



Reflections at Sheffield Park Photo: James Cummins

# The Bluebell Times

A Newsletter for Bluebell Railway Members, Staff and Supporters

November 2023

## IN THIS ISSUE

From the editor's position – whether that is the footplate or sitting behind the editor's (metaphorical) desk – it does feel like 2023 has been the year that the Railway has started to rediscover its mojo. There are objective signs, such as record takings for this year's Giants of Steam weekend, but also things based more on feel. Those feelings include running into Kingscote to see the platforms and field busy with families, or the increased prominence of vintage carriages in our regular services. In the loco workshop, things are already moving on apace with the overhaul / boiler swap of our flagship locomotive "Bluebell". The last six weeks of this year are the most financially crucial part of the year for us, with a busy programme of Santa and SteamLights trains, but as enthusiasts we can perhaps be allowed a glimpse into next year: It promises to be a busy one with dates now announced for the key special events – Branch Line Weekend, Road Meets Rail, the Model Railway Weekend and of course Giants of Steam. Moreover, we will have our own bona-fide giant achievement to celebrate next year, with the introduction into service of "Beachy Head", a triumph of engineering, project management and fundraising.

It will be vital though not to take our foot off the throttle (or should that be ease back on the regulator?). Our "Southern Six" colleagues at the Swanage Railway have had their own engineering triumph this autumn with the restoration of LSWR T3 No. 563 – yet almost immediately afterwards, have revealed a financial deficit for which urgent cost cutting and fund raising are required. We wish our colleagues well, of course – as a movement, our strength is a strength in depth to maintain healthy supply chains – but it should serve as a reminder if one were needed that our own success as a preservation society is dependent on our commercial success as a visitor attraction.

Tom James, Editor

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# Checking in with the Chair

By Paul Churchman, chairman, Bluebell Railway plc and chairman, BRPS

And another has gone by and what another great month it has been. We had the most successful Giants of Steam we have ever had. It was not only a financial success but an event success. I was inundated with comments from the railway press and other members of other railways. Well done to everyone who played any part in this event – a proud Bluebell moment.

Moving on from that, the unseasonably warm weather meant the ice rink was not the success I had hoped it would be, but it did OK and even attracted an Olympic Gold Medalist down to try it out.

We are rapidly moving towards Christmas and in just under 3 weeks we start the first of the SteamLights and 2 weeks after that we are into Santa Special season. I can't believe where the year has gone, but equally this is our busiest six weeks of the year where we take over a quarter of our annual revenues! The railway is now not running any public services until we start SteamLights and that gives everyone a chance to get the decorations up, the trains dressed, the

presents ready and so much more. This coming Sunday (5 November) I, along with a number of other willing volunteers, am doing my Wickham Trolley driving assessment so that during the SteamLights I can drive it to go and fill up the generators that power the lights on the lineside. I had my Wickham license 20 plus years ago but things have changed and the Wickham we have now is very different to the ones we had then – this one has brakes!

Looking beyond that we have a lot of exciting things going to happen early in the new year and 2024 is already shaping up to be another bumper year, we do need it as keeping this Railway running is no easy or cheap task. If I said that our overhead costs each month are not far off £280k you can see the challenges we face. We are doing well though, but as with any business we must keep ourselves focused and aware of the economic factors, visitor behavior and of course managing pricing and costs.

*Paul*

*Bulleid super-power at Giants of Steam  
Photo: Andrew Crampton.*



# Save the Date

## NEW YEARS DAY'S STEAM AT THE BLUEBELL RAILWAY

Start 2024 with us at The Bluebell Railway with a special day's running featuring 6989, 65, 80151 and Fenchurch! (subject to availability)

An intensive timetable will be in place, passenger and freight trains will be running throughout the day and travel in the LNWR Observation Coach hauled by Fenchurch. Normal fares apply and also kids get to travel for £1 with any fare-paying adult! Join us on what we hope to be a busy start to the year at The Bluebell Railway!

To view the timetable, visit <https://www.bluebell-railway.com/timetables-and-calendar/>

## SAVE THE DATES FOR 2024!

Keep these dates in the diary for some of our main weekend events for 2024. These dates are confirmed:

- ➔ Branch Line Gala Weekend: 10 – 12 May
- ➔ Road Meets Rail: 18 – 19 May
- ➔ Model Railway Weekend: 29 – 30 June
- ➔ Giants Of Steam 2024: 11 – 13 October

More events will be added during the course of 2024 but watch out for further news and ticket releases for these exciting events at The Bluebell Railway!

## NEW YEAR'S DAY STEAM AT THE BLUEBELL RAILWAY



SECR O1 No.65	BR STANDARD FOUR TANK NO. 80151	LBSCR A1 NO.72 'FENCHURCH'	BR HALL NO. 6989 'WIGHTWICK HALL'
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# MONDAY 1ST JANUARY 2024

VISIT [BLUEBELL-RAILWAY.COM](https://www.bluebell-railway.com) FOR MORE DETAILS



Photo Kindly Supplied By Jon Bowers.  
Dave Bowles & James Cummins



# Q Class 541 Overhaul Update

By Steve Pilcher, Treasurer, Maunsell Locomotive Society [Photos](#) Leaky Finders / Steve Pilcher

The locomotive is now fully dismantled at Leaky Finders premises in Devon. The boiler has been the focus of the overhaul and good progress has been made, the boiler has been gutted, cleaned internally and externally and undergone a full NDT analysis. On the 19 October the full scope of the boiler repair was agreed between Bluebell Railway Plc, Bluebell's boiler inspector and Leaky Finders. Work is proceeding in rolling the boiler and starting to cut out the life expired platework on the outer firebox wrapper.

The locomotive frames have been fully dismantled, including removing the wheelsets and other components. The wheelsets have been sent to South Devon Railway Engineering (SDRE) for ultrasonic testing of the axles and tyre measurements. A decision will then be made as to whether new tyres are required or whether the existing tyres can undergo one more turning.

The tender had been stored behind 31618, thus creating what appeared to be a U class with two tenders, reminiscent of Flying Scotsman in its two tender days. The tender has now been moved into the maintenance shed at Sheffield Park. At the time of writing this report, work was about to start to free up the tender tank, dismantle the brake gear, remove the wheelsets and examine the condition of the dragboxes.



## THE Q NEEDS YOU!

The [Maunsell Locomotive Society](#) has agreed to try and raise £40,000 towards the cost of overhauling the tender and providing a new tender tank. The Q is an ideal size and economical loco for Bluebell operations. It fits in well with the 'Southern' image, and it did actually operate in the vicinity.

Online payments to the appeal can be made by clicking the [DONATE](#) button on the Bluebell website and following the online payment instructions. Select Q Class 541 Overhaul in the drop-down box.

For those who prefer to use cheques, please send a cheque, made payable to the 'Bluebell Railway Trust' (and a [Gift Aid Form](#) – if appropriate) to the Bluebell Railway Trust, Sheffield Park Station, Uckfield TN22 3QL. Please add a note to say it is for the 541 Overhaul Appeal.

At the time of writing, there is over £26,000 in place towards the target of providing £40,000 towards this project. As ever, a very warm 'thank you' to all concerned who have generously contributed thus far. Please consider assisting reaching the target of £40,000 – and thus play a part in getting this very useful loco back in action at Bluebell.

# A Brush With Science!

Words and photos by Andy Taylor, Awake the Giant project leader

Around four years have gone by since launching the Awake the Giant campaign to awake 92240 once more. The group has grown from one volunteer rattling a tub to now just under 30 working volunteers doing various jobs. These range from working on the locomotive, manning the sales stall, giving out leaflets, arranging photo competitions, continual development of our merchandise range and much, much more. We are always on the lookout for further volunteers and if you wish to get involved with a project that is making a difference please get in contact.

## RELIVING THE 80'S

The tender that is attached to 92240 was built new in the 1980's. As was common back in the day the water space (that is under the coal space) was painted with bitumen. This helped waterproof the tank and also protect the steelwork. Roll on 40 years and the bitumen has mostly come off with the steel re exposed.

With the need to thoroughly clean the tank and repaint, thoughts quickly turned to what this should be with. Originally bitumen was going to be used but considerations were made as to what else was available in the 21st century. This is where [Specialist Coatings GB Ltd](#) come in, these guys are a family-owned company based just down the road in Battle, Kent. We knew they completed the lining of No. 35028 "Clan Line's" water space and, after speaking to the head engineer, we were convinced this was what we wished to do for a first class job on No. 92240's tender.

This is where the science comes in, the coating is specially formulated from Chemical compounds that react with each other. The two products are made by blending two components that react with each other and prior to mixing need to be weighed to the nearest gram. Firstly, the primer is applied which ensures a firm grip on the steelwork. Secondly the top coat that has to be applied within 24 hours of the primer to ensure a chemical bond. The other great thing about this product is that



unlike bitumen there is no odour from the product as it is not based on solvents for drying. Once dried the coating forms a flexible waterproof bond. When the whole tank is completed, it will be light due to the light grey colour and we shouldn't need



*The team from Specialist Coatings GB*

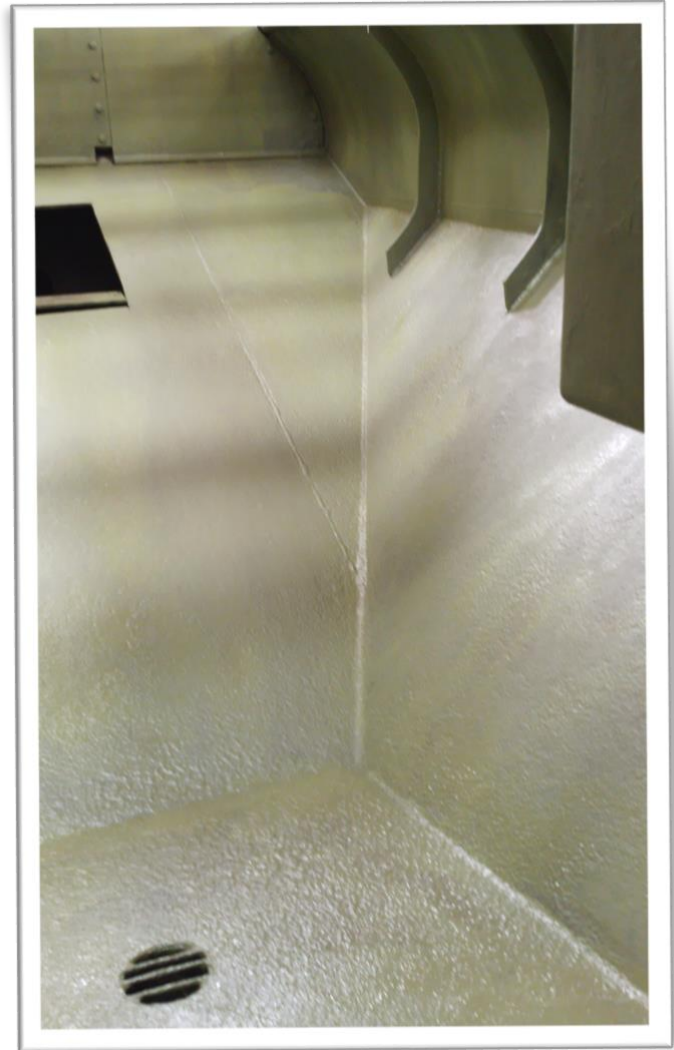


to touch again for many years. We thank Peter and the team from Specialist Coating GB Ltd for attending the railway and conducting a full mixing and product demonstration. We also had volunteers from the Maunsell Locomotive Society and a Project 27 present at the demo to understand if it is a product that may be suitable for their projects. Also thanks goes to Loco Workshop Supervisor Andy Sabin for helping to set up a storage location for the product and assisting with the movement of it.

As well as the inside of the tender work has continued in the coal space. This has had similar treatment in the fact it has been robustly cleaned and undercoated but this time with a specialist primer paint. All being well before the winter the first top coat will be applied. Work has also been carried out on a new coal sprinkler.

### 288 PINTS OF ALE!

To help raise funds at this year's beer festival, [Harvey's Brewery](#) in Lewes was again contacted to see if they could support Awake the Giant. The answer was "of course we will" and, looking to expand on the success of 2022, four firkin's (or 288 pints) of Old Ale were ordered – half of which were kindly donated by Harvey's. As last year, The King George V Buffet at Horsted Keynes was used to sell the ale which was co-branded as Awake the Giant Ale. New for 2023 we had a small bar and fundraising stall in the main shed at Sheffield Park. We had an amazing response over the 3 days of the event which generated a large sum of money that has gone directly into the Trust account for



*Primer applied to the tender coal space*

No. 92240's restoration. Special thanks must go to Miles Jenner and the team at Harvey's; and also Jim Taylor, Lisa Boyle and Megan Laughlin from the Bluebell and Paul Free from CAMRA.

### FUNDRAISING

Thanks to a fantastic team lead by Tom Parsons our stand manager we have had a very good year. This has been helped with the high-profile events that the Bluebell has held. Ken Upton has also been working on updating the merchandise range including new T-shirts, bags, coasters and even a teddy! Of course, much money is still to be raised and your help is always appreciated.

To stay up to date with the restoration why not sign up to the 92240 Gazette by emailing [giantgazette92240@yahoo.com](mailto:giantgazette92240@yahoo.com).

If you are interested in joining the team, signing up to monthly donations or wanting to show your support to the overhaul and restoration of 92240 then please email Andy at [andy.taylor@bluebell-railway.com](mailto:andy.taylor@bluebell-railway.com) or [awakethegiant@outlook.com](mailto:awakethegiant@outlook.com).

# Workshop Round-up



**Left:** Work has already started at Sheffield Park on the overhaul of No. 323 "Bluebell". Andy Kelly's photo from 7 November shows Bluebell's boiler removed from 323 and placed into 178, which has been largely reassembled to enable it to go back on display. No. 178 thus currently presents a somewhat harlequin appearance! The boiler thus removed from No. 178 – somewhat ironically the one carried by Bluebell when it arrived on the railway – can now be assessed for the repairs needed to overhaul it. Work is also continuing on the overhaul of No. 263 (the Wainwright H class) boiler.

**Below:** Meanwhile, at Horsted Keynes, David Chappell's photograph shows [Mk 1 Second Open No. 4754](#) in the paint shop, which is has entered following completion of painting on Pullman Car No. 54. Although originally allocated to the Western Region of BR, this carriage is of similar layout to those built for the Southern Region, which were in turn based on the internal layout of Bulleid carriages such as [No. 1464](#). No. 4754 was withdrawn from BR in 1983 and sold to the Ministry of Defence for use on the Bicester Military Railway, from where it was acquired by the Bluebell in 2014.



# HOPS Update November 2023

By Fraser Hutchinson, HOPS Manager

Being a home brewer, a year ago hops meant Goldings and Fuggles and the lovely aroma they give off as the brew is boiling. The brewery is confined to the garage as no one likes the smell. Fast forward a year and HOPS has taken on a second meaning, and again I am relegated to the garage to do all the daily admin that HOPS entails. So, what have we achieved as a railway in one year.

- ➔ 1100 registered members on HOPS all with ID cards.
- ➔ Operations and Loco departments using HOPS for rostering purposes. Other areas are about to go live.
- ➔ All competencies are now recorded and stored on HOPS.
- ➔ Improved communications with the news section and the internal email

During this month we are installing tablets and computers in various locations so that we can use the ID cards for signing in and off. The aim is for East Grinstead to go live for the Christmas period as a trial run. It was only last December we up north trialled the new rostering system and it proved a huge success.

All of the above plus much more that has been done to bed in HOPS could not have been achieved without the support and enthusiasm from you the working member. HOPS should make our lives easier so that we can enjoy our roles on the railway. For those that have complained, hopefully we have solved your issues.

The ID cards become even more important once the online booking process begins and therefore, I am asking everyone to do the following as we all will need to reapply each year for a new card.

- ➔ In order to reapply you must confirm that your personal details and emergency contact details already on HOPS are accurate.

- ➔ Make sure you are not logged on to HOPS. If you are you need to log off.
- ➔ Type or paste the link into your web browser [www.hops.org.uk/user/confirm](http://www.hops.org.uk/user/confirm)
- ➔ This will direct to the correct area. Log on and you should be able to edit and then confirm everything at the bottom of each page.

Once we have confirmation that your details are accurate, and your roster clerk has confirmed that you are continuing to work in your area(s) we can generate an order for the new ID card.

As of 6 Nov 2023, 243 have done this but there is 900 more to do before the deadline on Monday 20 November. If you have yet to update your details, please do so as soon as possible.

Any issues or concerns about this process please contact me at [fraser.hutchinson@bluebell-railway.com](mailto:fraser.hutchinson@bluebell-railway.com).

*HOPS stands for "Heritage Operating and Processing System". It is an online system used by both the Bluebell and many other heritage railways to manage rostering, competencies and distribution of notices and documents relating to our Safety Management System – Ed.*



# A Giant Success



Writing in his regular [weekly diary update](#), Society and Plc chairman Paul Churchman wrote that *Giants of Steam* "surpassed everyone's expectations. [...] Revenue for the weekend across the entire business surpassed £120k which was £25k up on last year and a record for the event".

**Above:** No. 21C127 'Taw Valley', visiting from the Severn Valley Railway, climbs towards Three Arch bridge with the 4.15 from Sheffield Park on 14 October. (Photo: Nick Gilliam)

**Below:** Following on from *Giants of Steam*, No. 34070 'Manston', visiting from the Swanage Railway, was used with four Bulleid carriages on a photo charter organised by Jon Bowers. The loco is seen departing Horsted Keynes in dramatic fashion, with sister 'Blackmore Vale' in the background. (Photo: David Cable).







*Another photo from the charter.*

*Photo: David Cable*

*Giant in reputation, if not stature, No. 72 'Fenchurch' was used to provide brake van rides at Horsted Keynes, utilising a short rake of vacuum-fitted wagons and the [Queen Mary](#) brake van. It is shown here double-heading with No. 80151 while working back to Sheffield Park at the end of the day.*

*Photo: James Cummins*





# Railhead Treatment Over the Fence

Roy Watts, Senior Station Master at East Grinstead, has sent this selection of photographs of Network Rail's railhead treatment trains that have worked through to East Grinstead mainline station. According to Network Rail, there are [29 dedicated locomotive-hauled](#) railhead treatment trains which are used throughout the autumn to clear leaves and other debris from the line, which could otherwise cause signalling and adhesion problems. The nature of the work is such that the trains inevitably appear filthy after a short period in service!



*Underneath the grime is class 73 electro-diesel No. 73141 "Spa Valley Railway 25 year Anniversary", sister to our own ED. Pairs of Class 73s – one each end – are common traction for the trains over the third rail network. Photo taken 14 October 2023.*

*Two weeks later on 29 October, considerably rarer motive power in the form of Class 57 No. 57306.*

*The class 57s – nicknamed by some "body snatchers" – were rebuilt from venerable Class 47 diesels by replacing the engines and alternators with more modern units to improve reliability at lower cost than building entirely new locomotives. As such, they can be seen to follow a long tradition of railway rebuilds – not least our own No. 65 which consists of a locomotive built in 1896, but given an entirely new design of boiler in 1908!*





# New Additions to the Museum Website

By Chris Wilson, Bluebell Railway archive volunteer

This month we have added a further 591 images to the Bluebell Railway Museum website bringing the total now available to 22,859. This update contains photographs taken by the late John Scrace and David Esau.

We have added more Bulleid Pacific's images from John Scrace and the second part of David Esau's Western Region photographs, which include many views of long lost routes and stations.

The images in the Archive are predominately Southern but we always prefer to keep a photographers collection together which is why you can find images from across the UK and Overseas on the museum website.



**Top:** o-6-oPT No. 6437 at Chalford station with the local train from Gloucester, on 19 May 1962.

Photo: David Esau [157297]

**Left:** Manor class No. 7802 'Bradley Manor' with the 'Cambrian Coast Express' at Llandre station, on 6 August 1962

Photo: David Esau [157669]



## VIEWING AND ORDERING

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 [www.bluebell-railway-museum.co.uk](http://www.bluebell-railway-museum.co.uk) and click on the Archive tab. 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 and the Nearly New key to see what we added last month.

# On That Day

By Tony Hillman, Deputy Curator

*Searching through our photograph collection we only have seven photographs taken on the Bluebell Times Fridays for the next three months. So we can continue with this feature we will be changing the name to "On That Day". During summer months we might have up to seventy photographs to choose from. This means that many that could be included are left out. So, during the next three months we will be reprising some of the 'Friday' images that did not make the final cut. Thanks to John Creed, Martin Elms, Richard Peirce, Chris Sutton, Roger Merry-Price and Chris Wilson for finding the pictures and providing the notes.*

Photo: John Scrace [081095]



The signal box at Deal as seen on 9 September 1969, with Middle Deal level crossing in the background, where Albert Road crosses the line. The box was opened on 14 May 1939, and is to the elegant (Art Deco) Southern Railway type SR13 design. Deal station is out of the picture, to the right, and the line leads away towards Sandwich on the left. The motivation for the SR to renew this box was economic, one of many such schemes of the 1930's whereby savings in manpower were made. Until 1939 there was a signal box with signaller in the station, and a separate "gate box" at the crossing worked by a lower-graded "gateman" under control of the signaller. This new box at the crossing combined both functions, thus saving one man on each of three shifts; the investment in the new box was deemed worthwhile by the SR if it was repaid within ten years.

One interesting feature is the ladder seen hanging from the front of the box. This was for use of the signallers in washing the operating floor windows, which formed part of their duties as well as indoor cleaning, polishing, etc. It was another economy measure, enabling the planked window cleaning stage and related handrail, found on some earlier designs of box, to be omitted. This box is still in service with Network Rail, one of the few remaining installations of semaphore signalling in the region. It has survived due to missing out on modernisation schemes, largely because of the low level of traffic on the line, and lack of demand from the relevant train operator. It looks very little different today, apart from the replacement PVC window frames.



Just after 2pm on Saturday 13 October 1956, rebuilt Merchant Navy Class 35014 "Nederland Line" powers westward, away from its Southampton Central stop with the down all Pullman "Bournemouth Belle". It has just passed the gantry carrying the Southampton Central Down Advanced Starter and Millbrook Down Slow inner distant signals, both are on the same post and show as clear.

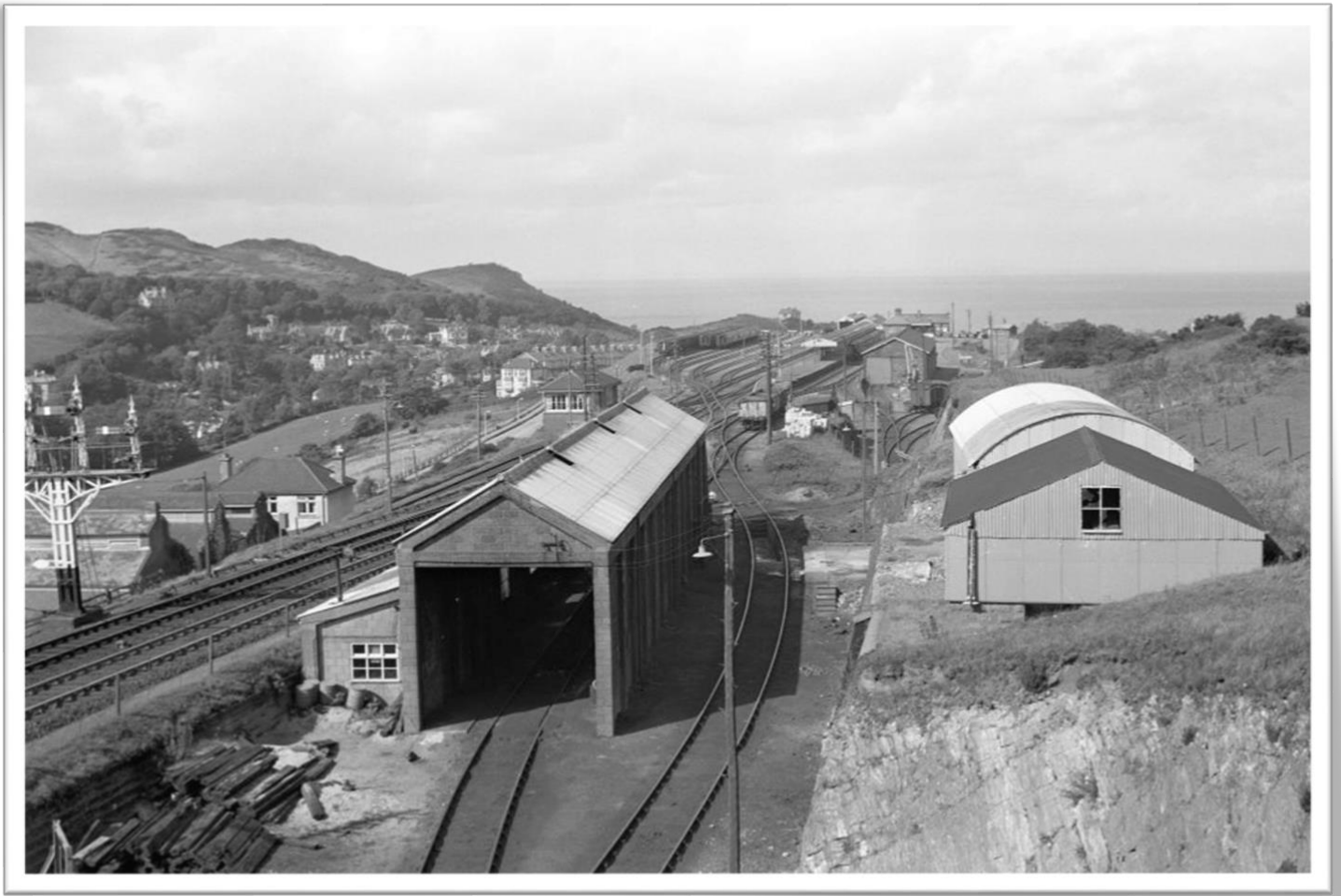
The "Bournemouth Belle" first ran on 5 July 1931, initially on summer Sundays, later on all weekends and summer weekdays, becoming daily in 1936. This continued with a break during WW2, until July 1967, when it was superseded by the electrification of the Bournemouth Line. It was steam hauled until just before the end, being rostered for diesel rather than steam from January 1967. Nevertheless, steam frequently substituted for diesel due to the latter's poor reliability. Indeed, rebuilt West Country Class engines worked it on the 5 July 1967, four days before the end, 34024 "Tamar Valley" with the down train and 34036 "Westward Ho" with the up train.

For some years the Belle was the last steam hauled all Pullman train in the British Isles. Leaving Waterloo at 12.30pm with a stop at Southampton Central from 1.59 to 2.1pm. After stopping at Bournemouth Central it arrived at Bournemouth West at 2.52pm. Returning at 4.34pm and retracing its outward journey it arrived back at Waterloo at 6.50pm. The 13 October 1956 being a Saturday, 35014 was working Nine Elms Engine Duty 33, but on Monday to Friday it was Bournemouth Duty 385 and on a Sunday, Salisbury Duty 461. In all cases a Merchant Navy was rostered and covered the train in both directions.

35014 was built at Eastleigh Works in July 1945 and rebuilt there in July 1956. After rebuilding it was allocated to Nine Elms until August 1964 when it was transferred to Weymouth, finally being withdrawn in March 1967 and scrapped by J. Cashmore, Newport in September 1967.

*Photo: Joe Kent [000104]*





This panoramic view of Ilfracombe was taken on 8 September 1963. It shows the North Devon terminus on the eve of its sad decline. The station had been listed for closure in the "Beeching Plan" in March of the same year. Strong arguments from the local council suggesting that 50% of summer visitors still arrived by rail and that the loss of the station would increase local unemployment may have delayed things but were unable to prevent the inevitable.

The decline of Ilfracombe began in earnest in 1964 when the engine shed shown in the foreground, opened by the Southern Railway in 1928, and the turntable located just behind the photographer were lost as the line was dieselised. The goods shed to the right of the station also closed in the same year. By 1967 the branch line from Barnstaple, opened in 1874, had been singled, and all the sidings shown in the photograph that had been provided for the once heavy summer traffic

had been removed. By 1968 all that remained was a single platform and a run around loop. The branch line was listed again for closure in 1969 having been deemed unsuitable for grant funding under the new 1968 Transport Act. It finally closed on 5 October 1970.

The whole station site, shown in the photograph, sits at 225 feet above sea level and is now occupied by a large factory. Around, three miles of the old track bed towards the next station at Morteohoe has been turned into a cycle track and can now be walked or cycled. The modern path accesses the track bed just behind where the photographer is standing and then climbs the 1:36 gradient out of the station. This bank was so steep that all but the lightest trains had to be double headed or banked.

*Photo: John Scrace [081990]*



Photo: David Cable

# The Bluebell Times

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## 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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