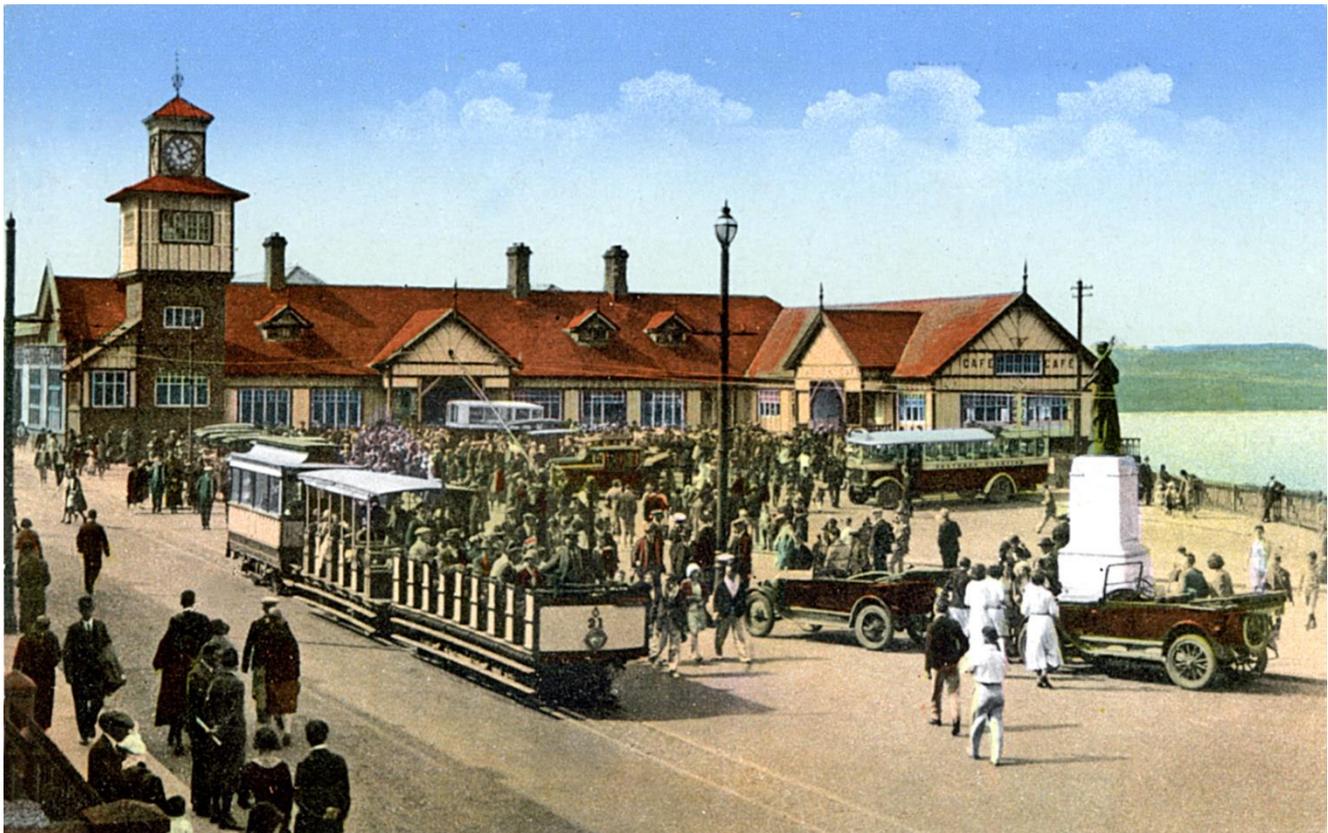


DAUGHTER OF CAUSEWAY TRAM PIONEER WAS ALSO A TRAILBLAZER

(By Maurice McAleese)

William Acheson Trill carved a niche for himself as a pioneer of electric traction, establishing the world's first hydro-electric tramway which began operating between Portrush and the Giant's Causeway in 1883.



Trill's Tram leaving Portrush Station bound for Giant's Causeway. Image courtesy of John Moore Collection

A lot has been written about the famous County Antrim man and his engineering exploits but what is not so well-known perhaps is that his daughter, May, also made a name for herself in broadly the same sphere of endeavour.

Her particular claim to fame was highlighted in a report I came across in a newspaper archive of a sporting event in England in January, 1918 – a ladies football match, no less, in which she was described as the star player.

The match was between teams from Southampton and Portsmouth played at the Dell, Southampton. Miss Trill was 22 years old at the time and the correspondent reporting on

the match had much praise for her skill and energy, attributes which were “greatly admired by a big holiday crowd.”



1917 - Government Rolling Mills Ladies (Woolston, Southampton) (the player holding the ball is May Traill, captain of the team) (photograph courtesy of John M Vaughn III)

Some information was also given about her family background and her achievements off the soccer pitch. It was explained that she was the daughter of William A. Traill, C.E., Managing Director of the Giant’s Causeway Electrical Tramway, the premier electric tramway in the world.

“Miss Traill,” it was noted, “has been at war work for upwards of two years – first as chauffeuse to the Ministry of Munitions, being attached to the Army Service Corps, and wearing its badge and khaki uniform. After some ten months working in London she was transferred as ‘electric driver’ at the power-house of the new Government rolling mills near Southampton where she had under her charge an electricity plant of 10,000 h.p., a post never before undertaken by any woman in this country.”

That writer went on to suggest that “surely there must be something heredity, when a daughter of the pioneer of electric traction shows such an aptitude for this type of work.”



Apparently Miss Traill took a hands-on approach to her job – after just 12 months in the post she was about to embark on another facet of this vital work by going “on the floor” of the fitting shops in order to qualify as an expert fitter as well. Considering the fact that “this remarkable young lady” was still only 22, her dedication was to be highly commended.

I’m sure that May Traill, as a young girl, would have travelled on the old trams on many occasions to and from the Causeway with her father. Perhaps it was while on one of these trips that she began to think about following in his engineering footsteps.

The old trams stopped running in 1949 and by 1951 the last remnants of the track had been removed and the rolling stock sold, mostly for scrap. One day, hopefully, Portrush and other places along the line will have some kind of memorial to mark this important chapter in the annals of transport history.

Our thanks to Maurice for this excellent contribution to our Heritage Newsletters.
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