



"Sir Archibald Sinclair" en route to Horsted Keynes, 31 December 2025 Photo: David Cable

The Bluebell Times

A Newsletter for Bluebell Railway Members, Staff and Supporters

January 2026

IN THIS ISSUE

This may be the first issue of *The Bluebell Times* in 2026, but in content it is really an end of year report for 2025. The period from mid-November onwards is always of critical importance to the Railway's income, and this year was no exception. SteamLights and Santa bring in over £ ¾ million of ticket revenue alone, and that is before you consider the catering and shop sales during the same period. The New Year's Day mini-gala provides an enjoyable bookend to the season (and of course, some more revenue!)

The first six weeks of the new year provide time for a reset and much needed maintenance – whether that is in the workshops at Sheffield Park and Horsted Keynes, or along the line, where there is no slackening in the pace of track renewals that we have become used to in recent years. It is also of course the time to set plans and budgets for the coming year; already there is a busy programme of events and visitors for both the Spring Steam Gala and Giants of Steam have already been announced. – not just a Giant, but a "[Phoenix](#)" is due to visit in October!

It is away from the locomotives, carriages and stations though in which 2026 may become one of the most pivotal years in the Railway's history. It is no secret that in recent years we have been facing strong financial headwinds, and seemingly no sooner is a successful event held in revenue terms than there is news of some unwelcome rise in costs. Here, there is a view that our tripartite structure – Society, Plc and Trust – may be holding us back. So the time is right to review the structure – the way the Railway is run – and that process is likely to be a key theme for the coming year. There will likely be much to cover in the next year: it is vital we get the decision right. See page 4 for more details.

Tom James, Editor

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Watts Occurring

By Roy Watts, BRPS Chairman

So that's it! The strains of Mariah Carey, Wizard, Shakin' Steven's, Cliff Richard and Band Aid consigned to the library for another year.

Nonetheless, the importance of the Festive Season cannot be underestimated. Just as the major retailers depend on the so called "Golden Quarter", so do Heritage Railways and other attractions – of which there are increasing numbers who are growing and developing their respective offers – so whatever we do, it is important to ensure we continue to give the best offers that give value for money and are delivered professionally with excellent customer service.

As in all walks of life, Christmas is never far off the agenda and once the year ends, it begins again with the all-important debrief, customer feedback and the inevitable lesson on what to improve.

But as the focus is now firmly on revenue and costs, I thought I would share it with you, so you can appreciate what these few weeks mean to us and also the results of your endeavours.

Overall, we enjoyed an exceptionally strong festive season with our services proving popular with families, enthusiasts and visitors.

The major services were as follows:

- ➡ SteamLights – sales £297,805 with 9,855 passengers
- ➡ Santa – sales £474,618 with 15,679 passengers
- ➡ Christmas dining – sales £119,420.00 with 949 passengers.

Catering outlets for Steamlights and Santa services:

- ➡ Bessemer Arms – £43,789.24
- ➡ Ice Cream Hut – £6,243.50
- ➡ Horsted Keynes Buffet – £35,383.84
- ➡ Horsted Keynes Pantry – £12,910.25

➡ Horsted Keynes Static RMB – £7,877.38

Total takings = £106,204.21

Total net income from catering for Christmas services - £208,422.81

Catering for New Years Day Mini Gala £10,332.90 - which was a 94% increase over 2025!

I regret I don't have all the retail figures to give you a complete picture but the shop takings for the full Christmas week were £12,071 (77% increase year-on-year) and for the New Year's Day gala, £8,410.97 (75% increase year-on-year).

Finally, between 27 December and 31 December, 1,738 passengers travelled with us realising a fares revenue of £27,682.

By giving you this picture, I hope it shows what the key period from mid-November to December actually means to the Railway.

Obviously, this is revenue only and costs have to come out and I hope I can give a summary on the overall picture next time. But I hope this helps explain that everyone, all staff right across the broad spectrum have worked so very hard during the season and we are really pushing on the revenue which is a must.

As always, lessons to learn but I hope this indicates the "size of the prize" and yes, we can always improve!

Likewise, it is imperative to take a closer look at costs. As I write, the finance team are working very hard on completing this year's budget. The work does not stop there – there are other areas need addressing such as the business rates which are clearly a hot topic with the Government at the moment. *[See page 5 – Ed.]*

But in summary, we closed off 2025 in a stronger position than was originally expected.

Sadly, we have lost a couple of people from respective Boards during this period.

Chris Welch, the Plc Finance Director, has had to stand down due to very personal reasons as has Society Trustee, James Young.

I would like to thank both gentlemen for their contributions during their tenure in office.

I must remind people that we are only volunteers giving up free time and when it comes to health and or family, that trumps everything else (not sure I should use the word “trump” at the moment!)

Chris did an awful lot of work in getting the financial management information into a much better position and ensuring it was circulated and in an understandable and comprehensive format for all to follow.

James led the Rolling Stock committee and was well known for all the effort he put into special events.

I'll end with the realisation that we have to take a complete in-depth review of what we can and cannot afford and yes, maybe some hard decisions have to be taken but also can we make better use of technology?

The Trust has been immensely helpful during the year supporting many projects that would otherwise be unfunded but remember, we can only spend that money once so it is important to evaluate how critical any request is when submitted and the impact it will have on operations.

The Trust was grateful to the shareholders of 80151 in giving us their shares and the loco is in safe hands.

The excellent work by the infrastructure team in relaying the line south of the tunnel continues the wise investment being made using their skill, dedication and attention to detail which is



*No. 80151 hauls a Santa service on 13 December.
Photo: David Cable*

fundamental to maintaining and improving the railway as are our lineside gangs who work hard keeping the lineside neat and tidy and drains clear – all elements affected by climate change.

So that was 2025 and now we have to move on.

With advanced tickets already underway for 2026 including the [Spring Steam Gala](#) and Giants events for enthusiasts, character and family events being posted as well as the reintroduction of [Valentines](#), [Mothering](#) and [Father's Day](#) trains, we want to be in a position that continues the momentum built.

In closing, we would like to extend our sincere thanks to all our visitors who chose to spend their hard-earned cash part of their festive season with us, and whose continued support made this year such a success. We are especially grateful to ALL our dedicated volunteers, staff, supporters and partners, whose hard work, enthusiasm and commitment ensured the safe and memorable delivery of our festive services. With this excellent year behind us, we look forward with confidence and excitement to welcoming everyone back in the year ahead.

Thank you for all your support and a very happy and I sincerely hope, a healthy new year to you all.

Bluebell Railway Restructuring Proposals

By Keith Leppard, BRPS Acting Vice Chairman

Many will know already that discussions have been going on over the past few months, in a joint BRPS/PLC Working Group that I chair, about possible changes to the corporate structure of the railway. That work was presented to a joint meeting of the Trustees/Directors/Governors of the BRPS/PLC/Trust in early December and both the BRPS and PLC Boards have now given the go-ahead to begin the detailed development and implementation of these proposals.

The proposals can only go forward with the formal support of both BRPS members and PLC shareholders. So this short article is the beginning of a process to introduce these plans to the volunteers and supporters of the railway, to explain why we believe that changes are needed and what the benefits will be, in order to gain that support.

There are two main reasons for change that we have identified: the need to improve the financial position of the railway and the need to streamline its decision making and management structures. On the first point, successive recent annual accounts show that we make regular losses on a scale that is not sustainable. We believe that a substantial reduction in that loss would come from making ourselves eligible to receive Gift Aid on parts of our income, which means the operating entity becoming charitable. Being charitable would also give us a significant reduction in our business rates. On the second point, we currently have three Boards that each has to discuss many of the same issues, which leads to delay and possibly confusion over where decision-making responsibility actually lies. There is also a practical problem in finding sufficient able and willing people to fill all the roles in this structure.

So what are we proposing? To reduce the complexity of the legal processes involved, we are not going to make any change to the structure of the Trust for the moment; that's something we can revisit later if we wish. Our plans focus only on the Society and the PLC, which are currently Companies Limited by Guarantee and by Shares respectively. The endpoint we are seeking to reach is for these two entities to be combined as a single Charitable Community Benefit Society (CCBS) that would own and operate the railway. Getting from where we are now to that endpoint is a multistep process that we believe will take about 18 months, though some benefits would start to accrue before the process was finished. Once completed, the CCBS membership would comprise the current BRPS members and the current PLC shareholders on an equal voting basis.

Many other preserved railways have already taken a path to becoming charitable operating entities – we are actually rather slow to do this, so the fundamentals of what preserved railways are about definitely fit with being charitable. Indeed, the Objectives statements in the Company/Society paperwork of these already charitable preserved railways describe all of the same activities that Bluebell has always been about. Some other railways have become CCBSs while others have become charitable companies; because of our own particular starting point, the CCBS route is the best one for us.

There will be lots more detailed information about these plans, timescales etc as well as updates on progress with implementation in future editions of *The Bluebell Times* and *Bluebell News*. We also intend to hold open forums at the railway in the coming months for people to ask questions and to find out more.

Help Needed – Business Rating Expert

By Vernon Blackburn, Chairman – Bluebell Railway Trust

The Railway is looking for help from an expert in challenging Rateable Values following the recent budget announcements. As things stand, our business rates are set to increase from £50k this year to £108k in 2026. This is due to an increase in our Rateable Value from £150k to £250k and an increase in the rate for Retail, Hospitality and Leisure businesses such as ours from 33p to 43p. This is on top of the huge increase in Employers' NI Contributions and the National Minimum Wage which were implemented in last year's budget.

We have been working hard this year to control costs and increase revenue as part of various measures we have put in place to address the deficit. Giants of Steam was a spectacular success,

the new Ghost Train was very successful, Santa trains are sold out, as are all the Christmas dining trains. The recent budget changes mean that much of the increased income will be wiped out by the unexpected increase in business rates.

While there is little we can do about the increase in the rate, we would like to challenge the increase in the Rateable Value but need expert help to do this. We know that our supporters and membership have a wide variety of skills and hopefully, there is someone who has practical experience in it. If you can help, please email Vernon.blackburn@bluebell-railway.com or call 07775 740381



No. 34059 'Sir Archibald Sinclair' with a very mixed vintage rake hauls the 2.05pm Santa Special service from Sheffield Park up Freshfield Bank, 20 December 2025. Photo: Peter Edwards

Maunsell Locomotives Overhaul Update

By Steve Pilcher and Chris Hunford, Maunsell Locomotive Society

Q CLASS NO 541

Up to the end of 2025, work had largely focused on annealing, setting, fitting and heading over the copper stays. Work to caulk and nut the monel stays has also been largely completed. Work has commenced on some of the smaller and more fiddly jobs like repairing and fitting the mudhole doors, marking out and fitting the blowdown valve and reaming the foundation ring holes.

The boiler flue tubes have been non-destructively tested in preparation for the copper bottle shaped ends to be braised onto the steel tube. These can now be fitted, along with the smoke tubes, when ready.

With work on the boiler now very advanced, the final jobs to complete before it can be returned to

Sheffield Park include the fitting of the steel backhead, final stays, foundation ring rivets, flue and smoke tubes; retapping the washout plug holes, then refitting the smokebox, fire grate and testing the boiler.

Following the discovery of cracks in most of the horn blocks, work on the chassis had slowed over the past few months while the horn blocks were sent for specialist repair. These have now returned and are being machined ready for fitting. This has allowed work to start on the second main frame insert. Other jobs such as manufacturing the new axlebox crowns and refitting brake components is also in progress.

Once the main frame inserts are complete and the horn blocks fitted, the final reassembly of the



541's sandboxes in grey primer. Photo: Steve Pilcher

chassis can start. This includes optical alignment of the horn blocks and wedges, supply, machine and fit of new bronze plates to ensure axle centres are correct, white metal various liner faces, align the slide bars and the refitting of all wheel sets, axleboxes, spring gear and valve gear.

Back at Sheffield Park, work is progressing on the tender chassis, with more pipework being re-fitted and a spare wheelset that had been sent away to the South Devon Railway for tyre turning (to replace a flawed wheelset) has returned.

Dave Cox and Bob Butcher are continuing to progress the painting of the exterior of the tender tank and various components.

The MLS volunteers continue to progress repairing corroded sections of cladding. A couple of

volunteers also undertook a 'snagging' of the inside of the tender tank in December and have concluded painting the interior. They will now focus on painting the coal space area in January.

SCHOOLS CLASS NO 928 STOWE

In December 2025 East Coast Castings made good progress on the new pattern for the left-hand cylinder casting that is required for Stowe, as shown in the photo below.

Although we had the finance in place for the pattern and casting, we still need to conclude fundraising to machine the casting. We need to raise £15,000 and as at the end of December 2025 over £10,000 has been raised. Many thanks to all those who have been so generous with their donations thus far.

CAN YOU HELP PLEASE?

The [Maunsell Locomotive Society](#) still needs to raise the final £5,000 or so. All extra donations will be gratefully received, preferably via the Stowe appeal in the Bluebell Railway Trust – or contact the MLS Treasurer, Steve Pilcher, jstevepilcher@yahoo.co.uk for further details.



Part of the pattern for the new left-hand cylinder. Photo: East Coast Castings

BR 2MT 84030 Rebuild Project

By Chris Wren

During the summer and autumn months progress was made in several areas including the bunker which is now complete except for painting the inside panels and the doors.



Inside of the bunker showing doors and shovelling plate.



All access steps to the bunker, cab and front of the engine are now complete, installed and mostly painted.

Some progress has been made on the cab floor supports but before bolting down in their final positions attention was turned to the rear balance pipe between the two side tanks as this runs under the floor.

Although the original BR design was for 3" copper pipe the decision was made to make it from schedule 4 steel pipe work. A drawing was made of the pipe which required a number of bends to allow for obstacles such as water valve connecting rods. To allow for assembly the balance pipe was made in 4 sections, each section being bent according to the drawing.

The pipes now need to be cut to fit and joined together including flanges at each end and a connection in the middle to allow for final installation. A flange drawing for profiling is currently being produced.



Balancing pipe sections.

Before the balancing pipe can be fitted, studs need to be installed in the side tanks to allow the flanged end of the balancing pipe to be connected. This will be no easy job!

Splashers to protect the crew from getting wet from the spray of the driving wheels have been fabricated and painted and are now ready for installation. The splasher on the fireman's side consists of 3 sections and will be easily fitted. The driver's side is more complicated and consists of 9 sections as it must be fitted around the reversing pedestal.

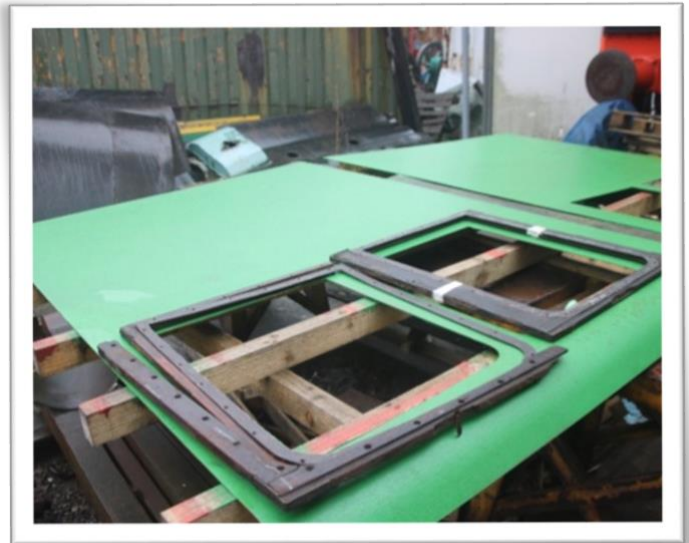


Parts of the splashers

Once the balance pipe, floor supports and splashers have been installed we will then start to build the cab. To date we have already had the side panels and backs to both the drivers and fireman's seat area profiled and they are currently being painted before final fitting.



Profiled cab side panels



The bracket to hold the water valves for the injectors has been fabricated and trial fitted before painting.



FIND OUT MORE

For more information about the 84030 project, and details of how to donate, see www.bluebell-railway.com/trust-project/br-standard-class-2-tank-84030/

Charity Walk for Heart Valve Voice

By John Deane, infrastructure volunteer

I am eighty-seven years old and have been a heart patient since 2008. I needed a heart valve replacement in June 2022 and after the necessary TAVI operation I fortunately made a speedy return to good health. I attribute much of my excellent recovery to the twice weekly lineside work sessions on the Bluebell Railway, believing that regular suitable physical tasks and plenty of fresh air are a winning formula for regaining and maintaining fitness.

My family and I would now like to raise funds for Heart Valve Voice as a meaningful gesture of thanks for my greatly improved fitness and the eighteen-year extension to my active life. Since my heart attack in 2008, I have completed seven years of leading mountain walking and a similar length of time doing catamaran sailing instruction. I am also a keen local walker.

Heart Valve Voice is a charitable organisation dedicated to spreading the word about Heart Treatment Options to everyone, and most especially to those who have a serious heart condition. The charity Heart Valve Voice works tirelessly to raise public awareness of the signs and symptoms of heart disease and empower patients with information about all treatment options.

I live in hope that my charity walk along the entire length of the seventeen-kilometre line of the Bluebell Steam Railway will usefully support the important work of Heart Valve Voice.

Just six weeks after my procedure I returned to full duties at my lineside work on the Bluebell Steam Railway. Because of the less invasive TAVI procedure I was able to avoid the typical year-long recovery associated with open-heart surgery.



Sadly, in the United Kingdom we lag behind the rest of Europe in using the less invasive TAVI procedure, which is both lifesaving and life enhancing. In my case I spent only 30 hours in hospital and was able to walk a quarter of mile only two days later.

If you are willing to support Heart Valve Voice, your contribution will help ensure that others receive the information, understanding, and treatment choices that have made such a difference to my life. Together, we can help more people live active, fulfilling lives after suffering heart valve disease, whilst easing pressure on the NHS.

For more information on heart valve disease please visit www.heartvalvevoice.com

My donation site is at:-

www.justgiving.com/page/johndeane2026bluebellrailwaywalk

My sincere thanks and very best wishes to all who feel able to respond to this appeal.

New Year's Day Steam-up

As has been recent tradition, New Year's Day saw a mini gala with four home-fleet locos in traffic, an intense timetable and goods train working. The following photos give a flavour of the event.



Left: 73082 'Camelot' passes Three Arch Bridge and approaches Horsted Keynes with the 2.05pm goods train working from Sheffield Park – a rare outing on the goods set for the locomotive.

Photo: Rob Howard

Below: A short while later. 'Fenchurch' makes a stirring departure from Kingscote with the 2.35pm service following the arrival of Camelot with the goods train

Photo: Nick Gilliam





Above: 34059 'Sir Archibald Sinclair' powers up Freshfield Bank with the 10.00am departure from Sheffield Park. Photo: Rob Howard



Left: The new livery on 6989 'Wightwick Hall' may divide opinion online, but from the editor's anecdotal experience certainly proves a draw for families keen to see the 'Harry Potter engine'. It is seen here approaching Three Arch Bridge with the 2.25pm departure from Sheffield Park comprising the vintage set.

Photo: Rob Howard

That Was the Year That Was

Photos by James Heppell

A selection of photos from 2025 focusing on loco crew.



Left: Ivatt 2MT No. 41313 visited from the Isle of Wight Steam Railway in March. The loco is shown departing from Sheffield Park on 14 March 2025 with the driver keeping watch down the side of the train.

Below: On the same date, the crew of 'Fenchurch' look out while operating a brake van ride at Horsted Keynes.



Right: At the other end of the year, a crew member climbs on to 'Beachy Head' on 19 October, as the loco is prepared for use at Giants of Steam.

Below: Later the same day, the crew return the token to visiting locomotive 'Tornado' at East Grinstead, having used it to unlock the ground frame to operate the points at the south end of the station.



Carriage Shop Donates £600

By Chris Wilson, Carriage Shop volunteer

This month the Carriage Shop team is delighted to donate a total of £600.

£300 has been donated to the Bluebell Railway Goods Division. This money was raised from the sales of model wagons. For more information on the work being undertaken by this group and how you can support them, visit www.bluebellrailway.co.uk/bluebell/wagon/

A further £300 has been contributed to the Loco Works to support the purchase of a high-specification PC for the CAD/CAM project.

Rich Tanton, Loco Works Pattern Shop volunteer, said:

“ I would like to thank the Carriage Shop team for helping to fund a high-specification computer to support the Loco Works CAD/CAM project, which is being led by Pattern Shop volunteers and supported by the Trust. The computer will be used by volunteers and paid staff to design patterns, some of which we make using our own 3D printer. It will also be used to produce CAD drawings of components being refurbished or manufactured from scratch. Funding for the computer has also been supported by the locomotive groups of the Bulleid Society, the Maunsell Locomotive Society, the 80151 Group, Project 27 and the Camelot Society. This is a team project which will enhance our ability to maintain and refurbish our loco fleet. ”

The Carriage Shop will reopen on Saturday 14 February 2026 when service trains recommence. For up-to-date opening dates and times please visit:

www.facebook.com/BluebellRailwayCarriageShop

DONATIONS NEEDED

The Carriage Shop was established in 1989 and is fully operated by volunteers, with the sole purpose of raising funds to support projects across the Bluebell Railway.

Following a successful end to 2025, we are in need of model railway items, Thomas the Tank Engine books or toys, and railway and transport books. If you can help please get in touch:

bluebellrailwaycarriageshop@gmail.com



Laurie Anderson with volunteers and supporters of the Bluebell Railway Goods Division.

More Photos From the Museum Website

By Chris Wilson, Bluebell Railway archive volunteer

This month we have added a further 463 images to the Bluebell Railway Museum website, bringing the total now available to 29,570.

From John Scrace, we have 200 colour images of the Brighton Belle taken between 1967 and 1972, plus a further 100 images showing Diesel Multiple Units at locations across the Southern, Western, Midland and Eastern Regions.

From Joe Kent, we have 163 photographs taken between December 1958 and April 1959. They include views at locations such as Nine Elms, Stratford, Clapham Junction, Brixton and Fareham, featuring a range of locomotive classes. This set also includes interesting rolling stock subjects, with several views around the Preston Park Pullman Car Works, including Pullman vehicles and continental vans.

Every photograph sale directly helps the Photograph Archive, providing 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 www.brm-archive.co.uk. There are various ways to search, including by locomotive number or class, and by location. The content key search allows you to view all images of a particular type—for example, all images of Pullmans. Use the New key to see the latest additions, including those mentioned (and shown) here.

We are grateful to have recently received a number of interesting collections of negatives and photographs. These are currently being catalogued and, where appropriate, will be scanned and added to the website in due course.

If you have a collection of photographs, negatives, slides or digital images that you are interested in depositing with the Archive—so they can be preserved for the future—please get in touch by emailing photos@bluebell-railway-museum.co.uk.



Top: BR(S) 'Brighton Belle' 5-BEL No. 3051 passing East Croydon with the 11.00am Victoria to Brighton, on 5 September 1968. John Scrace [084047]

Centre: BR(S) Class 205 'Thumper' No. 1115 approaching the level crossing and signal box at Cosham with 2.05pm Eastleigh to Portsmouth & Southsea service, on 9 May 1980. John Scrace [233543]

Bottom: BR(S) A1X No. 32640 taking on water at Fareham, on 6 December 1958. Joe Kent [092217]

Back page: BR(S) 'Brighton Belle' 5-BEL No. 3052 on the Quarry Line with 11.00am Victoria to Brighton, on 8 February 1969. John Scrace [084059]

On This Day, January

By Tony Hillman, Deputy Curator

This month we have the same problem as in previous winter months in that there is a shortage of suitable photographs actually 'On This Day'. Accordingly, we have selected three from across January for this edition. Thanks to Martin Elms, Richard Peirce, Chris Sutton, Roger Merry-Price and Chris Wilson for selecting the pictures and researching the captions.



During the latter part of the 19th century the SER and LCDR were locked in bitter competition with each other which resulted in most Kentish towns being served by both railways. Gravesend was no exception; the SER having first opened its station in 1845 with the LCDR following in 1886.

The LCDR station, known on different occasions as both Gravesend West and Gravesend West Street, was served by a five-mile line from Fawkham Junction, half a mile west of Fawkham station (subsequently renamed Longfield) between Swanley and Rochester. A seven chain (154 yards) extension led on to West Street Pier.

An intermediate station was opened adjoining the Rosherville Gardens but these closed in 1910 with the station closing in 1933. The pier was used by steamer services across the Thames and beyond and, from 1916, by the Dutch Batavia Line ships to Rotterdam. The latter service ended at the outbreak of the Second World War and when it resumed it switched to Tilbury.

With most passengers choosing to use the former SER station at Gravesend Central, BR closed the line to passenger services from 3 August 1953. Freight services remained in use and the picture shows Gravesend West on Saturday 31 January 1959 with ex-SECR Class C 0-6-0 31691 on the 1.40pm freight to Farningham Road as part of Hither Green Duty 188. The station had two facing platforms which formed a 'V' shape with the left-hand track alongside the down platform, at which 31691 is standing, leading to the pier. Freight services ended from 25 March 1968. The station was demolished in 1991 although the platform canopy supports survive on the Spa Valley Railway at Groombridge.

The C class was designed by Harry Wainwright with 31691 being built by Neilson, Reid & Co. and delivered to the SECR in July 1900. It was withdrawn in October 1961 from Hither Green (73C) shed.

Photographer: Colin Hogg [048546]



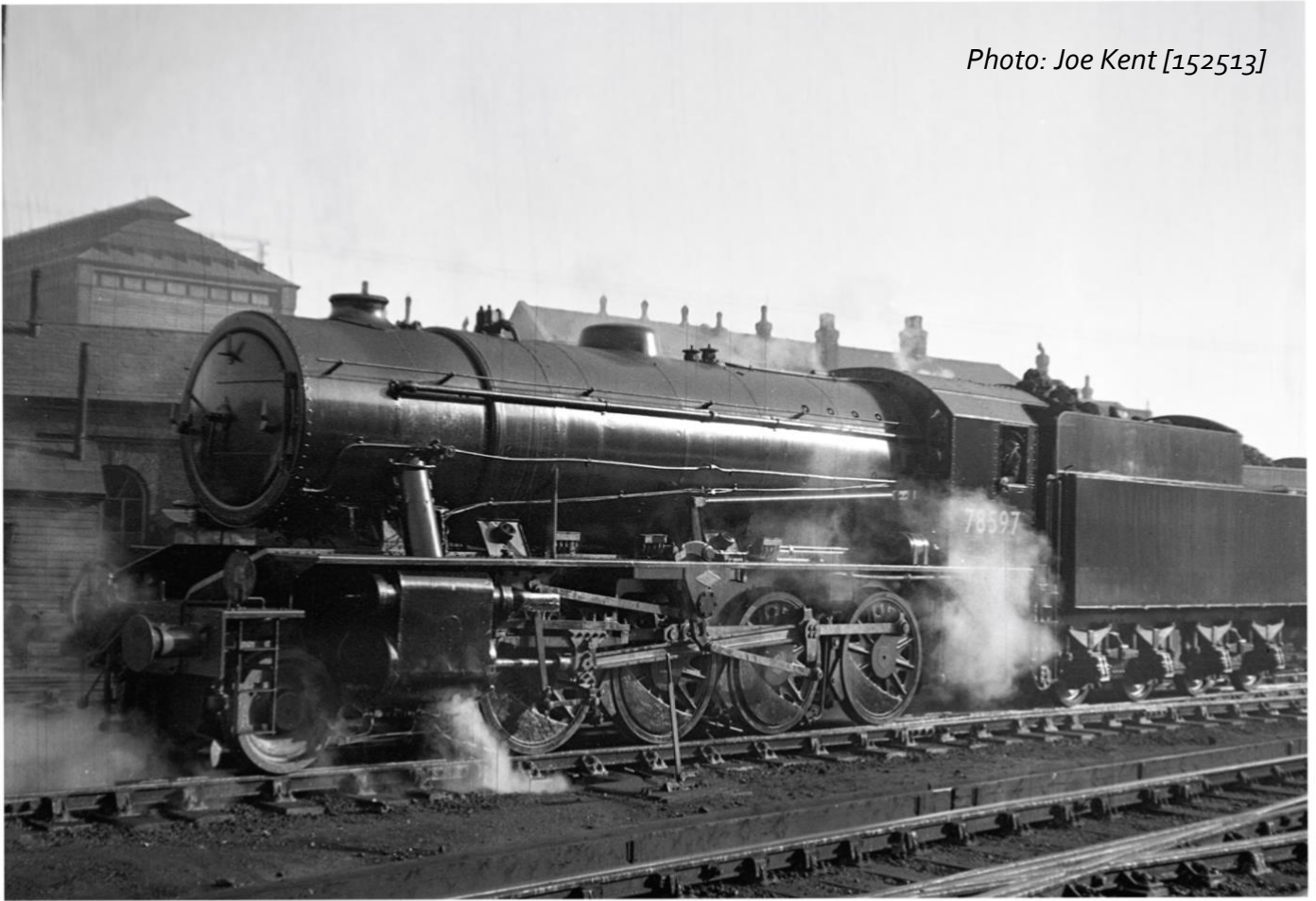
Nearly 71 years ago Colin Hogg was at Tenterden Town Station for the last day of passenger services over the Kent and East Sussex line on 4 January 1954. On the same day, the Headcorn – Tenterden Town section was completely closed. Today, the scene pictured is still recognisable, although that to the left of the train has been re-developed over the interim years, particularly since it became a heritage railway.

The train in the picture is the 8.50am Mixed from Headcorn to Rolvenden hauled by O1 Class 0-6-0 31065 allocated to Ashford Shed (74A). Prior to January 1954 the Kent and East Sussex line was operated in two sections, Headcorn – Rolvenden and Tenterden Town – Robertsbridge using two locos based at Rolvenden, a sub-shed of Ashford. The former, Duty 390 utilised the 01 Class and the latter an A1X class 0-6-0T, Duty 391, necessary due to weight restrictions on a number of bridges over water courses on the Rolvenden – Robertsbridge section.

After January 1954, Rolvenden sub-shed was closed as there was no easy access to Ashford, although track lifting between Tenterden and Headcorn was not completed until December 1955. The residual freight and occasional Hop Pickers traffic was transferred and worked by an A1X Class from St Leonards Shed (74E). Declining traffic saw the last Hop Pickers trains in 1958, after which steam was replaced by a Drewry Diesel Shunter until final closure on 12 June 1961.

The line was opened in three stages, between 1900 and 1905. It was independent until 1948. After closure in 1961, a preservation company was formed with the aim of reopening the line from Tenterden to Bodiam. This was achieved in stages between 1974 and 2000. More recently another preservation company was formed in 1990 called the Rother Valley Railway with the aim of reopening the line between Robertsbridge and west of Bodiam to connect with the Kent and East Sussex Railway.

Photographer: Colin Hogg [048007]

Photo: Joe Kent [152513]

On 29 January 1949, Joe Kent took this image of WD 2-8-0 78597 at Brighton Shed (75A). Records show that the locomotive had been in Brighton Works earlier in January, which probably accounts for its seemingly ex-works condition in the photograph.

78597 had been constructed by the North British Locomotive Company at its Queen's Park works in Glasgow and had entered War Department service in January 1944. At the time the photograph was taken it was allocated to Hither Green (73C).

First introduced in 1943 for war service both at home and overseas, a total of 935 WD 2-8-0s were built. Around 200 remained overseas after the war with the majority working in the Netherlands. 733 were eventually taken into British Railways stock and renumbered in the 90000-90732 series, 78597 itself becoming 90390 in April 1951.

The LMS Stanier Class 8F design had been chosen by the Railway Executive as its standard freight locomotive in 1939. The WD 2-8-0 was designed by Robert Riddles (later CME for British Railways)

to cover a similar role and be suitable for use in both the UK and war-torn Europe, but be easier and cheaper to build and operate. Changes included a steel rather than copper firebox, fabricated plates in place of steel castings and the replacement of the three-axle tender with a four-axle version to cope better with poor track conditions.

Newly renumbered, 90390 was transferred away to Newton Heath (26A) in May 1951 and spent much of the rest of its career at the depot and other locations around the Manchester area. It went to Frodingham (36C) in June 1965 and was withdrawn from there on 19 September. It was scrapped at Drapers of Hull during December.

Only one WD 2-8-0 is preserved. 79257 which had ended up working in Sweden was eventually repatriated and overhauled. Although it was never a BR locomotive, it has now assumed that identity using the next available number in the series, 90733. It is now based on the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway.



Photo: John Scrace [084059]

The Bluebell Times

*A Newsletter for
Bluebell Railway
Members, Staff and
Supporters*

*The Bluebell Times is published
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bluebell-railway.com/bluebell-times*

*If you have any comments or
feedback about this issue or
suggestions for future articles
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Tail Lamp

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