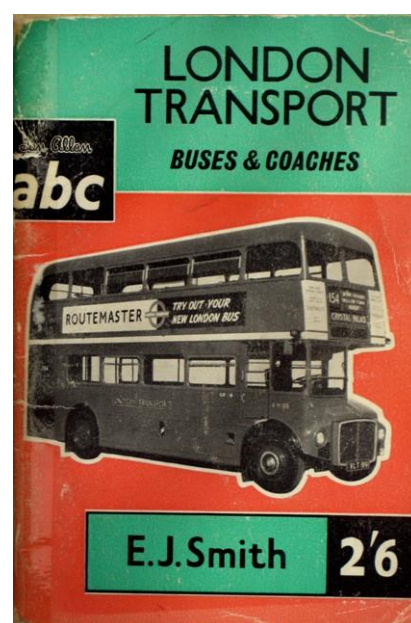


Roving around London (and elsewhere)

Around 1960 it was possible to purchase a "Red Bus Rover" or a "Green Bus Rover" ticket, valid for the whole of the London Transport Central or Country areas respectively, for the princely sum of 2/6d (child rate), allowing unlimited travel for 24 hours. Such a bargain - the same price as a day return on the train from Staines to Waterloo - was difficult to resist, so by mutual agreement a group of four or five of us would go after school on a Friday afternoon to get these tickets from the little L.T. travel office counter on London Road, just along from Staines police station, ready for an early start on the Saturday morning. This core gang (politely referred to in school as a travel club) included Nigel Walters, John Squier and Geoffrey Bluestone; we were joined by others from time to time. Travelling extensively around London by this means from the Autumn of 1959 onwards, we naturally became interested in the buses in their own right, unfortunately somewhat to the detriment of our train-spotting activities at that time. However this was not to be regretted since road transport was also undergoing significant change then, not least in London due to the rapid elimination of the wonderful old trolleybuses and their overhead wiring network.

A typical "Red Rover" day would start either on route 117 from Staines, connecting directly into the 657 trolleybus at Hounslow Heath, or on route 90 via Sunbury (where John Squier would join us if things went according to plan) thence onto the long route 37 somewhere in the vicinity of Richmond Bridge, a one and a half hour marathon right across South London to glorious Peckham. This second option embraced solid RTL territory; the combined allocation of Walworth and Camberwell garages, just across the road from each other, and nearby Stockwell, which worked the 37 route amongst many others, being some 400 vehicles or over a quarter of the then whole stock of this type. Even the most diehard number-collectors could become seriously bored hereabouts, as they all looked just the same, lacking both the bodywork and livery variations of the standard RT's and the comparative rarity value (to us) of the RTW's.



How to tell your RTLs from your RTs? In the pictures below, a nicely preserved RT is at left and left middle, and the other is an RTL; the difference is mainly in the radiators.....



Nonetheless, on one dismal wet Saturday in November 1959 we took the trouble to sneak undetected into the vastness of Stockwell Garage, in the hope perhaps of finding one or two interesting service department vehicles hidden amongst the regular buses. In the furthestmost depths of the buildings, a surprise awaited us!

Neatly parked in a long line, though very dusty and cobwebby, were some 35 examples of the "pre-war" RT2 type, lately finished on their staff-bus and trainer duties (some still carrying

'L' plates) and all showing the well-known blind display "PRIVATE - To hire a bus or coach apply 55 Broadway.... etc". Presumably anyone so doing would expect something better than one of these to turn up! They were by then the oldest buses in the fleet, easily distinguishable from the standard post-war RT by the drooping lower edge of the front windscreen, and the rear roof-mounted route number box. We crept furtively along the small gap between the vehicles and the garage wall, carefully noting down the numbers (ranging as low as RT's 4 & 7), hoping not to be seen by depot staff. However, towards the end of the row we became aware of a large pair of black boots heading our way on the far side of the last bus - this meant serious trouble.....

"I-warned-you-lot-last-time-if-I-caught-you-in-here-again-I'd-call-the-Police"

Suitably puzzled, we explained that we had come all the way from Staines to see these lovely old vehicles, and had never ever been here before. Officialdom was visibly taken aback by this, and further softened as we added that we were of course travelling on LT rover tickets. (We help pay your wages. You know it makes sense)

"Don't-suppose-you-might-be-interested-in-buying-one-of-these-then?"

Such sarcasm being entirely lost on us, this really started the imagination running riot; the ideal vehicle for our group tours - perhaps we could persuade our long-suffering Art master (veteran of various loco-shed bashes in the grimmer areas of the capital) to drive it? Would five pounds or so be enough, we wondered.....? Without waiting for a reply,

"Out-of-here-with-you-now-OUT!"

Sheepishly, we headed as slowly as possible for the exit, this time down the middle of the depot, noting further numbers as we went, including a real curiosity, RTL3, equally cobwebby, with its staircase and rear exit rebuilt to the offside. This, we found out later was to demonstrate the possibilities for conversion to potential buyers from foreign climes. I wonder what happened to all those RT2's no one wanted, as even such loyal customers as Ceylon were buying up much newer surplus RT's and RTL's by then. On future trips, we never dared to try and find out if they were still there!

We quickly tired of the commonplace RT family vehicles and the RF's, so our travels around the L.T. network tended to take us in search of other older or more unusual vehicles, and we soon discovered (often through the pages of "Buses Illustrated" magazine) that the most interesting of these were hidden away in just those garages which were as notoriously difficult to visit as their locomotive depot counterparts. We had a very similar experience to that at Stockwell some months later involving a large quantity of service vehicles of all descriptions at - I think - Cricklewood Garage, where again we managed to record all the details before being forcibly evicted. Some of these had been converted from ancient and long extinct bus types for such duties as carrying bus stops, shelters and trolley poles, tree lopping and towing work, all painted a drab olive green; the newer vehicles were standard vans and lorries, mainly Bedfords and Austins, and painted light grey. Most garages had only one or two service vehicles, so it was a surprise to see so many in one place - again, probably, the older ones had been collected together for showing to potential buyers. Around this time we discovered that Hounslow garage was being similarly used to store a collection of old de-licensed Bedford general-purpose lorries.

We encountered most of the small fleet of RFW coaches at Camberwell garage during the winter of 1959/60, and the surplus BEA airport coaches were at Shepherds Bush. We came across some of the collection of "preserved" vehicles stored in various garages prior to transfer to the Clapham Museum during 1960; quite a few were kept out in the wilds of Reigate, where the staff seemed to be generally much more friendly.

For such depots, Sunday visits were better, with more buses present and those fewer members of staff around being less hassled; being on premium shift rates seemed to make even the surliest more congenial, and some of those we had previously regarded with fear and trepidation might occasionally surprise us with the offer of a guided tour, in response to a polite request to look around. However, Sunday travel on the buses could be very frustrating, and only a fraction of the distances achievable on Saturday trips could be managed.

Our Country Area bus trips were completely different in character, the routes being longer, faster and much more scenic. It was not possible to complete a ring around the capital (however hard we might have tried), so we either headed north or south (to High Wycombe or Leatherhead first) for the day, reaching maybe as far as Harpenden or Crawley before turning back for home. Services tended to be less frequent, so needing an element of timetable based planning.

Yours Truly somehow came to be regarded as the "chief organizer" (or scapegoat) on these trips, bringing to mind one bit of major mis-planning for which I was deemed fully responsible, which stranded us at faraway St. Albans. We arrived at the bus station there at about 6 o'clock one hot Saturday evening, enjoying ourselves so much we hadn't noticed the time slipping by, and found no quick connection homewards.

Amongst our activities that day had been a ride on T792, at Tring. This was one of the very last of this type of single decker in normal passenger service; it ran until December that year (1960), but some others were still seen as staff buses elsewhere for some months longer. We also made a failed attempt to gain access to the vast and remotely situated bus overhaul works at Aldenham, which I suppose we should have anticipated.

In the gathering evening, the options seemed to be a very expensive but quick and comfortable return by Green Line coach, or a long wait - we chose the latter, phoned home, and finally arrived back very tired and very late but congratulating ourselves on having got extremely good value out of our day's ticket!

Trolleybus Travels

Our other abiding interest was in the trolleybus fleet. The fate of this was by now sealed, resulting in the abolition of another large chunk of the network every four months or so as conversion progressed, with a wholesale migration of the displaced vehicles, these in turn ousting older ones elsewhere.

Many of the trolleybus depots had formerly been in use for trams, and frequently the rails and pointwork remained in situ in characteristic cobbled forecourts. If we managed to sneak inside undetected, the twin hazards of open inspection pits and traversers made them somewhat un-nerving to explore, as these older sites generally had few windows and poor lighting. The entrances were often narrow, and the layout contorted with even gloomier recesses, especially in such heavily built up areas as Hammersmith and Poplar where space was at a premium. We never found much difficulty in gaining access and having a good look round. Most trolley depots would contain one or two of the service department vehicles, rarely seen on the road in daylight as these were employed on overhead wiring work or as emergency breakdown tenders. Trolleybus service vehicles tended to be painted red instead of the usual olive green.

The furthest we normally ventured on our Red Bus Rover excursions was to make the exciting high speed (or so it seemed) non-stop run on route 108 through the narrow and gloomy Blackwall Tunnel under the Thames. This would be in the course of a circular day trip taking in the sights of such as Limehouse, Canning Town, Poplar and the docklands in general, then still quite busy in their original function. One such took us to the Poplar trolleybus depot, where some interesting vehicles were reputedly to be found, but due to another small piece of mis-planning we arrived there a few days *after* the conversion (in November 1959) and found it full of gleaming new "Routemasters" instead! This did have the slight

compensation that this was the first such large scale influx of these vehicles (the previous conversions having used surplus stocks of RT's), thus the first of what was quickly to become London's new standard bus that we had encountered in any quantity, and our first opportunity to ride on them.

The last few of the once-large allocation of standard L3 trolleybuses lingered dejectedly to one side of the depot, still awaiting transfer westwards for further service, and we also noted some of the rare "South Africans", stored here since conversion of the Ilford area routes the previous August. These were quite unlike the standard London Transport trolleybus design, having very flat fronts and a clear indication of where a front entrance door was originally intended to be fitted. A few weeks later, we found yet more of these stored at Edmonton depot, reached after a seemingly interminable ride round the North Circular on a 112 from Ealing.

On this excursion, very early in the new year of 1960, we had started off from home while it was still dark, and John Squier soon discovered that his rover ticket (purchased separately from the rest) had been stamped 2 JAN 59 in error. It was accepted as valid, but had to be explained away several times during the day. In the afternoon we found ourselves out in the north west suburbs, and took a ride on a 645 northbound for Edgware, to see the TD's still running on route 240A. We didn't quite get there however, instead discovering for ourselves where all the old trolleybuses finally went to die!

Gliding smoothly and silently along the Edgware Road from Cricklewood Broadway, we were not even going to bother looking over Colindale depot, as we reckoned to encounter most of the small allocation in the course of our journeys. Suddenly, from our customary top-deck front seats we espied a veritable galaxy of trolleybuses stretching away from the main road as far as we could see. We were dinging the bell, down the stairs and off our trusty steed almost instantly, leaving the conductress gazing heavenward - yet another raiding party!

This was Cohen's scrap yard, an L shaped area to the south of, and stretching around behind the LT running depot, to where most redundant vehicles were being sent from conversion stage 3 (August 1959) onwards. Entry was easily gained - we just strolled in through a broken-down fence. The sad old stagers had been deliberately smashed into each other in several lines, to pack as many as possible into the available space. Near the entrance gates off the main road, they were in seemingly good condition, presumably recently arrived straight out of service, but further in the dustier and dirtier they became, with windows smashed, blinds flapping from broken holders and trolley poles splayed at all angles. All around was a sea of mud, twisted metal and glass. Clambering around slowly and carefully we inspected the mechanical workings behind missing lower panels, and even climbed through an upper deck rear emergency exit onto the roof to examine the current pick-up arrangements at close hand, a very rare opportunity.

Towards the furthest corner of the yard we found some vehicles so old and decrepit that they were not even listed in our ABC books; this felt literally like walking backwards through history.

This being our first visit it was easy to imagine that this might also have been the last resting place for the London tramcars, and we even half hoped to find one or two of these right at the far end of the lines, forgotten about for some seven years or more. This was of course not the case, as the trams were latterly a South London feature, and had their own valhalla at a similar site in faraway Woolwich, whence the trolleybuses from the earliest conversion stages had also been taken. The trolleys were predominant in North London, and the reason for the use of Colindale was that it was intended to be the last operative depot in the replacement programme, to which all vehicles could make their way under their own power (this scheme then envisaged that the compact group of routes around Kingston and Fulwell inherited from London United Tramways would continue in operation after the rest had finished, perhaps until as late as 1970, as they had the most modern, post war vehicles).

In reality, as we were to read later, all of what we saw had been in the yard for a few weeks at most. They comprised some 60 vehicles in all, mainly of the elegant C2/C3 classes (CUL registrations) of 1936, the oldest then existing in the fleet, some of which still carried the distinctive streamlined metal mudguards over the twin rear wheels. The rest were E1's (DLY

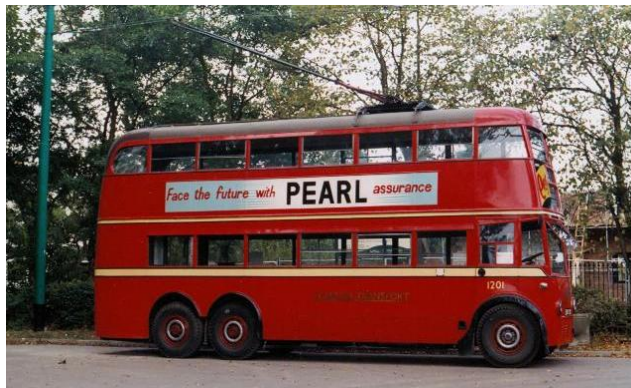
series) and H1's (ELB), together with the last of the A- and C-suffixed re-bodied vehicles and a few examples of much newer standard types (L's and N's) which had prematurely become beyond economic repair. Seeing them all together here, we could try to appreciate the subtle differences between the various classes which true aficionados were (and are!) quick to point out, but without much success. As for our "unlisted" vehicles (C3's in the 290-310 series), these would appear to be explained as a very rare error of omission in the Ian Allan booklet rather than long-withdrawn examples.

Being a wintry Saturday afternoon, there was no work going on in the yard, and we reluctantly extricated ourselves from our playground in a rapidly gathering dusk. A feast of journeys on a succession of very active trolleybuses (routes 666, 667 then 657) helped to sweep away the melancholy on our weary way home.

The yard at Colindale was part of the former Hendon tram overhaul works. The Cohen "600 group" paid £106 - 15s for each vehicle. One of the first to arrive was no. 65 from Carshalton, earlier in 1959, and well over half of all London's Trolleybuses were scrapped here, concluding in September 1962. Our subsequent visits witnessed a constant turnover of inmates, up to 100 or 120 being present in the yard on occasions, by now all of the newer types (together with the last few of the SA's) being disposed of en masse. On Saturday mornings we watched while a vehicle was pulled clear at the far end of the yard, quickly stripped of tyres and seats (which were piled up and offered hopefully for resale), then tipped on its side, doused in paraffin and set alight, a most spectacular sight. The proprietors did not seem to mind our presence at all during such operations! Occasionally, fires were started by vandals, that in August 1960 being serious enough to be reported in the London evening papers.

This was a sad place, but I am glad we saw it as it helped us to place related events and sights of the early 1960's into perspective, and to appreciate the sheer scale of the conversion programme.

We loved to ride around the London suburbs on the old trolleybuses, by then so generally discredited yet so fast, smooth, comfortable and quiet (perhaps too quiet, for the safety of other road users?). Unlike the mostly decrepit, draughty and rattly old trams they replaced, they seemed not to deserve their fate. The real problem seemed to lie in their incompatibility and inflexibility with the spread of traffic management systems such as the experimental one way street schemes then in vogue. Also, both the vehicle fleet and overhead wiring network was becoming life expired after some 25 years and would have required major capital investment for wholesale renewal. The wiring was a real work of art at some of the main road junctions, but very expensive to maintain or modify. At such locations, diverging routes were selected by means of levers mounted on the trolley poles, placed well out of reach of young schoolboys, and operated either by the conductors as their vehicles passed or by strategically placed points-men or inspectors at busy times (or by wicked youngsters standing on each other's shoulders, an occasional lark causing inconvenient de-wirings if not spotted by the crews in time). Here are some images of beautifully restored standard Londoner 1201 at the museum in Carlton Colville near Lowestoft, where we were lucky enough to see it and ride on it; the interior is just as smart as the exterior, and brought back many happy memories.....





Of London's trams, I treasure but one memory, of being lifted up the steps of an E1 or E3 class vehicle by my father, somewhere along the Victoria Embankment shortly before their final abandonment in July 1952, with him impressing on me that such things would soon be seen no longer; I was then at the tender age of four and a half, but have regarded these elegant double deck bogie tramcars as the epitome of their breed ever since. Here is no.1858 of this type, also preserved and running at Carlton Colville....



I find it most strange that nowadays urban street tramway networks are beginning to come back into fashion in the U.K (having never really fallen from favour in many other parts of the world), entailing enormous expense and disruption during the construction of the permanent way, whereas trolleybuses with their relatively much simpler infrastructure are totally forgotten now almost everywhere.

They finally came to an end in London some years earlier than we had been led to expect. In very general terms the conversion programme progressed from east to west, but the newer vehicles were running on the eastern routes. So the completion of each of the earlier stages through 1959 and 1960 was marked by a mass migration of vehicles between depots, with the oldest so released being sent for scrap.

The very last group of routes to be converted to motor buses included our familiar 657 from Hounslow, which for some years previously had been worked by the newest, post war 8-foot wide Q1 class vehicles, delivered in 1952 and intended to continue here until they became life expired in about 1970-71. However, several municipal authorities in Spain colluded to make London Transport an offer they could not refuse for this whole batch of vehicles. They quickly departed these shores during 1961, and were replaced at Isleworth by surplus pre-war K1's from Wood Green depot. The other Q1's, at Fulwell were likewise replaced by L3's, and the

whole group of routes operated by these two depots was then tacked onto the end of the current conversion scheme.

The final journeys were made on 8th May, 1962, rather inconsiderately a Tuesday night (common practice for any major change on L.T since this was the end of the payroll week) which meant that I was not able to witness the death throes on this occasion. More regrettably, I somehow also overlooked the opportunity to visit the area during the preceding weekends to photograph the trolleys in colour; few people in fact seem to have thought to do this. Thus it was that I had embarked on my own last silent journey in London on Easter Saturday afternoon, 21st April 1962; the vehicle was 1117, route 657, boarded at Kew Bridge in the course of returning home via Hounslow from a train-spotting session in the Acton/Willesden area.

I always felt somewhat deceived by this premature demise of the Trolleybuses in West London, and they were greatly missed. They lingered on elsewhere in the country for a further ten years, and travels on them in Brighton (1960), Manchester/Ashton (1965), Walsall, Reading and Cardiff (all 1968 - a busy year!) and finally Bradford in 1971 are fondly recalled; below are some of our pictures from these visits. The provincial systems often used short 4-wheeled vehicles, quite unlike London's high capacity 30-foot 6-wheelers; both these and the overhead wiring systems seemed to be less solid and substantial than the capital's versions. The Manchester livery was a very dull unrelieved red, and I encountered these on a typically sombre, wet November day (en route to a University interview) looking really down at heel towards the end of their lives. The Reading and Cardiff municipal vehicles were kept very smart in maroon and cream livery until their final days; these are at Reading on 27th September 1968 (note the unusual "No Entry – Except for Trolleybuses" sign in the third picture)





And these three are at Cardiff on a damp 17th August that year.....



Walsall and Bradford used variations of blue; we visited the former system on a Bank Holiday Monday, when by some long-standing tradition the trolleybus drivers had the day off, and their duties were being covered by motorbus crews. This led to at least one embarrassing de-wirement right outside the depot, as one of these men forgot his situation and pulled away from the stop trying to overtake the stationary vehicle in front. We were treated to a guided tour of the main depot, including some hands on instruction at the trolleybus controls, sitting in the cab of a parked vehicle. I nearly managed to run this into the garage doors (firmly closed) when operating the pedals as bidden, since the power had inadvertently been left connected!

The Bradford system finished in early 1972; here are our pictures taken on 1st May 1971.....



.....and one of a preserved Walsall vehicle at the Black Country Museum, Dudley (below left).....



Since then to sample intensive trolleybus operations in their natural environment one has to venture abroad. However, whether encountering the perpetual crush of travelling humanity in Athens, the integrated efficiency of Zurich or Basel, or the sleek modern vehicles of the Arnhem system in Holland, the single-deckers now universally used can never rekindle the great thrill of silent top-deck, front-seat travel we enjoyed so long ago.

Buses on Holiday

We came across a variety of different operators and vehicle fleets in the course of our summer holidays, but as these were spent mainly in the South and South-west, the green-livery BTC companies predominated. The omnipresent K-series lowbridge Bristols were totally different in both sight and sound to the London Transport RT's; the modern "Lodekkas" were beginning to make their presence felt, and were most impressive and comfortable. After just a couple of weeks in such an unfamiliar environment, the first sighting of an LT vehicle from the train window heading for home was reassuring, but somehow a little strange to the eye. This would be somewhere in the vicinity of Woking or Slough.

We became very familiar with Southern Vectis, exclusive to the Isle of Wight, with visits over many consecutive years from 1958. In that first year, I came across a real curiosity still running around Newport, 1934 Dennis Ace DL9015, still with petrol engine. I never saw it again, so it must have been scrapped soon afterwards.

In later years we habitually crossed to the Island via the Lymington-Yarmouth ferry, travelling down from London by train. On the last part of this journey, one or two Hants & Dorset vehicles would be encountered around Lymington Town.

Southern National was predominant at Seaton in August 1960, with the garage situated adjacent to the railway terminus, only a short step from our holiday camp accommodation at Warner's. Two years later, we travelled with the same company between the railhead at Camelford station and the resort of Tintagel, also on a day trip to Wadebridge; we might have expected Western National instead, but of course this part of north Cornwall was formerly Southern Railway rather than GWR territory.

We saw very little of the giant Bristol Omnibus Co., but their vehicles seemed almost identical in all respects to the Southern Nationals. Of the other major BTC operators in the south, we would regularly see vehicles belonging to Eastern National and Eastern Counties only at Pentonville Road Coach Station in London, a posh name for a tidied up but still muddy bombed site a fair walk up the hill from Kings Cross, during a break from train-spotting. Here also came the off white and black coaches of United Counties, from the Bedford area.

The "National" group companies' conductors generally issued tickets from automatic equipment, either in the form of the narrow, pale green or yellow "Setright" strips or the square, variously coloured "cinema style" versions from the "Ultimate" machine, all eminently collectable. They duly supplemented the by now sadly discontinued LT Bell-Punch examples in my scrapbook.

Scattered amongst the "Nationals" were other large concerns generally appearing to retain separate identities and territory, but in reality often part of some larger combine, particularly the BET group, also seen on our holidays. The area around Torbay was the stronghold of the Devon General Omnibus Co., a long time survivor from the same business stable as the old London General. This concern was a very early major user of the modern rear engined Leyland "Atlantean" type double decker when we spent a couple of weeks in Brixham in August 1959 - we had never experienced any vehicles quite like these before! They were painted in an attractive dark red and off white livery, and two years later also included some open topped variants for the coastal services, each carrying the name of a famous Admiral. The whole operation created an impression of a very progressive outfit.

Much of the south-east was served by Southdown Motor Services' light green and cream vehicles in Sussex (a typical preserved vehicle is pictured right), with the East Kent Road Car Co. (red, maroon and cream) and Maidstone & District Traction Co. (dark green and cream) much in evidence in their respective areas eastwards.

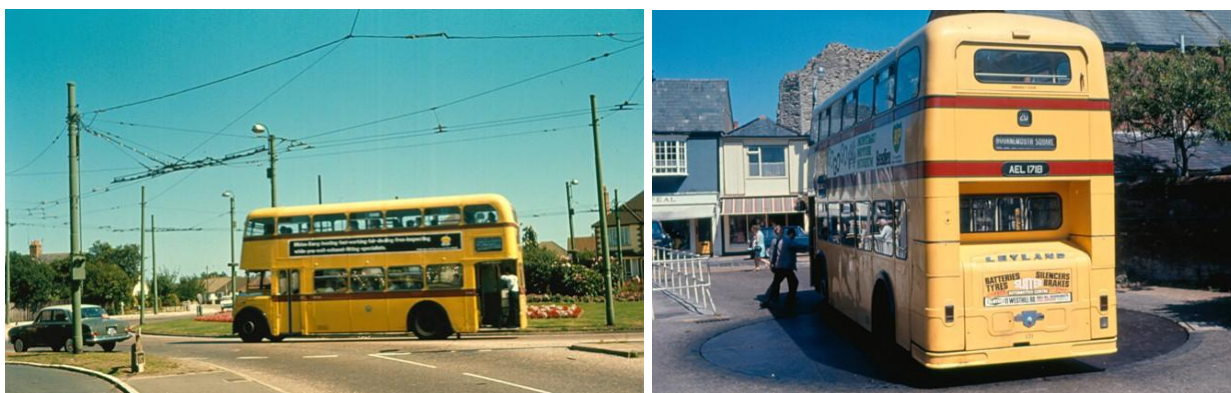
Southern England boasted a clutch of smaller operators; King Alfred Motor Services and "Provincial" (Gosport & Fareham) being the names we saw on a school day trip to the Winchester area by coach in the Spring of 1959, best remembered for one of the girls in our party managing to fall into the river during a "nature study" session! All the buses hereabouts seemed to be painted in various shades of green.



Corporation bus fleets were still common (though never as prevalent as in the Northern towns) and many of these also ran trolleybuses, as already mentioned. Brighton was particularly interesting and colourful in the late fifties, as the orange-red and cream buses and

trolleys of Brighton, Hove & District mingled with the Corporation Transport Dept vehicles and those of Southdown Motor Services, along the busy Old Steine.

Much of the foregoing was before we had a decent camera and enough cash to spare for film, but after 1962 things were better. Here is a selection of pictures from the 1960s and 1970s, starting at Bournemouth



We were just too late for the trolleybuses, but the wires were still up at the Iford Corner roundabout, here circumnavigated by one of the replacement Leylands, and the unusual trolleybus turntable in Christchurch was still being used for the buses on 7th July 1970



One of the last Hants & Dorset Bristol K types was at the bus station on New Year's Day, 1972, on driver training duties.

The beautifully restored tramcar was kept in Mallard Road depot, off Castle Lane, where we saw it during one of the regular Wednesday open days, on 7th August 1980. A curiosity here then was this pile of detachable bus tops, removed for the summer season workings along Bournemouth front.....



Here is one of several preserved Bournemouth trolleybuses, one of the older types nowadays kept at the museum at Sandtoft near Doncaster, on one of their regular open days....



Next, a reminder of the former Clapham Transport Museum in London on 6th April 1968, before it moved to Syon Park, Covent Garden and York.....



The Historic Commercial Vehicle Club held an annual London-Brighton run; on 6th May 1973, the following interesting assortment of buses passed through Battersea on their way south.....





Lastly, one of my favourite rural buses, the Bristol L type, this one is Thames Valley's L574 waiting for customers in High Wycombe station yard, 26th February 1966, with two interested admirers.....



Another of these was later smartly preserved, seen here at a Cobham Bus Museum rally at App's Court, Surrey in the 1990s.....



K. A. Jagers 1993