

FIVE FOOT THREE

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Editor: Alan Edgar

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Opinions expressed by contributors do not necessarily represent those of the Editor or the Council of the Society.

*Front Cover Photograph: No.85 "Merlin" poses for the camera at Larne Harbour.
(C.P. Friel)*

EDITORIAL

The Society is currently pre-occupied, understandably and quite rightly, with the question of finance. Any comments made here would merely be pre-empting those of the contributors, to whom I would refer the reader.

Unfortunately, there is another shortage which is profoundly affecting the Society, This deficit has been the subject of editorial comment in Five Foot Three on several previous occasions, and judging by the impassioned pleas regularly found in other societies' magazines, is not unique to the RPSI. If this commodity in question is ever allowed to run out completely not only would the Society grind to a halt, but it could also be said to have defeated the purpose of its existence.

The resource to which I allude is the volunteer. Rather than remarks of the “You had better come and help your Society because it is chronically short of manpower and if you don’t and it collapses it will be your fault” genre, perhaps a few sundry observations might point a path to progress.

Despite recent diatribes from certain quarters, it must be said that working for the Society as a volunteer is basically a hobby and equally basically extremely enjoyable. This is a simple fact that we could well advertise much more. Is it apparent from the image we project? The nature and organisation of work at Whitehead often means that a prospective volunteer arriving there is not even recognised as such, let alone quickly slotted into a task which he/she enjoys doing.

On the other side of the coin, it has been proven possible to successfully organise volunteer work parties. Three examples spring to mind; the site squads organised by John Glendinning in recent years; the parties of pupils from Banbridge Academy organised by John Lockett on regular occasions; and, most recently, the extremely successful Carriage Cleaning Rota organised by Michael Henderson, comprising members not normally involved in the operating of trains.

The key word is organise; the key person, an organiser. The various heads of departments are often too embroiled in the problems of the day to day running of the Society (Will that engine run hot again? Who filled the dining car tank full of diesel fuel?) to be able to try and recruit new volunteers as well. But supposing one person was appointed, a sort of “Personnel Manager” as the link between the prospective (or potential) volunteer and tasks required by the Society. This is not a new idea; several societies I know of have such a person; but it is one whose imitation would almost certainly be of benefit.

There is no aspect of the Society’s activities which should not be closely examined and questions like “Who could help with this?” be asked. These tasks need not necessarily be confined to Whitehead; there is plenty of work which could be carried out in members’ homes. Neither need it necessarily be connected to steam trains; for example, how many remember the excellent afternoon teas formerly provided by a rota of wives and girlfriends during the Sunday Train Rides?

For most tasks that could be thought of, the resource, potential volunteers, exists. It is up to us to utilise it.

[PHOTOGRAPH]

2-6-4T No.4 takes over the “Permanent Way Institution” Special for the run to Portrush, whilst No.171 “Slieve Gullion” prepares to depart for Whitehead. (C.P. Friel)

CHAIRMAN’S COLUMN

Sullivan Boomer

One of the problems of contributing a few lines for the magazine is the fact that the copy must be provided at least a couple of months ahead of publication. It is obviously difficult, therefore, as we approach Halloween for me to be topical in a column to be read in the weeks around Christmas! However, I will attempt to cover some of The developments which should interest members who are perhaps not as closely involved on a day to day basis.

By now EVERYBODY will have heard that GNR compound No.85 “Merlin” has started her running-in process, and indeed distinguished herself by rendering assistance to the railway company on her very first outing, by recovering a failed DEMU set. She has since that occasion been hauling members on revenue earning running-in trips, described as “Mystery Tours”. (As I write one trip has taken place - successfully!) This gradual introduction to traffic will be developed through 1986, and it is to be hoped that by the time we reach the 1987 season the locomotive will be fully available for traffic.

The logical follow-on to No.85’s return to the main line must, of course, be a look at this year’s operations, which have, on the whole, been successful. A fully booked two day tour (hereafter to be known as The International Rail tour?) led us on to three virtually booked out Flyers, although the Enterprises were not as well patronised as in previous years. Similarly the train rides at Whitehead saw attendances down this year, but perhaps the atrocious weather we called “the summer” was in part to blame. It may be said, however, that a new approach is called for, and this is being looked at for 1986. Southern operations this year have been unavoidably light but it is our intention to change this stale of affairs in 1986, and to try to develop more local operations for our Mullingar based train.

Yes, you read that correctly; our Mullingar based train; for, of course, we have now purchased from CIÉ a rake of coaches for use at Mullingar, and these have already received some attention and have a running certificate from CIÉ. This is a long overdue development for our Southern depot, and it is the hope of the Council that the members who are accessible to this base will undertake the task of maintaining this set, which hopefully will expand into the full restoration function currently practiced at Whitehead. It has long been the view of the Council, that more local organisation should be devolved to our members in the South, and that they could undertake the running of local operations with only central policy emanating from the Council; the Operations Committee would act as co-ordinator of effort, and tasks currently based in the North such as publicity, marketing and planning would be delegated to local representatives based either in Dublin or close to Mullingar.

Another major scheme which is advancing is the turntable at Coleraine, with a start date of March 1986 being talked about. Agreement on this is now complete, but some administrative details have still to be finalised. This has been a long time in the planning stage, and the Council have had to weigh up a large number of factors in reaching their decision. To commit the Society to an expenditure of several thousand pounds, especially when we are still paying off a very substantial overdraft was not, as you can imagine, an easy decision, and a great deal of soul-searching was needed by all of us. However, the die is cast and I can only echo the appeals which have already gone out to members. Please, please, try to give us some financial support to enable us to continue the high standard of main line steam that has become our trademark. If there is no turntable at Coleraine, no tender engines can work north and if there is insufficient money, then there is no turntable, (or even worse - no engines).

[PHOTOGRAPH]

Ex-GNR compound No.85 “Merlin” shows her paces on one of her first mainline outings. (C.P. Friel)

Let me get the “doom and gloom” out of the way. As the Council is well aware of the cashflow situation facing the Society, so it has been looking at possible economies over its last few meetings. We do not believe in false economies, which will in the short term give us a healthy balance sheet and nothing else. We see no benefit in cutting back on the standard of restoration or maintenance if it can possibly be avoided since this would merely defer problems and could, in the long term, prove to be more costly. But there is an indisputable need for tightening our belts, an example of this being the production of most circulars now by duplicator rather than photocopier; the quality may suffer slightly (although it shouldn't) but the cost saving should be of the order of £500 per year at the very least. All the Society departments are now being requested to look carefully at their expenditure, and to cut back where possible. A rough estimate has suggested that we could possibly save an amount equivalent to our loan repayments each year, and this would help us considerably. If any of you have a suggestion which could either earn the Society some money, or could save substantially on our present budget, then please tell us. But enough despondency; the Council is confident that we will weather these lean times, and I would not like to cause unnecessary alarm; the Society is financially sound and will be going for many years to come.

Which brings me full circle to 1986 again. Planning for the coming year has already started, and the May tour (that's right, the International Railtour!) to Westport is already attracting attention. You may remember a party from West Berlin who joined us in 1984; they want to come back in 1986! At this rate we will be closing bookings for the train even earlier, but it is, I hope, merely the precursor of another even more successful operating season, and I have no doubt that it will be a vintage year for steam operation.

I have rambled on for long enough, and stolen everyone else's best stories; this is the advantage of coming first. But the Editor has the final say, and I can only thank him, and you, for tolerating this mixture of good and bad. I hope as many of you as possible will attend the Annual General Meeting, and I look forward to seeing many of you during 1986, when we will all have a great season of steam. Finally, my thanks to my hardworking colleagues on the Council. Without all their unstinting effort and dedication, it would never work. Our success as a Society speaks volumes for their support.

[PHOTOGRAPH]

No.184, Ex GS&WR 0-6-0, ascends the 1 in 151 through Two Pot House on the Cork 800 railtour. (C.P. Friel)

NEWS FROM COUNCIL

Robin Morton

Finance has once again formed the backdrop to the Council's deliberations in the period since FFT No.31 with our objective being to make the best use of limited funds.

For this reason the Coleraine turntable scheme has been in “on, off, on” category. At the time of writing the project seems to have finally been taken down from the shelf, dusted down, and ready for construction to begin in Spring 1986. At the last estimate it involved expenditure of £8,500 on materials, although there is the promise of a 33% grant from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Enterprise Ulster have kindly agreed to provide labour, and with a bit of luck the table could be in action in time for the 1986 Portrush Flyer.

The appeal to the membership launched in August brought in some very generous donations and we are also hopeful of some support from Coleraine Borough Council. But there is still a substantial shortfall to be made up and it seemed inevitable that we would have to seek bank approval to further extend the Society's overdraft, taken out originally to cover essential excavation work at Whitehead.

The Council thought long and hard before committing the Society to the turntable project, but it is a key part of the development of mainline operation in Northern Ireland. The Council has decided to make the project its priority capital expenditure scheme for 1986 and has also agreed to deem the next 12 months a "minimum outlay" year in other fields so as to limit our overdraft as much as possible.

While the Council does not like to see the Society going further into the red, it is really a case of "speculate to accumulate". If we do not have a table at Coleraine the Flyer's future would depend solely on No.4 our 2-6-4T, and our newly restored 4-4-0 No.85 "Merlin" would be confined to the Larne - York Road - Central axis.

The Council has been gratified to see No.85 out on running in duties and we look forward to the day when she returns to the Belfast - Dublin run. Without the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum and the generosity of our Vice-President, Lord Dunleath, we would, of course, never have reached the threshold of such an exciting development.

Always on the lookout for new areas of development, the Council explored with NIR the practicalities of the RPSI leasing part of the Monkstown - Antrim railway line for possible use as a preserved branchline. Our idea had been that the Society could operate trains along one of the two tracks of the section of line, which is currently only used by occasional engineering trains and stock movements. We envisaged re-laying the track from Greenisland to link in along the old "back line" with the existing line. But the idea was dropped when it emerged that NIR were prohibited by the Ulster Transport Holding Company from leasing sections of track in such a manner.

But one positive development to arise from talks with NIR was the granting of permission by the company for an RPSI loco representative to remain on the footplate for observation purposes during trips such as the Portrush Flyer and Steam Enterprise. This brings the situation on NIR into line with that prevailing on CIÉ and we are most grateful to all concerned for this step forward.

With the Greenisland - Antrim project proving to be a non-starter, the Council turned its attention to a request from the Downpatrick and Ardglass Railway Society for a five year loan of RPSI loco No.3BG "Guinness", currently in store at Whitehead. In May the Council agreed to such a loan, subject to ratification at the 1986 AGM of the new rule empowering the Council to take such action. The proposed agreement involves the DARS in funding and carrying out the restoration work on the loco and is conditional on a financial commitment being received by DARS from the Department of Economic Development for the entire scheme from Downpatrick to Ardglass.

The DARS has also expressed an interest in former NCC Railcar No.1, the property of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, which has been in store at Whitehead almost since the Society arrived there. We have left the matter between the UFTM and DARS but have told both parties the RPSI would have no objection to the vehicle going to a new home.

During the year it was also suggested that the DARS could be granted the loan of ex-BCDR six-wheeled coach body No.182, which was donated to the Society and moved to the Limestone Youth Training Project in Belfast for restoration. Sadly it soon became clear that RPSI funds could not be spared for the renovation of the vehicle, and lending it to DARS seemed to hold out hope of ultimate restoration. However the Prince of Wales Trust has generously contributed £500 towards the project, conditional upon it being used in funding a YTP scheme, and the Council has now decided that it will be moved to Whitehead for restoration by our own Whitehead Railway Project.

The Society's difficulty had been that it was already fully committed to funding the ACE and Whitehead Railway Project schemes at Whitehead. The Society foots the bill for materials in both cases and contributes 10% towards the wage bill of the ACE scheme. We are watching with interest a proposed revamping of the ACE (Action for Community Employment) scheme whereby 100% funding may become available and provision made for a full-time supervisor.

Whitehead Railway Project, our youth training scheme run under the auspices of the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, continues to be a most useful adjunct to the Society's operations. The trainee office staff have handled railtour bookings and inquiries and also print and dispatch RPSI circulars to the membership. Meanwhile the coach squad's work is a key part of the RPSI coach overhaul programme and vehicles restored by the WRP now appear in the RPSI tour train.

[PHOTOGRAPH]

Ex-GSR third No.1335 stands at Whitehead, fresh from overhaul by Whitehead Railway project trainees. (C.P. Friel)

The Society's campaign to try to persuade the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum of the virtues of Whitehead as a suitable spot for a re-located Witham Street museum appeared to have run its course at the time of writing. The UFTM, we understand, intend to press ahead with relocating the museum within its main complex at Cultra. We were disappointed that our carefully worked out proposals have not, to date, borne fruit.

Whitehead excursion platform may be given a more railway-like atmosphere with the appearance shortly of the former Great Northern signal cabin from Lisburn, which could be coming to us as a result of negotiations between the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society and NIR.

Whitehead was the venue for the annual Schools Day held at the end of May, an event which attracted more than 1,000 children and which was an outstanding success. Unfortunately the Council was unable to make arrangements to facilitate Voluntary Service Belfast who had hoped to include visits by children round the site on a daily basis over the summer holidays. The Council's view was that the Whitehead site must remain a workplace during the week but such visits would be a more practical proposition if we had a museum facility or interpretive centre.

Conducted tours around the site were, however, a feature of the Irish Steam Weekends venture marketed by the Society during the summer. Numbers were small but it was a beginning and it also produced additional income for the Society. The NI Tourist Board are keen that the Society should continue the project in 1986.

As a recognition of the RPSI's contribution towards tourism the Society was presented in July with a certificate of merit by the British Tourist Authority in London.

On the international front the RPSI has been made an honorary member of the FACS, the French railway enthusiast group which participated in the Cork 800 Tour.

Domestically the Council was pleased to confer RPSI Life membership on former chairman Robert Edwards in recognition of his contribution towards the Society.

The RPSI Council has been meeting once a month with sub-committees dealing with operations and buildings. The Council's thanks are due to Gilmore and Barnes, who kindly afforded us the use of their offices in Botanic Avenue from April 1983 until July 1985.. Office alterations meant that we had then to look for a new home and we are grateful to NIR for having permitted us to hold our monthly meetings at Central Station in recent months.

Given the scale of RPSI operations these days it is not surprising that many outsiders find it hard to appreciate that, the Whitehead based ACE and training schemes apart, the Society remains entirely a voluntary body.

As we move into the 22nd year of the Society it would be gratifying if more of our 700 strong membership would come forward and help take the weight off present incumbents' shoulders. So what about it?

OPERATIONS

Ernie Gilmore

The twenty-first birthday year of the Society has been a memorable year for at least two reasons - increased support for our main line operations and the sight and sound of ex-GNR(I) compound 4-4-0 No.85 "Merlin" on the main line. For the first time the three day international railtour, the Cork 800, was booked out three weeks before the railtour date. Fortunately last minute cancellations took care of the waiting list of 20. The advance booking form is an important step forward for the Society since it produces a £10 deposit from each booking which just about covers the pre-purchase of coal for the big tour. Sincere thanks to Publicity Officer John Friel who, with considerable financial help from Bord Faille, produced the glossy brochure. It is interesting to note that only half of the passengers on the Cork 800 were members of the Society so an attractive brochure is all important.

The following passenger figures indicate a definite trend and justify the two day tour becoming the three day tour.

	1983		1984		1985	
	Port Lairge	3 rd Day	Galway Bay	3 rd Day	Cork 800	3 rd Day
Overseas	-	-	16	16	47	46
GB	67	5	116	51	138	70
RoI	45	2	41	2	47	3
NI	68	10	58	11	68	18
Total	180	17	231*	80	300	137

** Printed in error as 220 in Five Foot Three No.30.*

In the days when we were struggling to get 150 to 200 bookings for the two day railtour it was felt that the high fare was the problem. Inflation has put up the railway company charges and the cost of coal dramatically and, of course, the fares have had to go up. But the number of passengers travelling has also gone up and is showing a 70% increase in three years. I would suggest that advertising is the key. It is hard to believe that the people who come for the first time on our trips have had no previous knowledge of the Society and a quite common reply is that had they known about the Society's activities they could have supported us long ago.

[PHOTOGRAPH]

Wives can (and do) enjoy tours! Isabel Gilmore (left) and Heather Boomer prove that they are more than capable of holding the fort in the dining car whilst their husbands go about the Society's business elsewhere . (R.B. Hill)

The other view held is that because we use the same two locomotives each year we will lose custom. Yet the return rate for our regular supporters is around 70%. We had only two cancellations for the Cork 800 when it was announced that No.4 would not be taking part. The third point argued strongly is that we cannot compete with the frequency and low cost of steam trips on British Rail. What a bumper year 1985 was for those events, GWR 150 et al! My reading of the situation is that a general increase in the interest in steam railways in GB must be an advantage to the RPSI because sooner or later those enthusiasts will find their way to Ireland. I have had many letters after the Galway Bay and Cork 800 railtours contrasting the relaxed atmosphere of our railtours with the rather more regimented trips in GB. Mind you, if we were dealing with 500/600 participants the same remarks would perhaps apply - which brings me to a point for discussion. Bearing in mind the very favourable comments about our railtours from hardened steam travellers from GB, I would suggest that 300 participants is a desirable maximum on an enthusiast railtour. Although No.85 may be capable of hauling more carriages, do we really want to carry more passengers? I would caution that if many more passengers are carried we would need a second dining car or cafeteria/bar car. The number of meals served on the Cork 800 (4 sittings x 32 people) is already stretching our facilities to the limit, not to mention our catering crew!

The good news about the Cork 800 Railtour is that we have managed to cover our total costs for the operation and also make a contribution to the restoration and new carriage siding funds. Due to inflation in the Republic the 1986 fare will have to increase again to £58 Sterling. What is our destination? You may recall that Dublin - Belfast was forecast just before the Cork 800 but there was an outcry from a large contingent of our regular supporters to "go West". So accepting the argument that there would be many future opportunities to "do" the Great Northern, the decision was taken to go to Westport. We are pleased to confirm that ex-NCC 2-6-4 Tank No.4 has been passed for the road. No.184 will also be pressed into service to cover the Ballina branch, train splitting and double-heading. We may yet have the prospect of two steam locomotives spanning 67 years of development on the Clew Bay Railtour.

But back to the Cork 800. It was a weekend of ups and downs. Route planning and scheduling went smoothly enough although we had to accept that it was impossible to visit Youghal due to the time required to take water en route to Cork. The days when you can

run to Cork in three hours are gone. The schedule for the Sunday return from Cork was re-planned just a few days before the Raitour because of the insertion of two football specials. To make matters more hectic on the day a third special appeared behind us on Sunday which was not shown in any of the circulars. This special forced an early departure from Portarlinton, reinforcing the point that the railway companies operate our trains, not the RPSI.

The situation with hotels in Cork was anything but ideal. Due to heavy booking for the 800th Anniversary celebrations we were not able to obtain the sole use of two of the bigger hotels which would have accommodated all of us. Instead we were scattered over twelve different hotels and guest houses which in spite of painstaking preparations brought problems.

Connecting buses were required to bring passengers to and from hotels and most of these worked smoothly. The big disappointment was the bus that didn't turn up for the Cork Airport and Fairy Lawn hotels on Sunday morning, leaving 45 passengers stranded, missing the train and the lineside photographs at Kilbarry and Rathduff. Apart from one driver who could not keep up with the bus in front on the way between Limerick Junction and Rathluirc, the lineside buses provided some excellent photography, especially on the Cobh line. The highlights of the Raitour on Saturday were without doubt the taking of water from the road hydrant at Portarlinton, the visit to Mallow engine shed where No.171's cousin, ex-GNR (I) 4-4-0 No.131 is being overhauled by the Great Southern Railway Preservation Society, and the grand arrival in Cork with a band playing an international medley on the platform. Add the beautiful weather and the coastal scenery on the Cobh line and you have a memorable occasion culminating in a banquet and slide show in the Imperial Hotel attended by the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Cork. Many thanks to Jack Phelan and the members of the Cork Branch of the Irish Railway Record Society for their considerable help with arrangements in Cork.

By all accounts (I had joined the beleaguered 45) the double-headed climb out of Cork through the tunnel on Sunday morning was outstanding, closely followed by the runpast at Rathduff. At Mallow the train was split and ran in two portions to Limerick Junction. This is an interesting feature of our raitours and gives everyone the opportunity of observing the trains on the move. For myself the highlight of the whole raitour occurred at Rathluirc when No.184's train set back into the fertiliser loop allowing No.171 and four coaches to overtake non-stop at 68 mph. I can still hear the roar of the S class as she reeled her way through, notched up to the hilt.

The gremlins were still present at Limerick Junction for we discovered that the water tank for the locomotives had not been filled as requested. After dipping the tank in No.171's tender, it was calculated that there would be just enough water to take us to Portarlinton. And so it was a thirsty locomotive that arrived in Portarlinton and for the second time that weekend the fire hoses were rolled out to quench her. While the extra coal from the workshop coach was being manhandled on to the tender No.184 caught up with us, stealing in light engine on her way back to Athlone and Mullingar. Then the order came to depart with haste since an unscheduled overload football special was bearing down on us from Thurles. The Station Foreman got on to the 'hot line' to the nearby Railway Bar and the pints were downed with indecent haste to the impatient throaty whistle from No.171. In

view of the Engineer's possession and single line working ahead of us it was a timely departure and we steamed into Connolly in good time for the Cross-channel connections.

It was particularly pleasing to have on board a party of 40 French railway enthusiasts and a party of 6 Australian (5'3" men from Down Under!) from the State of Victoria. The scenes in the Dining Car when 32 at a time were served a 4 course meal with wine at over 60 miles per hour were unforgettable. Great stuff for the Entente Cordiale, but hard graft for the cheerful RPSI Catering Staff who did a magnificent job producing over 140 meals in a little over two and a half hours from a kitchen measuring approximately 6 feet by 5 feet.

Referring to the passenger figures in the table above for the Railtour Roundup (3rd day) the most interesting trend is the increase in the GB enthusiasts travelling to Belfast on Sunday evening and taking part in a very relaxed trip on the Monday. We were met at Botanic Station on Sunday night by buses provided free of charge by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. We had excellent accommodation arranged at a much reduced rate in the Regency, Wellington Park and Stormont hotels. The same buses appeared at the hotels on Monday morning and brought the passengers to Belfast Central to join the waiting steam train to Lisburn, Antrim, Belfast (York Road) and Larne Harbour. The Cork 800 ended in Whitehead with a climatic taste of things to come. Those who travelled all the way were rewarded by a close examination of ex-GNR (I) 4-4-0 compound locomotive No.85 "Merlin", completely and thoroughly restored, resplendent in blue and scarlet.

The "Portrush Flyer" season must be close to being the best ever. No.4 assumed confident command of the three full trains and enhanced her reputation for sparkling running gained at the latter end of last season on the Belfast - Dublin line. Her 100% reliability record this season vindicates all the hard work and heartache during the running-in period. The season was heralded by a most useful advance publicity leaflet provided free of charge by the Carrickfergus Borough Council. Booking forms were released on 1st June and this gave members, clubs and societies a better chance to organise themselves for a trip. As last year the date clash with Shane's Castle Traction Engine Rally on the first Flyer did not seemingly affect the success of either event. Our train was booked out over one week in advance and although the other two Flyers had very few empty seats, the solidly supported Portrush - Castlerock trips (around 1,000 passengers) were the icing on the Society's 21st Birthday cake. A magnificent effort by all concerned, especially Alan Love alias Portrush Flyer Officer, and Arthur Wickham in the Coleraine area. For the first time in years these trips to the seaside covered their costs and even managed to make a small contribution towards the restoration fund.

[PHOTOGRAPH]

A summer's day in Ballymena and a well-known NIR driver checks to see if the "Tank Engine" has filled yet. (C.A. Boomer)

In connection with the "Portrush Flyer", the Society organised packaged weekend trips to Northern Ireland called "Irish Steam Weekends". These trips included train/sea ferry bookings to NI via Larne, visits to Witham Street Railway Museum, the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum at Cultra, Shane's Castle Railway, Whitehead RPSI Site and a trip on the Flyer. With two bed, breakfast and dinner overnights at the Dolphin Hotel, Whitehead and a private bus with courier, the weekends are extremely good value at £80 per person

all-in from Lame Harbour. The venture made a small surplus for the Restoration Fund in its first season of operation and judging by the large number of enquiries should be a useful adjunct to the Society's activities next year.

By contrast the "Steam Enterprise" had a relatively poor season. In spite of the press reception held by Bord Failte at the NIR Whistlestop Bar the bookings seemed to be influenced by adverse publicity in the weeks leading up to the first trip. However, support for the "Bangor Belle" on August Bank Holiday Monday and the end of season "Lame Lough" railtour has increased and has helped to alleviate the overall deficit on the "Steam Enterprise" trips this year.

At long last we have got our train at Mullingar. With considerable excitement and not a little apprehension No.184 and five recently acquired CIÉ coaches from the 1950s set out on Saturday 26th October from Mullingar just after 7am on a foggy morning for Dublin Connolly. The RPSI Dublin Area can be justly proud of the train turned out at short notice, and repaired to running order for the "Maynooth Shuttle". Every seat for the three trips from Connolly to Maynooth was sold before the date and due to the thick fog the first trip got away just over one hour late. We had advertised the departure time at 10:30 in accordance with the approved schedule, but Rules and Regulations stepped in a few days before the trip and insisted that the Asahi (Acrylonitrile - potent stuff!) train should take precedence over the RPSI passenger train. We were rescheduled to depart at 11:15, allowing the Asahi to clear Connolly. The first trip was successful enough but did not make up any time on the running. From then on things went from bad to worse. The second trip was over two hours late leaving which was inexcusable. Reasons given on the day were poor water pressure for filling the locomotive tender (the DSER tank and water column was denied to us as it is now an Engineer's siding). Yet at 14:40, just over one hour late and virtually on the revised schedule, the locomotive was on her train and ready to depart. We then had a points failure on the crossing from Connolly (GNR) to the GS&WR Liffey Junction line and when we finally got the road over three quarters of an hour later, the locomotive had barely enough water left to do the return trip to Maynooth. To have cancelled the second trip at this stage with mothers, fathers and children waiting over two hours in a decidedly cool train would have been to invite a riot. So on a dip of the tender a quick decision was made to run the second trip but cancel the third, which was advertised to depart at 16:15. As passengers were arriving early for the third trip, the second got under way and at least some of the waiting was forgotten. For the second time in just over a year we had the ignominy of handing back large sums of money to extremely disappointed families. How can one measure the loss of goodwill in a situation like this? But, you tell me, memories are short. I jolly well hope so!

[PHOTOGRAPH]

*No.171 "Slieve Gullion" at Lambeg with the Bangor Belle on 26th August 1985.
(C.P. Friel)*

RPSI Council members apologised to every person queuing for a refund from a situation which was not of our making. Many thanks to the CIÉ loco crew who did their best to achieve success and the booking office staff for assisting at extremely short notice with refunds. Once again I reiterate that CIÉ operate our trains, not the Society. The majority of

people on accepting our apology wanted to know when our next trip would take place. Let's try again.

Looking to the future the success of the 3 day International Railtour looks secure enough. The three day event would be more attractive to Americans and Australians for example if we could plan the Whitehead to Mullingar positioning run, which takes place the weekend before the main railtour, in a package with a diesel-hauled itinerary of railway, cultural and heritage interest organised with hotels in conjunction with Bord Faille and CIÉ. What better way to end a weeks holiday in Ireland that with 3 days of steam?

We had put forward this plan as part of the Traen 150 celebrations in 1984 but had no response from CIÉ on the subject.

The "Portrush Flyer" is basking in success but it is depending on the Castlerock afternoon trips for viability, and that depends on the weather; warm and sunny its the beach, cool and wet its the train. 1985 was a perfect summer!! On the other hand the "Steam Enterprise" has had a comparatively poor season by recent standards. These cross-border trips are perhaps the most vulnerable to adverse publicity. If we could provide a local attraction in Dublin, steam or otherwise, on the same day it may prove to be the insurance policy we need. The first date in September coincides with Phoenix Park races. Anyone for a flutter? To travel may not be better than to arrive.

LOCOMOTIVE MAINTENANCE

Peter Scott

No.3 "R.H. Smyth" (Londonderry Port & Harbour Commissioners 0-6-0ST)

In Traffic.

No.3BG (Guinness Breweries 0-4-0ST)

In store.

No.4 (LMS NCC 2-6-4T)

For repair. At present out of traffic for boiler inspection and minor repairs. Patterns have been made, or are nearly complete, for the seven types of firebar which comprise the rocking grate, and further bars will be cast as required.

No.23 (Irish Shell 0-4-0DM)

In traffic. The electrical system has been overhauled.

No.27 "Lough Erne" (SL&NCR 0-6-4T)

In store. This locomotive is to be painted for protection purposes.

No.85 "Merlin" (GNR (I) 4-4-0)

Running in after overhaul. At the time of writing the locomotive is operating short advertised trips with a light load as a means of running in new bearings and ironing out any faults which may appear. So far the faults have been minor, and it is hoped to have the locomotive ready for traffic next summer. It should, however, be appreciated that "Merlin" is not an appropriate locomotive for tender-first running, and the provision of the turntable at Coleraine is an essential part of her return to traffic.

[PHOTOGRAPH]

No.85 “Merlin” prepares to leave Whitehead on a running-in trip. (W.S. Boomer)

An appeal has been organised for the £8,000 required to install the turntable and everyone is urged to contribute as generously as possible. I am frequently asked questions of a deep and philosophical nature regarding the way in which a compound locomotive works; for example: “are there two high pressure cylinders and one low pressure, or vice-versa?”, “How do you start a compound locomotive from rest?” and “How is it that a 3-cylinder engine has four exhaust beats?”. My answers to these, and other questions, which invariably seem to be asked as I climb out of the motion with an oil can, are seldom as lucid as I would like. I would refer any interested reader to an excellent publication entitled “3-Cylinder Compound Locomotives” which is currently available in photocopied form from the Sales Department. During the painting of No.85 a query arose as to the correct colour of GNR (I) headlamps, opinion being divided between white and black. As one who remembers only the red of the UTA lamps, I would be glad of an authoritative opinion on the matter. Probably the lamp colour was changed at different periods; to be appropriate for No.85 we are aiming at the late 1950s/early 1960s, since only then did the locomotive run with a VS class tender similar to the present one.

No.171 “Slieve Gullion” (GNR(I) 4-4-0)

For repair. Since the return to traffic after overhaul in 1968, this locomotive has suffered recurring problems with hot axle boxes. There were numerous other faults such as leaking tubes, erratic brakes and incorrect valve port spacing, but while remedies were found for all these faults no satisfactory explanation could ever be established for the hot axleboxes. The locomotive has been dismantled on several occasions, and the driving axleboxes have been completely renewed. Alignment has been checked and the lubrication system duplicated. Even though the erratic overheating problem persisted it was possible to live with it; for example the locomotive handled the entire main line operation during the years when the NCC tank engine was out of commission for overhaul. The mileage clocked up on the Portrush Flyer, Steam Enterprise and two-day tours has taken its toll in other ways and the bogie wheels will soon require re-profiling to avoid a “sharp flange” condition.

On the first Steam Enterprise this year the right driving axlebox was found to be severely overheated at Portadown, and reluctantly it was decided to remove the engine at Dundalk rather than risk a failure in section or serious damage. The engine was worked back light to Whitehead the same day.

Dismantling has started and the wheel sets will shortly be removed using the wheeldrop, to allow the damage to be assessed. Now that the wheel lathe is available the wheels and journals can be checked for truth. No.171 is due for her 5-yearly hydraulic test and this will be carried out while she is out of traffic. No retubing work is planned at this stage but a final decision must await the boiler inspection.

No.184 (GS&WR 0-6-0)

In traffic (Mullingar). A pressure reducing valve has been fitted to enable the locomotive to heat its train for winter operations.

No.186 (GS&WR 0-6-0)

In store. No.186 has recently been stripped of valuable fittings and moved outside the shed. The available shed space is now allocated to locos No.4, No.85, No.171 and No.461.

No.461 (GSR (ex-DSER) 2-6-0)

Heavy overhaul continues. The refurbishment of No.461 is progressing whenever essential work on the traffic engines permits. It is normally possible for the ACE boilermaker to work full time on the tender. The new well and internal baffles are nearly complete, and work is progressing with the flared coal rails. A fitter is now employed under the ACE (Action for Community Employment) scheme, and has been working on the dismantling and overhaul of the locomotive.

[PHOTOGRAPH]

As No.461 's tender takes shape the amount of work still needed may be clearly seen. (C.P. Friel)

Machining of the driving wheels is under way, one wheel and one journal now being complete. The wheel lathe has been modified with a special tool post at one side to permit machining of the journals. The left-hand journal can thus be machined at the same time as the right-hand wheel profile, and vice versa. An extension and support to the tool post were constructed to allow machining of the journals on the crank axle because the cranks prevent the tool post being positioned close to the journal.

Both driving horn blocks on the locomotive were found to be cracked at the top corners, repairs having been effected in the past by the addition of steel plates together with the welding in situ of the broken casting. Further cracking had subsequently occurred. Strangely enough, the right horn block is a steel casting and appears to be original; the left one is an iron casting with every appearance of being a 'cheap' repair after the failure of the original steel casting. Both horn blocks were removed to permit all round access for as good a welding repair as possible. The difficulties of ensuring a sound weld in cast iron have now led to the proposal to replace the left horn block with a steel fabrication. A new iron casting would be a ready solution but would almost certainly crack again as it is not possible to improve the shape of the vulnerable corners.

[PHOTOGRAPH]

The special tool, referred to earlier, in action on the wheel-lathe machining one of No.461's driving wheelsets. (C.P. Friel)

All the crown stay nuts in the firebox were severely wasted and all are to be removed, together with the rethreading of the stays. Since there are 130 stays, the rethreading work would be a mammoth task if attempted by hand using a die nut. A special jig was therefore constructed to hold a power driven tool in which the die nut can be mounted. The tool is powered by the motor and drive for the boiler-tube expander. New nuts are being made for the stays at the Society's metalwork class at the College of Technology, Belfast. The 'Tech' is also providing new fitted bolts for the horn blocks, and could be employed making other essential components if other members could be persuaded to attend. Unfortunately not only is the 'Tech' operating far short of its potential, but it is in danger of being discontinued as a result of poor support. By way of an illustration, the special crown stay nuts would probably cost something like £5 each if bought in. Thus the willingness of one or two members to give up 2½ hours per week to attend the class has saved the Society £650.

No major expenditure is planned on No.461 over the next year, since work can proceed for a while with the projects already started, and all available capital is required for the Coleraine turntable. Major cost items eventually required will be flue tubes, part of the tubing for the superheater elements, blast pipe and steam pipes, springs, steam castle, one safety valve and a set of firebars.

“Carlow Engine” (Comlucht Siuicre Éireann 0-4-0 DM)

General overhaul. This engine’s general overhaul is proceeding as time permits.

Locomotive Plant And Machinery

A MIG (Metal Inert Gas) welding plant has been acquired.

The wheel lathe has been fitted with a reversing switch to enable the machine itself to advance or retard the headstock centres.

Only minor expenditure on plant is proposed over the next year to release as much capital as possible for the Coleraine turntable project.

LOCOMOTIVE RUNNING

Brian Hill

1985 was undoubtedly the busiest year so far for the RPSI Operations Committee with a steam passenger service planned for every month from April right through to December.

Events commenced as normal with the “Easter Bunny” train rides, quickly followed by a period of preparation for the “Three Day International Railtour” at both Mullingar and Whitehead. Some of the tasks involved covered RPSI crew rostering, arranging the bagging of coal and its transportation to both Mullingar and Cork, and the locomotive and train examinations by the relevant railway companies.

From a locomotive running viewpoint, Portarlinton again became a focus of attention for locomotive watering problems. The tank supplying the platform hydrant had become unavailable since the last RPSI visit two years ago; but fortunately a new water main had been installed along the road crossing the railway at the south end of the station, with a fire hydrant outlet reasonably close to the bridge itself. An adaptor was eventually manufactured and checked to connect this source to the RPSI equipment carried on the train for tender filling. On the Saturday morning of the tour the train arrived at the down platform, locomotive No.171 detached and ran forward under the bridge, and the tender replenished via a hose system draped over the bridge parapet.

Meanwhile in Cork, engine No.184 (having arrived light engine in Cork the previous Friday evening) powered five CIÉ carriages on two return trips to Cobh for the benefit of Cork inhabitants, before taking the main portion of the tour train on a similar picturesque jaunt.

Sunday morning went reasonably well to schedule, but arrival in Limerick Junction found the electric pump used to fill the tank sourcing the water column had failed to perform that function. As an experiment two CB radios were obtained on loan for the duration of the tour; these now proved their worth by providing effective communication between the locomotive people in the yard and the tour and CIÉ traffic staff on the station platform. This resulted in No.171 being quickly dispatched with train to Portarlinton, with No.184 following as originally planned to Thurles where water could be drawn from a hydrant.

I would be interested in obtaining some robust professional hand-held radios - can anyone help?

On arrival at Portarlinton No.171 was watered and coaled quickly to give an early departure for Dublin, especially desirable as an unadvised special was on our tail. No.184 and No.171 both returned to their respective home sheds without further major incident.

[PHOTOGRAPH]

GNR Compound No.85 "Merlin" heads out to York Road from her base at Whitehead. (C.P. Friel)

June saw the commencement of the summer train ride season at Whitehead, made more notable than usual by the appearance of GNR(I) compound locomotive No.85 on her first 'passenger' duty as part of running-in. This month also saw two charter specials successfully operate. The first was a Portrush - Bangor train (previously outlined in "Five Foot Three" No.31) on behalf of NIR for the visit of the Permanent Way Institute to Northern Ireland. This day was a credit to both NIR and the RPSI, but such an extensive operation proved demanding with RPSI personnel rostered from midnight Saturday to 12:30 a.m. on Monday morning, and then facing the start of a week's paid employment that same morning! Much more relaxed was the "Charity Flyer" to Portrush for Belfast East Rotary headed by locomotive No.4; a lavish buffet was provided and entertainment in the form of a jazz band emanated from the diner (the GNR was never like this!).

The "Portrush Flyer" ran without problems with No.4 providing the motive power to the north coast resort on all three outings; the most outstanding factor being the high passenger loadings on each trip as a result of the John Friel publicity machine.

At the end of August No.171 left Whitehead for Bangor to eventually establish camp at Central Service Depot (CSD - formerly Queen's Quay station) for September operations to Dublin. Unfortunately matters had only progressed to Crumlin (41 miles by rail from Whitehead) when the injector blew back to indicate that the 3,500 gallon tender was void of water. Subsequent investigation could find no evident fault with the tender to account for this; failure to top up the tender prior to departure and misjudgement appear to be responsible. Events were salvaged with a minimum of delay, but arrival in Belfast Central found the engine to have run up a heat in the right driving axlebox; the day's programme was however fulfilled.

No.171 worked the first "Steam Enterprise", but had to be removed from the head of the train with a recurrence of the axlebox ailment, the train continuing on courtesy of a company diesel locomotive. The decision to continue to use No.171 in the light of "Bangor Belle" events has been forcefully criticised by a few people -why do they use hindsight as a destructive weapon? Nevertheless the decision was correct based on the information available at the time of it's making. On the return that same day of No.171 to Whitehead, No.4 was steamed and worked round to CSD; my thanks to those involved.

No.4 performed in a satisfactory manner on both the second "Steam Enterprise" and the "Larne Lough Tour" from Belfast Central to Whitehead via Larne Harbour.

Normally the completion of the "Larne Lough" would signal the close of the mainline season until after Easter, but the advent of a Mullingar-based rake of RPSI carriages has

given No.184 the chance of being utilised more intensively, commencing with the “Maynooth Shuttle” in late October. The locomotive (and carriages) gave no trouble, but events not attributable to the RPS1 eventually caused the cancellation of the last of three return trips; hopefully this will not deter future ventures.

Also, with No.85 having performed well on the summer train rides, a programme of mainline running-in trips was organised for the period leading up to the Christmas train rides using passenger coaching stock (including passengers!).

Certainly the running-in for No.85 will follow in the same vein as that for No.4, the engine eventually graduating on to hauling “Portrush Flyers” before being released further afield. The stumbling block for No.85 in this scenario is the lack of turning facilities in the greater Portrush area. Over the last several years progress has been painfully slow in reactivating the ex-Londonderry turntable at Coleraine, it is almost an embarrassment to the Society. Admittedly there have been problems, notably finance and other priorities, but operating the “Portrush Flyer” on a regular basis with only one suitable engine (No.4) is not equitable to consistent reliable performance or conducive to maintenance planning, nor does it permit locomotive variety. Particularly important is the loss of a proving ground convenient to the Whitehead workshops for tendered locomotives, namely No.171, No.85 and eventually No.461.

[PHOTOGRAPH]

GNR (I) Compound 4-4-0 No.84 “Falcon” at Dundalk in August 1950. (G.W. Sharpe collection)

On the present criterion of no turntable near Portrush, No.4 would have no operational problems with a Portrush run; No.171 is unsuitable but has been used in an emergency situation when No.4 was ‘indisposed’ at the last moment, but then only with the agreement of both NIR and the footplate crew involved, and the implementation of a speed limit when working tender-first. No.85’s large ‘VS’ tender gives even less rearward sighting than No.171’s and could not be utilised for long distance tender-first operation at normal passenger speeds, something these engines were not designed to do on a regular basis in company service. To overcome this a second engine could pilot when working tender-first, this could equally well be applied to No.171 or any other tender engine, but this would devastate the precarious “Portrush Flyer” economics.

Thus there is a definite need for a turntable at Coleraine to ensure security of operation north of Ballymena and to provide a convenient test track for overhauled locomotives and carriages. To explain - after overhaul, restoration or repair, locomotives are normally used at Whitehead for a time before venturing out on the mainline, firstly to Portrush, then Dublin, and then beyond Dublin. One stage of the programme cannot be commenced without successful completion of the previous one; this applied to No.4, and will be applied to No.85, No.171 (after repair) and in the future, No.461.

The RPSI Council has finally committed the society to commence work in early 1986 to install the turntable at Coleraine, but matching this decision with the necessary finance is the major task, especially after the heavy expenditure on excavation work at Whitehead last year. No matter what way the figures are juggled, this turntable will only become operational again with you, the reader’s help - if you are a member, a friend, or can induce

company sponsorship, please help by generously supporting the RPSI Turntable Appeal. Thank you in anticipation.

CARRIAGE MAINTENANCE

Jeremy Saulters

At the time of writing the position is as follows: In traffic:

- 91 (Ex LMS (NCC) "Northern Atlantic" Brake Third)
- 68 (Ex LMS (NCC) 1st/3rd Composite)
- 238 (Ex LMS (NCC) All third)
- 87 (Ex UTA Dining Car)
- 114 (Ex GNR(I) Brake Third)
- 1327 (Ex GSR Third)
- 50 (Ex GNR(I) Director's Saloon)

Withdrawn for minor repairs:

- 1142 (Ex GS&WR All First)

Undergoing Overhaul:

- 9 (Ex GNR(I) Open Third)
- 1335 (Ex GSR Third)
- 88 (Ex GNR(I) Dining Car)

Ex LMS (NCC) passenger brake van 411 is being retained in traffic as a spare brake for mainline work, and will presumably also act as Santa's Grotto.

While the above may look good, those who travel or work on the train cannot fail to notice the backlog of minor problems and repairs that builds up over the operating season, which has lasted for six months this year. Ex NCC brake 91 needs two large windows replaced and her toilet finished. NCC composite 68 still requires the installation of a second toilet together with exterior lettering whilst GNR brake 114 has the next part of a major overhaul to be undertaken.

The good news is that both Ex GNR open third 9 and Ex GSR third 1335 are nearing completion, and by the time this is read may be virtually finished bar the cleaning. 1335 needs new gangway steelwork, whilst 9 awaits the application of GNR(I) style scumble finish and lettering to the outside and a basic refit of interior furniture (seats, luggage racks and toilet). Anyone with an afternoon to spare is welcome to join in the fun at this job on any weekend.

Once 9 has vacated the shed 1335 and 68 will visit it for short periods, followed by GNR brake 114.

With ex GSR third 1335 essentially complete Whitehead Railway Project has now started rebuilding the Great Northern dining car 88. This is a long term project as much of the vehicle did not even exist due to severe rotting of the timber. At the same time other trainees are beginning to re-upholster the ex NCC thirds 238 and 241 where necessary, allowing the new seats to be available as soon as the interior is completed.

As you have no doubt heard the Society recently bought a set of 1950s built coaches from Coras Iompair Éireann, and by the time this is read they will have made their RPSI debut on the “Maynooth Shuttle”. These vehicles have only had a minimum amount of work done in order to put them into traffic. More work will be carried out in the future to bring them up to a better standard, following a similar line of steady improvement as the Whitehead based coaches.

[PHOTOGRAPH]

A carriage man’s nightmare ... this is one corner of GNR Brake 114. The indistinct mass on the left side, following the outer panel. (C.P. Friel)

[PHOTOGRAPH]

The interior of GNR third 9 ready for fitting out. (C.P. Friel)

This year has been one in which, despite the use of coach cleaners (who, incidentally, did an excellent job!) for the first time, overhaul work did not really progress because of running maintenance to a train which was running from mid-June to the middle of November thus requiring constant attention at weekends from the volunteer workforce. ACE and the Whitehead Railway Project, together with the midweek group of retired volunteers, have been concentrating on overhaul work; indeed it was only in late September that work by our own volunteers restarted on GNR open third 9 - for the first time since late May! Such is the case that if essential carriage work (and that on locomotives) is to continue at the necessary rate then either fewer people will be available to run trains or more volunteers will have to be found. My own view is that maintenance now has priority over running in the winter months, and that running-in trips and Santa Claus trains must regrettably take second place. If the Society is to continue at its present level of activity then the effort is needed NOW.

Leaving you with that thought, may I now thank the joiners employed under the ACE (Action for Community Employment) scheme, Whitehead Railway Project, the mid-week squad and those that attend each weekend throughout the year, without whom no coaches could continue to run let alone further vehicles be restored.

PUBLICITY REPORT

John Friel

The never ending quest to fill seats on Society trains and produce large crowds at Whitehead events has seen several innovations in recent years.

The establishment of the Whitehead Railway Project under the control of Senior Supervisor, Frank Gallagher, has given us a great boost. The Project aims to train young people in the various skills associated with coach restoration and it has an office to deal with administration, manned (or should I say womanned?) by Supervisor Reta Craig and 5 - 6 trainees.

The office has taken over the preparing and dispatching of circulars, and, in addition, deals with enquiries from the public about Society events, both by phone and by post. The value of this service, in terms of the success of RPSI ventures has been tremendous.

Carrickfergus Borough Council, in whose area Whitehead is situated, has always been very helpful in promoting Society events. At the start of 1985, they produced 5,000 brochures, for general distribution, giving details of all our events. They have promised to up-date and reprint the brochure every year (at no cost to the Society) and we are grateful for their generosity.

1985 saw the first production of another brochure for the Society (again free). For the Cork 800 Railtour in May, Bord Failte provided us with 2,000 copies of an advance information leaflet, which included colour photographs of the scenic highlights of the Cork area. It incorporated a reservation form, to be returned with a £10 deposit. As doubtless recorded elsewhere, the tour was booked out, and I am sure the leaflet had a lot to do with that happy state of affairs.

The editors of Railway World (Michael Harris) and Railway Magazine (John Slater) travelled on the tour as guests of the Society, with the tourist boards covering their travel and accommodation expenses. They certainly enjoyed themselves and gave the tour extensive coverage in their magazines.

Around Easter 1985, I was contacted by BBC Producer Bob Crooks regarding the possible broadcasting of the Radio Ulster "Day by Day" programme, live from the "Portrush Flyer" en route from Belfast to Portrush. Naturally, we were interested in what promised to be our biggest publicity coup ever.

"Day by Day" is broadcast Monday to Friday, 9 - 11 a.m. and Monday 1st July was set as the date, but the question was, could a radio signal be picked up from a moving train well enough to be broadcast, bearing in mind the frequency of bridges and cuttings?

The ideal solution, using a helicopter to fly above the train and relay the signal, was ruled out on the grounds of cost.

Discussions took place between ourselves, BBC sound engineers and Northern Ireland Railways. RPSI brake coach 411 was selected for test runs and was moved to Central Services Depot in Belfast. NIR staff fitted one of their own aerials on the roof and, on 17th May, the coach was marshalled at the rear of the 11:30 Belfast Central - Londonderry train and 14:40 return.

BBC staff loaded a generator and transmitting equipment and, with Johnny Glendinning present as RPSI representative, the train set off, its passengers unaware of what was going on in the last coach.

Sadly, the signals broadcast from the coach and picked up by a receiving station at Slieveanorra were not good enough. The BBC fitted a different aerial on 411 and installed directional aerials inside the coach for a second attempt on 7th June, this time on the tail of the 14:10 Belfast Central - Londonderry and 17:05 return.

The quality of the signal was better on this occasion, but still not good enough. Time was getting short, so the project was shelved (not permanently, I hope). Both BBC and NIR staff put a considerable amount of time and effort into the test runs, and I would like to express our thanks for the enthusiasm they showed for the project.

All was not completely lost, however, and the BBC decided to broadcast the programme from Whitehead. They set up on the platform, beside the Director's Saloon, and we had No.4 steaming up and down with two coaches in the background.

The sound of the locomotive, the chat with various Society members, the fiddle playing of Paddy O'Flaherty, the reminiscences of Tom McDevitte, all made for a enjoyable programme. At one stage presenter John Bennett climbed aboard No.4 to interview crew members Paul Newell, Charles Friel and Thomas Charters. They explained briefly how the locomotive was driven and then set off, still answering questions. It was a case of 'A Bridge Too Far' - as No.4 went under the King's Road bridge, the signal was lost and radios all over Northern Ireland went dead. The alert BBC staff in Belfast realized what had happened and quickly put a record on.

[PHOTOGRAPH]

Whitehead is a hive of activity on 1st July 1985 as BBC staff Broadcast "Day by Day" from the director's saloon, whilst No.4 provides background music. (C.P. Friel)

While the BBC was packing up after the programme finished, an Ulster Television crew was arriving and setting up. Led by producer and Society member Andrew Crockart, they spent the afternoon filming and interviewing. The result was a 15 minute piece about the Society, for the UTV evening news programme, which was conveniently shown between the 1st and 2nd Portrush Flyers.

The combined effect of the coverage given to us by BBC and UTV was a record number of passengers on the Flyer trains.

During the Summer, the BBC youth programme "Channel One" did a feature about the Whitehead Railway Project. They filmed the trainees carrying out restoration work at Whitehead, and then travelling on the second "Portrush Flyer", in coach 68, which has already been restored by the Project. Both supervisors and trainees were interviewed.

For the "Steam Enterprise" trains (Belfast - Dublin and return), Bord Faille now organized a press reception. In 1984, it was held in the Forum Hotel and the Association of Railway Preservation Societies Award (a Royal Train Coat of Arms) made a pleasing centrepiece.

In 1985, the venue was the Whistle Stop Bar in Central Station. Our Treasurer, John Richardson, kindly loaned his live steam model of our own locomotive No.171 "Slieve Gullion" for display at the reception.

On the first "Steam Enterprise", we had Margaret Cunningham of the Downtown Radio Travel Programme as a guest. She was recording a piece about our activities in 1986 - publicity never stops.

In the wake of the success of the "Cork 800" Railtour, it was decided to resurrect "Irish Steam Weekends", based on the three "Portrush Flyer" weekends. Briefly, the programme was: Friday - visit Belfast Transport Museum and Ulster Folk and Transport Museum; Saturday - travel on the Portrush Flyer; Sunday - visit Whitehead Excursion Station and Shane's Castle Railway. Friday and Saturday nights were spent at the Dolphin Hotel, Whitehead.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board gave a 50% grant towards publicity (around £230 in all) and the Whitehead Railway Project assisted with administration.

The total number of enthusiasts who came across the water to take part was 13 - a modest figure compared to 300 on the Cork tour, but a start nonetheless. It should be remembered

that publicity only got under way when it became apparent that the Cork tour would be a sell out.

The Publicity Officer can produce endless promotional leaflets (10,000 each in the case of the Flyers and Enterprises), but how do they get distributed? This year, we found the answer in the shape of ACE worker Max Irwin.

Max spent many days in Belfast, Bangor, Lisburn, Portadown and Carrickfergus going around travel agents, leisure centres, libraries, etc., giving out batches of leaflets and promoting the Society generally.

Of course, many Society members already do their bit in this regard. One amongst many worthy of mention is Arthur Wickham. Each year, he goes around the Coleraine/Portrush area giving out posters to advertise the Portrush - Castlerock trains.

Coleraine Borough Council gives us an annual grant towards publicising the Flyers and, this year, North Down Borough Council did likewise for the "Bangor Belle".

Despite everything already outlined in this article, our dream of every seat filled has not yet been realised. I always welcome new ideas on how to promote our events. New ideas backed up with an offer to help would be especially welcome.

I would like to thank my brother, Charles, for his endless supply of black and white prints for publicity purposes, and for his assistance in helping to organize press receptions, etc.

On behalf of the Society, I would like to express thanks to the following: Frank Gallagher and Reta Craig of the Whitehead Railway Project, Trevor Caughey and Stanley Bennett of Bord Failte, Ian Hill and Nigel Jess of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Bob Crooks and Alan Goodall of the BBC Andrew Crockart of UTV, Alan Phair of Carrickfergus Borough Council, H. Bateson of North Down Borough Council and Ian Lee of Coleraine Borough Council.

[PHOTOGRAPH]

Mr. Norman Lamont MP, Minister of State. Department of Trade and Industry (right) presents a Certificate of Merit in the "Come to Britain" Trophy Competition to Mr. Leslie McAllister, RPSI London Agent (left). In the centre is Mr. Duncan Buick, Chairman, British Tourist Authority. (British Tourist Authority)

Finally, the Society received another award this year - a Certificate of Merit in the British Tourist Authority "Come to Britain" Trophy Competition. The award was handed over to our London Agent, Leslie McAllister, by Mr. Norman Lamont MP, Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry at a reception in London during July.

OBITUARY: TOMMY DORRIAN

John Richardson

I met Tommy Dorrian when I worked in the Bank Agency at ICI in early 1971. Tommy had been employed there after years with Eastwoods, cutting up railway lines, bridges and rolling stock for scrap. Unlike many acquaintances met through my work he was different.

[TOMMY'S PHOTOGRAPH]

A casual invitation by me to visit Whitehead resulted in an enthusiastic relationship with the Society which lasted fourteen years. Initially he assisted in Fund Raising excursions to various field events, but in 1973 when we acquired the Diner he really came into his own - he travelled on every train run by the RPSI, with the Dining Cars from 1973 - November 1985.

A quiet unassuming character he took great delight in people and went out of his way to ensure that their trip would be an enjoyable one. The interest he showed in the Catering and Commercial side of the Society was remarkable. Tommy-based anecdotes are legion - for years living on a train for a week at Pearse, Mullingar or Queen's Quay (prior to a two day tour) the casual visitor or Tour Participant would be greeted with a smile and a willingness to chat. Not content with finding an interest in the Society himself - he involved his whole family in all aspects of our commercial activities. His very occasional breaks from work were spent in promoting the Society's name further afield and there are many who discovered the pleasures of Irish Steam from the 'Tommy who runs the Bar'.

In recent years he was a full time ACE worker at Whitehead - but it was in the years that he attended Whitehead daily on a volunteer basis that his true worth was apparent. It would be impossible to describe all that he did - the small unseen, unthought-of tasks, all of which were necessary to the smooth running of our organisation.

He was proud to wear the Society badge and extol all that we did or were - words are inadequate to describe Tommy - all the qualities that are considered good in a person shone from him.

The RPSI has lost a very fine member - I have lost a very dear friend.

RPSI RAILWAY LETTER SERVICE

Peter McBride

The Railway Preservation Society of Ireland applied to the British Post Office to become a party to the 1972 Post Office Act whereby a minor railway could have the right to carry mail on their trains both on a 'point to point' basis and for onward transmission. This concession is an extension of the rights of railways as recognised in the Post Office Acts of 1891 and 1908 and is operated in the same manner as in the early 20th century, and with the same Post Office control.

The application was duly made, and was finally accepted and validated in March 1981.

The Post Office Act permits a minor railway to convey two types of railway letter:

1. From point to point on the railway system, i.e. from station to station. The letter must be addressed to a specific person at a named station, and the letter must be endorsed with the instruction
"to be called for at (station name) station".
2. From the train to a specific station on the system and for onward transmission through the normal postal channels. In this case the letter must bear the instruction
"to be posted on arrival at (station name) station".

In both cases the normal national postage stamp, at the appropriate rate, must be affixed in addition to the stamp representing the "Railway Letter Fee". The Railway letter stamp is affixed to the front of the letter and is cancelled by the railway company. If the letter is to

be posted on arrival at a certain station then the national stamp is not cancelled, but if the letter is to be called for on arrival at a specific station then the railway company will cancel the national stamp in a manner agreed with the national post office.

Railway stamps were first issued by the RPSI on 16th May 1981 with a set of three stamps in a miniature format of 3 x 3.

The designs were taken from slides of three of the preserved engines in action on various routes taken over the previous two years.

The railway letter service is available on every train operated by the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, although the cost is different due to differing currencies and local postal regulations imposed by the relevant authorities. In Northern Ireland a railway letter costs 20p or 22p, plus the normal national/international stamp whereas in the Republic of Ireland the fee is IR£1.23, again plus the prevailing international postage rate. There is also a facility to transfer letters from the RPSI trains to those operated by NIR and CIÉ.

The following stamps have been issued by the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland for use on trains owned and operated by them.

16th May 1981

- 3 stamps with face value of 20p each in sheets of 9.
- Perforated 14.
- Fluorescent coated, no watermark, pva gum.
- Multi-colour offset litho.
- Designed by Peter McBride
- Printed by Format Security, London.
- Quantity printed: 4,200 sheets.
- The three featured engines were:
 - No.171 “Slieve Gullion”, an S class 4-4-0 built in 1913 for the Great Northern Railway (Ireland).
 - No.186, a J15 class 0-6-0 built in 1879 for the Great Southern and Western Railway.
 - No.4, a WT class 2-6-4T built in 1947 for the Northern Counties Committee of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway.

12th December 1981

- As original sheet, but with an additional overprint of three bars and the value expressed in Irish Currency, the overprint was in red. The values were increased to IR£0.33.
- Overprinting was done by M.M.T. (Printers) Ltd., Belfast.
- A total of 1,450 sheets were treated in this manner.
- The issue coincided with a steam train run at Mullingar, Co. Westmeath.

1st August 1982

- The original sheet was overprinted with the legend “Portrush Flyer”, and the value changed from 20p to 22p.
- Overprinted in black by M.M.T. (Printers) Ltd., Belfast.

- The issue was planned for the last of the annual runs of the “Flyer”
- A total of 500 sheets were so treated.

4th September 1982

- The original sheet was overprinted with the legend “Steam Enterprise” and the value changed from 20p to 22p.
- Overprinting in black by M.M.T. (Printers) Ltd., Belfast.
- The issue was planned for the first of the annual “Steam Enterprise” runs from Belfast to Dublin and return.
- A total of 500 sheets were so treated.

1st September 1984

- As an emergency measure, a very limited number of sheets were overprinted for use on two specific days, the 1st and 15th September 1984, to cover the runs of the “Steam Enterprise” on those dates as the rates for railway letters in the Republic of Ireland were to be brought into line with those of Coras Iompair Éireann.
- The original sheet was overprinted “IR£1”, and the original value obliterated with a solid square.
- Total number of sheets overprinted was 296.
- Overprinting was by M. & O. Printers, Cookstown, Co. Tyrone.

In May 1985 the supply of stamps had reached such a low level that a complete new issue was commissioned and two new sheets were produced:

10th May 1985

- Miniature sheet of 8 stamps in a horizontal format of 4 x 2.
- Face value 20p each stamp.

11th May 1985

- Miniature sheet of four stamps in a block of four.
- Face value IR£1.23 each stamp.
- Both May 1985 issues were designed by Messrs McBride, Kitts and McCorkell, with production by TAN AM AC Limited of Ottawa.
- Printing and perforating by Dollco Printing and the Canadian Bank Note Company, both of Ottawa, in five colours offset litho.
- Paper: No watermark security paper, pva gum, perf 13% comb, no plate or cylinder numbers. 8976 sheets were printed.

ALL THOSE YEARS AGO

Sam Somerville

I suppose I was a natural progression for the primary school pupil who spent most of his out of school time train spotting at the then picturesque Finaghy station on the Great Northern main line during the late sixties to take an interest in, and for a while participate with, the activities of the RPSI. Like many of those of my generation, the “new wave post steam one” you might say, who never actually saw a Mogul in full flight on the NCC or, in my own case, had only a hazy memory of the much loved “Derry Road” of the GNR (sitting in a musty old coach whilst travelling over the snow covered Sperrins behind either

an S or a Q class loco in 1963), my introduction to the infant RPS1 in October 1967 was one that, with hindsight, I felt transcended my own schoolboy perception of both time and railway history.

Sure enough, I knew things were changing and two years earlier on Saturday 13th February 1965, I was in a very unhappy mood after my late father had decreed that I attend a Sunday School presentation award ceremony rather than he and I making one more nostalgic trip down to his in-laws in Fermanagh with the first and most enjoyable section being the rail journey to Omagh. Despite that, and the fact a man named Craig wanted the whole lot shut down, the railway as I saw it was a living breathing entity with those big black steam locos still around. To the old school, steam had all but gone from the Great Northern in 1967, but to those such as myself, the year of Sergeant Pepper and endless summer days saw me making almost daily visits to Lisburn as soon as school finished (sometimes in a two-car AEC with the "Doodlebug" driving trailer, our own 586, leading) in order to see a Jeep, usually 3 or 10, shunting ballast wagons. Such an event to me was a common occurrence that could not end unless that man Craig got his way. Being so, it was strange I thought that grown-ups, who like myself shared a passion for railways, could be seen in a state of exuberant joyfulness when I joined them for the trip with No.186 from York Road to Dundalk Barrack Street and back. Did they know something I didn't and what was all this clicking of watches about? At that stage, steam locos on ballasts, the spoil trains or Sunday School excursions seemed to be such an integral part of the embryonic NIR that my attention was instead drawn in 1968 to the hell-raising runs the new Hampshire sets (the 70 class) were doing over the far from perfect track on the NCC main line to Londonderry. The warning signs that steam was to go were nevertheless to be seen and within months, young enthusiasts such as Jim Edgar and Michael Stevenson (and myself) started to enjoy travel behind steam as much as we did our rail runabout marathons up and down the Derry line with the 70 class diesel electrics.

The year 1968 I recall was a particularly good one for the mischievous side of us. The numerous ECS workings in the afternoons to Portrush were always steam and it was with delight that we would find out about a working from Waterside goods yard (on one occasion with loco 55 and eleven bogies) or cross one on the single line north of Ballymena. If both trains stopped at the loop, then out of the diesel we would jump and then round and into the steam train. En route to the Port, we sometimes filled whatever plastic bags we could find with water and hurled them out at the numerous crossings. The diplomacy needed for travel on steam trains today hadn't yet arrived; after all we were barely eleven or twelve years old!

Whilst we younger ones didn't look upon it with any great degree of nostalgia, the aforementioned warning signs that it was soon to end continued, one of them being the same men who used to hang around the ticket barriers at York Road most days at around 5:15 as Jim Edgar and myself would make our way off the Hampshire just in from Derry in the hope of equalling our eleven minute running record to Great Victoria Street station in order to catch the 5:35 to Portadown, usually a seven car BUT set. It was only later that I discovered those men were waiting on the famous 5:30 down to Lame Harbour in the hope of getting steam. They too realised that past and present blended together very nicely on NIR that year, the difference being that they knew it was the final chapter of Irish steam in company service whilst I only thought something was going to happen in a few years time.

[PHOTOGRAPH]

Coleraine, May 1950. NCC Mogul No.90 "Duke of Abercorn" sits with her train - just six years before being withdrawn for scrap. (G.W. Sharpe collection)

Whilst steam had always held and still holds a certain mystique for me, my interest in railways was, and still is, based on a broad conception of what it actually is that attracts most readers of Five Foot Three to this mode of transportation. Locomotives, signalling, architecture, etc., all combine, I feel, to produce that something that makes railways so fascinating and it was perhaps the impact of all these aspects that resulted in me not taking the writing on the wall about the end of steam so literally. That said however is not to suggest that the atmosphere of steam didn't produce a deep impression in my mind, indeed I decided to join the RPSI in the early seventies. The main watershed that made me acknowledge the sheer power badly maintained locomotives could produce with professional men on the footplate came retrospectively years later when I read the words of Mac Arnold in his book "NCC Saga". In it, Mac dwelt upon the human side of what I witnessed and in doing so paid a rightful tribute to the unsung heroes who are still making it possible for us to savour the delights of the true professionalism that still exists among the NIR footplatemen at York Road station.

As is perhaps clear by now, my earliest memory of the RPSI is not of the RPSI itself but more so of the sense of change that had taken place during the formative years of the Society. Having witnessed that change towards the end of the sixties, and seen what was to be lost forever, one can understand the degree of dedication of our founding members and the expert application that evolved from it, that in order to preserve the memories of myself and of the others who, likewise, look upon the last days of company steam in Ireland as, ironically, being amongst the best.

For many years those few enthusiasts of my generation whose interest was based on more than steam have felt to some degree detached from the Society as other aspects of the evolving railway scene in Northern Ireland seemed to be ignored. It was understandable at times, given the continuous modernisation that for many, myself included, denuded the railway of whatever interest it once had. That said however, it has been an interesting development in recent years to acknowledge that even the diesels RPSI members may have disliked for many years are in fact becoming historical in themselves. As I write this, the Society is one week away from running a farewell tour to the 70 class railcars, arguably the most successful units ever to run in the country. It is fitting that such a tribute be made to the trains that probably saved the Derry line from closure fifteen years ago. The Society has, in more ways than one, come of age. Here's hoping for the next twenty one years!

BRANGSCHBAHNEN, LEIPZIG

Charles Friel

Readers of the Cork 800 Railtour Brochure will have seen mention of the narrow gauge line running at an exhibition in Cork between May and October 1932. The line was referred to in Walter McGrath's excellent book "Some Industrial Railways of Ireland" (Cork, 1959) and in Volume Two of Alan McCutcheon's "Railway History in Pictures: Ireland" (David & Charles 1970).

The brochure repeated the known information; that the line was worked by two German 4-6-2 tender engines of main line outline (rather like the RH&DR locos are miniatures of main line prototypes). The reference in the brochure prompted Lance King, long-time Society member and Editor of Continental Railway Journal, to draw our attention to CRJ No.57. A short article in that issue by John R. Batts outlines the known details of Continental 15 inch gauge locos. With Lance's permission, some of the CRJ material is used here.

[PHOTOGRAPH]

Cork Industrial Fair and Exhibition line. Loco 1 works a four coach train on a blustery, overcast day in June 1932. The engines and rolling stock returned to Germany the following October. (Walter McGrath collection)

John Batts quotes details of seventeen 15-inch locos built by Lokomotivfabrik Krauss and Comp, Munchen (Anglice: Munich) between 1926 and 1929.

One of the Cork engines, Mr. Batts believes, was Krauss Works No.8351 of 1926, originally delivered to Gewerbe Ausstellung, Dusseldorf where it ran as No.1. By the end of the Second World War the loco was owned by E. Brangsch GmbH, Feldbahnbedarf, Engelsdorf bei Leipzig. Mr. Batts suggests that they may have been the owners throughout. The Cork loco, and its two sisters (8352 and 8353 also of 1926), were later purchased by the Dresden municipality (Rat der Stadt Dresden) for their new Pioniereisenbahn in the Grosser Garten which opened on 1st June 1950. The three locos are believed to be still running there.

Mr. Batts suggests that the other Cork engine was either one of the 1926 sisters or one of two engines built in 1928 (8444 or 8445).

These 1928 locos were probably identical to the 1926 ones and originally went to E Brangsch as Leipzig Nos. 1 and 2 and both these locos are still in existence. Loco 8444 is now running on the Leipzig Pioniereisenbahn as, perhaps, 03.1001.1. Sister 8445 passed from Brangsch to the Liliputbahn im Prater, Wien (Anglice : Vienna) in 1942. There it became No.3 but was converted to diesel in 1961/2.

Did any of our readers happen to fill an idle Sunday afternoon in either Leipzig or Dresden seeking out the local Pioniereisenbahnen? Any information or photos would be most welcome. Or maybe Herr Wagner's superb Pacifics were just too enthralling; certainly that was the case with myself.

A third Krauss loco with Irish connections is still at work and a lot closer to home than Leipzig or Dresden. No.8378 was delivered to the Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway in 1926 where it ran as No.4 "The Bug". In 1934, however, the loco was sold to Belfast Corporation Transport Department and used on the short line at Bellevue Zoo. It ran there until 1950 and lay out of use for many years before going for scrap to Eastwoods in Andersonstown. Fortunately the loco wasn't cut up but lay buried under other scrap until 1969 when it was discovered, rescued and eventually made its way back into service on the RH&DR where it sees occasional use. Our picture shows the loco shortly after arrival in Belfast - complete with jolly staff. What other pictures and memories are there of this Ulster Liliputbahn?

My best thanks go to Walter McGrath for publishing details of the Cork line and ready help with illustrations and to Lance King and John Batts for bringing this new information to my (and now to your) attention. Now it's over to you.

[PHOTOGRAPH]

Belfast Zoo - Krupp loco "Jean" shortly after the line opened in 1934. Has The loco got vacuum gear? Identification of the crew and/or further information on the line are eagerly sought. (Real Photographs Limited X5480)

COMING OF AGE

Sullivan Boomer

It all started in 1961 or 1962 I suppose. But although it seems only yesterday, it is really a quarter of a century ago, and so I suppose I had better try to set the scene, as it was at that time. After all, there will be some of you who are reading this who were not even born then!

Although CIÉ had started their diesellisation programme in the early 1950s, the locomotives were delivered between 1954 and 1957 when there was still an extensive track mileage, and although steam locomotives rapidly disappeared from the main line duties, the plethora of branches ensured the survival of a large number of engines, particularly the ubiquitous J15 class. By 1960, however, when the first series of General Motors engines started to arrive, the B121 single-enders, many of these small branches had disappeared, and only a few steam engines survived on ballast duties.

Railway preservation had started with the narrow gauge lines in Wales during the fifties, but by 1960 the Bluebell Railway was in existence, the Keighley and Worth Valley was being negotiated, and British Railways (as it then was) had said that steam traction would be gone before the end of the decade.

Although the situation in Northern Ireland was unsettled, with threats of a total closure of all railways continually being sounded off, the Belfast Transport Museum had started its collection of railway exhibits, and it appeared that something would be saved for posterity, although perhaps not in working order. The Belfast Corporation which had shown such foresight was, however, in a rather impecunious state so far as the upkeep of the railway exhibits was concerned, and as a result some enthusiasts formed themselves into an ad hoc grouping known as the 'Friends of Belfast Transport Museum' and started to carry out some basic preventative maintenance on the exhibits which were stored in Witham Street. (It is ironic to realise over 25 years later that the short term storage is still the Museum, although the Ulster Folk Museum and Transport Museum still talk of moving the exhibits to the Cultra site - but the pros and cons of the wisdom of that scheme are a totally different story!)

Such then was the basic situation which existed when some half dozen of us who were involved at Witham Street got together one night and discussed the possibility of starting up a Railway Preservation Society in Ireland. To be truthful, we virtually wrote off anything South of Dublin, and the furthest extent of our thoughts was that if we could run a few railtours, it might be possible to persuade the Ulster Transport Authority to keep a steam engine and a piece of track which could eventually be developed into another

Bluebell type of scheme. At any rate it would be a start, but as we were all still at school, we would have to prepare our case very thoroughly if anyone was going to listen to us.

We did our homework on the idea, and as we discussed it further, so the future of the railway looked a little more assured. The Benson Report did away with freight traffic, but emphasised keeping passenger services open on the suburban lines and the GNR and NCC main lines. (It also advocated a Central Station, first proposed in a GOVERNMENT report in 1935!) Eventually we decided that a base could be set up, an engine purchased, and steam hauled railtours could be continued for at least another ten years, if we were lucky. We met at the old Excursion Station at Whitehead one summer evening in 1964, decided that it would be a suitable place to start, and took the decision to launch the RPSI. Seven students with an awful lot of hope!

Well, as you know, a public meeting was called at the end of September 1964, and the Society was formally set up. It was 1965 when we first managed to do anything, and that was a railtour, hauled by an ex-Great Northern UG class locomotive from York Road up the NCC main line to Portrush, then back via the goods only line from Antrim to Lisburn. At Glenavy we staged the first ever run-past in Ireland, which the BBC filmed, and which they showed in "Transport of Delight". At Lisburn the 'Big Surprise' was waiting; a double-headed run to Portadown and back to Great Victoria Street with Nos. 171 and 207! Within a couple of months we had negotiated a lease for No.171 of £40 per year, which we still pay, and the other two locomotives had been withdrawn, and were subsequently cut up, as we could not afford to buy them.

[PHOTOGRAPH]

*The Guinness engine sits outside the 'Old Shed' at Whitehead, 17th April 1969.
(C.P. Friel)*

Meanwhile our pleas had not fallen on deaf ears in other quarters, as during 1965 we were presented with the Guinness locomotive, No.3BG, and early in 1966 CIÉ presented us with a J15 class locomotive, No.186, which was towed up to Adelaide shed and subsequently worked round to York Road so that we could start to work on her. By 1967 she was sufficiently back in traffic to join a company engine, No.4, on the Dalriada tour to Portrush, which took advantage of the fact that the branch had very little traffic on it outside the high season summer months. We were therefore able to run a double-header to Portrush, after which the train was split, and each locomotive worked a shuttle service, crossing frequently at Portstewart, and exploring just about every combination and permutation that was possible, before the trains were recombined at Coleraine in the evening for the return home.

By 1968 we were even more certain of our abilities, and operated our first two-day tour, this time to Athlone, and again with two engines, the Society's No.186 and Northern Ireland Railways No.4. It caused a problem which we had not foreseen, however, and one which fortunately has never happened since. The NIR crew on No.4 refused to get off their engine in Dublin, and insisted that they would only take a pilot driver on to Athlone. The CIÉ crew refused to accept this, because they wanted to work a steam engine, and so a stalemate ensued, which was only resolved by our old friend Frank Dunlop, who with the agreement of the CIÉ Inspector, split all the crews in two and put a mix of NIR and CIÉ men on both locomotives!

1968 was the year when No.171 had its first overhaul and came back from Harland and Wolff's shipyard sporting a small bright metal plate on the valance which was certainly not original, and which proclaimed that the shipyard had carried out a rebuild. Indeed they had done quite a lot, including realigning the frames, and had set the valves using compressed air. Alas, they forgot that one of the properties of steam, particularly when it has been superheated, is thermal expansion. As a result the valve timing was wrong, and took quite a while to get correctly set. Thus by 1969 we had no less than three working locomotives on our fleet.

Of course, progress has always been slow, and the Society motto might nearly be "Slow but Sure". It was the early 1970s before the NCC tank locomotive joined our fleet, and at about the same time we bought our first coaches. Since then there is not much that needs highlighted, since you will all no doubt be aware of our continued policy of purchasing suitable historic and, in some cases, more modern rolling stock to provide the necessary back-up to our operations. We have developed our fund raising activities since the end of the sixties, and have progressively introduced on-train catering and bar service on all operations. Additional motive power has joined our locomotive stud, with Nos. 184 and 461 on permanent loan from CIÉ. No.27 purchased by the Society from a former Chairman, and the Avonside shunter No.3 "R.H. Smyth" (affectionately known as 'Harvey'!) having been purchased from a member in Portstewart for the princely sum of £1.

The Society has been continually growing and developing, and is now well beyond the wildest dreams that I and those other founding members had back in 1964 when the whole thing was set in motion. But what does the future hold for us? Will we continue as we have done for the next umpteen years, or will there be fresh challenges to face? I am sure that the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland is here to stay, and I am equally confident that it will continue to be respected by the preservation movement and the railway companies for its high standard of professionalism. Our past gives us a lot to live up to, but we can do it!

Happy 21st Birthday, RPSI! Here's to your next 21 years!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Mr. Edgar,

As a member of the Society I am delighted that the Cork tour was such an outstanding commercial success and trust future trips will be equally successful. As a participant I am appreciative of the vast amount of work that must have gone into the planning and execution of such a tour.

In consequence, I do not find it easy to write this letter, but as one of the forgotten few who were stranded at the Airport Hotel on the Sunday morning I did find it somewhat galling to read in the News-Sheet of the tremendous spectacle provided by the double-header on the climb out of Cork, as indeed photographs already published confirm.

Whilst waiting for that belated bus I felt some anxiety as to whether the lineside bus would be held for us at Glanmire but I do not think it occurred to any of us that the Special itself would fail to wait. Accepting that VIP guests were aboard, the claims of participants should surely have had priority and a late start of half an hour would not have impeded any following traffic and could easily have been recouped en route to Dublin.

Yes, it was an excellent and enjoyable trip, but a pity that some people were deprived of its "highlight".

Yours sincerely,

S.C. Nash

Eastbourne

The Operations Officer Replies:

I sympathise with Mr Nash and the other tour participants who were stranded in the "Cork Airport" and "Fairy Lawn" hotels but perhaps if I explain the situation it will help them to understand the predicament we found ourselves in. First and foremost, the railway companies operate our trains - not the RPSI.

As you probably know, the stranded passengers could not get through to Cork Station because the telephone was switched to an answering machine. The first we knew of the problem was as the whistles were blowing for departure. A CIÉ official approached me with the news and I immediately requested that the train should be held till we at least knew what the situation was regarding the stranded passengers. I was advised by the inspector that the train could only be held for a few minutes and that it would take at least 15 minutes by bus to get the people from the hotel to the station, assuming they had got a bus. They were intending to dispatch the train and provide the bus which would catch up at Mallow.

In the light of subsequent events the decision to dispatch the train was probably correct. Other considerations were as follows:

- 1. In a supplement to the weekly notice issued on the Thursday before the Tour, CIÉ had organised two additional special trains on the Cork line, and it became vitally important to us to run to time. We HAD to reach Portarlington on schedule AND complete our locomotive servicing in the allotted time.*
- 2. Unknown to us until that morning, another special had been organised, for which no timetable path was available. This train actually followed us 'on the block' into Dublin, and any delay would have resulted in our train being shunted, which would have put off our arrival at Connolly until late evening, with imaginable effect on onward transport connections for those leaving the Tour at that stage.*

There were a number of other considerations as well, but these were the primary ones, and I hope that Mr. Nash will realise from this that the decision to proceed on time was not taken lightly; if it is any comfort several Society officials involved in the organising of the Tour also missed the bus to Rathpeacon while sorting out this difficulty. I hope that it did not spoil the Tour for those passengers who were stranded, and that they enjoyed the rest of the weekend enough to join us again on the Clew Bay Tour to Westport in 1986.

[INSIDE REAR COVER]

The headboard says it all. Diehard 'steam only' men would do well to remember that these "River" class DEMUs probably saved railways in Northern Ireland from extinction. No.75 "River Maine" waits at York Road Station to depart with the "Farewell To The 70s" special. (C.A. Boomer)

[OUTSIDE REAR COVER]

*Ex GNR (I) 4-4-0 No.85 "Merlin" approaching Crumlin on the 23rd November 1985.
(C.P. Friel)*