



June 2021

NEWS LETTER

LOCKDOWN TIMETABLE

2nd March: *General Manager:* The wheels keep turning (metaphorically) as we hopefully move towards restrictions being eased. This week saw the return to site of the HEI staff. The return of any staff or volunteers to site will be, as was the case last year, strictly controlled and limited to tasks that are necessary. We continue to monitor closely both government regulations and our internal risk assessments to ensure that we are doing our utmost to protect all who attend site.

Rebecca Laverty has been taken off furlough and is mostly working from home. Rebecca is working to complete a volunteer pack which will be given to all volunteers when they are permitted to return.

We have had a little more success with funding applications. An enormous debt of gratitude is due to the Heritage Recovery Fund which awarded us £167,300 for some fixed costs (staff and insurance), crew training, and digital outputs. This is an enormous amount of money and I can't begin to explain how much it will help as we continue to make no money. Also secured is just under £5,000 from the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Fund for necessary Covid expenditure - cleaning products,

sanitising stations and the like.

22nd March: *General Manager:* In terms of our own operations, it is simply too soon to be sure of anything, but 1st April could well see the beginning of a cautious easing of restrictions. What I am sure of is the need to be ready to operate when the time comes. We are confident that all necessary works to engines will be complete but there is still a body of work to be attended to on carriages. That being the case, and as we move towards easements which may permit volunteers to return more frequently, I am asking for any members who might be willing to assist with carriage work to contact me. This is not a request to return to site right now and I would emphasise that only essential tasks should be undertaken on site for the foreseeable future, e.g. necessary stock movements. Rather, expressions of interest come to me so that we can mobilise when permitted. With your help, I am sure that we can be in a position to have our Mark IIs out on the track where they belong.

20th April: *General Manager:* On 23rd April, outdoor attractions will be permitted to reopen. Having sought guidance from Tourism NI and Council, we would not be considered outdoors, even simply operating train rides, so this date does not relate to us.

On 30th April, we will be permitted to

serve food from our café on the platform. Social distancing of 2m and only up to 6 people from 2 households will be permitted to enjoy an al fresco experience.

Moving on to 24th May and museums are permitted to reopen. Last year we were cautious about reopening and we were right to be. This year is no different although we are much more comfortable with what we need to do, how we need to be led by risk assessments, and the level of signage and opportunities to sanitise and hand wash that we should be expecting from our staff, volunteers and customers. All that being the case, we are hopeful that we will be in a position to operate from the end of May.

28th April: The Platform 3 café welcomed guests to its new outdoor seating area on the platform.

The outdoor seating area is complete with plenty of picnic benches and gazebos, perfect for soaking up the Spring sunshine.

8th May: *General Manager:* If nothing changes, we will resume Steam Saturdays on 29th May for three days. The operation of anything on site will be guided by the now, very useful, risk assessments.

Following train rides at the platform, we will open the museum to the public on 3rd June. As before, customers will be asked to book in advance online and choose time slots which will be for bubbles of up to six people from two households. This worked well when we were permitted to operate last year and now we have more confidence that the system works well and our visitors will see and feel confident with all of the measures that we have put in place.

As some of you will know, our Technical Operations Manager, Ivan McAteer, is leaving us shortly. I can't announce strongly enough how much he will be missed and, on a personal level, how

much he has supported not just the organisation but me over the last challenging year. The Board has agreed to replacement of his Technical Operations Engineer post. *[Our congratulations to James Friel, known to many of you, who was appointed in early June. - Ed.]*

26th May: *General Manager:* Even if you don't fancy a train ride, why not come to Whitehead and have a coffee and a bite to eat. This week sees us permitted to serve food inside and we also have our substantial outside area if the weather is kind.

TRAINS & EVENTS

Steam Whitehead: Public trains in 2021 started off with a glorious day (Saturday 29th May).

No.131 performed well, although there was a little spot of bother with injectors. Coach 68 has been fitted with a new bluetooth PA system which worked well once the various controls were mastered. This was useful to inform passengers about the COVID regulations and a little history on the loco and coach. Also useful to advertise the Museum and the free rides to Carrickfergus on a vintage bus. It was interesting to note that a number of passengers were visiting us for the first time. The Platform 3 café was kept busy as were the train marshals.

A camera team from Storify My Business, funded by Mid & East Antrim, were filming over the weekend. All went well and they got some great footage.

There was also a guest appearance by NI Railways steam driver Noel Playfair who drove one of the train rides. He had parked his own train at Whitehead NIR and came along to get a slice of steam action, his first driving turn on steam since December 2019!

It is planned to operate further on Saturdays (and Fathers' Day) in June, with

Saturdays and Sundays in July and August.

Mainline: At present, there are no confirmed dates for a return to the main line. However, it should be noted that crew refresher/re-assessment operations will probably be required in advance.

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

YOUR SOCIETY NEEDS YOU + FRIENDS!

This is a request for help because of good news! As you will know our Railway Museum at Whitehead has now reopened with all due Covid precautions in place and so we can once again enjoy the presence of visitors to our site. In addition, we are running steam train rides on Saturdays. I'm delighted to report that the response has been excellent and we are expecting a busy summer.

This is where the appeal comes in. We really do need more volunteers to act as coach stewards, carriage sprayers, ticket sellers, tour guides or simply willing general 'gofers'. It's all good craic and a great way to get to know people. You don't even need to be a railway enthusiast so you could happily ask your friends, male or female, to join you. Even if you can't help yourself, you may know someone you think would enjoy helping in this way, if so, please suggest it to them. No experience is necessary but it helps if you like people including members of the public! Any necessary training will be given and the Society will arrange for the necessary clearance through Access NI.

Please do think about doing this - we really do need more helpers when the Museum is open thanks to the great response we are having. To volunteer in this way or to get more details, then please visit our website or contact Rebecca, our Education Officer - she will be delighted to hear from you.

John McKegney

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LOCOMOTIVES

No.85 "Merlin": The locomotive was in steam in Dublin on Sunday 13th June for its annual steam test.

No.105: On Sunday 25th April the frames were lifted into the upright position, and placed in temporary stands on two works trolleys.

The front buffer beam has also been attached, together with temporary cross ties to hold the frame in position.

Although far from complete, at least the frame plates and buffer beam are beginning to look a little more like a locomotive!

A small but significant move was made on Sunday 2nd May when the main frames were shunted from the Dunleath workshop into the rear yard for blast cleaning and priming.

This is the first time that the locomotive has moved, albeit for only 50 yards and on two trolleys rather than on its own wheels!

Our official Society appeal is currently directed at No.171. However, some members have asked if they can help fund No.105. The answer is - yes!

Donate links have been added to the locomotive's webpage. Simply select your currency and write "105 Fund" in the Add A Note box.

No.131: The locomotive was in steam at Whitehead on Thursday 13th May for its annual steam test. It operated the first weekend of train rides.

No.171 "Slieve Gullion": The start of Spring saw the launch of our 171 Spring Appeal. Following the success of the appeal for tubes for the locomotive, this was a follow-up stand-alone appeal which alerted members to the fact that, on average, each component of a spring (most of which are the leaves) costs £100

to manufacture. There are 66 components in total in 6 springs. Therefore £25 buys a quarter leaf, £50 buys half a leaf and £100 buys a whole leaf. This was a great success, with the target being met as Spring turned to Summer in early June.

Contract: On 2nd May, Donegal 3ft gauge locomotive No.5 "Drumboe" was shunted into the workshop. This is a contract job for the Donegal Railway Heritage Centre, which includes renewing the cab and coal bunker, together with reassembly of the locomotive for display purposes. All work is being carried out to eventual operational standards, but much remains to be done (mainly extensive repairs to the boiler).

BELFAST MEETINGS

10th March: Michael McMahon gave an interesting presentation on subject of his recent co-authored book "Locomotives of the GS&WR" to an audience of 134.

Broken into the main chapters of tender locomotives, goods locomotives and tank locomotives, the book uses a locomotive classification devised by Irish railway historian R.N. Clements.

Michael succeeded in illustrating most, if not all, of the locomotive types from the reign of the GS&WR (1844-1924), plus some from the minor lines taken over during that period. The WL&WR will have to wait for another time!

Next: The meeting season is over until October. Suggestions for topics are welcome as always.

GENERAL

Board: To add experience to the Board, members Mark Bailey and Sue Harpur were co-opted shortly after the AGM in February.

Unfortunately, subsequent to that,

Michael Guest had to stand down for family reasons. Our thanks to him for his help over the last couple of years.

B134 Models: The last of the remaining models were sold in late February.

A huge thank you to all those who organised and supported the RPSI in this venture. The project has brought in vital income at a time when all our normal operations had come to a halt, along with the associated income - approximately €27,000, staggering in current times.

This project would not have been possible without the generous assistance from Paddy Murphy of Murphy Models with the production and supply of the models. Also the team at IRM who volunteered their assistance with the hosting of sales, dealing with orders and dispatching the models to customers.

The success of these models along with the previously released Cravens gives plenty to consider regarding possible future releases. A number of options are under consideration and hopefully it won't be too long before we can announce the next project.

Website: The Gallery and Collection pages get regular updates so it is worth having regular dips into the Members Area for interesting new items.

Sales News: A new book has been added to the Shop pages:

"How Railway Workers and Dockers Defied an Empire - The Irish Munitions Embargo of 1920", Peter Rigney, paperback 15 x 21cm, 10 illustrations, 1 table, 1 map, 58 pages, £5/€6.

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