

# The Newry and Armagh Railway and Lissummon Tunnel

by JOHN CAMPBELL

On the 14th of January 1965, the rail link to Newry and Warrenpoint was closed when a train left Edward Street Station on its final run to Goraghwood. This single track line has been operating for over 110 years and had been built by two separate companies. The Newry to Warrenpoint section was constructed by "The Newry-Warrenpoint and Rostrevor Railway Company" and the line from Newry to Goraghwood had been built by a company named, at that time, 'The Newry and Enniskillen Railway Company.' Strangely enough, the Newry, Warrenpoint and Rostrevor Company never managed to take the line through to Rostrevor (although a 'railway' Hotel was built there) and while a line did eventually reach Enniskillen, it was not built by the Newry and Enniskillen Company.

As early as 1826, just one year after the opening of the Stockton to Darlington line (the first railway), consideration had been given to the construction of a railway line between the important port of Newry and the historic city of Armagh. In that year a survey was commissioned by a Mr. William Blacker of Elm Park, Co. Armagh, and a report was published. This however came to nothing and it was eight years later, when the first line in Ireland — the Dublin to Kingstown line (over 6 miles long) — was opened on December 17th, 1834.

Two years later two new railway companies were formed. They were the 'Dublin and Drogheda Company,' which was empowered to construct a 32 mile line north from the capital to Drogheda, and the 'Ulster Railway Company,' to construct a 36 mile line from Belfast to Armagh. This latter line had reached Portadown, via Lisburn and Lurgan, by 1842 and the Dublin-Drogheda line had been completed and was opened on the 24th May 1844. That was roughly the position, therefore, when in 1845 the "Newry and Enniskillen Railway Company" was formed to undertake the biggest and most ambitious project to date — the construction of a 72 mile line via Armagh and Clones to the Fermanagh town. However, Parliament had also given approval in the same year to the "Dundalk and Enniskillen Company" to construct a line linking these two towns and insisted that the Clones to Enniskillen section should be

constructed jointly by the two companies. At that time Newry was an important sea port and the promoters argued that the construction of the line would provide more effective access to the port and would benefit the trade of the town generally. The business people were also aware of the rising challenge of Belfast port. A local business man described it:—

"It is within my own memory when all the people from Portadown and the neighbourhood there, went to Newry, and it is within my own recollection when Belfast began to break in upon it. A coach between Armagh and Belfast was established by the Belfast people yet all the coach could carry was four inside and six outside, and that was once the amount of the passenger traffic between the West of Ulster and Belfast. It runs along the line of the old coach road, and now the Ulster Railway carries the people into Belfast along the same line by thousands. At that time the Belfast people started their coach, the Portadown people had to ride their horses 15 miles from Portadown to Newry to transact business, and then they began to tire of that sort of travelling in the winter day, and they began to prefer the coach to Belfast, and the Newry people let them go; and this is part of the way that Belfast has advanced on Newry."

Some idea of the significance of Newry port can be gained from annual returns from the port authorities about that time. There were 117 vessels registered at Newry and in one year 843 vessels had entered the port. The principal trade was with Great Britain and with Liverpool in particular, but ships also sailed from the port to the Continent, America and the Middle East. The trade figures for the year showed £500,000 exports and £600,000 imports.

The proposal to construct the line was greeted with enthusiasm and so in August 1846, having received the necessary parliamentary approval, the Company commenced work on the first section of the line between Newry and Goraghwood. The engineer on this first section was John Godwin, a highly qualified and able man who lived at Rostrevor. The Company was London based and the Chairman was Mr. William F. Spackman, who was allowed considerable freedom in how he conducted the affairs of the Company and in