

THE BEST TIMETABLES OF THE BRITISH ISLES

All the printed editions of my Directory contained this section, and it always seemed to stimulate great debate! In those days I merely listed the best without comment, except to say that for a timetable to qualify for consideration it had to be in 24-hour clock, have an index of places served and have decent maps. However, in those days, whilst the Directory attracted advertising it did not have sponsorship as such and I feared on switching to the internet with sponsorship it might be difficult either to expect sponsors to possibly have their own products ignored, or to have the confidence of users that the choices were indeed not dependent at all on any such sponsorship. I received, however, many requests to restore the section and so felt the time had come to do so. I sincerely hope all users accept that my choices are those that I would make whether or not any sponsorship of this site existed. A benefit of the new listings is that I now give reasons for my decisions and I hope this might spur on some who are not there, and wonder why, to realise that it is often the omission of something small that disqualifies them. One thing I consider essential: leaflets are fine as an extra but no replacement for an area booklet, or combined map and guide, showing the network. Sadly this is why, for example, not a single Arriva operation appears below. Finally a word about size. I consider only the content of a timetable, as it is reasonable to accept that an A4 volume permits greater clarity but on the other hand an A5, or even smaller, book lends itself to portability. Comments below regarding size are therefore mere facts and have no bearing on my decision to include a publication.

ENTRIES IN RED ARE THOSE I CONSIDER TO BE OUTSTANDING IN THEIR FIELD
ENTRIES IN BLUE ARE THOSE I CONSIDER TO BE VERY GOOD PUBLICATIONS

BEST LOCAL AUTHORITY TIMETABLES:

ENGLAND

Cornwall

Cornwall has been publishing a comprehensive timetable summer and winter without a break for as long as any authority in Britain. In recent years, whilst it kept this up, the quality of the publication slipped as it followed a policy of obtaining significant financial contributions from its main operators. The problem was three-fold: firstly it tended to be a 'First' book with the others tacked on, leading to an Index that was largely First-oriented; secondly each operator appeared in its own house-style of font, leading to an inconsistent appearance; and thirdly it was consistently 24-hour apart from the then Truronian input, where that operator alone insisted on its times appearing in 12-hour. In Summer 2006 every one of these problems was corrected and the publication once again became first-rate. The style became the same throughout with various operators merely delineated by various coloured headings, the index was much improved and became 'neutral' and well sub-divided too, and the whole went 24-hour – and all this with the financial contributions from major operators maintained, though this ceased in 2013. Summer 2008 saw this split into four volumes, each A5 in size, and this continued until April 2012 when it returned to a single volume. Then, in June 2015, it changed again – a major change in policy to keep costs down – and this has continued with the June 2017 edition. It now shows full timetables for 'minor operators' (and train services) with detailed summaries for bus services operated by First, Plymouth Citybus and Stagecoach. It is a 148-page A5 book and town maps are, as always, superb, especially for a county that does not have many large towns at all, covering Bodmin, Bude, Camborne & Redruth, Falmouth, Fowey, Hayle, Launceston, Liskeard, Looe, Newquay, Penzance, Perranporth, Saltash, St Austell & St Blazey, St Ives, Torpoint, Truro, and Wadebridge. These maps show all operators' services as does the overall System Map, which itself is spread over 8 pages. Cornwall's 16 ferry services and its air routes are included. There is an excellent index to places served. The publication would benefit from having details of what has changed since the last edition - something its neighbour Devon has always included to good effect – however the whole publication is very high quality indeed. REVISED 14/06/17

Derbyshire

It is difficult to find words to adequately extol the excellence of this county! They have always produced the most excellent books, updated with cumulative supplements as required. There are so many refinements: always a main index of places served plus at least one other to show access just from the main towns; a subscription card for free updates; an inserted system map; very-high-quality local town maps; and copious information regarding access to places of interest. Each timetable is, where possible, shown with 'up' and 'down' services facing each other. Incidentally, no nonsense here about omitting unitary parts of the county: Derby City is treated as is the rest of the county, with full details shown. For long-term consistent excellence, these have to be about the finest county timetables in Britain. [REVISED 27/09/16](#)

Devon

Devon has for some years produced an excellent series of books, both summer and winter, and this is no mean feat for a county that is predominately rural in nature. Despite the volumes being relatively small, each always has an excellent index and always adds the main changes since the last edition. The table layout is a model of clarity, there is always a system map and town plans are excellent. What is more, the timetables are always out well before implementation date. In recent times there has been the inevitable need to save money. Too many authorities are taking the lazy way out and merely abolishing timetables and/or maps. Not so here. The May 2011 timetables abolished spot colours and hence all are now black & white only (which personally I prefer anyway), removed some optional information, slightly revised some table banks to save pages and generally last a year rather than having winter editions - though in September 2015 they were re-issued owing to major network changes. Each volume has retained its colour system map and all the town plans. May 2016 editions have now been published. These are timetables of the very highest quality. [REVISED 18/05/16](#)

Herefordshire

Herefordshire has carried on the excellent work of the latter days of Hereford & Worcester. For years it has had three volumes, but changed (September 2012) to a 256-page single volume with a termination-date which was updated with cumulative supplements. This has continued with the latest, September 2016, edition, valid until September 2017, having 196 pages. Local maps are superb, covering Bromyard, Hereford, Kington, Ledbury, Leominster and Ross-on-Wye. A system map is issued separately. Tables have road-by-road route-descriptions and the front section has details of changes since the last edition as well as copious general information, including on fares. There is, of course, an index and also a full calendar showing school days. **Altogether excellent for such a rural county, and one of the finest publications in Britain.** It is even more remarkable that the cover-price is only £1, or £2.50 by post, and that a mere £7 covers the book plus all updates for a year. [REVISED 16/09/16](#)

Milton Keynes

A high-quality publication comes from unitary Milton Keynes with a superb 184-page single volume timetable, the latest being for June 2017, valid until October 2017. All routes are covered including long-distance services that go out of the area. It has an excellent index and blow-up maps for Milton Keynes centre and Olney, the former in a separate system map placed inside the rear cover. The introduction offers a great deal of information on fares, operators' addresses and contact details. Many another authority could learn from this excellent publication – yet this edition still says the future of the book is 'under review'. [REVISED 15/07/17](#)

West Berkshire

This authority produced five (A6) booklets, complemented by a general guide to using public transport in West Berkshire, which contained a system map. In November 2009 the booklets were replaced by one large volume for the whole area, but still A6 and with a system map and index of places served. It then went over to five books again, owing to a lack of stability in the network, before finally returning to a 162-page single volume in January 2011. The latest, for February 2017, has 100 pages. A plan of central Reading is included – not in the area, but very useful as many services inevitably go there. There is copious other detail added including operators' addresses, an index of places served, details of ticket types, a map of Newbury and three system maps: one each for West of Newbury, Newbury & Thatcham and East of Thatcham. There are also plans of where buses stop in Hungerford, Lambourn, Pangbourne, Tadley, Thatcham and Theale. Details of what has changed since the last edition are included. Clarity of the tables is excellent and each uses separate colours in headings to denote days of the week applicable. Other authorities should study these to see that it is perfectly possible to have an excellent publication in an A6 format. An updated October 2017 is available, but only downloadable from their web site. The book will, however, be published and printed again as usual in 2018. [REVISED 07/02/17](#)

Wokingham

Berkshire was unusual in not having some unitary authorities created within it, but in being split totally into six unitaries. As the original county produced comprehensive information the fact half of the unitaries do little or nothing is a major disappointment, but at least the other half excel. Wokingham has three excellent books, the latest all dated September 2017, each having an index of places served and a system map. The Twyford & Woodley book also has a blow-up of the Woodley area, the Western book a blow-up of Lower Earley and the Wokingham book one of Wokingham. However each also has town plans showing stops in Reading and Wokingham town centres - despite the former even being outside the authority's area, but nevertheless a main destination for many users. There is also an excellent introduction in each book giving copious information on fares, whilst details of what has changed since the last edition are added. Finally a separate system map complements the three books. These are very high quality publications.

REVISED 15/09/17

WALES

Conwy

Conwy has been producing good timetables for many years but they did not feature here as they were let down by the 'over-schematic' map of its most important town: Llandudno. However the summer 2010 edition upgraded all its maps to full colour and included a proper map of Llandudno and this has continued with subsequent issues. Indeed the town plans are now substantial in number: for Abergele, Betws-y-Coed, Colwyn Bay, Conwy & Llandudno Junction, Dwygyfylchi, Kinmel Bay, Llandudno, Llanfairfechan, Llanrwst, Old Colwyn, Penmaenmawr and Tywyn. There is also a system map, a full index, details of rover tickets, school term dates, places to visit and what's changed since the previous edition – and, needless to say, everything is bilingual. The latest version is May 2017 – altogether an excellent publication. **REVISED 20/05/17**

Denbighshire

After having produced quite good timetables for some years Denbighshire produced an excellent volume in July 2013 and this quality has been continued, with the latest edition being January 2017. It has an excellent introduction with the left-hand pages in Welsh and the right in English, including details of relevant telephone numbers and full details of the North Wales Rover. There is a very good index. At the rear is a high-quality system map and excellent town plans for Corwen, Denbigh, Llangollen, Prestatyn, Rhyl and Ruthin, all in colour. The book has 84 pages and the timetables are very clear in presentation. This is possibly the best timetable produced in Wales.

REVISED 04/01/17

Flintshire

Flintshire produced an excellent A4 timetable for some years, but reverted to A5. The latest, December 2016 edition, has an index and good general information, including for tickets, a very good system map, plus blow-ups of Buckley, Connah's Quay, Mold & Shotton, Flint and Holywell. The whole is bilingual and clarity is excellent throughout. The paper quality has been reduced but this is perfectly acceptable to keep costs down and has not affected the quality of the production.

REVISED 30/04/17

Isle of Anglesey (Ynys Môn)

The Isle of Anglesey has had good timetables for many years and these have got even better of late. The latest, for April-September 2017, is a 90-page book which has a good index, separate details of places to visit (including rovers), a good system map as a pull-out flap to the back cover and town plans of Amlwch, Beaumaris, Holyhead, Llanfair PG, Llangefni and Menai Bridge. Of course everything is bilingual. A very fine publication. **REVISED 03/06/17**

Pembrokeshire

Pembrokeshire's timetable is bilingual as one would expect - even for an area always considered less Welsh in outlook than its neighbours – but the arrangement is different from most others in that the book has an English introduction and Index at the front and Welsh versions at the rear, but each table has English names on left-hand-side table banks and Welsh appearing as right-hand banks. System and town maps are on the front inside cover and it is to be noted how many town maps are included for a county that might be considered to have few major towns: Fishguard, Haverfordwest, Milford Haven, Narberth, Neyland, Saundersfoot, Pembroke, Pembroke Dock, St David's and Tenby, plus Cardigan in neighbouring Ceredigion. An excellent publication putting its South and West Wales neighbours to shame. Unfortunately major changes late in the season

owing to the demise of one its main operators have meant that it has not been possible to produce this book for 2016, but it will resume publication in late 2017. [REVISED 14/09/16](#)

SCOTLAND

Argyll and Bute

This council covers a huge area stretching on the mainland from Helensburgh to Bridge of Orchy and, on the coast, from Oban to Campbeltown, but including around 30 islands, of which Bute, Islay, Jura, Mull and Tiree have bus services and others are also served by some of the 31 ferry services in the council area. In an era when many small authorities with simple networks make excuses not to publish timetables, it is so refreshing to see Argyll and Bute not only doing so in eight booklets, but ensuring they are all of a high standard. Each has details of bus and ferry operators together with information on ticketing, an index of places served and high-quality coloured maps including blow-ups of the relevant towns. There is also a separate system map and summary of services (currently 2017/18) and this also has blow-ups of Campbeltown, Dunoon, Helensburgh, Oban and Rothesay. Note that services in the Helensburgh and Lomond area are contracted to Strathclyde and so timetables for these services do not appear in these. The booklets are also reissued when changes take place and the Council is to be congratulated for putting so much effort into producing such high-quality publicity. [REVISED 03/10/17](#)

Dumfries & Galloway

This large area was covered by seven books but December 2008 saw them merged into a single 140-page publication. It has expanded to 154 pages with the latest, September 2016, edition. It has a good index and benefits from a very clear layout for each table, despite only being two-colour. It has a very attractive cover, all notes now appear at the foot of each page and school term dates and other general information is in a section at the front. The whole is complemented by a separate system map (May 2016) which itself has an excellent blow-ups of Dumfries and Stranraer. This is the best timetable produced by any Scottish council. [REVISED 21/09/16](#)

BEST BUS OPERATORS' TIMETABLES:

ENGLAND

Compass Bus

The new Compass timetable in September 2009 really showed what a small operator can do and should have put most others to shame. Having expanded it adopted three books, one for East Sussex, another for West Sussex and the few Surrey services in a third. It was, therefore, very good to see a single book for all Compass Bus services from April 2017 – except for those in the Brighton & Hove area, which only appear in the Brighton & Hove Bus & Coach book, which is disappointing as that book has a much lower standard. The latest edition is for September 2017 and is shown as valid until 'at least March 2018'. It has details of what's changed since the last edition, a system map and an index, plus local maps for its routes in Burgess Hill, Haywards Heath and Worthing and separate town centre plans for Horsham & Worthing. It has information about rovers, seasons and other fares and list its HQ details as well as making its enquiry number prominent. So many operators nowadays omit most of this – and cop out on enquiries altogether by using Traveline. This is one of the best small-operator timetables in the country. [REVISED 05/10/17](#)

First in Berkshire & the Thames Valley

The Slough & Windsor timetable from the above is a fine publication. With 94 DL-size pages it has a system map and an index, but excels with its plans of Slough and Windsor town centres, plus excellent maps of each route, the latter clearly showing railway stations passed *en route*, something omitted by so many operators. There is also a route map for the London route (still marketed as Green Line). The latest edition is for July 2017. [REVISED 02/08/17](#)

First in Dorset

After a break of many years this area resumed having a timetable book, which was a welcome return, not least owing to its high quality. The latest, now A5, is dated September 2017 and has 48 pages, details of what has changed, an index of places served and clear maps, including blow-ups of Weymouth town centre. In addition most services have excellent maps showing the route taken and all adjacent roads. The only disappointment is the lack of a system map as the one included only covers the 'greater Weymouth' area. Nevertheless this is a fine publication. [REVISED 01/09/17](#)

First in Portsmouth, Fareham & Gosport

This operator used to have rather poor books but gave them up a few years back in favour of leaflets. However it returned to having books – and good they are. That for the Fareham & Gosport area has 56 pages (issued September 2017) and for Portsmouth (which also covers Waterlooville and issued June 2017), 65 pages. Each has a system map and an index of places served and each route has its own detailed map showing the roads used throughout, these being a major strength of the books. [REVISED 13/10/17](#)

First in Southampton

As with First in Portsmouth, Fareham & Gosport, above, the Southampton division also has a good book. Issued in February 2017, with 62 pages, it has a diagrammatic system map and an index of places served and each route has its own detailed map showing the roads used throughout, again a major strength of the book. [REVISED 23/02/17](#)

Metrobus

A new timetable was issued by Metrobus for West Sussex in May 2007, produced by designers 'The Image Team'. It was updated several times and is now a single volume, dated April 2017, for their whole (non-TfL) network. With 130 A5 pages it has a full index, a full-colour map of the whole area and separate maps for Burgess Hill, Copthorne & Crawley Down, Crawley & Horley, Dorking, East Grinstead, Epsom & Tadworth, Horsham and Redhill & Reigate. There are also smaller maps showing where to catch the bus in Brighton, Burgess Hill, Crawley, Dorking, East Grinstead, Gatwick, Haywards Heath, Horsham, Redhill, Reigate and Tunbridge Wells, plus copious information on fares and lots of tourist information, including small pictures of places of interest served. Details of changes since the last edition are added. The tables themselves are excellent, retaining the old London Transport style of bold digits for the hours, but looking very clear. **This is by far the best timetable produced by any Go-Ahead company – indeed the best timetable produced by any operator in the British Isles.** [REVISED 29/04/17](#)

Midland Classic

Here we have a relatively small operator producing a first-rate timetable of all its services in one volume. The latest edition is April 2017. It has an index of places served and details of single fares, day, weekly and monthly tickets. There is a system map plus separate maps for Burton upon Trent and Swadlincote, together with a blow-up of Burton town centre. In a very positive move, Arriva and Trent routes are added to the maps, though, understandably, their timetables are not included. This is an excellent publication. [REVISED 27/04/17](#)

Southern Vectis

For years Southern Vectis had award-winning timetables but then they were downgraded and so SV lost its place here. A new, September 2013, edition restored the quality, and this continues with the September 2018 edition, which was available from late August. It has an index of places served and several pages devoted to its rovers, including those that combine bus travel with Solent hovercraft crossings – though sadly the promised restoration of catamaran, ferry and hovercraft timetables hasn't been achieved. There are 13 pages of excellent local maps plus a system map and full details of what has changed since the winter edition. It also shows an end-date (24 March 2018). This edition, as usual, includes full timetables for the frequent services that run on five routes on Christmas Day (Boxing Day and New Year's Day have normal Sunday services)! Dare I ask how Go-Ahead-owned Southern Vectis can do this when hardly any mainland operators run anything those days? Indeed in the south only Wilts & Dorset (Morebus) runs such services at present (also Go-Ahead owned). Altogether a first-rate 97-page DL-size publication. [REVISED 23/08/17](#)

Stagecoach South West

Stagecoach has a group standard for its timetables that utilises folders for most services with the occasional area booklet. In many parts of the country this is rather disappointing but if the operation is contained in a county that offers high quality comprehensive books of its own it is less of a concern as it implies the operator could cease all publications of its own bar general marketing. This would apply to Stagecoach South West. It does indeed produce very high quality folders detailing its range of day, week, monthly and annual tickets, but it also publishes quality timetable folders too and it features here for its excellent series of maps and guides, particularly for Exeter and Torbay where a combination of attractive design, quality mapping, decent frequency guides and copious tourist information offers a very effective complement to Devon's publications. It is also one of the few operators to publish a booklet showing its Conditions of Carriage. [REVISED 09/05/15](#)

Whippet Coaches

Whippet has an excellent timetable as one folder and shows what can be achieved with this format. The latest, issued September 2017, has a system map, plus blow-ups of Cambridge, Huntingdon and St Neots town centres and a full index of places served. It also has details of its various day, week and 4-week rovers. It is shown as valid 'until at least the end of October 2017'. All timetables are shown in full – and all this using two sides of an A2 sheet, folded to a third-A4 size. It proves that there is no truth whatever in the comment often made by smaller operators that they 'cannot afford' to have proper timetables that include a map and an index. This is an excellent marketing tool and so convenient to carry around and Whippet is to be congratulated on producing such a high-quality publication. [REVISED 04/10/17](#)

Wilts & Dorset (Morebus)

A new W & D timetable covering Bournemouth, Poole, Wimborne & Purbeck has been published, dated September 2017. The More brand is used for all except University buses, which are in a second book. The main book has 112 DL-size pages and has an index to places served, with the rear cover opening to form a system map of the Bournemouth, Poole & Wimborne area. It is a pity there is no map showing the routes taken by long-distance service to Lymington, Salisbury, Blandford and Purbeck, however the main operating area is expanded over 16 pages by excellent maps down to street and bus stop level, whilst there are also blow-ups of Bournemouth and Poole town centres. Details of what has changed since the last edition are added. The University buses are in a separate Unibus book, which also shows all other More services that pass the main University site. It has a System Map and a blow-up of stops in the Lansdowne Campus area and is dated 2017/18, covering the period up to September 2018. These are excellent publications.

[REVISED 14/09/17](#)

WALES, SCOTLAND, IRELAND, ISLE OF MAN, CHANNEL ISLANDS

Isle of Man: Bus Vannin

At last, a quality timetable from an operator outside England & Wales – indeed, outside the UK! Bus Vannin is the name for what was once Isle of Man Transport and it produced a first-rate 48-page A4 timetable for both its bus system and the Heritage Railways in September 2010. The latest version, dated 2017/8, is A5 with 94 pages and has even more information. There is a list of services plus an index to places served and copious information on the various multi-journey and rover tickets available for bus and for bus & train options (from one day to a year). It has an excellent system map of the IoM plus full-page town maps of Douglas, Peel and Ramsey, plus a map showing hotels in Douglas. Towards the rear are timetables for the IoM Steam Railway, Manx Electric and Snaefell Mountain Railways, and, for the first time, a timetable for the Douglas Bay Horse Tramway. Also included are details of Bank Holidays (which differ from those in the UK), school terms *etc.* There is also a section covering changes during the period of the TT Race. This is a superb piece of marketing and is the equal of the best of any UK timetable. [REVISED 09/05/17](#)

BEST RAIL TIMETABLES:

National Rail

Great Western Railway

Great Western Railway (GWR) has re-issued its timetable book for the period from 21 May to 31 December 2017 – the normal timetable period ends 09 December but they have sensibly managed to end-date it the end of the year. At 512 pages the excellent introduction alone takes up 65 pages. There is copious information on tickets, engineering work, on-board facilities and even four pages devoted to a history of each of its 20 named trains. Full information on what has changed since the last edition is added. Seating plans of long-distance rolling stock are included, plus layouts of its sleepers. Its station list has details of every station it serves, right down to ticket office opening-hours. Mileages are shown at the start of each rail table and every train has its internal Reporting Number shown (eg 1C77). The bus links section is very detailed and includes frequencies and journey times to 106 places. There is also a section on heritage railways in its area. Some very useful summary tables exist covering routes like London to Reading, Reading to Didcot Parkway and Taunton to Exeter. There is a good system map at the rear with table numbers shown, meaning using it is the easiest way to navigate around the book. I have never liked the grouping of the tables into East, Central and West as it has some silly outcomes: Castle Cary and Hereford in the 'East', for example! However it's actually worse this time in that there are tables like C3a, C3b,

C3c and C3d, appearing after C3, yet they are shown as just C3 on the map, whilst the index at the start gives table names and page numbers, but no references to listings like C3 at all. It is the biggest deficiency in an otherwise splendid book. This very impressive publication is well worth the £5 cover price and is available from Bath Spa, Bristol Parkway, Bristol TM, Cheltenham Spa, Exeter St David's, London Paddington, Newbury, Oxford, Penzance, Plymouth, Reading, Slough, Swindon, Taunton, Truro and Westbury stations, and also by post for an additional £3.90 by ringing GWR's Customer Support on 0345 7000125 (0600-2300 daily). REVISED 27/05/17

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