



May 2008

NEWS LETTER

WHITEHEAD

Storms: Overnight on Sunday 9th March, the storm which battered Britain and Ireland took a nasty turn and blew up from the South East, and channelled straight into the Society's yard at Whitehead.

A particularly heavy gust caught the Belfast end sheer-legs gantry and toppled it over. Unfortunately, it was in striking distance of the other gantry and on its way down also knocked it over.

How close we came to total disaster!! The Larne gantry hit an electricity pole about 2 feet below the wires and skidded down it. Power would have been removed from most of Whitehead. The Belfast gantry hit the lamp bracket on No.5 "Drumboe" - it was bent to Larne and there were minor scratches down the new smokebox door - before the winding gear smashed open on the wheel of the bogie. Literally ANY further to Larne and it would be a replacement chimney, smokebox and smokebox door. Any other direction of fall would have resulted in serious damage to the Mk2 coaches.

The container housing the grit blasting equipment took the weight of the Larne end gantry and is a write-off, but the actual equipment fortunately remained unscathed.

One consolation is that the gantry hoist gear was becoming due for dismantling and overhaul anyway - but not, by choice, at this point in time or in the manner described!

Preparation for recovery was undertaken

during the following week, and at the weekend a concentrated effort resulted in all the collapsed structures being made safe and lifted out of the way.

The Belfast end was easy enough - secure legs to hand-crane burn or remove bolts connecting the legs to the gantry and lift with hand-crane. One leg on transporter wagon, one on steel decked wagon. Gantry placed on steel wagon and winding gear removed to No.1 road.

Damage noted - gearbox smashed, driveshaft bent, motor mounting plate broken around bolts, a cast iron pulley on the hook assembly smashed. However, there is a spare set of winding gear and it is hoped spares can be salvaged from it.

The Larne end assembly was trickier. Each leg was secured to the hand-crane and the bolts burnt through. Very carefully, the whole assembly was lowered. One leg was placed in the workshop road as it was bent in the fall. The other leg was placed in No.1 road.

Thanks are due to all who worked long hours to achieve this result - especially to Site Officer Dermot Mackie who toiled so assiduously that he had to indulge in cooling off!

The extent of the damage has been assessed and work is under way on dismantling, cleaning and repairing the components using spare hoist units which have been kept in store. It is hoped to start work during the summer on reinstating the two cranes.

Building A Sustainable RPSI: To encourage new volunteers; to continue the

engineering skills required to maintain our mainline train fleet; to increase our market and make our mainline trains profitable enough to sustain our engineering facilities; decisive steps have to be taken. We now own our engineering base at Whitehead. What is it for? Is it a visitor attraction? Is it a heritage engineering centre of excellence? Is it a national or international heritage engineering training centre? What personnel and engineering facilities are required for it to provide for our mainline trains in the future? What about all our other non-mainline stock? What else can we use Whitehead Excursion Station for? How should it look? What new buildings are required on site?

We welcome your ideas, now, to help us plan our future strategy. As previously reported, we have engaged consultants who are working to provide the collateral required to open funding doors, education doors, marketing doors, to physically build our future. They need your input. Full details are available in the minutes from the AGM and our website. Please send your ideas, to arrive before the 20th June, to:

RPSI HLF Consultancy
c/o Philip Lockett
PO Box 171
Larne
Co. Antrim
BT40 1 UU
philiplockett@yahoo.co.uk

Tuesday Squad: The summer programme of Tuesday work nights has recommenced. All volunteers greatly welcomed, with immediate emphasis on repairing the damaged sheer legs and helping with the installation of secondary door locking.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.1 (Carlow Diesel): New piston rings for compressor fitted.

No.4: Work continues on running repairs. Also, preparation for fitting TPWS has involved fitting of larger battery box and new wiring looms, etc.

No.5 "Drumboe" (CDRRL contract): A number of jobs are continuing, including motion repairs, renewal of bearings, spring

buckles, and machining of replacement coupling rod.

No.461: Firebox repairs continue.

Foundry: Various castings including spare slipper blocks for No.186, bridge plates for the DCDR, brass oil pots for No.5 "Drumboe".

CARRIAGE & WAGON

Approval: All 'new' carriages have to be approved and certified by NIR before being allowed to operate on that network. Dutch van 462 and Mk2 diner 547 were on test on Sunday 4th May. The indications are that everything operated satisfactorily, but there won't be an official confirmation until the NIR panel meets late in May.

Secondary Door Locking: The design of the SDL system has been drawn up by Francis Richards, and the team led by Johnny Glendinning has been installing control panels and wiring at a frantic rate. Passengers on the "Barrow Bridge" railtour will have noticed the extent of the progress.

Getting the design right, and the initial installing in 547 was a very time consuming process as it was a steep learning curve. By the fifth coach, 181, the installation was being completed in 3 days!!

SDL installation is complete on 180, 181, 300, 301, 302 and 547, with 460 remaining. The system has been tested and approved by an independent approval body and now awaits certification by NIR.

Train Line: Wiring the coaches for SDL also includes fitting of the train line which will supply the complete train with power from the generator van 462. The van has been overhauled, painted and a Mk2 corridor connection adapter manufactured and tested.

Heritage Set: The Dublin coaches had their annual (successful) insurance inspection on Wednesday 23rd April.

Cravens Set: Plans are underway to tackle these coaches with a view to having 4 or 5 available for the end of the summer.

The feasibility of obtaining and erecting a temporary cover to act as a paintshop at Inchicore is being investigated. The

coaches will all need completed painted in the new blue livery.

'Ivan': Results of the overhaul are now very visible, and the brake van was moved from the seaward to landward side of the carriage shed to allow installation of the seaward timberwork.

In April, a 50 year time capsule was placed in the ballast well just before the final floorboards were fitted. Among the items it contains are the front page of a newspaper carrying the lead story of Ian Paisley's resignation, a 2006 £1 coin which features the GNR(I) Egyptian Arch at Newry and statements by each member of the team, detailing the skills they learnt along the restoration journey.

A number of new youthful (and a couple of not so youthful) members have joined the team and the work continued at a hectic pace for a while. It has slackened somewhat of late, not due to any lack of enthusiasm, but because it's the dreaded exam season - GCSE, A-Level and university exams all getting in the way!!

Still to be done, apart from the now routine fitting of timberwork, is the production of a pattern and casting for the guard's stove - a vital part of the finished vehicle.

OPERATIONS

Easter Bunny: Due to the ongoing work on SDL, the operation had to be confined to train rides at Whitehead. Nevertheless, and despite it being a bitterly cold day, it was a very successful event.

A number of the operating team had been most discouraged by not being able to operate mainline steam and had written off the day in advance.

In the event, 11 trains were operated in 'train ride' mode, hauled by No.3BG "Guinness". For the first couple, passengers had to be asked to wait until the next train as coach 460 was filled to capacity, the other Mk2 coaches being out of traffic for fitting of SDL.

The enthusiasm, professionalism and ultimate success in front of the public, in less than favourable weather, site and stock conditions, was in a very large part due to the excellent on-train team which

has been built up.

Midlander: Due to the ongoing issues regarding driver rostering on Irish Rail, the train planned for 12th April was not advertised.

Approval: The approval runs on 4th May involved gauging No.4 light engine to Larne Harbour, testing the coaches for 70mph running with an NIR GM between Whitehead and Yorkgate, repeating the same run with No.4 for further brake testing.

Barrow Bridge: The planning of the railtour also suffered due to uncertainty of crewing. Initially, it had been hoped that two steam crews would be available after the training programme but as this was not completed the tour was revised around one crew, and Irish Rail were very helpful in making sure that the drivers were available.

In the event, the weekend was very enjoyable - indeed, one seasoned participant reckoned it was one of the best as it was in many ways similar to tours of the "good old days".

No.4 hauled the Mk2 set from Whitehead to Dublin on Wednesday 7th May, unfortunately empty before Dundalk due to SDL issues on NIR.

No.186 made her first visit in many years to Mullingar on the Friday with the Dublin heritage set and managed (just about) to fit into the busy diesel schedule. That evening the IRRS kindly hosted a slide show by Michael Walsh and it was gratifying to see a full house in attendance.

On Saturday No.4 and the Mk2 set left Dublin in a raging downpour which continued most of the way to Kildare, but eased off somewhat after that. A visit to Clonmel followed arrival in Waterford.

The train continued to Rosslare on a glorious Sunday morning. Unfortunately, another example followed of the all-pervasive health & safety rigmarole when passengers had to vacate the train at Rosslare Strand while engine and coaches ran to the new Rosslare Harbour station for 'gauging'. However, the weather allowed many to wander to the beach and to take in the delights of the sleepy little town.

A number of photo stops on the DSER

section went down well, and the train arrived in Dublin all too soon for most.

Monday saw the usual spirited running on the northern line and, as the tour was to end in Dundalk, an extra return from there to Drogheda was added.

The Tuesday coach tour first visited McConville's scutching mill (prepares the flax fibres for weaving), then Hilden Brewery, followed by SS Nomadic.

Sooty Face: The train rides on 17th May were reasonably successful given the competing attractions of the North West 200 and FA Cup. There was an art display featuring some brilliant Irish railway paintings from Debra Wenlock, Janice Lightowler and David Briggs, among others. Also on site was a demonstration of how to make pottery figures, Shaun the Sheep being the most popular.

MRSI Charter: Due to non-availability of SDL, RPSI stock was not used on 24th May.

Bray Shuttle: The proposed operations on 31st May were another casualty of the uncertainty surrounding driver rostering on Irish Rail.

Steam & Jazz: The dates are Fridays 6th, 13th, 20th & 27th June. The third date was booked out in advance by a number of large parties, and the other dates are following close behind.

Steam Enterprise: No.4 will return to Dublin on Sunday 22nd June, and No.186 will come north.

Narnia Express: Belvedere House in Mullingar have hired the train for the weekend of 28th (Dublin - Mullingar - Enfield - Mullingar) and 29th June (Mullingar - Dublin). Packages are available from: www.belvedere-house.ie, 044 934 9060.

Private Charter: A diesel-hauled charter of the Mk2 set will operate to Cultra and return on Monday 30th June.

Sea Breeze: Trains will operate to Wexford and Rosslare on Sundays 13th July and 3rd & 24th August.

Whitehead Community Festival: Train rides, site tours and sideshows on 26th July.

Bangor Belle: On Saturday 9th August a train will operate from Portadown to Bangor. On Sunday 24th August two trains will operate from Lisburn to Bangor.

GENERAL

Meetings: The last meeting of the winter season took place at St. Jude's on Wednesday 12th March and there was an audience of 130 - the largest of the season and probably the largest enthusiast meeting in the British Isles; unless someone knows better!

The meeting started with the launch of Colourpoint's new book "Locomotives Of The NCC". A few words were said by Norman Johnston, the publisher, Bill Scott, the author, and by Frank Dunlop to whom the book is dedicated.

Fred Cooper's film show contained some great footage from the 1981 "Ben Bulben" tour to Sligo, the 1988 "Shannon" tour to Limerick, the Manx railways centenary in 1993 and finished with colour scenes from the Cavan & Leitrim Railway in its final days.

AGM: The meeting, held in Dublin on Saturday 26th April, passed off fairly quickly with Sir Kenneth Bloomfield in the Chair.

The present Council remains as last year, with the exception of Peter Marsden elected as Treasurer (he was co-opted into a vacancy during 2007) and Joe McKeown elected as General Officer.

Display: On 23rd February some photographs were taken at Whitehead in connection with a Help The Aged event. An exhibition of the photographs, including UTV's Paul Clark and the Society's No.3BG "Guinness", is taking place in Belfast's Ormeau Baths Gallery between 8th & 31st May.

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