
SOUTH WEST WALES

Connected

COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

Railway Heritage Meeting- Neath

Neath Library - Friday November 8th 2024 - 12:30pm-15:30pm

A big thank you to everyone who joined our Railway Heritage meeting at Neath Central Library. The gathering was both enjoyable and engaging, with a really warm and collaborative spirit among all attendees. Together, we explored ways of how we can honor and promote the region's rich railway history, strengthen partnerships, and inspire new generations to appreciate our heritage here in South Wales.

Introduction to South West Wales Connected Community Rail:

South West Wales Connected is a Community Rail Partnership established by Transport for Wales and hosted by 4theRegion. We cover the region from Port Talbot to Pembrokeshire. The overall purpose of Community Rail Partnerships is to encourage greater use of rail services through increased participation of local communities in their rail line and by a range of activities at and surrounding their station to provide economic, social and environmental benefits to the region's residents and visitors.

Eve Sherratt- Community Rail Officer

Meeting Highlights:

Transport for Wales (TFW) Railway 200 Project:

We discussed next year's TFW Railway 200 project, marking 200 years of railway history, and noted how South Wales is currently slightly under-represented in these celebrations considering all of the amazing heritage and railway groups that we have. The group explored ways we might highlight our region's unique contributions to this project, with ideas ranging from local exhibitions to community-led events and station events that showcase the stories, sites, and historical significance of railways in South Wales.

A discussion of our Port Talbot station project and how we hope to create an exhibition of the industrial heritage of our region.

We also discussed SWWCO contribution to the celebration of the Mumbles railway as a small start up event in March 2025 and would love to hear your ideas and collaboration opportunities.

Life and Death on the Railways Project:

University of Portsmouth - Mike Esbester's 'Life and Death on the Railways' project was also discussed. This project sheds light on railway worker safety and risks, bringing a more personal perspective to the

industry's history. Attendees expressed interest in how we might incorporate this project's insights into our own storytelling efforts:

The 'Railway Work, Life & Death' project is looking at accidents to British and Irish railway staff before 1939. It's using records that were produced at the time, by the state accident investigators, trades unions and the railway companies. The records show all sorts about who was involved, what they were doing, where, when and why, as well as about what happened after an accident, in terms of the support provided. The project is a collaboration between the University of Portsmouth, the National Railway Museum and the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick, with small teams of volunteers transcribing the accident records, which are then made freely available from the project website. So far the Railway Work, Life & Death project database includes around 50,000 accidents. Currently there are thousands of cases involving Welsh railway staff, and with tens of thousands more to come next year, particularly focused on south Wales. The project wants to make sure that people today know about railway staff in the past and can find more information about the individuals and their accidents. The project is always keen to hear from people and to try to help support their research.

If you would like to follow up by email, you're very welcome to visit the project website (www.railwayaccidents.port.ac.uk) or contact Mike Esbester (via the project email address: railwayworkeraccidents@gmail.com).

Review of Previous Meetings and Future Plans:

Our past meetings in Swansea and Llanelli were mentioned, with positive feedback on the insights and discussions from those gatherings. Looking ahead, we are considering Tenby or Haverfordwest as potential locations for the next meeting to continue building those conversations and connections across South Wales.

Once our next meeting, date and venue has been confirmed we will be sending out further information and invitations and really hope you can make it.

South West Wales Community Rail Partnership (SWWCRP) Updates:

Joy of the Journey and **Train of Thought** poetry projects were highlighted as recent initiatives aimed at enhancing the passenger experience, promoting the scenic beauty of the region, helping build confidence and encouraging people to connect using their experience of Railways.

(If you would like to request a copy of the Poetry anthology please get in touch)

South West Wales Without a Car Brochure:

This guide encourages car-free travel, showing residents and visitors how accessible and enjoyable exploring all that South West Wales has to offer by rail.

(If you would like to request a copy please get in touch)

Artwork Proposal at Burry Port and Pembrey Station: A new proposal aims to bring historical artwork

to this station, linking its railway history with modern-day visual storytelling and community engagement.

Mumbles Railway Event, March 2024:

Plans are underway for an event in March dedicated to the historic Mumbles Railway, bringing the community together to celebrate its legacy. We really welcome your ideas and input.

Youth Engagement ideas:

A subject that was raised a few times during this meeting is that we need to inspire a sense of pride and appreciation for railway heritage among younger generations - possible ideas were through podcasts, digital GPS-guided tours, Model railway collections and events and multimedia resources. Suggestions were made to also offer accessible formats beyond digital, ensuring the information and enjoyment reaches everyone.

How are we able to inspire the next generation? School engagements? Events etc.

How can we invite/ entice more youngsters to participate in these heritage meetings, groups and events? Event experiences and job/skills training?

Neath Train Station:

Ideas were discussed on how to make Neath Station more welcoming and attractive, along with other stations in general to make them less tired looking and into more vibrant community hubs, such as displaying historical photos and stories of railway workers and installing “digital audio” where passengers can listen to recorded histories and stories from the railways.

Many people have family stories and photographs at home of the railways. How are we able to showcase all of the historic photographs and preserve them for the generations to come?

Tackling Anti-Social Behavior:

As part of fostering pride in local heritage, attendees discussed the need for projects that could help reduce anti-social behavior by creating a more inviting, community-focused railway environment.

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to the following people:

Peri Martin, Brunel Dock Society: Provided insights on current restoration highlights and their efforts and struggles to preserve the heritage at the Brunel Docks.

Andre Van Wyk- Port Talbot Projects: Updated us on recent projects and Port Talbot initiatives connecting the railway to the area’s industrial history.

Graham Rowland, Historian - Tata Steel Museum: Gave an overview of his contribution to starting the Tata Steel Museum, the history of the area - and the relationship between rail and how vitally important it

is that the history of the industry needs to be preserved for generations to come.

Jeff Phillips, Artist and Historian: Shared news on his recent artwork installation at the Palace in Swansea, inspired by local railway history.

These contributions were greatly appreciated, and their projects continue to inspire the community's dedication to preserving and promoting our heritage.

Books:

Commercial: "Its not railway work" - John Davies

If you're fascinated by railways, the latest book by John Davies is a must-read.

John, who started his career in the Swansea District office, spent his whole career on the railways, and has some fascinating anecdotes and insights gathered in a huge variety of different roles.

You can buy copies from: Platform 5 mail order - www.platform5.com

Geoff Dendle - A selection of books, downloads and Railway archives

www.peoplescollection.wales/discover

The Reshaping of Rail in South Wales- Martin Davies

This book has been well received and concentrates on the history and development of railways in the Briton Ferry and Neath area.

Available for purchase from daviesmartin270@gmail.com

Or online at Briton Ferry books

Next Steps:

These meetings are always meant to be relaxed, enjoyable gatherings where we can share ideas without any pressure or added commitments. The informal setting keeps things fun and open, allowing everyone to connect, learn, and collaborate at their own pace.

By staying in touch and keeping each other updated on our projects, we're building a network of passionate people who can work together to hopefully make a real difference in protecting and celebrating our railway heritage in South Wales.

Collaboration is key, and by pooling our ideas, resources, and energy, we can make sure our work and knowledge is preserved and shared in ways that inspire and engage our communities. By supporting each other we can hopefully influence the next generation of historians.

Also - If anyone would like to speak with someone they met at the meeting, please feel free to reach out, and we'd be happy to help make the connection! And again if you would like a copy of the SWWCO books or a copy of the photograph slideshow from the event, just let us know, and we'll be glad to share it with you.

South West Wales Connected
<https://www.southwestwales.co/>

Email:

Eve@southwestwales.co

Amanda@southwestwales.co

A very special thank you to catering - Baglan Bakery
<https://www.baglanbakery.co.uk/>