



February 2014

# NEWS LETTER

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**Busy:** The 2014 meeting was the best attended since 2000. Was it the new venue, or the promise of a contest for Board posts? In any event, it was standing room only in Whitehead Excursion Station!

The election was an event in itself, as 14 candidates vied for 11 places. The result included a tie between two candidates which ended with one of their names being drawn out of a hat.

So welcome to new faces Bill Garrioch and Phillip Newell, and also to Mark Walsh who returns after a number of years absence. Farewell to David Houston as he passes the Chairman's chain to Denis Grimshaw.

The meeting was chaired by Society Vice-President, Dr Joan Smyth, and she made reference to the vacant posts of Vice-Chairman and Treasurer. The latter especially she said was a crucial position which would be expected to have a named person by a number of outside bodies, such as the Charity Commission and various potential funders. The membership should take responsibility for the good governance of their society and look among themselves to have the post filled.

Dr Smyth also said that a number of candidates had been approached for the post of Vice-Chairman, so far without success. The membership too, in the Republic's jurisdiction, should seek a suitable candidate. While not compulsory,

it is nevertheless a desirable tradition that this post is filled from the other side of the border to the current Chairman.

**Question:** A query was raised in regard to the annual accounts. In Section 9 Employee Costs, there was an item of Other Costs of £33,106 for which clarification was requested.

The Auditor has confirmed that this figure refers to crew training - a mix of north and south costs. It was agreed that the figure will be specifically identified in next year's accounts.

## LOCOMOTIVES

**No.3BG "Guinness":** This shunting loco is being overhauled as a volunteer and training project - progress has been slow because of unexpected defects and other commitments, not least because of several weekends of shunting and other manoeuvres in connection with the Whitehead site development.

**No.4:** The boiler and superheater are being hydraulic tested after minor repairs, retubing and renewal of the superheater elements. The boiler will then be steam tested before fitting to the frames. The plan is then to complete the reassembly and recommissioning of the loco as time permits and loco traffic requirements become clarified.

**No.85 "Merlin":** Following completion of electrics, including TPWS fitment, the loco is now ready for out-road testing. Painting and lining out is progressing as time and weather permit.

**No.131:** Being overhauled by HEI (RPSI

engineering subsidiary) plus RPSI voluntary assistance. The locomotive has been dismantled; mechanical and boiler overhaul is under way. Driving wheels are being machined and axleboxes and other wearing parts overhauled. The boiler is having platework repairs together with renewal of some stays and rivets. Missing parts are being sourced or manufactured.

**No.171 "Sieve Gullion":** On 22<sup>nd</sup> January the engine section along with some loose items started the long journey by low-loader to Rail Restorations North East at Shildon. On a very wet 30<sup>th</sup> January the tender followed.

The overhaul is being funded by GROW NI and by the generous donations made to the 171 Appeal over the past few years. The Appeal is still open as there will be costs involved in fitting out the locomotive for 60 mph mainline running.

**No.186:** Now retired from main line duties, it awaits a decision as to future locomotive requirements.

**No.461:** Currently 'winterised' at Inchicore Works in Dublin.

## TRAINS & EVENTS

**Santa Special (Dublin):** After a hectic month for the carriage maintenance crews in Dublin and Mullingar, the Dublin based Cravens and BR generator and heating van were passed for running. The Carriages were then decorated in very stylish Christmas thyme. Windows were washed inside and outside, carriages thoroughly cleaned, etc. It was the Santa season again!

This season was different; two Santa steam trains and a Santa diesel train on the Saturdays, and two Santa steam trains on Sundays.

The trains operated successfully and, apart from one day of poor steaming, the only event of note was on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> December - a very wet day - when due to high winds, a tree fell across the Midland line west of Clonsilla, which blocked the Sligo and Maynooth trains. So the first train of the day operated to M3 Parkway in County Meath instead of Maynooth.

**Santa Special (Belfast):** All trains to

Whitehead operated successfully, with only a problem with carriage 303 on the first day causing any concern. It was dropped for the first train of the day.

On the trip of 30<sup>th</sup> November, drivers Gary Moore and Noel Playfair were both re-assessed as steam drivers as part of their bi-annual requirement for certification.

**Santa Special (Portadown):** The trains on 8<sup>th</sup> December worked well and to plan for the two return trips from Portadown to Lisburn. The new station building at the former is certainly a great improvement!

**Thank You:** The Operations Committees would like to thank all the RPSI volunteers who decorated the trains, cleaned them after each operation and stewarded them on each outing. The catering and bar staff members are largely unsung, but they provided great service on a total of twenty-seven trains over the season!

Of course Santa and his elves must be thanked, as should those behind the scenes who ensured Santa was available and fully equipped for the job in hand.

**Mince Pie Special:** The trip on 29<sup>th</sup> December was a fitting mainline finale for our hard-working J15, No.186.

As well as Belfast, the trip took in its satellite towns of Carrickfergus, Bangor and Lisburn, all, especially the latter, very much No.186's stamping ground over the 10 years since its last overhaul.

A fully-booked train was a pleasing tribute to a locomotive which was a consistent and reliable performer over those 10 years. A couple of hitches in that period notwithstanding, No.186 could be relied on to do the job.

And so it was this time too, with the familiar crew of Gary Moore and Noel Playfair. The engine had been turned during the Santa season specifically at their request so as to be facing Bangor. This was to give one last experience of what the little engine could do on the fearsome Holywood bank on the route to Bangor. In the event, the timers were well pleased, with a minimum of 27 mph on the climb, Crawfordsburn being reached with no lack of steam.

On board the train, the atmosphere was festive, helped no doubt by the aroma of mulled wine percolating through the carriages. Praise should be paid to the catering team (and those press-ganged for the occasion) for distributing the mulled wine and mince pies throughout the train.

**Running-In:** It is expected that there will be a number of running-in trips for No.85 during March and April.

**Easter Eggspress:** Trains will be operating on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> April. Tickets on sale soon.

**Saint Canice:** The 2014 Railtour will be operating between 15<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> May. It will be based in Dublin and include the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner, plus trips to Enfield, Howth, Kilkenny and Wicklow. Also diesel to Galway and steam to/from Belfast and Whitehead.

## WHITEHEAD SITE

**Shunting:** During January a significant number of days were spent in shunting around the whole site in order to prepare for building work which is to commence soon.

In the middle of the month the situation was further complicated by movements to prepare No.171 for despatch to England.

The BR Intercity Mk3a Sleeping Coach 10651 too has been moved to the yard for overhaul work as part of our GROW grants.

The area behind the locomotive and carriage sheds required to be cleared to allow for extensions and additions to both buildings.

The result is that the yard to the front is now very cluttered, making the shunting of the running set very difficult and, indeed, the movement of vehicles between sheds should that be required.

## CARRIAGE & WAGON

**Dublin:** Friday 24<sup>th</sup> January saw a bit of shunting at Inchicore with GM 083 taking the heritage carriages from various sidings and assembling them into one single set, lining them up in front of the

former Carriage 2 building.

On the Saturday the carriage crew set to work preparing the set for its upcoming transfer to Heuston valeting plant for storage, with further work to take place in the coming days.

The formation from the Cork end is now: 1949, 88, 1335, 1383, 2421, 1419, 1463, 1916.

**Boiler Wagon:** There was a new arrival at Whitehead in December - the Boiler Wagon from the GNR(I) works at Dundalk. The wagon had been languishing at Mullingar for quite some years.

## BELFAST MEETINGS

**4<sup>th</sup> December:** Fred Cooper entertained yet again, with a varied selection of past Society railtours. Some, unfortunately, gave members of the audience quite some time to spot themselves in a previous life - rarely pretty!

There was also a more recent look at the working of the D&CDR at Downpatrick during one of their Halloween operations.

The bonus item was undoubtedly a news report from the early 1930s looking at steam in the Belfast terminals, with a quick visit to Derry.

Excellent stuff!

**8<sup>th</sup> January:** This was a fascinating show, with slides from Peter Scott, Francis Richards and Dermot Mackie, respectively the Locomotive, Carriage and Site Officers at Whitehead.

Edward Friel contributed two short videos - one of recent weeks, forging a new tender drawbar for No.131 from a carriage axle, and another on the mysteries of white metalling which finished with a rousing shot of No.186 climbing to Greenisland.

Even to old hands, this was a very entertaining and informative evening!

**12<sup>th</sup> February:** "The Armagh Disaster" by John McKegney, and "Lend Me Your Ears" by Ian Sinclair.

**12<sup>th</sup> March:** "Fifty Not Out", as part of the Golden Anniversary celebrations, Charles

Friel will review the Society's first 50 years of growth and achievement with many highs and some lows. Included are 40 years of the Portrush Flyer and completing his own first 40 years of organising the Belfast Meetings in St. Jude's and Orangefield. A chance to test your own memories and reflect on where the Society has come from - and maybe see yourself!

## GENERAL

**Film 50:** As members may be aware, Mike Beckett is currently undertaking the production of a 30-minute film to mark the RPSI's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It will look at the Society's past, present and future, and is due to be premiered at the end of March.

Various members are being interviewed as part of the filming but what Mike is short of at present is footage in digital form of the RPSI's early tours and activities, both in Northern Ireland and the Republic. If anyone can help, please contact Mike as soon as possible (end of February) at:

[rail@mikeb.org.uk](mailto:rail@mikeb.org.uk)

or via the Editorial address.

**Calendar 50:** Over the past couple of years the calendars produced for the 171 Appeal have been attractive to both the enthusiast and non-enthusiast market. The calendar has become very popular and provided much income towards the restoration of 171; indeed the calendar for this year sold nearly 1,000 copies. With this in mind, the idea of producing a 2015 calendar reflecting the 50 years of the Society came about.

The idea is for the 2015 calendar to cover operations over the last 50 years. Hopefully there will be images not seen before that will finally get to print. Maybe you have the image that is 'that shot' and would love to see it in print. Of particular interest would be images that capture in a unique way the achievements over the years - perhaps a different take on the ordinary, an image that appeals to both the enthusiast and people who just like to have a nice calendar on their wall. Hopefully we can have a broad range of images including all our locomotives in

steam and on location, from No.3BG "Guinness" to No.85 "Merlin".

To submit any images for consideration a special email account has been set up. Please edit and send your images (a maximum of 12 per person) before 28<sup>th</sup> February to:

[rpsicalendar@gmail.com](mailto:rpsicalendar@gmail.com)

It is hoped to have the 2015 calendar on sale throughout the year starting with the International tour in May.

**Website (1):** The Dates History page on the Society section of the Contents page of the website has been completed to include all trains between 1965 and 2013:

[www.steamtrainsireland.com/dates](http://www.steamtrainsireland.com/dates)

**Website (2):** Following on from the success of the Irish Railfans' News project, another page has been added to the Research & Archives section.

This is an archive of the Irish Railway News journals which were published by Drogheda member Tony Gray during the 1990s. It followed the same basic principles as the older journals in detailing current news on Irish Rail and NIR, together with feature articles and news on minor railways of the time.

We are indebted to Tony for giving permission to host his material.

[www.steamtrainsireland.com/IRN](http://www.steamtrainsireland.com/IRN)

**Tickets:** The outlet for Belfast-based tickets, the Belfast Welcome Centre, has moved premises since the previous News-Letter:

Belfast Welcome Centre  
8-9 Donegall Square North  
Belfast  
BT1 5GJ  
+44 28 9024 6609

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