

Memories of the Railway

Another year has passed and here I go again. This time I would like to tell you a little about the railway, that went through here from Armagh, on through Loughgilly, Goraghwood and on to Newry. The older people like myself will remember it well, the younger generation will scarcely know it existed. Goraghwood was the main line junction, and anyone travelling to Belfast or Dublin had to change there.

My father being a railway man himself and my uncles Joe, Johnny and James Bell also being railway men, I suppose gave me a greater interest in what was going on.

The first train from Armagh was here at 7.45 a.m. and the last one down was at 9 p.m., with a regular service in between. It was a great means of transport both for passengers and goods. For the children it was great excitement going through the waiting room, getting the tickets at the ticket office, and out onto the platform waiting for the train to pull in.

The highlight of this must have been the Sunday School excursions. Mullabrack Church went every year on the 14th July to Warrenpoint, and the Presbyterian Church went in June. Even though the passenger service ended early in 1930 a passenger train came down for the two excursions until late 1940's.

Between Loughgilly and Goraghwood there were the two tunnels. The first one called 'the Wee tunnel' was $\frac{1}{4}$ mile long, and the second one called 'the Big tunnel' or Lissumond tunnel was one mile long. In between was Ballydogherty Halt.

The railway was a great source of employment for the men in and around Markethill. There were a great many men needed to keep the track in perfect condition. They often had to lay down new sections of lines and sleepers. These were the timbers that the lines were attached to with iron spikes, and the lines were joined with very big strong bolts. The men who did this work were called platelayers. There was also a man who had to walk a ten mile section of the line every day to see and make sure that all the bolts were tight. The vibration of the train and the heat could have slackened them. He also had to check that all was safe. The section walked was from here to Goraghwood and back. This man was called a track walker.

Some of the plate layers from around here as I remember them were Ned Keely, Thomas David Compston and my father. They worked between here and Loughgilly. Johnny Mackin, Joe Irwin and Joe Noger were around Goraghwood. Tom Donagh was about Armagh and William Muldrew was in what was called 'the flying squad'. He had to go with his men to difficult places relaying and was based in Enniskillen and come home at weekends. Paddy Hanratty was at Warrenpoint. When my father retired Paddy took over his job which by then was a track walker between here and Goraghwood. Paddy remained at that job until the line finally closed down in 1955.

In between the passenger trains a goods train came from Newry to Armagh and stopped here at one o'clock every day and come back up at four o'clock. On the way down it stopped at Loughgilly bringing coal for Haire's coal store and also raw material for Gray's linen mill at Glenanne. For many years a horse-drawn tram went from Loughgilly to Glenanne taking the raw material up to the mill and the linen back down. After stopping at Loughgilly the train's next stop was here. It brought coal for Sinton's coal store, which was situated on the siding between the goods and the Keady Bridge, also feeding stuff for J. D. Hunter and Robert Doyle and took on eggs and poultry, especially turkeys at Christmas from R. Doyle's for export.

Mr. Mates was the Station Master. He lived in the Station house. The two cottages were built for William Lockart who was signal man, and Barney Donnelly, relief signal man. When Barney was transferred to Carrickmore, Tommy McCreary, another local man, got the job and lived in the cottage. George Bittles was head porter. He was transferred to Goraghwood as platform foreman, then on to the main line station at Bessbrook as station master, after which he came back to Markethill and was in charge, living in the Station house until he retired. After George retired James McCreary came to the Station house. He was a brother of Tommy's. He was there until the line closed in 1955.

Between 1930 and 1955 a goods train came down 3 days each week. It brought down coal and took away the livestock from the mart.

Shortly after the line closed the lines and sleepers were all lifted, and the signal box dismantled and all taken away. That was "Goodbye" to the railway. The Keady Bridge was demolished in 1970 to make changes to the Keady road.

Between the Keady Bridge and the end of the New Line now named "Fairgreen Road", the banks and the track have been levelled and used for building on. First, there is Jim Clark's joinery works, then there is the new telephone exchange and next Haire Brothers sheetmetal works.

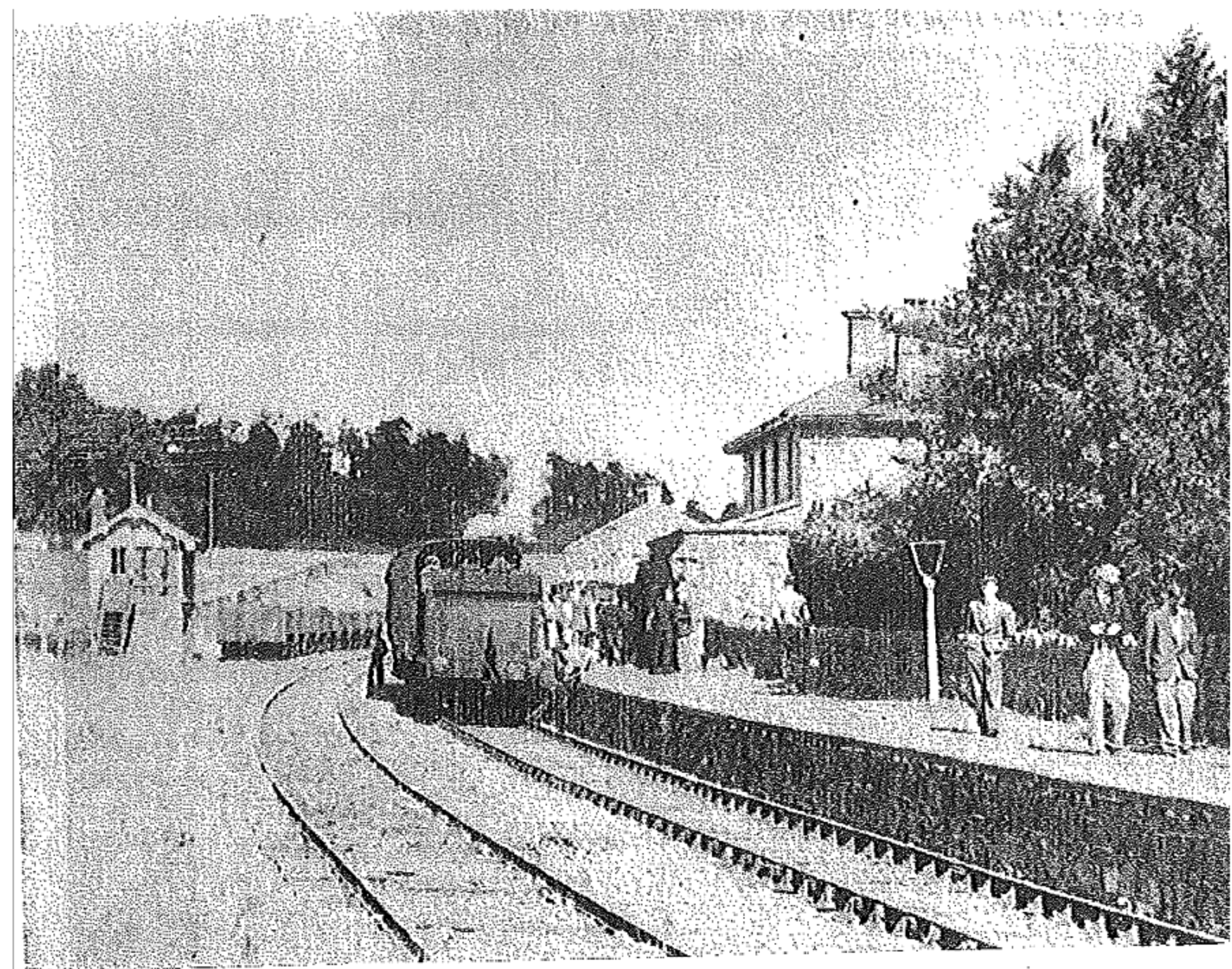
As a matter of local interest a lot of you will remember the first time the Enterprise, "The Bluebird", went from Belfast to Dublin non stop. The driver on the train was a Belfast man, but his father and his uncles were all railway men and came from the Shillinghill, Moyhan.

Did you ever hear the story told of the 'Wee' man that went every day with his donkey and cart to collect the travellers' luggage at Markethill Station. He tied the donkey to the white gate while he was up at the platform waiting for the train. One day two humorous boys in the goods store decided to play a trick on him. They unharnessed the donkey, closed the gate and harnessed her again on the other side with the shafts of the cart through the gate. When he came back with the luggage he looked and looked, gave a bit of a sniff and said "Bessy, how did you get into that mess"!

Now that the G.N.R. line has come to an end I also will come to the end of the line with a little bit of nostalgia.

When evening shades are falling,
And the toils of the day are o'er,
He will always remember
Those by-gone days
And the dear old G.N.R.

TOMMY PICKERING.



Markethill/Armagh Line closed in 1933.

MARKETHILL RAILWAY STATION

Markethill was the principal station on the Newry and Armagh Railway. This company began its life as the Newry and Enniskillen Railway, with plans to extend as far as Sligo, but it was always in financial difficulty and soon decided that Armagh, where it linked with the Ulster Railway from Belfast to Cavan, was a more sensible terminus. Work began at Newry in August 1846 but the first train did not reach a temporary terminus at Drummanmore outside Armagh until August 1864 – 20.75 miles in 18 years. The two tunnels at Loughgilly and Lissumon took a great deal of time and money.

The station at Markethill would have been constructed therefore by 1863. The estimate for its construction was recorded as £5,199, compared with £500 for Loughgilly and for Hamiltonsbawn. James Cochrane of Bellarena, Co. Derry was the first stationmaster at £50 per annum. The total tonnage handled in 1870 as 1738, of which 1257 tons were imported general goods and 516 tons exported general goods, 495 tons of livestock were exported. In 1877 a proposal to build a branch line from Markethill to Keady was mooted but it came to nothing. This would have been an idea of William Kirk the owner of the mills at Darkley and Annvale, who had for years been campaigning for rail convection to his mills.

The navvies who built the line had a fearsome reputation and in 1859, they caused a riot in Markethill, when they attacked John Small of Shanecracken, who sustained severe injuries. A crowd of locals, numbering 3,000 and accompanied by 31 drums assembled a week later and it took a force of 40 police a long time to separate the two crowds. There was no further problem from the navvies, who had caused trouble in Newry for years.

Markethill then settled down to a quiet existence. In 1896, there were six trains a day in both directions – 4 passenger trains from Armagh to Warrenpoint and 2 goods trains, but the opposite working, oddly enough, had one passenger train to Armagh and three mixed trains, i.e. trains which were both passenger and goods. The reason for this would presumably be that the branch always carried much more goods traffic away from Newry than towards it. There was one train on Sundays to Warrenpoint at 9.20, back in Markethill at 7.30.

Of course there were many excursions, mainly Sunday School, to Warrenpoint. After the 1888 disaster near Armagh, when 80 people were killed, the number of excursions fell away badly, but it gradually built up again. By the summer of 1932 (the last summer of through working on the branch), the pattern of working had changed remarkably little. Four passenger trains a day in both directions ran, plus a Thursdays only from Newry. The Sunday train to Warrenpoint now left at 2.20 and was back at 9.55.

However in 1933, there was a rail strike, which had disastrous consequences. It lasted 11 weeks, caused the loss of many railwaymen's jobs, and led directly to the closure of the Armagh - Markethill section of the branch. The comment of one

Armagh newspaper at the time was that "neither Armagh nor Markethill asks for a resumption" of rail service. At all events, the track was lifted soon afterwards and Markethill's last 22 years as a railway outpost were concerned entirely with the Goragwood link. No regular passenger trains ran over the 8.75 miles to the main line junction – occasional specials and excursions ran, but really the only traffic was the monthly Fair Day special and occasional coal trains from Newry.

Mrs. Mary Cullen of Ashgrove, Markethill tells how her father, George Bittles came to work at Markethill Station as a porter boy, just after the turn of the century. He worked under the Station Master, who was a Mr. Mates.

From Markethill, he was transferred to Goragwood Station, and worked there until 1929, when he was once again moved – this time to Bessbrook as Station Master. George was at Bessbrook up until 1948, and Mary recalls that the Station Master in Markethill, Mr. Billy Lockhart, died then. After Mr. Lockhart's death, George Bittles was told that there were two vacancies – one in Sion Mills and one in Markethill – and was asked which one he would take. As George's wife had connections with Mullabrack Church, he decided to come to Markethill, as Station Master. There were six members of the Bittles family, who worked with the railway at Markethill, from time to time and Mary also remembers Tommy and Jimmy McCreery, who worked in the station.

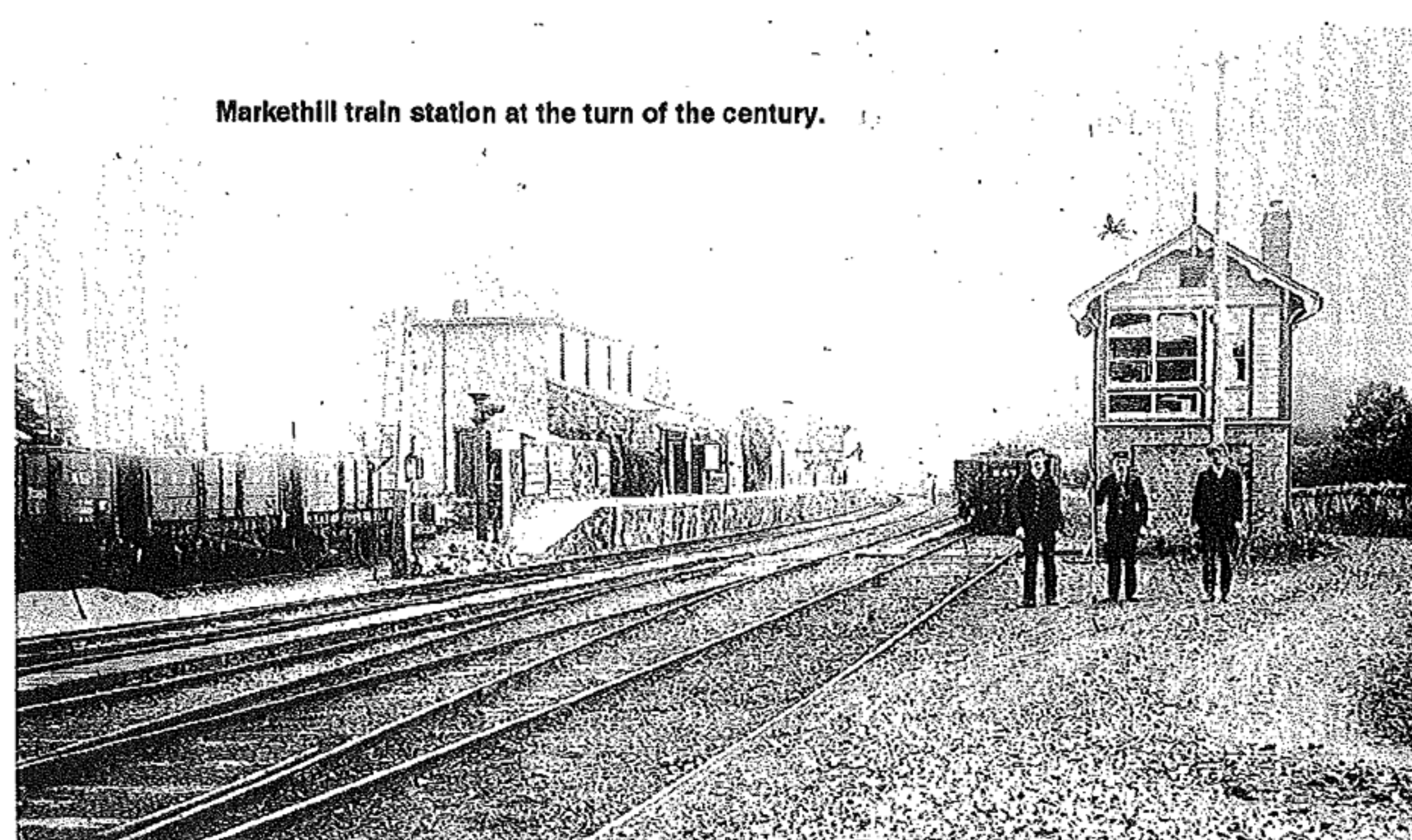
Mrs. Nora Allen of Main Street, Markethill recollects that Mr. Mates came to the Station as Master in 1900. A Mr. Thompson took over around 1933, which was the time the passenger trains stopped, and there were then mainly goods trains. The sheep were weighed in a shed on the railway platform, when they were brought to the Fair.

Mr. Noel Dalzell relates that he started business in Markethill around 40 years ago and remembers the cattle being graded up at the Market House (Alexanders) and then being put on the train monthly, to go to the factory. The furniture was also brought by train to Markethill. The Ammonia, fertilisers and animal feeds all came by train to be delivered at Doyles. Other people who worked at the station were Jack McStay, Joe Davidson and Isaac Jameson, who brought the suitcases for the Travellers, in a truck into town and back to the station, with their goods – china, cutlery, mats, clothes etc., – to get orders from the shops.

During the time that there were mainly goods trains, Mary, Nora and Noel all remember the excursions from the Presbyterian Church in June and the Mullabrack Church on the 14th of July, to Warrenpoint. Everyone was treated to tea and two buns in a bag in a big corrugated iron shed at the side of the railway in Warrenpoint. The Pipe band travelled with everyone, and paraded at Warrenpoint, followed by the people on the excursion, and there were nearly as many people waiting at the station in Markethill for their return in the evening. The numbers at these excursions would have been very large and on the year following the closure of the railway, there were up to 28 buses left Markethill on the excursion. For most people then, this was a very special occasion, as it would have been their outing of the year.



A view of Markethill Main Street in the early 1900's.



Markethill train station at the turn of the century.

This Copy to be handed or sent to the Producer or the Person acting on his behalf.

CERTIFICATE 'A.'

Serial No 79441

THIS FORM IS TO BE USED ONLY WHEN THE CERTIFYING OFFICER IS (a) IN A POSITION TO CERTIFY THAT THE SALE OF THE ANIMAL OR ANIMALS HAS TAKEN PLACE, AND (b) CAN GIVE ALL THE NECESSARY PARTICULARS OF THE ANIMAL OR ANIMALS.

Cattle Industry (Emergency Provisions) Act, 1934.

Certification Centre Markethill Co Armagh.

I HEREBY CERTIFY that

Four animal(s)
Four heifer(s).
Four cow heifer(s).

Insert IN WORDS the number of each class and strike out words not applicable.

particulars of which are given opposite, has/have this day been presented to the Certifying Authority under the above-mentioned Act by or on behalf of:-

Name in full MR. ROBERT DOYLE

Address in full MARKETHILL
CO ARMAGH

State whether Mr., Mrs. or Miss, and please write in BLOCK Capitals.

who is a producer of cattle within the meaning of the Act, that the Certifying Authority has examined the animal(s) and found it/them to be (an) animal(s) in respect of which the producer is eligible to receive payment in accordance with the provisions of the Act; that the said animal(s) has/have been marked in accordance with the arrangements referred to in Section 2 of the Act; that the said animal(s) has/have been sold to the above-mentioned producer on the 19th day of October, 1934, and that the weight(s) of the said animal(s) is/are as stated.

Dated this 19th day of October 1934

Signed W. McConnell
Certifying Officer.

* Note on Weight.

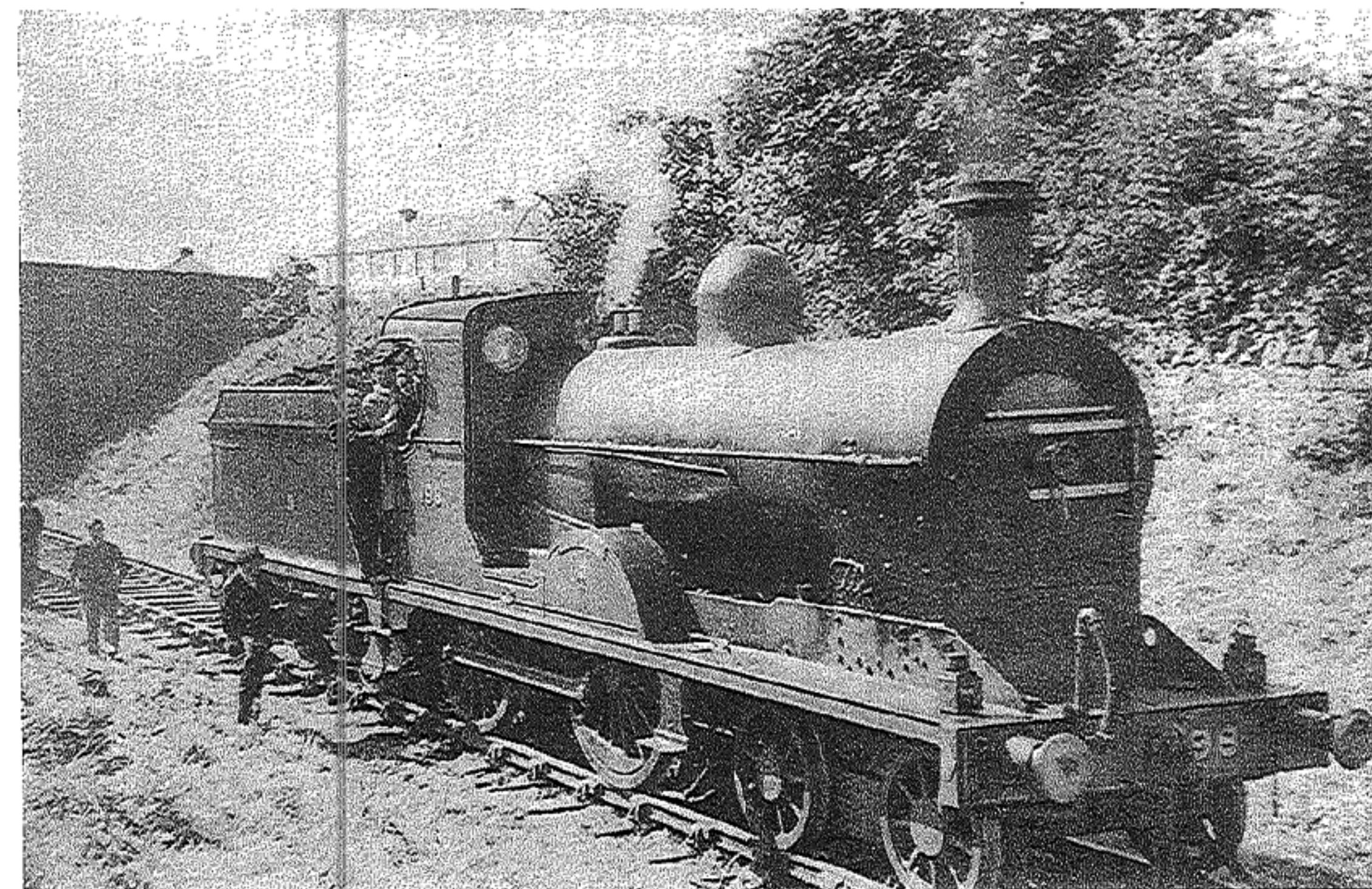
The weight of each animal specified in this certificate is the actual weight of the animal to the nearest quarter of a hundredweight. For the purpose of computing the amount of the payment to be made to the producer under the Cattle Industry (Emergency Provisions) Act, 1934, a deduction of 23 lb. from the actual weight in respect of each animal will be made by the Cattle Committee.

PARTICULARS OF ANIMAL(S) CERTIFIED

(Note.—A separate line must be used for each animal.)

(Quote this Number in any communication regarding this Certificate)

Animal's Identification Number (if any).	Colour of Animal.	Class and Weight (see Note *).				Price realised on Sale.		
		Steer.	Heifer.	Cow Heifer.		£	s.	d.
(1)	<u>R. Roan</u>		<u>11</u>	<u>0</u>		<u>33/- per Cwt.</u>		
(2)	<u>R. Roan</u>		<u>10</u>	<u>1</u>				
(3)	<u>Red white</u>		<u>11</u>	<u>0</u>				
(4)	<u>Black white</u>		<u>10</u>	<u>3</u>				
(5)								
(6)								
(7)								
(8)								
(9)								
(10)								
(11)								
(12)								
Totals			<u>43</u>	<u>0</u>				



G.N.R. (I) No. 198 "Lough Swilly" at Markethill 1953.