

Interludes in Ireland

I visited Ireland twice during the 1970s with college friends from Bangor; both trips being railway-oriented.

1970: Rosslare–Dublin–Belfast and around Ulster

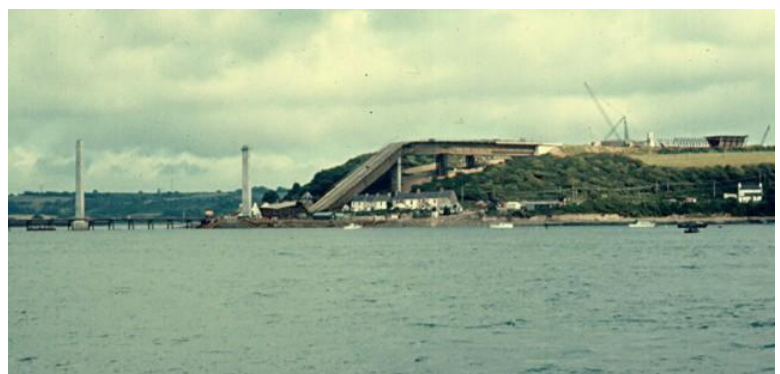
In June 1970 at the end of the college term, Eddie Calvert-Harrison was returning home to Larne, County Antrim, and I was invited to stay there with his family for a few days. Keith Walter was heading back to his parental home at Falkirk, Scotland, and joined us for the first two days. We decided not to go the obvious and easy way, on the Holyhead to Dun Laoghaire ferry, nor even from Liverpool or Heysham to Belfast, but instead booked on the Fishguard to Rosslare overnight service, thus giving us the opportunity to see something of the railways of both south west Wales and the Irish Republic.

We set off from Bangor early on the morning of Saturday 20th June by train on the first leg of our journey, to Chester. This was of course in the barren post-steam years of dull blue diesel locomotives and blue/grey carriages, but running into Chester General station we were surprised to see these two Southern Region carriages in very smart early-BR red and cream livery parked in the sidings. On our way out again some half an hour later bound for Shrewsbury I managed to photograph them through the train window; the left hand one is a Bullied vehicle, the other a Maunsell, and they are presumably in departmental service.....



Changing trains again at Shrewsbury, we boarded a 3-car diesel unit for the long scenic run over the Central Wales line to Llanelli, arriving in time for a cafe lunch. Then another similar unit took us down through Carmarthen and Clarbston Road, to the branch line terminus at Milford Haven. A short ride by Western Welsh bus to Neyland enabled us to catch the ferry across the Cleddau River to Pembroke Dock, another ex-GWR branch terminus.

From the ferry we had a distant view of the ill-fated Cleddau road bridge then under construction, which had collapsed around two weeks earlier.....



Our journey on the branch line from Pembroke to Whitland was interesting, including stops for the guard to alight and manually operate level crossing gates. This line is described in more detail, with pictures, on our “In search of the Great Western Railway” page. We had one more change of train at Whitland Junction, a longish wait then finally on to Fishguard for a fish and chip supper. The fine motor ship “Caledonian Princess” awaited us for the overnight passage to Rosslare.

I cannot recall how we bought tickets for our unusual journey down from Bangor in that very much pre-Internet age but it was presumably at our local travel agents, perhaps hand-written and calculated singles from Bangor to Milford Haven and another from Pembroke to Fishguard, as well as the ferry and Irish rail tickets!

Rosslare Harbour at 6.30am on a cold, grey Sunday morning was not the most inspiring of places. Here is the “Caledonian Princess” at its berth.....



Over at the terminus station, CIE General Motors “switcher” diesel B135 formed the 7.00am through train to Dublin, comprising a van and two coaches in their striking black, white and orange livery.....



Over at the other platform to the left the Waterford train included an ancient wooden-bodied carriage with clerestory roof, unfortunately hidden from view here.

Our ensemble duly trundled off on time; highlights of our journey included the coastal stretch from Drinagh to Wexford and the street running along the quayside at the latter place, then the further scenic stretch from Wicklow to Bray, all sights which of course can still be enjoyed today. Arrival at the elegant Dublin Pearse station (then just recently renamed from Westland Row) was just after 10, so we had minimal time to get across the river to Connolly station (the late Amiens Street) for our 10.30 train to Belfast – further exploration here would have to wait for my return a week later. This train was a much more “main-line” affair, with “A” class diesel loco A59R and four modern carriages, plus the obligatory van up front. Here we are passing near Pontzpass, between Newry and Portadown.....



There were no convenient Sunday trains onward to Larne, so we were met at the old Great Victoria Street station in Belfast by Eddie’s parents, and completed our two-day journey by car. We paused to photograph the delightful wooden wayside station building at Trooperslane, between Greenisland and Carrickfergus, seen here..... It seems to have been destroyed at some point in more recent years, in the name of “refurbishment”.



In the evening we had a look round Larne Harbour, when the other Keith went to board his overnight ferry to Stranraer, and found this surviving section of dual-gauge track & pointwork (Irish 5ft 3in and 3ft 0" gauges).....



The narrow track was probably a remnant of the British Aluminium Company's private system at Larne, which closed in 1960, rather than, as we thought at the time, part of the Ballymena and Larne line, which had closed even earlier, in 1950.

On the Monday, Eddie and I travelled the Larne line down to Greenisland. We found NIR diesel unit no. 18 shunting carriages and vans at the harbour station terminus in Larne.....



We stopped off at both Whitehead and Carrickfergus. At the former, DMU set 74 is seen below left entering the station on a Belfast-Larne working, with customary van in tow. Below right shows a mixed train at Carrickfergus, with a 3-car DMU towing former GNR(I) coach 593 still in green livery, and two LMS (NCC) vans.....



Arriving at Greenisland, we were invited into the signal box at this interesting junction, formerly a triangular layout but with one side by now disused, as shown on the amended panel diagram.....

On Tuesday 23rd June we caught the same train from Larne again, but this time continued through to Belfast. At York Road yard, brand-new Hunslet diesel locomotive, NIR no. 102 had been delivered, and awaited



commissioning to work the Belfast-Dublin “Enterprise Express” service (below left), and we found Eddie’s school friend Alan Franks on duty at the Queen’s Quay signal cabin (right).....



We were also allowed to look around the York Road workshops, where diminutive former British Aluminium Company, Larne 0-4-0 tank locomotive no.1 (Peckett works no. 1026 built in 1904, of 3ft gauge) was stored, propped up on a pile of old sleepers.....



We then travelled out on the line to Bangor and back; this terminal station is shown below, with the ubiquitous DMU set at the platform, and several GNR(I) buses parked in the yard. The view is taken from the signal box, to which we were again invited for a cup of tea and a chat.....



Finally that day, on returning to Belfast we visited the transport museum, where photography was not too easy, but below are seen (left) the LMS (NCC) 4-4-0 locomotive no. 74 “Dunluce Castle”, and (right) an interesting collection of five tramcars, including the former Fintona horse-tram at the right hand end of the row.....



The following day we took the train again into Belfast, then another on to Derry via a stop-off at Coleraine. From Derry we first caught a bus south to the town of Strabane, the objective being to see the stored collection of former County Donegal Railways narrow-gauge locomotives and carriages at the station there. Here are the two 2-6-4 tank locos, CDR nos. 4 (formerly named “Meenglas”) & 5 (“Drumboe”), with the cast-iron canopy supports of the old station visible in left background; demolition of the structures was in progress. Below left is a general view of the stored stock here, with several of the carriages already burnt out or stripped of timber by the local vandals. On the right is a close-up of locomotive no. 4.....



These relics had remained here since closure of the CDR system in 1960, reputedly purchased by an American railway enthusiast and stored awaiting his collection, which never occurred. After many further years of deterioration, the two locomotives were saved and are being restored in Ireland, but most if not all of the carriage bodies were probably beyond repair.



Back at Derry, the city’s Waterside station hosted NIR railcar set 50 in mid afternoon. Here the former Belfast & Northern Counties Railway somersault signals were smartly kept and in regular use, and the sidings contained a fine selection of ex LMS (NCC) loco worked carriages for summer excursion use. The left image shows coach no. 392 and another, with no. 340 in the right view.....



On Thursday 25th June Eddie's father very kindly entrusted us with the use of his Humber saloon 271GZ, and we were joined by Eddie's school friend John Currie for the day. As there was no speed limit on Northern Ireland's roads at that time, and the Ballymena by-pass dual carriageway (the first section of the future M1 motorway) had recently been opened, this was the first and only occasion on which I have driven at over 100mph, albeit only for a relatively short stretch. The luxurious limousine attained this with smoothness and ease. We went from Larne along the coast, stopping for a look at the Giant's Causeway on this unfortunately rather dull morning (right) then on to Coleraine.



From here we caught the branch train to Portrush, arriving at lunchtime. At the terminus, railcar 75 is seen leading an excursion train comprising eight very mixed older carriages, with some of them still in faded green livery, while the service train railcar set is at the right-hand platform.....



Returning to Coleraine and the car, our next stop was west of Castlerock, where the main Derry line hugs the shoreline, darting in and out of tunnels through the cliffs. Here is a 3-car DMU set on a Downhill to Derry service.....



Our journey back to Larne took us via Coleraine, Ballymoney and Antrim.

At the latter place we found ex LMS (NCC) WT class 2-6-4 tank loco no. 6 in open storage in the station goods yard, along with three former GNR(I) carriages still in the old green livery.....



On the Friday it was back to the trains again, to Belfast and then on to Lisburn and Portadown, by the ubiquitous diesel railcar sets.

At Lisburn, ex GNR(I) AEC 2-car diesel railcar set no. 116 is seen.....

And at Portadown station we found CIE General Motors "B" class diesel loco B165 engaged in shunting vans.....



In the yard here was this interesting pair of old cast-iron notices, with the original company names painted out, part chiselled away, and very crudely modified to show UTA (Ulster Transport Authority), by then also defunct!.....

We broke our return journey for a couple of hours to look around Belfast city centre, where we found ex-London Transport Daimler buses still running alongside the native Corporation versions, and some of the newest rear-engined double-deckers. These three photos show firstly, Belfast Corporation no. 499 (HGF868, ex-Londoner D191 of 1946) passing City Hall, apparently not on service. Then no. 407



(OZ6661 of 1953) on route 74 bound for Ballygowan. Lastly, new Bristol RE type 829 (AOI829) heads out of town on route 16 for Dundonald.....



Saturday June 27th was my last day of this short break in Northern Ireland, and we visited the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland's open day at Whitehead, with a group of Eddie's friends. These pictures show some of the exhibits here on this beautiful sunny afternoon in 1970, by which time the society was already well-established.....



Leaving at around 6pm, I made my way once again by NIR diesel railcar into Belfast. On the run in, other passengers pointed out that some streets far off to the west, in the Falls Road district, were ablaze, lighting up the evening sky. I was to read later at home that this Saturday night was effectively the start of the major “troubles” in the city, and I was glad to be able to leave promptly on the CIE operated “Enterprise” express through to Dublin, and the short leg to Dun Laoghaire port in good time for the overnight ferry to Holyhead – or so I thought. It was an unexpected surprise to wake up in the morning not as expected at the North Wales port convenient for Bangor, but at Heysham instead! The cause of the unscheduled diversion is not recalled; it did not appear to be due to bad weather as the crossing seemed to be quite calm; perhaps there were other “operational difficulties” at Holyhead? A free rail travel warrant to Bangor via Warrington and Chester was duly issued, and this awkward Sunday journey ended up taking most of the day!

1976: A round excursion of Eire from Limerick, and a full day in Dublin

Our second Irish adventure found Rob Palmer and myself booking a fly-drive package with Aer Lingus, from Liverpool Airport to Shannon, via Dublin. Outward on Wednesday 23rd June, we picked up our hire-car, a tiny yellow Fiat 127, at Shannon Airport and drove to Limerick’s Colbert station to meet Eddie and Charles Young who had travelled from Bangor via the overnight Holyhead – Dun Laoghaire ferry, thence by train from Dublin. How we managed to get all four of us plus luggage comfortably into this small car remains a mystery, but we set off in high spirits. The centre of Limerick town in the afternoon “rush hour” was a joy to behold with cars, lorries, bicycles and well-laden donkey-carts competing seemingly uncontrolled for the right of way across a major intersection! Having negotiated this without incident, we headed thankfully for the open countryside, to Six Mile Cross and then the small county town of Ennis for tea on a beautiful summer’s evening. On a stroll round the streets we found the West Clare Railway 0-6-2 tank locomotive no. 5 “Slieve Callan” perched on a plinth in a public park.....



The engine had been displayed here since the West Clare system closed in 1961, and was to remain thus exposed to the elements for a further 30 years, but it has now been fully restored to working order and performs once again on its native railway, a restored 2-mile section based around Moyasta Junction. There was not much else left to see of this lovely line during our 1970 visit, so we made our way to the village of Barefield, where we found comfortable B&B accommodation.

The following morning, Thursday 24th June, we were glad we had a full tank of petrol, as this garage, its large roof advertisement seen from afar as we came down the hill near Ennistymon, did not look likely to oblige! We thought the name very appropriate.....



After seeking out the remains of the West Clare Railway at Ennistymon station and Lahinch, we continued westwards, stopping to look at the dramatic Cliffs of Moher, on the Atlantic coastline.....



We then travelled the spectacular coast road northwards, stopping off at Lisdoonvarna, Ballyvaughan and Kinvara before arriving in Galway City for lunch. A sign of the times here was the Sinn Fein recruitment caravan parked in the centre of the main square, and apparently doing brisk business. At the station we found CIE "A" class diesel loco no. 35, in the distinctive livery then used, parked in the yard awaiting its next duty to Dublin.....



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For the rest of the afternoon we ventured westwards to look at the remote Connemara coastline and mountains, intending to reach Clifden and then return by a different route via Oughterard. Here we are on the coast road somewhere near Costelloe.....

However as can be seen, the weather was already closing in and within a few miles all we could see was thick mist, on a road which apparently continued without end, and with no



significant features along the way. We cut short and turned for Maam Cross, then headed back to Galway via Oughterard and Moycullen, mostly still in impenetrable mist. The fair city beckoned for tea, then the sun came out again here, and we struck eastwards, to Oranmore, Athenry and Kilconnell on a beautiful summer evening, finding another good B&B at the latter place.

On Friday we had decided to seek out some of the narrow-gauge peat extraction railways in central Ireland, Eddie having done some prior homework to locate those likely to be of interest. The day started cloudy and overcast, and we looked in at the CIE (former Midland Great Western Railway) station at Ballinasloe first.....



The sun came out as we then headed south-eastwards to our first narrow-gauge system near Shannonbridge. Here we see a modern “Wagonmaster” diesel, Bord-na-Mona (Irish Peat Board) no. LM222 awaiting its next run out onto the bog to collect another train of loaded wagons. The track gauge here is the Irish “standard” of 3ft 0ins.



Below, a trainload of peat enters the reception sidings at the mill. We were fortunate to be shown around the B-n-M workshops at Boora, and the right hand picture shows a former West Clare Railway diesel



railcar carriage being re-furbished for use as staff transport on the extensive rail system here.

After an interesting morning we continued via Portlaoise and Stradbally to Athy, for a late lunch. The CIE station at Athy is on the main Dublin-Waterford line, and here is "A" class diesel no. 50 entering the station.....



The main station house at Athy is unusually set back above the platforms, with a terraced area in front and steps down to the trains.

Unfortunately the very bright sunshine

was not conducive to good pictures at this time of day!



In the late afternoon we visited the Bord-na-Mona system near Athy, this time of only 2ft 0ins gauge. Operations had clearly ceased for the day, but we were able to explore freely; here is the gang with the small diesel loco LM16, on loaded peat wagons of a somewhat different design to the large bogie cars in use at Shannonbridge.....



Saturday was a long day as we headed south-west from Athy to reach the city of Cork by late afternoon. But first we called in again at Athy station to photograph this unusual site in the more favourable early morning lighting conditions. The lads are waiting patiently at the far end of the terrace balustrade.....



We travelled on a much better

main road than any we had so far seen, through Castlecomer and Kilkenny, Kilsheelan and Clonmel, pausing briefly to look at the stations en route, thence to Cahir for lunch. The station here had a fine, large stone main building.....

Thence via Mitchelstown, Fermoy and Carrigohill, we soon arrived at Cobh Harbour, enjoying a stroll in the sun through the town and along the waterfront, also visiting the fine cathedral (below).



The streets look surprisingly deserted for a Saturday afternoon, and likewise the spacious railway terminus station, which displayed an extensive array of wooden signs, but no trains.....



On our way into Cork, we also stopped for a look at the pretty Cobh branch intermediate station of Rushbrooke (right), equally deserted, and Cobh Junction. We visited the main Cork city Kent (formerly Glanmire Road) railway station, to find this former Dublin & South Eastern Railway Bury 2-2-2 locomotive preserved on one of the platforms. Eddie is examining the boiler fittings closely.....



Our second picture at Kent station, above shows “A” class main-line diesel 003 on a train of brand new “Mark 2” style coaches (similar to the contemporary ones entering service on British Railways) awaiting departure for Dublin. In contrast to the modern rolling stock, there is a fine array of lower-quadrant signals still in everyday use at this busy station.

After tea in the city centre we sought out other former railway sites and stations, at Albert Quay, Albert Street and Capwell. The latter was the city terminus of the long-closed Cork & Macroom Railway, whose fine main building was by now in use as Bus Company offices, with the large garage at the rear. Any ideas we might have had about exploring the former platform areas were quickly dispelled by the presence of an armed security guard, who wished to know the nature of our business there. Here is the main building from the road side, on Summer Hill Street South.....



On another fine long evening we followed the route of the old Cork, Blackrock & Passage Railway to its stations at Passage West, Monkstown and Carrigaline, then on to Kinsale where we found accommodation for the night.

Sunday morning, 27th June was spent relaxing by the coast in the glorious sunshine, near The Old Head of Kinsale.....

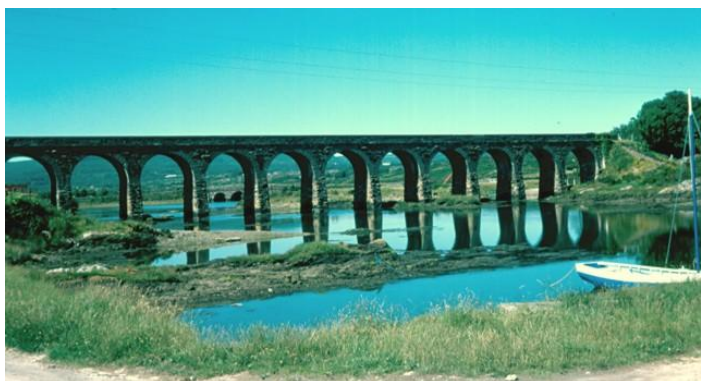
Towards lunchtime we headed for the small market town of Clonakilty, but there was nothing open and we fell back on emergency snack supplies carried in the car for sustenance.

In the centre of town we were surprised to see the communal water pump (right), still very much in use as it appears there was no mains water supply here to many if not all of the properties. This was of course the very hot summer of 1976, and the town may have been experiencing drought conditions, resulting in intermittent supply, with this being a more reliable alternative.

In the afternoon we went on to Skibbereen and Ballydehob, stations on the former Schull & Skibbereen Light



Railway, in essence mainly a roadside tramway, but with an impressive viaduct across the harbour at Roaringwater Bay, Ballydehob, seen here.....



This had been retained as a fine pedestrian promenade, and the view of the quiet harbour was taken from it.

En route to our overnight stop in Bantry, we drove the long way round the peninsula, and stopped to look at the spectacular cliffs at Mizen Head, the south westerly extremity of the Irish mainland.....



Monday morning found us at Waterville, around the Atlantic coast via Glengariff and Kenmare, with more glorious scenery (right).



At Cahirciveen we photographed the old police barracks (below left) and the spindly railway viaduct of the derelict Valentia Harbour branch, crossing over to its former terminus on Valentia Island.....



We followed the route of this old railway via Glenbeigh and Killorglin, en route to Killarney for lunch. Running short of cash, we were dismayed to find that all the banks were closed, apparently one of their periodic nationwide strikes. Accommodation also seemed to be scarce in this busy tourist area, but we managed to find a large country house hotel beside the lake with rooms at a very reasonable rate. They were very laid back about the issue of payment; saying “let’s wait until the morning and try to sort something out then”. (This was well before the days of credit cards and cash dispensers; Eire then had its own currency, the Punt, worth about 93p Sterling, and most establishments were reluctant to accept English money, especially

with the uncertainty at the banks). That settled, we headed south around the lake shore to visit Torc Falls and the magnificent Muckross House for the afternoon.....



Back in town for tea, then we called in at the distinctive and spotlessly clean railway station, where CIE “B” class diesel loco arrived with a train from Tralee, reversed and set off eastwards for Mallow.....

As at Cobh, there was a fine array of wooden bi-lingual signboards on the platform, under the overall roof.

We spent the evening relaxing in the delightful grounds of our accommodation.....



Come Tuesday morning, the banks in Killarney were still not functioning; I forget the exact arrangement we came to regarding payment, but we left our addresses with the hotel management and I believe agreed to send a money order from home to their bank when this re-opened, which was not for about three weeks after we had left!

We headed north, firstly to Farranfore Junction, erstwhile divergence from the main line of the Valentia Harbour railway we had followed the previous day, then west around the Dingle peninsula, looking for the remains of the Tralee & Dingle narrow-gauge system, at Inch, Annascaul and reaching the small town and terminus at Dingle for lunch. In the afternoon we headed back towards the northern coastal road for Tralee, stopping first to see the quaint former railway viaduct at Lispole.....



The former village station building nearby had been converted into a very smart cottage; the narrow-gauge line used to run where the steps and bushes are now.....

The big road junction was near Annascaul, graced with this wonderfully informative set of signs, with the distances we judged by our leisurely progress to be in the legendary “Irish Miles”



The day was another of those very hot and dry ones of that glorious summer, and we found the tarmac starting to melt on some stretches of the main road to Tralee, as can just be seen in the photo. It was impossible to avoid our nice, fairly new little yellow Fiat becoming spattered with tar along both sides, adding to the mud and dust accumulated during our previous travels!



We pressed on somewhat more quickly back to Limerick, and the end of our week’s tour, via Listowel, Tarbert and Foynes. There was time for a short visit to the delightful Bunnary Castle and its Folk Park before it closed for the day (below), before finding tea and accommodation for the night at Sixmilebridge, conveniently near to Shannon Airport for

our early flight to Dublin in the morning



We just about managed to muster enough money between us to pay for the B&B, then Rob and I parted company with Eddie & Charlie temporarily – they caught a bus into Limerick then train to Dublin, where we met up with them again later. We returned the hire car to the office at the airport somewhat sheepishly; we had collected it a week previously with only around 250 miles on the clock, now it had about 1500, nicely run in but in need of a good clean inside and out, not to mention the streaks of tar! Our flight was prompt, and with a bus ride from Dublin Airport and a short walk we arrived at the impressive Heuston (former Kingsbridge) station just in time to meet the other two stepping



off their train. We had until the late afternoon the explore the city, starting of course with the Guinness Brewery tour, conveniently on the way from the station, and the best pint of the black stuff I have ever tasted!



After lunch and a walk around the grounds of Trinity College and the Georgian Squares, we finally parted company with Eddie and Charlie, who were heading to Belfast and Larne for the night. Rob and I caught the bus back to the airport for our evening flight to Liverpool, and we had a couple of hours watching the comings and goings of Aer Lingus's colourful contemporary fleet from the viewing area, using up the rest of our slide film ready for processing at home.....



I wonder whether the BAC 1-11 EI-ANG or 1976 pride of the fleet Boeing 707 EI-ANO (lower right) are perhaps still in service today, somewhere in the world?!

Keith A. Jagers January 2011