

## A brief history of the . . .



*(courtesy of the Ipswich Transport Museum's website)*

Apart from the bus service to Shotley started by the Great Eastern Railway in mid 1904, the Ipswich and surrounding area had no motor bus services until after the First World War. In 1919 the appropriately named business brothers, Walter and Thomas Wolsey visited the town with a view to starting bus services, having previously been involved in similar ventures in London, Brighton and Folkestone. They persuaded Thomas Tilling Ltd to send four buses up from Brighton to inaugurate services in June 1919.

After some experimental operations, it was decided to form a company, Eastern Counties Road Car Company Limited (E.C.R.C.). This was registered on 30th August 1919 and on 1st September took over both the vehicles and services operated by the Wolsey brothers, from offices in Dogs Head Street, Ipswich, close by the existing Old Cattle Market Bus Station. The company was promoted in association with the British Automobile Traction Company (B.A.T.) rather than Thomas Tilling, although the latter company supplied many vehicles up to 1922. B.A.T. and Tilling were very much intertwined and had many common interests, including cross shareholdings.

About 16 Tilling Stevens TS3 petrol electric buses were put into operation, mostly open topped double deckers, but including a few charabancs. Being of petrol electric propulsion they were relatively simple to drive.

In 1920, a separate centre of operations was established in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, but this was to last only until 1922.

Back in Ipswich, a network of routes was rapidly established, leading to the setting up of another base at Bury St. Edmunds. 24 more vehicles joined the original 16 in 1920, providing a sizeable fleet of 40 vehicles, all being transferred from the London or Brighton parts of Tilling. By comparison, Ipswich Corporation Tramways only had 36 tramcars and did not need all of those to maintain peak services.

In 1922 the first new vehicles were delivered to the company in the shape of more Tilling-Stevens TS3A petrol electrics, but this time with bodies built locally by Ransomes, Sims and Jefferies and locally registered as DX 3442/3.

In April 1922 the service to Shotley was taken over from the Great Eastern Railway, although the vehicles, three Thornycroft J's with Hora single deck bodies, were transferred away to Thames Valley Traction.

Of course, the E.C.R.C. did not have everything its own way, and many small competitors established themselves, some taking over the role of the village carrier's cart by providing a "Market Days" only service into Ipswich. Amongst these were Beestons and Partridges, both of Hadleigh; names which are still connected with bus operation today.

During 1924, a great debate raged in Ipswich. Ipswich Corporation had experimented with trolleybuses as a possible replacement for the ageing tramway system. The E.C.R.C. was obviously well placed to offer an alternative to a trolleybus system. The

debate went on in the local press and in the council chamber. The E.C.R.C. issued a leaflet; cartoons appeared in the press and tempers became inflamed all round. The depression of the post war years was being felt locally and this also added fuel to the debate as both Ransomes and Garratts could build trolleybuses. The conclusion came at a Council meeting on 10th December 1924 with a decision to convert the entire tramway system to trolleybuses.

E.C.R.C. must have been disappointed, but quickly moved on to consolidate its position in the county. By the end of 1926, it had a fleet of around 70 vehicles and a large network of services.

Apart from the take-over of the Ipswich to Shotley service from the Great Eastern Railway in 1922, a series of take-overs began in 1925 with that of R. A. Moore of Aldeburgh. Others followed, including C. Quantrill of Chelmondiston, A. Quantrill of Kesgrave, and Felixstowe Motor Services, all in 1928; W. V. Edmonds of Shotley and the Swiftsure Bus Company of Ipswich, both in 1929; D. Kerridge of Needham Market and T. H. Butler of Ipswich, both in 1930. These brought a motley collection of vehicles into the company, but some were almost immediately sold off.

The railway companies, in this case, the London and North Eastern Railway, were investing heavily in local bus companies and had acquired a half interest in E.C.R.C. in 1929. This was followed by the 1930 Transport Act which effectively regulated the bus and coach industry. The stage was thus set for some large scale rationalisation. Locally, this meant the amalgamation of E.C.R.C. with three other companies; the Ortona Motor Company of Cambridge, the Peterborough Electric Traction Company of Peterborough and the East Anglian part of United Automobile Services, which took effect as from 1st October 1931. By this time the E.C.R.C. fleet had grown to 131 vehicles, mainly of Tilling Stevens manufacture and many with locally built bodywork by Ransomes, Sims and Jefferies.

The new company took a similar title to the E.C.R.C., becoming the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company, but with headquarters at Norwich. The new company quickly established different practices and vehicle policy and the E.C.R.C. slipped quietly away. The most immediate effect was the renumbering of all the routes by the addition of a '200' prefix to the former E.C.R.C. numbers. This rendered the enamelled route signs obsolete overnight.

