

THE RAILWAY PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF IRELAND

# OLDERFLEET RAILTOUR



N° 62 CLASS A1 AT WHITEHEAD 1934

23rd March, 1968.

BY COURTESY OF W. ROBB.

Souvenir 3/-

Proceeds in Aid of Locomotive Fund.

## OLDERFLEET RAILTOUR

The first outing of 1968 takes us over two different lines. In the morning we leave from the York Road terminus of the former LMS-NCC railway; now in the process of being rebuilt. On the Down side of the line just after leaving the terminus are the works of the old NCC. 29 locomotives were built here including the well-known broad and narrow gauge two-cylinder compounds. Apart from two rebuilds in Inchicore this was the only works in Ireland to build compound locomotives. These locomotives were the mainstay of the B&NCR and later the NCC for nearly twenty years and then were gradually rebuilt into the A1, B3, U1 and U2 classes. The last compound to survive was the former 2-4-0 7-foot compound No.55 "Parkmount" which lasted until 1944 though rebuilt as a 4-4-0. This locomotive was something of a pet with NCC men and many stories are told of her. One of these concerns a Sunday just after the blitz on Belfast in 1941. On this occasion Parkmount was the only engine available to haul a huge 17 bogie train out to Greenisland. The NCC line is level until post 3 and then rises steadily until Greenisland at gradients varying from 1 in 102 to 1 in 187. Parkmount was blocked at Greencastle and her driver got out and phoned Greenisland signal cabin, and asked to be allowed to wait until they could guarantee him a clear road to Greenisland as he could not risk a stop on the bank with his vast load of around 400 tons. Having received this assurance, he remained at the signal until he received an absolutely clear road. By this time the fireman had built up a huge fire and full head of steam so that an all-out attempt on the bank could be made. With plenty of steam and water to start with, a successful climb was made and Parkmount working in full gear and with full regulator arrived in Greenisland though with little or no water in the glasses.

Today we retrace Parkmount's route though with a far lighter train and on the way to Greenisland we pass Bleach Green Viaduct just after mile post 4½. This viaduct built with government assistance in 1932 provided the NCC with a direct line to Derry. Previously all trains had to reverse at Greenisland. It is the largest concrete viaduct in Ireland and in addition is Ireland's only flying junction since the Larne line burrows under the main line at this point. The layout was such that no slack more severe than 50mph has ever been imposed on Larne trains.

On entering Greenisland, on the Down side can be seen the remains of the old NCC main line, which was singled and realigned near Monkstown after the construction of the loop in 1932, and is now disconnected at Monkstown.

After leaving Greenisland the line drops down the Mount bank to Carrickfergus. It was on this stretch of line, prior to the introduction of the 50mph speed, limit that the highest speeds were recorded. In the opposite direction it provides a severe test of an engine's ability to steam and pull. Below Mount station on the Up side can be seen the remains of the Courtaulds' industrial railway which owned two 0-4-0STs - "Wilfrid" and "Patricia". Coal trains were

regularly worked to the Mount by NCC locomotives and then handed over to Wilfred or Patricia, so that the wagons could be weighed.

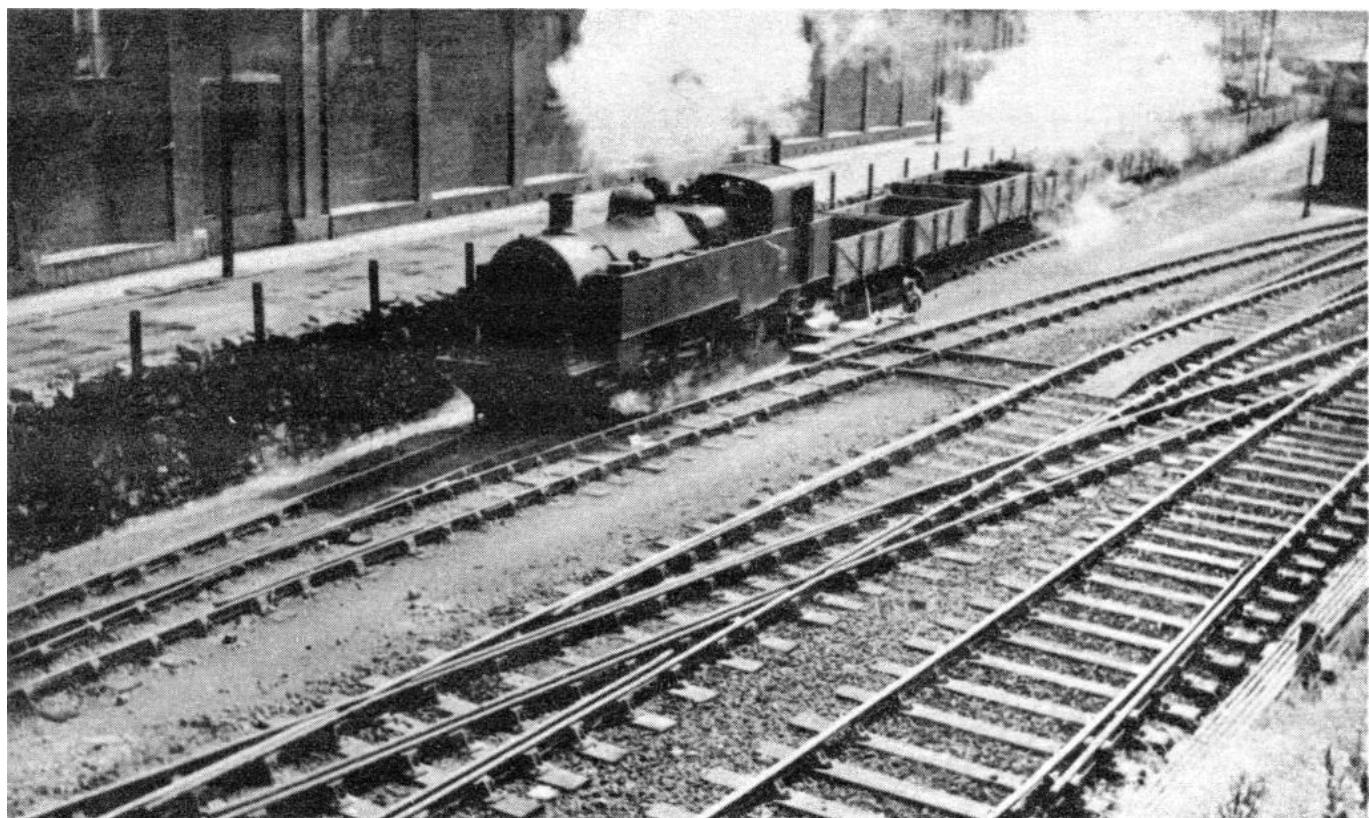
A junction between here and Clipperstown served the former Carrickfergus Harbour branch. Salt was taken down to the harbour for export. The axle loading did not permit engines belonging to classes C, D and E; the heaviest locomotives allowed being the "Whippet" 4-4-0s.

After Carrickfergus the line runs alongside the sea practically all the way to Whitehead. Up to 1929 the line was single beyond Kilroot but as an unemployment relief scheme in the 1930s doubling was completed to Whitehead. We pass through a short tunnel just outside Whitehead. This last stretch from around MP12 $\frac{1}{4}$  abounds in sharp curves and has a 45mph speed restriction. Between Kilroot and Whitehead in the days of the single line was a crossing place - Briggs' Loop. The stump of the cabin can still be seen on the Up side. Before the war, the NCC did a lot to develop the area for holidays, and to handle the traffic (it is not surprising that this was heavy - the evening return fare from Belfast came down to 6<sup>d</sup>), a special excursion station was opened to the Larne side of the present station. This consisted of two platform roads, a turntable and siding accommodation. The shed, at the Larne end, held two locomotives and minor repairs could be carried out. In the great days of excursion traffic it was not unusual to see two trains at the platform one waiting in Whitehead station and another lying in Briggs' Loop. All that now remains of Whitehead's former splendour is the road up to the shed and the shed itself. One of the attractions of this period at Whitehead was the Gobbins cliff path, constructed by the NCC for which a small charge was levied. This has now fallen into disuse. Whitehead promenade was once made of railway sleepers, and indeed the railway practically owned it. Latterly Whitehead shed which now houses the Society's engines, was used by the NCC to store engines surplus to traffic requirements - usually in the wintertime. Before the summer timetable commenced an engine went out to Whitehead and towed in the two locomotives stabled there. One notable engine to winter at Whitehead - in fact to spend her last days there - was the well-known performer No.96, Class W.

From Whitehead the line, now single, passes through an area of marshy ground to Ballycarry, a crossing point, and railhead for the NCC Islandmagee road services. The next crossing point is Magheramorne Loop, where the spoil trains load from the quarry. Apart from the loop itself, there is a network of sidings here enabling two spoil trains to load at once. The last station before Larne Town is Glynn, after which the line is built on a causeway, with sea on either side.

Larne Town is now only a shadow of its former self, all signals having been removed and the station reduced to little more than a halt. Formerly it possessed an extensive yard and an engine shed. There was a layby loop to the seaward side of the present platform road, but if crossing was necessary, one train used the bay platform. The last mile from Larne to Larne Harbour is on a sharp curve. It will be noticed that signals on this stretch are of the standard LMS upper quadrant

pattern and not the NCC somersault type. On the inland side can be seen the trackbed of the former Ballymena and Larne narrow gauge. That is why this stretch is mile-posted on both sides.



Class S2 2-4-4T (2 cylinder compound) No.110 at Larne Harbour in 1938. (A. Donaldson)

Larne Harbour at one time possessed much of interest to the enthusiast. Apart from the cross-channel boats and their railway connections, it possessed an industrial railway centred on the British Aluminium Works and operated by 0-4-0Ts. In addition it was the terminus of the Ballymena and Larne narrow-gauge railway which after running alongside the broad-gauge turns inland to begin the fearful climb at 1 in 36/44 up to Kilwaughter. In 1900 broad and narrow gauge trains must have left the harbour simultaneously because later in the year a notice was issued by Mr Bowman Malcolm strictly forbidding racing along the parallel lines. It would indeed have been a treat for any enthusiast to see perhaps the 7-foot compound Jubilee endeavouring to keep up with a narrow-gauge compound - 3' 9" wheels and remarkable acceleration or the little Sharp Stewart 0-6-0Ts which were practically immune from slipping. It is by no means certain that the broad gauge engine was first through Larne as the little 2-4-2T Compounds were capable of exceeding 40mph on level road. Perhaps the most fascinating engine to work out of Larne was No.109, the 2-6-0ST, a type unique in Ireland and rare in the British Isles. The engine was nicknamed "The Bruiser" and was capable of hauling a vast load and was a great favourite at Larne. Another unique engine though she only ran 60,000 miles, was the 2-4-4T compound tank No.110, a rebuild with a broad-gauge boiler of a standard 2-4-2T. One peculiarity of Larne was that no ramp was provided to unload the narrow-gauge engines from the transporter truck (this was usually done at Ballymena). After the

lifting of the Ballymena - Ballyboley stretch the engines had to be craned off at Larne.

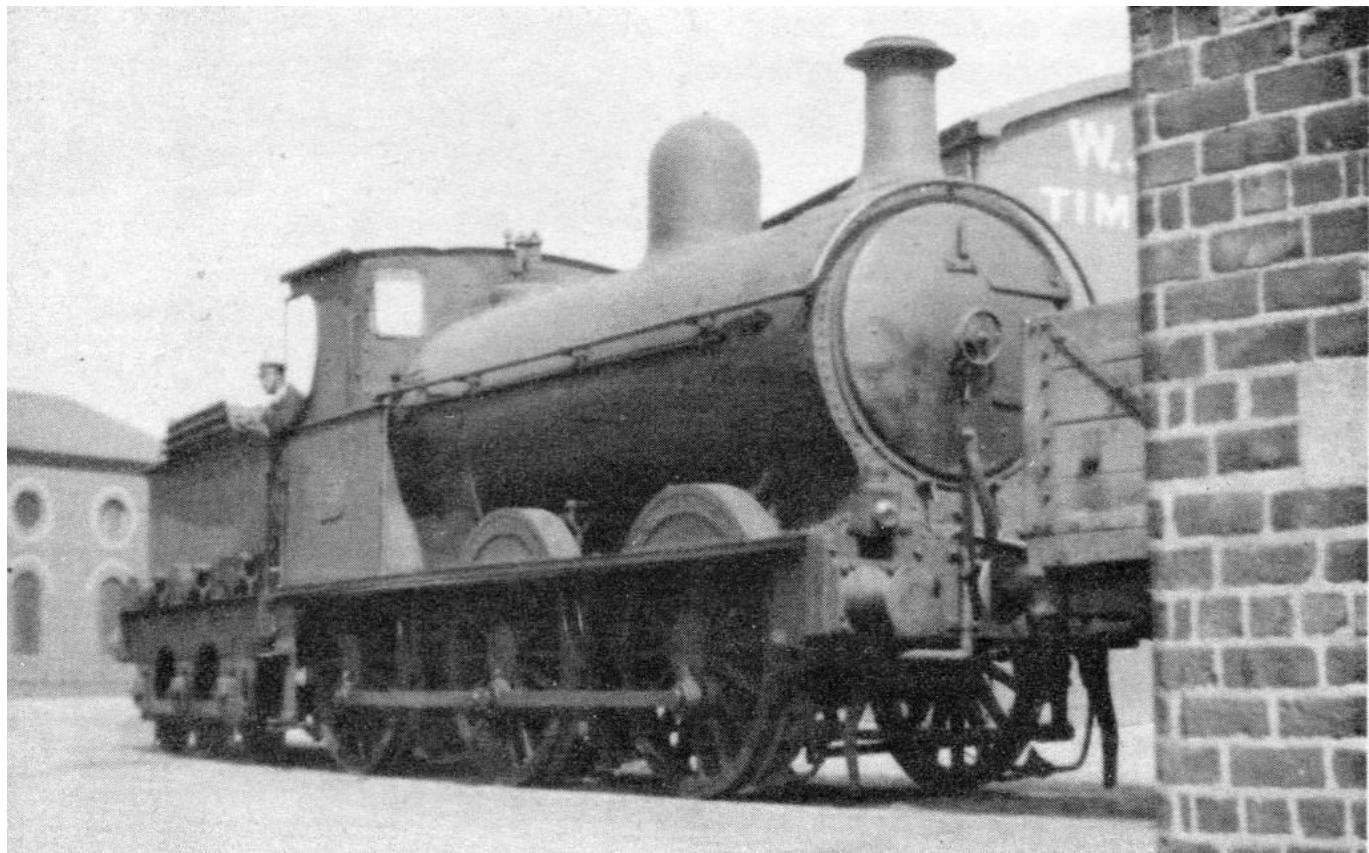
We complete our short survey of the Larne line with a note on the locomotives and performance on it. The greatest variety of engine power was seen pre-1933 when the Derry trains were hauled out to Greenisland by the Belfast shed engines. This meant that anything from a 2-4-0T to a V class goods engine was used. The Larne trains and Whitehead and Carrickfergus locals saw a wide variety of motive power including A and B class compound 4-4-0s, K class 0-6-0s and even the light compound 2-4-0 No.56. After 1930 "Glens" and "Scotch" engines predominated, joined by the "Mountain" and "County" classes as the compounds were gradually rebuilt. One well-known engine was No.50 "Jubilee", for a long period, in the 1920s and 1930s shedded at Larne. She is credited with having, worked the Larne Boat Express for 9 months in one spell without missing a single day. This is attributed to the fact that Larne possessed an excellent fitter who spent a lot of time on her.

A foreign engine which performed on the line with great distinction was GNR No.142. Other GNR engines to run over it included S classes Nos. 171 and 174, and also an SG3 0-6-0 running in after shopping. (After the last war the WT class engines had an almost complete monopoly of Larne services, some outstanding work being done by these engines, and even today they still run a few passenger turns together with the spoil trains.)

Perhaps the high water mark of hard running on the Larne road occurred in the 1930s with the tightening of the Larne Boat Train to 30 minutes start to stop, an average of almost 50mph despite a long slack to 45mph approaching Whitehead, and a 25mph through Larne Town together with the climb to Greenisland in the Down direction and the Mount bank in the Up. This train was almost always entrusted to either a "Scotch" engine or a "Mountain" class. The initial sharp booking of 9 minutes to Greenisland in the Down direction was rarely kept but by very hard running from here on the 30 minutes was usually cut - sometimes by almost two minutes. Speeds frequently approached 70 on the Mount bank and 62 - 66 was often sustained to the Whitehead slack. After Whitehead speed was again worked up into the sixties and on a few occasions 67 - 69 was recorded at Glynn. This was excellent work for 4-coupled engines with only 18" or 19" by 24" cylinders and relatively small boilers as the boat train was usually 6 or 7 bogies and on quite a few occasions in the summer reached 9 or even 10 coaches. The make-up of the Down morning boat train was interesting. The North Atlantic Express arrived in York Road at 9:23 and, its special stock strengthened as necessary, left as the Boat Train at 9:33. This gave a through coach service from Portrush and Ballymena to Larne Harbour. The normal procedure was for the Boat Train engine to place extra coaches on the tail of the "North Atlantic". No time could be wasted by Belfast since the North Atlantic, running to a 60mph timing from Ballymena, could not make up any delays whatever. On one occasion the North Atlantic, grossly overloaded to 11 bogies instead of the usual 5 - 7, arrived 1 minute late - in itself an incredible performance since

the schedule at the time was 32 minutes. The boat engine, No.84, lifted off 7 bogies, placed them on top of her own train of 3, hooked up and got away in under 5 minutes. The run to Larne was made in 29 minutes, a fine effort with a load of over 300 tons. The engine was worked very hard to Greenisland and thereafter 65 - 69 was sustained to Whitehead with another fine maximum of 67 at Glynn. Further fine work at Larne Harbour ensured that the boat left on time. With this story of railway efficiency of the 1930s we must move on to the afternoon part of the tour.

With this tour the wheel has turned full cycle since our Guinness 0-4-0ST is the third pug to have worked over the docks. It is now 93 years since the first NCC No.42 took up her duties. Our Guinness No.3 is also the first Hudswell Clarke engine to work here or indeed over any part of the NCC.



Class K1 0-6-0 No.30 in Whitla Street in 1936. (A. Donaldson)

The Belfast Harbour Commissioners never possessed an engine of their own to shunt the dock lines. Shunting duties were always undertaken by engines of the BCDR, GNR and NCC. Even in the 1950s one could still see GNR No.150 complete with red flag edging her way down Milewater Road with wagons for the NCC and taking back NCC traffic to her own system. The part of the system over which we travel today is unfortunately truncated due to the severance of the links with the GNR and BCDR. However the six miles which remain should be enough to convey an idea of what an industrial system is like. The part with which we are particularly concerned is reached from the old BNCR goods yard. Regulations were strict requiring three persons for the operation of the engine and a fourth if two wagons were hauled. Drain cocks could not be opened nor could the engine be allowed to blow off.

Maximum speed was to be 3mph. The first engines used on the system by the NCC were Nos. 42 and 16. Full details of these and other engines, to work the line can be obtained from the last issue of the Society's magazine, "Five Foot Three" (No.4).

W.T. Scott



PART ONE

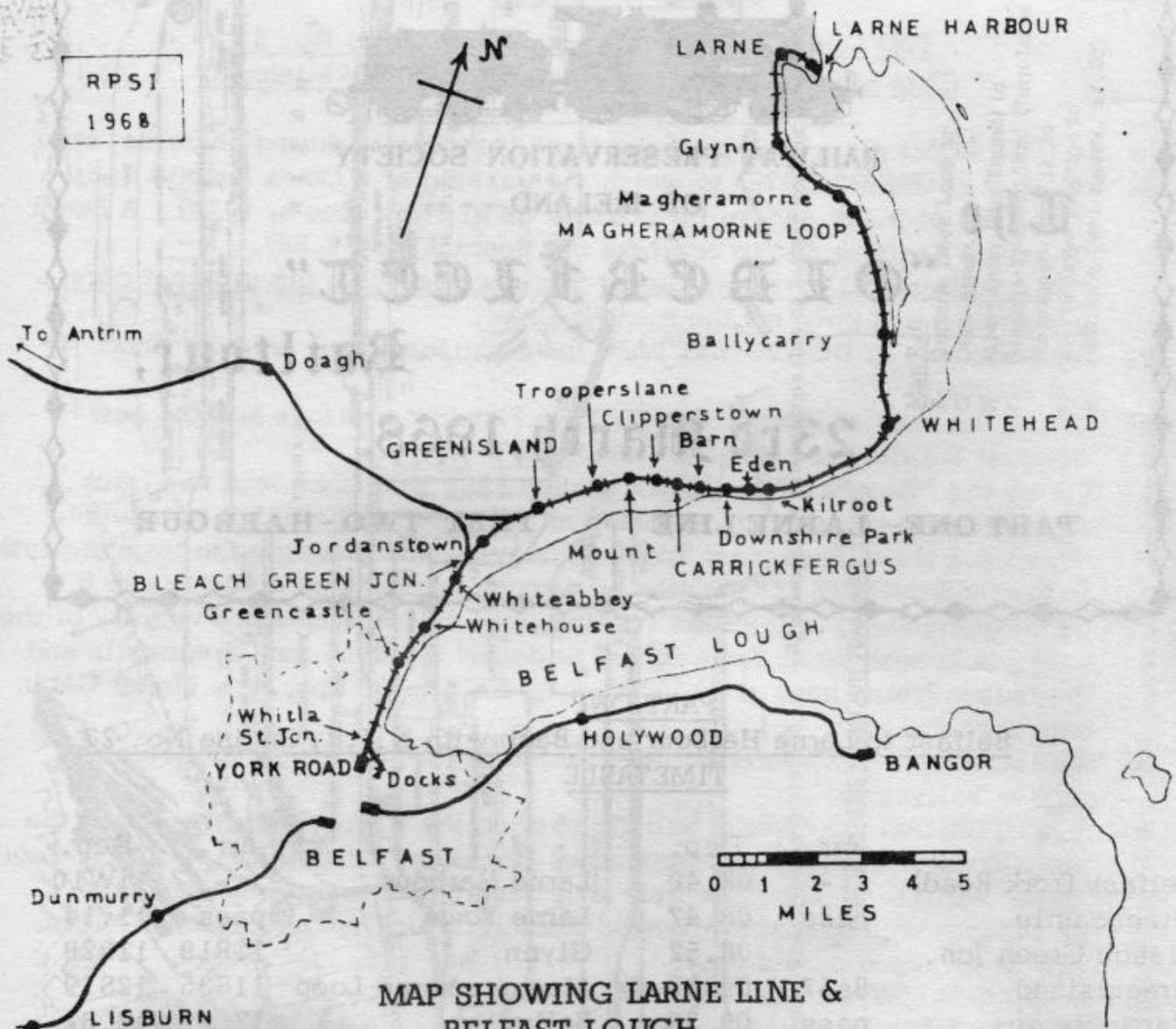
Belfast to Larne Harbour and Back with NIR Engine No.27

TIMETABLE

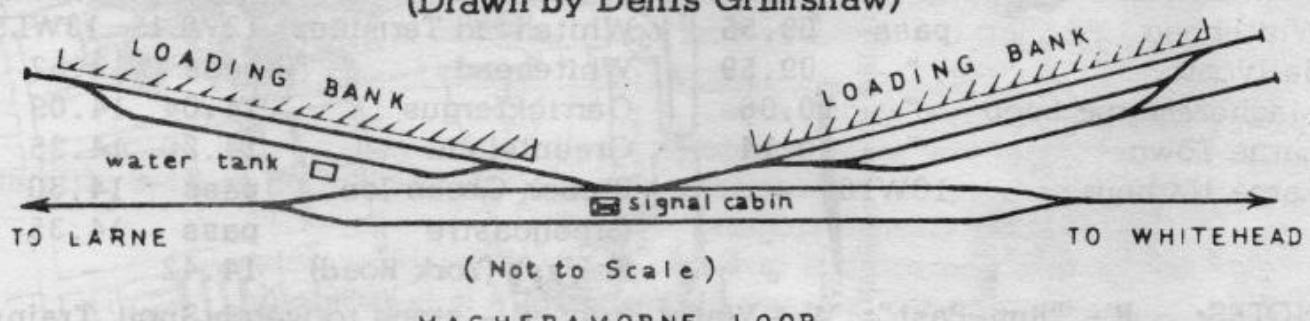
	Arr.	Dep.		Arr.	Dep.
Belfast (York Road)		08:40	Larne Harbour		11W10
Greencastle	pass	08:47	Larne Town	pass	11:14
Bleach Green Junction	pass	08:52	Glynn	11R19	11R29
Greenisland	08S57	09S30	Magheramorne Loop	11S35	12S19
Carrickfergus	pass	09:38	Ballycarry	12:27	12:32
Downshire Park	9:40	09:45	Whitehead	12:37	12:42
Whitehead	pass	09:55	Whitehead Terminus	12WL45	13WL50
Ballycarry	pass	09:59	Whitehead	pass	13:52
Magheramorne Loop	pass	10:06	Carrickfergus	14:04	14:09
Larne Town	pass	10:14	Greenisland	14:20	14:25
Larne Harbour	10W18		Bleach Green Junction	pass	14:30
			Greencastle	pass	14:35
			Belfast (York Road)	14:42	

NOTES: R = Run-past; W = Water stop; S = Stops to watch spoil trains;  
L = Lunch break at RPSI site at Whitehead.

RPSI  
1968



MAP SHOWING LARNE LINE &  
BELFAST LOUGH.  
(Drawn by Denis Grimshaw)



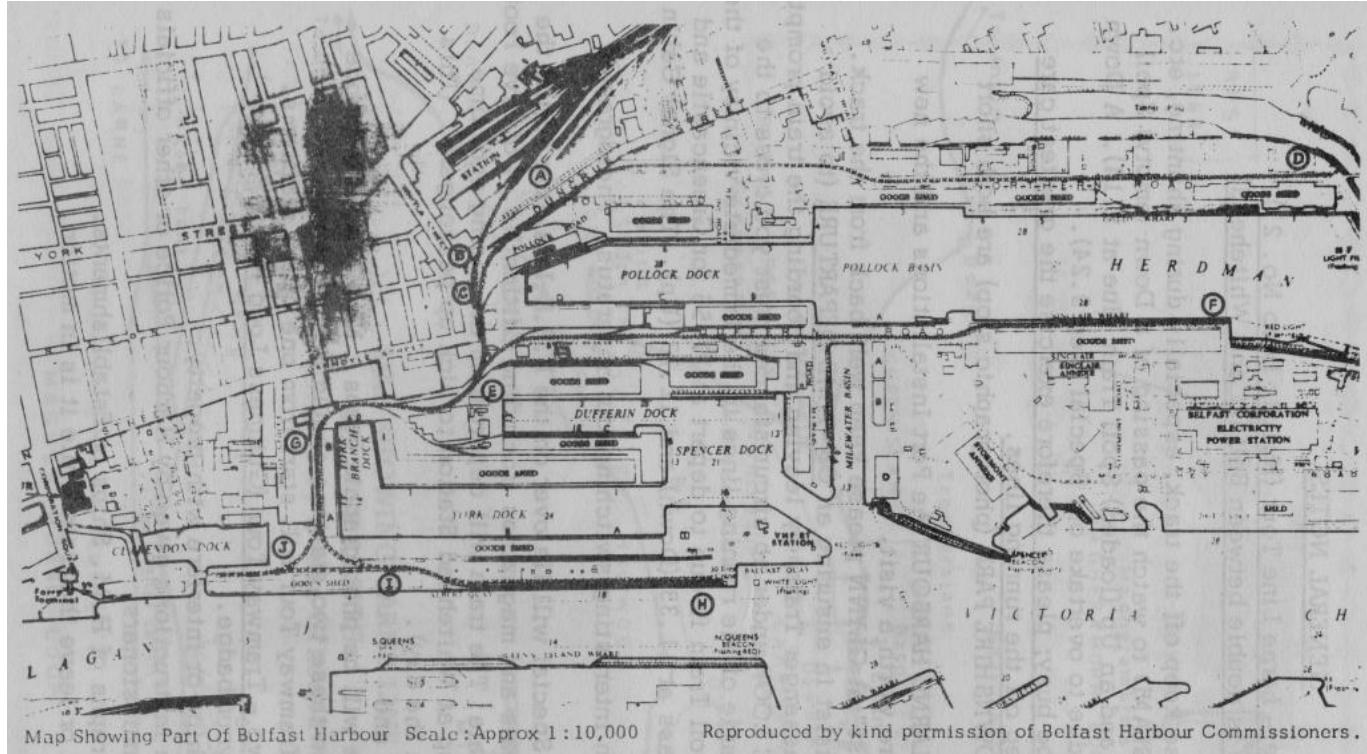
## GENERAL NOTES

### Part One - Larne Line Tour (NIR Loco No.27) (This Line is double between Belfast and Whitehead)

- (a) At YORK ROAD please keep off the track, especially during shunting, etc.
- (b) We stop at GREENISLAND to watch the passing of a Down (empty) spoil train (due at 9:08) and an Up (loaded) spoil train (due at 9:14). A Down passenger train is due to overtake our special (depart 9:24).  
This station will be busy; please therefore exercise the greatest care at all times and keep off the running lines.
- (c) The platforms at DOWNSHIRE PARK (photographic stop) are both short and staggered.
- (d) During the stop at LARNE HARBOUR the port installations and the new terminal building are worth a visit.
- (e) During the "Run-Past" at GLYNN please keep well back from the track. You are asked to assist in ensuring an ON-TIME DEPARTURE (to avoid blocking a Down passenger train) by leaving and boarding the train promptly.
- (f) At MAGHERAMORNE LOOP under no circumstances must you cross to the Up (loading bank) side of the running lines in the immediate vicinity of the loop. A loaded spoil train is due to depart at 11:55 for Greencastle and passenger trains pass at 11:33 (Down) and 12:13 (Up). The signal cabin both here and at Ballycarry contain interesting switching-out apparatus.
- (g) Photographic stop at BALLYCARRY.
- (h) At WHITEHEAD the special will lie over on the RPSI siding during the lunch break. Victuals and magazines (including edition No.4 of Five Foot Three) will be on sale. The train will depart from the siding and, time permitting, will stop at Whitehead Station to pick up passengers. (This will be arranged on the day).
- (i) At CARRICKFERGUS and
- (j) GREENISLAND there will be photographic stops. No.27's performance on the bank between these two stations should be interesting.
- (k) At YORK ROAD the Tramway Tour will start from one of the platforms.

### Part Two - Tramway Tour (Guinness Loco No.3)

- (a) Remember to wear your badge.
- (b) Do not board any ships or interfere with property.
- (c) Always observe the instructions given by Harbour Police or other officials of the Harbour Commissioners.
- (d) Do not take photographs of HM ships or establishments.
- (e) Do not try to board or leave the train while it is in motion.



#### ROUTE OF THE HARBOUR TRAMWAY TOUR

##### Map Ref:

- A York Road (dep. 15:00)
- B Whitla Street Junction
- C Garmoyle Street Loop (run round)
- D Northern Road (run round)
- E Dufferin Dock Loop (run round)
- F Sinclair Wharf (run round)
- E Dufferin Dock Loop
- G Dock Street
- H Albert Quay (run round)
- I Glasgow Steamer Shed (turn loco via triangle I, J, G, I)
- B Whitla Street Junction
- A York Road (arr. approx. 17:30)