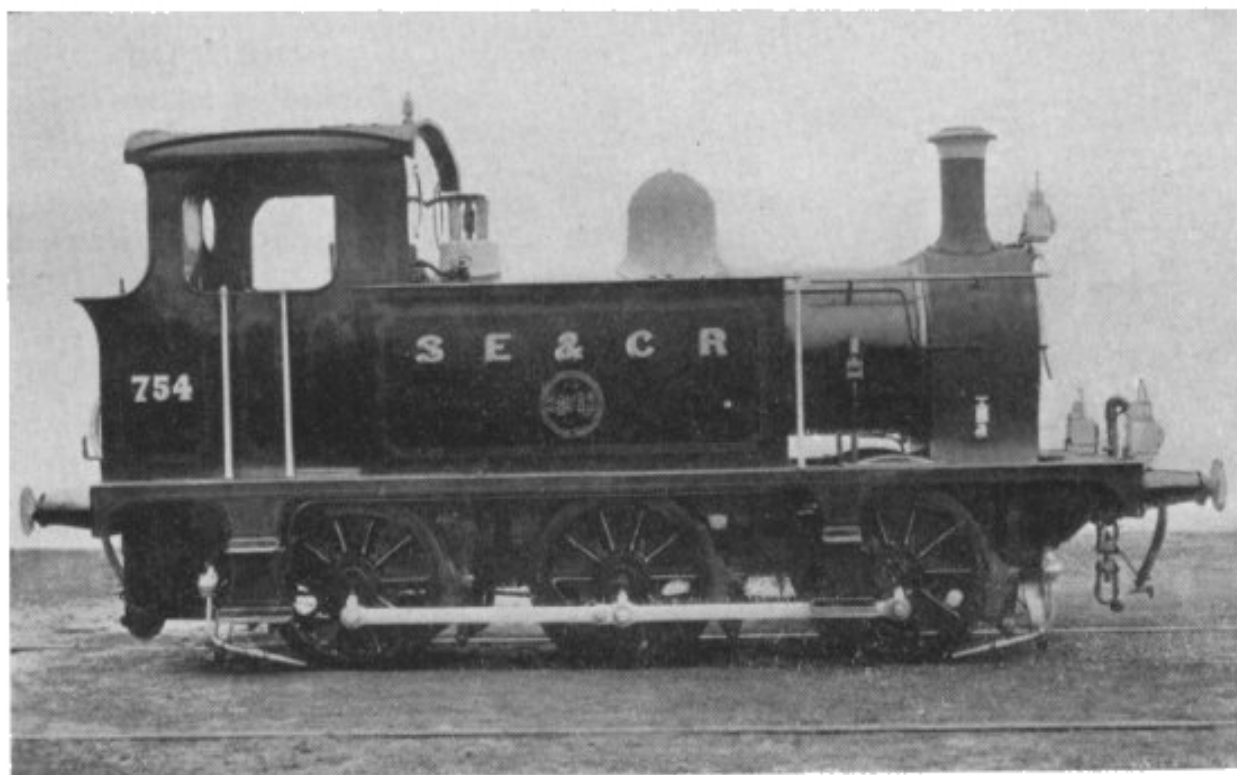


# The "P" Class Tanks of the S.E.C.R.

By D. L. BRADLEY



No. 754 in South Eastern & Chatham Railway livery

**D**URING the early years of the present century, the South Eastern & Chatham Railway purchased eight steam railcars from Kitson & Company for use on the Isle of Sheppey, the Hundred of Hoo, Otford to Sevenoaks, Elmers End to Hayes, the Westerham branch, Appledore to New Romney, Sandling Junction to Sandgate and other services of a light nature. For various reasons, but notably that of inflexibility, they failed to come up to expectations and had to be replaced on most of these duties by pull-and-push trains worked by a series of small six-coupled side-tank locomotives constructed at Ashford Works during the years 1909 and 1910.

These were numbered 27, 178, 323, 325, 555, 558, 753 and 754, and known as the "P" class. They were based to a large extent on the well-known Stroudley "Terriers" of 1872-5, but unfortunately were not to gain the same reputation because, in Harry Wainwright's desire for economy, their dimensions were much too small for the work required

of them. Thus they were found only slightly more successful than the railcars it had been intended that they should supersede.

Their main dimensions were cylinders 12 in. × 18 in., coupled wheels 3 ft. 9 in., boiler diameter 3 ft. 3 in. and length 7 ft. 7½ in., and grate area 9 sq. ft. The working pressure was 160 lb., heating surface 439 sq. ft., tank capacity 550 gal., fuel capacity 18 cwt. and weight in working order 28 tons.

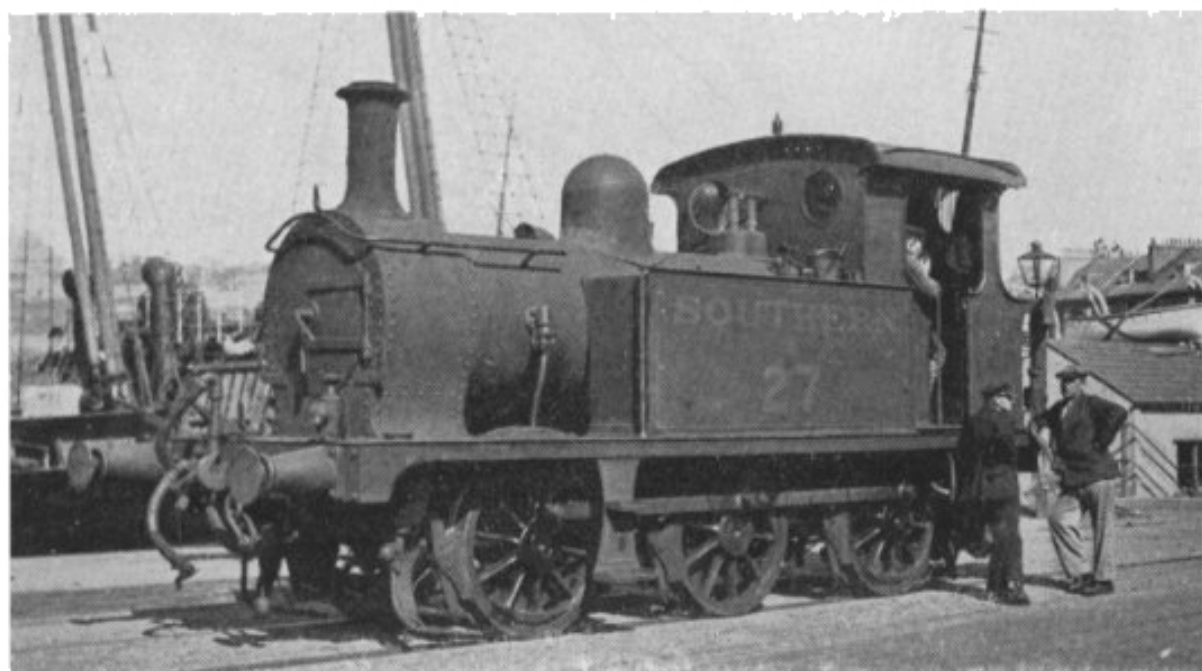
All entered traffic resplendent in the elaborately lined-out Wainwright light green livery used on all classes of S.E.C.R. locomotives, whether intended for goods or passenger duties. Brightly polished brass was used for the dome covers, safety valves and raised bunker-side numerals, and copper for the chimney caps. The standard "pagoda"-type cab of the period was fitted and appeared excessively large on such diminutive machines, especially Nos. 753 and 754, which had their roofs several inches higher than the remainder of the class.

All had the vacuum brake, steam heating apparatus, patent spark arrestors, steam sanding and the Stirling reversing gear, the latter fitting being originally placed inside the cab, but later resited on the leading end of the right-hand side tank in order to give more elbow room and to keep the cabs cooler on a hot summer's day.

When new, Nos. 27 and 753 went to Tonbridge for the Otford to Sevenoaks and the Westerham branch services, No. 323 to Orpington, Nos. 325 and 555 to Battersea for the Nunhead to Greenwich Park services, No. 558 to Margate West

was made in removing the copper-capped chimneys.

No. 558 was at the Channel port of Richborough during the period of hostilities, while from 1917 until the end of 1918 No. 27 worked in France around the quays and supply depots of Calais. After the armistice, when conditions on the S.E.C.R. returned more or less to normal, they were stationed as follows: Nos. 27 and 754 at Folkestone; Nos. 555 and 558 at Margate West; and No. 753 at Ashford. They were used on a variety of light shunting duties, for which they were found very suitable and popular,



Photo]

[J. E. Simpson

**Southern Railway No. A27 on the dockside at Dover about 1930**

and Nos. 178 and 754 to Reading for the Ash-Aldershot trains. In most cases the engine was sandwiched between two coaches, each of which was fitted with a driver's compartment, but sometimes the formation was altered to four coaches (two on either side of the engine) when increased accommodation was required. It was then that the "P" class tanks were found so sadly lacking in power, which undoubtedly was the main cause of their withdrawal from pull-and-push work. They were then used as shed pilots at the larger depots and on shunting duties at Folkestone, Dover and elsewhere. During the first world war their passenger green livery gave way to an unlined and uninspiring grey, which also covered over all the brass work, while a start

partly no doubt because of the ease with which they could be reversed and the excellent look-out obtainable from the large cabs. Of the others, No. 323 was at Tonbridge for the Otford and Sevenoaks pull-and-push trains, while No. 325 was similarly used between Hastings and Rye. No. 178 ran light early each morning to shunt at the large Royal Air Force depot at Kidbrook until 1920, when it was transferred from Bricklayers Arms to Folkestone.

The 1923 grouping of railways saw all eight entering Southern Railway stock to appear once again in a green livery, but this time of a darker hue, and to have their numbers prefixed by a letter "A." By 1926 all their pull-and-push duties had ceased, while the same year

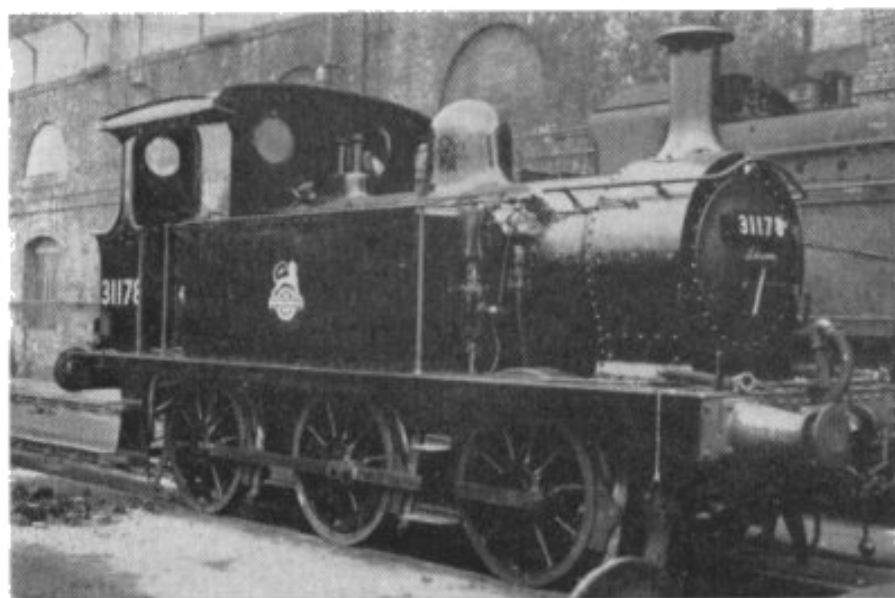
One of the "P" class tanks at Ashford in 1936, painted unlined black



found Nos. 753 and 754 renumbered A556 and A557 respectively in order to make way for the new 4-4-0s of the "L1" class. After 1931, as with other Eastern Section locomotives, 1,000 was added to their numbers and the letter omitted, while from 1936 onwards, because of their use on shunting duties and of a general need for economy, all future repainting was of unlined goods black—a livery, if it can be termed such, they have retained. No. A558, however, somehow managed to possess its early Southern number and green livery until February, 1940, by which time a further change of style had taken place and the numerals appeared on the bunkersides instead of the tank sides.

Generally, the "Ps" have kept to the Eastern Section, but in the summer of 1928 No. A558 was sent to Wadebridge for trials on the Wenford Bridge line,

where it was hoped it would prove to be sufficiently successful to replace the aged Beattie well-tanks. The six coupled wheels took unkindly to the many sharp curves, however, and the long return journey had to be made. During the latter part of 1928, Nos. A555, A556 and A558 were sent to Battersea Park for use on the construction of the Wimbledon & Sutton Railway. On April 17, 1938, No. 1557 was transferred to Brighton for working at the Kingston Wharf, Shorcham, which had been recently strengthened to enable locomotives to supersede horses there. At this date No. 1557 sported a brightly-polished cap to its chimney, as also did No. A558 of Folkestone. The same year saw No. 1556 loaned to the Kent & East Sussex Railway, where it went again in 1947; No. 1325 was working there in the previous year. Another, No. 1323, was



No. 31178 at Ashford Works in 1951. It was sold by British Railways last year

Photo]

[D. L. Bradley

on loan to the Snowdown Colliery, on the Canterbury to Dover line, during September, 1943, shortly before it was sent to Brighton as a spare for the Kingston Wharf engine and to act as coal stage pilot.

Since 1948, Nos. 1325 and 1558 have wandered as far afield as Eastleigh for use at Winchester in place of the withdrawn "B4" dock tanks; the former also reached Bournemouth, but was not set to work there and was returned to Eastleigh when No. 30087 arrived back from repairs. Despite their lack of power and earlier failures all survived to be taken over by British Railways in 1948 when one, No. 1178, received an "S" suffix under a short-lived scheme to

denote Regional ownership, but all later had their Southern numbers increased by 30,000 as they passed through works for repairs. Once again No. 1558 was very slow in getting its new number and it was not until July, 1953, that it was brought into line as 31558.

No. 31555 was withdrawn from service in February, 1955, No. 31557 in September, 1957, and No. 31178 in June, 1958. No. 31178 was sold to Bowater's Lloyd Pulp & Paper Mills Limited, of Sittingbourne, Kent. The present allocation of the surviving five "P" class tanks is Nos. 31325 and 31556 to Brighton, 31027 to Dover, 31323 to Eastleigh and 31558 to Folkestone; all are due for withdrawal this year.