

*Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association*

# Newsletter No. 92

MARCH 2024



## **THE NEW BARMOUTH BRIDGE IN USE**

The 1456 train from Machynlleth to Pwllheli enters the steel spans of the rebuilt Barmouth Bridge on the 23rd February 2024. Photograph: Denis Bates

## NEGES GAN Y CADEIRYDD

Mae'r flwyddyn newydd yn dod â chyfleoedd a heriau newydd. Datblygiad pwysig iawn i'r lein yw y bydd Tornado yn profi ei systemau ERTMS rhwng Amwythig a'r Drennewydd yn fuan. Does dim un injan stêm wedi rhedeg ar y Cambrian ers 2010, gyda dyfodiad y system signalau newydd ac hyd at nawr nid oedd neb yn awyddus i osod ERTMS ar injan stêm. Fodd bynnag, gyda system ERTMS yn dod i Brif Lein y Dwyrain (Llundain – Caeredin trwy Efrog), disgwylir i nifer o injans gwahanol gael eu haddasu i allu rhedeg o dan y system ERTMS. Er bod Tornado (RA9) yn rhy drwm i fynd ymhellach na'r Drennewydd, mae'n bosibl gallwn ni weld stêm ar y Cambrian unwaith eto, er enghraifft petai Black 5 yn cael ei addasu i redeg o dan y system ERTMS. Dylai'r symudiad at ERTMS ar weddill y rhwydwaith helpu datrys diffyg argaeledd achlysurol y Dosbarth 97 hefyd.

O ran trenau modern, mae oedi yn parhau o ran y gwasanaeth bob awr llawn a'r trenau newydd. Ymysg ffactorau eraill, mae oedi pellach wedi bod o ran darparu unedau o'r dosbarth 197, mae nifer o'r unedau newydd wedi datblygu olwynion fflat ac mae addasiadau yn cael eu gwneud i rai plattfformau ar gyfer y trenau newydd, sy'n uwch na'r trenau presennol.

Yn y cyfamser, rydym yn falch o weld bod dibynadwyedd ar y Cambrian wedi gwella yn ddiweddar ac mae'r trenau dosbarth 158 presennol yn darparu gwasanaeth da a chyfforddus gyda thŷ bach ym mhob cerbyd.

Yn olaf, mae pont troed newydd yn cael ei osod yng ngorsaf Y Drennewydd i ddarparu mynediad mwy hygyrch at blatfform 2.

## CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

The new year brings new opportunities and challenges. A very important development for the line is that Tornado will test its ERTMS systems between Shrewsbury and Newtown soon. No steam engines have run on Cambrian metals since 2010, with the arrival of the new signalling system and until now no-one was keen to set up ERTMS on a steam locomotive. However, with an ERTMS system coming to the East Coast Mainline (London – Edinburgh via York), it is expected that a number of different locomotives will be adapted to be able to run under the system. Although Tornado (RA9) is too heavy to go further than Newtown, it's possible that we could see steam on the Cambrian once again, for example if a Black 5 was adapted to run under ERTMS. The move towards ERTMS elsewhere on the network should also help to solve the sporadic availability of the Class 97s.

In terms of modern traction, delays continue regarding the full hourly service and the new trains. Amongst other factors, there have been further delays in supply of the class 197 units: a number of the new units have developed flats and alterations are being made to some platforms to accommodate the new trains, which are higher than the present ones.

Meanwhile, we are pleased to see that reliability on the Cambrian has improved recently and that the current Class 158 units are providing a good and comfortable service with a toilet in each carriage.

Finally, a new footbridge is being installed at Newtown station to provide a more accessible means of reaching platform 2.

Jeff Smith, SARPA Cadeirydd/Chair

## CLASS 197'S AGAIN

A Retired Railway Manager Writes ....

I recently had my first Class 197 DMU experiences during a return trip to Lancaster, and to say that I was totally appalled by what I found is a complete understatement.

As my train was approaching Shrewsbury from Machynlleth, the Conductor announced an all-change to another train on Platform 5, which is not that unusual these days. But when said train pulled into Shrewsbury it was a single Class 150. I looked at the Class 150 unit and looked at the crowd waiting to board and decided that I wanted none of it, so I went over to Platform 3 for a Holyhead train: by changing at Chester and Warrington Bank Quay I could catch the same train to Lancaster that I had proposed to catch at Wolverhampton.

As the train approached Platform 3 I could see it was formed of two two-car 197 units. After boarding and walking virtually the complete length of the train to find a seat I took stock of my surroundings and was appalled at what I found:

- \* The seating was almost completely airline style with only two tables per saloon section (i.e. between vestibules)

- \* The seats themselves are totally uncomfortable as they necessitate sitting bolt upright (unacceptable on a long journey).

- \* The height of the seat backs restricts any realistic forward view and makes the train feel very claustrophobic.

- \* The seat/window alignment is appalling (I sat next to a grey pillar which only added to the feeling of claustrophobia).

- \* There is only one toilet per unit.

- \* There are no opening windows as far as I could tell.

- \* The provision for luggage storage on these units is totally inadequate.

- \* The ride is very rough indeed and is every bit as bad as I had previously experienced on Caledonian Sleeper Mark 5s and West Midland Railway Class 196 stock.

- \* In effect, they are commuter trains and not very good commuter trains at that.

My onward journey from Chester to Warrington was also in a Class 197 as was my return journey between Crewe and Shrewsbury. These two journeys only amplified my disgust and discomfort at these totally unsuitable trains. The thought of riding any distance on such trains fills me with horror and Birmingham International to Aberystwyth/ Pwllheli would be an ordeal of the greatest magnitude.

From the above, you can probably deduce that I am of the opinion that such trains are a complete non-starter for the Cambrian line services. The thought of such trains plus the serious overcrowding we have experienced over the last few summers, would lead to an extremely dangerous situation.

P.S. I also noticed that the air-conditioning units are roof mounted and I wonder what the effects of high tides and high winds at: Tonfanau, Llanaber and Afon Wen will have on such equipment?

## DEG CANFYDDIAD AM RHEILFFYRDD FFRAINC A'R EIDAL

Ym mis Hydref 2023, aeth Jeff Smith, Cadeirydd SARPA, i dde Sardegna ar y trên. Cymerodd deuddydd i gyrraedd yr ynys, gan fwynhau safleoedd hanesyddol a thirluniau ar ei ffordd i Casteddu/Cagliari, lle bu'n annerch cynhadledd am ieithoedd lleiafrifol. Daeth yn ôl i Gymru yr un ffordd, trwy Nice, am fod tirlithriad wedi atal y lein uniongyrchol rhwng Lyon a Milan. Dyma rhai o'i gasgliadau:

- 1) Mae'r ystad rheilffyrdd yn yr Eidal yn arbennig yn llawer ehangach na fan hyn. Mae iardiau enfawr ym mhob man a gorsafoedd sydd â llawer mwy o blatfformau na'r disgwyl
- 2) Efallai o ganlyniad i'r uchod, mae Trenitalia yn dda iawn yn trefnu bod cysylltiadau rhwng trenau'n hawdd trwy sicrhau bod trenau'n cyrraedd platfformau ar bwys eu gilydd. Mae hyn yn gwneud cysylltiadau tynn yn hawdd iawn.
- 3) Ar drenau modern Trenitalia, mae sgriniau yn aml yn dangos sut i gyrraedd eich cysylltiadau ac o ba blatfform fydd y trên ymlaen yn gadael. Mae hyn oll yn yr Eidaleg a'r Saesneg – dydy cyhoeddiadau dwyieithog ddim yn ymddangos yn ormod o her iddyn nhw, yn wahanol i drenau Trafndiaeth Cymru! (Er, dydy Trenitalia ddim yn gwneud cyhoeddiadau yn ieithoedd brodorol Sardegna, gwaetha'r modd).
- 4) Mae trenau Ffrainc yn cael llawer o ddefnydd, o leiaf ar y prif leiniau. Yn aml mae trenau 2 lawr yn llawn teithwyr.
- 5) Mae SNCF wedi bod yn gweithio mewn partneriaeth gyda rhanbarthau Ffrainc i wella gwasanaethau rheilffyrdd i deithwyr. Roedd y rhwydwaith Zou yn ne ddwyrain Ffrainc yn rhedeg yn aml ac yn llawn teithwyr pan es i ar eu trenau, ac mae'r lliwiau'n drawiadol!
- 6) Os ydych yn newid trenau yn Aix-en-Provence TGV, mae ardal ymlacio awyr agored ar gael gyda meinciau a "sunloungers" fel y gallwch mwynhau'r heulwen tra'n edrych tua'r mynyddoedd ac yn aros ar gyfer eich cysylltiad ymlaen. Dychmygwch y fath beth yng Nghyffordd Dyfi!
- 7) Mae nifer o DMUau o'r dosbarth ALn 668 dal i redeg yn Sardegna. Cafodd eu hadeiladu o'r 1950au ymlaen ond roedd yr enghraifft o 1983 oedd yn rhedeg o Porto Torres i Sassari yn teimlo'n llawer hŷn na'i oedran. Roedd y profiad yn debyg i reilffordd trefadaeth.
- 8) Mae'r brif lein yn Sardegna, rhwng Casteddu a Sassari, yn cael ei gynnal yn dda iawn. Mae'r rhan fwyaf o'r lein â thrawstiau concrit ac mae llawer o'r gorsafoedd gyda 4 platfform, neu 2 platfform a 2 lôn trwyddo, yn ogystal ag iard enfawr. Hyn oll ar gyfer ychydig drenau bob dydd ym mhob cyfeiriad! Mae'r trenau hefyd yn fodern a chyfforddus.
- 9) Mae'r rheilffordd rhwng Marseilles a Ventimiglia yn anhygoel o brydferth. Gan gychwyn gyda golygfeydd gwych o'r Cote D'Azur, moroedd glas, creigiau coch a thraethau prydfferth, mae'n mynd yn well byth ar ôl Nice. Rhwng fan hyn a Ventimiglia,

mae'r Alps a'r môr yn cwrrd felly mae golygfeydd godidog o gymoedd dwfn, creigiau serth, mynyddoedd a threfi prydfferth sydd wedi'u hadeiladu mewn i'r graig i bob pwrpas.

10) Mae'r Eurostar yn cael llawer o ddefnydd. Oherwydd gweithdrefnau diogelwch mwy cymhleth ers brexit, mae angen cyrraedd dros awr cyn eich trên; am hyn mae'r ardal aros yn llawn top â theithwyr sy'n aros i ddal eu trên. Yn amlwg mae galw mawr o hyd am gludiant trên i'r cyfandir. Galla i weld pam!

## **TEN CONCLUSIONS ON THE RAILWAYS IN FRANCE AND ITALY**

In October 2023, Jeff Smith, SARPA Chair, went to southern Sardinia by train. He took two days to reach the island, enjoying historical sights and landscapes on his way to Casteddu/Cagliari, where he addressed a conference on minority languages. He returned to Wales the same way, via Nice, as a landslide had closed the direct line between Lyon and Milan. Here are some of his conclusions:

1) The railway estate in Italy especially is much more extensive than here. There are massive yards all over the place and stations with many more platforms than I'd expect.

2) Perhaps due to the above, Trenitalia is very good at organising easy changes between trains by ensuring cross-platform interchange. This makes light work of tight connections.

3) On Trenitalia's modern trains, screens often where to change trains for connections and which platform the connecting train will leave from. All this is in Italian and English – bilingual announcements – bilingual announcements don't appear to be too much of a challenge for them, unlike TfW! (Although, Trenitalia don't make announcements in the native languages of Sardinia, unfortunately).

4) French trains are well loaded, at least on the main lines. Double decker trains are frequently full of passengers.

5) SNCF has been working in partnership with the French regions to improve passenger rail services. The Zou network in south eastern France was running frequent well loaded services when I went on the trains, and the livery is striking!

6) If you change trains at Aix-en-Provence TGV, there is an open-air sun deck with benches and sunloungers so that you can enjoy the sunshine and look across to the distant mountains whilst awaiting your onward connection. Imagine something similar at Dyfi Junction!

7) A number of class Aln 668 DMUs still run in Sardinia. These were built from the 1950s onwards but the 1983 example that was running from Porto Torres to Sassari seemed much older than its age. The experience was comparable to a heritage railway!

8) The main line in Sardinia, between Cagliari and Sassari, is very well kept. Most of the line has concrete sleepers and many stations have 4 platforms, or 2 platforms and 2 through lines, as well as a huge yard. All this is for a few trains each day each way! The trains are also modern and comfortable.

9) The railway between Marseilles and Ventimiglia is unbelievably beautiful. Starting with great views of the Cote D'Azur, blue seas, red rocks and beautiful beaches, it becomes even better after Nice. Between here and Ventimiglia, the Alps meet the sea, so there are glorious views of deep valleys, steep cliffs, mountains and pretty towns which to all intents and purposes have been built into the rock.

10) The Eurostar is very well used. Due to more complicated security arrangements since Brexit, you have to arrive over an hour before your train; as a result the waiting area is full of passengers waiting to catch their train. Clearly there is still lots of demand for rail transport to the continent. I can see why!

## ON THE MOVE WITH GARETH MARSTON

I recently travelled across Germany to Austria with family and got to experience first-hand how two of the more highly rated railway "Tier 1" nations organise their transport systems. Not everything was perfect but personal experience always helps when comparing with others – so what can we learn?

**The journey** – We flew into Munich Airport on a Wednesday and headed to Salzburg in Austria. We then travelled to Vienna on the Friday morning and spent a long weekend in the city using its extensive public transport, returning from Vienna Airport on the Tuesday morning.

**Planning** – in theory it should be easy in the world of the internet – but of course as usual the on-line journey planners love to try and force you to select to travel on specific trains and don't give you the full picture of what services and options there are. Now as we were flying in and intending to travel onward on the same day "fixing" myself to a specific train was not really an option. Fortunately, there is the wonderful Man at Seat Sixty-One website giving a very good guide to travel on overseas railways – I found the website very helpful, crucially giving the big picture on options and perhaps more importantly based on experience and comparing it with what we found on the ground – it was an accurate and a fair representation. <https://www.seat61.com/>  
I also found Wikipedia was fairly accurate for descriptions of stations and services. Apart from the other half and daughter booking themselves on a Sound of Music Tour in Salzburg on the Thursday, and the journey to Vienna the next day, we kept ourselves flexible and adjusted our plans to the weather.

**Wednesday** – we walked out of the terminal at Munich Airport (München Flughafen) about 1500 and across the piazza next to the FC Bayern Munich shop and spotted the sign for the S-Bahn terminal. We knew the airport was only served by the local S-Bahn

services, unlike many airports in the UK that also see InterCity and Regional services, so we would have to get them into central Munich to change for Salzburg. From there was an express service every hour, alternatively operated by OBB (Austrian State Railway) and DB (German State Railway) plus an hourly Regional Express service run by BRB (Bayerische Regiobahn) and an open access operator (Westbahn) running six trains a day. The airport was served by two S-Bahn routes, with the airport North East of the city centre one swung round to the west of the city and accessed the main Munich Central (München Hauptbahnhof) station (32 platforms) on a 20 minute frequency, the other (also every 20 mins), which we opted for, went down the east side and as well as going to the main central station you could change somewhere called Munich East (München Ost) which only has 14 platforms! As we had luggage, we opted for this. The first surprise was even though we had come into a major international airport the S-Bahn station was unmanned so we had to negotiate the ticket vending machine on the platform. Fortunately, there was an English language option, instructions were clear and easy (it wasn't trying to access the UK's devilish fare system). Three singles to a destination in another country was far easier and quicker than trying to use a TfW machine to go 5 miles. The price was 39.99 EURO each, the distance was c.105 miles.

The S-Bahn was operated with full size mainline electrified trains with high capacity standing room metro style carriages – perhaps not ideal for airport traffic. The service didn't get too busy due to the time of day we arrived. Invariably many of the S-Bahn stations on the way had connecting bus stops next to them and München Ost was reached in about 25 minutes, clearly a station for the “self-loading freight” of regular travellers. Wikipedia states it was rebuilt in 1985 (with of course a U-Bahn station and a bus terminal) and it was pretty much in that condition apart from some new-ish and smelly elevators to the platforms from the sub surface passageway. The info screens in the passageway only had one page of info at a time which was very limiting given the volume of services using the station. Several S-Bahn lines as well as long distance and regional ones coalesced here before going into central Munich. The Daughter and I found somewhere to get a coffee and brought Mum, who had stayed with the bags on the platform, one back as well; we also got some bottled water. Our through ticket did not include the Open Access Westbahn operator and so you can guess the first train to Salzburg was of course one of their very smart looking double-deck Stadler KISS units! Never mind, the Regional Express was a couple of minutes behind and we left at 1604 ahead of any commuter traffic on a more than acceptable 6 car Stadler FLIRT EMU operated by Bayerische Regiobahn, a private operator awarded the contract by the Bavarian State government. The train was quiet, and we got a bay of 4 with a table for the two window seats, our smaller bags more than comfortably got on the overhead rack with our one big suitcase in the one vacant bay floorspace. The first stop was Rossenheim a town of c.63K. Our train was a numbered service RE5 – Regional Express Line 5 service from Munich to Salzburg and did a stopping pattern not really seen in the UK. We were nonstop to Rosenheim. going past the extremities of the S-Bahn services and flashing past smaller stations beyond. Once we got to Rossenheim (about 40 miles from Munich and 38 mins) the loadings picked up as we skirted around the west and south of the Chiemsee – an inland glacial freshwater lake 30 square miles in size – and stopped every few minutes at a station for towns in

between the size of Welshpool and Newtown in a popular leisure area. After about 30 miles we hit another junction and largish town – Traunstein (pop 30K) which was a local administrative centre. The scenery was more than pleasant: the line is rated one of the more scenic in Germany but not at a global level. In the distance to the south were the Alps with snow capped peaks glimpsed on a regular basis, the ride around the Chiemisee produced several views of it in the distance and we were in hill country – the best way to describe the countryside would be to compare it to the film the Great Escape and the scenes where Steve McQueen is trying to get away on a motorbike. These were of course filmed in southern Bavaria not too far from where we were with open fields and the multi storied wooden chalet style houses.

**The conductor came round checking tickets several times but not selling them, everybody already seemed to have a valid ticket and all the stations were open with no barriers. A cultural thing where the inhabitants are more trustworthy than Brits? I remember BR had gone to the open station model in the last few years before privatisation. Austria was the same. We were held up for 10 minutes at one station with the Conductor making an announcement we couldn't decipher. Once we got going the problem was obvious as we stopped again at a level crossing that seemed to be faulty and crawled over at low speed. The last station in Germany Freilassing was reached (pop 20K and the junction for Berchtesgaden) Soon we were over the border and in Austria with Salzburg Hauptbahnhof only a few minutes away we arrived slightly late just before 1800, fortunately looking to our right as we went over the River Salzbach and looking up at the Hohensalzburg Fortress. We opted to get a taxi to our hotel in the city centre new town.**

**Thursday** – I explored Salzburg (pop 156K) by foot avoiding the sing along on the Sound of Music Tour bus and came across an S-Bahn station, Salzburg Mullin Altstadt on line S3 and decided to have a proper exploration of Salzburg's main station. The fact that a standalone city the size of Salzburg has its own S-Bahn network including the line over the border to Berchtesgaden was a major point of difference with the UK. Whilst everywhere has different geography and surrounding areas Salzburg is notably smaller than Swansea, which does not have anything equivalent to its 5 lines and 64 stations 130 KM network – the trains were electrified and not toy 2 car lengths either. Lines had been expanded in recent years and the main station extensively rebuilt in the last ten. The platforms(9) had a large circulation area underneath with a choice of shops including a SPAR and a number of cafes. The information available for travellers was much better than encountered in Munich. There was a small manned OBB office in the main concourse and ticket machines, none of which seemed busy. Of course, Austria has led the way with its "Klimate Ticket" with residents able to purchase an annual pass for all public transport (second class) for 1095 EURO's or about 91 EURO a month. One assumed most local travellers had them already. There were printed posters listing all departures as well as numerous screens: the one for long distance services had train diagrams and carriage numbers. We had booked on Carriage 27 when we bought our ticket in advance in the UK for Friday's journey, this turned out to be the leading carriage behind the locomotive on a fixed 7 car set at the Vienna end. Salzburg also has one of the largest trolley bus networks in western Europe, with a network of numerous lines covering 147 Km and seeing 40 million users annually (nearly



half of Wales total bus usage). I didn't have any trips due to the short duration of the stay. The big standout differences we all noticed apart from the public transport were cleanliness, road traffic was next to non-existent or very light in the city centre and the shops were all occupied and open – no sign of dying town centres. Food and drink were more expensive than the UK but housing was notably cheaper.

**Friday** – an early start as we had decided to buy advance purchase First Class tickets to Vienna. We caught a RailJet service heading for Wien Flughafen (Vienna Airport) for 29.00 EURO each for a three-hour 195-mile journey. The 0811 did not leave on time and the reason soon became apparent: the 0803 from Munich to Budapest was running late and scheduled to overtake our semi-fast train. It was formed of two RailJet sets combined and the 14 coaches looked well loaded. It would only take two and half hours to Vienna. The first 40 minutes were in hill country before we got into the province of Upper Austria and the countryside became more undulating. I suspect the best views are to be had traveling the opposite way toward Salzburg. A pleasant young steward brought us breakfast (purchased onboard) to our seats, including proper China mugs for the Coffee! The journey was fairly uneventful, apart from noting the freight traffic (30% of all freight miles in Austria are done by rail compared to 10% in the UK) including trip workings, and the number of people who seemed to be wanting to use standard class no doubt using their Klimate Ticket. We also noted there seemed to be more rolling stock parked up spare or awaiting duties in the peak than you see in the UK. The main station in Vienna was another completely rebuilt one: Wien Hauptbahnhof is a through station mainly for long distance services that have been rerouted from terminal stations. There are two levels of shops beneath the 12 platforms (all occupied) and a U-Bahn station. The S-Bahn services still use the old terminals. We opted to get something to eat at the food court – and went for Curry Wurst and saw several vagrants being ejected by security staff – it was warm and the weather cold! As a general point everywhere indoors in Vienna was stifling warm. We didn't feel confident enough of trying the U-Bahn on our first day with luggage and opted for a taxi.

**Thoughts** – when you realise that Austrians own more motor vehicles per 1000 people\* (570) than then UK (491), the EU average (560) or Wales (495) but also have quality public transport with one of the lowest percentages of distance travelled done by private motor vehicle in western Europe (78% compared to 93% in Wales) the penny drops that it doesn't have to be an either or choice between private motoring and public transport as so many sterile debates are framed in the UK.

\*The stats I quote are pre covid it will be interesting to see what impact the Klimate ticket makes.

For Wales there are plenty of indicators on how we should repurpose the money we will no longer spend on road building after 2026. The trick is to get the balance and priorities right between the different options. Unfortunately re-building lengthy rural railway lines given the state of things elsewhere means they are going to be low priority, nor is spend on active traffic going to get a family in the West Midlands to choose to take the train instead of their car when they come to Wales on holiday.

So –

**Provide adequate train lengths** – if you want people to use heavy rail it must be more than 2 carriages.

**Electrification** – if you're serious about rail freight you have to get your mainlines wired. **Do Integration** – it's not that hard physically and do it with ticketing. Pre covid annual public transport farebox revenue in Wales was £378 million, that's the equivalent of each adult spending just £200 a year. Is a Welsh climate ticket really that hard?

**Give Trolley Buses a go** – Decarbonisation without the disadvantages of carbon or hydrogen sources of power and none of the hassle of digging up the streets like light rail street running incurs also much cheaper.

**Reform planning legislation** – the key to Austria's happier transport balance and alive town/city centres is planning. Out of town is bad on many levels, let's not encourage it further.

## TRAVELLER'S TALES

Roger Whitehouse

Since the Delay Repay saga in the previous issue, my wife has submitted two claims to TfW, which were accepted and paid within a day or so. Well done TfW! Trans Pennine have also responded promptly and correctly.

### Coast Services Resumed

After completion of repairs to the river bridge at Dovey Junction, trains resumed to and from Tywyn only\* on Saturday 4th November. I heard through the grapevine (thank you, Bill!). I couldn't find any mention on TfW's website, and journey planners for journeys from beyond Machynlleth often showed a Pwllheli replacement bus connection which was a minute or so quicker than the train!

\* Except for the 0714 Tywyn-Machynlleth. Why is this important part of the core every-two-hours service so often dropped?

The full service restarted, as planned, on Saturday 2nd December, a week before the general timetable change. As expected, early southbound services that day, in the absence of units overnight at Pwllheli, were replaced by buses. The poster for the week showed 0517 Machynlleth-Barmouth terminating at Morfa Mawddach, and omitted completely its return at 0645 (0714 Tywyn again!).

### Shrewsbury and beyond

On the first day of full coast service, my wife and I travelled to York via Manchester. The 1325 from Tywyn attached to the Aberystwyth train at Machynlleth, complete with trolley. So far, so good. Our onward service from Shrewsbury was our first encounter with a 197. I found the riding lively, even rough over pointwork, and noisy. We were seated over an inner end bogie, and I was unimpressed by the absence of gangway doors between the cars.

I draw a veil over Transpennine Express's continuation: TfW are not the only company to inflict cancelled and short-formed trains on their passengers. However,

our return from York in their class 802 bi-mode shows that properly designed trains are possible within today's regulations.

A TPE cancellation had given us a long break in Shrewsbury. On returning, the screens showed two trains at Platform 3: B'ham Aberystwyth 1321/1328 and Cardiff-Holyhead 1323/1326. If on time, that's only possible by exchanging units between services, not unknown. Then platform 4 for Holyhead was announced. About 10 mins later came "Platform 4A for Aberystwyth". So we trooped back down the stairs. In the event, the Cambrian service, starting from New Street, arrived late, creating the Platform 4 pairing which was normal when Arriva started the Standard Pattern Timetable.

### **Not by train**

To a SARPA meeting in Welshpool - by car, after discovering that Machynlleth to Welshpool would be by replacement bus. Why, I wonder, could I find no information about this (I assumed) engineering closure on TfW's website? Neither its location, nor the detail of replacement services?

### **Which goes first?**

As our return might land in the three-hour evening gap down the coast, our day trip across the border started at Machynlleth promptly at 0805. (For once, the 0645 from Barmouth did run.) The refreshment trolley appeared very quickly: so far, so good. Then we were held at Shrewsbury beyond 0930 while a train fault was identified, leaving at 0944. Have you guessed what comes next?

The 0940 West Midland stopping service was in front, losing us another 10 minutes or so to the outskirts of Wolverhampton. Then we waited 7 minutes, while Pendolinos passed in each direction on the main line, before entering Platform 3, which had been vacant for nearly an hour. We waited a further 7 minutes, still following a Pendolino, which left Platform 4 on time. The result? Termination at New Street nearly 40 minutes late (and 2 more Delay Repay claims for TfW to pay).

How much of the delay was caused directly by the train fault, I wonder, and how much to the apparent inflexibility of train regulation rules?

The 1822 from New St appeared, in correct order, on the platform indicator as front 2 Shrewsbury and rear 2 Aberystwyth. The internal screen informed us "This train is for Holyhead": potential for worrying the uncertain or nervous passenger. I have never encountered a good reason why trains which divide at Shrewsbury aren't advertised with the eventual destinations of both portions.

## DUKEDOG VISITING ABERYSTWYTH

A former GWR locomotive is now in Aberystwyth for display in the revamped engine shed of the Vale of Rheidol Railway's station.

Dukedog locomotive No. 9017 was built in 1938 for service on the Cambrian lines, and was withdrawn in 1960. She was then transferred to the Bluebell Railway. Currently out of ticket, she has now been loaned to the VoR for display for at least this year, arriving at the end of February.

The engine arrived in Aberystwyth on the 29th February.  
Photograph: Martin Bates.



## HISTORY OF THE VALE OF RHEIDOL RAILWAY SUPPORTERS' ASSOCIATION

In the latter days of British Rail's ownership of the Vale of Rheidol railway, a supporters' association (VORRSA) was set up, which ran from 1970 to 1991.

Chris Magner has now written a history of the association:

### *Cymdeithas Cefnogwyr Rhielffordd Dyffryn Rheidol* **The Vale of Rheidol Railway Supporters' Association**

With more additional information on the Cambrian Lines: Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth and Pwllheli

Copies may be purchased from Chris at 21 Dunval Road, Bridgnorth, Shropshire, WV16 4NA. The cost, including postage, is £17.

## NEWS OF THE LINES

### NEWTOWN

Work on the new footbridge and lifts has started at the west end of the station. This work has resulted in a period of trains for Shrewsbury using the down platform 2.

### SHREWSBURY

There are concerning proposals from the Shrewsbury Moves Plan for the station forecourt to be taken over for use as the new bus station.

### WELLINGTON

Due to a landslip near Oakengates, services between Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton have been cancelled, with rail replacement bus services in operation. Work to reinstate the may take some time. Meanwhile, Cambrian line services are terminating at Shrewsbury.

Photograph: Network Rail.



## MONTHLY MEETINGS

April	Saturday 20th	12:30	Railway Hotel, Borth
May	Saturday 18th	11:45	AGM Wharf Station, Tallyllyn Railway, Tywyn.
June	Saturday 15th	11:15	Royal Oak Hotel, Welshpool
July	Tuesday 16th	19:00	Remote Meeting
August	Tuesday 20th	19:00	Monty Club, Newtown
September	Saturday 21st	11:15	Wynstay Hotel, Machynlleth
October	Saturday 19th	11:30	Green Room, Criccieth Memorial Hall
November	Saturday 16th	11:30	Railway Station, Shrewsbury
December	Saturday 7th	11.45	Town Council Offices, Baker Street, Aberystwyth

## WANT TO JOIN SARPA?

The membership fee is currently (for membership up to 31 December 2024) £10.00 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 line's 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.

To join please send your details, making sure to include full name, address and telephone number (and also email address if you wish to become part of our electronic network) to:

Bill Redfern, SARPA Membership Secretary, 8 Plas Edwards, Tywyn, Gwynedd, LL36 0AS, along with cheque for the membership fee, or, and preferably, you can pay directly into our bank account: Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth Rail Passengers Association: Barclays Bank: sort code 20-61-08: account 20148148, and send your details to [Bill\\_sarpa@outlook.com](mailto:Bill_sarpa@outlook.com)

## USEFUL ADDRESSES

**Transport for Wales:** Customer Relations, Transport for Wales Rail Services, St. Mary's House, 7 Penarth Road, Cardiff . CF10 5DJ Tel. 0333 3211 202

### **Network Rail:**

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

### **Association of Community Rail Partnerships**

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

### **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

## OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION

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## WEBSITES

Our website <https://sarpa.info>

Webmaster Angus Eickhoff: [angus@anguseickhoff.co.uk](mailto:angus@anguseickhoff.co.uk)

Website host is Hostinger: <https://www.hostinger.co.uk/>

Find us on Facebook - Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1506868396111739>

### Other sites of interest:

A useful alternative to the National Rail Enquiries site:

[www.traintimes.org.uk/](http://www.traintimes.org.uk/)

Transport for Wales

[www.tfwrail.wales/](http://www.tfwrail.wales/)

National Rail Enquiries

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

London Northwestern Railway

[www.journeycheck.com/londonnorthwesternrailway/](http://www.journeycheck.com/londonnorthwesternrailway/)

West Midlands Railway

[www.westmidlandsrailway.co.uk](http://www.westmidlandsrailway.co.uk)

Avanti West Coast

[www.avantiwestcoast.co.uk](http://www.avantiwestcoast.co.uk)

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/)

Railwatch: the quarterly magazine of Railfuture

[www.railwatch.org.uk](http://www.railwatch.org.uk)

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp)

[communityrail.org.uk](http://communityrail.org.uk)

North Wales Coast Railway

[www.nwrail.org.uk/](http://www.nwrail.org.uk/)

Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways

[www.festrail.co.uk/](http://www.festrail.co.uk/)

Vale of Rheidol Railway

[www.rheidolrailway.co.uk](http://www.rheidolrailway.co.uk)

Talylyn Railway

[www.talylyn.co.uk/](http://www.talylyn.co.uk/)

Welshpool and Llanfair Railway

[www.wlfr.org.uk/](http://www.wlfr.org.uk/)

Welsh Highland Heritage Railway

[www.whr.co.uk/](http://www.whr.co.uk/)

Fairbourne Railway

[www.fairbournrailway.com/](http://www.fairbournrailway.com/)

Borth Station Museum

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

Real Time Trains

[realtimetrains.co.uk](http://realtimetrains.co.uk)

[Live Rail Record](https://live.rail-record.co.uk)

<https://live.rail-record.co.uk>

**Articles in the Newsletter contain the views of the contributors, not those of the Association.**

Copy deadline for the next newsletter is 22nd May 2024