

Journal of the Road Transport History Association

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The Bus Archive
Off to a good start

The collections of The Kithead Trust and the Library and Archive of The Omnibus Society have been merged into a new charity, The Bus Archive.

The two collections are largely complementary and together comprise around 40,000 items of original records, 8,000 books, a nationally recognised collection of timetables and publicity, and in excess of 1.5 million images. This is now one of the deepest and widest collections of road

passenger transport material available: covering bus, coach, trolleybus and tram.

There are also records and publications on other modes: haulage, canals, railways and vehicle licensing and these will be held under a subsidiary brand - 'The Kithead Transport Archive', which has its own website www.kitheadtrust.org.uk.

The three existing research centres will be retained: at Droitwich, Walsall and at the London Transport Museum at Acton, and some exchange of material is underway between the centres to give a more logical distribution.

The short-term aim is to bring the collections together and to bring professional standards to these, with temperature and humidity control and the use of archive-standard materials. It will take some time to get everything catalogued and the long-term aim is to gain Accreditation under the National Archives scheme.

An outreach programme is underway: a new website at www.busarchive.org.uk will shortly have an interactive catalogue and this will be developed further over the next few months. A Facebook page (@thebusarchive) gives regular updates on what's going on at the archive and from time to time puts the spotlight on specific areas of the collection. The previous Kithead newsletter will continue as The Bus Archive

The Road Transport History Association, founded in 1992, promotes, encourages and co-ordinates the study of the history of roads, road passenger transport and the carriage of goods.

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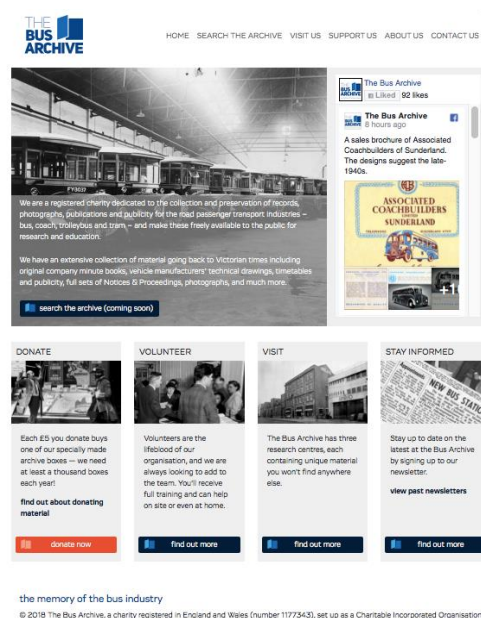
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The Editor is always interested in hearing from members and non-members who would like to write an original piece about transport history and/or research for inclusion in this journal or online.

News and there is a sign-up facility on both websites.

A partnership with Classic Bus magazine is underway, and there will be regular features in the magazine. Ray Stenning, the well-known designer (and editor of Classic Bus) is doing all Bus Archive design work on a *pro bono* basis. There is a heavy reliance on volunteers to carry out the important work, but there is also a need for funding. There is already interest from the industry and the first corporate partner – Transdev – has been announced. Individuals can also help through the Friends scheme, with regular or one-off donations. Again, details are on the website.

The archive is always looking for additional material to fill gaps or to extend the collections, whether of original records or published material. The Kithead Trust has long had a connection with the RTHA and this will continue under The Bus Archive.



Above: An example from the Bus Archive website

Report of the 2018 AGM

The AGM was held at the Coventry Transport Museum on 28 April, immediately before our Spring Business Meeting. 19 members attended. The following points are extracted from the draft minutes and should be treated as such.

The company made a small surplus for the year, of £94.76. There was a higher than anticipated charge for the Spring Business Meeting as this was held at a hotel rather than the museum, and the costs are approximately £300 more for this. There was a 'catch up' on fees for the website of £430. There was a downturn in income from sales of the Companion which has now dwindled to very small numbers (see below).

The Association bank account had been the subject of fraudulent activity to the extent that £600 had been extracted. This was completely the fault of HSBC, which had accepted fraudulent standing order mandates, signed by individuals with no connection to the company, and did not challenge these nor did they check with any company officers. In view of this, and generally very poor customer service, the directors have agreed to the opening of a fresh bank account, with CAF Bank which is running much more smoothly. A further result of problems with the previous bank account was that we were unable to track direct payments into the account with the result that some non-payers may have been missed. Membership numbers fell by some 16 to 74. Work is underway to track these previous members and to invite them to rejoin.

It was noted with considerable regret that the Autumn 2017 Business Meeting had to be cancelled due to lack of bookings; it was felt to be an embarrassment to bring in external speakers for only a handful of delegates. It was agreed that members should consider themselves giving papers or to invite an external speaker.

Sales of the Passenger Companion have now slowed to very small numbers, with more than 250 copies still in stock. It was agreed to dispose of the stock through a discounted channel.

The website has between 30 and 50 hits per day. The Journal editor reported that four issues had been published in the year, but that content is highly dependent on a small number of contributors and encouraged all members to consider submitting articles.

John Ashley and Mike Phillips were re-elected as directors. Profound thanks were offered to the University of Wales Trinity St David for their considerable support to the Association.

If any members would like a copy of the accounts, please contact the treasurer at philip.kirk@busarchive.org.uk or at the usual postal address.

Following the AGM, talks were given by John Edser, David Holding, Roger de Boer, John Ashley and Peter White. The last appears as a paper in this issue, along with a report of the talks by John Edser and David Holding. Reports of presentations by Roger de Boer and John Ashley will appear in the August issue.

Viewpoints and opinions expressed by contributors to this Journal should be seen as personal, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Association

Format of this issue

Following discussion at the AGM about readability of the Journal text, this issue is set in 10 pt (rather than 9 pt) font, without justification on the right-hand edge of each column. Readers' views on these changes will be welcome.

Book reviews

Smith's Coaches of Reading 1922 to 1979.

Paul Lacey. 288pp, card covers, ISBN 978-0-9567832-3-3. Published by the author at 17 Sparrow Close, Woosehill, Wokingham, Berks RG41 3HT. Price £30 by cheque payable to the author (available at this price post-free to RTHA members)

This remarkably comprehensive book describes the story of Reading's major coach operator from its establishment to merger with another company in 1979. The dominant figure is that Alf Smith, founder of the company, and for many years its chairman, until his death in 1977. The early days of the company were mainly associated with excursions, private hire and operation of express services from Reading to coastal destinations such as Southsea, built up to daily operation through the summer for some routes. Contract work played little role until the war, when military establishments generated demand in the Reading area, followed by substantial contracts for the Atomic Weapons, and Atomic Energy, research establishments in the area. Factory and school contracts also expanded.

A year-by-year chronology is complemented by a fleet list, and a section reviewing the history of other coach operators in the Reading area up to 1939, a number of which were acquired by Smiths. The greater part of the text within each year is devoted to developments in the fleet, comprehensively illustrated. A mixture of new and second-hand vehicles (often of quite recent vintage) provided the coach fleet, whilst post-war contract operations involved substantial double-decker provision, through purchase of older vehicles from larger fleets. The firm clearly had considerable engineering expertise in rebuilding vehicles as well as routine maintenance. Very comprehensive illustrations are provided, with

many later ones in colour, and some earlier ones colourised to show the firm's distinctive orange and blue livery.



Above: A number of Italian-built Lancias were operated in the early years of the firm. Shown here is one example, with coachwork by London Lorries, outside the company's premises at 20/22 Mill Lane, Reading, prior to the trees and shrubbery being replaced by a pull-in for coaches (Paul Lacey collection)

However, quite apart from the fleet details, this book also provides a comprehensive history of the owning family and others who worked for the firm, in the style of the author's earlier publications on independent operators in the region. Alf Smith and his wife served as Labour members on Reading Borough Council and he later held the role of Mayor on two occasions. Staff recollections describe operating methods and notable characters who worked for the firm. The patterns of excursion and express operation clearly reflect leisure activities in an age prior to mass car ownership, even the short-distance excursions in earlier years taking townspeople to places they had not seen before.

A noteworthy feature is the restrictive nature of the licensing system under the Road Traffic Act of 1930, in which even minor changes to excursion and express services (such as additional pick-up points) often took considerable time and effort to obtain. Established operators defended their local 'territory', a particularly striking example being

access to Hayling Island, initially limited to lightweight vehicles, so that for many years the express service from Reading could not run through, passengers being required to use local Southdown services for the last leg of their journey. Even when a bridge capable of handling full-size vehicles was completed, a lengthy process was involved in securing through services.



Above: Among the many second-hand acquisitions operated by Smiths was this 1937 Bedford WTB with a Duple 26-seater body, DTT484, acquired in 1945 and in the fleet until 1951 (Paul Lacey collection)

Unlike many independents, the firm built a sizeable depot, completed in 1950, and over 100 vehicles were operated at the maximum extent of activity. Inevitably, some decline set in from the late 1950s, as holiday patterns changed, and car ownership grew, but new excursion and tour destinations were also sought out.

One aspect that could have augmented the story would be some indication of overall turnover and profitability of the limited company, especially as circumstances changed from the 1950s onward, but this would of course have depended on company records still being available. Apart from a few minor oddities, the text is generally very clear, and the book represents excellent value for the price asked.

Peter White

Midland Red in Leicester: the early years.

Andrew Bartlett and Mike Greenwood. A4, card covers, extensively illustrated, 38pp. ISBN 978 1 9998209 0 9. Mike Greenwood Publishing, 11 Elliott Drive, Leicester Forest East, Leicester LE3 3FA. £12.95 including postage and packing, by cheque payable to Mike Greenwood

This publication marked several anniversaries in 2017, including opening of successive garages in the city, up to the Arriva brand name from 1997. Midland Red operations were first established in 1920, running from adjoining towns, followed by the first depot in the city itself from 1922. As the scale of operations grew, more than one depot was needed, but subsequently operations have been focussed on Wigston, opened in 1957. A detailed chronology of service development shows the very rapid growth during the 1920s, and also the large number of independents in the area at that time, followed by subsequent consolidation under BET-owned Midland Red. Later developments covered include the rapid expansion of minibuses from the mid-1980s, requiring reopening of the previously-closed Sandacre depot for some years. In addition to a wide range of photographs, striking illustrations are provided from early timetables, maps, depot plans and route-by-route guides which the company produced to stimulate travel.

Peter White

Poster Girls. A Century of Art & Design Text.

David Bowles, design by Sau-Fun Ma. London Transport Museum ISBN 978-1-871829-28-0. £25. 176pp, coloured illustrations.

This is a beautifully produced and fascinating book, which accompanies an excellent exhibition at the London Transport Museum. As its summary description indicates, it “celebrates more than a century of outstanding poster art for

the capital by women designers, illustrators and fine artists”, with colour illustrations from the LTM archives. The Underground tends to dominate, but LCC Tramways, buses and coaches will be found, sometimes in combination, for example Wimbledon Tennis by Underground to Southfields station “thence by special buses to the Ground”. Your reviewer recommends both the exhibition and its companion volume wholeheartedly. The exhibition continues until January 2019.

Richard Storey

John Scholes Prize Competition 2018

The John Scholes Prize Competition for 2018 is open, with a deadline for submissions of 31 July 2018.

The prize, which carries a cash recognition (275 Euros) and now an additional £150 of vouchers to spend with SAGE, is awarded annually to the writer of a publishable paper based on original research into any aspect of the history of transport and mobility. The prize is intended to recognise budding transport historians. It may be awarded to the writer of one outstanding article, or be divided between two or more entrants. Typically, the prize is awarded for research completed as part of a PhD.

Publication in the *Journal of Transport History* will be at the discretion of the Editor and subject to the normal refereeing process.

The prize is named in memory of John Scholes, the first Curator of Historical Relics at the British Transport Commission. The prize is funded by the Transport History Research Trust and SAGE, publishers of the *Journal of Transport History*. The prize is administered by the International Association for the History of Transport, Traffic

and Mobility (T2M – www.t2m.org).

Entry is limited to researchers who, at the time of submission, are not yet in or have just commenced a permanent / tenured academic (or equivalent) position, and who are just starting to publish research.

Essays (in English, double-spaced) should not exceed 8,000 words (including footnotes). Sources must be documented fully. Entries must be submitted electronically, to arrive no later than Tuesday 31 July 2018.

They must not bear any reference to the author or institutional affiliation. Senior scholars will judge entries against criteria of originality, thoroughness and excellence of argument, source use, composition and illustration. The process is ‘double-blind’. The judges will not enter into correspondence.

A cover letter and a one-page CV must demonstrate eligibility for the prize. Entries for the prize should be sent to the *JTH* Editor at jth.editor@gmail.com. The subject line of the message must read ‘John Scholes Prize entry 2018’. In the body of the message please indicate how you found out about the prize.

'Beeching buses'

Talks by David Holding & John Edser

The theme of the 'Beeching' era rail closures of the 1960s into the early 1970s, and the extent of bus replacements for them, linked three of the presentations at the meeting in Coventry on 28 April. John Edser's presentation discussed some of the general issues, and David Holding identified two specific case studies. The paper by Peter White on historical aspects of the recent 'Greengauge21' interurban bus report also relates to this theme.

John's talk began by recalling his role within BRB from June 1963, when he was transferred from the Trains Supervision Office, Southern Region, Woking to the Central Planning Unit in BRB HQ at 222 Marylebone Road, London, often known as 'The Kremlin'. He became the junior in a three-man team responsible for administering the closure processes involved in Dr Beeching's ground-breaking report on BR published the previous March. This meant keeping a record of all the various stages of the passenger service and freight station closures that followed.

Replacement bus services

Many of the passenger closures involved replacement bus services. These were recommended by the Regional Consultative Committees which ran the various public meetings that were held after the closure proposals had been published. Their proposals for replacement bus services might, or might not, be accepted by the then Ministry of Transport. The BRB had no influence on the bus services - that was the Ministry's decision.

In many cases, they were sensible. They either used existing services that paralleled the rail branches and had already taken the vast majority of the passengers, or were given sensible routes to serve those areas that had lost any form of public transport.

However, there were some problems that puzzled those in John's team. They were the ones that left the obvious main routes and centres of population and called at the old station sites that were surrounded by green fields ('xxx road', 'a for b' etc.). The journey times were so extended that it was obvious that no-one was going to use them, and they were the first services bus companies applied to withdraw, with a very high degree of success. John's team could not prove it, but suspected 'political' rather than 'public good' influences prevailed, as the routes would obviously fail, and cost to the taxpayer would come down.

Cases of station retention

To illustrate the other side, where the Consultative Committees recommended that individual stations be retained, the Ministry usually accepted this. An example is Ulleskelf, just south of York on the Leeds, and Sheffield via Pontefract, lines. The majority of the limited use travelled to and from York but, being just south of the River Wharfe, the road system was, and is, geared to going south or east-west. The Wharfe floods regularly - as it did in 2015-16 - and covers the whole area, apart from the railway. As a result, Ulleskelf is still open with five direct services to and from York, one to and two from Leeds, one to/from Hull, and two to/from Sheffield. From recent observations, the car park is well used.

At the other end of the country, the Plymouth - Bere Alston - Callington branch was retained as far as Gunnislake. The station at Callington was at least a mile from the town, but because of the Tamar and other river valleys, the access from Gunnislake and Calstock was circuitous, over very congested roads via Tavistock, and there were employees of the naval dockyards who lived there. Today's train service is roughly every

two hours, but the first train is at 0551, calling at Dockyard at 0629 and arriving at Plymouth at 0636, with the following train at 0731. In the afternoon peak there are trains at 1637 and 1823. There are plans to increase the service.

Carmarthen to Aberystwyth

David's first case study was the Carmarthen – Aberystwyth route, a lengthy rail line of 65 miles passing through two of then counties in Wales. Its alignment was somewhat indirect, notably in the sharp westward turn at Strata Florida. Proposed closure of the line would sever links between Aberystwyth and South Wales, except for a detour via Shrewsbury, in England. Proposed buses included new and extended journeys over existing routes, but length of the journey also dictated a new limited stop service over whole length. The convention was to award rail-replacement bus services to local territorial operators, usually from the Tilling or BET groups: here northern half (Aberystwyth – Lampeter) was in Crosville territory, but the operator over the southern half was an independent, Davies Bros.

Services would be timed to meet particular trains, and a Crosville would run south from Aberystwyth to Carmarthen about 0830, arriving at 1100 and not returning until about 1900. In between a Davies vehicle would run Carmarthen – Aberystwyth and back, leaving at 1200 and arriving Aberystwyth at 1430, then returning at 1530. Hence, it would have been perfectly possible for Crosville to cover the whole service.

The two counties covering the route at that time (Carmarthenshire and Cardigan - now unitaries, and the latter known as Ceredigion) of course objected, and one despatched its Chief Constable in a car with orders to drive over the route to the proposed timetable with the view to securing police objection on grounds that it would be

necessary to drive dangerously fast. If this objection were upheld and a licence refused, buses couldn't run, and line couldn't close.

The road service licence was granted. In practice nature intervened and a bridge north of Tregaron was swept away by flood in December 1964, necessitating an emergency bus service from Aberystwyth to Strata Florida. The whole line closed in February 1965 and the bus service operated safely. The police had allowed five minutes for fare collection at each stop, but because of very few passengers this high figure was unnecessary.

As a postscript he noted that the local manager of the then United Welsh company (a THC subsidiary, subsequently absorbed into South Wales Transport) needed a bus in the Carmarthen area for an afternoon school working. He found that Crosville (a fellow THC company) had a bus in Carmarthen for 8 hours (i.e. the rail replacement service), which he asked to use, but this was refused. The effects of drivers' hours rules may have been a factor. It was more likely that Crosville was being paid so much for rail replacement work that it was not interested. It was said at the time that Crosville's Mid-Wales depots were the most profitable because of rail replacement work.

Although taking place over fifty years ago, closure has remained controversial and in 2015 the Welsh Assembly Government commissioned a scoping study for re-opening. However, over the fifty years many bridges have been demolished, and land sold. The A40 runs over the trackbed at Carmarthen end, and a housing estate does so in Aberystwyth. Despite very high capital costs of about £700m, and the need for an operating subsidy, political interest continues, with a study of revenue and service options being considered.

Stopping services north of Newcastle

David's second case study was local stopping services on the East Coast main line (ECML) north of Newcastle. Strictly speaking, this is post-Beeching, but illustrates similar issues. Not all Beeching closures involved entire lines. In many cases stopping services and stations closed on lines that continued to exist for long-distance traffic. In this case, the Beeching-era closure was not total, as some stations had remained open while others closed. This had left a messy and sporadic local service between Newcastle and Berwick serving the remaining stations.

In late 1970s, BR was planning introduction of HST 125 sets over the ECML. It was decided these local trains would get in way of the much faster new trains. BR approached Northumberland County Council with a proposition. Cramlington was being developed as a 'New Town' by the County, with its station still open but a poor service. BR's proposal was to concentrate the resources being used for the existing service (i.e. one diesel multiple unit, DMU) to run hourly service between Newcastle and Morpeth, and close local stations to the north.

For stations north of Morpeth, United Automobile Services had an hourly service 418 serving all communities as far as Alnmouth. It was suggested rail passengers could either travel through to Newcastle on this, or transfer from the 418 at Morpeth to the new rail service, the station being close to the road south from the town. It was claimed that the rail timetable could be made to fit buses.

The Council held a 'consultation event' – not a formal closure process as such – where public views were invited. There was opposition, but this also provided an example of the public perception of realities. Most of the 418 service ran

from United's Morpeth depot, where driver changeovers took place. Users observed that everything was fine to Morpeth bus station, where the driver was due to be relieved. The resulting delay arose from (1) Cash-up, (2) disappearing into the canteen, (3) 10 minutes later a new driver appearing, who sorts out their cash (4) adjusts driving position (5) and collects Morpeth fares. The rail station was one mile south of town centre, whereby the train connection would be missed*.

It was clear to the County and BR that there was opposition to the station closure. BR then discovered (a) that the DMU set running the local service was stabled overnight in Berwick, so there was no problem in running a stopping journey south in the morning and back at night. (b) In addition to ECML HSTs, "Cross-country" trains, then loco-hauled, e.g. Edinburgh – Plymouth, would continue twice daily and could stop at Alnmouth and Morpeth. This was accepted and has continued since

This left Chathill, an isolated station north of Alnmouth, with about five houses. County Councillors took a keen interest and pointed out that north of Chathill is Belford, a small town whose station closed under Beeching but where buildings were still in place. Councillors were prepared to accept closure of Chathill if Belford was re-opened.

However, rail management found this was not possible because Chathill had historically been the junction for the 'North Sunderland Railway' line serving Seahouses. The government department's view was that if the branch line closed, passengers would continue to make way to junction, then travel by whatever means to end of branch, therefore the junction station could not close. However, the branch line had closed in the 1951. Certainly, there was no connecting bus to Seahouses by the 1970s, and no buses to Chathill.



Above: United Automobile Services Bristol/ECW single-decker 531LHN on service 418 in December 1968 (Philip Battersby)

Currently, Alnmouth and Morpeth have better service than ever, with greater numbers of Cross-Country and ECML trains stopping at both. The local service continues hourly to Morpeth; DMU set no longer stabled at Berwick, so return trip is made from Newcastle to Chathill (now a terminus!) twice daily. Belford is still closed – indeed, the station buildings were demolished to allow straightening of ECML.

*Editor's note – One of the earlier pieces of research work in public transport in which I was involved at the Polytechnic of Central London was a study of interurban public transport, including a case study of bus services between Morpeth and Newcastle. At the time (1974) there was a combined 15-minute headway provided by United services between the two points, which had traditionally followed the old A1 road

through the village of Wideopen taking 40 minutes. However, one journey per hour on the 505 through service from Berwick was routed along the A1 by-pass, taking only 30 minutes. A user survey showed a marked preference for the hourly fast journey in the southbound direction. Subsequently, all other bus services, including the now Arriva-run 418, have followed the direct route. This would make the case for an interchange to rail at Morpeth even weaker than before.

Historical development of interurban bus services

Peter White

This paper is based on one aspect of the report 'Interurban Bus: Time to raise the profile', published by Greengauge21 in March, and freely available at its website www.greengauge21.net. The writer is one of three co-authors, together with Jim Steer, Founder Director of the SDG transport consultancy, and Dylan Luke, who now works for the Department for Transport. A presentation made at the Association meeting on 28 April summarised both these historical aspects, and also the case studies of more recent developments such as the First Eastern Counties Peterborough – Wisbech – King's Lynn - Dereham - Norwich service, the Stagecoach East Scotland 'Express City Connect' network, which links many points in Fife with Edinburgh and Glasgow, the 'InterConnect' services in Lincolnshire, and the *TrawsCymru* network in Wales. Fuller details of these and other examples reviewed may be found in the main report. Use was made of the Omnibus Society timetable library at Walsall (now part of the Bus Archive) to document service changes for case study areas.

Early background

The development of railways in the nineteenth century in Britain provided a very comprehensive network by 1900. Some further expansion occurred after this period, including new rural lines under the Light Railways Act of 1896 which simplified the legal processes involved in obtaining authorisation.

However, rail technology was not necessarily well-suited to low-density flows, and many lines carried low volumes of traffic from their opening. The development of road motor transport in the first decade of the twentieth century created a technology both for private transport (the car) and for public transport (bus) which offered much lower costs and greater convenience. Initial impacts were small, but following the First World War, rapid growth occurred. Early services were slow and carried short-distance traffic, but as vehicles improved (pneumatic tyres) and roads

(asphalt surfaces) road transport became increasingly competitive with rail for longer-distances. In many cases, bus services offered higher frequencies and more convenient routings than railways.

Interurban bus services emerge

By the late 1920s a comprehensive bus network had been developed by a mix of large regional companies and numerous local 'independents'. In addition to village-to-town links, many services took the form of *interurban* routes, connecting two or more towns via a series of intermediate villages. This helped to provide higher load factors (through combining local and interurban passenger flows) and to justify a higher level of service. These services increased the degree of competition with rail, although typically remaining much slower, especially where indirect routings were followed to serve intermediate villages.

There is no explicit definition of an 'interurban' route, these services being licensed in the same manner as other local bus services, but a definition adopted for the report is that in which *two or more urban areas (typically towns, but might be cities) are linked via intermediate villages*. The degree to which deviations are made to serve villages off major roads varies, and in recent years has tended to diminish as operators have focussed more strongly on the major passenger flows.

Following the Road Traffic Act of 1930, consolidation occurred in many areas, and independent services were acquired by large companies (although this pattern varied substantially from one area to another). These larger companies in turn were often subsidiaries of national holding companies, such as Tilling or BET. The railway companies acquired shareholdings in these companies, in some cases their own directly-run operations (such as those of the Great Western) passing to them. In some cases, the interurban bus routes provided connections for which railways had been proposed, but not built, such as Gainsborough to Scunthorpe in North Lincolnshire.



Above: An example of specific branding for an interurban service was that between Cardiff, Neath and Swansea by the Neath & Cardiff company (a BET subsidiary). Seen here is an AEC Reliance of the company, the place names above the doorway and windows indicating principal points served (view by the late Roy Marshall, from the Bus Archive collection)

A number of lower-density passenger rail services were closed in the 1920s and 1930s, a process which may have been aided by the railways companies' involvement in the larger bus companies. However, there was little integration of rail and bus operations, apart from some provision of ticketing, such as inter-available returns between the same points, and some through ticketing facilities. For example, parallel bus services provided an opportunity for railways to rationalise their own services by cutting out little-used intermediate stops to focus on the longer-distance traffic. There were a few examples of this (notably York to Scarborough in North Yorkshire, leaving only Malton and Seamer as intermediate stations), but it did not become a general practice. A striking case of

more recent through ticketing is that available to points on the Peterborough - Norwich bus service, notably Wisbech, dating from a dedicated rail link service operated in the 1980s, later subsumed within the more extensive service now offered.

A more detailed example of the shift from rail to bus, and later developments, is described in the case of Lincolnshire elsewhere by one of the authors¹.

Express coach services

The development of road vehicles and increased speeds also enabled introduction of 'express coach' services from the 1920s, expanding rapidly

¹ White, P.R. 'Roads replace railways' Chapter 5 in Mills, D.R. (ed) Twentieth Century Lincolnshire. History of Lincolnshire,

Vol XII. History of Lincolnshire Committee for the Society for Lincolnshire History and Archaeology, Lincoln, 1989

during the 1930s. These services catered for longer-distance traffic, such as London to the South West of England, usually with vehicles of a much higher specification than local buses. Speeds were generally much lower than rail, but often a wider range of through services was offered and convenient connections were provided through hubs such as at Cheltenham. These services proved particularly appealing to holiday travellers, the coach market developing a highly seasonal form. However, there was little differentiation of service provided for travel at the regional level (e.g. around 30 – 80 km), for which bus services using standard vehicles with high density seating were the norm. A few exceptions did develop, such as the Neath & Cardiff Luxury Coach Company in the Cardiff - Neath - Swansea corridor, but these were rare.

An 'express' service was legally defined as one on which no standing passengers were carried, and on which a specified minimum fare applied – the latter was set at a relatively low figure, resulting in many short-distance services which did not carry intermediate traffic being classified as 'express'. Not until the Transport Act 1980 was a distance-based definition adopted (initially one of all passengers being carried a distance of at least 30 miles measured in straight line, reduced in 1986 to one of 15 miles).

Nationalisation

World War Two saw suspension of all express coach services, and some interurban bus services were reduced too, with an increased role for rail. Under the Transport Act of 1947, the railway system was nationalised under the British Transport Commission (BTC), as 'British Railways'. As a consequence of the railway companies' shareholdings in some regional bus groups, two of these (Tilling and Scottish) also came into public ownership. Some of the larger independent companies also sold out to the state at this time, anticipating possible compulsory nationalisation, often being merged with the existing regional companies in the area concerned. There were also proposals for 'area schemes' to rationalise bus and rail operations within the same region, but none of these came into effect. Closures of thinly-used rural railways

resumed during the 1950s, although not on a large scale.

As car ownership grew from the early 1950s, this had direct effects on rail and bus ridership, resulting in the first cutbacks to bus network coverage, and a general reduction in bus service frequency. Spread of television ownership also reduced demand for evening and weekend services (a glance at many rural/interurban bus service timetables of the 1920s and 1930s will show that schedules were often geared to evening and weekend demand such as cinema visits, rather than the journey to work market, for example). The bus industry responded largely by an incremental programme of service cuts, with little innovation in working methods or staff productivity, apart from a shift from conductors to one-person operation which, by retaining cash-based fare collection, often worsened service quality and speed through extended dwell times at stops. However, reductions in networks generally affected least used rural (village-to-town) routes rather than major interurban services.

Rationalisation of the railway network

The BTC was broken up in 1963, the railways becoming the responsibility of the British Railways Board (BRB), with regional bus and coach companies placed under the Transport Holding Company (THC). This may have reduced the already very limited integration of bus and rail provision, which could have proved useful during the period of extensive rail closures which followed. It was the intention that the state-owned businesses would continue to cover all costs from user revenues rather than receive general subsidy.

The separation of the railways may have accelerated the pressures to radically reduce costs, and focussed attention on the large part of the network that carried very low volumes of passenger traffic. The economics of highly seasonal operations (such as Summer Saturday services to coastal resorts), and wagonload freight traffic were questioned. Following the appointment of Dr Richard Beeching as chair of BRB, an extensive review of the rail network's

future was conducted. This resulted in radical reductions in seasonal passenger services (a function already covered to a large degree by the express coach sector) and wagonload freight, together with local stopping rail passenger services on many routes, releasing capacity for long-distance traffic (for example, on the East Coast main line north of Peterborough). Many rural railways closed entirely.

While the 'Beeching Report' has been widely criticised, it was inevitable that continued operation of many of the low-density passenger routes could not be justified, especially as the need for replacement investment in rolling stock and infrastructure would have become evident in due course. However, passenger data was at that time relatively crude, given the reliance on pre-printed ticket stocks, which may have led to understatement of the importance of feeder traffic from branch lines to main routes. For example, a study in 1975 of the Barnstaple – Exeter line, the sole route in north Devon to survive the 'axe', showed that about 75% of its users were not travelling to Exeter, or intermediate stops, but interchanging at Exeter for points elsewhere on the rail network, notably London². In other cases where branch lines closed, very little provision of connecting replacement bus services was evident, although it might well have been in the commercial interests of the railways to do so, in order to retain feeder traffic.

There were also some cases where a short-term approach was taken, ignoring already planned developments, notably closure of the Oxford – Bletchley – Bedford – Cambridge 'Varsity' route, which is now in the process of being reinstated as the 'East - West Railway', albeit at very high capital cost. A substantially improved interurban bus service is already provided, Stagecoach X5.

A surprising feature of the 'Beeching' era closures was that little attention was paid to potential losses of feeder or interurban traffic as a result. Inquiries were held into each proposed closure

case, but a criterion of 'hardship' to individual users appears to have been the main one applied, based on personal evidence, rather than a more strategic view of the role such lines served. This often led, in turn, to a fragmentary pattern of replacement bus services, often geared to local demands over parts the former line, rather than aiming to serve the longer-distance traffic carried. One of the few exceptions was the bus service between Bude and Exeter via Okehampton, provided from closure of the corresponding railway service in 1966³, and surviving to this day.

This fragmented replacement pattern can be seen in the example of the East Lincolnshire railway, a secondary main line route connecting Grimsby, Louth, Boston, Spalding and Peterborough. Little effort was made to replace the interurban links which were lost, the main focus being on some limited short-distance links, which were often withdrawn after a few years. In this case, John Hibbs (a founder of this Association), then a traffic officer with BR Eastern Region, had proposed a limited-stop replacement bus service over the main route, connecting principal towns served⁴ but no action was taken to implement it. Similar fragmentary replacements were provided elsewhere.

Bus services were seen as unsatisfactory replacements, not only due to lower speeds, but also the service quality provided, notably in the vehicles used. Very little through ticketing to the rest of the rail network was provided. Replacement bus services were sometimes included in rail timetables, but often in an inconsistent form, and declining over time. A comprehensive national rail timetable is now produced only on a very limited scale. A later example, December 2015 – May 2016, shows some bus services, principally those connecting with the East Coast Main Line (table 26), and the London – Cornwall main line (table 135), including the Exeter - Bude service, but few elsewhere.

² Stephen R. Williams, Peter R. White and Paul Heels 'The Exeter – Barnstaple line: A case for improvement or closure?' *Modern Railways*, August 1976, pp 300-303

³ Turns, Keith *The Independent Bus*. David & Charles, Dawlish, 1974. Chapter 12

⁴ Lincolnshire Transport Review, November/December 1970, pp 124/125

Subsequent rail developments

The closure programme ceased in the early 1970s and in some respects has been reversed, through reopening of local stations on lines which retained through services (for example, between Lincoln and Sleaford, or in West Yorkshire) and substantial re-openings of whole routes, most notably the Nottingham - Mansfield - Worksop line, and, in 2015, the 'Borders Railway' (Edinburgh - Tweedbank).

Lines which remained open since the early 1970s have often experienced improvements in the quality of rolling stock, frequency and provision of through services. The creation of the 'Regional Railways' sector within British Rail in the 1980s assisted this. Under subsequent franchising to Train Operating Companies, further improvements have often occurred, sometimes as part of the bid specification.

The dramatic general growth of rail demand since 1995/6 has occurred not only on suburban and intercity routes, but also in the regional sector, even where little improvement in services has taken place⁵. The combination of such growth and some re-openings could be seen as an indication that the public transport market has potential for growth, even in areas of low population density and high car ownership. This has led to further demands for re-openings, such as the Aberystwyth - Carmarthen line in West Wales. However, this would incur very high capital expenditure relative to traffic flows, and the need for continued operating subsidy as well. The current TrawsCymru service T1 provides an hourly link and requires only a very modest operating support in addition to concessionary fares compensation and BSOG, of around 66 pence per passenger trip in 2016/17.

Bus service developments to 1986

In 1967 the remaining large privately-owned regional bus holding company, BET, sold out to the state. Within England, its operations were

merged with those of THC to form the National Bus Company (NBC), and in Scotland, the Scottish Bus Group (SBG) took a similar role. NBC came into existence from January 1969. Operations were handled through existing local companies, each of which was given a financial target. A common brand image was adopted, with simplified liveries. Express coach operations were brought together under the 'National Travel' (later 'National Express') brand, enabling comprehensive marketing and network planning. However, little effort was made centrally to develop product differentiation for regional interurban services, which remained at the initiative of each subsidiary (although *Midland Express* was an exception across former Midland Red bus companies in the 1980s).

While most of the bus network continued to cover its costs, ongoing impacts of rising car ownership began to raise questions about the need for substantial public expenditure to support rural services. Some assistance was provided by the Fuel Duty Rebate (FDR) from central government, initially for 'rural' services only, which effectively reduced fuel costs. Local authorities had permissive powers to support bus services, and from the late 1960s/early 1970s bus operators began seeking such support in order to continue provision of rural services. However, given the dominance of incumbent operators in many areas, local authorities did not have the option of seeking to contract services competitively from lower cost operators, but had to negotiate with the incumbents, except where they voluntarily withdrew from some services.

Costing systems used in the bus industry were very crude, generally taking the form of a simple average cost per bus mile (now, km) for all services operated by a company. However, revenues from ticket sales were available at route-specific level, and hence an estimate of route-level profitability could be made. For example, an analysis of the Crosville company's network (covering urban areas around Liverpool, but also extensive rural regions in north Wales),

⁵ Le Vine, S. and Jones, P. *On the Move: Making Sense of Car and Train Travel Trends in Britain*. RAC Foundation, London, 2012

showed a very wide variation in apparent profitability on this basis⁶. While losses for low-density rural routes may not have been surprising, the lack of route-specific costing led to a very distorted pattern. This question was raised by local authorities when operators sought assistance for existing “loss making” services, for example by Norfolk County Council in respect of Norwich - Kings Lynn routes.

The bus industry was thus prompted to adopt a more rigorous costing system⁷, devised in the mid-1970s in collaboration with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) by which name the system is generally known. This broke down costs into components which were ‘time-based’ (principally staff), ‘distance-based’ (such as fuel) and those related to peak vehicle requirement (PVR), such as vehicle capital cost and depot overheads. The largest is time-based (drivers alone comprising about 40% of the total), not distance. Hence, a route with a high average speed (such as an interurban service) would incur much lower cost per bus-km (for a given size of bus) than one with a low average speed (such as one within congested urban area). Some seemingly loss-making interurban services were in fact profitable on this basis, and the scope for commercial expansion of interurban services was highlighted. However, a consequence of the greater driver productivity due to higher speeds is that fuel may form a higher proportion of costs for interurban services than local bus operation as a whole, and thus variation in fuel cost may have a greater effect of viability.

In the late 1970s NBC developed the ‘Market Analysis Project’ (MAP) concept, aimed at identifying commercially-viable networks with each company, given the uncertainty of local authority funding. This may also have reinforced the importance of more profitable interurban links, but in some cases may have encouraged less direct routing, in order to combine existing traffic flows using larger vehicles.

Bus industry deregulation and privatisation

Under the Transport Act of 1985, the local bus industry in Britain, outside Greater London, was subject to ‘deregulation’ from October 1986. Existing ‘quantity’ licensing (road service licences for each route) and regulation of fares was removed, general network subsidies were no longer permitted, and operators were asked to register those services which they regarded as ‘commercial’, i.e. covering all costs (including capital) from user revenue, FDR, and compensation for concessionary fares. Incumbent operators were not protected, and operators could therefore register parallel services over the same route. It was accepted that many services might not be ‘commercial’ especially in low-density rural areas, or at less popular times of travel such as evenings and Sunday mornings, so local authorities were given powers to secure such services through contracts, to be awarded by competitive tendering. This enabled operators other than the incumbents to bid for such work.

The commercial network registered in 1986 proved perhaps more extensive than many had expected, one probable factor being a move away from nationally-agreed wage rates which enabled lower, market-based, rates to be paid in rural areas. Radical improvements in productivity, notably through reducing management and engineering staff, also assisted in cutting unit operating costs. Local authorities generally sought to replace previous services where gaps were created in the networks thus registered. These applied to low-density rural areas and also to periods of time (typically evenings and Sundays) over routes including some interurban services otherwise registered commercially for core periods of higher travel demand. Where such journeys were awarded by contract to operators other than the incumbent, passengers could be confronted by separate operators with separate liveries on an individual route at different times of the day/week, and in some cases lack of inter-available ticketing or

⁶ Phil Drake ‘Making money and losing it – Crosville in the 1960s’ Omnibus Society Provincial Historical Research Group Journal no 184, January – February 2017, pp 2-6, and no 185, March-April 2017, pp 5-11

⁷ An early stage in this process is described in A.Beetham ‘An approach to operational costing in the bus industry’ Paper at Seminar on Rural Transport at the Polytechnic of Central London November 1973, pp 11-19

comprehensive timetable information. In subsequent years, some of these operations have reverted to the commercial operators, either through them regaining contracts, or deciding that commercially-registered operation might be worthwhile to sustain promotion of the service as a whole.

The fragmentary nature of tendered services generally made it difficult for local authorities to pursue a strategic 'network planning' role. However, in some rural regions where the proportion of tendered to commercial services was very high (notably parts of North and West Wales) something close to this became feasible.

The process of deregulation may have stimulated a further emphasis on the principal interurban routes in operators' commercial behaviour. A sharper demarcation has developed between commercially-registered interurban routes and other services, especially where demand-responsive operation has been introduced. In some cases, these have enabled interurban routes to follow more direct alignments, as small settlements are now served by demand-responsive services, such as '*Bwccabus*' in West Wales which enables more direct routing for *TrawsCymru* service T1, and Lincolnshire's *CallConnect* services likewise enabling more direct routing of InterConnect services such as the 6 between Lincoln and Skegness.

The deregulation process was also accompanied by privatisation, albeit on a longer timescale. The existing state-owned regional companies (NBC and SBG) were privatised, often with existing regional subsidiaries being broken into smaller units and sold separately to stimulate competition. Privatisation of the local authority-owned municipal fleets was also encouraged, although most of their operations largely within their own urban areas and had little involvement in the interurban sector.

Many of the earlier privatisation sales were to management and employee buy-outs (MEBOs), and thus adopted distinctive local identities and approaches to development of their networks. In some cases, further sub-division of operations through separate brands was adopted, notably

the former West Yorkshire Road Car Company of Harrogate, serving a region of North Yorkshire west, north and east of Leeds. Services from Leeds via York to the coast (Whitby, Scarborough, Bridlington) were rebranded as 'Yorkshire Coastliner', with local identities for the Harrogate and Keighley networks. A distinctive brand was also later adopted for the Leeds - Harrogate - Ripon service 36.

A subsequent phase of privatisation saw many of the earlier MEBOs consolidated into larger holding groups, such as Stagecoach and Arriva. While reproducing in some respects the former patterns of NBC and SBG, a much more mixed structure is evident. Local managements have (to varying degrees) retained their ability to initiate changes. In some cases, common brand names have been adopted for 'premium' services within each group, for which higher-spec vehicles are used on local bus services (for example, with higher quality seating - in some cases at lower density - and interior fittings) such as Stagecoach 'Gold', and Arriva 'Max'. These have been applied to interurban services in a number of cases. Given that the majority of costs are those such as drivers and fuel, the incremental costs of such enhancements are small, and may be covered by a corresponding increase in revenue from higher ridership.

In addition to permissive powers for local authorities to support non-commercial local services, central government also introduced specific funding to enable innovation in rural areas. The 'Rural Bus Grant' (RBG), introduced in 1998, was given to areas below a certain population density, paid on a per capita basis, enabling substantial expansion of rural services in some cases (the grant has since been discontinued). In addition, a 'Rural Bus Challenge' (RBC) grant was introduced, for an initial three-year period, based on competitive bids, to stimulate innovative services. In some cases, the services thus developed required too high a level of support per passenger trip, but others provided a stimulus to upgrading interurban services which subsequently proved largely commercially viable, an example being Interconnect 6 in Lincolnshire.

Service Quality and Fares

Vehicle quality has been raised by a general requirement for all buses on local services to have low-floor accessibility from January 2017.

Compliant vehicles have been introduced over a twenty-year period, attracting additional ridership from users such as those in wheelchairs or with child push-chairs, who would not previously have been able to use the service. In some cases, promotion of improved inter-urban services has coincided with such changes, for example InterConnect 1 in Lincolnshire.

Stemming from the Transport Act 2000, a minimum level of concessionary travel for older and disabled users was established at half the equivalent adult fare (local schemes existed in many areas prior to this, but with no compulsion on local authorities to provide them). More generous free travel schemes were introduced in Wales and Scotland, followed by England from 2006 (initially only in the area of residence, but from 2008 over England as a whole). Pass eligibility is now defined as the female retirement age). Such concessions stimulated large growth in bus travel, especially in rural areas⁸. Rural and interurban services benefitted not only from increased use by local residents, but also by visitors, affecting some tourist areas in particular. There is evidence of the greatest growth in concessionary travel in England since 2003-05 being for trips of 10 miles upward⁹, which would be consistent with a greater impact on interurban service ridership. The financial compensation to the bus companies for offering the concessionary fare is not the full adult fare forgone, but the net revenue loss to the operator (which takes account of ridership growth due to the concession). Hence, a percentage of the equivalent adult fare is paid, the intention being that the operator should be 'no better off, no worse off', as a result. This rate is typically around 50 -70%, but can fall outside this range. Within Wales and within Scotland, a common compensation rate applies, but in England this is set at county level. Hence,

the operator of a cross-boundary service may receive different levels of compensation on different sections of the same route.

While in general concessionary travel has resulted in increased use of interurban services, there can be distortions in route-level commercial viability (especially if the compensation level is relatively low and additional capacity costs are incurred). A further factor may be the use of compensation at a flat rate per bus trip irrespective of distance rather than one related to a graduated distance-based fare scale which produces higher revenue for the longer trips typical of interurban services.

While local authorities have permissive powers to support local bus services, this is not a mandatory requirement. Given the obligation to offer compensation for concessionary fares and pressures on local authority budgets, severe cutbacks have taken place in some areas, including cases where all support has been removed (e.g. Cumbria, Oxfordshire). In general, main interurban routes have been much less affected, but these may now be the only remaining local bus services in areas through which they pass. In some cases, local authority land-use planning strategy may also favour concentration on interurban routes, such as the policy of concentrating new housing in market towns in Oxfordshire.

The nature of the Interurban travel market

Interurban travel from one urban area to another differs from 'local' movement (e.g. from a village or suburb to the nearest town centre). Typically, interurban trips are made less often, and for a different purposes – for example, access to major regional shopping centres, visiting friends and relatives, day trips, travel to higher education facilities sometimes at weekends or start/end of term, and access to regionalised health facilities and, of course, journeys to work.

⁸ White, Peter and Baker, Stuart 'Impacts of free concessionary travel in an English rural region' in *Transport Policy* January 2010, Vol 17, issue 1, pp 20-26

⁹ See Figure 17 in 'Evaluation of Concessionary Bus Travel: The impacts of the free bus pass' Department for Transport report dated 2016

Although residents of villages and small towns make fewer bus trips than residents of England as a whole (expected, given higher bus use in large cities), when expressed in terms of distance travelled by bus per annum, the differences are less marked. While in 2013-14 inhabitants of 'rural towns'¹⁰ and fringe areas' made 34 local bus trips per year compared with an average for all areas in England excluding London of 61, bus-km travelled per person per year differed by much less – 253 versus 279¹¹.

A feature of this less frequent travel is that user awareness of the services available may be more critical. For a local bus service within a town, the physical presence may be fairly self-evident, but less so for interurban services. This may point to the need for better quality passenger information, and increased user awareness, for example by developing distinctive 'brands'. A railway announces its physical presence through track and stations, but an interurban bus service meeting an equivalent role may be less readily perceived by potential users.

Urban hierarchy

Within the population distribution of most countries, a fairly clear 'urban hierarchy' may be defined. Taking the capital, or largest city, this would form the highest level (London, in the case of England), followed by the next largest set of cities which form regional centres (such as Greater Manchester). Successive levels may then be defined down to small market towns. In most cases, fewer facilities are offered in the smaller urban areas, for example in terms of the range of shopping centres, education or health facilities. Much travel demand can then be seen as the need to move from lower to higher order centres.

The need for such travel may have increased as employment opportunities in smaller urban areas diminished, notably those affected by industrial decline (for example, the reopening of passenger rail services from former coal mining areas to regional centres in the East Midlands, and in South Wales). In addition, the quality of

shopping centres has in some case declined, and health facilities have become more centralised. An increased role for further (as distinct from higher) education may stimulate greater interurban travel, to centres where colleges are located. It is noteworthy that demands for 'rural' rail service re-openings may produce services acting mainly as interurban links.

As the more comprehensive rural bus networks offered in earlier decades have declined, one may also observe a decline in services which link centres of similar size and function (since there is limited demand to travel from one to another, apart from trips such as visiting friends and relatives). However, service provision and use to the higher order centres, may have increased. Such changes can be seen in the case of Bourne, a market town in south Lincolnshire. In the 1960s, daily interurban bus services were offered from Bourne to all other market towns within a radius of about 30 km (Spalding, Sleaford, Grantham, Stamford) together with a more frequent (hourly) route to the regional centre of Peterborough. Apart from the Stamford service, most of the services to the other market towns have disappeared or been reduced to market day only operation. However, the Peterborough service now runs half hourly, serving a city with a major regional shopping centre.

Concluding observations

In contrast to a general decline in rural bus services, many of the principal interurban services have prospered, with improvement in service frequency, quality and ridership, details of which may be found in the Greengauge²¹ report. In several cases, these have filled gaps in the rail network left after the 'Beeching' era, but often several decades after the rail services were withdrawn, and not as directly-planned replacements. Most operate commercially, apart from the *TrawsCymru* network which is largely operated as tendered services – due to the very low density of the regions it serves. Even in that case, support payments are very modest in comparison with those required for rail services.

¹⁰ Defined as those under 10,000 population

¹¹ Derived from an aggregate of data for 2013 and 2014, National Travel Survey England, tables 9902 and 9902.

Data Privacy statement

Introduction

A new law (the General Data Protection Regulation) comes into force in May 2018, and hence we are sending you this statement in order to clarify how and why we keep information about our members.

What information do we hold about you?

The information we hold about you is based on what you have given us when applying to be a member, or subsequently in your capacity as a member.

The information we hold includes your name, address and (in many cases) your email address.

The data is used to communicate with you about the Association and its activities. We may contact you by mail or e-mail.

Who do we share your information with?

We will only pass on your personal information to third parties where it is operationally required. The main situation where we will do this are when we send the names and addresses to our publishers who mail out the Journal on our behalf. We will not sell your data to anyone.

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All data is kept securely by the treasurer. The data is kept only for as long as is operationally necessary, or as long as is required by tax and legal authorities.

For some members we also hold bank account details so that payments can be made by electronic funds transfer. This information is held only by our bank within their secure on-line banking system which is accessible only by those who are authorised signatories of the bank account. Once input into the bank's systems, such bank account details are not held directly by the Association.

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If you have any queries about your personal data and how we use it, please contact the treasurer, Philip Kirk by email at philip.kirk@busarchive.org.uk or by post at: The Bus Archive, 100-102 Sandwell Street, Walsall, WS1 3EB.

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