

Simon Brown: A Tragic Loss

It is all too often that we have to report the death of a member of the Bluebell Railway family, but the loss of Simon Brown last Sunday at just 24 is especially hard to take. This is partly because of the circumstances of his passing: he was struck by a lineside object while leaning out of a Gatwick Express approaching Wandsworth Common. Our sense of loss is particularly acute because of the promise unfulfilled.

Simon first volunteered at the Bluebell Railway aged nine, as an elf on our Santa Specials. By 13, when I first met him, he was training to join the platform staff at Kingscote under the watchful eye of Mike Jackson. He was enthusiastic, but never obsessive; conscientious, keen, and quick to learn; and—remarkably for a teenager—never irritating! He moved on to steward the Rail Ale trains and—his great love on the Railway—the GN Saloon. But he popped up all over the Railway, always a pleasure to meet and wise beyond his years.

He was over the moon when Southern took him on as an apprentice fitter, and as ever he was a quick learner. Recently Hitachi recruited him as one of the team based at Stoke Gifford, Bristol, to bring the IEP into service on Great Western, and he quickly established himself as a valued member. But he still came home to East Grinstead, and to the Bluebell Railway.

Simon's death is a personal tragedy for his family, his partner Missy, and his

friends locally, at his work, and on our Railway, and we send them all our deepest condolences.

Just how much he is missed can be shown by the astonishing sum (more than £8,000 at the last count) contributed to a JustGiving page set up by Reuben Smith, one of his oldest friends here, to ensure Simon a fitting farewell. It could also be sensed up and down the Railway this past week, with little knots of staff pausing to remember him and suddenly finding it a struggle.

Reuben, in conjunction with the family, intends to run a "Celebration of Life" train in his memory for Simon's friends from within the Heritage Railway sector, and there will be more details on this soon.

The wreaths our engines have carried in memory of Simon (the photo below is from John Sandys) over the past few days bespeak not just our sense of loss, but our pride in having worked with him. He could have been a leading light in the Bluebell Railway for the next half century. Without him, we shall all have to try that little bit harder. We owe that to him.

By Nick Comfort

