career working for Eastern National and Elm Park Coaches, Bernie Waters had been General Manager of Harris Bus of Grays for 17 years, overseeing their expansion from Essex services into London tendering, winning contracts for networks of routes based on Ilford (operated from Grays) and south of the river from a depot at Belvedere, using over 60 buses. Indeed, he gave a talk to us about this in February 1998, but sadly the business got into difficulties and the bus company went into administration in December 1999, the London contracts being taken in house by LRT's East Thames Buses in March 2000 (the coach side of the business was unaffected at that stage).

Meanwhile Bernie had set up in business on his own account around January 1999, both as a sole trader with an O licence and as a limited company, each using the Town & Country Travel name. Services started in a modest way early in 1999 with routes in the Thurrock area previously operated by Harris Bus, plus rail replacement work on the Fenchurch Street line, all through the sole trader business. Expansion followed in December 1999 when the operation of Ensign Bus's then four bus routes was taken over by the limited company, initially using Ensign vehicles and licences. The routes were the 324 (Romford – Bluewater), 325 (Chadwell St Mary – Ockendon), 348 (Romford – Gravesend) and 509 (Stratford – Bluewater); all served Lakeside shopping centre when it opened in 1990. The 325 and 509 were soon given up but the 324 & 348 (licenced to T&C from 8 May 2000), along with a Thurrock local service 20, were transferred to Arriva East Herts & Essex in October 2000, along with four modern Darts that Town & Country had acquired from Q-Drive (R310-3 NGM).

Below: Four SLF Darts which were new to Q-Drive, where they had been used on London service 156 as part of the Limebourne fleet, were operated. In adapted London colours, R311 NGM was departing Grays bus station on 3 February 2000. It later gained Town & Country two tone blue livery but as noted above, it was sold to Arriva later that year.





Above: during the period when Town & Country operated Ensign's routes, using Ensign vehicles, at least some of which carried T&C fleetnames as here with GOG 265W (Ensign 165), ex West Midlands Travel, loading in Grays bus station on 3 February 2000 en route to Romford.

Various routes were established in the Thurrock area, too numerous to list here, generally being tendered services for the local authority, rail replacement and the Lakeside Christmas park & ride shuttle. The initial fleet in January 1999 had comprised just a Leopard bus and a Metrobus but had expanded to 10 vehicles (9 buses and one coach) by November 2000, after the transfer of services to Arriva. In February 2002 the fleet stood at 12 (1 x Leopard, 1 x DAF coach, 3 x M-B Varios, 2 x Olympians and 5 x Metrobuses). The livery was two shades of blue as seen, although some had initially run in as acquired colours. Subsequent fleet additions/replacements introduced Leyland Lynx, Titan, Atlantean, Scania N113, Dennis Dart, Volvo B6 and Optare Excel models and, earlier, an Optare Starrider, plus later a former Eastern National Bristol KSW open topper, taking the fleet to 25 in late 2004.



Left: ex London Olympians came to be dominant in the fleet, including C107 CHM, seen at Leigh station on c2c rail replacement duties on 5 May 2003.

Various route/tender changes followed and some school contracts were won, but rail replacement continued to be a very significant part of the business, accounting for 70% of turnover, with Town & Country acting as the lead contractor to the train operator, c2c. Sadly that was to change when National Express, who had run the rail franchise since 2000, took organisation of the rail replacement work in-house in 2005, resulting in a much reduced volume of work for Town & Country and the loss of BSOG (Bus Service Operators Grant) which T&C had previously been able to claim on scheduled rail replacement work. The business also suffered extra costs in having to relocate its operating centre from Grays to Purfleet in July 2005. Based at Askew Farm in Grays since 2003, the new, impressive premises with extensive parking and covered workshops were in Botany Way on the Beacon Hill Industrial Estate at Purfleet, where it was hoped that third party engineering work could be won. Cash flow suffered significantly, leading to action by HM Customs & Excise. Mr Waters then entered into an IVA (Individual Voluntary Arrangement) in December 2005, with his creditors to be paid over time. At the time he employed 28 staff.

The bus fleet in June 2006 of 21 comprised 2 x Dennis Dart, 4 x Optare Excel, 2 x Volvo B6, 9 x ex London Olympian, 3 x Scania N113, 1 x Leyland Atlantean plus ex EN KSW open topper WNO 480 and an ERF wrecker, but 4 buses were then repossessed in July. Then in mid-September 2006 Thurrock Council terminated all of T&C's bus and school contracts. The c2c Tilbury Ferry shuttle continued to run at this stage. Most services ceased or were taken up by other operators by the week commencing 25 September, but we think that Essex CC school contracts were still being operated up to half-term week in October, when operations finally ceased completely. Sadly, the IVA failed as he was unable to keep up the agreed payments, being terminated from 25 September and as a result, he was declared bankrupt in December 2006. The disposal of the fleet was reported in EBN 511 (November 2006); less well known, but a consequence of being a sole trader rather than working through the limited company (which never held an O licence), was that he also lost his house as it was sold by the trustee in bankruptcy, but despite that the preferred creditors were not paid in full and there was nothing for the unsecured creditors. A sad end to the business. Bernie subsequently went to work as a driver and mentor for Abellio at Walworth garage.

Sources include EBEG magazines, Bus Lists on the Web, my contemporary records of fuel duty rebate claims and other consultancy work for the business and correspondence from the accountants handling the IVA and subsequent bankruptcy proceedings. All photos by **Richard Delahoy** except as noted.

The previous feature in this occasional series covered Essex County Buses (EBM Extra 9, Autumn 2025). Not part of this series, but we also featured Clintona Minicoaches in our September 2000, December 2006 and September 2012 issues – pdf copies available on request from the EBMX Editor.

Below: a more unusual fleet member was a solitary Leyland Titan ex London T757 (OHV 757Y). It was used for a Group tour on 18 May 2002, seen here at Ensign's then storage yard at Frog Island, Rainham.



The Tilbury Town station to Tilbury Ferry bus service replaced the former rail service to Tilbury Riverside in December 1992. T&C took over this operation from Harris Bus in 2000. The short route, just 1.7 km long, initially had 32 journeys each way on weekdays and ran seven days a week. Here is a selection of the smaller buses used on it. Today it has been extended to serve parts of Tilbury north of the railway and the Asda store, as Ensign route 99.



Top: Optare Metrorider J586 CUB has driven down the linkspan and stands right by the ferry terminal on 18 March 2000. The side window notice reads LTS Rail Ferry Bus; there are fleetnames on the front and side but barely show up in yellow on white! The bus was new to APCOA Parking, Gatwick Airport.



Middle: also an Optare product, this is a Starrider on a Mercedes 811 chassis, F46 CWY, new to London Buses as SR46. It is parked in the layby on the up (London bound) side of Tilbury Town station. 15 June 2004.

Bottom: a later Mercedes Vario/Alexander new to Horsburgh of Pumpherston (near Edinburgh), T457 HNH, at the bus turning circle later installed at the Ferry terminus. 11 November 2004.

David Harman.





Double decker variety:

Top: a line-up of 10 deckers at the Grays depot on 14 May 2004 - eight ex London Olympians, headed by C43 CHM, with to its left, ex West Midlands Travel H237 LOM, a Scania N113/Alexander. Ninth in the row is the Atlantean illustrated below.



Middle: another one-off in the fleet was this former Ipswich Buses Leyland Atlantean/Roe, SDX 34R, retaining its original dual-door layout. Note the District Line rail replacement blind, seen parked in the Grays yard on 5 October 2004 by **David Harman**.



Bottom: distinctly more unusual, for private hire work such as wedding charters, was ex Eastern National Bristol KSW open-topper WNO 480 (2382). It was hired by the Group for a tour on 8 October 2005 and seen here posed at Ockendon station on the Grays – Upminster section of the c2c line. Today the bus is with Yesteryear Coaches, Haworth, West Yorkshire. **David Harman**.

Single deck variety:

Top: 109 (L112 HHV), a step-entrance Dart with Northern Counties body at the Grays depot on 14 May 2004. It started life with London Northern as DNL112. A couple of months after the photo was taken it suffered accident damage and was withdrawn, going for scrap by the following summer.



Middle: a less successful contender to the Dart was the Volvo B6, as seen here in the form of 108 (M106 PVN), a Plaxton bodied example new to Stagecoach owned Cleveland Transit in November 1994. It stands alongside the second bus to be numbered 109, L103 GHN, another B6 and replacement for the accident damaged Dart above. Purfleet depot, 26 July 2005.



Bottom: four Optare Excels that had been in the original Harris Bus London fleet and which Bernie was hence very familiar with later worked for Town & Country, including 102 (R377 DJN). Photographed by **David Harman** on 13 July 2005 it was also at the new, impressive but unaffordable Purfleet depot, with the maintenance building and offices prominent.



Blind spot

Bob Williamson, with notes by Richard Delahoy

With Halstead depot being featured on pages 12-15, here are two topical blinds from that depot.



Left: Dated December 1966, "list 10", printed by Norbury Bros and used in MWs 1338 & 1361. The final line (Conies Road) was a later addition, and some blinds had an entry for SUDBURY Gt. Cornard.

Right: Also referred to as list 10 and again printed by Norbury's, this dates from May 1971 and was fitted to FLF 2789. Some entries have been altered from 1966, such as for Tidings Hill and Great Cornard.

Removed since the 1966 version are Blackmore End, Mushroom Farm, Bury St. Edmunds, London Kings Cross, Glemsford, Wethersfield Old Dog and Halstead Conies Road, but new entries are for Halstead Churchill Avenue, Wakes Colne, Stansted Airport and Excursion.

The order of both blinds may appear to be random – certainly not alphabetical – but would reflect logical service groupings, with Halstead itself close to each end to minimise winding.

Perhaps the most obscure entry on both is for PENNY POT, the terminus once or twice a day for short working buses on the 313 (and served by some through journeys on 312/3). It is on the main A131 road south from Halstead to Braintree, whereas most buses ran via White Ash Green to serve Gosfield, as Stephenson's 38/38A do today.



"Standing room only!"

A bus conductor's job was not always easy, not least when it came to controlling loading and standing passengers at busy times. But were some of the rules on the number of standing passengers allowed just too complicated at times?

Regulations on the maximum number of standees were set by the Certifying Officer but also subject to decisions by management and agreements with the trade unions. In general, the maximum on a double decker was one third of the lower deck seating capacity with a maximum of 5 or 8. In the happy days when demand exceeded capacity, this was not just an obscure rule but of serious concern. Operators wanted to be able to carry as many passengers as possible but accepting too many standees made it difficult for conductors to get down the lower saloon to collect all fares, especially on town services with lots of short riders. Some operators had honesty boxes on the rear platform for passengers to deposit their fare as they alighted if the conductor had not reached them in time. I wonder just how honest most passengers were?

SOUTHEND CORPORATION TRANSPORT	
STANDING PASSENGERS	
MONDAY TO FRIDAY	NUMBER PERMITTED
Commencement to 9.30 a.m.	12
9.30 a.m. to 12.00 noon	8
12.00 noon to 3.00 p.m.	12
3.00 p.m. to 4.00 „	8
4.00 „ to 7.00 „	12
7.00 „ to 9.00 „	Nil
9.00 „ to Termination	8
SATURDAY	
Commencement to 9.30 a.m.	12
9.30 a.m. to 12.00 noon	8
12.00 noon to 3.00 p.m.	12
3.00 p.m. to Termination	8
SUNDAY	
Commencement to 1.30 p.m.	Nil
1.30 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.	12
4.30 p.m. to Termination	Nil
Head Office : 95 LONDON ROAD, SOUTHEND-ON-SEA, December, 1945.	
W. BAXENDALE, General Manager & Engineer.	

But pity the poor conductors on Southend Corporation in the busy immediate post-war time when faced with these astonishingly complicated rules! This notice is from December 1945, in the collection of and courtesy of The Bus Archive. The rules had been relaxed in the war, from 20 November 1941, to half of the seating capacity up to a maximum of twelve.

Clearly the restrictions were aimed at providing the maximum capacity in the peaks, but what was a conductor to do at say 3pm with 12 standing - tell the last four to get off?! It's thought that the relaxation to 12 standees ended in 1946.

Thankfully things are a lot more straightforward today, although how a driver on a one-person operated bus is supposed to count, let alone control the number of standees is unclear and indeed, in London at least, I see buses with huge numbers crowded in, including standing on the stairs and upper deck. It can be a similar issue for afternoon school buses, with large numbers of pupils forcing their way on and overloading buses. Indeed, I observed one driver conduct hearing before the Traffic Commissioner where a Harlow based driver was accused of just that. His defence, conducted via a

Polish interpreter, was that he never drove away and was trying to get them off. Since the DVSA witnesses couldn't agree amongst themselves whether or not the bus had actually moved off, he was exonerated but warned.

Today the Construction & Use Regulations base standing capacity on the available floor space, allowing a specific area per standee. This is why the permitted capacity will vary depending on whether the wheelchair space is occupied or not. The other constraint is the maximum gross weight of the bus, where we think passengers are deemed to weigh an average of 63.5 kg, seated or standing.

Park & Ride in Colchester – first time round

The current park and ride service in Colchester, operated by Arriva Colchester but up for retender in 2026, started in April 2015 from a site just off the A12 Colchester outer bypass. But it wasn't the first attempt to tackle the problems of town centre parking.

In fact, we have to go back to 1971 to find details of the first attempt. This ran for Christmas shoppers, Mondays to Saturdays from 6 to 23 December, from the Cavalry Barracks to the town centre, every 5-10 minutes at a fare of just 5p. In an early attempt at route branding, it was known as the Lancer Link and the signs on the buses were in the red and blue regimental colours. The service was provided by Colchester Corporation Transport, but operation was actually by Eastern National buses and crews on CCT's behalf, using four Bristol LS saloons – 1221/2/39/41. The picture **below** shows 1241, presumably at the Barracks terminus. **EBEG collection.**



The service continued after Christmas but only on Saturdays, operated this time by CCT themselves, using some of the ex-Salford AEC Reliances, but ceased after 5 February 1972.

Then a Saturday only Christmas operation was resumed in 1972/3/4, now directly operated by CCT (which became Colchester Borough Transport in April 1974). In 1972 it ran for four Saturdays with route number X72 ("Xmas '72") using Bristol RELs from the Colchester fleet; 1973 saw it curtailed to three Saturdays, as X73, again with RELs. In 1974 it was again only operated on three Saturdays, every 10 minutes as X25, using one AEC Reliance and a Ford demonstrator, NTW 438M, an R1014 with Plaxton B43F body hired from December 2 to 31 and numbered D7 in the demonstrator series.

In 1975 the County Council provided a grant for a planned six-month experiment, commencing on 13 December and now using the overflow car park at Colchester North station, a more obvious location for traffic on the A12 and from the north. It still only ran on Saturdays but wasn't successful but ended prematurely after 6 March 1976.

So far as we know, that was the last attempt before 2015*, but notes on such operations are very sketchy and not fully reported in our newssheets of the time. I must therefore acknowledge the helpful information in the book *Colchester 1904 – 2004, From Trams to Arriva* by Geoff Mills and Nicolas Collins. The photo above is the only one we've traced of any of these early P&R operations, do any readers have others, please?

* UPDATE: Clearly this statement was wrong! see update in EBM Extra 11, Autumn 2026

End of the line. Mention on the previous page of the ex-Salford AEC Reliances that Colchester bought (and which were covered in EBM Extra issue 4 and in EBMs 635 and 703) gives us an excuse to use this shot of the final resting place of one of the batch of six. The photo **below** is one of two that **Bob Williamson** found in a sales box at the Wythall Museum and he recognised their Essex connection. Some of the ex-Salford buses remained in their green livery for their whole time in Colchester and here is the proof in the form of Colchester 2, TRJ 102. The other print (not good enough for publication) shows the front of the bus, still carrying its Salford fleet number of 65. It was acquired by Colchester in February 1971 and lasted in service until around August 1973, being sold that November to Saunders Carter of Colchester for scrap. That's presumably where this photo was taken.



The Reliances were a stop-gap measure to enable the expansion of one-man operation, ahead of the delivery of Colchester's first Bristol RELs.

Fast forward to 2015 and Arriva introduced a fleet of five new ADL E200s for the newly-awarded park & ride contract, 4071 - 5 (SN15 GXR/S/T/U/V). **Below**, 4071 was seen in Osborne Street on a rather wet 24 July that year, in the Essex County Council black P&R livery. **Richard Delahoy.**

On contract renewal in September 2021, these E200s were replaced by newer E200MMC models, 4122-5 (SN67 WUL/M/O/P), transferred from Gillingham, depot, which didn't enter service until March/April 2022.

The older P&R buses were then transferred away, 4071 now operating at Maidstone.



V is for Victoria Coaches, Leigh on Sea

Despite at one time running around 100 buses and coaches, Victoria Coaches of Leigh on Sea are barely known by most enthusiasts. They had a lengthy history but here we are concentrating on the early 1950s and two specific operations that represented the peak of the business.

The involvement of the Parsons family in bus and coach operations in the Southend area from the 1920s onwards is complicated but a convenient starting point for this brief narrative is the immediate post Second World War period. Coach operations had been undertaken by Philip Parsons, his wife Bessie and Sam Pond, but from 1944 the Victoria Coaches business was in the sole name of Bessie Parsons and operated excursions from Marine Parade in Southend as well as general private hire work. The licences were transferred into the name of a limited company, Victoria Coaches (Leigh-on-Sea) Ltd, in 1950. As well as the Elm Road yard at the Elms in Leigh, just off the London Road, Victoria now had a modern garage nearby at 1000 London Road, Leigh-on-Sea, formerly the East Coast Garage, where all the maintenance was carried out. Vehicles were also based in an open yard at Roots Hall, today the site of Southend United's football ground.

A major development was the gaining of contracts to transport construction workers to the new oil refinery being built at Coryton for the Vacuum Oil Company (later renamed Mobil Oil). We have not been able to trace records of how many buses were used in total but evidence presented to a subsequent licence application (see below) in 1953 stated they had a fleet of 86 buses and coaches and additionally hired in about another 40 every day. Not quite as substantial as the similar operations in Kent for the Isle of Grain refinery, which required 252 buses and coaches a day, but Victoria weren't involved in that (another Southend operator, Pearmain's, were but that's a story for another day). Construction of the Tilbury power station for the British Energy Authority (BEA) also involved a significant workers' transport operation by other operators including Eastern National and Westcliff, but again that's a tale for another time.

Victoria Coaches amassed a substantial fleet of double deckers, all second-hand pre-war or war-time examples, Leyland Titans, AEC Regents and Guy Arabs, from a variety of original owners including LT (8), Leeds (15), Glasgow (14), Salford (22), Barrow (3) and Ribble (5). Derek Giles recorded over 70 double deckers, plus a similar number of saloons (which included both contract buses and private hire coaches). Here we present a small selection of his photos, which show that many of the buses were smartly repainted in Victoria's maroon livery, with fleetnames and destination displays – quite extravagant for buses used just for workers transport twice a day. We assume that other operators were also involved in taking workers to Coryton, do members have any recollections of this?



Left: typical of the traditional operations, Tilling Stevens B10A2 UF 6597 plies for trade on Marine Parade, Southend on 4 June 1950. New to Southdown in 1930, its Shorts body has a roll back roof. Westcliff Motor Services ran some similar coaches. Photographer **Derek S Giles**, copyright The Bus Archive, reference DG02_00360.



Above: standing outside the garage at 1000 London Road, Leigh on Sea, is GV 5940, a Duple bodied Bedford WTB new in 1938 to Goggin, Great Horkesley, near Colchester. It was acquired by EN in 1939 with the Goggin business and sold to Victoria in 1950. Note the monogram fleetname, the letters V and C intertwined; the livery is understood to be cream with a maroon flash. Photographer **Derek S Giles**, copyright The Bus Archive, reference DG02_01599.

The second significant operation by Victoria Coaches that we are featuring was a short-lived commuter service from Southend to London. There had been many complaints about the unreliable railway service from the Southend area to Fenchurch Street on the London, Tilbury & Southend line. This led Victoria Coaches to apply for a road service licence for a commuter service. The initial application submitted on 31 December 1952 was unsurprisingly rejected given the restrictive provisions of the 1930 Road Traffic Act, but against almost all the odds, was approved on appeal by the Minister of Transport & Civil Aviation and started in April 1954. Running from Southend Seaway car park, with pick-ups in Westcliff, Chalkwell, Leigh and Hadleigh, the pre-book service offered a very ambitious timetable with 18 departures between 0630 and 0930; return from Tower Hill gave 17 peak trips, at times every 5 minutes, with later journeys up to midnight. There was also a Saturday morning service with lunchtime return trips, many office workers having a 5½ day working week then. From 19 July that year the timetable was cut back to 10 journeys but the expected traffic simply wasn't there to sustain the operation and it ceased after five months, last running on 18 September 1954. Backing for the service came from Salford based coach operator J W Fieldsend Ltd, who provided some of the coaches. Victoria used Fieldsend's livery of cream with a black flash for coaches on the service.

After the end of these two major operations Victoria Coaches reverted to a more traditional private hire operator, plus excursions from Marine Parade in Southend and Western Esplanade, Westcliff. There were various changes of ownership and corporate structure and the business finally ceased in 1973, although the name was later revived for a while by J S Nichols. The yard at the Elms, Leigh was later used by Supreme Coaches.

This article includes abridged information from Peter Clark's extensive research into Southend area operators, and we are grateful to Peter for allowing us access to his records. There's more about the commuter service in my book on the Southend to London X1 service. And as well as the photos published here, there are many other photos of the Victoria fleet taken by Derek Giles in the Omnibus Society collection, available from <https://www.thetransportlibrary.co.uk/-/galleries/bus-images/the-omnibus-society> .



The contract fleet (1): two examples from the extensive fleet. BGA 66 is still in Glasgow Corporation livery as it stands in the Roots Hall yard in Southend on 25 April 1953. A 1937 built Leyland TD5 with a Weymann body, it was one of at least 13 Glasgow buses that Victoria Coaches bought. A sister bus sits alongside, possibly withdrawn from service by now. Photographer **Derek S Giles**, copyright The Bus Archive, reference DG02_02380

Bottom: standing in Leighton Avenue, just round the corner from the depot at 1000 London Road is GWE 731. A Leyland TD5c with Cravens bodywork, it was new to Sheffield's A fleet in 1940. In this case, the three-part destination/number display has been painted out and the bus has the full script version of the Victoria Coaches fleetname, on 2 December 1952. Photographer **Derek S Giles**, copyright The Bus Archive, reference DG02_02308.





The contract fleet (2): Top: BBA 547, new in 1940 to Salford City Transport, Leyland TD5 / Metro-Cammell, 3/2/52, Elm Road yard. Photographer **Derek S Giles**, copyright The Bus Archive, reference DG02_01669.

Bottom: former Leeds City Transport CNW 909, a 1936 AEC Regent with Roe bodywork, with paper destination display and the monogram version of the company fleetname, as it approaches the yard at the Elms. Note the bus shelter behind, in London Road. Photographer **Derek S Giles**, copyright The Bus Archive, reference DG02_01092.

REAR COVER - The commuter fleet: top: on the first day of operation, GHJ 839 at Tower Hill, Brewers Quay, amidst war time bomb damaged buildings, 5/4/54. A Plaxton body on a rebuilt pre-war AEC chassis. **Bottom:** GFW 496 was a Foden PSVC6 with a 43 seat half-deck body by Lincs Trailers to the Crellin-Duplex design. 19/9/54. Photographer **Derek S Giles**, copyright The Bus Archive, reference DG02_03033/03527 resp.





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