

FIVE FOOT THREE



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Editor: C.P. Friel

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

Front Cover: WT Class 2-6-4T No.4 speeds towards Cookstown Junction (Drumsough) with the 9:40am to Portrush on 21st July 1956. (N. Craig)

EDITORIAL

C.P. Friel

The recent announcement by the Stormont Government of the reopening of the Belfast Central and the building of a new passenger terminus at Maysfields came very much as a relief rather than a surprise. Ever since the line was closed we have had recurring rumours that reopening was pending and these were reinforced from time to time by activity round the Shaky Bridge area. When it finally came, the announcement was quickly forgotten under the barrage of political and terrorist activity now so much a regular part of life here.

The reopening will surely provide the Society with the opportunity of running tours over the County Down, as yet never traversed by one of our engines. The thoughts of No.186 getting to grips with the Holywood bank or visions of No.171 romping in by Sydenham or No.4 renewing her acquaintance with the bank out of Bangor are enough to tempt any enthusiast to dreaming.

The possibilities for NIR to capitalise on the new scheme of things are worthy of thought too. The interworking of Derry, Portadown and Lisburn trains over the main line in from Lisburn will make many a head ache. The possibilities of through Bangor-Portadown or Antrim-Airport-Lisburn connections into and out of Derry and Dublin trains all make for exciting operating possibilities.

Uppermost in many minds will be the future of the Shore line and Whitehead's connection with the outside world. While no specific mention was made of the future of this, it would seem to be the height

of nonsense to spend £1½m on new Shops at York Road only to abandon all rail connections into them. Indeed the building of these shops and the new goods yard at Adelaide point to a new and brighter future.

It only remains now to be seen whether NIR can take this new opportunity to make something of a system from the remnants of previous wielding of the proverbial axe.

NEW FROM COMMITTEE

J.A. Lockett

Committee meetings have been held on the first Thursday of each month since the AGM in November. During these meetings a large amount of business has been handled; the average meeting lasting about three hours.

On the Railtour front, it was very difficult to decide on a definite programme. While fully aware of the present upheavals in the country, we had to bear in mind that it might be possible to undertake tours over certain CIÉ lines in the future and it was decided to advertise the North Kerry tour in an attempt to gauge the members' reaction. It was further agreed that we should bear in mind a one-day Dublin-based tour in September. The final tour decisions will be as late as possible in an attempt to let the tours run, if at all possible.

Our site at Whitehead came in for its share of attention too. A sub-committee was set up to instigate a set of rules to cover shunting, train operation, etc., on the site and their report is to come up in May for discussion. The formulation of the rules is another step in our attempts to regularise the workings on our own premises. Negotiations for a fifteen-year lease on the site are, at long last, reaching a conclusion. The urban District Council, owners of the land, have been most co-operative while Mr. H.A. Frazer is negotiating on our behalf with the local Valuation Officer. A further £600 was allotted to the building of the shed extension, and this brings the total monies allocated to this project to £1,000. So far, we have managed to keep below our budgeted outlay although the Committee felt that the further spending of about £400 on the roofing of the shed would have to await the improvement of Society funds which have been deprived of railtour income recently. By the end of the summer we should be able to complete the shed. In the meantime the tracks are to be laid and No.171 moved in to comparative safety.

Although the Committee is not allowed to spend money on coaches, a lot of work has been done to find out what coaches are or will be available from both NIR and CIÉ. Special interest is being shown in the Director's Saloon (No.150) and we await the outcome of negotiations with NIR. CIÉ tell us they will not be withdrawing coaches until the new coaches from BR are in service, our negotiations are continuing and members will be informed of possible vehicles for which consortia may be formed.

Still on the rolling stock front, we have had consultations with NIR in order to determine just what work they will require done to No.4 before she would be allowed back on the main line. We are pleased to announce that Mr. Billy Steenson was good enough to accept co-option to the Committee which he joins in the capacity of Locomotive Advisor, a job for which he is well suited.

It was decided that a rate of 1½p per mile should be paid on a Committee-approved run of not less than 100 mile single journey. It was also decided that prior approval should be given to spending of more than ten pounds on any purchase.

Three projects are at present under study. The Committee is taking a fresh look at either forming a Limited Company or becoming a registered Charity, while we are at present having consultations with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board on the broad subject of grants. The third topic is the possible publication of a book, running to about 30-40 pages with plenty of good illustrations; as yet things are only at the embryo stage and we are looking around for a suitable subject.

Purchases approved so far are:

An addressograph machine	£25
A heavy duty electric drill	£12.50
A set of 16' double extending ladders	£16
A 20' x 20' tent for publicity/sales	£60

The last item may seem large, but it was found that the firm from whom we usually hired the tent, at £20 a time, were going out of business and it was thought to be to our benefit in the long run. The tent was first used at Whitehead on 18th March for the Bring and Buy Sale when £107 was raised, and it will find further use at traction engine rallies and at Whitehead during the summer steamings.

Other expenditure likely to come up soon is on items of machinery from NIR, now redundant with the final demise of steam locos on their system.

LOCOMOTIVE REPORT

P.A. Scott

Since January, maintenance work has been cut back considerably in order to release all available manpower for work on the new shed. To this end also the engines were given their visual boiler inspection rather earlier than usual, and the steam tests have been postponed, probably until the end of April.

No.3 At the time of writing, three of the main journals have been lapped and the brasses fitted, and are ready for assembly. The right driving journal was the most badly damaged and is requiring a considerable amount of grinding to remove the score marks. Added to this, the brass is too thin to permit turning to the new diameter, so the surface has been built up with white metal.

The new sponge boxes have been made out of welded steel plate. They will be bolted on to the bottom of the axleboxes, making lifting of the engine for examination of the journals unnecessary. The actual sponges will probably be made of cotton waste, similar to those in No.186.

It is intended that the engine will be back on her wheels in time for the steam test. There is still some work to be done to take up wear in the coupling rod brasses before the motion can be replaced. One improvement which has been made regarding the motion is the fitting of siphon tubes to the grease cups, thus transforming them into oil cups and bringing the engine into line with the others.

No.4 The Jeep was given a visual boiler test soon after being acquired by the Society, but has yet to be steam tested. Her boiler plates and firebox are in good condition and the tubes are fair but the crown stay nuts and ferrules will require replacement.

Wasting of the smokebox has been repaired by the fitting of patches inside, and the chimney, which was worn through in two places and had lost its rim, has been fitted with a steel liner. A spare chimney will be fitted at a later date when time is available.

Since the engine's coming to Whitehead, a group of members has worked regularly on the mammoth task of cleaning the frames and working parts. This has made a tremendous difference not only to the appearance of the engine but to the ease with which she can now be worked at.

During the building of the new shed extension, Craig Robb has taken advantage of the unnatural calm existing inside the shed to repaint the top of the boiler, where the former paint work was in very bad condition. As regards the livery of the tank engine, at present she will remain in the UTA's black lined out in red and straw. There is, however, fairly widespread approval for the idea of eventually painting her in NCC maroon, a livery never in fact carried by the tank engines but only hinted at in the original maroon and straw edging. Any suggestions on this subject will be welcome.

No.27 While the Guinness engine is out of commission, No.27 is carrying out any shunting that is

required.

The engine passed her visual boiler test, including an examination for the first time, of the inside of the firebox. Since the firehole door is too small to permit access to the firebox, the rear damper and firebars had to be removed for the inspection to take place. Apart from the severe corrosion of the firebox wrapper plates in the vicinity of the foundation ring, No.27's boiler is in quite good shape. The tubes are good and the firebox is reasonable, although the plates are slightly buckled between stays and a patch has been fitted to one side.

No work is being done to No.27, apart from patching the smokebox which is badly corroded, and the replacement of an oil pipe. The pipe in question carried oil from a lubricator mounted outside the smokebox to the right hand cylinder, and the break only came to light when it was found that washout water was entering the cylinder from the smokebox and issuing via the draincocks! If there is no non-return valve a jet of steam would have entered the smokebox while the engine was working - a state of affairs which would partly explain the poor steaming.

The mechanical condition of No.27 is very poor, and she would not be permitted to work a railtour. All the springs need replaced and the motion requires a considerable amount of work.

No.171 As soon as the track is laid into the new shed and it is sufficiently secure, No.171 will have her fittings replaced so that she can be steam tested. Several of the more outstanding jobs can then be tackled, notably the replacement of the piston packing and the rectification of the vacuum brake.

It is still the intention to repair the hot box and have the engine fit for working tours at the earliest possible date, but this is a major job considering the equipment available to us at present and may require outside attention.

No.186 Although No.186 has passed her visual boiler test, the boiler inspector has indicated that two jobs should be done on the boiler as a matter of some urgency. The more serious of these is a complete retubing, the other being the replacement of screwed rivets securing the firehole ring patch to the firebox.

No decision has yet been taken on the retubing, which it has been estimated would cost £900 for materials alone. At present the Society can ill-afford such heavy expenditure, but on the other hand No.186 is unquestionably our most reliable and useful engine and to have her out of commission solely due to lack of money could be most unsatisfactory. In order to raise some of the money, we might organise a 'buy a tube' drive, whereby individual members could help to spread the financial burden by donating the price of a tube.

While in Sallins, No.186 has received little attention, apart from preparation for the boiler test. Sallins shed suffers from the same drawbacks as Carrickfergus - it is suitable as a store only and is completely lacking in the facilities essential to an engine shed. The only water supply is a small tap some distance away, from which water has to be brought via a hose pipe for the lengthy job of filling the boiler and tender. Washing out of the boiler, which is usually done before the visual examination, could not be attempted. The absence of a pit means that cleaning of the ashpan can only be done by removing the firebars, and attention to certain parts of the motion could not be possible.

It is hoped that the steam testing of the engine can be postponed until she returns to Whitehead.

SITE REPORT

A.H.J. Glendinning

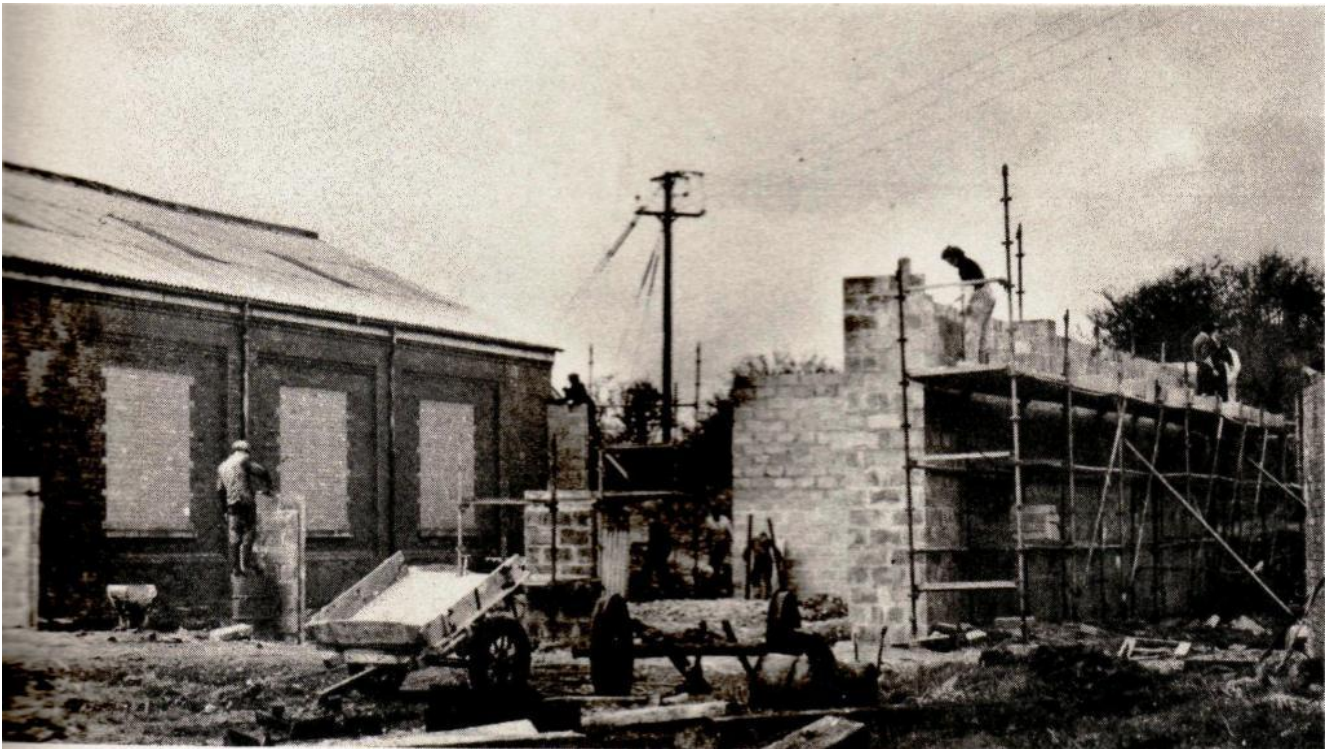
The major current job on the Site, and certainly one of the most ambitious yet undertaken by the Society, is the building of the new 40 by 60 foot extension to our engine shed.

The area for the extension was cleared in October and the foundations dug and filled with ready-mixed

concrete in mid-November. It was decided to postpone the actual wall-building until after Christmas, to enable the job to be done on consecutive Saturdays rather than in bits and pieces, as the latter would involve high expense in the hire of scaffolding.

Delay in obtaining the final planning permission held up work until the last Saturday in January and during the waiting period two small though significant alterations were made in our plans. Originally the extension was to be served by roads fanning out from the existing platform road, but it became obvious that stock would effectually block the new shed. Thus it was decided to take the new roads from the existing 'main line' near the water column. The second change was in making the road nearest the present shed (what will be 'No.3 Road') as a through line, extending behind the shed as a convenient store, out of sight.

The County Council insisted that the walls be eleven inch cavity walls and work finally got under way with lorry loads of sand, cement, blocks, etc., arriving in a rush. A cement mixer was borrowed, but proved inadequate and so hand-mixing was resorted to and maintained. A stock of building tools were "acquired" and a professional builder, Ernie Sterrit of Markethill, was employed on three Saturdays to give guidance and instruction - he thought we were sufficiently skilled to carry on to door-top height without outside help and this is the stage the building is at, at present.



Work in progress on the shed extension at Whitehead at the end of April showing the existing shed, the front portals of roads 3, 4 and 5, and the rear door on No.3 road. (C.P. Friel)

All other work on the site, including that on engines, was suspended and the usual Whitehead 'crowd' again bore the brunt of the work, but it must be recorded that several answered the appeal in the News-sheet for help - the newcomers can have no idea how much their enthusiasm and keenness helped everyone to tackle the job with new vigour.

The target of building three rows (inside and outside) was attained on most days, mainly thanks to a lot of hard work and the weather, which was remarkably favourable.

In view of the Society's financial position, we are unable to go any further with the actual building

although the laying of the tracks and making the doors vandal-proof will soon enable No.171 to come in from the cold. With a good income from the Steam Gala (on 1st July - the old Open Day renamed) and added support for the Sunday trains and other ventures, we hope to have the roof on by next winter.

JEEP MEMORIES

I.C. Pryce

It is now eighteen months since the last steam engine in revenue earning service in the British Isles finally retired, not, fortunately, to the scrap yard but to our depot at Whitehead, from where we hope she will be able to work trips over much of Ireland's railway system.

No.4 is now part, though thankfully not the final chapter, of the story of the steam locomotive. We now have as our latest engine a representative of one of the most efficient classes to run in Ireland, a worthy representative of the long series of NCC locomotives and a unique piece of railway history.

Being a fairly modern class some might imagine that the Jeeps lacked the character of some of the older classes, however, not being easily put off engines, or indeed people, by an undistinguished background, I acquired a great liking for these machines. Certainly they didn't collect many of the wonderful stories associated with some CIÉ engines whose antiquity and perilous foothold on this side of the 'Pearly Gates' seemed to attract many enthusiasts. I must admit to being a little impressed however on hearing of the driver of a midland 2-4-0 who disappeared underneath his engine with a large stone and a piece of wire and who emerged after a few minutes without either of these items, leaving passengers more than a little interested in what vital function they fulfilled.

The Jeeps just weren't like that.

For the enthusiast who looked for an engine with character and ability and for the intelligent engineman who looked for an engine that could do its work with ease, the tanks had a lot to offer. In few classes of engine have I found so much pleasure in watching that infinitely complex relationship between man and machine, that at its best gave much satisfaction to enthusiast and railwayman alike.

As one interested in locomotive working perhaps the most interesting thing was the contrast between the slick and apparently effortless work on the NCC and the often painful lumbering once so common on the Great Northern. I well remember on one of my few visits to the NCC in 1962 being amazed to find No.2 taking nine bogies from Portrush to Carrickfergus, via the 'Back Line' and then running back to Belfast, all on a tank of water. The Fireman, R.J. Simpson, thought nothing of this and indeed the gauge still had many hundreds of gallons showing.

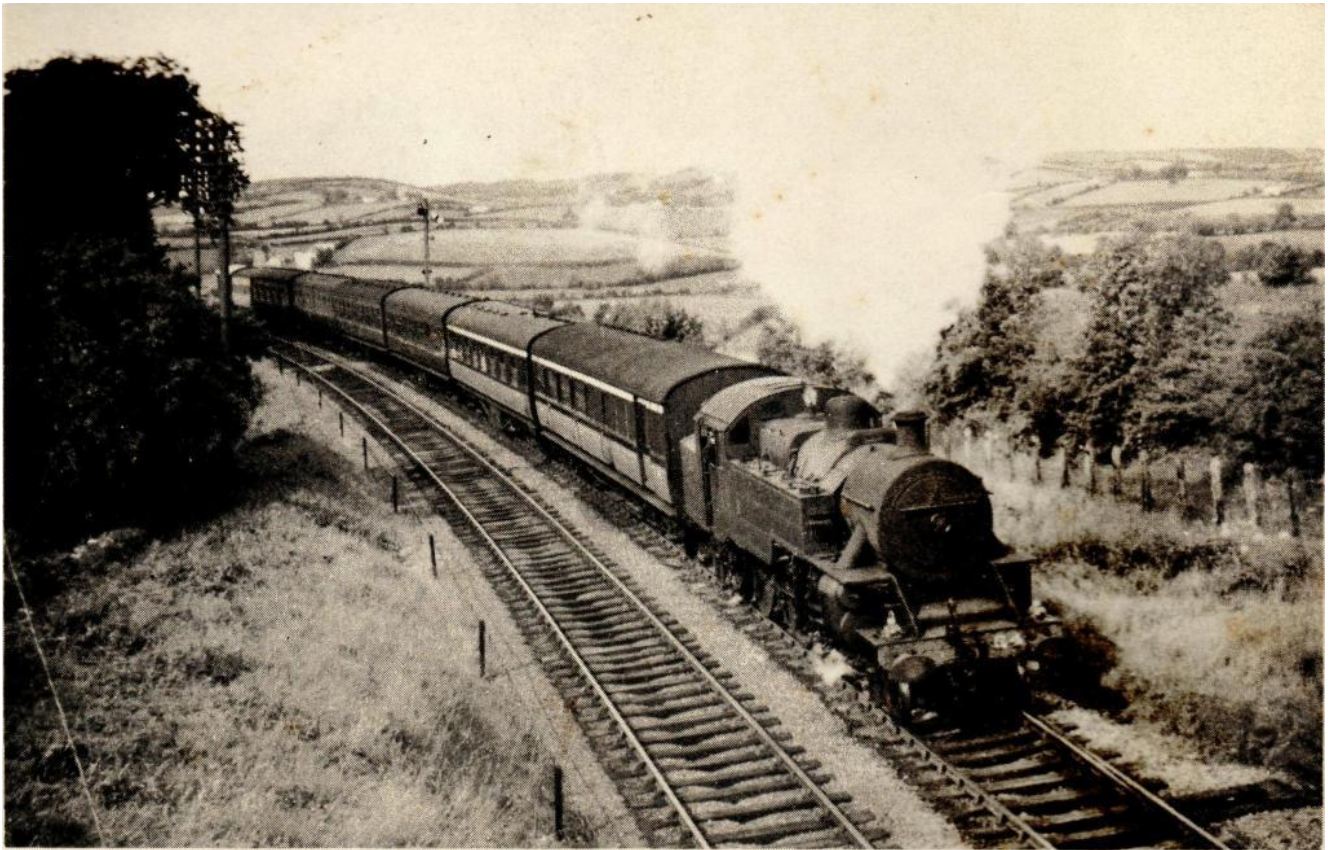
I must in fairness say that by the time the last of the Great Northern engines had been scrapped and a new and younger generation of drivers had succeeded the old hands, the locomotive work on the Great Northern had improved beyond all recognition. The recent tragic death of Harry Dickson reminded me of his enthusiastic and confident handling of No.56 when she first went on to the Dublin specials to replace the withdrawn 207.

Many of the older generation of Great Northern men, brought up the hard way on GN engines, excellent in their own way, seemed to find the problem of handling an off-form Jeep on a big train just too much. The kernel of the problem for many was learning to use the more limited steaming capacity of the Jeeps to the full. The smaller water space in the boiler didn't help things either, for an attempt to make steam by allowing the water level to fall back had inevitably to be followed by a hasty topping up with cold feed water and the resulting drop in pressure could be most disconcerting. By way of a back-handed compliment, one GN Driver did tell me that the NCC engines were the only ones that could go on pulling with 90 lbs on the gauge.

The same driver told me with obvious glee of an English enthusiast travelling on the footplate, edging out of the door ready for a quick escape, looking apprehensively at the gauge glass, even the

comforting bobbing of water at the bottom but having disappeared some miles back.

Another disconcerting feature for a GN man brought up with a simple and effective vacuum brake on his engine, was the NCC pattern with a vacuum brake on the train and a completely separate steam brake only on the engine. Few drivers seemed to use this, preferring to rely on the train brake only. Those who worked the tanks regularly generally got the hang of the brake, however, and regular travellers will remember the panache with which Bob Conn or Gerry Farrell would bring their train to a stop at Goraghwood from 60 plus in a mile on a down gradient of 1 in 100 and with the tank spot-on at the water column. Talking of expertise with the brake, who could forget the perfectly timed approaches of Dan McAtamney of York Road. On being told of the wonders being worked with the steam brake at York Road, one Great Northern driver, not to be outdone, told of stopping a compound at Dundalk only to find the brake blocks welded to the wheels with the heat! But then this gentleman could outdo most yarns.



Jeep 54 climbs away from Goraghwood with the 3:15 to Dublin on 15th August 1963. Note variety of CIÉ coach livery. (I.C. Pryce)

For the fireman the most important thing next to a good steaming boiler is a reliable pair of injectors. Here the Great Northern pattern of “combination injectors”, where the steam and water valves are adjacent on the faceplate compared favourably with the inconvenient layout of the Jeeps where the water valve is at floor level tucked away near the fireman’s seat and the steam valve at shoulder level on the faceplate. Admittedly, many firemen acquired the knack of knocking on the water with the foot whilst operating the steam valve with their left hand. Even with this trick the NCC injectors seemed noisy and temperamental in operation compared to the GN pattern.

One story illustrating the total unfamiliarity of the Great Northern with the Jeep’s footplate arrangements occurs to me. In the period around 1961 and 1962 the 9:35 to Newry was rostered for an

AEC railcar but was sometimes worked by a Jeep. On arrival at Newry one day, No.56 was handed to the Newry Shed cleaner to water and turn whilst her driver and fireman went on a foray into the town in search of refreshment. The cleaner looked at the footplate and remarked to me "You take her". On confessing a not-too-thorough knowledge of the engine, I was told "Ach go on. You know more about her than me anyhow". We did get the engine turned and back on her train. At this stage the driver, the late Ralph McBrien, arrived carrying a huge armful of potted plants, his face glowing red and shining through a mass of foliage, for all the world like a garden gnome.

Another point against the Jeep, on the Great Northern, was their association in enginemens' minds with the hated Moguls. A Northern Counties man wouldn't hear a bad word said against the Moguls, which was unfortunate as the Great Northern men had a rich collection of epithets to direct at them and some of these inevitably fell on all things NCC.

In addition to the aforementioned points, the Moguls could throw in a dusty, draughty cab and riding like runaway mangle on a cobbled street. The nearest picture of an off-form Mogul on the rough, curving boggy track of the GN's Derry Road is a vision of Hell's Kitchen.

I once met Bob Armstrong climbing down from 104 after bringing in an Omagh train. He directed a hateful look at his engine and said, "That bloody engine landed at Carrickfergus with King Billy in 1690."

Only recently I heard a comment originating from a Derry fireman which perhaps typifies the more earthy and practical views of GN men on engines, referring to the two handled regulator on NCC locos he said "There was more than enough metal in them to make three decent regulators".

These horrific views of NCC engines will not, I hope, give the impression that I feel No.4 should not be given house room in our new shed extension, for of all the thrilling hours I have spent travelling and photographing with steam engines, many of the happiest were with the Jeeps. Who could forget the long sprints from Kingsbog to Ballymena where the Jeeps just seemed to take flight, averaging over 70 mph for twenty miles? Or what about No.4 holding 66 mph up the long climb from the start in Antrim? I still get pleasure from the memory of the late Paddy Campbell carefully scrutinising every passenger in the 2:45 ex Dublin at Goraghwood to ensure that no officials were on board before giving me a meaningful wink and setting off on a highly illicit 17 minutes 35 seconds to Portadown with No.57.

Even in their last declining years, when their worsening condition decreed a 50 mph restriction, the enthusiast could derive pleasure from the spotless footplate and shining fittings on 50, 53 or 56 so carefully cleaned by their regular drivers, Al Robinson, Rab Graham, Harry Ramsey and R.J. Simpson.

Indeed, all of the regular 'Stone train' crews took such an interest in their engines that they were always ready to discuss the latest form of their mounts. Who but a real enthusiast for his job like Davy McDonald, could have coaxed such reliability out of No.51 when she had amassed a huge mileage in her five years since shopping?

But all that's gone now. Well not quite, for at least we will be able to relive some of those happy hours as No.4 goes out for an occasional spin. Members will be able to follow the progress of restoration in Five Foot Three and look forward to the happy day when a sparkling overhauled No.4 backs onto her train at York Road.

Throughout this article, I have freely used the term 'Jeeps'. The tanks were thus christened by Foreman McCullough of York Road, who likened their go-anywhere, do-anything ability to that of the army jeeps so common when the tanks were first introduced.

As do all railway enthusiasts, I must confess to finding more pleasure from one particular aspect of the subject. Unlike some, however I do not pursue this preference to the exclusion of all other railway matters.

My particular weakness is for NCC coaches, and since it now seems that the Society does not seriously consider pressing for preservation of any of these, but intends rather to find its 'railtour seating accommodation' elsewhere, I thought I would write a few words on the last remaining NCC coaches on NIR as an obituary to what must once have been an amazingly worthwhile topic for study.

With the rundown of steam passenger working since the advent of the UTA, NCC coaches, gradually being made redundant, were according to their age, weight, condition, etc., either scrapped, rebuilt as MPD or MED units, or left idle in sidings to make up the occasional football, loyalist or Sunday School specials.

It is not with the 'Larne Steels' that became MP intermediate trailers, or with the war shipment J11s that became MED trailers or those that sacrificed their bodies to become rail-transporters that I want to deal, but to look at the survivors of the last category - the last locomotive coaches of the NCC.

In the late spring of 1970, well into the NIR period, ten coaches of the fast dwindling rakes of NCC and GNR(I) loco coaches still in UTA green, appeared from York Road shops with a new all NIR red livery and a narrow grey waist line. (This is therefore a distinct NIR livery for inherited loco coaches intended for further use, as no other rolling stock has since been painted in this manner.)

With the repainting and assembly of one rake of ten (all ex-NCC) coaches, almost all the remaining coaches have been scrapped, with one or two exceptions.

Since the advent of this rake coincided approximately with the demise of the Jeeps, I never saw the 'red coach rake' steam hauled, although some were during Easter 1970.

The ten coaches consist of two 'North Atlantic' class, two F3, two J12 and four J6 class.

The two survivors of the North Atlantic quintet (unquestionably the most beautiful coaches to run in Ireland) need no describing and suit their new coat which is not so very different from their original one. They are No.392 (ex NCC 93), one of a pair of corridor thirds of class J8 built in Derby in 1935 and No.472 (ex NCC 91) of class K3 built a year earlier, the North Atlantic brake and the only brake in the red rake.

The two F3 class (Nos. 274 and 276 - ex 68 and 69) are the survivors of a class of side corridor, 28 ton, 57 foot, first/second compos sent in the batches of LMS coaches to compensate York Road for bomb damage. They appear almost the same as the J6 and J12 classes but each contains a couple of single sided compartments.

Included in the four remaining J6 class is an extremely good looking coach in fair condition (No.358, ex 243). The reason for this is that she still possesses a fair amount of her wooden panelling and ventilators above all her compartment side doors and the four corridor side doors. The other three of this class Nos. 352, 354 and 360 (ex 237, 239 and 244) are the plain steel-sided variety very similar to the two remaining J12 class.

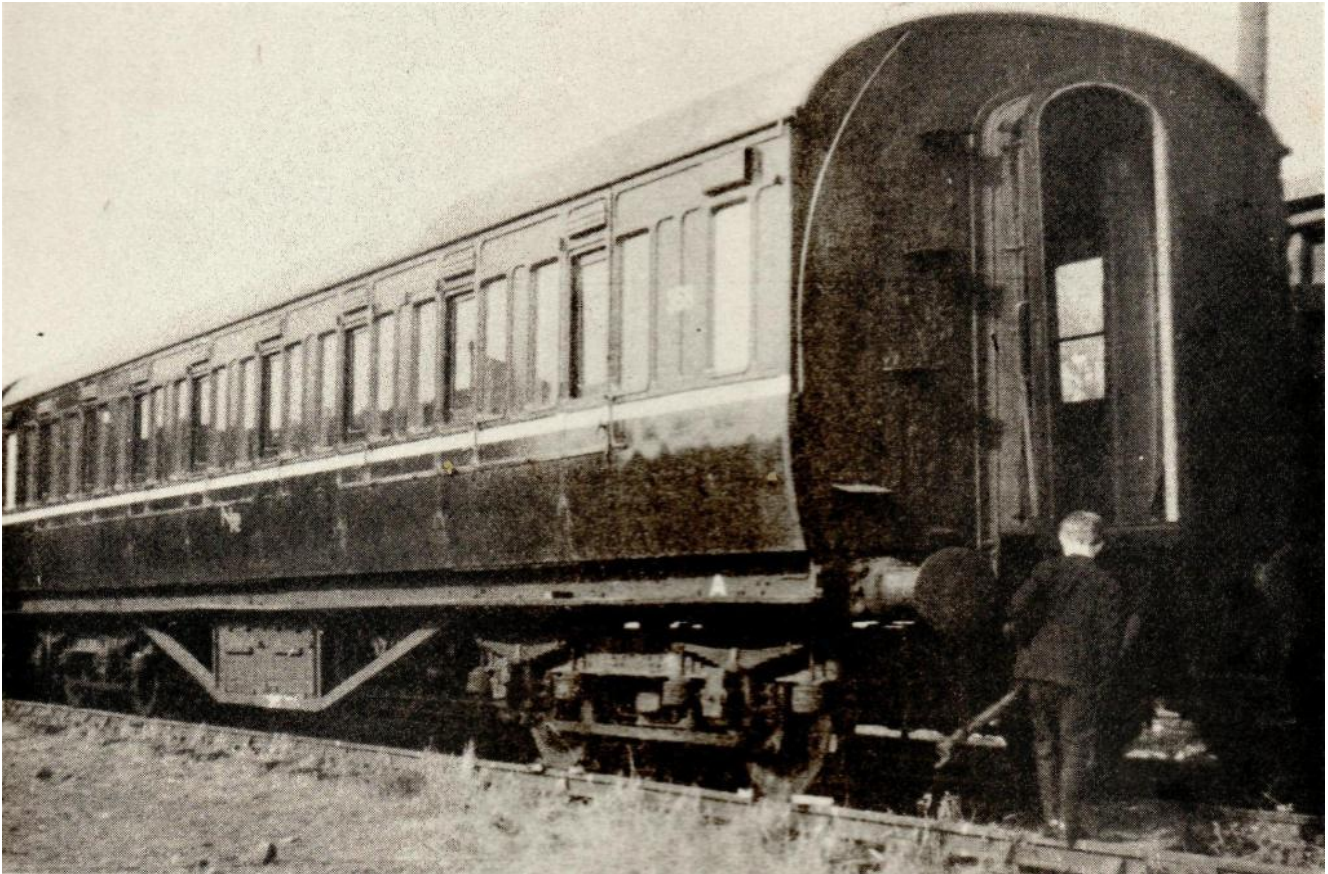
The J12s as with the J6s, were too old to be built into railcars, explaining the survival of representatives of this class. They were built in the twenties and were also shipped over from the LMS during the war. The two remaining are 340 and 342 (ex 238 and 241).

In 1971 I saw part of the rake in use on Easter Monday on a special to Carrickfergus. The eight coaches did not include 352 and 358) behind No.103 "Merlin" and again on 10th and 11th July, special Larne boat trains behind "Merlin" were made up of six to eight of the rake. Apart from these occasions, I

believe the only other employment for the rake was behind 103 to Portrush.

At present the rake is lying dispersed between Antrim, Ballymena and Cullybackey, devoid of brasses and possibly of future employment.

Since the Society has done almost all that is possible in the line of 'steam' preservation, and are now obligated to switch our interest to other topics of 'railway' preservation, some coach preservation must follow (even if only under the economical railtour north of the border argument). When this does occur, and when CIÉ-GN stock has been acquired, let us not forget the last NCC coaching stock, the Jeeps' last running mates and consider the possibility of a tour to pair them with No.4 before they finally disappear.



Ex LMS(NCC) J6 class coach No.358 at Antrim in 1971. (H. Cathcart)

MR. MAGILL'S PARTY (Part One)

J. Magill

The Irish North was closing. The announcement when it came, was completely undramatic, and delivered in the cluttered jargon of officialdom. As usual, anyone interested enough in the matter had to prod and poke at the bumptious array of words to get at the real meaning.

Forced into acceptance of a responsibility for the line, Governments on both sides of the border had for a number of years past been pouring out massive sums of money in an effort to ensure continued operation, and yet it was common knowledge that the Government in the North had no great liking for this form of transport, and so it came as no great surprise to hear that Stormont had at last decided to wash its hands of the affair completely.

The Dáil of course, as indeed it was bound to do, saw fit to issue a statement simultaneously deploring and condemning this act, which when it took effect would bring all train services on that part of the line

situated wholly within the Six Counties to an abrupt end. The Government of the Republic, knowing only too well the hardship that would ensue, went an unprecedented step further in declaring its intention of keeping open at all costs that part that lay within its own boundaries - though how much of this was a mere raking-in of political fodder was anyone's guess, for it must have been blatantly obvious that once the vital connecting services had gone, anything that remained would be forced out of business in a matter of days, or even weeks at the outside.

No - it was quite obvious that the Irish North was finished. Soon the precious days remaining would slip away like sand in an hourglass. The summer timetable would draw to a close - and when that moment arrived, a curtain would fall, and the Irish North would be no more.

I suppose it was selfish to think only of oneself and not give a damn for the communities and the individuals who most stood to lose. A lot of good men depended on this line for their livelihood, and that of their families, and losing their jobs, would possibly never find alternative work again. And towns and villages along the way would waken on a morning not far off to find that a way of life had changed overnight. And because a bus is no adequate substitute for a train, little things so long taken for granted, like a daily postal service, or a daily newspaper from the world outside, would simply disappear to slip back into memories of the past.

All these and a host of other implications it was possible to dwell upon. But because the average railway enthusiast is no different from anyone else whose interests are in peril, these things that should have mattered were pushed conveniently to one side, and instead we concerned ourselves with what mattered most to us.

No more standing in the gloom of Enniskillen shed and watching with a never-diminishing pleasure and delight as the firemen clambered about their engines, cleaning and polishing till every inch of paint-work shone spotless, and safety valves and spectacle frames and copper piping gleamed like burnished gold.

Never again thrilling to the sound of an immaculate blue 'U' class at the head of the "Bundoran Express" - or watching 'Dick' pound into Fintona Junction with the horse-tram - or timing a run with old Mick Murphy along the Cavan Road - or hearing the cathedral like quietness of Clones broken by the lonely sound of an 'A' class shunting - or jumping off an express in Dundalk with the bicycle and tearing after the Carrickmacross goods for a photo at Essexford. The list went on and on and was seemingly never-ending, of the pleasures we'd known in the past that would soon be gone forever.

Thank God it was still not too late. Enough time remained to round up as many of the lads as possible for one final nostalgic journey.

And where could we go this time? It obviously had to be somewhere special. Cavan? Belturbet? Bundoran?

Bundoran! The last run of all could only be to Bundoran!

* * * * *

I'm Mr. Magill - and what you are about to read is the account of a party outing of mine to Bundoran, that took place in the late summer of 1957 - that fateful year when the Irish North Western Section of the Great Northern Railway of Ireland finally went out of existence.

As a railway within a railway, the Irish North was possibly without equal, at least in the minds of railway enthusiasts. As an outing of any kind over any line in the British Isles, this one of mine has never been surpassed - and probably never will be, now that steam has gone. It was a journey of such a magnitude of madness and magnificence that people have, for ever afterwards, referred to it only as "Mr. Magill's Party".

This rather tends to show me up in a good light, I think, though most of the events connected with the outing were far beyond my control, and indeed it was completely by chance that I was called upon to organise the affair, for I am by nature incredibly lazy, and had on past occasions been more than content to sit back and let others much more energetic than I, do the work. However, the lot this time happened to fall upon my shoulders, and that being so, I determined from the beginning that mine would be an outing to remember.

Parties on past occasions had been content to travel 'en bloc' though I for one had never been able to see the sense in this and had never been able to escape the futility and feeling of wasted opportunity it imparted. On taking stock at the end, we found we had all timed the same trains, and seen the same sights, and even, in most cases, taken the same photographs, give or take an inch.



PPs class 4-4-0 No.12 comes on shed at Enniskillen. (Unknown)

Surely it would have been better, I reasoned, if everyone had travelled to and from the selected venue by a different train. At least this would give each individual the opportunity to see and time and photograph something exclusively his own, so that when the pieces were slotted together at the end of the day, the party as a whole would have viewed a vast panorama of railway operation sufficient to keep the fireside chat lively for many a night afterwards. Having these thoughts in mind for so long, now was the time to put them into practice.

But first things first. The immediate task was to drum up some support, and to this end I went out straight away and enlisted the services of my very good friend Derek Henderson. In this day and age, when a cult has grown up around the steam locomotive to an extent that has seen every steam special and steam-operated line in the country patronised by so-called enthusiasts in their thousands, it is incredible to look back and remember the difficulties we had in the past just getting a party of eight. But that was how it was and again looking back, I don't think we'd have wanted it any other way, for it seemed to make it all so much more worthwhile. We got round the problem by having men like Derek

in our midst - men blessed with a 'gift of the gab', as we say in the North - and I knew I could safely leave the matter in his hands while I got on with the job of planning the rosters.

Retiring in solitude with a copy of the current timetable was when the first flush of enthusiasm began to fade. The Irish North was certainly not a line renowned for density of traffic. A single glance was enough to show that, and to show too, that the most we could expect to make use of was a mere two trains between Omagh and Enniskillen, and a paltry one over the Bundoran branch itself.

Coming back was even worse, for come what may, the party would have no option but to travel back together the whole way from Bundoran to Belfast.

It was an impossible situation, and yet one in which I was loathe to admit defeat. It was not until several days later, however, when the zeal of the original idea had finally subsided, that a fresh solution came to mind - one so simple indeed that I was frankly amazed it had not occurred to me earlier.



PPs Class 4-4-0 No.46 awaits the 'right away' at Bundoran on 22nd April 1953. The locomotive was formerly named "Typhoon". (H.C. Casserley)

Now instead of keeping to a pre-selected route, various members of the party would each alight at various junction stations 'en route' and by the simple expedient of rebooking, strike away for a time on their own, returning later to join another train and complete the journey.

I ran it over a few times in my mind, could see no apparent faults, and accordingly went back to the timetables to draw up new rosters.

In the meantime, Derek was busy rounding up the men, and had collared already two of the regulars in Norman Foster and John Penny. Norman - a Dubliner - would as usual travel to Belfast to stay with Derek both on the eve of the trip and also on the night it finished.

And ‘Eedjit’ Ian was coming too - ‘Eedjit’ Ian who timed by the station clocks! But really, I shouldn’t be too critical, for without the patronage of men such as him, many of our earlier efforts would have been doomed to failure. And to show him how much we appreciated his coming, Derek managed to round up two wee lads from the Belfast College of Technology, of all the most unlikely sources, to keep him company.

Then Cecil caught a whiff of the news, and absolutely drooling from the mouth at the prospects, jumped immediately astride the bicycle and came dashing in haste from his home on the Shore Road to book seats for himself and his woman.

Alas, he came in too great a haste, having not first waited to see what she would say. Cecil’s woman had already been on one ‘Big Outing’, and was never likely to forget the experience, mainly because of the attitude of the other participants - all male and firmly entrenched against ‘Women’s Lib’ in any shape or form. In short, the trip was a complete disaster for her, and she had sworn it would never be repeated.

Cecil, returning home to blandly inform her that he had booked tickets for what she was convinced would surely be another ordeal, could not see that by his actions he was rubbing salt into wounds not yet healed.

But his woman was adamant, and our friend was made to return in even greater haste to cancel her seat, and was so beside himself with grief and remorse that he almost forgot to have the fare refunded.

We managed to console him at last only by pointing out how much worse it might have been, for she could easily have turned nasty and stopped him from going too. Not that our sympathies weren’t genuine, of course. But I think we were more relieved at having not lost the services of a competent timer.

This one incident apart, Derek at this stage was finding himself having to contend with a host of the more usual trials and tribulations associated with the task of scraping together a party. The ‘wee lads’ from the ‘Tech’ were both aged under 14, which meant, of course, that taken together they counted only as one - which taken a step further, meant that we were still as yet one short of the target, and fast despairing of ever reaching it too.

The numerous approaches made seemed destined to produce what very soon became a stereotyped reaction of gleaming eyes and exclamations of delight - followed all too quickly by a crestfallen look and a hurriedly-muttered excuse. Everyone, it seemed, had something better to do on the day in question and no amount of persuasion could alter their minds, and as the date of the outing came nearer we grew more and more convinced of having to share the cost of the eighth and last ticket between ourselves.

Indeed, we had all but abandoned hope, and the proverbial eleventh hour had all but drawn to a close, when there appeared before us the one man in all Ireland we were sure and certain would never be seen again in circulation - the one man in all Ireland, possibly, who had never even been considered.

It was our old friend and long-lost companion, Ernie Gilmore, who, prior to a rather sad departure from the ranks, had been without doubt the most gifted one amongst us - a man whose excellence in every sphere of railway and model railway activities had raised him to heights hitherto considered unattainable, and left the remainder of the pack straggling far behind.

But on reaching the very pinnacle of achievement he’d met a woman - and passed from our midst.

But Ernie was perhaps more fortunate than most, in having something more tangible than memories to which to cling. He had once been invited to spend a holiday with friends of the family in Kesh, and though it had seemed at the time a wasteful way of spending a holiday, he had, nevertheless, forced himself, not wishing to cause an upset, but certain in his mind that a sojourn of any length in such an

out-of-the-way spot could mean only one thing - drastic curtailment of railway activities.

But in Kesh, much to his surprise, he discovered the Bundoran line, and from the onset was completely captivated by its charm. So completely captivated, indeed, that his friends had been wangled, year after year, into having him back, and in each of the 5 years that followed, the tranquil summer days allotted to him in that lovely part of the country were spent on voyages of exploration and missions of photography that took in every inch of the line from beginning to end, until after a time the venture had become more a part of his life than he would ever have dared to admit, even to himself.

Thus, it is that a person who allows himself to become so deeply involved will not so easily find an avenue of escape, if ever he wanted to. As news of the outing filtered through to him on the grapevine, a whisper of the name Bundoran brought the years of involvement flooding back. And Ernie heard the name, and with it a far-off shout of trumpets, and rising and casting aside his mantle of sackcloth and ashes, he returned again into the blessed sunshine to be with us once more.

And if Cecil's woman had seen fit to opt out, our latest recruit more than compensated for that loss by fetching with him his own woman Sylvia - for she wanted to come along too, and share in this, the last ever run over 'Ernie's line'.

Concurring wholeheartedly with her sentiments, we gladly extended an invitation - and promised ourselves, as we did so, that this time we'd be on our very best behaviour.

* * * * *

The morning of Saturday 24th August, dawned grey and cheerless, and a breeze lifting off the top of Black Mountain, though slight, carried with it a bite and a promised threat of rain to follow later in the day, as in ones and twos the participants, fully burdened down with cameras and stopwatches and log books and all the other varied accoutrements of a 'Big Outing', arrived in Great Victoria Street to board the appointed trains.

At eight-fifteen that morning, Compound No.85 "Merlin" slipped quietly out of Belfast with the Dublin express - and the outing was under way.

Four men - 3 timers and, for purposes of convenience, a non-timer, travelled on board that 8:15am as far as Portadown, where on arrival one timer and the non-timer dashed out, rebooked for Warrenpoint and rejoined the train, and the two other timers alighted to await the train for Derry following close behind from Belfast.

This, of course, was the 8:25am, hauled by 'Q' class 4-4-0 No.130, and the four men on board - 2 timers and 2 non-timers - were joined at Portadown by the two off the Dublin Express and all six continued thence to Omagh.

Here, 2 timers 'left' out, rebooked for Derry, and 'left' back into the train to go on and complete the journey, leaving behind 2 timers and 2 non-timers who then caught the 10:50am ex-Omagh for the run down the Irish North to Enniskillen, which entailed rebooking at Bundoran Junction.

Arriving in Enniskillen the latter group split up. The two non-timers, who coincidentally were the pair from the 'Tech', were turned loose on the station - though not before first being warned in the gravest possible terms of the consequences to follow should they misbehave - and told to wander about as they pleased and record engine numbers and the like.

Free at last of responsibility towards the pair, the two timers were now able to pursue their own interests unhindered, and spent a useful day up until 2 o'clock travelling backwards and forwards between Enniskillen and Bundoran Junction, timing, but mainly taking photographs.

An alternative 'path' existed in the opposite direction between Enniskillen and stations to Newtownbutler, but neither man considered it worthwhile and it was not utilised. I daresay, though,

that it would have made a difference if this 'working' could have been extended further to Clones, but unfortunately the timetable did not permit this.

We must leave the Irish North now for a while and return to the two men on board the Dublin express.

These two were myself and 'Eedjit' Ian, and as he was also timing - albeit in his own inimitable fashion - the idea was for us to split up in Goraghwood - one man going to Warrenpoint while the other rebooked for a run over the bank to Dundalk.

However, the running of the express that morning very quickly put paid to this plan. Foul even by Great Northern standards, it was so terribly bad that we had reached a decision long before Goraghwood to forego the ordeal of a further 17 miles over the bank. Instead, we would simply carry on to Warrenpoint together.

Thus far the outing had not been a happy one for us, and the run of poor luck continued when the express arrived in the 'Wud' and we saw with a sinking feeling that it was Jimmy O'Hare of Newry who waited on the branch train, with Glover tank No.142.

Correct policy at this point in time, I suppose, would have been to beat a hasty retreat in the direction of the nearest waiting room, there to lie low till Fortune might swing in our favour. On the other hand, of course, a few minutes in the bracing sea air of Carlingford Lough would do no harm, and might indeed prove to be the tonic so badly needed to bolster flagging spirits, so in spite of misgivings we climbed into the nearest coach, and within a matter of minutes were trundling in the direction of Warrenpoint with the man who was surely the coldest driver in all the length and breadth of Ireland, whose monstrous and decrepit garb, worn as a means of holding at bay the chilling elements of Nature from which he was prone to suffer so dreadfully, seemed to consist of half-a-dozen overcoats and as many woollen scarves wound endlessly about his neck and chest.

The warmest day in summer would find him, when the engine was at rest, huddled in a ball by the open firehole door; but the time of greatest suffering came when the engine was on the move and the heat of the fire had of necessity to be forsaken for a seat by the draughty cab window, for it was then that the gale whipping in to tear ferociously at the layers of clothing would let the cold seep quickly through again, chilling the bones and fetching tears that welled up in the eyes and flowed down the pinched cheeks, blinding his vision of the road ahead and reducing his performance to a level that now, as always, very soon had us wishing that we too had six overcoats and as many scarves on hand.

Despite this very obvious affliction, however, he was kindness itself - always willing to share a pot of tea and a sandwich, as indeed he did on this occasion. And the three of us settled round the table in the tiny enginemen's messroom at the end of the platform buildings and felt snug enough to be at home in a warm bed as we sipped tentatively at the mugs of scalding hot tea and listened to the sounds from outside of the wind as it moaned across the sullen grey waters of the Lough, and closer by, but more comforting, the clang of a shovel on the steel rim of a firehole door and drone of an injector feeding a boiler as the fireman busied himself with preparations for the run back to Goraghwood.

Feeling quite marvellously keen and refreshed - whether from the tea or the sea breezes, or perhaps a combination of both - the return trip did not seem half so bad, and we were back in the 'Wud' with plenty of time to spare to catch the 9:00am express from Dublin - this time with 'VS' No.206 "Liffey" - for the run back to Portadown and a rendezvous with the two remaining members of the party, Ernie and Sylvia, who were coming out from Belfast on the 11:15am Derry express.

Or at least, they should have been on that train. But unforeseen happenings in Belfast were at this very moment combining to scatter our well-laid plans like straw before the wind, and when Ernie and Sylvia arrived in Great Victoria Street, they found a station concourse unexpectedly bursting at the seams.

Of all the three hundred and sixty-odd days in the year from which to choose, the population of Belfast

- or as many as were fit to travel - had seemingly picked this day as the one best-suited for visits to distant relatives and friends, most of whom appeared to live in the villages and towns along the Derry Road, and chaos and confusion reigned supreme as this struggling herd of humanity, complete with suitcases and baggage and dogs and bicycles and children, tried to jostle and fight its way past harassed perspiring ticket collectors in a bid to be on the 11:15.

The Great Northern employees, never men noted for quickness of thought or speed of action, deserve nothing but the highest praise in this instance for the promptness and efficiency they displayed in handling the situation.

The mob was held at bay long enough for a second engine to be rushed from Adelaide and a rake of carriages to be brought from the sidings and when the shouting and tumult had died away and the dust bed finally settled, the two trains - the relief booked to precede the regular train by 5 minutes throughout - were standing in adjacent platforms waiting to leave - and poor Ernie was also standing on the platform, 'britches' firmly down around his ankles as he surveyed the scene and wondered how on earth he would find a solution to this little problem.

The tragedy was, of course, that in spite of the hours of careful and meticulous planning this new development should be the one to escape attention, otherwise, like Cecil before us on a previous outing, we might well have set a new trend ourselves, for if only we'd seen the need, we could have brought along an extra set of stopwatches for Sylvia, and with a few minutes tuition beforehand, she could have gone ahead with the first train while Ernie followed on the second.

But we hadn't seen the need, and so only one course of action remained open - that of coming out on the relief train and informing the men at Portadown of what had happened.

Alas, this new arrangement was doomed to failure from the start, for Ian and I were standing on Portadown platform as the train we took to be the 11:15 came ripping and tearing into sight down past Seagoe cabin, and almost immediately two pairs of gaping eyes transported to an entirely new location on the ends of our noses as the implication sank home that she was running in a good five minutes before time.

And not only that, but the engine we could see far off in the distance was a superbly glittering thing of truly majestic beauty, that fairly sparkled and shone even in that dull light, coming swiftly closer and closer until at last those straining eyes of ours could pick out the number on the buffer beam.

It was 'QL' No.127! Fresh out of Dundalk Works! An engine amazingly resurrected from the bowels of the scrapyards and the threat of annihilation under the searing white heat of a breaker's torch!

Back again triumphantly in traffic, she ran in and ground to a shuddering stop in Platform 2, and our moment of bliss was made whole when a small portly figure with a cheerful beaming face and twinkling eyes beneath black bushy brows stepped out from a spotless cab. It was Adelaide's Ralph McBrien, whose positive leer was spread right across his face in a way that said very plainly - "Hurry up and get on MY train and come and enjoy a bit of speeding on the Derry Road".

Engulfed in a kind of delirious haze, it seemed long ages before we heard, somewhere above us, a plaintive voice clamouring for attention, and turning, found a somewhat impassioned Ernie vainly attempting, orally, to squeeze some sort of message through the confines of an open sliding top light.

His singular lack of success, demonstrated by the fact that we were actually on board the train and firmly ensconced in milepost seats before it sank home that this was NOT the 11:15 - that the 11:15 was in fact some distance behind, and with no timer covering the run either.

Oh, well! To hell with the 11:15. What man in his right mind would turn down an opportunity like this! The 11:15 would just have to wait a while longer, at least until we'd had a run with Ralph and 127.

And what a combination it proved to be! - hitting high spots along the way from Annakeera to Annaghmore and racing at a gallop for Vernersbridge, and through there and on to Trew and Moy and the slack for the tablet and the start of the single line section.

Once clear of the Moy restriction, the big 'QL' settled quickly back into her stride again to begin the assault on the bank, and the gruelling climb into Dungannon was tackled with a vigour that had the lovely 'chomping' sound of the exhaust ringing like music in the ears all the way up.

Ah! With what reluctance we stepped down in Dungannon to await the 11:15, leaving Ernie and Sylvia to carry on alone to Omagh. It was really quite heart-breaking, but alas, it had to be done.

Mere minutes later, however, the express was seen emerging from the depths of the tunnel in a cloud of steam and smoke and straggling up into the station, and I, for one, felt partly compensated by the arrival on the scene of 'S' class No.190 "Lugnaquilla". And with Charlie Bovaird of Derry up front, the express was quickly 'skelping' along in hot pursuit of the relief, with us doing little else but wonder how McBrien was managing to keep so far ahead in front. No doubt about it, Fortune was beginning to smile. The day was definitely beginning to brighten.

Arriving in Omagh, we met up again with Ernie and Sylvia, and we four were joined in turn within minutes by the two who had earlier gone to Derry, and who travelled back from there on the 12:25pm Derry-Belfast train. The next connection for us would be the 1:45pm train from Omagh to Enniskillen, that would drop us off in Bundoran Junction.

And so we waited, having nothing better to do - and looking round for a suitable resting place, spied some large wicker hampers on the platform and moved to where these lay.

It seemed as good a place as any at the time. And yet it was part of a pre-ordained scheme whose events had begun far back in time and were at this moment gathering a final momentum and pushing inexorably onwards to the summit of a breath-taking climax.

They say travel broadens the mind. I have a sneaking suspicion that the gentleman who first coined that phrase was a railway enthusiast, and one, furthermore, who had recently been on an outing.

But while every outing is a vast concatenation of incidents and events that doubtless do have a profound effect upon the mind, nevertheless there is always one incident in particular that stands out more clearly than the others.

It may be that this one in question is not even the highlight of the day's happenings, but something that, when viewed later in a proper perspective, seems totally insignificant. And yet it has a mysterious quality attached causing it to become firmly established in the mind and be remembered in every startlingly vivid detail, long after the memories of all other events have faded or become blurred around the edges.

And now such an incident was about to take place. Here in Omagh station a magnificent drama was about to unfold. All that was required was for us to be comfortably seated.

The stage was set - the station silent. The noisy babble of the invasion had died away and the bustling activity of minutes before was over. The three trains, along with their contents responsible for the disturbance, were gone from sight, and peace and tranquillity was beginning to settle again upon a scene that was in every way enhanced by the sombre backcloth of the overcast sky above.

Further along, under the station canopy, a small flock of pigeons, grey and mottled like the sky, came flapping down to settle on a mess of spilled grain, strutting around like tiny clockwork toys pecking greedily at the tasty morsels, and six people, the station's only other living inhabitants, were content to drape themselves on the makeshift seats they had chosen and watch in idleness, feeling so utterly at peace with these surroundings that scarcely one dared breathe for fear of breaking the spell.

Moments in time like this, however, do not come very often, and are not destined to last for very long. Suddenly and abruptly the spell was shattered by the noisy rattle of a door. The birds, startled, rose up on wildly-beating wings and fled aloft, as on to the platform stepped the Omagh Station Master, resplendent in cap and uniform neatly decorated with bands of gold braiding.

Spotting us, he slammed the door to his office behind him and turned and flurried briskly along the platform - an imposing figure bearing down at full speed.

“Hullo there! Are youse th’ lads going t’Bundoran?”

Nodding to affirm that we were indeed “th’ lads going t’Bundoran”, he fetched to a stand before us and straightened to full height, and the hands slipped easily into the ‘washing’ position as he nodded his own head and favoured us with the self-effacing smirk of someone who has never known what it is to make a wrong decision, or an incorrect assumption.

“Good,” he continued. “Now then - let’s see now! Where’s th’ resta yez?” and with that, he turned and cast a searching eye about the station.

Tiny furrows of puzzlement creased our brows. What on earth, we wondered, was he driving at? The eyes that swung their gaze upon us this time were quizzical.

“Well then - where’s th’ resta yez? Ah take it there IS more’n sixa yez?”

The blank expressionless faces staring back must have told him that something was wrong somewhere, for the look of questioning began to alter to one of doubt and uncertainty.

“Surely t’God there’s more than sixa yez?” - and the voice that spoke begged and implored to such a degree that doubts and uncertainty began to pluck at our own minds - doubts concerning the legitimacy of this madcap dashing about the system on a party ticket, and uncertainty that cried out for an explanation of this fellow’s irrational behaviour.

Had we, perhaps, by our actions, unwittingly broken a whole host of Company Rules and Regulations, the punishment for which required that we be shown the exit at the nearest station, or be sent home by the first available train? If such was indeed the case, it would no doubt be best to maintain silence about the four who were elsewhere, lest they too be rounded up and sent packing.

However, there was no need for anxiety. A single glance was enough to tell us that and put our minds at ease. The Station Master, far from appearing to have scored a notable triumph over wrong-doers and those who flout the law, was indeed quite the opposite, a picture of abject misery, and we did not have long to wait to find out why.

Haltingly at first, but soon rising in volume, to a torrent, the words began to pour from his mouth and the whole sorry tale to unfold and we could not escape a feeling that it was not so much an explanation as a way of seeking condolence.

Someone in Belfast, it seems, had sent a communiqué giving details of the outing - or at least as many of the details as were then available. The one detail missing, however, had been the numbers of those expected to travel - hardly surprising, as we didn’t know that ourselves until the last minute, but vital as far as he was concerned because the document had concluded with the instruction ‘accommodation to be reserved’.

Never having been set a precedent, and not wishing to make a mistake, he had rather cunningly played safe and booked a full carriage!

At this very moment, as if on cue, the stock for the 1:45pm came trundling into the station from the Mountjoy direction behind ‘PP’ No.12 - and sure enough, there was ‘our coach’, marshalled behind the engine - and we could see every window plastered with notices informing all concerned that the vehicle was:

‘RESERVED FOR MR. MAGILL’S PARTY’

The six members of the newly-christened ‘Mr. Magill’s Party’ not quite knowing what to say, and feeling at least partly to blame, deemed it wise in the end to say nothing, and climbing aboard, took their seats as quietly as possible.

We never saw the Station Master after that. Possibly, finding us so apparently unsympathetic, he had gone back to his office, there no doubt to close and bolt the door and spend some time alone, commiserating and making preparations for the Wrath to come.

But if those in ‘Higher Authority’ did have the matter brought to their notice, I sincerely hope that the punishment meted out was not too harsh. What harm did it cause anyway, having this over-abundance of accommodation provided? It meant that for once in our lives we did not have to fight and squabble with the other passengers over who should have the milepost seats.

My goodness! The style and comfort that day as we left Omagh to pursue our course along the Irish North! It will not, I think, be so easily forgotten.

And of course the episode was rounded off to perfection in Bundoran Junction with the sight of four mesmerised faces that watched in gaping amazement as the train drew to a stand in the platform and we six stepped down like veritable royalty from our own ‘special coach’.

But there was no time to linger for explanations. The branch train was waiting. And we piled into it to begin the last lap of the journey to Bundoran.

It was a happy train, now we were all together, that fairly rang with excitement and a great deal of incoherency too, as, speaking and laughing and shouting all at the same time, each man attempted to tell his own part of the story to the others.

As quickly as one would stop for breath, another would seize the opportunity to leap into the void, and for a time it was nothing but utter bedlam. But gradually the pieces began to slot into place and from the depths of confusion a picture began to emerge that was beyond our wildest imaginings.

The six timers, making use of no less than 14 different trains, had between them managed to record an astonishing 400 miles of separate running - every mile of it behind steam.

Present at some time during the day had been almost every class of passenger engine on the Great Northern, and some classes even had two representatives on display, and it was nice that the ‘PP’s should fall into this category, for the one at the head of our train now was another of these grand little engines - this time 44.

The flood of excitement remained unabated. Could we possibly dare to tempt Fate in hoping that the outing would continue on this high plane? Somehow the rain now falling steadily past the windows of the carriage was having little dampening effect on the spirits of those inside. The fires within were burning much too brightly for that to happen.

* * * * *

My intention when I began this article was to steer it on a course that would keep it clear of technical matters. Not everyone, I realise, is addicted to carrying a stopwatch, and in all honesty I think that the laborious task of wading through masses and masses of data associated with timekeeping is something to daunt the hearts of all but a handful of readers.

But having reached a point where I can break into the narrative without seeming to cause an interruption, I think the moment has come to pause for a while and describe some of the running over the Irish North, for in view of the circumstances appertaining at the time, it was nothing short of unbelievable.

But first to fill in some background - and it is, I suppose, a delusionary comfort of sorts to imagine that the present-day moods of apathy and deep cynicism that reign in the minds of the public whenever the subject of politics crops up is merely one more phenomenon of this age of unease in which we now live.

But politics have always been waged on a bloody battlefield - or so I have heard it described, though I'm sure others would prefer to liken the battlefield to a darkened back alley behind some sleazy pub or a Saturday night after closing time - and there can be little doubt that much political in-fighting took place at around the time of which I write between, on the one hand the Stormont Government, and on the other those parties interested in securing a future of sorts for the section of railway threatened.

It must have been abundantly clear from the start too that politicians were this time in no mood even for a compromise. But even if this was so, how is it possible to explain away the Great Northern's attitude of apparent disinterest, seen by a premature withdrawal and a decision taken long before the end to call a halt to all further maintenance of trackwork and installations. Was it a decision taken by someone in high position who had totally misread the situation? Or was this merely some bizarre form of Russian Roulette, thought up in a moment of madness to force a change of Governmental mind? Or is it me being too dramatic, and reading far too much into it? Perhaps the simple answer is that the Company knew all along the line would not be reprieved, and therefore felt fully justified in re-directing what would otherwise have been money wasted to serve a more worthwhile need. In all probability we shall never know. Politicians, and others, were not so adept in those days at rushing their memoirs into print.

But whatever the reason, the maintenance ceased. And the Civil Engineer was then left with little option but to step in and impose, in the interests of safety, a speed limit overall of 30 mph.

But we knew about this anyway before setting off, and in consequence, were not expecting anything at all in the way of good running after Omagh. Therefore what we did record left us completely astounded.

* * * * *

The line leaving Omagh swings out from the south-east end of the station platform in a great sweeping curve that, in a better setting, might well be termed 'majestic', then disappears behind trees in the distance to straighten up and head due south towards Fintona Junction.

The gradients at first, apart from one short drop at 1/106, are gentle and undulating until about milepost 79, when a climb at 1/177 begins that is continuous for two miles.

At Fintona Junction, 6¾ miles from Omagh, the line swings to the west, and the gradients, though short, grow more rugged, with many stretches at 1/100 in the 10 miles that follow past Dromore Road - 12½ miles from Omagh - on to Trillick, at 16¼ miles.

From Trillick the line swings south-west to Bundoran Junction, from whence it again changes course to the sou-sou-west for Enniskillen. In addition, a descent at 1/195 begins at Trillick and continues past the Junction (17¾ miles) as far as Ballinamallard 20¼ miles from the start.

The final 5½ miles from Ballinamallard to Enniskillen is the easiest stretch of all, with little variety and little of note either, except for a short, sharpish drop at 1/76 out beyond the latter station whose tightly-curved approaches warrant a reduction in speed to 5 mph.

This is the setting - though of the two runs that follow, the first, recorded on the morning 10:50am, was the only one over the full distance, and at this point I must thank Derek Henderson for kindly furnishing all the necessary details.

The engine was 'U' class No.205 "Down" with a load of 5 bogies and the train was in the very capable

hands of driver J.J. Kelly of Omagh.

With a somewhat leisurely start and speed held back to around the 30/32 mph mark, the running was at first completely in keeping with expectations. But a late burst to 40 mph, coupled with a finely-judged application of the brake at the finish, managed to produce an arrival in Fintona Junction in a time of 13m 5s. Nevertheless it was still a minute and 5 seconds over the allowance, for the schedules had not been altered to suit the new requirements.

Once clear of Fintona Junction, however, the running began to improve out of all recognition. With a max of no less than 51 mph at milepost 79 and sustained running thereafter rounded off with yet another fine brake application, Kelly was able to bring the train into Dromore Road in 9m 34s, a full minute under the time allowed, and this patter was continued in the section that followed to Trillick, reached three-quarters of a minute under time in 6m 50s, again with a max of 51.

Nothing remarkable was accomplished in the short mile-and-a-half to Bundoran Junction, and indeed a ½ minute was dropped over this distance. But with a booked stop ahead of three minutes duration there was really no need for a display of fireworks, and the lads on board were left with ample time in which to rebook.

On the restart from Bundoran Junction, the falling gradient helped produce a max of 47½ and secure an arrival in Ballinamallard in 4m 47s, and as this was again nearly a minute under the allowance it successfully removed all further incentive for hard running, so that with a top speed no higher than 47 mph, and in spite of a slack at milepost 65 for track subsidence, Enniskillen was reached on time in 11m 14s.

Not sensational by everyday standards, of course, but certainly a great deal better than we'd dared to expect, and it is worth noting the way in which the run established a yardstick for the one that followed later.

The driver of the afternoon 1:45pm was again J.J. Kelly, whose rostered turn of duty that day involved him in a double return trip between Omagh and Enniskillen, though in this second instance his engine was 'PP' No.12, and the load, including the 'special coach' only four bogies.

Of much greater importance, however, was the fact that whereas the 10:50am left sharp to time, the 1:45pm was rather badly delayed in Omagh through the goings-on in connection with 'Mr. Magill's Party' and was 6 minutes late getting away - though one would never have believed it from the leisurely and almost indifferent way the train was got on the move. Our driver seemed quite content to let the engine make her own way along, and seemed little concerned at this stage about keeping time.

It was not until a few months afterwards, when the Irish North had closed and his duties began to take him more often into the Belfast area, that we came to discover how typical a style this was, for the man was an absolute wizard at the controls.

Not for him the stationary wide-open cut-off and heavy hand upon the regulator. His was a driving technique that coaxed nothing but the very best from an engine in the most gentle manner possible, and the whisper of 12's exhaust was a barely audible murmur as speed began to build up rapidly and Kelly began taking her through her paces.

Up and up it went. Up and over the stipulated maximum. Climbing finally to a rousing 54 mph at milepost 85, that was followed by three exhilarating miles reeled off at speeds of 50 - 51½ mph - by which time the carriage windows were down and 'Mr. Magill's Party' were hanging head and shoulder out of the train. And this flight to Fintona Junction finally ended with a brake application of rare perfection that brought us to a stand in a time of 11m 33s.

It was unbelievable. And yet it was nothing to what came next, for on being "right away" at the Junction, Kelly set about showing us what a 'PP' could really do.

Again driving in that relaxed but so misleading manner, he had built up a speed of 50 mph by milepost 79, and over the next mile increased this to 58½.

A short rising gradient brought a drop to 55½, then suddenly we were over the top and hurtling into the dip at post 77½ at an incredible 62½ mph.

The switchback ride continued with another fall-off in speed, again to 55. Then up again to 57¾! - and the blocks were clawing at the wheels as Kelly braked for Dromore Road and brought the train to a stand in 8m 31s - all of TWO minutes under normal time!

Within seconds we were off again, with Kelly now in tremendous form, and 12 with the bit grasped firmly in her teeth - whispering her way up to 57¾ mph passing milepost 74 and holding this speed over the next half mile until a brake application cut things short, checking this runaway flight and bringing us to rest in Trillick in 6m 35s.

Having now pulled back 3½ minutes of the 6 lost at the beginning, Kelly obviously considered that he had entertained us sufficiently well for one day, and took 42 seconds over the 3 minute allowance to get us to Bundoran Junction. Not that we complained, of course. We were in too much of a daze.

Which brings me back to the beginning, I suppose, and the question of how much of this talk of track deterioration was bluff.

Certainly I know we encountered three distinct cases of track subsidence, and in every one of these cases the driver concerned showed a healthy respect for the spot in question.

But overall, the condition of the track seemed little removed from normal Irish North standards, and the argument gains strength from the fact that a man of Kelly's integrity would not be one to put the lives of passengers at risk for the sake of appeasing a handful of timers.

The whole affair intrigues me - but I had better move on now to the third and final run - the one over the Bundoran branch itself.

And I want to do something more in this case than merely give a description of the running. I want to try, if I can, to recreate some of the atmosphere on the branch.

Every nationality is open to caricature. The kilted Scotsman frantically searching the heather for a sixpence he has lost. The vastly over-probiscised Jew in the dingy attic gleefully mulling over a roll of banknotes. The flashily-dressed American tourist in the 10-gallon hat and heavy square-rimmed spectacles smoking an outsized cigar. These are but a few that spring to mind. And of course, the Irish - possibly the most over-caricaturised people on earth.

But closer inspection reveals a subtle difference between the Irish and all these others.

The Scot will bend over backwards in his efforts to prove to others the measure of his own warm-heartedness and generosity. The Jew tends to dress and carry himself in a manner that suggests a position in life that is just above the breadline. The American tourist, of course, has neither the wit nor the intelligence to be anything other than a carbon copy of his portrayal. But the Irish are the ones who work like hell to preserve and indeed increase and over-emphasise their image.

The ruddy faced old gentleman in the battered top hat leaning over the gate to a field will immediately turn the bowl of his pipe upside-down the moment he spies a stranger on the horizon. The navvy on the building site is still very careful to tie his 'yolks' in position before he starts work, even though he no longer needs to with Wellington boots. And of course the bhoyos who sail across the water to England to help build the motorways will go to extensive lengths in a bid to preserve what seems a below normal level of intelligence.

"New start, Pat? - Well then, get hold of a wheelbarrow and get to work."

“But sur - Oi’m not too familiar with anything mechanical.”

And what is the reasoning behind all this? The Irish are nobody’s fools. Collectively, they are without doubt one of the most intelligent races on earth. Not of course, when it comes to such things as to the moon, or building an atom bomb. But in the fields of endeavour that really matter, such as the arts, and writing poetry and books and songs, and breeding fine racehorses, and brewing the best whiskey, they are without equal.

And the old gentleman with the pipe will still turn the bowl upside-down anyway when it rains, to keep his tobacco from getting wet. And the lads on the building sites will gladly tie pieces of string around the knees of their trousers if they think it pleases the bowler hat and briefcase brigade hurrying past on the way to a nine o’clock deadline at the office. After all, doesn’t it help to conceal the fact that the former draw vast amounts of money each week in return for what they do, while the latter who look down upon them so disparagingly take home a measly £15 each week, and are very prone to heart ailments. It pays some times to be thought of as a dullard.

But what, you are entitled to ask, has all this got to do with the Bundoran branch? Well - the answer to that is simple. The Irish railways are also very well portrayed in caricature.

Everyone has seen the drawings of the country station where a line of washing hangs across the track and hens strut about the permanent way and lay eggs in the booking office. And of course everyone has heard of the express that stops everywhere to shunt and arrives at its destination hours behind time. And then there is the level crossing where the gatekeeper has positioned one gate across the track and the other across the road, because he is half expecting a train.

All very delightful, of course, if completely nonsensical. The Irish take their railways very seriously. But with everything else in life, they do not let the fact dampen their enthusiasm or sense of good humour. And when the chance arises to portray the image, they will gladly seize it with both hands. It was not by accident that the Bundoran branch proved to ideal.

The border slicing across the line, and the Republic’s refusal for a number of years to adopt British Summer Time, provided a heaven-sent opportunity in the summer of starting trains from Bundoran Junction and having them arrive in Bundoran, 35½ miles away, only 20 minutes later. Nothing could be done about the journey in the opposite direction that took all of 2 hours and 30 minutes but, of course, it was not like having to fly the Atlantic in an aeroplane, and there is no record of anyone adjusting his watch en route.

But the timetable was the thing that lent itself most admirably to the situation, for in a typical journey of 90 minutes duration, it was possible to spend all of 27 minutes waiting time at the six intermediate stations, and only 63 minutes actually on the move.

Not that the staff cared very much about what the timetable said. Stopping and starting times seemed to be determined by how good or bad the “crack” was at each station. If the conversation on such knowledgeable subjects as tomorrow’s race meeting at the Curragh or next Sunday’s All-Ireland semi-final should seem to be flagging - well then - it was time to be off elsewhere in search of more stimulating company.

And the drivers in most cases were not adverse to ringing their own trains through to the next cabin, and selecting their own staff from the tablet holder, before proceeding on way.

It was a lovely line, thoroughly delightful in every way, and one that is sadly missed nowadays. Much more than an Irish railway caricature, it seemed to typify an Irish way of life that is fast disappearing in the hurly burly of modern times.

And in trying to recapture this atmosphere, or at least bring out some of the flavour, I have set the Bundoran line run out in table form, as I think this method conveys much more than a mere description

could ever do.

I have nothing to add to the table. You will see from it that we arrived in Bundoran a minute before time, though we hadn't expected to get there, until a few minutes before the return train was due out.

The rain had ceased for a while, and with over an hour at our disposal and all the excitement behind us, it was time to seek out a cafe and lash into platefuls of sausage, egg and chips.

'Big Outings' are now a thing of the past. But shall we ever forget the spartan conditions of those occasions? I rather think not, for the day was usually spent existing on nothing more substantial than a few bruised and battered sandwiches, washed down with mouldy-tasting flasks of tea, and with the odd one or two bars of chocolate thrown in for good measure, mainly to help the blood maintain a sugar level consistent with adequate mental efficiency.

When the chance presented itself of lashing into a proper meal, it was seized in both hands. And now it was our chance, and we grabbed it gladly.

* * * * *

Below is the table giving details of the run on the 2:35pm train from Bundoran Junction to Bundoran. The load was 2 bogies, 1 'W' van and 1 'Y' van (85 tons) and the engine was 'PP' No.44 with driver Dan Armstrong of Enniskillen in charge.

		ARRIVE or DEPART				Remarks
Station		Schedule	Actual	Minutes Early	Minutes Late	
Bundoran Junction	dep	0:00	0:00	-	1'36"	
Irvinestown	arr	7:00	7:04	-	1'40"	Max speed 52¼
Booked stop		2:00	1:53	-	1'33"	
Kesh	arr	10:00	9:21	-	0'94"	Max speed 54½
Booked stop		7:00	5:32	0'34"	-	
Pettigo	arr	10:00	9:14	1'20"	-	Max speed 48½
Booked stop		4:00	1:52	3'28"		PWS - subsidence

At Pettigo we crossed the Enniskillen goods (PP No.50 with 6 wagons and brake van) and the train crews swapped over - Armstrong returning with the goods to Enniskillen and Joe Meehan of Clones taking over our train. Meehan, I think, was on loan to Bundoran at this period.

Castlecaldwell	arr	-	13:11	2'47"	-	Max speed 42¾ PWS - subsidence
Castlecaldwell	dep	13:00	15:11	1'17"	-	
Belleek	arr	9:00	8:31	1'46"	-	Max speed 42¼
Booked stop		5:00	5:09	1'37"	-	
Ballyshannon	arr	8:00	7:17	2'20"	-	Max speed 44½
Booked stop		8:00	8:40	1'40"	-	
Bundoran	arr	7:00	7:37	1'03"	-	Max speed 46½

A STICKY PROBLEM

P.A. Scott

A problem which we have been faced with over the last year is that of providing lubricating oil for the

engines. The first time that this came to light was on the occasion of the Slieve Gullion Railtour when it was found that the Railway could no longer supply oil of the correct type.

In the short time available before No.186 was due to work to Dublin, several samples of oil were procured and examined. The oil which at the time appeared closest to the proper engine oil was Shell 'Limea', a fairly unrefined oil used on the engines in Belfast's Sewage Pumping Station. In the absence of anything better, No.186 worked the tour using 'sewage oil' with a few gallons of carriage and wagon oil in reserve.

Although the engine appeared to run without any ill effects, it was decided to make a more determined effort to match the original engine oil rather than trust to a crude oil like Limea which is only recommended for very low speed applications. NIR had not kept any records of the type of oil used, apart from the fact that it was known as '80% rape oil' Accordingly, we took in hand the job of approaching the oil companies and also some of the steam-worked lines, including those of the Coal Board and the Isle of Man Railway.

The basic requirements of the oil for which we are looking are as follows: it must lubricate satisfactorily in all the various applications on an engine, from axle boxes taking heavy continuous loading to piston rods at high temperature. It must feed at the correct rate by all the various methods employed and stand up to water contamination and there must be no tendency to form compounds which would harm bearing metal or sponges.

The original oil fulfilled these conditions to an adequate extent because rape oil withstands high pressures and also emulsifies in water thus continuing to lubricate if water is present.

The survey was both encouraging and discouraging in its results. It soon became clear that '80% rape oil', and indeed any of the oils formerly supplied to the railways, were no longer available. The oil companies were able to suggest alternatives but were reluctant to actually recommend an oil, usually the representatives contacted were helpful and interested, but not prepared to spend a great deal of time on what would amount to a very small order.

The oils suggested were either straight mineral oils or mineral oils with some vegetable oil added, that is rape oil or its equivalent. Castro suggested a fairly viscous mineral oil known as 'Alpha 717' and five gallons of this were obtained for trial. It was tested on the Guinness engine and appeared to be successful, so a further quantity was obtained and used during the working of the Sunday trains at Whitehead. It was also successfully used by No.186 during the Arklow railtour.

The result of the approaches made to the various railways was that each used a different oil, so there was no question of there being an obvious choice, On the other hand, the fact that so many oils were used suggested that any one of them could be selected with equal chance of success.

The chief drawback to selecting an oil solely because of apparent success on a preserved railway would be that our requirements are more exacting. An oil suitable for slow running with frequent stops might well be quite unsuitable for fast running over long distances on the main line. When British Rail ran the test train hauled by Bulmer's "King George V", this provided the nearest equivalent to our own circumstances. The oil in question was supplied by Texaco and is a mineral oil containing a small percentage of rape oil. It is thinner than engine oil but retains its viscosity at high temperatures. From the point of view of available information, this is the most satisfactory oil and it may well be the final selection. Several of the oil companies were approached with a view to sponsoring us to the extent of supplying oil free and this resulted in Esso giving us 45 gallons of 'Teresso' oil. Teresso does not have the advantage of being used by any railway but it should at least provides us with oil for use on the Sligo and Guinness engines at Whitehead.

I would like to thank Esso for their generosity; we trust that co-operation will help solve our lubrication

problems.

SHANE'S CASTLE RAILWAY 1972

Lord O'Neill

After a reasonably encouraging season in 1971, when nearly 37,000 people visited the Railway, I decided that we were justified in improving the system in various ways. Although I realise that the present climate is rather discouraging, my basic enthusiasm overcame my reservations.

To start with the track. This worked well, and although it is heavier than necessary for our present rolling stock, I believe this will pay off in very low maintenance. Some of the rail joints are still rather angular on the tighter curves and I hope these will be improved before the Easter opening. The layout at the departure end of the 'Antrim' station was never right. This has now been substantially improved and, at the same time, an additional siding has been provided, with a back spur. The spur will lead to one of the ex-Larne Harbour 3' gauge wagon turntables which will enable us to turn the locos from time to time. Some of these tables were mixed gauge, but this one is three feet only. The siding will accommodate such items as the BNCR coal wagon and our weedkilling truck, which are only used occasionally.

The approach to Shane's Castle Station was also far from perfect. To improve this, the first turnout has been moved out one rail length which provides a longer loop and a better curve into the platform.

On the rolling stock side, two additional closed carriages are under construction, to the same design as the existing ones, making seven in all. The open carriage, equipped with a brake, is being enclosed with end verandas and will resemble Glynn Valley tramway stock to some extent. Four open carriages will be in use and all carriages embellished with the Railway's new 'arms'. Those who have visited Shane's Castle will know that the riding qualities of the stock are on the firm side. This is hardly surprising, as the frames were designed to carry up to two tons of peat and comfort was not a consideration. I am in touch with the original manufacturers and we are experimenting with softer springs, but I doubt if we will have the answer by opening day - Easter Saturday.

The motive power depot has been very busy ever since the end of last season - rather more so than we had hoped or expected. I will take the simple problem first. No.3 "Shane" ran throughout 1971 with virtually no trouble. It always steamed well and was able to complete up to six runs (approximately 20 miles) on one fill of the 230 gallon well tank. The new cylinder lubrication arrangements proved highly satisfactory. During the repairs to the inside of the boiler, undertaken in 1970, it had proved necessary to cut two of the longitudinal stays. These were subsequently welded up to the satisfaction of the boiler inspector. Unfortunately, the failure of a similar repair elsewhere during 1971 meant that we have had to replace these with new ones. This job has now been completed. Apart from this, the piston valves are to be renewed, which should make the loco as near perfect as possible.

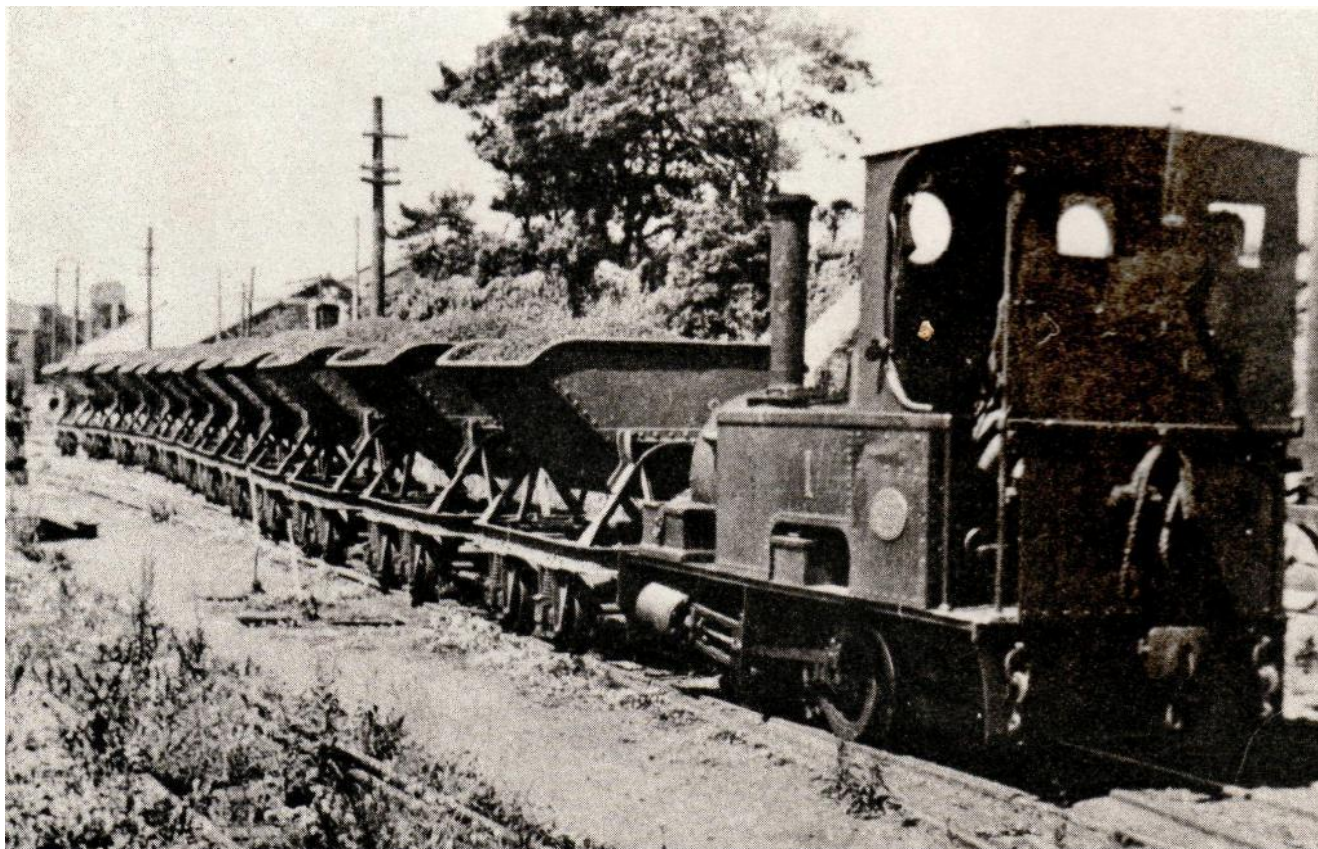
Our big problem has been No.1. It ran infrequently in 1971, except on the RPSI Special Day and on the Official Opening Day. On neither occasion did it go at all well and had usually run out of steam after one run out and back. In addition, it was often difficult to get under way at all; on opening the regulator, a lot of steam emerged from the chimney, but there was no movement. Obviously, this was no good at all and the loco could not play a useful part on the Railway.

During the summer of 1971, the axles and motion were removed, together with the bearings and hornblocks. There was a lot of wear everywhere. It was fitted new pistons and valves, while the cylinders were bored and valve faces reground. The motion was rebushed throughout and new eccentric sheaves fitted. The axle journals have been turned to suit new bearings. Pressure cylinder lubrication has been added and the connecting and coupling rods have been equipped with new oil cups. We are also trying to fit a constant feed to the eccentrics. When all this had been done we assumed that all would be well. Unfortunately our troubles were not over. When the valve gear was

reassembled, she still had the same problems, except that the valves were now tight on the faces.

The valve gear in its original form was of the locomotive link variety, the eccentric rods being attached to the link above and below the expansion link slot. The drop arm was attached to the same pin as the lower or reverse eccentric rod. The eccentric rod pins were a nominal eight inches apart and the eccentric throw was $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

It was found that with this arrangement, the total available travel of the die block in the link was fractionally over three inches and this imposed a limitation on the valve travel to the extent that only some $\frac{3}{16}$ inch of a half-inch port was opening in full gear and cut-off was at 50% of the piston's stroke - clearly not a satisfactory arrangement, as a 'blind spot' was thus guaranteed and this was confirmed by the loco's history of poor steaming and reluctance to start from rest.



British Aluminium Company 0-4-0T No.1 hauls a train of hoppers away from the factory at Larne on 4th July 1951. One of these hoppers is preserved at Shane's Castle. (H.M. Rea)

Obviously modification was called for and it was desirable that as much as possible of the existing hardware should be utilised. A marine or launch-type arrangement suggested itself and, after some experimentation with a full-size plywood mock-up, it was decided to reconstruct the links as follows:

Side plates were applied to the link, these being stood off by spacing pieces so that the original valve rod fork and die block could be utilised. The die block pin was reduced to the form of a plain gudgeon pin trapped on assembly between the side plates. Motion pins were now fitted and welded to the side plates $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches apart on the centre line of the link. Ideally, these should have been about one inch closer to each other, but consideration of clearance between the swinging link and fixed parts of the loco frame forced a compromise. New fork ends were designed and made for the eccentric rods as, with the new arrangement, these had to be considerably wider than before. Advantage was taken of the new layout in that the drop arms could now be attached at the centre of the assembly and these were

shortened and fitted accordingly. Judicious whittling of the valve rod fork enabled the die block travel to be considerably increased and the net result is practically full port opening with rapid opening and closing, cut-off in full gear now being something in excess of 75%.

The design work for this improvement was undertaken by Bob Beggs of the Transport Museum and the execution by Nick Watson and Bob in collaboration. It is interesting to note that No.2 (ex Larne aluminium and sister to our No.1) has similar problems. We checked it before altering No.1. This creates a bit of a puzzle as it seems hard to believe that all three had this deficiency when new.

After a lot of fine adjustments, she was steamed on Monday 28th February and I am pleased to say that the music from her chimney is now a pleasure to hear.

A damper and ashpan, an additional and much-needed refinement has now been attached. In Billy McCormick's time, the injectors were always a problem - one of these has been replaced with a 'Penberthy' but we hope to get adequate performance out of the original Gresham and Craven. After all this, I sincerely hope that No.1 will play an active part in 1972.

It only remains to mention human needs. A toilet or 'loo' block has been added to the Antrim Station area, while a reasonable number of platform seats will be available. A few trimmings, in the form of platform lamp standards, should also have been installed by mid-season.

The service in 1972 will be more extensive, all else permitting. As a rule, No.3 will run on Sundays and No.1 on Saturdays. During May, June and September we plan to run a diesel service on Wednesdays, but this will be steam hauled in July and August. On days when a particularly large crowd might be anticipated, both engines will be in steam and will take turns on the train. This should enable a more intensive service to be maintained, without delays for servicing, etc.

BOOK REVIEW

The Turf Burner

J.W.P. Rowledge, IRRS London Area, 40p

Following the very successful Sligo Leitrim book from the same publishers, their latest production was looked forward to with interest and they are to be congratulated for any book on Irish steam is, per se, a minor miracle.

The book covers more than the most famous of Ireland's attempts to use the native fuel as a prime source of railway power. Space is given to the experiments with Great Northern tank 142 as well as the early tests on the Great Southern.

The experiments with mogul 356 are described and illustrated, but of course, most space is devoted to CC1. The Turf Burner herself is dealt with in detail in both text and illustrations. There is a general arrangement drawing together with gas, steam and feed-water circuit diagrams together with cylinder and valve gear drawings and these provide material for much absorbing study. The more one examines the drawings of CC1, the more the complexity, novelty and ingenuity of the design becomes apparent and this is amplified by a compact text which requires close reading. Even so, one is left wondering, for instance, how the fuel and water were got on board, whether the turf was cut, briquetted or pulverised and just what all the hatches, covers and insets in the loco body are for.

A similar lack of information pervades in the section on 356 where the information is somewhat sketchy - although one is inclined to think that in both cases there is not much information available. Even so, some comments are sought in vain. For instance the photographs on page 11 show differing pre-heating boilers and it would have been of interest to comment on this. A diagram of 356 would have explained a lot about her novel draughting system - the brief mention of a chimney at the rear of

the tender is, to say the least, an intriguing one.

Returning to CC1, one gets the feeling that the author is not fully at home with his subject, although this must be partly due to a lack of material. However, it would surely have been worthwhile to draw conclusions as to why the engine was a failure.

Many enthusiasts evaluate an engine on its performance or other work done, but of these there is no mention except a tantalising mention that the loco was running at its designed maximum speed of 70 mph - the details of how this was achieved if available, would have made fascinating reading.

Indeed all through the book, the most interesting aspects of the turf burner appear to have gone unrecorded. Even so, a very commendable piece of work has been done from what appears to have been a dearth of information. In closing, it must be said that the book represents a useful addition to any library, though perhaps not the last we will hear of Bulleid's 'last fling'. **CPF**

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

I read Mr. Glendinning's letter in the last issue with interest coupled with surprise and finally dismay that my notes on Outing Organisation should have been so totally misunderstood as to appear as a condemnation of Whitehead. I have since re-read the article several times and can find only one mention of Whitehead and this is in the very last paragraph where it was suggested that energies should be channelled into running the tour programme and not dissipated on useless tree planting or aimless carpentry exercises. How this can be construed to mean condemnation of Whitehead escapes me.

It appears to me that in his unnecessary attempts to defend Whitehead, Mr. Glendinning has decided to have an unjustified, inaccurate and ill-timed attack on the rail tour programme. To go through his letter point by point would be tedious and a waste of magazine space but a few of the more absurd statements require correction.

(a) "Senselessly tight schedules" - There are three points here:

1. RPSI schedules are not conjured up by me but are carefully prepared having regard to steam times prevailing in the 1950s - in many cases not the fastest ever run.
2. They are submitted to the Committee even though experience in the past has shown this to be a waste of time since few on it are competent to criticise them and therefore the schedules are largely ignored.
3. In all cases months before the tour the schedules are submitted to CIÉ and NIR for their approval and here, it might be added, often times are tightened.

(b) "Loss of time on Colmcille" - If Mr. Glendinning ever takes the trouble to study an NCC working book he might discover some of the difficulties of planning a schedule to take in the amenities provided by the RPSI and fit in with the normal train service over a densely occupied piece of single line and give train and boat connections at the beginning and end of the day, let alone build in a recovery margin between Coleraine and Londonderry. The Colmcille tour might be summarised as follows: a bright spurt down Dunadry followed by easy running to Dunloy in an attempt to cross the usually late Up Derry and an arrival in Coleraine, practically on time. No time was lost in Coleraine taking water. The delay which was allowed for in the schedule was to enable the buses to get into position on the Derry side of the Bann Bridge. The lateness into Derry was due not to any faults in the schedule but to an overload goods being worked through on the same morning as the RPSI special - a fact unknown to myself or the train crew until Limavady Junction.

(c) "The engine was flogged back to Coleraine for the sake of a run' to Portrush" - This is absolute

nonsense. The schedule allowed 45 minutes for 31 miles, an average of just over 40 which should have been child's play to No.171 even with a blown gland since the load was a light weight of six bogies. In fact far from being flogged she was taken gently out of Derry and dropped two minutes on the 45 minute run. In any case how does one flog an express engine on a six coach train over a road for the most part limited to 50 mph. In making the statement at the top of this paragraph Mr. Glendinning has - I hope unwittingly - accused once again professional railwaymen of not knowing their job.

- (d) Decies - Here again a little thought on the relevant facts would have been better than a paragraph of exaggeration. No.171 was asked to run to Dublin in 2 hours 15 - not 2 hours 50 as stated, but the load was to be a featherweight one of two or at most three coaches with the rest of the train added in Dublin. This was surely a very easy task bearing in mind her fine work on the Brian Boru a year earlier with five bogies at least until the gland blew. One can hardly make out a tour schedule on the assumption that No.171 is going to blow a gland every 50 miles. Mr. Glendinning should also remember that she covered about 80 miles partly light on the previous tour as a try out to the Decies without coming to grief. The total daily mileage may seem a lot but running light engine from Dublin to Rosslare would hardly have taxed her severely. However should something untoward have occurred arrangements had been made for No.186 to have brought the train on in to Waterford.

Finally on the Decies, a running time of 2 hours 25 over the Cork line with our light train was easy - an average of little over 40 mph. It did in fact contain a recovery margin as apparently Mr. Glendinning seems to want and it was hoped a much faster time could be made. Incidentally I had intended the train to run to Connolly, Mr. Glendinning has obviously confused Heuston and Connolly distances.

In his final paragraph Mr. Glendinning mentions Open Day presumably again in defence of Whitehead since it is totally irrelevant to his attack on the railtours. Since he has introduced it however I may be allowed to add my own comments. It should be firmly grasped by all that Open Days are a way of making money by appealing to the more puerile instincts of the public. They provide no intellectual satisfaction to the serious student of railways and I believe that to such they merely degrade the image of steam. They are no substitute for a tour, just as this is a poor substitute for regular steam and never can be.

Let them therefore be seen in their true perspective as the unpleasant necessities which by bringing in money will enable the tour programme to continue and expand and not as an end in themselves. If the RPSI ever descends to the latter sorry state then we shall have wasted our opportunities and pandered to those to whom 'playing with steam' is the limit of railway knowledge and experience.

Yours, etc.,

W.T. Scott

Dear Sir,

While wholeheartedly commending the RPSI on acquiring a Jeep, I would dispute the wisdom of going ahead with work on this engine rather than ensuring an early return to service of "Slieve Gullion". For a locomotive that received a heavy overhaul, the latter enjoyed a remarkably short period of activity, no doubt as a result of a lack of respect from the organisers of the few tours on which she ran. It requires little imagination to foresee difficulties with such an engine, and surely it is irresponsible even to consider Enterprise timings on a journey from Belfast to Dublin, especially when this is intended only as the beginning of an intensive tour. Whether or not the locomotive is capable of such exertion is, I

believe, immaterial to most people, and the fact that No.171 (and No.186) is still in reasonable condition is grounds more for surprise than for satisfaction.

One does not have to read many pages of Five Foot Three to detect an over-emphasis on the speed and loading of trains. I suggest that the majority of enthusiasts admire locomotives more on account of their appearance than anything else. This is borne out by the popularity of runpasts and buses to permit lineside photography. In this respect, the train will provide just as appealing a sight at 30 mph as at 60 mph and it is also unnecessary to cover great distances. I would not complain even if the train took a whole day to reach Dublin from Belfast, provided that I could take half a dozen pleasing photographs; the normal service is not so intensive that paths could not be found for the special train.

From the various reports circulated to members, it is clear that the Society appreciates the importance of Cross-Channel patronage for tours. However, the unique position of the RPSI for the past 3½ years may not last for much longer if British Rail revokes its ban on steam. Even in the present favourable circumstances, No.171 is probably the only one of our locomotives that can entice participants from across the Irish Sea in useful numbers, since it is the most distinctive when compared with the large number of locos preserved in working order in Great Britain.

We have only a handful of 5ft 3in gauge locomotives, and there is no equivalent of Barry Docks from which to draw more or obtain spare parts. No doubt everyone could be as sad as I would if "Slieve Gullion" had to be retired prematurely, but I wonder if some officers of our Society are sufficiently aware that such an unhappy state of affairs could materialise all too soon if the present preoccupation with speed, strength and endurance is allowed to persist.

Yours, etc.,

Ian Cantlon

Dear Sir,

Letters to the Editor is not something I often indulge in but two letters in Five Foot Three No.11 regarding railtours make this letter necessary. Both your correspondents are destructively critical of the people in the Society charged with the running of the tours and maintenance of the locos. Writing as a professional engineman with 24 years' service on the footplate, I wish to inform them that their letters contained a great deal of rubbish.

Let me deal first with locos. No.186 is a rugged engine quite capable of running the schedules laid down for her. I personally know this loco intimately and declare her to be in perfect mechanical order, thanks to the dedicated men who maintain her. She is a credit to them.

Through the kindness of the NIR enginemen (Billy Croft and Leo Foy) I had the pleasure of driving her from Belfast to Portadown on the Slieve Gullion tour. At no time did I work the loco to her full capacity - it wasn't necessary, she ran easily and steamed well, attaining speeds of up to 53 mph. This running will not, repeat NOT, damage the loco as she is only called on to do this about four times in the year.

She needs a few very minor repairs which can be capably carried out by Irwin Pryce, Bob Edwards and P.A. Scott and I may add that these people receive a regular report from me after each trip on the loco and all of my suggestions are faithfully carried out. You can safely leave the locos in their capable hands and cease worrying about No.186's life span; she will probably outlive all of us.

Now for No.171. £3,000 was wasted by having this loco overhauled at Harland & Wolff. This firm has an international reputation for ship building - they know little of locos as the present mechanical condition of No.171 testifies. A loco fitter used many 'knacks' in loco repairs which are not found in textbooks. He works on a machine which he loves as much as the engineman does. He had pride in his

work. To a large firm like Harland & Wolff loco repairs are a job and that's all. I would suggest that a team of fitters and boilermakers (both retired and serving) be recruited by the Society and these men be given future contracts for major loco repairs. It can be done at Whitehead. You would buy dedication, skill and pride of craft for far less than £3,000 and have a lasting job performed. There must be many such men in Northern Ireland who would welcome a chance to work on the last remaining steam locos in Ireland.

Locos as I see it are the Society's first priority and spending money on anything else is wasteful.

Let me remind you that this is the only Society in these islands who can offer main line working. To continue with this, you cannot have the locos running at a slow funeral pace through the country, it's not practical. The tour people work hard on the schedules and believe me, if I thought the running too tight on any tour I'd very quickly point this out. I did not learn my job from textbooks and any suggestions I offer are based on long practical experience of railway work.

Like many railwaymen, I am amazed at the care and attention to detail given by the people charged with arranging the tours. Nothing is left to chance. Your Society is one of the best organised and offers 'the most for the least'.

One complaint I must make however, no meal is ever provided for the loco crew en route. A cup of tea and sandwiches can be very welcome on a dusty warm engine.

May I conclude with a proverb from my part of Ireland directed at the critics of the tour organisers "Leave the cobbler to his last".

Yours, etc.,

Jack O'Neill