



March 2006

NEWS LETTER

THE EARL OF DESMOND

Saturday 29th April: No.186 arrived safely in Dublin, having hauled 5 Mk2 coaches from Whitehead to take up position for the main tour.

It was a leisurely journey and the only disappointment was how few members sampled a great day out.

Later in the evening the locomotive, coaches and a 'dead' No.4 were hauled to Inchicore to be stored prior to the railtour.

Thursday 4th May: A small band of travellers were on board to appreciate No.186's 140 mile run from Dublin to Mallow with the 3 Society Cravens and a heating van.

Friday 5th May: Despite a heavy rain shower on the Shannon, the coach party enjoyed their boat cruise and visit to the Bord na Mona peat railway. Joe Fitzpatrick was the jovial host.

Saturday 6th May: Departure from Dublin Heuston had to be postponed from the original 08:10 timing to 10:43, because of difficulties with No.4's firebars which only became apparent during steam-raising at Inchicore. Participants were advised of the delay, which gave them a chance for a cup of coffee or a browse through Charles Friel's excellent railtour brochure. Happily the problem was resolved and steam-raising resumed - by 10:30 the 2-6-4T was backing down onto the train of five Craven carriages and one heating van. Many thanks are due to Peter Scott for getting the engine on the road again, and to Denis Grimshaw who largely rewrote the schedule when No.4's predicament became known.

Running to Mallow was sprightly, and from there No.186 took over to haul the train along

the 62-mile long Kerry branch. The 1879-built 0-6-0 is in excellent form and handled the undulating track with no problem at all. Several stops had to be cut out, in order to regain time, but there was time for a watering stop at Killarney. In the evening sunshine the Kerry hills looked spectacular. The train arrived in Tralee at 19:20, just half an hour down. Participants who were going to Dingle for the night as an add-on to the main trip detrained at Farranfore and travelled by coach, having a look at the surviving Tralee and Dingle trackbed en route.

Sunday 7th May: Departure was again delayed - for two reasons. Firstly, the engine needed additional water supplies before departing, and secondly, and more ominously, Control refused to allow the train to depart until the Garda had checked that spectators along the lineside did not pose a safety risk. The driver of the incoming IE local which arrived at 08:55 had reported that people awaiting the train (it was not clear if they were locals or photographers) might be at risk. The Garda were duly despatched, and once they reported that there was no danger, the train was permitted to leave - at 09:45. Unfortunately, as the path was lost the special was held to cross trains on the branch and then looped on the main line to allow service trains to overtake.

No.4 took over the train at Mallow and ran bunk-first to Limerick Junction where the engine turned on the semaphore signal festooned triangle. The sun shone, lunch was served and the bar did good business as the train ran faultlessly up the Cork main line to Dublin, although pathing problems meant the train did not reach Dublin Connolly until 20:35.

Monday 8th May: An excellent finish to the weekend was No.4's superb performance on the return from Dublin to Whitehead (via

Antrim).

Tuesday 9th May: The traditional bus tour (on a UTA-liveried Routemaster double-decker with Charles Friel at the PA) visited the new NIR railcar facility, followed by a Belfast city tour, before a relaxed visit to the Folk Park at Cultra - all in glorious sunshine.

There was still steam to be had as No.186 returned from Mallow to Dublin. Despite the small crowd it is still worthwhile to provide coaching stock for these loco positioning runs as some people who are unable to travel on the main tour can still contribute to the finance of the tour and also offset the costs that would be involved in the positioning the locomotive anyway.

Dues: Many thanks to all those who worked so hard in advance of the weekend and on the trip itself to make the trip such an enjoyable venture. Roll on next year's trip!

Photos: The Society webmaster is keen to receive digital copies of scenes from the railtour (or indeed any Society trains) so that those not fortunate to be travelling can see what they missed by visiting our website.

VISITORS

No.1: Orenstein and Koppel Loco No.1, from the Downpatrick Railway is to be restored (following sister engine O&K No.3 several years ago), but this will be a long-term project.

No.5 "Drumboe": County Donegal Railways No.5 has left Donegal for the first time in 47 years, and is now safely at Whitehead.

The locomotive was delivered by low-loader at lunchtime on Sunday 30th April.

During the preceding week, the Society's workforce had been hard at work preparing flat wagon R2 (ex-CIÉ open standard 1469) for receiving the locomotive. This involved removing about 30ft of its length from the middle and welding the two ends together, giving a 34ft wagon capable of taking the near 40 tonne weight of the locomotive.

Not all went according to plan as over 40 years of inaction and exposure to the elements has left the engine in a fragile state. When lifting on to R2, both the rear bogie and the pony truck were giving every indication of wanting to separate from the rest of the frame, and the pony very nearly did!

Now the question remains, were the calculations correct and will the combined

height of wagon and locomotive fit through the doors into the workshop, or will a hacksaw be needed?

No.5 "Drumboe" is a Class 5 2-6-4T (originally No.17 "Glenties") built by Nasmyth Wilson in 1907. Superheated in 1929, she had a tractive effort of 12,755lbs.

The locomotive is having some, but not all, parts overhauled to operating standard as part of a recently signed Inter-Reg agreement with County Donegal Railway Restoration Ltd (CDRRL) of Donegal Town.

The €125,000 Inter-Reg grant aid project will see a number of items being worked on by the RPSI for the CDRRL. As part of the grant aid package the RPSI has recruited an additional carriage worker. This will help the RPSI maintain these heritage skills into the future.

No.90: The ex-GSR locomotive arrived by low loader on 13th February. The event was historic for two reasons. First, No.90 is the oldest surviving Irish broad gauge locomotive in operational condition. Second, it now means that all Irish broad gauge steam locos other than those in museum care have visited Whitehead depot for one reason or another!

The loco was originally the motive power section of a "rail motor" or combined engine and coach; in this form it did not last long and was converted to its current state as a diminutive 0-6-0 side tank locomotive. With its slender chimney, double smokebox doors and cast iron wheel centres it is unmistakably something from the 1870s. Along with a similar locomotive No.100, it was used on light branch lines in West Cork. After withdrawal from traffic, No.90 was fortunately preserved by CIÉ and stood for many years as a feature on Mallow platform.

In the late 1980s, No.90 was loaned to Westrail and moved to Tuam where it was restored to working order, with additions necessary for operating passenger trains in the 1990s - for example, vacuum brakes and electric lights. The boiler was rebuilt by the Severn Valley Railway at Bridgnorth. For several years the loco operated in a most competent manner not only in the Galway area but briefly at Cork. Unfortunately, this did not continue (lack of steam crews and the end of Tuam as a block post were reasons).

The loco has now been loaned to the Downpatrick and Co Down Railway, who have secured funding for basic boiler and other repairs necessary to make the loco operational for their line. They have asked

RPSI Engineering at Whitehead to carry out this work, hence the loco has been delivered straight to Whitehead from Inchicore.

The first move will be to thoroughly examine the locomotive including opening up and inspecting its boiler. This will determine the extent of the work necessary. Only then can a definite timescale be established but it is hoped that No.90 can be made ready for action fairly speedily.

CARRIAGE & WAGON

Whitehead: Work continues on the overhaul of Mk2 diner 547, with the interior panelling receiving attention, and the first top coat of paint being applied to the exterior.

Work on the underframes of 6-wheel 62M is being undertaken in the workshop on behalf of the DCDR.

Dublin: Due to not having a full set available for the Good Friday train, three Cravens and a van had been booked from IÉ. However, by the Wednesday before the trip, three (1529, 1539 and 1541) of the Cravens now in the Society's possession were passed for operation and ran in the running rake.

To differentiate the Society's Cravens coaches from those still remaining with IÉ, a temporary green livery has been applied from the waistline down on 1529 and 1539. A decision on the final colour will be taken shortly. Volunteers handy with a paintbrush are being sought by Carriage & Wagon Officer Tony O'Shaughnessy (please write or email to the Editorial address).

The entire Dublin rake, including 1142 and the 3 Cravens, underwent an ultrasonic axle test on Friday 21st April and happily only one axle on 1383 requires attention. This procedure involved removing all the axle covers, and replacing grease as needed. Nine coaches with 4 axles each is 72 covers. Quite an effort! The job is just a bit of manual spanner work. We have many jobs like this so once again please volunteer to help.

OPERATIONS

Private Charter: The first train of the season ran on the evening of Friday 7th April. It was a private charter by Moffett Engineering, reportedly the world's largest manufacturer of lorry-mounted forklift trucks. The guests were picked up at Belfast GVS (a first for this station in recent years) and were taken to Cultra by No.186 and a set of five coaches.

The train ran empty to Bangor where it stalled until 23:30 when it was time to return to Cultra to pick up the passengers for return to Belfast.

Everything ran smoothly - the only event of any significance was a 5 minute engineering works delay passing through Central Station on the return journey.

Good Friday: Everything operated to plan and 250 passengers took part. No.4 hauled a mixed set of RPSI vintage and Cravens carriages.

Easter Bunny: The Easter trains continued on Monday 17th April, No.186 hauling two fully booked trains (600 passengers). It was the first time that the engine had operated local trains with the full 6 Mk2 set. While the difference was noticeable to the footplate crew it made no change to the running as time was kept.

The One-One-One-Day Tour: On 13th May the MRSI hired the 6 Mk2 coaches for a diesel-hauled trip to Waterford. NIR 113 and IR 080 and 074 were all involved.

Castlerock: On Sunday 21st May No.4 is booked for the LMS (NCC) main line. The operation will complete the final gauging exercise before the Mk2 carriages are passed for all lines in Ireland - Bellarena and Londonderry being the two remaining stations. Depart Belfast at 11:42.

The train will be empty beyond Castlerock, but two passenger options are available:

- A dining train incorporating a buffet lunch in the Golf Hotel at Castlerock, plus coach to the nearby Mussenden Temple and Bishop's Castle.
- Train travel only to Coleraine or Castlerock.

Three Cities: Monday 29th May sees the return of No.4 to Dublin and No.186 to Whitehead. This will be an intensive travel day; a day for those who prefer to travel rather than arrive. A day for the sandwiches and tea flask - or should that be hamper. Depart Belfast at 09:10.

Larne Alive: Larne Council have chartered the train as part of their summer festival. For more information on "Steam into Summer" and for ticket sales call Larne Tourist Information Centre on 028 2826 0088.

Tickets are £5 return and £3 single. Depart ex Carrickfergus 11:20 and 14:45. Return ex Larne 13:30 and 17:20.

Wicklow 400: This event, originally planned

for 4th June, has been postponed until 30th July.

Steam & Jazz: Dates this year are 16th, 23rd & 30th June with No.186, price £20 from usual Tourist Information Offices.

Mid-Summer Steam: No.4 will be hauling the usual barbecue train to Mullingar on 17th June.

Sea Breeze: Wexford and Rosslare are the destination points on 2nd July.

Michael Davitt 100: 2006 is the centenary of the death of Michael Davitt, founder of the Land League, and a number of events are marking the occasion, one of which is a public charter of No.4 and the RPSI train to Ballina and return over two days - 15th & 16th July.

Participants must arrange their own Irish Rail connections if making a single trip on either day, or arrange their own accommodation if making the return trip.

Stewards: The Belfast On-Train team are seeking to increase the pool of talent available to be rostered to act as stewards on Whitehead-based trains. If you would be willing to act in this capacity on a few days per year, please write or email to the Editorial address.

BELFAST MEETINGS

Round-Up: The final St. Jude's meeting of the season took place on 8th March and was a fine two part show.

Derek Martin detailed his research into the life of Freeman Wills Crofts, one-time Civil Engineer of the NCC, and part-time crime fiction author.

Derek Young showed a selection of slides of the NCC lines in the 1960s. This was a precursor to a book on the UTA In Colour which Derek and Colourpoint hope to publish later in the year. Derek would be interested in hearing from anyone with colour slides on the subject for possible inclusion in the book.

Next: As always, Charles Friel is on the lookout for ideas and volunteers for next season.

GENERAL

AGM: On Saturday 22nd April Vice-President Sir Kenneth Bloomfield chaired the meeting in Dublin. There were no major issues arising.

No nominations had been received for the post of Treasurer. But as one member had indicated that he was available from next year, Nelson Poots courageously agreed to continue for another 12 months.

Gerry Mooney, having served the maximum 3 years in the post of General Officer, stood down to be replaced by Norman Foster.

Philip Cox did not stand again as Dublin Area Operations Officer and was replaced by new boy Mark Tyrrell.

New Book: Steaming in Three Centuries - The 101 Class Locomotives Of The Great Southern & Western Railway by Irwin Pryce and Leslie McAllister, IRRS London Area.

ISBN: 0-90256-408-0 312-95 Softback, 192 pages, 237 photographs, drawings and tables.

WHITEHEAD

Platform One: On Saturday 1st April (no joke), despite being caught in a thunderstorm, the Whitehead Site Squad bravely stayed at their posts and were able to get all the platform edge paving slabs lifted.

A number of slabs were broken and it was deemed that replacement by tarmac would be a better job.

The work was carried out by a number of old hands supplemented with a few new faces - which was encouraging.

The last weekend in April was very busy at Whitehead, with a major shunt to position one of the flat wagons to accept County Donegal Railways locomotive "Drumboe", which was due to arrive in a week's time.

As the Whitehead depot gets more cluttered with 'foreign' engines, shunts become more and more involved, a throwback to the early 1970s before the major trackwork expansions which made shunting trains so much simpler.

Cutting up of redundant carriage underframes is reaching completion and this will free up some space.

EDITORIAL ADDRESS

148 Church Road, Newtownabbey,
Co. Antrim, BT36 6HJ.

www.rpsi-online.org

e-mail: rpsitrains@hotmail.com