

AUGUST 1980 NEWS-SHEET

**EXTRA, EXTRA:** The Sunday afternoon steam train rides at Whitehead are enjoying one of their most successful seasons ever. The number of people being carried on the train rides continues to grow - around 300/400 each Sunday afternoon. And the Whitehead Railway Shop proves to be a big attraction. Hence, it has been decided to extend the train rides season - due to finish on August 31 - right through to September 21 in response to public demand. No.3 "R.H. Smyth", complete with vacuum brake, continues her sterling work as train rides engine - so why not pay a second visit to Whitehead in September? Also, we could use some extra assistance behind the counter in the portakabin shop so if you're free on September 7, 14 or 21, give John Richardson a ring and offer your services.

**FLYING HIGH:** Another success story has been the Portrush Flyer. No.171 "Slieve Gullion" has been performing faultlessly - a real tribute to our loco maintenance department. The trains have been heavily booked, which is what we like to see. On average, passenger figures for the Flyer have been hitting the 300 mark, with the August 9 train loaded to eight coaches. The Portrush-Castlerock extensions have been well patronised, with almost 200 passengers taking advantage of the chance of an afternoon steam excursion. The extension to Derry on July 26 was also well supported, and Foyle Tourism Association have written congratulating the RPSI on this venture. The Flyer featured in a page one picture in the Belfast Telegraph on July 26 which helped publicise the other two trains.

**WRITE TRACKS:** Among the passengers on the Flyer have been the editors of two of the leading British railway publications. Mr Peter Kelly, editor of the magazine "Steam Railway" was on board on August 9 and Mr John Slater, editor of "Railway Magazine" is to be on the August 23 train. Both editors have come to Northern Ireland on a weekend visit courtesy of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, to whom the RPSI is very grateful. Hopefully articles on the Flyer and the RPSI will appear in due course in the publications, and the NITB is considering marketing specialist railway enthusiast holidays in Northern Ireland as part of its 1981 campaign. Mr Mike Harris, editor of "Railway World" travelled on the RPSI's South Kerry tour in May.

**LETTERS OF PRAISE:** We have received a number of letters of thanks from enthusiasts who enjoyed the South Kerry tour. Top place must go to a letter from Mr Don Potts, tour officer of the Australian Railway Historical Society (Victorian Division). A group of 28 Aussies included the tour as part of their 60-day Grand European Tour which took them right across the continent. Writes Don: "Undoubtedly, the highlight of our 60 day tour was our visit to Ireland and participation in the RPSI's South Kerry tour. All our members vote it a most enjoyable occasion with the hope of returning again some time in the future. All this, of course, was due to the excellent co-operation of the RPSI. Immediately upon arrival at Dublin Airport we were made to feel at home and welcome. This atmosphere and generous hospitality continued throughout the whole weekend."

**SONGS OF PRAISE:** Usually reliable sources indicate that 171 "Slieve Gullion" is about to make history by becoming the first steam engine ever to appear on the BBC programme "Songs of Praise". It'll all be clear in September, but apparently it's something to do with the 800th anniversary of St Nicholas' Church in Carrickfergus, whose treasurer happens to be one John Richardson. Hmm...

UP COUNTRY: And while on the subject of the BBC, listen out on Radio Ulster on September 20 for a full half-hour programme "Up Country" which is devoted to the Portrush Flyer on August 9.

LOUGH ERNE SECURED: Thanks to a generous donation of £1,250 from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, No.27 "Lough Erne", the ex Sligo, Leitrim & Northern Counties Railway 0-6-4T has been secured for the RPSI. The cheque, which was handed over at a ceremony at Whitehead on July 3, brought the fund to £4,000, although we are still £1,000 short of the purchase price of £5,000. So more funds are required, although the engine is safely in the hands of the Society. The NITB cheque was presented to RPSI treasurer John Richardson by an 81-year-old American railway buff who was over in Northern Ireland as a visitor of the NITB. He is Mr Rogers Whittaker, and he enjoyed himself so much during his day at Whitehead that he was back again on Saturday July 5 to travel behind 0-6-0 No.186 on the Whitehead Steam-Up special from Belfast York Road.

So, please, if you can spare even £1, please send it in to the 27 Appeal. "Lough Erne", which has not been in steam for eight years, will require a major overhaul at Whitehead and it will be at least a couple of years before she is back in action.

A TENDER MOVE: That trip 186 had from Belfast to Whitehead (see above) may in fact have been her last operation for a year or so. Our 101-year-old J15 requires a new set of superheater elements among other jobs. As priority work-wise and money-wise must go at present to getting our stalwart 2-6-4T No.4 back on the road, it has been decided to "mothball" 186 for the time being at Whitehead. Work will proceed on her as time and money permit. In the meantime, the J15 spotlight falls on 186's sister engine 184, currently celebrating her centenary year. To give 184 a wider range between water stops it has been decided to run 186's tender behind her as the larger tender holds more water and coal. The plan is to take 186's tender down to Mullingar, where 184 is shedded, by road and the new-look 184 should be all ready in time for the May 1981 two-day tour to Sligo.

NEXT STOP BOMBAY: Plans are being finalised for the RPSI's fourth escorted tour "The Romance of India - by Rail", which is being run by RPSI member Ian Slaughter of Williames Travel, Belfast. It's a 19-day expedition from February 14 to March 6 1981 and details are available from Ian. Everything from a metre-gauge steam-worked rack railway to 12th century temples!

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY: It's almost Belfast area meeting time again. The meetings are being held as usual at St Jude's Church Hall, Sunnyside Street, Belfast, with a starting time of 19.45. Provisional programme is:

Tuesday October 21 - Illustrated talk on CIÉ.  
Tuesday November 18 - Railway Yarns by Tom McDevitte.  
Tuesday December 16 - Some of the best of Maca Films.

The Spring meetings are on January 20, February 17 and March 24.

RUNG UP: The following promotions have been made in the operating grades:

To steamraiser - Alan Love and Patrick Kelly.  
To assistant shunter - Stuart Agnew and John Beaumont.

PALESTRINA: The day of filming on July 16 at Poyntzpass with BBC2 went very well. 171 performed faultlessly, and some of the passengers got parts as extras. "My Dear Palestrina" is to be screened on BBC2 Playhouse in November.

COMMERCIAL: Negotiations are under way for 171 to feature in a TV commercial which is planned for filming at Connolly Station Dublin on the evening of Tuesday August 26. Nothing has been finalised, but this would involve a light engine trip from Whitehead on the Tuesday morning, returning on

Wednesday. 171's latest role is to portray an Iron Curtain steam engine - a sort of a red star.

RING UP: Don't forget that all the latest railtour information, etc., is available on the answerphone, Whitehead 8567. Give us a buzz.

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