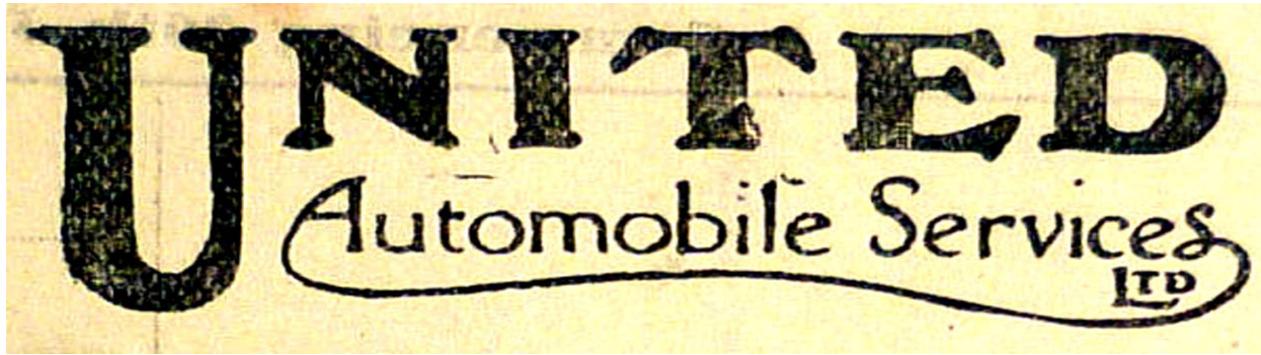


A brief history of . . .



(courtesy of 'Eastern Counties: The First 50 Years by Maurice Doggett)

On 4th April 1912, a new company was registered by a Mr. E. B. Hutchinson which he called the United Automobile Services Ltd., formed with the intention of taking over the railway operated services in the Lowestoft area.

The new company used four second-hand charabancs comprising two Commers and two chain driven Halleys, which were employed at first on a service from Lowestoft to Southwold in competition with the Great Eastern Railway (GER). Realising that competition on the road was not their prime concern, the GER withdrew their vehicles from the route on 18th January 1913, after the local Council had granted licences to United to operate between the two towns.

United then occupied premises in Denmark Road, Lowestoft rented from the GER. Originally, their vehicles were garaged in the stables of Mr. Fred Reeves in Mill Road, Lowestoft, near the junction with Horn Hill. Other services from Lowestoft to Beccles, later extended to Bungay and to Oulton Broad were established with additional vehicles.



A few months after the Suffolk routes were started, Mr. Hutchinson began to operate services from Bishop Auckland in County Durham, thus carrying on business in two distinct parts of England.

By 1914 the fleet had grown to 14 vehicles, but the First World War broke out in August of that year causing further expansion to be deferred. In fact, half the fleet was commandeered by the War Department for use by the armed forces. Some of those remaining with United were converted to run on coal gas and paraffin, as petrol for civil use was in short supply.

Returning to the road operations of the Great Eastern Railway, the Norwich to Loddon service continued throughout the war period with a change of the Norwich terminus to

Thorpe Station on the 22nd May 1916. The only other GER service to operate after the commencement of hostilities was that between Ipswich and Shotley, but when the Royal Navy Station at Shotley became a prohibited area, the service was temporarily withdrawn in August 1916.

At the end of the war, United was set to expand. New routes radiating from Great Yarmouth, Norwich, Cromer and King's Lynn were started during the next few years. Additional services were also started in Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, and in north east England, those in the latter area becoming the nucleus of the modern day operations of United, which became one of the largest bus and coach operations in the UK.

To operate the new services, United purchased a large number of ex-War Department chassis, mainly AEC and Daimler. In 1919, a site in Laundry Lane, Lowestoft, alongside the Norfolk and Suffolk Joint Railway line was acquired, on which buildings were erected and used at first as a garage and maintenance workshops. These premises were extended shortly afterwards by the addition of a coach factory, which was used initially for the reconditioning and conversion to passenger use of existing vehicles. In fact, some of the 'buses' were really lorries fitted with seats under a canvas hood.

In 1921, United built their first new body. This was the start of a local industry, which remained until 1987, albeit under the name of Eastern Coach Works.

By the mid 1920s, United buses were operating in every county along the east coast from Suffolk to Northumberland.

Up to 1925, second-hand chassis still formed the basis of the fleet, but in the following year, the first large batch of completely new vehicles entered service, as well as from acquired businesses.

By July 1931, the United fleet in the East Anglian district had reached a total of 226 vehicles, so it was the largest contributor to the fleet of the newly-formed Eastern Counties Omnibus Company Ltd. In addition, the coach factory at Lowestoft became a separate division of Eastern Counties. In July 1931 it was employing a workforce of approximately 600 and had produced close on 1500 new bodies which were bought for United and other operators.

