**Wednesday 22nd August**

**WWII veterans launch Virgin Trains’ RAF train in North Wales**

* *RAF veterans Mary Roberts and Wing Commander Wynne DFC unveil historic train name*
* *‘Royal Air Force Centenary 1918 – 2018’ in honour of RAF centenary*
* *Naming celebrates historic links between RAF base and railways*

Two Royal Air Force veterans who served in the Second World War have launched a specially-named Virgin Trains service from Holyhead Station in Anglesey.

‘Royal Air Force Centenary 1918 – 2018’ has been named to commemorate the RAF’s centenary and its historic links with the railway in North Wales.

The nameplate, which carries the station crest of the RAF Valley station, was unveiled at a ceremony by veterans Mary Roberts and Wing Commander John Wynne, both of whom served in WW2.

Mary, who turned 100 in May, served as a nurse. Her role saw her based at RAF Hemswell, where she was in close contact with the flying crews of the bombers that flew nearly every night over Europe. She was also posted to Flying Training Command at Penrhos, Pwllheli in North Wales.

John Wynne, who lives in Gwynedd, was a pilot and flying instructor who flew Wellington bombers, Fortress and Mosquito aircraft and the Valiant jet bomber throughout his career.

The pair spoke of their pride at naming the train at Holyhead station - Virgin’s North Wales base located six miles from RAF Valley.

Mary Roberts, who lives on Anglesey, said: “I am thrilled to have been invited to take part in this special occasion during the RAF’s Centenary year. God Bless the train and all who travel in her.”

Wing Commander John Wynne DFC, aged 97, said: “I’m delighted to be supporting this RAF Centenary event with Virgin Trains, which is about service and connecting people. This splendid ‘Royal Air Force Centenary’ train, which is a vital transport link for the people of North Wales and beyond, will provide us with a living reminder of the great service of the RAF to our nation and its shared history with Wales for the past 100 years.”

Air Commodore Williams, RAF’s Air Officer Wales, said: “The RAF are very grateful to Virgin Trains for naming one of their engines after the RAF Centenary. We know that having an engine named after you is a rare and special thing, so the RAF is delighted to be recognised in this way, and I hope Virgin Trains customers across the network will also enjoy this special connection to the RAF. The Virgin Trains route from London Euston to Holyhead also goes directly past RAF Valley in Anglesey, where all the RAF’s fighter pilots are trained, so these are all great reasons for us to celebrate the RAF Centenary together. Thank you, Virgin Trains.”

Gaynor Stewart, General Manager at Virgin Trains, added: “We’re proud to be playing our part in celebrating one hundred years of the Royal Air Force and its personnel – past and present. From its early days the RAF had connections to the railway and we’re pleased to be highlighting its continued links, as they mark a significant milestone in its history. We have been proud to serve North Wales for over 20 years and during this time we’ve worked closely to support RAF Valley with their work in the local community here on Anglesey.”

The nameplate was unveiled on Virgin Trains’ Super Voyager 221114 shortly before its inaugural journey to London.

It features the crest of the RAF Valley station, located yards from Virgin Trains’ North Wales route and home to No 4 Flying Training School, responsible for training the UK’s next generation of world-class fighter pilots.

This is the first Voyager in Virgin Trains’ fleet to carry a different name to the ‘famous Voyagers’ names that were used when the fleet was first introduced in 2001. The Class 221 train will serve the North Wales route and other destinations including Edinburgh, Birmingham and Shropshire.

The railway’s connections with the RAF can be traced back to the early days of the Air Force with Locomotive No. 6 Douglas – a steam locomotive that was built in 1918 for Air Service Construction Corps and used by the RAF until 1946. Now located at the oldest preserved railway in the world – Talyllyn Railway in southern Snowdonia – Locomotive No. 6 Douglas has been adopted by the Towyn & Aberdovey Royal Air Force Association and earlier this year received a RAF centenary livery to mark its 100th year.

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**About RAF Valley**

RAF Valley on Anglesey is home to No 4 Flying Training School, responsible for training the UK’s next generation of world-class fighter pilots.

Aircrew are also trained at RAF Valley for mountain and maritime operations throughout the world.

RAF Valley is also home to the Mountain Rescue Service, the military’s only high readiness, all weather search and rescue, aircraft post-crash management asset

For more information, visit: <https://www.raf.mod.uk/our-organisation/stations/raf-valley/>

**About Talyllyn Railway & Locomotive No. 6 Douglas**

The Talyllyn Railway is the first preserved railway in the World, known affectionately as ‘The Railway with a Heart of Gold’. The heritage steam engines transport passengers from Tywyn, the coastal town on the edge of the Snowdonia National Park, to Nant Gwernol, buried deep in the mountains above Abergynolwyn.

For more information, visit: <https://www.talyllyn.co.uk/>

Locomotive No. 6 was constructed at Andrew Barclay Sons and Co. in Kilmarnock as a 2ft gauge 0-4-0 tank locomotive originally for use at the Royal Naval Flying Corps airfield at Manston in Kent. A few weeks later, on 1 April 1918, the Royal Air Force was formed and the airfield became RAF Manston, and so the locomotive’s connection with the RAF began.

For more information, visit: <https://www.talyllyn.co.uk/news/no-6-douglas-gets-centenary-birthday-makeover>

**About Virgin Trains**

Stagecoach and Virgin are working in partnership to operate the West Coast inter-city route under the Virgin Trains brand, revolutionising travel on one of the UK’s key rail arteries.

The network connects some of the nation’s most iconic destinations including Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and London.

Virgin Trains is committed to delivering a high speed, high frequency service, offering shorter journey times, more comfortable travel and excellent customer service. Customers consistently rate Virgin Trains ahead of other long-distance rail franchise operators in the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) commissioned by industry watchdog, Transport Focus.

Virgin Trains has a proud record of challenging the status quo - from introducing tilting Pendolino trains, to a pioneering automated delay repay scheme, introducing the industry-leading onboard entertainment streaming service, BEAM, and becoming the first franchised rail operator to offer m-Tickets for all ticket types.

Virgin Trains operated the East Coast route between March 1, 2015 and June 24, 2018. In that time, we invested £75m to create a more personalised travel experience, including over £40m in the existing fleet. Customers have benefitted from 48 additional services between Edinburgh and London every week, and an extra 22 Saturday services between Leeds and London – a total of 1.74 million additional seats since May 2015.

Working together, the partnership railway of the public and private sectors has published a long-term plan, called *In Partnership for Britain’s Prosperity,* to change and improve Britain’s railway. The plan will secure almost £85bn of additional economic benefits to the country whilst enabling further investment and improvement, and contains four commitments which will see rail companies: strengthen our economic contribution to the country; improve customers’ satisfaction; boost the communities we serve; and, create more and better jobs in rail. For more information go to [Britain Runs on Rail](http://www.britainrunsonrail.co.uk/?gclid=CjwKCAiAr_TQBRB5EiwAC_QCq9OA-y_Al1Voo4ZvYjMvSBs86kuvjZLD8MfFvnOUU9UeVZ1T5CObLRoCasIQAvD_BwE).

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