

End of Southern Steam – 9th July 1967 by Geoff Burch

Before leaving school at the age of 15, I applied for a job at Guildford Motive Power Depot as an engine cleaner. I then received a letter through the post inviting me to attend a medical at London Bridge.

After successfully passing my medical, I started work as engine cleaner at Guildford on 4th April 1961.

My first day at work was incredible. Once kitted out with protective clothing, i.e. a uniform of overalls and a grease top hat, I then spent the rest of the day helping to clean Schools class locomotive, No. 30909 '*St Paul's*'. She was one of three Schools Class locomotives that were based at Guildford at the time (the others being No.30903 '*Charterhouse*' and No. 30906 '*Sherborne*'). I went home quite elated that I had helped to clean one of these wonderful Schools class locomotives.

I also worked on one of the last locomotives to leave Guildford on the final day of steam on the Southern Region, 9th July 1967. The following day, we all transferred to Woking and I became a secondman on diesels or electrics for the next two years before becoming a driver myself.

My last day was, was quite special for me. As previously mentioned, I was on one of the last locomotives to leave Guildford. I booked on duty at Guildford; my name on the alteration sheet showing 'locomotives to Salisbury if required'. There were four locomotives left at Guildford to leave on the last day; two BR Standard Class 5MT locomotives No. 73155 and No. 73118, West Country Class No. 34018 '*Axminister*' and the last locomotive to leave was USA class No. 30072 which was crewed by a pair of Fratton men.

My journey consisted of the two BR standard locomotives coupled together, my driver being Driver Bill Brain and the other locomotive was crewed by Passed Fireman Pat Kinsella and Passed Fireman Dave Elston.

After coupling the two locomotives together, we left Guildford, running tender-first to Woking and then reversed and continued engine-first to Salisbury. One poignant moment for me was going through Brookwood station where I had spent so much time as a boy watching steam locomotives passing through. There I was, on one of the last locomotives to pass through Brookwood on the final day of steam, so quite a nice feeling.

When we reached Grateley station, we were stopped by signals and had 10 to 15 minutes to wait. The signalman suggested that we get some refreshments, so we went out to the pub and brought pints of beer back to the locomotives. Photographs were then taken of us all with our pints of beer on the front of the locomotive! It was customary for you to have a drink somewhere after the journey to quench your thirst but you weren't really allowed to drink on duty.

As we continued on our journey to Salisbury, the West Country class locomotive followed us down. This locomotive was crewed by Driver Dave Bunce and Passed/Fireman Charlie Hampshire.

As mentioned, the last locomotive to leave Guildford made its way to Salisbury via Fratton because of the coaling and watering side of things and had to break its journey at Fratton to then continue to Salisbury.

It was quite strange getting off that locomotive at Salisbury for the very last time. I suppose because there were four of us, we were sort of all jovial about it but I suppose in a way, it was very sad that we would never set foot on a steam locomotive again.