

Public donations top £120,000 as appeal to restore historic railway station starts to sparkle

November 29, 2021



An appeal to restore a heritage railway station which has featured in Downton Abbey and scores of TV programmes and films is steaming ahead thanks to public support.

The Bluebell Railway has asked for donations to finance the repair of leaking roofs and replacement of rotting beams at Horsted Keynes station in West Sussex.

The railway's appeal co-ordinator Trevor Swainson said: "The 'Jewel in the Crown' appeal is beginning to sparkle as more donations roll in. So far, we have raised more than £120,000 from members, shareholders and friends of the Railway with the result that we are 70% towards our target of £170,000 from the public. We have had a really good response to our appeal and this will help us carry out vital restoration work to our 140-year-old station at Horsted Keynes.

"The station at Horsted Keynes is one of the finest preserved stations dating back to the opening of the East Grinstead to Lewes railway line in Victorian times. It is a Grade II listed site and it has been carefully

preserved throughout its working life but time is catching up with it and now is the time to restore the buildings and platforms to their former glory.”

Many film crews and TV production companies have used Horsted Keynes station as a location for period dramas because of its look and feel. The station has appeared in the Downton Abbey TV series, The Woman in Black film, Poirot, Grantchester and a remake of The Railway Children. Among the stars to have visited the station for filming are Daniel Radcliffe, David Suchet, Dame Maggie Smith and Jenny Agutter.

The Bluebell Railway is known as ‘The Line to the Stars’ because of its long history of filming dating back to 1961.

Horsted Keynes station was built in 1882 by the London Brighton and South Coast Railway as part of the Lewes-East Grinstead line. It was bought by the Bluebell Railway in the 1960s and the preserved railway has maintained it and decorated it in the style of a Southern Railway junction station from the 1930s.

The railway has carried out a major survey of the station and calculates the first phase of the repair work will be at least £500,000. The initial repairs will be to the station house and Platform 5. Later work will cover the other platforms.

Members of the Bluebell Railway Preservation Society have already pledged £20,000 and the railway’s charitable arm is promising to match-fund on a pound-for-pound basis all public donations between now and the end of January up to a total of £150,000.

The station has also played host to a number of famous visitors including the Rev W Awdry (who wrote one of his Railway Series books called ‘Stepney the Bluebell Engine’), British Railways chairman Dr Beeching (who lived nearby in East Grinstead), former Conservative prime minister Harold Macmillan and broadcasters Michael Portillo and Michael Palin.

The Bluebell Railway is the oldest heritage railway of its type and opened in August 1960. It runs on 11 miles of track from Sheffield Park in East Sussex to East Grinstead in West Sussex. Further details of the appeal and how to donate are at <https://www.bluebell-railway.com/donate/>

Photo credit: Mick Blackburn