

GRAVELING. Harry Gedney & WOOTTON. Alfred James

THISTLE SERVICES Ltd (429040) later

THISTLE SERVICES (Benefield) Ltd

Weldon Road,

UPPER BENEFIELD

Harry Graveling was born on 11th December 1920 at Market Deeping in Lincolnshire and after leaving school he went to work for Todd's Garage in that town as an apprentice mechanic. Due to chronic asthma he was unable to undertake military service during the Second World War. Harry married Edith Mary Goodliffe of Market Deeping and in due course the couple had a son whom they Christened Eric.

At the end of the War Harry Graveling went to work as a mechanic-cum-driver for Alfred James Wootton, the owner of Brookside Garage based at Market Deeping and from which both lorries and coaches were operated. At this point Alfred Wootton was looking to expand his coaching operations and following discussions with Harry Graveling they decided to form a partnership. The growth of the Steel industry in Corby attracted the two men and the influx of Scottish people to Corby suggested that the opportunity existed to promote a Corby to Glasgow coach service.

The first step was to secure an operating base in the Corby area and Messrs Graveling & Wootton became aware that Frank Crick's former business based at Upper Benefield was for sale. It is assumed that the Upper Benefield business was bought from the London based owner detailed in paper NN-CR5.

The date of acquisition is not entirely clear but it is believed to have been around July 1946 or soon afterwards. Harry Graveling moved from Market Deeping to 12 Stocks Lane, Corby so that he could manage the Northamptonshire operation whilst Alfred Wootton did likewise for Brookside Coaches at Market Deeping.

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Frank Crick had been operating five Stage-Carriage services under the War-time permit system and also held an Excursions & Tours Licence which was dormant during the War. Accordingly the Traffic Commissioners allocated the following Road Service Licences to Messrs Graveling & Wootton on their acquisition of the Upper Benefield business:-

TER 3463/1	Stage	Upper Benefield - Oundle - Glapthorn - Cotterstock - Tansor - Peterborough.	Wednesdays
TER 3463/2	Stage	Oundle - Benefield - Weldon - Geddington - Weekley - Kettering.	Fridays
TER 3463/3	Stage	Southwick - Glapthorn - Oundle - Pilton - Wadenhoe.	Thursdays
TER 3463/4	Stage	Upper Benefield - Oundle.	Thursdays
TER 3463/5	Stage	Oundle - Benefield - Weldon - Corby, Stewarts & Lloyds' Workers.	Daily?
TER 3463/6	E & T	Upper Benefield.	

Having settled down to operating the Upper Benefield business more or less as it was when acquired by them, Harry Graveling and Alfred Wootton gave consideration to providing a Wednesday and Saturday service between Corby and Peterborough routed through Weldon, Upper and Lower Benefield, Oundle, Glapthorn, Cotterstock, Tansor, Warmington, Elton, Chesterton and Alwalton. Application for this route was applied for in October 1947 but, as might be expected, was objected to by both United and Eastern Counties. The application was refused by the Commissioners at the end of the year.

Meanwhile Harry Graveling and Alfred Wootton had not lost sight of their original aim to take advantage of a perceived need for transport facilities between Corby and Scotland. With this in mind they formed a Company entitled "Thistle Services Ltd". The Company number of 429040 suggests a formation date of early 1947 but it was not until the end of that year that the name seems to have been used. Unfortunately the records of the Company's formation have been destroyed so it is not known who or how many subscribers there were. Notwithstanding this an application was submitted by Thistle Services Ltd to the Traffic Commissioners in late 1947 for an Express Service Licence to operate between Corby, Occupation Road and Glasgow, Park Head Cross, leaving Corby on Friday evenings at 7.00pm and arriving at Glasgow at 7.00am the following day. The return journey was made at 8.00am on Sunday mornings arriving at Corby at 9.00pm. Despite objections by the Railway Executive, Thistle Services was granted its licence at the end of April 1948 and the rest, as they say, is history. The service was initially routed via Stamford and the A1 Great North Road to Grantham, Newark and onwards. Under the Thistle title the Traffic Commissioners allocated the new operator's number of TER 3679 and the Corby - Glasgow service became TER 3679/1.

Buoyed on by the success of gaining a Road Service Licence despite opposition, another attempt at securing a Corby to Peterborough service was made in February 1948. TER 3679/2 proposed five return trips between Corby and Peterborough on Mondays to

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Saturdays with three on Sundays. This time the proposed route between Oundle and Peterborough was via the main road, which inevitably led to Eastern Counties and United Counties lodging objections. The Traffic Commissioners refusal followed in due course.

Keeping to the subject of Stage-Carriage services along with Excursions & Tours, the formation of Thistle Services Ltd meant that Graveling & Wootton's local services had to be transferred to the new company along with new operator references. It will be recalled from page 2 that Graveling & Wootton held six licences with the references TER 3463/1 to 6. From September 1948 the references became:-

TER 3679/3	Upper Benefield - Oundle	Formerly TER 3463/4
TER 3679/4	Oundle - Corby, Steel Works	Formerly TER 3463/5
TER 3679/5	Upper Benefield - Peterborough	Formerly TER 3463/1
TER 3679/6	Oundle - Kettering	Formerly TER 3463/2
TER 3679/7	Southwick - Wadenhoe	Formerly TER 3463/3
TER 3679/8	E&T Upper Benefield	Formerly TER 3463/6

TER 3679/4, Oundle to Corby is rather puzzling as the purpose of the service was to convey Stewarts & Lloyds' workers billeted at Deenethorpe Aerodrome and in a Hostel at Weldon to the Steel Works. The service was authorised to Graveling & Wootton but on application to take over the route by Thistle, both United Counties and Eastern Counties objected. No record has been found to confirm that the Traffic Commissioners either granted or refused the licence but as it was never renewed it is assumed that it was refused.

BENEFIELD & CUNDLE		Thistle Services Ltd.	
THURSDAYS ONLY			
	pm	pm	
Benefield	1255	3 0	Oundle
Oundle	1 15	3 20	Benefield
			pm pm
			2 30 5 10
			2 50 5 35

SOUTHWICK, CUNDLE & WADENHOE		Thistle Services Ltd.	
THURSDAYS ONLY			
	pm	pm	pm
Southwick	1 35	4 30	Wadenhoe
Glaphorne	1 45	4 40	Pilton
Oundle	1 55	4 45	Cundle
Pilton	2 10	4 55	Glaphorne
Wadenhoe	2 15	5 0	Southwick
			pm pm pm pm
			---- 2 15 ---- 5 0
			---- 2 20 ---- 5 5
			1 15 2 30 4 15 5 10
			1 25 ---- 4 25 ----
			1 35 ---- 4 30 ----

CUNDLE & KETTERING		Thistle Services Ltd.	
FRIDAYS ONLY			
	am		pm
Oundle	9 30	Kettering	2 45
Benefield	10 0	Weekley	2 55
Weldon	1030	Geddington	3 0
Geddington	1045	Weldon	3 15
Weekley	1050	Benefield	3 30
Kettering	11 0	Cundle	4 0

BENEFIELD & PETERBOROUGH		Thistle Services Ltd.	
WEDNESDAYS ONLY			
	am		pm
Benefield	9 30	Peterborough	2 45
Oundle	9 45	Elton	3 15
Glaphorne	10 0	Tansor	3 30
Cottestock	10 5	Cottestock	3 40
Tansor	1015	Glaphorne	3 45
Elton	1030	Oundle	4 0
Peterborough	11 0	Benefield	4 15

Thistle's Stage-Carriage services timetable. Note the Company's title was "Thistle Services Ltd" at this point.

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So far details of the rolling stock owned by Harry Graveling, Alfred Wootton and later Thistle Services have not been mentioned. Two buses came from Frank Crick's former fleet and these were NV 1182, a 1932 Bedford WLB and UT 7300, a 1930 Bristol B-type. During 1947 Messrs Graveling & Wootton introduced two new and two used buses and coaches. The new tackle comprised a pair of Guy Arab III chassis with Santus bodies and these coaches were registered as BTL 865 and CTL 184 respectively. The secondhand machinery consisted of ET 7171, a 1932 Bristol J-type with Roe bodywork and GLW 856, a Morris-Commercial twenty-four seater.



Unfortunately only photographs of very poor quality have been located for Thistle coaches and the above two images show the Guy Arabs BTL 865 and CTL 184 with their Santus coachwork. The picture on the left also depicts BTL 865 but in a later owner's livery.

As previously stated Thistle Services Ltd was formed fairly early in 1947 and the name Thistle Services (Benefield) Ltd was in use by the end of 1948. If this was a change of name the reasons for it are unknown and it maybe the case that the company's name always included (Benefield) in its title but was omitted from the Traffic Commissioners' publications.

The Corby to Glasgow weekend service seems to have been temporarily suspended at some point during 1948, possibly during the quieter months of October and November. It was however resumed for the Christmas and New Year period as the appended advertisement in the Kettering Evening Telegraph of 21st December 1948 shows.

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Going to Scotland?

'THISTLE SERVICES'

(Benefield) Limited

Desire to announce that they are resuming
their

CORBY to GLASGOW EXPRESS COACH SERVICE

(via Hamilton, Motherwell and Bellshill)

As from Friday, December 24th and until further
notice, coaches leave Corby (Occupation Road)
every Friday night at 7 o'clock, Glasgow (Park
Head Cross) every Sunday morning at 8 o'clock.
Fare 30/- Single. 50/- Return

For full particulars apply:
The Head Office, Benefield, near
Oundle; phone Benefield 230. Book
at 33, Occupation Road, Corby.



Travel the Superior Way!

Ec28

Further advertisements in January 1949 confirm that the service was still operating and the licence for the route was renewed for the next three years with no modification other than to fares. However, in November 1952, revisions to the service were proposed to both re-route it and to introduce additional picking up and setting down points. Instead of proceeding from Corby to Stamford and the A1 Thistle applied to divert the service via Leicester, Loughborough and Nottingham with fares to and from these points and Glasgow. The application attracted widespread objections but Leicester and Nottingham were subsequently granted and the period of operation was restricted to 1st March to 30th September and 20th December to 6th January. Duplicates were limited to two vehicles. In all probability the service had always been restricted to the dates of operation quoted above, which is why the advertisement shown above announced that the service was being resumed.

Returning to Thistle's other operations, on the Excursions & Tours front over the next few years only a Leicester excursion was added to the licence. However, in April 1949, Thistle applied to operate seven or fourteen-day tours to Glasgow, Park Head Cross but this application was subsequently withdrawn. The four local services to Peterborough, Kettering, Oundle and Southwick/Wadenhoe were all discontinued circa June 1951 although the Thursday only Southwick - Oundle - Wadenhoe route was picked up by

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Frank Coales (Aldwinckle) Ltd (NN-CO1) soon afterwards. In addition to running the local routes for a number of years, Thistle built up a considerable contracts portfolio which included personnel transport for the U.S.A.F. base at Molesworth, which mostly involved moving service personnel to and from Kettering for leisure purposes. Additionally school contracts were operated from Upper Benefield to Corby; from Lower Benefield to Oundle and from Brigstock, Rockingham and Harringworth to Corby schools. Furthermore, a Displaced Persons' Camp at Lilford Park provided valuable contract opportunities for Thistle Services, including the operation of journeys as far afield as Aberdeen.

It is by no means certain that all the buses and coaches owned by Messrs Graveling & Wootton have been recorded and in some cases the dates of withdrawal are unknown. Be that as it may, it is known that in 1948 a further three used machines and one new one were sourced. A Bedford WTL bearing the registration CXO 565, another Bedford WTB with the index FYO 700 and a rebuilt Leyland Tiger TS2 registered AJL 773 were the three second-hand coaches purchased. The new intake was ENV 598 which was a Crossley SD42/6 with thirty-three seat Burlingham coachwork, which was delivered new in November 1948. To replace older vehicles during 1949 a couple of Daimler coaches were bought second-hand, registered GO 5538 and EN 8977, and equipped



AJL 773 was a Leyland Tiger TS2 rebuilt in 1947 and mounted with an Alexander thirty-two seat body. Messrs Graveling and Wootton acquired it in October 1948.

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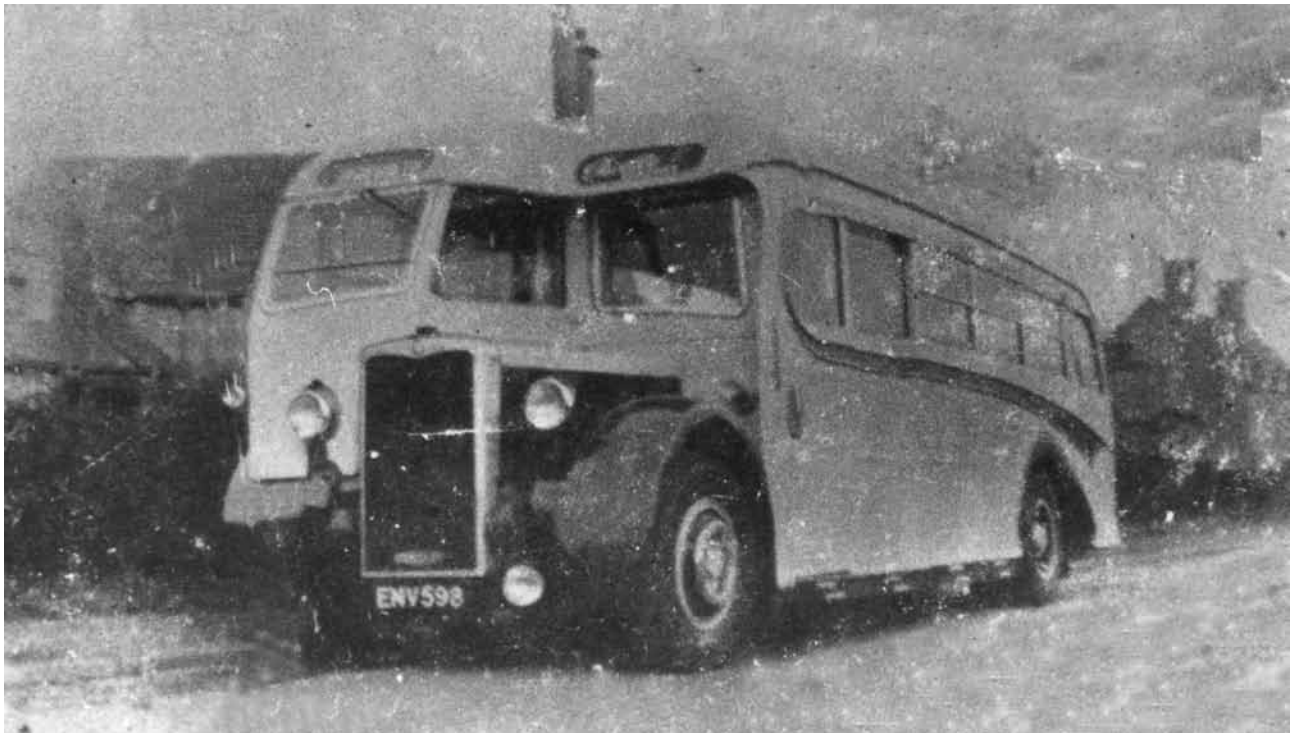
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This handsome Daimler CH6 registered GO 5538 started life as a double-decker but is seen here with a later Park Royal body prior to purchase by Thistle Services.

(Photo courtesy of S L Poole/Omnibus Society)



Not a very good photograph but Thistle's new Crossley SD42/6 coach with Burlingham thirty-three seat bodywork can be seen in this view. It was registered ENV 598 in November 1948.

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respectively with Park Royal and Longwell Green bodies. In the Autumn of 1951 a new Commer Avenger with Plaxton Venturer coachwork, registered DHL 876, took to the road to be followed in 1952 by a Dennis Lancet full-fronted A.C.B. bodied coach registered DJR 347 which had previously been used by A B Wilson of Horsley-on-Tyne.

Around about February/March 1952 the partners of Thistle Services (Benefield) Ltd had a serious disagreement and decided to dissolve the partnership and go their own separate ways. Alfred Wootton retained the Thistle name, the Glasgow service, the excursions and tours and continued to operate from Upper Benefield. Thistle's story from this point is continued in this paper. Harry Graveling retained the contract operations and henceforth traded as "Fleetway Coaches" from his address at 12 Stocks Lane, Corby. Harry's story from this point will be continued in paper NN-GR3A. It is believed, but not confirmed, that five of the Thistle vehicles transferred to Harry Graveling's Fleetway Coaches at this time.

For reasons that are not clear the McLean Brothers of Glasgow gained an interest in Thistle at this time and Alfred Wootton appears to have sold the company to the McLeans in November 1952. Indeed, David McFarlane McLean moved to Corby whilst James McLean remained in Glasgow. The McLeans immediately introduced two new Bedford SB coaches with Yeates Riviera thirty-nine seat bodies to the Thistle fleet for the operation of the Glasgow service and these were registered HRP 979 and KYS 563 respectively. In December 1953 a Daimler Freeline coach with Plaxton Venturer body was purchased new as JRP 750 and was joined in 1954 by a full-fronted Windover bodied Foden coach registered MUR 562.



Only the rear of the Bedford SB registered HRP 979 with its Yeates Riviera coachwork can be shown, but it does display its Thistle Services identity quite nicely.

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Thistle's Foden PVFE6 registered MUR 562 carrying a thirty-nine seat body by Windover. The livery of Thistle coaches was white and black. (Photo courtesy R Marshall).

On 24th November 1954 an agreement was reached between the McLean Brothers and Barton Transport Ltd of Chilwell for the former to sell to the latter the Goodwill of Thistle's Corby to Glasgow and Excursions & Tours from Benefield licences for a consideration of £7,500. In fact Barton Transport and Robin Hood Coaches of Nottingham immediately jointly applied for the Corby to Glasgow licences and backings and these were duly granted, with Barton first operating the service from Friday 4th March 1955. The Excursions & Tours licence was also applied for but the application was subsequently withdrawn following consultation and agreement with United Counties who in turn accepted that Barton and Robin Hood could make use of the Company's fuelling and parking facilities at Corby Depot. Incidentally, Thistle Services (Benefield) Ltd was finally dissolved on 2nd July 1963.

The Author readily acknowledges with thanks the enthusiastic help given by Eric Graveling in the preparation of this paper.

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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			
	NV 1182	Bedford	WLB	108434	Waveney	B20F		3/32	7/46	by -/49	F E Crick, Upper Benefield	R Wilson, Carnwath	
	UT 7300	Bristol	B	B615	?	B32F		6/30	7/46	12/48	F E Crick, Upper Benefield	No further owner	
	ET 7171	Bristol	JNW	J108	Roe	B32C	GO1979	6/32	-/47	-/49	Sherburn Transport Ltd, Kippax	No further owner	
	BTL 865	Guy	Arab III	FD29275	Santus	C33F		3/47	—	-/48	—	Hylton & Dawson, Glenfield	
	GLW 856	Morris Comm'l		135	?	C24F		3/42	6/47	9/50	Ministry of Transport (L437943)	No further owner	
	CTL 184	Guy	Arab III	FD32945	Santus	C33F		12/47	—	by -/53	—	D & J McAteer, Broomhouse	
	CXO 565	Bedford	WTL	4161.M	Willmott	C26R		8/36	1/48	12/53	M J Cox, Ellwood	Fleetway Coaches, Corby	
	FYD 700	Bedford	OWB	14827	Duple	B28F	33813	6/43	-/48	by 1/54	G A Wall, Mack	Brookside Services, Market Deeping	
	AJL 773	Leyland	Tiger TS2 (Rebuild)	1002	Alexander	C32F		1/47	10/48	3/52	W G Turner, Crowland	Fleetway Coaches, Corby	
	ENV 598	Crossley	SD42/6	97616	Burlingham	C33F	2979	11/48	—	by 2/54	Supp Beech Garage (Hanley) Ltd	R S Gaddes, Hook Norton	
	GO 5538	Daimler	CH6	9061	Park Royal (1936)	C31F		4/31	9/49	?	B J Mellor Ltd., Enderby	Fleetway Coaches, Corby	
	EN 8977	Daimler	CVD6SD	14368	Longwell Green	C33F		5/47	9/49	12/53	Auty's Tours Ltd, Bury	Fleetway Coaches, Corby	
	DHL 876	Commer	Avenger I	23A0893	Plaxton Venturer	C33F	1828	10/51	—	by 2/54	—	?	1
	DJR 347		Lancet	716J3	A.C.B.	FC33F		3/50	-/52	?	A B Wilson, Horsley-on-Tyne	Fleetway Coaches, Corby	
	HRP 979	Bedford	SB	13752	Yeates Riviera	C35F	335	2/53	—	12/53	—	A Wray & Son Ltd, Summerbridge	
	KYS 563	Bedford	SB	14321	Yeates Riviera	C35F	339	2/53	by 4/53	by 7/54	McLean Bros., Glasgow	A Davies, Mold	
	JRP 750	Daimler	Freeline CD650HS	25068	Plaxton Venturer	C41C	1884	12/53	—	?	—	Meikle & McRae, Lesmahagow	
	MUR 562	Foden	PVFE6	30634	Windover	FC39C		6/51	5/54	?	Flemming, Stirling	Bluebird Garages, Kingston-upon-Hull	

Notes: 1 - DHL 876 ordered by a West Riding operator.