

THE RAILWAY PRESERATION SOCIETY OF IRELAND

JUNE 1986 NEWS-SHEET

- DOUBLE TAKE      The big news this time round is of the expected mainline debut of our newly restored Great Northern Compound loco No.85 "Merlin". The engine is being "launched" in a ceremony at Whitehead on Monday June 30 to be conducted by our vice-president, Lord Dunleath, the man who made the £35,000 overhaul possible. As members will know, No.85 has been run in over the winter period and now it is time for her to take her first mainline trip. Accordingly, "Merlin" is booked to run in tandem with our trusty 2-6-4T No.4, double-heading the first Portrush Flyer train on July 19. The train is bound to be a sell-out so if you want to share in this historic occasion, make sure you get your booking in early.
- By that time we hope that the Coleraine turntable will be in full operation and if everything goes well, and both 85 and the turntable function as planned, the idea is that 85 alone should haul the second and third Portrush Flyers, on August 2 and 16.
- So, all in all, it should be a headline-grabbing Portrush Flyer season and one no RPSI member will wish to miss. So make up a party, take advantage of the Awayday fares and make tracks for Portrush.
- THE TABLE'S FOR TURNING      Steady progress was being made at the time of writing on the Coleraine turntable project. Enterprise Ulster have been busy pouring concrete and getting everything right in the construction of the pit. Meanwhile the ACE squad at Whitehead, along with the RPSI volunteer workforce, are putting the finishing touches to the renovated and extended table itself. The plan is for the table to be moved by road from Whitehead to Coleraine, probably over the weekend of June 28. The low loader will then be used to transport the former Londonderry table back to Whitehead, where it will be put in storage.
- A GOOD TURN      If we keep to the above timetable, the plan is for the table to be given its baptism on Saturday July 5, when hopefully No.4 will be in Portrush at the head of the mark II Charity Flyer. That, of course, depends on the number of bookings we get for the venture so if you haven't booked for the event (which was publicised in a separate circular to Northern Ireland based Members) get your letter in the post. For anyone who requires details, please ring the Whitehead Railway Project. The office is staffed Monday to Friday 9 am to 4.30 pm, but the annual holidays start on Friday July 4.
- CHARTER NO-GO      Just for the record, the proposed charter trains which were previously announced all failed to materialise. The Charity Flyer, as you have seen above, was postponed from May 31 to July 5 in the hope of securing more bookings. The proposed Lions Charter to Balbriggan on June 14 and the proposed Civil Service Flyer on June 28 both fell through as the organisers pulled out. It was a pity that the plans came to nothing as a lot of groundwork had been put in on both projects.
- DOWN SOUTH      Included in this circular you will find details of the Claddagh railtour from Mullingar to Galway on Saturday July 26. In launching this operation the Society is breaking new ground - for the first

time we are operating a summer excursion train with our own loco and coaches from Mullingar. The new Mullingar rake was involved in the Clew Bay tour arrangements and the coaches all performed very satisfactorily. So, within the space of a week, the Flyer will be operating from Whitehead with the tour train and 184 will be operating from Mullingar with the ex-CIÉ stock. Please help make the Claddagh the success it deserves to be.

Observant members will also have noticed that we shelved the original plan to operate a Maynooth shuttle service on June 7, due to the non-availability of No.184 at that time. We still plan, however, to run a Maynooth Shuttle on Saturday August 23. Watch this space!

CLEW BAY TRIUMPH The Clew Bay weekend tour to Westport proved to be an outstanding success with a fully booked train of 300 passengers, fine loco performances, reasonable weather, and excellent crack! Many thanks to all those who made it possible and also to those who supported the trip including groups from Britain and the Continent. We were particularly gratified by the support for the Monday and Tuesday sections of the trip, Monday being a leisurely run from Belfast to Larne and back to Whitehead, and Tuesday involving a bus trip to Shanes Castle Railway and the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum. There was only one cloud on the horizon the re-routing by CIÉ of the tour train away from the Dublin-Cork main line. Instead of using the previously agreed route via Portarlinton we had to reach Athlone by way of Mullingar in both directions. The company was enforcing a ban effective from April 1 on wooden-bodied stock using the main line - and of course all the RPSI stock is wooden bodied. Evidently the ban was imposed by the Railway Inspectorate following the Buttevant crash. The ruling is that wooden bodied stock should not be allowed on a line used by 90 mph trains. Originally it had been understood that the Clew Bay tour would be exempted from the ruling but this did not turn out to be the case. Obviously the ruling has extremely disturbing implications for the RPSI's mainline programme in years to come. Already the RPSI has raised the issue with the Railway Inspectorate and we are currently awaiting a reply.

SNAP HAPPY A plea from the Society's hard-working sales staff to any participants on the Clew Bay tour who might have photographs to spare. As the Society members were busy in the sales shop and the dining car, they did not have the opportunity to take any photos themselves and they would be delighted to receive any surplus material. Please forward any items to John Richardson, RPSI Treasurer. Obviously, any photos received will be for purely personal use and not for commercial reproduction.

BIRTHDAY TIME This year, believe it or not, the Society celebrates 20 years at Whitehead. It was in 1966 that the first intrepid explorers cut their way through the undergrowth to find a derelict engine shed with no roof, no doors, and a burgeoning population of wildlife! Now, of course, we have two engine sheds, carriage sidings, tarry, coal bunker, resurfaced platform, sales shop and train ride run. Our Whitehead headquarters is a must for any visiting enthusiast. So, what better way to celebrate our birthday than to visit Whitehead one Sunday afternoon in July or August? We've have train rides, afternoon teas and the sales shop in full swing and it'll be full steam ahead. Why not bring the family down for a visit?

The train rides are open for business every Sunday from 2 pm to 5 pm until August 31, and the train leaves once every 15 minutes.

TOP MARKS

The Whitehead schools days on June 3 and 4 turned out to be an impressive success. Some 1,100 children visited the site over the two-day period and thoroughly enjoyed their slide presentation, train ride, conducted tour and visit to the souvenir shop! Many thanks to all those who helped make it such an enjoyable event.

UNDERCOVER AGENT

The RPSI Council is currently making plans for a carriage storage shed to be built at Whitehead on one of the carriage sidings. This is in order to provide some protection for our historic coaches which are currently fighting a losing battle against the elements - the deterioration being caused to coaches which cost several thousand pounds to restore is quite alarming. We envisage a hayshed-style structure and we hope Enterprise Ulster may be persuaded to build it for us. Finance is going to be a problem - the RPSI would have to provide materials - but we have received a boost in the form of a promise of £1,000 from the Carrickfergus Literary & Scientific Trust. Now we hope to meet Carrick Council and the EEC. Again, watch this space!

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