

Background.

In 1902 Sam Fay was appointed General Manager of G.C.R. He instigated a campaign to propel the company from second rate to the number one spot. It became well known for fast and luxurious travel.

New services required new locomotives and John G Robinson, Chief Mechanical Engineer (CME) at Gorton, had the task of providing these, but new carriages were also required so, large orders were placed to increase the fleet at this time.

Although many carriages were still of the standard elliptical roof profile, well over a 100 G.C.R. carriages were built with a raised centre section to the roof i.e. a clerestory or, as the GCR described it - a "monitor" roof, similar to the fashionable Great Western pattern. These were more expensive to build and difficult to maintain. Thus, the construction of clerestory-roofed stock ceased in 1905.

The usual types were built - brake 3rds, 3rds, luggage and lavatory composites and full brakes. Even 6 slip vehicles were ordered but unusually there were no full 1st class carriages. The lavatory composites were possibly the most interesting of all. In fact, clerestory stock was used on every type of passenger train - local, long distance and passenger sets. Resemblance to Great Western practice was heightened by a change in livery towards the end of 1903, when the upper panels of French Grey gave way to cream. Mouldings were still picked out in gold and the pleasant serif lettering and numbering were in gold, shaded black. Transfers of the company's arms were emblazoned on the brown panels below the waist and they were also etched into the lavatory window's glass.

The earlier livery of French grey and brown had been in fashion for only a few years and had proved to be not very durable. The new scheme lasted somewhat longer but, by 1910, these once very smart carriages were painted overall 'teak' coloured with scrimbled grain effect. It is likely that most were withdrawn in this livery, except lettered LNER or perhaps NE. Possibly, the last ones were painted in plain crimson under BR, as they did not leave passenger service until late 1958. These examples had been altered for use in push-pull trains and some were gutted for service in the departmental fleet.

As part of Sam Fay's requirements for this additional passenger stock, 4 identical carriages - running numbers 1661, 1662, 1663 & 1664, were ordered by the G.C.R. from the Ashbury Railway Carriage and Iron Company Ltd.*, to the design of John G. Robinson (See page 2 carriage detail), on October 10^h 1902 at a cost of £2040 each:-

*In 1902 the business was transferred to Saltley, Birmingham when it merged with Brown and Marshalls, the Lancaster Carriage & Wagon Company, the Oldbury Carriage & Wagon Company and the Metropolitan Railway Carriage & Wagon Company, to form the Metropolitan Amalgamated Railway Carriage & Wagon Company. The GCR referred to the new company as the "Combine".

Initially all were built to GCR Diagram No. 4H3

General Drg. 2331-C, Underframe Drg. 2348-C and Bogie Drg. 2383-c

LNER Code 5148

No.1662 was withdrawn from service, under L.N.E.R. in August 1939.

No.1663 was withdrawn from service, under British Railways (BR), on 21st February 1948.

No.1664 was withdrawn from service under BR on 11th August 1951.

No.1661, also built 1903, was identical to the above, but sometime later bogies of 10'- 6" wheelbase, as opposed to the usual 8'- 0" type, were fitted. This meant at grouping in 1923, No.1661 was shown on a separate diagram, GCR Diagram No. 4H4, LNER Code 5149.

It was withdrawn from service under BR on 5th August 1953.

GCR 'Slip Coaches'.

Although this batch of carriages were not used for such a purpose, it is interesting to note that similar were utilized as 'slip coaches' on the G.C.R. In total they had 6 slips built to the same basic design by Ashbury's and took the next running numbers after No.1664.

This unusual practice required an express train to shed carriages at high speed en route. These carriages would then be brought to a smooth stop at the station platform by the guard (acting more like a modern DMU driver), whilst the main express powered onwards non-stop.

The 'slip coach' could then be picked up by a local train and taken with its remaining passengers up one of the branch lines, or onwards on the main line on a stopping service.

They had extra-large windows for the guard at one end, seating for both 1st & 3rd classes plus luggage space, all in the one coach.

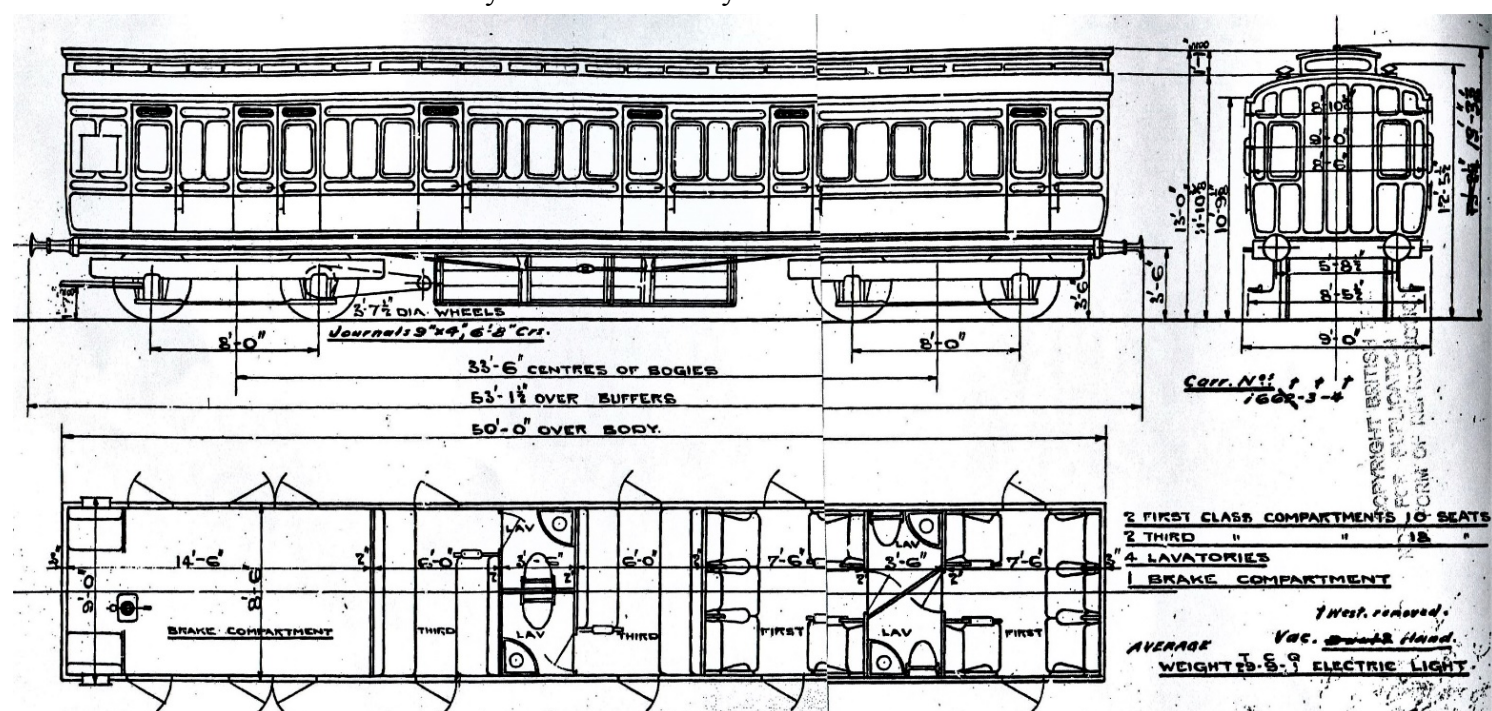
This interesting, but relatively expensive, operational solution by the G.C.R. to a perennial problem of how to cover these conflicting needs, ensured fast point-to-point express timings with maximum flexibility of destination, saving operationally on cost and timetable interruption on the main routes.

Slipping was discontinued by the L.N.E.R. in February 1936, following an accident on the former GC lines.

GCR No.1663 body history.

Known as an 'O Lavatory Van Composite', or 'First / Third / Brake non-corridor carriage'.

No.1663 was built in 1903 at Ashbury's works to the layout below.



(Original print courtesy of British Rail)

The mainline pre-grouping companies mainly favoured the vacuum brake system, but some, the N.E.R. and G.E.R. for example, used the Westinghouse air brake.

Some of the clerestory carriages were originally fitted with both brakes. This meant that other companies' passenger engines could take over a train from a G.C.R. locomotive and work the train over their lines.

The Westinghouse brakes, where fitted, were removed from the majority of former G.C.R. carriages c.1930.

Note: GCR-RST will use the GCR number 1663 and a build date of 1903 so that we, RST, our members and all other readers, have no confusion.

Under G.C.R. and L.N.E.R.

Overall height 13'-3 1/2"

Width over body 8'-6"

Length over body 50'-0"

Length over buffers 53'-1 1/2"

Bogie centers 33'-6"

Bogie wheelbase 8'-0"

Tare weight 29ton 9cwt 1q

Layout: Brake / luggage comp (14' - 6" long) + 3rd + 2 lav's + 3rd + 1st + 2 lav's + 1st

Total seating capacity: 10 first and 18 third class passengers, 28 in total - with 2 compartments each seating 5 x 1st class and 2 compartments each seating 9 x 2nd class.

Every compartment had its own toilet or lavatory.

All were electrically lit throughout, to a design based on Stone's patent system and were steam heated, including the brake / luggage compartment.

The first-class compartments.

The interiors were finished in walnut and incised with gold.

The spring mattress seats, together with their backs, were covered in green cloth and stuffed with curled hair. Parcel racks, umbrella racks and electroliers, (chandeliers which had electric lights), were in burnished brass.

In the lavatories, the woodwork and sliding doors were of walnut and sycamore and the WCs and wash basins of decorated porcelain, the floors being covered with mosaic tiles laid in cement.

The third-class compartments.

The general finish was polished oak, the spring seats being trimmed in moquette.

Lavatories were finished in light and dark oak and their equipment was similar to those of the first class.

Under British Railways.

The Transport Act of 1947 nationalized the railways, which were taken over by the British Transport Commission (BTC) in 1948 and given the name British Railways, which inaugurated public ownership of the railroads.

21st February 1948 - No.1663 was thus withdrawn from service in the initial year of 'British Railways'.

October 1948 - The body was sold.

The fate of the chassis is unknown but most likely it was sold for scrap.

Note: It is not known if many of these clerestories received an exterior repaint under British Railways. This is highly unlikely, especially for No.1663, as it was one of the very first to be retired under the new ownership.

However, some of the luggage composites, and possibly others, did receive B.R. 'suburban stock red', as they lasted until circa 1958.

Under ownership of Kingston Rovers Rugby Club, Kingston upon Hull, East Yorkshire.

It was used as a Tote office, possibly also as a changing room, at the old Hull Kingston Rovers rugby ground in East Hull, Old Craven Park, behind the tram and bus depot on the eastern end of Holderness Road, from whence it was salvaged.

Part of Kim Brooker Collection.

July 1980 No.1663's body became a part of the Kim Brooker GCR collection. An early preservation pioneer, he utilized his joinery business to restore the saved vehicles.

However, No.1663 was kept away from his other GCR Robinson vehicles, on the former RAF airfield at Chipping Camden.

Note: It was the owner's intention to put the body onto the chassis of former GCR Suburban No.799 (Now in use as the RST-GCR stores at Ruddington), as this carriage was not unique.

Considerable restoration work was done at the airfield to ensure the carriage's structural integrity and it was re-roofed to keep it watertight.

The alterations carried out to the side were repaired, much of the structural restoration completed, together with some of the interior.

When he decided to sell up, he was unable to raise sufficient interest to keep his collection together.

22nd July 1997 – No.1663 body was sold by Heathcote Ball & Co at Banbury auctions, Lot 341, to the then GCR(N) Director Stuart Copson.

Reproduction doors and seat ends, together with walnut and sycamore lining boards were included in the sale.



2005c - GCR Clerestory body No.1663 on a temporary army 'tank carrying' wagon. (Photo: GCR-RST Archives)

No.1663 body at the Nottingham Transport Heritage Center, Ruddington. Nottinghamshire.

Autumn 1997 - No.1663 body arrived at its new Ruddington home.

1st September 1999 – No.1663 was donated by Stuart Copson to the GCR-Rolling Stock Trust by Deed.

The body sat initially at Ruddington on an army 'tank carrying' wagon - sadly sent for scrap, as so few MoD related vehicles exist today.



2010 - GCR Clerestory body No.1663 on its 50ft LMS chassis in the yard at Ruddington. (Photos: C. Pennington).

50ft LMS BG Chassis History.



2000c LMS 50ft Chassis as a mobile crane base. (Photo: GCR-RST Archives)



2002-09-22 Jim Kent (lt) & Dave Ablitt descaling 50ft chassis (Photo: R. Tilden Smith)

30th July 1980 - Former LMS parcels van type 'B', as Vehicle M31927, based at British Rail Southern Region's Bricklayers Arms Depot, was purchased by Mr J. Graham of the Fowler 3F Society for £750, Sales ref: c52/230/552T/025/01.

20th August 1980 - Despatched from Bricklayers Arms to its new home on the Bodmin and Wenford Railway. Van body scrapped later, on an unknown date.

Chassis converted to a crane runner, at unknown date.

22nd December 2001 - Gordon Maslin picks up the story – "The people at Bodmin have a crane runner which is a former LMS 50ft BG. They have agreed to exchange this for one of 45ft length. Their prime requisite is that it is in reasonable condition with hand and vacuum braking. The existing runner can then be released for use as an underframe for an ex GCR coach owned by the GCR Rolling Stock Trust. It is they who will pay any bills. Bodmin have expressed a preference for a GWR Bogie Bolster, so it comes down to which is in best condition and fitted with brakes".

12th January 2002 - Gordon Maslin again by letter "Arrangements have been concluded and the chassis purchased from owner Peter Twyde of South Devon Railway and ownership transferred to Richard Tilden Smith, Chairman of GCR-RST. Initial thoughts - bolster wagon will go to Bodmin, then the lorry will go to Buckfastleigh, South Devon, to collect the 57ft underframe (also purchased by RTS for his GCR Suburban No. 5xxx) to give Bodmin chance to swop equipment onto the new bolster wagon, before releasing the 50ft underframe".

19th March 2002 - Collected from Bodmin, along with a 57ft LMS chassis from South Devon Railway & delivered by Allelys Heavy Haulage Ltd to the Nottingham Transport Heritage Centre, Ruddington on 20th March, at a cost of £875 + VAT.

LMS Chassis at the Heritage Centre, Ruddington.

24th March 2002 - Chassis was surveyed by Pat Sumner and Tony Keeble on behalf of GCR-RST and passed fit for purpose.

The intension was to use it as an underframe for the clerestory body No.1663 after framework preparation, including removal of decking timbers and added surplus steelwork, cleaning, de-rusting and painting.

2002c - Donated by Richard Tilden Smith to GCR-RST.

2002 – 2010 De-scaled, shot blasted and repainted.

Spring 2010 - No.1663 body was transferred, from its temporary military chassis on to the matched 50ft LMS chassis, by Peter Wilson and colleagues of GCR(N) and moved for long term storage into No.5 shed.

Note: It is not intended to undertake any restoration work on this carriage until after completion and hand over of the 'Carriage Restoration Workshop' – No.4 shed.

On-site vandalism and damage.

The body and its new donor chassis were stored under cover in No.5 shed, until 2012.

2012 - No.1663 was removed from No.5 without notice or authorisation by a GCR(N) member to reside in the yard. Much damage has subsequently ensued since, both externally and internally, due to neglect, vandalism and the ingress of water, with a resultant large increase in future restoration costs.

An attempt to cover the body in June 2011 proved unfit for purpose and again so in December 2017.

In 2018, a further temporary canvas 'roof only' cover was fitted by 'Big Tops Ltd' to limit the extent of water damage.

Winter 2018/2019 - The carriage was broken into once again, with more windows damaged. So, in March 2019, a full-length cover was fitted by 'Big Tops' to make life more difficult for vandals and to improve the general weather protection.

February 2020 - The site experienced very adverse weather conditions and, once again, its protective canvas was damaged due to its exposed location.

To date, the situation remains unchanged.