

NEWS LETTER

February 1996

MEMBERSHIP

Thank-You: To those members who paid their subscriptions early - we are grateful, especially if a donation or SAE was included.

Membership Fees: Members will recall that a few years ago, when the membership rates last increased, the Treasurer expressed the hope that the cost of membership could be held as it was for several years to come. With many members paying by standing order, it is not feasible to have a small increase every year, better to have a larger increase every few years and hold this for two to four years afterwards.

It has recently transpired that, with immediate effect, the Society must pay Value Added Tax on all membership income derived from within Northern Ireland and Great Britain. Consequently, we must pay £1.94 out of every £13 membership payment we receive. Consequently, the Society's actual income from all UK members has been cut with immediate effect to £11.06 per adult member, and correspondingly less for concession rate members.

Concurrently, the matter of fees in the South has also been raised. When the cost of membership was last changed, the two currencies were about par, but the postal costs to the Republic are considerably higher than those to members in the United Kingdom and this accounted for the IR£15 fee. Now, as it has correctly been pointed out, the Punt seems to be permanently worth more than Sterling.

The likely loss of income to the Society as a result of the imposition of VAT on membership fees is a figure approaching £1,500 per year. Theoretically, we could take the easy way out and just increase

all subscriptions by £2; but this would hardly be fair to non-UK members, who account for a very sizeable proportion of our membership - especially when they are paying a higher rate already.

Therefore, Council has regretfully decided to set all subscriptions at £16 adult, £9 concession and £39 family, with immediate effect. This will redress the difference, and also be fair to all. It will also account for a routine increase that would have been inevitable next year anyway as postal charges are to increase in the summer. The Society will have to bear the loss of VAT on memberships paid to date but the Treasurer humbly asks all UK members to consider rounding up their payments if they have already paid.

Council realises that money is tight everywhere, and no increase will be popular but the business we are in is also ever more expensive, and an increase of £3 works out at under a penny a day! Thank you in advance.

Renewal: Memberships expire on 31st January so payment is now due. Life members and Honorary members might wish to send a donation to help with our current projects.

The current mailshot will be the last for the membership year ending 31st January 1996. To ensure further mailings, subscriptions should be paid in full as soon as possible.

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 - as this enables us to keep the membership records up to date. It is particularly important that Life members and those with standing orders ensure that all details are correct since there is no

annual feedback via renewal forms.

Standing Orders: A form is included for those members who might wish to pay by standing order. Those who normally pay by this method are kindly asked to check with their banks to ensure that the revised rate, as given above, is due to be paid.

Members are advised that no card can be issued until the appropriate amount has been paid in full.

OPERATIONS

Christmas 1995: Operations in Dublin and Belfast ran successfully with thousands of happy travellers leaving our trains full of the Christmas spirit.

Over 2,500 passengers travelled on 6 filled trains from Dublin on 3rd & 10th December.

The first Belfast trips were not as well supported as last year but we believe the excitement and publicity surrounding US President Bill Clinton's visit to Belfast overshadowed all other events near the start of December.

Schools Day: In 1994 we held our most recent open day for schools at Whitehead. The event was cancelled in 1995 due to the work load on those organising the mainline operations. We are keen to reinstate the open day in our 1996 calendar but we must have someone to organise it who is not already involved in operations.

The post would be perfect for a retired member but anyone is welcome to get involved. The job would entail contacting schools, liaising with them, taking bookings, arranging guides for the day and ensuring questionnaires are ready for each visitor. No need to worry though, all the information and questions are to hand, as is the list of schools - it is simply a matter of processing all the details.

If you would like to help organise the event, or simply to be a guide on the day (crib sheets will be provided), please contact Heather.

Crew Training: At the time of writing, the final arrangements are being made for a steam training programme for Dublin-based drivers with No.461 and 4 RPSI coaches.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.3 "R.H. Smyth": Undergoing minor repairs.

No.4: Apart from what was reported in the previous News-Letter, the frames are due for cleaning.

No.23: Temporarily out of traffic for renewal of radiator drain cock.

No.85 "Merlin": Undergoing minor repairs.

No.171 "Slieve Gullion": The Boiler inspection was completed successfully. A leaking tube has become apparent and it is likely that new tubes will be required at the next inspection. The repairs to the big end and crosshead are complete and will need to be run in before the next planned operation.

No.461: The annual boiler inspection is due this month. The brick arch will have to be renewed.

Unilok: The road/rail shunter has been lifted off the rails to permit moving of No.4 and No.186.

Cold: Because of the severe frost conditions recently, all locomotives were drained of water to ensure no frost damage occurred.

FINANCE

Sponsorship And Grants: Quite often our members enquire about the apparently bottomless pit of funds which the Society may be eligible to seek aid from.

Our Treasurer, Fundraiser Ernie Gilmore, and member Johnny Glendinning have been working on this for some time. There has not been a great deal to report to date beyond the new application we have for further European Regional Development Fund assistance, but it is appropriate to report to members where we stand.

There are quite a number of funding bodies that seek to invest in Northern Ireland - but they all have their own criteria and rules of eligibility, so the RPSI may qualify for one, but maybe not for another. For example, a fund may require applicants to provide permanent

employment, or create sports facilities for the disabled, and so on. Ernie has been trawling through all these to find bodies that will give grants towards transport, cultural, historical or conservation projects as these are areas in which we would seem best able to qualify.

Currently, we have identified 5 of the more realistic options.

ERDF: An application for funding has been submitted and a reply is expected in the next few months. The bulk of this application is aimed at the construction of a properly designed and fitted locomotive workshop at Whitehead, a must for our long term survival. Within this application, there is also scope for a limited amount of locomotive work, particularly on No.4, and some carriage and site work.

British National Lottery: Out of the many funds they have, two have been identified, the Millennium Fund and the Lottery Heritage Fund, and we will be working towards a detailed submission to these bodies during 1996.

Irish National Lottery: We will be seeking a second grant from this source, though no firm details have been formulated yet.

ESSFPRNIBC: The European Special Support Fund for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties (a bit of a mouthful) is the so-called "Peace Fund" and concentrates on issues which will bring together both communities in the North, and aid cross-border co-operation. We are investigating terms for eligibility at the moment, and should it be appropriate, we will prepare a submission.

International Fund For Ireland: We have no plans at present to approach this fund again, having obtained half the cost of the Whitehead carriage shed from them. However, should applications for the above funds be unsuccessful, we can consider another IFI submission.

CARRIAGE & WAGON

Irish State Coach: On the morning of Saturday 13th January, No.351 was moved by low-loader from Inchicore to the FÁS workshop at Cabra, Dublin,

where restoration work will start immediately.

Chas Meredith is collating information on the coach's history, and if anyone can help with photos of the coach please contact Chas. What we have in mind is examples from general histories, rather than from railway publications. For example, a pictorial history of Co. Wexford has 3 pages of photos of a 1906 state train.

In Dublin: It seems certain that the 1996 set will be the same as for 1995. Work currently underway at Heuston includes internal refurbishment of Bredin 1335 and diner 2421.

In accordance with new regulations which came into force on 1st January, we are labelling most of our passenger accommodation as non-smoking. Addicts can still use vestibules, gangways and the bar for a fix.

How Far: For those members interested in what use we get from our coaches, here are some mileages from the Dublin operations. 88, 1335, 238 and 2421 - 2,160 miles. 1916 - 2,095 miles. 1416 and 1383 - 1,510 miles. 2423 - 1,496 miles. 2981 - 16.5 miles. So now you know!

WHITEHEAD

Site Work: The derailment which occurred in late October has meant a lot of hard work in replacing 20m of old wooden sleepered lengths with concrete sleepers, but all was completed on time for the busy Christmas period.

Since the new year a further 30m of the platform road has been replaced with concrete panels and it is intended to continue with this work until all the panels have been removed from the platform. The latter activity is to satisfy our insurance company, as is the replacement of the platform fence - removal of the old fence has already started.

Negotiations are underway with Carrickfergus Council regarding possible repair of the lane into the site.

BELFAST AREA MEETINGS

"The Last Days Of Steam On The NCC": This should be a good one! Joe Cassells, a long-time student of the NCC, gives his show on 14th February.

"Irish Railway Collection": On 13th March, Mark Kennedy, our Whitehead Carriage Officer, gives us a first-hand history of the railway collection at Cultra.

... AND FINALLY

Addresses: Members are asked to note that when corresponding with Society officers please use the appropriate address and try not to include items for different addresses in the one envelope. Your correspondence will be dealt with more quickly for instance if you do not include membership payments with tour bookings and vice versa.

Annual General Meeting: The notice for the AGM is attached. The original date set for the meeting was 2nd March but our Secretary, not being a follower of sport, failed to spot that this was the day of a rugby international in Dublin. Any members who were aware of the original should now make a note of the new date of 9th March.

Congratulations: A very Happy 21st Birthday to Caroline Stewart, our Northern Commercial PSR.

On The Map: Those purchasing Railway Track Diagrams No.6 - Ireland will find a truly remarkable book which contains a schematic track diagram of the entire railway system, showing inter alia each platform, crossover and signal cabin, not just for IE and NIR, but also for Bord na Mona and preserved lines. The eagle eyed will note that the RPSI set is marked in Heuston Yard! But don't buy the book until it appears on our own Sales List.

Wanted: A member, Patrick Sherlock, is seeking photographs of Kingscourt station prior to 1950. Write to: Boynabought, Kilmainhamwood, Kells, Co. Meath.

SALES

Latest Additions: A new black & white

and colour book from Michael H.C. Baker, "Irish Railways Past & Present", Volume 1, 260 pages, £14.70 inc p&p. "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. "Shove Gullion", "Merlin" and "The Derry Road", each booklet is 24 pages of colour photos and explanatory text, £3.50 each inc p&p.

Vintage Lines: For old tickets (mainly UTA and NIA), 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.

IN MEMORY

David Marcus: Our long-time sub-contractor suffered a fatal heart attack at the Whitehead site on the evening of 18th December. Our deepest sympathy goes out to his wife and family.

Sir Ivan Ewart: A founding member of the Society, from Hillsborough, Co. Down, died in January.

Robin Barr: Another long serving member of the Society, from Lancaster, also died in January.

EDITORIAL ADDRESS

148 Church Road, Newtownabbey,
Co. Antrim, BT36 6HJ.