



RPSI 50

It has been a busy summer of 50th Anniversary celebrations.

Royal Recognition: During Queen Elizabeth's visit to Northern Ireland she held a garden party at Hillsborough Castle on 24th June. Just returned from honeymoon, Society stalwarts Ruth and Mark Walsh had gone along (suitably well dressed!). They were presented to the Queen. She said she liked steam engines more than diesels and asked Mark if he drove. He said yes, but only on the branch line. All good fun!!

Pop-Up Displays (1): Passengers boarding the Steam & Jazz train at Belfast Central on 4th July were among the first to be able to inspect the RPSI's two brand new pop-ups, which have been created as part of the RPSI 50 celebrations. The Society is very grateful to Translink for its willing agreement for us to display the posters in rotation in various station concourses throughout Northern Ireland between July and Christmas.

Fliers Taking Wing: A glossy new RPSI flier has been produced. 15,000 were ordered, and they have gone far and wide. The flier gives a brief outline of the Society's activities along with contact details.

Irish Rail Magazine: It was gratifying to see that RPSI 50 featured in the July issue of Rail Brief, the IE staff magazine. The same issue featured the passing out of the new firemen in Dublin.

NI Railways Poster: Following the successful launch of the RPSI 50 posters on NIR trains and the display of RPSI 50 pop-ups at stations, large RPSI 50 posters featured in the display along the 'air bridge' between the concourse and the platforms at Central Station.

Pop-Up Displays (2): Following the successful display of RPSI 50 pop-ups on NI Railways, a set was produced for display in Dublin. The pop-ups were on display at Connolly from August until mid-September, when they were brought north for display at the RPSI Golden Jubilee Dinner at Belfast City Hall. They were taken south again and put on display at Dublin Heuston until the end of October. From there the pop-ups will be transferred to Pearse for the month of November, before returning to Connolly for display throughout December.

Belfast Grand Gala Dinner: The Dinner took place in the magnificent setting of Belfast City Hall on Saturday 13th September with a total of 260 guests, including 50 delegates from the Heritage Railway Association.

Belfast City Council kindly hosted a wine reception in the Rotunda where the Lord Mayor, Councillor Nichola Mallon extended a welcome to City Hall to the members and guests.

Guests then proceeded to the Great Hall for dinner. The tables were named after Irish steam engines ranging from 170 Errigal to 190 Lugnaquilla, and from 97 Earl of Ulster to 74 Dunluce Castle.

Lord O'Neill, acting as Master of Ceremonies welcomed everyone to the dinner, and introduced Lord Faulkner, President of the HRA, who spoke next.

The next speaker, Denis Grimshaw, RPSI chairman and the Society's first Hon Secretary back in 1964, told how the Society had been established by a number of people with an interest in

railway heritage in general and steam traction in particular. Mr Grimshaw also expressed gratitude to the RPSI's funding partners, in particular GROW South Antrim, Heritage Lottery Fund, Carrickfergus Council and Ulster Garden Villages.

Mr Grimshaw then paid tribute to Lord O'Neill who he said had set what was probably a world record for the President of a Railway Heritage organisation by being in post for 50 years. To mark this special anniversary he then presented Lord O'Neill with a specially commissioned set of silver cufflinks bearing the RPSI 50 logo.

After a special RPSI grace by Society volunteer Father Eddie Creamer, dinner was served.

Before the speeches resumed, a table ballot was held, followed by a speech by Barney McGahan, Permanent Secretary of the Department for Regional Development. Mr McGahan apologised for the absence of the Minister, Danny Kennedy MLA, who had been unable to attend but who had sent the Society warm congratulations on its Golden Jubilee.

Brian Simpson, chairman of the HRA, congratulated the RPSI on its achievements, noting that unlike many societies in Britain it had chosen not to go down the branchline route but had opted for main line operation. He commended the Society for its achievements and proposed a toast to the RPSI.

Nora Owen, the most recently appointed Vice-President of the RPSI, fondly recalled her Fine Gael party leader, Dr Garrett Fitzgerald, who had been a Vice-President of the Society. She said his knowledge of railway and airline timetables was legendary. By comparison, she admitted, she was something of a railway enthusiast 'virgin', but she said she was learning fast. She said she was looking forward to taking up the opportunity of a day on the footplate at Whitehead - the prize she had won in the table ballot.

The final speaker was Canon John McKegney, a lifelong transport enthusiast and a member of the RPSI for many years. He said that although he was a "not very active" member of the Society he was well able to appreciate the role that the RPSI had played over the years, and congratulated all those who had been involved for their commitment.

Cutting The Cake: The celebrations for RPSI 50 rolled on to Portrush on Sunday 14th September, where the arrival of the Portrush Flyer was followed by the cutting of a Golden Anniversary cake at a table on the platform. The cake had been iced with the familiar RPSI 50 logo.

The ceremony took place right beside No.85 "Merlin", which was catching its breath after the trip from Whitehead. The cake was jointly cut by NIR's senior steam driver Noel Playfair and RPSI chairman Denis Grimshaw.

After the formalities were over, the company footplate men were treated to an informal lunch in the Carvery at the adjacent Eglinton Hotel, courtesy of the RPSI. This was a small gesture of thanks to the NIR and Irish Rail footplate personnel who operate our trains on the main line. They are a key part of the equation, and we owe them a deep debt of gratitude.

Present at the lunch were: Noel Playfair, Mark Buchanan, Gary Moore, Barney McReynolds and Colin the conductor (Translink), along with Lar Griffin, Tony Cooke, Ken Fox, Keith Farrelly and Willie Ferns (Irish Rail). All enjoyed a good tuck-in and the craic was excellent.

Bangor Display: Many thanks to North Down Borough Council for setting a floral display of "Railway Preservation Society of Ireland 50" at the entrance to Upper Main Street, Bangor, and highly visible.

Steam Railway: The magazine featured the Belfast dinner, with photographs, in its October issue.

RPSI 50 Talks: Charles Friel took his "50 Not Out" show to the Irish Railway Record Society meetings in Dublin on 9th October and London on 16th October.