

1897-built “Trojan” Returns to Steam and Becomes the Oldest Working Great Western Railway Locomotive

April 16, 2021



May 1 will see diminutive 0-4-0ST “Trojan” return to service at [Didcot Railway Centre](#) at a ceremony to be performed by local MP, David Johnston OBE. The locomotive will become the oldest working Great Western Railway locomotive having been built by the Avonside Engine Company of Bristol in 1897 and working at docks around Newport before being acquired by the GWR as part of the 1923 “grouping”.

“Trojan” will be in action throughout the May bank Holiday weekend, 1, 2 & 3 May, working demonstrations goods trains on the Centre’s branch line and taking a turn on passenger workings and taking part in demonstrations and photo opportunities around the 21-acre site. These will include a rare chance to see all four of the Centre’s 0-4-0s in front of Didcot’s iconic Engine Shed as 1340 will line up alongside 1338, No 5 “Shannon” and No. 1 “Bonnie Prince Charlie”. With coronavirus restrictions still in place, tickets are limited and need to be booked in advance at bit.ly/DRC-MayBH.

Head of Visitor Experience and Marketing, Graham Hukins said “We are looking forward to seeing “Trojan” back in action, it’s almost ten years since she was last in action and the overhaul has cost over £200,000

so it will be a very special day indeed.

“The contrast couldn’t be greater between 1340 and some of the huge passenger locomotives here at the Centre, but “Trojan” performed a key role at a time when goods traffic was far more important to the railways and the country’s economy than the famous express trains that are so often romanticised” he added.

The diminutive saddle tank with tiny, 3’ diameter, driving wheels tips the scales at less than 23 tons and has room for just 630 gallons of water and ½ ton of coal, but is surprisingly powerful and was ideally suited to shunting heavy wagons on the tightly curved tracks that characterised dock railways.

1340 is the oldest locomotive in DRC’s operational fleet, having been built by the Avonside Engine Company of Bristol in 1897 (Works No. 1386) for Messrs Dunn & Shute of Newport Town Dock. She was purchased by the Alexandra Docks Railway in 1903 and was transferred to the Great Western’s books when the GWR absorbed that system in 1923.

“Trojan” received the number 1340 at that time and remained with the Western until 1932 when it was sold to the Netherseal colliery at Burton-on-Trent, who passed it on to Alders of Tamworth in 1947. The engine arrived at the fledgling Railway Centre in 1968 but it was not until 2002 that she entered service in preservation and was a regular performer until the expiry of her boiler certificate in 2011.

The extensive overhaul has been undertaken by Loughborough engineering company, Locomotive Maintenance Services, and has required extensive boiler work including the fabrication and fitting of a new copper firebox, copper tubeplate, firehole door ring, smokebox liner, ashpan, firebox stays and a complete retube.

Motion repairs have included remettalling of the axleboxes and side rod bearings, tyre turning, refurbishment of the springs, a valve gear overhaul and casting and machining a new brake ejector valve.

“Large Prairie” 4144 will be in action alongside 1340 for the three days of the Bank Holiday weekend and the Railway Centre is also open at weekends and Wednesdays allowing visitors to explore almost two centuries of railway heritage set across 21 acres. Steam trains will be running on the Centre’s demonstration line offering unlimited rides aboard a train of beautifully restored vintage carriages with each group allocated an individual compartment for their trip – further details can be found, and tickets booked, at www.DidcotRailwayCentre.org.uk.

Photo credit: Harry Jones