

Strewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association		Newsletter No. 52 November 2010
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Northbound Cambrian at Barmouth, 30th August 2010. Photo: Richard Bull

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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 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 2011) £7.00 per annum for individuals and for organisations. Please make any cheques payable to SARPA. Donations are of course welcome.

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

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

Please send cheques, payable to SARPA, to:
SARPA Membership c/o Gareth Marston, 64 Churchill Drive, Barnfields, Newtown,
Powys SY16 2LH.

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

Secretary and Treasurer

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

Early newsletters: we still need a copy of No. 11.

Chairman's Message

In August I had an experience new to me: twice in fact being left behind on the platform as the train I was intending to catch was too full. The first occasion was at Newport on Thursday 19th. I was intending to catch the 1509 ATW service to Manchester. It appeared on time but only formed of a 2 Car Class 175. There was a festival on in Crickhowell and Newport had a large number of festival goers all with rucksacks changing trains for Abergavenny. I didn't get on along with about 30 other people and the train left 12 minutes late packed to the gunwhales. I managed to squeeze on the following 1534 to Holyhead but it was also delayed due to overcrowding and a freight train was then pathed in front of it, meaning I missed my connection at Shrewsbury and had a two hour wait. The following Wednesday (25th) whilst on holiday with my family in Devon we found we couldn't get on the 1721 FGW service from Exeter Central to Paignton – a 2 Car Class 142 Pacer. Fortunately only 24 minutes elapsed till the next train formed of an on loan ATW 150/2, which clearly cannot be surplus to requirements in Wales and the Borders! The next day we stood all the way from Teignmouth to Torquay along with a round another 40-50 people on the 1233 FGW service, again a 2 Car Class 142 Pacer. On our return I noted the Shropshire Star had a letter about gross overcrowding on the ATW 1609 Birmingham International to Aberystwyth on Saturday 28th. When will there be a solution?

The Comprehensive Spending Review provided no instant positive answers. The plan to make Europe's most expensive rail fares even more expensive will not take place till 2012 and opinion polling on the spending review has shown this to be the most unpopular of all the cuts associated decisions. We're told the rises will pay for improvements like extra carriages – ex-Chancellor Alastair Darling used the same words in 2003 in a response to fare increases then. It looks like we're all going to be in an overcrowded train together - if we haven't been left on the platform that is - for some years to come. Will magic longer franchises rescue the day? The current fashionable argument says that operators will invest in things like more carriages if they have a longer franchise term –but at what point does the operator feel disinclined to invest due to diminishing length of return period? Say they order some carriages at the start but after a few years there's demand for more, will they order any or claim they're disincentivised with only 10 years on the franchise agreement left? Franchising throws up more questions that it ever answers. On current form it will be 2018 before any more carriages are ordered for the Wales and Borders franchise: we could have come out of this recession had a brief boom and gone back into another one by then, when the cry will be there's no money. A far better system is needed.

On November 17 the WAG will announce how it will manage the 7.5% cut in its budget. Undoubtedly capital spending will take the biggest hit – maybe up to 40% of the capital investment budget will go, and that mainly means road schemes given the current transport policies. The Welsh nation is unfortunately parochial and localist at the best of times, and no doubt a road scheme going ahead in one part of the country will cause mass gnashing of teeth in others, where local representatives will scream blue murder about the scheme that's "vital to their local economy" not going ahead. A reduced handful of road schemes and a redrawn Trunk Roads Forward programme are really not going to do much for the nation's transport. Perhaps there should be a reassessment of the National Transport Plan that takes into account that there **will be** money to make a difference to one mode across all Wales for the next four years, but not money to do anything other than some localised schemes for roads which will inevitably be even fewer once the road construction industries

notorious cost overruns kick in. A diversion of the remaining post cuts transport funds from roads into the railways would unleash a genuine national investment programme, which could show dividends in all Unitary Authority areas – all UA's have a railway line even if not all towns are on the network. All Wales would benefit and we would be doing something different and positive to less of the same. More rolling stock is the obvious answer - a pan Wales solution to transport improvements in a time of austerity.

**Gareth Marston
Newtown October 2010**

PS - let you in on little secret: the cost of the rural railways in Wales only amounts to c0.4% of the UK rail budget. Yes just 0.4% - less than half of one percent.



Jewish return at Aber on Monday 23rd August. The 1526 arrival 1209 ex INTL and 1530 departure was formed of a 4 car set. As you can see it was needed. Photo Gareth Marston

STOP PRESS COMPREHENSIVE SPENDING REVIEW

October 20th 2010

The early indications from London are that the easy option has been taken and that fare increases will hopefully cover for the decrease in budget and dampen down number travelling so passengers hopefully won't demand extra carriages.

Exact details on where the Transport budget cuts will fall will be announced in the following weeks.

News in brief

Aberystwyth

The Welsh Assembly Government has been criticised for saying one thing and doing another. Whilst paying lip service to improved public transport, a report in the Western Mail newspaper has pointed out that staff being relocated to the new WAG offices in Aberystwyth, Llandudno Junction and Merthyr Tydfil have been given incentives to drive to work in single occupancy cars by the structure of relocation compensation packages and provision of free secure parking. An unnamed source in a local authority said it was hard to take WAG seriously when it exhorted others to promote and use public transport when its own actions went in another direction.

Concerns have been raised about the accumulation of litter and growth of weeds around the buffer stops giving a poor first impression of the town for visitors.

“Like the last helicopter out of Saigon” – a description of the scene awaiting the 1526 arrival from Birmingham International one summer Saturday in August as hordes of passengers for the 1530 departure gathered round the doors.

Dovey Junction

A female Osprey bird of prey has nested for part of the summer in the man made structure easily visible from the train, however for the third year running no chicks have been born.

Newtown

The Café at the Caersws end of the UP platform has perhaps not surprisingly closed down. Nearly all the windows except those of Newtown Station Travel now have wooden boards covering them on the platform side.

The preferred route of Newtown Bypass will cross “under the Cambrian mainline east of the Dyffryn estate” WAG has announced. Officially they are sticking to the pre cuts National Transport Plan date of “by 2014” for construction to start. However no one takes the is date seriously, and no doubt the inevitable delay and postponement will be blamed on Westminster cuts by Plaid/Labour to embarrass the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in Montgomeryshire who have campaigned for the bypass to be built.

Caersws and Llanidloes Rd

The level crossings remain manually operated with the crossing keepers opening the control panel to the automatic barriers to activate the lowering and raising of the barriers. These should go fully automatic once ERTMS is implemented.

ERTMS

The latest rumours at the time of going to print are that ERTMS will go live between Pwllheli and Harlech during the October school half term and then on the rest of the Cambrian during the February half term holiday.

No.44871 was involved in ERTMS testing, on Sunday 1st August along the coast line between Mach and PMG [*Railway Herald* No.233]. For the steam service next year, it is reported that the train will have equipment in each end coach, with a cable connection to a monitor in the loco cab.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM was held at The Cambria, Pier St Aberystwyth on Saturday 8th October. The current committee were re elected en masse. A provisional meeting schedule for 2011 is printed in this newsletter. Subscriptions will remain at £7.00 for 2011. A number of non members attended, and questions were asked about Carno station reopening, the condition of toilets on trains and the hourly service.

SARPA people news

A quick reminder from the Chairman that he no longer commutes between Newtown and Machynlleth having taken a position in Newtown back in February 2009! However the new post allows him to travel by train for business more often.

Solihull member Ken Rushen is one of 27 Councillors from the seven metropolitan districts of the West Midlands elected onto the Transport Authority CENTRO. Ken is the **Lead Member for Rail and Metro**.

Welshpool member Vince Howells has been elected Chair of the civil service union PCS for Welsh Assembly Government members..

WAG and ATW in Class 158 refurbishment farce.

Detail of the WAG funded refurbishment has shown that the intention to keep the current number of seats, restore luggage capacity to pre ERTMS box capacity and cater for 2 wheelchair spaces to comply with modern DDA requirements will leave the units laid out in sub-optimal fashion. A quarter of the tables will disappear; there will be more airline seating and leg room will be comprised. Even worse it's emerged that the seating will not be aligned with windows.

We have written to WAG in protest and after receiving a lame reply trying to excuse the lack of thought, we have written in again reiterating the problems with the plan.

Freight

A new timber flow to Kronospan, near Chirk, commenced on the 11th August. The timber is loaded at Ribbleshead station, on the Settle and Carlisle line. Bogie KFA wagons are used, 16 being used on the first train. [*Railway Herald* No.234]

However, there is no sign of a flow from Aberystwyth, after the experimental flow in 2005.

Virgin Trains

Virgin Trains has been told that it has not been successful in its quest to extend its franchise by two years, and that it will expire as planned in 2012. The new franchise is expected to be an attraction for many of the current operators, and strong competition can be expected. [*Railway Herald* No.242]



The Talylyn Railway laid out the red carpet for SARPA on Saturday 4th September. Members held their monthly meeting in the conference room in the Narrow Gauge Museum, and then a reserved carriage was laid on for SARPA members and family on the 1350 departure from Tywyn Wharf. A grand day out was had by all though the triphome was ruined by some late running from Arriva Trains Wales.

Provisional SARPA Meeting Schedule for 2010-11

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

Tuesday December 7th	1900	Welshpool	Pinewood Tavern
Tuesday January 4th	1900	Newtown	Sportsman Severn St.
Tuesday February 2nd	1800	Shrewsbury	Hobbs Room Library
Saturday March 6th	1145	Aberystwyth	The Cambria Pier St
Tuesday April 5th	1915	Welshpool	Pinewood High St
Saturday May 7th	1145	Tywyn	Narrow Gauge Museum Wharf Station
Tuesday June 7th	1900	Newtown	Sportsman Severn St
Saturday July 2nd	1200	Borth	Railway Inn
Saturday August 6th	SARPA Summer Trip, likely to involve travel on 1 st UP train from Aberystwyth. Details nearer date.		
Tuesday September 7th	1900	Caersws	Caersws Village Club
Saturday October 8th	1130	Machynlleth	AGM Venue TBC
Tuesday November 1st	1800	Aberystwyth	Venue TBC
Tuesday December 6th	1900	Newtown	Sportsman Severn St.

Chairman's Travels - It can be done – Part 2

Watching a late running 1727 to Aberystwyth pull into Shrewsbury station one August weekday evening I spotted a white haired man with glasses I knew leaning over a table talking intently to an attractive girl in her early 20's. I banged on the window and once aboard went and sat down with him. The well known town councillor explained that he had been split up from his family on boarding due to "overcrowding" at New St and had been "helping" the young lady out as she along with many others had been totally confused, as the Aberystwyth train had disappeared off the indicators whilst they were waiting and had never been to Mid Wales before. I spotted his abandoned wife sitting at the other end of the carriage. Anyway he asked me where I had been that day and on hearing the story asked that I retell the tale like my article in Newsletter 47 last year showing that conducting business can be done by public transport.

I had been to Crumlin and Fleur De Lys that day in the South Wales valleys and neither place has a railway station anymore. Car- not on your nelly! I bought an off peak return to Cwmbran from Newtown (£32.30), took the 0625, changed at Shrewsbury to the 0719 to Cardiff but alighted at Pontypool & New Inn at 0846. The 3-car Class 175



was quieter than normal – school holidays and no students at Ludlow and Leominster. So far understandable, but how to get to Crumlin? Some research on the Internet indicated that Stagecoach ran an hourly bus service between Cwmbran and Blackwood which went through Crumlin. Not all bus stops are listed on internet timetables, only timing points: it would seem that there was a No.30 bus that came through New Inn village at around 0920 and that A Day Explorer ticket was available for £6.40. After alighting I went down the subway at the remains of Pontypool Rd Station which railway buffs will know was the junction for places like Usk, Raglan, Pontypool, Abersychan etc., and the GWR's Pontypool Rd to Neath service which ran east to west across the north to south valleys on some spectacular viaducts including Crumlin. No local bus information was to be found at the unstaffed station, I walked up the long driveway to the road above and on the bridge that crosses the railway and nearby A442 dual carriageway I found a plaque to the opening of the New Inn bypass in 1982 by then Secretary of State for Wales. Testament to the transport thinking orthodoxy of the time. More importantly there was a bus stop on either side - with information boards that were up to date. Powys CC take note!

In fact not only did the No.30 stop there but a number of other services meaning that there were roughly 4 buses an hour from the station into Pontypool itself. With no more trains scheduled before 0930 I jumped on the first bus that came along and into Pontypool itself, getting off at the bus station by the town hall next to the attractive Pontypool Park. All the stops had quality shelters and info on them telling you where buses went to from each stand, their route and indicating in minutes journey time. So plus marks to Stagecoach who monopolize services in this part of the world. Indeed there were quite a few services running to a range of destinations, including Express coaches to Newport & Cardiff. Pontypool (pop. c30,000 in 2001) is the largest town in Wales with no railway station, New Inn is a mile and a half a way from the town centre and the old trackbeds into the town are obliterated by the dual carriageway. Pontypool & New Inn has around 11 trains a day with a two hourly off peak service and a footfall less than Borth's! Clearly the populous don't railhead. I was one of three that got off the train and the only bus passenger.

After a short wait the No.30 caught up and off we went; most passengers were pensioners on free passes, a man got on in the village of Swffryd and asked for a return to Blackwood. My ticket was a bargain; his £5.90 return not! Crumlin is in the Ebbw valley but its station has not been reopened, and the hourly service from Cardiff goes through without stopping. Apparently the business case could not be made, but there is much anger in the valleys as the line has been a runaway success and other communities want in and a link to Newport. It's clear what they think of business case assumptions. After doing what I had to do in Crumlin I got back on the No.30 and a short trip via Newbridge station to Blackwood. I found a modern bus station with good information and a good reasonably priced café. Blackwood is about the size of Newtown and was on the LNWR Sirhowy Valley line. As well as good bus links to Newbridge station it also had direct buses to Ystrad Mynach on the Rhymney Valley line. The company I was going to visit had told me the bus links weren't good to Fleur De Lys and they'd pick me up, but as I was running slightly early I noticed there was in fact a bus every 15 minutes and decided to take it. Local buses do go round the houses literally and the No.20 to Bargoed was no exception, but was very busy. A man around my age got on and was regaling how he had been to an incapacity benefit assessment and what he'd told them. Clearly he was chuffed as he thought he'd got away with it – he demonstrated his still hand which had been shaking uncontrollably for the Doctors earlier for everyone's benefit, until he realized a man with suit was sitting nearby – me! Indeed I had a few funny looks that day all round, perhaps people wearing suits on Valleys' buses were checking on their benefit claims or maybe they were rare. He was "Nipper Roy's" son from New Tredegar for reference. The lady behind me said that she could see why he was so cheeky as he was "Nipper Roy's" son - clearly a local character!

I was deposited on the High St at Fleur De Lys, and after my work was done I was offered a lift – I opted to go to Pengam on the Rhymney line and get the train into Cardiff as I was going to be hard pushed to pick up the train at Pontypool & New Inn or Cwmbran to get back to Shrewsbury in time for the 1727 to Newtown. I got talking about trains and was shown the remains of Fleur De Lys station which was on the Brecon & Merthyr Railway's route between Brecon and Newport on the east bank of the Rhymney River. I was soon at Pengam on the west bank and was told that the morning commuter trains to Cardiff were packed out as were trains on match day when Wales play. The service at Pengam was every 15 minutes with trains running between Rhymney/Bargoed and Penarth. Around two thirds of the trains I crossed were 2 car 150/2 Sprinters, the others 4-car sets of paired up Class 142/143 pacers. The conductor didn't bother with my half of the 4 coach train as we went down the valley via Caerphilly; I had to go to the Excess Fares window in the tunnel at Central station. I paid £8.30 for the trip between Pengam and Cwmbran via Cardiff. I caught the 1450 from Cardiff and got a table seat which had the other 3 seats occupied. It was only a 2-Car Class 175 heading for Manchester. Some people got on at Cwmbran, and I noticed they stood.

In conclusion it can be done. You have to make the effort but as always the public transport turns out to be better than most people's perception of it, though there is scope for improvement. Here's a challenge with such a large town coughing out very few rail passengers: how do we get Pontypool people on the train again? In the brave new world of franchise reform perhaps the right sort of operator will come along with a big balance sheet for investment and good customer service skills.

Clearly this was all a diversionary tactic from Councillor for fear that the public would get to hear about the young lady. Happily I saw him with his wife sitting next to him at Aberdyfi the next week.

The engineering marvel that was the Crumlin viaduct, has its own website: <http://www.crumlinviaduct.co.uk>

Aberystwyth arrivals and departures summer 1951

By Gareth Marston

From British Railways Passenger Services London (Paddington) Bristol & West of England, South & North Wales, Birmingham, Gloucester, Worcester, West Midlands (including Suburban services). Saturdays June 18th to September 23rd Inclusive.

Tables 146, 184 & 189 and Through Services Summary Tables 9, 25 & 39
A snip at One Shilling!

The railway in 1951 had been nationalised just over some three years previously, but in essence it would have been the GWR of the immediate pre war years set in aspic. The recession of the 1930's had seen little investment and the war killed that off, with the government happy to let the railways shoulder the war burden without proper compensation. The fledging nationalised industry had soon been handed over to control of a non-believing Conservative government in 1950, who actually polled fewer of the votes than Labour with the help of road lobby cash. Standards, the Modernisation plan, diesels and the Indian summer of British Steam were still a couple of years off. Beeching was still playing with his chemistry set and faulty abacus at ICI. Foreign holidays were not really on anyone's agenda and some items were still rationed.

Aberystwyth station itself had been rebuilt by the GWR in 1926, and the need for five platforms are apparent in the list of arrivals and departures below. The railway had a large fleet of locomotive hauled rolling stock in abundance all steam hauled. A small number of Manor Class 4-6-0 locomotives built by the GWR in 1938 were the premier locomotives to be seen on the line. Aberystwyth's 1925-built locomotive shed itself was a sub shed of Machynlleth and in 1947 had 16 locomotives allocated to it:

2 78xx class Manors, 6 90xx Duke and Dukedog 4-4-0 Victorian and rebuilt Victorian passenger locomotives, 5 1930's built 0-6-0 Goods engines of the 22XX class, 2 2-6-2 45xx mixed traffic tank locomotives and a solitary 0-6-0 74xx class Pannier tank which must have been the station pilot.

Machynlleth and Oswestry sheds had similar types of allocation and their locos would work through to Aberystwyth. To the south Carmarthen had a small fleet of mixed traffic Churchward 2-6-0 43xx class locomotives which would have been prime candidates to work northward. The use of these engines on through trains from the midlands is well recorded. Most trains of any length would have been double headed for part if not all their journey.

Notes.

Services in bold had a limited calling pattern.

Non bold were all station services. Remember there are 20 closed stations between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury that were open then!

© denotes connection of less than 40 mins to/from Coast line at Dovey Junction.

Arrivals	(15)	Departures	(17)
		0655 to Carmarthen	
0707 from Whitchurch & Shrewsbury (Mail and passenger train)		0710 to Shrewsbury ©	
0845 from Carmarthen (Mail and passenger train)			
0857 from Machynlleth ©		0910 to Carmarthen	
		0930 to London Paddington (Cambrian Coast Express including Restaurant Car)	
		1000 to Shrewsbury ©	
		1100 to Manchester (London Rd)	
1145 from Oswestry & Shrewsbury ©		1200 to Shrewsbury	
		1210 to Carmarthen	
		1230 to Birmingham Snow Hill	
1230 from Birmingham Snow Hill		1250 to Crewe and Shrewsbury ©	
1311 from Birmingham Snow Hill ©			
1333 from Carmarthen			
1411 from Oswestry & Shrewsbury ©		1420 to Birmingham Snow Hill	
		1430 to Oswestry ©	
1615 from Manchester (London Rd)		1650 to Machynlleth ©	
1715 from London Paddington (Cambrian Coast Express including Restaurant Car)		1720 to Carmarthen (Mail and passenger train)	
1732 from Machynlleth ©			
1754 from Carmarthen		1800 to Whitchurch & Shrewsbury (Mail and passenger train) ©	
1925 from Shrewsbury ©		2100 to Machynlleth	
2050 from Carmarthen		2115 to Lampeter	
2142 from Shrewsbury ©			

The timetable was of course organised around the British summer holiday for a 14 week burst: families would arrive on a Saturday afternoon stay a week and leave on the following Saturday morning - most being from the midlands, as now. Wolverhampton and Dudley brewers had taken over many of the towns drinking establishments following the demise of the local Roberts brewery before the war. The hard working factory man and his family from the midlands would find familiar products on the mid Wales coast!

None of the through holiday trains stopped at Shrewsbury. The 2 trains to Birmingham Snow Hill and the Cambrian Coast Express took the Abbey curve, the Manchester train ran via Oswestry and Whitchurch. All stopped at Borth, Machynlleth, Newtown and Welshpool (sounds familiar). The Birmingham trains did not stop at Dovey Junction. Moat Lane Junction was stopped at by the DOWN Manchester service and the first UP Birmingham. The 1250 from Aberystwyth called at Borth, Dovey Junction, Machynlleth, Moat Lane Junction, Newtown, Montgomery and Welshpool, the Crewe portion calling at Four Crosses, Llanymynach, Oswestry and then all stations to Whitchurch, the Shrewsbury portion calling all stations from Welshpool to Shrewsbury.

The Snow Hill trains would have been the longest formations as they operated just between Aberystwyth and Snow Hill, photographs would indicate that 10 plus coaches were the norm. The London and Manchester trains being trains that split/joined at Dovey Junction with portions going up the coast to Pwllheli and Barmouth respectively would have been smaller. The Carmarthen services and the locals to Machynlleth would be unlikely to be anything more than 2 or 3 coaches in length. The longer distance stoppers on the mainline would have been around 6 coaches in length, especially those that split/joined at Welshpool, 6 being the maximum a Duke or Dukedog could take up Talerddig without assistance.

Two bursts of activity around lunchtime and early evening stand out. If you turned up at 1140 and stayed two hours you'd see no fewer than 4 arrivals and 4 departures. These in all probability would have been separate formations unlike today when the same stock forms the next working back. There would have been 3 of the Snow Hill trains: 2 arrivals and 1 departure. There might have been up to 50 separate carriages and over 10 different locomotives to see. In 2010 the same solitary 2 car Class 158 DMU would arrive and depart in the same timeframe. If you came back at 1600 and stayed till 1800 you would see the arrival of the through trains from Manchester and the Cambrian Coast Express, some local and Carmarthen workings plus the departure of the evening mail train. Of the 5 platforms only 2 had locomotive release facilities and these were used as the main arrival platforms. The remaining platform in use today is the old Platform 3 which was the main line arrival platform. Adjacent to it and now used by the Vale of Rheidol Railway since the late 1960's was Platform 2 this was used mainly for arrivals from Carmarthen, though this could also be accessed from the mainline. The most southerly Platform 1 was for Carmarthen departures. Platform 4 where the furniture store is now was the main departure platform; this was lost in 1982 with number 5 on the other side of the island normally used to house the morning mail train stock until its early evening departure. This platform survived into the 1990's and was still used for the Sunday Cambrian Coast Express departure in the late 1980's.

The paucity of workings on the Carmarthen line sticks out, as does the non clockface nature of the operations with a mix of local and long distance limited stop trains accommodated plus mail trains as of course does the amount of accommodation for passengers. I calculate there would have been three times as many seats per day from beyond Machynlleth as there are in 2010. The day trip market was not catered for at all, with the latest departure for beyond Machynlleth at 1800. However we must remember that journey times were considerably slower, Paddington was 6 hrs 40 mins away, Manchester London Rd 5hrs 41 mins, Birmingham Snow Hill 4 hrs 1min and even Shrewsbury 3hrs 20 mins. Cardiff was 5 hrs 30 mins via Carmarthen. It is often pointed out how many more trains run on the rail network these days compared to bad old BR or the rose tinted nostalgia steam days showing us how good it is now. However it's clear that the overall number of services to Machynlleth and beyond are broadly the same now as they were 60 years ago. The same timetable showed 8 services running over the length of the Central Wales line as it was then known: the whole length between Shrewsbury and Swansea Victoria direct, compared to 4 on the Heart of Wales via Llanelli today. This higher traffic level may in part explain why it survived and the Carmarthen and Mid Wales lines didn't. There were 8 services between Moat Lane Junction and Llanidloes, but only 4 went further south with just 3 all the way to Brecon.

In conclusion the service provided for Aberystwyth in 1951 seems appropriate for the times, catering for mail traffic, a limited number of irregular all station trains and a number of longer limited

stop through services to where the holidaymakers came from. Is today's diet of a 2 car train every 2 hours as appropriate for the second decade of the 21st century?

The view from Milepost 62 with the Brigadier

In my youth before my army career my sister and I travelled down to stay with our paternal grandparents in Devon for a month every summer just after the war. The Atlantic Coast Express from Waterloo was used, which on a summer Saturday in the 1950's was worked as no fewer than four portions. Four 14/15 coach trains would depart from Waterloo to various parts of the South West in a space of 25 minutes! These would be subdivided at various points serving all sorts of destinations like Ilfracombe, Bideford, Plymouth, Bude, Padstow, Seaton, Sidmouth and Exmouth. We used the Exmouth/Sidmouth train as we were heading for Ottery St Marys. On weekdays the same destinations were served but by just 2 or 3 carriages splitting from one train - and remember they all joined up on the return trip! Imagine how confused some of today's travellers that can't cope with the train reversing at Shrewsbury and splitting/joining at Machynlleth would be!

Many a happy moment was spent in the small town of Ottery or in the fields nearby and going to the nearby beach at Sidmouth. When I got older I persuaded my grandparents I was trustworthy enough to explore further west on my own, by train of course. The old London and South Western network west of Exeter was known as the withered arm. I made it all the way to Padstow the once, just before going up to Sandhurst. The return was via Launceton and the GWR line to Lydford: somehow I fell asleep and found myself coming across Dartmoor rather than changing for the line through Tavistock to Plymouth. Near Yelverton a strange woman got on and in my youthful eagerness to get on with people I agreed to hold a package for her whilst she went to the toilet. She disappeared. The package turned out to contain a pregnant Siamese cat whose descendants have been in the family ever since. These lines in central and North Devon, North Cornwall and the branches to various south coast towns in East Devon and West Dorset were particularly hit hard by the Beeching axe as the LSWR main line west of Salisbury to Plymouth was declared "duplicate". The fact that it was the only line to many places was of course ignored, as it intersected the GWR at Plymouth and Exeter. Today Ottery St Marys has a population the same as Welshpool's, Sidmouth is half as big as Newtown again. If the branch had survived it would probably support an hourly service direct into Exeter, which is much larger than Shrewsbury, with a journey time of around 35 minutes. The parallel A3052 and A30 roads are clogged with traffic. Peak services would no doubt suffer from overcrowding. The Otters must roll their eyes at our stupidity.

It just goes to show how lucky we are in Mid Wales to have our Cambrian Main and Coast lines still intact. No doubt some pig ignorant fellow will think he or she is the new blue eyed boy and will have a go at closing them "to save lots of money" with the budget cuts due to come. However the Cambrian Coast Line Action Group's fight against closure in 1971 was a turning point in the attack on rural rail lines, and with a few regrettable exceptions the line in the sand was drawn. Let's recap on why they were successful. Essentially they managed to prove the one thing at that time that would stop closure - that there would be hardship caused. Usually a replacement bus service was trotted out as alleviating this factor but in the Machynlleth to Pwllheli lines case the presence of so many estuaries that only the railway crossed but not the road meant it was easy to show that the vastly increased road journey times would indeed cause hardship. This basic geographical fact has not altered in 40 years. Some people far away may have to find where the Cambrian Coast is on an Ordnance Survey map and learn the lesson again.

However it's not unique circumstances or fond childhood memories that mean that rural railways should be exempt from cuts. Of course as has been said many times the structure of rail privatisation wastes money hand over fist. One of BR's last investment schemes was to spend £33

million in 1992 on building 22 three car Class 159 DMU's for services between Waterloo and Exeter via Salisbury along the stamping ground of the old Atlantic Coast Express. To date South West Trains has paid something like £130 million in leasing charges for something BR already paid for. Many commentators believe today's railways could easily cost two thirds of what it does today, easily absorbing a 25% cut in Government subsidy. International comparison of infrastructure provision done by the Office of the Rail Regulator included looking at vertically integrated and state owned Irish Rail: Network Rail costs 40% more than International averages. You don't need to cut to save just be smart.

Contributory revenue is another big factor that needs to be understood. The loss of revenue from line closures was always far greater than that allocated to the line itself. Revenue marked off against other lines will be lost as passengers are lost to the railways altogether - I'm sorry they don't take the connecting high quality bus I'm afraid. For example of the fare from Newtown to London only £6.00 of it is allocated to our line, the other £50 elsewhere. Studies show that only about 10% of these passengers would continue to rail head. One of the big reasons the Beechings cuts didn't put the railways in the black again had a lot to do with the ignorance of contributory

revenue, and the fact that people didn't bus then train from closed lines. Hard lessons that a new generation of bean counters will have to be taught again.

In the last few years the changing pattern of post industrial society employment has favoured rail, where many more jobs are found in regional city (and significant town) centres where commuting by rail is increasingly seen as sane alternative to traffic jams. Market share continues to increase here. Attacking this would undermine regional economies. And of course the elephant in the grass that some people have not seen- oil. No it's not running out we: don't have to run around with our arms in the air screaming because our cars won't have any petrol to run. If the west had continued to be the only significant user of oil I'm sure the problem would still be decades off, but it hasn't, and the rest of the world wants to consume vast quantities of it, and the point where increasing demand will soon trigger rising prices we haven't dreamt of yet will be upon us soon. Good old fashioned economics - supply and demand from Adam Smith not bizarre money making scams from right wing think tanks! We haven't been taken out of our comfort zone yet. The day we are, those legacy Victorian rail lines will be looked on in a different light. The future is steel rails.

Three Cocks Cottage September 2010

Websites

Our website <http://sarpa.info>

Webmaster Angus Eickhoff. Website host is mid-wales.net

Other sites of interest:

A useful alternative to the National Rail Enquiries site
traintimes.org.uk/

Arriva Trains Wales www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/

National Rail Enquiries www.nationalrail.co.uk/

Train and Bus Information Midlands www.centro.org.uk/wwwroot/HomePage.asp

LondonMidland www.londonmidland.com/index.html
 Virgin Trains www.virgintrains.co.uk/default.aspx

Chiltern Railways www.chilternrailways.co.uk/

Network Rail www.networkrail.co.uk/

Railfuture/Railway Development Society www.railfuture.org.uk/

Cambrian Rail Partnership www.thecambrianline.co.uk/

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp) www.acorp.uk.com

Wrexham and Shropshire company www.wrexhamandshropshire.co.uk/index.html

North Wales Coast Railway www.nwrail.org.uk/

Circular tour of North Wales by rail www.penmorfa.com/Cambrian/

Ffestiniog Railway timetable www.ffestiniograilway.co.uk/timetable.htm

Vale of Rheidol Railway timetable www.rheidolrailway.co.uk/timetable.htm

Talylyn Railway timetable www.talylyn.co.uk/timetable/2009

Welshpool and Llanfair Railway timetable www.wllr.org.uk/timetable.htm

Welsh Highland Heritage Railway www.whr.co.uk/index.php?pid=51

Fairbourne Railway www.fairbournerrailway.com/index.htm

Rail Photographs by Richard Jones including many of the modern Cambrian scene:-
railphotos.demeseo.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

Network Rail:

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

Newtown Station Travel

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

The Association of Train Operating Companies:

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

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

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08457 48 49 50 (24hrs)

0845 60 40 500 (Welsh Language Service)

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For ticket reservations please call: 0870 9000 773

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