

# Bygone Buses

of  
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-BI2  
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## **BILLINGTON. Charles Edwin t/a Shakespeare Omnibus Co. Shakespeare Inn, Marefair, NORTHAMPTON**

Before reading this account it is recommended that papers NN-WA3 and NN-AN3 be consulted, which relate to the bus operating activities of Alfred Walmsley and Violet Andrews, together with their involvement in running on the Northampton to Duston route.

This story relates to Charles Edwin Billington who was born on 13th November 1888 and by the 1920s had become a cabinet and furniture maker of some note. His mother kept the Shakespeare Inn in Marefair, Northampton prior to Charlie taking over and the Billington family resided at these premises. It will be recalled from paper NN-WA3 that Alfred Walmsley kept his buses in the yard at the rear of the Shakespeare Inn so it is clear that Charlie Billington knew Walmsley well and was acquainted with the bus services he provided.

In January 1922 Charlie Billington joined the fray and started running a bus from the Shakespeare to Duston, apparently with alternate journeys running to Berrywood Gates or the Rifle Butt at New Duston, although some journeys were extended to Harlestone. It is understood that Billington acquired a Ford T for this operation and it is said that he later bought two Ford T buses from Walmsley, this probably occurring when the latter gentleman ceased trading late in 1922. Apart from the local bus service Charlie Billington also ran excursions and tours from Northampton Market Square. Billington also made application to Northampton Borough Council Watch Committee to stand a vehicle at the corner of Commercial Street in connection with a proposed service between Northampton, Milton and Blisworth. A stand was granted in Cattle Market Road instead but whether or not the service ever operated is not known.

Early in 1923 Charlie Billington formed a partnership with William Thomas Benson and they continued Billington's former operations but traded as the "Shakespeare Omnibus Company". The partnership was short lived and was dissolved in November 1923 when Charlie Billington continued the Shakespeare Omnibus Company on his own and Benson, with his three sons, formed the "Squirrels Bus Service".

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.

BILLINGTON C E - NORTHAMPTON

Returning to the subject of vehicles, it is almost certain that Charlie Billington's next acquisition was an ex-War Department A.E.C. on which a charabanc body had been fitted.



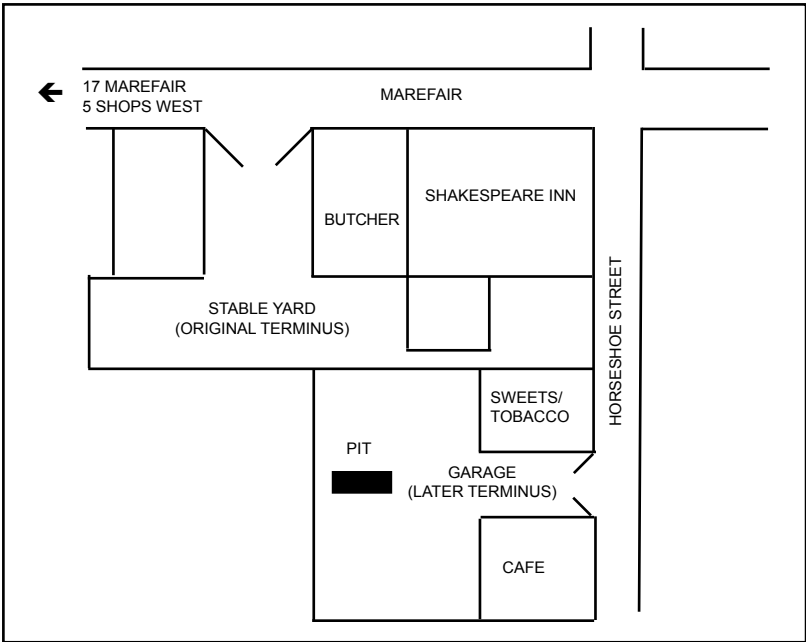
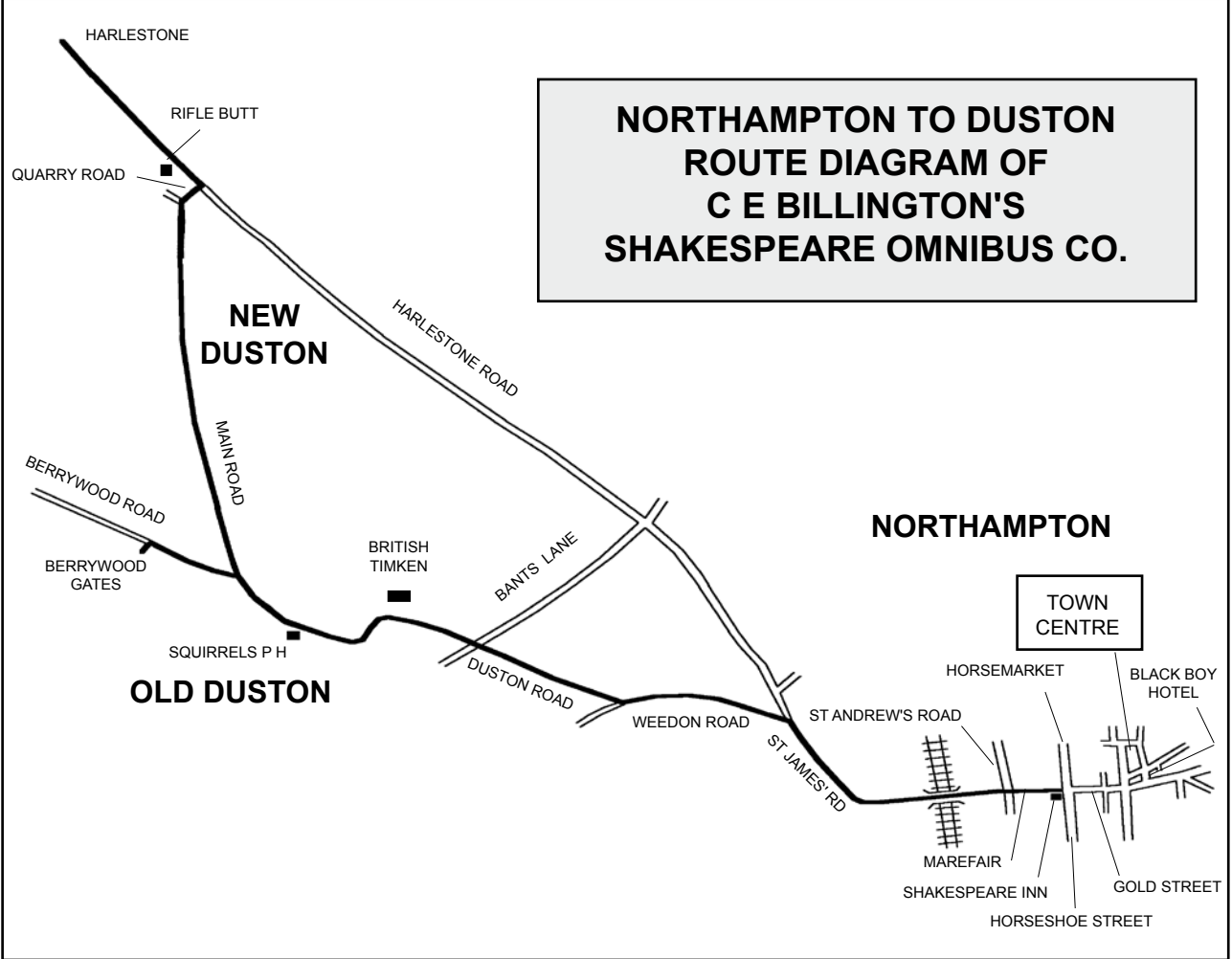
*Charlie Billington's A.E.C. charabanc was venturing to Woburn on the occasion on which this photograph was taken circa 1923. The registration numbers 7012 are visible but the letters are not. Mrs Florence Mabel Billington (Charlie's wife) is depicted below the x marked on the picture.*

Other vehicles owned by Charlie Billington included a Pierce-Arrow, an Albion and at least four REOs. The latter were registered NH 5500, NH 5614, NH 6166 and NH 7091 when new to Billington around April 1924, July 1924, April 1925 and June 1926 respectively. A fifth REO was BD 8873 which had earlier been operated by Timson of Burton Latimer and was acquired by Billington prior to June 1928. As mentioned earlier, Charlie Billington was a gifted joiner and he built many of his own bus bodies. Almost certainly the REOs bought new had Billington bodywork. It is reported that some of Charlie Billington's buses were painted blue and white and others maroon.

Circa 1924, on land at the rear of the Shakespeare Inn Charlie Billington built a large garage in which the buses were kept. Above the building was living accommodation and at the vehicle egress in Horseshoe Street, a cafe was built on one side and a sweet shop on the other. At this time running buses so occupied Charlie Billington that he decided to vacate the Shakespeare Inn and the family moved into the living accommodation above the garage. Mrs Billington ran the cafe and sweet shop at the front of the building.

**BILLINGTON C E - NORTHAMPTON**

**NORTHAMPTON TO DUSTON  
ROUTE DIAGRAM OF  
C E BILLINGTON'S  
SHAKESPEARE OMNIBUS CO.**

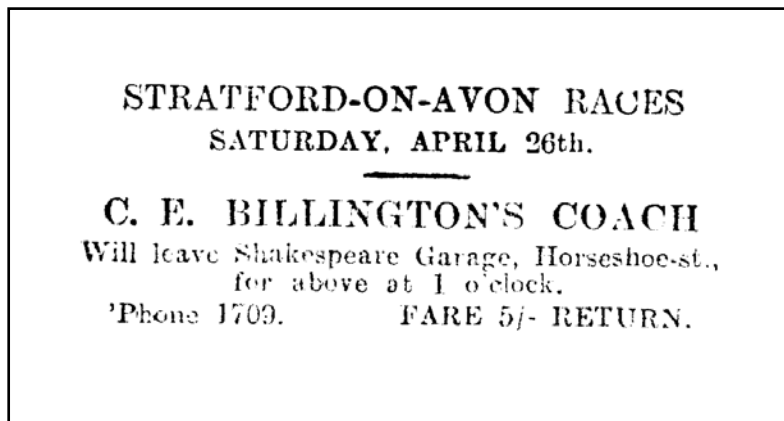


Left: Diagram of Marefair/Horseshoe Street area of Northampton showing the Shakespeare Inn and Charlie Billington's adjacent Garage in Horseshoe Street.

**BILLINGTON C E - NORTHAMPTON**

By 1929 there was much talk of regulation in the provision of bus services and the 1930 Road Traffic Act was in the offing. Accordingly Charlie Billington thought it best to sell his business to one of the larger public transport providers and on 24th September 1929 agreement was reached with United Counties Omnibus & Road Transport Co Ltd for the latter company to purchase the goodwill of Billington's services for £425. The agreement was effective from 29th September and no vehicles were involved in the transaction. In fact Charlie Billington was permitted to retain two of his current fleet of three vehicle for private hire work only, but could not purchase new or replacement stock in substitution for the two. Charlie Billington continued the operation of private hire during 1930 but not beyond that date.

After ceasing to run buses, Charlie Billington and his family left Northampton and bought "The Railway Junction" PH at Hitchin. This venture did not last for long and the Billingtons returned to Northampton and Charlie became foreman at Martin's building firm. Charlie survived until 1963.



*A facsimile of Billington's advert appearing in the  
Northampton Daily Chronicle of Friday 25th April 1930.*

I am most grateful to the late Mrs Florence Billington and Mr Norman Billington for family details relevant to the above story.

### BILLINGTON C E - NORTHAMPTON

#### Rolling Stock:

REGN. NO.	CHASSIS			BODY			DATES			PREVIOUS OWNER	INITIAL DISPOSAL	NOTES
	MAKE	TYPE	NO.	MAKE	TYPE/ SEATS	NO.	NEW	S/H	W/D			
	Ford	T			B14			1/22	?			
NH xxxx?	Ford	T			B14		6/22	c12/22	?	A Walmsley, N'pton		
NH xxxx?	Ford	T			B14		-/22?	c12/22	?	A Walmsley, N'pton		
xx 7012	A.E.C.				Ch30			c-/23	?			
	Pierce-Arrow Albion				B			by4/23	?			
					B			c-/24	?	Ex-Scottish operator		
NH 5500	REO			Billington	?		4/24	-	?		No subsequent owner	
NH 5614	REO	27-8hp		Billington	20?		7/24	-	-/28?		A Minney, Yardley Hastings.	1
NH 6166	REO			Billington	20?		4/25	-	11/29		No Subsequent owner.	2
NH 7091	REO			Billington	20?		6/26	-	-/30		No subsequent owner.	3
BD 8873	REO	Speed Wagon	F99290		14?		2/24	?	6/28			4
NH 7385	REO				26?		-/27	by5/29	-/30			5

- Notes: 1 - Last owned by A Minney, Yardley Hastings and last licensed 11/35.  
 2 - Last owned by C E Billington and last licensed 11/34.  
 3 - Last owned by C E Billington and last licensed 11/34.  
 4 - New to Timson, Burton Latimer.  
 5 - Hired to H M Reeve, Northampton 1930-2.

**Notes from Northampton Borough Council Watch Committee Minutes indicate that Billington had the following vehicles at the date listed:**

- 16/1/22 - 1 motor vehicle
- 15/1/23 - 2 x 14 seater Ford saloon buses
- 16/4/23 - 30 seater charabanc
- 14/6/24 - Charabanc and 2 saloon buses
- 8/12/24 - Coach to replace vehicle disposed of
- 27/4/25 - 20 seater charabanc
- 13/9/26 - 20 seater
- 14/5/28 - 14 seater
- 6/9/28 - 20 seater
- 7/5/29 - 26 seater