

AUGUST 1979 NEWS-SHEET

FLYING HIGH

Saturday 18 August was the final date for the 1979 series of Portrush Flyers and brought to a close an interesting and eventful season. As in previous years, the Flyers attracted immense public interest and were heavily booked. The first Flyer ran on 21 July and was made up with seven bogies hauled by S-Class 4-4-0 No.171 "Slieve Gullion". 171 took the train to Portrush in excellent style but, unfortunately, developed a hot driving axle box while on its way to Derry to use the turntable, and was unable to operate the return portion of the Flyer. On return to Whitehead, 171 was put over the wheeldrop (once again proving the usefulness of this facility) and the axle box removed and examined. After remetalting and attention to the lubrication system the box was replaced and the engine reassembled by the following weekend. 171 was steamed on Sunday 29 July and operated the Sunday Train Rides for part of the afternoon. This being successful, a running-in trip to Ballymena took place on the following Wednesday and the engine pronounced to be in order for the second Flyer on 4 August. This second run to Portrush went off without a hitch with the engine performing well hauling eight coaches. Nearly every seat was taken on the third and final Flyer on 18 August which ran on the one sunny day in a week of more typical summer weather (rain). Following the precedent of last summer, this final Flyer was extended to Castlerock as a separate excursion during the period when the train normally lies over in Portrush station. About 150 passengers travelled on this section of the journey. The coaches were left on the passing loop at Castlerock while 171 went on to turn at Derry and Flyer regulars were able to sample an alternative seaside resort for the two hours until the return trip. A point of interest about the 18 August Flyer was that it was featured on BBC Television's "Scene Around Six" on the following Monday evening. As well as interviews with passengers and crew there were several attractive lineside shots of the train at speed. If some of the locations appeared unfamiliar to those who know the Portrush route well this was because they were filmed on the Castlerock extension,

CAT-ASTROPHIC

The well-ordered routine of the shed and site at Whitehead has recently been shattered by the sudden appearance of a family of cats. These first appeared in the shed where diminutive kittens would leap from inanimate looking bundles of rags when an unsuspecting member approached. Latterly these feline invaders took up residence on the tarry steps where it is an unnerving site to watch hardened Whitehead regulars clutching saucers of milk and saying strange things such as "Here Kitty!".

UP ON THE ROOF

Work on the erection of the roof for the shed extension is about to commence. The shed area has been cleared of rolling stock to allow a crane to operate. The completion of the roof will greatly improve the facilities at Whitehead with three more covered roads where work can be carried out on locomotives and coaches in all weathers.

BACK IN ACTION

While 171 has been the RPSI engine in the public eye during the July and August Portrush Flyer season, work on Centenarian 186, including the fitting of a new chimney has been going on at Whitehead. 186 reappeared in steam on Sunday 19 August when it operated the train rides and proved a big

attraction with visitors. This was repeated on the following Sunday 26 August when both 186 and "R.H. Smyth" were in steam although the latter was not used for train rides on that particular Sunday. 186 is ready to operate the Lough Foyle Railtour on Saturday 1st September.

WINTER DATES

Once again summer is drawing to a close. (That was summer during the last two or three months, by the way, in case you hadn't noticed it.) However, the onset of Autumn and Winter does not mean an end to RPSI events for the season. Once more a series of Belfast area meetings is planned. As in previous years, we have been kindly permitted to use Saint Jude's church hall in Sunnyside Street, Belfast. The meetings will take place on the second Tuesday of each month which will enable us to hold a December meeting without clashing with the Christmas period. All meetings will start at 19.30. The dates for the Belfast area meetings are as follows:

9 October 1979
13 November 1979
11 December 1979
8 January 1980
12 February 1980
11 March 1980

So keep these dates free. The usual varied and interesting programme is planned: the October meeting is hoped to feature another opportunity to view Derek Henderson's cine featuring steam in Ireland, especially the Great Northern. The subjects of the subsequent meetings will be announced shortly.

SLIPPING & SLIDING

With the number of cameras to be seen on all RPSI tours and events, there must be great numbers of colour slides of the Society's engines in existence. The sales department is always on the lookout for suitable slides from which to make postcards. If you have any slides which you think might be suitable, especially featuring 186, 184, 4, 171 or "R.H. Smyth" (colour slides only please), John Richardson would be grateful if you would send them to him for consideration.