



**MID WALES MODEL ENGINEERING SOCIETY  
'MWMES'  
NEWTOWN, POWYS**

# **Mid Wales Model Engineering Society (MWMES)**

## **What is the MWMES all about?**

The Mid Wales Model Engineering Society is unique in mid-Wales. There are of course other model railway and engineering groups running activities with locomotives and stock in a range of sizes, but there is no other park railway in mid-Wales. As such, the entirely volunteer-run and staffed MWMES has a distinctive offer which contributes to the public facilities available in the Newtown area. The Society is proud to be able to present this experience for residents and visitors alike.

Although railway-focused for its primary activity, the Society believes it is important not to confine its activities to miniature railway locomotive running and construction. Alongside passenger hauling, driver and trackside training, the Society exists to assist other model makers with various engineering projects.

MWMES is keen to engage both more enthusiasts and people who would like to learn or contribute across a broad spectrum. Current members come from a wide range of backgrounds and careers; some are ‘tinkerers’, some are ‘serious model engineers’, some just love historic railways or the smell of the steam, some build locos, some handle computers, regulations and spreadsheets, some really want time to chat in a relaxed environment. Anyone is welcome and there is plenty for all to get involved in.

## Aims

The Society has two main aims:

- To promote miniature engineering or any form of engineering hobby or pastime.

The Society can give help and advice to anyone engaged in construction or operation of such projects. Model engineering involvement is mostly with miniature railway and traction engines, either steam or electric. Over its 40-odd years, it has covered a wide range of small engineering work – from replica hand gun repairs to classic car parts.

- To run and operate the miniature railway situated in the park at Back Lane, Newtown.

The main purpose of the railway is to provide train rides for residents and visitors and in so doing provide an attraction and service for Newtown. This also allows Society members to run and test their railway locomotives. The majority of passengers are children, many showing a keen interest in the locomotives and how they work. Through this it is hoped an interest in technology may be sparked in the children.



‘Draig Goch’ undergoing running repairs and testing

## History

The MWMES was formed in the early 1980's by a group of people who would meet at the Elephant and Castle Hotel. The objectives of the Society were to promote model or miniature engineering and also to promote any form of engineering hobby or pastime. It is worthy of note that some members were not engineers but had an interest in miniature engines and were seeking guidance and assistance in a building project.

With assignment to the Society by the Council of an amenity area in Newtown's park off Back Lane, the railway track in the park was laid down in the late 1980's. It included a passing loop to allow running more than one train at a time and track gauges of 5 inch and 7 ¼ inch (horizontal distance between the rails) were catered for. This gave flexibility in locomotive design and size, thus appealing to a wider range of members.

Passenger running started with a 5 inch gauge British Rail Diesel (electric) shunter. Later a 7 ¼ inch steam locomotive built jointly by the Society's members was added. The railway was immediately very popular with children and adults alike.

From around 1990 the Society rented workshop space in the Old College, Newtown. This workshop was equipped with machine and hand tools and was very busy. The present 7 ¼ inch Sweet William locomotive was constructed at this time, being completed in 1999. In 2002 the Council required the space for other undisclosed purposes and the workshop had to close. This was a serious blow to the Society which at this time was thriving. No alternative space was offered therefore the Society went into serious decline with many projects unfinished and the Society was reduced to around four or five active members. The machine tools were sold off or where possible were taken to the home workshops of members for safe storage.

The low number of members made operations very difficult, however the railway continued to operate and assistance was given to people undertaking various engineering projects. Gradually membership increased up to 2020, when Covid19 of course put a stop to all Society group operations for two years.

April 2022 saw the lifting of some Covid19 restrictions and the railway commenced operations once more. Track development and stock refurbishment has taken place every Thursday since then, with trains running on most Saturdays. With keen new members looking for involvement post- the frustrations of lockdown, 2022 saw membership increase and the membership profile widening both in terms of ages and backgrounds – engineering or not.

The Society still does not have a workshop but recently within planning for overall amenity development in the park, a shipping container has been sited at the track allowing the secure dry storage of equipment for running days. A permanent turntable and storage track have been installed, considerably easing operating realities for the members. The container will soon be clad to resemble a station building, and it is intended that it will be possible to carry out small engineering activities there when electric power is available.

## **Benefits**

### Interaction and learning

In general, model engineers tend to be of a more advanced age and are living with the problems that advancing years can bring. However, being a valued part of a Society like ours and sharing their considerable knowledge and experience in a positive supportive environment can be a great help, both to them and to those who can gain from their knowledge.

We believe strongly in the value of knowledge being passed between the generations, in both directions, and encourage interaction between younger and older members. Membership ages range between 16 and 80, with everyone taking part in all activities according to their interests, abilities and training gained. The Society operates strictly within the guidance of the Northern Association of Model Engineers and operates a Safety Management system in accordance with HSE 2020, so is also a good place to learn about personal and public safety, the importance of consistency in technical operation and the keeping of good records.

### Wellbeing

Our activities play a part in improving the mental health both of our members and passengers. Members can also gain physically as much of the work involved is quite active and can give much needed outdoor exercise.

We have no age or gender restrictions and actively seek to encourage a wide membership of anyone who would enjoy getting involved in a range of the roles involved in offering this miniature railway experience, or indeed wider modelling or engineering activities.

Children who enjoy riding on the trains are likely to develop or maintain an interest in trains/model engineering, their parents enjoy the family experience as well, and people from teenage to old age can enjoy being part of what our overall project offers. That much of this takes place out of doors is a bonus for mental and physical health.

- Our members gain from being part of our society in terms of friendship and mutual support.

- Our visitors gain from the enjoyment of spending time doing an activity with their families. This enjoyment spans across all generations, bringing families closer together.
- The younger generations can benefit from seeing how a group like ours works together to bring enjoyment to others of all ages. It can help instil in them a respect for others who may be different from themselves, and promote patience and discipline.

### Enthusiasing and preparing a new workforce

Newtown used to have proud engineering-based industry and whilst in some ways this is re-emerging through the development of new technologies in the town (medical, chemical, electric power, etc), the old skills are known to be disappearing. The country still needs those skills and young people need a way both to learn about them and to be enthused about them as possible career directions. Colleges can offer a practical and academic way into this, but without complementary activities nearby, few young people have the chance to be exposed to the challenges and importantly, to the fun, of engineering. Once they have the ‘bug’, young people are more likely to choose to stay around as a future workforce for the vital new industries establishing themselves in the town and needing a high quality workforce.

By getting young people onto a technical pathway, or even a management pathway if that is what interests them, MWMES believes it contributes to the employment options of young people and to the quality of workforce which will be available in Newtown, rather than having to be brought in from elsewhere. It is important to support young people to have work in their home area, but also to support local companies in being able to find appropriately interested and skilled workers.

## Community and municipal co-operation

The opening in 2022 of the Hafan Yr Afon building, just by the railway, will bring more people into the park, looking for varied activities. We are working closely with Open Newtown and Newtown Town council to develop the miniature railway facilities in such a way as to complement the area around the new visitor centre and bike shelter and to improve the experience of the park's users.

With a safe and eye-catching railway operating we will be able to run trains more often and help more people to enjoy Newtown's attractions. Anecdotal evidence from visitors in August 2022 reveals that the railway is an added draw for holidaymakers choosing a place to stop off on their routes to and from holiday destinations. The railway demonstrably helps bring visitors and trade into Newtown.

## **Statistics**

### Members

With a membership of 20 currently in 2022, of whom 10 regularly participate in maintenance or running days and a further three give time on the 'back-office' support (publicity and administration), the Society is growing slowly in size and membership diversity is widening. New members are welcomed from all sections of society and will eagerly be brought into whichever area they are interested in.

Depending on 10 active members to cover the majority of running weekends in the season is, however, marginal for ensuring appropriate staffing levels. We have an absolute safe minimum personnel requirement of 4 per running session and would prefer to have more each time.



## Running days

With limited personnel, in 2022 the Society committed to running on alternate Saturdays through the season (weather permitting). However, indomitable, cheerful, enthusiastic, volunteers have allowed running on almost every Saturday since April and on some Sundays too.

It is exciting now to be able to plan also to coincide with and service events happening in Newtown and around the new Hafan Yr Afon building just near to the railway in the park.

## Passengers

In 2022 the Society gave just over 2000 rides between the beginning of April and the end of August, which is no mean feat. Added to the regular Thursday morning maintenance and test sessions this has seen quite a commitment from the active members, who we hope are immune to ‘steam fatigue’!

## The financials

Although volunteer run and staffed, every year there are costs which the Society has to cover in order to be able safely and legally to offer a service to the members and to the public. An extract of significant planned costs in 2022, setting aside the calculable cost of volunteer time to achieve all these things, and other costs, includes:

Insurance:	£ 1,200
Coal and lubricating oil for steam engines:	£ 416
Track maintenance and development:	£ 600
Locomotive and rolling stock maintenance and repair:	£ 800
Container acquisition and development into station and storage:	£ 4,300

After two years of not being able to operate at all due to Covid19 pandemic restrictions, the Society began 2022 with funds to re-start running, but not to carry out the significant works needed to track, stock, etc.

One grant of £1,000 has been received from Newtown Town Council towards the container development. The remaining development money has come from passenger fares and kind member donations. Further grant funding is sought to complete projects and fund new developments in 2023. Donations of surplus materials relevant to projects or to daily running and maintenance are welcomed, as are financial contributions and ideas for collaborative projects.

The Society plans to strengthen financial sustainability by building a minor running reserve to assure its ability to cover upfront costs such as insurance at the start of each year, before income can be earned.

#### A snapshot of the 2022 community contribution by MWMES members

- Between 9<sup>th</sup> April and 8<sup>th</sup> October 2022, the locos pulled 2,367 passengers. There were many happy adults as well as beaming children of all ages!
- At least 6 volunteers staffed the track on most Saturdays (we won't run without a minimum of 4) and often more. That is at least 1,134 volunteer hours on running days alone.
- Members met at the track every Thursday morning to carry out maintenance work – that equates to at least 288 volunteer hours.
- At least 36 minutes of voluntary time is given by members to ensure each single happy and safe passenger ride can be experienced.
- Trains ran on 24 weekends (27 days) and supported 9 public Newtown events.



Rajasthan Heritage Brass Band greeting Draig Coch at the 2022 Food Festival



Draig Coch and Crow waiting at the turntable and by the station



**Facebook: Mid Wales Model Engineers**

(usual running days are Saturdays 11.00 till 4.00 between Easter and late October, but please check the Facebook page for regular updates)

**Website: [www.midwalesmes.org.uk](http://www.midwalesmes.org.uk)**

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