

Bygone Buses

of
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-LI1

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LION SERVICES (N'pton) Ltd 7 Balmoral Road (539374) NORTHAMPTON

Lion Services (Northampton) Ltd was incorporated on 16th October 1954 with a nominal capital of £1,000 divided into 1,000 Shares of £1 each, of which only 300 appear to have been allotted. The man behind the enterprise was Keith Norman Coates of 14 Balmoral Road, who was a motor engineer. He held 298 of the Shares whilst his co-subscriber Aubrey Corbin - a driving instructor - and Coates' widowed mother each held one Share.

The Memorandum of Association lists the objects for which the Company was established, amongst which were the following:-

- (A) To carry on the business of letting out on hire motor and other vehicles of every description.....
- (B) To clean, repair, refuel and maintain motor and other vehicles.....
- (C) To finance the purchase, hire-purchase, and sale of any such vehicles as aforesaid.....
- (D) To carry on the business of radio, television and electrical dealers and engineers.....



Lion Services' premises can be seen in this photograph, comprising the shop behind the car with the white roof and the garage at the rear. The property to the right of the picture was not owned by Mr Coates but was subsequently bought by Lion Services.

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It was in 1954 that Lion Services bought its first minibus which was a Morris J2 carrying the registration WMJ 206. It was then not until 1961 that a further Morris J2 eleven seat minibus registered 927 DTM was acquired and in the following year a slightly larger Morris LD2 which seated fourteen passengers in its Kenex body was taken into stock and registered 624 GTM. Presumably Lion Services had a couple of contracts for which these latter two vehicles were required but the Author is unaware of what they were.



The only photograph available of Country Lion's Morris J2 minibus 927 DTM is this rather sad view taken after withdrawal by its subsequent owner.



624 GTM was Country Lion's Kenex bodied Morris LD2 and a lot more attractive than many minibuses of the period.
(Photo courtesy T Richardson).

LION SERVICES (N'pton) Ltd

Having gained experience with the operation of minibuses Mr Coates devised an imaginative scheme to operate half-a-dozen circular minibus routes centred on Northampton and wandering off in all directions into the countryside prior to returning to Northampton. The six proposed routes for which Road Service Licences were applied from the East Midland Traffic Commissioners were as follows:-

| TC's Ref | Route | Days of Operation |
|-----------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| TER 5429/1 | Northampton - Nobottle - Little Brington - Great Brington - Althorpe - Church Brampton - Chapel Brampton - Northampton. And reverse route. | 4 Circulars M-S 2 Circulars Suns |
| TER 5429/2 | Northampton - Moulton - Holcot - Hannington - Walgrave - Old - Scaldwell - Brixworth - Cottesbrooke - Creaton - Spratton - Chapel Brampton - Northampton. And reverse route. | 4 Circulars M-S 3 Circulars Suns |
| TER 5429/3 | Northampton - Duston - Nobottle - Little Brington - Great Brington - Althorpe - East Haddon - Ravensthorpe - Coton - Guilsborough - Teeton - Holdenby - Church Brampton - Northampton. And reverse route. | 4 Circulars M-S |
| TER 5429/4 | Northampton - Church Brampton - Holdenby - Teeton - Hollowell - Guilsborough - Thornby - Cold Ashby - Naseby - Clipston - Sibbertoft - Marston Trussell - Lubenham - Market Harborough - East Farndon - Great Oxendon - Kelmarsh - Maidwell - Draughton - Lamport - Brixworth - Pitsford - Moulton - Northampton. And reverse route. | 4 Circulars M-S |
| TER 5429/5 | Northampton - Hunsbury Hill - Rothersthorpe - Blisworth - Shutlanger - Paulerspury - Potterspury - Old Stratford - Cosgrove - Castlethorpe - Hanslope - Quinton - Wootton - Northampton. And reverse route. | 4 Circulars M-F 2 Circulars Sats |
| TER 5429/6 | Northampton - Overstone - Sywell - Hardwick - Little Harrowden - Orlingbury - Isham - Burton Latimer - Finedon - Wellingborough - Mears Ashby - Sywell - Overstone - Northampton. And reverse route. | 6 Circulars M-S |

Each route required two minibuses to operate the service - a total of 12 buses without contingency for failures.

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The above proposed routes if operated would have had a profound effect on the viability of United Counties' rural Northamptonshire services and a lesser effect on the routes of some other operators. The applications by Lion Services sent shock waves through United Counties' Head Office and clearly the Company and others strongly objected to the applications. In fact United Counties and Northampton Corporation objected to all six services and were joined by Midland Red on routes 1 and 3 and by Basford's Coaches of Greens Norton, Johnson's Coaches of Hanslope and Webster's Coaches of Pattishall on route 5. The Traffic Commissioners travelled to Northampton to consider Lion Services' applications on 29th January 1964 and their deliberations were continued on 8th April and 1st June 1964 such were the complexities of the case. The end result was that all six proposed routes were refused later in June 1964.

Before Lion Services submitted their applications to the Traffic Commissioners they increased their fleet of three Morris minibuses by the purchase of a suite of brand new Commer 1500 machines with twelve seater bodywork fitted out by Harrington. These four new Commers were new in September 1963 registered SNH 532/3/4/6 and carried the Country Lion Mini-Buses fleet name on each side of their lovat green and white bodywork.



SNH 532 was one of four Commer minibuses owned by Lion Services.

LION SERVICES (N'pton) Ltd

In September 1963 Country Lion had the four new Commer minibuses already mentioned and no work for them to earn their keep pending a decision on whether or not they were to be allowed to operate their proposed network of services. By good fortune Avon Cosmetics of Nunn Mills Road, Northampton was looking to provide transport for its workforce between Northampton Town Centre and the Avon factory. So it was that in December 1963 Lion Services submitted an application to the Traffic Commissioners to provide a frequent service of minibuses between the Main Post Office in St Giles Street and Nunn Mills Road, on which only employees of Avon Cosmetics could travel. Northampton Corporation Transport objected as it ran a service to Midsummer Meadow. Unfortunately for Lion Services the hearing of their application got delayed by the saga that was concurrently unfolding with their other applications. It was not until July 1964 that the Traffic Commissioners granted permission for the Avon Cosmetics service to operate but with the Town Centre terminal moved from St Giles Street to the Corporation bus stop in nearby Derngate.

Incidentally Lion Services kept and operated their minibuses from rented premises situated at 68 Denmark Road, Northampton. Fortunately minibuses were only one aspect of Lion Services' business otherwise the firm might have got into financial difficulties. As it turned out Mr Coates continued to operate Country Lion Mini Buses for another couple of years before selling them and the brand name to Palmerston Garage (Northampton) Ltd in October 1966. More of Palmerston in paper NN-PA3A.

Keith Norman Coates continued to own and run Lion Services (Northampton) Ltd until November 1968 when it passed to new owners. Interestingly the Company is still very much in business and (in 2016) is again running minibuses under the Balmoral name!

Rolling Stock:

| REGN. NO. | CHASSIS | | | BODY | | | DATES | | | PREVIOUS OWNER | INITIAL DISPOSAL | NOTES |
|-----------|---------|------|---------------|------------|-------------|--------|-------|-----|-------|----------------|--|-------|
| | MAKE | TYPE | NO. | MAKE | TYPE/ SEATS | NO. | NEW | S/H | W/D | | | |
| WMJ 206 | Morris | J2 | J2BM 41631 | Morris | B11C | — | -/54 | — | 7/66 | — | Private buyer | |
| 927 DTM | Morris | J2 | J2BM 78480 | Morris | B11F | — | 5/61 | — | 10/66 | — | Palmerston Garage (Northampton) Ltd | |
| 624 GTM | Morris | LD2 | LD2 55156 | Kenex | B14F | | 9/62 | — | 10/66 | — | Palmerston Garage (Northampton) Ltd | |
| SNH 532 | Commer | 1500 | LB 228153 | Harrington | B12C | CO111 | 9/63 | — | 10/66 | — | Palmerston Garage (Northampton) Ltd | |
| SNH 533 | Commer | 1500 | LB 228126 | Harrington | B12C | CO112 | 9/63 | — | 10/66 | — | Palmerston Garage (Northampton) Ltd | |
| SNH 534 | Commer | 1500 | LB 226217 | Harrington | B12C | CO114 | 9/63 | — | 10/66 | — | Palmerston Garage (Northampton) Ltd | |
| SNH 536 | Commer | 1500 | LB 228225 | Harrington | B12C | CO113? | 9/63 | — | 10/66 | — | Palmerston Garage (Northampton) Ltd | |

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