



September 2012

NEWS LETTER

WHITEHEAD SITE

Station Building: On 17th August it was announced that Cleary Construction Ltd had been appointed as the contractor for the Whitehead Station Building and additional site security fencing.

The contractors took possession of the required section of the platform on Monday 3rd September. Completion is due by the end of May 2013.

They have been setting up working facilities, stores, temporary fencing, etc., including the provision of a 20ft steel container (with steel window covers) to replace the Society's existing 'station building' located on the platform, clear of the building works.

The station building will be in the style of an original Belfast & Northern Counties Railway station similar to the former Whiteabbey station. There is a page on the website showing how it might look.

The building will house a visitor reception area, ticket office, cafe with seating for 56 customers, and a souvenir shop. There will also be visual and interactive information and display facilities depicting and explaining the history and background of the railways in Ireland in general, and in the local area in particular.

The £269,000 contract has been financed by GROW South Antrim, Carrickfergus Council, and Ulster Garden Villages, to whom the Society is extremely grateful.

It is hoped that the new station will later form part of a much larger development comprising greatly enhanced workshop and restoration facilities and an extensive railway museum, educational and interpretive centre.

Further Plans: Full planning permission has

now been obtained for Phases 2 and 3 of the overall Whitehead development programme.

This comprises extensions to the locomotive workshop, locomotive sheds and carriage shed, construction of a carriage workshop, provision of a 60ft turntable, converting the former stables building to an education centre, substantial upgrading of staff and volunteer facilities, and enhanced material storage premises. Visitor facilities and segregated safe walking routes around the workshops and other areas will be included.

Discussions and negotiations for the funding necessary for Phase 2 and 3 are still ongoing.

TRAINS & EVENTS

Dublin & Wicklow Shuttles: Fine weather, full trains and No.461 in good form made for a very successful day on Sunday 15th July. There were no problems to report, except maybe some comment on the lack of a bar (due to reduced set for a locomotive still running in) and, operationally, the day went well.

The introduction of family fares seems to have been a popular decision as family groups travelled in big numbers, and the overall feedback was very positive.

Bangor Belle: Visitors and volunteers at Whitehead first thing on Saturday 28th July were baffled to be met with photographers and models positioning themselves in various poses around the yard. One photographer was taking reference shots for the NI Museums Council. The other was a fashion photographer, and his models appeared in various costumes before a bemused audience.

This, however, did not get in the way of the main event - the train to Bangor with No.186.

The run from Belfast to Portadown was beset with signalling problems, and at least one signal (near Knockmore) had to be passed at red with permission. Service trains in both directions delayed and it was feared more time would be lost. However, an efficient run-round at Portadown ensured no further time was lost on the run to Bangor. Just as well, as the NI Minister responsible for the railways (Danny Kennedy) and the head of Translink Rail Services (Mal McGreevy) were both on board as guests of member Will Glendinning, celebrating his 60th birthday with a large on-board party.

After the final pick-up stop at Lisburn the train was filled to capacity and the run to Bangor held no further surprises.

With not much sun about, 2½ hours in Bangor was sufficient. The return train departed on time and kept more or less to schedule all the way back to Whitehead via Portadown.

Dublin & Midland Shuttles: Sunday 29th July was a very successful day, with No.461 making a visit to Maynooth in the morning and M3 Parkway in the afternoon.

Both trains were well filled, No.461 performed without problems, and the customers seemed to be more than happy with what was provided.

Whilst M3 Parkway would not win any prizes as a picturesque destination, it does have attractions from an operating perspective, with double track, run-round facilities, etc. A return visit there can be expected.

Dublin & Drogheda Shuttle: On Sunday 12th August, a reasonably well-filled train got off to a slightly late start from Dublin Connolly heading for Drogheda. Some good work from No.461 reduced the lateness to just ten minutes on arrival.

A large crowd, including the Mayor of Drogheda, greeted the train there. Shortly afterwards a full train, well supported as usual by the local community, departed on time for the trip to Skerries and return. Some difficulty was encountered working back to Drogheda caused by a build-up of clinker in the firebox which had an adverse effect on steaming, and some delay resulted.

The return to Dublin, with the clinker now removed, was trouble free.

Portrush Flyer (1): No.186's failure during lighting up at Whitehead on the morning of Sunday 19th August was discovered early enough to allow action to be taken.

NIR were contacted and a request made for one of their 111 GM locomotives. Luckily 112, the only available locomotive, was at York Road (111 and 113 are 'locked in' at Londonderry on the relay project). However, a significant shunt was required to extricate 112 from the depths of the yard before it could run light to Whitehead to pick up the carriages for the journey to Portrush.

Arriving in Portrush a few minutes ahead of schedule the locomotive ran round for the shuttle to Coleraine during the afternoon.

112 then worked the train back to Belfast Central, arriving one hour ahead of schedule. With a quick run round here, the train ran back to Whitehead to drop the carriages off whilst 112 returned to York Road for stabling.

There were certainly some disappointed passengers on the fully-booked main train and, understandably, only 62 travelled on the "Portrush Coaster" to Coleraine.

Festival Express: Also on 19th August, over 300 passengers boarded at Dublin Connolly for the run to Kilkenny. A punctual departure was achieved, and the journey was routine until beyond Inchicore when speed fell away, and it looked like there was a problem with No.461.

This proved to be all too correct and an extended stop was required at Adamstown to raise steam. The problem was not resolved, and a further extended stop was required at Sallins loop where fire cleaning was undertaken and clinker removed. The booked water stop was taken at Kildare, but departure from there was almost two hours late (also due to poor water pressure).

Further problems arose on the approach to Kilkenny. GM 082 was on hand anyway at Kilkenny to shunt the carriages and it was decided to use it to pilot No.461 back to Dublin, and the planned turning move on the triangle at Lavistown was abandoned. In view of the very late arrival at Kilkenny a later departure time was agreed and at 17:15 a diesel loco (GM 082), with No.461 and train, departed for Dublin.

However, during a stop at Newbridge No.461 was found to have developed excessive heat in a bearing, and there was no option but to remove her from the train. The locomotive was placed in the bay platform and the train proceeded to Dublin without further incident. Eventual arrival was after 20:00.

Portrush Flyer (2): Following the problems experienced the previous week, repairs were carried out on No.186 and it was available for

26th August train.

It all started out so well, and then it went to pieces with the failure of locomotive to make steam on the outward leg, coming to a halt between Cullybackey and Glarryford.

After strenuous attempts to get the boiler to make steam, and despite no obvious signs of what the cause might be, the pressure remained too low to move and so a diesel was requested. GM 112 arrived and pushed the whole train the remaining few miles into Killagan loop at 10mph.

After the service trains had caught up, the train, with No.186 on the tail, was hauled at a very careful 40mph back to Belfast and Whitehead. To avoid a repeat of damage sustained on the Kilkenny train, frequent stops were made - at Ballymena and Antrim - to ensure all lubricating systems were working correctly.

Private Charter: A booking for Wednesday 29th August had to be cancelled due to no steam locomotive being available.

The loss of the charter, which was to operate to Ballymena and Bangor (including the Crumlin line) for a group of Swiss railway enthusiasts, was disappointing and a blow to Society income.

Portrush Flyer (3): GM 112 hauled the final train on Sunday 2nd September in place of No.186 which was undergoing investigation at Whitehead.

It turned out to be a fun day with an enjoyable atmosphere - lack of steam notwithstanding - and happy passengers. However, there was an unfortunate start to the day as B142 developed a fault (repaired later that day), trapping two of the Flyer coaches behind it. The NIR crew using 112 were able to temporarily detach the Dutch Van from the consist and place first class carriage 180 inside it. The train departed with Dutch Van and four Mk2s. All passengers were just able to get a seat, just!

The train operated to time on the outward journey. On the return arrival at Belfast Central was one hour early. This would have been improved on only for a stop at Templepatrick to be informed that a car had demolished one of the Kingsbog level crossing gates which had to be passed under severe caution.

European Heritage Open Days: It was a fairly quiet weekend (8th & 9th September) at Whitehead, with a slow trickle of visitors. Unfortunately, there were no train rides due to the building work having commenced the

previous week, making the platform difficult to access.

Dublin Operations: A series of public and charter trains in September and October have been cancelled to allow for No.461 to be repaired.

There may well be some running-in trips for the locomotive, but whether they will be advertised to the public remains to be seen at present.

Broomstick Belle: The traditional ghostly outing is planned for Sunday 28th October. Tickets on sale soon.

Santa Special (Dublin): Tickets went on sale on 30th July and were all sold by 16th August.

Santa Special (Belfast & Portadown): Tickets for these trains will probably go on sale in late October.

Praise Due: As can be imagined, the Society volunteers who have had to deal directly with disappointed passengers over the past year have had a tough time.

So a big thank you to them for doing their best under very trying circumstances.

Video: Member Mike Beckett has during the year produced high-quality videos of the majority of Whitehead trains. If you have access to a computer they are well worth viewing (again and again).

www.youtube.com/user/mikebeckettvids

LOCOMOTIVES

No.85: Undergoing overhaul at Whitehead Workshops. The motion and wheels are mostly complete; ready to set valves. Boiler being re-tubed; hydraulic test to follow soon. Lubrication pipework being fabricated. TPWS/OTMR design and fitting has still to be undertaken.

No.171: The subject of an appeal for funds to overhaul and return it to traffic by 2014. Its boiler has been removed from the frames and opened up for inspection, which has thankfully revealed no unexpected problems. Some stays are to be renewed but no platework needs renewal (as was the case with No.4 and No.461). The overhaul specification is currently being drawn up.

The mechanical parts of the locomotive have not yet been dismantled. Return to traffic within so short a timescale is unusual for an RPSI locomotive overhaul, which has traditionally been leisurely due to reliance on

limited funding and volunteer work. However, funding for the No.171 project is encouraging and with our current full time team every effort will be made to achieve the goal.

No.186: The engine which was based in Dublin following the May tour, returned to Whitehead for minor repairs which, due to lack of the necessary facilities, could not be carried out in Dublin.

Steaming problems on two Portrush trains resulted in repairs, after which it is hoped that it will be available for the Halloween trains.

No.461: Following rectification of a warm big end, the locomotive operated the first three Whitehead based Steam and Jazz trains. It transferred light engine to Dublin on 9th July. On Sunday 15th July the loco worked to Wicklow and Greystones with a reduced load (5 Cravens plus van) - a modest day's operation designed to assist the running-in and familiarisation process. This process continued with operations to Maynooth and Drogheda.

A combination of circumstances resulted in the locomotive failing and subsequently sustaining significant bearing damage on the Kilkenny trip. The locomotive was stabled at Newbridge, where it was examined in the days following. It was towed to Inchicore on Wednesday 29th August.

The plan is to remove a damaged wheelset for repair at Whitehead.

CARRIAGE & WAGON

Approval: Three Mk2 carriages have been submitted to NIR for approval:

- 303, ex Irish Rail Mk2d open.
- 463, ex BR Mk2z corridor first brake (now fitted with generator).
- 5408, Mk2d Irish State Saloon.

The approvals panel is meeting in late September, following which a brake test train will probably be required.

Best Wishes: Whitehead Carriage & Wagon Officer, Francis Richards, has had a spell in hospital for surgery. So a speedy recovery to him!

GENERAL

Annual General Meeting: Following the AGM the posts of Treasurer and a general director remain open and nominations for co-

option are invited from members.

FFT Archive: With the current issue of "Five Foot Three" now posted to members, the previous issue (No.57) has been added to the website archive.

Please note that this new online journal includes the colour photographs which were black & white in the printed version due to a mix up with the printer.

www.steamtrainsireland.com/FFT

New Society: A new railway society has been established in Portadown/Armagh - the Portadown Armagh Railway Society (PARS). It has the aims:

- To advance the education of the public in the history and development of railways in the Portadown and Armagh area.
- To collect and preserve railway artefacts and heritage to the benefit of the local community.
- To bring together current and former railway personnel and those interested in railways to develop a community of interest.

The Society has developed from the joint work with the Dundalk Railway Heritage Group and RPSI members in the Portadown/Armagh area supported by the IFI Integrating Communities Programme.

PARS wishes to work with the RPSI and the Dundalk Heritage Group as well as with other interested groups. PARS wishes to work with Armagh Council and others to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the Armagh Railway Disaster in 2014.

The next meeting of PARS will be in Armagh at 8pm on Thursday 4th October. Venue to be announced.

Anyone interested in finding out more or who may wish to come to the meeting contact Will Glendinning at:

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