

# Prologue

The Eastern National Omnibus Company Ltd — often abbreviated to ENOC — was registered at Companies House on 28 February 1929, but to understand the history we need to go back to Thomas Clarkson's National Steam Car Co Ltd of 1909. Clarkson was an engineer and inventor and had developed various steam-propelled road vehicles, culminating in an eight-seat Brougham named the 'Chelmsford' — he had established a factory there in 1902 — which he exhibited at the 1903 Automobile Show at Crystal Palace. Further development led to an order for eight 14-seat buses for the newly formed Torquay & District Motor Omnibus Co. More orders soon followed from around the country, and double-deckers were supplied to the London General Omnibus Co in 1905, but Clarkson found it difficult to break into the London market. In 1908 he demonstrated the potential of his steam double-deckers by transporting the Territorial Army from Chelmsford to Latchingdon in four buses (carrying up to 50 people each), assisted by a steam car and van. By the time of a second run for the Essex Yeomanry in May 1909 the buses carried the fleetname 'NATIONAL', establishing a precedent that was to last — just — into 2003, when the corporate 'First' style finally supplanted 'Eastern National'.

Unable to achieve meaningful sales in London, Clarkson was introduced to a firm of bankers, which helped him set up the National Steam Car Co to begin bus operations in central London in his own right on 2 November 1909. From just four buses, the fleet grew rapidly to around 180 by 1913, carrying over 24 million passengers a year. Unsurprisingly, the dominant London General Omnibus Co (LGOC) viewed his expansion with alarm and in 1913 reached an agreement with National which in effect made the latter an LGOC franchisee from 1 January 1914, albeit trading under the National name.



Clarkson began steam-bus operations in Essex just before World War I. This is ostensibly a shot of two National steamers at Market Hill, Coggeshall, but the bus on the right (F 8536) was in fact operated by Moore Bros of Kelvedon, which firm would not be acquired by Eastern National until 1963. Taken on 8 April 1914, the photograph was posed by Clarkson to obtain publicity for his buses. The bus on the left was a genuine National, but the company did not operate to Coggeshall until somewhat later. *Eastern National collection, c/o Essex Bus Enthusiasts' Group*

