

Shrewsbury  
Aberystwyth  
Rail  
Passengers'  
Association



**Newsletter**  
**No. 70**  
June 2016



Platform 3 in use at Shrewsbury, as at 18.25 on platform 3 and splitting with front 2 cars for Llandudno and rear 2 for Aberystwyth. 21st April 2016. Photograph: Martin Bates.

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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.

## Want to Join SARPA?

The membership fee is currently (for membership up to 31 December 2016) £8.00 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 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 Secretary:** 23 High Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7JP. 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.

## Chairman's Message

SARPA members were somewhat surprised to learn that over the summer, Network Rail is planning a huge amount of engineering work in our area. This comprises not only maintenance on the Cambrian Main Line but also features major interventions at Shrewsbury and along the Welsh Marches.

Whilst we are delighted that there is continued investment in the railway, I cannot help but feel that it could have been better timed. After all, the railway in our area is a major player in the tourist industry and disruption at this time of year will not be well received by either passengers or tourist related businesses. At Shrewsbury, the intention is to excavate the bridge at the north end of the station for some much needed maintenance. This will necessitate the removal of all the permanent way in the vicinity, resulting in the segmentation of Shrewsbury with all services to and from the north being replaced by buses for the duration.

The track replacement on the Cambrian does not have quite such drastic consequences, with much work being done at night. All the same, several weekends will still feature upheaval and inconvenience for passengers at the time our railway is at its busiest.

Earlier in the year, Network Rail failed to make any friends when they scheduled engineering work on the Cambrian to clash with the Machynlleth Comedy Festival. I believe Arriva Trains Wales were none too impressed about this, having shelled out quite a considerable sum in sponsorship for the event.

One could be forgiven for thinking that Network Rail couldn't care less about its image and reputation with the public at large – after all, in today's fragmented railway industry it's relatively easy to avoid responsibility for bad stuff.

Nevertheless, I cannot help but feel that NR neglects its public face at its own peril. It is after all, a publicly owned operation which is heavily unionised and doesn't make a profit, something which is total anathema to the present administration in Westminster, the more so since our wonderful leaders are looking for a way to make a quick buck by selling things off to their greedy corporate friends. In

reality this is an organisation which is essential for effective transport in the UK but it definitely doesn't need enemies.

So all the more peculiar that NR almost goes out of its way to avoid making friends. This has been something of a long standing attitude – their approach to the steam service which operated successfully on the Cambrian Coast until 2010 was not exactly inspirational, it being effectively wiped out by the introduction of the ERTMS signalling system. This is despite the fact that when employed selectively on the Cambrian, steam locomotives pulled trains and made money, without subsidy. Also, it might help if NR officials made the effort to attend, regularly, meetings of stakeholder groups, but all too often they are conspicuous by their absence.

Meanwhile, Government plans for NR have varied from a complete to a partial sell off with an emphasis on further asset stripping of the railway to help offset the burgeoning national debt, which to be fair to the railway is not really its problem; the industry is thought to be “Tax Neutral”. This includes the disposal of land which is currently “redundant” but in fact could prove most useful given projections for continued growth in rail use. Successive Tory administrations have not exactly been supportive to the rail industry, so this is very worrying and a potential triumph of ideology over common sense.

The most bonkers idea thus far has been a proposal to sell off major stations (some of which the taxpayer has forked out recently to refurbish) and lease them back. This seems an invitation to the property sector to fleece the public purse further and to a completely outrageous extent. Notably, such “public – private partnerships” (PPPs) have tended to end in tears for the long suffering British Taxpayer. PPPs are used to conceal public borrowing, while providing long-term state guarantees for profits to private companies – the corporate gravy train. Private sector corporations exist to maximise shareholder value. That's it! On the railway, this can conflict with the interests of the passenger or even the would-be freight user, and when it all goes wrong the general public winds up footing the bill. For instance, the Metronet PPP contracts to upgrade the London Tube left the DfT without effective means of protecting the taxpayer. Metronet's failure led to a direct loss to the public purse of between £170 million and £410 million.

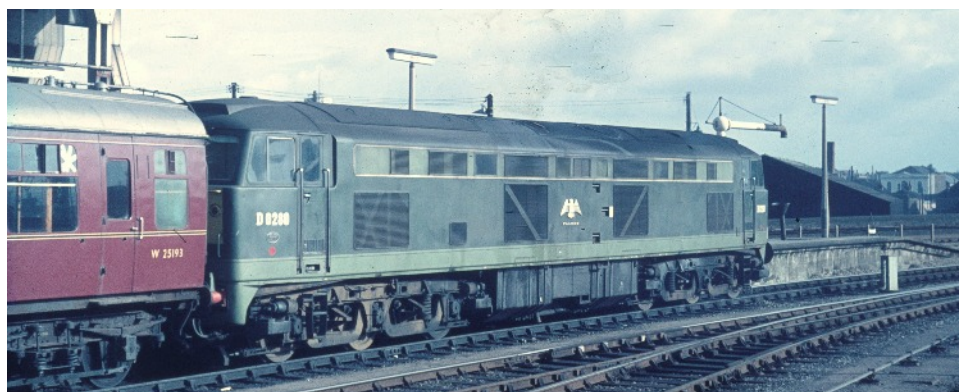
Also, any potential sell-off by Westminster of railway property around the UK poses serious questions with regards to regional sovereignty. This is doubly the case in Scotland as rail is much more devolved there than is the case here in Wales. Both countries were heavily ravaged by the Beeching cuts, Wales probably more so than Scotland, and re-connecting lost lines should be of greater importance for the local regional economies, rather than selling off railway assets, whether still in use or not.

Meanwhile, NR seems to be obsessed with rolling out the “Digital Railway” (does even NR know exactly what this means?), and one hopes that this is not history sort of repeating itself. In the early 1960s the scheme to rid the world of steam traction as quickly as possible was thought to be the great panacea for all ills, when in truth the real problems lay elsewhere.

So, come on Network Rail. Make some friends who will support you against a further round of ideological malevolence and asset stripping, learn to talk to local organisations and - Get A Grip.

Angus Eickhoff  
Llidiart Wood,  
Welshpool

June 2016



Brush Falcon  
prototype at Bristol.  
Date unknown.

Photograph: Denis  
Bates



## News in brief

### Birmingham New St

The Midland Metro finally arrived in Stephenson St outside the station at the end of May – you can now catch trams to Wolverhampton via Snow Hill station. The one way ride to Snow Hill costs just £1.00.

### Shrewsbury

An Engineering possession on the weekend of 9/10 July should see the damage to the bridge over the River Severn repaired and the freight road on the town side reinstated. The southern end of Platform 3 has been demolished. This was a repair in the 1970's after a derailed freight train destroyed the original platform at this end.

The avoiding lines between the Wellington and Hereford lines are looking noticeably less used since Ironbridge Power Station's closure.

The Starbucks Café has been labelled inadequate and slow for the number of people trying to use it.

### Welshpool

There's still no sign of the Tourist Information Office being able to sell rail tickets.



Bank Holiday Monday May 29th was the first day of the Midland Metro operating to Stephenson St just outside Birmingham New St station. The novelty factor had many people taking photos. Photograph: Gareth Marston

## Newtown

Newtown Station Travel is now online at [www.newtownstationtravel.co.uk](http://www.newtownstationtravel.co.uk)

The agency offers a postal ticket delivery service and can sell tickets from any mainline station in the UK to any other.

On the 6th June 97304 John Tilley failed near Abermule on a Tamper positioning move, causing the line to be blocked for over an hour and a half. Eventually Network Rail staff got it moving again and it reached Newtown, where the ensemble was shunted into the only remaining siding. On the 7th June 97303 was sent to retrieve 97304 and the rare sight of locomotive shunting and running around the passing loop was witnessed. Below, 97303 can be seen backing down to join up with 97304 which it had earlier shunted out of the loop onto the DOWN line. Photograph: Newtown Station Travel.



## Caersws

The station adoption group are in line for an award from the Keep Britain tidy campaign.

## Glyn T. Jones

We are sorry to have to report that our member Glyn Jones, of Aberystwyth, died after a short illness, on the 14th April. Glyn was a keen follower of railway developments in Wales, particularly on the Cambrian lines, and reported on them to Rail Wales, the newsletter of Railfuture in Wales.

## Vale of Rheidol Railway

During this winter 5 month period, the railway relaid 600 new sleepers, fitted ½ mile of new drainage systems along the line, put in 6 new track cross drains, rebuilt an embankment wall, fitted a new water tower at Nantyrionen Station, and extended the headshunts at both Aberystwyth & Devil's Bridge Station, for future use. These extensions will allow the use by both double-headed trains, and, intriguingly, longer engines.



## From the North Wales Coast Railway website

For a look at the Cambrian line in a 'golden era' visit the film 'Cambrian Coast' on the British Film Institute website. Richard W. Jones writes: 'A film made for the Great Western Railway Company to encourage people to discover - via the train - that "England isn't the only country in the British Isles". "Dear old Wales" is cast as the hospitable purveyor of wholesome holidays, with a never-ending supply of "smooth sands, sparkling seas, sunshine and good clean air" for those who are first seen crowding onto a train at Paddington Station in London. Dukedogs galore as well.'

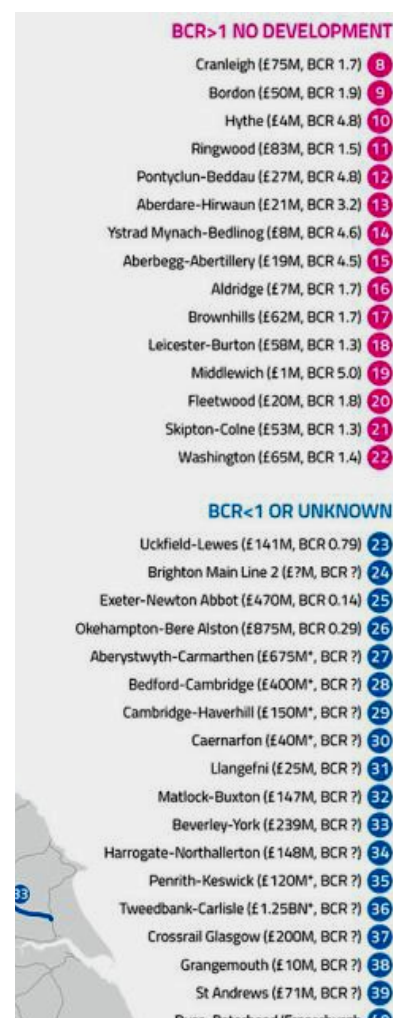
For those who would like to enjoy the trip today, Dave Sallery has updated his Cambrian Rail Cruise website with this summer's times and fares for the circular trip via the North Wales and Cambrian Coasts using the Ffestiniog Railway as a link. Doing the circuit is a good day out, and there is a special ticket available to do it, but each year Dave has to work hard to suggest practical timings. This year the 'clockwise' route seems the best, although it involves some quite early starts and a 12-minute connection at Blaenau Ffestiniog; Dave is always very interested to hear travellers' experiences of the journey; we'd welcome them here, too.

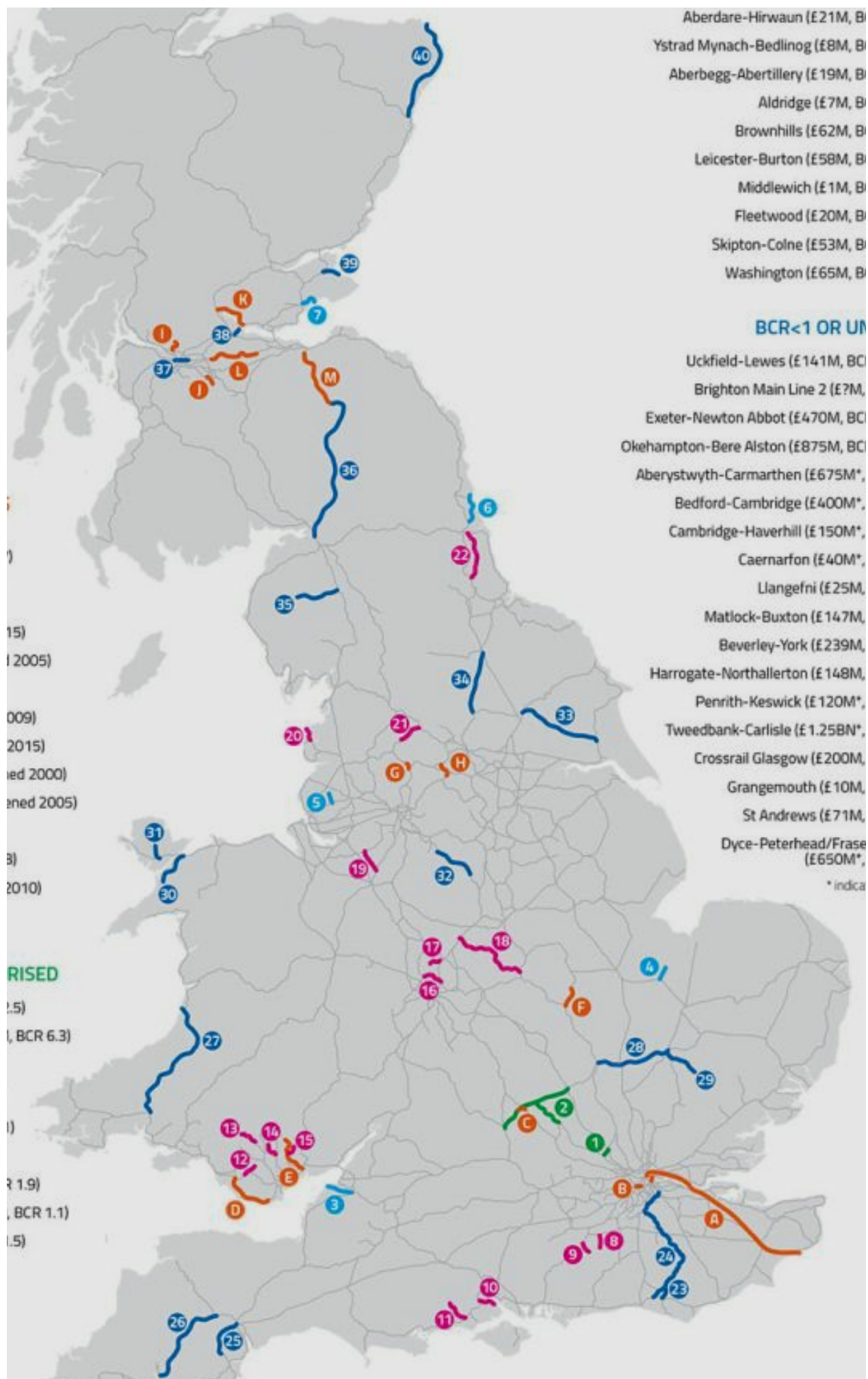
## Rail Engineer Magazine

Rail Engineer is the leading independent quality monthly magazine for engineers, project managers, directors and leading rail executive decision makers. Besides publishing the latest up-to-date rail engineering news, their team of engineer writers report on the engineering and technical aspects of many of the major projects being undertaken day in, day out, above and below ground, and across the globe.

From their website comes this map and list of new railway schemes, opened, in progress and proposed (BCR is Benefit Cost Ratio, assessing benefits that can't be quantified:

<http://www.railengineer.uk/2016/04/22/after-borders-what-next/>





## A Welsh Journey in 1948

**Gerald Ashton (1907-2000)** was a railway officer with a keen interest in the operation and geography of railways, particularly in relation to Ireland and Scotland. The journal of the Irish Railway Record Society has accounts of two of his visits to Ireland. On the second of these, he travelled back to Chester from Rosslare - and the IRRS journal No.189 gives his account of this Welsh journey. This is reprinted here with the permission of the IRRS.

### Friday September 3

*St. David* ploughed her way through a rather choppy sea, without personal discomfort to me, and halted outside Fishguard Harbour, impatiently waiting for *St. Patrick* to come out and vacate the berth. This is an interesting example of the reaction of late Down working upon the Up - a phenomenon which one grows used to in railway work, but doesn't think of in connection with the boats. By this time the heavens had opened once more and the rain was pouring down. The comfort of the passengers was not increased by a little miscalculation on board. Having got us all drawn up ready to disembark from the main deck, somebody discovered that the tide was a few inches too low, and the gangway was run out onto the boat deck instead. So the last became the first, and we stood and dripped in the rain (at 03:00) while the passengers were let down the gangway about a score at a time to run the gauntlet of the Customs.

Having survived this ordeal, we made our way to the waiting boat train, on which the best seats had already been secured by the passengers off the Waterford direct boat, due in half an hour before us.

My adventures were not yet at an end, as I had planned something of a diversion in South Wales on my way home. To start with, the 03:55 boat train now runs via the Swansea District line, leaving the main line at Llandilo East Junction, east of Llanelly, and rejoining it at Court Sart, west of Briton Ferry, being the only passenger-carrying train of the 24 hours to use this ambitiously conceived route. Over the four sittings of breakfast, it is best to draw a veil. When everyone wants breakfast and everyone is fresh from the plenty of an Irish menu, this is a sad anticlimax, and the restaurant car staff appear to glory on rubbing the fact in! Another matter for the Hotels Executive!

It rained all the way to Cardiff, where I alighted and joined then 07:35 back as far as Whitland. This follows the usual route, of course, reversing at Swansea and Carmarthen, so in place of the one '*Knowsley Hall*' which had brought me up, I had two Castles, Nos. 4094 and 7003, and No.4937 '*Lanelay Hall*' in turn. From Whitland I went over the hills to Cardigan, with a 45xx 2-6-2T hauling a two-coach set, three wagons and a brake. This is a long straggling single-line branch, pretty in places, and badly hampered by curvature. The rain abated a little but it was not a pleasant day. After a hasty lunch in Cardigan, I took the 13:55 bus to Newcastle Emlyn, where it was market day, and the 15:15 train from there to Pencader. This consisted of a solitary corridor composite brake, hauled by 0-4-2T No. 1419, and I changed at Pencader into the 15:10 Carmarthen-Aberystwyth, which had 0-6-0 No. 2223, three corridors and two vans. At Lampeter I got out - recalling my only previous visit here, on the morning of the Dieppe raid in August 1942, when we were late, were held here some 45 minutes to cross the first train from Aberystwyth, and I was able to shave in comfort! The Aberayron train was identical with the Newcastle Emlyn, 0-4-2T No. 1472 and one brake compo. A word with the guard about my 5-minute margin at Aberayron to catch the Crosville bus for Aberystwyth produced the desired results. and by ignoring the clock at any intermediate stations, we ran into the terminus 8 minutes early. This was as well, as I had about half a mile to go, and it was raining as hard as in Cork. A night of wild weather in Aberystwyth followed, with waves coming right across the promenade, and I was glad my crossing from Rosslare had not been made 24 hours later.

### Saturday September 4

Saturday dawned dry, which was a small consolation for the end of my holiday. Never having done the Vale of Rheidol in its more flourishing days, I took this opportunity and went up by the 09:45 along



with about half a dozen other people. We had a coach apiece - four closed and two open, but the latter did not appeal and No. 7 had some difficulty in getting round the curves. We all but stalled three times, and eventually arrived ten minutes late. A pity this. As the morning train only allows 45 minutes at the top, which is barely sufficient to make the circuit of the Rheidol Falls. In 35 minutes and with such greasy rail, I didn't risk it, but went down just far enough to see the Falls and came back the same way. It seems a pity that they don't alter the trains to (1) give at least an hour there and (2) proportion the load to the passengers, and obviate the sticking.

Back in Aberystwyth, I had a comfortable time for lunch before joining the queue for the 14:15 to Birmingham - a quite unnecessary precaution. When platformed, the train proved to be worthy of Blackpool, 10 LMS non-corridors, only one of which had a lavatory. A pity something isn't done to gather up the GW corridor stock off the branch lines! 2-6-0 No. 6321 set out with the Oswestry men who had brought her in on the Down journey, and they were not very sanguine about the results. We proceeded to lose time on each section, and 4 1/2 minutes overtime at Borth aggravated things. Having fallen to 20 mph on Talerddig bank, the driver decided that discretion was the better part, and stopped at Llanbrynmair for 3 minutes to blow up. We then went over the summit at 14 3/4 m.p.h. and crawled into Moat Lane 17 minutes late. Having overcome the worst of the road, the driver apparently felt more inclined to extend the engine, and had got down to 11 minutes late at Welshpool. Here most of the passengers alighted in haste, and we were 5 minutes overtime. The Stafford Road men apparently thought much the same of the engine, and went over Breidden at 17 mph, but then touched 55 at Yockleton. As the main object of this journey was to get me over the curve between Coleham and Abbey Foregate, this meant going through to Wellington, where I had a 26 minute margin to connect with the 14:10 Paddington-Birkenhead, and when we pulled up for signals at Sutton Bridge Junction, already 18 minutes late, I began to feel apprehensive. However, we moved on in less than a minute, and with 61 mph at the Severn Bridge and a minimum of 46 at Admaston, we made Wellington 16 minutes late.

I needn't have worried, as the Down express was 22 late from Birmingham and 27 late from Wolverhampton. No. 2989, one of the old Chester Saints, now surely due for scrapping, came in half an hour late with 12 on, and though we dropped four coaches off at Shrewsbury, leaving only 253 tons to go forward, our Stafford Road driver dropped time on every single section on to Chester, and it was only by cutting the exceedingly liberal station times that we kept our heads above water, running into Chester 27 minutes late. A GW 2-6-2T, No. 5186, maintained the same weary style on to Birkenhead and I was left reflecting on the punctual, if slow, running to be found these days on the Irish side of the Channel.

## SARPA Meetings 2016

July	Saturday 9th	11.45	White Lion, Machynlleth
August	Saturday 13th	12.15	Railway Hotel, Borth
September	Saturday 10th	11.30	Royal Oak Hotel, Welshpool
October	Saturday 8th	11.00	AGM. Machynlleth, White Lion.
November	Tuesday 1st	18.50	The Sportsman, Severn Street, Newtown
December	Saturday 10th	11.45	Aberystwyth Venue to be announced

## CRUG to SARPA: 1992-2016

SARPA was originally formed in June 1992, and was then known as the Cambrian Rail Users Group (CRUG). The first meeting was held in the Library in Newtown. Sympathetic British Rail Managers were active in getting the community organised to protect the line's future. It was recession time and there had been a severe drop off in numbers and revenue from London commuters, and other parts of the country were having to take cuts even though traffic had held up quite well. The Cambrian lines were no exception: BR had put some investment into the line in the mid to late 1980's, and claimed it to be the most modern rural line in Europe. Speed restrictions were lifted, new rolling stock introduced, the Cambrian Coast Express - a through train to London - had been reintroduced, and a Radio Electric Token Block (RETB) signalling system had been introduced that was considerably cheaper to operate than numerous manned signal boxes.

Despite this, the early morning mail train to Aberystwyth had finished in 1988, as well as the early morning UP train from Aberystwyth, leaving just 7 trains a day between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth. A bypass had been built around Welshpool in 1990, resulting in the station being relocated to make way for the road. No one had been consulted, and the new facilities were inferior to the old and the station less convenient. The Cambrian Coast Express was withdrawn in July 1991 - it was increasingly a picture of doom and gloom. The timing of the group's foundation was no coincidence - John Major had been surprisingly re-elected in May 1992, along with a manifesto commitment to privatise British Rail. Many people feared it would herald further attempts to close rural lines: once hived off to the private sector Ministers could distance themselves from any blame. Rail privatisation was hugely unpopular with the public at the time, and was dubbed the poll tax on wheels, with many suspecting ulterior motives behind it. Therefore the group was initially set up to protect the line, the threat of privatisation was a great recruiter and over a hundred members were soon on board.

So who joins a Rail User Group? The answer is not just rail enthusiasts. What became abundantly clear was that lots of people in Mid Wales relied on the railway not just for commuting but for making long distance trips; they may not travel every week but having the rail option to visit friends and family or go on holiday was highly valued. We had elderly couples concerned that they wouldn't be able to visit grandchildren, students from Mid Wales who used it to travel to and from university in England, and a strong element from Aberystwyth University, both staff and students. Local Town and Community Councils also joined. It was a surprisingly broad church, and totally at odds with the official attitude at the time that the railway was some dying Victorian mode of transport that had had its day. People came up with ideas on how to improve the service, and suggested reasons why their friends, neighbours and family didn't would travel by rail more. These basic reasons have remained valid till this day: frequency of service, ability to commute to work, decent connections and extra carriages at times of well known and predictable higher demand.

Early campaigning focussed around the forthcoming 1993 Railways Act. CRUG took a pragmatic approach that they were unlikely to defeat it, but lobbied the group of Tory MP's who were known to be concerned, and helped shape the amendments to the Bill that happened. It seems incredible now, but keeping national through ticketing and specifying that the private operators must run trains, only happened because of lobbying and the threat of rebelling. John Major's wafer-thin majority meant that the Bill as originally intended was watered down, and passenger rights and lines safeguarded. A small victory, but as 1993 progressed more gloom was that the last freight on the line was withdrawn - a weekly oil tank train from Stanlow to Aberystwyth. Then on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 1994 we found out the practical consequences of the fragmentation brought about by privatisation, the level crossing keepers at Caersws station had also sold tickets from the booking office. However they were now Railtrack employees, not BR ones, and were not allowed to help passengers any more - this was for the Train Operating Company! Fighting the madness of fragmentation has been a regular theme. Another early win was getting BR to reintroduce the early morning train from Aberystwyth, which happened in summer 1994.

Having seen off any immediate closure threat the group went into hiatus a bit as the original committee either stood down or lost interest. Peter Compton took over as Chairman in 1995, and thoughts turned to lobbying for improved services once it became clear who the new private operator was. National Express won the contract to run what had been Regional Railways Central Division just

weeks before the 1997 General Election, which saw New Labour arrive seemingly having promised to reverse rail privatisation.

National Express had kept the former BR Managers, many of whom were supportive and open to dialogue. We floated the idea of running extra trains just between Newtown and Shrewsbury over the busiest section of our line, involving just one extra unit as a low cost non infrastructure involved improvement. This was in 1997. The reply we got was that they liked the idea but didn't have any spare stock at the time. It was priced at under £500K per annum to run. Unlike others who claim to have been lobbying for extra trains for many years, we actually have the evidence in our files!

A name change to SARPA happened in early 1999, and Gareth Marston took over as Chairman in September 1999. All seemed to be going well when we were invited along with others to an announcement in Newtown in December 1999. Central Trains and the Welsh Development Agency announced that there was to be an hourly service over the whole length of the line! Central Trains proudly showed off their brand new Class 170 units on our line in March 2000, and it was more smiles as the new Assembly Finance Minister Sue Essex verbally promised on a visit to Aberystwyth that the Welsh Government would fund the hourly service. It all seemed a little too good to be true.

Meanwhile on the ground the shortcomings of Welshpool's new station included a set of light bulbs on the footbridge to access the platform that no one took responsibility to repair. The amount of effort that various bodies put into avoiding admitting responsibility was ridiculous. Enquires to the Land Registry showed that the Welsh Office owned the footbridge. The saga dragged on so long that members even wrote poems about it that were published in our Newsletter. Eventually after two years Powys CC changed the bulbs. We then did battle with farmers on market days, Powys County Council employees and shop workers in the town using the station car park at Welshpool, which had resulted in rail passengers missing trains as the car park was full.

By now we were producing a quarterly newsletter and meeting once a month in public at different venues up and down the line between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury. This allowed people from different parts the opportunity to have their say without travelling too far. It was announced that the franchise boundary was to change and a Wales and Border franchise created. This was something no one in Mid Wales had lobbied for, though we were told improvements were to be the order of the day. All our contacts in Central Trains who had been supportive of improved services on our line shrugged their shoulders and said it was no longer their responsibility. Then the railways hit crisis point: what became apparent was that privatisation had resulted in poorer safety standards and an explosion in costs. Far from being more efficient than the public sector the reverse was true.

In September 2001 our services were hived off from Central Trains with disastrous consequences: the timetable was unsustainable with late running and trains only reaching Wolverhampton not Birmingham becoming endemic, and the amount of rolling stock allocated inadequate. SARPA became an organisation that wrote letters of complaint on a regular basis. We received support from local political representatives both at Westminster and Cardiff Bay, and even had meetings with Government Ministers trying to get the agenda back on to improving the service. Despite our efforts it was decreed that instead of improvements there would be a 15 year "no growth" franchise we were told that we were lucky there were no cuts and that an official model had been run showing rail use was going to go into decline. We all knew rail use had been increasing for 10 years, and a red faced official from the Strategic Rail Authority ran off rather than enter discussion with our Chairman. Arriva, an organisation that had started life as a car hire firm in the North East of England and had got into running privatised bus and rail operations, won the franchise. For a few years it was all complaints, criticism and to some degree confrontation: we joined the many who called for Arriva to be sacked, so poor was the service on our line. The Welsh Government took over the management of the Wales and Border franchise contract in 2006 and we lobbied them to acquire some extra rolling stock – all of 4 carriages – in 2007. Plaid Cymru were in coalition, and we met the Plaid Minister who had the transport portfolio, who agreed to fund the extra passing places needed to increase the frequency of services all the way to Aberystwyth in 2008. The appalling service on our line was eventually sorted out in December 2008 when services were sent to Birmingham International. However there was no sign of any extra trains. We had some input into the design specification of the refurbishment of the Class 158 trains that are used on our line, and some of our members visited the units as they were being worked on in Crewe. Arriva's corporate attitude had mellowed following their takeover by Deutsche Bahn in 2010; however their mantra of "we deliver what the franchise agreement stipulates:



if you want improvements a third party must pay" still applied. We entered the age of austerity and a Labour only administration in Cardiff Bay with 7 years still left on the no growth franchise. We were back in the shut up shop phase after some progress. Gareth Marston stepped down as Chairman in 2012 and was replaced by Angus Eickhoff.

The group had believed in rail and knew more people would use it despite limited improvements on our line. The official statistics from the Office of the Rail Regulator on station usage published each year started to vindicate our views, with increases showing year on year proving that the official Government views on rail in the 1990's and early 2000's had been wrong. Charting the rises was a favourite in our newsletters. Numbers had doubled from 1994 by 2014. Despite this you still couldn't arrive into Shrewsbury for commuting purposes, with arrivals at 0711 and then a gap till 0925; connections between the coast line and Aberystwyth were non-existent; and there were still only 8 trains a day over the length of the line. We knew there was more untapped demand sitting there. Attempts at lobbying Arriva and the Welsh Government were falling on deaf ears; the by now completed extra passing places were rusting through lack of use. SARPA is a long standing member of the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Line Liaison Committee, a body that brings together local political representatives and other bodies interested in the railway through Mid Wales; often their meetings are attended by ATW, Network Rail and the British Transport Police. By a quirk in a non-Labour voting area two leading Councillors on the Committee were Labour party members and used party contacts to arrange a meeting with the Welsh Government transport Minister Edwina Hart in 2013. They were sent away and given some money to organise a survey on demand. We were tipped off that the Welsh Government Officials believed they would mess the whole thing up completely, or just get a hundred replies that could easily be dismissed. SARPA members worked hard making sure friends, families, neighbours and work colleagues responded to the survey. The Committee returned to Cardiff with 6500 responses, much to the civil servants' surprise, and the Minister agreed to some extra trains in a bizarre example of being forced into a corner through their own ignorance (and some hard work from the folk of Mid Wales). The survey said nothing that SARPA didn't already know back in the early 1990's. The extra trains were introduced in May 2015 – one year on significant increases in usage have been recorded and whilst the new timetable is not perfect by a long shot, there are now 12 trains a day the full length of the line between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth. Once more SARPA has been proved right. We expect the official usage on the line to be around the one million mark for 2015/2016.

So what does SARPA do now? Our focus is on ensuring that the mistakes of 2003 are not repeated when the Wales and Border franchise is renewed in 2018. Most people are probably unaware of how much the rail industry in the UK is dictated by government, the Welsh Government increasingly demands more and more powers so our efforts have been focussed on them. Consultations are the order of the day in the rail industry, and we have responded to many over the years. Recent submissions have been to Network Rail for their Wales Route Study, looking at infrastructure requirements of the next 30 years, the National Assembly's Enterprise and Learning Committee's report into Welsh Rail infrastructure, and the Welsh Government's Setting the Policy scene for the new Wales and Border franchise. Our top three priorities are to ensure that through services to the Midlands are maintained and enhanced, that there's an hourly service over the line between 0700 & 1959, and that more carriages are in service than now.

We interface with other Rail User Groups through the Shrewsbury Rail User Federation, and send a representative to the Line Liaison Committee meetings. We keep in regular contact with local elected representatives about rail matters and lobby them about issues such as station parking facilities and bus/rail non integration in Mid Wales. SARPA is a non party political organisation, we have no affiliation with any political party, though we are political in the sense that the environment we operate in is decided by it. None of the committee gains in any way, and all time given is voluntary. Where do we stand on rail privatisation or re-nationalising the railways? The current set-up of the railways in the UK is clearly sub-optimal, as we've discovered the fragmentation brought on by the 1993 Railways Act has produced a railway that is vastly more expensive than it needs to be, overly complex and slow in delivering improvements. Drawing battle lines between public and private ownership misses the point about the ill effects of fragmentation. There's been too much ideology and not enough common sense deployed from both sides. Rail use looks set to grow much further and has a bright future if handled correctly. The most important thing is that we have official recognition of this and the mechanisms put in place to make it happen. Groups like SARPA are needed to ensure this happens.



Llandre Station, xxx 2016. 97303 pilots 57XXX with the empty stock for the XXXXXX Statesman Rail excursion to XXXX the next day. Photograph: Denis Bates.

## Barmouth Bridge

Network Rail (NR) has produced a study for work to be carried out on Barmouth Bridge. The current steel part of the Grade II Listed Structure was installed around 1900, to replace an earlier drawbridge-like opening span. Extensive repair work was carried out in the early 1980s to counteract the effects of a marine boring worm on the timber section and the line over the bridge was closed for several years.

There were site visits by NR engineers in 2015, leading to a "High Level Options Report" and the project has been divided into two sections:- 1) Urgent Works and 2) Development Works.

There is presently a scheme in development for the repairs, which includes replacing many rivets in the steel spans. Detailed design work by NR is expected to be in place by autumn this year for presentation to Cadw and Local Authorities. At present, work is scheduled to start in spring 2017. There will have to be contingency plans as there are considerable unknowns with regard to the work, and it will need to be determined exactly what levels of engineers possession will be required and for how long. Further work will be scheduled for 2018.

The picture below is of a very fine 7mm scale layout, whose centrepiece is the bridge, exhibited at the Gauge O guild exhibition at Telford in 2009. Photograph: Denis Bates.



## All the Way to the Bank!

Some of the new incredibly expensive “Super Express” (IEP) trains being built by Hitachi may be surplus to requirements even before they have been built, let alone entered service but if so, they will still have to be paid for.....by the long suffering taxpayer.

Whilst the DfT was devising the next generation of inter-city trains, they ignored warnings that the units would be hard to adapt to unpredicted changes. They organised a private finance initiative which guarantees huge and regular contract payments for the Hitachi built trains, regardless of whether they are used or not.

The trains are to be used on both the Great Western to South Wales and the East Coast franchise, now operated by Virgin (VTEC). The East Coast fleet is tailored to the presumption that future and current franchisees would run services with the IEP units but we hear that regulators have offered some track access slots to First Group who wish to run “Open Access” services.

These have been opposed by both DfT and VTEC, on the grounds that some of the costly new trains will have to be laid up, as First will have no desire to fork out for them.

VTEC has apparently told regulators that the surplus new trains will have to be mothballed as they would not be needed on the East Coast and bespoke maintenance facilities would be needed if they were used elsewhere.

DfT is requiring First Group to use other IEP units on its Great Western Services anyway but with no compulsion to use any particular rolling stock for their open access trains, it looks as though Hitachi will be laughing all the way to the bank.....

Closer to home, Govia's London Midland franchise has switched to an extension contract which at the moment, lasts until 2017. A few extra train services are promised, together with free Wi-Fi on long distance services and a £130m subsidy package, which works out at around £41m for a half year. This is slightly more than double London Midland's subsidy for the second half of 2015. More laughing all the way to the bank for private business.

We are all aware of the Byzantine complexity of the franchising process, which led to the much publicised collapse of the West Coast renewal in 2012. It is now so complicated that DfT can only manage about three franchise replacements in a year and we get the impression that even this is pushing the boat out a bit. This means that existing operators can more or less name their price when it comes to an extension, with more laughing all the way to the bank.

We are not holding our collective breath that the new Wales and Borders franchise will be fully configured by the time it is supposed to start in 2018. It could be a fairly safe bet that Arriva will be offered an extension.

Meanwhile, we note that DfT seem to think that free Wi-Fi on trains is more important than better services or better trains with more spacious accommodation, and presumably this goes hand in hand with Network Rail's obsession with the so called “Digital Railway”. Some crossed wires with regard to priorities maybe?

(much via Private Eye)

## Oswestry station appeal

Oswestry-based Cambrian Heritage Railways (CHR) has launched a £20,000 appeal to help further return the Shropshire market town's restored historic station to its heyday of the 1950s. The appeal will cover the refurbishment of the former Down platform, reinstatement of the three lines that once ran through the station – a significant feature of the site – and the addition of further railway features, furniture and landmarks to the station area.

Volunteer-run CHR is currently busy extending its running line at Oswestry, which it is expected will see passenger trains running to Weston Wharf, on the southern edge of the town by Easter 2018 – a distance of one and three-quarter miles. There, the railway will provide a valuable public transport connection to the visitor centre operated by popular local micro-brewery, the Stonehouse Brewery.

CHR Chairman **Robert Williams** says: 'Since CHR gained access to the Gobowen to Llanddu



railway line in 2009, significant progress has been made with the Oswestry station area. We were greeted with a site that was almost completely derelict. One of the two through platforms had been removed, the other was overgrown – and fly tipping had taken place, with almost all features of a working railway wiped away. Since that time, we have cleared the site, completely reinstated one platform, refurbished the track, reinstated signals, a water column, signs and started regular passenger train running again over a short distance to Middleton Road bridge. The work to date has been funded by CHR, donations, gifts and small grants. This has created an operational station again, which is used for passengers and a growing list of special events, becoming an important asset to the local community.

CHR has to hand a significant quantity of material needed for the Oswestry station area and is also in receipt of offers to sponsor aspects of the work. To take full advantage of the materials and the offers of sponsorship, we need funds to make the CHR contribution and allow the work to take place. This is why we have now launched the 'Oswestry Station Revitalisation Project Appeal' to raise £20,000 for this phase of development. Donations are being sought in any size, and every bit will help make this appeal a success.

Philip Bradley, who has recently been elected to the CHR Board says: It's a really exciting time to be involved with this project. We have so much going on – from preparations for the new running season at our Llyncllys and Oswestry sites (which starts on Easter weekend), to the development of the heritage railway from Oswestry to link with Stonehouse Brewery visitor centre at Weston Wharf. This appeal will allow us to further enhance what CHR has to offer and supplement the Oswestry to Weston restoration project. New volunteers are always welcome to join us.'

For more information, visit [www.cambrianrailways.com](http://www.cambrianrailways.com) or call 01691 728131.



Oswestry Station, with ex-GWR 0-4-2T 1447 with a train for Gobowen. Photograph: Denis Bates.

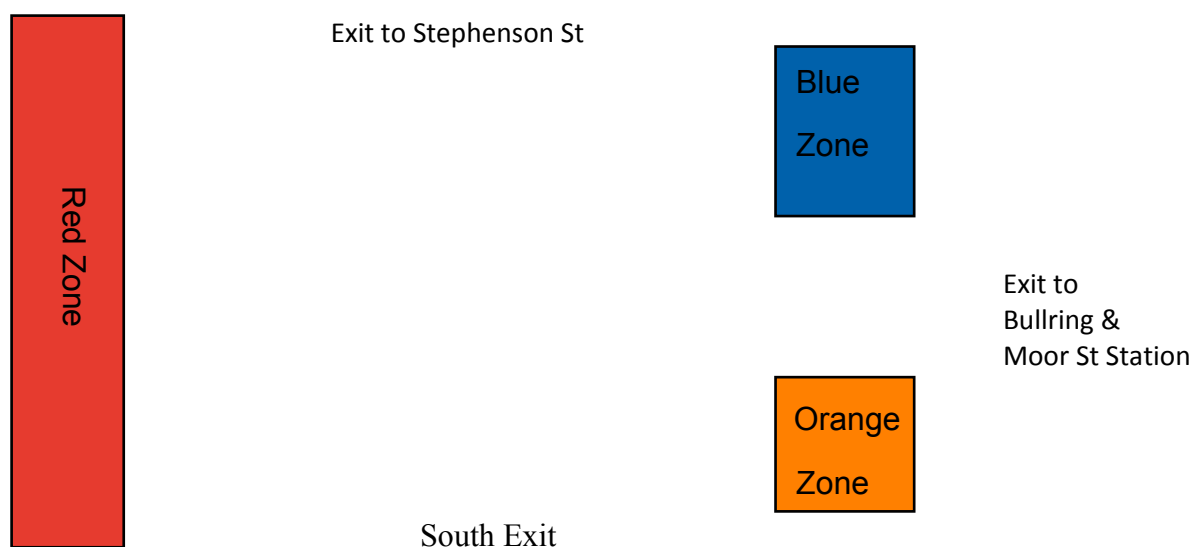
## Changing trains at Birmingham New St

We know that people are often confused by the new station layout above the platforms at New St and where they need to go, having to go out barriers and then back through them to change trains is a particular bug bear.

The level above the platforms where the escalators/stairs/lifts deliver you is at street level and is known as the concourse. It is divided into three areas where passengers can exit/enter the platforms (Blue, Red and Orange zones) a large circulating area in the centre with some shops around the fringes. (the Grand Central shopping arcade/restaurants are mainly on the level above this).

The Blue Zone is where passengers arriving from Mid Wales on ATW services will come to first. The Blue Zone is above the "A" end of Platforms 1,2,3,4 & 5. ATW services usually arrive at Platforms 1A, 2A or 3A.

### A simplified diagram of the concourse



The Red Zone is where ATW trains departing to Mid Wales go from: usually Platforms 4b, 5B & 6B. The Red Zone covers the "B" end of all 12 platforms, the Orange Zone the "A" end of Platforms 6 to 12.

### Onward Connections after arrival from Mid Wales (not an exhaustive list):

**Midland Metro-** the stop is located on Stephenson St just outside the station.

**Chiltern Railway** services to London Marylebone and **London Midland** local services to Stourbridge/Kidderminster/ Leamington Spa/Stratford Upon Avon. – exit at the east side and turn left in front of the Debenhams store. Moor St station is a few hundred metres.

**Virgin Trains West Coast** services to London Euston – these usually depart from Platforms 1,2,3,4 & 5. The First Class end will be at "A" end with Standard accommodation toward the "B" end. Access from Blue and Red Zones.

**Cross Country** services to Derby/Nottingham/Leicester/Stanstead Airport /Sheffield/Leeds/York/Newcastle. These usually depart from Platforms 6A,7A,8A,9A & 10A. Access from Orange Zone.

**Cross Country** services to Leamington Spa, Oxford, Reading, Southampton and Bournemouth. These usually depart from Platforms 2A, 3A, 4A & 5A. Access from Blue Zone.

**Cross Country** services to Cheltenham Spa, Gloucester, Bristol and South West. These usually depart from Platforms 7B, 8B, 9B & 10B. Access from Red Zone.

**London Midland** services to Bromsgrove, Worcester and Great Malvern. These usually depart from Platforms 7B, 8B, 9B & 10B. Access from Red Zone.

**London Midland** services Cross City South. These usually depart from Platforms 10B 11B & 12B. Access from Red Zone.

**London Midland** services Cross City North. These usually depart from Platforms 10A 11A & 12A. Access from Orange Zone.

**London Midland** services to Coventry, Rugby, Northampton. These usually depart from Platforms 2A, 3A, 4A & 5A. Access from Blue Zone.

**London Midland** services to Walsall/Hednesford/Rugeley Trent Valley. These usually depart from Platforms 2B, 3B, 4B & 5B. Access from Red Zone.

Remember to always check the departure boards as Platforming arrangements are subject to change and allow plenty of time to make a transfer as New St is a big station.

**Tip on avoiding going out through barriers to change trains** – instead of using the escalator up to the Blue Zone walk down the B end of the Platform you arrive at and use the escalators up to the Red Zone.

Whilst there are refreshment kiosks, toilets and waiting facilities in the Blue and Orange Zones, the bulk of the retail facilities for interchange passengers are in the Red Zone.

This advice is given in good faith by Newtown Station Travel, and is accurate to the best of our knowledge. June 2016.

Below: an unidentified King on the down Cambrian Coast Express at Shrewsbury. Photo: Denis Bates





## Caroline visits the Cambrian Lines

975025 *Caroline*, is an inspection saloon used for rail inspection duties on the railway network in Great Britain, and which has historically been used as a VIP excursion train on several occasions.

The saloon carriage is notable for being used as the British Royal Train between London Waterloo and Romsey for the first part of the honeymoon trip following the wedding of Charles, Prince of Wales, and Lady Diana Spencer on 29 July 1981. One year later on 28 May 1982 *Caroline* was the transport for Pope John Paul II's visit to the United Kingdom between Gatwick Airport and London Victoria station. Additionally *Caroline* formed the first standard gauge passenger service into the Channel Tunnel on 22 October 1992, leaving from Waterloo International railway station and propelled by 73112 *University of Kent* into the tunnel. The passengers on the journey were those from the Parliamentary All-Party Channel Tunnel Group. On 18 March 1996 *Caroline* and 33109 travelled to Chesham tube station on the London Underground network as part of suitability investigations for the Crossrail project.

The vehicle was originally built in 1958 at Eastleigh Works as type AZA trailer restaurant buffet car (TRB) S60755, for a British Rail Class 203 diesel-electric multiple-unit No. 1036, until withdrawal during 1964. These "Hastings Units" had a narrow body profile for working through tunnels on the Hastings Line, and is the reason for the continued narrow width of *Caroline*.

In 1969 it was converted at Stewarts Lane Depot to become the Southern Region General Manager's Saloon, and fitted with push-pull train controls. These allow usage with British Rail Class 33 and 73 diesel locomotives, and other Class 400 EMUs. In 1999, *Caroline* was overhauled by Fragonset Railways at the Railway Technical Centre in Derby and transferred to Network Rail. It is normally propelled by a Class 37 diesel locomotive.

It visited the Cambrian lines on 17-18th May, overnighting in Pwllheli.



*Caroline* leaves Aberystwyth on Wednesday 18th May, hauled by 97302 with 37425 Sir William McAlpine providing super-power. Photograph: Denis Bates.

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## Websites

**Our website** <http://sarpa.info>

**Webmaster Angus Eickhoff. Website host is** <http://www.redboxinternet.com/>

**Other sites of interest:**

A useful alternative to the National Rail Enquiries site  
[traintimes.org.uk/](http://traintimes.org.uk/)

Arriva Trains Wales  
[www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/](http://www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/)

National Rail Enquiries  
[www.nationalrail.co.uk/](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/)

Train and Bus Information Midlands  
[www.centro.org.uk/wwwroot/HomePage.asp](http://www.centro.org.uk/wwwroot/HomePage.asp)

LondonMidland  
[www.londonmidland.com/index.html](http://www.londonmidland.com/index.html)

Virgin Trains  
[www.virgintrains.co.uk/default.aspx](http://www.virgintrains.co.uk/default.aspx)

Chiltern Railways  
[www.chilternrailways.co.uk/](http://www.chilternrailways.co.uk/)

Network Rail  
[www.networkrail.co.uk/](http://www.networkrail.co.uk/)

Railfuture/Railway Development Society  
[www.railfuture.org.uk/](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/)

Cambrian Rail Partnership  
[www.thecambrianline.co.uk/](http://www.thecambrianline.co.uk/)

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp)  
[www.acorp.uk.com](http://www.acorp.uk.com)

Passenger Focus  
<http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/>

North Wales Coast Railway  
[www.nwrail.org.uk/](http://www.nwrail.org.uk/)

Circular tour of North Wales by rail  
[www.penmorfa.com/Cambrian/](http://www.penmorfa.com/Cambrian/)

Ffestiniog Railway timetable  
[www.ffestiniograilway.co.uk/timetable.htm](http://www.ffestiniograilway.co.uk/timetable.htm)

Vale of Rheidol Railway timetable  
[www.rheidolrailway.co.uk/timetable.htm](http://www.rheidolrailway.co.uk/timetable.htm)

Talylllyn Railway  
[www.talylllyn.co.uk/](http://www.talylllyn.co.uk/)

Welshpool and Llanfair Railway timetable  
[www.wllr.org.uk/timetable.htm](http://www.wllr.org.uk/timetable.htm)

Welsh Highland Heritage Railway  
[www.whr.co.uk/index.php?pid=51](http://www.whr.co.uk/index.php?pid=51)

Fairbourne Railway  
[www.fairbournerrailway.com/index.htm](http://www.fairbournerrailway.com/index.htm)

Borth Station Museum  
[www.borthstationmuseum.co.uk](http://www.borthstationmuseum.co.uk)

Rail Photographs by Richard Jones including many of the modern Cambrian scene  
[www.mylordz.com](http://www.mylordz.com)

## 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](mailto:customer.services@arrivatrainswales.co.uk)

**Network Rail:**

Community Relations, Kings Place, 99, York Way, London. N1 9AG

**Newtown Station Travel**

The Railway Station, Old Kerry Road, Newtown, Powys SY16 1BP. Fax. 01686 621966

E-mail [newtownstation@btclick.com](mailto:newtownstation@btclick.com)

**The Association of Train Operating Companies:**

ATOC, 2nd Floor, 200, Aldersgate Street,, London. EC14 4HD

**London Midland**

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

**Association of Community Rail Partnerships**

The Old Water Tower, Huddersfield Railway Station, St George's Square, Huddersfield HD1 1JF

**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](http://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

**Public Transport Users' Committee for Wales Secretariat**

Welsh Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NQ. E-mail [ptucwales@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ptucwales@wales.gsi.gov.uk)

**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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