



TfL Corporate Archives Research Guides

Research Guide No 34: London Transport Bus Garages and Depots

On its formation in 1933, the London Passenger Transport Board (LPTB) inherited a collection of garages in which to hold its bus fleet. Many had housed horse-buses or horse-trams; many were taken over from the London General Omnibus Co (LGOC) as part of the Underground Group whilst some had been in independent hands, either leased or owned. There were some twenty-three premises in the latter category, all of which were disposed of by 1934 as being unsuitable for the new Board. Sixty-five Central motorbus garages were used by the LPTB for any substantial length of time, plus thirty-two in the Country Area.

The fledgling trolleybus network, around the Kingston area, was housed at Fulwell depot.



A total of twenty trolleybus depots were eventually operated, as the tram to trolleybus conversion scheme of the 1930s progressed. The majority were rebuilt or

modified from tram depots, only one (Bexleyheath) being purpose-built for trolleybus operation.

In what was to become the London Transport Country Area (including Green Line operations), the majority of garages were taken over from London General Country Services Ltd, the short-lived company which took over from the East Surrey Traction Co. in 1932, and which itself was taken over by the LPTB the following year. Green Line coaches were allocated to Country garages, with only Romford (London Road) and Tunbridge Wells garages being used specifically by Green Line.

An agreement was negotiated with the East Surrey Traction Company, who operated country bus services from their garages in the south, whilst a similar agreement was negotiated with the National Omnibus & Transport Co. Ltd, who operated country services to the north of the Thames. Several other companies were involved, including Amersham & District, Aldershot & District Traction Co., Green Line Coaches Ltd and Eastern National Omnibus Co.

In a number of cases, different types of road transport vehicle operated side-by-side for some years. Fulwell, for example, operated trams and trolleybuses from 1931 to 1935, Wandsworth did the same from 1937 to 1950, and both Highgate (HT) and Stamford Hill had joint operation of trolleybuses and motorbuses for a time.

When the situation was regularised upon the formation of London Passenger Transport Board, the Board set about rebuilding existing garages or building new garages entirely. Priority was given to the Country Area, with the coming of the New Towns and their requirements for bus services, such as Stevenage, Hatfield, and Harlow.

Each garage was given a one or two letter garage code, normally denoted on a metal plate situated in a bracket just below the front lower deck windows on each bus. This was followed by a running number, changed daily. Garage codes were also shown on half-cab buses for identification purposes should the vehicle be loaned to another garage, as often happened at weekends. From later years (1960s) onwards, codes were painted directly onto the vehicles. Whilst the codes for the majority of garages and all trolleybus depots were clearly an abbreviation of the name, the codes for some Central garages bore no such relation, such as Sutton (A), Nunhead (AH), Seven Kings (AP), Forest Gate (G), Camberwell (Q), Leyton (T) and North Kensington (X). Many of these are still in use today under TfL.

The new or rebuilt Country Area garages produced some extremely fine buildings in the best design traditions of the LPTB under Chairman Lord Ashfield and Vice Chairman Frank Pick. Those particularly of note included Amersham, Dorking, Hemel Hempstead, Hertford, Leatherhead, Reigate, St Albans and Windsor.

Modernisation and building of new Central Area garages during the 1930s was on a far more modest scale. Hackney garage received a new frontage with curved end-walls similar to those used in the Country Area, and the only new garages built at this time were at Alperton (1939) and Gillingham Street, Victoria (1940). Alperton was unusual, with the use of the last two letters of its name used for its code (ON) and for a short

period during the war, normal road traffic was diverted through the actual garage as a result of bomb damage causing a road closure.

Victoria was to be the only bus garage located in central London and was unique in that it was built with a basement. The basement was used from 1947 to house the airport coaches, which London Transport operated on behalf of British European Airways.

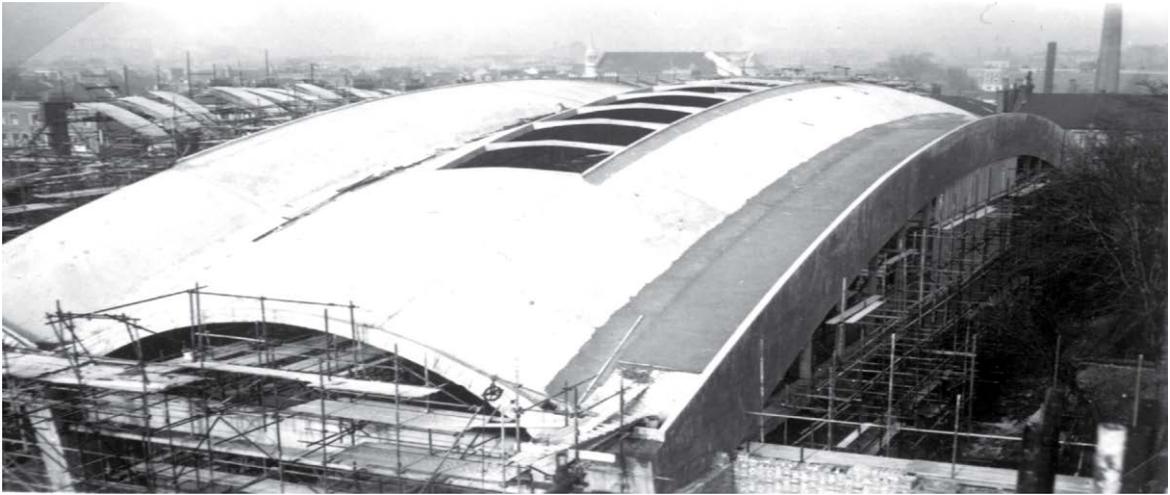
Whilst heavy maintenance and overhaul work was carried out initially at Chiswick Works, a certain amount of maintenance and minor accident damage repair was done at garages, many of which had workshops and pits. In addition to housing buses, garages were normally equipped with paying-in facilities for conductors, offices, a public counter, a cafeteria, conveniences and in some, recreational facilities for staff use, usually snooker.

Chiswick works was requisitioned for use as an aircraft factory in 1940 and five Central garages (Camberwell, Chalk Farm, Elmers End, Muswell Hill and Willesden) were selected to carry out body overhauls in its stead. The work was of a lesser standard than Chiswick but kept the fleet in reasonable condition for the duration of the conflict.

During the Second World War a number of garages and buses were damaged or destroyed by enemy action. Poplar, Athol Street was an early casualty and became the most-bombed LPTB garage of all, with its proximity to the docks. The former Tilling Bull Yard (Peckham) premises were hit by fire bombs in October 1940 and although not in use as a running garage, 59 buses and coaches stored there were destroyed. The site was subsequently used for the new Peckham garage. Croydon garage was hit by incendiary and HE bombs in May 1941, involving four fatalities and the loss of 58 buses. The other serious incident was the destruction of Elmers End garage, which was hit by a flying bomb in July 1944, involving 16 fatalities and the loss or damage to some 50 buses and other vehicles. A plaque was subsequently erected naming the members of staff who had been killed and the exit to the garage (after post war rebuilding) was named in memory of the fire-watcher who had sacrificed his life to warn others of the approaching bomb. Bexleyheath depot was hit in September 1940 involving much damage to trolleybuses, most of which were subsequently rebuilt.

In 1950, the Central Bus and Tram & Trolleybus departments were merged as Central Road Services and all depots received a code for the first time. In addition, certain trolleybus depots were renamed, e.g. Hounslow to Isleworth (IH) and two bus garages, Hammersmith and Hanwell, were renamed Riverside (R) and Southall (HW) respectively. Trolleybuses now carried their new codes in like manner to motor-buses. Hammersmith (Riverside) garage was unique in that it was built in 1913 on the site of an 18th century mansion named Bradmore House. When demolished, the LGOC persuaded the London County Council to retain the eastern façade and some interior decorative features. Buses entered the garage behind via doorways cut either side of the entrance door. After closure in 1983, the frontage was preserved in a modified form and now houses a restaurant.

With the post-war shortage of steel, thoughts turned to the use of reinforced concrete for new garage construction and a party was despatched to Manchester to inspect the Corporation's new garage at Northenden (1941), which utilised a 'shell-roof' construction on a reinforced concrete frame. The building clearly influenced the construction of the new Peckham garage, opened in 1951, which was built with a barrel vault roof of reinforced concrete, with roof lights to admit natural light and with a minimum of supporting pillars. Undoubtedly, this design was used to even greater effect when the most striking of the new post-war garages, Stockwell, opened in 1952. The building had been intended for use as a trolleybus depot, it being the intention at the time to convert the existing south London tram routes to trolleybus operation. A change of policy meant that there would be no more trolleybus routes and all existing trams would be replaced by motor-buses, which resulted in the need for new or much-expanded bus garages south of the river. The interior of Stockwell garage features a series of reinforced concrete arched ribs spanning 194ft with nine arched vaults between them, each 42ft wide.



As a result, buses can manoeuvre within the garage far more easily, without the risk of striking support columns. Parked-up buses are dwarfed by their surroundings.

London's trolleybus system was phased out between 1959 and 1962, involving the immediate closure of five depots, the remainder being converted to bus garages. And in the Country Area, a number of new or replacement garages were built to cater for the ever-expanding New Towns (e.g. Harlow, Stevenage and Hatfield).

As from January 1970, as a result of the 1968 Transport Act, the Country Area and Green Line operations were handed over to the National Bus Company under the name of London Country Bus Services Ltd (LCBS). This was to have a devastating effect on the former Country garages. Of the 28 garages taken over by LCBS as at 1 January 1970, 24 were closed by 1999 and only four survive as bus garages at April 2016.

Westbourne Park was a new garage (1981) built to replace the antiquated garage at Middle Row (North Kensington), and is located directly beneath the A40 (Westway). West Ham was a new state of the art garage (1992), replacing its namesake and built on a completely different site. Another new garage to appear during the 1990s was at Waterloo (Red Arrow base), the site of which had for many years been used as a bus

and coach park. Although maintenance facilities were installed, most of its vehicles (all for the Red Arrow services), including the former articulated buses, were housed in the open. The Red Arrow name was dropped in 2009.

There is a substantial amount of material to be found in the Archive, including the following:

Reference Number	Content
LT000271/010 & LT000271/011	Articles of Agreement, Schedule of Conditions of Contract, Specification and Bills of Quantities in respect of the construction of the new LGCS Coach Station & Garage at Windsor and at Reigate respectively, 1932
LT000271/002 & LT000271/003	Articles of Agreement, Schedule of Conditions of Contract, Specification and Bills of Quantities in respect of Guildford and Dorking, 1931
LT000271/004, LT000271/005 & LT000271/006	Articles of Agreement, Schedule of Conditions of Contract, Specification and Bills of Quantities in respect of proposed extensions to Chelsham and Godstone garages (1931) and Swanley garage (1930)
LT000271/007, LT000271/008 & LT000271/009	Articles of Agreement, Schedule of Conditions of Contract, Specification and Bills of Quantities in respect of Reigate, East Grinstead and Dunton Green, 1931
LT000016/004	Plans for modernisation work at Harrow Weald garage, 1964/65
LT000016/005	Correspondence and reports relating to the modernisation and later closure of Holloway garage and closure of Carshalton garage, 1964-1973
LT000016/006	Papers and report on a proposed bus garage for Morden Road, Merton and proposed extensions to Merton garage, 1970-1977
LT000232/126	Proposal to transfer responsibility of the line to London Transport in 1948
LT000016/008 & LT000016/011	Modernisation work at Sidcup garage, 1968-1975

Reference Number	Content
LT000016/009 & LT00016/010	Modernisation work at Seven Kings garage, 1969-1974
LT000016/023/001-004	Drawings of Proposed Alterations to Catford garage, 1961-1963
LT000016/24/001-008	Drawings of the proposed modernisation of Barking garage, 1963-1966
LT000016/002	Correspondence and other papers regarding modernisation work at Barking garage, 1963-1969
LT000016/025	Report by the British Railways Board into the layout of Traffic Offices at Central bus garages, 1963-1964
LT000016/026	Reports on modernisation programmes at various Central and Country Area garages, 1963-1969
LT000016/031	Correspondence and Minutes relating to a proposed new garage at Kings Cross
LT000016/001 & LT00016/011	Correspondence, Minutes and reports concerning proposed extension & modernisation to Battersea garage, 1964-1968
LT000016/003	Papers concerning proposed modernisation of Battersea garage, 1969-1971
LT000016/01/001-010	Plans of Battersea garage & proposed alterations, 1965-1970
LT000016/032	Minutes of Garage and Road Services Premises Committee concerning modernisation and alteration to various Central and Country garages, 1966-1973
LT000016/33/002	Correspondence and reports concerning possible re-siting of Middle Row garage, 1963-1972
LT000078/020	Effect on garages of the closure of Aldenham Works, 1983-1984
LT000254/817	Correspondence concerning Grouping of Central Area garages, 1932-1939
LT000254/818	Correspondence and reports concerning war damage and reconstruction for Central, Country, Tram & Trolleybus depots, 1940-1947

Reference Number	Content
LT000203/264, LT000232/262 & LT000232/275	Papers relating to the Tramway Conversion Scheme and construction of new garages, 1950-1952
LT001195/011	Bus garage buildings including complaints to property caused by construction of New Cross garage and subsidence at Plumstead garage, 1953-1959
LT001336/021	1958 Bus Strike – includes list showing how garages voted
LT001128/009	Catering at garages, 1958-1964
LT000134/008	Modernisation work at various Central Area garages, 1959-1987
LT000131/243	Correspondence, minutes and reports regarding improvements to Staines and various Central Area garages and proposed new garages at Hackney and Thamesmead, 1971-1974
LT000128/144	Extracts of minutes and correspondence with the Greater London Council and Department of Transport including garage strategy and modernisation of numerous garages and closures, 1983-1986
LT0001875/551 & LT000279/010	Asbestos identification and removal at various stations, depots and garages, 1985-91