

**The March and April meetings were cancelled due to the effects of Covid-19**

**Thursday 13th February 2020**

**“A Life on The Railways of County Laois” by Sean Cain**



Sean Cain and Tim Morton

A return to the Calthorpe Arms on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> February, saw the audience welcome Sean Cain, who gave an interesting lecture on his life in railways. Immersed from a tender age with trips with his father and mother,

An 18 year career started in the sleeper factory at Portlaoise. Unlike other stations in Ireland little has been written about Portarlinton and Portlaoise. Sean went on to talk about and illustrate with then and now images of the Mountmellick branch.

When he last spoke to the London IRRS he concentrated on Bord na Mona and he had early photos of Garryhinch and Cushnina where the steam fleet was kept. Subsequently the two locos he showed were preserved at the Stradbally Woodland Railway.

After the interval, graphic images of the wrong kind of snow and efforts to release stranded trains was followed by information on his professional employment as a fitter and relief maintenance planner at the Laois Train-care Depot for the ICR Fleet. A self-confessed diesel and railcar fan, Sean also explained his volunteering experience on the Stradbally railway

**Thursday 16 January 2020**

“NI Railways – Fleet Engineering” by Richard Noble



Leslie McAllister & Richard Noble

In the absence of Chairman Tim Morton, Leslie McAllister introduced Richard Noble the former Head of Rail Fleet Engineering for NI Railways, Richard is now Project Manager for the forthcoming introduction of additional rolling stock, perhaps in the golden days of steam the CME. Richard divided his talk on the operational side of NIR into the past history in 2005, recent developments and future plans. It was striking how much had been achieved in a relatively short time to transform the passenger experience in Northern Ireland. In 2000 ageing, rusting 450 & 80 Class DEMUs were a challenge to maintain and run a reliable service

Now in 2019/20 new trains (the 3000 and 4000 DMU's) supplied by CAF we're achieving considerably improved reliability and passenger comfort. The flagship service, The Enterprise, while not a new train had cunningly been made to look like one by a makeover that included internal refurbishment and a new livery. Infrastructure improvements in servicing and maintenance at Fort William and Adelaide contributed to the stock reliability. A dramatic turnaround in public use and perception of NIR had been achieved.

For the future Richard stressed the need to run 6 car trains to increase capacity albeit platform restrictions remained a headache. New stock for the Enterprise + more DEMUs and futuristically consideration of alternative means of propulsion!

Questions ranged from thoughts on improving Line capacity to Derry, reopening the “back line” through Crumlin and worries about dependence on CAF as a single supplier of stock.

An audience of 30+ warmly received Richard's lecture. The use of the CrossRail offices as a venue was viewed by members as certainly modern, spacious and easily accessible both internally and from Liverpool St. The downside being Guinness and real ale was not available!!

**Thursday 5 December 2019**

“With Lance King in Ireland – 1958 – 1963” by Leslie McAllister + AGM



Richard McLachlan, Leslie McAllister & Tony Eaton

Long serving Committee member, Leslie McAllister presented a series of images he had scanned from the archive of photos taken by our late founder Chairman Lance King. A first selection of Lance’s photographs taken in the Republic in the last years of steam were shown. Lance was a skilled photographer and left a fine record of steam in the Dublin area and on the fondly remembered branches such as Kenmare, Loughrea, Ballaghaderreen, Edenderry, Tullow, Clara and Youghal. His photographs, mostly in colour, and dating from the mid 50’s to the latter days of steam on the island, portrayed the variety and diversity of railways in Eire and Northern Ireland.

Lance visited Ireland frequently, often on rail tours that just in time captured this now long gone period. Of equal interest to the railway photos were the insight into life in Ireland. Leslie pointed out the donkeys, cattle markets and sugar beet trains. Coal from Arigna has shown in a series of shots. Lance was privileged to journey on many branch lines and of particular interest was the CBSR lines west of Cork. With reference to the memorable railtour with the last “Bandon tank”.

Leslie acknowledged the help by Lance’s executor Tony Eaton in scanning Lance’s notes which made Leslie’s task in constructing the talk a lot easier. He apologised in advance for using more notes than usual but in practice his talk was fluent and knowledgeable and was a fitting tribute to a man who while being an excellent photographer was also instrumental in setting up the London branch of the IRRS.

*The London Area AGM concluded the evening*

## **"Downpatrick and County Down Railway" by Robert Gardiner**

Thursday 14 November 2019



John Hatton & Robert Gardiner

Downpatrick and County Down Railway Chairman, Robert Gardiner, reviewed the railway's history and updated us on recent developments. From inception in 1985 with just a 'field', the DCDR has grown to become the only full-sized operational Irish mainline heritage railway. Initially a new station building and workshop were constructed, and a line built to Inch Abbey including reinstatement of a river bridge.

Robert gave an excellent lecture on the DCDR. A good audience heard him divide his talk into first an Overview of Recent Developments and secondly Future Plans. The acquisition and restoration of two "big beasts" Class A and B, "Very useful locomotives" Robert said. A more recent arrival was a C Class to complete the diesel set. To many people's amazement a representative of the much hated and unloved Castle Class DEMU had been acquired and restored to act as a wheelchair access, Buffet car. Highlight of the infrastructure work was the display Visitors' Gallery. Robert interspersed his talk with short video clips and newscasts from tv. One such showed Prince Edward opening the new Gallery. A smaller but equally interesting building was the restoration of Bundoran Junction Signal box as Downpatrick East. After the interval Robert concentrated on specific future projects and specifically the successful Class. 80 Appeal and working co-operation with the staff at York Road. It was an excellent evening with a fluent inspiring speaker.

## **“Irish Railways in my Lifetime” by Hassard Stacpoole**

Thursday 17 October 2019



Tim Morton and Hassard Stacpoole

Lifelong railway enthusiast, occasional railway activist, and professionally involved with railways, Hassard looked back on 50 years of radical change in the railways of the Republic. Diesel replaced steam and then the rest of the railway gradually modernised despite shoe string budgets. Signal cabins, freight and loco hauled trains largely disappeared but then significant “Celtic Tiger” investment provided a real boost. Hassard gave a very personal, and sometimes critical, reflection on how railways in the Republic have changed in his lifetime.