



September 2021

# NEWS LETTER

## TRAINS & EVENTS

**Steam Whitehead:** The afternoon train rides at Whitehead continued on Saturdays throughout June, July and August, plus Fathers' Day in June and the three days of the August Bank Holiday weekend.

The mode of operation in these uncertain times has been for visitors to book a particular time slot for a compartment in LMS NCC 68. This coach is unique in that it has two half compartments as well as six normal 6-seaters so it can be marketed on the basis of booking up to three seats or six, allowing a degree of flexibility.

At the start of the season the carriage was turned so that its compartment doors were on the platform side, meaning passengers never had to mix in the corridor. Between trips, our platform volunteers sanitised each compartment.

The whole procedure worked very well, and the public seemed to appreciate the effort. Proceedings were helped very much by dry weather for the most part, so there was rarely any need for passengers to congregate inside the station, the platform area being furnished with a covered area and liberally supplied with picnic tables. The Platform 3 café, as a consequence, did a roaring trade.

Originally the time slots were from 11am until 4pm, every 30 minutes. However, following the experience of the first month or so, it was decided to stop running after the 3pm train as there seemed to be very little demand at that time of the afternoon. Occasionally, an extra influx of people arrived and trains were run ad

hoc.

No.3BG "Guinness" was the motive power throughout, except for the first weekend at the end of May and on 17<sup>th</sup> July, the latter date being arranged for a film charter.

Further trains are planned for 11<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> September. In preparation for a return to mainline running it is planned to operate these trains with a Mk2 carriage and accept bookings on the basis of tables rather than compartments.

**European Heritage Open Day:** On 11<sup>th</sup> September, the Museum, like other similar sites of heritage interest throughout the country, will be open for free.

## GENERAL MANAGER'S DIARY

**9<sup>th</sup> July:** We have now entered our third month of post-lockdown operations and the new 'normal' environment is beginning to unfold. Our opening weekend was slow to begin with but, by the Bank Holiday Monday in May, we were busy and very well managed. Most customers were booking online, which can be done by visiting our website, which also includes phone booking details, but we also had a number of walk-ins attracted by the sounds and commotion of an operating steam engine.

A lot of visitors heard about us through our social media channels as well as by searching for things to do on our various partner websites such as DiscoverNI and Visit Belfast. Many also came as a result of recommendations which I was particularly pleased to hear. Perhaps a little surprisingly, we have not just had Northern Irish visitors.

Last Friday at the Museum, we had visitors from Japan, Falkirk, Cork, Drogheda, and Donegal, as well as a group from Ballymena. The previous Friday we had over 30 visitors from the Vintage Motorbike Club of Ireland - they certainly made themselves heard and came from all parts of the UK and Ireland.

It is with regret that I have to inform you that our Marketing and Events Manager, Zoe Latimer, has resigned for personal reasons. This has created a bit of a void in relation to marketing but plans are in place to address this in the short term. On a happier note, I am delighted to welcome a new employee into the organisation; as of last Monday James Friel took up post as Technical Operations Engineer and has already made a huge difference.

**17<sup>th</sup> August:** Talk of mainline running has been at the top of the agenda of late. It is now looking like we will be conducting all testing and competency assessments towards the end of September or early October, which should mean that mainline running could be possible by the end of October. I had hoped for earlier but it was not to be due to a variety of reasons. Perhaps it is for the best as we work out how to appropriately load and steward, as well as what we are going to offer.

In the meantime, the "Steam Whitehead" trains have been a roaring success thanks in no small measure to the volunteers who have been making them happen. The May Bank Holiday was the start, and we have been operating ever since. Last weekend we completely sold out the train rides and had over 130 visitors through the museum - an absolute triumph.

On 7<sup>th</sup> August we invited Pauline Poots to visit with some members of her family. Her husband Nelson had been at the heart of our operations for such a long time and I know that his passing last summer is still keenly felt around the site. His RPSI friends had a whip round for the family and they were treated to afternoon tea and a walkabout. Although I wasn't here on the day I know that Pauline and the family really enjoyed their afternoon, so thanks to all who made it so special.

We are planning a number of events for September now that restrictions are lifting so look out for more details.

## LOCOMOTIVES

**No.3BG "Guinness":** The locomotive has been having a busy summer, running train rides and shunting carriages. Usually, the big engines bring in the money but this year, with regular and well-filled train rides, our smallest engine has been earning its keep.

The locomotive was due its annual boiler examination at the end of August. To keep her time out of traffic to a minimum, the cold boiler exam was arranged for Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> August and the hot exam on the Friday. So, following the Train Rides of Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> August, No.3BG was withdrawn from traffic.

On Sunday, the boiler was drained, with the water still warm from Saturday's train rides.

On Monday the engine was stripped down, with all washout plugs, mud doors, safety valves, and water gauges dismantled. The boiler was washed out using the powerful Honda water pump, purchased in 2019, a process which it turned out the boiler treatment trials also greatly aided. There was no congealed mud despite the loco having likely been worked harder and with more days in steam since its last exam than it has possibly ever had in a previous year at Whitehead (no diesel available to carry out shunting, remember).

On Tuesday the parts were cleaned up.

On Wednesday the boiler inspector made a thorough examination of the boiler and, on his approval, it was reassembled.

On Thursday the locomotive was steamed and the safety valves set.

On Friday the inspector returned to witness the correct operation of the safety valves, injectors, and all other relevant parts of the boiler. He was satisfied with what he saw, and No.3BG is good to go for another year of shunting, crew training and train rides.

And so, the little loco resumed a weekend of Train Rides on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> August.

Not a bad week for the new Engineer, who very readily managed to persuade a few other key members of the operating roster to go and assist him in tending to what is, after all, their

engine. This is what we're after!

**No.5 "Drumboe":** This is an outside contract on behalf of the Donegal Railway Heritage Centre.

On Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> August the locomotives boiler was returned to its frames. Most of the contracted repair work is now complete - this includes new cab and bunker as well as boiler cladding and other essential work.

The cab, bunker, pony truck and bogie were refitted fitted a week later, followed by buffing gear and chains.

The present phase is to make the locomotive presentable for static display and it looks well in its newly-applied paintwork. All work has been completed to eventual operational standards.

The loco is shortly to return to the Donegal Railway Heritage Centre (at the former Donegal town station) for display.

**No.131:** On Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> June, the locomotive was quietly steamed so that the brake test section of its annual inspection could be performed. With a bit of minor trouble-shooting here and there, everything went satisfactorily.

**No.171 "Sieve Gullion":** Work will recommence in earnest once CDR No.5 returns to Donegal.

**B134:** At Inchicore Works in Dublin work on the restoration of this locomotive recommenced during the summer months and excellent progress has been made. The volunteer project manager, Gerry Mooney, has been giving full accounts for the Members Area of the website, but in summary work has included mostly bodywork and cab fitting.

Also, investigation into the exact livery the locomotive carried when new has been completed and paint ordered. The main colour of the locomotive is neither grey nor silver as some would suggest. There is a distinctive light blue running through it and the yellow is not as bright as some photographs would suggest. It is hard to use colour photographs from the period when these locomotives were in this livery as colour rendition and retention in film is nothing like what it is today with modern cameras.

**Coal:** In late July Whitehead had its first coal delivery since December 2019 as (mainly) No.3BG, burning in the order of 200-250kg per typical day, has finally worked its way through that 20 tonnes in something of an 'engine vs food' saga. That coal normally would have supplied the first significant period of the 2020 running season.

The new delivery was 13 tonnes of coal from Dublin, which had also stocked up in December 2019 only to have had no requirement whatsoever!

## CARRIAGE & WAGON

**Ivan:** In July, an unfortunate pre-trip inspection failure of brake van 81 led to its substitution on train ride duties by Dutch Van 462 until such time as repairs can be affected.

The said 462 is substantially less aesthetically pleasing than 81 so it has been kept to the Belfast end of the consist, where the engine normally goes.

This displaced No.3BG to the Larne end of the train and so it was decided to turn her to face Larne 'for the cameras'. No.3BG facing Larne is something of a once-in-a-blue-moon event, and no-doubt she will revert back after the train rides season.

**On Loan:** The Society's BR generator van 3173 is on loan to Irish Rail to work with their permanent way team.

It was transferred to Portlaoise yard on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> August behind Irish Rail locomotive 082, in preparation for use on the Sperry workings in the coming weeks.

## WHITEHEAD SITE

**Shunting School:** No.3BG was in action on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> July for a training session run by Dermot Mackie.

This involved five prospective shunters conducting moves about the yard which included the Train Rides train, 68 and 81, along with making and undoing of buckeye couplings between coaches 300 and 463.

Following their practical instruction and practice, the candidates undertook their

written theory exam and Lisa Adair, Rebecca Laverty, Rachel Harris, Alan McKnight and Nathan Lawrence were duly passed out as shunters.

After the training duty, No.3BG carried out the quarterly moves of the Mk2 stock, then turned carriages 303 and 463 on the turntable to permit works access from the shed aisle to the sides of them which had been against the carriage shed wall.

**Plant News:** Site Officer Dermot Mackie reports that the Atlas, JCB and Forklift all passed their annual insurance inspection at Whitehead on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> August.

The inspector was pleasantly surprised at the integrity of all the machines considering their vintage years. Normally he checks out much younger machines with many bells and whistles.

He called them Golden Oldies!

## GENERAL

**Top Museum:** Whitehead Railway Museum has been selected as one of the top museums in the UK by influential GB-based educational website twinkl.

The entry features information on the RPSI's coach 68 plus the Society's involvement in the Mid & East Antrim Council's "Shaped by Industry and Shared with Pride" initiative in 2019.

**Local Treasures:** Independent film-maker Lawrence Eagling of Swimming Head Productions visited Whitehead Railway Museum on 10<sup>th</sup> June and again on 12<sup>th</sup> June in order to make a short video about the museum, our collection and the steam train rides.

The result is a lively eight-minute video which features interviews with museum curator Mark Kennedy and No.3BG fireman Jonathan Clinton.

The video may be viewed on the Society's YouTube channel.

**Online Shop:** It has come to our attention that some members, surprisingly, are not aware of the facility to purchase items from the Society's shop online.

The Shop has been a great success since it became fully operational last November. Payments, in Sterling or Euro, are made securely by debit or credit card and customers clearly appreciate how easy it is to use the system.

Undoubtedly, lockdown has been a factor in boosting sales as the system is ideal for the housebound! Sales on one day in December 2020 exceeded sales for the whole of 2019.

Orders have been received from countries in Europe, plus USA and Australia. However, the previous payment system of writing and posting a cheque has been retained for those who prefer to use it, and the sales order form can be printed off from the Members Area.

No matter what your preferred payment method is, why not log on and browse through what is available?

**Help Request:** The Curatorial team are looking for video footage of the Royal Train (provided by the RPSI) which ran between Coleraine and Bellarena on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2016, for possible use at Whitehead Railway Museum.

If you have any which you are willing to let us use, no matter how short in duration, please contact Ian Sinclair.

**Love Your Railway:** Whitehead Railway Museum joined kindred organisations from across the UK in a nationwide campaign to raise awareness of the role played by heritage railways.

Spearheaded by the North Yorkshire Moors Railway (NYMR), Love Your Railway was a six-week summer campaign which kicked off on 26<sup>th</sup> July and ran through to early September.

**W.T. Scott:** Bill Scott, a founder member of the Society and a volunteer for many years, passed away on 24<sup>th</sup> July. A touching tribute by Joe Cassells was included in our email Bulletin, and a copy can be provided on request.

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