



June 2020

# NEWS LETTER

## LOCKDOWN TIMETABLE

**11<sup>th</sup> March:** With the Covid-19 pandemic getting increased publicity, and with the usual audience being of a certain age, the decision was taken to cancel that evening's meeting in Orange field, Belfast.

Hopefully, "Graham Hoare's Irish Railway Photographs" will be held at a later date.

**14<sup>th</sup> March:** The Steam Saturday went ahead. As was expected, not helped by the wet weather, there were no great crowds attending.

With the exception of the January and February Belfast meetings, this has been the only public event of the year to date.

**17<sup>th</sup> March: Statement from the Chairman:** In view of the current concern about the spread of Coronavirus and the directions given both by the UK and Irish Governments, the RPSI has taken a decision to cancel all its trains and events and to close the Whitehead Railway Museum and its Edwardian Tearoom to visitors until further notice.

We trust that you will understand this decision and continue to support the Society in the meantime as we, like other charities and businesses, will find this a very challenging time.

**18<sup>th</sup> March:** To add some relief for members, Paul McCann requested help with creating a more comprehensive photographic record of past tours. A

number of members responded with some fantastic photos going back to the late 1960s. The task of making these available on the Members area of the website is still ongoing.

More input from members would be welcomed.

**24<sup>th</sup> March: General Manager:** Having regard to the accelerating advice from the government and having met with the Board, we have taken the decision, with immediate effect, to close the facility at Whitehead.

I am contactable at all times by phone - 0795 128 6911.

**1<sup>st</sup> April:** From this date Museum and HEI staff were furloughed until further notice.

**9<sup>th</sup> April: General Manager:** I can confirm that, because of the virus crisis, the National Lottery Heritage Fund has agreed to release our final funding, even though we haven't quite completed our key approved purposes.

In essence, this means that, although we have more work to do to complete our side of the bargain when we are in a position to, the funders are content that we have made enough progress to be able to release the last and most substantial piece of funding. This allows us to 'breathe' for a considerable period of time, most important when we are unable to garner any income.

**10<sup>th</sup> April:** Marsh, our insurance brokers, produced a set of activities to help get through the boredom of lockdown.

(1)

This was soon followed by a drawing book by Charles Friel based on "Steam Trains of the British Isles" which Platignum published in early 1974 in collaboration with the ARPS. The four RPSI subjects, based on black and white prints from Charles, were scanned and cleaned up and made available with copies of the original subjects to help with colouring.

These, and a further May Day pack by Marsh, are available from the Lockdown Activities menu on the website.

**13<sup>th</sup> May: General Manager:** Today I sent volunteers out some questions to answer so that we can begin to consider what we look like and how many people we will have on the ground as we move forward. On the back of these questions, I would like to throw out a few additional questions to all members:

- Have you ever volunteered?
- Would you consider volunteering when we can ensure safe working practices?
- If you would like to volunteer, what would you be interested in doing?
- Do you know of anyone that would consider volunteering (members could be excellent foot soldiers and asking just 5 friends/family could make a real difference to future numbers and membership)?

**15<sup>th</sup> May: General Manager:** As part of getting ready for return we have been giving a lot of thought to protective clothing and sanitising. I have completed and submitted an application to get £1,000 assistance to buy masks, gloves, a new hand sanitising station and hand sanitiser. I got confirmation today that the application was successful so we can start to purchase what we need. I am exceptionally grateful, on behalf of the Society, to mid and East Antrim Council for their support.

**21<sup>st</sup> May: General Manager:** I got a call from our support worker in NHLF. I had submitted a detailed application form a few weeks ago to try to recoup 4 months' salary costs for Ivan McAtee and me, and for purchase of an access management system.

We got all the money applied for and a little more as the figure was rounded up. So, to date, our funders have given us our last 10% grant, an additional £19,500, and Council has granted us £1,000. This amounts to just short of £190,000 and without this money we would have been in a much more precarious position. We owe a debt of gratitude to both organisations.

**2<sup>nd</sup> June:** The Board agreed a Whitehead Re-Opening Roadmap document which attempts to break down the reopening process for Whitehead into a set of phased steps, each with milestones needing to be met before the Board would sign off on the next phase. It would also be dependent on political and medical decisions made by local NI legislators.

The document is available to view in the News area in the Members section of the website.

We are currently concentrating on Phase 1 and all of the actions that are necessary. This includes ordering cleaning products and PPE, organising online training, developing one way systems, providing additional hand washing stations, developing a volunteer induction booklet, and organising any necessary PAT testing and fire safety measures which have lapsed during our enforced isolation. That is not exhaustive but gives you a flavour of what it takes to only begin to think about opening tentatively and only for a small number of volunteers who will be permitted back into the workshops solely to complete agreed priority tasks.

**Secretary's Note:** Firstly, at the time of writing, it is planned to print this News-Letter at home as our normal printer is locked down, so the quality may not be great.

Secondly, if you have access to email and have not yet joined up for our email Bulletins then it is recommended you do so. The Bulletin has proved marvellously effective in keeping more than 700 of our members in touch over the last few months.

(2)

There have been one or two updates per week from the General Manager, about half a dozen quizzes, comments and reminiscences from a number of members and notifications of website gallery updates.

If you do wish to get involved then simply send an email to [rpsitrains@hotmail.com](mailto:rpsitrains@hotmail.com).

Thirdly, the rest of this News-Letter is based on pre-lockdown events and should be read as such.

Fourthly, if you are in a position to do so, please consider making a donation to help the Society weather this 'storm'. The grants previously referred to will not last long when wages and fixed costs are paid for. For instance, our annual insurance is over £70,000 - and there is no lockdown rebate!

There is an APPEALS/DONATE menu item on the website through which donations may be made. Thank you.

## CARRIAGE & WAGON

**Whitehead:** On the evening of Friday 21<sup>st</sup> February Mark Walsh and Phillip Newell put a whole stack of seats back into Mk2 300.

On the Saturday, Phillip and Paul Newell, along with Joe Cassells and Alan McKnight, blitzed the seat frames in coach 302. James Friel gave them a hand for an hour in the afternoon, and Adam Logoff joined in to help screw the seats together (i.e. back to back) on the Sunday.

It's warm, dry and sociable work. Please consider giving Phillip a hand as soon as we can get the work started again.

## WHITEHEAD RAILWAY MUSEUM

**WRM Guidebook Launch:** The recently-published souvenir guidebook to Whitehead Railway Museum has been officially launched by the Mayor of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, Councillor Maureen Morrow.

The ceremony took place in the Edwardian

Tea Room at the Museum on Thursday 20th February after which the Mayor had a whistle stop tour of two of the museum galleries.

Praising the contribution made by the RPSI's volunteers to the running of the Society, Councillor Morrow said the work being carried out at Whitehead Railway Museum was "brilliant".

The guidebook is available for purchase from the Sales pages of the website, priced at £5 a copy.

## WHITEHEAD SITE

**Shunt:** On Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> March the steam-raiser was up earlier than usual of late as there was something of a monster shunt in the offing. It had been a while since one of these was conducted and at 10:30 No.3BG "Guinness" moved off to:

- Reform a section of the Mk2 train.
- Provide a train for Train Rides on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> March.
- Put carriage 463 over the 1-Road pit for power washing.
- Shunt A-road stock into a different order for maintenance requirements.
- Put away carriage 463 and pull out No.131 for power washing.
- Pull out No.4 and position the hand-crane to remove No.4's dome to blank off the regulator for hydraulic testing ... and then put these away again.
- Pull out No.171's frames, on the Lowman wagon, from 2-Road, turn them on the turntable and position them in the wheel-drop shed so that the hoists there can be used to lift up axleboxes into the frames for examination.
- Take No.171's bogie and tender from the wheel-drop shed and put them in 2-road in place of the frames.
- Put the Carlow diesel in some extra room found in the wheel-drop shed to see if that helps the diesel squad to get it going.

An unusually sizeable squad gave No.131 a spring clean in the cab and on the exterior paintwork.

An 11-hour day for No.3BG from lighting the match to shutting up the shed.

## LOCOMOTIVES

**B142:** The locomotive has suffered a coolant leak in the engine, and has been withdrawn until investigations and repairs can be carried out.

**105 Project:** In mid-March the first cylinder block casting was made. A photograph in the locomotive's gallery shows it literally "hot out of the mould" and not yet shot blasted or fettled up when the photo was taken.

It is sitting on its end but the main cylinder bore and the valve chest are visible, also the steam and exhaust pipe connections which branch out from the side that bolts onto the frame of the loco. The two openings next to the camera are where the compression valves and drain cocks are connected.

One good piece of design is that both the right-hand and left-hand cylinder blocks are identical so only one pattern is required.

The next stage for the cylinder blocks is machining and fitting of valve liners.

Unfortunately, further progress must await a return to normal after the current lockdown.

## GENERAL

**Treasurer:** In early April, our recently appointed Treasurer, Ian Eagleson, advised us that he had been unexpectedly headhunted to carry out a major full time job which meant he wouldn't be able to give the RPSI the attention it required.

However, he approached a colleague to see if he would be interested in taking on the role he has had to vacate.

As a result of this the Board has co-opted Graham Coulter as our Treasurer. Graham

is a chartered accountant and currently Finance Director of the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Council.

**Loss:** Sadly, we have to relay news of the passing of two Society volunteers.

Robin Mowbray from Banbridge sat on various RPSI committees and was a tour guide for the Museum

Billy Walters from Dublin served as a steward and appeared as a catering assistant on the Dublin and Whitehead operations.

To their families and friends our sincere condolences.

**Industrial Heritage Week:** Had it not been for the Covid-19 pandemic, the week of 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> June would have been Industrial Heritage Week at Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. Sadly the restrictions meant it was impossible for the various centres to put on special events to mark the occasion.

The event has gone virtual and the Society is pleased to be part of this. We have posted a video of work behind the scenes at Whitehead.

The film is a short clip of the fitting of new tyres to the wheels of No.4 and shows a 4 tonne wheelset being gently lowered into the new tyre. This was a major job which took place over a six-month period in 2019.

We are grateful to Bob Single for making this film available. And also to the volunteers who feature in the footage - Brian Hill, Mervyn Fleming, Jeff Spencer and Stephen Peacocke.

It is available on the Society's YouTube channel, and it is linked on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

## EDITORIAL ADDRESS

**148 Church Road, Newtownabbey,**

**Co. Antrim, BT36 6HJ.**

Company Registration: NI010798

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

**[www.steamtrainsireland.com](http://www.steamtrainsireland.com)**

**[rpsitrains@hotmail.com](mailto:rpsitrains@hotmail.com)**