

THE RAILWAY PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF IRELAND

President: The Rt. Hon. The Lord O'Neill
Vice-President: The Rt. Hon. The Lord Dunleath



JUNE 1985 NEWS-SHEET

TOUR DE FORCE

As predicted in the last news-sheet in March, the Cork 800 "two-day" turned out to be a sell-out. We had 300 enthusiasts on board, some 200 of them from Britain and overseas, including a contingent of 39 from the Federation des Amis des Chemins de Fer Secondaires in Paris. For the first time ever, the RPSI was in the happy position of having a fully-booked two-day tour train - standing room only! Undoubtedly the advance booking form and the idea of a £10 deposit contributed to this success. The tour itself went more or less like clockwork, with sunny weather and faultless performances by our two locos, No.171 "Slieve Gullion" and No.184, star of the "Irish RM". The train itself looked splendid, featuring for the first time a full rake of fully restored coaches. The crack was good, with a convivial atmosphere in the diner throughout. Photographically the highlight was the Sunday morning lineside bus to the tunnel-mouth, with tremendous smoke effects as the double-header charged up the bank. In Cork we received an exceptionally warm welcome with a brass band on the platform to greet our arrival. At the railtour banquet praise was lavished on the RPSI by the Lord Mayor, Alderman Liam Burke TD, and by Bord Fáilte chiefs. A most encouraging aspect of the whole weekend was that 140 of our intrepid visitors chose to make a three-day weekend of it by travelling north to Belfast on the Sunday night, and enjoying every minute of 171's epic 280-mile one-day trip from Cork to Belfast! Last year we had 70 overseas and British visitors coming to Belfast so we are delighted to see the figure doubling!

Our thanks to all those who helped make the tour such a success, in the RPSI, NIR, CIÉ, Bord Fáilte and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

YEAR OF THE FRENCH

Our French visitors extended their stay in Northern Ireland to include a day-long coach tour to the Shane's Castle Railway, the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum and the Belfast Transport Museum. Magnifique! They also enjoyed a visit to historic Carrickfergus where they were given a conducted tour of St Nicholas' Parish Church by RPSI Treasurer John Richardson and then given a reception in the mayor's parlour at Carrickfergus Town Hall by Alderman Charles Johnston, the mayor.

TELLING THE WORLD

Among our guests on the Cork 800 were Mike Harris, editor of Railway World, and John Stator, editor of Railway Magazine, so keep your eye on the railway bookstalls in coming months.

The visit of the French group also featured in the Belfast newspapers.

WAVING THE WAND

Being groomed for stardom at Whitehead is No.85 "Merlin", the Great Northern compound which is due soon to start the painstaking process of running in. To date the loco has had a number of steam tests at Whitehead and the next step will be to try her out on the Sunday steam train rides at Whitehead during the summer. A test run with a short train on the Larne line may also be on the cards but we will have to wait to see. The main work on the loco is attending to some leaking tube ends. 85 was hauled out of the shed and put on display as the grand finale to the Cork 800 tour at Whitehead on May 13, and she was also much admired at the main platform exhibit at the schools' day events at Whitehead.

EVENTFUL TIME

Down at Whitehead recent special events have included the Easter Bunny train rides and the Schools' Days. Both were highly successful, with some 1,700 visitors at Easter and some 1,200 children for the schools' days. As well as being an attraction in themselves, the events provide a useful publicity platform for the Portrush Flyer (brochure enclosed). Our thanks to all those who helped, particularly to our schools' day guides, who had to explain the complexities of magnetic buffers to hundreds of sticky-fingered youngsters.

LOCO LOAN

At its meeting on May 30 the RPSI Council considered a request from the recently formed Downpatrick & Ardglass Railway Society for the loan of our loco No.3BG "Guinness", currently lying out of use at Whitehead. After discussion the Council voted unanimously for the loan at a nominal sum for a period of five years but subject to an agreement being worked out. The main conditions outlined by the RPSI were:

- 1 - Satisfactory insurance and indemnity arrangements.
- 2 - DARS to fund reinstatement of 3BG to working order.
- 3 - RPSI to supervise reinstatement of loco by DARS members at Whitehead.
- 4 - Agreement to be subject to ratification at next AGM of rule change over empowerment to lease.
- 5 - Agreement to be subject to financial commitment by Department of Economic Development to complete Downpatrick-Ardglass scheme in its entirety.

CHARITY CHARTER

Possible private charter is scheduled to take place on Saturday, June 29. East Belfast Rotary Club is hiring the Flyer and proceeds are to be divided between the Dr Jack Kyle medical aid fund for Zambia and RPSI. Again, the train is a private affair, but for the benefit of photographers, the outline timings are: Whitehead dep. 13.30, York Road dep. 14.10. Portrush arr. 17.00. Portrush dep. 19.00, York Road arr. 21.28, Whitehead arr. 22.15. Loco No.4.

RADIO CONTROL

There's also a possibility that the Flyer train might be hired by the BBC for a live broadcast of the "Day by Day" programme on Radio Ulster, with Walter Love. The date which has been pencilled in is Monday July 1, but at the time of writing tests are continuing to see if live broadcasting is going to be a practical proposition. The tests have involved

fitting out full van brake 411 with a radio aerial and transmitter, and attaching it to the NIR service train to Londonderry. So far results have been a bit patchy but the BBC boffins are busy trying to fix things up.

GOING WEST

Contrary to the first reports, the two-day tour in 1986 might now be destined for Westport, last visited by the RPSI back in 1979. The railtour plans are being co-ordinated by the operations sub-committee, and the plan is not yet definite. Originally the idea had been to concentrate on the Great Northern, but this would have involved two one-day tours, which it was felt was not as attractive as the weekend bash. The date remains the same - May 10/11. Watch this space!

IN TRAINING

Don't forget the Whitehead Steam Train Rides, which operate every Sunday afternoon in June, July & August. Why not make up a party and make tracks for Whitehead? And if you're free to help any Sunday, please complete the enclosed "Volunteers Wanted" form.

CLEANING UP

A concerted effort is being made this summer to keep the RPSI tour train spick and span. Michael Henderson has co-ordinated a roster whereby groups of members assume responsibility for the various coaches on the train. Our thanks to those who have agreed to help in this valuable work - don't forget that at the end of the day it's the cleanliness of the train and the toilets which will leave the lasting impression on our visitors. More helpers would be welcome to join the squad, which descends on Whitehead with mop buckets at the ready on Tuesday nights. Please contact Michael Henderson.

ASSEMBLY PRAISE

The RPSI came in for much praise during a debate in the Northern Ireland Assembly on May 22 on museum provision in the province. To the fore was Mr Will Glendinning who just happens to be a member of the RPSI and, of course, a brother of our Council member Johnny. Mr Glendinning declared his interest from the outset and flourished his RPSI membership card for all to see. Withstanding banter from other honourable members who wanted to know if he had run out of steam, Assemblyman Glendinning outlined the virtues of the RPSI proposal for a Museum of Irish Railways at Whitehead. The Society was also commended by Mr John Cushnahan, chairman of the Assembly education committee and Mr Sean Neeson, the Assembly member for North Antrim. The Assembly did not actually reach a verdict on where the Witham Street museum would be best re-sited - that was outside their brief - but they did re-print the entire RPSI submission as part of their report. As regards the proposal itself, we are still awaiting word from the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum.

RAISING THE ROOF

A new roof covering was being fitted to coach 9, a Great Northern open second which is undergoing restoration at Whitehead. No.9 was of the K15 style, dating from the 1930s, and was converted to run with AEC railcars. Her cab has been retained as an emergency brake compartment for operational reasons. Meanwhile the Whitehead Railway Project YTP is forging ahead with work on Bredin side-corridor 1335. Another job the trainees are doing is fitting out coach 68, recently in use on the Cork 800, with a second toilet. The "honeymoon coupe" coach was restored by the YTP.

NEXT POST

Our magazine Five Foot Three is currently with the printers, and was not to hand in time for this circular. However, it should be out soon and we hope to mail it out to you within a few weeks' time. Incidentally to defray printing costs we are for the first time including advertisements in FFT, and already several members have placed business adverts with us. If you would like to get your company or business to support the RPSI in this way please contact Mrs Heather for full details.

GREAT STEAM

Enclosed with this circular you will find details of the RPSI Irish Steam Weekends 1985. The idea is that enthusiasts from Britain, the Republic, overseas and even from within Northern Ireland join up in a group for a weekend package which includes a trip on the Portrush Flyer, and visits by coach to the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum and the Shane's Castle Railway. Accommodation, including dinner bed and breakfast, will be provided at the seafront Dolphin Hotel which is within walking distance of RPSI headquarters at Whitehead. The venture is being entirely organised by the RPSI, and any proceeds go towards Society funds. So please spread the word, come yourself, and don't leave your booking too late!

TAKING STOCK

CIÉ are currently having a bit of a clean out of 1950s built stock some of which might prove suitable to the RPSI's needs. Some coaches have been taken to our Republic of Ireland base at Mullingar and are being assessed before we decide which ones to buy. This could be the last chance for the Society to purchase steam stock.

QUIZZICAL LOOK

Whitehead Community Association has invited the RPSI to field a team for a quiz being held in July as part of Whitehead Festival. Volunteers please contact Robin.

FROM THE TREASURER

John Richardson writes: "It has been suggested that my recent comments on the Society's financial affairs were open to misinterpretation. I should like to take this opportunity of stressing there is no question of my being at variance with Council policy. It should be apparent from my 100 pc involvement in the current year's activities that my primary aim is the furtherance of the Society. All utterances from me, whether verbal or written, are intended to be constructive. "

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