

NEWS RELEASE

Bluebell Railway Honoured with Heritage Award

Volunteers celebrate 50th birthday by making it into history books

For Immediate Release

Volunteers at one of the country's most loved heritage railways in Sussex are celebrating this weekend after winning a rare heritage award for their restoration efforts.

The Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMechE) will present the Bluebell Railway and its volunteers with an Engineering Heritage Award (EHA) on Sunday (22) at Sheffield Park Station, near East Grinstead.

It had a starring role in the 1999 ITV production of the Railway Children and this month celebrated 50 years since the first train ran on what was the first preserved standard gauge passenger railway in the world.

Without the success of the pioneering effort in establishing the line (constructed in 1882), it is unlikely that many heritage railways would be operational today. The Bluebell Preservation Society, which will be receiving the award, looks after the railway and houses the largest collection of steam locomotives in the UK, after the National Railway Museum. It has a collection of almost 150 carriages and wagons.

IMechE Heritage Awards are granted to artefacts, sites or landmarks or groups that are either one of a kind and/or of significant engineering importance. Immediate past President of IMechE, Keith Millard, said: "Some of these items are the only existing examples. It is truly the dedication of the Society, its volunteers and the work they have all done that has made Bluebell undoubtedly one of the most famous heritage lines in the UK."

Roy Watts, Chairman of the Society, added: "I am absolutely thrilled that the Bluebell Railway has been given this prestigious award, especially in our 50th anniversary Year. This really is a special award that recognises the efforts that have been made over those 50 years by people from all walks of life.

"It is not just about preserving locomotives, carriages and wagons but also the very skills and craftsmanship of a traditional railway, that very essence that keeps them operational both now and into the future long after they would normally have been retired or consigned to the scrapheap."

NB: Media are invited to attend between 11am and 12.30 at Sheffield Park Station where the ceremony will take place.



Pic: One of the Bluebell locomotives.

ENDS

Notes to Editors/Background

- Journalists are invited to film/interview at the photocall via the IMechE Press Office on 020 7304 6877/07730644134 or email media@imeche.org .
- Sheffield Park Station is situated on the A275 East Grinstead – Lewes main road, two miles north of A272 junction)
- The IMechE first established its EHS (Engineering Heritage Scheme) back in 1984 in recognition of objects/artefacts/locations of significant mechanical engineering importance. To win an award the object must be industrially innovative; be associated with a person or event, which has made a significant contribution to society and/or mechanical engineering, or possess a unique feature, by being a prototype or only surviving example. The award is in recognition