

GWR OMNIBUS SERVICES AND GARAGE AT STROUD

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1 Introduction

The Great Western Railway was one of the first of the railway companies to operate bus services. GWR buses were used in the Stroud area between 1905 and 1929. The company built the black corrugated iron former bus garage [SO 84930509] lying between Stroud Railway Station and the Hill Paul Building at Cheapside. The photograph accompanying this article shows the garage as seen from the north west in about 1908 when it was new. The structure is little changed today.

The GWR built a number of these garages at different locations but only a very few have survived. Thus the GWR bus garage at Stroud is a rare monument to the once significant involvement of the railways in road passenger transport.

The first GWR bus service was introduced on 17 August 1903 in Cornwall between Helston and Lizard. In time, services were operated in many parts of the GWR's territory. There were a number of reasons why a railway company might introduce a bus service. Firstly, it was a cheap option for meeting local demand for a railway whilst at the same time exploring the potential market if a railway was to be ultimately built. Secondly, the buses could of course act as 'feeders' to existing railway stations. Finally, buses were sometimes used to supplement rail services as happened in the Stroud Valleys in 1905.

The first part of this note outlines the history of the GWR services in the Stroud area. It is largely based on material in John Cumming's excellent account of railway bus services nationwide (1). Fortunately the omnibuses caused such a lot of excitement at the time that a number of contemporary photographs survive. The second part describes the former bus garage at Stroud Station and discusses its future.

2 GWR Omnibus Services in the Stroud Area

On 9 January 1905 a road motor service was inaugurated by the Great Western Railway from Stroud Station to the Falcon Hotel at Painswick. A picture postcard exists which shows a GWR bus outside Painswick Churchyard. Remarkably, the postmark is 17 January 1905 which is just 11 days after the official opening.

The service was a success, and on 1 March 1905 it was extended from Stroud to Cainscross. A supplementary road service was started on the same date as far as Chalford to assist the rail cars which were working to capacity.

On 4 October 1906 the GWR bus service reached Cheltenham. Initially there were separate services Stroud - Painswick and Painswick - Cheltenham. However before the end of the year through running was advertised.

On 9 July 1921 the GWR withdrew their Stroud service from Cheltenham and only ran as far as Painswick. However, in 1926 Stroud was one of two starting points for six day 'Land Cruises' using charabancs built by Maudsley. The six day tour was Stroud, Forest of Dean, Wye Valley, Malvern Hills, Shakespeare Country to Oxford. The cruises proved very popular and were re-introduced in following summers.

Two short routes were started at Stroud, to Rodborough on 30 May 1926 and to Kingscourt on 26 July of the same year. In that summer the service to Painswick was extended through to Cranham for Sundays only.

At different times the company used vehicles built by Milnes-Daimler, Maudsley, AEC and Burfords. Experiments were performed at a number of depots including Stroud into the use of coal gas as fuel. The gas was carried in a large bag located on the roof of the bus.

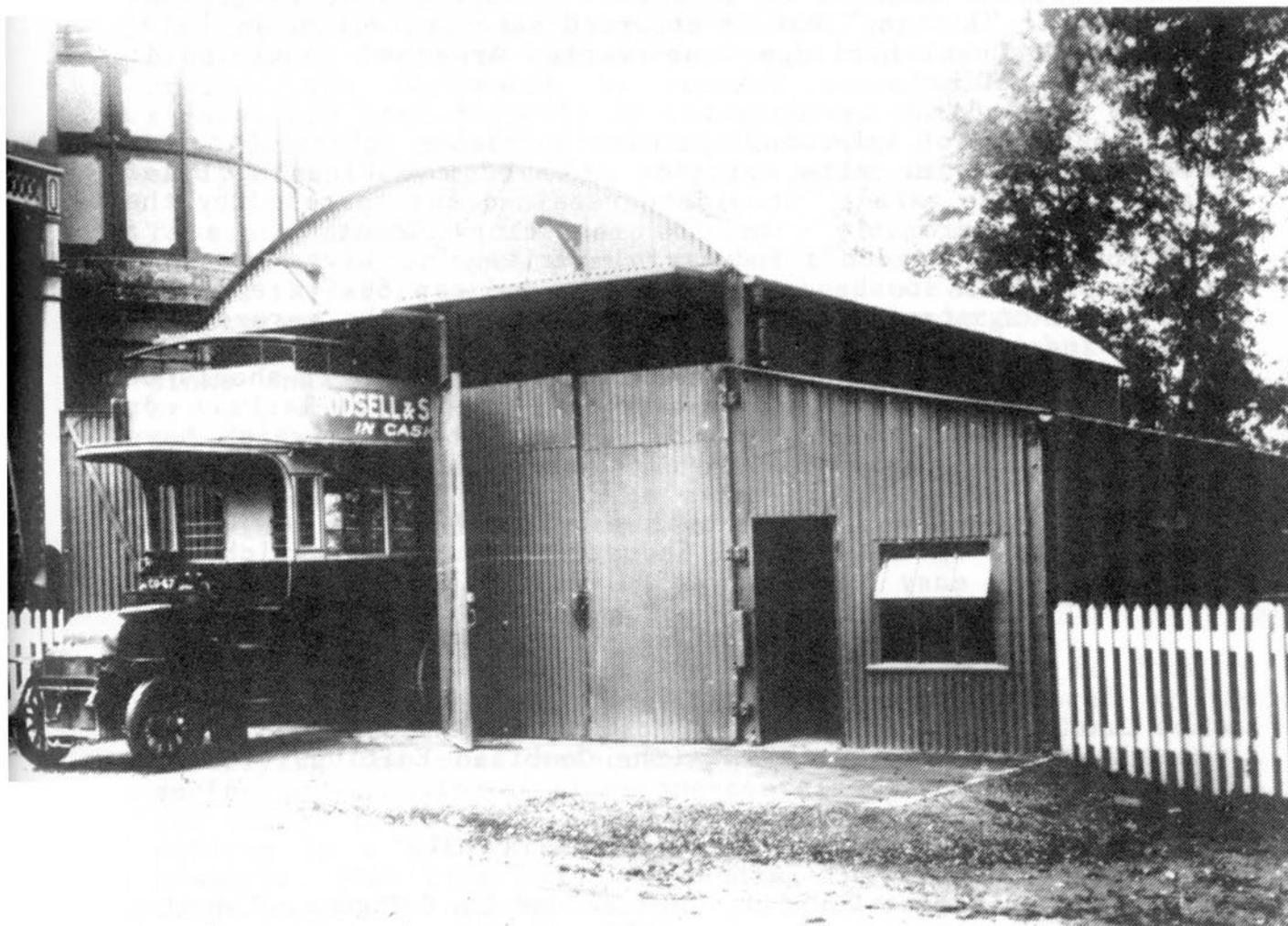
On 31 August 1929 the Western National Company took over a number of GWR services complete with vehicles. These included the routes from Stroud to Painswick, Rodborough and Kingscourt. Thus ended nearly 25 years of GWR involvement in local bus services in the Stroud area.

3 GWR Omnibus Garage at Stroud Station

As early as 12 April 1905 the GWR Traffic Committee had agreed £244 for the building of a garage at Stroud (2) but as the buses used either the yard at the Falcon Hotel at Painswick or in the open at the station yard at Stroud for some time after, presumably nothing was built. However, the Traffic Committee Minutes of 8 April 1908 again agreed the building of a garage at Stroud, this time for £266 so the garage dates from 1908 onwards (2). The vehicle in the photograph, Car 14, arrived at Stroud from Wrexham during 1908 and stayed there for some time, so it is not possible to date the building any more accurately. The bus carries an advertisement for Godsell and Sons who at that time occupied the Severn Springs Brewery on the Painswick Road out of Stroud.

The garage consists of a steel frame clad with corrugated iron panels. The main part of the building could house two vehicles side by side and is 5.3m wide by 8m long. The maximum height of the curved roof is about 5.8m. There are two pairs of double doors at the front and above each pair of doors is a flap. This could be raised to allow clearance for double decker

vehicles as shown here. The brackets and pulley systems to raise the flaps are still in place. The building is lit by a pair of windows in the east wall and a pair in the rear wall. A low lean-to extension runs along the western side of the main garage. This is about 3.3m wide and 12.5m long and thus projects beyond the rear of the garage. It is presumed that this would have been a workshop. The buildings appear to be currently used by British Rail for storage purposes.



The GWR Bus Garage at Stroud.

The area in front of the garage is paved with stone sets and contains a square, shallow depression with a metal grille at the centre. It is likely that this facility was provided so that waste water would be rapidly drained away when the vehicles were being washed.

4 Concluding Remarks

The Stroud Station bus garage structure is a rare survivor of a type of building that was once used extensively by the Great Western Railway. There has been some discussion recently of possible re-development of the area which includes the garage. However, the structure lies in the Stroud Industrial Heritage Conservation Area and has been noted in the Planning and Development Brief for the Wallbridge Lock area prepared by Stroud District Council in 1990 (3). The building may not be suitable for "listing" but is afforded some protection by being in the Industrial Heritage Conservation Area and mentioned in the Planning Brief.

In the event of planning permission being given for re-development of the site, Section 6(k) of the Planning Brief states that the garage "should be retained and restored by the Developer, preferably in its existing location, as a contribution to Stroud's Industrial Heritage". Given that the building appears to be in good repair and can fulfil a useful role (that of storage) it is to be hoped that the garage will remain in-situ for many years to come. However, if it is ultimately necessary to be remove the garage, then it should be offered to a group like the Forest of Dean Railway or Gloucestershire and Warwickshire Railway, both of which have strong GWR links.

Whatever happens, we should retain by some means, one of the last examples of a class of industrial buildings which were both cheap and easy to erect yet fulfilled their job well.

References

- (1) Cummings J., 1982, Railway Motor Buses and Bus Services in the British Isles 1902-1933, (The Combined Edition), Oxford Publishing Company.
- (2) Cummings J., Private Communication (1991)
- (3) Stroud District Council, Wallbridge Lock Stroud, Planning and Development Brief, October 1990.

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