

Thirty-five years ago trolleys replaced the old trams
NOW IT IS THE TROLLEYS' TURN FOR THE SCRAP HEAP
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PERHAPS the most picturesque part of the trolley bus route is the turntable in Church Street; it's certainly a tourist attraction. It was provided for the trolleys at a cost of £380 — formerly the trams didn't need one, as they were driven from either end. It operates smoothly, for every day conductors and drivers push an eight-ton trolley around on it.

The turntable will be used for diesel buses — they weigh a ton less —until 1970, when the lease of the ground expires. So far, Bournemouth Corporation has found no alternative turning place for afterwards.

Bournemouth has sold the kingdom of the trolleys for a load of trundling diesels.

In February—or as soon as the 17 new diesel buses arrive—the remaining trolley services will be replaced. Only the 20, 21, 22 and 23 routes, from Bournemouth to Southbourne and Christchurch, are now still operated by trolley buses. Since 1963 when Bournemouth Corporation decided to scrap trolleys—a year after it had bought nine brand new ones at a cost of £7,000 each—there has been a gradual changeover.

Next year will see the end of 36 years of trolleys in Bournemouth, for it was in 1933 that Bournemouth Corporation began an experimental route with three borrowed buses. The service was from the Square to Westbourne, a distance of 1.3 miles, and the fare was a penny.

The buses were borrowed from Sunbeam, AEC and Thornycrofts. They proved their worth so well that within a few months the council decided to replace the whole tramway system with trolleys—a decision which no doubt delighted cyclists, who no longer had to worry about how to stay upright every time they crossed the lines.

FOURTEEN years ago Bournemouth's trolley buses ignored a one-way street order at Pit Site, Christchurch; for nine months the trolleys went up 200 yards of one-way street the wrong way.

It was not this venial violalation of the highway code, however, which brought an angry axe across the antennae of Bournemouth's "silent service." It was the mortal offence of cost efficiency that brought doom to electric traction, with its heavy copper wires, its restricted routes, its clumsy crossings and its mess of poleage.

But if they didn't carve up the roads as the trams did, the new, fast trolleys still needed the restricting overhead wires. All the old tram routes were converted within 22 months, and the last of the trams ground off the roads.

The trams had a debt of £311,000 in 1930, but the trolley buses were whistling up a fat profit—and for a faster service, the fares were cheaper. Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole had good reason to be pleased. It was not surprising that Bournemouth cut its original tramways replacement programme from three years to 22 months.

April 8, 1936, was the day of the last tram in Christchurch, and the dawn of the trolley bus service to the borough. The last Bournemouth tram to run in service carried the Mayors of Bournemouth and Christchurch across Tuckton Bridge that afternoon. They left the tram at the bridge and took the first trolley back to Christchurch—halcyon days when Bournemouth and Christchurch were friends!

Passengers on the No. 21 route, however, had a reminder that they were crossing the frontier. At Tuckton Bridge there was a toll, and they had to pay an extra ha'penny. Tolls for bus passengers were abolished in December, 1942.

Tuckton Bridge had been opened in 1905 by the crossing of the first tram from Bournemouth to Christchurch.

End of an option

NOW THE end of the trolley bus service marks the end of an option for Christchurch Council: in 1930 the Bournemouth Corporation Act which gave authority for the running of a trolley bus service allowed Christchurch the option of buying the system in the borough on the last day of 1955, or subsequently at the end of each seven years. It was an option which Christchurch never took up.

In Poole, however, Bournemouth Corporation was meeting opposition. The corporation's lease was due to expire, and it promoted a Bill in Parliament to replace the tram service with trolleys. However, Hants and Dorset Motor Services also promoted a Bill—to run motor buses.

After a long struggle, agreement was reached. Hants and Dorset buses ran in Poole, and the company paid all fares collected for passengers carried in Bournemouth by Hants and Dorset were given to the Corporation. In return, the company received from the Corporation the cost of carrying the passengers.

The main part of the 60 miles of the trolley bus system in Bournemouth and Christchurch was in existence before the war, only minor additions and alterations being made since. Now only 20 miles of overhead wires remain. With small exceptions, the original wire is still being used—the scrap value of the copper will be a bonus to Bournemouth Corporation which will help to counterbalance the enormous loss on the capital value of the remaining trolley

buses. The ones the Corporation bought in 1962 for £7,000 each are not expected to fetch much more than £100 today.

The 1936 total of trolley buses —104—was not bettered for 14 years; in fact the number dropped during the war years when buses were loaned to other towns.

Twelve went to Wolverhampton, 18 went to London, and others went to Llanelli, Newcastle and Walsall. Services in Bournemouth were also drastically curtailed during the war years, last buses being at 9 pm at one stage.

Six months after the end of the war they were back to their former 11.30 pm standard. The following year through services from Westbourne to Christchurch were reintroduced, and a year later the services along Beaufort Road and Cranleigh Road, Southbourne, were started. With the Christchurch - Bournemouth service these are the only ones now operating.

Heyday of the trolleys

THE EARLY 1950s were the heyday of the trolley buses. In the year which ended in March, 1950, the 103 Sunbeam trolleys covered four million miles, carried 44 million passengers and earned a revenue of £340,000. No part of the trolley route had a frequency of less than 15 minutes, and most routes in fact had buses every five minutes.

To replace those trolleys which were in too bad a condition to warrant repair, and to provide for expansion of the system, an order for 24 new vehicles was placed. The first appeared in October, 1950, and when all were delivered the fleet totalled 127.

Wiring was extended to Bournemouth Pier in 1950, and a number of services to this point were started.

The last major extension to the system was made 1951, when the whole length of Castle Lane was given two ranks of poles and overhanging wires. In fact, however, no trolleys ran the whole length of the road. Passengers with that object in mind had to change buses more than once.

In Christchurch in 1954 a one-way street order came into force at Pit Site. Bournemouth Corporation, however, had no authority to run buses along the new road which formed part of the small one-way system, and for nine months until an Act of Parliament was made the trolleys had to continue on their old path—the wrong way along a one-way street—when leaving Bournemouth.

The decline of the trolley buses began in the second half of the 1950's; as the number of bus passengers dropped, so bus services became less economic, and trolley buses even more so.

It was around this time that bus operators in most parts of the country were either changing over to motor buses or planning to do so. But

Bournemouth soldiered on with electric traction. Forty new trolley buses were bought from 1959 to 1961. Total cost was almost £300,000.

In 1962 the trolley fleet totalled 83, and an order for nine new buses were placed. Twenty-two of the vehicles were the pre-war Sunbeams, most of which had covered almost a million miles in 26 to 28 years' service.

But in the following year came the end; Bournemouth Council decided to replace trolleys with diesel buses.

Services were gradually converted until now only the routes to Christchurch and Southbourne remain. There are now only 29 trolley buses—and at the last count 24 were working. Seventeen new diesel buses have been ordered to take the place of the trolleys, and the final changeover will take place when they arrive, probably in February or March next year.

A history of Bournemouth's trolley system was written by Mr. D. L. Chalk, assistant traffic superintendent, in 1962, and published by the Omnibus Society ("Silent Service, the story of Bournemouth's trolley buses").

His last paragraph, written a year before it was decided to scrap the trolleys, makes ironic reading: "... it will be realised that the council and management have given Bournemouth one of the most modern and progressive undertakings in the British Isles. There is no doubt that this town, with its long, wide and straight thoroughfares, is ideal for the operation of trolley buses, and their continued success is ensured for many years to come."