



August 2000

NEWS LETTER

SAVE OUR RAILWAYS

Interview: On 14th June, Vice-Chairman David Dillon was interviewed for Newsline, the BBC's local evening news programme in Northern Ireland. David highlighted the risk to the Society if NIR's network is cut back as threatened. Some sources suggest that Carrickfergus or Downshire might be the future terminus of the current Larne line. Should this be the case the Society's very existence is under threat, with the loss of access to our engineering base.

Task Force Meetings: The Railways Task Force organised three public consultation meetings in Belfast, Ballymena and Londonderry during June. Due to the demand, a further three were held during July - in Larne, Bangor and Craigavon. The first of these, on 24th July, saw a Society steam special connecting with the meeting in Larne. The train was organised by Translink and consisted of No.85 and train running from Belfast Central, picking up at stations on the line to Larne. Carriage was free for those attending the meeting.

The special train was the idea of the Belfast Telegraph newspaper, and was eagerly picked up by both Translink and the Society. The Belfast Telegraph has been at the forefront of the campaign to prevent Northern Ireland's rail network being closed in part or full following the release of a safety report which showed the lines need £183 million worth of investment.

Logos: In late June NIR's railcars started sporting the Save Our Railways logo on cab fronts and end boards.

Members in Northern Ireland should receive with this News-Letter a sheet of

labels with the same logo. You are invited to display these in prominent positions on all your correspondence. Please don't let the children waste them.

STONE TRAINS

Back To Real Work: Shortly after the previous News-Letter the Society was approached by Henry Boot Ltd, subcontractors to Farrans who are currently reinstating NIR's Bleach Green to Antrim section of the NCC main line to Derry. Henry Boot is responsible for the rail part of the contract and required a locomotive to haul a ballast train over the section.

As neither NIR nor IÉ had a suitable locomotive available, an approach was made to the Society for a steam locomotive. There was much bemusement, followed by the realisation that they were serious - remember a similar approach was mooted at the time of the relaying of the Dublin line near the border a few years ago, although no serious proposals were ever made.

Things subsequently happened very quickly, and on Sunday 18th June No.3 "R.H. Smyth" travelled from Whitehead to Muckamore by low-loader. After re-railing, a few trial runs were carried out with 3 bogie ballast wagons.

The following morning, the first day of operation, the first train started at 10:30 and by 12:30 four trains had operated, all being close to the loading area, on the Belfast side of Muckamore.

The locomotive is at the Belfast end of the train, and is chimney first, so it looks the part.

As ballast had already been laid from Antrim to Dunadry, the plan is that "Harvey"

will continue from there to the junction, taking about 12 weeks to complete the task.

Although an unusual arrangement, these operations are not without precedent. In the 1980s, following a spell being repaired, tank engine No.4, to run in, did a week on an NIR ballast train on the Larne line. David Dillon organised yet another TV slot for the Society when R.H. Smyth, her crew and those who unloaded her at Muckamore, made an appearance on BBC1 National Breakfast Time on Thursday 22nd June. This item, presented by Denis Murray, was broadcast all over the UK as well as on radio, satellite and in several Continental countries.

To Date: The trains have been operating as required by the contractors and will continue to do so until Bleach Green is reached.

The first drop of top ballast has now reached Kingsbog. There has been a suspension of operation while the track gang proceeds towards Bleach Green and the stone stockpile is allowed to build up again.

Photographers are asked to remember that the line is classed as a construction site and trespass will not be tolerated. However, the lineside locations are plentiful and varied.

OPERATIONS

"Greystones Shuttle": The first operation of the day (28th May) was diesel hauled by GM 085 due to a brake fault on No.171. This fault was rectified in time for her to haul the second and third trips.

The second "Greystones Shuttle", planned for 17th September, will not now operate.

Schools Day: Despite a low turn-out of schools, the event passed off successfully and, as always, was much enjoyed by all, not least those Society members who were showing the children around the site and answering all manner of intelligent questions!

"Steam & Jazz": Our second Jazz train this year with No.85 proved to be even more popular than the first. It looks as though these trains will become a regular feature in future years.

"Belfast Lough Express": Despite a late finish on the previous night's Jazz train, the

crews, both RPSI and NIR, were up bright and early for two consecutive days of running between Carrickfergus and Bangor on 24th & 25th June.

No.171 and train had been chartered by the Laganside group, in connection with a weekend of events all around Belfast Lough. A lack of clear advertising meant a lower turnout than the organisers would possibly have wished, but that was outside the Society's control.

In time for the Bangor trains were the repeat showings on BBC of two of David Dillon's programming classics. "The Day We Went To Bangor" and "Keeping Up Steam" were both broadcast in the previous week.

Strawberry Fair: A bomb explosion on the cross-border railway line near Meigh, south of Newry, in Co. Armagh early on Friday 30th June meant that No.171, due to travel south to work the operation to Enniscorthy and Rosslare, had to remain in Whitehead. Unfortunately, the operation had to be diesel-hauled instead - IÉ locomotive GM 071 got the job.

International Bachelor Festival: No.171 performed well on the packed 'International Bachelors Festival', a charter train from Dublin to Mullingar. A great day, all trains ran well filled, including the excursion from Mullingar to Edgeworthstown. If you would like to see what it is like to travel on one of our Dublin based trains - check out this website set up by a visitor:

www.johnschexnaydre.com/SteamTrain.htm

This line is changing rapidly, with the entire Mullingar to Edgeworthstown section now relaid with CWR, and the double track between Clonsilla and Maynooth well advanced.

Whitehead Open Day: In conjunction with Whitehead Community Association, 29th July saw both No.85 and No.171 in steam at Whitehead for the annual Open Day. A few hundred visitors enjoyed train rides, the chance to investigate the footplate of "Merlin", guided tours of the extensive workshops, and real ale on sale in our restored dining car.

"Bangor Belle": Trains will be running on 26th August in conjunction with the Bangor Festival.

Train Rides: Some of the scheduled Sunday Train Ride operations didn't happen as No.3 was on ballast duties and

No.171 was in Dublin substituting for a failed No.461. Apologies to anyone who turned up on one of these days hoping for a train ride.

"Atlantic Coast Express": The postponed Derry operation will be running on 9th September, much expanded to include local trips and bus tour of Donegal.

"Steam Enterprise": A repeat of the successful return to the Dublin main line is planned for 30th September.

"Broomstick Belle": It is planned that we will run this year on Sunday 29th October. Watch the local press for details nearer the time.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.3 "R.H. Smyth": On hire to Henry Boot Railtech Ltd for ballasting work for Bleach Green - Antrim reinstatement. The locomotive has proved extremely effective. It hauls 3 NIR 'Walrus' hopper wagons for discharging top ballast, working gradually from the Antrim end of the section.

No.4: The first signs (visible to the lay member) of re-assembly took place on Saturday 24th July when the locomotive was re-wheeled at the sheer-legs. She was then rolled into the shed for the fitting of connecting rods, etc.

Boiler - Steam tested and awaiting installation.

Mechanical - Fitting piston and valve rings. Renewal of all con rod and coupling rod bushes complete. Overhaul of fittings under way. Crank pins trued up. Driving axleboxes repaired and assembled, driving wheels, bogie and pony truck fitted. Coupling rod knuckle bearings being renewed. Rebuilding of side tanks well advanced - tanks renewed except for section at cab end. This became necessary due to severe corrosion of internal surfaces.

No.171 "Sieve Gullion": Repairs to tender bearing and firebox under way.

No.184: In store, partly dismantled. Requires boiler overhaul and new cylinder block. Tender requires renewal of body. Tender transferred by road to Whitehead since no room for storage inside shed at Mullingar.

No.186: Overhaul to proceed (Council decision) - to appeal for funding. (£50k in first instance.) Further dismantling and

repair to progress as time permits (especially regarding the boiler) and funds become available.

The principal reasons for progressing No.186 are:

- Even with major boiler refurbishment, it is likely to be the least expensive of our locos to overhaul since it is relatively small and unsophisticated. No.171 and No.461 are likely to require at least as much major boiler work since the last '10 yearly' overhaul did not include firebox renewal.
- Mechanical condition has been assessed as reasonable.
- It is a very useful locomotive for crew training and short trips, e.g. Greystones, Bangor - a 'user friendly' engine.
- It has no route restrictions.
- The work can progress right away, with dismantling and preparation taking place at the same time as No.4 is being reassembled, which is a satisfactory deployment of labour.

No.461: The locomotive is coming out of the workshops soon in Dublin having had her big end remetalled and journals re-turned following a running hot incident in May. Will require running in.

Unilok: To Coastal Containers for repairs.

B&CDR Crane: Overhead crane nearly operational. Cable reel ex-York Road traverser installed.

Contract Work (1): Orenstein and Koppel No.1 for DARCo. We have quoted for refurbishment.

Contract Work (2): We have quoted for refurbishment of GNR(I) No.131 and hope to be involved in some of the work. The project is subject to availability of funding.

Foundry: Casting firebars and brake blocks. Several contract jobs have been completed.

WHITEHEAD

Site News: Since the last report a further 40 tonnes of stone have been put into the carriage shed and the work will continue with further concrete later in the year.

The body of the last of the laminate coaches has been taken off its frames and scrapped. All items of interest were salvaged and the aluminium sheeting netted £104 at the recycling plant.

The site crew helped with the move of "R.H. Smyth" to Muckamore on Father's Day. This involved ramp construction at both Whitehead and Antrim.

The recent good weather allowed the JCB to get a well-earned coat of bright yellow paint and the site has been given a second dose of weed killer, in time for the Open Day on 29th July.

A combined site and engine squad spent all of the 22nd July putting the wheels into the frames of No.4. This was particularly satisfying as we used the heavy lift area which had been a major site project a few years ago and is now proving its worth.

GENERAL

E-Mail Bulletin: Since the last News-Letter, those members with e-mail addresses known to the Society will have received a number of news bulletins - 10 have been sent so far.

It is the intention to continue and expand this service as an extension of the Society's presence on the internet. Any member wishing to avail of this service should return the enclosed form fully completed.

Please note there is no guarantee that this service will be permanent, nor is there any commitment to the number of bulletins sent. The latter will be dictated solely by the level of newsworthy items occurring. Members without e-mail should be reassured that it will in no way be used as a replacement for any items currently sent by post.

Honorary Degree: In June, in Belfast's Waterfront Hall, the Open University conferred an honorary degree on Society Vice-President, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield. Sir Kenneth, former head of the Northern Ireland civil service, became a Doctor of the University in recognition of his contribution to public service and the arts.

Listowel & Ballybunion Revival: The famous Lartigue monorail which ran from Listowel to Ballybunion is to be restored. The train ran on a single rail and was the only one of its type in the world. It operated between 1886 and 1924.

A grant of £175,000 was awarded to the group who have embarked on the project to restore and operate the train on a 500 metre section of rail. Over £600,000 is to be raised for the scheme. The organisers

hope to have the train running before next Christmas.

Visit: On Wednesday 24th May a party from Inside Track visited Whitehead in the course of an Irish excursion and, after being shown round our many wonders, had a few trips in coach 68 behind No.3 "R.H. Smyth", with photographs and footplate trips for those so minded.

Gift Aid: In a previous News-Letter it was announced that the covenanting scheme was no longer available for UK subscriptions. The good news is that it has been replaced by a similar, but much simpler system.

UK members will have received a Gift Aid form with this mailing. For the Society to reclaim tax on your subscription and any donation, all you have to do is tick the correct box and sign the form. The few conditions are listed on the form.

Please complete this form - it commits you personally to absolutely nothing, and the Society benefits substantially.

MEETINGS

Enniskillen: The Erne Model Railway Club invite all members to their Exhibition And Collectors Fair between 10am and 5pm on Saturday 23rd September in Enniskillen Cathedral Hall.

SALES

New Products: Mark Kennedy's new book, titled "The LMS In Ireland", should be available shortly, having been delayed to meet the pre-Christmas market.

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.

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