

Great Northern Railway Society

Transcript of an article in the Great Northern News

The Great Northern Railway “Prince of Wales’ Saloon”

by Sandy Maclean & Bill Shannon



Ed's introduction: The "Royal Train Special" issue of GNN (No. 118) contained as much as I then was able to find out about the GNR's 1889 Prince of Wales' Saloon. However, as a result of contacts with colleagues in the North British Railway Association and the Scottish Railway Preservation Society, I can now publish further information on this unique vehicle.

We begin with the vehicle's history, compiled by Sandy Maclean of the North British Railway Association and a former Coaching Rolling Stock Officer at BR Scottish Region HQ, from various sources including records in the National Archives of Scotland.

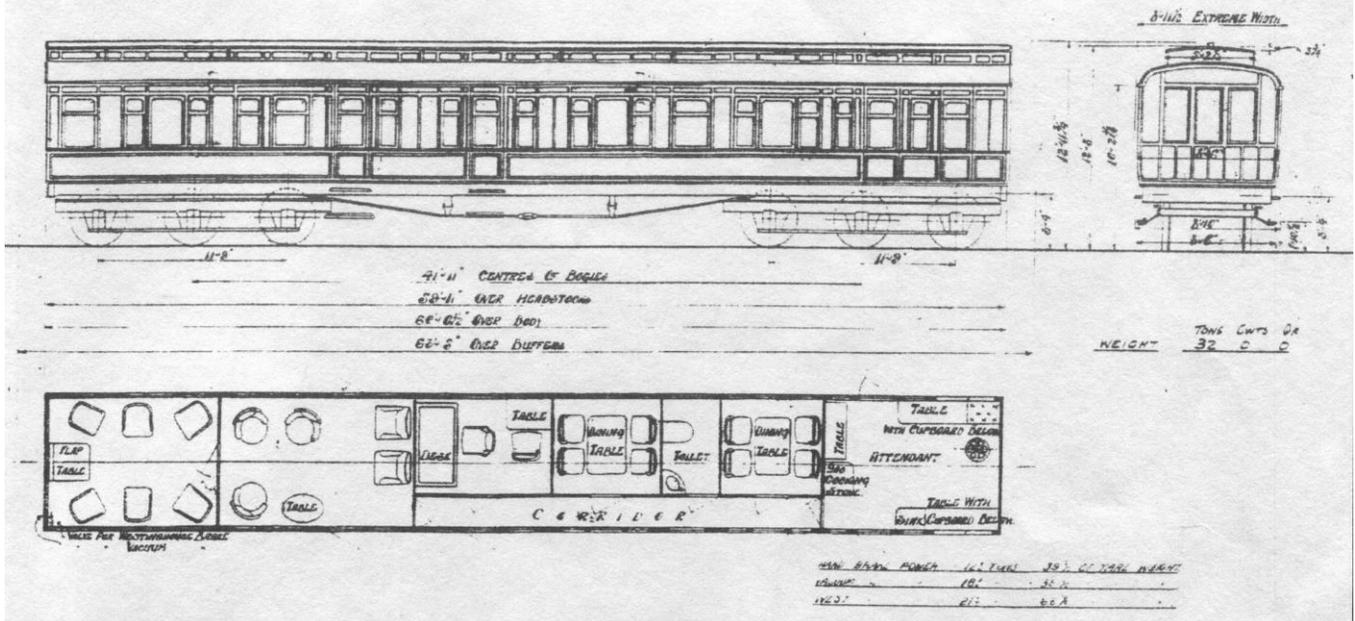
According to F A S Brown in his book GREAT NORTHERN LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS, it came about when [the General Manager told his Board on 31st May, 1888 that the London & North Western Railway, in addition to the suite of coaches provided for Queen Victoria, had built a new carriage for the Prince of Wales.](#) He considered that the then Great Northern equivalent "did not shine by contrast". In view of the known preference for the Royal Household to travel to Scotland by the West Coast route, it appears that the decision to build this car at all was perhaps more one of faith and hope, than operational or commercial necessity. Royal saloons were strictly for royalty!

Patrick Stirling stated that he could not build a suitable coach at Doncaster Works, and suggested that Messrs Craven Brothers of Sheffield, could do the job. In searching for a good interior layout, it was claimed that Mr. Craven had examined the saloons of several large Clyde built ships, and agreed to build the vehicle for £3,000, including decorations. However, although a subsequent official record claims the cost was only £1,500, the final bill from Cravens was £5,914, on which the Great Northern negotiated a 10% reduction. This unique carriage was delivered in November 1889, a few months before the completion of the Forth Bridge which gave the East Coast companies a slight advantage over the West Coast in terms of mileage between London and Aberdeen. It was given diagram number 1 and running number 2408.

A suite of special royal railway carriages had already been provided for Queen Victoria, but in November 1889 a special carriage, numbered 2408, was delivered to the Great Northern Railway for the sole use of the then Prince of Wales. It was designed and built by Messrs Craven Brothers of Sheffield.

The wooden vehicle body was 60' 0½" long, its underframe being mounted on two six-wheel bogies, each of 11' 9" total wheelbase. However, there were a number of variations from the then 'standard' Great Northern design patterns, which would suggest that the car probably owed more to Craven's than to the Great Northern drawing offices. Externally, the waist panels did not rise as high as GN stock, the glazed area above being deeper than usual. However, beading and panelling followed GN construction style of quarter round, with square corners below the waist, and flat mouldings with rounded edges above. The roof featured a clerestory of 5' 2" overall width, without the bowed ends which were to feature in later Great Northern and East Coast stock, and it was hinted that this part of the vehicle perhaps owed something to Mr. Bain, carriage engineer with the North Eastern Railway and later the Midland Railway. The ends of the clerestory were panelled with quarter round mouldings.

Internal lighting was originally by the then traditional heavy brass 'gasolier' suspended from the centre of the clerestory, although this was later altered by the Great Northern to electricity, with the lamps projecting out from brass brackets from the lower part of the clerestory. A semi-corridor occupied part of the interior which also featured a full width toilet at one, or perhaps both ends, and it is interesting to note that all doors from the separate compartments opened outwards into the corridor in the style of the early GN (and other railways) corridor carriages. The vehicle was not gangwayed at either end, but at that time very few vehicles were so equipped. Despite its bulk, the tare weight in working order was a mere 32 tons, indicated on the end by a single line of raised letters. When the gangway was fitted, the plate was lowered to waist height from its original position just below the roof level.



According to Wrottesley's history of the Great Northern, a gauging vehicle was sent down the Deeside line to Ballater, but some indicators were disturbed. 2408 then ran slowly down the branch and some bridges were claimed to have scraped the roof and sides. The wheel diameter was then reduced from 3' 6" to 3' 0", lowering the overall height of the car by 3 inches. The LNER Southern Scottish Area diagram (149B) issued after 1925 showed a maximum height of 12' 11 3/4", only 3/4" higher than the NBR loading gauge, other dimensions being within the gauge parameters.

The wheel diameter had to be reduced by 6" to 3' 0" to avoid some bridges scraping the roof and sides of the carriage.

After the death of Queen Victoria, when the former Prince of Wales became King Edward VII, the car was downgraded from a Royal Saloon into an officers' inspection or observation saloon, and this involved external modifications (and also some internal ones). At one end, a full width toilet compartment was removed and its area combined with an adjacent compartment, forming an observation saloon. The patterned obscure toilet compartment glazing in the bodyside was replaced by plain glass. Three fixed windows were inserted into the exterior end wall of the former toilet compartment. One additional side door was fitted to the bodyside on both sides of the vehicle giving access to the exterior from a second slightly larger saloon adjacent to the newly enlarged one. At the opposite end of the vehicle, a second full width toilet was also removed as was the partition to an adjacent passenger compartment but the external bodyside was altered with the toilet compartment window being replaced by a set of double doors. A small almost unobtrusive vertical window was cut into the former toilet compartment end wall between the vertical beading (which was retained) on the right hand side. The area internally which was formerly occupied by the seating compartment and toilet was stripped out and became an open compartment with accoutrements for the use of train staff, including a hand brake stanchion. A WC hopper and wash basin located in a small compartment off the central corridor portion served as replacement for the two removed full width toilets.

On 27th July 1923, a general outline scale drawing of the vehicle was prepared at Doncaster (drawing 4430N) which Mr H N Gresley signed on 3rd of August. Entitled, "LNER Doncaster Observation Saloon No. 2408", a copy was sent to the Southern Scottish Area to which the vehicle was eventually transferred in December 1923. The drawing showed several alterations to the external bodyside from its as-built condition. These included the sealing up of both sets of the double doors, and the original single door on the "compartment" side, second in from the glazed end. Although the doors were sealed, the hinges, frames and panels were retained, only the handles being removed. The internal appointments as described on this drawing were, from end to end, the main observation saloon, which was equipped with six loose chairs and a flap table below the central end window, and on one side valves for Westinghouse and vacuum brakes. Adjacent to this saloon was another full width smaller dining saloon equipped with five well upholstered armchairs and a small oval table.

This saloon opened into the side corridor which gave access to the adjacent office compartment with two chairs and two tables, then a dining saloon with 4 chairs and a table, a lavatory compartment, another four seat dining saloon and an attendant's compartment. The last mentioned had two tables, one of which had a sink unit fitted, the space below both being occupied by cupboards. In one corner, there was a horizontal hand brake wheel with an adjacent corner upholstered seat for the guard. The corridor interior doors were still hung to swing out into the side corridor and were positioned that they swung against the attendant proceeding from his compartment.

When the vehicle arrived in Scotland it received the passenger rolling stock Diagram 149B, and the Departmental Saloons series fleet number 3B. The main objective of the transfer was to release the 1917 conversion of an 1894 built former West Highland Railway bogie brake composite for other purposes, this being the increasingly unpopular No. 2B. The view held by the officers was that the old NBR car should be withdrawn, yet it survived for almost forty more years in official use. The new arrival was [based in Waverley Station, Edinburgh](#), and was used, as the occasion required, by the Chief Officers of the Southern Scottish Area, being located for many years at the buffer stops of No. 13 Platform at the west end of the station. This platform did not have a regular passenger train function, and was normally used for parcels vans. When the resignalling of Waverley was completed in the late 1930s, the platform was connected to the remainder of the station by a set of hand points! The saloon was always under the main station canopy and thus afforded adequate protection from the inclement weather.

A proposal was made in February 1928 for other vehicle modifications, but as neither correspondence nor drawing (2239CB of 20th February 1928) has survived, details are not available of the work to be undertaken. However, this may have included the securing of one of the external saloon doors on the "corridor" side.

On arrival in Scotland, the vehicle had both air (Westinghouse) and vacuum braking systems, the brake power of the air, vacuum and hand brakes were calculated to be respectively 66%, 58% and 39% of the tare weight of 32 tons. The air brake fittings were removed in accordance with LNER practice of the period during its overhaul at Cowlairs Works on 17th September 1932.

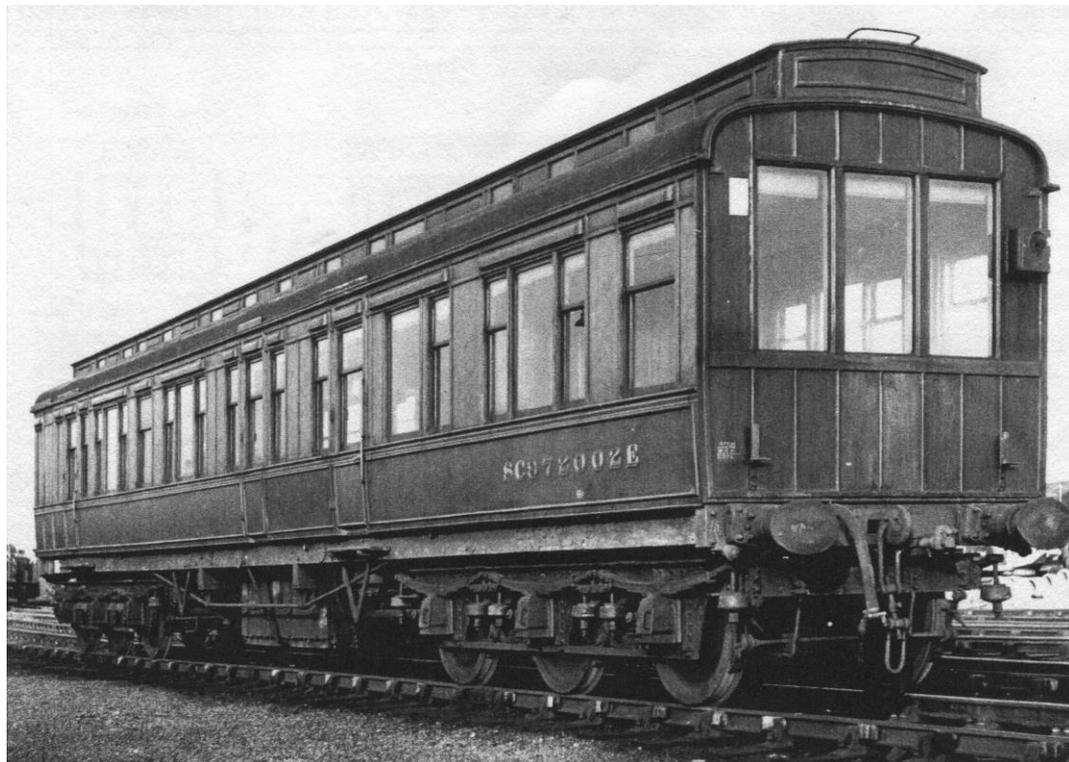
Under the 1938 Hollerith computerisation of rolling stock data, Diagram 149B was renumbered as Diagram Code 3065 and it was given a new Departmental Number of 972002. The original passenger livery of varnished wood with full lining and lettering in the coaching stock shaded gold leaf style was retained, the lettering and numbering being in the horizontal centre of the lower bodyside panels.

Becoming part of the British Railways fleet on 1st January 1948 it remained in LNER livery and did not acquire the British Railways prefix letter 'E'. In 1951, when the separate Scottish Region operating fleet was segregated from that of the other Regions, the saloon became SC972002E, its departmental number being flanked by passenger style prefix and suffix. The alphabetic lettering continuing to be in the former London and North Eastern Railway shaded gold leaf style. One presumes that the 'SC' was applied by hand, the 'E' being available from old transfers at Cowlairs. Evidence would indicate that the original LNER numbers were retained, as the new letters were obviously much fresher than the numbers indicating fewer layers of varnish. The vehicle never received the utilitarian lettering in the 'DE' style of lesser stock.

Operationally, despite its size and six wheel bogies, the vehicle was little restricted by the Scottish Region Civil Engineer, and prohibitions were made only in respect of the Auchmuty, Souterhouse, Gartverrie and Mayfield Colliery Branches. In the west, it was only prohibited from the Greenock Regent Street and Arthur Street depots, the former including the line to Dellingburn Power Station and the latter including the branch from Cartdyke Junction to the Victoria Harbour. It was surprisingly not restricted or prohibited from the Balerno Branch, which in Caledonian Railway / LMS days was restricted initially to four wheel stock, a restriction which resulted in the building of such vehicles by the Caledonian in the 1920s. With the transfer of the Regional Headquarters from Edinburgh to Glasgow under the aegis of British Railways, the vehicle remained at Edinburgh Waverley, but was reduced in its status as the Divisional Manager's saloon, with particular use by the District Operating Superintendent's Department. Not that it was unknown in Glasgow. The non-observation end acquired a British Standard gangway with Pullman Adaptor in the British Railways period, the end steps being repositioned to accommodate this. Buffing and other underframe equipment remained unaltered. Unfortunately, the date of this alteration is not recorded, nor is the exact type of BS vestibule which was fitted. Other alterations made were the removal of the exterior doors leading to the two saloons, and the toilet door was at last altered to open inwards. The internal modifications were mentioned on a 1948 diagram of the vehicle, but no date was recorded as to when the work was done.

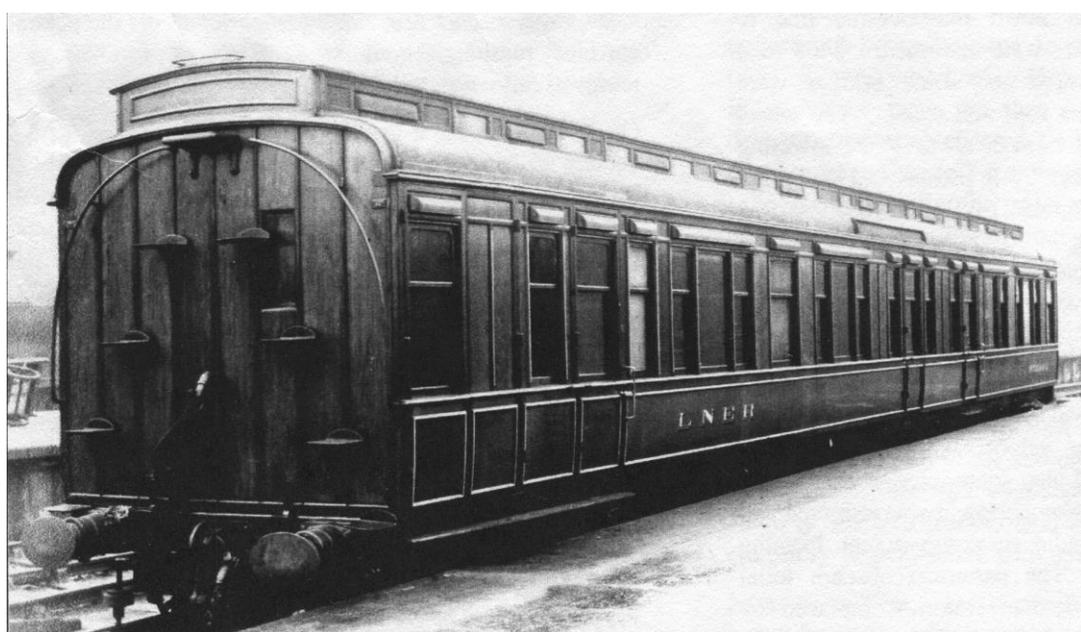
Despite the several upheavals of management structuring in the British Railways era, particularly latterly in its career where these became commonplace, the vehicle remained quietly at Edinburgh Waverley until its final withdrawal from service which is officially quoted as being on 16th January 1965, still in LNER varnished wood finish and lettering style, although the lining on the mouldings had gone by that time. Exposure to the atmosphere had highlighted the continuing use of the 1939 numerical transfers against the later BR (LNER style) lettering. On 1st January 1965, the Scottish Region underwent a managerial re-organisation, District offices being dispensed with, the new organisation having Regional and Divisional offices only. 972002 was the District Operating Superintendent's saloon at Edinburgh, and thus became redundant.

Arrangements for the disposal of the vehicle had been concluded before it was actually withdrawn. The station serving Gatehouse-of-Fleet in Kirkcudbrightshire was six miles from the village and its parish church, and for the previous 25 years, the people living around the station had assembled once a month for a service in an old railway carriage body obtained from the then LMSR in 1939 for the asking, and known locally as the "fivepenny hall" - the cost of the postage stamps expended on the correspondence. Formerly a G&SWR third class corridor carriage, it served as church, village hall and social centre.



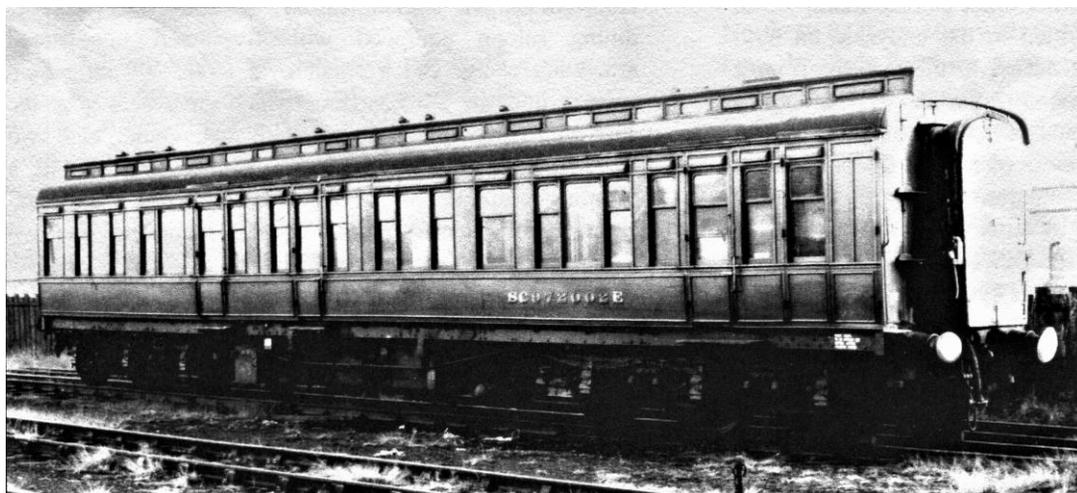
The vehicle in the period of use as an inspection saloon.

Top: The observation end, in the BR period, Note the handrail on the end of the clerestory, which must have been all but useless in the absence of steps at this end, and the electrification warning notice.



Centre: The opposite end in the LNER period, with the small window in the end (overlapped by one of the footsteps), prior to the fitting of the gangway.

Bottom: With the gangway fitted and the step positions and the vacuum hose connection changed to accommodate it. Note that one of the oval buffer heads has "rotated"



Next page: The compartment between the observation section and the side corridor.

Photographs supplied by Sandy Maclean.



Once a month, the service was held here, the Rev Christian Victor Aeneas McEachern of Kirkmabreck Manse, Creetown and the Rev John Turnbull of Anwoth taking it in turn to officiate. The role of Beadle was in the hands of Eddie McGaw who took on this task when he was but 13 years of age! On the first Sunday of each month, Mr. McGaw arranged the improvised pulpit, saw to the positioning of the collection plate, put out the hymn books and attended to the heating and lighting. Its ecclesiastical duties over, twice a week the carriage was used for carpet bowls. Time was, however, taking its toll.

A committee was formed in the mid 1950s and the then stationmaster at Creetown was appointed as Chairman to try to raise funds to build a new and perhaps more suitable hall. Another cleric, the Rev Andrew Swan, noted that in 1957 the usual Christmas treat was held in the carriage body that was decorated with a Christmas tree for the occasion. Although the event was well attended (as usual) and it was hoped that it could generate a contribution to the new hall, the endeavours of the small community to raise funds were not enough. With its isolated location, and the development of road transport during and after the 1939 war, (the main Dumfries - Stranraer road passing through the centre of the village) the train service at Gatehouse of Fleet diminished, and by 1961 had reduced to one train a day on Mondays, and two on Fridays and Saturdays towards Stranraer, but only one Saturday train in the reverse direction. The signalman, Jock McGaw and his family now occupied the former Station Master's house.

In 1964, 25 years after the LMS had donated the coach body, the Rev McEachern suggested to the Scottish Region of British Railways that as old coach was falling to pieces they might consider a replacement. He made the case that although the old coach had been a boon to the local community, moorland winters had taken its toll and the body now bulged and was supported by wooden buttresses. They replied that they would be glad to grant the request and invited him to go to St. Rollox Works on 30th November 1964 where he was shown the former royal carriage. On being asked if he would like it, he could not resist.

Despite its age and condition, SC972002E was prepared in December 1964 for its ecclesiastical role. Interior fittings and furnishings were removed and were destined for the then Museum of British Transport at Clapham, London. Bolts which required to be cut off on site to facilitate the lifting of the body from its underframe were coated with amber paint, details being highlighted by painting on the underframe.



On arrival at Gatehouse, some 30 local railwaymen helped to separate the body from its underframe before being placed in position, with ceremony, on the station loading bank replacing most of the elderly G&SWR vehicle. Overhead telephone wires were removed to give the crane freedom to manoeuvre. Unfortunately, all did not quite go according to plan. Daylight is at a premium in the Scottish winters, and a normal timetabled service had to be maintained along the Dumfries and Stranraer line requiring several shunting movements. There was doubt about the ability of the body to withstand the stress of lifting without breaking its back. Permission was sought to leave the supporting underframe despite its scrap value not being previously considered in the exercise.

However, eventually the chassis was stripped, the brackets burned off and all was ready for the final lift. But one end of the body refused to leave its chassis. In the gathering gloom, the wind arose and icy rain lashed the crews straining on the ropes which prevented the body from swinging against the crane. Eventually the problems were overcome and the body was finally laid to rest on a bed of sleepers, to the relief of all the onlookers. As one railway worker remarked, "I hope the minister hasn't got as much difficulty in getting the people to the church as they had in getting the church to the people!" The cost to the congregation of providing the new church was claimed to be six (old) pence (2¹/₂p). This was two pence for the stamp requesting the church, two pence to send a letter of thanks for the gift and two pence for envelopes and paper. One estimate is that it cost British Railways about £1,000 to deliver and position to vehicle on site! The whole operation from initial application to consecration had taken five weeks. Although it was a lavish piece of Victorian coachwork, inlaid with veneers, much more importance was laid by those who were to use it on the fact that it had a kitchen with sinks and a gas cooker!



The redundant underframe and bogies are assumed to have been scrapped shortly afterwards. These were the original fittings of 1889, although some axleboxes had been replaced over the years by those made by the LNER to the original Great Northern pattern.

The carriage was commissioned as a church at a special service on the 7th February 1965, lamps and a paraffin cooker providing light and heat. The minister brought the organ in the boot of his car, and Eddie McGraw, the Beadle, saw that the pulpit was in position and the collection plate handy. The regular congregation of the five railway workers and their families was augmented as about 100 worshippers crowded into the church. All the well-known psalms were sung, led by the Cree Singers from Newton Stewart. Mr. Ernest Wilson of Creetown played the portable organ from a different compartment. The offering plate was of natural wood and had been sent from Nigeria by someone who had heard the Rev McEachern preach in Tighnabruaich in 1913. The lectern came from the old parish church at Kirkmabreck. The coach was formally handed over by Mr James G Urquhart, the former Divisional General Manager of the Glasgow and South West Division during the service,

In addition to monthly church services, the coach also acted as a community hall and social centre for the local community, which was mainly drawn from the railway staff, farming and forestry workers, the Beadle now being the signalman. The fund which had been started years before to provide a permanent building was not wound up. One end of the former 1939 LMSR coach was retained and a local telephone coin box phone provided. In May 1965, the Rev McEachern conducted his last service in the coach before retiring at age 80. The station, which had but a skeletal train service (latterly one train per week - on Saturdays), and the main Dumfries to Stranraer line itself closed completely a month later on 14th June 1965. As the station was some six or seven miles from the village of Gatehouse, over a rough track road, its demise is perhaps not surprising, but it did mean the departure of the local railway community.

A colour photograph, taken in August 1969, showed the grounded coach body, still sporting its varnished teak livery and gold leaf lettering although much affected by the ravages of time and exposure on the moor, appears in the November / December 1994 issue of *BACKTRACK* magazine. The ornately glazed clerestory sides had been sheeted in and at least one lower bodyside panel had been replaced. Later, with the passage of years, the condition of the saloon gradually deteriorated to such an extent that it simply decayed away, retaining its LNER livery and number style to the end. Some woodwork and glazing was salvaged, and put to other uses, but most was lost. The vehicle was also vandalised during the 1970s, and for a time a piece of wood from it was on display in the Creetown Gem, Rock and Mineral Museum.

The Reverend Andrew Swan recalled that by 1995 the station site had all but disappeared in undergrowth. Only the station house and the office building were recognisable, whilst the railway cottages on the south side of the main road (now the B796) remain, although in private occupation. The former goods shed and signal box have, of course, disappeared, as have the oil store and the hut for the permanent way gang. The up plat-form is covered in rhododendron bushes. The masonry sided 87' long goods yard loading bank and the gravel topped down platform are covered in a mixture of rough grass, moss and gravel and provide a habitat for a nest of adders. Toads and the occasional roe deer provide the only other signs of life in the station.

The spiritual needs of the community were subsequently catered for by a new building, provided by the Church of Scotland.

The demise of the vehicle is described in a letter from Christopher Letcher, via Bill Shannon of the Scottish Railway Preservation Society.

In the 1960s my wife and I hired a holiday caravan which was permanently parked at a farm about halfway between Gatehouse-of-Fleet and Gatehouse station. The station had been bought from BR by a Mr & Mrs Musson, and in the summer of 1968 we bought it from them. It was in a derelict state and we set about restoring it. The ex-railway saloon had been damaged by Boy Scouts who, while camping in it, had lit a fire. It was becoming vandalised and I was afraid that the vandalism would extend to the station when it was unoccupied (we lived at Winchester at the time). Therefore although I was conscious that it would itself be an act of vandalism, in around 1972 I made an effort to buy the coach in order to demolish it.

The church accepted my offer although I now have no record of how much I paid - it was £5 or £10. My cousin and I took it apart and I sold some of it to a Mr Hinchcliffe, a builder and timber merchant of Creetown, and used the rest myself. Some of it was Jarrah wood which is now in the floor of the former waiting room of the station. The sawmill people grumbled because the Jarrah was so hard it ruined the saw blade. In 1974 due to changes in my personal circumstances I sold the station to a Mr & Mrs Bergstrom, who were (and still are) personal friends, and who still live there.

A section of the interior panelling from the coach is now in the Creetown Heritage Exhibition, as is the organ used for the services.





Top: The former GNR Prince of Wales' Saloon, in use as a church at Gatehouse of Fleet station in Kirkcudbrightshire.

Centre: The interior of the saloon.

Photos by Bill Shannon, July 1967.

Left: Front and rear sides of a panel from the interior of the saloon, preserved at Creetown Exhibition Centre.

Photos by Bill Shannon