

History of Manchester, Sheffield & Lincolnshire Railway (MS&LR) No.373

6 wheeled, five-compartment 3rd class carriage. (Rev6 Apr2020)

Acknowledgements: Author Clyde E. Pennington, Verifier and contributor John Quick.

Description of Vehicle.

This is a rare survivor of a classic late Victorian period railway carriage, built in 1885 at the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway's (MS&LR) Gorton Works, Manchester (the Company name later changed to Great Central Railway), in answer to the need for greater passenger capacity over the earlier 4 wheelers. In its original life it would have been used for local passenger train services. Originally designed by Charles Sacre, the company's locomotive, and rolling stock engineer. By the time No.373 was built minor changes had been made and Thomas Parker, the company's Locomotive, Carriage and Wagon Superintendent, continued with these. - The thirds were built between 1878 and 1901, with many later converted for main line use with vacuum braking.

Mounted on a wooden frame with side reinforcement of steel plate, the body is mainly mahogany on ash frames, using traditional coach building methods. The body is carried on three axles with six Mansell* wheels that are leaf sprung. (*Patented by Richard Mansell, the Carriage and Wagon superintendent of the South Eastern Railway, the design was created in the 1840s and was eventually widely used on passenger railway stock in the UK. The teak centre eliminated the ringing noise that emanated from early railway wheels. It was also arguably safer as it needed regular inspection and metal castings of the time were often flawed.)

Our research study of the surviving LNER 2B8 diagram print, where all carriage numbers were struck through by a broad diagonal black line when the carriage was taken out of service, implies that No.373 was built in 1885, making it the oldest survivor of its type. However, the list of Camping Coaches clearly states - built 1889. The author of this list may have mis-read the 2B8 drawing or simply made a mistake. Either way we have taken 1885 as the build date.

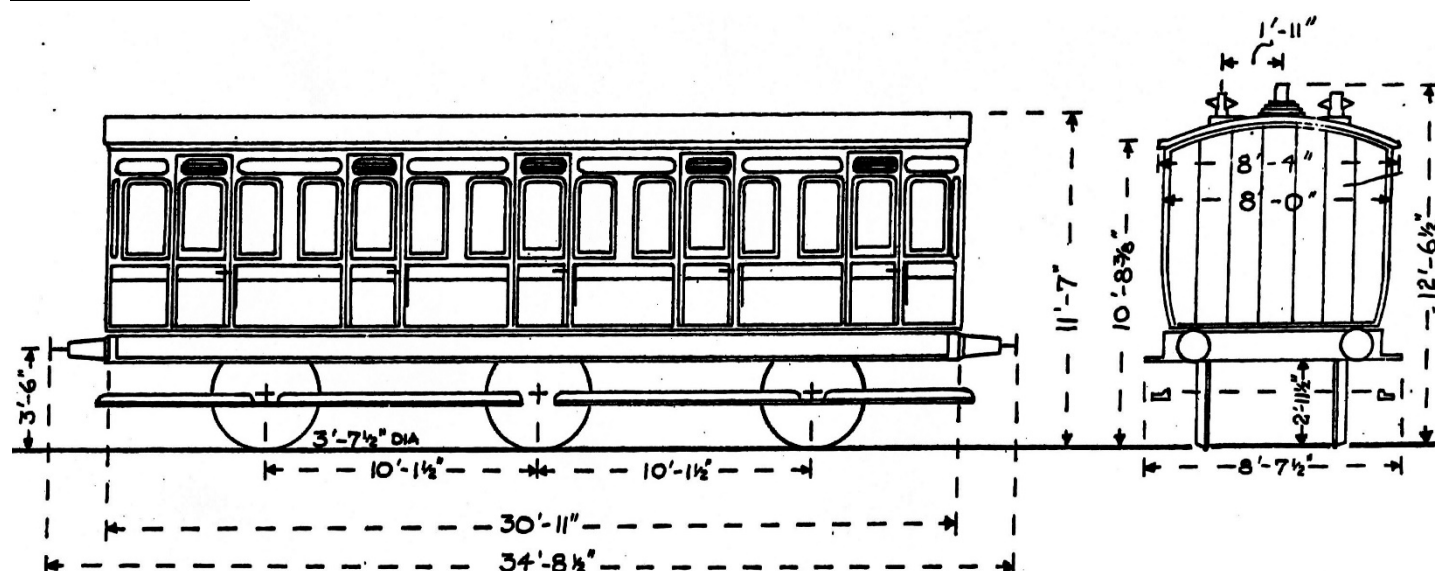
GCR Diagram No.2B8, General Drg.1596-c (14 listed as built in 1885)

LNER code: 5033. (Note: This code may not have been allocated as it became a camping coach in 1934)

Between 1923 and March 1934 it became at first 373C, then 5373, until it entered camping service as CC35.

Known under BR as CC35, according to LNER conversion records (BR Journal 23 p162) until it entered service as a Mess Van. The BR number as a Mess Van is currently unknown.

Main Dimensions



Wheel arrangement: six wheeled – Mansell type, 3'- 7½" dia., conventional springs and axle guards.

Gauge 4' - 8½"

Tare weight 12ton 1cwt 0q

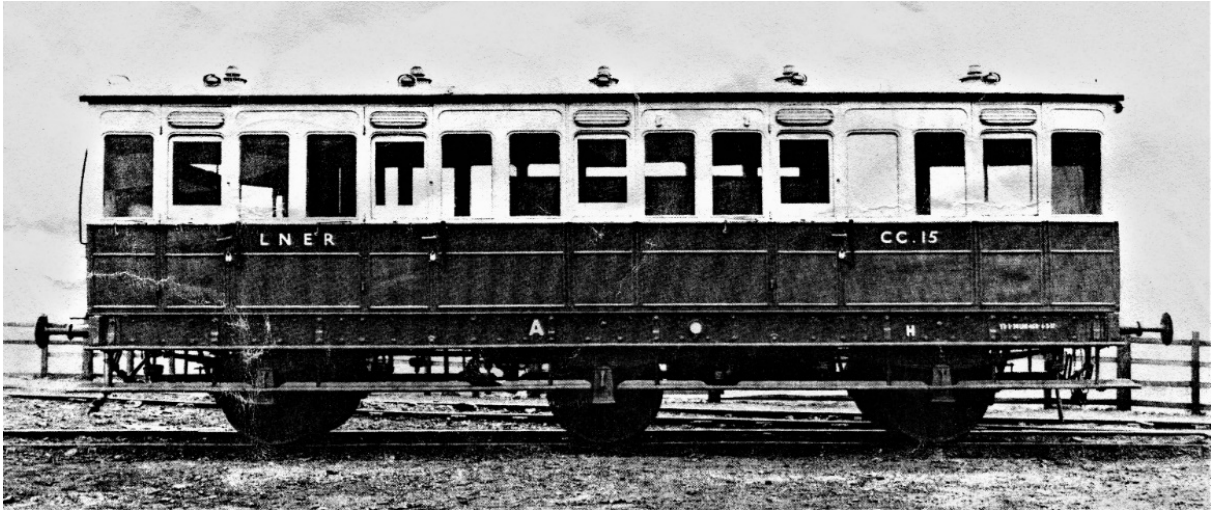
Seating capacity 50 max. in 5 x 6'- 0" wide compartments.

When built it would have been fitted with a non-automatic vacuum brake system known as the 'Smith non-auto'. This was the favoured brake on the MS&LR at that time, but after only a few years, it had the standard vacuum arrangement fitted.

We believe it to have been originally built as a 3rd class carriage and remained so throughout its passenger service life.

It has been agreed by John Quick, GCR authority and Trustee of GCR Rolling Stock Trust, that this carriage is most likely No.373, although under the Gt Eastern Group ownership it was referred to as No.379. No material evidence has been found to substantiate either to date.

Note: GCR-RST has adopted the number 373 and a build date of 1885 so that we, RST, our members and all other readers, have no confusion.



Picture taken from British Railway Journal of Camping Coaches showing identical No.CC15

The Early Years under MS&LR, GCR, LNER and BR.

The early life of No.373 remains very sketchy.

In March 1934 it became "Camping Coach CC35", possibly sited near Dundee, Scotland.

Believed subsequently used as a Mess & Tool van at Glasgow.

1964 Decommissioned by BR

373's Life in Preservation.

Again, rather sketchy.

1964 - Initially preserved at Carlton Colville Museum, Lowestoft. Suffolk.

November 1971 - No.373 was acquired by the Great Eastern Railway Group & located at East Anglian Railway Museum, Chapell & Wakes Colne Station, Nr Colchester. Essex.

Believed initially bought from a Glasgow scrap yard for £160 plus £30 for delivery by rail to a temporary home at Cantley Sugar (Beet) Factory, between Norwich & Gt. Yarmouth. - As per a letter dated 29th Aug 2013 from Mr R. A. Castle of Dunmow, Essex, a member of the then 'Stour Valley Railway Preservation Society' – Later the name was changed to East Anglian Railway Museum. (see page 3)



1972-10-22 0-6-0ST Jupiter with No.379 and No.373 center in tow at Chappel (T. Stevens)

Mr Castle picks up the story – If one end of the coach from East Anglian Railway Museum appears to have suffered damage resulting from a collision, this is definite evidence that the vehicle was mine.

I put an advert in the Railway Magazine offering a £5 reward for information about old coaches resulting in a successful purchase. The Scottish Railway Preservation Society told me there was one in a scrap yard near Glasgow. They gave me the address and told me that at one time it had been used as a Camping Coach near Dundee. I wonder how it came to be anywhere near Dundee?

In anticipation of getting a coach I managed to get short term permission to keep it at Cantley Sugar (beet) Factory, which is between Norwich and Yarmouth, Norfolk.

The scrap merchants wanted £160 and I told them I would buy it, provided it could be delivered by rail to Cantley.

The news came back that a BR Carriage and Wagon Inspector had passed it for fit to run to Cantley. Was he showing some secret sympathy for a preservationist? The journey was by no means a short trip. The carriage charge was £30. I paid a total of £190 to the scrap merchants and the coach soon arrived safely at Cantley..... Now to the frame damage, I was not there when it happened, so am reporting what was told to me. Chappel Goods yard is on a gradient which was said to be 1 in 70. My coach was kept at the top end with a Great Eastern full brake coach buffered up to it. The GER coach was one day wanted elsewhere in the yard and a sleeper was put in front of the wheels of mine. Note, not proper wheel fitted chocks. Hardly anyone at Chapel were experts and knew no better.

Anyway, my coach just pushed the sleeper away and off the track. It ran the full length of the yard where there was an Austerity 0-6-0 ST buffered up against an even heavier 0-6-0 ST.

Fortunately, these two engines were not buffered up to the stop blocks but some distance from them so they were not an immovable obstruction, otherwise I think the coach would have been wrecked beyond repair. I was told it hit the engines with sufficient force to move them about 6 feet. I don't know if this was a measurement or a guess. It does, however, illustrate that wooden underframes are very much stronger than most people think they are.....

Preservation years at the Nottingham Heritage Centre, Meres Way, Ruddington, near Nottingham.

When first surveyed by GCR(N) in June 1999, prior to its arrival at Ruddington, it was thought to be MS&LR No.379 built around 1882. However, no identifying plates or markings have been found to substantiate this to date.

June 2000 – Now known as No. 373, it arrived at Ruddington just before the summer gala.

Its condition on arrival at Ruddington was generally poor, due to years of external storage without protection.



3rd June 2001 - No.373's official hand-over to GCR-RST (Photo: J. Bagshaw)

29th May 2001 No.373 was donated through Deed by Brendan Sothcott, on behalf of the Gt Eastern Group to GCR Rolling Stock Trust ownership.



2007c - No.373 at Nottingham Transport Heritage Centre, Ruddington. (Photo: R. Tilden Smith)

2007: Due to its very poor condition, plans were made to dismantle and 'flat pack' the body pending a future rebuild/restoration, but also to possibly donate parts to assist in the restoration of MS&LR No.946 if needed.



2018-05-20 MS&LR No.373 (Photo: C. Pennington)

Note: In 2009 an original high-pressure oil-gas cylinder was exchanged between 373 and 946 to create a matched pair of cylinders, one being longer than the other, under No.946's chassis.

As the body was scratch built, doors etc varied in dimensions and were found generally to be in very poor condition and to differ in size from those on No.946, albeit slightly.

May 2015 - It was visited by thieves seeking brass or bronze wheel bearings. They broke the cast iron bearing casting and door on one axle to gain access but failed as no brasses are fitted, only oiling pads.

The future. (post 2020)

No.373 currently resides in its 'flat pack' condition in the yard at Ruddington.

There are no immediate restoration plans and, due to existing site constraints, there is no possibility of it being stored indoors out of the elements.

One future possibility is to modify the original body to create a 3rd class/ brake or Tri-composite vehicle, with disabled facilities, using the existing chassis, and the remaining body parts and No.946 as templates.

This could ultimately form part, along with No.946 and other GC 4 or 6 wheeled survivors from preserved railways, of a vintage GC set, pulled by the new build GCR class 2, 4-4-0 locomotive No.567 or similar.



MS&LR No.176 four wheeled tricomposite coach - courtesy of Keighley and Worth Valley Railway (Haworth)