

At the National Railway Heritage Awards ceremony, **Rowden Mill Station** received the **'National Highways Award for Restoration on a Closed Line'**. The ceremony took place in the splendid Merchant Taylor's Hall, Threadneedle Street Central London on Wednesday 6 December 2023.

Paul Kirwan and Cecilia Chavez-Brandon were presented with the plaque commemorating the award by Bill Reeve Director of Rail for Transport Scotland, Andy Savage MBE Chairman of the NRHA and Helene Rossiter from the National Highways Historical Railways Estate.

The category sponsored by National Highways highlights bringing back into sustainable use a building or structure no longer owned by the railway industry.

There were 50 entries to the awards this year from across all four nations of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. The applicants ranged from community groups and private individuals to companies as well as public authorities and train operators. They varied in size and scope and were judged in this competition across 10 award categories.

We were delighted to be recognised from an impressive group of fellow shortlisted nominees. We thank the NRHA judges, the trustees and patrons, the adjudicating committee, and all the ceremony organisers.

The station opened 1st Sept 1897 as part of the final section of the Worcester, Bromyard and Leominster Railway which had been bought out of bankruptcy by the Great Western Railway in 1888, who completed the line in 1897. Unstaffed as a station from September 1949, the line closed to regular passenger services on 15th September, 1952. On 26 April 1958 a special train organised by the Stephenson Locomotive Society ran from Worcester via Bromyard to Leominster, calling in at Rowden Mill, Fencote and Steens Bridge. The 50 society members/passengers rode on the last train that would run on the complete track before it was removed.

After closure, Rowden Mill Station was sold into private ownership and became part of a farm holding before being found in 1984 by the Wilkinson family who restored the site from derelict using original GWR plans and photographs from when the station was in operation. Thirty four years ago, in March 1989, Rowden Mill received the 'Ian Allan, Railway Heritage Award' for the Best Renovated Non-Working station.

In 2017, Cecilia and Paul took over the station at Rowden Mill immediately working to refurbish it to operate as a holiday letting business, making the station buildings available as accommodation to visiting guests. Saloon Coach DB 999508 arrived in October 2020 from the West Somerset Railway for conversion and preservation at Rowden Mill Station situated at the former livestock platform. After 21 months of painstaking work, the railway carriage was launched as further accommodation for holidaying guests in July 2022.

In parallel with these works we continue with the maintenance of the station buildings and all railway infrastructure on site (platform trolley, GWR lamp posts, running-in boards, poster boards, railway signals, ground frame and its hut, and around 250 meters of permanent way). In the pipeline, there is the conversion of the GWR brake van No.35251 into a 2-person accommodation space, for which we are hoping for completion sometime in 2024. With this we will likely have reached the maximum capacity of the site in terms of holiday letting units.

At Rowden Mill Station apart from being an accommodation provider that contributes to the visitor economy in Herefordshire, we are caretakers of railway heritage and it is in this latter capacity that we are so proud of this achievement. To share this with our community, there will be an unveiling of the plaque at a future date.

**Cecilia and Paul
Rowden Mill Station**

Rowden Mill Station, Bredenbury,
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For further information please contact us at
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On the awards and for a full list of shortlisted nominees, please visit: <https://nrha.org.uk/>

" A competition to recognise, acknowledge and reward, for the public benefit, the very best in re-use, restoration and conservation of our historic railway infrastructure. " (nrha.org.uk)

