

THE RAILWAY PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF IRELAND

NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 1990

GREAT NORTHERN BLUES ...

We start with the bad news (and apologies to Channel 4 for the heading) – No.85 “Merlin” is stopped for repairs! When the locomotive was taken into Harland & Wolff for the initial restoration work our insurers were asked to carry out a special examination of the boiler and firebox to determine exactly what work was necessary. This they did, and all the work which they advised us was necessary was carried out. During the routine annual inspection last month we were advised that there had been serious wasting on the sides of the firebox inner wrapper and it was becoming so thin in parts that we could no longer be offered insurance cover. This was a body blow to us and came without any warning. Happily, the technology involved in repairing the locomotive is well within our capability, but the repairs will take some time. The boiler will have to be lifted out of the frames, and after the patches have been welded into place (effectively new firebox sides), using the special copper welding equipment which we have at Whitehead, the firebox sides will need to have quite a number of new stays fitted. Our best estimate suggested that even if we put maximum effort into repairing the locomotive it would not be ready for traffic until the autumn at the earliest.

As a result the Council decided at its January meeting that No.171 “Slieve Gullion” would be repaired as quickly as possible, with a hoped-for return to traffic by about the middle of the summer. Again the boiler has to be lifted, but only for inspection this time. Some repairs are necessary to broken stays and firebox crown nuts, and the boiler needs a complete retubing, the tubes are already in store at Whitehead. Some minor mechanical repairs are also needed. The only work which has to be done for us is the removal of the asbestos lagging on the boiler, which must

be done by a licensed specialist contractor. The new boiler lagging will be fibreglass insulation, which poses no health or safety problems.

This all means that only No.4 will be available for traffic for the first half of the year, and repairs are already under way on her. We are waiting for her new driving springs to be delivered from the manufacturer, and her right outside rod has been dismantled to renew the trailing crankpin bush bearing.

COME TO THE COMERAGH ...

As you will realise, this year's International Railtour has suffered several trials and tribulations - first the sudden introduction of a near blanket ban on wooden-bodied coaches, then the shock of No.85 having to be taken out of service. The net result of this is the rewriting of the tour schedule for about the fourth time, even before it goes to Irish Rail! However, the basic route remains the same; on the Saturday we leave Heuston Station, Dublin, and run down the Cork main line to Limerick Junction, then down to Carrick-on-Suir before returning to Limerick for the overnight stop. Sunday will see us leaving Limerick and proceeding via Ennis to Athenry (No.4's first journey over this section, which has recently been upgraded to take heavier axle loadings), then to Athlone and Dublin, before returning to Belfast. The Monday Round-up will visit Portrush before returning to Whitehead. An Advance Booking Form is enclosed with this Newsletter, and we recommend you return it as soon as possible if you would like to reserve a place on the tour, as they could be in short supply!

WOODEN BODY PROBLEMS ...

There is little to report since the December Newsletter, except that the cost of hiring coaches from Irish Rail has now been obtained. This has confirmed our fears

that operations will become very expensive, and some formerly profitable trips will become_ extremely marginal financially. A Council Working Party is looking in detail at how the Society will be affected, and what steps we can take to improve the situation. At the moment it looks as though the Mullingar set will be used for at least half of the 1990 Dublin season, so that gives us a little breathing space. As soon as there is anything more to report we'll let you know.

WHEN SANTA CAME TO TOWN ...

As in previous years Santa and his merry band of helpers from Lapland paid Whitehead a few visits just before Christmas. A certain hit with the children, he was accompanied by his better half, Miss Santa, who certainly added a touch of glamour to proceedings.

To provide seasonal music the excellent choir from Carrickfergus Grammar School, led by Head of Music Mr Bryan Lynas, contributed a very traditional and most welcome rendition of many old Christmas carols. Our sincere thanks are extended to Bryan and the choir members for their help.

Thanks also go to all the volunteers who undertook rostered duties; to the Carriage Department for ensuring the beautifully restored diner No.88 was ready to provide hot drinks and snacks; to the present wrappers; and to the Locomotive Department for providing a trouble free locomotive, Londonderry Port & Harbour Commissions shunter No.3 "R.H. Smyth".

Unfortunately the financial aspect of the operation was most disappointing, and whilst our base costs have risen somewhat, traffic was down by around 40% compared with 1998. Poor weather and a new Santa's Grotto in Carrickfergus Town Hall were contributory factors.

SIGNS OF SPRING ...

The snowdrops are starting to appear in the garden, so spring must be just around the corner.

That means Easter is corning, and that the Easter Bunny will be visiting Whitehead on Easter Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. This event is one of our best earners and we need a good team of helpers. Are YOU available? Do YOU live within (relatively)

easy reach of Whitehead? Are YOU over 18? If the answer to all three questions is YES, then please contact Sam Somerville, our Whitehead Operations Officer and volunteer for a duty over Easter. Help us to make it a bigger and better success than ever before.

HARD CASH ...

How you can turn paper money into bricks and mortar for the Whitehead Carriage Shed. As you know we were visited in November by Michael Palin (it didn't take 80 days we're glad to say!) and while at Whitehead he very kindly autographed several Society posters, which will be raffled in aid of our Carriage Shed project. Michael McMahon, our Publicity Officer, is organising this raffle as well as a postal auction, and our next circular in March will give full details of both of these.

A very special offer you will receive in March commemorates the fact that 1989 was a momentous year in Europe, and especially in Berlin, where the Wall came tumbling down! Now thanks to several of our Berlin members, and especially Rudiger Reich, we can offer genuine pieces of the original 1961 wall for sale, with all proceeds going to the Carriage Shed Fund. There will be a limited number of "Pieces of the Wall" and each will be accompanied by a numbered certificate guaranteeing authenticity. Full details of how to get your very own piece of Berlin Wall will be in the next circular, so keep watching the post!

DUES TIME ...

Don't forget that your subscription falls due at the end of January, and this year it's gone up to £10 for Adults (IR£12) and £6 for Under 16 or Over 65 (IR£7). If you are a UK taxpayer, please complete a Standing Order form and a Covenant form (enclosed with this Newsletter) - this will benefit the Society with a refund of the Income Tax that you have already paid: If you already pay by Standing Order, please fill in new form - not only has the subscription gone up, but our bank accounts have changed as well! If you don't pay by Standing Order, why not change to this method of payment today? It'll be easier for you, and for us.

TYING THE KNOT ...

New for 1990 is the RPSI's exclusive tie.

They are navy blue with No.171 embroidered in blue, red, gold and grey, side profile view. Beneath are inscribed the letters RPSI in gold. Two "engine blue" thin diagonal stripes 2mm apart below the lettering complete the attractive design. They're available for only £6.80 including post and packing from Henry Beaumont.

IT'S COMING SOON ...

Five foot Three should be coming to you with the next circular about the middle of March. We're sorry for the delay, which has been slightly more than usual - just blame your overworked (and grossly underpaid!) Council, who have had the problem of their normal employment interfering with their hobby!

THE SILVER LINING ...

London Agent Leslie McAllister wants to say thank you to the members, over 80 so far, who have ordered over 100 advance copies of "Steam's Silver Lining", the soon to be published history of RPSI trains by member Joe Cassells.

The book has 76 pages and more than 60 superb photographs; every tour is listed; and there is a full description of all the "2 Day Tours", now known as the International Railtours. For the first time also the RPSI carriage stock is listed with full details of every vehicle. Leslie tells us that at the end of January they will have to take a decision on the size of print run, and obviously the more that you buy now then the more can be printed cheaply. This will maximise the profit, all of which goes to the Society. It is planned to have the book available for Easter, so get your order in today. Price is only £4.50 Stg or IR£5.00 per copy (including postage), and orders should be sent to Leslie McAllister. Please make your cheque payable to "The Syndicate".

AGM TIME ...

Details are given in this circular of the RPSI 1990 Annual General Meeting, which is being held at Belfast Boat Club on Friday 23 March. Please do your best to attend this important meeting- - it is your chance to hear of the Society's plans for the future and also an opportunity to put forward any views you may have

Your attention is also drawn to the Council

Nomination form, which is also enclosed. This year several stalwarts have intimated their intention to stand down from Council after doing their stint. In particular we are looking for new blood in the positions of Secretary, Treasurer, Coach Running and Whitehead Site, so this is your chance to get involved in the running of the Society. And of course, you can nominate someone for the other posts as well - competition is healthy!

BELFAST AREA ...

The Belfast winter meetings have been attracting big attendances this season and there are still two dates for your 1990 diary:

Wednesday 14 February - RPSI member Norman Foster presents a slide show entitled Branch Line Miscellany.

Wednesday 14 March - Historian Grenfell Morton looks at. Early Irish Railway Travel, as detailed in Victorian and Edwardian guide books.

Both meetings start at 7.30 p.m. and there is a chance to visit the RPSI sales stall. Interval refreshments are in aid of Barnardos and Arthritis Research. Everyone is very welcome.

AND IN LONDON ...

RPSI members are always welcome at the meetings of the Irish Railway Record Society in London, which are held at the Fred Tallant Hall, 153 Drummond Street, London NW1. The hall is about 5 minutes from Euston station, and from Euston Square and Warren Street underground stations. The next meetings will be:

15 February - Around Ireland in the 1950s by Hugh Davies.

15 March - More about Dundalk from Seamus Murphy.

19 April - Current Developments on Irish Railways by Tim Morton.

Meetings start at 7.30 pm, so if you live in London why not go along and meet some fellow supporters of the wider gauge.

Donations to the Carriage Shed Appeal Fund should be sent to Whitehead Railway Project at Whitehead.