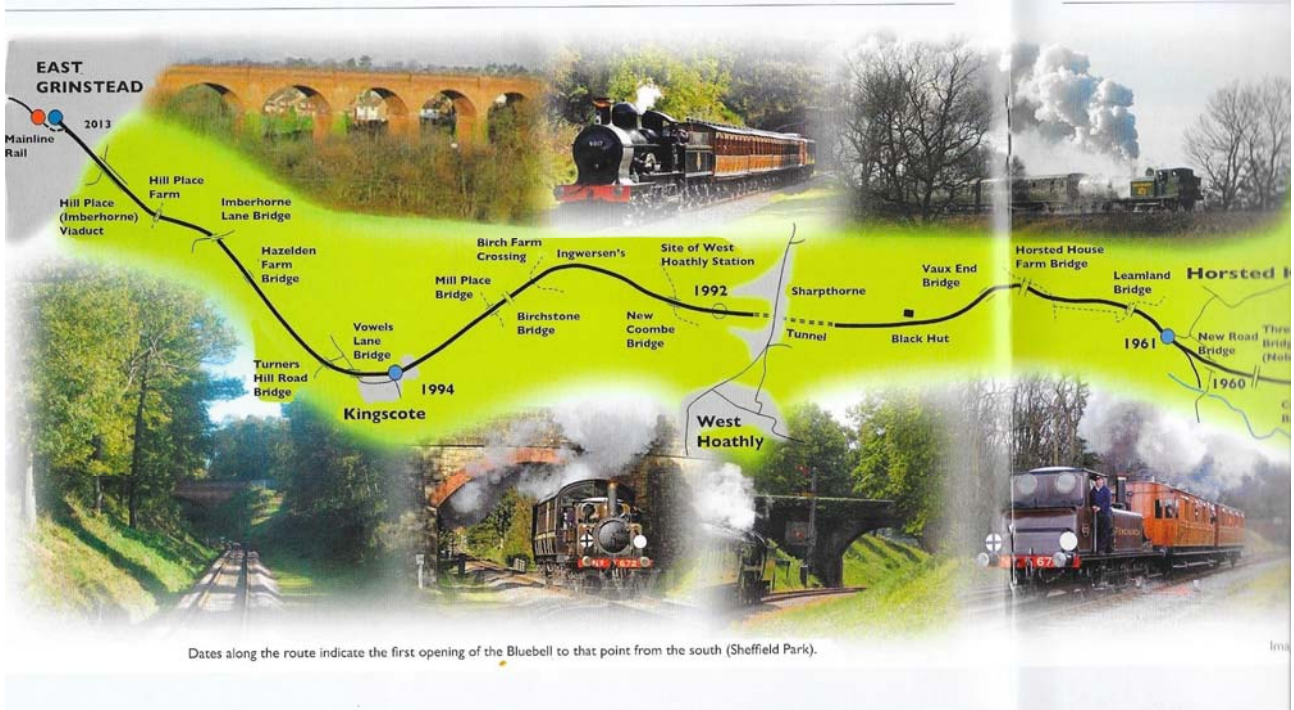
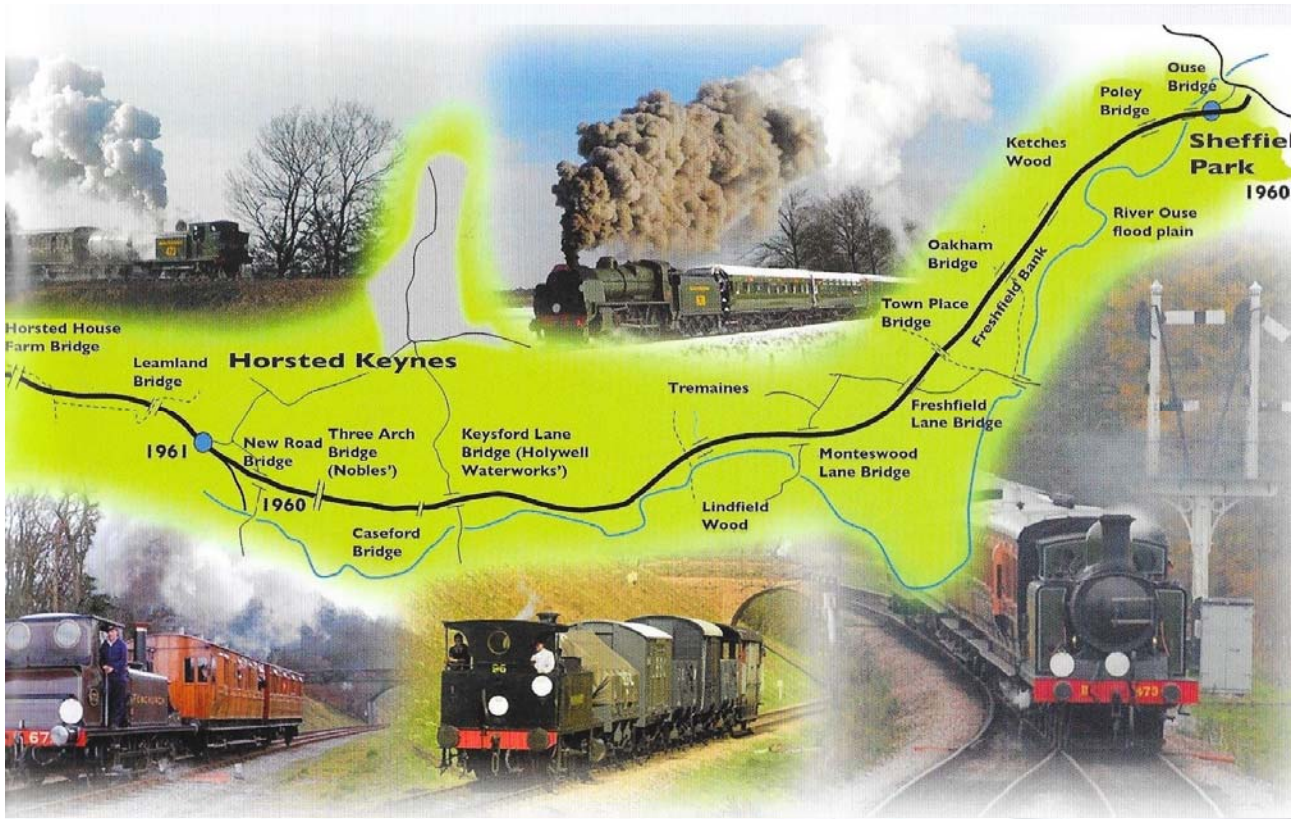


BLUEBELL RAILWAY EDUCATION DEPARTMENT



ALONG THE LINE FOR SCHOOLS



Dates along the route indicate the first opening of the Bluebell to that point from the south (Sheffield Park).

SHEFFIELD PARK STATION

1. Approaching the station buildings along the drive, the picnic area can be seen to the right, adjacent to the River Ouse, where lunch can be taken. The river is little more than a stream today but it was once navigable from the sea at Newhaven to just short of Balcombe Viaduct – on the London to Brighton main line between Haywards Heath and Balcombe. The 11 million bricks used to construct the viaduct were transported up river from Lewes by barge.

2. The station is built in the Queen Anne country architectural style, a style used at all stations on the line and is painted in the colours of the line's initial operators, the London Brighton and South Coast Railway. The year in which the line opened – 1892 -can be found in the decorative plasterwork on the front of the station building. Passengers enter the station via the booking hall and purchase their old fashioned Edmondson cardboard tickets from the booking office. The station was originally lit by oil lamps but is now lit by a mix of evocative gas lighting and more modern electric lights. It sits astride the Greenwich Meridian, the exact location being marked by a plaque at the north end of platform 1.



(Photo: Bluebell Archives)

3. The Railway houses and maintains its fleet of mainly steam locomotives at the station - currently it has some thirty engines in stock although only ten or so are in service at any given time – they need a boiler inspection and a new certificate every ten years. They are maintained in the locomotive works (not open to the public) but can be seen and inspected in the Victorian style engine shed at the south end of platform 1. Also to be found on that platform are the signal box, plus modern amenities, including a shop, the Bessemer Arms restaurant and bar and toilet facilities.

4. Crossing the line from platform 1 to platform 2 via the footbridge provides an opportunity for a comprehensive view of the station layout, including the sidings to the south where coaching stock is stabled when not in use. The line used to continue south to Lewes by way of a bridge over the A275 but this was removed soon after the line was closed by British Railways in 1958.

5. Just behind the footbridge on platform 2 can be seen a small cobbled area which was once used by the then Mid Sussex Dairy Company for loading milk churns onto the London trains, a significant source of traffic in the early 20th century but which was later lost to road transport. Another significant source of traffic in the early days of the railway and, indeed, right up until closure was timber, which was stored in a wood yard adjacent to platform 2. On part of that site the Bluebell has now erected storage facilities for some of its historic fleet of 90 or so railway carriages.

6. Further along platform 2 is the Bluebell's new and extensive museum, which illustrates the development of railways in general and the Bluebell in particular. Additional toilet facilities can be found here.



Photo :Bluebell Archives

7. The station provides much of historical interest to school parties and guided visits can usually be arranged to the Museum, the signal box and the locomotive shed but self-guided visits can also be made.

SHEFFIELD PARK TO HORSTED KEYNES

8. Following closure of the line by British Railways in 1958 the Bluebell was able to re-open a five mile section between Sheffield Park Station and a point just to the south of Horsted Keynes Station in 1960. In the spring the woods along this section of the line are carpeted with bluebells – hence the name of the Railway.

9. Immediately after leaving the station the railway crosses over the River Ouse and the line then becomes single track – the track bed was built wide enough to allow for double track but on this section the amount of traffic on offer was never heavy enough to justify the expense of laying the second track.

10. The locomotive then starts its long climb out of the Ouse Valley on a long straight gradient. It runs through woods and fields, with horses, cattle, sheep and pheasants all prominent in the landscape – often without a house in sight – passing en route the long closed Ketches Halt.

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11. Leaving the Ouse Valley the train enters an area known as Freshfield, an area popular with ramblers and where many public footpaths cross the line, hence the locomotive has to whistle frequently to alert walkers to its presence. The site of another closed halt, Freshfield, is passed soon afterwards.



(Photo: Bluebell Archive)

12. Immediately after leaving an area of woodland known as Lindfield Wood, Southern Water's Holywell Water Works come into view on the west of the line, on the road from Lindfield to Horsted Keynes. Again the train is climbing as it passes under Three Arch Bridge and then passes the site of Holywell Halt - opened by a certain Dr Beeching on 1 April 1962 and located on the Haywards Heath to East Grinstead bus route. However few passengers made use of the bus service, and motorists caused congestion by parking on the road, as a result the halt was closed at the end of that year.

13. The site of Bluebell Halt is then passed, this was the temporary terminus of the line until the Railway was allowed into Horsted Keynes Station in 1962.

14. Entering Horsted Keynes Station the former goods yard can be seen on the right and the route of the former branch line to Haywards Heath on the left. The Railway owns the track bed of that line as far as Ardingly and it is planned to re-open the line when funds permit.



(Photo: Ian Wright)

15. The main obstacle to be overcome before re-opening is the replacement of a small 117 yard (107 metre) viaduct immediately to the west of the station that was demolished when the line closed. It is proposed to bridge the gap by means of a bridge.

16. This was the first section of the line reopened by the Railway in 1960 and the first section of standard gauge track preserved by a heritage railway in the UK.

HORSTED KEYNES STATION

17. The Bluebell was allowed to enter and to use the station from 29 October 1961 – a time when British Railways were still operating an electric service to Haywards Heath – and took over the station completely in 1964 following the closure of that service. For a country station over a mile from the village it is surprisingly large, with four platforms and five tracks. Though passenger traffic could never be described as heavy, the station did once provide through services to London Victoria and London Bridge via East Grinstead and East Croydon and to Brighton via Lewes and via Haywards Heath.



(Photo: Bowers)

18. The buildings on platforms 3 & 4 and on platform 5 are original but those on platforms 1 & 2 were erected by the Bluebell early this century, the originals having been demolished by the London Brighton and South Coast Railway in 1919 as an economy measure. Passengers cross from platform to platform via a subway, rather than a footbridge as at Sheffield Park.

19. The station retains the ambience of a 1930s Southern Railway station and as such is very popular with film and television producers. In recent times it has featured in both *Poirot* and *Downton Abbey* – as can be seen from the station name board in the photograph – as well as featuring some years ago in the Thames Television film of *The Railway Children*



Photo: Mick Blackburn

20. The George V period buffet will be found on platforms 3 & 4, whilst weddings are conducted in a room on platforms 1 & 2. Wedding parties often make use of the Bluebell's Pullman dining car train or the Wealden Rambler afternoon tea train for the reception afterwards.

21. The Railway's coaching stock is maintained and restored in the Carriage Works which are accessible from platform 5 and, from a viewing area, visitors can see coaches being restored and rebuilt, some of them up to 80 years old. Many of these will have been used as holiday homes - often incorporated in seaside bungalows - or used as farm storage facilities for many years. Further extensions to the Works and its storage facilities are now planned.

22. The station contains a wealth of historical material of interest to school parties, particularly the Carriage Shed, where volunteers can be seen making use of old and new skills to bring historical carriages back to life. The station is also the focal point for our WWII evacuation exercises for schools, pupils can “shelter” in the subway during “air attacks”.

HORSTED KEYNES TO KINGSCOTE

23. Horsted Keynes Station was the Railway's northern terminus for some 30 years, with the extension to Kingscote opened in stages between 1992 and 1994. In order to relay and open the line the Railway had first to purchase the track bed from local landowners, to whom it had been sold after closure by British Railways.

24. Both the line northwards from Horsted Keynes, and the branch line to Haywards Heath, were double track but a single line suffices for the traffic today. Things might have been different if the Southern Railway had completed its pre-war plans to electrify the line from Haywards Heath to East Croydon via Horsted Keynes and East Grinstead, providing an alternative to the Brighton main line. The section from Haywards Heath to Horsted Keynes was electrified, but the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 put a stop to the scheme.

25. In the spring there is one notable change to the landscape as compared to the southern end of the line, with primroses rather than bluebells predominating on the lineside.

26. Leaving the station the locomotive has to work hard, on a rising gradient and the train passes, initially, through open fields and then past Horsted House Farm just after a stone over bridge. In addition to the more usual farm animals, this section of the line often provides a splendid opportunity to see herds of deer grazing in the fields and woods.

27. The line now plunges into woodland again, once used as a fuel for the forges of the Wealden iron industry in the 19th century and the locomotive again has to work hard up the gradient to the entrance to and through Sharpthorne Tunnel – which passes under the village of the same name. The tunnel, one of the major works on the line is 731 yards (668 metres) long and the longest on a heritage railway in the UK.



(Photo: Jon Bowers)

28. The tunnel was constructed entirely by way of pick and shovel and two men died during its construction. Two of the original five access shafts remain, the deepest having a depth of 150 feet (46 metres). Because of objections made by landowners prior to construction the route of the tunnel was altered and it was later discovered that it had been built under a hidden well. As a result considerable quantities of water seep through the tunnel lining and in cold winters huge stalactites form, these always had to be removed by hand before services could commence. To avoid this problem the Bluebell has recently erected a false roof in the worst affected section of the tunnel.

29. Bursting out of the tunnel the train passes the site of West Hoathly Station, which was demolished when the line closed and only the platform edges can be seen today. There is however a possibility that this station will be rebuilt at some point in the future. To the east of the station site can be seen the brickworks which supplied all of the materials for the lining of Sharpthorne Tunnel as well as the bricks for the station buildings.

30. The train now passes over New Coombe Bridge which marks the boundary of the second section of the line's original northern extension. The bridge is some 250 feet (77 metres) higher than Sheffield Park Station and the train, having passed over the watershed, now heads down into the Medway Valley – the River Medway rises just a few miles to the west of Kingscote Station.

31. The tunnel and its history always proves to be of great interest to school parties.

KINGSCOTE STATION

32. The train soon enters Kingscote, the most remote station on the line and, even today, little more than a hamlet but, while passengers were always few and far between, the goods traffic was once substantial. After closure of the line the station buildings – erected in the same style as Sheffield Park and Horsted Keynes – were sold and the purchasers planned to turn the station building into a house. However, they ran out of funds and the Railway was fortunate in being able to purchase the station in 1984, some eight years before the line was extended to that point in 1994.

33. Before the station could be reopened a great deal of work had to be undertaken. This included the restoration of the canopy over platform 1, the replacement of the Booking Office, the unblocking of the subway between the platforms and the rebuilding of platform 2 in its entirety. Today the station maintains the style of the nationalised British Railways era – 1947 to 1997- and maintains its floral tradition. The gardens are maintained by volunteers and there is always a magnificent display of roses in the summer season.



(Photo: Keith Leppard)

34. From re-opening in 1994 to the completion of the extension to East Grinstead in the spring of 2013 the station served as the northern terminus of the line, but suffered from one significant disadvantage. Local planning restrictions meant that prospective passengers were only allowed to join trains there if they arrived by any means of transport other than private car - car parking was prohibited by the Mid Sussex District Council. That is still the position today.

35. For a number of years any prospective passengers from East Grinstead and beyond had to make use of a connecting bus service made available by the Railway. That service however ceased on the opening of the extension to East Grinstead.



(Photo: Keith Leppard)

36. Today the station has once again become a quiet and secluded haven but it does have a large picnic area adjacent to platform 2 and use is made of this area for school parties comprised of younger children. They often find the whole line journey too long and a break at the station provides an opportunity to let off steam before joining the train back to Sheffield Park on its return journey.

37. Such breaks also afford an opportunity to show pupils around a traditional railway ticket office.

KINGSCOTE TO EAST GRINSTEAD

38. Reopening of the line beyond Kingscote to reach the original terminus station at East Grinstead was a major task, necessitating not just the purchase of the original track bed from local landowners but also the removal of some 100,000 tonnes of household rubbish from a local authority landfill site that was blocking the line. Thus it was not until March 2013 that this final section of the line could be opened.

39. Leaving Kingscote Station the line passes the original goods yard on the left, before passing over a substantial brick built bridge crossing the Turners Hill to East Grinstead road. It then enters a narrow section of track where the owner of the easternmost section of the embankment declined to sell the land back to the Railway. Fortunately the owner of the western section did so, thus enabling the Railway to restore the link to East Grinstead.

40. A short distance later the line passes under Imberhorne Lane Bridge which marked the southern boundary of the quarter mile long landfill site that blocked the line. Removing sufficient landfill to enable the railway to get through took some three years and cost in the region of £4m – all of which had to be raised by the Railway. However, the terms of the planning consent for the removal of the waste meant that there was neither the time nor the money to remove it all and the remains of the tip can today be seen behind black plastic sheeting on the west side of the line – in time nature will render this indistinguishable from the lineside elsewhere.



(Photo: Gordon Callender)

41. Initially the waste was removed by lorry but trials showed that it would be quicker and more cost effective to remove the material by rail using modern freight wagons. Most was transported to landfill sites in Bedfordshire.

42. Halfway along the cutting on the east side of the line, a plaque has been erected making the summit of the line. This was named in honour of Bernard Holden, who led the original team that saved the line for posterity and who was, for many years, its President. He died in 2012 at the age of 104 and was thus, unfortunately, unable to fulfil a long held wish to see the re-opening of the line to its original northern terminus.

43. The line then passes beneath a farm bridge which marked the northern end of the landfill site and, soon afterwards, crosses the ten arch 240 yard (210 metre) long and 90 foot (27 metre) high Imberhorne Viaduct, before entering the Bluebell's East Grinstead Station. From the viaduct there are extensive views of the Sussex Weald to the east of the line, while modern housing estates can be seen to the west.



(Photo: Bluebell Archive)

44. This section of the line provides a graphic illustration of what can be achieved in terms of both fundraising and engineering by a body staffed primarily by volunteers.

EAST GRINSTEAD STATION

45. The original terminus of the Lewes and East Grinstead Railway was platforms 1 and 2 of the mainline station but the Bluebell's new terminus is situated adjacent to that station and just a three minute walk away, it is, effectively, platform 3.

46. The new station lies on a rather cramped site but facilities available there include a booking office plus a travel centre and buffet and toilet facilities. There is a single platform, plus a loop line - this enables steam engines to run around their train and so be at the head of the train before departure back to Sheffield Park. A water tower has also been erected adjacent to the track to enable engines to fill their water tanks before the return journey.



(Photo: Bluebell Archive)

47. Unfortunately the Bluebell does not have any car parking space available at the station – other than limited disabled parking facilities. Other passengers can however park at well signposted local authority or railway car parks not far from the station. There are also frequent bus services between the mainline station, the town centre and nearby towns.

48. Coaches can drop off and pick up their passengers from the bus station adjacent to the main line station.

49. At the new station a connecting line has been installed between the Bluebell and the main line network. This enables trains from the main line to visit the Bluebell. In the photograph below a train, having crossed Imberhorne Viaduct, is leaving the Bluebell to access the main line.



(Photo: Brian Lacey)

50. For smaller school parties enjoying a whole line trip, the station usually provides an opportunity for pupils to visit the footplate of the steam locomotive.

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