

BR MKI OPEN SECOND No. 4803

Open Second, or latterly Standard Open, (SO) coach numbered 4803 was built by British Railway's York Carriage & Wagon Works to Design Diagram 94. SO is the designation for an open style of carriage seating 48 passengers in a 2 + 1 layout in 8 'bays'. Less capacity, than the ubiquitous 64 seater TSO coach, allowed SO seating to be that bit more spacious and comfortable for long distance travel.

4803 formed part of Lot 30376, a batch of 31 similar vehicles (numbered 4779 to 4809), which was ordered on 20th March 1956. The last vehicle (4809) was outshopped on 28th December 1957 so it is likely that 4803 would have appeared a few weeks before that. Initially, it was allocated to BR's Midland Region and given the number M4803.

The vehicle was constructed upon the standard MkI underframe supported on two vacuum braked BR I bogies. It was equipped with steam heating radiators under each seat and two toilet compartments were situated at one end either side of the central end vestibule. Seating was covered in uncut moquette and the coach weighed 33 Tons in working order.

Nothing is known of M4803's usage by BR but is likely to have ventured over a lot of its network. M4803 was withdrawn in 1989 and purchased, later in the year, for use in the Swanage Railway's "Wessex Belle" dining set. It's spacious layout and fitted tables proved to be most useful.

After a number of years it was removed from the dining rake, around 2004, to become an 'overflow' carriage, for the Swanage Station "Bird's Nest" buffet coach, in busy summer months. It remained on these duties for a while with both vehicles stabled in the Bay Platform at Swanage.

At some stage M4803 was despatched to the Midland Railway Centre at Butterley in Derbyshire for extensive contract refurbishment. It returned to Norden in mid-August 2010 entering service immediately in the "Wessex Belle" dining train.

Subsequently it was thoroughly refurbished again and repainted externally, during 2011/12, into BR's early 1950s Carmine/Cream (known as "blood & custard" to some railway enthusiasts) livery which it still carries as one of two "Wessex Belle" Dining Cars.

Dorset Police's rural crime team investigated an incident which happened at some point between the late hours of Friday 24th February and the early hours of Saturday 25th February 2023. Vandals smashed windows and attempted to set light to one of the 'Wessex Belle' dining train carriages.

During the attack several windows were broken and vandals gained entry. Paraffin was poured and a rag set alight in an attempt to set the carriage on fire. If anyone has any information that could help Dorset Police in relation to this incident they are asked to report it by telephoning 101 and quoting the incident number 55230030725.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Swanage Railway Stock Books

Preserved Coaching Stock of British Railways – Part One BR Design Stock
by Peter Hall and Peter Fox (Platform 5 Publishing – 1994)

The Railway Heritage Register Carriage Survey Project:
<http://www.cs.rhrp.org.uk/se/CarriageInfo.asp?Ref=1445>

Information collated by Peter Sykes 2nd March 2024