



October 2017

# NEWS LETTER

## BOARD

**New Director:** On 3<sup>rd</sup> September, Michael McMahon was co-opted to the Board to help strengthen the management team as part of the ongoing governance review.

**New Chairman:** On 23<sup>rd</sup> September, Denis Grimshaw stepped down from the post of Chairman to take a well-deserved rest.

For the past seven years Denis has worked tirelessly, first as Grants Officer, and then as Chairman, to fulfil the Society's ambition to establish a first class facility at Whitehead. It is no mean feat that he managed to succeed, and the forthcoming official opening of the museum will be a fitting tribute to his success.

We wish him well with his feet up! As his successor we are pleased to welcome John McKegney as Chairman. John has been co-opted to the Board and he is looking forward to the challenges ahead.

## WHITEHEAD RAILWAY MUSEUM

**Opening:** The museum and café at Whitehead were open on Wednesdays in August.

**Whitehead Tea Room:** The Whitehead café had Mary Peters as a visitor on 14<sup>th</sup> September. So, if the food is good enough for this famous guest then no reason for

you not to visit!

Bookings are now being taken for birthday parties or afternoon tea. The most recent inquiry is for a baby shower!

**Whitehead Tour App:** In September Ruth Harper (General Manager), Paul McCann (Secretary) and Ian Sinclair (Curatorial Committee) received a demonstration from CMC Associates of the phone app for the tour of the Whitehead Railway Museum.

CMC are developing the app, which will be free to download, as an aid to visitors to self-guide around the museum. Rather than be part of an organised tour, the app will enable visitors to set their own pace around the exhibits.

At designated locations along the tour route trigger points will enable the GPS in the phone or tablet to initiate a recorded explanation of what there is to see at that specific location; photographs and a text copy of the audio are also presented. At present there are 10 locations at which the GPS will trigger.

It is planned that the app will be available for the official opening of the museum later in the year. It will be available to download from the usual Apple and Google stores or from the Society's website.

## TRAINS & EVENTS

**Summer Steam:** On Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> July,

despite heavy rain and wind, a healthy crowd turned out for train rides behind No.3BG "Guinness". It was gratifying to see a busy station restaurant. The food on offer was top notch and it is recommended that everyone sample some at the first opportunity.

On Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> July a party of 35 on a pre-booked tour - a pre-war Austin club - helped to swell numbers. The oldest of their party was Sadie at 94 and her husband Bert at 86 years of age. The weather was variable but largely OK. A constant fairly heavy stream of passengers kept the train rides crew on their toes. Reports from the restaurant told of their heaviest day ever; the staff were very pleased.

The local Whitehead Food Festival ran from 12 to 7:30pm on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> August, and the train rides started at 12:30pm and went on to 5:00pm. The cafe was busy non-stop all day and closed the doors after 6pm. The train rides were very well supported, so much so that the staff ran out of tickets!

There were tables along the platform just in case the weather was fine, but it was a very mixed day. Fortunately, the brake van stove had been lit and the guard stayed warm and dry.

No.3BG "Guinness", carriage 68 and brake van 'Ivan' together form a train restored specifically to run events such as these, and it is the first time in 6 years we have been able to field them all together.

Eileen Armstrong ably organised the train rides, and thanks to her and to everyone else who helped out.

**The Boyne:** On Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> July, the locomotive for the day was LMS NCC No.4, on which a lot of work had taken place in Amiens Street Shed during the preceding week by volunteers and staff from Whitehead; the locomotive had been diagnosed with a number of issues after the recent Sea Breeze train to Arklow and Gorey.

The crew took it gently to Drogheda to bed in the repairs of the previous week. The Dundalk train departed on time with a full load of passengers. Driver Jolley again took his time to Dundalk.

The next trip was to Skerries Loop. Many people enquired as to why the train did not enter the station there. The reason is that the year of the first visit to Skerries it was discovered that the platform is very narrow. All passengers must leave the train for it to propel into the loop for running round, and with over 300 passengers it is extremely dangerous with passing Enterprise trains, etc.

Back at Drogheda the engine was watered. A great run back was only spoiled by being blocked at Clongriffin by a Dart.

A total of 896 passengers was carried, a record for Dublin Operations outside of Santa trains.

**Portrush Flyer:** This year saw the first use of the new signalling system on the Portrush branch. Only one train is now allowed on the branch at a time and as late as 3 days before the first Flyer on 30<sup>th</sup> July Translink informed us that only one visit would be allowed to Portrush on the day. Therefore, the locomotive (No.85) had to run round and depart with the trains as soon as passengers had disembarked. It then ran to Coleraine for storage. On the return journey passengers were brought by service train to Coleraine to resume their journey by steam. Apart from that, due to a thunderstorm and lightning strike that put out the signals between Killagan and Cullybackey earlier in the afternoon, there were some delays and the special crossed the 18:10 from Belfast at Magherabeg instead of Antrim. On Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> August, a day more akin to autumn, with morning rain quickly changing to heavy showers at Portrush, the Flyer crewed by Noel Playfair and Gary Moore ran to time throughout; a very professional out and back journey. There were fine bursts of what Merlin is

capable of and an excellent climb from Templepatrick to Kingsbog on the return. Apart from a few minor delays because of late-running railcars Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> August was another faultless day of running to Portrush. No.85 and crew were on great form as usual and a full train made for a great atmosphere on board.

Once again there is very little to report other than the 20<sup>th</sup> August trip went very much as planned, with a full train and superb running behind No.85. What minor delays there were - and they were minor - arose because of late-running service trains and signalling issues on the Portrush branch.

On Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> August, the final Portrush Flyer ran in its customary path, leaving Belfast at 11:35 and crossing Up trains at Antrim, Killagan and Coleraine. Arrival in Portrush each day was exactly on time at 13:40. Following last year's major NCC resignalling scheme, the branch is now normally worked under One Train Working (OTW) regulations. So if two trains need to occupy the branch at one time, pilot working becomes necessary along with special signalling arrangements at Portrush.

To accommodate the Flyer some local services around lunchtime had to be cancelled and additional NIR staff deployed. On arrival at Portrush No.85 ran round and took water before taking the empty train back to Coleraine Fuel Siding, where the set was recessed for the afternoon, and OTW restored on the branch. This left ample time to turn and water the engine, and give the loco crews (and RPSI support team) a well-earned break.

Leaving the train in Portrush, or taking it back later in the afternoon, would have been operationally difficult, and NIR arranged for RPSI tickets to be valid on the 16:35 and 17:05 services from Portrush to Coleraine, where passengers rejoined the steam train for a 17:43 departure. With a short crossing stop at

Killagan, arrival at Belfast Central was mostly dead on right time, at 19:15 each evening. The only significant delay, on the first Flyer of 30<sup>th</sup> July, was caused by the weather. A heavy thunderstorm that evening led to lightning putting the signalling out of action in the Cullybackey area - but even with the disruption to normal services, the Flyer was only 20 minutes late at Belfast.

The highlight each week was the nine mile climb from Antrim to Kingsbog junction, and the Flyer produced performances reminiscent of the best work done in the days of regular steam.

Passenger loadings were slightly less than full for the first two Flyers, but for the third train a sixth coach was added, and it and the last two were fully booked.

Visitors to Portrush unfortunately did not always enjoy the best of summer weather, but special events like the annual Truckfest, and a rally of Mini cars on the West Strand, added interest to their day out.

**The Slaney:** During preparations on the morning of Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> August, just before No.4 was ready to leave the shed at Amiens Street, it was discovered that a number of large tubes inside the boiler were leaking at the firebox tube plate. After a closer examination it was concluded that loco No.4 was not fit for service and declared a failure.

With two full trains ahead, the Operations Manager decided that we would run with a diesel. Passengers were alerted at the barrier as they arrived to board the train on the situation. Contact was made with Enniscorthy Rockin' Food Festival, who were promoting the local trip as part of their event. Driver Robbie Jolley, agreed to take the diesel to Rosslare.

The train departed on time at 10:35 and kept to the steam path as the organisers did not want an early arrival as they were having a performance taking place on the platform. At Enniscorthy the footbridge in

the station was filled with soldiers in period dress and armed with muskets. There were also armed people on the platform. An exchange of shots and the passengers from Dublin were escorted to the Square in Enniscorthy.

Passengers for Wexford were then loaded and the train departed at 13:18, arriving at 13:58. After unloading the passengers, the train departed for Rosslare Europort where the carriages were watered and serviced, before returning to Wexford to pick up for the return trip to Enniscorthy. On return from Enniscorthy, with no water stops the train was early at Greystones but had to wait for a crossing. Slow running thence to Dublin resulted in a 2 minute late arrival.

**Radio Train:** This train, due to run on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> August, had to be cancelled due to the unavailability of IÉ drivers. It was a very unfortunate situation on the back of the previous week's disappointment over the failure of No.4. It is morale sapping for volunteers at times like this, not to mention the loss of revenue for sales and catering and whatever profit would have made on the tickets.

**Charter:** The Irish Railway Record Society's diesel-hauled charter of the RPSI's Dublin set on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> August commenced with a trip to Howth. The weather was good, and everyone was ready to leave Connolly when locomotive 081 was declared a failure. It was replaced by 075, resulting in a late departure at 09:53 and arriving in Howth at 10:20. 227 followed and gave a good photo opportunity side by side with 227. 227 then crossed over and coupled up, departing from Howth at 10:36 and giving a good run back to Connolly.

After many phone calls 085 was sent from Inchicore, and the train departed again at 11:32, 10 minutes late. The first photo stop was Maynooth at 12:01, shortened to 4 minutes. The next stop, Enfield, was reached at 12:19 and was again cut to 4

minutes to make up time. Arrival in Mullingar was at 12:50, 2 minutes early. After another stop at Dromod there was a good run to Sligo Loop, reached at 15:00 on time, and in Sligo Station at 15:07, 2 minutes early.

With the train watered and cleaned, and everyone relaxed, the train departed Sligo at 16:44. Photo stops were made at Ballymote, Boyle and Edgeworthstown, followed by a non-stop run to Connolly, arriving at 20:03, 5 minutes down.

**Steam & Jazz:** The 2017 season of trains could have ended up a very damp squib. As the final train left Belfast Central on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> August the weather was very wet.

But it was warm, and the enthusiasm of the passengers too more than made up for the rain when the train made its first stop at Lisburn. Sometimes it can take a while for the things to get going, but not tonight - it was swinging right from the start.

The bonus was that the rain had ceased by the time of the second stop at Whitehead Excursion Station. There the crowd were treated to the bonus of seeing No.85 using the turntable in preparation for its trip to Portrush on the following Sunday.

All in all, not a bad end to a very successful Jazz season. Already we are considering extra dates in 2018!

**European Heritage Open Day:** Regular steam trains, the resumption of train rides after several years of absence and the availability of No.3BG have greatly accelerated steam crew training.

Recently passed Steam Raiser Stefan Wagner lit the fire at 06:30 on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> September, made himself breakfast on the shovel (i.e. baking his own bread, no fry-ups for Stefan!) and had the welcome company for a while of the crew working to get the mainline set ready to go to Sligo. George Ebrill stepped in as Trainee Fireman at 10:00 and was taken through

the process of oiling by Fireman Chris Ragg. 68 and 81 "Ivan" were pulled out of the carriage shed at 11:30 and train rides started shortly after midday.

When the gates opened to the public, European Heritage Open Day was marked in style, with several hundred visitors appearing.

For one day only, admission was free - from the train rides to the guided tour around the museum. But the hope is that those who came, saw and enjoyed will go home and spread the word and that this will result in a major boost in the months to come for Whitehead Railway Museum and for the RPSI's mainline tours.

The train was kept busy with departures every 15 minutes from 12:00 until 16:15. The train operated flawlessly, and all age groups enjoyed the short trip - with many people remarking on the evocative smoke and steam aroma of a genuine steam train.

The tour guides were kept busy as well with a truncated version of the full tour leaving every hour from The Stables. Several of the hour-long taster tours numbered around 40 people each - well above the usual figure. As ever, lots of looks of amazement and much interest evoked.

No.3BG had a day where it did not want to be kept quiet and George's ability to control the boiler was tested at times, but as there was plenty of work to do, plenty of steam was no bad thing. Guard James Robinson was in 81 "Ivan" and often had the company of Sam Hall, the shunter for the day. Train Marshall Tony had his work cut out in 68 with the number of people taking train rides but was more than up to the job.

The Tea Room meanwhile was flat out serving lunches, coffees, teas and snacks as people relaxed before or after their train rides and tours. Again, there was much favourable comment about the fare on offer and many visitors resolved to

return for a longer look.

Visitors came from far and wide - two car loads had travelled from Dublin to see what was on offer. Feedback was highly positive and it was a fabulous opportunity to show off the RPSI and the WRM. We had lots of locals too, building important bridges with the Whitehead community. The final train of the day carried a group of 16 visitors from Great Rail Journeys, who were including Northern Ireland on their itinerary for the first time ever.

Significantly, it was the first time Whitehead Railway Museum has played host to an organised group from GB. Even the weather played its part with morning showers giving way to blue skies and a warm and sunny afternoon. A huge debt of gratitude is owed to those volunteers who worked so hard to make the day one of the most successful ever. Seeds were sown and we made many new friends and supporters.

**East Coaster:** The tour on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> September was originally to go to Rosslare Harbour, but was rerouted to Sligo due to engineering works on the section between Bray and Greystones. Carriages on the set were passenger brake 463, 42 seater 180, 62 seater 300, diner 547, 64 seater 301 and 62 seater brake 303.

The train with NIR GM locomotive 112 "Northern Counties" and the Whitehead Mk2 set departed Whitehead Excursion Station at 07:35. It picked up at Carrickfergus, Belfast Central, Lisburn, Portadown and Drogheda, before arriving on time at Platform 7, Dublin Connolly. After a miserable night of rain it was a relief to be able to enjoy watery sunshine for most of the journey.

Soon, the road was set, but not for Newcomen Bridge Junction. A brief word with the signalman soon changed that, and the road was made for the booked route, departure being 4 minutes late. First photo stop was at Enfield, followed

by a 5 minutes early arrival into Mullingar for a crossing, and departing on time at 12:59. Dromod was next, and the 6 minutes early arrival allowed passengers extra time to explore the Cavan and Leitrim Railway premises there.

A number of passengers had requested a stop at Boyle so that they could go into the town and avail of lunch, so a quick extra set-down only call was made there. After the passengers had left the train at Sligo it was propelled onto the loop for running round. When coupling up again the locomotive was not able to release the brakes on the train. However, this was swiftly rectified and the train and loco behaved faultlessly for the remainder of the day. This caused a delayed departure of 22 minutes late.

Due to the delay it was decided to cut out the Ballymote photo stop and to shorten the stop at Boyle, which was at 17:03, 4 minutes late.

The crossing of a Down train at Carrick-on-Shannon loop was on time, and Dromod was passed 5 minutes early. The crossing in Longford caused a delay of 3 minutes. A late running Down train caused further delay at Mullingar, departing 10 minutes late.

Some great running resulted in an on-time arrival into Dublin Connolly at 19:27. Some delays getting through from the outer Dublin stations led to the run north being 5 to 10 minutes late throughout, and Belfast Central was reached just a few minutes down.

Locomotive 112 performed magnificently all day - a very pleasing tour.

Tribute must be paid to the volunteers working on board, the catering crew especially who had a very long day keeping passengers fed and watered.

**Steam Enterprise:** Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> September dawned a calm murky morning but the sky lifted in anticipation of a good day; and an excellent train performance day it turned out to be.

Although it wasn't possible for the Society to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the "Enterprise" with a non-stop re-enactment, Sunday's run to Dublin was of the highest standard. Joining the experienced drivers Gary Moore and Noel Playfair and Inspector Mick Hamill was David Haire, one of our newest NIR steam trainees, having his first taste of express steam. Gary Moore drove to Dublin and Noel Playfair the return.

The outward run featured one of the best ever climbs of the Wellington Bank and showed that No.85 is still in top form. The constant roar of the engine mile after mile must have been heard for miles around in the still morning air. After a sprightly run to Drogheda where the train arrived slightly early, it had to wait for the Down service train which was scheduled to cross the path into the station. Arrival in Dublin was a few minutes down having been seriously signal checked from about two miles out.

The passengers enjoyed a sunny warm Dublin afternoon and this weather lasted through the return journey.

The non-stop run from Dublin to Dundalk was the highlight of the return. This included two sparkling climbs - of Rush and Kellystown banks. The performance was well up with the best ever of the days of regular steam. There was a slight delay in taking water from the Dundalk hydrant due to poor water pressure on the day. More solid work won back most of the 8 minute late departure. The day ended "right time" back at Whitehead. An anniversary well celebrated indeed.

A special word of commendation to the locomotive crew who fully entered into the spirit of the day, the Society's support crew and to the locomotive department in turning out the locomotive in grand condition.

It was a day certainly enjoyed by those travelling and to those who did not book a ticket this time (about a dozen were unsold) you really did miss out.

**Emerald Isle Express:** The prestige diesel rail cruise charter by Railtours Ireland ran once more in 2017. This year's itinerary for the fully booked train was:

- Monday 25<sup>th</sup> September: Dublin - Rosslare; Rosslare - Dublin - Waterford (empty)
- Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> September: Waterford - Limerick Junction - Cork; Cork - Mallow (empty)
- Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> September: Mallow - Cobh (empty); Cobh - Mallow - Killarney
- Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> September: Killarney - Tralee - Killarney
- Friday 29<sup>th</sup> September: Killarney - Limerick - Ennis; Ennis - Galway (empty)
- Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> September: Galway - Dublin

**Munster Double:** On Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> October there will be a double-headed 071 tour to Cork and Tralee. Income in aid of the Diesel Restoration Fund.

**Broomstick Belle:** Tickets are on sale at the Visit Belfast Welcome Centre for the traditional Halloween trains on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> October.

**Santa Special (Dublin):** The number of requests which are received asking for information on the Santa trains increases significantly each year. To counter this the date for release of tickets was announced in advance, and a date of 1<sup>st</sup> October given, sales to be totally on-line this year. So it's first come, first served!

**Santa Special (Belfast and Portadown):** Tickets for these trains will be available from around the end of October.

**Film Contracts:** The Society had two contracts during the summer.

The first was for two days of filming with GS&WR carriage 1142 in Inchicore on Saturday and Sunday, 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> July, 7am to 7pm each day. The film is "Monterrey Express".

The second was on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> August, 8am to 5pm. There was a photo-shoot in Inchicore involving exterior and interior

shots with GS&WR carriages 1142 and 351. This was for the Dunnes Stores Autumn and Winter Collection by designer Paul Costello. This could subsequently be viewed on the Dunnes Stores website.

## LOCOMOTIVES

**No.4:** Undergoing repairs to tubes at Connolly Shed in Dublin.

**No.131:** After the European Heritage Open Day on 9<sup>th</sup> September, No.131 was pulled out of the loco shed where she has rested for over a year whilst her tender was rebuilt behind her. This now being complete, it received its first bucket of coal from the telehandler and its first fill of water from the Whitehead tower in preparation for steam testing on 12<sup>th</sup> September, which was passed, followed by a few moves around the yard with the new tender, No.37.

No.131 is now in the Wheel-Drop Shed for hopefully a very short time for painting and completion of fitment of OTMR (the necessary electronics), of the same nature as that applied to No.186 and No.461, to allow for running-in trips planned in for later this year.

The next stage is to draw up a testing protocol, e.g. operate either light or with at least 5 coaches on Larne line, with the ability to alter destination and times as necessity arises.

**No.461:** It is hoped to carry out a test run on one of the days of testing No.131 - an interesting comparison of locomotive performance.

**B134:** Since the locomotive transferred to Inchicore Works from Connolly shed, a lot of behind the scenes assessment and preparation for the overhaul of the locomotive has taken place.

Under the eye of Irish Rail CME Peter Smyth, the practical work of the overhaul and restoration is now well under way. The locomotive was first lifted in the Fleet

Casualty facility and the bogies removed for overhaul. The locomotive was then placed on accommodation bogies which allow restricted movement within the facility. The bogies were taken down to the former 'Diesel 1' shop and were given a thorough deep clean and initial exam. The traction motors were then removed and these have been sent away for complete overhaul and rebuild.

The bogie frames, wheels and axles will now undergo various ultrasonic and non-destructive testing (NDT) exams. All brake linkage will be inspected and replaced as required. The bearings on all axles will be replaced.

When the traction motors return they will be refitted to the bogies which will then be returned to the locomotive. This will then allow the next phase of the overhaul to begin in 'The Ramps' facility. This will be a very deep rebuild of the locomotive body returning the locomotive to as delivered appearance.

## WHITEHEAD SITE

**Moves (1):** On Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> July, No.3BG was in steam for a shunt of carriage shed A-Road to retrieve (GS&WR) ballast wagon 8309. This wagon is the latest recipient of an NIMC grant and was brought to the front of the yard for refurbishment work to start.

No.3BG was much easier controlled due to HEI's attention to the sticky regulator that has plagued the engine since overhaul.

**Moves (2):** No.3BG was steamed on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> September to perform an evening shunt which took B142 from the carriage shed and put it and No.131 in the Wheel-Drop Shed for painting.

The Bessbrook tram body, which is on the Dundalk boiler truck, was removed from the Wheel-Drop Shed into the loco shed, in place of No.131, from where it can be readily pulled out for shot-blasting of its

frames.

Mk2 carriage 304 was also removed from the Wheel-Drop Shed and put in A-Road of the carriage shed over the new pit there for work to continue to it.

## BELFAST MEETINGS

**Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> October:** The new season commences with "Sixty Years Gone" by Charles Friel, a look at the lines of the GNRB which lost all of their services on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1957.

**Your Help Needed:** Charles Friel is looking for your input to the "I Remember When ..." evening on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> December. You are asked to think about presenting about 20 pictures in a 15 minute slot on a railway-related topic of your own choosing. Let Charles know by email:

[charles.friel@btinternet.com](mailto:charles.friel@btinternet.com)

## GENERAL

**Lady O'Neill:** The sympathy of the Board and Officers of the Society goes to our President, Lord O'Neill, on the passing of his wife Gina, who died peacefully on 29<sup>th</sup> August after a short illness.

**Sales:** The shop page has returned to the website, and three new items have been added to the list.

- A set of 3 models of the Cravens coaches, due to be released shortly in aid of the Diesel Restoration Fund.
- 2018 Calendar.
- "Irish Railways in the 1950s and 1960s", a book by Kevin McCormack.

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