



TfL Corporate Archives Research Guides

Research Guide No 23: London's Transport during World War I

The United Kingdom declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914 following the invasion of Belgium. Its effect on London was far less damaging than that suffered during World War II.

At the time London was served by:

- The London General Omnibus Company (LGOC) and its associates (motorbuses)
- Tramways of the London County Council (LCC), Metropolitan Electric and several local authorities and others
- The Metropolitan Railway and various associated underground surface and deep-level 'tube' railways
- The main-line railway companies with largely steam-worked long-distance and suburban lines

Within two days of the outbreak of war, buses and drivers were commandeered off the streets for home troop movements, with single-deckers required for Admiralty medical service. The LGOC and its associates lost 2500 men to the forces in the first few months of the war and were later called upon to provide a further 2000 men – mostly drivers – with buses for overseas service. The buses were mainly the very



successful LGOC 'B' type, which initially were thought to be too light for war service but, with modifications, fulfilled the role admirably. Many were lost on the battlefields and never returned. Certain bus garages, eg Catford and Camberwell, were requisitioned by the authorities for war use.

Many thousands of men initially volunteered for war service overseas, the government of the day being reluctant to introduce conscription. This did not commence until January 1916. As a result, there was a shortage of men to fulfil jobs in the transport sector and women were successfully recruited for the duration of the war. They were used as booking clerks, porters and lift attendants etc on the Underground railways. Indeed Maida Vale - one of the few new Underground stations to be opened during the war - was initially staffed only by women. They were also used as bus and tram conductresses (known as 'conductorettes') but were not permitted to drive. Women were also employed as bus-cleaners and engine- and carriage-cleaners, suitable uniforms and protective clothing having to be specially procured for them. They also acted as guards on the Metropolitan Railway from 1916.

The employment of women was not immediately welcomed by either Trade Unions or management, even though it was understood that their employment would only be for the duration of the war. Their employment in transport was paralleled by their employment in other formerly male-only fields during the war, including munitions and jobs involving manual labour.

SUMMARY.		
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

File LT000317/004 contains details of employment during World War I of staff serving in the armed forces, women employed on London's transport during the war, and an extract from an Act for the better regulation of regular land forces of the Crown concerning the emergency possession of railways.

There were only thirty-one air raids on London during the war. A total of 670 people were killed and 1962 wounded. Air-raid precautions were introduced from September 1914 but were later relaxed. London Underground stations were used by shelterers from July 1917 and into the following year, with some 4.25 million Londoners using Underground stations and berthed trains for the purpose of shelter on more than thirty occasions. Special provision was needed for policing and sanitation. The Blackwall and Rotherhithe (road) and Woolwich (footway) tunnels were also used as shelters during raids.

In 1918 the Underground railways carried 67% more passengers than in 1914, more than half of the total passenger traffic of London, despite few new cars being delivered for service and many being laid up for repair work. The only extension to the Underground system during the war was of the Bakerloo Tube to Queens Park in February 1915, thence over LNWR tracks to Willesden Junction (May) and on to Watford Junction in April 1917.

In 1915 Lea Bridge tram depot was bombed, the only one to be hit, and two buses were destroyed near Liverpool Street. The main-line station of that name was hit in 1915 and 1917, and other parts of the national railway system in London were bombed frequently but interruptions to traffic on the Metropolitan and District

Railways were negligible. Victoria and Waterloo (also Charing Cross) national rail terminals were used to transport soldiers off to war and to receive the wounded.

A tram was wrecked at Streatham Hill in 1916, with loss of life. Some trams were equipped as mobile searchlight stations. The LCC tramways and the Metropolitan Railway in particular lost men to the war. Two major strikes occurred during the war, affecting the tramways and buses. In May 1915 LCC tram-men struck in support of a war bonus, whilst one year later LGOC bus workers struck, demanding principally union recognition and a 10s (50p) per week War Bonus.

File LT000558/020: 'Truth' the TOT (Tram Omnibus Tram) War Record, includes photos of London buses in army service, munition-making and war work at Underground workshops, war-damaged buses and convoys overseas, and stories from bus drivers abroad on military service.

File LT001467/001 contains a London County Council tram drivers register for the south side services covering the period c1875 to 1920, including drivers who enlisted or were called-up for war service and those involved in the 1915 strike.

File LT000239/025 refers to the use of the Underground railways during the Great War.

File LT000370/070 contains details of Parliamentary Acts affecting the Metropolitan Railway, namely National Insurance payments during the war, national finance and also powers for London United Tramways Ltd.

The acute shortage of buses after the war was alleviated partially by the introduction of so-called 'khaki' buses, which were temporary and sub-standard vehicles provided out of material in the LGOC's possession. Additionally, 180 'Traffic Emergency Vehicles' were introduced. Licensed to carry 27 passengers and in use from June 1919 to January 1920, these very basic vehicles were converted lorries hired from the Board of Trade. Crudely fitted with garden seats and canvas hoods, some were re-bodied as conventional buses or charabancs after withdrawal.

B-type bus B43, which had been one of the first to be shipped abroad, serving in France and Belgium until 1919, was subsequently re-purchased by the LGOC and was inspected by HM King George V at Buckingham Palace on 14 February 1920. File LT001670/1705 contains a postcard of the Auxiliary Omnibus Companies Association (AOCA) showing the King inspecting the vehicle; an LGOC wreath being laid at a Remembrance Day service; Cenotaph pictures and extracts from a TOT magazine and subsequent related material. The bus, under the ownership of the AOCA was subsequently used for charity work and is now displayed at the Imperial War Museum, Kennington.

The above is intended as a general introduction to the subject. If you have a more specific enquiry please contact us and we will be happy to search our catalogue for you.