

# Vehicle Profile: 974 AFJ

An initial look at a vehicle in  
the TV&GWOT Collection



974AFJ was first registered and taxed from 1 July 1960 and entered service with Exeter Corporation Transport (ECT) with fleet number 74. It has a Guy Arab IV chassis with a Gardner 6LW engine and a Massey double deck high-bridge 57 seat rear entrance body (H31/26R) and is preserved in ECT's classic mid green and cream livery.

974 AFJ represents an important stage in the history of bus passenger transport in TV&GWOT's area of interest and the consolidation of bus companies prior to and following the formation of the state owned National Bus Company on 1 January 1969. The road transport history which preceded this can be traced back to the earliest days of motorised public road transport when the railway companies, and in particular the Great Western Railway (GWR), developed extensive networks of bus services to extend the reach of the railways into the rural areas surrounding the main areas of population where the main line stations were located.

The first GWR 'road motor' bus service between Helston and The Lizard in Cornwall was inaugurated on 17 August 1903. By the mid-1920s GWR and other railway companies had many hundreds of buses providing integrated bus and train services. In the late 1920s the railway companies decided to develop this approach further by investing in or forming joint ventures with bus companies operating in their areas. In Devon, both the GWR and Southern Railway invested in the Devon General Omnibus & Touring Company (GWR 30%, SR 20%) and both GWR and SR separately formed 50:50 joint ventures with the National Omnibus & Transport Co. (Western National Omnibus Co. and Southern National Omnibus Co. respectively).

## DATA PANEL

**Registration:** 974 AFJ

**Type:** Guy Arab IV

**Built:** 1960

**Engine:** Gardner 6LW

**Body:** Massey H31/26R

**Operator:** Exeter Corporation Transport  
(to DG 4/70; WNOC 1/71)

When the railways were nationalised on 1 January 1948 their shares in the bus companies (generally aggregating to 50%) became state owned. The Tilling Group decided to sell their shareholdings to the state, thus ending their interest in bus operation. However the British Electric Traction Group (BET) decided not to sell but to continue to manage operations of their bus interests with the nationalised railways not exercising a management role.

ECT had a close relationship with the Devon General Omnibus & Touring Co. (DG) who had been operating bus services in the Exeter area in agreement with Exeter Council since 1924. In January 1947, ECT and DG had reached agreement to co-ordinate services within a 10 mile radius of the City Centre.

When the National Bus Company(NBC) was established on 1 January 1969 it took over the assets and operations of the state owned Transport Holding Company (THC). This included former Tilling Group companies, which had been state owned since nationalisation of the railways as described above (e.g. Western & Southern National Omnibus Cos), and BET bus operating companies, including Devon General, for which sale to the THC had been agreed in November 1967 and completed in 1968. Exeter Corporation Transport was loss making and a financial burden on rate payers so the Council offered it for sale to NBC in early 1969. Terms were agreed and ECT was absorbed by local NBC subsidiary, Devon General. All DG bus operations, routes and 370 vehicles (including 74 which was renumbered 274 by DG) were transferred into Western National Omnibus Co. (WNOC) in January 1971.

274 continued in service until June 1972 when it was disposed of to dealers W. Norths in October 1972. It was acquired immediately from Norths by the West of England Transport Collection (WETC) at Winkleigh without heading north. After 9½ years, 274 went on loan to a group in Kingsbridge who had it for four years and then after two more years it was acquired (in May 1997) from WETC by Steve and Chris Blood who cared for and rallied it for 25 years. 274, together with a quantity of spares, joined the Trust's collection in June 2022.



*Taken on 16 January 1962, this photograph shows 274 in the old tram depot in Exeter in the latter days of service with WNOC. Companions are Bristol LS 1769 (RTT988) and RE 1450 (LDV468F). [Colin Billington Collection (taken by the late D Habgood)]*