



November 1999

# NEWS LETTER

## TELEVISION CELEBRATION

**"Keeping Up Steam"**: This is the title of a BBC(NI) programme which promises to be a celebration of 35 years of the RPSI. The 50 minute programme has been produced by member, David Dillon, and will be shown on BBC 1 Northern Ireland at 10:20pm on 24<sup>th</sup> November. Now you will see why everywhere you have travelled with the RPSI, a bearded gentleman has been following with a video camera!

## DUBLIN OPERATIONS

**Oops:** Due to a wrong delivery by the Royal Mail, the following missed being included in the August News-Letter.

Dublin operations have been filled to about 75% capacity of the seven coach set. This decline in bookings may be partly explained by the relatively quiet tourist season this year. There are only seven coaches because of 1142 having to be removed from the set.

Operations have assumed the normal pattern of the barbecue train to Mullingar, two trains to Rosslare, one stopping at Enniscorthy and the other at Wexford for local participants. All trains ran successfully. Repairs to the mechanical interlocking in Rathdrum cabin means that the water column there has not been accessible in the down direction, so we run non-stop to Avoca.

One extra operation ran on 15<sup>th</sup> July, when Railtours Ireland chartered the train to carry a party of 200 from the Royal Society of Chemists from Dublin to Arklow, and back from Rathdrum.

On 27<sup>th</sup> June No.461 was in steam in Inchicore for an open day. State Coach 351 was on display (with no gangways),

resplendent in its maroon and cream livery. Thanks are due to the members who help to steward this event, putting our product in view to 3,000 members of the public.

**Motive Power:** For a number of years now the Dublin locomotive has been No.461, and very reliable too she has been. Based in Connolly during the summer, the locomotive is likely to return to Inchicore for the winter months, especially now that space is at a premium with the arrival of the new Sparrow diesel DMUs.

Following some problems, a move to a new source of coal has resulted in improved steaming of the locomotive. This coal is from the Ukraine and is proper steam coal. Dublin's coal is now sourced through Whitehead, and 30 tonnes are stored behind Connolly turntable.

## OPERATIONS

**"Bangor Belle"**: These operations proved to be very popular and were thoroughly enjoyed by all who took part. North Down Borough Council gave us excellent support, carrying most of the advertising. The second of the operations ran on the 28<sup>th</sup> August. The advertising for this train had been of a higher profile than the last, with inclusion of a clip of No.171 in a TV advert for the Council's bank holiday festivities.

On the day the Council provided an entertainer on the train and handed out sweets and balloons to the children. Due to rebuilding work at Bangor station only a 5 coach train was allowed to operate. Rebuilding will take another 18 months so train size could still be a problem if the event becomes more popular next year.

**"Sea Breeze"**: On 4<sup>th</sup> September, No.461 hauled a train of seven coaches on its final

trip of the season to Rosslare. Initial bookings were lower than usual leading up to the operation, possibly due to a confusion over dates. However, on the day over £1,000 was collected by passengers turning up unannounced. While grateful for the late rush, we always recommend booking in advance. This allows the Society to cater for the expected numbers, and it gives the passengers a guarantee of a seat, with no possibility of being turned away at the barrier should the train be heavily booked. All that notwithstanding, the day was a great success.

**European Architectural Heritage Day**: On 12<sup>th</sup> September, along with other industrial sites throughout Europe, we opened our site to the public in the form of an extra train rides day. An encouraging number of visitors attended.

**"Atlantic Coast Express"**: What started out as a very promising operation, gradually turned into something of a nightmare. Things started to go wrong on the outward journey when an unlucky combination of late-running service trains and failure of the water column at Ballymena resulted in an arrival in Derry approximately 2 1/4 hours late.

A prompt departure gave hope of an uneventful return journey - not to be! The delays earlier in the day, during which the locomotive was kept at full readiness, had resulted in an excess of coal being burned, leaving us very low for the return. The upshot was that we were put into the loop at Coleraine where a very unhealthy fire was cleaned, and a call was made for a diesel to meet us further up the line, there now being insufficient coal to see us home.

Not a day anybody would want to repeat!

**Family Day Charter**: NIR asked to charter a series of shuttles to run to Cultra in conjunction with their Family Days on 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> September. We were only able to help on the 19<sup>th</sup> due to the Derry operation the previous day.

**Cork 150**: Sustained hard work was required at Whitehead to have the small tubes in No.85 replaced. It should have been a routine job but a delay in the delivery of the new tubes meant fitting and testing had to be completed in the week prior to the operation.

No.85 travelled light engine from Whitehead to Dublin on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> October, and thence to Limerick Junction on the Thursday.

On Saturday morning, following the departure of the Up and Down morning

passenger trains, No.85 shunted its train of 6 Mk2 carriages to Platform 1, departing only a few minutes late with the VIPs who had arrived by service train. After a stop in Charleville for water, the train arrived in Mallow for formal ceremonies to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the coming of the railway to the area.

The train was met at Kilbarry, north of Cork tunnel and the original temporary terminus of the line, by dignitaries and a lone piper.

The locomotive was cleaned, coaled and watered in Cork before a departure at 16:00 for what was a fine run back to Limerick Junction, stops being made at Mallow (for show) and Charleville (for water). A diesel hauled the coaches back to Cork while No.85 and her crew overnighted at the Junction before returning to Whitehead the following day.

Following difficulties in the north with coal, the new Polish coal was being tried out and No.85 appeared to run happily with it, steaming freely despite sustained hard work.

The operation was the latest in a list of anniversaries marked by the railway companies, none of which would have been possible in any significant form without help from the Society. Cast your mind back to the 40th Anniversary Enterprise (1987), Ulster Railway 150 (1989), Inchicore 150 (1996) and Dundalk 150 (1999). Hopefully we will be able to help celebrate the anniversaries of the arrival of railways in Wexford (2020) and Rosslare Harbour (2056).

**"Broomstick Special"**: Our new venture took place on a sunny October Halloween day. It caught the imagination of a good number of people who came along in fancy dress. Many of the costumes were really superb and the train had a festive atmosphere like one long party. For a first time operation the loadings were good, being 35% and 75%. The event shows great promise for the future. We must thank all the train crew but especially the witches who had difficulty hiding their youth and vitality beneath their old crone costumes. They convinced some revellers who attacked them for being bad witches!!

**"Coleraine Shopper"**: On 27<sup>th</sup> November, we will be operating to Coleraine, with Santa trips to Castlerock and Ballymoney. We hope to be able to distribute vouchers which will be redeemable at stores in Coleraine.

**"Santa Special"**: The usual Christmas trains will be running in December. Belfast - 5<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup>. Dublin - 5<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup>.

Members are advised to book early to avoid disappointment. Experience from recent years suggests that all these trains are expected to fill to capacity.

**Running Matters:** The coal we have been using is taking some getting used to. It can provide good heat but, because of its low volatiles, needs more careful management and more thought. It will also clinker under some conditions though generally not badly. This has caused a lack of easy steaming on occasion and remedial action before proceeding. Hopefully, both Society and NIR personnel are now getting to grips with the new Polish coal which was recently introduced.

Delays to trains in the north have also been caused by the brake system butterflies on coaches being turned by lineside foliage. Consideration is being given to removing these devices.

**Retirement:** On 30<sup>th</sup> July a small number of Society members were privileged to be invited to Dublin's Ashling Hotel, where Locomotive Inspector Tony Foley's retirement function was being held. Tony has been associated with the Society's Dublin operations for about 10 years as inspector, and before that as an Inchicore driver. His retirement marked the end of an era, being the last of the IÉ staff who served in the steam locomotive line of promotion, and was the culmination of 50 years spent on the railway. The Society's best wishes go with him for a long and happy retirement.

**Footplate Matters:** The retirement of Tony Foley, former GNR driver and Irish Rail's Senior Traction Inspector, severed the last Irish Rail link with company-served steam operations. His replacement as steam inspector is Don McLaughlin who trained and passed out as a fireman in 1992.

Ireland's senior steam inspector is now NIR's Barney McCrory. In the summer of 1969, as a young 21 year old fireman, Barney was the last company employee (anywhere in the British Isles) to be passed out as a steam driver.

For the record, the following diesel trained drivers, all belonging to either Belfast or Dublin, comprise the steam links.

Belfast York Road - Micky Hamill (driver), Noel Playfair (driver), Billy Gillespie (fireman), Gary Moore (fireman), Drew Turkington (fireman), Stephen Glass (trainee fireman).

Dublin Inchicore - Tony Renahan (driver),

Tom McCarthy (fireman), Joe Maher (fireman).

Dublin Connolly No.1 (GNR) - Terry Hughes (fireman), Don O'Mahoney (fireman).

Dublin Connolly No.2 (D&SER, MGWR) - Dan Renahan (driver), Seamus Brennan (fireman).

**Contact:** We continue to have visitors from England and overseas who are very welcome and appreciated. Some have commented that the Society is difficult to contact. We are currently investigating the establishment of a permanent office at Whitehead which should make it easier for members to contact us and promptly receive up-to-date news of our activities.

## LOCOMOTIVES

**No.85 "Merlin":** Urgent re-tubing in time for the Cork 150 operation. Spark arrester also removed.

**No.186:** Returned to Whitehead on 2<sup>nd</sup> October from Belfast docks where it had been stored for a couple of weeks after leaving Inchicore because the locomotive shed at Whitehead was not yet ready to receive it.

The loco has lain out of use since 5<sup>th</sup> July 1980, first at Whitehead and then, from June 1996, as a stationary exhibit at Inchicore in Dublin. Dismantling is underway to allow inspection with a view to restoration to refit her for the new millennium. Funding permitting, the target date for completion is 2004.

**O&K No.3:** The Downpatrick Steam Museum's locomotive was returned to Downpatrick on 2<sup>nd</sup> October on the same low loader by which No.186 arrived.

Prior to its return, the locomotive had carried out a number of running-in sessions shunting at Whitehead, notably on its first public appearance on 12<sup>th</sup> September. This then concluded the Society's first major sub-contract project.

## FINANCE

**Foundry:** Members will be pleased to know that we are now able to add another aspect to our overall fund raising drive, following the completion of the Locomotive Workshop. Until now, our fund raising has been broadly divided into the operation of several dining cars on one the hand, and sales of books and souvenirs on the other.

Now, we have our foundry! The Locomotive Department has begun to take in outside casting work, and a small profit has been made on our first project, to manufacture cast tops for iron railings for an outside customer. Also, some trial castings have been made of replicas of old railway company signs - see also the advert included with the August News-Letter. We hope to have limited editions of these to members in time for Christmas presents!

## MEMBERSHIP

**Renewal:** Forms are enclosed to allow early renewal, if so wished. Members are asked to please take the opportunity to review any standing order arrangements as a number are still incorrect despite it being a few years since any change was required. Also would those who recently received covenant renewal forms please complete and return as soon as possible. If you live in the UK and don't have a covenant in operation, you are asked to consider doing so.

## WINTER MEETINGS

**8<sup>th</sup> December:** "Irish Steam Cinema" - Fred Cooper makes a return visit to St. Jude's.

**12<sup>th</sup> January:** "The LMS in Ireland" - Mark Kennedy introduces material from his new book on the LMS.

**9<sup>th</sup> February:** "Locos Of The GNR(I)" introduced by Norman Johnston, followed by "GN Main Line, Then And Now" from Michael McMahon.

**MRSI:** Our sister society, the Modern Railway Society of Ireland, will be holding their meetings in Dukes Hotel, Belfast, on 17<sup>th</sup> November, 19<sup>th</sup> January and 16<sup>th</sup> February.

**IRRS:** The Irish Railway Record Society will be holding meetings at their premises in Dublin on 25<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup> November, 9<sup>th</sup> December, 13<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> January, 10<sup>th</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> February.

## CARRIAGE & WAGON

**Compensation Award:** The criminal damage claim against the Northern Ireland Office as a result of the arson attack on the Society's carriages in May 1996 has now been settled in full. More details will be given before the AGM.

**Dublin Set:** As noted elsewhere, 1142 was

removed from the running set to go to Inchicore where it received attention in order to make it a suitable companion vehicle for 351 at the latter coach's launch - it was being painted in a similar maroon and cream GS&WR livery.

As usual in such matters, it is the final 20% of the work on 351 that is taking 80% of the time. Bogies for the coach have been procured from Whitehead.

Work is nearing completion on 1383 in Mullingar, after going in during October 1997. A new roof is being fitted which will receive a one-piece cover in due course. The communication cord will be removed and replaced by two emergency handles - a modification which has already taken place on 1463. It is hoped that when 1383 emerges from Mullingar its place will be sister Park Royal 2423.

## WHITEHEAD

**JCB:** With the help of John, our resident welder we have been carrying out repairs to the cab of the JCB. The cab is now, once again, self-supporting and relatively waterproof.

**Off-Site:** After the trouble with the water column at Ballymena on the Derry trip, Alan McRobert made a few enquiries locally and was able to obtain the services of Green Watch of the Ballymena Fire Service to empty the tank at the northern end of the station. Repairs were effected to the plunger mechanism and all is now well once again. The opportunity was taken to clear the tank of accumulated rubbish and rusty mud.

**Goodbye O&K - Hello J15:** Almost all of the site gang helped to build the rail ramps for the unloading of No.186 and the loading of Downpatrick's Orenstein & Koppel locomotive on 2<sup>nd</sup> November.

As the job was finished by lunchtime, the opportunity was taken to use the gang to remove the very last 60ft section of timber sleepers from the platform road. A fortnight later it was relaid with concrete sleepers.

**What Next:** From November it is planned to start installing the electrics in the locomotive workshop - a nice easy job with no need to get wet or cold!

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