

News

Barry railway to launch own main line tours

By Geoff Courtney

THE recently renamed Barry Island Heritage Railway – formerly known as the Vale of Glamorgan Steam Railway – has received a triple boost.

Firstly, formal agreement has been reached with Network Rail for the use of a main line connection at Barry station, on the Cardiff-Bridgend line, following nearly two years of negotiation. The railway is thus the first preserved line in Wales to have a direct link with the national network.

Secondly, the 500-metre eastward extension, to a new station next to a Morrisons supermarket on Barry waterfront, is due for completion next month, giving a running line of nearly two miles.

The £250,000 cost has been met by the Welsh Assembly, the European Union, and the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

Finally, the Barry-based rake of six push-pull ex-Gatwick Express carriages, delivered last year, is to be re-registered for main line work and will be used for tourist and special steam and diesel trains on the national network.

Backers of the line hope that the railway, albeit much shorter, will do for the northern coast of the Bristol Channel what the triple award-winning West Somerset Railway has done for the south.

Vale of Glamorgan Welsh Assembly member Jane Hutt, and Margaret Alexander, leader of Vale of Glamorgan Council, recently visited the railway to see how work on the extension was progressing.



Morrisons, here we come! From left: Andrew Dakin (Pride in Barry), John Buxton (project manager), Jane Hutt (Welsh Assembly), Margaret Alexander (Vale of Glamorgan Council) and Brian Mills (Barry Island Heritage Railway), inspect work on the 500-metre extension. MARK LANG

Tyneside to Vietnam by rail

A TEAM from Tyneside's Monkwearmouth Station Museum has embarked on a rail journey to the furthest place that can be reached by rail from nearby Sunderland.

Members of the team set out on 25 January destined for Ho Chi Minh City, formerly known as Saigon, 9300 miles away.

One of their aims is to forge links with national railway museums across the globe, including the China Railway Museum in Beijing, the Railway Museum in Belarus and Moscow's Metro Museum.

The group will also visit schools along the route, to help set up links with schools back in Sunderland.

They are scheduled to arrive in Vietnam on 6 March.

A Sunderland to Saigon exhibition will be staged this summer when Monkwearmouth Station Museum reopens following its £900,000 refurbishment, which was part funded by a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £497,000.

The museum will then have seven new galleries, many with interactive displays, and focusing on the history of travel and transport in Tyne and Wear.

The neo-classical station building was opened in 1848 as the Sunderland terminus for trains from Gateshead and Newcastle, and also to mark the election of railway magnate George Hudson as MP for Sunderland.

It closed in 1967 and was bought by the local council for conversion into a museum, including the restoration of the original booking office which had remained unchanged from 1866. The museum opened in 1973, and includes two items of rolling stock, a NER brake van from 1915 and a LNER CCT van from 1939.

Jane Hutt said: "I was delighted to see for myself the work on this next important phase of the railway."

"Every year I am impressed by the number of visitors and local people it attracts, and how many volunteers work so hard running the trains, operating the stations and visitor centre, and maintaining the track."

"I am sure that this new extension and platform will attract even more visitors to Barry, and continue to be an important part of the regeneration of our town."

Jane Hutt and Coun Alexander were greeted on site by the project manager, John Buxton of railway engineering company Cambrian Transport, and Andrew Dakin, Pride in Barry regeneration ambassador.

With the extension due to be completed by April, it is hoped to run the first passenger trains by late spring or early summer. For the present, the Morrisons station will comprise just a single platform, although a GWR-style waiting room is also planned.

Andrew Dakin said the new developments should help the railway, which links Barry Island with the town across the causeway, to thrive. The extension takes it nearer to its eventual goal of reaching the present Barry Dock station, where a new transport interchange is to be located.

Ironically, the railway circles the site of the former Woodham Brothers scrapyard, where the survival of so many scrap main line locomotives made possible the UK heritage sector as we know it today.

"There are many developments incorporated in the dockland regeneration, and the railway effectively provides the 'necklace' that links these new attractions, improving access and increasing economic activity in the town," said Andrew.

John Buxton, managing director of Cambrian Transport, said he was pleased to be supporting the regeneration of a town with such a well-known railway history, and was enjoying engineering the extension.

"I hope to see the main line connection regularly used by the ex-Gatwick Express carriages, which we funded, providing excursions for local people as well as boosting the town's tourism potential."

"Those carriages and our two Class 73 locomotives – soon to be three – could also be useful on the extension, as they can operate as a push-pull unit."

By Geoff Courtney

IN railwayana circles, the f-word causes as much unease as in any other walk of life. It may be whispered or spoken in lowered tones, but ideally it should never be aired in public.

Fake – or, if you prefer, forgery – is a taboo subject which dares not speak its name.

It may therefore have caused a considerable amount of surprise, and indeed even consternation, when Greg Norden, one of the most respected and upstanding of those at the heart of the railwayana scene, launched his new venture the Travelling Art Gallery.

No, it's not a road show touring the country with displays by railway artists, and nor is it Greg flogging paintings at railwayana auctions from the boot of his car.

The Travelling Art Gallery sells (wait for it) reproduction carriage prints. Not only the originals which actually adorned railway carriages either side of WWII, but mainly reproductions.

Not any old reproductions, mind you, but state-of-the-art, fine art giclée prints digitally and individually reproduced from Greg's own mint condition originals.

I can already see the serried ranks of brows being furrowed, tufts being tutted, and whispers being whispered, as those who like to control the railwayana scene feel another rein being loosened from their grip.

Already one high-profile dealer and collector has expressed to me his bemusement at what Greg is doing, feeling it will assuredly undermine the current carriage print market and lead to these reproductions becoming part of the mainstream and even being passed off as originals.

Such a reaction is understandable, but does a disservice to Greg. Understandable because 'fakes' is a touchy subject, and because the railwayana market is in a state of flux at the moment, resulting in nervousness simmering only just below the surface.

Competition among auction houses and dealers is fierce and becoming ever more so, and while daggers aren't yet drawn – well, not in public at any rate – everyone is eyeing everyone else, and stepping out of line is viewed with as much opprobrium as from a sergeant major on the parade ground.

But it does Greg a disservice for a variety of reasons. The first is that, as the owner of the largest collection of original carriage prints in the UK, Greg would be the last to want to undermine the market.

Secondly, those who deal with him would recognise him as a straight, open