

Writing about what really matters WomenTalk

ANNE
HAILES



When it's full steam ahead

RIGHT on time the Portrush Flyer pulls into Belfast's Central Station. It's a Saturday morning, the sun is shining, and the excited chatter of the boys and girls almost drowns out the hissing of the powerful engine. Grannies and grandas, experts and amateurs, children of all ages. What is it about a steam train? I used to walk more than a mile in the morning to catch the steam train to school even though there was a bus stop outside the door. I loved the drama and I was in love with a boy from Carrickfergus, that's why I did it! There can be few people who remain unmoved as these metal beasts are held back by the men on the footplate, only to be unleashed when the steam builds up and the whistle blows. Denis Campbell is the inspector in charge of getting us on board. By day he works in the School of Electrical Engineering at Queen's University. However, the rest of the time he surrounds himself with the business of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland, based in the north at Whitehead. In his smart uniform (white shirt and black tie) he cuts a dash and commands respect. He checks his watch, there is a rush of steam and at 21 minutes past nine, it is 'all on board' and we begin to move. With a beating heart, a couple of gentle chugs, the wonderful puff puff puff and we're off to the Port in the one and only Portrush Flyer. What a journey, it's about two-and-a-half hours of fun and fascination. In our carriage we have a cross-section of passengers, right down to a babe in arms. I set off to explore and

in the next carriage I meet up with Rita Henderson, who is manning the tea trolley! "We hope to get a new diner some of these days," she says, "in the meantime we have this moving feast!" Sometimes it is sausages rolls, sandwiches and the like, always coffee and a biscuit. Further along, her husband Derek was sitting with other enthusiasts who time the journey, milepost by milepost, noting the speed between and hoping for a record. These posts were designed so that the drivers could determine exactly where they were on the journey, especially important in case of a breakdown to report their location. Also on board is Gilmour Reid, who earned his living driving a steam train between Belfast and Dublin and Belfast and Bundoran. Peter Scott was on the other side of the corridor, they are all men who keep this society alive. No one seems to be a bit worried about the news that the line might be facing the axe between Coleraine and Portrush. "Been threatened for years, I don't think it will ever happen," is Derek's upbeat prediction. I suppose 40 years ago when the society was formed there was nothing but steam-pulled coaches. Today high speed has taken over and we've lost a

"With a beating heart, a couple of gentle chugs, the wonderful puff puff puff and we're off to the Port in the one and only Portrush Flyer."



■ **TRAIN GANG:** On a unique journey on the Portrush Flyer, Denis Campbell acts as inspector (top), also Noel Playfair and his colleagues work on the footplate (right), while two young boys, David Gourley and David Costley, sell memorabilia....

lot of the style and pride of the past. But by securing a number of these restored locomotives and coaches, the society is giving young people a taste of elegance. Like the two David's for instance, Gourley and Costley, who are in charge of memorabilia and sell souvenirs during the journey to make money to keep these trains on the rails. We stop at Ballymena to take on water and have a chance to wander the platform and talk to fellow passengers. It's here that I discover there's an important touring exhibition doing the rounds at the moment, *All Change: The Social Impact of the Railways*. The exhibition opened in Lisburn last May, appropriate because more than 165 years ago the Lisburn to Belfast line was the first to be built in Northern Ireland. In fact there are two exhibitions running simultaneously, at the Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum until November 6 and in the

Fermanagh County Museum in Enniskillen until August 31. As well as historical facts and artefacts the organisers, the Northern Ireland Regional Curators Group, have produced an excellent book full of interest and illustration. This exhibition, the chance to travel on the Flyer and to visit the workshops in Whitehead, all go towards making an exciting time for those of us who are in awe of this splendid way to travel. Similar journeys in England cost about £100 per ticket, here it's £15, £8 concession and £40 family deal. Money well spent. Our journey was the debut of the public announcement facility so it was a thrill to hear that we were approaching Portrush. Only when we arrived in the station, camera clicking, steam hissing did I get to say thank you to the men on the footplate, Jeff Spencer RPSI driver; John Lockett fireman, also member of the RPSI; and Noel Playfair, Northern Ireland

Railways driver; along with Colum Dillon. They had shifted one-and-a-half tonnes of coal on the 60 or so mile journey at 50 miles an hour, just short of the full line speed of 70mph enjoyed by the more modern engines. A real old fashioned day, steam train to the Port, ice cream and chips and an afternoon in the excellent Barry's. It's not all nostalgia. The young ones were just as hooked as we mature travellers who well remember when every journey had that lovely rhythm known only to the steam train. Try it next Saturday when the Flyer heads north again. Details and booking from Belfast Welcome Centre, Donegall Place. (028) 9024. ■ For more details about the exhibition www.ulsterrailwayexhibition.com and the society web site address is www.rpsi-online.org/ a.hailes@irishnews.com

What we eat affects our brain power

QUITE a few years back, in the days before I discovered the wonderful world of complementary health, I had a brief incarnation as a marketing executive. One of the aspects of marketing which fascinated me was that most of the vital rules within the various systems were completely common sense things that everyone knew. But just one person had written down this wisdom and was able then to call this nugget a theory, and be forever quoted in the desperate writings of hassled students regurgitating facts for their exams. Of course, for the most part, these theories are never really used once you get out there to the real world but someone has died happy, safe in the knowledge that their words would grace essays forever. This concept of stating the obvious and then claiming it as your own is endemic throughout the world, and food writing is no exception. When I look at many of the books which are released on a regular basis, I kick myself that I can't seem to get past my intolerance for claiming something widely accepted as my own and making it pay. Typical titles which I have thought just too passe to possibly comment upon have become bestsellers. For example Gillian McKeith's *You Are What You Eat*. Is that right, Sherlock? Haven't I been saying it for years and seeing the proof, the trick is realising that just because it is commonplace to you, it may not be so to the masses.

ROISIN
ARMSTRONG



I was cruising some literature the other evening looking for inspiration for this article when I found just such another piece of information which I would have thought everyone knew - what we eat affects our brain power! Surely, for generations kids have been forced to eat fish - not just in the pre-Vatican II days - but because it was brain food. Well, apparently food experts have discovered that good nutrition can increase the mental agility of children by 10 per cent. These tests carried out in 1986 proved that giving children nutritional supplements and comparing the before and after results to children given a placebo, those given nutrition showed a greater quickness of mind. A later study of 600 US and UK children confirmed these results. Prior to these studies nutritionists had always argued that only severe malnutrition led to marked changes in mental capacity. The findings

of these tests showed however, that the improvements only happened if there was a deficiency of vitamins and minerals, it did not help to supplement people who were nutritionally sound. One important side issue of this research is the role of nutrition for older people, because (as with children) this can be a time when nutrition is insufficient. It is estimated that 25 per cent of older people are deficient in vitamin B6. This vitamin may be very helpful in cases of memory loss, better in many cases than the more popularly used ginkgo biloba. Tests have shown that taking 20mg per day of this vitamin will improve mental function, most especially long-term memory by up to 40 per cent. To get maximum benefit of this take the supplement as part of a B complex or multivitamin blend. Amino acids can help to stimulate brain function and help to reduce mental decline. I can vouch for that one myself, having taken Acetyl-L-carnatine this year while studying. It definitely helped both focus my mind and also my retention of the information. I took that particular amino acid as it is recommended for those suffering from ME and since I do believe that your cognitive processes are never quite as good after suffering this horrible complaint, as a past victim I needed the help. It works. roisinarms@utvinternet.com

