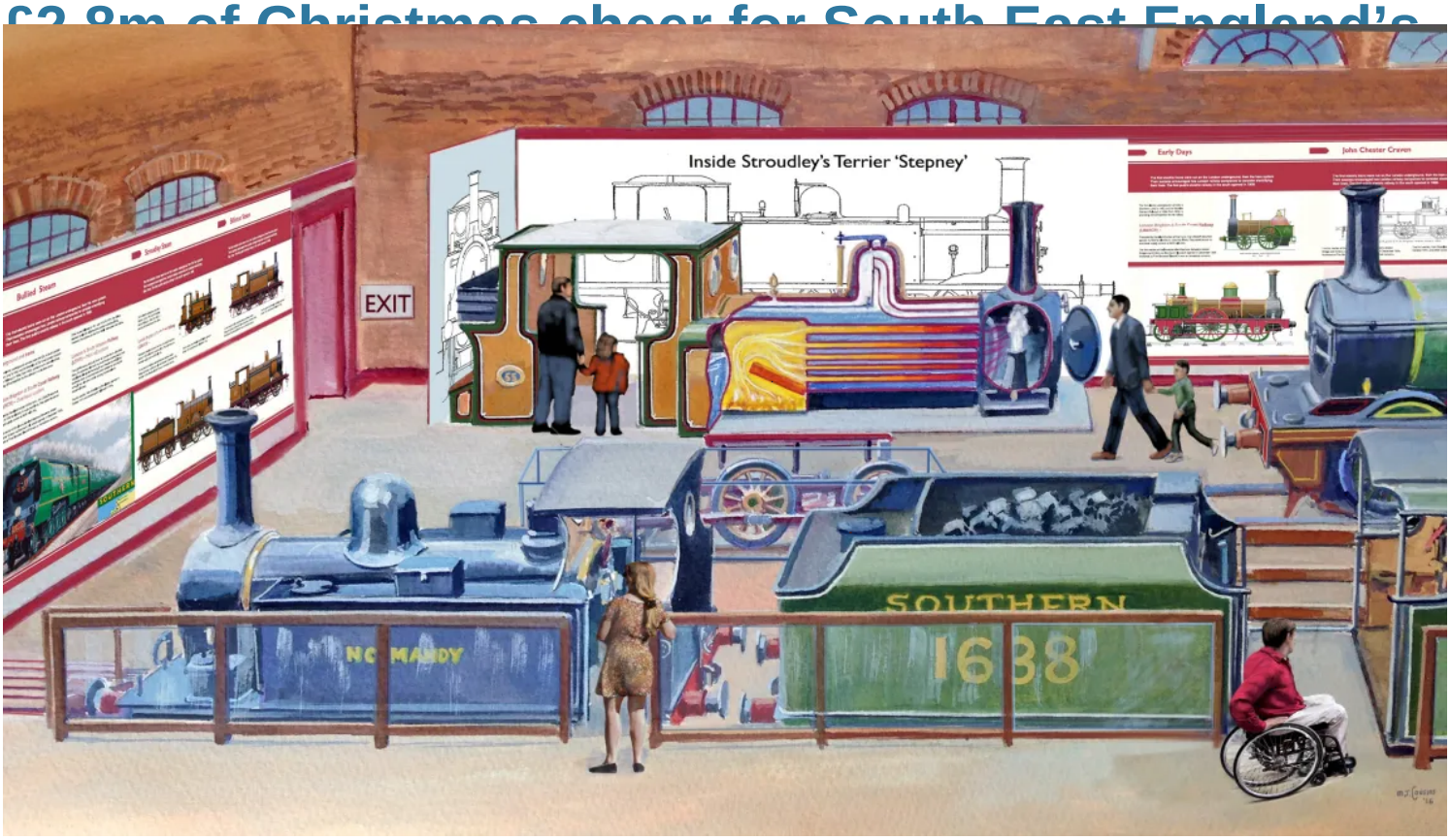
£2.8m of Christmas cheer for South East England's



An artist's impression of the new Exhibition Hall at Bluebell Railway Matthew Cousins

National Lottery players sent a warm Christmas wish this week when they made possible two new projects at flagship industrial heritage destinations in the South East.

The Bluebell Railway in Sussex and Whitchurch Silk Mill in Hampshire have been awarded £2.8million between them in HLF grants to carry out restoration and re-ordering works – ensuring their financial sustainability and a dynamic tourism offer for the future.

Making the history of steam accessible at the Bluebell Railway

The Bluebell Railway has been at the forefront of steam travel preservation in the UK for more that 50 years. Occupying 11 miles of track along the former East Grinstead line, it boasts one of the most significant collections of locomotives outside the National Railway Museum.

A new three-year project, called Accessible Steam Heritage, has been awarded £1.1m by HLF to transform the site by creating a new Exhibition Hall which will feature a family-friendly environment with interactive exhibits and exciting new attractions appealing to young and older audiences.

Highlights include the Stepney ‘Thomas the Tank Engine’ locomotive driving experience which is sure to be a hit with younger visitors, and the Rolling Road – a new exhibit telling the story of steam power using a restored USA Tank No. 30064 with slow-motion display of moving wheels, pistons and crankshafts. The project will also include a three-year apprenticeship and a host of exciting new volunteering opportunities.

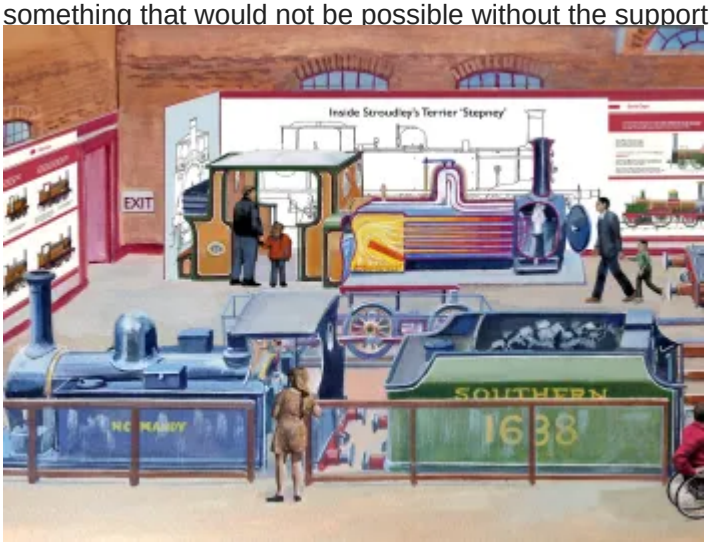
[quote=Stuart McLeod, Head of HLF South East]“We’re thrilled to support these two projects, both of which give us a fascinating insight into the industrial revolution in the South East."[/quote]

Bringing to life a 200-year-old story of silk weaving and water power

The Grade II* listed Whitchurch Silk Mill, built in 1815 on the banks of the River Test in Hampshire, has been weaving silk for over 200 years. It is also the only working silk mill in Britain open to the public and a beautiful example of Georgian architecture in need of essential repairs.

Now, thanks to National Lottery players and a £1.7m HLF grant, all that is set to change with a new project that will conserve the mill and keep silk weaving alive. Urgent repairs to the belltower, roof and wheelhouse will be carried out, as well as the weaving machinery, so that the Mill can continue to weave silk. The building will become fully accessible to all visitors with a new lift to upper floors and café at street level, and a new generation of weavers will be trained to ensure the skills of the trade are not lost to future generations.

Stuart McLeod, Head of HLF South East, said: “We’re thrilled to support these two projects, both of which give us a fascinating insight into the industrial revolution in the South East. From the history of steam travel to the inner workings of silk weaving, these premier heritage attractions and the stories they tell will now be conserved for the future – something that would not be possible without the support of National Lottery players.”



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Green Light for Bluebell Railway