

# Bygone Buses

of  
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-DR3  
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**DRAGE.** Walter Thomas & George Ernest  
t/a **DRAGE BROS.**

**Lineprop Yard, BOZEAT**  
later 18 Council Street, Bozeat and  
later still 1 Hope Street, Bozeat.

Walter Thomas Drage was born on 22nd May 1899 and during the first World War served in the Army. As far as can be ascertained some eighty years after the event, in January 1922 Walter's father - Thompson Drage - set his eldest son up in business with a Ford T van which was registered BD 1703 on 12th January. Thompson Drage was both a carrier and a shoe worker so it is likely that Walter Drage used his new van for the conveyance of general goods, much as his father had used his horse and cart in earlier years. In the same way that carriers conveyed passengers as well as goods to the nearest towns, it is thought that Walter Drage did likewise and this was to lead a year later to a fourteen-seat Ford T bus being purchased. This vehicle took the registration BD 7824 on 16th May 1923 and was used on a service linking Bozeat with Wollaston, Little Irchester and Wellingborough, terminating at the Palace Theatre. The Ford was painted red and cream which were the colours adopted by Walter Drage for his subsequent buses. Although not actively involved with bus operation, Thompson Drage appears to have continued to exercise some financial control over the business until his death in 1928 as all but one of the new buses were registered in his name.

Evidently the Wellingborough service prospered and in January 1926 a twenty-seat Thornycroft A1 bus was bought from and bodied by Messrs York, Ward & Rowlatt of Wellingborough, being allocated the registration RP 2109.

Precisely what happened next is somewhat of a mystery. John Henry Edmunds, always known as Dick, drove for Walter Drage and the likely scenario is that Dick Edmunds joined Walter Drage and possibly Walter's father, in some sort of partnership. The evidence suggesting this comes from the fact that on 8th May 1926 a new fourteen-seater REO saloon bus was registered in Dick Edmunds' name as RP 2613 and certainly by February 1928 at the latest the business is recorded as trading as "Drage & Edmunds".

The fleet was increased from three to four buses on 11th March 1927 when RP 3861, which was another twenty-seat York, Ward & Rowlatt bodied Thornycroft A1, was registered, this time in the name of Thompson Drage & Son.

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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DRAGE Bros. - BOZEAT

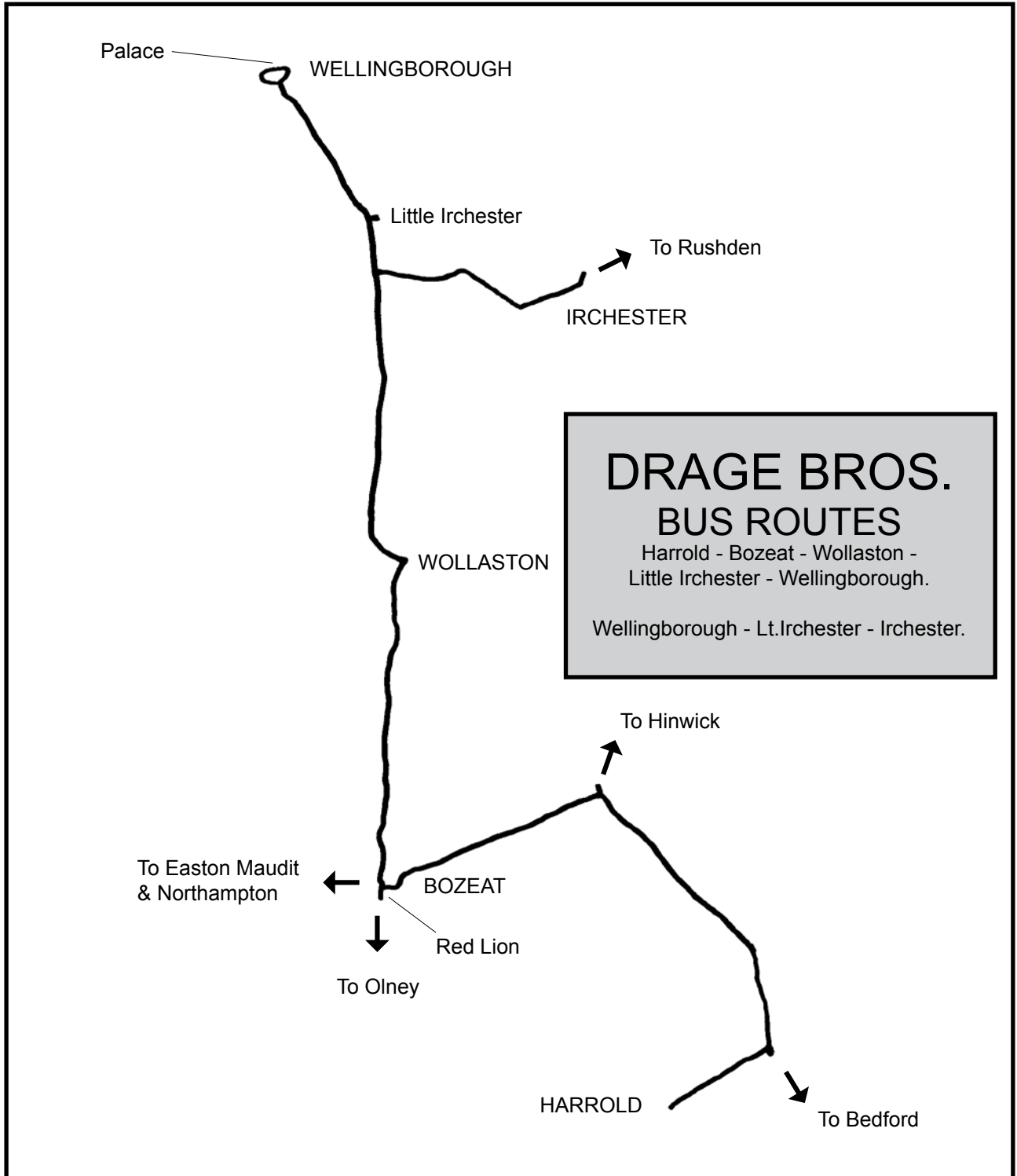


*Luckily a photograph of Thornycroft A1 - RP 2109 - has survived and it is seen here standing at the Red Lion, Bozeat. (Photo courtesy Alan Burman collection)*



*RP 2613 was an attractive fourteen-seat REO, again photographed at the Red Lion, Bozeat. John Henry (Dick) Edmunds is the driver and George Ernest Drage the conductor. Sitting in the bus is the landlord of the Red Lion, a Mr Pettitt. (Photo courtesy D Edmunds)*

**DRAGE Bros. - BOZEAT**



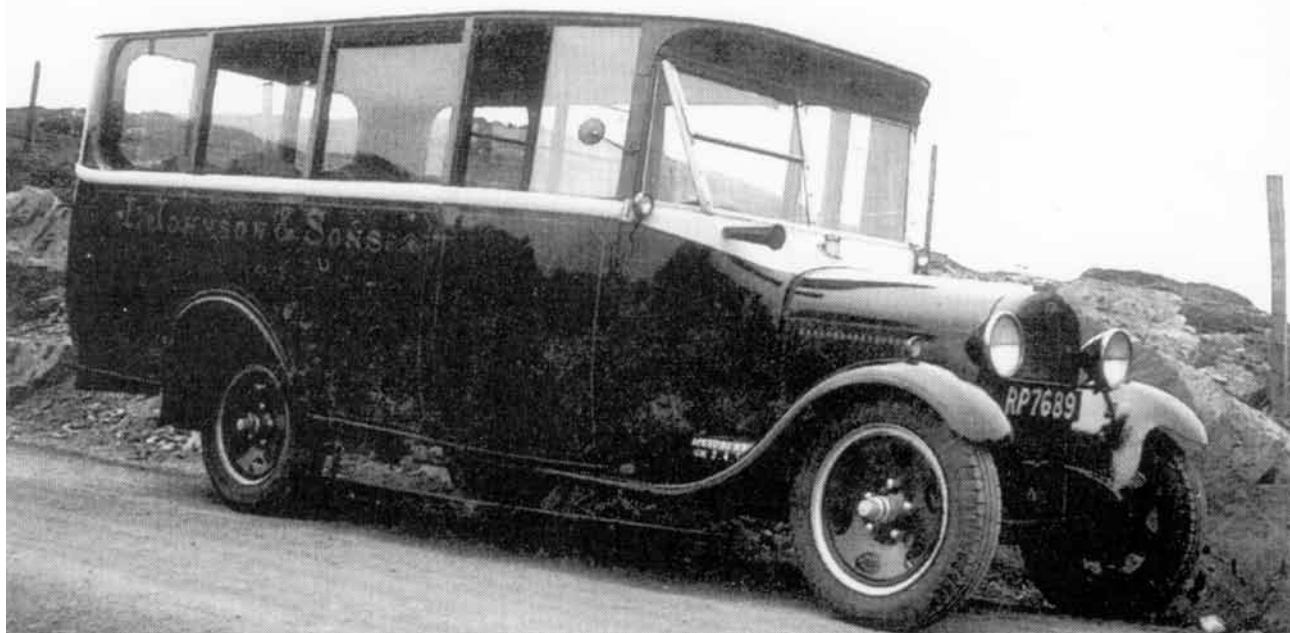
Just how long Dick Edmunds retained a financial interest in the business is another of the many uncertainties of this particular history. It may well have been the death of Thompson Drage in 1928 that caused a review of the situation as Dick Edmunds definitely ceased to be a partner prior to 1931 although he continued as a driver for Walter Drage and subsequently United Counties.

### DRAGE Bros. - BOZEAT

Walter Drage had a younger brother, born in 1903 and Christened George Ernest, usually being referred to as Ernie but sometimes as Joe! As will be seen from the photograph of RP 2613 page 2, Ernie Drage was acting as a conductor. Exactly when he joined his elder brother in running the buses is not known but he later drove them. It seems likely that following Thompson Drage's death that Ernie inherited a share in the business which thereafter traded as Drage Bros and Kelly's Northamptonshire Directory for 1928 shows the business trading as Drage Bros by this time.

At unknown dates during the 1920s Walter Drage introduced a service between Irchester and Wellingborough on a route already well served by United Counties and H G Wright of Irchester. It is believed that the service was specifically for shoe workers and ran only at factory start and finish times. In addition, on Sundays, the Wellingborough to Bozeat service was extended to Harrold, probably with three journeys each way being provided. In addition, in February 1928, application was made by Messrs Drage & Edmunds to Northampton Borough Watch Committee for a 14-seat bus to ply for hire from Becket's Well, Northampton in connection with a Bozeat to Northampton service. The required Hackney Carriage licences were granted but whether or not operation of the service proceeded is unknown.

The next new bus was bought in 1929 when it is understood the chassis of the original Ford T - BD 7824 - was traded into Messrs E Ward of Park Road, Wellingborough in exchange for RP 7689 which was a new Ford AA bus with a seating capacity of fourteen. As far as is known this bus, registered in Walter Drage's name, was the last one to be purchased. The body of BD 7824 was retained as a playhouse for Walter's daughters.



This photograph depicts Drage Brothers' former Ford AA registered RP 7689 whilst in the possession of the Shetland Isles operator James Johnson & Son. It was probably photographed in the late 1930s. (Photo courtesy of the late Gordon Jamieson).

### DRAGE Bros. - BOZEAT

In the aftermath of the Road Traffic Act 1930 the Drage Brothers submitted applications to the Traffic Commissioners for three licences in October/November 1931. Two were to continue their stage-carriage services between Harrold - Bozeat - Wollaston - Little Irchester - Wellingborough and between Wellingborough and Irchester whilst the third was for a small group of Excursions & Tours starting from Bozeat, Red Lion and also picking up at Wollaston. The tours in question ran to Hunstanton, Skegness, London Zoo, Riseley Races, Northampton County Show and Towcester Races. All three licences were granted and in due time took the Commissioners' references TER448/1, 2 and 3 respectively. In the absence of timetables it is difficult to confirm the precise level of service provided by the Drage brothers but it is believed that a relatively frequent service was provided on a daily basis between Bozeat, Wollaston, Little Irchester and Wellingborough, with the service extended to Harrold on Sundays only with a maximum of three journeys each way. The Wellingborough - Irchester route is thought to have provided workmen's services only.

Drage Brothers' licences were renewed in September 1932 but by February 1933 agreement had been reached between Walter Thomas and George Ernest Drage on the one part and United Counties Omnibus & Road Transport Co Ltd on the other part for United Counties to purchase the Goodwill of the Drage Bros. services for the sum of £1,400. This sum indicates that United Counties considered the timings operated by the Drage Brothers as having considerable potential, especially when co-ordinated with its own operations and those of Messrs B W H & F O M Davis of Lavendon and H G Wright of Irchester whose businesses were acquired at the same time as that of the Drage Brothers.

United Counties applied to the Traffic Commissioners in March 1933 for a new Excursions & Tours licence from Bozeat taking over the Drage operations without modification and this was granted from 24th May 1933. Concurrently application was made by United Counties to amend its existing Wellingborough to Olney route to incorporate the Drage Brothers' service although a separate licence was granted to cover the Harrold route. The Company's revised timetables came into operation on Saturday 25th March 1933 and so ended Walter and Ernest Drage's partnership.

Walter Drage went on to operate cattle trucks, still under the Drage Bros. name but without the involvement of his brother Ernest who took up a driving position with United Counties and remained with the Company for many years until his retirement.

*I am grateful to Walter Drage's daughters Gladys and Glenda and to Dick Edmunds' son Derek for providing family history information.*

### DRAGE Bros. - BOZEAT

#### Rolling Stock:

Regn. No.	Chassis	Type	Chassis No.	Body	Seats	Body No.	Dates			Former Owner	Disposal	Nts
							New	S/H	W/D			
BD 1703	Ford	T	5405841	?	Van	—	1/22	—	1/26?	Supp E Ward, Wellingborough?	?	1
BD 7824	Ford	T	7404774	?	B14	—	5/23	—	6/29?	Supp E Ward, Wellingborough?	E Ward, Wellingborough?	2
RP 2109	Thornycroft	A1	11861	YW&R	B20F	—	1/26	—	3/33	Supp York, Ward & Rowlatt, W'borough	?	3
RP 2613	REO	?	128529	?	B14F	—	5/26	—	3/33	—	?	4
RP 3861	Thornycroft	A1	12803	YW&R	B20F	—	3/27	—	3/33	Supp York, Ward & Rowlatt, W'borough	?	5
RP 7689	Ford	AA	4193?0?	?	B14F	—	6/29	—	3/33	Supp E Ward, Wellingborough	?	6

- Notes:-
- 1 - BD 1703 - Last owned by E Parsons & Son Ltd, Irchester and last licensed 3/29.
  - 2 - BD 7824 - Last owned by C W Bigley, Wellingborough and last licensed 11/30.
  - 3 - RP 2109 - Last owned by C J Taylor, Wellingborough and last licensed 6/34.
  - 4 - RP 2613 - Last owned by C H Warren, Lavendon and last licensed 6/34.
  - 5 - RP 3861 - Last owned by B Cunningham, London E1 and last licensed 6/36.
  - 6 - RP 7689 - Last owned by R Jamieson & Co. Shetland and last licensed 9/47.