

STEAMING ON

Newspaper of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland

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Portrush Flyer - Dream Come True



Steam fan Patricia McCutcheon of Newtownbreda, Belfast, with the Portrush Flyer engine.
(Photo, courtesy Belfast News Letter).

A regular steam train service was something that every member of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland had dreamt about since the Society was formed.

And in 1973 the Society achieved this aim with the operation of the "Portrush Flyer." The train ran on four Saturdays in the height of the summer and altogether about 1,600 passengers travelled on it.

The train started at the Society's base in Whitehead, Co. Antrim, and then made the 160-mile round trip up to Portrush on the Northern seaboard.

"The reaction of the children who came on the Flyer was particularly amazing," said Tony Ragg, Society Operations Officer. "They were absolutely amazed to see our engine with its roaring fire and hiss of steam and soon became enchanted with the whole idea."

Of course without the co-operation of Northern Ireland Railways, and in particular the understanding attitude of NIR managing director Mr. Hugh Waring, the whole "Flyer" episode would have been impossible. Fortunately train crews took to the idea with great enthusiasm and even the guards were not too disgruntled to be travelling along in a 1906-built brake coach instead of a sleek new railcar.

The kitchen in the dining car was powered by gas provided by Calor/Kosangas, and the same firm provided gas for lighting coach No. 861 — a thing quite unique these days in Ireland. This firm, too, undertook the inspection and testing of the gas fittings.

RPSI members also had a chance to sample life in a proper steam shed, as they prepared the engine for its run to Portrush. They lubricated the engine with oil provided by Esso and used coal from Cawood's. Both firms ensured that the RPSI got exactly the correct material.

Introducing the Society . . .

The Railway Preservation Society of Ireland is the country's only rail steam preservation body.

The Society's aims are, to preserve Irish steam engines

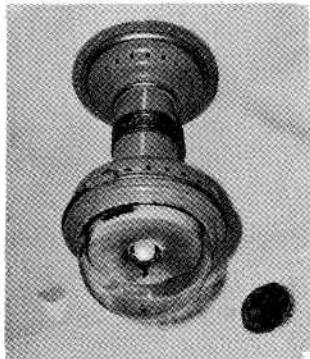
and rolling stock in working order and to use them on main line railtours whenever possible.

The R.P.S.I. is maintained entirely by voluntary subscrip-

ion — all proceeds are ploughed back into the restoration and maintenance of its historical vehicles.

Membership of the Society at £1.50 per annum is open

to anyone interested in Irish railways. Further details are available from the treasurer, Mr. John Richardson, 18 Downshire Gardens, Carrickfergus.



Above: A gas lamp in Coach 861.
Below: Some RPSI coaches.

coaches - the next step

Once the RPSI had a selection of steam engines at Whitehead the next logical step was to preserve some coaches.

Changes in the braking system used by the railway companies in Ireland meant that new coaches were unsuitable for being hauled by steam engines.

Now the Society has eight coaches.

DIRECTORS

No. 50 — When the Directors' saloon, coach No. 50 of the former Great Northern Railway of Ireland became redundant last year, it seemed certain that it would be scrapped.

But the Ulster Tourist Development Association stepped in and they purchased the saloon. It will be officially handed over to the Society when restoration work is completed.

Unlike an ordinary coach, the saloon is designed to give a panoramic view. Moveable tables and chairs are set in an interior of polished oak.

A new carpet has been provided for the coach by Ulster Carpet Mills of Portadown.

UNIQUE

No. 861—This is the oldest bogie coach in Ireland, dating from 1906 when it was built for the Cork-Rosslare boat expresses.

It is unique in Ireland today in being the only gas-lit coach on the railways. Calor/Kosangas helped modify the gas fittings so that the supply could come from modern-day containers.

And a diesel too!

You might think a diesel engine would be anathema to the hardened steam fans of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland.

But one has breached the defences at the Society's headquarters at Whitehead.

The "Planet" is a small diesel shunting engine which is on (long-term) loan to the

RPSI from the Southern-based Irish Steam Preservation Society. The engine used to work for Irish Shell and BP and was presented to the ISPS by them.

Now Shell-Mex and BP in the North have painted up the engine which the RPSI finds invaluable for shunting at Whitehead.

"Previously if we wanted to do even a small shunt we had to light up a steam engine," said loco running officer, Irwin Pryce. "Now all we have to do is get the diesel on the move - it must save us about three hours a time. Loath as some of our members may be to admit it we do find the diesel extremely useful."



a shade better

One thing that visitors to Whitehead always admire is the resplendent liveries in which both coaches and engines are painted.

The "blue" engine is "Slieve Gullion," a former Belfast-Dublin express engine remembered by many people. And to get the colour schemes exactly right, the Society relies heavily on the Belfast paint firm of Samuel Courtney Ltd. to reproduce the old company liveries exactly. Apart from that, Courtney's have also given invaluable help with the supply of paints.

STEAM EVENTS IN 1974

- * June 29th: Steam Gala at Whitehead
- * Sundays in July & August: Steam Train Rides at Whitehead.
- * July 20th, August 3rd, 17th & 31st: Portrush Flyers.
- * September 28th & 29th: Silvermines Railtour — Dublin - Limerick, etc. with two engines.

seven saved ... so far

6000, Best Ever!

The Steam Gala is the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland's chance to show off its home to the public.

And in summer 1973 the floodgates opened — about 6,000 people from near and far flocked to the RPSI's headquarters at Whitehead Excursion Station.

Fortunately the sun shone as the crowds listened to a silver band, milled round the side shows and enjoyed steam train rides up and down the site. Three of the RPSI's six engines were in steam for the day and crewed by Society members.

The Steam Gala is usually at the end of June, and in July and August train rides with the RPSI's engines are operated at the site on Sunday afternoons.

The usual engine for these train rides is No. BG3, "Guinness," which was presented to the Society in 1965 by the Dublin brewery. She is a favourite with all the youngsters, and is popular with crews too, for her easy steaming and simple operation.



With limited resources the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland has managed to save seven engines from the scrapheap in just under 10 years.

And the Society reckons it has a pretty representative bunch; everything from a Belfast-Dublin express engine and a sleek mixed traffic tank engine through to shunting engines is to be found assembled at the RPSI headquarters in Whitehead.

The Society's first engine came from Guinness' in Dublin where it used to shunt trains from the brewery to a mainline station.

Most of the engines are no youngsters. No. 186 is now in her 95th year and still going strong; recently new tubes have given her a new lease of life. CIE presented the engine to the RPSI in 1966 when she became redundant.

Since the RPSI took over 186 she has run about 3,000 miles on Society railtours in many different parts of Ireland varying from Limerick to Portrush and Waterford to Athlone.

The Society's biggest battle for funds was the purchase of

No. 4, the tank engine. NIR finished using her in 1970 and the RPSI set about finding about £1,300 to save her from the scrapheap. Fortunately members dug deeply into their pockets and their quest was successful.

Pride of the pack is No. 171, built in 1913 for the famous Great Northern Railway of Ireland. She was used on the crack Belfast-Dublin expresses and the Society had her overhauled in Harland and Wolff's in 1968. No. 171 "Sieve Gulion" is owned by the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company and is leased to the Society. When funds are sufficient, the Society plans to buy the engine.

One of the big problems for the RPSI these days is obtaining the right grade of coal for steam engines. In 1973, when faced with massive coal consumption, Messrs. Cawoods of Belfast generously came to the Society's aid and produced a good grade of proper steam coal — at greatly reduced rates.

Their Big Day

One date prominent in the RPSI's calendar each year is the day when a group of children come down from Dr. Barnardo's Home at Whiteabbey.

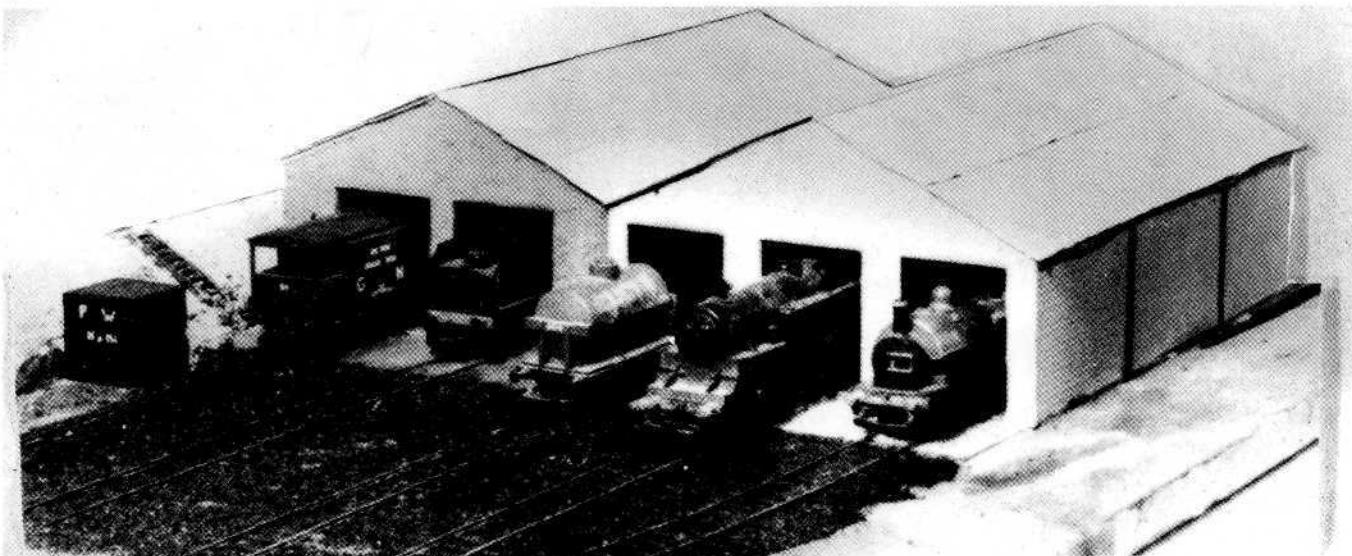
Usually the children's visit is in the autumn and they have a great afternoon being taken up and down the site on an RPSI train.

Another venture in which the Society is always keen to help is in bringing out the educational potential of having the only working main-line steam engines in the country.

"We like having parties of schoolchildren down to Whitehead," said Mr. John Richardson, treasurer of the Society. "They're always fascinated by the engine and I'm sure it helps with their education too."

WHO TO CONTACT

Secretary—John Friel, 48 Killycomaine Drive, Portadown, Co. Armagh. Treasurer—John Richardson, 18 Downshire Gardens, Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim. Operations Officer—Tony Ragg, 33 Ascot Gardens, Belfast. Publicity—Robin Morton, 2 Cranmore Park, Belfast. Dublin Agent—Sam Carse, 38 Oakley Road, Dublin 6. London Agent—Leslie McAllister, 30 Goodways Drive, Bracknell, Berks.



The shape of things to come at Whitehead. A model shows just what the engine shed will look like when funds permit. The original two road shed is on the left with the three-road extension on the right — the extension is, as yet, roofless.

Wanted - One Roof

One thing the RPSI needed for a long time at its site at Whitehead was a second engine shed in which to store its locomotives.

LUCKY LET-OFF

On a dark night in February, 1973 vandals broke into one of the Society's most prized possessions — a 1906-built brake coach. The vandals lit a fire in one of the compartments of the unique gas-lit wooden coach — but fortunately the fire did not spread and the coach was saved.

But the Society had learned its lesson, and work was started soon afterwards on the building of a 300-yard long security fence around the site.

The decision to build the fence was a heart-breaking one for the committee. For it meant that vital finances earmarked for a projected carriage shed had to be diverted.

CAPITAL NEEDED

Now that the fence is complete the Society is still faced with the problem of finding enough money for the essential coach shed.

And this is where the committee hopes that industry can help. At least £7,000 is

needed if priceless relics which the Society has managed to preserve are to be saved from further deterioration.

"The rain and wind are slowly ruining the coaches," said Mr. Ken Pullin, carriage superintendent. "We really need a shed big enough to take eight coaches — 300ft. by about 30 — but this is going to be expensive — about £5,000."

CAPITAL

We have achieved much in the past through the voluntary efforts of our members — as this paper shows. In order to carry on our work we need a large injection of capital. All our finance, so far, has come from our ever-willing members. But if we are to properly preserve this important facet of the country's heritage, we will need an immediate and substantial shot in the arm. We are appealing to industry for help — either financially or in materials towards the buildings necessary."

The original two-road shed held just two engines, and so members embarked on the building of a new three-road shed beside the original one in the Spring of 1972. After quite a few months work on the 60ft. by 40ft. shed the members, by now quite skilled at block-laying, had got up to eave level. And that was where the funds ran out.

HEAVY COST

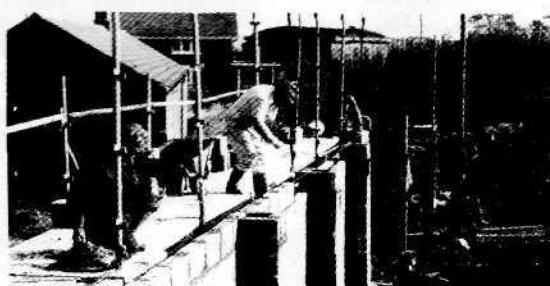
"Even getting the shed built that far was a great achievement — and a great drain on finances," said treasurer John Richardson. "But we could not afford the cost of the roof, unfortunately. This means that although the engines are secure enough there is no protection from the elements, and

already this has resulted in some rust damage to a couple of the engines."

All the money the Society can raise is needed for the vital work of keeping the engines and rolling stock in running order, and so the Society is appealing to industry for help in financing the roofing of the shed.

DONATIONS

"Already Guinness have stepped in with £200, and we're extremely grateful to them," said John. "But we need much more than that from other firms. It would be a tragedy if after all the voluntary effort put into saving the engines they were to be wrecked by the rain and wind."



"Building the new shed — before the money ran out".