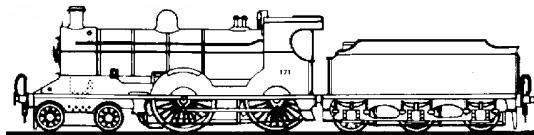


Railway Preservation Society of Ireland



August 2001

OPERATIONS

"Schools Day": The RPSI again threw open its Whitehead Engineering base to Northern Ireland's Primary Schools on Tuesday 5th June. Over 150 pupils from as far away as Donaghadee and Magheralin were treated to an audio-visual presentation and guided tours of the workshops and sheds. Tour guides were on hand to help pupils with questionnaires handed out by the RPSI, and to provide information about the rolling stock and engineering equipment.

We were very pleased to welcome back Frank Dunlop who deserves extra credit for persevering with 150 requests to blow No.85's whistle - apologies to the residents of Whitehead!

To finish their tour, all children were provided with a train ride behind "Harvey", followed by a visit to Henry Ritchie in the Society shop, open for business on the platform.

The day is actually quite a handful to manage and the fact that it runs so smoothly each year is due to the professionalism of the tour guides, train crew, Frank and shop staff, all ably organised by Philip Lockett. Sincere thanks to all of them.

We managed to move this year's 150 pupils through the site in only 2 and a half hours. We could handle MANY more schools, so if you have friends or family who are teachers then please point them in our direction for next year's Schools Days on 4th and/or 5th June 2002. If you would

like to volunteer as a tour guide or to help clean up our less well-known rolling stock (wagons and cranes) then please get in touch.

NIR Charter (1): The Society took part in a major way in NIR's launch ceremony on 9th June for the Bleach Green to Antrim line. It started at Belfast's Great Victoria Street station where invited guests were welcomed by a jazz band and tea or coffee. On the platform, participants were greeted by a gleaming No.4 and five coach train.

No.4 made a spirited climb of Mossley bank on what was her first full train on this section of track since return to traffic. The approach to Antrim was spot on time, but the train was held outside the station for 10 minutes to await the arrival of late-running service trains.

More guests were picked up at Antrim and after a quick reversal the train returned to Mossley West station. There, a reception was followed by speeches and lunch. There were three MPs, at least four mayors, and countless MLAs and local councillors present. The speakers were: Ted Hesketh (NIR), Jim Dougal (EU), the Newtownabbey Mayor, Joan Smyth (NI Transport Holding Company), Gregory Campbell (Regional Development Minister).

Dr. Smyth, as part of her speech, paid a very glowing tribute to the work carried out by the Society, and encouraged all present to sample our operations, including a visit to our comprehensive website. Society President, Lord O'Neill, was among a number of guests who received a

commemorative framed poster.

Following the festivities, guests returned to Belfast with the Society, or travelled to Antrim by special service train.

NIR Charter (2): On Sunday 10th June, No.4 again operated to Antrim - this time twice, with a seven coach train. The occasion was a charter by Translink to allow all their staff and families to experience the new line.

"Steam & Jazz": Friday 22nd June saw a very full train for this type of operation, with 250 passengers - all appeared to have a very good time!

"Mid-Summer Night Steam": The barbecue trip to Mullingar on Saturday 23rd May got off to a great start - full train, left on time, etc., but at Maynooth it was discovered that there was a hot axle box on 88, the GNR diner.

Following some discussion, it was decided to leave 88 at Maynooth and continue without her. After about an hour's delay the train continued to Mullingar where the party got underway without further hitches.

The damage to 88 was sufficient to bar the coach from travelling to Enniscorthy 2 weeks later.

"Strawberry Fair": With 340 passengers on board, the excursion to Enniscorthy and Rosslare on Saturday 7th July proved to be an excellent day out.

The only problem was Diner 88 not being available - a temporary facility was set up in Park Royal 1383.

"Mullingar Festival": The outing to Mullingar planned for 21st July was cancelled. The operation was to be a charter - as per last year - but when the organisers withdrew their interest we looked at the possibility of going on our own but eventually decided against it.

Whitehead Open Day: This event has been run in connection with the Whitehead Festival in recent years, but because of some local difficulties experienced in organising activities in the playing fields adjoining the Society's base, it was decided not to operate this year.

"Portrush Flyer": No.4 returns to Portrush and Castlerock on 4th, 18th and 25th August.

"Sea Breeze": The usual trips to Enniscorthy, Wexford and Rosslare take place on 11th August.

Dublin Shuttles: There will be a repeat of May's successful outings on 2nd September.

"Steam Enterprise": The postponed Dublin trip has been rearranged for 15th September. Of the Society's one-day trips, this is the most costly to operate and members are asked to give it their fullest support. It is hoped to sell tickets from Dundalk this year.

"Atlantic Coast Express": This, another postponed operation, will now run no 30th September.

"Broomstick Belle": Our Halloween trains will be operating again on Sunday 28th October. As is now usual, all participants are invited to come in appropriate dress, and there will be prizes for the best outfits. All children will receive a bag of scary goodies.

Further details can be obtained by phoning (028) 2826 0803 from 1st October.

Customer Care: Henry Ritchie is trying to compile a list of coach marshals who would be available for rostering on Whitehead-based trains or as site guides for the Sunday train rides. If you have in the past worked in either capacity, or would like to do so now for the first time, please contact Henry:

5 Beverley Mews
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LOCOMOTIVES

No.3 "R.H. Smyth": It is hoped to allocate some of the money which Harvey earned on the ballast contract to fund repairs.

No.4: Work on rebuilding of smokebox screens, sanding pipework and heating equipment.

No.85 "Merlin": Superheater elements tested and refitted.

No.184: Cleaning and general protection

proceeding.

No.186: Dismantling and cleaning of components progressing. Removal of defective stays complete - new stay material received and manufacture underway. Replacement of seam rivets by copper patch screws underway. Flue tube holes bored in new smokebox tubeplate by NIR at York Road. A supplier for the unique vacuum diaphragms and bellows has been located.

No.171 "Slieve Gullion": Attention was required to left-hand bogie axlebox - bearing remetalled and journal skimmed.

Coach Bogie Programme: UTA roller bearing bogies complete and fitted to 91. Next will be GNR bogies for 9 and 88.

Foundry: Casting firebars, brake blocks and other locomotive components. Several small contract jobs have been undertaken.

Workshop: Installation of electrics is proceeding slowly. The lifting equipment (cranes and slings) are now in the plant register with identification plates to be fitted.

WHITEHEAD

Guest: Due to lack of space at their York Road depot, NIR have asked the Society to store Hunslet 101 at Whitehead. 101 was transferred to Whitehead early in the morning of Saturday 16th June.

101 is nothing more than a shell, with both engine and traction motors missing.

GENERAL

Gift Aid: Have you returned your form yet? If not why not? There has been a very good response to the appeal for each UK member to fill out a form, but there is still scope for a lot more to do so!

Authors Wanted: The Editor of "Five Foot Three" is asking for contributions for the next issue. He is especially, but not exclusively, interested in matters southern as this area has been less well represented in recent years. This is not through slight or neglect but simply that the journal usually is filled with unsolicited contributions, and these have mainly been arriving with a

northern theme.

Although the next issue is not due until the new year, the lead time for articles is fairly long and submissions are requested as soon as possible. So get writing!

Harvey's Glory Days: Nelson Poots has written an article of the time No.3 "R.H. Smyth" spent on the ballast contract during Summer and Autumn last year. Together with pictures by Charles Friel, Philip Lockett and Ashley Black, it has been added to the Society's website.

E-Mail List: There are now 280 members receiving Society news updates by e-mail Bulletin. If you haven't yet asked to join, do so now - the e-mail address is given below.

Railway Safety Bills: Two government bills, both of which will affect the Society, possibly in different ways, although there will be major similarities, are been progressed by the authorities north and south.

In Dublin, the Rail Safety Bill has been sent to the Attorney General's office, and will come to the Oireachtas in the Autumn session. Changes of note include the obligation to produce safety cases within six, as opposed to nine, months and the addition of a heritage rail representative on the proposed Rail Safety Advisory Council (as requested by the Society, among others).

In Belfast, a consultation paper has been published which is the first step in pushing a new Railway Safety bill through the local Assembly. This too will require a safety case to be drawn up, and it will also have provision for heritage operators, although whether or not the Society falls into that category in either jurisdiction, being a mainline operator, remains to be seen.

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IMAGES OF GOD FROM THE AGE OF STEAM

This is not only the marching season. For many of us inclined to more peaceful pursuits, it is also the steaming season, because out of their winter hibernation have come those elegant reminders of poetry in motion cast in iron and steel. Add several tons of coal, several thousand gallons of water, oil the appropriate bearings, check the boiler pressure, and with grateful thanks to the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland the age of steam lives again through another summer.

The sight of 1913-built No.171 Slieve Gullion, resplendent in Great Northern Railway sky blue and scarlet, blasting its way up Bray Head en route to Enniscorthy with the packed "Strawberry Fair" special not only brought a lump to the throat but a reminder that, to the theologian James I. Packer, steam locomotives are nothing less than images of God.

The driver eased open the regulator as Slieve Gullion barely came to a stand at Bray. The former 4-4-0 Belfast - Dublin express engine poured dense clouds of smoke and steam from its chimney, got a grip of its long train, and in a marvellous controlled display of apparently limitless power moved up the steep gradient in harmony to a staccato yet mellow exhaust beat.

An image of God? Yes indeed - not just because of the power, and the glory of the smoke and steam darkening momentarily the morning sky, but because of the regulated control. It is the sheer power of God, nonetheless, which is closely connected with some of our most basic religious experiences.

Packer says the intimidatingness of God calls from the most elementary of all our religious attitudes, the fear of God. It was under this perception of God's overwhelming power that Isaiah cried out, "Woe to me! I am ruined!" (Isaiah 6:5) and the psalmist spoke of men being swept away by terror of God (Psalm 73:19) and the possibility of being broken in pieces like a potter's vessel (Psalm 2:9).

For the Christian believer, though, the element of control is expressed throughout the Bible in terms of God's power being available for our comfort. When we ask where our help comes from, we're told our safety comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth (Psalm 121:2). Because He never faints or becomes weary, we can, in Isaiah's vivid imagery, "mount up on wings as eagles" (Isaiah 40:31).

In the New Testament, the power of God ensures that no one can snatch the believer from the Father's hand; nor can anything in heaven, earth, or under the earth, separate us from Christ's love (John 10:29, Romans 8:39). Against hope we may believe in hope because God is well able to perform what he has promised (Romans 4:21).

The Christian is able to endure with contentment things that would ordinarily lay people low and even fill them with bitterness and resentment because, as St. Paul discovered, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Letter to the Philippians 4:13). Moreover, it is the power of the Holy Spirit, felt as a mighty rushing wind at Pentecost, that gives the church confidence to face its task of witness and service in the world.

So, grateful thanks to the RPSI for keeping Slieve Gullion and its shed-mates in such pristine condition. For some of us, anyway, these great engines will always have a spiritual aura around them as they bring to mind the power, majesty and glory of God.

Meanwhile, the most powerful Irish express loco of them all, No.800 Maeve, CIÉ's answer to the famous Royal Scot class of the London Midland & Scottish Railway, languishes silent and loved in the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. It's worth a prayer that one or more of the nation's fabulously wealthy entrepreneurs will realise how to really put their names in the history books by underwriting the restoration of this visually awesome monster. May Maeve emerge to steam again, to relive those halcyon days of the steam-hauled Dublin - Cork expresses!

G.F.

*Thinking Anew
(Irish Times - 14th July 2001)*