

LONDON TRANSPORT ROUTE 408



A route re-creation to mark 50 years since RT4779 was delivered newly-overhauled to Leatherhead garage on 29 Nov 1963.

A brief history of the 408

The 406 and 408 (the '6 road' and the '8 road') were Leatherhead Garage's senior routes. The 406 started operation (unnumbered) between Redhill and Epsom in June 1920, operated by the East Surrey Traction Co under an agreement with the London General Omnibus Co. In November 1921 (92 years ago now), the route was numbered S6 and an offshoot, numbered S6B, started operating from Epsom to Guildford. In 1922 that route was extended to run from Sutton to Guildford and then renumbered S8; the S6 was extended to Kingston. The following year the S8 was extended to run from Guildford to West Croydon.

In 1924, the Bassom numbering system was introduced for routes entering the Metropolitan Police area, requiring a renumbering into the 400-series for the southern 'country area'. The S6 became 406 and the S8 became 408.

The 408 ran hourly and needed eight K-type buses, which were supplied by the General and had replaced B-types in 1923. They were stabled at the yard of the Swan Inn in Leatherhead, one being swapped each day for another from Reigate Garage, running via the S6. Early in 1925, the new Leatherhead Garage opened, providing greatly increased capacity for the rapid increase in bus services in the Leatherhead and Epsom area. Chelsham Garage (south-east of Croydon) opened in the same year, looking after the 403 route that operated from Croydon to Westerham, Sevenoaks and Tonbridge, the two routes meeting at West Croydon.

The K-types were replaced by NSs in 1925, then by STs in 1930 with these in turn being replaced by STLs in

1936. Meanwhile, the East Surrey company had been wholly acquired by the LGOC in 1929 and was renamed London General Country Services in 1932. The whole group was absorbed into the LPTB in 1933 and LGCS became the Country Area of London Transport.

The Guildford to Croydon 408 was extended to Warlingham, also served by the 403, and the 403 was extended over varying parts of the 408, from March 1937. But the 408 routing in 1937 differed from the 403 by using South Park Hill Road instead of serving the Swan & Sugar Loaf in South Croydon. With the introduction of the 470 (from Dorking to Leatherhead, then via 408 to Croydon and Warlingham) in October 1938, the 408 was shortened again to run only to West Croydon; in March 1939, the 470 was re-routed south of Croydon to follow the 403. In May 1940, the 408 was re-extended to Warlingham (along the 470) and the familiar post-war pattern of 408 and 470 from Warlingham to Guildford and Dorking respectively was established.

Early in the war, the original front-entrance STLs were replaced by newer roofbox buses from the Central Area; these fine buses were repainted green over the following eight years and continued to operate the 408 and 470 until new RTs 3152 to 3183 were delivered to Leatherhead, Guildford and Chelsham in May-June 1950.

From the start of the winter timetables in 1963, just before RT4779 arrived at Leatherhead, the 408 and 470 became jointly scheduled, up to that point having had separate bus and crew duties. RTs continued to operate the 408 and 470 until replaced by modern buses in June 1972.

RT4779

One of the final batch of Country Area RTs built in 1954, RT4779 (OLD566) was one of the buses surplus to requirements and was placed into storage in Loughton Garage. The bus was delivered with Weymann body number 9021, built at Addlestone, Surrey, mounted on the chassis later numbered CU5672. Weymann were the second major supplier of RT bodies after Park Royal Vehicles, but supplied all RTs delivered in green livery.

The no-longer-new, but unused, bus was finally licensed on 24 June 1959 at Windsor Garage, where it worked until despatched for its first overhaul on 18 November 1963.

Like all London buses, RTs were subject to major overhaul every few years, when the body was removed from the chassis and both were repaired and repainted. Their identity (including both registration and fleet number) was removed at the start of this process and allocated to the next newly overhauled bus ready for delivery. As a result, the physical bus changed its identity at each overhaul. With RTs, the position was further complicated because the body took longer to overhaul than the chassis, so when an overhauled body was remounted onto a chassis, this was a different chassis from the one that had previously carried that body.

Confused? So were most people until the intricacies of the system became public knowledge, including the licensing authorities in Scotland who required a second-hand bus to be re-registered when its identity could not be agreed to the original record.

The 'new' and newly-overhauled RT4779 delivered to Leatherhead Garage on 29 November 1963 carried a Weymann body that had previously been on RT3433, borne by a chassis which had two previous identities, red RT4056 registered LUC405 and green RT4120, registered LUC469; both carrying Weymann bodies.



At Leatherhead, RT4779 worked all the double-deck routes based at Leatherhead Garage, comprising 406/A, 408, 418, 468, 470 and 472, plus short-workings on 462, also working 403 or 408A when 'sleeping out' at Chelsham or Guildford. In 1963, the garage had a scheduled allocation of 50 RTs during the week, 37 on Saturday and 29 on Sunday.

RT4779 worked four and a half years at Leatherhead before its next overhaul, departing after service on 12 May 1969. The following day, another 'new' RT4779 emerged from Aldenham overhaul works, this time in red livery. This bus carried (and carries) Weymann body 6140, originally supplied in 1950 and first fitted to Green Line RT3259; some evidence of its Green Line origin remains. The body is mounted on the 1954 chassis originally registered as RT4544, OLD764.

Red RT4779 worked for another eight years, without further overhaul, ending its service life on the last day of RTs on Harrow Weald route 140. Following a year as a training bus at Mortlake Garage, the bus was sold in 1979.

Since sale, the bus has been unused. It was stored in the open for fourteen years and became badly rotted. It was incomplete when bought by Peter Osborn in 2008.

Work has included restoring or replacing rotten steel and timber in the structure, overhauling mechanical units and replacing missing interior and exterior parts. As much original material as possible has been retained or reclaimed, including glass (scratched), panels and timber. The work took 4 years, 11 months and was carried out by a team led by restoration expert Ian Barrett, assisted and distracted by the owner. Thanks are due both to Ian and to all who have provided parts and advice over the course of the project.

Although physically a different bus from that based at Leatherhead in the 1960s, it has been restored to its 1963 condition as it would have been when RT4779 was delivered to Leatherhead 50 years ago.