

Bygone Buses

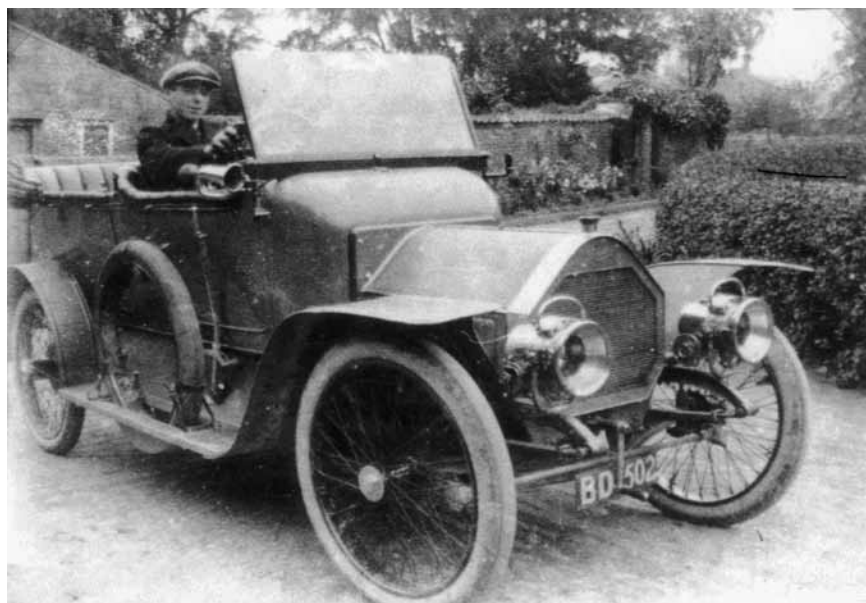
of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-GE2
Page 1

GELL. Walter 35 High Street, RAUNDS

Walter Gell was born in April 1896 being a native of Stanwick who, in the two years prior to the first World War, variously sold and repaired bicycles; worked for a local farmer named Blackwell, chauffeuring his car; and worked for Allen's of Bedford assembling aero engines. During the 1914-18 War Walter Gell served in the Royal Flying Corps during which time his brother Jim looked after the cycle repair business in Stanwick, taking it over after the War and establishing West End Garage.

On return to civilian life Walter Gell worked at Master Brothers' garage in Brook Street, Raunds where he gained experience as a motor mechanic. By 1930 he felt he was sufficiently competent to branch out into business on his own and in that year he rented premises which comprised a house with a motor garage alongside at 35 High Street, Raunds. Later in the decade he acquired the freehold of these premises and also opened a showroom at Raunds Square. This latter site was compulsorily purchased by the Town Council in the 1940s for town centre improvements. With money partly acquired from the compulsory purchase, Walter Gell bought land and buildings at Rotten Row, Raunds that had earlier been used by William Peck, a local carrier, for his horse-drawn carts. The main building was later adapted to serve as a garage for Walter's coaches. Whilst



considering property development, it can also be noted that Walter Gell bought premises which stood in front of 35 High Street and comprised the former Wheatsheaf PH and a row of cottages. All were demolished to make way for road widening and a modern petrol filling station.

Left: This illustration shows Walter Gell circa 1925 driving his Humber open tourer registered BD 1502.

Bygone Buses of Northamptonshire is compiled by R M Warwick, "Torestyn" 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.

Bygone Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-GE2

Page 2

GELL. Walter - RAUNDS



A view of the entrance to 35 High Street, Raunds showing its restricted access. The buildings to the right of the picture comprise the former Wheatsheaf PH and a number of cottages, the demolition of which both enhanced the site and provided road widening.



This photograph shows the junction of Rotten Row and High Street. The main building in the centre of the picture provided Walter Gell with garage accommodation for his three coaches.

GELL. Walter - RAUNDS

Returning to Walter Gell's business activities, initially in the 1930s he concentrated on repairing motor cars and cycles but he later branched out into the hiring of cars for rental, weddings and private hires. After the Second World War, Walter Gell's hire facilities were used for the conveyance of Raunds Town football team to away fixtures, for which purpose two or three eight-seater cars were used. This activity led to Walter buying a second-hand twenty-seat Dodge in circa 1947/8, registered CVP 690. This vehicle was painted dark and light blue and was purchased from the Horton Motor Works near Northampton, although having earlier been once owned by the North Western Road Car Co Ltd of Stockport.



Walter Gell's first bus was this twenty-seater Dodge CVP 690 photographed undergoing maintenance at his premises at 35 High Street, Raunds.

Shortly after acquiring the Dodge CVP 690, Walter Gell was awarded Huntingdonshire County Council school contracts to convey pupils from Keyston to Bythorn school and from Bythorn and Old Weston to Leighton Bromswold school. These contracts were operated for many years and were, in fact, the only school transport contracts Walter Gell ever ran. By 1950 the school runs demanded a larger vehicle and for this purpose Walter again turned to the Horton Motor Works for the supply of a half-cab Albion Victor coach registered ADF 149, fitted with a Bedford petrol engine and painted silver and blue.

GELL. Walter - RAUNDS



Not a particularly good photograph but it serves to show a little more of the nearside of Dodge CVP 690 prior to the departure of its first private hire. The gentleman on the extreme left was Ralph Farr, the driver, whilst fourth and fifth from the left (ignoring the man standing in the doorway) are Mena and Walter Gell.

In April 1953 Walter Gell expanded his fleet to three vehicles by the acquisition of a Bedford OB with Duple V twenty-nine seat coachwork and registered HDG 798. At the end of 1953 the Albion ADF 149 was sold and replaced by an unidentified Bedford WTL carrying a twenty-seven seat Duple body. It was bought from Murkett's Huntingdon garage and had previously been used by an operator trading as "Blue Belle" Coaches. This Bedford WTL was itself replaced in about 1955 by another unidentified Bedford, this time an OB with standard Duple Vista twenty-nine seat coachwork. Walter Gell adopted cream and blue as his livery but the 1955 acquired Bedford OB came in maroon and red colours. It was obtained from Coaches & Components Ltd of Holloway Road, London N7 and carried the "Shadow Coaches" name on its sides.



Left: Walter Gell's Duple V bodied Bedford OB registered HDG 798, photographed near to 35 High Street, Raunds.

GELL. Walter - RAUNDS



A nearside view of Bedford OB - HDG 798 parked in High Street, Raunds.

By late 1957 or early 1958 Walter Gell's original twenty-seater Dodge required replacing and an Austin CVC with Kenex fourteen-seat body was chosen as a replacement whilst the Dodge ended up as a mobile shop.

For most of the time Gell's fleet comprised one small and two medium sized coaches. The two Bedford OBs were in turn replaced by two similarly sized vehicles in 1957 and 1961 respectively. A further example of the Bedford OB/Duple Vista combination, registered MTC 756 replaced the unidentified Bedford OB in June 1957 whilst in May 1961 a twenty-nine seat Bedford C4 model registered 943 CAL was acquired from Yeates of Loughborough to replace HDG 798. At the close of 1961 the Austin minibus MKR 40 was superseded by a Trojan thirteen - seater minibus registered 5261 WW.

Bygone Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-GE2

Page 6

GELL. Walter - RAUNDS



Walter Gell's replacement Bedford OB with Duple Vista bodywork came in 1957 when MTC 756 joined the fleet. (Photo courtesy D Bailey).



The small Bedford C4 chassis looked elegant when fitted with Duple Vista bodywork and Walter Gell's cream and dark blue example registered 943 CAL was no exception. It was photographed at Raunds Square in readiness for a trip to Northampton Football Ground.

GELL. Walter - RAUNDS

During the first half of the 1960s Walter Gell's fleet of three coaches was replaced by two Bedford SB5 machines and a small Bedford J2 minibus. One of the Bedford SB5 coaches was acquired when Walter made a trip with Alec Head of Reliance Coaches, Lutton to Brown's Blue Coaches of Markfield, as a result of which both Walter Gell and Alec Head purchased consecutively registered Bedford SB5 coaches 726/7 AUT. Walter Gell took 727 AUT with its Harrington Crusader II forty-one seat body whilst Alec Head bought 726 AUT. The Bedford J2 registered 18 DHO and equipped with attractive Plaxton Consort bodywork saw the demise of the Trojan minibus which passed to Herbert's of Shefford who required it for contract work for H.M. Prison, Bedford. In October 1965 Walter Gell traded in his small Bedford 943 CAL for his one and only new coach. This order materialised as a Duple Bella Vega bodied Bedford SB5, seating forty-one passengers and registered CVV 103C in October 1965.



This photograph shows Walter Gell's Harrington Crusader II bodied Bedford SB5 registered 727 AUT.

Bygone Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-GE2

Page 8

GELL. Walter - RAUNDS



Pete Skinner stands alongside 18 DHO which comprised a Bedford J2 chassis mounted with a Plaxton Consort III eighteen-seat body, about to leave for a private hire trip to London.



Walter Gell's one and only new coach was CVV 103C, a handsome Duple Bella Vega bodied Bedford SB5 with 727 AUT alongside at Rotten Row, Raunds.

GELL. Walter - RAUNDS

Apart from his school contracts, Walter Gell's income from his coaches came entirely from private hire work, most of it from the Raunds area. Many Northampton Town Football Club home matches seemed to have attracted hires from Raunds using Gell's vehicles. In fact coach operation was merely an aside to Walter Gell's main garage and car sales business and the passenger rolling stock enjoyed a very leisurely existence.

Walter Gell and his wife, Mena, had two children - a son Kenneth and a daughter Elsie. Kenneth, amongst other things, drove the coaches for his father whilst Elsie looked after the clerical side of the business. At the end of December 1969 Walter Gell decided to retire and the garage and car sales part of the business was continued by his son and daughter. As far as coaching was concerned, however, this aspect of the firm was sold to Alec Head's Reliance Coaches of Luton from 1st January 1970, together with two of Gell's three Bedford coaches - 727 AUT and CVV 103C. The third Bedford -18 DHO - was sold privately to Wiffen's of Finchingfield, Essex. Sadly Walter Gell enjoyed only a relatively short retirement of five years before he died at the age of seventy-nine in February 1975.

Finally, the two illustrations on the following page depict a Duple Vista bodied Bedford OB registered LNA 367 restored under the auspices of Pete Skinner, painted in Walter Gell's cream/blue livery and keeping the memory of Gell's Coaches alive.

I am grateful to both Ken Gell and Peter Skinner, a former part-time employee of Walter Gell, for information and photographs relevant to Walter Gell's operations. In January 1977 Peter Skinner, jointly with Robin Pentelow, purchased the garage and car sales business from Kenneth and Elsie Gell, continuing to trade as "Gell's of Raunds".

Bygone Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-GE2

Page 10

GELL. Walter - RAUNDS



GELL. Walter - RAUNDS

Rolling Stock:

Regn. No.	Chassis	Type	Chassis No.	Body	Seats	Body No.	Dates			Former Owner	Disposal	Nts
							New	S/H	W/D			
CVP 690	Dodge	PLB		Daggart	B20F		3/37	c-/47	by2/58	Horton Mtr Wks/ N.W.R.C.C.S'port	V Woolley, Mobile Shop	
ADF 149	Albion	Victor PK115	250041	Duple	C27F	5376	5/35	10/50	12/53	Horton Mtr Wks/Burchill, Staple Hill	Rushden Operatic Soc & scrapped	1
HDG 798	Bedford	OB	91202	Duple V	C29F	43888	10/48	4/53	5/61	Bowles, Ford	Yeates, Loughboro/ Gray, Stamford Br	
?	Bedford	WTL		Duple	C27F		?	12/53	c-/55	Murkett, Huntingdon/ Blue Belle Coaches	Chs & Components Ltd, London N7	
?	Bedford	OB		Duple Vista	C29F		?	c-/55	6/57	Chs & Components Ltd, London N7	Kirkby, Anston	2
MKR 40	Austin	CVC	13611	Kenex	C14F	—	c6/50	by2/58	12/61	Smith, U Heyford	Cresswell, Spoor & Wills, Leicester	
MTC 756	Bedford	OB	146061	Duple Vista	C29F	56559	-/50	6/57	c4/63	Kirkby, Anston/ Brockbank, Brimingt'n	Johnson, Rushden	
943 CAL	Bedford	C4Z2	3867	Duple Vista	C29F	1111/16	4/59	5/61	10/65	Yeates, Loughboro/ Smith, Beeston	Yeates, Loughboro/ Ballard, Welshpool	
5261 WW	Trojan	19	1509620	Trojan	B13F	—	5/60	12/61	9/65	Wilson, Stainforth	Herbert, Shefford	
727 AUT	Bedford	SB5	90368	Harrington Crusader II	C41F	2674	6/62	3/63	12/69	Brown, Markfield	Head, Lutton	
18 DHO	Bedford	J2SZ2	120963	Plaxton Consort III	C18F	612803	11/61	1/65	12/69	E J Baker (Dorking) Ltd, Farnham	Wiffen, Finchingfield	
CVV 103C	Bedford	SB5	97346	Duple Bella Vega	C41F	183/446	10/65	—	12/69	Supplied by Yeates, Loughborough	Head, Lutton	

Notes: 1 - Fitted with a Bedford petrol engine.
2 - Formerly owned by Shadow Coaches.