

Institute of Physics – London & South East Branch – Retired Members Section

Visit to the Bluebell Railway on Thursday 28th July 2016

This visit has been organised by Peter Mercer.

Description

The visit is to the Bluebell Railway, one of the many railway lines closed in the fifties and sixties and one of the first of them to be re-opened again as a volunteer-run railway. The restored line initially ran from Sheffield Park to Horsted Keynes, was then extended on to Kingscote and eventually (after many problems) was finally connected through to East Grinstead where today it connects with Network Rail. It has a good collection of engines and rolling stock, you can see more information on their website at <http://www.bluebell-railway.co.uk/>



In order to have a reasonable amount of time for the visit, we are attending on a day when they have two engines in steam rather than only one (*Service 2 on the website*).

The Bluebell Railway

Two acts of Parliament in 1877 and 1878 authorised the building of the East Grinstead and Lewes Railway between the two towns and its subsequent take-over and operation by the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway. Today the Bluebell line is the only remaining section of the original line in use. The railway was closed by British rail, after a certain amount of wrangling and legal dispute, in March 1958.

In March 1959 a Preservation Society, which became the present **Bluebell Railway Preservation Society**, was formed. The line opened in 1960, running from Sheffield Park to Bluebell Halt, 100 yards south of Horsted Keynes. In 1962 services were run through to Horsted Keynes itself and then in 1994 the section up to Kingscote came into operation (which includes the longest tunnel on a preserved railway at 731 yds./668 m. in length). Finally in 2013, after a lot of effort which included the re-clearing of a cutting which had been filled with over 3 million cubic feet of rubbish in the 60's and 70's, the final stretch up to East Grinstead was completed and opened, re-connecting the railway with the national rail network again. For the most part the line is single track (economy of maintenance) apart from the stations. Signalling and track construction are mostly in traditional styles, i.e. mechanical, semaphore signals etc.

The Bluebell Railway has been used for the making of various films (at least 29), television programs and advertisements. Today it has the largest collection (over 30) of steam locomotives in the UK after the National Railway Museum (NRM). The Society also has a collection of almost 150 carriages and wagons, most of them pre-war.

The Stations

These have been refurbished in various styles:

The station at Sheffield Park was built in 1882 by the London Brighton and South Coast Railway and it has been restored in the Victorian style of the LBSCR era in the 1880's.

Horsted Keynes emulates the Southern Railway style of station (1922–48)

Kingscote echoes the British Railways style of the 1950s

East Grinstead (the only completely new station) has been painted in post second world war Southern Railways colours.

There is a lot more information on the Bluebell Railway website at <http://www.bluebell-railway.co.uk>.

Where and when to meet

For convenience we start at East Grinstead, which is easily accessible by train from Victoria (see below in "Getting there"). We will catch the 12:00 train from East Grinstead which starts from the Bluebell Line station.

Getting there

By train

To get to East Grinstead there are trains from Victoria departing 10:23, arriving 11:18; and departing 10:53, arriving 11:48. As we catch the 12:00 train from East Grinstead, members might wish to catch the earlier train in case the train runs late (the next Bluebell train is not until 1:15 pm). There is a railway-carriage buffet car at the Bluebell station serving hot drinks, ice creams, cakes etc. where you could wait.

Arrival is at East Grinstead mainline station. The platform for the Bluebell Railway is next to the mainline station and the two stations are about 200 yards apart. Most trains arrive at East Grinstead on platform 2 and there is level access to the exit; occasionally they arrive at platform 1 and passengers then have to cross by a footbridge. The Bluebell platform has a ramp access.

By car

There is no long-term parking close to the station at East Grinstead. There is parking at a pay-and-display car park at the junction of Station rd. and London rd. which is about a quarter of a mile from the station. There are buses from the town centre to the station.

There is good (free) car parking at Sheffield Park. The 11:00 train will get you to East Grinstead at 11:41 to join the party for the return journey, or you could meet them when they arrive at Sheffield Park.

There is also parking at Horsted Keynes, but none at Kingscote.

The visit

From East Grinstead we take the midday train down to Sheffield Park where we will be given a tour of the engine sheds by a volunteer. Not all the engines will be in the sheds, but there is always a good selection there.

Afterwards we have lunch in The Bessemer Arms on Platform 1, which is a licensed self-service cafeteria. The Bessemer Arms serves a range of options from sandwiches up to a full cooked meal. If you prefer to bring your own sandwiches and the weather is kind, there are picnic tables by the river Ouse, otherwise you should be able to eat under cover at the station.

After lunch there should be time to investigate the Railway Museum. The museum is on Platform 2 which is accessed by a foot-bridge, but staff will escort members of the public across the line on request. Prior to the visit, you may wish to download the free App relating to the museum from <http://app.bluebell-railway-museum.co.uk/> for further information. There is also a shop selling toys/souvenirs etc. on platform 1. There are disabled toilets on each platform. (I assume that this means toilets for the disabled, not non-working toilets.)

We catch the quarter to three train to Horsted Keynes where we visit the carriage works. There is a team of volunteers who carry out Railway repairs and refurbishing of its rolling stock and they are very meticulous about their work. Their recent restorations include an attractive, original rake of carriages from the old Metropolitan line, immortalised by John Betjeman in "Metroland", and these were used in 2013 when steam

trains were run through the original underground on the 150th anniversary of the creation of the London Underground.

After the visit to Horsted Keynes Carriage Works the group returns to East Grinstead and the visit ends.

Timetable

- 12:00 Meet on Bluebell station platform at East Grinstead and depart for Sheffield Park.
- 12:47 Arrive Sheffield Park. Guided tour of the Engine Sheds (just off platform 1) which should last for about three quarters of an hour.
- 13:30 (approx.) After the tour we have lunch; the Bessemer Arms on Platform 1 serves snacks and full meals, there are also picnic tables in a fenced-off area next to the river Ouse, by the side of the Station Approach (100 yds from the station). After lunch, an optional visit to Museum and/or shop.
- 14:45 Depart Sheffield Park. Meet on Platform 1.
- 15:02 Arrive Horsted Keynes. Tour of the Carriage Works - hopefully about three quarters of an hour.
- 16:17 Depart Horsted Keynes (make sure you are on the northbound, East Grinstead, train or you end up back at Sheffield Park)
- 16:40 Arrive East Grinstead. There are half-hourly trains to Victoria from the main-line station leaving at 7 minutes past and 37 minutes past the hour.

Size of party A maximum of about 20 is suggested. If the visit is oversubscribed, a repeat could be organised.

Cost: £27.00 payable on registration. This covers your £17.00 all-day Bluebell Railway ticket and a £10 donation to the Bluebell Railway Trust who will provide the guided tour of the engine sheds at Sheffield Park. The Bluebell tickets will be distributed by Organiser, Peter Mercer, from 11:40 at the Bluebell Railway Station ticket office next to East Grinstead Station. Participants pay for their own travel to the meeting point at East Grinstead Station and for their comestibles.

Contacts

Before the visit: Tony Colclough on 020 8398 0766, tonycolclough@tiscali.co.uk or Peter Mercer on 01273 478231, pelt@pavilion.co.uk On the day: Peter Mercer on 07762 474229

Late arrivals Be warned - if you miss the 12:00 train from East Grinstead, this is a problem. You could take a taxi to Sheffield Park (expensive) or retire to the town and have lunch in a pub, then catch the 1:15 which arrives at Sheffield Park at 2:02 and allows time to have a quick look round before joining the group to catch the 2:15 for the Carriage Works visit.