

ONE GOOD TURN: One item of railway equipment which is not normally expected to travel great distances is the turntable. However, the turntable formerly situated at Ballymena Station has been proving an exception to this rule. Its first journey was from Ballymena to the former GNR(I) Belfast terminus at Great Victoria Street during the period when the Northern Sections of the old GNR were being operated by the Ulster Transport Authority. This transfer was necessitated by the closure of the triangle at Adelaide where engines had previously been turned. In its new location the turntable not only outlasted the days of steam operation on the railways of Northern Ireland but also survived the complete closure of Great Victoria Street Station in April 1976 when Belfast Central was opened. The turntable remained in situ on the now derelict site until acquired by the RPSI and on Saturday 28 April last it once more set off on its travels. The turntable, which is 55 feet in length, was prepared for transportation some days previously by a number of members. On the Saturday morning two cranes were brought to the site to lift the turntable from its pit. (Two cranes were necessary since a straight vertical lift of several feet was required to detach the turntable from its central pivot and this was not possible for one machine operating from the edge of the pit.) The turntable and all its associated equipment were loaded on to a telescopic trailer and transported to Whitehead where one of the cranes unloaded everything the same afternoon. Once a pit has been prepared and the turntable installed at Whitehead it should prove to be a valuable piece of operating equipment.

IN THE BAG: Advantage was taken of all the comings and goings of cranes and heavy haulage vehicles on 28 April to move several other bulky items of equipment. A coal bagging plant, recently acquired by the Society was transported from Belfast to Whitehead. This will greatly benefit all members involved in the slow and tedious operation of bagging coal for use on tours, etc. The returning road trailer was used to carry one pair from the spare set of driving wheels for No.4 to York Road where a torch burn is to be repaired.

SKY-TRAIN? Anyone arriving at Whitehead during the afternoon of 6 May would have been confronted by the unnerving sight of coach 532 minus its underframe supported on a series of jacks. The underframe has now been replaced with a spare vacuum braked underframe.

GETTING PUSHED ABOUT: A great deal of shunting has been taking place at Whitehead over the last few weekends. As well as the underframe transferring operation already mentioned, the coaches stored on the site have been reorganised so that those required for this year's tour programme have been positioned in convenient places. No.171 has also been moved from the wheel-drop to the shed. The engine used for all these operations was the ex-Londonderry Port Harbour Commissioners 0-6-0 "R.H. Smyth".

NEW LINE: Work has now almost been completed on connecting in shed roads Nos. 4 and 5 at Whitehead. This means that all three inspection pits in the new section of the shod are now rail connected. This will considerably improve the facilities for both loco and coach maintenance and repair work.

FLYING TIME AGAIN: Enclosed in this current circular are booking forms for this year's Portrush Flyer. You can help to attract passengers to this popular train by passing on those forms which are surplus to your own booking requirements to friends, neighbours or workmates who may be interested.

Don't forget the "Flyer" when the annual outing from your office, church, etc. is being planned.

BACK ON THE ROAD: After many months of work at Whitehead the major overhaul of No.171 is nearing completion. The new driving axleboxes have been fitted and the engine's driving wheels have been fitted back in position. After some further work it is hoped to steam "Sieve Gullion" by mid-May and, if all goes well, carry out several light engine running-in trips on the Larne line. Provided performance is satisfactory 171 will be the engine in charge of a steam special planned to operate from York Road on Saturday 2 June to bring customers to Whitehead Steam & Vintage Transport Gala. The most demanding allocated to 171 this year is the operation of the three Portrush Flyers on 21 July, 4 & 8 August.

GALA NEWS: While "Sieve Gullion" is working the special train from York Road on Gala day two of the Society's other engines will be kept busy at Whitehead. Class J15 186 and the Derry engine. "R.H. Smyth" will be in charge of the train rides up and down the site. The sight of three steam locomotives all working at the same time at Whitehead is not exactly an everyday event in these times and should prove most popular with members and public alike. More helpers are still urgently needed for this event and for putting up advance publicity posters during the fortnight prior to the Gala. If you are able to help please ring Sam Somerville.

"SLIEVE BULLION"?? That famous gold bullion snatch of the 1850s is being recalled once again as "The First Great Train Robbery" comes to Belfast for the first time. It opens at the New Vic on Monday 14th May. This is an excellent opportunity for all those members who were not able to travel on the Flood and Frost Special to Dublin last December to take their friends and families to see the Society's two J15 Class locos, 184 and 186 in action.

TIME IS SHORT: Don't forget that the "Croagh Patrick" Railtour is less than a fortnight away. If you haven't already sent in your booking for this tour hurry and do so and avoid the disappointment of missing the major tour of the year.

IRISH PRINTINGS: The sales department have reminded me of the two excellent new books on Irish subjects which they have in stock. "Irish Railways in the Heyday of Steam" by H.C. Casserley at £4.25 & 15p P&P with many photographs is of interest to all steam enthusiasts while "Locomotives and Rolling Stock of CIÉ and NIR" by O. Doyle and S. Hirsch is a much needed guide to the present scene on Irish railways.

FIVE FOOT THREE: The Society's magazine "Five Foot Three" will have its next edition published shortly. The magazine will probably be ready to send out to members by the end of June.

RIDING HIGH: The Sunday afternoon train rides at Whitehead will be a feature in the programmes of both the Whitehead and Carrickfergus Festivals. Sunday 1st July falls during the former festival while Sunday 29th July is during the latter. Just a reminder ... the Sunday Train Rides will operate from 17 June to 9 September inclusive, with "R.H. Smyth" and occasionally 186 providing the motive power.

POST SCRIPT: Further to the item on "Portrush Flyer" booking forms - anyone who requires further forms or knows of someone who does can obtain these at Whitehead or by contacting Alan Love at the address on the forms.

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