

# Llandudno & Colwyn Bay Electric Railway



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Cover Illustration: Llandudno & Colwyn Bay No. 6 came from Bournemouth Corporation in 1936 and was a 1914 open top double deck bogie car on Brill 22E trucks with United Electric Car Company 68 seat bodywork. (John Kaye).

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In 1899 the Board of Trade confirmed the Llandudno and Colwyn Bay Light Railway Order of 1898 which provided for the construction of an electric tramway from Colwyn Bay to Deganwy, passing through Rhos-on-Sea, Penrhyn Bay and Llandudno. By 1906, following years of wrangling and extensions, the tramway, apart from a short stretch in 1904, had still not been constructed. The original promoting company, the Light Railway and General Construction Company Ltd. was replaced in 1902 by the Llandudno, Colwyn Bay and Rhyl Electric Traction Co.Ltd. In 1906, following a name change that had omitted Rhyl from the title, the company went into liquidation and in July 1906 the Llandudno and District Electric Construction Co. Ltd, along with Peebles of Edinburgh, was formed to take over the powers of the liquidated company.

Early in 1907, work began on the construction of the tramway and by July 1907 the line between Rhos-on-Sea and Llandudno was ready for inspection by the board of Trade. After the initial inspection it was found necessary to fit the trams with an additional hand brake and the Board of Trade inspector withheld the certificate to carry passengers until the modifications had been made. The initial trams (1-14) were covered single-deck bogie cars by the Midland Carriage Company, seating 42, on Mountain and Gibson trucks. The livery chosen was red and cream, which was lined out in gold.

A second inspection on the 26th September 1907 found the trams to be now satisfactory and the certificate was granted and the line duly opened on the 19th October, although, in order not to offend the staunchly religious locals, trams did not run on the Sabbath.

The Company now concentrated its efforts on the Colwyn Bay section of the line, which had suffered a delay, partly because of local objections to the proposed route. However, everything was eventually settled to the mutual satisfaction of all parties and the line to Colwyn Bay opened on 7th June 1908.

In 1909 the company title was changed, for the final time, to the Llandudno and Colwyn Bay Electric Railway Limited. In the same year the company took delivery of four new tramcars (15-18). Built by the United Electric Company, they seated 31, 27 in the saloon on transverse seating and 4 on two bench seats, one on each platform. They were nicknamed 'Yankees' on account of their resemblance to American streetcars of the period. Throughout this period the Company was engaged in a track-doubling programme and, with the opening, in 1915, of the section to the Queens Hotel in Old Colwyn, the total length of track stretched over 8 miles.

Permission to run double-deck trams was given by the Board of Trade in 1916, despite Llandudno's preference for single-deck trams and Colwyn

Bay's opposition. However, in 1920, four more single-deck tramcars arrived. Although they were ordered in 1914 from the United Electric Car Company, they were delayed by the Great War. They were numbered 19-22 and had open 'toastrack' bodies, which seated 60. They were delivered in a green and cream livery and were extremely popular with the tourist trade until their final summer in 1955.

The Great War, however, had its effect on the company, both financially and materially. In consequence the company applied to the Ministry of Transport, who regulated the charges that the company was allowed to make, for permission to increase the fares charged, for which sanction was given.

Colwyn Bay UDC commenced major road improvements in 1920 to cater for the increased traffic along the coastal route. This included doubling the length of tram track along that stretch of the road, however, the trams found it increasingly difficult to compete with the motorbuses that were also operating the coastal route. This was especially the case on the section to Old Colwyn, partly caused by the fact that electricity was only supplied from the Llandudno end of the track causing a fall off towards the Old Colwyn side, and partly because the original 14 cars had had their motor capacity reduced from four to two. This prompted the Company to apply to the local Council for licences to operate motorbuses over the Old Colwyn section of the route. To further their application

the Company acquired an interest in North Wales Silver Motors Ltd, who would operate the services on behalf of the Company. The Colwyn Bay Council agreed to give consideration to the application, but in the event North Wales Silver Motors was taken over by Crosville in 1930 and the Company's bus services never materialised. Around this time the possibility of replacing the trams with trolleybuses was mooted but was not pursued, and the trams continued to run. Sunday running was introduced, although only for part of the day (after church services had finished at midday!). It was extended to a full day service in 1933.

In the same year plans were made to replace the rolling stock with newer, second-hand cars, and as a result, five single-deck cars (1-5) were purchased from Accrington Corporation, replacing original cars 1-5. The largest second-hand purchase came in 1936, comprising ten (6-15) open-top double-deck bogie cars from Bournemouth Corporation, personally chosen by the then manager Mr Walter Hamilton. Although permission had originally been given in 1916 to operate double-deck trams, this had been opposed by the local councils, who again opposed their operation. The Board of Trade again rejected the Councils opposition and sanctioned the operation of double-deck trams over the whole line. A stipulation was inserted in the licence to the effect that if the wind-speed exceeded 50 mph on certain sections of the route then passengers must be brought down from the upper deck. It is recorded that a man was employed by the company whose job it

was to measure wind speed, using an anemometer, and if it exceeded 50 mph, he was to board the trams and ensure passengers were removed from the top deck. This practice, however, eventually died out.

The remaining cars not now required because of the new imports were scrapped, the Company removing some components to use for spares. Four trams 6, 10, 11 and 14 were retained and re-numbered 16, 19, 17 and 18 respectively.

The financial position of the company was never really secure and the maintenance of the infrastructure had been problematic. The system had been merely patched up when needed. In 1938 the complete re-wiring of the system was tackled, as far as the finances would allow, much of it new. The company was just reaping the benefits when war broke out in 1939. What could have been a disaster for the Company instead turned out to be a blessing. The transfer of many Government staff and departments to the two Welsh resorts resulted in an increase in the passenger traffic over the war years and by 1946 the Company was in a sound financial position.

In 1946, with the imminent closure of the Darwen Corporation tramway system, two enclosed streamlined double-deck trams became available and the Company quickly purchased them. However, on subsequent inspection by the Ministry of Transport, they were deemed to be unsuitable for the open

stretches of the line and were condemned to work out their lives on local services at each end of the line.

Although receipts were healthy, the large costs incurred in the maintenance of the infrastructure meant that it was often deferred. The track and roadway in Llandudno was allowed to deteriorate to such an extent that the local Council reported the Company to the Ministry of Transport, forcing the Company to carry out the repairs.

The Penrhyn Bay tram track was badly damaged in January 1952. Gales stirred up enormous waves that washed away much of the ballast from under the track. In order to repair the damage a giant pulley wheel was affixed to the track and a tram used to haul boulders up the beach to plug the defences. This proved to be a futile operation. The following year an even larger section of the track was damaged. At this time the directors of the Llandudno and Colwyn Bay Electric Railway were seriously considering replacing the trams with buses, but the likely cost of reinstating the road surface after the tracks had been lifted prompted them to retain the trams for as long as possible.

In 1954 the Company applied to the North West Traffic Commissioners for a licence to operate buses. They were informed that agreement would have to be reached with Crosville before any such licence could be issued.



At this stage, Llandudno and Colwyn Bay Councils objected to the abandonment of the trams, being fearful that the cost of reinstating the road might fall upon them.

Although no date for the conversion to buses had yet been announced, early in January 1956 the tramway staff broke up trams 1, 2, 9 and 10. Preservationists were quickly on the scene and attempts were instigated to save the line, but in the end they did not come to fruition. Driver training had already started using a 1938 Leyland Titan from East Kent and the date for the last tram was announced as 24th March 1956. Tram No. 8 was reserved for the official party and, for the final stretch of the journey, was driven by the mayor of Colwyn Bay, arriving back at the depot after midnight, and so the last privately owned street tramway in Britain, watched by a large crowd, ceased operations after almost 50 years.

The Company, however, continued to trade, now using motorbuses. The main operator on the former tram route was Crosville Motor Services with whom competition was fierce and finally on the 28th May 1961 the Company succumbed and sold out to its main rival, the last L. & C.B.E.R. bus arriving at the depot on the 27th May 1961.

**Tram Fleet List  
1907-1956**

This listing is in the format - Year into Stock; Fleet No; Type; Trucks; Body; Seating.

**1907**

**1-14    Single-deck bogie    Mountain and Gibson    Midland    42**

Nos. 6, 10, 11, 14 were renumbered 16, 19, 17, 18 respectively in 1937. Withdrawn 1933 (1-5), 1936 (7-9/12-13), 1945 (6[16]), 1955 (11[17], 14[18]), unknown (10[19]).

## **1909**

**15-18 Single-deck four wheel semi-covertible Mountain & Gibson UEC 31**

Trucks replaced in 1927 with Peckham P35.  
Withdrawn 1936 (15-18).

## **1920**

**19-22 Single-deck bogie toastrack English Electric UEC 60**

No. 19 was renumbered 23 in 1937, reverted to 19 at a later date.  
Withdrawn 1956 (19-22).

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No. 22 was a 1920 single-deck bogie toastrack on English Electric bogies with United Electric Car Company 60-seat bodywork. It was withdrawn in 1956. (John Kaye).

### 1933

<b>1, 3, 4</b>	<b>Single-deck bogie</b>	<b>Mountain and Gibson</b>	<b>Brush</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>2, 5</b>	<b>Single-deck bogie</b>	<b>Brush Type C</b>	<b>Brush</b>	<b>40</b>

Nos. 1, 3, 4 (ex-Accrington Nos. 28, 30, 31 - bodies only) mounted on trucks of withdrawn 1907 trams (numbers unknown).

Nos. 2, 5 (ex-Accrington Nos. 29, 32).

Withdrawn 1956 (1-5).

### 1936

<b>6</b>	<b>Open-top double-deck bogie</b>	<b>Brill 22E</b>	<b>UEC</b>	<b>36/32</b>
<b>7-15</b>	<b>Open-top double-deck bogie</b>	<b>Brill 22E</b>	<b>Brush</b>	<b>36/32</b>

Nos. 6-15 (ex-Bournemouth Corporation new 1914).

Withdrawn 1955 (6, 10), 1956 (7-9, 11-15).

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No. 3 had an ex-Accrington Corporation Brush built 40-seat body mounted on the Mountain & Gibson trucks of one of the original 1907 cars that had been withdrawn in 1933. (D. J. Norton).

**1946**

**23-24 Enclosed double-deck bogie English Electric English Electric 24/32**

Nos. 23, 24 Ex-Darwen Corporation (24, 23 respectively).

Withdrawn 1953 (23), 1954 (24).

## Bus Fleet List 1956 - 1961

This listing is in the format - Year into Stock; Fleet No; Reg. No; Chassis; Chassis No; Body; Seating.

### 1956

-	AJG26	Leyland TD5	301029	Park Royal	L27/26R
-	GUF175	Guy Arab II 5LW	FD27766	Northern Counties	H30/26R
1	HTN231	Daimler COG5	10906	Northern Coachbuilders	H30/26R
2	HTN233	Daimler COG5	10907	Northern Coachbuilders	H30/26R
3	GUF128	Guy Arab II 5LW	FD27329	Northern Counties	H30/26R
4	GUF133	Guy Arab II 5LW	FD27093	Northern Counties	H30/26R
5	GUF155	Guy Arab II 5LW	FD27390	Northern Counties	H30/26R
6	GUF165	Guy Arab II 5LW	FD27663	Northern Counties	H30/26R
7	GUF177	Guy Arab II 5LW	FD27773	Weymann	H30/26R
8	GUF183	Guy Arab II 5LW	FD27819	Weymann	H30/26R
9	GUF387	Guy Arab II 5LW	FD28033	Weymann	H30/26R



## 1956 (continued)

10	GUF388	Guy Arab II	5LW	FD28034	Weymann	H30/26R
11	GUF391	Guy Arab II	5LW	FD28037	Weymann	H30/26R
12	GUF393	Guy Arab II	5LW	FD28045	Weymann	H30/26R
13	GUF398	Guy Arab II	5LW	FD28168	Park Royal	H30/26R

AJG26 ex-East Kent Road Car Co. (new 1939); purchased in 1955 for driver training but not used in service.

GUF175 ex-Southdown MS (No. 475; new 1945); purchased for spares only.

Nos. 1-2 ex-Newcastle Corporation (new 1939).

No. 1 converted to open-top in 1957.

Nos. 3-13 ex-Southdown MS (Nos. 428, 433, 455, 465, 477, 483, 487, 488, 491, 493, 498 respectively; new 1945 [3-12] or 1946 [13]).

No. 5 converted to breakdown tender in 1957.

Withdrawn 1957 (3, 5), 1959 (4, 6), 1961 (1-2, 7-13).



No. 12 (GUF393) was one of 12 Guy Arab II's that the Llandudno & Colwyn Bay company purchased as replacements for the trams in 1956 and 1957. Formerly Southdown Motor Services No. 493, it was built in 1945 and had Weymann 56-seat bodywork. (Cliff Essex).

**1957**

**3    GUF159   Guy Arab II 5LW   FD27414   Northern Counties   H30/26R**

No. 3 ex-Southdown MS (No. 459, new 1945); converted to open-top in 1960.

Withdrawn 1961 (3).

**1959**

**4    BJB355   Guy Arab II 5LW   FD26783   Park Royal                H30/26R**

**6    BJB356   Guy Arab II 5LW   FD26784   Park Royal                H30/26R**

Nos. 4, 6 ex-East Kent Road Car Co. (new 1944); converted to open-top in 1960.

Withdrawn 1961 (4, 6).



No. 6 (BJG356) was another wartime Guy Arab II this time with Park Royal H30/26R bodywork, ex-East Kent Road Car Co in 1959. (PSA Redmond).

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Additional information, corrections and photographs are always welcome.  
Our general email address is: [lth.library@gmail.com](mailto:lth.library@gmail.com)

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*In producing this booklet reference has been made to the following publications: The Llandudno and Colwyn Bay Electric Railway, Keith Turner, Oakwood Press, 1993; A nostalgic look at Llandudno and Colwyn Bay Trams since 1945, Geoff Price, Silver Link Publishing, 1997; The Llandudno and Colwyn Bay Electric Railway, Lawson and Morris, Light Railway Transport League, 1956.*

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*Series Editor: Peter Gould ([secretary@lthlibrary.org.uk](mailto:secretary@lthlibrary.org.uk)).*