

## **SR 20-Ton BALLAST & SLEEPER WAGON DS 61963**

This was Southern Railway's (SR) first Permanent Way ballast wagon design based on the standard 21 ft 6 in Railway Clearing House (RCH) designed underframe. It had a 5 plank body with divided doors. A batch of 60 wagons was ordered by SR, on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1928, under Design Diagram 1771.

They were constructed by the Birmingham Railway Carriage & Wagon Co. in Saltley, Birmingham between June and October 1928. The wagons were numbered 61945 – 62004 and cost £189 each. In fact, this was not much more than a standard open wagon without doors.

These 20 Ton five plank drop side ballast wagons were 24 ft 5 ins long over buffers, weighed 8 tons 16 cwt empty and, for many years, were unique in being the only non-hopper ballast wagons in the UK.

The 60 vehicles were delivered in three batches. The Permanent Way Depot at Redbridge received 61945 to 61964 so this would have been 61963's initial 'home'. Meldon Quarry was allocated 61965 to 61984 with the final batch being based at Angerstein Wharf (61985 – 62004). These allocations were noted on white enamelled plates fixed to wagon solebars. On 61963, for instance, 1¼ inch high red lettering were the words "TO BE RETURNED TO REDBRIDGEWORKS".

They were constructed for the Engineers Department for principal use of transporting new granite stone ballast from SR's own Meldon Quarry on Dartmoor. Mainly this would have seen weekly movements to various track work sites around the SR network and they had a long life used in this traffic.

Over the years, SR gradually went over to using hopper ballast wagons of either bogie or four-wheeled designs. The 20 Ton five plank drop side ballast wagons, being vacuum brake fitted using an 18 in cylinder, were attached to passenger trains from time to time apparently during the latter period of service. This enabled delivery of rapidly needed replacement items, such as point blades, from either Redbridge or Angerstein PW engineering workshops.

They were never withdrawn as a life-expired design although change came when BR(S) withdrew all vacuum braked stock in the 1970's. However, DS 61963 was photographed at Stewarts Lane Depot, on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> June 1979, with it's cargo of sand and cement being unloaded. So it seems to have survived in traffic on BR(S) for some time.

It has not been ascertained what DS 61963 did after this although many wagons of the same design were transferred to Western Region to serve the stores at Swindon. Only when this closed in the late 1980s were survivors generally withdrawn. By then, they were probably the oldest fleet of wagons still operating on the BR network.

DS 61963 has seen intermittent use at Swanage Railway but, at the time of writing, is carrying items related to the dismantled 70 ft turntable extracted from Old Oak Common.

Information compiled by Peter Sykes 14<sup>th</sup> June 2022

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