

CHARLES. Caleb Ernest t/a Yellow Bus Service Main Road MIDDLETON CHENEY

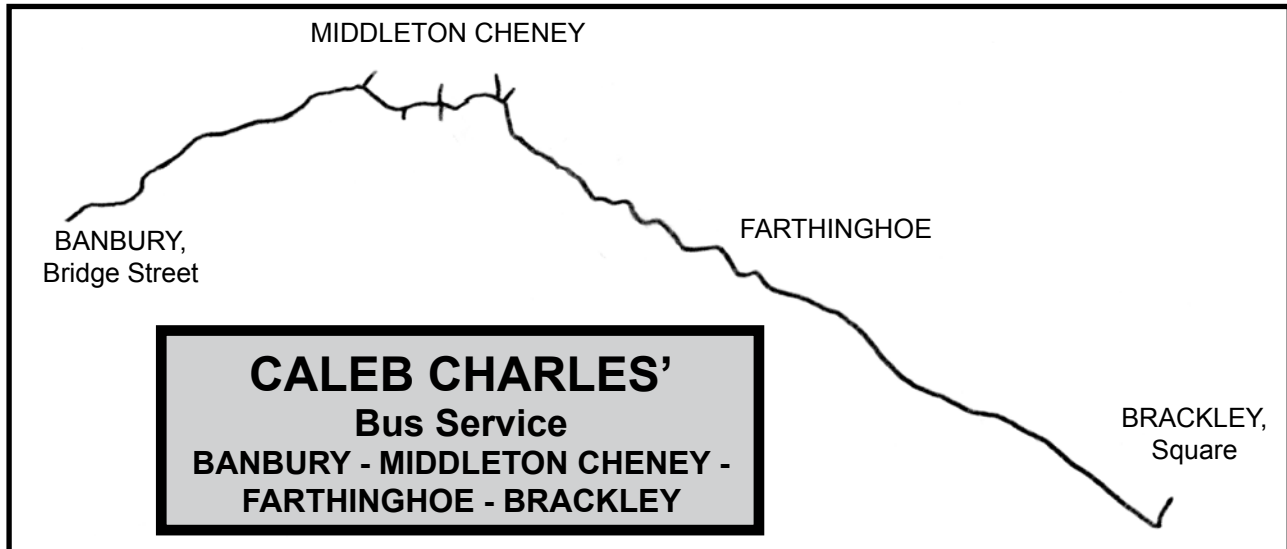
Caleb Charles was a native of Middleton Cheney who was born in 1884, one of seven children of Samuel and Fanny Charles, the family then living in Queen Street. Fast forward some twenty-two years and Caleb marries Maggie Vera Oldham in November 1906 and the couple in due course welcomed three daughters and a son into this world. At some stage after his marriage Caleb set up home in Main Street, Middleton Cheney from which he operated his carrier service and eventually established a repair garage and petrol retail facility.

It was probably in the early 1900s that Caleb Charles became one of Middleton Cheney's village carriers, operating to and from Banbury on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. He was certainly listed as such in Kelly's Directories for Northamptonshire in 1910 and Oxfordshire in 1911. The 1914 Northants Directory repeats the information regarding Caleb Charles' carrier's service operating on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays and also indicates that a motor bus left the Dolphin Inn at 1.30pm on the same three days. It is not clear whether this operation was undertaken by Caleb Charles or not.

It is known that Caleb Charles purchased a Ford T van on 31st December 1915 which he used as a public conveyance. Apparently the chassis of this vehicle registered BD 3227 was equipped with a Dixie Patent Convertible Body which allowed it to be used as a van or as a passenger vehicle. Charles retained this Ford in his fleet for over ten years and so obtained good use from it. The Ford was acquired at least a year after the 1914 Directory was published and so it does not confirm whether Caleb Charles was either the provider of the 1914 motor bus service to Banbury or whether he used BD 3227 as a bus or taxi vehicle. At some stage during the First World War Caleb Charles served in the Army Service Corps. It was probably on his return from War service that Caleb Charles began to operate a bus service from Middleton Cheney to Banbury.

In March 1921 Caleb Charles took delivery of a former War Department Locomobile van which was adapted to seat thirty-two passengers. This machine was registered

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BD 5813 and remained with Charles for only a year or possibly two. Throughout the 1920s Caleb Charles developed his Banbury service and at some stage extended his service eastwards to Farthinghoe and Brackley. In the absence of a timetable it is difficult to say what level of service was provided although between Middleton Cheney and Banbury it is reported to have been hourly. Charles' next two vehicle acquisitions were fourteen-seater buses with an Austro-Fiat model being registered BD 7184 in January 1923 and a Ford T as BD 9949 in August 1924. Thereafter buses of REO manufacture caught the eye of Caleb Charles and between 1925 and 1931 he bought eight new machines of this make. Whilst information is available that confirms the buses bought new, there is hardly any surviving data that confirms when they were taken out of the fleet and probably traded in part-exchange for the newer ones bought. The sole exception to this relates to REO Speedwagon RP 1777 which was destroyed by fire in late 1927. It is however believed that Caleb Charles generally ran three vehicles in his fleet at any one time.



RP 1204 was Caleb Charles' first REO Speedwagon which he bought new in May 1925.

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At this point it is worth quoting from a book published by the late John Wheeler "Grist for the Mill - Memories of a Village in the 1920s". John writes:-

The next cottage was the home of Caleb Charles and his family. Caleb ran the first bus in Middleton Cheney. Just after the first war Mr. Charles bought a Peerless Army Lorry which he covered at the back and installed seats along each side. The entrance to the bus was at the rear. The bus service to Banbury proved very popular with the villagers so Caleb was able to invest in more buses. This time they were called Rios, the vehicles were painted yellow. The drivers were Cyril Aris, William Franklin, Mr. Fonge and later on, Jim Charles. The buses ran every hour and provided a comfortable and reliable service. Caleb Charles then went into partnership with Sid Chown (?) however the partnership was later dissolved and the two gentlemen went into competition with each other. For a while the village benefitted greatly as we had a half hourly bus service for 3d single fare, 5d return from 7.30 in the morning until 10.30 at night, 11 on Saturdays.

About ten years later the Midland Red bus company started up and although the local firm was able to continue for some time they eventually went out of business".

Presumably the Peerless Army Lorry referred to was in fact the Locomobile BD 5813, The reference to the partnership with Sid Chown is unknown to the Author of this paper, who admittedly has not been able to undertake nearly enough research within the villages located at the southern extremity of Northamptonshire.



This illustration shows Caleb Charles' garage on the left, his cottage on the right, the rear of REO Sprinter RP 6297, petrol pumps and Caleb's Austin car. The gentlemen standing by the REO are Drivers William Franklin and Cyril Aris, Caleb Charles and a Mr Smith from Brackley. The photograph was taken in the early to mid 1930s.

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To regulate bus services, the Government of the day passed legislation in the form of the Road Traffic Act, 1930 which for many purposes became effective from 1st April 1931. After that date bus operators wishing to continue their services were required to apply to the Traffic Commissioners for Road Service Licences. Caleb Charles duly applied for two stage-carriage licences in August 1931, the first being from Middleton Cheney to Banbury and the second from Banbury to Brackley via Middleton Cheney and Farthinghoe. Both were duly granted in October 1931 under references E 6206/7 which in the following June became TER 82/1 and TER 81/2.

Midland Red was the dominant bus operator in the Banbury area, its routes 500/1 running from Banbury via Middleton Cheney to Brackley, and consequently that company wished to consolidate operations on those routes. Accordingly agreement was reached between Midland Red and Caleb Charles in April 1933 for the Company to purchase the Goodwill of the Yellow Bus Service routes for the sum of £1,975. Midland Red duly took over Charles' operations from 13th April 1933, consolidating their timetable and reducing mileage between Banbury and Middleton Cheney from 25th September 1933.

As part of the Agreement, Caleb Charles covenanted that he would not operate any motor omnibus service within a radius of twenty-five miles of Middleton Cheney for a period of ten years but he was allowed to use his present vehicle as a Contract Carriage. This implies that in 1933 Charles had two vehicles engaged on the Middleton Cheney/Banbury/Brackley services and one on a contract operation, which may well have been to the Northern Aluminium Company in Southam Road, Banbury. Midland Red did not take over any of Caleb Charles' buses. As far as it is known Charles did not hold a Road Service Licence for Excursions & Tours.

After the sale of the Goodwill of the stage-carriage services to Midland Red the subsequent history and operation of Caleb Charles become very difficult to determine. An examination of the vehicle tables on pages 6 and 7 clearly show a steady influx of coaches into the fleet right up until the early 1950s. However, the absence of reliable exit dates from the fleet very much clouds the issue of what comprised the rolling-stock at any given date. Presumably private hires must have been high up on Caleb Charles agenda and contract and school services must also have played their part.

During the War there were many opportunities for bus operators to acquire contracts for works services and for the movement of labour for the construction of airfield sites but what involvement Caleb Charles had in such activities is unknown. In the post-War period when the opportunities for private hires to the seaside and other leisure venues increased rapidly, Caleb Charles bought one new Commer coach registered FRY 81 in April 1949 and several used Bedford coaches and, indeed, one Thornycroft.

Right up until the end, mystery surrounds Caleb Charles' operations and more research is required to expand this account. It is thought that Caleb ceased trading in either 1954 or 1955 by which time he would have been seventy years of age and it is known that he died in 1956.

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This elegant Thornycroft Cygnet coach registered VG 5466 was acquired secondhand around 1948 from Wesley's Coach Services of Stoke Goldington. It was however photographed when new to a Norwich operator and almost certainly carries Eaton coachwork.



The last coach bought new by Caleb Charles was this Commer Q4 registered FRY 81 and sporting a Yeates thirty-seat body. It looks immaculate at Gloucester Green, Oxford.

(Photo courtesy R H G Simpson).

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REGN. NO.	CHASSIS			BODY			DATES			PREVIOUS OWNER	INITIAL DISPOSAL	NOTES
	MAKE	TYPE	NUMBER	MAKE	TYPE & SEATS	NUMBER	NEW	S/H	W/D			
BD 3227	Ford	T	911911	?	Van/Bus	?	12/15	—	by 6/28	—	?	1
BD 5813	Locomobile	BB	1329	?	Van/ B32	?	3/21	—	by 7/23	—	?	2
BD 7184	Austro-Fiat	?	ITC2826	?	B14	?	1/23	—	by -/29	—	?	3
BD 9949	Ford	T	9138251	Eaton?	B14	?	8/24	—	by 6/31	Supp H E Taylor, Cringelford	?	4
RP 1204	REO	Speedwagon F	113358	?	B14F	?	5/25	—	by 6/31	Supp W & G Lambert	?	5
RP 1777	REO	Speedwagon F	122561	Eaton?	B14	?	10/25	—	12/27	Supp H E Taylor, Cringelford	Destroyed by Fire	
RP 3291	REO	Major	G5010	?	Van	?	9/26	—	by 3/45	Supp Worthmore Motor Co., London	?	6
RP 3830	REO	Speedwagon F	143623	?	B	?	3/27	—	by 12/30	Supp Allchin & Son, Northampton	?	7
RP 4141	REO	Speedwagon F	145275	?	B14	?	4/27	—	by 12/36	Supp Allchin & Son, Northampton	?	8
RP 5429	REO	Pullman	GB159	?	B	?	2/28	—	by 9/34	Supp Allchin & Son, Northampton	?	9
RP 6297	REO	Sprinter FAX	6397	?	B20F	?	1/29	—	by 12/43	—	?	10
VC8106	REO	Pullman	GE207	Cross & Ellis	C26	?	4/31	—	12/47	—	No further owner	
NV 416	A.J.S.	Pilot	222	?	B24	?	7/31	—	by 9/39	—	?	11
NV 598	A.J.S.	Commodore	5064	?	32	?	9/31	—	by 12/44	—	?	12
MV 9438	Ford	AA	4480063	?	B14	?	8/31	?	by 12/38	Jones, London N9	?	
RP 4046	REO	Speedwagon F	145271	?	B18	?	3/27	c2/33	9/35	W A R Gibson, Walgrave	No further owner	
EH 7977	Gilford	?	?	Buckingham	B26D	?	4/26	?	6/33	Cooke, Stoke-on-Trent	?	

Notes: 1 - BD 3227 last owned by Rubber, Metal & Scrap Ltd, London EC4 and last licensed 6/28. 2 - BD 5813 last owned by H Pointer, Norwich and last licensed 7/23.
3 - BD 7184 last owned by E Hales, Bournemouth and last licensed -/29. 4 - BD 9949 last owned by C Briggs, Old Buckenham and last licensed 6/31.
5 - RP 1204 last owned by F Spratley, Mortimer and last licensed 6/31. 6 - RP 3291 last owned by W McKinnon, Twickenham and last licensed 3/45.
7 - RP 3830 last owned by C W Shelton, Daybrook and last licensed 12/30. 8 - RP4141 last owned by O Back, Witney and last licensed 12/36
9 - RP 5429 last owned by E W Tarry, Fawsley as a goods vehicle and last licensed 9/34. 10 - RP 6297 last owned by Eastern Roadways Ltd, Norwich and last licensed 12/43
11 - NV 416 last owned by C Taylor, Belsize Park, London NW3 and last licensed 9/39. 12 - NV 598 last owned by Edwards Bros, Beddan, Pontypridd and last licensed 12/44.

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REGN. NO.	CHASSIS			BODY			DATES			PREVIOUS OWNER	INITIAL DISPOSAL	NOTES
	MAKE	TYPE	NUMBER	MAKE	TYPE & SEATS	NUMBER	NEW	S/H	W/D			
UE 9069	REO	Pullman Jnr-FB	1095	?	B20F	?	7/29	?	3/46	Gaddes, Hook Norton	?	
JC 232	Bedford	WLG	113900	?	20F	?	7/31	9/39	4/41	Jones, U Llandwrog	Taylor, Bicester	
VH 6346	Bedford	WLB	109532	Duple	C20F	4266	-/34	7/47	12/52	Grainge, Westbury	No further owner	
VG 5466	Thornycroft	Cygnets CD/F	22955	Eaton?	C32R	?	3/33	c-/48	-/55?	Wesley, S Goldington	?	
CEL 216	Bedford	WTB	110548	Duple	C26	6899	-/36	by 3/49	-/55?	Fear, Wimbourne	Contractor	
FRY 81	Commer	Q4	15B9070S	Yeates	C30F	?	4/49	—	by-/55	—	Aston, Marton	
BNX 103	Bedford	WTB	111127	Duple	C25F	8628	3/37	-/53?	-/55?	Fletcher, Rugby	Dare, Birmingham (Contractor)	
EKV 740	Bedford	OWB	11335	Mulliner	UB28F	?	5/43	by 5/54	-/55?	Barker, Hitchin	?	
UD 9455	Bedford	WTB	111899	Duple	C26F	3773/2	3/38	-/54	10/54	Taylor, Bicester	Bolding, Rochester (as a lorry)	

Notes: