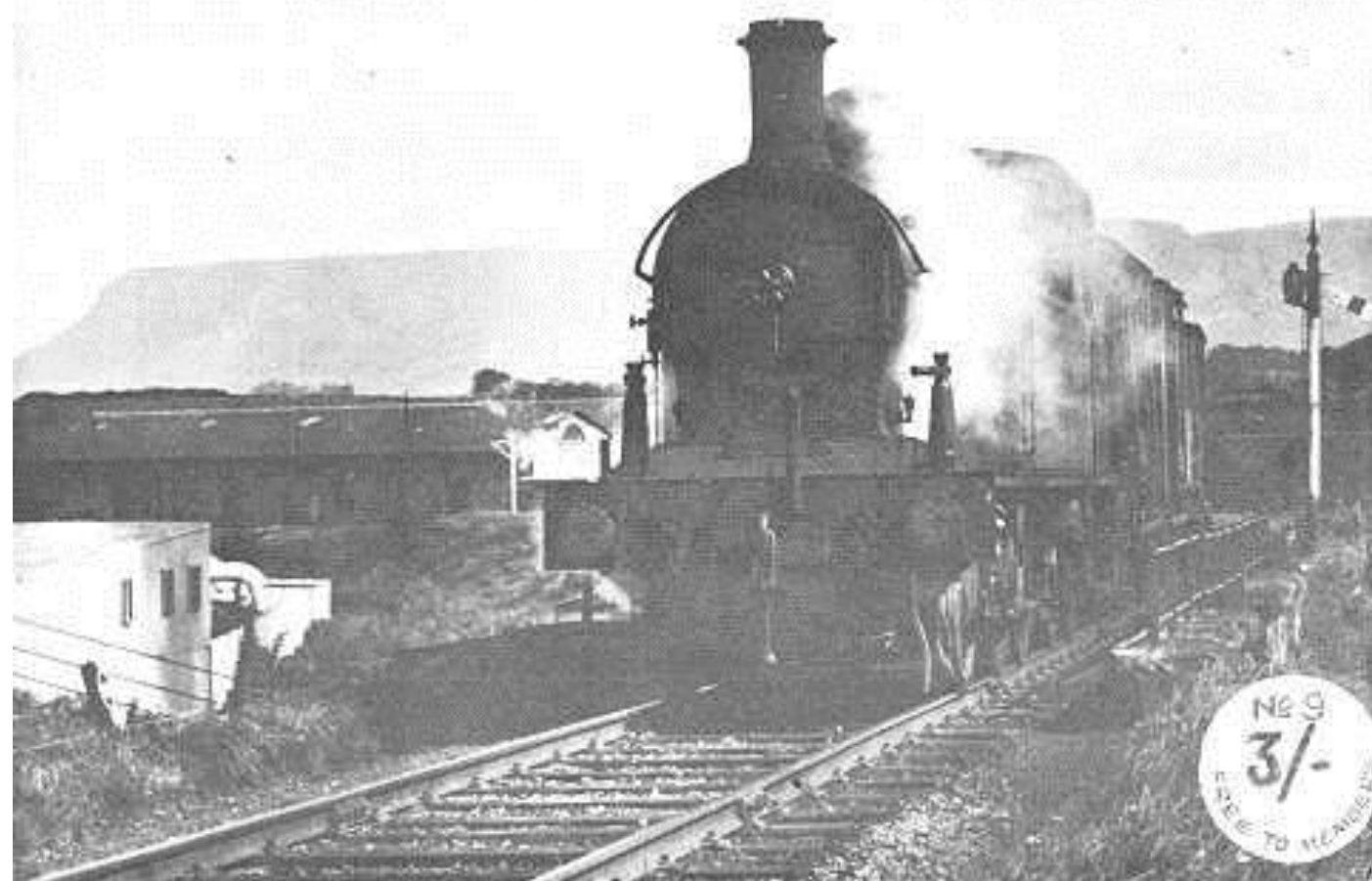


R. P. S. I.

Five Foot Three



FIVE FOOT THREE

No.9

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Editor: A. Donaldson

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Opinions expressed by contributors do not necessarily represent those of the Editor or the Council of the Society.

Front Cover: "Lough Melvin" on the 11:15am goods leaving Sligo Quay (Ben Bulbin in background) on 22nd August 1957. (A. Donaldson)

ATHENRY - A RAILWAY CROSSROADS

R.M. Arnold

(A one-time paradise for timers)

Athenry "Ford of the Kings" has always been, I expect, as it is today, an insignificant place well in the centre of the second largest county in Ireland. On the old Midland Great Western, it was just a few hundred yards further from Broadstone than is Great Victoria Street from Amiens Street. In fact it is exactly thirteen miles from Galway which is 129 miles from Westland Row where all Midland trains from Dublin start nowadays.

The Down platform bears the legend "Athenry & Ennis Junction" and the Up "Athenry & Tuam Junction". Such might well be my text except that it is my intention to give you some Midland main line running as well. In April 1952 I visited this area for the first time and spent a full week, mainly centred on Tuam. In certain respects this is the story of that week and of the more interesting aspects of the many visits which followed, once I was caught up in its fascination.

Fortunately this is not a historical paper as the building of those two offshoots (the southern one to Ennis in particular) is one of the most complicated I know. The Midland had reached Galway in 1851 and almost immediately considered a branch to Tuam, but when it was opened in 1860 from Athenry it was as a separate company, though worked by the MGWR. In 1872 it was leased to the Waterford &

Limerick and in 1893 this Tuam branch was, with the Athenry-Limerick section, amalgamated with the Waterford & Limerick. The following year the line began to extend north through Claremorris to Collooney but we are not concerned here with that part which was to complete the 139 miles of the longest branch of the Waterford Limerick & Western.



D17 class 4-4-0 No.59 on 3:30pm Galway train at Tuam, Easter 1952. (A. Donaldson)

When I knew it the Tuam branch train made two runs in the day to Galway, which apparently was the service when it opened. During the intermediary period this was for the most part doubled and when one remembers that there were also four Dublin trains per day out of Galway traffic on the local Athenry-Galway section must have been brisk enough. I usually stayed in Tuam and it was quite an achievement (Western hotels being what they are) to catch the 7:45am. This returned from Galway at 11:55am and the afternoon train out of Tuam was 3:10pm. Leaving Galway again at 6:40pm this train sat 29 minutes at Athenry (even Preston seems slick with the average station work in these parts) and was usually mixed thence to Tuam.

I never knew the exact allocation of Tuam shed but there were always a few small 0-6-0s about, both Midland and Southern. In a way this was puzzling as the WTT showed only one goods (to Limerick and back) originating at Tuam as well, of course, as the Galway passenger. However, during the beet season Tuam became very active. There were many fair specials and Tuam, rather than Galway, was the senior shed of the area. Old Dick Cole, very quiet spoken, tall and angular, was Tuam's senior driver and, week in week out, always worked the morning passenger. He was courtesy itself on my first visit, always taking me on the footplate and indeed well over half of my runs over this branch, with various drivers, were not in the train, a useful thing if I hadn't had a ticket (though I always had) for there was a searching ticket check at the one intermediate station on the branch, Ballyglunin. If any of you have seen that excellent film "The Quiet Man" you will have seen No.59 at Ballyglunin (disguised as somewhere else) and I never saw Cole with any other engine.

A different man seemed to work the afternoon train every day, all quite good except Paddy Ryan who can only be described as outstanding. At that time there were only two unrebuilt “52” class 4-4-0s in addition to No.59 and one of those was No.1 which a friendly foreman at Limerick had had pulled out of the shed there some time previously. I had always a great hankering to get a run with this engine, never seen in steam, and I expect I rather tortured the various Tuam drivers as to whether she ever came to work the branch. That is one of the things I remember about Ryan, apart from his fast running, that about eighteen months after I had been talking about No.1 he came over to me at Athenry, as I was looking out of the afternoon mail for Dublin, and said, “That engine you were talking about, No.1, she was here for a few days recently.”



D6 class 4-4-0 No.541 (formerly MGWR No.8 “St. Patrick”) and K1 class 2-6-0 No.386 on 3:30 Mail ex-Galway at Athenry and J15 No.229 on Tuam-Galway train in December 1956. (W.T. Scott)

The WLWR train proper, all that remained of the service by 1952, was the 8am ex Sligo, returning from Limerick at 3:35pm. This covered the Tuam section also, of course, invariably with a larger engine and a lighter load. Yet, as the example given shows, its running was always inferior. Of course, with corridor stock and a not too badly pressed travelling ticket checker, there was no need to linger at Ballyglunin so running could be more relaxed, especially as this train connected with absolutely nothing at Athenry whereas all No.59’s trains either took or gave connections.

The other passenger working (Galway drivers) was the 8:50am from Galway to Limerick returning at 12:45pm. This may, but I think it unlikely, be the survival of the right of the Midland to run over the WLR between Athenry and Limerick and it involved turning the engine at Athenry in each direction, for which 15 minutes were allowed. At the turn of the century W&L tanks of both 4-4-2 and 0-4-4 types were used in the Tuam area (I did manage a run with one survivor, No.295, from Limerick to Limerick Junction) and no doubt it would have suited well to have worked out of Galway bunk first and thence to Limerick.

Probably the line from Athenry to Ennis would never have been completed but for the expectations of the development of Galway as a great transatlantic port with connections south to Limerick and Cork and it is just as unsuited to fast running with its light switchback construction as the Tuam section appears to be ideally suited.

From Limerick to Athenry the vast majority of the gradients are 1/100 but too short and undulating to be difficult for a passenger train. One of the few instances where there is a continuous grade for as much as a mile is after Cratloe where it is down at 1/100 from post 9 to 10½ and again from post 19 to 20½. The latter is through Ardsollus station where all ordinary passenger trains stop. At post 45 there is a sharp dip down and then up again at 1/70 and there is ½ mile up after Ardahan at the same grade. After Athenry the track takes on a more mainline appearance and there is a steady climb of five miles to post 65 begun at 1/70 but mostly rather easier than 1/100 with a short downward dip at post 62 at 1/200. After Ballyglunin there is a hump at post 70½ at 1/120 after which it is easy to Tuam.

During my first visit, with unlimited travel for the Mullingar-Sligo-Athenry triangle, the Athenry-Ennis section remained a tantalising mystery, difficult to fit in without time wasting even if my ticket had been valid. One day I did remain in the Athenry area just to see what would work the Limerick train and it turned out to be a very smart looking No.55 (rebuilt). I envisaged this engine doing running of at least the quality of her original sister on what seemed a more important train. A year or two later I began to travel this section quite often - it was a very handy turn to leave Limerick at 12:45pm and be in Athenry in plenty of time to catch the mail up to Dublin, always an interesting train. By this time, however, No.55 had been scrapped and I found the actual running much less exciting (as the tables show) than I had hoped.

You will note, however, the run with old W&L 2-4-0 No.291. This engine had appeared mysteriously some time previously for shunting Limerick passenger yard and it certainly never occurred to me that there was the slightest chance of getting a run with her, but CIÉ was like that; anything could happen. These engines were built for the W&L main line but I have a note of interest about No.291 that she was involved in an accident with No.1 (of all engines) at Athenry on 25th November 1933. No.1 had the 5:20pm Tuam to Limerick and ran into the 5:30pm Galway to Dublin train which was, apparently, forced back onto No.291 on the 3:15pm Limerick to Tuam. Both engines suffered some buffer and frame damage.

Before moving away to Midland matters, I should like to mention that both the Athenry offshoots saw steam passenger workings later than the majority of CIÉ and some of you may have records of this. The Tuam branch train was one of the last to be dieselised and serious flooding at Ballycar (a feature of the other line) brought steam engines onto the line during the 1960/1 winter, and even as late as March 1961 No.301 worked on this line where in proper steam days she can scarcely ever have been seen.

And so we pass to the kind of experience which resulted from using the main line at Athenry. The pattern of services in 1952 was not greatly different from that of a century ago or, indeed, today. The day mail left Westland Row at 8:40am and returned from Galway at 3:30pm. Night mails left both ends of the line shortly after 8pm and the other passenger working left Galway at 8:05am returning from Dublin at 3:35pm. The runs I had in 1952 on the latter, in particular, were a useful experience, as the arrival of diesel railcars almost immediately afterwards meant that in future years, and then not for long, only the mails were steam.

In 1880 the fastest train was, curiously enough, the night mail which left Dublin at 7:30pm and took five hours. Nine years later pride of place had passed to the 7:40am Limited Mail with a commendable three hours fifty minute timing for which one paid extra. The next accelerations were in 1902, some time after both the GS&WR and GNR had made big improvements. But the Midland had now more power than either of their rivals with the largest engines in Ireland and a very short lived timing of three hours ten minutes makes really startling comparison with 4½ hours of the 1952 period and even

with 3½ hours today.

However, I must immediately correct any impression that the top engines of 1952 wouldn't have been able for that kind of thing. You can see from the tables that Nestor reached Athlone from Galway in 62'50". Allowing for one stop for water after, his work forward to Dublin was equal to a time of under 160 minutes from Galway. Insert reasonable stops at, say, Athenry, Ballinasloe, Athlone and Mullingar and the three hour ten minute timing could be achieved or even cut. But that was just the point. Stops on the Midland were of prestigious extent; fifteen minutes at Mullingar, for example, on the 3:30pm ex Galway. Loads too must regularly treble that train of 1902 and indeed the afternoon mail of 1952 was consistently the heaviest passenger train in Ireland, from Athlone forward.

We are not concerned here with loads which include the Mayo portion and just as well, for the grades west of Athlone were quite severe. From milepost 82 for over 18 miles the only favourable section is a four mile stretch after Carrowduff which is partly at 1/150, a welcome relief for the famous Woodlawn bank beyond. This, apart from the level mile at post 94 is 8½ miles long, mostly at 1/160. After Woodlawn station the line falls in steps to the sea at Galway, rather less severe as the process takes 25 miles which is all downhill (shortish banks of 1/100 and 1/150) or level.

The 545 class (royal blue engines of 1902) were a sorry sight by 1952 though they still, occasionally, might handle a Galway train and a big load. As it happens, the Athlone-Galway section is the only part of the three Midland main lines on which I did not time them, so they do not appear in the tables.

As far as the Galway trains were concerned that was one drawback in which they resembled the NCC - lack of variety of motive power, one of the charms of the Cork main line and, to a lesser extent, the Great Northern. However I have very happy memories otherwise of that very independent concern, the Midland, which in pre-grouping days seemed to keep clear of English influence in a way which neither of its neighbours could. A night mail with a diner was doing things in style and except at holiday periods (when it was chaos) the trains were pleasantly empty.

I find it easy to forget how puerile the running could seem all the way from Dublin to Galway (the Up run was always better) with so many miles covered at less than 50 mph. Instead I remember how fleet of foot the "Woolwiches" could be when they did get a chance and especially the Athenry set-up whence one could either scamper over to Tuam with a high-wheeled engine of nigh the three score and ten or else turn south and proceed more sedately past the stone ditches of County Clare.

Limerick-Athenry

	Date	19-9-1953	22-4-1954	23-3-1956	
Engine		93	89	16	
Gross Load		100t	80t	90t	
Train		12:45pm	12:45pm	12:45pm	Allowed
Limerick		0:00	0:00	0:00	
Ennis Jct		2:43	2:48	3:06	
MP 3		6:48 42	6:42 41	7:42 32	
Longpavement		<u>8:37</u> 35	8:38 17	<u>10:02</u> sigs	7
MP 8		8:57 37 ³¹	15:28	7:23	
Cratloe		<u>12:12</u>	<u>18:20</u> 43	10:19 ⁴⁷ 26	10
MP 11		3:19	2:47	12:47	
Sixmilebridge		<u>6:12</u> 46	<u>5:46</u> 47	<u>16:18</u> 44	4

MP14	3:24		2:28	47	2:49		
Ballycar	<u>8:18</u>	35	<u>6:21</u>	43	<u>7:18</u>	41	6
MP 19	4:21	45	4:58	pw	4:51	42	
Ardsollus	<u>6:48</u>		<u>6:44</u>	33	<u>6:45</u>		6
MP 22	3:50	50	3:50	47	4:02	47	
Clarecastle	<u>5:44</u>		<u>5:45</u>		<u>6:08</u>		5
MP 24	2:50	35	2:51	35	3:04	33	
Ennis	<u>4:33</u>	1 late	<u>4:29</u>	2 early	<u>5:06</u>	time	3
MP 30	10:34	39/33	9:51	45	9:52	45	
Crusheen	<u>15:06</u>	41	<u>13:52</u>	43 ³⁵	<u>14:42</u>	41 pw	14
MP 34	3:41		3:27		3:32	48	
Tubber	<u>7:38</u>	48	<u>7:30</u>	47	<u>7:37</u>		6
MP 40	6:41		5:25	44	6:24		
Gort	<u>10:20</u>	47	<u>8:57</u>	40/47	<u>10:26</u>	45	8
MP 45	5:12		4:45		5:08	48	
Ardrahan	<u>11:21</u>	48	<u>10:53</u>	50	<u>11:16</u>		11
MP 53	6:44	pw	7:31	43	7:39	45	
Craughwell	<u>10:52</u>	45	<u>11:24</u>	37	<u>11:36</u>		10
MP58	5:39	44	5:30	48	6:07	45	
Athenry	<u>10:28</u>		<u>9:29</u>		<u>10:52</u>		9

12:45pm ex Limerick; arrive Ennis 1:45, depart 1:50; arrive Athenry 3:08pm

93 took 143 minutes as booked arriving 2 late at Athenry

89 took 138½ minutes as booked arriving 2 early at Athenry

16 took 140 minutes as booked arriving 1½ early at Athenry

Athenry-Tuam

	Date	14-4-1952	15-4-1955	1-12-1955	16-4-1952	26-8-1954
Engine		59	54	96	59	16
Gross Load		80t	90t	90t	80t	80t
Train		7:35pm	7:00pm	7:00pm	12:35pm	12:40pm
Athenry (60.6)		0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00
MP 63		6:24 43 ₃₆	6:12	6:50	6:38 43 ₃₇	5:05 35 ⁴¹
MP 65		9:24	9:45 ³⁹ 31	10:15 ³⁶ 33	9:36 50 ₅₆	7:21 35 ⁵¹
MP 68		⁴¹ 53	13:17 ³⁶ 43	14:41 51	11:20	10:30 58 ^{53/61}
Ballyglunin		<u>16:24</u>	<u>18:25</u>	<u>17:55</u>	<u>16:12</u>	<u>13:08</u> 59
MP 73		6:00	5:32 ⁴⁷ 44	55	pw ⁴⁵ 32	3:44 ⁶² 66
MP 75		46	8:12 47	sig stop	35	5:38 ⁶⁴ sigs
Tuam (76)		<u>11:35</u>	<u>10:33</u>	<u>12:57</u>	<u>12:12</u>	<u>9:37</u>
Allowed 30		30:52	32:40 11 late	33:13 6 late	30:17	25:15 7 late

Tuam-Athenry

Date	16-4-1952	15-4-1952	16-4-1955	26-8-1954	
Engine	93	59	54	16	
Gross Load	90t	80t	90t	80t	
Train	8am ex Sligo	7:50am	7:45am	3:10pm	Allowed
Tuam	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	
MP 75	4:01 27 ^{35/30}	4:03 39 ³⁰	4:04 35 ³²	3:24	
MP 73	7:52 ^{pw} 36	7:38 ^{pw} 37	7:54 36 ¹⁸	6:32 ⁴⁹ 38	
Ballyglunin	<u>12:55</u>	<u>12:41</u>	<u>14:52</u> 33 ²⁶	<u>11:10</u> ⁴⁵	11
MP 68	4:46 28	4:34 37	6:11 21	4:58 34 ³⁰	
MP 65	9:34 45 ⁴⁹	8:57 51 ⁵⁷	13:19 43 ^{52/46}	10:19 43 ^{54/55}	
MP 63	13:37 sig stop	12:15 55	17:12 50	11:53 53 ³³	
Athenry	<u>25:25</u>	<u>14:34</u>	<u>19:47</u>	<u>16:37</u>	16
	39:32	30:20	35:16 12 late	31:7 time	

Athenry-Limerick

Date	16-4-1955	2-12-1955	24-12-1954	
Engine	96	291	16	
Gross Load	90t	100t	100t	
Train	9:40am ex Galway	9:40am ex Galway	9:40am ex Galway	Allowed
Athenry	0:00		0:00	
MP 59	3:24 ³⁷		3:26	
MP 57	6:54 ³⁵ 33		6:07 48	
Craughwell	<u>10:24</u>		<u>9:01</u>	9
MP 53	4:18 ³⁹		4:28 ^{pw} 23	
MP 51	7:29 ⁴⁰ 37		8:19 36	
Ardrahan	<u>10:58</u>	0:00	<u>13:10</u>	9
MP 48	2:30	2:18	2:14	
MP 45	7:06 ⁴⁵	6:21 ⁴⁸	6:15 ⁵³	
Gort	<u>11:35</u>	<u>11:06</u>	<u>10:47</u>	10
MP 41	4:16	3:22	3:29	
MP 39	7:28 ⁴⁷	6:45 45 ³⁵	6:25 ⁴⁸	
Tubber	<u>11:05</u> ^{pw}	<u>10:37</u> ^{pw}	<u>9:54</u> ^{pw} 38	7
MP 34	5:09 44 ³⁵	5:13	5:56 39 ²⁵	
Crusheen	<u>8:02</u>	<u>8:41</u> ³⁷	<u>9:25</u>	7
MP 30	4:22 44 ³⁷	pw	4:49	
MP 27	8:16 51	8:20 53 ⁴⁸	8:39	
MP 25	11:17	10:39 57	11:35 ⁵³	
Ennis	<u>12:09</u>	<u>16:29</u>	<u>12:39</u>	12

Clarecastle	<u>4:29</u>	34	<u>4:46</u>	34	<u>4:51</u>	3
MP 22	2:41		3:11		3:15	50 ²³
Ardsollus	<u>6:18</u>	45	<u>7:23</u>	40	<u>7:30</u>	5
Ballycar	<u>7:22</u>	sigs 44	<u>7:20</u>	40	<u>7:08</u>	sigs 45
MP 14	4:57		5:08		5:20	47
Sixmilebridge	<u>6:51</u>		<u>6:50</u>	46	<u>7:09</u>	5
Cratloe	<u>5:56</u>	41	<u>6:24</u>	37	<u>6:32</u>	36
MP 7	6:05	48	6:08	50	5:00	48
Longpavement	9:32	35 22	9:32	25	<u>10:53</u>	8
Ennis Jct	15:28			40	3:19	37
Limerick Check	<u>16:41</u>		<u>15:38</u>		5:10	
Limerick	<u>2:03</u>	7½ late	<u>2:18</u>	7 late	<u>7:41</u>	5½ late

8:50am ex Galway; Athenry arrive 9:22, depart 9:40; Limerick arrive 12:05pm

Athlone-Galway

	Date	4-8-1956	15-4-1952	14-4-1952	19-4-1953	23-8-1954	17-4-1952
Engine		613	381	383	375	373	381
Gross Load		220t	240t	140t	160t	160t	190t
Train		Relief	8:40am	3:35pm	Radio Train	Night Mail	3:35pm
Athlone			0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00
MP 80				4:38	4:27 47	4:25	4:46
MP 82			8:24 41 ³³	8:15 ³⁶	6:58 53 ⁶⁰	7:38 41	8:20 39 ³⁷
Carrowduff		0:00	<u>13:31</u>	<u>14:11</u>	10:11 52 ⁵⁷	12:37 32	<u>13:32</u>
MP 87		4:45 47	4:46	4:33 ⁴⁸	12:22 61 ⁶⁵	15:38 51 ⁵⁵	4:10 54
MP 89		7:29 44	7:28 52 ⁵²	7:14 54 ⁵⁰	14:13 67	17:57 ⁶⁰	60
Ballinasloe		<u>12:04</u>	<u>11:53</u>	<u>11:27</u>	17:30 25	<u>21:16</u>	<u>9:56</u>
MP 94		5:46 41	4:51 47 ³⁸	4:17	21:43 45 ⁵⁰	5:24 39 ³⁶	
MP 96		9:07 33 30	39	6:53 53 ⁵²	24:12 46 ⁴⁸	8:30 43	8:10 37 ⁴⁶
MP 99		14:54 31	12:44 36	10:33	28:03 45	12:48	12:48 33 ³⁵
Woodlawn		<u>20:14</u>	<u>17:34</u>	<u>14:17</u> ⁴⁷	31:42 24	<u>16:40</u> 43	<u>18:08</u> sigs
MP 103		3:01 *	3:54 35	3:13 ⁴⁷	34:07 51	3:38	3:25 46 ⁵⁴
MP 105		5:11 57	6:43 44 ⁴⁴	5:31 ⁵⁷ 54	36:19 56	5:55 ⁵⁰	5:43 53 ⁵⁴
Attymon Jct		<u>8:39</u>	<u>10:23</u>	<u>8:42</u>	39:23 25	8:48 15 ⁵⁸	<u>8:58</u>
MP 109		2:57	3:20 54	3:20	42:07 50 ⁵⁹	57	3:23 49
MP 111		sheep ⁵⁷	5:32 59	5:40 54	44:17 56		5:32 58
Athenry		<u>9:38</u>	<u>9:04</u>	<u>9:40</u>	47:47 22	<u>17:43</u>	<u>9:19</u>
MP 113		19:29 7 late	68:12	62:44 5 late	50:47 49	62:03 time	64:58
MP 118					54:21 61		
MP 120					56:38 54		
Oranmore					58:48 21		

MP 123	62:00	39
MP 125	64:53	⁴⁶
Galway	<u>68:15</u>	Allowed 73 - 5 early

* After Woodlawn: this was a different train - again the date was 4th August 1956, and the train was another relief, the engine was 542 with a load of 130t gross. 613 completed the first part of the log in 34 minutes 39, overall 12 late.

Athenry-Athlone

Date	18-4-1952	18-9-1953	26-8-1954	19-4-1952	15-4-1952	
Engine	381	372	373	379	381	
Gross Load	190t	240t	220t	260t	250t	
Train	8:05am	3:30pm Mail	3:30pm Mail	3:30pm Mail	3:30pm Mail	Allowed
Athenry	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	14
MP 112	3:20	3:44	3:24	3:45	4:00	
MP 109	8:19 ³⁵ 43	9:08 ⁴²	7:48 ⁴⁷	9:00 ⁴²	9:08 ⁴⁰	
Attymon Jct	<u>11:18</u>	<u>11:57</u>	<u>10:44</u>	<u>11:44</u> ⁴³	<u>12:13</u>	12
MP 105	5:28 ⁴¹	5:13	4:32	5:29	5:18	
MP 103	8:12 ⁴⁶ ⁴²	7:57 ⁴⁷ ⁴⁴	6:51 ⁵³ ⁵⁴	8:11	8:11 ⁴³	
Woodlawn	<u>10:52</u>	<u>10:26</u> ⁴⁶	<u>9:15</u> ⁵³	<u>10:37</u> ⁴⁹	<u>11:00</u> ⁴¹	10
MP 100	4:20 ⁵³	3:58	3:22	4:00	3:53 ⁶³	
MP 96	8:39 ⁵⁹ ⁶⁰	8:15 ⁶¹ ⁶⁰	7:20 ⁶⁷ ⁷⁶ ⁷¹	8:06 ⁶⁷ ⁶²	8:10 ⁶⁸ ⁶⁰	
MP 93	12:12 ⁵⁶	11:08 ⁶⁶	9:53 ⁶⁸	10:53	11:07	
Ballinasloe	<u>14:42</u>	<u>13:31</u>	<u>11:56</u>	<u>12:41</u>	<u>13:27</u>	13
MP 90	4:12 ³⁷	4:08 ⁴⁰	3:38	3:46 ⁴³	4:16	
MP 88	7:46 ⁴⁴ ⁴⁸	7:14 ³¹ ⁴⁵	⁴⁹ ⁴⁷	6:33 ⁴⁷	7:13 ⁴¹ ³⁵	
Carrowduff	<u>12:30</u>	<u>12:18</u>	<u>10:36</u> ⁵⁵	10:26 ⁶⁰ ⁶²	11:44 ⁵⁷ ⁵³	12
MP 82	5:19 ⁴⁶ ⁵³	5:02	4:40	13:33 ⁵⁹ ⁶⁰	15:00 ⁶⁰ ⁵⁸	
MP 80	⁴⁹ ⁵¹	7:05 ⁵⁷ ⁶⁰	6:33 ⁶⁰ ⁶⁴	15:35 ⁶⁰	17:07 ⁶⁰	
Athlone	<u>11:26</u>	<u>10:27</u> ⁵⁹	<u>9:57</u> ⁶⁴ ⁵⁹	<u>19:00</u>	<u>21:05</u>	11
	65:24	65:37 ⁷ late	60:07 ⁸ late	61:17	64:03	

Galway-Athlone

Date	19-4-1953	22-4-1954	3-8-1956	24-12-54	
Engine	375	377	164	18	
Gross Load	160t	140t	140t	110t	
Train	Radio Train	8:10pm Mail	6:20pm	6:20pm	Allowed
Galway	0:00		0:00	0:00	
MP 125	3:52		3:38	3:04	
MP 123	6:25 ⁵⁰ ⁴⁷		6:37 ³⁸ ⁴⁰	6:16 ⁴¹ ³⁵	
Oranmore	8:31 ⁵¹ ³⁹		<u>9:14</u> ⁴⁶	<u>9:06</u>	10

MP 119	11:54	⁴⁶		4:39	40 ³⁷	5:17	35	
MP 117	14:29	44		7:40	⁴⁵	8:59	39 ³³	
MP 115		53		10:26		12:07	sig stop	
Athenry	19:12	35	0:00	<u>13:25</u>		<u>15:17</u>		14
MP 112	21:47		3:58	23:25	1 early	25:44	15 late	
MP 109	26:35	⁴⁸	8:53	³⁷				
Attymon Jct	28:47	35 ⁵³	<u>11:50</u>	⁴⁴ 43				12
MP 105	32:19	50	5:11					
MP 103	34:48		7:53	⁴⁷				
Woodlawn	36:25	⁵⁶ 35	<u>10:42</u>	⁴¹ 43				10
MP 100	38:31		3:49					
MP 96	42:22	⁶⁹	8:08	63 ⁶⁷				
MP 93	44:58	⁷⁵	11:02	56				
Ballinasloe	46:39	39	<u>13:30</u>					13
MP 90	49:42							
MP 88	52:02	35	8:14	³⁵				
Carrowduff	55:16	64	12:10	45 ⁴⁸				12
MP 82	57:52	69	15:31	56 ⁵³				
MP 80	59:39	69 ⁶⁷		⁵⁵				
Athlone	<u>62:50</u>	2 early	<u>21:49</u>					11
	Allowed 70		63:55	time				

Tuam-Galway

	Date	24-12-1954	15-4-1952	3-8-1956	2-12-1955	
	Engine	18	59	164	96	
	Gross Load	100t	80t	140t	80t	
	Train	Empty	3:00pm	3:10pm	7:45pm	Allowed
Tuam			0:00	0:00	0:00	
MP 75			pw 33	3:08 36	3:34 26 ³⁶	
MP 73			7:09 31	5:55 52		
MP 71			10:45 36	8:32 38 ⁴¹	9:37 35 ⁴¹	
Ballyglunin			<u>12:38</u>	<u>10:25</u>	<u>11:54</u>	
MP 68			4:19 38	5:17 37 ³⁶	5:14 29 ³⁰	
MP 65			8:26 63 ⁵⁷	9:44 59 ⁵⁹	10:33 43	
MP 63				11:52 51	12:57 58	
Athenry	0:00		<u>14:55</u>	<u>15:46</u>	<u>17:29</u> sigs	
MP 113	3:26 36		32:14	4:07	3:50 37 ⁵⁴	
MP 118	7:14 56			7:52 53 ⁵⁵	7:49 53 ⁵⁷	
MP 120	9:13 62 ⁶⁰			10:01 ⁵⁶	9:58	
Oranmore	<u>11:36</u>			<u>13:17</u> sig stop	<u>12:35</u> sigs	10

MP 123	3:23		3:33	40 ₄₆	5 late	
MP 125	6:14	45 ⁴⁹	6:30	43		
		sigs		sigs		
Galway	<u>20:06</u>	42 late	<u>10:27</u>	time		8

LOCO MEMORIES OF THE HARCOURT STREET LINE

S.J. Carse

The Harcourt Street-Bray section of the GSR could always be relied upon to provide the enthusiast with an interesting and varied collection of motive power. My earliest recollection of this line, which ran behind my house, was of 60 class No.60 herself, the DSER 2-4-2Ts of F1 and F2 classes including 430 destined many years later to go on loan to the County Down, J15s including 143 and 200 unrebuilt and 136 rebuilt, with DSER 4-4-0s Nos. 453 and 454 on the main line together with 302, 306 and 314 of classes D11, D12 and D10.

About 1929 one of the Clayton steam railcars worked for a short while, coming up from Bray on the 6:30am, working local services to Foxrock during the day and returning to Bray in the evening. I only remember once travelling in it to Foxrock and back, and I think it was often replaced by a loco and coaches.



13 class 0-6-2T No.671 and No.674 at Harcourt Street in 1956. (W.T. Scott)

It was on a Sunday however that the greatest selection of engines was to be seen, as a very frequent service of trains ran to Bray, leaving Harcourt Street at five, twenty-two and forty-five minutes past each hour (the first-mentioned being non-stop between Ranelagh and Bray) with a few extras thrown in just to make it interesting. This meant that the train coming at five past was probably an extra, with the

five past following nearer to the twenty-two past, so that nobody, including the crews, knew what trains would stop where. To one old lady's question, "What train is this?" a guard replied, "The Railway Company's, Miss."

On those days Broadstone would supply additional motive power and we would have G2 2-4-0s with flyaway cab, J18 0-6-0s and D7 No.539 with her original boiler which afterwards came to Bray shed for a few years before going to Inchicore to be rebuilt, following which she returned to the Midland.

One night 539 arrived in Greystones with the 6:05 ex-Harcourt Street where she crossed the 4:20 ex-Wexford, which arrived somewhat late behind 337, with the two coupling rods lying on top of the coal. After banking assistance by 539 in the rear to get the train on the move, 337 was able to take it on to Bray unaided.

Over the years I only once saw one of the DSER G1 class 2-4-0T; this was on the Saturday before a bank holiday when one of them came in with a long rake of empty six-wheelers for working the "Sea Breeze" excursions. These excursions started from the cattle bank in Harcourt Street (passengers approaching the station via the goods entrance in Adelaide Road). At the Wicklow end they terminated at the Murrough Goods Station - thus they were a forerunner of the present use by morning and evening business trains of this station, which is more convenient to the town than the main line one. All the various engines from Bray shed worked these trains from time to time. The J15s, 4-4-0s, 703, 710 of class J15a and J15b. These trains were formed of old four and six-wheelers which appeared to be kept only for these and race specials to Foxrock. They were stored in Foxrock during the winter months.

One day in January 1934, I was in my railway room, which overlooked the line, when I heard a strange loco approaching. (I knew all the regular engines by sound.) It had a beat quite different from anything I had heard before, and when it came in sight it proved to be 0-6-2 T No.670 on its first passenger run. Initially Bray got 670, 673 and 674. 673 afterwards became a regular on this line, the others working the sea road. The tender version of these engines, J15b 710, 714 and 717, also worked at one time or another.

The lone 2-6-2T No.850 made infrequent visits, until Saturday 17th August 1946 when she disgraced herself by running into the turntable pit, after which she came no more.

The 4-4-2T of class C2 and C3 worked mainly on the sea line but in latter years we had 456 and 459. The latter was a very bad steamer on poor coal and often got into trouble on Carrickmines bank. Another 4-4-2T, No.274 ex-WLWR, came for a short while but was unpopular owing to lack of adhesion.

No.61 class D14 4-4-0 (painted green) and 89 came in latter years and were used mainly on the 8:50am non-stop Bray to Harcourt Street, and the 6:05pm in the opposite direction on which their 6'7" wheels could be used with advantage. Nos. 52 and 63 also worked these trains at various times.

The MGWR 2-4-0Ts of class G2 were well suited to the ordinary trains and several were always attached to Bray shed, notably 660, 661, 652, 665 and 668. However, by far the best engine ever on the line was 4-6-0T No.466 from the Bandon. She came to Bray in 1947 just out of the shops, fitted with an 'R' class boiler (having been the last of the class to retain her original boiler). But what a pity she missed being painted green by only a few months.

Then there was the Saturday in 1955 when 603 failed to stop at the water column and was derailed at the trap points. It was not until Monday, after the steam crane was called, that she was put back on the road.

By the time I knew the line, the main goods trains worked to and from North Wall, so that we seldom saw 461 or 462, though 462 was on the last train ever to pass my house.

An interesting working was that involving the 9:10am ex-Wexford which arrived in Harcourt Street at

1:05pm (with a four-wheeled wagon of milk from the Shillelagh branch attached next the engine). The engine might have been 302, 306 or 314. The engine remained in Harcourt Street and worked the 5:05pm (tender first) to Foxrock and the 5:30 return, thence back to Wexford on the 6:45.

A variation of this was when the 5:05 was extended to Bray, continuing on attached to the Up goods which left Bray at about 5:00pm and which was double-headed, the other engine being required for the 6:05 ex-Harcourt Street. The principal traffic on this goods (which was a connection of the day goods) was Belleece stone from the siding of that name near MP 38. It was unloaded in Harcourt Street by means of a chute to road lorries below. The siding on the extreme right being known as Belleece Road.

There was no corresponding goods in the Down direction, empty wagons being worked on the 11am ex-Harcourt Street, which was allowed 35 minutes to Bray instead of the usual thirty.

During the oil burning period around 1946/7 we had No.255, usually on the 8:05am ex-Bray, not for long however as soon after that all the oil burners were reconverted to coal.

I have tried to recall many of the locos and events, but I am sure many others have been forgotten, and my lasting regret is that I did not photograph all that went on, but in those days I thought it would be a case of: “Mar a bhí ar dtús ...” *[as it was in the beginning]*

TRIBUTE TO ‘ROMNEY’ ROBINSON

J. Magill

An old friend has gone to his rest.

The sad news came to me in a letter I received from Belfast - a letter which, amongst other things, told me simply - “You’ll be sorry to hear that Romney Robinson died at Christmas”.

Sorry isn’t the word - for Romney was a great friend, and a grand character, and as one of Adelaide’s top link drivers in the late 1950s, a man who, to me, symbolised an era which has now gone forever.

In that capacity I came to know him very well indeed, and then I lost touch with him when he retired, and over the years I’ve often paused to think of him, and to wonder what had become of him. And to wonder, too, whether we might ever meet again, as friends sometimes do, and in the meeting turn back the clock and mull over the times we enjoyed together in the “good old days”.

“Good old days” is a phrase I don’t use lightly, for those were the days when Romney gave us timers what was without doubt the finest and fastest running which had been recorded on the Great Northern since the far off halcyon days of the 1930s.

Of late, and one by one, those latter day steam men have been slipping quietly away - unsung and unnoticed.

Now Romney has gone too - and yet another link with the past is severed.

I feel very strongly that his passing, at least, should not go unnoticed - and so if I may I’d like to use the pages of “Five Foot Three” to pay a tribute - my tribute - to one of the most exciting drivers ever to grace the footplate of a steam engine.

To begin with, I think he would like me to tell the truth here; and, indeed, knowing him as I did, I’m sure he would insist upon it. So I won’t distort his image by being boastful of his abilities as a good engineman - though I feel he could have been that had he put half a mind to it.

But he was too much a lover of power and speed to be unduly bothered about the finer points of his trade - a ‘big hammer man’ who liked to drive his engines off a wide open regulator, and an almost equally wide open cut-off - as any of his Adelaide top link firemen of that period will only too readily confirm, for most of them sweated under him at some time or other, and some even felt that the treatment they had been accorded too harsh, and reported him for what they considered vicious and

abusive use of the controls.

But Romney only laughed at them - telling them how soft they were, and reminding them of his own experiences - and he continued in his ways undaunted and unrelenting - and we timers loved him for it and followed him around like lap-dogs.

I first timed the big fellow way back in 1955, when he was still in the No.2 link at Adelaide - the Derry link.

His performances in those days were good; though not, as yet, exceptional. The great runs were to come later - for those were difficult times, when austerity was the order of the day and hard running frowned upon by the 'higher ups'.

The struggling Great Northern had finally reached the end of the road financially in 1951, and the two Irish Governments had been forced to step into the breach to save what was a large part of the public transport system in Ireland from total collapse.

Between them they set up the Great Northern Railway Board - a body as defunct in ideas and initiative as the previous regime - but a body nonetheless determined to draw the purse strings tight and see to it that economy, not least where coal was concerned, was kept uppermost in everybody's mind.

But soon the diesels were beginning to arrive, and beginning to make inroads into the hitherto almost unchallenged domain of steam, and it was this factor more than any other which was responsible for the great steam revival around 1956.

But perhaps 'revival' isn't quite the operative word. Perhaps it would be better called 'A Final Fling'. And in capital letters.

The days of the steam engine were clearly numbered. And to men born and raised on steam engines, and to whom the engine had become part and parcel of daily life - even, indeed, a part of themselves, for what railwayman loves a steam engine better than an Irish railwayman - the knowledge was a bitter pill to swallow.

So to hell then with economy! If the steam engine was on the way out then, by God, the drivers were going to do their very best to see it go in a fitting manner - in a blaze of glory!

Thus the movement began which brought a great upsurge in the level of Great Northern steam locomotive performance - a movement ably led by a small band of men from Adelaide shed - and I can't say that what they wore was intended as a badge of defiance but certainly they could be instantly recognised by the cloth caps they wore in place of regulation headgear.

The Cloth Cap Brigade! What sterling memories that conjures up! Men like Ernie Thorpe, Joe Shields, Bob Dudgeon, Jack Bolands, Arthur Boreland and Joe McDonald to name but a few, and I apologise sincerely to those I've left out.

And leading the Brigade - now in the top link and sporting the most battered and disreputable head-piece of all was Romney Robinson, and the Editor has a lovely photograph, taken around this time, of the 2:30pm Dublin-Belfast express swinging through Scarva - a photograph that, to me, catches the mood so magnificently - for Romney's old cap forms the very centre-piece of the scene!

What it must have weighed, that old thing! For it was thick, and heavy, with layer upon layer of grease and oil - just as such a cap ought to be.

Indeed, I remember a night in Great Victoria Street, at the end of one of those typical runs home with the 6:25pm express from Dublin, and as usual on these occasions Romney and I were on the footplate together, enjoying a chat, in a darkness relieved only by the glare of the fire and dim glow of the station lamps. And there, amid the sounds and the smell of steam and hot oil, with the fire casting deep shadows upon our faces - suddenly, for no reason at all, he reached up and pulled the battered old thing

from his head, and holding it at arm's length, and gazing upon it with the utmost affection, he looked across at me and said, "Man! That's a load of my mind!" And the rugged features creased into a great beaming smile that rivalled the fire for warmth.

He was joking, of course. He just had to be! A bigger man than Romney you'd be hard pressed to meet.

A big craggy man of perhaps 5'10" or 11" in height, though seeming to be taller than that when he stood erect. And though he was at that time going into his sixties, yet the years in the driving seat had dealt lightly with him, so that the usual 'driver's paunch' could hardly be noticed, and what there was of it might easily have passed for baggy overalls. And where the coat sleeves ended, the thick knotted wrists and muscular hands told a tale of their own, and spoke eloquently of earlier days, and his own apprenticeship on the shovel - which would have been before the War, when a fireman's lot must indeed have been a harsh one. All this; and then to complete the picture, a ruddy, rough-hewn, weather-beaten face, brimful of character, and with eyes that creased into slits when he smiled, or laughed, which was often - for nothing ever seemed to worry Romney.



***Compound V class 4-4-0 No.87 "Kestrel" on 2:30pm ex Dublin at Scarva in June 1958.
(A. Donaldson)***

A steam man to the bitter end, he'd have liked the RPSI, though, and of course I never got his opinion on this, he might not have entirely agreed with the choice of preserved engines. "Them wee skittery boilers don't hold enough steam for me," he used to growl, in lighter moments.

And when the diesels appeared on the scene and one at least of the top link workings - the "Enterprise" express - succumbed to diesel power, he flatly refused to have anything to do with the new form of traction - preferring to remain faithful to his beloved steam engine. Progress, of course, eventually caught up with him, as it was bound to do, and at last, with his back to the wall and his position in the

top link in jeopardy, he was forced to concede defeat and allow himself to be sent for diesel training - almost the last Adelaide driver to do so.

How he hated the weeks he was rostered to work the "Enterprise". How, on those occasions, we were forced in our quest after 'good running' to meander along behind the lesser lights of the Great Northern and all the while mentally count the dragging days till Romney was back with us again on steam.

Ah! But how we rejoiced that memorable summer's night in 1958, when in his big hamfisted way he tore the "Enterprise" asunder at Laytown, with a broken coupling, on the road home from Dublin! Adelaide shed rocked to its very foundations, and laughed for weeks afterwards, on seeing the 'big lad' come limping home that night on a wing and a prayer at around the witching hour of twelve, and this after having 'stitched' practically the whole of the Great Northern main line for the best part of the evening and night. In no time at all the situation, in true railway manner, had been distorted out of all recognition, and the incident, bandied from mouth to mouth, had assumed the proportions of a major epic as his unkind colleagues, much to Romney's disgust, put the story about, with sundry variations, that he was on through Drogheda and halfway up Kellystown Bank before it dawned on him that something was terribly amiss - that he was having an almighty struggle to maintain vacuum!

The whole affair was, of course, only a leg-pull on their parts. Or was it?

I often wondered afterwards, for those stories often contain more than a grain of truth, and with Romney anything was possible. Anything could happen - and very often did! Diesels - for all the 'experts' may say - were never able to withstand the "poundin' an' batin'" he dished out!

But back on steam again the top link turn we timers most looked forward to was the late turn. 6:00pm Belfast-Dublin express as far as Dundalk - swap over there with the crew off the 6:25pm express from Dublin - and back home again to Belfast with that train. I think it must have been Romney's favourite turn too - for certainly his most prolific feats of driving were performed on that 6:25pm express - feats which have now become legend, and will live on for as long as timers can draw breath to tell the tale.

Each new run, bringing with it its very own quota of excitement, saw fresh performance records set up, and faster and faster speed achieved, and point to point timings achieved on the latest run eclipsed those attained in the last, so that we began to wonder where it would all end - and even the chaos to traffic caused, when it came, by the reconstruction of the road bridge at Derriaghy was made to appear a small and insignificant blemish on the speedy road home - an obstacle in our path to be treated with nothing but the utmost contempt. Romney merely ran that little bit faster before Lisburn, observed the slack to the letter, opened the engine out again afterwards - and still made Belfast, from Lurgan, in under 26 minutes, the normal schedule. And where once upon a time we'd have been more than satisfied - even elated - at clocking a 65 or a 66 coming down Moira Bank, these speeds paled into insignificance as Romney, night after night, roared us down the bank at speeds well into the 70s.

Great runs - each and every one of them! Each one performed to the accompaniment of an exciting and unforgettable symphony - the awesome thundering roar of hard-working Compounds, or the roaring, drumming, 6-beat song of a VS! It was magnificent!

And such became our devotion, and so strong our craving for this kind of excitement, that we began to find the usual Saturday night trip, coming as it did every six weeks, insufficient to satisfy thirsty appetites. And thus began the ritual, when Romney worked that late turn, of dashing home from work at least on Wednesdays - the cheap fare day - and certainly any other night of the week when the fare was readily available - nights of hastily gulped cups of tea, and perhaps a sandwich if time would allow; of stop-watches clipped with fumbling fingers into jerkin pockets, and log books and pens crammed with haste into bicycle saddlebags; of mad dashes from the house and astride the bikes, with a mother's dire warnings ringing out that, "This carry-on won't last much longer, Ah c'n tell ye! Ah'm sick an' tired a' makin' meals an' seein' them ruined! Ah'm sick an' tired a' you an' yer ould

railways!” - this, ringing in the ears, and receding faintly behind us in the distance as we hared off down the road to Great Victoria Street, to catch the out-going express. Ah, sure what did we care about threats, and ruined meals. Sure, weren’t we on our way to have a run with Romney.

One thing only makes me gnash my teeth whenever I hark back to those days - that because of shortage of money we never got the chance to travel more often. I see today’s youngsters with their pockets overflowing with ready cash, and I see them splashing it about like water on all sorts of gimmicky rubbish, and I think, “God! Why didn’t the bloody affluent society come along sooner - when Romney was driving in the top link at Adelaide?”

Of all the Great Northern engines he handled over the years there can be little doubt that the Compounds were far and away the engines he liked best, principally, I suppose, because they were most suited to his style of driving.

And if asked to pick from these I would have no hesitation in choosing No.83 as his favourite - though ‘why’ is another question, and one I wouldn’t like to, and indeed couldn’t, answer - for the “Eagle” must surely have been the most notorious and fickle engine of the five - an engine prone to all sorts of strange maladies, such as broken piston rods, which kept her, towards the end, more often in the Works than she was ever in traffic. Sometimes, too, she seemed to suffer from a complete inability to steam freely, and in this respect quite a few drivers found themselves in dire straits with her, and made very heavy weather of time-keeping.

But with Romney she was a different engine altogether - always on her very best behaviour. And he always seemed able to squeeze performances out of her that were astonishing, to say the least, so that nearly all the record runs were timed when the pair were together, ‘Romney and 83’. It should rank as one of the classic partnerships of all time. And I think if 83 could speak for herself she would declare Romney by far her favourite driver.

Not, mind you, that he treated her in any way different to any other engine. Far from it. At times, his handling of the faithful 83 was brutal to the extreme, and would have wrung tears from the eyes of an out and out purist.

One such occasion comes vividly to mind, and concerns a footplate run I had with the pair of them on the 2:30pm express from Dublin, with a train of 11 bogies. I joined them at Goragwood, and there gratefully accepted an invitation to “come up front”, and getting the ‘right away’, off we went in typical hell-for-leather fashion for Portadown - with 83, working in simple, and roaring like a wounded bull.

Down the bank to milepost 74; howling - and no other word can describe it - howling up to post 75; roaring down the other side; then the regulator clanged shut, and the brakes went hard on for the Poyntzpass curves - and the train was rounding the curves and trundling through the station. And at that point about halfway along the platform Romney rose to his feet and gripped the regulator handle in both hands. The big shoulders heaved ... and that handle very nearly disappeared up through the cab roof as it flew round the quadrant! Poor old 83, going into compound in such a vicious manner, shuddered down to her very last rivet, and groaned as I’d never heard an engine groan before, and flapped about wildly at the front end ... and then found her feet and galloped off again, in full cry, for Scarva.

That was one of many runs I enjoyed with him on the footplates of Compounds - runs during which I sought time and again to fathom a standard method of driving ... but always without success. Sometimes he’d work the engine in simple - sometimes in compound. At other times, such as in the case above, he’d alternate between the two, but not always over the same stretch of line.

One of the drawbacks of using a stopwatch from the footplate is that it leaves not enough time to study

driving methods properly, for of course the wheel beats cannot be heard above the din of the engine, and thus a sharper eye must be kept on the mileposts.

One thing did emerge, though. Cut-off never varied - always remained fixed at 30% - 35%.

With the 3-cylinder simples my experiences are not quite as personal. Strange as it seems to me now, I never travelled with him on the footplate of a VS under road conditions, and while I did have numerous light engine trips between Adelaide shed and Great Victoria Street, these cannot be used to judge. In any case, we were always "blethering away" to one another on these occasions, and the fireman was usually driving. But of one thing I am certain. He never once, in my presence, worked these engines on the 'big valve'. Nor, for that matter, did any of the Great Northern drivers with whom I had runs, and of these, I travelled quite a few footplate miles with other men. A friend did tell me once that he heard a VS shifting up on to the big valve one night on a train starting up the bank out of Lurgan, but it must have been rare occasion, this.

Standard procedure seemed to be first port on the regulator, and cut-off adjusted to suit the man in question - Romney working these engines at around 35% - 40%, to judge from the roar of the exhaust.

I have always thought this a great pity, for I'd have liked to have timed a VS working on the big valve, and well pulled up, if only to see what kind of performance she would have turned in, comparison-wise.

Of the other Great Northern engines little need be said here. A situation existed at Adelaide in latter days, brought about mainly by the closure of branch lines, which saw that shed in the enviable position of having a vast surplus of motive power as opposed to requirements, and this meant that engines of classes other than V or VS rarely, if ever, found their way on to the Dublin expresses, and although the situation at the Dublin end was completely the opposite so that engines of classes Q, S and even U were frequently pressed into service, Dublin nevertheless always managed to dig up from somewhere a Compound or 3-cylinder simple for the only southern based express which found its way into Adelaide hands at Dundalk - the 9:00am.

To obtain a comparison I would have to go back to Romney's days on the Derry road, and here I would have said, and again the reason seems to defy logic, that he much preferred a Q to and S. But that has little to do with this story.

Finally, and even though it detracts from the picture I have painted of the man, mention must be accorded the NCC 2-6-4 tanks - the 'Jeeps' - which began to appear on the expresses with ever increasing frequency from the latter end of 1958 onwards. It cannot be denied that the Jeeps put in some magnificent performances on these trains - performances so brilliant that we were left gasping at the speeds and point to point timings they achieved. But alas, always with other men - for Romney was never at home on these engines at any time, and their introduction was a signal for his own performances to begin to deteriorate alarmingly.

Many will no doubt extend the theory that this was only to be expected - that the engines were completely unsuited to his particular 'big hammer' style. But where that may be true to a certain extent, I personally feel - as indeed I felt even at the time - that the reason went much deeper.

1958 saw the final demise of the Great Northern as an independent concern - independent that is, in so far as it managed to retain a separate identity even though the GNR Board was composed mainly of representatives of the other two major transport concerns - CIÉ and the UTA. But in the autumn of that year the ailing Board, quite unable to shoulder the burden any longer, collapsed, and the GNR went out of existence.

CIÉ and the UTA moved in to claim the spoils, each taking equally, and in quite a gentlemanly fashion, I thought, half of everything that moved. That which didn't move of its own accord they left as it was,

CIE assuming control of the southern section, the UTA the northern, and Dundalk becoming to all intents and purposes a terminal station for both sides. With the sole exception, for a little while anyway, of the "Enterprise" expresses, all other through loco workings, and train crew workings, ceased.

This, coupled with the drastic closures and associated redundancies which had preceded the fall of the Board, plus the now ever increasing threats and daily rumours of further closures and redundancy, served to shatter completely what little was left of railway morale.

Always in these 'modern' times, when the terms "efficiency", "productivity" and "labour cost control" seem to pour unceasingly from the mouths of the so-called 'top brass', and are made to appear the basis of some miracle cure for all the ailments afflicting human industry, it has never ceased to amaze me, and cause me intense anger and frustration, and above all, deep concern, that these same 'top brass' should find themselves the very last to suffer - if, indeed, they suffer at all - for it is surely their mistakes, and their shortcomings, which cause an industry to decline in the first place.

The hardships which come with the decline fall mainly upon those whose activities formed the true backbone of the industry - and in quoting the railway as a prime example, is not a railway but a vast industrial concern catering for the needs of transportation - and are not the people who suffer most the drivers and firemen, guards and signalmen, maintenance staff and station staff? It is they who must learn to live with the constant fear that their jobs, and livelihood, may be taken from them; they who must suffer the indignities of being made redundant, and cast aside unwanted - and where this concerns the more elderly employees, to live with the knowledge that employment in any other sphere or walk of life may be unobtainable.

The men whose mistakes caused the fall suffer the least inconveniences of all. They merely order up a new nameplate, to grace the doors of their secluded and well-appointed offices, and retire unscathed to the comfort of plush office chairs, under a fresh guise. It seems to me, and I do not profess to hold extreme left-wing views, nor seek to make a case for the 'shop floor', that something is terribly amiss, and terribly wrong, with our 'modern' thinking, which needs readjustment.

If this outburst seems strange and completely out of context with the story, I offer it up for one reason only. These facts are unalterable, and cannot be concealed, and if one man, about whom the story centres, should suddenly seem to lose interest in his work, then I feel the reasons will be found here, and not in a theory that a particular class of engine was unsuited to a particular style of driving technique.

But I deviate - and must return now to the story.

Soon after the split-up came that terrible decision, in the northern section, to withdraw the top link workings from the Adelaide men and give these to Portadown crews - a decision that nearly broke Romney's heart. And justly so - for though he never spoke of it as such, to have striven and toiled the major part of his life towards that ultimate goal of any railway engine driver - a place in the top link and the resultant prestige that went with such a position - to strive for and reach that goal, and then have the prize snatched from his grasp by an unthinking and uncaring management, could only be construed as the ultimate insult.

In spite of his ready smile and carefree ways, he was - deep down - an intensely proud man. And now he found himself - almost at the end of his career - reduced to the role of a mere messenger boy, fetching and carrying the expresses to and from Portadown, there to hand the trains over to lesser men many years below him in seniority.

I think we understood his feelings, and we forgave him the poor performances with the Jeeps. Indeed, how could we have acted otherwise, in view of what had gone before?

But the magic had gone anyway. The Jeeps turned in some sterling performances on the expresses, but

somehow it never was, and never could be, ever again the same. We missed old Romney, and the excitement his running used to bring. We missed the Compounds and the VSs too, for they now only rarely appeared on the expresses. Now they sat about Adelaide, their thundering voices silent, waiting an inevitable end.

A walk between those serried ranks was a heart-breaking thing, and would have revealed, in the silent murky depths of road No.5, a dusty grimy 83, derelict now, and with paint flaking from her boiler.

I often used to slip across there, and stand in quiet reverence in the shadow of that big roomy cab; and with the fleeting thoughts of yesterday slipping through my mind again I would see a pair of gnarled hands grip the regulator handle, to through it full round the quadrant, and see a rough-hewn face wreathed in smiles and topped with a grimy old cloth cap, and hear a voice say, "Ach! Hullo there! It's you, is it? Y' comin' up?"

Yes - the magic had gone. And all too soon the days had flown past and brought the time appointed for Romney's retirement - a sad retirement, for in such a manner was the railway spirit broken that he passed from the scene almost unnoticed, and faded out of sight ... and I never saw him again. The Great Days had come to an end.

Let it not be said though that I ended this tribute on such a sour note - for that would be a most unworthy way to conclude. So let me, instead, draw aside the veiled curtain of time, and in pushing aside the years return to a memory I shall always hold dear - a memory, not of a run, but of Romney's shunting of the 20 ton bogie van, the 'P' van, at Portadown station on the 6:25pm express from Dublin - easily the highlight of the night's activities.

The 'P' van, a nightly Dublin-Strabane working, travelled at the head of the 6:25 as far as Portadown, where it came off and was later attached to one of the night goods trains up the Derry road. And the shunt would be all the more exciting if the express, because of Customs examination, should happen to be running a few minutes down on time.

Come with me then - back to the draughty wintry darkness of Portadown station at around nine o'clock at night, the express, with us aboard, coming in from the Junction, and rumbling across the Bann bridge to thread a path down Platform 3, the engine clank, clanking her way along the platform as the force of the brake application shakes those big compound coupling rods down into equilibrium.

The hiss of escaping steam; a final shudder of brakes bringing the train to rest; and the fireman, having travelled the final few yards on the bottom tender footstep, is leaping to the ground and running along the train to dive between the 'P' van and the leading coach.

Above the background noise of disembarking passengers comes the clang of dropping shackle, and the dull clump of vacuum pipes and steam heating pipes falling apart. A muffled shout from between the vehicles - and the station comes alive to the thunder of a roaring exhaust as Romney throws the regulator wide and heads out towards the crossover.

Once clear, a signalman is pulling levers as fast as his arms will allow, and dropping a dolly - and again the station shakes and vibrates as the engine comes roaring back into Platform 2, and comes to a grinding rending stop opposite the point where the fireman is waiting to drop down and uncouple the van.

Almost too fast, it seems, for that operation to be properly completed another muffled shout of affirmation is ringing out, and with thunder bursting from her chimney the engine is away again and standing in fuming impatience at the crossover, waiting for point blades to slide home and give her the road.

Once more the roar, but dying quickly this time, as Romney brings her back in and on to the train, with only the merest shudder through the vehicles as the buffers compress. Shackle on! Vacuum pipes on!

Steam heat on! And the fireman is out and stumbling across the ballast, running for the engine and clambering up into the cab, just as a whistle trills and heralds a final slamming of carriage doors along the train.

Two minutes flat! And from somewhere in the gloomy depths a green lamp winks and with a mighty blast on the whistle the engine lurches into movement, straining to overcome inertia as she slips away from the platform - the roaring thunder of the exhaust booming out across the flat reaches of the River Bann as we pull out past the carriage sidings and head up towards Seagoe - leaving the cold sea of light that is Portadown glimmering feebly behind us in the darkness.

In front, a slumbering countryside wreathed in blackness wakens with a start at the sound of our coming, and startled, flings back a mocking echo in our ears, and sinks to sleep again in our wake as we roar through the night - heading home to Belfast.

Great nights, each and every one of them! Great runs too! Every single one worthy of remembrance.

We'll never see the likes of it again. I'm glad I was around, with a stopwatch in my hand, when Romney Robinson was driving. The most difficult part of this assignment has been without doubt the task of picking from the vast amount of material at hand those logs which will, in the space available, most suitably illustrate Billy Robinson's work (how strange it seems to use that name). Here the main theme of the story has helped considerably, in dealing as it did with journeys into and not away from Belfast, though of course many of the latter were exciting enough in their own way.

However, it will be principally the running into Belfast, and that mainly on the 6:25pm express from Dublin, for which Robinson will most be remembered, and my final decision has been to concentrate on these and ignore everything else for the time being, and the three tables which follow are the result. I have visions, if and when this article appears, of seeing timers rush to their log books to bombard "Five Foot Three" with further examples of Robinson's work, and if this should happen I look forward eagerly to seeing these and comparing them with my own, more especially if they should feature that latter day Adelaide top link working which reached up the Derry Road as far as Omagh - the 8:25am ex-Belfast and 10:00am ex-Derry, for which I have not been able to find room here.

At this point a word or two about my own methods of timing might not be out of place. My opinion has always been that the prime purpose in timing a train is to use the data so obtained to make comparisons with other similar runs, and I would here ask the reader to bear in mind the fact that we are dealing now in terms of seconds, and fractions of seconds, of a minute. It follows, therefore, that the position taken by a timer in a train is of the utmost importance if the information he obtains on the various runs is to compare favourably, for it will be readily seen that, for instance, if two timers board the same train and take up different positions along the length of that train their respective times from the start to the first passing point and from the last passing point to the stop, in each section, will differ. With this in mind I always made a point of timing all runs from the leading coach, even to the extent of standing in a corridor should the seating accommodation in this vehicle be first class, and these logs of mine can therefore be compared accurately in their entirety.

The paragraph which follows may seem superfluous, but it is directed mainly at the non-timing fraternity, and was forced upon me by comments of an English friend, albeit a somewhat inexperienced English friend, who reading the proofs exclaimed, "Good Heavens! What a remarkable journey! Portadown to Lurgan in 7 hours 53 minutes!"

All times are of course in minutes and seconds, and what follows is the speed of the train passing the timing point, followed again, to the right by any further necessary comments on the journey, mainly 'mx' (maximum speed) and 'mn' (minimum speed), set against figures indicating speeds to which the train rose or fell in the section between the timing point against which these appear and the preceding timing point.

Having said that, on now to Table A and four runs with express trains running between Portadown and Belfast, calling at Lurgan and Lisburn.

Runs 1, 2 and 3, taken collectively, bring out to the full this remarkable characteristic of Robinson's running - an ability to first of all produce a really fast time in a particular section of line (in this case Lurgan to Lisburn), and to follow this on later runs with better and better times, and faster and faster speeds. Runs 2 and 3 were timed on the oft-mentioned 6:25 ex Dublin. Both feature the incomparable 83, both were loaded identically, and it is interesting to speculate, in Run 2, just what the finishing time would have been had not adverse signals at Knockmore junction spoilt the final run in.

The 6:25 was not normally booked to call at Lisburn (though of course in true Great Northern manner she did so quite often), and the schedule of 19 minutes applies here to the very loosely timed 2:30pm (Runs 1 and 4). The normal schedule for most trains observing this stop was 17 minutes, 19 minutes being too loose by far. Run 4, even allowing for the fact that the 19 minute allowance was cut by over a minute and a half, was marred somewhat in this section by the extensive relaying slack at Knockmore, but it is included mainly for the run in from Lisburn to Belfast.

Shades of 1932! I don't think I shall ever forget this run! Nor will any of the other members of a small party of us who shared this experience. Work on the new road bridge at Derriaghy had just been completed, and the slack removed but of course this time Dunmurry (25 mph), Balmoral (30 mph) and Central Junction (15 mph) were still very much in evidence.

Most drivers were content to shut off steam at a point midway between Lambeg and Derriaghy (railway men being ardent rose growers this was probably done in deference to the prize blooms of Sam McGredy growing at that point), and allow their engines to coast the final five and a half miles or so into Belfast, which made the slacks of little consequence anyway. But Robinson that day just kept "batin' and batin'", and speed kept rising and rising, until at Balmoral it was up into the middle sixties - at which point half a dozen or so completely enthralled timers were hanging head and shoulders from the carriage windows, eyes popping with excitement!

In past the Junction, and with milepost 112¼ safely behind us, we could relax and watch with interest as a swaying lurching engine flew a path amongst the maze of points and crossovers leading into Great Victoria Street - but it was an interest that quickly turned to alarm as the train hit the approach ramp to Platform 4 at a speed well into the thirties, and realisation came in a blinding flash that this time Robinson had overdone it.

That very same thought must have smacked home to him at exactly the same moment. He was coming in too fast, and he new it - and for the first time in all those years of high speed running he panicked, and the brakes came on with a shattering force and almost stopped the train halfway down the platform, so that we crawled and crawled towards the buffer stops for what seemed an interminable period before finally coming to rest - which explains the rather slow (!) time in from the Junction.

The two runs in Table B (Runs 5 and 6) were recorded in the section between Goragewood and Portadown, and are rather unique in a way.

For some obscure reason known only to himself, Robinson was loath to arrive in Portadown before time with this train, and was usually content to take things very easy in this section. I often wonder to what extent the Lurgan Station Master had a hand in this. He was a small man, very portly, and very jovial, with a blood red face and a wheezing raucous laugh, who always took up a position at the very top end of Lurgan platform, opposite the point where the engine would be most likely to come to a halt. The ensuing bantering match between him and Robinson was great 'crack', and would have made the journey worthwhile even if the running had been of a far lower standard than it was, with the Station Master chiding Robinson for his 'late' running, and the latter being very insistent that he would still make Belfast before time. They even took bets on it one night, I remember.

Fast running was therefore something of a rarity on the Goraghwood-Portadown section, making these two very fine examples somewhat unique. Both trains were identically loaded, making for a nice comparison between the running of the Compound and that of the VS, though the latter's very sluggish start was no doubt due in part to the train leaving Goraghwood exactly to time and Robinson holding the engine in check, not wanting to disappoint his friend on Lurgan platform.

After Poyntzpass, though, he obviously seems to have had second thoughts, and from that point onwards the running becomes very exciting.

The first run, featuring No.83, was one of those many typical and tremendously exhilarating affairs with this engine, and is certainly the only time in my life I ever clocked a '70' in any direction on this particular stretch of road, the most difficult on the entire Great Northern main line, curves at Poyntzpass, Scarva and Portadown Junction being sharp enough to warrant permanent speed restrictions of 30, 50 and 15 mph respectively, and making it difficult for drivers to attain high overall speeds. The schedule was extremely tight too, for this train, and it will be seen here that despite the high-speed running Robinson only just managed to keep the 20 minute allowance. The signal check at the Junction made very little difference to the overall time - perhaps only 12 - 15 seconds. Normal timing points on this 15¾ mile section were usually milepost 74, the three intermediate stations, and the Junction cabin, but I always considered these insufficient for a proper detailed and comparative study of running, hence the very full accounts given of both runs.

Lastly to Table C - and two tremendous runs on the 6:25 recorded at the very height of the Derriaghy slack, the train this time observing her normal booked path between Portadown and Belfast - and I've never yet been able to make up my mind which one of these two I enjoyed most!

Both again are identically loaded, making for a nice comparison, and both this time feature VS No.206 "Liffey" - and what an engine she was! A magnificent engine - easily the best of the five three-cylinder simples - but her allocation to Dublin meant she was unlikely to be seen very often on this train, the return of the Adelaide-based twelve noon from Belfast, a factor making her performance here all the more valuable.

It is a fact though that 'foreign' engines did appear quite often on Adelaide-based workings. And because these were nearly always 'poached' from other depots, one of the most delightful experiences open to the Great Northern enthusiast to behold was that being on the fringe of activities and therefore in something of a position of 'armed neutrality' he was able to sample to the full without getting his fingers burnt in the intense antagonism and feelings of deep resentment directed towards Adelaide by the other sheds. And not without just cause. The Adelaide running shift foremen - Brennan, Mahaffey and Barber - were three wily characters indeed, each with an eagle eye for a 'good engine' and it was amusing to see a 'foreign' engine arrive on shed there and see one of these grand old characters, whichever happened to be on duty, nip out smartly from the roster office for a word or two with the driver and a quick tour of inspection round the locomotive, and if the latter should measure up to expectations, sink then into a trance-like state of deep thought as he racked his brains for a feasible excuse to send one of Adelaide's patched-up old relics back home on the return working and keep the newcomer to himself for a few days.

So great became their reputations for these acts of piracy and skulduggery that Newry men wouldn't take an engine to Adelaide at any price, preferring to stay down in Great Victoria Street with those gleaming, glittering 'crack' QLS of theirs, and use the station turntable to get their engine "right way round for home".

It fell to Dublin to suffer most though, the three Dublin VSs - 206, 207 & 209 - being not only the best engines of that class, but the three best engines in the Great Northern fleet. Mention Adelaide to a Dublin man and his nose would wrinkle up in disgust, and as like as not you'd be treated to a tirade of

abuse directed against “them hallions up there in the Black North that keep stealin’ our engines”, and these runs obviously belong to a period when their beloved 206 had been ‘spirited away’ from under their noses.

If it were forced upon me to choose between the two runs, I think I should have to plump for the first one - this being the very first time Robinson cracked that elusive ‘26 minute barrier’. As such, it represents one of the most tremendously exciting moments of my life - so exciting indeed, that I did something that night I’d never done before - I recorded the name of the fireman for posterity alongside that of the driver, for young Robert Wright - and he it was, a spare link fireman at Adelaide standing in for the regular but rest day Dick Greer - must surely have performed heroically with the shovel on this run, and most certainly deserves an accolade for his magnificent part in the affair.

I see him yet - staggering from the engine in Great Victoria Street almost done in - shirt and overalls clinging to his back like wet rags, and sweat lashing from every pore and running freely down his face and neck. But having obviously enjoyed every single minute of getting himself into that state, for the huge beaming grin on his face nearly outshone the station lamps with the force of its intensity! I see him yet - standing there and waiting for Robinson’s back to be turned for a moment before leaning towards me and hissing in an incredulous whisper from behind the back of his hand - “Wad’ya think a that then? Eh! The man’s mad, Ah tell ye! Mad as a hatter!”, and thus satisfied turning away to uncouple the train and prepare the engine to run light to Adelaide.

They were grand lads, those steam men. Always full of humour, and as tough as nails.

And the second run. What can I possibly say about the second run? What words of mine could possibly enhance such a performance? Best leave it alone and let it speak for itself.

Ah yes! It was a grand thing to be around in those days ... when ‘Romney’ Robinson was driving.

Table A: Portadown-Belfast

Run	1	2	3	4	
Train	14:30 ex Dublin	18:25 ex Dublin	18:25 ex Dublin	14:30 ex Dublin	
Engine	84 “Falcon”	83 “Eagle”	83 “Eagle”	85 “Merlin”	
Load	250 tons	190 tons	190 tons	280 tons	
Date	10-7-1957	22-3-1958	26-4-1958	8-8-1958	Allowed
Portadown	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	
Seagoe	2:45 29	2:30 35	2:25 34	2:50 28	
Boilie	5:48 50	5:20 57	5:14 55	6:05 50	
Lurgan	<u>8:33</u> 56 max	<u>7:56</u> 57 max	<u>7:53</u> 79 max	<u>8:54</u> 56 max	10
MP 94	3:18 41	3:17 42	3:01 41	3:42 36	
MP 96	6:08 47	5:59 50	5:34 52	6:44 42	
Moir	8:23 69	8:11 65	7:36 72	9:07 62	
Damhead	10:05 64	9:52 66 69mx	9:17 68	10:52 66	
Broomhedge	11:06 67	10:53 63	10:39 66 63mx	11:55 62	
Maze	12:22 69	12:11 66 70mx	11:33 73	13:15 64 68mx	
Knockmore	13:12 62	13:12 56 sigs	12:22 64	14:19 34 pw	
MP 104	13:47 49	13:44 52	12:57 54	15:20 35 pw	
Lisburn	<u>15:37</u>	<u>15:30</u>	<u>15:17</u>	<u>17:2</u>	19

Hilden	2:26	44	2:06	47	2:27	45	2:34	40
Lambeg	3:07	46	2:43	50	3:07	48	3:20	46
Derriaghy	4:13	11 pw*	4:32	11 pw*	6:32	10 pw*	4:32	50
Dunmurry	5:28	42	7:06	44	7:55	40	5:41	56
Finaghy	6:43	52	8:14	60	9:11	53	6:42	62
Balmoral	7:37	55	9:01	61	10:01	58	7:28	65
Adelaide	8:36	44	9:55	57	10:55	57 60mx	8:17	64
Central Jct	9:53	30	10:49	44	11:53	41	9:05	52
Belfast	<u>12:17</u>		<u>12:43</u>		<u>13:46</u>		<u>10:59</u>	

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* Derriaghy road bridge reconstruction

Table B: Goraghtwood-Portadown

Run	5	6	
Train	18:25 ex Dublin	18:25 ex Dublin	
Engine	83 "Eagle"	207 "Liffey"	
Load	210 tons	210 tons	
Date	22-3-1958	28-5-1958	Allowed
Goraghtwood	0:00	0:00	
MP 73	2:24 47/54	2:43 43/45	
MP 74	3:27 64/62	3:55 53/51	
MP 75	4:28 57/61	5:07 50/50 48mn	
MP 76	5:28 61/64	6:18 49/52	
Poyntzpass	6:36 37 pw30	7:33 37 pw30	
MP 78	8:08 46/48	9:07 44/47	
MP 79	9:19 52/55	10:20 51/55	
Scarva	9:55 57 pw50	11:00 49 pw50	
MP 80	10:22 60/60	11:30 5253/	
MP 81	11:20 64/66	12:36 59/63	
Tanderagee	12:16 65/69	13:34 62/64	
MP 83	13:09 66/64 70mx	14:31 66/66	
MP 84	14:05 63/64	15:29 61/63	
MP 85	14:59 68/67	16:26 66/67	
MP 86	15:53 66/61 71mx	17:21 61/60	
Portadown Jct	17:50 13 pw15	19:03 19 pw15	
Portadown	<u>19:43</u>	<u>20:38</u>	20

Table C: Portadown-Lurgan-Belfast

Run	7	8
Train	18:25 ex Dublin	18:25 ex Dublin
Engine	207 "Liffey"	207 "Liffey"

Load	190 tons	190 tons	
Date	15-2-1958	28-5-1958	Allowed
Portadown	0:00	0:00	
Seagoe	2:32 35	2:32 35	
Boilie	5:24 55	5:25 74	
Lurgan	<u>8:02</u> 59 max	<u>8:07</u> 57 max	9
MP 94	3:02 42	3:05 40	
MP 96	5:35 51	5:43 48	
Moirra	7:42 73	7:53 69 69mx	
Damhead	9:19 68 74mx	9:31 71 73mx	
Broomhedge	10:16 71 64mn	10:30 72 66mn	
Maze	11:31 69 75mx	11:41 75 75mx	
Knockmore	12:16 67 74mx	12:26 68 72mx	
MP 104	12:47 68	12:58 62	
Lisburn	13:45 60	14:06 52	15 pass
Hilden	14:50 54	15:12 55	
Lambeg	15:27 51	15:45 54	
Derriaghy	17:23 11 pw*	17:12 18 pw*	
Dunmurry	20:00 43	19:16 44	
Finaghy	21:10 57	20:28 58	
Balmoral	22:00 59 61mx	21:17 61 60mn	
Adelaide	22:55 57	22:09 59 61mx	
Central Jct	23:50 49	23:15 28	
Belfast	<u>25:47</u>	<u>25:20</u>	26

* Derriaghy road bridge reconstruction

SHANE'S CASTLE THREE FOOT LINE

Lord O'Neill

I thought it might be helpful to members to outline the plans for my three foot gauge project at Shane's Castle, Antrim, the progress so far and the likely opening date.

The object in the first place is to provide an additional attraction to the opening of Shane's Castle ruins during the summer months. The track will run for 1¾ miles from the Lodge nearest Antrim right up to the Old Castle. It will consist of single track with run-round loops at each end and a few additional storage sidings at the Antrim end. The track will be laid alongside the existing drive and at various places will cross it, with the intention of reproducing, as far as possible, something of the typical Irish roadside tramway atmosphere. Initially operations will be extremely simple, with one engine in steam hauling four-wheeled 'toastracks' built up on Turf Flats. The word 'toastrack' is used very loosely.

However, the track is being laid in 75 lb per yard flat-bottomed rail so that heavier equipment, perhaps from the County Donegal, could be used later. The acquisition of this equipment is still hedged about with many problems and, in the meantime, the rolling stock at Strabane has been almost completely destroyed. At the Antrim end of the railway there will be a loco shed and separate accommodation for rolling stock. At the other end a small replica station is planned, which will also house the catering and toilet facilities. At the outset, no signalling is envisaged, but, in time, I hope that all the necessary

features to complete the 'Railway' scene will be included.

At the time of writing (mid-June 1970) the track bed is virtually complete but no track has been laid, however work is in progress on laying out all the rails and sleepers along the trackbed ready for final laying. The loco and rolling-stock sheds are completed. I do not anticipate that there will be any movement of rolling stock to the site until late June or early July.

The ex-Larne Aluminium Peckett 0-4-0T (No.1026 of 1904) is in the Queen's Quay works of NIR undergoing a fairly complete overhaul; the principal problem is boiler repairs. The Bord na Móna Andrew Barclay 0-4-0WT (No.2265 of 1949) is still at Stradbally and will not be moved until the shed is completely ready at Antrim. If her condition is roughly the same as the ISPS example (a sister engine), retubing will be the only major repair required. I have also acquired a small Simplex loco together with ten four-wheeled flats from a bog railway. All this equipment is basically sound.

It is difficult to be certain when everything will be ready for opening. I had hoped that it would be possible to combine this with the annual ISPS Rally at Shane's castle on 17th and 18th July; however this now looks very unlikely. I would hope that whatever happens, some sort of running will be possible before the end of the summer, even if the official opening is left until the Spring of 1971.

In the meantime, I realise that there may be a certain amount of interest in what is going on and the urge to come and see what progress has been made. Obviously, I am keen to be as helpful as possible about this, but there is also a Nature Reserve and some sort of control is essential. Ordinarily, the area is open from May until September, but I have decided not to reopen until the rail project is complete. As a result I would be grateful if visitors would hold off until the project is in a fairly advanced state, when some sort of RPSI Open day might be considered.

Finally, I would like to thank those members who have already been very helpful in many ways.

BOOK REVIEWS

Sligo, Leitrim and Northern Counties Railway

N.W. Sprinks, Irish Railway Record Society (London Area), 15 Shillings.

The 'Sligo Leitrim' was capable of arousing strong affection in the breasts of those who knew it. Everything about it had character; and it had almost miraculously managed to keep its independence to the end of its days and to the last fought back with determination against forces that finally wrought its closure. It was a difficult line to get a steam run on - Garland Sunday only came once a year and the 7:20pm ex-Enniskillen was an awkward train to travel on, so most of us hadn't as many runs on it as we ought to have had. But its charm still survives, as witness the numbers who travel when a 'Sligo Tank' works the train - as "Lough Erne" yet may once again.

This most competent work may therefore be expected to meet with a hearty welcome from those who knew the Sligo Leitrim while younger enthusiasts will still find plenty of interest in it.

Accounts of the negotiations leading to the formation of Railway Companies and their financial vicissitudes can make dull reading, but with the easy style, and skilful intermingling of elements in the railway story, avoid any tedium of this kind.

Every aspect of the line is fully and readably dealt with, except perhaps locomotive performance, the nearest approach to which is a list of permitted loads for the various classes of engine. The Sligo Leitrim was not, of course, a line on which any notable running could be attempted anyway, though while on this type of topic, it strikes one that the author's personal experiences of the railway in general was somewhat limited. Yet this shortcoming, if such it is, is offset by a couple of racy extracts towards the end, while the author shows quite a profound understanding of Ireland's tortured history and the

chasms which have divided her people - a topic usually shunned, glossed over, or trivialised in books of this kind,

The detail is so complete that, given a few more line drawings, one could actually model the line and its working very accurately from the book, and the whole work is backed up by an array of photographs which leave nothing to be desired in variety, interest, rarity or quality. **AD**

Steam Over Belfast Lough

R.M. Arnold, Oakwood Press, 21 Shillings

The ethos of "Five Foot Three" might be defined as description by active railway enthusiasts of what they saw, timed, heard, did or photographed, and intelligent comment thereon; and our next book is surely the quintessence of railway observation.

Its nominal theme is the parallels between the lines which operated on each side of Belfast Lough. Being chiefly based on the fact that after the UTA take-over of the BCDR a considerable number of locomotive exchanges took place both ways; this is somewhat tenuous, but that does not detract in the slightest from the immense permanent value of the facts and interpretations given.

The best sections of all are those which deal with traffic and engine allocation, given with detail never found in railway books and probably impossible for any other writer on Irish railways.

The engines of both lines are also described with incredible thoroughness, the author having something special to say about EVERY engine - or very nearly: the NCC Y 0-6-0T's are omitted (ex-LMS 3Fs having their wheel centres, with typical NCC ingenuity, turned inside out to suit the new gauge), though one is supposed to have been tried on a passenger train and it would have been interesting to know how she did; and BCDR 2-4-2T No.27 is missed from the performance section; she mostly worked the 'Holywood Motor', which the author does not appear to have sampled - a pity, since this small train could provide considerable excitement - not perhaps involving high horsepower output, but nonetheless hair-raising. It was not an easy train to stop (I know - I tried, under the driver's eagle eye, of course) though I well remember one brilliant stop in particular, the 1 mile from Marino (passed at 57) to a stand in Holywood occupying only 78 seconds.

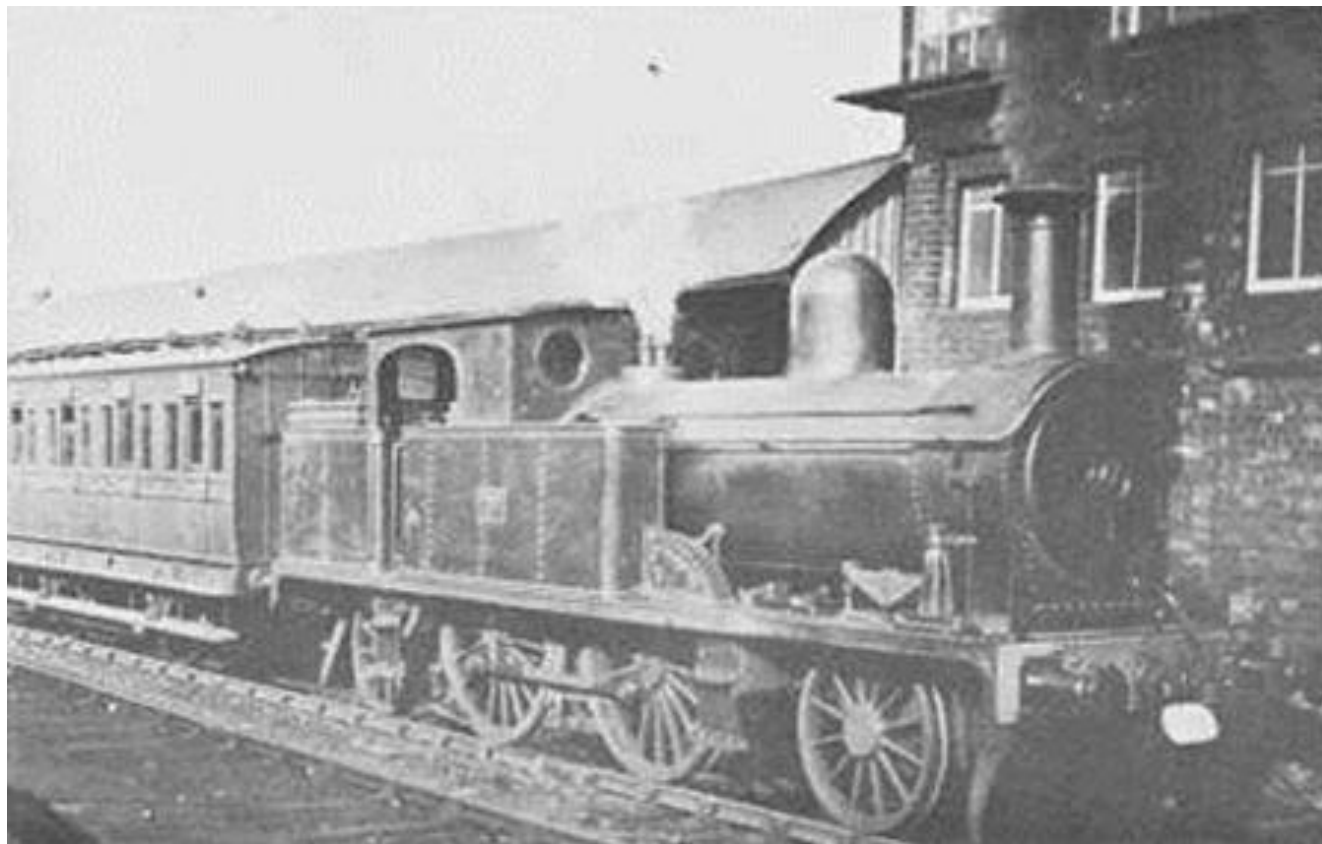
My fondest memory of the 'motors' was the result of mentioning to Johnny Heyburn (he was not noticeably 'gentle' or 'wheezy' then) that I had clocked a 57 on this train on the level between Holywood and Sydenham. "You'll come with me tomorrow on the early turn," was his answer, "and I'll do a 60 for you." And I did, and he did - 62 to be precise between Tillysburn and Kinnegar. I can still feel the engine shaking herself (they had only 7' coupled wheelbase) when she hit the curve after Sydenham at 52 mph (a speed I had never previously timed here in the Down direction). If I hadn't had my notebook fastened to my jacket with a string a valuable record of BCDR 1939 running would have been lost. He drove on full regulator, pulled up as far as she would go, shut off as soon as I (foolishly) called out "62" and entered Holywood cautiously. On a subsequent run, he demonstrated that the engine could also manage a 60 on the first valve and same cut-off - he was still doing 60 this time at Kinnegar, 0.6 miles short of Holywood. The load was 71 tons.

The following year, the same driver on 2-4-2T No.5 on the 10:25am with a trifle of 90 tons attained 57 before Holywood, fell to 39 on the bank and accelerated over the top to 51 before stopping in Helen's Bay in the incredible time of 12 minutes 42. *[On a point made by the author about 2-4-2Ts - 14½" cylinders would provide more than adequate tractive effort to haul 120 tons up Holywood bank; the speed at which this could be done would then depend on the steaming qualities of boiler and firebox. - Ed.]*

Incidentally, 60 mph behind BCDR engines was not nearly so rare as Mr Arnold's tables of runs would suggest - it was regular on the 8:20am and nearly so on the lighter 11:15am (Up), while I once clocked

one behind Baltic No.23 at Carnalea on a DOWN train - the 7:33am (which, strengthened, returned at 8:20). The load was 165 tons.

The high speeds attained by the 2-6-4Ts were not solely due to their greater power. I remember, for example, one rock-steady Cork-main-line type of run, when I shared the footplate with Paddy Fitzpatrick. We were chatting at Bangor when the guard came up and gave Paddy hell - he had been fighting the bikes in the van most of the way - and this was an all-bogie train.



BCDR 2-4-2T No.27 on Motor Train at Holywood in 1939. (A. Donaldson)

Of the GNR engines, their running on the Bangor line gave no indication of their real capacity. Great though my admiration is for the BCDR standard tanks, they were not superior to the U class 4-4-0s at hill climbing and I consider the UGs could have held their own against them. For one thing, the BCDR engines were normally driven much harder; for another, I have seen UG No.149 (UTA 49) put up a superb performance from Goraghowood to Belfast Central Junction with a 260 ton Sunday School train, and then do nothing on the Bangor line.

I seem to remember hearing that steam engines were under some restriction in the last days, though a U has been timed at 60 mph on the Bangor line.

Even if this digression seems unduly long, I make no apology: it simply illustrates what this book does to you - it sent me searching through my BCDR logs and reliving many pleasant days in consequence. The very nature of the material in the book compels a very close look and I could not help noticing three faults - all interconnected. The tables of logs are weak. The omission of very necessary mileages is not the author's fault but a quirk of publication; but the logs themselves are far too cramped to allow the inclusion of an adequate set of passing and intermediate speeds. The latter are particularly necessary in short start-to-stop runs, to illustrate acceleration and braking. *[On the BCDR, for example, I recall No.8 with 140 tons reaching 36 mph at Victoria Park, 75 seconds after starting from*

Sydenham, and 41 at Ballymacarrett 41 seconds later (she then ran into signal checks). As to braking, I once timed No.6 with Driver Smith at 40 mph between two successive mile posts, the second of which was on Saintfield platform, where the train stopped - without overrunning! - Ed.] This fault is due to the extraordinary method of printing the driver's name so as to take up about one sixth of the column. As every run is mentioned in the text (excellent idea), a referencing method could easily have been devised. In the preface, the author lays down the very sound principle of accolade for the ordinary railwaymen who, in spite of a very discouraging environment, displayed the enthusiasm and devotion which inspired the book, and many enginemmen have been pleased to find their efforts recognised for once. But doctrinaire adherence to this principle has resulted in the introduction of many names and lists of names which are simply labels attached to nothing and an encumbrance to the general reader. A similar flaw appears in the handling of the coaching stock. The comments on the make-up of trains on both lines are well up to the general standard of the book in acuteness, but there are curious lists of carriage numbers which mean nothing unless every carriage had some individual characteristic.

A book of this calibre could stand on its own feet without illustrations, though one must cast one's marketing net as widely as possible, and it is in fact well illustrated: it must not have been easy to cover the early days on the BCDR, even Mr W. Robb's excellent collection from the period, examples from which have graced our own publication at times, does not contain a great deal of the Bangor line; this may explain the peculiar choice of cover picture - the cover as a whole rather belies the quality of the material behind it.

This is a book for the devoted amateur and the professional railwayman; but even the 'fringe' enthusiast, if somewhat daunted by the staggering amount of observation crammed into it, will find plenty of general railway lore to interest him, while even the more perceptive of Hoi Polloi will be able to pick out a sociological thread - the relation between man, machine and timetable - which will satisfy. Some idea of Mr Arnold's incisive writing may be gained from the article which opens this issue.

AD

EDITORIAL POLICY

A. Donaldson

An eloquent - indeed rhetorical - protest was made about the magazine at the 1970 Annual General Meeting, so that a few words on the topic may not be out of place.

The precise nature of the complaint was not made clear, but it came in the course of a discussion on the retention of members and apparently referred to lack of Society news.

Admittedly the offending issue only contained about six pages of Society matter out of a total of twenty-eight, and there was no Site Report. It should, however, be borne in mind that a News Sheet had been published only a little over a month previously, giving adequate coverage of all activities. The then Site Officer had in fact been asked for a report for the magazine, but it is hardly surprising that he had been unable to comply, in view of the amount of work possible during four or five weeks in winter time.

The topics dealt with by Letters To The Editor may be interesting in this connection. After January 1968 ALL of these (every one of which has been published) have dealt with various matters of railway interest, and NONE with the Society's activities (or lack of them). In issue number eight we actually asked for railtour suggestions. Only two practical examples were forthcoming and these have in fact been incorporated in our plans. This has been the nearest thing to an exception to the rule just mentioned - ALL of which give some indication where lie the interests of those who can be bothered to write.

Moreover, "Five Foot Three" in its present form is steadily winning recognition. Apart from the many

appreciative remarks in letters (remarks which it is NOT our place to publish in this case), the magazine is now taken by three of the County Libraries in Northern Ireland and we have recently been asked to allow ourselves to be included in a general library survey, while publishing firms have begun to send us their works on Irish railways for review. Most of the credit for this, of course, goes to our contributors (though probably the illustrations help) but the Society is bound to gain thereby.

Unlike other preservation societies in the British Isles, we have all Ireland to exercise our engines in. "Is fada fairsingeach an tír í Éire," [*Ireland is far less extensive*] said Keating, little realising that his words would be used in connection with steam preservation. Ireland is certainly an extensive and spacious country compared to a preserved branch line. The geographical scope of our activities surely justifies taking a general view of steam operation on all Irish railways, and it would be a retrograde step to confine ourselves to accounts of tail-chasing at Whitehead.

In any case, the Editor does not hold his post *ad vitam* nor even *ad culpam*, any more than any other Committee member, and it is quite easy to elect another in his stead.

VAPORARIA (August 1969 - June 1970)

J.A. Cassells

The August disturbances called an abrupt halt to steam working on the weekend Stranraer boat trains, and the 7:55 and 2:05 were steam for the last time on 16th August. On the main line, 4 and 55 worked specials into Derry on 12th August, and the final steam passenger train of the year to Portrush was on 21st August - a special from Larne worked into Belfast by No.6 and forward to Portrush by 53. A football special to Ballymena with No.50 on 6th September was the last main line working of the year - indeed the last main line steam passenger train to date.

During the winter, ballast trains on the Great Northern and NCC areas were at first unaffected by the arrival of three new diesel hydraulic locos. A dispute over their manning, plus the inevitable mechanical problems, kept them confined to York Road for some time after delivery. In the meantime steam locomotives powered a variety of trains ranging from a load of boulders to strengthen the sea wall at Whitehead to a weekend bridge rebuilding scheme near Derry, with 51 and 55 working a ballast and steam crane special, on 23rd and 24th August.

The dieselisation of the GN ballast occurred shortly before the end of the stone trains, but this was due more to shortage of steam engines than the arrival of diesel No.3 to shunt Great Victoria Street.

More recently, the allocation of another diesel to Coleraine has ended the longer distance ballasts from York Road. On Sundays 24th and 31st March the building of a new bridge at Ballyclare Junction necessitated the running of a spectacular girder train with 4 and 51 at either end, and on arrival the leading engine running forward to Antrim to collect the steam crane.

Passenger working was very thin during the winter. On 10th November No.4 (the rear engine of the 10:15 Down empty stone train) was detached at Ballycarry to rescue the 11:00 diesel ex-Larne Harbour. Not until Easter Monday was there another steam working on the Larne line, but 30th and 31st March almost provided enough steam to justify the writing of this edition of Vaporaria. On Easter Monday No.4 worked the 9:50 Carrick, 12:35 Carrick and 15:35 Whitehead, while No.5 was an unusual choice for the 17:35 Whitehead. Easter Tuesday was not quite as good, but 4 again produced some sparkling performances on the 14:35 Carrick and 16:40 Whitehead trains.

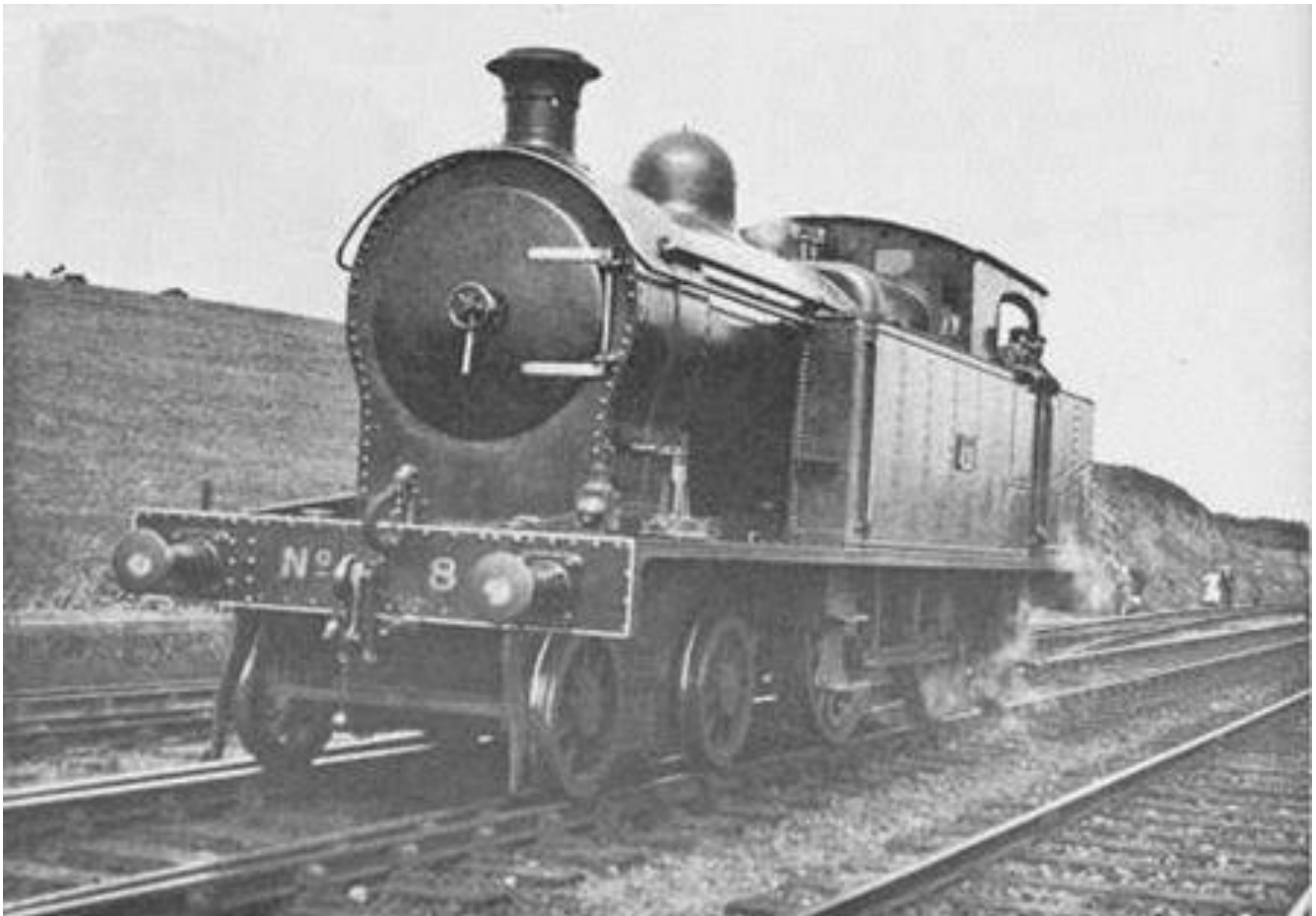
During the last few weeks of stone train working, the locomotive position at times passed beyond the critical stage. There were few days on which a full service operated, and fairly frequently there were no trains at all. No.6 failed during the last week of the stone trains. No.10 was withdrawn before Christmas. 50 shed part of her motion after Easter on the way back from a GN ballast and never steamed again. 53 suffered a cracked firebox, and a patching job only gave her a few weeks reprieve. 5 was considered too weak, in the last months, to be allowed on to stone traffic. Last of all, 55 failed on

the penultimate day of operation. So on 2nd May 4 and 53 were chosen as the last stone train engines, with 51 as standby. They worked 5:40 empties to Magheramorne, and the 10:50 ex-Magheramorne. After unloading at Greencastle, the empty train returned to Magheramorne, and the engines stabled at Carrickfergus. On the following weekend 4 was back in Belfast, but 53 (which was earmarked for retention) was condemned, and as a result 5 and 52 have also gained a summer reprieve. 4, 5 and 51 thus remain, and the rest of the engines are to be sold for scrap immediately.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

From the Society's recent News Sheet, I note that a comprehensive review of "Steam Over Belfast Lough" is to appear in the next issue of "Five Foot Three". You may consider that enough space will, as a result, be occupied by the subject of the book. On the other hand, a few personal recollections may not be out of place. These, and many others, have been evoked by the personal approach of the author of the book, who has clearly demonstrated that both men and machines of a certain calibre are required to run a railway.



BCDR 4-4-2T No.8 at Comber on T.T. Race Day, 20th August 1932. (W. Robb)

Before my father's death at an early age in 1943, he was a senior driver on the Ballynahinch branch of the County Down, having previously been on the Bangor line, and on the main line, Belfast-Newcastle. The families of both my parents came from the Ballynahinch area and for this reason my father chose to be on the branch. Joe Douglas, mentioned in the book and still driving on the Bangor line, though well over retiring age, also came from the Ballynahinch area, and was at one time fireman to my father.

Hugh Moore, one of whose timed runs to Bangor appears in the book, was another driver on the branch.

As a schoolboy, I was a sort of 'mascot' on the branch, and given every freedom to travel on it as I wished. I was often permitted, alone, to run the engine round at Ballynahinch, and recall doing this with BCDR engines Nos. 3, 6 and 30, and also with GSR No.430. This engine was on loan from the GSR during the War, and most of her time on the County Down was spent sitting on the 'middle road' at Ballynahinch, waiting for H&W diesel No.2 to fail, as it often did. Then one of the drivers would light her up and a porter would act as fireman until one could be sent out from Queen's Quay. Until steam was raised, passengers would be sent out by bus or taxi to the Junction. I recall once being entrusted with the branch staff in a taxi to the Junction, so that another train could enter the branch after a No.2 failure.

On reading in the book of that autumn incident at Cultra, I was reminded that I too ran through a BCDR halt (Creevyargon) driving diesel No.2. I had not braked early enough, and had to reverse into the halt again. Perhaps this could be excused as I was only twelve at the time!

I recall seeing no less than five troop trains filling the Ballynahinch station to capacity during the War. On another occasion, while still at Queen's Quay, my father was rostered to take a very early morning goods to Donaghadee. When he arrived at the shed, during a heavy air raid, he found that the cleaners had 'gone to ground'. He lit the fire himself, waited for the fireman and guard, who arrived a bit late, and proceeded, only to find bomb damage between Comber and Donaghadee.

These are just a few of my recollections of the BCDR, which used to charge me 7d for a reduced rate second class return from Ballynahinch to Belfast. These memories have little to do with the Bangor line, but I hope they will be of some interest to members, especially if they feel, like the author and myself, that railwaymen - as well as the tools of their trade - are a class apart.

Yours sincerely,

W.F. Gillespie

Tandragee

ROYAL MEATH RAILTOUR

C.P. Friel

"Out of the mouth of disaster came sweetness" could well be a biblical misquote to summarise our Royal Meath Railtour on 23rd May.

We were in the comfortable position of having the engine [*No.186*] fully ready for the tour; we could even boast a new brick arch and small ends re-done, not to mention the almost unheard of luxury of cleaning the engine a full three weeks early! However, misfortune deserted us and threw taxing difficulties in our path.

Only three days before the tour developments in the Republic of Ireland's four month old cement strike meant that our visit to the cement siding at Drogheda had to be called off. Something not much short of a frenzy of activity resulted, with the Railtour Committee trying to arrange an alternative 'extra' somewhere, but with such short notice their efforts could only be in vain.

Having consoled ourselves with the promise of an extra runpast or two on the branches, our confident anticipation was shattered by news that the engine's tender was severely damaged and was not holding any quantity of water. When the engine was put under York Road's coaling plant almost the first thing to hit the empty coal space was a huge lump about three feet long which fell with such force that it split open a weld along the side of the shovel plate. With just over a full working day before the engine had to leave for Dublin, it seemed that a repair could be effected. However, NIR are under no obligation

whatever to repair an engine not their own and it was an act of benevolence on their part that a welder was put onto the job. But Lady Luck was still being uncooperative and by stopping time on Friday the welding job was still incomplete. Modern synthetic materials were applied and while they did staunch the flow for a time, the leak was still there, though no much less than before.

With the engine ready to go, albeit rather less trustworthy than usual, there were loco crews to re-arrange, new paths to be worked out, additional tools and materials to be laid on (just in case) while Macha Film Studios, custodians of the portable pump referred to in the last News Sheet, received a frantic phone call to have it ready for possible use in about eight hours' time.

The engine left York Road early on Saturday morning to thread the circuitous route towards Dundalk while the participants were whisked out of Dublin behind a diesel to meet No.186 at Dundalk. In a way, it was at Dundalk that the horizon began to brighten, perhaps Lady Luck was smiling on us after all.

With No.186 safely coupled to the train of three bogies and a parcels brake van, we had a promising run up the main line to Drogheda; it was good to be on the open road behind steam again. No.186 hadn't worked a train over this section of line before, so this part of the tour could be regarded as a bonus. Drogheda was reached about an hour and a half behind the original timetable, but even so the local populace had waited for us and were rewarded with No.186, with safety valves popping, busily running round the train and watering before reversing the train southward out of the station to the junction for the Navan line. The proceedings at Drogheda were enlivened by the presentation of two oil paintings by a retired GN engine driver to the Society. One depicts a Compound at speed on the Enterprise while the other is a VS. With the presentation photogenically covered by the local paper we set off along the branch; everywhere there were large crowds assembled to wave or just stand and watch - many had probably forgone their dinner to make sure of seeing us.

Navan was the first stop, where the engine took water and most of the passengers walked towards Navan Junction to photograph and tape the train between the two stations. Heading away from Navan Junction we left the former Great Northern Oldcastle branch and swung sharp northwards on the Midland Great Western's Kingscourt line. With Kingscourt turntable out of action, No.186 had to run tender first to there; as a result there were no photographic stops on the outward journey and the non-stop run to Kingscourt was accomplished very briskly indeed, with some twenty-five minutes pulled back.

After running round and shunting the stock, the crew had a well-earned rest and we prepared for the run home. First stop on the return journey was at the gypsum siding, where everything was covered with white gypsum dust and looked as if it had been hit by a freak snow storm. On then to Nobber for a runpast on the embankment, curve and cutting, all on a rising grade. With wide regulator and almost continuous whistling the scene was recorded by all the media from a hundred different angles; it delighted the locals assembled on the platform and terrified some of the younger ones while the local police force came to see for himself what all the commotion was about.

In an effort to cut time, a stop at Kilmainham Wood was cut and a similar fate befell Proudstown Park. During the stop at Navan the tender was topped up and most of the participants walked across the Boyne Viaduct to take up positions along the river's steeply cut banks to photograph the train crossing the Viaduct. Having crossed and stopped the participants entrained from ground level; after a further photographic stop at the new Cement Factory at Platin we were quite adept at this scrambling back into the coaches.

After arrival in Drogheda the train was reversed across the Boyne Viaduct (the more famous one this time) and a good number of our travellers boarded buses and were later deposited around and below the Viaduct. Having waited on the north bank to let the Down Enterprise pass, No.186 steamed across the

Viaduct, providing good cine and still material and giving what was basically a majestic runpast.

Continuing south on the Great Northern main line, with the driver well used to his charge, a sprightly run was made to Butlins Mosney for a photographic stop before continuing to Balbriggan where the sizeable Belfast contingent had to leave us for home. On from Balbriggan, speed fell momentarily to 27 at the top of the bank, but once over the top the engine was given her head and we were rewarded with a very creditable 53 at post 13¼; not bad for a goods engine in her ninetieth year.

We took advantage of this to have a photographic stop at Kilbarrack, a new halt near Howth Junction. This stop was to have been made on the outward journey at the start of the day and in making it in the opposite direction we had accomplished one of the attractions advertised for the original tour.

No.186 continued on her lively way and we arrived in Dublin Connolly (Amiens Street) only a couple of minutes down overall, and had succeeded in keeping out of the way of the Enterprise following us. All in all we had pulled most of the tour out of the fire - what a pity we didn't get the chance to awaken the Kings of Brugh na Boinne with a rousing start out of the steep Cement Siding, still that's there for another day. No.186 had done us proud and we can now look forward to the exciting two-day Decies Railtour from Belfast to Waterford and back in September - with a lively No.186 and her stablemate No.171.

LOCOMOTIVE REPORT

I.C. Pryce

The reader who lightly scans these pages or the traveller on railtours can scarcely imagine the many hours of back-breaking labour which go into preparing the engines for each tour. The casual visitor to the shed may have gathered from the frequent stream of richly descriptive language that the job of keeping three ancient engines in running order is no easy one. More than one staunch GN enthusiast, when removing firebars or cleaning the inside motion of No.171, has been heard to mutter that perhaps the NCC Jeeps had their points - or even that a "wee diesel" would be handier.

Most of our work has its reward however in seeing the last main line steam locos in the British Isles at work.

In the last report we mentioned that work was proceeding on removing the taper and ovality of No.186's left driving crankpin. This has since been completed and the former $\frac{1}{8}$ inch taper has been reduced to less than five thou. A new brick arch has been fitted - the original arch could not be reproduced exactly with the bricks available nowadays, so the replacement arch was cast 'in situ'. Such arches are in use in some preserved locos in England.

The more observant travellers on the Royal Meath railtour will have noticed a slight change in No.186's appearance - her front buffers have been replaced by longer ex-GN ones (from the rear of No.171's small tender) and screw couplings fitted front and rear. This was at the request of CIÉ since for some strange reason when running tender-first GS&WR buffers do not touch those of the leading coach, causing a violent pluck on the drawbar on starting. *[Many ex-GS&WR engines ran on CIÉ with the extra length made up by a six inch wooden block inserted behind the buffers. - Ed.]*

On a lighter note - in April a thrush made its home in behind the rear buffer beam of No.186's tender. The nest was carefully removed to a nearby pile of sleepers.

No.171 has had a completely new set of firebars made and fitted. New studs were fitted to the safety valve flange on the firebox top. The twenty-two $\frac{7}{8}$ inch studs provided some awkward moments during removal - three requiring to be drilled out, the remaining nineteen polishing off a large spanner, a pair of chain tongs and a set of stilsons in quick succession. Replacement studs had to be specially made from high tensile, high temperature steel and the entire job passed by the boiler inspector.

Guinness No.3 has had little work done on her since the completion of repairs to the hot axlebox which

is now trouble-free. A mysterious defect in the lubricator was traced, after much thought, to a blockage in the oil pipe.

Saturday 28th February saw the completion of the first night shift at Whitehead when all three engines were required in steam for the annual steam test early that morning. The boiler inspector passed all three as fit for service.

Finally, mention must be made of those railwaymen who, in a professional capacity, share some of the load of running our engines, especially Mr W. McAfee, Mechanical Engineer of NIR, who more than once has stepped in with practical help and advice.

STOP PRESS

Ex-Sligo Leitrim and Northern Counties Railway 0-6-4T "Lough Erne" (No.27 of NIR) has been purchased by RPSI Chairman Roy Grayson and was moved to Whitehead in early June - preliminary boiler inspection has been favourable, but mechanical repairs are likely to be a long term job. The engine was steamed on 13th June.

SITE REPORT

A.H.J. Glendinning

At the time of writing, all efforts at Whitehead are being concentrated on preparing the place for our second annual Open Day on 27th June.

The track in general has been the subject of much packing and levelling while some fishplates have been tightened and others renewed. The shed point has also received a lot of attention.

The weeds, etc., on the platform and some of the running lines were sprayed with weed-killer during late May but this had little effect; it was found that at least four times the recommended strength was needed to make any impression instead of the double strength mixture used. The weed-killer came by way of a gift and was, fortunately, applied sooner than planned so that other steps can now be taken to clear the vegetation. The fine weather during the last few weeks has really dried the growth and two paraffin flame throwers are now in use in a new scorched-earth policy; first results are encouraging. Some members bravely tackled the long grass beside the shed roads and their efforts have brought improvements.

A lot of tidying up has been done with lengths of rail, sleepers, chairs, bolts and keys gathered from their various and numerous hiding places in the grass and stacked near the shed. A side benefit of this is a large quantity of scrap metal which will be sold off in due course.

A three-phase electricity supply is now available in the shed and this should prove valuable for welding and other heavy-duty jobs. A new stove with a back boiler has been put in the mess-room at the back of the shed; this has supplied much-needed hot water for washing, albeit with the tap at a peculiar angle! One other addition that should be mentioned is the new bag on the water column, dutifully sewn up from a sheet of canvas by the wife of one of our members.

Our best thanks are due to all those who have worked so hard preparing the site for Open Day.