

SEPTEMBER 1983 NEWS-SHEET

90 SHOPPING DAYS TO: Advance notice of our plans for Christmas 1983 Santa Claus steam train rides. This year, activity will be centred on our headquarters at Whitehead because in view of essential repair work it has been decided not to send the RPSI tour train down to Mullingar until springtime. So because there will be no carriages at Mullingar, we cannot operate Santa train rides there. The provisional plans for Whitehead involve Santa train rides on the following dates:

Saturdays December 3 & 10, and Sundays, November 27 and December 4, 11, and 18. 13.30 to 16.30 each day.

You can help by spreading the word - don't forget every child gets to meet Santa and gets a value for money present from him. The mums and dads qualify for a complimentary glass of punch, while the whole family go for a trip on the RPSI steam train. We hope to distribute posters advertising the event at our November Belfast area meeting. You can also help by volunteering to help at the shop or diner at Whitehead. Santa is recruiting his team of helpers now, so if you can help, contact him through John Richardson.

A BIG DRAW: Plans are being made for the annual RPSI bring and buy railwayana sale which is being held at the RPSI Railway Shop in the portakabin on the Excursion Station platform at Whitehead on Saturday October 22. It takes the form of an auction for the major items, while lesser objects such as timetables, books, tickets, etc., will be on general sale. The key items of interest should be on display from 14.00 with the auction at 15.00. If you have any items to contribute, please bring them along.

Also taking place will be the draw for the winners of the RPSI Grand Autumn Ballot, tickets for which were sent out with the last circular. If you require more tickets for sale, contact John. And if you haven't sold all yours yet, get moving!

COMMERCIAL BREAK: The Society won another feather in its cap on September 5, 6 & 7 when a special train was operated for the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce to mark the Chamber's bicentenary. On day one 171 "Slieve Gullion" attracted a lot of attention when she hauled the special from Belfast Central to Lisburn and Portadown and back. Thereafter the four coach train - directors' saloon 50, dining car 87, refurbished Bredin side corridor 1327 and gas-lit Rosslare brake 861 - was diesel-hauled on the tour to Ballymena, Coleraine, and Londonderry. The RPSI dining car was staffed throughout by Society members who kept the distinguished visitors plied with snacks, sandwiches, savouries and refreshments. Many tributes were paid to the Society for its professionalism during the three day expedition. Well done all concerned.

STAR QUALITY: Needless to say the involvement of the steam train loomed large in media coverage of the Chamber of Commerce event, and it was quite a week for TV coverage. On the Wednesday 171 was featured in a UTV production Ulster Landscapes which was broadcast nationwide by Channel 4, and on the local UTV news programme on the Thursday 171 popped up again to illustrate a feature on the Downpatrick and Ardglass Railway Society.

END OF SEASON: The Whitehead Steam Train Rides completed another worthwhile season on Sunday August 28. Hundreds of people travelled on the train and had a look at the site in the course of the season, and once again it

proved an excellent launching-pad for the publicity drive for the Portrush Flyer and Steam Enterprise.

TRAIN OF EVENTS: An update on the RPSI's motive power situation following the last news-sheet. No.4, our 2-6-4T, operated an empty stock test train from Whitehead to Ballymena and back on Thursday August 18 and then was booked for the August 20 Portrush Flyer, which she operated single-handedly without incident. On Monday August 29 4 was out again to operate the Belfast Central railtour from Whitehead to Belfast Central again incident-free. On September 3 4 was at the head of the Steam Enterprise for the first time ever (the Enterprise first ran in 1980) and she set off from Belfast in fine style, delighting the timers with a superb run up and over the Wellington Bank into Dundalk. Sadly, trouble struck between Dundalk and Drogheda in the form of a hot big end, and it was decided that while the train could continue through to Dublin, 4 should return light to Whitehead for attention. Meanwhile a Hunslet diesel of NIR was summoned from Belfast to haul the Enterprise train on the return leg of the journey to Belfast. The 250 passengers on board reacted philosophically to the day's events, and the universal feeling was one of sympathy for the Society, admiration for the efficient way the rescue plan swung into action, and contentment with the ahead of schedule arrival back in Belfast. No.4 eventual limped home to Whitehead around 20.00, but that was not the end of the saga. RPSI operating department personnel had returned post haste from Dublin on the 13.00 CIÉ Enterprise, and made straight for Whitehead upon arrival at Belfast. Once there, they raised steam on No.171 "Slieve Gullion" and prepared her for the road. So when 4 drew into the Whitehead site, the NIR crew switched locos and headed back round to Belfast Central with the replacement loco No.171. They eventually arrived at Central Services Depot around 22.30, and the engine was ready and waiting for her booked turn with the Chamber of Commerce special on Monday September 5. A superhuman effort by all concerned, all credit to them. Now, while 4 receives attention, 171 will operate the September 17 Steam Enterprise.

DOWN LINE: Members of the RPSI Council were invited to a reception in Downpatrick Library on September 6 to mark the opening of an exhibition by the recently-formed Downpatrick and Ardglass Railway Society. The Society has plans to re-open the Downpatrick-Ardglass branchline and is seeking the backing of Down District Council and the support of the RPSI. At the exhibition, handsome tributes were paid to the RPSI by the Downpatrick Society secretary, Mr Gerry Cochrane, and the Council chairman, Mr John Ritchie. The RPSI's position is that we are "in discussions" with the proponents of the scheme, but that no commitments have been entered into.

DIARY DATES: First of all, a quick plug. If you haven't purchased your Railway World calendar for 1984 through the RPSI so far, do so now. Stocks are fast running out, and we are not re-ordering. Price £1.40 plus 20p postage from John Richardson. Now, some dates to note:

Saturday September 17	Steam Enterprise to Dublin, 171
Saturday September 24	Dublin Bay shuttle service, with Belfast connection, 184 in Dublin.
Sunday September 25	Belfast Lough steam tour, 171.
Friday October 7	EGM, Belfast Rowing Club, 19.45.
Tuesday October 18	Belfast meeting, St Jude's Hall, 19.30.

Looking way ahead, don't forget to keep the weekend of May 12/13 1984 free for the RPSI Traen 150 two-day tour to Galway.

NEW-LOOK LADY: Be prepared for a new-look 184 on the Dublin Bay. The loco has been fitted with a safety cage over the cab and a safety valve deflector

for operation under the wires. Less obviously, a drop grate has also been fitted to make fire dropping easier. Enclosed for you, if you live in the Dublin area, is a Dublin Bay poster. Please help us by getting it displayed in your local shop or garage.

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