



DUBLIN

Grant News: It is pleasing to report that the Heritage Council have approved a grant application to help fund a replacement steam-heating boiler for BR Van 3173.

The smooth running of this van is vital to Dublin operations using the Cravens carriages, so well done to all involved in the grant application.

WHITEHEAD

A Big Shunt: An informal Zoom focus-group meeting was convened on 18th March by those from the Belfast Area (although one was on a balcony south of Barcelona with a BBQ) who were increasingly of the highly concerning thought that complacency had set in and that the mainline was not going to happen again in the north unless it was taken by the scruff of the neck. The metaphorical can was kicked around and two major priorities identified. The Mk2 Carriages had a backlog of routine maintenance arrears which simply ruled out more than a few of them from going forward for re-certification; and that NIR required formally approached in a focussed manner and (nicely) pressed towards remembering that we are still here and furthermore that we are wanting back out.

A second fat-chewing meeting on 19th May (with the Barcelona attendee having moved to the Nürburgring - some people have 'essential jobs') identified these are both progressing most satisfactorily and a target of the latter portion of the summer for the first mainline train since December 2019 is certainly shaping up. Whilst the wheels begin to turn again in terms of focussed meetings between the General Manager and others with NIR, the details of this are not really for here and so we will look at Mk2 carriages. To these an enormous amount of work has been being carried out in the last two months (with more to follow) and I attempt to detail the headline aspects of it. Get a blank page and see if you can follow!

27th March: No.3BG "Guinness" was steamed and brought 463 to the heavy lift. There, one end was lifted so that a works bogie, which had been substituting for one which required attention since October, could be replaced with the original, now refurbished. Following this, 547 was then brought to the heavy lift and one of her bogies extracted and replaced with the works one ex-463. Finally, 301 was brought to the heavy lift and one of her (now life-expired) bogies removed and the good one ex-547 put in.

28th March: No.3BG did a double-day weekend and was steamed to shunt the

handcrane. This was used to lift dismantled bogie components from carriage shed B-Road and bring them to the 2-Road concrete apron for power-washing; and then return them to B-Road for painting. These components, including bolsters and spring planks, will go into refurbished bogies for 302. With the unavailability of the Dunleath Workshop due to 105 and HEI projects which appear to have been given priority status, an approximate one Mk2 length area of B-Road just inside the Belfast end roller shutter door of the carriage shed has been requisitioned as a bogie dismantling, inspection, refurbishment and re-building area, and currently contains 4 bogies in various states of completeness - 2 for 302 and 2 for 181. Overhead cranes being limited to the Dunleath, bogie-building now relies on the handcrane, an 'exertion crew' for it, and a further crew for No.3BG.

10th April: No.3BG was steamed to conduct a general yard tidy to make carriage shunting easier, and to position 301 over the A-Road pit for vacuum cylinder fitting, these being fitted on 11th April.

17th April: No.3BG was steamed and used to take 301 and 547, in turn, to the turntable, turning them. These coaches had had their Belfast-end bogies swapped on 27th March and were now to have what were their Larne end bogies swapped, but were now their Belfast end-bogies. 547 was lifted first and the good bogie extracted and replaced with the life-expired one taken from 301 on 27th March. 301 then had her second life-expired bogie removed and replaced with the second good one from 547. Whilst of course we have two gantries, it is preferred not to lift both ends of a carriage at once, such that it is totally suspended and both bogies swapped at once, where this can be avoided. No.131 was pulled out at the end of the day. Did someone say 300 was turned also to allow access to corrosion on what had been the western side?

The result of this is 301 now sits on good bogies and 547 now sits on life-expired ones. 547 is described by the Carriage Officer as 'the only failure of 2020', her electrics having somehow come a major cropper in storage, with nobody seeming to know how, meaning she is now withdrawn.

18th April: 301 and 463's bogies having been got into shape, this now gave 5 coaches in line for service. Focus now switched to the intended sixth, 302, residing in the paintshop at the rear of D-Road, this track running through the Museum entrance of the carriage shed and also containing 861 in the Carriage Workshop. No.3BG was steamed (another double-day weekend for it) to swap 180 (8 Mk2-lengths back in A-Road, last save the short grain van 504) with 302 in the D-Road paintshop: behind the Gatwicks, steam crane, museum section and 861. Technically the withdrawn 547 took up the actual spot vacated by 180, and 302 went to the Belfast end of the carriage shed over A-Road pit to allow vacuum cylinder swapping - so it wasn't a complete swap, but that's a technicality. A general tidy up of the decrepit stock was also performed; but there's only so much can be done - a constant bugbear on big shunt days this stuff. Two Gatwicks were used as barrier vehicles to fish out 861 and 302, and then replace 861 and 180 so that No.3BG did not need to enter the museum foyer or workshop area

with its myriad plastic strip curtains. Turning 861 such that HEI could access the side against the wall of the workshop was contemplated but measurement revealed she had a wheelbase 10 inches longer than the turntable.

Also on this date, No.131 was quietly steamed, for the first time since September 2020, in a preparatory steam-test.

24th & 25th April: No.3BG slept this weekend out whilst carriage activity progressed inside the carriage shed, but on 25th No.131 had a further steam test and performed the minor job of handcraning a gangway for refurbishment for 302 into the carriage shed, a job which had been overlooked the previous weekend.

2nd May: No.3BG steamed for an early start - as shunts go - of 09:30 to get the various bits of Drumboe into the Dunleath workshop, 2 days over the 15 years since it first arrived on site. The idea was to place the 3ft-gauge Drumboe (on its transporter wagon) into the workshop and leave this to be lifted off, coming back after some handcraning to retrieve the wagon and swap it for the one carrying Drumboe's boiler, such that that could then be lifted off. However failure of the crane to lift Drumboe put a kybosh on much of the day from the get-go and No.3BG (and it has to be said her driver) spent much of the day simmering beside the carriage shed in between using the handcrane to construct a bolster / spring plank assembly (some of the ones power-washed on 28th March) for the first refurbished bogie which will go under 302.

8th & 9th May: There was no engine requirement but a very long list of carriage work was completed including installing vacuum cylinders, brake components, resolving door lock gremlins, further construction of the first new bogie for 302, light cleaning, painting and refurbishment and fitting of rubber to 302's new gangway (sitting on the ground). On 8th May there was a possible record for carriage work in recent times - 10 bodies working at them, half from the operating roster, many of whom have loaned themselves to the Carriage Officer these last few months; no carriages, no operations! The prospect of a lunch from Platform 3 maybe helped this!

13th May: On a glorious day, of a type which are very much in short supply when steam-raising these years, No.131 passed her steam test. She was cleaned in the sunshine (along with the inside of No.3BG's cab) and was briefly posed at the platform for publicity photos for the upcoming Train Rides. A loco in the bag for mainline operations - now back to those carriages!

15th May: A busy day in the carriage shed, to which the General Manager paid a visit.

16th May: Drumboe having descended from her transporter wagon by way of removal of her pony truck and bogie lightening the load, No.3BG had another busy day putting the boiler for Drumboe (which has been residing on flat wagon C309) into the Dunleath workshop before pulling out 302 and fetching the handcrane and the refurbished gangway and then installing this onto 302. The handcrane was then brought to A-Road, inside the shed over the pit, a regular spot for it these weeks, from where it can reach across to the bogie-building area of B-Road. On this day it lifted the

frames for the first bogie for 302 and set them on the wheelsets, before assembling the spring plank / bolster assembly for the second bogie. The wheelsets for this second bogie are in the Dunleath workshop (as they needed lathing) and it is intended to fit their axleboxes on the weekend of 29th-31st May and bring them round to the carriage shed to meet their bogie on the weekend of 5th/6th June.

At the end of the day, No.131 was pulled out and coaled as the steam test on 13th May finished off the tender, last filled following the last Santa Train in December 2019. A rough count suggests no less than 8 yard steaming days were got out of it, although there may just have been one or two more.

22nd May: This was another day working at carriages in the shed.

23rd May: On an abominable day (there's no way we used to get as many of them when we steamed engines, I'm sure they used to be able to be cleaned much more regularly in the sunshine in the summer small hours) No.3BG was steamed relatively late in order to shunt at 15:00. This was to pull out most of the stock in A-Road in order to swap the Train Rides stock of 68 and 81 from towards the Larne end of the shed (they were the seventh and eighth vehicles in the shed out of 10) up to over the pit at the Belfast end where they are readily available for No.131 to collect on Saturday 29th. Unfortunately, the use of No.3BG's vacuum brake when shunting revealed an issue with one of 460's vacuum cylinders which will now also need to go on the list for attention - just when you think it's getting shorter! A marathon painting session is planned for the Mk2s over the coming Bank Holiday weekend.

In the next month, working around Train Rides, 302 will be able to be re-bogied (giving 6 coaches) and attention will then switch to 181, the bogies for which are already assembled but await final clearance examination. All this will result in a 7-coach train 460-300-301-302-303-181-463 going forward for acceptance to get back on the rails, hopefully in the latter portion of the summer following audits and certification. It does feel like something of a Herculean carriage effort and Phillip Newell, his regular small carriage squad and the operating roster who have stepped in to help him are to be congratulated. Phillip has co-ordinated his expanded workforce very well and has achieved much. 180 will be the next carriage for overhaul, giving an 8-coach rake, although an issue will be that the operating roster will undoubtedly begin to take their focus off directly helping the Carriage Officer as weekend operations resume.

Phew - and all done under COVID restrictions!

68, Can't Be Late: Robin Morton has penned a short story about Coach 68 and its interesting life story. Ian Sinclair has kindly made a recording of the story with excellent sound effects.

The story can be found on the website as a News item or on 68's own webpage.