

## **GWR SMALL PRAIRIE 2-6-2T No 5526**

The 45xx and 4575 classes were favourites for branch line work over most of the Great Western Railway's territory. Devon and Cornwall were no exceptions and virtually all the branch lines in the two counties saw engines of one or other of the two types right up until the end of steam on British Railways (Western Region), or in many cases, until the closure of the lines in question. The branch line from Totnes to Ashburton – today's South Devon Railway – was no exception where the 45xx class were used for the freight traffic.

5526 was completed at Swindon Works in May 1928 as part of GWR Lot number 251, at a cost of £3,602 which included £737 for the boiler. She spent almost her whole life in the West Country having been shedded at St Blazey and, whilst there, was out-based at Bodmin for about two months working the branch to Wadebridge.

Further transfers occurred going first to Exeter in November 1929 for a period of 2 years. Another six years of service saw 5526 being allocated to the sheds at Plymouth (both Millbay and Laira sheds), Moorswater, Launceston and Newton Abbott before being sent back to Laira Depot for its first general overhaul on Saturday 26th January 1935.

During this overhaul the engine was fitted with its second boiler after which 5526 was outshopped and transferred to Truro shed on Thursday 6th June 1935. 5526 settled to a regular routine at Truro, for the next 24 years, where workings would have included branch passenger services to Falmouth and Newquay (via both Chasewater and Par).

1959 saw the class pushed out of the West Country by the Diesel Multiple Units and 5526 was moved from Truro to Westbury in March of that year. Whilst at Westbury 5526 received its last heavy overhaul, in fact its last "Classified" overhaul, being stopped between 17th April and 5th June 1959. During this overhaul it was fitted with its seventh and final boiler, which had been constructed at Swindon in October 1947 for the sum of £1,087.

Its final years were spent on local passenger and various goods workings to locations such as Swindon and Bristol (via Radstock). On Friday 8th June 1962, after travelling a total of 968,577 miles over a service life of thirty-four years, it was withdrawn from revenue earning stock.

5526 was sold to Woodham Brothers scrap merchants on 28th August 1962 and was moved to their yard in Barry during November the same year. After around twenty-three years of exposure to the sea air, and removal of many parts for other locomotives, had taken their toll on 5526.

During 1984, three of the founder members of a group conducted a survey on the range of Small Prairie Tank locomotives present which revealed a prime candidate for restoration from which the "Project 5526 Group" was formed. In July 1985, 5526 was transported to Toddington on the Gloucester and Warwickshire Steam Railway. By 1988, it was realised that many of the facilities needed to complete the engine were not available to the group at that time.

The engine was moved to Swindon Works Heritage Centre during April 1988. Here, in No. 19 Shop (formerly the DMU Repair Shop) most of the machinery needed for the overhaul and repair of the locomotive was available. The corroded rear portion of the main frame was replaced, wheels re-profiled and the boiler stripped, surveyed and re-tubed.

During this period two new riveted side tanks and a bunker were manufactured. The locomotive was obliged to vacate the workshop in November 1992 due to building development hindering access to the site.

Seeking a suitable operating base, 5526 Ltd moved the loco to Buckfastleigh on the South Devon Railway. It currently enjoys the enthusiastic attention of group members and South Devon Railway staff in a well equipped workshop.

5526 was initially outshopped in BR black livery but then taken out of service awaiting repairs after being taken out of service in March 2012. This followed the discovery of cracks in the firebox backhead. By the end of 2016 a replacement backhead had been pressed and fitted at the South Devon Railway's workshops at Buckfastleigh.

A fire was lit on the grate of the locomotive on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017 and the boiler was lifted back on the frames later in the month in order to allow the tank engine to be back in service in May 2017.

5526 spent the period from March 2018 until January 2019 at the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway where it hauled five coach trains up the 1 in 68 incline. In 2020 it appeared at the East Anglian Railway Museum at their Spring Steam Gal after which it went on loan to the Battlefield Line but was back at C&PRR for the 2021 season.

5526 also appeared on the Mid-Hants Railway at their 2021 Spring Steam Gala and then went on loan to the Dartmouth Steam Railway for the Summer season. It then went to the Gwili Railway in the September and starred in their special October Gala.

On 15<sup>th</sup> February 2022, the South Devon Railway General Manager Dick Wood announced: *“My predecessor Richard Elliott, who is also 5526 Ltd Chairman, had a hunch that the engine's mileage must be close to a million, so we took a look at the records and the February figures showed that 5526 had indeed already run 1,004,792 miles! We look forward to many more miles on the rails with this wonderful 83-year-old engine.”*

On Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2022, 5526 arrived by road at Norden road/rail siding to begin a loan period of a few months on the Swanage Railway. Currently it is painted in GW Green livery. This is the first time a small prairie tank locomotive has operated on the Swanage branch.

The West Country stalwart will be operating the Blue Timetable between Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> February – 5 trips a day between Swanage and Norden. This is the first time since 2016 that a Western engine has visited the Swanage Railway. The last loco was GWR 2-8-0T loco No. 4247.

Thanks to the South Devon Railway and 5526 Ltd for agreeing to loan the engine to the Swanage Railway.

## **BASIC DETAILS**

Builder	GWR – Swindon Works	Class / Type	4575 / Prairie
Built	01/05/28	Wheel Arrangement	2-6-2T
Driving Wheels	4 ft 7½ ins	Trailing Wheels	3 ft 2 ins
Boiler Pressure	200 psi	Tractive Effort	21,250 lbs
Cylinders (2)	17 ins x 24 ins	BR Power Classification	4MT
Weight (In Working Order)	61 Tons 0 cwt	Status	In Traffic

After two months of active service at Swanage, 5526 was steamed to Norden Road/Rail interchange sidings on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> April. This was in readiness for road transport back to it's home on the South Devon Railway at Buckfastleigh the following day. The lorry that transported Class 25 D7612 from the South Devon Railway, to take part in the Swanage Railway's 2022 Diesel Gala, was scheduled to take 5526 back to South Devon as a return load.

Information collated by Peter Sykes 15<sup>th</sup> February 2022 and updated 27<sup>th</sup> April 2022