

NEWS LETTER

August 1995

"MICHAEL COLLINS"

Latest: As reported in the June newsletter, the Society has received a contract for three day's work on the film of the life of Michael Collins, starring Liam Neeson and Julia Roberts, and directed by Neil Jordan. Of course, the real star is No.461, with No.171 and the Southern coaching set co-starring. No.171 has been painted black temporarily, while the coaches have gained a GS&WR/MGWR maroon livery which will remain for the foreseeable future.

Shooting has already started - at Rush & Lusk and Laytown on the GN main line on 16th July, and at Pearse, Dublin, on 30th July when both locomotives were used for platform scenes and false starts. Further scenes, including an on-board fight, are planned for filming near Wicklow in late August.

OPERATIONS

Sunday Train Rides: Despite little in the way of advertising, the Sunday operations have been building in popularity again.

"Hills Of Donegal": The run on 10th June was one of the best supported yet but is still a borderline operation on profitability. Running now for several years, it has not proved to be as successful as we would like, and the Operations Committee feel that reliable profitability cannot be achieved until there are additional passing loops between Castlerock and Londonderry, and ideally a turntable in Londonderry, thus shortening what is otherwise a very long day which puts off many of the day trippers. The Operations Committee have reluctantly recommended that we do not run this train next year, but they're looking at an alternative operation to Newry or Dundalk.

"Mid-Summer Night Steam": A well filled

train operated to Mullingar where the participants partook of barbecued steaks. We are grateful for the assistance of Dawn Farm Foods and the catering Sergeant at St. Columb's Barracks, Mullingar.

"Steam & Jazz": On a glorious Friday evening in June, our train left Belfast Central for Poyntzpass, surely one of our more unusual destinations! The Apex Jazz Band (some say Ireland's finest) kept our full load of passengers entertained, and the trip was judged by all to be a resounding success. Already ideas are being put forward for next year.

"Strawberry Fair": No.461 was back on familiar D&SER territory running in connection with the "Fair" at Enniscorthy.

"Portrush Flyer": It's been a good season so far. The first train on 15th July was well filled, carrying about 75% load, while the second on 29th July was totally filled - and that was with 9 coaches! Similarly, the 12th August operation was a sell-out, and bookings for 26th August are going well - at the time of writing the train is nearly half full and we expect it to fill up before it runs.

The Castlerock Excursions have also been doing well, the first one being virtually full, although the second was lighter. However, on that day we were competing with the Senior Open Goff at Royal Portrush, and local traders told us that the town had been quiet all week. If the hot weather keeps up (yes, it's been hot in Portrush!) we can expect good loadings for the last train.

"Sea Breeze": Loadings were much as for last year on the run to Rosslare on 29th July but this year's larger train meant a number of empty seats.

Unfortunately, the second operation, on 19th August was cancelled by Iarnród Éireann because of complaints of lineside fires in the Wicklow area. The recent hot weather has made the hedges prone to fires, and our trains are an easy target for blame, despite the area having many

popular lineside paths. David Humphries has defended the RPSI's operations in an interview in a local Wicklow newspaper, but we feel it is probably best to be seen as environmentally responsible and agree to the cancellation.

"Maynooth Shuttle": Don't forget these popular and scenic shuttle journeys on 10th September.

"Atlantic Coast Express": The best supported of the Derry trips, it is proving popular again this year, with bookings coming in steadily. The Foyle Valley Railway tell us they will be staging a Gala Day on that Saturday. So if you haven't booked for 16th September contact us now to make sure of your ticket.

"The Phoenix": You've probably heard the rumours; you might have seen it in the magazines; now we can confirm it's official! Arising from the ashes of 1976, Great Victoria Street re-opens at the end of September, and on Sunday 1st October No.85 will work the first public special into the new station before giving us a run up the main line to Dundalk. It should be a spectacular day! Book now to ensure your place!

"Santa Special": Yes, it's hot and sunny, but we're already planning our most intensive operations, manpower-wise. With the exception of the annual railtour, the Christmas operations are now our most profitable ventures - we can't afford not to make a success of them. We plan to operate on a total of 7 days from Belfast and Dublin, and that means 14 Santa rosters to be filled, not to mention stewards, helpers, ticket checkers, etc. Just this once, PLEASE make an effort to help, if only for one day. Don't ask the same overworked few to carry it all again!

Extras: As well as filming in the Dublin area, No.461 (out of steam) and the GN Directors' saloon (hailed specially from Whitehead) were in attendance at Dublin Heuston on 13th July as part of the celebrations of 100 years of Irish railway catering. The occasion was used by Iarnród Éireann to launch their Network Catering. No.50 was the venue for an exhibition of historical catering material and it attracted much favourable comment from the guests dining in the Executive train. A unique line-up consisted of an IE 201 class locomotive, Mk III coaches with No.461

and 50.

Little Weed: No, not the return of Bill and Ben, but a cautionary tale instead. With most of the steam operations in England and Wales wiped out because of the hot dry weather, and the consequent fire risk, the RPSI summer steam season (at least in the north) has been like an oasis in the desert and enjoyed considerable success. However, the "Portrush Flyer" on 29th July ran into different problems. Trouble started to appear by Antrim, when the train was delayed because of injector problems. The difficulties persisted throughout the day, and got progressively worse on the journey home, to the extent that we abandoned the trip at Ballymena. The passengers were put on the following NIR service train, to ensure that they made their onward connections to Larne and Bangor, and the driver and guard were whisked by taxi to York Road, where GM112 was waiting ready to go. The loco reached Ballymena a little after 10 pm and hauled the train back to Whitehead, reaching there about 1 am.

Sunday morning saw investigations into the problem under way, and these rapidly revealed the cause to be a blockage in the tender water feeds to the injectors. Warm weather earlier in the summer had caused a major growth of algae and water weed in Lisburn water tank. The weed blocked the strainers in the tender and thus prevented sufficient water reaching the injectors.

To prevent a repeat, members of the Society's Locomotive and Operating Departments have started a programme of cleaning and refurbishing the water tanks regularly used for steam operations. Already Lisburn tank has been drained to reveal weed growths over 8 feet long! The sieve box in the tank has collapsed under this, and remedial works are now in hand, although the supply in Lisburn was not available for the operation on 12th August. It is now planned to carry out work on all the tanks as soon as possible.

Crew Training: Negotiations are continuing with NIR with regard to the publishing of a formal steam crew training and qualification procedure, and with Iarnród Éireann on the commencement of a training scheme.

Safety First: Following similar discussions with Iarnród Éireann, NIR are making their safety training video available to Society

crews The NIR Track Safety leaflet has also been copied for issue to RPSI personnel.

LOCOMOTIVES

"No.3 "R.H. Smyth": In traffic at Whitehead for shunting and Sunday train rides.

No.4: The inner firebox has been installed and work is now concentrated on other areas.

No.23: Still restricted in use for light shunting.

No.85 "Merlin": In traffic and none the worse for the weed growth in the tender.

No.171 "Slieve Gullion": Having come north to Whitehead, along with North Atlantic brake, on Sunday 18th June, following repairs to the motion pin which had broken just before the William Dargan Railtour, the locomotive returned to Dublin for film work. Some lubrication problems have been reported.

No.461: A tendency to blow glands is being cured by the fitting of a replacement set.

Carlow Diesel: The engine has been started successfully but some gearbox problems still remain to be attended to.

GENERAL

Retirement (1): Joe Fitzpatrick, our southern Operations Officer will be retiring from Council at the end of September. Everybody who knows Joe will appreciate the effort he has put into the Society over the years in various departments. Many thanks Joe!

Retirement (2): At a brief ceremony at Mullingar on 17th June, Sullivan Boomer presented engraved tankards to recently retired IE steam drivers Ned Dunphy, Joe Murphy and Nicky Moore. Also present was retired inspector, Jack Aherne who featured on many an RPSI train. Jack most recently was to be found instructing locomotive crews on "Le Shuttle".

English Steam: Previously unpublished photographs of English steam trains and sheds from the early 1960s are required for a new book. McCreadie Publishing of 58/60 Rivington Street, London,

EC2A 3AY, are willing to pay for any prints used.

Pop Coaches: 1335 and 238 are being used in the shooting of a music video by The Corrs".

Track Laying: Balfour Beattie and Railtrack are both tendering for the renewal contract for sections of NIR's GN line in the border area. Obviously, any equipment these companies possess would be of the 4'8½" variety. Naturally, as the third largest railway company in Ireland, the RPSI was approached for the supply of locomotives and rolling stock of 5'3" gauge. Both companies have requested the loan of rail flats, which we may be able to provide in the form of redundant carriage underframes. Railtrack, however, also require motive power and are apparently willing to consider using steam engines. It is more than likely that Iarnród Éireann and NIR between them will carry out the work but the fact that the Society should be considered is more than interesting.

FINANCE

Tour Viability: Both northern and southern operations are showing moderately healthy activity, with seemingly better seat occupancy. We are learning more and more on what types of operation make money, and which don't. For example the decision has been taken to drop one of the Derry trips next year as several years' trial have not produced a meaningful return.

Seat Occupancy: There is a gradual increase in the number of parties booking on tours, and 40 to 50 is not an uncommon size for these groups. The Treasurer would like to encourage members to get their local church or special interest group to try a day out with us.

Commercial: Our Treasurer would like to appeal to members to support our commercial activities as much as possible. We now have a wide range of items but if you have any other requirements, please let us know.

"Michael Collins": Following our contract with Warner Brothers, and after we pay for coal and other costs incurred, we should have a sizeable sum to put towards the restoration of locomotive No.4, as well as a few other urgent items. Full details will

follow when they are finalised.

ERDF: 5 potential project proposals, totalling £160,000 have been submitted for approval: a luxury carriage; a workshop coach; the locomotive workshop; the restoration of No.4; the installation of a turntable at Whitehead.

BELFAST AREA MEETINGS

New Season: Hopefully you will have received a poster announcing the details of the forthcoming meetings. If you live in Northern Ireland, please display your poster in a public place - a library or place of work, for instance.

The first meeting on 11th October is open to anyone who would like to contribute about 20 slides on a suitable theme. Contact Charles Friel to book your spot, or for extra posters.

Fred Cooper is giving his "Irish Steam Cinema" a break this year, although we hope to have him back next season. Fred has given over 20 shows to RPSI members and guests over the years, including filling the hall every year since 1980!

Remember, if it's the second Wednesday of the month, it must be St. Jude's!

MULLINGAR

Vandalism: The fire at Mullingar (see separate carriage report) was a serious blow for the Society, but the fact remains that the carriages were easy targets, not being under lock and key nor fenced off from access by anybody who cared to throw a match in through an open window. As many as possible of the better vehicles remaining on the site will now be accommodated in the shed. We are still awaiting confirmation from CIÉ that we can commence our FÁS scheme there.

WHITEHEAD

Recent Developments: Nothing much has been happening on the site during July due to the holidays. However, Paul Maxwell did manage to paint the JCB.

The water column is now functioning, complete with its own water bag, and some repairs are underway to the pump at the base of the water tower before the whole

system can be declared complete.

The side braces for the heavy lift gantry have been made up and fitted. Brake 91, after its recent return from Dublin, visited the gantry for a change of wheelset, thus enabling the vehicle to run on the second "Portrush Flyer".

Vandalism Again: Over £2,000 worth of carriage materials were stolen from the site on the 11th July, presumably for a local bonfire. On this occasion we were lucky that the intruders removed the timber from the site for burning rather than repeating what happened at Mullingar. Unlike Mullingar, the stolen articles were fenced off but this latest incident shows what the determined vandal can, and is prepared to, do when there is something he covets.

Can anyone help with the supply of barbed wire, thorn hedges, climbing roses, etc., to deter further intruders?

SALES

New Products: 1996 Steam Railway Calendar (featuring No.85); 1927 Railway Clearing House maps of Ireland; a selection of new books; a colour poster featuring Society locomotives.

Main Lines: We stock most of the current Irish railway books and videos. Our branded RPSI items include coloured locomotive badges, postcards, posters, 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.

Vintage Lines: For old tickets (mainly UTA and NIR), timetables, tour brochures, magazines, back numbers of "Five Foot Three", GNR(I) and GSR coats of arms, drawings of a selection of Irish locomotives, coaches and wagons, etc., send details of your requirements to: Henry Beaumont, 148 Hillsborough Road, Lisburn, Co. Antrim, BT27 50Y.

EDITORIAL ADDRESS

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