

URIE S15 CLASS 4-6-0 No. 506 (30506)

Class S15 locos were designed by Robert W Urie for the London & South Western Railway (LSWR) purely as 2-cylinder Fast Freight engines. During the First World War (WWI), the LSWR management wished to address the requirement for a modern, standard heavy freight locomotive to work from London's freight yards to the south west of England.

As the LSWR lacked existing freight designs capable of undertaking this task, a new design was needed to serve the south coast ports of Portsmouth, Weymouth and Southampton. The design was also to haul traffic including milk trains, which required fast transit to various dairies in London.

Urie used this opportunity to develop his recent H15 class design of 4-6-0 locos. He applied the 4-6-0 locomotive concept to a purpose-built freight design built to LSWR order number S15. It was this order number that gave the class the name 'S15'. Their principal workings were to be heavy night express goods trains between Exeter and Nine Elms as well as between Southampton Docks and Nine Elms yard.

A second batch of five S15 Class locos were ordered in March 1917 by the LSWR. They were all built at Eastleigh Works, with 506 being completed in October 1920. It was outshopped in LSWR's Holly Green livery and then run-in on local duties before being allocated to Nine Elms shed in Battersea.

It moved to Strawberry Hill shed in 1922. Then, in 1923, a new marshalling yard and loco shed, were built at Feltham in West London. 506 was one of a number of engines re-allocated there after it opened and it would spend the rest of her working days at Feltham. Apart from scheduled overhauls at Eastleigh Works, 506 remained based at Feltham until withdrawn from service in January 1964.

The type was employed working both cross-London goods trains, between Feltham and Willesden, as well as the heavy goods train between London and Southampton Docks. They proved to be very strong and capable locomotives going about their duties mainly on heavy goods services over much of the Southern network. However, on summer weekends they were rostered regularly on relief passenger and seaside excursion trains.

After the Grouping on 1st January 1923, the Southern Railway (SR) painted the S15 Class locos in lined goods black when an E prefix was applied to the numbers. The S15 Class locos were so successful that after Robert Urie's retirement, as the SR Chief Mechanical Engineer, his replacement Richard Maunsell modified the design and built a further batch of S15 locomotives in 1927

From 1928, the S15's were painted in Maunsell lined green at their next overhaul. E506 received its lined black livery at its second heavy overhaul in 1924, and did not return to a green livery until 1930. At the same overhaul 506 received a Maunsell-designed superheater header. Later it received the new smoke deflectors and, in 1932, it lost the E-prefix to become 506 once again.

When the London Brighton & South Coast Railway (LBSCR) 4-6-4 tank engines were rebuilt to become N15X Class 4-6-0's, in 1934-36, 30506 was one of a number of Urie

S15's that donated their tenders to the new locomotives. In return for tender No. 3210, 30506 received a Drummond eight-wheel 4,000 gallon 'watercart' tender No. 221 of 1902 vintage from a C8 Class 4-4-0 loco that was being scrapped.

The next changes were the introduction of Bulleid's unlined dark green livery in 1939 and wartime plain black livery in 1942. This was followed by the replacement of the Urie stovepipe chimney with a Maunsell class UI pattern chimney in 1945. With the nationalisation of Britain's railways, 506 received number 30506 and was painted in British Railways goods black in August 1949.

During 1956, the Drummond 'watercart' was replaced by an Urie double bogie tender No. 859 from a withdrawn 'King Arthur' Class locomotive. On 5th February 1962, 30506 was photographed near Wimbledon hauling a 4EPB EMU from Durnsford Road depot to the works at Eastleigh for overhaul.

It then ran with this until withdrawal on 5th January 1964 having accumulated 1,227,897 miles whilst in service.

A group of four S15s (30499, 30841, 30847 and 30506) were purchased by Woodham Brothers, in Barry, South Wales. 506 was selected to haul the group on their final journey to the scrapyards in June 1964. Fate stepped in when, due to badly blowing superheater elements in the boiler, she failed with low steam and water at Staines. 30506 was towed back to Feltham and then was towed to Barry scrapyards in October that year.

The Urie Locomotive Society was formed in April 1972 with its primary goal of saving a Urie S15. This was achieved when 30506 was purchased in March 1973 for £4,000, just before 10% VAT came into force, saving a further £400. A location for the engine and raising of the transportation costs meant that 30506 did not move to the Mid-Hants Railway at Alresford until April 1976, being the 79th loco to leave, which was arranged following a vote amongst its membership.

Whilst undergoing restoration, the boiler on 30506 (No. 451) was examined on several occasions, but state-of-the-art metallurgical tests in 1979 determined that the cracking at the top of the firebox was not repairable. The group returned to Barry in 1980 and by agreement with Woodham Brothers purchased a second boiler (from classmate 30825) and this was eventually lifted into 30506 in February 1981.

The restoration of 506 was side lined for some years whilst the group administered the move from York and overhaul of LSWR class T9 4-4-0 120. This was on behalf of the National Railway Museum for use on the Mid-Hants Railway. This resulted in 506 returning to steam in August 1987 and ran on the Mid-Hants Railway for a full fourteen years before coming out of service in 2001.

After completing a new operating agreement with the railway, a heavy overhaul was undertaken which has seen the boiler go into the new boiler workshop at Ropley where extensive repairs have been completed. Society members de-stayed the boiler, where required, including the complicated areas in the roof of the firebox.

By August 2016 severe corrosion at the front end of the frames behind the cylinders had been detected (as they were cracked) and a new buffer beam cast. At that time it had been hoped that the locomotive would return to service during 2017.

By the end of 2017 the front end had been completely rebuilt which included replacing nine feet of the frames. The boiler overhaul was nearing completion at this time with only

superheater elements still to fit. Driving wheels were returned to Ropley in November 2017 having the tyres and journals turned at the South Devon Railway Engineering. By April 2018 the overhaul of the boiler was almost complete at Ropley with work on the bottom half of the locomotive also well advanced.

In November 2018 an out-of-frames boiler test was conducted which enabled it to pass the insurance examination before the boiler was fitted to the frames. 506 was in its final stages of the overhaul and entered service at the Mid-Hants Railway from 2nd June 2019. The loco was repainted in 1940s Southern Wartime Black livery.

In June 2019, 506 returned to service after 18 years of restoration efforts and one year prior to her 100 birthday. Having given a proper send off with the likes of President Bob Urie – grandson of the S15 designer – 506 has since been pulling trains on the Watercress Line to everyone's delight.

It visited the Severn Valley Railway for their Spring Steam Gala (21st - 24th April 2022). This was 506's first visit to another heritage railway away from its Mid Hants Railway base. 506 then visited the Great Central Railway for their Winter Steam Gala (27th - 29th January 2023).

Six years later, in April 2025, the locomotive was withdrawn from traffic for unexpected firebox repairs. 506, was then repainted into British Railways unlined black livery with running number 30506.

August 2025 saw repairs completed and fully painted in BR Black livery with an early crest. This marked the first time an S15 has carried the early BR crest in preservation. It then went on test at the Mid Hants Railway (the Watercress Line) in readiness for its visit to the Swanage Railway for the Autumn Steam Gala (12th - 14th September 2025).

30506 is scheduled to be back at the Mid Hants Railway in time for their Autumn Steam Gala between 3rd and 5th October 2025.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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