

LEW moves to Brazil

Dave Tooke

One of the most famous "main line" locomotives to be sold into industrial use must be LEW, the Manning Wardle 2-6-2 side tank (maker's number 2042), which was purchased by the Southern Railway for use on the Lynton & Barnstaple line in 1925. Following closure of the Lynton line in September 1935, the other four L&B engines were sold for scrap at the auction in November 1935. LEW, which was Lot 6 at the auction, was by far the newest of the locomotives and survived in order to work demolition trains on the railway.

Ownership of LEW at this time is uncertain: the lifting of the L&B appears to have been undertaken by Sidney Castle, General Manager of Castle's Shipbreaking Co Ltd of Passage Wharf, Cattedown, Plymouth. However, it is thought that Castle was acting as a sub-contractor, probably on behalf of John Cashmore Ltd, of Newport. Newspaper reports at the time stated that Cashmores had purchased four locomotives (including LEW), and that the fifth engine, EXE, was bought by a London firm, Messrs D. Barwick. This adds confusion to the issue, since EXE was scrapped alongside YEO, TAW and LYN, whilst LEW survived. Fifty years later, surviving relatives of the late Mr Barwick were located, but they were unable to add to our knowledge of these events.

Removal of the track was completed in the Summer of 1936, by which time a purchaser for LEW, the surviving engine, had been found. *The Locomotive*, issue dated 15th June 1936, reports thus: "Lynton & Barnstaple Railway. The last of the locomotives of this line, Southern Railway No. 188, LEW, is still at work removing the track. When the dismantling is completed the engine will be



LEW with a demolition train stands in the exchange siding at Barnstaple Town, probably in early 1936. Note the stacks of rails in the background, waiting to be loaded on to standard gauge wagons for re-use elsewhere.
(Lynton & Barnstaple Railway Trust Collection)



*LEW was still in steam in the late summer of 1936, when posed beside the timber-built L&B Barnstaple signal box. Note that the cabin has been marked "sold", having been part of Lot 4 at the auction.
(Brian Hollingsworth collection)*



LEW awaits shipment from Barnstaple Town exchange siding with the "ALC Pernambuco" markings clearly painted on to the front of the side tank. The cowcatchers have been removed and stored on the tank tops. The helter-skelter in the background reveals that this is Barnstaple Fair week. 15th September 1936.

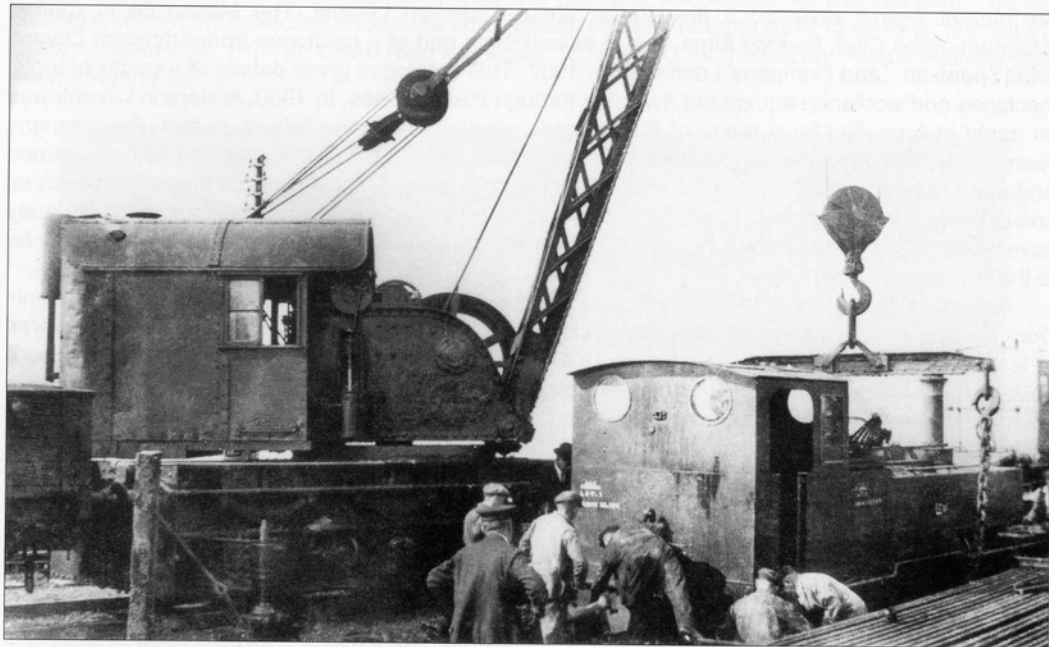
(Colin Pealing collection)

reconditioned and shipped to Brazil, for service on a private narrow gauge line." Leslie Catchpole, author of the Oakwood Press history of the L&B, visited Pilton Yard, Barnstaple, on 30th May 1936. It appears that he learnt of the proposed export of LEW at this time, and when the second edition of

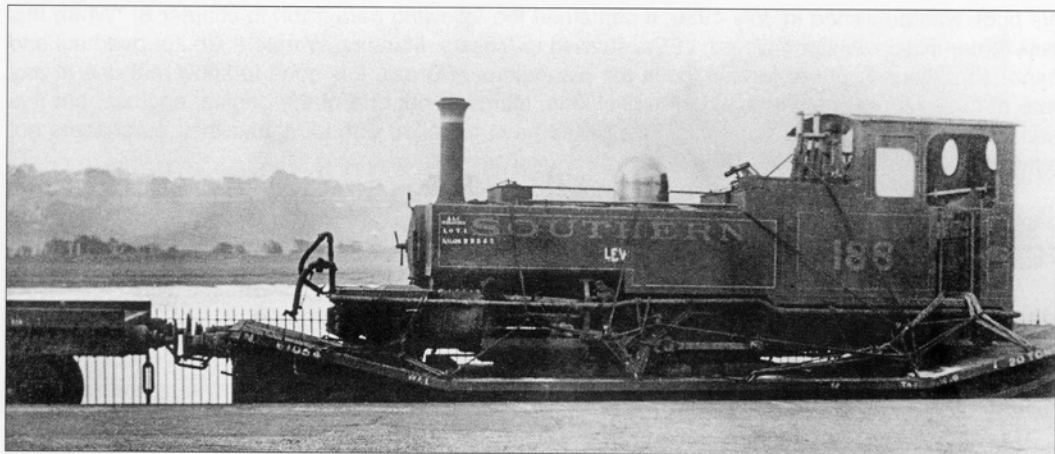
his book was published in July 1936, it contained the following paragraph in chapter 8: "When this task of demolition was completed, LEW returned to Messrs. Manning Wardle & Co. for overhaul and minor alterations to fit her for service in the plantations of Brazil. It is good to know that one at any rate of the locomotives has avoided annihilation, although not one of the original engines, but it is sad to reflect that her stable companions would have travelled with LEW had their purchasers not acted so hastily."

This report, however, was both premature and incorrect. LEW did not leave Barnstaple Town until 16th September 1936 and it could not return to Manning Wardle, because that company had gone into liquidation in 1927, some nine years earlier. So far as is known, LEW went direct from Barnstaple to Kings Dock, Swansea, where it was shipped to Brazil on board the SS SABOR on 28th September 1936. Eighty tons of L&B rail also left for Brazil on the same ship, enough for just over a mile of track.

Sadly, almost nothing is known of the destination of LEW in Brazil. A small number of photographs taken around the time of shipping reveal the following information painted on the sidetanks of LEW: "A.L.C. Pernambuco Lot 1 Kilos 22353". Pernambuco is a state in Brazil, about the size of Portugal. The common assumption is that LEW was shipped to Recife, the main port in the area, and that it was destined for service at a "usina" (sugar mill), of which many in the area had 600mm gauge rail systems. "Lot 1" is assumed to be a shipping mark; certainly it does not relate to the L&B auction on November 1935 because these painted marks first appeared at least six months later. A photograph taken in Pilton Yard in 1936 shows that some wagon under frames also had "ALC Pernambuco" painted on them, so it is presumed that these were also shipped to Brazil. However, there is no evidence that they left Barnstaple at the same time as LEW, and brief reports in the *Western Mail* and the *South Wales Evening Post* at the same time mention only the locomotive and rail being loaded aboard the SABOR. Possibly the wagons made the journey as part of a second shipment.



On 15th September 1936 the Exmouth Junction steam crane starts the operation to lift LEW aboard a well-wagon, ready for shipment to Swansea Docks. It is said that the crane struggled to lift LEW, which weighed 22 tons
(Narrow Gauge Railway Society collection)



LEW is securely lashed down on to a well-wagon, seen at Barnstaple Town Station.

(Colin Pealling collection)

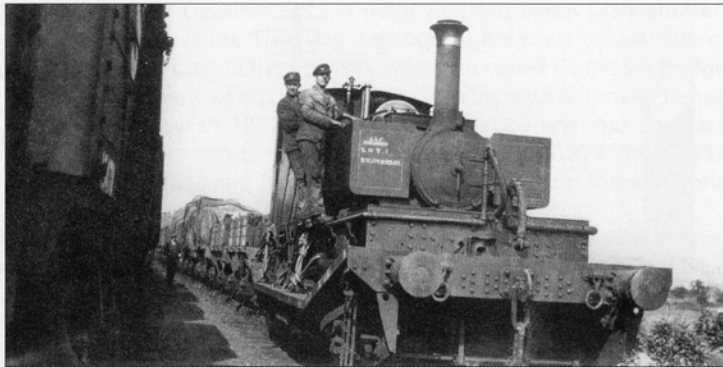
The long standing mystery has been the initials "A.L.C.". Could these hold a clue to the purchasers or the ultimate destination of LEW? Enquiries by several people over a number of years have so far failed to produce a likely identity for A.L.C. It was therefore with some surprise that I came upon a note in RECORD 165 from Bob Darvill recording the export of a Hibberd diesel locomotive to Argentina, to the order of Anderson Levanti. By coincidence, this 20hp locomotive, maker's number 2000, was shipped in September 1936, the very same month that LEW departed for Brazil. An internet search revealed a few details about Anderson Levanti. The Museo de la Ciudad (Museum of the City), Buenos Aires, has in its collection part of a catalogue from Anderson Levanti y Cia (Spanish: "and Company") dating from 1937. This catalogue gives details of a range of tools, machines and workshop equipment available through this business. In 1950, Anderson Levanti was an agent in Argentina for a range of British-made aviation fire extinguishers. In fact, the company seems to be still in existence, but now based in Montevideo, Uruguay. There is a business named Anderson Levanti y Cia SA acting as import and export agents, distributing such diverse products as horseshoes, electrical accessories, security seals and packaging materials. Enquiries to Uruguay have so far failed to generate a response, so it is not known what connection, if any, there may be to the Argentinian company.

Reference to a copy of the F.C. Hibberd works list (John de Havilland and Brian Gent, Dennis Duck Publications, 2008) reveals that Anderson Levanti & Co, 471 Alsina 485, Buenos Aires, ordered at least 19 Hibberd locomotives between 1936 and 1947, all of 600mm gauge. There was also a solitary metre gauge locomotive purchased as late as 1962. The first four of these diesels were shipped in September 1936, two more following in September 1937. Presumably Anderson Levanti & Co acted as agents in the purchase of these engines. Does anyone have any further information about Anderson Levanti & Co, or about the ultimate destination of any of their Hibberd locomotives? For example, is there any evidence that any of them may have been destined for Brazil, rather than Argentina?

Over the years many stories have circulated about LEW, including reports in 1991 that it had been found and was about to be returned to England. Curiously, the rumour at that time was that LEW had been located in Argentina, not Brazil, where it had been working in forestry and timber production. In view of the possible Anderson Levanti connection, is this more than mere coincidence?

On the other hand, D.L. Bradley, in his history of Southern Railway locomotives, wrote that LEW went to a "coffee plantation near Sao Louis. Scrapping was reported in February 1957, although it is

*The last photograph of LEW,
believed to have been taken
in Barnstaple Junction Yard
shortly before departure for
Swansea on 16th
September 1936.
(E.J. Northcombe photograph)*



thought to have lain derelict for several years.” It is not now known what evidence the late Mr Bradley had for these assertions. Will we ever know what really happened to this famous engine? Any information about the fate of LEW, or other suggestions for the identity of A.L.C., would be of great interest.

