

Class T9 in Action Near the Bluebell Railway? Or, a Tale of Two Pictures

By Tony Davies

Yet another snapshot! On one of the walls in our little cottage in North Yorkshire there is a photograph of an H tank (No.1521) “coming off the marsh”—as I always thought. *Oh no*, it could NOT be Romney Marsh, but it was still a puzzle!

Then, from a chance browse through past issues of *Bluebell News*, I discovered a photograph of that same painting, on its presentation day at the Railway. Guess? Autumn 1986 (Vol. 28, No. 3) p. 103, and the caption to that painting suggests the scene is somewhere in the Forest Row area, on the line from Tunbridge Wells to East Grinstead. Please read on for now, since this text will refer to another photograph, in that same area, that has yet to be found!

Let’s cast our minds back to summer 1962. That was the first full summer after the final phase of the Kent Coast electrification. With the impending demise of steam on British Rail, as things then were, railway societies were running many railtours, and 1962 was a busy year! The LCGB ran a “Sussex Coast Limited”—using the then newly-preserved T9 4-4-0 No. 120—from London to Eastbourne and back, by various routes. The return run from Eastbourne was via Mayfield to Forest Row, East Grinstead, and then London. In those days there may not have been many railtours when crews were changed after only 40 minutes!

As far as the Bluebell Railway is concerned, at the end of my “snapshot” in the [eNewsletter No.176](#) there was mention of the preserved M7 0-4-4T No. 30053 which, by the way, made a visit to the Bluebell Railway over the winter of 1994-1995. Then there was the ex-LSWR T9 class—in British Rail days they were very occasional visitors on through trains over the Bluebell Line. But, No. 120 herself did spend a period—from autumn 1994 to summer 2008 at a guess—on static display at Sheffield Park. Since 2008, and later restoration, she has been seen in action on many other preserved railways in our country.

So far so good. It’s June 1962 and our T9 has brought its seven-carriage load into Eastbourne for a break before the return run up the Cuckoo Line, or the Cuckoo Trail as present-day walkers might know it! It’s a hilly line with severe gradients in the order of 1-in-50. M7 0-4-4T No. 30055 was provided as a pilot but only as far as Rotherfield, where the crews on the T9 were changed (and then the M7 scuttled back to Eastbourne).

Now our T9 and its crew had a gentle run down the hill, through Eridge, then a left-turn at Ashurst Junction and through Hartfield and Withyham to Forest Row. Plain sailing so far, but from that station it’s some three miles of solid 1-in-80 up. That was a real challenge for our T9 and its crew! My own notes say that the engine,

after a few half-slips, went away strongly, was eased back for a short while and then climbed the rest of the bank “strongly”. Nevertheless, her speed was never more than 20 mph.

Bluebell News Winter 1995, p. 199, refers to “toiling up the 1-in-80”. *Somewhere* there is a Mike Esau photograph of that very scene! (Our Bluebell Line of the present day has plenty of 1-in-75 grades.) And, *yes*, after only 40 minutes or so, it was quite a surprise to find a fresh crew awaiting our T9 special at East Grinstead, for the last lap to London, on that bright sunny day in June 1962!