

RAILWAY PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF IRELAND
NEWS-SHEET - MAY 1992

GENERAL

Before pen is put to paper or stencil is struck we have a problem. This time it is a postal strike in the Republic of Ireland, which makes it unlikely that the substantial number of members resident there will receive this News-sheet or, perhaps more importantly, the circulars accompanying it as soon as they ought to.

A further meeting with the Museums & Galleries Commission, is to be held in June in connection with our application for registration with that body. Registration would give the RPSI the advantage of liaison with other similar bodies and could also qualify the Society for consideration for certain types of grant.

Something which many people had probably forgotten about was recently brought to the notice of Council and that was the Railway Letter Service. It has been decided to revive this service which enables a traveller on trains operated by participating companies to post a letter - or a "wish you were here" postcard - on a train. In addition to the usual postage stamp the company's (in this case the RPSI's) stamp is also applied to it and the company is then responsible for ensuring that it is promptly forwarded via the Post Office. It's not just a gimmick either as the whole business is covered by legislation. Obviously a relic of a more leisurely age, before the portable phone, fax and the like, a railway letter would nonetheless be something a little unusual to send to a friend - or to yourself if you're a collector. Needless to say, the RPSI will be willing to sell you an appropriate postcard.

On the subject of sales, Nevin Hamilton has kindly offered to take over the post of Northern Commercial Officer, thereby enabling Henry Beaumont to take life a little more easily. More details when the changeover has been organised.

The Downpatrick & Ardglass Railway Society on hearing of our acquisition of NCC railcar No.1 were quick to express their interest in restoring and operating it themselves and it has been agreed that the vehicle will be leased to them.

A meeting with Irish Rail is to be arranged with a view to establishing a long-term policy in relation to wooden-bodied coaches. The most recent debacle - see Operations - surely indicates that it is in the interests of both the Society and Irish Rail that a firm policy be arrived at as soon as possible.

On the financial side Treasurer John Beaumont continues to perform his amazing feats of juggling so that we can continue our programme of planned expenditure in order to gain the maximum benefit from the ERDF grant while avoiding an overdraft at the Bank. Latest reports indicate that we are just about keeping our heads above water.

In the latter respect a continuing source of concern is that in order to keep up with the work schedule a considerable expenditure is being incurred on wages. Whilst a sizeable proportion of the paid work is of a skilled nature quite a lot of it could be handled by volunteers who, if they

did not already know how to do the jobs, could quickly learn. To help generate income we would also urge as many members and friends as possible to travel on RPSI trains. After all, didn't you join the Society because you were interested in steam trains?

In Dublin, Chas Meredith and his wife ran a coffee morning and found that in addition to having a pleasant morning they had raised £100 for Society funds. Why not have a go at something like this yourself?

OPERATIONS

The major recent event was, of course, the 1992 International Railtour which after one or two identity crises bore the name Grainne Uaile and, despite the efforts of bureaucrats, bombers and blackguards, ran successfully.

Crises were much in evidence this year, to the extent that if Operations Officer Michael McMahon does not have grey hairs by now he probably never will have! Ever since last September Irish Rail had been assuring us that our preserved coaches would be allowed to run on the tour. Michael had attended what appeared to be a satisfactory meeting in Dublin nine days before the tour and was just settling contentedly into his seat for the return to Belfast when he was summoned from the train to be informed that our coaches could not run after all. Even for someone as well used as Michael to the sight of moving goalposts this was quite a shock!

As matters turned out, we could not have used the Whitehead coaches anyway as terrorist activity severed the Great Northern main line near Newry, marooning the stock, plus No.171, in the North. This meant that No.461 had to operate a modified Southern section on her own and in the circumstances coped very well. An English visitor was heard to muse on the likelihood of a Midland 4F - a more powerful loco - even, being considered for operating a similar train over some lightly-trafficked trans-Pennine route. Perhaps life this side of the water isn't so bad after all.

Meanwhile the tour participants, having been conveyed to Belfast on the Sunday night by means which did not include No.171, retired to their beds in anticipation of a run over the NCC main line behind No.171 in the morning. But it was not to be. On Monday morning the seldom used section between Bleach Green Junction and Antrim was closed by a suspicious object near the line so a trip to Larne Harbour had to be hastily substituted.

On the positive side, passengers were able to savour such rare pleasures as exploring Ballycarry station and the interior of the recently refurbished diner No.87 - the latter enabling them to make up for the lack of their favourite dark refreshment during the previous two days. Although the cancelled workings meant that No.171 only ran about 50 miles Loco Maintenance Officer Peter Scott may well have felt a certain amount of relief that the loco, with a recently re-metalled big-end bearing, did not have to go charging off to faraway places.

Earlier in the tour, after visiting Athlone, instead of the usual peaked cap or beret protruding from the side of the loco a once-familiar cloth cap was observed. Beneath this cap was none other than Eamonn Lacken, locomotive inspector at Athlone until his retirement a few years ago and whose enthusiasm and courtesy did so much to help the RPSI in earlier years. It may be only by coincidence that No.461 was performing in a particularly spirited manner at the time when the cloth cap was seen!

On the Saturday night Eamonn was guest of 'honour at the banquet in Westport when he was presented with honorary RPSI membership together with an album of railway photographs of the Athlone area plus some more recent ones featuring RPSI tours in the area from the Charlie Friel collection.

On 25 April No.461 operated a charter train between Killucan and Mullingar in connection with the wedding of a member of the Guinness family - no, the banking side! The journey led to a convivial gathering on the platform of Mullingar station, nowadays usually very sparsely populated.

As you'll see from the accompanying circulars, the season has just begun so please turn up and help us to make a success of it.

LOCO REPORT

No.4 (ex-LMSNCC 2-6-4T):

Preparation for boiler lifting continues. The person who installed the concrete in the smokebox during its last repair might like to call at Whitehead where he will be offered the opportunity to remove the remaining quarter of his rock-like handiwork!

"R.H. Smyth" (Avonside 0-6-0ST):

Work on re-staying firebox continues.

No.23 (Planet 4-wD):

This busy little loco, though now strong in engine, has become weak in clutch and can handle only light loads with much coaxing. This can only get worse so a repair will have to be carried out fairly urgently.

"Carlow" (R&H 4-wD):

Little change since last report.

No.85 "Merlin" (ex-GNRI 4-4-0 compound):

Firebox work continues with drilling out of stays and removal of defective sections of plate. A project which must be rare on a railway preservation site was commenced some weeks ago, when Peter Scott was seen creating strangely shaped objects out of steel plate and heavy round bar. Eventually these were positioned with a large piece of copper plate securely sandwiched between them and it became apparent that his intention was to fashion a new firebox doorplate, i.e. the one inside at the back. Some handy little mallets were made from 20" lengths of sleeper and the fun began when a few members of the Saturday squad had the doubtful honour of being selected to deal whatever blows they could before tottering off to recover. A smaller mallet was made from a section of flue tube filled with lead but was so heavy that no-one could swing it. Meanwhile a publications officer thought he had found himself a handy little job in No.4's smokebox but is now a disillusioned man. Happily, after all that effort we now have a fine new flanged doorplate. The actual hole for the door has not yet appeared and lots of smaller holes for rivets and stays will have to be drilled but the most brutal part is now over.

In mid-May the boiler and firebox were turned upside down so that new plate can be lowered into position when ready for fitting. This has meant that in order to carry out his ministrations inside the firebox the Reverend Eddie now descends from heavenwards instead of rising from the pit!

No.171 "Slieve Gullion" (ex-GNRI 4-4-0):

On recent outings a big-end was found to be carrying some heat so the bearing was taken down and re-metalled. No problems have been experienced during the limited amount of running the loco has done since then.

No.461 (ex-DSER 2-6-0):

On the tour, some heat was noted in the driving axleboxes. Possibly due to the intermittent nature of the running on the early part of the tour this did not become too serious until the later stages. The axleboxes have been removed at Mullingar, re-metalled at Whitehead and will be re-fitted in time to enable the loco to carry out its scheduled summer programme.

SITE REPORT

The carriage shed structure is now practically complete. Front and rear doors have been fitted and both lines of track have been laid although one requires to be re-aligned. Electricity and water services will be installed as time and money permit.

The two sidings between the carriage shed and loco shed have now to be re-aligned and a turn-out, materials for which are already on site, installed to give access to the heavy lift area where a concrete pit and apron have been constructed. The next step will be the overhaul of the sheer-legs acquired several years ago.

In order to prevent all the fine new structures from becoming hidden from view Site Officer Dermot Mackie recently carried out a pre-emptive strike with a weed sprayer, attacking unwanted vegetation in all parts of the Whitehead site. In this, he was ahead of the railway companies who didn't start their programmes until a short time later.

SALES ITEMS

Special Offer, available about mid-June:

Donegal Railway Co. - reproduction of a 1903 coloured lithographed poster, approx. 38½" x 24"; limited reprint on good quality paper with gloss finish. Shows at the top a view of the river Foyle with a DR train at station in the foreground; company coat of arms and views of Donegal Castle, Glencolumcille, Slieve League, train in Barnesmore Gap and general views of Killybegs and Lough Eske. Price, inc p&p: £11.00

Irish Railways in Colour by Tom Ferris (From steam to diesel 1955 - 1967) Price, inc p&p: £16.40

A few Grainne Uaile tee-shirts, unsold on the tour, are available at £6.50.

The long awaited RPSI stock book is now at the proof stage and should be available shortly, also a RPSI colouring book. Look out for further details.