



April 2017

# NEWS LETTER

## WHITEHEAD RAILWAY MUSEUM

**Title:** The new museum is to be called the "Whitehead Railway Museum" and branding to reflect this has been released on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and a new-look website.

**The Team:** In early January, General Manager Ruth Harper was joined by Sean Conlon (Events & Marketing Coordinator) and Claire McAuley (Learning and Interpretation) as part of the museum team at Whitehead.

Later in January the first round of applications were invited for members to volunteer to be tour guides. Around 20 guides were appointed after interview, and it is hoped to strengthen the team in due course.

The interior of the station building has mostly been refurbished into a café, and Kenny Maxwell and Jacqueline Webster have been appointed to the roles of chef and supervisor, respectively, on a part-time basis.

The café will hopefully be opened shortly after Easter.

**Positioning:** Over 4 days in January the whole yard area was shunted to ensure most of the required vehicles were in place for display in the museum. This was a mammoth exercise which took hours of planning, and was hampered by tightness of space in the yard and having to leave it set for yet more vehicles to arrive, which meant extensive shunting was required.

**Clean-Up:** On Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> February, just the day before the opening of the museum, a marathon clean-up day was arranged for Whitehead. Volunteers responded magnificently to a last-minute appeal for help.

**Day One:** Lord O'Neill welcomed local residents, school children, and RPSI members/volunteers to an open day at the Whitehead Railway Museum on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> March to mark the first day of opening. The guests were treated to guided tours and got the first glimpses of the Museum, and were the first to sample the new café.

Reasons for the low-key opening were twofold. Deadlock in the local political scene left it difficult to arrange invitations to dignitaries, and the last-minute rush to meet the opening deadline inevitably meant that some areas of the museum were not 100% complete. It is hoped to arrange an official opening in the autumn.

**Your Visit:** With the museum now open to the public, members are asked to note that all visitors, without exception, must now be conducted by a member of the guiding team unless prior authorisation has been approved by one of the Whitehead Station staff.

For the time being, the museum is open Thursday to Saturday from 10:00 to 16:00 (last admission 15:00) during term time or 10:00 to 17:00 (last admission 16:00) for non-term time.

## WHITEHEAD SITE

**Planting:** As part of the landscaping of the exposed earthworks around the new buildings at Whitehead a significant number and variety of trees and bushes were planted in December.

**General:** In the midst of the emphasis on the museum construction, fitting out and opening, normal life must continue at Whitehead with an eye on the approaching operating season.

On Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> February diesel locomotive B142 performed a shunt to re-bogie Mk2 open brake 460 with freshly overhauled bogies, using the

sheer-leg gantries.

A set of overhauled Cravens bogies were removed from the workshop and set for collection on the turntable to go to Dublin the following week. They departed along with 460's old bogies which are now fit for use only as a pair of slave bogies for use under Cravens carriages in Inchicore to free up their own bogies for overhaul.

Prior to placing the 4 bogies on the turntable for collection, B142 was herself turned, as at the end of the day she was withdrawn temporarily for cab window work and found a home in the carriage shed. Turning has allowed easier access to the afflicted windows.

**Shunting School:** On Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> April Dermot Mackie carried out a Shunter training day for 4 new recruits to the operational grades.

The course took the form of a 3 hour practical session which emphasised personal safety and included hand signalling, point work and a thorough demonstration of coupling and uncoupling Mk2 coaches - using No.3BG in steam.

The candidates followed this up with a written multiple choice examination on all aspects of a shunters duties. All candidates passed both the practical and written tests and can now be used on future rosters.

## CARRIAGE & WAGON

**Camping Coach 26:** Following the successful positioning of the sleeping coach on the pre-formed curved track

at the back of the wheel drop road during the previous weekend, the Site squad on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> February carried out a series of moves to position the coach in its final resting place. Unfortunately, it was very wet but this did not dampen their spirits.

The coach was propelled around the rest of the curve towards Larne and onto a straight piece of track. Once this was done the curve was split and the required length for the coach was straightened. The coach was then hauled towards Belfast on this track, now parallel to the gabion wall, and into its ultimate, planned position.

**Tank Wagon 602:** Restoration work began in earnest on the Irish Shell oil tank wagon, with significant progress being made over the Christmas break.

The wagon was ready in time for the museum opening and is now on display in all its tank-like glory.

**Cravens:** Every year, these carriages have an annual D Exam to examine their bodywork, electrics and mechanical components. The exam is carried out in the valeting shed at Connolly. To that end, GM 088 transferred 8 Cravens and van from/to Inchicore on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> February. All passed with flying colours.

**Gatwicks:** On Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> January, the 5 ex Gatwick Express Mk2 coaches (8945, 8946, 8947, 8948 and generator 8911) were moved from Lisburn to Adelaide by NIR GM 112. Due to the carriages not having moved for so long the transfer was restricted to 15 mph. The coaches

have been at Lisburn for just over 6 years, and been subject to graffiti attacks over that period.

A further move occurred on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> January when 8946 and 8948 were transferred again - to Whitehead this time. The remaining 2 coaches and generator van will be moved from Adelaide to Whitehead in due course.

## TRAINS & EVENTS

**Santa Specials:** Over the Dublin season a total of 5,826 passengers were carried, and in Belfast and Portadown 3,936. A tremendous effort by all concerned.

**IRRS Visit:** A party of 72 from the Irish Railway Record Society was welcomed at Whitehead on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> March. As well as a visit to the museum, they partook of trips in the yard behind B142. IRRS Treasurer Alan Hyland presented a donation, wishing success in the future.

**The Midlander:** The 2017 season kicked off with No.461 hauling two trips to Maynooth on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> March.

Prior to the day, from the beginning of January, a lot of work was undertaken at Inchicore to the carriages, 1506 and 1541 having had major refurbishment done to the interior. The steam heating system was serviced, wall panels varnished, tables and chairs painted, ceilings washed and all the seating upholstered.

It is pleasing to be able to report that No.461 was in good form on the day,

although some issues with tubes were apparent afterwards.

**Marble Tribesman:** On Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> April a diesel railtour in aid of the Society's Diesel Restoration Fund is planned, e.g. see the item on Bo-Bo 134 in the Locomotive section.

The tour will operate to Galway and Kilkenny.

**Easter Eggspress:** The first train leaves from Belfast Central each day at 11:30, and the second train at 14:30, on both Easter Monday (17<sup>th</sup> April) and Easter Tuesday (18<sup>th</sup> April).

The first day's trains have now all but sold out.

**Dublin Riviera:** No.461 is due to run 2 return trips from Dublin to Greystones on Easter Monday (17<sup>th</sup> April).

**Charter:** The Old Newry Society have chartered a train from Whitehead to Newry on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> April.

**Portrush Flyer:** There are provisional plans to operate to Portrush on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> April, but these have not yet been confirmed.

**Shannon & Suir Railtour:** The booking forms for this, and the diesel-hauled "South Kerry", are available from the website.

**Howth 170:** Celebrate 170 years of the railway to Howth, with 2 return trips to the seaside town on 28<sup>th</sup> May.

**Steam Enterprise:** Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> June will be a return trip from Belfast to Dublin.

## LOCOMOTIVES

**No.4:** Following issues on Christmas trains, a full complement of volunteers from both Dublin and Belfast, alongside HEI personnel, arrived at the RPSI locomotive base in Connolly locomotive shed on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> December.

The brick arch that had given trouble was not just repaired but totally rebuilt. This involved the complete removal of the existing arch before support and arch formers were placed in the firebox. Then the arch was carefully constructed and left to set in place over the next couple of days.

On 8<sup>th</sup> January, the locomotive moved to Whitehead to have an Irish Rail train radio fitted as the Dublin team were unable to do it. At the time of writing this has been completed but some attention to tubes is expected, with possible running in at Easter, before return to Dublin.

**No.85:** The piston rings have received some attention.

**No.131:** At the end of January, the appeal to raise funds to rebuild a tender for the locomotive and then fit the locomotive with all the electrical safety equipment required for mainline operation, had raised just over £47,000 from generous donations - from Ireland, the UK and even as far away as Spain and the USA.

The RPSI would like to thank all those who have donated. This figure includes the full value of a £10,000

match-funding pledge announced at the 131 Dinner in October 2016.

Work on the tender is now well advanced. However, we are still significantly short of the original £85,000 target needed to complete all the works (and even that was an estimate). So, we would like to extend our appeal again to our members.

If you can, please spare a few euros/pounds towards this worthy cause, and with your donation we will soon see No.131 at the head of our trains, back on the mainline.

**No.186:** On 7<sup>th</sup> January, the locomotive was taken to the turntable by B142 and turned to be facing Belfast for display in the Museum.

**No.461:** This locomotive also gave trouble on the Christmas trains, and the offending large tubes were thoroughly examined before the tedious job of expanding their ends was completed to enable a return of the locomotive to traffic.

**No.202:** An unusual train movement took place on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> February in the greater Belfast area. The GNR(I) SG3 class model departed the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum at Cultra at 11:15, leaving GNR(I) tank engine No.93 behind, heading chimney-first for the Society's Excursion Station at Whitehead.

On arrival in the engine shed at Whitehead the locomotive took the lift to the first floor whilst her display case used the stairs.

The model, which was originally

shedded at Dublin Amiens Street before WW2, is probably best remembered for the time spent entertaining children of all ages at Belfast's Great Victoria Street station in the 1950s and 1960s.

In her new depot at Whitehead she will be in the company of three other GNR(I) engines (171, 131 and 85).

**134:** The Society's diesel locomotive was moved from Connolly Shed to "The Ramps" in Inchicore on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> February. This is to facilitate some bodywork in the shops there.

134, one of the single-cab GM Bo-Bo locomotives which came to CIÉ back in 1961, has been part of the RPSI's collection since its withdrawal in 2008, but had been in store at Inchicore until it moved to the former GNR(I) shed at Connolly station in 2015.

Since then work on its overhaul has been underway with the expert knowledge of Bob McGuirk (RPSI) and Philip Clampett (Irish Rail). Now, thanks to the support of Irish Rail's CME Peter Smyth and the ongoing overhaul of the Class 071 fleet, 134 is set to benefit from Inchicore's full expertise.

**B142:** GM locomotives may be many things to many people but they certainly score very low when it comes to their ability to shunt bogies, the buffers simply slip over the top at any track imperfection and lock.

It is proposed to construct a simple device to fit to the drawhook which will clamp the bogie 'at arm's length' from the loco and save the legs of its

crew who currently often have to disembark to help the shunters push bogies by hand! (No.3BG and the little Carlow shunter never had this problem as they have large diameter buffers for shunting tight curves of their home yards and these have proved perfect for shunting bogies as the buffers cannot ride over them.)

## NCC LOCOMOTIVE PROJECT

**A Second Boiler:** The RPSI Board has approved that work proceed on a second NCC "G8AS" boiler - the type suitable for NCC 2-6-4 tank engine No.4.

Locomotive No.4 has proved to be our most versatile engine, well living up to the nickname 'jeep' applied to the 18 strong class. As per the Society's business plan (covering both the Whitehead Museum development and our main line operations) we intend to increase the frequency of our steam trains, and keeping No.4 available is considered essential to this end.

A project to achieve this was first suggested several years ago. It consisted of 3 stages:

1. To provide strategic spares so that No.4 would be out of traffic for the least possible time when requiring overhaul or maintenance. (Our locomotive overhauls have taken anything up to 10 years - although in fairness that has usually included major rebuilding.)
2. To provide another tank engine boiler - again to avoid down time

for No.4. The boiler would be based on existing parts.

3. More ambitious, to provide a second tank engine - which would ensure that one 'jeep' would always be in traffic at any one time, and two for a lot of the time.

Stage 1 has barely passed the 'make a wish' list stage, but now needs to be addressed more seriously. No.4 is shortly going to need new valve liners and new tyres, to name only two of the items approaching the life-expired category.

Stage 2 progressed further several years ago, with the acquisition of materials for the firebox. The Board has now approved that we proceed with the second boiler, and work has started with the preparation and flanging of the firebox plates.

Stage 3 is the interesting one - there is no doubt that another locomotive would be desirable that could handle our more frequent and heavier trains that must fit in with intensive timetable services. (It should be remembered that for our Whitehead and Dublin based operations, we actually only have four express passenger locomotives to call upon, and in reality one at least must be under overhaul at any one time.) The basis of the third stage of the project is that we possess many of the working parts of the loco, so would not be starting from new.

A recent twist has been the suggestion that this loco should not be a tank engine but rather an NCC mogul - the latter being the mainstay

of the NCC main line services from the 1930s into the early 1960s, but sadly not surviving into preservation. The mogul was of course a tender engine with the inherent drawback of having to turn, but the advantage of increased coal and water capacity.

Both the mogul and the jeep were based on the LMS 2300 class tank engines, which provided basic design for the cylinders, working parts, much of the running gear and the boiler.

Either option would require substantial funding and would be a longer-term project. Feasibility has been investigated and no insurmountable practical problems have been identified, but financing and the rate of financing are unknown - although early signs are encouraging and funding is already in place to allow the Stage 2 boiler work to make a start. Practical volunteer work is playing a very significant part, and most of the work would be done at Whitehead with only essential work being contracted out where the RPSI workshop does not possess suitable equipment.

## BELFAST MEETINGS

**14<sup>th</sup> December:** Charles Friel gave an interesting talk on royal trains which ran north of Dublin, coupled with fascinating photographs, at least one of which displayed the crest which appeared on No.85 "Merlin" at Bellarena in June 2016.

In the second part, Selwyn Johnston and Alan Devers presented the history of the Headhunters barbers

shop and, latterly, railway museum in Enniskillen.

**Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> January:** Tony Ragg presented an interesting show on what can be done to model Irish Railways.

Peter Richardson looked at how his garden railway, based on the Clogher Valley, was developed.

**Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> February:** The Turf Railways of Ireland was the main attraction of the evening - a two-part talk by Andrew Waldron who was making a return visit after two years.

He outlined the history of the various bog networks and then gave a tour of each, with copious photographs.

**Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> March:** Charles Friel presented "Whitehead - 50 Years and Counting", a pictorial recollection of the RPSI's first 50 years at Whitehead. He outlined how Society volunteers developed Ireland's last steam shed into a heavy engineering centre, loco and carriage maintenance base and a train operating depot.

Plus, there was a glimpse of Whitehead's evolution into a working museum with public access and a preview of what the visitor can experience right now and how you can play a part in these exciting developments.

## GENERAL

**Board:** In January, Stephen Comiskey was re-appointed as Carriage & Wagon Officer (Dublin), being co-opted back to the Board as a result.

There will be two vacancies for a director going into the Annual General Meeting, so nominations are invited. Please apply for a nomination form as soon as possible.

**Farewell:** On 20<sup>th</sup> February we lost Henry Ritchie, our popular Train Manager, who died peacefully in hospital after a short illness.

Anyone who has travelled on a Society train from Whitehead or Belfast in the last 20 years will have encountered Henry, with his peak cap, leather satchel and ticket punch.

Sadly, there soon followed another sad loss from the Society's ranks. Pearse McKeown, who died on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> March, began his railway career with the Great Northern Railway at Dundalk Works, subsequently serving for many years with CIÉ until his retirement in 1993.

An expert with a vast and long-standing experience of steam and diesel locomotive operation he, along with his friend P.J. Curran of the IRRS, was instrumental in securing the preservation of GNR(I) Q Class locomotive No.131, now being restored by the Society.

**Bequest:** The Board are pleased to report on a generous bequest from the estate of the late Lance King of Harrow. Lance was a long-term member who gave great support to the Society via the GB-based "Syndicate".

If you would like to remember the RPSI in a similar way, please see the Legacy leaflet circulated periodically, or write in for one.

## MEMBERSHIP

**Renewal:** If there is a membership form included with this circular then it indicates that, at the time of mailing, your subscription for 2017 has not yet been received.

If you have renewed then your membership card should be included in your envelope.

## EDITORIAL ADDRESS

148 Church Road, Newtownabbey,

Co. Antrim, BT36 6HJ.

Company Registration: NI010798

Charity Registration: NIC102389 (NI), CHY6141 (ROI)

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

[rpsitrains@hotmail.com](mailto:rpsitrains@hotmail.com)