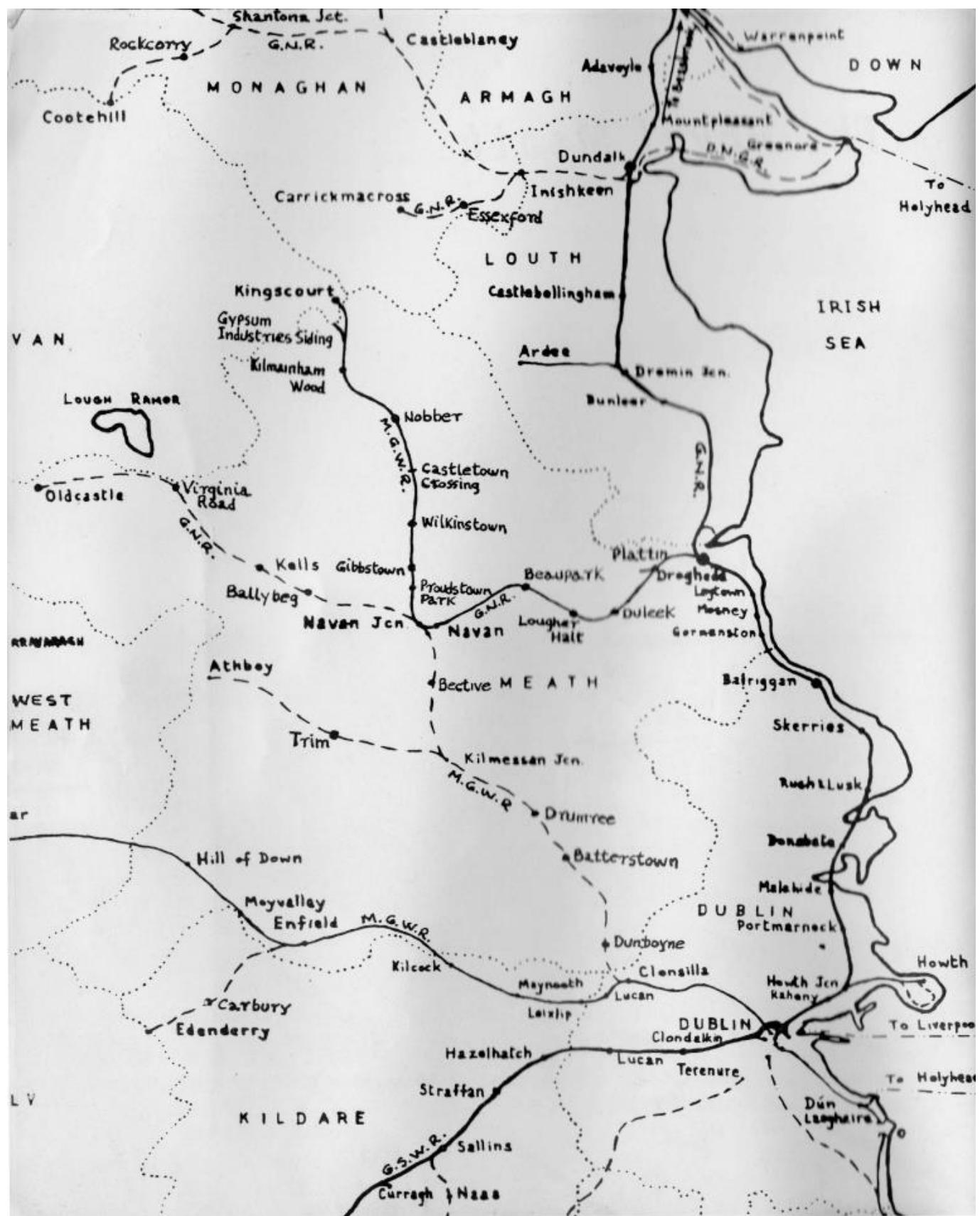


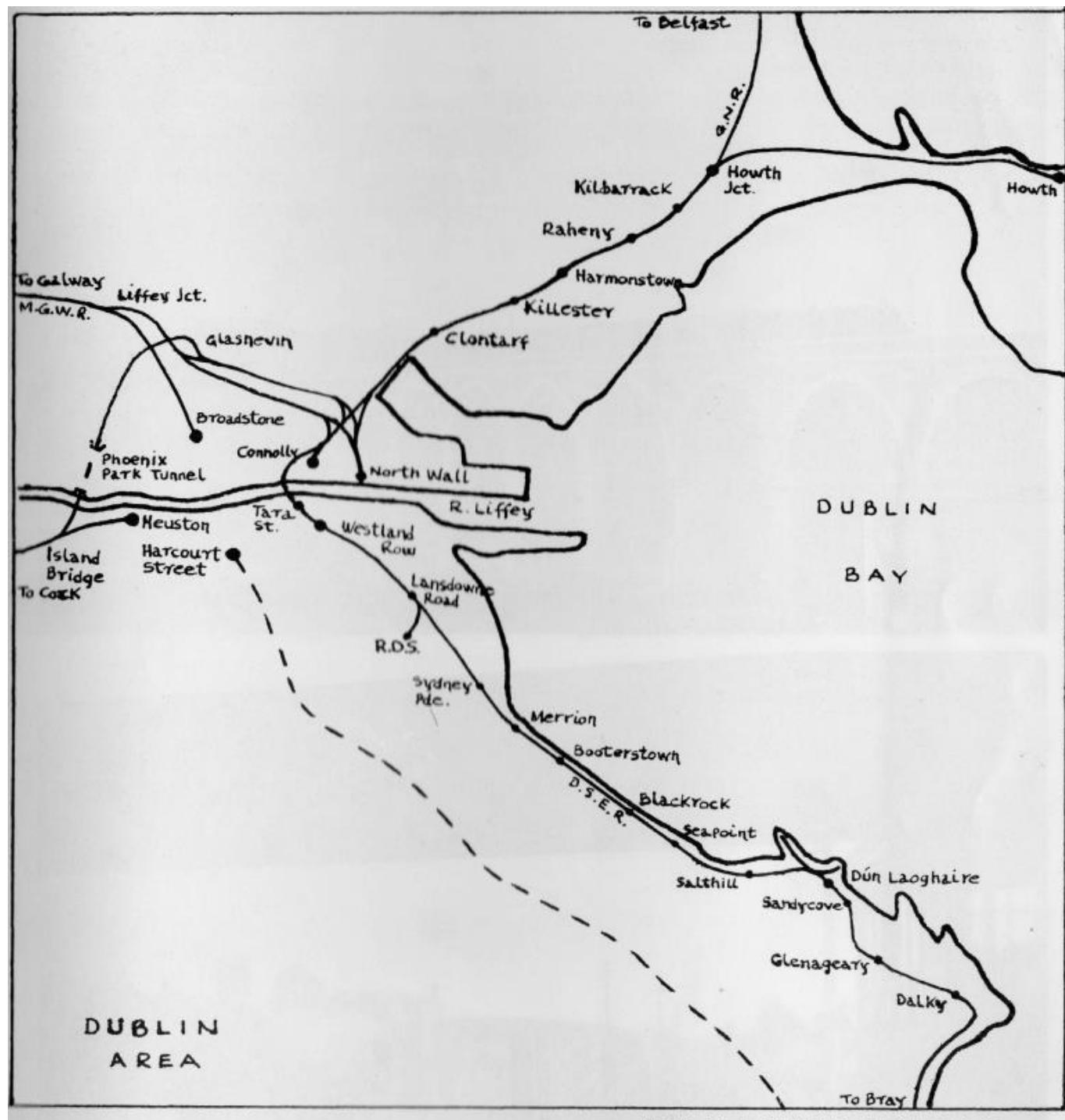
# *The Royal Meath*



4/-

Front Cover: J5 0-6-0 No.626 on the 11:00am Goods ex Kingscourt at Gibbstown on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1957. (A. Donaldson)





RAILWAY PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF IRELAND  
ROYAL MEATH RAILTOUR  
SOUVENIR BROCHURE

The first portion of our route lies over the former Great Northern main line, opened in 1844 after a legal battle against the exponents of an inland route to Belfast via Navan and Armagh, the objective of the Ulster Railway. We shall meet traces of this route later.

The line is mile-posted on the Down (inland) side, from zero at Connolly. The start is an easy one and advantage was taken of this in GNR days to run very heavy trains, with portions for the Irish North line and, before World War II, to Oldcastle, slipped at Drogheda. Loads regularly ran to twelve bogies, which the Compounds and VSS managed without great difficulty unpiloted. The train was fairly well under way before the first bank, a two mile rise at 1/173/213 to MP3 was encountered. After a fall, mostly at 1/200 to about MP5½, there is only one other obstacle of any note - a climb at 1/180/163/173 to MP16, after which the line drops at 1/150 to Skerries, with gentle undulations thence to Drogheda.

Connolly is still interesting from the traffic point of view. In steam days it was an enthusiast's paradise, with engines of five companies using it almost to the end of steam, while the gradual elimination of the MGWR and DSER types towards the end was partly counterbalanced by the arrival of newcomers in the shape of NCC Moguls and then WTs, as well as by the use of GNR types on the DSE suburban trains. Apart from impressive departures of the large GNR 4-4-0s with their heavy loads, there were to be seen the equally heavy MGWR section trains, to restart which on the sharp curves at the south end of the station called for quite an effort - even from engines as powerful as the Woolwich 2-6-0s. Heavy boat trains hauled by tiny 2-4-0Ts were fitted into a dense suburban service and there was the odd Cork special - worked by an 800 class which had, if it was a Sunday, hauled her own empty train tender-first round from Island Bridge.

A splendid spectacle in the late evening was provided by No.461 on the Wexford goods as she pounded Up the 1/51 from Newcomen Bridge Junction, with banker roaring behind.

The GNR operated a frequent service to Howth, originally with push and pull trains worked by BT 4-4-0Ts; later with JTs (2-4-2T), and then 4-4-2Ts with handsome corridor stock, a revelation after the 100-seaters we were used to around Belfast. Latterly the off-peak services were turned over to diesel railcars of various types.

Recently, a practice instituted in World War II to save coal has been revised - through local workings between the GNR and DSER lines, and the Loop line has been altered to facilitate this.

Though through Rugby and other specials ran direct into Platform Five, the Belfast - Cork Enterprise did not, she used Platform Two as at present and was transferred by the CIÉ main line engine in the southbound and by the GNR pilot in the northbound direction.

As we leave the terminus, the GSWR line to Island Bridge, used also by MGWR section trains since 1937, runs parallel to us for a short distance before swinging away to North Strand Road Junction on its way to the south and west. Beneath us are the MGWR and GSWR North Wall lines. Among the last duties of CIÉ steam locomotives of GNR, GSWR and MGWR vintage was the banking of diesel-hauled goods trains from North Wall. Thirty-ton brake vans have now largely eliminated banking.

Just after MP $\frac{1}{2}$  comes in trailing on our right the GNR North Wall Branch, opened in 1876. All northern section goods trains now use this line, but in GNR days much goods was handled at Sheriff Street adjacent to the passenger station. Shunting was long performed by QGTs No.99, with a very modern-looking high bunker, and always kept spotlessly clean. Sometimes her place was taken by A class 0-6-0 No.33.

Immediately after East Wall Junction we cross the River Tolka by a concrete bridge built in 1955 to replace that swept away in a rainstorm late in 1954. For a time Amiens Street was isolated from the rest of the system. Goods trains were re-routed via Clonsilla, Navan and Drogheda, but unfortunately (from the enthusiast's point of view) this did not apply to passenger trains. Howth locals were replaced by bus services and mainline trains terminated at Clontarf. Turning difficulties led to unusual tender-first working (this was in mid-winter) and a WT on loan to the GNR at the time was tried, this being the first appearance of the class in the Dublin area. A Bailey bridge enabled normal working to be resumed after a month though the timings of all trains except the Enterprise were eased until the permanent bridge was finished. The Enterprise was allowed extra time to Howth Junction, which was recouped over the ensuing sections, producing the best running ever regularly experienced on this train. Should such a contingency arise today, the position would be eased by the existence of the motive power depot at Fairview, about MP1, though of course the alternative route is no longer available.

The only colour-light signal on the GNR was, oddly enough, Goraghwood Down distant, but CIÉ have re-signalled from Connolly to Howth Junction with automatic colour-lights.

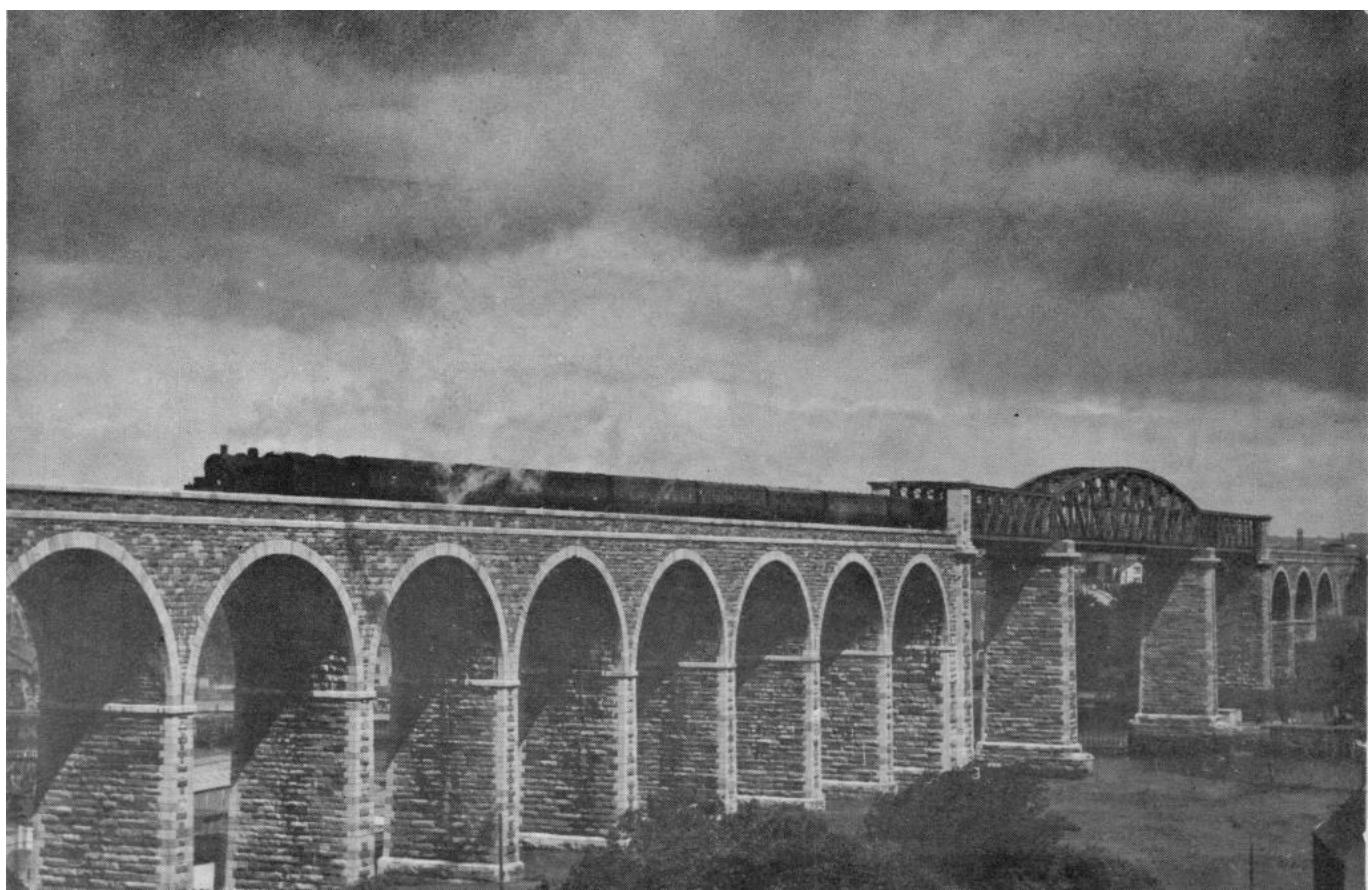
After MP $\frac{1}{2}$  may be seen the concrete blocks which alone remain of Clontarf station, closed in 1956. It was at Clontarf, on the seashore, that Brian Boru organised his famous victory over the Vikings in 1014, after which all Western Europe had a respite from these raiders. Unfortunately Brian, the first (and last) truly national leader, was slain in his tent after the battle and is reputed to be buried in Armagh, the nearest approach to an Irish capital in those days.

The closure of Clontarf station has, however, been atoned for by the modernisation of Killester, and the opening of Harmonstown at MP3 (in 1957 by the GNR) and recently of Kilbarrack by CIÉ. The Howth Branch diverging about MP $\frac{4}{5}$  was always double-tracked. It opened in 1847. It took all GNR types except the three-cylinder locomotives and all sorts

of engines, even LQGs, were pressed into service on bucket-and-spade trains.

Most of the stations on the main line also carry a heavy seaside traffic; in the case of Laytown and Mosney this comes from Belfast as well as Dublin. Gormanston (MP24) yard serves as a permanent way department store. The station is close to the military aerodrome and camp. Its happily pacific and humanitarian role during the 1969 troubles is well known.

Mosney (MP25½) with its attractive modern cabin (the last one put in by the GNR and similar to Brownstown on the Armagh line) was opened in 1948 to serve the holiday camp. In the early 1950s the GNR ran frequent excursions from Belfast including the option of a visit to the camp and tea in it. For enthusiasts these provided a chance for a long run on the main line at low price, and interesting operation including tender-first working by Compounds to and from Drogheda.



W 2-6-0 No.97 "Earl of Ulster" on an Up Tourist Train crossing the Boyne Viaduct, ca 1963. (W.T. Scott)

At Drogheda, the original temporary Dublin and Drogheda Railway station was behind the bank on the east side of the modern station. The tracks are still in use as sidings.

No trace, however, remains of the Dublin and Belfast Junction Railway Newfoundwell station of 1849 across the river. It was near the present cement branch junction. Road transport connected the two stations until a temporary wooden viaduct was opened in 1853 to enable through trains to be run for the Dublin Exhibition; the permanent structure

came into use in 1855, after much delay caused by the difficulty of obtaining suitable foundations. Fears were later felt about its condition and single line working was instituted (it carried double track). During the 1907 Exhibition, for example, wild rumours, about its supposedly unsafe condition were afoot. Belying these, however, it lasted till 1930, when the decision to renew the girders was taken. The SG3 0-6-0s of 1921 had been confined north of Dundalk and, on passenger trains, though the S class were, according to Mr Glover, hard put to it to keep time with increasing loads, it was not possible to build anything bigger. The reconstruction of the Viaduct, however, made possible the Compounds and the 1932 accelerations which made the GNR the first Irish line to join the "60mph Club".

The Cement Branch was opened in 1938. The GNR built two types of special wagon for this traffic; you will probably see a number of more modern hoppers for bulk cement around Drogheda. These were designed by Mr W.J. Devereux, the present Mechanical Engineer.

Much of the goods work around Drogheda was handled by the four NQG 0-6-0s, which were rarely seen on other parts of the GNR.

The Great Northern Oldcastle branch, on to which we now pass, was planned by the Dublin and Belfast Junction Railway, but in the event was bought by the Dublin and Drogheda who opened it to Navan in 1850, Kells in 1853 and Oldcastle in 1863. It is mile-posted from zero at Drogheda, on the Up side (our right, facing Navan) though the first few posts are on the wrong side.

The chief banks are a two mile climb out of Drogheda at 1/205/186 and after a break a further climb at 1/162 to a point east of Beauparc. There are two portions of downhill thereafter, first at 1/162 and then at 1/154/275 down to the Boyne Viaduct at Navan.

About three and a half miles out is the huge rail-connected cement factory at Platin, being built to supplement that at Drogheda. Construction trains have already been there and a siding has been laid. It is expected to be in part production in 1971.

Just after MP4½ we pass Duleek platform on the Up (north) side. Situated a considerable distance from the village, it was formerly distinguished by one of those bi-directional signals fairly common on the GNR. Duleek is Damh liag = stone house, i.e. stone church; most early churches were of wood, wattle and thatch.

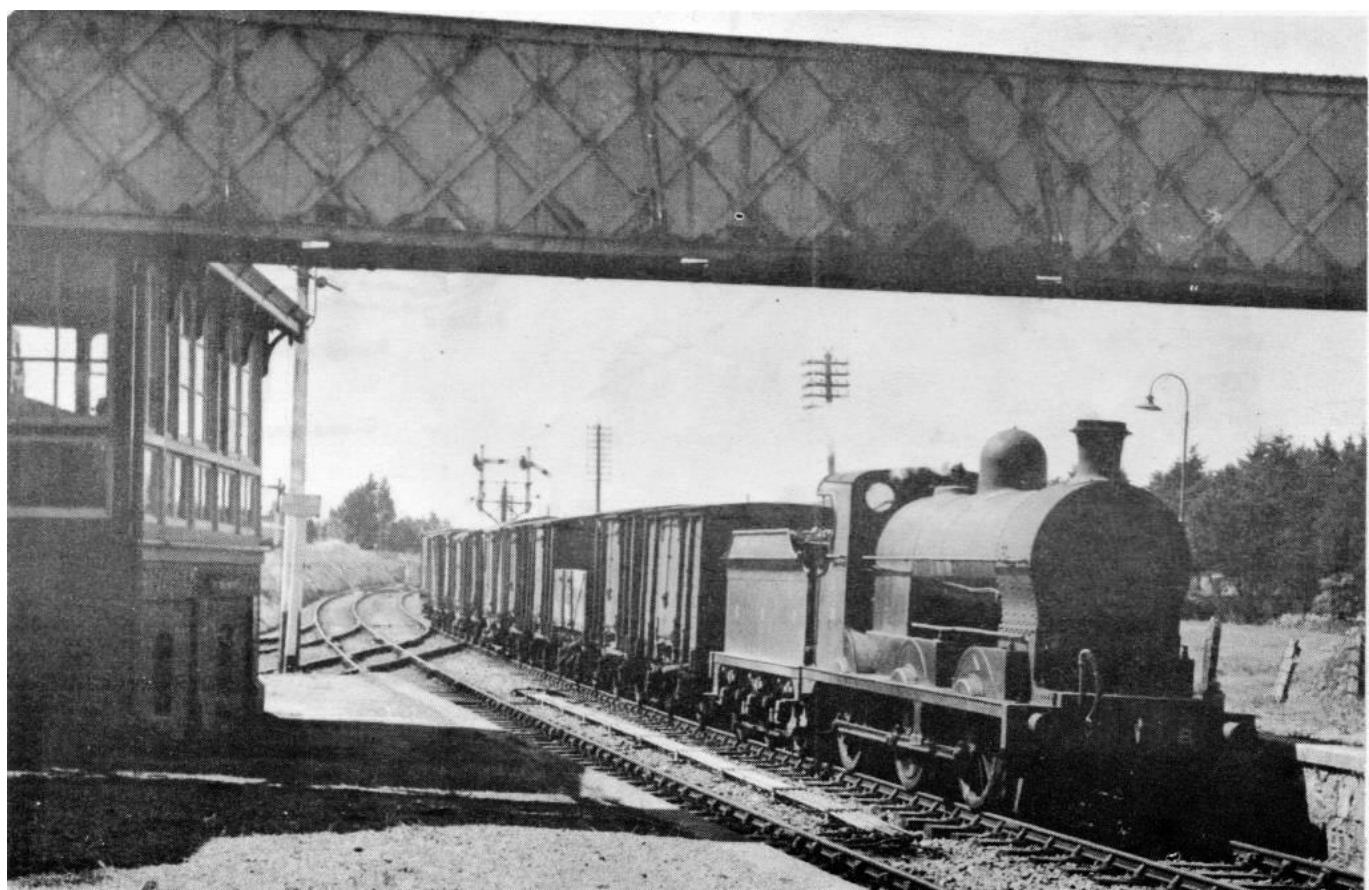
Near MP8½ was, on the Up side, Louher Halt, a one-coach-long wooden-faced platform with sleeper-built shelter, adjacent to a road overbridge.

After MP11½ comes Beauparc. The recent filming of "Darling Lili" in which J15 No.184 was, to enthusiasts, the real star was carried on just east of this station.

There were several railbus stopping places without platforms of which the only one to appear latterly in the Working Timetable was Factory Crossing, ¾ mile, short of Navan. At one time an engine was stationed

in Oldcastle (which had a shed), but latterly a goods left Drogheda at 2:45am and provided the engine for the first Up passenger at 7:45, Drogheda arrive 9:06. The return working at 9:55 (connecting out of the 9:0am) was also steam, the engine returning on the Up goods at 1:10pm. All other workings were by railbus (occasionally railcar); but the 3:40pm Down and 5:10 pm Up were scheduled to be (and were) steam-worked on Saturdays, making an attractive half-day outing via the 12 noon ex Belfast. In the last years of working, the SG and SG2 classes of 0-6-0 monopolised the steam trains, though UGs appeared at the end. Various classes of 4-4-0s had previously worked the passenger trains, the largest class allowed being the QLs.

Navan Junction, only  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile from Navan "Town" retains its four platforms, though there is now only one track through the station. Some of its former glory is illustrated on the photograph shown here. The MGWR Kingscourt trains, both passenger and goods, called here, but GNR trains have not used it for many years.



SG2 0-6-0 No.18 on the 1:10pm Goods ex Oldcastle at Navan Junction on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1957. (A. Donaldson)

The Dublin and Meath Railway had intended to have its own Dublin terminus but in the event only got to Clonsilla on the Midland main line and exercised running powers thence to the Broadstone.

Incidentally the Meath Line trains were diverted to Amiens Street some years before Broadstone was closed in 1937. Being light they were able to use the Newcomen Bridge Spur. There was no junction at Glasnevin at the time. The Dublin and Meath Railway also possessed, and exercised, running powers to Kells on the Oldcastle branch, but the Midland

abandoned this after leasing the DMR in 1869. The reason for these powers was a clause in the Dublin and Drogheda Act, occasioned by the roundabout nature of the Dublin and Drogheda route from Dublin to Kells.

The half mile or so from Navan to Poorhouse Crossing, where the Oldcastle and Kingscourt lines diverged, was double originally, later two single lines connected by a scissors crossover. The level crossing was protected in the Down direction by GNR and MGWR signals side by side.

The line is mile-posted from zero at the Broadstone, like all MGWR routes, the posts being on the Down (west) side.

Tape recordists should be at the ready as follows, Down direction: after Proudstown (MP33); MP34½ - MP36½ (after Gibbstown); MP38 - MP39¾ (Castletown level crossing, where the GSR built a halt on the Up side in 1928); MP47½ - MP48 (after Kilmainham Wood). There are heavy banks in the Up direction out of Kingscourt to MP48 with a break half-way; MP47½ - MP46¾; almost continuously from MP43 - MP41½; MP33¾ - MP33½; MP32 - MP31½.

To continue our itinerary: at MP33 is Proudstown Park Racecourse Platform, a modern-looking concrete structure. It was built as late as 1924 but has not been used since 1939 as it is a considerable distance from the racecourse.

Gibbstown (MP34½) and the surrounding area was the location of an interesting social experiment by the government of the Irish Free State, which encouraged families from the various Gaeldhealtachta to settle here and form a new Gaeldhealtacht. It still exists and some men from it worked on the lifting of the Athboy branch in 1958.

Nobber (MP42½) is An Obair "the Work" thought to be a reference to the fine example of a Norman Motte-and-bailey fortification north-east of the station. It dates from the twelfth century.

Gibbstown, Wilkinstown and Nobber were once block posts, though not all at the same time.

Near MP45½ track was diverted about sixteen years ago owing to a subsidence. Kilmainham Wood was the Navan and Kingscourt terminus from 1872, when the line reached there from Navan, till extended to Kingscourt in 1875. It was worked by the Midland from the outset.

The Gypsum Siding (MP48) was opened in 1939 but has been disused for some time, the gypsum being now loaded from a local quarry at Kingscourt itself, where there is a lorry ramp and turntable to enable tipping into the wagons.

For a short distance after Kilmainham Wood the line passes through County Cavan, the only railway left in that unfortunate county. It enters Cavan again about a mile south of the station and runs through Meath for a short distance before finally coming into Cavan - literally yards from the station approaches, therefore just managing to be in the Province of Ulster.

This is a good enough place to explain the name of our tour. Kingscourt is Dún an Ríogh - the King's Fort - a rath to the west, presumably the residence of some petty chief or "King". Meath is sometimes called "Royal" from having within its borders Tara, for long the seat of the High King. The whole county is exceptionally rich in historical remains of all periods and deserves a more leisurely visit than is possible within the framework of our closely-knit railtour.

Even a cursory inspection of Kingscourt suggests that it never intended to be a terminus - beyond the platform end is a mile-post (50½) which seems to beckon the railway on - where to but Carrickmacross whither the Navan and Kingscourt ran a (long) car service. But by the time the Midland got round to buying the Meath lines in 1888, the GNR had already reached there (1886). But the Midland were biding their time, and in 1893 proposed to extend to Armagh, no less. And that wasn't all - some towns to the north actually pressed the MGWR to continue all the way to Cookstown, and make a junction with the BNCR (Irish thinking was not so geographically compartmentalised, evidently, as it is now). The whole project is a fascinating might-have-been and would actually have affected the Irish Free State Railway Amalgamation of 1925. The new line was to be double to Armagh (though single thence to Cookstown). Of course the Midland had an amazing amount of double track; they even intended to double the road from Clonsilla to Navan, but only got as far as Drumree {11.8 miles from Clonsilla). Another remarkable feature was its studious avoidance of any physical connection with the numerous GNR lines it met on the way. The scheme was dropped, but some of it reappeared as the Castleblaney, Keady and Armagh Railway, always worked by the GNR.

The Kingscourt branch is, we are glad to say, one on which the train service has increased in recent years - there is now a daily (Saturdays excepted) goods each way, whereas in steam days the train was a lodging turn operating on alternate days. The engines were J5s (0-6-0s) but J4 0-6-0s (ex GSWR) worked it just before the end of steam. The maximum permitted axle load was 18½ tons, but the Kingscourt turntable was only a 45 foot one.

Passenger trains last ran in 1946, when there was one passenger and one goods working each way daily. In pre-war years the goods only ran as far as Navan, one of the two passenger workings being mixed in each direction between Navan and Kingscourt. In 1939 the 7:35am mixed from Kingscourt called at the Gypsum Siding, which must have been interesting for the passengers, while the 6:10pm Down was mixed if required from Navan forward, in which case it was allowed an extra twenty-two minutes. These trains were worked by G2 (650) class 2-4-0s. Before World War I, and at some periods after it, there was an extra passenger working between Dublin and Navan only.

An article on the Kingscourt, Keady and Armagh Railway appeared in "Five Foot Three" No.3.

Itinerary written by A. Donaldson

Maps by E.H. Gilmore

This Souvenir Brochure is produced by the Magazine Sub-committee of  
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