

<p>Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association</p>		<p>Newsletter No. 54 June 2011</p>
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The refurbished Class 158 - 158840 at Aberystwyth on its first run. Photo: Angus Eickhoff.

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This is the quarterly newsletter of the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passenger Association. Contributions are welcomed from members and non-members about the mid Wales rail scene.

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

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

Want to Join SARPA?

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

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

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

Please send cheques, payable to SARPA, to:

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

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

Secretary and Treasurer

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



Chairman's Message

One step forward - We had some positive news on Friday 15th April as the first refurbished Class 158 unit- with tables lining up with windows was launched at Aberystwyth. Long overdue, but the internal condition was much better, and on a personal note the increased leg room in the "airline" seats was most welcome though I'm not convinced the high seat backs are best for a scenic line, and the poor air con system has not been addressed. The ATW fleet should all be done in around a year. When the initial specification for the refurbishment came out we did kick up quite a fuss, as it turned out that many of the tables for a type of train to be used on a scenic line did not line up with the windows with views blocked. With the help of the now departed AM for Montgomeryshire Mick Bates, we met with ATW and they listened to our concerns and acted upon them given the constraints of the underlying floor space. We also contacted the Welsh Government (as funders), who whilst initially stating nothing could be done subsequently tell us they too met with ATW on several occasions to influence them. So some praise for ATW and WG for not just ploughing ahead with what by all accounts many stakeholders considered a mistake, but taking stock of legitimate concerns and seeing what could be done. A good result for rail users and a demonstration of the ability of effective lobbying. A Western Mail journalist contacted me near the launch: he obviously had picked up on the initial concerns over the specification, but was very disappointed that the views from the table seats were OK. He didn't print any of my positive comments; clearly he didn't welcome good news. So some praise for SARPA in helping to head off a negative story as well?

But two steps back - The late Easter break this year has been stretched with schools in England opting to break up for the 2 weeks prior to Good Friday, whilst in Wales the more traditional week either side has been selected – add the Bank Holiday for the Royal Wedding and the first May Bank Holiday the same weekend and the Easter period has effectively lasted from Friday 8th April to the Monday 2nd May! The weather has been good too and encouraged many to travel to the coast by train. Many tales of gross overcrowding, catering trolleys and passengers left behind on platforms have reached us - it's simply not good enough if you're serious about Wales having a modern efficient transport system. You couldn't physically park another car in Barmouth on Sunday 1st May – so how did our customer orientated commercial railway react? The winter one train a day timetable was in operation! Then we have what Network Rail claims is the world's most modern signalling system on our line from March 28th - ERTMS may be great, but the first few weeks have been plagued by teething troubles and late running, though as time goes on incidences are declining. This has cruelly exposed the problems with informing passengers when things go wrong and contingency planning. An area where ATW and indeed all TOC's need to put in a lot more effort.

Hopefully the punctuality is just a short term woe whilst the ERTMS system settles down. However the ongoing battle to have adequate quantities of rolling stock and service provision for the second decade of the 21st Century as peak oil looms (or is it already here?) goes on with no sign of resolution. It's now widely accepted that the Wales and Border franchise agreement was not up to the job from day one when faced with the real world, its pessimistic assumptions couldn't cope yet nearly eight years on it's still with us. But what is being done about it? For the May WAG elections recognition of the faults of the franchise agreement came from 3 of the large 4 party manifestos, but only 1 said they'd try and do anything about it prior to the end of the franchise agreement in December 2018. A priority for us is to encourage action **before 2018** and to ensure that the expensively provided infrastructure on our line is properly utilised: it is only of any real use for more trains to run.

Those of us who travelled to London or the South East of England in the last 15 years will well remember the weekend no goes and all the disruption of the so called West Coast Modernisation of the Virgin/Railtrack era. Having electrified and modernised the West Coast Main line in the late 50's/60's, the thinking of the day condemned all the other routes between London and the West Midlands and London and the North West as “duplicate”, and closed them down or severely downgraded them with everything funnelled onto the WCML. So when thirty five years later the WCML needed to be rebuilt it had to be done in expensive and time consuming dribs and drabs whilst still being allegedly operational – on weekdays anyway. A complete disruptive nightmare lasting a decade as anyone who experienced it will tell.

Now the UK is planning a High Speed rail line from London to the West Midlands and on to the North West And Yorkshire. Leaving aside all the various arguments for and against, let's focus on what the Against lobby are arguing – they are putting it about that you can upgrade the existing railway lines to give the same capacity boost as HS2 will deliver. What utter nonsense, as the West Coast and Chiltern Mainlines need to be fully operational 52 weeks a year including weekends and there are no diversionary routes.

Who's behind this? The RAC Foundation and a body calling itself the Taxpayers Alliance both have a long history of being anti public transport, and their not so hidden agenda is to spend more money on the road network. Indeed the Taxpayers Alliance screams blue murder at any Government expenditure and what it sees as waste, on the basis that it requires taxation to fund, it yet it advocates more roads expenditure where ironically some of the biggest budget overruns occur. Their opposition is underpinned solely on the fact that the money is not being spent on roads, they may for now be in bed with what's known as the Chiltern NIMBY brigade but would soon turn on them to build roads if given the chance.

I don't want to relive West Coast Modernisation, and welcome the freed up capacity on existing lines that HS2 will give – Wrexham and Shropshire's demise and through services from Shrewsbury to London are all tied up with West Coast Mainline capacity. The real reasons for High Speed rail have to be argued.

Gareth Marston

Newtown Montgomeryshire May 2011



Welsh Highland Railway train, No.138 on the 1725 from Carnarfon to Porthmadog, near Nantmor, May 30th, 2011.

News in Brief

Talerddig

Regular users of the passing loop and the views from it whilst waiting for late running trains to cross, have had new operating procedures to entertain themselves since the introduction of ERTMS. The old UP loop is now used for all trains arriving first to be held in, while the old DOWN loop sees the second service to arrive go through non stop over the higher speed points installed. The RETB timed timetable is still in operation with all UP trains due in the loop first, however the late running problems caused by ERTMS glitches have often seen the DOWN services reach the loop first and enter the UP loop.

Llandre

Consultants employed by TraCC managed to get the backs of the residents of Llandre up with their plan for a proposed station showing the village playground consumed by a station car park. Apparently they weren't consulted about it.

Dovey Junction

For a fourth year a pair of Ospreys have nested at the Montgomery Wildlife pole seen to the north of the line barely 30 metres from the tracks, halfway between the station and the junction points at the Machynlleth end. Three eggs have been laid, the third on May 1st. A herd of Water Buffalo are planned for the area south of the tracks also – two arrived in mid May. The Montgomery Wildlife Trust reserve has a recommended charge for visitors arriving by car; there's no extra charge to see the wildlife by train. Their centre, on the A487 between Glandyfi and Derwenlas, has live video-cams of the nest site (courtesy of Network Rail). The new rail officer has produced a "Cambrian Safari" leaflet pointing out the different types of wildlife that can be seen at Dovey Junction and elsewhere.

Nora, the female osprey, on the nest with her three eggs. Taken from the Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust website. The logo says that the nest cameras are powered by NetWorkRail: presumably the electricity comes from Dovey Junction station.



Nest Cameras powered by 

Summer 1938 at Newtown saw three times as many trains as 2011 and a surprise overnight train.

Looking at old timetables often features in SARPA Newsletters, the summer 1951 passenger workings at Aberystwyth being recently featured. A flick through a copy of the Great Western Journal from 2009 found an article on Newtown station and a list of workings from the 1938 summer working timetable. No fewer than 51 different train movements could be gleaned on a Summer Saturday through Newtown, including 3 Passenger and Mail trains, 27 Passenger trains, 14 Goods trains plus 7 Light Engine and empty stock workings (just 16 Passenger trains only in 2011). Whereas the early 50's saw 4 through holiday trains pre war there were 6: one from London Paddington, two from Birmingham Snow Hill and surprisingly three from Manchester. Two were from London Rd but intrepid Lancastrians could arrive at Victoria station after midnight on a Friday and catch the 0045 service to Aberystwyth. Running on B code headlamps (stopping passenger) it was not until 0510 it reached Newtown departing at 0512, alas its routing unknown. Overnight holiday maker trains were common back then, run with ordinary stock. One hopes the Cafes of Aberystwyth were open early on Saturday morning to revive the overnight travellers! The return working left Aberystwyth at a more civilised 1105 on the Saturday morning running on A or Express headlamps.

Caersws and Llanidloes Rd.

The manually operated level crossing gates and signals plus associated wiring rods and levers were removed on 19th March ready for ERTMS operation and the crossing keepers made redundant. The box at Caersws had been opened under Cambrian Railways ownership in 1891 built by Duttons of Worcester. Until 1987 it controlled a crossing loop and block sections either side to Talerddig and Newtown, prior to 1965 the sections were to Moat Lane Junction West and Pontdolgoch.

Caersws Community Council is looking to set up station adopters.

Borth & Students

Uproar amongst the student fraternity some of whom decided to take accommodation in Borth blithely assuming their Young Persons Railcards would get them discount for their daily commute into Aberystwyth. The national terms and conditions have changed somewhat: you cannot use a Young Persons railcard before 0930 and can only buy tickets over the value of £12.00 now. However all is not lost for the students who can, as with any other residents of Borth, buy a Cambrian Local Railcard for just £5.00 and use it before 0930. McNulty cry your eyes out.

The 0514 from Aberystwyth

It has been noted a couple of times by regular travellers that the Conductor does not always get around to sell tickets to all passengers from Welshpool and even Newtown. The propensity for travellers at that time of day going long distances and paying by card appear to be a large factor, as are increasing numbers of passengers. One morning in April saw a 2-car formation with people standing on arrival in Shrewsbury. As the service arrives at Shrewsbury officially at 0711 and in practice often slightly earlier, and does not go forward to Birmingham until 0731, there is an opportunity to get off and go down to the ticket office: the ticket barriers are not manned that early in the morning.

ATW are to issue new card transaction machines in June which are said to be quicker than their current kit.

Marches Mayhem?

The timetable and service pattern along the Marches has seen some considerable changes this May. The number of Manchester to Cardiff services stopping at Craven Arms and Church Stretton has been reduced, and stops at Nantwich and Whitchurch substituted instead. Some Holyhead trains now stop at Craven Arms and Church Stretton to compensate. There is now no standard departure time on each and every hour from Cardiff with the Marches trains changing each hour. Please consult timetables.

In addition the number of through trains from Cardiff to Holyhead have been increased to 10 Northbound and 9 Southbound at the insistence of the Welsh Assembly Government – though many are very sceptical as to the actual demand for so many through trains. The route was traditionally known as the North and West with through expresses from the South West of England to the North West routed via the Severn Tunnel and Maindee curve avoiding Newport station. Up until the late 60's on weekdays and summer Saturdays in the late 70's they ran until all diverted via Birmingham. A Crewe to Cardiff service ran until the introduction of second generation DMU's by BR in the late 80's, seeing through trains restored to Manchester, Liverpool, Bristol and beyond. After privatisation the first franchises continued and expanded on this only to see the Wales and Border franchise turn the line into a Cardiff only service at its southern end.

Newtown to Welshpool

Sittings of the Magistrates Court at Welshpool have unfortunately brought trouble to the line, court customers from Newtown often travel by train bringing friends and family for the day out. The concept of paying seems alien to many and some incidents of verbal abuse have been reported by staff. British Transport Police are aware and have been seen walking through the trains.

Tywyn

May sees the 60th anniversary celebrations of the world's first preserved railway. To SARPA's friends at the Talylyn Railway – Happy Birthday!

Merthyr Tydfil

WAG announced in March that the current 704 Trawscambria service to Brecon will have new vehicles and be extended to Merthyr Tydfil by March 2012. Experience suggests that a near 3hr bus trip from Newtown to Merthyr Tydfil will attract very few through passengers. From Charlie Hulme's website: Cambrian Coast jottings (*<http://www.nwrail.org.uk/>)

Cambrian Coast trains have taken a (slightly) different route from 9 May, as a short section of line near Minffordd has been relocated over the weekend to allow for the Porthmadog by-pass road.

Following on from the detached brake disk on a Class 158, four other 158's have been found with fractures in the lugs of the discs; it is said that all four had been serviced at Arriva's LNWR Crewe facility.

2011 Cambrian Coast steam cancelled

West Coast Rail has announced that their Summer season steam special working 'The Cambrian' will not run this summer. Their website has the following announcement:: Network Rail are carrying out modernisation and extensive EU compliance work on both the Cambrian line and our engines, it was anticipated that work would be complete in time for this years (2011) season.

Unfortunately this will not be the case and our Cambrian route will not run this year. It will however for 2012, we apologise for this inconvenience and disappointment but look forward to welcome all passengers back for 2012.

Newtown

Powys CC plans to divert all buses away from the station and thereby render the expensively installed bus lane from around 10 years ago a waste of money and question how committed to integrated public transport the authority is.

First loco hauled passenger train under ERTMS?

Saturday 28th May saw probably the first loco-hauled train, an excursion from Hull to Aberystwyth It travelled from Crewe with no less than four locos (was this a first for the Cambrian lines - ever?). ERTMS-fitted class 97/3 locos 97 303 and 97 304 led the train, which was topped-and-tailed by 57 601 and 47 826.

Railway Industrial Archaeology Competition

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

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

What and where are these items? What is the technology with which they are associated? (Its full title please) What was the contribution to railway safety when it was finally eclipsed?

For a bonus five quid name one instance when its presence was a contribution to a major railway mishap.

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

McNulty Rail Value for Money Study final report published

Benchmarking against railways in France, Sweden, Switzerland and the Netherlands had revealed that costs per passenger-km were around 40% higher in Britain. Of this, he believes that savings of 30% are achievable.

McNulty recommends the formation of a Rail Delivery Group of senior industry leaders including Network Rail, passenger and freight train operating companies and major suppliers to overcome interface issues which add cost. A new Rail Systems Agency would deal with technical issues and standards, largely replacing the current Rail Safety & Standards Board.

Many of the recommendations can be taken forward by the rail industry, and review Deputy Chairman Ian Dobbs was 'encouraged' by the 'engagement' shown over the past 15 months. Other proposals will require government intervention, including suggestions that the regulation of passenger franchises should transfer from the Department for Transport to the Office of Rail Regulation. The government should also undertake a full review of the current fare structures to reduce confusion, eliminate anomalies, and improve management of capacity at peak times, but the net cost to passengers should be broadly neutral.

McNulty emphasised that there were no proposals for line closures, and he was keen to see average load factors increased rather than cuts in the frequency of services, suggesting that there was ample capacity to accommodate further growth without increasing costs.

Above all the review team emphasised the need for much greater clarity from the government on 'policy, objectives and strategy for the industry.'

Marston on McNulty

The Chairman provides some thoughts on the recent McNulty report On a sticky cloudy June day in 2003 I along with other SARPA members met with the then Secretary of State of Wales, Peter Hain MP in the Houses of Parliament. It was notable primarily for two reasons: firstly he yawned his head off throughout the meeting – this was excused due to his work load of being Leader of the House as well as Welsh Secretary – and secondly we said, "by the way Minister, all these wonderful things for the railway we'd like would be much easier to achieve if costs in the privatised industry were brought down".

This has been a long standing and consistent line that we've taken. Some six and a half years later the view that costs were out of control in the rail industry and something should be done became official Government policy when Lord Adonis appointed Sir Roy McNulty to launch a value for money review. Another 18 months has elapsed and now eight years on from our meeting we have his report. I'm not going to do a blow by blow piece of analysis, that's for others in the rail press or you can read it all online – all 400 plus pages of it. What we have to remember is the brief he was given – how to reduce costs within the current system. There's no mention of peak oil or any attempt at looking forward beyond costs within the current system. So on one hand it disappoints but there's some interesting stuff tucked away in the report.

Of course McNulty's recommendations consist mainly of suggestions and more studies into various areas; he's found no magic solution to make the current system work

more cheaply, and clearly advising Government to return the industry to its factory setting of a single vertically integrated nationally owned entity was not on the agenda for political reasons. Essentially he's given Government a shopping list and as ever it will be down to the politicians to choose or not choose to act on what he says. Serpell's report in 1981 was binned despite it having strong support in some quarters as it appeared like electoral suicide to then deeply unpopular Tories. Beeching's recommendations on investment were of course largely ignored, and lines not listed by him closed, whilst others selected for closure were kept open. So history tells us that some of Sir Roy's suggestions might be taken forward, but expect the bits not liked to be binned. Indeed it looks like he's hedged his bets and has offered a number of areas to pursue, so at least something of his work will be taken forward. In short McNulty points the finger at nearly everyone as the cause of the problem, including us passengers who want to travel at peak times, but cast iron solutions are thinner on the ground. Anyone reading it without any prior knowledge will soon see the interdependencies and relationships in all areas and between the players and maybe question why so many are needed.

He picks up on a bugbear of mine. The vast increase in number of off peak services since privatisation (OK this has passed the Cambrian by but think nationally), initially trailed as how wonderful the private sector was compared to BR, is now seen as part of the problem of why costs have gone up. Unless you're prepared to financially underpin very frequent off peak services, the fact remains that on the whole for a host of reasons most people don't want to travel off peak and numbers travelling in the off peak are low-ish and all the silly give away advance purchase fares that generate little revenue can be found on these trains. Take travelling from Abergavenny to Cardiff. In 1991 BR ran 19 trains, 5 in the peak, now ATW run 29, with still around 5 in the peak. Common sense dictates that the service now costs a lot more to provide, including those extra nasty overpaid union members to crew the extra trains. Yet there's no increase in peak capacity, which brings us to fares: instead of meeting demand we now try and price it off, the industry then tries to entice people to travel in the off peak with give away fares. It's financially bonkers. The TOC of course uses a non standard DMU type that has cost more to produce and lease. Interdependencies and relationships indeed. McNulty complains that we need to manage peak demand better. Instead it seems to me we need to plan to meet peak demand better. We have to get away from lazy management of providing a little train but often and really think about matching supply to where demand is. I would suggest using the Abergavenny example that we don't really need to have anything other than an hourly service out of the peaks and deploy units saved as strengtheners or peak extras which will attract more custom and revenue, whilst not manning and running those units all day will lower costs. We must stop fiddling about with yield management techniques. Let nature take its course: supply and demand. This will of course mean some sacred cows may have to be sacrificed, like North to South trains in such quantities.

What's its significance for us? Well we on the Cambrian can forget about the resurrection of the community rail concept even for the coast line, as ERTMS has locked us into mainline costs and standards for the foreseeable future. A trial area for vertical integration looks unlikely. I suspect that Driver Only Operation is out of the window as well unless it becomes a free railway. The angst about peak fares and shoulder peaks is also something that the Cambrian will struggle with, as unless you live in Borth and Machynlleth there's no service to match! Booking Offices? Well unless you have simple fares system the need for a human presence remains. Catering trolleys may be a vulnerable single element in the short term. We may not notice too much.

'WAG 2' Official Statement

Title: Second Fast North-South Rail Link

Date: 9 March 2011

By: Ieuan Wyn Jones, Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport

In 2008 I funded the introduction of 'Y Gerallt Gymro' express Holyhead to Cardiff service. This flagship service is key to delivering our 'One Wales' commitment to reduce journey times between North and South Wales. It has proven to be very popular and has strengthened economic links between the north and south of the country.

I have now decided to introduce a second express train service, from May 2011, Monday – Friday, initially using a Class 175 train. This service will compliment the existing Y Gerallt Gymro service and has competitive journey times considering the current infrastructure constraints. The train will depart from Holyhead at 07:51 and arrives in Cardiff at 12:08. The return journey will leave Cardiff at 18:18 and arrives in Holyhead at 22:34.

I am aware that, as we have been preparing these proposals, that some Members, and Council Leaders, have expressed concern to me that the service would not call at stations on the North Wales Coast, or at Wrexham. I am now able to confirm that the train will be able to stop at Wrexham in both directions. The morning train will call at Holyhead, Bangor, Llandudno Junction, Colwyn Bay, Rhyl, Chester, Wrexham, Ruabon, Chirk, Gobowen, Shrewsbury, Newport and Cardiff. The evening train after departure from Cardiff will stop at Newport, Abergavenny, Hereford, Shrewsbury, Gobowen, Ruabon, Wrexham, Chester, Rhyl, Colwyn Bay, Llandudno Junction, Bangor and Holyhead. This is the optimum journey pattern that is achievable within the overall target of journey times between Holyhead and Cardiff, via Wrexham, of some 4 hours and 17 minutes.

In order for the second express service to be able to call at Wrexham General Station in the morning I have asked Arriva Trains Wales to reroute the 07:15 Holyhead – Birmingham International service via Crewe instead of Wrexham. It would otherwise not be possible for the second express service to call at Wrexham due to the infrastructure constraints of the single track between Wrexham and Chester. This means that the 07:15 Holyhead – Birmingham International service can no longer call at Ruabon, Chirk and Gobowen. Therefore the new express service will call at these stations in order to avoid what would otherwise be a two hour gap in the mornings. Passengers for Birmingham joining from these stations will be able to complete their journey by changing and connecting into the 07:15 Holyhead – Birmingham service at Shrewsbury. The Class 175 service will have an enhanced at seat trolley service including some hot food.

From the timetable changes in December 2011, the Class 175 train will be replaced by a Class 67 locomotive with carriages similar to those used on Y Gerallt Gymro. This service will be able to have a first class carriage and dining facilities similar to those currently available on Y Gerallt Gymro. I am funding a substantial refurbishment before these carriages are brought into service.

I remain committed to pathing the original 'Y Gerallt Gymro' service via Wrexham rather than Crewe. The study I am funding Network Rail to undertake, to improve the railway infrastructure between Holyhead and Cardiff, will be completed by the end of April. It will include consideration of options for capacity enhancements on the line between Chester and Wrexham with the objective of both a step change reduction in journey times

for all services and of routing the express return service via Wrexham. I expect construction work to commence next year.

As this term of Government ends, I believe that I have taken firm steps to improve transport provision between North and South Wales. This is important for the economy of our country and improving journey times for passengers.

Will the new service have a name? Suggestions to the Editor.

Backload Bonus

Back in the early 70's a young man rode as a second man on lorry making a delivery to a destination in South Wales from a Newtown factory. Having delivered the load the driver instead of heading back for Mid Wales took a detour and joined a queue of other Lorries.....“Don't worry lad I've had a tip off” said the driver “It's a cash job, some for you too”.

They were by an old railway yard near Merthyr Tydfil, which was being dismantled and cleared. Once inside they were pointed over to a corner and loaded up. Their load was old metal “chairs” that were used to hold the track to the sleepers. The foreman looked at the load as they queued to depart, and duly handed over a generous sum in cash - no questions asked despite the lorry clearly saying the name of the non local firm on it. Back up to Mid Wales and up to Potters yard to dispose of the load. By the time they got back to the factory it was clocking off time. The factory foreman smelt a rat as the detour, queuing for a load, being heavily loaded on the way back and going to Potters meant they were far later than they should have been.

The driver was quick thinking: “Those roads to South Wales are no good they should never have closed the railway”.

The Centenary of the opening of the Aberaeron branch was marked by the unveiling of a plaque on the station site; a walk by school children in



Edwardian costume, and the restoration of Llanerchayron Halt, with a replica of a GWR Pagoda shelter, and a nameboard.

A VIEW FROM THE COAST

Roger Whitehouse

Apologies to the Brigadier for stealing his title! My occasional commentary will cover different ground, arising from my experiences as a fairly frequent leisure traveller on the Cambrian lines.

Are you in the right portion?

If a regular traveller, familiar with the working of the Cambrian service, you probably are. Otherwise, you are quite likely to be among the forward flow of passengers for Borth and Aberystwyth, or in reverse for the Coast, which follows the usual check by the conductor after leaving Shrewsbury. Why?

158 destination indicators are quite often wrong, and labelling of units is rare. (Even car letters get in a muddle: the car letter for your reserved seat may well appear twice or not at all.) However, that is merely the start ...

Recently, while waiting at Telford Central for a train to Birmingham, I saw and heard the description of a departure to the Cambrian. The portions were in the wrong order, and the, I assume automated, announcement couldn't pronounce 'Talsarnau' or 'Abererch' properly. A few days later I joined the 1424 from New St. The display was correct, except for the spelling 'Talsamau' - but as the train started from New St. because of disruption caused by the flooding between Shrewsbury and Wrexham, you needed to know which end would be the front. (Yes, Cambrian trains can leave in either direction.) I couldn't see the displays at Galton Bridge or Telford, but Wolverhampton didn't mention the Coast portion, and Wellington had the portions in the wrong order dividing at Dovey Junction!

This persistent muddle (is it caused by the computer software or the users?) has continued for far too long.

English or Welsh?

More on automated announcements. For some while after they were introduced at Tywyn, every time a Pwllheli departure was announced I winced at the English "penny-chain" while the Welsh had "Pen y chain". The English has now changed to "Pen y chain", and the Welsh to "Pen Ychain", which I am assured from two reliable sources is correct: the etymology is two words, pen = head and ychain = ox. (I am not myself a Welsh speaker.)

However, the Welsh have now got their own back, with "Smeth-wick" with a hard 'th' and 'w' pronounced, rather than "Smeth'ick"!

Wrexham & Shropshire

A sad loss. I used them once to London and back, and occasionally by chance between Telford and Wolverhampton (or on one Sunday, Galton Bridge). The service, and catering in First Class, were excellent, and the old-style MkIII seating and layout such a pleasure after Voyagers and Pendolinos.

However, they seemed to change their timetable almost as often as some people change their underclothes, which didn't encourage regular patronage, any more than apparently random omission of intermediate stops: my return trip from London passed through Tame Bridge and Wellington non-stop. Their connections to and from the Cambrian were mostly awful.

Replies from ATW to two recent emails from SARPA, regarding trains at Shrewsbury
Our Chairman recently sent two emails to ATW, as follows:

I know I've verbally raised it but I now ask it in writing that the the opportunity is taken when the recast of the Cambrian TT is made to take into account ERTMS sectional running times, that will no doubt show some alterations on current practice to better align arrival times into Shrewsbury to connect with Holyhead via Wrexham services.

I'll stick my neck out (touch wood and cross fingers) that it (ERTMS) seems to be settling down now.

We are getting increasing comments about "confusion" at Platform 4 at Shrewsbury station with the Holyhead bound trains, especially when their 3 car Class 175's extend back almost to the sign for 4A - please see attached picture from last Friday. Many non regular travellers could be caught out. The stop sign on Platform 4B is easily two carriage lengths from the far end of the platform with room to move it closer, and perhaps the 4A sign is too close? Perhaps some non costly step ladder and screw driver work would cure it.

Again the reversal of Cambrian trains at Shrewsbury is causing comment, though the traincrew are always excellent on departure from Shrewsbury, ensuring the right passengers are in the right portion - the lack of any signage on the units as to which carriage goes where causes much confusion on a daily basis. I suspect the Cambrian is the only line in the UK where a train that subsequently splits reverses en route swapping the running order of the portions. Is some labeling not unreasonable to ask for?

I'm OK as are most SARPA members but it's the non regular users that suffer.



ATW replied as follows:

Dear Gareth

Many thanks for your two e-mails and the helpful suggestions.

On the platforming issue at Shrewsbury, the problem may now be alleviated slightly with the Cardiff-Holyhead services planned to depart from platform 3. However, in so far as the general issue is concerned, I have asked for this to be taken forward specially with my train planning/ops colleagues in conjunction with the station management team. Hopefully, we can address your concerns in time.

I have noted your comment on ERTMS and would like you to know that we are monitoring the system closely. An assessment on timings will follow, possibly when we are through the summer period and evaluated the performance of the new timetable.

Hope this proves useful.

Regards Mike [Bagshaw Arriva Trains Wales]

The view from milepost 62 with the Brigadier

Journeys from Mid Wales to the West Country now involve changing at that god awful dump Birmingham New St, or multiple changes at Shrewsbury, Newport and Bristol. Until just a few years ago there were three or four through trains from Shrewsbury to at least Bristol - far more civilised. For the life of me I cannot see why so many trains need to go between north and south Wales via the Marches, 3 or 4 genuine expresses a day would meet the actual demand leaving room for through trains to Bristol once more. I say this as I had an experience with changing at Newport the other day. Despite spending millions and claiming it modernised let's just say that the passenger was put last in whoever designed its mind.

Not wanting to hit New St on a Friday evening at peak time we opted to come up the Marches. Our FGW train deposited us at the country end of Platform 1 at Newport where the new "spaceball" footbridge is, and as it turned out only some the station facilities are. The memsahib wanted a drink – it turned out the catering facilities had been left at the London end of Platforms 2/3! Not having too long before our train I decided to make the run myself, leaving the better half to carry the suitcase and pet carrier to Platform 4 (she is younger than me I hasten to add). Having made the best speed a retired officer in his early 70's could, I got back up the staircase to the space age structure to hear a commotion going on. A whimpering English Bull Terrier had blood spurting from his nose and a man was apologising to my wife! What's more our suitcase was on the floor and our Siamese cat Dusty was growling from the overturned pet carrier, what a mess!

Once it had settled down it became clear that my darling wife had become discombobulated by the new structure due to lack of signage and had banged into a man and his dog who was similarly confused. He had reasonably thought that you should change at Newport for Risca – a near suburb of Newport but could find no information anywhere! Spike was an Army veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan and was struggling adjusting to civilian life and just wanted to visit an old comrade. I explained you had to go to Cardiff for the Ebbw Vale line, despite the line running through the Newport suburbs. Overcome by our world class transport facilities he burst into tears. We immediately helped a hero and took him for the drink – at the far end of Platform 2/3 whilst he calmed down and we sorted out our case and cat. We even found a plaster for the dog's nose. The Café staff freely admitted the station structure was for top show and looked pretty from the air,

but lots of nitty gritty actually of use things had not been addressed properly. I'm glad CNN viewers who caught a glimpse from a helicopter camera of it during the Ryder cup appreciated it! "Gee honey ain't that quaint English county of Wales nice!" AAAAGHHHH. Try using public transport in it.

By the time it was all sorted and Spike and his dog were heading to Cardiff to backtrack, we had missed our train and some more plus connections at Shrewsbury. Well two hours of time was worth it to help Spike. It then occurred to me that there was a theme going on. Half a station refurbishment and a half reopened line, sounds familiar? It matches up well with the Cambrian's expanded infrastructure but no extra trains to run on it. The more I thought the more it struck me we have extra trains to Fishguard Harbour this September but no station reopened in the town itself, and all those extra trains from North to South causing all sorts of problems as the double track between Wrexham and Chester has not been reinstated. Why can't we get the full job done anymore?

The next train up the Marches was now due - the WAG Express!! It was jolly full too but was remarkably quite after Abergavenny, as it appears its prime use is as an early evening commuter train for Cwmbran and Abergavenny. I have to admit I was admiring the views out of the MK2 coaches and thinking how civilised it was to have seats, luggage space, tables and views – just what a long distance train should have – I must write to the mandarins in Marsham St and remind them. Then surprisingly we rolled through Hereford non-stop just before 1720. So a train with plenty of room on it not stopping at a major regional centre slap bang in the evening peak with no trains heading in the same direction between 1650 & 1750- how odd. What would McNulty make of it?

The non-stop run up the Marches was fun but we arrived at Shrewsbury at 1805 and faced an 82 minute wait, At last the 1927 left on time and we even got to travel in the new refurbished 158840 – immediately it felt hot and passengers asked the conductor to open the windows. Another half done job without the air conditioning being attended to.

I looked at a newspaper and saw that the South Wales politicians were all moaning about the Westminster decision not to electrify the mainline from to Swansea but stop at Cardiff. Indeed another job half done it would appear, though a source in London tells me that it was made perfectly clear to the WAG that if they coughed up part of the sum - £50 million was the figure banded about apparently - then the extra 48 miles to Swansea would have been included. In March WAG announced £300 million of road construction contracts.

Three Cocks Cottage

June 2011

A British Railways Western Region Totem for Machynlleth.

Photo: Angus Eichkoff.



The refurbished unit in pictures



Unit 158840 at LNWR, Crewe during the refurbishment. The unit is partially masked off for the application of the darker paint coat.

Where the money came from. The Welsh Assembly Government - now the Welsh Government - on the side of the unit.



A view down the aisle, with facing seats - presumably without tables, in front. Note the luggage space on the right hand side.



Seats with tables, lined up with the windows.

SARPA Meeting Schedule for 2011

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

Saturday 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 6th	1900	Caersws Village Club	
Saturday October 8th	1130	Machynlleth	AGM White Lion Hotel
Tuesday November 1st	1800	Aberystwyth	Venue TBC
Tuesday December 6th	1900	Newtown	Sportsman Severn St.

Websites

Our website <http://sarpa.info>

Webmaster Angus Eickhoff. Website host is Redbox Internet:- www.redboxinternet.com

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

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:-
<http://railphotos.fourecord.com/index.php>

Useful addresses

Arriva Trains Wales:

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

Network Rail:

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

Newtown Station Travel

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

The Association of Train Operating Companies:

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

London Midland

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

Association of Community Rail Partnerships

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

Virgin Trains

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

Traveline Cymru for all public transport information

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

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

For Train Times and Fares Call:

08457 48 49 50 (24hrs)

0845 60 40 500 (Welsh Language Service)

0845 60 50 600 (Textphone)

For ticket reservations please call: 0870 9000 773

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