

Bygone Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

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DOUGLAS. George Stuart Campbell **Bridge Villa** **Banbury Road** **BYFIELD**

Stuart Douglas, the son of a tenant farmer, was born on 3rd March 1930 at the village of Hinton which adjoins Woodford Halse. On leaving school towards the end of the second World War, Stuart worked part-time on his father's farm and part-time on a nearby farm owned by a Mr Leadbeater. Stuart Douglas's father died in 1955 and although his mother continued to run the farm for a short time, the family was forced to quit in 1956. During the period Stuart Douglas was assisting his mother with the running of the farm the opportunity arose for him to train to drive public service vehicles with Judd's Coaches of nearby Byfield and upon passing his driving test Stuart went to work part-time for Denis Judd, driving works and school contract coaches.

Partly to be nearer his work and partly because the family was obliged to leave the farm at Hinton, Stuart Douglas moved to Bridge Villa in Banbury Road at Byfield in 1957. Furthermore, because of the limited amount of work available with Judd's Coaches, Stuart transferred to G T Owen & Son of Upper Boddington as a driver, again in a part-time capacity. Owen's had the advantage of having local stage-carriage services in addition to schools and works contracts and were thus able to offer more hours of work, and consequently more remuneration, to part-time drivers.

It was whilst driving for G T Owen & Son that Stuart Douglas was advised that Mr. Ken Chamberlain, the proprietor of West End Garage of Leamington Spa, who operated a school contract from Wormleighton via Fenny Compton, Knightcote and Northend to Kineton School on behalf of Warwickshire County Council, wished to be rid of this contract as it did not fit in with his other commitments. This event acted as the catalyst that led Stuart Douglas to become a coach operator in his own right, as opposed to driving for other proprietors. Accordingly he bought an ex-Maidstone & District half-cab A.E.C. Regal coach with Harrington bodywork from Fleet Car Sales of Dunchurch and arrangements were made for Stuart Douglas to take over the school contract from West End Garage. Thus Stuart commenced operations in September 1957 and the contract was valued at £5.25 per day, which at that time was considered quite a good income for work of this nature.

Bygone Buses of Northamptonshire is compiled by R M Warwick, "Forestyn" 101 Broadway East, Northampton NN3 2PP, who would be pleased to be advised of any additional information relating to the above operator. The records of the PSV Circle and the Omnibus Society have been consulted extensively for this series and acknowledgement and thanks are due to these organisations.

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From the above account it will be seen that it was quite by chance that Stuart Douglas set up operations on his own and the business developed thereafter as a result of similar chance occurrences. Stuart Douglas's school contract regularly took him past the Fenny Compton works of prefabricated concrete buildings manufacturer "Compton Buildings Ltd" and, by observation, he foresaw that a works bus services would eventually be required by this up-and-coming firm. With this in mind he visited the factory, made contact with the staff and left his business card with the personnel manager. This action paid off as in February or March 1958, Compton's own two staff transport minibuses were both involved in accidents and at short notice Stuart Douglas was asked to provide a works bus from Bloxham and Banbury to Fenny Compton on a temporary basis. This he did and the temporary period was extended and extended to eventually last for as long as Stuart ran coaches.

One bus only was required to operate both the school and works runs. By the summer of 1959 Compton Buildings required pick-ups to be made from Milcombe and Adderbury and from this time the load exceeded the capacity of the coach. Additionally, personnel were recruited from Middleton Cheney which necessitated the acquisition of a second vehicle to keep pace with Compton Buildings' requirements. Accordingly a Tilling-Stevens coach with Harrington bodywork was bought second-hand from W S Yeates the Loughborough bus and coach dealer. It was powered by a Gardner 6LW engine and both it and the A.E.C. proved to be extremely reliable vehicles. Had this not been the case the fortunes of Stuart Douglas in coach operation could have been very different, but the initial good fortune he had with these coaches enabled him to become well established.

From September 1959 an additional picking-up point at Gaydon was added to the school contract route which, as with the works contract, meant that a second vehicle had to be provided. Once again the combination of works and schools contracts slotted together very well and the two lots of income for each bus ensured a sound financial operation for Stuart Douglas's business.

The next development in Stuart Douglas's career came with a requirement from Compton Buildings for a vehicle to transport office staff from Banbury in the mornings only for a 9 o'clock start at Fenny Compton. This event occurred in February 1960 when a Bedford OB with Duple Vista 29-seat coachwork and registered KMA 378 was acquired for the purpose. This contract had the added advantage that it provided some sort of relief vehicle should anything untoward have happened to either the A.E.C or T.S.M. "front-line" motors.

At about this time, early in 1960, Stuart Douglas was asked to provide school transport from Bishop's Itchington via Harbury to Southam Convent. Previously parents had conveyed the children in cars but this proved no longer practical and Stuart Douglas's coach which ended up at Kineton School was deployed to operate light to Bishop's Itchington to work the Convent contract. The run was provided for about three years, but the work did not fit efficiently into the vehicle schedules and usually the Convent journeys were operated late.

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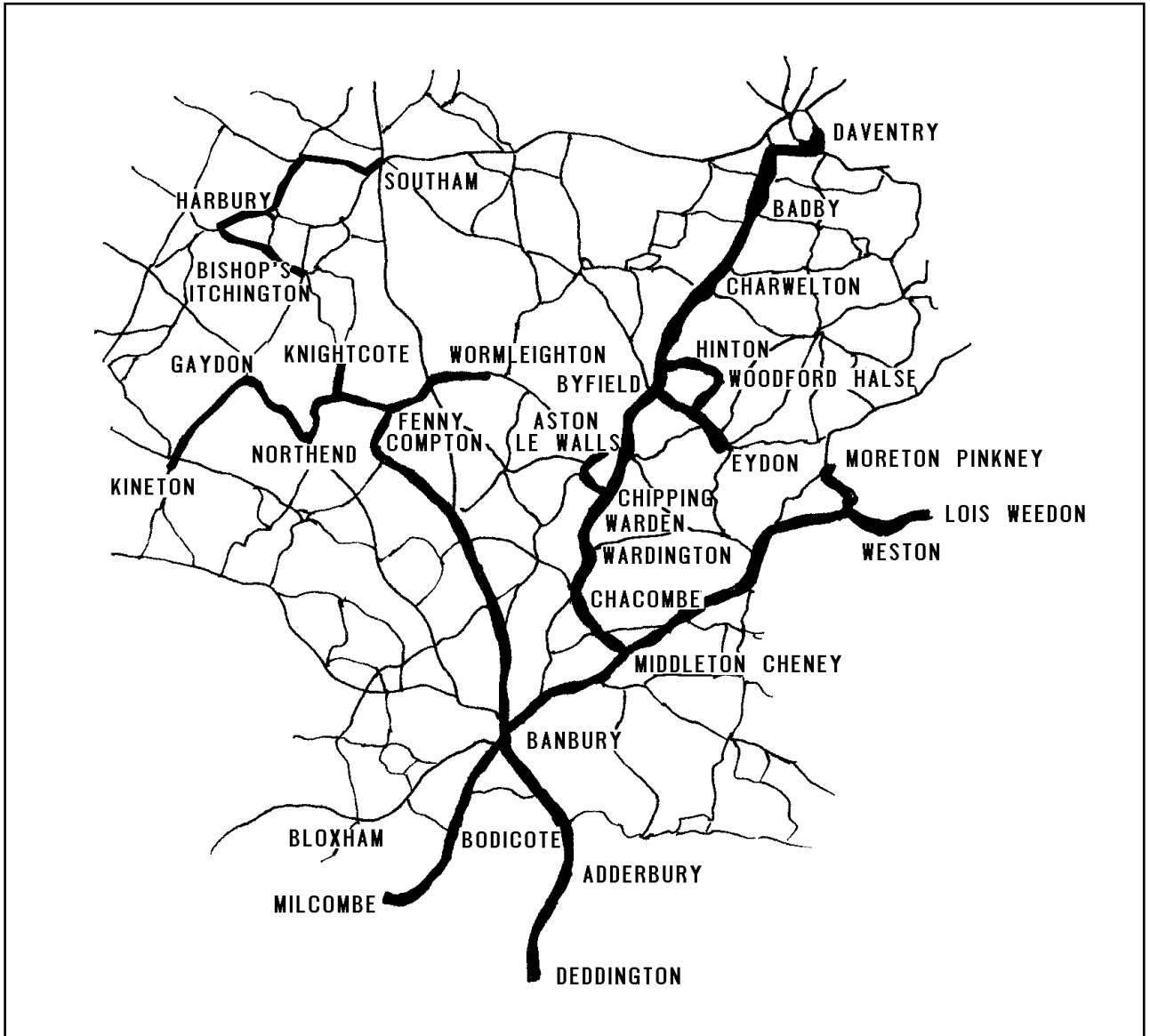


Diagram of Stuart Douglas's contract and bus routes.

The fleet was to increase to four coaches in April 1960 when another ex-Maidstone & District Harrington bodied A.E.C. Regal coach was taken into stock, registered JKM 430. This vehicle was not in the same excellent mechanical condition of its companion from the Maidstone stable as it served Stuart Douglas for only two months. It was replaced in August 1960 by a Sentinel 37-seat coach which Stuart Douglas bought from Nesbit Bros. of Somerby. This vehicle, registered NAL 333, was not a huge success either but it was retained for a year. An additional A.E.C. Regal was obtained in time for the 1960 September school term and the chosen vehicle was registered DFU 972 being equipped with a Plaxton body seating 32 passengers. By February 1961 the original ex-Maidstone & District Harrington bodied A.E.C. Regal had played its hand and Stuart Douglas replaced it with ORE 650 Leyland Tiger PS1/1 with Weymann 35-seat bodywork.

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Stuart Douglas garaged his vehicles on the land adjoining his house at Byfield but as the fleet grew some were parked at Castle Street Car Park at Banbury and others on the grass verge in Banbury Road, Byfield. Whilst Stuart Douglas did much of the vehicle maintenance himself, Jack Walker of Fenny Compton Garage performed any major repairs that were required. The livery of Douglas's coaches was cream and blue.

Stuart Douglas had not previously considered operating stage-carriage bus services but he was approached by influential people at Moreton Pinkney to provide a facility from that village via Weston and Lois Weedon to Banbury on Mondays to Saturdays. He therefore applied to the Traffic Commissioners for his one and only Road Service Licence in April 1961 and, not surprisingly, the route was an utter financial failure as, at most, it carried six people on any one journey. The route was provided until July 1963 when the licence was surrendered and it is believed that the operation was an express service rather than a stage carriage route, the difference being in the minimum fares that could be charged. Pre-printed tickets were obtained for the service and issued on bus. To make the operation of this service possible, from a financial point of view, Stuart Douglas negotiated for an Oxfordshire County Council school contract to convey pupils from Bodicote and Adderbury to Deddington School and this contract also was relinquished when the Moreton Pinkney – Banbury route was abandoned in 1963.

It will be recalled that the Sentinel coach registered NAL 333 acquired from Nesbit Bros. of Somerby had proved disappointing from a performance point of view, and the opportunity was taken to trade it in for a brand new Trojan minibus in August 1961. This minibus, registered VAP 534, was taken into stock to deal more cost effectively with contracts for Compton Buildings who regularly required transport for employees who had been working overtime and for which a small capacity vehicle was sufficient. It will be noted that many of Stuart Douglas's vehicles remained in his possession for short periods only, as contract prices were so competitive between operators that insufficient cash was generated by the business to renew the fleet with new rolling stock. Consequently not all second-hand vehicles acquired were as good as Stuart Douglas would have liked and often coaches had to be passed back to dealers quickly and replacement machinery sought.

At an unknown date in the early 1960s two other school contracts were awarded to Stuart Douglas. One was to provide transport from Middleton Cheney via Chacombe, Wardington and Chipping Warden to Aston-le-Walls Catholic School and the other ran from Charwelton via Woodford Halse and Byfield to Chipping Warden School. During the course of 1962 Stuart Douglas is believed to have replaced Leyland Tiger coach ORE 650 with a Bedford OB 29-seat coach registered KKO 193. This vehicle was utilised for about two months only before being replaced by GUS 815, a 33-seater Maudslay Marathon. In the summer of 1962, probably in readiness for the additional school contracts mentioned above, a pair of Leyland-Beadle coaches that had previously been operated by Maidstone & District were acquired from fleet Car Sales of Dunchurch and these were retained until 1963.

Destiny was to lead Stuart Douglas and his T.S.M. coach, in particular, into a period of

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extremely hard work during the mid 1960s. Messrs. Hutfield's Coaches of Warwick were providing Troop Transport for the Central Ammunition Depot, Kineton and R.A.F. Gaydon on a contract basis during the 1960s and this work involved taking troops on leave at weekends to Manchester and Liverpool. Hutfield's sub-contracted much of the work to Stuart Douglas and for about three years, each Friday evening the Tilling-Stevens coach would head north to Manchester and Liverpool and return light. On Sundays the coach would have to return empty to Liverpool to head back south on Sunday evenings. In the 1960s these journeys were quite gruelling for both driver and machine.

In January 1964 it became necessary to replace the Maudslay Marathon GUS 815 and at the same time Messrs. Whitecroft Motors of Woodford Halse became interested in coach operation. Stuart Douglas agreed to hand over to Whitecroft Motors his Southam Convent contract, which did not fit well into his operating schedules. It is believed Whitecroft Motors took over the operation in January 1963, but as the volume of private hire work anticipated by this latter firm did not materialise, the contract passed back to Stuart Douglas in January 1964 along with Whitecroft's Bedford SB registered NLR 194. This coach had a two-and-a-half year life with Stuart Douglas before it was, in turn, replaced by JP 7537 - a Crossley with 35-seat Duple Vega bodywork.

Later in the 1960s the Aston-le-Walls school contract was lost for a short time to Maybury's Coaches, but it was not long before Stuart Douglas was asked to operate it again. Similarly the Kineton School contract was lost to G T Owen but to replace this work an alternative run to take the children of the Armed Forces personnel from C.A.D. Kineton and R.A.F. Gaydon to Kineton High School was undertaken.

Stuart Douglas did his best to avoid conflict with other local coach operators and he concentrated on winning contracts for new work as opposed to under-cutting other's prices. One such contract was gained when the new Southbrook School at Daventry opened and there was a need for a vehicle to convey scholars from Eydon, Byfield and Charwelton to the school. Another new contract was operated from Woodford Halse via Byfield and Chipping Warden to the Blessed George Napier School at Banbury.

The fleet hovered at around the four vehicle mark during the latter half of the 1960s increasing to five in 1970. By 1971, Stuart Douglas's wife had become terminally ill and Stuart decided that he no longer wanted the responsibility of operating a coach fleet, with all the pressures it placed on his time whilst he needed to be attending to his wife's requirements. David Adkins of nearby Upper Boddington was a willing buyer and the business was sold to its new owner in December 1971. Part of the agreement was that Stuart Douglas should continue to drive for David Adkins for a year and a restrictive covenant prevented Stuart from operating his own coaches within a twenty-five mile radius of Byfield for a period of five years. Five coaches passed with the business to David Adkins and these were registered TRY 199, 328 DHA, 2207 MV, WBF 838 and ROX 184.

It was clear to Stuart Douglas, before he sold his business, that either he needed to invest a considerable sum of money to update his fleet to include vehicles having larger seating

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capacities, or be faced with the danger of losing his contracts and income, to operators who were investing in their fleets. The advent of 53-seater coaches so often meant that just one larger vehicle could cope with the loads of two smaller capacity coaches and, consequently, contract prices became very competitive.

David Adkins had the wherewithal to improve the fleet, but the development of this operator's business is another story and is related in paper NN-AD3.

Thanks are due to Stuart Douglas who so readily gave information relating to his experiences in running contract coaches and without whose help the above account would have been much less detailed.



Two of Stuart Douglas coaches are depicted in this illustration taken at Byfield. At the front is WBF 838 which was a Ford 570E with Duple Yeoman bodywork and behind it is 2207 MV, a similar Ford but with Burlingham Seagull 60 coachwork. Bridge Villa can be seen behind the rear coach.

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Unfortunately only two other photographs are available of Stuart Douglas's coaches. Above is the Burlingham Seagull bodied A.E.C. Reliance registered ROX 184 and on the right is the Yeates Europa bodied Bedford SB3 registered TRY 199. Stuart appears on both photographs.



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| STOCK NO. | REGN. NO. | CHASSIS | | | BODY | | | DATES | | | PREVIOUS OWNER | INITIAL DISPOSAL | NOTES |
|-----------|-----------|--------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|---|--|-------|
| | | MAKE | TYPE | NUMBER | MAKE | TYPE & SEATS | NUMBER | NEW | S/H | W/D | | | |
| | ? | A.E.C. | Regal | | Harrington | C32F | | | 8/57 | 2/61 | Fleet Car Sales, Dunchurch/ Maidstone & District | W S Yeates, Loughboro' | |
| | ? | T.S.M. | | | Harrington | C37F | | | 6/59 | c-/66 | W S Yeates, Loughborough/ | | |
| KMA 378 | | Bedford | OB | 74070 | Duple (Vista) | C29F | | -/48 | 2/60 | c7/65 | Fleet Car Sales/ Seville, Hollingworth | Fleet Car Sales/ Ogilvie, Stirling | |
| JKM 430 | | A.E.C. | Regal | 06625166 | Harrington | C32F | | -/48 | 4/60 | 6/60 | /Maidstone & District CO30 Nesbit Bros. Somerby | /Longhurst, Wallington Part Exc. for VAP534 | |
| NAL 333 | | Sentinel | SLC6 | 6/35/64 | Gurney- Nutting Plaxton | C37C | - | 5/52 | 8/60 | 8/61 | | | |
| DFU 972 | | A.E.C. | Regal | 06624637 | | C32F | 185 | 1/47 | 9/60 | 6/61 | /Lincs. Road Car 1832 | /Mitchell, Peterborough | |
| ORE 650 | | Leyland | Tiger PS1/1 | 462393 | Weymann (1949) | B35F | C9424 | 11/47 | 2/61 | c3/62 | /Deiniolen Motors | | |
| VAP 534 | | Trojan | | 1509828 | Trojan | B13F | - | 8/61 | - | 6/64 | | | |
| KKO 193 | | Bedford | OB | 74538 | Duple (Vista) | C29F | 46125 or 48125 | -/47 | 3/62 | c5/62 | /Melody, Chatham | | |
| GUS 815 | | Maudslay | Marathon III | 70495 | Plaxton | C33F | | -/49 | c5/62 | 1/64 | /Babbage, Cromer | | |
| OKP 982 | | Leyland- Beadle | | JCB211 | Beadle | C35F | - | 4/52 | c7/62 | c3/63 | Fleet Car Sales, Dunchurch/ Hallen, Bristol | | |
| OKP 999 | | Leyland- Beadle | | JCB228 | Beadle | C26F | - | 9/52 | c7/62 | c9/63 | Fleet Car Sales, Dunchurch/ | /Palmer, Middlesbrough | |
| NLR 194 | | Bedford | SB | 16405 | Plaxton (Venturer) | C36F | | -/53 | 1/64 | 7/66 | Whitecroft, Woodford | | |
| VWP 277 | | Austin | 152 | J2BA36661 | Austin | 12 | | 1/59 | 10/65 | 10/67 | Parkes, Quarry Bank | | |
| JP 7537 | | Crossley | SD42/7 | 97750 | Duple (Vega) | FC35F | 223/1 | 3/49 | 7/66 | 9/67 | /Carter, Foulden | | 1 |
| OUY 799 | | Bedford | SBG | 38122 | Duple (Vega) | C38F | 1055/394 | 6/55 | 10/67 | 2/69 | /Everton, Droitwich | | |
| HHR 964 | | Bedford | SB | 3567 | Duple (Vega) | C33F | 1006/243 | 3/51 | 10/67 | 12/69 | /Shaw, Maxey | | |
| WMT 49 | | Bedford | SB | 1232 | Duple (Vega) | C33F | | 1/51 | 2/68 | 6/68 | /Garner, London W5 | | |
| TRY 199 | | Bedford | SB3 | 61345 | Yeates (Europa) | C37F | 685 | 5/58 | 7/68 | 12/71 | | Adkins, U.Boddington | |
| 328 DHA | | Bedford | SBG | 50264 | Duple (Vega) | C41F | 1074/180 | 1/57 | 2/69 | 12/71 | /Gees, Lutterworth Don Everall, W'Hampton/ Morris, Bearwood | Adkins, U.Boddington | |
| EX 8407 | | Bedford | SBG | 27790 | Duple (Vega) | C38F | 1051/245 | 6/54 | 12/69 | 12/71 | /Maybury, Souldern | | |
| JCL 398 | | Commer | Avenger IV | T85A0316 | Duple (Vega) | C41F | 1062/92 | 5/56 | 8/70 | 6/71 | | Adkins, U.Boddington (For Car transporter) | |
| 2207 MV | | Ford | 570E | 510E39204 | Burlingham (Seagull 60) | C41F | 7142 | 5/60 | 9/70 | 12/71 | /Wing, South Witham | Adkins, U.Boddington | |
| WBF 838 | | Ford | 570E | L80A292277M | Duple (Yeoman) | C41F | 123/18 | 3/62 | 2/71 | 12/71 | /Bell, Witchford | Adkins, U.Boddington | |
| ROX 184 | | A.E.C. | Reliance | MU3RV427 | Burlingham (Seagull) | C41C | 6069 | 3/55 | 7/71 | 12/71 | /Ashley & Hewitt, Rugby | Adkins, U.Boddington | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | /Grayline, Bicester | | |

Notes: 1 - Rebodyed in 1950s.

Many vehicles purchased from/sold to dealers Errington of Evington or Yeates of Loughborough.