

# The Bluebell Times

A Newsletter for Bluebell Railway Members, Staff and Supporters

May 2025

Fenchurch with vintage carriages – 24 April. Photo: David Cable

Most rail enthusiasts will know of the narrow tunnels on the old SER line to Hastings. Whether it was a contractor who had misquoted and was trying to cut corners to maintain a profit margin, or lax supervision by the client, the resultant tunnels had insufficient strength as built, and had to be lined with additional layers of bricks, narrowing their width.

Ever after – at least until they were singled by British Rail in the 1970s and 1980s – those tunnels presented challenges to railway companies in building suitably slim rolling stock. Such carriages were labelled by the Southern Railway "Restriction o", and one such carriage is the latest gem to emerge from the Carriage and Wagon works at Horsted Keynes. It is due to enter traffic on 31 May and then run at weekends through June, coupled to our other Maunsell carriages. It will be a treat worth savouring.

Now, time to get behind the restoration of "Stowe", which was of a class also built to deal with the narrow Hastings tunnels!

Tom James, Editor

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#### Watts Occurring

By Roy Watts, BRPS Chairman

Welcome to May! Almost halfway through the year already – where does time go?

The Railway has had quite a strong start this year with many weekends exceeding trading expectations.

However, it is very clear that people are being very cautious with their spending or changing their habits.

Long gone are the days of running 14 trains on a summer Sunday, the last leaving the Park at 6.15pm.

So yes, it's very easy to criticise the fact that certain trains do not achieve respectable loadings but please, sometimes you need to look at the wider picture such as you don't know that fact until you actually run them to begin with!

Hence one of the reasons a close look is being taken on the timetable and the trains we run because clearly there is a swing from afternoons to early morning now and some of our evening services are in desperate need an overhaul.

There are times it has proved difficult to get the balance correct but that is the nature of the business we are in and although I will sound like a cracked record (remember them?), it's the importance of giving our visitors a great experience which they in turn will see as value for money. Like it or not Dinosaurs and Stormtroopers do work and I am sure we can ask Sonic the Hedgehog to return so you can have your picture taken!

Without sounding too morbid, we know for certain that the two certainties in life are death and taxation. Certainly, the latter has or is having an impact on everything that we do right across the board, so its' no wonder that people and families are accounting for their budgets and prioritising what they can or cannot afford. (I can wait to receive my new road fund tax renewal for the car but at least the buses are exempt!)

Living in such difficult times does make it tough to get an accurate service pattern achievable. BUT at the same time, we must remain totally cost-conscious. There is little wriggle room between income and overheads. For a business reliant on a few revenue streams, i.e. fare revenue, catering etc. balancing the books and ensuring we are and remain a going concern now and in the future is paramount. To repeat, the current trade is very respectable but as always, you need more to balance the books and create a healthy reserve.

As for the former part, we seem to be in a period where we are losing many stalwarts of the railway, many with irreplaceable skill sets and this is where every single one of us in our roles as "Ambassadors" for the Railway can play our part.

The current society membership stands at 9431 which looks a very healthy figures on paper but bearing in mind we are spread far and wide – you cannot expect a member to come over on an awayday from Canada! – so just as with the finance, we need to "top up" the labour bank as well.

We must not forget the contribution our late members have made to the success of the Bluebell Railway and we owe them the respect and gratitude they deserve.

There is a lot to consider currently in this everchanging world and sometimes there is a need to look at the wider picture and get a balanced perspective. However, just to round this conversation off, we all can appreciate the current ways of working but do not think Bluebell is unique, to quote "we are not alone" by any stretch of the imagination

It's good to see that we have currently a couple of roving ambassadors with *Fenchurch* visiting the West Somerset Railway and 4VEP 3417 participating in the Swanage Diesel Gala. I am pleased we are able to support such events as they not only foster good relationships within the Heritage Railway movement but they are

promoting us as well in their own way. More often than not, it can lead to a reciprocal arrangement saving money for both parties but the loaning of locomotives is becoming difficult particularly when you need to balance a loan with your own operational requirements.

Even then, the number of steam locomotives available for hire or loan is not that great at the moment and to give notice it might not be possible to run some of our galas in the future. That is simply down to that dear old toxic mix of manpower and resources. How much does it cost to restore a steam locomotive these days?

I always feel that I write about things with a negative approach but it's all about being honest and upfront, sharing the problem and hopefully adding some perspective to the issues we face. It's quite incredible the number of people who say "I hear that ...." and come out with some complete waffle which when you challenge back and ask who told you that, guaranteed 99.9% of the time it's a "I cannot remember" or "it was in the lobby and I don't know who.." so if it's a case of playing "bait the Chairman" it won't work!

But let's be positive, we are continuing the trend of releasing excellent stock back into traffic with Maunsell 3687 being released at the end of the month, RAIL200 events not that far off now and with 2 galas – the Diesel and the Giants events – latter this year, we should and must remain both positive and optimistic. I have not given my 57 years (yes, I know there are some Members with longer service) to see it evaporate or go to waste.

It's about working together as a team, applying sensible solutions to sensible problems and not leaving it to someone else to pick up the pieces. The successful team is the one that plans to succeed not fails to plan.

Talking of teams, have I made mention that Crystal Palace Football Club is in the FA Cup Final this year? Advance notice ... I will NOT be available on the 17 May!

My best wishes and thank you to you all. I enjoy our conversations and the opportunity to discuss Stay safe.



# 'Hastings' Brake to Enter Traffic: a Tribute to David Wigley

By Keith Leppard, Southern Railway Coach Group

After several false dawns, our Maunsell 'Hastings' Brake 3rd No 3687 is finally ready for traffic. It is scheduled to be launched into public service on May 31st. The restoration of this coach began way back in 1993 and proceeded for many years in the open air before the project finally gained a space in the carriage works in 2019. At that point, many of the major tasks seemed already to have been done. The body frame had been repaired where necessary and all the steel panelling had been replaced and given a protective coat of paint. Inside, all of the partitioning had been recreated and the panelling and mouldings made. Underneath, the underframe had been cleaned and painted.

Nevertheless, it's taken us 6 more years to get the project finished. Two of those years were completely lost, one to COVID lockdowns and another when the coach was sidelined in storage waiting for time to be available on the jacks to do work underneath. But there was also a lot actually left to do too, hence why it is only now that we are celebrating finishing the job. In that time, the roof has been canvassed, vents & rainstrips added and then painted with several coats of paint. The exterior panelling has been brought up to a final finish in Maunsell's mid-bronze green with about 10 coats of paint and varnish, plus of course the ornate lining and lettering that goes with it. Inside, the ceilings have been put up, all the varnishing



**Above:** 3687's first revenue earning activity turned out to be for some static filming at Horsted Keynes. It is seen here positioned in Platform 4/5 for that work on 7 May 2025.

finished and the seats trimmed in Green Jazz moquette. The lavatory compartment has been fitted out and plumbed in and the guard / luggage area cleaned and painted.

Then there's what goes on beneath the solebar. The bogies have been fully overhauled, with renewal of all the bushes in the brake system and suspension. Latterly, when we tried to set the coach up on its bogies with all this done, we found we needed to modify the suspension to accommodate the type of coil springs now fitted. The vacuum brake system also had to be demodified from the form that had been installed earlier. The electrical system has been completely renewed, the steam heaters installed and piping upgraded. Lastly the gangways and buffing gear have been overhauled / re-installed. The end result is a product of the work of very many volunteers, including over the past few years the SR Coach Group team, plus a lot of effort from the paid staff in recent months.

The foundations of this project were laid by David Wigley, who led a small team that did all the hard graft on 3687 outdoors for more than 20 years. So it is a particular sadness that David passed away at the end of April, just a couple of weeks before we hoped finally to be able to give him a ride in the coach he had devoted so much time to restoring. David was a stalwart of the Carriage and Wagon Department for over 50 years. He had an encyclopaedic knowledge of SR coaches that proved invaluable to many projects beyond the ones he himself worked on. When he joined the railway in 1971, he brought with him Maunsell Brake Composite 6686, a coach that has been part of our running fleet for many years, also the GWR Toad Brake Van and the now departed USA Tank. He also gave impetus to the idea that led to three other SR coaches being bought for the railway, Bulleids 2515 & 1482 and Maunsell 5644. Even after he handed over the reins on the Hastings Brake project, he remained actively engaged on sorting out the final details of its interior until late last year. Now that 3687 is completed, it will be a lasting reminder of David's dedication to our railway over so many years.



**Above:** Interior of 3687's compartment A – the one adjacent to the lavatory compartment. Unlike the composite brakes, whose compartments are lettered from the brake end so the first class get the earlier letters, the third-class vehicles are lettered from the other end; just one of the little details that David Wigley knew about SR coaches.

Photo taken 7 May 2025



#### Q Class 541 Overhaul Update

By Chris Hunford and Steve Pilcher, Maunsell Locomotive Society

April has seen a significant step forward in the overhaul of Q class 541 with the delivery of the new tender tank to Sheffield Park on the 9 April. After being temporarily placed on the ground within the Loco Works, the new tank is now sitting on the chassis to enable the holes for the holding down bolts to be drilled. Once complete and after a bit of 'fettling', the new tank will be permanently bolted to the chassis. Our thanks and appreciation must go to our friends at the 4253 Locomotive Group who have done a first-class job fabricating the new tank.

The Maunsell Locomotive Society working party have continued cleaning and painting various parts of 541's cladding as well as cleaning up the loco springs ready for testing. These are all vital 'behind the scenes' tasks which contribute to the overhaul.

Meanwhile in the south west of England at Leaky Finders, work is continuing on the loco's boiler and chassis. The machining of over 300 new monel stays for the boiler is almost complete while work to fit the new patch screws to the new outer wrapper boiler plate is finished.

Alongside the boiler work, three areas of the chassis have progressed. The removal, reaming, countersinking, supply and fitting of new fitted bolts for the lefthand and righthand side cylinder blocks has been completed, while on the main loco frames, the reattachment of the leading and driving horns with new fitted bolts and nuts is complete.

This completion of both tasks marks another significant milestone.

**Top:** New tender tank placed on the tender chassis for drilling and fitting of new holding down bolts. Photo Melvyn Frohnsdorff

**Bottom:** Completed patch screws on the new outer wrapper. Photo courtesy Leaky Finders







**Left:** Completed copper and monel stays plus tapping the remaining holes on the new outer wrapper. Photo courtesy of Leaky Finders.

**Below:** Reaming of the main frame holes ready for attaching the horns with new fitted bolts. Photo courtesy of Leaky Finders.



### Platform Work at Horsted Keynes

By Bruce Healey, infrastructure volunteer

Work is reaching completion on Horsted Keynes Platforms 1 and 2. In the last month or so, work has concentrated on the platform edge slabs, drainage and the tarmac surface on platform 2 and on the north end of both platforms.

Sorting out the overflowing gutters on Platform 2 led to the discovery of leaks in the underground drainage pipes which was causing dampness in the cellars and required replacement of the rainwater drainage system.

The former model railway room is having a disabled toilet and a unisex toilet fitted. These toilets will be invaluable for special events to save people having to go to another platform.

Some of the stone slabs were loose, others had delaminated and required replacing, and there was the remains of an old tarmac surface to be removed. Spare slabs recovered from platform 1 provided the replacements.

Before replacing the slabs, it was necessary to repair the wall of platform 1. This was in far better condition than platform 1 but there were quite a few loose bricks, and also slight subsidence where the culvert runs under the platform – but this was nothing like as pronounced as the platform 1 side. The slabs were replaced ensuring that there is a slight backward slope from the platform edge.

At the north end of both platforms, the grass has been removed (it was unpopular with women with high heels) and a flower bed created. The water crane was removed, the stonework around it was replaced making it level with the rest of the platform and at the correct height. The crane was then replaced.

With the platform surface work approaching completion, the tarmac surface could be applied.

Preparations to lay the track into platform 1 are well advanced. With the old track long removed, the trackbed has been scraped and levelled, a drain which connects to the culvert put in, terram fibreglass matting laid and ballast spread. The line of the track has been altered to take account of the new profile of platform 1. This has required removing the foot crossing into the field at the north west end of the station.

At the time of writing this, reinstating the foot crossing and compacting the ballast are the only jobs remaining before the track can be relaid.







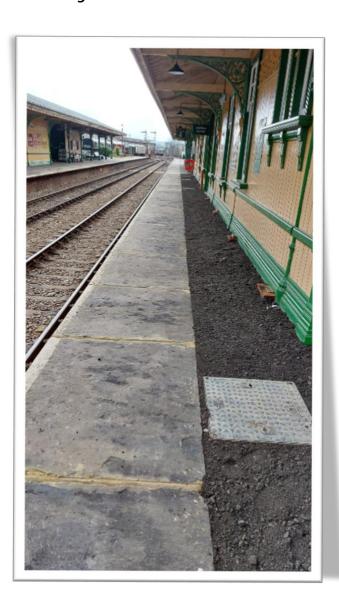


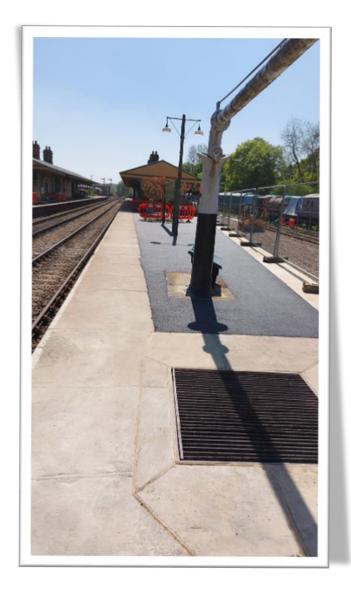
Above left: Martin Whitting and Nigel Chard removing old tarmac from the edge slabs (Jon Goff)

**Above right:** The corbelling on platform 2 has been repaired (Tony Astor)

Below left: The platform has a temporary surface prior to tarmacking (Bruce Healey).

**Below right:** The tarmac has been laid round the new base of the water crane (Bruce Healey)

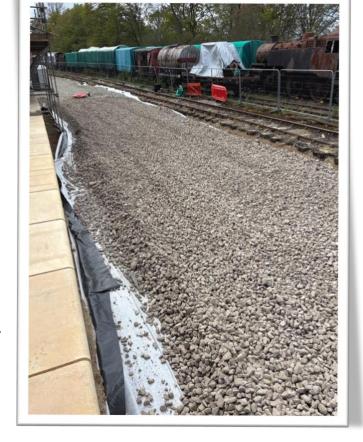






**Above:** A new beam has been spliced into the canopy structure replacing one which had severely rotted. (Tony Astor)

**Right:** The trackbed for Platform 1 under preparation (Tony Astor)



### Long Service Awards

By Gavin Bennett, BRPS General Secretary

Rather late in the day, if there are any volunteers who have achieved, 10, 25, 40, 50, 60 or even 65 years service, and would like a certificate of recognition, please let me know by 31st May. Those who have done 25, 40 or 50 years service can also have a badge, if they wish. This gives me time to print the certificates and time for the Chairman to sign them all.

You should state your Department (s) for this list of names which will be published after the AGM. I'm afraid we've stopped doing the mini biographies as they were getting longer and longer with some people not understanding the meaning of the word "Short"!

#### Fenchurch - Home and Away



Left: In early May, Fenchurch travelled to the West Somerset Railway for their Spring Steam Spectacular, and if online comment is representative, stole the show. The locomotive is seen here passing Combe Florey with the 2.10pm from Bishops Lydeard on 2 May 2025.

Photo: Nick Gilliam

Right: A couple of weeks earlier, the loco is seen in more familiar territory on a Jon Bowers photo charter, 24 April.

Photo: David Cable.



#### Carriage Shop Donates £1000

By Chris Wilson, Carriage Shop volunteer

The Carriage Shop team are pleased to be able to provide £1,000 to support Bluebell Railway projects.

We have donated £500 to the 1305 Oxted Thumper Gang to support the restoration of Oxted DEMU 1305 'Brighton Royal Pavilion'.

Also, £500 to the Friends of Horsted Keynes station to help fund the restoration work at the station. These amount has primarily been raised from sales in the Kiosk on platform 4.

Thank you to everyone who has visited the Carriage Shop to make these donations possible.

We currently have a wide selection of Horsted Keynes exclusive souvenirs, model railway items, railway and transport books and Railway Art by Matthew Cousins. We are also supporting the 1305 Thumper Gang, Bluebell Railway Goods Division and the Fenchurch Fund by stocking a small selection of their items in the shop.

The Carriage Shop is always pleased to receive donations of model railway items, books, DVDs, bound magazines, pictures, postcards, photographs, slides, mugs, badges, keyrings or other railway or transport material. If you can help please contact:

bluebellrailwaycarriageshop@gmail.com

For our opening times and news please visit our Facebook page:

facebook.com/BluebellRailwayCarriageShop





**Top:** Members of the 1305 Oxted Thumper Gang. To find out more about this project visit: <a href="www.bluebell-railway.com/trust-project/oxted-demu-1305/">www.bluebell-railway.com/trust-project/oxted-demu-1305/</a>

**Bottom:** Kevin Leggett and Graham Poulson from the Horsted Keynes station team

#### Photos From The Museum Website

By Chris Wilson, Bluebell Railway archive volunteer

This month we have added a further 165 images to the Bluebell Railway Museum website bringing the total now available to 27,371.

These new additions all come from the camera of Joe Kent and showcase more of him images taken 1955. Locations include Brighton, Stratford, Romford, Custom House PLA Shed, Fratton Shed, Eastleigh Shed and Preston Park Pullman Works.

If you have a collection of photographs, negatives, slides or digital images you are interested in depositing with the Archive and preserving for the future please get in touch with us by emailing <a href="mailto:photos@bluebell-railway-museum.co.uk">photos@bluebell-railway-museum.co.uk</a>.

Every photograph sale directly helps the Photograph Archive giving us much needed funds to invest in conservation and storage materials. The information needed to pay for orders online by BACS is now included on every order form.

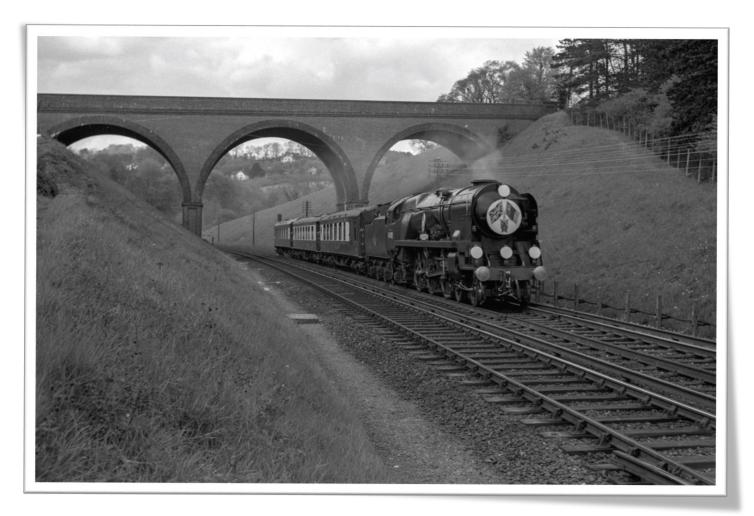
To view and order go to <a href="www.brm-archive.co.uk">www.brm-archive.co.uk</a>. There are various searching methods, including by locomotive number or class and location. The content key search allows you to see all the images of a particular type, for example, all the images taken of Pullmans. Use the New key to see all the latest images including those mentioned and shown here.

Workers and interior view of Pullman Car No. 54 at Preston Park Pullman Works, in April 1955. Photo: Joe Kent [154911]

### On This Day - 9 May

By Tony Hillman, Deputy Curator

Three pictures from the Bluebell Photographic Archive taken on the 9 May. Thanks to John Creed, Martin Elms, Richard Peirce, Chris Sutton, Roger Merry-Price and Chris Wilson for finding the pictures and researching the notes.



In early May 1963, President Ahmadou Ahidjo of newly independent Cameroon made a state visit to the UK. Accompanied by his wife, he arrived at Gatwick Airport on Monday 6 May for a four-day stay that included being entertained at Buckingham Palace by the Queen. He flew on to Paris on Thursday 9 May.

British Railways was entrusted with conveying the Presidential party between Gatwick and London Victoria in both directions. For this task it employed Battle of Britain Class 4-6-2, 34088, 213 Squadron and a short rake of three Pullman cars; Niobe, Aquila and Isle of Thanet. The train worked

up as the 10.15am from Gatwick on the Monday and down as the 3.3opm from Victoria on the Thursday.

On the afternoon of 9 May 1963, John Scrace captured this magnificent image near Merstham on the Brighton main line. The locomotive is displaying the Royal Train head code and carrying a headboard decorated with the flags of the UK and Cameroon.

The Southern Railways Archive at the Bluebell Railway holds other items related to the visit including the Royal Train notice (next page) and a photograph, also by John Scrace, of the footplate

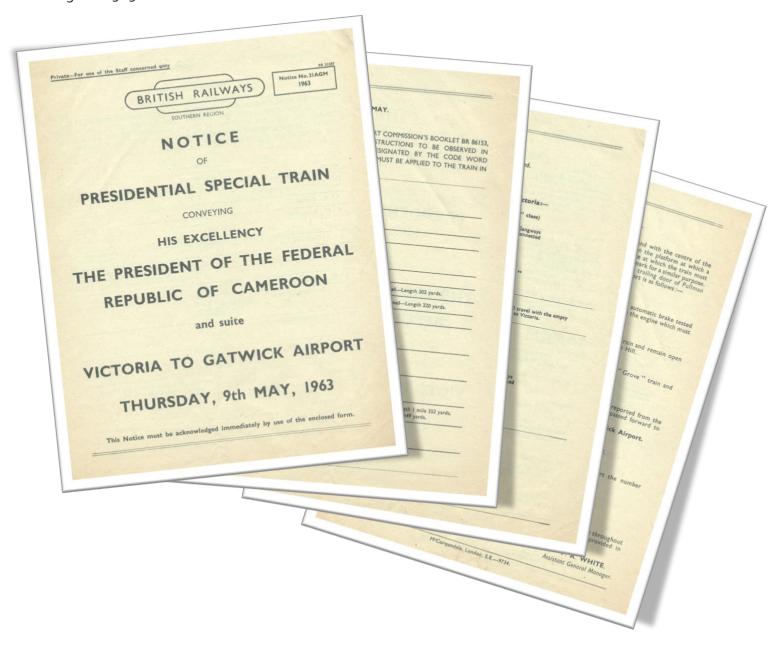
crew, Driver C Miles and Fireman A Goodhall, taken at Three Bridges Shed where the engine was being serviced (right).

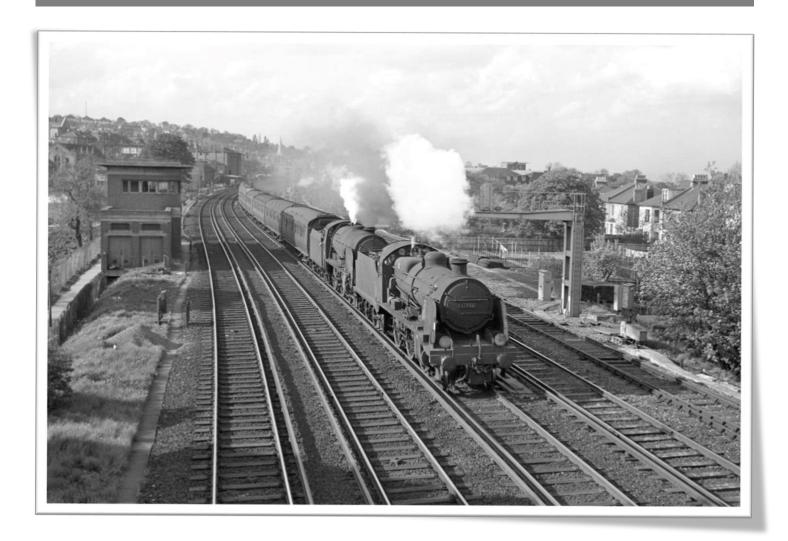
34088 was built at Brighton, entered traffic in December 1948 and was rebuilt in 1960. At the time of the photograph, it was allocated to Nine Elms (70A). It was withdrawn on 19 March 1967 and scrapped the following year.

Pullman car *Niobe* dated from 1927, it was sold in 1964 and scrapped; *Isle of Thanet* was built in 1924 and is now at the Kent and East Sussex Railway; whilst *Aquila*, in which the President travelled, was a 1951 build and, after a short spell at the Bluebell Railway between 2021 and 2023, is now a café near Weston-Super-Mare. President Ahidjo remained in office until 1982 but died in exile in Senegal in 1989.



Photos: John Scrace [141555] (main image); [141556] (crew image).





It is the end of the climb from New Cross Gate as the 5.25pm London Bridge to Reading South and Tunbridge Wells West passes the 1950 signal box at Forest Hill on Wednesday 9 May 1962 hauled by Schools Class 4-4-0 30916 'Whitgift' of Redhill Shed (75B) and piloted by U Class 2-6-0 31796 of Nine Elms Shed (70A).

30916 'Whitgift' is working Redhill Duty 620 which includes the corresponding up train at 7.27am from Reading South, but without a Tunbridge Wells West portion, as well as local workings while in London, then a return working from Reading to Redhill in the evening; a long working day of 17 hours 45 minutes. 31796 on the other hand is probably working Guildford Duty 189 which runs "as required" at 11.48am from Woking to Redhill conveying ballast from Meldon Quarry near Okehampton. On some occasions the train is extended to New Cross Gate, the 5.25pm being a convenient way of getting the engine back to Redhill.

The 5.25pm was usually formed of 10 corridor coaches, the Reading portion of 6 coaches – a 3-car Set T (Maunsell restriction 4) with 3 "loose" coaches; the Tunbridge Wells West portion detached at Redhill – a 4-car Set E (Maunsell Restriction 1). The 7.27am from Reading was formed of the same stock as the Reading portion of the 5.25pm, but the stock for the Tunbridge Wells portion arrived in London via the Oxted Line departing Tunbridge Wells West at 8.47am.

The 5.25pm and 7.27am up were terminated at very short notice on 15 February 1963, initially on a temporary basis to release crews for freight work in connection with "a coal distribution crisis". An 8-CEP electric train between London Bridge and Reigate replaced it with steam connections from and to Redhill. In the event the temporary arrangements became permanent with effect from 17 June 1963. The end of an unusual through train.

Photo John Scrace [140623]



Exactly one hundred years ago, on Saturday 9 May 1925, ex LSWR 4-4-2T 415 class Eo431 was photographed at Bournemouth Central, outside the locomotive shed. The background to the left was extensively altered in 1928 when the down platform was extended westwards to accommodate two 12-coach trains. At the same time the down bay and the original 'B' box were dispensed with.

The station opened as Bournemouth East on 20 July 1885, replacing the original terminus on the opposite side of Holdenhurst Road that was then devoted to goods traffic. The station was renamed Bournemouth Central from 1 May 1899.

When the LSWR extended its original London to Southampton line westwards towards Dorchester, its route, via Ringwood, bypassed Bournemouth, then a small seaside village. A branch from Ringwood to Christchurch, which opened in 1862, was later extended to the original Bournemouth East station in 1870. Subsequently a new line from Lymington Junction to Christchurch was

constructed in 1888 thus creating a direct route from London that is still in use today. A link to Bournemouth West station was created at the same time whilst the Ringwood to Christchurch line became a backwater that closed in September 1935.

The 415 Class was designed by William Adams and introduced by the LSWR in 1882. 71 were built in total, all being constructed by contractors. Intended for suburban traffic they were superseded initially by the M7 class and then electrification.

No. Eo431 was built in June 1883 by Robert Stephenson & Co. as No. 431. In January 1905 it was renumbered 0431 in the LSWR duplicate list and 'E' prefix was added by the SR in March 1924 when it was painted Maunsell green. It was withdrawn in December 1925.

One of the 71 survives. 488 (BR number 30583) was purchased by the Bluebell Railway in 1961 and is currently awaiting overhaul in Atlantic House.





#### Tail Lamp

If you've enjoyed this issue of *The Bluebell Times*, feel free to pass it on to other people you think might also want to read it.

To find out when the next issue is out and for other updates about the Bluebell Railway, check our website or follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

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If you have any comments or feedback about this issue or suggestions for future articles or features, contact:

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