

H. V. Burlingham Ltd.



1928 - 1963

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Cover Illustration: Harper Bros, Heath Hayes No. 60 (1249RE), a 1959 Guy Arab LUF with Burlingham 'Seagull' bodywork, now in preservation. (LTHL collection).

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H. V. Burlingham

Company History 1928-1963

Herbert Victor Burlingham arrived in Blackpool in 1928 and set up as a coach builder, initially leasing premises in Bloomfield Road and Bond Street, Blackpool. Like Thomas Harrington in Hove and Plaxton in Scarborough, Burlingham realised that a seaside resort offered advantages for the highly seasonal trade in luxury coach bodies in that the workforce were able to take other jobs during the summer when there was no coach building work.

Burlingham's first body was a van for a local butcher, but coach bodies were soon to become the company's main product. Initial production consisted of the 'all weather' style coachwork, common at the time, and comprised a steel-reinforced wooden frame panelled in aluminium with windows capable of winding fully down and a full length folding canvas roof. An option common on many builders' coaches at the time was a luggage rack mounted on the rear of the roof, but Burlingham were early in offering coaches fitted with a toilet compartment, which was a long way from being the standard fitment in long distance coaches.

Burlingham coaches soon began to make a name for themselves and unlike many coach builders of the period whose clientele was localised, Burlingham were soon selling not only to Lancashire coach firms but to Scottish Motor Traction of Edinburgh,

Walter Alexander of Stirling and Glenton Tours of London amongst others. Output in these early years kept outgrowing factory space, and in 1929 the original sites were relinquished in favour of a workshop in Bank Road, Marton, which was used until 1931. A factory was constructed at Preston New Road on the outskirts of the town in late 1929. After the Marton workshop was sold further premises were bought in Newhouse Road and these were used both to build components and to repair and recondition bodies.

In 1930 Burlingham, who had been a sole trader, decided to sell the business to two local businessmen, Richard Eaves and Harry Lowcock. They set up H. V. Burlingham Ltd on 25 November 1930 with a registered share capital of £26,000, after which Burlingham himself set up in business as a caravan manufacturer in Garstang. Mr Eaves became the managing director and took great pride in motivating the design team. Styles were developed into the era of the saloon coach often now fully enclosed, windows only dropping to half depth and a sliding aluminium or folding canvas roof section optional. Pioneering styling features often appeared on Burlingham designs, including the use of curved sightseeing windows above the main windows. By the end of 1931 there was again pressure on space so a further site was acquired at Vicarage Lane. This was used for body assembly and from then until eventual closure finishing was undertaken at the Preston New Road factory, which also manufactured sub assemblies. Once Vicarage Lane was in full production Newhouse Road was solely devoted to servicing existing bodies.



DM6228 was a Leyland LTB1 Lioness with a Burlingham C26D body new in 1929 to Brookes Brothers, Rhyl whose business was acquired by Crosville in May 1930 and this became Crosville 435, being withdrawn in 1936. (John Kaye).

To extend business, bus bodies were also offered. Among the first were a batch of centre-entrance 33-seaters on Leyland Lion chassis for Blackpool Corporation. By the time of the 1932 sales brochure double-deck designs had been prepared, Blackpool Corporation again being the first customer, taking four rear entrance 48-seaters. By 1935 Blackpool Corporation and Burlingham had developed streamlined fully fronted centre-entrance bodies, single- and double-deck, open- and closed-top, which were as futuristic as the corporation's English Electric and Brush tramcars. Also in 1935 the first export Burlingham bodies are reported for an Egyptian customer, and also that year a batch of very conservative-looking bodies were constructed for John Fishwick & Sons of Leyland. These were on Leyland Titan TD4 chassis and were to the Leyland outline as produced on the Titan from 1929 to 1932, incorporating Leyland components. In following years Fishwick were persuaded to take a more modern outline as built for Ribble Motor Services.

Among the more radical coaches of the time was a 25-seater on a normal-control Leyland Cub chassis for Marshall of Blackpool, which had a streamlined near-full width bonnet with concealed radiator, similar in shape to the Chrysler Airflow car. Duple had used a similar idea on a special airmail van for the Royal Mail a year or so before the Marshall's coach but were never to apply the style to a coach body. Another mid-1930s design to give coach builders a chance to be creative was the Maudslay SF40, with its set-back front axle and design for modern full-width bodywork. Burlingham produced a number of very flamboyant styles on this body. Like Duple, Burlingham were prepared to build to practically any outline the customer requested, and as a result in



Lawson, Kirkintilloch P172, WG2376, was a Leyland LT5B Lion new to W. Alexander in 1934 with an Alexander C32F body which was rebodied in 1947 with a Burlingham B35F body. Transferred to Lawson in 1953 it is seen here at Dundas Street Bus Station in Glasgow. (John Kaye).

1939 Duple were building (1936) Burlingham outline coaches on Bristol chassis for Black and White Motorways whilst Burlingham built to (1937) Duple outlines on Bedfords for Bournemouth Corporation in 1938 and 1939. Among trademark Burlingham features however were ornate shaped window frames and the use of decorative stained glass work, often used when toilet compartments were fitted to coaches but also used to illuminate the stairwells of the pre-war Blackpool centre-entrance double-deckers. From 1937-8 a revised coach style began to evolve with no canopy over the bonnet of half cabs and a near semi-circular window to the sliding forward entry door with the main applied decoration a slim curved side-flash, the whole coach curving gracefully in the idiom of the post-1936 Duple design, but being distinctively Burlingham in its sharper details, and especially in its rear aspect which was v-shaped in plan about the centre-line of the divided rear window. This was adapted to suit normal control chassis such as the Austin K4 and even used in a centre-entrance version on the Maudslay SF40 but, like the contemporary Duple style it was to become better known after World War Two.

By the end of 1940 Burlingham were instructed to cease coach building and concentrate on war work. For the duration Preston New Road works and the assembly shop at Vicarage Lane were to produce airframe assemblies for Vickers Wellington medium bombers, which were assembled at a Vickers shadow factory on the site of today's Blackpool Airport. As well as this work the Newhouse Road workshop built mobile canteens on Austin chassis for the armed forces and produced a limited number of utility-design bodies for half-cab single-deckers. Although such chassis were not



Brown's Blue, Markfield GAY459 was a Leyland CPO1 Comet with a Burlingham C33F body which had been new in May 1950. (John Boylett courtesy John Kaye).

produced under the utility scheme some chassis were assembled from remaining stock parts or from export orders impossible to deliver, and in 1941-2 Burlingham built bus bodies for 15 such chassis and in 1943-5 again built bodies to replace worn out or war-damaged ones. Customers included Barton Transport and United Automobile Services. During early 1945, before other coach builders, Burlingham were allowed to reintroduce compound curvature to the rear-dome of its bus body as it had a crude but effective pressing machine for this task, unlike other coach builders who required skilled panel beaters to do the work.

Like every other coach builder Burlingham had bulging order books at the end of the War, many operators having placed orders for completion as soon as peacetime conditions applied. The first post-war coach was completed in January 1946 and was very similar to the 1939 design but featured an extra window pillar in each body side, Burlingham being justifiably cautious as adequately seasoned timber for framing was very hard to obtain at the time. During 1946 a standard single-deck and double-deck bus body were introduced. The double-decker was basically the Ribble-type pre-war outline, whilst the single-decker could be best described as the utility frame re-clothed with traditional refinements such as compound curvature on front and rear domes and outswept skirt panels. Output of all three types was large, many operators such as Ribble and Walter Alexander not only buying new chassis (for which a substantial waiting lists had built up) but also sending pre-war vehicles to Burlingham for new bodies.



Hargreaves, Hebden operated one of the only four Commer Avengers fitted with Burlingham bodies. JWU792 which had a Burlingham C31F body was new in June 1950 and is seen in Glasgow. (John Kaye).

By late in 1948 Burlingham was able to begin to move away from its enforced policy of rigid standardisation, helped by a couple of longstanding and influential customers.

Local British Electric Traction subsidiary Ribble Motor Services was responsible for the largest share of inter-urban routes in Lancashire, and wished to make more efficient use of its crews on limited-stop services running from the great industrial conurbations in the south, centre and east of the county to the seaside resorts in the west. As a result they commissioned a double-deck lowbridge coach body with 49 seats on 30 Leyland Titan PD1/3 chassis to the newly authorised 8-foot width. These had full fronts, electrically operated platform doors and coach trim as well as luxury seating; the outline was generously curved as were the window outlines. These became famous as the first of Ribble's 'White Lady' coaches. Ribble also took the same outline but with a half cab and 53 bus seats for service duties over the next few years. Scottish Motor Traction, seeking to publicise the return of peacetime standards on its Edinburgh-London coach service, chose a special Burlingham body for display at the 1948 Commercial Motor Show. This was mounted on the new AEC Regal III coach chassis and had a full front, with the AEC radiator hidden behind a chrome grille arrangement, the whole front of the coach tapering in plan so that a single full-width windscreen with opening upper section could be fitted rather than the traditional vertically divided style (as on pre-war fully fronted designs). The ensemble was completed by bulbous front and rear wings and a pair of low-set rectangular headlights. No other bodies were quite like that show coach but it pointed the way to the future. Incidentally SMT took Ribble-style double-deck bodies from Burlingham on 20 AEC Regent III chassis in 1950



Ribble 1202, BRN262, seen here at Burnley Cattle Market Bus Station in bus livery, was one of the original 'White Lady' coaches. It was a Leyland PD1/3 with Burlingham FCL27/22RD body and was new as number 2519 in 1948. (John Kaye).

which incorporated Ribble's post-war style of destination and number-blind glazing, to an irregular hexagonal outline - basically a triangle with the corners chopped off. This style of destination glazing spread over the next few years to become the double-deck standard throughout the Scottish Bus Group until the 1980s.

By mid-1949 further bespoke styles were being built. Burlingham had not built trolleybus bodies during the boom in popularity of such vehicles in the 1930s but received a contract from Portsmouth Corporation to body 15 British United Traction (BUT) 9611T two-axle vehicles in 1949. These followed the operator's ideas on appearance and were generally less bold in outline than the Ribble-style double-deckers, but the operator's idea of enclosing the support gantries for the trolley-booms inside the roof-structure resulted in a top-heavy look, whilst the plentifully lined-out livery and features like an offside destination indicator added to their archaic aspect.

In contrast the pre-war Blackpool Corporation/Burlingham style double-decker was actually in advance of much of what had been produced until this time and Blackpool waited until 1949 for chassis so it could get what it wanted from Leyland. This was a unique variant of the Titan PD2 with 8-foot width, air brakes, a straight frame rather than a dropped frame aft of the axle and modified positioning of equipment and a re-profiled nearside frame member to especially adapt all 100 of these Titan PD2/5 sub-types for their Burlingham fully fronted centre-entrance bodies. These were, though, wider, similar to the final pre-war examples of the style in having powered



Taylor (Ideal), Cudworth bought OWB995 in 1952. This Crossley SD42/9 was fitted with a Burlingham 'Seagull' C37F body and ran until September 1963. It was caught entering Barnsley Bus Station on May 9th 1959. (John Kaye).

sliding entrance doors and concealed radiators but omitting the stained glass illumination of the stairwell.

Similar options were now offered on the standard coach, becoming available in two widths, with a full front that kept the traditional radiator outline, or in the case of the Foden the manufacturer's grille, or in a version with a decorative frontage like the SMT show coach, but with wider cab front and normal glazing. SMT took some half-cab bodies on pre-war Leyland Tiger chassis, with full canopies over the half-cab to display a bus-style destination aperture. The majority of Burlingham coaches went on the full-sized heavyweight half-cab coaches of the day, but some bodies were built on the normal-control Commer Commando and Leyland Comet models.

Not everyone took to the new Ribble style, so for some customers a version of the pre-war Ribble outline was kept available until the early 1950s. Salford Corporation took aspects of the 'white lady' design and hybridised them with features of their standard post-war body, the resultant bodies combining straight staircases and other Salford body features with the generously radiused windows that were becoming a Burlingham trademark.

Unlike Thomas Harrington Ltd, Metro Cammell Weymann, Saunders-Roe or Duple, Burlingham did not build up an extensive export trade. In 1950 a batch of Leyland Tiger LOPS4/3s went to the operator of the Cordoba-Roasario-Buenos Aires express service in Argentina; these showed only a few Burlingham details in their fully fronted



Baddeley Brothers of Holmfirth No. 56 (RWY277) was a Bedford SBG with Burlingham Seagull 41-seat coachwork new in May 1956, seen here at Wembley Stadium. (John Boylett courtesy John Kaye).

straight-waisted coachwork. The only other export customer was the Johannesburg municipality who took some old-style highbridge double-deck bodies on Daimler chassis in 1951. The Argentinean coaches did, however, break important new ground for Burlingham in that they used all-steel rather than steel-reinforced ash framing. Metal framing was to be a major facet of Burlingham's new range of bodies for the new underfloor-engined single-deckers such as the Royal Tiger and the AEC Regal IV.

At the 1950 Earls Court Show Burlingham had two new coach designs on Royal Tiger and AEC Regal IV chassis, both shown with a luxury 37-seat seating plan in their central-entrance bodies, when 39 or 41 would have been the more likely choice of all but the most-upmarket customers. The designs were related, having similar detailing and windscreens, and an identical cast chromium-plated frontal motif, but the AEC had traditional teardrop-shape wheel-arch mouldings and a straight waist rail with vertical window pillars, whilst the Leyland had a curved waist rail, window pillars angled back from the vertical and an ellipsoid moulding sweeping from the front to the rear of the coach; this feature was known internally as the 'tank panel' because of its resemblance in shape to a World War One tank. This second coach was finished in the livery of its customer Woods of Blackpool, who traded as Seagull Coaches. Show visitors asked Burlingham for the style with the seagull on the side, and this (despite some chagrin at Woods) soon evolved into the marque name for the style. The previous body was still available for vertical-engined heavyweights but also to the new 30ft length, and only in full-front form, with the tank-panel and front chrome motif as options. 1951 would be last season of a style with its origins in the late 1930s. For the Seagull,



SJW515 was a Guy Warrior with Burlingham Seagull 41-seat body, new as a demonstrator before passing to Dodds of Troon. It is seen here at the Donisthorpe Street, Leeds premises of Wallace Arnold Tours. (John Kaye).

though, it was the start of a prosperous decade. In 1994 it came second in the Classic Bus reader poll to find the most attractive coach body style of all time. It was by far the most successful type of coach body for the early underfloor-engined chassis, selling well on Royal Tiger, Regal IV and Daimler Freeline chassis, Daimler choosing the Seagull style for LKV218, its coach demonstrator. Two were also fitted to Foden rear-engined coaches. From 1952 variants were introduced for vertical-engined chassis, starting with a style for the initial Bedford SB, a 35-seat version with a lengthened rear overhang. Shortly afterwards Scottish Omnibuses (as SMT had become) requested a version to fit Bedford OB chassis converted to forward control; these were known as 'baby Seagulls' and went to SOL and its Highland Omnibuses subsidiary. SOL also took Seagulls to re-body half-cab AEC Regal IIIs. Others who ordered very large numbers of the style were Ribble and many other BET group members and independent coach operators, the largest customer from that sector being Wallace Arnold.

A small Wiltshire Coachbuilder, Heaver of Durrington who were best known for Albion Victor buses supplied to Guernsey Railways and Guernsey Motors, constructed two 'New Mark' coaches in 1953 on a Leyland Royal Tiger and in 1955 on a Daimler Freeline, these were a near exact copy of the Seagull.

Burlingham also produced a service bus body for the new chassis; this had a simple outline but generally came with the brightwork motif on the front and with optional chrome trim strips along the sides. Among the stranger examples were a batch for



Trent No. 1218 (VO8566) was a 1932 AEC Regent rebodied in 1949 with a Burlingham 56-seat body and is seen here in Derby Bus Station. (John Kaye).

Bournemouth Corporation in 1953, which had a double-deck-style open rear entrance and a front exit with doors. The open platform did not work well with an underfloor-engined bus and as in Sheffield, Edinburgh, Pontypridd and West Bromwich, the Bournemouth buses were converted to front entrance layout.

Manchester Corporation started a spell as a Burlingham customer with the purchase of a batch of split-level coaches for its airport service: the first six were on Leyland Royal Tiger chassis in 1953 and, like the contemporary British European Airways' AEC Regal IVs, carried the roof line from the raised rear passenger section through to the front of the bus. Of this batch three were completed at Blackpool and the other three were sent as framed chassis to be finished by S. H. Bond of Wythenshawe. Three similar bodies came on Tiger Cub chassis in 1956. Manchester then took double-deck bodies which were similar to the mid-1950s Ribble outline but highbridge with a more upright front to fit the maximum number of seats in a 27-foot-long bus. These were taken on 62 BUT 9612T trolleybuses and 80 Daimler CVG6 and Leyland Titan PD2 buses. Ribble's mid-1950s design had a sliding rear platform door. After the large order in 1949/50 Blackpool took no more new buses until 1956, when it took five rear-entrance Titans with full fronts. These were highbridge with open platform but of similar styling to the Ribble vehicles. The single-deck body was developed for lighter-weight underfloor-engined chassis such as the Leyland Tiger Cub, AEC Reliance and Guy Arab LUF from 1953. For urban operators starting to experiment with driver-only operation a centre exit door was optionally available, this was specified by Sunderland and Reading Corporation amongst others. In 1956 double-deckers were allowed to be



AST829, a Bedford OWB, had been new as Highland Transport 5 in November 1942 with an S.M.T. B32F body later reseated to B29F. It passed to Highland Omnibuses on formation in February 1952 as C5 and, after being converted to forward control, was fitted with a Burlingham FC24F body in May 1953. (John Boylett courtesy John Kaye).

as long as single-deckers (30 ft or 9.2m), and a double-decker could now seat 72. Ribble were immediately attracted to the idea and placed 105 Burlingham 72-seat highbridge bodies on Titan PD3/4 chassis into service during 1957/58. These had full fronts and a sliding entry door just behind the front wheel. Wolverhampton Corporation took one identical body on a Guy Arab IV whilst another but with half-cab and exposed radiator went to Samuel Morgan of Armthorpe Yorkshire. Scout Motor Services bought 5 PD3s similar to the Ribble models in 1958/59 but with half-cabs, these buses passing to Ribble upon their purchase of the Scout business in 1961. Sunderland District Omnibus Co took a batch of 13 rear-entrance exposed-radiator Titan PD3 in 1958, and Western SMT took lowbridge rear-entrance tin-front PD3s in 1960, these were the last double-deck motorbus bodies built in Blackpool. The single-deck bus body styles began to diverge from the mid fifties with some operators such as Sheffield Transport looking for more coach-like vehicles while Reading sought a design better suited to moving large numbers of standing passengers. Before the end of Burlingham's independence there was an important development with trolley-buses as Glasgow corporation ordered a batch of ten single-deck 50-seaters on BUT RETB1 chassis. These were Burlingham's only electrically powered single-deckers and the longest single-deckers yet seen in Britain.

Burlingham sought to facelift the Seagull every two years or so to keep up with rival coach builders but every time a change was introduced some of the original purity of line went with it; whilst late Seagulls on Reliance or Tiger Cub chassis could still look good the versions for Bedford SB, Commer Avenger or Ford Thames Trader PSV began



South Yorkshire Motors 61, GWT630, was an Albion CX13 with Burlingham C33F body new in 1947 and is seen here behind the garage in Pontefract. (John Kaye).

to assume a very strange appearance, the strangest perhaps being the version known internally as 'The Pig' which was fitted with a shallow two-piece wrap around wind-screen. Launched in 1958 it was at the limits of glazing technology yet less than a year later Plaxton and Duple had designs with deeper and better looking windscreens supplied by the same company.

Burlingham realised there was nowhere left to take the style, which by now had reverted to steel reinforced timber frames for the lightweights and from 1959 launched a new range of bodies. These were the Seagull 60 for front-engined lightweights and the Seagull 70 for underfloor-engined chassis.

In August 1960, Duple Motor Bodies Limited acquired 100% of the share capital of H. V. Burlingham Ltd at a price of £550,000. Although H. V. Burlingham was renamed Duple (Northern), existing body designs continued to be sold under the Burlingham name until 1963, these included more Reliance standee buses for Reading, a final batch of double-deck trolleybuses on Sunbeam F4A to a forward entrance design, also for Reading and two restyles of the body for lightweight coaches, the Seagull 61 and the Gannett. After that some further Blackpool designs were introduced, primarily the Continental, Alpine Continental and the Firefly/Dragonfly but these were badged as Duple (Northern) Products and H. V. Burlingham passed into the annals of transport history after 35 years of production.

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Additional information, corrections and photographs are always welcome.
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