

Railway Preservation Society of Ireland



December 2004

NEWS LETTER

RPSI 40

It Finally Arrived: Wow, what a night! The RPSI celebrated its 40th anniversary in style on the night of Saturday 2nd October. The setting was the Irish Railway Collection at the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum in Cultra, and the means of travel was a special steam train from Lisburn. The train, which was composed of the RPSI's newly renovated Mk2 carriages, was hauled by the Society's recently re-launched J15 class No.186. With NIR steam driver Noel Playfair at the regulator, the 1879-built 0-6-0 made light work of the run in from Lisburn and the Holywood bank.

On board the train, the atmosphere built up as the train called at Hilden, Lambeg, Balmoral and Belfast Central to pick up passengers. More than 200 of the 250 guests chose to travel by train and just to insure the event got off with a swing, passengers were treated to a complimentary glass of wine as the train headed for Cultra.

Upon arrival at Cultra, the passengers were greeted by a beaming Lord O'Neill, dressed appropriately in an authentic MR(NCC) stationmaster's uniform, which he later told guests dated from 1922. His lordship, who has been President of the Society since its foundation in Belfast on 30th September 1964, was particularly delighted to finally make the acquaintance of one of his Vice-Presidents, the former Taoiseach Dr Garret FitzGerald. Ironically the two gents had not until that moment come face to face, because Lord O'Neill tends to chair AGMs in the north while Dr FitzGerald is in the hot seat when they are held in Dublin.

Also on board were some of the Society's special guests for the night, who included Dr

Joan Smyth, the chairman of the NI Transport Holding Company, Keith Moffatt, the chief executive of Translink, Dick Fearn, chief operating officer of Iarnród Éireann, Mal McGreevy, general manager (rail) with Translink, Jimmy Doody, carriage officer with Iarnród Éireann and Gregg Ryan, the heritage officer of IÉ.

With rain clouds threatening, the guests made their way the short distance from Cultra station to the museum, where they emerged onto the balcony overlooking the Irish Transport Collection. What a sight greeted them!! As the enchanting music of the Grosvenor Grammar School string quartet gently wafted over the gallery, guests gazed down to see that where No.74 "Dunluce Castle" normally sits, 25 tables and a stage had been erected. With the dining area ringed by the museum's prime exhibits, chief of which must be No.800 "Maedhbh", the setting was superb.

As guests strolled round the balcony admiring the scene below, their eyes were caught by the magnificent RPSI 40 banners which were displayed from the balustrade. The banners, which featured line drawings of No.171 and No.461 with an RPSI-1964 logo in between, were based on drawings by James Friel, to whom particular thanks are due. Another banner proclaimed that the event was the RPSI's 40th anniversary dinner (no doubt it will be a prize in the ballot at RPSI 50!).

Guests descended the ramp to the lower level to be offered an aperitif at a drinks reception sponsored by Translink as they took in their surroundings. Never has the gallery looked so well and as friends met and greeted each other, many of them after a gap of many years, there was a chance to reminisce and catch up. A seating plan

guided people to their tables, each of which was named after an Irish railway company.

The event attracted a capacity attendance of 250, including groups from the Republic and Britain, with a full table of 10 being taken by members of the Heritage Railway Association. On the tables, guests found a special souvenir menu, and gifts including a miniature bottle of Bushmills whiskey (sponsored by Dillon Bass), a Translink Parker pen, and a presentation pack of chocolates. Each table was decorated with a floral arrangement.

Guests were welcomed by Marshall McKee, chief executive of the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum, which had kindly waived the charge for hire of the venue as a contribution to the night. Noting that the UFTM was also celebrating its 40th birthday this year, Mr McKee congratulated the Society on its achievements. He said there could be no more fitting venue for the gala dinner than the Irish Railway Collection.

Charles Friel from the RPSI 40 Committee, who was acting as master of ceremonies, added his welcome to guests, and said it was particularly gratifying to see so many founder members present. He drew attention to the ballot for the No.461 restoration fund and appealed to those present to be as generous as possible. He thanked the sponsors of the prizes, who included NITHCo/Translink, the UFTM and AMARC catering.

The Lord O'Neill spoke of his pleasure at finally meeting Dr FitzGerald. He reflected on the importance of the Irish Railway Collection to the museum scene in Northern Ireland, and praised his other Vice-President, Sir Ken Bloomfield, for the part he had played in promoting the move of the collection from Witham Street to Cultra. But he said an extension was now urgently needed for the museum.

The dinner, he said, was the final event in what had been a busy year of celebrations for the Society. In June the book "Forty Shades of Steam" had been launched at Central Station, while in July No.186 had been launched at Whitehead.

Recalling the meeting at which the Society had been formed, he said one of the great strengths of the RPSI had been the fact that it had always been an all-Ireland body. On the whole, he said, north-south relations had been harmonious, and on this score the Society had done somewhat better than the politicians. Lord O'Neill noted that 40 years after his late uncle, Terence O'Neill, had

been pilloried for meeting a Taoiseach, such meetings now appeared to be in vogue.

Lord O'Neill said that in the early days, when the RPSI ran just two or three trains a year, nobody had any idea that it would grow to become such a substantial body. He said the Society owed much of its success to the voluntary endeavours of its members, some of whom must have spent a large amount of their lives at Whitehead or Mullingar.

Lord O'Neill said thanks were due to the UFTM for making the museum available and for helping in the organisation of the event. He also expressed gratitude to Iarnród Éireann and Translink for facilitating the Society's activities on the modern railway. He then voiced appreciation to the various sponsors who had helped make the evening possible.

Lord O'Neill then invited the Rev Canon John McKegney from Armagh to say grace. Dinner was then served.

Before the desserts were served, Charles Friel invited John Harcourt, first chairman of the RPSI, and Norman Foster, current chairman, onto the platform to cut the RPSI 40th birthday cake. This task was performed to much acclaim.

During the coffee break the ballot envelopes were collected. Then Lady Bloomfield was invited to draw the five winners from the hat. They were then invited to come forward and collect their prizes.

The winners were:

1. Jimmy Doody, Dublin. Two tickets for the RPSI May 2005 tour to Waterford (sponsored by RPSI Council).
2. Evans Hamilton, Carrickfergus. Two First Plus return tickets from Belfast to Dublin (sponsored by Translink).
3. Neil Faris, Belfast. Family ticket for the UFTM for 2005 (sponsored by UFTM).
4. Alan Marshall, Table 15. Family ticket for Sunday carvery at Cultra Manor (sponsored by caterers AMARC).
5. David White, Brussels. The genuine smoke-stained "No.186 - 125 Years Young" banner from the launch at Whitehead on 22nd July this year (sponsored by RPSI 40 Committee).

The ballot raised the magnificent total of £1,950 for the No.461 appeal. Our thanks to all those who contributed so generously.

After the meal, Dr Garret FitzGerald took to

the rostrum, praising the volunteers who kept the Society's wheels turning. To applause, he said he was aware that a heavy burden fell on the shoulders of the locomotive squad, under the dedicated leadership of Peter Scott.

Dr FitzGerald thanked the railway companies for their co-operation but expressed concern that the number of qualified steam drivers had now been reduced to three. He said he hoped that the situation would be addressed soon.

The former Taoiseach said that all his life, he had been fascinated by all forms of transport, but particularly by rail and air. He said that from the age of 12 he had been a collector of airline timetables, and then produced some of the finer items from his collection. These dated back, he said, to the days when it took 22½ hours to travel from New York to Foynes, a route which was at that time the only air link between the United States and Europe.

As a boy, he said, he remembered many trips by train in Ireland, including an 11-hour trip from Dublin to Bantry which he undertook in 1941. At one time, he said, he had worked out that in Ireland there were 17 different sets of points which were served by two railway companies. He also listed towns and cities served by more than one railway company, such as Cookstown and Londonderry.

Dr FitzGerald recalled that during his spell as Irish Foreign Affairs Minister, he had presided over a meeting in Leningrad which had necessitated a trip on the Red Train from there to Moscow. He teased his hosts by pointing out that the journey took the same time then as it had done in 1914 - five and a half hours.

Next up were Philip Lockett and Gerry Mooney, two of the youngest members of the RPSI Council, from Belfast and Dublin respectively. Philip said that the Society's level of activity had increased vastly in recent years and this year, for example, there had already been 32 public mainline trains and were a further 28 to go. In Northern Ireland, the Society was now carrying around 10,000 passengers a year, many of them being first-time visitors to the province.

The RPSI, he said, was a family, but it was also a professional organisation. Its assets were its locomotives and its carriages, but so too were its members. While paying tribute to the "old giffers" who had formed the Society, he said the age profile of the RPSI was a

cause for concern. More young people had to be encouraged to join the Society and work on the engines and carriages, and to work in the dining car and on fund-raising if the future was to be secured.

Gerry Mooney also highlighted the need for more volunteers in all aspects of the Society's activities. He said the challenge facing the Society was to encourage people to come on board to keep the RPSI going for the next 40 years.

David Morgan, chairman of the Heritage Railways Association, congratulated the RPSI on the achievements it had attained over the past 40 years. He praised the fantastic work accomplished by Peter Scott and his team and said that as an owner himself of a J15 he was particularly pleased to see No.186 back in operation. He said the RPSI had produced magic both at Whitehead and Mullingar.

Mr Morgan said he had enjoyed travelling in the Mk2 stock but regretted they were not as exciting as the old wooden bodied carriages they had replaced. But railways were changing and credit was due to Translink and Iarnród Éireann for accommodating the Society.

He said that within the wider railway preservation movement there was a recognition that the days of the "steam anorak" had disappeared. As Philip and Gerry had underlined, the market now was for the general public. Last year, he said, the railways represented by HRA in Britain and Ireland had between them carried 12 million passengers, more than preserved railways in the rest of the world put together.

Mr Morgan concluded by proposing a toast to the RPSI, which he said could look to the next 40 years with confidence.

Responding to the toast was Sir Ken Bloomfield, RPSI vice-president, who praised the co-operation Translink and Iarnród Éireann gave to the Society. Referring to the current threat to the lines to Londonderry and Larne, Sir Ken said the goal now must be to preserve not just steam trains but the whole NIR rail network. He said that with new rolling stock about to be introduced onto the NIR system, it was vital that Translink was given every support, and enabled to make a success of the whole railway system. He said that if people believed in the future of the railways, they had to support Translink in this venture.

Sir Ken said he had found Philip and Gerry's

contributions really uplifting, but said it was clear that the Society needed more young people in its ranks. He concluded by thanking all those involved in the organisation of a hugely successful evening.

Charles Friel then brought proceedings to a close, and guests departed to Cultra station, where the steam train was waiting to convey them back to Belfast and Lisburn.

The RPSI 40 Committee are to be congratulated, along with all others who helped to make the evening such a success. Also the Society's gratitude to all those who supported the event. Roll on RPSI 50!

A Personal Reminiscence: John Friel enjoyed the big occasion so much that he was moved to put pen to paper (or finger to keyboard).

Memories Of Autumn 1964, And Later

Autumn 1964 was a depressing time for railway enthusiasts with the impending closure of the Warrenpoint branch (January 1965), the Derry Road (February 1965) and the abandonment of rail freight other than Dublin - Belfast. The realisation that steam would not last much longer (the motorway spoil contract had not yet been thought about) led to the formation of the RPSI.

My brother, Charles, and I first heard about it in the form of a local radio news item on 1st October 1964. It stated that, at a meeting in Belfast the night before, a Society had been formed to preserve steam locomotives in the "cleaning shed" at Whitehead.

Back then, making contact with the Society could have been a major problem. There was no internet and the majority of households, including our own, did not have a phone. We were in the forefront of technology with an electric doorbell! However, the first Secretary was Eamon Jordan from Portadown (where we resided), so contact was soon established and we joined up.

In those days, enthusiasts were trying to pack in as many trips on scheduled steam trains as they could afford and the platform ends at Portadown became gathering points for enthusiasts to exchange information on which trains were likely to be steam, which engines were running well or badly, etc.

Not being from the great city of Belfast, Charles and I would hang around the periphery of these groups to hear the latest news. I remember being very impressed with these Belfast folk who seemed to know everything about railways and, indeed,

everything about everything! Naturally, the future prospects of the RPSI were a major talking point and, frankly, nobody gave it a chance. Can anyone remember what the initial membership fee was? I assume that it was £1. That amount of money would have filled the petrol tank of most cars.

Anyway, I remember one comment from a member of the "cognoscenti" to the effect that, with £60 in the bank, the RPSI could afford to buy a buffer beam. Another person predicted that if the Society ever succeeded in running a railtour with its own locomotive, and if the loco failed in mid-section, the relevant railway company would cut it up ON THE SPOT. I have always been amused at the thought of daily announcements that the line from X to Y is still closed as a steam loco is being cut up.

However, then as now, a large number of people was working away furiously but quietly in the background - not looking for glory but getting results.

As an aside, some time after the closure of the Derry Road in 1965, locomotives from Omagh and Derry were moved to Portadown engine shed. No.60 "Slieve Donard" (GNR(I) No.172) arrived from Derry with the slogan "We will rise again" on the smoke-box. I have often wondered if this was some sort of prediction of the troubles which lay ahead for all of us.

When the RPSI operated its inaugural railtour in September 1965, most of the doubters started to come round. That tour was operated entirely over UTA metals and, with steam still in daily use, it presented no operating problems to the railway company. I wonder how many drivers were available at that time.

CIÉ was a different matter, with steam having already ceased there. At the Society's 1966 AGM, a plan was announced to run a tour from Belfast to Dundalk and back in 1967, thereby bringing preserved steam on to CIÉ metals for the first time. One member predicted that the chances of that happening were zero and if a letter were sent to CIÉ requesting a path, it wouldn't be answered! One other dismissive comment was that "CIÉ changes its mind as often as you or I change our socks!" - what prophetic words!

Of course, the railtour - the "Cuchulainn" - did run, and many of our members enjoyed seeing cine film of it at the recent Macha Film Studios show at St. Jude's.

By now, the theme of this article should be

apparent - if the RPSI had £1 for every time somebody said it would not succeed, overhauling No.461 would be no problem.

Here's to the next 40 years!

Forty Shades Of Steam: Have you bought your copy yet? It is still the aim to have a copy in the home of every member!

LOCOMOTIVES

Congratulations: On 10th November the Heritage Railway Association announced that they would be presenting the John Coiley Award for Locomotive Preservation for 2004 to the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland.

The citation reads:

"for the restoration, during a challenging period, of the oldest operating mainline locomotive in the British Isles, Class J15 0-6-0 locomotive No.186, built in 1879 by Sharp, Stewart & Co. for the Great Southern & Western Railway".

Well done to Peter Scott and his team. And also a massive thanks to all members who supported the No.186 Appeal a few years ago. Without you it would not have been possible.

No.4: Wednesday 20th October saw No.4 moved outside at Inchicore for a routine boiler washout which revealed (to Gerry Mooney with the help of Paddy O'Brien who was celebrating his 66th birthday!!) that the water from the columns over the summer contained a lot more foreign matter than would be desired. A steam test followed in preparation for cleaning for the Santa trains.

No.85 "Merlin": The Coleraine train on 27th November was the last confirmed operation for compound No.85 "Merlin" before withdrawal when her boiler certificate expires early in the new year. It is not clear what the future holds for No.85 but she is unlikely to be pounding the tracks for some time to come.

No.171 "Slieve Gullion": In store awaiting boiler lifting. Locomotive moved periodically to minimise static bearing damage.

No.186: Steam heating has been extended to the front of the locomotive in preparation for the Christmas season.

No.461: Dismantled for repairs in the workshop.

Workshop: Installation of wiring is complete.

Relocation of machines proceeds as time permits. Installation of air lines to proceed.

Foundry: A supply of scrap cast iron is urgently required to melt down for making castings.

At present we particularly need light material (which is best for starting the process). For example, old rainwater pipes and gutters, iron water pipes, gratings, old stoves, brake drums, valve bodies - anything about 1/4 to 1/2 inch thick (so long as it is not enamelled - cast iron baths are no good).

Note: It must be cast iron - steel, etc., is no use!

Any members in a position to help should contact Peter Scott:

pscott@locoengineer.fsnet.co.uk

or at the Editorial address below.

Collection can be arranged within a reasonable distance of Belfast. For anyone further away, appropriate arrangements may be made.

No.461 APPEAL

Appeal Update: A word of thanks to all who have donated so far to the No.461 Appeal Fund. Donations received have enabled the work to progress well.

But a word on the overall background. Our Locomotive people will confirm that long into the future, restoration and repair jobs are going to be become more and more expensive. We will very probably be facing major fund raising appeals on a regular basis for a long time to come.

In the last fifteen years or so, a pattern has emerged showing that a typical medium-term restoration job will cost about £80,000 and upwards at today's prices. Add anything complicated, or unexpected, and costs can easily triple - that's nearly a quarter of a million pounds, by the way!

We are very conscious of "charity fatigue". After the Locomotive Workshop Appeal a few years ago, and many requests for funds for No.4, and then No.186, now there's another one. And, as you have just read, there will be more in the future - guaranteed!

However, as members and enthusiasts we need to face this. Running mainline steam engines, as has been pointed out in the last two appeal brochures, is an exceptionally expensive hobby, or business, or spare time

activity - whatever it means to you personally. And it's getting more so.

This isn't negative talk - it's a challenge. One we've met successfully for forty years. We continue to do it (having confounded, for forty years, those who WOULD take a negative view of our potential capabilities).

So, let's do it again! Can we ask every member - in Northern Ireland, the Republic, Britain and beyond - who hasn't yet contributed, to please consider doing so. We know it's a bad time of year to ask - but think of it like this: add the Society to your Christmas list!

The work MUST go on. We NEED No.461 back in use as soon as possible. Please Keep the money coming, and help us to achieve our target. We still need up to £35,000 to £40,000.

But if you have donated already, our sincere thanks. Your assistance is both crucial, and very much appreciated by your Locomotive Officer, Treasurer and Council.

Remember, if you donate over £250 / 400, you get five free day trip passes which can be used on any Dublin or Belfast based day trip between now and the end of 2007. But any amount is appreciated - if you have not already donated, we would ask that you consider sending a cheque or credit card donation off today.

We can now claim gift aid in the Republic as well as Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

Appeal contact details:

jhb171@aol.com

or post to:

RPSI
9 Kenilworth Avenue
Lisburn
Co Antrim
BT28 3UG
Northern Ireland

Looking forward to hearing from you!

OPERATIONS

European Architectural Heritage: The annual event at Whitehead on Sunday 12th September saw an estimated 350 visitors shown round the workshops and sheds. About half of these took the opportunity of a train ride. No.186 and No.3BG were in action.

Well done to Henry Ritchie and his team for coping so well.

Photos showing the preparations for the event can be seen at on the Society's website.

Bray 150: Sunday 19th September saw the operation of the last Dublin trips before Christmas. In connection with the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the railway in Bray, the Society was asked by the Irish Rail heritage office to run three trips to Wicklow.

The only complicating factor was the closure of the line north of Pearse on Saturday and Sunday. This meant that No.4 and coaches were hauled to the loop platform of Grand Canal Dock Station on the Friday where they stayed until the Monday.

The train departed Pearse at 12:20 on the Sunday and was reasonably full of passengers, who returned by Dart to the city.

As we took our first group of customers around Bray Head the new arrangements in Bray were noticeable. The old roofless steam shed is gone, replaced by storage sidings for eight-coach Darts. Watering in Wicklow was tricky, the hydrant being ten hose lengths away at the bottom of a hill. This, plus the fact of a potential stop and examine order on each trip due to the hot box detector did not help punctuality. However, the passengers were well pleased with the day. Arrival back in Pearse was in the dark at 19:25.

Causeway Express: Because of driver hours and NIR engineering works on the day, it was not possible to operate the planned "Atlantic Coast Express" to Derry on 19th September. Instead, a hurriedly revised plan was put in place to visit Portrush, with a coach connection to the Giant's Causeway.

Despite forecasts of dire weather, No.85 managed to haul her train to Portrush on Sunday 26th September without encountering any rain. It was only as the train started its return journey that any appeared.

It was good to see the large number of passengers who boarded at Antrim and, to a lesser extent, Ballymena. The train was 80% full which was very gratifying given that it was not in the programme until just over two weeks before it ran. The surprising outcome, however, was the small number taking up the chance of the coach to the Giant's Causeway. It had been assumed that this would have been the preferred destination for our passengers. Obviously, Portrush still holds an attraction for many, even on a grey autumn Sunday.

Running was to time throughout - for once we were neither delayed nor caused delays. An excellent day out!

RPSI 40: No.186 and train spent a week in total in Adelaide yard, having worked there on the afternoon of Wednesday 29th September as empty coaches. That movement was to put the train in place for 2nd October as there were engineering works prohibiting movement on the Larne line (new crossing gates at Trooperslane) over the 40th Anniversary weekend.

Because of constraints on propelling into the yard, it was necessary to go to Lisburn, run round and access the yard directly from the Down direction. The train was parked under the gantry with the locomotive at the Belfast end and was practically invisible from anywhere but up close.

There is a new security fence at Adelaide with rail and road gates, together with an overnight security guard and nasty dog so ensuring the train remained safe.

The train left Adelaide early on Wednesday 6th October heading straight for Crumlin. It was the first RPSI operation over the Lisburn - Antrim branch since it closed, and it was undertaken to gauge the Mk2 coaches through the platforms at Knockmore, Ballinderry, Glenavy and Crumlin. On return from Crumlin, the train ran to Great Victoria Street where the platforms there were visited by the carriages for the first time, being shunted in and out by GM 224 while No.186 took water.

The Mk2 carriages have now been all round the NIR system, with the exception of Castlerock - Londonderry, Whitehead - Larne Harbour and south of Newry, i.e. acceptance by Irish Rail.

Also, as a consequence of visiting GVS, the whole train and locomotive have now be turned, i.e. No.186 is chimney-first to Dublin and the brake van on the train is at the Dublin end.

Broomstick Belle: Sunday 31st October saw the Halloween trains operate with No.186 in dry weather.

Two full trains operated to Whitehead, with the third to Lisburn in the evening being about 85% loaded. Nearly all the children, and a number of adults, were dressed in Halloween costumes and, with prizes for the best costume and magicians entertaining the passengers, the on-board atmosphere was buzzing.

The first train was delayed at Kilroot for about 30 minutes due to engineering works at the Whitehead Up platform. Thereafter, running was to time.

Santa Special - Coleraine: On Saturday 27th November the Christmas season kicked off in Coleraine behind No.85.

Because of the lighting restrictions imposed by NIR on the Mk2 set (due to the current reliance on battery power), the 08:00 start out of Belfast was intended to make the best use of daylight. Around 90 hardy souls braved a cold and miserable early morning Belfast to make the train.

It may have been the time (11:00) of the first Santa train out of Coleraine or it may have been the destination (Ballymoney), but the loading was only approaching 50%.

Strange, as the second train (to Castlerock) was sold out. Maybe when a generator is available and lighting limitations no longer apply, a later time might help.

No matter, the day went very smoothly operation-wise and it was only a late-running railcar which kept the return train late into Central on what may be No.85's last outing for some considerable time.

Santa Special - Dublin: Demand for the Santa trains in Dublin has been so great that, with the co-operation of Iarnród Éireann and the Dublin based volunteers, an extra day of operation has been agreed for Saturday 18th December. The extra trains were not for attracting new custom but to deal with the huge waiting list for tickets which had been in place for some time. This is a mammoth task for both IE and the Society and brings the total number of Santa trains to Maynooth to 15 (nearly 600 Santa train miles over the three weekends of operation), the highest number of Santa trains ever in Dublin.

The dates, with No.4, are 4th, 5th, 11th, 12th & 18th December.

Santa Special - Belfast: No.186 will be operating between Belfast and Whitehead and Lisburn on 5th, 11th & 12th, 18th & 19th December.

Ticket Policy: Members are reminded that there is currently limited seating available on our Whitehead-based carriages and, no matter where they are travelling from, a full price ticket MUST be purchased in advance before travel. In this busy Christmas season especially, tickets must be purchased in advance through one of the recognised outlets (Belfast Welcome Centre,

Carrickfergus, Lisburn and Bangor Tourist Information Centres).

Help Required: It may not yet be too late to volunteer to help the Society over the busy Christmas season.

There are always rosters to be filled on the operating grades (steam raising, shunting, footplate), stewarding (very important for Santa trains), Santa, Santa helpers, catering, sales.

If you can fill even one day in any of these roles over Christmas (or in the coming year) please get in touch as soon as possible.

Don't forget - it's your Society!

CARRIAGE & WAGONS

Arson: In the late evening of 4th November, Park Royal coach 1416 of the Dublin set was very seriously damaged by fire at Inchicore. No other RPSI coach was involved.

This is a very serious blow to the Society as the coach was due to run as part of the set servicing the sold-out Christmas trains.

An insurance assessor has been appointed to see what from the vehicle can be salvaged.

Dublin: No.4 and the Dublin set were stored at Inchicore ahead of the busy Santa train season. As the gap in the operating season allows, some work was carried out on both the locomotive and stock. Bredin 1335 had a fresh coat of green paint applied in the 'Ramps'.

Whitehead - Mk2: The running fleet has received attention to the pressure ventilation (PV) heating system and has had steam heating bags fitted.

Diner 547 is in the workshop at present being assessed for the work to be carried out when the hoped for grant funding arrives. Work will be required on the bodywork and floors. Also required is restoration of the steam heating and conversion to vacuum brake.

TSO 301 is receiving repairs to its gangway and floor at the Larne end. Painting is to commence shortly. The coach has been given a coat of gloss paint by Joe Galbraith - it looks very well and is now ready to be submitted to NIR for approval to enter traffic.

On Tuesday 28th September two Mk2 bogies and some buckeye couplings arrived at Whitehead. The bogies were unloaded by

hand crane.

Whitehead - Mk3: Saturday 25th September saw the arrival at Whitehead of 10651, an InterCity branded Mk3 Sleeper. It came complete with 5ft 3in bogies (for temporary use).

The coach was purchased to replace fire-damaged GS&WR 1287 (now at Downpatrick) which provided accommodation for overnight Steam Raisers. Nothing but the best! A space has already been cleared at the rear of the site.

It goes without saying that the paint work has faded quite a bit but still an interesting addition to the Irish carriage fleet.

Offloading the coach at Whitehead proved an interesting problem as it is about 3 metres longer than anything that has come before. Some oil storage tanks had to be removed, and some of the bank to the rear of the site cut away to allow the lorry to manoeuvre. So despite arriving on Saturday, it was late on Sunday before the lorry could depart. Thanks to Kevin Maxwell and Stephen Booth for helping with the earthworks removal.

A few weeks later much time was spent preparing the coach to move safely on its temporary bogies and then shunting it to the back of the premises, close to where it is planned to finally locate it. The shunting was done using loco No.3 "Guinness".

Although of little obvious immediate value, it is hoped that decent overnight accommodation facilities will help in attracting new volunteers in the future. The coach is in very good internal condition and makes an ideal dormitory. Electrics, water supply, etc., need to be sorted out. Part of the Workshop Management Committee's task is to carry out a risk assessment and recommend a policy for the, safe use of the vehicle.

The Committee would like to mention the contribution of our member Dr Gould, who generously contributed to our domestic Whitehead arrangements and thus helped with the acquisition of the sleeping coach.

Whitehead - Vintage: NCC brake 91 has suffered from some vandalism at Whitehead (broken windows).

The low-loader which delivered the sleeping coach has removed ex-NCC 238 to the Embsay and Bolton Abbey Railway at Skipton as part of a lease agreement. Recent photos of the coach can be seen by logging on to the news section of the Embsay &

Bolton Abbey Steam Railway website at:

www.pogo.org.uk/railway/news.html

ON-LINE

Website: The Society's web pages continue to be a valuable source of news and heritage information.

The Irish Railway Bibliography on the website has had a long-due major update. Please let us know if you find it useful.

Readers aware of books not listed are invited to submit the relevant details, in a format similar to that used, to:

rpsitrains@hotmail.com

IRN Gallery: The pictures section of the Irish Railway News has an area devoted to the Society. There are currently over 320 photographs there, dating back to 1969. The latest additions are some excellent black & white shots of No.85 in Harland & Wolff shipyard in the late 1970s:

groups.msn.com/irishRailwayNews

WHITEHEAD

Tidy Up: Sunday 7th November at Whitehead and two GS bogie sets, which were generally getting in the way of all shunting operations, were lifted off the track and set to one side using the hand crane and the Guinness engine. Then Mk2 923 was lifted off its temporary bogies using the heavy lift, and placed onto a set of CIE B4 bogies.

This left the yard well clear of surplus items to make the forthcoming Santa trains a lot easier to shunt.

Bits & Bobs: At Whitehead on Sunday 21st November No.186 was steam tested to check all was well after her boiler washout - she needs to be in tip-top shape for the fast-approaching Santa trains. Included on the day's agenda was rechecking the washout plugs for tightness as the boiler warmed, and testing the newly-fitted steam heating bag at the front of the locomotive. Happily all was well.

The opportunity was also taken to introduce three new recruits to the art of steam-raising, oiling, and general footplate duties.

The last lathe in the engine shed was lifted out using the hand crane and taken to the new workshop.

Some shunting practice was also incorporated in the day's activities, then lastly disposing of the engine.

An enjoyable and rewarding day, with new experiences learned by all.

BELFAST MEETINGS

Round-Up: Charles Friel started the new season with a slide show entitled "Another Forty Shades". It was a mixture of material that missed the final selection for the book, as well as pictures that might be actionable if published!

Although there was something there for everyone, the show was definitely one for the member of more mature years.

The first half of the show was broadly a history of the Society's headquarters at Whitehead, showing how the facilities (and the waistlines) have developed over the years. The changing hair styles were also remarkable! The story of how the locomotive and carriage fleets expanded was also presented, along with shots of the various tours all over the island - high summer at Whitehead, deepest winter in Mullingar.

The second half looked more at the personalities over 40 years of the Society. There were quite a number present who must have had difficulty hiding their embarrassment. Unfortunately, also a number who are no longer with us.

A night for the members and a fitting way to continue the 40th Anniversary celebrations!

The November meeting was a two-parter: "Post War Ballymoney" by Ian Bennington, and "Portstewart Tramway" by Michael Pollard. An excellent night!

Still To Come: The December meeting is due to feature films made by Macha Film Studios between 1966 and 1972.

The January meeting will be a Great Northern film show by Derek Henderson.

In February Fred Cooper will be showing footage of the lamented Derry Road, also marking a 40th anniversary but of a very different nature.

March - a long way off yet, but the intention is to throw the meeting open to other railway-based societies. So if you would like to feature your favourite, after the RPSI of course, then please contact Charles Friel as soon as possible.

MEMBERSHIP

Renewal: Membership cards for 2005 are now available if you wish to renew before the end of the year (31st January).

GENERAL

Publicity: As a result of newly forged relationships with railway publications in GB, there were two recent multi-page features with well written and equally illustrated articles on the RPSI on both this year's May Railtour and 40th celebrations in Steam Railway and Heritage Railway magazines.

The article in "Heritage Railway" magazine No.66, October 2004, was a news focus special entitled "Merlin: The Spell Is Over".

Programme 3 of the second series of "Trainspotting" on Discovery Home & Leisure featured the Society when it was shown a few times in October and November.

Restoration Of A GNR(I) SG3: Our not-so-young members will recall the cut-away model of the SG3, late of Great Victoria Street station, in its glass case just to the right as you entered the station (up the steps past the Victorian columns).

If you put a penny in the slot, a light came on and the wheels went round for about half a minute - quite fascinating since the engine was half cut away and you could see the cranks going round and the pistons and valves moving. The boiler was also sectioned showing the large and small tubes, the regulator and firebox, etc.

I squandered many a penny in it as a schoolboy!

We have had difficulty trying to trace the origins of the locomotive - what was the purpose in building it, when and by whom, and why not a more glamorous loco than a heavy goods engine? To this end I am indebted to several people who have helped - not the least being Jim Webster of Dundalk who was able to tell us that the loco was built by his father, a tool room fitter and then foreman at the GNR(I) Dundalk Works.

Why the loco was built is still a mystery - although the date (1920s) would suggest that the SG3 was selected as the most up to date GNR(I) design - the most recent passenger engine had been the S class of 1913. Whatever the reason, the model is a superb

example of craftsmanship.

After the closure of the old Great Victoria Street station, the model was moved to York Road where tragically it was badly damaged in a bomb explosion. Enough of it was left to warrant retention, but the glass case and "penny in the slot" drive were no more. The tender was practically destroyed and the engine suffered severe damage with many of its fittings missing.

Following some restoration work, the model eventually passed into the care of the RPSI. Further restoration has largely been done as time permits at the Society's "Tech Class" - the metalwork class at Belfast College of Further and Higher Education attended by Society members wishing to take part in locomotive maintenance. (Full size locos that is - the model SG3 has been something of a novelty.)

The SG3 is now close to completion, with the fitting of newly made coupling rods. The only outstanding part still incomplete is tender body, which should not present too many difficulties - especially since there is only half of it to start with. We plan to construct a glass display case but not, I would stress, the electric motor and "penny in the slot" mechanism.

Regarding the future - the model has a practical value for instruction of those involved in the maintenance and operation of the Society's locos. It has already been used in connection with training of footplate staff. We intend that its normal location should be at Whitehead, eventually in suitable "working museum" surroundings. However, it could also be displayed at other appropriate locations.

So that is the story so far. Any further information about the model will of course be highly valued.

Peter Scott

Five Foot Three: The Editor of the Society's journal "Five Foot Three" is asking prospective contributors to have their submissions with him by 31st December.

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