

A Southern Region Secret

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Perhaps it is a personal view, but some classes of locomotive seemed disproportionately reclusive compared with the class size. The British Railways Class 2 2-6-2 tanks (the 84XXX) seemed to fall into that category and particularly the final ten. In some ways this should not be a surprise as some of this group only had a seven year life span, and when moved away from the Southern, where they had been based from new, spent up to three years in store.

The design was based on the Ivatt Class 2 with the first member of the class emerging from Crewe works in July 1953. The original plan was for this first batch of twenty to have been built at Darlington and it was the latter works which received the order to build what turned out to be the final ten members of the class (84020-9).

All of the batch were delivered in a four month period commencing in March 1957 with the first five going to Ashford depot with Ramsgate receiving the balance. After two years the Ramsgate allocation moved to Ashford and thus the whole ten were then to be found working from the latter depot. This situation lasted for a further two years until between February and June 1961 and thus the batch association with Kent was for just four years. Compared with the other members of the class it seems that relatively few photographs were taken of this group and similarly, few references to their activities appeared in the railway press.

Once ousted from Ashford, the first five had a brief sojourn at Bricklayers Arms and then a similar quick visit to Exmouth Junction whilst Brighton and Eastleigh provided the new homes for the second five. All ten were then shipped out to the Midland Region in September 1961 where little work and periods of storage followed for most of the batch. 84027 for instance went into storage within a month of the transfer and did just two months more work before withdrawal in 1964. Thus it amassed no more than 160,000 miles and no doubt represented a large loss to the tax payer of the day.

The peculiarities of the batch were that they were push-pull fitted, but the equipment was not compatible with the Southern Railway system. Darlington also had a different paint layout for its locomotives with larger cabside numbers. Careful study of the tankside lining reveals that at the point where the tank base turned upwards to accommodate the motion, the lining on Crewe built locos rose vertically whilst that on Darlington engines sloped at an angle parallel to the tank edge. The batch also started life with the new style BR crest. Due to the low mileage run by this batch, they appear to have carried the same boilers throughout their working lives.

Talking of work, having run in on the Middleton-in-Teesdale to Darlington line, they took over duties worked by H class 0-4-4 tanks on various shunting duties. To actually earn a living they were given a range of secondary passenger duties such as Ashford-Maidstone East, Rye, Hastings and Margate. Thus the centre of the universe for seeing the class was definitely Ashford. The only time that they appear to have

strayed from these duties was when they paid a visit to Eastleigh works, when naturally they were purloined to cover local duties.

Without wanting to re-open the debate about the need to build the BR standard designs, it appears self evident that this batch of engines, with hindsight, should never have been built. H Class tanks hung on elsewhere on the Southern into the 1960s and so could have remained in charge of the work allocated to these machines. Indeed if there was a need for them, then it could equally have been met by further construction of the Ivatt design, a type which they worked alongside at many of their homes.