

Bygone Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

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KEACH. Walter George

14 Crown Street

KETTERING

The name 'KEACH' has been synonymous with transport in Northamptonshire for over one hundred years, especially in the Kettering area. George Keach commenced business at Kettering in 1890, delivering coal from horse-drawn carts before progressing to general haulage and furniture removing. In 1912 he advanced to mechanical traction by purchasing a secondhand Foden steam lorry. George Keach and his first wife, Sarah, had two sons, the eldest being Charles who was born circa 1887 and the youngest being Walter George, born around 1889 and with whom this story is principally concerned. Both sons joined their father in the family business which was run from their home at 26 Crown Street, Kettering. In due time the business passed to the eldest son Charles Keach.

An advertisement for George Keach & Sons' business that was included in a 1922 Kettering & District Calendar and Guide.

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.

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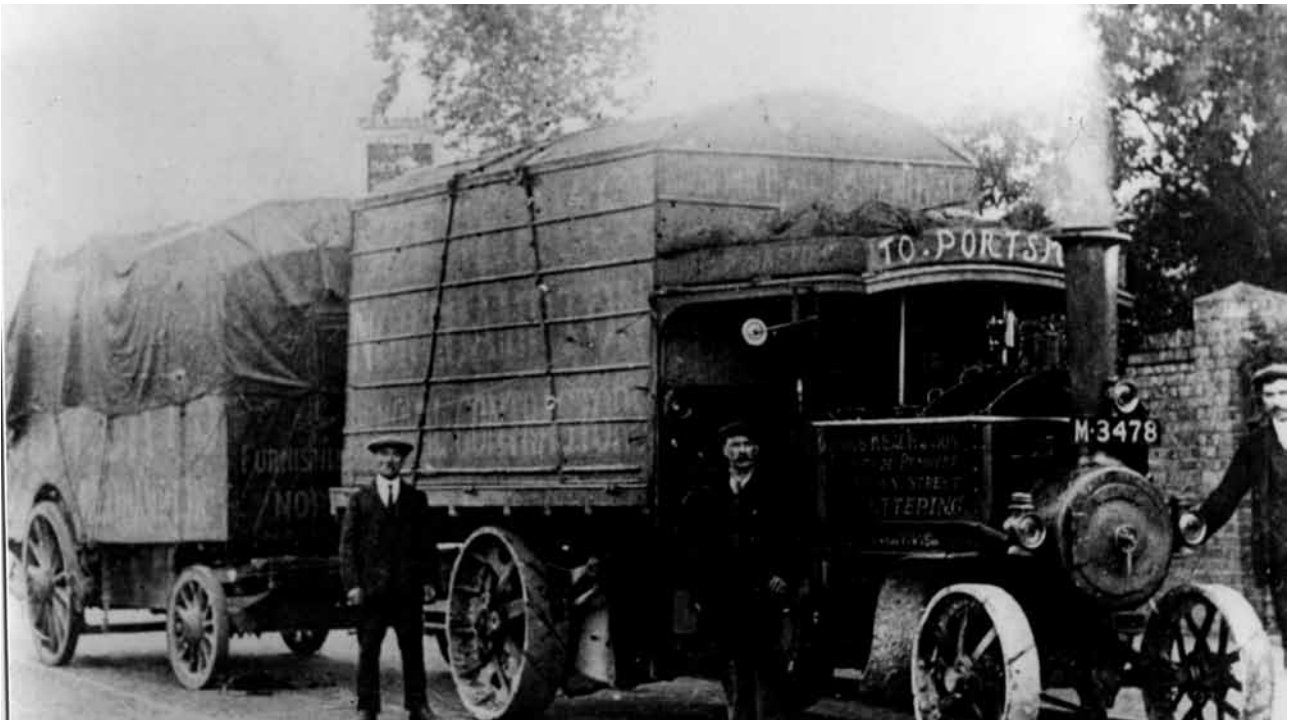
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An illustration of one of George Keach's beautifully sign-written removal vans dating from the horse-drawn days before his two sons had joined the business. Probably the lad on the left is Charles Keach and the one on the driving seat is Walter Keach.



In this view George Keach & Sons' Foden steam lorry M 3478 appears to be ready for departure with a bulky load for Portsmouth. It seems likely that George Keach stands by the rear wheel with his two sons to the right of the picture.

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It is now necessary to consider another Kettering coal merchant, by the name of Albert Wardle who, apparently at the age of forty in 1900, went into partnership with a gentleman named Jacques and was contracted to transport considerable quantities of coal from Kettering Railway Station to the gas works. Mr Jacques thereafter soon died and was replaced by Albert Wardle's son Harold and the business developed similarly to that of George Keach & Sons. The two firms are said to have worked together harmoniously and by 1926 the respective owners of the two firms - Harold Wardle and Charles Keach - formed a partnership generally known as Wardle & Keach. In fact the business is still ongoing today, albeit not owned by members of either the Wardle or Keach families and now based at Little Houghton rather than Kettering.

So far little has been said about Walter Keach who was to set up his own coach operating business. The earliest reference to this that has so far been found, is the advertisement shown below.

KEACH & SONS' MOTOR
WILL RUN TO
TOWCESTER RACES,
On EASTER MONDAY, MARCH 28th.
Single Seats, or Special Terms for Parties of 26.
Book at 26, CROWN STREET, KETTERING.
"Phone 129.

This advertisement appeared in the Kettering Evening Telegraph in March 1921 in the name of Keach & Sons operating from 26 Crown Street.

The only known motor vehicle that George Keach & Sons had in March 1921 was BD 4696, a Daimler CJ which had a truck body and is recorded as having a removable van body. It could equally as well have been fitted with wooden seats to convey passengers to Towcester Races.

All the evidence suggests that operating to Towcester Races was Walter Keach's initiative and by April of the following year - 1922 - he had removed himself to nearby 14 Crown Street to establish his own business. The exact details of the above event are unclear but it is known that George Keach retired from the business around about this time and the operation passed to the eldest son, Charles. It could be that George Keach also wished to see his youngest son succeed with his own business and so financed the

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Fortunately a photograph of Keach's Daimler lorry registered BD 4696 has survived. This machine was painted crimson.

setting-up of Walter's coach business at 14 Crown Street. The charabanc Walter Keach started with, a twenty-seater Daimler CB purchased from and bodied by Messrs York, Ward & Rowlatt of Wellingborough in April 1922 was registered as BD 6471 in the name of George Keach at 26 Crown Street and not in Walter's name.

Right:- Walter Keach's announcement in the Evening Telegraph in April 1922 that he was expecting delivery of his 20-seat charabanc which, incidentally, was painted bright yellow.

W. KEACH, Junr.,

Begs to announce that he is shortly expecting delivery of an UP-TO-DATE

20-Seater Char-a-banc.

Open to Cater for the Public, any time, any-where.

Private Parties at Reasonable Terms.

NOTE ADDRESS—

14, Crown St., Kettering.

LOOK OUT FOR FUTURE TRIPS.

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The next passenger vehicle, which was new in December 1923, was also registered in George Keach's name but thereafter new rolling stock was documented with Walter Keach being the owner. The December 1923 delivery was a Thornycroft J charabanc seating twenty-eight people and carrying the registration number BD 8554. Another similar twenty-eight seat Thornycroft J was obtained but its registration is unknown. However, a photograph of it exists, from which only the final digit of its number is partially visible and it certainly is not the number '4'.



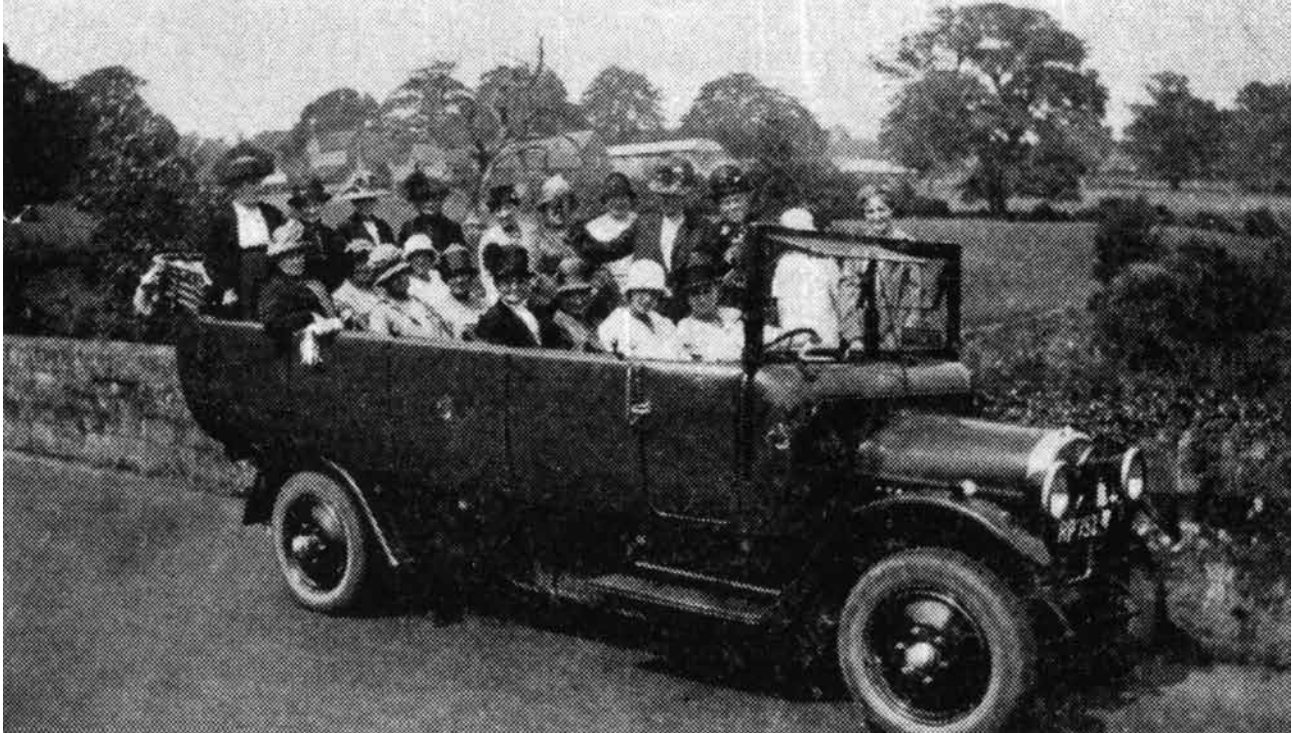
One of Walter Keach's yellow Thornycroft charabancs taking a party from Broughton & Cransley Working Men's Club for an airing in the 1920s.

Another mystery vehicle that was either purchased new or secondhand by Walter Keach was NH 3037 which was a 30cwt Wolseley. Nothing more is known of this machine so it may have been a car or a charabanc.

For the rest of the 1920s Walter Keach purchased only REO chassis, four of them in fact, and it seems the livery of his vehicles may have changed from bright yellow to blue and cream. The first of the four REOs was new in April 1924 as BD 9261 and it was probably a charabanc although this is not certain. Then in April 1925 RP 752 put in an appearance and this was definitely a charabanc which seated twenty passengers.

The next two REOs were delivered in March 1927 and May 1928 respectively, the first with an all-weather body and the second with enclosed saloon coachwork. The 1927 model collected the registration RP 3829 and the 1928 Sprinter became RP 5882. This latter

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A fine body of women are on board RP 752 in this photograph of Walter Keach's REO charabanc of 1925 vintage.

vehicle is somewhat of a mystery as although bought by Walter Keach it was immediately either re-sold or leased to A H Shaw of Lower Harlestone (NN-SH3). Shaw retained it for only a matter of months before it passed to A Roberts of Gayton (NN-RO1) who is believed to have retained it until about February 1934 when it returned to Walter Keach and was licensed by him until the end of 1936.

W. G. KEACH'S NEW LUXURY COACH

WILL RUN TO
LEICESTER

TO-MORROW (SATURDAY).

Start Rockingham-road 1.0 p.m. Return 10.30.
Fare 4/-.

WEDNESDAY NEXT,

THE LINCOLN RACES.

Start "Woolpack," Horsemarket, 8.30 a.m.
Fare 8/6.

Book at "Woolpack" and 14, Crown-street.

Walter Keach once again did not miss the opportunity to promote his NEW LUXURY COACH when this advertisement was placed in the Kettering Evening Telegraph in March 1927.

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A great view of Walter Keach's REO registered RP 3829 fitted with a twenty-seat all-weather body.



A nearside view of REO - RP 3829. It is said the ladies depicted in the photograph used to hire Keach's coach each year to take them blackberrying near Grafton Underwood. Clearly they have taken their own picnic but there's no sign of any blackberries! The frame work for the canvas roofing can clearly be seen.

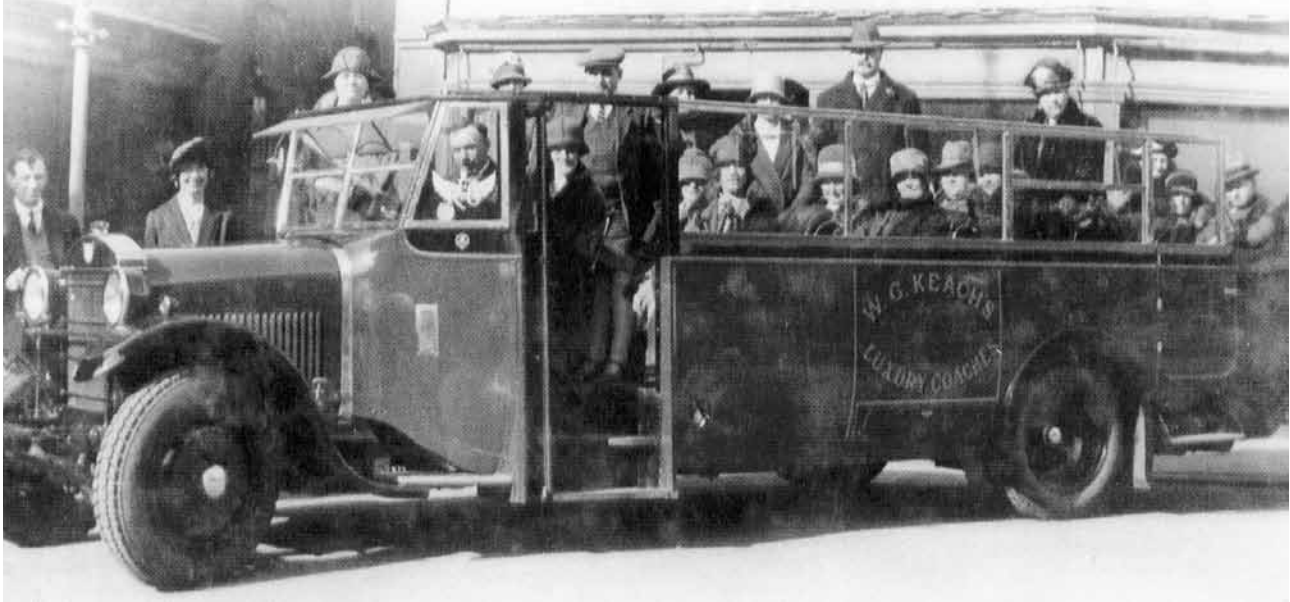
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Another nearside view of RP 3829 showing a little more of the coachwork but with the canvas roof stowed at the rear.



REO Sprinter RP 5882 is depicted in this photograph taken when it was in service with Arthur Roberts of Gayton.

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At some stage during the 1920s Walter Keach probably had the use of a Ford T that could be equipped with either a lorry or a charabanc body. The vehicle in question - BD 7500 - was acquired by George Keach from H J Phillips of Kettering, a carrier who's business was taken over by George Keach & Sons. Although owned by Walter's father and brother, it is likely that Walter made use of the Ford whenever the need arose. Incidentally, Walter Keach garaged his buses in Havelock Street, Kettering.

Walter Keach specialised in private hires and excursions, the latter particularly to the East Coast and to Race Meetings. He also operated trips to follow the local hunt meetings. Naturally, when the 1930 Road Traffic Act became law, Keach applied to the Traffic Commissioners for a Road Service Licence to operate Excursions & Tours starting from Kettering, Rockingham Road. As he was an established operator the required licence was duly granted (TER 440/1) specifying fifty-three tours with a vehicle allowance of two coaches. Only minor alterations were made to this licence during the 1930s but in 1936, when Keach wished to increase the number of vehicle permitted from two to three, this move drew objections from United Counties and the L.M.S. Railway.

Interestingly the Thompson's Kettering Rail and Bus Guide for March 1932 shows a local bus service timetable being operated by Keach between Kettering and Rothwell on a daily basis in the evenings. Whether or not Walter Keach ever ran these journeys is questionable. Certainly he did not apply for a licence to do so. However, for Christmas Day only in 1931 Keach applied for a short-period licence to run between Kettering and Desborough, this being granted. He repeated the exercise on Christmas Day 1932 and 1933. The only other occasions on which Keach provided stage-carriage services were for brief periods in 1936/7 when United Counties' drivers and conductors were on strike, when he ran between Kettering and Broughton.

W. G. Keach.

KETTERING & ROTHWELL.

Mons to Thurs. Leave Kettering, 7 5 pm. Leave Rothwell 1030 pm,

Fridays. Leave Kettering, 525, 615, 7 5. & 810 pm. Leave Rothwell 545, 635, 725 & 830 pm.

Saturdays. Leave Kettering, 510, 615, 7 0, 750, 910, 950, 1020 & 1110 pm.
Leave Rothwell 530, 635, 720, 810, 930, 1010, 1040 & 1130 pm.

Sundays Leave Kettering, 630, 710, 810, 920 & 1010, pm.
Leave Rothwell, 650, 730, 830, 940 & 1030 pm.

The Kettering to Rothwell timetable that was included in Thompson's Kettering Rail & Bus Guide for March 1932.

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Otherwise in the 1930s Walter Keach continued much as before, running his excursions and operating his private hires. At an unknown date he took into stock a used Gilford 168SD coach registered GC 8527 which started life in 1930 with Messrs Plotts & Goldman's Central London Coaches. Also unrecorded is the length of time Keach retained this Gilford. It is likely that he bought other secondhand stock in the 1930s to keep his fleet up to date.

It was not until July 1938 that another new coach was purchased and at this time ANV 360 appeared on the scene. This was a fine Duple Hendonian bodied Bedford WTB supplied by the Central Motor Co Ltd of Kettering. Suitably impressed by it, Walter Keach ordered another virtually identical coach for delivery in April 1939 and this took the registration ARP 546.



The Author has no photographs of either of the above mentioned Bedfords taken whilst owned by Walter Keach, but ANV 360 subsequently saw service with several Northamptonshire operators and it is seen in this illustration in the post-War years whilst with Johnson's Motors of Rushden. The Bedford WTB chassis with Duple Hendonian bodywork resulted in a most attractive coach. (Photo courtesy A J George).

With the onset of the Second World War in September 1939, there was little further opportunity for Walter Keach to continue his private hire and excursion operations after 1940. His coaches were laid up for a period and the two Bedfords were sold to York Bros. of Northampton in 1942. Walter Keach did not resume operations after the War and instead sold the goodwill of his licence to Royal Blue Coach & Transport Co Ltd of Pytchley which already held a tours licence from Kettering. The Author had no information regarding any occupation which may have been followed by Walter Keach either during or after the War.

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Since the publication of this paper in 2013 this wonderful photograph of four charabancs taken at Oundle Market Place has come to light. It is thought to depict an outing arranged by Walter Keach circa 1924 using his own REO Speed Wagon BD 9261 and Daimler BD 6471. No doubt it was a busy time for Keach and he needed to hire in two extra vehicles to run the trip. The Vulcan BD 7560 is believed to have belonged to the Hayes Car Company of Kettering and the Ford T BD 6714 was owned by Edward Simms of Kettering.



An Enlargement of Walter Keach's REO Speed Wagon registered BD 9261 which was new in April 1924 shortly before the trip to Oundle was undertaken.



BD 6471 was Keach's Daimler, probably a CB model, and a couple of years old by the time this photograph was taken. It would accommodate 22 passengers.

STOCK NO.	REGN. NO.	CHASSIS			BODY			DATES			PREVIOUS OWNER	INITIAL DISPOSAL	NOTES
		MAKE	TYPE	NUMBER	MAKE	TYPE & SEATS	NUMBER	NEW	S/H	W/D			
	BD 4696	Daimler	CJ	3738	?	Van	—	6/20	—	3/34	—	Wardle & Keach, Kettering	
	BD 6471	Daimler	CB	1620	YW&R	CH22	—	4/22	—	12/25	Supp. York, Ward & Rowlatt, Wellingborough	Broken up	1
	BD 8554	Thornycroft	J	4023	?	Ch28	—	12/23	—	by 12/32	—	No further owner	2
	?	Thornycroft	J	?	?	Ch28	—	?	?	?	?	?	
	NH 3037	Wolseley	1t 10cwt	?	?	?	—	7/20	?	11/30	?	No further owner	
2	BD 9261	REO	Speed Wagon	99016	?	Ch14	—	4/24	—	by 4/31	—	J Prior, Dunchurch	
	RP 752	REO	?	110417	YW&R?	Ch20	—	4/25	—	c-/28	Supp. York, Ward & Rowlatt, Wellingborough	A Roberts, Gayton	
	BD 7500	Ford	T	649226	?	Lorry/Chara	—	3/23	c-/26	9/30	H J Phillips, Kettering	?	
	RP 3829	REO	?	2761	?	AW20D	—	3/27	—	9/37	—	No further owner	
	RP 5882	REO	Sprinter	FAX5556	?	B20F	—	5/28	—	5/28	—	A H Shaw, Lower Harlestone	3
	RP 5882	REO	Sprinter	FAX5556	?	B20F	—	5/28	c2/34	12/36	A Roberts, Gayton	No further owner	3
	GC 8527	Gilford	168SD	11155	Wray	C26F	—	3/30	?	?	Plotts & Goldman, (Central London) E1	?	
	ANV 360	Bedford	WTB	112369	Duple Hendonian	C26F	3811	7/38	—	-/42	Supp. Central Motor Co., Kettering	York Bros., Northampton	
	ARP 546	Bedford	WTB	112881	Duple Hendonian	C26F	5888	4/39	—	-/42	Supp. Central Motor Co., Kettering	York Bros., Northampton	

Black - indicates vehicles registered in Walter Keach's name.
Red - indicates vehicles registered in George Keach's name.

- Notes:** 1 - BD 6471 described as a yellow coach.
2 - BD 8554 last licensed 12/32 as a goods vehicle.
3 - RP 5882 was new to Keach but apparently immediate sold or leased to A H Shaw of Lower Harlestone, later passing to Arthur Roberts, Gayton and back to Keach.