A Local Bus Ticket from the early days of the 'Midland Red'

This bus ticket has been out of sight for possibly 100 years! Only coming to light recently, it was found in the middle of a book given as a Sunday School prize to a young girl who travelled on the Sutton/Birmingham City Centre Bus Route in the 1920/30s. Was it hers, or did she chance to pick it up? We shall never know, but it does invite a few questions which we hope to answer here!
Our thanks go to Victor and Rosemary Parslow, who have let us 'borrow' it!

What of its History?

Having posed the question, we have received a couple of suggestions as follows:-

1 The ticket is an Exchange ticket, which means it was handed to a passenger when the passenger gave the conductor a return ticket, presumably to avoid any risk that the return might be used again. The view is that it almost certainly dates from the 1920s, though similar tickets did continue into the 1930s; the Typhoo advert also looks very 1920s. With all ‘punch’ tickets, the conductors’ punch machines were emptied every night and all the little paper discs were kept and audited; with normal tickets, the colour distinguished the fare paid, but with these, covering a range of fares, the little letters were used to identify what fare it had been used for. *(Taken from a Midland Red enthusiast Facebook page)*

2. Roy Billingham, who submitted an article entitled *'Midland Red' Omnibuses in the Borough*, in *Proceedings, Volume 10* on this website *(www.sclhrg.org.uk),* is of the opinion that this ticket may be older than the 1920/30s and is likely to date from 1912 onwards. He goes on to say that it is definitely a 'Midland Red' ticket manufactured by The Bell Punch Company of London. It is an Exchange ticket, being buff with a black ‘X’ overprint. 5d each way would indicate a long journey.

However, in order to reduce the large number of ticket types, it was decided that from December 1924 the value of "Exchange" tickets be grouped together onto three buff-coloured tickets, overprinted '**Ex**', in blue, green and red. Here is an example of a red one.

Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that the previous ticket was issued sometime between 1912 and 1924.

18C9064

The Birmingham & Midland
Motor Omnibus Co., Ltd.

3/7
3/8
3/9
3/10
3/11
4/-
4/1
4/2
4/3
4/4

EXCHANGE
FOR RETURN
TICKET ONLY

Available for Single Journey only on the Bus on which issued. This Ticket must be punched in the same denomination as the Return Ticket

4/5
4/6
4/7
4/8
4/9
4/10
4/11
5/-
5/3
5/6

Ex

Bell Punch Co., Uxbridge. 12-24

'Midland Red' Exchange bus ticket introduced from December 1924.

(Ticket courtesy of Roy Billingham)

Did you know?

Details of the early years of the bus service between Birmingham and Sutton and its environs are easily obtained elsewhere, but there are some interesting events of those times that can only be discovered by looking at the **Borough of Sutton Coldfield Fire Brigade & Hackney Carriage Committee Minutes, 1914-1927**, which are kept in the archives of Sutton Coldfield Library.

One of the matters reported on by this Committee was the licensing of drivers of the motor buses. It is interesting to note that, during WWI, ladies were commonly used to drive the buses due to the shortage of men at the war front. Here are some other matters that were discussed at their meetings:-

Nov	1914	Buses should have numbers for identification purposes.
Dec	1914	Highways Committee to be asked for permission to erect "bus stops"
Apl	1915	Badges for drivers and conductors
Jul	1915	Application by Walsall Corporation to run buses to Sutton Coldfield
Oct	1915	Motor Buses not to exceed 8 miles an hour between Manor Road & Tamworth Road and not more than 12 miles per hour in any other part of the borough

Jan	1917	An increase of fares:	
		Birmingham to Sutton	7p
		Birmingham to Four Oaks	8p
Apr	1917	Birmingham to Mere Green	9p
Oct	1918	Clerk to write to Motor Omnibus Co. to provide better service between Sutton and Birmingham	
Feb	1919	Application from Birmingham & Midland Motor Omnibus Company to run a service between Tamworth & Sutton Coldfield and reinstate between Mere Green & Lichfield *(granted).*	
		Route to Tamworth be via Mill Street, Coleshill Street, Rectory Road & Whitehouse Common.	
Sept	1919	Insufficiency of service between Mere Green & Sutton Coldfield, none to Whitehouse Common, brought to the notice of Motor Omnibus Co	
May	1920	Resolution to meet re Midland Motor Bus Co regarding, inter alia, Walmley & Oscott Routes	
June	1920	Walsall Corporation intended running buses to Sutton	
		That the Clerk suggest to the Motor Bus Company that Walmley Bus runs through Sutton to Walmley	
July	1920	Approval for buses to Lichfield on Sunday mornings	
Nov	1920	Next Spring - a special service between Tamworth & Sutton Coldfield	

May	1921	There was a shortage of trains, therefore the Birmingham & Midland Motor Bus Co was asked to augment their services
May	1921	A Letter from the BMMBC said that they had provided the extra buses during the curtailed railway service
Dec	1922	A Police letter to the Hackney Carriage Committee had been received regarding the Motor Buses - a Stand was to be erected outside the Dog Inn/Baptist Chapel
Jan	1923	A letter was read from the Midland Motor Omnibus Co agreeing to run additional buses to Walmley on Saturdays
Jan	1924	Birmingham & Midland Motor Bus Co agreed to issue Return Tickets on Sundays. As a result there was bus congestion on the Parade
Sept	1924	The Bus Company be informed that the speed of the motor buses was excessive, the overcrowding was excessive and the Police's attention should be called to it.
		The Bus Company be asked to run a bus in and out of Walmley about 3.30 in the afternoon.
		The Chairman reported that, in fact, the Walmley service was withdrawn on Monday, Tuesday and Wedesday during the Bank Holiday week.
		That the Company be asked to run a normal service on all days to Walmley.

And Did You Know?

There was a famous event that caused mayhem for the travelling public in Birmingham in 1926. This was The General Strike which took place between the 4th and 12th May.

There were no buses, trolley buses, trams or trains. The newspapers had failed to warn the travelling public of the imminent strike. Therefore this became the day of the "Great Trek", as there was no alternative but to walk to wherever you were going.

The **Midland Red Omnibus Company** services were stopped completely and, if they did manage to get buses out of the garage, the strikers removed the valves from the tyres and the drivers were forced to leave their vehicles.

In Sutton, as a precautionary measure in order to save fuel, lights were temporarily dimmed, although street lighting was not affected in Birmingham. Life, generally, was not affected. The Post continued; offices, shops, schools and libraries opened normally. Cinemas were busier than ever. Food was allowed through picket lines and quite a common sight was "Food Only" chalked on the sides of lorries. However, one inconvenience was the short supply of coal for domestic use, which was rationed.

(Taken from 'The Nine Days in Birmingham: The General Strike 4-12 May 1926,'
Published by Birmingham Public Libraries, Social Sciences Dept - 1976)

Janet Jordan, June 2020

An early 'Midland Red' bus

(Illustrated by G.S. Cooper, Transport Artist)

Tilling Stevens TS3, 1919 Brush 29 seater body, at Salford Bridge Birmingham prior to widening in 1922 (old postcard)