



Branch Line Weekend 15-17 March 2019



Photo report



First train of the gala – hauled by the two visiting locomotives (Steve Lee)

We present some of the best photos submitted from the weekend, together with the text of the Railway's Press Release, which acts as a nice summary of the weekend's activities, rated by many participants as our best ever such event!

Event roundup:

The Bluebell Railway's 2019 season of special events kicked off with a 3-day Branch Line event on 15th – 17th March. The event came earlier in the calendar this year, but despite 'mixed' weather was very well supported.

The Friday proved the most popular day and indeed provided the unique opportunity to see the cavalcade of no less than 4 ex- L.S.W.R. locomotives in the form of Bluebell residents – Adams Radial 30583 and B4 30096 'Normandy' together with visiting W24 'Calbourne' and Beattie Well Tank 30587. Many thanks go to the Isle of Wight Railway for the loan of 'Calbourne' and the National Railway Museum for the loan of the Beattie Well Tank for this event. The other locomotives in steam were resident S.E.C.R. trio of 'H' 0-4-4T No. 263, 'P' 0-6-0T No.178 and '01' 0-6-0 No. 65, plus S.R. 'Q' 0-6-0 No. 30541.

The Adams Radial which earlier in the year underwent a repaint from LSWR green for the first time since 1983 to British Railways lined black – looked resplendent in her new livery and was much photographed whilst on static display at Horsted Keynes following movement up from Sheffield Park as part of the cavalcade. The support of Steam Railway Magazine, Heritage Painting and Bluebell Railway Trust for the repaint is much appreciated.

An intensive timetable was operated and carriage sets included the ever popular 'Chesham' set of 4 Metropolitan coaches, and the return to service after major overhaul of S.R. Bulleid carriage No.5768 as part of a 4-coach Bulleid set. The timetable was challenging but in the main followed – and technical problems were few; it was unfortunate however that No.30587 had to be withdrawn from duties early on Sunday afternoon.

Visitor numbers over the 3 days totalled 3044 which was 30% up on the event last year. The number of visitors turning up on the day to purchase tickets was broadly the same as 2018 with this year 47% starting their journey at Sheffield Park, 28% at East Grinstead and 25% at Horsted Keynes. Advance tickets sales were however significantly up at 802 compared with 176 the year before.

On the catering front revenue was up 50% on the same event last year with Saturday proving their busiest and similarly sales in the shop hit a record for the Branch Line event with Saturday also proving their busiest.

Overall a great start to the Season with the event proving popular with both families and enthusiasts – our thanks go to all those who made it possible.

*Roger Garman – Communications Director Bluebell Railway Plc
22 March 2019*

Photos contributed by Julian Clark:



Friday morning, and the visiting ex-LSWR engines W24 and 30587 approach New Road Bridge near Horsted Keynes, with the 09.30 service from Sheffield Park.

Below, the cavalcade of four ex-London & South Western Railway (LSWR) locomotives passing Nobles Bridge on its way to Horsted Keynes on Friday. Our resident Adams Radial, No.30583, and B4 No.30096 'Normandy', repainted and reliveried for the event, were then posed for photos at Horsted Keynes for the remainder of the weekend.





Radial glimpsed, and the O2 at Sheffield Park – sadly the weather was not generally kind to our photographers!





The visiting locomotives with our Southern Railway Maunsell carriages at the former West Hoathly station site.





Horsted Keynes became the centre of activity, following the arrival of the cavalcade of four ex-LSWR locomotives.





More from the Friday in the rain at Horsted Keynes.





There was also a night shoot on Friday evening. In addition to the photos in this section from Julian Clark, the one below is from Jonathan Hughes.





The Beattie Well Tank at the Friday evening photo shoot. On the Saturday, the visitors are seen leaving Horsted Keynes with one of the two sets of Victorian carriages in use over the weekend.



The last of Julian's photos shows the pair of 0-4-4Ts with the Victorian Metropolitan Railway carriages, which haven't run as a 4-car set for a while, having needed attention to brakes and door locks.



Photos contributed by Andrew Crampton:



The four ex-LSWR locomotives approach Horsted Keynes on the Friday afternoon.



It's been some time since we've been able to turn out a rake of four Southern Railway Bulleid carriages. The return to service after a painstaking rebuild, of corridor composite carriage 5768 was one of the Bluebell milestones celebrated over the weekend, and since they are all in BR(S) livery the pairing here with the Maunsell Locomotive Society's Southern Q-class No.30541 is most apposite.



The South Eastern & Chatham Railway H-class No.263 is here also seen with an appropriate rake, with three London Chatham and Dover (later SECR) carriages immediately behind the engine.

The visiting locomotives, at West Hoathly - photo by Yoshi Hashida:



Southern Railway carriage No.5768 ready for service (Photo by Martin Lawrence)



This Southern Railway 1947-built carriage, designed by Oliver Bulleid, has just reached the end of a comprehensive overhaul by volunteers in our C&W department at Horsted Keynes.

It is seen here at Sheffield Park on Thursday 14 March, following a test run that day. A few minor problems discovered will be rectified in the coming weeks.

The carriage has both first and third-class compartments (hence known as a “composite”), and is one of only two such Bulleid carriages surviving, the other having recently been restored at the Swanage Railway.

Its previous period of service on the Bluebell was from 1976 to 1993, and the overhaul, which started a decade ago was effectively a complete rebuild. Significant areas of the timber body were replaced or repaired along with the complete renewal of the steel bottom-side plates and timber floor (which necessitated removal of the internal partitions of the compartments), with new external steel sheeting and main side-light (window) frames, new seating material, and much more.

Photos contributed by Brian Lacey:



Brian only managed to catch a couple of the trains, at East Grinstead, on the Saturday morning. Firstly the LSWR pairing with the Victorian 4-wheelers and the LNWR Observation Car.





The ex-LSWR Beattie Well tank, visiting from the National Railway Museum, and O2 W24 from the Isle of Wight.





The Bluebell's resident SECR pairing of the H-class and the O1 with the 7-coach Southern Railway "crowd-buster" set, just half an hour later with the second train of the day.



Photos contributed by Steve Lee:



The cavalcade of four ex-LSWR locomotives on the Friday afternoon, and below, the visitors at West Hoathly on Saturday with re-grouping stock.





Above: the 1896-built SECR O1 starts the two-mile 1-in-75 climb out of Horsted Keynes with the Maunsell carriages on Saturday, whilst below the two 0-4-4 tank locomotives have just come off their train at the same station.





The Bulleid carriages, hauled by the Q-class and piloted by the Beattie Well Tank, approach Horsted Keynes on the Saturday. On arrival the two locos and the carriage set each headed off on three different services, and that hauled by the Well Tank is seen below.





When not required on passenger duties, SECR P-class No.178 was busy at Horsted Keynes with brake van rides.

Photo Charter – Monday 18 March (photos by Steve Lee):



Adams Radial Tank No.30583 appears to be "in steam".



The repainting of LSWR Adams Radial Tank No.488 into BR Black as 30583, as it ended its days on the Lyme Regis Branch, has stirred some controversy. However, having carried its previous coat of LSWR Pea-green for over a third of a century, the repaint sponsored by Steam Railway magazine, Heritage Painting and the Bluebell Railway Trust, enabled the scene shown here, with the Bulleid carriages, and will hopefully spur thoughts towards a potential overhaul back to working order. With this likely to cost in the region of half a million pounds, the increased exposure from the event can only be a good thing when the time comes.



The LSWR Dock tank 'Normandy' was also temporarily reliveried for the event, as No.30096.

Always the bridesmaid, never the bride... but again a potential candidate for an overhaul – owned by the Bulleid Society, it may have to wait until their Pacific locomotive 21C123 'Blackmoor Vale' returns to steam, or maybe it'll slip into the works first!



We finish with Steve Lee's superb portrait of the Maunsell Q-class North of Vaux End with the four Bulleid carriages on the Monday. The only survivor of its class, this 1939-built locomotive has just returned to service after major mechanical work undertaken over the winter. It has been a stalwart of our operational fleet since returning to steam 4 years ago.

Built as a basic goods engine to replace life-expired pre-grouping locomotives, this was Maunsell's final design as Chief Mechanical Engineer of the Southern Railway. Bulleid, Maunsell's successor, improved the draughting arrangements with a multiple blast-pipe arrangement and new chimney, and it was in this condition that 541 was withdrawn from service in 1964. Sent to Barry scrapyard, like many other locos there it escaped the cutter's torch and was bought by preservationists.

In 1973 it was moved to Ashchurch in Gloucestershire and moved on in 1978 to the Bluebell, where its owning group merged with those of U-class No.1618 and S15 No.847 to form the Maunsell Locomotive Society. The blast pipe and chimney arrangement have been further modified using BR Class 4 components, in the same way as BR had done to some of the class. This has the advantage of returning the locomotive visually to very close to its original form. Major restoration work saw it return to steam in 1983, operating for the following decade in Maunsell livery as No.541. Its recent overhaul was undertaken in part by the volunteers of our Locomotive Working Group.