

SEPTEMBER 1985 NEWS-SHEET

MAGIC MOMENT

Our restored Great Northern Compound 4-4-0 No.85 "Merlin" has hauled her first mainline passenger train. But before you all write in to complain that there was no advance information, let me explain! It all happened on Thursday August 15 when the Compound was doing her first tentative test run from Whitehead to Belfast York Road and back. On the way back, 85 was following the 15.00 NIR service train from York Road to Larne. The 80-class DEMU struck a cow on the line at Kilroot - and yes, you've guessed the rest. "Merlin" was brought in to assist the diesel set which had been rendered powerless by the collision, and the startled diesel train passengers were privileged to become 85's first mainline customers! The steam loco took the diesel set to Whitehead while another DEMU was summoned to take them on to Larne. But 85's good turn was not yet over. The loco then took the disabled railcar back up to York Road works before returning light engine to Whitehead. Thomas the Tank Engine just wouldn't be in it at all. The events were duly covered by some RPSI photographers and the results should be appearing shortly in the British railway magazines.

The test run itself helped loosen up the engine a bit and the next part of the plan is to operate some "mystery tours" from Whitehead for the RPSI membership. These will probably take place on Saturdays in October or November, so watch this space. The plan would be to charge a set fare of around £5.00 and then sally forth, returning if need be at any stage direct to Whitehead. More details in the next circular.

DOWN SOUTH

The proposed Maynooth shuttle trips with 184 have now been put back from September 26 until Bank Holiday Saturday, October 26. Further Work has had to be carried out on the loco and coaches to get everything ready, but the plan is for three round trips from Dublin Connolly on that date. Again, full details in the next circular.

BALANCING UP

Thanks to those members who have already dug into their pockets for the Coleraine turntable appeal. At its meeting on August 22 the RPSI Council weighed up the finances involved in restoring Portrush table (along with turnout requirements) compared with installing the table at Coleraine, and it emerged that Coleraine was by far the cheaper option. So we have now decided to set our sights firmly on Coleraine. The whole job will still probably involve the Society in expenditure of up to £5,000 for materials, craneage and excavation, so all donations are welcome. Send them to the Coleraine Turntable Appeal.

FULL HOUSE

The August 17 Portrush Flyer was, as predicted, a total sell-out. For the first time on a public excursion we were in the position of just having to turn people away as all the seats had been taken. The total complement was a record 360 passengers, with some 280 on the Castlerock extension. And, for once, we were treated to some sunny weather, so it was a record day in more senses than one. Well done to all concerned.

TRES BELLE No.171 "Slieve Gullion"'s pipe-opener for the Steam Enterprise was the Bangor Belle on August 26. The loco performed well and the venture was well supported, with some 200 passengers joining the train at both Belfast and Bangor.

VERY ENTERPRISING Our thanks to Bord Fáilte for hosting a most successful press conference at Belfast Central station on Monday August 19 to help publicise the Steam Enterprise. BF's Mr Trevor Caughey, and Mr Stanley Bennett arranged the reception, and we were pleased to have present some dignitaries including the chairman, Sir Myles Humphreys, the chief executive, Mr Roy Beattie, and other executives. Tickets for the Enterprise have been selling steadily so if you haven't got yours yet don't leave it too late. 171 is due for a hydraulic test next year so this could be her swansong on the Steam Enterprise for the time being.

IN TRAINING Before heading off on the Bangor Belle No.171 fitted in a Sunday on the train rides at Whitehead, which drew to a close on August 25, after another successful season. 171's appearance meant that in all four RPSI steam locos had featured at various times on the Sunday trains - 3, 4, 85 and 171. Is this a record?

THAT'LL LARNE 'EM Enclosed with this news-sheet you will find a members' circular all about the Larne Lough railtour on September 29. For public consumption we have put out a handbill marketing a round trip by steam on the Larne line from either Belfast York Road, Carrick, or Whitehead. The idea is that they catch the train on its way down to Larne, stay with us for the return non-stop run to York Road, and then are left off as the train makes its way down to Whitehead on the final run of the day. There is a round fare ticket of £4.00 adults or £2.00 concession on sale at Mullan's Bookshop, Donegall Place, Belfast, and at Caters Estate Agents, High Street, Carrickfergus. So why not bring your friends and family for an afternoon steam trip on the Larne line - which is, after all, just about the most scenic stretch of line in Northern Ireland?

WELLS FARGO? Along with this circular you will find a Belfast area meetings card, giving the dates and topics for our series of meetings at St Jude's Church Hall, Sunnyside Street, Belfast. The dates are all the third Tuesday of the month and it promises to be an entertaining season so make sure you put the dates in your diary. Opening the season on October 15 is Dr D.B. McNeill, the historian, who has entertained us and informed us in the past. This time his subject is "The Limited Mails" - 250 years of public transport between Belfast and Dublin. From the stagecoach to the 071s.

BRING & BUY Don't forget the Railwayana Bring and Buy sale at Whitehead on Saturday October 19; the winning tickets in the Grand Autumn Draw will also be drawn so it could be your lucky day. Don't forget to get busy with selling those tickets which were sent to you in the last circular.

NEW STOCK There's been a change of coach at the Whitehead Railway Project scheme at Whitehead. 1335, the Bredin side-corridor, has been rolled out but will require some further work before being capable of going back into traffic. The coach has been renovated inside and out and looks a treat. Now the youth

training group have turned their attention to 88, the Great Northern diner which was the mainstay of the tour train for so many years, but which now requires a major rebuild.

--oo0oo--