



January 2020

NEWS LETTER

TRAINS & EVENTS

Volunteer Day: Thank you to those of you who helped organise and participated in the Volunteers Day sessions Saturday 28th September. All told, there were around a dozen potential volunteers.

As part of the event, No.3BG "Guinness" was in steam operating public train rides.

Steam Enterprise: On Sunday 29th September, No.85 was in fine form for the return trip from Belfast to Dublin, with a full load of passengers.

Running was to the minute for most of the day, only PW slacks near Laytown and Dromiskin causing a delay.

Water was taken from the column at Dundalk on the outward journey, and from a hydrant at Drogheda on the return. The latter stop allowed a Down Enterprise to overtake.

Cobh Rambler: On Saturday 5th October, the route for the double-headed diesel special was Dublin-Cork-Cobh-Mallow-Killarney-Mallow-Dublin.

With 078 leading 232, it was a Society first to stop at the new Down platform at Limerick Junction. At Cork, 078 unhooked and proceeded light to Cobh, while 232 followed with the train. 078 came on the rear of the train for a non-stop run onwards to Mallow used the avoiding line

through Cork and into the tunnel.

The train was greeted by sunshine in Killarney and most of the passengers went into the town during the lie-over.

At Mallow 232 again joined the train, leading 078. Another first for us - the train was signalled through the Down loop in Ballybroughy and across onto the Up Road. There was a Down Cork at the station as we went through.

A great effort by all involved in what was a very long day.

Steam Saturday: No.131 was on train rides duties on 26th October. Numbers were boosted by a visit from the Porsche Owners Club. There were visitors too from Dublin, Swansea, Cyprus, Latvia, Germany, Canada and St. Petersburg, Russia.

A pleasantly busy day for the time of year in bright, cold weather, rounded off by storytelling in the train.

Haunted Express: On the Friday the Society received notice that Irish Rail would not be in a position to supply a fireman for trips on Saturday 26th and Monday 28th October. It was made known that NIR's Noel Playfair was on a rest day on Saturday, and he confirmed his willingness to work the two days out of Dublin.

The Saturday trips operated successfully

between Drogheda and Dundalk and Skerries, with Noel firing to Robert Jolley.

On Monday the driver was Keith Farrelly, with Fireman Playfair. The weather was fantastic and the views along the Royal Canal were brilliant for the two trips out to Maynooth.

Five groups of passengers won prizes for best dressed and they will be drawn in a competition for a family set of Santa Special tickets.

Broomstick Belle: No.131 hauled the two trains from Belfast to Whitehead and back on Sunday 27th October.

It was a great day out in brilliant sunshine, though a touch cold. The only disappointment was that the train hadn't filled as well as in recent years - wonder why?

Storytime Express: On Wednesday 30th October, the Dublin set was chartered by An Post with Children's Books Ireland. It was placed at Platform 2 of Heuston Station. It was a free event for children to encourage reading.

Model Railway Day: Despite Saturday 9th November being a very wet and miserable day, this event was a great success.

It only worked because of the enormous effort put in by all the teams, led by Mark Kennedy and Ian Sinclair from the Curatorial Committee. There was a large turn-out of help from Site, Locomotive, Carriage & Wagon, Operations, Web, Sales, Catering, Events, Tour Guides, Tea Room, Curatorial and staff. The Whitehead Community Association kindly lent 20 tables for the show.

Model and miniature railway clubs and individual enthusiasts from as far away as Wexford came together to support the event with their model machine displays. Our star guest layout from England, "Saltdean Brewery", didn't disappoint,

and impressed model makers and public alike.

Financially the event did well. Set up costs were quite high and the attendance was almost certainly lower than it could have been due to the awful weather but we still managed to attract around 900 people which was comfortably over the target of 800 visitors.

Apart from the exhibitions there were two RPSI sales stands (in the café and in the Carriage Shed) and the new WRM guide book was a good seller.

The Catering team was busy in Diner 87 (exhibitors) and Diner 2422 (Public) selling tea, coffee, sandwiches and buns. It was reported that the café had its busiest day ever.

We ran out of milk, biscuits and pound coins during the day proving how busy we were.

There were very favourable comments from visitors, many of whom hadn't visited before, or not for a long time. Young, and not so young, people were 'tweeting' and 'live streaming' during the day. The promo video featuring Big Tony and Wee Tony was viewed 590 times on YouTube and around 1,000 times on Facebook.

On the platform in the rain a normal Train Rides operation was underway, and congratulations to George Ebrill on the footplate on this first turn as a newly-qualified fireman.

Victorian Street Fair: Saturday 30th November was the busiest by far of the "Steam Saturday" events of the 2019, no doubt significantly helped by the crowds wandering the streets of Whitehead.

Thanks to all who helped so much over the year - we had nearly 4,000 train rides and the events grossed over £14,000.

Santa Special (Dublin): As has become

the norm in recent years, the tickets for these trains sold out within minutes on 28th September. We believe demand for some trains may have been up to 20 times the seats available!

After three weekends of hard work by all the volunteers, 7,112 passengers were carried and over €12,000 raised for the No.171 Appeal.

Santa Special (Belfast & Portadown): On the first train on Saturday 7th December, thanks to the generosity of RPSI members donating to our Christmas Family Appeal, we were able to offer over 160 complimentary tickets to the Salvation Army and SVP.

Before the train left Belfast there was a visit by the PSNI Chief Constable, apparently himself a volunteer on a GB preserved railway! He didn't travel, but instead had a tour of No.131's footplate.

The rest of the trains also ran successfully, with the exception of the two on Saturday 14th December. On that day, during pre-trip checks on No.131, it was discovered that there was an issue with the electrics of the signalling equipment. After a prolonged diagnosis, the fault was traced to a set of corroded contacts and easily fixed.

However, there was no way the locomotive was going to be allowed to operate on the main line without this vital equipment. Luckily a 3-piece railcar was made available by NIR and the crew dispatched from Whitehead to York Road depot to pick it up.

When the railcar arrived at Lanyon Place the majority of those waiting opted to travel, the rest deciding to seek refunds. The delayed train made its way to Whitehead where Santa, not having been able to get from Whitehead to Belfast, set up in the Stables to meet the children and distribute presents.

Unfortunately, the steam crew was needed to return the railcar to York Road so could not operate the repaired No.131. As a consequence, the railcar had to be used for the afternoon train as well.

Mince Pie: Unfortunately, we were not able to operate the usual post-Christmas train.

A combination of problems with steam crew availability and the lack of a suitable cross-border locomotive led to the decision to drop it from the calendar for this year.

2020: The first operations of the new year will probably be around Saint Patrick's Day, followed by Easter and the Lough Foyle Railtour in May.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.3BG "R.H. Smyth": The historic steam locomotive from Londonderry went on display at Whitehead Railway Museum - just in time for the Halloween holidays. It had been languishing at the back of the engine shed, but has been given a cosmetic overhaul including a complete repaint.

The bright green engine is now taking pride of place at the front of a train of goods wagons in the display gallery at the museum.

No.4: Transferred back to Whitehead on 30th October. The loco is due extensive mechanical work. This commenced with the motion on her left-hand side - rectification of a coupling rod bearing that had been carrying heat during the locomotive's stay in Dublin. Next up will be a re-tube over the winter months.

No.131: The locomotive has been running well but injector performance has been unsatisfactory and both devices received attention, including renewal of internal parts, for the Santa trains. It should be

noted that when No.131 was saved from scrap in the early 1960s, it was devoid of some of the boiler fittings and a set was cobbled together for display purposes.

No.171 "Sieve Gullion": Cab and cladding removed on 21st September. Boiler lifted 5th October and placed in Dunleath Workshop.

On Saturday 19th October, No.171 was lifted off her wheels to allow detailed examination of the bearings and journals. These were partially overhauled when the locomotive was in England five years ago. The wheels were moved into the wheel-drop shed to allow use of that facility's crane in removing the axleboxes.

On the weekend of 2nd & 3rd November, the bogie frame was lifted from the bogie wheelsets and all axleboxes were removed for examination.

The plan over the coming months is to examine the bearings and pour new white metal where appropriate. Then the locomotive can go back on its wheels to allow further reassembly of the motion and valve gear.

Meanwhile, in the workshop, the boiler has been lifted out and is on a wagon where it has been turned onto its side for access to crown stays. These are all to be renewed, the work being about 50 per cent complete. The frames have been lifted off the wheels and the bearings dismantled for assessment. Two bogie bearings require re-metalling.

We already have had three recent recruits join in on the work on No.171. If you would like to help, please get in touch via our volunteering page. If you can assist financially, our appeal is still open.

No.105 (NCC Mogul Protect): Work is continuing on marking out the frames for drilling, also machining of horn-guide and horn-stay castings. The main motion brackets have been cast and the pattern

equipment for the cylinders is complete. The cylinder blocks were being cast in December. Work is complete on machining the driving wheel tyres (new tyres were acquired at the same time as the tyres for No.4). Boiler G824 is being rebuilt and some of the renewed parts for the firebox are well advanced. (The basic LMS G8AS boiler is dimensionally suitable for either the mogul or the NCC tank engine No.4.)

B134: Work continues on this locomotive at Inchicore.

B142: It is hoped, assuming the weather cooperates, that the locomotive will be painted over the next few months. Minor repairs and annual inspection will also be performed while the locomotive is inside, necessary following a failure during a post-Christmas shunt.

A Complete Washout: On Sunday 17th November locomotives No.3BG "Guinness" and No.131 had their boilers washed out, using for the first time the newly-acquired petrol-powered pump.

A news article in the Members section of the website has the full story and photographs.

A Lesser-Known Engine: It is little known that we have a very large stationary steam engine on site, it is Waller-built and powered the exhausters in Belfast Gasworks. Exhausters sucked the gas produced in the retorts through the various cleaning & scrubbing stages to the gas holders.

The process of gas-making can be seen online in a short and fascinating documentary of Belfast Gasworks from 1964 and very possibly features our engine in the opening sequence.

Peter Scott says: "Almost certainly it is our Waller engine. I saw into the engine room at the Belfast Gas Works along with Lord Dunleath when he was interested in

acquiring some of the equipment. There were several steam engines, one large one and at least two small ones. The large one was acquired by Lord Dunleath, partly overhauled by Rory Woolf, but after Lord Dunleath's untimely death it lay in the yard at Ballymena for years until I took pity on it and asked Rory if we could have it. My idea was always to set it up in as near to operational condition as possible somewhere on the RPSI site. Sadly it never happened, although it would not be difficult and I still think it would be a good idea - another attraction for visitors and preserved as near as practical to the Gas Works where it came from.

Fascinating to see it in operation."

Footplate News (1): On Saturday 16th November, Jonathan Clinton passed out as a new GM diesel driver at Whitehead. Jonathan is one of two drivers progressing through the new training and assessment procedure in place for those who want to become diesel drivers, and the first to qualify fully.

The new process involves the candidates, who must be qualified shunters, acting as second man on the GM loco for a number of turns. This allows the candidate to observe and question operations, both in the methods of being a driver, and the operation of the sometimes cranky locomotive. The candidate can then progress to becoming a trainee driver, and under the mentorship of a driver will be expected to perform at least 5 turns as trainee driver. This will include preparation of the locomotive, basic fault finding and maintenance, and then full day shunts, including forming and reforming the Mk2 rake - a tricky operation thanks to the buckeye couplers. The rostered driver fills out a report on the trainee, and once the trainee is deemed ready, will perform a written and practical assessment.

Footplate News (2): Some of the Dublin Locomotive Crew were in Whitehead on Saturday 23rd November for a locomotive training class, delivered by Adam Lohoff.

The course consisted of a theory class on locomotive preparation, maintenance and disposal and a practical demonstration outside in the yard on Ex-GNR Q Class loco No.131.

WHITEHEAD SITE

Shunt: On Saturday 5th October B142 performed a big shunt to:

- Put HLF-funded, cosmetically-restored No.3 "R.H. Smyth" in C-Road for display in the Museum.
- Take the grain van from the workshop and put it in Harvey's vacated spot at the rear of Carriage Shed A-Road for further HLF-funded work
- Remove No.171's boiler in the heavy lift, put it on the 'Lowmac' well-wagon and put it in the workshop for work funded by ... YOU.

On Sunday 6th October, No.3BG "Guinness" was steamed to mop-up anything left over from the day before, but there being nothing instead hauled out No.85 for coaling and turning, before replacing her in the shed again.

On Sunday 12th October, B142 was to be used in the late afternoon to pull out No.131 for steam testing of the amended clack valve in one of her injectors and to remove the Lowmac wagon from the workshop, No.171's boiler having been lifted off it. But she decided to fail with battery issues rather than shunt and so No.3BG was quickly prepared and pulled out with the Telehandler.

On Sunday 13th October No.3BG found herself unexpectedly steamed in the early hours and pulling out No.131 such that

there was plenty of time to steam her during 'office hours'. As No.131 brewed, No.3BG performed the shunt to remove the Lowmac wagon from the workshop. No.131's amended clack worked very well and it was then coaled for her next operation.

Forklift Handover: On Thursday 21st November, at a short ceremony at Whitehead, the General Manager of the Port of Larne, Roger Arnsom, took payment (£1) from RPSI President Joan Smyth for the ex Port of Larne forklift truck.

Also present from the Larne Port were David Moore, Chief Engineer, and Sally Bonnes, Marketing Manager.

The Society is very grateful to the Larne Harbour authorities for thinking of us when the vehicle became surplus to their requirements.

BELFAST MEETINGS

9th October: The new season of Belfast meetings kicked off on in a relatively new venue. Rather than the Parke Hall of Orangefield Church, where we have been meeting for ten seasons, we moved upstairs to the Main Hall which is considerably larger.

Glenariff Mineral Railway - The first presentation of the new season came from Steve Flanders who has recently published his researches into the Glenariff Railway in an e-book entitled Glenariff Mines, Railway & Pier - the rise and fall of a Victorian Enterprise

More Banking by Train - After the interval, John Richardson presented the second part of his escapades as a peripatetic bank clerk in towns served by railways or, at least, had been served in the recent past.

13th November: The Belfast and County

Down Revisited - Our first speaker was Patrick Davey who brought us on a pictorial tour of the B&CDR and included his family connections with staff on both the B&CDR and the Ballycastle line. Patrick included some telling then-and-now combinations which reminded us of how much has gone.

Railway Graves - After the interval, we heard from Peter McCabe who, during his ongoing mid-life crisis, has made a study of headstones in various graveyards around Belfast. Peter has published a book on headstones in Belfast City Cemetery and is working on a book on Dundonald Cemetery. Each has a number of themed trails, including railways. Peter commented that old headstones often record both the address and occupation of the deceased. While this greatly helped his researches, this useful practice seems to have died out.

11th December: The Wee Donegal in Pictures was presented by Charles Friel. As well as some well-known favourites, Charles used as many previously unpublished pictures as he could find in both his own collection and in the Society's growing archive. Taken from prints, negatives and colour slides, each picture had been carefully restored to bring out the best in it.

8th January: Our Daily Bread - Another Slice by James Davidson, and The BBC Archives Revisited by Ian Sinclair.

GENERAL

A Bad Case Of Cut & Paste: Apologies that a bout of carelessness saw the printed version of the last News-Letter issued with an incorrect date. It should of course been September 2019.

Tony Renahan: We have to report the sad news that ex-Irish Rail steam driver Tony died on Monday 18th November.

Tony was the first of the new generation of drivers to qualify on our locomotives after the steam era had finished.

An excellent article by Joe Cassells on Tony's railway career was given in 2009's "Top Link" railtour brochure. It is available to read from the Publications menu in the Members section of the website.

Galleries: A number of galleries in the Members area of the website have been created or updated:

"Various (2010-2019)"
"Whitehead Weekends (2019)"
"No.171's Overhaul (2019)"
"Locomotive 105"
"Harvey On The Ballast - 2"

Sales News: The new 64-page guide to our museum and the work of our Society has a multitude of pictures, in both colour and black and white, to give our visitors a flavour of all that our railway museum, railway works and 'Museum on the Move' has to offer.

Printed on large landscape-format pages (10½ by 8½ inches / 270 by 210mm), many of the pictures are printed full-page for maximum impact.

The Guide includes a labelled map of our station, works, sheds and track layout at Whitehead Excursion station as well as an artist's perspective aerial view of the site from signal box to carriage shed.

The Guide includes lots of information on how to get in touch - and keep in touch - with the Society, the facilities we offer. And, for those suitably inspired by the Guide, how to volunteer for the myriad of jobs that need to be done to keep the show on the road.

The Guide is aimed at our visitors but, at only £5 or €5, every railway bookshelf should have one! Get one today and recommend it to your friends.

Available from the Shop.

Five Foot Three: The Editor says it is time again to appeal to possible contributors for historical articles on the company steam era or on Society topics the consider of interest.

Anyone with any thoughts can contact the usual address.

The Editor is grateful for the contributions made to last year's edition which did not get published on that occasion; he will use them in due course and indeed could readily make a couple more editions without even appealing this time.

One thing the Editor particularly wondered about as No.131 ratcheted up 'firsts' on the NCC last year ... did locomotives really stay fairly rigidly on their home systems during World War II or did it tend to be whichever engine started a journey on a troop or war materials train which was destined for another company's system tended to run through for expediency, saving on engines lingering at places such as Antrim or Cookstown?

One earlier edition of FFT details a GNR engine running through Maysfield and far down the BCDR mainline on a war materials train; are there any more stories like that?

Personnel News: Members will be interested to learn of the following developments.

- Long-serving HEI employee Jim Adams has been appointed as HEI Foreman at Whitehead.
- Ivan McAteer, who had stepped down earlier this year as General Manager of HEI, the RPSI's engineering subsidiary, has been appointed to the part-time role of Technical Manager with RPSI.
- Our Edwardian Tea Room chef Martin Black has taken up a new opportunity at the Dunadry Hotel. In the meantime

we are offering a more limited menu of soup and stew at lunchtimes.

- Rebecca Laverty has reduced her hours and assumed responsibility for Education and Outreach on a part-time basis.
- Zoë Latimer has been appointed to the full-time post of RPSI Events and Marketing Officer.
- Our Treasurer Seán Clancy recently stood down from the post because of the pressure of work and personal commitments. He will remain involved as a volunteer in Dublin and we thank him and wish him good luck.

We are pleased that the post has not remained vacant and we are grateful to Ian Eagleson for stepping in. He has been co-opted to the Board to act as Treasurer.

Ian is a chartered accountant with over 30 years business experience gained in private practice, industry and the public sector. The son of a County Down farming family, after attending school in Comber and Belfast Ian studied at QUB. After graduating he joined KPMG Chartered Accountants. Following KPMG he took up the post of Group Financial Controller at Boxmore PLC an international packaging company. A number of other senior finance roles followed before Ian was appointed as Director of Support Services at Carrickfergus Borough Council.

Ordinary Love At Whitehead: A Hollywood movie which used Whitehead Excursion Station as one of its filming locations went on general release on Thursday 5th December.

It is "Ordinary Love", starring Liam Neeson and Lesley Manville, both of whom were on site at Whitehead in July 2018 for the filming sequences.

Memo From The General Manager: In order to give some recognition to the work of our volunteers, I am organising an awards ceremony in February. Further details about this event will be distributed in due course. In the meantime, I am asking all of our Members to nominate individuals who they think have really 'stepped up to the plate' in the following categories:

- Volunteer Of The Year (North)
- Volunteer Of The Year (South)
- Young Volunteer Of The Year (North)
- Young Volunteer Of The Year (South)
- Volunteer Team Of The Year
- New Volunteer Of The Year
- Fundraiser Of The Year
- Lifetime Achievement

In regard to the Young Volunteer, we would be asking for nominations of volunteers under the age of 25. The new volunteer should be someone who began volunteering in 2019.

Once all nominations have been received, I will be drawing up a short list which will be sent out to all members to vote on. The results will then be guarded safely until the awards ceremony when all will be revealed.

Please send your nominations to me at Whitehead as soon as possible.

Many thanks in helping the Society to recognise the efforts of all our volunteers. Looking forward to your nominations!

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