



## September 2018

# NEWS LETTER

### TRAINS & EVENTS

**Rockin Food Festival/The Slaney:** It was pleasing to be able to announce, following a break in the dry weather, that this operation to Enniscorthy and Rosslare on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> August would go ahead with steam. It also featured the first ever working of Great Northern Railway of Ireland express passenger locomotive No.85 "Merlin" on the former Dublin and South Eastern line.

The trains sold out at an early stage, which was very encouraging.

On the day, No.85 "Merlin", looking great after being polished and buffed in Connolly Shed during the week, took up position on the train, with crew Robbie Jolley, Connie O'Gara and Inspector Lar Griffin. Departure was at 10:40.

There followed a stop at Greystones where 25 passengers were picked up. Water was taken from the tank at Avoca and from a bowser at Gorey.

Enniscorthy was reached at 13:44. The passengers from Dublin were set down and a full train was loaded for the trip to Wexford and Rosslare Strand.

Due to the late running, the Up Rosslare was crossed in Wexford Loop. It was some sight to see the massive blue

engine travelling down the Wexford Quay with a rake of blue and cream carriages. Traffic came to a stand and many photographs were taken. However, delays had built up and the Harbour was reached at 15:34, an hour late.

The engine was turned without much difficulty - volunteer Dylan Kinsella had visited and removed all the high grass and weeds from the pit a few days earlier.

The train departed the Harbour at 16:27, 47 minutes late. Passengers were picked up again from the Strand followed by another traversing of the Quay.

Following passenger stops at Wexford and Enniscorthy, water was taken again at Gorey and Avoca.

A signal check just outside Greystones stopped the train. The Down Rosslare was to be crossed and it was sitting in the station. A Dart arrived and was placed in the siding. The special then moved up to the next signal and waited there. This is on a gradient of 1:95. The signal cleared with a feather signal to enter the station. But it became apparent that there was something amiss with the train, the driver making several attempts to move. Peter Scott was on board and made himself

available on the footplate.

In the meantime, the signal was returned to danger and the signalman allowed another south bound Dart to enter the station. The Up Rosslare was in Wicklow, behind us. Unable to move his engine, driver Jolley declared it a failure. A diesel engine was requested from Connolly. 087 was dispatched.

It then became known that the Dart in the platform had also failed, due to a braking issue. The Down Rosslare was returned to Bray.

Driver Jolley, still working on his locomotive, managed to get the train moving and with permission from the Signalman, brought the train onto the platform.

The failed Dart was repaired and departed for Bray. The Up Rosslare arrived and passengers on the special were offered accommodation on this train, many taking up the offer. 087 had arrived and hooked up to No.85. The next movement was the Dart in the sidings being dispatched to Bray. The Signalman then sent the Down Rosslare back to Greystones and onto Wicklow. We eventually got the road and arrived back onto Platform 5 Dublin Connolly at 23:33, 4 hours late.

As a gesture to the delayed passengers, they were offered complimentary tickets to travel on the "The Boyne" on 16<sup>th</sup> September.

The summary of the post-trip report is that restarting the train proved impossible after repeated attempts, despite there being no obvious reason since there was plenty steam and vacuum. After checking that the brakes on the train were released and no apparent problem with the locomotive,

a rescue loco was requested. Before it arrived, another attempt was made and this time the train managed to start and moved into the platform.

Several aspects of the locomotive have since been checked - with it out of steam, and again in steam. No obvious defect has been found.

The operation of the brakes on the coaches will also be checked - although the brakes were observed to release, the symptoms were consistent with a binding brake somewhere plus the 1:95 gradient.

**Portrush Flyer:** After the much-needed rain former GNR Q Class No.131 was approved to operate the trains on 12<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> August.

It was No.131's first major mileage outing since being retired by CIÉ in early 1963.

The first train started out on a damp early morning which turned into a fine dry day by the time the train arrived in Belfast Central from Whitehead.

It was crewed by Gary Moore driver, Anto Dargan fireman, Mickey Hamill inspector and Jamie Reid guard. A bowser provided water at the station.

As all passengers were on board, the train left slightly early. No.131 appears to be a free steaming engine and made a grand climb to Kingsbog with its sharp beat; a pleasure on the ears.

The train made the customary crossing with an on-time Up passenger train at Antrim. For some inexplicable reason the train was checked on the approach to Ballymena and routed through the Down platform road (the loop) much to the annoyance of the crew. Some time

was lost but it was made up again at Killagan with a through run, the Up passenger having been looped. Arrival in Coleraine was one minute down on schedule.

Passengers had to make a prompt transfer by footbridge/lift to the opposite platform where a dedicated railcar was waiting for a quick non-stop run to Portrush, arriving about two minutes down on schedule.

The afternoon in Portrush was bright, calm and pleasantly warm.

Passengers returned to Coleraine on the 17:05 service train, a 6-piece. No.131 and train was waiting on platform 2. As we had to wait for our booked path (as if we had worked steam from Portrush), there was time for some photographs and a leisurely transfer between trains - departure was on time at 17:43.

Running was good and steady. Departure from Killagan loop was about one minute down, as too at Ballymena. The Down passenger train was crossed at Antrim followed by a steady climb to Kingsbog. All too soon for most, the journey was over at Belfast Central, where the water bowser waited.

On Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> August the train, with No.131 again, was crewed by Gary Moore driver, Anto Dargan fireman, Charlie Lewisley inspector and Dave Wilson guard. It departed Belfast Central virtually on time. The running was steady. With a green light on approach to Ballymena we knew we had a through run on the Up road, only to be met with an inexplicable yellow with the starter signal in the distance showing red, bringing the train to an untimely stop. Time was lost. This was further compounded by a similar incident at

Ballymoney. Arrival consequently in Coleraine was 13 minutes down on schedule. As a result, the dedicated CAF set to Portrush was cancelled. To run the set would have delayed service trains. Passengers joined the following Portrush service train for the short onward journey.

The return from Coleraine on time at 17:43 was uneventful, with good steady running throughout. Belfast Central arrival was about four minutes down on the booked return time.

The weather throughout the day was bright and pleasant.

It was good to have two fine Portrush Flyer days. One can now look forward to next year and a revamped Portrush station.

***Portrush Flyer (A Footplate Point of View):*** On Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> August No.131 made her first trip (unless you know better) up the NCC to Coleraine.

No.131 looked resplendent in her 1920s GNR(I) livery, complete with newly applied crests on the splashes. The RPSI crew arrived early to start the preparation, fuelled by the excitement of the day and by a little nervousness on how No.131 would tackle the climb on the Bleach Green line.

On the tender-first run from Whitehead to Belfast, No.131's recently installed tarpaulin and tender cage were put to good use, but the rain stopped as the train arrived in Central. Also tried out for the first time were No.131's rear sanders, which are hand fed in a similar fashion to No.171's. They were used to good effect starting out of Carrickfergus on the climb to Greenisland - never a popular stop with the crew, especially on damp tender-first days.

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Water was taken from a tanker at Central station - the norm in recent years as the water tanks at Ballymena are still unserviceable and pathing constraints mean that we couldn't use them even if they were working.

The train left Central station slightly early and made a very competent climb of the bank through Bleach Green and Mossley to Kinsbog. From there the train was able to make use of its new top speed of 60 mph - recently increased from 40 mph after various brake tests and certification updates.

A stop in Antrim to pass an Up train gave an opportunity to check bearings after the sustained hard work up the bank - fortunately all was well. Brisk running on the remainder of the run to Coleraine resulted in an (almost) on time arrival. The train of 6 carriages was then propelled to Henry's siding, the fuel road was in use holding the railcar which was to take our passengers to Portrush.

The locomotive was turned, and then watered. Several of the turntable pushers commented that the comparatively small No.131 was much easier to turn than No.85!

The run back to Central Station was without incident and after taking water from the road tanker again, the train left for Whitehead on time.

No.131 proved herself to be a user friendly and free steaming locomotive. In particular, our driver noted how free running she was on the downhill stretches, while the fireman appreciated the boiler's quick reaction to steam demands. The historical sources which said that the Qs class were almost as good as the S class seem to have been correct!

We are greatly indebted to the people who had the foresight to save No.131 from being scrapped before the RPSI was formed.

***Summer Steam:*** The Whitehead Festival day (4<sup>th</sup> August) was the busiest of the season of Saturday train rides during July and August. Over 300 passengers were carried. There was a bit of a panic in the Tea Room to start with - a need for more staff, but it all came together in the end with a number of volunteers stepping into the fray! So teamwork won out in the end.

Over the season of train rides a pleasing number of cross-border visitors were observed, plus some from Europe and North America. In most cases, they were alerted to the museum's existence by picking up leaflets - a good moment to encourage members to keep distributing them (please get in contact for a supply).

Otherwise, the café was kept busy with museum visitors, train rides passengers and casual visitors.

The end of summer train rides also sees the end of Sunday opening - at least for the time being.

***Steam & Jazz:*** The late summer mini season commenced on 24<sup>th</sup> August with No.4 doing the honours.

Following that, on the evening of Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> August, after the train rides, No.131 was turned in order to work the 60 mph timed Lisburn - Whitehead section of the final Jazz train.

No.461 was also pulled out of the shed for a steam test on the Sunday. It was intended that she make her only mainline passenger-carrying run since June 2017 on the latter part of the

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evening's trains. This would in all likelihood have been No.461's last turn for some time as her boiler certificate will shortly expire pending storage or overhaul.

Friday 31<sup>st</sup> August was the end of a very successful season of six booked-out trains over the summer months.

On the whole, the weather was very kind and the rain stayed away - just what was needed!

A variety of locomotives were used over the season: No.4, No.85, No.131 and an NIR diesel (remember the scorching weather in June and July - seems so long ago now?).

It was a great pity that there wasn't a clean sweep of locomotives; No.461, due to work the final leg of the last train from Whitehead to Belfast Central and return, failed with a piston defect while shunting during the evening prior to taking over the train, so No.131 worked throughout.

It was especially disappointing for the Locomotive Department as they, led by James Friel, had put in a lot of work to equip No.461 with instrumentation to monitor steam performance on what was to be a test run for the locomotive.

Many thanks to all the volunteers who worked so hard to make the season a success.

**Just Go Holidays:** This company chartered a train to run on 3<sup>rd</sup> September (Dublin-Killarney), 5<sup>th</sup> (Killarney-Westport) and 7<sup>th</sup> (Westport-Dublin).

**European Heritage Open Day:** This year's open day will be on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> September

Steam train rides will be running (normal fares apply) and the Museum will be free entry.

**The Boyne:** The next public steam trip from Dublin will be on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> September, departing from Dublin Connolly and Drogheda with former GNR(I) locomotive No.85 "Merlin". This trip was postponed from earlier in the summer because of the very dry weather.

Tickets are available from the website and the Tourist Office in Drogheda.

**Steam Enterprise:** Tickets for this trip on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September are still available.

**Volunteers Day:** On Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> September there will be an open day at Whitehead to recruit new members and volunteers.

There will be two sessions, one at 11am and the second at 2pm. You will be able to hear more about the opportunities that are available. The information sessions will be held in The Stables Gallery of the Museum.

This will be your chance to ask questions and to see if there might be a way in which you could give us a bit of your free time. There is no obligation, however, so don't feel under any pressure.

If you are an existing volunteer, please come along too. This could be an opportunity for you to see if there are other capacities in which you might be able to use your talents.

An engine will be in steam and operating train rides, so if a role in the footplate or on the train appeals to you, this will be a chance to hear more about what the

various roles involve.

As part of the day you will be able to explore the Museum and learn more about what is involved in being a guide or a gallery supervisor. We have jobs to suit all aptitudes, abilities and interests. So please come along and hear more.

We will also be inviting members of the local community to attend these information sessions. We are hoping to enlist local people as volunteers, particularly in the Museum.

**Date Move:** As a result of a clash of dates with an operation from Dublin on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> October, it has been decided to move the date of the Presidential Dinner to Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> November.

The function will be held at Ulster Reform Club in Belfast, as planned, and a revised booking form is now available on the website. The Events Committee apologises for any inconvenience this will cause.

Please note that places at this function are limited, so if you intend to attend, please do not leave it too long. We know that many members will wish to be present at this dinner.

## LOCOMOTIVES

**No.3BG "Guinness":** This engine has long had a lamp bracket on the back wall inside the cab which no-one could really work out why and it was wont to karate chop the crew neatly between the neck vertebrae when they stand up from firing, adjusting gauge glasses, etc.

Jonathan Clinton, trainee fireman, having taken a chop himself, mentioned that in old photos the bracket was on

the outside. This is indeed true; photos show it on the outside in the engine's brewery life, changing to the inside in the first days of the Society.

The bracket has now been reversed to be on the outside of the cab after 54 years of unprovoked aggression towards crew members.

**No.4:** After some repair work the engine returned to Dublin on 28<sup>th</sup> August.

**No.85 "Merlin":** The engine was out and about on the Great Northern mainline early on the morning of Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> August. It made a light engine return trip from Connolly shed to Skerries and back.

The purpose was to conduct a number of light engine brake tests to achieve better operating conditions when the locomotive is moving around the network without a train behind.

Currently the locomotive is restricted to 30 mph when operating light engine which gives difficulty when it comes to scheduling engine moves around regular services. It is hoped that the braking figures obtained from the test will greatly help with increasing this maximum speed.

It is good to report that the locomotive performed perfectly in all aspects, following a number of thorough exams after the delayed return to Dublin from Enniscorthy.

**Crews:** The constant use of steam for shunting and train rides over the summer at Whitehead is finally bearing fruit with several volunteers passing footplate tests and several more keen and able candidates awaiting assessment or climbing the ladder from steam raiser.

The knowledge gap that must be bridged to make it from steam raiser to fireman (which, combined with PTS, is also the minimum level required to become a loco rep for mainline operations) is quite large and time-consuming. The process involves logging a minimum number of five satisfactory turns with supervising drivers and firemen compiling reports to identify areas for further improvement. Once the holes are sufficiently filled (in regard to firing) the trainee is given the theory questions to work on at leisure, as this can (and is expected to) involve reading and research into such things as the intricacies and physics of lubricators and injectors. The door is open for the trainee to ask anybody for advice at any stage.

Having submitted their first draft of answers, the trainee gets the opportunity to walk round the available locomotives and check their draft answers with a qualified fireman before being able to amend them for final submission to an A1 Assessor.

Finally, assessment day dawns and the A1 Assessor marks the theory and supervises the trainee carrying out their fireman duties for a day whilst completing the practical assessment.

It takes a high level of commitment, flexibility, willingness to learn and desire to progress to make it from steam raiser to fireman.

The rewards of making it to the mainline however can be very great!

## GENERAL

**Pop-Up:** NI Railways have once again very kindly hosted the display of the

Society's pop-up banners. The schedule is: July 16-30: Belfast Central; July 30-Aug 13: Lisburn; Aug 13-27: Portadown; Aug 27-Sept 10: Newry; Sept 10-Sept 24: Belfast Central; Sept 24 - Oct 8: Antrim; Oct 8-22: Coleraine; Oct 22-Nov 5: Carrickfergus; Nov 5 - Nov 19: Belfast Central. Many thanks to NIR and to the volunteers who will be moving the banners around the network.

**Welcome:** We are pleased to welcome Séan Clancy to the Board.

Sean, who is a chartered accountant, has been co-opted to act as Treasurer.

We would ask that all members and volunteers would give him every assistance in the post.

**Filming (1):** On Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> July Whitehead Excursion Station was taken over for a film shoot, starring B142 and 3 Mk2 carriages. Liam Neeson and Lesley Manville co-starred!

**Filming (2):** Passengers on board the Cork & Kerry Railtour will recall that there was a film crew who were making a film about Irish railways for French TV. The film was for a much acclaimed international series called *Des Trains Pas Comme Les Autres* (*Trains Not Like The Others*) - at the time of writing still available on YouTube.

**Filming (3):** Another filming which took place on the Saturday of the Cork & Kerry Railtour, involving Irish actor/comedian Pat Shortt will be broadcast on RTÉ at 9:30pm on 16<sup>th</sup> September. The RPSI will be featured, we're assured.

**Filming (4):** The cameras were rolling again at Whitehead Railway Museum on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> September for the shooting of scenes for an Irish language television

programme. BBC Northern Ireland carried out an interview with RPSI director Peter Rigney - himself a fluent Irish speaker.

The interview will be featured in an upcoming Irish language programme being made to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Translink NI Railways.

**News-Letters:** The Members pages of the website now has an archive of Society news-letters. There are gaps in the issues from the 1960 and 1970s. This is a renewed appeal for the loan of copies of any of the missing issues you may have.

**Portrush Station:** A photo of No.85 on the Portrush Flyer has been selected by a public vote to be one of a series of local views featuring on the external wall of the new Portrush station building.

**Sales News:** The RPSI calendar for 2019 is now available.

## BELFAST MEETINGS

**New Season:** The 2018/19 programme is enclosed. Please try to have it displayed in an appropriate public place to help make this the best season ever.

## WHITEHEAD RAILWAY MUSEUM

**Free Admission:** As announced at the AGM on 7<sup>th</sup> July, the Board has decided that members of the Society should be entitled to one free visit per annum to Whitehead Railway Museum.

To secure your complimentary ticket, just present your membership card at the ticket desk. The membership card will then be stamped and the free ticket

issued for a conducted tour. It is another advantage of paying your sub and of being a member of the RPSI.

We hope that each and every member will take advantage of this opportunity to see Whitehead Railway Museum for themselves. Please bring friends and family along with you (they will have to pay!).

And when you are there, don't forget to take time for a cuppa or lunch at The Edwardian Tea Room. The freshly cooked lunches are earning much acclaim.

Furthermore, if you would like to get involved behind the scenes or as a tour guide, this is your opportunity to sample what we have on offer. Please consider joining the team - it's a great contribution to make to the RPSI and above all, it's fun and gives you a sense of pride in what the Society has achieved.

Contact RPSI General Manager Siobhan Dillon for further details of being a Guide.

**Tickets:** Museum tickets are now available for purchase in advance from the website.

Why not give it a visit?

**Museum Accreditation:** The Society has had its Museum Accreditation renewed. Well done to all involved, Tony Ragg especially.

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