

GWR 10T 'BLOATER' FISH VAN 2661

2661 was designed by G J Churchward and built in August 1926 at the Great Western Railway (GWR) Swindon Carriage & Wagon Works to design diagram S10 in Lot No. 1356. This Lot (batch) totalled 50 fish vans numbered 2650 to 2699.

To cope with growing amounts of fish traffic from South Wales and West Country ports, the Great Western had many odd vehicles in service up to and during the 1914-18 war, some built as far back as 1880. As most of these wagons were quickly being condemned, a completely new design of fish wagon was planned, and between the years 1919 to 1923 with one hundred and forty-seven vehicles being built. The telegraphic code name of 'Bloater' was used by the GWR to describe these fish vans when ordering them to cope with demand.

Volumes continued to increase, as the country's population grew, so additional batches were needed and this was one reason why Lot No. 1356 came into being. Bodywork measured 28 ft 6 ins overall and the vehicle could carry 10 tons of fish when travelling in vacuum braked trains. Their long wheelbase of 18 ft helped keep it stable at these higher speeds. Because of this wheelbase, however, four V-hangers were used to avoid unduly long push rods from the vacuum cylinder to actuate the brake shoes.

Like GWR Fruit Vans, these Fish Vans were painted in Brown (chocolate) passenger livery with yellow lettering and branded "FOR FISH TRAFFIC ONLY". Due to the smells generated by fish, a specialist range of wagons and vans were normally reserved for the exclusive use of this traffic. In more recent years, the railway network lost this traffic completely with fresh fish transported by road. 2661 became W2661W under British Railways ownership.

After withdrawal from revenue earning service in 1961 it was converted at Swindon to a Tool & Mess Van, under Lot 1084, as replacement for DW80996. It was renumbered as DW 150289 being based in the Plymouth District for many years, allocated to the CM&EE's Bridge Division. Noted as stabled by itself in Plympton sidings, on Tuesday 27th July 1972, it was made redundant and condemned in March 1976.

2661 was purchased privately and arrived on the West Somerset Railway in June 1976 where it stayed until 1996. It was then transported to the Swanage Railway to become the workshop for the (then) newly created Crane Department based at Norden and remains in that role. Ownership changed to the Swanage Railway Company around 21st October 2016.

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