

Programme of Events 2018/19

Below is a summary of talks and events hosted by the IRRS London. If you would like any further information about a subject or wish to get in touch with the speaker, please use the [Contact Us](#) page.

Thursday 4 April 2019

“Classic Irish Steam” by Ciarán Cooney



Ciaran Cooney

IRRS Photographic Archivist, Ciarán Cooney, has skilfully restored the classic photos of Bob Clements, Denis Morris and J Macartney Robbins, with stirring shots of 400s, 500s and 800s hard at work. There were rarely-seen places like Clara Midland and Inny Junction, then high-wheeled J5s on the Midland doing everything from cattle trains to excursions, and 2-4-0's in the west. The talk moved on to the SL&NCR, the GN, the B&CDR, and the NCC moguls, mogul tanks and 4-4-0's. This was a veritable feast of classic Irish steam.

Thursday 14 March 2019

“Railways of County Wexford” by Oliver Doyle



Oliver Doyle and Tim Morton

Former Irish Rail manager and railway expert, Oliver Doyle, explored the fascinating history of Wexford's railways. This rich agricultural county, noted both for farm produce and manufacturing farm machinery, had a good railway network. There was keen competition to gain rail access to Wexford and Waterford and the GWR, jointly with the GS&WR, became involved with its line from Rosslare Strand – Waterford, over the fine Barrow bridge. Oliver's talk took an expert look at the rise and demise of Wexford's railways and their traffic.

Thursday 14 February 2019

“NIR – the Good the Bad and the Ugly” by Colin McVea (Signalling and Telecom Engineer, NIR)



Tim Morton and Colin McVea

“The good, the bad and the ugly” was a reflection of Colin’s 30 years with NIR, from working on track through to managing staff. The talk stemmed from a number of accidents and incidents, each of which identified the need for change. Today’s NIR is very different from that of the railway of 30 years ago. The many characters from the old days (and their stories) have been replaced by investment, equipment, safety, performance, competency. Colin described how the whole culture of the railway has changed and how that came about.

Thursday 17 January 2019

“A magnificent folly – the Burtonport Extension Railway” by Roger Crombleholme



Tim Morton and Roger Crombleholme

Roger presented a very entertaining and thought-provoking audio-visual presentation of the famous “extension” to the Lough Swilly Railway. He recounted the perilous state of Co Donegal in the late 1800s and the struggles of the people to survive.

The UK Board of Works sought to improve their lot by building a railway to open up the County and especially help its fishing industry. Roger argued that the choice of the “Swilly” route rather than an extension of the “Co Donegal Railway” route was not necessarily the best choice. The Board then put up the money (not enough) to build the line cheaply, managing to avoid the few

towns of any size, failing to provide enough passing places and finally failing to provide it with enough rolling stock.

Despite this, the line made a profit initially, albeit by dodgy management practices while they squeezed long hours out of their unfortunate staff who had to work the line on trains often many hours late.

As with many narrow gauge railways, the line suffered from road competition after WW1 and succumbed in the 1930s. Roger cleverly gave us a taste of what it was like to travel over the windswept bogs which the line traversed, some of which can be experienced today as parts of the line are now a foot / cycle path.

Prior to his presentation, Roger projected some “Swilly” photographs taken by the Area’s late Chairman, Lance King. Lance visited the surviving line to Buncrana and Letterkenny on a very wet weekend in 1953.

A worthy and memorable presentation of a line which disappeared many years ago.

Thursday 6 December 2018
“Listowel to Cobh 1978-86” by Gerry McMahon



Gerry McMahon and Tim Morton

Gerry McMahon shared his splendid memories of railways in the Tralee area in the 1970’s and 1980’s with a capacity audience. He reminded us of rural railway operations at the time when nothing had changed since the steam age apart from the traction.

We saw long lost goods yards, branches, stations and semaphore signalling, loose-coupled wagonload and beet trains, steam cranes in use by the civil engineering department, and shunting by gravity and by cable. We appreciated the experience, skills and teamwork of a bygone era of railwaymen who made it all work. Gerry’s memories of the time were vivid and comprehensive and brought it all alive once again.

Following Gerry's talk there was a complimentary Christmas drink and followed by the London Area AGM.

Thursday 15 November 2018

“Current and Future Fleet development on Irish Rail” by Peter Smyth (Chief Mechanical Engineer, Irish Rail)



Peter Smyth and Dick Fearn

Peter sits in the chair once occupied by McDonnell, Ivatt, Maunsell and Bulleid and his talk to us shows him to be a worthy successor – a man on top of his job.

He spoke under four headings – the current situation; the DART expansion; the fleet today and future plans; and finally the rolling stock maintenance regime in Irish Rail today.

IR is in the happy position of enjoying an 8% year on year increase in passenger traffic, but is short of vehicles to carry that traffic. Peter described the fleet and where he wanted to go with it. The happy news was that further intermediate cars for the Rotem Intercity Railcars had been agreed. However, upgrading the once-stored 26000 railcars to current standards was not economical, so other avenues were being progressed, including considering secondhand stock from the UK – the Class 185 and 170 being mentioned!

Peter is clearly an enthusiast for electrification – Switzerland was often mentioned – and he developed the issues of replacing the earlier DART units and the need for more. The Japanese built cars had proved an excellent buy for their reliability. He discussed the current enthusiasm for hybrid vehicles, startling us with a picture of the famous Drumm battery railcars – at least one engineer is not ignoring history. Using modern battery technology is certainly in his sights, bearing in mind the increasing range of battery vehicles and the fact that a modern battery can recharge to full capacity in as little as ten minutes.

The final section, Peter described the systems available to predict issues with stock, while they were actually in motion, which was the stuff of Science Fiction – today becoming Science Fact. He showed how IR is looking at best practice, worldwide to help keep the wheels turning and the passengers enjoying timely, safe travel.

An unmissable evening. One of the best talks which your writer has had the pleasure to attend in fifty years with the London Area.

Thursday 18th October 2018
“Valencia Harbour Branch” by Barry Carse



Tim Morton and Barry Carse

Longstanding Irish enthusiast and regular contributor to the Journal, Barry Carse, revisited the London Area with fascinating new research about the Valencia Harbour branch. Building on a recently discovered report, “Closing of Unremunerative Branch Lines” written by railwaymen rather than accountants, he described the branch, its history and its steam and diesel locomotives, finishing with railcar trials and GAA specials. This most westerly and scenic Irish line had a character all of its own.