

## **Summer of 1970 – A Norwich bus conductor remembers...**

*As I reach a certain age milestone, from my vantage point in sunny Brighton, I have been reflecting back 45 years to the summer of 1970, when I worked as a young bus conductor for Eastern Counties Omnibus Company in Norwich. The bus industry was on the verge of some fundamental changes, and the way things were done then would soon change forever.*

### **First Memories**

My first memories of my local buses are of big red double-deck machines with gold underlined fleet names, cream bands with black lining, aluminium exposed radiators and a massive black mudguard over the near side front wheel; the drivers had to climb up into the cab to wrestle with giant steering wheels, long gear levers and massive hand brakes. I realised later that these were members of Eastern Counties' LKH class, although occasionally I noticed some were rather different, more primitive looking machines which I subsequently learned were the Leyland Titan AH class, having been re-bodied by ECW to look like LKHs but with protruding front mudguards which wobbled rather alarmingly. I observed that some LKHs had black steering wheels while the rather more pleasing looking buses had white ones. When I later discovered and bought my first Ian Allan British Bus Fleets ABC book of East Anglia in Jarrold's book shop I was to learn that the black steering wheeled variety were 7'6" Bristol Ks with H30/26R ECW bodies while those with white steering wheels were the 8' KSWs with H32/28R bodies. These were, and still are to this very day, my favourite buses of all.

I lived on the West Earlham estate in Norwich which was served in the 1950s by service 86, which terminated at the top of Malbrook Road. Our other local service was the 83, which terminated at the West Earlham library on Earlham Green Lane. After waiting time there they would complete a massive U turn in the road to start the long journey back across the city to Tuckswood. I would travel with my mother on the 83 to visit her mother who lived on the Drayton Road; although it was a long walk from our house to the library terminus and then another long walk from the stop at Nelson Street, it saved having to catch two buses. Often my granddad would drive us home in his Rover car. My maternal grandmother lived right beside the Parr Road terminus of the 88 and I noticed that these buses were not the ones I was familiar with on the 86; some looked not as tall as usual and had long seats upstairs (and a low ceiling downstairs on the offside). I learned that these were the LK class, Ks and KSWs with ECW lowbridge bodies.

My mother had a friend who lived in Hellesdon so the 86/87 was ideal when she went to visit her. I travelled with her more than once. It seemed a very long way - right through the city centre, along St. Giles, past the City Hall, along Gentleman's Walk by the market then round to Castle Meadow via Orford Place, once the terminus for Norwich trams. After that it was foreign parts! Tombland, Magdalen Street, St. Augustines (no swimming pool then), then all the way along Aylsham Road to the Boundary and Reepham Road. Coming back we had to make sure we didn't catch an 84 or 85 but we did have the prospect of creeping back along the side of the market then up Guildhall Hill to the stop for the City Hall - a journey that has not been possible for many years.

My mother would often talk about the City's trams, which had long gone by the time I was born, although some of the Norwich Omnibus Bristols still survived in re-bodied form. She also pointed out to me, while waiting at the Castle Meadow stop, what she called the 'seaside buses'. She identified them by the chrome rings on the front wheels. Later I realised she meant the AP class of lowbridge Leylands which worked the county services almost exclusively.

### **School Days**

It must have been before the LFLs came that some decidedly odd looking buses arrived to work the 86 set of routes. These were FHT 801/6/8 which were second-hand from Bristol Omnibus Company. They would pass my school (West Earlham junior) and I would watch them from the classroom window or playground. I remember sitting downstairs behind the driver's cab on them and seeing the cab bulkhead moving independently of the body side! Quite disconcerting! That and the single piece destination screen made them seem really ancient compared to those lovely KSWs.

Not far from West Earlham junior school, outside a house on Edgeworth Road, there would from time to time be parked some brand new buses, similar to those I was familiar with but in different colours. These were Lodekkas and coaches on delivery from ECW to places like Bristol, Cumberland and even to Scotland. I wish I'd had a camera then. In the early 1960s, after I had passed the 11+ and left West Earlham junior school for CNS, the 86 and 83 swapped routes in West Earlham with the 86 travelling along Earlham Green Lane and terminating at the Good Companions pub. The 83 diverted to serve the West Earlham estate

terminating at Wilberforce Road, Jordans Close. (I think this change coincided with the introduction of the six 30 foot long LFLs). The 83 was thus my usual mode of transport for getting into the city and on the days when I took the bus to school (CNS) if my mum could spare me the bus fare. I liked this route: along Wilberforce Road with the sharp left hand turn at the bottom of Larkman Lane (I admired those drivers who could do a racing change down to third before hauling the bus round the corner - with a rather alarming body lean to the right) before starting the climb up the aptly named Rockingham Road to the shopping centre. Another right then left past the top of West Earlham junior school up to Earlham Green Lane; past the cemetery then the West Norwich hospital (where I was born), down the hill to the Earl of Leicester then across Dereham Road into Hotblack Road; turning right onto the fittingly named Waterworks Road past the city's waterworks, then Old Palace Road past the old bishop's palace, then Heigham Street past Pickfords depository, across Barn Road (before it was made dual carriageway), up Westwick Street past Bullards brewery to the junction with St. Benedict's, over the narrow Charing Cross past Strangers Hall museum and the old city library. By now we were sharing the road with 81s and 88s (and 29A, 13A and 13B on their outward journey), up the steep hill past St. Andrews Hall, onto Bank Plain, turning right (before the new-fangled one-way system) to Castle Meadow, which was served by pretty much all city and many county routes. Sometimes I got off at Castle Meadow but sometimes I rode past Bonds to the Lame Dog pub. I never travelled the whole route to Tuckswood for reasons I can't remember. I seem to recall that the 83 was mainly worked by the 7'6" Ks, presumably because of the narrow streets, particularly Hotblack Road, but it may have been because those buses with black steering wheels were more numerous than those with white steering wheels. Although there were not so many cars parked on the roadside in those days it was a squeeze on Hotblack Road if the 83 going the other way was met there.

The frequency on the 83 was every 12 minutes as opposed to every 15 minutes on the 86, although it was a slightly longer ride into town than the 86. The 83 and 86 arrived at Castle Meadow in the opposite directions, the 86/87 heading towards Hellesdon which is on the other side of the city to Tuckswood. I would often take the 86 home from school for a change, the attraction being a ride on one of the massive LFLs with their roaring 6 cylinder Bristol engines, a complete contrast to the regular 5 cylinder Gardners in the rest of the fleet. (Or it could have been the chance of meeting the very attractive Anne who was a scholar at the Blyth girls' school and who lived in the police house opposite Earlham library). I didn't mind the slightly longer walk home if I'd had the double pleasure of an upstairs ride on a LFL and a brief chat with the attractive aforementioned Anne.

On the days I went to school (CNS) by bus I would catch the 83 at Jordans Close and get off at Castle Meadow and walk a little further to the 90 stop. Regular 90s were normally worked by OMO LMs but on school day mornings there were many extras. I would usually get one of the fairly new LFSs with Cave-Brown-Cave heating systems that had come in from Stalham on the 5. These seemed really new - compared with the highbridge city buses or LKDs - with their peculiar curved seat back tops and fluorescent lighting. By the time the bus got to Bonds it would be full and it was then non-stop to Eaton Road (via Ipswich Road so as to pull up outside the school on the right side of the road). At going home time there would be an assortment of buses waiting outside the school; we had to get on whichever bus was at the front of the queue which would pull away as soon as it was full. The buses would be screened up "90 Thorpe Station" and would start dropping off in the city from the bus station onwards. The usual performers on the regular 90 (which passed the Newmarket Road end of Eaton Road) would normally be LS or MW type one-man-operated LMs.

More often my usual means of getting to school was by bike. My route took me through the West Earlham estate to Earlham Road Fiveways, along Earlham Road to Henderson Road, then along the Ring Road to Unthank Road, turning right then left into Leopold Road. This avoided the worst traffic (although I would never cycle that route today) and meant we crossed Newmarket Road at its junction with Eaton Road. The usual mix of buses on this journey would be 79s on Earlham Road, 80s on the Ring Road, 84s and 85s on The Avenues, and 89s on Unthank Road; all K or KSW type LKHs. On the last leg up Eaton Road the school buses would be approaching - LFSs, LKDs, LKHs, LKs, APs, LLs mainly but very occasionally a RE or LS coach or, even rarer, an AH. How I wish I'd kept a notebook in those days as a camera was completely out of the question.

The highlight of our lessons in the 3rd form at CNS was 'Local Studies' with Mr. 'Gabby' Blake, which nearly every week meant trips out of school to the local museums or local businesses - the Co-op shoe factory, Steward & Paterson's brewery, McIntosh's chocolate factory (everyone's favourite with the free pack of chocolate mis-shapes), the city waterworks, the City Hall - to mention a few. For me the most memorable and meaningful was the visit to Eastern Counties' Central Works at Cremorne Lane, just behind their Thorpe

Road head office. I never knew this existed before the visit but afterwards I visited often although I was never allowed in. We visited all the various departments, seeing destination blinds being prepared, seats repaired, body shop, paint shop and general repairs. For my account of the visit I received the highest mark ever.

The last lesson on Friday afternoons was 'Hobbies' and it was here that I discovered fellow bus enthusiasts in the Transport 'hobby' and was introduced to BUSES ILLUSTRATED magazine. A trip was organised to Eastern Coach Works in Lowestoft, which was a real eye opener for me. The details of this visit are somewhat lost in the mists of time and may be confused in my mind with a later trip to ECW organised by the Eastern Counties Omnibus Society (forerunner of the Eastern Transport Collection Society). I remember seeing FLF Lodekka chassis, including some with semi-automatic transmission, waiting to be bodied, so this must have been with the school trip in 1966 or 1967. Of course, in subsequent years a visit to the ECW factory was a must on any of my visits to Lowestoft. Sadly this can be done no more.

I have already mentioned discovering my first Ian Allan bus spotters' book in Jarrold's in 1964 and this is marked with the LKHs that were resident in Norwich at that time and that I 'spotted':

K: FNG823, GVF 65, 67, 70-73; HPW 77, 85, 87, 88, 89, 92-94, 96-106, 108, 113, 114, 117-119, 123-129, 131, 134, 139-142; KNG 154, 160, 251, 255, 257;

KS: LNG 261-265,

KSW: LNG273-275; MAH 306-308, 313-320, 323-332; NAH 933-942; OVF 166, 167, 169-172

I had to wait till 1965 for the next edition (which is described as the Third Edition) and till April 1<sup>st</sup> 1967 for the Fourth Edition.

One aspect of my interest in buses was the adverts that they carried. This is probably one reason I preferred double-deckers to single-deckers, but single-deckers rarely came my way. I always thought the adverts were eye-catching and the best were amusing. I had slight artistic leanings in those days and thought I might like to make a career in commercial art. I never did but whenever a new advert was posted on the side of buses I tried to copy it in miniature for my Matchbox Toy buses, which were based on my full-size ECOC favourites.

I kept a note book detailing the adverts carried in the 1960s on my favourite double deckers:

GVF 67, 70, 71, 72, 73, HPW 77, 85, 87, 117, MAH 303 (LK303) 313, 314, 315, 316, 319, 320, 323, 330-342, 166, 167, 169, 170, 171, 172, 273, 274, 275; LFLs 56-61.

### **On the buses – In the Training School**

I left school in 1967 and joined the Royal Insurance on Bank Plain (on the 83 route). After a couple of years I decided to have a change and apply to teachers' training college but before that I arranged to take a year out. As I was only 19 and not old enough to be a bus driver I applied to be a conductor at the Surrey Street garage of Eastern Counties and took myself off one lunch time to take the necessary aptitude tests. I passed all the tests - including a medical – and was offered a job and so on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> September 1969 I reported to the conductor's training school at the bus station in a little office at the top of some stairs - near the bike sheds and overlooking the tyre section - under the tutelage of dear old Fred Elsegood, with a few others. My earnings prospects were good – I left an office job with a salary of about £400 a year to a weekly wage of £15 – more with overtime!

Training was to take a week. Monday to Thursday was spent in the classroom learning about ticket types, how to complete the waybill, how to read duties and rotas, how to plan your work schedule for weeks ahead, fare charts and much more. We were measured up for our uniform, shown where to report for work at the foreman's office, where to cash in and of course we spent plenty of time in the large canteen upstairs. I was issued with my green PSV Conductor's badge (FF26508) and accompanying paper licence (cost 3 shillings for 3 years). We also needed a leather cash bag and a box in which to carry our ticket machine harness, ticket rolls and fare charts. (Only county conductors had their own ticket machines in those days). We also needed a piece of hard-board, plywood or aluminium (about A5 size) on which to keep our carefully folded waybill. Being able to write on the waybill while balancing on the back of a moving, open platform bus was a skill that was soon necessarily acquired. Of course, Fred imparted much of his valuable experience of being 'on the back', accumulated over many years, in order to get us as ready as he could for going out on the road. Busmen worked 6 day, 40 hour weeks in those days so on Friday and Saturday we were sent out with an experienced conductor on his shift, to shadow him and – in quieter moments – to actually issue tickets and take fares. Even though I had grown up watching conductors going about their work and

imagining what it must be like to do it, when it came to actually doing it myself for the first time it was both exciting and daunting. I seem to remember that Friday and Saturday were spent on a mix of city and county routes; the travelling patterns on Saturdays were different from Mondays to Fridays with their morning and afternoon peaks; after a quiet start on Saturdays things got steadily busier with people going into the city for shopping or to the football match and with increased traffic it gradually became difficult to keep to the timetable. (Some things never change). In those days it was the conductor's, not the driver's, responsibility to keep to time so what with running upstairs and down issuing tickets, ringing two bells as the starting signal, keeping track of where new passengers went to sit, having to be aware of where the bus was and ensuring you didn't run early (not a problem when you were busy) there was a lot for a new bus conductor to learn!

### **On the buses – Learning the Ropes**

Having completed my intensive one week training course, which finished on Saturday, I was rostered to work the next day - Sunday - on a late duty. I was allocated to Group 3 which covered the 82/98, 84/5/6/7 and 89/A groups of routes, and my first week – starting on the Sunday - was covering holiday leave for driver Alan Mann's conductor.

My first duty – a late - on my own with Alan Mann on the front was fairly quiet (most Sundays were) and at the end of the shift we ran into the garage where I proceeded to complete my waybill and cash up while Alan parked the bus for fuelling and cleaning. He was going to give me a lift home and when he came into the conductor's room he found me still finishing off. "What are you doing? You should have done that as we were running in!" he chided. I was a fast learner. Needless to say he didn't have to wait for me again that week. I was cashed up by the time we reached the terminus on the last run so that all I had to do at the garage was drop the cash bag into the safe and my box into my locker.

On city routes in 1969 the SETRIGHT ticket machine (which had a single cash dial from ½ penny to 1 shilling) stayed on the bus all day. When the first conductor took the machine out in the morning the opening numbers had already been entered on his waybill in red by the ticket office staff. When he handed over for his break he had to enter the closing numbers on his waybill, unclip the machine from the harness and leave it (usually) on the back seat. The takeover conductor had to enter his opening numbers on his waybill before he could issue tickets, which was always a bit of a performance if take-over was in the middle of the rush hour with a bus full of passengers. The last conductor of the day would hand the ticket machine in with his waybill and cash. Some duties were in 3 or even 4 parts so by the end of his shift a conductor could have 3 or 4 sets of different opening and closing numbers to add up.

There were 3 sets of counters on the machine which needed to be recorded on the waybill: total tickets issued, halfpennies, and another, details of which are lost to my memory bank. In reconciling your cash takings with tickets issued you had to subtract your halfpenny opening counter number from your closing halfpenny counter number; this gave the value of tickets issued in ha'pennies; there was space on the waybill to divide this number by 2 to get pennies, by 12 to get shillings then by 20 to get pounds. All of this in your head without the use of an electronic calculator! You then had to add all the cash totals together to get your total for the shift. In all my time on the buses I never made any arithmetical mistakes on my waybill.

The waybill itself was almost the size of a table-cloth! It had to be folded in a certain way and clipped to your A5 size hardboard or aluminium pad so that you could enter the journey details in the appropriate places without unfolding it. There was space for date, duty number, driver's and conductor's names, opening and closing counter numbers, bus numbers and journey details. Each journey had to be recorded with journey start time and fare-stage. At the fare-stages marked on the fare chart with an asterisk you had to note down the last 3 digits of the total tickets counter – unless you were busy collecting fares at the time.

All conductors were issued with a full set of fare charts in a two ring binder for all services worked out of Norwich. I bought myself a few clear plastic wallets in which I would keep my main city fare charts in my cash bag. I would highlight the Castle Meadow fare stage with a vertical row and horizontal column; this made it quicker to read the fare from the outlying stops but I soon memorised the most common fares and only had to refer to the chart for the less common combinations – or when the fares changed. When we worked a county service I would select the relevant fare chart from the folder and slip it in to the clear wallet. The charts for the longer county services would cover two or more pages which was a bit of a challenge.

Most single city fares were just a few pence but some longer fares, and most county fares, were a shilling or more. Return fares were all more than a shilling. If the maximum fare on the 'town' machines (as they were called) was a shilling, how were higher value tickets issued? It meant issuing two tickets; one shilling plus

the balance was time-consuming and involved changing the dial. The quickest way was to issue two equal value tickets, i.e. return fare 1/6d, set the ticket type to 'Return', set fare to 9d and whizz out two tickets. With practice this could be done almost without thinking. By an extension of this, if the return fare was 2/3d it was quicker to issue THREE 9d tickets. You soon got the hang of other combinations, e.g. return of 1/9d = two 10½d. After issuing a return ticket you had to remember to reset the dial to 'SNG' for single.

Later, during 1970, all conductors were issued with their own 'County' SETRIGHT ticket machines. These could issue much higher value tickets (up to £1 I believe before they were converted for decimalisation) so no more issuing 2 or more tickets for a return fare! And you only had one set of opening and closing numbers each day because you kept the same machine all the time.

Cash had to be bagged up into little paper bags in the correct denominations, copper and silver. Although the SETRIGHT machines recorded ticket sales in halfpennies, the actual half penny coins ceased to be legal tender in 1969. This was before decimalisation so we still handled the big old pennies, quaint little threp'ny (3d) bits with 12 sides, sixpenny pieces (the smallest silver coin), shillings, two shillings (or florins) and half crowns (2/6d). It was not unknown to get a ten shilling note and occasionally a pound note but I don't ever recall getting a five pound note. I would keep threp'ny bits and pennies in my hand to give out as change and bag up the silver as I went along; this saved time at the end of the day and I rarely had much in the way of bronze coins to pay in. We were never given a float. Most passengers tendered the exact fare but if they didn't you would have to give change out of your own pocket. If you had more cash at the end of the day than was recorded on the machine, that was your 'tea money'. If you paid in short it was deducted from your next week's wages.

### **On the buses – Getting the hang of it**

Towards the end of 1969 I contracted glandular fever and was off work (and with no pay) for many weeks. I resumed my conducting career on Monday, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1970 with a one day refresher with Fred Elsegood. After that it was as if I had never been away.

Almost all city routes crossed the city from one side to the other and there was a pattern depending on the day of the week and time of day. For example, the 8 a.m. weekday departure on the 86 from the Good Companions usually left with a fair few seated passengers. You would be picking up at stops all along Earlham Green Lane and Bowthorpe Road. A few would alight at the West Norwich hospital and some would get on. At the Earl of Leicester you joined the Dereham Road with the busy 81s, so you would still be picking up passengers who wanted the City Hall rather than Bank Plain. A right turn at Heigham Road to join the Earlham Road at West Pottergate meant there was some respite from issuing tickets (although one busy morning with an LFL when I was new, I was still issuing tickets upstairs as we were crossing the junction at St. Giles!) Along St. Giles street to City Hall and passengers started to alight so by the time you reached Castle Meadow the bus was fairly empty and you had a more relaxed journey out to Hellesdon. On the next journey back in it would be a similar pattern – picking up all along the Reepham or Cromer Roads into the city then a chance to sit down from St. Giles back to West Earlham (or North or South Park Avenue if you were an 84 or 85). It would be a different pattern in the afternoon peaks: there would be crowds waiting at City Hall or Castle Meadow but you would be dropping them off as you made your way to West Earlham, North or South Park Avenue or Hellesdon.

In the early evenings you might be busy taking people into town for the cinema or theatre, then it would be fairly quiet until the last bus home, which was often packed. Once you had taken fares you could start completing the waybill and even cashing up as you dropped passengers off. The return journey back to the garage was done at some speed – any passengers bold enough to hail the bus would get a free ride!

Most daily duties were about 6 hours 40 minutes long to make up a six day, forty hour week but there were several X/N duties of 2-3 hours that were available for overtime. These were usually booked up each morning for the afternoons and on Mondays to Thursdays were in much demand by crews anxious to do overtime. However, by the time Friday came round nobody wanted to do overtime so the controllers would implore anyone to cover, not only the extra duties but any that had become necessary to cover due to crews not turning up. One summer Saturday I did two complete conducting duties. Conductors were not subject to the same working hours as drivers.

### **The summer of 1970**

I still have my 1970 diary. I tried to record in it each day's duty, the routes worked, but most importantly the buses I worked on. Sadly there are some gaps but there is enough to give a flavour of what it was like to work on the buses out of Surrey Street garage in 1970. By that time all 7'6" Bristol Ks had gone, as had the

APs, LKs and LLs. The 7'6" KS with 8' wide bodies were withdrawn in 1969 and 1970; I remember working on them in 1969 – they were usually on 82/98s and would lean over alarmingly at the roundabout at the bottom of Ketts Hill!

FLFs, LKDs and LFSs were still the mainstays of the county routes but were appearing more frequently on city services. But the main feature of 1970 was the rapid withdrawal of my favourite KSWs and the coming on stream of new VRs. My favourite of all was LKH306 (MAH306) although I don't really know why. It was the first of the 27 MAH registrations highbridge KSWs and it had a distinctive crackle to the exhaust. It also spent its whole life in Norwich (as far as I'm aware) and was a regular performer on the 86 route past my school and only ever carried an advert for "Brett's for Furniture" on the offside. It turns out that I conducted on it 11 times in 1970 (more than any other) and the last time was the day before my very last day. My one regret is that I don't have a photo of this favourite of favourites.

*Photo below of LKH 306 is courtesy of the late Robert Mack and has been supplied from the webmaster's collection.*



In total I worked on LKHs 131 times – more than any other type. They were my favourites and I loved every minute I worked on them. My next favourites were open platform LFS 46 & 48 and the LFLs, although LFL 56 and 61 do not feature in my 1970 diary. At that time the LFLs still had Bristol engines and I thought they sounded very powerful, although I have since learned from those who drove them that they were painfully loud. FLF348 was also a favourite with its Bristol engine.

It was inevitable that doored buses would become a feature on city services. My diary records I conducted on a total of 100 LFSs, 95 LKDs and 83 FLFs in 1970. Although doors on rear entrance buses provided a safety feature, and kept in the heat in the winter, it was tempting to leave them open in fine weather. There were two disadvantages to this: the absence of a pole meant you couldn't lean out and get the fresh air; and the rear bulkhead acted as a scoop, resulting in cold air rushing into the lower saloon. There was a knack to operating the folding doors: as the bus came to a stop you pulled the bar and the door slammed open against the other bulkhead. Then, as the bus pulled away from the stop and you undid the latch, so the door would close by centrifugal force. It was a pain if you were upstairs and the bus came to a bus stop with the door closed as nobody knew how to open it. You had to leave collecting fares and go down and open the door, then go back upstairs again. On FLFs the powered front doors were controlled by the driver and because

there was not much room by the front stairs it was just as easy to stand at the rear of the lower saloon and ring the bell from there.

New VRs were continuing to be delivered and my diary records 18 occasions when I conducted on them, on both city and county routes. Although they were designed for OMO use, when they were new they were usually crew operated and there was nowhere for a conductor to stand while passengers were getting on and off, but there was a strong temptation to talk to the driver – very distracting and not officially allowed. (The first VR I ever drove - much later - as a qualified driver was VR288; but that's another story).

My diary records that I was a conductor on other types too: LMs six times (LM986 on an early morning Cawston outstation duty when the driver went sick); 640 (92), 643 (12C), 924 (7B), 926 (96), 968 (90). These were OMO duties where the OMO driver was off for one reason or another.

There was also a variety of coaches: CBs twice - CB843 (a VAM70 with Duple Viceroy body) on overtime but no details recorded and CB837 (VAM14/ Duple Viceroy) the very next day on a 17; Ls 804, 808, 809, 811, 816, 827, 834; REs twice - RE876 on a 34 all the way to King's Lynn on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> May 1970 and RE892 on 11 relief the next day. There was nowhere for a conductor to stand on these single-deckers; there were rails on the seat backs of the buses to hold on to but nothing at all on the coaches, although the seats on these were more comfortable to sit on. And in reality you were not very busy so you could enjoy the scenery.

I was allocated to city services but our duties sometimes included a peak hour county service. In the morning we would run light out and back 'in service' to terminate at the bus station. In the afternoon we would start from the bus station with a full load and run light back. For a while I was covering conductors who were on leave and I worked with several drivers including Alan Jennings, T. Mulcahy, David Waller, Ron H. Ward, Colin Applegate. Eventually I was teamed up with a regular driver, Brian Corder, with whom I stayed for the rest of my time.

Early on the morning of Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> June 1970, with driver Basil Browne, we were allocated new VR380 to run light to Dereham to work a 34 into Norwich. Somewhere between Hockering and North Tuddenham, there was a loud bang and a loss of power. Basil pulled into a layby and went off to knock on someone's door to phone up (the days before mobile phones). Quite a while later the fitters brought out LFS121, and we were expected to continue to Dereham and operate the 34 service into Norwich, albeit quite late!

Another early morning with driver Micky King: we were running light to Salhouse with one of the Gardner 6LX FLFs (I think it was 359 but I can't find a record in my diary). I could see the speedo through the little slanting cab window and we were doing 70mph! Micky was very pleased.

One Saturday afternoon I was paired with a driver who normally worked in head office on Thorpe Road who was doing overtime. We had an LFS. It was a county route I had never done before and he wasn't sure of the route either. Somewhere around Barton Turf we were lost and had to rely on passengers to tell us where to go. We managed to get to our destination at Happisburgh, and, more importantly, back home again.

At last, on Saturday, 12<sup>th</sup> September 1970, my time as a bus conductor came to an end. I am so glad I had this unforgettable experience before irrevocable changes came about in the bus industry. All the LKHs would be withdrawn by the end of 1971 and crew operated Norwich City services taken over by LKD, LFS, FLF and VR 'deckers. In the near future the traditional red and cream Tilling livery was to be replaced by corporate NBC red and white with the double N symbol; decimalisation swept away the historical UK coinage system; Norwich City Services would be completely renumbered and reshaped; the Scottish VR/NBC FLF swap was to take place; and the complete phasing out of conductors by Eastern Counties. Who was to foresee the eventual break-up of the National Bus Company, the closure of the Bristol and ECW factories, privatisation, mini-buses and subsequent take-over by First Bus (and horror of horrors) pink and grey – and many other coloured - buses on the streets of Norwich!?

For me, a career in teaching was not to be, but later I was to obtain my PSV driver's licence (FF36612) on my own and resume my direct association with the bus industry. I was told that once I had a PSV (now PCV) licence I would be in demand as a part-time driver and so it was. Later, a spell driving Routemasters in London, before they were replaced by bendy-buses, and now I am driving fully accessible low-floor, state-of-the-art buses for Brighton & Hove. But they are all stories for another time.

According to my 'bible' (Eastern Counties Omnibus Company Fleet History 2PF1 The PSV Circle, The Omnibus Society, Eastern Counties Omnibus Society, July 1981) the following buses were delivered to Eastern Counties in 1970:

RLC 715-718; RLE 861-875; LH 899-916 (and prototype 719); LHS 595-599; VR 380-384;  
RL 720-739

*Photo: A very young Alec Mitchell with driver Brian Corder and LFS 48 at the Judges Walk terminus of the 89A in July 1970.*

