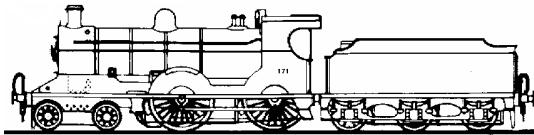


Railway Preservation Society of Ireland



August 2007

NEWS LETTER

PRESS RELEASE (28/6/2007)

Portrush Flyer 2007: The Railway Preservation Society of Ireland has been informed by NIR that it is unable to operate the Portrush Flyer steam hauled tourist train this year. NIR have not taken this decision lightly and have tried unsuccessfully to accommodate the operation of the Portrush Flyer.

There are a number of reasons for this unfortunate cancellation:

1. NIR's passenger traffic has increased so much that they are now supplementing the train service to Portrush which reduces the opportunity to provide a path for the Portrush Flyer.
2. NIR have informed us that because of the condition of the railway track between Ballymena and Coleraine they have been compelled to introduce a series of temporary speed restrictions, and increase the journey times. Again this makes it difficult to provide a path for the Flyer.

The Railway Preservation Society regrets that we have had to cancel this year's Portrush Flyer and we apologise to our customers and friends.

We hope that the new Assembly will be able to make available the money required to upgrade and increase the capacity of the line from Ballymena to Londonderry.

The RPSI will continue to work with NIR to see what can be achieved for 2008.

Update: Subsequent to the press release, NIR informed the Operations Officer in early August that there would be no more steam trains north of Ballymena until the line has been relaid. This affects a proposed train to the Portrush Air Show in September and the Coleraine Santa train which was due to run on 2nd December.

A timescale for any line relay has not been made known. The Society's approach since the ban was announced has been to push for the line to be funded rather than to castigate NIR. This was emphasised when the Society's Phil Lockett was interviewed along with Translink's Mal McGreevy on the Radio Ulster Stephen Nolan Show on 5th July. The confrontation typical of this show never materialised as both were making the same points regarding the current lack of funding.

OPERATIONS

Bray Shuttle: On Saturday 2nd June, the train (more accurately a "Shuttle") operated from Dublin Connolly to Bray. Owing to an unfortunate shunting error with a 29000 class railcar, No.186 got trapped in the yard in Connolly minutes before she was going to go 'off shed'. Despite much attention to the railcar it was unable to move, with the result that the first Bray train had to be cancelled.

In the time between trains the railcar was moved back to the block and No.186 was able to get out to operate the 14:00

departure. Many of the passengers from the earlier train decided to travel on the second train, which resulted in around 160 passengers enjoying No.186 on her first public day excursion out of Dublin since returning to traffic.

Private Charter: The charter to Portrush on Saturday 9th June for the Fisherwick Presbyterian Church looked as if it was going to be a very successful outing. However, like all our trains so far this year, it was not to be.

Everything started out well, with events proceeding to plan until Ballymena was reached. There, the line ahead was declared out of bounds due to a track circuit failure in the section ahead and it was announced that the train would be held until a pilotman arrived. In the event, permission was given to enter the section and the train departed about 12 minutes late.

North of Cullybackey there was a 20 mph speed restriction of about 10 metres for a track deformation, but not much notice was taken of it apart from the train now being 14 minutes delayed. An 8 minute layover at Coleraine was not required, and absence of further delays meant that Portrush was reached dead on time.

On the return journey, there was a long delay in entering Coleraine due to a red signal on the exit from the Portrush branch. Eventually the train entered the station where the information came through that the track problem encountered earlier had been made much worse by the very hot weather during the afternoon. It transpired that the preceding service train had been allowed through the restriction under supervision of the NIR Civil Engineer. What he saw made him close the line to further traffic.

The Society's passengers were subsequently ferried by bus to Ballymena from Coleraine and Ballymoney (service trains worked that far from the north) to join a service train. It was a very disappointing end to what promised to be a great day out.

No.4 and train were stabled in Coleraine yard and returned on the following Wednesday (13th June).

Steam Enterprise: Essentially a locomotive swap operation, the train operated southwards from Belfast with No.4 and northwards with No.186 on Sunday 17th June.

The train was a light load of two open carriages and the half brake and they were comfortably filled. However, it is always notable how few members take up the chance of travelling on these superb outings.

No.4 easily improved on the schedule and with slick station work was able to arrive early in Dublin. No.186, too, was equal to the challenge and performed especially well - one seasoned timer reporting that the climb out of Dundalk was one of his best ever!! Despite a late start from Dublin, arrival was dead on time at Belfast.

Steam & Jazz: The first train of the season ran on Friday 15th June behind No.4 before her return to Dublin. It was a very well filled (but not full) train.

The second train operated with No.186 on 22nd June. It was another evening of fine dining, good music and good craic. The event started off about 15 minutes late but time was recovered and the remainder of the evening passed without further problems.

The season ended with No.186 on 29th June with what must have been one of the best evening's entertainment ever on these trains.

Each evening the train departed Belfast Central at 19:45. The first stop was Lisburn's platform 2, which allowed use of the wide island platform for the band. After 40 minutes there, it was on to Portadown for another 35 minutes of fine music. The final visit was back at Lisburn's platform 1 for a full hour of fun.

The Midlander: The train, operated by No.4 with the Dublin heritage set, ran to Mullingar. There then followed a local trip back to Enfield.

Sea Breeze: On Sunday 8th July, hauled by No.4 and with about 250 on board, the train departed Dublin Connolly 15 minutes late. Stops were made in Rathdrum and Gorey for water. Some

extra passengers boarded in Gorey.

The time was fully recovered by Wexford, where the sun shone - something most people haven't seen for some time.

Approximately 200 joined for the 'local' trip to Rosslare Strand and Harbour.

Shunting, watering, turning, etc., were all done in a very slick manner in the 1½ hours available. The train left again at 16:30 and picked up at 17:00, departing Wexford at 17:10 - the happy crowd arrived in Connolly on time.

There were quite a few first-timers on this trip mainly due to two radio interviews on East Coast and Dublin Country Mix, and by what was said in feedback they will travel with the Society again.

Another fully booked train, to the same schedule, operated on Sunday 29th July. A last minute extra date was added on 26th August to replace the cancelled "Northern Enterprise" operation.

Summer Steam: For the second year, the RPSI Youth Team have organised a series of Open Days at Whitehead, starting in May. The fourth Open Day on 12th August was added to provide a steam-fix for those missing the "Portrush Flyer" trains.

New features introduced by the Youth Team include the chance to sit in the driver's seat of No.85 "Merlin"; a much cleaner site, locomotives and crew (many wearing ties) leading to a very professional image, for which the Team is very grateful to everyone involved; an enhanced Diner, cleaned out and provided with tablecloths, flowers and crockery; and an increased emphasis on our collecting tin at the end of tours.

As well as allowing the public the opportunity to experience a working steam shed, these days are a great opportunity for our roster grades to operate No.3BG and train for the day, increasing competence and skill. New volunteers are always welcome, especially so when it should be noted that 13 workers are required to safely and successfully operate a train rides event.

For those of you who missed out, there is a final opportunity to see behind the

scenes at Ireland's only mainline steam engineering depot on 8th September as part of the European Architectural Heritage Day.

Northern Enterprise: Due to technical reasons within the RPSI, the 25th August train from Dublin to Belfast was not able to be run.

While the Cravens are serviceable they need to be certified before running and as there are also carriages from the heritage set which require certification, but are not quite ready, the operation was cancelled to avoid the double cost for this procedure.

Country Comes To Town: The RPSI has been signed up for another year to operate shuttles between Lisburn and Portadown. There will be a flat fare of £4 for return travel in any direction between the two towns or intermediate stations.

Broomstick Belle: 28th October is this year's date and it is hoped that No.4 will be the engine.

Santa Special: Due to exceptional demand there is now an extra day of Santa trains in Dublin on Sunday 16th December.

Driver Training (1): A programme of driver training is scheduled to commence in September. It will consist of 7 weeks of in-steam training with the aim of passing 5 more drivers. Details have to be confirmed but it is probable that the Drogheda- Navan line will be the main venue, with some time on the main line possible. No.186 will be the locomotive.

Driver Training (2): In late May there was some good news on the grant front - the UK Heritage Lottery Fund's NI Awards For All scheme announced an award of £10,000 to the Society.

The grant is to fund steam driver training and assessment for the current NIR steam driver and firemen, and to pass out 2 firemen as steam drivers. The award will cover fees, travel, accommodation and train costs for an assessor from GB. It is hoped that the visit will take place in the autumn.

Posters: Over the past year or so most

of the Society's operations have a poster which can be printed from the website. Members with access to a computer are encouraged to print and display as many copies as possible, but please only do so with the permission of the owner of the premises.

CARRIAGE & WAGON

Ivan: The GNR brake van 81 had the last of the ballast emptied from the wells in early June. The final 'haul' was 125 brake blocks, 5 big ends, parts of platform seats and luggage racks, pull chains for passenger brake application, 3 carriage door locks, innumerable smashed axleboxes and 5 tons of swarf!!

Other work on Ivan includes: safety loops de-rusted so they can be painted once they are welded on; the two safety loops bent in the derailment straightened; start made on getting auxiliary rubber spring parts freed up and dismantled; start made on getting auxiliary spring rubbers sorted into scrap and reusable groups; last two spring leaves reshaped and re-tempered, ready for reassembly once spring holding yoke is completed; last piece of DCDR's van brake gear dismantled; Larne end floor lifted to allow de-rusting in the last five boxes; more needle-gunning under the landside ballast tanks; more de-rusting in the last five under-floor boxes; springs fitted; inside of ballast tanks cleaned and refilled with removed brake blocks first; new vacuum pipes have been fitted to permit of through piping.

The team has come on leaps and bounds. The brake van is pretty much ready for timber now. The remaining big jobs are timber and casting of a new stove. Nearly all the metal work (underside, springs, bearings, brakes) is complete.

Member John Richardson has kindly loaned his brake van stove to copy for IVAN. Hopefully, patterns can be made and a replica stove cast in the Society's foundry.

Cravens: The Society now owns the following Cravens coaches: 1505, 1506, 1508, 1514, 1522, 1523, 1529, 1539,

1532, 1541. Plus BR steam heating vans: 3173, 3185.

Of these, only 1522 and 3173 are passed for traffic - they have been transferred to Mullingar for further overhaul. 1522 is being converted to a coffee shop/diner. 3173 will be a longer project for complete refurbishment.

In Dublin, refurbishment of 1541 continues.

The short-term plans include the installation of a temporary fixed bar in 1508 which will act as a Bar/Tea Car - it already has a small tea counter which will be familiar to those who have travelled on the May railtour over the past number of years.

The main priority is to have 3 coaches and a van in traffic for driver training which is scheduled to start in September. These need to be passed for running but not refurbished internally.

At present, work is concentrating on carriage brakes. All is going well so far (although more volunteers would be a help) and it is hoped that 3185, 1508, and 4 standard coaches will very soon be available for inspection by the Society's insurers and larnród Éireann.

547 (Dining Car): Battery box fitted. Now in No.5 loco shed road to provide pit access for fitting train line and central door locking electrics. Locomotive No.131 and No.461's tender are temporarily located in the carriage shed to allow the work to be carried out on 547. Still requires water tank and some remedial floor repairs. A gas box has been constructed from a CIÉ battery box (ex 4112) and will be fitted after the under chassis wiring is installed.

460 (Open Brake): To be equipped with Lister generator (as in 462).

462 (Steam Dutch Van): Body and roof repairs are completed and the vehicle is nearly ready for painting.

463 (Compartment First Brake): To be equipped with Lister generator (as in 462).

Bogies: A spare B4 bogie is in the workshop where it has been dismantled,

shot-blast cleaned, and painted.

Hand Crane: Received a complete new decking in early July.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.1 (DCDR Contract): Machining of crank pins. Shrink fitting new crank pins.

No.3BG "Guinness": During a day's shunting the engine was fired on wood - no coal used! The wood was a sample from a dealer who turned up in the yard and offered a tonne of free wood blocks to see what they would be like to burn, with the option to purchase more for half the price of coal.

No.3 "R.H. Smyth": The Downpatrick and County Down Railway have asked for, and been granted, an extension of the loan of No.3 "R.H. Smyth" until the end of the summer season. The DCDR is not yet in a position to arrange the transfer of No.90 to Downpatrick.

No.5 "Drumboe" (CDRRL Contract): The CDR locomotive returned to Whitehead on Sunday 3rd June after its short visit home to Donegal to celebrate its centenary. The locomotive is presently situated on its transporter wagon pending discussions on future work to be undertaken.

No.90 (DCDR Contract): Fit modified regulator and steam test loco.

No.186: Upon arrival at Whitehead from Dublin on 17th June, No.186 was found to have suffered a hot left leading axle bearing. This was surprising since no trouble has ever been experienced with this locomotive's axleboxes and everything else had operated extremely well during the run. After assessment, it was decided to try and carry out repairs in time for the next operation - the "Steam and Jazz" train on the Friday 5 days later.

This was recognised as a tall order and dependent upon everything going to plan. It was necessary to dismantle the brake gear, coupling rods and horn stays, disconnect the tender and lift the front end of the loco using the "heavy lift" gantry. The leading wheelset was then rolled out for dismantling of the axlebox.

The latter and the journal were found to be not too badly damaged. The journal was polished up using the wheel lathe and the axlebox was re-metalled and fitted within two days.

The cause of the problem has been attributed to collapse of an oiling pad due to corrosion of its spring frame. Fortunately we had a spare. All the pads will need replacement once more spares have been acquired.

No.461: The steel outer firebox had some rivet work done. To put in technical terms, the Rivet Heater heats rivets and tosses to Rivet Catcher who catches hot rivet in a bucket who puts rivet in hole. Rivet Holder puts his air gun on rivet head and Rivet Basher rivets over the head on the outside of the firebox. Valve liners fitted by shrinking (liquid nitrogen).

Those visitors who took the opportunity to tour the site on Saturday 28th July were treated to the sight of a number of burly volunteers beating seven shades of whatumaycallit out of a sheet of 3/4" copper. The job in hand was the flanging of the copper for the inner faceplate of No.461's firebox. It involved heating the copper with a gas torch and shaping with the concentrated force of a number of large wooden mallets against a former underneath.

WHITEHEAD

Bird's Eye: There are now a couple of low resolution aerial pictures of Whitehead yard available on the website. They show the length of the carriage shed and the long thin nature of the site.

As any of Whitehead's resident shunters will tell you, the site seems much smaller when you're trying to shunt in it!

Track: On 4th July 11 panels of concrete-sleepered track, most 45ft long, were lifted onto lorries at Greenisland and transported to Whitehead and stacked on the platform.

Planned Centenary steam train rides at the end of the month meant that the platform storage option could only be a temporary measure. All had to be

dismantled, the rails stacked under the platform edge and the sleepers put into bundles of six which could be lifted by the hand crane, moved by the Carlow diesel and neatly stacked on the opposite side of the tracks.

In all, 22 rails and almost 200 sleepers were moved in a combination of Saturdays, one filthy wet Friday 13th and Tuesday nights. The task was completed ahead of schedule on 17th July.

NEWS FROM COUNCIL

Queries: At the AGM a number of important queries were raised by the members present. Council's views are presented below.

Contract Work: At Whitehead we repair and maintain our fleet of steam locomotives and a rake of Mk2 carriages to the standards required to enable them to be operated on IE and NIR networks. The two railway companies have agreed with us the standards to which the Society must adhere and the procedures are the subject of an annual audit.

The work involves boiler making, welding, machining, fitting, foundry work, sheet metal work, carpentry, painting, plumbing, and electrical. Though a lot of this work is done by our members as volunteers, it is not possible for volunteers to complete all in the required time. The Society, therefore, needs to keep a pool of skilled employees available. An employee costs the Society about £17,700 per year.

Last year Council agreed to take on some contract work which would not only guarantee full employment for staff but enable us to increase the range of skills. Labour for contract work is charged at a higher rate than the cost to the Society therefore helping to subsidise our own labour cost.

We had a profit in 2006 of £169k, but that was because of the ballast contract. In 2005 we had only a profit of £40k and that year contracts brought in £46k most of which would have been from ballast. Last year, with 5 employees, our wages bill was £88,700.

The workshop is costing us money in insurance and maintenance. Contract work enables it to pay for itself.

Operating Trains At A Loss: The train mentioned was the Castlerock Luncheon Special. This was primarily a gauging train to enable us to gauge the Mk2 set between Castlerock and Derry.

Philip Lockett and Mark Kennedy made use of a Museums and Galleries Month (May) grant of £500 to assist with the promotion and to sell enough seats between Belfast and Castlerock to cover the cost of gauging. The limiting factor was the number of people the hotel could serve lunch to.

It should be noted that all previous gauging had been done as a pure cost to the Society with no income. This gauging train thanks to Philip and Mark cost us next to nothing.

Rent For No.3: The engine was overhauled for the Ballast contract and paid for by AMEC. We already have No.3BG as the Whitehead shunter. Her boiler will hopefully not need retubed until around 2010. No.3 will need retubed by, say, 2011. No.3's boiler will deteriorate whether it is used or not.

Downpatrick can not afford to pay commercial hire rates. The loan has been of mutual benefit to both parties. No.3 has allowed the DCDR to operate a steam service while No.90 was made ready at Whitehead.

As part of the agreement with the DCDR, RPSI staff have the opportunity to crew their own loco over a more extensive section of line than at Whitehead.

Retention Of IE Steam Drivers: The safeguarding of the use of Irish Rail drivers after training is being addressed as part of the training agreement with the company.

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