

FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEMISE OF EXETER'S BUSES

Forty years ago this month Exeter City Council sold its municipally controlled bus services to the National Bus Company. The NBC had been created through an Act of Parliament in 1968, that effectively brought together over fifty bus companies up and down the country previously in the hands of the Tilling and BET groups. Interestingly Luton Corporation, an operation of similar size to Exeter, was sold to NBC two months earlier in February 1970, and the interests of both were then vested with the larger neighbouring NBC subsidiaries.

Here in Exeter the Western National company, now part of NBC, became the new owners of the Exeter fleet of over sixty buses, and its services and staff, and continued to run it from the Heavitree Road depot under the local name of Devon General. Formerly a BET company itself, Devon General had enjoyed a joint running agreement with the City since 1947. Within a short space of time the green and magnolia liveried City buses were repainted into the NBC corporate style, in this case using a much lighter shade of red than the Devon General had used themselves. Within a few years both the Heavitree Road depot and Devon General's Blackboy Road premises closed when a new garage facility was built at Belgrave Road, adjacent to the City's bus and coach station.

It is at the coach station next Saturday (10th April) that visitors can admire a gathering of former Exeter City buses, all in green and ivory livery. They will be on show between 10am and 4pm and will include a Leyland Panther, also forty years old this month, and one of the last delivered new in Exeter's colours. This vehicle is now an exhibition bus for the West Country Historic Omnibus & Transport Trust who are organising the event. More details available at www.buseum.org.uk or 07974-567756.