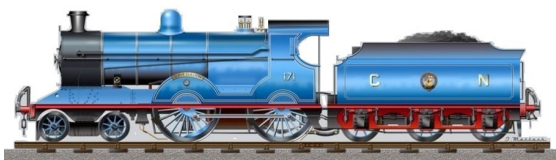


Railway Preservation Society of Ireland



December 2017

NEWS LETTER

CARRIAGE & WAGON

Gatwicks: Early morning on Sunday 15th October, and Whitehead Excursion Station was awakened by the distinctive hum of a GM locomotive. NIR 112 was in action to deliver the final three ex-Gatwick Express carriages from storage in Adelaide. These are 8945, 8947 and generator van 8911.

The visit of 112 was also used to collect 'Dutch Van' 462 from Whitehead, to be brought to York Road Works for wheel turning.

TRAINS & EVENTS

Emerald Isle Express: The fourth annual charter was another great success for the RPSI and Railtours Ireland.

The diesel-hauled carriages travelled over 1,024 miles during the six days Monday 25th September to Saturday 30th September, and travelled through the Counties of Dublin, Wicklow, Wexford, Waterford, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Limerick, Cork, Kerry, Clare, Galway, Roscommon, Offaly, Laois, Westmeath and Kildare.

This tour would not have happened without the full support of the volunteers from all departments of the Society. Thanks also to Irish Rail - great support was received at all stations visited.

(1)

Munster Double: On Saturday 14th October, two GM locomotives working in multiple, 071 in the 1976 livery with CIÉ roundel logo and 073 in the later livery with white lining and Irish Rail logo, hauled this unique railtour.

Thurles was the first photo stop, with a pick-up at Mallow, followed by an on-time arrival at Cork. Here, the locomotives ran round the train and it departed for Mallow for another run-round and thence to the Kerry line.

Many passengers got off at Killarney to get a photo or video of the train departing and to sample the fare in the town, which is handy to the station.

At Tralee the set was serviced and the carriages cleaned for the return journey, during which stops were made at Killarney and Banteer. There was a delay at Mallow for the driver, travelling down on a service train from Dublin. The next photo stop was at Limerick Junction.

A huge thanks to the bar and kitchen staff who were on their feet for the duration of the tour, keeping the passengers fed and watered throughout. A total of 39 volunteers were rostered across all departments.

Broomstick Belle: Sunday 29th October was a very crisp sunny day and two full trains operated from Belfast to Whitehead, No.85 hauling carriages packed with ghosts and ghouls of all ages.

The two Wicked Witches (although they did a lot of smiling!) distributed goody bags to the children.

At Whitehead Excursion Station the shop in Tea Room was open for business and the merchandise went like hotcakes.

In the evening, the Locomotive Department had requested a test run for No.461, and as the locomotive simmered in the sun at Whitehead during the day it provided a bonus to photographers. No.461's test was with the 6 Mk2 coaches and it ran to Belfast Central, with a compliment of hardy souls on board for the extra mileage.

The train was worked steadily throughout, having got away early from Whitehead at 16:32, working into a rapidly setting sun after a fine calm day. A quick run round at Central saw the train return to Whitehead for 18:10. The Locomotive Department will assess the performance.

Whitehead Victorian Street Fair: On Saturday 25th November, despite a few wintry showers the Museum, Tea Room and train rides were very busy. In fact, at one stage visitors had to be turned away as there just wasn't the capacity.

No.131 was the locomotive on duty, and looked well at the head of the train.

Santa Special (Belfast & Portadown): Tickets for the trains from Belfast and Portadown went on sale on 23rd October and sold out.

The trains featured newly-outshopped carriage 460 (looking splendid) and meant that the set was back up to 7 coaches, all packed out. No.85 "Merlin" was the motive power for the scheduled dates: 2nd, 3rd, 9th, 10th (Portadown), 16th, 17th & 23rd December.

Following a successful trial in 2017, there was the chance to travel on the otherwise empty morning and evening trains between Whitehead and Belfast.

Santa Special (Dublin): Tickets went on sale online at 11:00 on Sunday morning 1st October, and within a couple of minutes all the steam-hauled trains had been sold, with the diesel trains following a couple of hours later. According to the figures, the trains could have been sold 3 times over for the 6 dates: 2nd, 3rd, 9th, 10th, 16th & 17th December.

At the time of writing the trains have been operating successfully with locomotive No.4, hauling 8 Cravens and a van.

Mince Pie Special: After a gap of a year, the post-Christmas train will be running again, to Dublin on Sunday 31st December. Tickets are already sold out.

Branch Line Wanderer: Another diesel railtour will run on Saturday 7th April. Once more, it will be in aid of the Diesel Restoration Fund. The itinerary will include Waterford and Limerick.

BELFAST MEETINGS

Sixty Years Gone (11th October): Following the usual news-reel of events since the last meeting, i.e. all the summer's goings-on, Charles Friel spent the first half of the evening presenting photographs from the GNR(I) lines which ceased to operate on Monday 30th September 1957 - Armagh to Clones to Omagh and the Bundoran branch.

The latter half of the presentation had images from the last day of operation, and then some from what happened after the event, i.e. lifting trains, auctions, scrapping of locomotives, etc.

Lough Swilly Revisited (8th November): E.M. Patterson's book on the Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway has been reworked, revised and updated by Joe Begley and Steve Flanders. Steve took the opportunity to give a potted history of the Swilly system, illustrated by photos from the book.

(2)

Just after the break, and hot off the editing desk, Edward Friel showed his 6-minute and multi-camera video of No.131's trial runs on 5th November. The footage included a tribute to the restoration work by NIR Driver Noel Playfair.

A Railway Miscellany (13th December): A selection of reminiscences and photographs from members Shaun Martin, Evan Connolly and John Richardson.

Portrush Station / More From The BBC Archives (10th January): Two short presentations by John Moore and Ian Sinclair.

MEMBERSHIP

2018: Cards are now available for next year so renewals are invited.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.4: Work on tubes has been carried out in Connolly in preparation for Christmas. It involved significant travel for HEI staff from Whitehead.

No.131: The locomotive passed its 'acceptance' inspection by Messrs TCL on Tuesday 10th October. This opened the way out-road testing.

The first test date was Sunday 5th November when No.131 spent the day operating trains on the Larne line. The object was to run in new bearings and to demonstrate that everything was working correctly - basic things like ability to pull the train up a gradient, stop when required and steam against the injectors. Also, less obvious items, for example steam joints, cylinder lubricator, sanders, cylinder drain cocks and up to date innovations like electric headlamps.

Even with easy operation and frequent stops to monitor bearings, No.131 put up

an encouraging performance with the test train of 5 coaches. There were delays during the day but these were operational matters and not caused by the locomotive.

This was the first time No.131 has operated a train on the main line since the early 1960s when some of its last duties were on the Howth locals.

Several minor problems were attended to during the day. The only serious issue that arose was an overheated bogie axlebox, which was attended to before the next operation.

A second round of running in and braking test trains ran on Sunday 19th November - the weather thankfully proved to be suitable. One of the fears was that slippery rails could result in wheel damage (this was still the leaf fall season and the braking trials are done at full brake application). In the event there were no problems, and the results seem to be satisfactory. Our thanks are due to NIR for accommodating this exercise.

Locomotive No.131 is proving capable of a sprightly performance. The climb out of Central with the curve over the Dargan bridge is not easy and had to be tackled with reduced pressure due to an early start out of Central. Advantage was taken of the earlier path because time in the yard at Whitehead is of greatest benefit when checking round a locomotive newly into traffic.

The bogie bearing which gave trouble on the first operation had been dismantled, attended to and re-fitted using the Whitehead wheel-drop - this being an effective means of removing a wheelset by lowering it down rather than by lifting the locomotive up. The wheel-drop is fortunately not often called for but is invaluable when the need arises.

The appearance of No.131 in passenger use is hopefully not too far away, since

nearly all the official procedural boxes have now been ticked. The locomotive is now fitted with refurbished tender No.37.

An aside - was No.131 ever on the Larne line in GNR(I) days? The answer is probably not, but maybe someone knows better!

No further running in trips are currently planned, and we are in negotiation with NI Railways to have the locomotive approved for passenger traffic.

B142: Saturday 21st October saw the long awaited oil change performed on GM diesel locomotive B142. We have been working towards this moment since an oil analysis was done back in May with the discovery of higher than normal zinc levels in the oil. Also, by its nature, the EMD 2-stroke diesel engine fitted to the locomotives tends to lose a certain amount of oil through the turbocharger and through the combustion process.

Our stock of top-up oil was depleted, so it was decided a full oil change was required. Oil was sourced locally but had to be shipped from England, and oil filters had to be sourced from England and shipped from the US via France!

The locomotive was at that time stabled in the Wheel-drop shed so it was decided to perform the oil change inside, as the wheel-drop gantry could be used to lift the oil barrels, and also to shelter from the wind and rain. Once some piping was cobbled together, the sump was drained into two empty barrels. This took about 2 hours, and meanwhile the two oil filters (each one about 4 foot long and 6 inch diameter) were replaced. The opportunity was also taken to drain and replace the fuel filters.

Two of the new barrels of oil were moved to the No.1 road door using the telehandler, and the third placed in the oil store for later use. The barrels were then brought to the locomotive and hoisted up

7 feet to the oil inlet, after a small electric pump was used to pump oil directly in to the locomotive's oil pump housing to force the remains of the old oil out of the oil-ways and galleries.

Two barrels (approximately 400 litres) were poured in using a proprietary system consisting of some steel pipe with a treaded end that screws on to the barrel neck, a ball valve and a vacuum brake pipe.

Finally around 18:30 the locomotive was started to check for leaks, and to check the levels.

This sees the locomotive return to traffic, albeit with some minor bodywork items to be completed, and the full repaint to be done once the weather improves next spring.

Crew Training: In mid-October, Irish Rail drivers Keith Farrelly and Connie O'Gara attended a footplate training course at the North Yorkshire Moors Railway.

The training first involved classroom sessions, then moved to practical footplate experience with some light engine and shunting moves. This was to allow familiarisation with controls and movement of the locomotive under shunting conditions. The next stage was the longest section of the training and involved full line running with a dedicated training train with two full line return trips per day.

Contract: County Donegal Railways locomotive No.4 "Meenglas" has been stored outside the Foyle Valley Railway Museum for quite a number of years, clearly visible from the top deck of the bridge across the river in Londonderry.

The locomotive was delivered to Whitehead on Thursday 30th November. It was lifted onto a low loader by mobile crane at the Foyle Valley Museum in Derry, and lifted off at Whitehead using the RPSI gantries. It now rests on the

recently-acquired lowmac wagon.

We have a contract for cosmetic restoration of the locomotive. The next move will be to remove evidence of temporary repairs, also unwanted vegetation, prior to moving into the Workshop for essential repairs necessary for display purposes.

WHITEHEAD RAILWAY MUSEUM

Official Opening: Around 130 guests attended the ceremony which took place in the carriage gallery in the museum on Wednesday 25th October.

Happily the sun shone and the skies were blue as guests arrived at Whitehead Excursion Station. They enjoyed a smooth arrival along the approach road, Castlevue Road, which has just been resurfaced by Mid & East Antrim Borough Council. The new surface is a joy to behold compared to what was there before.

Guests were met and greeted by RPSI volunteers, and specific members of the Events Committee were assigned to chaperone each of the VIP guests - Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant for the County of Antrim, Mrs Joan Christie, Ms Anna Carragher, chair of the NI Committee of HLF, Ms Michele Shirlow, a board member of Tourism NI, Councillor Paul Reid the mayor of Mid & East Antrim, and last but not least, our own President, Lord O'Neill.

On display at the platform was former Dublin & South Eastern Railway 2-6-0 No.461, back in steam for the first time since its arrival back light engine from Dublin to Whitehead on 2nd July. The engine later hauled a number of train rides up and down the site. She was steaming well, and was much admired by our guests as they arrived. Many took the opportunity for a quick look on the footplate.

Having been met and greeted, guests followed the green route through the museum to the Carriage Gallery, where the ceremony was to take place and refreshments were on offer.

Guests mingled and chatted as the atmosphere built up. The guest list was representative of many interests - our main funders Heritage Lottery Fund and Tourism NI, along with Mid & East Antrim Council and Ulster Garden Villages, which also contributed to the development. Also on the list were National Museums NI, NI Museums Council, Irish Railway Record Society, Downpatrick & Co Down Railway, Translink, the Port of Larne, Whitehead Community Association, GROW South Antrim, Carrickfergus Tourism Cluster and Visit Belfast Welcome Centre.

From GB we welcomed Mark Smith and Steve Wood from the Heritage Railway Association, along with Gary Boyd-Hope from Railway Magazine. The guests included representatives of the construction and design companies involved in creating the five-gallery museum and the design team itself. It was a chance to say thanks and to let everyone see the finished product in all its glory.

But pride of place went to the RPSI members and volunteers who were present, and also the donors to the museum. It was a chance for them all to stand back and to reflect on how much has been achieved and also to recognise the enormous potential of the museum.

The ceremony took place on the viewing platform in the Carriage Gallery, with the backdrop being former Great Southern & Western Railway J15 Class No.186, one of the prime exhibits in Whitehead Railway Museum.

Lord O'Neill acted as master of ceremonies and he really looked the part, resplendent as he was in his authentic Midland Railway-NCC station master's

uniform. Not to be outdone, our recently appointed chairman Canon John McKegney wore not just the RPSI chain of office but also his clerical collar.

In his opening remarks Lord O'Neill welcomed everyone and introduced the speakers. Canon McKegney opened his remarks by regretting that Ruth Harper, the General Manager, was unwell and hence apologised that she was unable to attend the event.

Canon McKegney said that Whitehead was a railway town and hence an entirely fitting location for the RPSI to choose as its home in 1966. At that stage, he said, there was just an overgrown siding, a derelict platform and a shed that was past its prime.

Some 51 years later the RPSI was proud to be opening this most impressive museum with its workshops and café, and how fitting it was that the RPSI today should be a living legacy to the foresight of those from the Belfast & Northern Counties Railway who had first spotted the tourist potential of the town.

The Chairman said: "On this six acre site there are now five galleries - the signal cabin, the Stables which once housed the horses and jaunting cars used to transport visitors to The Gobbins, a greatly extended locomotive shed, a workshop gallery that includes a foundry, a carriage shed and a truly attractive Edwardian style tea room.

"While the opening of WRM is the culmination of years of planning by the RPSI, it simply would not have been possible without the magnificent support of our funders who, thankfully, shared our vision. We are confident that their faith in us and this project will be repaid."

Canon McKegney thanked all the funders, namely Heritage Lottery Fund, the European Regional Development Fund under the European Sustainable

Competitiveness Programme for Northern Ireland and administered by Tourism Northern Ireland, along with support from Mid & East Antrim Borough Council and Ulster Garden Villages.

He added: "The potential of Whitehead Railway Museum is enormous. We believe it can become in effect the Northern Ireland equivalent of the magnificent National Railway Museum in York."

Canon McKegney said that with the development by Tourism NI of the Causeway Coastal Route, Whitehead now found itself firmly on the tourist map. He said the RPSI was hugely encouraged by the high proportion of out of state visitors who had come to the museum since its soft opening on 1st March.

Councillor Paul Reid, the Mayor of Mid & East Antrim Borough Council, said he wanted to thank all those who's "commitment and passion" had created a museum which would be an "historic gem" in Whitehead. He added: "It is a wonderful attraction to have preserved for future generations. I have no doubt that Whitehead Railway Museum will add value to the tourism offer in our area."

Anna Carragher, chair of the NI Committee of HLF, congratulated those involved in the development of Whitehead Railway Museum. She said it was a most welcome addition to Northern Ireland's tourism portfolio and said it would become an even bigger attraction as more locomotives were restored and more artefacts put on display. She said it would help people understand the past, learn from it and celebrate it.

Michele Shirlow, director of Tourism NI, said tourism was booming in Northern Ireland and cited the announcement by Lonely Planet that Belfast and the Causeway Coast had been voted the world's top tourist region. She said Whitehead Railway Museum was well placed to benefit from this rising level of

international interest.

She commended Whitehead Railway Museum for its attention to detail in telling the story of how the railways had impacted on society. She added: "It is my pleasure to celebrate the launch of this valuable new addition to our tourist offer."

Joan Christie, the Lord-Lieutenant, recalled that she had presented the RPSI with its Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2015 and said how impressed she had been by the extent of volunteer commitment to the Society.

She said she was confident the museum would be of interest to old and young and safeguarded the future of the Society. The RPSI, she said, was spreading its wings and everyone would benefit.

Mrs Christie then unveiled a plaque to mark the occasion. Canon McKegney then invited Jackie Webster, café supervisor at Whitehead Railway Museum, to present Mrs Christie with a bouquet of flowers.

Wrapping up the formalities, Canon McKegney said he had one further duty to perform. He invited immediate past chairman Denis Grimshaw and his wife Jean to come up to the stage. Canon McKegney said that Denis had recently decided to step down as chairman for health reasons.

However, the Board wished to mark its appreciation to Denis for his "long and outstanding" service to the Society over many years and had decided to make Denis an honorary life member. Canon McKegney then presented Denis with a framed certificate to mark the award.

In reply, Denis Grimshaw thanked the Board and said he had derived a lot of pleasure and enjoyment from his association with the RPSI over many years. He wished the Society well as it went forward and said he was confident that Whitehead Railway Museum would

be a huge success.

The formalities over, it was time for more chat and photographs. Guides were on hand to conduct visitors through the museum and then up to the platform where they could enjoy a short steam train ride behind No.461.

All too soon the proceedings were over. Thanks are expressed to the RPSI Events Committee for organising the opening and to all those who played a part in making the day such a success.

Funding breakdown:

- £1,644,400 - Heritage Lottery Fund.
- £1,311,549 - European Regional Development Fund and Tourism Development Scheme via Tourism Northern Ireland.
- £33k - Carrickfergus Borough Council, now known as Mid and East Antrim Borough Council.
- £7k - Ulster Garden Villages.

Local Access: To celebrate the Official Opening of Whitehead Railway Museum on Wednesday, 50 complimentary visitor tickets were offered to local people, through the good offices of Whitehead Community Association, to which the RPSI belongs. They were allocated by WCA on a first come, first served basis, and all were snapped up within a matter of hours.

The idea was to spread word about the museum to the Whitehead area and to encourage local people to identify with their local museum - and also to highlight the excellent refreshments available through the Tea Room. A number of the tickets were quickly redeemed and this led to a healthy increase in visitor numbers during the day. We are most grateful to Whitehead Community Association for their collaboration in this initiative.

Video Tour: Thanks to Northern Visions

TV there is now a video tour of Whitehead Railway Museum. The tour is conducted by Robin Morton as he takes a party of visitors around the exhibits.

Whitehead Tour App: A self-guide tour app is now available. It is 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 will be available to download from the usual Apple and Google stores (search for Whitehead Railway Museum) or download from the Society's website.

Health & Safety: Thanks to the generosity of a Society member we now have a modern, automatic defibrillator at Whitehead. This life-saving device will be kept in the Bothy where it should be easily accessible to all on site.

The use and functioning of the machine was explained at Whitehead today to an audience of volunteers, guides, museum and HEI staff by John Williams, a long-time member and a Senior Cardiac Nurse in the Lagan Valley Hospital. The device uses clear audible and visual instructions allowing it to be used by anyone at all skill levels.

Publicity: The December 2017 issue of Railway Magazine carries a 5-page article featuring the museum at Whitehead.

Award: On 29th November, in Lagan Valley Conference Centre, Lisburn, the Society received an award from the William Keown Trust. The Trust inspects public businesses to see how they cater

for people with disabilities, they were very impressed with the Whitehead Railway Museum.

GENERAL

Film News: On Thursday 12th October Inchicore Works was again a film studio. The shoot was for "Vita and Virginia", a film about Virginia Woolf starring actors Gemma Arterton and Rupert Penry-Jones which will see carriages 1142 and Royal Saloon 351 used.

Five Foot Three: FFT is under new management (Mark & Ruth Walsh) but retains the same email address:

5ft3magazine@gmail.com

At this stage the new Editor would like to invite members to contribute any stories / memories or photographs they have of steam events related to Irish Railways. These could be from the days of steam or recent events from your own perspective if you think them worth capturing "for the record".

Features in the last edition ranged from memories of the BCDR in 1950 through to the Royal Train of 2016. Maybe something of the GNR / SL&SNCR lines which closed in 1957 may be particularly poignant this year.

Regarding photographs, particularly welcome are photos of RPSI activities during 2017 so far and of Christmas yet to come, once it has become Christmas past! Submissions to be in by 7th January.

EDITORIAL ADDRESS

148 Church Road, Newtownabbey,
Co. Antrim, BT36 6HJ.

Company Registration: NI010798

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

www.steamtrainsireland.com

rpsitrains@hotmail.com