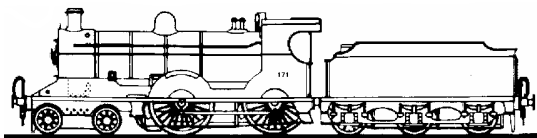


Railway Preservation Society of Ireland



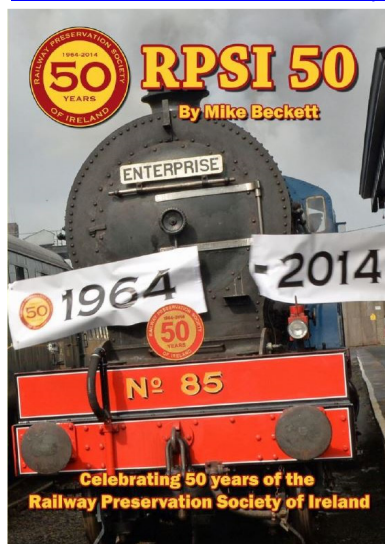
June 2014

NEWS LETTER

RPSI 50

DVD: The RPSI 50 DVD is now available from our online shop:

www.steamtrainsireland.com/shop



The DVD by Mike Beckett is a 30 minute documentary on the first 50 years of the Society plus 72 minutes of extras and photo archive.

The main feature on the DVD is a specially-commissioned 30-minute documentary telling the history of the RPSI, interviewing key figures and including rare archive footage and glimpses behind-the-scenes. There's also an additional 72 minutes of features:

- Archive films of early railtours.

- Steam & Jazz 2013.
- The return to traffic of No.85 "Merlin".
- Whitehead Station Official Opening.
- RPSI 50 Banner breaking ceremony.
- Additional interviews.
- Over 70 photographs of early RPSI operations.

More Merchandise: To go with your RPSI 50 badge, why not get a matching pen? A black pen which has the Society's name and the RPSI 50 logo printed on it.

Also available is a RPSI 50 Car Sticker by Richard Armstrong. It is 4 cm x 29 cm, and features No.85 "Merlin" and No.171 "Slieve Gullion", both in Great Northern Railway (Ireland) blue livery, face each other, separated by the RPSI 50 logo, against a yellow background.

To view or purchase, log on to:

www.steamtrainsireland.com/shop

Travelling Posters: Irish Rail have kindly agreed to display on their trains a poster marking the Society's 50th Anniversary.

Grand Gala Dinner: Saturday 17th May saw the first of two dinners to celebrate the Society's 50th Anniversary. The date for the function, at Dublin's Davenport Hotel, had been chosen so as to coincide with the weekend of the railtour.

Around 120 people attended, including a good cross-section of the RPSI's membership and a table of retired enginemen. Also present were RPSI vice-presidents Robert Guinness, Nora Owen and Joan Smyth.

Guests were welcomed with a glass of bubbly, and during the reception everyone was able to relax to the background music provided by the

Malcolm Gooding jazz quartet. The band performed as a tribute to the late, lamented Chas Meredith, who had been a much-loved member of their band and also a dedicated member of the RPSI in Dublin. It was a fitting tribute - the band was keeping the music going and the RPSI is keeping the trains running - just as Chas would have wanted.

The tables were numbered in accordance with the RPSI locomotive fleet - with the table markers featuring every engine from No.3BG to No.461. A menu card was adorned with an eye-catching RPSI 50 design on the cover, the artistic image having been created by member Stephen Comiskey.

Guests were also able to savour some recent footage of RPSI steam trains which was being shown on a large screen. The film, a sample of the work of RPSI film-maker Mike Beckett, was the subject of much favourable comment.

With RPSI President Lord O'Neill being out of the country, Master of Ceremonies for the night was RPSI Vice-President Robert Guinness who extended a warm welcome to guests, particularly those from Britain. Proposing a toast to the founders of the RPSI, Mr Guinness said they had shown great foresight in 1964 by committing the Society to promoting main line steam, something which distinguished the Society from the many groups which were striving at the time to set up branchline operations.

Mr Guinness said that Whitehead had proved to be a prudent choice as headquarters and noted that the base now boasted excellent workshops. He said the Dublin 2020 committee was trying to follow this lead by setting up a Dublin base, something he said was of paramount importance to the future of the Society. He said that at present, the wheels encouragingly were starting to turn.

Responding to the toast RPSI Chairman and inaugural secretary Denis Grimshaw reflected on the situation that faced the founding fathers back in 1964. The railway network was contracting and steam traction was being phased out. A small group of enthusiasts had decided that something had to be done to ensure

that main line steam was not lost to future generations and so it was that the RPSI was founded in Belfast in September 1964. He said that much had been achieved over the years, and paid particular tribute to the co-operation of the railway companies.

Fr Eddie Creamer said a grace especially composed for the occasion and characteristically given a special RPSI and railway dimension.

After dinner, the first speaker was Cormac Downes, National Sales Manager of Irish Rail. He said that a survey had shown that 8% of inland tourists in the Republic made a rail trip at some stage during their holiday, and this was something that Irish Rail intended to build on. He predicted that the 2015/16 period would be a turning point in terms of the development of rail tourism, and said that there was a great opportunity to grow the market. In closing, he congratulated the RPSI on its achievements over the past 50 years and said that Irish Rail looked forward to growing co-operation with the Society.

Gerald Beesley, commissioner at the Railway Safety Commission recalled the negotiations conducted between the RSC and the RPSI which had culminated in the signing off of an RPSI Safety Management System in July 2011, and commended the dedication of all those RPSI personnel who had been involved in the process. He said that the SMS meant that the RPSI was now a railway undertaking under the terms of European law and said the Society was one of the first heritage railways in Europe to have secured such accreditation. This boded well, he said, for the future growth of the RPSI.

Jim Deegan, a board member of the National Transport Authority, and proprietor of Railtours Ireland commended the Society for its achievements to. He said Railtours Ireland was planning an exciting collaboration with the RPSI in the autumn, when the Cravens carriages would be used for a diesel-hauled rail cruise around Ireland. He said that the RPSI had been involved in rail tourism for many years and recalled a trip which he

and his then partner David Humphries had organised 25 years ago which had involved bringing 250 enthusiasts from Britain over by ferry for a one-day Sea Breeze steam excursion. Rail tourism, Mr Deegan said, was a growing business worldwide and he said he hoped and expected that Ireland would play its part in this expansion.

Alan Hyland, a board member of the Irish Railway Record Society, said that the RPSI and IRRS had much in common in that they were both closely associated with the railway industry in Ireland, albeit with different objectives. Mr Hyland said he was pleased to report that the relationship between the two societies had grown closer in recent years, with much joint membership. Mr Hyland congratulated the RPSI on reaching its 50th anniversary but told guests that in 2016, the IRRS would be marking its 70th birthday. He noted that the IRRS had run a successful outing to Cork in 2013 using the RPSI Cravens and said a similar trip would be held in July, with the destination being Waterford and Limerick.

In response, David Humphries from the RPSI thanked all the speakers for their good wishes. He said the RPSI could be justly proud that it had achieved "in spades" a prediction in a railtour advert in 1967 that "this tour may herald the beginning of a new era of long distance steam railtours in Ireland".

Mr Humphries recalled that his first "two-day" tour had been the Silvermines in 1974 and of some of the highlights of the RPSI's operations in the Republic since then. In 1977, the Society had been granted access to the former locomotive shed at Mullingar which despite its "Dickensian" conditions was the location of much good work on the locomotive and carriage restoration front. He paid tribute to the volunteers who worked at Mullingar and at Inchicore, where the running set and the "Dublin engine" were once stored and maintained. He noted that at present, the RPSI did not have a permanent base in the Dublin area and said that while the Society was grateful to Iarnród Éireann for its willingness to accommodate stock at a number of locations, the need for a permanent base was now becoming a

critical aim. A sub-committee had been set up with this objective in mind, and while good progress was hoped for, the challenge should not be underestimated.

Mr Humphries referred to the Society's involvement in more than 30 films since 1976, both for the cinema and for television. He noted that both Nos. 184 and 186 had been restored at Mullingar in 1978 to a sufficient standard to star in the First Great Train Robbery movie.

He recalled the formation in 1988 of the Dublin Area Operations, and said its biggest and most intensive operation each year was the Santa season, which started in Mullingar in 1981 and had operated since 1992 from Dublin. The popularity of these trains was evident from the fact that they usually sold out by early September.

Mr Humphries said that one particular high profile event had been the launch in April 1991 of No.461 by the then President, Mary Robinson. Then there had been the launch by President Mary McAleese of the Irish State Coach 351 in October 2000. He said the next challenge for the Society was to get the current President, Michael D Higgins, onto an RPSI train.

Over the years, Mr Humphries said, there had been many defining moments for the Society - such as the question of whether steam would be allowed under the wires with the introduction of electric DART trains in 1984. The completion of the Safety Management System in 2011 had been a "herculean task" while the current focus was on the training of more Irish Rail drivers to act as footplate crew. Without competent crew, he said, the RPSI's locomotives and carriages were going nowhere.

Mr Humphries said he wished to record the RPSI's appreciation to both the present and former staff of Iarnród Éireann - at all levels in the company - for their help, support and co-operation.

In closing, Mr Humphries paid tribute to four Dublin-based members who he said had made an immense contribution to the RPSI in different ways, but who had now passed on - the first Dublin agent Sam Carse, members Philip Booth and Chas

Meredith and the RPSI vice-president and former Taoiseach, Dr Garret FitzGerald. All, he said, were fondly remembered.

The final speaker was Fred Heide from New Jersey, USA, a regular railtour participant since 1991, when he came to Dublin to undertake a canal tour and decided to include the steam tour as well. Recalling various ups and downs of the two-day tour weekend, such as the Barrow Bridge being hit by a boat, the line at the border being "re-arranged" by the IRA, and the re-routing caused by foot and mouth disease Mr Heide said in an amusing speech that he intended to "keep coming back until you get it right". He spoke of the many good friends he had made within the ranks of the RPSI and told of the congenial atmosphere on the tour.

Mr Guinness wrapped up the formalities by thanking those involved in the organisation of the function and renewing the welcome to the various retired Irish Rail staff present.

He concluded by reminding all present that the next big function in the RPSI 50 programme was the Grand Gala Dinner which was being held on Saturday 13th September in Belfast City Hall.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.4: The Board has approved the locomotive's return to traffic and work has commenced on re-assembly with volunteer labour.

No.131: On Saturday 26th April the frames of locomotive No.131 (in workshop undergoing overhaul) were lifted and turned round to face Larne.

This was necessary because both the boiler and tender of the locomotive were already facing Larne, leaving the frames as the "odd man out" facing Belfast. (The frames, boiler and tender were all delivered to Whitehead separately and at different times, hence the discrepancy.)

Turning of the loco can only be done by the workshop crane; a single central lift is essential and the carriage lifting gantries, although capable of lifting the weight, could not then permit the loco frame to be

rotated because of the presence of the gantry framework.

The workshop crane dates from 1897 and came from the B&CDR works at Queen's Quay - it is flat belt driven and is a notable piece of Victorian engineering which was incorporated in the Whitehead Workshop as part of the "working museum" policy. However, the belts suffer from slipping at high loads and the crane only just managed to lift No.131's frames, albeit with application of belt dressing and other encouragements.

For anyone interested in the technicalities, the "balance point" for the frames without any attachments turned out to be exactly at the driving wheel position.

Work on the wheels, stays and smokebox is progressing.

No.171: Railway Restoration North East Ltd have indicated that overhaul is progressing well and they hope to return the locomotive from Shildon in County Durham to Whitehead by early autumn.

No.461: A boiler washout, annual inspection and valve gear examination took place while at Whitehead. The locomotive returned to Dublin light engine on 29th May following the annual railtour.

TRAINS & EVENTS

The Boyne: Departure from Dublin Connolly on Saturday 12th April was 20 minutes late due to trouble with the GM moving the coaches.

The water column at Drogheda was out of commission so the stop there didn't take too long.

On arrival at Dundalk, the train was shunted to a siding off the down road. The RPSI reps on the footplate were from Whitehead, Mark Walsh and Adam Lohoff and they provided the usual top class footplate performance.

Unfortunately, the passenger uptake on the trip from Dublin was poor.

Sunday was a beautiful sunny morning and the whole train looked well as it backed into the platform in Dundalk. The first return trip to Drogheda ran more or less to time, as did the second trip. The

second train was equally as full as the first.

Servicing of the locomotive took longer than was planned and IÉ Control decided that the Up Enterprise would overtake at Dundalk and not in Mosney as planned. On hearing this, there were a few disappointed enthusiasts who travelled on the train in the belief that the train was going into the station at Mosney.

However, all was not lost, as between the RPSI Operations Officer and the IÉ DTE, Control agreed that the train would stop at Mosney anyway for a photo-shoot.

Arrival in Dublin at Platform 5 was at 18:20, 25 minutes down. 081 arrived at the rear of the set and hauled it back to its base in Inchicore works.

There was a double celebration this weekend. The RPSI 50 headboard was carried on the front of No.461. And the carriages, Cravens, were also celebrating their 50th anniversary. They entered service on the 10th April 1964 with a 18:30 departure from Dublin Heuston to Cork.

Running-In: Further mileage accumulation runs on 13th April saw No.85 with 5 carriages operating two return trips between Portadown and Lisburn. Apart from some delay due to a temporary restriction (platform extension work at Moira) running was more or less to time throughout and the locomotive wasn't overly taxed.

Once again, a disappointingly small number of members travelled despite a request for help to defray the costs of this necessary running-in.

Easter Shuttle: On Easter Monday, the train departed from Platform 5, where a huge crowd was waiting when No.461 and train arrived. Passengers came from many parts, including a family group from Newry who could not get tickets for the Belfast trains, these being sold out.

There was a short stop at Greystones to check the engine and arrival in Wicklow was at 12:12. The Easter Bunny had distributed Easter eggs to 142 children.

There was a Down train to Gorey following and as the train, seven carriages and van, was slightly too big for the passing loop, it was necessary for the

train to propel into the Rathdrum section and wait the arrival of the railcar. This was done smartly and the train departed Wicklow for Greystones only 10 minutes late. The sun was still shining and there were many on the beaches waving and staring in amazement as the train sped past. Following a quick run round at Greystones there was an on-time departure for Wicklow.

There was a similar problem as before, a Down Rosslare was behind and after running round the train No.461 propelled again into the Rathdrum section. When the Rosslare train arrived there was a points failure which took about 30 minutes to sort out. The train was routed into the Up Platform in Wicklow, No.461 unhooked and went into the headshunt, the Down Rosslare departed and No.461 returned to her train.

All passengers had boarded by this time and departure was 45 minutes late. A very smart, non-stop run from Wicklow to Platform 5 Dublin Connolly reduced the deficit to 20 minutes. That run was the highlight of the day, brilliant!

Easter Eggspress: The four trains over two the days of 21st and 22nd April were fully booked (the last bookings being made on Tuesday morning).

The Easter Bunny was on hand to distribute over 400 eggs - a lot of chocolate!

No.85, still being treated gently as running-in, behaved well and the crew professed themselves well pleased with her performance.

All went according to plan and no problems were experienced.

Slieve Gullion Railtour: It was a triumphant return home to Dundalk for No.85 "Merlin" on Sunday 4th May. With driver Noel Playfair and fireman Barney McReynolds on the footplate (assisted by inspector Mark Buchanan and various RPSI reps) a first class climb was made over the bank from Poyntzpass to Dundalk. There was a stop at Poyntzpass to pick up a party from the local historical society, so the climb was made from a standing start there. Timekeeping was to the minute throughout. Excellent stuff!

A very well filled train made for a great

atmosphere on board.

Saint Canice: On Thursday 15th May No.85 and a well-filled trained left Whitehead dead on time at 09:05. Subsequent departures from Belfast, Lisburn and Portadown were also prompt. It was only at Dundalk that participants suspected something was wrong when a gathering of reflective vest was spotted huddled around the locomotive's right-hand rear driving wheel. There was some heat in the bearing but it was decided to proceed with caution. But at Drogheda it was decided to declare the locomotive a failure as the problem had got worse.

Disappointed passengers were transferred to a following Up Enterprise, and continued to Dublin. The locomotive returned to Whitehead tender first, and reached there around 20:00. Meanwhile the Mk2 carriages were transferred to Inchicore by IE diesel. Many thanks to all those within NIR and Irish Rail who went the extra mile to arrange the transfers of passengers, locomotive and coaches.

The Galway Bay Railtour on Friday 16th May -diesel 074 and Cravens - took place as advertised, transporting railtour weekenders and diesel enthusiasts to a very sunny Galway. Despite 082 being in Galway, raising the hopes of gricers, 074 was the motive power for the return leg.

In order to prevent a repeat of a recent visit to Wicklow, when there were difficulties over section occupancies, the Cravens set was reduced from 7 plus van to 6 plus van on the Saturday. The Honorary Secretary was to be observed redirecting a number of passengers to revised seats, their booked seats no longer being on the train!

As No.85 was the booked motive power from Dublin Connolly to Maynooth, 074 substituted for this short leg of the day's itinerary. There was a prolonged stop at Howth awaiting the light engine arrival of No.461 to take the train forward to Wicklow. Apparently, there were trespassers on the line between Howth Junction and Howth. It is to be hoped that none were RPSI members as the Society in no way condones such behaviour!

No.461 was the booked motive power onwards to Wicklow, and back to Dublin

Connolly (where the engine was turned and serviced) and thence to Enfield and back. All in all a very pleasant afternoon in brilliant sunshine, with an engine and crew on top form.

A reasonably early return to Dublin ensured there was time for participants to ready themselves for the Grand Gala Dinner in the Davenport Hotel (report to come).

Sunday was to be No.85's day, but with No.461 as the motive power the schedules had to be slackened somewhat. The torrential rain in Kilkenny dampened the enthusiasm of participants as they headed to the city, but not that of the crew as once again a great performance was coaxed from the locomotive. Water was taken at Athy in both directions from a tanker manned by Irish Civil Defence personnel.

Over the weekend Whitehead (and Brighton!) volunteers had laboured on No.85 to fix the bearing problem, and indeed it was sorted by Friday evening. Frantic attempts were made to seek a return of the engine to Dublin. Unfortunately, NIR were not in a position to issue the paperwork in time for a return to Dundalk or Dublin to pick up Monday's train.

So No.461 was the motive power, and a valiant effort was made to keep to time, which was done as far as Dundalk. However, watering there took longer than scheduled resulting in a delayed departure. Sectional times were nearly kept as far as Lisburn, but missed paths increased the station times there and at Portadown. Whitehead was reached around 5pm - a valiant effort from locomotive and crew.

The traditional Tuesday heritage coach tour this year took in the Nomadic Museum in Belfast's Titanic Quarter, Hilden Brewery (not so much heritage!) and the Ulster Aviation Society at Long Kesh, near Lisburn. It was a fascinating day, full of interest and much enjoyed by all.

Once again thanks are due to so many Society volunteers and railway company staff who have laboured for months to organise the tour. Well done one and all.

As always, the loyal participants who come back year after year deserve our lasting gratitude - thank you!

Balbriggan Festival: On Sunday 1st June, departure from Dublin with No.461, hauling 7 Cravens and BR van, was at 10:30. On board the engine on this very sunny and warm morning was the new trainee fireman, Keith Farrelly of Dublin Connolly Motive power Depot, recently returned from his training at the North York Moors Railway. Under the watchful eyes of DTE Lar Griffin and drivers Robbie Jolley and Ken Fox, he was in capable hands.

It was an excellent run to Balbriggan with an on time arrival and a packed Down platform full of families and people of all ages greeted the train.

Water was due to be taken from a hydrant in the car park adjacent to the water column at Drogheda, which is out of use presently due to a fractured pipe. Niall Kelly had been dispatched earlier by the Down Enterprise equipped with all the watering gear. However, on arrival it was discovered that the standpipes were not compatible with the hydrant, which resulted in two members getting totally soaked. All was not lost, a quick phone call to Drogheda Fire Service and the matter was sorted swiftly.

On the return trip, passengers were dropped in Balbriggan on the Up Platform and the train proceeded to the loop in Skerries. Here the Loco ran round and left for Balbriggan for the second run to Drogheda.

At Drogheda No.461 proceeded up the Navan Branch for watering and servicing. The train left Drogheda 8 minutes down at 15:28. Passengers were set down in Balbriggan and the passengers that travelled from Dublin boarded the train for the return.

Schools Day: One of the events to showcase the RPSI in its 50th anniversary year was a Schools Open Day held at Whitehead on Wednesday 4th June.

The event was co-ordinated by RPSI volunteer John Williams. Four schools were welcomed. After an introductory presentation outlining what the Society does, each school was given a guided

tour of the workshops. All the shed doors were open and the pupils and teachers could see work in progress, the machines in use and examples of completed work.

Back on the platform, No.85 was waiting with a carriage to offer train rides, and many pupils and teachers took the opportunity to stand on the footplate and talk to the Driver and Fireman about their roles and how, at the age of 14, many people started their lives on the steam railway years ago.

This was a great example of how the RPSI is still living up to its stated aims of sharing history and educating. The guides were particularly impressed with the 12 year olds who understood that the boiling point of water increases with increased pressure!

Seashore Festival: These trains on 7th and 8th May were chartered and marketed by North Down Borough Council, and sold out very quickly - return tickets were only £1.

Saturday was a great day operationally, but the weather was terrible.

Sunday was a good day weather-wise, but operationally a complete nightmare!

The trouble started on the first run from Belfast to Bangor when the train slowed to a stop after Cultra on the steep bank between Holywood and Crawfordsburn. To those on the train it was assumed that No.85 had run out of steam, but after numerous attempts at a re-start on the hill it became apparent that something was amiss. A check of the train by the crew was followed by some checking beneath one of the carriages. When they returned to the footplate a successful re-start was made. Bangor was reached about 90 minutes late.

As there had been knock-on delays to other trains, and the second charter train, NIR control declared the whole train a failure and sent for a diesel. GM 112 appeared after about 30 minutes and returned the carriages to Whitehead. After taking water No.85 followed light engine to Whitehead.

The GM had no problems while hauling the train, nor did any fault come to light when the train was checked with No.85 coupled up upon return to Whitehead.

Steam & Jazz: The latter three trains (20th & 27th June, 4th July) sold out in advance, and the first train (13th June) was virtually sold out by the time it operated.

Marble City: Trains will be operating to Kilkenny on 15th June, 27th July and 24th August.

Bray Shuttle: Trains will be operating to Bray and Wicklow on 13th July.

IRRS Charter: The Irish Railway Record Society will be running a diesel-hauled trip to Waterford, Limerick and Nenagh on 19th July with RPSI carriages.

Portrush Flyer: At the time of writing plans are being confirmed for trains on 27th July, 10th & 31st August and 14th September.

The latter date will be operated in conjunction with the Heritage Railway Association who will be holding their AGM in Northern Ireland and taking part in the 50th Anniversary dinner on 13th September.

Whitehead Festival: This year's event, including train rides, will be on 9th August.

Great Northern Getaway: A repeat of last year's successful operations, based on Drogheda, will be on 10th August.

GENERAL

The Syndicate: The ever-successful GB group continue their fund-raising efforts and, as in recent times, their profits are being donated to the No.171 Appeal. The most recent donation is £1,000. So, thanks to them. And if you see the guys on your travels to railway shows please do support them.

Fireman/Driver Training: Training has begun on the next generation of Irish Rail footplate crews. Following an advertisement earlier in the year in the Weekly Circular seeking applicants, a good number of current drivers expressed interest in joining the footplate of Dublin based operations. Interviews for the positions were carried out over a number of days and the standard of applicants was very high.

Following the interview process, the first two candidates from the pool were

selected for training. Keith Farrelly and William Ferns, both Connolly drivers, departed for training on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway for two weeks. The training involved a number of days in the classroom followed by practical footplate training on scheduled services on the line. The trainees had a variety of locomotives during this period, mainly working on a 'Standard 4' and 'Black 5', but also included a B1 and A4.

The trainees will now bring the skills that they have learned and apply them to the Society's locomotives. They will undergo some out-road training with No.461 over the coming weeks and will then be assessed as firemen. This will ease the current situation of just two steam men out of Dublin.

There will be further training of more candidates as firemen later in the year which will follow the same pattern.

All trainees will then progress to drivers which will give greater flexibility for our operations and also ease the demand on our current crew.

Thanks to the RPSI's Gerry Mooney for arranging the training, and to Iarnród Éireann for their assistance in the programme which will ensure the crewing of our trains over their network into the future.

CARRIAGE & WAGON

Tailboard: The RPSI Whitehead set now boasts an RPSI 50 tailboard, and very swish it looks, too. The vinyl RPSI 50 logo, which mirrors the headboard carried by the engine, has been applied to both ends of the Whitehead Mark 2 set and should further help to raise the profile of our big anniversary.

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