

SOUTHERN RAILWAY COACH GROUP

BLUEBELL RAILWAY

Newsletter Issue 5: March 2026

It's been an eventful 6 months for the SRCG. Much has been achieved on several projects, though casting my eye back to my editorial in Issue 4, one central event that I confidently predicted would take place in that time has not yet happened: the re-erection of the Restaurant Car body hasn't started. The central reason for this is that the underframe was deemed to need some steelwork repairs before any rebuilding could begin. That work is now underway but how long it will take depends on several factors. Do I dare to make a new prediction about where the project will be at when Issue 6 is written? Well, as a confirmed optimist, I renew the thought that reassembly will be under way by then but carriage restoration is a long road and you never can be sure what lies around the next bend!

Keith Leppard, Editor

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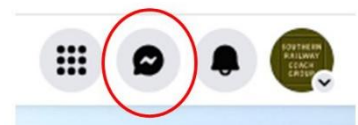
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SR Coach Group News

March 7th 2026 turned out to be a big night for the Group as we learned that our restored Maunsell 'Hastings' Brake Third No 3687 had won the prestigious Heritage Railway Association Rolling Stock Award. As the last newsletter reported, this coach was returned to traffic in May 2025 after a 32 year restoration. We couldn't be more pleased; it's a fitting tribute to the efforts of the late David Wigley, who led the project for its first 25 years.



The BRPS Chairman, Roy Watts, was on hand at the HRA ceremony in Llandudno and kindly collected the Rolling Stock Preservation award on our behalf. 7 Mar 2026

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Back in December 2025, we received another very generous donation to our funds from the Carriage Shop. Thanks Chris, Matthew and everyone else in the team for the work you do to raise money for good causes around the railway.



Steve, Tony, Keith, David, Roy, Paul and Alex receiving a £500 donation from the Carriage Shop for SRCG funds.

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The SRCG steering committee met on 14 March 2026 to discuss progress and plans. The group's own funds now stand at £25,887, of which £5,000 is committed to 971. We also have a substantial fund for the Restaurant Car project, which we expect to be fully utilised in bringing this coach to running condition.



1482 in the paintshop, ready for traffic again. 11 Oct 2025

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Last October, Bulleid Open Third No 1482 re-entered service after an intermediate overhaul. It looks great now, inside and out, after efforts from a number of people from our team and others in C&W.

Maunsell Restaurant Car No 7864: Progress Report #4

We passed the 24 month point in the project to restore 7864 on 24th February. We had hoped that we would by now be beginning the reassembly process but close inspection of the underframe last October revealed that some work was needed to the steelwork and this has held things up. Nonetheless, the team has been busy and much has been achieved.

Rebuilding the coach body frame Even by last September, the vast majority of the repairs needed to the body framework had already been done. Those remaining tasks were dealt with by the end of 2025. Making the new NE corner pillar proved the most challenging of these jobs since it lacked any flat sides square to one another. Once it was made, the whole NE corner was trial assembled and the joints fettled to get the side and end to meet at the correct angle.



The north east corner being trial assembled on 17 December 2025

New bottom sides and cantrails Making the new east bottom side, which was in progress at our last report, was also finished by the end of 2025, again in four lap-jointed segments. At the same time, we also dusted off the partly finished west cantrail

task and finished both it and the equivalent for the east side.

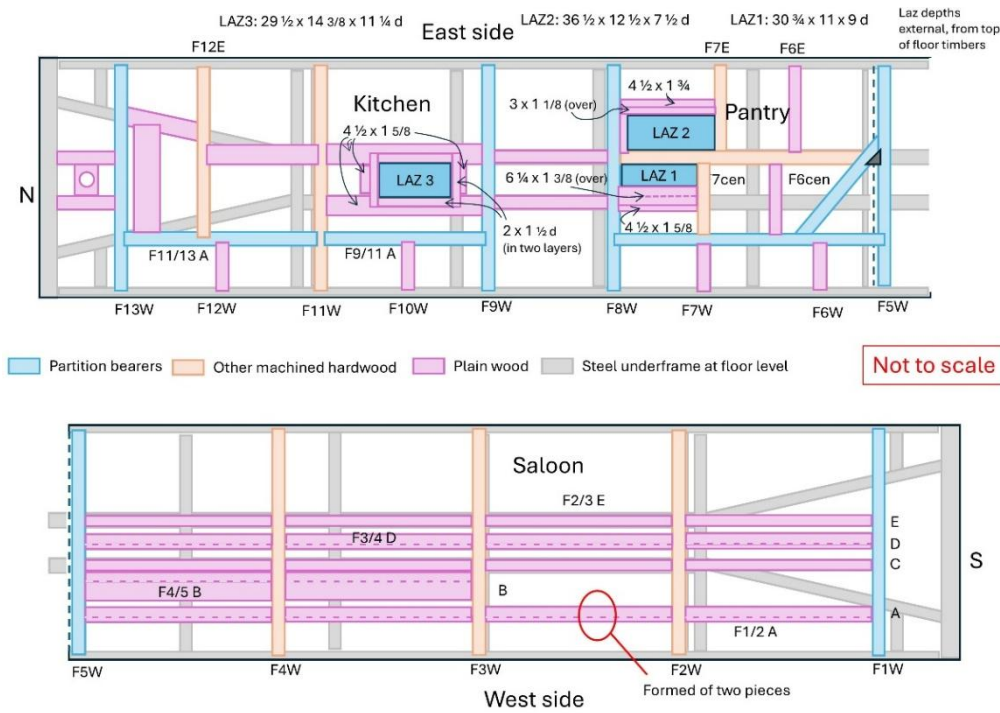
Once the basics of all four 58' lengths were done, both bottom sides and cantrails were laid out



The east and west bottom sides and cantrail all laid out to check their alignment. 6 December 2025

together to check and adjust the alignment of the mortices in each. Clearly, the bottom side mortice for the tenon on the bottom of a body pillar needs to line up with the equivalent one for the top tenon in the cantrail but there's also the alignment of the mortices for e.g. pillars 8W and 8E on opposite sides of the coach to consider, and whether the mortices on the back edges of the bottoms sides, which will take the floor cross members, are aligned. Happily, with a bit of tweaking here and there, everything was deemed satisfactory. Since Christmas, each of the timber sections has been gone back over to repair any small defects that might otherwise let in water in the future.

Regenerating the floor The timber framework of the floor, which we had recently dismantled at our last report, comprised a mix of transverse and

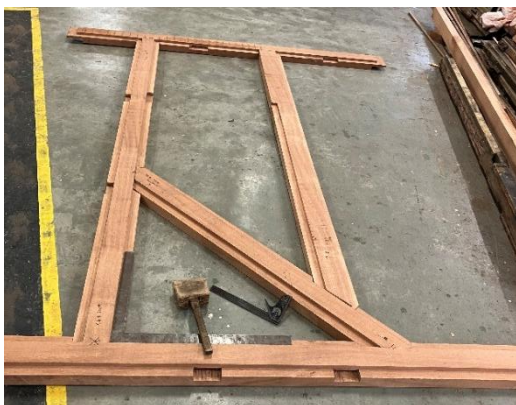


New and refurbished roof components Five of the coach's roof hoops anchor the tops of the partitions that separate the saloon, kitchen and pantry from the vestibules. As a result, they have complex structures with two or three timber layers attached to the steel arc. All five have now been remade with mostly new ash but with some salvaged pieces. We are also now getting near the end of making the 69 curved pieces of new ash required for the other 23 roof hoops.

Schematic of the floor framework. All the pieces shown in blue or orange have been made new, also some of the pieces shown in pink from around the lazarettes.

longitudinal pieces of machined hardwood that had formed the boundaries of the various sections of decolite floor, and some simpler longitudinal lengths of plain timber that had been under (and hence protected by) the decolite. The latter were mainly repairable, being in good condition apart from the holes we had cored out of them to remove the rusted screws that had held the framework together. However, all of the hardwood pieces had areas of rot so a complete new set of these was made using the dismantled pieces as patterns.

Work on doors At last report, we had four of the six internal sliding doors for the coach (three original, two of which still need some panelling added, and one new). Now we are close to having all six, as all the components for two more new doors have been made and the first trial assembly of them has taken place. These last two doors will give crew access into the kitchen and pantry from the central vestibule. Each has two louvred panels in its upper half. Work has also been continuing on the frames of the remaining external doors not yet completed.



Assembly of new floor framework for the pantry area. 5 Nov 2025



Paul Giles with one of the internal doors that he is making for the coach. 11 March 2026

Work on the underframe By mid September, the strip-down of the underframe was completed and we got in a contractor to grit-blast and spray prime it for us. This was done in

mid-September after which, based on a positive initial assessment of the condition of the underframe, we painted it back up to topcoat except for those areas where some building up with weld was needed. We cleaned, tested as required, painted and reinstalled all the buffers, the south end drawgear and the two vacuum reservoirs. The two battery boxes were also repaired and repainted and are ready to put back onto the underframe.



South end buffering and drawgear refurbished and refitted. 4 Nov 2025

However in late October, a determination was made that more extensive repairs would be needed to the steelwork, firstly to remedy some ripples in the strengthening plates that are rivetted to the faces of the solebars over the bogies and secondly to correct an outwards deflection in the east side truss rod and queen posts. This of course is skilled work for which we don't have the necessary expertise in the volunteer team. Hence we are dependent on the paid staff to help us and it was only at the start of March that they had the time to begin the job. Consequently, we have not been able to begin to reassemble the kit of parts



Drilling through rivets on the underframe. 7 Mar 2026



One of the two battery boxes, fully refurbished. It was fitted with a new top amongst other repairs. 6 Dec 2025

that is the current state of the body of our coach. So far, we have made good progress with drilling out the rivets that secure the strengthening plates but no replacement steel has yet been installed.

Work on the bogies With it not being possible to progress the reassembly of the body yet, we've been turning our attention to other tasks. On 7864, the main beneficiary has been the bogies, which we otherwise might not have started yet. Both have been in the works for periods of time since January and all of the brake gear and primary suspension parts have been stripped off them.



The eight leaf springs from 7864's bogies collected together on a sturdy pallet. 25 Feb 2026

Among the myriad of parts now stored on pallets, 8 'dog bones' and 7 damper pots from the northern bogie have been fully cleaned up and are being painted. Everything else has had an initial clean. The rest of the 'spare' labour has been committed to work on 2526 and 971, for which there are separate reports in this newsletter.

Keith Leppard

A Volunteer's Perspective: Robert Hayward

A reflection of my first year working with SRCG on the restoration of Southern Railway Restaurant Car 7864 and other Southern carriages



I had lost the routine of regular volunteer work at the Railway because the workshop closed during the Covid era restrictions but was eager to return to restoration activities having missed the satisfaction of hands-on work. I had been doing other 'office' work for the Railway in the meantime, but that wasn't quite the same as physical activity. I had to find a way to return to the workshop and quite fancied working with SRCG.

After an initial visit to find out what was going on with Restaurant Car 7864, I was immediately impressed by the physical progress that had already been made by the Group in the previous six months. I started working in September 2024 and at that time the careful deconstruction of the carriage was well underway, with the cladding, windows and southern end body framing removed along with most of the roof boarding.

Oddly, it felt like I was starting a new job and the apprehension of a first day at work but I wasn't new to the C&W Department as I had been a

volunteer since the mid 1970s. This was notwithstanding being with old friends - and now a few new ones. My first reaction was that it remains a community of like-minded individuals who want to see Bluebell's carriage and wagon fleet put into the best condition for all to enjoy.

This wasn't my first time working on this carriage either: about 25 years ago, I had helped build the internal support structure to prevent collapse whilst it was stored in the open and sheeted it with tarpaulins to reduce deterioration. In hindsight I don't think that the carriage would have survived without doing that work back then.

What was clear to me at the start was that the restoration of this carriage was being done with careful thought, significant research and planning. The process of careful deconstruction of the carriage and repairing or replicating rotten sections of framework as an essential part of the process will be key to success of the project. Careful storage such that reconstruction can take place in the reverse order using completed components will make the project straightforward and produce rapid progress. Bodywork, the interior, underframe and bogies are all being worked on in parallel lines of work with different activities being spread across the team.

I had done a lot of woodwork in the past but mostly using softwood so the challenge was learning about the different techniques needed to work with the teak, for example, which has an irritating tendency to shatter or split when being worked on. Importantly, my new and enhanced skill set has been helped by the practical advice and kind encouragement of the team, as well as watching others have similar snags! Patience is certainly needed as well as the group therapy amongst friends.

Working on repairs to various components and making replacement parts for the north and south ends has been a stimulating 'archaeological' process of trying to understand how complicated

framing was made by the Southern Railway's experienced coach builders in an age before hand-held routers and multi-tools. They would certainly have done things differently but that doesn't mean that our heritage skills are any less than theirs. A lot of ingenuity and a few compromises have been needed due to the limitations of our workshop equipment but overall, the standard of workmanship is likely better than the original as the intention is to make the carriage last indefinitely rather than the likely 30 year life that was probably envisaged.

During the last few weeks, I have been working with Simon to produce the curved wooden 'hoops' that are used fix the roof boards down and the internal ceiling panels. These are made of ash, and rather than being bent to shape they are made by carefully cutting large planks to a profile. They will later be bolted, in three sections, to the steel roof hoops.

Looking forward, I am excited for the reconstruction phase of the bodywork to start once the underframe is repaired. Then will come the stages of recladding the outside and forming the new steel sheeting. I hope that I can remember how we did this on the recently award-winning Maunsell 3687; I'm sure that 7864 will produce some issues to overcome to reinstate the carriage to its original appearance. Then there's the interior to fit out.

It is often said that teamwork makes the dream work, and with everyone's help it makes a positive and incremental contribution to achieving a complete train of Maunsell carriages presented in their 1930s splendour. Whatever an individual's skill set is, everyone's contribution is appreciated and there is a job for everyone, so if you are thinking about joining SRCG then you will be welcomed, just like I was.

Robert Hayward, March 2026

Work on Bulleid Semi-Open Brake 3rd No 2526

Our Bulleid Semi-Open Brake Third, No 2526, was launched into traffic in October 2009. After 16 years in service, it was starting to look a little tired, particularly the chain link moquette.

After our work in 1482 finished when it re-entered traffic in October last year, we were asked to give a hand in the refresh of 2526. Our colleagues in the trim shop had already started re-trimming the surprisingly large number of parts that form each of the seating bays in the saloon – seat frame, cushion, seat back, quarter panel, two arm rests, two packing strips, one grab handle and three overlay strips that cover the gap between the seat backs.

The first job was to dismantle the seats and strip out the old quarter panels on the side of the coach and fit the new ones. We would then build up each seat bay as more parts were re-upholstered by the very professional team in the trim shop. The moquette being used is the red and cream Fleur de



The refurbished saloon of 2526. 11 Mar 2025

Lys design already used in our two other operational Bulleid coaches – 5768 and 1482. This fabric works very well with the interior woodwork of 2526.

As we progressed with the re-trim, it started to become apparent that some other areas could do with a bit of a refresh. Most noticeable were water stains and blown varnish on the wood trim around the main lights. We have therefore removed the bottom trim rail, sides and the rail below the top lights. Where necessary we stripped back the old varnish, removed the worst stains using oxalic acid and built-up new varnish. The wooden trim to the saloon tables has also received a flatten back and a re-varnish.



Closer view of a completed seating bay in 2526. 11 Mar 2025

Chrome kick boards sit between the seats, in the vestibules and the corridor. These have all been removed, cleaned of dirt, re-polished and refitted. It is not a comfortable job on your hands and knees removing and returning all the screws, but the results have been worth it.

Finally, using a gentle wood cleaner, we have given the interior wood a clean and polish, removing a lot of grime and bringing the wood back to a lustre.



2526's corridor after completing work to the mouldings and kick plates. 11 Mar 2025

The result has been a very satisfying step-change in the interior condition of the saloon, corridor and vestibules. The team in the trim shop are now turning their attention to the two compartments and we will help them fit the trim in those as well.

While we have been focusing on the interior, 2526 will enter the paint shop shortly for a full external repaint. We will need to remove lifting filler over some of the bodyside screws and refill, as we had to do on 1482, but on completion of the repaint, we will have three good looking Bulleid coaches in 1482, 5768 and 2526 all with identical third class moquette.

Tim Preston

Review of SR Catering Vehicles

Part 1: Coaches in Service at the Grouping

By Keith Leppard

With our current major project being the restoration of No 7864, the sole surviving Southern Railway kitchen car, this two-part article looks at the variety of catering vehicles that the SR operated, and examines how their design evolved over time.

At its formation in 1923, the Southern Railway inherited catering vehicles from only one of its three constituent companies, the LSWR, the SECR and LBSCR having used Pullman cars to provide catering on their trains. The LSWR had also used the Pullman Car company on its services, firstly as a short-lived experiment in 1880 and then more widely from 1890 until 1911, but it began introducing its own dining carriages from 1904 and these eventually displaced the Pullman cars completely.

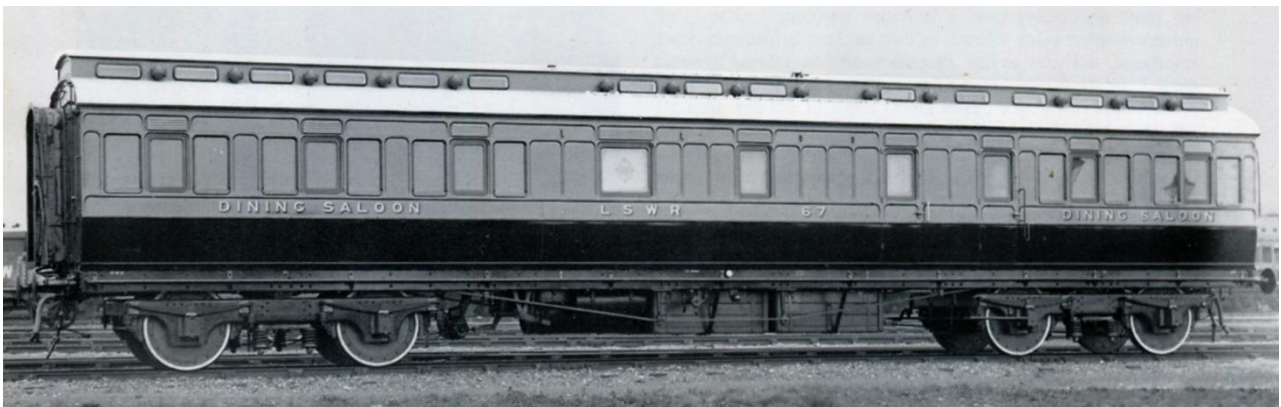
Wooden-bodied Dining Cars

The LSWR built 23 wooden bodied 56 ft dining saloons between 1904 and 1912, to drawings 1319 (8), 1601 (11), 1869 (2) and finally 2077 (2). They

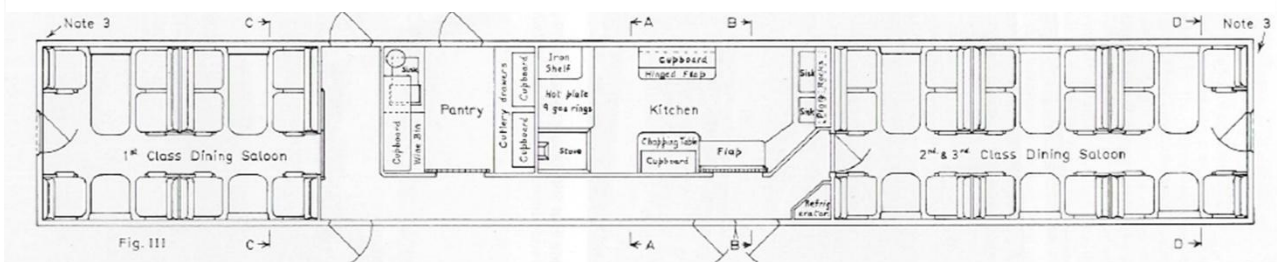
were originally numbered 59-81 and later became SR 7821-7843 within the number series 7801-8000 that the SR allocated for catering vehicles. Externally, these coaches were panelled with mouldings and had Standard gangways. Internally, all had centrally located kitchens and pantries with two- and three-bay saloons at either end seating 11 first and 17 2nd/3rd class passengers respectively.

The most important differences between the four batches were below the solebar with changes being made both to the truss rods, to improve the strength of the previously standard underframe for what were unusually heavy vehicles, and to the bogies to improve the ride quality. The most visible change however came with the final two batches in which the conventional bodyside layout for passenger seating areas of the time (two small sidelights flanking a droplight) was switched to a single large, fixed light for each seating bay to give better light and views out for the passengers.

As built, coaches 59-81 had clerestory roofs but all were rebuilt by the SR in 1931 to an elliptical



Above: LSWR dining saloon No 67 (credited to National Railway Museum). Below: internal layout of 56 ft dining cars to drawings 1319, 1601 & 1869. Drawing 2077 had sliding doors at each end. Both Weddell, LSWR carriages.

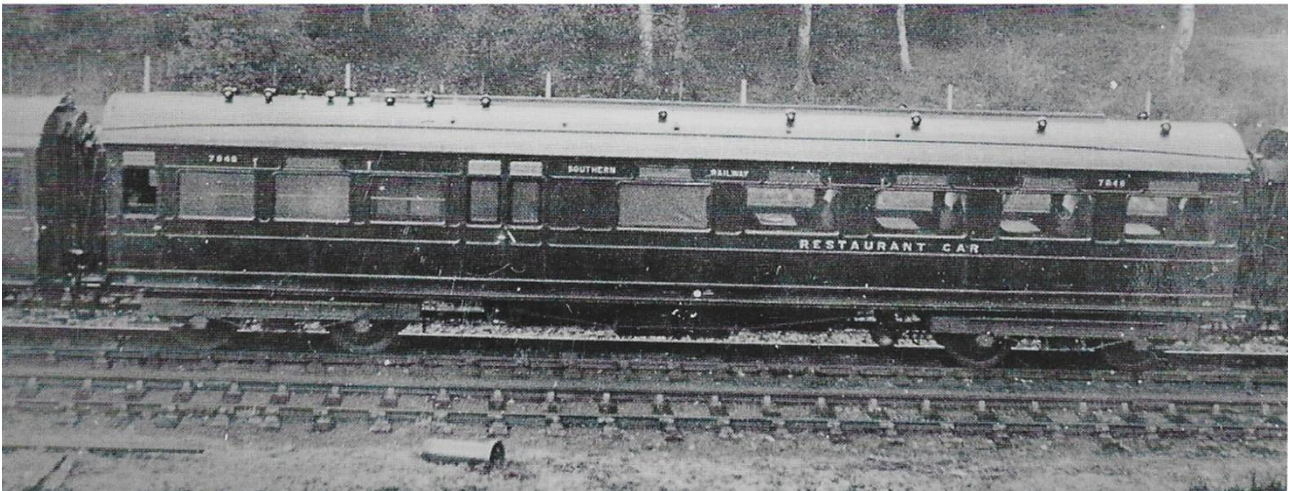




Interior of Dining Saloon No 67 (credited to National Railway Museum.) From Weddell, LSWR carriages.

in 1943, is on display in that form at the National Railway Museum.

Six further wooden bodied dining saloons were built in 1913 to drawing 2158. They were numbered 44-49 and later became SR 7844-49. Compared to the final development of the first series, these carriages had two major differences. First, the internal layout was altered to move the pantry and kitchen to one end of the coach, though these were still much the same size, shape and had the same facilities as before. The passenger dining area in the other half of the vehicle comprised five seating bays, each with a large, fixed window on each side but now with inwards opening top lights above. Second, the roof profile was altered to be elliptical. As with the earlier series, there was no provision for passengers to board these coaches directly; the only external doors provided were for the use of staff and loading of supplies. These coaches too were taken out of use at some point 1939-45 and found various roles in Departmental service.



profile. Fourteen of the coaches (7821-32, 7834, 7838) also had their kitchens and pantries removed at this time, to be replaced with two compartments, two lavatories and two additional external doors, after which they were designated 'Nondescript Saloons'. During World War 2, all 23 coaches were sidelined and most went into Departmental service; 7840 was the last to be withdrawn, in 1946. Three of these vehicles have survived: Nos 70 (7832) and 76 (7838) are the focus of an acquisition/restoration project by the Titanic Boat Train Heritage Trust while No 72 (7834), which was converted to an Ambulance Car

Dining saloon No 44, in SR livery as No 7844 (credited to F. Foote). The dining saloon is to the right and the side corridor past the kitchen and pantry to the left. From Weddell, LSWR carriages.

Steel-sheeted Catering Vehicles

Shortly before the Grouping, the LSWR began building its 57 ft 'Ironclad' stock. These coaches had galvanised steel sheet exteriors over a timber frame, with no external mouldings, and were fitted with screw couplings and Standard gangways. Intended as a major step forward in carriage

design, vehicles of several types were built to provide complete 'Ironclad' sets.

Focusing on catering vehicles, four Pantry Thirds were built in 1921 to drawing 3288 and numbered LSWR 930-3 (later SR 713-6 in their full third number series). They had seven compartments plus a small pantry that was equipped to provide hot drinks and light hot snacks; they were operated with two Brake Thirds, a First and a Third in 5-coach sets on the Bournemouth line. The following year, four Kitchen Brake Firsts were built to drawing 3665 (LSWR 4061-4, later SR 7711-4). These had just three compartments and a small guard's area, plus kitchen and pantry similar in size to those of the earlier dining saloons. They were formed, with eight Firsts, into two 10 coach sets for Southampton boat trains. With the passenger compartments in both types of vehicle being accessible via direct external doors, tables for meals service had to be put up and taken down as required.

The Pantry Thirds were modified twice. In 1927, the pantry was enlarged at the expense of one passenger compartment. Then, in 1936, the pantry was removed completely, adding back the lost compartment and a further compartment plus

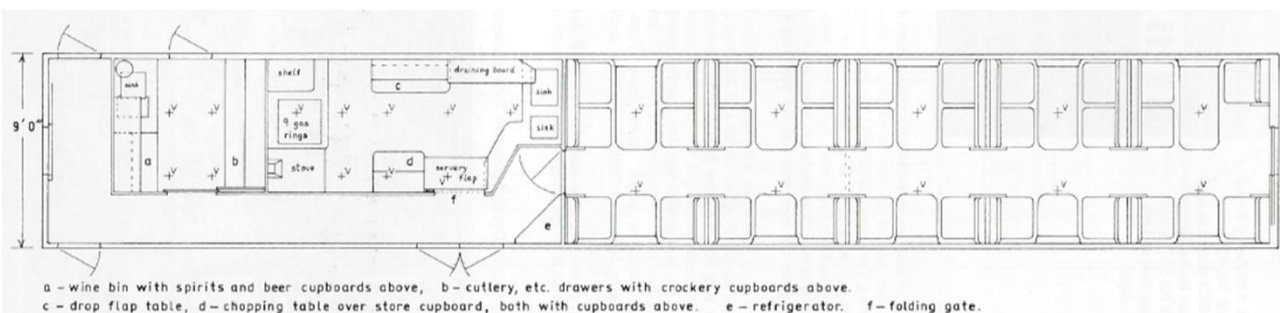
lavatory (SR Diagram 23). The Kitchen Brake Firsts similarly lost their catering areas in 1948/9, replaced by three additional compartments. The Thirds were withdrawn in 1957, three becoming breakdown riding vans, and the Brake Firsts were withdrawn in 1958/9.

Two Ironclad Kitchen Dining Cars (LSWR 4150/1, SR 7850/1) were completed to drawing 3854 (SR diagram 592) in 1923; six further vehicles to the same design (7852-7) were built by the SR in 1925. Internally, these had a very similar layout to the wooden bodied coaches of 1913, with pantry and kitchen at one end and a five-bay 29 seat saloon at the other. Externally, they had all the features of the other Ironclad types except that, above the side lights in both in the dining saloon and the kitchen & pantry, there were opening top lights rather than vent hoods for ventilation, this time in the form of vertical glass louvres.

By 1938, these Kitchen Dining cars were out of regular use. Three of the eight were withdrawn in 1944 and the remainder in 1947, seven being put into use as mobile canteens for the Civil Engineering Department. One of these, 7853, was later reinstated as a Restaurant Car in 1949/50 before being converted to a Cafeteria Car (diagram



Above: 'Ironclad' dining saloon No 7854, pictured in 1938 (credited to F Foote). Below: internal layout of 57 ft 'Ironclad' dining cars to drawing 3854. Both Weddell, LSWR carriages.



600) in 1952, after which it was transferred to the Western Region. It operated there until withdrawal in 1963. Another, 7851, survived into preservation and was under restoration at the Mid-Hants Railway when it was lost in a fire in 2010.

Thus, on 1 January 1923, the newly constituted Southern Railway inherited a modest number of almost new catering vehicles from LSWR, along with many more that were already 10-20 years old. Its development of that fleet, initially under Richard Maunsell and later under Oliver Bulleid, will be explored in Part 2 of this story.

(to be continued)

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An Illustrated History of Southern Coaches by Mike King (OPC, 2003)

Maunsell's SR Steam Carriage Stock by David Gould (Oakwood Press, 2000)

The Titanic Boat Train Trust web site (<https://titanicboattrainheritagetrust.org/> accessed Feb 2026)

SR '100 Seater' No 971: Progress Report #1



'100 seater' No 971, which was built by the SR in 1923 to an SECR design, was moved into the workspace in 'A road' on 20 February 2026 so that its overhaul – which was begun in 2007 and then 'paused' – could be restarted.

971, which has been out of traffic for nearly 20 years, has been an SRCG 'back-burner' project really since the group was formed in 2023. Now that it has been found space in the main works, the intention is that its overhaul will be progressed by a number of teams working as and when they have time. The intention is that this collective effort will see it back in traffic in a reasonably short time.

The scope of the planned work currently includes removal and replacement of the floor, some repairs to the bottom side frame timber, repairs to all the door carcasses, replacement of some corroded steel panels and reinstatement of others that were removed in the past, complete interior refurbishment and a full below solebar overhaul.

The first step was removal of asbestos from the seat backs by a licensed contractor and disposal of the decolite floor. After this was done, as our team has some time to commit to the project at the moment whilst 7864's underframe is worked on,



Floor of a compartment after removal of the decolite layer. The floor is set in a 1 ½" rebate in the frame timbers on all four sides. 4 Mar 2026



The first compartment to be stripped of its varnished mouldings etc. 4 Mar 2026

we have set about removing the corrugated steel sheeting that formed the support for the decolite floor in each compartment. So far, one floor has been removed completely and two more have been largely freed up and just need the steam heaters to be taken out before they too can be removed. The floors will be replaced with two

layers of ¾" plywood and the sheets for one compartment have already been cut to size and are being painted up.

In November, we started removing the varnished mouldings from the two compartments that did not have any seating stored in them. With the seats out of the way, two more compartments



Julian and Sam taking a break from varnish scraping to admire an SR route map in a view frame. 4 Mar 2026

have been stripped out recently. All these mouldings are being scraped to take off all the layers of muddy brown varnish, repaired if required and then varnished up again. Each compartment has 28 pieces of varying size and shape that need this attention. So far, the pieces



Two of the surrounds that sit above the seat backs and take the view frames and luggage rack brackets, freshly varnished. 28 Jan 2026

from approximately two compartments have been cleaned up and perhaps one compartment's components have had two coats of varnish. And not forgetting that we have already repaired 10 of the 20 doors and made some progress with two more over the past two years.

Keith Leppard