

JANUARY 1983 NEWS-SHEET

HAPPY NEW YEAR: We're back. Apologies to you for the break in transmission since last Autumn, but this is a bumper bundle to enable you to catch up on all the news. The circular had been delayed in the hopes that Five Foot Three might be available in time for Christmas, but that didn't happen, unfortunately. We now hope the next mailing will be towards the end of February and will include two-lay tour information, the AGM reports ... and your very own Five Foot Three.

WHAT A CHRISTMAS: As mentioned in the Irish Steam Scene circular, it was a bumper Christmas at Whitehead. Santa was wiping the sweat from his brow as some 2,500 visitors trekked through the grotto - it was a record. All the visitors appreciated the personal attention and waited on despite having to stand in the cold for a while. Santa received many letters of thanks and nicest of all was one completely unsolicited letter of praise which one visitor sent in to the Belfast Telegraph. He praised the friendly staff, the top-grade Santa, and concluded "Keep up the good work, lads." Rest assured.

A TEAM EFFORT: The Santa operation was a real team effort and on the loco front it was far from plain sailing. At Whitehead, the original plan had been to use the Derry engine, No.3, but she was out of traffic with axlebox trouble which took longer to cure than expected. 171, which had been "mothballed" for the winter, had to be put into traffic in her place. At Mullingar work on retubing 184 took longer than expected, and the plan had to be changed at the last minute. In the end, 184 passed her hydraulic test on December 13, her steam test on December 15, and then operated Santa trains at Athlone on December 18, followed by the same operation at Mullingar on December 19. As usual, all the work fell on a very few shoulders, and it all went to underline the need for more help from you, the members.

NEWS FROM THE SHEDS: A quick recap on the current loco position:

- 3 The Derry engine is still sitting over the wheel-drop at Whitehead, minus leading axle. Axleboxes have been re-metalled and new journals fitted, and the engine has been partially re-tubed.
- 4 The motion on the 2-6-4T has been dismantled, and the wheels will be taken out once the wheel-drop is clear for use. Target is to start running in at Easter.
- 171 New chimney required (see accompanying circular). Some minor repairs and renewals are taking place.
- 184 Loco completely re-tubed (130 new tubes), and other overhaul work included welding the firehole ring, building up the firebox by re-riveting.
- 23 Our trusty diesel needs a new coat of paint - any volunteers?
- Carlow Diesel The second diesel has had its "donkey engine" (the device for building up air to start the engine) removed for repairs.
- Tender The large tender from Mullingar has been receiving repair work at Whitehead and so for the Santa trains 184 had to run with the old small capacity outside spring tender. The large tender should be back with 184 for the two-day tour.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY: Just in case you're confused by this welter of information, here's a quick rundown of coming events:

Tue Jan 18 Fred Cooper's Vintage Steam Cinema, Belfast meeting at St Jude's Hall, 19.30.

Thu Jan 20 Film show in DUBLIN. Norman Foster showing slides of European & South African steam at IRRS, 30 Lower Drumcondra 20.00.

Fri Feb 4 RPSI Soiree, Drumkeen Hotel, 19.30.

Fri Feb 11 RPSI AGM, Belfast Rowing Club, 19.45.

Tue Feb 15 Giant's Causeway Centenary night at the Belfast area meeting, St Jude's Hall, 19.30.

Tue Mar 15 Ten Years of the Portrush Flyer, St Jude's Hall, Belfast, 19.30.

Don't forget, you can always get the latest info by ringing the RPSI ansaphone at Whitehead 78567.

LIFE OF WAGNER: 171 must be getting quite blasé about the movie world these days. Our 1913-built star was on cue again for a day's filming at Dublin Heuston on Tuesday September 28. The film, starring Richard Burton and Gemma Craven is, we understand, destined for Channel Four. 171, which had worked down to Dublin on the September 25 Shoppers' Special, returned to Whitehead on Wednesday September 29. Just for the record, the second Steam Enterprise, on September 18, was a magnificent success, with all 360 seats on the train taken and another sparkling performance from 171.

ONE TRACK MASTERMIND: If Magnus Magnusson is looking for a real competition anytime, he could try taking on the RPSI "Timers" team. The Timers, comprising Nelson Poots, Irwin Pryce and Bob Hunter, swept home to victory in the Belfast area Christmas quiz on December 14. Six teams took part - the Stuffers, Great Northern, Irish Steam Scene, The Lady Victoria, and Railtours, who were beaten finalists. Our thanks to all who took part, and to the very efficient quizmaster, Sullivan Boomer, and scorekeeper Charles Friel. Trophies and plaques were awarded to the members of the winning team and runners-up.

* For the uninitiated, the "Stufflers" are the folk who fold your circulars and insert them into the envelope!

BRANCHING OUT: The latest on the branchline front is that the Society is negotiating with Banbridge Council with a view to the acquisition of Lawrencetown station site, which has now been made available by the Department of the Environment. Information is still being gathered about the setting up of a limited company, but it has been established that the name "Banbridge Junction Railway Company" is available from the Companies Register. Talks have also been held with the Department of Economic Development about the possibility of grant aid from the Government.

FOR PEAT'S SAKE: The Society is currently giving shelter to two narrow gauge diesel locos from the Maghery Peat Bog Railway at Portadown. The engines have been restored by the Department of the Environment Conservation Branch and will ultimately be used at a folk park style development at Maghery.

WHEEL LATHE LATEST: Work is proceeding apace at Whitehead on the building of a wheel lathe to accompany the wheel-drop. The lathe, which came from Belfast York Road, is now 90 pc assembled, and the next job is roofing the lathe house. Parts were assembled by judicious use of the rail-mounted hand crane, which having to hire in machinery. The 6½ ton crane,

positioned on track which had been slewed for the NIACRO scheme, was just the job.

INITIAL REPORTS: First things first. NIACRO stands for the "Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders", and they are due to start a scheme at Whitehead in the spring. The idea is that they will teach new skills to teenagers by having them work on the restoration of RPSI carriages. The squads will be supervised closely, and the scheme, will probably last for two years at least, will involve 22 unemployed teenagers and four supervisors. The scheme has now received approval from the Treasury, so things should start happening shortly. Needless to say, wages cost the Society nothing, but we are responsible for supplying some finance towards materials.

A TRUMP CARD: The Society played its ACE card again in September. ACE, standing for "Action through Community Effort" is the scheme whereby the Society pays 10 pc of the wage bill, and the Government pays the other 90 pc, with the Society supplying materials. The trouble is the personnel have to change every 12 months, so in September we had to bid farewell to the trio who started in September 1981. Thanks to the efforts of the treasurer, John Richardson, a new trio were recruited pronto and everything has been working out very satisfactorily. The new team comprise a welder, and two joiners, and their efforts have given Whitehead a major, boost.

BY APPOINTMENT: The following PSRs have been appointed:

Rory McNamee, acting locomotive maintenance PSR at Mullingar.
Denis McCabe, acting carriage running PSR, Mullingar.

IN THE PICTURE: An appeal from Dr D.B. McNeill, to those who attended his highly successful Belfast area meeting in November. Apparently, when Dr McNeill got home he realised a postcard showing a double-headed Clogher Valley train had fallen out of his file. If anyone found it, please contact Dr McNeill. Incidentally, Dr McNeill has promised a talk on the SL&NCR for next winter.

ATLANTIC VIEW: Work on the carriage front has been concentrating at Whitehead on two vehicles - the North Atlantic NCC 91, and the Great Southern all-1st side corridor 1142. Great inroads are being made, with the ACE squad busy during the week, and RPSI volunteers at the weekend. Also receiving attention from the mid-week squad of retired members is the second diner, 87.

NEXT CIRCULAR: Hopefully you should be receiving your magazine, etc., sometime in February.

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