

PETER SCOTT MBE CELEBRATORY DINNER

Report by Robin Morton

The Ulster Reform Club in the centre of Belfast was the venue for a celebratory dinner which was held on Friday 30th March to mark the award of an MBE to RPSI locomotive maintenance officer Peter Scott. The function, which was organised by the RPSI Events Committee, was attended by 65 people, including members, their spouses, partners and friends and it proved to be a most convivial event in congenial company.

On a sunny and warm evening, guests began arriving at the Ulster Reform Club, a distinguished sandstone building. Car parking was surprisingly easy, with free on-street parking available in nearby Donegall Place, Castle Junction, Castle Street and High Street.

After meeting up in the members' bar of this stylishly old-fashioned club - of which membership is now open to both gentlemen and ladies - guests were summoned to dinner in the main dining room at 8pm. The high ceiled wood panelled first-floor dining room with its minstrel gallery and large windows overlooking Royal Avenue was just the right size for the party and guests quickly found their way to their allocated tables.

The Lord O'Neill, the RPSI president, who was acting as master of ceremonies, welcomed guests to the function and expressed appreciation to Johnny Glendinning, the RPSI Chairman, who as a member of the Ulster Reform Club had secured the use of the club for the Society. He expressed regret at the absence of a contingent of three Dublin members, including Chas Meredith, who was to have spoken, and Paddy O'Brien, who was due to attend as an official representative of the Irish Railway Record Society. Lord O'Neill explained that their travel plans had been disrupted at the last minute because of the closure for security reasons of the Lisburn to Portadown railway line. This had meant that the Enterprise was subject to severe delays, and the three had unfortunately been stranded in Dublin.

Lord O'Neill then invited Father Eddie Creamer, a regular member of Peter Scott's locomotive team at Whitehead, to say Grace. Dinner was then served and there was a great buzz of conversation as guests renewed acquaintances and made new friends.

After dinner, Lord O'Neill opened the formal proceedings by renewing his congratulations to Peter Scott on receiving the accolade of an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list of last June. He said it was a well-deserved honour.

Lord O'Neill said that during a recent visit to Whitehead he had been intrigued to see Drumboe, the Co Donegal Railway narrow gauge locomotive, which was undergoing a partial restoration. He said it was encouraging that the Society was winning contracts from kindred societies. Lord O'Neill then introduced Sir Ken Bloomfield, the RPSI vice-president, who proposed a toast to Peter Scott.

Sir Ken said the conferring on Peter and the Society of an MBE was a great honour. He said that as chairman of the Board of Governors at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution, he was easily persuaded that Peter's schooling at Inst had set him off on the right lines. He noted that Peter had been a member of the RBAI Railway Society and after leaving school had studied mechanical engineering at Queen's University.

He said he had been fascinated to learn that at one time, Peter had been employed by UK Optical in Lurgan. In 1960, he said, when he had been appointed by the Northern Ireland Government to act as its industrial representative in the United States, he had decided to visit a number of industrial establishments in Northern Ireland prior to his departure for America. One of these was UK Optical and the event stuck in Sir Ken's mind because on an icy winter's day, his feet had slipped from under him as he entered the premises. In the years to follow, he said, he

had reason to recall UK Optical every time he felt a pain in a certain part of his anatomy.

Sir Ken said that Peter had left UK Optical to join Northern Ireland Railways, but had continued to pursue his passion with the RPSI. Sir Ken said many voluntary enterprises rested upon the singular enthusiasm of a small group of utterly dedicated individuals.

More than any other person, Peter is the individual who has kept the wheels turning, and sometimes pretty venerable wheels at that, added Sir Ken. It is thanks above all to Peter that the Society has built up and maintained at Whitehead the premier steam locomotive workshop in the whole of Ireland, focusing not just on the Society's own fleet but winning contracts from kindred bodies.

A key support for this workshop is the only working foundry now left in Northern Ireland. We rely both on enthusiastic volunteers and a small group of full-time workers, but it has been well said that weekend by weekend, it is Peter with his sleeves rolled up who leads from the front.

Sir Ken then invited all present to rise to their feet and toast Peter Scott MBE, which was done with much enthusiasm, followed by warm applause. Lord O'Neill then invited Peter Scott to respond.

Peter, who was sporting his MBE on his lapel, thanked Lord O'Neill and Sir Ken for their congratulations. He said he had been delighted to receive the MBE and saw it as public recognition for railway preservation in Northern Ireland. He said the success of the RPSI depended on many other people including members past and present, volunteers, paid staff and the co-operation of NIR and Iarnród Éireann.

He recalled the events of 6th December when he had gone to Buckingham Palace to be invested, saying he had been accompanied by his girlfriend Rosemary, his cousin Alison and Johnny Glendinning, the Chairman of the RPSI. They had all, he said, been much impressed by the surroundings and he said he hoped those attending the function would enjoy an official DVD taken on the day which was to be screened after his speech.

Over the last 30 years, Peter said, the RPSI had overhauled locomotives No.184, No.171, No.85, No.3, No.461, No.186, No.4, No.3BG, the Carlow diesel, No.90 and Orenstein and Koppel No.3 for Downpatrick. At present, No.461 was under overhaul for a second time round, while work had started on O&K No.1 for Downpatrick. Also receiving attention was Drumboe from the Co. Donegal Railway.

Peter said the facilities at Whitehead were a microcosm of the heavy industry of a type now lost from Northern Ireland since the demise of enterprises such as the shipyard, Mackies and Sirocco Works.

Thanking everyone for their good wishes, Peter concluded by saying that the award inspired confidence for the future of the RPSI.

Lord O'Neill then invited Johnny Glendinning to come to the lectern. Johnny thanked Robin Morton and the RPSI Events Committee for organising the function, which he said was the latest in a growing list of such occasions. He also thanked the Ulster Reform Club for facilitating the event and the catering for a splendid meal.

Johnny then invited his wife Mary to present a bouquet of flowers to Isabel Gilmore, who had been responsible for receiving and registering all the bookings for the dinner. Isabel Gilmore expressed thanks, saying that the bouquet was a marvellous surprise.

The Lord O'Neill then asked James and Edward Friel to present an edited version of the DVD of Peter Scott's Day at the Palace, which was shown on a plasma screen to much acclamation.

After the screening, Lord O'Neill announced that the formal proceedings were at an end, but invited all present to remain in the dining room for a chat or a nightcap, an offer which many people took up.