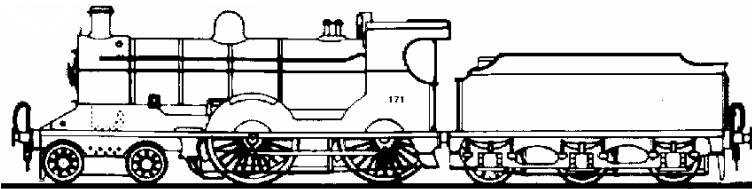


Railway Preservation Society of Ireland



June 2013

NEWS LETTER

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

The news is finally out - see press release!

The Whitehead development funding from HLF and GROW is a great step forward for the Society and puts the whole Whitehead project on a firm financial basis, fully recognised as a viable project, and all I can now say is a very sincere 'thank you' to Denis Grimshaw in particular, and to all his colleagues on the Whitehead 2020 Committee, for doing so much to make this big day happen.

A tremendous amount of work has gone into this project, and I'm sure we must feel a high level of satisfaction at the excellent news now in the public domain. Coming as it does as we approach our 50th Anniversary, the celebrations of that notable achievement will be all the sweeter when the time comes.

WHITEHEAD EXCURSION

Handover: At a small ceremony at Whitehead on Thursday 6th June, the RPSI accepted the keys of the new Excursion Station building from the contractors, Cleary Construction Ltd.

Siobhan Dillon (RPSI Project Manager), Johnny Glendinning (2020 Committee) and Denis Grimshaw (RPSI Vice Chairman) represented the Society.

VICE-PRESIDENT

Retirement: In March our Vice-President, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, had to step down from the post on health grounds.

We have had a long and fruitful association with Sir Ken over the years and he will be badly missed, and most certainly very hard to replace!

We wish him well in the future.

TRAINS & EVENTS

Steam Trials: No.186 and No.461 were out on both days:

- Saturday 16th March (3 x Whitehead to Belfast Central): No.186, No.461, No.186.
- Sunday 17th March (3 x Whitehead to Lisburn): No.186, No.461, No.461.

Both engines were fitted with smokebox temperature and vacuum gauges for comparison.

The weekend also saw the first public outings for new carriages 303 (ex Irish Rail Mk2d standard open 5203) and 463 (ex BR ER corridor brake first). The generator set in 463 hummed away merrily - certainly more quietly than that in Dutch Van 462.

Transfer: No.186 moved to Dublin on Sunday 24th March.

Easter: All went well on Monday 1st April, except that the east wind made it feel colder than Christmas in both Dublin and Whitehead.

In Dublin, No.186 coped well with a seven piece train - 4 Cravens, 2 catering Cravens and a generator van.

No.461 was in action between Belfast and Whitehead on Monday and Tuesday, with full trains throughout.

Royal Canal: On Sunday 22nd April, No.186

hauled two trains to Maynooth - over 470 passengers in all.

No.186 was in superb form and the morning run was particularly enjoyable, with a lively run to Maynooth - arriving 10 minutes early. Passengers were all in good spirits and full of praise.

There was almost an hour in Maynooth on the second train. It was a busy period there at the time - a local suburban ex Pearse arrived, shunted to down siding, the up Sligo appeared, loaded passengers and left promptly, then the down Sligo, which was waiting at the home signal, arrived. The steam train got the road shortly after that. The bar was extremely busy with music and a sing song.

A fleet of heritage barges on the adjacent Royal Canal added greatly to the atmosphere.

Bangor Belle (1): The train on Sunday 5th May was arranged at short notice. No.461 required turning for its trip to Dublin on Thursday 9th May. The triangle at Belfast GVS station is used to turn locomotives and the only realistic time to do this is at the weekend (preferably Sunday) as weekday traffic is too intense to allow such a movement. Hence the chance to raise some money by selling a trip which would have had to be made anyway. Looking forward to the turntable in Whitehead!

Due to the short-notice nature of the trip the train was about half full, but the atmosphere was good and all went very much according to plan.

Golden Vale Railtour: On Thursday 9th May, the positioning run featured No.461 which ran well and climbed banks like they weren't there.

95 passengers boarded in Dundalk thanks to efforts by the local heritage guys, headed by Brendan McQuaid. Unfortunately, a hot box detector soon afterwards delayed matters a bit but Dublin was subsequently reached without further to-do.

Friday was the Ben Bulben diesel trip to Sligo, behind GM 072; it set off a few minutes late but thereafter timekeeping was exemplary.

A single stop was made on the outward journey to visit the Cavan & Leitrim society at Dromod. Otherwise it was full permitted speed all the way!

The return journey saw numerous photo stops between Sligo and Mullingar, thence straight

back to Dublin.

On Saturday, to deliver the train to Waterford in good time to make the Golden Vale journey to Limerick, 072 was again on the train from Dublin.

At Waterford, No.461 was prepared and waiting, and a reasonably quick coupling and departure followed. Locomotive and crew took the twists and turns, both vertical and horizontal, of the line in their stride.

The only hiccup of the day was the cutting of a stop at Tipperary to make the scheduled crossing at Limerick Junction - with only a short platform, to get a mass of passengers off and on again would probably have taken too long. In the event, the train was held outside the Junction by CTC anyway.

Sunday morning dawned wet and miserable and an anxious crowd waited at the barrier at Limerick, held by the station staff until the locomotive had coupled up. Not a great start to the day, which then proceeded to deteriorate. A longer than scheduled stop for water at Cloughjordan, and slow running to Ballybrophy because of PW slacks, meant that the departure slot from the latter was missed. This was severely compounded at Portarlington where the water pressure on the day was very poor; little more than a trickle.

Arrival in Dublin was about 90 minutes down. An extremely quick transfer from the Dublin Cravens to No.186 and the Whitehead Mk2 set was achieved, but with the result that departure was an hour late and without some vital supplies and personnel.

In the event the crew made valiant efforts to keep time and were mostly successful until Portadown where the train was held for two following service trains to overtake. Arrival in Belfast was around two hours behind schedule.

Unfortunately, due to restrictions in crew hours caused by the lateness of the previous evening, Monday's proceedings were delayed by a deferred start, and for the Railway Company it proved more convenient in respect of the day's planned schedule to cancel the Antrim Branch leg; a decision confirmed during the course of the morning.

No.85 was in steam at Whitehead in the afternoon and, after posing for photographs for the tour participants, was used to shunt the train to bed. The efforts taken to provide this

'extra' appeared to be well appreciated by those present.

It was a disappointing end to a weekend which saw locomotives and crew at their very best. And all because of unsuitable water supplies!!

The Tuesday coach trip finale this year visited Belfast's Crumlin Road Jail - a very interesting tour - and, following lunch in Dundrum, an afternoon of exploration of the Downpatrick & County Down Railway at Downpatrick took place. Thanks to the latter for being very welcoming hosts.

As always the railtour organisers must thank our passengers for being so loyal and understanding, and the crews and volunteers for putting so much effort in to make everything happen.

Bangor Belle (2): Saturday 25th May was a fine day (for a change) and No.186 was on a trip to the seaside.

The locomotive and crew performed magnificently on the Whitehead - Lisburn - Bangor return trip, and on the Bangor - Belfast local trip for the Bangor folk. A great day out!

A bit of a pity though that vandals at Carrickfergus in the morning thought it fun to stone the train and break a window in carriage 463.

Balbriggan Festival: As part of the Balbriggan Festival on Sunday 26th May, No.461 and Cravens were on the GNR main line to run two local trains.

While the outward run from Dublin was somewhat sparse on passengers, the local shuttles were packed, with over 600 passengers, all eager for a taste of steam haulage.

Balbriggan too, it would seem, is not devoid of vandals - as the train left to head home at the end of the day stones broke a main window in 1514 and a top-light in 1523.

Mystery Train: On Sunday 9th June, No.461 and train are due to operate from Dublin to an unknown destination.

Steam & Jazz: The dates are Fridays 14th, 21st & 28th June, 5th July.

Train 3 (Friday 28th June) and Train 4 (Friday 5th July) are sold out - so book now to avoid disappointment.

Bray Shuttle: A series of trains to Bray and Wicklow will be running on Sunday 23rd June.

Train 1 - Bray Shuttle, Dublin - Bray & return
Train 2 - Coast Run, Bray - Wicklow & return
Train 3 - Coast Run, Bray - Wicklow & return

Summer Barbecue: It is hoped to once more host a barbecue train at Mullingar - on Saturday 6th July.

IRRS Charter: The IRRS have arranged a diesel-hauled train with the RPSI's coaches to Cork, Cobh and Midleton on Saturday 20th July.

Portrush Flyer: The Operations Committee have had to cancel the Portrush trains for 2013.

After track upgrades over the past few years, NI Railways have recently increased the frequency of their service on the line to Portrush. This means that RPSI trains would only be able to get a path to Portrush with a locomotive capable of 60 mph. As both No.461 and No.186 are limited to 40 mph, running a Portrush Flyer is not currently possible.

However, No.85 "Merlin", once back in traffic, will be permitted to run at 60 mph, which will enable trains to be run to Portrush once more.

In the meantime, alternative destinations are under consideration for the summer months, both from Belfast and Dublin.

BELFAST MEETINGS

13th March: The final meeting was "Rails Around Fermanagh" by Charles Friel.

Ideas for the 40th season please!

Charles Friel - A Celebratory Dinner: As members of the RPSI will be aware, Charles was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) in this year's New Year Honours list. This well-deserved accolade was specifically in recognition of his services to the RPSI. Charles will be known to members in a number of capacities - as organiser of the Belfast meetings, official photographer, noted archivist, author of several books, editor of our railtour brochures, speaker, broadcaster, coach steward and Whitehead volunteer.

To mark this award, the Society is organising a dinner at the Ulster Reform Club at Royal Avenue in the heart of Belfast on Thursday 13th June.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.4: Being dismantled for assessment.

No.85: The locomotive was steamed for the first time since overhaul on Saturday 6th April.

After some reluctance, the locomotive moved up and down the platform road - initially with some very strange exhaust sounds since the new low pressure slide valves took a while to seat properly.

As always with the first steam test after overhaul, there was a list of minor faults which are being attended to since. Painting and fitting of TPWS are ongoing.

No.171: It is hoped that the next circular will include a long-awaited report on the status of the No.171 Appeal.

WHITEHEAD SITE

Siding: During March good progress was made on the turnout for the third road siding.

The crossing and the switches were in place in the first two weeks, complete with check rails. Inter-spaced track was then cut to reconnect the main road and, once gauge alignment was checked, the team drilled and screwed down both the crossing and the switches and installed the switch tie bars.

At the end of March one ton of fishplates and 500 keys were purchased and collected from IE's Portlaoise PW depot using a hired van. These materials are already being used to extend the siding and so far over 200 feet of track has been laid. The jacking and packing with ballast of both the switches and the crossing was completed in mid-April and the Atlas and the small bogie wagon made the first successful traverse of the point work onto the new siding.

GENERAL

Website: The contents page of the website now has a section devoted to Research and Archives. Along with Five Foot Three and other links, two important new sections have been added:

Steam Railway

With the kind permission of Steam Railway, the RPSI is pleased to be able to publish archived copies of the Irish News page which appears every month in the magazine.

Irish Railfan's News

Older enthusiasts will need no introduction, but younger members may not be aware that a group of Irish enthusiasts, based in Dublin, published a printed news-sheet from 1955 to 1973 on the subject of the then current Irish railway scene.

It was a fascinating time on Irish railways when CIÉ made the early transition from steam to diesel and the GNR and UTA disappeared from the scene completely.

The news-sheets make a fascinating (and at times unbearably sad) read. These were truly different times!

Sales News: "RPSI 2012 - a year of mainline steam in Northern Ireland" from the camera of Mike Beckett. If you travelled on any of these trains, you may well see yourself! The DVD runs for 92 minutes, plus 13 minutes of 'extras', and it costs £10.

Stamps: Royal Mail stamps being issued on 18th June will include photos of locomotives: NCC mogul, GNR SG3, Larne Aluminium Peckett, CDR class 5, plus the RPSI's own SL&NCR No.27.

Big Move: The video of last year's move of diesel locomotives from Whitehead to Cultra is available at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMlnBWUJXao

Belfast Telegraph Archive: The newspaper has a photograph archive of images from their library, entitled Historical Ulster: The Steam Engine Era:

<http://bit.ly/belfaststeamera>

It includes quite a number of RPSI trains.

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