

GRESLEY'S 'HUSH-HUSH' COACHES

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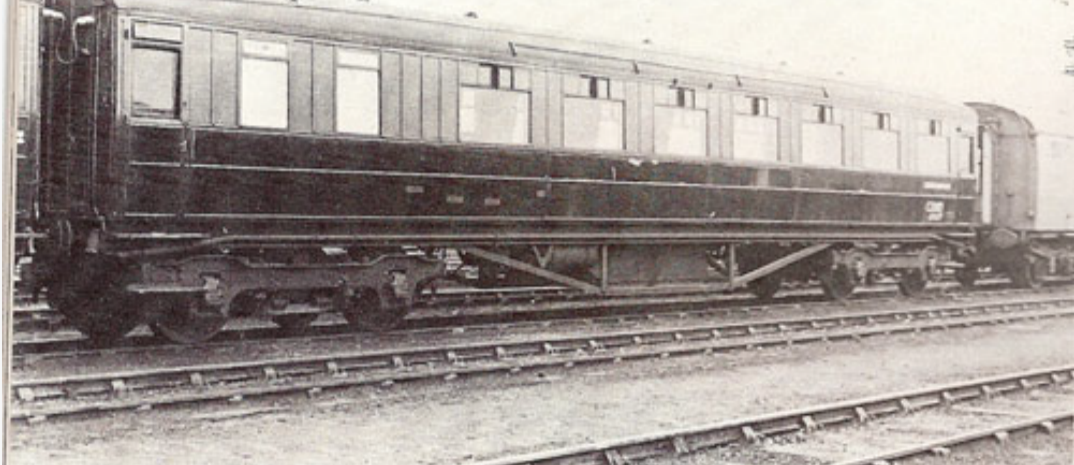
It is now over 50 years since Gresley's celebrated 4-6-4 No 10000, known as the 'Hush-Hush' appeared, but at the start of the 1980's, some of that distinguished gentleman's coaching stock has survived under a similar cloak of secrecy. The passing of the years has seen a growing interest in coaching stock, especially in examples of pre-nationalisation vintage. Only a few years ago, many such coaches could be seen, mostly in departmental service, but nowadays their numbers are dwindling.

Coaching stock observers on the East Cost main line may still see several Gresley-designed vehicles, but the black-liveried Gresley coach which protruded from Carr locomotive depot, Doncaster, had until recently invited particular interest. A visit to Carr Loco would have revealed seven other black Gresleys, all locked and with windows painted white. At this point we enter the world of secret trains, hard to believe with the hustle and bustle of the busy railway scene all around.

Those eight Gresley coaches, together with eight others elsewhere in the Eastern Region, formed the Eastern Region's mobile control trains, the total of sixteen making up four trains of four coaches each. The story of these secret trains goes back as far as 1953 when planning for the eventuality of any future hostilities, included the moving of the district control offices and the construction of replacement static emergency control centres. Four years later the scheme was suspended, but in 1961 the idea was resurrected. A government grant of just under £500,000 was made available for this programme, but when it became evident that the grant would not cover all costs, together with the fact that the Ministry of Transport favoured mobile controls, a decision was made to provide each of the six Regions then in being with two trains apiece, each train costing approximately £40,000.

The trains for both the North Eastern and Eastern Region were made up of two types of coaches: open seconds to LNER Diagram 186 and corridor seconds to LNER Diagram 115. Each four-coach train contained two vehicles of each Diagram and comprised a generator car (with two diesel generators to provide power for the various equipment for which the coaches were rewired); a stores and mess car; a control and apparatus car, and finally, an office car. Doncaster Works undertook the conversion of the Eastern Region sets while the North Eastern mobile controls were fitted out at York Works.

The four trains were stabled at York and Newcastle (for the NER) - with the two ER trains at Retford. In the event of their being required for operational use, they were to be moved to pre-planned sites where facilities had been provided. Darlington was the location for the Newcastle-based train and the set at York would have been moved to Hebden Bridge. Of the two trains at Retford, one would have remained there for operational use and the other was destined for deployment in the Eastern Counties.



A view of one of the least altered conversions - TDE 320960 (LNER 43600) standing at York in March 1980. Peter Goodall

Although converted from the same types of vehicles, detailed differences, such as the amount of seating accommodation provided, differentiated the ER sets (vehicles Nos TDE 320953-960) from the NER trains (vehicles Nos TDE 321001-08). In addition, the two Retford based sets each had a 12t van (formerly banana vans) provided for cable storage, these being DE 58527 and DE 7862. No such vans were provided for the NER sets.

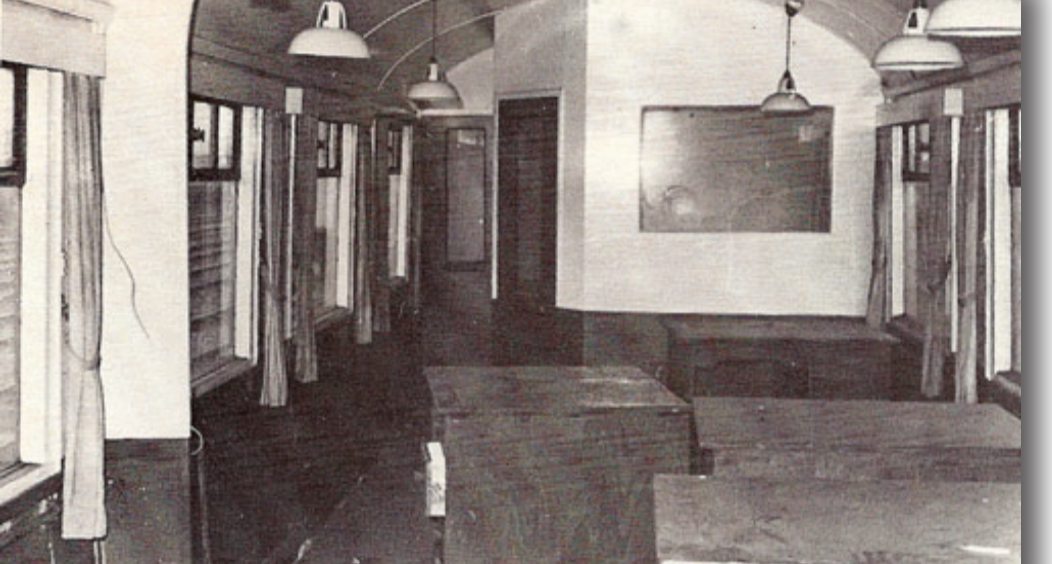
The four mobile controls passed to the ER following the merger of the NER with the ER in 1967. By the September of that year, it was evident that damp was affecting the telephone apparatus in the York train and a decision was taken to move it from Queen Street sidings to Clifton carriage shed where provision for low wattage heaters could be made. At the same time, by coincidence, the Newcastle train also moved home as South Gosforth depot was no longer considered convenient and so Heaton was chosen as its new stabling position.

The Retford vehicles were inspected on 5 February 1968, with a view to assessing the need for remedial work, and shortly afterwards the two sets were moved to Doncaster Works for repairs costing £3,000. Vandalism had taken place while they had been stabled in the open at Retford and, with the desirability of covered storage, efforts were made to find a more suitable site. To that end, Doncaster Carr locomotive depot was selected in December 1968, but it was not until late 1969 that Nos TDE 321001-08 were moved from Retford as repairs to the roof of Carr Loco were found necessary. In May 1970, a second operational site for one of the former ER sets was selected: this was Hitchin although Letchworth was also considered.

Meanwhile, although the York train was in the comparative luxury of Clifton shed, damp combined with the poor condition of Heaton depot was taking its toll of Nos TDE 320953-56. By 1973, remedial attention was considered desirable and the coaches were sent to Simonside wagon shops for work to be carried out.

With the passage of years, by 1976 consideration was given to dispensing with the control trains, in view of the cost of their upkeep. Similar suggestions were made in April 1977, with the need to make available more space at Carr Loco in connection with an expansion of wagon repairs there. But as the trains were Government-sponsored, the decision was not BR's alone. However, in July 1979, the Department of Transport issued the withdrawal order. The sixteen coaches making up the four ER trains were officially condemned, the various equipment in them removed, and the lot put up to the BR Director of Supply at Derby for disposal.

Because these vehicles had spent many years under cover, their exterior condition was remarkably good when compared to their contemporaries in breakdown trains for example. Many of the coaches, especially the former compartment type (Diagram 115), had received considerable structural alterations including the removal of compartment partitions. Consequently, their restoration for revenue-earning service, posed a difficult challenge for would-be preservationists. The former open coaches (Diagram 186) were therefore more popular with the prospective purchasers.



No TDE 320960 (LNER 43600) before restoration showing the additional compartments furniture and office lighting. Peter Goodall

It would be true to say that had those private railways interested in purchasing these vehicles liaised with each other to prevent bidding for the same coaches, then more would have been saved. As it was, no less than seven of the sixteen ER Gresley coaches were sold to a breaker, though BR subsequently consented to the resale of one of these for preservation.

The coaches outlived the two cable storage vans, for both of these (built in 1929 to Diagram 52 at Faverdale Works, Darlington) were scrapped: No DE 58527 at Doncaster Works in 1968 and DE 7862 at Draper's, Hull, in 1975.

For one of the control train coaches, its eventful life was not over once having been sold. No TDE 320956 was being delivered to Grosmont for the North Yorkshire Moors Railway in the weekly pick-up freight to Whitby hauled by No 37020 on 25 June 1980, when several wagons in the formation became derailed at Battersby, thereby blocking the single-track Esk Valley line. Fortunately, the coach stayed on the rails and it was stabled at the picturesque station of Castleton until services were restored. No TDE 320956 reached its new home five days later.

TDE 320956 was the first Gresley designed vehicle to be specially purchased for the Moors Railway's LNER train project. This ambitious scheme is being organised by the LNER Coach Association and while the scheme has the full blessing of the NYMR, it has to be funded privately. Within weeks of its arrival on the Moors Railway, No 24109, as the former open third will eventually be correctly numbered, was starring in Granada Television's £2m film of Evelyn Waugh's novel Brideshead Revisited. For this role the coach received a coat of maroon paint and was paired with the Railway's Gresley Buffet No E9134. Since then, the somewhat woebegone former mobile control coach is now enjoying a thorough renovation, including a new roof canvas and complete internal re-panelling.



No TDE 320956 (LNER 24109), formerly in the Newcastle set, at Goathland, NYMR. Colin Sykes, the new owner, contemplates the restoration. Murray Brown

As to the other ER control train vehicles preserved, thanks to information contributed by their new owners it is possible to bring the story up to date, so far as restoration and relocation are concerned. Three coaches are now on the Severn Valley Railway, all Diagram 186 open seconds. Nos TDE 320960 and 321005 were both office cars in the control trains and hence largely unaltered. No 320960 was purchased with the aid of large loans by the LNER (SVR) Coach Fund. Two windows at one end were reduced in size and two extra compartments and an office installed. This coach was delivered to the SVR in April 1980. The two compartments and the original windows have been reinstated and the vehicle repainted teak brown and partly lined out. The communication cord has been reconnected, other missing (pilfered) parts replaced and the interior equipped with loose seats and fixed tables to enable the coach to enter SVR service at the autumn 1980 Enthusiasts Weekend. It will be used regularly this summer. The full electrical system, fixed seats and internal steam heating will be refitted on completion of the restoration of the Gresley brake composite No 24068 already on the SVR.

No 321005 was purchased by Mr John Giles and delivered to the SVR in May 1980. Last summer the office and furniture inside the vehicle were removed and the saloon entrance vestibule returned to its original layout with a central door.

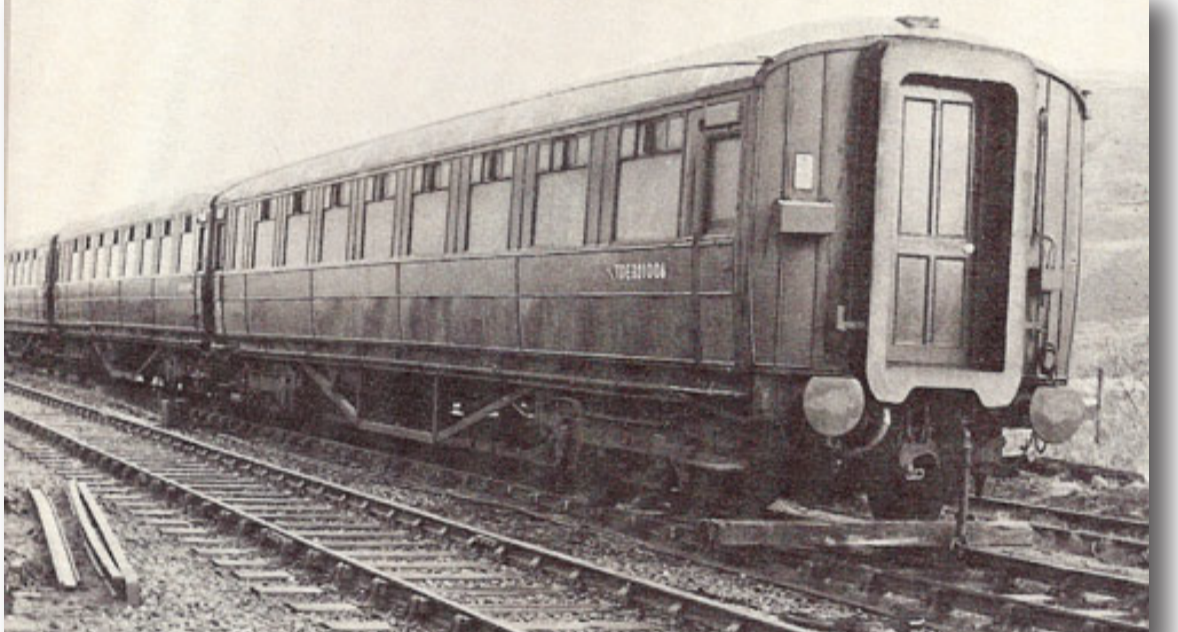
The rotten floor was replaced and restoration is proceeding with the replacement of the ceiling and interior saloon panels. The missing electrical fittings have been obtained, as has a set of seats. An investigation is being made into the possibility of manufacturing replica mirrors and luggage racks.

The third control train coach on the SVR, No TDE 320957, was obtained in a series of exchanges with Carnforth by Mr R H. Marrows. Its conversion had been more extensive than the other two with most of the windows on one side blanked out, and also some on the other side, double doors fitted in the side and one end and two compartments installed. It was delivered to the SVR in October 1980 and opened as the new Erlestone Manor Fund Shop last Christmas. It will remain as such for the time being, although restoration will eventually proceed, resources permitting.

Three of the Diagram 186 coaches are on the Yorkshire Dales Railway, two ex-control cars (Nos 321002 / 6) and a former office car. They arrived on the YDR on 22 February having worked through from BR as a train with two other vehicles destined for the Railway over the coincidentally installed permanent connection with BR at Embsay Junction. Only minor repairs are needed to the coaches and work on restoration has started so that they can enter service this year. It is proposed that No 321001 will be used as a buffet car and the other two in their original form. Initially, they will have a painted finish, although it is hoped that they will be restored to varnished teak in time. Unfortunately, soon after, arrival on the YDR, thieves removed some makers plates and smashed others.

Of the three other preserved ER coaches, the two purchased by Resco Ltd are at present in store. It is hoped to use the partitioning from both of these to recreate one in its original condition, the other also being internally and externally restored, but probably not as a side corridor vehicle. One other Diagram 115 coach, that at Carnforth, is not likely to be restored, at least in the short term.

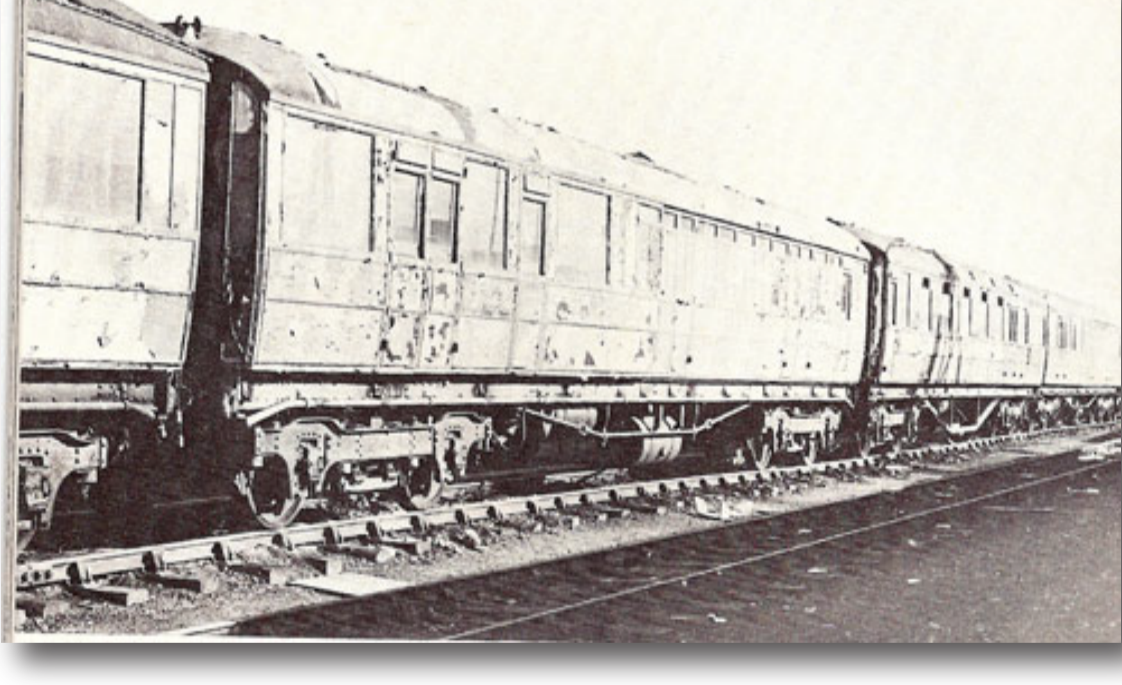
If the story of the ER and NER mobile control trains contains an element of mystery, then that of the Scottish Region's trains is really intriguing. The ScR also chose Gresley vehicles, but the eight coaches forming its two trains were converted from four types: Diagrams 40A (second brake) and 155 (second corridor), as well as vehicles of Diagrams 186 and 115. All eight vehicles were withdrawn from revenue service during 1961/62, at either Cowlairs or St Rollox, with the exception of an open second, which was condemned at Thames Wharf on the ER and sent to Scotland for its new role. The coaches were modified at Cowlairs Works, but remarkably enough the eight vehicles were not given departmental numbers and so carried their original numbers complete with suffix 'E'. As a result, they did not appear on BR's TOPS computer system records. Nor for that matter, did they appear anywhere else for, to add a note of real mystery to this tale, BR had no official record of them! BR's Rolling Stock Library, where all records are kept and updated, had no official knowledge of the existence of the two ScR control sets, the individual numbers having been written out of the records many years earlier. Indeed, two of them had been shown as sold to a private firm in the early 1960s! Thus BR found itself owning eight vehicles for which there were no records and so they were taken on to the files so that disposal could take place - a fitting end to these secret Gresleys!



View of the three ex-ER coaches now at Embsay - TDE 321006 nearest the camera. From this side little in the way of external conversion is apparent in all three. - P.Hatherley (For 2011 locations, please see the table at the bottom of this article)

Carstairs was the final home of the ScR mobile control trains. In recent times, this shed was more famed for its pigeons than for Caledonian 0-6-0s and it was a place where a pair of boots was mandatory apparel before entry! Previously, the ScR sets had been stabled at St Enoch, Glasgow.

Unlike their ER and NER sisters the eight ScR vehicles were painted in red breakdown livery. Sadly, the remarkable ScR coaches were not afforded the same hospitality as their ER counterparts and latterly were in poor condition with peeling exterior paintwork and, in some instances with the roof canvas missing in places. Nevertheless, among the eight were two gems. The two office coaches, SC 13251 E and SC 13254 E (open seconds built in 1936), were virtually intact with nearly all seating still in place. Although damp had taken its toll, with the result that much work is needed to restore them, the two presented a fine sight. It's not everyday that 45-year old coaches can be found on BR in practically original condition. The original bucket-type seats are now, of course, been replaced by the 'straight-sided' variety. Nos 13251/54 were rightly claimed by the National Railway Museum and they are now at York. Of the six-others as with those in the ER / NER trains, considerable alterations had been made by way of the installation of double doors and the removal of compartment partitions. This presented a formidable task to would-be restorers, quite apart from the damage caused by damp.



The flaking paintwork and missing canvas typical of the Carstairs set in latter days. No 16198 nearest has since been scrapped. Note the fuel tank below the underframe; this was a generator coach. Murray Brown

Three of the Carstairs coaches were initially intended to have a further extension of life in normal departmental service for which they would have received departmental numbers - nearly twenty years late! SC 12936 E and SC 12937 E were moved to Muirhouse but the decision was taken not to make further use of them and so they, too, were put up for disposal, as was No SC 12504 E which had remained at Carstairs. Apart from the two open seconds from the Carstairs train now with the National Railway Museum, only one other from the set has been preserved, SC 12934 E by Quainton. In time, the two NRM examples may well form part of a train of preserved coaches for main line running. The vehicle going to Quainton represents an otherwise unrepresented type of Gresley

coach, that with the end vestibule side corridor layout and it is one moreover with shallow sliding ventilators. It was an equipment coach in one of the ScR trains, retaining four compartments and a lavatory but being rebuilt with a pair of double doors on one side. Thus some structural work is required to return it to service and it is hoped it will run at Quainton with No 41384, a Gresley brake third, whose restoration is nearing completion.

The interior of SC 13254E, now at the NRM York (now on loan to LNERCA and restored as 23956). Murray Brown



In view of official sensitivity towards these 'secret' trains, their story could not have been related without permission and so the writer extends his gratitude to Mr Alan Sourbut, CM&EE, Eastern Region who has enabled the history of these vintage vehicles to be documented. In addition, Mr Sandy Maclean of BR Glasgow, an authority on LNER coaches, is also the recipient of the writer's thanks for making it possible to tell a more complete story about the Scottish Region vehicles.

Scottish Region mobile control trains

Departmental No	Original LNER No	Built	Type / Diagram	Condemned / Location	Disposal	Location (2011)
Newcastle train						
TDE 320953	23975	1936	TTO / 186	05/09/79 Heaton	C.F Booth Ltd	Scrapped
TDE 320954	7434	1936	TK / 115	05/09/79 Heaton	C.F Booth Ltd	Scrapped
TDE 320955	24435	1937	TK / 115	05/09/79 Heaton	C.F Booth Ltd	Scrapped
TDE 320956	24109	1936	TTO / 186	05/09/79 Heaton	NYMR	NYMR
York train						
TDE 320957	24105	1936	TTO / 186	05/08/79 York	SVR	SVR
TDE 320958	4988	1935	TK / 115	05/08/79 York	C.F Booth Ltd	Scrapped
TDE 320959	23890	1935	TK / 115	05/08/79 York	Carmforth	NYMR
TDE 320960	43600	1934	TTO / 186	05/08/79 York	SVR	SVR
Retford / Doncaster trains						
TDE 321001	43654	1935	TTO / 186	03/08/79 Carr	Yorkshire Dales Railway	NYMR
TDE 321002	21256	1935	TTO / 186	03/08/79 Carr	Yorkshire Dales Railway	North Norfolk Railway
TDE 321003	52724	1931	TK / 115	03/08/79 Carr	C.F Booth	Scrapped
TDE 321004	1450	1934	TK / 115	03/08/79 Carr	C.F Booth	Scrapped
TDE 321005	52255	1935	TTO / 186	03/08/79 Carr	SVR	SVR
TDE 321006	43632	1935	TTO / 186	03/08/79 Carr	Yorkshire Dales Railway	NYMR
TDE 321007	3291	1935	TK / 115	03/08/79 Carr	Resco (Rlys) Ltd	NYMR
TDE 321008	23896	1935	TK / 115	03/08/79 Carr	Resco (Rlys) Ltd	NYMR

Eastern and North Eastern Region mobile control trains

BR No	Original LNER No	Year Built	Type / Diagram	Disposal	Location (2011)
SC 16187 E	3379	1930	BTK / 40A	J.MacWilliam Ltd	Scrapped
SC 12934 E	3188	1934	TK / 155	Buckinghamshire Railway Centre	Buckinghamshire Railway Centre
SC 12937 E	3280	1936	TK / 155	J.MacWilliam Ltd	Scrapped
SC 13251 E	23953	1936	TTO / 186	National Railway Museum	East Anglian Rail Museum
SC 16198 E	1264	1928	BTK / 40A	C.F Booth	Scrapped
SC 12504 E	4173	1931	BTk / 115	C.F Booth	Scrapped
SC 13254 E	23956	1936	TTO / 186	National Railway Museum	NRM at NYMR
SC 12936 E	3193	1934	TK / 155	J.MacWilliam Ltd	Scrapped