

# *Account of Purley on Thames*

## Buses before 1948

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### *Background to the Bus Industry*

Bus services evolved from four major sources: the carriers, the railways, municipalities and the coachbuilders. Many carriers mechanised their services usually by first acquiring a lorry to replace the horse and cart, then putting seats into it and later acquiring a specialist vehicle. The railways found the use of connecting buses an easy means of getting total coverage of their territory so that in conjunction with other railways they could offer a nationwide transport system for goods, parcels and people. The coach builders also began services to employ and promote the vehicles they were building. Local councils entered the scene in major towns, often supplementing or replacing tramway systems or horse drawn omnibuses, but usually enforcing strict regulation to exclude other operators within their boundaries.

At first most bus services outside the major towns were privately owned. In the 1920s there was intense competition between the bus operators but after the 1930 Act many went out of business or amalgamated with rivals. By the second world war there were a small number of very large groups operating under the guise of local companies. Of these the Tilling Group was the most relevant to the Purley scene as they owned and controlled Thames Valley. This group had also absorbed most of the services started by the railways which were operating under the banner of Western National (Ex GWR), Southern National (Ex SR) and Eastern National (ex LNER) Other former railway services were merged into local Tilling subsidiaries.

After the war the 1948 Transport Act forbade the railways from operating bus services. The major groups retained a measure of independence, although ownership transferred to the British Transport Commission, until they were fully nationalised and merged into the National Bus Company in 1968. But otherwise by the mid fifties there were virtually no private buses.

Following the formation of the National Bus Company there came an explosion in the number of the private coach operators who were not allowed to run stage services, but, starting from scratch, soon came to rival the nationalised carriers in many parts of their market, such as private hire and contract work. Regulation of bus services, which had started in the 1930's to address the problems of road congestion and unbridled competition, was used to keep private operators out of the stage bus services market. In the 1980's however a change of political climate saw the end of regulation and the selling of most of the nationalised buses to private hands with municipal bus companies forced to operate as free standing companies rather than departments of the town hall.

### *Bus Services in Purley between the Wars*

#### *British Automobile Traction Co.*

One of the first services to Purley was started by a bus manufacturer when a branch of the British Automobile Traction Company was established to operate bus services. Its first route was from Streatley to the Bear Hotel in Reading and on to Maidenhead. This started operation on Saturday 31st July 1915. It used five 30hp Leyland S-type single deckers registered HE 8 to HE 12. They had 27 seats and were licensed to carry 32 passengers. They carried the logo 'BRITISH' on the sides with painted boards to show the towns and villages served.

One of its buses was badly damaged by a falling tree in a severe storm in early 1916 while travelling through Purley. The service was extended to Wallingford in 1919. In 1920 the bus operations were separated from the rest of BAT and into a new subsidiary known as Thames Valley Traction Ltd. when Thomas Tilling, a Lowestoft coach builder took a 14% interest in the new company.

### *Thames Valley Traction Company*

The new company took over on 10th July 1920 operating only the Reading to Wallingford Service through Purley. Some journeys diverted to the Berkshire Lunatic Asylum at Moulsoford (later Fairmile Hospital) and to ensure that patients did not use the bus to escape only return halves of tickets were accepted there. Route no 4 was shown in the timetable but not on the buses. At Wallingford connections were made with City of Oxford Services. In September 1921 a bus was outstationed at Wallingford to facilitate the early morning service into Reading. The route was renumbered 5 from 1st May 1922, the number it retained until 1992.

When the bridge between Streatley and Goring was rebuilt in 1924 some of the no 5's were diverted to Goring and Cleve but this did not prove successful and were withdrawn in October 1924. Another attempt in April 1926 was more successful and a daily Reading to Goring service was established. In January 1927 a second spur route was started, using a bus outstationed at Wantage. This left Wantage at 1030 and ran to Reading via Blewbury, Streatley and Purley. From Reading the bus covered the Goring services before setting off back to Wantage at 5.30 pm In October 1927 the Goring service was dropped and the Wantage service improved by starting earlier. A short trip to Pangbourne and back from Reading was fitted in at 1 pm. By May 1928 a second trip daily to Wantage was being operated with an even earlier start from Wantage at 8.20 am.

Parcels were a valuable part of the business and agents were established at major villages, Messrs. Tidbury Bros. acted as agent in Pangbourne and there was interchange with Reading Corporation at St. Mary Butts.

Fleet numbers for the buses began to be allocated from August 1920 starting at 1 and continuing without duplication until 230 was reached in 1930. A few specialised vehicles escaped being numbered. Bodies and chassis tended to be regarded as separate entities and were often interchanged. When withdrawn from service several of the Thames Valley bodies ended up as summer chalets on the Purley River estate.

Route expansion in 1921 saw the introduction of a new Reading to Woodcote service in June. This ran via Chazey Heath, Goring Heath and Whitchurch Hill as service 15. This was re-routed from September 1921 via Purley, Pangbourne and Whitchurch Bridge. The revised service known as 16 brought in much more revenue as there was considerably more population south of the river than to the north. In January 1922 the service was reduced to run Tuesdays, Saturdays and Sundays only. In May 1922 it reverted to service 15 and in October 1922 the service was withdrawn completely.

### *Reginald Braggs and G Jarvis*

Reginald Redwood Braggs set up a charabanc business in July 1921 with a 14 seater vehicle registered DP 3791 and known affectionately as 'Cushy'. He operated variously from Kentwood Hill and garages in the Oxford Road. As well as local hire trips he organised several long distance tours to places as far away as Cheddar and Torquay, being known as Cushy Motor Tours. As the charabanc business was both very competitive and seasonal, he decided to go in for scheduled bus operation and was granted a licence to operate between Reading and Tidmarsh in January 1926 under the name 'Reading and District Motor Services'. The fare between Purley and Reading was 5d return and 7d between Reading and Tidmarsh. The service was later extended to Ashampstead and finally to Yattendon in April 1929..

By October 1926 he was sharing facilities at 1a Castle Street in Reading with G Jarvis and Sons who operated as 'Comfy Coaches'. In November 1926 he started a new long distance coach service from

Pangbourne to Marble Arch in London which operated Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, but this did not last very long.

Jarvis seems to have become a partner with Bragg and the two businesses merged around March 1929. Licences for the Reading to Yattendon service were renewed in the name of Bragg, but Jarvis was in sole command and he sold the business to the Thames Valley Traction Company on 1st January 1936. Two vehicles were transferred to Thames Valley in the deal. They were a 1931 Star Flyer' (RD 3016) and a 1934 Thorneycroft 'Ardent' 26 seater (RD 6270).

### *Herbert Galpin*

Herbert Galpin of Yattendon appeared on the scene in September 1925 when he licensed a Ford 'Model T' 14 seater bus (MO 5902) and ran a service between Yattendon and Reading on Tuesdays and Saturdays. He had started as a carrier and gradually moved most of his operation to buses, but still carrying parcels as well as passengers. He was still operating just before the outbreak of the Second World War. Some of the other vehicles he operated were BL 7928, a Republic 'model 11x' carrier's van with seating for 14 passengers; MO 3459, a second Republic which by 1932 was licensed only for goods; MO 7520, a Ford 'T' 14 seater charabanc painted red; and RX 6889, a Ford 'AA' 14 seater coach which survived under another ownership until September 1950.

### *T R Harris*

Thomas Richard Harris of 'The Nutshell' in Yattendon started a horse drawn service between Pangbourne and Newbury during the First World War, but on Tuesdays and Saturdays he extended the service to the Peacock in Reading. In September 1920 he acquired a Republic 'Model 11.X' carrier bus painted green and registered as BL 7928. He sold out to D A Stewart of Yattendon in 1922, who in his turn sold out to Gilpin around 1925.

### *J Prothero*

J Prothero started his bus services between East Illsley and Newbury in partnership with R V Revell in Jan 1921 as an extension of their carrier business. In December 1931 they extended their services to run into Reading via Compton, Ashampstead, Upper Basildon, Pangbourne and Purley. At first they were refused a Hackney Licence from Reading Borough Council and had to operate from private land near the Palace Theatre. They operated daily, except Wednesday with four return journeys but on Fridays and Saturdays they added a late evening service and on Sundays there were only the two afternoon services.

Protheros obtained their licence immediately the Traffic Commissioners took over licensing and regulation from the Borough and District Councils after the 1930 Transport Act, but in September 1932 they were taken over by the Newbury & District Transport Company which had been founded only a few months before. They had three buses out-stationed at East Illsley to provide the services to Reading and Newbury and other buses operated from the Newbury and Reading garages.

### *William White*

William White was a carrier in Hermitage. He and his son Edgar started a regular passenger service to Reading in July 1922 running via Yattendon, Upper Basildon and Purley. He ran only on his regular days of Tuesday, Friday and Saturday. The Saturday return journey was delayed until 9 pm to allow for visits to the cinema. He had two vehicles which seemed to be readily convertible between bus and lorry operations. In June 1925 they acquired a 14 seater Mason charabanc (MO 5620) This was putty coloured and named 'Tony' In October 1925 they acquired another 14 seater charabanc, a Chevrolet, registered MO 6416 this was sold to Pockocks towards the end of the 1920s. A Dennis 30-cwt 14 seater coach (RX 5493) was purchased in November 1929 and a second, slightly larger vehicle in May 1930 (RX 6401) By 1930 some of their Reading journeys ran via Compton and Aldworth and the Saturday trip was dropped. In September 1932 their whole operation was revised and the buses travelled into Reading on Tuesdays and Fridays, but via Stanford Dingley, Bradfield

and Theale. Whites sold their bus and coach business to Newbury and District in Summer 1934 along with the two Dennis coaches.

### *The 1930 Transport Act*

It was the Transport Act of 1930 which, by setting strict standards for timetables, fare tables and maintenance, eventually saw off the carriers and independents, leaving only Thames Valley Traction and Newbury and District Transport operating at the outbreak of War.

