

NEWS LETTER

August 1996

COMMENT

Is the RPSI experiencing terminal difficulties? A good question which might occur to the aware member as he or she reads some of the news items in the following pages.

Undoubtedly we are faced with increasing difficulties as the years progress but none more so than this year, so, far. Some of these difficulties are outside our control: vandalism, ever spiralling insurance costs, creeping bans on wooden stock as high speed lines advance across the country, erosion of servicing facilities, and the decreasing availability of railway company drivers qualified to operate our trains.

Despite the above, all of which can be alleviated to some degree, the major difficulty facing the Society is the perennial problem of manpower.

Members around the country can now be heard to complain: "Not that old spiel again!", and rightly so - hardly any News-Letter escapes without some plea from Council for members to volunteer their services.

But the fact remains that unless we have a large increase in volunteers and income, the former hopefully contributing to the latter, we are in serious danger of losing our viability.

The situation is particularly bad north of the border in terms of helpers - witness the failure of the Carlingford operation in June, cancelled mainly due to lack of interest among members and lack of help to publicise

the event to the public. The "Steam & Jazz" and the early "Portrush Flyer" operations were poorly patronised, the latter probably due to the recent bad press.

Meanwhile, in Dublin patronage remains at a healthy level, although there has been a slight downturn on some trains and mutterings about a lessening of interest among members in helping out. While our southern members may rightly be feeling pleased with their performance, they must remember that the locomotives and carriages they operate rely on northern input for any heavy engineering repairs.

Thus if we follow the trends to their logical conclusion, we will

have an efficient operations team in Dublin providing the bulk of Society income, a very small number of northern members attempting to run some semblance of a season out of Belfast, with small but dedicated teams struggling against all the odds at Whitehead to produce locomotives and two trains of carriages for all our operations.

Gross exaggeration you might say - but no, already the Belfast Operations team is considering a reduction in the number of operations in the north next year. Evan Pamely, one of the locomotive squad, is single-handedly organising the summer train rides at Whitehead, while the Whitehead Carriage Officer is up in arms that the train rides are happening at all - the members who would usually spend their Sundays working on carriages are the same people who are expected to help operate those trains.

IT'S THE FUTURE OF YOUR SOCIETY

FINANCE

ERDF: Following the announcement in the last News-Letter of our successful bid for a second round of European grant aid, it is now becoming more and more likely that we could be in the embarrassing position of not being able to fund our share of the required spending.

As a consequence of the poor performance, reported elsewhere, of some operations, the situation could become more serious unless other sources of income are found. Already, there has been a cut in the monthly allocations for running maintenance on locomotives, carriages and site, leaving precious little for ERDF projects. It is all the more important, therefore, that our members help, by volunteering their services and/or travelling on our trains.

OPERATIONS

"Royal Canal": A large number of participants (1,400) travelled with us on 26th May, significantly up on last year. Well done to the Dublin members.

Charter (O'Reilly Tours): The private charter from Rathdrum to Lansdowne Road on 5th June was very successful and earned praise for the Society from the charter company and a great number of the passengers.

"Carlingford Express": Unfortunately this operation had to be cancelled, but as very few (18) members had booked not too many refunds had to be made.

Due to engineering possessions, single line working was imposed between Newry and Poyntzpass in June. Operationally this would have entailed late running and it was felt that this would have been a major disadvantage.

However the tour, if it had run, would have made a loss unless significant numbers had turned up on the day.

With the major commitment and outlay required to operate trains nowadays, members, if they are interested in seeing trains continuing to run, must be prepared to travel, organise parties and spread RPSI publicity as widely as possible. What is more, bookings should be made well in advance to allow arrangements to be made, safe in the knowledge there will

be enough interest to make the operation viable.

Mid-Summer: On Friday 21st June the annual evening trip ran to Ballymena with No.85. It is disappointing to have to report that only 100 passengers travelled on this train whereas the following evening's train with No.171 carried 300 to Mullingar where, once again, catering was provided by the Army Catering Corp, with food sponsored by Dawn Farm Foods.

Charter (Iarnród Éireann): On 30th June No.171 and a set of 6 Mk2 vacuum braked coaches plus EGV operated a race special to the Derby Day. This was very much a last minute arrangement which came about because someone in the higher management of CIÉ thought that it might be a good idea to run a steam train to the Curragh!! The train ran on to Kildare for stabling, from where, after taking water, the locomotive returned light to Inchicore for turning before operating the return leg. The occasion saw the Curragh having its first steam train since the early 1960s, and the first ever haulage of Mk2 stock by steam.

"Strawberry Fair": The annual outing to Enniscorthy and Rosslare ran successfully on 6th July, with No.171 as a last minute substitute for No.461 which had suffered the collapse of its brick arch at 17:30 on the Friday evening. The train was only 70% loaded but No.171 gave a good performance, the high point being the start out of Rathdrum on the run home.

"Portrush Flyer": Unfortunately, the recent events in Northern Ireland have made the public less likely to venture out at the present time. As an example, it is reported that Ulsterbus have cancelled 40% of their tours. Consequently, the first two operations have had poor loading levels. Maybe this is just as well as there were only 5 carriages available anyway. The third operation was more successful, and the fourth promises to be better still. Harry Ramsdens restaurant in Belfast has sponsored the posters and tickets for this year's Flyers. In addition, discounts at the restaurant can be had on production of Flyer tickets.

"Sea Breeze": The Dublin team had their

problems on 27th July when No.461 and train had to be stopped at Enniscorthy on the outward run because of problems with injectors.

Due to the late running, the Wexford portion had to be dropped, but the locomotive was able to operate the return trip.

Whitehead Open Day: The Society, in association with the Whitehead Festival, operated train rides and threw open our premises to the public. All who organised the event, especially the display in the loco sheds, are to be congratulated. Unfortunately, very few members were in evidence.

Charter (Iarnród Éireann): On 10th August a train of a similar format to that to the Curragh is planned to operate to Carlow to celebrate 150 years of the railway to that town. It is hoped to use the new triangular loop at Lavistown, outside Kilkenny, to turn the locomotive.

Unfortunately, the operation was a last minute affair, leaving insufficient time to publicise it.

"Sixties Steam": This will be of a similar format to the Mid-Summer trip to Mullingar, so get your mini-skirts and flares on and wear flowers in your hair for a night of love and peace on 24th August.

"Atlantic Coast Express": Operating to Derry on 7th August, this trip will allow participants to see the latest progress at the Foyle Valley Railway - a special day of operations is being laid on for our visit.

"Greystones Shuttle": An extra day of operations has been added to the calendar, with three trips from Dublin to Greystones on 22nd September.

Adelaide Remembered: To compensate for the failure of the Carlingford operations, enquiries were made with NIR to see if a train could be run to Dundalk in late October to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the closure of Belfast's Adelaide locomotive shed. However, the multitude of engineering, track and signalling works currently taking place on the cross-border route, and due to continue into the Autumn, does not allow for any unscheduled track occupancy. We hope that members appreciate that the effort was made to attempt a final fling on the GNR with

vintage stock.

Inchicore 150: Not strictly a Society operation but No.85 and carriages 1142 and 91 did travel from Whitehead to be present at Inchicore over the weekend of 15th/16th June. No.186 was transferred by low-loader on 7th June and was paired with its tender which had previously been transported from Mullingar. On return north, it is hoped that the locomotive will go into the Transport Museum at Cultra in place of diner 2422. As No.171 was in Dublin since the railtour in May, she too was in attendance.

As well as our vehicles, the RPSI was represented by publicity and sales stands where over £700 was raised. It was a credit to all involved that the quality of the RPSI exhibits was so high. In all, over 15,000 visitors viewed the exhibits, the layout of which was:

Diesel 1: 1383, 88 and 91 providing an historic contrast to the exhibition of contemporary stock on an adjacent track. *Carriage Conversion Shop:* 1916, 2421, 1335 and 238 were on display with walk-through steps. On adjacent roads were a new De Dietrich coach and a TPO whose restoration is being sponsored by An Post. Diner 2421 served as a hospitality suite. Our sales stand was also in this building.

Outside Diesel 1: No.171, No.186, No.461 and No.85 (in steam) were displayed with Westrail's No.90 (ironically the only Inchicore locomotive present) and the Inchicore steam crane (also in steam). No.85's popularity was such that nearly every young visitor joined the queue to blow the whistle.

Photographers had a bonus late in the afternoon when No.85 shunted the crane before heading home with 91 and 238.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.4: The boiler has now been turned onto its side for tapping and fitting of crown stays. The vacuum pipework has been renewed. The rear bunker and associated pipework have been found to be severely corroded in places.

No.171 "Slieve Gullion": Remains in Dublin while some repairs are carried out on No.461 Due to operate the IE charter to Kilkenny.

No.186: Reunited once again with its tender at Inchicore, the locomotive was painted in olive green by Iarnród Éireann.

No.461: Operated the "Sea Breeze" on 27th July to run in after minor repairs. Some injector problems.

SALES

Main Lines: A variety of branded RPSI items is always available from: RPSI Postal Sales, 1(A) Carnhill Road, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim, BT36 6LA. The principal lines are: locomotive outline badges; books; videos; postcards; posters (including the new RPSI locomotive poster); pencils; rulers; 1927 Clearing House map of Ireland; "Thomas" items; etc.

For The Collector: Send details of your requirements to: RPSI Collector's Shop, 148 Hillsborough Road, Lisburn, Co. Antrim, BT27 50Y. Typical items are: drawings of a selection of Irish locomotives, coaches and wagons; back numbers of 5'3", tour brochures and various railway magazines; old timetables and tickets (mainly MR & UTA); UTA & GNR coats of arms; etc.

MULLINGAR

The Future: The Society's existence at Mullingar has been questioned on a number of occasions over the last few years. There were hopes for a FÁS carriage project, although this has not yet been ruled out. Currently, negotiations are being conducted with a number of local bodies interested in various schemes, including running steam trains between Mullingar and Athlone and, more modestly, setting up a living museum of railway life within Mullingar station. In the meantime David Humphries continues to keep the RPSI activities ticking over, and a small squad has been working on carriages over the winter months.

WHITEHEAD

Track: The platform road has now been completely relaid with rails on concrete sleepers. All the spare sleepers have been removed from the platform. Dermot Mackie and his team are to be congratulated on carrying out a task that

on other railways would require the most modern of heavy lifting equipment.

Fences: After the trackwork, attention turned to the platform fence, all of which has been renewed. Following the break-in and fire, work is being switched to securing the perimeter fence with some heavy palisade panels in the Society's possession.

Summer Site Work: The site gang will be in operation each Wednesday evening until the end of August.

WINTER MEETINGS

New Season: At the time of going to the printers not all the dates had been finalised, so there may not be a poster with this circular. In that event, it will be included next time. The venue and times are St. Jude's Church Hall, Ravenhill Road, Belfast at 7:30pm.

9th October: "Summer Saturdays in the Sixties" by Derek Young. Slides of all that was good on the UTA.

13th November: "A Night at the Movies" by Derek Henderson. Cine of Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s, with recent steam from Britain and South Africa.

GENERAL

Internet: Definitely a sign of the times - the Society now appears on the Internet, with an entry on the pages of the AIRPS's World Wide Web site. Currently there is a brief history of the RPSI with a listing of this year's operations, but in the future we hope to expand this with photographs and more details of the Society. The web site can be found at:

www.ucl.ac.uk/pers/1278/Rly-Pres/rpsi.html

Comments from members with access to the Internet would be appreciated.

"Five Foot Three": It is now the time of year when our editor Nelson Poots casts his net in search of articles for the journal. All contributions, whether modern, historical, reviews or reminiscences will be welcomed on the subject of railways north and south.

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