

THE RAILWAY PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF IRELAND

NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 1989

CONTRACTING IN ...

Work is about to start at the time of writing on Phase 1 of the £90,000 Whitehead Carriage Shed with the contractors due on site on Monday 18 September. The £27,000 contract for this first phase has gone to McKitterick Contracts of Belfast, the documents being signed on Wednesday 14 September. The work involves the removal of the earth bank between the RPSI site and the NIR Belfast - Larne line, the erection of a perimeter fence, and the laying of hardcore on the site of the 16 coach shed. Work is expected to be completed before the main running set of coaches arrives back in early October.

Our thanks go to the International Fund for Ireland which has given the RPSI a 50% grant for the project, and to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, who administer the grant aid, for all their assistance. The Society's share of the bill for this first phase will be paid out of the Carriage Shed Appeal Fund, but this will virtually clean out the account, and we would appeal to all members to do their bit to keep the Fund topped up for 1990. Remember the sooner we get the project completed the less it will cost, and the sooner we will benefit from the building. Why not arrange a film show or a wine and cheese evening at your home with the proceeds in aid of the Whitehead Carriage Shed Appeal, or try a sponsored walk, swim, parachute jump or similar? And if you've got any good ideas for raising cash, let us know and we'll try to organise it. Have a bit of fun and help a good cause at the same time.

MAKING HISTORY ...

The RPSI was to the fore in NIR's Railway Week in August, held to mark the 150th Anniversary of the opening of the Ulster Railway from Belfast to Lisburn on 12 August 1835. Locomotive No.85 and the RPSI vintage train operated a morning rush hour commuter service on each of the NIR suburban lines in turn - from Larne, Antrim, Bangor and Portadown. The idea caught on with commuters in a big way, many taking a trip back in time courtesy of the RPSI. It was a most imaginative idea which really paid off, and

NIR were pleasantly surprised. One enterprising enthusiast, who got up to be at York Road before 6 a.m. actually booked a ticket from York Road to Central via Antrim, and the Portis ticket machine didn't blow a fuse! At Bangor many regular travellers spurned the diesel set (which would have got them to work about 20 minutes earlier) to travel by steam.

The climax of Railway Week was on Saturday 12 August when No.85 operated a steam shuttle service between Belfast and Lisburn in a re-enactment of the original opening day of the Ulster Railway. The first train was dispatched our Publicity Officer (dressed for the occasion and looking not unlike an undertaker!) and carried NIR senior management and the Deputy Lord Mayor of Belfast. The event proved very popular with the public and No.85 performed excellently. At a luncheon in Lisburn attended by 250 guests, NIR Chairman Sir Myles Humphreys paid a handsome tribute to the RPSI and its successful efforts to keep the steam age alive.

Our thanks go to all concerned for a magnificent week - particularly our hard pressed operating crews who went without sleep to make sure "Merlin" was ready on time each day.

PORTMAGIC ...

The sun shone, the steam hissed, and the Portrush Flyer chalked up yet another fantastic season as the flagship of the RPSI. Having completed some 18 years it must surely be the longest running preserved main line steam operation in the world! The new venture this year of an afternoon shopping trip by steam from Portrush to Coleraine worked out very well, and on each occasion the trains were loaded close to capacity. Coleraine Council have made a donation again this year of a publicity grant of £100 which will help to defray some of our expenses.

A BIT OF DIVERSION ...

The RPSI Steam Enterprise from Belfast to Dublin on Saturday 2 September fell foul of the current campaign of disruption to the NIR network. The fully booked train was cancelled

because of a bomb scare which closed the Portadown to Newry section of the GNR main line. As far as any of us can remember, this is only the second occasion in some 20 years that a train has had to be cancelled due, to the "troubles". However, although this was very disappointing, all was not lost, thanks to some quick thinking by the RPSI Operations Department and NIR Control. An alternative schedule was hurriedly worked out (some of it en route!) and the Steam Enterprise set sail ... to Coleraine. We had hoped to continue to Portrush but a signal man was not available, and as the branch is normally worked on the "One engine in steam" principle (even when its diesel) we had to terminate at the junction station. The bulk of the 180 passengers who had booked to travel from Belfast and Lisburn came with us to Coleraine, and then used their tickets to travel by service train to Portrush.

Unfortunately there was no time to reorganise groups from Portadown and Poyntzpass (over 100 from the latter station!) and they, along with Belfast passengers who didn't fancy Coleraine as a destination were offered the option of rebooking for one of the two remaining Steam Enterprises on 16 and 23 September.

The 19 August Steam Enterprise had operated without incident and some 200 passengers thoroughly enjoyed their day out - and some sparkling running from "Merlin". It was also the first of the two trains planned to serve Malahide, giving Northern passengers a chance to visit Malahide Castle and the Fry Railway Exhibition, as well as giving the good people of Malahide a chance to pop into Dublin for some shopping by steam train. For a new venture initial response was good, nearly 40 passengers getting off at Malahide, and nearly 100 getting on! Figures for the second train were even better, but it was scheduled to run on 2 September! It will now take place on 16 September, all being well. It looks as if this, and a couple of similar ideas, may aid marketing in the years to come, but the Steam Enterprise still remains one of the best value for money steam workings anywhere in Western Europe.

FOOTNOTE: The 16 September Steam Enterprise was a roaring success; a fully booked-out train and the party from Poyntzpass travelled, as did the Malahide passengers. Poyntzpass station hasn't been so busy (intentionally!) in years. And No.85 turned in yet another very creditable performance in the hands of Willie McCaughley and Jimmy Croft.

JEEPERS, WHAT A LOCO ...

The RPSI's 2-6-4T No.4 has been winning fans from crew and passengers on the successful summer season of steam trips from Dublin. The outings have all been very well supported, with the Sea Breeze on 12 August being booked out a fortnight in advance! A problem with the locomotive very nearly caused its cancellation, but the maintenance crews in Belfast and Dublin worked hard and all went according to plan; our biggest problem was again disruptions on the Belfast to Dublin service which delayed the delivery of spare firebars to Dublin for a day or two. Having smashed every record on the Southern and Midland sections, those members not involved in the Ulster Railway 150 operation who went south were not disappointed, as No.4 put up some fine performances over the old South Eastern main line, and showed just how an engine ought to climb hills with a heavy train! Water problems caused a slight delay, but this was recovered, and the 400+ passengers were delighted with their day out.

The Maynooth Shuttle trains on 9 September were reckoned to be an easy working, but delays with crossings (the Sligo trains were all running late - the evening Up train over an hour!) meant that some sharp engine working was necessary over a relatively short and difficult section. Added to that, the need to load and unload the train in about 5 minutes at Connolly, to avoid blocking the DART service, called for some very sharp marshalling, which was most efficiently handled by the Dublin Operations team. As the day progressed the train loadings increased from nearly full to "Are you sure there are enough seats?", but there were, and approximately 1,200 happy customers were given a taste of travel by steam. It was a fitting end to another extremely successful season for the Dublin operations, and hopefully next year will see several new workings joining the popular programme from the last two years.

CLOSER TO HOME ...

The Whitehead Operations Manager, Sam Somerville, wishes to extend a special thanks to all those members who worked on this season's Summer Steam shuttle rides at Whitehead. Despite higher operating costs from the use of loco No.85 for the greater part of the season, early indications are that the operation broke even and has possibly produced a small surplus.

Meanwhile plans are being considered for a full refurbishment of the Whitehead operation. Details will be announced as soon

as they are finalised.

DEADLINE LOOMING ...

Five Foot Three is coming due again and Editor Nelson Poots appeals for anyone who would like to contribute to the forthcoming issue to put pen to paper without delay. Contributions for Five Foot Three on any railway or Society subject should be sent to Nelson at the Whitehead Railway Project, Castlevue Road, Whitehead, BT38 9NA, by Friday 13 October.

WHEN YOU'VE DONE THAT ...

It's not too long until the Herald Angels start singing and RPSI volunteers start the Santa Steam Rides season. This year trains will be operating on Sundays 26 November, 3, 10 and 17 December and Saturday 16 December. Volunteers are always required for this operation, which is often the busiest of the Whitehead season. If you can help in any way please contact Sam Somerville.

EXTRAORDINARY ...

With this Newsletter you will see a notice convening an Extraordinary General Meeting. The Council have warned at the last couple of Annual General Meetings that an increase in membership subscription would have to be considered some time, and with recent announcements of increases in postal charges we are now in the situation that your subscription doesn't really pay for all that you get. Although we have made strenuous efforts to cut costs, and will continue to do so, all we have been able to do is prevent them rising too quickly. There hasn't been a subscription increase in the last few years, and the Council hopes that this increase will be held for at least two years and hopefully for longer. You will be receiving with your subscription renewal form, a Standing Order payment mandate, and for UK taxpayers, a covenant form. Please use the standing order method of payment - it reduces administration so much you wouldn't believe it - and it saves the Society money in reminders! A covenanted subscription means that your subscription is worth around 25% more to us because we get the tax you have paid on it, not the Treasury, so help the Society that little bit more, and at no cost to you!

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ...

Membership Secretary Paul McCann is sending out to every member a questionnaire with their membership renewal form. It asks you how you can help the Society. Please complete and return it with your subscription renewal. We need a lot of help from our members over the winter to complete our maintenance

programme in time for a busy 1990 season.

Please give us our support and physical help!

OPEN DAY ...

Mullingar depot is staging an Open Day for members on Saturday 21 October to try and recruit extra workers. If you can get along they will be delighted to show you the ropes of keeping our trains running.

LOW TECH ...

Classes at Belfast College of Technology have started up again, and already Monday nights at Millfield echo to the sounds of a workshop busily turning out much needed parts for locomotives and coaches. The course fee is only £17 (yes, it's £1 cheaper this year!) and if you're interested contact Peter Scott - you can do this through our Whitehead number during the day, by leaving a message with the girls. No experience is necessary, and you will learn how to use all manner of machine tools. IF you live in or near Belfast, why not come along?

HIGH TECH ...

Most of you will be aware that over the last couple of years we have been making more use of modern technology and that even our circulars, newsletters and mailing lists, as well as our membership records, make considerable use of computers. We are currently trying to develop this, with Society accounting planned to be computerised from our next financial year. There has been some justifiable criticism of the print quality of some of these newsletters, as we have been experimenting with typefaces to improve readability, but it is planned to introduce in the very near future some more distinctive "house styles" or presentation, and constructive comment will be welcomed as we review the way we present the Society to others. "Corporate image" is a bit of a dirty word in some circles, but the Society is now a major business, and to ensure our continued success and expansion we will be looking at every aspect of our activities, and the way we tell the public and the membership about them. There are exciting times ahead!

SHADES OF '64 ...

It was back in September 1964 that the RPSI was formed at a meeting in Belfast and to mark our 25th Anniversary we are celebrating with a special steam run from Belfast to Londonderry on Sunday 8 October. Details of the outing are enclosed with this Newsletter, and you are encouraged to support the "Atlantic Coast Express", which will be our first visit to the maiden city for 10 years.

A CHAPTER CLOSED ...

It was the end of an era in August when Mullan's bookshop in Donegall Place, Belfast, closed its doors for the last time. Mullan's, with its friendly staff, had been very much a focal point for RPSI members and all railway enthusiasts, with its excellent collection of railway books. The shop also provided invaluable help for the Society down the years in acting as a ticket selling outlet and unofficial information centre for the RPSI public excursion trains. The Portrush Flyer's success was in no small measure thanks to the fact that Mullan's provided a public point of contact.

Our most sincere thanks go to Jim Crozier and all his colleagues for their assistance, and our good wishes to them in the future. As a mark of the Society's appreciation, the RPSI Council has decided to make Jim Crozier an honorary life member of the Society.

SCENE ONE ...

One of the RPSI's Mullingar based coaches was hired for a day in August by film makers from the Shooting Stars company of New York, who were making a television commercial at Heuston Station in Dublin - for, would you believe, Cabbage Patch Dolls!! They had asked Irish Rail for a coach, and were taken to Heuston to choose between a Mk2, Mk3 or a Craven. The director looked across the yard and said "That green one is just what we want." Shooting was underway before Irish Rail suddenly realised that it wasn't one of their coaches, and a couple of slightly embarrassed telephone calls followed, but everything was amicably settled in a matter of minutes, and the film company only heard about the mistake afterwards. We were rather amused by the whole affair, and it augurs well for the future, as there are apparently quite a few filming jobs in the pipeline for Dublin, so we may get some earnings out of them.

RPSI stock is also booked to be used (we hope) for a diesel hauled filming sequence between Mullingar and Moate for the production "Fools of Fortune" in the near future. Negotiations are in progress, but it looks as if coach 861 will be required. The period is around 1920 and the location is meant to be a train between Dublin and Cork. Only interior shots are required, so only the one coach is needed.

An enquiry about a further film, "Ghosts of Monte Carlo", which was to transform Heuston station into the Gare de Lyon in Paris in the 1880s period failed to reach fruition. Elstree Studios reckoned that they might find

it easier to film the sequence in England and we think that they are right in this. Apart from all else, can you imagine some of our "personalities" speaking French!?!?!

DIESEL DUTIES ...

The RPSI came to the assistance of diesel enthusiasts running a Bangor Belle type trip on 10 September. The Irish Traction Group, an English society, had planned to run a trip between Bangor and Lisburn using an NIR diesel hydraulic locomotive.

These locos were only fitted with vacuum brake, and all current NIR coaches are air braked, so the only way the trip could operate was with RPSI stock. We were approached by NIR and duly hired out to them a mini rake of NCC coaches, Nos. 91, 238 and 241, for the day. In the event, the diesel hydraulic (No.2) never made it, for after spending a week in York Road being repainted she failed, apparently with a broken con-rod in the engine, at Muckamore on the Saturday on her way to Central Depot. She was towed back to York Road, and the trip was worked from Central to Lisburn by Hunslet No.101 and from Bangor by Metrovick No.104, which is also vacuum brake only. The 50 or so passengers, we understand, were quite happy with their day out, and beyond a broken droplight the only damage incurred by our coaches was a severe blow to the emergency brake indicator on No.91, which was hit by the branch of a tree on the Bangor line. As this brought the train to a stand it's nice to know that our emergency brake system is in full working order, and very effective!

BELFAST MEETINGS ...

Your attention is drawn to the enclosed card which gives details of the RPSI Belfast meetings, which are being held once again at St. Jude's Church Hall, Ravenhill Road, Belfast. The season opens on Wednesday 11 October with a film show recalling steam filled days on NIR in 1969, courtesy of Maca Film Studios. Come along and bring your friends for a night of nostalgia. Intervals refreshments are available, the proceeds going in aid of charity.

STEAM TO THE CAPE ...

RPSI member John Gilberthorpe, a driver with South African Railways, has written to advertise that time is running out for steam on SAR. John, who is based at Beaconsfield steam depot, drives class 25NC locomotives on the lines to De Aar and Bloemfontein, but he says this is "steam's last stand" as it is all due to finish in June 1992. Any RPSI member contemplating a visit is invited to contact John Gilberthorpe.