

Railway Preservation Society of Ireland

NEWS LETTER

June 1997



Slieve Mish International Railtour

"Never again!" That phrase has probably never been used to such an extent as this year. I'm sure that we all turned noticeably greyer (or more bald) as the carefully planned weekend trip to Tralee fell apart at the seams. Well, there were of course the usual problems with the scheduling, and of course the last minute complication this year was a water shortage in County Tipperary! That's not a joke - the water pressure at Limerick Junction was so poor we couldn't have filled the tender in a day! And there's always the problem of getting someone to reply to your enquiry; "Is there anyone left in Tralee?" But of course, the power of the individual always shines through, and it all came together on the day.

A very large slice of credit must go, as always, to Tony Foley, Iarnród Éireann's Chief Locomotive Inspector (although no doubt he has been retitled as Senior Driver Performance Manager, or some such phrase - why aren't there any Locomotive Inspectors any more?). Tony not only sorted out the problems of the low water pressure at Limerick Junction by organising, at less than 24 hours' notice, a water stop at Thurles in quite arduous conditions. Equally, he organised to get our footplate crews out to Tralee for a "bit of a refresher" as one person described it. In fact, Connolly crew were passed out to Tralee for the

occasion!

On the Saturday morning there were the usual panics - where are the bar stocks, have the packed lunches arrived, who has the key to that store we used yesterday, and so on. A departure on time helped lower some blood pressure, but confusion still abounded. Well, we had printed the schedule for the passengers on Monday, an amended version was produced on Thursday night and printed on Friday, and on Friday night a further amended version arrived by fax. There was only one copy of it on the train!

A spirited climb up the Gullet and a good steady run to Portlaoise settled us all down, and after taking water another fine piece of engine work as far as Thurles kept everyone happy. There was even time for a quick nip down to the pub for a lemonade! On to Limerick Junction, where we stopped long enough to pick up (Can't stay away, can you McMahon?) and set down a couple of passengers, and then on to Mallow for our change of locomotive.

The locomotive rosters were one of our minor headaches. On the Tuesday before the tour a sharp flange had been diagnosed on No.85; this was the first time ever that a "Qr" gauge had been used on the engine - it had passed both the MR and AAR gauge tests which have been the usual requirement. Peter Scott and Evan Pamely got a squad together to re-profile the wheel immediately, but reasoned discussion suggested that it would be better to let No.171 substitute. No.171 was in any case banned from the Kerry branch - the Civil Engineer apparently felt that only No.461 should traverse it, although No.85 worked to Tralee in 1989 - so a simple shuffle of motive power was possible, and the

pressure on overhauling No.85 was removed. Alas, we still haven't got two 4-4-0 locomotives together on the Cork road, and I doubt now if we will in the foreseeable future.

No.461 ran beautifully on the Kerry Road, and the lineside bus passengers got some nice photographic opportunities. The timers weren't badly served either, especially when a freight overload of one bogie container wagon, complete with 40 foot box, was allowed out of Killarney ahead of us! I suspect that the GM and wagon did some hard running to get to Farranfore! The railtour's departure from Farranfore was delayed a bit as a result, but the only people who suffered were the lineside bus passengers, who were caught in a torrential downpour, one of the few real bits of bad weather the whole weekend.

On Sunday the outing to the Tralee & Dingle narrow gauge railway was a disaster for those who stayed in bed too long to catch the first train out of Tralee. Only one train operated, in spite of being ready from about 08.45! I'm told the driver went off somewhere, and couldn't be found. There were some choice comments I'm sure from those left waiting for an elusive photograph.

The running back to Dublin was as polished and brisk as the day before, although sadly Tony Foley had to leave us at Mallow in the middle of a hail shower and rush back to Dublin, as his wife wasn't well. An early arrival in Connolly, albeit by only a few minutes, showed just what could be done by a steam locomotive running on well-maintained track.

On the Monday steam haulage extended only to Dundalk, but some crisp engine work was set off by a most competent and professional climb of Kellystown and a superb descent through Dromin. It's nice to see that there are still superb enginemen available throughout Ireland.

From Dundalk we travelled in an NIR 80 class railcar to Cultra and then to Whitehead. The set was subject to some overheating, and tripped out at the Wellington summit. We free-wheeled down the other side! My thanks to Mark

Kennedy for organising our visit to the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum at such short notice - it proved very popular.

Tuesday saw a visit to the North West, including the Tower Museum in Derry and the Foyle Valley Railway where, as always, we were made very welcome. (The narrow gauge track of the FVR is approaching the border at a very rapid rate.) My thanks here to Redmond Gallagher and all the folk in Derry who put together the package for us.

A special word of thanks too for Joe Fitzpatrick and Philip Booth for organising the usual Friday trip. One of these years I'll get a chance to go on it!

So next year we plan to go to Waterford. "Oh dear! Well, maybe just one more time!!!"

*Heather Boomer
Belfast Area Operations Officer*

NIR OPERATIONS

NIR Operations: Most of you will have realised that the Society is currently not advertising any operations over the metals of Northern Ireland Railways. Indeed, since the "Easter Bunny" specials at the end of March we have not turned a wheel on NIR track. The reason for this is simple.

After the derailment last September of the "Atlantic Coast Express" the railway company carried out an investigation, as did the Society. While neither investigation found any defect in any Society vehicle, the railway company felt that an independent assessment of safe operating speeds for steam locomotives should be carried out by an expert engineering consultancy, acceptable to the railway company.

The Society has therefore commissioned Halcrow Transmark, probably the pre-eminent consultancy in dealing with heritage equipment (as our locomotives and rolling stock are now classified). They are presently carrying out their assessment, and are expected to report by the end of June.

This will hopefully allow the operation of the "Portrush Flyer" season which has

been planned, and possibly an "Atlantic Coast Express" could be operated in early September. However, to comply with a request from Northern Ireland Railways the Society is not advertising any of its proposed operations until the report from the consultants has been accepted by the railway company.

The Council of Management of the Society has been actively progressing this matter, and is confident that a satisfactory outcome can be achieved. We will have to be patient, however, and await the report as the Council views the safety of our passengers as being of paramount importance.

OPERATIONS

Iarnród Éireann Steam Training: In other areas, the news is of a very much brighter nature. Dublin locomotive representative, Chas Meredith, has provided this report:

Following the initial training of a new batch of 7 IÉ drivers as steam firemen during the late winter of 1995/6, continued pressure on Iarnród Éireann resulted in the selection of 3 of the previous trainees for training as drivers. These were Ray Kearns (already passed as a fireman), Seamus Brennan and Joe Meagher of the 1996 trainees, not yet passed as firemen). It was also decided that the opportunity should be taken of giving additional firing training to Arthur Goonan, one of the intended 1996 trainees, but who missed some of his training due to illness.

Training took place on the following dates, using No.171 and coaches 1335 and 1916: 10th/11th, 18th/19th, 20th/24th & 25th/26th March.

Unfortunately, intended training on 12th & 13th March had to be postponed due to leaking tubes in the firebox tubeplate of No.171.

All trains were run from Connolly to Mullingar, departing at approximately 11:00 and arriving back around 16:00. The IE driver was Dan Renehan and Locomotive Inspector Tony Foley was in charge of operations.

In the event, Inspector Foley decided to leave most of the instruction to Driver Renehan, with only two of the trainees on the footplate at any time. Arthur Goonan received considerable driver training as well as developing his firing skills, and may be said to have caught up with the others in all respects.

A decision has yet to be taken by IÉ as to precisely how the trainees will be passed as drivers - clearly they need more experience than 8 days training with a two coach train. It is intended that they be rostered as often as possible during the 1997 summer season to give them more experience with full weight trains.

The informal opinion of Inspector Foley is that all trainees performed well and show the necessary driving aptitude.

Running 8 trains on mid-week days posed considerable crewing difficulties, quite apart from the problems caused by locomotive defects. However, the effort expended by a large number of Society members in helping to organise the training was thought to be very well worthwhile.

Our thanks must go to IÉ for their interest and foresight in allowing these operations to take place and in releasing the drivers for training.

"Royal Canal": The shuttles ran on 25th May, with an eight coach train making two well filled return trips in fine weather to Enfield. No.171 performed well, and the return at Connolly was punctual. On view was the impressive new track geometry at Liffey Junction, where the line now curves over the old down platform.

Mid-Summer: Unfortunately, the proposed northern operation on the 20th June will not now be operating, but the annual barbecue train to Mullingar from Dublin on 21st will.

Rosslare: Further to what was reported in the previous circular, we are advised by IÉ that DSER operations during the summer are 99% certain to continue to Rosslare. The first trip of the summer will be the "Strawberry Fair" on 5th July.

Open Day: Don't forget to come to

Whitehead on 26th July when the site will be open to the public. There will also be a number of other interesting attractions.

LOCOMOTIVE WORKSHOP

Appeal: By now you should have received, or very shortly will receive, a letter from the Council asking you to help with funding the workshop. We are hoping that all members will respond as generously as possible.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.85 "Merlin": Both bogie wheelsets re-profiled following inspection for annual railtour.

No.171 "Sieve Gullion": Based in Connolly shed at present, where it is the current operational loco.

No.461: In the ramps in Inchicore, having returned from Mallow the Wednesday after the two day tour. Our thanks are due to the staff in Mallow Station who showed us so much consideration and help during our stay there.

The locomotive is currently waiting repairs to the regulator and to a weeping large tube.

WHITEHEAD

Summer Squad: Don't forget that the site team is at work every Wednesday evening during the summer months. All welcome.

CARRIAGE & WAGON

FÁS Cabra: Work on 351 continues. Our thanks are due to Dublin Container Services whose kind donation of a 20ft container permits material to be stored in a way that allows the work to go on faster.

Mullingar: Work is proceeding on the interior of 1463. The seats have been moved to Dublin on the crew training trips for upholstering.

Heuston: A full programme of internal work is under way on most of the vehicles in the running set. This includes painting,

cleaning, electrical and carpentry.

Park Royal 1416 emerged briefly from Inchicore for the Royal Canal shuttles, after the completion of panelling work. It is hoped that it will return for completion of work on the roof and upper body panels. The work involves the replacement of galvanized steel with aluminium panels.

SALES

Main Lines: A variety of branded RPSI items is always available from:

RPSI Postal Sales
45 Drummacanvy Road
Portadown
Co. Armagh
BT63 5LX

The principal lines are: locomotive outline badges, videos, postcards, posters, pencils, rulers, etc.

For The Collector: Send details of your requirements to:

RPSI Collector's Shop
148 Hillsborough Road
Lisburn Co. Antrim
BT27 5QY

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; etc. Railway Clearing House 1927 maps of Ireland are now available, folded in cover, priced £3.90.

Book List: The current book list includes:

"Railway Days in Strabane"	£5.50
"The Fintona Horse Tram"	£6.50
"Isle of Man Horse Trams"	£3.55
"The Warrenpoint Branch"	£5.55
"Irish Metrovick Diesels"	£5.55

All prices include postage.

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