



GWR 'Dukedog' No. 9017 'Earl Of Berkeley' To Return to Aberystwyth For The First Time In Over 60 Years.

25th February 2024

GWR 'Dukedog' No.9017 'Earl Of Berkeley' will be heading on loan from The Bluebell Railway to our friends at The Vale of Rheidol Railway for static display in the new Museum & Display Space at Aberystwyth.

The locomotive is nicknamed a 'Dukedog' because it is a hybrid of two different classes of engine: the underframe of a 'Bulldog' locomotive, combined with the boiler of a 'Duke'.

The 'Dukedog' class of locomotive have a long association with Aberystwyth, having been a regular sight working trains between Aberystwyth, Machynlleth and Pwllheli in steam days. The last 'Dukedog' locomotive left Aberystwyth in May 1960, and one has not returned to the town until now.



Llŷr ap Iolo, Managing Director of the Vale of Rheidol Railway, said:

"We are very excited to announce the loan of this locomotive to go on public display here in Aberystwyth. As part of the project to construct our new museum, standard gauge track was laid to facilitate this kind of visit: the 'Dukedog' seemed the perfect choice to be the first standard gauge locomotive to be put on display. I am very grateful to the board of the Bluebell Railway for making this loan possible".



The locomotive is normally based at the Bluebell Railway in Sussex, where it has lived for the last sixty years. The locomotive came out of traffic for repairs in 2011, and has been hidden away in undercover storage since then.

Neil Glaskin, Operations and Commercial Director of the Bluebell Railway in Sussex, said:

"We are really pleased to be able to work with The Vale of Rheidol Railway to bring the Dukedog back to Aberystwyth. Since 2011 the locomotive has been stored undercover but this has meant limited chances for the public to see it, by displaying the loco in the new museum everyone will have the chance to admire this fascinating machine."

The locomotive was built in Swindon Works in 1938 for the Great Western Railway, and spent its working life in Wales, where it worked over the Cambrian lines to Pwllheli and Aberystwyth. It was light enough to work over Barmouth Bridge, so remained in regular use until the 1950s despite its antiquated appearance.

John 'Abergynolwyn' Davies (94) still lives in Aberystwyth, and worked on the 'Dukedog' locomotives when they were based in Ceredigion in the 1950s. He said:

"I spent a glorious week in the summer of 1955, firing No.9017 with driver Tom Phillips. We worked the 9.55am 'all stations' from Aberystwyth to Welshpool each day, where we serviced the engine: our return working was the Cambrian Coast Express, all the way to Aberystwyth. Working with Tom felt like a 'holiday job', because of his light handling of the loco".

John recalled:

"We were climbing Talerddig bank with No.9017, when Tom said: "shall I show you how to get the best out of a Dukedog?". I stood in the driving position, as gave me a demonstration of the easiest way to fire it. The loco performed well all week: it was one of the best working weeks of my life".

The 'Dukedog' will be on display in the restored 1938 engine shed at Aberystwyth station from March 2024 onwards. This building has recently been transformed into a museum, display and events space as part of a larger project called "Wales to the World", which is developing the terminus at Park Avenue into a Great Western-style station suitable for the modern tourist.

This location is especially significant for No.9017, as it will be displayed in the building where it was based and used to work in the 1950s.

For more information about the Vale Of Rheidol Railway and their new exciting Museum and Display Space at Aberystwyth, visit www.rheidolrailway.co.uk

(Photographs kindly supplied by Andrew Strongitharm and The John Reeves Collection.)