

NEWS LETTER

August 1994

FINANCE

ERDF: Our three year programme of grant aid from the European Regional Development Fund is now almost at a close. We have claimed almost all the allowable £366,000 between 1991 and the present, and only the last few thousand remains. This is a suitable time to review our present and our future.

When ERDF aid first became available we had two running sets of carriages, and with No.461 not then quite ready, one engine in traffic, although all our vehicles were very much in need of overhaul.

Over the previous few years there had just been no money available at all for carriage work, even quite important maintenance; and with only one engine serviceable we had to concentrate all our railtour efforts for one season in Dublin, where most money was then to be had.

Had ERDF not come along the RPSI would be a very much more low-key organisation now than it is. We have been fortunate in being able to do so much work over the period since. The return to traffic of No.171, No.3 and Dining Car 87 would have been impossible in the timescale without ERDF. A host of other smaller, but equally important jobs were also funded, the return to traffic of the GNR Directors' Saloon and the new sheer-legs at Whitehead being two examples. The visible results of many of the projects may not be immediately obvious but they were necessary to satisfy the ever more stringent requirements of our insurers and the railway companies.

During last year we were invited to make a submission for a second round of funding and early indications were that this would

run consecutively after the first, thus allowing continuity of work on designated projects and retention of our regular sub-contractors. Unfortunately, this was not to be and we are now relying, once again, on purely volunteer labour at Whitehead and Mullingar. As the Locomotive and Carriage

Officers will testify, the sub-contractors have been a great boon to the Society over the past few years, and we can only ask our volunteers to make a special effort to help that little bit more.

However, we have submitted a programme which, if approved, will allow us to continue our high level of restoration and maintenance work

right to the end of the decade. At present, we are expecting news within a few months, and this will be passed on when we get it.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.3 "R.H. Smyth": Now in traffic at Whitehead, having operated the Sunday train rides in July. The smaller locomotive allows us more flexibility to operate train rides, and the opportunity was also taken to train steam raisers as firemen on these days.

No.4: The new outer firebox sides and door plate have been welded in place. The next stage is drilling and riveting of the seams, followed by reassembly of the inner firebox. Work has been temporarily stopped due to the completion of the ERDF programme and all available manpower is being concentrated on No.85 and on running repairs to No.171.

No.23: Having given valiant service for many years, the Whitehead shunting diesel failed recently with a broken main shaft between engine and gearbox.

No.85 "Merlin": The boiler has been refitted and most reassembly work has been completed. The locomotive is now paired with tender No.73 which has been rebuilt similar to the tenders which ran with the compounds for most of their life. Major pipe-work and painting is still to be completed, for a proposed steam test during August.

No.171 "Slieve Gullion": The big end which gave trouble on the railtour is running in after overhaul on the Belfast-based excursions. Broken tender springs are proving to be a problem.

No.461: The overhauled driving axleboxes, journals and big ends are proving satisfactory. Damaged firebars are being replaced - no definite cause for the damage has been established.

Carlow Diesel: The gearbox is being overhauled as time permits. A damaged oil distribution bearing effectively means that third and fourth gears will not operate.

BELFAST AREA MEETINGS

Winter Season: Enclosed with this mailing should be the notice of Charles Friel's next season of meetings. Any member who can make it to St. Jude's over the winter will undoubtedly be rewarded by an entertaining evening - highly recommended.

CARRIAGE & WAGON

Vacancy: Gavin Martin, our Whitehead Carriage & Wagon Officer, has unfortunately had to stand down from the post due to pressure from other commitments. Jim Bromfield has agreed to look after the day to day running of the Whitehead projects but he is not keen to sit on Council. We therefore have a vacancy and all members are welcome to consider being co-opted on to Council, at least until the next AGM.

Dublin Set: Work continues on 1916 at Mullingar, although it is unlikely now that we will see this coach back in traffic during 1994 unless there is a considerable increase in the number of work parties. The Park Royal has had some of her exterior panelling replaced and has received a much needed coat of paint. 1327 is still in Mullingar awaiting replacement springs. 1469, now at Whitehead, has been partially stripped for the repair of rotted structural timbers. The rot is mainly due to water

overflow from the tank fillers and leaks from the narrow section rain-strip with which these coaches were fitted. In future, the 14xx series of coaches will be fitted with a gutter of larger cross-section.

Seats: Travellers on both our sets this year will have noticed the reduced number of coaches. The problem is particularly bad in Dublin where we are having great difficulty in restoring vehicles to traffic, although this was alleviated to some extent when a number of coaches were sent south from the scarce supply at Whitehead. We badly need the Dublin area members to make an effort on the carriage front because even if there were more vehicles available at Whitehead the cost of transferring them south is prohibitive. The fact that Whitehead has more facilities is no excuse as there is plenty that can be done elsewhere with simple brushes, hammers, nails, screwdrivers and saws.

FÁS Scheme: Briefly mentioned in the last issue, it is broadly similar to the NIACRO and ACE schemes in the UK, both of which we have benefitted from at Whitehead in the past. If successful, it is planned that a small, government-sponsored, carriage workforce will be established at Mullingar to turn out much needed vehicles there. Although we still intend to set up the project, with the end of the 75% ERDF grant programme, possibly only a quarter of what was originally planned may now be feasible.

NCC 243: For a number of reasons this coach is of great importance to us: (1) it's the only example of its class left; (2) it will be the most extensive coach restoration the Society has ever undertaken; (3) with its completion, and the return to traffic of locomotive No.4, we will be able to turn out a 7 coach train for the "Portrush Flyer" which is entirely NCC. About £5,000 needs to be spent to finish the restoration and the Carriage & Wagon Department is seeking 64 members who can subscribe £8 a month by standing order from September to May next year. The subscribers will each get a certificate of appreciation, photographs of No.243 before, during and after restoration, and will travel as the Society's guests on the initial outing of the coach to Portrush. Please write to: Coach No.243 Appeal, Whitehead Excursion Station, Castlevue Road, Whitehead, Co. Antrim, BT38 9NA.

A Final Thought: The standard of

presentation of our coaches, while maybe not all it should be, has been raised significantly in the last few years. Incredibly, one of the National Railway Museum's party on the "Lough Atalia" railtour commented that ours were the "best toilets ever seen on a preserved train". It's a small point but one that counts for a lot when our most numerous passenger is the one-day excursionist from the general public. Presentation is mainly a matter of manpower, and not money.

OPERATIONS

"Steam & Jazz Night": On the evening of 24th June we had four hours of traditional jazz with the beat of "Slieve Gullion" in the background and accompanied by Auntie Rita's wine and cheese supper. These were the goings-on inside the train - outside, the destination was Larne Harbour (twice, in theory). Due to a delay at Carrickfergus on the attempted return to the Harbour, we made recent history by running round at Magheramorne Loop, although it is doubtful whether most of those on board were aware that the train had even stopped. All in all this was a memorable trip on a beautiful mid-summer evening on a most under-rated railway route.

"Strawberry Fair": The annual outing to Enniscorthy - on 2nd July this year - has continued to prove very popular.

"Newry 850": Planned for 2nd July, this was always going to be an operation carrying a lot of risk, what with the distances involved and pressure from the Locomotive and Finance departments. On the Tuesday before the operation the Newry 850 organisers informed us that bookings were slow but that this was normal for their events, with usually a last minute rush for tickets. Unfortunately, this was not sufficient for us to allow the operation to go ahead - even though it was underwritten by £1,000 - so we decided to cancel. The return postal bookings didn't take long as only one member had actually booked through the Railtour Office. The outcome is inexplicable because the publicity for the operation was very good. In the end, the risk just wasn't worth taking as there is a very high number of expensive empty train miles involved in getting to Newry, in the hope that sufficient numbers turn up on the day. Something similar, based on Newry or Dundalk, may

be possible when the Belfast rail link is complete, making stock transfers from Whitehead significantly cheaper.

On the subject of members booking for the one day excursions, the Belfast Area Operations Officer reports that only three members have used the Summer Steam booking forms for northern trips. Are members booking through ticket outlets, or are they simply not travelling on our trains?

"Portrush Flyer": The first operation of the season got off to a great start with a full train, and standing room only on the Castlerock extension. Unfortunately, the return trip was marred by stone throwing at Templepatrick and one elderly passenger was slightly hurt. However, the local police managed to arrest those concerned and Northern Ireland Railways will be bringing prosecutions.

On 30th July, also a successful day of operation, the GS&WR coach 1097 saw service for the first time in its new guise as a wheelchair saloon when a party of disabled passengers travelled. It was only because the Whitehead team burned a great deal of midnight oil and with some inspired improvisation that the coach was able to provide such satisfactory lavatory facilities for our passengers.

"Sea Breeze": The outing on 23rd July, the first of two operations to Wexford and Rosslare, operated very successfully.

Coming Attractions: Our next outings are to Portrush on 13th & 27th August, Wexford on 20th August, Greystones on 11th September and Derry on 17th September.

SALES

Main Lines: A variety of items is always available from RPSI Postal Sales, 148 Hillsborough Road, Lisburn, Co. Antrim, BT27 5CW. 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.

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