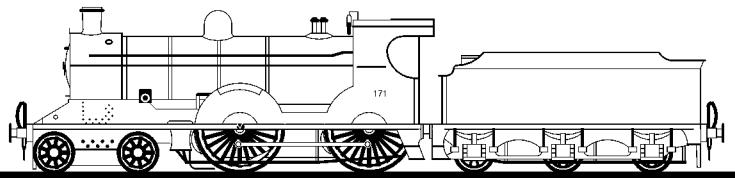


Railway Preservation Society of Ireland



September 2010

NEWS LETTER

TRAINS & EVENTS

Steam & Jazz: A successful evening on Friday 18th June saw No.186 perform well in brilliant sunshine. All on board seemed to enjoy it.

Another perfectly dry evening, 25th June saw the first train of the season to be fully booked, the previous trips slightly less so. The only snag of the night was a signalling problem at Lisburn, and No.186 had to travel to Portadown to run round to the down line!! This caused a late departure from Lisburn - at midnight rather than the scheduled 23:15. But the band kept playing and the people danced on.

Friday 2nd July was the last train of the season - and it was an eventful night for all.

Two of NIR's driver assessors, Stevie Faulkner and Micky Hamill, were rostered as the crew, to be tested on their driving skills by Ron Smith of West Coast Rail. This was a follow-up to their training on the North York Moors Railway in April and May. Their assessor colleague, Stewart Andrews, was also on the footplate as the rostered inspector. Regular drivers, Noel Playfair and Gary Moore, were present but remained off the footplate.

No.186 hauled a full train of 6 coaches and the van. After the first stop at Carrickfergus the train headed off for Lisburn. But at Belfast Central there was a signal check and the crew were informed there was a problem with the signalling (again) at Lisburn and it would not be possible to run round the train there. After a quick discussion it was agreed to terminate the train in Central and have the band perform there instead of Lisburn. In the meantime,

No.186 returned to Carrickfergus to take water from a hydrant and to give the footplate crew more mileage under test conditions.

On the final journey back to Whitehead Micky Hamill became ill and the train had to be stopped at Greenisland. An ambulance was summoned and he was taken to Belfast's Royal Victoria Hospital. The good news is that Micky is well on his way to a full recovery and itching to get back to work.

Charter (Ireland Fund): A delayed transfer of coaches from Inchicore, by GM 076, was the unfortunate start to the charter to Wicklow and return on Sunday 20th June.

Eventual departure from Connolly, with No.4 and 6 carriages from the heritage set, resulted in a late pick-up at Pearse. However, once the approximately 50 passengers were on board they soon settled down to a relaxing journey in beautiful weather along Dublin's 'Côte d'Azure' aided by tasty refreshments provided by the catering team. Arrival in Wicklow was approximately one hour late.

Having agreed that the guests would have two hours to see the sights of Wicklow, departure for home was also one hour late. A leisurely schedule allowed some time to be recovered, despite a long stop south of Greystones.

The guests departed the train at Pearse expressing considerable praise for the event. Some just wanted to keep going!

Sea Breeze: The operation on Sunday 4th July proved to be very successful. There was a full train, generally excellent weather and punctual running. Approximately 60 patrons were picked up at Rathdrum going down, and set down on the return. At Enniscorthy the train was met

with live music and punnets of delicious strawberries, which were well received. On the return journey the key feature was early running, culminating in a 13 minute early arrival home at Connolly despite being behind a stopping train most of the way from Bray.

On Sunday 25th May, No.4 hauled approximately 240 passengers on the train out of Dublin, and an almost full train from Enniscorthy. Departure from Connolly was delayed by about 25 minutes due to congestion there, and the late departure resulted in some pathing delays en route. But there was still a punctual arrival in Enniscorthy, where a two-piece Jazz band greeted the passengers in glorious weather and where the passengers were again treated to Wexford Strawberries. The return from Wexford was delayed due to a late running down service train, so arrival at Connolly was 5 minutes late.

Summer Steam: Due to the continued efforts to refurbish Diner 87, combined with the congested mainline schedule, it was decided to run Summer Steam days back to back on Saturday and Sunday 24th and 25th July.

The Saturday saw Diner 87's welcome return to its tea/coffee bar duties with a much improved seating area and tea bar. Unfortunately, it was not possible to have the former bar area open to the public as a museum exhibition area this time, although that was to change in the coming weeks! Visitors could view the work in progress across a cordon.

Saturday also saw the annual Whitehead Community Festival taking place on the football pitch adjacent to the RPSI's site. In all, 177 passengers visited on Saturday and enjoyed No.3BG "Guinness", first class Mk2 181 and GNR(I) brake van 81 'Ivan' in service, the revamped 87 and guided site tours. No.3BG behaved impeccably on the train and No.186 had a stress-free day as Platform Engine, with visitors having a guided tour of her controls. Ivan's stove was in steam turning the cabin into a sauna and producing its first can of tea!

On Sunday, there were 112 visitors (quite healthy) and the line-up was the same. A missing site gate key resulted in a late steam raise and B142 found useful employment shunting the ensemble to the platform before No.3BG found enough puff to take over.

The weather on both days just about held fair.

The train rides operated again on Sunday 1st August. It was a showery day at Whitehead, but that didn't deter the visitors. They came from as far as Belarus, Canada, Cork, Galway, Newcastle upon Tyne, Stirling, Texas and Wexford, not to mention folk from Bangor, Comber, Portadown and many spots around good old Belfast. Quite a gathering!

No.3BG "Guinness" again did the honours. A still warm No.186 (lit up for a steam test on Saturday) was the platform display locomotive.

In the workshop, visitors were able to view the bogie wheels from No.85 "Merlin" being turned on the lathe. Outside, a gang of hardies was erecting the timber framework for the new shot-blasting facility, and on 305 (ex NIR 935) work was taking place to make the roof watertight. Early visitors would have seen the Atlas moving a set of replacement doors from the carriage shed for this coach. Work was also taking place on No.85's frames, with further dismantling being carried out.

Steam Enterprise: Sunday 8th August was a day of mixed fortunes.

No.186, with a train of 5 Mk2 carriages and Dutch van, made good time from Belfast to Dundalk. But after that a clinkered fire made a stop necessary just before Kellystown summit. The fire was cleaned and built up again and the train continued to Dublin, arriving somewhat late.

The return leg with No.4 was in a different league, and an excellent run was had. One Society footplate representative declared it "the best day ever"!

Bangor Belle: On Saturday 14th August, No.4 was in action all day, but after the initial departure from Portadown police took the decision to close the line at Lurgan, fearing there might be an attack on the railway there. The RPSI train was one of the last to be allowed through.

The passengers enjoyed a fine day in Bangor, only to be informed on return to the train that they could only get as far as Lisburn, the onward journey to be made by bus.

Another summer Saturday, another upset caused by useless people with nothing to offer!

Portrush Flyer: No.4 performed impeccably on the Flyer on Sunday 22nd August. The weather

stayed dry just until the train arrived back in Belfast - when the heavens opened! There was a good crowd on board, although there was room for more, and all seemed to enjoy it.

Sunday 29th August was another successful day for the 'return of the Flyer'. A well-loaded train operated in beautiful weather behind No.4 and all went according to plan.

Greystones Shuttle: Also on Sunday 22nd August, the heritage carriages arrived into Connolly's platform 1 hauled by GM 171 at 10:15 - in plenty of time. It was watered and loaded with supplies before being hauled to the wash road.

Departure was on time to Greystones with 273 passengers in brilliant sunshine arriving on schedule.

There were 250 passengers on the Greystones to Wicklow run and again kept to time all the way - well done No.186!

The Greystones passengers were picked up and were treated to a lively run all the way to Connolly Station arriving 2 minutes early.

It would seem that a trip by the sea brought back fond memories to quite a few of the happy travellers and a good day was had by all.

Maynooth Shuttle: The two shuttle trains to Maynooth on Sunday 12th September operated successfully behind No.186.

European Heritage Open Day: The Whitehead site was opened on Sunday 12th September for the annual European heritage open days event. It was a very busy day and all went off very successfully.

Country Comes To Town: The Lisburn - Lurgan - Portadown shuttles in connection with the country festival in Portadown were planned for 18th September.

Charter (UFTM): A private charter is due to operate to Bangor and Cultra on the afternoon of Monday 27th September.

Best Of Both: A diesel-hauled trip is planned for Sunday 3rd October. The itinerary will be: Connolly - Arklow - Connolly - Mullingar - Connolly. Tickets (Adult €30, Concession €15) available from: EBS Offices at Malahide, Drumcondra and Dun Laoghaire; Dublin Pearse booking office.

Broomstick Belle: The traditional scary trains

will operate to Whitehead on Sunday 31st October.

Autumn Leaves: If all is well with No.4 following her autumn at Whitehead, the plan is to swap with No.186 on Sunday 14th November.

Santa Special (Dublin): All the tickets were sold by mid-August.

Santa Special (Belfast): It is planned to put tickets on sale by the end of October.

Railtour 2011: Due to a scheduling clash with hotels the annual May International Railtour will take place from 5th to 10th May 2011. Put it in your diary now!!

CARRIAGE & WAGON

Brown Van: About a year ago member Phil Lockett approached the NI Prison Service (NIPS) with regard to them restoring one of our wagons (particularly brown van 697). The NIPS were enthusiastic about the idea but due to a number of non-related issues in the prison service as a whole the idea was shelved.

A couple of months ago the idea was again raised and the governor of Hydebank Prison (young offenders), Austin Treacy, was very keen on the idea. After a visit to Whitehead along with two colleagues they agreed to take the NCC Brown Van to Hydebank and restore it along with setting up an exhibition for when it returns to Whitehead so it may be displayed during train rides.

The NIPS are working with the RPSI and Opportunity for Youth to obtain a grant from the UK Lottery. The van will be restored at Hydebank Prison by the inmates. They will be able to learn the skills needed to restore a historical object which has a significant connection to Belfast - working on the NCC and built by Harland and Wolff in 1948. The inmates are also going to be monitored upon their personal development such as teamwork and the attitude to working and focussing upon a project.

The van was moved from Whitehead by the army (on a tank transporter) on Tuesday 22nd June. The truck arrived at 9am and, after a difficult number of manoeuvres to the sheer leg gantries and back out again, the decision was made to haul the van onto the low loader via a winch, with the Atlas road/rail excavator provid-

ing support. This was successful and the van left Whitehead for Hydebank at 2pm.

Once at Hydebank it was lifted over the security fence into the workshop compound by a commercial crane. The van was placed and secured in the area outside the workshops where it will be worked on by the inmates.

With regard to the future plans, the grant application for the van is under way and there are high hopes it will be accepted. The main tasks so far are to take photographs of the van so they may be referred to when it is being rebuilt. The brake rigging and wood will be removed in due course and measurements taken so a timber order can be placed.

Member David Orr is working with a member of the prison services to research and set up a display within the van which will tell its story and use along with a display of its restoration by the inmates.

351: The Irish State Carriage arrived back at Inchicore on Friday 10th September following its exhibition in Utrecht, Holland.

68 Appeal: Following the successful launch of Diner 87, the next wooden coach in line for grant-aided restoration will hopefully be ex LMS (NCC) coach 68, a corridor 1st/3rd. A bid for this carriage is currently in with one of our major funders and we await the outcome.

If successful, the maximum proportion of the total cost that can be obtained from the funding body is 65%, with the RPSI contributing a further 21% of labour in kind. This leaves a potential shortfall of 14%, a sum of £1,300.

68 was shipped by the LMS to its NCC constituent following the loss of coaching stock at York Road during the Belfast Blitz in 1941. There she was re-gauged and ran until with withdrawal by NIR. Acquired by the RPSI, 68 was refurbished and returned to service with the RPSI's Northern mainline rake until 2003. She is a bi-composite corridor coach with both First and Third class compartments - now unique in Ireland.

Since 2003 the RPSI's collection of Whitehead-based wooden carriages has been largely inaccessible to the visitors to our site. Following their withdrawal from mainline use, four of the carriages have been re-distributed to our own Dublin base or loaned to other railway museums that have use for them. Diner 87 now

serves as a museum to give the public access to smaller artefacts. However, there is not currently a typical wooden passenger-carrying carriage at Whitehead which is suitable for the public to experience. It is this role that 68 would fill during our train rides and open days as she would be used in conjunction with brake van 81 'Ivan' and a steam locomotive to give the authentic wooden-bodied carriage experience. She will also be perfect for photographic and film shoots.

68 would be the cheapest and quickest of the wooden bodied carriages at Whitehead to refurbish and indeed much of the exterior work has already been done by volunteers as time permits. The major outstanding tasks include the internal surfaces, which while in good physical condition require complete stripping and re-coating with decorative combed staining and varnishing, work to revive the electric lighting, external lining out and overhaul of the vacuum brakes.

The funding is required to achieve the work quickly, to a high standard and in such a way as not to delay work on other projects such as 461, 85, 463, 861 and 303 which currently stretch our labour force. The aim is to have 68 in traffic for the 2011 train ride season where she will replace the steel Mk2 carriage we currently use for this purpose.

If you are interested in contributing to making up the shortfall in funding or manpower then please contact the editorial address or:

mark_walsh15@hotmail.com

LOCOMOTIVES

No. 1 (DCDR): Cab and tanks removed for positioning boiler and making new tanks.

No.4: In traffic. Minor running repairs. Valves to be examined during October.

No.5 "Drumboe" (CDRRL): Riveting new frame members at cylinders. Fitting driving horn liners.

No.85 "Merlin": All pistons, valves and cylinder block fittings now dismantled. Overhaul requirements being assessed. Bogie wheels being re-profiled. Casting new blast pipe. Tubes delivered.

No. 186: In traffic. Minor running repairs.

No.461: The pace of locomotive overhaul work has been stepped up significantly.

The boiler is proceeding at speed. All the stay holes are drilled and the crown stay holes tapped ready for new stays. Firehole door riveting under way. Tubes delivered.

Once setting up the slide bars has finished the motion can be reassembled.

The big remaining jobs on the boiler involve fitting hundreds of stays, tubing and testing, then reinstalling it in the frames. Most of the parts to be refitted to the locomotive are ready to go on, although some boiler fittings still need overhauled.

The tender is being assessed currently. This involves clambering around the tank, chipping rust, adjusting and oiling brake gear, dismantling bearings and checking flange profiles. So far only a small amount of re-plating has been found to be necessary.

RPSI DIESEL PROJECT

Update: Diesel matters have been a bit quiet of late, but the project is slowly progressing. As you will have read in recent Society email Bulletins (and in the recent hard copy News-Letter), Mark Healy was co-opted on to the Council in March and formerly elected at the AGM in April. Mark is the diesel department representative on the Council and will serve as the Society's Assistant Locomotive Officer (with responsibility for the diesel fleet) alongside Peter Scott. The diesel fleet currently consists of B141 and B142, and will shortly expand to include 134 and one other BGM once we have raised the money and purchased them from Irish Rail.

Mark along with David Houston, the Society's chairman, and Tony O'Shaughnessy, the Dublin area Carriage & Wagon officer met CME Phil Verster and Heritage Officer Gregg Ryan on 26th March. A very constructive meeting took place and a purchase price was agreed for 134 and the third 141 at very favourable rates. Representatives are currently in the process of identifying which remaining 141 will become part of the RPSI fleet. At the moment it is looking likely to be a straight choice between 175 and 177 as these are the best of the remaining fleet that are available. 171 as many

members will know was recently been returned to traffic and will remain in IE's books for the foreseeable future.

In addition, a list of spares is being drawn up and there is now some urgency to finalise it; as some members will no doubt be aware Irish Rail recently issued a tender for the disposal of all remaining spares for their GM fleet. Mark Healy has now passed the list to the CME and it is hoped to secure sufficient spares for 121s and 141s at a reasonable price.

B141 is currently at Inchicore and B142 is at Whitehead. Some members may be surprised at the suddenness of B142's move to Whitehead. It has always been the intention to have one BGM based at Whitehead which would be rotated every so often (as currently happens with the steam fleet). B142 was moved by Irish Rail who were fulfilling the terms and conditions of sale to the RPSI which included the delivery to Whitehead. The locomotive cannot operate passenger trains on NIR without TPWS but can operate light engine (with a pilot man) and there are no obstacles in allowing it to be sent back south to work tours. It is hoped in due course that at least one locomotive will be fitted with TPWS when opportunity and funds allow.

In the meantime, member Ken Fox has been putting time into identifying a number of volunteers with GM diesel knowledge and experience. For the project to succeed, the Society needs to be able to have a knowledge base of how to maintain and run the locomotives safely and pass this knowledge on to a new generation. The reality is that like steam the knowledge to maintain these locomotives will be lost if volunteers with the correct experience are not identified and recruited.

On the proposed Charleville base, no further progress has been made - deliberately. The option still exists to take over the goods store if wished and this was reaffirmed by the CME when the Society met with him in June. He has indicated that for now the diesel fleet can be kept at Inchicore until a final decision is made on where the Society will be based in the greater Dublin area. It is the view that it is prudent for now not commit to Charleville until the decision is made on a Dublin base as it will have cost implications for the diesel fleet. To commit to Charleville now would mean having to spend some money in kitting the goods store

out to meet health and safety requirements. In the short term, funds would be better spent on securing the fleet and returning the locomotives to traffic.

A significant number of new members joined over this past year on the basis of the Society establishing a diesel fleet, many of them pledging donations towards the Diesel Fund. They are now been asked to honour those pledges. The aim is to raise over the coming weeks at least half what was pledged. That will allow completion of the purchase of 134 and the third 141, secure spares and give enough funds to start getting both machines certified for main-line running. With 134 this is more pressing as it is the aim, if possible, to get her back in traffic in time to mark the 50th anniversary of the delivery of 121s to CIÉ next February.

Members interested in donating to the Diesel Fund should send it to:

RPSI Diesel Fund
16 Alderbrook Heath
Ashbourne
Co Meath

Donations can be made by cheque, credit card or by standing order. Cheques must be made out to the 'RPSI'.

Finally, Ken Fox is collating a list of potential working members. If you are in a position to volunteer over the next six months and want to get actively involved please could you contact Ken at:

railwaymad@hotmail.com

Volunteers will need to be approved and passed fit. Why? It is anticipated that initially the fleet will be based at Inchicore. For a volunteer to work at Inchicore, he/she will need to hold a Personal Track Safety certificate (PTS). As a result some forward planning is required to ensure potential volunteers can be facilitated.

GENERAL

Video: A recent German programme on steam in Ireland is available on YouTube. Search for "Steam In Northern Ireland".

The Railway Society: Founded towards the end of the 19th Century, this society has gone into voluntary liquidation. As part of that pro-

cess they have realised some funds, part of which has been donated to the RPSI.

Many thanks to them for the kind gesture.

Stamps: On 19th August the Royal Mail issued a set of six stamps to mark the 50th anniversary of BR's last steam locomotive "Evening Star".

As part of the publicity for the launch Royal Mail held a photo-call at Whitehead on Wednesday 18th August.

No.4 was posed at the platform with various youthful, and not so youthful, RPSI members. The jeep's sister engine No.2 features on the new 97p stamp.

Sales: A number of new items have been added to the sales catalogue:

<http://www.steamtrainsireland.com/shop/>

WHITEHEAD

Development: Vice-Chairman John Lockett on Wednesday 11th August signed the application for the Society's £3m+ bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The application is complete and well done to all those who made it happen. A fantastic achievement to get to this stage.

Now, fingers crossed!

Blast Cleaning Facility: Construction of framework for the enclosure is under way.

Clean-Up: All the old lead batteries at Whitehead, mostly from carriages, have been recycled - they generated £300.

H&S: Following a safety audit two new man-hole covers have been fitted on the platform, some odd rails moved, the site tidied and a serious bush whacking campaign has levelled the vegetation at the back and sides of the carriage shed.

Favour: McLaughlin and Harvey, a large civil engineering contractor, asked to use the platform as access for concrete lorries in the early hours of the Saturday mornings after the Steam and Jazz trains. They were doing a job for NIR. This arrangement was facilitated by removing bollards and opening the King's Road bridge gate.

Donation: In mid-August a delivery was taken of almost 200 concrete sleepers, surplus to

NIR's requirements following the relaying of Magheramorne loop on the Larne line. These were left on the platform at Whitehead.

With the help of the small flat wagon, made from a Mk2 B4 bogie, 112 of these were moved to safe storage under the King's Road bridge.

87/STABLES LAUNCH

Report by Robin Morton: The sun shone, the sky was blue and RPSI Whitehead was looking its best for a VIP event on Wednesday 25th August. More than 50 guests attended a ceremony at the Society's Whitehead Excursion platform, held to mark the successful completion of phase one of the RPSI's proposed multi-million pound museum project.

The first phase, which has cost around £20,000, involves the restoration of LMS NCC diner 87 which now houses a mobile museum, and the re-roofing of the 100-year-old Stables building on the RPSI's Whitehead site.

After registering, guests were treated to morning coffee/tea and scones in the Mk2 diner 547, which was stabled at the platform. There was also an opportunity to inspect the "Meals on the Move" exhibition in 87 which focuses on the history of railway dining in Ireland from 1898 to the present day. Also on display were two locomotives, No.3BG "Guinness", which was in steam, and LMS NCC No.4, along with the Society's recently restored GNR(I) brake van.

In the build-up to the ceremony, guests took advantage of a chance to mingle and chat, and many useful contacts were made. Among guests were representatives of the Downpatrick & Co Down Railway, the Irish Railway Record Society, and the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum. The exhibition on catering, largely the brainchild of RPSI member Edward Friel, attracted much favourable comment.

At 11am the ceremony began, with RPSI vice-chairman John Lockett welcoming guests to Whitehead. He said the development of a museum facility at Whitehead would complement existing facilities at the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum in Cultra, and the Downpatrick & Co Down Railway. The three bodies, he said, now worked closely together to ensure a co-ordinated approach to railway heritage and its display to the public.

Mr Lockett told guests that the RPSI currently had 1,100 members, of whom more than 140 had carried out work for the Society in the past year. Whitehead, he said, undertook all the heavy engineering required to maintain steam locomotives and carriages to main-line standards.

He added: "The success of the Phase One Development that we celebrate today is only the start of a much bolder plan to ensure the sustainability of mainline steam trains and the necessary heritage skills that are required to maintain them.

"We wish to enable many more visitors to access our engineering facilities in order to see heritage skills being undertaken and to educate them in the history of Irish railways. We also wish to provide many more opportunities for the public of all backgrounds to access our trains."

Mr Lockett said the second phase of the scheme was already well under way and would see the provision of a new replica period station building being constructed on the Whitehead Excursion platform.

The project, for which funding of £225,000 has been secured under the GROW (Generating Rural Opportunities Within South Antrim) programme, is designed to provide visitor facilities as well as having an educational and commercial function, and the aim is to have it open by late summer 2011. Mr Lockett expressed thanks to GROW and to Carrickfergus Council for making the funding possible.

The RPSI vice-chairman said phase three was also in the pipeline and plans were well developed to provide the engineering and visitor facilities necessary to bring it about. He said more details would emerge in due course.

Mr Lockett said the event was being held to celebrate the joint work of the RPSI, Heritage Lottery Fund and NI Museums Council in progressing two linked schemes to securely store and display the Society's small artefacts collection.

He said HLF funding had been key to the restoration of dining car 87 and had helped provide the fixed display panels for the exhibition.

Meanwhile, the Stables project had been assisted by grant aid from the NIMC. This had meant that contractors were able to provide a

new roof with re-pointed chimneys in the original style. The building, he said would ultimately act as an interpretative centre and would also provide a safe store area for the RPSI's collection of small artefacts.

Mr Lockett said that Carrickfergus Council had been prominent in financially supporting further studies into the best way forward for the RPSI.

He added: "Without the help of the NIMC and HLF neither of these important developments would have been possible. I also wish to record my thanks to Northern Ireland Railways and Translink for their continued support and encouragement in all that we do."

Mr Lockett also expressed thanks to all those who had donated artefacts for the exhibition in 87 and for the Stables collection.

Finally, Mr Lockett expressed thanks to Johnny Glendinning, the former RPSI chairman, for his vision in driving forward the museum project, and to Mark Walsh and Edward Friel who had made it all happen. He also thanked RPSI events co-ordinator Robin Morton for his work in organising the event at Whitehead.

Next up was Ronnie Spence, former permanent secretary at the Department of the Environment, who is now Northern Ireland chairman of the Heritage Lottery Fund. Mr Spence congratulated all who had been involved in the museum project to date and said their efforts enabled the wider population to enjoy their railway heritage. The museum facility would encourage more people to come to visit Whitehead and would prompt people to ask questions about the railways and the role they played in Society.

Mr Spence said that over the past 15 years HLF had allocated £4.5bn to a total of 34,000 projects across the UK, many designed to promote the value of heritage. In Northern Ireland, some £126m had been spent, triggering investment by other bodies of £200m, with the funding going to 1,000 bodies, large and small.

Lexie Scott, chairman of the NI Museums Council, opened by paying tribute to the contribution made to NIMC by Johnny Glendinning in his role as a member of the board. He said they greatly valued his enthusiasm and commitment.

He said NIMC had been delighted to support

the museum project at Whitehead. One of the most exciting aspects of the scheme, Mr Scott added, was the active involvement in the scheme of young people. It was so encouraging that heritage skills were being handed down to the next generation.

At this point, Mr Lockett invited Mr Spence and Mr Scott to unveil plaques to mark the occasion, which they did to much applause. The HLF plaque will be displayed in the dining car while the NIMC plaque will go on display in the Stables.

Alderman Jim McClurg, the Mayor of Carrickfergus, congratulated the Society on the completion of the first phase of the project. He said the Society had achieved a significant amount since it first set up its base at Whitehead in 1966.

Alan Clarke, the chief executive of the NI Tourist Board, outlined the NITB's current strategy in developing its five signature projects - the Walls of Derry, Causeway Coast, Titanic and Maritime Belfast, St Patrick and Christian heritage, and the Mourne.

He said the NITB's efforts were bearing fruit, with visitor numbers from the Republic up by 40% to the highest level since 1995. He admitted the GB market was more difficult, and needed to be grown.

Mr Clarke said he had been working with the RPSI on its plans to develop Whitehead and said NITB was keen to "join up the dots" with other railway heritage centres such as Downpatrick, Cultra and the Causeway railway.

Mr Lockett concluded the official proceedings by thanking all those who had spoken, and thanking all those who had attended the event. Guests were then invited to participate in a conducted tour of the workshops and site, and to take a short steam train ride behind No.3BG.

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