
 * FROM TILLING TO NATIONAL BUS COMPANY *

The Story of Eastern Counties Omnibus Co Ltd (1939-1970) by C.G.G. Everett

(b) Expansion during the 1930s

Whilst the policy of the new company can be said to be one of economy, this did not stop Eastern Counties from having a policy of absorbing other operators, both large and small in its area. The most well known of these was the Norwich Electric Traction Company Limited and the story of its absorption needs space on its own.

As I have already stated, at its formation the company did not operate express services but this was rectified in 1932, when Eastern Counties purchased Bush and Twiddy's "East Anglian Highways" Limited. In 1933, Westminster Coaching Services Limited and Pullman Lounge Coaches Limited were acquired. Bush and Twiddy were a Norwich firm, Westminster Coaching Services was based at London and Cambridge, and the Pullman concern was based at Yarmouth, Varsity Express Motors and Varsity Coaches Limited of Cambridge and London were also acquired in 1933. These operators gave the company a framework on which to build their Express Services.

In all 55 operators were acquired during the late 1930s (these will be published as Appendix I) and it is difficult to pick any one of them out. Apart from the Norwich Trams, in 1939 Norwich City services were increased with the absorption of Fitt Bros. The other operators were taken over to prevent competition or to increase Eastern Counties services and so enter upon routes not previously served by them or their predecessors. "The Broads Service", service 5 Norwich to Yarmouth via Wroxham, Ludham and Ormesby had a new partner service 5A after 1929 and when H. Robertson of Stalham was acquired, his Stalham-Norwich service was absorbed into Eastern Counties service 5A, Norwich to Sea Palling via Stalham increasing the daily frequency.

With the expansion of routes it became increasingly obvious that the current arrangements of terminating services in various parts of the City of Norwich could not be tolerated. Ipswich could boast of a central area for its services by terminating them at the Old Cattle Market, but Norwich had inherited the United termini of Recorder Road, Foundry Bridge, Ber Street and Thorpe Station. Peterborough and Cambridge had adequate arrangements but even these were insufficient.

In the Eastern Daily Press of the 26th June 1934, it was announced that there would be a "New Central Bus Station for Norwich". It was to be built in the grounds between Surrey Street and Bull Lane in Norwich. It was acquired from the General Accident Assurance Company. The press felt that with the recent acquisition of the Tramway Company the opportunity to centralise country and and city routes would now be taken at long last. On the 24th March 1936, the new Bus Station was opened by the Lord Mayor with due ceremony. It had cost £50,000.

In the Lowestoft Journal of 16th May 1936, it was announced that work was to start on a central bus station for Lowestoft. "It is suggested that the services at present utilising the Public Service Vehicle Stands at Denmark Road, Waveney Road and Battery Green Road shall terminate at the new Omnibus station or alternately on private property." The picture accompanying the report showed the site being cleared with the aid of a horse plough. A fitting reminder of the link of the omnibus with the horse!

Yarmouth Mercury on 22nd May 1936 also carried a long report on the proposal of a bus station at Wellington Road.

Thus it can be seen that the Company was improving the facilities it offered to its travelling public. Apart from the planning of new bus stations the local