

RAILWAY PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF IRELAND

NEWS-SHEET - AUGUST 1992

GENERAL

On 27 June the RPSI featured in a history of Irish transport supplement published by the Dublin Evening Press newspaper.

The Society continues to attract new members and, while some members drop out each year, the overall trend is upwards, with membership now approaching the 1,000 mark. In addition to the large number from Great Britain, without whose support our International Railtour could not run, there is the German group who by now must be candidates for honorary Irish citizenship. Our membership has become even more international as among those joining recently were railway societies from Poland and Portugal. Those who venture to foreign lands in search of steam will know that some can still be found in regular service in Poland whilst although Portugal ceased to have such workings several years ago its narrow gauge in the 1970s was pure delight. We welcome all those who have joined us recently and can assure those from across the water(s) that they will not be criticised for not turning up for work!

On the latter subject, it would not be out of place to express appreciation of the work of Alan McRobert who turns up regularly at Whitehead and, without a great deal of assistance, does his best to bring our coaches up to the standard of cleanliness which our passengers have a right to expect. If the result falls short of perfection don't blame Alan - think of what it takes to give a car a good cleaning and then think of 7 or 8 carriages, If the help was there a lot more could be done.

Now that our running coaches are housed in the carriage shed, work on them can be carried out in comfort. However, coaches are rather high vehicles as anyone who has climbed into one from ground level can testify. Has anyone got access to portable staging which would facilitate work? Carriage windows are a source of difficulty as their outer surface seems to act as a magnet for "railway dust" which is very hard to remove. Can anyone suggest - or produce - a substance to deal with this?

Some confusion seems to have been caused by reference in the last Newsheet to Nevin Hamilton taking over as Northern Commercial Officer. Apparently he hasn't quite taken over but will look after on-train sales and supply of material to public bodies, etc. Although still anxious to find a successor, Henry Beaumont will still supply your requirements by post.

An overdue word of thanks to Leslie McAllister and his London-based RPSI team - the Syndicate - for their tireless work in raising funds for the Society. In addition to its publishing activities the Syndicate regularly operates sales stands at a variety of railway gatherings. The result of their efforts in 1990/91 was that they were able to present Treasurer John Beaumont with a cheque for £2,000 which was very welcome, helping to ensure that we can maintain the work programme under the ERDF scheme. So well done the Syndicate for showing what can be achieved.

OPERATIONS

Things are going well in Dublin. The Royal Canal Festival operation on 13 & 14 June carried around 2,000 passengers in eight trains.

The Midsummer Night's Steam to Mullingar on 20 June was a great success. It would appear that the legendary Mullingar heifers must have come under some pressure as 470 steaks were consumed by the 430 passengers. This statistic isn't what it seems as unfortunately some passengers got no steak at all, which would suggest that there must have been at least 41 Midsummer Night Gluttons! Our apologies to the involuntary vegetarians.

On 4 July the "Strawberry Fair" train left Dublin fully loaded and carried 300 passengers from Enniscorthy to Rosslare Harbour. This was a historic date for the RPSI, with loco 461 reaching Rosslare Harbour for the first time since her restoration. In the absence of information to the contrary it is assumed that the supply of strawberries was adequate.

Bookings are coming in fast for the "Sea Breeze" trip over the same route on 22 August. And don't forget the three "Maynooth Shuttles" on Sunday 13 September.

Meanwhile in the North it seemed to be all putting up sheds and fixing engines but, after the problems of May, things got properly under way on 27 June with the successful "Hills of Donegal" excursion. Some 200 passengers took the train to Londonderry, three bus-loads continuing on a tour of Co Donegal in rather mixed weather while others paid a visit to the Foyle Valley Railway.

A not entirely fortuitous gathering in Derry of former footplatemen included the awe-inspiring Ned O'Hara, ex Great Northern driver. A famous fireman from the same company had been expected but was apparently confined to local workings in the Belfast area! Those present proceeded to premises appropriate for their purpose and, although no formal communique was issued, the impression was gained that it had been a very satisfactory meeting.

The "Hills of Donegal" operation was something of an experiment but the results were very encouraging so it could well be repeated and possibly even improved on in the future. One slight drawback, while 2-6-4T No.4 is out of action, is the need to turn the loco at Coleraine which means that in one direction or another it has to run over 30 miles tender-first so that those on the engine get damp if it's raining and dirty if it isn't. However, no-one was complaining and it was even rumoured that assistance might be forthcoming to re-instate a turntable at Derry.

The Derry operation and indeed the re-timed Portrush Flyer make a very long day for RPSI staff. For example, the RPSI loco crew book on at 0530 to prepare the engine, stay with it all day, on return to Whitehead shunt the train, dispose of the engine, remove some of the dirt from themselves and are lucky to get away before midnight. If a few more qualified members were to volunteer the turn could be split, making it easier for all.

The Society had an unplanned return to Derry on 12 July when No.171 took an almost empty 5-coach train there at the behest of NIR who had suddenly decided that we could run no more trains on that line until brake tests had been carried out at certain level crossings. As they had carried out similar tests on their own stock about two years ago it is a pity that this had not occurred to them a little sooner, such as when No.171 was being run in. In the event, the train coped satisfactorily with the planned tests at crossings but was unable to avoid striking some cows which had strayed on to the line near Ballyboylan - two of them for the last time.

The Portrush Flyer season is well under way, with two well-filled

trains running on 18 July and 1 August. On both dates the Portrush - Castlerock extensions also ran very successfully. The 7-bogie trains seemed much to the liking of No.171 and her crews, with some very pleasing little spurts where track conditions permitted. Despite the difficult rail on the little-used Loop line George Gaw made two excellent climbs from Bleach Green while Willie Graham made his presence felt on 1 August with a tremendous start out of Portrush.

Against the tide of retirements came Tom McCrum, a former steam man who had been absent for a very long time following an injury but now back in fine form. Another welcome sight was Noel Playfair, like George Gaw a RPSI member, but whose movements in recent times did not appear to coincide with those of our locomotives. The training of other NIR drivers on steam duties continues, one man showing considerable prowess with the shovel being the inexhaustible Mickey Hamill.

Less welcome - in fact not welcome at all - were persons unable to have a few drinks without making a nuisance of themselves. Some of these were on the 1 August Flyer when their misconduct led to the train being stopped at Coleraine until the police arrived, spoiling other peoples' day out and nearly causing a much longer delay as our train had been timed to fit in between normal service trains. Since they are now known they should be assured that, tickets or not, they will not be allowed to travel on RPSI trains in the future.

Recent visitors to Belfast's York Road station will have noticed considerable activity in that area in connection with NIR's cross-Harbour link. Track alterations are in progress and the new Yorkgate station is taking shape on its elevated site. In the near future Central Service Depot, near the former BCDR Queen's Quay terminus, will close and its operations will be transferred to York Road. The latter will then close to passenger traffic, with Yorkgate becoming a temporary terminus for the Larne line until the link is completed through to Belfast Central station. The RPSI plans to run a commemorative special train on 4 October - watch out for further details.

Also under consideration is a steamy weekend in September, starting on a Friday with a special train in connection with the official opening of the new Whitehead carriage shed, followed by a run from York Road to Central via Antrim and Lisburn. Then on the Saturday a possible trip to Dundalk or Derry and to round off the weekend, the Friday trip in reverse but extended to Larne Harbour. Various uncertainties mean that none of this can at this stage be said to be definitely running so please check nearer September with the Whitehead answering machine.

If present plans materialise the Whitehead Santa will emulate his Southern counterpart this year and become a main line operator, between Belfast and Carrickfergus or Whitehead. More details nearer the festive season.

SITE REPORT

The Publications Officer has already sought the forgiveness of Whitehead Site Officer Dermot Mackie for forgetting to publish his appeal for mid-week workers in the last Newsheet! Despite this, Dermot managed to round up a team and work has progressed well. All track in the carriage shed has now been aligned and work has proceeded on tidying up the track beyond the shed. A start has been made on installing a water supply in the shed, to

be followed by electricity - hopefully before winter starts to close in.

Sadly, Dermot will be out of action for the next few weeks. While carrying out his professional duties he sustained a broken ankle during what turned into a disorderly encounter with a bull(ock). Whether the creature was acting in a spirit of reprisal for Ballyboyland or merely expressing an understandable personal grievance is not clear but neither party emerged unscathed! We wish Dermot and his patient a speedy recovery.

LOCO REPORT

No.4 (ex LMS NCC 2-6-4T): The boiler is now practically ready for lifting out of the frames.

"R.H. Smyth" (Avonside 0-6-0ST): It had been hoped that the new sections of inner firebox plate could be butt-welded into position, thereby reducing the number of lapped joints. However, it was found that the new copper plate differed in composition from the original material, preventing satisfactory welding, so it was back to lapped joints. Two replacement sections of plate have been prepared and positioned, with two more to come before the whole assembly, including foundation ring, can be riveted and stayed together.

No.23 (Planet 4-wD): No sooner had the clutch been repaired than the cylinder head gasket blew again - somewhat perplexingly as both the cylinder head and block had been machined true before the present gasket was fitted.

Carlow Diesel (Ruston & Hornsby 4-wD): A group of interested persons appeared recently and carried out some further re-assembly. Once the mechanical parts have been attended to the cab and the controls therein will require to be overhauled, followed by painting of the locomotive.

No.85 "Merlin" (ex GNRI 4-4-0 compound): Preparation for replacement of sections of the inner firebox continues. This firebox is of more recent construction than that of "R.H. Smyth" and uses more modern grade of copper which is compatible with the replacement plate and is thus capable of being welded satisfactorily. The new door plate referred to in the last Newsheet is now complete. The previous report was somewhat over-optimistic in referring to the brutal part of the work being over as when the fire hole had been cut out of the plate it had to be fashioned into a bell-mouth, necessitating further sessions with the monster mallets!

No.171 "Slieve Gullion" (ex GNRI 4-4-0): In traffic. No further problems have arisen and, as recorded elsewhere, the loco is performing well.

No.461 (ex DSER 2-6-0): In traffic, based in Dublin. This loco has also operated satisfactorily since axlebox repairs were carried out in June.

POSTAL SALES

As mentioned earlier, Henry Beaumont is still looking after postal sales and has quite a few interesting items, among them:

Donegal Railway colour poster - not many left of this reproduction of a 1903 issue. Never mind Monarch of the Glen or Chinese Girl; get one of these and have it framed at one of the many shops offering this service.

Price (inc p&p) £11.00

Irish Railways in Colour (from steam to diesel, 1955 - 1967)

Price (inc p&p) £16.40

Also available are drawings of Irish locomotives and rolling stock, useful to model makers. If interested, please drop Henry a line stating your

requirements.

Has anyone got any spare copies of Five Foot Three? These are quite often in demand so, if you can help, Henry would like to hear from you.

AND FINALLY ...

It has been felt for some time that while the content of Newsheets is, hopefully, not too bad the standard of production leaves something to be desired and that a more professionally produced, even glossy, publication would project a better image of the Society. At present the Publications Officer scribbles the whole lot out, corrects it and then usually introduces errors while pounding out stencils on his preserved ex-Education Board Imperial! It then goes elsewhere to be duplicated and posted. This system has the advantages of being fairly cheap and having the news up to date to within about a week of members receiving it.

Enquiries have been made, and some quite attractive offers received, with a view to getting a professional job done, based on a format of A3 folded to A4 size. With the availability of FAX, distance need not be a problem insofar as transmission of copy and proofs is concerned. For transportation of the finished product, however, it would be preferable to have the work done within striking distance of Belfast or Dublin.

Have we any member(s) in the printing trade or anyone else who would like to help the Society by either carrying out or sponsoring the job. If so, the Publications Officer would be delighted to hear from you.