



March 2006

# NEWS LETTER

## HARVEY ON THE BALLAST

**The End:** The last scheduled ballast operation finished with the morning shift on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> December. No.3 "R.H. Smyth" is now back safely tucked up in the engine shed at Whitehead.

Driver Nelson Poots and Fireman Francis Richards had the task of ending what was a long-running and intensive campaign from the Society's point of view.

All those involved - and there were quite a number - are to be congratulated for the dedication and professionalism with which they represented the Society. Well done!

**Facts And Figures:** The contract ran from 4<sup>th</sup> August until 9<sup>th</sup> December, a total of 128 days. The locomotive actually operated on 81 days and AMEC were invoiced for a further 20 in respect of which the agreed notice of cancellation had not been received. Another 24 days were not charged as the agreed notice had been received. There were 3 days specifically set aside for maintenance, more of which was carried out during some of the lay-offs, the longest of which was from 1<sup>st</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> October (the end of the section to Carrickfergus), although this was broken briefly on 5<sup>th</sup> October when the train had to be moved from the Up to the Down line near Carrick.

The longest unbroken period of daily operation was from 24<sup>th</sup> October to 5<sup>th</sup> November while based at the Salt Mines - a less than ideal location.

Three loading/stabling points were used: Greenisland, Salt Mines and, to a much lesser extent, Beach Avenue, Whitehead. Despite hopes to the contrary the locomotive only managed to stay 2 or 3 nights in its RPSI home.

A total of 20 RPSI members covered a roster

of two crews per day, normally 06:00 till 13:00 and 13:00 till finish. Five night turns, entailing entry into NIR possession south of Carrickfergus, were worked during November.

Based on Peter Scott's calculations, the total train weight was about 275 tonnes, around 200 tonnes of which was stone. With an average of 4 drops per day this would give a total weight of stone moved of about 65,000 tons - and no passes!

Note, as a consequence, for the first time in 30-odd years, the locomotive now faces Larne!

## MEMBERSHIP

**Reminder:** It's the new membership year and subscriptions are due. Some points to note:

- A donation is always welcome, so if you can afford it please consider including a little extra. Don't forget to indicate which department you would most like to benefit from your donation. Many thanks to members who have already donated.
- Members who are eligible to use Gift Aid (UK taxpayers) and who have not done so will be sent a form along with their card. Please consider filling it in as it can increase the value of payments by 28%.
- Perhaps Life members, from whom we don't normally hear from one year to a next, would consider using the renewal form to send in a donation.
- As the Society has a low volume of credit card payments the expense of an electronic system is not justified. Therefore, the old manual hand-written system is still in use. So members are asked to use cheques drawn on sterling or euro bank accounts in preference to credit cards.

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- Where credit cards are used, they will be processed in sterling only, so please use the sterling rates when renewing by this method. A £1 handling fee will also be added.
- If you are a Senior member (over 65) then please let us know, even if you prefer to pay the full Adult rate, as we are charged VAT on the membership rate. Any extra can always be added as a donation.
- A self-addressed envelope would be appreciated, with a UK stamp if you can get one.

## OPERATIONS

**Santa Special Dublin:** The season (3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 10th, 11<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> December) was completed without any major problems - trains filled, weather fine. No.4 hauled a nine piece set - BR van plus three Cravens plus RPSI 88, 1463, 2421, 1383 and 1916.

The new feature this year was that rather than numbering coaches, the seats were numbered, with each ticket number corresponding to a seat. It worked quite well and gives food for thought as to its possible adoption for all trips, although there is a major overhead in administrative effort.

The trick on these trips is to load and unload quickly, as the train indicator on the platform will generally show a DART a few minutes behind. Each coach door has an RPSI steward allocated to help passengers board, and to load and stow baby buggies.

On the way back, the PA on the RPSI part of the train allows a 'Get ready to disembark' announcement to be made as the train passes through Connolly. Again, each door has a steward to help people off. It is usual to have arrived in Pearse with a DART shown 4 minutes behind, have discharged all the passengers and not delayed the DART!!

The train proceeds to Grand Canal Dock where it is all hands to clearing glasses, picking up rubbish and sweeping the train. This is a very slick operation and thanks are due to the 40 or so volunteers who make it possible.

**Santa Special - Belfast:** Having operated successfully on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> December, a mechanical problem occurred on No.186 whilst operating the second train on the following Saturday. The loco was failed at Antrim and subsequently operated back to Lisburn via the Antrim branch, while the train was hauled back by GM 111.

Unfortunately, the trains on 11<sup>th</sup> December

had to be operated by an NIR 80-class railcar. Over the following week No.186 was repaired in extra quick time at Lisburn and could have been run in on the next weekend. However, that would have required 3 drivers for Society operations (2 steam plus 1 railcar) and NIR just didn't have the resources, so the remaining trains on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> December were also railcar operated. It might have been possible to operate our own coaches by diesel haulage but without steam there would have been no heating.

While the situation was very much less than ideal, the Operations Committee are grateful to NIR for making an alternative available at short notice. It is hoped that members and their friends who travelled will understand that the only alternative would have been to cancel the trains.

Despite No.186's absence, the Society volunteers overcame their disappointment and rose magnificently to the occasion. All prospective passengers had the situation explained to them, with the offer of a full refund should the lack of a steam engine mean a completely spoiled journey. Most were sympathetic and understanding and few, if any, refused to travel. As a result it was full trains all round.

The usual cheery Father Christmas and the quality presents helped the children overcome their initial disappointment.

The volunteers involved in dealing with the passengers should be congratulated, having turned a potential disaster into a very pleasant day out for many.

**Return To Whitehead:** No.186 and train returned to base on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> January. Leaving Lisburn after a full ten months there, it got home via York Road (twice) and Larne Harbour.

But the opening occasion on the day was a first for the Society. After leaving Lisburn the train stopped at Adelaide where a short ceremony was held to scatter the ashes of former member Gilmour Reid. Gillie, who died in November, had been a cleaner and firemen for the GNR and had been based at the former locomotive depot at Adelaide. His relatives approached the Society and, following approval from NIR, it was agreed to return Gillie to where he had spent most of his working life.

After Belfast Central the train called at York Road for a visit to the carriage wash where 10 months of outdoor living were rinsed from the coaches.

From there the train ran to Larne Harbour

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with stops at all the Down line platforms to check compliance to the gauge. On the run back, although there was a stop at Whitehead's NIR station, the train had to return to York Road to allow gauging of the Up line platforms.

Eventual arrival back at the Society's platforms was at 16:30. There, members had been busy all afternoon trying to make space for locomotive and carriages in what is now a very cramped depot.

No.186's visit to Larne Harbour was only the second in its history - the first being the "Inver nOllarbhá" railtour on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1970, a mere 36 years ago. But what's 36 years to a J15?

It was also No.186's first visit to "Larne Town" station - in 1970 "Larne" station was situated on the original alignment some 200m further west, before the new route through the town was opened in 1974 to facilitate road construction.

**Good Friday:** The first public operation of 2006 is the traditional run to Mullingar on 14<sup>th</sup> April.

**Easter Bunny:** There will be two return trips to Whitehead on 17<sup>th</sup> April.

**Earl Of Desmond:** Quite a sizeable number of intending passengers have indicated Dingle as an alternative destination on the Advance Booking Form. We have to advise that as a result of the Sunday departure from Tralee being revised to around 08:55 it will mean a very early departure from Dingle of around 07:15. A continental breakfast only will be available. Patrons will need to rise around 06:00. Numbers are restricted to 50 with no single rooms available.

Please advise the Railtour Office by return if you feel that you can accept this and whether we should proceed, or advise that you have reconsidered. The Railtour Committee need to hear from you to allow a decision to be made.

Dingle passengers are scheduled to transfer to their coach at Killarney on Saturday afternoon.

**The One-One-One-Day Tour:** The Modern Railway Society of Ireland are hiring the RPSI's Mk2 coaches for a diesel-hauled tour from Belfast to Dublin, Rosslare, Waterford and Limerick Junction on 13<sup>th</sup> May. Details can be obtained from: MRSI, 4 York Avenue, Whitehead, Co. Antrim, BT38 9QT.

## LOCOMOTIVES

**No.3 "R.H. Smyth":** During the last few days

of the ballast contract there were some problems with the left hand slide valve being out of timing. This in no way affected the work being carried out as the loco was still able to pull the three hoppers. The fault was identified and corrected on return to Whitehead.

**Hunslets:** The Society's website now carries a page dedicated to the Hunslet locomotives, linked from the Locomotive page (as are the other Society engines). See:

[www.rpsi-online.org/lccos/loco101\\_102.htm](http://www.rpsi-online.org/lccos/loco101_102.htm)

Some work was carried out on 102 on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> February in an attempt to get the engine started. However, the battery master-switch was found to be faulty and will need be repaired first.

## CARRIAGE & WAGON

**Dublin:** Considerable refurbishment continues to take place on two vehicles. The team of Peter Emmett, Denis McCabe, Paddy O'Brien and Alex Richardson has totally overhauled Park Royal 1419 at our base in Mullingar. Substantial work has been done externally and internally. The original capacity of 70 has been reduced to 66 - this to make way for the installation of a toilet for disabled passengers. The doors at one end have been made bigger to facilitate wheelchair access. It is envisaged that 1419 will shortly be transported to Inchicore by low loader for inspection and repairs to the (Commonwealth) bogies. The vehicle should return to service during the 2006 operating season.

The 'all-first' seven compartment side corridor vehicle 1142, of 1921 vintage, is undergoing major refurbishment at Inchicore. The compartment side has been totally re-panelled with new materials - next up will be fitting safety glass and a full paint. The panels below the window level on the corridor side have also been totally replaced and windows and top panels are next in line for treatment. Both ends will also receive full attention in due course. It is not expected that 1142 will be in the set for 2006. The team on this restoration project is Fred Andrews, George Dempsey, Peter Fletcher, David Humphries, Chas Meredith and David Seymour.

**Whitehead:** Mk2 Diner 547 is the main recipient of attention. The vehicle is still in its green exterior undercoat. Work continues on the interior - currently the wall panels are being varnished. The kitchen remains to be fitted. Likewise the bar, while in situ, still has

to be fixed in.

On Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> February the refurbished bogies were put under the vehicle using the sheer legs.

Further dismantling of the Irish Rail Mk2 open coach for spares has produced windows, doors and toilet plumbing plus electrical wiring. These items have been put in stables for storage.

It is hoped that Mk2 coach 920 will return shortly from Heysham for overhaul at Whitehead, hopefully with disabled facilities.

## WHITEHEAD

**The Done List:** January saw the arrival of 10 good quality second-hand crossing timbers from the Larne Line relaying contract. The chairs were a mixture of flat bottom and bullhead. The former were removed for recycling in the foundry, while the latter will be useful for track repairs. It is hoped to visit Greenisland in the near future to remove some more surplus trackwork which NIR and Amec have kindly donated.

Several sets of points at the end of the platform have been freed up by removing dirt and have been oiled so that blades can move more freely after nine months of relative inactivity.

On Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> February the loading shovel returned to Whitehead from Lisburn.

**The To-Do List:** In the 'close' season before Easter there will still be a lot happening at Whitehead:

- Preparatory work on DCDR No.90 and No.1.
- Getting the site into shape for Easter visitors.
- For the diesel fans, work continues on Hunslet 102. Or help getting the generator van back into service.
- In the carriage shed the push is on to get diner 547 back into traffic.

## GENERAL

**Council:** The Carriage & Wagon (North) Council post has been vacant since the AGM earlier in the year. Council are happy to announce that Francis Richards has agreed to take on the post. Francis has been co-opted onto Council until the next AGM. A debt of gratitude is due to Paul Newell who carried on in the background with most elements of the job.

Similarly, the Carriage & Wagon (South) post

was vacated as Alex Richardson has taken himself off on a year-long world tour. Best wishes to him, with the hope that he sees some steam somewhere along the way! Tony O'Shaughnessy has agreed to take on the job and he has been co-opted to serve until the AGM.

**AGM:** Treasurer Nelson Poots and General Officer Gerry Mooney are retiring from their posts so nominations are invited for these, and any other, Council positions.

**New Book:** "Steaming in Three Centuries" by Irwin Pryce and Leslie McAllister, the history of the GS&WR J15 class, i.e. our own No.184 and No.186, was published at the end of January.

**Film Update:** Back in early June 2005 Society coaches were involved in filming at Dublin Pearse for the film "Lassie". The film went on general release on 16<sup>th</sup> December and no doubt will be available on DVD soon!

**Obituary - 1:** Tom McDevitte, long-term RPSI member, former newspaper columnist and frequent broadcaster with BBC, UTV and RTÉ, died in December aged 94.

**Obituary - 2:** Norman McAdams, Hon. Treasurer of the Irish Railway Record Society, and RPSI member since 1964, died on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2006.

## BELFAST MEETINGS

**Round-Up:** The current season has proved that Charles Friel shows no sign of running out of excellent topics and presenters for the meetings. So far members have experienced: Irish Railway line, Drogheda's railways, the County Donegal, the Harcourt Street line and film of GNR goods.

## ON-LINE

**Website:** A number of Five Foot Three issues have now been converted to PDF format on the website by our web team. The new format means that photographs now appear in the appropriate place in the text and the layout is a nearer match to the original journal.

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