

Essex Bus Magazine Extra

Deregulation 40 years ago & historical features

Issue 11 Autumn 2026



Essex Bus Enthusiasts Group

www.essexbus.org



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Colchester was long the place in Essex where the greatest variety of different operators and liveries could be found, even if today that variety is seriously diminished. By the time that **Richard Delahoy** started visiting the town (as it was then, now a city of course), the range of independent operators had narrowed, but the scene remained very colourful, and thoughts of deregulation of the industry were a long way off. Here we see three operators who all survived into the deregulation era post 1986 and who each ended up as part of Hedingham Omnibuses (today's Transport Made Simple group). Such a suggestion would have seemed very improbable when this picture was taken on 15 July 1971 in the layover area of the Lewis Gardens bus station!

First we have TWL 928 of Norfolk's of Nayland. A 1953 built AEC Regent III with a Park Royal body, it was new to the City of Oxford Motor Services. It joined the Norfolk's fleet in November 1966 and lasted with them until June 1975. Their principal service was from Stoke-by-Nayland to Colchester, operated jointly with Eastern National service 85. For many years this included the unusual situation where many journeys were operated by each company on alternate weeks, although by the 1970s that had ceased (except for one trip, run by Norfolk's M/T/W/F/S and EN on Thursdays). By the time the picture was taken, Norfolk's were thought to be the oldest independent bus undertaking still in business anywhere in Great Britain, but that was to end in April 1991 when their services and vehicles were acquired by Hedingham. TWL 928 has survived into preservation at the Oxford Bus Museum.

Alongside we have Osborne's of Tollesbury 37, 349 FTB, a 1958 Guy Arab IV with Northern Counties bodywork, new to Lancashire United Transport and bought by Osborne's in November 1970, staying with them until September 1975. Like Norfolk's, Osborne's was a family business with a long history, not quite as far back as Norfolk's however! Their principal services were from their home village of Tollesbury to Witham, Maldon and Colchester (by two different routes). They were bought by Hedingham in February 1997 and operations continued from their modern garage in Tollesbury until ten years ago, the depot being closed in July 2016 as commemorated in EBM for August 2026.

Just in shot on the right is a typical country bus, a Bedford OB/Duple, RHK 843, new to another family business, Wents of Boxted in March 1951, so over 20 years old at the time of the photograph. That business had been established in 1927 with a service from Boxted to Colchester. There was a gradual run down of operations before sale to Hedingham in July 1991. Withdrawn by Wents by mid-1979, it was initially preserved in Eastern National coach livery as "4065" (which in reality was ONO 86, long since scrapped). It later passed to Tours (IoM) on the Isle of Man as 1950 MN but later returned to the mainland and later regained the RHK 843 registration. It is currently recorded as SORN (Statutory Off Road Notification). Does anyone have further current information, please?



Essex Bus Magazine Extra from the Essex Bus Enthusiasts Group

Issue 11

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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. This issue has been generously sponsored by David Harman, to whom we extend our grateful thanks. You can read more about David on page 2. All articles in this magazine were written by **Richard Delahoy**, except where noted.

This issue has a substantial focus on a defining moment in the bus industry's history – the implementation of so-called bus deregulation in October 1986, now an astonishing 40 years ago. We look back to the very early days of the revolution that changed our industry. Ticketing also features heavily, a topic we rarely cover.

We hope you will enjoy this Extra magazine and will find the range of articles interesting and stimulating. Hopefully there is something for everyone. Enjoy!

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Front cover: The fundamental changes that the 1985 Transport Act brought about included some rather unexpected early outcomes, including East Midland Motor Services, then still an NBC subsidiary, winning a group of Essex CC tenders for routes in the Brentwood area. East Midland established a base at Wyatts Green to service the contracts, using a mix of Bristol REs and Leyland National 2s, which were rotated back to Derbyshire for maintenance once a week via an obscure service X90, Ongar Two Brewers to Worksop. It ran one journey each way on Fridays and Saturdays. Did any (fool)hardy enthusiast ever travel the whole way?

Here we have East Midland 5, NNN 5M, a 1974 Bristol RELH with ECW dual purpose body, at Wilsons Corner, Brentwood, turning right on the double mini-roundabouts into the High Street on service 239 from Ongar, Four Wantz. They won three Monday to Saturday routes, 239 (Warley – Ongar), 261 (Brentwood – Blackmore) and 347 (Brentwood – Romford) plus Sunday 260 (Warley – Ongar) and 270 (Brentwood – Hutton) and later went on to win London tendered services. There's another picture of their operations on page 11. **Alan Osborne**

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This Issue's Sponsor – David Harman

David has been a life-long bus enthusiast with a particular interest in ticketing. He was EBM Editor from January 2004 to December 2012 and has edited the Transport Ticket Society Journal since 2001. He comments that his early years were spent in a far-off, forgotten corner of the EN empire. A sketchy look back at that far-off corner will hopefully appear in a future EBM Extra. In this issue, David has contributed an article on one aspect of EN's operations that most of us probably took for granted - the Setright ticket machine, as used both by conductors and the drivers of OMO/OPO buses.

Here, **right**, David is pictured in April 2009, conducting Stephenson's "Queen Mary" Leyland PD3, 424 DCD, at the East Grinstead Running Day, when the bus operated trips on the 409, Godstone Green to Forest Row. Recalling that London Country had operated three Queen Marys in 1975/6 as LS1-3 during a period of dire vehicle shortages, the bus was dressed as a fictional LS4 for the running day. The ticket machine that David was using was a London Transport TEL (Ticket Equipment Ltd) magnetic tape experimental type that was latterly used by LCBS at Godstone garage. Richard Delahoy was his driver for the day.

He has also written about his 2009 New Year's Day experiences when he was paired up with Stephenson's driver Terry Fosdike, again to crew the Queen Mary, in a short article we published in EBM and now available on-line at <https://essexbus.org/wotb/home/>. There you can also find David's article about his time as a seasonal student conductor for Eastern National at Brentwood in the 1960s.

Below: This is one of the earliest colour slides that David took, of Eastern National 2324, EJM 630, a classic Bristol KSW5G that had been new to Westcliff Motor Services in 1951. Allocated to Braintree, it stands outside Chelmsford depot, displaying the rarely photographed "School Service" destination blind.



Two of a kind - EN's Bristol FSs

In the transition in Bristol Lodekka production from the original LD series to the flat floor F types, EN's last two rear entrance, 60-seaters arrived as the new FS model, numbered in series with the 137 LD Lodekkas but with some significant differences. They didn't seem to receive the same enthusiast attention as the main LD fleet. Here then is the story of two of a kind.

So first, the differences. The FS model had a completely flat floor, as opposed to the dished gangway downstairs on the LD, and the body had slightly wider side windows, eliminating the slightly awkward short quarter window ahead of the rear platform. They also had a flat lower edge to the cab and driver's window. Under the skin, mechanically they had air/hydraulic brakes rather than vacuum, and air suspension on the rear axle, giving a constant ride height laden or unladen. As mentioned, EN only received two FSs, following directly on from the 137 LDs, from the initial batch of 100 FSs built in sanction 155. They arrived in April 1960 as 1569/70, 61/2 PPU, renumbered 2538/9 in August 1964.

We don't have a complete set of allocation lists pre-1964 but believe that they were allocated from new to Southend (1569) and Chelmsford (1570). They were signwritten for the 11/11A service linking the two towns, as seen in the picture below. They remained at those depots for substantially all their lives with EN, 2538 having a month at Hadleigh in 12/64, a few months at Basildon from 12/72 and then on to Hadleigh again in 6/73, before returning to Southend in 6/74. 2539 was at Kelvedon from 9/66 to 2/67, then on to Southend for the rest of its time. But they are perhaps best remembered for their driver training duties, again as shown in the picture. It would seem that the air/hydraulic brakes made them more suitable for this task, being mechanically the same as the numerous FLF Lodekkas. Brian Barrett recalls "EN was strangely averse to instructing existing drivers on new techniques demanded by specification changes such as air brakes, where the pedal pressures needed for a smooth stop with vacuum (increasing) or air (decreasing) were not explained, although from the mid-sixties, the two air braked Lodekkas 2538 and 2539 were employed on driver training at Southend and Chelmsford respectively between covering a morning and an afternoon peak duty".

Their end came in 1976, being delicensed in 4/76 (2539, withdrawn 7/76) and 7/76 (2538, withdrawn 9/76). They both went to dealers (Sykes and Norths respectively) and were not traced further, so presumably scrapped.

Below: 2539 stands in the yard at Southend depot on 2 March 1970; is that a trainee driver or the instructor sitting downstairs, or an established driver there for a familiarisation run? Note the route branding. **EBEG collection.**



More on Colchester Park and Ride

Following on from the picture in EBMX 10 of the Eastern National Bristol LS operating Colchester's first park and ride service, at Christmas 1971, we have more information and photos.

Roger Tuke writes: "I was immediately drawn to the article on CCT Park & Ride. As to photos of the early park and rides I have two poor quality acquired black and white photos of the EN LS buses with Lancer Bus branding taken in Cavalry Barracks. One is of all four lined up I believe on the first day of operation and one of 1222 568 CTW nearside front view. Neither are credited and they were found years ago in a box at a transport sale or rally. On Flickr (by typing in 861 ETW) there is colour view of the four lined up (again on first day?) in Cavalry Barracks, credited to Stephen Day.

"There is a good nearside Nicolas Collins' view of RE 25 on P&R on the Garrison roads on page 45 in his and Geoff Mills' 100 years book mentioned in the article. On Flickr there is a good nearside front view of Ford demonstrator D7 NTW 438M on P&R leaving the bus station, by Simon Beeston (search on that registration).

"As to the ex-Salford Reliances, of the six only nos 2 & 3 retained Salford green livery throughout their stay at Colchester, all others were repainted in CCT colours, although 1 & 4 definitely operated in Salford Green for a while at CR, I believe 5 & 6 never did and were repainted before use. As to the other photo you mention of no 2 TRJ 102 in the scrapyard with a Salford fleet number of 65, this was its SELNEC number, not its Salford fleetnumber. These buses CCT 1-6 were new to Salford as 109, 102-6, but were then after 11/69 acquired by SELNEC where they were numbered 72, 65-9". Thanks Roger for those updates.

We should also have mentioned that CCT 1, TRJ 109, later operated elsewhere in Essex for both Lewingtons and Bordabus and is now preserved at the St Helens Transport Museum in Salford colours, as illustrated in EBM 703 (November 2022).

We have also recently acquired this shot **below** of the 1973 operation, featuring here Bristol RELL 18, YWC 18L, at St Botolph's in December that year, with appropriate route number. **EBEG collection**

We were also clearly very wide of the mark in suggesting that there was no park and ride service in Colchester between 1976 and 2015, as Robert Appleton, Gary Sharpe, David Edwards and Dave Cope have pointed out. In my defence, they were not well reported in our newssheets/magazines at the time.





Without going into detail, at Christmas 1987 Hedingham operated a P&R service; I'm not sure about 1988. Then in 1989 there were two Saturday Christmas services, both operated by Eastern National and both numbered 555, from North Station and from the Paxman's factory site. Then from 28 July 1990 EN started

operation every Saturday from North Station. Initially a 6-month trial, it seems that it continued running all-year round until Spring 2008, being renumbered from 555 to C3 by 1997. Meanwhile, from November 1995 two new routes had started, C1 & C2, linking to inner car parks. Initially operated by Hedingham Omnibuses, **Gary Sharpe** recalls "From memory, I think one route started at Sheepen Road car park and called at Butt Road on the circuit of the town. The other route started at Sheepen Road and did a circuit of the town without going to Butt Road, the result being confusion for the passengers who boarded the wrong bus, playing havoc with the operation as our drivers either took them there anyway or put them on the other bus at Sheepen Road for a second trip round town to the right car park. The whole thing was a disaster due to impossible timings and traffic congestion". It passed to First Eastern National early in 2001, by then just as C2. Operation had ceased by the end of 2004 (date not yet traced).

Robert Appleton took the photo **above** in the High Street on 11 February 1995 of EN 3230, SUB 789W, one of ten Bristol VRs drafted in to Colchester from Yorkshire Rider after the disastrous fire at the depot on Boxing Day 1994.

Other Follow Ups

Optare Solos in Essex

In addition to the Acme bus mentioned in the article, Lodges still have their SR model Solo YJ62 FXA – we had thought this had been replaced by the ex-Stephensons E200, but clearly not so, the Solo having been seen in Chelmsford in April, although by June it was advertised for sale in the trade press. Apologies.

Buses in unusual guises

The picture of Ford Thames Trader 7 ROO with the Richmond Machine Tool Company of Leeds should be credited to **Len Wright**. And with some relevance to our Deregulation theme in this issue, I recently noticed that amongst the registrations of services under the new legislation in 1986 was a service for Colchester Lathes workers, from Brightlingsea, Thorrington, Alresford and Wivenhoe, operated by Wards Coaches of Alresford. This was almost certainly the continuation of an existing contract. I've not traced how long the service remained registered – before about 2002 the records were not available on-line so it would need a trawl of the fortnightly N&Ps to find the cancellation date.

Halstead depot

The list of services operated in Spring 1977 should have included the following – not sure how I missed them!

Route	Mon-Fri	Sats	Suns
88	LN, RE, VRT	VRT	RE, LN
89	RE, VRT		

(The 88 was also worked by Colchester Mon-Sat and Harwich Mon-Fri)

The Dawn of Deregulation: D-Day October 26, 1986

Forty years ago this month saw the most fundamental change the bus industry had experienced since the coming of the 1930 Road Traffic Act. We look back to some of the buses and services that were new or changed then.

The 1985 Transport Act swept away the old system of quantity licensing that had applied since 1931 and gave operators the freedom to run when and where they wanted, subject only to the registration system for new or altered services and the rules of the operator licensing system. Local Authority support for unremunerative services became more transparent through the tendering process and resulted in many more operators being awarded local bus service contracts. (We should also note that deregulation didn't extend to London, nor to Northern Ireland).

It's worth briefly reflecting on what existed immediately prior to the 1985 Act coming into effect. The vast majority of bus services in the County were provided by a handful of state owned or municipal undertakings – Eastern National (with by far the greatest number of services/vehicles), Colchester Borough Transport, Southend Transport (jointly with EN through Southend & District Joint Services) and London Country (Grays and Harlow areas principally). There was limited coverage by London Transport (mainly in the Loughton area) and Eastern Counties (a few routes from Suffolk and Cambridge penetrating into Essex). The County Council's Public Transport Plan 1984/5 had identified 26 small/independent operators running bus services, some extremely obscure and with very limited services. The principal independents included Chambers, Hedingham & District, Osbornes and Premier Travel. The County Council provided grant-aid support (block grant funding) to all of the major operators for specifically identified loss-making services, and to a limited number of independent services. That was all to end, with support from October 1986 being provided through open competitive tendering (with some limited "de-minimus" direct payments of small amounts).

Operators had to decide what services to provide commercially, ie without subsidy, and at what times of day/week. Typically that saw many evening and Sunday journeys being curtailed or withdrawn. Equally, it allowed established operators to exploit what they saw as new opportunities, within or beyond their traditional sphere of operations. Additionally, it opened up the possibility for operators who had not previously run bus services to enter the market. Operators were required to register their services and timetables by the end of February 1986, to take effect from D-Day, 26 October 1986. This allowed time for local authorities to identify the resultant gaps in service provision, decide which of those gaps they wished to fill, prepare timetables and service specifications, invite tenders and let contracts.

The pattern of services that emerged from the new-found freedoms and tendering opportunities could perhaps be broken down into half a dozen scenarios:

- 1) "Business as usual" – the core commercial networks of the established operators.
- 2) Tendered evening and Sunday services where those established operators withdrew these marginal timings.
- 3) Tendered daytime services – the routes that were already marginal and might previously have only existed through cross-subsidy or Local Authority block grants.
- 4) New initiatives – not too many of these in Essex.
- 5) Competitive spats – think Coastal Red vs. Eastern National for example.
- 6) Oddities and innovations – such as taxi buses.

As well as the major operators, bus service contracts were awarded to many smaller operators, often with no prior experience of running bus services. A kaleidoscope of colours was launched on a confused public and gave enthusiasts a lot of interest and photographic opportunities, as we aim to show in this feature. Our selection of operators/routes is necessarily subjective and constrained by limitations of space, and focuses on the earliest months of de-reg – lots more was to change over the following years, not least privatisation, before the industry settled down a bit with the emergence of the big plc groups.

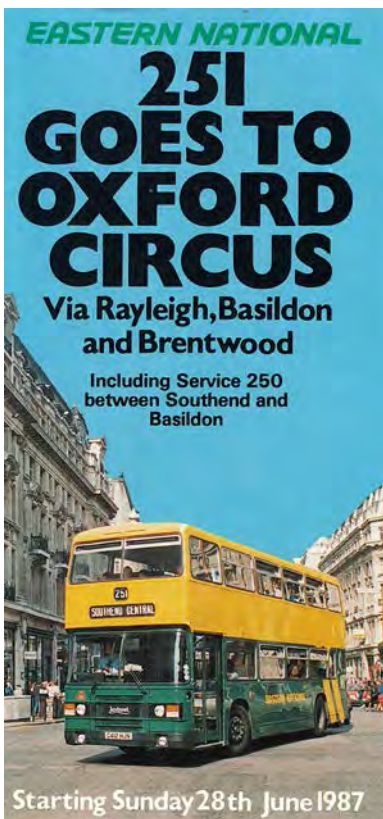
In total, over 20 independents won tenders to start in October 1986, along with big wins by Eastern National and, to a lesser extent, Colchester, Southend and London Country. The biggest surprise was perhaps the award of a group of services in the Brentwood area to East Midland Motor Services, as mentioned on page 1. The independent wins tended to be concentrated in south, west and mid-Essex, with relatively few in north-east Essex – with one big exception, that of Chartercoach of Harwich, trading as Coastal Red – of which more later in this issue.

Competitive commercial services were relatively limited, with Simien Coaches, Castle Point Bus Co (S&M) and T V Taxis in south-east Essex and, to a much greater extent, Coastal Red in the Clacton area. “Innovative” services such as taxi buses that the architects of the Transport Act hoped would flourish were very limited although in Southend were to prove a thorn in the sides of EN and Southend Transport.

Here then is a small selection of the variety that could be seen in the early days and weeks of deregulation, 40 years ago. More photos can be found in the articles *“All in a Day’s Work”*, *Deregulation at Hadleigh Depot* by Paul Harvey and *The lost names of deregulation - 3: Coastal Red*, both later on in this issue.

Right: Whilst deregulation didn’t apply in London, operators were still able to run cross boundary services, such as EN’s long established 251 and 400, for example. Eastern National did however alter some of its services and expanded its coverage in east London, including starting new routes 550, Ramsden Heath – Billericay – Brentwood – Romford – Hornchurch – Upminster – Upminster Park Estate, and 551, Billericay – Brentwood – Romford – Ilford, each hourly and coordinated over their common section. On the first day of operation, 27 October, Brentwood depot’s 1933, MHJ 729V, a Leyland National 2, departs Upminster Park Estate, Waycross Road on the 550, whilst **below right** at the other terminus, The White Horse at Ramsden Heath, is BD’s 1796, TJN 495R, a mark 1 National.

Both **Richard Delahoy**



Linked to those changes were reductions in the frequency of the 251 (Southend to Walthamstow) and the start of a parallel limited stop version, X51, running on from Walthamstow to Oxford Circus.

However from June 1987 the X51 was withdrawn and 251 extended instead to Oxford Circus, publicised by this attractive leaflet **left**, featuring dual-purpose seated Leyland Olympian 4012, C412 HJN. It ran hourly with a 3-hour journey time, supplemented by an hourly service 250 from Southend to Wickford, which then continued to Basildon (shades of today’s First Essex 25).

The Oxford Circus extension ceased in April 1988, with 400 extended on from Kings Cross to Oxford Circus instead. That only lasted a year, with 400 then routed to Victoria from April 1989, but 400 was withdrawn completely in January 1991.





The first day – Sunday 26 October 1986:

Basildon was a good example of the impact of deregulation. Eastern National didn't register any Sunday services on town routes 502/3/5/20-4. ECC let contracts for just two routes across the town, 241 & 244, both from Pitsea Station to Langdon Hills, via the key estates, each running hourly. NIBS (Nelsons Independent Bus Services) won the contract, as well as other weekday tendered work.

Top: Former Bristol OC Bristol RELL LAE 348E at Langdon Hills, Westley Road on the 241, and **middle**, former LT DM1803, GHM 803N at Pitsea station on the 244. Both have home-made destination boards. A similar situation existed at Grays, with the only London Country commercial operation on Sundays being 370, Grays to Romford and 723, Tilbury to Victoria. Frank Harris Coaches won the contracts for local services 372/3/5/7/9, plus four weekday services, 265/9, 372/5, and bought four of these new Volvo B10M-46 with Plaxton B35F bodies, D301 PEV seen **bottom** leaving Grays bus station.

All Richard Delahoy

The architects of deregulation foresaw lots of **taxi bus** type services springing up. Apart from in Southend, they were to be disappointed by the response in Essex. Here we have two commercial services and one tendered.

Top: Perhaps the most improbable example, a Sunday service once each way, Shoebury to Southend via Barling, by Mrs Raymond. Here her Morris Ital car YPU 406X is on the first trip, with no passengers. The service ceased very quickly.

Middle: The other commercial operation was by TV Taxis, initially with 3 routes from Highlands to Southend using 8-seat VW LT28s like A231 AAK seen in Leigh Broadway on 27 October. They were to expand and become a thorn in the sides of Southend Transport and Eastern National.

Bottom: One of the new tenders let for very small vehicles was to Southend Radio Cars for three occasional routes north from Rochford, 10B, 12A & 65A. Operation was often by this 8-seat Toyota Hiace Dormobile C623 HJN, caught on film in Canewdon on 27 October on the 12A from Wallasea to Rochford.





Independent contract wins:

Top: Clintona won the tender for Brentwood local 262, Mon-Sat evenings & Sunday all day including evenings, with EN converting the M-S daytime service to minibus routes A1 & A2 (see opposite). In Bishops Hall Estate on a Sunday working is XUT 911S, a Moseley bodied Ford A series.

Alan Osborne.



Then two shots at Chelmsford rail station on 27 October on former Eastern National workings.

Middle: Jacksons of Bicknacre on the 46B, High Ongar to Chelmsford, one trip each way on schooldays, using C678 KFW, a Mercedes-Benz conversion by Coachcraft.



Bottom: The main service on the irregular 46, Ongar to Chelmsford, was awarded to Webbs Coaches of Galleywood, here with OAT 703P, a Duple C45F bodied Ford R1014. Webbs had also won the M-S 52/A/B and Sunday 41A/44C but quickly lost those contracts. Both **Richard Delahoy**

Top: EN converted its Brentwood local services to high frequency minibus operation routes A1, A2, B, C1 & C2 with a fleet of 20 Mercedes L608D 20-seaters, 0225-44. Complete with colour-coded destination blind but no number tracks yet, 0241 on the A1 loads in a damp Brentwood High Street on the first day, 27 October.

Richard Delahoy



Middle: London Country North East also won tenders bringing them into Basildon. Still on the dreary first weekday of deregulation, SNB375, YPF 775T, arrives from Romford on the 403, a four times a day service from Romford via Upminster, West Horndon, Bulphan and Horndon on the Hill. Other Basildon wins were the 156 & 159.

Richard Delahoy



Bottom: Leyland National 2s featured in East Midland's Front-runner operations at Brentwood. Seen here on a brighter day, 34, VWA 34Y, descends Kings Road towards Brentwood Station on the 261 from Blackmore. There's another picture of their operations on the front cover.

Alan Osborne





Top: Clintona won work in Southend as well as at Brentwood, with one bus employed on the 18, Southend to Foulness Island. On 27 October, HKN 333V, a Ford Transit/Reeve Burgess DP17F new to Maidstone CT is in Southchurch Boulevard heading into Southend.
Richard Delahoy



Competition between Colchester & Ipswich

From 18 April 1987 Colchester BT started service 25 to Ipswich, every two hours on Saturdays only.

Middle: On the first day, Olympian 44, D44 RWC, is seen arriving at Tower Ramparts bus station in Ipswich. As it took passengers away from Eastern Counties services 92/93 Ipswich - Colchester, ECOC retaliated with two new services, 199 St Michael's - Colchester bus station, Saturdays only wef 18 July.



Lower: Usually a Bristol VRT series 3, on 19 Sept 1987 OT3, JNG 50N, was used. The other service was 190, Ipswich - Colchester, a limited stop direct service along the A12, Saturdays only wef 31 October 1987. The competition soon ended.

Pictures & captions
Robert Appleton

Eastern National and the Setright Machine David Harman

Many members will remember the Setright Speed machine, used by Eastern National to issue tickets for over 30 years. In fact, Eastern National's association with the Setright goes back further than you may imagine. The following is an account of that association.

Henry Roy Setright was an Australian precision engineer who had been involved in the design and manufacture of racecourse totalisator equipment in his homeland. With the prospect of 'pooled betting' (which had originated in France as the "pari-mutuel") and the idea of the totalisator (a device to record bets and issue a betting slip) becoming legal in Britain (which eventually occurred in 1928), Setright had come to London in the hope of selling "tote" machines here.

Harry Setright 'hedged his bets', so to speak by also working with another Australian, George Bethell, in designing a portable ticket issuing machine for use on buses and trams. The London General Omnibus Co. had issued a specification for such a machine and this had attracted a lot of interest. Automatic Ticket Issuers Ltd was formed to make and sell what was termed the "Trambus" machine, an early ancestor of the Setright Speed.

However, the "Trambus" proved unsuccessful, as did Setright's attempt to gain a foothold in the totalisator market. Undaunted, he acquired the "Trambus" patents and set up in Upton Road, Kingsland, N1, to make the "Setright Fare Register", for which he found three ready customers: Westcliff-on-Sea Motor Services Ltd. (13 machines), Manchester Corporation Transport Department (4 machines) and The Borough Services of Southend (14 machines). The Setright Fare Register stamped the fare, stage etc. on a blank card inserted in the machine.



Setright Registers Ltd. was formed in 1931 with French financial backing, and sales of the Setright Fare Register progressed. In Essex, Westcliff bought further machines, and new customers included Edward Hillmans Coaches, Benfleet & District, Rayleigh Motor Services, Rochford & District and Ashdown's Saloon Coaches.

Left: Westcliff Setright Fare Register (c1931)

Below left: Examples of early tickets:

Left: Eastern National Setright Fare Register ticket issued through an ex-Hillmans machine CX;

Middle: Westcliff Setright Fare Register ticket issued through machine W8 (prewar);

Right: Eastern National 2/4d Setright Fare Register ticket issued through ex-Borough machine B10 and cancelled through Westcliff Setright Speed WMS16 (1949 or so);

Bottom: Benfleet & District 4½d Setright Fare Register Workmans Return ticket through Canvey machine C2?, cancelled in machine 7G (possibly ex-Hillmans).



By 1934, the long-range Setright LR.D model (the "insert Setright") had been developed, principally for the Scottish Motor Traction group - a substantial customer. The first new Setrights appeared with Eastern National around this time as they bought a handful of machines for the office issue of weekly tickets at the Park Street Bus Station in Luton and at the Vauxhall Works in Dunstable.

Right: Westcliff insert Setright LR.D c.1935. It had an E number, like the prewar Setright Roll Ticket Registers of Westcliff but why is not known. As the machine is in almost new condition, I suspect it was little used.

Eastern National had also acquired quantities of the earlier Setright Fare Register by virtue of the takeover of the Edward Hillman concern by the LPTB, Eastern Counties and EN in 1933, and the purchase of The Borough Services Ltd. (which ran as an EN subsidiary until 1940) and the Aylesbury Omnibus Co. Ltd. in the same year.

Westcliff, then independent of the Tilling Group, was a good customer of Setright's and they were among the first to buy the Setright Roll Ticket Register. This was a short-range predecessor of the Setright Speed, developed from the "Trambus". The Setright Speed itself is reputed to have been designed just before the War principally to meet the requirements of the Tilling Group. Pre-production models were supplied in early post-war years to Eastern National and Westcliff among others, and the first production machine, WMS01 was received by Westcliff around 1948 as part of a small batch.

Hicks Bros. Ltd. followed (replacing the Willebrew system) and then, Eastern National. Machines could only be supplied in small quantities because of the extreme shortages of raw materials in the post-war years.

Early machines had a fare range up to 12s 11½d but this was later extended to 19s 11½d. Whilst ordinary fares, even returns did not go much above 5/-, the higher range was required for weekly tickets, then sold on-bus as card tickets printed through the slot on the front of the Setright.

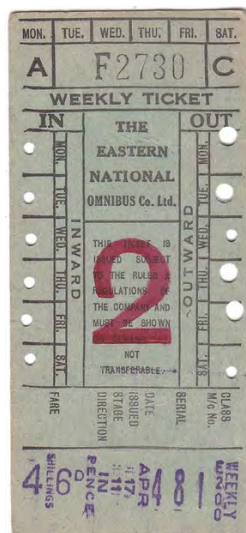
Up until the advent of the Setright Speed, Eastern National was in the slightly unusual position of having three/four ticket systems on the go at the same time! The early "insert" Setrights inherited from Borough, Hillmans and Aylesbury Omnibus were eventually concentrated on the Grays area. The cumbersome Williamson Willebrew* system was used in the Chelmsford, Colchester, Halstead areas at least, whilst the old bell punch system with rack of tickets and Williamson punches was used elsewhere. The small number of long-range "insert" Setrights for weeklies at Luton continued in use until replaced by two specially-adapted Setright Speeds, E421 and E422.



Contrasting weekly tickets:

Left: Eastern National insert Setright weekly ticket for Luton area, issued through office machine A01 (wartime). These existed in a great range of colours, varied week to week to deter fiddling. Those with a colour stripe were not available for travel on the Luton side of Dunstable Town Hall, Hitchin (Bancroft) or Toddington, The Green.

Right: Eastern National 4/6d Setright Speed weekly card issued through E200 (early 1950s). Not sure what "2" indicated, maybe random code to stop fiddling. [not to same scale as illustration on the left]



The takeover of Hicks Bros. by the BTC in 1950 and its placing under EN control, and the transfer of Westcliff to EN control in 1952, accelerated the need to institute a common system, and further batches of Setright Speeds were ordered for both Westcliff and Eastern National. This programme was complicated by the Westcliff acquisition of the City Coach Company Ltd. City had been a user since pre-war years of the "insert" Setright and a large number of machines passed to Westcliff. These continued in use for a period but to standardise on the Setright Speed, the newer of the redundant insert machines were sold to Wilts & Dorset MS and Lincolnshire Road Car.

Over the years, Eastern National bought regular batches of new Setright Speeds. It is believed that these further machines were to allow conversion from the system of "one machine per duty", the machine being issued at start of duty and returned with takings at end, to that of "one machine per conductor", and the ability to pay-in via a night-safe. This allowed a saving in depot cashier staff who henceforth could work normal office hours and who checked machines only on a periodic basis.

Machines supplied are thought to have been: WMS01-WMS248 - new to Westcliff
H01-H48 - new to Hicks Bros.
E001-E1595 - new to Eastern National.

However, the transfer of Westcliff to EN control in 1952 was counter-balanced by the transfer of the Midland Area to United Counties, and a quantity of Setright Speeds (Exxx and WMSxxx series) passed to UCOC at that time.

More recently, Eastern National bought some Setright Speeds from Southend Corporation, rendered surplus by the latter's gradual conversion to Almex A. These machines, in the Sxxx series, were identical in specification to EN's own machines.

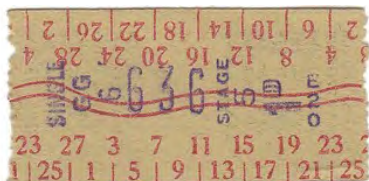
In connection with the computerisation of Setright machine records, all second-hand machines were given new "case numbers" (on the front casing), although they still printed their original number on tickets. The system was:

- ex-Southend machines renumbered in the 7xxx series; thus S023 became 7023.
- ex-Hicks machines renumbered in the 8xxx series; thus H03 became 8003.
- ex-Westcliff machines renumbered in the 9xxx series; thus WMS132 became 9132.

A great variety of rolls existed for the Setright Speeds and space permits only a brief mention. Suffice to say, nearly all the established printers of Setright rolls (termed "coils") supplied Eastern National at one time or another: Bell Punch (later, Control Systems), Williamson's of Ashton, Glasgow Numerical Printing (GNP) and National Cash Registers (NCR).

For many years, Bell Punch (brown rolls) supplied the southern depots, WG, BD, BN, HH, CY and SD, and Williamsons (primrose rolls), the central/northern depots, CF, MN, BS, CR, HD, CN and DT. The split ordering may have been connected with unexpired contracts relating to the old Willebrew system but was certainly still going in the 1960s long after the Willebrews had gone. Perhaps someone forgot this and just kept ordering from Williamsons.

One unusual feature of the brown Bell Punch rolls was the red stripe on the back. This was quite distinct from the red or purple stripe that appeared on the front to warn conductors that the end of roll was nigh. The red stripe [on the back] is thought to have been intended to make it difficult for passengers to erase the cancellation mark on returns. Later the stripe was replaced by commercial advertising.





A classic EN Setright Speed, E001 (c.1948), with insert slot and slot where return tickets could be inserted and cancelled with the machine details.

Another quirk was the brief appearance of a variety of different colour rolls from Williamsons from about 1960 onwards: green, pink, lilac, white, dark blue and dark orange in addition to the usual primrose. The reason for this is not known with any certainty but it may have been connected with paper shortages or perhaps an overstock of coloured paper at Williamsons, prompting some sort of “special offer”. Crosville Motor Services, another Williamson customer, also enjoyed a colourful Setright roll interlude at around the same time.

The dark blue and the dark orange rolls were not entirely suitable as the machine-printed text was difficult to read, and the latter appear to have been withdrawn and placed in store (which see later).

Two other events that had a bearing on the Setright machines were the introduction of one-man operation, a protracted exercise that took place over many years, and decimalisation which occurred overnight in 1971. One-man buses were fitted with Setright motor-drives which speeded up ticket issue by a small margin. Decimalisation required modifying the machines which, given the large fleet of these, involved a gradual conversion process from 1968 onwards.

In the lifetime of the Setright Speed with Eastern National, four other ticket systems were used:

1) In 1964, the old Westcliff “D” service (Southend - London) was converted from pre-booking to “pay on the coach” and became the famous X10. With the introduction of the coach FLFs, increased custom was anticipated and indeed occurred. EN decided for reasons unexplained that a different ticket system should be employed by X10 coach conductors - a return to the old Insert Setright. Some elderly insert Setright Registers were obtained from Wilts & Dorset and a set of three card tickets for use in them was printed - single (white), period return (lilac) and day return (yellow). One might have thought that Wilts & Dorset would have dug out and returned the old City Coach machines (CYxx series) that they obtained from Westcliff in 1952/3, but instead, they found some Cxxx series machines that had been ordered by Cumberland Motor Services but cancelled before delivery, and subsequently sold on by Setright’s to a number of other operators, including W&D.

Most of these had a short life on the X10 because in 1963, Eastern National inherited 34 insert Setrights with the takeover of Moore Bros (Kelvedon) Ltd. These were numbered MB01-32 and Z27-Z28. These replaced the earlier insert machines on the X10 and six of the Cxxx machines were sold on to Osborne’s of Tollesbury.



Below: Eastern National X10 insert Setright period return ticket issued through ex-Moores machine MB01 and cancelled through MB11.

Later, the X10 became one-man operated and Setright Speeds replaced the insert machines. As X10 returns could be used to return over common sections of other (stage-carriage)

routes, principally the 151/251 (but not vice-versa), tickets needed to be recognisable as issued on the X10. Thus, the deep orange rolls were brought out of storage and put into use. When the stock of these was used-up, Control Systems supplied pink rolls to serve the same purpose.

2) Two other on-bus systems used were the Almex A and the Setright Keyspeed. A number, thought to be six, Almex A machines were in intermittent use from 1960 onwards mainly for statistical purposes as they incorporated a paper audit roll. They were allocated initially to Chelmsford and Basildon.

3) Three Setright Keyspeeds were tried in 1974 at Brentwood. This was an electro-mechanical machine designed for OMO, which printed on plain rolls. It was not a success with EN or with other users. See example of a 3p ticket **right**:

4) A Setright Multiset self-service machine was installed at Kings Cross Coach Station for the issue of tickets for the coach-air services. This did not last long. (see EBN 522, October 2007 – available on-line at our Archive website).



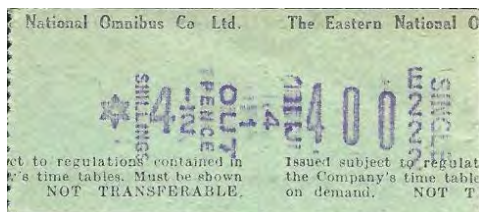
The beginning of the end for the Setright Speed with Eastern National came with the trial purchase in 1984 of 13 Microsystem Design Wayfarer electronic machines.

These were allocated to Bishop's Stortford. These printed small tickets on thermal paper. The trial was successful but when more general conversion to ETM (electronic ticket machines) came a year or so later, it was to the uprated Wayfarer II system with ballistic (dot-matrix) print mechanism.

When the Wayfarer conversion programme was completed, the Setright finally bowed out – except perhaps on the open-top Bristol KSWs that lingered on into the 1990s – can anyone confirm, please?

More examples of different coloured ticket rolls:

Both are pre-decimalisation, for 4½d and 2/- respectively, but with subtle differences in details – can you spot them?



* For a little more on the Willebrew system, see the article in EBM Extra 9, page 19 (in relation to Viceroy Coaches).

Further reading: *From White and Red to Green: A Ticket History of the National and Eastern National bus companies*, Martin Eastale, Transport Ticket Society, 2019, ISBN 978-0-903209-88-5.



Ticket illustrations here are sized to be legible in the magazine and are not actual size or all to the same scale. All illustrations are from David's very extensive collection, plus a couple from the Group's archives.

Finally, how to wear your Setright with pride. We've used these pictures before, cropped from an Eastern National recruitment leaflet showing conductress Jeanne Cunniffe, but worth reprising here. Some conductors choose to wear theirs much more low slung!



“All in a Day’s Work” Deregulation at Hadleigh Depot Paul Harvey

Paul was the Depot Controller at EN’s Hadleigh depot at the start of bus deregulation. Here he recalls some experiences from 40 years ago.

I joined Eastern National Southend (SD) depot on 13 August 1974 as Senior Travel Clerk until summer 1977, when I transferred to a Depot Management training scheme under the watchful eye of the current District Traffic Superintendent at the time. This involved learning traffic detail, operations, cashiers, audit and wages. In 1978 I was transferred to Hadleigh (HH) depot to cover the Traffic Detail Clerk’s role for holidays and upon his retirement gained the position on a permanent basis. I was then promoted to Senior Traffic Clerk in 1983 when the current holder secured the Traffic Superintendent role at Maldon.

During the summer of 1985 the company was divided into 6 operating districts with appointment of 6 new District Managers to focus on local activities. SD & HH depots became part of the Southend & District area under new District Manager Maurice Jordan, in readiness for deregulation on 26 October 1986 supported by a Planning & Schedules Officer.

Each depot had a Traffic Superintendent, where the company decided to rename these positions to Depot Controller from 1 October 1985 as part of the organisational review. These positions were advertised and I duly applied. I was interviewed and successfully appointed to the position of Depot Controller Hadleigh depot. A review of office/supervisor positions was undertaken.

Upon appointment I was involved in a number of planning meetings on the services which the district would operate from deregulation. The 400 & 402 (Southend to London) services were at threat of being cancelled but the management team including me managed to persuade the District Manager to keep the services going. Overall 80% of bus services for the company were registered from 26 October 1986 until the first change date of 26 January 1987.

Eastern National introduced new liveries for vehicles during summer 1986 in preparation for privatisation. The old HH travel office was relaunched as the Bus Shop during October 1986. The company was purchased by its management team from NBC in December 1986.

SD & HH depot services were part of the Southend & District coordination area which ceased on 26 October 1986 after 30 years. Only the Southend & District Travelcard remained, though not accepted on ECC tendered journeys. Bus services were split between Eastern National and Southend Transport on a formal agreement ready for deregulation. Southend Transport kept service 3A (Southend to Canvey). The profitable service 3 (Shoeburyness to Canvey) remained with Eastern National upon deregulation, the SD vehicle line and Southend Transport vehicle line all transferred to HH.

Most services were registered, with lightly used evenings and Sundays cancelled. These services and journeys were tendered by Essex County Council. For example affecting HH depot, Castle Point Bus Co secured service 5A, three Sunday morning journeys from Benfleet to Canvey Eastern Esplanade, and the Wed & Sun service 404 from Canvey to Rochford Station serving Southend Hospital.

Right: Castle Point MDW 388G, an ex-Newport CT Atlantean/Alexander, on the Sunday 404 in Rochford East Street on D-Day.
Richard Delahoy



UMBH secured the weekday evening and Sunday 24 service between Southend & Thundersley. New EN services were registered as X15 (Canvey to Romford) operating Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays using 1118 Leyland Tiger Alexander from HH, and X51 (Southend to London Oxford Circus) from SD. Other long-distance services 251, 400 & 402 remained with timetable adjustments.

As always, duty card content was actively reviewed by Trade Union representatives before posting for the road staff. A smooth changeover was experienced on D Day, with most drivers continuing to report for duty without any real concern. Some drivers were more knowledgeable on the change of operating environment than others. Printed timetable leaflets were produced for individual services. I put together a service change booklet for the Southend, Hadleigh & Canvey areas outlining all the service changes for our staff and passengers. A new timetable booklet titled "Canvey Connections" was printed dated 26th October 1986. At this time HH was experiencing competition from Castle Point Bus Co who were operating 4 M-F peak time routes between Canvey Island and Benfleet Station. An inspector was rostered to supervise EN operations during M-F late afternoon/early evening at Benfleet Station.

The second stage of deregulation was 26th January 1987 where bus operators could register changes to those services that were introduced on 26th October 1986. Eastern National was no different, where changes were registered affecting SD & HH depots. The operating Districts were reduced to 4, merging Southend, Hadleigh and Brentwood into one District. Later the District was renamed South Essex which included Basildon. Simien Coaches registered a new service from Benfleet Station to Canvey Island using step entrance coaches, a fixed timetable was registered but not always adhered to. Smaller operators as well as EN and Southend Transport were securing Essex County Council tendered services in the area.



Edition 2 of the "Canvey Connections" timetable booklet was printed, dated 29th March 1987 which included new Canvey Circulares 26A/26B which didn't last that long. The cover photograph of this booklet (left) involved arranging for a Network SouthEast train, running out of service from the Shoeburyness depot, stopping just before Benfleet Station. A Leyland National was parked on the road bridge while Essex Police stopped the traffic. We had a very small window opening to get everything staged and photographed before regular timetabled trains were due.

[The Editor adds: I always thought that was a lucky shot with no traffic in the way, it had not occurred to me that it was a set up! But looking closely, I can see the Police holding the traffic back. Now we know the truth . . .]

Also printed was a timetable booklet titled "London Road Buses".

On the 28th June 1987 Southend London Road/Victoria Bus Station closed, where the bus operations were transferred to the new SD depot at the original Prittlewell Works and Coach depot. The small coach unit was transferred to HH depot as there was insufficient space at the new SD depot.

On 6th September 1987 HH introduced new service 26 operating Mon to Fri between Canvey and Rayleigh via Thundersley. It's interesting to note that First Essex have changed today's service 27 from Canvey to Southend to operate to Rayleigh & Hullbridge from 31st May 2026 partly in the footsteps of the 26.

While I was at HH depot over the many years I developed the private hire panel of drivers to undertake private hires and support to the Coaching unit providing second drivers for express services and excursions. We were providing rail replacement buses for Network SouthEast when trains weren't operating. Many Saturdays during the summer one driver would provide a second driver to the Ilfracombe and separate Bournemouth express coach service from Southend. Our Leyland Tiger 1118 was actively allocated with drivers every Saturday on the express service to Great Yarmouth from Southend, operating as part of the National Express network, then the Highwayman network. Private hire vehicles were 1118, 1400 (Lynx), 1928 (National 2), 3085 & 3109 (VRs). We lost 3109 to London and it was replaced with a normal early Leyland National.

On a number of occasions Essex Police hired single deck buses from us at HH to provide transport from Rayleigh Police Station to London where the officers were required to support the Met Police force on policing events. Drivers had free range of which Leyland National they wanted as there were no regulations to adhere to and it was a long day.

I moved on from Eastern National to Basildon Council in September 1989, but competition continued with bus services from HH with many more service changes introduced over the years and still happening today. The staff at the time coped well with the new way of working, though Benfleet Station with four operators providing registered bus services, especially late afternoon peak time, caused concern at times. HH even managed to provide duplicate journeys on services to the Island where gaps occurred in the timetables, thus ensuring waiting passengers didn't use other operators' services.

Right: The ugly face of deregulation. Paul mentions the peak hours competition across Canvey to Benfleet Station. Here is TOE 438N of Castle Point Bus Co, an MCW bodied Bristol VRT new to West Midlands PTE, but latterly with NBC company National Welsh. It remains largely in faded poppy red, with fleetnames and advertising crudely disfigured. Seen at Benfleet station on arrival from Canvey on the first morning of the service. They ran 4 different routes across Canvey. Simien Coaches were also later to run a similar service.



Below: Southend coach operator UMBH (Upson Minibus Hire) won the Essex contract for Sunday services 10 & 12 to Canewdon, Wallasea and Paglesham, as well as the 24 referred to above. In another shot in East Street, Rochford on D-Day itself, Ford R1114/Duple coach OMJ 792M displays a handwritten "blind" in the windscreen on its way from Wallasea to Southend. Our *Southend Busman* extra newssheet of the time recorded that UMBH subcontracted the operation of 10/12 to Southend Radio Cars with an 8-seater C623 HJN from November 23, without the County Council's permission. Their operation on 10, 12 and 24 was very short lived! Both **Richard Delahoy**.



A Videmat Mystery

Sometimes official records contain entries that are baffling and even nonsensical when viewed later. This is one such tale.

It concerns an entry in the minutes of Eastern National's Board of Directors 17 June 1971, "Approval was granted for the purchase of a Videmat Ticket Issuing Machine for use at Chelmsford Bus Station at a total cost of £400.00".

The Videmat ticket machine was manufactured by Ticket Equipment Ltd of Cirencester (but actually invented by the ticket printers, Alfred Williamson Ltd of Ashton-under-Lyne) and designed for self-service use on buses (not in offices). Swindon Corporation was the earliest trial user but Southend were the first to put them into regular use. Other users included Reading, Southampton, Portsmouth, Bournemouth, Cardiff, Sheffield and Leicester, West Midlands and SELNEC PTEs, as did Ribble and Crosville.



Southend Transport used them on all their OMO double deckers at one time, starting in 1971. The picture **above** (courtesy The Bus Archive) shows one brand new as fitted to a Southend Fleetline. To explain, with a Videmat, placed to the right of the doorway, passengers simply put their coins in and pressed a button to obtain a ticket that had an image of each coin on it. The weakness of the Videmats (mechanical issues aside) was that there was no control over what passengers put in – foreign coins, washers and so on. This abuse could only be picked up by Inspectors checking tickets on bus, who in the event had a difficult job working out what had actually been paid. Since the machines only copied one side of each coin, if that was heads, only the size of the coin indicated its value. At the time we had the larger 5p and 10p coins, each not much bigger than the 1p and 2p coins respectively (a 5p was only 1/8th of an inch wider than a 1p, a 10p just 7/64ths of an inch than a 2p), and sometimes images overlapped as well. Having established what had been paid, the Inspector then had to consult the boarding fare stage and fare chart to establish validity for the actual journey. Overriding (ie going further than the fare paid) was clearly an issue but that could apply equally to tickets sold by the driver where the passenger simply asked for the fare, say 30p, rather than stating their destination, so Videmats were not wholly responsible for such underpayments.

In the Southend Coordination Area, services were joint between EN and ST and revenue was pooled and shared 63% EN, 37% ST. EN were therefore very concerned if fares were underpaid, since they suffered 63% of the resultant loss of income. There is a voluminous file at the Essex Record Office of complaints from EN management to ST, citing reports of their Inspectors checking ST buses, as the Coordination Agreement permitted. There was clearly a difference of opinion – ST appeared to be willing to accept a degree of loss as part of the need to speed up fare collection on OMO buses. With Videmats, there were two simultaneous boarding streams, either paying the driver or using the Videmat, thus speeding up boarding and easing the driver's work. EN clearly didn't share this opinion, but the correspondence suggests they were largely banging their heads against a brick wall as ST would not back down.

ST finally withdrew the Videmats in April 1985; they had been fitted to the Lowlanders and all Fleetlines except 231/7/40/1 and rebodied 306-10.

But back to the start of this story: why did EN want to buy a solitary Videmat machine, did it actually come and was it for a static office installation, as the minute suggests: who knows? None of it makes any sense to me or other experts I've spoken to and I've not found any further company records related to it. Do you know?

Below: Could you quickly work out the fare paid here? A typical Videmat ticket.



Around the EN depots – Southend Pier Hill

Almost certainly the least known of EN's operational premises in Southend was the Pier Hill Coach Station, although it has a long history, pre the Great War, in the hands of predecessor businesses.

The story in fact goes back to around 1913 when the expanding business of Holmes & Smith (a limited company, C & G Holmes & Sydney Smith Ltd from September 1909) took a lease on a motor garage in Pier Hill, actually at 3 Grove Terrace, used by the various vehicles including taxis, hire cars, hearses and char-a-bancs, as their fleet gradually became motorised in place of its horse origins. Then The Westcliff-on-Sea Motor Char-a-Banc Company Ltd was formed in 1914 and bought Holmes & Smith ("Royal Reds") and The Southend-on-Sea Charabanc Company Ltd ("Royal Blues") and hence took on the Pier Hill site, which became Westcliff's headquarters. Westcliff then adopted its more familiar name of The Westcliff-on-Sea Motor Services Ltd in January 1922 (abbreviated to just "Westcliff" in the remainder of this article). Pier Hill became the base for coach services and excursions, and in 1921 the first premises in London Road, near Victoria Circus, were purchased for the expanding bus fleet, then the Prittlewell workshops and garage were established in 1926, but the HQ remained at Pier Hill.



Above: On the left is the first Pier Hill site, 3 Grove Terrace with Westcliff Daimler char-a-banc (or perhaps more properly, an "all-weather" style of body, with a folding roof hood) HJ 3717 of 1924, with white coated driver complete with uniform cap. At the right is the Temperance Billiards Hall, which became the later Westcliff & EN premises, and extreme right the start of the Grand Pier Hotel. **Commercial postcard**

Notice was then served on the initial Pier Hill site in 1928 when the owner wanted to lease it to Holmes & Smith Ltd for their private hire car department. However there was a billiards hall next door (to the east) as seen above and a sub-lease of this was initially secured by the daughter of one of the Westcliff directors and this was transferred to Westcliff in February 1929, being converted to a garage with booking office, establishing the premises that some will remember and which remained in use successively by Westcliff and then Eastern National until 1966/7. Meanwhile, the HQ offices were moved to first floor offices at 18/20 Victoria Avenue (as mentioned in the "Colour Archives" picture in the previous EBM Extra) and then on to the London Road depot in 1937.



Above: Westcliff have now moved next door and rebuilt the old billiards hall site. Dennis FS type 32-seat coaches HJ 9875/6 new in 1930 stand ready for business, whilst people queue at the booking office window. The original garage to the left is now in the sole control of Holmes & Smith Ltd, offering motor cars for hire, petrol and oil sales and garaging for 1/- (5p) a day. Both drivers display enamelled Southend Council licence badges, predating that national driver licensing brought in with the 1930 Road Traffic Act. **Courtesy The Bus Archive, Derek Giles collection**

Right: A close up of the elaborate advertising for express services, local excursions and bookings to “anywhere” through London Coastal Coaches.

With the growth of day trips to Southend, by many operators, Westcliff established a coach parking area in Tylers Avenue (not on the same site as the City depot) in 1932 and this enabled Pier Hill to be used as the focus for the express services and local excursions used by local residents and holiday makers staying in the town rather than visiting coach trips. In winter, with a much reduced coach activity, part of the site was used for storing vehicles. Unfortunately, I have not been able to trace any plans showing the internal layout or how many vehicles it could hold but photos suggest it was quite limited, perhaps just three or four spaces inside. There does not appear to have been any formal allocation of coaches to Pier Hill, vehicles being drawn from Southend London Road and Prittlewell depots.





Above: Former City Coach Company Bedford OB/Duple B51, now part of the Westcliff fleet, on the forecourt on 14 April 1952. Advertising for express services and excursions has now moved to the panels above the doorway.
The Bus Archive, Derek Giles collection, ref DG02_01734.



Left: EN's first Bristol LS, 4174, UEV 829, was caught by **Frank Church** leaving Pier Hill in summer 1954, still in its original 2-door layout (front and rear doors) and bus livery. Fitted with dual purpose seating from new, it was later converted to single door, with the route number and intermediate destination boxes combined, and repainted in coach livery for London to Southend coach/air services. It was renumbered 359 in July 1954 and again to 1200 in August 1964.

Right: The building frontage was later modified a little, along with the booking office, as in this undated shot of Bristol FLF coach 1640 (later 2604) waiting custom on the X10 to Kings Cross and Victoria.

RD collection

The official transfer of the site from Westcliff to EN took place in September 1955 as a final part of the assimilation of Westcliff into EN. At some point the freehold of the property had been acquired. Minutes of EN's Board of Directors recorded in September 1965

approval to offer the site for sale at a target price of £35,000. A year later, approval was given for a sale at £30,000 but evidently that didn't proceed, meanwhile operations from Pier Hill ceased some time after the end of the summer season in 1966. It was not until the September 1971 Board that approval was granted to sell to W & C French for £30,150, consistent with the picture on the next page taken in March 1971 which still shows the EN name over the boarded-up premises with a "for sale" sign displayed. However it appears that a sale was not finally achieved until 1974 (I've not been able to trace that particular Board minute book) and the building became a carpet warehouse, largely unaltered. The building and all the surrounding area was gradually demolished in 1985 for the construction of the Royals Shopping Centre and the paved area behind the centre.



Below: In possibly one of the last shots of Pier Hill in operational guise, **Mike Walker** took this shot in September 1967 of Tillings Travel T541, 19 POO, a 1964 delivery, Bedford SB8 with Duple Northern Firefly body, hoping to attract custom for the "Around the Town for Half a Crown" local tour.



I've not been able to trace the exact date of closure. As the only all-year round service starting there, the X10 timetable leaflets *should* provide a clue. The Winter 1966/7 issue, valid from 25 September 1966 still states Pier Hill Coach Station and makes no mention of an impending move, but the summer 1967 leaflet, commencing 22 May 1967, shows the terminal moved to Southend Seaway, EN Terminal (which had also earlier replaced the Tylers Avenue depot/bus station used by the 251 in 1964, as explained in EBM Extra 3). However the seasonal express services moved to "London Road, opposite the EN Garage" from the 1967 season, rather than to Seaway. An exception was the X1 which ran from Victoria and Kings Cross to Southend by a more direct route than X10 and served Southend Airport; that service continued to use Seaway and later became the X8. Confusingly, the 1968 excursions leaflet still lists Pier Hill as the start point.

Below: It's March 1971 and the EN depot has been closed and for sale for around three or four years, but still proudly displays the company name. The former Holmes & Smith/Westcliff premises to the left are now run by Chandler's Radio Taxis and continue to offer car parking and servicing. **John Coppins, RD collection.**



However, this was not entirely the end of coaches being based at premises on Pier Hill/Grove Terrace, as at some point in the 1970s a small independent, UMBH (Upton Minibus Hire) started running from the original site as used by Holmes & Smith and Westcliff in the 1920s, at 3 Grove Terrace, ie next door to the now closed EN premises. Again, we don't have a date for when this started, our earliest recorded notes from 1974 state they were based at a yard on Southchurch Avenue opposite the Kursaal. They were certainly at Pier Hill/Grove Terrace by October 1980 when they started a short-lived London commuter service under the relaxed provisions of the 1980 Transport Act, initially using full-sized coaches. Then at bus deregulation in 1986 they won some Essex local bus tenders, weekday evenings on the 24 and Sundays on 10/12, but the contracts were very quickly terminated for poor performance as mentioned earlier. I believe they were still using the premises up to the time the site was cleared, as I was out photographing the destruction of that part of Southend's history in April 1985 and they stopped me to ask for copies of my photos, which I duly supplied. By this time the former EN coach station and the adjacent Grand Pier Hotel had already been demolished, as seen in my picture on the **next page**.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the coach station was close to but separate from the Pier Hill bus terminus outside the Palace Hotel.

A busy final year! Summer Saturday high season departures from Pier Hill in 1966:

Time	Ser	To	Time	Ser	To	Time	Ser	To
2152 F	X3	Brixham	0825	X25	Gt Yarmouth	1600	X28	Cambridge & onwards
0600	X10	Victoria CS	0825	X27	Walton-on-Naze	1600	X35	Tunbridge Wells
0630	X10	Kings Cross	0830	X10	Victoria CS	1630	X10	Kings Cross
0700	X28	Cambridge & onwards	0845	X46	Norwich	1700	X30	Sevenoaks
0715	X26	Bournemouth	0930	X10	Kings Cross	1730	X10	Kings Cross
0715	X43	Skegness	1000	X1	Victoria CS	1800	M	Norwich
0730	X10	Victoria CS	1030	X10	Kings Cross	1830	Y	Cambridge
0740	X29	Derby	1130	X10	Kings Cross	1830	X10	Kings Cross
0800	X30	Sevenoaks	1140	Y	Cambridge & onwards	1900	X51	Bishop's Stortford
0803	X22	Folkestone	1200	X1	Victoria CS	1900	X11	Enfield
0803	X24	Ramsgate	1230	X10	Kings Cross	1930	X10	Victoria CS
0810	X23	Hastings	1330	X10	Kings Cross	2000	X1	Victoria CS
0815	(X1)	Weston-Super-Mare	1430	X10	Victoria CS	2045	X10	Kings Cross
0815	X20	Worthing	1510	X1	Victoria CS	2130	X1	Victoria CS
0815	X23	Eastbourne	1520	X29	Derby	Some routes may have been combined, to connect/interchange at Basildon		
0815	X26	Isle of Wight/B'mth	1530	X10	Kings Cross			

There will also have been one or two excursions but these tended to avoid Saturdays due to the express service commitments.

Sources and further reading:

The Westcliff-on-Sea Motor Services Ltd, A Company History, Peter Clark, Omnibus Society
Westcliff-on-Sea Motor Services Ltd, An Outline History, Alan Osborne & J R Young, Farley Publications
ENEG newssheets including the *Southend Busman* supplements and *A Survey Of Eastern National Garages 1964 to 1980*, Derek Stebbing, published as a supplement to the ENEG newsletter 200, November 1980.
Eastern National Board Minutes, various dates. Timetable leaflets.

Below: Back to the beginning. Centre in this shot, with the pitched roof, are the original Holmes & Smith/Westcliff premises of the 1920s, seemingly not much altered in the intervening years, although the advertising hoardings above the entrance seen in the picture left have now gone. The building was now back in use for bus and coach operations by UMBH, but not for much longer. In this shot taken on 6 April 1985 their depot is still open but the adjacent EN premises have been demolished, the frontage replaced by a temporary advertising hoarding for Stanley Tools. Everything right and centre of this picture, along with all of the buildings on the east side of the High Street up to Heygate Avenue, plus the much-missed Ritz Cinema, will soon be no more as work starts on the indoor Royals Shopping Centre, which opened in March 1988. **Richard Delahoy**



The Lost Names of Deregulation - 3: Coastal Red

Competitive spats were an inevitable consequence of bus deregulation but few expected that the first one in Essex would start in Harwich and then spread to Clacton. Here is the story of Coastal Red's challenge to the long established Eastern National operations.

A convenient starting point for this story is to note that the bus/coach operations of Hooks of Great Oakley, dating back to 1919 and subsequently incorporated as R W Hooks & Co Ltd, merged in 1983 with Harwich & Dovercourt Coaches. The latter had been formed in 1962 and was by now under the control of Derek Betts. The resulting business operated as Chartercoach (Harwich) Ltd from the former Hooks' premises in the north Essex village of Great Oakley. With deregulation looming, a decision was made to enter the bus market, both with commercial services and by bidding for Essex County Council tenders. The commercial services were designed to parallel (compete with) established EN routes and were able to start a couple of months ahead of "D-Day" with a fleet of six Willowbrook coach bodied Leyland Leopards painted all-over red with the fleet name Coastal Red. These competitive services started on 1 September 1986, utilising the more relaxed road service licensing rules that the 1980 Act had brought in. The initial routes were Harwich to Colchester (10), Harwich to Great Oakley (10A) and Harwich to Parkston Quay (30).

No further service registrations were made to take effect from D-Day; there was then a brief period when no new registrations or changes could be made, before the market was fully opened up from 26 January 1987, from which date Coastal Red moved into the Clacton town service market with services 50A, 50B, 60, and later adding the 70, 70A, 80 and a Harwich to Clacton service (40).

Coastal Red were also very successful in winning ECC tenders in the initial round, winning 16 routes, a mix of daytime rural services and evening and/or Sunday contracts on longer routes, including to Colchester and the Sunday services from Colchester to Braintree and to Halstead. They also won school contracts previously held by Barnes Coaches and, in a tenuous link to our story in EBMX 9 & 10 about the demonstration units of the Colchester Lathe company, a works contract for that business.

In June 1987, perhaps in a sign that they planned to stay, a large depot was established in Clacton, in Telford Road on the Gorse Lane industrial estate, in modern premises previously used as a Fiat commercial vehicle maintenance and distribution site.

We don't have room here to tell the full story, including details of all the various services and revision dates and the fleet, which is told in our **Fact File 4**, available on-line at <https://essexbus.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/EBEG-Factfile-4-Coastal-Red.pdf> ; the archive also contains a set of duty cards from December 1986. Suffice to say that Eastern National mounted a vigorous response to the competitive commercial services and also succeeded in winning many of the tendered services at the first contract renewal from 1 November 1987. Around that time, talks had begun for Eastern National to buy the Coastal Red operations and their garage in Clacton. The takeover of these bus operations took effect from 28 February 1988, with the residual CharterCoach coach operations reverting to the Great Oakley garage. CharterCoach was then acquired by Abridge Enterprises (Supreme Coaches) of Hadleigh, Essex in January 1994.

The acquisition of Coastal Red's modern premises in Clacton presented Eastern National with an opportunity to move all their operations to that site on the industrial estate in Telford Road and to sell the old depot site in Castle Road, which was in a residential area and dated back to EN's take-over of the Silver Queen business in 1931. EN's office and management staff moved to Telford Road in April 1988 and, after modifications to the buildings, the fleet moved across over the weekend of 3 & 4 September 1988. Those were the premises that EN and latterly First continued to occupy until First closed the depot and withdrew from Clacton in July 2018.

These early deregulation competitive battles between EN and Coastal Red were played out in the familiar way, with the newcomer running ahead of established services, the incumbent running duplicates and retiming services, lowering fares, aggressive marketing and so on. All tactics employed in many other bus wars across the country until the market reached a degree of maturity, although even in 2026, almost 40 years on, there are still limited outbreaks of hostilities . . .

The pictures that follow (including rear cover) were all taken by **Robert Appleton** and reflect aspects of the 18-month competitive battle that played out in north Essex. Caption information is by Richard Delahoy and Robert Appleton.



Competition in Harwich: The opening Coastal Red fleet comprised six Leyland Leopard PSU3E/4R Willowbrook C49F new to Eastern Counties in 1979/80. These had transferred to Ambassador Travel (Eastern Counties) Ltd in Sept 1984, when Eastern Counties was split up, and most of the coach operations were transferred from Eastern Counties. Acquired by Coastal Red in July/August 1986, they carried fleet numbers 1 - 6. Here (**above**) 2 (JCL 812V) arrives at Harwich Station Approach on service 10, 4 October 1986.

As part of their response to the Coastal Red competition, Eastern National introduced new services 22A/22B Harwich - Dovercourt Long Meadows Circulars on 2 February 1987. **Below:** 0601, C601 NPU, was the regular bus on 22A/22B, named "Barbara's Bus" after its regular driver, Barbara Sutherland, who is behind the wheel. Barbara had been a conductor at Harwich depot for many years.





Fleet expansion – Bristol REs: 7 (CRU 141L) **above** was a Bristol RELL6G/ECW B45D, new to Hants & Dorset in 1972, acquired by Coastal Red from Hampshire Bus in October 1986. On 7 July 1987 it was entering Great Oakley on a Colchester - Harwich service 10 journey. Further buses acquired by Coastal Red did not carry fleet numbers.

Below: Also an ECW bodied RELL, this time single doored, LAE 348E was an RELL6L new to Bristol Omnibus Company in 1967, acquired by Coastal Red from Nelson's, Wickford in April 1987 (see picture on page 8). It was photographed at Colchester bus station on Sunday 5 July 1987 on tendered service 129, Colchester - Weeley - Clacton. Upon re-tendering, this Sunday service passed to Eastern National from 1 November 1987.





Above: Another RE operated was Coastal Red OTF 360K, a Bristol RESL6L/East Lancs B42F new to Accrington Corporation Transport in 1972. Accrington became Hyndburn Borough Transport due to local government reorganisation in 1974. Acquired from Hyndburn in December 1986. Seen at Colchester bus station on 27 December 1986, on Walton-on-the-Naze - Colchester tendered service 105.

Below: Coastal Red ORP 462M was one of three ex United Counties Leyland Nationals, here at Colchester bus station on 6 February 1988, also on Walton-on-the-Naze - Colchester 105. The Coastal Red operation of this tendered service lasted until the end of their operations on 28 February 1988, Eastern National taking over on the next day.





Cross town competition: Coastal Red started service 70, Jaywick – Clacton – Holland-on-Sea from 5 May 1987 (with a subsequent 70A variant from 6 August that year). Eastern National's response was new service 300, Jaywick – Clacton – Highfields Holiday Park from 11 May, using veteran Bristol KSW open-topper 2383, WNO 479, reintroducing conductor operation due to the KSW's open rear platform. Coastal Red had obtained four Daimler Fleetlines with Park Royal bodies and four MCW bodied Bristol VRs, all ex West Midlands PTE.

Above: Coastal Red EOF 246L, one of the Fleetlines, stands at Jaywick Sands on 7 July 1987 whilst in the shot **below** we can see that ahead of it stood EN's 2383, advertising the 30p maximum fare.





Part of Eastern National's response to the initial competition from Harwich to Colchester was to lower fares and proclaim that their services were "Regular and reliable; that's us", both as advertised on Olympian 4008 (C408 HJN) **above** arriving at Harwich bus station on service 104 from Colchester on 4 October 1986.

Coastal Red marketing included bus (ticket) bingo as explained by this flyer **left/below**. The bingo numbers were found by adding up the digits of the ticket number on the Setright tickets used, in this case "462", so the bingo number was 12 ($4 + 6 + 2$)

Coastal Red BINGO

- Every month Coastal Red will be giving away one free Weekend Break for two in Paris or £100 cash.
- All you do is add up the last three digits in your ticket number.

RED COASTAL RED
020-200-462

eg $4 + 6 + 2 = 12$

- Then check your bus overleaf and tick off the number. (12 in this example)
- When you have ticked off all five numbers, claim your prize by phoning Ramsey 880249.

Please Note:
Only tickets issued in March can be accepted.
You must retain your winning Coastal Red tickets with this leaflet.
The first entrant with a complete bus will win.
The competition is not open to employees or their families.
The decision of the Managing Director of Coastal Red will be final.

GOOD LUCK

GAME Nos 2 MARCH 1987

6	11	13
18	22	26

Coastal Red

Win A Weekend Break For Two In Paris Or £100 Cash Alternative

See over for details

Rear cover pictures: Competition in Clacton, Station Road, 7 July 1987:

Top: Coastal Red EOF 275L takes a pop at Eastern National's Coastline minibuses, with its slogan on the front "The Return of REAL Buses". The decker is an ex-West Midlands PTE Daimler Fleetline/Park Royal.

Bottom: Eastern National had also brought "real" buses back into play with Bristol VR 3025, WNO 545L, working on minibus route 3. Both buses are offering a 30p fare and both are going to "Circular" with no indication on the front of where the circular will take you [Great Clacton], although the Coastal Red bus has route branding on the sides to assist but then fails to identify whether it was an A (clockwise) or B (anticlockwise) circular.

There is of course a business running buses in Norfolk today also called Coastal Red Ltd, t/a Lynx, based in Kings Lynn. That business started local bus services in 2015 and has no connection with the story above.



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