**The GWR Iron Mink**

*notes by Gareth Price*

The GWR V6 ‘Iron Mink’ is one of the iconic designs that came out of the Wagon Works at Swindon.  Built to a design which consisted of a metal body and roof, over 4000 vans were built between 1886 and 1901. The vans were long lasting and could be seen all over the rail network, with at least two being recorded at Inverness in 1927...!!

Many of the Iron Minks went through several changes in their lifetimes. Besides the obvious repaints, vents were lengthened, brakes were replaced with DCI/DCIII brakes and some had their iron doors replaced with wooden doors. 10 of these Iron Minks were built and registered for use in passenger trains, with one van (GWR 57576) lasting until the 1960s.

The Iron Mink design was also used by several pre-grouping GWR companies and was also adapted by other pre-grouping companies which included the NB, GN, LSWR, LT&SR, LNWR and Caledonian Railway for the gunpowder traffic. The body design was used by several cement manufacturers which included Rugby, B.P.C.M. and Blue Circle for their own cement vans.

The Great Western also used the design as the basis for a one off iron cattle wagon (GWR 38101) built in 1888 and lasting until 1935. Another wagon that owes its existence to this design is the larger sister of the Iron Mink, the 30T Mink F bogie vans. Built between 1902 and 1912; they were mostly used on night trains between Paddington and Bristol/Cardiff/Fishguard. All were condemned between 1951 and 1954 but two lasted in usage as stores vans until 1966.

With the shadow of the First World War looming, the Iron Minks found a further use in the gunpowder traffic. Vans were converted for this traffic by having their doors replaced with thick metal doors and the vents being removed and covered with a panel. When the war ended, the vans were converted back to goods traffic. However when the Second World War commenced, several Iron Minks returned once again to gunpowder traffic. From 1937 onwards, several of these vans were loaned to the Southern Railway until the end of the war when they were returned to the GWR and resumed their goods traffic duties. This is the case with the preserved Iron Mink 58725 at the Severn Valley, which, whilst being restored, was discovered to have been loaned to the Southern Railway during the Second World War.

Withdrawal of the Iron Minks began in the 1930s and continued through to the mid 1960s. Despite being condemned, many of the vans however found alternate uses such as sawdust and sand vans, lamp rooms and tool stores. Two van bodies even found usage as stop blocks at Machynlleth and were fitted with self contained buffers!!

Luckily, three GWR Iron Minks and several van bodies have survived into the preservation era alongside two Barry Railway Iron Minks (1151, Kent & East Sussex and 1388, Gloucestershire Warwickshire). The preserved GWR Iron Minks include:

GWR 58725 built in 1896. Purchased by the GWR 813 Fund and resides on the Severn Valley Railway. Current livery is the GWR Improvised Gunpowder Van one that would have been seen during the Second World War.

GWR 11152 built in 1901. Purchased by the GWS and is resident at Didcot Railway Centre. Since arriving, 11152 has took on three various liveries which include the ‘Salvage Save for Victory’ livery, post-1904 GWR livery and currently wears the 5" white "G. W. R" lettering.

GWR 47528 (fictitious running number) is preserved at the South Devon Railway and currently has the ‘Salvage Save for Victory’ livery.

The Iron Mink is currently available to the railway modeller in OO, N and O gauge in kit form. Sadly no ‘ready to run’ version is yet to be manufactured.

OO gauge currently offers the well known Ratio Iron Mink kit. Shire Scenes also offers the option of converting the Ratio Iron Mink into examples with Wooden Doors, Gunpowder Van Doors or earlier mentioned GWR Iron Cattle wagon.

An N Gauge version is again available in kit from the N Gauge Society. This kit can be converted into a wide range of Iron Minks from the GWR, . A 2mm Scale Association version is also available too.

Lastly WEP Models produce the Iron Mink along with its Gunpowder equivalent and Iron Cattle wagon.

If modellers or railway enthusiasts wish to go into further detail on the history of the GWR Iron Mink and any related vehicles mentioned, then the out of print publication by the HMRS ‘All About GWR Iron Minks’ is a very informative publication. Also the recent publication, GWR Goods Wagons by A. G. Atkins, W. Beard and R. Tourret offers a more condensed version on the history of the Iron Mink.