

Bath Electric Tramways Co Ltd



1904 - 1939

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Cover Illustration: Bath purchased 6 single-deck cars specifically for the Oldfield Park route because of a low bridge. Seen here is No. 52, built by George Milnes & Co in 1904 in a computer colourised image. (LTHL collection).

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Horse trams had begun running in Bath on 24th December 1880 when a single route from the GWR Station via Southgate Street, High Street and Walcot to Grosvenor, using six horse drawn cars built by George Starbuck of Birkenhead commenced. It was built to a gauge of 4ft. The horse stables and depot were situated at the rear of the Porter Butt Hotel, London Road in Kensington.

The service was not profitable and on 26th May 1884 the company was taken over by the Patent Cable Tramways Corporation and seven further 12-seater cars were purchased. The Company's fortunes fared no better and it went into liquidation, being acquired by Dick, Kerr & Company on 11th August 1888. Operations were taken over by the Bath Road Car and Tramways Company, who already ran horse buses in the area, on 1st April 1889.

Bath Electric Tramways Ltd, a subsidiary of British Electric Traction, was formed to take over the horse tramways in the City of Bath, under the Bath & District Light Railways Order of 1901. The reconstructed system operated on tracks of 4ft 8½in gauge and covered 14.78 miles in length. The company operated from a depot in Walcot Street in a livery of bright blue and primrose.

The system opened on 2nd January 1904. Lines from the city centre to Bathford, Combe Down, Oldfield Park (worked by the single-deck trams because of a low railway bridge in Westmorland Road, which precluded the use of double-deck cars), Twerton, Newton St. Loe and Weston being opened between then and August of the same year. No further lines were constructed.

The fleet consisted of 34 open-top double deck (Nos. 1-34) and 6 single-deck (Nos. 50-55) cars, all built by George Milnes & Company of Birkenhead on trucks supplied by the Hamburg firm of W.C.F Busch.

The routes were as follows –

1. Bathford – Guildhall – Combe Down
2. GWR Station – Kingsmead Square -Upper Bristol Road – Newton St.Loe
3. GWR Station – Kingsmead Square -Upper Bristol Road – Weston
4. Guildhall – Lower Bristol Road – Twerton
5. Guildhall – Old Bridge – Oldfield Park (Cynthia Road)

There were, however, several districts (like Lansdowne and Whitcombe) that the Company had promised to serve that remained without a tram service. It was considered that the gradient of Lansdowne Hill was too steep for trams and that the traffic on the other promised routes was unlikely to be sufficient to justify the heavy capital expenditure on permanent way construction and overhead equipment. The Company decided to experiment with motor buses on these routes and six double-deck buses were ordered from Milnes-Daimler in 1905. Initially three of these buses were used on a service between the tramway termini at Bathford and Box via Corsham, Chippenham, Bradford-on-Avon, Melksham and Trowbridge, two buses being held in reserve. One bus was allocated to the Lansdowne route. Such was the success of these vehicles that the Company continued to open up routes and eventually was also

running excursions using 'torpedo' charabancs which they advertised as 'Green Torpedo Motor Cars'.

Every square foot of space was already occupied at the tramway depot and so it was necessary to have the buses garaged elsewhere. The company secured an old house known as York Villa, located in the centre of the city and having large grounds. The old house was prepared for temporary occupation by the resident engineer. A corrugated iron shed was erected in what had been the kitchen garden and was designed to accommodate eight buses.

In December 1936 the Bath Electric Tramways Company was taken over by the Bristol Tramways and Carriage Company and a link between Bath and Bristol established. As both companies were already operating motorbuses the Bath lines were gradually closed. The Newton St. Loe route closed on 3rd November 1938, with the Twerton section closing on 22nd April 1939. The rest of the system was closed by 6th May 1939, the last car No. 22 arriving with due ceremony at the depot. Nearly all the trams were broken up at the Glasshouse sidings opposite St. Martin's Hospital, Midford Road, with the remainder being scrapped at the depot.

Tram Fleet List 1904-1939

This listing is in the format - Fleet No; Type; Trucks; Builder; Seating.

1903

1-26; Double-deck open-top 4-wheel; W.C.F. Busch; Milnes; 33/22
50-53; Single-deck combination 4-wheel; W.C.F. Busch; Milnes; 30

Withdrawn 1939 (1-26, 50-53).

1904

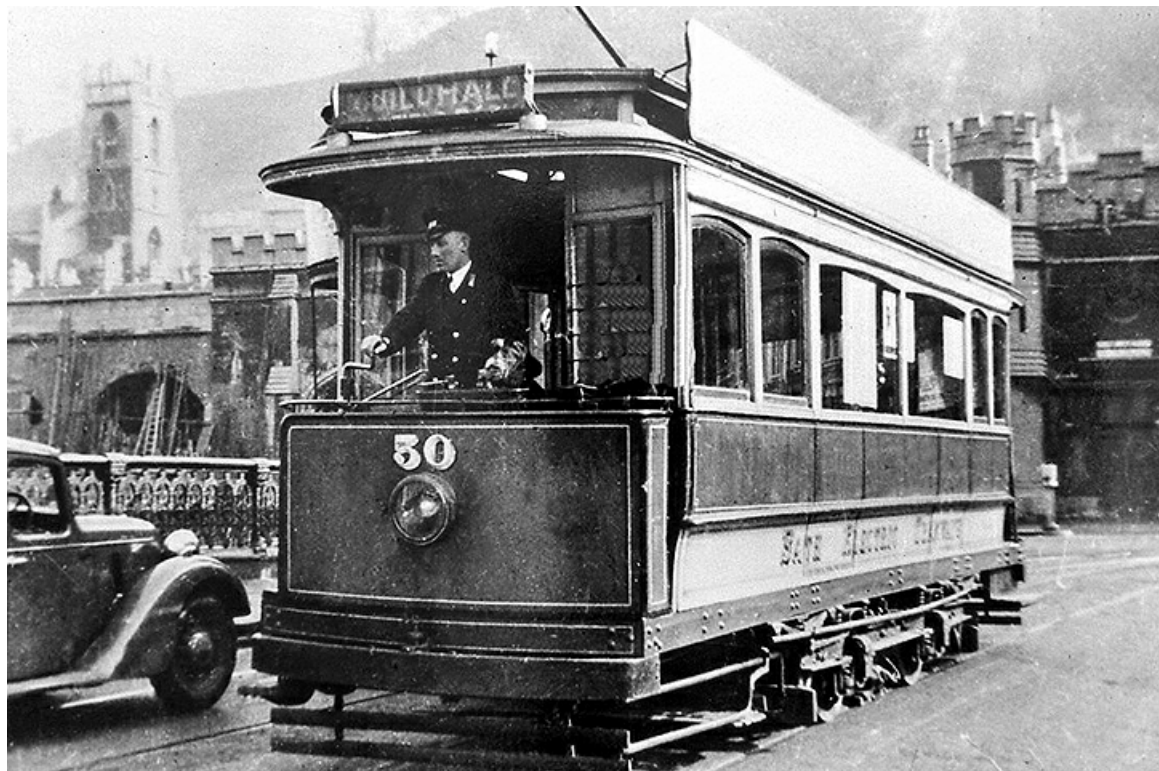
27-34; Double-deck open-top 4-wheel; W.C.F. Busch; Milnes; 33/22
54-55; Single-deck combination 4-wheel; W.C.F. Busch; Milnes; 30

Withdrawn 1939 (27-34, 54-55).

All the trams were broken up and scrapped.



Car 17, one of the first batch of Milnes-built cars delivered in 1904 is seen here some 30 years later in 1939 travelling along Bath High Street



Bath purchased 6 single-deck cars primarily for the Oldfield Park route which passed under a low bridge. This is No. 50 of 1904 built by Milnes on Busch trucks. (LTHL collection).

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Additional information, corrections and photographs are always welcome.
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