



NEWTON e-NEWS Spring 2007

The e-newsletter of the Bournemouth Passenger Transport Association

Shamrock Buses and the BPTA

Extracts from an article 'Shamrock rambles where Routemaster feared to tread' by James Prince published in the April 2007 issue of Buses Magazine (www.busesmag.com). Re-printed with kind permission of Buses Magazine with whom the copyright resides.

Although on the face of it a modern company with fewer than five years operating experience, Shamrock Buses' roots go back to 1 November 1962 and the entry into service of Bournemouth Corporation trolleybus 301 (301 LJ) a Weymann-bodied Sunbeam MF2B and the last trolleybus to enter passenger service in the UK.

Five years later with Bournemouth's trolleybus system about to close, a small group of enthusiasts set up the Bournemouth Passenger transport Association, went on to preserve 301 and over the next 20 years restored several other buses and trolleybuses with a Bournemouth connection.

By 1987 it had over 35 vehicles most of them stored at Yellow Buses' Mallard Road depot. Then the council withdrew the grant aid to garage the collection, prompting the BPTA to set up an operational unit using buses from the collection and some acquired vehicles on a mixture of town tours and contracts. That led in May 1993 to launch of Routemaster Bournemouth, with a dozen Routemasters (and other types) operating frequent services in the town with some support from then employee-owned Clydeside 2000. Yellow Buses retaliated strongly with a White Buses low-cost operation and the venture closed in August 1994.



Routemaster Volvo Ailsa in Christchurch High Street

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However plans were soon in place to start up another company when a deal was struck with Yellow Buses. The result was Christchurch Buses, a low-cost unit set up to undertake contracts and private hires using mainly vehicles transferred from the parent Yellow Buses fleet. It was based at Bournemouth (Hurn) Airport, the new home of the BPTA collection and ran alongside Vintage Yellow Buses, which had been established to target the sightseeing and vintage vehicle market. By 2000, staff shortages resulted in Christchurch Buses being merged into the main yellow Buses fleet and the open-top vehicles used by Vintage Yellow Buses returned to the BPTA collection, by then stored at a site near Poole town centre.

During 2002 plans were formulated to set up another company to restore support for the BPTA which otherwise would have to liquidate. The idea was to use double-deckers on school contracts and private hires and a licence was granted that September. This was Shamrock Buses and it was based at the next new home for the BPTA collection, an industrial unit in Parkstone a couple of miles from Poole town centre. This unit included office space and undercover storage that was suitable for running a bus company.

Shamrock's turnover broke the £1 million barrier last year for the first time. The BPTA has no meaningful source of income and the cost of looking after and storing the collection is high, even though this has been reduced to around 25 vehicles. The success of Shamrock means that the BPTA and the collection are safe and Shamrock is now able to sponsor some restoration projects. The first involves substantial repair work to trolleybus 297 (297 LJ) following damage sustained during a trip to the Czech Republic in 1999. This is currently being undertaken at the Sandtoft Trolleybus Museum and will be followed by a thorough restoration of 1950 twin-staircase Weymann-bodied BUT 212 (KLJ 346) which will include a full retrim and rewire.

The motorbuses have not been forgotten, with unusual Belfast built MH Coachworks-bodied Daimler Fleetline 40 (ALJ 340B) currently being repainted and further restorations planned.

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Compiled by Mark Maidment

mark-maidment@rocketmail.com

Views contained in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the compiler or the BPTA.