

SR 20-Ton BALLAST & SLEEPER WAGON DS 61989

This was Southern Railway's (SR) first Permanent Way ballast wagon design on a standard 21 ft 6 in Railway Clearing House designed underframe. It had a 5 plank design with divided doors. A batch of 60 wagons was ordered on 25th January 1928 by the SR under Design Diagram 1771.

They were constructed by the Birmingham Railway Carriage & Wagon Co., Saltley between June and October (numbered 61945 – 62004) at a cost of £189 each. In fact, this was not much more than a standard open wagon. These 20 Ton five plank drop side ballast wagons were 24 ft 5 ins long over buffers, had a 12 ft wheelbase, weighed 8 tons 16 cwt empty and, for many years, were unique in being the only non-hopper ballast wagons in the UK.

The 60 vehicles were split into three batches. The Permanent Way Depot at Redbridge received 61945 to 61964. Meldon Quarry was allocated 61965 to 61984 with the final batch being based at Angerstein Wharf (61985 – 62004) so this would have been 61989's initial 'home'. These allocations were noted on white enamelled plates fixed to wagon solebars. On 61989, for instance, 1¼ inch high red lettering were the words "TO BE RETURNED TO ANGERSTEIN WHARF".

They were constructed for the Engineers Department for principal use of transporting new granite stone ballast from SR's own Meldon Quarry on Dartmoor. Mainly this would have seen weekly movements to various track work sites around the SR network and they had a long life used in this traffic.

Over the years, SR gradually went over to using hopper ballast wagons of either bogie or four-wheeled designs. The 20 Ton five plank drop side ballast wagons, being vacuum brake fitted using an 18 in cylinder, were attached to passenger trains from time to time apparently during the latter period of service. This enabled delivery of rapidly needed replacement items, such as point blades, from either Redbridge or Angerstein PW engineering workshops.

They were never withdrawn as a life-expired design although change came when BR(S) withdrew all vacuum braked stock in the 1970's.

It is not known for sure what 61989 did afterwards although many of this design were transferred to Western Region serving the stores at Swindon. Only when this closed, in the late 1980s, were survivors generally withdrawn. By then, they were probably the oldest fleet of wagons still operating on the BR network.

61989 was withdrawn by BR and condemned where it lay at Bristol East yard. It was purchased by the Southern Catering Project Group in January 2003 but did not arrive on Swanage Railway metals until November 2003.

DS 61989 has seen intermittent use at Swanage Railway but, at the time of writing, is carrying some items related to the dismantled 70 ft turntable extracted from Old Oak Common Depot.

Information compiled by Peter Sykes 14th June 2022

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