

Railway Preservation Society of Ireland

REPORT OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Belfast Boat Club, Friday 23rd March 1990

Lord O'Neill presided, and 70 members were present.

Apologies were received from Heather Boomer, William Frazier, Johnny Glendinning, Julian Duroure, Joe Fitzpatrick, Mark Hodge, Aidan McDonnell, Barry Carse, Leslie McAllister and Rudiger Reich.

Lord O'Neill opened the meeting by paying tribute to Sam Carse, the RPSI Dublin Agent, whose death had taken place on February 27. He said Sam had been a member of the Council since 1967, and had served the RPSI most faithfully over the years. His passing would be a great loss to the Society. All present then stood for a minute's silence in memory of Sam.

The minutes of the 1989 AGM, which had been circulated, were adopted on the proposal of Derek Carter, seconded by Gavin Martin. The minutes of the November 1989 sub increase EGM were also adopted, on the proposal of D.Carter, seconded by Rory McNamee.

The Chairman's report was adopted on the proposal of D.Carter, seconded by David Humphries, and the Secretary's report was adopted on the proposal of Jim McBride, seconded by D. Carter.

Lord O'Neill thanked the Treasurer, John Richardson, for having come out of retirement to prepare the books for the audit. J.Richardson then dealt with several points which arose from his report and the audited accounts.

Sam Somerville said that income from the Whitehead summer train rides was £619. J.Richardson told G.Martin that the auditors had levied a charge for the first time this year, having performed the service in an honorary capacity for 24 years. He said Coopers & Lybrand had recently merged to become Coopers & Lybrand Deloitte. The new Treasurer would be meeting the accountants in April to establish whether an audit fee could be expected next year.

D.Humphries suggested that the expenditure incurred by the Society on the two "exceptional items" of NIR train hire and a film contract should have been deducted to make the figure more realistic. Alan Edgar said about £2,000 had been spent in repairing coaches for the film contract, and J.Richardson said this was something which the Council should take on board for the 1990 accounts. Ernie Gilmore said that the deduction of expenses on the two exceptional items would probably have left a surplus of around £5,000 as against the income of £16,101 quoted in the accounts.

It was explained that the Whitehead carriage shed was shown as a fixed asset because it was being grant-aided by the International Fund for Ireland. There was a statutory obligation to show the shed as a fixed asset in the accounts for a period of several years.

D.Humphries said he thought it was inappropriate for an acting Treasurer to make critical comments about the Council's financial policy when due to pressure of time the Council had not had an opportunity to review the accounts in detail. Bill Scott said that had he not resigned as Treasurer, his report would have been couched in similar terms to that of J.Richardson. D.Humphries said he felt reference should have been made to the exceptionally difficult circumstances in which the Society had found itself as a result of the £10,000 increase in insurance premiums. He said there might have been items charged to the carriage department at Mullingar which should have been billed against another heading, but that there had not been time to examine all the bills. A.Edgar said the same might apply to Whitehead.

Derek Henderson said that in view of the ban on operation of wooden-bodied stock on part of the Irish Rail system, money should be allocated to the locomotive department rather than coaches in 1990. G.Martin said it would cost IR£2,620 to hire an IR steel-bodied Cravens set for a day, and he urged that it would be better to spend money on the RPSI's own stock. John Harcourt warned that, with NIR upgrading its tracks, a time would come when wooden-bodied stock would be banned altogether. He suggested that money should be put into a reserve fund for ultimate purchase of a set of steel-bodied coaches.

A.Edgar said the Society had 20 coaches passed for mainline operation in 1989. Irwin Pryce said spending money on wooden-bodied stock was like putting money into a bottomless pit. He said the coach heavy lift area at Whitehead had incurred expenditure of £11,000 and had still not been completed. He asked why coach wheels without axles had been purchased, and complained about the 'burgeoning' amount of free travel for Society workers on every outing. I.Pryce asked why the carriage shed had been given the go-ahead at a time when Society finances were hard-pressed.

D.Humphries referred to the call in J.Richardson's report for proper stewardship of resources and said the Council had already moved to set up a finance committee. Steps were in hand, and the Council was now considering the possibility of computerising the Society's accounts. J.Richardson said he hoped the Council would take proper measures to ensure that the Society's resources were shepherded as much as possible. G.Martin said that in many cases those members making use of the complimentary travel scheme were involved in the maintenance of the locomotive or the train.

The Treasurer's report and the accounts were adopted on the proposal of G.Martin, seconded by J.Harcourt.

R.Morton proposed and E.Gilmore seconded the re-appointment of Coopers & Lybrand Deloitte as auditors. This was agreed unanimously.

E.Gilmore then reported on operations during 1989, which he said had been a fantastic year. He said that because of the wooden-bodied stock ban and the shortage of locomotives, 1990 had been a difficult year to plan. The Operations Committee only had one locomotive, No.4, to base the year's programme on, although it was hoped No.461 might be available for some operations in Northern Ireland. No.4 had been earmarked for a number of trips in the Republic which had been well marketed and well booked, and to transfer the engine up and down from Dublin would cost £650 a time as well as running the risk of having the engine

trapped on the wrong side of the border due to the campaign of disruption on the Belfast-Dublin line.

D.Humphries said a full programme of events had been planned for both Northern Ireland and the Republic before it emerged that No.85 would not be available. He said it was very regrettable that the pattern of 1988 and 1989 of parallel operations north and south could not continue. D.Humphries mentioned that because of lead-in time, the RPSI would not after all be featured on Cornflakes packets this year. He told members that the £2,000 Corporation Tax bill referred to in the Secretary's report had now been set aside.

P.Scott said in his report on the locomotive department that Cornhill had deemed No.85 unsafe to operate after a boiler inspection at Christmas. Firebox side plates were extensively wasted, and the wasting was down to half the original thickness in several areas. Various possibilities had been explored as regards repairing the wasting, and it was physically possible, although the boiler would have to be removed from the frames to facilitate this, and it would take time and money. In that situation, the Society had to choose between No.171 and No.461 as the more immediate prospects for a second operational locomotive. The extent of boiler work on No.171 meant it would be unwise to press forward with that locomotive as she would probably not be available for the 1990 season. No.461's hydraulic boiler test was taking place, but there were many small jobs which had to be undertaken.

P.Scott said further discussions were to take place with Cornhill to establish what had gone wrong with No.85. To avoid a recurrence, however, he said he would anticipate the Society having more input into boiler inspections rather than solely relying on the insurance company boiler inspector. He warned that locomotive expenditure was set to rise. P.Scott reported on the state of the fleet.

A.Edgar then presented his report on behalf of the coach department. He said it was wrong to suggest that the Society was not going to be allowed to run its own coaches in the future. The problem was still being investigated by the Council and no-one knew what the outcome would be of moves to have the IR ban lifted. In any event, the RPSI train could continue to run on NIR metals.

A.Edgar said the new inspection arrangements for the RPSI train had been introduced in 1989 and had proved to be rigorous but realistic. A.Edgar reported on the state of the fleet. He announced that he was due to move to a job in England in several weeks' time and that this would be his final report as Carriage Maintenance Officer. A.Edgar thanked all those who had helped over the years.

R.McNamee then reported on Mullingar, and said negotiations were continuing with CIÉ to secure a lease for the site. He said IR£1,000 worth of equipment had been stolen from the site last autumn, and that three weeks ago RPSI members had arrived at Mullingar to find itinerants trying to remove engine brasses. On the crew-training front, he went on, IR now had a commitment to train steam crews.

Various questions were then put forward from the floor. W.Scott asked why it had been necessary to use the Mullingar set on the Mount Brandon two-day tour when a Cravens set had already been hired from IR. W.Scott and D.Henderson asked why there was a variation in

the fares being charged for trips to Rosslare and Sligo in 1990. D.Humphries said this was for marketing reasons, as the trips were being aimed at different markets with British enthusiasts being organised to travel on one enthusiast-based outing which involved runpasts and photo stops. The other type of trip was aimed at the public.

Charles Friel asked for an avoidance of “hideous” headboards such as that sported by No.85 on the Dundalk trip in 1989, and also requested that proper lamp codes be adopted. E.Gilmore told J.McBride that to hire Cravens for the Flyer would put £5 on every fare. He said IR did not always have steel coaches available.

The election of the 1990 Council then took place. S.Boomer explained that following the death of S.Carse, his sons and fellow Dublin members had suggested that the position of Dublin Agent should be allowed to lapse.

Lord O’Neill said there was just one contest, for the post of Commercial Officer. Derek Carter and David Humphries were appointed tellers, and Bob Hunter defeated Joe Fitzpatrick by 33 votes to 31. The rest of those proposed for Council posts were deemed elected.

The 1990 Council is:

Chairman - Sullivan Boomer, 22 Town Lane, Islandmagee, Larne, Co. Antrim, BT40 3SZ.
Secretary - Paul McCann, 19 Ferndale Road, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim. BT36.
Treasurer - John Beaumont, 30 Strangford Road, Lisburn, Co. Antrim.
Loco Maintenance - Peter Scott, 17 Finaghy Park Central, Belfast 10.
Loco Running - Brian Hill, 39 Prospect Downs South, Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim.
Coach Maintenance - Alan Edgar, c/o Whitehead Railway Project, Whitehead, Co. Antrim.
Coach Running - Thomas Charters, 7 Chichester Gardens, Whitehead, Co. Antrim.
Operations - Ernie Gilmore, 20 Chichester Park South, Belfast 15.
Whitehead Site - Gavin Martin, 57 O’Neill Road, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim.
Publicity - Michael McMahon, 40 Balmoral Court, Belfast 9.
Publications - Nelson Poots, c/o Whitehead Railway Project, Whitehead, Co. Antrim.
RoI Marketing & Publicity - David Humphries, 33 Torquay Wood, Dublin 18.
Mullingar Site - Rory McNamee, 19 Thornhill Road, Mount Merrion, Dublin.
Mullingar Coach Maintenance - Mark Hodge, 83 Springhill Ave, Blackrock, Co. Dublin.
Mullingar Coach Running - Aidan McDonnell, 29 Bother Bean Aoibhinn, Dublin.
Commercial - Bob Hunter, 23 Barn Road, Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim.
London Agent - Leslie McAllister, 22 Lansdowne Road, Frimley, Camberley, Surrey.

Lord O’Neill made a presentation to Robin Morton, who was retiring after 16 years on Council, the last 13 of them as Honorary Secretary. He paid tribute to R.Morton’s contribution. In response, R.Morton thanked all those who had helped over his period as Secretary. He said his successor, Paul McCann, was an ideal choice, and wished the Society well in the future.

Derek Carter suggested that the Council should be expanded to include a Commercial Officer for both North and South, and it was agreed Council should look at this. R.Hunter said it was certainly his intention to appoint Joe Fitzpatrick as his PSR in the Republic, where he had done an excellent job.

Lord O'Neill said he understood British Rail was about to impose a ban on wooden-bodied stock and said that in time many wooden-bodied coaches would become museum pieces. In this event, he went on, it might be that the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum or the Downpatrick Ardglass Railway might provide a home for them.

A.Edgar said people were being too negative about the prospects for wooden-bodied stock. He said wooden-bodied Pullmans could run on BR at up to 70 mph.

A.Edgar then reported on the possibilities of the RPSI securing a steel-bodied set of coaches. Irish Rail Cravens were unlikely to be available before the year 2000, while NIR Mark II coaches would be in use until the mid-1990s. The RPSI was now on the official tendering list for BR stock and could bid for surplus coaches. However, he said, IR had recently bought three Mark II coaches from BR at a cost of £2,000 each. It had cost a further £2,000 per coach to transport them to Ireland, and each coach was now being refurbished at a further cost of £100,000 a time. Vacuum fitted Mark IIs were much sought after by the preserved lines in Britain, while brake vehicles and buffets commanded significantly higher prices. G.Martin said that even if wooden-bodied stock was subject to a ban for carrying passengers, they would still have a role for film contracts, as vintage coaches were attractive. Mark Kennedy suggested that the RPSI, the UFTM and the DARS should meet to discuss the possibility of keeping all existing preserved coaches if possible.

Derek Henderson expressed concern about a recent reference in a news-sheet implying that under-18s were not welcome at Whitehead. S.Boomer said this was for insurance reasons, as insurance cover would not cover those under 18 unless they were accompanied by their parents or guardians. However, it was something the Council could take up with the insurance brokers, and this would be looked at. Bob Edwards said the Council should be able to ban anyone from the site if they were unruly, and Paul McCann said the problem was trying to weed out those teenagers who were undesirable from those who were doing an excellent job and who deserved to be encouraged.

John Mathews said a number of people in Whitehead were interested in discussing with the RPSI the possibility of setting up a club with the Society. These people would be interested in joining the RPSI if the Society was interested. It was agreed the Council should consider this possibility.

There being no further business, Lord O'Neill declared the meeting closed.

Signed: _____ *Chairman* _____ *Date:* _____