

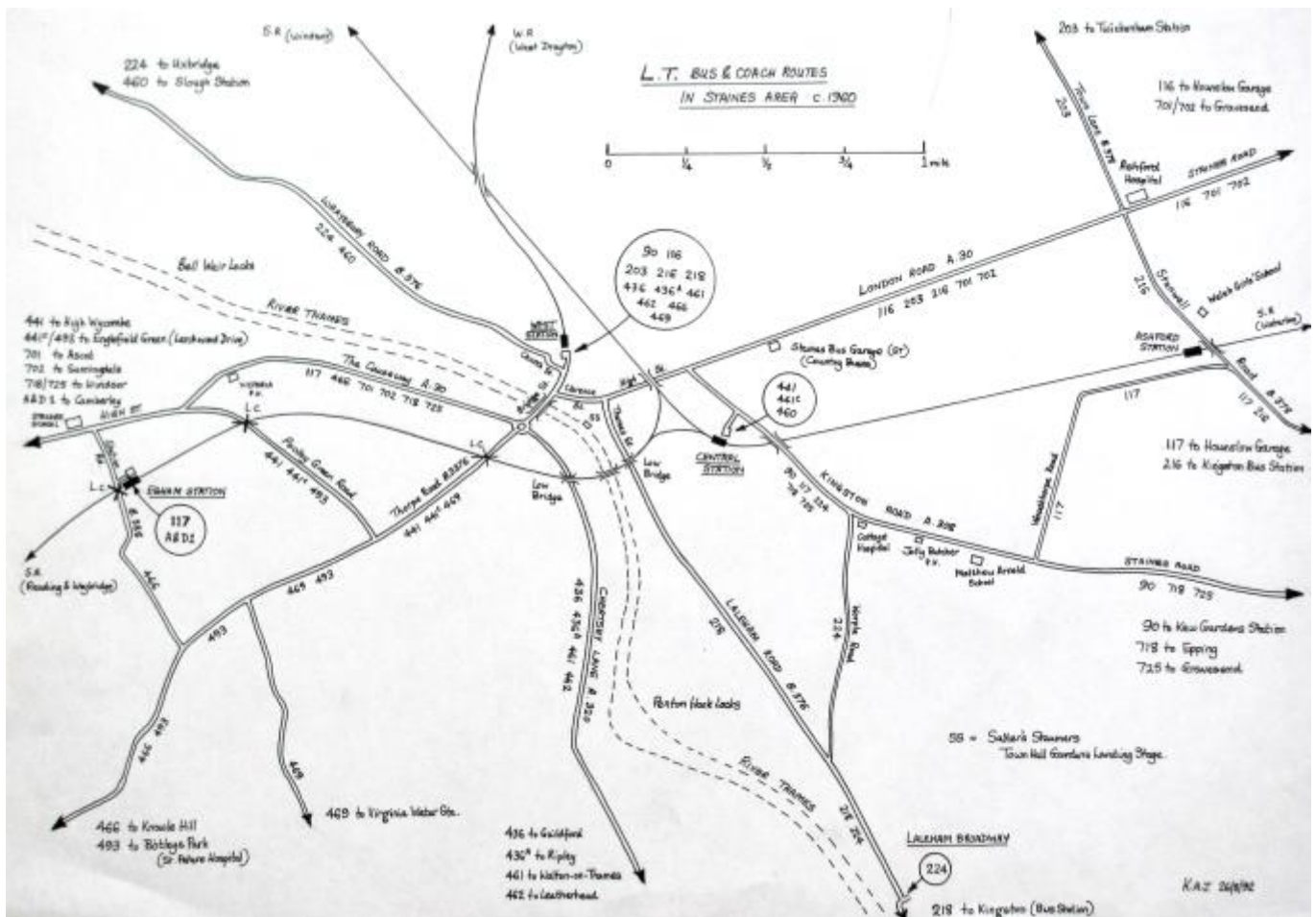
Staines – the bus services

Introduction

Staines, the dormitory suburb of my youth, achieved some prominence on the vintage bus rally scene with the major "Staines-60" event commemorating the 60th anniversary of London Transport, held in 1993. This event prompted me to recall a different "Staines-60", the year 1960 of fond memory, and how much has changed since then!

Of course, we were really only ever interested in trains then, but it has to be said that Staines was not the most exciting place for train-spotting, compared to the attraction of the Western and Southern main lines lying just a few miles North or South, to which lack of cash or bicycles precluded frequent visits. Within about a year of starting the hobby in 1958, we had seen all the local steam locos and electric multiple-units many times over, and the only excitement was derived from the occasional surprise visitor. On starting at secondary school in September 1959 and meeting up with other like-minded individuals, we therefore turned our interest to the local buses.

Though all the stage services in the Staines area were then provided by London Transport, it was somewhat of a frontier town, being situated near the outermost fringe of the Central area, with its famous red buses, and on the inner boundary of its Country District, served by the green bus routes. Also, several of the prestigious "Green-Line" luxury coach routes ran through the town. All of these, with their termini, are shown on the plan:



For variety, a couple of provincial operators ran services to within a few miles westwards. In Staines as yet unbypassed and lying astride the main A30 road to Southampton and the West, the High Street and River Thames bridge were host to major traffic jams on summer weekends, in which coaches and relief buses in the varied liveries of many other operators could be viewed at leisure. There was thus plenty to be seen before service cuts, road improvements and re-organizations began to take effect from the mid-1960's.

Many London Transport bus routes were long-lived, hardly changed from their inception, mostly during the 1920's and 1930's, until at least the early 70's. In contrast, the social and commercial upheavals of the last 30 years or so have meant that this very stable situation has now been transformed virtually out of all recognition.

Through the 1950's and 1960's we lived in Fenton Avenue, about 1 mile along the Kingston Road from the town centre, beyond the Southern's Central Station. Our nearest bus stop was the "Jolly Butcher", complete with a big red time-clock upon which conductors had to register the passage of all eastbound journeys. Despite this special importance, the stop was not a fare stage, so the one we used most (at least, until I got my free school bus pass!) was a short walk away, at Broadway (Cottage Hospital), thereby saving a halfpenny or two on the fare into town.

Unfortunately I took very few photographs of the vehicles, and some that I had went missing many years ago. I have a fair collection of those of other photographers much more expert than I, purchased at various enthusiast events over the years. I am always on the lookout for more, and permission to use any such here would be most welcome, so that the article might be much better illustrated! Meanwhile, I have included some of the beautifully-preserved vehicles taken at various rallies in recent years, as examples of the vehicle types involved.

The Red Bus routes

Staines was at that time served by four red bus double decker routes, all using the universal RT vehicles dating from the early 1950's. To me always synonymous with these were the old Bell Punch type tickets, individually pre-printed on papers of various pretty colours according to their value, which the conductor pulled individually from a rack and punched to show the destination fare- stage; I collected these avidly as a young child. They were sadly replaced early in 1957 by the "Gibson" machine -printed slips of thin paper, with purple ink that came off on your fingers, which were definitely not worth collecting.

Three of the four routes were then operated by Hounslow Garage (code AV). The **116** ran directly along the main London Road via Bedfont and terminated in Staines West station forecourt. It was one of the oldest services in the area, having its origins in General route 45, operating c.1912 with the famous B-type double deckers.....

By 1930 the primary route was designated 116a, with summer afternoon extensions to Virginia Water (Wheatsheaf) as 116b, and on Sundays to Ascot (Royal Ascot Hotel) as 116.

Under LPTB from 1934, the daily running was designated 116, operated by ST's, extended on Saturday afternoons only to Egham (Eclipse). In 1935 the summer extension was to Virginia Water (Tea House), in 1936-38 to Windsor (Castle Hill), and in subsequent years both before and after the war



generally to Old Windsor (Bells of Ouseley), serving the popular Thames-side meadows of Runnymede.

RT's replaced the ST's in 1948, and continued for no less than 23 years, until 1971 when the ubiquitous Routemasters took over fully. From May 1962, as part of the route 657 trolleybus replacement, the 116 was

extended at its eastern end from Hounslow to Turnham Green (and to Hammersmith in peak hours and on Saturdays). The picture shows RM1710 at Staines West station on 27th December 1969.

Route **203** also came in via London Road, but wandered around the back lanes of Hatton Cross and Stanwell and thus we hardly ever found occasion to use it. This relative youngster was started in 1951 running only from Hanworth to Hounslow, but soon extended at both ends becoming Twickenham to Hatton Cross. It was the domain of the last 7 STL's at AV garage, until they were replaced by RT's in 1954. Meanwhile, a new route 162 had started in 1948, replacing the erstwhile Staines-Stanwell section of the 224 (see later), using ST's. In 1956, the 203 was diverted via Stanwell and extended regularly to Staines, replacing the 162, running with a total of 10 RT's. From 1965, the Sunday service (Staines-Stanwell only) was handled by just one OMO RF, but the weekday RT's continued until 1972. The route survives in recognisable form today.

The **117** came down through Feltham and Ashford, past our home stop, continuing over Staines Bridge and along the "Causeway" to terminate at Egham station - the furthest point reached daily by the red bus services in the area in 1960. Before the war it went even further. Starting life as General route 141, Hounslow to Virginia Water in 1914, it was re-numbered to 117 in 1920, by then running daily through to Windsor.

Ten years later, as 117d, the main route had been further extended to Slough station, but in 1933 the section beyond Staines was transferred to London General Country Services and incorporated into new route 417, later re-appearing as the 460. Under LPTB from 1934 the regular western terminus became Egham (Eclipse), with summer Sunday extensions initially to Windsor Castle, then to Virginia Water (Tea Gardens) from 1936. At this time, the route was worked by ST's shared with the 116. A minor diversion in Egham to terminate at the S.R. station occurred from 1943, setting the pattern for many years to follow. The last ST's were finally ousted by RT's in 1950, by which time they were the oldest LT double-deckers in regular service, and looking somewhat decrepit.

The first of the RT's had arrived at Hounslow in September 1948, and the allocation here quickly grew to some 95 vehicles, shared with the 81 group of routes; a new, modern garage with adjacent bus station was opened during 1954. With the four-year regular overhaul cycle, we could thus expect a turnover of some 20-25 new vehicles a year on our local routes (some returned to the same garage after overhaul, but this was not generally the case). There were always some of the earliest examples with roof route-box bodies, RT's 179, 220, 330, 363 and 369 being very regular performers in the late fifties.

I used the 117 service nearly every day from 1959-66, going to school in Egham. In the opposite direction it enabled direct connection into the smooth and fast 657 trolleybus service at any point after the start of the overhead wires near Hounslow Heath. A major change took place following the 657's abolition on 8th May 1962 - one of the very last group of trolley routes to be converted to diesel buses. Our local 117 route was then extended right through to Shepherds Bush, and on the following morning, we got a gleaming brand-new "Routemaster" for the run to school. The novelty soon wore off; I never did get to like their somewhat spongy ride, and much preferred the solid old RT's.

These stalwarts remained in use for many years longer on our other local service, the **90**. In early 1932, this General route was running from Richmond to Chertsey only via Sunbury, using the last of the old K-type double-deckers at Hounslow garage.....



to Kew Gardens station at the other end). The extension into Staines came 5 months later, still mainly AV-

worked, but with Twickenham garage (code AB) providing NS's on Sundays. AB gradually took over all duties, with new STL's, in the period 1937-39. From 1949-54, route 90 was host to some of the ill-fated SRT's (RT bodies on STL chassis, with somewhat deficient braking!), working alongside the STL's.



Standard RT's then took over, some initially in green livery. Among the regulars for very many years was GB-plated RT3070 bearing a plaque in the lower saloon commemorating its European publicity travels. Twickenham's RT allocation was boosted to around 45 vehicles by 1959, but this garage closed in April 1970. Route 90 was then worked by Fulwell (FW), the former trolleybus depot, and the RT's finally finished in February 1972. The picture shows RT2224 at the former Staines

West station yard terminus on 27th December 1969, with RLH26 behind on route 436 to Guildford.

The old route 90 survives in Staines as the 290, the only one in 1993 still terminating at the old Staines West station rather than the "new" bus station at the Elmsleigh Centre (in 1995 it was diverted across Staines Bridge to the new Sainsbury store site, best known amongst us exiles as the old Petter diesel engine works, or even earlier as the home of Lagonda cars!).

Staines was also served by three red bus single-decker routes, all worked by traditional half-cab, front-engined vehicles throughout the fifties.

The **224** was started by LPTB in 1934, though superseding London General's 506 (which started in 1929 using K & S type single-deckers) over most of its route, Uxbridge (New Inn) - Cowley - Wraysbury - Staines, extended to Stanwell in 1932. Most duties used the little OMO Dennis Darts (DA type) from Uxbridge garage (UX), but Hounslow supplied one vehicle at weekends until 1942. Cs and new CRs took over in 1939, and diversion in Uxbridge to terminate at the station occurred the following year. Increased wartime traffic saw conversion to fully-crewed Ts in 1942. Quite a variety of the T types could be seen, with 11T11 from 1946-49, then 9T9 until 1951 and 10T10 1951-53. In March 1948, the Staines - Stanwell section was replaced by new route 162 (later 203), 224 being diverted along Kingston Road and Worple Road to terminate instead at Laleham Broadway. As this now passed quite close to home, I sometimes caught one of these from Clarence Street when nothing had turned up at the due time on our normal routes. After 1953 this would invariably be one of the Weymann bodied T-class AEC Regals of 1946 (14T12), with very large front route indicator box and elegantly curving dropped roofline beneath it, resulting in a somewhat aggressive appearance. They had front entrances (no doors) and a couple of steps with convenient handrail up into the main passenger compartment. These old staggers had nice growly engines, whining gearboxes - and superb brakes: I have particular cause to remember T767 in this respect! I had managed to get involved in some sort of schoolboy gang "brawl" on the narrow pavement at the very brow of Kingston Road railway bridge one afternoon in the spring of 1958, which spilled out onto the road right in front of this vehicle. Fortunately it stopped dead instantly, but the driver gave vent to his displeasure in most colourful terms. We were given away by our uniform maroon school blazers, and there was duly a mention of the transgression (with a demand that the guilty ones should own up immediately) at Assembly the following morning!

The T's worked until November 1958, when they were replaced by the rather similar but more elegant Leyland Tiger TD class vehicles. These however did not last long, being themselves ousted by RFs some seven months later. The service frequency over the full route was hourly Monday to Friday, 30 mins on Saturdays and 40 mins on Sunday, with journey time around 66 mins. There were also short workings at the Uxbridge end (e.g. to Harmondsworth only), the whole requiring an allocation of 6 vehicles, supplemented by one more on Saturdays.

Following the lowering of the roadway under the BR Western Region main line at West Drayton station in May 1963, RT double-deckers were used for the first time, but the 224 reverted to RFs once again in the period 1971-

76. On my nostalgic 1993 visit, I detected no surviving trace of this route, indeed what with the M4, the M25, Heathrow extensions and gravel excavations, the same may be said of much of the area it once served!

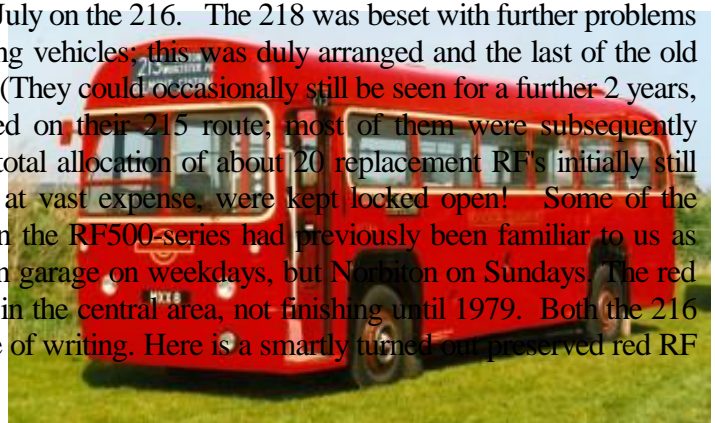
The other two single-decker services were the 216 and 218, both from Kingston, running through to Staines West station by different routes; the **216** via Hampton Court, Sunbury & Ashford then along London Road, and the **218** via Hershams, Walton, Shepperton & Laleham coming up Thames Street, under the low railway bridge with its supporting pillar inconveniently projecting into the road. They were both operated by Kingston Garage (K), and were predominantly worked by the Leyland TDs for much longer.

The 216 route may be said to have its origins in a Kingston to Ashford station service started by Sunshine Saloon Coaches in 1928, using probably just one vehicle. This was superseded and extended into Staines by General route 198 in January 1933 with OMO DA-type single-deckers, and renumbered to 216 in 1934. The DAs were replaced by C and CR types in late 1939, and became fully-crewed with LTs (the "Scooters") in 1942 serving also as a replacement for part of former Green Line coach route 21. The TDs started in 1949, and were of two distinct batches, the initial Weymann-bodied version, all of which were withdrawn by early 1958, then around 25 from the later Mann-Egerton series TD32-131. A trio of green 15T13s were drafted in to help out for a few months in 1956. The service frequency was about every 15 minutes including Sundays, and the full journey was scheduled to take 56 mins, with 11 vehicles allocated. Here are a couple of pictures of the Cobham Bus Museum's preserved TD type....



In 1923, General route 62 (which started 1922 running Kingston - Shepperton) was extended to Staines. Old B-type single-deckers were replaced by single-deck S-type, operating from Weybridge and Kingston garages. A summer Sunday extension went even further, to Burnham Beeches, over the route later familiar as 162, 162b, 462 and finally, 460! Under LPTB from 1934, 62 became 218, terminating at Staines Bridge Street, operated by 1T1's (in the series T1-50) of 1929, together with some LT "scooters" from 1938-45. Pre-war there was also a General route 61, which became 217, running Kingston to Staines via Walton, Weybridge and Addlestone. Weybridge garage closed in 1939, its duties transferred to Kingston. The weakening state of Walton bridge meant that the last 14 old 1T1's had to be retained specially until it was replaced by a "temporary" Bailey bridge in early 1953. Enthusiasts at that time had hoped for an appearance of red GS's, but got yet more TD's instead! Route 218 frequency was typically every 10 minutes (15 on Sundays), with the full journey timetabled to take 64 mins.

The 216 and 218 were scheduled to change over to the modern, underfloor-engined RF's with one-man operation ("Pay as you Enter") in May 1959, but the unions objected to this radical change, the newly converted RFs were put into store and the TDs soldiered on until July on the 216. The 218 was beset with further problems as it was not then licensed for operation by 30-foot long vehicles; this was duly arranged and the last of the old TDs thus ran regularly in Staines on 6th January 1960. (They could occasionally still be seen for a further 2 years, as Kingston retained a small allocation, normally used on their 215 route; most of them were subsequently exported for further sterling service in Ceylon). The total allocation of about 20 replacement RF's initially still carried conductors, and the air-operated doors, fitted at vast expense, were kept locked open! Some of the numbers carried were also quite confusing, as those in the RF500-series had previously been familiar to us as green country buses. Operation was still from Kingston garage on weekdays, but Northon on Sundays. The red RFs survived to become the last of the type in service in the central area, not finishing until 1979. Both the 216 and 218 routes survive in recognisable form at the time of writing. Here is a smartly turned out preserved red RF in near-original condition....



The last (and most definitely the least) traditional red bus route to start was the **225**, a rail-replacement service introduced 29/3/65, upon withdrawal of the Staines West - Colnbrook - West Drayton branch trains. It used 2 RTs from UX garage, running at peak hours only, Mondays to Fridays, and survived for only some six years.

The Green Bus routes

London Transport Country Area RTs painted in their very smart Lincoln Green livery with cream band, worked two main routes starting from Staines Central station up-side forecourt. The **441** went deviously via Thorpe Lea, Egham, Old Windsor and Slough to Hedgerley Village or High Wycombe. It had an impeccable pedigree, originating in a very early Slough-Beaconsfield road motor service of the Great Western Railway Company, latterly their route 41, renumbered 441 by LPTB in 1934, then worked by STs.

At that time, services between Staines and Windsor were provided by what later became routes 436/436a, amongst several others, on a Woking-Uxbridge axis, and the 441 did not arrive in Staines until late 1937, the result of a general re-organization of this area which also saw the demise of the



417 Windsor to Staines service. For a few weeks in the summer of 1939 the 441 was further extended from Staines (Southern Railway) station to Ashford (Links Hotel), still mainly with STs, supplemented by the occasional TD type double-decker. By 1948, it was worked by STLs from Staines (ST) and Windsor (WR) garages. The RTs came in from 1951-53, and lasted until 1972, with occasional forays by the survivors until about 1976. Around 1954, some 10T10 single-deckers were also to be seen, and were then replaced by new RFs; however by 1959 RTs predominated. I would often walk to the station to catch one to school on a pleasant morning, or if the regular 117 did not turn up. There was an occasional **441c** (417a before 1938) derivative going only as far as Englefield Green, and a **441d** to Virginia Water, worked by Staines vehicles.

The other main route **460** ran directly to Slough via Datchet. This was created in May 1943 using STLs, replacing the equivalent portion of the 461 and 462 (see below), both of which were then truncated in Staines. There was a Mon-Fri peak hours extension from Staines to Ashford station until late 1947. The 460 was operated from Staines Garage with about 5 RTs from July 1951 until December 1966, thence RFs until September 1972

Quite a few of the green RTs, ironically the newest ones, carried the unflattering registration letter sequence "OLD", indeed RT4773, the very last one to be licensed for service (though neither the last-built or the highest-numbered) carried OLD560. This vehicle, which came to operate on the 441 route from Staines garage in late 1959, was equipped experimentally with an automatic passenger counter ("Loadmeter") which clocked up one digit every time someone sat down on any seat. Once our terrible homeward-bound school contingent got wise to this, we would spend the whole journey bouncing up and down on the seats in unison, thereby creating improbable passenger loadings of several thousand, and so no doubt guaranteeing the continuation of such a popular service (the trial was soon discontinued!)

In addition to the 441 and 460, ST operated a number of purely local routes, **466** to Knowle Hill and **469** to Virginia Water, and the **493** in Egham (the latter did not come into Staines itself; it was a special hospital service, one journey only on Wednesdays and Sundays from 1953-65, with one RT). The 466 was started in February 1934 from Staines (south side of the river bridge) to Callow Hill via Pooley Green, Stroude Virginia Water and Knowle Hill, but soon extended over Staines Bridge; it was terminated at Virginia Water station from July 1935 and worked by Staines garage vehicles after mid 1936. In late 1941 it was from converted from C-type single-deckers to STLs due to wartime demand and renumbered 441c; it reverted to 466 in late 1943. The 469 was also started in 1934, from Staines (south of bridge) to Knowle Hill via Thorpe and Virginia Water. It was converted from C-type to T-type single-deckers in 1942 and most journeys were cut back to Virginia Water after 1949.

We sometimes caught the 466 service after school in Egham, as far as Staines Bridge Street, where it terminated. This route was RT-operated from October 1952 but by the late fifties had become almost exclusively RF (usually just the one vehicle; RF598 being the regular performer throughout 1958-62) It was one of the first in the area to be run as one-man operation, the vehicle being fitted with air operated doors controlled by the driver. This was most infuriating as we could no longer jump aboard at the last minute as the bus moved away from the stop!



Occasionally one of the quaint bull-nose bonneted little GS type 26-seaters would turn up, probably on temporary loan from Windsor Garage (where two or three of them worked the 445 route from 1954 to 1966) as a replacement for a failed vehicle. From 1959 to 1961 this was invariably GS77. These had always been one man operated, with the driver sitting right within the main passenger compartment; real rural style buses.



The **462** service to Leatherhead was one of a final group of four routes serving Staines which left the town by means of Chertsey Lane, whose low height railway bridge precluded the use of standard RT type vehicles, and the only one operated by single-deckers. General route 162 was started in 1925, Staines-Slough-Burnham Beeches, then extended to Leatherhead via Cobham the following year as 162b. Single-deck K type vehicles were replaced by Cs, operating from WR garage, and the LPTB re-numbering of October 1934 was to 462. New CR class CR12-17 started in 1939, but were soon replaced by Ts then lowbridge STs and STLs to cope with wartime traffic levels. In 1943-44 gas-powered Ts were in use, and the route was now operating from Leatherhead (LH) and Addlestone (WY) depots, having been truncated at Staines, the section onwards to Slough superseded by the new route 460. After the war, downgraded 9T9 and 10T10 coaches were used, and these were replaced by country-area green RFs in 1953. One-Man Operation commenced in July 1958. In early 1961, the three AEC Reliance/Willowbrook demonstrators RW1-3 appeared; these had novel dual entrance bodies of very boxy outline. This trial lasted only some 6 months; drivers complained that they could not pull up with both doors adjacent to the pavement at some rural stops! The RFs continued here until January 1973, though the Chertsey - Staines section of the route had ceased to run after the end of 1966.

The other three Chertsey Lane routes, **436** to Guildford, **436a** to Ripley and **461** to Walton-on-Thames, were operated by lowbridge double-deckers. The first two of these were originated around 1928 by J.R. Fox & sons, trading as Woking & District Motor Services, running Guildford - Woking - Chertsey - Staines - Egham Hythe, and West Byfleet - Chertsey - Staines - Windsor respectively. Messrs Fox were bought by Aldershot & District in 1931, but operation of these routes was handed via LGOC to East Surrey, becoming their 36 & 37; the former now extended to terminate at Windsor Castle. LPTB renumbered them 436 & 437, and they were extended from Windsor to Uxbridge in July 1935, replacing parts of 458, 457 from Staines (these being former LGOC 506/507). The 437 was also extended at the other end, to Ripley. However, these long hauls were short-lived, being cut back again to Windsor in March 1936 whereupon the 437 became 436a, and to Staines (diverted over the river bridge to terminate at the GWR station) in October 1937 upon extension of the 441. Regular vehicles during the early 1940s were 4Q4 type single deckers, then from May 1943 lowbridge STLs painted in wartime grey livery; the service was cut back to Staines - Woking only. The new RLH (Regent low-height) type replaced these and the odd remaining lowbridge ST in 1950. In that year also the extensions beyond Woking to Guildford and Ripley were reinstated, requiring extra vehicles. The distinctive "Godstone" STLs, 1044-1055, were drafted in, 6 each at Addlestone and Guildford (GF) garages, and served here until 1954 when they too were replaced by more RLH's

The RLH's comprised only some 60 country examples in total plus a few in red bus service. They had rows of four cross-bench seats on the upper deck, very awkward to get in and out of especially at busy times (stooping to avoid hitting the low roof with our heads), and a sunken narrow gangway on the right hand side which similarly obstructed the lower deck headroom. They worked on our local routes until 1970.

In 1959, 436/436a outward journeys from the terminus at Staines West station, amongst other routes, were diverted via Church Street and Clarence Street as part of an experimental one-way traffic scheme, later made permanent.....



Here we see RLH33 working route 436 to Guildford on 20th December 1968, firstly at rest at the terminus in Staines West station yard, along with red RF468 on route 218 behind, and an RT on route 116 to the right. Then, having traversed Church Street eastwards and made the very awkward right turn into Clarence Street, it is passing the Regal cinema stop and is about to turn onto the River Thames bridge.

Inward journeys continued to use Bridge Street. Route 436 still operated in 1993, extended from Staines to Heathrow Airport since 1981.

Route **461** first came to Staines in October 1937, as a replacement for parts of several other routes; LGOC 61 had started 1922 (Kingston - Chertsey), being extended in 1928 to Staines and Windsor. By 1930, it was cut back to Staines (Bridge St), running with S-type single-deckers from K garage; it became LPTB 217, using Ts. Meanwhile, route 171 (LPTB 214) operated Kingston - Staines via Weybridge (s/d K-type at K, later also Ts). Both these were replaced by an extended 461, Hersham – Staines, operated from Addlestone (WY) with 4Q4 and R-type single-deckers. By 1940 some weekend afternoon journeys were further extended through to Slough station via Datchet and Upton, but this section became new route 460 in 1943 as already noted. Staines garage took over the operation from May 1946, now running to Walton on Thames with low-height STs and STLs. The RLHs took over in 1950, these lasting until 1970. By 1993, 461 seems to have transformed itself into several derivatives: 521, 561, 567 etc, covering broadly similar territory.

Green Line Coaches

The "Green Line" luxury limited stop coach services were normally operated by specially fitted out and painted RF's, having such luxuries (to us) as power operated folding doors, luggage racks and saloon heaters. A few vehicles also had an extra row of curved "sun-roof" windows above the cant-rail along the length of each side of the saloon; these had been built originally for private hire contract work, and were only 27ft 6ins long whereas all other RFs were 30ft. We only made use of these elite services on special occasions for longer journeys, say to Virginia Water on summer Sundays; somewhat higher fares than normal were charged.

Routes 701 & 702 ran from Ascot and Sunningdale to Gravesend via the A30 London Road through Staines. The Sunningdale service was started first, on 23rd July 1930, with 5 new T-class AEC Regal coaches in the series T157-206 operating from a then-new (though temporary) Staines garage. Initially running to Central London only, it was extended to Dartford in early 1931 and Gravesend in 1933. It became designated firstly as route A (shared with the Ascot service), then subsequently AA, A2 and 23a (the last running Sunningdale-Victoria only, in 1941-42). All Green Line services were then suspended for the rest of the war, and 1946 re-instatement was as route **702** with the famous 10T10 coaches, now coming directly along London Road into Staines, not via Ashford and Feltham as previously.

The Ascot service started 5 weeks after that to Sunningdale, and had a very similar subsequent history. This route A became A1, 23 and **701** in turn, and lasted until October 1975. The RFs arrived in 1952, with 7 vehicles at each of Staines and Northfleet (NF) garages for the two routes. Converted to OMO operation in November 1968, they ran here until July 1973, when route 702 finished.

We had the 718 and 725 coming down Kingston Road. Neither of these had a direct pre-war equivalent; a Windsor-Staines-Hounslow-London service was started 10th July 1930 and extended out to Epping in 1933. This became route N, but the wartime replacement 52 did not run west of London. Another route, D, Sevenoaks-Victoria-Sunbury, was extended to Staines garage in 1934, and ran into London via Kingston and Richmond. It became 21 (Staines-Victoria only) in 1940, but ceased along with all the others in 1942. The **718** started in 1946 was thus almost equivalent to the pre-war N north of London and D west of London, although it now ran via Putney instead of Richmond. The northern part was diverted via Chingford in 1950 and extended to Harlow New Town in July 1956. The switch from 10T10 coaches to RFs occurred in March 1952, with 6 vehicles at Windsor and 8 at Epping (EP) garages. The beautiful prototype Routemaster coach CRL4 worked a regular 718 duty from WR during 1960 and 1961, and several of the Green-Line liveried RTs were also often used at this time. The route became entirely double-decked from October 1962, with the new production RMC coaches, but was curtailed in 1977 to run between Windsor and London only. It still functions in summer as "The Royal River Express", but now comes up from Thorpe Park to the south end of Staines Bridge, thence along the Causeway.

The **725** was a brand-new rural route Windsor-Gravesend via Kingston & Croydon introduced in July 1953, unusual in that it avoided Central London completely. It was RF worked from the start, shared between ST and Dartford (DT) (later NF) garages; these were converted to OMO operation in 1969 and ran regularly until early 1972, with occasional forays for a while thereafter. Route 725 was diverted away from Staines, to run instead from Kingston to Woking, from April 1980.

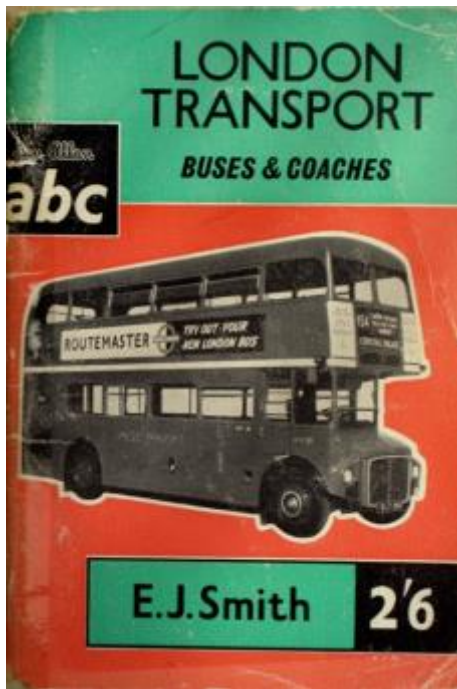
There was a basic 1/2 hourly service on all these Green Line routes around 1959. There was often a need for relief journeys, and some interesting vehicles could be seen, including front-entrance STLs on the 718 in 1953, ex-country area converted RFs from 1956, and the ex-Private Hire RFs. In late 1958, some 725 relief workings were covered by RLH vehicles borrowed by Staines from Addlestone garage, which seemed most unsuitable for such duties.

Depots and Details

Staines had a small LT country bus garage situated half a mile or so along the A30 towards Ashford. This dated from 1935-1936, and replaced a corrugated-iron Green Line structure installed in 1930 (coded CL, formerly in use at Potters Bar). While the new garage was being built, vehicles were temporarily garaged at premises in The Avenue, Egham. The new building remained in use until the 1990s but was then sadly demolished, despite having achieved a degree of recognition for architectural merit, of which we were totally ignorant and unappreciative all those years ago. It then housed vehicles for the 441 group and 460 routes (15 RTs from June 1950, rising to a maximum of 18 with the final delivery of RT4746 in March 1958). There was also just one country RF for the single deck local services 466 and 469, which lasted until July 1976, and a fleet of 15 Green Line coaches.

A special operational requirement for just a few days in June every year was the 443 Ascot Races Week service. Extra vehicles had to be drafted in from elsewhere for this intensive duty, which was fulfilled in 1961 by rare Green-Line liveried RTs amongst others.

Due to extremely vigilant staff, access by itinerant schoolboys was virtually impossible at all times, but this mattered little since most of the contents could be viewed easily from outside the large main doors fronting onto London Road. A regular and conspicuous inmate was the red "pre-war" RT2 driver trainer, RT141, which was shared with Windsor garage. For an occasional few days at a time it was also host to one of the five olive-green liveried Tree-Lopper service vehicles, converted from old front-entrance STL buses (usually 973J - ex STL1039 - based at Northfleet), as its gang worked around the local roads. I remember it once being particularly active in the verdant surroundings of the Cottage Hospital bus stop, though this was of course firmly within the Central Buses operating area! Hereabouts also we often saw the little Austin van 1059AS from Hounslow garage, as its crew paused to change the timetable cards displayed at all bus stops.



All LT buses carried their fleet numbers in elegant gold and black transfers applied to the bonnet side panel and below the driver's cab window. As for the British Railways locomotives, there was an Ian Allan ABC pocket book listing all the numbers, types and registration letters – the picture shows mine, the 1959 edition, well-thumbed.

The garage and duty allocations (running numbers) were shown on small aluminium stencil plates slotted into guides below the forward lower deck saloon windows on each side. The garage operating the vehicle was denoted by a one or two letter code, most of which were fairly logical, e.g. Staines = ST, Windsor = WR, Uxbridge = UX, Kingston = K, but others were more obscure; Hounslow was AV and Twickenham AB! These depot plates seemed prone to disappear mysteriously (we schoolboys of course knew nothing about this!) so the codes were later painted directly on the side of the vehicles.

Around 1961, I recall some experiments were being conducted with an arrangement of reflectors mounted in the top deck front nearside panel of selected vehicles, which were meant to report the identity of each bus as it passed by a scanner in Clarence Street (above the old library on the corner of Bridge Street). This precursor of modern bar-code techniques supplemented but did not eliminate the stern inspectors with their clipboards hereabouts. No great improvement in the service seemed to result however, and the conductors on route 117 still had to jump off briskly to punch their time-cards in the big red clock at our stop at the top of Fenton Avenue, while passengers were boarding or alighting.

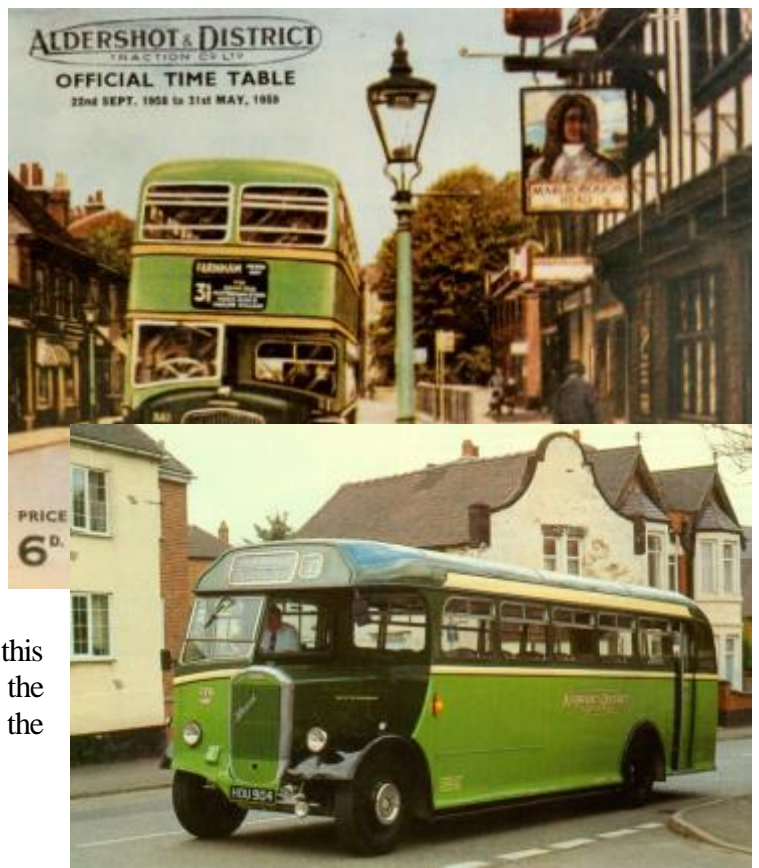
Provincial Operators

London Transport in the late 'fifties had a virtual monopoly of all bus services in the capital, as far west as our home area. Not far away however we could encounter some of the colourful liveries and different vehicle types of the provincial bus operators. The nearest was the **Aldershot & District** Traction company, referred to colloquially by all and sundry as the "Tracco". Based at Aldershot, with good service coverage also in the Woking, Farnham, Alton and Guildford areas, they were mostly loyal to the vehicles produced by Dennis Motors in the latter town. They were painted in an attractive two tone green livery with cream band, elaborately lined out and lettered.

Their number 1 route penetrated deep into LT territory to reach Egham station (hence our own special nickname "ave a shot and risk it" amongst others even sillier or quite unprintable).

This service was used by those elite kids attending our school from the Surrey stockbroker belt; we could always distinguish the sound of their bus coming up Station Road from our own old RT. It was probably no coincidence that A&D's newest and sleekest vehicles, the Dennis "Lolines" were paraded on this lengthy and prestigious route. Although being of lowbridge format like all their double-deckers, they were of conventional and roomy layout upstairs, really comfortable and quiet, and the first locally to have such modern features as heaters and air operated doors.

Some of the more ancient vehicles owned by this concern were to be found lurking around the back-streets of Guildford and Aldershot, including the



last pre-war Dennis Lances and some re-bodied wartime Guy Arabs until 1959. The quieter rural routes were operated by old-fashioned looking normal-control single-deckers, the Dennis Falcons, which I thought were the ugliest buses ever made. They were in fact contemporary with LT's little GS type, so not really that old.

The highlight of a day's tour in this company's area was an exhilarating ride up at the front of the top deck, along the Hog's Back road to and from Farnham. Staff were generally very friendly and helpful - the main workshops and depot at Halimote Road, Aldershot were accessible on request, and contained several interesting vehicles on our visit in the summer of 1960.

The red buses of **Thames Valley** Traction Co. Ltd were prevalent outside Windsor, Reading and High Wycombe ex G.W.R. stations. This was one of the nationalised BTC group companies, operating mainly Bristol vehicles with the usual Eastern Coach Works bodies. Of the various companies in this group, which in fact had a service monopoly covering most of East Anglia, Southern & Western England and Wales, the majority used a uniform green livery with cream embellishments; in our vicinity only Thames Valley and neighbouring Wilts & Dorset used red in place of the green.



These two views are at Windsor & Eton Central Station (ex-GWR) in March 1970.



The vehicles too comprised just a few basic standardized designs, which were upgraded by newer models year by year, in much the same way as car manufacturers now generally operate. The double deckers were virtually all lowbridge height; the sturdy old half cab K series vehicles with their angular bodies, very flat roofs and sliding window vents, and the modern "Lodekka" replacements supplied in various versions of gradually increasing refinement from 1956, with their distinctive combined radiator and front wing cowling arrangement.

The older single-deckers were similarly of half cab, front engine layout; the L family. These had elegant lines, with a very distinctive large front route indicator box and pronounced rounding of the bodywork panelling at the back end. Here is Thames Valley L574 on the forecourt of High Wycombe station on 26th February 1966.



This vehicle type was to me the definitive country bus, associated with rural lanes, branch line station yards and village squares right across the south of England; comfortable, reliable and homely. Much better in my view than that other well known type, the Bedford OB, by then mostly in the hands of the smaller private operators, which often seemed to run to an unpublished schedule and unpredictable fare structure known only to the local populace, and made a loud whining or droning noise as they progressed on their way.....

Coaching Days

Independent Operators in the Staines area were largely restricted by the LT monopoly to private coach operations, though famous exceptions were "**Windsorian**" and "**Imperial**" who had since time immemorial retained some stage routes in Windsor. There was a "**Cosy Coaches**" outfit in London Road, Staines, of which I recall little and have been able to trace few other details. I was much more aware of the other local coach operator, Harry **Beach**, at his little depot adjacent to the Staines Central station goods yard in Gresham Road. I didn't get around to photographing it until 1997, after a change of ownership and fortunately just before it was demolished for redevelopment.....



He indeed possessed three of the dreaded Bedford OBs which were by the late fifties used mainly for schools contract work; five or six newer SBs with Duple Vega bodywork made up the balance of this small fleet and were assigned to day trips (to Brighton, Bognor etc) and the luxury private hire work. The livery was cream with red trim. The garage remained into the 1990s, but unfortunately the original business had by then ceased, after some 50 years service.

However, without doubt the largest variety of fleet names, vehicle types and liveries could be seen simply by standing in one place, on the A30 coming off the "Causeway" on the south side of the Thames bridge at Staines, on summer holiday weekend afternoons and evenings, as I did often in 1960. This was the last year of the great summer traffic jams at this point, before our by-pass road was opened.

Caught in the very slow moving eastbound procession would be coaches from many of the major nationals and independents, plus numerous buses (some of quite venerable age) drafted in as relief or standby vehicles; even then before the motorway era road transport was a cheap and popular alternative to rail travel over quite long distances. The main traffic flows were: West Country - London, Midlands - South East coast, Home Counties & South East - Windsor, the latter mainly as day excursions.

There was a basic pattern of regular services, running all year round, provided by Aldershot & District and by the **Royal Blue** services of the BTC group companies. The A&D express coach service to London was by then normally worked by modern AEC Reliance vehicles (below right), but at busy times the old half-cab Dennis Lancet coaches (below left) and the full-fronted later versions (LAA series registrations) were drafted in, still retaining their former elegance.....



The distinctive but by now somewhat dated deep blue and cream liveried Royal Blue half-cab Bristol luxury coaches, with their roof luggage racks accessible only by ladder at the back (picture right), could still be seen working turn and turn about alongside the modern LS's (right lower) and MW's. They ran mainly from Bournemouth and Exeter up to Victoria Coach Station in London.

London Transport itself maintained a fleet of special "private hire" RF's (with the curved roofline windows) plus a group of 15 luxury coaches - the RFW type based on the same chassis - which looked



very modern for their period. In earlier years these were painted in a special grey and green livery with red lettering and were very smart, but by 1960 they had become a drab overall unrelieved Lincoln green. They ventured far outside the normal boundaries of bus operation and we would occasionally come across them in the unlikeliest of places on our holiday travels. At Staines however they were invariably engaged on Windsor day tours. There was also a batch of strange looking "one and a half deck" coaches operated by London Transport but carrying BEA grey and white livery. These were normally used between London Airport (later known as Heathrow) and the Central London Air Terminal near Victoria station, but were also often drafted in to help out with the private hire work.

Also seen at Staines on those hot summer days were vehicles of many of the other major bus companies. The BTC group companies would loan coaches and relief buses to each other, and also to the Royal Blue service, as indicated by paper slips posted inside the front windscreen. The distinctive Hants & Dorset "Queen Mary" full fronted Bristol coaches were quite common, along with assorted vehicles from Western & Southern National (picture right), Wilts & Dorset, Bristol Greyhound, Black & White (Cheltenham) and South Midland (the latter in reality the coaching arm of Thames Valley).



Thames Valley themselves contributed double-decker coaches, based on both Bristol K and Lodekka chassis, at that time a somewhat unusual format.

Less frequently, representatives from Eastern National, United Counties and even Red & White (Chepstow) could be seen.

Of the other larger operators, East Kent sent Tigers and Lancets, and Maidstone & District their Regals, Royal Tigers and Reliances (right) on tours to Windsor, often in convoys of several vehicles. Southdown likewise contributed mainly their modern Royal Tigers, but often older vehicles too, on reliefs (below right). Grey Cars (owned by the Devon General omnibus co, picture below.) came up from Exeter.....



City of Oxford Duple-bodied Regals in that very



distinctive livery and Midland Red's cheap looking, droopy fronted own build vehicles were also fairly common, with their main traffic flows in the opposite direction to everyone else.

Last but by no means least were coaches from the many and various independent operators, some of which were also quite large. Some of the regulars seen were:

Grey-Green (London), Bourne & Balmer (Croydon; AEC Regal/Duple), Tilling (London; RFW clones smart in cream with black trim); Venture (Hendon), Valliant (Ealing), Greenslades (Exeter, picture right), Orange Luxury Coaches, Timpsons (Catford; unusual Commers with Beadle bodies); Yellowway (the distinctive Burlingham Seagulls), and Smiths of Reading (a strange dark blue and orange livery, and a great assortment of vehicles,



many ancient/secondhand, even some double-deckers pressed into long-haul service). There were probably many others too, now long forgotten. They completed our very colourful early-1960's bus scene, soon like the local railways to be consolidated, and changed out of all recognition.

K. A. Jagers 1993 (some revisions & additions October 2013 and February 2017)