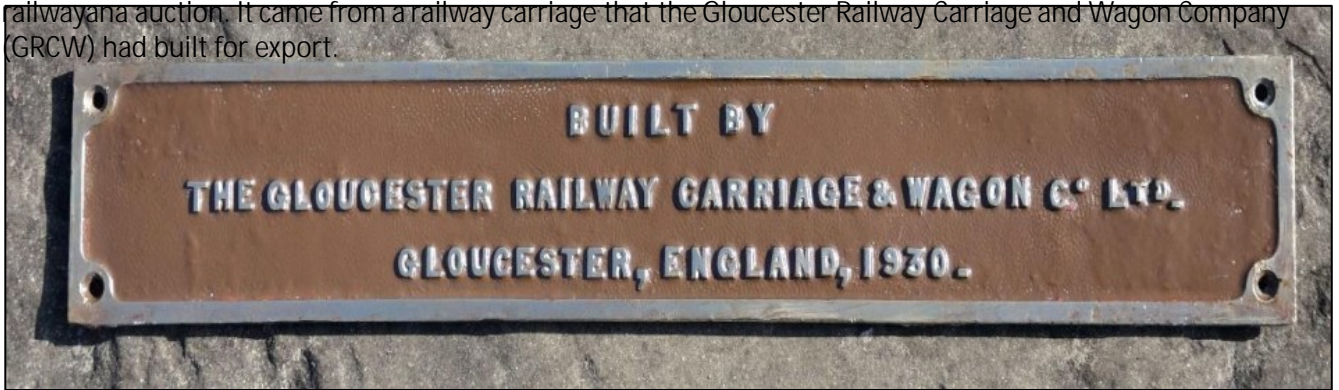


Gloucester Railway Carriage and Wagon Company Works Plate

Mike Smith January 2024

In February 2020 I bought a brass Gloucester Railway Carriage and Wagon Company's builder's plate from a railwayana auction. It came from a railway carriage that the Gloucester Railway Carriage and Wagon Company (GRCW) had built for export.



The face of the plate has been repainted but the edges still retain brown paint from its final days in service. "R-R M" is lightly stamped into the top boundary edge of the front of the plate, so I thought the carriage had probably been built for Rhodesia Railways. The brown paint on the edge supported this theory because the National Railways of Zimbabwe's carriages were painted brown and cream during my 1994 visit when I travelled across the Victoria Falls Bridge in a Gloucester-built carriage hauled by a British built steam locomotive.

Rhodesia Railways placed numerous orders for railway carriages with the GRCW in the late 1920s and early 1930s. My plate is dated 1930 and I learnt from a search through the order books of the GRCW at Gloucestershire Archives that the company supplied six batches of railway carriages to Rhodesia Railways in 1930, 28 first class saloon carriages and 28 native carriages.

The back of my builder's plate is stamped 89218 and GRCW photograph number 4812 features Rhodesia Railways carriage number 89216, the first one built under order number 6170, so my plate is from the third carriage of that batch.

Order number 6170 was the last of the six orders for railway carriages Rhodesia Railways placed with the GRCW in 1930 and was for twelve native carriages. Four were delivered on 20th December 1930, four more on 19th January 1931, and the remaining four on 2nd February 1931, so my plate is probably from one of the four shipped on 20th December 1930.

The black and white photographs are all copies of GRCW photograph number 4812 and are reproduced courtesy of Gloucestershire Archives. The Archive's reference for this particular album of photographs is D4791/16/87. The GRCW used one number for all photographs of the item being photographed. In this case, photograph number 4812 actually consists of four separate photographs.

Fortunately, the GRCW's photographer usually placed information boards in front of the subject being photographed. From those boards, we learn that the carriage was designed to carry 100 passengers. The carriages were built to "Cape Gauge", 3 feet 6 inches, much narrower than the standard gauge of 4 feet 8½ inches, so how did they manage to get 100 passengers into it? The interior of the carriage was split into three saloons, separated by lavatories, and the photograph of the interior shows how Rhodesia Railways managed

to squeeze so many people into such a small space. It shows longitudinal bench seats beneath the windows on both sides and a central longitudinal bench designed to take two rows of passengers, providing seating for four rows of passengers in each of the three saloons. With 100 people on board, it would have been very cosy.

The fourth photograph shows one of the four lavatories, all “Asian” or “Squat” toilets. These discharge straight onto the railway track via the white pipes visible under the toilet compartments on the external photographs. Asian toilets are not liked by European travellers!

These carriages were beautifully proportioned, beautifully finished and a credit to the craftsmen of the Gloucester Railway Carriage and Wagon Company who built them, but I suspect their beauty and craftsmanship was lost on the native Rhodesians who travelled in them.

Finally, I would like to thank the staff at Gloucestershire Archives for their invaluable assistance during my visits to the Archives and for permission to use photographs from their collection to illustrate this article.

