

NEWS LETTER

April 1995

AGM

Comment: The 1995 AGM has come and gone. It was a reasonably non-controversial affair and our thanks go to the RPSI President, Lord O'Neill, for the competent manner in which he conducted the meeting. It was good to see Lord O'Neill back in the chair, annual commitments in February having prevented him from attending in recent years - indeed, it was for this reason that the AGM was held in early March this year.

The main topic this year, as in most previous years, was the locomotive versus carriage argument. The locomotive and timing fraternity believe that money spent on the current wooden-bodied stock is money wasted which could be better spent on locomotives, and on obtaining steel coaches. On the other hand, carriage fans believe that public operations are the main source of income and we should retain vintage stock, as that is what the general public wants to travel in. Doubtless, this is a topic of conversation that will run and run - at least until the wooden-body ban is extended, or until steel coaches become available to the Society.

There was some criticism at the meeting that the venue was Whitehead, this supposedly being a reason why members might not attend. With the opening of the Dargan Bridge in Belfast, and direct rail access now available, the Council felt it appropriate that the AGM should return to Whitehead after an absence of many years. It should be noted that 66 members attended, a 50% increase on the previous northern AGM which was held in Belfast, adjacent to the main railway station! Requests for a more suitable venue than the Society's own base are eagerly awaited.

There have been suggestions that we need a more informal forum in which members can discuss the business of the Society

and perhaps be persuaded to contribute more to the Society in various ways. These ideas are being investigated by the Council and it is possible something may come of them. Indeed, there are currently some moves afoot to find out whether we can run an open day at Whitehead, it being many years since such an event was held.

Welcome: With the retirement of Peter Emmett and Joe McKeown from the Council - many thanks to them for their time and effort - the AGM saw the return to Council of old-timer Joe Fitzpatrick, as the Dublin Area Operations Officer. Also elected, for the first time, was Brian Gillen as the Southern Carriage and Wagon Officer.

OPERATIONS

Lovers' Special: Belfast operations got off to a good start this year with an unexpected charter from Ulster Television's "Kelly Show". The "Kelly Love Train" consisted of No.85 and a train complete with a red padded heart-shaped headboard - enough to make any loco enthusiast commit hari kari. Inside and out, the train was festooned with dozens of red roses and balloons. As the train was destined for Bangor, the route to which is mostly through wooded cuttings, the balloons didn't last too long on the outside.

The music from a piano in the vestibule of 50, and the crack from a cast of local radio and television personalities, kept the group of hopeful lovers happy as we travelled. The event was organised at very short notice so unfortunately it was impossible to get the information to members in advance. The operation was recorded and interviews with selected participants were televised on the show on Saturday 11th February.

"Easter Bunny": Easter Monday, 17th April, is our next day of operation. Starting from Belfast Central, there will be 2 return trips to Carrickfergus (11:45 and 15:10) and 2 return trips to Lisburn (13:25 and

16:40). Fares will be £4, including Easter eggs for the children. An all-day ticket can be obtained for £12 from the Railtour Office, 22 Town Lane, Islandmagee, Co, Antrim, BT40 3SZ.

There is a roster for these operations and Heather Boomer (c/o the Railtour Office) would urgently like to hear from those interested in helping out.

VE Day: The first Saturday in May sees us back on the Bangor line with a series of shuttles chartered by North Down Borough Council to commemorate the VE celebrations. All tickets are being marketed through the council.

Greystones Shuttles: A busy weekend for the Society finishes with 3 trips to Greystones on Sunday 7th May.

"William Dargan": After a slow start, the arrangements for the tour are starting to come together at last, and the final booking forms have now been mailed. It is still not too late to ask for a form. Double-heading two Great Northern engines on the Cork main line must surely be the event of the year in these islands, and not to be missed.

There was a slight hope that we might have had the chance of visiting Dundalk Barrack Street on the return journey to Whitehead. The former station is on the Irish North-Western / Great Northern / Dundalk & Greenore meeting point and was latterly used as a goods depot for the Dundalk area. It is now likely to close before May, its function being transferred to a new depot on the stub of the Irish North line.

Members not travelling on the main tour are reminded that the fringe events are open to all. Firstly, Saturday 13th May sees the tour train going to Dundalk, then on Friday 19th May, there is a bus tour to the Wicklow Mountains and Glendalough high level power scheme. On Monday 22nd May, the tour train returns from Dublin to Whitehead. Finally, on Tuesday 23rd May, there is a bus tour of Belfast's harbour estate followed by a visit to the Whitehead site.

A large number of chasers are anticipated this year and we would ask that they contribute something to the Society for their fun. Copies of the schedule will be available from the Railtour Office for £10 (at least). Chasers are also asked to show consideration for landowners and for other

road users.

"The Big Breakfast Express": The Society is helping out in a national day (23rd May) of fund raising for Cancer Research, by running a breakfast time charity special from Belfast Central to Antrim or Ballymena (destination to be confirmed). Tickets can be obtained through Cancer Research's Belfast office.

Summer Steam: The booking forms for operations in both the Belfast and Dublin areas are included. Why not go out and canvass among your friends and relations and use them to help fill all the trains this year? You could even consider getting a party together.

Charters: We already have a firm booking for a private charter in 1996 and tentative enquiries about other dates that year, as well as one for 1998! These aside, both operations officers would be delighted to receive more requests, as not all come to fruition or, indeed, are feasible. So pass the word round to your business colleagues, sports clubs, etc.

Tickets: Our planned outlets this year are: the Alliance & Leicester Building Society, Wellington Place, Belfast; the Carrickfergus Tourist Office; the Educational Building Society, Dublin (branches to be confirmed); Iarnród Éireann, Abbey Street and Pearse station, Dublin.

Steam Crews: The provision of railway company steam crews is becoming a real threat to our operations so the Society is now trying to formalise a training programme with Northern Ireland Railways. We have had NIR trainee firemen on our northern operations for quite a few years now and the procedure for passing them out is now being negotiated with the company.

If anything, the situation in the Dublin is worse. A training programme a few years ago was starting to show some promise when, for a number of reasons, over half the trainees became unavailable for further training. It is hoped, however, to start another programme before the summer with a new group of volunteers from Iarnród Éireann's diesel drivers.

RPSI Crews: The Society crews are not being neglected when it comes to training. Peter Scott's squad of passed drivers, firemen, steam raisers and shunters are being required to undergo annual

assessment as to the number of turns worked each year, and their competence to remain on their present grades will be evaluated. The summer train rides at Whitehead are used to introduce new faces to the operating grades, and to give old hands the chance to brush up on their skills.

Royal Crimson: Not a livery colour, but the shade of the Belfast Operations Officer's face after a recent Royal outing. On 9th March, the Queen opened the new Dargan rail bridge in Belfast, and Heather Boomer was in attendance as a guest of Northern Ireland Railways. Sometime during the day she - Heather that is, not the Queen - managed to trip, cracking a bone in her elbow. The arm will be in plaster for a number of weeks, but we are assured it will be in full working order for the railtour in May when it gets its annual exercise at the bar. We are also assured that this was not the reason Heather tipped in the first instance.

MEMBERSHIP

1995 Subscription: Once again, many thanks to all who paid their subscriptions so promptly, especially if a donation was included or a covenant form filled in. Apologies are due to some members who pay by standing order into our Dublin account - there was a delay in receiving a statement detailing the payments and this resulted in some cards being slightly late. Hop-fully the majority were received in time for the AGM.

CARRIAGE & WAGON

Spring Is Here: You might not think it but spring is in fact here and the Heuston coaching gang, under the direction of David Humphries, is doing fine work on the southern set in the yard of the Dublin station. First to be tackled is Bredin 1335, to be followed by our Park Royals.

At Mullingar: 1916 is proceeding towards completion. Springs for Bredin 1327 have returned, having been re-tempered by Messrs Pierce of Wexford.

At Whitehead: Laminate coach 1469, previously destined for the scrap line, has been examined and found to have been less of a restoration task than first thought. A return to traffic may be as early as Easter

thanks to hard work by sub-contractor David Marcus.

Similarly, NCC coach 68 is currently receiving attention and is expected back in traffic for the summer season. Some extra help on these coaches would be appreciated.

In Transit: At the time of writing still in Dublin awaiting transfer to Whitehead, it is hoped that NCC brake 91 will be made ready in time for the May railtour.

A New Livery: Which are the two latest coaches to be painted in the standard GSR / NCC maroon? 1327 in Mullingar? 243 in Whitehead? Neither actually. Iarnród Éireann seem to have taken a shine to the RPSI's standard colour scheme and have introduced a maroon livery with yellow lining to two coaches in their Mark 3 Executive Set.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.4: Undergoing boiler repairs as time permits. A restoration proposal has been submitted to the Finance Committee for a budget to expedite return to traffic.

No.85 "Merlin": Front end steam heating was installed prior to the "Kelly Show" charter.

No.171 "Slieve Gullion": The tender repairs are coming to a conclusion. Some work is being carried out on the valve gear. The intention is to have this locomotive working the Easter operations, although it is not yet certain whether all the necessary work will be finished in time.

No.461: Repairs are being undertaken in preparation for its insurance examination.

Carlow Diesel: The gear wheel parts have arrived but await fitting.

Unilok: This small road/rail vehicle, purchased from Northern Ireland Railways, has arrived at Whitehead. It is powered by a Volkswagen Beetle engine and, when overhauled, may go to Mullingar to act as a shunter if the FAS scheme there comes to fruition.

MULLINGAR

FAS: A draft licence for the use of extended premises at Mullingar has been received from CIE and is being considered by the Society legal and insurance advisers. If agreeable, it will clear the way

for the scheme to be progressed considerably.

Some expenditure will be required at the site, namely a fence to secure the existing and newly acquired areas of the Mullingar yard area. The work will also involve the construction of a new roadway to allow lorries and other heavy machinery access to the site.

Steam Museum: Certain official bodies in the Co. Westmeath region are hinting at plans to have a steam museum in the Mullingar / Athlone area. Representatives of the Society have attended a meeting but any action would be a long way in the future, if ever.

WHITEHEAD

Concrete Progress: The carriage shed is currently having a concrete floor installed up to rail level. A budget of £1,000 has been allowed and, starting from the shed doors, as much concrete as can be bought for this amount will be laid.

Spring Cleaning: The site was given a much needed clean up before the AGM and this was much appreciated by our visitors, both on the day and on the next day when a party from the International Association of Transport Museum Curators dropped in. The latter, holding their first ever convention in Ireland, were suitably impressed by what they saw, especially the display of hand riveting which Peter Scott and his squad were carrying out.

SALES

New Products: Reprints of the Clearing House map of Irish railways will be available shortly at £3, including p&p.

Main Lines: We have most of the current Irish railway books in stock, including: Midland Great Western History, £20.99; Irish Steam Loco Register £15.95; The Newry Railways In Pictures, £5; Irish Railways, Traction & Travel, £11.95. Our videos include: RPSI's Steam and Scenery £10.95; Twilight Of Steam In Ulster, £16.99. The prices are in Sterling and include postage & packing.

We also keep: coloured locomotive badges, including GSR No.800 "Maedhbh"; old tickets; timetables; tour brochures; magazines; post-cards; GNRB coats of arms; drawings and posters. Send details

of your requirements to: Henry Beaumont, 148 Hillsborough Road, Lisburn, Co. Antrim, BT27 50Y.

Branded RPSI Items: Pens, pencils, pencil sharpeners, rulers, key-rings, notepads, book-marks, etc., specially produced for the Society. Write to: Caroline Stewart, 1(A) Carnhill Road, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim, BT36 6LA.

FINALLY

Winter Meetings: It is certain that any member who attended any of the meetings at St. Jude's during the winter would want to congratulate Charles Friel and his speakers for the excellent presentations. It is not an easy task to maintain the high standard, so Charles would be interested in receiving suggestions of subjects for next season. Even better if you could put together a show (or half a show) yourself.

"Five Foot Three": Once again our Editor, Nelson Poots, has produced an excellent issue of the magazine, despite an absence of articles of southern interest. It is recognised that the Irish Railway Record Society journal caters more for this region but it would be nice also to receive contributions for our own magazine.

Wanted (North): The Society's Treasurer, John Beaumont, would be interested in receiving a second-hand photocopier in reasonable order. The current specimen is life expired.

Wanted (South): Likewise, Joe Fitzpatrick is seeking the donation of a photocopier and fax machine for use in the Dublin area.

Photographers: Paul Tyrer Photography of 34 Florence Road, Maidstone, Kent, ME16 8EL is offering a printing service for black & white negatives of up to 6x9 cm, and also a print renovation service. Paul says, "Every negative is hand printed and treated with respect as most members may well have old negatives which need special attention". Further information can be obtained from the classified section in Steam Railway.

EDITORIAL ADDRESS

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