

To The Manor Born

J Crosse
(copyright 2004)

The Great Western Manors currently have a unique place in railway preservation history in that of the classes where more than five survived the cutters torch all have run in the heritage era.

The lineage of the Manors went back to 1911 when the Churchward designed 43XX 2-6-0 first took to the rails. As the need for more genuine mixed traffic locomotives grew (and the 43XX fleet aged) the GWR announced plans to 'rebuild' all the 43XX class to either Grange or Manor specification. The reason that British Railways did not inherit 300-plus 4-6-0s of these two classes was due to the outbreak of the second world war when the programme was suspended, never to be restarted.

Grange conversions appeared first, 6800 Arlington Grange leaving Swindon Works in August 1936. The Grange class had a 'Red' route availability which meant that they were restricted to the core routes in the same way as the Halls. However the 43XX were able to work many of the secondary routes and there was a need for 4-6-0s here too and thus the Blue route Manors were developed.

Twenty rebuilds were authorised under lot 316. 'Replacement' is a much more appropriate term as only the wheels and motion of the 43XX were re-used in the building of 7800-19 Indeed an entirely new boiler design was required for the class, this being designated the Standard No.1 type.

January 1938 marked the entry to service of 7800-3 with 7804 following in the February, 7805-8 in March and 7809 in April. Production then resumed in December of that year (7810/1) with the balance following in January 1939 except for 7819 which appeared in the February. Although donor engines do not appear to have been recorded the following 43XX were withdrawn during 1938 to 'balance' the Manor production :- 4304/4/7/12/9/25/8/36/42/9/55/60/9/71/9/80/2/92/4/9.

Proposals were made to build further Manors after Nationalisation resulting in the production of 7820-9 all of which entered service in November/December 1950 making them some of the younger locomotives on the heritage scene. Unlike the earlier representatives of the class no parts were taken from the 43XX class.

The 1938/9 builds carried the range of Great Western Green and wartime black liveries. In the BR era lined black was at first standard but the RCTS reported that in 1953 members of the class started to appear in unlined black before gravitating to lined green.

Allocations at the end of the GWR era found most of the twenty locomotives working the more 'northern' part of GWR territory with Banbury having five on its books with a further five on the Cambrian section. At this time Bristol also had five with a sole representative 'in the south' at Weymouth.

For the early 1960's enthusiast living in the centre of the Western Region empire Manors were by far the rarest of the GWR named classes as by then they were nearly all working at the extremities of the region, either westwards from Newton Abbot or on the West and Central Wales lines with only 7808 being a regular at say Bristol or Swindon, the most efficient way of getting to see the class being frequent visits to Swindon Works. Following the demise of steam in the South West some members of the class were allocated to the London division with others going to Gloucester to finish out their days.

The transfer of Birmingham division sheds to the LMR was in fact the salvation for most of the preserved examples as they lasted longer than most of their WR counter parts but also the disposals took them to Barry rather than to any of the other scrap merchants who were much more proactive in cutting up their stock. In fact all of the survivors except 7808 came via this route.

Into the preservation era we find that nine of the class survived with only 7802/8/12/9 from the original batch of 20 with the other 5 coming from the 1950 build.

Severn Valley based 7802 Bradley Manor is currently has probably the highest profile of any class member due to its mainline status. However it presents the least authentic face of the class being paired with a 4000 gallon tender rather than the correct 3500 gallon type. Having just acquired a refurbished boiler from 7812 it will hopefully be active for another eight or so years.

7808 Cookham Manor went straight from BR service to the Great Western Society at Didcot and was one of the early mainline performers. Unfortunately it has not steamed for a number of years and there are no immediate plans to return it to running order.

7812 Erlstoke Manor. If its boiler had not been donated to 7802, 7812 would probably have started its second spell in traffic by now at the SVR. Not having run there since the early '80s it is possibly the least known member of the class to today's enthusiasts but hopefully it will return to service in the next twelve months.

7819 Hinton Manor is the only member of the class to run in lined black in the preservation era and regardless of your attitude towards BR liveries, the red backed name and number plates along with the polished brass and copper set this engine aside from the rest. Returning to traffic just in time to play a major role in the GWR celebrations of 1985 it had many mainline outings but now waits its turn in the queue for overhaul alongside the signal box at Highley.

7820 Dinmore Manor is coming towards the end of its boiler ticket at the West Somerset Railway having pounded up and down the steep gradients on the line clocking up a considerable mileage in the process whilst class mate 7821 Ditchat Manor has been doing likewise on the Great Central Railway.

7822 Foxcote Manor has been a bit of a wanderer originally operating on the East Somerset Railway. It made a gala appearance on the Severn Valley Railway in 1996 but is the only member of the class that could be said to be really working on 'home

ground' being based now at Llangollen and looking at home amongst the dramatic scenery with a rake of chocolate and cream coaching stock.

7827 Lydham Manor on the other hand is definitely not a wanderer being confined to the Paignton and Dartmouth Railway throughout its time in preservation. It has not run for a number of years but its return is not far away. Will it retain its non authentic Great Western livery?

And finally to 7828 Odney Manor which is now out of its ticket and awaiting overhaul. For many years a Great Western exile in Lancashire the engine has latterly worked at the West Somerset alongside 7820.