



OPERATION UNDERCOVER – HORSTED KEYNES

NEWS RELEASE

Thursday 30th November 2017 saw a milestone event for Operation Undercover, or OP4 as the project to support the Bluebell Railway's work on heritage rolling stock has become known.

Conceived in 2008, a fund-raising campaign was launched in 2014 after the completion of the Northern Extension project fundraising. In a matter of weeks £350,000 was raised and since then donations and grants from the Bluebell Railway Trust have generated a further £200,000.

With initial funding in place, site clearance was carried out in 2015 before construction work started in 2016. As of November 2017, the roof work is complete to cover not only four new storage roads but also the existing maintenance road – where previously all tasks had been undertaken in the open air! Track for two of the four storage roads has been laid and works undertaken have also included a revised lay out of the point and trackwork in the Horsted Keynes downyard.

The project's objective is to provide covered accommodation for the array of historic carriages awaiting their turn in the restoration queue – at present their only protection from the elements being a tarpaulin. OP4 will provide cover for around 24 carriages in all and the first three of these were shunted under cover at a ceremony attended by various Bluebell Railway officers and staff as well as several financial sponsors of the project.

The first carriages placed ‘undercover’ were LBSCR Director’s Saloon No 60, Maunsell corridor brake composite no 6575 and Bulleid semi-open brake third no 4279.

In his remarks Bluebell Railway Plc Chairman Dick Fearn stated that this is a key event for the OP4 project and reflects accomplishing the will of the Railway and those individuals that sponsored the project to better preserve and protect these priceless assets which the Bluebell are very fortunate to possess.

This is not the end of the project, but it is “the end of the beginning”. There are still further phases to complete and these include external and internal walls and doors plus further improvements to the maintenance area. The immediate focus is now on completing a Heritage Skills Centre as a key part of the project. This will include offices, workshops and a training area to ensure the skills of carriage and wagon restoration are preserved for future generations. Further donations are very welcome and can be made to the Bluebell Railway Trust at Sheffield Park Station – full details at www.bluebell-railway.co.uk/bluebell/trust

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