

Rail & Bus for Herefordshire Newsletter Spring 2019



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Hereford Civic Society

Hon. President: Professor John Whitelegg

Newsletter Editor: Gareth Calan Davies

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A Call for Late Subscriptions

Renewal date was February 1st. Prompt payment of subscriptions is of great help to RBfH in continuing the work of campaigning and keeping you informed of events. If you have not renewed please think of doing so now or even better, start a standing order with RBfH.

For those who already pay by standing order we give huge thanks for your long term support. Best wishes.

RBfH Meetings

A modestly attended AGM on 5th March was followed by an entertaining informal ‘chat show’ performance by that colourful bus operator David Robert Morris, MD of DRMBus prompted by Gareth. They have known and worked with each other since the heady days of the 1980’s, the Hereford Trial Area and bus deregulation. David is well known and respected in the bus industry and equally well known amongst the passengers for the reliability and standard of his modern buses on DRMBus services 476, 420 and 469. He ended the session on an optimistic note with a loud Bromyard ‘YES’ for the future of the small operator. For a report of AGM business see our Committee News at the end of this newsletter. Our meetings are held at the Friends Meeting House, King St, Hereford, commencing 14.30.

Gloucester Bus and Rail Station Enhancements

On 2nd April RBfH held the first of this year’s talks on the subject of Gloucester’s acclaimed new bus station. The speaker, Philip Ardley, is a Regeneration Consultant who has been retained from the start by Gloucester City Council to lead and deliver this and other redevelopment projects.

It was immediately apparent that he has done just that: lead and deliver. One of the first challenges was to eke out a site that enabled the existing bus station to continue to function during construction. The scheme required an area of public highway to be incorporated, and significant changes to traffic movements in the immediate area.

The scheme's £10M budget was met by the Local Enterprise Partnership and Gloucester City Council.

In order to maximise the capacity of the station's small footprint, Dynamic Bay Allocation has been incorporated. This allows incoming buses to be directed to any vacant stand, with internal signage adjusting instantly to suit. It is perhaps no surprise that this has not found favour with the bus operators! An adequate on-the-ground team is in place to keep on top of antisocial behaviour.

The new facility has been widely recognised for its excellence and GCC receives many requests for visits from other authorities

Philip is now working on radical improvements to the setting of the Rail station. The area outside the station will be pedestrianised, the Victorian subway made DDA compliant and the station facade improved. There is real ambition behind these projects; it is a great pity that this is lacking in Hereford

Dates for your Diary

Our meetings are open to all, members and guests.

7 May – RBfH Honorary President Professor John Whitelegg will talk about the importance of public transport to the future of both town and country. Professor Whitelegg is well known internationally for his stand on public transport and major environmental issues as well as being a vociferous campaigner against new roads.

4 June – Faye Easton (Head of Stakeholder & Community: West

Midlands Railway). We are delighted to welcome Faye to this outpost of the West Midlands Railway network. Faye has just been appointed to this important role, a good signal that the train operator values the role of organisations such as RBfH in the future of our railways.

02 July – Railway, Road, Canal - A Perambulation of Victorian Industrial Worcester (led by Gareth Calan Davies). By profession Gareth is a transport and industry geographer. This steady walk will take us from Foregate Street station via the interesting Arboretum area and Lowesmoor wharf to the Shrub Hill complex, once the home of the Worcester locomotive works and the railway signalling firms of Dutton & Co and Mackenzie & Holland and Co. There will be a fascinating look at Shrub Hill Station, one of the last bastions of mechanical signalling in Britain, and its architecture. From there we drop to the Worcester and Birmingham Canal and along the towpath, through the areas of the blockhouse and the commandery, to Diglis basin which was once a thriving commercial port where the canal meets the River Severn.

We return along the riverside path below the cathedral to the river bridge and the railway viaduct with the unusual Butts branch dropping sharply from Foregate St station to the river wharves. A walk via the Butts will see us back in Foregate Street with a last look at the marvellous Victorian Hop Exchange.

The route is mostly on the level via pavements and footpaths and is expected to take some 2 to 2.5 hours. Gathering at the bottom of the Foregate St Station stairways will be following the arrival of the train from Hereford at ???. For those arriving by car you should park at the Butts or Croft Road car park by the viaduct and river, a short walk from Foregate St Station. If you are interested, please contact Gareth on 01531 633594 or 07980 273764 and give your telephone number in case of cancellation due to very inclement weather. There will be a

small fee of £5.00 per person which will go to the RBfH fund.

Autumn meetings - It is hoped to hold a short series of Autumn meetings, details of which have yet to be finalised.

Stagecoach Barred from Franchise Bidding



This fascinating piece of news has only recently broken upon the already groaning British railway franchise system. Stagecoach were bidding for the East Midlands and South Eastern franchises as well as being an integral part of the partnership with Virgin who are bidding for the West Coast franchise.

A DfT spokesman said: "Stagecoach is an experienced bidder and fully aware of the rules of franchise competitions. It is regrettable that they submitted non-compliant bids for all current competitions which breached established rules and, in doing so, they are responsible for their own disqualification."

Stagecoach chose to propose significant changes to the commercial terms for the East Midlands, West Coast Partnership and South Eastern contracts, leading to bids which proposed a significantly different deal to the ones on offer.

While Stagecoach has played an important role in the UK railways industry, it is entirely for Stagecoach and their bidding partners to explain why they decided to repeatedly ignore established rules by rejecting the commercial terms on offer!"

The comment from Stagecoach was: "We're baffled why the DfT did not tell us that we would be disqualified or even discuss the issue - they have known about this qualification in our bid on pensions for months.

The pensions regulator has warned that more cash will be needed in the future, but no one knows how big that bill might eventually be and no responsible company could take that risk with pensions.

We can't accept a risk we can't manage - this would have been reckless. This is an industry-wide issue and forcing rail companies to take these risks could lead to the failure of more rail franchises."

Such a comment comes hotfoot on Stagecoach/Virgin getting their fingers burnt over the East Coast Franchise which was then promptly dumped back on the DfT to sort out. The DfT obviously did not take too kindly to taking a railway back into public ownership, smacking as it does of renationalisation!

Richard Branson of course chirped up in true Virgin style. In **a blog on Virgin's corporate website**, Sir Richard said Virgin Trains "could be gone from the UK in November". There was also a strong hint that he would take his trains with him!!

What does the long suffering British passenger make of all this? It would seem our important and essential railway system is being tossed into a game of power ping pong between the government and the big corporations.

The only strong message to come through is yet again that the current franchise system is no longer fit for purpose, is costing both the passenger and the country a great deal of money to get nowhere. Unless of course you have shares in HS2. And if you are an employee of Stagecoach I should keep an eye your pension!!

Transport for Wales (TfW) - Can it Achieve?



The Welsh Government's vision of a transformed railway system with new trains, better stations, advanced and fairer ticketing and a south east Wales metro system is to be applauded. They have set themselves an immense task and with partners Keolis Amey have launched themselves into it with gusto. What does it mean for the Borders where the Marches line runs mostly in English shires? The main features as outlined are:

Introduction of new two and three-car new diesel multiple units (DMUs) for the Milford Haven to Manchester service by 2023.

Create a true intercity experience on the North-South long-distance

services, bringing 12 newly refurbished Mark IV carriages into use on Cardiff to Holyhead services via Shrewsbury and Chester.

Introduction of a new Liverpool to Llandudno and Shrewsbury service (1tph) and **Liverpool to Cardiff service (1 train every 2 hours)**, and a consistent 1tph between Cheltenham and Cardiff by December 2022.

Introduction of a new Community Rail Partnership on the Crewe to Hereford line. Three Community Rail Partnerships will be supported by the recruitment of a new Community and Stakeholder Manager and eight Community and Customer Ambassadors.

To invest £194m in station improvements and building at least five new stations. A £15m fund will make stations more accessible and the launching of a new app allowing customers requiring assistance to ‘turn up and go’ from April 2020.

In June 2018 it was announced that Transport for Wales (TfW), the current operator of the Wales & Borders franchise, would take delivery of 51 two car and 26 three car diesel multiple units from CAF, which are to be based at Chester and Machynlleth depots.

TfW states: All the improvements will help to achieve the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – driving prosperity, improving the cohesion of Welsh and Border communities and contributing to a healthier and more equal Wales.

The recognition of the Border communities as stated in the above is an important statement and it is up to the likes of RBfH, our politicians and our local authorities to ensure that this recognition is maintained. I have no doubt that TfW Rail Services will be looking to close assistance from us, this side of the Border in the important job of modernising and promoting our vital Borders railway service. It is only by worthwhile and cordial partnerships that our public transport

services can be elevated to the important position they can hold in the future social and economic welfare of our communities. Onward with hope and encouragement.



Image of new CAF diesel multiple units to be introduced in 2022

West Midlands Railway

Unfortunately, Herefordshire's equally important rail service to Birmingham is looking increasingly like the poor relation in the West Midlands rail stakes. Adverts have started appearing in trains about the £1bn investment by West Midlands Trains and West Midlands Rail Executive. New trains are on order, to be used in the conurbation area. The Hereford service looks set to get cascaded stock from the Chase line electrification and six class 170's from the Gospel Oak-Barking service in London, but at present this is delayed. This at least should mean strengthening of the trains to cope with the continuing overcrowding into and out of New Street.

The Herefordshire board member on the West Midlands Rail Executive sounded a note of optimism with recent local newspaper reports that frequency on the Hereford service is to be increased. This is perfectly true but as RBfH reported in the Winter Newsletter this is not programmed until the post 2034 period.

We all know that capacity on the Hereford line is restricted by the single line sections between Gt Malvern and Shelwick Jcn (Hereford). The Marches LEP emphasised this important scheme in their document 'Investing in Strategic Transport Corridors in the Marches'. Herefordshire Council is a partner in the LEP and has made great play about improved connectivity with the West Midlands. So much so that the proposed Hereford bypass has been pushed by Herefordshire Council to become a significant part of the Midlands Connect transport strategy. But not so the doubling of the railway line which is of equal importance to the future of Herefordshire.

So the best rail users can hope for is an alleviation of overcrowding but not necessarily any significant improvement in reliability or a dramatic reduction in cancellations.

At least West Midlands Railway appreciate we are here at the far end of their empire. On 4th June Faye Easton, Head of Stakeholder & Community at West Midlands Railway, has agreed to come and address us at Hereford. We are delighted to welcome Faye so please turn up and give her a good audience.

Great Western Railway

With thanks to RBfH member Nick Jones and his contact at Great Western Railway (GWR), the London to Worcester and Hereford pocket timetable T6 now contains a note on Rail and Bus for Herefordshire as well as The Cotswold Line Promotion Group (CLPG) This is quite a significant achievement and it is hoped indicative of the

From the Archives

Searching through our GHAL archives I came across Newsletter 8. It is a real demonstration that RBfH continues to develop into a long standing and hopefully respected organisation.

Rail for Herefordshire

NEWSLETTER 8

Edited by Gerald Dawe NUMBER

Rail for Herefordshire, a pressure group run by volunteers, is a voice for rail users in the county.

Newsletter 8 focuses on the following issues:

- News of Hereford to Ledbury track redoubling and Edgar St Grid
- First Great Western's timetable improvements and bumpy rides
- Herefordshire Rail Partnership?
- Party & Social, see Stop Press Pg 23

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Please let us have your criticisms of the rail service and information on any positive actions you have tried to take to improve things. With climate change being at the forefront of our thinking and in view of the fact that train travel is a much lower contributor to this (per person) than car transport then we must work together to make the trains the transport method of choice. We meet on the second Thursday in every month at 7.30 p.m. Venue: All Saints Church, central Hereford (at the top of Broad Street).



Email: railfh@aol.com

Twelve years have passed but what has changed? Apart from the

operators and their names and train colours, very little. Transport for Wales has taken over the Marches Line. West Midlands Railway (alias Abellio) have taken over the Birmingham service and First Great Western has become Great Western Railway. The level of service is comparatively static although one major achievement in which RfH was involved was the introduction of a Sunday morning service to Birmingham which still runs and is well used.

However, passengers continue to use the railways in increasing numbers. Herefordshire stations showed a healthy increase of some 30% over the 10 year period 2007-2017. This gives a county rail usage as near 34,000 passengers per week.

Overcrowding, reliability and cancellations continue to be the main bugbears of our rail services. Transport for Wales have promised us new trains on the Marches line in 2022, West Midlands Railway have promised a strengthening of the Birmingham trains with cascaded diesel stock and Great Western Railway have given us the new IET trains on the London service, much to the chagrin of many users who considered the British HST, which they ousted, to be far superior in comfort.

Infrastructure improvements seem non-existent in Herefordshire, compared to London and the main conurbations. The Hereford to Ledbury doubling of track to improve reliability and capacity seems lost in the mists of time, despite being a priority of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership. It featured in Newsletter 8 of 2007 but now the scheme is relegated to post 2034 in the West Midlands Rail Executive investment strategy. It receives minimal support from Herefordshire Council who are preoccupied with covering the countryside west of Hereford with tarmac and concrete.

In fact, Herefordshire Council has effectively cut off Barrs Court station from the city with the creation of a new super 2 lane highway

now looking like a bomb site and as to where to catch a bus....just look at the passengers outside the station scratching their heads before in desperation opting for a taxi and expensive charges to the outlying villages.

But that is enough. I, like many people I speak to, find it bewildering that a council of so called professionals, backed up by a Balfour Beatty empire team of engineers, planners etc can make such a mess of a beautiful city and completely ignore the importance of trains and buses to its future.

The Rural Transport Problem (Part 2)

In part 1 we examined the subject of rural public transport from the 1960's to the deregulation of bus services in the mid 1980's. Deregulation has and continues to have a significant effect on bus services in Britain. The main aim of government was to free the market, encourage competition for bus services and thus reduce the amount of direct public financial control. This undoubtedly was achieved, the annual subsidy bill being reduced by some 40% from £1,489m in 1985/86 to £890m in 1997/98 (*source: Government Research Paper 99/59*). It continues to fall.

The provisions of the deregulation act had two main effects of importance to rural services. Firstly, competition allowed for companies to enlarge through predatory acquisitions until today the majority of bus mileage in Britain is in the hands of 5 main corporations: Arriva, FirstGroup, Stagecoach, National Express Group and Go-Ahead. Municipal bus operators were the first to fall to the onslaught of competition from these growing conglomerates. This in turn has led to a concentration of resources on urban and inter-urban routes as the most profitable. However, cross subsidy of rural routes from the profit made on urban operations then duly disappeared.

Secondly, deregulation split bus services into two categories:

- a. **commercial**: services which require no financial support
- b. **tendered**: services or journeys which a local authority deems socially necessary and which are secured through a competitive tendering process.

Thus support for local bus services was neatly passed from the commercial operator to the local authority. In a time of economic stability and growth this was quite acceptable and the majority of rural services continued under a reasonable arrangement between operator and local authority. Herefordshire was lucky in that it had a goodly supply of small to medium independent operators who took on the rural routes with a successful mixture of commercial and tendered services.

But cycles of economic prosperity and growth have their ups and downs. In the first decade of the 21st century Britain entered a period of economic uncertainty and with it the government determinedly embarked on a programme to significantly reduce government expenditure. Financial support for local authorities has been a major casualty and this in turn has led to very tight constraints on local authority budgets. The reaction was mixed but one main casualty was the bus service support budget. Between 2010/11 and 2017/18 local authority bus service support was reduced by 45.8% from £374.3m to £202.7 and is set to fall further. (*source: Buses in Crisis Report; Campaign for Better Transport*)

The effect has been and continues to be quite dramatic. Britain's bus network has shrunk to levels last seen in the late 1980s, BBC analysis has revealed. There are a number of reasons why Britain's bus network is shrinking in size, according to John Disney, a transport researcher and lecturer at Nottingham Business School.

He said: "Commercial operators have definitely, over the last 10 years, become much more risk-averse and so they are really concentrating on what they consider to be their core routes and are not really bothered about much else. At the same time many local authorities, which would have stepped up to subsidise unprofitable routes, have reduced this spending".

Undoubtedly rural areas have been the worst hit. Unlike urban areas where bus operating economies can be made by a reduction in frequency but still leaving a service, frequency reductions in rural areas means the bus service disappearing altogether. Rural mobility, deprivation and isolation are subjects of worrying importance. This in turn is coupled with a greater concentration of services and healthcare in the towns with the closure of local shops, post office and doctors surgeries.

We read a great deal about transport investment in the city regions but nothing about new initiatives to deal with the rural crisis. Surely this is now the time for a serious reassessment of special measure for rural public transport and policies for securing its long term future beyond the time when the private car will have become an expensive luxury.

Shropshire Rural Buses

Report by the Foundation for Integrated Transport: FIT

Meanwhile across the county border in Shropshire our President Professor John Whitelegg has been actively engaged in the above study and report.

In the foreword the chairman of FIT states: *'When the Foundation for Integrated Transport (FIT) was set up, one of its key goals was to raise the profile of rural transport campaigning. It is really shameful*

that while people's access to service as basic to our society as transport is being removed hardly a finger has been lifted by the vast majority of organisations that purport to campaign for a better society.

Is it too much to ask for a system where everyone living in a town or village, or a suburb of a large town, or on a main route, can travel at any time of day from early morning to late evening, Sundays included, while even people in smaller communities can rely on having services that provide for journeys to/from the basic needs of work, education, shopping and healthcare? And where visitors can use public transport to access the county's natural beauty and heritage in an environmentally friendly way?'

The report concludes with a very simple and important observation.

'There is no such thing as a "rural transport problem" and it is in fact very easy indeed to provide high quality rural public transport in a way that supports vibrant, healthy, economically successful rural communities and contributes to keeping young people in those communities. This is what happens in Switzerland, Germany and Sweden and there is no reason at all why it cannot happen in England. There is a very real need to pose a rather fundamental question at all levels of government and to all political parties and all councillors and MPs "What is the reason why rural residents in England should have a poor quality public transport service when high quality is routinely delivered in Switzerland, Germany and Sweden"?' There is a need for wider system change at the national level. This system change will require a regulatory and legislative change as well as a change in the level of funding. The Swedish approach to designing, co-ordinating and funding rural public transport is a legislative requirement in the way bus and rail services are organised (Ringqvist,

2016) and there is a need for similar legislative change in the UK. The level of funding for rural public transport will have to increase but it would not be correct to regard the whole rural transport nexus as something that can be solved by “more money”. The main thing that has to happen is that rural public transport is seen as a vital component in maintaining the social and economic viability of rural communities and is charged (as in Sweden) with promoting broader sustainable development objectives. The perceived problem of rural public transport in England cannot be solved by providing more money and linking that money to a defective model of planning, design, coordination and integration.’

This is very significant report which goes straight to the nub of the problem....Britain has not got a comprehensive and integrated transport policy. The whole approach to public transport is fragmented, based on the ethos of reaction and not pro-action. In amongst this porridge of reactive policies, rural public transport stands no chance of survival without the necessary political mind-set change.

The report which is well worth reading can be found on:

<http://integratedtransport.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/FIT-Shropshire-Buses-Report-web.pdf>



It can equally be applied to Herefordshire where the rural public transport network is being eroded. Professor Whitelegg will be addressing an RBFH meeting on Tuesday 7th April.

Heart of Wales Line Trail Opens

The new waymarked footpath paralleling this scenic line from the Borders through mid-Wales to the coast at Swansea is now open. The 141 mile long route has been created to encourage use of this rail route which traverses some of the most remote and beautiful countryside of mid-Wales. Our past chairman Professor Les Lumsdon was been deeply involved in the project. A trail guide 'The Heart of Wales Line Trail' by Les is available from Kittiwake Books, price £10.95. For those who love walking and rambling in the great outdoors below wide skies this is a must.



This archive photo is of Craven Arms station, the northern start of the trail. It was once a major busy junction. Today all the buildings have gone and it is reduced to an unstaffed halt. However, the potential for creating a railhead and park and ride facility remains and should be included in future development plans for the Marches line.

Promoting the Marches Line

Reading about the Heart of Wales Line trail I was prompted to muse on promoting the Marches line and its train service. The line is quite unique connecting as it does a number of historic and picturesque towns: Abergavenny, Hereford, Leominster, Ludlow, Craven Arms , Church Stretton and Shrewsbury. Each town has its own character and history and I am sure the town authorities would welcome any moves to bring tourists into the area.

If Transport for Wales stick by their words for ‘improving the cohesion of Welsh and Border communities’, then this modest approach to promoting the line could well show willing and commitment. Early days yet but an interesting thought.

Hereford Civic Society

There is a great deal to be said for cooperation between two organisations with the future of this historic city of the Marches at Heart. The Civic Society is well qualified to deal with the built environment of the city. RBfH dovetails into this with its major concerns on the future of public transport and its role in improving the environment of the city. In this respect the two come together and there is already a growing and healthy exchange between the two.

This is particularly the case with the call for a city Masterplan instead of the ad hoc and fragmented approach of Herefordshire Council. The Hereford Transport Package for instance is what it says. A mixture of uncoordinated low priority so called ‘sustainable’ transport measures firmly wrapped in a parcel labelled Hereford Bypass. Buses get a small mention and the city’s rail service none.

The 2018 highly critical report on Hereford by the Historic England Review Panel highlights much of what is going wrong. The panel will be horrified to see what is planned as student accommodation near the station. The building has been described as a ‘monstrous carbuncle’, by the Civic Society which also states that it ‘fails to relate to the

proposed transport interchange because there is, as yet, no plan for it'. Yes, twelve years on and still no plan from Balfour Beatty, WSP Consultants or Herefordshire Council. *For Civic Society details - david693fowler@btinternet.co*

Another matter of importance to our two groups is the scale and location of housing development in the city. With large scale development targeted at Holmer West, Three Elms and Lower Bullingham the report 'Transport for New Homes' by the Foundation for Integrated Transport comes at an opportune time. However, it makes dismal reading as to what exactly goes on. In summary it says:

'We have seen some good examples of new homes where residents can use a combination of walking, cycling or public transport to go about their daily lives. However, most new developments we have seen, particularly those built on large greenfield sites on the edges of towns, are designed for travel by cars. They have plentiful car parking, but limited or no access to public transport, limited facilities and services, and a lack of safe pedestrian or cycling routes to town centres or the surrounding area. The new 'urban extensions' and 'garden villages' by their very location away from large conurbations promote car-based living. This is a major issue of public policy'.

Frequent, efficient and environmental public transport links between these housing areas and the city centre is of vital importance. In a city where the council purports to support policies that reduce dependence on the private car, public transport penetration of and connectivity with large new housing areas is as important a service as water, electricity and sewerage. A greater use and reinforcing of Section 106 agreements with developers to support public transport provision at the planning stage is essential. Let us hope this can be achieved in Hereford before the so called city road space to be released by the bypass is swamped by 1,000s of additional car journeys from new developments that should be economically and socially tied into the city as a work, retail and service

The RBfH Committee

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Committee News

A modestly attended AGM saw your committee re elected with a few changes. Gareth and Will have become joint chairmen to share an increasing load. Sue Warren has stood down from the committee and Naomi Bell has taken on the information role for our open meetings. Michael Sullivan is doing wonders on the rail side with train operator communication which is great help. Peter Gwatkin, treasurer, reported a healthy financial state. There were a few questions including a request for more regular newsletters. However, I am sure you will appreciate that it takes time to put a newsletter together and then distribute. We are all volunteers who have other pursuits. A more frequent posting would mean just a two page bulletin and no Newsletter Booklet. As it is, I must apologise for delay in updating the website due to illness.

Herefordshire stations handle in excess of 1.7 million passengers per annum and the number is growing. Herefordshire buses account for in excess of 36,000 passenger journeys per week. **RAIL AND BUS SERVICES ARE IMPORTANT.**

- ◇ *Help in the development and future of rail and bus services in Herefordshire*
- ◇ *Help get improvements at your local station*
- ◇ *Help give rail and bus services a fair chance against an over emphasis on roads*
- ◇ *Help develop new innovative ways of providing rural and urban public transport*

Join Rail & Bus for Herefordshire Get a Friend to join

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.