EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

19th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

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Old trains rolled back into service

8 February 2026



Old style 1980s rolling stock that had been taken out of service to much fanfare, including a huge ticket-only retirement party, are still being used to cover shortages across South Western Railways services.

The train operator made a big song and dance about the retirement of its old iconic Class 455 trains, even charging £45 a ticket for its supposed last ever journey – with the money going to charity.

The LDRS understands old rolling stock is still being used to cover shortfall when the new trains are unable to get off the blocks, notably on the Hampton Court to Waterloo route.

In December last year some 9,000 enthusiasts tried to buy tickets for the 400 spaces on the celebrated final service from Waterloo. Demand was so high a second train was put on. The day was supposed to mark the last rides of the Class 455 as they were finally phased out and replaced with modern Class 701 Arterio – the ones with the odd half table ledges.

Thousands gathered to say their goodbyes to the ‘iconic’ SWR trains that have, and continue, to serve Surrey for decades. The ceremony for the ‘red train’ involved a nine-hour round trip from Waterloo across the SWR network.

South Western Railways celebrated with a story titled ‘Train enthusiasts bid farewell to iconic red trains after almost 43 years of service’ – except they are still in service. Among the passengers was social media train fan Francis Bourgeois.

South Western trains said the December ‘farewell’ event was to celebrate the life of the Class 455, first introduced in the 1980s ahead of their removal from timetabled services and that it was always planned to keep some of them back as a contingency.

A spokesperson for SWR said: “The Class 455 fleet of trains was withdrawn from our timetable at the end of 2025. A small number were retained for resilience purposes, to cover any eventuality that may affect the trains we use on our suburban network.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

The 17.54 from Hampton Court to London Waterloo on Thursday January 29 was the old retired train brought back into service (LDRS)

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