

NEWS LETTER

June 1994

OPERATIONS

"Easter Bunny": These operations, on 2nd & 4th April, were given the go-ahead at a very late stage and this meant that the advance publicity was virtually non-existent. However, as the operations were being created as running in turns for No.171, they would have had to take place in any case. Therefore, we were not too concerned, especially as the costs were more than covered.

"Thank-You Special": Another running in trip used to good effect was the operation from Dublin to Mullingar, and return, with No.461 on 23rd April. By special invitation, the Society took the opportunity to thank various people who have helped us over recent years. At one stage it looked as if the trip might not take place due to impending industrial action on Iarnród Éireann, but in the event the latter did not happen.

"Lough Atalia": It was felt that the May railtour operation merited more extensive coverage so a separate report is included with the news-letter.

"Royal Canal": Still in Dublin following the railtour, and after the work on her left-hand big end, No.171 operated these trips. With some initial problems due to slight heat and poor coal, the day's proceedings did come together and the result was a successful and well patronised operation with a total of over 1,200 passengers travelling.

"Steam By Slieve Gullion": A new tour and a new title to replace the "Hills Of Donegal" operation. The latter was due to run on 4th June but was cancelled due to locomotive problems. The replacement tour, on the same date, was arranged as a means of swapping the two engines transposed due to the complications with the railtour. At the same time the opportunity was taken to recover some of the costs by advertising the operation to the public, with the added attraction of a section of double-heading. No.171 was worked light from Dublin to Dundalk where she was joined by No.461 which had arrived with its train from Whitehead. The pair were due to double-head to Poyntzpass where No.461

would be detached. In the event, Iarnród Éireann were unable to operate the double-headed portion and no official explanation was given. In the eyes of our customers this shows both the Society and the railway company in a very bad light - something we could well do without. Meanwhile No.461 continued light to Dublin and No.171 returned to Whitehead with the train.

"Classic Carrick": Such was the name given to a weekend of fun and games to attract people to the grand borough of Carrickfergus. As part of the festivities, the local council asked if steam rides could be operated on 5th June. Some problems were posed for locomotive rostering as it ran on the day following the "Steam By Slieve Gullion" operation. However, all was well apart from the train title committee, who were fresh out of ideas and simply stole the council's logo and repeated the "Easter Bunny" operation, with two return trips from Carrickfergus to Larne. Not too many people travelled however - a better publicity effort will be required if Carrickfergus Council want to repeat the operation in the future.

"Schools Days": After several years' absence, the Society once again organised a series of operating days for schools. During 7th and 8th June nearly 600 pupils and their teachers visited Whitehead, travelling from as far away as Enniskillen. The children were given an audio-visual presentation and a conducted tour around the site, followed by a train ride behind No.3 "R.H. Smyth". Many thanks to those who helped organise the event, especially those who took time off from work to act as guides for our visitors - the effort was appreciated by the teachers, many of whom complimented the Society on the work being carried out at Whitehead.

"Mid-Summer Night Steam": We went ahead with our barbecue special to Mullingar on 11th June as we had been able to obtain part sponsorship from Dawn Farm Foods for the event. Two years ago we had a very successful operation and were hoping to at least match that success this year. In the event our expectations were more than realised and a very good time was had by all, the local Irish Army catering team cooking 400 steaks to

perfection.

Greenisland Golf Club Charter: Also on 11th June, No.171 operated a special for Greenisland Golf Club to Larne. The majority of the participants came dressed in costumes from the Edwardian era and everybody entered into the spirit of things. Apart from the bar staff, that is - they were still charging 1994 prices!

Shunting Day: Unfortunately this operation, a training and refresher course in the art of shunting and hand signals, scheduled for 12th June had to be cancelled due to lack of interest from our members.

"Steam & Jazz": Planning for the mid-summer excursion from Belfast on 24th June is well advanced, with this year's theme being a sixties night. If we see a repeat of last year's frolics, it should be a great night's craic.

Summer Steam: Don't forget that bookings are now being taken for "Newry 850" and "The Strawberry Fair" operations on 2nd July, and the "Sea Breeze" and "Portrush Flyer" runs in July and August. There will also be train rides at Whitehead on Sundays in July from 2:30pm.

Steam Crews: As yet another driver approaches retirement on Iarnród Éireann, crewing problems are looming, especially on the Rosslare turns where two crews are required Iarnród Éireann are taking steps to train more crews but things are progressing very slowly and it will be next season at the earliest, but probably later, before any effects will be seen.

Ticket Sales: We are indebted to the Alliance & Leicester Building Society in Belfast (Wellington Place) and Iarnród Éireann in Dun Laoghaire, Malahide and Dublin (Pearse, Connolly, Travel Centre) for agreeing to act as ticket outlets. Without their assistance we would find it very difficult to deal with the number of tickets required for a season's operations.

Catering: Our long-serving chief steward on the Dublin based set, Tim Moriarty, has stood down and our thanks go to him for all the hard work he has put in over the past 6 years. Tim's replacement is Laura Gillen and we wish her well in the new post - it's a hard job keeping a hungry and thirsty clientele satisfied.

PUBLICITY

30 Years: As 1994 is the Society's 30th year in existence, we feel we should be publicising the fact, and we hope to have a logo to that effect on all our posters this year. Why the emphasis on the number thirty? Well, it is not so much the number itself as the fact that the Society has 30 years of organising tours behind it. Also, there are 30 years of experience in marketing, locomotive restoration and carnage

restoration under our belts. These facts should be repeated long and loud in the ears of those in the corridors of Tourism and Transport power in Belfast, London, and especially in Dublin. But loudest of all should be the echoes resounding around the corridors of those who have the ear of the men in Brussels controlling the purse strings.

Our Treasurer reports that the decision on the second ERDF programme has yet to be made, despite being promised before Easter. It may be that we will get less than hoped for from ERDF, so it is imperative that we try elsewhere. In all submissions we must emphasise our track record and 30 years is a long track which few in this business can match.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.3 "R.H. Smyth": It is hoped to have her ready by Schools Days in early June. The locomotive will be the star attraction for all those attending the shunting school at Whitehead on 12th June.

No.4: Welding of the boiler and firebox plates is progressing.

No.85 "Merlin": Assembly of the cab and boiler cladding is progressing.

No.171 "Slieve Gullion": Unfortunately, due to railtour commitments, a risk had to be taken and the engine was pressed into service on the tour without adequate running in, so running hot big ends on the Saturday came as no big surprise. The engine was subsequently taken to Dublin for examination.

No.461: Returned to traffic following work on her big ends and leaking stays. The success of the work can be judged by her excellent performance following No.171's departure from the railtour. Particularly outstanding was her run up the Great Northern mainline from Drogheda on the Monday of the tour.

Carlów Diesel: The gearbox will have to be removed for overhaul before the locomotive can return to service.

CARRIAGE AND WAGON

The Bogieman Returneth: After a spell of absence the Bogieman has removed the red flag and ventured out from under the axles. He has had a very hard winter but still has managed to produce a paragraph or two for us.

UFTM Move: Visitors to the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum's new Rail Gallery will have seen the Society's No.50, the GNR's Directors' Saloon there. Not any more - No.50 is required for the operating season in Belfast and she was replaced on 19th June by our ex-CIÉ diner

MULLINGAR

Facilities: Shower equipment and a cubicle have been purchased and these should be installed shortly, bringing a vast improvement in conditions on site, particularly for those who might consider staying overnight there. In addition, flooring for a toilet has been installed. Murrough O'Brien is tackling the ongoing problem of pigeons with wire netting which will be installed soon.

FÁS Scheme: Preliminary discussions are taking place with a view to setting up a government sponsored training scheme on Society projects at Mullingar. More details will be given if and when the idea comes to fruition.

WHITEHEAD

Sheer-Legs: The electrics and cabling of the gantries are now complete and the first lift, of coach 1142, took place on 21st May. Thanks to Dermot Mackie and his willing team, this facility will prove invaluable for the future overhaul of coaches.

Spray That Again: Like Iarnród Éireann and Northern Ireland Railways, the RPSI site squad like to keep their track free of weeds, and for that reason they try to spray the site at least as often as the railway companies. The annual spray and tidy up has just taken place and it is safe for all members to venture there again.

Summer Plans: Dermot's plans for the summer include the reinstatement of the damaged water column and moving some track panels from the platform to a safer position on the site.

SALES

New Products: Now available (all prices are in sterling):

- (1) **Books:** "Midland Great Western", 144pp, £18.99 (p+p £2.35); Irish Narrow Gauge Volume 1, "Cork To Cavan", 110pp, £15.99 (p+p £2.15); Irish Narrow Gauge Volume 2, "The Ulster Lines", 126pp, £15.99 (p+p £2.15).
- (2) **Videos** (p+p £0.89): Irish Railways Volume 1, 55min, £12; Irish Railways Volume 2, "Swansong Of Steam In Ulster" 63min, £14 99; Irish Railways Volume 3 (narrow gauge colour, 1939-59), 50min, £16 99; "The Portrush Flyer", (RPSI footage), 55min, £9.95.

Main Lines: A variety of items is always available from H. Beaumont, 148 Hillsborough

Road, Lisburn, Co. Antrim, BT27 5QY. The principal lines are: locomotive outline badges, including GSR No.800 "Maebhdh" @ £1 40; books; videos; postcards; posters; drawings of a selection of Irish locomotives, coaches and wagons; back numbers of 5'3", and various railway magazines; old tickets (mainly UTA and NIR); GNR(I) coats of arms. Send details of your requirements.

WANTED

Workers: Now that the good weather and long nights are here, there may be some members who are considering spending a little time at Mullingar or Whitehead. Peter Emmett or Murrough O'Brien will be able to provide details of opportunities at Mullingar. At Whitehead, Dermot Mackie has track nights every Tuesday evening from now until the end of the summer. Peter Scott and Gavin Martin usually have squads at work every weekend from 9 am onwards.

GENERAL

Dublin & Drogheda Railway: We have been informed of an exhibition currently running at Ardgillan Castle in Balbriggan, Co. Dublin Entitled "Aspects of the Dublin and Drogheda Railway 1884 - 1994", the exhibition is due to continue until mid-July. Opening times are 11 am to 6 pm Tuesday to Sunday and public holidays.

Society Video: The long awaited Society video, "The Portrush Flyer", is now finally available. The video, which was a great hit on the recent railtour, is the result of many hours of sweat and perseverance by Alan McRobert, our Whitehead carriage preparation PSR. Congratulations to Alan who is already producing a second run of tapes as the first sold out so quickly. Details of how to obtain your copy are given in the Sales section.

Corporate Image: Those members not in the know may be wondering why the name Iarnród Éireann appears throughout the news-letter. Well, that is the new title for Irish Rail as was. A new logo has been introduced on the latest timetables and it is expected to appear on locomotives before long. With the introduction of the new Japanese railcars there is even talk of sectorisation, with different liveries for Intercity and Suburban!

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REPORT OF THE "LOUGH ATALIA" RAILTOUR, MAY 1994

Every year during the normal summer season the past Railtour is just a memory in the back of your mind. A little akin to the pain of child-birth, your body makes you forget the pain and only remember the good bits. This year's tour was no exception - in spite of some of the most extensive surveying, planning, timing and attention to detail.

The first thing to go wrong was poor No.171's big end bearing, something no one can plan. But as usual the Railtour emergency committee came into its own with a quick re-arrangement of the schedule and off we went to Mostrim with No.461, not that far behind time.

Meanwhile Peter Scott and his team were re-assessing the situation and No.171 was given another chance. At Athlone No.171 traversed the Shannon Bridge two minutes early but the rest of the train was held to wait for the late running up Galway. The unexpected delay at Athlone did not help matters and we had to stop at Ballinasloe to water two engines - a slow process. We still hoped at that stage to run the local trips from Galway but eventually these had to be cancelled, and the buses and Banquet in Galway delayed. Even though we were late it did not seem all that bad, but disaster struck and No.171 had to be dropped at Athenry, meaning we arrived in Galway 2 hours 17 minutes late. My thanks to all those who attended the Banquet and made it such a success, having managed to find time to clean themselves.

On Sunday our thanks should go to Peter Scott for deciding to let No.171 double-head back into Athenry with No.461 and give those of us who travelled the thrill, and those on the lineside bus the chance for their photographs. I hope this made up for some of the other things that went wrong on the Sunday: the late departure from Galway - I still do not know why; a few water problems at both Athenry and Ennis and, after the quite good tender-first running into Ennis, the much slower run back. Some of this I know was due simply to weather conditions and slippage on the track coming into Athenry. 52 minutes late into Ballinasloe and we then had to wait to let two other trains cross - I am told by the lady who owned the shop close to the station that she lifted more during our stop than she would normally expect in a week. Problems were further compounded by having to wait to get the road after the Shannon Bridge, the reason, I am told, was that there were problems with a set of crossing gates.

Monday morning dawned dull and cold, and for those of us who remember last year, a touch of déjà vu reigned as we stood on the platform wondering why the Vintage Set was still there and the Cravens Set absent. The truth is I do not believe anyone knows why, in either the Society or IÉ. With the late arrival of the Cravens Set, there was no time to letter the coaches and some missed out on milepost seats. Sorry - I hope the fact we did get to Navan made up for the disaster that started the day. It has been quite some time since our last visit and I was among the many really looking forward to it. After Navan we managed to hold to the schedule extremely well, No.461 actually managing to make up 13 minutes on one stretch and with the best running of the entire tour arrived 2 minutes early at Knockmore. From Lisburn we made it to Yorkgate without too much problem and from there the engine can find its own way home.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank all of the Railtour Committee for their dedication and hard work over the many months taken to plan this tour, and to the others who gave up time to make the weekend all it was to everyone. My very special thanks of course go to Michael McMahon - 'double heading' a tour with him can be an extremely tiring but educational experience and I only hope I can live up to his high standards over as many years as I can stick the pace.

Heather Boomer
Belfast Area Operations Officer