

A BRIEF HISTORY...



Back in the 1890's Ellen Gilson would never have believed that her married name would adorn coach sides throughout the UK in 2024, with an accompanying tiger!



The story goes back to the elopement of Ellen and Lund to a farm in Littleborough. As an aside to their farming, they began to operate a haulage business using horse drawn vehicles that, in time, diversified into a passenger carrying operation around Rochdale. Following Lund Smith's death their children Miles, Fred, and Perry, along with Ellen, took control of the business. A son Harry died young and another, Lewis, was badly affected by shell shock following the Great War. Two daughters Gertie and Cissie were also involved.



Motorised vehicles were introduced in 1915, these were often multifunctional, haulage during the week and passengers at weekend.

Up to the outbreak of war in 1939 both sides of the business prospered, and Charabanc holidays were added into the mix. It is believed that Gracie Fields was a passenger on one of them.

During the war the company was contracted to transport POWs to their places of work, and many coaches were commandeered by the war department, some never to be seen again.

In 1946 the company took up where it left off, with more vehicle purchases and more diversity in the type of work undertaken. During this time the business was ably managed by Harry Smith, son of Miles, his wife Majorie, and Eric, son of Fred, alongside some dedicated and long serving drivers and mechanics. The standards they espoused, and their reputation amongst their rivals were exemplary, so, of course, passenger numbers grew! The Tiger, an amalgam of Leyland Vehicles and a cigarette card, designed by Jack Mills, vehicle painter, first appeared.



In 1988 Harry passed away, he had been actively involved for over 60 years. In 1991 the Smith family decided to sell the business and it was duly sold to Council owned Rossendale Transport Ltd in 1991.

Ellen Smith Tours Ltd operated as a subsidiary of Rossendale Transport and work was further diversified with continental tours to Europe, UK based tours, day excursions, works contracts and schools work, at one time the fleet size was 35 full sized coaches. However in 2002 the Council appointed non-executive directors of Rossendale Transport agreed to a management buyout of the tours element of the business to Paul Targett and John White, both Directors of Rossendale Transport Ltd.

Over the past 20 years there has been an ongoing rationalisation of the company's operations, gone are the five retail outlets to be replaced with an emphasis on telephone sales and a strong on-line presence. John retired from the business in 2008. Our small administrative team now operate from our Rochdale base, with customer satisfaction at our heart. Along with our business partners Grayways, Rothwells, Viking Coaches and Town Taxis, and our superb drivers, we believe we offer a service that is second to none.