

London Transport Depot Sweepers

By Steve Newman

I started taking notes of the depot sweepers I had seen in the early 70's, partly out of boredom with chasing the few buses I had not seen and partly due to their similarity, especially the Listers, with Narrow Gauge Industrial locos, which were my main interest at the time. There were two types of sweeper at this time, the RL class Reliance and later L class Lister's. Sweepers were often kept in out of the way inaccessible dark corners or alcoves of garages, and were rarely seen or photographed. Indeed, I would often have to ask the garage staff if they had one, and where they had hid it! Therefore most enthusiasts would not have been aware that these interesting vehicles existed, and fewer still taken an interest in them.

The origins of these sightings are a list I produced, about 1974, from my various sightings seen up to that date. Much of the sweeper information published by LOTS in SUP15B appears to have been based on this list and, as such, did not include subsequent updates such as the final generation of sweepers, which were the Lincoln 7000SS models purchased in bulk in the early 80's.

This prompted me to contact Tom by E-Mail, and we agreed to meet up at Waterden Road Open Day in June 2005. Tom was able to confirm that the list he had used was indeed a copy of the original I still held. After some discussion, it became fairly clear that I was probably the only person who had taken detailed notes of sweepers at the time. I agreed, therefore, to bring the story up to date, as and when time permitted. I have now put the details I hold that were not included in SUP15B, into this article so that it can be readily available to all on Tom's excellent LTSV website.

My notes date mainly from the 1970-1988 period. After this date my interest in buses finally waned, and I stopped visiting London Transport garages, apart from the occasional open day.

From the sightings I made it would appear that the RL class were withdrawn 1977-1979 with a few lasting into the early 80's. The L class lasted mainly until the 1982-1984 period; both being replaced by the Lincoln 7000SS sweepers delivered 1982-1986. The Lincoln sweepers appear to have been chosen after trial Lincoln and Tennant examples were purchased in 1977-1978.

A remarkable survivor, and indeed the last Sweeper I noted prior to ceasing visiting LT garages, was L1 at TL in 1990. Could this have survived as a possible museum exhibit I wonder, being the first of the Lister sweepers. Whilst RL92 (Or a sweeper bearing that number – see notes) is preserved at Cobham, there was another preserved in the early 80's, RL53, at a yard in Woolwich where quite a number of ex LT buses were being restored at the time. Does anyone know if this sweeper still exists?

This article is based on my original 1974 list with subsequent sightings, which I noted in pencil on the original list. There were no easily updated computer databases in those days; the only way to update lists was to laboriously type again from scratch. Luckily I must never have found the time to do this, hence there is quite a lot of information included here that may well have been lost had I retyped the list.

The information contained in the list includes Make, LT number, Garage, Works Number, Year built, 1st seen, last seen dates as well as other sightings, and finally a section for additional comments. Included in the 'comments' column are details of withdrawn/stored sweepers. SE (Stonebridge Park) seemed to be a garage where withdrawn RL sweepers accumulated in the early 70's, latterly CS (Chiswick Works) seemed to take over this role in the 80's.

Whilst the RL & L class carried LT numbers, I never saw a Lincoln sweeper with a number. The RL class carried the builders works number and date built on a small brass plate on the front of the bonnet. Lister sweepers carried a builders number only, on the frame if my memory is correct, whilst the Lincoln plates were near the drivers position, again number only.

The RL class were built in two batches; 1935-1939 and 1951, but as far as I know were to the same design. They bore LT numbers RL1-RL97. It is suggested in SUP15B that some of the RL class were renumbered, but if you look closely at the builders details it seems that the original batch went up to RL72 or RL73. RL74 onwards were all from the 1951 batch. Only RL9, 12 & 56 were possible re-numberings, but might well have been 1951 replacements for earlier batch examples damaged/destroyed in the war. This might just explain why the batch finished at RL97, in those halcyon days before accountants ruled, LT would normally order in 10's or 20's, not odd numbers. Also, in the main, the RL's LT numbers and Builders numbers are roughly in the same order, giving the impression that they were given consecutive LT fleet numbers as batches were delivered.

The Lister sweepers I saw were numbered L1-L23, but missing L7 & L16. There were also 4 other, unnumbered Lister's, which suggests the original batch may have been L1-L25. Whilst it is impossible to say for certain, comparing the Lister works numbers with those known from Industrial Locos would suggest they were built 1964-1967 rather than the 1950s as stated in SUP15B. In contrast to the RL class, the Lister sweepers appear to carry random LT numbers compared with builder's numbers. Could it be that the Lister's were purchased second hand, ex MOD perhaps, to replace the worse of the first batch of RL's, which would have been 30 odd years old by then. This might explain why so few 'early' numbered RL's survived until the 70's.

So here it is, all the info I hold on these fascinating contraptions. The RL class in particular were very long lived, indeed a few of the 1936 examples lasted until 1984, 48 years, almost equalling the iconic Routemaster in longevity. In the 1970's they were certainly the longest lived of all LT service vehicles at that time.

If anyone has further information, pictures, or indeed can take the story on from 1988 when I stopped taking notes, I am sure Tom Young would be pleased to hear from you. I hope you have found this of interest.

Steve Newman

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Make	LT No	Garage	Works No	Year	1st Seen	Last Seen	Also Seen	Comments
Lincoln	-	AV,HL	59753	-	4/78	3/85	To HL by 9/84	Lincoln 'Scrubmobile'
Lincoln	-	SW	130001	-	10/82	-		Lincoln 'Scrubmobile'
Lincoln	-	TC	700190	-	1/86	-		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	NX	700196	-	12/84	1/86		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	AG	700268	-	9/83	12/84		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	HT	700271	-	2/85	1/86		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	X	700436	-	1/86	-		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	L,AD	700586	-	5/86	10/88	To AD by 10/88	Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	PD	700589	-	3/86	1/88		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	S	700592	-	1/84	1/86		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	AC	700598	-	9/84	-		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	EM,MH,PB	700601	-	6/83	1/88	To MH by 11/83, PB by 10/85	Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	CA	700693	-	12/84	1/86		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	Q	700699	-	1/86	-		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	SW	700952	-	4/84	12/84		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	UX	700994	-	3/85	1/88		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	AV	700997	-	9/84	4/89		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	PM	701000	-	12/84	1/86		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	WH	701003	-	12/83	12/84		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	WN	701006	-	10/88	-		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	CT	701352	-	1/86	-		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	AL	701358	-	1/84	1/86		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	FW	701361	-	4/84	4/90	4/89	Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	W	701364	-	9/84	2/86		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	HW,ON	701367	-	3/85	3/88	To ON by 3/88	Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	AR	701376	-	12/84	2/86	1/86	Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	WD	701379	-	1/86	-		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	BX	701382	-	12/84	1/88		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	SP	701385	-	12/84	-		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	E	701571	-	1/85	9/87	2/86,2/87	Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	L	701585	-	1/85	-		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	N	701699	-	1/86	-		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	BN	701701	-	1/86	-		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	NS	701703	-	5/85	6/86		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	HL	701705	-	3/85	3/88	5/86	Model 7000SS

Make	LT No	Garage	Works No	Year	1st Seen	Last Seen	Also Seen	Comments
Lincoln	-	GM	701706	-	5/86	-		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	BW	701708	-	1/86	-		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	TB	701710	-	1/88	-		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	TH	701782	-	1/86	-		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	HD	701793	-	1/88	-		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	RD	701811	-	6/86	-		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	NS	GO1061	-	4/92	-		Model 7000SS
Lincoln	-	TL	GO8265	-	5/90	-		Model 7000SS
Lister	-	WH,WL	54040	-	c.74	10/82	3/80 To WL by 5/81	
Lister	-	GR	54044	-	c.74	c.74	Gone by 4/77	
Lister	-	WR,LH	54668	-	c.74	10/78	Ex WR by 4/77. Dsm by 10/78	
Lister	-	WL,Q	56063	-	c.74	10/82	To Q OOU by 2/79,7/81, back in use by 10/82 .	
Lister	L 1	TL	54611	-	c.74	5/90	10/78,12/84	
Lister	L 2	TC,ED,CA	55554	-	c.74	12/84	ED by 9/78,2/79 CA by 12/84	
Lister	L 3	NX,CA	53510	-	c.74	10/82		Later carried No3
Lister	L 4	SW	55801	-	c.74	7/83	10/78	Noted at CS Wks 3/7/83
Lister	L 5	AR	55553	-	c.74	c.76		
Lister	L 6	CT	54041	-	c.74	c.5/77	To CS c 5/77	
Lister	L 8	PR	54624	-	c.74	10/82	8/78	
Lister	L 9	FW,AV,FW	54043	-	c.74	7/83	To AV 4/74-10/76	Noted at CS Wks 3/7/83
Lister	L10	R	53503	-	c.74	7/83	4/79	On display at CS 3/7/83
Lister	L11	X	55800	-	c.74	10/82	To CA by 10/82	
Lister	L12	AF	55552	-	c.74	7/83	4/79	Noted at CS Wks 3/7/83
Lister	L13	AV,S	55799	-	c.74	8/84	4/79	Dsm at CS 8/84
Lister	L14	BEA(HB)	54645	-	c.74	c.77		At CS by 77/c
Lister	L15	HL	56062	-	c.74	7/83	2/80	Dsm CS 3/7/83. Later carried 1
Lister	L17	GM,AC	56064	-	c.74	8/80	To AC by 8/80	
Lister	L18	WW	54458	-	c.74	3/82	1/81,10/81	
Lister	L19	HT	56450	-	c.74	c.76		
Lister	L20	E,EM	56457	-	c.74	1/86	8/77,6/83,7/84,1/85,12/85,1/86	At EM by 8/77 Poss at WN also
Lister	L21	AL,BN	56466	-	c.74	12/84	To BN by 12/84	
Lister	L22	BW	56467	-	c.74	8/84	2/78	At CS 5/8/84
Lister	L23	CF	56468	-	c.74	c.76		
Reliance	-	SE	1560	1936	c.74	c.76		Dsm (for spares?)
Reliance	-	PB	1562	1936	c.74	c.76		No Tank. Dsm (for spares?)

Make	LT No	Garage	Works No	Year	1st Seen	Last Seen	Also Seen	Comments
Reliance	-	SE	1729	1938	c.74	c.76		Dsm (for spares?)
Reliance	-	SE	-	-	c.76	c.76		OOU.
Reliance	-	W	-	-	10/82	10/82		Dsm (for spares?) Possibly RL9
Reliance	RL 6	SV	1383	1935	c.74	3/77		
Reliance	RL 9	U	3458	1951	c.74	11/77		Not at U 10/82
Reliance	RL11	CS	-	-	c.74	5/77		OOU?
Reliance	RL12	Q	3453	1951	c.74	2/79		OOU by 2/79. Not at Q 10/82
Reliance	RL14	ON	1475	1936	c.74	c.76		
Reliance	RL16	PM	1476	1936	c.74	2/79		Not at PM 10/82
Reliance	RL17	GY	1483	1936	c.74	7/82	7/81	
Reliance	RL18	CS	-	-	c.74	5/77		OOU?
Reliance	RL20	L,T	1477	1936	c.74	5/77	At T by 11/74	To CS OOU? By 5/77
Reliance	RL21	CS	-	-	c.74	5/77		OOU?
Reliance	RL23	EW,SE	1563	1936	c.74	5/76	At EW by 5/74, also seen there 3/75,5/76	
Reliance	RL24	A	1656	1937	c.74	c.76		
Reliance	RL25	HA,SA	1559	1936	c.74	10/78		At SA by 10/78
Reliance	RL26	BK	-	-	c.74	11/80		
Reliance	RL29	BN	1568	1936	c.74	12/84	7/78	Carried Reg 520UNK
Reliance	RL34	W,PB	1643	1937	c.74	3/79	At W c11/74, to PB by 3/79	
Reliance	RL42	HW,HL	-	-	c.74	c.10/74	To HL by c10/74	
Reliance	RL45	E	-	-	c.74	c.76		
Reliance	RL48	AK	1838	1939	c.74	5/77		To CS OOU? By 5/77
Reliance	RL49	CS	-	-	c.74	5/77		OOU?
Reliance	RL52	HA,HF	1842	1939	c.74	6/77	At HF by 6/77	
Reliance	RL53	BX	-	-	c.74	10/82	2/79	To ? Woolwich (Pvd?) by 10/82.
Reliance	RL54	W	1845	1939	c.74	10/78		
Reliance	RL56	FW	3498	1951	c.74	4/79		
Reliance	RL57	CS	-	-	c.74	5/77		OOU?
Reliance	RL58	N	1891	1939	c.74	5/77		To CS OOU? By 5/77
Reliance	RL59	AD	1479	1936	c.74	3/79	Dsm by 3/79, not seen 10/82	
Reliance	RL60	NB	1488	1936	c.74	c.76		
Reliance	RL62	SJ	1584	1936	c.74	4/77		
Reliance	RL63	EM	1565	1936	c.74	8/84	Last seen at EM c/76.	At CS 3/7/83, Dsm by 5/8/84
Reliance	RL64	UX	1571	1936	c.74	c.75	Not at UX 5/75	
Reliance	RL65	PB	1564	1936	c.74	3/79		OOU by 3/79

Make	LT No	Garage	Works No	Year	1st Seen	Last Seen	Also Seen	Comments
Reliance	RL67	ED	1732	1938	c.74	c.76		
Reliance	RL71	SE	-	-	c.74	c.76		Dsm (for spares?)
Reliance	RL72	D	1892	1939	c.74	c.76		
Reliance	RL74	V	3452	1951	c.74	c.76		
Reliance	RL78	B	1474	1936	c.74	c.76	Not seen by myself.	
Reliance	RL79	AC	3461	1951	c.74	9/78		
Reliance	RL80	HH,GR	3462	1951	c.74	5/77	At GR by 5/77	
Reliance	RL81	NF	3463	1951	c.74	c.76	Not seen 4/77	
Reliance	RL82	ST	3464	1951	c.74	9/78		
Reliance	RL84	TB	3480	1951	c.74	2/79		
Reliance	RL86	RG	3481	1951	c.74	c.76		
Reliance	RL88	NF	3501	1951	c.74	2/79		
Reliance	RL92	NS	3457	1951	c.74	11/77	See notes section also.	To Cobham, Pvd by ?/??.
Reliance	RL93	M	3483	1951	c.74	c.76		
Reliance	RL94	Q	-	-	c.74	2/79	OOU at Q by 2/79	
Reliance	RL95	RE,HH	3482	1951	c.74	5/77	To HH by 5/77	
Reliance	RL97	MH	3479	1951	c.74	8/84	10/81,1/82	At CS 3/7/83, Dsm by 5/8/84
Tennant	-	U	-	-	11/77	11/77		Tennant '520' Sweeper

Notes

c.74 Assumed date I compiled the original list.

c.76 These sweepers were never seen again after 31/12/76.

L1/2/3/5/8/9/12/15 & 17 at least lost their numbers in latter years, most probably when repainted.

RL16,59,84 & 97 at least lost their numbers in latter years, most probably when repainted.

RL92 assumed machine Pvd at Cobham, however this now carries incorrect makers number 1382/35.

Codes

Dsm Dismantled

OOU Out of use

Pvd Preserved