

Pendolino named Asquith Xavier in honour of train guard who fought the colour bar

October 2, 2023



Avanti West Coast has named one of its Pendolino trains after a trailblazer who successfully fought to become a train guard at Euston despite being barred from the role because of his race.

Pendolino 390103, has been named after Asquith Xavier and was unveiled officially on September 28 at London Euston station.

Asquith became part of rail history in 1966 when he overturned a decision not to employ him because of his ethnicity after he applied to become a guard at Euston station. This unofficial policy was known as the “colour bar”.

Not only did his campaign result in the ruling being reversed but also contributed to a change in the Race Relations Act in 1968, which made it unlawful not to employ an individual on the grounds of race.

Before applying for the job at Euston, Asquith worked at Marylebone station after arriving in the UK from the Caribbean island of Dominica in 1956.

Designers at Avanti West Coast consulted with Asquith's family on the train nameplate which captures him at work as a train guard.

The unveiling took place with members of Asquith's family alongside representatives from the train operator, Network Rail and the RMT union.

Asquith's daughter, Maria Magdalena-Xavier, said: "To think about what our father experienced, whilst applying for a promotion as a train guard at Euston Station with the racial discrimination he faced, and now to this day – a train being named after him in his honour and recognising his important campaign, is truly amazing.

"I sincerely hope that the passengers on their train journey will take the time to look up and learn about our father's journey to justice. I also hope that in addition to this, that staff at stations and on board will find the story of Asquith Xavier an inspirational one."

Rail Minister Huw Merriman said: "Asquith Xavier's fight against discrimination paved the way for equality across the railways, leading to crucial change across the country and shaping the Race Relations Act.

"His story and determination for fair employment is one that everyone should know, and I'm delighted to see his name adorn this train for passengers up and down the country to see and be inspired by."

Andy Mellors, Managing Director for Avanti West Coast, said: "To mark Asquith Xavier's achievements like this is a wonderful honour for someone who left an incredible legacy which goes beyond the rail industry. This will be seen around our network and will celebrate his campaign which still has an impact today."

Simon Bennett, Head of Stations and Passenger Experience for West Coast South at Network Rail, said: "We were delighted to host this train naming event in honour of Asquith Xavier at London Euston station. Along with the plaque installed in the station in 2020, it will be another reminder of Asquith's legacy as we continue with our commitment to being an industry where each individual is valued, respected and encouraged to reach their full potential."

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch described the train naming as an "important initiative to remember National Union of Railwaymen member and guard Asquith Xavier".

He added: "I am proud that members of my union's predecessor the National Union of Railwaymen backed Asquith in his fight and the union raised the issue with British Rail which agreed to end institutional racial discrimination at London stations.

"We have come a long way since then and my union stands for equality across society which still needs to be championed by everyone."

Photo credit: Avanti West Coast