Ardingly Goods Shed finds new home at Kingscote

In November 2017 it came to our attention, via a chain of contacts, that the former Ardingly Station goods shed still existed and the owners were keen for it to be given to the Bluebell! Clearly the shed was not at the Ardingly station site, otherwise it would have been more widely known about. Intrigued we decided to follow up the lead and make contact with the owners, Lois Willett and her sister Joanne. The building was immediately recognisable as a LB&SCR shed, of the same size and appearance as the one erected at Kingscote after the Railway opened in 1882.

Original shed at Ardingly Station

Ardingly Goods Shed History

According to Klaus Marx's book 'The Lewes & East Grinstead Railway', authorisation for the construction of the shed, or Goods Lock-up as it was officially known, was listed in the LB&SCR's engineer's minutes for 12 April 1890. Unusually, compared with the other similar Goods Lock-ups between Kingscote and Newick & Chailey, this one appears to have been built onto the goods dock, dispensing with the need for brick supporting pillars. This might also explain the lack of a wooden floor.

Original shed near the Gardeners Arms, Ardingly

After construction the shed seems to have had led an uneventful existence, as nothing is known about the time between 1890 and its occupation by F. G. Tester & Son, Coal Merchants. Robin Tester, son of Frank, was the father of the shed's donors, Lois and Joanne. He and his father trading as F. G. Tester & Son served both Ardingly and the surrounding villages for many decades before Robin's retirement from the coal business.
They had a lease on part of the Ardingly goods yard as a coal stacking area from at least 1942, according to documentary evidence.

By 1962 line closure was looming and plans were afoot to create an aggregates terminal in the Goods Yard. The change in layout required removal of the shed, but a letter from BR dated 17 May 1962, states that Mr Tester has been given permission to move it from the dock into the coal stacking area. The shed remained there until around 1968 when it moved again to his yard at Little London opposite the Ardingly Showground.

Restoration

In April 2018 a visit was made to the shed to look more closely at what needed to be done to prepare it for lifting and transport. A plan was prepared and finally in July 2019 the owners confirmed it could be moved. In early August, the garden shed standing on the proposed location was dismantled and a new concrete base prepared. In late September Friends of Kingscote prepared the shed for its move

Shed ready for renovation at Kingscote

On 22 October, ProMech, the company contracted to perform the lift, started by reinforcing the building with specialist bracing equipment, before lifting it with a HIAB crane on to the lorry. On arrival at Kingscote it was lowered on to the concrete slab.

The first consideration was to retain as much of the original timber frame and cladding as possible. Three cladding planks were removed all round the shed and this revealed that the bottom rails and many of the ends of the verticals where they joined the bottom rails were beyond repair. Timber rails of the correct dimensions, left over from the re-roofing of the ex Horsted Keynes Goods Shed in 2014 fitted very well and saved expense.

Lois Willett with the partially restored shed in March 2020

It proved impossible to save many of the cladding planks which were very rotten where they had been exposed to the weather, particularly at the ends. A dilemma was the presence of differently sized cladding, where repairs had been made in the past. Whether this took place in BR times or earlier was unknown. Lack of evidence one way or the other and replacement costs dictated retention of the two styles and replacement where necessary with larger planking.

With the exterior completed and the roof flashings installed the interior was insulated and boarded over. It has been a very interesting project and when completely finished the station will have gained an excellent authentic building with a history dating back to 1890.

Richard Hill
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