

Leatherhead U3A Local History Group
Public transport (buses) in the 20th/21st Centuries.

There is not a great deal, that I could find, on the history of road public transport. Most of the information I have been able to research has been through Surrey Local History centre and my own public library in Leatherhead.

Prior to the motorised omnibuses was stage coaches that carried passengers to destinations around the country. The popularity of stage coaches declined during the latter part of the 19th century due to the arrival of the railways, which carried people much greater distances and in more comfort than the stage coaches.

In 1905 The London Motor Omnibus Co. started a route to Brighton but this ceased very quickly following a fatal crash at Handcross.

1911 saw the formation of the East Surrey Bus Co. in Reigate. Initially it was used to take people from the "smog" of London to country areas around the capital. By 1914 the reliability of the internal combustion engines and buses in particular had much improved and Sunday services were running out as far as Leatherhead and Dorking.

During the war years the services were, generally, suspended although records show that by 1916 there was a daily timetable to Dorking and by 1919 there were hourly buses running to Dorking. All these initial routes used single decker buses only. In those early days there were naturally a lot of Companies vying for the various routes and it is thought that of these around 40 went "to the wall" due to competition, bad maintenance, or bad scheduling.

1930 saw the registration of Greenline Coaches as a company with its head office at 55 Broadway, Westminster with a starting capital of £20,000. By 1934 Greenline Coaches operated out of London to all the four points of the compass into the suburbs going as far as Stevenage, High Wycombe, Gravesend, Dorking, Leatherhead and Bookham.

Typical fares in these early days would have been around 1/6d (7 $\frac{1}{2}$ p) or 2/- (10p) for a 16 mile return trip. Some double decker buses were introduced in the 1930's and continued to be used until the early 1950's. Greenline Coaches carried on through the war and in 1952 some 33 million passengers were carried on them. The peak of the popularity for the Greenline bus was 1959/60.

In 1970 nationalisation of the transport system saw *Greenline* become part of the London Country Bus Service and in 1992 the company was renamed *Countryliner*, which operated throughout Surrey, Hampshire and Sussex.

Although it was planned in the early days no route went as far as Effingham. The *Guildford* route used Cobham and Ripley and the *Dorking* route went via Epsom and Leatherhead.

In the 21st century the company obtained new livery of buttermilk or white with a green 'skirt' and is now based in *Guildford*.

For further reading the "*Greenline*" by A. McCall gives great detail of the types and makes of buses used together with a comprehensive display of tickets and a very full list and maps of the routes around London and the suburbs and timetables.

David Wall

14 September 2008