

Bygone Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-KE3
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KEEBER. George
15 Havelock St., WELLINGBOROUGH
later **Keeber. George & OAKLEY. Walter**
and finally **OAKLEY. Walter**
44 Broad Green, WELLINGBOROUGH

George Keeber was born in Brixworth around 1878/9 and before the turn of the century had married a Lincolnshire girl named Annie and was living at 16 Cambridge Street, Wellingborough. Prior to the end of the first World War George Keeber had moved to 15 Havelock Street, Wellingborough where he set up business as a carrier and also owned horse brakes for passenger carrying work.

During the War George Keeber bought at least two motor vehicles, the first in September 1915 and being a second-hand Argyll registered AY 4748 with an unknown type of body. Then on 3rd April 1918 he bought a new 25 hp Austin van which became registered BD 3682. There are no records which suggest either vehicle was used for anything other than the carriage of goods. However, on 25th January 1919 Keeber took over a Lacre covered lorry, which also doubled as a charabanc, from Alfred Jackson of Earls Barton and Keeber used this for the conveyance of passengers. This Lacre was registered BD 1872 and dated from 1913.



*An illustration of Lacre
BD 1872 taken at the
Stag's Head public
house at Earls Barton
when in the ownership
of Alfred Jackson.*

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It is possible that George Keeber bought the Lacre as an interim measure pending the arrival of a new Austin 25 horsepower lorry/bus as the Lacre was quickly sold to J Willis of Earls Barton for further use on 24th February 1919. Keeber's new Austin duly arrived and was put on the road on 27th March 1919 when it took the registration number BD 597.

George Keeber did not run any local bus services as such but hired out his motors to take parties to local hunt meetings, football matches and the like. Wellingborough people enjoyed what were known as "tea drinkings" which were from time to time held in Bassett's Close (a local park). At these festivities it was a regular thing for George Keeber to convey people for rides from the Bassett's to "Kruger's Grave" and return on his motor lorry/bus at ½d per time. "Kruger's Grave" was a road traffic island in Wellingborough at the junctions of Northampton Road, Oxford Street and Westfield Road and was constructed in the shape of a coffin at about the time of Kruger's death in 1904.

In June 1919 the Police reported to Wellingborough Urban District Council that George Keeber was operating without a licence, which led to him submitting an application which was granted for a vehicle seating twenty-five inside and two outside. A couple of years later and Keeber was applying for a Hackney Carriage Licence from Northampton Borough Council for a motor lorry to take up and set down passengers outside St. Edmund's Church in Wellingborough Road. It appears that George Keeber's operations to Northampton were intermittent and for special occasions only. During the mid-1920s this operator was granted a driving licence by Northampton Council in September 1925; a Hackney licence for a 14-seater saloon to operate from Campbell Square in October 1925 and a replacement licence for a twenty-seater saloon in March 1927. Certainly as the 1920s progressed George Keeber became more adventurous and operated to East Coast seaside destinations, local race meetings and other visitor attractions.

By the mid-1920s the use of dual-purpose lorries that could be converted to buses by the addition of seating became less acceptable to the public. Accordingly George Keeber purchased a REO on 3rd July 1926 from Messrs York, Ward & Rowlatt of Wellingborough who in all probability also built the fourteen-seat body. This machine was allocated the registration mark RP 1408. Seven months later, on 11th February 1926, Keeber added a twenty-seater Guy registered RP 2150 to his fleet. Once again Messrs York, Ward & Rowlatt supplied the chassis and were the likely builders of the body. George Keeber generally ran just two passenger vehicles at a time.

With the introduction of legislation regulating the road passenger transport industry George Keeber was obliged to apply to the Traffic Commissioners for Road Service Licences to enable him to continue to operate his excursions and tours business. It appears that Keeber may have been somewhat nonplussed by the new system as in September 1931 he applied for licences for seventeen tours starting from Wellingborough, Cannon Street that he had operated during the previous twelve months, only to be followed by a largely similar application for nineteen tours in October 1931 and,

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in November 1931, an application for a further eighteen excursions making thirty-seven in all. Keeber must have satisfied the Traffic Commissioners as his required licences were granted in November 1931 and January 1932 and subsequently took the Commissioners' reference TER292/1.

George Keeber's initial licence permitted him to run one vehicle per day but in September 1933 he applied to increase the vehicle allowance to three whilst in 1935 permission was sought to operate twenty-six seater vehicles in place of twenty seaters. Over the years George Keeber applied to the Commissioners for various additional tours, some of which were granted and others refused, but in the end he was authorised to operate forty-four tours. This number included the seaside destinations of Clacton, Felixstowe, Hunstanton, Skegness and Yarmouth, local race meetings, shows, football and boxing matches and a number of afternoon and evening tours. To take advantage of his increased vehicle allowance for Excursion traffic, George Keeber bought a second-hand Guy twenty-seater registered KX 1523 that had formerly been in the fleet of the Thames Valley Traction Company.

We now need to consider the other gentleman included in the title of this paper - one Walter Oakley. The Oakley family apparently came to Wellingborough from Wisbech although Walter Oakley was actually born just over the border in Walsoken, Norfolk in 1879. What his profession was in his earlier career is unknown to the Author but by October 1932 he had formed a partnership with George Keeber and the business operated from 44 Broad Green, Wellingborough, with the buses being parked in the yard of the nearby Dun Cow public house.

By the end of 1933 Walter Oakley had bought out George Keeber's share of the concern, which henceforth was operated solely in Walter Oakley's name. Soon afterwards Oakley decided to partially replace his fleet by the purchase of two second-hand G.M.C. saloons. One of the two was RP 8303 which was a sixteen-seat Grose bodied bus that had previously been operated by Stan Smith of Irthlingborough. The other was an import from Derbyshire where TV 3508 had been run by J H Booth of Westhouses, who sold his business to Midland General in 1934. This latter company had no use for TV 3508 and so it passed to Walter Oakley. Curiously there are discrepancies in the seating capacity of both vehicles! RP 8303 was recorded as a sixteen-seater when used by Smith but as a seventeen-seater by Oakley. Perhaps he squeezed in an extra seat at the rear of the bus to make a row of five rather than four. TV 3508, on the other hand, was recorded as a seventeen-seater by Booth but as a twenty-six seater by Oakley. The Northamptonshire evidence all points to it having seated twenty-six.

During 1938 an agreement was reached between Walter Oakley and United Counties for the latter to purchase the goodwill of Oakley's Excursions & Tours Licence for the sum of £900 with a further £100 guaranteed for the two G.M.C.s RP 8303 and TV 3508. It was agreed between the parties that the vendor be at liberty to dispose of his two buses privately and this he did for a total of £85, which meant that United Counties had to pay

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This G.M.C. with Grose bodywork was registered RP 8303 and is seen when new to Stan Smith of Irthlingborough.

Oakley a further £15 to bring the total to £100. The sale and purchase was effected on 22nd June 1938.

At the time George Keeber handed over his business to Walter Oakley he would have been fifty-five and he went on to live to be over ninety, dying in 1970. Walter Oakley, on selling to United Counties, moved south to take over the Post Office at 200 High Street, Dunstable

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Rolling Stock:

Regn. No.	Chassis	Type	Chassis No.	Body	Seats	Body No.	Dates			Former Owner	Disposal	Nts
							New	S/H	W/D			
AY 4748	Argyll	35cwt	?	?	?	—	?	9/15	1?	?	?	1
BD 3682	Austin	25hp 2-3 ton	20568	?	Van	—	4/18	—	2/18	—	A H Leaberry, Wellingborough	2
BD 1872	Lacre	30hp	20843	?	Lorry/ Chara	—	5/13	1/19	2/19	A S Jackson, Earls Barton	J Willis, Earls Barton	
BD 597	Austin	25hp 2-3 ton	1397/19/ 696	?	Lorry/ Bus	—	3/19	—	c7/25	—	A H Leaberry, Wellingborough	
RP 1408	REO	?	113728	YW&R?	B14	—	7/25	—	c-/34	Supp. York, Ward & Rowlatt, W'borough		3
RP 2150	Guy	?	08447	YW&R?	B20	—	2/26	—	by-/30	Supp. York, Ward & Rowlatt, W'borough		4
KX 1523	Guy	OND	8924	?	B20	—	12/28	-/33	6/38	Thames Valley	To lorry by -/40	
RP 8303	G.M.C.	T19B	15186	Grose	B16F	—	1/30	c3/34	6/38	S Smith, Irthlingborough	--??--, Oxon Mitson, Croydon	5
TV 3508	G.M.C.	?	923013	?	C26	—	1/31	-/34	6/38	Midland General/ Booth, Westhouses		6

Notes: 1 - AY 4748 the type of body carried is unknown.

2 - BD 3682 probably never used for the conveyance of passengers.

3 - RP 1408 last owned by E Gilby, Hail Weston and last licensed 9/36.

4 - RP 2150 last owner by J E Chambers, St Albans and last licensed 6/30.

5 - RP 8303 also recorded as 17-seater when disposed of by Oakley. Last owned by J H Marling, Billing and last licensed 12/49.

6 - TV 3508 last owned by R Mitson, Croydon and last licensed 9/43.