

SOUTHERN RAILWAY COACH GROUP

BLUEBELL RAILWAY

Newsletter Issue 2: September 2024

As summer gives way to autumn, it's hard to believe the SRCG is now over a year old. In that time a lot has been achieved, not least getting the long-awaited Maunsell Restaurant Car project under way and finishing the interior of 1482. We've also welcomed many new members to the group and several new faces to our band of active coach restorers, though there's still plenty of scope for more to join us: do get in touch if you feel able to help. On the downside, we've not finished Hastings Brake 3687 yet – we are still waiting for space in the maintenance road schedule to do those last few jobs – but we think a slot will open up soon. Our delayed open day for SRCG members, October 12th, is fast approaching and we are looking forward to showing and talking to you about our work. I hope that you will be able to join us that day.

Keith Leppard, Editor

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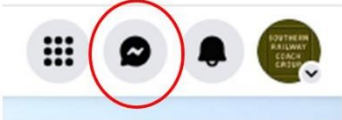
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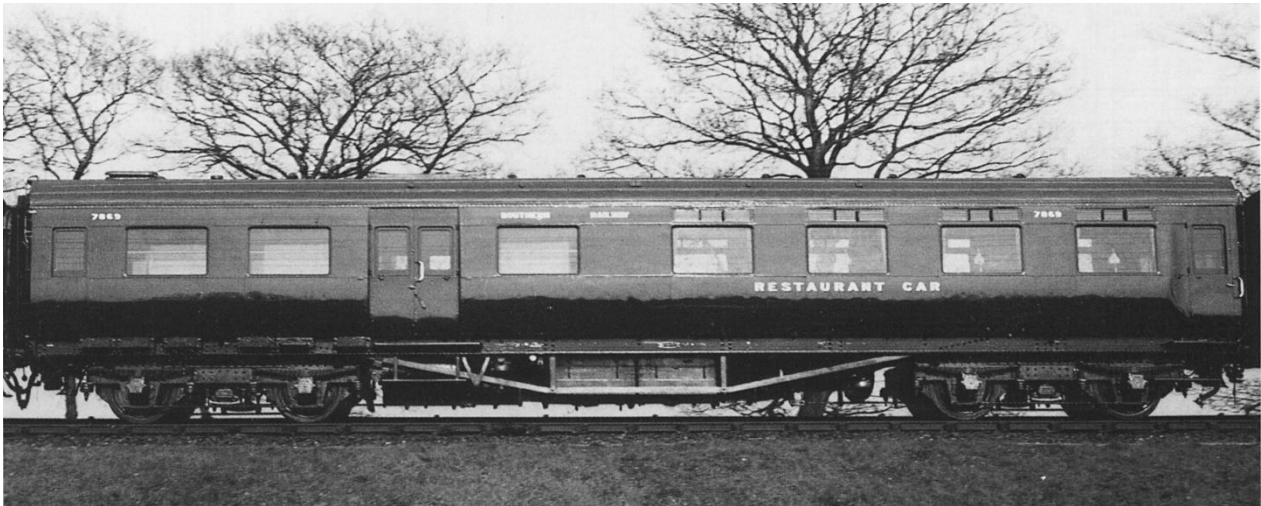
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7864: A Brief History



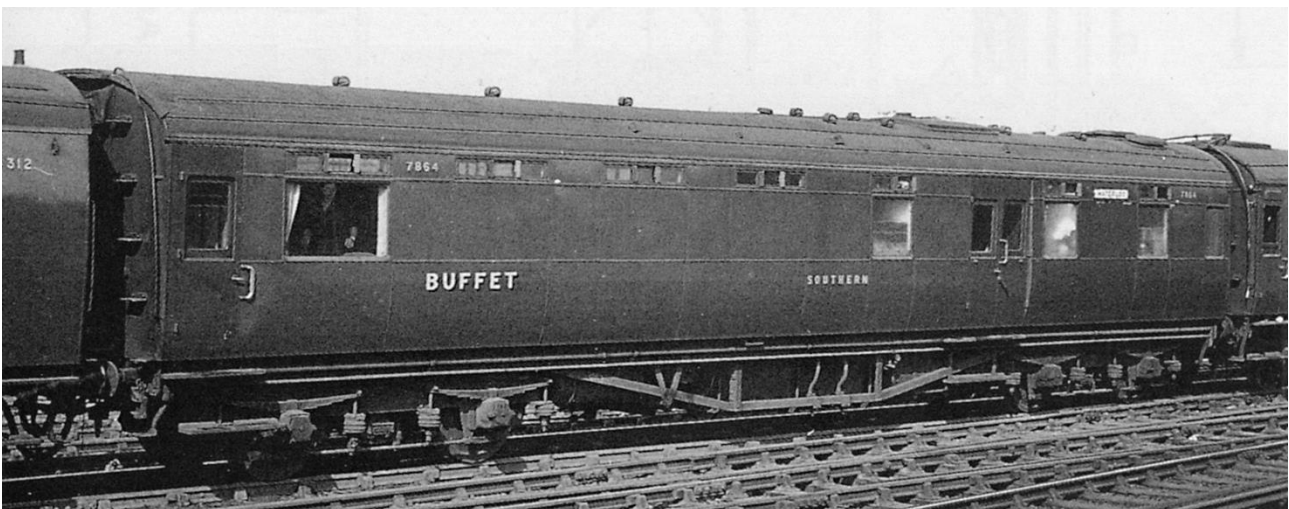
Sister vehicle 7869 pictured in 1940 in its as-built condition, showing what is equivalent to the west side of 7864 in the C & W works. Photo: M King

As much of this issue of the newsletter is devoted to our project to restore Maunsell Restaurant Car 7864, it seems appropriate to reprise briefly its design and history for the benefit of anyone who isn't familiar with it.

Carriage 7864 was built in 1932 to diagram 2656 as a Restaurant First Kitchen vehicle. It was one of ten such carriages in order number 635, the others being 7865-71, 7931/2, part of a large authorisation for new stock that was made in 1931. These coaches took numbers that had been previously assigned to the 1927-built third-class dining saloons 7864-9, which were then renumbered 1363-8 in the open third number series (see article by Tim Preston).

Dining services on the Southern Railway were curtailed to a large extent during the World War 2 with many catering vehicles, including 7864, being laid up out of service. Still in store in 1947, 7864 was rebuilt to diagram 2659 before re-entering service, to provide a buffet counter and 8 third class seats in place of the 24 seat dining saloon. This change involved blocking up the sidelights in three of the four seating bays on both sides, leaving just the sliding top lights visible. The sidelights nearest the vehicle end were left to give light to the remodelled seating area.

7864 is listed as being withdrawn in January 1962, at which point it was bought by the Bluebell Railway. It arrived in March 1962 for use as a static



7864 photographed in 1947 after its conversion to include a buffet counter. The image shows what is now the east side of the carriage in the C & W works. Photographer unknown.

catering outlet at Sheffield Park, a role in which it continued until early 1981 when it was replaced by Maunsell Nondescript Brake 4444. At some point during its service, Bluebell modified 7864 to provide a large sliding door in the west side, losing one of the blocked-in sidelights and a section of framing in the process.

From 1981 to 2023, 7864 sat outside in all weathers, latterly protected to an extent by

tarpaulins. As various structural elements gave way, it was saved from collapse by having a substantial timber supporting frame built within it to take the weight of the roof, also three steel tie bars were inserted to keep the two sides of the coach approximately in the right place. During 2023 it was brought into OP4 where it could dry out. As detailed in other articles in this issue, it entered the works for comprehensive restoration in February 2024.

7864: Assessment and Restoration Plan



The west side of 7864 in 1982. The large sliding door in the middle of the coach is a Bluebell modification. Considerable further deterioration has occurred during storage since this image was taken. Photo: Tim Robbins

7864: initial condition assessment

Roof: There were multiple layers of old coverings over boards that had areas of rot at the north end and on the east side towards the middle of the coach. The steel roof hoops all looked to be in good condition with just surface rust, but the wooden inserts were badly split and rotten in places. The three large ‘monsoon’ vents and two chimneys over the kitchen were still in place but the vents over the dining saloon and pantry were missing,

with the holes blanked off. The water tank was in its location above the centre vestibule ceiling.

Body sides and ends: The galvanised steel sheeting was mostly still in place but with severe corrosion in many areas. The condition of the timber framework varied depending on the wood used: most of the pillars and rails, being formed of teak, were in generally good condition with just a few having areas of rot, but quite a few splits, whilst

the bottom sides and cantrails, being of mahogany, had seriously decayed with large areas absent (cantrail) or sufficiently rotted to have released the tenons of the pillars (bottom side). The two bottom ends, also some of the corner pillars, had significant splitting caused by the expansion of steel bolts as they had corroded. All six external doors were present but an area of framework on the west side equivalent to one seating bay was missing, as well as one sliding top light, both removed during departmental service at the Bluebell.

Interior: Relatively little of the original interior was present. This reflects firstly the rebuilding carried out in 1947 that removed much of the passenger

dining area to provide buffet facilities and secondly the changes made in the early years of 7864's time at the Bluebell, when it was further modified for use as a static buffet. Some mouldings from the doors and windows, also three internal sliding doors, were still there. The floor, formed of Decolite, had some areas of damage, particularly at the north end.

Underframe and Mechanical: The underframe itself, and the two bogies, appeared in reasonable condition but it hasn't been possible to evaluate any wastage of the steel fully until the vehicle is dismantled. A full set of brake components etc was present, also both gangway connections and a full set of buffing gear.

Restoration Strategy

We are working to restore 7864 to its original configuration as a Restaurant First Dining Car. Our approach has evolved over the first six months of the project as we have learned more about what needs to be done. The current plan is to:

1. Fully dismantle the body, roof and gangways, removing the body side and end framework in manageable sections for repair while discarding the steel sheeting and roof timber.
2. Separate the bogies from the underframe and overhaul.
3. Remove and dispose of the Decolite floor and remains of the bottom side.
4. Remove all fittings from the underframe for overhaul, then grit blast and paint it having addressed any steelwork repairs that may be needed.
5. Manufacture new bottom sides and cantrails from teak.
6. Repair side and end framework, and doors, as required.
7. Manufacture new seats, partitions and internal components, refurbishing those original parts that are available.
8. Erect new bottom sides & repaired bottom end timbers and fit new plywood floor.
9. Re-erect the side and end framework sections, roof hoops, partitions and gangway plungers.
10. Fit new roof boards and canvas, and galvanised steel sheeting.
11. Fit out the interior.
12. Fit steam heat, brake cylinders etc
13. Paint the exterior.

Keith Leppard

7864: Progress Report #1

Writing this in late August, it is just six months since we began work on the restoration of our Maunsell Restaurant Car. With that in mind and remembering that we were unable to access the coach for a month during that time because of work to the adjacent shed wall, everyone involved feels we have made really good progress. Hopefully, when you read this report, you will agree with us!

Removing the steel sheet cladding

One of the first things to be completed was the removal of the steel sheeting from the bodysides and ends. This is built up of a series of rectangular panels of different sizes, mostly with butt joints that are covered with metal strips screwed to the timber frame. Where a sheet abuts a window, it is returned by about ½" into the opening and screwed on that face, so these screws are concealed by the window frame. The brass top



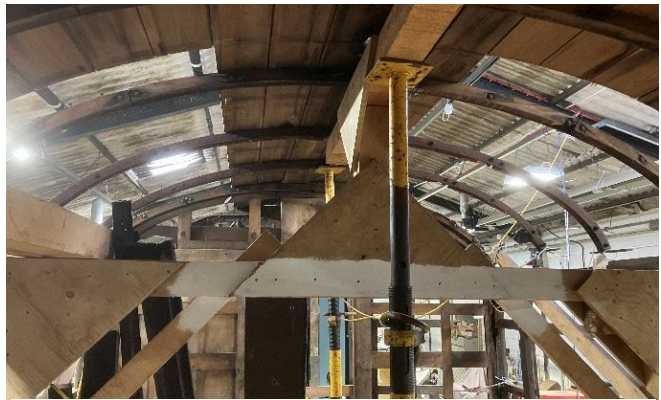
Steel panelling detail showing the joint cover strips and returns into the window opening. March 2024

light frames are also fixed in front of the panelling, so all these had to be taken out to release the panelling. The end cladding is formed of two large side panels plus a smaller top panel sited above the gangway, all shaped to fit the curve of the bodyside and roof. To remove the side panels, all of the end furniture (steps, lamp brackets and emergency brake gear) had to be removed first. The screws holding the cladding were around

50/50 brass and steel, the latter being the worst to get out. All the extant panels have been retained and documented as patterns; none are reusable.

Stripping the roof

Another task that has been ticked off is to completely strip the roof to expose the 28 roof hoops and two end structures. First, several layers of roof covering were taken off. The topmost of these were felt layers added at various times by the Bluebell during departmental service, held down by numerous clout nails, but immediately over the boards was a traditional painted canvas. The exposed roof boards were then removed as scrap. The narrow boards towards the two edges



Roof board removal in the saloon. The timber structure visible is supporting the roof. April 2024

were obviously rotten in many places but even the wider middle boards that looked better were too brittle to be salvageable. To get the boards off the northern half of the coach we first had to remove the water tank and its timber housing, situated above the central vestibule, and the large



Water tank and (top left of picture) a monsoon vent, still in situ after removing the roof covering and the wooden tank cover. April 2024

'monsoon' vents located over the kitchen, above where the original range had been sited. More recently, many of the roof hoops have also been removed.

Dismantling the end structures

We focused first on the south end because, with both cantrails rotten and no bodyside framing to tie it in (because of the door openings), it was somewhat isolated from the rest of the coach and a bit precarious, as was the side framing on the south-west side. In fact, the very first pieces to come off the coach were the south-west corner pillar and door, this with the aim of reducing the weight in this area.

To dismantle the south end, the first step was to free the gangway faceplate from the top and bottom plungers and lower that to the ground. Next, the top plungers, housings and supporting steel framework (which sit in the vestibule ceiling void supported by the end structure and the first partition) were removed. Because of the design, this had to come out as one rather large heavy assembly. Once that was on the ground, it was broken down into its components. What was left was the timber frame, the two halves to left and right of the gangway being linked by a top timber with the joints braced by reinforcing steel L sections; these three frame sections were separated and lifted out of the bottom end timber.



South vestibule after taking down the gangway plungers and end frames; SE end frame. July 2024

The north end gangway and plunger gear have been similarly dismantled but the timber end frame is still in place.

Work on the doors

Of the six doors, two for passenger use at the south end and two double doors located somewhat north of the middle on both sides, one had come off previously and was stored inside when 7864 came into the works. The other five have been taken off, and each one stripped of its interior mouldings, droplight, exterior cladding and hinges to leave just a timber frame. We are progressing through the necessary repairs to these frames: two have been worked on so far.



One of the doors from the west side double-door pair under repair; a new bottom moulding has just been added. Sep 2024

Cleaning and fettling of components

We have already accumulated a large pile of bits from our dismantling efforts and, as far as possible, we are trying to clean these up and make them ready for reuse before putting them away. Many metal components have been scraped back to remove old paint and rust and/or grit-blasted, prior to priming to protect the metal from further corrosion. Whilst much of the wooden interior is missing or in poor condition, there are some useable pieces and some of these have also been

scraped clean of paint and varnish, ready for new layers to be applied in the future.

Rebuilding the body

Proceeding in parallel with the dismantling work, major progress has already been made in manufacturing new structural timbers. The first part to be tackled was the new west bottom side. This has been made in five parts lap jointed together with the joints reinforced with bolts. Each piece is now morticed to receive the many body pillars that slot into it. The front edge of the 58' assembly has been chamfered to suit the tumblehome profile of the body and the back edge rebated to receive the floor. The new west side cantrail is also well on the way to being made. All the sections have been produced to length and the joints made, and about half of the morticing has been done.



The four sections of the new west bottom side, set out and temporarily joined so that the chamfer could be applied to the front edge. May 2024

The hole on the west side of the coach that spans four body pillars, where Bluebell previously cut out a section of framing to put in a sliding door, has had replacement pillars and rails made to fill the gap. It has been trial-assembled and looks very impressive.



The replacement frame section for the west side; shown is its inner face. Aug 2024

As well as making whole replacement timbers, much has been accomplished in repairing original timbers for reuse. Both the south end corner pillars have been repaired and a good start has been made on the central pillars from that end too. Various repairs have also been done to pillars and rails of the west body side *in situ*, though the body sides will be completely taken down in due course for further work to be done. Very recently, one short section of the west side has been taken off the coach for this purpose.

Manufacture of new seat bases was begun before the coach entered the works. New brackets to support the tip-up seats have been machined in-house. Off site, replacement steel brackets have been made by a contractor, both for the corners and to brace the joints between the main body pillars and the bottom side.

Keith Leppard

A Volunteer's Perspective: Alex Morley



joined the C&W department in 2007 and soon found myself part of the team restoring the LSWR brake third 1520. Along the way I learnt much about how coaches go together and things like the sheer quantity of screws involved just to attach the mouldings. I also picked up new skills including making most of the view frames for the compartments.

Moving onto the restoration of the four wheelers I seem to have found a niche in frame repairs and

gained a reputation for excessive use of G clamps, managing to use 24 on one occasion.

Although woodwork is my preference, depending on the stage of the project there are often other tasks that need doing such as painting, both stripping and applying. We have also been involved in the overhaul of bogies for the Hastings brake third coach and in a short space of time I learnt more than I ever wanted to know about the complexities of their construction. For more distraction there have also been some wagons to work on, helping out the Goods Division with some of their projects. These have the advantage that the results are often seen quicker than coach restorations which often run for several years.

We have now started on the biggest challenge since I started, which is the restoration of the Maunsell restaurant car and I have been able to get back to deploying the G clamps whilst repairing the corner pillars.

The main perk of the job, other than working with a group of like-minded people, is being able to watch the results of your efforts go past the shed carrying passengers enjoying the ride.

Overhauling Bulleid Open Third 1482

1482 is one of three Open Thirds on the Bluebell Railway that were built by British Railways in 1950 to the designs of Oliver Bulleid, the others being 1481 and 1464. It seats 64 passengers in two open saloons. 1482 arrived here at Bluebell in 1973 in sufficiently good condition to be pressed into service briefly before being subjected to the first comprehensive carriage overhaul done by the then newly established Carriage and Wagon Department. It emerged from that overhaul in 1976 to be part of the return to steam celebrations for 21C123 Blackmoor Vale. Between 1996 and 2000 the coach had a further major overhaul, which this time included complete replacement of



1482 after its first major Bluebell overhaul, May 1976

the steel bodyside sheeting as well as internal refurbishment.

A team led by the late Roger Williams began a rolling intermediate overhaul of 1482 in 2018, carrying out work during opportunities when it was not needed in traffic.

The overhaul work focussed on two fronts, the first being the removal, repair and re-bedding of all saloon glazing. At the same time, the moquette was replaced from the fading red Candy Stripe to the post war Fleur de Lys burgundy and cream pattern used by the Southern Railway after the Second World War. Both programmes of activity were abruptly curtailed by the Covid pandemic. Since work recommenced, the moquette renewal has been essentially completed with just one or two very small items to finish and the coach has been in regular service while this has taken place.

with others in the C&W team. From April to August, the last four sidelights and top lights that had not been previously re-bedded were taken out, the frames de-rusted and painted back up, the glass cleaned and then reinstalled. To do this, the luggage racks had to be taken down and the seats



The second of the four top light assemblies being reinstalled in 1482's northern saloon. July 2024



Screwing into place the inner frame for one of 1482's sidelights. July 2024

Four of the sixteen seating bays in the coach had not had the glazing re-bedded and the SR Coach Group has been working to complete this project

dismantled in the western half of the north saloon.

At the same time, three of the varnished panels that had suffered damage were replaced. All this was completed and the interior reassembled in time for the coach to be made available again for service by late August.

There are plans to reinstate functioning lavatories in the coach, for which a new water tank is needed. Once this has arrived, it's planned for 1482 to come back into the works for this to be done, also

for some roof work, new wooden strips at cantrail level, hopefully a repaint, and a mechanical overhaul. It should then be good for another long period in traffic.

Keith Leppard and Tim Preston

1365 and its Loose Chairs

by Tim Preston

Of all our Southern Railway built coaches, 1365 has always held a fascination for me. It is a remarkably shy vehicle, the colour pictures and grainy black and white image on the railway's website, together with some film in the Tom Martin collection, are all that I have seen of it. It is one of the few vehicles I have not been inside in 30 years volunteering in the Carriage & Wagon department. It has therefore developed a mystique which is enhanced by its complex service history. It is worth remembering that it was part of a small build, six vehicles only, to diagram 2652 when constructed at Eastleigh in 1927 with its original number, 7866. The intention was to couple them to the new first class restaurant cars to work the Bournemouth and Portsmouth services. The opportunity to create this pairing with our own 7864 now under restoration is a tantalising prospect.

In the late 1930s new open thirds started to support the catering vehicles and led to reclassification of 7866 to a general open third and renumbering to 1365. It found itself in mixed formation sets, initially in a special traffic set and then an 8-coach set which worked an Oxted line service: during the week it provided a morning service to London Bridge and then a return evening service from Victoria. In early 1945, 1365 became an Ambulance Car before we get to its last role and the one that is the subject to this article.

In yet another set of catering vehicle alterations, 1365 was rebuilt as a composite dining saloon. This involved the creation of two saloons of equal length accommodating 31 third class passengers in fixed seatings and then 24 first class passengers in loose dining chairs.

This was its last alteration in British Railways service, and it arrived at the Bluebell in this form in 1963 where it was initially set to work with 7864 to provide refreshment facilities. It was returned to periodic service in 1970 following structural repairs and an interior retrim before being withdrawn in 1977. It has since remained out of sight and with restoration still some way away.

At the beginning of 2024, a move around of some of the C & W stores saw 1365's loose fitted first-class chairs moved from the wooden sheds at the north-west end of Horsted Keynes station back into the carriage shed where they are now stored for the immediate future in the Brighton Directors' saloon in B Road. This move provided an opportunity to reflect on the Southern Railway's Restaurant chairs, typically used in Bulleid first and third-class restaurant and dining vehicles. Several of this type of chair have been restored for use in the Grinsteade buffet at East Grinstead.

The chairs are characterised by three cross members between the legs and a rebated handle on the rear of the chair back. What struck me in the move of these chairs was their weight. They are heavy pieces of hardwood with a lot of strength provided by the multiple cross members which would have helped give stability for diners on rough riding track or across point work.

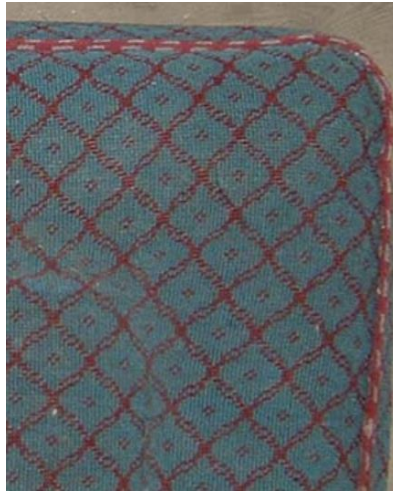
The other observation was the curious mix of covering styles, four in total among the set for we have for 1365, that are summarised below. The number in each style varies. As can be seen from the images, the chair fabrics after 50 years out of use are in extremely poor condition, and I must thank Dave Clarke for use of his images of much better fabric samples to illustrate the style.

Chair Style 1 - the odd one out



A leather/faux leather finish in a medium to dark blue. There are several chairs in this style. I would be interested to know if this was a BR finish, or something applied by the Bluebell to keep

the chairs in use during the early 1970s.



Chair Style 2 - Badly faded but this uncut turquoise fabric with a red diamond pattern with detailing is a common 1950s British Railways moquette.



Chair Style 3 - Chain Link. This well-known cut moquette is still produced as a replica moquette and is currently used in Bulleid Semi-Open Brake Third 2526. The photograph shows the rear of the chair and the rebated handle.



Chair Style 4 –Heavily weathered, this is an uncut fabric of orange arrows on a beige background which was used in 4RES electric stock.

Conclusion

The chairs are an interesting mix of styles. The time between the withdrawal of 1365 from Bluebell service and even longer since it arrived at the railway makes it difficult to unpick the history of these chairs. The Southern Railway Coach Group would be extremely interested to hear from anyone who can help develop the story behind them. Please contact tim.preston1520@gmail.com if you can help with any information.