

tea, or a bag of sugar, or some other treat.

There is a persistent story that survived the news media reporting restrictions during the spring of 1944. At a time when beaches were being utilised for D-Day training, some observant locals were surprised to see two mature-looking men deep in discussion as they walked along Donaghadee's foreshore. The surprise was caused by their recognition of the well-known figures of Winston Churchill and General Dwight Eisenhower.

When V.E. Day eventually arrived the relief was almost overpowering. Street parties were arranged, and life gradually returned to normal. The air-raid shelters came down, the troops disappeared and slowly the range and amount of foodstuffs grew as imports could now arrive safely. The war had been a time of never-to-be-repeated horrors and fears – but the awfulness seemed to heighten awareness of the brevity of life, and this in turn created an atmosphere that had made for a giddy and exciting social whirl.⁸

The end of the line

After the Second World War, a series of unfortunate events conspired to bring about the end of the Belfast-Donaghadee railway. The economics of railway travel were already in doubt when, in 1945, a terrible rail crash near Ballymacarrett took the lives of twenty-two people, and with them most of the B&CDR's very limited contingency fund.

On October 1st 1948, after scarcely any public debate, it was announced that Northern Ireland's railways were to be nationalised. In early 1950, contrary to the wishes of most of their customers, the Northern Ireland Road Transport Board decided to close the railway lines from Belfast to Donaghadee and Newcastle. A few weeks later, on the suitably miserable, wet morning of April 24th 1950, the last train left Donaghadee.

Everyone wanted to say that they had been on the last train, so very seat was taken, even though many tickets were only valid for one stop. Driver Thomas Girvan, fireman James Clegg, and two men with almost eighty years' service between them, William Petticrew and Davis Saunders, bade their farewells to the Donaghadee Stationmaster, another forty-year-man called Alfred Jamison. At the Millisle Road Halt, hordes of passengers dismounted, and hordes more boarded for the next bit of the journey.

Many more found vantage points from which to witness the event. An elderly lady from Ballyvester, Mrs Mary Ann Miskimmon, stood on Semple's Bridge on the Killaughey Road. She had more reason to be there than most. In



Mary Ann Miskimmon, who saw the first train come and the last train go. (Jean Cowan)



1861, at the age of seven, she had watched the first train steam into Donaghadee, the only surviving person known to have done so. She had watched it come in from Logan's Arch at Herdstown, and she was determined to see the last one out.

The closure was intensely unpopular, but the new Ulster Transport Authority was determined that no amount of protest would reopen the lines. Over the subsequent weeks, with what many saw as an indecent haste, level crossings were destroyed and railway lines lifted. Only the bridges and embankments remain to remind us of the railway's former grandeur.

In 2002, there were 2,608 registered motor-cars in the town. What was the figure in 1950? One can hear the answer, 'Maybe a hundred' floating in the air. Those car-owners who journey to Belfast or other towns every day, and those who depend upon bus connections, have lived to deeply regret the short-sighted closure of its rail link.

But Donaghadee weathered the closure. Between 1901 and 2001 its population grew from 2,073 to 6,474.⁹ It now serves Belfast, and places such as Bangor and Newtownards, as a dormitory town. Employers have come and gone. Easily the largest and most unforgettable of these was Cyril Lord, the

Tourism boomed again after the war, until cheap air travel lured tourists off to warmer climes. With its carousel, dodgems and ghost train, Turnbull and Lambe's fun fair was a popular summer attraction during the 1950s-60s. (Funfair, Donaghadee 1963, Elizabeth Taggart)