

SPIRIT OF THE BLUEBELL RAILWAY

Matt Allen

The magnificent Bluebell Railway is mainly run by volunteers and operates steam services between Sheffield Park and Kingscote in Sussex. It has over 180,000 visitors per year and is also one of the major Heritage Railways in the UK.

On 1 Aug 1882 the line from Lewes to East Grinstead was opened, primarily intended for freight. There was also a spur that connected Horsted Keynes to Ardingly and Haywards Heath, opened in 1883. The Southern Railway absorbed the whole line in 1923, but by this time the decline had set in.

Under nationalisation, British Railways took over in 1948 and by the early 1950s plans for the line's closure were being drawn up. Following representations by a local resident, Miss Madge Bessemer, it was discovered the closure was illegal. However, after a public enquiry held in Lewes in October 1957, the legal constraints were overcome by B.R. and on 16 March 1958 the line closed for a second and final time.

On 24 December 1959, a group of volunteers, keen not to see the line disappear into history, were able to lease the 4 1/2 mile section of line from Sheffield Park to the south of Horsted Keynes under a five year term. The first items of rolling stock began to arrive on 17 May 1960 with the first trains running for the newly formed 'Bluebell Railway Ltd' on 7 August 1960. In 1967 a huge step forward was made when the lease of the line was converted into an outright purchase. The Bluebell Railway always had an eye on extension. Gradually the railway moved north. By 1992 trains were running through West Hoathley tunnel, and 1994 saw the service extended to Kingscote. This is not the end of the story as plans to extend north from Kingscote to East Grinstead are at an advanced stage with the achievement of being reconnected to the national network at East Grinstead on the horizon.

Through more than 60 photographs in a handy pocket-sized format, Matt Allen captures the true spirit of the line, taking us on a photographic journey along its route and highlighting the reasons why the railway can rightly boast to being among the most popular heritage lines in the country.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt Allen has been interested in railways for as long as he can remember. His father was a fireman in the steam days and latterly a driver for British Rail, so an interest in railways was in the blood. Most weekends will find Matt photographing steam trains somewhere, covering many miles all over the country. Every autumn also sees the launch of his annual "Steam Railway Calendar" showcasing his best pictures from the year. He is a regular contributor to the railway media, specifically *Railway Magazine*. This book follows on from his other titles in the Halsgrove Railway Series, including *The Mid Hants Railway*, *The Bluebell Railway*, and the *The Great Central Railway*.

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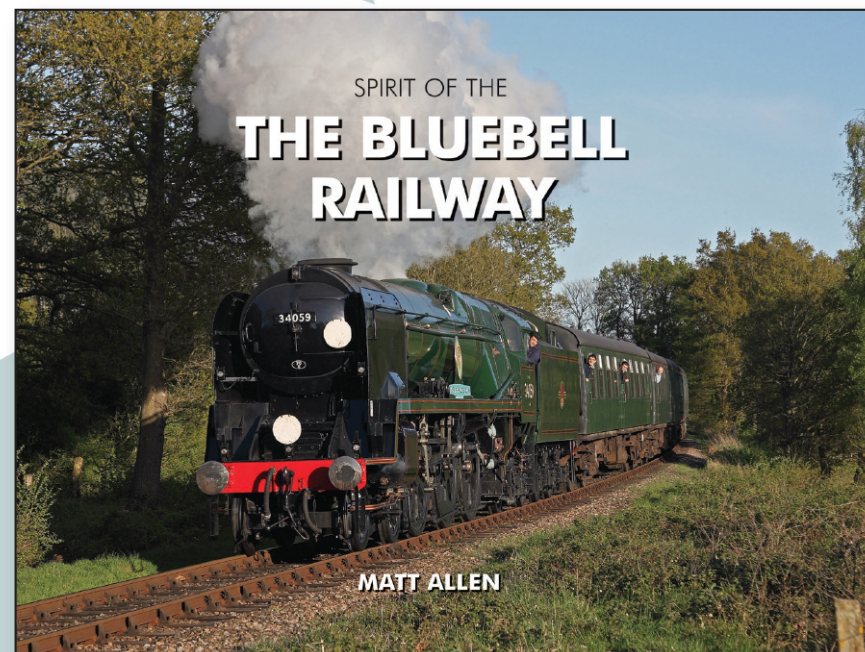
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Number 672 'Fenchurch' was built in 1872. After finishing its service with British Railways it was purchased by the Bluebell in 1964.



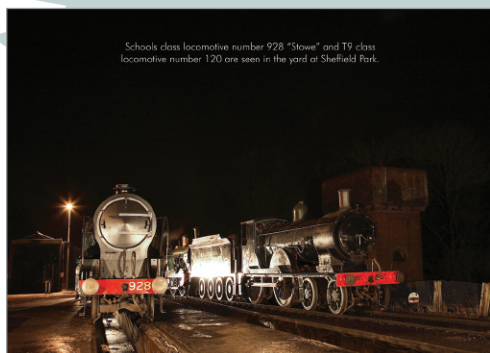
'Three Arch Bridge' is one of the well known landmarks on the line. 53809 passes under the bridge as it approaches Horsted Keynes Station.



7F number 53809 was originally constructed for use on the Somerset and Dorset line, being built at Darlington in 1925.



Kingscote is the current northern terminus of the line, although an extension to East Grinstead is planned in the near future.



Schools class locomotive number 928 "Stows" and T9 class locomotive number 120 are seen in the yard at Sheffield Park.



"Stepney" bathes in lovely light at the end of a days work.



A train is seen waiting to depart Sheffield Park with the 9 mile journey to Kingscote ahead of it.



Standard Tank number 80151 is beginning the climb up Freshfield Bank as it heads from Sheffield Park to Horsted Keynes.



On a stunning December morning 7F locomotive number 53809 is seen on a photographers' charter.

Example of a double-page spread.