



August 2016

NEWS LETTER

ROYAL TRAIN

Introduction: On Tuesday 28th June, the RPSI was honoured to host a Royal train.

As part of their 90th birthday celebration tour, Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, boarded the steam train at Coleraine and travelled to Bellarena, where they carried out the official opening of a new railway station.

The route re-created part of the journey that the royal couple had undertaken in June 1953 when the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh travelled by steam train from Lisburn via Coleraine to Londonderry.

The preparations for the event began during the previous week with a team of professional cleaners engaged to deal with the train interior.

Saturday 25th June: The 5-coach train was hauled by diesel to NIR's traincare depot at Fortwilliam, for external preparation.

Monday 27th June: The train was moved to Belfast Central where it was picked up by No.85 and taken to Coleraine. There, the whole train was subjected to hours of security, with sniffer dogs, etc.

One of NIR's GMs was also brought to Coleraine as a back-up, but this wasn't needed!

Tuesday 28th June: The number of guests invited by NIR was very small as one coach was for the royal party and

VIPs, one coach for guests, one for pupils from local schools and one for the press. The guests gathered at the Council offices in Coleraine for registration and security checks. From there they were taken by coach to the railway station, where there was sufficient time for photographs with the locomotive and the coat of arms, last used on a royal train in Ireland in 1903, and kindly loaned by the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum.

The Queen, Duke of Edinburgh and other dignitaries arrived at the station around 2:30pm and were introduced to a line-up of local and railway people, the latter including RPSI President Lord O'Neill and Chairman Denis Grimshaw. The train departed at 2:45pm and made the 25 minute journey to Bellarena. There were great crowds at vantage points along the way, including the spectacular tunnels at Castlerock and the beach at Downhill.

One of the highlights of the journey was watching a string of police motorcycles and royal cars speeding along parallel roads attempting to reach Bellarena by the time the train arrived.

On the platform at Bellarena a plaque to mark the official opening was unveiled by the Queen. The footplate crew were also introduced - NIR Inspector Micky Hamill, Driver Noel Playfair, Driver Anto Dargan and RPSI footplate representative Peter Scott. The royal party then did a walkabout among the crowd gathered at the station, before departing.

The train subsequently left for Londonderry to clear the section to allow normal services on the line to recommence. A small group of RPSI die-hards remained on board rather than return by coach to Coleraine. At Derry the train was shunted and parked up.

Wednesday 29th June: No.85 returned from Derry after the last service train, reaching Whitehead in the early hours of Thursday.

The RPSI would like to thank Translink for including a steam train in their programme - it was a privilege to be involved.

TRAINS & EVENTS

The Fingal: On Sunday 29th May the weather was brilliant, with the sunshine making the train look like a seaside special. The beaches were crowded along the way. A successful train was enjoyed by all.

Steam Enterprise (1): On Sunday 5th June No.85 was in sparkling form for the trip to Dublin. The loco's first job was to deposit the 7-coach train at Belfast Central, after having run from Whitehead tender-first. A turn on the triangle at Great Victoria Street and it was off to Dublin.

Those who decided not to travel missed the most amazing and exhilarating run in the Up direction - and the sun came out too.

The weather remained fine for passengers in Dublin, and also for the run home. It was another very fine effort, and no time was lost with an on-time arrival back in Belfast.

Emerald Isle Explorer: The Steam Dreams charter kicked off on Thursday 16th June with No.461 on the Rosslare line. Thanks were due to NIR's Noel Playfair who helped out on a firing turn between Dublin and Rosslare. Two steam crews were needed that day as No.4 was simultaneously travelling from Dublin to Waterford.

As part of preparations for the northern portion of the tour, No.85 and train

moved to Londonderry on Sunday evening, 19th June. The subsequent run from Derry to Belfast on 21st June was judged by many to be the highlight of the week.

The railtour ended, unfortunately, on a disappointing note. The last leg from Belfast to Dublin on Wednesday 22nd June had to be cancelled prior to departure from Whitehead due to a door lock fault.

That aside, it seems to have been a very successful week of trains. As always, a massive debt is owed to all those volunteers who gave their time both before and during the tour.

Steam & Jazz: The Bourbon Swing Jazz Band provided the entertainment this season (17th & 24th June, 1st & 8th July), and very good they were too.

The first of the four trains was marred by an intransigent carriage door lock that had to be fixed before departure from Whitehead. Apart from the delay arising, everything else went well on the night, as did operations on the other three nights. The weather was variable over the 4 trains, but most seemed to enjoy themselves.

There is a further (sold out) train on 2nd September.

Western Gateway: Sunday 10th July was a miserable day in more ways than one. The itinerary was a return trip to Athlone, with a local trip from there to Ballinasloe.

The day got off to a bad start with a delay at Portarlington when the train was wrongly signalled to a platform with no watering facilities. Delays then mounted as the paths were lost.

Compounded by the weather and the need to empty the train at Ballinasloe for a shunt by diesel, it was not a great experience.

However, the trains were full and given a different destination - Roscommon perhaps - there is probably scope to build on this operation.

The Boyne: On Sunday 24th July an early delay due to coal delivery was caught up and the two return trips from

Drogheda - to Dundalk and Skerries - operated successfully with very well filled trains.

The trip towards Dundalk was made even better as the "Steam Enterprise" was passed on the way near Castlebellingham.

Steam Enterprise (2): On Sunday 24th July everything operated to plan and the passengers had a very enjoyable day. It was a great day out with good running and a full train. We were blessed with good weather in Dublin and on way home.

The train passed No.4 in a flash near Castlebellingham on the outward journey and at Swords on the return.

Whitehead Food & Folk Fest: Saturday 30th July was the annual Whitehead Festival, and train rides were one of the attractions. A successful day was had and the weather was (mostly) OK. Thanks to all who turned out to help.

Dublin Riviera: No.461 was in top form for the two return trips to Greystones on Sunday 7th August. Good crowds, kind weather and superb timekeeping throughout - excellent!

The DAOC complemented the Locomotive Department for the work done on No.461 which has improved her performance greatly and provided such fine running.

As an aside, this was the first train turned out totally in the new standard blue & cream livery; 1506 was finished just at the end of July.

Radio Train: A trip to Kilkenny is scheduled for 21st August, complete with on-board commentary.

Portrush Flyer: The three trains initially planned had to be cancelled because Translink have put extra summer trains on the Coleraine to Portrush branch and this made it unfeasible to fit in suitable paths.

Initial thoughts were to run at least one train to Bangor instead. However, the first date was given over to a Steam Enterprise. Subsequently, with the kind help of Translink, suitable paths were

negotiated and two Portrush dates, 21st & 28th August, were agreed.

Steam Enterprise (3): On Sunday 25th September it is planned to run another train to Dublin.

Railtours Ireland: For the third year there will be a diesel-hauled charter around various parts of the Irish Rail network - 26th to 30th September.

No.131 Dinner: Bookings are still being taken for the event on 20th October. Tickets are priced at £25 each and cheques payable to "The RPSI" should be sent to:

No.131 Dinner
10 Sharman Drive
Belfast
BT9 5HL
donal.wildy@ntlworld.com

LOCOMOTIVES

No.3BG "Guinness": The boiler was returned to its frames for the final time on Saturday 21st May.

The saddle tank and cab also went into the workshop for minor work before being re-united with the rest of the loco.

Diesels: On Tuesday 19th July the RPSI's diesel locomotives 134, B141 and 175 were transferred from Irish Rail's Inchicore Works to Dublin Connolly locomotive shed to join steam locomotives No.4 and No.461 currently there.

The locomotives were hauled by heritage-liveried GM 071 - first B141 and 175, followed by a second trip to fetch 134.

WHITEHEAD SITE

Turntable: The former turntable from Belfast Central Services Depot was installed at Whitehead on Wednesday 1st June.

It involved a large mobile crane, and the first move was to lift the two end carriages (each of these has four wheels), and place them on temporary supports at each end of the turntable pit.

The main beam of the table (weighing

about 15 tonnes) was then lifted from its wagon, which had been shunted into No.5 loco shed road, and placed beside the turntable pit. The crane then had to be moved and set up again in a more favourable position so that it could reach the centre of the pit. The centre pivot had already been bolted into position, and the crane manoeuvred the beam onto it. The centre pivot consists of a large spherical roller bearing for ease of turning.

Once in place, the levels were checked and found to be pleasingly close to the required position.

This was only the start of the turntable reassembly. Further jobs included work to correct the curvature of the circle rail on which the end carriages run. The circle rail should have been in place and bolted down before lifting in the table, but it was in fact found to be far from circular and required work with a rail bender to rectify. After that the decking, railings and operating mechanism will be installed.

The track to the pit has been installed, but not yet the turnout from the existing yard trackwork. Also, final painting is required so the more hands the sooner we will see a locomotive turn on it!

Incidentally, the table is long enough to turn our longest vehicles.

Tarry Farewell: The Tarry at Whitehead, the rest area for generations of RPSI volunteers, was reduced to a pile of lighting-up fuel on Tuesday 14th June.

The Society bought the building from Bangor Boatyard. They were so keen to get rid of it that they dismantled it and transported it to Whitehead.

Accommodation was needed to replace the "Gibbon", which was part of the original engine shed and had to be demolished to allow track to be extended from the shed road No.1 to the new wheel drop. The Tarry structure was assembled in early 1978 during a cold and sleety weekend, followed by a few months of fitting out to make it fit for habitation.

It has been replaced by mess facilities

in the new museum block.

The Stables building, an important part of the new development and for years hidden behind the Tarry, is now visible.

Construction: At the time of writing, the building work is very nearly at an end, the last piece of work being the public path from the platform, behind the coal bunker, to the Stables, now viewable in all its glory, no more to be hidden behind the Tarry.

Sleepers: It became apparent recently that the poor quality of the wooden sleepers in the turnout at the Larne end of the platform were no longer holding the track to gauge, and frequent use of this by No.85 was starting to spread the track.

A short gap in operations in mid-July gave the Site squad a chance to do much needed repairs and 6 sleepers were replaced, after initial removal of rails. Final checking and tidying up was completed in time for the Steam Enterprise.

GENERAL

2017 Calendar: Now on sale on trains and via the usual sales address.

Railtour Brochures: A number of brochures from railtours dating back to 1965 have been made available on the website.

Posters: Thanks are due to Translink and Irish Rail for facilitating a request by the RPSI to display steam train posters on their trains. The posters, designed by Emma Mackie, are now appearing on the NIR CAF units, and Irish Rail followed suit in mid-August. We are most grateful to both railway companies for their assistance and co-operation.

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