



## WHITEHEAD

**Secondary Door Locking:** The Mk2 project was completed in time for the first Jazz train on 6<sup>th</sup> June. Apart from a few minor teething problems it has worked very well. So, congratulations to all involved in its design and installation in record time.

**Diner 547:** The vehicle remains to have cooking gas and beer pump facilities installed, but was sufficiently well advanced to enter traffic with the Jazz trains in June.

It is hoped that the new diner and bar will quickly become the centre-piece of the train and be well patronised by members to help offset the significant cost of its overhaul. Like any other licensed premises, it is preferable that customers buy their beverages from the bar rather than bring their own, especially on the Jazz trains. It is hoped to discourage this latter practice in future.

**‘Ivan’:** The GNR brake van, including a newly cast stove, was finished just in time for its official launch on 30<sup>th</sup> July.

**Mk2 Coaches:** On Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> August a party from Whitehead visited Inchicore to acquire redundant spares for Mk2 coaches.

Immediate plans for the set are to supply a standby generator, and to fit disabled facilities.

## DUBLIN

**Cravens:** It is planned to have 4, if not 5, coaches available for the train to Dundalk in September.

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# ‘Ivan’ & 547 Hit The Rails

*Report By Robin Morton*

Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> July was a fabulous day for the RPSI, because it marked the launch at Whitehead of two restored items of rolling stock - brake van Ivan and diner 547. More than 100 guests were present, including representatives of Translink, Iarnród Éireann, local councils and the bodies which had helped fund the £400,000 project. Around 85 stayed for lunch on what was, by common consent, an enjoyable and productive day.

Arrangements were set in place over several months by the RPSI Events Committee and the weather forecast watched with increasing concern as the big day drew near. After a period of dry and warm weather, the Whitehead site was swathed in drizzling rain on the morning of 30<sup>th</sup> July, and so a decision was taken to relocate from the proposed open-air setting of the Excursion Station platform to the interior of the carriage shed.

Charles Friel and his band of helpers got to work, erecting a podium and setting up the PA system in record time. The plaques were readied for unveiling, with minutes to spare. Guests began to arrive shortly after 10am and after registering with Heather Boomer and Christine Friel in the Whitehead shop they were invited to the diner to see the reconditioned Enterprise carriage and to enjoy a warming cup of tea or coffee. En route, many took the opportunity to inspect No.3BG “Guinness”,

crewed by Phil Lockett and Nelson Poots, and to inspect Ivan.

While the VIPs were having media photographs taken on the veranda of Ivan, guests took the opportunity to make new acquaintances and catch up with old friends. Then it was time for No.3BG, under the guidance of shunter Dermot Mackie, to ferry the VIPs in Ivan across to the carriage shed, with the rest of the guests following down the platform and across the track on foot.

RPSI chairman Johnny Glendinning called the meeting to order, welcoming guests to the event and introducing Lord O’Neill, the RPSI president. Lord O’Neill said he had been coming to Whitehead since around 1966, when the Society moved into its premises. He recalled having a shovel pressed into his hand for publicity purposes, but said the extent of his labours was to dig out one or two sleepers.

Lord O’Neill commended the work of the RPSI youth wing which had been responsible for the rebuild of Ivan the brake van, so called because it was a GNR(I) van. He said it was very important for the Society to bring on young people.

He said one of the founding principles of the RPSI was that it should be an all-Ireland body, and said this had proved to be a great strength. Already this year, the Society’s trains had visited places as far afield as Ballymena, Mullingar, Rosslare and Waterford. None of this would have been possible, he stressed, without the continuing support of Translink and Iarnród Éireann. Lord O’Neill expressed the hope that the Society’s trains would continue to be facilitated by the continued existence of various turntables and water columns.

The RPSI president said he was pleased to see the railways enjoying a renaissance north and south and expressed the hope that some day the Burma Road - the line from Claremorris to Collooney Junction - would be re-opened.

On behalf of the Society, Lord O’Neill expressed thanks to the bodies whose funding had helped make the launch of Ivan and 547 possible - namely the International Fund for Ireland, the NI Tourist Board and the NI Museums Council. He said Translink’s role, in making the Mark 2 carriages available to the RPSI when they were withdrawn from service, had also been a key element of the project.

Sandy Smith, director general of the International Fund for Ireland, noted that the shed in which the ceremony was taking place had been funding in 1993 by the International Fund, and it was good to see the relationship being continued. He said the IFI’s ability to help support such projects depended on the generosity of the fund’s international donors, who were still channelling money in, 21 years after the IFI had been established.

Siobhan McCauley, director of product development at the NI Tourist Board, said it was easy for people to under-estimate the level of work and commitment that went into the restoration of vehicles such as Ivan and 547. She said the NITB was delighted to see the RPSI prospering, and said the Society’s activities were helping to boost tourism. She closed by wishing the Society continued success.

Mark Cosgrove, deputy mayor of Carrickfergus, said the council was delighted to have the RPSI within its borough. He said the appearance of the diner and “Ivan the Great” would add to the Society’s attractiveness. Praising the young people who had got involved in the brake van project, he said it was heartening to see their dedication to something good.

Lexie Scott, chairman of the NI Museums Council, recalled visiting the site some years ago with his son, to travel on a Santa train. He said he particularly wanted to pay tribute to the young people involved with the Ivan project, combining their work at Whitehead with their preparation for university and school exams.

Mr Scott joked that he was a little disturbed to note that the diner, a vehicle which was two decades

younger than himself, should be considered as a candidate for preservation.

Catherine Mason, group chief executive of Translink, said it was a great privilege to be invited to Whitehead to take part in the launch of the two vehicles. She said the visit was her first association with steam trains in Northern Ireland, but told guests that she was a member of the Great Central Railway in England, which operated a double track line.

Mrs Mason said that with the diner in operation, there was plenty of scope for the RPSI to develop steam train activity in Northern Ireland, mentioning the popularity on the Great Central of ventures such as evening dining trains and all-day breakfast specials.

Mrs Mason said Northern Ireland was witnessing a real rail renaissance at present, with the passenger figure having grown from six million in 2000 to an expected figure of 10 million this year. Importantly, customer satisfaction levels were also on the increase.

Acknowledging that there were some rigorous rolling stock appraisals to be met these days, Mrs Mason said she was delighted that the RPSI had risen to the challenges, citing the installation of secondary door locks on 547, something that was never envisaged when the coach was originally built. The launch, she said, marked a real step forward.

Mrs Mason noted that the Department for Regional Development had made a major investment in the railway network in recent years, and said it was now hoped to proceed with track upgrades north of Ballymena. Once this was completed, she said, we should see a return of steam to the north coast.

The Translink group chief executive praised the young people involved in the restoration of the brake van, and said it was vital to keep such skills going.

In conclusion, Mrs Mason said she looked forward to many more years on continued operation of steam trains, and continued co-operation between RPSI and NI Railways and Iarnród Éireann. She said steam trains were “great for tourism, good for the public and good for the railways, too”. She said she wanted to reaffirm Translink’s support for the RPSI’s activities.

With that, Mrs Mason unveiled plaques on both Ivan and on 547.

Guests were then invited either to join one of the conducted tours around the RPSI carriage shed, loco shed and the Dunleath engineering works, with guides John Lockett and John Williams, or to board Ivan to take a train ride up and down the site.

Then they were invited to board two preserved buses, provided courtesy of Translink to ferry guests from Whitehead Excursion Station to Whitehead Golf Club, where lunch was served.

Before the meal was served, RPSI member Fr Eddie Creamer said grace. The appropriately composed text read:

“God our Father, We ask you to bless this food which we have received from your goodness and which we are about to share, as we acknowledge and celebrate the completion of the restoration of GNR brake van 81 (Ivan) and the dining car 547.

“May our sharing of this meal together reflect the sharing of the different skills of the many people and the generous giving of their time which was needed to successfully finish this work.

“We pray that the good humoured co-operation of all who participated in these projects may be seen as an example to all who work to build a better, new world, while preserving the best of the old. We pray through Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

Following the meal, Johnny Glendinning invited Mark Cosgrove, deputy mayor of Carrickfergus, to say a few words. The deputy mayor said that after the events of the morning, Ivan the Terrible could be better described as “Ivan the Illustrious”. He expressed gratitude to all those who had been involved in building up the RPSI since it was founded in 1964. The esteem in which the Society was

now held, he said, could be seen by the presence of so many people at the function.

The next speaker was James Friel, representing the RPSI youth wing. James, an engineering student at Queen’s University, said he was pleased to be present at an event which marked the culmination of the Ivan project. He said the involvement of younger members had been a key element in the project. But he said Ivan would not have been restored had it not been for the assistance and guidance of more experienced members, the group memorably dubbed the “old giffers” by Phil Lockett at the RPSI 40 dinner. James also expressed special thanks to Mark Walsh, who he said had devoted countless hours to the Ivan project and to Thomas Charters, who was always available to offer help.

James Friel said the youth team was already weighing up various contenders for its next project, and among the options were the Hunslet diesel engine and Q class No.131. He concluded: “Watch this space!”

Peter Ovenstone, who had travelled over from Edinburgh to represent the Heritage Railways Association, said the RPSI was, as always, at the forefront of the preservation movement. He noted that the Society had won the HRA award on several occasions, and praised the Society for deploying its skills in order to assist kindred bodies.

Working with other groups throughout the community not only fulfilled the HRA’s agenda but helped to meet the needs of the community as a whole, he said.

Mr Ovenstone highlighted the RPSI’s role which he said was integral to economic development and the promotion of tourism at Whitehead and across Ireland.

He said that the RPSI was not only a member of the HRA but also of Fedecrail, a European-wide preservation movement which represented the 350 railway preservation schemes now in existence across the Continent.

Sir Ken Bloomfield, the RPSI vice-president, noted that railway enthusiasm created wonderful alliance, recalling that during a recent visit with his wife to Krakow, he had ended up chatting about the RPSI with the tour leader, Vic from Wigan.

Sir Ken praised the role of the International Fund, a body in which he said during his civil service days he had had a hand in helping to create. He also highlighted the role of the NI Museums Council, which he said was keeping cultural development alive.

The RPSI vice-president congratulated all the young people involved in the Ivan project.

Expressing gratitude to the Golf Club caterers, Sir Ken said it had, all in all, been a most agreeable day. It was yet another step on a great journey, and it had been great to hear the Translink group chief executive showing goodwill to the RPSI and offering continued co-operation in the years ahead.

In closing Sir Ken thanked all those involved in organising the launch ceremony and the lunch and said he had felt privileged to have been involved.

Guests then boarded the two special buses to be transported to Whitehead Railway Station and onward to the RPSI site.

The events of the day were covered on BBC Radio Ulster (interviews with Mark Walsh and Phil Lockett), BBC Newsline television (interviews with Peter Scott and Edward Friel), Downtown Radio and in the Belfast Telegraph. The Larne Times and Carrickfergus Advertiser are expected to feature the event next week.

So thank-you to my colleagues on the Events Committee for organising the event, to the youth team who did the Society so proud and showed the older members what is possible with a bit of get-up-and-go. Also, congratulations to all who worked so hard to get 547 ready in time for the summer season.