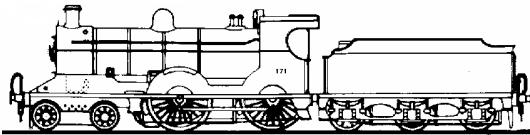


Railway Preservation Society of Ireland



February 2004

NEWS LETTER

RPSI 40

40th Anniversary: Did anyone ever think the Society would last this long? In some ways it's a miracle that we did, but here we are nearly 40 years after an initial tentative meeting in Belfast on 30th September 1964.

There are big plans for 2004, the culmination of which is a grand gala dinner on the weekend nearest the actual anniversary - see the enclosed invitation for details. Other ideas are still under wraps but will be revealed in the fullness of time.

Please note that at the gala dinner, the seating is at tables of 10. If you can take a complete table you get to name it after an Irish railway company (if you book early enough!).

PRESS RELEASE

RPSI Press Release (19/1/2004): On 18th January the RPSI Engineering Base at Whitehead, Co. Antrim, was the scene for the first steam testing of J15 0-6-0 No.186.

No.186 represents the most numerous class of locomotives to run in Ireland. 'Maids of all work' and popular with crews, the J15s worked everything from pilgrimage trains to stand-ins on occasional express passenger services to sugar beet specials, and since starting their life anew on the preservation scene their versatility and popularity have

remained undimmed.

The steam test was successful and marks the first steaming of the locomotive since 5th July 1980. The locomotive has now entered a commissioning phase, the last phase in a very extensive overhaul, largely funded by an RPSI members' appeal, which raised over £45,000, and a 15,000 grant from the Irish National Heritage Council.

RPSI Vice-Chairman Johnny Glendinning commented, "We are very pleased to see this advance in the progress of No.186's overhaul. She represents a very robust and easy to operate locomotive class, ideal for hauling the short-hauled mainline specials that are so popular in Ireland at the moment. A welcome return to the fleet."

It is hoped that No.186 will be back in action in time to feature in this year's RPSI annual May "3-day" International Railtour. This year's tour is from 8th to 10th May and will take in over 650 miles of steam haulage from Dublin to Limerick (via Ballybroy, Nenagh and Limerick Junction), Limerick to Dublin (via Howth) and it is hoped that No.186 will be the star turn on a tour of Northern Ireland's lines on the Monday.

OPERATIONS

"Santa Special" Coleraine: On Saturday 29th November, the Christmas season kicked off. No.4 and the Northern wooden-bodied carriages ran from Belfast to Coleraine and back with a good

quota of passengers enjoying a relaxing steam trip in very wet conditions. Once at Coleraine, the train ran two packed Santa Specials. Nearly 600 passengers were carried to Ballymoney and Castlerock.

Light Engine: On Sunday 30th November, No.4 moved to Dublin for the Christmas season. No.85 returned to Whitehead in her place.

"Santa Special" - Dublin: In thankfully dry and bright weather, roughly two thousand people travelled on the Dublin trains on Saturday and Sunday, 6th & 7th December.

The trip was from Pearse station to Maynooth where there was enough time to water the loco and some coach toilets. The set consisted of the normal eight, plus Irish Rail generator van 3189 for steam heat. The newly constructed shop in the vestibule of coach 1383 did a roaring trade. The only sour note was a stoning incident which left a window broken in Bredin 1335. Thankfully, this occurred after our last trip, on our way to Grand Canal Dock station to run around. The window was replaced by the Monday.

No.4 was a star again on Monday, with a photo of the train at Pearse Station in the 8th December Irish Times.

In a cold but sunny weekend the Dublin season concluded with No.4 hauling six trains over the weekend - two were charters, one for HOK estate agents and the other for Irish Rail.

The operation ran smoothly, with the destination being Maynooth. Van 3189 provided steam heat, keeping the train warm as toast. We are now able to run into Pearse and discharge our passengers without delaying a DART running 4 minutes behind.

To our volunteer activists who support this, our most intensive operation, our best thanks is due.

"Santa Special" - Belfast: The first trains to Whitehead operated behind No.85 "Merlin" in bright crisp weather - perfect for the occasion.

The morning train was open to the public,

but the afternoon was booked entirely by the Sargent Cancer Care, complete with brass band on the concourse of Central Station.

The second weekend of five trains ran in rather wetter weather, one a charter for the Inland Revenue.

Unlike Dublin, the Belfast team could not yet take it easy as there was another two days of operation the following weekend.

The last train ran on Sunday 21st December and it can be reported that it was another very successful season, with the Dublin trains carrying around 4,000 passengers and the Belfast trains around 3,950. A total of 8,000 is a magnificent feat!

14 trips operated in the north on 4 different routes, i.e. Coleraine to Ballymoney, Coleraine to Castlerock, Belfast to Whitehead, Belfast to Antrim. The latter replaced the overflow trains which once ran to Carrickfergus to take up the surplus from the main trains. For the first year or so they were never particularly full but they now stand as trains in their own right, the last one on Sunday 21st December being booked out days in advance! They are also particularly atmospheric, with No.85 pounding up the bank through Mossley in the dark. Especially so when there was a seasonal covering of snow which fell on the very last train of the season.

Atmosphere was also a big feature of the wooden-bodied coaches. Was this the last ever outing with these in the north? Time will tell.

A page of photographs and some video clips of the final day of running has been put together on the website.

A Personal Message: As Train Manager of the Belfast-based trains, I was at the sharp end for the "Santa Special" operations. I am glad to say it was an honour to be there! The whole operation was a team effort and thanks are due to:

- The Locomotive team for providing reliable locos ALL year.
- Carriage & Wagon for keeping "the set" in running order. With the limited

maintenance they get, age is starting to show (the carriages, not the team)! They will be sadly missed.

- Commercial for providing first class presents and manning the shop. Everybody praised the presents "as very good value" and far better than all the big stores and shopping centres. This year there are very few presents left over!*
- Catering for providing the food and drink.*
- Bar Staff, always a happy spot in the train, no matter what happens elsewhere.*
- Santa, we have the best Santa in the country.*
- The Passenger Services team for all their support in keeping the train tidy and Santa supplied with presents.*
- The Support team who did all the planning and administration, etc.*

I have not mentioned any names but I have spoken to most heads of Departments. If I have missed anyone I do apologise. The list is in no particular order. As I said at the start I was proud to be a member of RPSI.

My thanks to all. Roll on the 2004 season!

Henry Ritchie

"Enfield Shuttle": The Leixlip Town Commissioners have again chartered our train for public trips - there will be two return trips from Leixlip to Enfield and return on Sunday 7th March.

"Good Friday Special": The very popular annual Easter outing to Mullingar will be running as usual on 9th April.

"Easter Bunny": The Easter celebrations continue with the traditional trips from Belfast to Whitehead on 12th April, complete with eggs, magicians and balloon benders.

"Titanic Festival": This is a new operation which the Operations Committee has been trying to put in place for a number of years. In conjunction with Belfast City Council's annual Titanic

Festival, there will be three return trips to Bangor on Saturday 17th April, and again on Sunday 18th April.

"Slieve Kimalta": As a lot of members suspected, following the damage to the Cahir viaduct due to a derailed cement train, it was going to be difficult, if not impossible, to operate the "Suir Valley" railtour as planned.

Irish Rail eventually gave the Society the news that an opening date for the repaired Cahir Viaduct would be most unlikely to be before the tour weekend. (Irish Rail subsequently reported that the design work for the replacement viaduct at Cahir had been finalised. It will be concrete and steel with the running line aligned to the centre of the structure. The tender was expected to be let early in January with work starting immediately. The project is expected to be completed in July when the line will reopen.)

Also, other weekend work (DASH) on the DSER in Dublin and mini-CTC work on the Kilkenny line compounded the problem regarding access to Waterford and made the decision to relocate an absolute necessity.

Therefore the "Suir Valley" railtour has been postponed until next year (May 2005). In its place, the "Slieve Kimalta" tour to Limerick is being arranged for 8th and 9th May 2004.

Monday 10th May will hopefully feature No.186, returning to railtour duties after being retired from service in 1980.

There is an advance booking form included with this News-Letter. Note that only those who return it will get sent the full tour booking form.

Crew Training: As this following extract from Rail Brief, the Irish Rail staff magazine, explains, there appears to be serious moves afoot to ensure a continuity of steam crews in Dublin.

Rail Brief (November 2003)

The rapidly growing industry of railway Tourism, which has long been a feature of the British and European railway scene is quickly spreading to this country and with it comes new commercial

opportunities for Iarnród Éireann.

Large number of enthusiasts from abroad are now travelling to Ireland, availing of cheap air and ferry rates to travel behind steam specials run by the RPSI in co-operation with Iarnród Éireann and early diesel motive power organised with the Irish Traction Group, with a special affection for steam-heated Craven coaches.

Iarnród Éireann's commitment to maintain this hugely popular operation of steam trains into the future in co-operation with the RPSI took a major step forward recently when Iarnród Éireann Locomotive driving instructor Tom McCarthy and Foreman Joe Maher undertook a full certificate training course on the Severn Valley Railway.

Tom, based at Mallow, and Joe, at Inchicore, both have previous experience of firing steam locomotives owned by the RPSI. In order to establish a formal driver training course, the Driving School at Inchicore decided to arrange, through the Heritage Office, an intensive training programme on a UK railway.

The Severn Valley Railway was chosen, and with the assistance of General manager Alun Rees and mainline rail inspectors, both Iarnród Éireann men completed a full and detailed syllabus in firing, driving and instruction techniques handling heavy trains over steep gradients and in sometimes extremely trying conditions.

They were 'passed out' with full certificates by Gareth Jones, the Chief Superintendent for steam traction on the UK's premier main-line operator, EWS railway. Their input and experience, in tandem with that of current steam locomotive crews on our system, will form the basis of a comprehensive training programme for this form of traction. It is expected to start delivering the course in the coming year.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.184: Now in the workshop for cosmetic reassembly. This is being carried out to keep all her bits and pieces

together and avoid them being mislaid since early restoration of this loco is unlikely. At the end of it we should have something that looks like a locomotive, rather than a rusting hulk, which can be readily restored if and when the occasion arises.

No.186: Work continued on the locomotive leading up to Christmas, with attention to boiler cladding and tender brake rods.

No.186 was moved from the workshop to the locomotive shed on Saturday 27th December. Some minor work remained to be done before the engine could be steam tested. Our electrician was wiring in a most industrious manner - the cab now looks more like the flight deck of the Starship Enterprise than a nineteenth century goods engine. The locomotive still needed weighed and its heights adjusted - this can be done when the tender is filled. The footboarding needed built and the cab bolted up. Also, the tender required painting.

Following the first steam test (see above), a second test has been carried out the following weekend and the locomotive has been put through its paces to the extent permitted by the sidings at Whitehead. It has shunted two coaches, with working vacuum brakes.

The J15 locomotives are fitted with a "diaphragm" type vacuum cylinder, not the usual rolling ring type, and it was necessary to source replacement rubber diaphragms. Work still to be completed includes painting, spring adjustment, footplating, cab windows - also completion of the electric system for lights, speedometer, etc.

The No.186 Appeal page on the website has been updated with a few photographs of the locomotive in steam after overhaul.

No.461: Lifted off its wheels in December and is now being further dismantled. The wheelsets will be thoroughly cleaned and examined, together with non-destructive testing, following which the tyres will be re-profiled.

No.131: Peter Scott organised the

movement on a low loader from Dublin of No.131's boiler and a hole-punching machine. Following a delay due to transport problems, these arrived at Whitehead on Tuesday 23rd December, which had the advantage that it did not clash with any Santa operations.

They were offloaded using the heavy lift gantries. The lift included: boiler 10 tonnes, iron-working machine 6 tonnes, tubes 1 tonne, and sundry other items totalling approximately 1 tonne.

The ironworking machine ex Limerick Works was unloaded into the workshop.

MK2 PROJECT

Progress: On Saturday 15th November, the 3 Mk2s in the carriage shed were swapped to the opposite road to facilitate painting the other sides of them. All transfers were removed from 13475 and an undercoat was painted on ex-Scotrail 5135.

On Saturday 22nd November the Carriage & Wagon team were able to get a coat of gloss paint applied to Mk2 9382 so both sides are now glossed. 935 required more fillers.

On Saturday 6th December, Mk2 5135, recently arrived from Heysham, was placed on a set of overhauled bogies.

The Lancastrian Carriage & Wagon team were at Whitehead for a week before Christmas to work on some follow-up jobs on the Mk2 coaches. Among other tasks, they painted "RPSI" and the red and yellow lining on 13487 - looks quite splendid. The 3 coaches in the shed have also had their roofs painted grey.

In late January the 5 restored coaches at Whitehead were inspected by the vehicle acceptance body, Resco.

The 5 coaches passed inspection and have received their certificates to run. In preparation for running-in trials, the vehicles were for the first time buck-eye coupled up together into a rake on Sunday 15th February. Using GS&WR locomotive No.186, a complete static and running brake test was carried out. The coupling was awkward but the brakes

were superb. There was even some painting done in the balmy sunshine.

For the record the formation, from the Belfast direction, was FSK RPSI 181 (ex BR 13487), FSK 180 (13475), TSO 300 (ex NIR 934), TSO 302 (5135), and SBO 460 (9382).

A sixth carriage, TSO 5207, fully restored along with refurbished bogies will be RESCO inspected at Heysham and is due for delivery to Whitehead in a ready to run state around mid-March.

CARRIAGE & WAGON

Whitehead: In the early hours of Sunday morning, 30th November, a fire started in coach 1287 at Whitehead. The fire service was in attendance very quickly, but substantial damage has resulted.

The coach was a GS&WR compartment 3rd with 64 seats. It was built in 1915 and was used on Dublin suburban/local trains. It came to the Society in 1978. During its stay in Whitehead it was used as a dormitory for Society members staying over to light engines.

MEMBERSHIP

Apology: Membership renewal forms were sent out with the November News-Letter for those wishing to renew early. Unfortunately, the stuffing team were not at their best and a number of members did not receive forms.

This may or not have been the reason for the large number of standing order payments which were not updated to reflect the new rates. Can members who are in that position please make good the difference as soon as possible? This is the last News-Letter of the membership year and full payment is required to continue into the new year.

A couple of membership payment points:

- If paying by credit card, only use GBP amounts as all payments are processed in pounds sterling.
- Those upgrading their standing order authorities do not need to send the

form to the Society - please send it direct to your bank.

- If you change from the category from Junior to Adult, or from Adult to Senior, please let us know the usual membership address.

Donations: It's a bit of a cheek after a fairly large subscription increase, but PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE, if you can, include a donation with your membership payment.

Also, a special plea to Life, Honorary and standing order members from whom we don't normally receive direct payments - please consider sending a donation.

The recent increase in membership rates was based on the increase in last year's costs but already this year we have seen an increase in our insurance premium of around £12,000.

So you can see we have a major cost to cover before we can spend a penny on our locomotives and carriages.

So please look favourably on us when it comes to renewing. And UK members, don't forget to complete a Gift Aid form if you haven't already. If you are in doubt, send one in anyway.

Membership Cards: Apart from those whose payments may have crossed in the post with this mailshot, all members who have paid should have now received their cards. The exceptions will be those with a shortfall in their standing order payments.

WHITEHEAD

Appointment: Council has approved the appointment of Irwin Pryce as Operating Staff Training and Assessment Officer for Whitehead based train operations.

The principal duties of the position are:

- To arrange training and assessment of RPSI Operating Staff.
- To approve staff who have completed the requisite training and are judged to be competent.
- To keep training and approval records.

- To advise the Council regarding disciplinary matters.

Irwin is a founder member of the Society and has been regularly involved in the maintenance and operation of the Society's locomotives, as well as taking a keen interest in locomotive performance.

The position will involve close liaison with Mark Buchanan (Rostering Officer) as well as Peter Scott (Locomotive Officer) and Jeff Spencer (Locomotive Running Officer).

It is envisaged that Irwin will be given assistance in training by other experienced Society personnel.

For initial training and approval, we are grateful for the help given by Frank Dunlop, former NIR steam locomotive inspector, who until his retirement regularly supervised the Society's main line operations.

The above appointment is a necessary consequence of the incoming Railway Safety legislation, which specifies a much more structured approach to training and approval of personnel.

Society Operating personnel and those wishing to become involved should be quite clear that the purpose of the above procedure is not to exclude anyone or create difficulties, but rather to enable those members sufficiently interested to take part in railway operations with the confidence that they have been properly trained and authorised.

Site Matters: In November, a big weekend of work saw the welding table removed from the locomotive shed and re-positioned in workshop. Likewise the grinder. Both jobs done with hand crane. Also, the roof was removed from old compressor house preparatory to demolishing. Old compressor lifted out.

An addition to the concrete floor in the locomotive workshop was laid on Saturday 6th December. It is on the left hand side of the entrance of the main door, i.e. the Larne Line side.

Some concrete was left over and it was used to improve the floor at the side entrance of the carriage shed.

Future Plans: The Site Team has carried out some track repairs post-Santa and filled in pot holes in the lane way.

Scraping of old bogies is proceeding. Emphasis is still on helping Paul Newell get the Mk2 set fully painted for Easter.

BELFAST MEETINGS

Round-Up: Another in the list of anniversaries this year is that of Charles Friel organising his 30th season of meetings, and what a great selection they have been so far!

On 10th December, for the first time, digital technology was used, all the slides for display residing on a laptop computer, ably operated by James Friel.

Wednesday 11th February at St.Jude's must have been one of the best shows ever for those of a certain age in the Society. To see tractor-driving teenagers, schoolboys in short pants and full heads of hair when now there are only balding pates and middle-age spreads certainly brought a few titters from the audience.

The occasion was the airing of some of Macha Film Studio's cine from the late 1960s. In particular there were the "Cu Chulainn" to Dundalk with No.186, and the "Olderfleet" to Larne Harbour with No.27 "Lough Erne", the latter also including the legendary tour of the Belfast docks behind No.3BG "Guinness".

The dock tour train, for those not aware of it, was made up of a rake of brake vans and In wagons, as many participants as possible trying to crowd into the vans as the rain was pouring down (the wet also not helping the locomotive's adhesion on the severely curved and not-recently-used tramway lines). The whole procession was led by the traditional man with red flag.

While the technical quality of the films may not have been up to modern standards, the energy and enthusiasm which went into the making of them was second to none. And as to the content - we'll never see the like again.

What's Left?: The final meeting of the season will be on 10th March when Peter

Scott, Irwin Pryce and Jeff Spencer will be recounting the history of the J15 locomotives, followed by details of the extensive work carried out to bring our own No.186 back into traffic after nearly 25 years. The latter will be illustrated with a video diary.

ON-LINE

Bulletins: The number of members on the email Bulletin list continues to grow - now at 470! If you believe you should be receiving the Bulletins and are not, please send an email to the address below and hopefully you can be on-line right away.

Website: The Society's website now has a Contents page (accessed from the Home page) which should make navigation of the site a lot easier.

News: All the latest details of Society events and trains are published on the website as soon as they confirmed. So if you can access the Internet, keep an eye on the Next Trains Page.

Tickets: The website has a section detailing how to order tickets for all Society trains. Currently, there are tentative plans to upgrade these to allow on-line purchasing of tickets. This will probably start later this year with Dublin trains, followed at a later date by Belfast-based trains.

GENERAL

AGM: See enclosed leaflet for notice of the Society's annual general meeting. There is expected to be a couple of vacancies on Council for the coming year, so if you feel in a position to stand, please contact the Secretary as soon as possible.

Sales: Those who migrated to the back of St.Jude's Hall on 10th December would have been overwhelmed by the number of books on display - no less than six new volumes, plus a superb selection of second-hand books from a recent donation. Lots of Christmas presents bought!

During its first full year of operation for some time, RPSI postal sales has been very successful profit-wise. Some of the items sold were donated which helped the margins considerably.

Our thanks go to those members who bought books and videos from us. Remember that when railway books are produced, the print runs are small and the books tend to be sold out after a year or two. To illustrate this, Colourpoint cannot supply us with any more copies of "Along UTA Lines" or "35 Years of NIR", and these books were produced fairly recently. Currently, we have 6 copies of each title in stock. When these run out, that's it!

The Society has a huge need for money, so get your next order in soon. There is an order form included with this News-Letter. Alternatively print one off from our website.

Payment Plea: The renewed popularity of the postal sales has increased the problem of combined cheques for different departments, i.e. it is extremely inconvenient to receive a single cheque, or a number of cheques to the one address, for different services, e.g. any combination of subscription, sales items, tickets, etc.

As you can appreciate, those processing the different payments are volunteers and work from their own homes. Because of this lack of a central office, and the existence of individual accounting codes for each payment category, it becomes extremely time-consuming to allocate separate amounts from a single cheque. It is for that reason that we request members not to make payments to the Society in such a fashion, but to send cheques for each payment to the correct addresses. Even separate cheques to the same address can cause problems if one needs to be forwarded to another officer of the Society.

Hopefully, our position will be appreciated. It will help to keep costs down, reduce work-loads and, more importantly for members, avoid undue delays and the possibility of payments going astray.

Now Available: Copies of the excellent new book "The Irish Narrow Gauge in Colour" by Norman Johnston. It is selling fast but a copy can be obtained by post for £21, from: RPSI Postal Sales, 103 Wynchurch Road, Belfast, BT6 OJJ.

Wanted: One of the least glamorous but nevertheless important pieces of equipment is the washing machine in the Tarry at Whitehead. The Society's impecunious state renders purchase of such an item a matter to be avoided. So we rely on second-hand machines donated by well wishers.

Unfortunately, by the time we get such machines they are well advanced in senility and usually have a short life. The present one is now in this category. What is needed is an ordinary front-loading washing machine, without frills, that is still in working order and that someone is only replacing because they have inherited a fortune or it doesn't suit the curtains.

Lifeboat Naming: The Station Manager of the Howth lifeboat reports that a D class lifeboat in memory of Philip Booth has been allocated to Wexford lifeboat station. There will be a naming ceremony sometime during 2004 on a date to be fixed.

Philip, for those who didn't know him, was one of the regular helpers on the Society's Dublin-based trains until his untimely death in January 2001. Philip was a great supporter of the RNLI as well as of the RPSI.

Tram Discovery: Mr Graham Semple recently discovered two Giant's Causeway tram bodies on land which he had acquired in the Dungiven area. One has already been removed; the other, somewhat more dilapidated, is available for the taking. Mr Semple's phone number is 028 7774 1268.

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