



January 2016

## WHITEHEAD SITE

**Preparations:** In August, following the removal of the Gatwick coaches to Dundalk, the Site squad was back in action repairing the crossing between carriage C and D roads. This was vital to be able to safely empty these roads behind the sheds in time for the building contractors. The crossing was lifted and 3 large timber sleepers were replaced and the track re-aligned and bolted up by the end of the month.

During this time 2 second-hand containers were delivered to the car park and one of better containers at the back of the site was also put in the car park. These would be needed for temporary storage.

The first two weeks in August were occupied with the movement of the steam crane, initially towards Larne, after lifting a wagon to make room and then, following re-alignment of D road, movement of the steam crane into the carriage shed. A shunt then moved the steam crane, hand crane and Railcar 1 and other items, clearing C and D roads. Two remaining containers at the back of the site were removed for scrapping. A small rake of wagons on B road were shunted the following weekend, making the rear of the site empty and ready for the contractors.

It is pleasing to note the main yard at the front of the sheds was not as bad as was expected and it remained possible to continue to shunt for maintenance, etc., pretty much as normal. The removal of

the Gatwick coaches to Dundalk for temporary storage was the key element here.

The acquisition of Connolly shed has helped too, as there are now two locomotives in Dublin where formerly there would only have been one and hence a space created at Whitehead!

If you have access to the internet, do have a look at the Society's website and Facebook page where the work to clear the site and subsequent building work is well documented.

**Developments:** MSM Contracts Ltd of Portadown were appointed in late August as the contractors for the site extensions. They came on site on 7<sup>th</sup> September and very quickly made their presence felt. Work started on excavating the bank on the seaward side of the site. The steelwork and cladding of the new and extended buildings went up in next to no time.

By October major progress had been made on the building work, including the new 'NCC style' signal cabin plus turntable area excavations and work in the Stables.

At the time of writing the flooring is being laid in the new buildings.

As well as creating a major educational and interpretation centre for visitors to what is now the sole surviving traditional railway workshop in Northern Ireland, improved engineering and staff facilities will be provided, to facilitate more extensive restoration work on our historic railway locomotives and carriages.

The development project comprises extensions to the locomotive workshop, locomotive sheds and carriage shed, construction of a carriage workshop, provision of a 60ft turntable, conversion of the former stables building to an education centre, substantial upgrading of staff and volunteer facilities, and upgraded material storage premises.

The project features the development of a visitors' audio guide for tours of the centre and enhanced education and interpretation opportunities created by the displays in our buildings and workshops, as well as the development of on-train apps to provide information for passengers.

The capital works, funded by Heritage Lottery Fund and Tourism Northern Ireland, along with Mid and East Antrim Council and Ulster Garden Villages, will include:

- A portal frame extension to the Carriage Shed including Workshops;
- A portal frame extension to the Locomotive Shed including Workshops;
- A turntable and signal box;
- An education room in a converted Stables building;
- Concrete hard standing and pathways;
- Landscaping, seating and play areas;
- Bunkers, concrete retaining walls, brick walls, fencing and gates.

Significantly, there is a separate budget allocation for interpretation, with HLF funding three years of costs including some restoration works and salaries.

**Turntables:** On Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> December, a crane was brought onto the site to help extricate parts for the new turntable (previously at Belfast Central Services Depot). It will be installed as part of the development work.

The crane was required to lift the Society's other turntable (ex NCC Waterside) which was blocking access to some of the required equipment.

**Loan Appeal:** Thank you to those members who have made loans so far totalling £140,000. These have enabled

the RPSI to make the October, November and December payments to our contractor of over £1.5m. In due course, these will be recouped from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Tourism Northern Ireland, and in the form of a VAT refund. Payments in 2016 should be significantly smaller.

**Signalling Squad:** With the new signal cabin being constructed at Whitehead (a substantial structure!) the Site Officer is keen to see a dedicated team set up to progress the connection of the cabin to the existing point-work and to signalling equipment which we have in storage.

A signalling plan was drawn up a few years ago by an engineer from Irish Rail so the basis of what we want to achieve is already known.

If you are interested in signalling or wish to learn you are invited to get in now 'on the ground floor'. You can help to make the project yours as there is knowledge within the Society but little in the way of practical experience.

## TRAINS & EVENTS

**Marble City:** Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> August was a wet miserable day in Dublin, but somewhat brightened up by the Baillies Mills Accordion Band from County Down on the train. The band fell in and marched up and down Platform 3, entertaining the passengers with their music. This was the start of Heritage Week and of the Radio Train to Kilkenny - another first for the RPSI.

In Kilkenny, the band marched from the station into the city, playing as they marched. The provided a short concert within the grounds of Kilkenny Castle. The afternoon weather was good and the rain only started again as No.4 propelled the train into the platform for departure. During the journey up and down to Kilkenny there was music, interviews and information about the locations the train was passing. The band played in the bar at certain times and was the highlight for many.

**Portrush Flyer:** The last Flyer of the season on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> August managed to fit in between very heavy early morning

and evening showers giving the passengers a very pleasant afternoon in Portrush. Both the main train and the afternoon local trip to Coleraine were packed out behind No.85 - a fitting end to the Flyer season.

**Steam Enterprise:** Despite the upset by a last minute engineering possession of the yard in Dublin Connolly, resulting in the turntable being out of bounds, the sold-out operation on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> September went off successfully. It was a bright sunny day, which helped immensely.

No.85 and train operated to Dundalk. There, Irish Rail's 075 took over for the trip to Dublin and back to Dundalk.

In the meantime, No.85 ran light engine all the way back to Belfast's Great Victoria Street triangle to turn - quite a significant tender-first run there and back. Our thanks must go to NIR and their crew for facilitating this extraordinary effort to ensure the day was disrupted as little as possible, allowing No.85 to complete the last leg of the trip as planned.

**Emerald Isle Express:** The second annual diesel charter by Railtours Ireland ran from Monday 28<sup>th</sup> September to Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> October. The train consisted of 5 Craven carriages and a BR van: 3173 (van), 1532 (open standard) 1514 (bar car), 1532 (open standard) 1522 (dining car) and 1508 (buffet car). 1532 was a sitting room / saloon carriage with Irish railway reading material available. The passengers were seated in 1532 and 1522.

- Monday 28<sup>th</sup> September: Dublin Connolly - Rosslare Strand (then empty to Waterford)
- Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> September: Waterford - Cork (engineering works in Cork yard meant the train had to be stabled in Mallow)
- Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> September: Mallow - Cobh (empty) then Cobh - Killarney
- Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> October: Killarney - Limerick - Ennis (then empty to Limerick)
- Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> October: Limerick - Galway (then empty to Westport via Athlone)

- Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> October: Westport - Dublin Heuston

Congratulations to all involved in another successful week.

**Birdhill, County Antrim:** On Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> October Whitehead Excursion Station was the venue for film scenes for "Property Of The State" by Pix Productions.

About 75 people made up the crew! It was the real deal - props staff, make-up artists, continuity staff, sound crew and film crews.

Early fog held up the filming due to lighting but cleared about 10:30 and they filmed from then to lunch time. Filming on the train continued to about 16:00, then they did the outside shots which involved 8142.

A long day was had by all, but Pix Productions were pleased with the location and the help from the team on site for the day.

The station building posed as Birdhill, Co. Tipperary.

**Private Charter:** On Friday 9<sup>th</sup> October O'Reilly Tours chartered a train for a one-way trip from Dublin to Arklow, which operated with No.4.

**Broomstick Belle:** Nothing much to report other than Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> October was unseasonably sunny and warm, trains were sold out, the passengers were impressively costumed, No.85 behaved impeccably, Hilden draft ale was launched in the bar, the crew of Noel Playfair and Michael Hamill were reassessed as drivers by Ron Smith of West Coast Rail, the Wicked Witch was an evil so-and-so, the Catering team did their first afternoon tea on the train, and everything else went to plan.

**Halloween Shuttle:** On Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> November Connolly Shed once more looked like a proper steam depot with two locomotives simmering outside in the autumn sun. No.461 hauled the morning train to Greystones, and No.4 took the afternoon trip. Drivers Ken Fox and Robbie Jolley were also reassessed as drivers by Ron Smith. The standard of costumes of both passengers and crew alike was frightening!!

**Victorian Street Fair:** The afternoon of Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> November was a damp one at Whitehead. It was very disappointing for the Community Association in that a number of stalls and marquees were unable to be present due to the wind and rain.

Those who came to the train rides at least were dry and there was a steady flow of visitors over most of the afternoon.

**Santa Special (Dublin):** The season kicked off on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> November and 15 trains operated from Dublin Pearse to Greystones, 3 of them were diesel-hauled, the others hauled by No.4. The only issue of note in a very successful season was on the return journey of the second train on the first day when No.4 experienced steaming problems between Killiney and Dalkey. After a delay a diesel was fetched and 078 towed the locomotive and train back to Dublin. The third train was due to be diesel-hauled anyway and this got underway as soon as No.4 was returned to Connolly Shed. The problem was sorted out overnight and No.4 operated the rest of the season successfully.

**Santa Special (Belfast & Portadown):** The season in Belfast started on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> November, with No.85 hauling three trains to Whitehead. The latter station was festooned with lights along the temporary fence on the platform behind which visitors could inspect progress on the new signal cabin. All 14 trains were sold out and operated without issue due to a massive effort by all involved.

The Santa programme finished on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> December with No.85 "Merlin" hauling the last train. In total 29 sold-out trains were operated from Belfast, Dublin and Portadown, carrying over 9,000 passengers.

It was a brilliant effort on the part of all the volunteers who so willingly gave up time over 4 weekends to make sure the passengers got the Santa 'experience'.

**Mince Pie Special:** The last train of the season was a trip from Belfast to Dublin behind No.85 on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> December.

The train had sold out in advance of Christmas and was much-anticipated.

In the event, apart from the cold, it was a great day out with some brilliant running and a great atmosphere on board.

During the afternoon, for the first time in over 50 years, there were three steam locomotives in Connolly Shed: No.4, No.461 and visitor No.85.

**The Midlander:** 2016's first outing, with trips from Dublin to M3 Parkway and Maynooth on 7<sup>th</sup> February.

**The Shannon:** A new idea - a trip to Carrick on Shannon, with a local option to Boyle, on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> March.

**Easter:** The first Belfast trips will be the usual Easter Monday and Tuesday.

**Croagh Patrick Railtour:** Deposits are now being taken for the Croagh Patrick Railtour and the 071 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Diesel Railtour between 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> May. But hurry - due to a couple of large parties, advance bookings are already well over 220, and a waiting list will probably have to be put in place.

## LOCOMOTIVES

**No.3BG "Guinness":** Boiler overhaul and mechanical repairs. Renewal of studs at cylinder block, repairs to cracked stretcher. Hydraulic test successfully carried out in late December. The next stage can now be tackled - remove hydraulic blanks and lift boiler into frames for assembling smokebox (then out again for 'out of frames' steam test).

**No.131:** Painting, fitting of TPWS, etc. Renewal of a slack valve spindle bush. While the locomotive is now overhauled and has worked on Whitehead train rides, it cannot yet work public trains on the main lines as it must be fitted with TPWS/OTMR monitoring equipment. It also needs a tender of its own, having been tested while using the tender from No.171.

**No.171 "Sieve Gullion":** Completion of overhaul progressing as time permits. New firebox cladding made and fitted, together with overhauled boiler fittings. Making new piston rods and crossheads, reducing ends of boiler flue tubes. New blast pipe now ready. Overhaul of boiler fittings continuing.

The locomotive is to be painted in a displayable condition pending completion of overhaul. Work is ongoing, with a view to having the locomotive back in action in a couple of years' time. The delay is due to the unfortunate insolvency of the company carrying out the work, and the subsequent necessity to recover the locomotive, which was in dismantled and partly overhauled condition. This resulted in the overhaul of No.131 being completed first, instead of later, with its boiler 'ticket' now running and requiring only the tender and electrics to get it into action.

The good news is that the funds available have enabled the purchase of all outstanding items for No.171, and will allow work to proceed with full time and volunteer input.

Our thanks are due to all who contributed to the overhaul of No.171, and everyone should be reassured that the Society remains committed to completion of the project - and the interesting goal of having 3 ex-GNR(I) 4-4-0 locos in action at one and the same time!

**Tender No.37:** No.131's new tender is under way. The underframe overhaul is nearly complete. Waiting for rubber springs for which a special mould is being made. Tender coal rails ready for assembly. Building of new tank - floor plates and 'well' under way. Also preparation of coal rails which involves reforming the cope irons (beading) to the new shape for the 3,500 gallon (16,000 litres) tender.

**No.131/Tender Appeal:** A new appeal has been opened to raise funds to complete the TPWS and OTMR electrics and return No.131 to traffic, and to build a new tender to operate with the locomotive.

Full details are available on the No.131 Appeal web page. Members are asked to give generous support as has been done for previous appeals.

## CARRIAGE & WAGON

**460 (Mk2 half brake):** The van has had a diesel generator installed, similar to 463. The generator will supply power via the

train line to operate air-conditioning, lights, batteries, central door locking and dining car catering equipment. Also the pressure ventilation fan motors - the actual heat is supplied by steam from the locomotive or steam heating van.

**462 (Dutch Van):** Heating boiler recommissioning and bodywork repairs.

**Mk2 Carriages:** General repairs to Mk2 bodywork. Re-profiling of bogie wheels ex dining car 547.

## BELFAST MEETINGS

**14<sup>th</sup> October:** Joe Cassells gave an account, in words and pictures, of the last years of steam in Ulster and some of the untold tales that went with them. Joe covered each line out of Belfast in turn, keeping the NCC until after the break and finishing with the spoil trains.

**11<sup>th</sup> November:** Fred Cooper entertained with his usual diverse range of films, including No.131 shunting at Whitehead in July last, the Great Northern's Derry Road, rare footage of Richhill between Portadown and Armagh and the lifting trains which ran in 1959, two RPSI tours - the Comeragh in 1990 and the Decies in 1991, never-before-seen footage of Moneymore about 1955 with Jeep No.56 on Sunday School excursion duty and No.74 "Dunluce Castle" working the goods for Cookstown, shots of an IRRS railcar trip on the Derry Central and V class 0-6-0 No.13 on the goods working from Kilrea, Belfast stations in 1932, the Fintona Tram in action, and finishing with the County Donegal.

**2<sup>nd</sup> December:** The first speaker was Robin Masefield, author of the recent book "Be Careful, Don't Rush", the story of the first 150 years of the Holywood to Bangor line. He brought us on a tour of the "Travails, Tragedies and Triumphs" of the line from its failed parliamentary bill of 1836 and share lists compiled, literally, on the back of an envelope through using bathing tickets to attract day trippers to Holywood, the development of steamers on Belfast Lough and the buying up competing bus services.

After the break, Charles Friel recounted the transfer of the standard-gauge

vehicles from the Transport Museum in Witham Street to the new Irish Railway Gallery at Cultra in February 1993. He set the scene with some memories of the museum and its last days before showing how each vehicle was brought across the city by road to Adelaide Goods Yard. From there, three special trains were worked across the Belfast Central line to Cultra.

**13<sup>th</sup> January:** Edward Friel shares a 1968 movie newsreel of UTA steam including the year's football specials, excursions, ballast workings, and spoil trains, plus No.186's first arrival at Whitehead and first railtour to Kilkenny - and more besides. Plus Edward's own video of Driver Stevie Glass and his memorable last day with No.4 in 2011.

**10<sup>th</sup> February:** Form an Orderly "Q"! Charles Friel outlines the introduction of the GNR(I)'s Q class 4-4-0s in 1899 and the work that the thirteen locos did, almost to the end of steam on both CIE and the UTA. Followed by Peter Scott describing and illustrating the work undertaken at Whitehead to restore the surviving Qs class loco, No.131, to mainline operation after an absence of over 50 years.

**9<sup>th</sup> March:** Alan Hyland presents the late David Seymour's exploration of the fabled Sunday School excursions, their impact on communities and the lengths to which the railways went to make it all work - usually behind steam. Plus, Ian Sinclair again delves into the archives of BBC local radio to bring us once-familiar voices from both regular slots and one-off feature programmes which explored the local railway scene.

## AGM

**Date:** The AGM notice is included with this News-Letter. We are sorry to report that Mark Healy is standing down as a director. That leaves vacancies for 4 directors and a Vice-Chairman - not at all satisfactory for running a large company, especially the lack of a vice-chairman.

If you are interested, or believe you can persuade another member to stand, then please contact us for a nomination form.

## MEMBERSHIP

**Renewal:** The new membership year begins on 1<sup>st</sup> February and members are kindly requested to renew promptly.

## GENERAL

**RPSI 50:** The RPSI is delighted to announce that the much-acclaimed RPSI 50 DVD made by member Mike Beckett has been recognised in the annual Heritage Railways Association Publications and Media Awards. RPSI 50, which was produced to mark the RPSI's Golden Jubilee in 2014, received a Special Award for Broadcast Material. The presentation was made at the HRA's Autumn Meeting which took place at Lynton in Devon on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> September. Vice-President, Robert Guinness, was on hand to receive the award on behalf of the RPSI.

Congratulations to Mike and all those involved in the production. Copies are still available from the RPSI Shop.

**Sales News:** Recent additions are:

- Fishguard & Rosslare Railways & Harbours Company, An Illustrated History by Ernie Shepherd.
- Irish Railway Rambler, The Railway Photographs of Michael McMahon.
- 2016 RPSI calendar.

**Eircode:** If you live in the Republic of Ireland and your News-Letter envelope does not have an Eircode then please send it in to us.

**Farewell:** In the last number of months we regrettably learned of the passing of Society volunteers Lance King, Eddie Murphy and Garruth Reid.

## EDITORIAL ADDRESS

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