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Towards a Better Understanding of Transport in Society: the Motorbus in Scotland pre-1939

Ian Souter

1. Background

There is more data available on Britain's horse tramways than there is for Britain's pre 1931 motorbus operations! Given the impact of the motorbus on society, this represents a major gap in understanding the acceptance of a new technology. By the later 1920s publications such as "Motor Transport" were recording the experience of some operators but many of the small operators were not covered, other sources then having to be used to gain a fuller picture of developments. PSV Circle data is

one such source and has been used to prepare this survey of motorbus operators across Scotland. Note that this is a survey of "operators", not the services provided (the "operations"), and it should be borne in mind that the existence of an operator is no guide to the extent of their activities.

The findings are outlined in three time snapshots:

1. At the peaks of operator numbers, mostly in the mid-1920s
2. Developments up to 1914
3. The position in 1939

2. Methodology

The accompanying table is a summary of a county-by-county tally of the numbers of bus operators based in each administration. Separate counts from the parent counties have also been presented for the islands of the Inner and the Outer Hebrides, and the Clyde Estuary. Thereafter, the table was developed using the following guidelines:

- A count has been added for the years the operator is known to have been active. It is the case that records exist in many instances when a minor operator started in business but not when they ceased. The picture being presented is thus less than complete.

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The Editor is always interested in hearing from members and non-members who would like to write an original piece about transport history and/or research for inclusion in this journal or online.

- No account is taken of when in a year the operator was active, nor how long in the year they remained active.
- Counts are stopped when a business is carried on by another operator.
- Where an operator has initiated services in more than one location in a county, only one count is awarded. For example, the Great North of Scotland Railway was running motorbuses on five unconnected groups of routes in Aberdeenshire in 1914 plus various tours and excursions, but these activities earn a count of one in the Aberdeenshire totals. However, a count of one has been added to the Banffshire totals in respect of the company's separate activities in that county.
- Where an operator has initiated separate, unconnected, services in more than one county, activities in both counties are recorded until such time as the separate operations were united by a connecting public service by that operator.
- Cross boundary services are credited only to the county of the operator's head office.

3. An initial look at trends found in numbers of operators

Operator data is continually being updated, and the detail now being presented represents knowledge at the time of writing. However, given the size of the database, any additional information is felt unlikely to materially affect the industry trends identified.

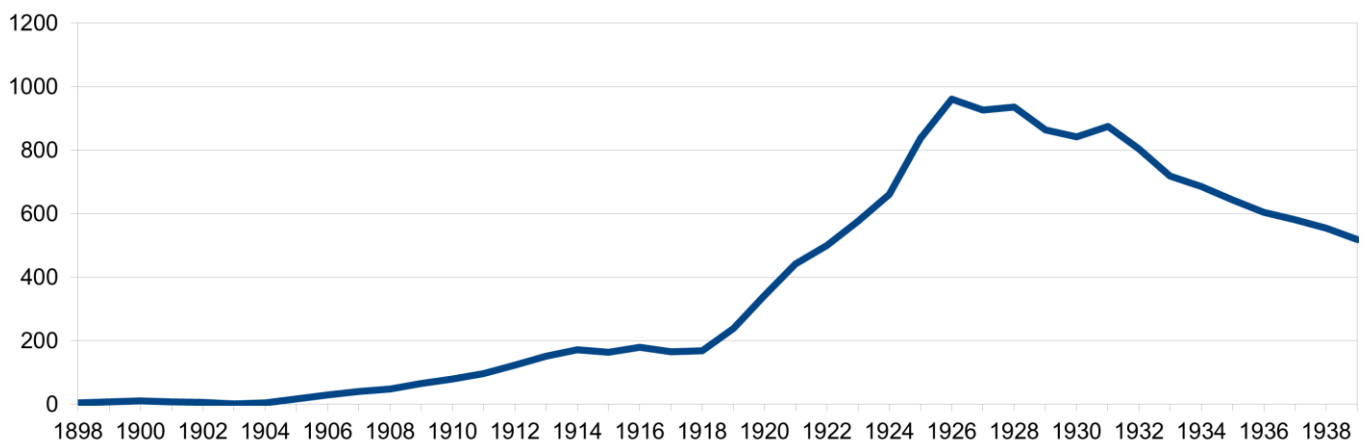
From summing the county tallies to produce an all-Scotland picture the maximum number of operators in any one year was 960, this in 1926. This maximum had dropped to 518 in 1939 but with a secondary peak of 875 in 1931

and a roughly 6% annual decline thereafter. The initial rise in numbers of operators from 171 in 1914 became 238 in 1919, followed by an overall three-fold increase to the 1926 peak. Some highlights are offered on developments across the country:

3.1 At the Peaks of Operator Numbers

- The all-Scotland peak of 960 operators was in 1926, a peak year shared with eight of the country's administrations, mainly those in the industrial central belt.
- The earliest peak in operator numbers was in 1924 with five administrations starting the trend that year, viz, two in the South West in what became Caledonian Omnibus territory, two in the borders in what became Scottish Motor Traction territory, and the city of Dundee.
- Eleven administrations peaked after implementation of the 1930 Road Traffic Act (say, 1932), the latest of which was the Isle of Mull in 1939. Of the eleven, nine were island administrations, the balance being the mainland counties of Argyllshire and Ross-shire.
- The administration with the greatest number of operators was Lewis, with 114 recorded in 1932. Next was Lanarkshire with 85 known operators in 1926, then Fife with 61, also in 1926.
- There was a notable contrast in the numbers of operators in the four main cities, Aberdeen having the greatest number at 54, more than Dundee and Edinburgh's totals combined.

THE MOTORBUS IN SCOTLAND



Above: A graph showing total operator numbers from 1898 to 1939.



Above: SA614, a 1910 vintage Milnes Daimler operated by the Great North of Scotland Railway company, who also built the bodywork. It remained in service until 1924. The vehicle is seen in East Aberdeenshire near Newburgh where the company was providing a road motor service to Aberdeen in lieu of the originally intended branch line. The substantial bodywork was designed for the carriage of luggage and light goods on the roof and could seat a total of 18 1st and 3rd class ticket holders (Tom Ritchie Collection).

3.2 Developments up to 1914

- The first recorded motorbus service was in Perthshire in 1895, and in 1900 there was a minor peak of ten operators, four of which were in Aberdeen. None of these pioneers endured, nine of the ten having ceased trading by 1903, the tenth in 1905.
- There has been a continuity of motorbus operation in Scotland from 1904 to the present day, and by 1914 there were 171 separate instances. These were spread across the whole of the mainland, including the three thinly populated counties north of Inverness-shire.

- The counties free from a home-based motorbus operation in 1914 were Nairn, Moray, Kinross, Peebles and Selkirk. In these counties it could be argued that there was a good coverage of railway routes.

3.3 The position in 1939

- There was an overall near 50% reduction in operators between the 1926 peak and 1939, but with a wide variation between administrations in the numbers of operators remaining.
- The administrations least affected were dominated by the Hebrides and Shetland,

then Argyllshire, Dundee, the South West counties, Perthshire and Ross-shire.

- The administrations most affected were the city of Glasgow with only 3 operators compared to a peak of 44, Fife with 9 compared to the peak of 61, and West Lothian with 4 compared with the peak of 19.
- Of the 518 operators extant in 1939, only 34 had been in business in 1914.

4. Some observations and comments

When the motorbus emerged as a viable transport option, it gradually took over from established horse- drawn operations such as onward travel from a railway station or pier, i.e. scheduled service work, or local tours/private hires/excursions. Public demand for travel being insatiable, technology encouraged motorbus improvements and the number of operators grew steadily to 1914, progress changing from 1918 when war-surplus chassis started to become available, along with many ex-servicemen who knew how to exploit them. In rural areas, the motorbus could be providing a service every day, this at a time when Sunday services were rare on secondary railways, and motorbus operators were also providing local parcels services.

The 1920s became a decade of the most remarkable technical development for motorbuses, with UK and overseas chassis manufacturers aggressively promoting their products. By the end of the decade there were vehicles available of varying sizes with varying capacities for varying purposes, all causing operators to face the problem of keeping up with technology. Such dilemmas were then

compounded by the obligations of the 1930 Road Traffic Act and the new controls on vehicle Construction and Use that condemned previously tolerated practices and designs.

The road networks of the time struggled to meet the increasing demand from all types of road traffic and, particularly in the Highlands and Islands, limits were placed by roads authorities on the size of motorbuses allowed; usually this was a maximum of 14 seats. In part sympathy with this constraint, services in the earlier days were sometimes provided by large motor cars, often of North American origin, and this practice continued beyond 1939.



Above: ST5727, a Chevrolet with 14 seat 'all-weather' bodywork by an unknown supplier. New to Fraser Bros of Kiltarlity, Inverness-shire in 1929, it was typical of the size of vehicle operated not only by rural operators but also by newcomers to bus operation in urban areas in the mid-1920s. It is seen on deployment on Fraser's excursion run to Culloden Moor, a place of increasing interest in the expanding tourist market being served by motorbuses. (©Bus Archive, original photographer Charles Klapper)

Some selected observations are offered as an aid to better understanding the complexities behind the expansion and contraction in the numbers of operators:

4.1 At the peaks of operator numbers

- The build up to the 1926 all-Scotland peak had started from the end of the First World War but not all counties expanded at the same rate. Some had a near steady year-on-year growth but most remarkable was the accelerated pace from 1924 in Glasgow, Dunbartonshire, Renfrewshire, Lanarkshire and the City of Aberdeen. The surge in numbers of operators in these locations saw many “entrepreneurs” try their luck/test the market on routes often served by tramways outside the two cities, inside the city in the case of Aberdeen. Operators were generally using a small, lightweight, pneumatic tyred vehicle such as Ford, Chevrolet, GMC, REO and Beardmore.
- Glasgow Corporation licensing practice prevented other than its municipal operation conveying passengers on journeys wholly within the city boundary. The city’s independent operators were making their mark by joining their county colleagues in running cross boundary services from the city centre to neighbouring towns.
- Whilst there was a national peak of operators in 1926, there had been much loss of operators before then, but with losses being more than made up by others entering the field. As an example from Aberdeenshire where there has been much research into early motorbus operations, 39 operators who were in business after WWI had ceased trading by the time of that county’s peak in 1927. Of that 39, only two

businesses were continued under different control following a merger, 16 had given up and 13 had no known closure date.

- As a snapshot of how the industry was changing between the peak of operators and the 1930 Road Traffic Act becoming effective, a further example from Aberdeenshire is offered. There were 22 operators in business during the county’s 1927 peak who had ceased trading by the end of 1931. Of that number, nine were continued following a merger, 11 had given up and only two had no known closure date.
- The peak of operators in Lewis at 114 was in 1932, well after the national peak. Neighbouring Harris peaked a year later in 1933, as did Shetland, and the Isle of Skye did not attain its maximum until 1937. Business conditions on islands were very different from those on the mainland.
- That some islands returned such high numbers of operators reflects the working of a route on a part- time basis, other proprietors in the locality providing the service at other times. There was co-operation, not competition. These were/are societies where folk often had more than one source of employment, operating a local bus being one of them. Bear in mind too the increasing demand for motorbus services in Lewis and Harris where previously isolated coastal communities were gradually being connected to the island road network. This process was still taking place in the 1980s.

4.2 Developments up to 1914

- The very early motorbus deployments in urban areas around 1900 saw attempts to provide scheduled services prior to the arrival of the electric tram. That they were

- commercial failures was principally on account of their high capital cost, poor reliability and low passenger carrying capacity. Not to be overlooked too was the lack of local technical support.
- The numbers of operators were boosted by road haulage businesses using their vehicles for passenger work at weekends for tours/excursions/private hires, etc.
 - The steady growth in operations was dominated by expansion in rural areas, sometimes boosted by the securing of Royal Mail contracts.
 - Motorbuses of this period were no match for the electric tramcars in urban areas.
 - Of the 171 known operators in 1914:
 - 93 were undertaking service work, 21 with Royal Mail contracts,
 - 61 were undertaking non service work such as tours/hires or providing a hotel bus service,
 - The purpose of the remainder is unknown.
 - Judging by details from PSV Circle operator histories, in 1914 the biggest motorbus fleet in Scotland with 36 vehicles was that of the Great North of Scotland Railway in Aberdeen. A close second with 34 vehicles was the Scottish Motor Traction Company in Edinburgh.



Above: RSX135, subsequently RS 3711, a 1920 vintage Thornycroft J type, that was Aberdeen Corporation Tramways' first motorbus and was one of four. The dual door bodywork was by Northern Counties of Wigan and seated 32 passengers. These vehicles were used to initiate a motorbus service much discussed extensions to the tramway network but were also deployed on local tours. Such vehicles were no match for the smaller, more nimble, pneumatic tyred buses offered by the 'pirate' operators in the city in 1926/27 and all were withdrawn in 1927 (First Aberdeen).

4.3 The Position in 1939

- It is assumed that the history of the 1928 Railway Act, the 1930 Road Traffic Act and the reformation of the Scottish Motor Traction Company with railway capital is understood. The end result was that the bus industry in Scotland in the early 1930s abounded with willing sellers and a willing buyer. The Walter Alexander of Falkirk constituent of the SMT group made full use of this opportunity, acquiring through the SMT parent about 80 different operations of different sizes across 14 county authorities.
- The SMT Group was far from being alone in its enthusiasm for takeovers of stage carriage operators. In the 1930s Scotland's largest two independents, Young of Paisley and Sutherland of Peterhead, were equally active; Young had acquired nine local businesses and Sutherland six by the end of 1939.
- By 1939, the Alexander company had grown to be the third largest bus operator in the UK, exceeded in fleet size only by London Transport and Midland Red. In 1914, Alexander had but one bus.
- Of the c80 operators taken over by Alexander, only four were exclusively on non-service work. Overall, there was not a great demand for the purchase of businesses not engaged in service work. Of the 518 operators recorded in 1939, 124, (approximately 25%), were on tours/excursions, etc., a greater number than in 1914 but a lower proportion of the total.
- In those parts of the country where the territorial bus companies did not penetrate, the numbers of independent operators stayed relatively high. This was particularly the case in all the islands but was also seen in mainland counties such as Argyllshire, Perthshire and Ross-shire.
- There was one notable attempt by a territorial bus company, Highland Transport, to venture into an island market. This was in Skye in 1930, very soon after the company had been formed. The activity was sold off in 1935. The MacBrayne company's motorbus activities on any of the Western Isles did not start until 1941 (on Islay).
- What was unique to Skye and Islay in 1939 amongst the many operators of the western and northern isles was the emergence of local operators specialising in tours/excursions/hires. This trend was also apparent in mainland counties such as Perthshire and Argyllshire, and also in the city of Aberdeen. The motorbus had come of age in the new, expanding, tourist economy.
- A most notable contraction in the number of operators by 1939 was in the city of Glasgow. Of the three remaining concerns, one was Glasgow Corporation Transport, and none of the three were exclusively in the tours/excursions/hires sector. Whilst operators in these specialisms from neighbouring counties could and did serve the city, a question to be answered is whether there is a gap in city operator data.



Above: DS1617, an AEC Regal with 32 seat bodywork by Stewart of Wishaw, new to Andrew Harper of Peebles in 1930 and seen in its home town of Peebles. It went to the Caledonian Omnibus Company in 1932 with the sale of the Harper business, remaining in public service until 1943. This form of vehicle, with subsequent refinements, was typical in Britain for single deck buses and coaches from the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s (©Bus Archive)

5. In Conclusion

- As has been said elsewhere, transport provision does not work in a vacuum. The motorbus in Scotland responded to society's various needs and wants at the time, just as it did in other domains. It would be helpful to the better understanding of transport history and to social history to compare Scotland's experience with that elsewhere, guided by a knowledge of the research questions to be asked.
- Whilst the 1930 Road Traffic Act was intended, *inter alia*, to reduce "wasteful competition", Scotland's peak in operators in 1926 stands out as showing that processes of consolidation in mainland

Scotland had already started, although challenged by the uncontrolled competition on Clydeside and Aberdeen. Why other parts of Scotland were not thus affected has still to be revealed. Later experience of the 1930 Act in the Highlands and Islands too seems to go against what had been intended, particularly given the lack of interest in these areas by the major bus groups save for their extended tours of the later 1930s. The patience of the Northern Area Traffic Commissioner subsequently failed when operators on Lewis were actively encouraged to combine.

- Any early success by a motorbus operator did not assure future success, even in an expanding market.

The published PSV Circle histories used in compiling this paper were:

- A Fleet History of Pre-War Operators in Aberdeenshire & Kincardineshire
- A Fleet History of Pre-War Operators in Argyllshire & Dunbartonshire
- A Fleet History of Pre-War Operators in Angus, Perthshire & Kinross-shire
- A Fleet History of Pre-War Independent Operators in the Scottish Islands
- A Fleet History of Pre-War Independent Operators in Dumfriesshire, Kirkcudbrightshire & Wigtownshire
- A Fleet History of Pre-War Independent Operators in Clackmannanshire, Fife & Stirlingshire
- A Fleet History of Pre-War Operators in the Northern Scottish Highlands & the Moray Firth
- A Fleet History of Pre-War Independent Operators in Renfrewshire

In addition, unpublished PSV Circle data (which may not have been updated for some time) was used in estimating statistics for the areas marked by an asterisk in the table.

Finally, I should like to acknowledge the help given by Mr Richard Gadsby of the PSV Circle and Dr Mike Mitchell for their help in progressing this study.

The following table provides statistics for each area separately, showing operator numbers by area in 1914, 1939 and the peak year.

Location	1914 Oper ators	Peak Oper ators	Peak Year	1939 Oper ators
Aberdeen City	5	54	1927	20
Aberdeenshire	3	61	1927	23
Angus	5	24	1927	12
Argyllshire*	10	60	1932	35
Islay	1	6	1926	6
Mull	2	7	1939	7
Ayrshire*	1	57	1931	17
Banffshire	4	17	1931	5
Berwickshire*	2	4	1929	3
Bute	1	10	1931	3
Arran	2	16	1932	8
Cumbræ	0	4	1933	4
Caithness	3	25	1930	9
Clackmannan	1	9	1930	2
Dumfreisshire	8	32	1924	16
Dunbarton-shire*	3	36	1926	12
Dundee	3	18	1924	11
East Lothian*	2	13	1926	7
Edinburgh*	5	13	1928	5
Fife	9	61	1926	9
Glasgow*	3	44	1926	3
Inverness Shire	7	36	1930	14
Harris	1	10	1933	6
Skye	2	21	1937	20
Uists & Benbecula	1	6	1933	6

Barra	0	2	1933	2
Kincardine-shire	2	10	1927	3
Kinross-Shire	0	2	1927	0
Kirkcud-brightshire	9	27	1925	3
Lanarkshire*	4	85	1926	24
Midlothian*	4	12	1930	4
Morayshire	0	20	1926	5
Nairnshire	0	4	1931	2
Orkney	0	29	1928	10
Peeblesshire*	0	7	1926	2
Perthshire	19	55	1928	32
Renfrewshire	5	56	1926	14
Ross-Shire	6	22	1934	18
Lewis	0	114	1932	60
Roxburgh-shire*	15	18	1924	4
Selkirkshire*	0	4	1924	1
Shetland	1	48	1933	35
Stirlingshire	9	30	1926	5
Sutherland	6	12	1931	7
West Lothian*	5	19	1926	4
Wigtown-shire	2	11	1924	7

Reviews

Yorkshire Independent Bus Operators

Stuart Emmett

Stuart Emmett is the author of numerous books on bus companies and services in Northern England. He concentrates on smaller undertakings, publications including those on Hardwicks, Scarborough, 1952 to 1987; Cumbria Buses - Barrow in Furness 1948 to 1989; Skipton 1967; Tommy's (Burrows & Sons), Wombwell, 1921 to 1974; and two volumes on the Bradford to Queensbury Bus 1949 to 1974.

This review covers four of Emmett's books on independent operators in Yorkshire:

- York Pullman – 1926 to 1985 (Stenlake 2018, £10.95, ISBN 9781840338256)
- Ledgard of Leeds Buses (Key 2020, £14.99, ISBN 9781913295851)
- York Independents: Eastern Stage Bus Operators (Key 2020, £14.99, ISBN 9781913295936)
- York Independents: Western Stage Bus Operators (Key, 2020, £14.99, ISBN 9781913870096)

Publishers' websites are at www.stenlake.co.uk and www.keypublishing.com.

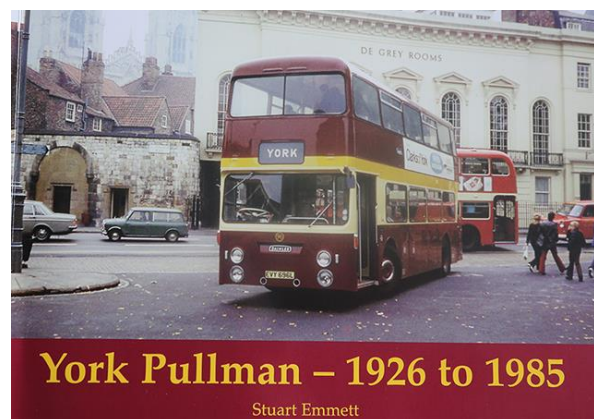
All the operators described in these volumes began life as family businesses, most of them remaining so, albeit sometimes with changes of ownership, until they either closed down or were sold. Emmett's books, as he states in the Introduction to the Ledgard volume, are not definitive histories of the businesses. Rather, they offer brief historical summaries accompanied by well-chosen photographs in

colour and black-and-white; 'well-chosen' because they portray the buses in service, in their natural environments, often including passengers, staff and pedestrians. Image and print quality are both generally good, the high number of colour images from the 1950s and 1960s being of particular note. The author is perhaps unduly modest about his achievement. Whilst there is a substantial history of Samuel Ledgard's (*Beer and Blue Buses*, Don Bate, Regent Transport Publications, 2005), researching the histories of small local undertakings, sometimes since as far back as the 1920s, must have presented a considerable challenge, as the extensive lists of references and photographic acknowledgements make clear. It is nevertheless surprising that there seems to have been no book on York Pullman, apart from a PSV Circle Fleet History (Ref PB26, 1992), before Emmett's 2018 publication.

A strength of these books is the route maps and service summaries for each operator; although the vehicles are comprehensively appraised and illustrated, they are not just fleet histories. The service summaries are comprehensive, showing for each route from/to/via, days of operation, maximum number of return journeys per day, journey time and dates the services were acquired or started and sold on or finished. At first glance, the summaries and maps often give the impression of intensive networks; but further study shows some routes to have been very infrequent or operating on certain days only. For example, Reliance's Nunnington to Helmsley via Harome service began in 1930 and is shown as 'gone by 1943'; and it only ran on Fridays, with one return trip per week in 1932 and two in each of 1934 and 1938. A

challenge left to readers is to compile comprehensive all-operators maps, to show the overall supply of services in each locality.

So to the individual publications. *York Pullman – 1926 to 1985* begins with a brief history of the company and then describes the stage routes from York. The remaining two-thirds of the book is taken up with descriptions and illustrations of the fleet. From 1953 the company's head office was situated in Bootham Tower, part of York's historic city wall, some of whose stonework dates from the 11th century, 900 years before the company's founding. Although vacated in 2002 after the original York Pullman company's closure, Bootham Tower subsequently became the York office of City Sightseeing, so remains in bus industry use in 2021.



York Pullman's network of stage carriage routes extended mainly north-west and south-east from the city to Easingwold, Helperby, Selby and Market Weighton. Part of the latter route, to Sutton-upon-Derwent, is currently operated under contract by the 'new' York Pullman company, set up in 2007 by road haulier KJ Logistics, but the other former Pullman routes have passed to different operators; unfortunately Emmett's story stops

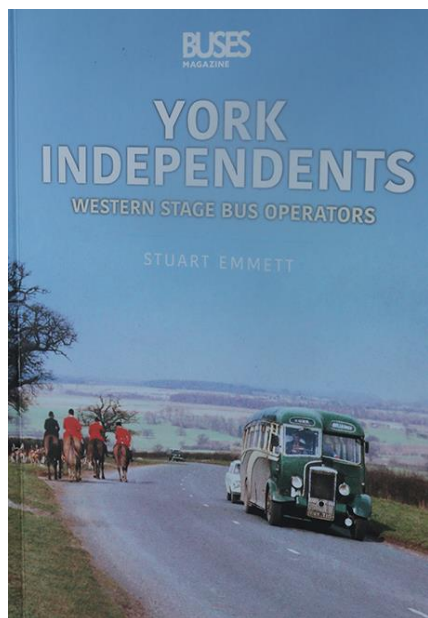
at 1985, despite the book not being published until 2018. The importance of non-stage work, excursions, tours and private (26% in 1963 and 40% in 1971, after the takeover of Fawcett of Acomb, a local coach firm with numerous excursion licences) is given due attention. The fleet comprised a mix of single and, latterly, double deckers, buses and coaches, with the company's "beautiful and unique maroon, cream and yellow livery" – one cannot disagree with Emmett's judgement – a key selling point that has very fortunately been retained by the successor company. A feature of the fleets of York Pullman and several other York area independents was the purchase of vehicles bodied by Hull coachbuilder Barnaby, the first being acquired in 1942 and the last, from 1954, not being retired until the early 1960s.

In contrast to the mainly rural operations of York Pullman and the other operators considered in this review, *Samuel Ledgard* was an urban and interurban operator, headquartered in Armley, Leeds. Founded after the eponymous Samuel Ledgard took over his father's pub in 1896, the business expanded by way of outside catering at, and then transport to, race meetings. It followed the classic example of acquiring a convertible lorry with an interchangeable coach body, thus opening the door to coach services and outings. Bus services began through company acquisitions from the 1920s onwards. By the 1950s around a dozen routes were operated, radiating west and north to Bradford, Ilkley and Harrogate. As befitted its urban territory, double deckers dominated the bus fleet, mainly new Leylands, accompanied by single decker coaches. After the founder's death in 1952, direction of the company passed to his

son Tom, who instituted the purchase of second hand vehicles, hence the presence of former London RT highbridge and RLH lowbridge vehicles in the fleet thereafter. In 1967 the company was sold to West Yorkshire Road Car, with what Emmett considers to have been indecent haste.

The final two books reviewed here between them cover ten independent operators serving York and the surrounding area. All but one of these, Reliance Motor Services of Sutton-on-the-Forest, discussed in the *Western Stage Bus Operators* volume, have ceased to exist. The founders of Reliance were Ted and Mary Sheriff, who started Cosy Car Service by purchasing two Ford Model T's, which they had fitted with Barnaby bodies. Cosy was sold to West Yorkshire Road Car in 1920 and Sherriff was granted a licence to operate three buses taken over from a company he had previously run, Ovington Motors, then in receivership. Thus was born Reliance Motor Services and the company opened the headquarters and garage in Sutton-on-the-Forest, eight miles north of York, from which it still operates in 2021. In 1966, soon after Ted Sheriff's death, his widow sold the company to Carol and Ted Shelton, their daughter (who had a psv driving licence) and son-in-law, a heavy goods vehicle driver. In 1980, the Sheltons retired from the business, which was sold to John Duff, a power station engineer at Drax, and his wife Margaret; their grandson Gary Newby is the current Managing Director. The York – Easingwold corridor, via two routes (currently numbered 30 and 40) has remained Reliance's key catchment area, with extensions serving Thirsk, Crayke, Helmsley and Kirkbymoorside; and several local contract services. Emmett's coverage ends at 1980, with

readers referred to *Classic Bus* Issue 118 (April May 2012) to continue the story; a sensible avoidance of duplication.



Other operators covered in the *Western* book include Sykes of Appleton Roebuck, which survived until 2002 and operated to and from a delightful and much photographed riverside terminus in York; and A. S. Burley (Majestic of Cawood), whose service used the antiquated wooden swing bridge over the Ouse there. The company remained with the Burley family from its founding in 1928 until sale to Jaronda Travel in 1983; Jaronda subsequently sold out to Arriva, which still operates the route between Selby and York via Cawood, which is now extended from Selby to Drax.

The fascinating story of *Western North* Yorkshire village bus operators includes Hope & Sons, Terrington (1929-1974); Hutchinson Brothers, Husthwaite (1920s to 1986, then continuing after sale by the Hutchinson family until closure in 1989). The *Eastern* volume continues in the same vein with brief histories

including the stories of Everingham Brothers, Pocklington, a chapter particularly well illustrated with photographs from the 1920s onwards, and Bailey's of Fangfoss, which in 1985 sold out to the still extant Ingleby's of York. Two companies, Broadbent, Stamford Bridge and Milburn of Leavening each in the 1980s passed to Reynard Pullman, subsequently to become part of Hull City Transport. Finally, the life of one of the longest-lived of the small Yorkshire independents is summarised. Gorwood of East Cottingworth ran a horse bus in the late 19th century and the business only surrendered its last school contract and closed in 2002 on the retirement of the then owner Ken Gorwood, grandson of the founder George Gorwood. How many other rural bus firms have run up centuries?

For those interested in the histories of small businesses Stuart Emmett's books will certainly whet the appetite; and if you want to see the vehicles in their glorious miscellany of liveries and environments, you are in for a treat. From early Leylands through Bedford WTB, OB, OWB and SBs to twin-steer VALs, bodywork and chassis by dozens of manufacturers, open platforms and centre entrances, half cabs and flat fronts, you will find them all in profusion, sharply and brightly printed, with informative captions. I wholeheartedly commend these books.

Martin Higginson

British Leyland: From Triumph To Tragedy – Petrol, Politics and Power. Lance Cole.

Barnsley: Pen & Sword Transport www.pen-and-sword.co.uk, 2020 ISBN 978 1 52674 823 2. 279pp, inc many half-page colour photographs. £25 hardback

Lance Cole, an established motoring journalist and author, sets out to recount and analyse what really happened in the rise and fall of British Leyland (BL). To do so, he also addresses issues which occurred in its predecessor companies BMC, BMH and BLMC. Even the forerunners (Austin, Morris, Riley, etc.) are covered in this comprehensive mission. The result is a complex and uncomfortable story – in essence, much brilliant engineering and skilled design was hampered by internecine squabbles amongst workforce, trade unions, management and politicians alike.

Cole eschews the established, popular view of a lazy, incompetent and militant workforce, whilst acknowledging the profound impact of a few of these. Likewise, he refuses to lay blame at the feet of Sir Michael Edwardes or the earlier Donald Stokes. Graham Day does not escape so lightly – his ‘Roverisation’ of the company is seen as not learning from previous errors and as merely stoking dying embers.

There are some intriguing political insights from interviews with key politicians like Tony Benn, Michael Foot and Tam Dalyell and summaries of the decisions taken across the political divide of the 70s and 80s. Cole also highlights the strains between different factions of trade unions, with some claiming

that Longbridge’s ‘Red Robbo’ of tabloid hate, was insufficiently militant.



Above: Triumph’s Stag was brilliant but had engine issues. These sadly diverted attention from its design brilliance and global popularity. Stag was another hero of great British car design that was contaminated by what happened at BL (photo by Lance Cole, reproduced with the author’s permission)

He handles well the badge engineering from the 1950s (which misunderstood how GM successfully did the same in the US through a carefully-delineated market segment for each brand), and the attempted ‘Fordisation’ of BMC/BL in the 60s and 70s – re-skinning old models with modern bodies. Of particular interest is the claim that the design brilliance of Alec Issigonis (Mini, 1100, 1300, 1800 etc.) with their in-built austerity also became a weakness of the company’s offerings. It was reduced to offering the ‘Fordised’ Morris Marina, a backward step technologically. Such decisions caused buyer confusion as to BL’s credentials, particularly over small Triumphs, which were available with either front-wheel drive or rear-wheel drive, depending on specification! Triumph itself becomes a focus with its re-badged old Honda becoming the Acclaim, and in Coles’ view, politicians attempts to save BL

also let in Japanese manufacturers through the back door.



Above: An early Morris badged 18-22, capturing the essentials of Issigonis austerity design. Alas, the huge internal passenger space did not appeal to the fleet market which preferred the more glamorous and cheaper to maintain Ford Cortina (photo by Lance Cole, reproduced with the author's permission)



Above: In the author's words: "Designed in 1969, on sale until the 1980s, Marina to Ital just about summed up the internal disorder that ruled BL. Not a 'bad' car, but neither a 'good' one. Merely trying to mimic the opposition: 'SLX' indeed." (photo by Lance Cole, reproduced with the author's permission)

There is much to commend this book – the product knowledge, detail, access to inside voices and high-quality photographs. However, rather than a purely chronological

sequence, the author backtracks several times over the same ground (particularly during the Edwardes era). A fuller characterisation of key figures such as Edwardes, Stokes and the warmly-viewed Musgrove would help a clearer understanding of the leadership decisions and rationale of these men who embraced the poison chalice that was BL. Whilst Cole confidently debunks the many media myths surrounding BL, his own style at times can be rambling and prone to his own political and societal views. This does not assist readers gain a fully clear and dispassionate view – although it is difficult to be dispassionate about the demise of one of the UK's greatest motor combines. Readers seeking detailed information about BL's truck and bus operations are likely to be disappointed – Leyland trucks and buses are viewed favourably, as is the tractor division, but the woeful birth of the Sherpa van, based on 1950s panels and engineering is treated, rightly, with dismay. Ford's Transit was always streets ahead.

This is an important and overdue book, well researched (even if not fully proof-read) which will find a welcome place on the shelves of transport academics and motoring aficionados alike.

Rod Ashley

Early Independents of the Maidenhead area

Paul Lacey. 96pp, card covers, extensive illustrations. ISBN 978-0-9567832-6-4. £15.00. Available from the author at 17 Sparrow Close, Woosehill, Wokingham, Berks RG41 3HT. Available as special offer with the Henley & Marlow, and Bracknell, Crowthorne & Wokingham histories at £39.

This book follows other histories by the same author of operations in the Berkshire area, including early independents of the Henley and Marlow areas (reviewed in issue 97) and the Bracknell, Crowthorne and Wokingham area (also reviewed) in a broadly similar style, describing not only the story of the vehicles and services operated, but the personal and family histories of the owners and in some cases staff employed. The focus is on operators based in Maidenhead itself and some surrounding settlements, covering an area north to Henley and Marlow, west to Reading, and south east to Eton and Windsor. Scheduled local services generally served smaller settlements than those on the interurban Thames Valley routes. Some operators provided a mix of scheduled, excursion and hire operations, others focussing on the latter sectors.

As in many other areas, some services were established before World War One, but most grew after that conflict, operated by servicemen with experience of driving and vehicle maintenance. Origins as country carriers seem less common than found elsewhere but a striking feature is an early horse omnibus service between Maidenhead and Windsor, operated between about 1899 and 1915, a route subsequently covered by several motorbus operators. Remarkably frequent services were operated in thinly-populated areas, notably at evening and weekends. Some business were very short-lived, but others survived the 1930 Act, often to be absorbed by Thames Valley. Rationalisation of services was encouraged by the Traffic Commissioner for the area.



Above: One of more unusual fleet names in the area was 'The Owner Driver' – the operations of Sidney Robert Proberts. Seen here is ex-War Department AEC Y-type charabanc XB8106 on an outing to Brighton in June 1922, the owner and his other driver standing alongside.

The post-war period saw some expansion of contract services for the remaining operators, along with private hire and excursion work. Helpful examples are provided of the range of points served by excursions. The last operator, Carters Coaches, ceased in 1988.

Presentation and illustration are very clear and comprehensive (apart from some full-page-width views on pages 33-36 which seem to have been elongated). A problem for the reader not familiar with the area is the use of many local place names in operator timetables and routes described, which are at times difficult to trace even on a 1:50,000 OS map of the area. However, these are very minor considerations, and the book undoubtedly represents excellent value.

Peter White

Trends in public transport use

Following the feature on public transport use around its peak in 1950 in the last issue, Ian Souter offered a number of comments. These are condensed below (incorporating responses and additional comments by the author, Peter White), together with his findings regarding peak years of public transport use in other cities.

In addition to the Notts & Derbys system, two other trolleybus systems came into state (as distinct from local authority or private enterprise) control through nationalisation, i.e. the other ex Balfour Beatty system, Llanelli [now Llanelli], and Brighton, Hove & District. BH&D trolleybus operations were by a largely motorbus operator, who had had to adopt trolleybus use as part of the Brighton Area Agreement. BH&D came into BTC ownership directly on nationalisation of its Tilling parent, but the Balfour Beatty operations were first allocated to the British Electrical Authority. Llanelli was soon transferred to the South Wales Electricity Board before passing to South Wales Transport (part of BET) in 1952 and closing later that year. N&D came to the BTC in 1949. It would thus seem likely that BH&D's trolleybus fleet of 11 formed part of the BTC total of 43 rather than this being the N&D fleet alone. However, trolleybus wiring was owned by the Corporation and would probably not have counted toward the route mileage total for BTC.

There is an issue of the accuracy the passenger totals – based on ticket sales - reported by operators. Stemming from requirements by the Board of Trade requiring horse tramway operators to submit annual returns of their operating stats from the 1870s, these were

equated to the number of passengers - one ticket equals one passenger. In 1950, this probably did not cause any serious distortion for bus, trolleybus and tram use, but this has certainly been an issue in interpretation of trends in later years where operators used the 'Ultimate' ticket machines where a number of fixed value tickets had to be issued for one journey. This was a problem exacerbated by inflation where the frequent fare increases made life difficult in the using of existing stocks of pre-printed, fixed, value tickets. Subsequently, the need for robust estimates of trips per season ticket, travelcard or concessionary passes has become important – widespread use of smartcard now greatly improves accuracy here.

Trolleybus operations were treated as tramways by the Board of Trade and successors in respect of annual reports, but motorbus operations were not. However, in contrast to pre-WWII practice for tramways and trolleybuses this data was not published by individual operator, possibly because there were far too many bus operators. Today, the DfT continues to gather such data (annually from large operators, smaller ones being sampled periodically) but it is only published in aggregate form for all operators. The DfT annual bus statistics for England give total trips and trip rates per head by region and local administrative area (county or unitary authority) but not by named operator. For Scotland, regional data are produced, but no breakdown within Wales.

The loss of tram passengers between 1949 and 1950 reflected operators catching up with their pre-war tram abandonment programmes. Six

operations closed completely in 1949 (Blackburn, Bury, Manchester, Rotherham, Leicester, Southampton) with others such as Newcastle, Bradford, Birmingham and Cardiff well under way with their pre-war conversion programmes as finance and new vehicle deliveries permitted. In London, the pre-war tram substitution programme was not restarted until 1950, LT opting instead to use new motorbus deliveries to relieve the dire condition of their then motorbus fleet. Another significant LT event was the substitution of motorbuses for tramcars for post war conversions instead of the pre-war use of trolleybuses when the tram abandonment programme was restarted. However, the replacement motorbuses had only 56 seats, in contrast with the 74 seats of the typical London tramcar and 72 seats on a trolleybus, and LT was already suffering badly from post war labour shortages.

Wartime conditions in many countries brought about considerable increases in public transport use, much of it from the mobilisation of civilians for war work (and other factors, as discussed re the parallels with Covid-19 in the British case in issue 100, pp24-26) . On cessation of hostilities, growth in passenger numbers ceased quite quickly, pre-war private car use coming back equally quickly in the USA. However, in contrast to other countries, passenger numbers in the UK continued rising until 1949 for reasons not well understood. Possible factors include high levels of employment and growth of much new low density housing remote from public amenities and workplaces. Such new housing was common throughout the UK and could require a change of bus to complete a journey or

additional bus journeys to be made from home for access to facilities previously within walking distance from inner city housing. Observations on this from readers would be welcome.

The following examples show outcomes in other countries which might be considered broadly comparable with Britain, the post war peak year for public transport use being shown in brackets:

- Australia: all state capital cities; all public transport modes (1946)
- Helsinki: municipal tram and bus (1945)
- Marseille: urban tram, bus and trolleybus (1946)
- New Zealand: all municipal operators; urban tram, bus and trolleybus (1945)
- Minneapolis, USA: urban tram and bus (1946)
- Stockholm: all tram, bus, trolleybus (1947)

Note that in some cases public transport use growth later resumed as urban populations increased, for example in Helsinki.

Viewpoints and opinions expressed by contributors to this Journal should be seen as the personal views of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Association.

Wales on Wheels

This event will not take place in May, but it is hoped to retime it to September 25th, shared once again with the Local Heritage Fair run the by the Swansea branch of the Historical Association.

Copy date for Journal No. 104 is 6th May 2021.

Spring meeting: 17th April 2021

The Spring meeting on Saturday 17 April will be held in 'zoom' format, comprising two parts:

- The Annual General Meeting at 1045; formal papers for this accompany this Journal. The AGM element is scheduled to take a maximum of 30 minutes.
- This will be followed by a Conference open to wider audience, from 1130 to 1245 on the same day.

The topic is:

Ribble Motor Services, 1919 to 2001, the North West's Premier Bus Company. Including an insider's snapshot from 1970

The presenter is Dr Martin Higginson, a director of the RTHA. An outline is given below.

Based in Preston, Lancashire, Ribble Motor Services originated in the Edwardian era in characteristic fashion, when local carter James Hodgson supplemented his daytime cotton carryings by taking mill staff to and from work. This soon evolved into a regular bus service and Ribble Motor Services Ltd was founded in 1919 when Harold Hickmott took over the business, staying until his death in office in 1939. By 1930 Ribble had 550 buses, with some 1100 operated from 1939 to 1969. From 1920 until 1968 Ribble was part of British Electric Traction (BET), then from 1969 until privatisation in 1988 publicly-owned through the National Bus Company (NBC). Finally, after a short-lived management buyout and over a decade with Stagecoach, in 2001 the once-proud name disappeared and Ribble became Stagecoach North West.

This presentation summarising Ribble's complex evolution is illustrated with numerous photographs and extracts from company documents. In addition, a snapshot from the inside is presented, based on the author's six-month 'Cook's Tour' sandwich course placement with Ribble in 1970, facilitated by John Hibbs, RTHA's founding president. The author's student placement report showed a company unsure of its future direction and struggling to come to terms with NBC ownership; and it proved highly sensitive to anything that looked like criticism.

This presentation will also be open to interested parties outside of the association. For this reason, there is a different Zoom access code from the AGM (which is members only). The Zoom link to be used for the conference at 11.30

is: <https://zoom.us/j/97497105702?pwd=YmZRUVdjWXp5NXlKWlhmNFM1RElwdz09>

Please ensure that you advise John Ashley by email in advance of the conference meeting of your intention to attend: john@globespinner.net.