

# Serving the people of West Kent and East Sussex



By 1952 Maidstone & District was well established as the main operator in west Kent, its route network extending into East Sussex with depots on the Sussex coast and services running through that county on routes from Tunbridge Wells and Hawkhurst and all the way from Gravesend to Brighton.

Formed on 22nd March 1911 with a fleet of five solid-tyred buses and twelve employees, organic growth and the acquisition of other companies, especially in the 1930s, meant that 852 buses and coaches were owned by 1952, based at depots in Ashford, Bexhill, Borough Green, Faversham, Gillingham, Gravesend, Hastings, Hawkhurst, Maidstone, Rye, Sittingbourne, Sheerness, Tenterden, and Tunbridge Wells. Buses were also parked at outstations in East Grinstead, Horsmonden, Heathfield, Oxted and Uckfield, and there was a winter storage facility at Queenborough on the Isle of Sheppey.

Routine maintenance was carried out at local depots but M&D also had a large central works, Postley Works, in Maidstone, which had opened in 1922 to undertake major mechanical overhauls, body repairs, repainting and the overhaul of a wide range of units from ticket machines through to engines. The Head Office had been at Knightrider House, in Knightrider Street, Maidstone, since 1928.

M&D had two subsidiary companies, Chatham & District from 1930 with local routes in the Medway Towns, and Hastings Tramways Company from 1935 in the Hastings and Bexhill area. In 1952 these ran 50 double-deckers and 53 trolleybuses respectively. C&D was absorbed in 1955, and HTC in 1957, Hastings' trolleybuses being replaced by motorbuses in 1959.

Business boomed until the early 1950s as people started travelling after the austerity of the war years. In 1950, M&D's fleet travelled 29 million miles and carried 165 million passengers, but steadily-declining patronage was evident by the mid-50s as people became more affluent, buying cars and having television sets at home instead of going by bus to the cinema. By 1961 the number of passengers was down to 120 million, carried by a fleet of 800 vehicles and with employees numbering approximately 3,250.

One-man operation started in a big way from 1955 with large batches of driver-only single-deckers purchased in the following years, this principle being extended to double-deckers from 1968, and ultimately leading to the last conductors leaving the company in 1981.



● *Newest double-deckers in 1952 were the fifty-three Leyland PD2s delivered the previous year, such as NKT 877 shown at Sittingbourne Rail Station.*



● *Typical of the one-man operated single-deckers of the 1950/60s is Harrington-bodied AEC Reliance 244BKM at Sevenoaks on rural service 106 to Fawke Common.*

Previously part of the British Electric Traction (BET) group, M&D was nationalised in 1969 and a new corporate livery was introduced across the National Bus Company (NBC) in 1972, replacing M&D's familiar dark green and cream. Coaches were painted white with large red and blue 'NATIONAL' fleetnames, and buses wore a lighter green and white. The traditional gold 'scroll' fleetname was replaced by white block capital letters accompanied by the NBC's 'double-N' symbol.

M&D was to work more closely with its NBC neighbour, East Kent, although each retained their own identities. From 1974 M&D's Head Office functions progressively moved from Maidstone to East Kent's Head Office in Canterbury, and Knightrider House closed in August 1981.

High inflation and reducing passengers in the late 1970s and early 1980s saw the service network significantly restructured to match demand. Between February 1980 and August 1981 the long-established depots at Faversham, Sheerness, Bexhill, Hastings (Brook Street) and Maidstone were closed. In September 1982 the company's newest depot, built in 1960 at Tonbridge, was also closed.

The combined M&D and East Kent organisation was split into smaller units in May 1983, the new M&D company being broadly the same as before, but with the Hastings and Rye area transferred to the new Hastings & District Transport Ltd., and M&D's Head Office relocated to Luton Road in Chatham. H&D was subsequently purchased by Stagecoach in 1989.

In 1986 the bus industry experienced two significant changes. Deregulation of local bus services from 26th October made it easy for any operator to run services in competition with M&D and all services had to run profitably. Any loss-makers became the responsibility of the local authorities who could decide the timetable and offer a contract for the service by competitive tender. Some of M&D's traditional services were lost to other companies on behalf of Kent or East Sussex County Councils, and, in more recent times, Medway Council, as a result of this policy.



● *The standard single-deck bus of the NBC era was the Leyland National. KKL538P was one of twenty in the M&D fleet of the shorter 10.3 metre variety, seen here at Doddington.*

purchased local coach operator New Enterprise Coaches of Tonbridge. Chiefly engaged in private hire, excursion and contract work, it also ran bus services in the Borough Green, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells area in competition with M&D. New Enterprise retained its own identity and continues to do so today as part of Arriva Southern Counties.

Deregulation of local bus services resulted in M&D experiencing competition from a number of operators, including, perhaps surprisingly, holiday tour operator Shearings and London coach company Grey-Green Coaches. During the 1990s, M&D acquired the bus operations of both, and also took over Wealden Beeline of Five Oak Green, Fuggle's of Benenden, Mercury Passenger Services of Hoo and Turner's of Maidstone.

The largest acquisition, in June 1992, was that of Boro'line Maidstone, the borough council's bus company set up at deregulation to continue the operation of a network which had its roots in the local tram, trolleybus and bus services of the early 20th century. Boro'line had gone into liquidation and M&D purchased



● *An early sign of NBC ownership was the painting of coaches into all-white livery, including dual-purpose Weymann-bodied AEC Reliance BKT814C, the first to receive the livery and seen in Maidstone.*

The other change was privatisation of the National Bus Company, the subsidiaries being sold to the private sector. M&D was sold on 7th November 1986 to a management-led employee buyout and the company soon adapted the NBC identity to establish its own image, retaining the NBC green paintwork but relieved by cream instead of white and with a new bespoke fleetname style.

On top of all this activity, M&D put into service in 1986 the first of a fleet of ninety Mercedes-Benz 20-seat minibuses, offering high-frequency services in a number of towns. This new concept in urban transport was very much in vogue at that time.

On 22nd June 1988, M&D's holding company, Einkorn Ltd.,



● *In 1986 there was deregulation, privatisation and . . . minibuses. D27 KKP was one of M&D's initial batch of thirty-nine, converted from vans by Routes of Maidstone.*



● A new livery based on traditional colours was used in 1997, as shown on Olympian P931MKL at Leybourne near West Malling, one of 92 vehicles bought new that year. It was later rebranded under the iconic Green Line name from 1995.

its assets, including the large depot in Armstrong Road into which M&D quickly moved from a temporary site in Hart Street.

Bygone Buses of Headcorn, which ran a small network of local and rural routes, mainly around Maidstone, was taken over in May 1994 following a period of competition between the two companies.

On 13th April 1995 M&D was sold to the expanding British Bus Group which already owned the neighbouring Kentish Bus company. The Head Offices of Kentish Bus and M&D were combined on the Armstrong Road site from October 1995 as the Invictaway Group, reflecting the name which M&D established in the early 1980s for its London express services, those in turn

A new look for M&D came in 1996 when buses began to appear in a dark green and cream livery with an oval logo which hinted at the shape of the traditional 'scroll' fleetname. It was, however, short-lived as British Bus was sold in 1997 to the Cowie Group, another of the groups which had developed from the major changes that transformed the bus industry in 1986. Cowie wanted a corporate look and the brand name Arriva was introduced, with an aquamarine and stone livery, the prototypes of which appeared on two M&D vehicles prior to introducing the livery nationwide. Buses began to receive the new colours as a matter of routine in early 1998. Over the years the livery has evolved to the current style with an all-blue front and a darker blue skirt.

The Maidstone & District title continued to be carried as part of the legal lettering on the side of buses, but from April 1998 the company was renamed Arriva Kent & Sussex Ltd. New Enterprise was unchanged. In April 2001 the operation at Gillingham, Sheerness and Sittingbourne was separated as Arriva Medway Towns Ltd.



● Arriva's livery has evolved over the years and there has been large investment in new buses like these two Volvo B7TLs in Chatham, part of a batch of forty-nine bought in 2004.

Although, to all intents and purposes, the M&D company was no more, Arriva Kent & Sussex Ltd and Arriva Medway Towns Ltd are currently the direct descendants of M&D. Under Arriva ownership the former M&D and Kentish Bus area became part of Arriva Southern Counties and other areas were brought under the same umbrella over the ensuing years, including operations in Surrey, West Sussex, Southend, Thurrock and, for a short time, Colchester.



● Latest buses for Arriva include the Optare Versa, like KX61FHN seen in Tunbridge Wells and one of five bought to upgrade the long service 402 to Bromley.

In 2012 much of M&D's traditional network continues to form the core of Arriva's services in Kent, though now with only minimal incursion into East Sussex and operated from just four depots at Gillingham, Sheerness, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells with a combined fleet of around 250 vehicles. Stagecoach continues to run much of what was M&D's network in East Sussex from the former M&D depot at Silverhill, Hastings.

The M&D and East Kent Bus Club continues to record all of Arriva's and Stagecoach's operations in the former M&D area and their current activities are published in the Club's range of publications and its monthly *Invicta* magazine.