

## Takken's double-decker buses



*The history of the double-decker buses that were imported into the Netherlands in the 1960s and 1970s.*

*Frans Angevaare  
Noordwijk (NL)*

*London double-deckers, Parisian city buses, American school buses and Swiss post buses: this quartet of exotics has been making familiar appearances on Dutch roads for many years now when it comes to weddings and other parties, advertising campaigns and other applications for which public transport buses are not actually intended. In this article we look back at how it all started in the Netherlands with the double-decker buses – which hardly ever come from London.*

There were double-decker buses from the very beginning of bus services in our country, and just after the Second World War there also were a number of them, even imported from Britain. However, they were 'just' used to transport passengers from A to B and that is not what this article is about. For the use described in the introduction, the story commences in the sixties of the last century.

At that time, the company *Harris Lebus*, a large furniture manufacturer from London, had furnished some double-decker buses as mobile showrooms with which they traveled the European mainland. In 1965 and 1967 they also visited the Netherlands - including the towns of Den Helder, Leiden and Rotterdam - with MXX 242 and 243, AEC Regent III / Weymann from October 1952 (ex London Transport RLH42 and 43). So no Dutch owners, because these forerunners returned to their home base in London after business was done.



*Lebus of London MXX 242 on the Westblaak in Rotterdam in 1967. Stadsarchief Rotterdam, Collection Ary Groeneveld 4141/305494-10*

In 1968 two young Englishmen, Andrew Maclagan (29) and Peter Warren (25), had come up with a similar plan that involved selling clothes in a double-decker bus. *Boutique* was then the name in vogue for shops selling trendy clothes, so they called their vehicle the *bus-boetiek*. Although it was sometimes somewhat irreverently referred to as a *jurkenbus* (dress bus) in press reports.

They also bought the bus from London Transport, it was a Leyland 6RT from October 1950 with registration number LLU 567 (RTW417). The problem they immediately ran into – the bus was too high according to Dutch legislation – they had solved by reducing it to 3.97m and provide the bus with a roof that hinged on one side, like an old-fashioned baker's cargo bike. An ingenious solution and a special sight, but it worked.



*The bus of Maclagan & Warren in 1968 at the Grote Markt in Haarlem. Photo: Noord-Hollands Archief NL-HlmNHA 07419.*

They had big plans, with four buses also in other countries, with the use as a disco in the evenings, but nothing much seems to have come of it. In any case, in the summer or autumn of 1968 they have been in the cities of Haarlem, Groningen and Leeuwarden, while permission was refused in Vlissingen.

It is now becoming a bit more Dutch, because the gentlemen had lived here for a while and the bus has stayed behind in the Netherlands.

Then it really started in September of the same year. On the 13th of that month, the Haarlem company *Automobielen Takken* advertised for the first time with double-decker buses, English imports and available from stock. To be used for anything: showroom, country house,

boutique, coffee bar, construction site canteen, office, storage, warehouse, chip shop, timekeeper's house – their imagination knew almost no bounds and sure enough, all these uses of the double-decker buses have occurred in later years. Weddings was the only use they didn't think of at the time.

Coincidence or not, but a week later an article appeared in the *Vrije Volk* newspaper with the story that the Baarn police had forbidden garage owner D. Hoek from that

**Dubbeldeks-Autobussen**

Eng. imp., i.z.g.st., 100 pct., origineel, zeer geschikt voor showroom, buitenhuisje, boutique, koffiobar, bouwkeet, kantine, kantoor, opslag, magazijn, friteskraam, tijdwaarnemershuis enz. enz. Zéééér veel ruimte voor zéééér weinig geld. Uit voorraad leverbaar. Ook het adres voor antieke en classic cars o.a. Rolls-Royce, Bentley, Daimler, T-Fords, Chevrolet, Citroën, Darrag enz. enz. Automobielen Takken, Showroom, Rustenburgerlaan Haarlem. Ook 's avonds en zondags geopend. Telef. 023-16441-81390-20591-18286. - C21

*The first advert with double-deckers of Automobielen Takken in De Telegraaf of September 13th, 1968.*



*Bristol PHN 808 in September 1969 in Veghel at the opening of a bridge. This has probably been one of Dirk Hoek's buses. Photo: Harry van Liempd, collectie BHIC, nr. BCV4030*

town to use his English double-decker buses on the road. He had bought two, Hoek said, and had 23 more on order, to use for advertising purposes and for tours with children and for charities.

Some information can be found in the local newspaper from that time, in the shape of a small controversy between a sarcastic inhabitant (6m high bus...) and Dirk Hoek himself. This tells us that one of his buses was taken off the road by the Baarn police on September 15th and had been confiscated. He got it back after some parts were removed, making the bus unsuitable for driving, and it was put under seal. But they were not rid of him, because Hoek stubbornly concluded his letter with "P.S. I bought twenty-five more."

Somewhat later, the British PSV Circle reported that 14 double-decker buses had been exported to the Netherlands in September 1968, without reporting who had bought those buses.

That's quite something, one company suddenly has a number of double-deckers in stock, the other says he bought 25, and also 14 were shipped from the UK - what an unprecedented popularity suddenly for those buses. It is almost inevitable that these three events from the same month were connected.

First, however, something needs to be clarified. Those 14 buses, with a number added later, were at one point attributed to *Beyer, Hoofddorp* in the databases of both the PSV Circle and the ADV, its Dutch counterpart. The ADV did question his status (*dealer?*, it says literally in the database), but otherwise there has never been a reason to doubt it in all these years.

Until in 2020 someone remarked to me that in addition to Beyer, a certain *Piet Takken* had brought many double-deckers to the Netherlands, and I did not find that name in the databases. When I continued to search for mentions of Beyer and Takken, it turned out that there was very little to be found about the first name in connection with buses, and all the more about the second. That indicated that somewhere, at some point, something must have gone wrong in the documentation.



*BS-27-01 came to the Netherlands in September 1968 and was abandoned in India after it's last trip. Doetinchem 27th July, 1974. Photo: Harry Laming.*

Beyer, it turned out, was based at Kruisweg 1517 in Hoofddorp, and Automobielen Takken was, from early 1970, at Kruisweg 1525. So almost neighbors, and that calls for caution when buses are sighted there. The societies further assumed that Beyer traded as *Antique and Classic Cars* – but that turns out *not* to be the case. It was Automobielen Takken that used it as a trade name during the 70s, while there are a number of mentions of a car company *De Cruquius* at Kruisweg 1517. That was Beyer’s business.



*Bristol OHY 952 with LTM logos, seen in Hoofddorp on July 18th, 1970. Photo: Jan Erik Grunveld.*

There are still more clues, of which I will mention two more. In 1975 and 1978 I took pictures of double-decker buses in Hoofddorp at the Kruisweg, and one of the photos shows the house number 1525, which undoubtedly links the then spotted buses to Takken. And recently, in a high-resolution press photo from 1971, I discovered that on the back of BS-04-97 there was a small sticker with the name “TAKKEN” printed on it. Once you know that, the same sticker can also be seen on BS-04-96. I will not go into each bus individually here, but it is clear to me that the vast majority of the buses attributed to Beyer actually belonged to Automobielen Takken.

We pick up the thread from 1968 again. In October there was an incident with one of the 14 buses (NAE 37), when it was taken off the road near Dordrecht after a serious accident happened due to clumsy maneuvering (because the bus was too high for a viaduct). A year later, again a car dealer from Baarn was national news because his bus was taken off the road. That must have been Hoek, and it’s the last time we hear from him, which raises the question

whether he really had bought those 25 buses. I really don’t think so, it may have been an unruly bluff caused by his chagrin about his confiscated bus.

Still, the number of 25 fits well, but on the buses of Takken, because there were 14 bought in 1968 and 11 more in 1970/71. Quantity discount due to a purchase of 25 buses, to be delivered in the years 1968-71, it is easily imaginable and can be incorporated into other available data. Hoek will then have immediately acquired two, or maybe somehow collaborated in the purchase.

Also in 1969 we hear something from Britain again, namely that someone had spotted some of the 14 buses at a scrap yard in Vijfhuizen. The small village of Vijfhuizen is, like Hoofddorp, also located in the Haarlemmermeer, and relatively close to Takken’s premises - it was virtually around the corner. The ADV also has such a report, namely from 1970 of three double-decker buses at a scrap yard in Nieuwe Brug. That is one hamlet further along the Ringvaart, let’s assume that it was the same site, between Vijfhuizen and Nieuwe Brug.

Now that seems a bit strange. Is one going to import 14 buses in September – perhaps for a bargain, but still with considerable relocation costs – and then sell half of them for scrap iron six months later? And then again import such a number of exactly such buses that all find a new owner. And besides, several of the buses that were in the supposed scrap yard have been spotted in use later.

It seems more likely to me that it was a Takken site where they parked their buses (it turned out later that they also had property in Vijfhuizen); or that it was a friendly company where they could temporarily park their stock.



*VN-36-51 during a farmer’s protest in September 1974 on Dam Square in Amsterdam. Photo: Nationaal Archief, Rob C. Croes, 2.24.01.05/927-4529*



*Bristols ZV-78-22 and 47-49-FB at Takken in Hoofddorp, 7th July 1975. Photo by the author.*

The British spotter, who so diligently noted the license plates of the buses in April 1969, also saw LLU 567, Maclagan & Warren's bus, in Vijfhuizen. Those men would have had more costs for the renovation than for the purchase and you wouldn't expect this one at a scrap yard so quickly.

It does provide a link between the two Brits and Takken, and I imagine that the Takken brothers in the summer of 1968, when the bus was parked on the Grote Markt in their home town, immediately saw its potential: there's profit in it. With their contacts in the

world of car dealers in Britain, they will have found an address of a bus dealer in no time, and have taken the bull by the horns. That dealer was W. North in Sherburn-in-Elmet, not far from Leeds, one of the major players in the field of used buses in Great Britain. Many public transport companies from all over the country sold their end-of-life buses to this company and coincidentally, there are photos to be found of some of the 14 'Dutch' buses at Norths, shortly before they were shipped..

The Takken brothers were Gerhard (Gé) and Pieter, who at one point specialized in antique and classic models with their car dealership at the Rustenburgerlaan in Haarlem, from Rolls Royces to T-Fords and London taxis. In March 1970 their sales center at the Kruisweg in Hoofddorp is mentioned for the first time, and that year the trading name Antique and Classic Cars also appeared, which later became Classic Cars Ned. for a while.

From 1970/71 some buses were also rented out for the aforementioned advertising purposes, which also includes election campaigns. I suspect that two were even specially registered for the campaign of the parliamentary elections of 1971. Their actual rental buses were red and that wouldn't have suited the parties who wanted to rent a bus. So it became two green ones that were used. The brothers themselves also mentioned in an interview that the buses were frequently used for recording TV programs and were often at car fairs.

A good example of a temporary rental is that of the OHY 952, which drove a week for LTM in the province of Limburg as part of a catering trade fair in March 1970. Back in its old craft of passenger transport, but now between Heerlen and Valkenburg.

The first group of 25 Takken double-deckers included only Bristol K buses in various variants, with Eastern Coach Works (ECW) bodies. A chassis that originally dates from 1937 and of which more than 4100 have been built. The oldest of the bunch was from 1949 – it is one that was only discovered in 2020 as a 'Dutch' bus, so you see that information can still surface even after 50 years. In the attached list details of the 25 buses are shown, with where known the first owner after the brothers Takken.



*BS-04-96 again bears its old British license plate LTA 945 at Roda BTP / Duiventours, ca. 2000. Photo Marcel Nijland.*



*Stichting Vastenavond OHY 968, seen in Bergen op Zoom on February 28, 2017. Photo by the author.*

September of '75 again, and the following month *Engelse dubbeldekkerbussen*. That's English double-decker buses plural, and the only time in that way because after that, between mid-1976 and early '77, only a few Bristol Lodekkas were offered (and only one at a time). It can be deduced from this that Beyer only traded in double-deckers to a limited extent from 1974-77.

For the Takken brothers, buses were actually an sideshow, their heart lay with classic cars. After 1975 there is little activity regarding buses at Takken. Competition had also arisen – Beyer with a couple of buses, Van Wijk from Leeuwarden also started importing them, and Kleyn Trucks from Vuren brought some 10 Lodekkas to the Netherlands. And all with the same formula: rental and sale. In addition, people increasingly managed to find their way to Great Britain on an individual basis to buy a bus, such as Garage Slotboom from Elst, who in 1973 was one of early ones when they bought a Bristol KSW6G. That was one of very few of the Bristol K in the Netherlands that was not imported by Takken.

In September 1981 the possessions of the brothers Takken in Haarlem, Hoofddorp and Vijfhuizen were put up for sale, because they planned to start an automobile museum. That won't have come off the ground, because as a car company they continued to advertise and in March 1988 the company in Hoofddorp was put up for sale again, this time due to a reorganization. Shortly afterwards, another name, Van Asselt, appeared on Kruisweg 1525. Automobielen Takken continued in Haarlem.

The last two buses were sold in February 1993 to two other brothers, De Greef from Echteld. The condition of the buses indicated that they had been out of service for a long time. Both these Bristols have been restored and are still in existence, 81-79-DB remains at Echteld, the other is the open topper that came in 1975 and was repatriated to the UK in 2009. This bus is in the collection of the Isle of Wight Bus Museum.

After 1971 it was quiet for them for a few years as far as the import of double decker buses is concerned. In 1974 a Bristol Lodekka was bought, as a model the successor to the Bristol K. This was to replace one of the most frequently used rental buses, VN-36-51. The following year another Bristol K, but that was a special one, a so-called open topper, with a chassis from 1940 on which a new body was built in 1954. A few more Lodekkas followed, but with these individual purchases it is also more difficult to determine now who imported the buses; Takken, Beyer or perhaps others.

Also in 1974, Beyer has to be given some attention, because in May of that year he offered a Bristol double-decker bus for sale for the first time. That was probably a Lodekka, and then it was the first of its kind in the Netherlands. In



*Gebr. de Greef 81-79-DB in Echteld on April 11, 2018. Photo by the author.*

With the first import of the 25 double-deckers, the Takken brothers have set a trend that continues to this day, although in recent years it has only happened occasionally that a British double-decker is brought into the Netherlands. A newer trend is that the buses are returning to the UK or are being sold to other countries. Still, at the moment the current stock of former British double-deckers in the Netherlands is estimated to be about 120 to 130. A considerable number, and who knows, there may still be one here and there in a backyard or shed that we have never spotted....



BS-04-97 with Uitzendbureau Aktie '68, 4th August 1971.  
Photo Noord-Hollands Archief, Fotopersbureau De Boer 09770K01\_36.



NAE 44 in use as a canteen with SCW, Rijsenhout.  
Photo Noord-Hollands Archief, Fotopersbureau De Boer 09000K00\_29.



ZV-78-22 seen in Zuidbroek in 1974.  
Photo: Groningen Archieven, Persfotobureau D. van der Veen, NL-GnGRA 3099 5457



BK-19-FV (ex 47-45-FB) with Hans Classic Cars in Nijkerk on 1st July 2019. Photo by the author.

On the next page is an overview of the first group of 25 Bristols imported into the Netherlands.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	J	K
1	NAE 34	KS6B	1/51	Bristol Omnibus G1521	9/68	---		-?-	
2	NAE 37	KS6B	1/51	Bristol Omnibus G1524	9/68	---	12/68	Koetser, Baarn/Apeldoorn	
3	NAE 44	KS6B	2/51	Bristol Omnibus G1803	9/68	---	--/70	SCW, Rijsenhout	
4	NAE 52	KS6B	3/51	Bristol Omnibus G8021	9/68	---		-?-	
5	NAE 53	KS6B	6/51	Bristol Omnibus G1804	9/68	---		-?-	
6	NHY 950	KSW6B	10/51	Bristol Omnibus 8028	9/68	---	< 1/73	Waterloopleinbus. A'dam	
7	NHY 952	KSW6B	10/51	Bristol Omnibus 8030	9/68	---		-?-	
8	NHY 953	KSW6B	12/51	Bristol Omnibus 8031	9/68	---	--/70	Presumably Garage Sas, Breda	
9	NHY 977	KSW6B	3/52	Bristol Omnibus 8055	9/68	---		-?-	
10	OHY 941	KSW6B	7/52	Bristol Omnibus 8078	9/68	BS-27-01	7/71	Ten Cate, Geesteren	
11	OHY 952	KSW6B	12/52	Cheltenham District 8553	9/68	---	6/72	HZVV, Hoek van Holland	
12	OHY 968	KSW6B	3/53	Bristol Omnibus C8111	9/68	---	1/69	Stichting Vastenavend, BoZ	yes
13	PHN 807	KSW6B	6/52	United Automobile BH25	9/68	---	9/68	Presumably Hoek, Baarn	
14	PHN 808	KSW6B	6/52	United Automobile BH26	9/68	---	9/68	Presumably Hoek, Baarn	yes
15	KUO 939	K5G	12/49	Western National 926	-/70	BS-04-97	9/71	Aktie '68, Haarlem	
16	LTA 817	KS5G	9/50	Western National 998	-/70	47-49-FB	--/--	Delta Promotions, Ressen	yes
17	LTA 942	KSW6B	1/51	Southern National 1832	-/70	AS-25-69	5/70	Sijthoff Pers, Rijswijk	yes
18	LTA 945	KS5G	6/50	Southern National 1835	-/70	BS-04-96	--/73	Van Wijk, Leeuwarden	
19	LTA 949	KS5G	1/51	Southern National 1839	-/70	VN-33-67	9/70	Neckermann, Tilburg	
20	HWW 884	K6B	4/50	Keighley-West Yorkshire KDB857	-/70	VN-35-04	10/70	Keser, 's-Hertogenbosch	
21	HMO 843	KSW6B	9/53	Thames Valley 697	-/70	VN-36-51		-?-	
22	JRX 801	KSW6B	6/53	Thames Valley 726	-/71	81-79-DB	2/93	De Greef, Echteld	yes
23	JRX 802	KSW6B	6/53	Thames Valley 727	-/71	47-45-FB	--/81	Nederland Oké	yes
24	JRX 824	KSW6B	9/55	Thames Valley 749	-/71	---		-?-	
25	HBL 64	KSW6B	11/52	Thames Valley 662	-/71	ZV-78-22	--/--	Sjoerds, Hilversum	

Column A: sequence number (fictitious); B: British registration; C: Bristol type; D: first in service; E: last owner in GB; F: import date (partly assumptions); G: Dutch registration; H: sale by Takken; J: first Dutch owner after Takken; K: still in existence

*This article appeared first in Dutch in the Autobuskroniek, the magazine of the Autobus Documentatie Vereniging (ADV), issue 03-2021. This English version includes some new information and are more photos added. It's a reconstruction based on a lot of data, but also on a number of assumptions. Although the broad outlines are thought to be correct, it may have been a bit different in some respects than described here. There is also much unknown about the whereabouts and further history of several of the buses.*

*I would like to hear from readers who have additional information, especially about the companies Hoek, Takken, Beyer and Van Wijk, but also photos and/or spot reports of British double-deckers in the Netherlands in the last three decades of the 20th century. My e-mail address is f.angevaare'at'gmail.com (please replace 'at' with a @ sign).*

Frans Angevaare  
December 2021