



December 2005

NEWS LETTER

HARVEY ON THE BALLAST

Tranche 1: The first period of the ballast contract ended on Friday 30th September as NIR took back possession of the section to Carrickfergus. The line as far as there reopened on 10th October. The Society's crew and locomotive were on ballast duty for a total of 44 days.

Tranche 2: After a short break, as the rail had not yet been laid much further than Carrickfergus, work started afresh on the section to Whitehead. As the evenings got darker the wagons were fitted with strings of large white 'fairy' lights powered from a portable generator to enable ballasting to continue after daylight (see picture in Whitehead Photo News on the website).

By the first week of November, track had reached Whitehead, and the Society's depot was temporarily reconnected to the rest of the railway network by slewling the new Up line direct into the RPSI platform.

No.3 "R.H. Smyth" made use of the new connection to return to base on Friday 11th November. Over the Saturday and Sunday some essential maintenance jobs were carried out, e.g. boiler washout, which could not be done at Greenisland or the Salt Mines. The locomotive was steam tested on the Sunday.

Some further top dressing was required in the Bleach Green - Carrickfergus section and four successive night time possessions were required in mid-November - a first for both RPSI crews and trains. The first night turn was on Monday 14th November, with a run all the way from the Society's depot at Whitehead to Bleach Green Junction where ballast was dropped on the turnouts

there. Harvey never actually made it on to the main line as it was at the Larne end and only the wagons reached the actual junction.

In theory the locomotive should be based at Whitehead from now until the end of the contract. However, the pointwork giving access to the RPSI yard has still to be fully installed so there will still be a period when stabling at Salt Mines will be necessary.

By the time this issue is circulated, the ballast contract should be completed as Whitehead had been reached by the end of November and services are due to start on 9th January.

CARRIAGE & WAGON

Lisburn: The running fleet remains at Lisburn and is likely to do so into the new year. NIR have scheduled the re-opening of the Larne line for the second week of the new year and 8th January is the provisional date for the return to Whitehead of No.186 and train.

The set continues to have running repairs as required, plus monthly checks on doors, locks, droplights, seats, lavatories, etc.

Whitehead: Work continues at Whitehead on:

180 (Corridor First) - Removed from the running set as Lisburn can only accommodate five vehicles. Like all the new vehicles, 180 will require a train-line wiring system.

547 (Diner) - Minor work only is being carried out until such times as a decision is made on the grant application - a provisional indication of success has been given but official approval is awaited at the time of writing.

(1)

By the end of October the fourth and final wheelset was in the lathe for profiling. On the coach body, the final stages of filling the side panels was complete and by mid-November a coat of green primer at last covered the undercoats, fillers and previous owner's livery. It will require more coats before the final finish is applied. The vehicle continues to receive donor parts from ex Irish Rail Mk2 4112, which the Society is fortunate to have.

The Locomotive Department have finished overhauling the various bogie components for 547 and are in the middle of re-assembly.

Internally, the next stage to be tackled is the panelling. Refitting of the kitchen and construction of a new bar remains to be done. This will be expedited when the grant is approved, as will the interior and exterior decor. The Locomotive Department will be able to complete the overhaul of a set of bogies. A train-line wiring system will be required, plus completion of brake and heating systems.

463 (Brake Corridor First) - Moved to Whitehead from Heysham in early November. Work on this corridor first brake vehicle is on hold pending the grant approval. Interior decor, corrosion repairs, installation of the generator systems, overhaul of bogies will all be required.

The coach is a Mk2z, with 24 seats, built in 1966. It originally came from BR Eastern Region, previously numbered 17091 and 14091. It will be fitted with a generator to provide train-line power and light to the train. It will be numbered 463 in the RPSI series.

625 (Dutch Van 4602) - The main generator in the 'Dutch' van has been started and seems in good running order. The smaller generator needs repair. Parts have been acquired from 4601 at Inchicore. Also, vacuum gear has been recovered from a scrap van at Inchicore.

1097 (ex-GS&WR) - Exterior repairs were completed in preparation for the move to Downpatrick which took place on the same weekend as 463's arrival.

4112 (Mk2 Open) - This ex Irish Rail vehicle was acquired as a source of spare parts. An exterior door and 2 buckeye couplers have been earmarked for 547.

Spares: At the end of October a delivery from Heysham arrived at Whitehead with 2

Mk2 bogies, 2 Mk2 trestles and several pallets of assorted spares.

Dublin: Following a derailment at Connolly earlier in the year, there are still some outstanding issues regarding the Dublin set. It is hoped that some, if not all, of the vehicles will be available for Christmas, possibly strengthened with Irish Rail Cravens.

LOCOMOTIVES

Hunslets: Following an email appeal from member Brian Torrens, an encouraging number of interested members met at Whitehead on Saturday 29th November to have a good look around both Hunslet locomotives with a view to furthering the attempts to get one back into traffic.

It was agreed that 102 could be got moving again with some work, namely getting batteries and a charger rigged up. These items, minus leads and plugs, have been acquired and, as a first step, the group will be trying to get them organised.

Brian would like to hear from like-minded members who are willing to work on diesel. He can be contacted at:

napierdeltic1977@yahoo.co.uk

OPERATIONS

Causeway Express: Unfortunately, the procedure for approving No.186 to operate again after the "Bangor Belle" derailment at Lisburn was not completed in time to allow the train on Sunday 25th September to operate.

No.186 was steamed on 18th September and successfully tested over the same portion of track. However, the approval process does take some time and it was felt that there was insufficient time to market and sell tickets. Hence, the reluctant decision to cancel.

Halloween Special: Due to the uncertainty of the Dublin set being available for Halloween it was decided to cancel the operations planned for 29th October. As this was a new venture for the Dublin team it was agreed that to do it justice a suitably long lead time was required.

Broomstick Belle: On a beautiful autumn day, No.186 hauled two packed trains from Lisburn and Belfast to Antrim on Sunday

(2)

30th October. Such were the crowds that when all the creepy presents were distributed on the second train there was only one left - a close run thing!

The usual turnout of young ghosts and ghouls contributed massively to the atmosphere and they were rewarded with a competition with prizes for the best costumes.

No.186 performed adequately throughout, keeping to time on each section.

Greystones 150: The operation on Sunday 13th November ran without a hitch - thanks to all concerned (including No.4).

The 10:10 Connolly to Greystones connecting service was 80% full, while the three shuttles from Greystones to Wicklow were full to capacity. In total, 750 customers enjoyed the day, albeit diluted as the train had to run with Irish Rail stock (3 Cravens, buffet 1508 and BR Van).

Charter: No.186 hauled a private charter for Invest NI from Belfast Central to Cultra on the evening of Tuesday 15th November.

Due to events earlier in the day the driver ran out of hours and the empty train had to terminate in Bangor rather than returning to Lisburn. Locomotive and coaches ran direct into the middle road in Bangor for stabling. Despite this, the charter portion of the trip operated successfully with a number of very favourable comments being received.

The train returned to Lisburn on Sunday 20th November.

Coleraine Shopper: Most of the available tickets were sold for what is essentially a connection into the Santa trains operating out of Ballymena and Coleraine - a chance to enjoy 138½ steam miles behind No.186 for a very reasonable fare.

Santa Special - Ballymena: Tickets were made available on a trial basis for the train to Coleraine on 26th November and were sold out within 5 hours of going on sale - surely a Society record!

Santa Special - Coleraine: Two fully booked Santa trains operated from Coleraine to Castlerock on Saturday 26th November.

Santa Special - Dublin: All the trains from Dublin were fully booked out by the middle of October. While this is disappointing for many prospective passengers, there is simply no way that more trains can be run

due to the heavy commitment required from the Society's volunteers and from the Irish Rail footplate crew.

Santa Special - Belfast: Tickets for the remaining trains are on sale at:

Bangor Tourist Office (028 9127 0069)
Belfast Welcome Centre (028 9024 6609)
Carrickfergus Tourist Office (028 9335 8049)
Lisburn Tourist Office (028 9266 0038)

Return To Whitehead: No.186 and train are due to return to Whitehead on 8th January. It will not be carrying passengers as the opportunity will be taken to gauge the coaches against the new track and platforms between Bleach Green and Larne Harbour.

Earl Of Desmond: Please note that due to problems with hotel availability the 2006 May railtour has been brought forward a week from its normal slot. It will operate to Tralee over the weekend of 6th & 7th May.

ON-LINE

Website: After a lull, issues 17, 19, 20, 27, 28 and 48 of "Five Foot Three" have been added. There are now 24 out of 51 copies on the website and they make a major, and valuable, contribution to the documented history of Irish railways.

There have been significant additions to the Gallery and Whitehead Photo News pages.

The Society's Webmaster is currently looking at ways to improve the content and accessibility of the website. So if anyone has any ideas for improvement or for desirable new features then please send them in.

WHITEHEAD

Work Goes On: The Site squad continues to maintain the layout at Whitehead - three life-expired sleepers were replaced on Saturday 1st October.

Following a spate of vandalism on the platform at Whitehead, 15 slates were replaced on shop roof on Saturday 15th October.

SALES

New: The following items are new from the last Sales List:

"Main Line Railways of Northern Ireland", W.P. McCormick, £5. This 48 page, paperback book containing 19 photos was published as long ago as 1948, yet these copies are in mint condition.

"Irish Rail Archive Volume 6 - Sugar Beet Updated", Markle Associates, 56 minute DVD, £16.95.

"Crossing the Boyne", book, £7.50.

"RPSI 40th Anniversary Grand Gala Dinner" plus connecting trains, 94 minute DVD, £12.

"Suir Valley Railtour" plus connecting trains, 60 minute DVD, £12.

"Great Northern Railway (Ireland) in Colour", Norman Johnston, hardback, 31 x 21 cm, 235 colour photos, 112 pages, £20.

"Chasing The Flying Snail", Tony Burges, paperback, 20 x 24 cm, 54 b&w photos, 64 pages, £8.99.

"Railways In Ulster's Lakeland", Tony Burges, paperback, 21 x 24 cm, 54 b&w photos, 64 pages, £8.99.

RPSI Christmas Cards, pack of 6 with three different paintings by Debra Wenlock, £7.50.

"Rails Around Cork And Kerry - An Irish Railway Pictorial", Michael Baker, paperback, 28 x 22 cm, 200 b&w photos, 80 pages, £14.99.

To obtain any of these items, send a cheque payable to "RPSI", to: RPSI Postal Sales, 103 Wynchurh Road, Belfast, BT6 OJJ.

To cover the cost of postage, please add 10% (UK only) or 20% (outside UK).

Collectors' Corner: if you have any items missing from your collection then drop a line to Collectors' Corner at the Sales address - there is always a large selection of second-hand items in stock.

GENERAL

In The News: The October 2005 edition of "Railway Magazine" included short snippets on the use of RPSI No.3 on ballast trains and about the Society's acquisition of the NIR Hunslets.

The September/October issue (No.314) of "Steam Railway" featured a small news item (with photo) of No.3 on the ballast contract.

Irish Abroad: In September, members of

the Society's Dublin catering team took part in the Steam Grand Prix in Hungary. They took over a dining car and had a very hectic time serving Irish stew and Guinness.

Pictures can be found here:

<http://paulbigland.fotopic.net/c696524.html>

Magheramorne: On Tuesday 11th October Lafarge, the present owners of The Magheramorne Cement Works, put on display their plans for the future of the works, the quarry and the spoil peninsula.

The scheme includes apartments, shops, hotel, water sports, outdoor activities and, from the RPSI's interest, a heritage railway with museum and working line, with plans to:

- Build a visitor centre/museum to exhibit RPSI Rolling Stock which is not in use.
- Provide a station connected to the main line for excursion steam and diesel trains to arrive at and depart from.
- Construct a standard gauge line from the station in town area along the top of the peninsula to the far end and run steam train rides.

The RPSI position throughout has been that it is keen to see one, two or all three of these projects go ahead provided the funds are provided to finance them.

BELFAST MEETINGS

Round-Up: The new season of meetings commenced on 12th October and was a show by Tony Price and Liam Mooney of vintage cine from as long ago as the 1950 and more recent footage of RPSI railtours.

The second meeting was a celebration of the railways of Drogheda and its surrounds by the ever-excellent Charles Friel.

The now-traditional autumn release of new books ensured the sales tables were groaning to the point of collapse!

EDITORIAL ADDRESS

148 Church Road, Newtownabbey,

Co. Antrim, BT36 6HJ.

www.rpsi-online.org

e-mail: rpsitrains@hotmail.com