

Shrewsbury
Aberystwyth
Rail
Passengers'
Association



Newsletter
No. 55
September 2011



A corner of Borth Station Museum. The headboard and nameplate are both replicas: the Cambrian Coast Express headboard has been used on steam specials.

Chairman's Message.....	2
Brake disc failures on class 158 DMU's.....	4
News in Brief.....	5
Train Stay Save.....	9
Letters to the Editor.....	10
A new station for Bow Street?.....	11
Llanbadarn Level Crossing.....	13
The view from Milepost 62 with the Brigadier.....	14
Club 55 for the autumn.....	17
Cheshire Cat Tours: Aberystwyth to Durham.....	19
Safari'r Cambrian Safari.....	20
Borth Station Museum.....	21
Railway Industrial Archaeology Competition.....	22
Three Ways to Worcester – an idea for a day out.....	22
Charles Williams Westwood Park Welshpool.....	23
SARPA comment on the McNulty report.....	24
SARPA Summer Trip.....	25
SARPA Meeting Schedule for 2011.....	26
Websites.....	27
Useful addresses.....	28
Officers of the Association.....	28

This is the quarterly newsletter of the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association.

Contributions are welcomed from members and non-members about the mid Wales rail scene.

Views expressed in it are those of contributors and not necessarily representative of the Association and its Officers as a whole. Information provided is published in good faith, but the Association cannot accept responsibility for any loss or damage arising therefrom.

The Editor reserves the right to abridge or amend copy. Whilst the Chairman contributes articles always published under his name he is not involved in the selection process of other copy for publication.

Want to Join SARPA?

The membership fee is currently (for membership up to 31 December 2011) £7.00 per annum for individuals and for organisations. Please make any cheques payable to SARPA.

Donations are of course welcome.

- * **SARPA will lobby for better rail services.**
- * **Act as a watchdog to safeguard the lines future.**
- * **Meet in public once a month.**
- * **All members will receive our quarterly Newsletter free of charge.**
- * **Members with access to e-mail can be included in our electronic network if they so desire.**

The majority of our expenditure goes towards the cost of publishing and distributing our newsletters. We subscribe to the Shrewsbury Rail Users Federation and occasionally pay for room hire. Any surplus is held as an emergency fund for the future. None of the officers gains financially in any way from SARPA.

Please send cheques, payable to SARPA, to:

SARPA Membership c/o Gareth Marston, 64 Churchill Drive, Barnfields, Newtown, Powys SY16 2LH.

Make sure to include full name, address and telephone number and also e-mail address if you wish to become part of our electronic network.

Secretary and Treasurer

These positions are currently vacant. If you wish to volunteer for either position, please contact the Chairman.

Chairman's Message

Traditionally the summer is described as the silly season in the media due to a lack of real stories, so nonsense ones are made up to fill column inches. This has been inflicted upon the Cambrian. A rumour has been flying around that the line has severe problems with its new signalling system, and that all the trains run late: you may even have seen this in the press. It's even been said that this is a reason not to introduce extra trains on our line! Let's knock this nonsense on the head. It was blatantly obvious that the implementation of an untried in-cab signalling system that had not been tested on a test track first would inevitably have a few problems initially whilst things were sorted out. And so it proved: the first few weeks were poor but things have

substantially improved and are back to the pre ETCS level now. The Cambrian service group in period 4 (up to 23 July 2011) achieved 90.3% punctuality. Back with the old RETB system in period 10 of the preceding year it was down at 84%. It's been fashionable to knock ETCS and blame any disruption on it. Recently I've been late due to cows on the line, a passenger being taken ill on board, awaiting a late running connection from Cardiff, units failing to couple at Machynlleth and a broken rail at Wolverhampton. Add to this the post creation of the Wales and Borders franchise timetable on our line and its innate inability to recover from disruptions and you have people that don't understand or know the line tutting and sucking their teeth pretending there's evidence of ETCS not working.

On the East Coast Main Line, whose punctuality is notoriously stuck in the low 80's, they introduced a completely recast timetable this May including extra services to many destinations - no one was insisting punctuality was sorted out first! Managers of the route are hailing a "surge" in usage since the recast. Perfect punctuality is clearly not the be all and end all, new and extra services can happen successfully without it. We endured seven and a half years of truly poor timekeeping following the creation of the Wales and Borders franchise. Where were these people insisting on perfect punctuality post ETCS and their concern for Cambrian timekeeping then?

I've feared for a while now that the - for want of a better description - hourly service on our line has become lost because no one seemingly understands what it's about. Whilst our local political representatives lobby WG regarding it I, can't help but feel that some have lost sight of the wood for the trees and perhaps maybe some didn't even see the wood in the first place. The hourly service is all about a mechanism for delivery but what are the reasons for having it? Who's standing up and saying why this service is needed and explaining the rationale. Is it TraCC? ATW? If I ran into the new WG Minister with responsibility for transport Carl Sargeant AM, from Alyn and Deeside, and mentioned it he should have heard of it but would he have the foggiest idea about it beyond realising it means running more trains with a cost implication? The thing has become an out of control monster that no one demonstrates they understand the rationale for, and therefore it's been easy to push down the agenda. Recent phone calls from journalists at the Western Mail and Shrewsbury Chronicle amply demonstrated this as I had to explain the geography of Mid Wales and what not having a morning peak arrival into Shrewsbury or no connections at Dyfi Junction in the evening meant to someone trying to use the train to get to work.

Lets make it clear once more the concept of an hourly service between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury is something that others have put forward. SARPA has been supportive in that it was one but by no means the only way of resolving a number of systemic weaknesses in the way services have been run on the Cambrian since the recession of the late 80's - early 90's. In short our line to this day does not function correctly in terms of providing the basic building blocks of what a public transport system should be, as it does not provide journey opportunities from hinterlands into regional centres (and return) at peak times. Anyone that knows the Cambrian understands that travelling between the Coast and Aberystwyth is "forbidden" unless you're a masochist that likes hanging around Machynlleth station for hours on end. If Shrewsbury was in Wales it would be its 4th largest conurbation and has many more job opportunities than Aberystwyth, so to facilitate this we handily time trains from its natural Upper Severn Valley hinterland to arrive at 0711 and 0925! The real issue is perhaps not so much the sheer number of trains run on our line but the times they run. As far as the Southern Gwynedd coast and the Upper Severn Valley are concerned, their public transport link is disconnected from acting in the best interest of the local economy as people can't use the railway for peak trips for work

and education opportunities. I use the first UP train on a fairly regular basis and see sometimes 25 or more people get off and descend the stairway at Shrewsbury station at ten past seven in the morning. Imagine how busy an 0825 arrival would be! Take a look at the A458 road between Welshpool and Shrewsbury - the market is there. An extra 1000 jobs are being promised in a £150 million pound revamp of the three Shrewsbury town centre shopping malls, all within 5 minutes walk from the station. Who's coming up with solutions so opportunities can be accessed? No one - it's all talk about that vague aspiration for an hourly service whatever that is, and of course the franchise operator is generally happy to sit on its laurels delivering the flawed franchise agreement. The consultation for the timetable between December 2011 and December 2012 has just arrived with not a single change to the existing timetable being proposed.

SARPA is not asking for disproportionate spend in rural areas taking away money from priority areas elsewhere, just the bare basics of what a public transport system should be. In other parts of Wales and the UK it's done, and our continental neighbours in the Netherlands, Germany or Switzerland would barely believe the situation on the Cambrian with its dysfunctional timetable. In the media I've recently read reports of families giving up second motor vehicles due to the cost, and petrol consumption being down by 15%. Not so long ago we were spun the line that rail use was going to go into decline, to try and justify no investment. Today the hard facts show that it is road usage that has gone into decline whilst rail usage soars. On our line we've already put £13 million into the infrastructure - it would be a waste not to utilise it to help remedy the weaknesses listed above and help free the demand for rail.

Gareth Marston

Newtown, Montgomeryshire August 2011

Brake disc failures on Class 158 DMU'S

In the last newsletter (No.54, p.7) we reported (quoting from the North Wales railway website, www.nwrail.org.uk) that, "following on from the detached brake disc on a Class 158, four other 158's have been found with fractures in the lugs of the discs; it is said that all four had been serviced at Arriva's LNWR Crewe facility."

Simon Taylor, Heavy Maintenance Manager of LNWR has replied to this item as follows:

As you may be aware LNWR (an ARRIVA Group Company) are performing the Refresh work on ATW's Class 158 fleet, of which 5 units are currently in passenger service, those units being 840, 838, 821, 820 and 827.

I would like to take this opportunity to point out the incorrectness of your statement, as the inference is that LNWR are connected with or have performed the work on the units found with brake disc fractures. There is no connection what so ever between any Class 158 units discovered with faulty or fractured brake discs and work carried out at LNWR. The faulty discs were part of a maintenance programme performed at another company's facility as part of an entirely separate maintenance contract that is totally unconnected with the Class 158 refresh programme being undertaken at LNWR's Crewe Train Maintenance and Delivery facility.

We wish to apologise for this item, which was clearly incorrect.

News in Brief

Chiltern Mainline service

Ex-Wrexham & Shropshire trains are being put to good use by Chiltern Railways on their Birmingham to London services. From September there will be a Business Zone in the buffet car:

In the Business Zone we have created the ideal working environment. You can enjoy larger tables and seats that are not only wider, but also have more legroom than any other train service between Birmingham and London. Passengers in the Business Zone are also attended to by a dedicated train host who can provide an at-seat catering service that includes freshly cooked bacon rolls.

All trains with a Business Zone will offer free Wi-Fi, and passengers will be able to reserve specific seats. Business Zone access can be purchased with your ticket or dependant on availability passengers can upgrade onboard. A £20 supplement is required per journey to travel in the Business Zone. Business Zone is not first class, and any standard class ticket is valid with a Business Zone supplement, which can be purchased with your ticket (if booking at a station) or simply upgraded onboard.

On the 08:37 train from London to Birmingham and the 15:55 service from Birmingham to London, the Business Zone supplement will be just £10.'

Misbehaviour on trains

The Cambrian News of the 18th August carried a report on misbehaviour on trains, particularly the 1930 ex-Aberystwyth on Saturdays. On the 30th July two men on this service were arrested by British Transport Police for public order offences and the alleged possession of Class A and B drugs.

Sergeant Karl Anderson said that patrols would continue to reinforce the message that anti-social behaviour would not be tolerated.

ERTMS problems sorted out

In the Cambrian News of the 11th August, Peter Leppard, operations and safety director for Arriva Trains Wales, reported that the teething problems of ERTMS had been substantially overcome, as a result of concentrated efforts by the project's engineers. From an initial punctuality rate of 60%, it was now around 90%.

Borth

SARPA members were treated to a preview of the Borth Railway Museum on Saturday 2nd July before its public opening. The Museum Volunteers reported a brisk trade in train enquiries from passing members of the public.

Aberystwyth

Yes you've guessed it: no sign of the station refurbishment starting yet. Despite having been announced and in modern fashion announced a few more time it seems part of the funding in the form of EU Convergence Money has still not been formerly approved.

Carno

TraCC's consultants have completed the business case for the reopened station in the village and at Bow St. TraCC are said to be pushing the WG Minister to include reopening in the Rail Forward Plan. Bizarrely the business case for Carno claims that 4000 journeys a year will be lost to the line because of the 2 extra minutes trains will take to stop there. The methodology used seems half baked, as TOC's have all been slowing down schedules nationally since privatisation, whilst usage has increased.

Welshpool Dynamic Loop

All service trains have continued to use the old UP track and UP platform only at Welshpool since the dynamic loop was installed. Test trains and occasional use due to late running have been observed.

Shrewsbury

Since the May timetable change most Cardiff to Holyhead trains have used Platform 3, thus negating the confusing issue with Cambrian bound services occupying Platform 4 simultaneously with Holyhead trains. All Cambrian trains are currently scheduled to depart from Platform 4a, except the first and last trains which use Platforms 6 and 3 respectively.

Cardiff

Ministers and Officials are sticking to the line that a reprioritised National Transport Plan will be announced in the "autumn". A number of rail schemes' futures hang in the balance. Many fear that road schemes in the South Wales Valleys will be the Labour administration's preferred choice.

Newtown

Network Rail's website reveals the eye watering rents that it demands for the empty parts of the building. The 1095 sq feet former Café Loco will cost £10,000 per annum plus VAT and the smaller 571 sq feet rooms at the Caersws end £4950 plus VAT.

Caersws

The Community Council is taking forward plans for station adoption.

Overnight trains from Manchester to Aberystwyth in the 1930's

Further to last newsletter's unearthing of an overnight service in the summer of 1938 a non member contacted us insisting that we were describing the mail train. Far from it. The GWR Timetable from summer 1932 fleshes out some detail that the list of arrivals/departures from Newtown that SARPA No. 54 did not show.

The mail train departed Manchester London Road at 1145 on the Friday night, departing Crewe 0205 then departing Whitchurch @ 0245 it ran via Ellesmere to Oswestry arriving 0320, departing 0330 calling only at Llanymynach reaching Welshpool @ 0400. Here it was joined by a service from Shrewsbury arriving 0405, it then went forward only calling at Newtown, Moat Lane Jnc, Machynlleth and Borth @ 0415 from Welshpool

arriving Aberystwyth 0620. At 0425 a second portion followed calling at more but not all stations arriving Aberystwyth 0646. The Saturdays only (July 18th to September 3rd) Holiday Through train from Manchester Victoria to Aberystwyth departed 0045 on the Saturday and ran via Crewe (0217) and also came via Ellesmere to Oswestry and down to Welshpool departing 0440, Montgomery was deemed worth a call @ 0452 as was Newtown, Moat Lane Jnc, Machynlleth and Borth arriving Aberystwyth @ 0705.

So 3 trains an hour then!

Re-opened rail line between Stafford and Telford?

Rail chiefs in Shropshire have unveiled ambitious £230 million plans to re-open the Telford to Stafford railway line creating a direct link from Shrewsbury to London in under 2 1/2 hours. Shropshire, Telford & the Marches Strategic Rail Group has voted to lobby the government to back its bid to fill the gap left when the Wrexham and Shropshire Railway ceased operating in January. The group, which includes members of Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Herefordshire councils, believes that there is no room for expansion at Birmingham New Street and that a route via Stafford is the quickest, cheapest and most realistic option for re-establishing a direct link to the capital.

The rail group wants stations at Donnington, Newport and Gnosall to be re-established along a dual line that would roughly follow that which existed until the 1960s. Members have travelled in a bus along the potential route and were pleasantly surprised by the lack of work that would be needed, with only a small detour required at new houses in Donnington. They have already held meetings with Network Rail and Association of Train Operating Companies about the proposals. [Stafford Railway Circle website

Gowerton

It is noted in the railway press that the Swansea-Llanelli redoubling is likely to go ahead to reverse the singling of approximately six miles though Gowerton in 1986. This now places a serious constraint on service frequency and recovery from delays for West Wales services, including hourly workings from Milford Haven or Carmarthen. Loughor Viaduct which is on the route is said to be now too weak to support the loads associated with reversion to double track. Funding for a new viaduct was said to have been earmarked just before the May elections for the Welsh Assembly.

Meanwhile the obfuscation with regard to the Chester-Wrexham redoubling continues, with silly proposals for dynamic loops instead of double track throughout. The reason? The existence of 2 single track bridges built in the 1980s, one over and one under the A483 Gresford - Pulford bypass. It would of course be very difficult to imagine a road scheme for a dual carriageway being constrained in such a manner by the existence of a single carriageway bridge over a railway! Interesting too that the Gowerton redoubling is in South Wales. Double standards or what?!

Unit failure at Newtown

Refurbished unit 158840 failed near Moat Lane Junction on the evening of Thursday 30th June, while working the 1730 Aberystwyth to Birmingham International. The fitters got it going, and it was dumped in the old Bay at Newtown and the service terminated. It went back to Mach on Friday lunchtime.

The bay was intended for Brecon services, but in practice trains from Brecon mainly terminated at Moat Lane. It was used on weekdays up until June 1965 to store the stock of the terminating service from Machynlleth which ran primarily as the school train from the Carno valley. The locomotive from this service then became the Newtown station pilot in the morning, working the goods yard before going down to Moat Lane and Caersws before returning to work the return passenger working to Machynlleth just after 1600 from the bay.

The bay survived as it was the part of the track behind the signalbox and used as an engineers siding.

As 158840 says "Welsh Assembly Government" on it can we speculate that it was in fact a test train for restored services to Brecon?



1959: The Cambrian Coast Express leaves Aberystwyth. In the foreground is an open wagon carrying a Vale of Rheidol open wagon, presumably returning to the line after overhaul. Photo: John Challinor.



Train Stay Save

Following last year's launch of Train Stay Save in conjunction with Mid Wales Tourism (MWT), the Cambrian Railways Partnership (CRP) are encouraging more accommodation providers to sign up to this free service to encourage visitors to mid Wales to use the train and benefit from a 10% discount on their accommodation costs. The scheme, which has been in operation since November 2010, has proved to be very well received.

'By taking part, accommodation providers will benefit from free promotion on the Visit Mid Wales website, along with all the additional promotion that the scheme gets along the Cambrian Lines. People are unfortunately facing tough financial times at the moment, and any saving to the cost of an annual holiday or short break means a lot. In addition, more and more people are coming for their breaks to the area by rail, and, along with all the other low cost pastimes that the CRP are encouraging people to take advantage of whilst in Mid Wales, we're hoping that we can attract more families to Mid Wales and use the train to get from place to place during their stay here.'

For further information on the TRAIN STAY SAVE initiative or to discuss the scheme please contact Rhydian Mason on 07795 644 412 or email enquiries@thecambrianline.co.uk, or For further information and a list of all participating accommodation providers visit: www.visitmidwales.co.uk

Letters to the Editor Station Announcements

Dear Editor,

Thank you for publishing Roger Whitehouse's interesting piece "A view from the coast" in SARPA Newsletter No. 54 .

To my way of thinking one of the worst automated station announcements is the "female voice" at Shrewsbury, which is so boring and insulting to Welsh speakers. This lady's voice and pronunciations are enough to put one off rail travel for ever!

Her obvious ignorance regarding how to pronounce certain station names on the Cambrian route are exacerbated when station names on the North Wales coast route are read out. The fact that all these names are repeated in order to advise "customers" that stops have to be requested to the conductor on the train just prolong the agony. This recording predates ATW running the Wales and Borders franchise: their recorded station announcements elsewhere are very good.

However am I alone in objecting to the mispronunciation of the end of line eponymous ferry port of Holyhead. The "lady at Shrewsbury", no doubt trying to be as trendy and up to the mark as countless BBC Wales and BBC Radio Wales announcers, insists on calling it Holly---Head. Maybe within SARPA we have someone who is an authority on the flora and fauna of this part of Anglesey. I certainly have never been aware that this town is a naturalist's hot spot for holly trees and bushes !

Perhaps we should start a campaign to ensure that this ferry port is simply known to all and sundry as Caergybi. After all across the Irish Sea we have Dún Laoghaire which is just that to everybody.

Sincerely yours,
Gareth W. Parry.

Platform labelling at Shrewsbury

The last issue highlighted a problem with the platform signage at Shrewsbury (Newsletter 54, p.14). The problem could be easily cured by siting the down 4b stopboard about 1 carriage length north. This should stop 3-car trains from impinging onto 4a. Regarding the front & back confusion at Salop - Labelling units would help & also the station announcements at Salop need to be changed. She says passengers for Aber & Borth travel in the front section. This should be changed to passengers for Aber & Borth travel in the section furthest away from the station centre. This does away with 'front' & 'back' which causes the confusion for passengers getting on at Salop.

Regards,
Dave Taylor

A new station for Bow Street?

From the Cambrian News of 14th July

By Norman Williams

Norman@Cambrian-news.co.uk

A NEW £1m rail station in Bow Street could be open by 2016, a councillor claimed this week. But the Welsh government is also considering a new station in Carno, Powys, after infrastructure projects consultants Capita Symonds identified both villages as potential sites. It has not been decided yet whether just one of the projects will go ahead or both.

The report was commissioned by Tŷnïdiaeth Canolbarth Cymru (TraCC), a group working with councils on transport issues.

The proposed location for Bow Street station is next to the Build Center depot, with access off the A487 at e Aberystwyth end of the village. It is virtually the same site which was closed by Lord Beeching in the 1960s.

The report states: "The Bow Street site was chosen as being well situated to capture commuter traffic into Aberystwyth. The site has potential to operate as a park and ride to serve Aberystwyth."

Cllr Paul Hinge, who serves Tirymynach Ward, which includes Bow Street, said: "It's a wonderful idea, as it helps the Aberystwyth Travel Plan, and would be significant in taking traffic off the road into Aberystwyth."

The proposal supports both the Aberystwyth Strategic Regeneration Area and Sustainable Travel Centre projects.

Cllr Hinge said: "I envisage the station being used by commuters from Talybont, Llandre, Penrhynoch, and IBERS staff. It is an environmentally sustainable project, which would cost around £1 million. And if there are no hiccups, it could be up and running by 2016, subject to funding, and the availability of the site earmarked as a car park, which is presently owned by a West Midlands Firm."

The report also forecasts the number parking spaces required.

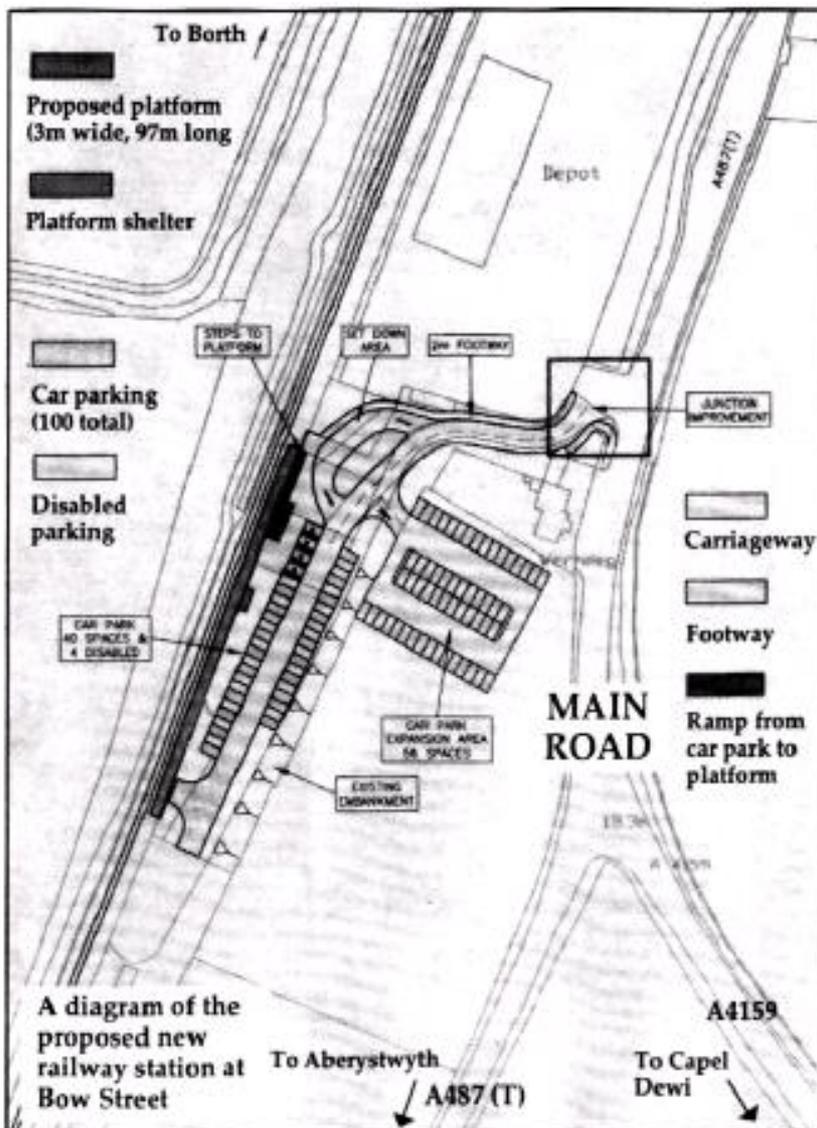
It reads: "At Bow Street, 38 parking spaces would be required to cater for initial forecast parking requirements (2016). Based on the forecasts, 56 - 57 spaces would be sufficient to accommodate demand in 2026 if trains stop every two hours, or in 2016 if services stop hourly. If an hourly service stops at Bow Street, 85 spaces would be required by 2026. If the station is promoted as a Park and Ride location, then parking demand may be higher than this estimate."

TraCC's report incorporates a similar appraisal to establish a case for a railway station in Carno. Cllr Hinge said: "The ball is in the Welsh Government's court, to decide on one new station, two new stations, or none at all."

Following the publication of this article, a number of letters have appeared in the Cambrian News, some advocating a Llandre stop in addition to Bow Street. It appears that Llandre was considered, but car parking would have had to have been on the site of the children's playground.

Editor: Perhaps the station should be called Aberystwyth Parkway. I can envisage many people will drive to the station (particularly from the Aberystwyth suburbs) to travel east. Indeed this might be a greater passenger flow than that of commuters into Aberystwyth.

I am puzzled by the mention of IBERS staff as a source of traffic. As the station would be over a kilometre from IBERS at Plas Gogerddan, it is unlikely that staff would commute out from Aberystwyth to Bow Street and then walk, or indeed drive to Bow Street and take the train into Aberystwyth. There are also two good bus services between



The proposed Bow Street station. Original in colour.

Aberystwyth and Penrhyncoch, which pass Plas Gogerddan. Arriva route 5 runs hourly. Aberystwyth students may also have a student bus pass, which allows free travel on local services in Aberystwyth, and 50% discount on services further afield.

The Cambrian News of 25th August reports a letter from Cllr. Paul Hinge to the Welsh Government Minister for Local Government and Communities, asking for support for the proposals to reopen Bow Street, in spite of concerns raised by consultants Capita Symonds. CS estimated that, if Bow Street and Carno stations were reopened, the resulting four minute extra journey time would result in a loss of 9,000 through journeys. This is disputed in the letter: the extra journey time would be insignificant and connections would be unaffected.

Llanbadarn Level Crossing

from Charlie Hulme's website 18/7/2011

The automatic half-barrier level crossing on the Cambrian main line at Llanbadarn, just outside Aberystwyth, adjacent to another one which is on the Vale of Rheidol narrow gauge line, has had its problems in the past, and here it is again in a recent Railway Accident Investigation Board preliminary report:

The RAIB is carrying out an investigation into an incident which occurred at the level crossing at Llanbadarn, near Aberystwyth, Dyfed, on the railway between Aberystwyth and Machynlleth, on Sunday 19 June 2011.

At 21:52 hrs on 19 June, the late-running 21:30 hrs Aberystwyth to Machynlleth train passed over the crossing while the barriers were raised, and came to a stop with the front of the train about 40 metres beyond the crossing. There were no road vehicles or pedestrians on the crossing at the time.

Llanbadarn level crossing, which is on the A4120 Heol y Bont, is an automatic half-barrier crossing, whose operation is monitored locally (ABCL). For trains travelling from Aberystwyth towards Machynlleth, operation of the crossing is normally initiated by the driver pressing a plunger on the platform at Aberystwyth station shortly before the train is due to depart. There is a driver's crossing indicator, positioned a short distance on the approach side of the crossing, which normally displays a flashing red light. This changes to a flashing white light when the crossing equipment has operated normally, i.e. the red road traffic signals are showing and the barriers have lowered. Passenger trains are permitted to pass over the crossing at 65 km/h (40 mph).

This section of the national rail network is equipped with the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS), which was commissioned in March 2011, and replaced the previous signalling system on the Cambrian lines between Shrewsbury, Aberystwyth and Pwllheli. The status of automatic level crossings is not indicated on the driver's cab display.

The RAIB's preliminary examination has found that the operation of the crossing had been initiated at Aberystwyth by the train driver, but that by the time the train reached it the crossing had 'timed out' and re-opened to road traffic.

The investigation will examine the sequence of events leading up to the incident, the risk associated with the level crossing, the history of previous incidents involving train driver error at this location, and the factors that influenced the behaviour of the driver on the approach to the crossing.

The last mishap, in 2008 involved a train (158 831) heading towards Aberystwyth, and a 'near miss' - the train stopping 2 metres short of a road tanker which was crossing. The report on that incident said that 'Since 2001 there have been three previous occasions recorded when a train ran through Llanbadarn level crossing in an uncontrolled manner when the barriers were not lowered, on 17 August 2001, 8 November 2005, and 24 April 2007. None resulted in any collision with a road vehicle, or any injury or damage. The 2005 incident involved an up train, and the other two down trains.'

The View from Milepost 62 with the Brigadier

It's time for the passenger to hit back! The Government has seemingly declared war on the passenger, the environment and the economy by allowing the world's most expensive train fares to become even more expensive. Having failed to heed the lesson of rail privatisation – that the fragmentation is the key underlying reason to the vastly increased costs since 1993 on the rail network we're instead having the tired old nonsense about needing to pay for investment and reduce the burden on the taxpayer spouted. We've had a double whammy of paying for rail privatisation twice, once through our taxes (the New Labour "solution") and increasingly when we buy a ticket (the Con/Dem "solution"). Remember all the noises about how the sun was going to shine out of the private sector's behind and how inefficient BR was? The Wild West saw more convincing snake oil salesmen! BR was not perfect, but the one thing it did have was a lower cost base which meant lower state subsidy and lower fares. Apparently praising an ex-nationalised industry is heretical but the uncomfortable truth for many is that rail privatisation amply demonstrates that ideology and prejudice fall to pieces in contact with the real world. The rail industry in 2011 adjusted for inflation needs roughly twice the income that BR did to make a passenger journey happen.

So how can the passenger who never asked for this shambles fight back and indeed be able to afford to travel by train? I don't condone fare evasion or making the frontline staff's job any harder than it is already. However the fare system is such a shambolic mess full of inconsistency and geographic variations that a savvy passenger can play the system. I have compiled a guide and Dusty my cat provides some comments!

Routing

There's often more than one way to skin a cat! [apologies to Dusty] Many destinations can be travelled to via different routes; sometimes the same fare is available but often different routes have different fares. Online planners will try and take you the quickest and often most expensive way. Alternative routes can be cheaper. On some routes there's even competing operators.

Dusty's Comment- *There's three ways to Worcester from Shrewsbury and Birmingham to London can be done using 3 separate operators and two different combinations of two others.*

Rovers and Rangers

Travelling relatively long distances for just a day or a combination of days over a given period in a geographically set area. These can be money saving manna from heaven. They are usually restricted to starting in the off peak or OK all day Saturday, but there are some exemptions. Individual Terms and Conditions exist. ATW alone run over a dozen different types. You have to do your research to find what suites you and it might not even be for a Leisure Journey.

Dusty's Comment – *the best bargain in the UK? The North Wales All Zone Rover for £23.00 gives you unlimited train travel on the Cambrian and all ATW services in North Wales for a day plus local buses in the North. No time restriction.*

Split Tickets

The rail system is broken up geographically with different areas having different levels of fares historically, add to this rail privatisation boundaries and support from PTE's and all sorts of discrepancies and inconsistencies including old BR regional boundaries can be unearthed, meaning fares between two places can be undercut by buying two tickets between Point A and somewhere between Point B and that somewhere and Point B. A good starting point is TOC boundaries, though break points can be found even within

TOC's. You have to do some research and it can be quite addictive, generally only split once or twice. The person selling you the fare is obliged to sell what you ask for and providing you are on a train that stops at the somewhere point you are not obliged to get off the train. Though I have heard some TOC's have instructed staff not to issue split tickets. Simply buying the second ticket en route or the day before easily avoids this hassle.

***Dusty's Comment-** with a proliferation of self service machines and online buying it's impossible to police!*

Railcards

Please get one if you can, which if you live in Mid Wales is everybody. Terms and Conditions vary somewhat: Seniors & Disabled can use them before 0930 in the morning but Young People can't. The Cambrian Local Card is usable all day long. But remember it's not applicable to fares beyond Shrewsbury! For a Family providing you have one adult and one child between 5 and 16 you can use them anytime. All give 33% discount. We are very fortunate to have the Local Card on the Cambrian meaning working age folk travelling alone can get discount.

***Dusty's Comment** – try travelling to Shrewsbury using your Cambrian railcard discount and then buy another ticket from there to your destination.*

Season Tickets

Commuters -when the media covers rail fares it seems only people using these tickets actually use the rail network! The traditional season ticket gives you a 4 week period whereby you can travel on all 28 days if need be with no restrictions. Normally the maximum would be 20 days anyone actually would and even then remember they are cheaper than 20 individual anytime fares so you already have a discount. They do rely on a captive market and to a large degree the passenger if needing to commute in the morning peak has little leeway. Though if you're thinking of moving house compare season tickets from different locations to where you work\; for instance there's no consistency to any of the season fares into Shrewsbury from its converging lines. Also available as 7 day options handy if you're going on a course.

***Dusty's Comment-** there no need for anyone living permanently in Mid Wales to buy a season ticket. The Local Cambrian Railcard is valid all day long and gives a 33% discount off all journeys meaning buying each journey works out cheaper than the season tickets. For example Newtown to Shrewsbury for 1 month is £115.20. If you travel 20 times a month you would pay £94.00 using the card.*

Advance Purchase

The marvellous deals hailed by ATOC are slightly dubious as AP is a way of trying to encourage people to travel on less busy trains by tying them to them for a discounted price. Generally you can't get them in the peaks or at busy times and many inexperienced travellers are caught out by this mislead by advertising. There are also only a small number of them so the sooner you try and book the better. Great if you are flexible about when you can travel and then can become tied down to certain trains.

Off Peak and Peak

The operators love what they call yield management, getting people to pay more at peak times and then offer seats at cheaper prices off peak when fewer people want to travel. It's a method of trying to buck natural supply and demand. If you're flexible enough to avoid travelling at peak times then a cheaper deal can be found. Generally speaking travel after 0915 or 0930 is deemed off peak. On some "rural" lines these rules don't always apply, such as ours where all tickets are deemed Anytime and no peaks exist. Some operators have made evening peak restrictions out of major cities and on Friday and Sunday afternoons so beware.

Dusty's Comment- *if you arrive at Shrewsbury on the second train of the day (0925) any onward journey would automatically be in the off peak. Think about splitting tickets at Shrewsbury.*

Special Offers

Individual operators run individual schemes to try and encourage people to use off peak trains and on routes with seasonal demand variations to encourage travel in quieter periods. An example would be ATW's Club 55 offer which doesn't apply in the summer or any other holiday period. You have to keep your ear to the ground to spot these and of course want to travel out of season.

Dusty's Comment- *ensure your staff are on pensions or have private incomes so they are able to take advantage of such deals!*

So how about some examples?

Example 1.

The Hurst's are from Hertfordshire and have driven to Mid Wales and are staying in a Caravan for a week in Tywyn and want to visit Portmeirion. They have 2 adults and 3 children under 16 but over 5. They don't have a family railcard but fancy the train ride for the scenery and don't mind walking from Minfordd. The Anytime return for 2 adults and 3 children is £30.80.

Dusty Says – *Buy a Cambrian Coaster Day Ranger- Family for £17.90. Leave Tywyn on the 0926 and its valid. You can break the outbound or return journey. Saving 42%.*

Example 2

Mr Williams from Borth wants to travel to London and return around 2 weeks later and is flexible about what day of the week and times he can, though he can't pin himself down to exactly when yet. He's looked at a website that's routed him via Wolverhampton and Stafford and will only offer him £60.80 singles each way and no return fare. What can he do?

Dusty Says- *Don't trust online route planners! Technically by changing at those two places you can get to Euston a few minutes quicker but at a terrible cost! Go via Birmingham. The £61.80 Off Peak Return from Borth to London Euston via Birmingham seems a lot but in fact this particular fare from Cardigan Bay to London is relatively reasonable given the distance travelled and the lack of draconian restrictions in and out of Euston. Saving 49%.*

Example 3

Mrs Snodbury (43) lives in Warwick and wants to visit Powis Castle she and meet her friend Mrs Jones at Welshpool station. To be there for 1000 she will have to get the 0726 from Warwick to catch the 0824 from New St. The Anytime return for 1 Adult is £32.10.

Dusty Says- *get an Anytime return from Warwick to Birmingham Moor St for £7.80 then buy an Anytime return from Birmingham New St to Welshpool for £14.60. Total £22.40 Saving 30%*

Example 4

Mr Jones want to visit the market in Ludlow on his day off. He lives in Caersws and has a Cambrian Railcard. The Anytime return from Caersws to Ludlow departing 0837 is £27.50.

Dusty Says- buy an Anytime return to Shrewsbury with your Cambrian Railcard for £4.70 and then an Off Peak return from Shrewsbury to Ludlow for £12.00. Total £16.70 **Saving 39%**.

Example 5

Emma is from Cirencester, she has gained a place at Aberystwyth University and wants to know the cheapest way to go home to visit her parents. She thinks she can travel late Thursday afternoon returning Sunday and will want to do it once a month. Her father enquired at Swindon station a dozen or so miles away where he regularly goes to London from and has been told a return fare via Newport (South Wales) is £76.00.

Dusty Says- Poor Emma with no station in her home town anymore. First of all buy a Young Persons Railcard for £28.00, that will give you a third discount and pay for itself after two trips. Secondly don't travel from Swindon! Get the bus to Kemble or get daddy to drive the four miles. The Off Peak fare from/to Kemble via Cheltenham and Birmingham with a YP Card is £36.70. **Saving 54%**.

Example 6

Ms Jones works for a voluntary sector organisation in Newtown and has been asked to attend a day conference in the centre of Cardiff on a weekday. Aware of the need to be frugal she wants to travel by rail so as not to claim £87 in mileage plus car parking, to help the organisation and save money for their clients. She's too late to book any advance singles and wants to know if the £50.80 Off Peak return on the first train can be brought down.

Dusty Says – Buy an Anytime return £7.10 to Shrewsbury (cheaper with a Cambrian railcard), then an Off Peak return to Cwmbran for £26.70, then a Anytime return from Cwmbran to Cardiff for £7.10. Total £40.90. **Saving 19%**.

Example 7

Rob & Tabatha live in a Tteepee in Ceinws. They want to visit friends in Manchester for the festival of the parsnip tree. (Dusty thinks I've made this up) They want to go on a Friday coming back on the Sunday, the £47.60 each Off Peak return from Machynlleth to Manchester have frightened them. £95.20 in total.

Dusty says – A hard one - use your Cambrian Local Railcard and buy singles to Caersws on the Friday and from Caersws to Machynlleth on the Sunday at £4.40 each Sub Total £17.60. The Off Peak return from Caersws to Manchester is £33.20 each, sub total £66.40. Total £84.00. **Saving 12%**.

Hopefully we've provided a few hints at saving money and note we haven't even ventured into the world of advance purchase. All the above can be bought on the day off the guard or at the ticket office or the new fangled self service thingy. Power to the passenger!

Which leads to the following item:

Club 55 for the autumn

- 1) To take up this offer you must be aged 55 or over and provide proof of age when you travel using a Club 55 ticket. We will only accept passport, driving license, pension book or a bus pass as proof of age.
- 2) Customers who are unable or refuse to provide proof of age on request will be required to purchase a new ticket as if no Club 55 ticket is held, no credit will be given for the Club 55 ticket.

3) Club 55 travel will be valid between 4 September and 14 December 2011. Outward travel is permitted on the date shown on the ticket and return travel is permitted within one calendar month of the date of outward travel or 14 December whichever is the earlier. All travel must be completed by 14 December 2011. Travel on 15 December 2011 or later will require a new ticket to be purchased.

4) Travel is valid on the entire Arriva Trains Wales network and the services of the following operators (supplementary return add-on fare applies):

Chiltern Railways - Between Birmingham Moor Street and London Marylebone (£20.50 add-on). An interchange between Arriva Trains Wales services and Chiltern Railways is available using London Midland between Smethwick Galton Bridge to Birmingham Moor Street.

Cross Country – Between Cheltenham and Birmingham New St only (£10 add-on).

First Great Western - Between Bristol, Bath Spa, Taunton, Westbury, Castle Cary (£5 add-on).

London Midland – Between Crewe and Liverpool only (£5 add-on).

Northern Rail – Services in the Greater Manchester County – Bursough Bridge/Bromley Cross/Glossop/ Littleborough/Greenfield/Poynton and Patricroft (£1.50 add-on).

Merseyrail – Any station on the Merseyrail network (£1 add-on)

Add-on fares are only allowed at one end of the journey and not both. Journeys may start or end on the add-on area of the partner train operating companies. Add-on fares must be purchased as a complete journey when the Club 55 ticket is being purchased and cannot be purchased without the core Arriva Trains Wales Club 55 ticket or as an addition at a later date. Club 55 tickets can be used on the services of other train operators within the Arriva Trains Wales network for line of route travel only using the following operators: First Great Western, Cross Country, London Midland, Virgin Trains between North Wales and Crewe. Travel on the services of operators not included in the Club 55 offer will require a new ticket to be purchased. Some Club 55 tickets will have limitations on the train operating companies that can be used on some journeys and only the company or combinations of companies shown on the ticket.

5) A £2 discount to Senior Railcard and Disabled Persons Railcard holders is available on Club 55. Other than this, there are no other railcard/child concessions available in conjunction with this offer.

6) On Mondays to Fridays, some morning travel restrictions will apply. Journeys may not be made which arrive into Cardiff Central, Birmingham New St, Manchester Piccadilly or Liverpool Lime St / Central before 9:30am and 10.00am for London Marylebone. Evening travel restrictions also apply to departures from London Marylebone from 4.00pm to 7.00pm.

7) Date of outward travel may be changed providing this is done before the date of outward travel. Changes on or after the date of outward travel will be treated as refunds and a new ticket will have to be purchased. Any change of date must be within the scope of the offer.

8) Refunds. A full refund, less administration fee, will be granted on unused Club 55 tickets. There are no refunds for part used tickets (this includes travel in one direction only or any journey not completed before 14 December).

Please note: Club 55 tickets will not be available for purchase until the promotion start date, 27 August 2011. You cannot travel until 4 September 2011.

9) All tickets are issued subject to National Conditions of Carriage and can be used by any permitted route or any additional routing permitted on the ticket. Travel beyond the map shown in this leaflet will require a new ticket to be purchased for that journey.

10) Seat reservations are optional with this offer. This offer cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer.

11). Club 55 offer valid until 14 December 2011.

Cheshire Cat Tours: Aberystwyth to Durham

Based on a news item, and a letter (by Brian Tomlins of Llanon), in the Cambrian News of 1st September.

On the 18th August Cheshire Cat tours ran an excursion from Aberystwyth and Cambrian line stations to Durham. Loading of the train was good: 200 from Aberystwyth and 450 leaving Shrewsbury. The train left Aberystwyth at 0540: it reached Shrewsbury at 0830 - a journey time of 2 hours 50 minutes. It has been reported that one of the two class 97s failed before the climb up Talerddig - leaving the other engine to climb with 12 coaches and the failed engine in tow. As a result the train was one hour late at both York and Durham.

However, it had been arranged that the return from Durham would be rescheduled for one hour later. It departed from Durham at 1620, but was subject to delays as a result of being juggled between service trains on the East Coast line to York.

It arrived in Shrewsbury at 2030. Here it was held for 45 minutes while the service train from Aberystwyth arrived, unloaded and reloaded for return to Aberystwyth. It then had to wait until the service train arrived at Newtown. On arrival at Machynlleth it was held further, as the service train had just left, and therefore it would have to wait until it returned.

Arrival at Aberystwyth (scheduled at 2315) wasn't until 0109. During the hour long stop at Machynlleth passengers on the train were denied the use of any toilets, either on the train as it was stopped at a station, or in the station, as they were locked closed.

Both the correspondent, and an un-named passenger, criticised Network Rail for their handling of the schedule, in giving priority to service trains. Brian Tomlins also commented on the performance, or lack of it, of the ERTMS signalling system. In contrast, both were full of praise for the tour company and the crew on the train.

The locos and stock ran to Aberystwyth the previous day, and were stabled overnight in the loop; they also stayed there after returning, leaving on the morning of Friday the 19th.

[Editor: It is normal practice to give priority to service trains over Charter and Excursion trains. We have been unable to confirm the locomotive failure.]



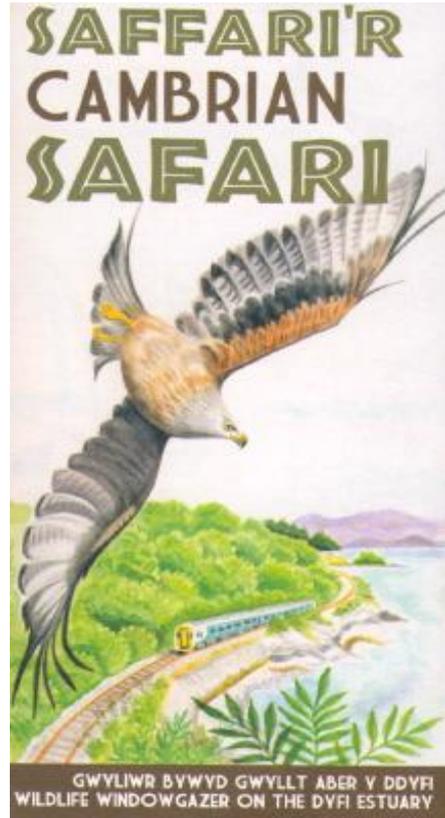
97 302 and 97 303 with the train on the 19th, before returning to Crewe. Photo:- Denis Bates.

Saffari'r Cambrian Safari

This is a new leaflet covering the wildlife to be seen from the train around the Dyfi Estuary, or by visiting a number of Nature Reserves. It includes a map of the area, and illustrations of the main birds and mammals (both wild and domesticated) to be seen.

Travelling from Machynlleth towards Aberystwyth, the osprey nests on the Cors Dyfi Reserve can be seen just before entering Dovey Junction. About a mile beyond Dovey Junction, the line passes between the RSPB Ynyshir Reserve and the estuary. If visiting the hides on this reserve, you can spot the trains as well as the birds! Further down the line, the Cors Fochno Reserve is on the left.

On the coast line, there is ample opportunity to see birds between Dovey Junction and Penhelig, on the sand flats and shore.



The cover of the guide shows a red kite; while the osprey is featured inside.



Cors Fochno entrance

The guide describes a circular route of approximately 1.5km providing public access to Cors Fochno. It runs south along a track from the B4353 1km west of Llancynfelyn at SN636926. Parking is very limited and no dogs are allowed on the route. Visitors are strongly advised to heed the safety information on the sign at the second gate.

Note that access is by permission of the Countryside Council for Wales: telephone 01970872900.

Borth Station Museum

Borth Station now has a heritage museum and community facility. The station was adopted in 2006 as part of the Arriva Trains Wales Adopt a Station scheme. Local residents George Romary and John Toler have led the enterprise, now expanded to become the Borth Station Volunteers, with about 12 members. An art project followed, involving local people of all ages (Newsletter No.40). Following discussions with ATW and the station landlord, Network Rail, a £40,000 refurbishment of the rooms started in January 2011.

The rooms were opened on the 9th July, as a museum, by Mark Williams, MP for Ceredigion. Three rooms in the 1860s station building - the booking office, parcels office and a waiting room (with the booking office window), are linked.

For the summer, the museum, manned by volunteers, is open from 11 am to 5 pm on Tuesdays to Saturdays, and from 12 pm to 4 pm on Sundays. Winter openings are not yet finalised, but may be at weekends. A number of items are on sale, including fridge magnets with local station totems, and the collectors pin badge shown below.



Railway Industrial Archaeology Competition

Looking at all this new fangled equipment on the track for the purposes of making the ERTMS work properly has prompted the webmaster to go mad and run a competition for SARPA members to win £25. You have to answer the following questions:-

At a major Cambrian location there is cast iron evidence between the tracks of a previous technology, thankfully now long obsolete. There are at least three examples at this location, astonishingly still there for all to see.

What and where are these items? What is the technology with which they are associated? (Its full title please) What was the contribution to railway safety when it was finally eclipsed? For a bonus five quid name one instance when its presence was a contribution to a major railway mishap.

The first correct answers drawn out of a hat at the SARPA AGM is the winner. Answers by email, please or by post to the webmaster's address on our contact page. Closing date Friday 5th October. You must be a SARPA member to enter and the webmaster's decision is final.

Clues, you say? You need clues? Whatever next! The webmaster can't say too much or it will give the game away.

However, you know what these things are made of, 'cos it says so. Track or tracks? Yes, it is significant. Until about five years ago your wait here for a connecting Up train might have been inconvenient, though you might then have had time to ponder these items in a round about way. They are, incidentally, nothing whatever to do with railway signalling. Up until the mid 1960s, if you liked working outside in the rain but within four walls all the same, then this was the Cambrian location for you!

With this mantle of knowledge you might even be able to hazard a guess at the length of a Cambrian Railways coach if asked.

Three Ways to Worcester – an idea for a day out

Adrian Bailey

The Midlands City on the River Severn has a fine Cathedral dating back to Saxon times: amongst its relics is the tomb of King John, and a stained glass window paid for by his family in memory of Brigadier-General Brownlow Stuart. Who? Well as a Major in the Worcestershire Regiment in 1911 he ordered his troops to fire on striking railway workers in Llanelli - the recent 100th anniversary saw him painted in a bad light! There are other reasons to visit, including a fine walk along the banks of the River Severn where a Swan sanctuary is maintained, with up 30 Swans living there, plus River Boat trips. Links to the English Civil War are celebrated and Friar St still retains many Tudor buildings.

Of interest to us, though the direct Severn Valley route via Bridgnorth closed in the mid 60's there are still three different routes you can travel to the City, all around 2 hours journey time from Shrewsbury.

Assuming you arrive at Shrewsbury @ 0924 on the 0730 from Aberystwyth.

Via Hereford. Catch the 0940 ATW service to Milford Haven arriving Hereford 1032. This gives a tightish 8 minute connection to the 1040 London Midland service from Hereford to Birmingham New St via Great Malvern and Worcester Foregate St. This arrives 1121.

Via Smethwick Galton Bridge. Stay on the train from Aberystwyth and alight at Smethwick Galton Bridge at 1020. There's a tight 1023 London Midland service via Stourbridge Junction arriving Foregate St 1110, then a 1053 arriving Shrub Hill 1139.

Via New St. Arrive 1026 from Aberystwyth and then there's a comfortable connection to the 1049 London Midland Service to Hereford going down the Lickey incline, arriving Worcester Foregate St 1131.

Returning, the Hereford route is again tight in the timetable but remember those charter minutes will probably give you extra minutes in reality!

Via Hereford. Depart Worcester Foregate St on the 1532 London Midland to Hereford arriving 1619. Get the 1627 ATW to Holyhead arriving Shrewsbury 1720 in time to pick up the 1727 to Aberystwyth.

Via Smethwick Galton Bridge. The 1516 London Midland to Dorridge via Stourbridge Jnc arrives Smethwick Galton Bridge 1605, with a 25 minute wait for the 1630 ATW to Aberystwyth.

Via New St. Catch the 1524 London Midland service to New St, arriving 1611. (Though again this has Charter Minutes), Get the 1624 ATW to Aberystwyth.

So much to choose from, the beautiful Marches: the Malvern Hills, revitalised GWR Midlands suburban with brand new Class 172 trains coming on stream, or the vicious Lickey Incline on the Birmingham to Bristol mainline - plus Worcester itself! The Off Peak fare from Welshpool @ £28.60 for instance is valid on all 3 routes. A West Midlands Day Ranger available from Shrewsbury for £20.00 is not valid via Hereford.

Charles Williams Westwood Park Welshpool

It's with regret that we must report the passing away of Charles Williams on the 26th July. Charles despite his advancing years was a regular at SARPA meetings. He had come to the Borth meeting just three weeks before, and had been involved in the Welshpool Station Adoption Group. He was 88 years old. He was not the most talkative of men but when he did make a contribution it was often blunt and to the point, he resigned from the Welshpool Station Adoption group as he felt nothing was done by ATW/Network Rail despite repeated requests. His frustration at the post privatisation way of things will have been no surprise to those who knew that he had a lifelong career on the railway.

Charles came from a long standing native family of Welshpool who were actively involved in St Mary's Church, and was a bell ringer like his father, grandfather and great grandfather. Born in 1923 he joined the Great Western Railway at Welshpool Station in 1940. The war saw him serve in the Royal Engineers. He saw service in North Africa and Italy in a Railway Operating Company ending it as a Regimental Sergeant Major. He resumed his railway career afterwards and sought promotion spending time at a number of major railway centres across what was by then BR's Western Region. Eventually he ended up on the Eastern Region and settled in Colchester and held a number of senior posts out of Liverpool St until retirement from BR. Afterward he acted a business travel consultant for a travel firm until 1987. On the death of his wife in 1990 Charles bought a house in his native Welshpool.

We understand that Charles had written down his wartime experiences but was searching for accompanying photographs, in particular of the GWR Deans Goods Locomotives that he helped operate in Italy. Hopefully this document will see the light of day. Several SARPA members attended the funeral.

SARPA Comment on the McNulty Report and the suggestion that closing ticket offices could allegedly save money

McNulty has to be seen in context – his brief was to identify ways of saving money within the current framework of the railway structure. Those of us that have read and analysed the report that appeared in public are painfully aware that he has actually come up with few answers. That he couldn't find a magic wand was to be expected. All those European rail industries he compared costs so favourably with the fragmented UK network had something in common that the published report was perhaps never going to suggest moving toward. That's right – they were all vertically integrated national entities which might, given the mountain of evidence have something to do with their lower cost bases, lower state subsidy and lower fares they enjoy – something which BR had too.

It's against this background we must place the proposal to close ticket offices at Category E stations. You may have seen press reports listing stations near you and some on the Cambrian – for the record Pwllheli, Barmouth, Machynlleth and Newtown are all Category E which is based on sales. The list ignores the fact that Barmouth and Newtown are run by Agencies and have no direct cost to the TOC. In all there are 685 stations in that category in the UK; the TSSA union calculates that 1000 people could be made redundant. These aren't your overpaid Senior Management Team or ASLEF Train Drivers we're talking about. Most only earn around £15K per annum – the cost of employing them probably no more than £20K per annum each. If these 1000 were all full time the salary cost per annum for them all would be just £20 million. Let's face it – it's a drop in the ocean of how much the Government want its annual rail subsidy bill to come down by. McNulty is clutching at straws as he can't find any way of making substantial savings whilst at the same time, keeping TOCs, ROSCOs and Infrastructure Providers. It's perhaps the most Beeching-esque suggestion in the whole report. – mad cutting but not actually getting anywhere near the intended target. Beeching couldn't make the railways profitable by cutting what he saw as lightly used branch lines and services any more than if implemented the closing of 685 ticket offices will cut the Government's subsidy by £Billions.

Then came the creatures at ATOC – The Association of Train Operating Companies – whose primary concern is making profits, not passengers. Ticket Office sales are in decline and only account for a third of ticket sales they claimed. We must remember that a season ticket sale counts as a ticket sale – no doubt only a single ticket sale. The well heeled London commuter paying £10,000 per annum in one go the same bean as a £1.50 Child off peak return in the regions. The truth is probably far more than half of all journeys and revenue come from ticket office sales. How they would love us all to pay over the odds on confusing websites.

Forget any customer service presence on the booming railway – on many regional peak services the conductor can't travel through to issue tickets anyway, the TOCs will only barrier and man the most busy stations – people will soon cotton on and expect free rides between many points. Extending all those barriers and manning them will cost far more than a 1000 booking office clerks.

So the Welsh Government must be praised for saying it has no plans to close ticket offices and so too Arriva Trains Wales; though the reality of the situation would be that the franchise agreement would have to be altered and once precedent is made it could happen again. Best to lie low till 2018?



A Welsh Highland Rly Beyer Garratt loco takes water at Caernarfon. Photo:- Angus Eickhoff

SARPA Summer Trip

A number of members plus four partners made this year's SARPA excursion doing the Mid and North Wales circle anti-clockwise, utilising the recently completed Welsh Highland Railway link between Caernarfon and Porthmadog on Saturday 6th August. After having to kill nearly an hour at Shrewsbury due to the inexplicable one minute missed connection to the Chester line, the group was treated to some overcrowding on the 2-car 1023 from Shrewsbury to Holyhead. A lot of revenue was lost going into Wrexham as the guard couldn't walk through the train. On arrival at Chester 90% plus of the passengers got off allowing the group to re-gather on table seats for the quieter run along the North Wales Coast. It was interesting that this service managed to drop 6 minutes for no good reason at all onwards from Chester along the North Wales Coast. The Chairman provided a quiz, which helped distract from a man speaking Welsh loudly in an East European accent. On reaching Bangor @1237 the group found an amazing site near the station - a bus stop with readable timetables on it and incredibly bus services actually coming past the station. Members from Powys were left with impression that the insurmountable obstacles to integration in their county don't actually exist elsewhere.

Travel over the missing section (closed under the Beeching Axe in 1970) between Bangor and Caernarfon was accomplished with the assistance of an Arriva bus, on which our North Wales Rover tickets were also valid, though this is not the case for other operators. The bus - a frequent Arriva X5 Llandudno to Caernarfon service - was a new vehicle saying it was sponsored by TAITH, the North Wales equivalent to TraCC. The 30 minute 8 mile ride was just about OK apart from in a frightening parallel with what happened elsewhere in the UK that weekend. A 10/11 year old boy threw something at the windscreen of the bus as we went past a council estate on the edge of Bangor. It turned out to be a tennis ball and thankfully bounced off without damage. Arrival at Caernarfon gave an hour for lunch before the departure of the Welsh Highland train to Porthmadog. All the same, whilst the bus interchange at Bangor station could not be faulted, it was quite a lengthy walk to the railway in Caernarfon, so it was as well we had time in hand.

The Welsh Highland station is situated on the trackbed of the former LNWR standard gauge route to Afon Wen, which was swept away completely after closure in 1964, though

notably the tunnel northwards under the town has been utilised for a sparsely used road. The new station essentially consists of a series of portacabins, basic but adequate. A healthy discount was also available when we presented our North Wales Day Rover tickets. Departure for Porthmadog was at 1500, prior to which our Beyer Garratt locomotive was serviced. No doubt the engine crews will appreciate the luxury of a pit when the railway finally gets around to installing one. Raking out a substantial ashpan whilst kneeling in a pile of wet ash is hardly state of the art in the way of steam traction facilities!

Immediately after departure it becomes apparent that the Welsh Highland is a very impressive operation. Substantial work has been carried out to resurrect this line, which has been the beneficiary of much funding from Welsh Assembly Government. The first part of the route utilises the trackbed southwards of the former standard gauge Bangor-Afon Wen section as far as Dinas, thence the railway runs over the Welsh Highland proper on to Porthmadog. It is on this latter section that the scenery becomes really impressive.

Our Garratt locomotive appeared to have no difficulty in coping with a long and well loaded train, though it was notable that the engine was throwing out a fair amount of unburned fuel as it climbed up into the mountains, so one couldn't help but wonder what might happen in a really dry summer. The flexible gangways between the coaches on this line are not made perfectly weathertight and in consequence it was not long before a carpet of ash had collected in the end vestibules, which turned to gritty filth in the rain. It would seem that the locomotives have not yet had any treatment which would bring them more up to date in this respect, like the Lempor exhaust or gas producer firing. This is a pity as no doubt the railway would notice the financial benefits of improved performance from its steam locomotives and the carriage cleaners would be delighted to have less work to do....

Members who are also involved in the Tallylyn Railway had warned of endemic late running on the WHR and so it proved with the train 15 late all the way with some slack station working not helping matters. It appears that the last section of the Welsh Highland to be renewed, between Beddgelert and Porthmadog is subject to a 15 mph speed restriction, maybe to allow the track to bed down, but all the same, certainly no aid to timekeeping.

Arrival at Porthmadog is preceded by a short trip along the main street, where the railway and road share the same right of way. Porthmadog Harbour station as yet has no dedicated platform face for Caernarfon bound trains, so a reversal is necessary to gain the Ffestiniog one. A diesel was waiting to drag us back into the station and our Garratt continued light engine across the Cob to Boston Lodge, none of which procedures does much for a right time arrival. After all this it was time to hot foot it across the town to the main line station for the last Up departure for Machynlleth and stations to Shrewsbury.

All in all a fantastic day out with a visit to an equally fantastic new railway, the breathtaking scenery only slightly impaired by the heavy showers encountered en-route. That being said, attention to timekeeping would be a help. So would ending the long running disagreements between the new Welsh Highland and the Welsh Highland "heritage" operation based in Porthmadog, as this railway operates from a site adjacent to the main line station; cross platform interchange with Caernarfon bound narrow gauge trains would be possible at a site near Pont Croesor. It would save a large wedge of shoe leather and would encourage patronage from rail based visitors.

Attention to locomotive matters would help too, in the way of bringing the machines up to 2nd generation steam (sgs) standards as outlined by Dante Porta and David Wardale, with consequent improved efficiency and hauling power. This should no doubt include servicing facilities as there is no excuse for laxity here on what is essentially a brand new railway.

A long but enjoyable day was had by all and at a bargain price. The North Wales All Zone ticket that was £23.00 full cost gave a 50% discount on the WHR so we

paid only £10.50 for that leg with the All Zone ticket covering both bus and mainline rail. It should be noted that it could be done from other non-Cambrian destinations by travelling to Chester/Wrexham/Shrewsbury and picking up the route there.



On the SARPA summer trip, Beyer Garratt No.143, in green livery, enters the Aberglaslyn Pass. Photo: Angus Eickhoff.

SARPA Meeting Schedule for 2011

We try and meet monthly at venues that are close to the stations on the line and at times convenient to travel by rail. All venues are booked in advance for some time but we have suffered from changes of ownership and booking records being lost, venues closing down and engineering work disrupting travel in the past. Any alterations will appear in subsequent Newsletter and on our website.

Saturday October 8th	1130	Machynlleth	AGM White Lion Hotel
Tuesday November 1st	1800	Aberystwyth	Cambrian Buildings, Pier Street
Tuesday December 6th	1900	Newtown	Sportsman Severn St.

Websites

Our website <http://sarpa.info>

Webmaster Angus Eickhoff. Website host is Red Box Internet Services.

Other sites of interest:

A useful alternative to the National Rail Enquiries site	www.traintimes.org.uk/
Arriva Trains Wales	www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/
National Rail Enquiries	www.nationalrail.co.uk/
Train and Bus Information Midlands	www.centro.org.uk/wwwroot/HomePage.asp
LondonMidland	www.londonmidland.com/index.html
Virgin Trains	www.virgintrains.co.uk/default.aspx
Chiltern Railways	www.chilternrailways.co.uk/
Network Rail	www.networkrail.co.uk/
Railfuture/Railway Development Society	www.railfuture.org.uk/
Cambrian Rail Partnership	www.thecambrianline.co.uk/
The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp)	www.acorp.uk.com
North Wales Coast Railway	www.nwrail.org.uk/
Circular tour of North Wales by rail	www.penmorfa.com/Cambrian/
Ffestiniog Railway timetable	www.ffestiniograilway.co.uk/timetable.htm
Vale of Rheidol Railway timetable	www.rheidolrailway.co.uk/timetable.htm
Talyllyn Railway	www.talyllyn.co.uk/
Welshpool and Llanfair Railway timetable	www.wllr.org.uk/timetable.htm
Welsh Highland Heritage Railway	www.whr.co.uk/index.php?pid=51
Fairbourne Railway	www.fairbournerrailway.com/index.htm
Rail Photographs by Richard Jones including many of the modern Cambrian scene	http://railphotos.fourecord.com/index.php

Useful addresses

Arriva Trains Wales:

St Mary's House, 47 Penarth Road, Cardiff CF10 5DJ. Tel 0845 6061 660
Email: customer.services@arrivatrainswales.co.uk

Network Rail:

Community Relations, Railtrack House, Euston Square, London NW1 2EE

Newtown Station Travel

The Railway Station, Old Kerry Road, Newtown, Powys SY16 1BP. Fax. 01686 621966
E-mail newtownstation@btclick.com

The Association of Train Operating Companies:

ATOC, 3rd Floor, 40 Bernard Street, London WC1N 1BY

London Midland

London Midland, PO Box 4323, Birmingham B2 4JB. Tel. 0121 6342040

Association of Community Rail Partnerships

Rail & River Centre, Canal Side, Civic Hall, Slaithwaite, Huddersfield HD7 5AB

Virgin Trains

Virgin Trains, Customer Relations, PO Box 713, Birmingham, B5 4HH. Tel. 0870 789 1234

Traveline Cymru for all public transport information

www.traveline-cymru.org.uk Tel.0870-6082608

Rail Franchise Performance Manager Rail and New Roads Division, Transport Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ. Direct Line (029) 2082 6849

For Train Times and Fares Call:

08457 48 49 50 (24hrs)

0845 60 40 500 (Welsh Language Service)

0845 60 50 600 (Textphone)

For ticket reservations please call: 0870 9000 773

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