

Rail & Bus for Herefordshire Newsletter Summer 2019



New Sign for Ledbury



Historic Company name becomes history

News to keep you informed

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Hon. President: Professor John Whitelegg

Newsletter Editor: Gareth Calan Davies

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Published & printed by GHAL Productions, Ledbury

RBfH Committee News

Will Frecknall is now your chairman and Naomi Bell has taken over the function of events secretary. Peter Gwatkin continues as your very capable treasurer. Gareth at present continues as the newsletter editor for this edition.

Michael Sullivan, Philip Baeur and John Thorne continue as ordinary committee members.

The committee are looking for new members so please, YOU in the membership out there come forward and take up the challenge.

RBfH Meetings

The Spring meetings concluded with two interesting meetings. Professor John Whitelegg, our Honorary President, gave a rousing talk on the need to address our current transport problems, particularly in Hereford, with a new and fresh approach based on a very much improved public transport and cycle plan involving an integrated tram, bus and cycleway network. Examples from the continent were illustrated to show what can be achieved given the willpower of our politicians, local and national, to act on their words about vehicle emissions, improving air quality, the environment, and the need to invigorate our decaying cities.

The last talk was by a very enthusiastic Fay Easton, Head of Stakeholder & Community at West Midlands Railway (WMR), about the prospects of community engagement with Ledbury and Colwall and the setting up of a Community Rail Partnership. WMR already sponsor the Ledbury Poetry Festival and have paid for a new eye catching sign at Ledbury Station (see article in this newsletter) and a

poet's chair. Unfortunately, as our chairman pointed out in a letter to WMR, their train service does not live up to the same enthusiasm and is currently suffering a deterioration in rolling stock quality, overcrowding and poor reliability. One hopes that their statement about new trains in 2020 will prove a reality, otherwise any drive to engage with the community will be fruitless.

Unfortunately our last meeting which was due to be a perambulation of Transport & Industry in Victorian Worcester was cancelled due to a lack of positive support. One hopes it may be repeated in the future.

Herefordshire Council Update

The May local government elections saw a dramatic change in the composition of Herefordshire Council with an alliance of Green Party, Its Our County and Herefordshire Independents forming the majority of the new cabinet. There appears a great deal that the new council has to tackle in these rapidly changing times. The following extract from a letter to Rail & Bus from David Hitchiner, Leader of the council, explains the approach to major road infrastructure schemes. Mr Hitchiner states:

'At a full council meeting today (Friday 12 July 2019), I announced that a decision will be taken shortly in relation to major transport infrastructure projects, including the Hereford bypass (as part of Hereford Transport Package) and Southern Link Road (as part of South Wye Transport Package).

A forthcoming decision notice has been published on the council's website confirming the intention for the cabinet member for infrastructure and transport, Cllr John Harrington, to take a decision in relation to these projects and the options as to whether to continue with progression of the schemes, pause and review the schemes or cancel them. A cabinet member decision report will be published setting out the matters being considered.

The decision is scheduled to be taken within the next two weeks and will be subject to the council's governance processes.

Since the election, the new cabinet and I have been reflecting on these schemes and taking time to understand all the issues, whether the current schemes provide value for money and solve the problems that they are intended to solve, and whether additional evidence might be required. We are also mindful of the pressing issue of the climate emergency.

Thank you for your understanding while we take the time to consider these decisions which are extremely important and will affect not only our lives but those of generations to come.'

One can but hope that such a letter heralds not only a move to more open local government but also a move to consideration of more sustainable transport options for the county with due regard to the importance of the environment and landscape.

Public transport has an important and vital part in the future of the county and its communities, both urban and rural. Rail & Bus for Herefordshire is here to assist as best we can. That is why we need more members and more members to come forward to support the voluntary work of our committee.

PLEASE PASS THE MESSAGE ON

Buses and Trains, their safeguarding and development are important to the future of Herefordshire.

**PLEASE GET A FRIEND OR COLLEAGUE TO JOIN US AT
RBfH (application form on back page)**

Community Rail Partnerships (CRP's)

Government and train operators make great play of Community Rail. The concept of bringing communities and railways together started as far back as 1993 when Professor Paul Salveson published his document *'New Futures for Rural Rail'*. The idea came following a visit to Ledbury where Gareth Calan Davies had set up the first private rail ticket and information office in a wooden chalet on the station. The station was previously unmanned and Gareth considered it needed to be better integrated with the town and community. The enterprise continues today.

Professor Salveson went on to develop the concept and in 2004 it won Government approval with the publication of the *'Community Rail Development Strategy'*. A new version of the strategy was published in 2018 and a strong commitment to community rail and the setting up of CRP's is expected from train operators as part of their franchise. Today there are over 50 CRP's throughout Britain and the following articles from both Transport for Wales and West Midlands Railway tell of further development in Herefordshire.

Transport for Wales: CRP's

The following article was kindly provided by James Nicholas, Community Rail Manager covering the Marches Line

Rapidly approaching the end of our first year, Transport for Wales is delighted to have made great strides in transforming rail across the Wales and Borders network.

One of our key achievements is the launch of our Community Rail Vision, putting a clear focus on working together with communities to build a transport system that is fit for the future.

We will be expanding on our current Community Rail Partnerships to cover the entirety of our network across Wales and the Borders, with a view to establishing a CRP between Crewe and Hereford by 2020/21.

Currently there are five community rail partnerships, each unique in its own way, forming vital links between the train operator and the community and promoting use of those lines. Community Rail Partnerships are funded by the Train Operator though some also receive additional funding from their various local authorities.

Station adoption is also set for a boost with an ambitious target of having adopters at 90 per cent of all stations on the Wales and Borders network.

Transport for Wales wants to celebrate the fantastic work of its volunteers, with Community Rail Ambassadors set to be appointed to help grow the scheme to make stations the best they can possibly be.

Almost £200 million is set to be spent on Transport for Wales' 247 stations across Wales and England too, improving all aspects of customer experience from passenger information to waiting rooms. This will include the creation of dedicated community spaces at stations where possible.

Colin Lea, Customer Experience Director for Transport for Wales Rail Services said: *'Our Community Rail Partnerships and station adopters do fantastic work in promoting their individual stations and lines. You really see the passion for those routes and it's great to see it build from a grassroots level up into something really special.*

Herefordshire in particular is somewhere a CRP can be very successful, with Hereford and Leominster stations being gateways for some of the best things the county has to offer. We want to celebrate those great things and get more people choosing public transport.

Of course there are challenges with building a successful CRP, so we will be working closely with ACoRP and other voluntary bodies as well as our active rail user groups and other train operators the route connects with to get this right. We will be funding community activities to levels not seen before so it really is an exciting time.

West Midlands Railway: CRP's

The following article was kindly provided by Fay Easton, Head of Community & Stakeholder for West Midlands Railway.

People Power & Better Railways

Community engagement all over the UK is acknowledged to help improve the quality of rail services, increase off peak usage and create local economic and social regeneration.

In November 2018 Rail Minister Andrew Jones challenged train operators across the UK to step up their support for 'life-changing' community rail projects and the response at West Midlands Railway is to invest in senior officers to work on developing community-focussed, sustainable Community Rail Partnerships across the network.

What is a Community Rail Partnership (CRP)?

A Community Rail Partnership is a well-tested mechanism that connects key stakeholders to form a group dedicated to gaining rail improvements, business growth and measurable local regeneration. The philosophy being that all partners reap rewards and results.

The Top Five Aims of a CRP are listed here:

1. Putting stations back into the heart of communities, building the vision of stations as places of welcome and local identity
2. Local stations functioning as economic and social assets for the areas they serve
3. Bringing empowerment and closeness to communities
4. Helping with wider economic and social regeneration
5. Increasing volume and quality of rail usage with happier passengers

This is a short synopsis covering the potential and possibility for Ledbury, Colwall and Hereford to form a Community Rail Partnership.

With the current service pressures, small towns expanding rapidly and increasing commute and leisure travel demands, partnership working to connect with transport providers is a productive measure to help improve the services and bring stations closer into the communities they serve.

A CRP brings together stakeholders who invest core funding annually for 3 years to create productive partnership that will:

- ◇ provide a strong voice for the line, the service and the areas the rail
- ◇ network serves, building bonds between railways, local authorities and communities
- ◇ persuade people of the wider benefits of rail travel, increasing levels of sustainable travel
- ◇ develop ‘inward’ business and leisure visits capitalising on the ‘empty seats’ off peak heading into the destinations on the line.
- ◇ connect key partners to develop joint projects to improve the service and bring off-peak travel to the fore to spread demand for peak services while creating economic benefit
- ◇ create a partnership venture to facilitate wider funding bids to be spent on agreed projects at the three locations
- ◇ play a visible and effective role in local economic development and social inclusion, using the station and rail travel as invaluable elements improving the welcome at the stations, creating a positive ‘gateway’ entrance to the area, organising adoption of each station and connection with their town centres, supporting with local grant aid for upgrades
- ◇ create dedicated marketing campaigns and ‘identity’ for the line, developing campaigns to attract visitor and business numbers inward

Potential Local Partners/Stakeholders

Business Improvement District

Local Authorities
Ledbury Poetry Festival
Britain in Bloom Groups
Other Community Groups
Rail User Groups
Councils
TOCs

Funding the CRP

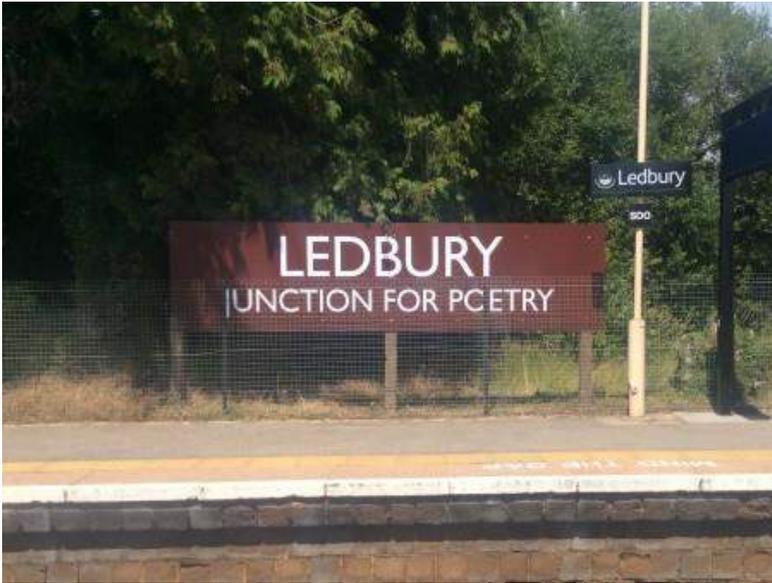
The working model is based on the partners co-financing the partnership with varying levels of investments to secure a fund that finances a paid officer and starter projects, with an immediate aim to ‘grant-find’ to develop projects.

The philosophy for such a Rail Partnership encompasses an ‘agreed mission statement’ with all core funders having a place at the board table to develop the business plan, ensuring that projects benefitting their own areas will be pursued.

The paid officer works on target-achieving project delivery, ensuring value for money & economic and social returns for all partners.

Funding contributions for partners vary from a few hundred pounds investment by user and community groups to £5,000 core funding from public partners, private enterprise sponsorship varying between £1,000 and £10,000 with the Train Operating Company investing £10,000 per annum for the three-year initial term.

Recent reports from the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP) conclude that community rail is an outstanding low-cost / high-benefit measure and to date over the twenty year history of CRPs, there have been no ‘wound-up’ Partnerships, which affirms the value of these arrangements to funders and communities alike. Across the UK there are now 64 Community Rail Partnerships in operation and in the West Midlands Rail Network, the first CRP was launched in June, the second set for the Autumn and three further partnerships in the planning stage.



Ledbury Station Renamed for Poetry Festival

Passengers passing through Ledbury station over the next week will be visiting the official ‘Ledbury Junction for Poetry’.

The railway station has been renamed in honour of the town’s week-long poetry festival which starts today.

West Midlands Railway is supporting this year’s Ledbury Poetry Festival by adding additional railway signage to Ledbury railway station and also sponsoring the reading of a special poem which recognises the work of community groups at stations across the West Midlands Railway rail network.

‘Pride of Place’ was written by Steve Pottinger from a Black Country Trio known as ‘Poets, Prattlers and Pandemonialists’. Steve will be reading poem as part of the week’s festivities at The Poetry Stage at the Ledbury Celebration on Sunday 14th July, part of six hours of non-stop poetry music and entertainment on the final day of the Festival.

West Midlands Railway supports over 300 volunteers across 114

railway stations, these stalwart members of the community help to brighten up platforms through planting, painting, adding local features and arranging community activities such as book swaps and little libraries for commuters.

The train operator is also hosting a special ‘Poetry Chair’ at the station. Rail passengers are invited to take a moment to sit in the chair and put together their own literary piece, which may be published onto the Ledbury Poetry Festival website.

Fay Easton, head of stakeholder and community for West Midlands Railway, said: *‘Poetry is something that resonates closely with so many people and our community groups at the stations across our network have loved the Pride of Place ‘thankyou poem’. Renaming Ledbury station seems a fitting tribute to recognising the impact of poetry, particularly in light of the very special poem we commissioned last year. The poem is a literary thank you to the volunteers who brighten up railway stations across our network, and will soon be found displayed at fifty of our stations across the rail network.*

With many of the Ledbury Poetry Festival’s events just a short walk from the station, travelling to and from Ledbury by train is an easy and convenient option for visitors to the Poetry Festival this week.’

Phillippa Slinger from Ledbury Poetry Festival, said: *‘We are so delighted with this partnership with West Midlands Railway. Over the years many poets have stood on the station platform, from Robert Frost and the Dymock poets to the hundreds of international poets who have visited the Festival since it started over twenty years ago. So to have the station named as the junction for poetry is very fitting. And it’s equally*

perfect to have Black Country poets travelling down the line to perform their poetry here’’ (source: West Midlands Railway press release 05 July 2019)



The Happy Bus

My friend Deano calls it the Happy Bus. He was already on it when I joined him for the Thursday's only service from Ledbury to Ross-on-Wye. I soon realised why Deano calls it Happy Bus. Those already on it at Ledbury were joined by others at Much Marcle and at various points through the lanes up over Perrystone Hill and down to Old Gore cross roads and the back way into Ross via Brampton Abbots. There were cheery good mornings and the murmur of conversation as pleasantries and no doubt gossip was exchanged.

The following day I took the Fridays only bus from Ledbury to Leominster via Bosbury, Cradley, Bishops Frome, Bromyard, Bredenbury and Steens Bridge. Nearly a full load from Bromyard raised the noise level considerably and I was able to catch up with the local Bromyard news to good effect!

Both these services have so far escaped the drastic slaughter of our country bus services nationwide. Perhaps Herefordshire is luckier than most counties in retaining a very small proportion of its once extensive rural public transport network.

The issue of rural accessibility and public transport provision has been around for some time. In 1984 TEST (Transport & Environment Studies) published a report 'After the Bus' commissioned by Friends of the Earth. In that report it was stated:

'The rural accessibility dilemma has been well documented. There is general agreement as to the nature of the problem – in the first place services have become increasingly centralised in larger population centres. Secondly, the rise in car ownership has led to declining patronage for bus services, and thus to service reductions and higher fares which have contributed to a downward spiral where more people use cars. Yet, there remain many people without any means of transport for journeys longer than those that can be

made on foot or by pedal cycle – always assuming these people are physically able to move about in those ways. A further significant social change has been the decline in agricultural employment and the influx of retired and economically inactive people into the countryside, as well as those buying second homes.

Villages could become dormitories, with many retirement and second homes. But retirement connotes ageing and the eventual inability to drive. Less affluent retired people may then have to join the car-less and migrate to urban areas. The alternative for car-less villagers is to watch their standard of living continually decline’.



The ‘Happy Bus’ resting at the Ross-on-Wye terminus before its next rural journey to the small village of Llangarron on the Monmouthshire border.

The Shropshire Bus Upgrade Project

Our Spring newsletter carried an article on this interesting project. The project management has now appointed a coordinator and we bring you an update:

The Shropshire bus upgrade project, sponsored by the Foundation for Integrated Transport and launched on Saturday 21 June, has three objectives:

To make sure that councillors, MPs and transport decision makers are all aware of the multiple benefits that are delivered by high quality bus services (reduced congestion in urban areas, reduced air pollution, reduced carbon emissions in line with Shropshire Council's declared "climate emergency" and improved health).

To identify improvements that can be made in bus services so that they better meet the needs of all users (students, commuters, visitors to hospitals, those who need connections to stations ...).

To work with other organisations nationally to argue that central government should fund high quality rural bus services at a level to be found in other countries.

Commenting on the objectives of the project, our Honorary President Professor John Whitelegg said:

This report is asking for changes in the way that all politicians and decision-takers think about buses. We can do so much better than the current disorganised and uncoordinated arrangement. Establishing a model of integrated rural transport is the first step. After that we need to address funding but changing the way we do things is more important than that. Residents in Shropshire and in every other English shire deserve a much better bus services than those currently on offer and the time is now right to embark on the upgrade"

Alastair Hanton, representing the Foundation for Integrated Transport that funds the project, added:

'The bus is the only truly inclusive mode of transport. It's available to everyone, does not requiring traffic skills, physical fitness or wealth, and is able to go almost anywhere. All other modes of transport (driving, taxis, walking, cycling, rail) whatever their merits fail in one or more respects. We therefore believe that the provision of a high quality bus network should be a first call on available transport resources, rather than an optional extra'.

Rail and Bus for Herefordshire wishes the Foundation for Integrated Transport every success with this project. All their ambitions for Shropshire are equally applicable to Herefordshire.

(source: Professor John Whitelegg)

The Hay Ho! Bus

The Hay Ho! Bus, 39A, has been operating for five years now. This is a major achievement for a rural Sunday bus kick-started by the community. There are three principal partners supporting it: RBfH, Ramblers and Hay Tourism Group. A small working group meets twice a year to plan ways in which the service can be sustained. Herefordshire Council's public transport team manage the contract and both Herefordshire and Powys Councils offer a small financial contribution each year to keep the wheels rolling. Yeomans have done sterling work in terms of reliability and friendly driver support. They all contribute to make Hay Ho! work well.

Having said all of this, patronage has plateaued despite our efforts to hold fares down and market the service. A major disappointment is that recently demand has not increased in summer as it did during the first two years of operation. The exception is, of course, Hay Festival when more fare payers step aboard. And yes, the 39A regularly brings Hay residents to Hereford Railway Station and carries tourists home after a weekend in Hay. There are just not enough of them!

So the message is loud and clear: we need more people on board. If you fancy a trip out to Hay on a Sunday the service offers either two and a half hours or a full day browsing the booksellers and eclectic craft shops or enjoying easy walks near the Wye. There are, of course, plenty of cafes and most of them are open all year round until 17:25 when the last bus for Hereford pulls out of Oxford Street.

Hay Ho! leaves Hereford Railway Station on Sundays at 10:15 ,13:15 and 16:15. It returns at 11:25, 14:55 and 17:25.



The Hay Ho! Bus at the Pandy Inn, Dorstone on its picturesque journey from Hereford to the Town of Books at Hay-on-Wye.

**THE ENVIRONMENT IS IMPORTANT
OUR HEALTH IS IMPORTANT
PUBLIC TRANSPORT HAS A MAJOR PART TO PLAY
IN THESE IMPORTANT ISSUES
SUPPORT BUSES & TRAINS AND HELP**

Threat to Steiner Academy's access to 36 bus lifted

Our Chairman, Will Frecknall, has been active in assisting the Steiner Academy. He writes

Early in June Rail and Bus for Herefordshire was approached by the Steiner Academy at Much Dewchurch. A number of their pupils currently use Stagecoach's 36 Hereford-Monmouth service to travel to and from the school. The Academy had been informed that Stagecoach no longer wished to serve the school, claiming that it was uneconomic. Being an environmentally-minded rural school they were dismayed at this threat to their public transport link. They were seeking our advice on how they might fight this decision.

Currently Stagecoach operates a short service from Hereford to Much Dewchurch on schooldays, timed to arrive immediately before the start of the school day. The first service running through to Monmouth runs some thirty minutes later. Our suggestion was that these two services be combined.

At a constructive meeting between representatives of the Academy and Stagecoach's James O'Neill, a compromise was agreed involving an adjustment to the timing of the Monmouth service. Congratulations to both parties on their pragmatism which has secured the school's access to the 36 bus and achieved a small victory for public transport.'

The Department for Transport Bus Statistics

An annual digest of bus statistics for England is published every year by the Department for Transport. Those for the year ending March 2018 showed a continuing trend of decline in bus usage and bus mileage. The report states: The number of local bus passenger

journeys in England fell by 85 million or 1.9% to 4.36 billion in the year ending March 2018. Passenger journeys in England outside London declined by 3.2% over the same period, continuing the decline since 2008/09 and are now 4.2% lower than in the year ending March 2005. Bus mileage in England decreased by 3.4% when compared with 2016/17.’

A graph of passenger journeys per head by local authority shows Herefordshire as third from the bottom with just an average of 11 journeys per head. The report, however, does state ‘In general, more urban local authorities have above average levels of bus use when compared with rural areas.’

Nevertheless the decline in bus usage is somewhat alarming and does indicate the need for a form of extra government support for rural public transport. The report goes on to note the somewhat obvious: ‘In England outside London bus mileage has declined by 12.9% since 2004/05. This has been driven by a decrease of 49% in local authority supported mileage, in particular in non-metropolitan areas. Although commercial mileage increased by 0.6% from 2004/05 to 2016/17, it decreased by 3.5% over the year to 2017/18. Overall, the decline in supported mileage has not been fully matched by an increase in commercial mileage and in the latest year commercial mileage decreased by 3.5%.

That commercial mileage is showing a decrease must surely sound alarm bells where the Council’s Local Transport Plan policy on bus services relies heavily on a core network of commercial services, thus exonerating itself from having to support rural bus services.

Professor Whitelegg and the Shropshire model are quite correct in asking that all politicians and decision takers think seriously about the future of our bus services.

From the Archives: Disappearing Names

Herefordshire was once renowned for its plentiful supply of small country bus operators. This could well have been part of the reason for the county to be chosen as a Trial Area for bus deregulation in the early 1990's. Deregulation was meant to open up the industry to competition by removing the need for a road service licence. It was also designed to reduce public subsidy. Thus it was hoped that existing operators would compete for services and new operators would be encouraged to enter the market.

All went well for the first half decade of deregulation and then the power of corporation and monopoly stepped in and the reverse started to happen. This was the beginning of the now all powerful corporations such as FirstBus, Stagecoach, GoAhead, Arriva and National Express. A second blow befell the local bus service operator when the squeeze on local authority funds meant the supply of financial assistance for bus services, particularly in rural areas, dramatically declined and in some instances completely dried up. The result, a decline in the supply of local operators, contrary to the aim of deregulation.

Those independent operators that are left are struggling, forced into sometimes disastrous cost saving measures, service abandonment and finally potential closure. Two famous names have recently disappeared from the books of the Traffic Commissioner. Lugg Valley/Primrose were brought into the Yeomans business as a result of deregulation and the need to consolidate to survive. Yeomans still traded their Leominster operations under the operators licence name of Lugg Valley/Primrose. Economic measures have forced the final integration and the O licence for the latter has now been relinquished, the route being re-registered under Yeomans.



Above: Primrose Motors on the 292 Leominster-Hereford Service: Right: Lugg Valley Motors awaits passengers at Hereford Bus Station on the service to Leominster via Canon Pyon.

The Vicissitudes of Travel by a Country Railway

Committee member Michael Sullivan penned this delightful picture of his experience of travel on the Heart of Wales Line.

On Saturday March 26th 2011, it was my intention to take a scenic trip on the **Heart of Wales** line from **Knighton** to **Llandeilo**, the former county town of Carmarthenshire, for an excellent Luncheon at the Cawdor Arms. This is normally a 2hr journey through rural Mid Wales. Unfortunately the reality did not quite equal the expectations, but notwithstanding the mechanical deficiencies of the trains used on that line it turned out a pleasant enough day and I met some most interesting people on the train.

When patronising country railways, especially this one where one is taken back in time some 50 years, one must always remember that such travel is always slow, and it is more than possible that one might not reach their destination.

The day dawned overcast with low cloud and not very warm, but that

was not a barrier. I duly set off on the 30 mile drive to Knighton. Arriving at that quaint little town nestling in the folds of the Radnorshire hills, I was a little early so visited the weekly Country Market which I found most extensive and of a high standard. I came away with a home made Smoked Game Casserole in red wine (frozen of course), comprising venison, pheasant and wood pigeon with various vegetables and a pot of lime marmalade.

The 2 car train arrived on time and we set off at 0954, along the single line. Although it was a fairly ancient Class 150, it had been refurbished and reupholstered with the seating high enough so that I could see out of the windows which I have never been able to do previously. The train was most clean also. Two walkers joined the train with me at Knighton, alighting at **Dolau** and walking back to Knighton although not all in the one day.

Proceeding westwards and southwards the day suddenly changed for the better when we got to **Pen-y-bont**, with the sun beaming down out of blue skies.

We duly arrived at the principal, and only staffed station, **Llandrindod Wells**, at 1030. This is a small Victorian town now slumbering, some might also add decaying, away peacefully. I always say - "a very nice place to come **from**". Then 1100 found us at **Llanwrtydd Wells** where we cross with the northbound train, or supposed to, and the crews change trains. However, on this occasion, it had broken down at **Llangadog**, a wayside halt near **Llandeilo**, and a considerable distance from where we were. What to do? The driver was only cleared to take the train as far as Llanwrtydd, so he was not allowed to proceed. Alight and await a **possible** bus for onward travel? or remain with the train and return whence we came? Naturally I chose the latter and persuaded others to do the same. As we pulled out of the Halt about 10 or so of our former passengers were standing disconsolately on this remote country road waiting for a bus that may, or indeed may not, appear.

Many were on the train simply for a day out, and were intending to go to Swansea; (in Wales the Welsh people get free travel). Some of them, like my travelling companions detailed below, then decided to have an afternoon out in Shrewsbury, a much nicer town than Swansea.

I then got into conversation with a very interesting couple from St Harmons, a small hamlet near Rhayder on the Llanidloes mountain road. They were so interesting that I made copious notes about one of their holidays. This commenced with them telling me that they had travelled on the Trans Siberian Railway from Beijing to Moscow for a mere £ 300 (1st class). I was agog to know more and here is a potted version which I must relate to you, as, doubtless, you will find it as riveting as I did. The year was 2007, and they were away approx. 3 months. They flew with Qatar airlines to Kuala Lumpur and from there took a bus to Penang. Then a bus to Phuket and another one to Bangkok. From there they flew to Xian, the city where the Terra Cotta warriors were discovered. In all they spent about 1 month in China which included a 4 day cruise down the Yangtze. Then from Beijing they took the Trans Siberian Railway to Moscow, but alighted for a day at Ulan Bator on Lake Baikal. Briefly they stayed in Moscow for a week and another week in St Petersburg. Then took an overnight bus to Riga the capital of Latvia. From Riga they flew back to Liverpool with Ryan Air for the incredible sum of 87p !! At that time Ryan Air hadn't become the grasping and avaricious creatures that they are today, so there was no charge for hold baggage and no charge for airport taxes. How very interesting. I was fascinated.

I was considering alighting at Llandrindod on the return and lunching there, indeed The Metropole hotel is quite satisfactory, and also a vintage car rally was taking place there. However I felt that an enforced 4 hour stay in Llandrindod would indeed be a fate almost worse than death itself. What would have happened if the next train didn't turn up and how could I get from Llandrindod to Knighton.

However, I am not so venturesome as I was in my younger days and decided, wisely I think, to return to my starting point and get my car. I must say that I enjoyed my serendipitous day. I will try this journey again soon, hopefully with greater success.’



The dramatic Cynghordy Viaduct on the drop from Sugar Loaf summit into the upper Tywi valley at Llandovery. Unfortunately Mr Sullivan was to miss this very picturesque part of the line.



Left: Travelling on the Heart of Wales Line is truly an experience, even down to the steps provided for passengers to get into and out of the train. This photo from the archives was taken some fifteen years ago. I doubt if anything has changed at Builth Road High Level where the railway crossed the long closed rural line from Brecon to Moat Lane Junction, for Newtown.

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Rail & Bus for Herefordshire: Application Form

Name.....

Address.....

Tel.....

Email.....

Membership is £8.00 for a year payable on 1st February. For those joining after October 1st membership is free until following February. Please make a cheque for £8.00 payable to Rail For Herefordshire and send to: **The Treasurer, Rail & Bus for Herefordshire, 60 Broomy Hill, Hereford, HR4 0LQ** pmgaccountancy@gmail.com You can also pay by Standing Order or a Bank Transfer. For details contact the treasurer as above.