

The Vice-Chairman's Thoughts

April 2004

Dear Member,

In October the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland will be 40 years old. I would like to reflect with you about what our Society has achieved in those years.

In 1964 the railways were in decline, steam had either gone or was on the way out, and the general public considered that anyone who was interested in railways was a nut case. It was against this background that our founding members established the RPSI. We started with 3 locomotives and 6 wagons, but we had nowhere to store them and we had no carriages.

The 4 or 5 trains which we operated each year were called railtours and used the railway company's carriages which were hauled by either NIR's locomotives or the RPSI's locomotives that had been overhauled by NIR, steamed and driven by NIR or CIÉ staff. The RPSI members were sometimes able to get involved in cleaning the locomotives, but little else. A number of these early railtours were run at a loss and had to be subsidised from members' subscriptions.

In the last 40 years we have increased our fleet of steam locomotives to 9 and who knows how many more will become available in the future. Consider the following:

- We now have the largest collection of historic carriages in Ireland.
- We have built an excellent locomotive workshop.
- We have one of the last operating foundries in Ireland.
- We have extended our locomotive running shed to hold up to 6 locomotives.
- We can now store 10 carriages under cover, and we are planning to increase this to 26.
- We keep two trains operational throughout the year, with one in Dublin and one in Whitehead.
- Last year we ran a total of 42 trains.
- We are now internationally recognised as a museum.
- We are about to purchase our own premises at Whitehead.

Not bad going for a voluntary society of only 1,000 members, certainly something to be very proud of when you consider the wealth of resources and manpower our sister organisations have across the Irish Sea.

The RPSI may have started life as a voluntary and fairly amateur organisation, but

over the last 40 years we have become Much less amateur and very much more professional.

This year your Society will have to present its Safety Case to both Governments and have it approved. We must acquire funding to finish the Mk2 carriage project and have them accepted for use on both NIR and IÉ networks.

Also this year, we hope, with the aid of Heritage Lottery funding, to extend the carriage shed so it can protect all of our historic and Mk2 rolling stock.

Work will also continue on locomotive overhauls, for while No.186 is being run in, No.461's boiler will be getting some new copper plate and boiler stays. Consideration will also be given to No.171 and what work will need to be undertaken on her.

The Society can no longer afford to subsidise railtours for its members. Our public liability insurance alone costs us £30,000 a year, and that's before we turn a wheel. So we must run more trains and those trains must make money.

Your Council needs your support more than ever in the next few years.

The Society must, if it is going to continue, increase the number of trains we run in both the North and South of Ireland. We need more volunteers to prepare the trains, steward the trains and work in the shops, diners and bars. We need more people to come forward to be trained as carriage and locomotive crew.

It is not an impossible task. If out of 1,000 members we got an extra 5% who are prepared to assist, we would have 50 new active members.

We also need your support to help fill our trains. We need you to tell people about us, about our trains and about what a great organisation the RPSI is and what it has achieved.

Have you considered making a financial donation to help get No.461 overhauled or the new Mk2 dining car into traffic?

I would like to conclude by saying - BE PROUD OF YOUR SOCIETY.

Yours sincerely,

Johnny Glendinning
RPSI Vice Chairman