



February 2010

NEWS LETTER

CARRIAGE & WAGON

Congratulations: Every two years the Heritage Railway Association presents carriage and wagon awards to its member societies. The awards come in 3 categories:

- Carriage
- Wagon
- Self-propelled

There is a winner for each section plus an overall winner.

HRA have announced that the Great Northern Railway (Ireland) goods brake van No.81 ("Ivan") is the winning entry in the wagon category.

The judges were impressed with the quality of the restoration and the substantial work by young volunteers. They also noted that this is one of the few survivors of traditional standard (Irish) gauge freight vehicles.

The award is to be presented to a group from the Ivan squad at the HRA AGM Dinner at the National Railway Museum at York on Saturday 6th February.

Very well done and congratulations to the RPSI Yoof Team!!

301: Refurbished B4 bogies prepared and fitted.

916: The Hunslet driving trailer was due for scrapping at the end of January.

923: During January the coach was stripped of all salvageable parts in preparation for scrapping.

Wagons: New headstock recovered from scrapped wagon fitted to flat wagon to replace damaged end.

Dublin: Work is being concentrated on the heritage carriages, which it is intended will form the running set this year.

TRAINS & EVENTS

Santa Special - Portadown: On 5th December No.186 hauled two trains from Portadown to Lisburn. Everything operated satisfactorily.

These were the first trains on which the Dutch Van's steam heat was in commission, and it certainly worked well - it was NOT a cold train!

Also, carriage 300 ran very smoothly on newly refurbished bogies, as did 302 on newly wheeled bogies.

No.186 operated with a leaking valve gland, which was dealt with during the following week. It didn't affect performance once the crew had adjusted their technique to take it into account.

Santa Special - Dublin: The first weekend of Santa Trains went off successfully. Whilst the five trains were fully booked, quite a few vacant seats were evident, and from feedback quite a number of intending passengers couldn't travel due to sickness.

No.4 was in splendid form as usual, the train was well decorated, Santa was in generous form, and everybody seemed to enjoy themselves. The weather was even kind.

On the second Saturday (12th December) trains ran successfully, to capacity, and largely to time all day. However, on return to Pearse after the last trip, No.4 was found to have operating difficulties. Luckily the train had moved to the Down loop at Pearse when the problem was discovered, and there was no delay to regular services. A 201 GM diesel was summoned from Connolly, and eventually the whole train was hauled back there for stabling. It was readily apparent that No.4 would not be able to resume duties on Sunday, so a diesel locomotive was rostered

instead.

Committee members faced Sunday with some anxiety, as passenger reaction to diesel rather than steam haulage had yet to be tested. All intending passengers were met in the booking hall at Pearse before both trains departed and were advised of the situation. Their reaction was wholly positive, which was a great relief. NIR Enterprise locomotive 208 duly arrived at the platform for the first train, doing her best to create 'atmosphere' by much horn blowing, but there was clearly something missing!

Both trips passed without incident, Santa did his best, passengers gave the impression that they were happy, and the Committee certainly were, given the circumstances. The Society is grateful to Irish Rail for their help in keeping these trains running.

Santa Special - Belfast: The 8 trains to Whitehead and 2 to Lisburn operated very smoothly with nothing much to report. All were sold out.

Some comment on the operation of these trains:

- The new coal performed well when the fire was cleaned at appropriate intervals. What clinker formed was easily removed from the grate.
- The quick turn-around on Sunday evenings in Central before the Lisburn train is now legendary.
- The recently replaced crossover sleeper timbers at Whitehead are performing well.
- The coal loading process at each Whitehead stop is now down to a fine art, with a queue of youthful members queuing to learn and practice the skills of mechanical loading shovel driving.
- Since some recent promotions the first all youth team shunt was carried out on one of the Sunday evenings, and went very smoothly.
- The steam heat from the Dutch Van is most appreciated as the heat no longer disappears when the engine is going uphill or has gone off to run round (but see below!).

Mince Pie & Mulled Wine: In recent years this trip has run to Dublin - it started as a means of recouping the cost of a post-season locomotive swap. But this year No.4 could not operate a passenger train as TPWS was not fully commissioned. But it was decided to continue with the operation with a solo No.186. It was the first public steam train to Coleraine since 2006.

Sunday 27th December was a very cold day in the north of the island. It was also blessed with beautiful winter sunshine which made the countryside north of Antrim a spectacular sight - not one seen in many a year from an RPSI train.

No.186 hauled 5 coaches and the van, the latter unfortunately not producing steam due to a fault, the locomotive having to be used instead for heating - and then only when attached. A compounding problem was the presence of a certain amount of slack in the coal which didn't aid steaming.

A delay running round at Lisburn and the extreme cold weather started a series of missed crossings, the first of which was at Ballymena. There, it was found that the Down water column supply had been disconnected about 6 weeks before! The train was routed to the Up loop where water was taken from the Up tank. Thanks are due to NIR local staff who went out of their way to have the tank filled. The ensuing delay meant that the special was held for an Up service train, which should have been crossed at Killagan.

Happily the Coleraine turntable had been cleared of the track machine which has apparently taken up residence there over the past year or so. However, there were a number of unusual manoeuvres required to get to it as there were signalling issues at the south end of the yard. Also, while traversing the sidings to the turntable No.186 could not get through a 2 inch covering of ice on the rails; clearance entailed around 150 yards of ice having to be chipped away with crowbars and shovels by three RPSI crew, and the NIR fireman and driver. Sand was found to be particularly useless in this circumstance. The turntable did turn - eventually! It has not moved for 2½ years.

In the adjacent bus yard, meanwhile, the ice prevented the RPSI team finding the water hydrant too quickly - they did in the end though. But for expediency's sake, and because the water level in the tender was adequate to do so, it was decided to water from the tank in Ballymena and head back to the station for the train which needed to be shunted out of the platform to allow service trains to cross.

On arrival at Ballymena, a rather thirsty No.186 was greeted by a tank with a valve which had not seated after its use earlier in the day and which was therefore empty. Some time was spent attempting to use the inlet flow to fill the engine but this was inadequate so it was decided to proceed to

Antrim where a hydrant was known to exist. At Antrim No.186 was detached to take water. Here, the NIR crew, particularly the inspector, were at their best, arranging to leave the train in the Up platform and run to the Down to avoid having the barriers on the crossing lowered for the duration of the fill.

The gate on Whitehead yard was finally locked at 00:30 - 24 hours after the initial steam raise began.

One of the better aspects of the day was the willingness of the crew to soldier on and tackle what problems they could. And to them a massive thank-you.

At least the photographers had a fine day!!

Locomotive Movement: The first operation of the new year was not a public train but the return of No.4, running light engine, to Whitehead from Dublin on Sunday 3rd January.

The Diesel Do: The inaugural railtour featuring double-headed haulage from Dublin to Enniscorthy and return by the Society's newest locomotives 141 and 142.

ITG Charter: Another diesel railtour, by the Irish Traction Group but featuring the RPSI heritage carriages. Dublin to Sligo and return.

Easter Eggspress: Trains will be operating on Monday 5th April - Belfast to Whitehead and Dublin to Mullingar and Killucan.

Driver Training: Two weeks of training runs will operate on Irish Rail in late April.

Dalriada Railtour: Advance bookings are now coming in for the May tour. An updated version of the advance booking form has been made available on the website.

BELFAST MEETINGS

9th December: Former Chairman Norman Foster presented a wide-ranging tour of the British Isles behind steam using his own pictures - and they were simply stunning. Norman broke the night into several sections and moved deftly between various regions of BR and Ireland. At home he focused on, amongst others, the GN Main line, steam on CIÉ, Irish narrow gauge, the Warrenpoint branch, the Derry Road, and around Dublin, as well as his beloved NCC. He finished with slides of the last day of the Guinness tramway. There were many delights throughout and much to relish later. There was some encouragement that Norman needs to find a publisher.

One big highlight was Norman's shot of a

goods passing Vengersbridge. Norman had showed this before but Jim Donaghy (who lives near there) had missed that meeting and was particularly looking forward to seeing it. It fully lived up to expectations! But the next two scenes were of Norman's shots trains crossing the nearby Blackwater Viaduct - and they were taken from one of Jim's fields!!

13th January: The first half was taken up by Roy Forsythe and Richard Hayes. They showed lots of pictures of closed stations in Ulster. There are some remarkable survivors and, curiously, the stations closed in the 1950s and before have survived better than those closed later. The audience showed a remarkable knowledge of obscure stations and station houses that are still standing but Roy said that he was disappointed not to have started more rows. It was an absorbing presentation with not an engine in sight!

The second half was a video by Macha Film Studios entitled "Back in the Saddle" - the story of the relay between Bleach Green Junction and Whitehead using "R.H. Smyth". As well as a detailed account of the contract, the film recounted some of the engine's history and the previous Bleach Green to Antrim ballasting as well as footage of the engine active at Downpatrick.

Andy Crockart proposed an eloquent vote of thanks to all three presenters.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.1 (DCDR contract): Fitting of flanges to steam pipes. Facing up joint surfaces of feed pump.

No.4: During the week after the failure on the Santa train a team from Whitehead travelled to Dublin on 3 occasions to assist with repairs. Indeed, the locomotive was able to continue with the remainder of the season. The repair would not have been possible without the huge effort from the Dublin and Whitehead locomotive crews, and also the great assistance from the Iarnród Éireann staff in Connolly depot who could not have been more helpful.

The locomotive is now in Whitehead for commissioning of TPWS.

No.5 "Drumboe": Corroded platework replaced and pony truck riveted. Studs at valve chests renewed. Painting of recently completed frame repairs.

No.85 "Merlin": Boiler de-scaled and inspected. The boiler has been moved into the locomotive shed, and its stands are being

positioned.

No.186: Minor repairs. Renewal of small tubes is under way.

No.461: Riveting inner firebox. Staging erected for working at boiler. Overhaul of crossheads progressing.

Hunslet 101: On 25th January, all usable parts having been removed, the locomotive was cut into three lorry-sized chunks by an outside contractor, and carted off to Liverpool for scrapping.

C18 (Wickham trolley): Brake gear assembled and successfully tested. Now back at Donegal.

GENERAL

Help Required: As always, the Society is keen to attract new volunteers into the various departments. But the Whitehead Catering Team in particular are very short of help, and this was very noticeable during the Santa season.

Can you spare one day occasionally? Surely you can! Please consider it and get in touch at the Editorial address below.

Congratulations: Best wishes to our Treasurer, Peter Marsden, who got married just before Christmas, and to his new bride Sylvia. May they have a long and happy time together.

Sales News: These books have been added to the sales list. The first two are very welcome reprints, as they both sold out quickly when first published.

Along UTA Lines - Ulster's Rail Network in the 1960s by Ian Sinclair. Paperback, 23 x 18 cm, 32 colour & 267 b&w photos, 192 pages, £14.99. Includes the "Derry Road" (Portadown - Londonderry) and the Goraghwood - Newry - Warrenpoint lines.

Death in the North Channel - the Loss of the Princess Victoria in January 1953 by Stephen Cameron. Paperback, 26 x 21 cm, 180 b&w photos, 144 pages, £14.95.

The Wee Donegal Revisited in Colour by Robert Robotham and Joe Curran. Paperback, 29 x 20 cm, 155 colour photos, 108 pages, £19.99.

Railways in Ireland Part Three by Martin Bairstow. Paperback, 24 x 18 cm, 7 colour and 190 b&w photos, 6 maps, 128 pages, £15.95.

Restoration of Great Southern & Western Railway Royal Saloon No 351. Paperback, 30 x 21 cm, 20 colour and 6 b&w photos, 24 pages, £3.

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