

Shrewsbury
Aberystwyth
Rail
Passengers'
Association



Newsletter No. 46

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Converted Class 37's 97301 & 97002 at Shrewsbury 1st April. Designed to pilot special trains and haul infrastructure trains using ERTMS equipment. Not seen on Cambrian yet.

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Chairman's Message

ATW's not so magic formula of padding out journey times with dollops of charter minutes has finally produced something like near acceptable performance on our line. Lest we get carried away in a frenzy of relief remember ATW are now in their sixth year of running the franchise. That it's taken this long to sort out shows up not only ATW but a myriad of others in a very poor light. Underneath this improvement there are still the systemic weaknesses that passengers have to contend with on a daily basis. SARPA had its biggest correspondence load about an individual incident for a long time in relation to Saturday February 28th. Bus replacements were running due to Network Rail closing the line as the telephone system at level crossings had failed. But where was the information for the passenger? Chaotic scenes abounded with passengers at Welshpool hardest hit. ATW's Business Plan for 2009 recognises information when things go wrong as an area to work hard on. Again six years in and were talking about what should have been basics from day one.

ATW's Stakeholder Relationship Manager for North and Mid Wales Ben Davies has a party trick whenever he comes to a meeting. He whips out a copy of the franchise agreement and says that this is the contract Arriva have signed up to and that they deliver it. He uses it to rebuff criticism of Arriva, and by and large Arriva does actually deliver what the franchise agreement says. Over the years I've been to many a meeting where stakeholder expectation levels of what the railway in Wales should be are clearly vastly different to what the franchise agreement says. SARPA has always been critical of the franchise agreement primarily over its greatest fundamental weakness – the failure to provide for the growth in rail use which was so obvious to SARPA but not those that drew up the contract.

The latest figures available show that there is around 35% more passengers using the Cambrian mainline than there was before the Wales and Border franchise, and its predicted "no growth" started. In fact the franchise overall sees nearly 40% more usage. OK, below average for our line but when you consider the infrequent, often poor quality service on the Cambrian with the punctuality problems in that period it's pretty clear that there's a strong underlying demand for rail in Mid Wales. We could be in the situation now that punctuality has been sorted out (and an improved Sunday service) that previously untapped demand will be unleashed. Amid the recession doom and gloom, the overall figures for the third quarter of this financial year (Oct to Dec 08) for regional railway franchises still showed a near 5% growth. In fact back in the early 90's recession regional rail usage held and even increased, as it has been doing since 1982 - not 1997 as the spin merchants proclaim. It was the journeys to London market (both commuter and Intercity) that collapsed. Already growth in London commuter franchises has stalled. A warm sunny summer (we're due one), the pound weak against the Euro discouraging foreign holidays, the recession with less money about for long breaks could all be factors that see rail use on the Cambrian grow further this year. If this surprises anyone that's expecting that the recession will see off growth in rail usage and with it calls for investment, then I draw this to your attention. Having been out and around Wales a bit recently I've seen no sign of any tailing off in demand.

Already before the holiday periods we're hearing that the 0809 Birmingham International to Aberystwyth on a Saturday and the 1730 Aberystwyth to Birmingham International on Fridays and Saturdays are suffering from overcrowding. The franchise agreement has no answer to this need for more rolling stock, and Arriva will not stick its hand in its own pocket too deeply to help out. Many members are asking me the question

is the Wales and Border franchise agreement fit for purpose? Is it delivering the rail network and service that the people of Wales and the Borders expect and need?

In 2007 the official line changed and the Wales Rail Planning Assessment expected usage on the Cambrian to increase by 41% between 2005 and 2026 at a rate of 1.64% per annum on average. The reality has been that it's grown by this much and more each quarter. We now have the situation whereby usage levels not expected to the end of the next decade have already occurred. Many feel a fundamental reassessment of the franchise: what it's for, where it's going, service levels, rolling stock quantities etc is long overdue.

For those that would be in government please take note: the Wales and Borders franchise at 15 years, is already one of the longer ones. Tinkering with franchise length is no panacea to producing a modern fit for purpose railway. Please take note, 150 year ago our forefathers funded and built our railway using local labour and capital: they deserve a better legacy.

Gareth Marston, Newtown, March 2009

News in brief

The strange case of the refurbished ATW Class 158's.

Minister for the Economy & Transport Ieuan Wyn Jones AM has responded to Montgomeryshire AM Mick Bates' complaints about the condition of the trains running through his constituency. In his letter dated 24 November 2008 all is well. Apparently ATW have refurbished their trains already! So far it's a mystery as to where these refurbished trains are. Those running definitely have not been refurbished. ATW in their Business plan for 2009 comment on the need to find funding to carry out such work.

Meanwhile the All Wales Commission was in Newtown in Mid March, and the audience was asked the question "Has the Welsh Assembly Government served the needs of Mid Wales properly?" 78% said NO.

Aberystwyth

Official footfall figures from The Office of the Rail Regulator show that in 2007/2008 there were 269,070 recorded entries and exits.

The Monty Python film *The Life of Brian* finally had its first official public screening in Aberystwyth, having allegedly been banned since 1979. Well known rail supporter Michael Palin attending the showing at the Arts Centre. Congratulations to Aberystwyth Town Council and the Mayor for bringing Aberystwyth out of the dark ages. A lesson another Aberystwyth based organisation TraCC could learn from, whose views seem stuck in 1979.

Llanbadarn level crossing

The level crossing at Llanbadarn stuck with the barriers down on 6th February, causing chaos for two hours.

Borth

Official footfall figures from The Office of the Rail Regulator show that in 2007/2008 there were 52,735 recorded entries and exits.

Dovey Junction

Official footfall figures from The Office of the Rail Regulator show that in 2007/2008 there were 1,978 recorded entries and exits.

Campaigners against street lights being turned off by strapped for cash local authorities are highlighting the safety regulations, which is presumably why the station in the middle of nowhere has more lighting than most villages in Mid Wales.

Machynlleth

Official footfall figures from The Office of the Rail Regulator show that in 2007/2008 there were 103,617 recorded entries and exits.

The trees at the bottom of the station drive have been cut down - allegedly the reason being put about the town is that the wind turbine was not getting enough wind! The reason the trees were planted in the first place we understand was - um err - as a wind break!

Talerddig

Wind turbines (on top of a hill with plenty of wind on tap) have appeared on the horizon to the south adding to the vista when waiting for trains to cross.

Weig Lane

Local residents are upset that a new warning siren fitted to the crossing is so loud. The overnight testing of the ERTMS fitted unit has not been welcome.

Caersws

Official footfall figures from The Office of the Rail Regulator show that in 2007/2008 there were 34,159 recorded entries and exits.

The new automatic barriers will leave no room for the loop to be restored. Yet another expensive error that will cause problems in years to come.

Llanidloes

"I'd kill that bloody Beeching if he wasn't already dead." The views of one non car driver who's had to commute to Newtown by lift or Tanant Valley X75 Bus since moving there last November.

Newtown

Official footfall figures from The Office of the Rail Regulator show that in 2007/2008 there were 105,260 recorded entries and exits.

Trees have been felled on the Treowen hill side of the station opening up a vista of 1970's housing.

Welshpool

Official footfall figures from The Office of the Rail Regulator show that in 2007/2008 there were 90,100 recorded entries and exits. A remarkable 49% increase since 2002/2003. If one station had the odds stacked against people using it you would have thought it would be Welshpool. The disastrous station relocation of the early 1990's, lights that didn't work on the ramp, issues with non rail users blocking the car park, poor/non existent passenger information and until July 2006 no chance of getting a seat heading toward Shrewsbury before lunchtime.

The reward for booming usage is a new shelter for passengers installed in March. This is of standard pattern familiar to those who use the rail network in South Wales. The condition of the surface of the footbridge is now pressing with wear and tear producing uneven surfaces which collect rainwater as well as being a tripping hazard.

A successful prosecution was undertaken against a lorry driver for misuse of a level crossing. His lorry was hit by a unit in September 2008 east of Welshpool on an unmanned crossing putting the unit out of action for several weeks. Thankfully no one was hurt. The unit's CCTV images were used in evidence.



The new platform shelter at Welshpool. Note the waste bin on the platform in use.
Photographs: Gareth Marston.

Shrewsbury

Official footfall figures from The Office of the Rail Regulator show that in 2007/2008 there were 1,460,461 recorded entries and exits.

Work has started on bringing Platform 3 back into regular use, and other station improvements.

Wrexham and Shropshire have cut back on weekday services cutting 1 train a day from Shrewsbury and 2 from Wrexham. They have also introduced a standard walk on buy anytime return fare to London with no restrictions costing £40 from Shrewsbury.

Virgin Trains ran into a storm of protest over their proposal to run 3 trains a day to London Euston from Shrewsbury. The bid was widely seen as a cynical attempt to kill off competition from Wrexham and Shropshire before Virgin's anti competitive protection agreement from Birmingham to London ends in 2012. The welter of negative publicity saw Virgin withdraw its bid claiming that after all there was no business case. A simple ticket check on all Birmingham trains out of Euston would contradict this.

Meanwhile ATW have kept a low profile with their Marylebone bid, rejecting claims by some AM's from North East Wales that they would be using public subsidy to compete against Wrexham and Shropshire. 22 of their Class 158 fleet are provided for in the franchise agreement and paid for out of their £140 a million a year subsidy and a further 2 units are entirely funded by WAG since July 2006. We understand that no new acquisition of stock is planned, so the leasing costs of the units for Marylebone will indeed be paid for by public funds.

Infrastructure works

The official completion date for the works is the 27th October 2009 after which it will be possible to run additional trains and/or alter the existing pattern of service. So far only an additional departure from Shrewsbury at 1828 is mooted. The WAG website tell us that the works will improve punctuality on the line, but as all trains will still continue to cross at Talerddig bar one on the Welshpool to Fron section it's hard to see how this claim can be substantiated.

ERTMS

Apparently no provision has been made for any sort of portable ERTMS equipment, jeopardising charter, steam and freight traffic ever using the line.

Cambrian Country Gazer Gets Going



Launching the Cambrian Country Gazer are members of the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Line Liaison Conference at their meeting held recently in Welshpool.

A new publication, the Cambrian Country Gazer, has been launched by the Cambrian Railways Partnership to really bring to life the journey on the train between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth.

Did you know that Charles Darwin was born in Shrewsbury; that the World's first mail order company was based in Newtown; that Machynlleth was the medieval capital of Wales; or that Aberystwyth is home to the World's biggest Camera Obscura? These facts and a wide range of others are provided in the Country Gazer and will be of interest to local people and visitors as they travel on the train.

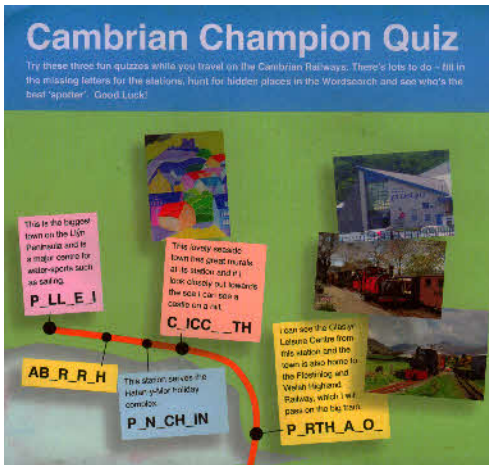
The Gazer was launched at a recent meeting of the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Line Liaison Conference held at Welshpool Town Hall. Commenting on the launch the Chairman, Cllr. Mansel Williams, said *"The Cambrian Main Line between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth is an increasingly important communication link for a wide range of travelling purposes including for commuting, work, shopping, social and leisure. Initiatives such as the Cambrian Country Gazer will enhance the journey experience as well as developing the line as an attraction in its own right"*.

Speaking on behalf of the Cambrian Railways Partnership Gerwyn Jones said *"This new publication forms one part of our marketing plan for this year which is aimed at encouraging visitors from the Shropshire and West Midlands areas to travel to Mid Wales on the train to enjoy a great day out, short break or longer stay. The region has so much to offer and as well as existing initiatives such as our walk leaflets between railway stations, the Cambrian Trailways, and discounted entry at attractions to those who travel by train we will be looking to develop this further later in the year with a Cambrian Beach and Bargains initiative to further showcase and promote the area and train travel"*.

The research and design of the Country Gazer was undertaken by local company Timeline and is beautifully illustrated by Borth artist Gabrielle Adamson. The Cambrian Country Gazer is a partner publication to the popular and well received Cambrian Coast Gazer launched last year.

The Country Gazer will be available for free from staffed railway stations, at Tourist Information Centres and other outlets along the Cambrian network.

For further information on the Cambrian Lines visit: www.thecambrianline.co.uk



Left: A recent publication from the Cambrian Railways Partnership is this quiz, based on the Coast line, including Dovey Junction to Aberystwyth. It is available from stations.

Below: Gerwyn Jones and Jane Davidson, with one of the new Cambrian Railways Charity Posters.



Minister Launches New Cambrian Railways Charity Posters

Jane Davidson, Welsh Assembly Government Environment, Sustainability and Housing Minister, launched the newest addition to the popular Cambrian Railways Poster collection on a recent visit to Machynlleth Railway Station. The initial four posters launched in August 2008 have to date raised more than £1,200 for the Save the Machynlleth Clock Appeal and the Wales Air Ambulance.

The attractive new design is a montage of features and views that can be seen from the train journey on the Cambrian Coast Line. The A2 posters are available for a minimum donation of £5 each from Machynlleth and Aberystwyth Railway Stations and at the Tourist Information Centre located on Barmouth Station.

Commenting on the initiative Ms Davidson said: *"I would strongly encourage people to use this wonderful railway rather than the car to see the Cambrian Coast and bring down their carbon footprint. I hope initiatives like this will help fill the trains, not only cutting carbon emissions but providing a welcome boost to the tourism industry in Wales."* *"I am also pleased that this initiative is raising funds for local charities."*

For further information on the Cambrian Lines visit: www.thecambrianline.co.uk

The view from Milepost 62 with Brigadier John Faviell

It has been brought to my attention that a number of themes talked about in this column in previous issues have come to pass!

Under the heading “recession induced stupidity” we have the SuperExpress train – a technically inept, not go anywhere, confused abortion that should not be built. However somewhere in the Ministerial brief was the totally unsubstantiated and geographically non exact claim of creating or safeguarding 12,500 jobs. Queue the Department for Transport jumping up and down pretending they’ve procured a high speed train and saved the British economy from recession! High speed trains for high speed lines please. Existing 125mph maximum main lines need a modern BR MK 3 Coach and an electric locomotive for under the wires and a diesel one for off them. SuperExpress will not be coming to a station near us. Banzai all the way to the annual profit statement and two fingers once more to the long suffering travelling public and taxpayer – even the glossy artists’ impressions show that the seats don’t line up with the windows!

And guess who’s been caught red handed cooking the cost benefit analysis books? Such was the desperation to “prove” the case for the third runway at Heathrow that the made up environmental impact assessment on “green planes” was soon disproved rather embarrassingly by another government department.

No I won’t be asking for a bonus as it’s the day job to get things right. I well recall the poor chap allocated to mind me on a trip to the Soviet Union – imagine my delight as I saw working steam locomotives in the early 1980’s! Having bunked many a UK steam shed in my youth the KGB and the Red Army weren’t going to stop me getting a closer look. The chap was rather likeable and affable and pleaded with me not to cause trouble fearing the Gulag for himself and family or worse if I was caught. Now that’s real pressure just to do the day job right not expect ridiculous reward regardless of performance level.

Which brings me to Arriva. Apparently there’s been some champagne corks popping in Sunderland at the £30 million plus profit their UK rail division made in 2008. I doubt anyone travelling on the truncated, overcrowded, high fare Cross Country network will think the operator has anything to congratulate themselves about. This year’s fare rises were seen as a step too far that even the national media got. Indeed with the Passenger Focus report stating that we officially have the highest fares in Europe the TOC’s and DaFT just got away without being made Public Enemy No 1 by the greedy bankers. They’re Public Enemy No 2. BR’s operations in Wales and the Borders and its Cross Country network in no way consumed the level of subsidy that Arriva got in 2008 which was over £400 million. The only possible way you could justify this massive increase in public spending which has allowed the profits going to private companies would be if the level of service provided was infinitely better than what BR served up and the railway massively expanded. Let’s not pretend for a second it has.

It’s no more right that bankers are rewarded for losing massive sums of money and plunging the world economy into recession than TOC’s are allowed to make a profit on the back of massively increased Government subsidy, the highest fares in Europe that keep going up for an overcrowded and all too often sub-standard product. Still if the original privatisation model had come off and premiums from profit making TOC’s covered the subsidy to loss making ones no one would complain too much. But of course that hasn’t happened. Guess where the clown that designed rail privatisation- Sir Steve Robson - turned up: As a non executive director of the company that’s made the largest loss in UK corporate history the Royal Bank of Scotland. This just goes to show that the best of the best are not at the top of civil service or in the boardroom at all.

Back in the Soviet Union in the early 80's readers will be pleased to hear that my affable Soviet whom I did not embarrass was replaced by a right miserable little communist apparatchik. We had moved on by then and I only found an electric shunting locomotive that night and its crew who readily shared a bottle of vodka with me! But the right person carried the can for once.....

Three Cocks Cottage
March 2009

Aberdyfi gets the hump?

This solution could be a glass fibre and plastic ramp, designed to give access to the two central doors of a two car 158 unit. Costed at £60,000, it could be in place in the autumn. However, other costings suggest upwards of £250,000. The new hump design can be set to any desired height in the factory, and comes in sections that allow it to be made to almost any length.

Announcing the consultation programme for Aberdyfi, Wales' Minister for Economy and Transport, Ieuan Wyn Jones said: "The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to improving the quality of stations and platforms across Wales. "So I am delighted to announce that subject to further consultation this exciting project at Aberdyfi will proceed so quickly. I pay tribute to Network Rail and Arriva Trains Wales for reacting so quickly to my initiative on this."



The crossing at Caersws now has lifting barriers. Together with them is a new, well-fenced and tortuous entrance to the station, round the near barrier. Photograph: Peter Compton.

Shrewsbury to London services

Everyone wants to run the service but who is really providing the best deal for Mid Wales passengers?

Wrexham and Shropshire, Arriva Trains Wales and now Virgin Trains were all wanting to run a direct service between the county town of Shropshire and London. BR withdrew services in 1992 under pressure for InterCity to be "profitable" and operational convenience reasons. So how do the three private operators stack up against each other and with how it was done in steam days?

Here's what Mondays to Fridays could have looked like in December 2009 had not Virgin got withdrawn their proposal. We have put in current Wrexham and Shropshire times and the proposed times of the newcomers. Through trains in bold, connecting services to Aberystwyth in italics.

	WS	V	AW	WS	AW	WS	V	V	WS
Aberystwyth	-	-	0530	<i>0530</i>	0730	<i>0930</i>	0930	1130	1330
Shrewsbury arr	-	-	0725	<i>0725</i>	0925	<i>1125</i>	1125	1325	1525
Shrewsbury dep	0552	0635	0730	0807	0930	1207	1325	1425	1607
London arr	0857	0932	1055	1123	1249	1523	1638	1724	1922

	WS	V	V	AW	WS	AW	WS	V	WS
London	0645	1033	1110	1215	1217	1515	1633	1746	2003
Shrewsbury arr	0958	1320	1420	1520	1532	1820	1934	2030	2312
Shrewsbury dep	<i>1127</i>	<i>1327</i>	<i>1527</i>	<i>1527</i>	<i>1727</i>	<i>1827</i>	<i>2143</i>	<i>2143</i>	-
Aberystwyth	<i>1326</i>	<i>1526</i>	<i>1726</i>	<i>1726</i>	<i>1926</i>	<i>2026</i>	<i>2342</i>	<i>2342</i>	-

Clearly apart from direct ATW services the connections to the Cambrian would be downright useless with the exception of 1 Virgin service providing a 7 minute wait heading towards Aberystwyth. Interchangeable tickets (if the timings were any use) would also be a problem.

Here's how the GWR did it in the summer of 1932 from Paddington. Mondays to Fridays shown, the Cambrian Coast Express was a summer Saturdays only creature in 1932.

London	0130	0855 (1)	0910	1110 (2)	1410 (2)	1610	1810	1910	2125 (1)
Shrewsbury arr	0731	-	1219	1415	1721	1919	2124	2250	-
Shrewsbury dep	0756	-	1427	1427	1730	1935	2138	-	-
Aberystwyth	<i>1137</i>	<i>1633</i>	<i>1705</i>	<i>1705</i>	<i>2050</i>	<i>2120 (3)</i>	<i>2231 (4)</i>	-	<i>0804</i>

(1) via Carmarthen (2) Through Carriages (3) arrival at Llanidloes (4) arrival at Welshpool.

Aberystwyth	<i>0645</i> (1)	-	-	<i>0730</i> (3)	<i>0750</i>	1015 (2)	-	1255 (2)	<i>1430</i> (4)	<i>1710</i> (1)	1810
Shrewsbury arr	-	-	-	<i>0950</i>	<i>1115</i>	1318	-	1605	-	-	2136
Shrewsbury dep	-	0740	0840	1053	1125	1343	1405	1635	1826	-	2155
London arr	1510	1100	1205	1400	1620	1705	1800	2005	2205	<i>0325</i>	0410

(1) via Carmarthen (2) Through Carriages (3) departure from Llanidloes (4) via Oswestry & Gobowen.

As well as being able to get to Aberystwyth via Carmarthen and overnight trains the other stand out feature is the journey times between Shrewsbury and London. 3hrs and 7





minutes being the quickest time clearly steam traction via the old Great Western main line through Birmingham Snow Hill is competitive with modern units and routes though there is a noticeable speed up west of Shrewsbury. The modern service caters for earlier arrivals into London whereas only 1 service in 1932 was pre midday unless you travelled overnight. In 2009 4 are on offer. Whilst not clock face the 1932 options are more evenly spread throughout the day than the bunched up modern offerings.

Readers will also note that in 1932 nearly all the services seem strangely to connect with each other and of course they actually ran! Is this the primary difference between a Railway and a Train Operating Company or Open Access Operator?

In 1932 the through carriages from Aberystwyth were added or detached from larger express trains carrying more coaches and a dining car on the Paddington to Birkenhead mainline. The ATW version sees formation length shrinking and onward journey to London at best accompanied by a trolley. In fact a GWR express could leave Birkenhead with just 3 coaches and grow to 12 or 13 by Wolverhampton catering for demand by adding/detaching coaches.

Chiltern Railways have announced their own funded Evergreen 3 project which will see line speed raised and Birmingham to Marylebone times reduced to 100 minutes by 2013. What chance a new chord from the Stourbridge line to the Soho line allowing through running to Shrewsbury?

New Walks pamphlets

<p>Cambrian Railway No.8 Newmarket - Shrewsbury Distance: 14.25 miles Type: Moderate Time: 5 – 8 hours</p>	
<p>Cambrian Railway No.7 Aberdovey - Tywyn Distance: 10 miles Type: Challenging Time: 4 – 7 hours</p>	
<p>Cambrian Railway No.6 Llanaber - Barmouth Distance: 3.25 miles Type: Moderate Time: 1.5 – 3 hours</p>	
<p>Cambrian Railway No.5 Dyffryn Ardudwy - Talybont Distance: 3.75 miles Type: Easy Time: 1.5 – 3 hours</p>	

These four new walks pamphlets have just been produced by Cambrian Railways Partnership. They are available free from manned stations and local tourist information centres.

No.8 is the longest walk, almost entirely along the Montgomeryshire Canal towpath, and naturally almost level. As the pamphlet indicates, the walk can be shortened by using the local bus service between Newtown and Welshpool. This is not possible on No.7, which includes over 1800 feet of climbing (the pamphlets use no metric scales). Reflecting the closer spacing of stations and halts on the Coast Line, Nos.5 and 6 are shorter.

Cambrian Freight

Some history and musings by Adrian Bailey

Most people think it's nothing short of a national scandal that so little freight is moved by rail these days, especially given that the road haulage industry does not pay for any of its external costs such as pollution, congestion and environmental damage. In fact the recent TraCC submission for its Regional Transport Plan consisted mostly of funds to catch up on a backlog of road maintenance, no doubt caused by too many heavy Lorries pounding the roads of Mid Wales, thereby raising questions about covering internal costs. The alleged high cost of rural railways are sounded off about at about 5 year intervals no doubt there wouldn't be such a huge thumb suck if rural railways were being used to their full potential. It may come as a surprise to some but railways were actually conceived and designed to move everything around the countryside, not just the fabled fresh air.

In 2005 there was a trial of a new type of freight train using a pair of Multi Purpose Vehicles (a freight multiple unit) with wagons in between them carrying timber from Aberystwyth to Chirk. Despite positive noises nothing further has developed, and finding any plausible reason why has proved impossible. The last freight flow on the Cambrian was oil tanks from the Shell depot in Aberystwyth to/from Stanlow in Cheshire. This was a once a week working on a Wednesday and ceased in 1993. There were protests about this, and the number of lorries that would be put on unsuitable roads (see TraCC RTP). Photographers and the curious who watched the last departure were treated to Stasi-like observation, and were photographed by shadowy figures that ran away when challenged. Clearly trying to save money and the environment was viewed as a crime in the early 1990's! A section of the main line between Oswestry and Llynclys Jnc remained opened until the early 90's also allowing access to Blodwell Quarries. This has remained, albeit overgrown and is now subject to reopening by preservationists. A brief attempt at moving timber from Welshpool happened in 1985; before that we must go back to 1982 when regular daily freight was scheduled. Mail had been carried courtesy of a very early morning train from Shrewsbury that also carried passengers, and an early evening departure traditionally carried mail eastwards as well as passengers. This was withdrawn in 1989. In later years it had been an ordinary DMU that connected with mail trains at Shrewsbury. The UP & DOWN mail remained one of the last steam hauled turns until March 1967, and into the early 1970's a diesel locomotive hauled an Aberystwyth portion of a mail train heading for York that joined up with coaches from other parts of Wales at Shrewsbury.

The closure of the Barmouth Bridge in 1980 dealt a death blow to much of the remaining freight on the Cambrian. The primary source was the ICI works at Penryn-deudraeth with explosives and chemicals carried from there; this flow transferred to the Conwy Valley until it ceased. Nominally Pwllheli, Porthmadog, Tywyn, Machynlleth, Aberystwyth Newtown and Welshpool had operational good yards. Apart from the oil to Aberystwyth what little traffic that remained consisted mainly of domestic coal whose use was in decline. The loss of traffic North of Tywyn and the recession were used to rationalise the Cambrian further. Casualties at the same time in addition to freight facilities were Cemmaes Road loop, Aberystwyth signal Box and the reduction in operational platforms from three to one at Aberystwyth station. Cement traffic for the building of Clywedog Dam ensured the line to Llandiloes lasted into 1967, nearly 5 years after passenger services and the line southward had gone. Freight facilities had been rationalised in the early 1960's and many of the village stations had their freight facilities

withdrawn 12 or 18 months before passenger closure in June 1965. History books tell us that freight was running on the Llanidloes and Newtown Railway in April 1859 months before the first passenger train.

Whereas these days everything has to enter and leave via Shrewsbury, traffic to the Cambrian could attain egress via several routes back in the summer 1904. The working timetable shows that the traffic was worked from the boundaries of the Cambrian Railways system. The DOWN mail started from Whitchurch at 0225 arriving Aberystwyth at 0620, the UP working departing Aberystwyth at 1825 arriving Whitchurch at 2225. Connections were made and coaches added/detached at Machynlleth and Moat Lane Jct. Several passenger trains carried horse boxes, and of course parcels traffic could be carried in the Guard's van of any train. The busiest section for goods traffic was between Welshpool and Moat Lane Jct. with no fewer than six workings in the DOWN direction - three of which started running by 0600. A similar number worked in the UP direction with three workings after 1700. Origin and end points varied as did calling points, the smaller village stations usually just saw two goods trains per day. Around half the services started at Welshpool where wagons from Shrewsbury were transferred between companies. Today we talk of a 24hr society but there was only an hour and three quarters at Oswestry between the last freight from Aberystwyth arriving and the morning mail from Whitchurch. A DOWN freight left Moat Lane Jct. at 2145 for Brecon arriving at 0250: one of four freights to Llanidloes, three of which went further south. The Machynlleth to Barmouth section of the Coast line, and the Machynlleth to Aberystwyth section could only muster three freight workings a day. However freight could arrive from alternative directions for Aberystwyth and communities further up the coast.

Working timetables for 1938 & 1950 show that Newtown still had a similar pattern of service, with early morning mail and freight trains heading westward and another spurt of freight trains in the evening and mail trains timed to leave Aberystwyth just after 1800. Despite becoming part of the GWR in 1922 the Cambrian was still mainly run, as far as freight was concerned, along old lines with no services extending beyond ex Cambrian metals, though the pattern of trains suggest there may have been some attempt to tranship freight via Oswestry with nearly all trains starting/ending there. A feature of operations at Newtown in the 1950's was a well worn pattern of the engine from the morning school train which arrived from Machynlleth at 0851 shunting Newtown yards until lunchtime, then travelling a few miles down the line to Moat Lane Junction or the Bridge Dept in Caersws to shunt as required before returning to lead the school train back to Machynlleth at 1635. Newtown handled around 35,000 tons per annum, or 10 loaded wagons per day, with all sorts of goods with a station staff of around 35 needed as well as several cats to control vermin. In 1933 51,000 parcels were dispatched. In 1933 the figures for Aberystwyth seem phenomenal by today's standards. 117,259 parcels forwarded, c. 40,000 tons of goods plus over 4,200 trucks of livestock. Llanbrynmair by contrast handled c. 2,500 parcels, c. 4,500 tons of goods and just 82 trucks of livestock in the same year.

1979 was the last full year when you could describe the Cambrian as being a true mixed traffic railway. The mail train (DMU) left Shrewsbury at 0415 having connected with an overnight service from York arriving Aberystwyth at 0642. The next service was the daily freight train leaving Cotton Hill yard Shrewsbury at 0425. 15 minutes were allowed at Welshpool, 48 at Newtown arriving Machynlleth at 0739. On Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays it went to Aberystwyth leaving Machynlleth at 0825 arriving at 0921. It left Aberystwyth at 1105 reversing at Dovey Junction and went to Porthmadog. This train needed an air brake for delivering the Chemicals traffic to Penrynudraeth. On Tuesday and Wednesday it went straight up the coast leaving Machynlleth at 0905.

On a Tuesday it made it all the way to Pwllheli stopping at Porthmadog on Wednesday. On the Wednesday it had a an air brake on its return to Bescot carrying explosives/empty chemical vans arriving Sutton Bridge Jct. at 1753. The rest of the week it stayed later arriving Sutton Bridge Jct. at 1953. At 1000 a Diesel Parcel Unit (DPU) left Shrewsbury bound for Newtown arriving 1048 and having unloaded returned catalogue parcels for Kay & Co in the Pryce Jones building, it ran back empty at 1055. The departure from Aberystwyth at 1900 joined up with a DMU from Pwllheli (1720) at Machynlleth and carried mail to Shrewsbury, the Pwllheli portion continuing to Crewe Monday to Thursday. On Saturday there was no freight or parcels traffic but in the summer the morning mail had super power as the locomotives and stock for the 1010 Aberystwyth to Euston formed the working.

What chances of freight returning? A collective change in UK transport policy is truly needed. There has been talk of timber or bespoke traffic such as supermarket containers as seen on the Far North line in Scotland. Perhaps European legislation and the construction of high speed lines will encourage a return to the UK thinking rail freight. The space freed on our current main lines by long distance passenger trains going high speed will act as a catalyst, and once the culture is developed it will permeate the rest of the UK. Freight Multiple Units can load/unload direct onto existing platforms at stations making the recreation of bespoke facilities less necessary. Though what do you do at Welshpool with goods on the Island platform and getting them away from there? [*The Brigadier has suggested miscreant teenagers performing community service forming a human chain across the bridge he says there's enough of them!*]

Heritage line for Oswestry

The Cambrian Railways Trust and the Cambrian Railways Society have announced an agreement for the lease has been signed with Shropshire County Council for the eight miles of line between Gobowen and Blodwel.

Henry Thomas, the Trust spokesman, says: 'At a time when many local businesses are struggling, the heritage railway will bring many new opportunities and can play an important role in improving the town's fortunes. The Trust's short line at Llyncllys will again see steam trains starting this Easter, and work is already in hand to secure funding for extending these trains into Oswestry by 2012. At the same time society volunteers plan to run their trains from Llyncllys Junction towards Blodwel, and links will be improved to the Montgomery Canal, the Llanymynech Heritage Area, and other nearby attractions. The county council also plans to construct a cycleway and footpath alongside parts of the railway track.'

Ken Owen, Society Vice Chairman, says they would be working alongside each other as the 'Cambrian Heritage Railways'. He added: 'The completion date for the deal will be April 1.'

(From the *Shropshire Star*)

150 years of the railway at Newtown

A plaque will be unveiled at Newtown station, to commemorate 150 years of the railway there, at 11am on Tuesday 9th June. There will also be a musical performance (by an accordionist!), linked to the Gregynog Festival, between 10.00 and 11.00 am. It is hoped to get as many people there as possible to enjoy the music, some welsh cakes / bara brith and a cup of tea to note the 150 years and promote the railway in general.

So if you can, come to this event.

Gerwyn Jones
Cambrian Railways Partnership

Websites

Our website <http://sarpa.info> **Webmaster Angus Eichoff**

Website host is object4.net

Other sites of interest:

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

Wrexham and Shropshire company

www.wrexhamandshropshire.co.uk/index.html

North Wales Coast Railway

<http://www.nwrail.org.uk/>

Circular tour of North Wales by rail

<http://www.penmorfa.com/Cambrian/>

SARPA Meeting dates and venues 2009

May	Tuesday 5th	1830	Newtown	Bell Hotel
June	Saturday 6th	1200	Borth	Sea Horse Inn
Mark Williams MP for Ceredigion will attend this meeting.				
July	Tuesday 7th	1830	Shrewsbury	Ye Olde Bucks Head inn
October: AGM	Saturday 10th	1230	Newtown	Montgomery Club Broad Street

Other dates to be announced.

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. Tel. 01686 621966
E-mail newtownstation@btclick.com

The Association of Train Operating Companies:

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

Wrexham and Shropshire: Great Central House, Marylebone Station, Melcombe Place, London NW1 1JJ. Tel. 0845 260 5233

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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