

MAUNSELL CLASS V ('SCHOOLS')

No. [926] 30926 REPTON

Designed by Richard Maunsell for the Southern Railway (SR) in 1930, the 'V Class' were, perhaps, better known as the 'Schools Class'. Their names arose from another successful publicity campaign by SR. They represented the public schools of England, initially due to their proximity to the SR that served them, but not all from it's area.

The class naming process generally consisted of pupils attending the specific schools visiting 'their' engine during naming ceremonies. However, Repton School is a 13–18 co-educational private boarding and day school located in the distant village of Repton in South Derbyshire. It has not been possible to ascertain if any pupils travelled to see 'their' locomotive being named but, on the face of it, this might seem unlikely.

The V Class locos were intended to meet a need for an intermediate passenger locomotive for routes needing much power, but couldn't handle large express engines. This was especially true for the Hastings Line which had fairly stiff gradients but was constrained by poor construction originally. This later required tunnels to be lined with further layers of bricks, to strengthen them, but the resultant reduction in tunnel dimensions caused 'normal' locos and coaches to be banned from that route.

Essentially, these V Class locos could be considered as cut-down 'Lord Nelson' class locos. Effectively, Maunsell adapted three of the 'Lord Nelson' cylinders as well as use the same design of driving wheels and bogie wheels. These features were topped by the round-topped firebox, and shortened boiler, of 'King Arthur' class design. The whistle had to be sited horizontally to keep the overall height low enough.

The cab roof was somewhat low to fit in with the tapered upper sides of the cab. This led to countless footplate crews, normally of above average height, to 'tap' their heads climbing into/out of the cab until they got used to them. The tender top was also tapered inwards to a similar profile. All these features made the 'Schools' locos powerful enough but sufficiently narrow for restricted routes such as between Tonbridge and Hastings.

Production delays at Eastleigh Works meant that the initial batch of 10 locos started being delivered in March with the tenth being outshopped during July 1930. Once the original batch had proved their worth, and been well received by footplate crews, a further twenty locos were ordered in March 1931 for delivery between December 1932 and March 1934.

A third batch of twenty were ordered by SR in March 1932 with construction following completion of the previous order. This order was reduced subsequently to ten locos because of the continuing worldwide trade depression. The final locomotive in the class was delivered in July 1935.

Southern Railway 926 *Repton* was completed at Eastleigh Works in May 1934. After a spell at Bournemouth it operated from Fratton (Portsmouth) depot until the Waterloo-Portsmouth route was electrified in July 1937. It was then one of ten 'Schools'

locomotives transferred to Bournemouth, as replacements for withdrawn 'King Arthurs', on the London expresses.

It remained at Bournemouth for most of the Second World War (WW2), being used on many expresses and, after the war, on inter-regional trains. On 20th April 1957, 30926 *Repton* was photographed at Charing Cross Station at the head of the 10:25 express to Hastings. This was during a period when the loco was allocated to Bricklayers Arms shed.

Several photographs were taken during the 1960's which depict 30926 *Repton* hauling Royal trains. These all seem to have been into or departing from London Victoria station. In June 1962 it was pictured on Stewarts Lane depot, in pristine condition, apparently prior to another Royal train duty.

Further Eastern Division electrification caused more moves of locos westwards on BR's Southern Region and *Repton* ended its working life at Basingstoke shed. It was withdrawn there, along with the remaining members of the class, on 30th December 1962, just 2 years after a major service and one of the last of the class to be overhauled by BR. The loco was recorded as having covered 1,126,976 miles in service with the Southern Railway and British Railways Southern Region.

As a result of the recent overhaul, it was considered a good choice for preservation. In 1963, *Repton* was optioned for purchase by New York businessman/Wall Street Executive Edgar T Mead Jr, on behalf of the Empire State Railway Museum in Middletown, New York. *Repton* had been restored cosmetically at Eastleigh Works by 1966 after which it was towed to be stored, in Fratton Depot's roundhouse shed, but Edgar Mead's option lapsed.

Ultimately, *Repton* was acquired, along with LSWR Drummond M7 Class loco No. 53. They had both been cosmetically overhauled at Eastleigh Works, in 1966, before moving to America the following year. They had been purchased by millionaire F Nelson Blount and moved to his Steamtown Railroad Museum in Bellows Falls, Vermont, USA. Unfortunately, he was killed the following year when his private plane crashed during an emergency landing on 31st August 1967.

Steamtown Museum loaned *Repton* to the Cape Breton Steam Railway (CBSR) in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, Canada. Some modifications and additions were made, such as a headlight and centre couplers, to satisfy US/Canadian running requirements. CBSR was a short-lived tourist railway, running between Glace Bay and Louisbourg, operating between 1973 and 1976. The tourist railway was part of an economic development initiative but proved uneconomical to operate, and closed down, with the tracks abandoned.

926 returned to the US but Steamtown was by then in something of a state of flux which led to much of its collection moving to Scranton, Pennsylvania in the mid-1980s. Whilst there, *Repton* operated occasionally but it didn't really fit in with the rest of the collection of (mainly) American railroad locos and railway vehicles.

During 1989, after 23 years in North America, *Repton* was sold again to British-born Clifford Brown who had emigrated many years earlier, with his family, and by then lived in Alexandria, Virginia, USA. He transported *Repton* to the UK where it was unloaded at Felixstowe on 11th April 1989.

This was the same day that saw the first run of Clifford's other engine, WW2 2-10-0 No. WD 73672 *Dame Vera Lynn*, on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway (NYMR). Originally, Clifford came from England's north-east region so it was natural to also locate *Repton* on the same line. *Repton* was overhauled thoroughly, at Grosmont shed, where the boiler was found to be in surprisingly good condition despite more than two decades in storage interspersed with infrequent steamings.

In 1990, the NYMR outshopped the loco in BR Brunswick Green lined livery and numbered 30926. During 1992, the loco was moved to the Great Central Railway where it operated trains for a while. After Clifford Brown died on 10th October 1995, at the age of 88, he left both his locos to the NYMR in his will.

By early 2004, *Repton* needed new tyres for its driving wheels. Later it underwent a lengthy period of overhaul at Grosmont shed with it returning to service in August 2017. In the following month it was transported to the Severn Valley Railway to appear in its Autumn Steam Gala. In March 2019, *Repton* was moved to the Nene Valley Railway to participate in their Southern Steam Gala. October saw it moved to the Great Central Railway as well as the East Lancs Railway for their respective Autumn Steam Galas.

During the winter of 2020/2021, the NYMR fitted 926 with a wide diameter chimney and a Lemaître-designed multiple jet blastpipe as a trial to see how well the locomotive steamed and performed over a season or two. This was hastened by the enforced use of imported lower-quality coal by heritage railways in the UK.

A similar chimney and blastpipe modification was carried out on 'Schools' Class 4-4-0's and 'Lord Nelson' 4-6-0's, during the 1930's and 1940's, under the Southern Railway's then Chief Mechanical Engineer Oliver V S Bulleid. The outcome then was an overall improvement in coal and water consumption for the 'Lord Nelsons' although improvements in 'Schools' was less clear-cut. Today's heritage railway use is, of course, very different from main line operations many decades earlier.

Despite these economies, 'Schools' locos only had a six-wheel tender. These had a 4,000 gallon capacity so needed to replenish water supplies at Southampton during station stops. The normal time for station duties there was around 3 minutes so the crew had to be quick to use this time to the best advantage.

The locomotive was returned to steam again in August 2022 following the replacement of the superheater and elements as well as major 'bottom end' mechanical work. Towards the end of 2023, however, *Repton* was taken out of service again for an intermediate overhaul. This involved re-boring its three cylinder valve liners along with examination and overhaul of the motion. The overhaul also included white-metalling the three crossheads and removal of the bottom row of small boiler tubes for examination.

In early September 2024, *Repton* was back in traffic following completion of the intermediate overhaul. It underwent several test runs before entering service at the NYMR in time for its Annual Steam Gala from the 26th to 29th. *Repton* was repainted into Southern Railway's Olive Green with her original number 926 – a livery it still carries.

During its time on the NYMR it has been registered for use on part of the national rail network. Part of the necessary works included fitment of a Global System for Mobile Communications-Railway (GSM R) radio to allow communications between loco crews

and the relevant signaller. Since then it has hauled NYMR trains to/from Whitby and Battersby on many occasions.

926 Repton is intended to visit the Swanage Railway for the first time when it attends the Autumn Steam Gala (12th - 14th September 2025). The loco doesn't go straight back to NYMR as it is due to appear at the 'Southern Giants Steam Gala' on the Epping Ongar Railway on the following weekend.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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