

Leslie McAllister

FOR THE Railway Preservation Society of Ireland, 1981 was heralded as the year in which it would fulfil the unspoken aims and dreams of its founders. On that cold autumn evening in 1964 when the Society was founded, the idea of covering all the passenger carrying standard gauge railways in Ireland behind its own locomotives would have been dismissed as a dream. Yet, in 1981, there remained only one section of track to cover — Mullingar to Collooney Junction near Sligo — and the day was set, 16 May 1981. Alas, it was not to be.

On 2 May last year, while running a series of 'Bangor Belle' excursions on the Belfast to Bangor line, the tubes of the chosen tour locomotive, Great Northern Railway 'S' 4-4-0 No 171, began to give trouble. As our other express locomotive, NCC 2-6-4T No 4, was in the process of a major overhaul, the planned 'Ben Bulben' rail tour was postponed until September.

No 171 was quickly retubed and was available to haul a special carrying Northern Ireland Office Minister Michael Alison (himself an enthusiast) on 4 July. During the summer she hauled the now traditional three 'Portrush Flyer' excursions and plans were made for a busy programme of September tours culminating in that climax at Collooney on 26 September. The programme included two 'Steam Enterprise' excursions (Bangor to Dublin and return), then the postponed two-day tour. With 'empty carriage' mileage, over 1,000 miles were to be covered by No 171, with a lesser mileage by the ex-Great Southern & Western Railway '101' class 0-6-0 No 184, second engine for the two-day tour. Little wonder that the locomotive department complained!

The steamy month actually began on Bank Holiday Monday when No 171 hauled the eight coaches required for the tours from the Society's base at Whitehead to Belfast (Central) — just over 15 miles direct, but

STEAM SEPTEMBER

All photographs by Charles P. Friel

over 60 by rail! The route was via Belfast (York Road), Antrim and Lisburn. The first 'Enterprise', on 5 September, began with gusto, No 171 being worked hard right from the start and getting through Lisburn in just over 14 minutes, having already achieved 52mph on the long and adverse gradients out of Belfast.

Southbound trains face nearly nine miles of adverse gradients in the Border country, between Mileposts 74 and 65.5 (measured from Dublin), varying mainly from 1 in 100

to 1 in 120 with short stretches of easier grades. On this trip No 171 climbed strongly, holding 30mph up to post 67 where she slipped and so speed fell off to 22.4mph,

Above: The 'Ben Bulben' rail tour, 27 September 1981. GNR (I) 'S' 4-4-0 No 171 *Sieve Gullion* leads GS&WR 0-6-0 No 184 for the climb out of Longford on the return run.

Below: One of the 'Steam Enterprises' of 19 September. No 171 crosses the Boyne Viaduct at Drogheda.





but once over the top she ran briskly down to Dundalk in the sixties. Unhappily, two stretches of single line working, one for electrification work in the Dublin area, saw much time dropped beyond. On the return trip, No 171 conquered the slightly easier 10-mile climb out of Dundalk with a minimum of 30 before the first summit at Adavoye and, after 44 in the dip there, a final minimum of 37. This climb is faced immediately by the train starting out of Dundalk, so little momentum can be gained, unlike southbound where the climb follows a useful dip.

Two weeks later, No 171 was again hauling eight coaches, packed with the general public off for a day in Dublin. The main climb was again carried well, but with no slips the minimum at the top was 30.5mph — a stirring effort. Beyond Dundalk, the running was sprightly between those engineering possessions, with some pleasant stretches at over 60mph. Vintage stuff from the 4-4-0 on her own main line!

The hard work for No 171 continued the following Monday when she set off with a lighter load of seven coaches, technically empty stock but with the bar in the diner sustaining 20/30 passengers. Again, the main southbound climb was of note with a minimum of no less than 34.5mph. One train-timer was heard to remark that he had to go back to 1963 and one of the fabled 'VS' class (1948 simple three-cylinder 4-4-0s) to find a better climb with the load. How preserved steam awakens those cherished memories of earlier triumphs by engines long gone!

I didn't participate in all this steamy activity until I joined No 171 and her seven-coach train for the two-day tour on 26 September, having travelled over by sea with a party of British enthusiasts. Others had made their own way across, taking the opportunity of having a longer holiday travelling on Ireland's interesting railways by service train. The largest British contingent took advantage of our inclusive air tour,

available from seven mainland airports. I joined the tour at Dublin (Connolly), formerly Amiens Street, headquarters of the GNR(I). I would have travelled to Pearse (formerly Westland Row), the real starting point, but the engineers had taken advantage of the weekend for another possession — no trains were running!

Before setting off on the tour, let us look at the make-up of the train. At the head, resplendent in sky-blue livery, was No 171, one of the GNR(I)'s 'S' class, the magnum opus of Charles Clifford and his Chief Draughtsman L. J. Watson. Indeed, Clifford

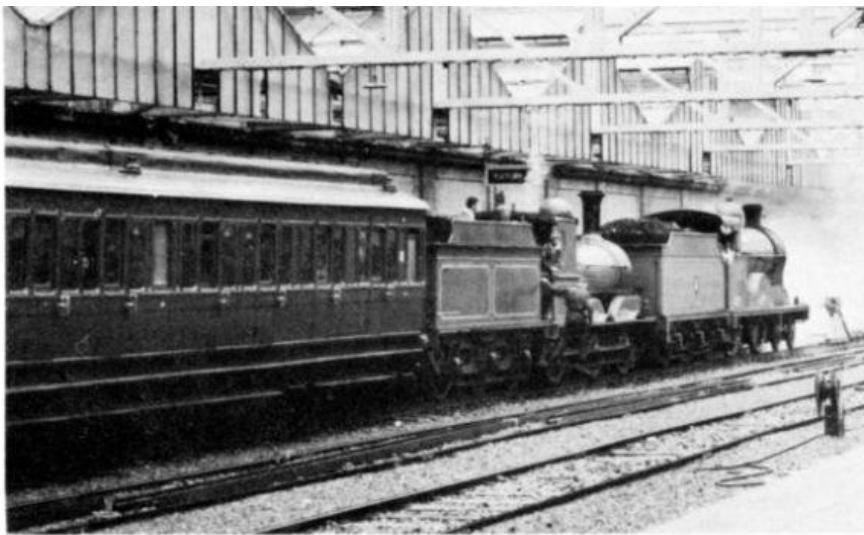
had retired before the first of his masterpieces arrived from Beyer Peacock in February 1913. The entire class of eight (George Glover had added three with detail differences in 1915) was substantially rebuilt at Dundalk in 1938/39. All were named after Irish mountains, No 171 bearing the name of a peak within sight of the main line on the aforementioned hilly stretch over the Border — *Sieve Gullion*.

Marshalled next to the engine was No 861, our gas-lit, tri-composite/brake clerestory-roofed coach from 1906. No 861 carries the Society's railborne shop selling souvenirs to participants and the general public who come out to admire. Behind her came two Bredin era coaches of the GSR, built in the mid-1930s — one a side-corridor third and the other an open. Next, the all-important ex-GNR(I) Diner, No 88, dispensing drinks and light refreshments

Above: Mullingar, 26 September. No 171 after arrival from Dublin. No 184 at the rear of the train ready to shunt the stock.

Below: No 184 on her own with seven coaches and being pressed very hard, topping the last 1 in 100 before Kilfree Junction, 26 September.





throughout the tour. One of our two vehicles of this type, this may have been her last two-day tour for some time as someone has noticed that the second vehicle has a larger bar! The next vehicle stood out from the others, not only because of its mahogany livery (the others are 'RPSI Red') but also the splendour of its appointment and the standard of restoration. Built in 1911 as the GNR(I)'s Directors Saloon, it has been beautifully restored by Northern Ireland Railways' workshops at York Road, through the generosity of our president Lord O'Neill and a consortium of friends. Passengers could enjoy the tour in the luxury of the saloon on payment of a supplement! Finally came the workshop coach, an ex-GNR third brake.

We set off for Mullingar in unexciting fashion without exceeding 47mph on this easy, 50-mile section. This is the site of the Society's southern base, home of No 184 and of No 461 (ex-D&SER No 15 — a 2-6-0, inside-cylinder goods locomotive) and several coaches. Also at our base are four ex-GNR(I) 'U' class tenders. The Society is buying one as a possible replacement for No 184's small tender. No 184 is a saturated '101' built in 1880. The class was introduced by Alexander McDonnell in 1866, No 184 being one of the majority of the class built at Inchicore. Smaller numbers were turned out by Beyer Peacock and Sharp, Stewart. The class eventually numbered 111 engines.

No 184 still carries a green livery, applied for the making of the film *The First Great Train Robbery*. We think it looks nice in this guise! The '101' class carried green, black and, even, grey liveries over the years!

With No 184 as the train engine and No 171 as pilot, we set off up the ex-Midland Great Western Railway's Sligo line. Although there were once two double-track sections, the line is now single throughout. At Longford No 184 was due to come off, but as No 171 was experiencing some injector trouble, it was the 4-4-0 that came off instead, leaving the tiny 0-6-0 to soldier on with seven coaches. We were halted at Dromod to cross the 13.20 ex-Sligo (hauled by General Motors Bo-Bo diesels No 133/74) allowing time to explore the remains of the erstwhile Cavan and Leitrim narrow gauge railway. The station building is in very fine order, now a dwelling house, while the engine shed and water tower were just about photographicable amid the undergrowth.

The following adverse sections proved to be too much for No 184, now with a gland blowing, and after a valiant 33-mile solo

Above: Arrival at Sligo, 26 September. No 171 leading No 184 and, behind them, the GS&WR tri-compo brake No 861.

Below: Between Boyle and Carrick on Shannon, 27 September, Nos 171 and 184 with the GNR (I) third brake at the head of the train. This is the workshop coach.

effort she stalled just a mile from the summit of a tough four-mile climb, much at 1 in 100. After stopping for a blow-up, she stormed away touching 50mph while racing downhill and then halted at Ballymote for water. This stop was extended to allow the following 13.30 ex-Dublin to overtake and for No 171 to catch up. The recalcitrant injector had been blocked off and the 4-4-0 was to steam excellently throughout the remainder of the tour on the remaining one.

So to Collooney, where the Mayor of Sligo in full regalia boarded the train to ride with us over the final stage. Lord O'Neill took No 171's regulator and drove us over the finishing line at the junction, just beyond. At Sligo, we were met by a large crowd, eager to see a steam-hauled train again, although we had been here in 1975 with No 186, the Society's superheated '101'.

In the evening, the customary meal was used as an opportunity to exchange gifts — the Society presenting plaques commemorating the occasion to Coras Iompair Eireann and the town council. In return, the Society received the coat of arms of Sligo, to be hung in the Diner beside that of Athlone, destination of the first two-day tour in 1968. The Society's retiring Operations Officer, Denis Grimshaw, who has guided our tours for six years, was presented with a suitably engraved tankard.

An early visit to Sligo shed the next morning found Nos 171 and 184 inside, with the CIE diesels outside in the rain! A nocturnal effort to resuscitate the second injector had proved impractical. After breakfast, we made the short run down to the quays. There are no goods facilities at the passenger station; instead all such traffic is dealt with in the yard at the bottom of this short, but steep branch. Even the Sligo Leitrim and Northern Counties Railway used this arrangement. Indeed, one of its engines ended up in the harbour after an incident during The Troubles.

Perhaps it was appropriate that the second circuit began in the rain and indeed the tour as a whole was run in very dull weather. More than 100 local people joined the 175 participants (less those in the lineside buses) for the journey to Ballymote, pausing for a run-past at Collooney. The bus passengers were able to photograph the train before and after. They rejoined at Ballymote, the buses taking the Sligo people home.

The succeeding section, including two miles at 1 in 80, taxed our locomotives and speed fell from 44 to 29mph at the summit. After running easily to Carrick-on-Shannon, we halted for another locomotive change, complicated by No 184 being the train engine and the need to cross the 09.25 ex-Dublin. No 171 continued alone, managing over 50mph before and after the Shannon bridge slack.

After another, shorter photo-stop at Dromod, a longer stop at Longford ensued while the planned watering of coaches took place. No 184 caught up, to add muscle for the five-mile climb ahead, much at 1 in 80. Surmounting this at 25.5mph, we enjoyed 51 before and 52 after slackening through the Mostrim loop. A permanent way slack at the



bottom of a section of 1 in 80/100 near Multyfarnham saw us through there at only 24.5mph but our engines conquered the final 1 in 150, breasting the summit at 36mph. Then we raced away, recording 55mph before arriving at Mullingar, five minutes late.

Another lengthy stop to facilitate locomotive servicing followed, the engines being coaled efficiently with the aid of a CIE forklift truck. The bagged coal had been sent from Northern Ireland by container. A large crowd gathered, soon joined by the town band, complete with corps of majorettes who performed while we departed behind No 171 amid a fusillade of detonators.

The ensuing locomotive performance was very drab indeed, bearing in mind that it is more or less downhill all the way to Dublin. After Enfield, where we stopped for water, there was a brighter moment as we managed 55mph on level track, but the speed fell off gradually so that we plodded on, sometimes in the 'forties', through Leixlip, Lucan North, Clonsilla and Blanchardstown — all being reopened and renovated for the new diesel-hauled suburban service, the outward terminus of which is Maynooth and which was inaugurated on 28 November last year.

Routed into Connolly via Newcomen Junction and the succeeding short, sharply inclined curve, we were halted by signals at the junction. Unfortunately, we were quite unable to summon the momentum to surmount the spur. After an embarrassing wait we were rescued by Metrovick-built, General Motors engined, Co-Co No 054.

The tour proper ended here, but, as the locomotive had to return to Whitehead, an empty stock working to Belfast followed. Four coaches were removed for return to Mullingar to be used on southern-based tours and the December Santa Specials. The latter attracted 1,500 people who travelled on four main line Santa Specials to three different destinations from Mullingar on 12 December. This left No 171 to work north with the Diner, now serving two sittings of evening meals, the saloon and the workshop coach.

Single-line working to Malahide was in force and we lost time through this although we managed to get into the 'sixties' twice before the Drogheda water-stop. Here the photographers attempted the seemingly impossible feat of photographing No 171 at 19.30 on a September evening. An enduring memory is of the Society's official photographer using a time-exposure, with the camera propped up on a Mars bar!

Here we picked up a further Society acquisition — an ex-MGWR six-wheeler of 1897 — partition- and almost glass-less but claiming a ladies-only compartment. A 45mph limit had been put on this vehicle by CIE and its locomotive crew rather overdid the caution to Dundalk, the on-time departure from Dublin now converted to a 35-minute lateness.

With a NIR crew now in charge we climbed over the Border with a minimum of 29mph on the 1 in 100. We ran down to Goraghwood with No 171 blowing off lustily and, after the slack, ran smartly on to



Above: A scene that could well date from another age. 'S' 4-4-0 No 171 *Sliabh Gullion* working 'empty stock' on 28 September 1981 from Belfast (Central Service Depot) to Whitehead and here approaching Antrim. The second vehicle is the MGWR six-wheeler and fourth is the GNR directors' saloon.

Portadown with much work in the fifties and a maximum speed of 56mph.

After a short stop for Customs purposes, we charged noisily into the darkness, managing 53mph before passing Lurgan in a fine 7min 54secs at 45mph. I really enjoyed this section with the engine audibly working hard and the stop-watch confirming the evidence of one's ears. Charging over Kilmore summit at 47mph, the regulator remained open just long enough to see the 60mph mark crossed again. The moment the driver shut off, the 4-4-0 blew off — the retubing was clearly worth every penny and the hours of toil! A moment to remain in the memory beside *Clan Line* at 97mph and those oil-burning German Pacifics roaring away in the high eighties! Gone are the days, or are they? From Lisburn, the train stopped on request to set down participants at their home stations — a unique opportunity to savour a steam-hauled main line local train again!

The next day, No 171 set off from Belfast Central servicing depot where she had spent the night. Now with a fourth bogie coach, left there after the 'Enterprises', a small company enjoyed their own train (with bar) for the day. We retraced our steps to Lisburn and then on to Antrim where we reversed. Then, tender-first, No 171 hauled us up the closed, but double-track, ex-LMS (NCC) main line into Belfast (York Road). Here we were joined by about a hundred Carrickfergus schoolchildren for the trip to their home town and the three bogie carriages and six-wheeler were a trifle crowded. The GNR saloon remained at York Road to be stored under cover. The arrival back at Whitehead saw the end of the busiest month the Society has ever enjoyed, with not too many repairs to be sorted out over the winter.

Even after all this activity, there still remained the 'Shannon' rail tour of 10 October (Mullingar-Athlone and return) and those Santa Specials, for which No 184 was used. The year's rail tours and empty stock workings amounted to 2,500 train-miles, No 171 accounting for 2,200 miles and No 184, 380 miles.

The 'Ben Bulben' was our twelfth two-day rail tour and as enjoyable as ever, whether one was a 'stop-watcher' or a photographer. Although the latter had over 15 photo-stops including two run-pasts, the weather could have been kinder. In 1982, we're off again on 15/16 May visiting Limerick via Portarlington, Athlone and Athenry, returning via Nenagh, Ballybroy and the Cork main line. The locomotives in use will be Nos 171 and 184. I hope that some of you will be able to join us, but be warned — our tours are contagious!

In conclusion, I would like to thank Joe Cassells and Robin Morton who provided details of those runs which I wasn't on and the photographers for their excellent illustrations. The thanks of all the participants are due to the Society's locomotive department who worked hard before and during the tour to ensure the well-being of the motive power. Finally, our thanks are due to NIR and CIE for the continuing cooperation in making such tours possible.

Mr McAllister is London Agent of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland

Details of RPSI 1982 spring and summer rail tours

17 April — 'Claddagh', the now traditional steam hauled day out for the people of Mullingar, Co Galway. Locomotive: 184.

1 May — Mullingar-Dublin (and possibly Bray). Locomotive: 184.

8 May — 'Empty stock' Whitehead-Dublin. Locomotive: 171.

15/16 May — Two-day trip (see text), and return empty stock to Belfast.

30 May — 'Steam Enterprise' Belfast-Dublin and return. Locomotive: 171.

13 June — 'Steam Enterprise'. As above.

24 July, 7 August, 21 August — 'Portrush Flyer' (Whitehead, as empty stock)-Belfast York Road-Portrush and return. Locomotive: No 4 or 171.

Further information nearer the tour date from Leslie McAllister, London Agent, RPSI at 'Szombathely', 26 Regent Way, Frimley, Camberley, Surrey GU16 5NT.