

## Arnold Benson Coaches – the story of a Kildwick business

Arnold Benson was an independent coach company, based in Kildwick, that ran from shortly after the end of WW2 up until at least 1970.

Coach travel was very popular in the 1950s and 1960s, with many small operators offering weekend and Wakes-Week day-trips, and seaside excursions. During the week, many operators were contracted to do mill or factory personnel transport duties.

Some of these operators briefly benefitted from the Beeching railway closures in the mid-1960s, operating country branch line services for a very short and unprofitable period. However, by the early 1970s the growth in car ownership made many coach businesses unprofitable and the closure of local textile mills in the area at this time also killed-off the weekday "bread and butter" income.

In addition to arranging their own weekend and bank holiday public excursions or day trips, Bensons also offered their coaches for hire to the larger companies, which was a very common practise in those busy days of seaside/Dales day-trips. The photograph below shows Christine Overend standing next to an Arnold Benson coach, probably on one of these excursions.



This photograph must have been taken between August 1952 and September 1954.

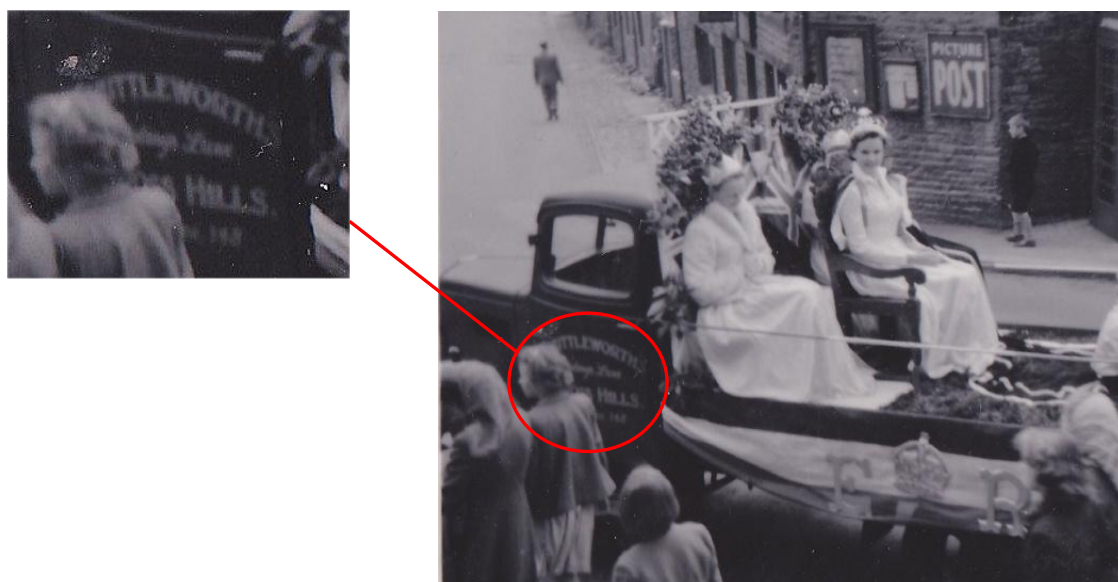
## Who was Arnold Benson ?

The name Arnold Benson doesn't appear in any of the school photographs we have in our archive; nor is he mentioned in any local newspaper reports. He doesn't appear in the Farnhill or Kildwick census (although the latest available is 1911); and there is no record of him in the register of Births, Marriages and Deaths.

But there is a good reason for these absences. Very simply, Arnold Benson didn't exist !

The name was made up, a trading name created by the Shuttleworth brothers: Edwin **Arnold** Shuttleworth, who lived at Lion Farm, and John **Benson** Shuttleworth, who lived in Jessamine Place, Junction.

In 1953 Edwin Shuttleworth, then operating a haulage business from Cross Hills, supplied the flat-bed truck that was used as a float in the Kildwick Coronation parade, to convey the "Queen", Mary Roberts, and her deputy Marion Brown, to St. Andrew's church.



It seems likely that the Shuttleworths adopted the trade name "Arnold Benson" for their coach business in August 1952 – possibly to give them a more commercial image than "Shuttleworth Coaches" or to differentiate the coach operations from the Shuttleworth haulage operations.

It has also been suggested that the derivation of the name might have been inspired by that of the much larger coach operator Wallace Arnold, which was named after its founders Wallace Cunningham and Arnold Crowe.

## Where was the company based ?

The photograph below was taken from the back of the old Lion Farm, situated at the bottom of Priest Bank Road next-door to the White Lion pub. Ignore the ball-point **X**, the interesting feature of this photograph is the coach parked next to the outbuilding.



This is one of the few pieces of evidence we have for Arnold Benson Coaches operating from “Lion Garage, Kildwick”.


Access was via a narrow lane leading off Priest Bank Road to the garage, which faced the fields overlooking the River Aire. The garage provided workshop facilities and was capable of holding three or four coaches. The area in front of the workshops provided washing facilities and parking for another two coaches, with the final coaches and first to leave in the morning being parked in the site access.

## The Arnold Benson coach fleet

The Shuttleworths’ first public transport vehicle seems to have been an Albion single-decker bus dating from 1938 (XS 4766). It was bought in 1947 from Youngs of Paisley and sold, probably for scrap, in 1953. Probably not a good vehicle for excursions or private hire, so perhaps Shuttleworths had a mill or factory contract at this time ?

The photograph shown on page 1 features CAG 796, a Daimler with a Burlingham coach body built in 1948. It was originally ordered by Western SMT (a large bus/coach operator in Scotland) but it never entered service with them. Instead, it passed to a dealer in Glasgow in 1949. It must have been offered at a good price because "Edwin Arnold Shuttleworth, Lion Garage, Kildwick" bought it in April 1949. This coach stayed in Kildwick until sold to a firm in Dartford in September 1954 and, surprisingly, remained licensed until 1966.

The following list of coaches owned and operated by the Shuttleworths up to 1970, has been provided by transport expert, John Kaye of Croydon.

XS 4766	Albion Valkyrie with a Cowieson bus body, built for Youngs of Paisley in 1938; bought from Blair and Palmer of Carlisle in 1947; sold 1953.
CK 4902	Weymann-bodied Leyland Lion coach originating in the Preston area and bought from Richardson, West Hartlepool, in 1948; sold 1956.
CAG 796	Burlingham-bodied Daimler coach, built for Western SMT in 1948 but not operated by them; bought by Shuttleworth in 1949; sold 1954 to Becketts of Dartford; scrapped 1966 ?
<b>Adopted "Arnold Benson" as a trading name 1952?</b>	
HYG 191	Tower-bodied Commer Avenger coach bought from Hutchinsons of Eastburn in 1953 (another long-gone operator); sold to Cleveleys of Leeds, 1960 ?
ATE 980	AEC Regal originating from the South Lancashire area in the late 1930s(?), fitted with a second-hand Transun coach body in 1955; bought 1956; sold 1959.
UAK 813	Duple-bodied Bedford SB1 coach, bought new in 1960; no record of being sold so perhaps still with them when they ceased operating ?
<b>Took over/bought Thompsons of Sutton, December 1965</b>	
1878 WU	Plaxton-bodied Bedford SB3 coach, built in 1959 for Thompsons of Sutton; sold in 1967.
LWR 546D	Plaxton-bodied Bedford VAM coach, bought new in 1966.
513 GWX	Plaxton-bodied Bedford SB5 coach; built in 1964; bought from Denroy, Hebden Bridge in 1967; sold (via Angus of Sheffield) to Earnside's of Glenfarg. 
DYG944H	Ford coach bought new in May 1970 – this is their last known vehicle.



Arnold Benson acquired further vehicles when they took over part of the operation of another small local operator. The following information is from the book "Independent Bus Operators of Western Yorkshire" by Neville Mercer (publ. Venture Publications Ltd.):

*In May 1967, Cowgill of Lothersdale gave up its long-established Lothersdale to Cross Hills and Skipton bus service, but retained a coach operation and a school contract (to South Craven?). However, lack of business forced the closure of its operations and the sale of its remaining vehicles to Arnold Benson in April 1968.*

*These were:*

*LWR 762 - an Albion Victor with a Barnaby bus body (for school duties) bought new in 1952. (Reportedly used by Bensons for a further two years as a "School bus" until scrapped).*

*EWV 710 C - a Bedford SB5 coach dating from 1965*

*KWU 770 D - a Bedford VAM coach dating from 1966*

Evidence for competition between Arnold Benson and Cowgills comes from the photograph below, which shows Farnhill Methodist Church Choir on an outing to Buxton, in 1955, using a Cowgill bus rather than one from Arnold Benson.



**Very back:** Rupert Barker, Arthur Lofthouse, Florrie Whitaker

**Back row:** unknown (possibly Rupert Barker's son who lived in Buxton), his wife ?, unknown, unknown, Mrs. Mosley, Mrs. Cooper, Mrs. Barker

**Front row:** Tommy Cooper, Minnie Dixon, Cissie Lofthouse, Joan Lowther, Leslie Sharp, unknown

## How the company operated

By 1967 there were three distinct parts to the business.

**Tours operated under the Arnold Benson name.** These included:

- Evening circulars, starting around 6pm, costing five shillings and six pence.
- Country runs were of a slightly longer duration, starting off at about 1.30 pm and returning at 7.30 pm; fare nine shillings. These would cover anything from Mystery Tours to journeys with a specific destination, for example the “South Yorkshire Tour”.
- Full day trips to the coast, usually Scarborough, Bridlington, Blackpool or Morecambe. Typically organised by a church, club, pub, etc.
- Period returns, which involved transporting one group of holiday makers to their chosen holiday destination (Scarborough, Bridlington, Blackpool or Morecambe) where they would spend their week or fortnight’s holiday whilst the coach returned with another group who had completed their stay.

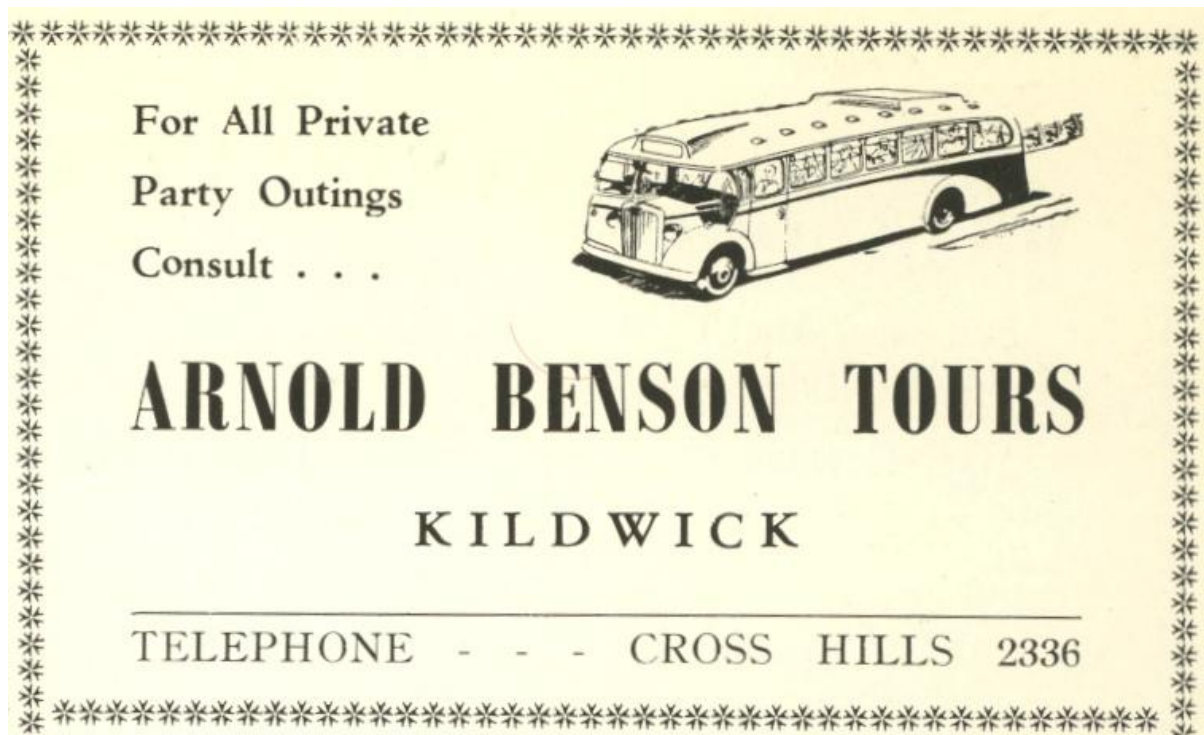
These tours were often advertised in the local newspapers, such as the Keighley News.

**Contracts with local textile mills,** transporting employees to and from their place of work. One of these involved collecting employees from in and around Keighley and transporting them to their place of work in the Cross Roads – Haworth area.

**Operating as a sub contractor to a larger operation.** Including Heaps’ Leopard Tours of Leeds and Wallace Arnold. These often involved longer journeys with many varied destinations.

In addition to their own booking office in Kildwick (telephone number Cross Hills 2336), the company had a number of other booking agents in the local area. These included:

- R Dewhurst, Silsden
- Henderson, Steeton
- Lunn, Eastburn
- M Craven, Sutton in Craven
- Ainsworth, Crosshills



Advertisement for Arnold Benson coach tours. From the programme for the Sutton Baptist Bazaar, 1954

### What next – can you help ?

Do you know any more about Arnold Benson Coaches ?

We know some Glusburn and Sutton mills had their own small fleets of buses for works transport, but does anyone know of other mills in the area which used hired-in transport – possibly using Shuttleworths/Bensons ? Did the purchase/takeover of the Sutton bus company Thompsons, in 1965, come with a mill contract as part of the deal ?

After the purchase of their last coach in 1970, the trail goes cold. Did they sell up in the early 1970s? Does anyone in Kildwick or Farnhill remember using this school bus from 1968 to 1970/1? When did “Lion Garage” cease to be a coach storage building?

The Farnhill and Kildwick Local History Group would like to hear from you about this or on any topic of local interest. Please contact [history@farnhill.co.uk](mailto:history@farnhill.co.uk). Or why not join us at one of our monthly meetings – see the website for details.

## Acknowledgements

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