

EASTERN COUNTIES OMNIBUS COMPANY LIMITED



Photo taken in June 1966 at the Old Cattle Market Bus Station, Ipswich, Suffolk.

REG NO: 3003 AH FLEET NO: LC 556 BODY NO: 10131 CHASSIS NO: 147004

1958 Bristol SC4LK 33 seat saloon with ECW bodywork and Gardner 4LK oil engine.

Vehicle owned and fully restored to original 1950s condition by Patrick Burnside of Eye, Suffolk.

Rescued for preservation from Ward Jones, Motor Dealer, High Wycombe, Bucks in July 1993.

Restoration completed in August 2005.

LC 556 started life with the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company Ltd at Peterborough on 1st January 1959 and was the 56th member of the LC class to enter service with the Company. A total fleet strength of 78 such vehicles was achieved between 1955 and 1961.

Being a light weight, small capacity vehicle, she was mainly used on country services and was originally crew operated. Sometime during the early 1960s, she was converted for 'one man operation', the driver's seat being fitted with a swivel mechanism to allow the driver to face the nearside in order to collect the fares.

Vehicles of this class were once a very familiar sight on the lonely Fenland roads around Peterborough, March, Ely, Wisbech, Ramsey and Chatteris. Others were allocated to Norwich, Ipswich, Cambridge, Yarmouth, King's

Lynn, Lowestoft and Bury St Edmunds depots and were more often than not out-stationed in remote locations all over East Anglia. LC 556 is known to have been allocated to Peterborough, Market Deeping, Ipswich and Felixstowe depots during her career with the Company.

The Bristol SC was not designed for a long service life – ten years at the most, but many members of the class lasted well beyond this. LC 556 was eleven years old when she was retired from revenue earning service in 1970. A small number of these vehicles lasted until 1973 when the final members of the class were withdrawn.

Subsequent history . . .

After leaving Eastern Counties service, she passed to Ben Jordan of Coltishall in October 1970, who sold her to A Monk & Company, a Warrington contractor in March 1971. She was operated as a workers bus for the next three years. Upon withdrawal, she passed via Martin, a Middlewich motor dealer to the Archbishop McIntyre RC High School, Stoke-on-Trent in June 1974, where she was employed to transport schoolchildren around the locality for the next six years. In August 1980 she was sold to the Margaret Ward High School in neighbouring Tunstall for further school duties. Upon withdrawal in 1986, she fell into the hands of Mr Peter Hulin, an Oxford bus enthusiast, who stored her in his garden, together with 608 JPU, an Eastern National SC, for the next seven years. Following his death in early 1993, the two buses were sold to Ward Jones motor dealer of High Wycombe, from where she was finally rescued for preservation by her present owner. 608 JPU was cannibalised to provide vital parts for the badly decayed LC 556.

A change of registration number . . .

Unfortunately, in the mid 1980s, LC 556 lost her registration number which had been sold off as a ‘cherished plate’ and the vehicle was subsequently re-registered with a Staffordshire number – FRE 699A, by the DVLA. It had always been the owner’s intention to track down the original registration mark, a task which was not made easy by the confidentiality rules which control the release of such information by the DVLA. However, a peculiar turn of events occurred whereby the owner of the ‘cherished plate’ had enquired to an online registration numbers agency as to the value of the plate. The agent believed the owner wished to sell the plate and duly advertised it on his website. Quite by chance, I stumbled across this fact when I did a search of available AH registration numbers and lo and behold, 3003 AH showed up for sale! Unfortunately, despite my initial excitement, the asking price was quite a lot more than I could afford at the time and it later transpired that the current owner of the plate did not even wish to sell it, despite it being advertised for sale on the agency website! However, a decade or so later, the owner of the plate made contact with me quite out of the blue via the LVVS museum, enquiring who might be seeking his ‘cherished plate’ for a restored bus! By chance, the museum chairman was on site and happened to answer the telephone. He realised that I was the owner of the bus in question and very kindly passed the caller’s details on to me, thereby allowing me to make contact with the plate’s owner and successfully negotiate a deal. In April 2015, the long held ambition was finally achieved when LC 556 was joyfully reunited with her original registration number, so completing the final piece of the jigsaw of her restoration!



LC 556 is currently the only restored survivor of the Eastern Counties stage carriage SC fleet and is believed to be the only red and cream Bristol SC4LK in preservation.