

Railway Preservation Society of Ireland

REPORT OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Ripley Court Hotel, Dublin, Saturday 13th May 2017

Lord O'Neill chaired the meeting and 48 members were present.

Lord O'Neill opened by welcoming everyone. Now in his eighties, he declared it was his wish to stand down as President, perhaps to remain as Patron, as soon as a successor could be found.

He noted that the RPSI was at a turning point; it was no longer just a railway society but a major business, with all the responsibilities both legal and those required by the charity regulators in both jurisdictions.

Apologies

J.Carson, J.Darling, M.Darragh, R.Guinness, E.Hamilton, N.Hamilton, J.Harcourt, M.Hayden, M.Holland, G.Huxley, D.Mackie, J.McCullagh, F.McDonnell, G.Mooney, B.Mullally, I.Sinclair, J.Smyth, S.Somerville, K.Walker, M.Walsh, C.Yewlett.

Minutes of the AGM on 13th February 2016

The minutes, previously circulated, were adopted on the proposal of R.Morton, seconded by A.Hyland.

Chairman's Report

Further to the circulated report, a memo was read:

I am pleased to report that following our 'soft' launch on 1st March, the Whitehead Railway Museum has been attracting visitors from far and wide. We were particularly pleased to host a successful visit by some seventy members of the Irish Railway Record Society on 18th March.

The feedback from visitors has been encouraging though, at this early stage, safety requirements mean that all visits must be arranged on the basis of a guided tour on a set day and time.

We are grateful for the continuing help and support of our funders, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Tourism NI (TNI). The excellent buildings and facilities now at Whitehead are due largely to the financial resources provided by these organisations. Some £3.1 million of public money has now been invested on our site, and this sum does not take account of previous amounts received from local government as well as European development programmes.

Thanks to this support, we have a facility that is unique on the island of Ireland; in a single location, visitors may see priceless heritage railway vehicles, acclaimed traditional engineering workshops, and living, breathing operational steam trains.

Investment on this scale is never short-term or low-key. HLF and TNI will be involved in supporting, monitoring and evaluating our performance over the next ten years at least and will maintain an active interest in our operation well beyond that timescale.

It is important, therefore, that we appreciate the fundamental changes underway in the Society. We are no longer a relatively small charity that exists solely for the benefit of its members and supporters; we are now a significant public attraction in receipt of millions of pounds of public

funds. That change in our status places important responsibilities on management, staff and especially those of us engaged in activity of any kind at Whitehead.

Our Society will be required to follow best practice in terms of organisation, management, policies and procedures just as all other publicly-funded bodies are obliged to do. The requirement for best practice will apply to everything we do, including the way staff and volunteers relate to visitors and to each other, how we maintain and safeguard our premises and site and, more generally, whether we run our Whitehead base in a competent, professional manner.

As an essential condition of the funding received, the way we organise and conduct our business will be regularly monitored by our funders in the years ahead. Any significant failure on our part in this regard could jeopardise further instalments of grants and, in extreme circumstances, could lead to a demand to repay the cost of the investments to date. Our funders have a charge against our premises and land should such a scenario ever arise.

These are serious responsibilities we are undertaking but I am confident that we can meet them. We have excellent staff and dedicated volunteers. Our Board has instructed our general manager and her team to devise and implement a range of operational regulations and procedures to ensure that we are fit for purpose as an organisation serving the public. Our management team can only do that if it has the goodwill and support of all our members, staff and volunteers.

These are very exciting times for the RPSI and particularly for our base at Whitehead. They are also very challenging times and I appreciate that some volunteers may not be comfortable with the pace of change going on around them. Nevertheless, I hope this note goes some way to explaining why change is necessary if the RPSI is to survive and prosper in its major new role.

I am grateful for the hard work and dedication of all our staff and volunteers and I know that, through their commitment and collaboration, the Whitehead Railway Museum will come to be regarded as a professionally run organisation and a first class visitor attraction.

The reports were adopted on the proposal of M.Tennis, seconded by A.Hyland.

Secretary's Report

E.Armstrong asked why the hours of the Education Officer at Whitehead had been increased, and why there was an advert for more part-time staff, neither of which had been budgeted for nor approved by the Board. This was another example of the new set-up at Whitehead haemorrhaging money. D.Grimshaw replied that both were temporary measures to address the significant extra work to get the museum up and running, and would be reviewed in due course; the matter to be referred to the 2020 Committee and Board for confirmation.

R.Nugent said there had been a missed opportunity at Easter when there were no staff present at Whitehead to show visitors the facilities. It was also extremely disappointing that there was no visible notice of the RPSI on any signage at Whitehead, any reference being virtually unreadable.

D.Grimshaw told M.Halliday that museum entrance fee options remained under review.

The report, previously circulated, was adopted on the proposal of D.Houston, seconded by J.McKeown.

Treasurer's Report

J.Beaumont said he estimated the surplus expected in the coming years would be around £100,000 less annually because of extra staff and museum overheads. He said it was worrying that in 3 years the partial grant-funding of wages would cease.

J.McBride said it would be instructive to have the wages expenditure to date, and the estimated number of visitors required to break even. He further said that the publicity from Whitehead appeared to be lacking as the East Antrim Tourist Guide had no mention of the RPSI, despite a 50 year presence in the area.

J.Richardson said the issues responsible for the drain on funds should be addressed in a calm and mature manner.

D.Grimshaw stated that it was a Heritage Lottery Fund requirement for a certain level of employed staff, and it was the clear role of the staff to improve revenue sufficiently to at least cover the increased costs. Should things not work out cloth will have to be cut accordingly.

R.Morton said that a visit to the Whitehead Railway Museum tells a story and brings the attractions there to a wider audience, and pride should be taken in what has been achieved. P.Scott also noted that the workshop facilities at Whitehead had been significantly improved.

The report, previously circulated, was adopted on the proposal of J.Richardson, seconded by P.Rigney.

Appointment Of Auditors

Guardian were re-appointed on the recommendation of J.Beaumont, seconded by D.Houston.

Reports Of Operations Officers

J.McKeown said there had been 37 trains, including 3 charter operations, originating in Dublin in 2016. The on-board raffle had raised over €18,000, with which it was hoped to help the diesel restoration fund. He noted that the trips would not have happened without the help of the dedicated volunteers and the assistance of Irish Rail.

The reports were adopted on the proposal of A.Hyland, seconded by M.Walker.

Reports Of Locomotive And Carriage Officers

P.Scott gave an update on the locomotive position. He reported that No.85 had been running extremely well lately, but the bearing damage experienced on the recent run from Belfast to Dublin was fairly significant and an amount of running-in will be required. No.4 was now fitted with an Irish Rail train radio, yet to be tested. Tyres are required for the locomotive and an initial £7,000 has been spent on material for pony and bogie wheels. No.461 is coming near the end of its tube life. No.131 is nearly ready for commissioning of TPWS, electronics, etc. No.171 is still in line for completion of its overhaul, with the majority of materials in stock.

Referring to the 58 project, P.Scott stated that the initial intention was, and still is, to have a set of strategic spares for No.4, including a second boiler which has now been approved by the Board. There are a significant number of spare parts on hand and should funds become available they could be used on a new engine, be it a jeep or mogul. The views of members are invited as to which of the latter would be preferred.

P.Scott reported that £100,000 is required for the wages of Heritage Engineering Ireland – incoming Board to take note.

The reports were adopted on the proposal of N.Poots, seconded by N.Foster.

Election Of Board and Office Bearers

P.McCann reported that J.Glendinning was retiring from the Board but D.Houston had agreed to remain as Vice-Chairman for one year only. A further nomination had been received from E.Friel.

There being no further nominations from the meeting, the following were elected to serve on the Board on the proposal of P.Rigney, seconded by C.McAtee:

<i>Chairman:</i>	Denis Grimshaw	<i>Directors:</i>	Eileen Armstrong	Fergus McDonnell
<i>Vice-Chairman:</i>	David Houston		Stephen Comiskey	Joe McKeown
<i>Secretary:</i>	Paul McCann		Mervyn Darragh	Phillip Newell
<i>Treasurer:</i>	Bill Garrioch		Edward Friel	Peter Scott
			Dermot Mackie	Mark Walsh

R.Morton paid tribute to the outgoing Board, especially those standing down.

Any Other Business

J.Beaumont expressed his disappointment that the corporate brand of the RPSI had all but disappeared from the Society's website. The museum is a subsidiary but it appears as though the RPSI is the subsidiary, and this is completely wrong. P.McCann replied that the website was still under development and it was hoped to rectify the branding anomaly in due course. P.Rigney said that the appearance of the website was an improvement and that it was still a transient period between the old and the new and there was still time to correct issues.

R.Moran said that the post-operation reports as circulated by the Dublin Operations Officer to volunteers should be circulated verbatim in the email Bulletin. P.McCann replied that he did not agree, that the Bulletin was a news facility for members and all submissions for publication were edited with this in mind.

S.Comiskey reported that facilities in Dublin were better than they had been in recent times, but members and the Board need to realise that a facility to work on carriages was still urgently needed if operations were not to suffer for lack of carriages turned out in suitable condition. For instance, with only one generator van available, should anything happen it then trains could not run.

B.Garrioch said he would like the meeting to know of his deep gratitude to all the volunteers who had worked to keep the Society running so successfully this past year. he also paid tribute to Lord O'Neill on behalf of the members and Board, and thanked him for all his hard work and support down the years, wishing him well for the future.

That being all the business, Lord O'Neill thanked everyone for attending and brought the meeting to a close.

Signed: _____ ***Chairman*** ***Date:*** _____