



BLUEBELL RAILWAY

Newsletter Issue 4: September 2025

Putting together this newsletter at the end of August, it feels like an unusually sharp line has been drawn under this year's summer. Seemingly endless warm/hot days have rapidly given way to something more autumnal. In the works, our Maunsell Restaurant Car project is similarly going through a transition, between the dismantling phase and the start of rebuilding. You can read of about the past six months' progress in this issue; by the next issue, I'm confident we will be telling you about starting to put things back together again!

Meanwhile, our annual Members' Day event is now just around the corner. We're looking forward to seeing you on Saturday September 20th and having the chance to show you what we've been doing.

Keith Leppard, Editor

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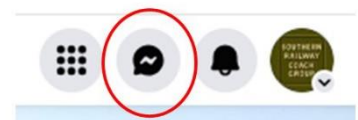
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SR Coach Group News

The run-up to the successful launch into traffic of Hastings Brake 3rd No 3687 on May 31st made for a very busy month. We were able to have a special pre-launch celebration on May 28th for the team that had worked on the project, when No 3687 was attached to the service train for our party of guests. As well as members of the team who have been busy on the project over the past six years, it was good to welcome back Bob Searle



Above: 3687 posed at Horsted Keynes with members of the restoration team. Left: 34059 Sir Archibald Sinclair bearing a wreath in memory of David Wigley. 28 May 2025



from the earlier era of the restoration and to have as our special guest David Wigley's brother Robert. As you will have seen elsewhere, David passed away before he could have the chance to ride in the coach that he spent so much time working on so it was fitting that Robert could be with us to represent him; our locomotive for the day – 34059 *Sir Archibald Sinclair* – carried a wreath in David's memory. Many of the restoration team subsequently attended David's funeral.

3687's entry to traffic gave us some very welcome opportunities for publicity. As well as an in-depth article on the restoration project in Bluebell News, we also had news coverage of the event in the July issue of *Trackside* – actually published in early June – and substantive pieces written by members of the group in the August issues of both *Trackside* and *Steam Railway*.

The SRCG management group met in April, and as notified at the time, we have offered to provide £5000 to kick start the overhaul of SECR '100 seater' No 971. As always, things take longer to organise than first hoped, but we still expect 971 to come into the works before the end of the year.

Lastly, we owe big thank you to the Carriage Shop for another very generous £500 donation given to us in June, this time from the proceeds of the sale of Matthew Cousins's artworks. The support we receive from their efforts is so valuable.

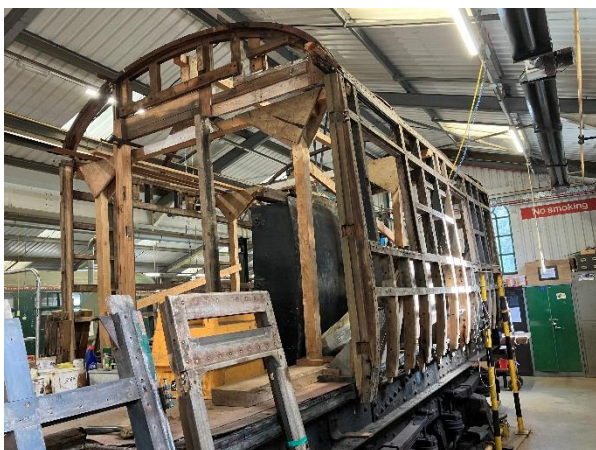
Bluebell Railway Carriage Shop
June 14

This month we have donated £500 to the [Bluebell Railway SR Coach Group](#) to support their important restoration work. This amount has all been raised from the sales of [Matthew John Cousins](#) railway and transport artwork that has sold in the Carriage Shop.



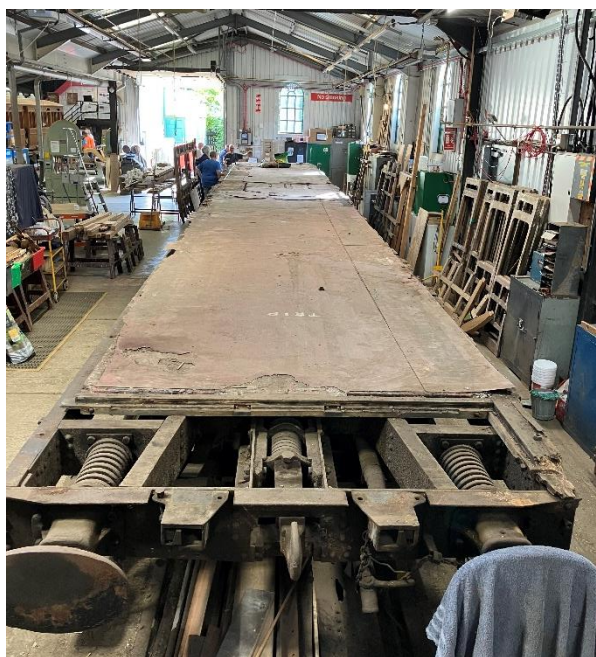
Maunsell Restaurant Car No 7864: Progress Report #3

We are now 18 months into the project to restore 7864 to its as-built condition. Since our report in Issue 3 of this newsletter, a lot has been going on. Here's a summary of the main elements of the work that's been done in that time.



How the period for this report began: the residual body of 7864 as seen on 8 Apr 2025

Dismantling the body frame At the end of March, dismantling had reached the vestibule between the pantry and the kitchen, leaving just the northern quarter of the coach still to be tackled. During the spring, we moved fairly quickly to take down the rest of the body. The remaining east side came down in two sections, pillars 30E-36E and



The floor and chassis of 7864 after completing the deconstruction of the body, 25 Jun 2025

37E-42E (the NE corner), followed by the eastern half of the north end. Next, the western half of the north end plus the corner pillar (41W) and the adjacent short piece to 40W was taken down as a unit. The last section of the frame to be removed was pillars 30W-39W on 14 June, this being the corridor area alongside the kitchen. That left the residual piece of the partition between the middle vestibule and the kitchen still standing, which had been isolated and tied to the temporary support frame when the east side came down. A simple lift out from the mortices in the floor saw that brought to ground level the same day.

Rebuilding the body frame Work to repair and/or make new body frame components continued apace alongside the dismantling of the frame, and is now almost complete.

The southern quarter of the east side (2E-13E) and the middle section of the west side (22W-29W) were finished and put into storage in late April. The second and third sections of the east side (14E-22E and 23E-29E) followed in mid-June. The final sections of the east side (30E-35E and 36E-42E) were finished in mid-August, except for the ongoing repairs to 30E (a door pillar) and the shaping of a new NE corner pillar (42E) which is just starting. The last piece of the west side (30-41W) is still being worked on.



The growing stock of repaired frame sections in storage, pictured on 11 Jun 2025. The section at the front of the pile comprises pillars 22E-29E, being the section of the east side that forms the exterior wall of the pantry.

In Issue 3, I wrote that the two halves of the south end had been finished. That proved too optimistic as it was later determined that the two original central crash pillars that we had repaired actually needed replacement. So two new pillars for this end had to be made, plus two more for the north end. All four of these have now been fitted to the



The new north-west end frame fitted to its new crash pillar and trial fitted to the corner pillar, 30 Jul 2025

relevant end frame sections. In the case of the north end, these frame sections were completely re-made from new wood during July and August.

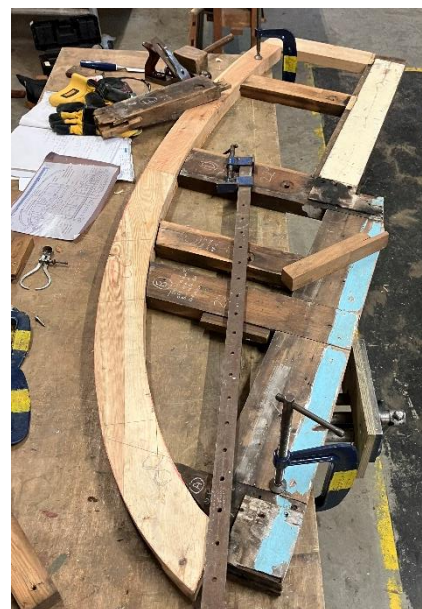
To sum up, all that remains to do on the body frame is to make a new corner pillar 42E, to repair the equivalent pillar on the west side (41W), and to complete repairs to pillar 30E & section 30-41W.

Making the new bottom side timbers With the new west bottom side already finished last year, the past six months have focused on progressing the equivalent for the east side, which has been put together from four substantial lengths of teak and one shorter piece. Since March, all the sections have been lap-jointed together after which the mortices for the body pillars and, on the back edge, the transverse floor timbers have been formed along its length. At the time of writing, the mortices for the door and corner pillars still have to be made and the front edge chamfer added.

New and refurbished roof components By March, most of the 28 roof hoops that are bolted to the cantrail on both sides had been taken down, cleaned and refurbished. The last three were

brought down and similarly dealt with during the final dismantling of the body in May/June.

Woodworking efforts on the roof components have recently focused on the two partition hoops from the northern end of the coach, hoops 22 and 28 being the southern and northern ends of the



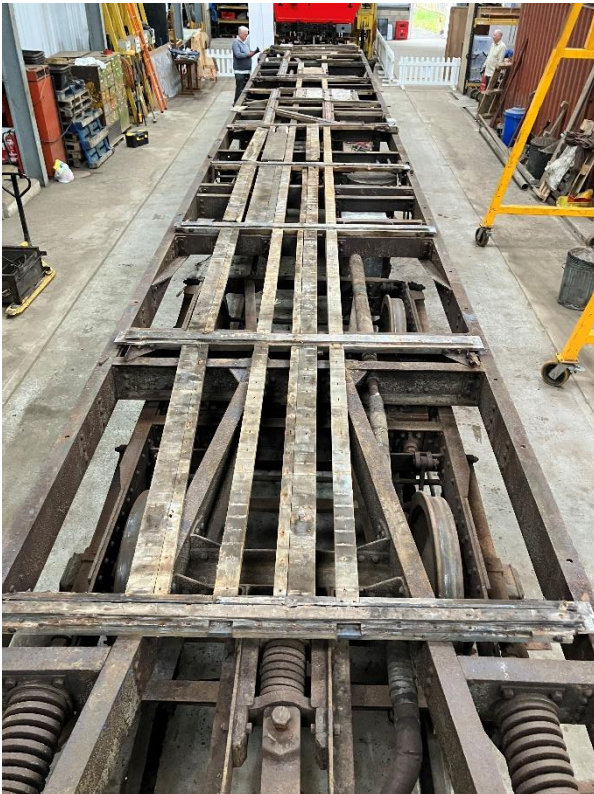
Rebuilt roof hoop 22, which is the top of the kitchen south end partition, 30 Jul 2025

kitchen, along with hoop 2 from the south end of the saloon. All three have multiple timber layers bolted to or around the steel hoop, one of which is the top of the partition and into which several vertical elements are morticed. Hoops 2 and 28, being the partitions that form the southern and northern vestibules, also have a complex transverse piece of timber at cantrail height through which the steel supports for the gangway plunger gear that sit above the vestibule ceilings are bolted. These have been re-made and repaired respectively. These timber partition tops are now in store ready for when they are needed.

Work on doors There are a total of six sliding doors needed for the coach, of which we had three from the vehicle available when we started – the two curved end (gangway) doors, and one from the south end of the saloon. Now we have four, as a new door for the north end of the saloon has been made. It's now being panelled appropriately. With two external doors already done, work has been continuing on the third and fourth of the six.



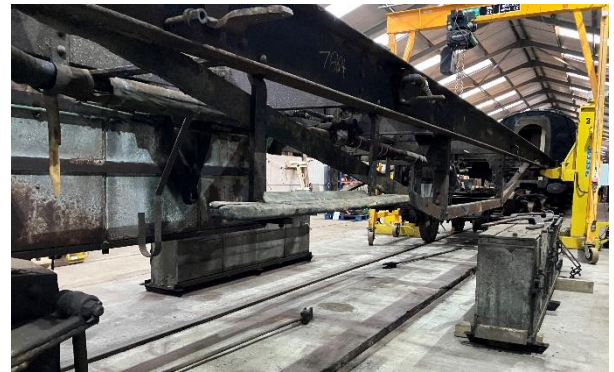
The newly assembled frame for an internal sliding door, made in walnut. 16 July 2025



The underframe, viewed from the south end, after removal of the floor but with the floor framework timbers still in place. 20 August 2025

Work on the floor and chassis The floor throughout the coach, except for a couple of areas in the kitchen (formed of terrazzo) and the south vestibule (a steel mat well), was made of a 1-2" layer of Decolite. This material was produced by SR as a semi-liquid mix and poured into a mould formed of sheets of corrugated iron that had been screwed in place into rebates in transverse and longitudinal timber supports and into the inner edge of the bottom side timbers. With many areas of the Decolite breaking up and the corrugated iron underneath being somewhat vestigial in places, it was always intended to replace it with a

wooden floor. After several false starts as we sought an acceptable method for its removal, a contractor was employed to do this in mid-August.



The two battery boxes sitting off the underframe. 20 August 2025

With the Decolite out of the way, the remaining five balance weights, which counterbalanced the weight of the kitchen range on the eastern side, were removed from the west solebar (the first having been taken off in late June). At the same time, the brake cylinders, cross shafts, brake rods, vacuum reservoirs and battery boxes were taken off the underframe. The dynamo had been taken off earlier in the summer. The timber framework for the floor was also dismantled. Lastly, the underframe was swapped onto accommodation bogies, so the long task of refurbishing 7864's own bogies can now begin.



The underframe being lifted clear of the bogies. 20 August 2025

We are now removing the buffing and draw gear at both ends. This is all preparatory to getting the underframe grit blasted and painted by a contractor, which will hopefully take place during September.

Keith Leppard

Who's who in SRCG: Tony Clements



Tony Clements is SRCG's restoration project leader and is overseeing the rebuilding of the Maunsell Restaurant Car. For the first in an occasional series featuring members of the SRCG leadership group, Tony agreed to answer a few questions about his railway and other interests.

How long have you been volunteering at the Bluebell?

22 years

Which major projects have you been involved with?

SECR Birdcage Brake No 3363, LCDR/SECR 4-wheelers No 114, 3188 and 3360, Bulleid CK No 5768 (all pictured below) and most recently the Hastings Brake 3rd No 3687 (see p10)

What do you enjoy about volunteering in Carriage and Wagon?

The camaraderie, and the fact that most people are so willing to help and share their knowledge.

Your skills in carriage restoration: did you bring them with you or did you learn them at the railway?

I had basic skills when I started but have improved them over the years I've been at the railway.

Any other hobbies away from the Bluebell?

When there's time, I enjoy a bit of gardening, and model railways.

Your favourite carriage?

Probably Birdcage Brake 3363

Your favourite locomotive?

H Class or P Class in SECR livery

Your favourite livery?

SECR Fairground livery

Your most enjoyable task in a restoration? Creating new woodwork

Your least-favourite task in a restoration? Overhauling bogies!

'12" to the foot' or scale models? Can't choose: 50/50

Favourite drink?

Real ale

Favourite pub meal?

Salmon fillet

Favourite musical decade?

The 80's



LSWR Gate Stock: a Bluebell 'might have been'

By Tim Preston

The Southern Railway Coach Group is concentrating on work to the Maunsell and Bulleid fleet, but this article is a reminder that the group is also interested in the restoration of pre-grouping vehicles from the Southern Railway's constituent companies that the SR inherited. It considers two pre-grouping bogie coaches which, under different circumstances, would have formed part of the Bluebell's rolling stock collection.

What am I talking about? It is of course, LSWR gate stock Set 373, comprising Brake Third No 2622 and Third No 738 under the Southern Railway's numbering system.

In service, Set 373 worked Seaton – Seaton Junction, Yeovil Town – Yeovil Junction, Plymouth – Turnchapel, Plymouth – St Budeaux – Tavistock, and Plymouth – Bere Alston – Callington. A picture of Set 373 at Yeovil Junction is published in G Waddell's 'LSWR Carriages in the 20th Century', p98.



Gate stock Third No 737 from Set 372. Source: Bluebell Railway Photographic Archive

The story of the attempted purchase of Set 373 by the Chair of the Bluebell Railway at the time, John Leroy, in early 1960 is well documented. Set 373 was brought up from the West Country to Eardley sidings south of Streatham on the understanding that it had been reserved with an agreed purchase

price. The two coaches were expected to head to Horsted Keynes, but a local decision, contrary to the agreement made by senior management, sent them to Newhaven for scrapping.

The two coaches of Set 373 were part of the last batch of gate stock built for the LSWR in June 1914, originally numbered as Third No 4265 and Brake Composite No 4303. The set received electric lighting in May 1920, and the brake composite was converted to a brake third in August 1939. The other big change came in 1929/30 with the fitting of standard Southern Railway pull-push control equipment and 4-window driving ends.

Notable differences from previous gate stock were the end windows in the driving end which were longer than previous LSWR designs, with the top much closer to the cant rail, and the gate, which had changed from a trellis to the scrolled design which characterised these most distinctive of vehicles.

From LSWR salmon pink and chocolate to SR lined olive green & malachite green, BR crimson lake in 1951 and then BR plain green in 1958, there would have been plenty of livery choices for an embryonic Bluebell to consider.

The gate and the extensive glazing made these coaches handsome vehicles, and they would undoubtedly have had the "wow" factor if they had arrived at the Bluebell as planned all those years ago.

However, fast forward 65 years and I wonder if they would have become a bit of a headache?

Like other rolling stock, it would have been make-do and mend for those early years at the Bluebell. After a quick clean and external paint at Sheffield Park, Set 373 would have worked well topped and tailed between the smaller tank engines.

Inevitably though, the time would have come when the set would have been withdrawn needing repair and in the short term stored exposed to the elements as the railway sought to fight for its very existence. Set 373 would have required a complete rebuild in the same way that the Metropolitan set was restored from the 1990s. This would have required a big investment of time and, unlike the Mets which can run as a full four coach train, Set 373 would have needed to run with others, possibly as part of vintage Southern set with the 100 seaters, the Brighton first and the Birdcage.

A rebuild question would have been what to do with the 1929/30 Southern conversion which standardised the driving end and introduced the push-pull equipment. Would the Bluebell have stripped this out and retro-converted it to the original LSWR layout in a similar way to the way to the Met brake reverting to its original layout when it was restored?

Another consequence of Set 373 reaching the Bluebell as was planned might well have been the 100-seaters or the Mets not arriving, as hard choices would have been made for a Society struggling to find every penny in the early 1960s.

Herein lies the problem. Pretty vehicles yes, but with less seating capacity than other vehicles particularly the brake third, how and when would restoration have been prioritised?

I also wonder what the Office of the Railway Regulator would have made of the gate in today's safety environment; I suspect, not very much. Modifications to the saloon doors and gate may have been required to the point at which authenticity might have been heavily compromised. Add in that rain would be blowing into the open vestibules in bad weather and I wonder if for operational, regulatory compliance and maintenance reasons, these lovely vehicles might have become essentially unusable? Certainly, they would have created many challenges for the railway compared with the other vehicles that came in those early years; we will of course never know.

For those who enjoy their modelling, the production of these sets, including Set 373, in SR Olive, SR Malachite and BR Green by Kernow Model Railway Centre in 2017, provided the opportunity to reflect in OO gauge on what might have been at the Bluebell.



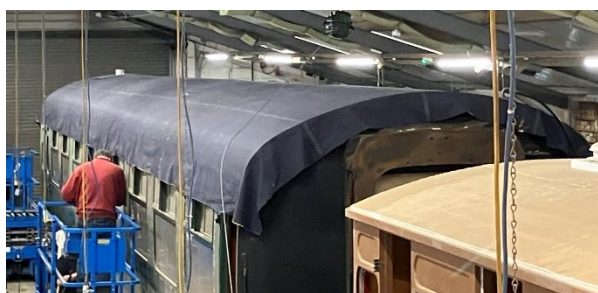
A rare chance to photograph '100 seater' No 971 in Nov 2024. 'A road' was being shunted and so the doors into the works and at the south end were open, letting in some light. Repairs to all of 971's east side doors were finished in August so recently the first of the west side doors was removed for similar repairs.

Overhauling Bulleid Open 3rd No 1482: Progress Report #3

In works since October 2024, the main focus of work on 1482 has been on the roof. A large team including both Bulleid and Maunsell SRCG teams assembled to fit the new canvas in June.



East side of 1482, with recanvassing in progress. 7 Jun 2025



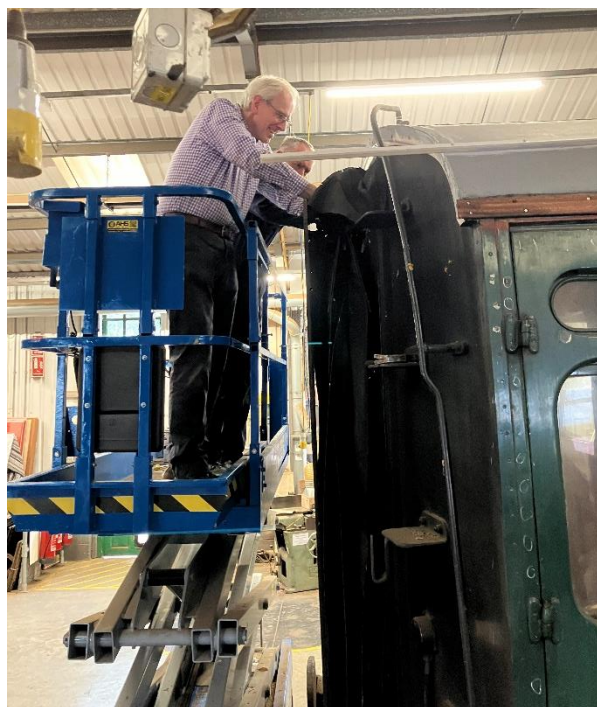
1482 recanvassing: the finished job. 7 Jun 2025

After getting the basic task done in a day, there was a lot of work to do to finish the edges, get the initial coats of paint on and then to fit the roof vents, tank cover, rain strips and cantrail strips. All this has been done by the midweek staff along with refitting the lavatory compartments.

Meanwhile, a lot of the Bulleid team's time has been spent on three issues relating to the body: working on two doors that needed repairs, removing popped filler over many screwheads, and cleaning & priming the heads, and removing the gangway bellows at both ends. The stitching in these was splitting so they needed to be replaced. 1482 moved into the paintshop in mid-August. There, the remaining work needed on the roof has



The team working to remove popped filler over the bodyside screwheads. 12 Apr 2025



Tim and Richard separating the north end bellows from the body and faceplate. 16 Aug 2025

been done and the tightening and filling around the screw heads has been advanced recently by a large gang of midweek folk.

Keith Leppard

Pictorial: Official Launch of Maunsell Brake Third No 3687



32424 Beachy Head with the Maunsell set led by No 3687 approaches New Road Bridge at Horsted Keynes on 3687's official launch day, 31 May 2025. Keith Leppard



No 3687 at the rear of the Maunsell set arriving at Horsted Keynes on the afternoon of 31 May 2025. Keith Leppard