BUSES SERVING TEFFONT

It is almost certain that the service currently identified as the Wilts and Dorset Service 25 (at one stage it was the 225), which runs from Salisbury to at least Hindon and from there onwards to either Gillingham or Tisbury, has been running since the 1930s. (Wilts and Dorset Motor Services Ltd celebrated its centenary in 2015.) It is probable that the Skylark Bus Company, one of the Companies that had been taken over by the Wilts and Dorset in 1951, started by only running the routes up and down the B3089 on Tuesdays and Saturdays, the Market Days in Salisbury. The buses used before the 2nd World War would probably have been open-topped single-decker ones which would have been used on the other days of the week for ”charabanc outings”. From at least the end of the 2nd World War, one of the major uses for this service was and still is the provision of school transport in term times. There is a photo of an earlier charabanc on an outing to Bournemouth in the 1920s on page 111 of “The Bounding Stream”.

There are no references to the Buses and Bus Services in any Teffont Parish Council Minutes until 1946 - and, even then, such a reference is oblique in the form of a request of the Wilts and Dorset Motor Services to provide a Bus Shelter near the shop in Teffont; there would be no need for a shelter without the passengers and their buses! The request was refused.

A year or more later, in August 1948, the RDC wrote to Teffont Parish Council to ask if there were any potential improvements to the Bus Service from Teffont’s point of view - as the service was considered adequate, no action was requested. Soon after this, the Council discovered that the Wilts and Dorset Motor Services were planning to move the Bus Station from the New Canal bus park to the far site at the North end of Castle Street; the effect was that passengers would have to walk a lot further, carrying their shopping. No amount of complaining had any effect on that decision.

Three years later, on 17th June 1951, there were more upsets for passengers. As part of a major rationalisation, including that of the timetable, the Wilts and Dorset Motor Services took over its competitor for the Hindon to Salisbury route from the Skylark Bus Company; the joint timetable was to be reduced leaving the last buses from Salisbury on Mondays and Tuesdays at 7pm. The Clerk pointed out to a Council meeting that this and other changes were proposed with no warning - he had already written to the Licencing Commission asking that a public enquiry be held. While this request for a public enquiry was being awaited, a meeting of representatives of all the Parish Councils or Parish Meetings along the B3089 was called to discuss the matter on 7 May 1951; additional attendees of this meeting, which was held in the Teffont Old National School and chaired by Mr W F Crouch, included Mr R Hiscock, Clerk to Mere and Tisbury RDC and Mr Clay, the Area Inspector of Wiltshire and Dorset Motors. The meeting was minuted by the Teffont Clerk and the Minutes were held in Teffont’s Parish Council Minute Book.

After discussion, the meeting agreed five proposals:

1. The 6am bus from Salisbury was not necessary.
2. The 3pm bus from Salisbury should to run daily instead of just on Tuesdays,

Thursdays and Saturdays - this was the bus that transported primary

School children between Dinton and Teffont and was needed on every school

Day. The Teffont School had closed in 1936!

1. A 5.40pm bus from Salisbury was needed daily for those who worked in Salisbury

and finished work at 5.30pm.

1. That a bus be run from Salisbury at 9pm daily instead of just on Wednesdays,

Fridays and Saturdays. This is necessary for both recreational and

Educational needs. It was also to meet trains and coaches.

1. That a bus should leave Hindon daily at 9pm.

It was agreed that Mr Hiscock would attend the meeting of the Licensing Authorities scheduled to be held at Yeovil 29th May 1951. In fact, it appears that the Parish Clerk accompanied him as it was he who reported to the Teffont Parish Council meeting held on 9th June. The outcome of the Licensing meeting was as follows:

1. The 3pm bus from Salisbury would run daily.
2. The 6pm bus from Salisbury would leave at 5.50pm so that a bus would run

to Chicklade on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

1. An additional bus would be put on Tuesdays which would be the 10.15pm from

Salisbury.

The Clerk was thanked for his efforts but if you compare the new solution for passengers, it does not appear to meet their difficulties very much. It would be interesting to read any Wilts and Dorset feedback report especially as the Clerk to the RDC was soon to be hearing that Wilts and Dorset Motor Services were not running the timetable as agreed at the Yeovil meeting. Mr Hiscock then appealed to the Public Service Vehicle Licensing Authority and there were, over the next several months, various proposals about the timetable covering the Salisbury to Hindon bus route passed and presumably communicated to the RDC and the Authority though it is not clear if and when the Wilts and Dorset started running the approved route - presumably they started to conform at some stage.

One new route was added, running from Ridge and Chilmark to Salisbury and stopping at Teffont on the way. In September 1952, Teffont Parish Council was asked by a firm of solicitors, Trethowan, Vincent and Fulton, acting for Messrs Hull and Bartlett, whether the Parish Council would support this route and it agreed to do so. A licensing meeting in Salisbury on 3rd September 1952 approved this new route which presumably, to some degree, (as it only ran on Tuesdays and Saturdays), replaced Skylark Buses when these were taken over by Wilts and Dorset Motor Services. It is not currently known for how long the service ran - perhaps it is the “antecedent” of the current coach which, on its way to Salisbury, runs on Tuesdays and Saturdays through Teffont and on down the B3089.

Returning to the history of the Wilts and Motor Services, the next relevant information is that at a Council Meeting in 1956, a complaint was raised that buses had been ignoring the passing places and failing to keep to the time-table. The next year, there were further complaints, the first one being that the Saturday evening service was inadequate; the Clerk was asked to raise the matter with the Wilts and Dorset Motor Services, A year later, the Chilmark Parish Council asked whether the Teffont one would join them in a joint complaint about the Sunday service - or the lack of it - they agreed to co-operate.

In 1957, here was a national staff strike and there is no reason to believe that this did not affect the Wilts and Dorset routes such as ours. It was for a claim for an extra £1 per hour where the employer offered three shillings. It was settled for ten shillings (50 pence) per hour.

1958 saw the introduction of a new model of bus on the route, one where a driver and a conductor would not both be needed – this model would be known as a “Conker box” and were interesting and unique. There were 15 delivered in 1954 as traditional half cab front rear door vehicles operated with a conductor. They were a special order as the industry had moved into full front one man single deckers by then. They were ordered as W&D felt that the more modern bus with underfloor engine would stand the terrain of Wiltshire country roads. Within five years a programme of converting these buses for one man operation commenced whereby they became full front with the door behind the front wheel. These were converted in the Company’s Castle Street workshops

At a meeting of the Parish Council on 17th November 1959, a new time table published recently by Wilts and Dorset was discussed, especially the matter of the discontinuance of the Wednesday afternoon bus which would affect the Teffont children needing to return from Dinton.

Another subject was a matter of interest - to quote directly from the Minutes of the Parish Council meeting of 21 March 1960: ”The Clerk reported on the situation of the conveyance of children from Dinton to Teffont and it was accepted”. At the Annual Parish Meeting later that evening to which only one member attended, it was reported “The question of the behaviour of the senior children on the school bus between Teffont and Wilton was discussed and the Chairman volunteered to raise the matter with the County Council representative”. At the same meeting, the matter of extra buses in the evening in Salisbury was raised and the Clerk was asked to write to the Wilts and Dorset Motor Services on the subject.

At the 1960 Annual Parish Meeting, buses were again on the agenda and the Clerk reported that he had held a conversation with the Traffic Manager of the Wilts and Dorset, hoping that an improved service might be established. Apparently, because of dwindling passenger receipts, this seemed unlikely. At the following Annual Meeting, in 1961, that prognosis was unfortunately confirmed.

Buses or problems with them remained on the agenda, especially the behaviour of the children at school at Wilton. Correspondence was read out at the next meeting and a proposal that immediate reporting of problems would be instigated was accepted.

It is not clear whether, over the next decade, behaviour improved or alternatively, the Parish Council got bored discussing it the matter but it was 1970 before, discussions, about the school children and their bus transport, were minuted again. In a Parish Council meeting on June 1st 1970, it was stated that, from the end of the end of the next term, the County Council would provide a school minibus to transport the children to Dinton in the morning but that parents must make their own arrangements for their return in the afternoon. The Bus Company, presumably Wilts and Dorset, was to continue the present return service which the children may use on payment. This arrangement was not popular with the Parish Council - or the parents - who thought that the Bus Company should be responsible to provide this service. Another problem was that the younger children had to walk or cycle along the open pavement. It was therefore resolved that the County Council be asked to guarantee to accept the responsibility for the provision of a return service. The objection was not the payment for the service but the possibility of its being unilaterally withdrawn at some stage. There the matter stood until the Annual Parish Meeting was held in March. At that meeting, it was agreed that a further letter be written to the County Council giving notice of the need to resolve the matter of the problems of transporting school children from Dinton to Teffont. Late in 1971, the danger to children walking down the pavement to collect to children resulted in the proposals being withdrawn at least for the time being. The actual transport from Dinton to Teffont was resolved by use of the Chilmark, Ridge and Fonthill bus. This conclusion was regarded as satisfactory.

At a Parish Council Meeting in September 1971 which was open to the public, there was a long debate about evening buses, both routes and timetable. Proposals to be taken to the Bus Company include the buses on the B3089 forking left at the Lodges just before Teffont, going past the lake and turning up to Teffont Evias; this appeared to be unacceptable to the Bus Company. Instead, a user Committee under the auspices of the Community Council was set up with Pam Fisher as Teffont’s representative. For the year or so that she held this post, she reported to each Parish Council Meeting. What did she achieve? Another sets of almost illegible minutes make it very frustrating - what is clear is that that she had been putting pressure on the Bus Companies to keep their buses clean - with only limited success.

Late in 1973, it was reported that there would be new proposals for evening buses, taking in many of the local villages. Again it is almost impossible to read the Minutes and it is not clear whether a reference to Post Office in one sentence is to sharing Post Office vans (as mini-buses) or as utilising the space outside the Post Office to turn the bus in the space outside Teffont Post Office. Either way, the conclusion was that no action would be taken.

At a Parish Council Meeting held in 1973, it was reported that new plans for evening buses, taking in many of the local villages were to be proposed. These were to work with Mere’s “wiggly bus” but nothing came of it.

A new term in September 1974 brought new problems of the timings of evening buses to get College students home. Typical negotiations finally produced a compromise that eventually worked. 1975 brought with the Chairman reporting fare increases with the curtailment of half rates on children fare levels. It appears that the Bus Company seems to be able to have carte blanche to set the new fare levels. although it was appreciated that Bus Companies could set economic fare levels if the buses were not fully utilised. The subject continued to be discussed at subsequent Parish Council Meetings where it was agreed that the County Council would cooperate with the Parish Council in a proposed bus usage survey followed by a petition on behalf of the Teffont parents and the levels of the children’s fares. At the 1976 Annual Meeting, it was agreed that the Parish should push for reintroduction of half fares for these school children and over the next Parish Council Meetings the County Council was to be chased up for the results of bus usage survey.

At a Parish Council Meeting in January 1977, fare increases were noted and a single to Salisbury was now fifty pence; a report from the WALC on usage was tabled. At the next meeting, held in March, the District Council advised that the County Council was threatening to reduce the rural buses further. At that stage, the Clerk to the Parish Council resigned and it is hoped that this account becomes more legible and hence more credible! It was May 1978 before the first results from the survey of bus usage became available and these were only a summary. Group Captain Willan, our County Councillor, assured the Meeting that the results would be used particularly how the County Council would subsidise Public Transport in the future.

The next meeting of the Parish Council on the 1st August 1978 included a discussion about the County Council Transport Policies and Programmes (1979-1980) and resulted in the Clerk being instructed to let Mr Mabey, Teffont’s RDC member, having copies of all relevant correspondence, whether for heavy traffic which include Public Transport that set of minutes or not. This subject was involving a great deal of local attention as showed by the extra meetings and regular Public Transport bulletins though the meetings were not necessarily well attended.

Talking of attendance, Mrs Willan had to apologise for missing the last meeting but she did not think she had missed much except a report on a 6 month trial of turning a bus down to Fovant.

The next Parish Council meeting was of more interest as it included details of proposals from the Wilts and Dorset for a new timetable – one that no longer included any buses running on Sundays. The Chairman reported that when he heard of this, he expressed what he was sure what the Council’s views would be. The Council also endorsed the opposition of parents for having to pay transport costs. It appears that all these proposals were on hold while the County Council discussed the matter. A letter to the Parish Council about the costs was tabled at the next meeting but it had been overtaken by national events – whatever these might turn out to be.

The world moves on, despite what might have been the effect of complaints, and by the end of May Councillor Combes was complaining about the lack of Sunday buses for the visitors for the hospital. Also, complaints were voiced re time keeping and discipline on the journeys to and from Westwood St Thomas School though this was not ben confirmed by Mrs Willan, the Teffont representative.

It was May 1984 before there is any more input to the Parish; it came in the form of a letter being tabled by Mr Parker, the letter asking for the co-operation of the Parish Council in a bus survey; this was approved by the County Council. A year later, Mr Parker reported on a meeting of the Parish Transport Group; his main news was that school children going to Westwood St Thomas along the A30 through Barford St Martin could change buses there to shorten their journey times and the need for going into Salisbury.

It is not clear how much the changes to the day to day running of the buses on Route 25 (changed to Route 225 in 1984) were the effect of the political decisions of the ownership in buses in general. Wilts and Dorset at some stage passed over its ownership to its own Management team with a management buy-out and with ownership hopefully went improved efficiency. The most recent timetable, dating the 2nd January 2014 has four buses in each direction on week days and less on Saturdays. Tuesdays and Saturdays also have coaches to Salisbury twice a day almost mimicking Route 25 There is a timetable in one bus shelter which includes Teffont and Wincanton but it is old and out of date. There is a weekly coach which reputedly includes Warminster and Teffont among other places.

But how did we get from deregulation and denationalisation in the first half of the 1980s to today’s comparatively successful position. A lot of it was caused by County Council subsidies where anyone over 60 years of age get a free pass card pass. But there was more to it than this, although details from Parish Council Minutes are few and far between. What detail there is follows:

Under the agenda item AOB in a meeting in October 1986, new timetables were discussed but left for the next meeting where Mr Parker reported on the new arrangement by which Badger Line buses were to run a service between Mere and Salisbury District Hospital and back; what is not clear from subsequent Minutes is that this was all cancelled because the business case fell to pieces within a year. Two years later a report by Mr Parker in his role as Transport Group co-ordinator included news of a survey of Night riders, a minor time table amendment. There was also to be a new operator requesting permission to run a intra village service based on Newton Toney. At the next Parish Council meeting; still in 1988, it was reported that the Nightrider service had been discontinued as had a service between Mere and Salisbury District Hospital, one that was on the Teffont route. At this stage, the Service 25 was slowly deteriorating with only possible plans ones for a reintroduction of Nightriders and this trend continuing in 1989 with a report of no plans for a “Skipper” Service. There would be lobbying for concessionary fares for the elderly.

It was two and a half years since the last Parish Council Meeting minutes containing any bus information; this was mainly that it now cost £1.80 for the single fare from Teffont to Wilton or back. Investigations were under way about the possibility of a Community mini-bus and were still at that stage at a meeting held in September where it was also reported that the concessionary fare scheme was not successful in the Western parishes.

It was the middle of 1994 before there was a report affecting buses and that just read “The Chairman reported probable curtailment of some local services but nothing affecting Teffont”.

This is certainly not the end of buses in Teffont as anyone using Route 25 will testify, but depending on subsidies does not make for a happy position - but for those who are without transport and have a need to travel it may be the best alternative.