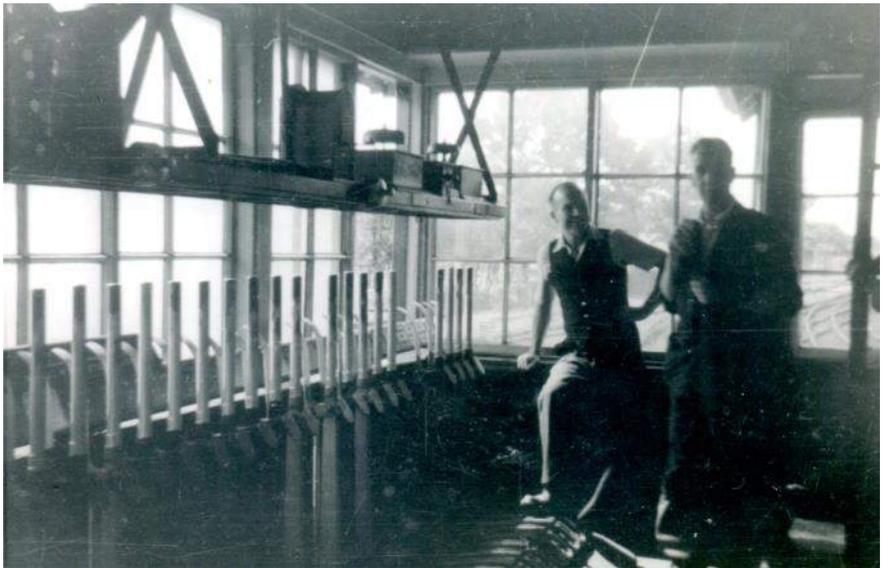


Rail & Bus for Herefordshire

**Summer 2021
Newsletter**



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Where is the Signal Box?

The image on the cover of the Spring Newsletter proved far too easy with many of you guessing it correctly as Pontrilas. So the image for this edition has gone to the opposite extreme of making it difficult. One clue; it is just across the border.

Subscriptions

If you have not paid for 2021-22 then please send a cheque for £8.00 to our Treasurer, Peter Gwatkin at 60 Broomy hill, Hereford, HR4 0LQ. We can only keep Rail & Bus for Herefordshire and the newsletter going with your help

Annual General Meeting

In 2020 we were fortunate to hold our AGM on 10 March, only about a week before Covid measures were introduced. Restrictions on public meetings have remained in place ever since and we were unable to hold 2021's AGM during March or April as usual. We were hoping to hold it in late July, but further postponement of the lifting of restrictions has meant that we cannot yet set a date or book a venue with any confidence. In the expectation that all Covid restrictions will be lifted within four weeks, we sincerely hope that the next newsletter can carry an announcement that the 2021 AGM will be held in October.

Mike Ledlie made Honorary Member

RBfH has decided to invite Dr Mike Ledlie to be an honorary member of the organisation given his exemplary work as secretary to the organisation from 2011 to 2016. Not only did Mike ensure that all business was conducted and reported properly he also offered up his family home for committee meetings. His commitment was second to none and helped the organisation to gain influence during that period. He also was very hands-on, including leafletting the whole of Hay-on-Wye himself to encourage use of the Hay Ho! bus.

Mike has since written several walking books including one featuring Herefordshire Walks Around Hereford and Leominster. The walks, as you might expect, are all accessible by bus or train and Mike continues to

champion walks using public transport in association with Rail Ramblers (Mid Wales and Marches).

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Support your bus and rail services

Support Rail & Bus for Herefordshire

From the Editor

Despite Covid 19 and lockdowns 2021 is proving to be a busy year on the public transport scene. Government announcements on public transport have been arriving thick and fast. Determined to make an impact and reform the way our buses and trains are financed, managed and planned we have seen the emergence of ‘Bus Back Better’ and ‘Great British Railways’. A number of articles in this edition of the newsletter deals with these.

Passengers are returning to both buses and trains which is very encouraging. However, it is somewhat doubtful if they will ever return to pre Covid levels. Changes in the way we work, shop and take our leisure have impacted greatly on public transport. This in itself has prompted the government to undertake an ambitious review of the structure of the public transport industry.

Working from home has reduced the need to commute. The huge increase in online shopping has dented once frequent trips to town centres. However, as a corollary, perhaps the leisure market for trips by public transport will show an increase as foreign travel has been severely reduced and the word ‘station’ has come into vogue.

Whatever the trends the public transport industry has a great challenge ahead of it. That challenge focuses on the need for innovation, adapting to a changed market situation and a far better public relations strategy aimed at making the journey by bus and train attractive, clean, efficient with seamless interchanges between services.

I have no doubt the public transport industry will adapt. Dynamic and innovative management in conjunction with local authority and central government partnerships provide the key.

Back to the Future – A Very Brief Overview of the Williams/Shapps ‘Plan for Rail’

RBfH Committee member John Eden provides an overview.

The much-anticipated Williams/Shapps ‘Plan for Rail’ – the first ‘Root and Branch’ review of the rail industry for many years – was published as a

White Paper on May 20th 2021, as a mere 112 page ‘taster’ with more detail to follow. The document is a reaction to the 2018 timetable failure, and no doubt further informed by industrial unrest and franchise operating difficulties in recent years. It is generally accepted that fragmentation of the rail industry has not been particularly successful, with franchise failure, service standards falling to meet key performance targets, a confusing fares structure and a flourishing mini-industry to deflect/direct blame when things go wrong, with the passenger being very much the bottom of the order of priorities. Advocates of privatisation promised improvement and competition which have not been experienced by passengers, especially where one operator lines persisted – such as the Marches line – the result is monopoly replacing monopoly with no competition to drive standards up and fares down.

Upon reading much of the report and comment from union, industry and legal parties, it is clear this is not another Beeching of Serpell – it is not driven primarily by a need to manage down the burden of debt on the Exchequer, but rather to see railways as a core part of a flourishing, diverse, economy. This is best attempted by having a strategic ‘guiding mind, which is to be expressed through an arms length public body: ‘Great British Railways’. GBR will have a thirty-year strategy and five-year business plans, which should give a degree of consistency and confidence from operators and passengers. The first strategic plan has been commissioned to be ready by 2022.....

The Williams/Shapps report can be distilled into seven promises, ten key outcomes and sixty-two commitments. Space precludes the exploration of all the commitments. The seven promises are:

- Bring the railways back together, delivering more punctual and reliable services
- Make the railways easier to use
- Rebuild public transport after the pandemic
- Maintain safe, secure railways for all
- Keep the best elements of the private sector that have helped to drive growth

- Make the railways more efficient
- Grow not shrink the network

There is not much to disagree with here – so far.....

In terms of the outcomes, the ten are: (the italics are my comments)

- A modern passenger experience (*words such as this irritate me as much as the student experience: what does it mean?*)
- A retail revolution (*what does this mean?*)
- New ways of working with the private sector (*but what is really in it for them?*)
- Economic recovery and financially sustainable railways
- Greater control for local people and places (*this sounds good but can it really happen?*)
- Cleaner, greener, railways
- Bold new opportunities for rail freight
- Increased speed of delivery and enhancements
- Skilled, innovative workforce (*were rail staff consulted when this study was undertaken?*)
- Simple industry structure (*passengers and the public generally do not know who is in charge*)

Much of the thinking has been influenced by transport systems managed by a single authority, the obvious example being Transport for London and the improved coordination and integration of services as well as a consistent offer to the passenger. The ticketing reforms in the report are not as far reaching as might have been anticipated, however it is understood the Treasury wants to monitor past pandemic travel behaviour before committing to more ambitious change.

In summary, the public must demand the ‘Plan for Rail’ delivers the promises made and the outcomes secured; must press government to regard

railways as critical infrastructure and not political football. Perhaps more complicated is the challenge of enmeshing this strategy with the devolved administrations.

Some Comments on the Williams/Shapps 'Plan for Rail'

RBfH Member Nick Jones gathers some comment on the plan

Though he failed to explain why it had taken the government 18 months to publish the Williams Review, Transport Secretary Grant Shapps opined that “Britain’s rail passengers have been failed by years of fragmentation, confusion and overcomplication,” omitting to mention the regular above-average annual hike in rail fares which were nodded through. Former British Airways boss Keith Williams was handed the poisoned chalice by Chris Grayling, following the 2018 timetable chaos.

Labour’s Jim McMahon said the review raised more questions than it answered. “It is yet another example of ministers talking a good game, with very little substance underneath.” The RMT felt the review was “a lost opportunity to make a clean break” and ASLEF was deeply suspicious that “with capacity falling through the floor and a £2.9bn revenue shortfall, the government will use the Williams Review to justify cuts in services.”

Bristol-based Campaign for Better Transport welcomed the plan’s focus on passengers, simpler fares and contactless ticketing, cautioning: “...the devil will be in the detailing. Will ‘flexible season tickets’ – so sorely needed to encourage commuters back onto trains – offer a decent discount? And will the very welcome commitment to grow the rail network be backed by proper funding, so that disconnected communities can access the opportunities that rail brings?”

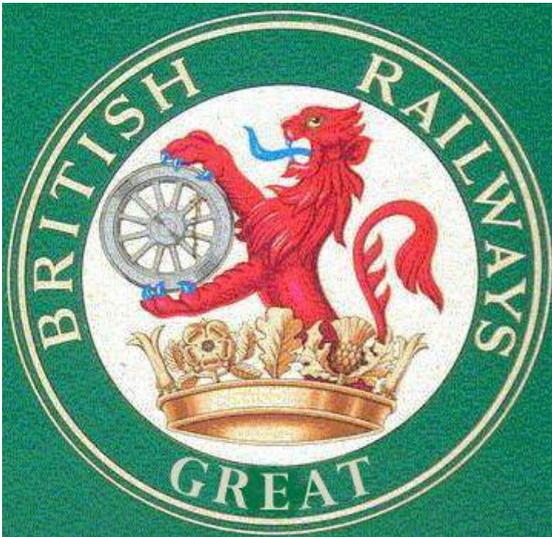
Transport Focus, successor to the independent passenger watchdog originally created by David Cameron’s government, gave this predictably anodyne response to the Williams-Shapps Review: “Passengers will welcome this move towards a more accountable and joined up (sic) railway. Ultimately what they will care about is whether rail is the best option for them; if it is reliable, efficient and good value.”

Simon Jenkins, writing in the Guardian, considers “Britain’s new GBR railway faces two titanic headaches: managing a possibly long-term slump in passengers, and watching its investment eaten alive by HS2.”

But it seems the biggest bone of contention is likely to be the new rail network’s rebranded title – Great British Railways – with the Scottish Government (which plans to nationalise all its rail routes by March 2022) accusing Westminster of failing to respect devolved control of the railways in Scotland.

Nick reserves the last comment for the new name.

The old American saying “If it ain’t bust, don’t fix it” seems remarkably apposite in the case of the proposed name change from British Rail to Great British Railways. British Rail - to quote another old sore - does what it says on the tin, while Great British Railways sounds like the title of a train spotters anthology or a new TV series by Michael Portillo.



Is this going to be the new logo?

Doubtless the new name proposed in the Williams-Shapps review was dreamed up by a panel of highly paid re-branding consultants. But re-branding is fraught with costly pitfalls, as Gap, Mastercard, Tropicana fruit drinks and the mighty Pepsi empire will confirm: the latter had to stump up \$1-million for a 5-month re-design exercise that loyal customers loathed. An epic UK disaster was when the mighty Royal Mail inexplicably decided to re-brand itself Consignia (meaning ‘Left Luggage

Office’ in Spanish!). The new name survived for just 15 months.

Changes to the Network Rail Structure

If ever there was an organisation plagued with frequent changes, it is Network Rail. The latest change sees the Worcester area moved from the Western sector to the Central sector. This means infrastructure and development on the Worcester-Hereford line is now controlled by Birmingham although that is unlikely to accelerate the doubling of the line.

Wales Transport Strategy 2021

The publication of this strategy by the Welsh Government marks an important point in the development of rail services in Wales. Most important is that the strategy covers Wales as a separate nation. From a railway point of view this is highly significant as there is no mention of rail in the Borders which comes under the Wales & Borders franchise as an agency agreement with the Department of Transport.

Clearly the Welsh Government recognise that the Marches Line is a Department for Transport Responsibility as it caters for English passengers. The Welsh government therefore view the Marches Line mostly as part of the development of a high-quality fast service between South Wales and the North West. This is demonstrated by their intention to introduce from December 2022 a two or three hourly service of five coach mark IV locomotive hauled trains to Manchester on the route.

This is in line with speeding up the Manchester service and echoes a longer term economic and social strategy to strengthen links between the North West and South Wales rather than with London and the South East. The vision of a Western Britain economic unit is beginning to emerge.

Such quality trains on the route with improved overall timings, increased capacity, comfort, and possibly with good catering facilities does however beg the question of what happens to the smaller stations on the route. Hereford, Ludlow and Shrewsbury are long distance traffic generators but the smaller stations cater mostly for local traffic, including large volumes of students between the colleges at Hereford, Ludlow and Shrewsbury.

Undoubtedly the Welsh Government views local traffic as a responsibility of the Department for Transport. What happens when the franchise system is buried and the new regime of Great British Railways and the rail services

contracted to the English Government comes into existence has yet to be sorted. The Wales & Borders railways have been nationalised by the Welsh Government and are managed by Transport for Wales with Keolis Amey contracted to run it. Any attempt to bring Welsh Railways back into a Great British Railways scheme of things will be met with fierce opposition from Cardiff.

In a Welsh Government Statement on Westminster's Union Connectivity Review, Ken Skates, AM for Economy and Transport made this perfectly clear with the statement: *I made clear that we would support a review where it leads to the UK Government adequately funding its existing responsibilities to Wales in areas such as rail infrastructure and aviation. However, this Government will not support any review which seeks to weaken or trample over the existing devolution settlement.*

Where this leaves the development of the Marches Line for the benefit of both Welsh and English passengers is now in the lap of the gods.

Three Artists & a Railway Station



Ledbury railway station is set to become a showpiece for local art. Three talented female artists from the town, Caroline Owen-Thomas, Cheryl Davies and Jeanette McCulloch, are preparing a new art display advertising the heritage buildings of Ledbury. The display, in three sections will comprise calligraphic script describing the buildings, paintings and drawings of the buildings together with a location map and calligraphic script documenting the coming of the railway including a number of archive photographs. The display will be housed in a three bay glazed cabinet.

The project is being funded by West Midlands Railway under their 'Your Community, Your Fund' scheme with the generous assistance of Ledbury Town Council and Ledbury Civic Society. The project is being managed by Gareth Calan Davies of Ledbury under the aegis of Rail & Bus for Herefordshire.

Fay Easton, Head of Community & Stakeholder at West Midlands Railway, is keen to firmly promote Ledbury on the West Midlands Rail Map. This project will complement the work undertaken by Ledbury Poetry Festival, making Ledbury the art and poetry place to visit by train.

The project is expected to be completed by early autumn.

Contacts:

Gareth Calan Davies at ghal@btinternet.com (tel: 01531 633594)

Fay Easton at Fay.Easton@wmtrains.co.uk

Sargeants Launch New Bus Services in Hereford

RBfH Committee Member Les Lumsdon reports.

Bus A to Tupsley and Bus B to Bobblestock were launched by Sargeants in the first week of June. Natalie Amos, Transport Manager explains why... "We had done some research and found there were some missing links in the city and also the main shopping areas of Hereford are spread out: town, Holmer Road and Bobblestock, for example. We wanted to join them together for people to have access to these. Also the new medical which is now a big part of the community is important and we wanted to give people

easy access”

The services operate every half hour between 0800 and 1730 on Route B and 0840 to 1710 on Route A, both operating from the City Bus Station. The fares are on a 1234 rate for the services ranging from £1 single trip to £4 daily ticket , plus a Weekly ticket @ £14 pounds which is value for money and can be used across both A & B routes. The child’s fare is $\frac{3}{4}$ the price of an adult ticket (to the nearest 5p) and a daily child ticket is £3.

Several members of RBfH have taken a ride on the services; drivers are friendly, ticket range simple and buses comfortable and so far reliable despite traffic congestion. However, we wonder if these services will abstract from the existing services operated by Yeomans Canyon Travel and is that really what passengers want? It is also a pity that Sargeants cannot extend into the evenings and certainly on Thursday, Friday and Saturdays and why not operate on other Bank Holidays than Good Friday as Hereford, like many other cities, will be focussing on events and experiences rather than just shopping.

We’ll leave the last word to Natalie:



“We want to provide a superior service to our customers and give them what they need, we are very much looking at new ideas and routes and what we can do to expand.”

Bus Service Improvement Plan

RBfH Committee member Les Lumsdon reports

Rail & Bus for Herefordshire has written to all County councillors, parish and town councils regarding our aspirations for an improved bus network. This is in anticipation of the local authority taking up the challenges presented in the Government Strategy Bus Back Better. As noted in a previous edition, Herefordshire has to agree enhanced partnerships with bus operators by the end of this month and then develop a Bus Services Improvement Plan by the end of October, 2021.

In order to help the authority to bring this together a consultancy has been engaged although no announcement has been made to date. We sincerely hope that this company will engage with passengers. That is when we hope to present our ideas in full. In the meantime, we welcome any further comments from members as to their expectations and wish list for an improved bus network.

Our initial response is available on the RBfH website rbfh.org.uk

Take a look.

Electric Buses are coming to Town

Chairman Will Frecknall reports on success.

In the January 2021 newsletter we were pleased to report that Rail and Bus had been invited, through Hereford Green Networks, to contribute a 'Connectivity' element to Hereford's Stronger Towns Fund Investment Plan. An independent Towns Fund Board, backed by Herefordshire Council and comprising representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors, has been established to lead this work locally. We reported that a successful bid could yield up to £25 million for regeneration projects in Hereford, creating new jobs, training local people and boosting growth.

A small team put together a scheme for an electric bus service to be known as Hereford City Zipper. We worked closely with the City Council in preparing the bid.

On 11 June we were excited to receive a Press Release from Hereford

Stronger Towns Board announcing that they had been awarded of £22.4 million, little short of the full bid sum. So provided the Zipper forms part of the final package (surely a formality given its prominence in the press release) then the hard work of working up all the detail will begin.

There are some big issues to be addressed in delivering this project and it represents a major commitment for Rail and Bus. We are fortunate in having a number of experts to call upon and we relish the challenge.

Hereford Transport Hub

RBfH Chairman Will Frecknall reports

Despite my relatively upbeat assessment in the Spring newsletter, and some ongoing contact with Herefordshire Council, I am unable to report any tangible progress on the delivery of this important project.

Meanwhile RBfH member Nick Jones has discovered a futuristic hub in Sweden.



His comment is '*Now that is what I call a hub!*'

Hereford's hub however is likely to be a far more modest affair!

Hereford City's bus services need a radical revision and update with better, modern vehicles, improved frequencies, bus priority, good bus stop infrastructure, better information and new routes along with the much promised transport hub at the station. Let us hope Herefordshire Council's new Hereford Transport Strategy will deliver all this.

Kington Calls for Evening and Sunday Buses

RBfH Committee member Les Lumsdon reports.

KLEEN (Kington Local Energy & Environment Network) is campaigning to restore the evening and Sunday buses on the 461/2 bus route between Kington and Hereford. Backed by Rail & Bus for Herefordshire, KLEEN is calling on Herefordshire Council to seize the opportunity provided by the government's Bus Back Better National Bus Strategy. Here is a summary response from Judith Gardner, a member of KLEEN and a Kington Town Councillor.

Since services were cut in 2015, Kington, one of Herefordshire's six market towns has no bus connection with Hereford after 1815 and no connection at all with Leominster - its nearest major centre and railway station. The lack of services significantly constrains local lives and opportunities, for both older as well as younger people. It's an economic as well as a social issue with many unable to commute to Hereford for work opportunities because they simply can't get back at night. The nearby rural population plus villages and hamlets along the route are also affected. For local traders and hospitality providers, post-covid Kington desperately needs its tourism economy boosted – a better bus service will enhance it as a destination, especially for weekend walking breaks.

The campaign is based on compelling local evidence: a public online survey conducted in mid-March received 138 responses within a few days. 78% of respondents say they are likely to use the services. Of these, 37% do not own a car and 25% have no alternative means of transport. The survey also brought to light local demand for the reinstatement of a Kington – Leominster service.

KLEEN's campaign aligns with Herefordshire Council's declaration of a Climate and Ecological Emergency, and the need to provide alternative choices to the car. KLEEN <http://kingtonkleen.org.uk/> or kingtonkleen@gmail.com.

You can express your support for KLEEN's campaign by writing to Cllr John Harrington (the portfolio holder for Public Transport in Herefordshire Council... john.harrington@herefordshire.gov.uk).

Update on Herefordshire Buses

RBfH Secretary Andrew Pearson gives us an update on bus services

With the exception of the following all Herefordshire buses have returned to their pre pandemic timetables:

T14 Brecon – Hereford still reduced from 7 to 4 per day in each direction.

71 Hereford – Credenhill M-F early journeys and late Friday service axed. Saturday normal service except 2 late journeys cancelled. Sunday normal service.

72 Hereford – Bobblestock M-F first and last buses and Friday late buses all cancelled. Saturday normal service except last 3 buses axed.

74 Hereford – Newton Farm M-S reduced from every 12 mins to every 20 mins and last bus 18.05. Normal Sunday service.

77 Hereford – College Green – Bobblestock M-S last bus cancelled.

81 Hereford – College Green reduced from half hourly to hourly.

420 DRM Hereford – Bromyard – Worcester reduced from 5 to 4 journeys to Bromyard and 4 journeys from Bromyard – Worcester.

447 Bredwardine – Hereford no service on non-school days.

449 Madley – Hereford Normal service M-F school days but 2 hourly non-school days and Saturdays.

469 Bromyard - Bishops Frome - Hereford now one journey in each direction as early and late journeys scholars only.

476 Ledbury – Hereford still 2 hourly M-S Sunday service returned to normal.

492 Hereford – Leominster still 2 hourly and no Sunday service

674 Bromyard – Ledbury Scholars only.

802 Leintwardine – Hereford Scholars only.

A Bus Success Story – TrawsCymru

A report from across the Border

TrawsCymru is the brand for a network of medium and long distance express bus routes in Wales, sponsored by the Welsh Government. It was introduced as a replacement for the TrawsCambria network following a review in 2014. The main recommendation of the review was that TrawsCymru required a strategic all Wales approach. As a result funding of the network was taken on by the Welsh Government,

Since 2014 passenger numbers have shown a very encouraging increase rising from 1.41 million in 2014/15 to 2.46 million in 2019/20. During 2019/20 the Welsh Government continued its ‘ground breaking’ offer of weekend free travel for all across the TrawsCymru network.

As a result the network carried 501,000 passengers during weekends. That represented an increase of 233% over the three years that the scheme has been in operation.

During 2019/20 over 501,000 passengers were carried during weekends, which compares to 155,000 on weekends during 2016/17 the year before the initiative was first launched, which is an increase of +233% over 3 years.

A passenger survey also revealed that: 62% of passengers stated that free travel on TrawsCymru services on weekends has encouraged them to make more journeys by bus throughout the week.

The weekend free travel scheme has attracted more young people onto the bus network.

82% of passengers stated they were very happy with TrawsCymru® services in general.

From what people said, TrawsCymru has been able to calculate that for each £1 spent subsidising free travel, passengers who travelled were spending on average an additional £3 on local goods and services, thereby supporting local businesses in rural areas and small towns across Wales; 92% of passengers using the services on weekends were resident in Wales. (*Source: TrawsCymru Annual Report 2019/20*).

Interestingly, the Department of Transport report ‘Value for money of

tendered Bus Services (2016) concluded that ‘*Tendered bus services provide a number of benefits to local communities and high value for money overall. They generate between £2 and £2.50 for every £1 of local authority spend*’. We seem to have gone backwards in England since then whereas Wales has gone progressively forward



TrawsCymru T4 service to Brecon and Cardiff at Hereford station..

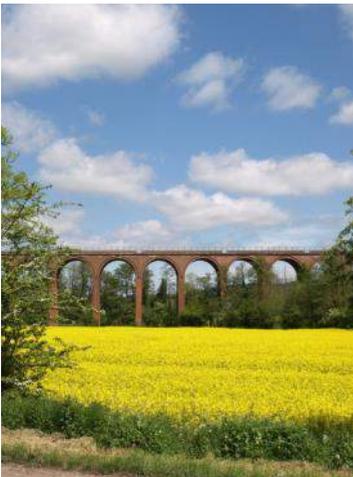
England has got a long way to go to match such Welsh success in attracting passengers back onto the buses.

From the Archives - Ledbury Viaduct

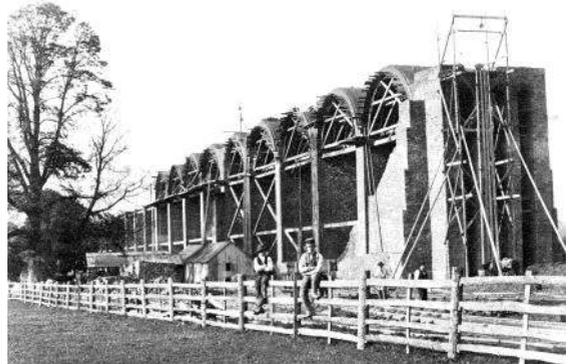
The main railway through Ledbury started life in 1845 as a vision for connecting the two cities of Hereford and Worcester. However, it was 1861 before it was finally opened. Although only some twenty-seven and three quarter miles long the Hereford and Worcester Railway involved some heavy engineering feats. Two of these were at Ledbury. Having completed a mile

long single bore tunnel through the difficult rock of Bradlow Knoll, the railway builders were faced with having to cross the wide valley of the River Leadon.

To overcome this the engineer, Stephen Ballard, built an impressive thirty one arch red brick viaduct. The arches are of a thirty foot span rising to a maximum of seventy five feet, each with a blue engineering brick string course. The total length is three hundred and sixty seven yards. The bricks were reputedly kilned on site but some most probably came from the brickworks of Robert Ballard, Stephen's brother. This brick works was on the site of what is now the UBL cider mill on Little Marcle Lane.



The engineering bricks were made and kilned by girls brought in from Staffordshire where blue bricks were traditionally made. Navvies, carpenters, brickmakers and bricklayers all lived in temporary cabins on the meadows below the viaduct. The whole scene must have been fascinating and quite alien to the inhabitants of Ledbury which was, until the coming of the railway, a small, quiet market town.



The viaduct across the meadows of the River Leadon: detail of arch showing blue brick string course: archive photo showing viaduct in process of construction. Note the collection of huts on the meadows. (photo David Postle collection)

From the Archives: Bromyard Omnibus

The Editor recalls

How many of us remember the Bromyard Omnibus Company, founded and managed by Martin Perry. I first knew Martin when he was a technician in the highways department of Hereford & Worcester County Council. He was never happy working for someone else and from an early stage he had an intense interest in buses. He eventually decided to step out into the big wide world, brought the small garage on Bringsty Common and two minibuses. With these he tendered for some council school contracts and succeeded.

Not one to stay still for long, the lure of big bus operation soon saw him enter the business of bus breaking. There were plenty of old buses hanging around when fleets were modernised and Bromyard Bus Breakers soon came into existence. The buses provided spare parts for a lucrative export business as many of the ex British-colonies and third world companies were still operating Leyland Bedford and Commer vehicles. Hundreds of old buses passed through Martin's business and he kept an accurate history of every one.

The operating side of buses, however, would not leave Martin alone and in the 1970s he set up the Bromyard Omnibus Company. With the Herefordshire Trial area and subsequent national deregulation he found he could successfully bid for council contracts and also run some commercial services. He built up a small mixed fleet of interesting buses and ran services from Bromyard into Hereford, Worcester via Clifton-on-Teme and Ledbury as well as gaining the 417 Ledbury-Worcester service and the 37 Hereford-Ross-on-Wye via Hoarwithy. He also started a Bromyard-Ledbury-Ross-on-Wye service on a Thursday which still runs today between Ledbury and Ross.

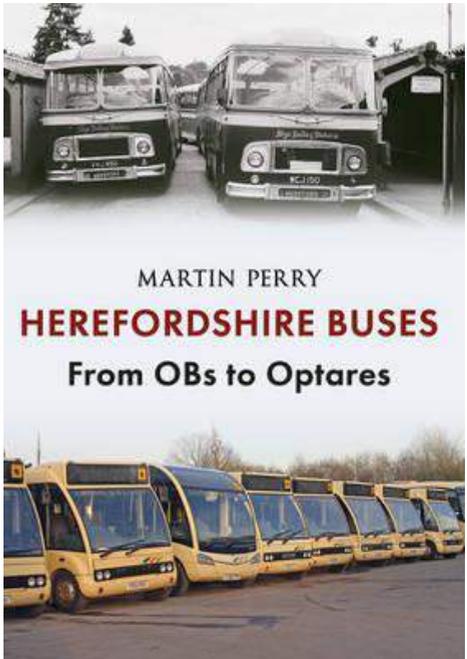
At the turn of the century Martin decided on something new. He moved to New Zealand and started up a small rural bus company there, shipping out some of the Dennis Pointer buses in his fleet. The bus breaking business was sold and the Bromyard Omnibus Company ceased to exist. Martin remains a respected member of the PSV Circle and his archives of omnibuses, especially those that operated in rural areas remains extensive. His recent book 'From OBs to Optares' recalls his passion for rural buses.



Pride of the fleet. Martin's Alexander bodied Leyland Leopard at Hereford bus station on the 37 to Ross-on-Wye via Hoarwthy.



Above: Smartly presented Bromyard Omnibus Company Dennis Pointer at Worcester on the 310 service to Clifton-on-Teme.



Right: The cover of Martin's book Herefordshire Buses: From OBs to Optares.

Mike Hart Continues His Observations at Ledbury

Some interesting train movements have taken place over the last three months which have been summarised here.

On the West Midlands Railway Birmingham service, class 172 units are now regularly to be seen. The 172 fleet was first introduced by London Midland for use on the Worcester-Stourbridge-Birmingham Snow Hill-Solihull-Whitlocks End and Shirley lines. The fleet has been undergoing an extensive refurbishment over the past year including interior painting, new carpets, refreshed seat upholstery and the installation of wi-fi and USB ports. They appear to have graduated to the Hereford service to replace the Class 170.

The class 170 continue to put in an appearance. They were introduced by Central Trains in 1999. During November and December 2020, the centre vehicles of the Class 170/6 units have been removed from their consist. They will have a minor refurbishment: along with being reliveried externally, internally the vehicle will be changed to the house colours of their new operator Cross Country. These vehicles will be used to extend some of their 2-carriage Class 170 units. The Class 170/6 units which remain at West Midlands Trains will be renumbered to reflect them becoming Class 170/5 units, before being moved to East Midlands Railway after the Class 196 units are introduced. This would account for Mike's observation on 5th May of one unit repainted in a purple livery. Purple is the new colour for East Midlands Railway which is part of Abellio who also own West Midlands Railway.

On 6th April the 15.12 Great Western Railway London-Hereford service was observed with large blue and white lettering on the leading and third and fourth coaches which thanked the NHS workers for their efforts during the crisis.

Turning trains at Ledbury because of late running continues. This happened to West Midlands Railway services on the afternoon of 5th and 14th May. This had also happened with a Great Western Railway service on the afternoon of 8th April. Train service irregularities do seem to be on the increase!

The network rail inspection train was in evidence on 16th March, 19th April, 11th May. Work on the track over the viaduct was to take place from 0005 to 0450 from 25th May to 28th May. The track was due to be lifted and new



track replaced by machine. Residents were informed as there would be a considerable level of noise during the nights. On 16th May between 0130 and 0235 there was a lot of movement and noise and bright lights as materials were brought to site. Since then however, no nocturnal noises have been heard and trains have been running normally so presumably the work has been delayed. Mike has an outstanding enquiry with Network Rail.

On 19th June an anonymous train of about ten coaches in blue with red stripe and two or three in a lighter colour went up through Ledbury hauled by a powerful diesel locomotive. Any guesses or info?

Much Optimism in Ewyas Harold & Pontrilas

There is much optimism and excitement in Ewyas Harold and Pontrilas It was twenty-eight years ago that a report was published on the possibilities for reopening Pontrilas railway station between Hereford and Abergavenny. Since then momentum has gathered, fuelled by an increase in population in the area and the setting up by government of a 'Restoring Your Railway' fund.

With the support of the South Herefordshire MP, Jesse Norman and Herefordshire Councillor Peter Jinman, the Ewyas group of parishes incorporated the scheme in their local neighbourhood plan. Professor Clive Stainton has been leading the project for the parish and having secured the support of the Welsh Government who operate the train service, a strategic outline business case has been presented to the Department for Transport.

Professor Stainton recently stated that he was optimistic about the project being delivered. "I think none of us can quite believe this, but we think this is actually going to happen," he said. The parish council has now been told it looks like the station will reopen, with the Department for Transport asking for specifics about how the station would be run by train operating company Transport for Wales. This would be a new station on a new site.

The matter of new stations is an interesting one. Eighty-seven railway stations have opened or been added to the railway network since 1st January 2000 across the UK National Railway network. Irrespective of who builds the station the main cost factor will be satisfying the ORR (Office of Rail Regulator) that the structure meets safety requirements as laid down in law and is fit for purpose. Such modern-day requirements relate to platform height, adequate lighting, footbridge and ramps or lifts to satisfy DDA (Disabled Access Acts), CCTV coverage, help points, adequate shelters with lighting, adequate fencing to stop trespass on the railway.

Railway stations that opened in 2020/21 are Horden (County Durham - population 8,000), Kintore (Aberdeenshire; population 4,800) and Bow Street (Ceredigion; population 1,900). The single platform, shelter and car park at Bow Street cost £8 million, whilst the two platform stations at Horden and Kintore cost £10.55 million and £15 million respectively. It is likely that Pontrilas will wade in at £15 to £20 million.

However, it would be a travesty if Pontrilas station was built, part funded by the Department for Transport and complete with disabled access whilst the existing station at Ledbury, with a footfall of 218,858 passengers per year (600 per day) pre-Covid still has no access to the Worcester direction platform for people with mobility impairment. This is despite lobbying over a number of years in respect of the Access for All requirements under the DDA Acts!