

The Bogieman's Gazette

APRIL 1992

What's 400 feet long, 35 feet wide, and as tall as a house? A Carriage Shed, of course! At least that describes the one at Whitehead reasonably well. It is very nearly finished - indeed by the time that you read this it probably will be complete. There was a little slippage of the contract, which is builder-speak for delays, but these were outside the control of everyone. The Weathermen must have decided we were having it too easy, for the bricklayers building the side walls were delayed by heavy rain and high winds, and the wind also prevented the cladding going on as quickly as expected. Would you like to try to manoeuvre panels of steel cladding about 4 feet wide by 12 feet long in a wind speed of around 55 mph plus when you're anything from 10 to 25 feet above the ground?

The shed will be complete by Easter, and already Carriage Siding No.2 runs the whole way through, and coaches are stored on it! Our Site Officer Dermot Mackie has been working like a Trojan, and has used up all the track panels which he had pre-assembled. He needs about 4 or 5 to finish laying No.1 siding through the shed, and proposes to relay No.2 siding over the next few months as well, as all the new trackwork is on concrete sleepers. His small but dedicated band of helpers, who like the rest of us knew nothing about permanent way work when they started, have become very skilled indeed, and are now starting to assemble the next sets of panels on the platform, using the JCB and the hand crane.

At the moment there are no services in the Carriage Shed, although provision is being made for the installation of electricity, water and compressed air. It is planned to gradually install the lighting over the summer, if manpower and finance permits, with the power outlets to follow as soon as practicable, so that the shed can be used for minor repair and valeting work. Indeed, some minor works

have already been carried out on coaches in the shed, and those of us who have been involved can testify that it is an absolute dream to be able to work in dry conditions, and eventually in draught-free ones as well!

While we're on the subject, what's 90 feet long and around 20 feet wide, with no height but a little depth? Give up? Between No.1 Shed Road and the Carriage Shed, running up to the embankment surrounding the Water Tower, the contractor is working at a continuation contract, and is installing the concrete base for the Heavy Lift area, complete with a shallow pit, which will make working under coaches at the brakes and running gear very much easier. Over the next couple of weekends, while we have a crane on site for other jobs, we'll be getting the sheer-legs lifted out to an accessible place so that they can be cleaned down, probably with a needle scaler and wire brush, and painted, ready to be erected. New lifting cable is being ordered for them, and the electrical connections and control gear will have to be organised before they are ready for use. Hopefully Dermot will be able to lay in the new turnout sometime in early to mid summer to connect the lifting bay to the rest of the site. As soon as it's commissioned, we've got several vehicles which will be going through the lifting process as soon as possible to allow essential preventative maintenance work to be carried out on bogies and running gear, and our own lift facility will save us hundreds of pounds. At present, to hire a crane in to lift the entire running rake (which takes 2 to 3 weekends at least) costs us over £1,000!

As you will realise, things are moving ahead steadily, although it must also be reported that the train was inspected just before its return from Dublin, and a number of defects were noted against vehicles; it is a fact that only two

coaches escaped with a single defect against them, and none of us were surprised! Let's look at some stark and I'm afraid, rather unpleasant facts. Over the last couple or three years the only money spent on our coaches, outside of any grant aided schemes or long term contractual commitments like Whitehead Railway Project, has been the bare minimum to keep them running. Planned Maintenance is an ideal which has never been achieved. The onset of our recent critical locomotive situation required a re-allocation of funding, and the carriage maintenance budget, along with all others, was reduced effectively to zero. We're not complaining about that, but it does mean that we now have a backlog of essential maintenance to complete, and the inspections are now more thorough and searching. This, however, is a good thing, and we can at least say that when a vehicle is now certified "fit for traffic" it most assuredly is fit to run.

The other problem we have faced is the fact that the Whitehead Carriage Maintenance Team fell to 2 members. If we count in Alan McRoberts' Coach Cleaning Squad it comes up to a more respectable 3! Over the last few weeks, as the pressure has come on, several members have rallied round to help, and the numbers have increased to around 7 workers (although the cleaning squad is still only 1), and that includes a couple of Council members, one of whom has surprised everybody by being quite a useful chap when it comes to running gear overhaul! Recent appeals to local members, both through the circulars and the Belfast meetings, have produced an influx of ... no-one! A couple of phone calls to the usual willing few did as ever produce a maximum effort, but if there is anyone out there who would help in any way, even giving Alan a hand in the cleaning, please, please phone or write, but let us know, and come down between now and the Saturday after Easter, excepting Sunday 12 April, and you will find you will be made most welcome.

Now, a quick review of the coaches in detail.

9 - Hopefully when you read this she will be in Whitehead. The bearing which failed on the way to Dublin was repaired in Drogheda, and the coach was picked up by the rest of our set returning north. Although limited to a 20 mph maximum speed as far as Dundalk, when she got there the bearing had again failed quite catastrophically. A replacement was prepared in Whitehead and taken to Dundalk where it was fitted, and the coach was worked to Portadown at a modest speed by a ballast train. On the way the bearing gave out again. Whitehead locomotive department has helped out, Peter Scott having taken on board the replacement and recovery of the vehicle. However, when she reaches Whitehead No.9 will need extensive examination and overhaul of her running gear, including lifting to service the bogie pivots and the replacement of several wheel bearings; she may even get a full set! She is likely to be out of traffic for the early part of the summer, but hopefully can be ready for the "Portrush Flyer" season. It all depends on manpower really.

87 - Fitting out of this vehicle is coming to an end, but we're at that awkward stage where we're trying to dovetail jobs together; the gas installation can't be completed until the stainless steel panels for the kitchen have been fitted, and they are tied in with the plumbing, which is going ahead as quickly as possible, but has to wait for some alterations to the stainless steel, and ... well, you get the idea. The electrics are nearly finished, but we are awaiting the delivery of light fittings, which are on order. The varnishing is very nearly all done, and the floor covering and tables will go in, all being well, in the next couple of weeks. The routine inspection of the running gear and a brake test is still required, and a mechanical inspection "below the floor" has still to take place, but no problems are expected,

since this coach was lifted by NIR a couple of years ago.

88 - This coach has been lifted and examined, using a mobile crane, and the running gear serviced. Her internal fittings need to be replaced, but otherwise she should be ready for traffic in the very near future.

91 - Already one end of this coach has been lifted to carry out routine maintenance on the bogie and running gear, and by the time you read this the other end should also have been done. A small problem with that end, however, is that there is a crack in the bolster plank and it has to be replaced. The difficulty is finding a timber merchant who can supply a hardwood plank greater than 2 inches thick; this seems to be the maximum thickness that most timber yards stock, but the bolster plank is a good 4 inches thick. As the last resort it may be possible to use a laminated beam, but we are still attempting to find a source of the correct thickness of timber. No.91 has also had her coupling hooks removed, and they and their wear plates have been built up by welding, the hooks being annealed afterwards. They will be sent to Irish Rail's works at Inchicore for testing, as the company wish to have their own metallurgists examine them and certify them safe for use. Bodywork attention will hopefully be possible before May, as above the waistline this coach needs some repainting, and internally the toilet needs some urgent plumbing work. However, the priorities are for mechanical checking out, and only if spare hands become available will the more cosmetic needs be satisfied.

238 & 241 - The "terrible twins" of our train, this pair of NCC side corridor thirds are basically sound. Both will probably be lifted for a check on bogies and running gear, and No.238 will have one coupling hook and wear plate built up; the other coupling, and No.241's couplings, are satisfactory. Some concern was expressed about the springs on both these vehicles, but examination has shown them to be quite satisfactory. The reason for this "defect" may well be a design

difference between the Great Southern and Great Northern design of springs, and the NCC design; the NCC pattern does not have steadying tie straps around the leaves approximately halfway along the span of the spring to keep the leaves in alignment, but relies, like most locomotive springs, on moulded spigots on the leaves to keep them straight and true. We intend to check that the buckle wedges are tight but there is no obvious defect in any of our NCC coach springs. No.241 also needs toilet repairs, being afflicted in her only "working" lavatory, like No.91, with a leaking tank. At the other end the lavatory has still to be installed!

1335 - Apart from routine checking of her running gear the main work required on this coach affects the body. One window needs to be refitted, and we have the glass, but regrettably no-one, not even the railway company or the original manufacturer of the window frame, can provide suitable sealing rubber to mount it. We have been in touch with several of the largest suppliers of rubber mouldings, but we keep getting the same line - not a stock item. It may well be necessary to have some of this rubber specially made, and that will be a slow and costly procedure. We're still working on the problem, however! Also, the gangway tunnels for this coach need to be rebuilt, and that work will be undertaken in the very near future. Some internal "freshening up" will return this coach to traffic on completion of this work.

1327 - Still in Dublin, this coach was found to have some damage to her running gear. Reports suggest that there are signs of accident damage, but we can't think of an occasion in the last 20 years when it could have happened! Incidentally, that's how long this coach has been running on RPSI trains - it's our longest serving vehicle and has never missed a season in the last 20 years. It's also the coach which was repanelled internally by a couple of female members, so if they can do it, what's wrong with all you fellows out there? The plan is that this vehicle will be repaired in

Dublin by the Mullingar team, as some spare parts will be available from Inchicore. It should be back in traffic for the summer season, if not before.

1142 - Lifted and examined, her running gear received routine maintenance, and she's back on her wheels ready to go.

68 - After lying for a year following a piece of vandalism, this coach has now been reglazed and will be refurbished internally, mainly with a floorbrush and cleaner, so that it can return to traffic. It will need an inspection of the running gear, and it is planned to lift this vehicle during the course of the year, but it should be fit for traffic within the next couple of weeks. Whitehead Railway Project have been given the job of tidying up the coach.

1097 - This half saloon coach, a former studio coach off the Radio Train, and subsequently an ambulance coach for pilgrimage trains, is once again returning to a medically related role. It is being equipped to carry wheelchair passengers, and grant aid from the BBC Children in Need appeal has been put towards this work. The toilet off the saloon has already been reconstructed to take wheelchairs, and the saloon area is currently being refurbished. One compartment has been adapted as a small galley or pantry to allow for (very limited) catering services, and the other compartment, will be fitted out with conventional seating. Mechanical checking and maintenance examination of the running gear will be required before the coach enters traffic, but it is expected to be available for the summer season. Our biggest problem is the delay in getting some of the specialist fittings for the wheelchair passengers - although the ramp and part of the toilet have

arrived, the wheelchair clamps haven't, and some other bits have been on order for quite a long time. Incidentally, the coach will, we hope, be available for hire as a conventional saloon/first as well, and for this we could do with some removable armchair seating for the saloon end. Does anybody know of any available, possibly from a hotel or similar source?

227 - The coach being refurbished by Whitehead Railway Project, and their last one. Sadly, with the redevelopment of the site at Whitehead and the impending construction of the locomotive workshop, the land presently occupied by "The NIACRO Shed", as it's always known, will be needed for the site of the machine shop area. We have had to tell our friends that from the end of this year we have nowhere for them. It will be a sad parting after nearly 10 years, but the scheme wasn't originally expected to last any longer than 5 years, and even that was thought to be a bit optimistic! It's hoped that 227, which is almost complete externally, and which should be complete internally before the end of the year, can be rolled out as a "completed job" before WRP finally leave the site for the last time.

As you will realise, this year is going to be spent on essential, and long delayed, maintenance to make sure that our train is safe. Many of the minor jobs, however, which might seem to be more cosmetic in nature, still need to be done, so if anyone fancies that he could spend a couple of hours painting, or finishing off a little bit of joinery, or simply going round with the oilcan stopping hinges squeaking, then we want to see you at Whitehead, any Saturday or Sunday, from about 11.00 onwards. The crack's good, so come and join us!