

NEWS LETTER

March 1996

MEMBERSHIP

Renewals: Thanks to all those members who renewed so promptly despite the recent unfortunate increase in subscription rates. We would hope to hold the current prices for a number of years at least, unless there is a major unforeseen rise in our costs. We are also grateful to those members who pay by standing order, or who had paid before the increase, who sent in the extra to ensure the full amount was received.

Standing Orders: Now would be a good time to renew the amount on your standing order for next year's subscription. Certain sterling standing orders are still being paid into a closed account in our previous bank in Carrickfergus, despite numerous requests for members to check with their banks. Please renew with the form attached to the membership renewal slip to ensure the correct account is being targeted, i.e. bank sort code 90-01-34 and account 91104799.

AGM

In The Chair: Sir Myles Humphreys, our Vice-President, got a bit of a shock when he turned up for the meeting, fully expecting to have a relaxing afternoon watching the members slugging it out with Council. Unfortunately, Dr FitzGerald, who had been expected to chair the meeting, had to attend elsewhere and Sir Myles found himself in the hot seat. Our thanks to him for the fine job he did - there was no blood shed - at least not during the meeting - what went on in the bar afterwards is anybody's guess.

Donation: A pleasant surprise awaited our Treasurer and our Locomotive Officer at the AGM. A member, who wishes to remain anonymous, offered a donation of

£500 towards the restoration of locomotive No.4. Those attending got a shock, however, when they learned that the donation was on condition that the same amount was raised from the meeting. It is not true to say that the Treasurer stood at the exit and charged members to be allowed to leave, but they responded readily and at least £450 was collected, an average of nearly £10 per adult member. Satisfied with this response, our anonymous donor signed a cheque for £500, and the No.4 fund benefited accordingly. Any member disappointed at not being at the AGM and thus missing the opportunity to contribute can send something to the address below.

Steering Committee: The major issue to arise from the meeting was the setting up of a steering committee to examine the role of Council, its structure, and the responsibilities of its members. The following is the background to the subject as perceived by Chas Meredith, who put forward the AGM motion:

The RPSI is no longer a simple club or society; it is a limited company, incorporated under the Northern Ireland Companies Act and regulated by its own Memorandum and Articles of Association.

The Articles lay down the basic rules for the election of what the RPSI calls its Council but which is in effect the board of directors of the company.

At present the elected members are tied to specific duties, i.e. locomotives, coaches, site, etc. Certain apparent disadvantages to this system have been pointed out:

(1) Prospective candidates are limited to those who are (or who believe they are) capable of carrying out the specific duties, thus automatically eliminating those who are not, for whatever reason, "hands on" members, or who are not

prepared to stand against "hands on" members, regardless of their suitability as company directors.

(2) Experience has shown that not all Council members from Dublin are prepared to attend meetings in Belfast, and vice versa. Some Council members in the past attended virtually no meetings whatsoever. As the RPSI is a "big business", both in terms of finance and in terms of public responsibility and accountability, it is essential that the affairs of the company are looked after by directors who are prepared to attend as many meetings as possible in order to provide maximum continuity of thought and the maximum number of minds brought to bear on any issue. When electing new officers, members are not made aware of the attendance record of nominees. At present there are almost separate boards meeting in Belfast and Dublin.

(3) It is arguably more important that Council should comprise members with financial and management skills rather than "hands on" skills. Of course, there is no reason why both skills should not exist in the one person, who should be entirely capable of wearing both hats.

(4) In view of the importance and public responsibility and accountability which now surrounds the Society's activities, it is possible that the Council should have at least partial separation from the "hands on" responsibilities, if only to enable Council to hold "hands on" officers more accountable.

It must be stressed that the foregoing is Chas's personal view and it is printed solely to keep members informed of what the steering committee has been set up to examine.

Members are invited to contribute their thoughts and suggestions to the steering committee which will be looking into the subject over the next year with a view to deciding how best the Society's activities can be carried through the closing years of the century and into the next millennium.

OPERATIONS

Charter: Helen's Bay Golf Club have

hired the train for a run from Helen's Bay to Belfast and back on Saturday 30th March. It will entail the train making two return trips to Bangor to run round. For the photographers, the expected departure times are: Whitehead at 8:55; Belfast Central at 10:00 and 12:38; Bangor at 11:45 and 13:50. Ring the Railtour Office for any late changes.

"Easter Bunny": Not only will there be Easter eggs for the younger passengers, there will also be a chance to see both our GNR locomotives in steam at Whitehead. The format will be similar to the Christmas operations, with two return trips from Belfast Central to Whitehead, departing at 11:30 and 14:30.

Unfortunately, there will be no operation from Dublin. It was felt that there would be insufficient time and manpower to make a success of it this year so the decision was taken to cancel rather than risk a loss on the operation.

Visit Of Titanic Proportions: The US-based Titanic Historical Society is holding its first ever convention in Belfast in April. Included is a visit to the Society's site at Whitehead on the morning of Sunday 14th April at 8:30. It is early, but there will be an engine in steam, probably No.171, so you could pay a visit and stay on to spend the day helping out with the locomotives, carriages or site.

"Knocknarea": The final booking forms are now being posted to those who paid a deposit. If you paid and have not yet received your booking form or you did not pay but would still like to travel, get in touch with the Railtour Office on (01960) 353567.

Fringe Benefits: Don't forget that the fringe events for the "Knocknarea" are available to all members separately, i.e. Dublin area bus tour on the Friday, Portrush operation on the Monday, and a bus tour to Downpatrick Steam Railway on the Tuesday.

Train Rides: The advert in the last circular seeking an organiser for the train rides at Whitehead was a great waste of time, effort and money. At the time of writing, not a single reply has been received for these events or for the Schools Day. Obviously members are not interested in helping, even with tasks for

which no prior knowledge or experience is required. It would seem that those members who believe we should have a presence at Whitehead during the summer weekends with an attraction for tourists are quite willing to let the usual team do all the work. It now remains to be seen whether or not there will be any Sunday operations this year - the Schools Day will now definitely not take place.

Driver Training (NIR): The NIR/RPSI training procedure document has recently been agreed with the company. We can now start to consider the official passing out of trainee drivers and firemen.

Driver Training (IE): Following negotiations with Iarnród Éireann, the driver training programme ran from 22nd to 26th January and from 5th to 9th February. Seven drivers were trained, in the following format. Days one and two were spent in the training school in Inchicore and going over the locomotive cold in Connolly shed, while the remaining three days were spent on the road, with a return trip to Mullingar (week one) or Drogheda (week two). The locomotive was turned on the old DSER turntable in Connolly, the first time it has been used in some years. The weather certainly presented some challenges, but the timing of the training programme was dictated by the requirement to fit it between the new year peak and the beginning of the spring holiday week. Our thanks are due to Inspector Tony Foley, Drivers Dan and Tony Renehan and to the seven trainees.

BELFAST AREA MEETINGS

Spring Again: Our thanks to Charles Friel for another successful series of shows. Also thanks to those who provided the shows and to all who attended.

If the winter meetings are over, it must be spring, the time when Charles is looking for requests and suggestions for next season's meetings. If you have a suggestion or indeed would be willing to participate, please contact (01232) 655560.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.4: When the bunker and its associated tank were removed for cleaning some corrosion was found on the frames, particularly under the footplate where years of washing out water will have attacked the metal.

No.85 "Merlin": It is hoped to have the engine in steam together with No.171 on Easter Monday to check all is well before the railtour in May.

No.171: A running-in operation to test repairs to both big ends took place on Sunday 25th February, with two return trips from Whitehead to Belfast Central. Running was easy and, although some heat was carried in the left big end, Peter Scott reported himself reasonably happy with the performance. The intention is to use the locomotive on the charter operation to Bangor on 30th March.

No.461: Some minor boiler repairs are now due and appropriately the locomotive will go to Inchicore for attention. Although not in steam, its latest public appearance was at Connolly on 12th March when it appeared in the company of diner 88, the IE executive train and a 201 class locomotive as part of an exhibition for the visit to Dublin of the Institute of Railway Signal Engineers.

Power: A 2cwt power hammer has been temporarily set up in the running shed at Whitehead. It will be installed as part of a forge when the new locomotive workshop is complete.

CARRIAGE & WAGON

Whitehead: A new roof has been fitted to 1287, the coach used as a dormitory. Weatherproofing has been carried out, as has a repaint in a decidedly non-authentic shade of purple.

Dublin: Work continues on the Heuston set with the "Ministry of the Interior", led by David Humphries, putting the finishing touches to a full internal refurbishment of 1335, which commenced in January of last year. Park Royal 1383 is the next target, and preparatory work has commenced. Work continues on the upgrading of the electrical systems.

State Coach: 351 is currently drying out

in the FÁS workshops at Cabra. Measurement and recording is expected to start shortly, following which overhaul will commence.

Liveries: There is currently an on-going debate at Council on the subject of liveries, and on carriage liveries in particular. Some feel that each coach should always be authentic to the exclusion of all else. Some believe that each carriage set should be in a consistent, if not standard, livery to avoid a multi-coloured train.

The debate has arisen mainly from influx of predominantly maroon coaches to Dublin. These were sent from Whitehead to strengthen the all-green Dublin set a few years ago. The problem was compounded by the GNR blue and cream on a number of vehicles - the previous GNR livery of mahogany did not look out of place alongside NCC or GS&WR maroon.

The situation in Dublin has recently been alleviated with the complete set being painted by the film company in so-called MGWR maroon. While the latter may be of questionable authenticity, it certainly makes the train more presentable - the green, in particular, did not weather very well. Meanwhile, the debate continues. What do the members think?

SITE

Track: Despite wind, rain, hail and snow the relaying of the platform road at Whitehead with concrete sleepers continues and the pile of track panels on the platform is slowly disappearing. With a good gang of volunteers a 45ft section of the old wooden sleepers can be removed and replaced by concrete in one day. This efficiency is crucial if work is to continue throughout an increasingly busy operating season.

The old link fence on the platform has also been removed and will be replaced with a new fence later in the year.

Power: The Northern Electric Company from Manchester are laying cable over a large area of Whitehead and are using our site as a base. In their spare time they have installed a new power supply to our platform shop and included a new

supply to our yard lights and power points.

Water: Due to on-going upgrading of track and a new alignment, the balloon water column at Lisburn down platform has come under threat. We are currently talking to NIR about the future of this and other watering facilities around the system.

SALES

Update: The book, Railway Track Diagrams (Ireland), as mentioned in the last News-Letter, is now available at £5.50 plus p&p. This and the usual list of books, videos, magazines, timetables, etc., is available from RPSI Sales, 148 Hillsborough Road, Lisburn, BT27 5OY.

RPSI Brands: All stock with the RPSI logo, i.e. badges, pencils, rulers, etc., is available from RPSI Sales, 1(A) Carnhill Road, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim, BT36 6LA.

GENERAL

Errata: Alan McRobert has reported two errors which have crept into the commentary on "Compound Interest", his latest video for the Society. Firstly, there is a single high pressure cylinder on No.85 in the centre of the frames - the external cylinders are, of course, low pressure. Secondly, No.85 stopped for water at Port Laoise on the return from Cork to Dublin, and did not run non-stop. Alan will have these errors corrected for the next run of the video.

Films: Negotiations had been concluded for the use of No.461 for a day's film work, and for the use of the Dublin coaches for another day, in a film on the life of Brendan Behan.

However, the entire project was postponed indefinitely due to problems with the availability of the leading actor, Sean Penn. That, as they say, is show business.

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