**Cymdeithas Rheilffordd Llyn Tegid**

**Bala Lake Railway Society**

**Minutes of the Committee Meeting held at 7.30 PM on 11th July 2024, via Zoom**

**Present:** Cathy and Martin Houghton, Chris Jackson, Peter Miller, Hilary Moorhouse, Bob Newton, Mat Peacock, Francis Stapleton, Tim Williams.

**1) Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Bob Shell, Nick Talbot and Dave Fildes.

**2) Matters arising from the Minutes of the previous Committee Meeting (18th April 2024)**

Peter Miller proposed that the draft Minutes of the above Meeting be approved. Chris Jackson seconded the motion, and it was carried with all in favour apart from Hilary Moorhouse and Francis Stapleton abstaining (due to their not having been at the previous Meeting).

Tim Williams has lent a digital photo frame to Ron Finley for use on the Society Stand (though he is not sure if it has actually been used yet). He also recently asked Ron for a shopping list for Stand equipment. The Stand’s visits to the Llangollen Garden Railway Festival in May and the 7mm Narrow Gauge Association model show in Burton-on-Trent in June were both successful, thanks to Ron and Lynne, with several new members recruited. The Stand currently has invitations to the Bala Model Show (21st and 22nd September), the Stafford Model Railway Show (28th – 29th September) and the Vale of Rheidol Model Show (26th October – not certain we can attend). Extra volunteers were needed for these events.

Tim had spoken to David Jones about the vacant section of the poster board at Bala Pen-y-Bont Station and has been given provisional approval for us to use it for Society purposes. Tim estimated that a suitable poster would cost about £50. Peter Miller asked about the Llanuwchllyn porch display board: Tim was not sure how many visitors to the Railway even noticed this but agreed it was worth a revamp. Tim also reminded the Meeting of the idea to put a site map on the Signal Box: its main function would be to help visitors find the Heritage Centre but it could also be used to advertise the Society. Hilary Moorhouse commented that these ideas and the “Funded By” plaques would represent a gradual increase in Society visibility at the Railway, and that one step at a time was probably best.

Tim had tried to contact Julian Birley about the new, all-inclusive Extension leaflet proposed by Chris Jackson, but had not yet had a reply. Mat Peacock urged that we find ways to strengthen the relationship between the Society and the Trust.

It seemed to have been decided that the green, sit-astride 7.25” gauge coaches at Llanuwchllyn are ours and that the ones with Llechwedd lettering belong to the estate of the late Paul Perryman (contrary to what his executor, Diane Hamilton believed). However, this was still not known for certain. Mat had discussed with the Diane the possibility of helping her to dispose of some of the rest of Paul’s collection. However, it seems that much or all of it is now being sold through shops such as Footplate Models. Joe Stevens’ plans for a 7.25” line on platform 2 at Llanuwchllyn are in progress and David is broadly in favour of the idea, though a final decision has not yet been taken. A 5” gauge “Simplex” steam loco chassis has apparently been donated to the Railway. Tim therefore passed on a request from Joe that we allow an extra rail to be welded to the track panels that will be used in the Platform 2 miniature railway, to make them dual-gauge. There were no objections to this (or to the Society’s track being used for such a project).

In response to Bob Newton’s suggestion that the Society help the Railway acquire a defibrillator, David Jones has replied that he would like the Railway to have several (for the guards’ compartments as well as Llanuwchllyn and Bala stations). David believed there is an organisation which can supply them for free, but asked if the Society could handle the discussion. Bob offered to work with and for the Railway on this matter.

**3) Issues related to the AGM (18th May 2024)**

**a) Matters arising from the Minutes**

Bob Newton proposed that the draft Minutes from this year’s AGM be submitted to the next AGM for full approval. Peter Miller seconded the motion, and it was carried without objection.

As reported at the 2024 AGM, the Society will need a candidate to take over as Treasurer from Dave Fildes at the 2025 AGM. The position of Vice-Chairman also still remained vacant. Tim Williams said that he had made some progress on these matters but was not yet in a position to report anything. Mat Peacock had promised at the 2024 AGM to try to elucidate the way each year’s final balance was calculated (in the 2020-2024 period he had not been able to reconcile the income and expenditure figures from each year with the changes in the final balance from one year to another – he suspected his lack of accountancy acumen was to blame but wished to check). Mat had, however, not yet contacted the Treasurer due to Dave Fildes’ extra work-load as Treasurer in the wake of Dave Scotson’s death.

**b) Ways we might improve the running of the AGM itself**

At this year’s AGM, far more people attended via Zoom than ever before. Time lags and sound quality issues meant that some people struggled to hear or be heard, with cases of people talking over each other. Tim Williams suggested, admitting a little reluctance, that the Chairman would have to impose a much stricter system in future years. Peter Miller said that the Ffestiniog procedure is to require Zoom attendees’ microphones and cameras to stay switched off unless they wished to speak. Tim thought that, for our purposes, requiring microphones to be switched off unless needed was worth trying. Mat Peacock suggested that allowing people from the floor to speak before people from Zoom, at least at the start of a discussion, might help (and this could be alternated for fairness), but Chris Jackson and some others thought this might excessively restrict debate.

Cathy Houghton commented that the sound quality from the Hall wasn’t very good on Zoom this year. Tim said he would deploy more microphones next year and also thought, as did Chris, that it was worth trying Peter’s suggestion of a roving microphone, both for sound quality and for better protocol.

Mat Peacock then brought up the matter of the election being conducted as a single show-of-hands vote for all candidates at once. This was done on a proposal from the floor to save time. However, Mat was very unhappy with this on the grounds that it might have made it difficult for individuals with objections to specific candidates to have their views recognised and recorded. The July 2023 Committee Meeting had voted unanimously in favour of secret ballots, but at the 2024 AGM nobody from the Committee objected to the single vote apart from Mat (and by the time he had marshalled his thoughts, the single vote had acquired unstoppable momentum, so he ended up abstaining when it was decided to have a single vote). Cathy Houghton was also not happy with what had happened, because she had been forced to leave her computer for a short while and was very surprised to find that a secret ballot was not under way when she returned.

Mat therefore proposed that we bring a motion to the next AGM to have compulsory secret ballots enshrined in the Constitution. Peter Miller preferred the idea of a regulation stating that single votes be allowed if everybody at a given AGM agreed but Mat said that he would always vote against in such situations so there would be no point and Cathy added that offering the single-vote option might actually be promoting that option. Tim thought that simplicity was the best approach and Chris Jackson asked Mat to draft a constitutional amendment to be discussed at the next Committee Meeting.

**c) Ways we might improve the AGM day in general**

Mat Peacock suggested this discussion, starting from the understanding that many people find travel to the AGM ever-more difficult and expensive (as he himself does – he lives in Norfolk). However, having more people attending the AGM physically would reduce the Zoom-related problems and make the effort put into catering, special trains and staffing the Society Stand on the platform more worthwhile, plus flying the Society flag in many other ways. Most of the food which Tim had organised for the AGM buffet went uneaten on the day (but was ‘recycled’ amongst the volunteers later). Mat had therefore suggested to Tim Williams not long after the AGM that we might look into an extra Society train, in the 10.10 ‘slot’ on the Saturday morning but only running to Llangower and only with passenger coaches, to make the day more attractive for Society members whilst minimizing any risk of disrupting the public service.

Tim replied that he had discussed the low attendance figures at the AGM and the possibility of more attractions with David. David’s response was that given so many people now used Zoom, having any special provisions at the Railway at all on AGM Day might soon be unnecessary. The Company pays for the special train(s) on AGM Day and David was not at all keen on increasing the number of such trains, quite the contrary in fact. Even the slightest risk of disruption to service trains was to be avoided at all costs. Tim also reported that he had spoken to several members – including some at Llanuwchllyn on AGM Day! – who had no idea that the AGM was taking place. This was in spite of multiple adverts in *Llanuwchllyn Express,* on Facebook and on the Society web page.

Mat was worried about AGM Day dwindling even further as an event if attendance levels were on the brink of no longer justifying even one special train. He was also worried in more general terms about the lack of member awareness of and engagement with the AGM. He suggested that perhaps the Society could fund a special train, if the Company felt the costs were unjustified. Nobody else spoke in favour of such an idea and the general feeling of the Meeting was that no attempt should be made to push for an increase in AGM Day special attractions involving operations on the Railway itself.

Instead, ways were discussed to strengthen publicity, in the hope that more people would come to the AGM in its current form if they knew it was on. One suggestion, made by Tim Williams, was to include a leaflet with the *Llanuwchllyn Express*, well in advance. Peter Miller also suggested that the AGM could be announced on the cover-wrapping of the magazine. Mat offered to send out emails to the entire membership in 2025. This has not been done in the past as it takes a considerable amount of work and there were data protection issues, which the committee now felt were not insurmountable.

**4) Financial Report**

Dave Fildes, being unable to attend the meeting in person, submitted a financial summary in advance. As of 10th July, the Lloyds Current Account balance was £5093.17 and the Lloyds Deposit Account balance was £21377.04. A letter has been received by the Treasurer confirming that our issue with HMRC and Corporation Tax has been resolved.

As regarded the Barclays accounts, frozen since the death of Dave Scotson, some progress appeared to have been made. The late Patsy Hall was now confirmed as the second signatory to the Barclays accounts, the one whom we had been struggling to trace. This was because she was co-organiser of the Santa Trains for many years. It seems that Barclays wrote to her for clarification after we applied to replace Dave Scotson as signatory. The letter passed to her son and executor, David Hall. At the time of the Meeting, he was trying to use his position as executor to take over as a signatory in order to pass that authority on to us.

Peter Miller also asked Chris Jackson to circulate his obituary of Patsy Hall and this was done after the Meeting.

**5) Projects**

**a) Accommodation**

A new volunteer has recently been helping with cleaning and maintenance and it was hoped that she might be persuaded to continue doing so. She has also kindly offered to replace the portable hotplate which had been sourced by the Company but not returned for replacement by them when it turned out to be faulty. Hilary Moorhouse had also had a separate offer from another potential volunteer cleaner, again to help Liz as necessary.

Since the AGM, Hilary had collected a lot more discarded bed linen, which has been upcycled wherever possible as cleaning rags in the Engine Shed. She hoped that the amount of linen dumping would soon start to tail off. At the previous Committee Meeting and at the AGM, there had been some discussion about additional notices encouraging users to treat the Accommodation properly: Tim Williams said that some more had been put up recently and he and Hilary believed that as many notices as practicable were now in place. Also, a balance had to be maintained between getting Accommodation users to treat the facilities properly and not putting people off from volunteering. There was a brief discussion about what would happen if an individual was suspected of causing damage to the Accommodation and the consensus was that Tim would speak to David first and foremost. It was still planned to replace the kitchen floor over the winter of 2024-2025, a project to be led by Tim and John Moorhouse.

**b) Memorials**

Chris Jackson sent the latest draft of his list of potential honorands to the Committee in advance of the Meeting. This was based on discussions with members plus extensive research of old committee lists and issues of the *Llanuwchllyn Express*. Chris’ document contained 47 names, and Francis had even more recently suggested a 48th. Peter Miller stressed the importance of contacting the relatives of the deceased for permission to put up a memorial plaque. Mat Peacock noted that a 10cm square plaque in Blaenau Ffestiniog slate, just bearing the name of the deceased person, with shallow engraving, would cost £5 plus postage. This was thought to be perfectly acceptable even given the size of the list.

The various options for a memorial area were looked at again, and those present agreed that the best option available was a sleeper-built structure to which plaques could be attached, similar to the very well-made one on the K&ESR, at the western end of platform 2. This would take advantage of the proposal to build a foot crossing there, in connection with the planned miniature railway on the platform: the crossing would allow people to visit the memorial. It would also, it was thought, improve a currently rather neglected little area. Mat Peacock proposed that this plan should be presented to the Railway Company. Bob Newton seconded the motion and all present were in favour.

**c) Slates to Velinheli reprint**

Chris Jackson reported that he had been unable to make any progress on this project since the last Meeting.

**d) Penrhyn Guidebook reprint**

Mat Peacock reported on this. He had personally paid for ten copies of this 1913 guidebook, to be sold via the Society Stand. Any profits would go to the Railway. He expected that the books would be ready in time for the Model Show. [After the Meeting, on 17th July, Robin Willis contacted Mat to say that the books were ready ahead of schedule. It might therefore be possible to sell the books at the Gala as well].

**e) Illustrated Map**

Chris Jackson reported that he had been unable to make any progress on this project since the last Meeting.

**f) Society Storage Area**

Tim Williams spoke to David about this and gained his assent in principle. David suggested, however, that the cattle dock would be a better position than the ones we had proposed, as access would not require crossing the line. He also stipulated that a much stronger structure than a basic ‘garden storage box’ would be required. Tim said he would check with other potential users of this area to make sure a Society store here would not be in the way, and would also research suitable storage containers. He also noted that the two standard-gauge ‘Palvans’ adjacent to the cattle dock, intended as display and storage spaces for the Company and Maid Marian Fund, need a lot of restoration work before they can be used. Therefore, we were probably better off creating our own space. Tim hoped that our storage unit would be in place by the Autumn.

**g) "Funded with the support of the Society" plaques**

Mat Peacock had ordered twelve six-inch diameter slate plaques from Raven Eve Designs, to be collected at the Model Show. The total cost (with no postage expenses) was £132, payable by September 1st. The text on these will be in the ‘Hoefler’ typeface used on the front cover of *Llanuwchllyn Express*, and it will read “Ariannwyd gyda chymorth Cymdeithas Rheilffordd Llyn Tegid” and “Funded with the support of the Bala Lake Railway Society.” They will have screw holes top and bottom so as to be fixable on posts as well as walls. The placing of individual plaques will be subject to agreement with the Company: a further requirement from the Company was that the Society would be responsible for maintaining the plaques. Mat had therefore ordered twelve in case any got broken and needed replacing. He suggested that the two signal boxes, Dai the Dragon, the living room upstairs at Llanuwchllyn and the forthcoming disabled toilet would be suitable locations to start with.

**6) Fundraising, Member Recruitment and Member Engagement**

**a) President's Appeal**

Prior to the Meeting, Mat Peacock had contacted both Peter Miller and Tim Williams with a suggestion that the relaunched President’s Appeal could focus much more strongly on fully-equipping the Llangower Signal Box, making this popular location the ‘poster child’ for the fundraising. Peter now spoke about the Appeal and in favour of this plan. He stressed the benefits of a fully-operational Llangower Box to the Railway, whether or not the Extension went ahead. The idea met with the general support of the Meeting.

Peter then talked about the logistics of the Appeal and how difficult it had been for him at the 2023 Gala: he had struggled to find help to set up a stand and to make it eye-catching enough. This year, he stated, we must do things properly, with a well-situated and presented stand (including a poster display) and an allotted time or times for him to make a speech about the Appeal. He did have a new folding table which he could bring, but would rely upon others for the design and printing of the promotional material and general help at the Gala. Tim Williams said he would ask the Publicity Officers to come to the Gala and have a full Society Stand there alongside the President’s Appeal section. He would like at least one new pull-up banner (one of the existing ones is almost worn out) and this could feature Llangower.

Chris Jackson suggested we acquire a new collecting bucket carrying President’s Appeal branding, and this idea was warmly received. Cathy Houghton and Nick Talbot did not have any Appeal leaflets yet but thought there was a good supply of them in the store at Llanuwchllyn. Cathy asked Tim to send her a batch. Tim said he would also look at new online marketing ideas for the Appeal, accompanied with a piece in the *Express* and maybe a separate leaflet to be sent out with the magazine.

Cathy Houghton asked about the current status of the Llangower Group and Tim replied that they had done nothing for a year. In fact, this group had only ever been very small. Mat wondered if we could reinvigorate this group and resume drinks sales at that station – given Llangower’s popularity as a tourist destination, this might make the Society a decent return. It would not be possible, for safety and other reasons, for the signalman there also to sell drinks.

**b) Membership Recruitment**

It was agreed that the existing Society notice boards at Llanuwchllyn need refreshing. There was also the possibility of putting up a Society poster at the Bala terminus (see Item 2 above). Mat Peacock, Hilary Moorhouse and others spoke about the vital importance of the Society Stand in recruiting new members, as had been recently demonstrated at the Llangollen and Burton-on-Trent model shows – and hence the need to keep looking for additional volunteers to run it. Mat also said that he had suggested a new “Red Dragon Appeal” to the Trust as a fundraising scheme should the Extension be given the go-ahead (he also noted that the deadline for third-party comments on the Extension, on the National Park website, had recently been pushed back from 28th June to 15th September). He had even suggested the title “Green Dragon Appeal” for this new venture, which, he suggested, might be a way of recruiting even just a few new members without impinging on the Trust’s fundraising. He had, however, found out from Cathy Houghton that the person who managed the original scheme for the Trust was no longer involved there. And he had not received any reply from Julian Birley, after more than a month.

**c) Engagement and Volunteer Recruitment**

The idea of including more leaflets with issues of the *Llanuwchllyn Express*, which had come up several times already in the Meeting, was discussed again. The need was stressed to get them to the members well in advance of the event they were advertising. Chris Jackson wondered whether better ways could be found to draw attention to specific events and appeals on the pages of the magazine. He and Peter noted that the proportion of members who volunteer for the Railway is actually quite high, compared with other societies, but Mat added that recruiting volunteers specifically for the Society Stand and the Model Show remained very difficult. He also suggested that the Model Show could be used a lot more to recruit local volunteers and that the Society Stand there in the last few years had not been visible enough, due in part to sharing space with the ticket stand and Company sales, but also due to the lack of volunteers meaning that there was often nobody specifically working on our Stand. Space at the 2024 Model Show is tighter than ever, but it might be possible to make the Society Stand more prominent.

Cathy Houghton said that we could add Society-specific volunteering to our New Members’ Letter. It could also highlight the Society Stand and other Society tasks as opportunities to volunteer for people not interested in or physically able to carry out operational or maintenance roles. At the moment, the Letter advises all people interested in volunteering to contact the Company.

**7) Any Other Business**

Mat Peacock asked about the lack of updates to the News Page on the main Company website. Tim Williams explained that this was because nobody had been found to replace Patrick, who as a volunteer had produced the news up until the end of 2023, and that his skills in wheedling news items out of the Company and the Trust were sorely missed.

**The Meeting concluded at 9.47 PM. The Minutes were recorded by Mat Peacock.**