

TfL Corporate Archives Research Guides: World War II 75th Anniversary Edition

Keeping London Moving During WWII

"One of the marvels of London" was how one journalist described the success with which London Passenger Transport Board maintained its services during the air raids. Using original material from the Corporate Archives we shed some light on the industry and loyalty put to the test.



A volunteer fire crew in action during a London Transport firefighting efficiency competition at Acton Works, 1943. Archive ref num: LT001768/001 U35542.

To fill as many of the vacancies as possible, the LPTB also used one of the approaches that had worked so well during the First World War and engaged women. More about the employment of women can be found in our 'Women in the Workforce' story.

Grade	Number of Female Staff Employed	
	On work normally performed by women	In place of men
FEMALE CLERICAL STAFF		1,901
RAILWAYS -		
Female Conciliation Staff	3	1,175
Female Workshop Staff	38	753
Miscellaneous Female Staff	329	52
CENTRAL BUS STAFF	181	4,604
TRAM AND TROLLEYBUS STAFF	86	2,941
COUNTRY BUS STAFF	23	1,861
ROAD TRANSPORT, ETC..	1,362	73
MISCELLANEOUS STAFF		
TOTAL	2,022	11,459

Office of the Chief Staff Officer,
London Passenger Transport Board,
55, Broadway, S.W.1.
15th January, 1943.

4.

Summary of women employed in London Transport in January 1943. Archive ref num: LT000234/151

The Home Office approved slight relaxations in lighting restrictions on buses and trams to assist passengers during the blackout. A cut in the cowls of the lamp fittings could be made to reflect more light into the vehicle. Drivers and conductors began to wear white. Lighting restrictions at LPTB's garages and depots seriously impeded the preparation overnight of vehicles for their next day's work. Eventually modified fittings were produced to improve the situation and these became an approved standard through the country. Due to shortages of petrol and fuel oil, 839 buses had to be withdrawn from service and mileage cut by 30%.

The Omnibus Brigade

Under this heading the *Daily Telegraph* writes of the efficiency of the London bus services in the black-out :

The skill and nerve displayed by drivers in piloting their buses through the Egyptian darkness must command admiration. The conductors, too, merit their meed of praise. Those much-harassed men unfailingly keep their temper and their head. Decidedly, busmen have acquired merit in these testing times . . . It is not as if busmen had gone through a period of preliminary training in war-time service.



—and he's so judicial too

vice. They have, as it were, passed straight from their peaceful avocations into the firing-line.

A salute to "The Omnibus Brigade" from the *Daily Telegraph*, December 1939.
Archive ref num: T000030/078

Staff Praised for Actions

A bus garage was extensively damaged by enemy action, blasting the roof off and blowing out the windows of all the buses stationed overnight. Working all night, and unbeknown to the public, staff cleared the damage and selected the least-damaged buses for service. Within seven hours it was possible to run a normal service.

In the Operating Department, an emergency fleet of 600 double-deck buses was used to supplement or replace interrupted services on the tube, tram, and trolleybus network and peak services were maintained.

'Crippled' Bus Fleet Restored in Six Hours

STAFF of London Transport continues to use the twin weapons team-spirit and courageous resource against enemy planes. Here is what happened one night this year—it's not exceptional: some time or other every garage, depot and workshop has met blows with the same temper.

Blast lifted nearly half the roof of a garage filled with buses. It smashed the glass of every bus. Time: 2 a.m.—yet in a few hours the buses must be running out.

Unseen by the public, staff toiled in the garage. Broken panes were removed. The buses least damaged were picked out for the first journeys.

By 8 o'clock three-quarters of the fleet was in operation: practically a normal service on all routes. By 8.50 the whole fleet was at work!

Operation Staff say Engineering Staff was magnificent. Engineering Staff praise Operating Staff: the drivers and conductors who swept up the glass, the D.I.'s who organised the service—all were Trojans.

As usual the canteen staff was not behind anyone in adapting itself to unexpected circumstances: it went and served food and drink in the mess room until the canteen was re-roofed.

And the District Supt. summed it all up thus in his official memo: 'A good time was had by all. Public not inconvenienced. On today's showing we've nothing to fear if the enemy sends more.'

Article from staff magazine, August 1944. Archive ref num: LT000030/078

Outstanding actions of staff continued throughout the war. Following an air raid at Hanger Lane Junction, Frank Goodsall isolated damage to signalling equipment and enabled the train service to be restored.

A Lineman Restarted Trains in an Air Raid

WHEN, one night in 1940, enemy bombs wrecked Hanger Lane junction, Ealing, and caused trains to be stalled, a power-signal lineman of 45 went out during a period of intense enemy action and, by isolating damage to an air main at two points, facilitated the restoration of traffic movement. He offered to tackle the task, and the service that he rendered was outstanding, said the Signal Engineer afterwards.



The good servant was **Frank Goodsall, Ealing Broadway.**

Mr. GOODSALL Nearly four years afterwards he has lost his life in an accident while at work on the track at Ealing. A brave, good-natured man is mourned.

Power-signal lineman keeps London moving, August 1944. Archive ref num: LT000030/078

Night repair staff heroically reinstated trolleybus lines shattered by bombs. Damaged lines were fixed in time for the first trolleybus service at 5.30 am, and 500 yards of new lines were installed in a few days.

Valiant account of night repair staff, May 1941. Archive ref num: LT000030/078

PENNYFARE MAY 1941

New Records in Wire Repairs

BOMBS blew down bays of trolleybus wires. As more bombs fell, linesmen replaced wires, gangs cleared litter. This first-aid began at midnight, yet the first bus ran through at its usual time, 5.30 a.m.

It was all part of the London Transport service. Day and night men are ready to go and do everything necessary. Once a crater blocked all traffic. Too big to fill quickly. So we diverted the trolleybuses along two roads for the first time and put up a new system of wires 500 yards.

Narrow roads, too narrow for trolleybuses to pass one another, six sharp corners—and a delayed-action bomb !

Yet in a few days, 43 holes 6 ft. deep had been drilled by hand, 43 poles fixed, overhead gear completed, one-way traffic instituted. Trolleybuses were running and bell punches ringing again.

Short Lived Riverboat Service Set Up Following Bomb Raid

When bomb damage caused split some tram services, a connecting steamboat service was temporarily instated. The Government also felt that river could be a good means of transport to factories and wharves. It ran for 2 years between Woolwich and Westminster.



William Wordsworth's England, NR Farbman. LIFE photographic collection.

Staff Recognition

LPTB staff were recognised across the globe for the lengths they went to, to keep London's transport network operational in spite of adversity.

This letter from the Vice-President and General Manager of the Chicago Motor Coach Company expresses "great admiration" for the LPTB's work and perseverance.

U.S.A. Traffic Chief Admires Your Courage and Devotion

PENNYFARE has received the following letter from Mr.
W. J. Sherwood, Vice-President and General Manager
of Chicago Motor Coach Company, Chicago :

IN reading the January 1940 edition of *Pennyfare*, I am stirred by a feeling of great admiration for an organization with the courage, perseverance, devotion and loyalty to so wonderfully carry on during the blitzkriegs of London.

It will be my pleasure at the next General Staff Meeting of this company to offer it as an outstanding example of the stamina of an organization in carrying on its responsibilities during these destructive and harassing days of warfare, and I feel confident that the examples of courage as set forth in the January issue will provide a beneficial moral lesson to the members of this organization.

With a sincere trust in the ability of England to emerge with glory and to once again devote herself to social and cultural advancement . . .

P.S.—If opportunity presents itself, please convey to Lord Ashfield my respects and kindest regards as coming from one who was associated with him and W. W. Wheatley back in the year 1903.

Letter of admiration from American traffic chief, April 1941. Archive ref num: LT000030/078

Some staff sadly lost their lives whilst driving trams and trolleybuses, manning stations, conducting on the buses, and performing other roles of vital importance.

DEATHS IN AIR RAID

Members of London Transport staff gave their lives while 'carrying on' in an air raid on 12 March. Dvr. H. E. Brown, 43, died in the cab of his bus, which was burnt out. His conductor, Mrs. G. I. Pond, suffered from shock. A bullet went through an upper-deck window of a trolley-bus and killed Dist. Insp. C. E. King, 53, Central Buses, who was travelling to duty. Dvr. G. A. Harwood was struck in the eye by glass and he also suffered from shock, as did Condr. F. T. Nash. Dvr. Brown's service was 19 years, Insp. King's service 24 years.

Air raid death announcements, April 1943. Archive ref num: LT000030/078

In the words of an article that appeared in *The Times*:

"Transport kept London alive....The routine, the sense of duty, and the system held out. The schedules remained in force; vehicles were serviced; drivers and conductors reported normally for duty....buses took other workers home through dark streets undeterred by bomb or shell."

This story has been compiled using information in records at the Transport for London Corporate Archives. The Corporate Archives seeks to preserve and make accessible records, not to interpret them. A wider range of material is available for physical consultation.

Email: CorporateArchives@tfl.gov.uk

This story has been enhanced using some material from the LIFE Photo Collection. All enquiries regarding this material should be made directly to that institution.