

Thoughts and Feelings

Bryson's Wales

I don't remember it myself, but it appears that once, in a certain book, I suggested that there were some, well, small deficiencies in a particular Welsh railway line, owing to my experience with it on a wet Sunday out of season.

Goodness knows what I was thinking, but when it was suggested to me that I had been both unfortunate in my experience and perhaps just a touch churlish in my assessment (I know, it hardly seems possible), and I was invited to try again — indeed, to spend three full days sampling the delights of Wales by rail — I agreed to give it another try, particularly after it was established that I could start the experience with dinner in a superb hotel in my favourite of all seaside resorts.

And so it was that I found myself, one warm early autumn evening, strolling along Llandudno's grand and sweeping promenade to the small and stylishly discreet St Tudno Hotel. From without St Tudno's is largely indistinguishable from the other hotels that line Llandudno's sweeping front, but step inside and you find yourself immersed in a honeyed glow of Victorian elegance and smothered with kindness by Janette and Martin Bland, the proud owners, and their attentive staff.

Martin and Janette Bland bought St Tudno's nearly 30 years ago when it was an anonymous and declining B&B and have invested a lifetime in building it up. It has won a flock of awards, including Best Seaside Resort Hotel and — twice — Best Hotel Loos in Great Britain. I never scorn a spotless loo, but in fact it is the snug bar and outstanding restaurant that will bring me back again and again. Chefs Stephen Duffy and David Harding produce exquisite dishes night after night, much of it locally sourced. I had a saddle of lamb that was simply unimprovable.

I'd have loved a chance to waddle off some calories the following morning with a tramp up Great Orme, Llandudno's sheltering mountain, but I had a train to catch — in fact a series of trains to catch. It has to be said that if you intend to cross Wales from north to south by train, you need a little ingenuity and an excellent timetable — not to mention a willingness to return to England from time to time. Most trains seem to have a curious and irrepressible urge to take you to Shrewsbury, which is very nice but is patently not Wales. The payoff, however, is that you can enjoy magnificent scenery without the exasperation and hassle of driving and you get to ride on some of the best trains around.

My goal for the day was to ride on possibly the very best, certainly the best known, the much-treasured Ffestiniog Railway, which runs for 13½ miles from the old slate-mining village of Blaenau Ffestiniog to the coastal town of Porthmadog, along the south eastern slopes of Snowdon. To get there I caught an early-morning Sprinter train from Llandudno to Blaenau, and there transferred to a neighbouring platform where a couple of hundred trippers were eagerly filling the snug and rattling wooden carriages of the narrow-gauge Ffestiniog Railway.

Wales, you soon realise, doesn't lock up its lunatics. It just puts them in charge of steam trains. "Oh, yes, you have to be a bit mad to get mixed up with all this," agreed Paul Davies, who was our driver for the day — and who invited me to ride along with him in the locomotive to see if I could get my clothes as oil-soaked and grubby in an hour as his were from a whole summer. (I could!)

The Ffestiniog line was built in the 1830s to haul slate from mountain quarries to the coast, but I stopped a mile or so short at Minffordd for a visit to Portmeirion, the colourful, endearing, architecturally frolicsome hillside village built by the architect Sir Clough Williams-Ellis over a period of 50 years last century.

It would be almost impossible to top the Ffestiniog Railway, but the ride on the Cambrian Coast line, from Minffordd south to Aberdyfi gives it a game try. It is a lovely ride, with the comely swell of mountains to one side, boundless sea views on the other and a broad estuarine plain in between. If there is a more soothing way to end a happy day by rail, I don't know it.

The following morning, I gave in to the inevitable and caught a train to Shrewsbury. There was, I hasten to add, a certain reason in it. I wished to ride the whole of the Heart of Wales line, and it begins in Shrewsbury, even if the heart of Wales doesn't. The line, running for 121 miles from Shrewsbury to Swansea, is celebrated for its matchless scenery through the Cambrian Mountains. It wasn't the fastest way to get to Llandrindod Wells, but it was surely the most rewarding.

If these experiences hadn't transformed my perceptions of seeing Wales by train, then my final run into Swansea the next morning, through an Eden of green fields and rolling hills, would have done the trick. It was sensational. So I take back everything I ever said, though I'm awfully glad I said it. If I hadn't, I'd never have been invited back, you see.

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What are Bryson's thoughts and feelings about his train rides across Wales? [5]

What impressions

I was brought up in Sardinia and Sardinian culture is very simple: you're a football player, a boxer, a waiter, or a cook. That's about it. I wanted Joe to be a football player, but he wasn't picked for this and that, and then when he was eight, I gave him a punchball and he was pretty good. I took him to the gym, aged 10, and the trainer said: "You have an open-class kid." I said: "What does that mean?" He said: "It means he's very, very good."

Now I'm not stupid. I know class. People say don't push your kid. But I'm completely the opposite. If you've got a kid with class – whether it's in tennis, studying or whatever – they've got to be pushed, because the day they don't make it, they will say; "It's because of my old man. He didn't give me any encouragement." But then, if it all goes wrong and you did push them, it'll be "Dad ruined my life". I've never been scared of pushing Joe, because my son is not a run-of-the-mill talent. He's a genius. I noticed that, and I was not going to let him live a normal life and destroy what I'd spotted. There was something unique there. Obviously, he wanted to play with other kids, but I was trying to make him understand his ability. Encouragement became an order.

I'm a dad only to the door of the gym. Then we're purely fighter and trainer. We switch off. Moody in the gym? Joe's a psycho. That works for us. That chemistry is exactly what we need in order for me to push him, and him to want to be pushed. That's the beauty of it. In the lead up to a fight, I call him a chameleon, a snake of different colours. He changes all the time. His eyes go from passionate and warm to cold and ice. I don't get any communication out of him. He's what you'd call arrogant and psyched up. That's what I want to see.

I never think of the danger. At the end of the day, boxing is a sport, no worse than driving a car. I've got no reason to be anxious or stressed. It's his job and he does it well. Because I've trained him, I know he's better than the other guy so I've never had the eyes of a father in the ring. It sounds as if I'm a sadist but we love each other to bits. I would never be training Joe if I didn't have the ability for it. A few years ago, there were some selfish remarks in a newspaper. They were saying he wasn't performing, even though he won. They were saying: "Change your father as a trainer." That hurt me because they wanted Joe to leave me. I'd got a win out of him so what was the problem? I said to Joe: "If you want to go, go. But I don't deserve this." But we rode that storm.

I don't know why Joe has never got the recognition he deserves. The problem in Britain is they love losers and Joe has never had the respect. He's too good for his own good – that's the bottom line.

We've never been tempted to leave Wales. When you've got enough, you've got enough, and the warmth we have as a family – you couldn't get that if you were a billionaire. You can't buy love. The family is the most important thing. If the fighting finished tomorrow, my job is done. I've been rewarded as a father and as a trainer. I'm happy – absolutely over the moon with myself.

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What impressions does Enzo Calzaghe give of his son, Joe? [10]

Section B: Writing

What to do?

You will need to complete 2 tasks in this section, based on argumentation and persuasion. You can draw upon reading materials from section A where appropriate.

You could be asked to write any type of non-fiction writing which include: letter (formal or informal), review, leaflet, guide, speech or article.

Each task is worth 20 marks each (10 marks for communication and organisation; 10 marks for written accuracy).

Aim to write 250 words (around 1 ½ sides of A4).

DON'T WASTE TIME COUNTING WORDS!

Varied sentence openings:

Present tense participle (-ing word)

Visiting St Fagans, was both enlightening and enjoyable.

Past tense participle

Damaged by the huge energy bills, we have to make a commitment to save energy.

Subordinate clause

As we draw closer to the dreaded exams, it is imperative that we remain focused.

Preposition

Within our local community, it seems ridiculous to host a motorcycle race.

Pair of adjectives

Traditional and authentic, the museum has so much character to offer.

Student Friendly Criteria

Band	Communicating and organising	Band	Writing accurately
5 9/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The writing is grown up. ▪ There is a range of clever rhetorical/literary devices and the piece is very engaging. ▪ You've adapted what you say and how you say it to suit the purpose and audience. ▪ You have used your imagination and how you write is original. ▪ The writing is organised into paragraphs and they are linked by concluding and topic sentences. ▪ FLAIR 	5 9/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lots of interesting and unusual words are used correctly and for effect. ▪ You vary your sentence structure to achieve a particular effect. ▪ You can use capital letters . , ' ? ! : ; - () ... correctly all of the time. ▪ All spelling, including harder and more complex words, is correct. ▪ You don't switch between tenses and always make sense. ▪ FLAIR
4 7/8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The content is well-judged (you've picked the best things to say). ▪ You've adapted what you say and how you say it to suit the purpose and audience. ▪ Lots of rhetorical/literary devices are used for effect. ▪ The writing is organised into paragraphs and they are linked by concluding and topic sentences. 	4 7/8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lots of interesting and unusual words are used correctly. ▪ You vary your sentence structure to achieve a particular effect. ▪ You can use capital letters . , ' ? ! : ; ... correctly all of the time. ▪ All spelling, including harder words, is correct. ▪ You don't switch between tenses and always make sense.
3 5/6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The sentences make sense and most of it is interesting. ▪ There is a clear awareness of purpose and audience. ▪ Some rhetorical/literary devices are used for effect. ▪ The writing is organised into paragraphs and they link sequentially. 	3 5/6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lots of interesting words are used correctly. ▪ You start sentences in different ways and use subordinate clauses. ▪ You can use capital letters . , ' ? ! : ; ... correctly most of the time. ▪ Most spelling, including harder words, is correct. ▪ You don't switch between tenses and always make sense.
2 3/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The sentences make sense. ▪ It kind of suits the purpose/audience. ▪ The examiner can see you've tried to make it interesting. ▪ There are paragraphs. 	2 3/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some interesting words are used. ▪ You sometimes start sentences in different ways. ▪ You can use capital letters . , ' ? ; correctly most of the time. ▪ Most spelling is correct. ▪ You don't switch between tenses. ▪ You usually make sense.
1 1/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The sentences make sense. ▪ There is organisation (e.g. one point leads on to another). ▪ It kind of suits the purpose and audience but not always. 	1 1/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Everyday words are used. ▪ Most sentences are structured in the same way. ▪ You can use capital letters . , ' ? correctly sometimes. ▪ Some spelling is right. ▪ You sometimes switch between tenses. ▪ Some of your grammar is awkward. You don't always make sense.



