
 * FROM TILLING TO NATIONAL BUS COMPANY *

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

Chapter II Two County Towns

(a) Ipswich

I have already mentioned the Eastern Counties Road Car Co. in Chapter I(a). Before any operator was allowed to run bus services in a town or county area they had to apply to the old 'Standing Joint Committee' in a County area, or the 'Watch Committee' in a County Borough for a licence to operate bus services.

In 1919, Thomas Tilling Ltd., had successfully applied to Ipswich Corporation Watch Committee for a licence and they were allowed to use the public highway at the Old Cattle Market as a terminal point. At various times between 1919 and 1928, their successors, Eastern Counties Road Car Company Ltd. applied for licences to operate services within the borough of Ipswich when each application was judged according to the effect on the Corporation's own tramway and subsequent trolley vehicle services before being granted. Endeavour was made during this period to ensure some measure of fare protection for the Corporation services. During this period the Corporation were obliged to consider the future of their public transport system and embarked upon an experimental operation of trolley vehicles on 22nd September 1923, on a short length of route of about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile between Ipswich Railway Station and the town centre, Cornhill. The trial was for three months and the Corporation arranged for three single deck "trolley omnibuses with a seating capacity of 30 passengers each". These vehicles are of historic importance and therefore I feel a short description of them is required.

The trolley buses were built by 'Railless Ltd' and the seating accommodation was arranged for twenty two inside in the main saloon with an open ended compartment at the back having accommodation for eight passengers. This compartment was for "the convenience of smokers". The body had a front entrance for a 'pay as you enter' system of operation. The two compartments were separated by a sliding door and the entrance also had a sliding door which was operated by means of a lever from the driver's compartment.

Whilst the Corporation was encouraged by the results of the test runs of these vehicles, a large proportion of residents of Ipswich were more in favour of motor bus operation than tram or trolley bus operation by the Corporation. However, the Corporation pressed on with their scheme and acquired a Ransomes Sims and Jefferies 30 seat single deck trolley bus in 1924. This vehicle was built by a local firm and the Corporation sought Statutory Authority to operate trolley buses in place of trams and in 1924 whilst seeking this authority the Eastern Counties Road Car Co. Ltd. made an offer to the Corporation to take over the operation of public transport in Ipswich. This offer was debated at a special meeting held on 10th December 1924 in the morning. It is interesting to note that trolleybuses were never officially given that title in Ipswich, but were known as "Trackless Trolley Vehicles" as is seen in the report of these discussions. It would also seem to account for the notice to be seen at the Whitton terminus in the latter years of trolleybus operation which read "Tram Turning Circle. No parking".

The meeting was held to consider the Bill to be put to Parliament and the Bus Company's offer. The offer was basically this:-

- 1 To provide a basic group of bus services in Ipswich.
- 2 The ECRCC would pay £6,000 per year for 20 years subject to the Corporation handing over the four experimental trolleybuses.
- 3 The Corporation to give the Company adequate protection against competition.