

GWR HALL CLASS 4-6-0 No. 4953 “PITCHFORD HALL”

Pitchford Hall is a member of the GWR 4900, or "Hall," Class of locomotives, designed by Charles Collett. 259 locomotives of this class were built, and the design is said to have heavily contributed to LMS Class 5 ('Black 5) and LNER Thompson B1 classes. The Hall class latterly received a 5MT power classification under BR. 11 examples have been saved for preservation, several have made it back onto the mainline, including Pitchford Hall and one of which, 5972 Olton Hall, gained international fame through becoming the 'Hogwarts Express' locomotive.

Pitchford Hall was built at Swindon in August 1929 at a cost of £4,375, and was first allocated to Bristol Bath Road shed. On 30th November 1946, 4953 was noted outside Swindon Works awaiting entry for scheduled overhaul/repairs. In August 1950 it was transferred to Cardiff Canton shed and fitted with BR type piston valves and liners February 1956 but reverted back to WR standard within two years.

During Spring 1959, 4953 was reallocated to Swindon shed. During 1962, 4953 was noted running down the gradient between Hinton Admiral and Christchurch on an inter-regional service from York to Bournemouth. The loco was transferred again back to Cardiff Canton shed in August before moving to Cardiff East Dock shed in September 1962.

'Hall' class locomotives were used all over the Great Western and Western Region. Their duties were diverse from standing in for failed 'Castles' on expresses (keeping to tight schedules) to heavy freight work and secondary passenger services. The impressive acceleration of these engines made them particularly suited to the duties that required frequent stops, where the smaller wheels gave greater adhesion and therefore reduced slipping when starting from standstill.

The 'Hall' class, and other GWR 2-cylinder, engines all have a distinctive 'bark' to their exhaust notes, which is one thing that helps maintain enthusiasm throughout the generations. Their long service also ensured they wore a number of liveries. This included the passenger class fully lined GWR green until 1948 then, during the early BR years, mixed traffic classes on all regions carried lined black livery. In 1956 some discretion was permitted by BR, and the Western Region was allowed to paint mixed traffic engines in fully lined Brunswick green.

The last years of revenue-earning service were spent at Cardiff East Dock before the loco was withdrawn on Thursday 2nd May 1963 having covered 1,344,464 miles. The loco was towed to Woodham's Brothers Scrapyard in Barry in November 1963. Whilst there it was marked up for the "South Gwent Locomotive Society" but nothing further came of this 'reservation'.

Pitchford Hall became the 150th departure from Barry in February 1984, when it was purchased by Dr John Kennedy and taken to Tyseley Locomotive Works. There a comprehensive overhaul was undertaken at a cost of reportedly almost £1m. She moved again under her own power in February 2004, making the debut public appearance in 42 years at Crewe Works. 'The Great Gathering' Open Day on 10th/11th September 2005 saw some 40,000 people attend to see 4953 and many other steam, diesel and electric locos.

Pitchford Hall returned to the main line in December 2005 after making the required light and loaded test runs from Birmingham Moor Street to Stratford-upon-Avon and back. In February 2007 the locomotive attended the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway's Winter Steam Gala and, on 19th May 2007, performed in tandem with 4965 Rood Ashton Hall on a trip to Bristol Temple Meads from their Tyseley base.

4953 also took part in the June 2007 season of The Melton Mowbray Fair & Harringworth Shuttle trains [Tyseley Warwick Road-Burton-Melton-Kettering, Melton-Kettering with a Class 50 diesel on the rear to haul the train back]. In addition, a journey from Birmingham to Kidderminster occurred in conjunction with the Severn Valley Railway's Autumn Gala.

During 2009, Pitchford Hall operated two Shakespeare Express services between Birmingham Snow Hill and Stratford upon Avon. On 31st August 2009, 4953 operated a railtour to Corby, via Harringworth Viaduct again. In October, it ran as a light engine with 5029 Nunney Castle and support coach to the West Somerset Railway Gala, operating services between Bishops Lydeard and Minehead.

After the 2010 Tyseley Locomotive Works steam, the locomotive was moved to the Great Central Railway. It then visited the Llangollen Railway, double heading with GWR 3717 City of Truro, and operating at the West Somerset Railway before returning to Loughborough.

In 2011, after working the Great Central Railway Winter Steam Gala, it visited the Mid Hants Railway, before returning to the GCR. It was sold in late 2011 by Dr John Kennedy to Roger Wright for use on the Epping Ongar Railway [EOR] but remained at the GCR for two years until April 2012, when it was moved to the EOR in time for the line's opening in late May 2012.

The locomotive remained in service until summer 2013 when it was withdrawn and underwent a thorough 10 year overhaul by Locomotive Maintenance Services at Loughborough. It had been anticipated that 4953 would be operational on the EOR during 2018.

This turned out to be optimistic but by October 2019 the locomotive had been moved to the GCR for running in before moving back to the EOR. This time it was outshopped in BR lined Black livery.

In November 2019 it was disclosed that the Dartmouth Steam Railway was in discussion to hire the locomotive for a two year period starting in early 2020. In January 2020, 4953 took part in the GCR Winter Gala followed by, on 5th February 2020, 4953 was part of a Timeline Events charter.

Pitchford Hall visited the Severn Valley Railway Autumn Steam Gala in September 2021. It replaced 6233 Duchess of Sutherland following its unexpected withdrawal from service. The loco had been undergoing some extensive repairs and maintenance at its base in Ripley, Derbyshire. Quite late in the work schedule, a problem was identified with 6233's driving-wheel axle boxes. Some of the metal bearing surface had cracked and become loose, necessitating replacement. Unfortunately, this meant this could not be completed in time for the event.

In September 2023 it visited the GWS depot at the Didcot Railway Centre. In September 2024, 4953 Pitchford Hall replaced 4079 Pendennis Castle as a visiting loco for North Yorkshire Moors' Annual Steam Gala.

The visit of 4953 Pitchford Hall, for the Spring Steam Gala from 28th to 30th March 2025,

will be the first visit of a 'Hall' Class loco to the Swanage branch line.

LOCOMOTIVE SPECIFICATIONS			
Configuration	4-6-0	Boiler Grate Area	27¼ sq ft
Leading Bogie Wheel dia.	3 ft 0 ins	Total Heating Area	1,158 sq ft
Driving Wheel dia.	6 ft 0 ins	Overall Length	63 ft 0½ ins
Tractive Effort	18,510 lbs ft	Coal Capacity	7 tons
Working Boiler pressure	225 psi	Water Capacity	3,500 gallons
Cylinders (outside)	Two	Locomotive Weight	75 tons
Cylinder size	15½ ins x 30 ins	Tender Weight	46 tons

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

<https://www.eorailway.co.uk/the-railway/rolling-stock/4953/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GWR_4900_Class

<https://www.svrlive.com/blsep21>

Compiled by Peter Sykes 4th March 2025