

Undergrowth, Isle of Wight Railway. Credit: John Faulkner

There is a light at the end of the tunnel for heritage railways stopped in their tracks by the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis.

When lockdown began, heritage railways were just getting ready to open for their busiest season. Instead they were forced into survival mode.

“Heritage railways have been put in serious jeopardy,” says Kim Shaw, Acting General Manager at Nene Valley Railway. “The lockdown started at exactly the wrong time, just before the beginning of a new operating season.”

Stopped in their tracks

Usually, UK heritage railways welcome **thousands of passengers, support around 4,000 jobs and contribute some £400million** of economic impact to the visitor economy. They also play a key role for apprentices and trainees to learn vital heritage skills.

Now, turnstiles remain still, carriages empty and workshops silent.



Isle of Wight Railway. Credit: John Faulkner

As well as a large number of staff being put on furlough, the closure of heritage railways has had a huge impact on its volunteer workforce – many of whom see it as "not just a hobby but a way of life" according to Lisa Adair, General Manager of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland.

> "This crisis has put a big part of our volunteers' lives on hold. Many of them are in the 'at risk' age group and are very concerned about when they will be able to return safely."
>
> *Paul Blount, Project Engineer at Strathspey Railway*

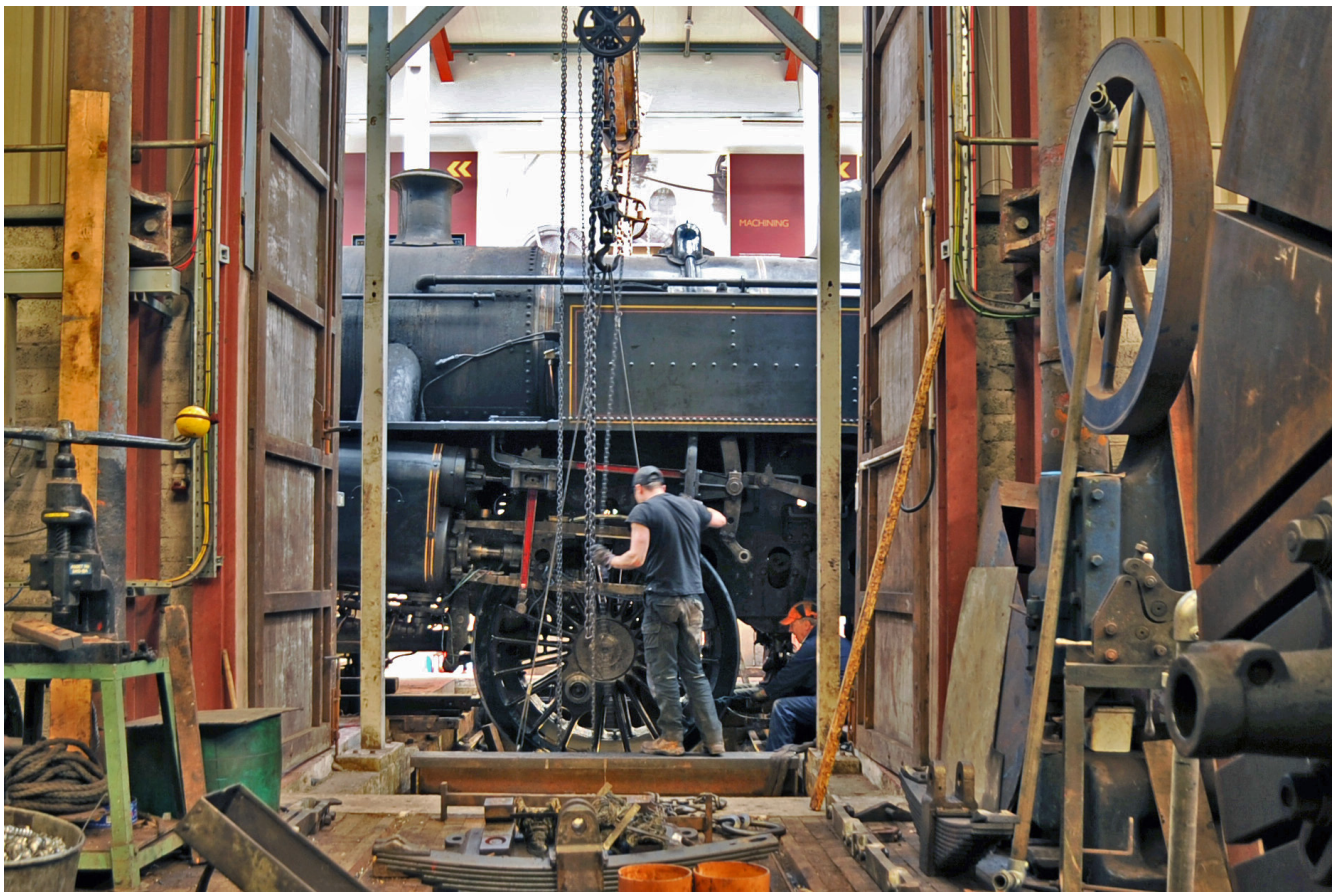
"I cannot stress enough the benefits volunteering has for wellbeing," adds Paul Blount, Project Engineer at Strathspey Railway. "This crisis has put a big part of our volunteers' lives on hold. Many of them are in the 'at risk' age group and are very concerned about when they will be able to return safely."

The difference between survival and oblivion

Nene Valley Railway, the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland and Strathspey Railway are among a number of heritage railways that have received vital funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund's Heritage Emergency Fund.

Made possible by National Lottery players, the funding is enabling bills and salaries to be paid and essential repairs and maintenance of tracks, engines and trains to continue. It is also helping organisations look towards reopening for

business and getting their volunteers, apprentices and staff back on board.



Railway Preservation Society of Ireland, Dunleath workshop. Credit: Charles P Friel

“This National Lottery funding means the difference between oblivion and survival,” says David Pearson, Fundraising Co-ordinator at Keighley & Worth Valley Railway – a principal attraction for West Yorkshire and the setting of the 1970 film The Railway Children.

Many heritage railways say the emergency funding will help them to bring back apprentices and trainees earlier than they would otherwise have been able – either through online courses or in the workshops. They say they will play a key role in getting heritage railways moving again.

Light at the end of the tunnel

As lockdown measures begin to ease, heritage railways are now looking towards how they might reopen safely.

“There are so many things we need to consider – how will we safely accommodate passengers on narrow platforms and usually busy coaches?” asks Paul Blount. “With all the safety measures in place, will we be able to generate an income still?”



Nene Valley Railway

National Lottery funding is helping heritage railway organisations to:

- establish online booking and access management systems which could help visitors plan their trips safely and the railways to carefully manage people on site
- explore options for diversifying income in the future
- provide consultants, advisors and the opportunities to develop recovery plans and new business models

Kim Shaw adds: “Thanks to The National Lottery and its players we now have a fighting chance of being able to welcome visitors back to the railway when we are allowed to reopen.”

Supporting heritage during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

Have you applied for support yet?

The National Lottery Heritage Fund is committed to helping the heritage sector through this crisis.

Our £50m Heritage Emergency Fund is open for grants from £3,000–£250,000 until 12noon on 31 July.

We want to support as many organisations as we can. Submit an application before the deadline so we can help your organisation too.

Additional support includes:

- Digital Skills for Heritage: increasing sector skills and confidence to bring heritage to more people
- maintaining our financial commitment to all of our 2,500 existing projects
- help and advice from our UK-wide teams

Find out more.

Expand All accordions

National Lottery support for heritage railways

Heritage railways which have received funding through our Heritage Emergency Fund so far are:

- Bressingham Steam Preservation Company (£46,700)
- Caledonian Railway (£115,500)
- Colne Valley Railway Preservation Ltd. (£29,800)
- Didcot Railway Centre (£9,900)
- Isle of Wight Railway Company Ltd. (£39,300)
- Keighley & Worth Valley Railway Preservation Society (£50,000)
- Nene Valley Railway Limited (£47,000)
- The Railway Preservation Society of Ireland (£19,500)
- Strathspey Railway Co. Ltd (£45,500)
- The Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway Preservation Co. Ltd (£25,200)

- Wensleydale Railway Association (£50,000)



S.E.5e biplane



to emergency funding

Welsh island puffins protected thanks to Heritage Emergency Fund grant