

**EASTERN COUNTIES
OMNIBUS COMPANY LTD**

THE TILLING YEARS

1931 to 1969

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Preface

This book is the result of my lifetime's passion for the vehicles and routes of East Anglia's erstwhile road passenger transport operator, the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company Ltd.

Formed in July of 1931 from the merger of four constituent companies which had been operating the vast majority of motor omnibus services in the English counties of Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire since the turn of the last century, the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company quickly established itself as East Anglia's main road passenger transport operator.

Over the years, a number of books have been written about this charismatic company, covering many aspects of the Company's operations and vehicles. In this book, I have made no apologies for focussing largely on the Tilling era, the period from formation in mid 1931 to the emergence of the National Bus Company in early 1969, as in my personal opinion, this was truly the most interesting and character-full time in the Company's history.

I have also reflected upon the railway companies and the four aforementioned constituent companies, namely, United Automobile Services Ltd (East Anglia area), Eastern Counties Road Car Company Ltd, Ortona Motor Company Ltd and Peterborough Electric Traction Company Ltd, to provide readers with a fuller picture and greater understanding of the development of road passenger transport within East Anglia, since its conception around the turn of the last century.

Within this work, I have attempted to collate the vast quantity of information currently available covering the plethora of vehicle types, premises, routes and auxiliary services obtained from a wide variety of published sources, but never before brought together in a single publication.

Also included for the first time is a comprehensive list of all former Eastern Counties Tilling era vehicles which were acquired by the late Benjamin Walter Jordan, the erstwhile motor dealer of Coltishall, Norfolk to whom this book is proudly dedicated.

This work is aimed mainly at the avid road passenger transport enthusiast, but undoubtedly, will also prove to be a useful reference for transport historians and those with a wider interest in local East Anglian history.

Readers may also wish to visit the website I have created catering for enthusiasts of the Company, spanning a similar period to that covered by this book.

<http://easterncountiesomnibusco.com>

This book is dedicated to the late

Benjamin Walter Jordan

1916 ~ 2002

who sadly passed away

on

Sunday, 19th of May 2002

aged 86 years

His yard at The Dell, situated in the pretty Norfolk village of Coltishall

and his farm field adjacent to the World War II

'Battle Of Britain' aerodrome at the former R.A.F. Coltishall, served as an invaluable source of

Bristol/ECW spares for omnibus preservationists nationwide since 1948.

The author's restoration of Eastern Counties Tilling era vehicles

LM452 (3014 AH), LC556 (3003 AH) and LL711 (KNG 711)

was made possible by the existence of

'Jordan's of Coltishall'.

~ May he rest in eternal peace ~

Foreword

By Maurice Doggett

The Tilling Years are a period which saw so many developments occurring to the road passenger transport industry. Patrick describes how it affected the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company Ltd which was one of the many subsidiaries of the Tilling Group.

It was a period during which the gradual improvements affected the design of both the chassis and bodies of the buses and coaches, the change from solid tyres to pneumatics, the introduction of diesel (or oil) engines and the double deck buses having covered roofs instead of open tops.

The stage had come whereby it was necessary to introduce regulations and controls on all aspects of the bus industry. The introduction of the 1930 Road Traffic Act sought to bring the afore-mentioned controls and regulations into force, such as routes and services. The introduction of proper bus stations was also a requirement.

There was also the question of investment and the acquisition of the small independent operators by the larger concerns. The Act also affected roads and general road traffic and also allowed local authorities (Councils) to operate their own local bus services.

The 1930s continued with Eastern Counties acquiring many independent operators along with other developments, both technical and legal. However, when World War II broke out in September 1939, more regulations and controls were imposed which affected the bus and coach industry and the population in general and which were not eased until peace returned.

The Dr Beeching cuts in the railway network provided opportunities for the bus and coach industry to improve their existing services and to introduce new ones, but the increase in the car-owning public provided a certain amount of opposition to the bus and coach industry's intentions.

Patrick has described all the regulations introduced by the 1930 Act and subsequent legislation and how they affected Eastern Counties in the years up to 1969.

Author's note:

Maurice Doggett is a well recognised omnibus archivist & photographer with a deep specialism in the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company which was based in Norwich, Norfolk and Eastern Coach Works Ltd which was established by United Automobile Services Ltd and based in the Suffolk coastal town of Lowestoft. He has written many articles and authored a number of books on both of these organisations. I am deeply indebted to him for allowing many of his photographs of the vehicles and premises to be freely published in this book.

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Chapter 1

How my Eastern Counties passion began and the story so far

Blissful childhood and school days

My earliest recollection of contact with vehicles of the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company was way back in 1967 when I stood by my open junior school gate and watched an aged half cab saloon make its weary way along Great Yarmouth's St Peters Road.

The Eastern Counties bus depot was located just around the corner in Wellington Road and all departing buses had to pass by my school as they made their way out into the East Anglian countryside to such far flung places as Norwich, Cromer, North Walsham, Martham, Hemsby, Winterton, Happisburgh, Bradwell, Stokesby, Belton, Burgh Castle, Beccles, Loddon and Lowestoft.

This must have been the time when the crucial seed was sown which would one day see me acquire and restore three classic examples from the 'Tilling' Eastern Counties fleet. By the time I was old enough to possess any degree of understanding of the various vehicle types, routes and timetables, most of the half cab, exposed radiator type buses had all but disappeared, save for one solitary double decker of this ilk, namely fleet number LKH341 (NAH 941), a 1952 built high-bridge Bristol KSW5G/ECW, which was retained at Yarmouth depot as a driver training vehicle. This fine vehicle was subsequently acquired by the Eastern Counties Omnibus Society, the forerunner of today's Eastern Transport Collection Society, for preservation and is currently undergoing major restoration with a target date for it to return to the road sometime towards the end of 2025.




(Pictured above: LKH341 resting in Great Yarmouth bus station circa 1971)

Prior to 1970, the fleet was predominantly in the original 'Tilling' red and cream livery, but with the Company's full assimilation into the National Bus Company during this year, the traditional colours gradually gave way to a somewhat less attractive poppy red and white scheme. The old style gold, black edged fleet names were replaced with white block letters, complimented with the National reflected 'N' symbol, indicating Eastern Counties' membership of the new much larger corporate concern. By the mid 1970s, most of the fleet had been so treated, with only vehicles due for imminent withdrawal remaining in the old 'Tilling' livery.

It was around this time that my interest in buses grew considerably and it wasn't too long before I became well acquainted with the many platform staff, inspectors, fitters and cleaners based at the friendly Wellington Road garage which alas, was sadly demolished to make way for a residential development in the mid 1990s.

DAILY 'WANDERBUS' TICKETS

Adults 60p 

Children 35p

Feel free to go places with 'Wanderbus' tickets and take the Family.
Travel anywhere in 9,000 sq. miles of East Anglia.

Buy them on any bus then travel as far and as often as you wish on all buses for the rest of the day.

**See the Countryside with a
a 'WANDERBUS'**

Many happy non-school days were spent riding the red and white buses through the pleasant Norfolk and Suffolk countryside with a day's unlimited travel 'Wanderbus' ticket clutched tightly in my hand! Every route was meticulously explored and quickly memorised and the now familiar Eastern Coach Works bodied vehicles became my firm friends. Each vehicle seemed to possess its own idiosyncrasies and despite models being of similar age and design, to quote a seasoned driver's words "no two buses are ever the same to drive".

After a long, quiet winter, the summer time in Yarmouth was extremely busy in the 1970s, when a huge influx of holidaymakers descended on the famous East Anglian seaside resort to enjoy their annual week or fortnight's holidays. To cope with the heavy demand for buses on the busy holiday camp workings to Caister-on-Sea, California, Scratby, Hemsby, Newport and perhaps to a lesser extent, Belton, Burgh Castle, Corton and Hopton-

on-Sea, the Yarmouth fleet had to almost double in strength!

Many of the relief vehicles came from the main Company depot in Norwich. These were nearly always aging double deckers of the LKD (Bristol LD/ECW) and LFS (Bristol FS/ECW) classes with the occasional LM (Bristol MW/ECW) type saloon and downgraded LS (Bristol LS/ECW or MW/ECW) coach thrown in for good measure! Needless to say, I soon acquainted myself with these newcomers and felt very sad when the holiday season finally drew to a close towards the end of September, when schooldays loomed again and these faithful old beasts were finally consigned to Norwich's Silver Road 'tram sheds' to await collection, often by erstwhile dealer and breaker, Ben Jordan of Coltishall. Witnessing these sad annual departures from the fleet, quickly made me realise that these 'Tilling' era vehicles were not going to be around forever and this is when I set my heart on saving one of these fine old stagers for future posterity. Once I had secured my first summer holiday job, I started saving every spare penny that came my way to raise the necessary funds required to realise this ambitious dream! My first love was fleet number LKD201 (VVF 201), a somewhat faded and battered Bristol LD type Lodekka with a 60 seat ECW body dating from 1958, which had carried its last fare paying passengers towards the end of the 1975 Yarmouth summer season. Like many other aged buses, LKD201 was sent from Norwich as a relief vehicle to handle the heavy Yarmouth holiday traffic and in typical form, was rendered 'de-licensed for disposal' when the season drew to a close. This fine old workhorse was relegated to a far corner of the front coach parking area of the Wellington Road depot

to await her fate and I will remember paying regular visits to her in between journeys. I often sat inside her upper and lower saloons, pondering what may happen to her and wishing I had the means to rescue her from her uncertain fate. There was very little I wouldn't have done to have had a sympathetic father or uncle to have arranged her purchase! Sadly, this wasn't to be and I was nowhere near



old enough to raise the necessary funds myself, being still at school, studying for my GCE 'O' levels. The next thing I knew, she had disappeared from her resting place and I never saw her again! A year or two later, I learnt that she had been acquired by one of the many Barnsley bus breakers and cut up for scrap . . . poor old 201. Now, if only I'd been born a few years earlier!!

(Pictured above: LKD201 withdrawn from service on the front coach park at Great Yarmouth bus station in September 1975)

Leaving school and a move to Essex

Upon leaving school in mid 1977, I moved from Great Yarmouth to the Essex town of Westcliff-on-Sea for three years, where I took up a post with Her Majesty's Customs & Excise at their headquarters offices in nearby Southend-on-Sea. Whilst I was there, I joined the Eastern National Preservation Group, an organisation known nowadays as the Castle Point Transport Museum Society (after having attained charitable status), based in the former Canvey & District (later Westcliff-on-Sea Motor Services and Eastern National Omnibus Company) bus garage at the far eastern tip of Canvey Island. I became very familiar with the mainly green and white Bristol/ECW fleet operated by the Eastern National Omnibus Company of Chelmsford and enjoyed many trips out on their vehicles all over the Essex countryside during my days off. However, the mainly Leyland and Daimler fleet of Southend Corporation Transport did not escape my attention. Their large fleet of very well turned out blue and cream vehicles were a familiar daily sight on the roads of this large Essex resort and its extensive environs. I was particularly drawn to six 1958 built low-bridge Leyland PD3/6's with very attractive Massey bodies. Four of these buses had been converted to open top to operate route 68 along the extensive sea front, stretching from Shoeburyness in the east to Leigh-on-Sea in the west, before turning inland to Leigh Highlands (Thames Drive) and I had many an enjoyable ride on these fine vehicles, as I also did on Eastern National's splendid route 67, which was also open top operated, serving the sea front with four tastefully converted and very character-full 1953 vintage Bristol KSW5Gs! Of the six aforementioned Leyland PD3s of Southend Corporation, two remained as original with closed tops and I grew rather fond of the last member of the batch, namely, fleet number 316 (PHJ 955) and came very close to acquiring this fine old workhorse when she was withdrawn from service and subsequently came up for sale by tender towards the end of April 1978. Sadly, I later

discovered that I had been outbid by fifty pounds on the sealed tendering process by a Mr Peter Newman (later of EnsignBus fame) who I understand, later exported the vehicle to a buyer in Bielefeld, Germany. This was my first attempt at acquiring a bus, sadly unsuccessful, but I'm pleased to note that sister vehicle, fleet number 315 (PHJ 954), was subsequently acquired for preservation by the aforementioned Castle Point Transport Museum Society and now resides in their Canvey Island premises.

(Pictured right: Southend Transport's 1958 Massey bodied Leyland PD3/6 – fleet number 316 circa 1977)



The acquisition of my first bus

As things turned out, I had to wait a further three years to realise the dream of owning my very own Eastern Counties bus. After a long, seemingly interminable wait, my prayers were finally answered, when, lo and behold, in June of 1978, I was contacted by the Eastern Counties Omnibus Society who had recently acquired a 1958 built Bristol MW5G saloon, namely, ex Eastern Counties fleet number LM452 (3014 AH), later renumbered to LM952, from a Cambridge building contractor. The Society's committee were considering



breaking this vehicle for spares for their recently acquired former ECOC Bristol MW5G coach, fleet number LS789 (5789 AH), having deemed the vehicle surplus to their requirements. I was subsequently approached by the Society's treasurer and asked whether I would be interested in taking this vehicle on? Interested!! Wow!! Of course I was INTERESTED!! Two weeks later, a deal was struck with the Society's esteemed treasurer, the late Bernard Watkin, and I found myself the proud custodian of my very own Eastern Counties bus! And I hadn't even had my first driving lesson!

(Pictured above: LM452 when first seen in June 1978)

Old and battered this vehicle may have been, but she immediately became my pride and joy and the first of many, many days of dedicated hard work to restore her to her former glory began in earnest! Six years later, she arose from the ashes, resplendent in original 1950s 'Tilling' livery, taking pride of place at the 1984 Norwich Bus & Coach Rally, organised by the Eastern Transport Collection Society at the Royal Norfolk Showground. I was completely overwhelmed when I learned she had won two prestigious awards at this event, namely 'Best Single Deck (1956-62)' and 'Best Former ECOC Vehicle'. This was indeed, the crowning glory after six long years of hard slog, most of it completely unaided!



(Pictured left: LM452 after full restoration in August 1984)

As far as I am aware, LM452 is the sole survivor of the once extensive Eastern Counties stage carriage Bristol MW fleet, numbering 105 similar examples, making her a very valuable part of Eastern Counties Omnibus Company history! I was very fortunate in that I was able to secure a

transfer back to Norfolk with my job during the winter of 1980. However, I had to wait almost seven months before I could locate suitable storage accommodation for LM452 within reasonable travelling distance of my new home on the eastern outskirts of Norwich. This accommodation was on an open air plot located on a farmer's land, situated on the edge of a former WWII airfield, just outside the mid Norfolk village of Weston Longville.

My second acquisition

In the summer of 1982, another former ECOC Bristol MW5G saloon, also dating from 1958, was acquired by the Eastern Counties Omnibus Society as a possible preservation project. Fleet number LM444 (3006 AH), later renumbered to LM944, had been working for Garnham's Garage in Woodbridge, Suffolk as a school contract bus before acquisition by the Society. When the Society's committee decided not to go ahead with her restoration, I stepped in and offered her a home! The transaction was successfully negotiated



in the autumn of 1982 and the vehicle was moved to sit alongside her sister, LM452, on a piece of hard-standing farmer's land on a former wartime airfield just outside the village of Weston Longville in mid Norfolk. In 1983, LM452 was moved into undercover accommodation for the first time, in a farmer's barn in Blofield Heath, Norfolk, leaving her former fleet-mate, LM444 parked alone on the airfield at Weston Longville.

(Pictured below right on previous page: LM 444 with Garnham's Garage, Woodbridge, Suffolk, c1982)



My third acquisition

Around a year later, in November of 1984, I learned of another fine old former Eastern Counties vehicle which urgently required a new home. A very forlorn looking 1950 Bristol L5G saloon, namely fleet number LL711 (KNG 711), was found languishing in a motor repairer's yard in the Suffolk coastal village of Kessingland, a few miles south of Lowestoft.

(Pictured left: LL711 arriving at Low Farm, South Walsham when first acquired in November 1984)

She instantly evoked fond memories of my very first sighting of an Eastern Counties bus all those years ago when I was in junior school. I had always longed to own an Eastern Counties half cab saloon with an exposed Bristol radiator, but never believed I would ever find one so late in time. Imagine my delight when I discovered this treasure was actually up for sale and a former ECOC example as well! I'd struck gold!

Urgent negotiations with the owner quickly ensued, resulting two weeks later in arrangements being made for her removal from her Kessingland resting place to a rented thatched barn located just outside the picturesque Norfolk Broadland village of South Walsham. With my six year restoration of LM452 now complete, work on her restoration



began almost immediately and culminated four years later when she made her proud debut appearance at the 1988 Norwich Bus & Coach Rally, resplendent once more in sparkling 'Tilling' red and cream livery.

(Pictured below right on previous page: LL711 seen at the East Anglia Transport Museum, Carlton Colville, after her full restoration)

Relinquishing LM444

In the summer of 1985, the un-restored LM444 was moved from her Weston Longville home to an open air parking spot immediately adjacent to LL711's rented thatched barn near South Walsham, where she remained in an un-restored state until 1987. With considerable financial resources being required to complete



LL711's restoration, a very reluctant decision was taken to pass LM444 on to another preservationist and so, in the autumn of 1987, a large tow truck duly arrived from Bedford to remove her to a new home.

(Pictured above: LM444 just before departure to her new owner in Bedford in the autumn of 1987)

Unfortunately, despite my request to be offered 'first refusal' on her should her new owner wish to part with her again, I later learnt, to my horror, that she had been sold to a Barnsley breaker without my knowledge! **TRAGEDY!!** Had I known this was to be her fate, I certainly would never have agreed to part with her! Learning this dreadful news was indeed the lowest point in my preservation career and I was determined that nothing like this should ever be allowed to happen again in future!

My fourth acquisition

Having recovered from the shock of LM444's sad demise, life had to go on and with two fully restored examples from the Eastern Counties Tilling era fleet now in the stable, the time was ripe to seek out another preservation project. Unfortunately, quite a few years passed with very little in the way of former ECOC vehicles from the 'Tilling' era becoming available.



However, in July of 1993, a very battered, semi derelict 1958 built Bristol SC4LK saloon was reported languishing in a motor dealer's yard near High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire. This vehicle turned out to be former Eastern Counties fleet number LC556 (3003 AH) which had been re-registered FRE 699A by a previous owner. This once fine light-weight saloon was delivered new to the company in January of 1959, at the same time LM452 was delivered new!

(Pictured below right on previous page: LC556 on the right at Ward Jones' premises near High Wycombe, Bucks., when first seen in June of 1993)

Following lengthy negotiations with the owner, a Mr Ward Jones, himself an enthusiastic preservationist and owner of a fine early post war former Thames Valley Motor Services low-bridge Bristol K, I managed to secure a deal which included removal of the bus from his High Wycombe premises to Norfolk. Two weeks later, the worn and battered LC556 was returned once again to her home territory, following some twenty years in exile, suspended behind a vintage Atkinson tow truck! Upon arrival, she was immediately placed under cover in a rented shed at Model Farm in the South Norfolk village of Aslacton. Close examination of the bus revealed much work to be done to bring her anywhere near back to her former glory and eleven solid years later, restoration was still very much in progress!



(Pictured above: LC556 arriving on suspended tow at Model Farm, Aslacton, Norfolk in July of 1993)

Finally, in May of 2005, LC556 emerged from her garage resplendent in 'Tilling' ECOC livery to become the very first red and cream liveried Bristol SC4LK saloon to be fully restored. She made her rally debut at the East Anglia Transport Museum's summer 'Bus Event' in July of 2006 and took part in a '75th Anniversary of Eastern Counties Omnibus Company' road run from the museum at Carlton Colville to Beccles, Old Market Bus Terminal, accompanied by former fleet-mates, Bristol prototype LS4G, fleet number LL744 (MAH 744) from the Ipswich Transport Museum and Bristol RESL6G, fleet



number RS658 (KVF 658E) from the Eastern Transport Collection Society. She attended the First Eastern Counties 'Vintage Bus Running Day' on the 2nd of September 2006 in Norwich to commemorate the ECOC 75th anniversary and subsequently won 'Best in Show' at the Norwich Bus Rally held at the Royal Norfolk Showground, the following day. A real crowning moment! In late 2014, I was extremely fortunate in locating the owner of LC556's original registration mark, 3003 AH, which had been purchased as a 'cherished plate' by a gentleman in the Derby area,

whose initials happened to be A.H. Following some lengthy negotiation, mainly around the price, I managed to persuade the gentleman to relinquish the plate to me so that it could be repatriated to LC556 to complete the painstaking eleven year restoration.

(Pictured above: LC556 shortly after undergoing her eleven year restoration in May of 2006)

My fifth acquisition

In the autumn of 2020 I was very fortunate to become the next joint custodian of LKH133 (HPW 133), a fine example of a 1949 Bristol K5G with 56 seat Eastern Coach Works bodywork. This vehicle had been owned and restored by Mr David Gray of Lincoln since 1977 and had spent many years as a working exhibit at the Lincolnshire Road Transport Museum in North Hykeham, situated just outside the cathedral city of Lincoln. In September 2020, negotiations with David were successfully completed resulting in my long held ambition to repatriate this wonderful example of Eastern Counties history to its home territory. The vehicle is now in the safe custody of the author and the Revd. Michael Kingston and has since had its interior extensively restored and the original Tilling style 'thin over thick' front destination indicator reinstated,



along with the re-chroming of most of the internal and external coach fittings. A start has also been made on refurbishing all the seats with new old stock original style moquette sourced from the Lincoln

Transport Museum. Much of this work was carried out during the two Covid lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. The vehicle attended the Buses Festival hosted by Buses Magazine publisher, Key Publishers, at the East of England Showground near Peterborough in August of 2022 and won the prestigious award of best double decker in the show!

(Pictured below right on previous page: LKH133 seen in September 2022 in Rouen Road, Norwich during the annual Norwich Busmens' Reunion, proudly exhibiting her newly reinstated front destination indicator and freshly re-chromed headlamp bezzels)

What next?

Well ... you may well ask! I must admit that my ultimate ambition is to be instrumental in the establishment of a permanent 'Eastern Counties Bus Museum' to house a selection of fully restored former ECOC vehicles, together with a comprehensive collection of Company artefacts, literature and memorabilia and to possibly acquire one more 'Tilling' era Eastern Counties vehicle to join the stable presently occupied by the now fully restored quartette!



The author

Chapter 2

Early beginnings

Introduction



(A Great Eastern Railway Milnes-Daimler omnibus on the Ipswich-Shotley route which commenced in 1904)

The very first motor bus services to operate in East Anglia were those provided by the **Great Eastern Railway Company Ltd** (GER), the first of which was a route running from Lowestoft to Southwold, which was established on the 18th of July 1904. The service was operated by three twenty horse power double decked Milnes-Daimlers which seated sixteen passengers inside, eighteen outside (upstairs) and two beside the driver. Other services were established over the next few years including routes from Norwich to Loddon and Beccles, Ipswich to Shotley and from Bury St Edmunds and Horningsheath to Stanton. These services lasted until around 1913, when the Railway Company decided not to pursue further interest in road passenger transport; the services subsequently passing to the newly formed **United Automobile Services Ltd**, in respect of the Lowestoft to Southwold and the Norwich to Loddon and Beccles routes and to the **Eastern Counties Road Car Company Ltd**, in respect of the Bury St Edmunds/Horningsheath to Stanton and the Ipswich to Shotley services. Further services were established in Essex, centering on the towns of Harwich, Clacton, Colchester

and Chelmsford, which upon cessation by the GER, were taken over by the **National Steam Car Company Ltd** of Chelmsford, a company which later became a constituent of the soon to be formed **Eastern National Omnibus Company Ltd** (ENOC).

In order to fully understand the origins of the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company, it is useful to explore the early days of road passenger transport in East Anglia. The following short histories of the four predecessor companies shed some light on this fascinating era.

Ortona Motor Company Ltd (and it's predecessors in Cambridge)

Vehicle livery: A special shade of green known as 'Ortona Green' with roofs painted white.



(CE 9786 – an early Tilling Stevens open decked omnibus seen here in Cambridge about to depart on Service 7 to Royston. This route became Service 107 in Eastern Counties days. This vehicle was considered too elderly to be transferred into the new Eastern Counties fleet in October of 1931 and was subsequently disposed of.)

On the 15th of April 1905, two companies began the first motor bus service in the city of Cambridge. Not only were they in competition with each other, but also with the tramway service. The **Cambridge University and Town Motor Omnibus Company Ltd** ran a 25 horse powered light blue liveried Straker Squire - registered CE 299.

Their rival company was the **Cambridge Motor Omnibus Company Ltd** which operated two double decked Thorneycroft omnibuses. On the first day of service, The Cambridge University and Town Motor Omnibus Company Ltd carried about 1,705 passengers between 4:30pm and 9:30pm, with a fare of one penny.

In those early days there were no set stops. If one wished to board a bus, one needed to wave as the bus approached to get it to stop. It was becoming apparent that the companies were holding poor safety records and were causing damage to kerbs, lamp posts and other street furniture. When a ticket person was accidentally killed, this led to both companies having their licences to operate withdrawn in 1906.

On the 1st of August 1907, James Berry Walford founded the **Ortona Motor Company Ltd** with three new Scott-Stirling saloons and a second hand Maudslay double decker omnibus. He promised to make it a success, despite the setbacks of the previous two companies. These first four Ortona buses ran in direct competition to the Street Tramways, having the advantage that they could travel from the entrance of the railway station, to the Post Office and then over the River Cam to New Chesterton, terminating at De Freville Avenue.

With the Ortona buses, came fixed bus stops, the tramway company having chosen to stop whenever passengers requested. It is said that James Berry Walford decided on the name Ortona after visiting the place of that name in Italy whilst holidaying on a Mediterranean cruise ship. The Ortona buses adopted a smart leaf green livery with red wheels and body trim and ran every fifteen minutes from 8:00am to 9:35pm, Monday to Saturday.



(ER 4922 – a Leyland GH7 omnibus with Dodson 53 seat open decked bodywork was new in 1926 and is seen here in Cambridge awaiting departure on Service 3 to Shelford. This solid tyred vehicle was transferred to the new Eastern Counties fleet in October of 1931 and became their fleet number AA40.)

By the start of the 1920's, Ortona had rival firms, firstly with **Whippet** in 1919 and then with the **Burwell and District Bus Company** in 1922. A new bus station for the city was duly opened in 1925 at Drummer Street. However, the building of the new bus station sparked a great deal of controversy between the City Council and the city's residents, because the proposed site took land from Christ's Piece, which was a long recognised public amenity. A mass protest involving some three thousand people took place because the Council started work before approval had been given. Protesters were carried in carts to the Mayors house, with the horses being replaced by supporters. Before Drummer Street bus station had been built, the original bus service ran from the railway station to the Post Office at the top of Petty Cury and then proceeded to its terminus over the River Cam in the village of Chesterton.



On the 1st of October 1931, the Ortona Motor Company was taken over by the newly formed **Eastern Counties Omnibus Company Ltd**, which was based in Norwich. The green liveried Ortona buses then changed to the Tilling red and cream of Eastern Counties. The Cambridge Street Tramways carried on for another seven years, following the emergence of the Ortona Motor Company, until their revenue receipts became so poor that the Company could not afford to pay the Council for the upkeep of the road.

A week prior to the closure of the tramways, the tram cars carried notices informing passengers that the trams would no longer run after the 18th of February 1914 and suggested that they should take their children on them, so they would be able to remember them. On the last day of operation, the receivers decided that the trams should stop early to prevent student vandalism! The last tram duly departed the railway station at 6.25pm, appropriately driven by Mr Ephraim Skinner, the Company's oldest and longest serving driver. Ortona Motor Company contributed 96 vehicles to the new Eastern Counties fleet.

(ER 5305 – a Leyland GH7 omnibus with Dodson 53 seat open decked bodywork and solid tyres was new in 1926 and became fleet number AA47 upon transfer to the new Eastern Counties fleet in October of 1931.)

Peterborough Electric Traction Company Ltd

Vehicle livery: A special shade of brown known as 'Lake Brown' on the lower panels with white above on saloons. On double decked vehicles, the panels between the decks were also painted 'Lake Brown'.



(This fascinating photograph captures FL 4760 – an SOS 'S' type saloon with Ransomes 28 seat bodywork, delivered in 1926, receiving attention from industrious workshop staff in the Peterborough's Lincoln Road paint-shop. This vehicle was transferred to the new Eastern Counties fleet in October of 1931, becoming fleet number S18.)

There is a record of a form of public transport in Peterborough going back to the eighteenth century, when Sedan chairs were used to carry passengers from point to point; but public transport was modernised by the introduction of horse drawn tram-cars in September of 1878. This was two years before a similar means of conveyance was seen on the streets of Cambridge and Ipswich.

It was recognised that the electric tramcar was a logical development and the **Peterborough Electric Traction Company Ltd** was incorporated on the 5th of August 1902, with the first electric tram running on the 23rd of January of the following year. This Company, the oldest of the four constituents of Eastern Counties, was a subsidiary of the **British Electric Traction Company Ltd** (BAT), which was itself formed in October of 1896 to promote the introduction of electric traction in various parts of the UK. The Peterborough tramway system was a comparatively small one. There were only fourteen tram-cars in the fleet and these lasted until the trams were finally withdrawn on the 15th of November 1930.

In the meantime, and as early as 1913, the motor bus was introduced into the fleet with four Straker Squire vehicles, two saloons and two charabancs, mainly employed on feeder services to the trams. After the First World War, further buses were purchased and services to outlying districts started. By 1925 the bus fleet consisted of only nine vehicles, but from then on considerable expansion took place with new vehicles entering service each year. These were mainly of Leyland and SOS manufacture. SOS was the chassis type manufactured by the Birmingham and Midland Motor Omnibus Company Ltd (BMMO) primarily for their own use, but also supplied to various other operators including Ortona Motor Company Ltd, but a number of vehicles of other makes, mainly small capacity, were added to the fleet with the purchase of the businesses of other small operators.



(FL 8380 – a 1930 all Leyland Titan TD1 with 48 seat low-bridge bodywork, seen here after transfer to the new Eastern Counties fleet, awaits departure to March on route 351, via Whittlesey and Benwick from Peterborough's, Bishops Road bus station.)

After twenty-seven years of trams, the bus was now the sole passenger carrying vehicle in Peterborough and the surrounding district, but a change of ownership was not far off as the Peterborough Electric Traction Company Ltd was soon to disappear with the formation of the **Eastern Counties Omnibus Company Ltd**, which occurred on the 1st of October 1931.

Peterborough Electric Traction Company Ltd contributed a total of **76** vehicles to the new fleet.



(Another fascinating photograph, which captures perfectly, the delights of a bygone age. FL 5664 – an SOS ‘Q’ type saloon keeps company with HA 3503 – an SOS ‘S’ type, with workshop staff proudly posing for the camera outside the March, Wisbech Road garage. The ‘Q’ sports a Brush 37 seat body whilst the ‘S’ carries Carlyle 28 seat bodywork. These two vehicles which were new in 1927 and 1925 respectively, were transferred to the new Eastern Counties fleet in October 1931 and received fleet numbers Q2 and S11.)

Eastern Counties Road Car Company Ltd

Vehicle livery: Originally all over 'Tilling' red. Later, saloons were painted red on lower panels and white above and double decked vehicles were painted red up to above the lower deck windows with white above.

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 of 1919. After some experimental operations, it was decided to form a company

called **Eastern Counties Road Car Company Limited (ECRC)**. This new company was registered on the 30th of August 1919 and on the 1st of September it took over both the vehicles and services operated by the Wolsey brothers, from offices in Dog's Head Street, Ipswich, which were 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.



(XB 8380 – a 1920 built Tilling bodied 51 seat open decked Tilling Stevens Petrol Electric TS7 omnibus in the early all over red livery, waits in line for a presumed departure to a Suffolk destination. Unfortunately, the location of this photograph is unknown. Interesting to note that ‘new fangled’ pneumatic tyres are carried on the front axle, whilst the rear axle still bears old style solid tyres. This vehicle was transferred to the new Eastern Counties fleet in October of 1931, becoming fleet number PE30.)

About sixteen Tilling Stevens TS3 petrol electric omnibuses 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.



(DX 6139 – a 1926 built TSM B9A saloon with 31 seat Tilling bodywork was caught by the photographer having arrived at Felixstowe bus station from Ipswich. The Eastern Counties Road Car Company name can clearly be seen in this view affixed above the garage entrance. This vehicle was transferred to the new Eastern Counties fleet in October of 1931 becoming fleet number PA75.)

Back in Ipswich, a network of routes was rapidly established, leading to the setting up of another base at Bury St. Edmunds. Twenty-four more vehicles joined the original sixteen in 1920, providing a sizeable fleet of forty 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 of 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 Ltd.



(XA 8692 – a 1920 built Tilling bodied Tilling Stevens TS3 open decked omnibus seating 51 passengers is seen here operating a Bury St Edmunds to Newmarket service in the early days of the Company. This vehicle was transferred to the new Eastern Counties fleet in October of 1931, receiving fleet number PE19.)

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. Indeed, the former name is 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 the 10th of December 1924, with a decision to convert the entire tramway system to trolleybuses.

E.C.R.C. must have been very disappointed, but quickly moved on to consolidate its position in the county. By the end of 1926, it had a fleet of around seventy 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 and **D. Kerridge of Needham Market** and **T. H. Butler of Ipswich**, both in 1930.



(DX 3443 – A Tilling Stevens Petrol Electric saloon with a 28 seat Tilling body seen outside the Bury St Edmunds garage, awaiting departure to the horse racing capital of Newmarket. This vehicle was one of many considered too old to be transferred to the new Eastern Counties fleet and subsequently disposed of.)

These brought a motley collection of vehicles into the company's fleet, 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 the 1st of 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 Ltd** (E.C.O.C.), but with headquarters at Norwich. The new company quickly established different practices and vehicle policy and the E.C.R.C. quietly slipped 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. service numbers, thus rendering all the former enamelled route signs employed by ECRC obsolete at a stroke!

The Eastern Counties Road Car Company contributed **130** vehicles to the new fleet.

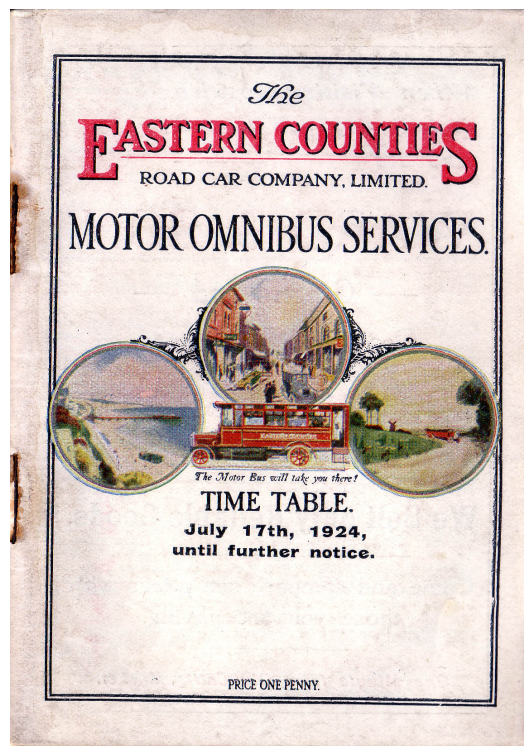
United Automobile Services Ltd (East Anglia area)

Vehicle livery: Originally two shades of grey, darker grey on lower panels. A blue band was added later. Changed to yellow and black in 1923. Changed again to yellow and brown in 1927. Changed again to red and white in 1930, although not all vehicles were repainted by the time of transfer to the new Eastern Counties fleet.



On the 4th of 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 the 18th of January 1913, after the local Council had granted licences to United to operate between the two towns.



(PW 9901 – A delightfully nostalgic view of the Butter Cross in the Suffolk market town of Bungay, depicting this 1927 built ADC 415A United bodied, 32 seat saloon, resting with its proud crew, before setting off for the seaside resort of Lowestoft, where its body was built and where the company was inaugurated in April of 1912. This vehicle was transferred to the new Eastern Counties fleet in October of 1931, retaining its original United fleet number F101. Interestingly, this view has changed little in nigh on 100 years!)

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 inaugurated, 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 of May 1916. The only other GER service to operate after the commencement of hostilities was

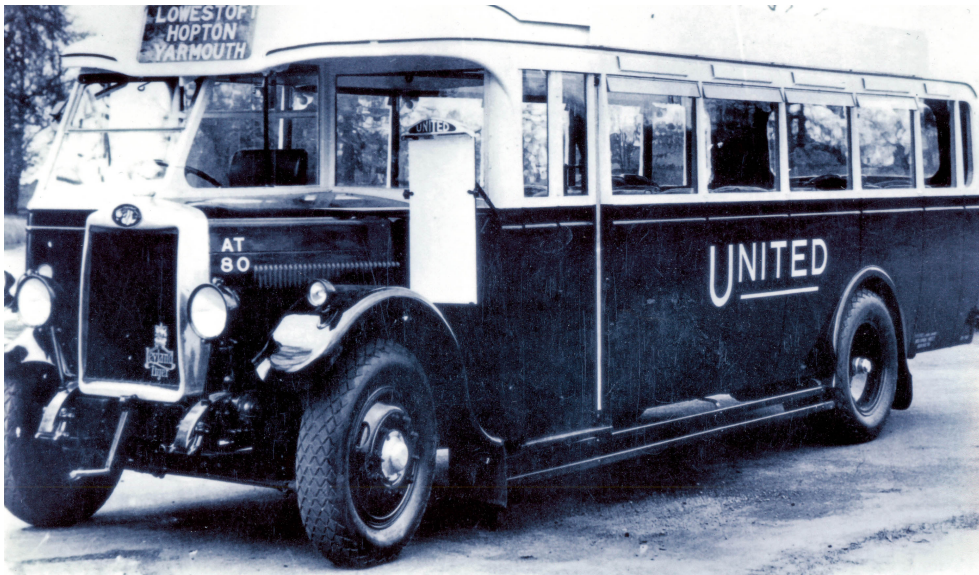
that between Ipswich and Shotley, but when the Royal Navy Station at Shotley became a prohibited area, the service was temporarily withdrawn in August of 1916.

At the end of the war, United was set to expand. New routes radiating from Great Yarmouth, Norwich, Cromer and King's Lynn were commenced 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 latter day operations of United, which became one of the largest bus and coach operations in the United Kingdom.



(AH 0716 – An early bus spotter's delight! This nostalgic view of a miscellany of United saloon omnibuses awaiting departure to various Norfolk and north Suffolk destinations from the original Norwich bus terminus in Recorder Road, close by the city's Thorpe railway station, dates from just after the First World War. It is unlikely any of these vehicles were transferred to the new Eastern Counties fleet in October of 1931, as they would have been considered too elderly by that time.)

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 these 'omnibuses' were really lorries fitted with seats under a canvas hood. In 1921, United built their first new body. This was the start of a very successful local coach building industry, which remained in the town until 1987, albeit under the names of **Eastern Counties Coach Works** and **Eastern Coach Works Ltd**, before finally being bought out by British Leyland Motor Corporation in 1969, when the name Eastern Coach Works purely became a trading name of the much larger nationalised concern.



(VF 7644 – a Leyland TS3 with 29 seat United coach bodywork was new in May of 1930 and was one of the newer vehicles to be transferred to the new Eastern Counties fleet a year later. Bearing fleet number AT80, this vehicle sports a modern style roller destination blind screened up for the Yarmouth-Lowestoft route 1.)

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 those from acquired businesses.

By October of 1931, the United fleet in the East Anglia district had reached a total of **230** vehicles, so it was by far 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 October of 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.



Chapter 3

A brief history of the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company from its formation in July of 1931 to its full convergence with the National Bus Company in December of 1969

The **Eastern Counties Omnibus Company Ltd** was registered on the 14th of July 1931 to amalgamate four relatively small undertakings in East Anglia, all of which were subsidiary companies of **Tilling** and **British Automobile Traction Ltd (BAT)**. Its management hoped that the larger company would result in increased efficiency and improved results.

The oldest constituent company was the **Peterborough Electric Traction Company Ltd (PET)**, a subsidiary of the **British Electric Traction Company Ltd (BET)** registered on the 5th of August 1902, and from May of 1928, placed under Tilling and BAT control.

The second oldest constituent was the **Ortona Motor Company Limited** of Cambridge, founded in August of 1907. From 1914, the company had a BAT investment and was placed under Tilling and BAT control in May of 1928.



(A182 - NG 1917 – This 52 seat ECOC bodied Leyland Titan TD1, was one of the very first brand new double deck vehicles to be purchased by the newly formed Eastern Counties Omnibus Company in January of 1932. It served the Company for 18 years, six of those through the long dark years of WWII, and received a new Eastern Coach Works body in March of 1942.)

The third and youngest constituent was the **Eastern Counties Road Car Company Ltd (ECRC)** of Ipswich, a Tilling subsidiary registered on the 30th of August 1919 and placed under Tilling and BAT control in May of 1928.

The fourth and largest constituent was the eastern operating area of **United Automobile Services Ltd**, founded in Lowestoft and registered on the 4th of April 1912. A controlling interest in United was purchased jointly by the **London & North Eastern Railway Company Ltd (LNER)** and Tilling and BAT in July of 1929.



(AT128 - NG 3872 – This Leyland TS4 was supplied brand new to the Company in April of 1933 with a 29 seat ECOC rear entrance coach body. It was amongst the very first brand new single deck vehicles to be purchased new by the newly formed Company. This coach received a new ECW body in January of 1942 and served the Company for 17 years until retirement in 1950. It is seen here

operating local Norwich city service 90 from Cringleford to Thorpe St Andrew, after being downgraded to stage carriage duties towards the end of its service life.)

Negotiations for the formation of the new company (as yet un-named) were conducted between the United management and Mr J. F. Heaton for Tilling and BAT and a provisional agreement dated 28th of May 1931 stated inter alia that "United shall sell (its eastern area assets) and a new company shall buy..." as at close of business on the 30th of September 1931. The provisional agreement was confirmed as the final agreement on the 24th of July 1931 and the **Eastern Counties Omnibus Company Ltd** (ECOC) was then in business with its head office established at 79, Thorpe Road, Norwich.

The agreements to transfer PET, Ortona and ECRC to the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company Ltd were all dated 24th of July 1931, but not registered until 23rd of October 1931.

The final structure of ECOC at its formation was as follows:-

- United Automobile Services Ltd - 43.2%
- Tilling & British Automobile Traction Company Ltd - 27.6%
- London & North Eastern Railway Company Ltd - 24.3%
- London, Midland & Scottish Railway Company Ltd - 3.3%
- Miscellaneous shareholders - 1.6%
- The new company was valued at £672,069.00.

In addition to the transfer of vehicles, services and depots, the United coach factory at Laundry Lane, Lowestoft was also transferred, to become a division of ECOC.

The Company pursued a policy of absorbing other operators, both large and small, within its area, acquiring no fewer than fifty businesses before WWII. The most notable of these was the **Norwich Electric Tramways Company**, in which ECOC acquired a controlling interest on the 1st of December 1933 and this resulted in the abandonment of the Norwich trams on the 10th of December 1935.

(Norwich Electric Tramways Company car number 13 is seen here operating the Newmarket Road to Riverside Road route in Norwich city centre in the early 1930s.)



Express coach routes in the area had been mainly in the hands of other operators, but the purchase of **Bush & Twiddy's 'East Anglian Highways'** in 1932, **Westminster Coaching Services Ltd**, **Pullman Lounge Coaches**, **Varsity Express Motors Ltd** and **Varsity Coaches Ltd** in 1933, provided the framework for the subsequent ECOC express coach services.

The **532** omnibuses owned by ECOC at its formation were a varied collection, but comparatively modern. Early withdrawal and replacement by standardised vehicles was not economically feasible, so a programme of rehabilitation was undertaken. Single and double deck buses were re-bodied and a few single deck chassis were re-bodied as double deck vehicles. The diesel engine had firmly established itself in the bus industry by the mid 1930s and showed considerable economies over the petrol engine. From 1936, the petrol engines in all but the older re-bodied vehicles were progressively replaced by Gardner 4LW oil engines in most single deck chassis and by Gardner 5LW units in a few single deck and nearly all double deck chassis.

By 1936, the coach factory with a workforce of 950, was producing one double deck and nine single deck bodies per week, both for ECOC and other operators. It was decided to separate the coach-building activities from the operating side of ECOC and so, on the 1st of July 1936, **Eastern Counties Coachworks Ltd** came into being, although it remained a wholly owned subsidiary of ECOC. Its name was simplified to **Eastern Coach Works Ltd** (ECW) in 1937. At about this time, Laundry Lane, Lowestoft was renamed Eastern Way.

Tilling and BAT was put into voluntary liquidation on the 28th of September 1942 and its property and assets were equally divided between two new companies - **BET Omnibus Services Ltd** and **Tilling Motor Services Ltd**. Eastern Counties Omnibus Company was allocated to Tilling Motor Services Ltd.

War breaks out!



(Hitler's wave of destruction hit the fine city of Norwich in 1941 when these two unfortunate omnibus victims were caught by a photographer from Norfolk County Council shortly after a bombing raid targeting the bus station and the historic city centre. Here we see the extensively damaged remains of two 1932 built Leyland Titans AH187 (NG 2722) and A189 (NG 2724). Both of these vehicles were subsequently rebuilt with new bodies shortly afterwards, AH 187 receiving a new ECW body, whilst A189 received a new Brush built one.)

WWII started on the 3rd of September 1939, and by October of 1942, supplies of petrol and diesel fuel were very scarce. The Ministry of War Transport gave instructions to the London Passenger Transport Board and 57 provincial operators, each of whom had more than 150 buses, to convert 10% of their fleet for 'producer gas' operation. This situation had been foreseen by the chairman of Tilling Motor Services, Sir J. Frederick Heaton, and he was well ahead with his group of companies. Development work on a 'producer gas' unit mounted on a trailer, was carried out by the Eastern National Omnibus Company Ltd (ENOC) at Chelmsford and they turned over the entire fleet at Maldon depot to gas operation on the 1st of May 1941. Clacton (ENOC) and Cromer (ECOC) garages were similarly converted in 1942 and together with Grays (LPTB) were used to demonstrate gas buses to other operators. By March of 1943, ECOC had twenty-six gas buses and by the end of the year they expected to have 81 running. All of the buses converted to run on gas had petrol engines, since it was very difficult to persuade a diesel engine to function satisfactorily. In the middle of September 1944,

the effects of U-boats on shipping had considerably lessened and crude oil supplies improved, so the Ministry authorised the bus industry to abandon the use of gas buses with immediate effect, much to the relief of all concerned!

Peace once more



(An early post war scene in the centre of Norwich as the city struggles to return to normality following the huge damage inflicted upon it during the dark days of World War II. The large building under reconstruction in the foreground is Curl's department store and this well loaded, early post war Bristol L5G saloon, with 35 seat ECW bodywork, is patiently waiting for its opportunity to turn right into Rampant Horse Street from Red Lion Street on a local city service.)

Once the war was over, ECOC settled down to a vehicle purchasing programme which was basically similar to that of any other Tilling group company, although it opted for 4 and 5 cylinder diesel engines as opposed to 5 and 6 cylinder engines by most companies. The vehicle rehabilitation scheme, suspended for the duration of the war, was restarted on a limited scale to cover the period when new chassis were in short supply. The only pre-war vehicles re-bodied were Leyland TD2s of the A & AH classes in 1949. The war-time Bristol Ks in the LK & LKH classes and some post-war Bristol Ls in the LL class, which had entered service with second-hand bodies, were also re-bodied around this time. By the end of 1958, virtually all of the pre-war fleet had been withdrawn. The Company continued its pursuance of its pre-war policy of absorbing other operators in order to consolidate its network of stage carriage services in East Anglia.

The emergence of the British Transport Commission

The **British Transport Commission (BTC)** was set up under the terms of the 1947 Transport Act and on the 1st of January 1948, entered into ownership and control of a large part of inland transport. Its Railway Executive managed the former main line railway companies, including their interests in the bus companies in which they had purchased shares. Since the BTC already held considerable shareholdings in most of the Tilling companies, it made tentative enquiries about the possibility of purchasing Tilling Motor Services from the Tilling group. Sir J. Frederick Heaton negotiated for Tillings and the agreement to sell to the BTC was signed on the 5th of November 1948, but back dated with effect from the 1st of January 1948. Hence ECOC and ECW passed completely into public ownership and ECW ceased to be a subsidiary of ECOC.

In late 1948, the BTC set up the **Road Transport Executive**, whose main function appears to have been the setting up of **British Road Services (BRS)** for freight, but also managed the road transport interests. Following the purchase of the **Scottish Motor Traction Company** road transport interests in March of 1949, the Commission formed a **Road Passenger Executive**. After a change of government in 1951, a review of the 1947 Transport Act was undertaken and by a further Transport Act of 1953, the BTC was established as the direct management organisation and its subsidiary Road Passenger Executive was abolished.

More legislation appeared on the statute book with the passing of the 1962 Transport Act, which abolished the BTC and formed a **Transport Holding Company** to look after road and bus interests.



(Post war enamel time table case header plate)

One Man Operation

With the need for economy of operation becoming ever more paramount in the post war era, the concept of introducing one man operated stage carriage buses was pioneered as long ago as the mid 1950s by the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company.

The first vehicles to be fitted out for this purpose were the newly designed light weight Bristol SC4LK saloons, the first of which, fleet number LC501 (TVF 501), was delivered new to the Company in December of 1955, followed by a further seventy-seven such examples over the years to March of 1961.

An electrically motorised Setright Speed ticket machine unit was fixed to the bulkhead which rested on the engine compartment cover by means of a hinged holding device and the driver's seat comprised a swivel mechanism, allowing the driver to turn towards the nearside of the vehicle to face the passengers in order to accept their fares as they boarded the bus.



(An official ECW photograph of LC501 (TVF 501) taken at Everitts Park, Lowestoft, sees Eastern Counties' very first light weight Bristol SC4LK 35 seat saloon posing for the camera, shortly before delivery in December of 1955 as the Company's very first purpose built one man operated bus.)

As the decade progressed, this concept was quickly adopted by many other operators who were anxious to keep their operating costs to a minimum. The reasons for this policy were very real, with revenues noticeably declining as a consequence of mass car ownership quickly becoming a reality and thus threatening the viability of many lightly loaded rural bus services.

By the early 1960s, many of the Company's rural stage carriage routes had been converted to one man operation (OMO) and another batch of vehicles, this time from the LM class, comprising Bristol LS and MW saloons, were duly converted to cope with the ever increasing demand for operational economy.

The emergence of the National Bus Company and the corporate image



(RL735 (AAH 735J) a 1970 Bristol RELL6G with 53 seat ECW bodywork poses for the camera on the front coach park of Great Yarmouth's Wellington Road garage c1975, resplendent in its all over advert extolling the virtues of sending parcels by bus in the National Bus Company era.)

A further Transport Act, introduced in 1968, resulted in the setting up of the **National Bus Company** (NBC) on the 1st of January 1969, under whose control came all of the Transport Holding Company's subsidiaries, including ECOG. The formation of the National Bus Company heralded many changes in the bus industry. Outwardly, to the travelling public, standardised liveries of poppy red and white and leaf green and white became the norm to present a corporate NBC image and not so obviously, a start was made on vehicle standardisation, initially based on the Bristol VRT and Bristol RE chassis with bodywork by ECW.

However, in July of 1969, the nationalised **British Leyland Motor Corporation** (BLMC) jointly formed the **Leyland National Company Ltd** to produce a new range of single deck buses. In 1970, control of this company passed to **Bus Manufacturers (Holdings) Ltd**, a company jointly owned by NBC and BLMC and the first bus duly appeared in prototype form in October of 1970 as the Leyland National. Eastern Counties received its first examples of these totally new fangled machines in 1973.



Tilling vehicles in the NBC era...



(FLF440 (GPW 440D) Eastern Counties' very first Bristol FLF6G Lodekka delivered in January of 1966, sporting the new corporate National Bus Company poppy red and white livery scheme. This 70 seat ECW bodied bus is seen here resting at the Hellesdon, Park Way terminus of Norwich city route 511 c1980.)

The vast majority of the fleet delivered during the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s survived into the National Bus Company era. The last few examples to be withdrawn were members of the Bristol FLF class which remained in service to cover school contract work at Lowestoft until mid 1987.

The last saloon to remain in service was:

RL706 (TVF 706G) which was withdrawn in 1986.

The last double deckers to remain in service were:

FLF446 (GVF 446D) **FLF448** (HPW 448D) **FLF457** (JPW 457D) **FLF466** (KAH 466D) &

FLF470 (KNG 470D) which were all withdrawn in 1987.

The last coach to remain in service was:

RE897 (SVF 897G) which was withdrawn in 1981

Chapter 4

The vehicles

Introduction

The Eastern Counties Omnibus Company operated a mainly Bristol/Eastern Coach Works fleet during the 'Tilling' era, but owing to the amalgamation of the four predecessor companies which formed Eastern Counties in October of 1931, a relatively modern, but extremely varied fleet was inherited, comprising many different makes and models with an interesting variety of bodywork. As time progressed, the Company worked towards standardising on a typically 'Tilling' fleet, comprising the rugged, well engineered Bristol chassis combined with the very attractive and durable bodywork by Eastern Coach Works of Lowestoft. It is worthy of note here to mention again that Eastern Coach Works Ltd was originally wholly owned by the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company, being inherited as part of the merger of the aforesaid predecessor companies. Between 1931 and 1936 the coach building works was known as Eastern Counties Coach Works Ltd.



(This interesting photograph from the Eastern Daily Press archives takes a tantalising peek into the highly industrious world of the Eastern Coach Works factory at Eastern Way, Lowestoft. This view dates from 1959 and clearly shows the high level of activity which once took place in this venerable and much respected establishment. Vehicles under construction include Bristol LD type Lodekkas and MW and SC saloons.)

Eastern Counties adopted a fleet classification system comprising prefix letters followed by suffix numbers. All Bristol manufactured vehicles were classified with the prefix letter L whilst Leyland constructed vehicles were prefixed with the letter A. So for example, Bristol Ks with standard low-bridge bodywork were classified LK with the high-bridge variants being classified LKH. Leyland TD2s were classified A if low-bridge bodied and AH if high-bridge bodied. So good so far! However, despite what could have been a very simple vehicle classification system for the fleet, it became somewhat complicated as the Company moved into the post-war era. Unfortunately, the system failed to follow this pattern when it was applied to subsequent deliveries of later mainly Bristol models. A good example here, is that there was no distinction made between the three Bristol L variants (L, LL and LWL), which were all classified as LL. To further add to the confusion, all the new Bristol LS and MW stage carriage saloons delivered between the years 1957 and 1959 were also initially classified as LL, despite these new arrivals having totally different chassis and body specifications to Bristol L types! This 'error' was partially corrected in 1960, when all of these vehicles were re-classified as LM, upon conversion to one man operation. Similarly, when the first Bristol Lodekkas arrived, these were classified as LKD, a term which could identify them as low-bridge Bristol Ks with doors perhaps? This 'fault' was never rectified, as all Bristol LD Lodekkas retained their LKD classification prefixes throughout their entire service lives. Common sense returned in 1960 when later delivered Lodekkas of the FS and FLF types were correctly classified as LFS and FLF respectively. However, the biggest anomaly of all fell upon the coach fleet, where all Bristol manufactured coaches were classified as LS and all dual purpose vehicles were classified as LE, irrespective of their chassis designation!



(LKD179 (UNG 179) was one of 55 LD type Bristol Lodekkas delivered to the Company between 1954 and 1959. The LKD class was something of an anomaly, as the classification prefix letters did not correctly refer to the vehicles falling within this category! Surely the prefix LLD would have been more appropriate? Yet all the vehicles in the LKD class retained their original prefix letters

throughout their entire service lives, despite them having no relationship whatsoever to their predecessors in the correctly prefixed LK class! LKD179 was new in May of 1956 and is seen here in the old Colchester Bus Park, awaiting its return journey to Ipswich, via Capel, East Bergholt and Stratford St Mary on Service 207.)



Vehicles delivered NEW to Eastern Counties Omnibus Company

Section 1 - Standard Bristol & Leyland vehicles

The A & AH classes

There were **50** members of the A & AH class.

Members of this class comprised:

- five Leyland TD1 51 seat Leyland bodied low-bridge double deck buses delivered in 1932
- five Leyland TD1 52 seat ECOC bodied low-bridge double deck buses delivered in 1932
- twenty-one Leyland TD2 56 seat ECOC bodied low-bridge double deck buses delivered in 1932 and 1933
- ten Leyland TD4 60 seat ECOC bodied high-bridge double deck buses delivered in 1935

These vehicles were primarily used on stage carriage city and county services. Many members of the A & AH class were renumbered at various times and many of the low-bridge A class were for some mysterious reason, reclassified as AH during the war years. All were withdrawn from passenger service by the end of 1961.

This class also included a further **93** members which were acquired second hand as a result of the merger of the four constituent companies in October of 1931, the acquisition of Norwich Electric Tramways Ltd in 1935 and a further two acquired from Plymouth Corporation Transport. These vehicles are shown under the '**vehicles acquired second hand**' heading.



(An unidentified A class Leyland TD2 with 52 seat ECOC bodywork seen here resting outside the Norwich, Surrey Street bus garage c1940. Note the white tipped mudguards and the slit headlamp attachments to comply with wartime regulations. Two similar vehicles were destroyed by enemy action here in 1941.)



Fleet No.	Reg.No.	Chassis	Body	Date In	Date Out	2 nd No.	3 rd No.
A176	NG1911	Leyland Titan TD1	L51R	Jan 1932	1950		
A177	NG1912	Leyland Titan TD1	L51R	Jan 1932	1952		
A178	NG1913	Leyland Titan TD1	L51R	Jan 1932	1951		
A179	NG1914	Leyland Titan TD1	L51R	Jan 1932	1952		
A180	NG1915	Leyland Titan TD1	L51R	Jan 1932	1951	AH180	
A181	NG1916	Leyland Titan TD1	L52R	Jan 1932	1950		
A182	NG1917	Leyland Titan TD1	L52R	Jan 1932	1950		
A183	NG1918	Leyland Titan TD1	L52R	Jan 1932	1950		
A184	NG1919	Leyland Titan TD1	L52R	Jan 1932	1950		
A185	NG1920	Leyland Titan TD1	L52R	Jan 1932	1950		



(A195 (NG 2730) a 1932 built Leyland Titan TD2 with ECW 56 seat bodywork, awaiting departure to Yarmouth, via the Broads, from Norwich, Surrey Street bus station, some time during the mid 1950s. This vehicle originally carried an ECOC built body, but received this new post war one in May of 1950, which saw it through until withdrawal some ten years later in 1960, following an amazing 28 years of passenger carrying service!)

Fleet No.	Reg.No.	Chassis	Body	Date In	Date Out	2 nd No.	3 rd No.
A186	NG2721	Leyland Titan TD2	L56R	Jul 1932	1950	AH186	
A187	NG2722	Leyland Titan TD2	L56R	Jul 1932	1952	AH187	
A188	NG2723	Leyland Titan TD2	L56R	Jul 1932	1961	A193	A396
A189	NG2724	Leyland Titan TD2	L56R	Jul 1932	1950	AH189	
A190	NG2725	Leyland Titan TD2	L56R	Jul 1932	1952	AH190	
A191	NG2726	Leyland Titan TD2	L56R	Jul 1932	1951	AH191	
A192	NG2727	Leyland Titan TD2	L56R	Jul 1932	1950	AH192	
A193	NG2728	Leyland Titan TD2	L56R	Jul 1932	1951	AH193	
A194	NG2729	Leyland Titan TD2	L56R	Jul 1932	1961	A8	A397
A195	NG2730	Leyland Titan TD2	L56R	Jul 1932	1960	AH195	AH9
A196	NG2731	Leyland Titan TD2	L56R	Jul 1932	1951	AH196	
A197	NG2732	Leyland Titan TD2	L56R	Jul 1932	1960	A10	