

LAST YEARS OF THE LONDON METROBUS



MATTHEW WHARMBY

LAST YEARS OF THE
LONDON
METROBUS

First published in Great Britain in 2019 by
Pen and Sword Transport
An imprint of
Pen & Sword Books Ltd
Yorkshire - Philadelphia

Copyright © Matthew Wharmby, 2019

ISBN 978 1 52674 967 3

The right of Matthew Wharmby to be identified as Author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission from the Publisher in writing.

Typeset by Matthew Wharmby

Printed and bound in India By Replika Press Pvt. Ltd.

Pen & Sword Books Ltd incorporates the Imprints of Pen & Sword Books Archaeology, Atlas, Aviation, Battleground, Discovery, Family History, History, Maritime, Military, Naval, Politics, Railways, Select, Transport, True Crime, Fiction, Frontline Books, Leo Cooper, Praetorian Press, Seaforth Publishing, Wharncliffe and White Owl.

For a complete list of Pen & Sword titles please contact

PEN & SWORD BOOKS LIMITED
47 Church Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, S70 2AS, England
E-mail: enquiries@pen-and-sword.co.uk
Website: www.pen-and-sword.co.uk

or

PEN AND SWORD BOOKS
1950 Lawrence Rd, Havertown, PA 19083, USA
E-mail: Uspen-and-sword@casematepublishers.com
Website: www.penandwordbooks.com

LAST YEARS OF THE LONDON METROBUS




PEN & SWORD
TRANSPORT
AN IMPRINT OF PEN & SWORD BOOKS LTD.
YORKSHIRE - PHILADELPHIA

MATTHEW WHARMBY

CONTENTS

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Introduction | 5 |
|--------------------|---|

PART ONE: EX-LBL AND MAJOR LBSL/TfL CONTRACTORS

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. London General | 6 |
| 2. Arriva London South | 30 |
| 3. Arriva London North and Leaside Travel | 46 |
| 4. First Centrewest (Challenger, Gold Arrow, Uxbridge Buses) | 72 |
| 5. Capital Citybus / First Capital | 82 |
| 6. London United | 100 |
| 7. Metroline | 120 |
| 8. MTL London / Metroline London Northern | 142 |

PART TWO: SMALLER LBSL/TfL CONTRACTORS

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 9. Blue Triangle | 160 |
| 10. London Traveller / Metropolitan Omnibus | 164 |
| 11. Limebourne | 166 |

PART THREE: SHORT-TERM OR SUB-CONTRACTED OPERATORS

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 12. London Coaches (Arriva presenting London) | 168 |
| 13. Miscellaneous (Driver Express, White Rose, Nostalgiabus, Redroute Buses, Amber-Lee, Regal Busways, East Thames Buses, Mitcham Belle, Connex Bus) | 170 |

PART FOUR: OTHER METROBUS OPERATORS

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 14. Arriva Southern Counties (Croydon & North Surrey, Guildford & West Surrey, East Herts & Essex, Colchester) | 174 |
| 15. Miscellaneous (Rail Replacements, etc) (Trustline, Decker Bus, Imperial, Carousel, Trimmer Travel, Anglia, Metrobus, Town & Country, Wiltax, Sullivan Buses, S&M, Alec Head, Atbus, Country Bus, Southdown PSV, Ensignbus) | 178 |
| 16. Tours (London Coaches, London Pride) | 184 |

PART FIVE: AFTERWARDS

| | |
|---------------------|-----|
| 17. Preserved | 188 |
| Bibliography | 192 |

Front cover: Arriva London North M 716 (KYV 716X) at Camden Town on 14 October 1999.

Back cover, top: First Capital 304 (BYX 284V) at Northumberland Park on 22 April 1998.

Back cover, middle: London United M 687 (KYV 687X) at Kingston on 1 July 2002.

Back cover, bottom: Metroline M 326 (EYE 326V) at Golders Green on 9 August 1999.

Title page: Metroline London Northern M 106 (BYX 106V) at Golders Green on 30 August 1998.

INTRODUCTION

This book pays tribute to the stalwart M class of MCW Metrobus bought in large numbers by London Transport between 1978 and 1986. In concert with its Leyland Titan sibling, the M class saw off the standard DMS and then began to make inroads into the Routemaster fleet before the arena changed forever with the onset of tendering. With few double-deckers bought new and minibuses gaining prominence, the Metrobuses found their lifespan greatly extended and even by the end of 1994, when all the London Buses Ltd subsidiaries had been privatised, almost all of those bought new were still in service.

The eight Metrobus-operating successors to LBL only began withdrawing their Ms by the very end of the 1990s, when low-floor double-deckers gained a serious foothold in London and the price of purchasing them thus came down. This is where this book begins, as not only are the declining ex-LBL Metrobus fleets explored, but second careers, as examples were bought by fellow LBSL contractors as short- or long-term devices with which to place tendering bids. Ms also filled the ranks of smaller bus companies, operating either on LBSL contracts or emergency augmentations to the same, as well as their own commercial and rail-replacement arms. Finally there were London tour operators who made use of the large number of Metrobuses available and had them converted to open-top configuration.

Personally, I was enormously fond of these buses; the best modern vehicles you could buy, they were successful because of their lack of pretences and glamour. Because they were cheap, versatile and numerous, they could weather the unique punishment of pounding London streets 20 hours a day at a lower cost and for a longer life than anything available subsequently. I even got to drive one, just the once!

Matthew Wharmby

Walton-on-Thames

June 2018



Used to their own large fleet of indigenous mark 2s bought new and second-hand examples taken from South Yorkshire PTE, Capital Citybus, later First Capital and born as Ensignbus, took a strong liking to the LT-spec Metrobus once it started coming out of service. When the 76 and 259 were taken over on 28 February 1998, they acquired two dozen Metrobuses from London General prior to the delivery of the intended Dennis Arrows. After that they were put onto the W8, which was taken over on 25 July 1998. On that day at Edmonton we see 318 (KYV 668X) passing 319 (KYV 769X) and squeezing by one of the aforementioned Arrows. These were former Ms 668 and 769.

LONDON GENERAL

London General came away from privatisation with 296 Metrobuses, second only to Leaside's 334. On 30 November 1998 two of them are seen at Clapham Junction, exemplifying the two main garages to operate the type; at left is Merton's **M 1211** (B211 WUL), based since the end of 1990, and it's passing **M 806** (OJD 806Y), which had been at Stockwell for only nine months but distinguished itself through a London General-style radiator grille and half an upper-deck front window replacement.



Stockwell also ran the 49, or at least the northern half of the route before it was hacked in three upon the implementation of the Wandsworth Area changes on 25 May 1991. The grille on **M 1224** (B224 WUL), seen in the Kings Road on 31 August 1998, is distinctly more home-made than usual, and the numberplate has been refreshed with unfamiliar transfers, but this M still has four years in it. It had come to Stockwell after being outstationed at Battersea Bridge when the 49 was run from that location.





The 88 had been converted during 1992 from RML to RM and then to crew M prior to its OPO conversion on 15 August 1992, but less than a year later it received Volvo B10Bs classified VN. These single-deckers proved too long for the route, however, so they were transferred within Go-Ahead to Oxford and Ms returned on 29 March 1997. Seen at the route's Oxford Circus stand on 6 May 1998 is **M 1304** (304 CLT, ex-B304 WUL), fresh into Stockwell but still carrying Putney codes from its decade and a half at that garage.



Although cut back to Putney with the Wandsworth scheme, the 37 remained the major partner in the resulting trio, remaining operated by Stockwell but with Ms replacing its DMSs of four years' standing. Serving Clapham Junction on 30 November 1998 is **M 1264** (B264 WUL), another recent incomer into Stockwell but in this case from Sutton after eight years.



Route 219 commenced on 21 November 1988 as a way of converting the outer ends of the 19 and 88 to OPO, but dwindled in priority and on 30 June 1996 gave its Ms up to the 155 in a straight swap for that busy route's Darts. Even so, Ms remained available to turn out at Merton, and seen on stand at Tooting Broadway on 27 June 1998 is **M 1196** (B196 WUL).

Installation of the London General grille didn't always mean accompanying it with a new reflective numberplate; the old ones looked better, and that on Merton's **M 318** (EYE 318V) definitely does. On 27 June 1998 it is serving Tooting Broadway, almost at the finish of its run from Vauxhall. Merton was its final posting, ending in January 1999.



The situation whereby only Merton had the spare capacity to run the 22 on Sundays persisted for two and a half decades; on 31 August 1998 (the Bank Holiday Monday), **M 256** (BYX 256V) serves the Kings Road. It had come to Merton in January 1991 and would last until August 2000, when the first of the PVLs arrived.



Merton's **M 670** (KYV 670X), is pretty much 'as is' when sighted at Morden on 27 June 1998, taking the place of an LDP-class Dart SLF on the 163. Other than the white numberplate, red entrance doors and running-number cluster moved forward, it could be an LBL bus, and was until the autumn of 1994. It is still carrying Sutton codes, however. It would last until September 2000.





On 25 July 1998 Stockwell's **M 816** (OJD 816Y) is in Peckham at the beginning of the 37. It had left Sutton in November 1996 upon the receipt of the garage's first NVs; after a year at the 49's Battersea Bridge outstation it was put permanently into Stockwell and would finish its career there.



On 15 August 1998 **M 318** (EYE 318V) is seen leaving Waterloo, the 77's central London terminus since the Wandsworth Area Network changes of 25 May 1991.



Introduced on 25 May 1991, the 270 was the bridge between two routes considered to be too long under the traffic conditions of the time, the 220 from the north and 280 from the south. Operated with Merton Ms from the start, it is seen on 27 June 1998 in the hands of **M 412** (GYE 412W) serving Tooting Broadway. This bus had worked briefly from Merton in 1992, but came here permanently in November 1997 after displacement from Sutton by a new NV.

How splendid this livery would have looked on all London General buses, but four examples carrying it was generous enough and **OM 171** (VLT 71, ex-BYX 171V), reclassified to denote its open-top status, is seen at Victoria on 20 June 1998, operating the Greenwich Clipper service.



Uniquely among the remaining crew routes at the time this book's account opens, the 11 was OPO on Saturdays as well as Sundays, this change having happened on 9 April 1994 so that Waterloo, the operating garage after Victoria closed, could close all weekend and not wind up locals with vehicle noise and fumes. On 20 June 1998 Stockwell's **M 514** (GYE 514W) calls at Victoria. Based at Stockwell since May 1991, this bus would finish in June 2000.



Merton's **M 900** (A900 SUL) comes through Tooting Bec on 27 June 1998; after three years of desperately inappropriate DWs and DRs, Metrobuses returned on 30 June 1996, lasting until a second single-deck conversion of the route on 29 May 1999. M 900 itself finished in August 2000.





Upon the Wandsworth changes of 25 May 1991, the 170 had suffered the ignominious fate of being hacked down to a Roehampton-Clapham Junction shuttle and converted from M to DR operation. However, later in the decade it was moved from garage to garage wherever staff availability was most pressing, and on 13 September 1997 it landed at distant Merton. On 6 March 1999 that garage has seen fit to put out **M 1223** (B223 WUL), which is seen at Clapham Junction carrying a lazy blind.



For the duration of the reconstruction of the Northern Line's Bank branch, the 133 was extended beyond Moorgate to Euston. Seen there on 3 July 1999 are two Stockwell Metrobuses, **M 816** (OJD 816Y) and **M 475** (GYE 475W). Ironically, the older Metrobus would survive longest, beating the 1983 model by two years.



Sunday 25 April 1999 sees Merton's **M 1230** (B230 WUL) passing through Hyde Park Corner on the 22. Higher-numbered than most Metrobuses operated by Merton, this had found its way there via the Colliers Wood operation on the 200, which had specified newer Ms by contract. After displacement from Merton by a PVL it served at Stockwell and finally at Sutton, finishing in April 2002.

The 344 of 25 May 1991 creation fused the 170's central end with the 44's roads beyond Vauxhall to London Bridge, leaving the corridor to Aldwych under the 77A alone. Originally operated by Victoria, it was reallocated to Stockwell when that garage closed, but on 29 May 1999 Limebourne took over with new Caetano-bodied Dart SLFs. On the 21st at Clapham Junction **M 1224** (B224 WUL) is seeing out Stockwell operation.



Arriva Croydon & North Surrey (previously Londonlinks) came off the 127 on 1 August 1998 after staff shortages, and London General took it over with five Sutton Ms plus five Stagecoach Selkent (Plumstead) DALs on a sub-contract. On 23 January 1999 the latter had to pull out to furnish their own large acquisitions locally, and Blue Triangle stepped up. On that afternoon we see Sutton's **M 1311** (C311 BUV) at the first southbound stop at Tooting Broadway.



Most of Stockwell's Ms were V- or W-registered, with a smattering of newer examples like **M 1235** (B235 WUL), seen at Charing Cross on 29 April 1999. This had come to Stockwell in March 1997 after six and a half years at Sutton, and finished in April 2002. In this picture there's no bar over the grille but the yellow band has been painted on anyway, and there are mismatched wings even if the foglights they used to contain have gone.





London General cut the odd corner by never ordering quite enough new buses for a complete conversion, topping it up with stragglers from the previous allocation. Thus did Ms remain at Sutton long after NVs were meant to have taken over the 93; on 29 May 1999 at Morden we see **M 361** (GYE 361W). It would linger until November 2000.



The development of the low-floor bus by the second half of the 1990s was only at the single-deck stage, obliging the planners to specify them for conversions regardless of how unsuitable they were in terms of seated capacity. One such route was the 49, seen on 21 May in the hands of Stockwell's **M 307** (BYX 307V) at Clapham Junction, but from the 29th transferred to Armchair with new Dennis Dart SLFs. M 307 remained at Stockwell until August 2000.



Also photographed on 21 May 1999 is another Stockwell Metrobus, **M 292** (BYX 292V) at Bank. It and the partner just visible behind it are taking the place of two of the 133's proper VCs. The Volvo Citybuses would last three more years longer on the 133, but when it came time for their disposal, what should replace them but trusty Metrobuses.

The big order for PVLs arriving in 2000 covered Merton's routes 44, 77 and 270, with the 280 waiting a little later under its own contract. That made it incumbent upon photographers to get the Metrobuses before they started disappearing, and at Tooting Broadway on 21 May 1999 we see **M 589** (GYE 589W) ahead of **M 226** (BYX 226V). The latter had been one of the first two Metrobuses into Merton, and both had left London General fleet strength by September 2000.



Transferred to Merton garage in November 1990, **M 392** (GYE 392W) is setting off from Putney Bridge on 12 October 1999. It was withdrawn the following August upon the entry into service of the first wave of PVLs.





M 725 (KYV 725X) left Sutton in July 1997 and came to Stockwell, who was still operating it on 21 May 1999 in this Clapham Junction shot. It was withdrawn in August 2000.



At Tooting Broadway on 21 May 1999, two 44s have closed up to one another sufficient to oblige the controllers to turn the leader short. That one is **M 814** (OJD 814Y), until February 1998 a Putney bus, and behind it is **M 908** (A908 SUL), which had come from Harrow Weald in October 1991 as a DMS replacement. M 814 was withdrawn in September 2000 but M 908 lingered until December 2001.



Anyone forced to face rush-hour traffic along the Clapham Road in the modern era wouldn't have begrudged too much the inevitable shortening of the 155, which on 29 May 1999 was curtailed at Tooting, turning the roads beyond to Wimbledon over to the 219. It was at that point that the mistake of converting the 155 to single-deck was made for a second time, and the low-floor LDPs fared no better than the DRs and DWs of 1992-1996. It was also transferred to Stockwell, making **M 1301** (B301 WUL), seen on 15 April 2000 at Tooting Broadway, a visitor, and to make that possible has had to wind up an N155 panel no longer needed by that garage and obliterate the redundant via points. Ignore the ultimate; it's been a long, long time since the 155 went anywhere near central London!



The last summer of overall Metrobus operation on the 44 sees Merton's **M 690** (KYV 690X) in a sunny Wandsworth on 22 July 2000. It was sold the following month.



The PVLs into Stockwell during the summer of 2000 comprised the allocations for routes 37 and 77A. **M 822** (OJD 822Y), seen at Charing Cross on 27 August, fell victim to the new Volvos and was sold in October.



This 17 June 2000 shot of Merton's **M 1433** (C433 BUV) passing through the leafier bit of Mitcham, captures this bus in the middle of what was only a four-month spell at Merton; it returned to Putney in August and it took an accident on 27 October to remove it from fleet strength.

On 29 May 1999 Merton's **M 953** (A953 SUL) heads south through Clapham Junction. It wasn't quite finished when PVLs came to Merton, however, as it moved to Stockwell for training work and was subsequently returned to service. A busy period followed, during which it was loaned to Nostalgiabus, Metrobus and Blue Triangle and even served at Merton again. Withdrawal finally came in February 2003, by which time the Metrobus was very nearly done altogether at London General.



On 10 August 2000 a rail replacement over the Victoria-Brixton end of the Victoria Line has brought **M 1436** (VLT 136, ex-C436 BUV) into action, where it is seen at Stockwell. Despite the Putney codes, it had not been based there for over two years, serving mostly as a trainer at Stockwell.



Prior to the construction of the bus station adjacent to the railway hub, Vauxhall was a windswept and unattractive place geared solely to speeding cars on their way to and from central London. After the Wandsworth changes of 25 May 1991 it became the terminus of the 44, and on 17 March 2000 Merton's **M 411** (GYE 411W) is about to turn around and head back in the Tooting direction. It was withdrawn in June and sold to PVS for scrap.



On the same day at the same spot we see **M 226** (BYX 226V), though it has a little further into town to go yet, to the 77's Waterloo terminus also instituted on 25 May 1991. This had been the first Metrobus into Merton, in December 1989, and after remaining there ever since, would be withdrawn in August 2000.





For some time a Sutton route, the 280 had found itself separated when reallocated to Merton and thus sidestepped the Suttonbus unit into which it would have fitted pretty well. It received Ms with fellow Merton DMS services in 1990-91 and on 15 April 2000 at Tooting Broadway we see **M 274** (BYX 274V). It was a latecomer to Merton, arriving only in May 1998 after a period on loan to Capital Citybus, but was withdrawn in August 2000.



Unaltered since its 25 May introduction other than the rerouting of its northernmost leg via Putney Bridge Road rather than Putney High Street, the 270 on 15 April 2000 is seen in the hands of Merton's **M 354** (GYE 354W) at Wandsworth. This bus had come to Merton from Norbiton and stayed put for the rest of its life, coming off finally in August 2000.



Another latecomer to Merton, **M 433** (GYE 433W) started working from there in March 1997 and is seen on 2 June 2000 at Mitcham tramstop, which had just started operating passenger-carrying services. This was another one of the large number of Merton Ms to be withdrawn in August.