

Bygone Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

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CLARKE Bros., Harry & George Albert t/a "Red Bus" Service The Wheatsheaf Inn, WEEDON

The George Henry Clarke who featured in papers NN-CL5 and NN-CL6 had two sons. The eldest was Harry Clarke who was born in 1898 and the youngest was George Albert Clarke who entered the world in 1903. Harry Clarke served in the Royal Flying Corps during the First World War and on demobilisation in 1919 returned to Weedon establishing, in the following year, a car repair and taxi business operating from buildings to the rear of the Wheatsheaf, where his father continued to be landlord.

Harry's younger brother, George, joined him at about this time and the two traded as "Clarke Bros" although their mother - Phoebe Emily Clarke - seems to have financed the outfit. Presumably, as George Henry Clarke had earlier been declared bankrupt, his name could not be associated with the business.

It seems that the Clarke Brothers acquired their first charabanc in November 1921 when BD 273 was registered in Harry's name. This machine was a Lancia which seated twenty passengers and, in the initial years, the Clarke Brothers used it only for private hire trips. In January 1924 another vehicle was purchased and registered BD 8689 in Phoebe Clarke's name. This was a S.P.A. (Soc. Piemontese Automobili) which was of Italian origin and was described in registration records as "a red single deck".

In the Spring of 1924 the Clarke Brothers decided they would enter the local bus service market, as their father had done before them, and duly applied to Northampton Borough Council Watch Committee for a licence to stand a single-deck vehicle in St. Andrew's Road, Northampton. This application was granted on 14th June 1924 and a service commenced operating between Lower Weedon, Road Weedon, Flore, Lower Heyford, Kislingbury and Northampton. It can be assumed that the S.P.A. was used to operate this service.

Evidently the local bus route was successful, due partially to the Clarke Brothers initiative and partly to the demise of the Midland Motor Bus Company. During the course of the years 1924 to 1926 a second-hand Sunbeam charabanc joined the fleet and at least three new Lancia buses were taken into stock during 1926. The registration numbers of these vehicles were AC 8907, RP 2067, RP 2785 and RP 3261. There were certainly other second-hand acquisitions about which nothing is known.

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.

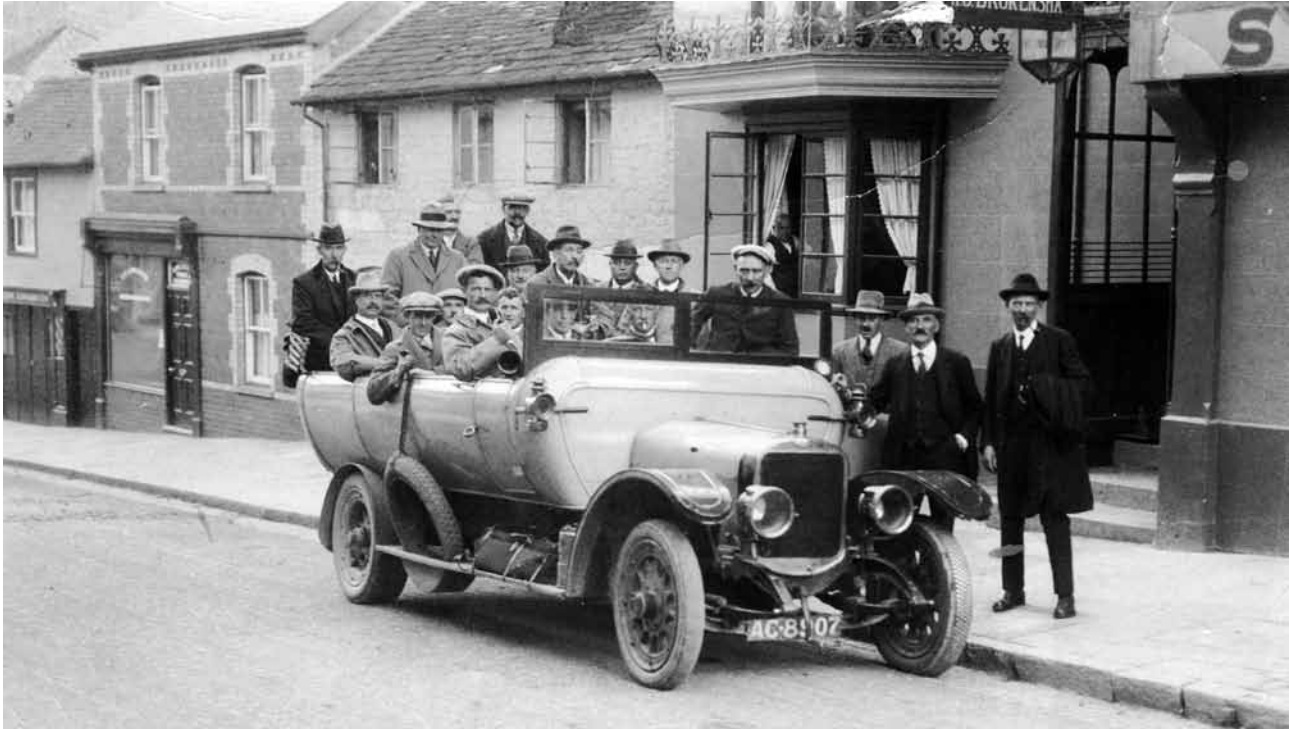
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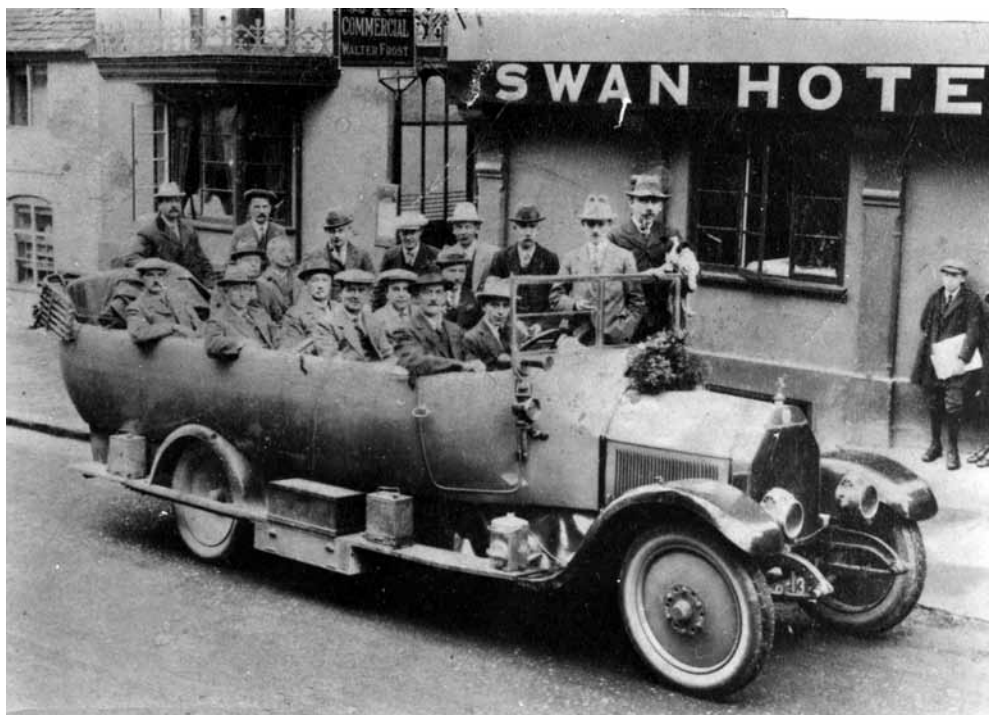
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Fortunately a good photograph of Sunbeam AC 8907 has survived and this charabanc is shown here at the Swan Hotel, Buith Wells, having conveyed the Weedon and/or Daventry Bowls Club to this town for an away match.



This unidentified Lancia charabanc was also photographed at Buith Wells on a later occasion when the Bowls team made its annual sojourn to Wales. Harry Clarke was driving on both occasions.

CLARKE BROS., WEEDON



The Wheat sheaf Inn at Weedon showing the entrance to the Clarke Brothers' garage circa 1920. Without doubt the two vehicles on the left of the illustration were the Clarke's taxis. Note the Pratts petrol pump on the kerb edge and the petrol tanker in the gateway.

By February 1926 a fairly substantial range of timings was being operated on the Lower Weedon to Northampton service, as can be seen from the timetable illustrated on the following page. Incidentally, Clarke Bros. traded as the "Red Bus" Service and painted their vehicle predominantly red with white or cream reliefs.

At an unknown date between 1926 and 1929 the Clarke Brothers extended their Northampton to Weedon service through to Daventry and in April 1930 it was agreed that certain journeys be operated to Byfield, but whether or not this actually happened is not clear. In addition, a Weedon - Daventry - Braunston - Rugby service was inaugurated in the late 1920s, certainly with the intention of conveying workers to and from the B.T.H. Factory in the latter town.

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FEB : 1926.

RED 'BUS

SERVICE BETWEEN
WEEDON
AND
NORTHAMPTON.

(All previous Times cancelled).

PASSENGERS will be set down and taken up at
ST. ANDREW'S ROAD, NORTHAMPTON.

We will endeavour to maintain a standard
service, but accept no liability by reason of
unpunctuality or failure to maintain service.

RETURN TICKETS WILL BE ISSUED EACH DAY.

TRAVEL IN COMFORT
BY THE
RED 'BUSES.

Clarke Bros., Weedon.

Travel in Comfort by the RED Buses.

PRINTED & PUBLISHED FOR THE PROPRIETORS BY C. ADAMS, 52 HIGH STREET DAVENTRY.

Wednesday service.

Leave	a.m.	a.m.	noon	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.
Lower Weedon...	8 50	9 50	10 50	1 50	2 50	4 50	6 50	8 50	9 50
Road "	9 0	10 0	11 0	2 0	3 0	5 0	7 0	8 55	9 55
Flore "	9 5	10 5	11 5	2 5	3 5	5 5	7 5	9 5	10 5
Heyford "	9 10	10 10	11 10	2 10	3 10	5 10	7 10	9 10	10 10
Kislingbury "	9 20	10 20	11 20	2 20	3 20	5 20	7 20	9 20	10 20
Northampton arr	9 35	10 35	11 35	2 35	3 35	5 35	7 35	9 35	10 35

Saturday service.

Leave	a.m.	a.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.
Lower WEED'N	9 5	9 50	10 50	11 50	12 50	1 50	2 50	3 50	4 50
Road "	9 15	10 0	11 0	12 0	1 0	2 0	3 0	4 0	5 0
FLORE	9 20	10 5	11 5	12 5	1 5	2 5	3 5	4 5	5 5
HEYFORD	9 25	10 10	11 10	12 10	1 10	2 10	3 10	4 10	5 10
Kislingbury	9 35	10 20	11 20	12 20	1 20	2 20	3 20	4 20	5 20
Northampton arr	9 50	10 35	11 35	12 35	1 35	2 35	3 35	4 35	5 35

Sunday service.

Leave	a.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.
Lower Weedon...	9 50	1 35	2 50	7 35	9 50
Road "	10 0	1 45	3 0	7 45	10 0
Flore "	10 5	1 50	3 5	7 50	10 5
Heyford "	10 10	1 55	3 10	8 0	10 10
Kislingbury	10 20	2 5	3 20	8 5	10 20
Northampton arr	10 35	2 20	3 35	8 20	10 35

Mon. Tues. Fri.

Leave	a.m.	noon	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.
Weedon	9 0	12 0	2 0	4 45	8 0
Flore	9 5	12 5	2 5	4 50	8 5
Heyford	9 10	12 10	2 10	4 55	8 10
Kislingbury	9 20	12 20	2 20	5 5	8 20
Northampton arr	9 35	12 35	2 35	5 20	8 35

Thursdays.

Leave	a.m.	a.m.	noon	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.
Weedon	9 0	10 30	12 0	2 0	6 0	7 0	8 0
Flore	9 5	10 35	12 5	2 5	6 5	7 5	8 5
Heyford	9 10	10 40	12 10	2 10	6 10	7 10	8 10
Kislingbury	9 20	10 50	12 20	2 20	6 20	7 20	8 20
Northampton arr	9 35	11 5	12 35	2 35	6 35	7 35	8 35

For Wednesday service
see back.

AND FOR
Effective Printing
C. Adams

52, High Street, Daventry

"Red Bus" timetable at February 1926.

CLARKE BROS., WEEDON



A general view of Daventry Market Square showing two buses. On the left is Clarke Bros.' Lancia RP 3261 and on the right is the Northampton Motor Omnibus Company's Daimler XB 9885.

In 1927/8 two new and one second-hand Lancias are known to have joined the fleet. These were registered RP 4573, RP 5477 and NR 5483 and all were saloon buses. RP 5477 is of some interest as it had twin rear axles and seated forty passengers, a high number for the period in question. Furthermore, it could not easily gain access to the firm's garage at the rear of the Wheatsheaf and in order to accomplish the manoeuvre, planks had to be laid in the gutter at the front of the public house in order to keep the rear of the vehicle at the right height to gain entry. Sadly, RP 5477 had only a short life, as in the same year that it was new, it caught fire one Sunday evening whilst operating between Daventry and Staverton and was completely destroyed.

August 1928 saw the delivery of Clarke Brothers' first Tilling-Stevens vehicle which was registered RP 6142 and was fitted with thirty-two seat bodywork. A second-hand Tilling-Stevens registered UP 218 was acquired in late 1928 and by February 1929 a Maudslay ML3B thirty-two seater bus joined the fleet. It is believed that UP 218 was purchased as a replacement for RP 5477 which was destroyed by fire. Clarke Brothers' final acquisitions were two more Tilling-Stevens which were registered RP 8139 in December 1929 and RP 8609 in June 1930.

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The impressive twin rear-axled Lancia RP5477 ready to depart from Daventry Market Square for Northampton. The rear of a United Counties' Leyland Lion can just be seen on the left of the photograph.



RP6142 - a Tilling Stevens B10 stands at Daventry Market Square prior to returning to Weedon and Northampton.

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RP8139 was another Tilling-Stevens motor, with Driver Joe Beckett standing alongside. This photograph was taken at Drayton near Daventry.



UP 218 was probably bought second-hand to replace the burnt out Lancia RP 5477. It was a Tilling-Stevens B10 that is seen here in the livery of General County Omnibus Co Ltd, Newcastle prior to registration.

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Clarke Brothers' Maudslay RP 6839 can be seen to the rear of this group photographed after the bus had passed to United Counties.

United Counties took over the services of the Northampton Motor Omnibus Company Limited in 1928, which put them onto the Northampton - Weedon - Daventry and Northampton - Kissingbury - Bugbrooke - Lower Heyford - Weedon routes. Thereafter the operations of Clarke Bros were of some interest to the expanding United Counties and when the Clarke Brothers approached the Company with a view to the sale of their business, negotiations were opened immediately. On 30th December 1930 an Agreement was signed to purchase the Clarke Bros. business from Harry, George Albert and Phoebe Emily Clarke for the sum of £3,500 which represented £2,500 being the value of the three Tilling-Stevens and one Maudslay buses which changed hands and £1,000 for the goodwill of the business.

The precise date of transfer of the business is somewhat confused. United Counties' records show acquisition of the four buses on Monday 29th December 1930 whereas the Agreement to purchase is dated Tuesday 30th December 1930 and the Assignment is dated Saturday 24th January 1931. United Counties inserted an advertisement in the press on Wednesday 31st December stating that having acquired from Messrs. Clarke Bros, of Weedon their Northampton and Daventry service this would continue to operate at time presently run by Messrs. Clarke Bros., but depart from Horseshoe Street Omnibus Station.



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CLARKE BROS., WEEDON

CLARKE BROS.' BUS SERVICE between Weedon, Daventry, and Northampton.

Buses start from St. Andrew's Road, Northampton. Return Tickets issued each day.

MONDAYS, TUESDAYS, THURSDAYS, AND FRIDAYS.

Table with columns for LEAVE, A.M., P.M., and destinations: Daventry, Dodford, Weedon, Flore, Heyford, Kilsingbury, N'pton ar., Northampton.

Late Bus on Thursdays only—Leave Daventry 9.50, arrive Northampton 10.35, and leave Northampton 11.0 and arrive Daventry 11.45 p.m.

SUNDAYS.

Table with columns for LEAVE, A.M., P.M., and destinations: Daventry, Dodford, Weedon, Flore, Heyford, Kilsingbury, N'pton ar., Northampton.

WEDNESDAYS.

Table with columns for LEAVE, A.M., P.M., and destinations: Daventry, Dodford, Weedon, Flore, Heyford, Kilsingbury, Northampton ar.

Table with columns for LEAVE, A.M., P.M., and destinations: Northampton, Kilsingbury, Heyford, Flore, Weedon, Lower Weedon, Upper Weedon, Daventry ar.

SATURDAYS.

Table with columns for LEAVE, A.M., P.M., and destinations: Daventry, Dodford, Weedon, Flore, Heyford, Kilsingbury, Northampton, Daventry ar.

Intermediate Buses will run from Northampton to Upper Weedon every hour from 9.45 a.m. up to 11.0 a.m. *Upper Weedon 6.45 p.m. From Weedon 6.45 p.m. Intermediate Buses from Weedon to Northampton every hour starting Weedon 8.45 a.m. An Intermediate Bus runs from Weedon to Northampton every hour interval from 8.45 a.m. and an early bus at 7.30 a.m. from Weedon.

Clarke Bros.' Northampton - Weedon - and Daventry Timetable at December 1930 immediately prior to acquisition of the route by United Counties.

United Counties had a territorial agreement with Midland Red that prevented the former Company operating into Rugby. As a result United Counties took the Northampton to Weedon and Daventry routes only and this left Clarke Bros with the Rugby service and private hire commitments. Tilling-Stevens RP 8139 was retained by Clarke Bros for these operations which were continued until 27th February 1933 when the Rugby route passed to Midland Red and private hire operation was ceased.

A former resident of Weedon recalls that every summer in the mid and late 1920s. Clarke Bros took all the village children from Weedon and Flore to Wickstead Park, Kettering

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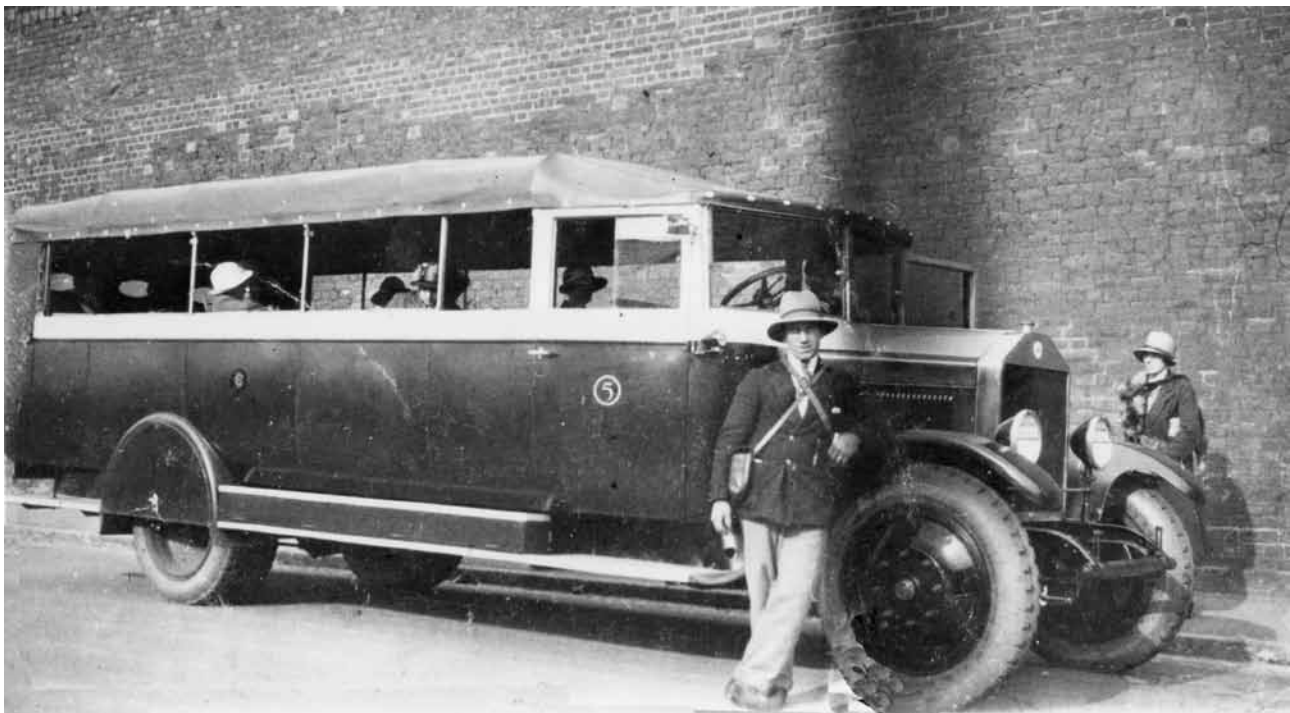
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free of charge and gave them all an apple and orange. This was an example of the kind of personal service the small firms were able to deliver that the larger companies found hard to emulate.

Returning to the Clarke family, George Henry Clarke died on 30th January 1926 aged only 49 years. His wife took over as licensee of the Wheatsheaf and remained at this public house for many years. Harry and George Albert Clarke continued to concentrate on the car repair and taxi business, operating from the Wheatsheaf after disposing of the bus side of the business. In the early days their telephone number was "11 Weedon" and their telegraphic address was "Taxie, Weedon". At the end of the second World War, premises were taken over from a cycle and motor-cycle repair business on the Watling Street, south of Weedon, and Clarke Bros transferred from the Wheatsheaf to this new site in 1944. Harry Clarke eventually died in March 1953, aged 55 years, whilst George survived until he was 64, making his exit from this world in March 1967.



The rather unusual advertising item illustrated on the left is a 2" circular mirror with a promotional message for Clarke Bros buses on the reverse. The Author has not seen a similar item produced for any other operator.



An unidentified Lancia saloon, numbered 5 in the Clarke Bros fleet, or that of its former owner and photographed at St. Andrew's Road, Northampton.

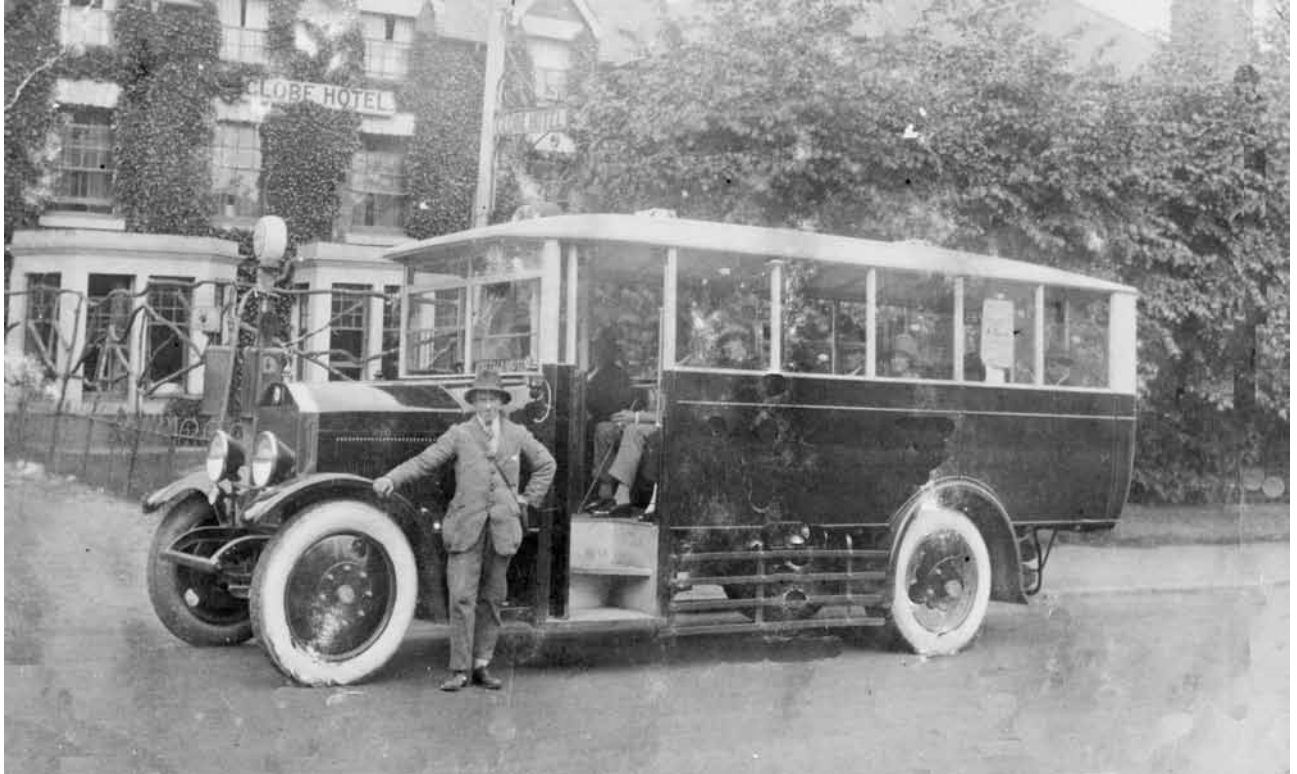
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Another unidentified Lancia saloon belonging to the Clarke's and this time photographed outside the Globe Hotel at Weedon.

Postscript - The Clarke Bros. garage was still being operated at the time of writing these notes, in 1994, by Henry Clarke who was the son of Harry Clarke. I am grateful to Henry Clarke for his assistance in expanding on some of the information I have collected over the years in relation to his family's bus operating business. Sadly, however, Henry Clarke passed away aged 68 in May 1999.

CLARKE BROS., WEEDON

Rolling Stock:

REGN. NO.	CHASSIS			BODY			DATES			PREVIOUS OWNER	INITIAL DISPOSAL	NOTES
	MAKE	TYPE	NUMBER	MAKE	TYPE/ SEATS	NO.	NEW	S/H	W/D			
BD 273	Lancia		423		Ch20		11/21	-	4/28			
BD 8689	S.P.A.		8415		B20?		1/24	-	By-/28			1
AC 8907	Sunbeam	20hp	9032		Ch14		10/20	c-/24	By-/27			2
?	Lancia				Ch18			c-/25				
RP 2067	Lancia		1045		B20?		1/26	-	?			3
RP 2785	Lancia	36hp	1211		B26		5/26	-	9/30		No further owner	
RP 3261	Lancia		1044		B26F		9/26	-	By-/30		Dukin Bros., Lichfield	
RP 4573	Lancia		2062		B26		7/27	-	12/32		No further owner	
RP 5477	Lancia		1760		B40F		3/28	-	-/28	Ward, Calverton	Destroyed by fire	
NR 5483	Lancia	Z	5018		B26		12/24	4/28	1/29		Atkinson, Biggleswade	
RP 6142	Tilling-Stevens	B10	5789		B32R		8/28	-	12/30	G Towers, Chester le Street	United Counties O&RTC	
UP 218	Tilling-Stevens	B10	5767	George & Jobling	B30R		8/27	-/28	12/30		United Counties O&RTC	4
RP 6839	Maudslay	ML3B	4454	Vickers	B32D		2/29	-	12/30		United Counties O&RTC	
RP 8139	Tilling-Stevens	B10	6592		B32F		12/29	-	c-/33		F C Gibbins, Daventry	
RP 8609	Tilling-Stevens	B10	5915		B32R		6/30	-	12/30		United Counties O&RTC	

Notes: 1 - Last owner E Marlow, Dublin. Last licensed 12/28.
 2 - New to F Ponting, Central Garage, Rugby (Dealer?). Last owner F Somerville, Wolverhampton. Last licensed 9/27.
 3 - Last owner Wallasea Bay Yacht Station Ltd., Essex. Last licensed 8/42.
 4 - Also recorded as a Tilling-Stevens B9A - chassis number 5167.