

Shrewsbury Aberystwyth Rail Passengers' Association

Newsletter No. 98

SPRING 2026



FORMER CAMBRIAN LINES LOCOMOTIVE IS RETURNING TO ABERYSTWYTH IN LOCOMOTIVE SWAP

Manor Class locomotive No. 7819 'Hinton Manor' is returning to Aberystwyth, for display in the Vale of Rheidol museum. It is replacing Dukedog No. 9017, which is going to the Severn Valley Railway's museum at Highley.

Appropriately, both engines spent part of their lives shedded in Aberystwyth, in the engine shed which is now the museum. Hinton Manor also returned to the Cambrian lines in the 80s and 90s.

The photograph above was taken about 1964; your Editor is on the platform.
Photograph: W.E. Bates.

NEGES GAN Y CADEIRYDD

Mae 2026 yn flwyddyn bwysig i Reilffyrdd y Cambrian. Yn ôl rhai, efallai mae dyma fydd blwyddyn olaf y dosbarth 158 gyda dyfodiad yr unedau 197e. Mae SARPA wedi dadlau ers y cychwyn nag yw rhai o rinweddau'r unedau 197 newydd yn ddigonol ar gyfer y lein ac rydym ni dal i bwysu am fesurau i liniaru rhai o'r problemau. Yn sicr, bydd angen sicrhau bod mwy na 2 gerbyd ar unrhyw drên os am ddarparu mwy nag un tŷ bach ar deithiau hir iawn. Rydym ni hefyd wedi bod yn holi am fesurau i leihau'r anhawsterau wrth fynd o'r plattform i'r trenau wrth ystyried bod yr unedau 197 yn uwch na'r unedau 158.

O fewn y mis, bydd y treial o gadw'r gwasanaethau hwyr dros y gaeaf ar lein yr arfordir yn dod i ben, gyda'r gwasanaethau hwyr yn parhau i fod yn rhan o'r amserlen arferol tan y gaeaf. Roedd SARPA yn rhan fawr o sicrhau'r treial hwn ac mae rhai o'n haelodau wedi bod yn brysur iawn yn codi ymwybyddiaeth o argaeledd y gwasanaeth. Mae'r adborth o gymunedau ar hyd yr arfordir wedi bod yn bositif, gyda busnesau yn adrodd gwell perfformiad na fyddant yn disgwyl heb y gwasanaethau hwyr ac unigolion yn cael mynychu gweithgareddau yn y nosweithiau. Bydd SARPA yn parhau i bwysleisio buddion cadw'r gwasanaethau hwyr dros y gaeaf wrth i Drafnidiaeth Cymru werthuso'r treial.

Wrth edrych ymhellach hyd yn oed i'r dyfodol, mae SARPA wedi dechrau holi Trafnidiaeth Cymru ynglŷn â'r trefniadau ar gyfer y Tour de France yn 2027, lle mae un cam yn cychwyn yn y Trallwng.

Rydym wrth gwrs yn parhau i bwysu ar Drafnidiaeth Cymru o ran perfformiad a dibynadwyedd. Yn ddiweddar, er enghraifft, mae'r gwasanaeth 08:27 o Aberystwyth yn cael ei ganslo'n aml. Ers i Drafnidiaeth Cymru dynnu'r gwasanaeth cynnar o'r Bermo i Fachynlleth, y trên cyntaf i Amwythig yw'r gwasanaeth o'r arfordir sy'n cysylltu â'r 08:27 o Aberystwyth ym Machynlleth er mwyn cyrraedd Amwythig am 10:20. Pan ganslir y cysylltiad o Aberystwyth, does neb o lein yr arfordir yn gallu cyrraedd Amwythig tan 11:19! Rydym wrth gwrs yn pwysu am welliannau a gwell dibynadwyedd o'r gwasanaeth hwn yn benodol, yn ogystal â gwasanaethau eraill.

Mae'n edrych fel y bydd 2026 yn flwyddyn llawn ymgyrchu.

Dr Jeff Smith, Cadeirydd SARPA

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

2026 is an important year for the Cambrian Lines. According to some, this may be the last year of the 158 class with the arrival of the 197 units. SARPA has argued since the beginning that some of the specifications of the new 197 units are insufficient for the line and we are still pressing for measures to mitigate some of the problems. It will certainly be necessary to ensure that there are more than 2 carriages on any train if more than one toilet is to be provided on very long journeys. We have also been asking for measures to reduce the obstacles when going from the platform to the trains considering that the 197 units are higher than the 158 units.

Within the month, the trial of keeping the late services over the winter on the coast line will come to an end, with the late services continuing to be part of the normal

timetable until the winter. SARPA was a big part of securing this trial and some of our members have been very busy raising awareness of the availability of the service. The feedback from communities along the coast has been positive, with businesses reporting a better performance than they would have expected without the late services and individuals being able to attend activities in the evenings. SARPA will continue to emphasize the benefits of keeping the late services over winter as Transport Wales evaluates the trial.

Looking even further into the future, SARPA has started to ask Transport for Wales about the arrangements for the Tour de France in 2027, where one stage starts in Welshpool.

We of course continue to lobby Welsh Transport in terms of performance and reliability. Recently, for example, the 08:27 service from Aberystwyth is often cancelled. Since Transport Wales removed the early service from Barmouth to Machynlleth, the first train to Shrewsbury is the service from the coast which connects with the 08:27 from Aberystwyth in Machynlleth to arrive in Shrewsbury at 10:20. When the connection from Aberystwyth is cancelled, no one from the coast line can reach Shrewsbury until 11:19! We are of course pushing for improvements and better reliability of this service in particular, as well as other services. It looks like 2026 will be a year full of campaigning.

Dr Jeff Smith, Chair of SARPA

RECORD USAGE AT CAMBRIAN STATIONS IN 2024/2025 CONFIRMED BY THE OFFICE OF RAIL AND ROAD

Official figures released in December 2025 [Estimates of station usage | ORR Data Portal](#) show that total combined footfall from Cambrian Coast and Cambrian Mainline stations reached their highest ever recorded level in 2024/2025 with just over 2 million (2,050,050) exits and entrances recorded at stations from Welshpool to Aberystwyth and Penhelig to Pwllheli. This was an 18.17% increase from 2023/2024 and the fourth year of double-digit growth following the Covid crash of 2020/2021 (275%, 42%, 14% now 18%). For comparison in their 15-year tenure growth was 50% under ATW with an average of just over 3% per annum which they regularly attained. Separately TfW have sent statistics to SARPA showing that Cambrian passenger journeys in the months April to November 2025 were c.13% up on the same months in 2024. The Office of Rail and Road have released passenger usage figures for Q1 and Q2 2025/2026 for the UK and individual operators with the UK and TfW seeing record usage in those quarters - strong sustained growth is the headline.

Several individual stations recorded their highest ever footfall usage, including Pwllheli, Criccieth, Porthmadog, Barmouth, Tywyn, Aberdyfi, Dovey Junction and Bow St. Several stations saw growth of over 30% on the previous year.

The estimates of station usage series go back to 1997/1998 at the start of rail privatisation: station exits/entrances on our lines then were 1,111,681. Those that are into this sort of thing may like to note that the record usage this year has happened under state ownership with TfW Rail - owned by Welsh Government since 2021, though the reasons for it have nothing to do with ownership!

The Top 10 stations accounted for 75% of the recorded usage on the two lines. They were:

Rank	Station	Total Footfall	Main Origin/Destination	Journeys/ % of total
1	Aberystwyth	298,878	Borth	41,666/13.9%
2	Barmouth	236,854	Tywyn	39,134/16.5%
3	Welshpool	176,730	Shrewsbury	78,638/44.5%
4	Newtown (Powys)	171,366	Shrewsbury	74,622/43.5%
5	Tywyn	133,700	Barmouth	39,134/29.3%
6	Harlech	129,000	Penrhyndeudraeth	41,576/32.2%
7	Machynlleth	128,212	Aberystwyth	27,254/21.3%
8	Porthmadog	100,700	Pwllheli	27,438/27.2%
9	Pwllheli	98,420	Porthmadog	27,438/27.9%
10	Caersws	69,134	Shrewsbury	21,458/31.0%

The Top 5 Passenger Flows were:

1.	Welshpool/Shrewsbury	78,638 Journeys
2.	Newtown/Shrewsbury	74,622 Journeys
3.	Aberystwyth/Borth	41,666 Journeys
4.	Penrhyndeudraeth/Harlech	41,576 Journeys
5.	Barmouth/Tywyn	39,134 Journeys

Other things to note were that the number of educational season ticket trips on the coast had gone up from the previous year and accounted for nearly a quarter of all coast journeys. Post 16 Educational season ticket trips from the upper Severn valley stations into Shrewsbury accounted for 1 in 9 journeys from these stations. Newtown (Powys) was the primary driver of this market accounting for nearly two thirds of it, accounting for 15% of all journeys from Newtown(Powys).

There was a big leap in usage at Dyfi Junction (283%) almost certainly due to people splitting tickets there mainly to take advantage of the use of bus passes for free trips on the coast line in winter. Whilst this does distort the figures a little bit, bear in mind the total usage here was just 2% of the total for the Cambrian lines.

The figures supplied Separately by Transport for Wales for April 2024 through to November 2025 confirm the seasonal variation in usage, with January being the quietest month and August the busiest on both lines. On the coast August usage is 225% of January's and on the mainline there's an 86% increase between the two months. The months April through to October see higher than the monthly average usage on both lines, with November through to March being below average. Both lines show that Quarter 2 (July to September) is the busiest with 30% of annual usage in the quarter with Quarter 4 (January to March) the quietest with 19% of annual usage in the quarter. Quarter 1 (April to June) sees 28% of annual usage and Quarter 3 (October to December) sees 23% of annual usage. These figures translate into an average footfall of just over 4000 a day in Q4 and just under 7000 in Q2.

Shrewsbury station also recorded record footfall with 2,321,270 entrances and exits in 2024/2025, up 15% on the previous year. That's 6,354 passengers starting or ending their journey there each day on average; with interchange passengers there's 7,030 passengers using the station each day on average. Around 10% of footfall at Shrewsbury is to/from Cambrian stations; this is three quarters of the usage to/from Wales. Despite a plethora of through services from Shrewsbury to destinations in North and South Wales, they only account for 3.5% of usage. Journeys via Wellington account for c.60% of usage.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Borth station

Network Rail has applied for Listed Building Consent to reinforce the 1930s station canopy. The pillars which support the canopy are badly corroded, so a temporary encasement is being emplaced. A permanent refurbishment is expected in the next five years. [See photographs in pages 12 and 14.]

TfW Performance watch

Whilst TfW performance on our line(s) had been their best for some time and near where it should be in Q1/Q2, unfortunately things slipped back quite badly in Q3 on the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth line. The 0630 and 0830 departures from Aberystwyth in particular saw a higher than acceptable number of cancellations, with around 1 in 6 of these services cancelled. Performance usually dips in Q3 due to autumn leaf fall, but this was a lot poorer than seen in previous years.

Shrewsbury

The new gyratory system outside the station, and a floating bus stop signed off by the previous Shropshire County Council administration, have drawn lots of criticism for causing delays and potentially being unsafe. Arriva buses have stopped calling at the stop. Owners of a business nearby are leading a campaign against it and using social media to show pictures of two-way traffic happily passing the station in years gone by and lots of people are commenting on how well it worked and we should go back to that layout.

The picture used appears to be from c1970 and what the people getting excited by and liking the picture are missing entirely is that there were far fewer vehicles on the roads back then. In 1971 there were 12 million cars and 3 million other vehicles on the UK's roads; in 2025 there are 35 million cars and 5 million other vehicles: of course, traffic moved more freely when there was just 37.5% of what there is now! The streets around the station are of course narrow and built in Victorian or earlier times pre the motor car and no amount of tinkering with the road layout is going to make traffic flow freely with the volume of vehicles on Britain's roads now.

In the meantime, the town's Member of Parliament, Julia Buckley, who came to our December meeting has been active in driving forward improvements to public transport in and into the town, including forming working groups looking at improving access to the station from the Abbey Foregate area and securing night buses in the run up to and after Christmas.

Passenger loading data taken in Summer 2024 for weekdays show that the busiest period at the station with the most number of passengers on the platforms at the same time is c.1720 to 1725 when the 1609 Birmingham International to Aberystwyth service arrives at Platform 5 and the 1530 Aberystwyth/Pwllheli to Birmingham International service arrives at Platform 4 simultaneously with an average 173 passengers alighting

whilst 107 others try to board the two services adjacent to each other. On a Friday which is busier than the other days the numbers are well over 300.

Source: <https://www.railwaydata.co.uk/loadings/gbr>

Newtown

In November 2025 Reform Ltd Montgomeryshire and Glyndwr branch posted disparaging comments on their facebook page about the DDA compliant footbridge and lifts at Newtown station claiming that “no one uses it” and that the existing Brimmon Lane bridge was already “a disabled access route”. The post attracted people making comments saying the lifts were “woke”whatever that means.

The reality is that the lifts and new footbridge are used by the elderly, people with mobility issues, young mothers with pushchairs and others with heavy luggage – a significant percentage of the population. The narrow vehicle accessible 19th Century Brimmon Lane bridge has no footpath over it, the approach to it on the town side is very steep and is not paved on the Treowen side---hardly ideal. Perhaps more disturbing than this basic lack of knowledge of the situation at Newtown station is Reform Ltd’s cavalier dismissal of other people’s legitimate issues and problems like they’re not important.

Coast Line evening trains from December 2025

TfW have reinstated the “winter timetable” late evening services on the coast line that were cut between December 2024 and May 2025 and they will run between December 2025 and May 2026. Locally “use it or lose it” messages are being pushed along with publicity about the services not being cut this winter.

Coast Line Engineering Work

In what’s becoming an annual occurrence the entire coastline was closed for the February half term again in 2026 (Saturday 14th February to Monday 23rd February) to allow engineering work to take place. With no schools traffic it’s almost certainly the quietest week of the year on the line for usage. Track renewals took place between Talybont and Dyffryn Ardudwy Station and between Llanaber Station and Barmouth Beach Club. Also during the closure there was maintenance work on the tracks and level crossings along the route here and complete bridge inspections.

Rail fares frozen in England

The day before the budget the DfT announced that regulated rail fares in England would not be raised in March 2026 and would be frozen for the first time in 30 years. This applies to fares “owned” by Train Operating Companies that report direct to the DfT and not devolved administrations. This means that very long-distance fares beyond TfW’s network such as Off Peak Returns to/from London from Cambrian stations that are owned by TOC’s other than TfW will be frozen.

Rail passengers have endured inflation and above inflation price increases since privatisation – specified by Government. Normally devolved administrations and

unregulated fares mirror what has happened with English regulated fares. At the time of the newsletter copy deadline 22nd February 2026 the Welsh Government had not announced its intentions.

Whilst welcome as a response to the cost-of-living crisis many commentators have pointed out that this is still not genuine fare reform which many believe would not only lower the cost of rail travel to the public but also increase usage and farebox revenue for the railway and help achieve wider policy objectives.

Birmingham International

Celebrated its 50th anniversary of opening in February. A rare piece of rail investment from the 1970's it of course serves Birmingham Airport and the National Exhibition Centre. Cambrian services to the West Midlands have terminated there since December 2008. Regional Railways Central ran services to Aberystwyth starting there in the early 1990's but only once a day.

Birmingham New St

Passenger loading data taken in Summer 2024 for weekdays show that TfW's three busiest services were Cambrian services serving Birmingham New St with loadings significantly greater than any TfW services serving Manchester or Cardiff.

Source: <https://www.railwaydata.co.uk/loadings/gbr>

1. The 1709 Birmingham International to Llandudno departed New St (1724) with an average loading of 300 (the rear 2 carriages of which detach at Shrewsbury to form the 1830 to Aberystwyth – though it's not advertised as a through train).
2. The 1609 Birmingham International to Aberystwyth/Pwllheli departed New St (1624) with an average loading of 269.
3. The 0519 Aberystwyth to Birmingham International arrived at New St (0830) with an average loading of 266.

These were average loading across the week; individual days could be higher (and lower). Average loads dropped under 200 after/before Telford Central.

Birmingham New St was the busiest station outside London with exit/entrances of 36,623,678 and 5,641,463 interchanges in 2024/2025. Which is an average of c100,000 journeys starting/ending their everyday and c.15,500 passengers changing trains.

Wolverhampton to Birmingham New St is one of the Top 10 passenger flows outside of those involving a London station with 1,918,276 journeys between the two stations in 2024/2025/ c.5,250 a day. TfW Cambrian services of course form part of a very frequent service between these two stations and passengers doing the 19 minute journey between the two West Midlands cities often opt to use them in significant numbers at peak times and are a source of complaints about "overcrowding on Cambrian services" which local media and social media seem to think effects all trains in Mid Wales at all times.

Transport for Wales Infrastructure aspirations on the Cambrian

TfW have notified the Chairman of their infrastructure aspirations for our line; in the short term they are working with Network Rail to implement several line speed improvements that take into account the soon to be introduced Class 197's superior acceleration characteristics compared to the existing Class 158 DMU's. The intention behind this is to create more recovery time in the timetable rather than reduce journey times.

In the longer term they have said these are currently unfunded aspirations:

- Additional loops (e.g. Westbury and Borth) to provide recovery opportunities during significant perturbation, plus flexibility to accommodate freight and charter traffic
- Extended loops at Talerddig, Dovey Junction and Welshpool - Fron; these are where trains are timed to pass and longer loops will provide more performance resilience, because it will be less likely a late train will delay the one its passing
- Extended loops at Tywyn and Harlech (reasoning as above)
- 3rd platform at Dovey Junction (serving the DOWNSIDE loop)
- Improvements to Level Crossings where these would allow a higher line-speed

This broadly aligns with SARPA's thoughts and communicated aspirations for our line, TfW also noted they would welcome our help in lobbying for these measures – see the article “from the SARPA archive” in this newsletter for a contrasting standpoint from years gone by!

In February TfW published their vision document: ***Today, Tomorrow, Together: A vision for rail across Wales and Borders***, which has been presented to Westminster and endorsed by Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander and Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer. The section relating to the Cambrian is on p. 26:

More Reliable Trains on the Cambrian Line

Investment in track and signalling will allow us to make it easier to prevent or recover from any disruption on the single-track sections in Mid Wales. Longer term opportunities include building more stations along the line. Estimated Cost: £50m - £150m

Class 197 DMU's

Crew training will take place throughout 2026 with the intention to introduce them to full passenger service on our line in September after the summer peak. TfW don't appear to want any teething new rolling stock troubles interfering with the summer timetable from May, which we are told is supposed to be hourly on the mainline* and with the extra summer passengers on the coastline. Summer 2024 was very busy on the coast and drove the record footfall figures achieved as reported elsewhere. This has been repeated in summer 2025. Whilst coherent answers are still needed from TfW as to why the new stock promised in June 2018 to be delivered in 2022 has taken so long to introduce, timing their introduction not to affect the busiest time of year is sensible.

TfW have finally won an award at the annual industry golden spanner awards for fleet reliability winning silver for their Class 197 in the second generation New DMU category for the second most improved fleet from the previous year: reliability up 29.5%! It's noted that in this category the field is not exactly crowded or the bar set high! The

statistics show that generally trains powered solely by electric are the most reliable, with diesel at the bottom of the tables and hybrid trains in between though factors like type of work undertaken access to overnight maintenance facilities and terrain operated over can lead to variation. TfW's operating patterns with high mileage complicated diagrams using DMU's, crossing lots of different types of terrain with different stopping patterns and a low percentage of units returning to their home depot each night are a recipe for lower than average unit reliability.

*TfW have confirmed major changes to the service pattern along the North Wales Coast Mainline from May 2026 with Manchester Airport services running hourly to Holyhead instead of to Llandudno and the hourly Liverpool Lime St service to Chester service extended to Llandudno. The two hourly Birmingham International to Holyhead service will be cut back to Llandudno Junction. The current hourly Crewe to Chester and Chester to Wrexham shuttles will combine to form an hourly Crewe to Wrexham service.

Class 158

Industry sources are indicating that the TfW fleet of 22 units based at Machynlleth will be transferred to the Great Western Railway once they are replaced in September and are likely to be used so that GWR can eliminate Class 150 use in the South-West of England. The two units damaged in the October 2024 Talerddig crash are reported to be undergoing repair work at an engineering depot in Wakefield for return to traffic, though it's unclear whether they'll be returned to TfW.

The ex TfW Class 175 fleet after a period of storage has been sent to GWR as well and if true that the Class 158 will follow local services in Devon and Cornwall later this year will be in the hands of 25 and 35 year old cast offs from Wales....of course ordering £800 million in brand new rolling stock for TfW in the last few years has allowed this.... which is entirely off message with what certain political parties would have you believe.

Aberystwyth

The log trains returned after a near six-month hiatus, running down in the early hours of Friday 16th January and returning on the morning of Saturday 17th January. The next week's logs had to return on Tuesday 26th due to the Shrewsbury to Chester line being closed for engineering work at the weekend.

The Vale of Rheidol Railway Museum is swapping exhibits with the Severn Valley Railway this spring and host ex Great Western Railway Manor locomotive 7819 Hinton Manor with the SVR displaying 3217 Earl of Berkeley. Hinton Manor spent most of working life from 1939 until 1965 based on the Cambrian system being allocated to Oswestry up until 1962 and then having spells at Machynlleth and Shrewsbury until withdrawal. It came back to the Cambrian in the summer of 1987 to work steam hauled specials and again in 1991 on excursions. It's currently not in operational condition.

Pontdolgoch

The bridge over the A470 has been hit no fewer than 12 times since January 2024. As well as causing delays to rail services while the bridge is inspected for damage, the road is also closed whilst the offending vehicles are removed and bridge inspected delaying motorists as well. Network Rail highlighted the bridge at the launch of yet another national campaign in November 2025 to educate road users as to remembering the height of their vehicle and complying with the Highway Code. A picture of a logging lorry half turned over wedged under the bridge was used.



Photograph: Network Rail.

Heritage event in Llandudno

Hundreds of people from historic railways right across the UK are expected in Llandudno during March for the Heritage Railway Association Annual Awards 2026. Considered to be the 'Oscars' of the heritage rail world, the shortlist covers awards in areas as diverse as infrastructure, steam locomotive restoration and events, alongside categories for teams, rising stars and young volunteers.

Returning to Wales for the first time in many years, the awards will be held at Venue Cymru on the Llandudno sea front on Saturday, 7 March 2026. The publicly owned integrated transport provider, Transport for Wales, has partnered with the Heritage Railway Association to make the event possible.

FROM THE SARPA ARCHIVE – CORPORATE HANDBAGS OVER THE SARPA NEWSLETTER

Gareth Marston

Suffice to say in the first few years of Arriva Trains Wales operations after they took over in December 2003, there were more popular pork chops at a bar mitzvah than ATW. They couldn't run the trains on time, services turned around at Wolverhampton instead of going through to Birmingham New St causing missed connections and lengthy waits for long distance travellers on a regular basis, they had fewer carriages than the previous Central Trains operation and talked about investment plans on the Cambrian had failed to materialise in the new franchise. Whilst not all the problems were of ATW's making – many of them were hard wired into the new franchise and would have had to be addressed by whomever took over – ATW's Senior Management response was all too often from the school of macho management and made the optics worse.

Understandably the frustration at the state of the service, lack of resolution and ATW's corporate attitude led to calls for ATW to be sacked from the franchise and the SARPA Newsletter carried articles and views along those lines: we certainly were not alone in this and just reflected the general mood regarding ATW. Then in early 2007 it was discovered that ATW were making a healthy profit from their heavily subsidised operation; as you can imagine this hardly endeared them to rail users in Mid Wales and Shropshire facing another Wolverhampton turnaround on an overcrowded train.

One of the in-built problems of the franchise was not having full maintenance facilities anywhere nearby for the units that operated our line and ATW decided (or were forced to on threat of losing the franchise according to at least one source) to invest in reestablishing them at Machynlleth. Once construction of the new maintenance shed started a rumour went around the town, almost certainly originating from rail employees, saying it was being built to the wrong dimensions – to fit a 20m long unit, not the 23m long ones that operated on our line. SARPA Newsletter 39 April 2007 reported on this; elsewhere in the same newsletter an exasperated comment was made regarding subsidy ending up as profit as the details of yet another ATW performance cock up was reported on.

The SARPA Newsletter has always been sent to interested parties in the rail scene in Mid Wales as well as its members, and in more recent years published online, some are posted to CF postcodes and a copy of Number 39 clearly found its way to and was read by someone senior at ATW in Cardiff and touched a nerve. We received a Solicitor's letter demanding we publish a correction to things published in SARPA 39. Apparently, the new shed at Machynlleth would fit 23m units and subsidy did not end up as profit – we were told to state this or else! We published these comments in SARPA 40 July 2007 as requested. The newsletter of course reported on all the awful performances ATW had served up that summer, and direct quotes taken from the Welsh Government's website about how much subsidy it gave ATW followed by Arriva Group's own press release on how much profit it made and from what sources! Readers could draw their own conclusions given it was all on the public recordit's not recorded if ATW sent a Solicitor's letter to their own owning group and the Welsh Government.

As to the maintenance shed, what looked like an extension appeared to be added to it and 23m units have happily fitted in it ever since. This facility helped ATW get out of their Cambrian performance doom cycle, along with the two extra Class 158's that SARPA 40 reported had been funded by the Welsh Government – as lobbied for by SARPA – we never got a thank you letter from ATW for that..... In December 2008 ATW extended their services to Birmingham International with a robust turnaround time and regular Wolverhampton turnarounds became a thing of the past.... a full 5 years after ATW took over operations on the Cambrian.

In 2010 Arriva Group were bought by German State operator Deutsche Bahn and the corporate attitude to the people who used their services mellowed under the new owners – the original Arriva were a car leasing firm from the north of England that had got into bus and rail operations after privatisation. ATW and particularly their pre-2008 incarnation is now just an unhappy footnote in the history of the railways, a here today and gone tomorrow outfit that was a symptom of Government policy failure on transport. SARPA, the railway, people and communities have continued and moved on. We clearly brought the heat as they say to ATW back in 2007, but as we point out regularly there's no need for a rail user group's newsletter (or via any other channel) to criticise operators or government publicly or privately if they're up to the job of providing an acceptable quality rail service. Corporate messaging and aggression can't disguise reality; if ATW and their Solicitors were hoping to silence legitimate criticism, they were mistaken. Things might not be perfect now under TfW, and we regularly say what's needed to be said, but at least in 2026 no one running the rail service is trying to go to war with its customers over the state of rail services in Mid Wales!



Borth station in the 1890s, with the original canopy. There was even a refreshment room!

TRAVELLER'S TALES

Roger Whitehouse

A good summer!

My summer continued with trips to Crewe, Aberystwyth (twice), Machynlleth, Talybont, Newtown and Machynlleth, all free of operational incident. There was, however, one occasion when, on changing at Dovey Junction for Aberystwyth, I had to direct two puzzled visitor couples to the far end platform. The direction sign on the Aberystwyth platform fence faces south, so is not seen by passengers alighting at the coast platform. One screen serving both platforms 2a and 2b has always been inadequate: however, Bill Redfern tells me that a second screen is at last in hand.

On into Autumn

Autumn tends to bring longer journeys. One to Burton-on-Trent and back was affected by closure of Machynlleth station car park, while damaged 158s were removed, so we drove to Welshpool instead. This time we were allowed to remain on the 0816 arrival at Shrewsbury when it became part of the 0830 to Birmingham. Late running in the West Midlands led to a connection at New St just caught, and one at Shrewsbury (1630 to Aberystwyth) missed. The resulting Delay Repay claim was accepted and paid far more quickly than in the past. One black mark was that the car park closure wasn't mentioned on TfW's journey planner: we knew of it only from local social media.

One of our usual trips to Birmingham saw the 2032 from Shrewsbury delayed awaiting a driver on an incoming train, and further delayed waiting for an up train at the end of Welshpool loop, not very dynamic this time. However, there is so much slack in the timings of the coast connection that we arrived in Tywyn almost on time.

Looking to the future, TfW have agreed to reinstate the late trains on the coast line throughout the winter, so we shall not need to drive to and from Machynlleth on Birmingham days.

PS How good were Arriva?

I began writing reports along the lines of my Traveller's Tales series many years ago, when I joined the Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth liaison committee. At that time they went to stakeholder manager Ben Davies, a regular presence at liaison meetings, who welcomed them as evidence to present to his superiors. All too often, they included deficiencies in service delivery or information to passengers, as have continued since.

It seems that a coast resident and one from Newtown had rather different experiences of Arriva.



Borth: the columns encased in protection, and the old and new stop signs.



MEMBERSHIP

The membership fee for the forthcoming year (up to 31 December 2026) is £10.00 per annum for individuals and for organisations. Please make any cheques payable to SARPA. Donations are of course welcome.

SARPA will lobby for better rail services.

Act as a watchdog to safeguard the line's future.

Meet in public once a month.

All members will receive our quarterly Newsletter free of charge.

Members with access to e-mail can be included in our electronic network if they so desire.

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

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

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

Bill_sarpa@outlook.com

USEFUL ADDRESSES

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

Network Rail:

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

Association of Community Rail Partnerships

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

Traveline Cymru for all public transport information

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

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

Public Transport Users' Committee for Wales Secretariat

Welsh Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NQ. E-mail ptucwales@wales.gsi.gov.uk

For Train Times and Fares Call:

08457 48 49 50 (24hrs) 0845 60 40 500 (Welsh Language Service)

0845 60 50 600 (Textphone)

For ticket reservations please call: 0870 9000 773

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION

Chairman: Jeff Smith, 17 Marine Terrace, Aberystwyth, SY23 2AZ. Tel. 07949426374. Email abergogledd@gmail.com

Vice Chairman and Webmaster: Angus Eickhoff. Contact by email:

angus@anguseickhoff.co.uk

Treasurer and Membership Officer: Bill Redfern, 8 Plas Edwards, Tywyn, LL36 0AS. Tel. 07769685117. Email: bill_sarpa@outlook.com

Secretary: position vacant.

Newsletter Editor: Denis Bates, 86 Maesceinion, Waun Fawr, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 3QQ. Tel. 07952187021; 01970 617667. Email: denisebbates@gmail.com

Committee Members

Tony Harvey: 23 High Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7JP. Tel. 01938 559087. Email:

tony@montgomeryshire.eu

Ivor Morris: 2 Dingle Road, Welshpool, SY21 7QB. Tel. 01938 554463.

Thomas Wheeler. Contact by Email: sarpa@sarpa.info

Roger Whitehouse. Contact by Email: sarpa@sarpa@sarpa.info

ASSOCIATION CONTACT POINT

Email: sarpa@sarpa.info

WEBSITES

Our website <https://sarpa.info>

Webmaster Angus Eickhoff: angus@anguseickhoff.co.uk

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

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

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

Other sites of interest:

A useful alternative to the National Rail Enquiries site:	www.traintimes.org.uk/
Transport for Wales	www.tfwrail.wales/
National Rail Enquiries	www.nationalrail.co.uk/
London Northwestern Railway	www.journeycheck.com/londonnorthwesternrailway/
West Midlands Railway	www.westmidlandsrailway.co.uk
Avanti West Coast	www.avantiwestcoast.co.uk
Chiltern Railways	www.chilternrailways.co.uk/
Network Rail	www.networkrail.co.uk/
Railfuture/Railway Development Society	www.railfuture.org.uk/
Railwatch: the quarterly magazine of Railfuture	www.railwatch.org.uk
The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (Acorp)	communityrail.org.uk
North Wales Coast Railway	www.nwrail.org.uk/
Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways	www.festrail.co.uk/
Vale of Rheidol Railway	www.rheidolrailway.co.uk
Talylyn Railway	www.talylyn.co.uk/
Welshpool and Llanfair Railway	www.wlfr.org.uk/
Welsh Highland Heritage Railway	www.whr.co.uk/
Fairbourne Railway	www.fairbournerrailway.com/
Borth Station Museum	www.borthstationmuseum.co.uk
Real Time Trains	realtimetrains.co.uk
Live Rail Record	https://live.rail-record.co.uk

MONTHLY MEETINGS

March	Saturday 21st	11:30	Monty Club, Newtown
April	Saturday 18th	12:30	Railway Inn, Borth
May	Saturday 9th	11:45	AGM Town Council Offices, The Presbytery, Aberystwyth
June	Saturday 20th	11:15	Methodist Church, Welshpool.
July	Saturday 11th	11:45	Talylyn Railway, Wharf Station, Tywyn.
August	Thursday 20th	19:00	Monty Club, Newtown.
September	Saturday 19th	11:15	Wynnstey Hotel, Machynlleth.
October	Saturday 17th	11:30	Vestry, Capel Y Traeth, Criccieth.
November	Saturday 14th	11:45	Town Council Offices, The Presbytery, Aberystwyth.
December	Saturday 5th	11:30	The HIVE, Shrewsbury.

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

Copy deadline for the next newsletter is 22nd June 2026