

SR GANGWAYED LUGGAGE VAN S2464

This Gangwayed Luggage Van (GBL) was built in 1931 at the Southern Railway (SR) Carriage & Wagon Works at Ashford to design diagram 3099 within Lot number A573 – a batch of 21 vans numbered 2461 to 2481. In 1927 the SR had embarked on a further expansion of electric inner suburban services utilising some LSWR 'Bogie Block' coach bodies, suitably lengthened, on new (longer) underframes. This left 120 comparatively new LSWR underframes with no bodies. SR were loathe to waste anything and decided to re-use them, by adding new parcel van bodies, rather than scrapping.

SR Design Diagram 3099 not only covered bodywork and interior fittings but also the lengthening of both 49 ft and 51 ft long LSWR underframes. S2464's underframe was formerly used by London & South Western Railway 49 ft non Corridor Lavatory Brake Third coach No. 2869, built originally at Eastleigh in 1905. Coupling and buffing gear needed updating and new sections were bolted at each end to allow for this. This increased S2464's underframe from its previous 51 ft to 53 ft 3 ins.

Original LSWR 8 foot bogies were retained but with coil springs replacing the original elliptical bolster springs. Their R C Mansell designed wooden centred wheels were also retained although at various times between 1945 and 1948 all these wheels were replaced with steel disc wheels which S2464 retains to this day. The whole of Lot No.A573 was completed by Ashford in July and August 1931.

British standard gangways were fitted at each end with screw link couplings and SR standard pattern buffers. When GBL's were used with most passenger stock an adapter plate had to be used to couple them as main line trains used Pullman gangways and retractable buffers. Adapters were not needed, however, when coupled to pre-Grouping stock or in parcel/newspaper trains. In fact GBL's were utilised mainly on Southampton Docks Boat Trains and other South Western Section main line expresses as well as on the numerous overnight newspaper and mail trains.

As World War 2 approached, SR was requested by the Railway Executive Committee to make up three Casualty Evacuation Trains (CET) numbered 32, 33 and 34 converted from existing coaches/vans. S2464 was one of those vans and has been written about elsewhere.

On return to SR in 1945/6, S2464 it reverted to use as a Gangwayed Luggage Van, being re-diagrammed 3097. Between 1959 and November 1961, S2464 was amongst several GBL's to be reserved for pigeon traffic. During this period the transport of racing pigeons, to various release points, was a lucrative business for railways.

Regarding operational liveries, GBL's were introduced initially in SR Olive Green livery with a small number in much brighter SR Malachite Green. Under British Railways they were repainted in overall Crimson Lake, such as S2464, although others went to 'Carmine and Cream' whilst around 3 or 4 received BR(S) Passenger Green.

During November 1961, S2464 was withdrawn from Capital Stock and moved to storage (with many others) in sidings on a former WW2 spur near Worthy Down in November 1961. Subsequently this spur, which had linked the SR and GWR between Winchester Junction and Worthy Down, had become isolated at both ends which was to cause extra work the following year!

When Sir Winston Churchill was 87 he had fallen out of bed, breaking the neck of a femur (thigh bone), whilst staying in the penthouse suite of the Hotel de Paris in Monte Carlo. This accident, which was very serious for a man of his years, had occurred on Thursday 28th June 1962 and he had an operation, to reset the broken bone, at the Princess Grace Clinic later that day. A Comet of RAF Transport Command flew him back to Heathrow, on the following day, after which he was admitted to the Middlesex Hospital for continued treatment.

After this accident, certain people in HM Government and elsewhere decided to prepare for the worst and on 3rd July 1962, a Southern Region carriage and wagon inspector was sent to Worthy Down in Hampshire to inspect the 24 vans stored on this former WW2 spur. S2464 was judged to be the 'best' of a poor lot requiring the least amount of repair work. It had last been painted, in September 1956, into BR Crimson Lake livery but much of it was found to be flaking off. 11 of the 16 door and fixed lights (glass panes) were broken by vandals but, despite this, the Decalite flooring was still in good condition. The gangway rubber diaphragms were perished although both scissors and frames were satisfactory.

A sizeable amount of Permanent Way work was needed to re-connect this line and extract S2464. A light engine was sent from Eastleigh to do the necessary shunting and S2464 was taken to Stewarts Lane depot for internal and external refurbishment plus re-painting into Umber and Cream to match Pullman livery. It was then stored in the adjacent Carriage Sheds, next to the other Pullman coaches, destined to be used in Sir Winston's funeral train on Saturday 30th January 1965. Incidentally strict instructions had been issued, after refurbishment, that S2464 was not to be moved or used without specific authorisation but was, in fact, repainted again after Sir Winston's death.

Subsequently, S2464 was sold for £350.00 and moved in October 1965 for display at 'Industry Halls', Sheraton Resort & Conference Center, Los Angeles, California. It was repatriated via Southampton in September 2007, thence to Cranmore for restoration before being moved to Swanage Railway in May 2010 to form part of a possible museum display at Corfe Castle.

Then S2464 went on loan to NRM, York to be displayed with loco 34051 *Sir Winston Churchill*, as part of their commemoration on the anniversary of his death in 1965. "Churchill's Final Journey" display occurred between 20th January and 31st May 2015. In advance of this S2464 was transported northwards on Saturday 13th September 2014 where restoration work was undertaken at Locomotion Shildon before moving to York. The loan agreement with NRM lasted until February 2016 although this was extended with S2464 moving back to Locomotion Shildon for a further period of display. During September 2019 it moved south to the One:One Collection sited in the former Hornby Models warehouse in Margate.

Some details from: <http://www.ww2rsg.org.uk/> plus:
https://sremg.org.uk/coach/coupe/coupe_se15.pdf (Copyright Terry Bye)