



November 2003

NEWS LETTER

OPERATIONS

"Southern Enterprise": No.85 bade a triumphant farewell to Cork over the weekend of 6th and 7th September. The locomotive was in sparkling form and ran well, if not spectacularly, throughout. The train of six Cravens and a generator van was well filled with around 260 passengers, more than half of whom had come from Britain for the special trip. En route, copies of a colour booklet "Merlin's Mainline Farewell" were distributed to passengers.

The climb out of Cork on the Sunday morning must be the high point of the tour, as always. Those who possess a 1935 GSR appendix will see that the load at which a 400 or a Woolwich could call for a pilot was 12½ (a bogie coach counts as 2) while a 500 could take 14½. No.85 took six cravens and a bogie van, speed dropping to 9mph on the most difficult bit which is not in fact in the tunnel, but on the reverse curves in the vicinity of Monard viaduct. No.85 thus repeated the feat of 1999 with a similar number of Mark 2 coaches.

This was a venture which provides us with lessons about our market. The tour was marketed as a good value product, and was very well patronised. Internet and email mean that we can leave accommodation arrangements to the customers in some circumstances, while a small number of long photo stops with clear views of the locomotive are as appreciated as a large number of rushed stops, some of which may be abandoned

due to timetable constraints.

Congratulations to the Dublin Area Operations Committee for a most enjoyable weekend. It was suitably different to a two-day tour to be a complementary event to the May event, and if the participants from the British market feel they got a value product then that would suggest this is a venture which could be successfully repeated.

Charter: A charter to Cultra for the Institute of Cytologists took place (nearly) as planned on 15th September.

It was a day of widespread disruption on NIR, with major signal failures on the Larne line. Our passengers were due to be picked up at Belfast's Great Victoria Street station at 19:20, but due to the hold-ups it was nearing 20:00 before the train arrived at Belfast Central. In the meantime, the passengers had been bussed to Central, and the Museum at Cultra arranged that the planned dinner there would be put back. After a quick run-round, No.4 and train departed Central shortly after 20:00.

After set down at Cultra, the train ran to Bangor where it stabled. The departure from Bangor was put back to 23:10 with the agreement of the customer, thence to Cultra where the returning passengers were picked up.

European Architectural Heritage Day: On Sunday 21st September, the Society marked this annual event by opening the Whitehead depot to the public. A very respectable 181 visitors enjoyed a train ride and site tour.

"Atlantic Coast Express": Due to the

advance publicity, the outing to Londonderry on 28th September was a great success.

No.4's running was excellent, and it was only a late-running railcar that delayed the train at Killagan loop on the return journey.

"Northern Enterprise": The train operated on 18th October with No.85 and 7 Cravens plus van, with 320 passengers on board.

It was the third such train this year (approximately 1,000 passengers in total). If this new market can be maintained, it will be a significant contribution to both the Society's income and to its public profile. Well done to all within the organisation team!

"Broomstick Belle": Sunday 26th October was the traditional Halloween outing. Nearly 500 passengers travelled on the two trains, with the vast majority of the children, and a few adults, dressed up as ghosts and ghouls - and some very fine costumes there were! No.4 was in sparkling form and would have made a fine shot for those who were there to photograph her on the return of the second trip between Carrickfergus and Jordanstown as she headed into a beautiful sunset.

"Santa Special" - Coleraine: Unfortunately for the Society, since last year a change to the NCC line timetable for Saturdays means that the earliest that a steam train can reach Derry is midnight. This is simply too late to allow crews to work a full day on the Sunday.

The plan this year is to do an out and back trip to Coleraine on 29th November and run two Santa trains. The first train will operate to Ballymoney, and the second to Castlerock - all fares £6.50 from the usual Tourist Information Centre outlets, and from Kingsgate Newsagents in Coleraine.

The connecting train from Belfast will allow the afternoon free in Coleraine - fare £10, pay on the day.

"Santa Special" - Dublin: The twelve trains planned for the first two weekends in December are now completely sold out.

Disappointed members should note that

the sixth train out of the twelve filled up on 31st July - bear this time frame in mind when considering booking next year. All of these sales are a result of 'word of mouth', and no publicity for any of the trains has been undertaken - a sure sign that the popularity of steam hauled trains is as strong as ever!!

"Santa Special" - Belfast: Trains will be operating on 7th, 13th, 14th, 20th & 21st December. Tickets from the usual TIC outlets.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.1: Gearbox and injector pump faults will receive attention when convenient now that the Guinness loco is available.

No.3BG "Guinness": The loco has been steam tested and is back in action, having carried out some shunting and crew training duties. Some of the repair work is still incomplete, including painting and attention to the steam brake.

No.4: Out of traffic after the Halloween trains for minor repairs, for example attention to firebars and springs before "Santa" season. Cleaning and washout commenced.

No.85 "Merlin": Now carrying out its final duties before the end of its 'boiler ticket'. The final date for operation will depend upon the boiler inspection, which is due in April.

No.186: Overhauling boiler fittings and pipe-work. Assembly of valve gear nearly complete - valve settings checked. Cab and boiler cladding ready for assembly, boiler lagging fitted. Tender placed on wheels and coupled to loco. Drawgear and buffers being assembled.

Overhauling steam heating equipment. New electrical equipment including lights and speedometer being installed. Some items of brake equipment still awaited, steam testing to commence as soon as possible after that.

The No.186 Appeal page on the Society's web site has been updated with the latest position on the appeal and on restoration progress. It's still not too late to make a donation to nudge the appeal total towards the target amount.

No.461: The boiler has been removed,

opened up and inspected. Main items requiring attention are replacement of most stays in the fire area, building up of wasted plates, repair or replacement of firehole ring patch. Costs are being estimated. Mechanical overhaul proposed includes re-profiling wheels and renewal of some bearings.

Unilok: This machine has proved most useful with a tractive effort far in excess of what would be expected. On two occasions it has been taken by lorry to the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum at Cultra, where it shunted No.74 "Dunluce Castle" in order to clear the railway gallery turntable area for a function.

Foundry: Casting firebars. Also several non-railway contract jobs.

Workshop: Installation of machines and wiring is proceeding as time permits. A replacement air compressor has been acquired.

A big shunt on 2nd November saw the huge steel bed plate welding table and heavy stationary grinder moved from the loco shed into the workshop - both jobs done with No.3BG and the hand crane. The opportunity also allowed the old compressor to be removed, through the by now dismantled roof, from the house beside the water tower.

WHITEHEAD

Update: A temporary siding, between the Carriage Shed and the Loco Workshop, has been laid and will be used as much needed extra storage space once the Guinness engine is ready for full time shunting duties.

Pilot trenches have been dug to evaluate ground conditions for foundations for a proposed extension to the carriage shed.

All other work of the Site team this Autumn has been concentrated on helping to get the carriages ready for traffic.

MK2 CARRIAGES

934: (Ex-NIR standard open) Bogies fitted. Electrics have been checked. Water tank being made and fitted. Painting continues - undercoat. Some

work remains to be done on floor and ceilings by LC&W.

5135: (Ex-BR standard open) Arrived at Whitehead from Heysham on 2nd November, bogies to follow. Unlike those already at Whitehead it has 6 doors, with 2 toilets at one end. In green undercoat. The interior has been completely refurbished and only requires new lino on the floors.

9382: (Ex-BR half brake) Electrical work ongoing - requires rewiring and fitting of a PA from an ex-IÉ coach. Painting ongoing - primer and undercoat.

13487: (Ex-BR corridor first) Electrical work ongoing - ex-IÉ PA.

13475: (Ex-BR corridor first) Complete with bogies. Electrical work to be started. Some work to be done on floor by LC&W. A further coach arrived from Heysham on 2nd November, bogies to follow. Another, complete with bogies, will arrive in early December.

Livery: The Society's first non-wooden framed coaches are nearing completion, and the subject of their livery surfaced recently, as a result of which an informal survey was conducted.

Apart from a number of suggestions which ended up being "one-offs", the general feeling was just about evenly divided between:

- UTA green. A slightly lighter shade of green similar to CIÉ pre-1955, or near to UTA green.
- GNR navy blue and cream.
- GNR brown (as in steel-panelled days).
- Maroon, more or less what is currently carried.

Of these "winners", UTA green had a very slight majority. A deciding factor too, was the preference of the volunteers who are actually doing the painting - they were unanimous on UTA green.

Lining out is being done in RPSI style - for those who read "UTA" as "666", take comfort: it's just UTA green, not UTA livery! Our lining will be one red and one yellow line, slightly separated.

In addition, a full RPSI coat of arms has been designed, and will be unveiled just

as soon as the designer's computer allows it. This will consist of a garter in the style of the Midland Great Western Railway (we've nothing preserved from this company in running order, so this is the best substitute). The background will be red, with gold lettering around the garter. Inside, a shield will carry an outline of No.171 on the upper level, in the style of old Isle of Man crests, below which will be the coats of arms of Co. Antrim (for Whitehead) and Dublin.

CARRIAGE & WAGON

Dublin: Diner 2421 from the set is being repainted in time for Christmas.

Brake standard / generator 1916 has had a replacement set of bogies fitted in Inchicore.

BELFAST MEETINGS

Round-Up: The first show of the season has taken place with Hassard Stacpoole's talk centring around a collection of colour slides, mainly from the late 1950s and early 1960s.

MEMBERSHIP

Increase: It is with regret that Council has had to review the membership rates in the light of the relentless continuing rise in operating costs in recent years. We do try to keep these reviews as infrequent as we can, and the expense as low as we can, but eventually we are put in a position of having to pass on some of it.

There are predictables, for example the ever-more voracious appetite of the insurance industry for our hard earned loot. It used to be that we could meet insurance costs just by the income from subscriptions - no longer; in 2002 membership income covered less than two-thirds of the insurance burden.

Other less obvious costs include the higher costs 'behind the scenes' in operating trains on NIR - 'proving' runs for certification purposes are necessary, involving hundreds of miles of light engine or empty train mileage. For the

first time in 2003, Iarnród Éireann required such a train, No.4 having to run light engine to Westport prior to the May railtour. A day's operation without a payload can easily cost the Society well over £1,000. By degrees, other expenses creep up, and margins on day trips are squeezed to the extent that some do little more than break even. A look at the Society's accounts in recent years will show the gradual increase in almost all areas of expense.

Another factor is the Society's age profile. In recent years this has increased, with the result that a smaller number of our members are paying the full Adult rate. Comparison with other clubs and societies often shows that a Senior rate is perhaps 80% of the full Adult one, but for years the RPSI's concession rates have been half, or just above half, the full rate. For members to continue receiving News-Letters, "Five Foot Three" and other correspondence, increasing costs of stationery and postage (especially to addresses outside the UK) have also to be borne in mind.

We realise, regrettably, that in the circumstances a substantial increase in rates is something we must face. While it will come as a shock to some, do bear in mind that even the Family rate is little more than £1 or €1.50 per week, while the Adult rate is less than 50p/60c per week.

Standing Orders: As always, when there is a rate increase, we would ask members who pay by standing order to update their payment authority with their own bank (before 1st February 2004) to ensure continuity of membership.

ON-LINE

Bulletins: The RPSI email Bulletin now has a circulation of 445. It appears to be levelling out at around this number.

EDITORIAL ADDRESS

148 Church Road, Newtownabbey,
Co. Antrim, BT36 6HJ.

www.rpsi-online.org

e-mail: rpsitrains@hotmail.com