

17 April 2010

Andrew Hall
General Manager
The Midland Railway – Butterley
Butterley Station
RIPLEY
DE5 3QZ

Dear Mr Hall,

Proposed group visit – Saturday 1 May 2010

I have to write to you regarding a planned visit on the above date, something which I have been in the process of organising for nearly six weeks, only now to find that your plans have changed at the last minute in such a way that I cannot see an obvious way of me being able to rearrange our itinerary.

I have to say that I was already far from happy with the accuracy of information I was being given by the Railway, and the timeliness of responses I was receiving, but I was going to give you the benefit of the doubt before lodging this complaint. Regrettably I have had to bring the date of my letter forward.

Our advertised itinerary, based on the information available to me, involves a round trip from Liverpool, visiting locations in Yorkshire and Derbyshire. Arrival at Butterley is planned for 15:15, we catch the 15:30 train round to Swanwick arriving 16:04, have an hour or so to see some of the exhibits at Swanwick before leaving there at 17:00, getting back to Butterley at 17:18 and leaving the site at 17:30.

The above plan was made on the basis that (a) timetable C would be in operation and (b) that the exhibits at Swanwick would be open until the departure of the last train, both of which had been advised to me by officials of your Railway. This is the chronology of correspondence with the Railway which led me to plan these arrangements:

- 28 February: Initial email enquiry to data@midlandrailwaycentre.co.uk No response.
- 7 March: Follow up email.
- 8 March: Emailed letter (backdated to 6 March) from Andrea Hett with details of departure times and group rates.
- 20 March: I took the trouble to visit each of the places on our itinerary, arriving at Butterley at about 15:30. In conversation through the ticket office window, I established that the timetable for 1 May was neither B nor C, but the exact details of the timetable would not be revealed to me. In fact I would go as far as to say I received a scornful response – “We can’t *possibly* publish timetables for *all* our special events” – when I pressed the point. I was, however told, that the attractions at Swanwick close with the departure of the last train from there.
- 22 March: In parallel with my enquiry/visit, a colleague had been in touch with someone else at the Railway and received the following message: “We will be running the C service timetable on all three dates for the Vintage Train weekend. Alan Calladine”.
- 23 March: I emailed Mr Calladine to ask if he could definitely confirm that timetable C would be in operation, but received no reply.

- 27 March: In the absence of a reply from Mr Calladine, I emailed Andrea Hett with the same enquiry.
- 29 March: Reply: “Yes we will be now operating “C” timetable on 1st May, the Vintage Weekend. Many Thanks Andrea”. (But see 16 April entry – third bullet point.)
- Also 29 March: Response from me: “Thanks. That sounds good for our plans. From what you said last weekend, the attractions at Swanwick are open until the last train, so am I right in assuming they remain open until 17:00 when timetable C is in operation?” No reply received.
- 13 April: Follow up email enquiry from me. Still no response.
- 16 April: Phonecall from me. I was put through to the aforementioned Mr Calladine (although I did not realise the 22/23 March connection until after the phonecall). I was told:
 - Timetable B would be in operation, meaning the last train from Butterley would be at 15:15 (which would make a very tight connection with our tour bus) and there would be no time to disembark at Swanwick. (Incidentally, your website still claims that you are running one of your unpublished special timetables on 1 May.)
 - In any event, even if timetable C was in operation, the attractions at Swanwick would be shut at about 16:00 (ie the information I was given about them being open until the ‘last train’ was incorrect).
 - The email sent to me on 29 March was not from Andrea, although it had been sent in her name, but Mr Calladine had no idea who had sent it. (Had I realised, I should have asked who had actually written the email to my colleague on 22 March, as this contained the same information.)
 - Mr Calladine immediately offered to reduce the group rate to £6.00/head when I asked, but said that this was as far as he could go as it would be unfair to charge regular visitors less than “people who just turn up at the last minute”. I did point out to him that our initial enquiry had been six weeks ago.
 - I asked how I would have been informed about the change of timetable plan had I not made the phonecall, but Mr Calladine was unable to advise me.

The situation remains unresolved. I have a party of about 40 people who are all set to come to Butterley on 1 May, travel on your train, visit your other attractions, and spend money in your shops and cafés. 40 x £9 plus, say, another £2.50 of general spend = £460.

At the moment I am rather at a loss as to how the situation can be resolved, but I would appreciate your suggestions. Clearly I need a very speedy response given the fact that our proposed visit is now less than two weeks away.

Yours sincerely,

CHARLES ROBERTS