# UK’s last cinema carriage is restored for railway anniversary screenings after 37 years



The UK’s last remaining cinema carriage, a unique relic of railway and cinematic heritage, has been meticulously restored and is poised to screen films again after 37 years. Originally opened in 1975 by Princess Margaret, this mobile cinema was part of a travelling exhibition train celebrating 150 years of the modern railway. It showcases a fascinating chapter in British transport history, weaving together the threads of rail travel and film presentation.

After its inauguration, the cinema carriage served an important role in showing British Rail staff training films until 1988. However, following this period, it was relegated to use as a meeting room in a Bristol depot from 1991 onward. Its future seemed bleak when Alan Willmott, the carriage’s final manager, feared it would be scrapped, potentially erasing this unique piece of history. Thankfully, a determined group of volunteers and close friends of Mr Willmott intervened, ensuring its survival. Spearheaded by Steve Foxon, a curator at the British Film Institute and a family friend of Willmott, the carriage was transported to the Swindon & Cricklade Railway in 2019 where an extensive six-year restoration project began.

The restoration work involved repanelling, rewiring, repainting, and raking the floor to recreate the carriage’s original 1980s character. Vintage seats salvaged from a cinema in Deptford, London, were installed alongside a speaker system and a rebuilt 1970s Bell and Howell projector, bringing the carriage dazzlingly back to life. Martin Rouse, the volunteer leader of the project, remarked that while the carriage could have been restored for general passenger use, preserving its cinematic heritage provided a rare and almost unique facility in the UK today. The carriage now seats 25 people and will stage screenings on September 13 and 14, 2025, as part of the Railway 200 celebration, marking two centuries since the world’s first steam-powered passenger railway journey was made by Locomotion No. 1 on the Stockton & Darlington Railway in 1825.

The screenings will feature British Transport films, including "Locomotion," a 15-minute film chronicling rail travel history commissioned for the 150th railway anniversary. While the coaching unit will remain static for these showings, organisers hope to eventually host screenings on the move, reviving the original experience of a travelling cinema. Access to the screenings is free; however, attendees must purchase tickets to board the Swindon & Cricklade Railway itself, a heritage line running just under 2.5 miles and operated by a registered preservation society since 1978.

This revival highlights the broader cultural value of heritage railways in the UK, which preserve not only the trains but also the rich social history tied to the railway age. Sites like the Swindon & Cricklade Railway, the Didcot Railway Centre in Oxfordshire, and others across the country function as living museums. They safeguard artefacts such as the Southern Railway Maunsell carriages — iconic railway vehicles known for their distinctive design and historical significance — thus keeping the legacy of British rail travel alive for new generations.

The restored cinema carriage stands as a rare testament to how transport and entertainment once intersected, offering a tangible link to a nostalgic era when mobile cinema experiences travelled the rails. Enthusiasts and railway historians alike applaud the careful preservation and restoration efforts, which not only honour the memory of Alan Willmott, the carriage’s late custodian, but also celebrate the ongoing cultural heritage of British railways.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.perspectivemedia.com/uks-last-cinema-carriage-restored-to-screen-films-again-after-37-years/), [[2]](https://www.perspectivemedia.com/uks-last-cinema-carriage-restored-to-screen-films-again-after-37-years/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.perspectivemedia.com/uks-last-cinema-carriage-restored-to-screen-films-again-after-37-years/), [[2]](https://www.perspectivemedia.com/uks-last-cinema-carriage-restored-to-screen-films-again-after-37-years/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.perspectivemedia.com/uks-last-cinema-carriage-restored-to-screen-films-again-after-37-years/), [[2]](https://www.perspectivemedia.com/uks-last-cinema-carriage-restored-to-screen-films-again-after-37-years/), [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swindon_and_Cricklade_Railway)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.perspectivemedia.com/uks-last-cinema-carriage-restored-to-screen-films-again-after-37-years/), [[2]](https://www.perspectivemedia.com/uks-last-cinema-carriage-restored-to-screen-films-again-after-37-years/), [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swindon_and_Cricklade_Railway)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.perspectivemedia.com/uks-last-cinema-carriage-restored-to-screen-films-again-after-37-years/), [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swindon_and_Cricklade_Railway), [[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didcot_Railway_Centre), [[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SR_Maunsell_carriage)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.perspectivemedia.com/uks-last-cinema-carriage-restored-to-screen-films-again-after-37-years/), [[2]](https://www.perspectivemedia.com/uks-last-cinema-carriage-restored-to-screen-films-again-after-37-years/), [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swindon_and_Cricklade_Railway), [[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SR_Maunsell_carriage)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.perspectivemedia.com/uks-last-cinema-carriage-restored-to-screen-films-again-after-37-years/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.perspectivemedia.com/uks-last-cinema-carriage-restored-to-screen-films-again-after-37-years/> - The UK's last remaining cinema carriage has been meticulously restored and is set to host its first screening in 37 years. Originally opened in 1975 by Princess Margaret as part of a travelling exhibition train celebrating 150 years of the modern railway, the carriage was later used for British Rail staff training films until 1988. After being repurposed as a meeting room in a Bristol depot in 1991, volunteers, with the support of the late Alan Willmott's family friend, Steve Foxon, relocated it to the Swindon & Cricklade Railway in 2019. Over a six-year period, the restoration included repanelling, rewiring, repainting, and the installation of vintage seats from a cinema in Deptford, London. The restored cinema coach will screen British Transport films on a rebuilt 1970s Bell and Howell projector at the Swindon & Cricklade Railway on September 13 and 14, 2025. Entry is free, but attendees must purchase tickets to the railway. The coach, which seats 25 people, will be static for now, though future plans may include screenings on the move. One of the films to be shown is 'Locomotion,' a 15-minute history of rail travel made for the 150th anniversary, named after Locomotion No. 1, which made the world’s first steam-powered, passenger railway journey on September 27, 1825, at the opening of the Stockton & Darlington Railway.
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Charrette> - La Charrette was a unique 23-seat cinema located in Gorseinon, near Swansea, Wales. Constructed from a disused railway carriage, it began showing films in 1953. The cinema was originally built and operated by Gwyn Phillips, an electrician who had a passion for movies. After his death in 1996, his widow, Rita, continued to run the cinema. La Charrette closed in February 2008 due to structural issues. Following its closure, the carriage was moved to the Gower Heritage Centre, where it was restored to its former glory and reopened as a cinema.
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swindon_and_Cricklade_Railway> - The Swindon and Cricklade Railway is a heritage railway in Wiltshire, England, operating on a section of the old Midland and South Western Junction Railway line between Swindon and Cricklade. Established in 1978, the railway has reopened several stations, including Blunsdon, Haynes Knoll, and South Meadow Lane. The line extends just under 2.5 miles, with plans for future expansion. The Swindon and Cricklade Railway Preservation Society, a registered charity, manages the operation and preservation of the railway.
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didcot_Railway_Centre> - The Didcot Railway Centre is a railway museum and preservation engineering site in Didcot, Oxfordshire, England. Formerly a Great Western Railway engine shed and locomotive stabling point, the site was taken over by the Great Western Society in 1967. The centre houses a collection of historic locomotives and carriages, including the GWR 6000 Class No.6023 King Edward II and GWR 4073 Class No.4079 Pendennis Castle. The Didcot Railway Centre offers visitors the opportunity to explore the history of the Great Western Railway and its engineering achievements.
6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SR_Maunsell_carriage> - The Southern Railway Maunsell carriage was a family of railway carriages designed by Richard Maunsell for the Southern Railway in the United Kingdom. Built between 1925 and 1936, over 1,200 Maunsell carriages were constructed. These carriages were well-represented in preservation, with 33 preserved on heritage railways across the country. The Maunsell carriages were known for their distinctive design and played a significant role in the history of British rail travel.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swindon_Works> - Swindon Works was a railway workshop in Swindon, Wiltshire, England, opened by the Great Western Railway in 1843. It served as the principal maintenance centre for the Great Western Railway until its closure in 1986. The site has since been redeveloped, with one building housing the Museum of the Great Western Railway, dedicated to the works and the GWR. The engineers' office now serves as the headquarters of English Heritage, and most of the remaining buildings have been redeveloped as part of the Designer Outlet Village.