



RPSI 50

The year of celebration to mark the Society's 50th anniversary, is taking shape.

RPSI 50 Lapel Pin: To mark the anniversary a limited edition lapel pin has been produced, bearing a miniature version of the RPSI 50 logo. These are on sale at £2 on trains and at Whitehead or for £2.50 including postage from RPSI Sales.

Early Day Motion: An EDM saluting the work of the RPSI, which was sponsored by East Antrim MP Sammy Wilson, has been signed by more than 25 MPs from various parties and passed in Westminster on 5th February 2014:

RAILWAY PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF IRELAND

That this House salutes the work and achievements of the volunteers of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland (RPSI) in its golden anniversary year; acknowledges the valuable work carried out by the Society across the whole island of Ireland in preserving and restoring to working order its fleet of steam locomotives and carriages which, with the co-operation of Northern Ireland railways and Irish Rail, enables RPSI to run its annual programme of special steam trains both in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic; notes that over 50 years the RPSI has enabled nearly 450,000 families and individuals to experience the age of mainline steam; and wishes the Society continued success in the future, not least in its endeavours to meet the requirements of the modern railway and to develop its Northern Ireland base in Whitehead Co Antrim into a fully-equipped engineering base and heritage working museum.

RPSI 50 Talk: Charles Friel presented an illustrated lecture on RPSI 50 on Wednesday 12th March.

RPSI 50 DVD: The DVD was launched at Whitehead on Wednesday 26th March. More than 100 guests attended the function, which is the prelude to a busy year for the RPSI.

The Lord O'Neill, RPSI President, welcomed the guests and told how John Harcourt, the Society's first chairman, had invited him to become patron for the Society's inaugural meeting in Belfast on 30th September 1964.

RPSI Chairman Denis Grimshaw said it was noteworthy that among those present today were no fewer than 11 of the founding members of the Society - who had attended the inaugural meeting. He said it was also pleasing to have present representatives of various bodies which had helped the Society in recent years with funding. He said that in recent years the Society had been fortunate to have won funding from several bodies, including Generating Rural Opportunities Within (GROW) South Antrim, Carrickfergus Borough Council and Ulster Garden Villages, as well as Heritage Lottery Fund Northern Ireland which had offered funding in principle. This support was enabling the Society to start to achieve its aim of transforming its premises at Whitehead from an industrial workshop to a working heritage museum where visitors would be able to view restoration projects taking place. He said the Society was still in negotiation for a number of major grants which would help to realise this objective.

Mr Grimshaw then invited Lord O'Neill to unveil the RPSI 50 headboard which will be carried by

RPSI locomotives on all special trains during the 50th year.

Lord O'Neill said one great strength of the Society had always been that it was an all-Ireland body and noted with approval the existence of an active group in the Republic. He then invited Mr Harcourt to pass "the staff" on to board member Mark Walsh, representing the older generation handing over to the younger generation.

Former chairman Sullivan Boomer told guests that as part of the celebrations, the RPSI 50 committee had decided to commission a film to mark 50 years. Member and movie-maker Mike Beckett was the obvious choice, and the committee had been delighted when he had agreed to undertake the job. Mr Boomer said Mike Beckett had done "the most remarkable job", in distilling 50 years into 30 minutes. The film was then viewed in its entirety.

There then followed speeches from Joe McKeown of Dublin Area Operations Committee, who spoke on the development of the Society in the Dublin area, and from Phil Lockett, who spoke on looking forward to the next 50 years.

Patsy Duffy from Dundalk Railway Heritage presented Charles Friel with a cheque to go towards the ongoing return to traffic of No.85. He congratulated on the sterling work over the years by past and present members. Charles Friel expressed thanks, noting the close connections between Dundalk and the Great Northern Railway (Ireland) and the RPSI.

Then it was time to venture outdoors to watch Lord O'Neill drive No.85 through a banner emblazoned with RPSI 1964-2014 to signify the start of the golden anniversary year. Lord O'Neill said he was looking forward to the experience and recalled the time when RPSI vice-president Lord Dunleath had performed a similar task. He said the Society owed a debt of gratitude to the late Lord Dunleath whose funding had made the restoration of No.85 possible in the first place.

Guests then gathered along the platform to witness Lord O'Neill driving No.85 through the banner - and RPSI 50 was officially under way. Among those present was East Antrim MP Sammy Wilson, who had sponsored the Early Day Motion at Westminster. Mr Wilson had arrived just in time to see No.85 breaking through the banner - and was much impressed. The MP chatted with many of those present and posed for photographs - we much appreciate his support. RPSI vice-president Dr Joan Smyth took the opportunity to present Mr Wilson with an RPSI 50 lapel pin badge - which he immediately pinned onto his jacket.

Dublin Dinner: The Dublin Gala RPSI 50 dinner will be the Davenport Hotel in Merrion Square. Booking forms are now available.

Schools Days: As part of RPSI 50 the Whitehead Schools Days are being revived, after a gap of some years. John Williams is taking the lead on this event, which will run on Tuesday 10th June and Wednesday 11th June. We hope to provide train rides and guided tours. We will need help in stewarding and marshalling on the day, so if you are free, please contact John at: john@williams1639.freemail.co.uk.

Five Foot Three: To mark RPSI 50 a special issue of Five Foot Three is being planned, featuring articles on the Society's origins and achievements, and looking to the future. The magazine, due out in the late spring, will feature some historic photographs. It promises to be a collector's item.

Belfast Dinner: Plans are proceeding apace for the Belfast Gala RPSI dinner at Belfast City Hall on Saturday 13th September. This function is being held in conjunction with the Heritage Railway Association, which is holding its autumn meeting in Northern Ireland that weekend.

North Atlantic Express: On Sunday 14th September, the day after the Belfast Dinner, the Society plans to operate a steam train from Belfast to Portrush which will of course be open to RPSI members and the public. A great way to celebrate the anniversary.