

News Release

14 January 2010

TRIPLE ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS FOR KENT & EAST SUSSEX RAILWAY



Knowle at Tenterden Station

This year the Kent & East Sussex Railway commemorates three anniversaries. Taking centre stage is an old timer who, as well as reaching the ripe old age of 130, also celebrates the seventieth anniversary of her debut on the line.

Built in 1880, locomotive No.78 *Knowle* was one of fifty of its class produced for the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway by its locomotive engineer, William Stroudley. Weighing a mere twenty-eight and a quarter tons, these diminutive little workhorses provided sterling service mainly in southern and southeastern England. Thus *Knowle* had clocked up more than 700,000 miles by her thirtieth birthday; upon withdrawal from British Rail service in 1963, that had increased to more than 1,400,000 miles.

Knowle was initially allocated to New Cross for work on London suburban lines. Around her first birthday, she was displaced and sent to work on the newly-opened Midhurst - Chichester branch. For some reason, no-one seemed to want *Knowle* or was able to hang onto her for any length of time. The locomotive had a most peripatetic and colourful career and like most of the surviving Terriers, (as her class became known), saw action on both the Isle of Wight and the much-lamented Hayling Island branch.

Numbered as Southern Railway 2678, *Knowle* became the third Terrier to be hired by the Kent & East Sussex from its larger neighbour. Arriving at Rolvenden in February 1940 to assist with the increased traffic demanded by World War II, the little engine found a welcoming home at last, being busily employed right through the war years and beyond, including the honour of working part of the very last through passenger train from Robertsbridge to Headcorn on 2nd January 1954. For most of the subsequent goods trains and hop pickers' specials period, 32678 as she had become under BR, continued to work the line from St Leonards, Hastings and it was not until 1958 that the locomotive was finally displaced; final withdrawal came in October 1963.

That, however, merely marked a new beginning. In 1964, *Knowle* was bought by Butlins as a static exhibit for their Minehead holiday camp. Subsequent changes of ownership eventually saw her return to service on the preserved Kent & East Sussex in 1999 where she has once again become a firm favourite: when rostered to haul the railway's famous vintage carriages, passengers may experience riding on a train whose combined age is approaching 700 years. Now wholly owned in perpetuity by the Terrier Trust, it's a fine sight indeed, for *Knowle* is at home today along the winding rural line as she was seventy years ago.

BROWNIES & SCOTS GUARDS

Twenty-one years ago Anneka Rice, a contingent of Scots Guardsmen, local brownies and a myriad of volunteers descended on the Kent & East Sussex Railway's Northiam station. Yes, this was the episode of TV's *Challenge Anneka!* in which she was tasked with rebuilding the station, thus completing the restoration of a further three miles of line and allowing trains again to run between Wittersham Road and Northiam.

However, it was not until May 1990 that the first public train ran the length of the then seven mile line. It is this official reopening that the railway will be commemorating across the weekend of 12th/13th June, with the additional promise of the Rother Valley Brewing Company brewery tours and vintage bus rides.

Alternatively, visitors may break their journey at Northiam for the short stroll to the riverside village of Newenden. Once a thriving port, its charming range of architecture spans many centuries. Newenden, too, is a claimant to the title of England's smallest village, and is reputedly the birthplace of cricket; the sport was recorded here in 1300.

Back at Northiam station, visit the tea room and sit on the platform with an ice cream; it's an idyllic spot to look out across the Rother Valley, watching steam trains pass by.

BODIAM IS 10

Join railway staff on Good Friday to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the reopening of the Kent & East Sussex Railway to Bodiam. It was in the year 2000 that the final three-and-a-half miles of the railway's current ten-and-a-half miles was reopened.

Formerly used by hundreds of hop pickers who, annually, came "dahn 'opping" from London, Bodiam is the line's most characterful station. It's a brief walk from the medieval castle, now in the care of the National Trust. Present a valid Kent & East Sussex ticket for discounted castle admission, or travel on selected dates, (including most of the school summer holidays), for "Kids go Free" at both castle and railway.

Savvy travellers arrive in style, (by steam of course), and in so doing enjoy unrivalled views of the castle as their train sallies along the Rother Valley.

For more information or to request images please contact Caroline Edmunds at Pennington PR on 01892 616647.