

FIVE FOOT THREE



Magazine of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland

FIVE FOOT THREE

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Editor: Nelson Poots

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

Front Cover: "R H Smyth", in its new identity as "RPSI No.3", on the Up line between Mossley and Monkstown. (W.T. Scott)

EDITORIAL

Now that the media and business interests have finally ceased trying to persuade us that last year marked the dawn of a new century, we can look back on what was really the end of an old one.

An interesting development, proving that the Society is not unwilling to embrace new technology in pursuit of the old, was the setting up by Paul McCann and Philip Lockett of a website on the Internet to publish Bulletins whereby interested persons can now get up to date information on the doings of the RPSI in particular and Irish railways in general. As part of this enterprise a start was made on the reproduction of the back numbers of Five Foot Three, so that it will eventually be possible to join the select band of those who possess a full set. Unedited copies of the notorious No.2 issue, which contained some material so potentially actionable that it had to be obliterated with black markers prior

to posting, will remain a collector's item!

Just to show that much older dogs than the Editor can still learn new tricks, the octogenarian author of "Comments and Recollections" has recently acquired a computer. However, like the Editor, when it becomes recalcitrant he finds it frustrating that its only moving parts are buttons. For the sake of his continued good health, one must hope that he is more even-tempered than the writer.



Seniority in action. Having decided that a younger member should familiarise himself with No.171's bogie oiling points, the Editor mans the oil pump. (P.A. Scott)

Whether via Internet, grapevine or otherwise, there cannot be many members now who are not aware of the big event of the past year, namely the use of our 0-6-0ST "R.H. Smyth" on the reinstatement of the section of the former NCC main line between Bleach Green and Antrim. This was truly a history-making event. From time to time cross-Channel groups have tried to recreate the past by arranging for a preserved loco to shunt a coal yard for a day or two, but this was the real thing. Here was a 1928 industrial loco, only cleaned enough to remove the worst of the grime and decorated only with the accoutrements essential to its daily toil, working substantial loads over often considerable distances on a daily basis.

Despite its antiquity, the loco returned home with the proud record of having been the only major item of plant on the site to complete its duties without a single failure. It would be an interesting exercise for railway historians to trace the last occasion on which a contractor's steam locomotive was used in the laying of a main line. Accounts of the operation can be read elsewhere in this issue.

Keen-eyed readers will in due course observe that, by a curious coincidence, both the Belfast and Dublin based Santa trains had problems due to landslides. Fortunately, these caused no harm to our trains or passengers and the one on the Larne line happened after the very last train of the programme. By an even more curious coincidence, in November the Editor received a request for assistance from a gentleman who is writing a book about disruption of railways by natural events such as landslides. As they would say in these parts, he must have put a "scud" on us!

The events of 2000 resulted in the Editor temporarily becoming something of a multi-headed monster,

at one stage holding the additional roles of Treasurer, loco driver and, for a mercifully short period, rostering officer. Life has since returned to a more normal pattern, hopefully enabling the magazine to appear at its appointed time.

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

Norman Foster

During a year when many of our planned operations were unable to be fulfilled, there were still many bright days out and about. The unfulfilled days were due to modernisation in both ends of the country. Nevertheless, the trains that ran were of great interest and were well patronised.

The decision to run a lot more local trains in the Belfast area was indeed a great success and I had the opportunity to travel on most when they did not clash with our southern operations.

Once again our International two/three/four/five day tour was a success, though using in the main Cravens carriages. The return of Steam Enterprise trains proved their popularity and those who were on the September train will remember No.85's climbing of the hills for a long time to come.

We were delighted on 18th October to welcome the President of the Republic of Ireland, Mrs Mary McAleese, to launch the former State Coach 351 back into traffic. After the launch the President travelled to Dun Laoghaire on the train hauled by No.461. Our President welcomed Mrs McAleese who was very impressed by the RPSI operations, both North and South.

I would like to thank the members of Council and, indeed, those on sub-committees for all their devoted work during the year. They put in so much work when with a little extra help their tasks would have been much easier. If there are more people out there who can give even one day I am sure it would be more than welcome.

Your Council gets older every year, yes, even your Chairman, so come and give a hand. We have an intensive programme of operations planned for the coming year and I look forward to meeting you all. Finally, I would like to say a personal word of thanks to the Southern catering crew for their great efforts and to welcome our two new recruits, Tony and Fergus. Tony had slipped a word on the return empty carriages Enterprise train so they got roped in.

NEWS FROM COUNCIL

Paul McCann

So much new in 2000, and yet so much the same.

What was the same?

- The depressing rows at the AGM. Hopefully, this will be addressed in the future as a committee has been set up to review all aspects of the Society's Articles and Memorandum, especially in the areas where they might be amended to better address employment policy, AGM notices, elections to Council, membership arrears, etc.

The employment issue arose when two possible conflicts of interest arose among Council members, one of which has resolved itself with the member withdrawing from Council. There is also the situation to be considered where an ordinary member is sub-contracted by the Society. Notice to the members of candidates for election to Council was also found to be a contentious issue, and this needs resolving.

- The lack of day-to-day manpower leads us to run trains with one or two on-board marshals where one time there would have been one per carriage. Some very popular trains have run without sales persons on board to sell flags, whistles, etc., to willing children. The carriage situation at Whitehead is becoming critical, with no volunteers attending for most of the year.
- Two vacancies on Council this year meant that Northern Operations and Northern Carriage &

Wagon were badly served.

- There is an ever-increasing uncertainty about what the future holds for the Society. For instance, it is hard to commit to obtaining redundant NIR Mk2 coaches because of the cost of converting locomotives to operate their air brakes. Availability of Iarnród Éireann Cravens always seems to be two or three years down the road, but that has been the case for five years now. Meanwhile our wooden coaches get by on the minimum necessary to keep them safe as it is hard to commit to major expenditure when we don't know for how long we will be able to run them on even the minority of lines on which they are currently allowed. Hopes might have been raised when two Mk2 carriages arrived at Whitehead early in the year, but they still belong to NIR and it is possible that the bogies will have to be returned.
- The operating agreement with NIR is up for possible review in the near future, while IÉ is threatened with break up into a track authority and operating companies. Even if the latter doesn't happen a new Inspectorate/Safety authority is being set up, with possible consequences for the Society. The outcome from neither region is likely to make it easier for the Society to operate.

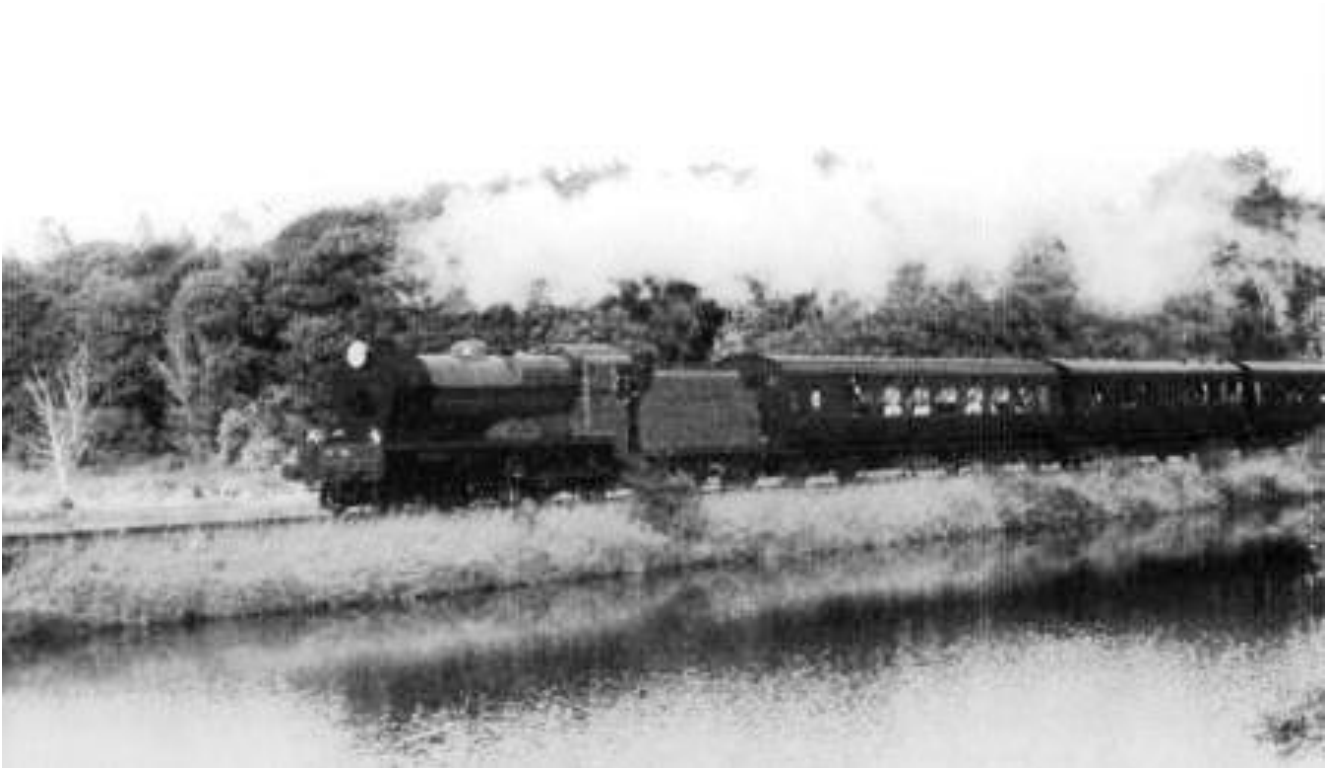


No.85 crosses the former “Ten Arches” viaduct at Mallow on 14th May 2000. This structure, which replaced that damaged in the 1920s Troubles, is impressive rather than beautiful. (W.T. Scott)

- Costs continue to rise, especially when more and more work, formerly carried out by volunteer labour, has to be sub-contracted out. However, it is recognised that, even where volunteers are available, the more formal nature of the work nowadays means that some is better centralised. Some of the administrative burden of Dublin Operations has been undertaken by an office service, Ashgrove House of Dun Laoghaire, for a few years now. In 2000, a similar service was requested by Belfast Operations, and Wilma Cairns of Larne now oversees this for us. Wilma has also taken on some of the day-to-day book-keeping for the Treasurer, and has become the voice behind the Society's answering service. While those running the Society in Whitehead and Dublin are thankful for these services they come at a price - the cost of wages and accommodation, hence the decision for the rather steep rise in subscription rates this year. It is hoped that members realise they are still

getting good value from the Society and understand why there had to be an increase - it does come with the usual promise to try to keep the same rates for as long as possible.

Along with the increase came a change in bank to allow internet access to standing order payments made by members. It is understandable that members are reluctant to change standing orders - after all they are supposed to make life simpler. However, consider the grief your Secretary has each year in which a change is made, when a large percentage of members fail to upgrade their payments. Each and every one has to be chased up with an individual letter to the member concerned. This year a letter explaining the situation in full went out in good time to each member with a standing order and it is hoped that each one will be heeded. Only time will tell.



No.85 on the causeway at Magheramorne en route to Larne Harbour on the NIR-sponsored “Save our Railways” trip on 27th July 2000. (W.T. Scott)

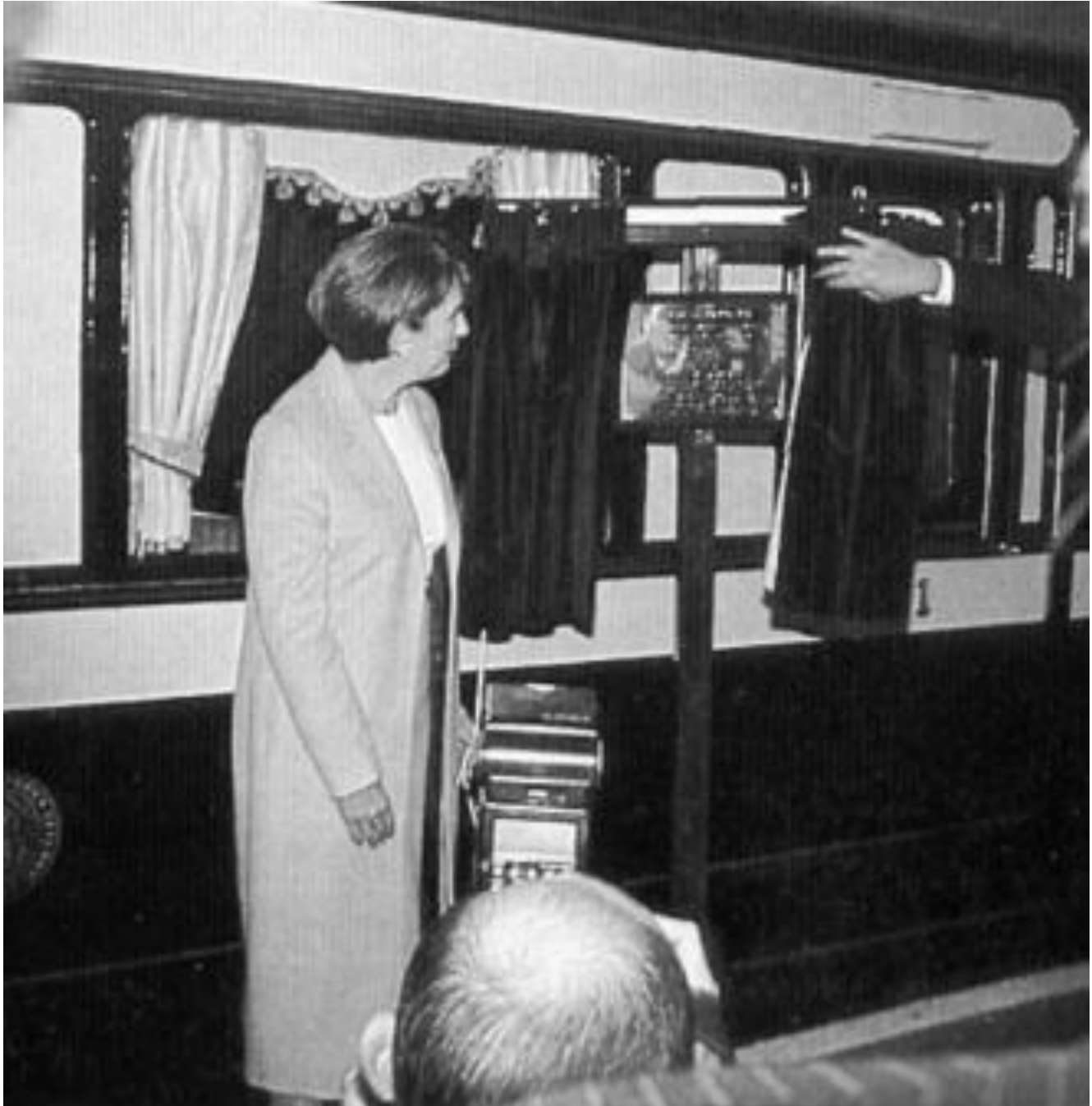
That’s all the gripes and depressing items behind us. Now, what was new and different?

- Probably the most exciting news of the year was that one of the Society’s locomotives was earning its keep magnificently doing a real railway job - No.3 “R.H. Smyth” spent five months laying ballast on NIR’s newly relaid Antrim to Bleach Green section of the old NCC main line. Late in 1999 things were on a high following the successful lease of six converted carriage underframes to contractors relaying the Lisburn-Belfast main line and, more recently, the Belfast Central line. Council was aware that the NCC relaying was in the offing but that the nature of the project was different, with a closed line, double track gauge to lay a single line, and excellent access for road vehicles. This was confirmed in November 1999 when it was established that our vehicles were not required. It was not until late May that an approach was made about the possible provision of a locomotive to haul a ballast train. Things moved very quickly after that, and the rest is now history - a story for someone else to tell, hopefully.
- The political aspect of the Save Our Railways campaign in the North is not something that the Society would normally get involved with. But for once, not only were we asked by Translink to

lend our weight to the campaign, but it became apparent that our very existence in the North was under threat when one of the options put forward for the railway was the closure of the Larne line beyond Carrickfergus. In the end it became clear that, despite the threats to the railway being very real, a bit of scare-mongering had taken place and it now looks like funds will be made available to keep the system intact, without any closures.

- The Irish State Carriage 351 was returned to traffic with a launch by President Mary McAleese on 18th October. It was hoped that a new FAS scheme, in conjunction with CIÉ/IÉ at Inchicore would have been set up to provide a continuity of work following 351 leaving the shops. This was not to be, but negotiations are still continuing to put in place a heritage vehicle restoration programme there.
- Another old friend from more recent years returned when the “Steam Enterprise” ran twice, in April and September. Due to the co-operation of IÉ in making a set of coaches available, we returned with our first public excursion to Dublin since the 1980s.
- In only the second year of running the “Bangor Belle” and “Broomstick Belle” trips, full trains were to be seen on each occasion. These new short-haul trains appear to be what the public want and, even with the relaying of the Portrush branch, it is unlikely that we will see a return to the annual programme of four “Portrush Flyer” trains in 2001.
- There have been a healthy number of charter trains running from Belfast and Dublin and this is an excellent form of operation, with guaranteed money and no hassle of publicising the trains and selling tickets.
- On the locomotive front: No.4 nears completion, with a return to traffic due in 2001; No.186 has entered the works; and No.184 has come to join her sister in the North for the first time. Meanwhile, it is promised that GNR No.131 is to be restored (and the Society has tendered for the job) but no funds are yet available to do so.
- Philip Lockett has put substantial work into making the Society’s internet web site the true asset to the Society that it now is. A substantial number of new members and train bookings have arrived by this route, especially after a concerted effort was made to increase our presence on the most popular search engines - thanks to member Barry Lloyd for his help there. An up-to-date list of our operations is maintained, along with a short history and photograph of each and every one of our locomotives and carriages. A recent innovation has been the provision of early editions of Five Foot Three for members and the public to read. Scanners are wonderful labour saving devices of modern technology, but they are unfortunately unable to cope with the typewriters and copying apparatus used by Drew Donaldson and his team on the very early issues, and this has entailed the Secretary in long nights at the keyboard. Thankfully, after the first few issues, the quality of the journals improved and scanning technology has taken over.
- Allied to the web site is the recently introduced e-mail bulletin service, which operates on an ad hoc basis as and when news arises. This grew out of the Save Our Railways and ballast train situation during the early months of the summer. News on these issues was arriving nearly on a daily basis and, with a number of months between each News-Letter, it was felt that members would appreciate being kept up to date. There was a circle of Society members who were known to have access to e-mail, and they were provided with the news as it happened. A small trickle of members joined as and when they happened to contact the Society via e-mail, but the big push came with the August News-Letter when an invitation to join was made to the membership at large. Subsequently, very encouraging feedback was received, and the number of members receiving this service is now over 150.

- The new 25 year lease for the Whitehead site was agreed after a year of on-off negotiations with our landlord, Carrickfergus Borough Council. The delay was due mainly to concerns regarding rights of way onto the platform.
- Work continues to ensure that the locomotive workshop is adequately fitted out. 2000 saw the completion of the overhead crane installation, plus concrete flooring put in alongside the running line. Flooring from the old Sirocco Works has been obtained and fitting of this began in December 2000.
- For some reason, Council meetings have become more business-like and productive this year - long may that continue!



President McAleese unveils the memorial plaque on State Coach 351. (C.P. Friel)

Membership figures were up again for 2000, being 1,036 against 1,009 in 1999. The membership breakdown was: Northern Ireland, 383 (up); Republic of Ireland, 346 (up); Great Britain, 276 (up); Overseas, 31 (down). Alternatively: Adult, 716 (up); Senior, 195 (up); Junior, 17 (down by 33%); Family 26 (up); Life 64; Honorary, 13; Societies 5. The number of Senior members continues to increase significantly, but the disappointing figure this year is the reduction from 25 to 17 in Junior membership - very worrying, and the main reason why the increase in the subscription rate was not as high for this category as it might otherwise have been.

As is customary in these pages, I must thank those who helped Council cope with the burden of management: Marsh Ltd - insurance brokers; Ashgrove House - ticketing and phone service; Wilma Cairns - ticketing, book-keeping, phone answering and general secretarial services.

Within the Society the Posts of Special Responsibility to the Secretary for 2000 were: Charles Friel (Belfast Meetings); Nelson Poots ("Five Foot Three" Editor); Johnny Glendinning (Museums Liaison Officer); Philip Lockett (Web Manager). There is no official Legal Advisor as such but John Creaner was always there to have his ear unofficially bent if required. Other unofficial, but still useful posts, were Peter Rigney - provider of southern input to the Society news machine; Barry Carse collector and collator of membership payments from the south.

Thanks also to all those members who served on the various sub-committees, allowing us Council members to serve from on high!

And finally to the management and staff of Iarnród Éireann and Northern Ireland Railways without whom ...

LOCOMOTIVE REPORT

Peter Scott

No.3: LPHC 0-6-0ST shunting loco. In traffic, Whitehead.

When writing both last year's and the previous year's reports, I searched with indifferent results for something interesting to say about this, the smallest of our operational steam locos. I actually hinted that something unusual might happen in the year 2000. (I don't quite know why I said that - possibly some hidden prompting from the demented paper clip that pops up and performs gyrations in the bottom right corner of the monitor. Those familiar with "Windows 98" will know what I am talking about!) *[I do, and have often wished the wretched thing to be gyrating in the bottom right hand corner of a firebox! - Ed.]*

Anyway, unusual things certainly did happen in 2000. In June we were approached by Henry Boot (Railtech) Ltd, the contractor constructing the trackwork for the Bleach Green to Antrim railway reinstatement, who enquired if we could supply a steam loco for hauling ballast wagons for a period of several months. An investigation into the economics of the operation and the availability of both loco and personnel indicated that No.3 could handle the work and that the contract would be a viable one.

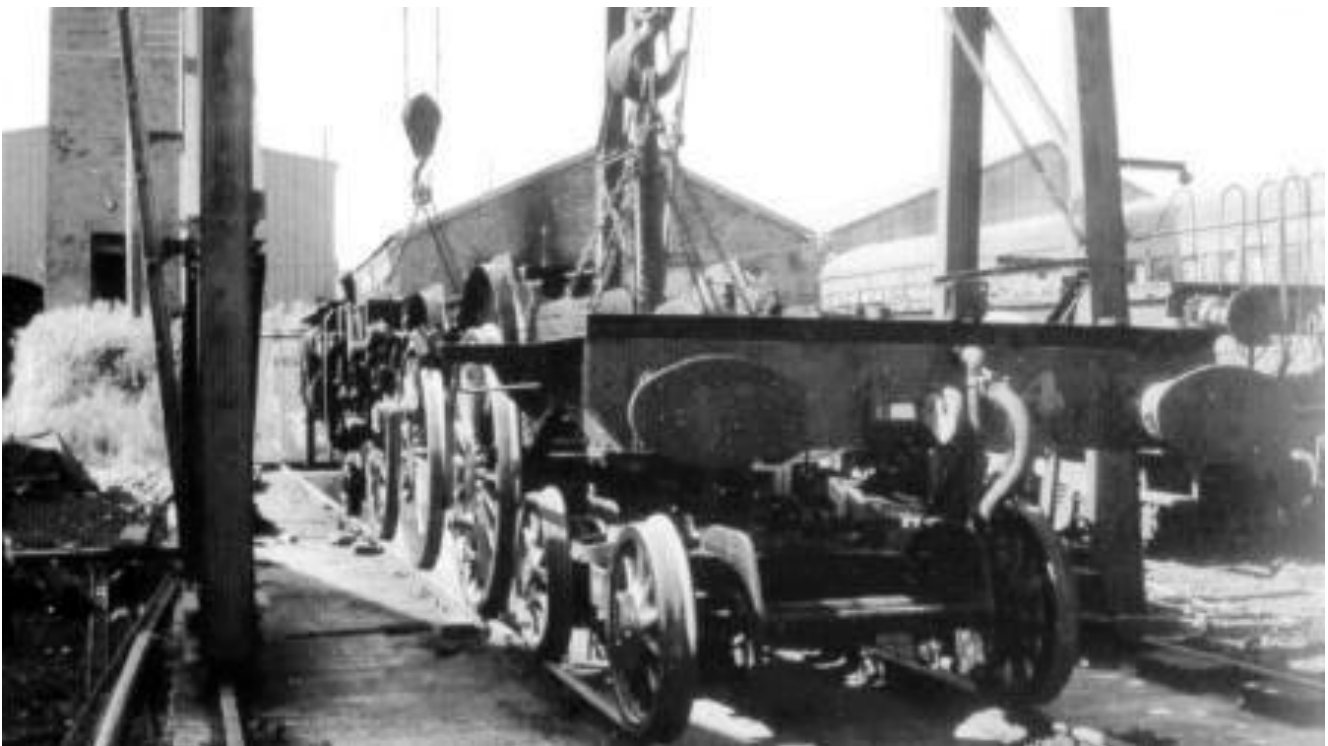
Things moved exceedingly quickly; loco No.3 was delivered to the site at Muckamore by low loader on 18th June and began work the next day, hauling three "Walrus" ballast hoppers for the discharge of top ballast - first working towards Antrim and then in the Bleach Green direction as the track laying progressed. The operation quickly fell into a routine and after several weeks we might have been doing this for years.

As this story is covered elsewhere, I will only remark here that the loco performed exceedingly well, never missing a planned day's operation for just over 5 months. Slogging around with 180 tons of ballast hopper in tow, with gradients up to 1 in 75, is a good enough recommendation for any small locomotive, not to mention the crew. Mechanical problems were few, although the much needed attention to bearings and the long promised coat of paint are now even more pressing. After moving

something like 50,000 tons of stone No.3 is now back to her menial duties shunting at Whitehead.



Not a field gun, but No.4's pony truck with a large piece of wood on top, being positioned for the re-wheeling of the frames. (P.A. Scott)



Suspended between the two sets of sheer-legs, No.4's frames are carefully lowered on to the wheels. (P.A. Scott)

No.4: Ex LMS NCC 2-6-4T loco. Whitehead - General overhaul.

The protracted overhaul of this locomotive is hopefully now approaching a conclusion. The boiler is back in the frames and most of the working parts are now intact, with only assembly and setting of the valves outstanding. One major job which became necessary was the virtual renewal of both the side tanks, and this set back the completion date very considerably. Originally we had intended to renew only parts of the wasted lower sections of the tanks, but when work was started a different story soon emerged. The blast cleaner revealed extensive corrosion leaving the bottom half of the tanks like a colander, and complete rebuilding became the only sensible course of action. The rear section, including the cab sides and the more complicated framework was retained, together with all the fittings, and the rest was renewed. The original was a curious mixture of riveted and welded construction - seekers after authenticity will be glad to find the same layout of riveted seams. At the time of writing, work has transferred to the coal bunker and the tank beneath it, which was nearly as bad and has been the subject of extensive repairs. Once the tanks, bunker and cab have been assembled, the fittings and pipework will remain as the major outstanding item - that may sound like a minor detail, but experience has shown that more man hours can go into things like door hinges and cylinder fairings than into matters more often associated with a heavy overhaul, like re-profiling wheels or re-tubing boilers. Most of No.4's fittings (things like the vacuum ejector and lubricator) have been overhauled and have just to be installed - together with several miles of piping which needs to be annealed and repaired. But at least the locomotive is looking slightly more as intended and that is encouraging.



Partly assembled No.4 is transferred from the shed to the loco workshop for trial fitting of tanks, bunker and cab. (I.C. Pryce)

No.27: Ex SLNCR 0-6-4T. In store, Whitehead.

No.85: Ex GNR(I) 4-4-0 compound express passenger loco. In traffic, Whitehead.

The compound has been “winterised”, i.e. drained of water after operating most of the “Santa Claus”

trains which ran between Belfast and Whitehead on the weekends leading up to Christmas. Her next major appearance should be the forthcoming May Tour to Galway. No.85 still has two years of current "boiler cert" to run.

No.171: Ex GNR(I) 4-4-0 express passenger loco In Traffic, Whitehead.

Although the location in the heading is correct as the official shed for this loco, at the time of writing No.171 is actually stabled in the "diesel shed" at York Road in Belfast. This was not a planned move, but arose due to a landslip which occurred between Whitehead and Carrickfergus on the last Saturday of the "Santa" operations, the only one worked by No.171. The train became marooned on the wrong side of the slip - fortunately after the last passenger operation. No.171 requires some minor mechanical attention such as new gland rings. Her "boiler cert" is up in one year's time, and extensive boiler and mechanical overhaul will be required at that time.

No.184: Ex GSR 0-6-0 standard goods loco. Whitehead. Requires major repairs.

Due to difficulties with adequately storing and protecting this locomotive at Mullingar, first the tender and then the loco were transported by road to Whitehead. Basic cleaning, dismantling and protection work, which is essential irrespective of the final plans for the loco, is continuing as time permits.



The Planet diesel is about to descend the portable ramp at Whitehead with a much-dismantled No.184. The rails are being sanded in case No.184 should decide to take charge! (P.A. Scott)

No.186: Ex GSR 0-6-0 standard goods loco. Whitehead. General overhaul.

No.184 and No.186 are the last survivors of the ubiquitous J15s of the Great Southern and Western Railway. If choice had been available to us, the swapping of one or other for some different class of Great Southern engine would have been a desirable move - a "400", for example would have been a good bargain, or maybe even a "Midland" engine of which there are no survivors at all. But preservation came too late in Ireland, and short of getting down to build something from scratch, we are stuck with what history has left us. Of course, in the two J class locos we do not have two identical machines - No.184 is close to original condition, whereas No.186 has the extended frames and superheated boiler. No.186 also has the somewhat ungainly but very useful large tender - maybe some

of our readers could enlighten as to what loco, or type of loco, it ran with originally. Restoration plans are loosely to keep No.184 as “original” as possible, and to carry out a basic overhaul of No.186 to have her back in action as quickly as possible. To this end, dismantling of the boiler and working parts is well advanced, and an overhaul plan for the boiler is being finalised. The boiler repairs will include replacement of the front tube plate, partial re-staying of the firebox and restoration of corrosion damage. Of course it all needs money and an appeal is being launched for funds, to which everyone is urged to contribute. Incidentally, if any reader has forgotten what the J15s look like (and this is excusable bearing in mind their long absence from traffic), both figure in last year’s “Five Foot Three” - although No.184 is heavily disguised for her part in making the film “The First Great Train Robbery”. We also hope to see a re-print of the IRRS book on the 101 class locos.



No.4 in the loco workshop. Above the dome can be seen some of the many belts which drive the now fully operational 1897 crane from Queen’s Quay works. (I.C. Pryce)

No.461: Ex DSER 2-6-0 goods engine. Dublin.

No.461 continues to faithfully perform her duties as Dublin based loco. She was returned to traffic in time for the official launch of the State Coach No 351, after a big end gave trouble during the positioning run for the Tour to Cork in May last year. Considerable damage was caused to the big end and journal, and in order to dress up the scored surface, a tool was borrowed from the Bluebell Railway - my best thanks are due to them for what proved to be a most effective gadget. No.461 is shortly to come out of traffic for her 10 yearly boiler exam, and it is for this reason that No.186 is getting the somewhat Spartan overhaul referred to above. While not quite in the same league as No.461, No.186 should nevertheless handle the local Whitehead or Dublin based trains without difficulty, and has the advantage of being an extremely user-friendly machine.

No.23: Ex Irish Shell “Planet” diesel shunter. In Traffic, Whitehead.

“Carlow” Diesel: Ex CSÉ “Ruston” Diesel Shunter. Whitehead.

The Carlow loco is still awaiting resolution of the gearbox fault referred to last year. It is unfortunate that a potentially useful loco, which has undergone extensive refurbishment, should lie out of use since

we rarely have the manpower to divert from other more pressing work. Where are all the diesel enthusiasts with a flair for tinkering?

Coach Bogies

Overhauled “UTA” type bogies with SKF roller bearings have been fitted to dining car 87. A second set of this type of bogie is nearly complete, and the next set of bogies planned is an ex GNR set which will go either to vehicle 9 in the Whitehead based set or to Dublin for diner 88.

Other Locos

In last year’s report I alluded to other locomotive restoration possibilities, in suitably vague terms since obviously I cannot divulge information given in confidence or make public the subject of negotiations which have not come to a conclusion. This is still the case, but I think it fair to say that the restoration of two locomotives not owned by the RPSI is under active consideration. Loan agreements, operating agreements and, above all, funding takes an inordinate time in the world of railway preservation, and at present I can only counsel patience.

As a footnote to the “Other Locos” section, I should maybe add that the Orenstein and Koppel loco No.3 which was overhauled by RPSI Engineering for the Downpatrick Railway, is reported to be working away in a satisfactory manner - we wish the owners every success with it.

CARRIAGE & WAGON REPORT

Evan Pamely

The Whitehead Carriage & Wagon Department has been ticking over this year with one volunteer, one paid worker and occasional help from Dermot Mackie’s site gang. Conditions in the carriage shed have been made safer by the provision of further concrete flooring.

While great scope existed for improvement of the coaches, regrettably this was not possible due to the amount of inspection, running repairs and routine maintenance required.

Although new water tanks were fitted for the toilets of 238, the internal panelling and plumbing are not complete.

Replacement of windows has not occupied so much time this year, though a single act of vandalism at Crumlin on our return from Londonderry broke five windows. Fortunately no-one was hurt. At one stage all the top lights in 9 and 87 were in good order but, since the summer, five in 9 and three in 87 have been broken by trackside trees. Further damage has occurred to trim in 91 and 1097.

Alan McRobert must be thanked for his sterling work on carriage cleaning during the year.

In common with the Loco and Operations Departments the C&W Department has been implementing the provisions of the Halcrow Transmark report. Records have been kept of all repairs and renewals, as well as daily and annual inspections and work on the fire extinguishers and gas equipment in the diner. The coaches are now restricted to a speed of 45 mph and 50, the GN Directors’ Saloon, is not permitted to run because of her part wooden underframe. During the year the records of the Loco and C&W departments were audited by NIR and found to be satisfactory.

A Carriage & Wagon Officer is much needed to direct the work of the department, the ability of which to consistently make available the required stock is seriously in question since the paid worker has resigned. There has been talk of obtaining paid assistance to repaint the coaches, which is much needed, but neither this nor the provision of a general worker for repair and maintenance have been implemented.

There is nothing like a bit of digging to work off the Christmas spirit, so a trench and duct were put in place during the first weekend in January 2000 to allow the carriage shed alarm to be upgraded and to connect it to the main system. A manhole and duct were also built to bring the electric cabling into the new workshop and this allowed the overhead crane to be brought into operation.

Later in the month John Wolsley, Johnny Lockett and Alan McRobert helped to load a flat wagon with 50 concrete sleepers which we intended to use to renew the sleeper interlacing of the turn-out at the Larne end of the platform. In early February a small squad, plus some loco workers, helped load a number of very heavy machines from the Shane's Castle workshop onto a lorry in Antrim. Only having a hand powered chain hoist made this a long hard job but the new powered crane at Whitehead whipped it all off the lorry in 30 minutes! The afternoon was spent lifting the old turnout sleepers which were long overdue for replacement. The following weekend saw Bob Davison, Trevor Mounstephen and myself placing 18 of the concrete sleepers, though the snow and cold defeated us by mid-afternoon. By sod's law the next Saturday was blazing sunshine and, with the help of Robin Morton and Philip and Tim Lockett, we put the rest of the sleepers in place. March failed to come in like a lion so we got the rails in and keyed up, ensuring that the subsequent Easter Bunny trips passed off without a hitch - to the satisfaction of those on the footplate of No.171.



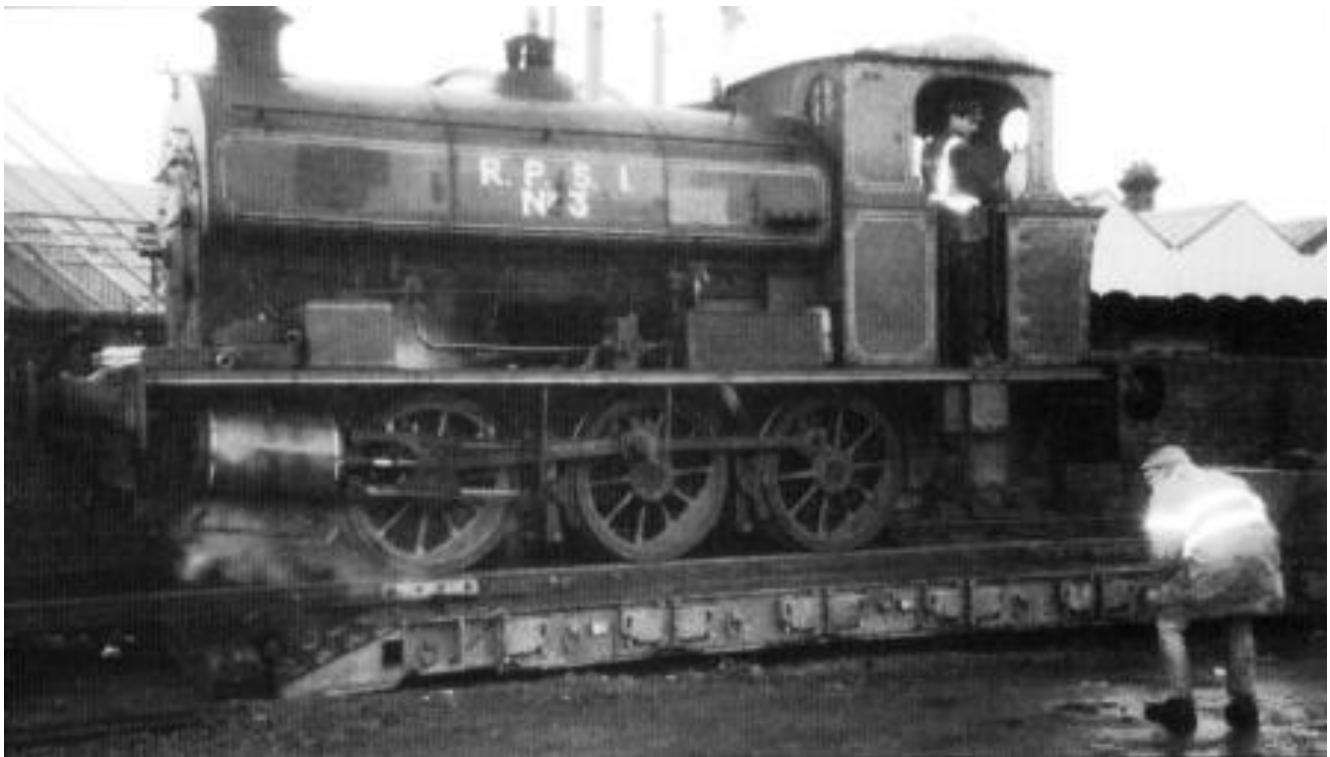
One of the "Mowlem" wagons, now in RPSI service - Dermot Mackie and crew laying concrete sleepers at Whitehead. (J. Wolsley)

By now, it was apparent that No.23, our faithful diesel shunter, was in need of serious attention. It required a major overhaul, including lifting the cylinder head, and I would like to thank all those who helped with this work, particularly Thomas Charters. Incidentally, because of these problems, it was decided to use our summertime midweek sessions to try to sort out the problems on the Carlow diesel engine. While the whole braking system was overhauled, with a lot of help from David Henderson and Trevor Wood, the gearbox problem was never cured so if anybody has any bright ideas on what we missed, they would be welcomed. April was a good opportunity for our traditional scrap drive - which

raised £100. We also carried out some running repairs to our laneway.

Thanks to the good offices of member and past treasurer, John Richardson, we were given two money grants, totalling £2,300, for concrete flooring. This enabled us, in early May, to bring in 40 tonnes of stone for the carriage shed and, later in the month, allowed us to lay 6 cubic metres of concrete with the additional help of Bill King-Wood. The body of the last of the laminate coaches was pulled off its frames by the ever-useful JCB and was soon reduced to a pile of bonfire wood. The aluminium was, of course, recycled and brought in another £100. Father's Day saw the combined site and loco squads building a ramp to put an in-steam R.H. Smyth onto a low loader for transportation to Muckamore. Once there, the ramp was re-assembled to allow "Harvey" to roll down onto the brand new track of the Bleach Green to Antrim line ready for a busy summer of ballast working.

The good weather in July allowed the JCB to get a renovating coat of bright yellow paint and the site to get a second dose of weedkiller. Later in the month as many of the site squad as possible were on hand to help Peter Scott and his merry men to put the wheels into the frames of No.4. This was very satisfying because we used the heavy lift area, a major site project a few years ago, with its two powered sheer legs, for the job. Late August and most of September were taken up with more stones and concrete, initially in the loco workshop. This will mean that the motion and tanks for No.4 can be fitted in safety and comfort over the coming winter months.



It's good-bye to the main line, as the "Derry Engine" mounts the low-loader at Antrim on 25th November 2000. (J. Wolsley)

During the early autumn, the old Sirocco works in east Belfast was being demolished and, thanks to the generosity of Mr John Eastwood, we were able to acquire a quantity of electrical switchgear and 160 square metres of wooden floor blocks. The switchgear will allow us to install the machines mentioned above in our loco workshop. 35 square metres of the wooden blocks have already been laid because, apparently, castings don't take too kindly to being dropped on concrete! In addition, we acquired 30 excellent sodium lamps which we will use to upgrade the lighting in the loco running sheds. Work continued on the flooring of the carriage shed well into October and November - with more stones and

concrete. Now that we have more than half of the carriage shed flooring covered in concrete, it makes the work, such as the erection of scaffolding in this area, a lot easier.



With one of the NIR Mk2 coaches in the background, some of the Site gang, plus observers, take a break during the re-wheeling of No.4. The tall vertical object is not part of the hand crane but is the ex-Dundalk water column. (P.A. Scott)

On a wet and windy Saturday in late November we brought “R.H. Smyth” home on a low loader. The operation meant building a ramp at Antrim, appropriately enough, on the old ballast siding, and then rebuilding it at Whitehead. Earlier refurbishment of the yard lights for Santa Trains meant that the latter could be accomplished safely after dark and it was all finished by six o’clock with a flurry on the engine’s whistle. We still have some money left for more concrete. Oh no, I hear the track coolies groan! Even better, we still have over a thousand wooden blocks to lay and, if you don’t fancy that, we

still need help to cable the workshop electrics. The pay is somewhat indifferent, and you will need to bring a packed lunch but the craic is good. So, if you feel like giving a hand with any of it, you will be most welcome.

BELFAST AREA OPERATIONS

Evan Pameley

In the autumn of 1999 the Belfast Area Operations Committee submitted to NIR their programme for the year 2000. It was a busy schedule, including the reinstatement of the Steam Enterprise and the perennial Portrush Flyer. The year started promisingly with a well-filled train to Dublin and very popular shuttles to Bangor. Then the non-availability of No.461 and repair and renewal of NIR track resulted in noticeable changes to the planned operations.

The May tour was re-planned using No.85 and No.171. This required No.85 to run from Dublin to Cork with only stops for water, servicing being carried out during those stops. Fortunately, the fire did not clinker and excellent work by Irish Rail and RPSI crews resulted in a memorable run. Irish Rail personnel must be particularly thanked for their help and co-operation in making this tour successful.

Sponsorship by North Down Borough Council again helped enormously with running trains to Bangor, the TV advertising raising the RPSI's profile considerably. This is also true of David Dillon's programme "Keeping Up Steam" which has undoubtedly made the public more aware of the RPSI and encouraged people to travel on our trains.



No.171 leaves Holywood on one of the "Bangor Belle" trips on 22nd April 2000. Desmond Coakham's BCDR book shows how much this area has changed. (W.T. Scott)

The Atlantic Coast Express, which ran on 9th September, proved that there is a considerable market for our trains out of Londonderry. Derry City Council helped with the publicity and as a result of radio and TV coverage the local Tourist Centre was inundated with the demand for tickets. It is hoped that we will be able to operate afternoon trips from Derry in the future.

Sadly, we were not able to run the Portrush Flyer, although we did have a charter to University Halt on 7th October, which went on empty to Portrush. The train was chartered by the Church of Ireland Diocese of Connor, whose representative was kind enough to follow up with a letter expressing complete satisfaction with the trip.

Before both the Atlantic Coast Express and the charter we were required to carry out non passenger-carrying proving runs. These are now necessary following the full implementation of the Halcrow Transmark report into the safe operation of RPSI trains on the NIR system. If we have not run over the line within the previous six months then a proving run is required.

15th April saw the return of the Steam Enterprise. Hauling 7 coaches and a van, No.85 proved that main line operation of steam trains to schedule is a practical proposition. We kept to time, apart from an unscheduled stop for water at Dundalk on the return journey to ensure that we reached Lisburn. The second trip, on 30th September, had an almost festive atmosphere due to the superb handling of the loco and a lighter load. We arrived in Connolly 30 minutes early, a performance repeated on the return trip. To the delight of some and consternation of others (seen firmly gripping their seats) we ran through Dundalk at speed, a performance first experienced on this year's May tour.

A special word of thanks must go to Dublin members who assisted with the Steam Enterprise by making the carriages comfortable and easing the burden of train catering. There has also been special co-operation by NIR who enabled our operations and kept them to time. Noel Playfair has been the backbone of the NIR operating crew and his enthusiasm and professionalism have been invaluable.



No.85 passes No.461, crippled by damaged big-end bearing, at Limerick Junction during the International Railtour on 14th May 2000. (C.P. Friel)

Some of you may have spoken to Wilma Cairns, our new “Whitehead” office person (in Larne!). Wilma has shown a capacity for patience and hard work and has increasingly eased the burden of BAOC and our Treasurer. Wilma’s location meant that the siting of our Post Office Box in

Carrickfergus was inconvenient and could give rise to delay in dealing with postal bookings. Fortunately the same number was available at Larne.

Lastly, the Operations Committee must all be thanked for their stalwart contributions.

DUBLIN AREA OPERATIONS

Charles McDonnell

The main focus of Dublin Operations this year was somewhat different from other years. The traditional high season months of June, July and August saw relatively few operations while a considerable amount of operations took place in the autumn and winter. The background to this change was twofold: the need to focus on the launch of State Coach 351, and the constraints placed upon us by the rail investment programme.

These constraints are awkward in the short term, and have caused the restriction or cancellation of a number of trips. In the longer term however they mean that the integrity of the current network is guaranteed, and that further expansion becomes a real possibility.

The early part of 2000 saw the Dublin work team engaged in the repainting of No.461. This was started in the ramps in Inchicore, with the finish coat being applied in the newly commissioned spray paint shop. Our thanks to foreman Tony Nicholson for his co-operation in this matter. The manufacturers of the spray booth were intrigued when they discovered that one of the first vehicles through the booth was a steam locomotive!



This spot between Skerries and Balbriggan having often been eyed from the train, it was decided that a photograph was overdue. 15th May 2000. (W.T. Scott)

The first appearance of No.461 was on 27th and 28th March, when the Dublin set made its by now traditional appearance in Pearse for Rebel Heart, a BBC historical drama. Drama was indeed the word when the special effects team tried to spray synthetic dirt on the locos brand new paintwork! A compromise was reached, involving the use of talcum powder. The season proper started on 21st April, with the now traditional Good Friday trip to Mullingar. No.461 performed well with a small train of six

coaches augmented on the return trip with Park Royal 1383, fresh from overhaul.

No.461 ran hot on the positioning run for the three-day tour. This meant that No.171 had to cover both Dublin and Belfast operations while No.461 was repaired. In this context, the lack of Dublin operations in August proved to be a blessing in disguise. On 28th May our Greystones shuttles ran. Trouble dogged this trip, as a fault on the loco brake cylinder caused diesel substitution on the first trip. After much hard work, the brake was repaired just in time for the second and third trips. This was the first time we co-existed with the new DART service to Greystones. The trip saw a return of our old friend Tony Foley as the crew consisted of Seamus Brennan and Joe Meagher, two of the last group of footplate trainees.

No.171 returned North after this trip, but its return to work the Strawberry Fair was prevented by a security alert at Newry. The Strawberry Fair trip was hauled with an 071 class diesel. No.171 returned South in time for 15th July, which saw a charter to Mullingar in connection with a local festival. After a run to Mullingar which was quite well filled, we made two runs to Mostrim, followed by a return to Dublin which was somewhat delayed by a block failure between Enfield and Maynooth. Shunting in Mullingar was slowed up by the work under way to upgrade the mechanical locking in the cabin.

August was a dead month, and the onset of autumn saw the focus shift significantly towards the launch of 351, which is dealt with separately.

Our 17th September trip, planned as a Greystones shuttle, was instead a charter for a Dutch incentive group and involved the now familiar format of an empty run to Rathdrum where the party was picked up for the return trip to Dublin. On this occasion the contract specified that the train would arrive in Rathdrum in order to surprise the customers, who were under the impression they were returning to Dublin on a service train. This necessitated going all the way to Arklow, as propelling into the section is forbidden in this station. This was the first public outing for 351, taking place almost nine years to the day after the fire in Inchicore which nearly destroyed the coach. The operation ran from Inchicore, with No.461 and a 4-coach train being diesel hauled between Connolly and Inchicore in each direction.

Another charter which came at short notice was one to Leixlip Town Commissioners, which ran on 28th October. This involved two return trips between Leixlip and Enfield, which in practice meant Clonsilla and Enfield. Each of the two trips was filled to capacity, and the local authority has made enquiries for a similar special in 2001. Vigilant members who use our website were given tour and booking details. This train had the distinction of being the last RPSI special to use the single track between Clonsilla and Maynooth. The double track was commissioned on the first weekend in December, thus putting the traditional Santa destination off limits for this year.

Traditionally, the Dublin Area has run six trains spread over two days in December. These trains fill extremely well and normally are fully booked by mid-November. This year, the Sports and Social Club in Inchicore chartered a complete train. It was consequently decided to run a second train on this day, thus making eight runs. As always, these trains run from Pearse but this year we used the DSE, running to Dun Laoghaire and Bray.

On 3rd December our first trip was curtailed at Dun Laoghaire due to engineering works south of Dalkey. On the second Sunday all our services terminated in Dun Laoghaire due to a landslip at Killiney. Our third Sunday saw two trips only, with the second one being a charter for the Inchicore sports and social club. This train carried many familiar faces, and had a larger than average crowd at the loco in Bray to see the footplate. Bray is a suitable destination for this kind of trip, and the schedule fits in well with the Sunday DART schedule. Approximately 2,500 passengers were carried on the Santa trips.

So the year ended with 13 operations: 12 in steam and one partially diesel substituted. More than a third of our trips were charter based. This is welcome, as it takes the marketing strain off the Society,

while showing our product to a wider audience.

This was No.461's last year in service. A most useful and serviceable loco, its capacity to haul eight full coaches has done much to swell the Society's coffers. Its axle load is one of the lowest in our fleet, and hopefully its absence will be short.

Coaches

Park Royal 1383 returned to the set after an eighteen month absence in Mullingar.

Sister vehicle 2423 will go to Mullingar. Some preparatory work has been undertaken in Inchicore. Diner 88 missed most of the season undergoing body repairs at the hands of the FAS team in Inchicore. The passenger emergency equipment was also replaced. It made a return in time for the Santas, but will return for a repaint in the New Year. All-first 1142 received an overhauled set of bogies and returned to the set after the launch of 351. Bredin 1335 also received an overhauled set of bogies along with sundry minor repairs in Inchicore. Arrangements have been made to have the running set hauled into Heuston valeting plant each Bank Holiday Monday. This makes regular inspections and repairs much easier.

COACH 351

Peter Rigney

The year 2000 saw the completion of the most ambitious coach restoration project ever undertaken by the RPSI, with the return to traffic of GS&WR state coach 351 twenty-seven years after withdrawal from traffic, nine years after it was nearly destroyed in a fire in Inchicore and four years after restoration commenced. The progress of this project has been published in previous issues of Five Foot Three and the history of the coach in general has been chronicled in a booklet produced for the launch event, written by Chas Meredith. This article sets out to bring the story up to date.

Coach 351 could be seen as an allegory for the history of much of twentieth century Ireland. Built for a royal visit at the turn of the century, it carried Taoiseach W.T. Cosgrave to the reopening of the Mallow viaduct at the end of the Civil War, and was restored to serve as a presidential vehicle for Cosgrave's rival Eamonn de Valera.

The Society became involved in this project when it became apparent that the vehicle was in danger from decay and vandalism, and that only a major restoration job would save it. The RPSI was ideally placed as the lead body in a partnership consisting of FAS, the employment and training Authority, Iarnród Éireann, who retain ownership of the vehicle, and a number of commercial sponsors.

Because this project was not RPSI core business, all the necessary resources were raised by the Dublin Area Operations Committee, either by way of materials sponsorship or cash award. It would be invidious to name any individual sponsor, but suffice it to say that without their assistance, the materials cost would have presented an insurmountable barrier.

Iarnród Éireann made an initial cash contribution. FAS paid the wages of all staff, and paid a materials allowance. These sums were substantially augmented by awards from AIB and Ford Europe, which were competitively applied for, and by a substantial grant from the European Regional Development Fund.

In 1998, the project was awarded £10,000 by the National Heritage Council and at the presentation ceremony, Society representatives were pleasantly surprised to hear the Minister, Éamon Ó Cuív TD departing from his script to single out the 351 project for special mention due to the connection with his grandfather, Eamonn de Valera.

The restoration work was undertaken initially in FAS premises in Cabra. As soon as significant underframe work became necessary, the coach was returned to Inchicore, where it was located in Diesel 2 shop, on a set of slave bogies. At that stage 1142 was taken out of service and its bogies were

fully refurbished for 351. A set of bogies were despatched from Whitehead and, in turn, fully refurbished for 1142.

While in Inchicore 351 was the recipient of many visitors. In March 1999, a private visit was arranged for the Minister and Junior Ministers for Arts and Culture, Sile de Valera and Éamon Ó Cuív, both of whom were grandchildren of Eamonn de Valera.

By the early part of 2000, the coach had been moved to the old carriage lifting shop beside the running shed. George Dempsey and his team were concentrating on interior finish and on those infuriating small jobs which proliferate towards the end of any project. Also undertaken at this stage was an exterior and internal repaint of 1142 to make it a suitable matching vehicle for 351 on the launch train.



Three Renehan brothers on No.461. 18th October 2000. (C.P. Friel)

By late May of 2000, 351 was ready for out-road trials. One trial was planned for mid-June, and a train was made up of a 141 class GM, 351 and a Dutch van. This did not proceed, and when it next became practical to conduct a trial, coaches 1142 and 1335 were in need of a trial run as was No.461 herself, fresh from the repairs to the big end.

First priority was a test run not just for No.461's big end, but also for the refurbished bogies under 351, 1142 and 1335. This test run took place in September, running from Inchicore to Sallins and back. The intended destination was Portarlinton but warm bearings on 1142 dictated an early turn back.

In any event, the Rathdrum charter referred to in the DAOC report allowed for a more extensive test. No snags were encountered on this trip, and all that remained was a diesel hauled trial to Dun Laoghaire to check clearances in the bay platforms. The week immediately preceding the launch saw intensive preparations for the event.

The week prior to the launch saw last minute preparations of the launch set of 1142, 1463 and 1916. The latter two vehicles were hauled to Inchicore some days before. The set was assembled outside the running shed, while the loco was lit up near the turntable.

At approximately 13:00, the train set out for Connolly station, where it was brought into platform 3 for

final attention to detail. At 14:00, with Dan and Tony Renahan on the footplate, and accompanied by Inspector Don McLoughlin, the train set out for the short run to Pearse station.

Meanwhile in Pearse, the guests had begun to arrive. A reception was laid on and music was provided by the Army No.1 band. Among the guests were Mary O'Rourke TD, Minister for Public Enterprise; Michael McDowell, Attorney General; and Jim Higgins TD, Opposition spokesman on transport. Dr John Lynch, Chairman of CIÉ; Joe Meagher, Chief Executive of Irish Rail; and John Keenan, Human Resource Manager of Irish Rail, represented the Railway Company. We were also happy to welcome Dave Watters, formerly Chief Executive of IÉ, who set the restoration ball rolling in 1995.

Following a short speech by the President, Mary McAleese, No.461 hauled the train in bright autumn sunshine to the bay platform in Dun Laoghaire. In the course of her speech, the President paid tribute to those involved in the restoration, and in particular to what she termed "that hardy band of determined and devoted enthusiasts of the RPSI". She also paid tribute to the project team headed by George Dempsey.



RPSI Chairman Norman Foster samples the luxury of Coach 351. (C.P. Friel)

On arrival in Dun Laoghaire, the guests headed for Restaurant na Mara for a reception. The loco ran round the train with the help of an 071 which followed us out, and shortly afterwards we conveyed our passengers back to the city centre, much to the bemusement of gathering commuters. The train continued immediately to Inchicore, which it reached at approximately 19:00, thus concluding a successful day's operation, which received good publicity. In addition to this, the restoration project was the subject of two longer news feature TV programmes.

The effect of the 351 project has been to raise significantly the public profile of the RPSI, not only among the public at large, but also among those who control and administer the national policy on heritage. The presence of the President and two Cabinet members at the launch is testimony to the success of this aspect of the project.

The Society also benefited by having the FAS team available to carry out work in Inchicore on other vehicles in the running set such as 1142, 1335 and 88. Our particular thanks are due to George

Dempsey, Colm Hyland, Noel McCarthy and Gerry Taylor for their dedication in this and in all other aspects of the project.

The challenge which now arises for the Society is to capitalise on what has been achieved to date, and to show off 351 to the public at large, particularly those living outside Dublin. Work is under way on a project in this area, and members will be kept informed of developments.

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER

Michael H.C. Baker

My involvements with Santa Specials have been somewhat limited; selecting some of my class to be gnomes to entertain on the Swanage Railway specials which run along the bottom of the field next to our school, and back in the 1980s taking two of my own children and their cousin on the specials which British Rail ran for a couple of years out of Marylebone. All three were of an age where belief in the jolly old gent was not exactly unquestioning. But, never loath to visit London or ride on a steam train, they were nevertheless eager participants. I can't remember just what class of gift was included in the ticket price, but it can't have been anything memorable. Accompanying Santa were several helpers, young ladies whose daytime job involved doing something not too exciting behind a desk at BR headquarters, but who for this occasion were decked out in miniskirts, spangly tights and paper hats. They passed our table several times during the journey, provoking some less than complimentary comments about red noses, resemblances to reindeer and the like, and one was heard to remark to the other as they passed us for the last time on the approach to High Wycombe, "Keep well clear of that lot." Very mortifying.

Coming over for our usual visit to the wife's parents in Dublin, I'd planned a trip on the Enterprise to Belfast the Saturday before Christmas. Consulting the RPSI's website, I realised there would be steam running between Whitehead and Central and saw that volunteers were needed to help out Santa. I rang Evan Pamelý who said, "yes," if I presented myself on the platform around 11am I might well be found something useful to do.

For no very good reason, except that we hardly exceeded 50mph as far as Dundalk, the Enterprise was 20 minutes late into Belfast and although the buffet car was staffed it remained resolutely closed throughout the entire journey. As I'd set out extra early, on account of the DART being disrupted owing to an industrial dispute, I was not in the best of spirits as we pulled into Central under heavy, grey skies.

But Belfast seemed more relaxed than I'd seen it for many years and the sight of a shiny blue Great Northern 4-4-0 steaming in over the Lagan was enough to lift the most Scrooge-like spirits. Having met Evan, and Paul McCann, I was put in charge of a huge black sack full of presents with instruction to hand these to Santa who would then pass them on to the customers - in other words I was to be nothing less than one of Santa's little helpers. Feeling both honoured and apprehensive, I was relieved to find I was required to wear neither spangly tights nor a mini-skirt.

"Slieve Gullion" ran around her train and was in position, simmering away, nicely level with the foot of the ramp as the mums, dads, the occasional grannies and granddads, and children gained the platform and, greeted by a highly authentic looking Santa and satisfyingly abundant clouds of smoke and steam, climbed aboard.

"Right," said Santa, "better get aboard," and we made our way to the very last door of the very last carriage where, just arrived from Lapland, the brightly wrapped presents were stacked in the corridor. There being three of us to assist Santa, the presents were divided into those suitable for the tinies, those for the in-betweens, and those for the over nines.

Off we went and Santa got into his stride. It immediately became apparent that one advantage of the old, traditional side corridor carriage with its separate compartments and sliding, relatively sound-proof

doors, is that a jolly gentleman with a big white beard, a bright red costume and handbell, can fling open the door and with a couple of “Ho-ho”s, completely take the occupants by surprise, either reducing them to goggle-eyed, slightly apprehensive silence, or produce squeals of delight. This probably played little part in carriage designers’ decision to move to open layouts, but is nevertheless worthy of note.

It was clear that the RPSI had moved on a great deal from my BR experiences of the 1980s and had got the whole business splendidly organised, making sure its small customers, and their parents, went home feeling they had celebrated the approach of Christmas in a highly original manner and had got great value for their money. The BR trips provided a variety of motive power, but the RPSI can boast a wonderfully unique rake of vintage carriages, a main line experience not to be had anywhere else in these islands. Just how much the motive power, beyond the fact that it is steam, and the distinctive quality of the carriages, registers with the passengers on Santa Specials is perhaps less relevant than when providing for the enthusiast market, although I did note one gentleman in the buffet car making detailed notes of speeds and passing times.

As a teacher of 9 to 13 year olds it was just fascinating to watch the reaction of the children as we progressed down the train.

Some of the little ones, babies really, were not going to commit themselves to total approval of twinkling eyes and luxuriant white whiskers which suddenly filled their vision until they had weighed up just what it was all about, although none was so reluctant that a small hand wouldn’t be proffered to grasp the present. Santa, sensing the mood, would kneel or sit to be at their level, and shortly the hands up to the face, fingers slightly spread so their owner could still see what was going on, would relax and the beginnings of a smile emerge. Others would stare, unabashed; one small blond fellow, all of two years, sitting on a table supported by his father, pausing from munching his way through a packet of ready salted, gazed steadily at Santa with an expression which clearly said as he fingered his present, “Fine, this will do for now, but don’t forget what I’ve ordered from you for tomorrow night.”

The older ones, three and upwards, had no doubts and leapt up, eager to sit beside Santa, or on his knee with brothers and sisters whilst cameras flashed and mums and dads urged, “Go on, squeeze up”, the compartments of 1922 vintage thirds not being designed for panoramic family portraits.

I was entrusted with the over 9’s sack, and the reactions of these sophisticates to Santa’s appearance was the most amusing of all; a somewhat embarrassed half smile, or perhaps merely a twitch of the facial muscles. Dignity and street credibility is all important at that age; I could probably have made a fortune by threatening to reveal to their friends that they had been seen in conversation with an old fella dressed all in red with a long white beard two days before Christmas. Being well brought up to a man and woman, they greeted Santa politely enough and none was so committed to his or her principles that the present was refused.

There was a lovely atmosphere on the train. You would, I guess, expect this on a Santa Special two days before Christmas but there was a time at certain steam centres in the early days of the preservation movement in England, when visitors were regarded as a necessary nuisance, only tolerated because they provided the money to enable members to pursue their hobby.

Everyone was out to give the children a great time. During the stopover at Whitehead I queued behind a man who was buying 10 hot dogs, no less. The demand for these delicacies seemed insatiable and cooking them must have been as hot a job for the ladies in the kitchen as for any footplate crew but no-one complained and those serving radiated good humour. Setting off on the return journey to Belfast I found myself chatting to a middle-aged man who seemed familiar but whom I couldn’t place. Suddenly it dawned on me. It was Santa in mufti, disguised as an ordinary citizen and looking a whole lot younger: John Sloane! In full Santa regalia, luxuriant beard and moustache he was virtually

unrecognisable. I can reveal that, contrary to popular belief, Santa's preferred mode of transport, other than a train of vintage carriages hauled by No.171 of course, is motor bike and sidecar. John has a collection of these, all restored since retirement last year to working order. We talked of various things, but reindeer and the frozen north were never mentioned. I pass this information on to anyone who meets Santa so that you will know what conversational openings are appropriate.

John's services were not required on the return journey until we were drawing into Central station, by which time he was once more transformed into Santa, to be slapped on the back by a youth off a suburban train who exclaimed, "I've always believed in you," and to pose on the platform for yet more pictures and to say goodbye to the children.



Santa Claus engaged in consumer research at Whitehead. (M.H.C. Baker)

However, this was only half-time for now the next contingent were coming down the ramp, equally eager to meet No.171 and Santa. This time I was promoted to holding two sacks, the one for the tinies as well as for the oldest children. Once again each child was greeted by name and given a few moments of Santa's time as the present was handed over. Halfway down the third carriage I was afraid we were going to run out of presents but in the nick of time reinforcements arrived care of the young lady who had earlier served me a hot dog but was also one of the OTHER Santa's helpers. Yes, it can be revealed that there are two Santas operating between Belfast and Whitehead! Such is the demand for his services that this is the only way of ensuring all the children get to meet him. One begins at the back of the train,

the other at the front and they meet in the buffet car - well they don't actually meet for can you imagine the shattering of illusions if any child should see them both together. So great care is taken to make sure that only one was on view at any one time. Such are the logistics of adapting ancient traditions to the year 2000.

At Whitehead my duties finished. I needed to get back to Central in order to catch the 16:10 Enterprise, and took the 15:14 DEMU, 14:57 out of Larne Harbour, although as it happened I needn't have hurried for although the doors of the Enterprise closed promptly at 16:10 we didn't depart until 16:26 and were, as in the morning, 20 minutes late arriving at our destination. Although at this point a touch of Santa's magic would not have come amiss, it was nevertheless a great day out, one of the best in 39 years of rail travel in and around Belfast.

STEAM'S LAST CHALLENGE

J.A. Cassells

The origins of the Magheramorne Stone Contract

"There won't be a puff of steam about the place by 1960". This famous prophecy by a senior UTA executive following the dieselisation of the NCC in 1958 was to haunt both the speaker and his company for over a decade - no more so than when the engines for which he was responsible were called on to play a major role in building the widest piece of motorway in Ireland between 1966 and 1970.



2-6-4T No.1 with brake van and one stone wagon on clearance trials at Trooperslane, a handsome station before modernisation set in. (W.T. Scott collection)

1966 was a year of mixed fortunes for UTA steam. On the debit side, the railway lost a long-standing contract carrying coal from Belfast docks to the Courtaulds factory sidings at the Mount. A further minor frustration was the seamen's strike of 1966 which disrupted coal supplies to Northern Ireland for almost two months. But there were happier days for York Road's engines and men. Major mechanical problems with MED and MPD diesels in the springtime meant that up to five trains a day on the Larne line were regularly steam, and this did not greatly diminish as the first of the 70 class DEMUs arrived. Steam's profile was raised even higher when the UTA landed the huge contract in connection with the M2 foreshore extension into Belfast, which is the subject of the present article. From November 1966 until May 1970, trains of spoil ran daily from Magheramorne Quarry to Greencastle on the Lough

Shore in Belfast. Little has so far appeared in print about this contract, and in this article I hope to shed some light on how it was planned and begun in 1966-67.

The stone contract, of course, threw the whole ‘puff of steam’ theory into reverse. Senior and middle management began a concentrated operation which expanded the number of steam crews, increased engine availability, improved the railway infrastructure and rebuilt stocks of important equipment - not least large numbers of purpose built wagons.

Recovery of surplus engines from the Great Northern area began as early as 7th May 1966, when No.57 hauled No.7 from Adelaide to Ballymena for storage. They were joined a week later by the RPSI’s No.171 and No.186, and on Monday 16th May Inspector Dunlop took a day in Ballymena to grease the stored engines and cover the chimneys. The ending of steam on the GNR section brought some much needed motive power back to York Road. On 7th November 1966 Roy Stanfield, Jimmy Donnelly and Peter McCann brought No.54 back to the NCC, hauling a failed MPD car and engine No.55. The following day Roy Stanfield and Cecil McAdam with No.51 hauled engine No.56, two vans and four wagons of coal round to the NCC, the third man on No.56 being Gerry Chambers. By the following Saturday 12th November (the day before the Stone Trains officially began), 55 and 56 had joined 52 and 57 in store at Ballymena, while 53 was in winter storage at Coleraine.



No.51 at the water tank at Magheramorne. One of the two loading banks is on the right, while the “lop-sided” construction of the stone wagons shows clearly. (W.T. Scott)

Engines 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 50, 51, 55 and 56 were all taken into York Road shops in late 1966 and 1967. In many cases the work done was of a fairly minor nature, and I reckon that only engines 50, 51, 53 and 55 were given any substantial attention. (Appropriately, No.5 - the first of the tank engines - was the first to receive the NIR monogram when that company came into existence in 1967!) Some tank engines on the Great Northern area had been fitted with bunker extensions (‘cribs’) to facilitate through working to Dublin, and later most of the regular engines - including our own No.4 - were given this useful extension. If a short-bunkered engine looked like running out of coal before the end of a shift, she would usually be put on the front of a train for Belfast so as to be able to nip on to the shed for a quick refill during unloading.

Engines 2, 7, 8, 52 and 57 had all been withdrawn - though 57 did have one last day of usefulness on 12th August 1966 when she was brought in from Ballymena to stand as station pilot on this heaviest day

of the year on the NCC. The rest of the class - including the elusive 1, 9 and 54 - worked stone trains during the first months of the contract, and even ex SLNCR No.27 was sometimes to be seen tripping repaired stone wagons from York Road yard to Port Arthur. Some firebox work was done on 9, but her untimely demise early in 1967 at least helped to keep other engines in steam: 56 gained her smokebox door during repairs following her infamous escapade at Pomeroy whilst lifting the Derry road; 56 also got her pony truck and our own No.4 got her bogie. For good measure, two of her buffers finished up attached to the stop-block in the arrival platform at Larne Harbour! 54, an otherwise sound engine, succumbed in April 1967 when her firebox was condemned. No.1 was in poor order by this time, and was largely confined to station pilot duty for the remainder of her life.

Locomotive Inspector Frank Dunlop also had to begin building up depleted stocks. As well as firing shovels, he remembers ordering corks, and even going round the fashionable department stores of Belfast in search of suitable wool for trimmings! He found what he was looking for in the Bank Buildings at Castle Junction but what he possibly did not know was that Inchicore still had stocks of suitable wool which were used in the traction motors of the A class diesels. Rubber washers for gauge glasses were a particular problem, and the UTA finally had to fork out £300 to get a suitable mould made. Even then, they were a lot lighter than the type they replaced and had to be jammed one inside the other to make a serviceable product. Stocks of firebars had also to be built up, particularly as some of the younger firemen tended to be a bit over-enthusiastic when cleaning fires and breaking up clinker. Facilities for servicing steam were still substantial and intact at Belfast. Water had to be supplied at Magheramorne, though, and the substantial water tank from Newry (Edward Street) on the closed Warrenpoint branch was installed here.



With Tom McCrum leaning out, “Lough Erne”, bearing its UTA number 27, is shunting stone wagons in York Road yard in May 1967. This photo also serves to illustrate Mr Liddle’s reference to “long-boilered tank engines” in “Comments & Recollections”. (J.A. Cassells)

No less important than engines and tools were crew arrangements, and the whole project had to be sensitively negotiated with the Trade Unions and carefully rostered by the traffic office. Important matters of principle had to be resolved. Would the new trains be worked by the most senior men or by a link of more junior drivers? Would men be required to transfer from their home depots? Would the stone train link be exclusively formed of Belfast men? Would drivers who were approaching retirement be prepared to stay on for a few extra months? In the end these questions were all satisfactorily resolved, and adjustments to the duty rosters ensured that no-one lost out in the country depots.

The original stone train link included Davie McDonald, Bertie Wright, Alan Robinson, Willie Gillespie, Harry Ramsey, Willie McAleese, Rab Graham, Billy McGarvey, Paddy Shannon, Percy

Mitchell, Dan McAtamney and R.J. Simpson. Other steam drivers, of course, filled in for rest days and holidays, including Jimmy Donnelly and Peter McCann of Portadown, who came to the NCC after Adelaide shed closed on the GN area. New drivers were passed out as well, and in March 1966 Inspector Dunlop examined Jack Kitchen, Stephen Friel and Willie McAleese. In each case the driving test was on Mount coal trains. Kitchen was passed out on the 7th, Friel on the 11th and McAleese on the 24th March, while Brian Nicholl was passed out on 2nd August. Some of the 'look out boys' who acted as second men on the MPD cars which shunted Derry Waterside were persuaded to travel up and down to Belfast and join the link of firemen. Gerry Phelan, for example, came into that very fit link of young firemen in this way, and Arthur McMenamin and Albert Plews also worked out of York Road.

Purpose-built wagons had to be ordered and the order was eventually placed with Cravens. Before production, a small scale-model was apparently sent to Mr W.A.G. McAfee and put on display for senior and middle management. The wagons weighed 50 tons laden, but despite the views of the late J.H. Houston, the decision was taken that they should be four wheelers and not bogie wagons. In hindsight this seems an odd decision: but bogie goods vehicles were a rare enough commodity in Ireland, and as far as I am aware, no Irish railway used fitted bogie ballast wagons before the 1970s.



Double-heading and superpower combined. Two "Jeeps", No.50 leading, with twelve loaded wagons on Slaughterford bank, approaching Whitehead. (W.T. Scott)

The prototype wagon arrived by sea in Larne on 25th April 1966, and driver Paddy Dobbin, with Inspector Dunlop, went down with single MPD power car 63 to collect it, testing bridge and platform clearances as they brought it back to Belfast. Further wagons arrived singly off the boat, and were often worked up to Belfast on the back of the up perishables. Following a derailment, this practice stopped, and it became the practice to wait until a rake of new wagons arrived, and then send a steam engine down to collect them.

For obvious reasons, the wagons could not discharge vertically, and there was concern about both the stability of side-discharging wagons and the speed at which they could be emptied, given that in the early days of the contract unloading temporarily blocked the up main line. During trials in the autumn of 1966, steam engine or single MPD cars were to be seen bringing single wagons into Belfast so that a

PW man with a stopwatch could measure the speed of discharge. The late Mac Arnold took careful note of 'the wagon train', recording that on one occasion the wagon rapidly emptied while the man was getting his watch out. A second run was made to refill the wagon but this time, on arrival at Port Arthur, the contents of the wagon refused to come out at all!. Metal plates were later welded to the inside of the wagons to increase the slope and speed up discharge.

The door-opening mechanism was activated by something akin to car jacks, though due to constant thefts, they eventually had to be removed when not actually in use. Mechanical door-opening was tried on one wagon - M65 - but it was unsuccessful and no changes were made to the rest of the fleet. Concern about the size of the springs caused yet another wagon to be modified with plates welded on top of each, but these were removed after a derailment in which the spring modifications were reckoned to have played a part. Ultimately the wagons were all modified with a hard rubber pad on top of the springs, which made their riding distinctly lively! There were originally no special speed restrictions on the wagons, though more will be said on this subject later.

On 13th November 1966, the day before the operation began, Willie Gillespie, Barney McCrory and engine 51 ran three round trips with a ten wagon rake. A single train worked for some time, then gradually a second was introduced as more wagons became available. The first unloading point was directly from the up main line into Belfast Lough at Greencastle, and once unloaded, trains came into Belfast to turn. Signalling was at first controlled by a small lever frame in a corrugated iron hut at a place always known as 'Port Arthur'. Until a network of reception sidings began to spread out over the reclaimed land, unloading sometimes delayed regular trains: I have a note that on 25th February 1967 the boat train was delayed by nearly 15 minutes for this reason.



No.50, with banker No.53 out of sight, at Greenisland on the 13:44 working from Magheramorne. The train has been put up the "back line" to clear the Larne line which can just be seen on the right. Carriage enthusiasts may also find the photo of interest. 17th February 1967. (J.A. Cassells)

By mid-February two trains were regularly running: one a 20 wagon set with two engines and one a shorter rake with a single engine. Quite frequently, too, in these early months, the makeup of trains would change during the day if there were loading problems at Magheramorne. Ideally each train should have left Magheramorne fully loaded, but provided 17 or 18 of the 20 wagons were loaded, a

train would be despatched rather than lose its path on the busy Larne line.

Sets would at times be split or run in two portions to suit operational convenience. For example, on 10th February 1967 50 + 53 worked all day with 20 wagons, while 54 worked a 7 wagon set in the morning before adding 10 wagons and combining with 51 to work a 17 wagon set in the afternoon. A week later I noted 54 arriving at Port Arthur with 10 wagons, but leaving half an hour later with only 3. Later in the same day there was superpower as 54 and 6 topped and tailed a mere 7 wagon set. On 24th March I noted 55 with only 5 wagons and No.4 working with 10. On 31st March delays in loading led to the 18:55 ex Magheramorne running in two portions. 6 left with 10 laden wagons at 19:15, followed half an hour later by 51 with the rest of the train. Later it became a more normal practice simply to cancel the train unless at least 16 or 17 wagons had been loaded by departure time.



No.6 and No.4, on the Saturday 10:10 Belfast to Magheramorne light engine working, approaching Whitehead tunnel on 4th February 1967. Due to instability of rocks in the area, this line is currently out of use. (J.A. Cassells)

By mid-1967, twenty wagons became normal on all trains. There were rumours that the standard formation was to be 25 wagons, but such loads never materialised - and would almost certainly have defeated even two engines! Trains normally ran with an engine at each end, and care was taken to turn each engine every four or five trips to equalise wheel flange wear. Double-heading was rarely done (though not officially banned until September 1967), though I did note 53 + 50 so employed on 24th February 1967 and 6 + 51 on 30th March. The latter incident was almost certainly related to the failure of the 11:05 diesel ex Larne, as No.6 with Harry Ramsey and Eddie Bray was sent light to Carrickfergus to assist Jim Simpson with the MPD set into Belfast.

In the initial months of the contract each train carried a fitted brake van and guard: after 17th April 1967 vans were dispensed with, and the guard rode (and sometimes slept) on the footplate of the rear engine. One of the older guards with large and rather flat feet was particularly welcomed, since he - unwittingly - made himself useful by breaking up lumps of coal on the footplate floor!

Paths for the stone trains were advertised in the weekly circulars rather than in the Working Timetables, and up to six trains a day worked in each direction. During the first year of operations, driver R. J. 'Batman' Simpson and fireman Albert Plews began to maintain engine 56 in a superb state of cleanliness, and this challenge was taken up by other crews. As a result, in 1968 management revived an old practice of allocating engines to sets of crews as a gesture of encouragement for such enthusiasm. This, however, belongs to a later part of the story, for another time.

The trains usually ran straight up to Belfast and straight back, but on weekdays in early 1967 the afternoon working was sometimes turned up the stub of the back line at Greenisland to be overtaken by a following passenger service. This was the only occasion on which complete stone trains ever varied their route - though, since stone trains rarely ran on Saturday afternoons or Sundays, wagons often found their way around the system on weekend ballast trains - on one occasion even worked by preserved J15 No.186 to Kingsbog Junction on 11th March 1967. On Saturdays, when only one pair of engines could be spared for stone train work, two rakes would be worked into and out of Belfast by the same engines, with a mid-morning light engine operation from Belfast to Magheramorne in between. If traffic required, of course, a second set would appear, and on 6th May 1967 4 + 10 with 20 wagons were supplemented by 55 with 10 wagons. Trains rarely ever ran on Sundays, though Paddy Shannon and Jack Kitchen with No.6 worked three round trips on 20th November 1966.



No.51, with ten wagons, passing the derailed van mentioned in the text, at Greencastle on 10th February 1967. (J.A. Cassells)

One of the biggest disruptions to the stone train programme occurred in the last week of June 1967, due to an overtime ban at York Road works which left several diesel power cars stopped awaiting attention. During the whole of the week beginning 27th June, three, four or five evening Larne line services had to be steam-worked and the stone trains were suspended in mid-afternoon to provide the motive power. The biggest day was the Wednesday, when 53 worked the 06:45 Larne and 09:25 Portrush trains, 4 took the 07:55 Larne, 51 worked the 17:10 Carrickfergus, 55 the 17:30 Larne and 6 the 17:55 Larne. A total of nine scheduled passenger trains were steam at least once during this memorable week, and two of them - the 17:30 and 17:55 - were steam every day. Unfortunately for us (but not for the newly-formed NIR) the dispute was settled during the weekend, and life returned to normal the following Monday!

As to maximum loads, an occasion was recorded in 1967 of Rab Graham and Johnny Magill bringing 15 loaded wagons from Whitehead to Carrickfergus after the grate collapsed in the back engine. An assisting engine was waiting at Carrickfergus - much to the disgust of this fine engineman, who reckoned that with a run through the station he could have made it up the Mount bank unassisted! That date is unknown, but I have a note of another mammoth effort on 30th January 1967. After a night of heavy frost, two of the three diesel sets stabled at Larne Harbour could not be started up, while the third failed at Whitehead on the 06:25 up. Steam substituted the 8:05 empty train to Whitehead and 08:35 Whitehead-Belfast, and a following up stone train was stopped at Whitehead. One engine was used to haul the failed railcar to Belfast, whilst the other took the full 20 wagon load to Carrickfergus to await the return of the second engine light from Belfast. The longest, as opposed to the heaviest, train I ever saw was one Friday night in 1968 when a 40 wagon set was brought empty from Belfast to Magheramorne following a loco failure.

Following the derailment of an ex GNR 4-wheel fitted van on the Lough Shore, the Larne line speed limit was officially reduced to 50 mph from 5th May 1967, and all four-wheeled vehicles were restricted in speed. The attachment of 4-wheel vans to passenger trains was prohibited except for the 05:55 Belfast-Derry, the 12:45 Derry-Belfast and the Larne perishable. Stone wagons were officially restricted to 40 mph laden and 30 mph empty. Worse was, however, to follow. There was a minor mishap at Greencastle on 28th August 1967, followed by a much more spectacular one at Downshire Park when several wagons of an empty train became derailed. A detailed list of restrictions followed this: speeds of empty trains were further restricted to 20 mph; trains were not allowed to leave Magheramorne unless all wagons were loaded; double heading was prohibited, and guards were to ensure that their journals were accurately kept. The prohibition on double-heading was briefly set aside in the early summer of 1968, when concerns about damage to wagon buffers led to a revival of the practice. It only lasted for a few weeks, however, and for the rest of the contract the formation reverted to an engine front and rear.

My intention is to finish the story of the Stone Trains in a future issue, and I would welcome additions, corrections and amendments from readers with personal memories and observations of this fascinating operation. Meantime, my warmest thanks are due particularly to Frank Dunlop, George Gaw, Irwin Pryce, Bill Scott, Charles Friel and Ian Wilson, all of whom have given me much help in preparing this article.

MEMORIES OF THE BCDR

L.S. Duncan

[By a happy coincidence two of our members, within a fortnight of each other, sent in the following articles which since they are to some extent complementary are reproduced together. Although Desmond Coakham's book pre-dated it slightly, there were obviously others who remembered that 2000 marked the 50th anniversary of the closure of most of the BCDR - or the "County Down" as it was popularly known. - Ed.]

Prompted by advancing years and by the recent excellent book by Desmond Coakham, I am jotting down a few of my memories of the "Co Down" as I knew it as a child in the 1930s and a youngster in the 1940s.

My father spent all his working life - apart from two World Wars - in the Secretary's Office. He began as an Indentured Clerk, earning the princely sum of £100 for this five year "apprenticeship" before the 1914-18 War. He brought me into the office occasionally when he was working overtime in the 1930s. I recall banks of high sloping desks at which the Clerks worked on stools and massive typewriters with violet carbon paper.

Although he was always poorly paid, there was the great benefit of free travel for the family on all Irish

railways and concessionary travel on the mainland and in NW Europe. We were in Killarney when our school-mates hadn't got as far as Killinchy and, in 1938, in Paris when my friends might have got to Portrush. Free travel also led to summer picnics at all the resorts on the County Down system and - the greatest of all thrills - free seats in the grandstand at Comber Station for the spectacular TT races.

Free travel must have dictated that mode of travel - rather than the more convenient tram - for my five years at Inst. For the couple of years before the 1939/45 War, I caught the 08:25 railcar set, propelled by one of the 2-4-2 tanks from the "down" platform at Knock. There was little of railway interest on the way in. The siding at Bloomfield seemed little used. Desmond Coakham refers to it as serving a stone yard belonging to a Ballygowan quarry-master. My recollection of it is that of storing granite slabs, presumably brought up from Newcastle, for use as gravestones, etc. The site is now occupied by a Hyundai dealer!

On the approaches to Queen's Quay Station - if one were not too busy with a quick "cog" of homework, one might see an engine not usually at that location, or a newly-painted engine just out of "shops".

A complete digression - but can any Old Instonian who travelled in from the Bangor or Comber lines explain why the outward and return walks across the City centre were on totally different routes? The morning route was out of the station, through the coal yards, over the Queen's Bridge, down Ann Street and Castle Lane to Donegall Place, through Queen's Arcade and College Street, across the front of the Tech and into school. In the afternoon, it was like a cork out of a bottle, straight up Wellington Place and Chichester Street, across Oxford Street, over the Bridge, and back through the coal yards into the station.

Our return train was the 15:22 for Donaghadee, a five-coach set headed by a 4-4-2 tank lying at Platform 3. This required pretty smart timing from school bell at 15:00, into the locker room and cloakroom and off for the mile-long walk. Going through Ballymacarett Junction it was usual to see a coal train headed by a GNR 0-6-0 waiting in the sidings to move over to the Central line for Adelaide yards or wherever.

With the outbreak of war in 1939, and the need to conserve locomotive coal on the Co. Down, our 08:25 up train was withdrawn, and we had to join a Donaghadee train usually headed by 0-6-0 No.26, leaving Knock at 08:31.

Following the German air-raids in early May 1941, there was a mass spontaneous evacuation of East Belfast each evening. But there was a real problem for railway management. An unexploded mine was believed to be lying in the Connswater just beside the railway bridge near the Holywood Arches. Rail movement was prohibited for a few days and the Donaghadee and Newcastle lines were effectively severed from their City terminus, loco facilities and carriage sidings. In spite of that difficulty, the Company managed to work 10-coach trains into Bloomfield Station, which had only one crossover, and lift thousands of residents out to Dundonald, Comber and beyond.

If, for any reason (perhaps disciplinary!) we missed the 15:22 train home, our fall-back was the 16:20 rail-motor set working out of Platform 1. With a few minutes in hand on the concourse, one could sneak out past the Gents' toilet to see what was going on in the carriage sidings and goods yard, or operate one of the penny-in-the-slot machines. The short sidings at the buffer end of the centre lines between Platforms 2 & 3 and 4 & 5 were usually occupied by the Golfers' Saloon or a fish van which never seemed to be used on a train.

As to train-spotting outside my daily travel, my favourite vantage point was at the top of the cutting alongside Barnett's Road at Knock and my favourite sight an "up" goods from the Newcastle line headed by No.4 or No.10 going up to Belfast at the end of the morning commuter traffic.

With my father away in the Army in the early 1940s and distant travel out of the question, my mother took my sister and me to Donaghadee for our summer holidays. My main interest there was watching the arrival of a short goods train about mid-day. No.14, the small 0-6-0, might have shunted the yard for half-an-hour, brought in full coal wagons from the quay and then “dozed” through the afternoon until taking out the “up” goods in the early evening.

My father spent the last year of his railway life handing over the Registrar’s Department of the BCDR to the UTA - a sad experience for a man who had pride in his work and his company. My own farewell to the BCDR was, appropriately enough, travelling home to Knock on the last famous and noisy train in April 1950.

CLOSURE OF THE DONAGHADEE BRANCH OF THE BCDR

Brian McDonald

In May 1850 the Belfast and County Down Railway Company opened their line from Belfast to Newtownards, and in June 1861 it was extended to Donaghadee. The BCDR continued to operate the line until 1948 when it was taken over by the recently formed Ulster Transport Authority. This new company was unsympathetic to railways and decided to close many lines. One of these was the line through Newtownards to Donaghadee.

The last train from Donaghadee departed at 9:15pm on 22nd April 1950. Many people travelled on it to Belfast and then back again on the final passenger train over the line. Among the passengers were Mr R.E.M. Hughes, UTA Passenger Manager; Mr N.E. Flanagan, District Passenger Manager, and his assistant, Mr D.P. Connolly. Also travelling were a large group called the Wavers Club, who had booked two carriages. This was one of a number of clubs which had been formed by the regular commuters on the line.

It was the custom of some of the commuters to wave to their wives from the train on leaving Millisle Road Halt at Donaghadee. The custom spread to other commuters who also began waving to the ladies, and so the Wavers Club was formed.

When the train from Donaghadee arrived in Newtownards the club held an interesting little ceremony at the station. Mrs Crail, wife of Mr Jordan Crail, a former stationmaster, was serenaded by members of the club and presented with a bouquet of flowers. She stayed at the station and waited until the last train to Donaghadee passed at 11:30pm.

One person specially known to the club was “our faithful friend”, a Mrs Morrison of Talbot Street, who used to wave to the trains every morning. As the last train to Belfast went past, the driver blew the engine’s whistle specially for her, and all the Wavers Club waved to her for the last time.

At Belfast the club arranged for a mock funeral to commemorate the closure of the line. A member carried a placard announcing “In memory of the BCDR, foully murdered by the UTA, 22nd April 1950”. A miniature coffin, bearing the inscription “BCDR killed by the UTA 22nd April 1950 RIP”, was carried in procession to the ticket barrier where it was set alight. While all this was happening some members of the Wavers Club went off to get fish suppers for the return journey.

The last train left Belfast to the sound of exploding fog signals and cheers from the crowds. On reaching Newtownards, those passengers who got off shook hands with the driver and fireman and watched as the train disappeared into the darkness towards Donaghadee and into history.

Saturday, however, was not the end of traffic over the branch. On that night there were about seventy loaded wagons in Newtownards station and there were other wagons at Donaghadee, all of which had to be got back to Belfast. On Monday there was quite a lot of activity getting these vehicles away and just before noon a goods train brought fifteen wagons of coal into Newtownards Station. These should have arrived earlier in the previous week but had been held in Belfast because of lack of

accommodation at Newtownards.

Among the staff employed at Newtownards station at the time were William Taylor, stationmaster; James White, signalman; William Boal, head porter; William Donaldson, signalman and James Carvill, senior clerk.

BOOT AND BALLAST

N. Poots

The above title struck me as one which might appear on an English pub sign and, given the events of the summer of 2000, could well have been adopted by certain premises in the Antrim-Kingsbog area.

In his Locomotive Report, Peter Scott has described how it came about that on Sunday 18th June 2000 our lowly Avonside 0-6-0ST made a sudden escape from the confines of Whitehead into the big wide world.

While the move was being planned Evan Pameley embarked on a series of phone calls to see who would be available to crew the engine. Having initially expressed enthusiasm for the project and recently joined the ranks of the retired I was fairly sure of a place, and indeed found myself rostered for the very next day and the three following.



Access 2 - where it all began - in early days. Subsequent canting of the track and further ballasting made it impossible for the loco to re-mount the low-loader here at the end of the contract. The absence of human life would suggest that all concerned are visiting the shop. (I.C. Pryce)

On the Sunday quite a crowd of enthusiasts had assembled in what had been the goods yard of the former Muckamore station. Here, a large stone-loading depot had been set up by the main contractors, Farrans Ltd, and named Access No.2 in a series of road access points between Antrim and Bleach Green Junction. In due course, a low-loader appeared, bearing an engine in steam which identified itself as RPSI No.3 and turned out to be "R.H. Smyth" minus its nameplates and maker's plates, these having been removed before leaving Whitehead in case anyone else might be tempted to do so at another time and place.

At one stage disaster threatened, when the tractor unit got bogged down in deep ballast but this was resolved by the ingenuity of its driver and under the watchful eye of Peter Scott, Thomas Charters had the honour of cautiously driving the engine down the ramp and on to real rails. Henry Boot's Unimog (whose inadequacy had been the reason for the return to steam) having placed the three ballast hoppers in a suitable position, the "Derry Engine" proceeded to move them around to the accompaniment of applause and the exposure of much film. David Dillon was present with some serious-looking equipment and the results duly appeared on BBC TV.

Due to the haste with which the operation had been set up, Evan's rostering for the first week turned out to be largely "thee and me" with occasional assistance from others. A system was subsequently arranged whereby one man was rostered to light up the engine at 05:30, another, normally the driver, coming on at 07:00 and the lighter-up being relieved at about 12:00. The agreement with our employers, Henry Boot Ltd, was that the engine would be available from 07:30 for ten hours or so, depending on the nature of the work in hand.

Thus it was that Evan and I presented ourselves and our little engine for duty at Access 2 on the morning of 19th June, not quite sure of what to expect. We duly made the acquaintance of Gary, from Middlesbrough, who was in charge of the train, along with his two assistants. There may have been other more senior persons present to see the operation begun but I can't remember them and, as time went on, the personnel on the train changed quite often. During the first week there was considerable media interest and an often-asked question was, "Why are they using an old steam engine?" Apart from the Unimog being on the light side for the work in prospect, there may have been other reasons, but the simple answer was that the steam engine could do it, so why shouldn't it - a view which events proved to be well founded.

At the beginning, the wagons were loaded by a mechanical shovel driven vigorously by a young man who was said to be aged 17 but looked about 13. His machine may have been older and did not last the course. It suffered from overheating and when its driver became aware that the loco was a source of water he often visited us, armed with several large Coke bottles. Eventually his ailing mount expired and was replaced by a similar vehicle. This and its driver, Seamus, came from around Cookstown. The stone reputedly came from even further afield. Seamus was a most agreeable and obliging person, particularly when it came to getting coal on to the engine. This was normally done by loading bags from a container into the bucket of his machine which would then convey them to the cab roof where they could be slit open and emptied into the bunker. He also had a sharp eye, whereby he was on occasions able to warn H. Boot's staff that a hopper had been left open and that what he was putting in the top of the wagon was falling out the bottom.

One day, while plodding along dropping ballast, I was confronted by a man making urgent stop signals. Since stopping while dropping ballast was to be avoided if at all possible, I was in something of a quandary. It turned out that this person was a senior member of Farrans and had been approached by Denis Murray and team who were filming an item which was broadcast the next morning on the BBC Breakfast programme.

Encounters with the media produced a dilemma - while the contractors welcomed the publicity, the resulting delays were less than welcome. The TV people seemed to me to take a lot of time doing very little. I would tell them what we were going to do and where we would be doing it but they seemed to have a different set of priorities and ended up with a lot less - though doubtless of higher quality - than I managed to get on my days off. Later in the programme, Henry Boot brought in their own man to take stills and video for promotional purposes, during which process the engine acquired a Henry Boot headboard and the middle wagon a not quite horizontal sticker. The bright yellow headboard was eventually quietly relegated to the position of tailboard.

Speaking of wagons, those which made up our train were something of a vintage bunch and had started

life on BR Southern Region. Having acquired more modern vehicles, NIR made these three mature specimens available to Henry Boot. Dating from more affluent days on NIR, they carried cast brass number plates and could euphemistically be described as specialised - the one nearest the engine would discharge only in the middle, the next could do both middle and sides while the third could only do sides. The third wagon could also cause problems if the doors were opened too enthusiastically, when the operating mechanism would go “over the top” and refuse to close. RPSI personnel observed Gary sorting this out and made their acquired expertise available to his successors after he had moved to other duties.

In the early days the wagon brakes gave cause for concern as their cylinders were reluctant to maintain vacuum. This actually had its advantages on uphill sections if, for some reason, boiler pressure had fallen to the extent that the brakes would normally have come on and brought the proceedings to a halt. On several occasions, due to the leakiness, it was possible to plod on quite safely to a loading point. This could be lived with on the more gently graded Antrim side of the hill but thoughts inevitably turned to the prospect of the 1 in 76 descent through Mossley, (perversely called Mosely by English visitors) with over 150 tons of loaded wagons behind 30 tons of engine, and the wagon brakes soon received a good seeing-to.



John Ferguson and Billy McConnell, normally found at Whitehead, have had an outing to Access 17 to carry out some running repairs. The engine is carrying its eye-catching Henry Boot headboard. (P.A. Scott)

One of the first things to be learned was the speed at which to proceed while discharging ballast. This was not too difficult in the earlier stages - a brisk walking pace with the chutes well open. Only in a dire emergency should one stop while discharging, especially with the middle chutes open. Stopping, or excessive slowing, with either side or middle open, would result in stone being deposited on the rails and, especially with the middle chute, could result in the train being anchored by a pillar of stone, resulting in much digging by the wagon crews, with requests for the loan of the engine's ash rake. Stones on the line meant that the journey was somewhat bumpy and this was not at all to the liking of

Gary, who was wont to express his feelings vociferously.

Stones were not the only things to make a journey bumpy. On one morning in the early days we were trundling happily uphill when I noticed what looked from a distance like catch-points. Since, to the best of my knowledge, our new railway was unlikely to use such things I stopped short and found that the rails had been cut and were now out of alignment. It turned out that, due to the unusually warm weather, the rails had expanded and distorted and had had to be unclipped and cut. Gary & Co eventually got things sorted but I was to find that this was only the first of many gaps in the rails. Being regularly on the job, I soon got to know where they all were, but some who had not had the chance to familiarise themselves had a few surprises. I thought it strange that nothing was done to stabilise such gaps as, apart from the chance of derailment, the less supported rail was being deflected while the better supported one was having its end pounded by the wagons to the tune of some 15 tons per axle. As the job progressed, fishplates began to appear - some bolted between the two lengths of rail - and expansion-jointed sections began to be inserted. It appears that the whole line had to be stressed; this (as I understood it) involved calculations being made on the basis of an average temperature, the gaps being appropriately drawn together and welded with the whole line being basically in tension at normal temperatures. I never managed to observe either operation, not least because the last thing they wanted was a locomotive disturbing their work.



Irwin Pryce positioning the hose prior to watering at Kingsbog. Laying the hose along the handrail meant that one did not have to hang on to it to keep it in the tank and could also avoid getting soaked if the water was turned on too enthusiastically. An auxiliary supply of coal can be seen on the cab roof. (W.T. Scott)

At the outset one of the main considerations was the security of the engine. It was stabled in what were considered to be safe areas but, initially, an additional security measure was the erection around the engine of a metal mesh structure, the legs of which had to be inserted into heavy rubber blocks and the sections of which were held together by metal clamps. This structure, designed to prevent people falling into excavations, was not really secure and was an absolute torture to erect at the end of the day. I was very glad when it fell into disuse, as it seemed to be an unnecessary addition to the loco's

security measures. These consisted of four steel sheets fitted to the cab sides, with a padlock on the driver's side. All the loco's equipment: drums of oil, hoses, fire irons and wood for lighting up were stowed in the cab prior to being locked up - a tiresome but necessary procedure at the end of the day's work and an impediment to the person lighting up the next morning.

At the beginning, since some Henry Boot personnel lived in houses in the Dunadry area, while we were working in that area the engine was often parked there or a little nearer Muckamore beside a farm crossing. The latter had the advantage of convenient water.

Probably the most frequently used stabling point was Templepatrick Loop, though not always from choice. Provided one had some water to begin with, more was available nearby where the line crossed the old Belfast Road. This involved scrambling down the embankment and then walking under the bridge to reach the hydrant. Being prone to flooding in bad weather the latter area had to be negotiated with caution at such times in order to avoid a soaking by unthinking motorists.

At Kingsbog crossing was a yard occupied by various contractors and it was felt that the presence of a security man would ensure safety. However, after a couple of nights it was found that engine and wagons had been tampered with so that ended that. Water was available here but required five lengths of hose, some of which were normally left concealed under a hedge. This worked well until someone decided that there should be a footpath, and the hedge suddenly disappeared!



The loco crew had been asked to set back to Access 14 so that the road/railer could dismount at the level crossing there. Unfortunately, it failed en route and here the elderly but reliable loco is pushing the stricken beast back to clear the loading point at Access 15. (W.T. Scott)

The two other stabling points used were Access 13 & 14, respectively Kingsmoss West and East level crossings, it being felt that this was as near Greater Belfast as it was prudent to go.

The former also had convenient water, although its pressure was the most feeble of all and, when used for the loco, deprived the nearby house of its supply. However, the good lady there did not complain

and one can only hope that she never has a serious fire.

Coal was delivered by road in a container which was located at whichever of the stone loading points seemed convenient but a frustrating aspect of the operation was that we were seldom able to operate from a fixed base - to have easy access to both coal and water was a luxury! As the ballasting moved on, so did the engine and we often found ourselves sent to work and/or stable some miles away from our coal supply. This required the assistance of various combinations of Mark, Walter, Sam, Billy, Hooded Henry and one of H Boot's vans which would produce varying amounts, sometimes as we were scraping the last out of the bunker. However, I never heard any grumbles and this was typical of the good relations which prevailed on the job.

Another requirement, to prevent the new ballast from being contaminated, was that the ashpan be raked out on to metal sheets placed between the rails. Normal procedure was for the ash to be let lie there overnight, the engine being moved back the next morning to allow for disposal. I think it was Evan who eventually pointed out that there was no particular reason for the cleaning of the ashpan to be done last thing at night, especially as the evenings grew darker, and that life could be made easier by doing it in the late afternoon while wagons were being loaded.



An (almost) identical sister loco, Avonside 2004/27, photographed at Snowdown colliery in Kent around 1970. The keen-eyed will be able to spot several detail differences. (I.C. Pryce)

Ballast loading points were:

Access 2: Former Muckamore goods yard, level, spacious and convenient to a shop;

Access 5: Beside Islandreagh Road, level, small, but had the advantage that, when the engine was uncoupled, the loading shovel could deliver coal directly to the bunker, rather than via the cab roof;

Access 7: About ½ mile west of Kilmakee, towards which the line climbed. Since, as at most loading points, there was room to load only one wagon at a time it was usual to place the back wagon first, subsequent movements being taken care of by gravity;

Access 10: Also on a gradient, between Templepatrick Loop and the M2 bridges, large and used a lot

but not popular with Seamus due to steep ramp up to line - still less popular with the original shovel driver as it was on this ramp that his machine finally expired!

Access 12: ¼ mile east of former Doagh station, convenient for loading;

Access 15: At former Ballyclare Junction, convenient for nobody except observers on the Larne road from whence a steep ramp led down to a sharp bend;

Access 17: Between Mossley and Monkstown, beside the Ulster Way, with pleasing views of Belfast Lough and the Co. Down shore while preparing for the slog up through Mossley. In latter weeks the amount of stone here resembled a young mountain range, to the constant bewilderment of Seamus, "Where are they going to use it all?" - but they did, and more.

To the Henry Boot people, the geography of the line consisted of the access points set up by Farrans, names like Sallybush or Ballyclare Junction having little meaning - even Templepatrick Loop tended to be known as Access 9, although Ballymartin Crossing, home of exotic fowl, tended to be known by its proper name. Between here and the former Doagh station the line curves through almost 180 degrees and seemed capable of absorbing endless train-loads of ballast. On one occasion we found that all was not well with the exotic fowl as a cat had entered one of the pens and was terrorising its occupants, two highly coloured pheasants!

But, you may say, never mind all that, what about the engine? The engine, I am glad to report, gave a very good account of itself - all the more so since it was put on to the job at short notice and had always taken second place to main line locos where maintenance was concerned. Someone aptly commented that, until this job, the engine didn't know what a hill was like. Quite true, since neither the docks at Derry nor the site at Whitehead have significant gradients. With that, and some of the distances it had to cover, the loco embarked on a completely new lifestyle.

It has been suggested that the engine was never meant for that kind of work and certainly the Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners would not have envisaged anything of the kind. However, having observed 16" Andrew Barclay 0-4-0STs pounding daily up similar gradients for 3-4 miles at the coal mines near Dalmellington in Ayrshire, it seemed to me that, with suitable handling, it should not be a great problem for our engine. And so it turned out, once it was realised that whilst when shuffling around Whitehead the sight of the shovel was enough to make the engine blow off, the ballast job was a very different story. The engine frequently had to work hard and, when doing so, swallowed coal and water at a rate unheard of in its earlier employment.

While some might say that one of the attractions of steam locomotives is their unpredictability, as a regular crew member I much preferred predictability. Axleboxes seemed to be among the more unpredictable aspects of the loco. In the early days, the trailing boxes were quite often afflicted with heat, until the underkeeps were stuffed with oil-impregnated cotton waste. Despite this, one or more boxes would still occasionally carry some heat. One tended to feel that this was more likely to happen on a long run than a short hard run but this was not always so, leading to the conclusion that heating problems were perhaps more related to preparation. One of the engine's little foibles is that the oil cups on top of the axleboxes seem to attract any water in the vicinity so that careful work with a syringe was an essential part of daily preparation.

Since the engine was in less than first class condition before the job began, some problems could reasonably have been expected. The most obvious were not the most debilitating. Given the engine's position well down the maintenance queue, some wheezing and knocking were not unexpected. Packing of glands and attention to bearings reduced this and adjustments to the smokebox door resulted in better steaming. Part-way through the contract, a leaking firebox seam gave cause for concern but a few visits to the affected area by Messrs Scott and Pameley put this right - being slim can have its drawbacks!

However, the boiler still had an inconvenient habit of losing water overnight. If well filled at disposal this was not a problem, except after a few days of idleness when the next steam-raiser would probably find things not to his liking. When the engine was not parked near a source of water, to get water into the boiler involved siphoning it from the saddle tank through a plastic pipe of unappealing aspect.

After a few weeks of operation, Thomas Charters reported that there was a frog residing in the saddle tank. Cynical persons suggested that Thomas was suffering from some kind of stress, until one day when Irwin Pryce and myself went to wash out the boiler and tank and the frog revealed itself to me. Being concerned for its nourishment and general welfare, I eventually retrieved it from the tank, whereupon it sprang into the cab. Not finding conditions there to its liking, it sprang out again and made its way into a congenial hedge in the Dunadry area where it may well be living and croaking happily to this day.



The incomplete Templepatrick loop, with the former goods store and platform on the right. Neither this nor the old passenger station will be brought back into use, as a site with parking space is required. (W.T. Scott)

So what of the actual operation? This varied from day to day. As mentioned earlier, at the start it was easy - just get the speed right and drop as much stone as possible. Later on, complications began to set in, not the least being that of getting stone on to the outside of canted curves. With the cant, the ballast wagons were reluctant to discharge so we had to go back and forth releasing a dribble each time. To study existing gradient profiles was futile as the line went up and down and all over the place. So one got to know all the ups and downs - and then the tamper would come along and change them! After it had been operating in an area it was necessary for the ballast train to go back and replenish what the tamper had used

This required more attention to detail and was therefore a slower process than the initial stages when the stone had gushed forth merrily.

The movements of the tamper and the track regulator, a sort of glorified ballast plough, led to an increase in steam mileage. There were all sorts of other machines on site but, apart from these two, they were all road/railers so that all that was required of us was to leave them a suitable place to clamber off the rails. When either of the yellow perils needed to get past we had to go to Templepatrick Loop, which was sometimes far from convenient. Until a fairly late stage the Loop was not a loop at all since about 20ft of rail was missing at the Antrim end.

H Boot was not keen on road crossings, particularly, and understandably, the one at Kilmakee where the line crosses the major road to Aldergrove (sorry, Belfast International) Airport. Although carrying much traffic the road here is straight, unlike that at Kingsbog where traffic from the Belfast direction tended to hurtle round a sharp bend, ignoring the warning signs on the road - after all, there hadn't been trains here for years! Other crossings were much less of a problem. However, several persons accustomed to walking themselves plus dog over the line in the past few years may have to change their habits when NIR trains start to run. Given modern attitudes, they probably won't and will claim against the railway when trouble ensues! There are also quite a few accommodation crossings where the passage of vehicles or animals could be a problem for a high-speed railway.



Charlie had better look to his laurels! Here his young son has caught the loco in the classic “rods down” position at Access 17. The northern foothills of the ballast mountain are also visible. (J. Friel)

As already mentioned, our major problem was the lack of a fixed base. Coal was supplied, through the good offices of Paul Newell, on pallets in a container. (Some of the pallets were judged to be in such bad order as to be only good for lighting-up material!) In the later weeks of the job the entire site, previously littered with all kinds of potentially useful material, received a general tidy-up which made lighting-up wood rather scarce. Any stray pallets, if not seized there and then, would have their positions noted for future attention.

For those who may have fired our larger engines on main line work, to fire “Harvey” might seem a retrograde step, but I would not agree. On the main line engines you might not get it quite right but could probably get away with that on account of their greater capacity. Likewise on Whitehead or

Downpatrick train rides where, unless one is totally incompetent, not too much can go wrong. Not so on the ballast job, where the needs were more immediate. In addition to the engine not having the reserve capacity of its larger sisters, the requirements of the operators could be unpredictable. During loading of the wagons, which could take anything from 30 minutes to almost an hour, it was normal practice to begin to get the engine ready about halfway through the loading of the third wagon. Then someone could announce that we were only loading two wagons. What to do - if it was a short run on easy road there was no problem but if it was going to involve hard work or a long run then there was a problem, to which the only answer was to wait until there was a good fire, full boiler and full pressure. Drivers and firemen - myself included - who have done otherwise have found that if you didn't start right, things would only deteriorate, eventually resulting in a stop for a blow-up. On the other hand, when everything was in order, the engine could be a joy to drive, either steadily plodding or (for the more adventurous) storming up some of the steeper gradients.

Those of us accustomed to its pedestrian activities at Whitehead have been pleasantly surprised to find how well the engine performs, even on steep climbs, once started and then pulled up a few notches, even though it then tends to knock and nose about a bit. I was surprised at how seldom the engine slipped - the first time in several weeks was when making a hurried start over Kilmakee level crossing. Later, despite the onset of wet weather, as long as the rail was good and the driver patient, slipping was seldom experienced.

When we first started to load at Access 17, between Monkstown and Mossley, it was a different story. Although on the previous Friday, a dry day, the crew had got three loaded wagons some way up the bank, the following Monday was drizzly and this, along with a dirty rail, led to a great struggle to reach where the others had left off. While these conditions lasted, two loaded wagons up the bank became the order of the day. Later on, when conditions had improved, the UTV camera team recorded Bob Edwards and Jeff Spencer pounding up with a full load. In damp weather the track regulator/ballast plough could be a menace, tending to cover the rails with stone dust which nothing short of a downpour would clear.

The climb from Access 17 to the top of the bank became a great challenge to Jeff, a keen fireman, and I regret to say that I was the driver when he lost his 100% success rate. An untimely shower resulted in repeated bouts of slipping and a stop for a blow-up. Jeff was despondent, but a spell of driving helped to cheer him up. At the end of the day, in premises in the Kingsbog area, he was able to apply his skills to a troublesome fire which had almost caused an evacuation by filling the place with more smoke than we had encountered all day!

On a personal level, what can be said? I was on the engine for 60 of its 90 working days, almost three times as many as anyone else. However, what this amounted to was that I was retired, available and willing. Apart from the summer holiday period, when lots of persons were available, much credit must go to those who took their holidays at other times or took days off work, probably at some cost to themselves, to ensure that the engine was available to work when required. "When required" could, and frequently did, vary from the original rosters which often meant that those who had volunteered for a certain day were cancelled or called in at short notice to cover some other day not originally notified. Evan Pamely, in addition to his many other commitments, had the task of organising rosters and, having had some experience of this towards the end of the job when he was on holiday, I can't say that I envied him.

I must admit that, being on the engine such a lot, I began to have a rather proprietorial attitude. Not being in favour of dirt and disorder, I would attack the exterior from time to time and had my own notions as to where and how things should be in the cramped cab, thereby perhaps earning a reputation as a grumpy old so and so! One found that various useful little odds and ends tended to get lost as time went by - in fact, of all the bits and pieces in the cab, the greatest survivor was a spoon left there in the

early days by Evan. After a couple of days, only a brave man would have used it in his tea and it was useless for anything else but no-one seemed to have the heart to throw it out! Somewhat unreasonably, since ballasting was what the job was all about, it was ballast which annoyed me most. When deposited from the wagons, the stone formed steep slopes, over which I used to stagger and scold. Others seemed to be less inconvenienced, suggesting that they were more agile, or patient, or both!

At the start of the job it was a big novelty, for some a fun thing, something that neither the RPSI nor any similar body had ever done before. Money was to be made by the Society, the job was to be for 12-14 weeks and there were any amount of people available to crew the engine. Then summer ended; people became scarcer and the days got shorter while the hot weather, earlier complained of, ended and the job was nowhere near finished - extending, as it did, to just over 5 months. Lighting up and preparation at 05:30 on a dark and rainy morning was far from being fun but, despite this, the engine never failed to be available for its rostered duty nor did it ever fail to complete that duty.

A few (approximate) statistics:

The total of 90 days worked by the engine was actually not far away from the forecast of 12-14 weeks. However, lay-offs and cancellations spread this out to just over 5 months.

22 persons were involved in crewing the loco - 19 RPSI, including one Dublin member; 2 from the Downpatrick Railway and one from the Bluebell Railway in England.

Based on an approximate average daily mileage of 10 or so, the loco ran 900-1,000 miles.

Taking a daily average of 4 trips, the loco shifted something in the region of 50,000 tons of stone.



Almost the end of the road. In a rare burst of sunshine, the loco is seen arriving at Antrim on 25th November 2000, the only occasion when it hauled its train bunker first. (I.C. Pryce)

The unique nature of the operation suggested that it would generate considerable interest by media and enthusiasts. However, despite the fact that it was probably well over half a century since a contractor's steam loco was involved in railway construction, interest was less than overwhelming. In the early days BBC and, later, UTV sent out teams but cross-Channel interest seems to have been minimal. It would

appear that photographers there will pay money and flock to a preserved branch line to take pretty pictures of some engine with a spurious identity acting out a 1930s scenario but were not prepared to cross water to record the real thing. Perhaps our operation was like Dr Johnson's famous saying about the Giant's Causeway - worth seeing, but not worth going to see!

Despite tentative suggestions that it might return home by rail, "Harvey" returned on 25th November by road, again in steam so that it could be driven off on arrival. This operation covered almost the entire length of the line, beginning with a final dropping of ballast in the Mossley-Kingsbog area in the morning. The wagons were then propelled, in seasonably foul weather, back to Templepatrick Loop where the engine ran round before hauling them bunk-first to the former stone loading bank at Antrim, this being the only time that the train ran in that configuration. Having travelled back in luxury in the cab of the large Scania tractor unit, Jeff and I dropped the fire at Whitehead at about 8pm and the big adventure was over.

Finally, a few things seen and heard:

A Person (after a late lighting-up, having heard the blower operating and then having seen steam shut off at the castle): "What's the problem with the blower?" Answer: "I'm waiting until we have enough steam".

A Boot Person (who had worked on other railway contracts): "Stop at the crossover", e.g. Kilmakee/Ballymartin/Kingsbog, etc., none of which has one.

Perhaps the same Boot Person, at Templepatrick Loop: "Is that turn-out OK for you to go over?", and, the train having done so, "Is that alright for you to go back over?"

All Drivers, if they were honest (having applied steam brake to facilitate release of handbrake): "What's wrong, this bloody engine won't start ..."

Various Boot Persons: "Don't know how you work in here, with all the heat and fumes". Later, on wet days, while persons and garments are drying out: "God, it's great in here".

Various Boot persons (since early October): "Another week or two should finish it".

A certain Driver-cum-Author, with Jeff Spencer as fireman, has been to take water and then, for reasons still not apparent, believes he is light engine. On attempting to return to the loading point, he finds that the engine will only move a few inches before stopping with a bump and does no better in forward gear. Concerned that the engine may have sustained some damage to its innards, he is pondering the situation when the ever-helpful Jeff suggests blowing up the vacuum brake. Driver (condescendingly): "What good'll that do?" Jeff: "I think you should try it." Driver (somewhat testily): "Sure it only works on the wagons!" Jeff (patiently): "Yes, that's right". Only then does the Driver look behind and notice three large yellow things.

COMMENTS AND RECOLLECTIONS

Laurence Liddle

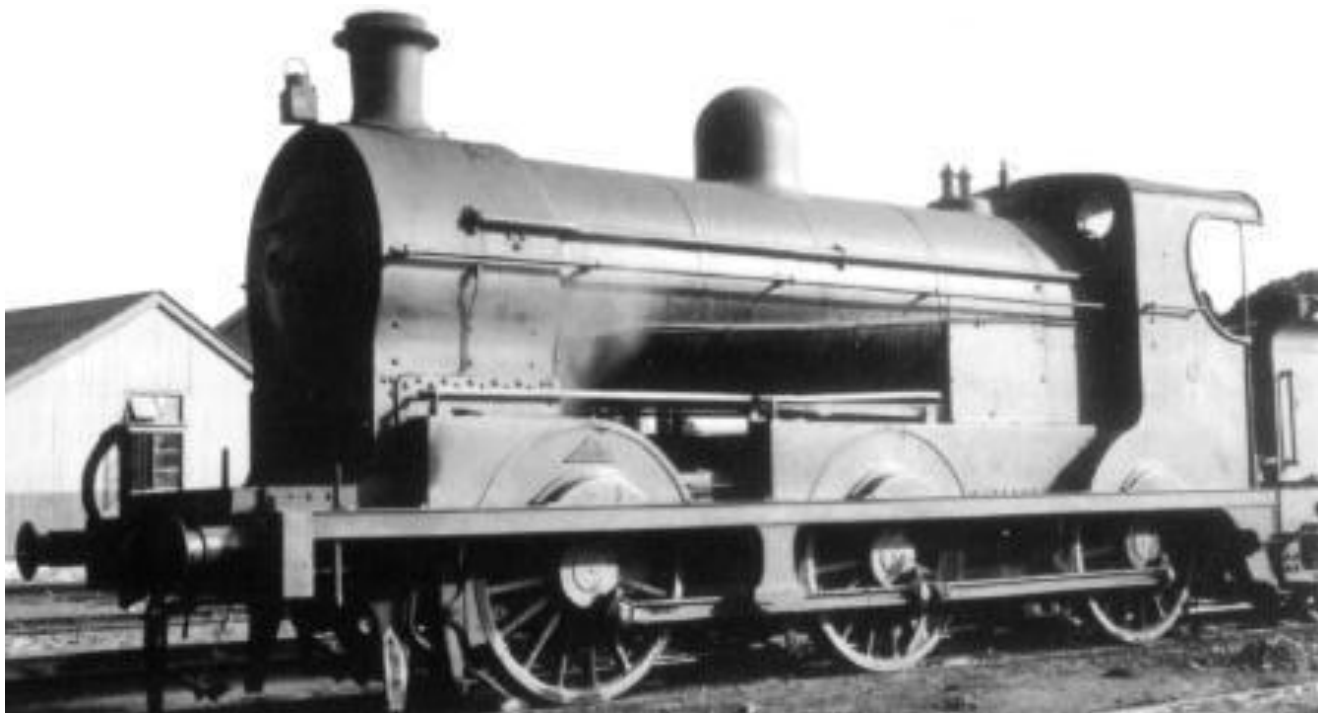
Norman Johnston's comprehensive and beautifully produced "Locomotives of the GNRI" provides far more material for comment than I have space for here. Before I read the book I had thought that so far as the post-1880 period was concerned I was as knowledgeable about the Great Northern as any other interested layman. Pride comes before a fall - from both the text and the illustrations I have derived much information, and continue to do so at each re-reading.

Not the least valuable part of Norman's work is that a sizeable part of the information on Irish locomotive history amassed by the late Bob Clements over the major part of a long life has now become available, and that Bob's pre-eminence as an Irish railway historian has thus been reinforced.

Of course, it was not just to the Great Northern that Bob directed his research; as well as his beloved

“Midland” pretty well every Irish railway, no matter how small, and particularly its locomotives, came under his scrutiny. He was as interested in the long boiler tank engines of the Sligo Leitrim as he was in the “Woolwich” 2-6-0s of the MGWR/GSR, and would discuss the performance of DSE/GS 461 & 462 as eruditely and authoritatively as he would recall the performance of a GN “Q” class 4-4-0 on Carrickmore bank. Now that the results of at least some of Bob’s work on the Great Northern have been published, is there a competent historian who will produce a companion to Norman Johnston’s work. “Locomotives of the GSR”? - surely among our membership and that of the IRRS such a person can be found.

I was intrigued to read in Norman’s book that as late as 1952 the Great Northern was considering building more steam engines, namely ten SG2 0-6-0s. That nothing came of this may well have been due to the fact that in 1953 the Great Northern Railway (Ireland) ceased to exist and its successor, the Great Northern Railway Board, was totally dependent on the two Irish governments for finance. Whatever Dublin’s view on acquiring new steam locomotives might have been, the proposal would have been doomed to failure in view of the strong anti-railway philosophy (some might say obsession) in vogue at Stormont. It may be remembered that about the only positive statement that emanated from the GNRB was that it had been agreed, with the blessing of the two governments, “to re-equip the main line”. In effect this translated into the acquisition of the BUT railcars.



SG2 No.19 at Dundalk shed in 1936; note Nasmyth Wilson builder’s plate on the leading splasher. A pity to spoil its delightfully clean lines by not using a few more inches of piping, thereby allowing the oil pipes to run parallel to the handrail! (Loco & General)

The choice of the SG2 rather than the SG is interesting. The former machines, close relatives of the SGs, resembled the latter in virtually all respects other than the final drive for the Stephenson’s valve gear; the SGs having rocking gear while on the SG2s there was direct drive. Exponents of rockers claimed that their preferred system gave a more even steam distribution, while the direct drive school pointed to greater simplicity, fewer points to oil and fewer bearing surfaces to wear. Among the RPSI’s main line locomotives, 171 and 461 have rocking gear whilst the two J15s have direct drive.

That George Glover, under whose auspices the SG2s were built, should have chosen the direct drive

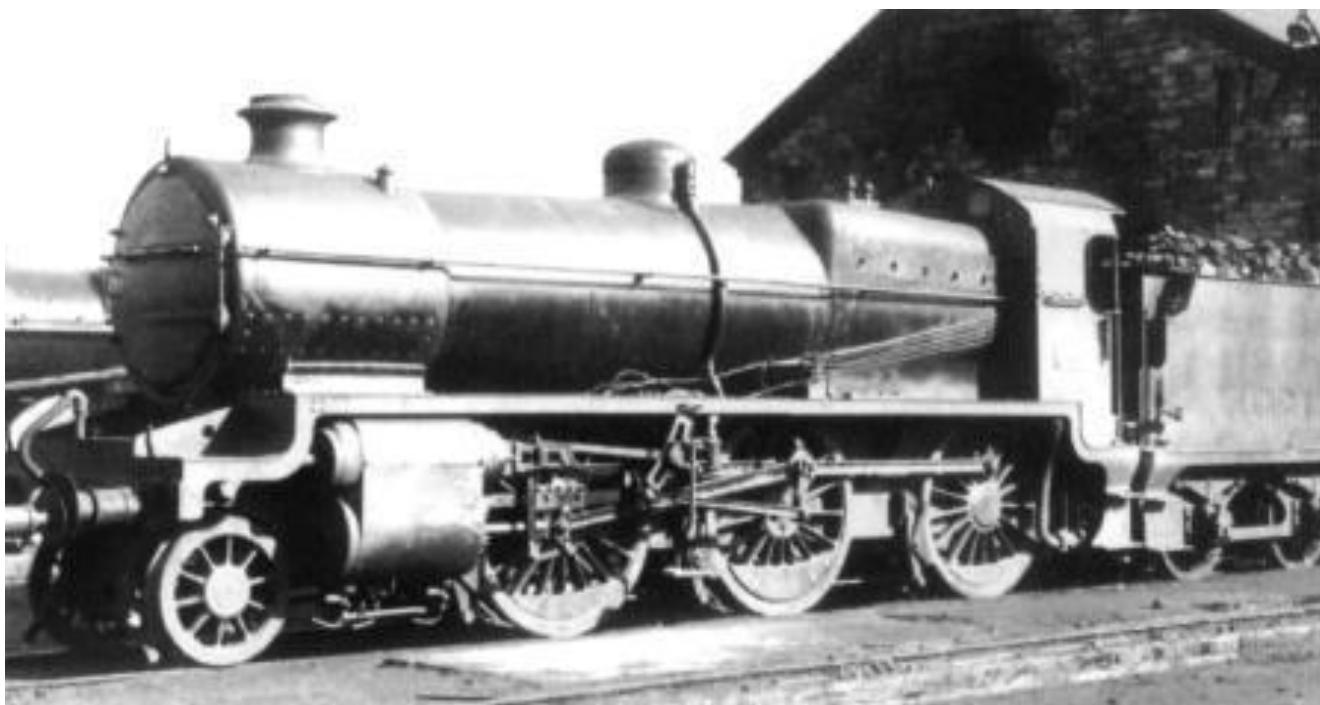
system for these locos and their larger “cousins”, the SG3s (the “Big Ds”), was unremarkable, coming as he did from the North Eastern Railway of England where direct drive for Stephenson valve gear was the rule. What was strange however was that when Glover rebuilt and superheated the “Q” 4-4-0s and the LQG 0-6-0s he provided each of these classes with piston valves actuated through rocking gear. It would seem therefore that his views on valve gear underwent some transformation between 1913, when the first batch of SG2s and the three S2s were ordered, and 1920 when he started to rebuild the Qs. Could this have been due to the fact that the original S class 4-4-0s (Clifford’s design as amended by Glover but retaining their rocking gear) were consistently achieving better coal consumption figures than the S2s, although all were operating on much the same main line duties?

Just why, in 1952, it was suggested that the SG design (the “Cs”) rather than the larger and more powerful SG3 should be the basis of new construction is not clear. Norman Johnston suggests that “perhaps it ... was felt that there were enough big goods engines”. This could certainly have been a relevant factor since, apart from a few heavily graded sections, notably those on the main line between Dundalk and Goraghtwood, and on the Derry Road between Dungannon and Omagh, the maximum load for “Cs” and “Ds” was the same - “equal to 65” plus brake van. The reason for this similarity was of course that the limiting factor was brake power. No doubt on a test on level track a “Big D” could have shifted a few more wagons than a “C” but in everyday working conditions this was irrelevant.

It is interesting to note that the various classes of big goods and mixed traffic engines on GSR/CIE, “Woolwiches”, “500s” and the inside-cylindered 2-6-0s of classes K3 and K4 (ex-GSWR) and K2 (ex-DSER), were also all limited to a maximum of 65 plus brake on other than the heavy banks. On the Cork main line, for instance, this figure applied for the whole distance between Clondalkin and Rathpeacon, but on steep gradients there were differences. From Kingsbridge up through “The Gullet”, whilst the small-wheeled Woolwiches (K1s) were permitted to take 45 and the 6’0” versions (K1as) were considered to be capable of shifting 40, all three varieties of inside-cylindered Mogul were restricted to 38. Whilst the “B1” 4-6-0s (the “500s”) were ranked with the K1as I wonder if in practice these mixed traffic 4-6-0s, with their larger grates, greater total heating surface and slightly larger cylinders than the “Woolwiches” might not have been a more reliable engine with a maximum load on a heavy bank despite their lower working pressure (180lb as compared to 200). A point which may be relevant here is that I remember the late Matt Devereux (CME at Inchicore in the mid-60s) saying that the three best loco classes on CIE - in his time, presumably - had been the 500s, the K2s (461 & 462) and the J4s (“257” class 0-6-0s).

Reverting for a moment to the subject of braking loose-coupled goods trains: it was generally considered by footplatemen that the “Woolwiches” were deficient in brake power, a point of view which would seem to be amply supported by the tragic and fatal runaway of a beet train at Cahir and the equally alarming, though fortunately non-fatal, similar occurrence with a regular goods at Liffey Junction. After this latter runaway (which ended at the North Wall) the driver is reported to have said, “I thought we were going to end up in Holyhead”. In Vol.1 of his autobiography “Locomotive Adventure” the late Harry Holcroft, who was a member of the CME’s staff on the South Eastern & Chatham and the Southern Railways, and who was for 15 years Technical Assistant to R.E. Maunsell, has an interesting comment about the brake power of the “N” class 2-6-0s, from which the Irish “Woolwiches” differed basically only in gauge. He states that although these locos had, in his words, “powerful steam brakes”, their tenders, which were vacuum braked, had only a single brake cylinder. Normal practice when working goods trains was to use the steam brake only, but when approaching a heavy down grade a vacuum would be created and the tender brake brought into play. However - and this seems directly related to the GSR/CIE experience - drivers complained that the “N” class were deficient in brake power. The upshot of these complaints was that the tenders were provided with a second vacuum cylinder, after which presumably the enginemen were happy. However, since only a single tender vacuum cylinder would have been shown on the drawing and specifications

supplied to Woolwich Arsenal, tenders produced by them would have been equipped accordingly. Hence, presumably, the cause of the poor braking performance of the Irish “Woolwiches”.



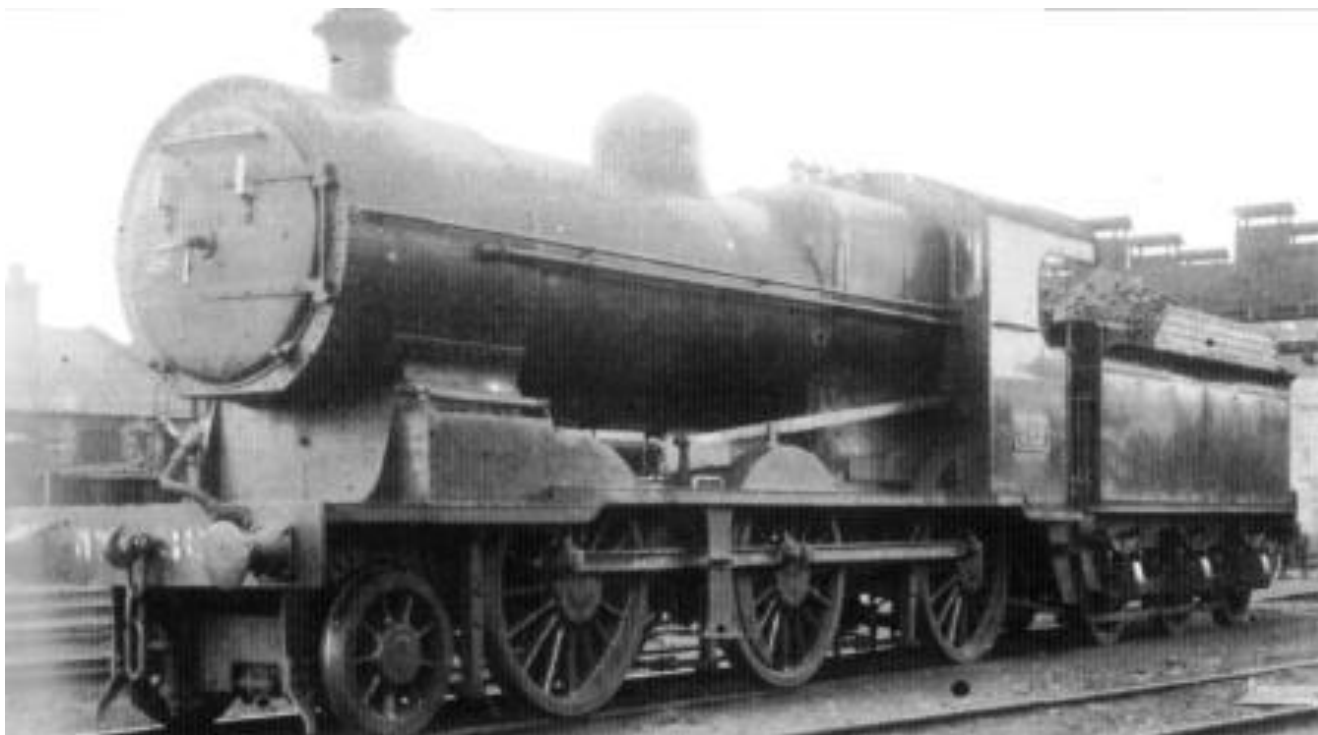
“Woolwich” K1 class No.376 at Broadstone. (Kelland collection)

To return to the Great Northern; maximum loads for goods trains between Dundalk and Goraghwood were: Class “D” locos - 55 and Class “C” locos - 47, plus brake van in each case. Between Dungannon and Omagh during the last few years before the line was closed the figures were 45 and 38 - my recollection is that originally “Ds” were allowed 49, but I will not be dogmatic about this.

A factor likely to have been taken into account when considering whether the SG2 or SG3 was the better model upon which to base the design of a new goods engine was almost certainly route availability. The heavy SG3s were, for instance, banned from both the Oldcastle and the Antrim branches, both of which were frequently traversed by the “Cs”. It is true that the other group of “D” class 0-6-0s, the LQGs, had a wider route availability than the SG3s, (including the two branches just mentioned). However, these were nothing like as versatile a type as the SGs and SG2s, and among footplatemen were considered sluggish when running shut off or under easy steam. In fact, the “C” was basically a mixed traffic engine, which the LQG was not. It must be said, however, that some quite impressive speeds were stated to have been achieved by locos of this latter type on suburban passenger trains under CIÉ ownership.

There are two very interesting photographs on Page 87 of “Locomotives of the GNRI”. The upper one is of one of the North British engined “Railmotors” of 1905, whilst the lower depicts what may be described as the “guts” of one of the Manning Wardle engined vehicles of 1906. These “innards” comprised the motor bogie (0-4-0) with its two cylinders and outside Walschaert’s valve gear, together with a vertical boiler. So far as I know, little has been written about the GN railmotors except that they were not a great success on either the Lisburn locals (North British) or the Howth trains (Manning Wardle), and that the engines were scrapped and the carriage portions converted into ordinary passenger vehicles within a few years of their introduction. The Great Northern experience of railmotors seems to have been similar to that of the various British lines (with the notable exception of the Great Western) which introduced them in the early 1900s.

The photo of the North British car intrigued me, particularly as regards the Walschaert's gear. So far as I can make out, and I have spent more than one session on it with a magnifying glass, the eccentric rods, instead of deriving their motion from the usual eccentric cranks secured to the ends of the big end crank pins, are attached to separate crank pins which are fixed to the rims of the wheels. The engine component of the car is described as a 0-4-0 but (also after several sessions with the magnifying glass) I can see no sign of a coupling rod. Were these North British engines 2-2-0s? The type was not unknown for railmotors. That fearsome man, Dugald Drummond, at various times Locomotive Superintendent of the North British, the Caledonian and the London & South Western Railway companies, built a couple for the LSW which however seem to have been even less of a success than the Great Northern cars.



This, and our own No.461, demonstrates what can happen when your inside-cylinder 0-6-0 turns out to be unacceptably heavy! K3 class No.361 is seen here at Inchicore. Why the two lamp brackets on the smokebox? (Real Photographs)

I have said that the carriage components of the GN railmotors became ordinary coaches. These and the very similar looking trailers, both of which were built to a rather larger construction gauge than other contemporary coaching stock, mostly lasted in suburban and longer distance stopping trains until after the end of the second world war. One was usually marshalled in the two-coach sets which operated on the Warrenpoint branch and between "The Point", Newry and Portadown during the mid- and later thirties. Despite their generous external proportions these were not very attractive vehicles to travel in, in any of the three classes. The thirds in particular had narrow, hard seats in their open saloons and although the wide windows had their merits, the fact that they were fixed was a considerable disadvantage in warm weather. One of these coaches, No.207, originally a trailer car, was provided with corridor connections at each end and worked in mainline service for a number of years. For example, in the working timetable for the summer of 1938 this coach (a brake tri-composite) was rostered to work on the 13:30 Belfast to Warrenpoint and the 18:20 Warrenpoint to Belfast on Fridays and Saturdays during July and August and on Saturdays in September. The 13:30 was a through Belfast-Derry train whilst the 18:20 connected at Portadown into the 16:50 Cavan-Belfast service.

Between Belfast and Portadown in either direction the coach was attached to one of the two-piece branch sets. With no toilet accommodation and sub-standard seating this vehicle provided an uncomfortable journey for its patrons. Nevertheless, it still turned up occasionally as a through Belfast-Warrenpoint carriage in the later 1940s.

From the information given in "Locomotives of the GNRI" it appears that none of the railmotors or trailers was built as a tri-composite. Since, however, No.207 was designated in the working timetable as Class "J" (i.e. brake tri-composite) some re-classification of accommodation must have occurred, probably of thirds as seconds. Certainly I remember the second class as being very little better than the third.



GNR P5'6" class No.105 on the turntable at Cavan, 18th April 1955. (H.C. Casserley)

The lower photograph on Page 146, of P5'6" loco No.105 arriving at Cavan at the head of two coaches and a string of cattle wagons reminds me of the very heavy interchange of livestock between MGW/GSR/CiÉ and GNR at Cavan. Before 1922 there had been a substantial interchange of ordinary merchandise traffic also. Despite the fact that Cavan (GNR) dealt with goods and livestock only (passenger trains used the MGW/GS station), it ranked as one of the more important stations on the system and its stationmaster was graded accordingly. This official had the unique distinction of living in a thatched house, reputedly a couple of hundred years old. A story goes that during the reign of G.B. Howden (formerly Chief Civil Engineer) as General Manager, the then Chief Civil Engineer, or possibly the District Engineer, Enniskillen, within whose area Cavan was included, suggested that the old house be re-roofed with slates or tiles but Howden vetoed the proposal. I believe that the house was demolished some years ago. Until the decline of the livestock traffic in the late fifties and sixties "specials" from various Midland towns, for onward passage to Belfast for shipment were very much the pattern of business at Cavan. For some of these specials the GN provided wagons for the entire journey, e.g. Mullingar to Maysfields. [Why, when this area became a leisure centre, was its name changed to the singular? - Ed.] Stock from the Midlands arriving at Cavan in GS vehicles appears always to have been detrained there and re-loaded into GN wagons. I cannot remember ever having seen a GSR/CiÉ cattle truck on the Northern. Sligo Leitrim wagons were commonplace, but there again

beasts from Western and West Midland fairs were de-trained and re-loaded at Collooney. All this detraining and reloading was primarily due to the need to rest and water stock coming from long distances; Ballinasloe or Roscommon, for example.

Did a MGW/GSR/CIE loco ever work through from Cavan to Clones? I have never heard of such a happening. In view of the fact that the frequent stock trains were exclusively Great Northern north of Cavan the procedure seems unlikely but, on the other hand, in an emergency a loco could have been borrowed. There was not much interchange of passenger traffic at Cavan - one could get from Belfast to Galway as quickly via Dublin, although of course a change of stations in the latter city was entailed. The late pre-war excursions, regularly operated from Belfast to Galway, certainly ran via Cavan, with a loco change at the latter place.

Whatever about Cavan, workings between Navan Junction (GS) and Navan (GN), admittedly a very short distance, were common occurrences by "Southern" engines; again for transfers of stock and, in later years, gypsum. The Appendix to the GNR Working Timetable gave the special whistling codes to be used by engines of either company on these transfers.

In "Comments and Recollections" in our last issue I stated that the fireman shown posed along with Driver Paddy Martin on 4-4-0 No.46 at Bundoran on Page 109 of "Fermanagh's Railways" was Mickey Gilheaney. I am indebted to fellow member Pearse McKeown for the information that this fireman was in fact John Carthy. Mea culpa!

LETTERS

Dear Sir,

In Five Foot Three No.45 Percy G Harris, in his article "Who was William Dargan", gave the date on the pillars of Bray station as 1888. In fact, the correct date is 1853, with the legend 'Irish Engineering Co.' in a semicircle over the date, and a second legend 'Seville Works' under this date which is stamped on nearly all the pillars but is missing from one or two due to the passage of time. Three pillars also contain an additional legend which reads 'J.S. Goodfellow, Contractor'. As these pillars are frequently painted against the ravages of the sea air, it's only a matter of time before these inscriptions and dates are totally obliterated by succeeding coats of paint.

Yours sincerely,

James Scannell

Shankill

Dublin

[For the dedicated student of minutiae Mr Scannell's letter raises a couple of questions: why Seville Works, and was Irish Engineering Co an ancestor of Irishenco which allegedly went bust on the unfinished Wexford Quays project? - Ed.]

Dear Sir,

A visit which I made to Inchicore Works last June, in order to see the ex-GSWR State Coach then being restored, provided an unexpected bonus in the shape of two ex-Midland Great Western six-wheeled coaches (possible subjects for restoration) which retain their Mansell wheels.

The Mansell wheel, which at one time enjoyed a considerable vogue in Ireland and Britain, was named after its inventor who was Carriage Superintendent of the South Eastern Railway of England (shades of the Great Train Robbery). This gentleman is not to be confused with R.E. Maunsell, ex-Inchicore, who

was successively the last Locomotive Superintendent of the South Eastern & Chatham Railway and the first Chief Mechanical Engineer of the Southern. Mansell wheels had hardwood, usually teak, centres and steel rims and tyres; their inventor claimed that they gave a smoother ride than all-steel wheels.

Mansell wheels can be easily be identified (nowadays usually in photographs) by the heads of the metal studs along the circumference of the metal rim. I hope that the accompanying photograph of a wheel of one of the old six-wheelers at Inchicore may interest those readers who may not have seen an actual Mansell wheel.

I am most grateful to my good friend and fellow Society member, Charles McDonnell, for having organised my Inchicore visit, and to George Dempsey, in charge of the State Coach restoration, for showing me this current example of traditional craftsmanship.

Yours sincerely,

Laurence Liddle

New South Wales

BOOK REVIEWS

Irish Railways in Pictures - The Giant's Causeway Tramway, Michael Pollard Published by Irish Railway Record Society, London Area, £3.95

This 40-page booklet is the fourth in the series - the first came out in 1976 so the IRRS could hardly be accused of flooding the market! Like its predecessors, it consists of a collection of photographs, with a fairly brief historical introduction.

Given that the Tramway was not a large employer in any case, there cannot be too many former employees still around but the author is one such and will be remembered by those who attended his interesting presentation at one of the RPSI's winter meetings. Whilst the introduction is necessarily brief, Mr Pollard's personal knowledge of the subject shows in the generous and informative photo captions. The photographs, some 60 of them, are on the whole well reproduced, given that some were not professionally taken. Although a few will have been seen before, many have not been published before. From the photographs and diagrams, a reader will find it easy to follow the course of the line, much of which has changed little in 50 years.

It is sad - though hardly surprising, given their record in other areas - that Stormont / UTA could not see their way to find the few thousand pounds needed to keep the Tramway going. For those who missed it, as well as those like myself who remember it, this book will provide much of interest. It is well worth the modest price - not least to find out how Mr Traill got away with placing his untrousered bottom on the conductor rail!

NP

Steam's Last Fling: The Summer of '69 on Northern Ireland Railways Michael R. Stevenson, Published by Colourpoint Books, £12.99

In contrast with the acres of print which recorded the end of steam on British Rail in 1968, comparatively little has appeared about steam's demise just over a year later in Northern Ireland. "Steam's Last Fling" is, as far as the reviewer is aware, the first full length book to be produced dealing exclusively with NIR steam, and it adds to the variety of Irish transport titles published in recent years by Colourpoint.

Michael Stevenson's chosen period has been researched in painstaking detail, and the past clearly comes back to life through his narrative. There is a wealth of accurate information on the operation, the performance and the personalities of that final full year of Northern Ireland steam - and even something

of the contemporary diesel scene as well! For those fortunate enough to have been active at the time there is much to jog the memory; for those too young to remember those times, there is plenty to evoke the atmosphere of what is now a bygone age. 1969 was clearly a year which meant a lot to the author personally, and he has told his own story with some feeling.

Readers may have differing views of how well the autobiographical element blends with the railway operation, and some may also be left wondering about the precise identities of the enthusiasts of the period whose names crop up in the text. The work would have benefited by input from some of the enginemen who still have memories of the period, and could have been set a little more in the context of the gradual decline of steam throughout the 1960s. There is a wide selection of interesting illustrations, though the quality of their reproduction - particularly in the colour sections - is rather variable.

The L.M.S. In Ireland, Mark Kennedy
Published by Midland Publishing, £12.99

This book follows the same format as previous volumes on the BCDR, Cavan & Leitrim, etc. The writer takes us on a trip over the LMS, both broad and narrow gauge, describing principal stations and illustrating each with well-chosen and reproduced photographs enhanced by informative captions.

Locomotive pictures are plentiful, but not to the exclusion of other aspects of the LMS scene such as architecture, signalling and the non-railway features of that large company. Those accustomed to the narrow confines of the modern railway will be amazed at the range of activities of the LMS in Ireland. Tourism, hotels, road transport and shipping, even air travel, all were part of this multi-faceted company, as the last ten pages of the book make clear.

There are many pictures of interest and character but two stand out. On page 85 (bottom) is a photograph of passengers from a cross-Channel steamer boarding a brakeless carriage by step-ladder, surrounded by lorries, wagons, horses and a steam engine. What would the present-day nanny state / meddling industry make of this? The other print of great interest is on page 41, depicting Mogul 96 immaculate in black, awaiting running-in on the BCDR with the frames of 95 beside her, both engines being shopped by Harland & Wolff.

One can have few criticisms of the book but the caption on page 18 regarding Mogul 93 shows a train leaving for Belfast, while that of No.53 on page 94 should be dated 26th February 1966, not June. The picture on page 67 of Railcar 3 is not at Whitehead but at Belfast engine shed - the bottom picture on page 8 also shows it in this position between the offices and the turntable.

Minor blemishes aside, this is an excellent book, full of interest, which should be on every enthusiast's shelves. One can only hope that a second volume will appear before too long.

WTS



No.85 with the “Steam Enterprise” of 15th April 2000, between Dunleer and Kellystown. (C.P. Friel)



“RPSI No.3” climbs away from Access 12 towards Kingsbog. (I.C. Pryce)