

NEWS LETTER

December 1995

FIRSTLY ...

Technology (Pah!): We had planned to get the news-letter out to give plenty of advance warning of the Belfast Santa operations. Sorry, but unfortunately the Secretary's computer let us down. For the same reason, replies to subscription payments made during the past few weeks have been delayed, but normal service has now been resumed. Our apologies to everyone.

IRISH STATE COACH

No.351: The loan agreement between the Society and CIÉ has been finalised, and was signed by the Chairman and Secretary on the RPSI's behalf on 12th November. The agreement allows the Society to have long-term use of the vehicle subject to it remaining the property of CIÉ.

We hope to have arranged the move of No.351 to FÁS in Cabra, Dublin, as soon as possible. There it will be restored by tradesmen on a government training scheme. A short history of the vehicle is included in the "Bogieman's Gazette".

OPERATIONS

"Portrush Flyer": It is sufficient to say that we had a successful season with some very spirited running, with some upsets, along the way.

"Sea Breeze": As stated in the last News-Letter, the second train, scheduled for 19th August, did not operate due to the threat of lineside fires in the extremely dry weather at that time.

"Maynooth Shuttle": The shuttles to Maynooth and Enfield on Sunday 10th September ran to time and to capacity.

"Atlantic Coast Express": These operations continue to show a slow but

steady increase in popularity.

"The Phoenix": This year the reopening of Great Victoria Street showed that the true Railway Enthusiast still exists. The whole day was such a pleasure, mostly for the "old folk" who told us how it used to be, through to the "young folk", some of whom want to tell us how it is going to be. Frank Dunlop, Eamonn Lacken, Tom McDevitte, Sir Myles Humphries, Harry Mulholland, Roy Beattie, Jimmy Donnelly and Peter McCann, to mention but a few, all travelled with us. As for the future, please try and remember what the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland means. If you want it to remain, then continue to support it as if every trip was the first or last one, since you never know what is around the corner. Thanks to all involved in the organising and running of the Phoenix. What started out as a small suburban run turned into a mini railtour and a great celebration of the GNR.

"Santa Special" (1): We are now in the last run up to the Christmas operations and the perennial problem arises. Who will be the man himself? Why I wonder do our men folk dislike the role of Santa so much? A lot of pleasure can be had by watching all the future enthusiasts receiving gifts from Santa. So far bookings are holding their own with only the first day looking light.

Tickets can be obtained from the Railtour Office (01960 353567) or from the Alliance & Leicester Building Society in Wellington Place.

"Santa Special" (2): Dublin area operations will run on 3rd and 10th December from Pearse station. These are normally heavily loaded trains, so early booking is advisable.

Tickets can be obtained via the Educational Building Society or through the new southern Railtour Office at P.O. Box 74, Blackrock, Co. Dublin (01

2880073).

"The Knocknarea Railtour": The 1996 International Railtour, named after a mountain to the south of Sligo Bay, has as its destination - surprise, surprise - Sligo. We hope we have put together a weekend with something to suit everyone with, by popular request, a return trip to Belfast on the Sunday afternoon.

1996 Programme: We are now looking forward to next year and a full calendar of events. We will see a new run from Belfast to Dundalk in June as part of a minimum of nine one-day runs.

Film Contract: The film "Michael Collins" required an extra day's shooting above and beyond those originally contracted for. No.461 and the train duly departed for their final scenes near Wicklow on 1st October. This event was marred by a number of lineside fires, some of which were tackled by the RPSI support crew.

American Express: Not quite - it was actually an American Mastercard advert which took a train of 4 newly decorated carriages from our southern set to Killarney, hauled by diesel, for filming on 25th September. This contract along with extensive film work during the summer more than made up for the losses incurred by not operating the second "Sea Breeze" in August.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.3 "R.H. Smyth": In traffic at Whitehead.

No.3BG "Guinness": The locomotive, in traffic on lease to the Downpatrick & Ardglass Railway Company, is reaching the end of the life of its boiler tubes. An assessment will be carried out in the near future.

No.4: The major work is in the rebuilding of the boiler. To date, the lower three quarters of the outer firebox sides and door plate have been renewed and welded into place. The inner copper firebox, which was in fair condition, has been refitted and the foundation ring is being riveted at present. The transverse stays have been made and fitted, and work is progressing on the drilling of the waterspace stay holes and the manufacture of the crown stays.

The front tubeplate was found to be in a worse condition than had been hoped, and is being replaced. The old tubeplate has been removed and the new material is on order.

The major work still outstanding is the making and fitting of the waterspace stays, together with purchase of some of the material, the drilling and fitting of the tubeplate, and the fitting of boiler tubes, long stays and palm stays.

As well as boiler work, the locomotive is having piston and valve rings renewed, and bearings inspected, and renewed if required. The side tanks need repaired and all fittings and pipe-work overhauled.

No.4CSÉ: The Carlow Diesel is undergoing overhaul at Whitehead. It may still need further gearbox attention.

No.23: Still in restricted use at Whitehead due to a worn gearbox.

No.85 "Merlin": In traffic at Whitehead. A boiler washout and inspection have been completed. New injector cones have been ordered. The cover of the high pressure cylinder has been removed to reveal a build-up of carbon.

No.171: An overhaul of the right crosshead and big end is being carried out and the left big end is being checked. Cylinder lubrication continues to be investigated.

The locomotive recently took part in the making of the "Michael Collins" film and for this was required to look like a Great Southern and Western Railway locomotive with black livery and GS&WR crests. The painting was carried out by the film technicians and was to the minimum standard required. The wheels were actually left blue - as No.461 was the starring engine, No.171 was only required for platform scenes and her wheels did not appear. Although a sum was secured for repainting of the locomotive, it has been set aside for the present as it was felt the work involved would be largely wasted if carried out right away. The locomotive has less than two years to run until the end of her current boiler overhaul period, and then repainting will be required anyway.

It was therefore decided to restore the livery as near as possible to authentic

GNR(I) black for the intervening period. Livery is now plain unlined black, with red headstocks and GNR lettering on the tender. At the time of carrying this livery, i.e. prior to rebuilding in 1938, the engines did not carry names and so for the meantime, to ensure authenticity, "Slieve Gullion" is just plain No.171!

No.461: The boiler is approaching the end of its overhaul period and will have an assessment in the new year. Work being carried out includes renewal of some firebars, drop grate repairs, replacement of driving spring, check tender springs, ultrasonic testing of crank pins.

Unilok: The road/rail shunter obtained from NIR is awaiting general repairs at Whitehead.

FINANCE

Surplus: Our Treasurer, John Beaumont, has declared the operating season a success. And together with the income from adverts and the film contract, he believes we have enough to allocate special budgets over and above the normal monthly allowances. Projects which will receive extra resources are weather-proofing for the Park Royal coaches in the southern set, a start to a series of bogie overhauls at Whitehead, but most importantly a fund to accelerate the return to traffic of LMS (NCC) 2-6-4T No.4.

MEMBERSHIP

Renewal: Any members wishing to renew their subscriptions early please use the enclosed form. Life members and Honorary members might wish to send a donation to help with our current projects. Please ignore this reminder if you have already received your membership card for 1996.

Records: When returning the renewal form, please ensure that all the appropriate boxes are ticked or filled in where appropriate, especially if you have had a change in circumstances - this enables us to keep the membership records up to date.

Standing Orders: A form is included for those members who might wish to pay by

this method. Members who normally pay by standing order are kindly asked to check with their banks to ensure that the correct amount is due to be paid on 1st February. Despite the membership rate having been the same for three years now, and despite numerous reminders, a number of members are still paying the 1993 subscription rate. It should be understood that no membership card can be issued until the appropriate amount has been paid.

BELFAST AREA MEETINGS

"Irish Railways In Pictures": Tom Ferris, the author of recent colour books on Irish railways on 13th December.

"Warrenpoint Memories" & "Down Update": Des FitzGerald recalls the Warrenpoint line and Colin Holliday brings us the latest happenings at Downpatrick. Both on 10th January.

MRSI: The meetings of the Modern Railway Society of Ireland are on 17th January, 21st February, 20th March and 17th April at Dukes Hotel, Botanic Avenue, Belfast.

WHITEHEAD

Heavy Lift Area: The two heavy lift gantries have been successfully tested and certified to raise 9 tonnes each. They are being used to carry out bogie overhauls on 3 coaches before the Christmas Santa operations.

Security: Approximately 100m of second-hand palisade fencing has been acquired from Bass and will be used to reinforce our security fence beside the main Larne line in the new year.

Water: The water tower now has a functional mains supply and together with the refurbished ex-Dundalk water column we should be able to quickly turn round our engines at Whitehead.

Relaying: Unfortunately, all is not good news. A derailment on the platform road in the middle of October resulted in serious damage to a turnout and a 10m section of track. Repairs required extensive excavation, new turnout timbers and the replacement of 20m of track on panels of concrete sleepers.

However, the effort was not wasted as the platform road was due for replacement anyway, and the experience gained during the repair will stand us in good stead when the remainder comes to be done.

Platform: A push is on to have the platform area as presentable as possible for the Christmas operations. There isn't much time left but if you could come to Whitehead a suitable job could be found for you.

Insurance: Members may be interested to know that we have recently had the insurance cover for all working members - not just at Whitehead - increased substantially. The insurance is for personal injury only so members should ensure that any personal property brought to the site is covered under their normal household insurance or under a separate policy.

SALES

New Products: "Irish Railways in the 1940s and 1950s", a 45 minute video which includes Lough Swilly, Dundalk Newry & Greenore, Sligo Leitrim & Northern Counties, and many other unique scenes mainly in colour, £15.60 inc p&p. "Irish Railways in Colour, A Second Glance. 1947 - 1970", 144 pages, 350 photos. £21 inc p&p. "Midland Great Western", 140 pages, 130 b&w photos, £21 inc p&p. "Slieve Gullion", "Merlin" and "The Derry Road", each booklet is 24 pages of colour photos and explanatory text, £5 each inc p&p.

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 5QY.

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, bookmarks, etc., specially produced for the Society. Write

to: Caroline Stewart, 1(A) Carnhill Road, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim, BT36 6LA.

AND FINALLY

Trespass: It has been brought to the attention of the Council that 2 trespassers were recently approached at Westlink Junction by an NIR employee. They refused to leave the Company's property, allegedly claiming that they were RPSI members.

It goes without saying that in no way does Council condone such behaviour, whether by Society members or not. All members are asked to act responsibly when on Society trains and when simply viewing items of railway interest. Society membership is NOT a passport to trespass on railway property.

Ghost Trains: Barry Herbert, the author of three books so far on the subject of railway ghosts, is seeking more material, especially from Ireland. So far, he has very little information on Irish ghosts and trains so if anybody can offer suitable stories or point Barry to a new source please contact him at: 41 Humberston Avenue, Humberston, Grimsby, Lincolnshire, DN36 4SW.

Council Nominations: Any proposals for the 1996 Council should be notified to the Secretary using the enclosed form, for receipt no later than 1st January 1996.

New Faces: Following Joe Fitzpatrick's retirement, the Council welcomes David Houston as the new Dublin Area Operations Officer. David, who has been co-opted until the 1996 AGM is a new face on the operations scene and we wish him all the best. There is a good team behind him so he should have no trouble settling in.

Michael Bolger has been appointed as PSR to look after commercial interests in the Dublin area, another vital role which Joe was responsible for.

EDITORIAL ADDRESS

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