

Fundraising efforts receive a welcome boost as steam engine goes on holiday

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Due to the pandemic, millions of holiday-makers will be enjoying a “staycation” this summer but a small steam engine from South East England will be enjoying a “steamcation” trip across the water this June.

Knowle an A1 steam engine of a class known as “Terriers” has just completed her overhaul and will be leaving the mainland in this month, to take part in the Isle of Wight Steam Railway’s anniversary gala in June, celebrating 50 years since the reopening as a heritage line.

Knowle will be reprising her own historic service on the Island before the Second World War. Next year Stroudley’s iconic A1 class “Terrier” locomotives will be celebrating 150 years since the first batch of these locomotives entered service.

The A1 “Terrier” class locomotives’ diminutive appearance belies the astonishing performance these locomotives put in on Victorian suburban services, earning their “Terrier” nickname from their performance and distinctive ‘bark’.

A total of 50 Terriers – officially, the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway A1 Class – were built at the

Brighton works between 1872 and 1880. The diminutive tank locomotives were designed to haul commuter trains on the already heavily congested lines in South and South-East London.

Only 10 Terriers remain; two of which are on static display.

The Kent & East Sussex Railway are proud to be the home for two of these historic locomotives; Bodiam, was the first to be constructed and among the first batch to enter service in 1872, and Knowle, one of the last batch to enter into service in 1880.

Both locomotives are owned by The Terrier Trust CIO and run on the Kent & East Sussex Railway, a heritage line which passes through 10.5 miles of the picturesque Rother Valley.

Knowle first saw service on the K&ESR in 1940 and pulled the final passenger train when the line closed-60 years ago this year. After a brief spell operating on Hayling Island branch towards the end of an astonishing operational career - she had covered nearly a million miles by the time the Southern Railway was formed in 1923 - she was sold to Butlins in 1964, becoming an exhibit in the children's playground at Minehead.

Fortunately, she was rescued and brought back to working order at K&ESR. Back in 2019, The Terrier Trust and the K&ESR launched a £150,000 appeal to help get Bodiam and Knowle overhauled in time for the landmark.

More than £85,000 has already been raised and now a £25,000 pledge has been made by a charitable foundation.

The Kent & East Sussex Railway and The Terrier Trust continue to raise money so that Knowle's older sister, Bodiam (originally known as Poplar), can return to steam to mark her 150th birthday next year, when she will take part in events telling the story of the 150 years of history she has witnessed.

K&ESR chairman Simon Marsh said: "The pledge by the Garfield Weston Foundation gives a huge fillip to our fund-raising efforts." "We are truly fortunate to have two of the surviving Terriers based at K&ESR. They are by far the oldest engines in our small fleet and have been synonymous with this line for more than a century."

The overhaul of Bodiam is a larger undertaking, the engine having been out of use for some years. The work has been outsourced to the engineering arm of the North Norfolk Railway.

Mr Marsh said: "'Bodiam' came here in 1901, soon after the line opened, and ran throughout the original period of operation, hauling passenger trains until services ceased in 1953 and goods services until they ended in the early '60s.

"She was saved for preservation and has served the line faithfully, treating locals and tourists alike to scenic rides along the Rother Valley."

Tom White, the chairman of The Terrier Trust CIO, said: "'Knowle' was preserved for some years on static display. However, like me, our supporters believe that our heritage is transformed by being in steam and

the reason for this is clearly demonstrated by 'Knowle' standing before us breathing steam today.

"I should like to thank all our donors who have made this possible and Rolvenden Works at the Kent & East Sussex Railway for the overhaul of the loco and the stunning repaint. I should also like to thank the Garfield Weston Foundation for their substantial contribution towards helping us complete the Terrier 150 Project.

"They are two of the oldest steam locomotives still in regular use and will continue to reside on the Kent & East Sussex Railway, a line that has been the home of both locos for much of their existence."

The line runs from Tenterden in Kent to Bodiam in Sussex and attracts 90,000 visitors a year. Hundreds of volunteers help make it one of the south east's favourite attractions.

The COVID lockdowns had a savage impact on the railway's income, particularly through the necessary cancellation of the hugely-popular Santa Specials.

When a limited service resumes on Saturday, 22 May, it will be the first time in six months that trains have been able to operate. The Garfield Weston Foundation was established in 1958 and is a family-founded charitable grant-making trust which now gives away approximately £80 million a year to charities across the UK.

Donations and more details about the Terrier 150 Project can be found online at:

<https://www.terriertrust.org.uk/appeal>

Photo credit: Liam Head