

Memories of Eastern Counties - The Golden Years

My first memories of a bus go back to when I was about two and a half and living with my mother and sister in Sussex. We were up on the Downs somewhere near Lewes and I have a very distinct picture in my head of a green double decker going along the road which was some way a way across the Downs. This was what I now assume to be a Southdown and it was such a vivid picture that it was probably what started what was to become a great interest in buses, and particularly Eastern Counties, a few years later.

The year was 1940 and, with the Battle of Britain raging overhead, we were apparently close to being strafed by a German fighter flying low over the Downs. My father was with the RAF in Egypt and so, being on her own, my mother decided that we would be safer moving to East Anglia where most of our relatives lived. We thus moved to a village on the Suffolk/Norfolk border not far from Diss and close to where an Aunt lived. Other Aunts and Uncles lived in Norwich so visits there were quite regular travelling by train from Diss station.

These visits brought my second distinct memory of buses as during our visits to Norwich we stayed with an Aunt and Uncle who lived at 18, Queens Road. Those reading this and familiar with Norwich before it was 'redeveloped' will immediately know that this was the road that ran across the top of Surrey Street bus station. A narrow lane, I think called Bull Lane, ran along the back of the Queens Road houses and immediately on the other side of this lane were the bus station garage buildings where buses were kept, when not in use, and overnight.



The picture above shows the Surrey Street Bus Station from the lower end and the houses to be seen at the top and going to the right are those in Queens Road. My Aunt's, at No. 18, backed onto the

last section of the garage the apex roof of which was the last one that can be seen running to the right.

It can be seen from the picture that Surrey Street was on a considerable slope with an even steeper section at the top end where it formed a Tee-Junction with Queens Road. My memory of this time, early 1940's, is waking up quite early in the morning and listening to the buses slowly grinding their way up Surrey Street and then the steeper bit and then out onto Queens Road. The sound was very distinctive and memorable!. Surrey Street was one way so all buses setting out on their journeys would have to climb the slope.

Nearly all of the buses would have been from the 30's with some even from the late 20's. Many of the older buses were re-bodied in the late 30's and some new ones came into service up to 1942. Illustrated below are some of the buses that I would have heard making that climb out of Surrey Street.

A Bristol GO5G of January 1937 vintage. In service up to 1957.



A Leyland Titan TD1. In service from December 1930 until 1952.



An ADC 425 from 1928. In service until 1949.



A Bristol GJW of January 1933. In service until 1952



A single decker fitted with a trailed gas producer.



A Tilling Stevens B10A. 1927 to 1950.



There were, of course, several other types of bus in service with Eastern Counties in the early 40's, and notably a variety of coaches, but the above gives an indication of what might have been seen and which I can still hear so vividly.

I also have a quite distinct memory of seeing an open staircase bus disappearing down Prince of Wales Road. I have since discovered that Eastern Counties did indeed have such an animal which I believe had been acquired from Brighton Corporation. I'm pretty sure that the one I saw had a closed upper deck but if this ties in with the ex Brighton one, or possibly two, I don't know. Something which I was to experience myself much later was seeing single deckers with the seats arranged around the sides of the bus thereby creating a large open floor area which thus enabled a much larger number of standing passengers to be carried and therefore a larger number of passengers overall. Obviously the 'eight standing passengers only' didn't apply in wartime conditions! I wonder whether extra straps were fitted to hang on to?!

My mother, sister and myself were staying with my Aunt at No. 18 during the second Norwich Blitz of the 26th and 27th of June 1942 when the talk, locally, the following morning was of an unexploded bomb that had gone through the bus station roof. My uncle was in the Auxilliary Fire Brigade and was out that night. When he eventually came home he said that the bomb was quite near the back of the house at No. 18. We were all sheltering down the cellar during the raid and had the bomb exploded it could well have been that I would not be writing this.!

My father returned from Egypt at the end of the war in 1945 and sometime later that year or in 1946 we moved from the Suffolk/Norfolk border to the village of Bentley about seven miles west of Ipswich. Bentley is bordered by two main roads, the A12 Ipswich to Colchester and the A137 also Ipswich to Colchester but via Brantham. Both these roads were served by Eastern Counties with the service 207 to Colchester on the A12 and the 209 to East Bergholt on the A137.

Unlike for some other villages off the A12, Washbrook and Stratford-St.-Mary for example, the 207 route didn't stray off the A12 and come through Bentley so if we wanted to go to Ipswich, the nearest town, we had to cycle a mile to the bus stop at Capel Station which in those days was a level crossing with manually operated gates on the A12. An indication of the lack of traffic compared to today.!

I have no recollection of the buses of Eastern Counties during the latter years of the 40's although we went to Ipswich on numerous occasions. I do, however, remember the ticket machines of the time using long tickets of different colours and which cut a chunk out of the ticket to indicate the fare paid.

The ticket shown gives an idea what they looked like. The machine used was a Willebrew type and



carried by the conductor by a strap around his neck in the same way as his money bag but on the other side. The whole ticket was placed in a horizontal slot near the top of the box and a lever was then pushed down and with a rather satisfying clunking sound the appropriate section of ticket was punched out with the cut out piece remaining in the box. The tickets were quite long, maybe four or five inches, and must have been subject to some serious damage when shoved into a pocket or a ladies handbag.

In September 1949 I started school in Ipswich which meant that for the next six years I would be travelling daily, including Saturdays, to Ipswich by means of the 207 Ipswich - Colchester service and it was then that I began to take a close interest in the buses I travelled on and all the different types and variations that there were at the time. I first became aware that, perhaps, some buses were more desirable than others when a fellow schoolboy, with whom I would walk to school from Ipswich bus station, remarked in the course of our conversation one morning, 'Well you have Leylands'. This made me think that 'Leylands' were somehow special.

The 207 route did indeed have two Leylands which provided the main daily service between Ipswich and Colchester. These were from the GPW3-- batch of twenty new PD1A's with low bridge Eastern Coachworks bodies delivered to Eastern Counties between September 1947 and

January 1948. My research shows that the registration numbers of these two Leylands were most probably from GPW362 to GPW365 with the other two being on the 201 Felixstowe service.



Of the twenty Leyland PD1A's four ran from the Ipswich bus station. These were two on the 207 route and two on the 201 Felixstowe route. The two on the 14 Norwich route would have been based in Norwich as indicated by the route number.

These three routes always seemed to be favoured with new models as they came along and it would be interesting to know how and why such allocations were made. The 207 seemed to be favoured in other ways too as will be seen later on.

Having the 'desirable' Leylands on the 207 made me curious as to what was being run on other routes and often having to wait at the Old Cattle Market bus station for the bus home gave me ample time to study other types. At the time I didn't know the official designation of the various types so I can only bring them to mind by my own description and it has only been since I have acquired a number of books on Eastern Counties, Eastern Coachworks and Bristol that I have been able to give a proper description. Hence PD1A for the Leylands!

In the late 40's and into the early 50's there seemed to be mostly pre-war buses operating from Ipswich. Those I can remember were probably, as I now know from my books, rebodied Leyland TD1's and TD2's originally of early 30's vintage double deckers. Other double deckers could have been early Bristol Ks and those built from 1945 onwards. Single deckers were probably mostly Bristol L5G's or similar. Most of the bus types mentioned above had the metal flap type destination boards, also known as bible boards, and these were stored standing in a large box just inside the left hand door of the Ipswich bus station garage. The drivers, and maybe the conductors too, were well practiced in fitting these into place. Carrying them on their right shoulder and supported by their right hand they would step up onto foot rests either side of the bus radiator and then holding onto a handle just below or just to the side of the driver's windscreen with their left hand they would lift and swing the indicator board from their shoulder into position on the bus. The clips on either side of where the indicator board was placed would either have been left open or would have had to be opened first and then once the board was in position the moveable flap would be raised or lowered according to the destination of the bus and then the clips closed. I never once saw a destination board dropped so it must have been a dexterity that the drivers and conductors soon acquired. Without the destination board in place either private or relief was shown depending on whether a flap was raised or lowered.

Apart from the Leyland PD1's which had moveable blind destination indicators there were a few other double decker types that had blind destination indicators. These would have been post war re-bodied Leyland TD1's and 2's and perhaps some early, to Ipswich, Bristol K's. There were also a number of coaches of various descriptions with the flap type indicators but more of these later. I think what irked my fellow pupil traveller was that on his route, the 202 Ipswich to Shotley, they had what appeared to be somewhat tired and decrepit looking double deckers. I can't determine exactly what model they were but they could have been some of the 1945 built Bristol K's. Features that come to mind are sliding window openers that appeared to be edged with black tape and the hand rails and platform poles being wrapped round with white plastic ribbed tape. I also recall that the top rear of the upper deck roof line sloped downwards quite noticeably and was painted white.



Typical of the type of buses operating from Ipswich in the late 40's and early 50's is this Leyland TD1, there were also very similar looking TD2's. These were re-bodied versions of the original dating back to the 30's. Many of these would have yet another re-bodying in the mid to late 40's but, again, more of these later.

The Leylands we had on the 207 were quite distinctive in their way and stood out from other buses of the time, in Ipswich, because of the newer style body with sliding window vents, the destination blinds and, most probably, the very distinctive Leyland radiator. The engine had a lovely rumbling sound to it and could hardly be heard at tick over. Inside the seat tops didn't have the chrome rail as later body styles but were just plain square edged with a bit of a hand hold at the gangway side corner.

Travelling home I was usually the only person to get off at Capel Station and I have fond memories of hanging off the rear of the platform waiting for the bus to slow until I was able to step off and then the conductor would ring the bell so that the driver didn't have to actually stop but could pull away without having to change down to first gear. No Health and Safety back then! Thank goodness!!

The two Leylands on the 207 were nearly always crewed by the same two pairs of driver and conductor. The conductors being Ernie Allsop and a chap named Stiff. Ernie was a lovely character and made friends with everybody, especially us school boys and girls, whereas Mr. Stiff was quite

the opposite being rather dour. Ernie knew who had a season ticket and who didn't and for us school lot he hardly ever bothered to see them whereas Mr. Stiff always wanted to.

In those days the attitude of the drivers and conductors always seemed to be that the buses had to run no matter what. There were several occasions in maybe late 1949 and the early fifties that fog was very bad with visibility virtually zero. Today everything would stop, because of Health and Safety!!, but not then. People had to get home and the crews were going to make sure that they did. To keep the buses moving when it was very bad fog it was not at all unusual for the conductor to walk in front of the bus to guide the driver. I remember on one occasion when the conductor, and it could well have been Ernie, walked in front guiding the driver out of Ipswich and onto the A12 where the fog began to be less dense. This would have been a distance of at least two miles! Similarly in icy or snow conditions never once can I remember that the buses didn't run. The A12 at the time had several quite steep hills the most notorious of them being Dedham Gun Hill leading down into the Stour valley. Sand boxes were placed at strategic points on the hillside verges and vehicle drivers made use of these to help to provide traction in bad conditions. It was not unknown either for bus passengers to get off not only to lighten the load but also to push!

Passenger numbers were high in the early fifties as few had cars, or even motorbikes, and depending on the time of day, e.g. early morning or late afternoon, numbers travelling were more than the scheduled service bus could take. This was certainly the case for the bus I used to get into Ipswich which arrived at Capel White Horse from Colchester at 8.15a.m. and left at 8.16 a.m. To cater for the extra passenger numbers a relief bus was sent out from Ipswich as far as Capel White Horse where it would turn round ready for its journey back to Ipswich. It seemed that in those days route 207 was favoured not only with new buses as they came into service but also, in many cases, with the use of coaches as opposed to single decker service buses as required. For most days from September 1949 and through 1950, and maybe longer, the relief bus for the 8.16 a.m. to Ipswich was provided by one of three coaches new to Eastern Counties in June 1949. These were Beadle bodied L6Bs numbered GPW493, 494 and 495. Only the latter two were based at Ipswich. These coaches were very smart looking and extremely luxurious and comfortable. And 'heated'!. Eastern Counties service A to London left Ipswich at 8.00 a.m. and then 10.30 a.m. and the 8.00 a.m. would invariably be the other GPW so they would pass each other quite often near to Capel Station. Oh! To have had a camera.! It was quite probable that our relief coach became the 10.30 a.m. service to London on its return to Ipswich.

The GPWs had 6-cylinder engines and being only a 28 seater were quite fast for their day even with a full load of passengers which being a relief would include a number of standing passengers usually somewhat over the eight normally allowed. This number was, of course, not shown in the coach anywhere, unlike a normal service bus.

A picture of GPW495 in it's prime is shown below. Unfortunately at the end of their passenger carrying lives 495 and 494 suffered the ignominy of being reduced to tree loppers. A sad end for such iconic little coaches.



G PW495 a Bristol L6B 28 seater Beadle bodied coach. June 1947 - 1958



GPW494 after conversion to a Tree Lopper.

On the occasions when one of the GPW's wasn't the relief one of several what we called the 'white' coaches might be used. These were pre-war coaches built between 1935 and 1937 and, still operating as coaches and in their full coach livery and with front entrances, looked most imposing especially against an ordinary single decker of the time. The ones based at Ipswich, so far as I can remember, all had the streamlined bodywork with a curving waistline and side flash in red outlined top and bottom with polished trim. As with the GPW's these coaches were quite fast and also had heaters. Whereas the GPW's had blind destination indicators these still had the Eastern Counties style flap indicator boards. Designated LJ they might have 5 or 6 cylinder engines. As with the GPW's they were eventually converted to other uses and in most cases, if not all, this would be for ordinary bus work. Those not converted would probably be sold and it is not unusual, even today, to see one or two operating in some guise with travelling showmen. i.e. circuses or fairground people. Conversion might include repainting to the standard red and perhaps replacing the coach seats with ordinary bus seats.

To a schoolboy used to the deprivations of wartime and the years following, and when cars were

still few and far between, to be able to travel everyday on a virtually brand new, or perhaps on an older but still very imposing and luxurious coach, is something that I will never forget. Sometime in 1950 a brand new coach appeared as the relief into Ipswich. This was one of a batch of about twenty Bedford OB coaches and buses Eastern Counties had bought. It would be interesting to know why!, These were delivered in 1949/1950. As with the GPWs they looked very smart in their Eastern Counties coach livery and we knew them simply by their registration of KAH. Only the coach version appeared at the Ipswich garage so far as I know. They were, of course, something completely different to anything we had seen before with respect to Eastern Counties and were the first I had seen, with Eastern Counties, where the driver's position was open to the passengers. The engines were petrol and seemed quite wheezy compared to the more powerful sound of the GPWs. None the less for that the Bedfords were well appointed and very comfortable coaches.



A Bedford OB with a Duple body. 1949 or 1950 - 1957

In the late forties and well into the fifties and even early sixties the A12 carried very little traffic and so there were several opportunities for overtaking which the more powerful coaches often did especially once the last pick-up stop had been made. Although only single lane, unlike today when it is all dual carriageway, I can't remember any time when the following bus had to stop whilst passengers were being picked up by the first one.

There was one particular point on the A12 on the approach to Ipswich that was reasonably flat and with a good long view ahead and it was here that the coaches, of whatever description, would pass the slower and fully laden double decker. Quite what the comparative speeds were I don't know but I don't think that the maximum speed of a Leyland PD1A was much above 30 m.p.h. Also the relief drivers were often the younger element and tended to push their more powerful charges to the maximum!

On the odd occasion when the relief wasn't one of the coaches as described then we would have to suffer the indignities of an ordinary L stage carriage single decker. These all looked very similar to me at the time but I do remember that some of the registration numbers were ENGs and CVFs. These would have been of 1938 to 1942 vintage but some could well have been older. Eastern Counties were absorbing many local operators at the time along with their fleets in the fifties and amongst them was Beeston's of East Bergholt. One morning I saw the relief bus in the distance coming from Ipswich and it was something I'd never seen before. It turned out to be a Maudsley Marathon, one of two ex Beeston. I think that they were both brand new having been ordered by Beestons but never delivered. Instead they had come to Eastern Counties to be painted in

Eastern Counties coach livery. The Maudsley was the first full fronted Eastern Counties coach, or bus, I had seen as opposed to half cab, and it looked quite large and very different. Unfortunately it served as our relief bus for only a few times and I was never lucky enough to travel on it. There were five flat fronted Bristols in the Eastern Counties fleet at the time and these were LWL6Bs introduced in May 1951, an example of which is shown below. I recall seeing one of these at a much later date as I don't think any were at Ipswich during the time I am describing.



An LWL6B, one of five flat front fronted coaches of Eastern Counties introduced in 1951.



One of two Maudsley Marathons ex Beeston of East Bergholt. 1951 - 1962. When I saw this coach in the distance as it was approaching Capel Station having come out from Ipswich to serve as our relief bus and the first thing I noticed was the bar of light (it was a dark morning) above the destination indicator blind. This turned out to be an illuminated sign reading Eastern Counties which, for the time, was quite a novel touch!. Such small and individual embellishments plus, what appeared to me to be, a much superior looking paint job to that given to Beeston coaches gave these bought in coaches a much more pleasing appearance than when in their original company colours.



A Bristol L5G 'ordinary' single decker. 1942 - 1957. Earlier versions of the above were in the CNG registration range and were fitted with 4 cylinder engines and these models were designated L4G and were introduced in 1938 and phased out in the very early fifties.



The above is a typical example of what we knew as a 'White' one. Such coaches were still being used on coaching services in the late forties and early fifties. These were JO5G thirty seaters and introduced in 1936 with most being disposed of in the mid fifties.

During the time we were waiting for the bus at Capel Station in the early morning we would often see a group of maybe six or more strange looking things being driven towards Ipswich. The drivers were open to the weather and therefore well muffled up and it was some time before we discovered that these were bus chassis being driven from Bristol to Lowestoft to be made into buses or coaches. Travelling in the opposite direction it was not uncommon to see a similar group of brand new buses, never coaches that I remember, being delivered to the various regions of southern England. Always in green and with no indicator blinds and brilliant in their sparkling paintwork six or more in convoy was quite a sight. It was some time before we worked out that Southern Vectis was the Isle of Wight!.

As in the mornings so at the end of the school and working day passenger numbers were higher than the two service buses working the 207 route could cater for so extra services were provided at this busy time of day. The middle of the afternoon service from Ipswich to Colchester left at 3.30 p.m. and it was after this that passenger numbers began to increase beyond that which the two service buses could take. To cater for this a single decker service was added which left at 4.25 p.m. This was mainly to cater for school children and afternoon shoppers. For this reason the destination was Capel-St.-Mary on Wednesdays, early closing day in Ipswich, and Dedham on other days. Generally known as 'the Dedham' this was very often served by one of the 'white' ones although never by a GPW or a KAH. There was a special 'white' one which was frequently on the Dedham and this was DAH161. This and a sister coach DAH162 (never seen at Ipswich) were Bristol L5Gs delivered in June 1939 for the purpose of providing touring coaches particularly to mountainous areas of the continent such as Austria and Switzerland. To this end curved roof lights (or windows) had been fitted to allow passengers a view of the mountains. Delivered in June 1939 events in Europe overtook things so these coaches were never used for the purpose for which they were intended. Seating capacity was only twenty six which presumably was to allow more leg room for continental touring.

Front entrances and a back seat made these 'white' coaches very popular with us school children.!



Above is shown DAH162 the sister coach to 161. This was the favourite coach on the Dedham service in the latter half of 1949 and the early 50s and would usually be on several times a week. It was very light and airy inside and it was easy to visualize it making those planned journeys into scenic mountain countries.



The inside of the DAH coaches. Not for nothing were these known to us as 'The Glass Toppers'.

Like all of this class of coach these two highly individual coaches were converted to ordinary bus use in 1954. According to information available on the Bristol Commercial Vehicles website they were stripped of their coach fittings, fitted with 31 bus seats and designated B31R instead of their original C26F unless the R does not indicate 'rear' as I am assuming. This indicates that, for some reason, the entrance door was moved from front to rear although this would not appear to make much sense. The photograph below shows 161 painted red but not with a rear door.



DAH161 painted red but still with the roof quarter lights so far as can be seen. The bus continued in service until 1957 when she was sold, like so many others, to Ben Jordan of Coltishall, Norfolk. It is not recorded what happened to her after that. Maybe she was sold to a 'showman' or simply scrapped but we just don't know. In any event what a distressing end for such a fine and unique coach.

Eastern Counties was buying up many smaller, private concerns at this time and as with the Maudsley, previously mentioned, a product of this was a Dennis Lancet EX6717 which came from Reynolds Garages Ltd. (Metropolitan Coaches)-Great Yarmouth. New in 1950 this appeared in full Eastern Counties coach livery in 1951. The Dennis, as she came to be known, had a streamlined body similar to DAH161 and, again, was a most imposing coach for it's day. A half cab like the

DAH, but without the full width canopy, she was very similar to the Eastern Counties coaches except, of course, for the very prominent Dennis Radiator. She was often on the Dedham service and even had Dedham on the destination blind, not that it was always shown as most coaches had been fitted with holders on the radiator for the service number as used on the rear of buses with the flap type indicator boards, the blind indicator being left blank. She was converted to bus duties sometime later in the fifties and eventually disposed



of in 1960. Unfortunately I don't have a picture of her in full coach livery but the above shows her converted to bus style although seemingly still with coach seats. The fitting of the destination boxes does nothing to improve her looks but became a common way to provide service bus style destination and route number fittings even on much later coach designs.

As on the morning 8.16 a.m. service to Ipswich if a coach style vehicle wasn't allocated to the Dedham, or Capel-St.-Mary service on a Wednesday, then an ordinary service bus of the L type would be used. These seemed to be always the older type with the flap style indicator boards but which vintage I have no idea. I do remember that on one occasion, probably in the latter half of 1949, when we had one of the L type on that it still had the periphery style seating as adapted for wartime use. As mentioned earlier I had seen these in Norwich during and just after war but it was a bit surprising that some were still being used in that configuration.

The only other service that I can remember occasionally having a 'white' coach on was the 4.20 .p.m. 236 to Harkstead. Sometimes both the 236 and the 207 had a 'white' coach but if they did and we didn't it was very, very annoying!!.

In 1949 and into the early 1950s the majority of buses, both single and double decker at Eastern Counties, Ipswich seemed to be of the flap type destination board variety. Whilst this was obviously not the case for the Leylands on the 14, 201 and 207 services I can't recall seeing many others with blind type indicators. It would be interesting to see the yearly fleet lists for the various depots to determine when the first blind style indicators came to Ipswich. Do they exist?.

As with the 4.25 p.m. service to Dedham or Capel so was the 5.35 p.m. to Colchester. i.e. an additional service to those operated by the two Leylands. The 5.35.p.m. to Colchester was provided by the incoming bus on the 205 service from Hadleigh and in the early part of my school journeys was one of the older double deckers from the Eastern Counties fleet. In the latter half of 1949 and into 1950 it would be one of the flap type double deckers and from information I have gleaned from the excellent books by Maurice Doggett coupled with the fleet lists shown on Patrick Burnside's wonderful website I can be reasonably sure that this would have been a Leyland TD1 or TD2 of 1929/30 vintage rebodied in the late 1930s. One thing I remember quite distinctly is the interior lighting. It was a soft cosy type of lighting and was provided by very art deco style light fittings and most attractive too. Whether all Eastern Counties buses of that period had this style of lighting I don't know, i.e. the single deckers and coaches. The interior picture of DAH161 shows a similar type of light fitting but those on these double deckers, from memory, seemed to have more facets and to project more forward at the top. Several photos of bus and coach interiors showing this style

are to be found in Maurice Doggett's book 'Eastern Coachworks Vol 1. And one of these is shown below.



The light fittings seen in the coach interior above are probably identical to those fitted to the double deckers mentioned.



Above is a picture, all be it of a high bridge type, of the style of double decker providing the 207 service to Colchester at 5.35 p.m. in the late 40s and early 50s.

In the October of 1950 a pair of bright, shiny and brand new double deckers appeared on the 207 route. These were Bristol KS5Gs numbered LNG282 and LNG283 and were the 3rd and 4th of the type to take advantage of the new length of 27 feet, as opposed to 26 feet, permitted by new legislation. So it was farewell to the two trusty Leylands and wellcome to the Bristols. What happened to the Leylands I don't know as I can't remember seeing them on other services out of Ipswich. They were finally retired in 1964 so had some years to go after leaving the 207 route. As with the Leylands the new Bristols were only on the 207 and 201 routes from Ipswich. I think the 14 from Norwich also had the new Bristols but I can't be sure.

I remember asking Ernie Allsopp why we had the new buses on the 207 and he said that he thought it was to boost passenger numbers but as the buses were always full at busy times I don't think that this could have been true. Anyway most people had no other means of transport.

The main thing I remember when these new buses arrived was the smell of 'newness'. A smell that is instantly recognisable today with a new car but in those days was almost unknown to most of the general public. During the time that I was at school these two LNGs went through at least two repaints which also gave a distinctive smell to the bus when it returned but not the same as a brand new bus just out of the factory.

These new buses were different from previous Ks in that they were slightly longer and, a short

while later, 8 feet wide, due to a further change in legislation. This can be seen by the four bay window design and the pressed panel to the rear of the last lower window. The front of the bus was curved below the driver's cab including the lower windscreen. On Eastern Counties buses the destination display was now a three section box, instead of two, with the route numbers individually adjustable. When set up correctly this gave a clear and, pleasing to the eye, destination and intermediate calling points. Inside the immediate reaction was one of sparkling newness. This was mainly because the seats now had chrome top rails and all the poles and hand rails were also chrome. This had been so on the previous Ks but not on the Leylands where the poles and hand rails I think were black.

The next batch delivered to Ipswich not long after the arrival of our two LNGs were still LNGs but in the 290 number range. Much to our annoyance these were the new width of 8ft. So denoted by a white steering wheel. More to our annoyance was that two of these were on the 201 Felixstowe route!. I seem to remember now that the 14 Norwich route also had these white steering wheel buses.



LNG283 on the 209 service to East Bergholt. This would have been some time after she was replaced by yet newer buses on the 207 service because the 209 in the early to mid fifties was only ever served by single deckers and this development of The Old Cattle Market bus station hadn't yet taken place.



LNG295 is one of the later deliveries of the new KS5Gs designated KSW5Gs, with the white steering wheel denoting the new width of 8ft. The width had increased from 7ft 6ins. to 8ft. but quite where this shows itself on the body is difficult to determine. The chassis on these deliveries was still the 7ft. 6ins. width and this can clearly be seen by the distance between the front mudguard and front wheel

In the late forties Leyland TD2s originally of early 30s vintage and already the recipients of new bodies from the original were again rebodied with a new body very similar to the Bristol Ks. The most striking visual fact was the long Leyland radiator tapering towards the top. The Leyland name was imprinted onto the top of the radiator and the word Titan at the bottom. In some cases they carried a side destination above the rear platform although I think that this was nearly always painted over. To my mind these buses seemed to be rather ungainly and even inside they didn't seem to give the impression of any degree of newness. Whether these were the earlier rebodied buses I don't know but some of them, I'm sure, had wooden tops to the seats which certainly didn't help!.

These Leyland Titans replaced the incoming flap style buses on the 205 to provide the 5.35 p.m. service to Colchester although in fact they were the same buses but with a new body. The engines and general running of these Titans seemed rougher than the Bristols but there seemed to be quite a few of them so it must have been worth it for the re-bodying programme to be undertaken.



VG4824, originally a high bridge Leyland TD2 of September 1932 vintage, rebodied in the late 30s and again in the late 40s as shown in the picture above. It is shown here on the 207 service at Colchester, probably the return journey of that departing Ipswich at 5.35 p.m. The prominence of the Leyland Titan radiator is evident and the painted over destination panel over the rear platform can also be seen. This bus was eventually withdrawn in 1960 after a total of twenty eight years service originally with Norwich Electric and then Eastern Counties.

At some point after the LNGs came onto the 207 route two other buses from the same batch appeared at Ipswich. These were LNG280 and LNG281 and they took over from the Titans on the 5.35 p.m. to Colchester although there were still occasions when a Titan would appear.



LNG281 on the 221 service also to Colchester. This service was part of the 221 which mainly went to Mistley but also provided a service to Colchester. 281 is shown here turning in to Manningtree off the A137 Ipswich to Colchester road. Manningtree railway station is up the road opposite and the A137 to the left goes up Lawford hill and on to Colchester.

As the fifties progressed so the passenger numbers on the 207 route increased and towards the end of my schooldays in September 1955 a double decker was often the relief bus on the 8.16 a.m. to Ipswich. Sometimes this would be from Washbrook, the last major pick-up before Ipswich, and this would be in addition to the single decker from Capel-St.-Mary.

The time table for 207 buses out of Ipswich in the late afternoon and early evening was the 4.25 to Dedham, or Capel on Wednesday, the 4.40 double decker to Colchester, the 5.35 double decker to Colchester and the 5.50 double decker to Colchester. From about 1955 it was not uncommon for relief buses to be provided for the 4.40, 5.35 and the 5.50 services. That for the 4.40 was a single decker whereas those for the 5.35 and 5.50 services would be double deckers. Usually these would only go as far as Washbrook but it showed the determination of the company and crews, as in the foggy and winter conditions, to get their passengers home.

I left school in September 1955 and so my close association with Eastern Counties and route 207 in particular had come to an end but how thankful I am that I was able to experience the joys and seemingly privileges of route 207 with it's Leylands and use of brand new coaches and those of earlier times but still special and luxurious. New buses continued to come along, as described below, but the use of coaches, either old or new, would undoubtedly diminish quite rapidly.

Further Observations.

In May 1956 the LNGs were replaced by another pair of brand new buses and this time they were the very new and very different Lodekkas UNG178 and UNG179. The LNGs went on to other services until eventually being retired in 1966 after sixteen years service. UNG178 and 179 were the 16th and 17th Lodekkas to be delivered to Eastern Counties so again route 207 had been favoured when considering the number of routes using double deckers over the whole of Eastern Counties territory.

The Lodekkas were, of course, something completely new and were part of the second batch of sixteen delivered to Eastern Counties between March and October 1956. The first was a batch of four with registration OVF during 1954.

The main noticeable difference between the two batches was that the 1954 delivery had the longer radiator air intake or apron whereas the 1955 delivery had the shorter apron.



UNG179 before departure to Colchester.

These two new Lodekkas represented a big change from the LNGs having two rows of seats upstairs separated by a central gangway instead of the sunken gangway as before. They also had a manually operated folding rear door. No more hanging off the platform!! And heaters. The step up into the lower deck from the entrance platform was done away with so the platform and lower gangway were all on one level. The seating downstairs had a five abreast seat at the far end facing down the bus which must have been a bit daunting for the passenger sat in the middle!. The destination indicators were now of two section design but with the route numbers still individually operated. The seating capacity was sixty, an increase of four on the LNGs. As with the LNGs these new Lodekkas were only on the 14, 201 and 207 routes out of Ipswich.

I don't know what was happening to the relief buses on the 8.16 .am. to Ipswich or the buses on the Dedham and Capel-St.-Mary services as the older coaches, the 'white ones' and the Dennis, were phased out. Photos of 207 services at later dates show ordinary service buses of the day being used so presumably the exotic delights of my schooldays were no more.

UNG178 and 179 continued on the 207 service until the early sixties when they were replaced by new ultra bright versions of the Lodekka. Whether, as before, two designated Lodekkas replaced 178 and 179 I don't know although on the occasions when I saw a 207 bus, which was fairly frequently, it was always one of these new type. These new Lodekkas although very similar to the LD were now with a totally flat floor and designated FS and these ones on the 207 were most noticeable because they now had fluorescent lighting and an illuminated advertising panel on the offside and were of a batch of some twenty five so fitted. The seats now had wavy backs instead of the straight chrome rail and in most cases, if not all, the window openers were of the pull down type, sometimes called 'hopper type' instead of sliding. The registrations were four number then PW or NG but which were on the 207 I don't know. I never travelled on these new Lodekkas but they certainly looked very attractive especially when brightly lit.

The Lodekka continued to evolve, mainly because of new legislation allowing longer lengths, with the final type being a front entrance model. I believe I may have seen some of these longer buses on the 207 route but which I don't know.



An FS Lodekka at Ipswich showing the wavy backed seats, the pull down windows and the illuminated advertising panel. Note the white steering wheel signifying 8 feet.



The picture above shows the effect at night of the fluorescent lighting and the illuminated advertising panel albeit, unfortunately, not an Eastern Counties bus.

Below is a development of the Lodekka designated an FS i.e. as an LD but now with a flat floor. Unlike the previous picture of an FS this has the usual type of chrome railed seat and no lit panel.





The above is the final version of the Lodekka known as an FLF i.e. Flat Floor Long. Front Entrance. This version of the Lodekka was 30 feet long with a 70 seating capacity.

The FLF paved the way for the next generation of double decker known as the VR. This was the first Bristol double decker with an engine at the back and also the first with a full front. The first VRs had the engine placed longitudinally at the side but quite soon afterwards the engine was placed transversely across the back and were known as VRTs. Apart from the change of position of the engine the most noticeable change was to the windscreen which became curved instead of flat as pictured below.



The picture also shows the Eastern Counties painted in white as part of the National Bus Company.

Occasionally I would see one of these buses on the 207 but by this time it seemed that the timetable that I had known was no longer and neither were the buses designated to the route. In some cases it seemed that single deckers were used and it was obvious that passenger numbers were dropping off and certainly a far cry from the need for the relief buses of my school days and immediately after. Then I noticed that the colour red had changed and the words Eastern Counties looked as if they had been painted on the sides by somebody using an emulsion brush.

It was then that I learned that Eastern Counties were now part of the National Bus Company and it seemed all downhill from there! The next thing was the appearance of multi coloured buses with all over advertising. Ugh!!! Then the route numbers changed and my beloved 207 was gone forever.

As mentioned I would sometimes get the bus to work which would mean the 7.25 a.m. to Ipswich and then the 201 to Felixstowe as far as a short way past the St. Augustines roundabout. The bus to Ipswich came out of Ipswich as far as Capel where it turned round and was then the first service of the day to Ipswich. It was always an older type L of about 1948 or so vintage and I'm sure had wooden tops to the seats. So far as I'm aware this was the only 207 service where I saw, and experienced, this type of bus. We never had one on the Dedham or Capel neither was there ever one on the relief in the morning. A typical example of the type is shown below.



Sometime in the mid sixties we moved from Bentley to Stutton which then meant the 221 route if

we wanted to go to Ipswich although by that time I had my own means of transport. There were one or two occasions though when I went by bus and this gave me the opportunity to travel on one of the lightweight SC4LK buses which were used on that service at the time. These were quite light and airy and very different from previous single deckers I had been on. They seemed quite flimsy and more akin to the single deckers we see today in their construction. Certainly a different experience than that associated with those lovely coaches of the early fifties



A lightweight SC4LK of the late fifties early sixties.

Bristol and Eastern Coach Works had been experimenting with underfloor flat fronted single deckers since the early fifties to eventually replace the Ls which, as with the double deckers, had increased in length and width as legislation changed and were then designated LL.

I can't remember the introduction of these new flat fronted single deckers at Ipswich as the 207 was serviced by double deckers, apart from reliefs and the Dedham, up to the time I left school and some way beyond so new single deckers didn't register with me as new double deckers did.

As time went on, as described above, I noticed that single deckers were sometimes being used and these were all the flat fronted type by then but which type I don't know. Photos in books I have bought show various single deckers being used on the 207 including some of the newer coaches which were later, or had been already, demoted to stage carriage work.

As described above the time table for route 207 seemed to have been drastically altered, no doubt reflecting the dramatic change in passenger numbers, and the buses used seemed to vary from the large capacity VRTs to single deckers, including down graded coaches.

At some point the route number was changed, as were all Ipswich numbers, and the route was even contracted out to private operators.



A typical single decker of the mid sixties.



A single decker painted in brown advertising the parcels service.



An overall painted double decker advertising anywhere tickets.

In the May of 1955 a friend and myself cycled to Clacton to see the first British Coach Rally. Eastern Counties were showing their new flat fronted underfloor engined coach known as an LS5G. We came across it standing on the promenade with it's door open so it was, of course, too much of a temptation not to go inside. The inside appearance was breathtaking to our eyes to say the least. Extremely light and airy due to it's curved roof windows above the side windows, like our old friend the 'Glass Topper', and , I think, possibly a sunshine roof. The coach had been polished up and was just immaculate. It took second place in the Concourse d'Elegance to be bettered the following year by a similar coach taking first place. Example is shown below.



Several superb looking coaches appeared in the following years some of which were used on the 207 after being downgraded to bus work. It seems such a shame that this should be their fate but, after all, they were only following in the tyre tracks of their counterparts of years gone by.



An MW6G of the early sixties. These would later be downgraded by being painted red and, where applicable depending on the front design, bus style indicators being fitted.



An RELH6G coach of the mid sixties. Of note is that the sliding window openers had disappeared

in favour of forced air ventilation.

All coaches of these shown would be painted white and with the word National painted on the sides. As I have read somewhere it has been commented that they then lost all individuality and just became 'bloody great white ambulances'!



An RELH6L dual purpose coach which would be demoted to bus duties but not painted red. Such a vehicle was often to be seen on the 207 Colchester service.

As already mentioned something was happening with the bus services out of Ipswich as not only did the route numbers change but also other types of buses operated by other companies, even Ipswich Corporation Transport, appeared.

It wasn't until I read books on Eastern Counties, Eastern Coach Works and The Bristol Story that I began to understand the full implications of Nationalisation then the National Bus Company and finally it's dissolution. Political machinations had taken their toll until Bristol, as a chassis designer and manufacturer, and Eastern Coach Works, as a bus and coach body manufacturer, were closed and the operation of bus services, and with it the supply of the vehicles themselves, had been put out to tender. Thus the expertise in design and manufacture of many many years was lost all for the sake of what!! No more would we see those familiar red buses and cream coaches and wait in eager anticipation for the next model to come along. Considering what Bristol and Eastern Coach Works had already produced, and then Eastern Coach Works on Leyland chassis, it would be interesting to conjecture what Bristol and Eastern Coach Works would be producing today.

Many buses and coaches have, of course, been preserved but, as Patrick Burnside has commented on his excellent and informative website, it is such a shame that many have not. At least not in Eastern Counties colours and registrations. No Leyland PD1A, no Glass Topper DAH161, no Beadle bodied Bristol GPW and no Bedford OB KAH.

At least I had the chance to travel on these wonderful buses and coaches and that memory will stay with me forever.

Michael C Goose

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as detailed below.

Eastern CountiesS The First 50 years by Maurice Doggett

Eastern Coach Works An illustrated history of the Company and its products up to 1946 by Maurice Doggett

ECW 1946 - 1965 M G Doggett & A A Townsin

ECW 1965 - 1987 M G Doggett & A A Townsin

Further details were obtained by research into:

The Bristol Story Part One - 1908 - 1951 by Alan Townsin

The Bristol Story Part Two - 1952 - 1983 by Alan Townsin

Eastern Counties by John Hypher

Bus and Coach histories were obtained by research into the website of Bristol Commercial Vehicles (For instance: DAH161 and the reference to it's rear door)

The wonderful website 'Eastern Counties Omnibus Company' operated by Patrick Burnside was also a mine of information particularly with 'The Vehicles' section and, of that, the Fleet Lists in particular.