

SR GOODS BRAKE VAN S 56400

S 56400 is a development of the basic SECR designed 'Dance Hall' brake vans which, although superior in many respects, were seen as excessive in size by the Southern Railway (SR). It came up with a brand new design built on the same length frame as the 'Dance Hall' vans but instead had a smaller centrally placed body. The unusual feature being the Guard's viewing duckets were fitted off centre as internal space was somewhat limited. They soon became known as 'Pill Box' brakes as they were quite dark internally.

The 25 ton design was successful though and SR produced vehicles to the same basic design from 1928 with the last examples appearing up to 1948. S 56400 was built by SR as part of Lot No. 1185 to design diagram 1579 constructed at Lancing Carriage & Wagon Works in 1943.

After nationalisation, British Railways added the prefix "S" to its number. Photographs show them at work in the Midlands and further north during the 1950s. Even more moved when Southern Region became an air brake only region.

With the steady demise of freight traffic, and the elimination of older design brake vans from departmental service, S 56400 passed into the ownership of the Civil Engineers Department where its 25 Ton weight would have proved most useful in down-hill braking, etc. As a result S 56400 became KDS 56400.

KDS 56400 was photographed at Exmouth Junction Carriage & Wagon Depot on 2nd September 1981 in somewhat unkempt condition. It was repainted into gloss Olive Green and outshopped on Wednesday 2nd June 1982 possibly whilst at Exmouth. On Sunday 25th July 1982 it was photographed at Yeovil Pen Mill yard coupled to a ballast train loaded with new ballast from Meldon Quarry.

After purchase and movement to Swanage S 56400 has been in use on many trains during the construction of the Swanage Railway. Main activities now revolve around its use as part of the demonstration goods train. Currently it is in all over grey livery and stencilled on each side: "NOT IN COMMON USE" above "TO WORK BETWEEN SWANAGE & FURZEBROOK".

After many years in service S 56400 entered Swanage Goods Shed, in January 2019, for a thorough internal and external refurbishment. Problems arising from COVID restrictions, and other factors, caused serious delays. However, major progress on stripping parts for refurbishment/renewal started during 2021. The original Guard's stove had corroded badly and a new one was obtained from a cast iron foundry at the end of July. A new chimney was also required due to a major crack in the existing one.

Refurbishment of the four verandah gates (doors) proved to be a longer job than envisaged as each handle and keep was different - requiring different size packers to ensure proper alignment. New hasps and padlocks have been fitted to both cabin doors, to improve security, as the vehicle is likely to spend substantial periods in remote areas from time to time.

The roofing felt, fitted when it was first refurbished at Swanage, had deteriorated somewhat over the years so two coats of heat reflective paint have been applied to prolong its life. A quantity of filler has been used on the wooden panelled sides and ends before

various coats of primer, undercoat and top coat were applied. S 56400 departed the Goods Shed on Thursday 31st March 2022 although some small painting jobs remain outstanding such as the solebars and exterior veranda at the Swanage end.

Information compiled by Peter Sykes 8th October 2021 and further updated 27th April 2022

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