

## The No. 1 bus

TY



SF



SF



Richard E. Keys



*Sights to be seen from the No. 1 bus.*

Most large towns have a key bus route that traverses their urban sprawl from end to end; lengthier and more essentially arterial than lesser suburban services, they are the red blood cells of metropolitan life, linking the heart of the city to the furthest reaches of its fingertips. In Newcastle, this service is the appropriately designated No. 1.

As a Heaton resident, the No. 1 is something of a taxi service for me. Early morning journeys to work, weekend shopping expeditions to Northumberland Street, evenings out at the Theatre Royal, and late rides home after a night on the town have all begun and ended on these double-decked leviathans that ply our streets at ten-minute intervals from dawn to midnight.

Like all shifts of perspective, seeing familiar streets going by from the upper deck of a bus offers new facets of the passing scenery, invisible to the pedestrians below; the city roofscape as seen from the approach to Heaton Road; eye-to-eye contact with the golden fairy on the Northern Goldsmith's clock; the sweeping views of the winding Tyne as you climb the steep banks to the west of Scotswood.

Twenty-five years ago, the upper deck on an early weekday morning would be full to the gunnels with cloth-capped men and head-scarved women among a sea of newspapers, the air a fug of cigarette smoke, which would clear as if by magic as the bus emptied at the Central Station. Nowadays, not quite so early in the morning, it's filled with students from Coach Lane campus and the warren of Tyneside flats in Heaton and empties much earlier in the University quarter of St Mary's Place. The only caps these days are of the baseball variety, the only cigarette a few rebellious wisps from some defiant teenagers encamped noisily in the back seats.

Changing travel habits and the advent of the Metro have made buses something of a poor relation today. But



*A bus crew, 1948.*

have you ever seen visitors from other countries, where double deckers are unknown, make straight for the front seat upstairs, and enjoy the ride with finger pointing delight? It happens – and long may it continue to do so. Until, that is, the No. 1 inevitably disappears, like the trolley buses of my childhood

*✿ Christopher Goulding*

### **Trolleybuses – a better way of travelling**

**A**rguably, the most environmentally friendly form of public transport in cities and towns, was the trolleybus. Silent running and with no nasty petrol or diesel fumes to pollute the atmosphere, trolleybuses were surely the kings of urban transport; faster and quieter than trams, and quieter and cleaner than motor buses. They did have some disadvantages, of course – they required traction poles to support the wires which carried the electricity that powered them. However, these traction poles usually served a dual purpose, acting also as lamp posts! Although the trolleybus was able to move short distances on its internal battery power, the need for the overhead wires meant that they were inflexible. But in spite of these drawbacks, they were the most brilliant form of urban public transport.