

Carmarthenshire station in running for top rail award

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LLANDOVERY Station has been shortlisted for the station of the year award at the 2019 National Rail Awards

Taking place in September, the awards celebrate all aspects of the rail industry from safety innovations and sustainable developments to stations, trains and customer service.

Now in its 20th year, the National Rail Awards are amongst the most important in the rail industry in Britain.

Nominations have now been confirmed, with Llandovery, based on the Heart of Wales line, up for the Best Station (Small) award.

Though un-staffed, the station is adopted through Transport for Wales' Station Adoption Scheme by the Friends of Llandovery Station, a group of local volunteers who run the cafe and look after the station garden and floral displays.

Mary Hargreaves and Joan Snaith are two of the station's longest standing volunteers.

"It's very nice to be nominated and we're really pleased with what's been achieved so far," they said.

"We've been running the cafe with a small core group of volunteers and it's been great to be able to get people in for work experience too."

Originally built in 1858, Llandovery station once employed 57 people and used to boast a shunter's yard where a spare steam locomotive was kept to help pull services over the steep gradient of Sugar Loaf to Llanwrtyd before coming back to the yard. The station building closed in 1992 but was brought back to life by the Heart of Wales Line Development Company and reopened as a cafe in 2011, with HRH Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall guests of honour.

The Royal Couple, who have a residence nearby, returned to the station last year as part of the Heart of Wales line's 150th anniversary.

Lisa Dennison, Development Officer of the Heart of Wales Development Company, said: "It's fantastic news that Llandovery has been nominated for the award and a huge amount of credit must go to the Friends of Llandovery Station for all their hard work.

"The café has gone from strength to strength.

"The station really is at the heart of the community and a key location for some of our best walking trails."

Transport for Wales' Tom Owens, who manages Llandovery station, said: "It's a real gem on our network and a huge credit to the amazing work of our volunteers from the community.

"I always look forward to going to Llandovery and the welcome you get there is always so warm. I'm delighted it's up for the award and fingers crossed we'll bring it home to Wales."

The building hosts a regular model railway club and exhibitions of local artists. They are passionate about giving work experience to young people, including those with special educational needs who regularly help the core group of volunteers.

It is a testament to how the station cafe is seen that many of its customers are regulars.

David and Valerie May have been travelling up by train from Gorslas every Wednesday for the past three years.

“It’s a really friendly and lovely cafe and the cakes are to die for,” said Valerie.

Another regular is Kathleen Duncan who started coming last year after a personal loss.

She said: “The kindness everyone has shown me here really is tremendous. I didn’t know that many people in the area and it’s been a lifeline for me and has made me really feel part of the community.”

Volunteers also look after the hanging baskets and station garden, where fresh produce is grown for use in the cafe.

They hope to see a station canopy installed in future years, something which was in place during its Victorian heyday.