

Flabbergasting finds mean funds for Friends of Bishopstone Station

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Contractors working for Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) have unearthed a strange hoard of abandoned objects at Bishopstone station.

The workers had started tidying up inside the station to get ready for a major refurbishment of the Grade II-listed building. As they pulled up the wooden shutters of the old parcel office, unopened for over 30 years, they had no inkling of what they were about to reveal.

The space behind the shutters was jammed full of vintage junk including 1970s car parts, fishing rods, rowing oars, British Rail advertising posters, a sack of fertilizer, and two spectacular individual vintage wooden water skis, possibly from the 1950s. Objects discovered range in age from a 1950s 'automotive electrical equipment tester' to a 1980s skateboard.

With architectural guidance and financial support from the Railway Heritage Trust, GTR plan to restore Bishopstone as part of its network-wide, multimillion-pound station improvement programme. The train company is developing detailed plans to refurbish the unusual octagonal booking hall, with guidance from the Friends of Bishopstone Station (FOBS). The Friends, a local group dedicated to protecting and

preserving the Art Deco building, are supported by the Southeast Communities Rail Partnership (SCRП) in their work with GTR.

The refurbishment plans include transforming the old parcel office into a community space that FOBS can let out to local groups.

GTR have pledged to donate any proceeds from the sale of 'the Bishopstone Bric-a-brac Hoard' to the Friends. The most saleable items are thought to be the car parts, in particular a box of rubber tubes, still in demand for spares and repairs.

One of the potentially valuable finds that might not be put on sale is a teddy bear, now called Fobsy.

Barbara Mine, chair and founder member of FOBS, said: "It was surprising that anything was hidden away and forgotten for so long, let alone such a strange collection of objects. But there are some sellable items, especially the car parts, and we're very grateful to GTR for donating any proceeds to the Friends. We're looking forward to working alongside GTR as the station improvements progress."

Harry Sieviewright, SCRП's Community Rail Line Officer, said: "The project to regenerate Bishopstone Station has been ongoing since 2018. The old parcel office is an area we wanted to develop as a 'social hub' for the local community and we are grateful to both GTR and the Railway Heritage Trust for helping fund the project. It is amazing to find such interesting and rare artefacts, but not surprising in a way, as the area has been disused for such a long time. The station probably has more secrets yet to uncover."

Station Manager Andy Gardner said: "The station was built to serve a new housing development that never happened because of the Second World War. It has been underused ever since, so it's great to be working with SCRП, the Friends and the Railway Heritage Trust to help this architectural gem achieve its potential as a community asset."

Photo credit: GTR/ Friends of Bishopstone station