

BEDWAS & MACHEN No.7

JWO 355

AEC Regal III 9621A 854

Bruce B35R

This was one of two AEC saloons supplied to Bedwas & Machen UDC in January 1951 and the last single decks to be built by Bruce Coach Works Ltd at their Pengam Moors factory in Cardiff. They featured 9.6 litre diesel engines and crash gearboxes and with bodies built on East Lancs frames they had two large wooden advertising boards on the sides above the windows -later removed – on the sides above the windows.

The livery had a single cream band, but later included more cream. When new they carried the Council crest on the side panels, but sadly due to cost cutting these were replaced by the more familiar lettering. Also, for some reason, while with B&M, the destination display was made smaller making it difficult to fit in the Welsh valley names. The Regals were used on the colliery and industrial area routes, schools and to local housing estates by this small municipal fleet.

Sister vehicle No 6, JWO 354, was the first of the two to be withdrawn and was scrapped by Trelyn Metals in 1967. No. 7 soldiered on for another four years after some attention by Caerphilly UDC workshops. In June 1971 No. 7, the last Regal, was withdrawn and fortunately sold shortly afterwards to John Allen of Cannock for preservation. Twenty years later the bus followed John and his family to South Africa, firstly to Durban, Natal, then later No. 7 was placed into the care of Sandstone Estates, near Fricksburg in the Eastern Free State. Whilst in South Africa it received local registration numbers, as described by Mr. Allen. We are pleased that the registration JWO 355 has been reallocated to the bus for future use.



An early view at Caerphilly shows the advert boards and the Council crest. (Omnibus Soc.)

(The following is taken from reports and letters written by John Allen on the further history of No.7.)

I contacted Mr. Hadyn Williams the B&M Engineer and Transport Manager, and he told me that if I wanted the bus I would have to guarantee the purchase the next day as the tender from the scrapyard had been accepted for £180, though the scrapyard had not been informed of this. Hasty arrangements were made to visit south Wales and view the vehicle. Two of us went down to the depot and there was No. 7 standing in the yard, forlornly out of use. One conductress was in tears, though I'm not sure whether she was sad to see it go, or pleased that it had been saved for preservation. No. 7 was bought for £190 which included a spare wheel and a new front spring, but the bus had to be removed from the depot within the next month.

Having bought the bus I now had to find a home for it. I eventually found a coach operator at Walsall who agreed to my parking No.7 in their yard. So, for the next nine years the bus stayed at Walsall and most Saturdays I worked on it. The first task was to replace the tyres and these were acquired from wrecked lorries in scrap yards, then the 4x6 volt batteries were replaced by 2x12 volt. The paintwork was then tackled, but it was not easy to paint a bus in the open with a brush using enamel. The right rear mudguard was rusted away so I fitted some very thick plastic to the bodywork. Later, the electrics were professionally rewired and one rear brake drum was skimmed to prevent vibration when the brakes were applied. Unfortunately, some vandals started the bus and reversed it down a bank damaging the right hand corner which was then repaired with fibreglass.

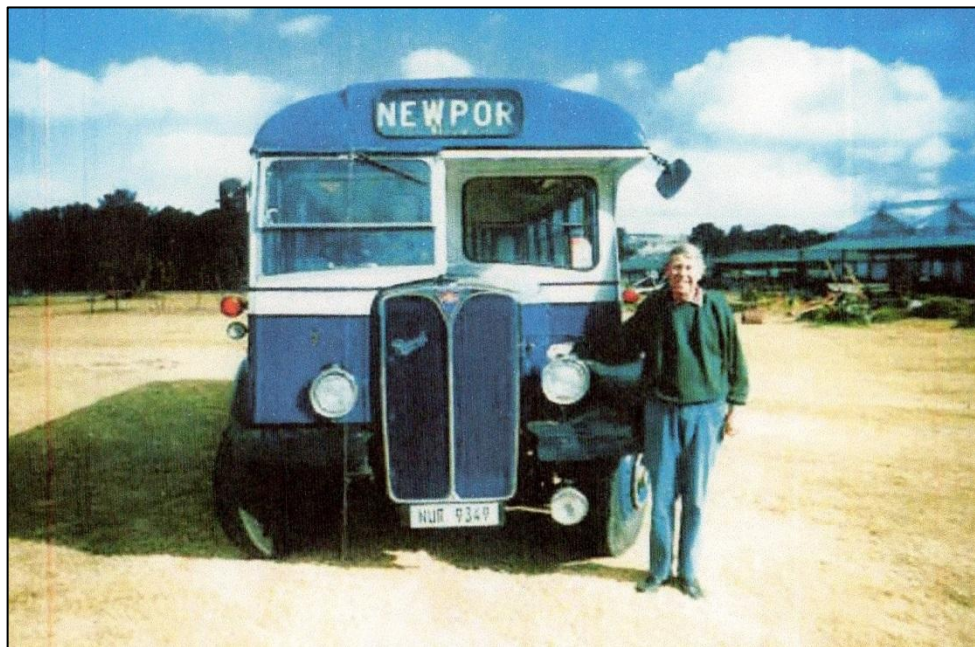


In March 1974 No. 7 returned to the valleys for a short visit to mark the end of the UDC bus services in the Rhymney Valley. There it was reunited with other heritage buses from Caerphilly and Gelligaer UDCs. (photo. Mike Street)

I was soon able to take No.7 to rallies in the summer including Weymouth and Blackpool, then in 1980, I moved with my family to the village of Chalgrove in Oxfordshire where the bus was kept in a farmer's barn for the winter. The first time it had been under cover since I'd owned it.

I was made redundant in 1991 and we decided we would like to live in South Africa for some years, as I had spent five years there when in my twenties. I wanted to take the bus with us, as I didn't want to part with it. I was advised by the Authorities that foreign buses were not allowed in the country, but an exception may be made as the bus was a preservation project and would not be used in passenger carrying service.

The bus duly arrived at Durban Docks in November 1991. After settling with custom and shipping agents I went to collect it and found that a crane had broken some windows as it had travelled the long sea voyage as deck cargo. It was arranged with Putco at Durban to temporarily park it. I arranged to license the bus and was given a licence number specially created for me, ND19514 (Natal Durban and the year of the bus, plus 4). I also had to take a heavy vehicle driving test before our first trip with the bus. I then learned of the Veteran Car Club at Kloof, some 15 miles north of Durban. They agreed to let me to park in their grounds and for the next few years No.7 remained at Kloof.



John Allen poses c. 2001 with his beloved Regal, by then in South Africa.

By 1996 members of the Durban Bus Preservation Society (of which I was a founder member) became the owners of five vintage buses sited at Midmar Village and accordingly No.7 moved in to join these vehicles and a museum was established. Over the next few years we took part in processions to celebrate various events in Durban.

In due course we moved to premises at the site of the Durban Drive-In Cinema Centre, just off the city's North Beach area. Eventually The DBPS had seven buses and a trolleybus. Moving to Natal Umhlanga Rocks, I re-registered the bus NUR 9349, as in South Africa, if you move to another town you have to re-register your vehicle and pay a licence fee to that town.

The years flew past and I was getting concerned at the increasing vandalism we were experiencing, the taking of headlights and badges etc., despite of barbed wire and a locked gate. We appealed to the council for a more secure site, but although sympathetic, they were unable to help us.



John Shearman, our well-travelled member, takes the Regal's wheel in South Africa.

On a visit to Cloccolan in Free State we heard of the Sandstone Collection, some 20 miles away, at Hoekfontein Farm and decided to visit on our way home. At this time the narrow gauge railway was still being laid and the large sheds were not yet built, but we were impressed that someone had the foresight to assemble such a collection of steam and motor vehicles in such a superb location. All this sounded like an answer to my prayer. In that a safe site could be found to accommodate my bus, and enable it to continue in preservation and also to be driven around the site at future events. I thought about this a great deal, as not only vandalism, but also the destructive elements of the sea air at Durban were an increasing worry.

After a friendly discussion, it was decided that No.7 would move to Sandstone initially for ten years. And so, in 2001 the Regal arrived at Sandstone Heritage Trust, having travelled some 300 miles from Durban on a low-loader.

Later that year I called in, as I wanted to see where it was housed. Once again I was impressed with the accommodation and relieved that Sandstone had kept their promise to keep it under cover and this was to influence my decision as to its future.

My bus first came out at the hugely successful Sandstone Great 100 Tractor event and I was able to share the driving from the carpark to the centre of the site. No.7 was packed solidly all the time with standing passengers and I was a little concerned about the 50 year old floor, but all went well.



No.7 at Sandstone in 2013. (Anon)

By the mid. 2000's we were considering returning to the U.K., so Regal No. 7 was donated to the Sandstone Estates in 2004. There further restoration took place including a repaint into "Sandstone." livery. They also re-registered the bus as CXC 040-FS so it could be used outside the park.

This could have been my last involvement with this bus had it not been for the recent interest by the CTPG in repatriating the bus back to its home country of Wales. I was delighted to hear that the group was successful in achieving the necessary funds.

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The following is an interesting, fully detailed account by John Woodward of the sea journey from South Africa to the U.K.

THE REGAL HOMECOMING by John Woodward

The 6,000 mile journey home for the Regal to South Wales was by road to Durban, then by sea to Southampton, then road to Barry, straight forward, but there was more to the trip than just that.

Thursday 18 December

The 294 mile road journey by low loader which started on 18 December from the Sandstone Heritage Trust at Hoekfontein Farm near Ficksburg in Eastern Free State, on the border of South Africa with Lesotho, was for 61 miles along the R26 road to Bethlehem, and then 57 miles along the N5 to Harrismith and 176 miles on the N3 over Van Reenan's Pass to Durban.



Ready to go! The Regal is hauled by Sandstone's Freightliner unit and low loader. (Sandstone)

Monday 22 December

The bus was taken into the vehicle deck of the 38,000 tonne Ro-Ro Vehicle Carrier 'World Spirit' and was fully protected inside the ship throughout the journey.

The ship left Durban for East London (South Africa), Las Palmas (Canary Islands), Vigo (Spain), Zeebrugge (Belgium) due 12 January, and then on to Emden and Bremerhaven (Germany). The Regal would be transhipped to a second vessel after arrival at Zeebrugge for the sailing to Southampton.

Tuesday 23 December

'World Spirit' made its way south down the coast of South Africa to call at East London at 0513 on 23 December, sailing on southward and around the southern tip of South Africa passing the Cape and Cape Town, then turning north west out from the coast of

Namibia and far out into the South Atlantic Ocean for the long haul passing the remote Island of St Helena, then far out to sea, way off Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, then gradually nearing the coast of The Gambia to pass between Dakar (Senegal) and the Cape Verde Islands on 1 January. The wind had increased to 25kts for a while after passing Cape Town, but otherwise the sea conditions were remarkably good.

Sunday 4 January

The ship passed Las Palmas in the Canaries on 4 January, with no call at that port although it was originally scheduled to do so.

Wednesday 7 January

Lisbon was passed at 0930 on 07 January heading north at 15kts for Vigo Spain eta 1200 on 8 January.



The 38,000 ton 'World Spirit'

Friday 9 January

However, crossing the Bay of Biscay, the wind began to increase as the ship sailed north. Wave heights forecast to be up to 7mtrs. Passed cruise ship Aurora at some distance earlier outward bound for Madiera.

After what must have been a boisterous crossing of the Bay of Biscay, 'World Spirit' rounded the Brest Peninsular on 10 January, the shipping forecast for the English Channel was for strengthening south westerlies to severe gale force 9, increasing storm force 10. Storm force ten is unusual in these areas.

Saturday 10 January

By 0916 on 10 January our ship was sailing east up the English Channel, at about half way between Torquay and Jersey. Speed 15kts, the speed which had been maintained more or less throughout the voyage, wind on the stern, west 35kts. Out in the Channel under way were Saga Sapphire (for Funchal), Queen Mary 2 (for Malaga) and Oriana (for Southampton).

Then, at 0921 the speed was increased markedly to around 17/18kts, maintaining the same direction until 1142 when the ship made a sharp and quite sudden, almost alarming, turn to port (left) from 51 degrees on the compass to 296 degrees, and headed north west for Torbay, arriving there at 1655, whereupon a Pilot came out from Brixham, met the ship, then immediately returned to Brixham.

Sunday 11 January

'World Spirit' was still in Lyme Bay the following morning January 11 and by then carrying out rather more complex manoeuvres, just a couple of miles from a similar vehicle carrier 'Genuine Ace' which had arrived in Lyme Bay on 9 January.

The two ships were moving about independently in Lyme Bay, first moving at very low speed (1 to 3kts) more or less drifting, for a few miles, which was taking an hour or two, then sometimes abruptly turning and running in the opposite direction, or thereabouts, at around 5/6kts ('World Spirit') and 9kts ('Genuine Ace'). This strange manoeuvring continued right through the night of 11 January.

Monday 12 January

'World Spirit' eventually left Lyme Bay early on 12 January making for Zeebrugge at a lively 17.5kts eta 0252 on 13 January. 'Genuine Ace' was also returning east up the Channel.

There must have been good reason for the sudden diversion from the schedule on 10 January to call off Brixham to rendezvous with the Pilot, followed by the continuous and complex manoeuvres in Lyme Bay for the following 48 hours day and night, in tandem with the similar vehicle carrier 'Genuine Ace' (59,000 tonnes).

There is speculation that this was in connection with the grounding of a similar vehicle carrier, 'Hoegh Osaka' (51,000 tonnes), which on 3 January, loaded with cars, industrial diggers and other machines, and ten new Optare single deck buses destined for the Far East, started to list soon after leaving Southampton, and by the time the list had increased to 52 degrees and the ship had taken on 3000 tonnes of water, the Pilot had no alternative after 50 minutes other than to beach the ship safely on Brambles Bank off Cowes, Isle of Wight.

Incidentally, it may have been fortuitous that the Regal was unable to get a booking on a previous sailing from South Africa which apparently could have been on the 'Hoegh Osaka', although the bus would have been safely offloaded at Southampton.

Tuesday 13 January

'World Spirit' finally arrived in Zeebrugge at 0440 on Tuesday 13 January, before continuing its journey to Emden and Bremerhaven. The Regal was then taken off the

ship in readiness for its journey to Southampton on a different ship, and once the bus was transhipped the journey would take around 12 hours.

Friday 16 January

There was no confirmation of which ship brought the Regal from Zeebrugge to Southampton, there were four large vehicle carriers making that trip between 15 and 17 January, and the most likely departure for the Regal would have been the huge 'Tonsberg' at 75,000 tonnes, which left Zeebrugge at 1115 on 16 Jan, eta Southampton 0200 on 17 January.

Saturday 17 January

The Regal has landed!

Mike informed us on Saturday 17 January that The Regal was in Southampton Docks within a customs compound, and that it would be ready to pick up pending clearance.



Back in U.K at Southampton, behind RT Williams Volvo. (RT Williams Ltd)

Monday 19 January

The Regal was duly returned to South Wales by RT Williams' low loader on the evening of Monday 19 January and was then safely tucked away inside the Depot, home at last!

AN AEC REGAL III COMES HOME by Tudor Thomas

On the very wet and blustery morning of Saturday 28th March members and guests arrived at The Bus Depot Barry for the official arrival of a very special bus. It was the last single deck bus built in Cardiff by the Bruce Coach Works in 1951, Bedwas & Machen UDC No. 7. Our principal guest was The Mayor of Caerphilly, Councillor David Carter, who seemed quite at home in our depot. He had worked as a manager with Gelligaer UDC many years ago!

The Mayor had a look at some of the buses inside the depot including progress on the former Caerphilly UDC no. 3 double decker. He also took great delight in looking over the old ticket machines in the displays created by Viv Corbin in the Julian Brinkworth Room. He remembers well the old Bellgraphic machines as used by Gelligaer UDC and even noted a signature on a document from someone he knew.

Thankfully the winds reduced, and as the rain took a break, the assembled guests went outside to the depot forecourt. Here stood the bus looking somewhat care-worn against the fully restored 1968 Bedwas & Machen 6 double decker. In a ceremonial fashion Mike Taylor passed The Mayor a new registration plate. This first piece marks a start in its full restoration of the 64-year old bus. The Mayor promptly got on his knees with screwdriver in hand and fixed the new shiny black traditional style mark JWO355 to the bottom of the AEC Regal III radiator.

Various people had been invited including representatives from Caerphilly County Council, Stagecoach in South Wales, the current bus operator in Bedwas & Machen today, and our members and supporters who helped raise the £20,000 to purchase, repatriate and eventually to restore this bus. One day, not too far away it will sparkle again in Oxford Blue and Royal Ivory but there is quite a bit of work to do first. Mike put it well --“The body needs a lot of work -- the years of touring the South African National Parks has not been kind to it”. It will be on view at our open days, the first being Sunday 3rd May.



*The Mayor of Caerphilly
fixes on the registration
plate JWO355 to
Bedwas & Machen UDC
7. (Photo Paul Hamley)*