



# BLUEBELL RAILWAY



**A.**

## TEACHERS' INFORMATION PACK

Copyright of 'Bluebell Railway plc'  
May only be reproduced by teachers for educational purposes.

Revised January 2015

[www.bluebell-railway.co.uk](http://www.bluebell-railway.co.uk)

# BLUEBELL RAILWAY TEACHERS' INFORMATION PACK

## Contents

1. General Information
2. Facilities for School Visits
3. Safety Guidelines and Risk Assessment
4. History of the Line.
5. The Birth and Development of the Railway
6. Complementary Educational Activities



## 1. General Information

**Projects based on the Bluebell Railway can contribute towards all elements of the National Curriculum.**

- 1/1 The Bluebell Railway is a single track standard gauge preserved railway based at Sheffield Park Station in East Sussex situated between Haywards Heath (7 miles) and Uckfield (8 miles). It runs for some 11 miles between Sheffield Park and East Grinstead with intermediate stations at stations at Horsted Keynes and Kingscote.
- 2/1 The railway's older stations (not East Grinstead), its locomotives and rolling stock, cover a period of railway history from the 1880s to the 1950s and, as such, provides children with a unique insight into a way of life that has largely disappeared from Great Britain today. A way of life that was heavily dependent upon the railway both for personal transport and for the transport of goods.
- 3/1 Visits can be tailored to meet specific educational needs relating to the syllabus or to provide experience of specific events, such as wartime evacuation exercises. For younger children "Santa Special" services are provided during December.
- 4/1 Facilities available include:-
  - Provision for disabled visitors
  - Reserved accommodation on trains
  - Toilets at the larger stations and on the trains
  - Picnic areas and a dry area for eating lunch at the larger stations
  - Refreshment facilities on trains, at Sheffield Park and Horsted Keynes stations
  - Classroom seating up to 25 students
  - Guided visits to booking offices, signal boxes, engine sheds, the footplate of a steam engine and to the new museum.

- Gift shop at Sheffield Park Station
- Free parking at Sheffield Park and Horsted Keynes Stations

For full details of the above see Section 2

5/1 More detailed information about all of these facilities is provided in Section 2, with Safety Guidelines and Risk Assessment in Section 3. The background material in Sections 4 to 6 should be helpful in terms of projects relating to key stages 1 and 2 of the National Curriculum while Section 10 contains a list of complementary activities.

6/1 Teachers responsible for organising visits to the railway are invited to contact the Sales and Information Office at Sheffield Park Station (tel: 01825 720825, Email: [info@bluebellrailway.co.uk](mailto:info@bluebellrailway.co.uk)) to arrange for a free preliminary visit (up to two teachers) during which your needs can be discussed.

## 2. Facilities for School Visits

**The carriages in which school parties travel are normally the “younger” coaches dating from 1933 and beyond because, as corridor vehicles, they provide the most flexible accommodation for larger groups.**

**Arrangements can however be made for trips in some of our older (Victorian) non corridor coaches but this would require a greater number of adults in the party.**

**A leaflet describing a journey along the line in detail is also available.**

### **Disabled facilities**

1/2 A carriage with a hoist for wheelchair bound or mobility impaired visitors is normally available on scheduled trains.

### **Reserved accommodation**

2/2 Seating, in open plan carriages, is reserved for groups starting their journeys from Sheffield Park or East Grinstead and return. In the case of groups breaking their journey at Horsted Keynes or Kingscote and returning to Sheffield Park or East Grinstead we will do our best to provide reserved accommodation on the later train but, unfortunately, we cannot guarantee this.

### **Toilet facilities**

3/2 Toilet facilities are available on board most trains (not disabled) and at all four stations:-

**Sheffield Park** - male and female toilets, together with a disabled toilet, are located in the Bessemer Arms restaurant on platform 1 and on platform 2 near the museum. There is a separate male toilet on platform 1 and a female toilet off the booking hall.

**Horsted Keynes** - male and female toilets are located on platforms 3 & 4, with a further male toilet being located on platform 5 and a female toilet off the booking hall. Unfortunately no toilet for the disabled is available at this station.

**Kingscote** - male and disabled toilets on platform 1, with a female toilet located off the booking hall

**East Grinstead** – male and female (but not disabled) toilets are available on the forecourt.

### **Picnic and covered accommodation**

4/2 Picnic areas are available at all stations (except at East Grinstead):-

**Sheffield Park** - alongside the River Ouse on the right hand side of the approach drive

**Horsted Keynes** - at the front of the station

**Kingscote** – adjacent to platform 2.

5/2 In wet weather covered areas are available beneath platform canopies and in the Waiting Rooms at both Horsted Keynes and Kingscote.

### **Refreshment Facilities**

6/2 Full refreshments facilities, including meals, are available in the Bessemer Arms Restaurant at Sheffield Park Station and there is a Café at East Grinstead. Catering facilities are also available at both Horsted Keynes and Kingscote Stations at peak times. On board the train a buffet car is normally available, serving light refreshments, including hot drinks.

### **Study Facilities**

7/2 The Railway does not, currently, have full scale teaching facilities available but a small classroom is available at Sheffield Park Station, seating up to 25. It may also be possible to make use of our larger Conference Room at Sheffield Park, which seats up to 75 people.

### **Shop**

8/2 The shop at Sheffield Park Station carries a large stock of inexpensively priced souvenir items and is open from 10 30am to close of service. Souvenir packs comprising a postcard, a pencil and a badge cost £1 and can be made ready for parties in advance of your visit. Please telephone the Shop on 01825 720803 to place your order.

### **Parking**

9/2 Coach and car parking facilities are available at Sheffield Park and Horsted Keynes Stations.

### **Guides**

10/2 Every effort will be made to allocate a guide to your party but as these are volunteers this cannot be guaranteed. All guides are members of the Bluebell Railway Preservation Society and will be happy to show their accreditation on request.

11/2 Where Guides are available they will be happy to show parties around the stations and to facilitate visits to the footplates of the engines (subject to operational constraints). The Museum has a steward who can provide guidance to visiting

school parties.

Where no Guide or Museum Steward is available school parties will be able to access the Locomotive Shed and Museum at Sheffield Park Station independently.

### **Confirmation of Available Facilities**

12/2 Confirmation of the facilities available will be made when bookings are confirmed. Any changes will be notified in advance of the visit.

### 3. Safety Guidelines and Risk Assessment

**Whilst schools will wish to conduct their own risk assessments the Bluebell Railway is happy to provide advice and guidance as appropriate.**

1/3 The Railway is committed to ensuring the safety of our visitors so that visits go smoothly and are an enjoyable and memorable experience. It is therefore necessary to set down some basic safety guidelines.

- Children should be supervised at all times, one adult to ten or fewer children
- As platforms can become slippery in wet weather sensible shoes and appropriate wet weather clothing should be worn
- Everybody should stand well back from the platform edge when a train is entering or leaving the station.
- At Sheffield Park Station the footbridge should be used to change platforms whilst at both Horsted Keynes and Kingscote the subway should be used for this purpose. At all three stations however arrangements can be made for those unable to climb the stairs to cross the line – such arrangements must however be agreed with Bluebell staff first.
- Nobody should trespass on the railway line; any items falling onto the track should be reported to a member of railway staff.
- Doors must not be opened until the train has come to a complete stop
- Leaning out of windows or carriage doors should be discouraged





## 4. History of the Line

**This section sets out the historical background to the construction and operation of the Railway. A project based around life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century will help pupils to appreciate why railways were built and their role in society.**

- 1/4 In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century roads in Sussex were so poor that it was very difficult for farmers to send produce to market in London and a group of local landowners, led by Lord Sheffield, decided that the solution was to build a standard gauge (4 foot 8 ½ inch) railway between Lewes and East Grinstead from where a connection could be made with other rail routes into London.
- 2/4 The Lewes and East Grinstead Railway Company was formed and Parliamentary powers secured to build the line. Money was however short and the nearby London Brighton and South Coast Railway Company was soon asked to take over the building of the line which was opened in 1882, with intermediate stations at West Hoathly, Horsted Keynes, Sheffield Park, and Newick & Chailey. Additional stations were later opened at Kingscote and Barcombe and, in 1883 a branch line was built between Horsted Keynes and Haywards Heath, with an intermediate station at Ardingly.
- 3/4 Soon after the First World War traffic on the line began to decline as lorries took away much of the goods traffic and the bus and car drained away passenger traffic. It didn't help that the stations themselves, reflecting the fact that the line had been constructed to meet the needs of goods traffic rather than those of passengers, were generally situated some distance from the villages that they were supposed to serve.
- 4/4 In 1955 British Railways (BR) was given permission to close the line between East Grinstead and Lewes and did so on 28 May that year. However, a local resident then discovered that the closure had been illegal because the original Act of Parliament, requiring the Lewes and East Grinstead Railway and its successors to run four trains a day, had not been repealed. BR was forced to reopen the line on 7 August 1956, operating what was known as the "sulky service" whereby trains ran only between the hours of 9am and 4pm and stopped only at the four intermediate stations specified in the original Act - West Hoathly, Horsted Keynes, Sheffield Park and Newick & Chailey.
- 5/4 BR finally secured Parliamentary agreement to close the line permanently with effect

from Monday 17 March 1958. The branch from Horsted Keynes to Haywards Heath remained open however, but was itself closed on 27 October 1963.

- 6/4 After closure BR lifted the tracks along the length of the line between East Grinstead and Lewes, - except those between Horsted Keynes and Sheffield Park - this became the Bluebell line - and between Horsted Keynes and Ardingly. The section between Ardingly and Haywards Heath was retained for goods traffic and is still open today.
- 6/5 The trackbed was sold off to local landowners while the bridge to the south of Sheffield Park Station was demolished, as was a viaduct to the west of Horsted Keynes on the branch line to Ardingly and Haywards Heath. Also, Imberhorne Cutting, to the north of Kingscote was used as a tip for domestic rubbish, blocking the Bluebell's route back to East Grinstead for many years.

## 5. The Birth and Development of the Bluebell Railway

**This section describes the steps taken to preserve the Railway.  
A project based on co-operation and voluntary work will help pupils to appreciate how people can work together to secure a common aim, without having to rely upon local authorities or the State for funding.**

### First Steps

- 1/5 Following closure of the line a group of enthusiasts formed the Lewes and East Grinstead Railway Preservation Society (later the Bluebell Railway Preservation Society) and tried to take over the whole line as a commercial venture. If they had succeeded this would have been the first such venture for a passenger carrying standard gauge line.
- 2/5 In those days however the idea of a group of volunteers trying to run a railway was ridiculed and their first approaches were rejected. The Group persevered however and was eventually granted a lease of the section of track between Sheffield Park Station and a point just south of Horsted Keynes Station and began running services on 7th August 1960 – becoming the forerunner of the many preserved lines in operation today.
- 3/5 It was not until 1961 that the Railway was allowed into Horsted Keynes Station and this was shared with British Railways until the service to Haywards Heath closed in 1963. BR then withdrew and the Bluebell was left in sole occupation.
- 4/5 In order to operate the service the Bluebell had to buy from British Railways locomotives and carriages and succeeded in buying a number of historic steam engines and rolling stock which would otherwise have been cut up and destroyed. Over the years other stock has been obtained, enabling the Railway to operate the present level of service.

### Development

- 5/5 There were many difficulties in the early years and doubts about whether the Railway would survive. It did so, and such was its success that proposals were put forward to extend the line. While extension south was prevented by the demolition of the bridge over the A275 to the south of Sheffield Park Station and by houses built on the trackbed at Newick, the Railway could extend north to Kingscote, if the trackbed could be bought back from the local landowners.
- 6/5 The necessary funds were raised by way of a share issue in 1986 and, following tortuous negotiations with landowners, the Railway was able to reach Kingscote in 1996. En route the line passed through Sharpthorne Tunnel, the longest on a preserved railway and the site of West Hoathly Station - the local residents there did not want their station re-opened.

7/5 In its final years of operation by British Rail passengers were few and far between, today the Railway carries over 180,00 passengers a year and additional facilities are planned.



## 6. Complementary Educational Activities

**The material included in this Guide can be utilised as part of projects designed to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum.**  
**The complementary activities set out below can contribute to a greater understanding of the role of the railway in the life of the UK.**

1/6 As well as trips along the line the Bluebell is able to offer a range of complementary activities for school parties, including:-

For all age groups

- guided tours of the stations
- guided tours of the locomotive shed
- a visit to the signal box
- guided tours of the museum

The Railway's new museum is nationally accredited and charts the history of the railways from their earliest days and the Bluebell's part in the heritage railway movement.

Inside the museum you will find a replica Victorian ticket office complete with ticket racks, oil lamps, old telephones and a manual typewriter. Graphic displays tell the story of the construction of this railway line in 1882 through to its closure in the 1950s and reopening by the Bluebell Railway Preservation Society.

In the main gallery, the story of transport and industry in Sussex, from Roman times to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is related on a graphic display table. There are more wall panels, photographs and artefacts related to the development of railways nationally, the engineers and workers who built them, railway catering, ferry services and signalling. Further panels tell of the lives of the Victorian workers who built and operated the railways. Many of their tools are on display.

The work of the railways in wartime is described in display panels. The evacuation of children from cities and the evacuation of soldiers after Dunkirk are among the topics covered. There are also railway posters from the WWII period on display.

The museum also has a restored Victorian signal box that can be visited by small, supervised groups.

- visits to the footplate of locomotives

- wartime evacuation exercises (based at Horsted Keynes)

The Bluebell does operate a WWII Evacuation exercise for schools, this is based at Horsted Keynes Station and we are in the process of effecting improvements to the format to meet the needs and expectations of schools – many of which do play a full part, with the children dressed in appropriate dress, with gas masks, wearing name labels and carrying identity cards.

The usual pattern is for the schools to arrive at Sheffield Park Station around 10.15 am, where they are met by Bluebell guides who proceed to show them around the station – the locomotive shed, the signal box and the Museum, before boarding the 11 am departure for Kingscote.

We have made moves during the past year to improve our input into the exercise by including the use of actors from local theatre groups to interact with the children. This has proved to be so successful that we will continue with this format.

In essence the actors, dressed in suitable WWII outfits, will shepherd the children on to the train where their ID papers are checked and those without the requisite or faulty documentation are questioned. Prior to reaching Horsted Keynes they are then warned that an air raid is anticipated. At some point after they have alighted at Horsted Keynes the alarm, on a genuine WWII air raid siren, will sound while they move into the subway for shelter. After a suitable period the all-clear is sounded, following which the actors then take part in a billeting exercise, with the children allocated to host families. After writing, and posting, their postcards and being shown around the station (Carriage Works, Signal Box etc.) they are ready to board their transport back to school, usually around 2pm.

- studies of particular aspects of railway operation

For the younger children

- colouring sheets
- quizzes relating to individual stations
- Santa for schools days

2/6 Further information on all of the above activities can be obtained from the Sales and Information Office of the Railway:-

Tel: 01825 720800

Email: [info@bluebellrailway.co.uk](mailto:info@bluebellrailway.co.uk)