

# Bygone Buses

of  
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NN-C08

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## **COOMBS. William Edward & Sons t/a "Pride of the Midlands"**

**33A Louise Road, NORTHAMPTON &  
later 77 Colwyn Road, NORTHAMPTON**

William Edward Coombs was born in the early 1870s and at some stage prior to the 1920s had established a Mineral Water manufacturing plant based at 33A Louise Road, Northampton. William lived with his wife Alice at 18 Colwyn Road, Northampton and amongst their children were two sons - Edwin John, born 1896 and Frederick William, born 1906. Both Edwin and Frederick joined their father in the mineral water enterprise.

In 1921 William Coombs decided to diversify, purchased a couple of charabancs with which to operate tours and private hires and was advertising trips to Leicester Races as early as February that year, departing from the "Queen's Arms", Ketting Road, Northampton. Coombs then applied to Northampton Borough Council Watch Committee on 11th April 1921 for permission to stand two charabancs on Northampton Market Square each day other than Wednesday and Saturday when Regent Square was the appointed loading point. The required Hackney Carriage licences were duly granted for the period to 25th March 1922.

Unfortunately full details of the fleet of W E Coombs & Sons are not known but the original two vehicles are likely to have been a Traffic charabanc seating 18 passengers, for which the registration number is unknown, and a Thornycroft 22-seater which was registered NH 3370 in April 1921. William Coombs painted his vehicles crimson and in later years added cream reliefs. The legend "Pride of the Midlands" adorned the sides and rear of each charabanc and these were first garaged at the yard of the mineral water factory in Louise Road, Northampton. However, in July 1922 William Coombs purchased property known as 77 Colwyn Road, Northampton which comprised a dwelling house, land and outbuildings and this site was soon established as the "Pride of the Midlands" operating base.

On 11th June 1923 the Borough Council Watch Committee granted an application submitted by W E Coombs & Sons to stand its charabancs in Derngate in connection with a new service being opened up between Northampton, Rothersthorpe, Dalscote, Eastcote, Astcote, Pattishall, Foster's Booth, Cold Higham, Grimscote, Litchborough, Maidford, Adstone, Canons Ashby and Moreton Pinkney. Why such an odd destination should have been chosen is a mystery. The main roads out of Northampton to the major towns and

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

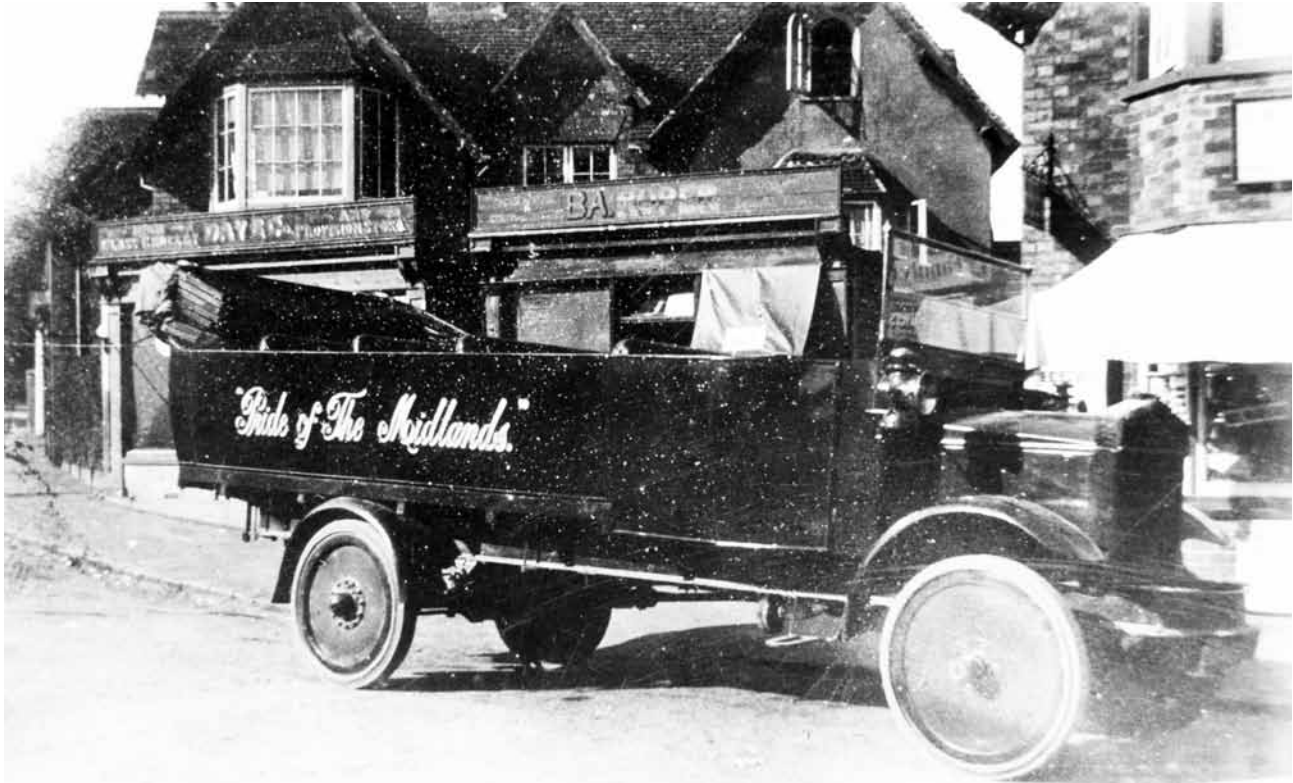
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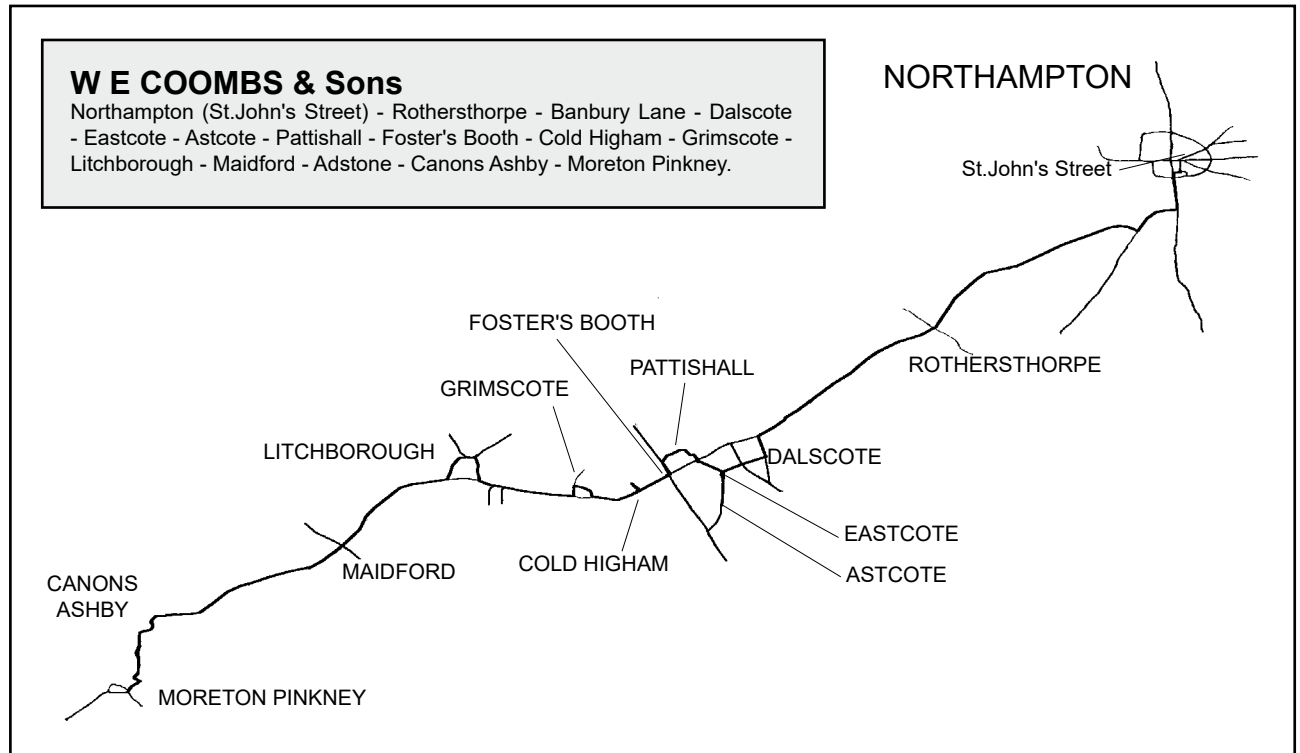
*The unidentified Traffic charabanc owned by W E Coombs & Sons.*



*Coombs' Thornycroft charabanc NH 3370 followed by Daimler charabanc XB 9980. This photograph was taken at Regent Square, Northampton.*

**COOMBSWE & Sons, NORTHAMPTON**

villages in the district were already served by established bus operators and presumably the Coombs did not wish to engage in wasteful competition with other providers. Hence a road of lesser importance may have been selected but that still does not explain the unlikely terminal of Moreton Pinkney when Banbury would have been a more logical destination.



*Diagram of W E Coombs & Sons' local service between Northampton and Moreton Pinkney.*

William Coombs used his existing charabancs for the service during the summer of 1923 but by October of that year had acquired a "motor bus" to augment the route but just what this "motor bus" was has not been established. Of other rolling stock owned by W E Coombs & Sons only a Daimler charabanc XB 9980 has been positively identified. This vehicle was new to Samuelson's of London in May 1920, although the chassis was ex-War Department stock. The date when William Coombs acquired it is not known for certain but it is likely to have been at Northampton by 1922. A contemporary driver working for another operator recalled that W E Coombs & Sons also ran an A.E.C. charabanc and pictorial evidence shows Napier charabanc NH 3140 operating alongside Coombs' XB 9980. The Napier was new to F & E Beeden of Northampton and it may be co-incidence that it was photographed with the Coombs' charabanc, or Coombs may have hired it from Beeden's for the particular outing, or they may have bought it from Beeden's. Almost certainly there were other vehicles in the fleet about which nothing is known. However, in June 1922 W E Coombs & Sons were advertising "Pride of the Midlands" numbers 1, 2 and 3 running to Whilton Locks. Applications to Northampton Borough Council for Hackney Carriage Licences suggest that by June 1925 a 14 seater replacement charabanc had been obtained and by September 1926 a 26 seater saloon was in the fleet.



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*Daimler charabanc XB 9980 accompanied by Napier NH 3140 which may have still been owned by F & E Beeden of Northampton at this time.*

Furthermore the firm is known to have owned a Reo Sprinter seating fourteen passengers but, once again, the registration number has not come to light. To live up to its name "Pride of the Midlands", W E Coombs & Sons embarked on a programme, late in 1926, to renew their fleet. Three Brockway charabancs were ordered and the first was delivered as NH 7362 on 11th December 1926. It was an "all-weather" coach by John Buckingham Ltd of Birmingham, which could operate in charabanc form in hot weather or have a canvas hood unfurled in cool or wet weather. With pneumatic tyres the vehicle had the words "safety coach" painted on its sides as was common practise at the time. Passenger access to the vehicle was gained by front and rear doors. Six months later NH 7362 was joined by two sister vehicles registered NH 7811 and NH 7814. The bodywork on these latter vehicles was different, with each row of seats having its own passenger door. Although having canvas hoods it is unlikely these vehicles were ever equipped with side windows and were therefore classed as "charabancs" rather than "all weather coaches". Incidentally, W E Coombs & Sons were appointed sole agents for Northamptonshire for Brockway coaches.

One of W E Coombs & Sons' major customers was the Northamptonshire County Cricket Club and during the 1920s Coombs' provided all the team's transport requirements.

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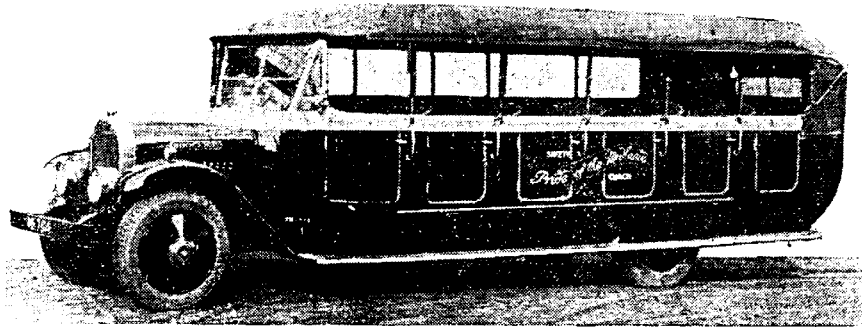
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**FIRST & FOREMOST!**

OUR WELL-RENOUNDED COACHES

**“The Pride of the Midlands”**



They incorporate everything of the best in modern engineering and coachwork. Distinctive Beauty, Reliability and Comfort go to retain this famous name.

MAKE SURE OF THE BEST, AND BOOK YOUR DAY OR HALF-DAY TOURS NOW!

**Easter Holiday Tours.**

- APRIL 6 (Good Fri.)—Banbury & Edge Hills; Woburn Sands; Old Warden & Bedford.
- „ 8 (Easter Sun.)—Stratford-on-Avon; Oxford & Bicester; Banbury & Edge Hills; Woburn Park, Ampthill and Bedford.
- „ 9 (Easter Mon.)—Thames Valley; Matlock and Buxton; Stratford-on-Avon; Oxford and Bicester.

**BOOK NOW FOR YOUR SUMMER OUTINGS.**

**W. E. Coombs & Sons**

**COLWYN ROAD (Phone 1084) NORTHAMPTON**

Facsimile of W E Coombs & Sons' advertisement appearing in the Northampton Independent in March 1928. The charabanc depicted is Brockway NH 7814.

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*Brockway NH 7362 photographed in July 1927 showing the ladies fashion of the day.*



*"Pride of the Midlands" Brockway charabanc NH 7811.*



#### COOMBSWE & Sons, NORTHAMPTON

By March 1928 the Northampton to Moreton Pinkney service passed to Harry Webster of Eastcote who commenced passenger vehicle operation at this time. The reason for the transference of the route has not been established but presumably, as it was in fact being operated "back to front" as far as traffic flows were concerned, W E Coombs & Sons decided it would be more profitable to concentrate on the private hire and tours side of their business rather than the local service. In the event, "Pride of the Midlands" did not continue to run tours for that much longer and the firm disposed of its business to Messrs W A Nightingale & Sons of Northampton in December 1929. Four vehicles were taken over by Nightingale, the three Brockways and an unidentified machine.

William Coombs and his sons Edwin and Frederick thereafter concentrated full time on their mineral water manufacturing activities. William died in March 1940 and Edwin and Frederick sold the business to Messrs. Phipps & Co Ltd of Northampton in about 1954.

*Since this paper was first published the photograph to the right has come to light depicting the 'Pride of the Midlands' REO Speedwagon registered NH 6336 which was acquired from Allchin's of Northampton at an unconfirmed date.*



#### Rolling Stock:

REGN. NO.	CHASSIS			BODY			DATES			PREVIOUS OWNER	INITIAL DISPOSAL	NOTES
	MAKE	TYPE	NO.	MAKE	TYPE/SEATS	NO.	NEW	S/H	W/D			
?	Traffic				Ch18			4/21				
NH 3370	Thornycroft				Ch22		4/21	-	9/40		No further owner	
XB 9980	Daimler	Y	4286		Ch27		7/21					1
NH 3140	Napier				Ch		4/21			F & E Beeden, Northampton?		2
?	A.E.C.				Ch		?					
NH 5097	Thornycroft		?		Lorry?		9/23	-	9/30		No further owner	3
NH 6627	Ford	T	11282 2177		Lorry?		11/25	-	9/34		No further owner	3
NH 7362	Brockway	EB7	16153	Buckingham	Ch26D		12/26	-	12/29		W A Nightingale, Northampton	
NH 7811	Brockway	EB7	16160	Buckingham?	CH26		6/27	-	12/29		W A Nightingale, Northampton	
NH 7814	Brockway	EB7	16156	Buckingham?	CH26		6/27	-	12/29		W A Nightingale, Northampton	
NH 6336	REO	Speedwgn F	101359		CH14		6/25	C-/28	12/29	Allchin. Northampton		4

Notes: 1 - W E Coombs & Sons' vehicles carried fleet numbers painted on the rear panels. Photographic evidence shows that XB 9980 was either 3 or 5. XB 9980 was new to Samuelson, London WC2 in 7/21 and the chassis was ex-War Department. Last owned by Goddard, New Bilton 12/32.  
 2 - NH 3140 was new to F & E Beeden of Northampton and may not ever have been owned by Coombs.  
 3 - NH 5097 and NH 6627 thought to be Mineral Water lorries.  
 4 - Last owner Deragate Motor Co., Northampton 12/36.