



April 1999

## AGM

**Meeting:** This year's meeting was held in Whitehead and passed off with no major contentious issues being raised. A large contingent of southern members attended and we thank them for the effort they made to be there.

Chairman, John Creaner, introduced our new Vice-President, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, to those present and Sir Kenneth was very kind and complimentary in his reply to the Chairman's welcome.

**Thank You:** Outgoing Council members this year were our two Operations Officers, Heather Boomer and Joe Fitzpatrick. Our thanks to them both, Heather for her 5 year stint in the thankless (during recent years at least) task of northern operations, and Joe for returning to Council long after he thought he had seen the last of it.

**Welcome:** Evan Pamely moves to fill the northern operations post, a task he has become somewhat familiar with over the last few years with sitting on the Belfast Area Operations Committee.

Two new members have arrived on Council, Charles McDonnell from Co. Meath takes over southern operations, and Bill King-Wood from Dundonald takes up one of the General Officer posts. Both are familiar faces on trains and around the sites in Dublin and Whitehead, Bill being a regular in the Locomotive Department, and

# NEWS LETTER

Charles in the Dublin Carriage & Wagon team.

## OPERATIONS

**Belfast Area Operations Report:** A word from Evan Pamely, our new Belfast Area Operations Officer:

As incoming Operations Officer, I am writing to give you an outline of the pattern of Northern operations for this summer. We have the exciting prospect of a run to Dundalk on 24<sup>th</sup> April to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the line to Dundalk, and on 18<sup>th</sup> June we are again running our "Steam and Jazz" train, with the Apex Jazz Band providing the music.

Civil engineering work in Belfast on the line between Central Station and Central Junction is expected to close the line during June, July and August and will prevent running between Whitehead and Portrush. The summer operations will likely centre on Belfast Lough, or possibly a locomotive based at NIR's Adelaide yard. This could produce a pattern of local operations to Bangor or Whitehead and if steel bodied stock were available "Steam Enterprise" trains to Dublin. All depends upon the co-operation of many people which at this stage is not assured. We will do our best to keep you informed in good time of proposed steam specials as they are finalised.

I realise that many people could find the absence of the "Portrush Flyer" very

disappointing but I hope that other operations will satisfy your thirst for steamy days out.

If anyone has suggestions for possible new operations I would be glad to hear from you.

**First Outing:** The inaugural run for 1999 was a charter for Belfast Scout groups having a day out in Carrickfergus. The operation involved a return trip from Belfast Central to Carrickfergus.

The section from Whitehead to Belfast & return was used as a running-in trip for No.85 following repairs to her wheels.

At Whitehead No.85 was swapped for No.171, and while the scouts were sampling the delights of Carrickfergus, locomotive and train travelled back to Belfast and thence to Bangor. The latter section and return was covered with NIR's track recording machine on board, it being the first visit to Bangor by steam since the consultant's report of 1997.

Members were offered the opportunity to avail of a cheap £5 fare for the day, and a small number travelled. However, the scouts enjoyed themselves and have mentioned the possibility of a repeat charter in the future.

**Easter:** At the time of writing, the planned operation to Mullingar on 2<sup>nd</sup> April and the "Easter Bunny" were progressing towards fruition.

**Dundalk 150:** See the enclosed booking form for details of this major event in Society operations. Two trains running simultaneously from Belfast and Dublin to Dundalk meet in the latter station to celebrate 150 years of railways in that town. The last time such an operation took place was in 1977 when two trains met in Drogheda and combined for a run to Kingscourt as the destination. The last local operation on the GNR main line was the "Phoenix" in 1995.

The operation is being sponsored by and run in conjunction with the island's

two railway companies. Iarnród Éireann and Northern Ireland Railways.

After arrival in Dundalk there will be the option of taking one of the trains on a return trip to either Drogheda or Poyntzpass.

The trains will comprise IÉ Cravens coaches, with No.171 starting out of Dublin, and No.85 out of Belfast.

Since the withdrawal of "Steam Enterprise" operations, questions have been asked continually about a return to the GNR main line. Now is the chance for all those members, north and south, to experience that thrill again - and with GNR locomotives!

A word about the enclosed poster - it is not for decoration but, with your co-operation, for displaying in a local shop, place of work, etc.

**Saint Munchin:** It is not too late yet to send in your booking forms for the International Railtour to Limerick.

## GENERAL

**Eamonn Lacken:** We are sorry to have to record the death on 16<sup>th</sup> February of Eamonn Lacken, former Chief Locomotive Inspector of Irish Rail and long-time friend of the Society. Ernie Gilmore remembers:

Eamonn, a proud Midland man, like all professionals appreciated the relative comforts of modern traction but liked nothing better than to step up on one of the Society's locomotives to take charge of a 2-day Railtour. During my tenure as Operations Officer, nothing was too much trouble for Eamonn to arrange. The driest of humour produced a fund of footplate stories, born of a deep respect for his fellow workers and their working conditions.

A tireless supporter of charitable causes, he was closely involved with the National Foresters in Athlone and the St. Hilda's Services in aid of which he organised special steam excursions using RPSI positioning runs.

Eamonn was a devoted family man and

while recalling epic journeys by steam with Eamonn in charge, our sympathy must lie with his wife Bridie and their daughters, of whom he was so proud. His big regret was that there were no Midland engines in our preserved stock.

## LOCOMOTIVES

**No.3 "R.H. Smyth":** Due for re-tubing soon.

**No.4:** Boiler - Steam testing complete. Repairing, renewing and assembling cladding. Casting firebars.

Mechanical - New piston rods machined. Preparation for boring cylinders and valve liners. Renewal of valve heads and rings. Re-metalling and machining of cross-heads. Renewal of connecting rod and coupling rod bushes.

**No.85 "Merlin":** Minor repairs being run in.

**No.171 "Slieve Gullion":** Minor repairs being run in.

**No.461:** Work to plugs and stays. New set of volute springs fitted.

## CARRIAGE & WAGON

**Any Old Iron:** If anyone has any old cracked or broken cast iron implements, then please bring them down to Whitehead where Peter Scott and his gang will melt them down and turn them into new brake blocks for the carriages.

**Weather Reports:** The storms on Boxing Day blew the blue tarpaulin cover partially off NCC Railcar No.1. Apart from that no damage was reported.

The rear doors of the carriage shed were moving in the high winds and setting off the burglar alarm. The doors have been screwed up as a temporary measure until long bolts can be made up for them, however it may be some time as this is hardly a priority.

GNR brake carriage 114 has been outside for about five years and is beginning to show visible signs of

deterioration. (It was taken out of service due to signs of rot.) If anyone can provide a tarpaulin cover to protect it, 114 would be most grateful.

**Volunteers, What Volunteers?:** We need your help to restore, maintain and run our trains. Railway modelling is a great hobby, but you can't beat the real thing.

**Ministerial Visit:** Irish Minister for Arts, Culture, Gaeltacht and the Islands, Silo DeValera, and her Minister of State, Eamonn O'Civ, paid a private visit to Inchicore on 31<sup>st</sup> March to view the progress on the restoration of 351, the Irish State Coach.

Both ministers are related to the late President DeValera who travelled on the coach during his time in office.

## WHITEHEAD

**Sign Of The Times:** Two new signs have been made for the steam train rides at Whitehead. The maroon and cream painted one advertises the shop and the other, in UTA yellow and black, is to direct people along the lane to the platform. They are similar in style to the station name board with raised cast-iron lettering. The main design flaw is that they are quite large and heavy.

**Fire Alert:** The sleeping coach and the Tarry mess room were fitted with new smoke alarms. They only cost a fiver each, so check your own, or go and buy a couple.

**Shop:** Plans are under way to re-roof the shop on the platform at Whitehead. It is basically a portacabin and, as such, it has a flat roof which invites eventual collapse if the weather should penetrate the roofing material.

**Get Well Soon:** Best wishes to Dermot Mackie for a speedy recovery after his spell in hospital in January.

## MEMBERSHIP

**Thank You:** The Secretary would like to thank all members who responded so promptly to the membership renewal

notice. Double thanks to those who included a donation.

**Covenants:** Currently, around 230 members, or 35% of the total eligible, have taken out a covenant in favour of the Society. This returns around £1,000 per year and is well worth having. Could we please encourage more members, i.e. those residing in Northern Ireland and Great Britain and paying UK tax in any form, to consider taking out a covenant. It is a one-off process - once the initial forms are filled in the covenant continues until you inform us otherwise. The forms are simple to complete, and full instructions are supplied with them. Interested? Then write to the address at the end of this News-Letter.

## WINTER MEETINGS

**Spring Has Sprung:** With winter over we can reflect on another successful season of meetings at St. Jude's. Charles Friel and his presenters must of course be congratulated for their superb shows, and the members for turning up in such satisfying numbers.

However, for Charles the easy bit is over and the difficult task resumes of trying to twist arms and cajole reluctant presenters to commit themselves to putting on shows before the deadline of mid-August.

As always, members are asked to contact Charles with ideas for the meetings or, better still, to offer themselves as candidates.

## SALES

**Cine Video:** There are still a few copies left of the vintage cine footage transferred to video as reported in the last News-Letter, i.e. Armagh in 1958 and the Cork line in the 1970s. Price £10.

**New Products:** Video "From Baltimore to Belfast", colour and b&w GSR and GNR steam from the 1950s, £17.70.

Also available are: Railway Clearing House 1927 maps of Ireland folded in

cover, priced £3.90; "Irish Railways in Pictures, The Cork Lines", £4.50; "Castlederg & Victoria Bridge Tramway", 96 pages with black & white photographs, £10.60; "Fermanagh Railways, A Pictorial Tribute", 144 pages with black and white photographs, £12.90; "Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway Visitors Guide", £6.50.

Just in - "The Wee Donegal" by Robert Robotham, and "Trams to the Hill of Howth" by James Kilroy.

Send details of your requirements to:

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

**Book List:** The current book list includes:

"Irish Railways in Pictures - GNR(I)"	£4.35
"The Fintona Horse Tram"	£6.50
"Isle of Man Horse Trams"	£3.55
"The Warrenpoint Branch"	£5.55
"Irish Metrovick Diesels"	£5.55

**Main Lines:** A selection 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.

All prices are in sterling and include postage. For the time being, we must ask that you please add 10% when ordering in punts.

## EDITORIAL ADDRESS

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