



# November 2011 News

## County Donegal Railway Restoration Ltd



### Events at Kee's

We have been running presentations and model railway exhibitions at Kee's Hotel in Stranorlar, in fact the original venue for CDRJC meetings of old when the railway was running. We began with railway talks/slide & film shows on 23<sup>rd</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup> July using our digital projector to enlarge our archive photographs.

We then ran two exhibitions, on 19/20<sup>th</sup> August and 9/10<sup>th</sup> September. To present the Donegal scene we had two 4mm scale layouts, of Donegal Town and of Letterkenny, in running order thanks to the work of John Darch. At the first show we also had a 3mm scale model of Castelfin and at the second show Alan Gee's model of Schull station on the narrow gauge Schull and Skibbereen line.

We also provided the Hornby O Gauge that we had shown at the Bosco in 2008 and 2009, working large Meccano models and a Dinky Toys display.

The large size of the conference room used for the show allowed us to take the 7¼" gauge ride-on track with a coach and miniature Ruston to give rides. This turned out to be a significant innovation as Kee's have agreed we can take this back at Christmas to support two Santa days there, with the train taking children to Santa running alongside Sunday diners.

We also made an innovative link from our previous slide presentations by offering a stand at each show with the projector enlarging our archive pictures to order. Local people found this most interesting and several memberships were signed up during the two-day exhibition.

We made an average of €1000 per exhibition, hugely valuable towards our survival. The pictures here will hopefully give some flavour of the shows. But what we need to add is that the shows were all the more valuable to us because of the special co-operation Kee's have given us, by offering the room without charge and harking back to when there was a special understanding with the CDRJC.

### Donegal Room in Dublin

Thanks to co-operation from the South Dublin Model Railway Club, we were able to have our "Donegal Room" at the Dublin Show on 29<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> October. This is the first time we have shown working layouts at Dublin. These were our own 4mm scale Letterkenny and Bill Garrioch's 3mm scale Castelfin. We are sure the link to the models helped our sales stand in the same room, which is as well as sales at Dublin are down to one third of what they were several years ago.

### Enniskillen and other shows

We had a larger sales stand than in previous years, hopefully as a precursor to running one of our model layouts there in future years.



Given the success of the shows and their potential as a revenue-earner, we have decided to re-structure to allow us to plan and run many more such events in 2012 and onwards. The justification is that at certain times of year we have made 100 times more at an off-site show than if we had sat and waited for customers at the Donegal Railway Heritage Centre. Currently we are planning possible exhibitions at Letterkenny in March and November, back at Donegal Town in late May – with our AGM moving back to the last Saturday in May, Derry - Foyle Valley in July, Kee's in August, and our usual stands augmented by a working layout(s) at Enniskillen in September and Dublin in late October. There is also the possibility of a Dublin activity in early August.

All our model railway exhibitions will incorporate our ideas on showing heritage pictures coupled with the working model equivalent side by side. This innovation has allowed us to apply to the Heritage Council for funding to support our effort to exhibit the railway heritage in this way and reach more people with the heritage message, this activity coming under the Heritage Council's heading of 'outreach'.

Members who have contacts with shows in the UK are asked to consider perhaps whether the addition of one of our layouts plus a sales stand would be of mutual benefit to the shows they know and to ourselves – both in generating awareness and in gaining revenue.

### Other types of events

For years we have been advised that bag-packing in the big supermarkets is a good source of donated income. Whilst that is undoubtedly true, there is competition for space, and an organisation needs a good few volunteers to line up at along row of tills and keep going packing bags for several hours.

Given the occupation of management with enforced unnecessary bureaucracy, staff members Margaret Ward and Pamela McGrath were asked to set up a bag-packing schedule. This came to fruition with two days at Supervalu in Donegal town earlier this month.

It was a struggle to find enough people to staff this, even in a comparatively small shop like Supervalu in Donegal. That said, the result was fully worthwhile, and was the most profitable exercise CDRRL has ever run on a return versus investment basis.

Photos – from top: 3mm Castelfin layout shown at Stranorlar and Dublin by Bill Garrioch. The 4mm Donegal Station built by Andy Cundick and shown at Stranorlar in 2011 and also at the opening of the Donegal Railway Heritage Centre in 1995. John Matthews running 4mm scale Letterkenny, also built by Andy Cundick. The 15mm scale CDR models including railcars and live steam locos.

As a result the effort to schedule more bagpacking has been stepped up. We will be at Tesco in Letterkenny in December and are seeking time at Dunne's in Letterkenny, Supervalu in Killybegs, and Kee's in Laghey. We are also looking at how to get an introduction to Asda in Strabane and Supervalu in Ballybofey.

### Model Engineering

Much of our ability to put on any exhibition at all with scale Donegal models is down to the efforts of John Darch who worked on both the Letterkenny and Donegal Town layouts, both some 25 years old, to get them into working order. The enhanced levels of running at the Dublin show exacerbated some electrical gremlin problems with the Letterkenny layout which John is rewiring. In breaks from this, John has been making up members' stocks of Backwoods Miniatures kits of the CDR locos and rolling stock.

This has included a Class 5A loco for George Haire, much stock for the Letterkenny and Donegal Town layouts, and now at least one Swilly Hudswell Clarke 4-8-0 is being tackled. €1500 has been earned by John for this exercise so far. While €100 or so more than the bagpacking, it was earned with a huge amount more skill and effort over a long period of time – demonstrating just how bagpacking can fit into our repertoire of revenue earning if we can get the venues, so those of us who lack John's skills can earn a significant amount for us.

### Improving the museum

If it were not for the burdensome amount of administrative work that arguing with Pobal brought upon us this year, we should have spent more time changing exhibits, refreshing the museum, adding new items and bringing others up to date with new captions etc. Alan Haugey has, however, been able to begin his programme of renewing the storyboards, adding to and updating captions and adding a number of new colour pictures that were not available when the original ones were set up for the museum opening in 1995. The first new wallboards, for Derry and Strabane, should go up within days of this news being written. There will then be an impetus to complete the exercise as the new boards, judging by the trial prints, make all the others look like needing improvements after their 16 years of display service!

The second improvement to write about has now been completed. After the tunnel-visioned lack of understanding by Pobal of our proposals for an elderly drop-in facility, we were delighted to have the antidote approach from Donegal Local Development Company (DLDC) who provided us with a €6,500 grant for the provision of a wheelchair-access toilet. An easy access toilet will enable us to appeal more to the elderly, and indeed to special needs groups, during the winter months. We have always believed we should have an extra welcome for the elderly during the winter when there are virtually no tourists and we can offer them

DVDs and films of the railway plus hot drinks and snacks and make a small income while offering this service. This was confirmed at the Stranorlar shows where we had the large screen connecting to a computer showing many of our archived local pictures which thrilled some of the elderly visitors and relatives of those who had worked on the railway.

Now that this initial project with DLDC has been completed successfully we hope for a Phase II which will see Trailer 15 restored as a presentation room and Coach 58 restored as some liner 86 feet more display space. Both of these restorations have been on our To Do list for a good many years. Completion would not only enable the museum to deal with a full size coach party at a time, but also remove the issues of this stock looking dilapidated on site. It would be nice for the current management to complete this before their retirement in about two years time. We understand DLDC do have available funds and that they would give some favourable consideration to our application provided that the Phase I toilet installation went well.

Below we see the new position of the signal box with the toilet installed inside. Also clear is the new ramp to the toilet, which also allows better access to Trailer 5.



Now that the toilet installation is complete we shall be inviting groups who will benefit from its installation such as the elderly and those with access problems to visit the Donegal Railway Heritage Centre, particularly during the winter when we should like to set aside a day each week for running suitable heritage films coupled with availability of tea and coffee and the warmth of our DVD room.

### Staffing

The uncertainly engendered by Pobal's approach to micromanaging us in the early part of 2011 has been partly instrumental in the departure of Gavin Wray, our joiner, and Paul Sinclair, our electronics expert. Gavin has gone to Australia and Paul has trained as a banksman at the Olympics site in the UK, both now gaining far more income than we could ever pay them. Having drawn the plans for our wheelchair access toilet and gained the planning permission, Paul Collum has also left to extend his architect qualifications at Galway University.

While some staff have now gone, John Darch has needed to increase his hours to deal with the preparation of layouts for the exhibitions and for the construction of the

numerous Backwoods Miniatures kits that he has put together recently.

Although, via sacrifice of a number of heritage items for scrap when we had one day hoped to restore them, we have met the targets set by Pobal, we have told them that there is no more family silver to sell. Given their insistence on making more income, we have had to look at the contribution to this from staff. Sadly, as a result, and entirely because of changes in the emphasis of the grant aid, we have had to ask two staff to consider voluntary redundancy. The supreme irony of this is that Pobal want us to maintain our staff level, but, given the obligatory revenue targets, we will need to look for new staff who can tangibly contribute to developing and maintaining new income streams. Maybe at the same time they would bear some of the administrative burden so that those with the right skills can produce our publications and films for selling. Thus, there is a positive side to this, but it uncomfortable for those affected.

### Finance

Although we have met Pobal's enforced requirement for an approximate 50% increase in revenue during the recession, and in Donegal where tourism recession is likely worse than elsewhere, members are counselled not to rejoice too much. This apparent success was facilitated by selling our Rustons, some wagon chassis parts, and saved corrugated wagon roofs for scrap. This enforced approach, without which we should not have got grant aid, netted over €5000 but lost for ever some of the heritage a number of us had worked so hard over more than a decade to conserve. Such is the legacy of the last government and the inadequacy of the current one to correct it!

We hope that the forthcoming book reprint, bag-packing and exhibitions, coupled with a new DVD as soon as we have staff to produce it will provide the required new sources of income to save us in 2012 and to arrest the need for such regrettable disposal of heritage.

### Backnumber railway magazines

We have amassed a large number of these, particularly Railway Modellers and have evolved a way of free delivery within 5 miles of the M1/M6/M11/M25/M2/M20 and A75 roads. Email/ring for list/prices.

### Phoenix

Given the recession we were unable to persuade advertisers to support a second issue of The Phoenix in 2011 and hopefully this newsletter will substitute.

### Mail Order

A new mail order list is enclosed. Please note that we have good stocks of the 2012 calendar and can supply our special Christmas cards of Donegal Railway items in the snow.

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