

NEWS LETTER

November 1993

MEMBERSHIP

Membership Renewal: As is usual at this time of year, we would like to suggest that you might prefer to pay your membership early before the Christmas bills start appearing. A form enclosed with this circular will allow you to do just that.

Subscription Rates: Unfortunately the Council has felt it necessary to raise membership rates due to the increasing overhead costs being experienced. The most significant of these is insurance which, as most members in the United Kingdom will know, has increased significantly this year, in our case by up to 50% for some policies. We would ask that you don't look too unkindly on this increase as it is our first for 4 years, and we believe few other organisations could match the stability of prices.

Standing Orders: Those members who pay their sub by standing order are asked to take particular note of the increase as their banks will require notification of the change. Rather than simply amending the existing mandate for payment, please use the form included with this mailing. It is especially important for those paying in sterling as a high proportion of payments are still going to a bank account that was closed three years ago. Our bankers in Belfast have requested that we try to correct the situation and it would certainly be less of a headache for our Secretary.

Please also note that unless standing orders are amended, new membership cards will be held until the full amount is paid. In the past this hasn't always happened which meant that those paying by this method were being subsidised by the rest of the membership.

Introduce A Friend: As a matter of interest, 1993 has seen the highest ever level of membership - currently standing at over 1,060, and rising - and we are hoping for even better figures in 1994. If any member is aware of a friend who is interested in railways please use a little persuasion and point him or her in the direction of the Society

- the more the merrier. Just send the relevant amount with a note of name and address to the Secretary at the editorial address.

Computer Records: Our registration with the Data Protection Registrar is currently undergoing renewal. The Secretary would appreciate it if every member would check that his/her name and address, as appears on the mailing label, is correct. If not, please write to the listed address with an update. This applies in particular to Life Members and those who pay by standing order as there is no annual feedback from them via membership renewal forms.

Donations: Finally, on the subject of membership, the Council would like to thank all those members who have supported the Society over the years and those who made donations when they were able. It is a necessary evil that an appeal for donations be made every year but they are especially needed now that we have the, undoubtedly large, European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) grant facility. It may seem ironic that the larger the grant we are in receipt of, the more we need funds but we can only claim the grant as a 75% refund of what we have already spent on approved projects.

OPERATIONS

"Portrush Flyer": It is pleasing to note that all the trains this year ran to capacity having attracted a good number of party bookings from a very wide range of backgrounds - indeed, a social club from Carrickfergus required so many seats that an extra train was operated for their exclusive use.

"Sea Breeze": Following the unfortunate cancellation of our operation planned for 24th July it was particularly good to get back on DSER metals on 21st August. Passenger numbers were healthy and we carried approximately 320 out of Dublin and another 280 from Wexford. Interestingly, we had a water stop at Avoca on the return journey - at the request of the Irish Rail crew!

"Greystones Shuttle": We were back on

the DSER on 12th September with three return trips which carried about 1,000 passengers. The weather could have been kinder and it was probably just as well that our time in Greystones was limited. An Irish Rail requirement now is that we are restricted to 25 mph when running tender first. This rule required that we adjust our original advertised paths for this operation - so apologies to any member who was discommoded by the late changes.

"Atlantic Coast Express": While not so well patronised as the Portrush trains, this operation was successful but, like the 'Hills Of Donegal', may need some more development.

"UFTM Special": A special was run, at the request of the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum, to convey guests from the press to the opening of the new rail gallery at Cultra.

"Santa Special" (1): Following the same format as last year, we will be operating trains from Dublin's Pearse Station to Maynooth and back on Sundays 5th and 12th December. Departures will be at 10:45am, 1:45pm and 4:15pm. As previously, tickets may be obtained from selected branches of the First National Building Society.

"Santa Special" (2): Last year's new Christmas venture in Belfast was very hectic, but successful. In an attempt to alleviate operating problems, we will be running on three Sundays this year: 5th, 12th and 19th December, departing from Belfast's Yorkgate Station at 11:00am and 2:30pm. Don't forget the appeals from both Operations Officers for help in running the Christmas events.

For The Latest News: As it is not always possible to issue a circular at short notice, members are reminded that the Society's ansaphone is (0960) 353567. Up to date information on operations can be gleaned by phoning this number. For instance, the state of bookings for the Santa operations or, in the new year, possible running-in trips for No.85 "Merlin".

Operating Crews: When we started running steam train rides at Whitehead in the early 1970s they proved to be an excellent way to train our crews. However, the Guinness engine or "R.H. Smyth" were not the same as working on a "Portrush Flyer" but this was not a concern as we were always assured of having an NIR inspector with steam experience on the footplate - the RPSI crew gave support with oiling, cleaning fires, etc. Nowadays there are no steam inspectors on NIR, nor are there many steam drivers remaining. Therefore it is desirable that we

implement a scheme for training, not only NIR crews but RPSI crews also. Train rides ceased at Whitehead a few years ago for several very good reasons but it is hoped to revive them in some form next year. Certainly we need to provide more opportunities for our members to become acquainted with, and trained on, the steam footplate.

This is an urgent appeal to members from Paul Newell (0846-660237 or 0232-741111) to starting on the operating grades, at Whitehead in particular, as we are experiencing increasing difficulty in rostering staff for each operation. As explained above, a very high level of experience is desired so it is hoped that members who have previously worked on the grades will also consider coming back. The situation is bad, and may even affect the future running of trains.

Catering Results: Our Treasurer, John Beaumont, reports a good year on our dining cars. We are fortunate again in having the assistance of Bass Ireland who provided generous discounts on their products for the northern operations. The food and refreshment area provided the usual tea, coffee, confectionery and a new variety of high quality burgers. Thanks in particular to the Henderson family, Caroline Stewart and Jim Bromfield in the north and Tim Moriarty and his team in the south for their excellent work during time year. While it may seem a peripheral activity as far as railway preservation concerned, the profits generated by our dining cars are of considerable benefit. A typical day's profit will pay a fair slice of the coal bill and many a trip ("Atlantic Coast Express" and "Hills Of Donegal") has run which would not have been profitable without the contribution from this area. We are constantly reviewing what we stock, so if any member has suggestions please pass them on.

Congratulations: On Friday 20th August Debbie Sheridan, a familiar face behind the bar as one of our dining car crew, gave birth to a daughter, Anne. Congratulations and best wishes to mother and baby.

FINANCE

Computer Accounting: More from our Treasurer - he reports that, as the Society's financial year ends, the first indications are that we have had a good twelve months. There are a number of points worth commenting on. Firstly, the Society has

acquired a computer system and, so far, this has been used for designing a specialised accounts program which will be of considerable help in monitoring on-going ERDF expenditure. Indeed, it could be considered essential if we are successful in obtaining any further help in the future from this source. Another specialised program has been written which allows us to have a much more efficient booking system. Posters have been designed, and much back-up is now available for Belfast-based tours - already increased passenger figures have been evident. Our thanks to Christopher Boomer who slaved over a hot keyboard during the summer.

So what has all this to do with a finance report? Well, up to now, all back-up work has been carried out manually and this requires a mind-bending amount of examining and documenting of receipts, invoices, paid cheques and the submission of the claims to the ERDF (thanks here to Brian Hill). It also requires an ever more accurate breakdown of what we spend on each project and careful comparison of this against budgets. Lately, we have been informed that we may apply for a second stage of ERDF funding, commencing when the present programme ends in June 1994. It will run for 6 years, taking us to the turn of the century. A submission to the ERDF is at present being prepared which, if successful, will cover a wide range of work on our premises, locomotives and rolling stock - more details will be published if and when our submission is accepted. But one way or another, we will need our computer.

Better Belfast: One feature of this year's overall figures which has filtered through, even in advance of the year end totals, is that, yet again, we are very heavily dependent on tours for our income. So it is heartening to note that, after years of less than impressive performance, the Belfast-based operations are contributing a greater share of the takings. The southern operations, with the annual railtour, are still the main profit makers despite a number of operational adversities this season, not least a train cancelled by Irish Rail and one coach short for the whole summer. We would appeal to members, very often noticeably thin on the ground, to travel on a few more trips next year.

PUBLICITY

No Reply: The response to David

Humphries' appeal in the last news-letter to help deliver posters to offices and factories was NIL! Are there not even a few members out there in the greater Dublin area who would be willing to give those few hours 6 or 7 times a year to help David in his efforts to reach an even greater public? Go on - give him a call on Dublin 2888900, and don't be shy about leaving a message on his answering machine if he isn't in.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.3 "R.H. Smyth": The boiler has been successfully steam tested and replaced in its frames. The saddle tank has been repaired and the new smokebox positioned for riveting. This is complicated by the fact that the positions of tank, smokebox and chimney are inter-related and if they are incorrectly positioned the blastpipe will not be aligned with the chimney. A number of mechanical repairs are desirable but these will depend on availability of money and volunteers.

No.4: The inner firebox has been removed and the lower ¾ of wrapper and door plate had to be cut away due to extensive corrosion and cracking. Flanging blocks have been fabricated in preparation for construction of a new steel door plate for the firebox. The inner copper firebox is being repaired and re-riveted.

No.85 "Merlin": Replacement of firebox stays is almost complete and the boiler is being prepared for a hydraulic test.

No.171 "Slieve Gullion": Replacement of valve rings and re-boring of valve chests has taken place - the cylinders and pistons may need similar treatment.

No.461: Following the Greystones operations it was deemed essential that the recurring problem of No.461's hot axleboxes be thoroughly investigated. With the co-operation of Inchicore Works, the locomotive was stripped down by Charles Meredith, Brian Gillen, Tommy McQuillan, Peter Fletcher and Frank McAllister. The locomotive was lifted on Saturday 9th October and the offending axle and boxes were removed. The operation was covered photographically by Charles Friel and at least three video cameras. The scored journals are being trued up and work to repair the damage is progressing with the view to having the second lift and the motion put together again in plenty of time for the Santa specials. The opportunity is also being taken of carrying out a number of other desirable, but not crucial, jobs while the Inchicore

facilities are available,

Tender Care: The Locomotive Department has also been busy at Mullingar where teams from both Mullingar and Whitehead combined forces to effect the move of one of the Great Northern tenders to Whitehead for future use with No.85. It is a 'hopper' type, of 2,500 gallon capacity, and will be rebuilt with extended coal rails as on the tenders with which the compounds ran for most of their lives. The tank will also be enlarged.

CARRIAGE & WAGON

Mullingar: Work continues on the major rebuild of 1916 and 1463. With a bit of luck 1916 should be in traffic for the Christmas operations in December. Many members will be aware that, for the 1993 operations out of Dublin, it was necessary to borrow coaches from the Whitehead set. Unfortunately, this has left us a coach short in Dublin and with no spares at Whitehead. There are coaches such as 1327 lying out of traffic with relatively minor defects and it would not be sensible to spend the money transferring them to Whitehead for repairs when these could be carried out at Dublin or Mullingar. It is essential that more of the 'green set' be returned to traffic as soon as possible. So this is the chance for all members in the Dublin or Mullingar areas to use their practical skills to produce a Dublin-based train up to the usual high standard.

Don't forget there is a special weekend day return fare via Irish Rail to get you to Mullingar to assist Peter Emmett in his efforts on the coach front - phone Dublin 8217409 to get in touch.

WHITEHEAD

On Site: Dermot Mackie informs us that the water pressure at Whitehead has now been restored to its former glory by virtue of a new 50mm mains pipe, contrary to the report in the last news-letter (a rap on the knuckles accepted).

Sheer Delight: The last weeks of September saw elements of the second set of sheer-legs being sand-blasted, along with the new tender for No.85, and then painted in primer and finished with a top coat. These were assembled on Saturday 9th October and the legs were lifted into position with our invaluable hand-crane. Future work will include the restoration of the motors and gearboxes for each sheer-leg and some

track laying for the proposed turntable in the corner of the playing field adjoining the site. So, interesting times ahead for all track enthusiasts - don't miss out on this chance to get involved.

SALES

Main Lines: A variety of items is always available from H. Beaumont, 148 Hillsborough Road, Lisburn, Co. Antrim, BT27 59Y. The principal lines are: locomotive outline badges, now including GSR No.800 "Maebhdh"; books; videos; postcards; posters; drawings of Irish locomotives, coaches and wagons; back numbers of 5'3", Railway Magazine and Railway Modeller; old railway tickets; GNR(I) coats of arms; etc. Send details of your requirements to the above address.

New Products: Now available (all prices in sterling): 1994 calendar, 12 photographs of GNR(I) and County Donegal scenes in the Strabane area, £3.30. Reprints of various LMS(NCC) working timetables from 1939 onwards, £5.20. Irish narrow gauge books, "Cork To Cavan" and "Ulster Lines", 144 pages, £17 each.

GENERAL

"Irish Rail Collection": On the evening of Thursday 30th November the Council and a large contingent of invited members attended the opening of the new Rail Gallery at Cultra near Belfast. The gallery is set out to display the collection to its very best advantage and a visit is highly recommended. Local members are probably familiar with its location but southern members might like to know that the museum is rail connected - simply change trains at Belfast Central Station.

Envelopes: if any members have a source of unwanted envelopes the Secretary would be delighted to hear from them. It is not a problem if they are over-printed or have a logo.

Thanks: We would like to thank the staff at Ballylumford Power Station at Larne for responding to the request in the last news-letter for office equipment. We are now the owners of a fax machine. However, another machine would also be useful please.

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