

November 2021

# NEWS LETTER

## TRAINS & EVENTS

**European Heritage Open Day:** On Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> September, while there was a constant flow of visitors (all Museum slots were booked) the train rides were not as well patronised as recent summer Saturdays. Most people were on a mission to visit other free attractions, so had a quick Museum tour then off to the next venue.

No.3BG was the motive power but the carriage was an open Mk2 instead of the heritage compartment carriage, 68, used during the summer, a test to see how passengers could be organised for mainline trains again. All seemed to work well!

**Family Fun Day:** Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> September was the public launch of the Museum's newest exhibit - a fully restored wagon dating from 1911, the GNR(I) Guinness gran van 504.

The plaque unveiling was carried out by Councillor William McCaughey, the Mayor of Mid and East Antrim Borough. Also present was Olive Hill, a board member of National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Appropriately, the locomotive on duty for the ceremony was the Society's own No.3BG "Guinness", which was presented by Guinness Brewery to the RPSI in 1965.

No.3BG operated train rides for visitors and on a sunny afternoon the buzz was enhanced by an open-air concert by 1<sup>st</sup> Old Boys Brass Band from Belfast.

**Return To The Mainline:** On Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> October, steam made a welcome return to the main line in Ireland. At about 14:15, No.131 and her train of 5 Mk2 carriages passed the catch points and signal CL560 that connects the RPSI sidings to the main line.

The purpose of the day's operations was to carry out some engineering checks on bearings that had not moved any real distance in the last 21 months, and to reassess the competency of our main line steam crew.

A lot of behind-the-scenes work led up to the seemingly routine departure from Whitehead Excursion station, both on the NI Railways and RPSI sides. The Locomotive and Carriage and Wagon departments had prepared the rolling stock and worked

with NI Railways to gain a "Network Compatibility Certificate", certifying the vehicles as safe and suitable to operate on their metals.

A Traction Inspector and Guard's Assessor from West Coast Railways in Carnforth had travelled over for the day to reassess the footplate crew and guards respectively.

A briefing was held on the platform before the train departed, and with all crew clear on their roles and responsibilities, the rain off and the sky clearing, the train left for Carrickfergus.

The Larne line was closed to passenger traffic for the weekend, the main reason being the removal of an overbridge near Whiteabbey. This meant that No.131 and her train was the only one out on the line.

On arrival at Carrickfergus, bearing temperatures were checked and noted before No.131 left light engine for the emergency crossover at Greenisland. Some nuance of the signalling at the crossovers at Carrickfergus station precluded using these to run round.

The train then ran to Magheramorne Loop, before returning to Carrickfergus and then Whitehead Excursion station. We think this may be the first time No.131, and quite possibly any Qs locomotive, had been beyond Whitehead on the Larne line - unless you know differently!

Water was taken at Whitehead Excursion and in the light of an autumnal sunset, the train left for Carrickfergus to do the same again. On the return from Magheramorne

Loop, the train pulled into the Up platform at Whitehead and then propelled into Whitehead Excursion station.

By 22:00, the engine and carriages were back in their sheds and the day was complete.

**Wizard's Express:** The public return to the mainline got off to a mixed start - to say the least.

The two return trips on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October ran well, with good crowds on board, mostly in seasonal costumes.

However, on Sunday, when the first train from Belfast reached Whitehead an issue arose with the central door locking. As this could not be sorted before departure time, the train had to be declared a failure. Passengers were escorted to the Translink station to take a service train back to Belfast. The second train of the day was a special CAF (3014) provided by Translink for those who wished to travel to Whitehead anyway.

A very unfortunate day, especially as there were a lot of disappointed passengers - and refunds had to be made.

**Santa Specials:** Unfortunately, all the required elements to make a successful season could not be put in place for the Dublin trains. For the same reason, we cannot run trains from Portadown either.

However, Belfast trains are feasible because we have our own premises at Whitehead. We are able to ask Santa to meet our visitors there, meaning the train can be kept free from close contact mingling that would

otherwise be the case with Santa visiting children at their seats.

We have enough platform space to ensure that as much as possible of the experience can be held outdoors and hence more risk-free. Also, we have excellent catering facilities, plus toilets, which do not then need to be on the train, removing more risks.

That being the case, tickets went on sale on 11<sup>th</sup> November - still available at the time of writing.

**2022 Programme:** We are planning to run as full a programme of trains as possible in the coming year, including the annual railtour in May which has been provisionally arranged for 12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> May.

## LOCOMOTIVES

**No.5 "Drumboe":** The locomotive was moved out of the Workshop and into the yard on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> September to check that all was well for its planned move back to Donegal.

The locomotive has been reassembled with new cab and bunker, boiler cladding, dome cover, etc., which have all been made recently, together with the side tanks, chimney and parts of the motion which were the subject of earlier overhaul work.

On the morning of Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> October, the engine was loaded by mobile crane onto a lorry and departed for Donegal Town.

The whistle was made operational as an added interest for several planned stops on the journey (although worked by a mobile air compressor

since the loco is not yet capable of steaming).

Drumboe has had major restoration work carried out by both HEI and RPSI volunteers, with a view to eventual return to operation. The work took place, on and off, from when the locomotive first arrived on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2006. The major work still required is overhaul of the boiler and brake system, and the provision of missing fittings.

**No.85 "Merlin":** There was a mini-appeal in the Autumn for £3,000 to secure an authentic Wakefield cylinder lubricator for the locomotive as that fitted is actually a non-authentic "Silvertown" lubricator, used because the original was missing at the time of restoration.

There are two mechanical lubricators on No.85. On the Fireman's side of the framing is the lubricator which feeds engine oil to the four driving axleboxes. On the Driver's side of the framing is the lubricator which feeds thicker, cylinder oil to the cylinders, valves and glands. Both lubricators are driven mechanically via a linkage to the motion of the engine.

The purchase price was soon raised, so thank you to all the generous donors. And, the said lubricator has now been purchased.

Although Dublin trains are unable to operate at the moment, on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> November the engine was required to be in steam for the annual boiler exam by our insurance provider. The locomotive was lit up on the Thursday evening and gradually brought to life overnight

and was ready for the inspectors when they arrived shortly after 11am. The good news is the boiler inspectors are more than happy with the boiler and all is good for her to operate once conditions in society allow.

Following the test, the opportunity was taken to shunt the locomotive back to the middle road of the shed. This allows better access around the locomotive for upkeep and maintenance when not in service.

**No.105:** After the CDR engine left for Donegal the frames were moved into the Workshop again.

Volunteers have assembled the cylinder blocks and motion brackets to both sides of the loco for a trial fit. This is to check that alignment and bolt hole positions are correct - all appears to be in order.

The frames are temporarily connected by tie bars - the next move is to provide the saddle casting (between the cylinders) and "flanged plates" which will form the permanent connection.

Note that this was just a trial - a lot more needs to be done with frame stretchers, etc., before the cylinders are finally assembled.

**B134:** Since early summer there have been regular updates on the progress of this diesel locomotive added to the Members Area of the website. If you have internet access, a read of these reports is highly recommended.

At the time of writing, the locomotive is in the Paint Shop in Inchicore having had a temporary Irish Rail 071 livery applied.

## WHITEHEAD SITE

**Workshop News:** On Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> September the Site Team laid some rail in the Dunleath Workshop. This was an extension of the existing 3ft gauge track (interlaced with 5ft 3in) to take it further into the shed. The other end of the track extends to the yard at the rear.

The job was finished off with new wooden-block flooring on what was until now bare sleeper and ballast.

**Ironworker:** Advantage was taken of the crane for "Drumboe" to lift a large ironworker onto its base behind the Workshop. The ironworker came from the railway workshops at Limerick, where it was used to shear and punch holes in heavy steel plate. It was in store inside the Dunleath Workshop where it was taking up space and also was inaccessible to visitors.

**Packing:** For some time, the A road approach to the carriage shed door has been noticeably 'hilly'. A radical vertical re-alignment involving extensive jacking of the track and packing of the sleepers over 60 feet took up two weeks of site work in October. This resulted in a more gradual approach to the shed and was used successfully on the preparations for the Halloween trains.

## BELFAST MEETINGS

**Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> October:** Charles Friel took an in-depth look at Sion Mills station on a scenic section of the GNR's Derry Road between Victoria

Bridge and Strabane.

It was a preview of a talk which Charles has yet to give to a local group in the County Tyrone town. It covered mostly Sion Mills, but got as far south as Newtownstewart and north to Derry. However, surprisingly, there was much to see in Sion Mills itself, from its (probably) bigger than necessary station house to its beautiful mill buildings, the latter served by a siding from a wagon turntable.

**Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> November:** Michael McMahon gave a fascinating talk based on a selection of photographs made available by the Transport Treasury archive for a new book, compiled by himself and Charles Friel. From all over Ireland, the views were both familiar and sometimes unfamiliar.

The book, titled "Rails Around Ireland" is expected probably in January. Look out for it on our Shop in due course.

**Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> December:** Ian Sinclair will give a talk on how the railways coped during and after the WW2 Blitz on Belfast.

## GENERAL MANAGER'S DIARY

**20<sup>th</sup> September:** It's been an incredibly busy summer with 3,676 passengers having been hauled during the season and over 1,000 visitors through our Museum.

We are delighted to be in a position where we can now generate some income, and sales from the shop have added greatly as have all efforts by

café staff. We are not out of the woods just yet but perhaps there is a glimmer of light in relation to mainline activity which would be a great relief.

To mark the end of Summer operations I wanted to personally thank the crews and 'back room' volunteers who have kept us running seamlessly throughout the season. So, I hosted a barbecue for the crews on 28<sup>th</sup> August which was attended by over 40 volunteers and HEI staff.

**12<sup>th</sup> October:** We have had very productive meetings with Translink about 2022 operations and I will keep you posted when a calendar of trains has been agreed.

The last 18 months have been difficult for everyone. Good news has been thin on the ground. So, for all of you who have been waiting so patiently, dust off your Halloween outfit, tell your family and friends and join us for what, hopefully, will be the first trip of many. Of course, we will continue to be totally compliant with all current government restrictions/regulations and passengers will have all appropriate information to travel as safely as possible.

**27<sup>th</sup> October:** Excitement is mounting as we move towards our first public mainline operations since 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2019. The work that has been put in to 'get out the gate' has been arduous but will hopefully pay off over the weekend and we welcome our first mainline customers.

The next step towards more operations has yet to be confirmed but I am hopeful that next week will see a new announcement about more seasonal

activity.

The engineering side of the business continues to keep busy and the Workshop is now reconfigured following the departure of Drumboe. It is envisaged that the next large project to be managed will be the overhaul of No.171 "Sieve Gullion". We need the engine to be ready for operations preferably by the 2023 season and I'm sure you'll agree that it will be great to see the locomotive back doing what it was built to do.

**4<sup>th</sup> November:** I wasn't in a position to be on the Halloween trains and only managed to be present on the first one on Saturday. On the Friday evening, I had a fall and badly lacerated my shin and was suffering with extreme bruising.

So, step up to the plate Rebecca, James and everyone else who had to react to the unfortunate situation on Sunday's trains. Unpleasant for all but you were all fantastic. A special thanks to Don and Conor who had to deal with passengers in Lanyon Place, and to the station-mistress who helped greatly with announcements.

If you have a few spare hours and are able to give a hand in the run up to Christmas, please get in touch. There is a lot to do and only a few weeks to get everything ready. Drop me an email if you're at a loose end and we can certainly keep you busy!

## GENERAL

**Railtour Galleries:** The backlog of photos of past railtours has now been cleared with the posting of the Inver Colpa gallery to the website Members

Area.

Please have a look and if you have any pictures which could be added to any of the galleries then please do get in touch.

**Sales News:** These books have been added to the online shop:

- "Lost Tramways Of Belfast" by Peter Waller, hardback, 15 x 20 cm, 40 b&w photos, 1 map, 64 pages, £8.99/€10.50.
- "Rails To Wexford" by Gus Geraghty, softback, 22 x 28 cm, 21 colour and 39 b&w photos, 2 maps, 50 pages, £13/€15.
- "Rails Through Connemara" by Jonathan Beaumont, softback, 21 x 15 cm, 2 colour and 101 b&w photos, 19 maps, 22 drawings, 192 pages, £15.95/€18.50.
- "Irish Railways Line by Line - Volume 1. Dundalk to Dublin and the West of Ireland" by Jim Edgar, softback, 15 x 20 cm, 97 colour and 2 b&w photos, 1 map, 48 pages, £11.50/€13.50.
- "Donal The Dart" by Ken Doyle, a book for children, softback, 26 x 18 cm, 12 colour illustrations, 28 pages, £4.99/€4.99.

**Spend Local:** If you are a member from Northern Ireland and have received a "Spend Local" card then the Society would be very glad to see you use it to book your Christmas trains. Although the card cannot be used online, bookings may be made with the telephone option on our web booking page.

Alternatively, why not have a family visit to the Whitehead Railway Museum, followed by lunch in our

café?

And don't forget, you must spend the balance by 14<sup>th</sup> December!

**Great Coastal Railways:** BBC presenter Michael Portillo paid a visit to Whitehead as part of his forthcoming BBC 2 series on Britain's Coastal Railways.

The former MP was at the Museum with his film crew on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> October and interviewed a number of RPSI volunteers and staff.

No.131 was in steam for the occasion and Mr Portillo interviewed James Friel, the RPSI's Technical Operations Engineer on the footplate, then Rebecca Laverty (Education and Outreach) before visiting the workshops to meet Peter Scott.

Clad in full safety gear Mr Portillo had a go at operating an overhead crane and inspected the frames of No.105, the locomotive currently under construction.

During his visit, the TV personality also chatted with RPSI President Joan Smyth and Society Chairman John McKegney before enjoying a cup of coffee at the museum's Platform 3 café.

*PS: Some present were disappointed that Michael's jacket and trousers were totally matching - and a dull beige!*

**Charity Santa 2021:** Members may recall that on the first Belfast Santa train of the season in December 2018 and 2019 two carriages were allocated to the leading local charities, De Paul and Salvation Army. This in turn enabled the charities to

invite needy families to travel as our guests on the train.

On both occasions this arrangement was made possible by the generosity of a number of individual members and some corporate sponsorship, with the funding covering the cost of the trip for our special guests.

Now that we are back on the main line, and are operating Santa Specials once again, we are keen to repeat the formula on the 10:30 train on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> December. The total cost for one carriage plus refreshments at Whitehead is expected to be £1,200.

To this end we would be delighted to receive donations from members who would like to offer their support. We invite members and supporters to make donations to the RPSI, marking the narrative or the envelope "Charity Santa". And don't forget, if you are a UK taxpayer, all donations can qualify for Gift Aid tax relief, because the RPSI is a charity. Please indicate if you wish the RPSI to claim Gift Aid on your donation.

Time is short so we would like to hear from you as soon as possible. It is a lovely way to brighten up the Christmas season for those who are less well off, and to share with others the magical combination of Santa and steam train travel.

To give a subscription, please send a cheque made payable to "The Railway Preservation Society of Ireland" to:

Don Wildy  
10 Sharman Drive  
Belfast  
BT9 5HL

Alternatively, you can make payment

(7)

by transfer, but please be sure to mark in the narrative that the donation is in respect of the Charity Santa, and include your name. The details of the RPSI bank account are:

Bank of Ireland  
Glengormley  
Sort code: 90-23-89  
Account: 49087661  
IBAN: GB05 BOFI 9023 8949 0876  
61

If you are paying in euro, please transfer funds to:

Bank of Ireland  
Ranelagh  
Dublin  
Sort code: 90-01-72  
Account: 17529453  
IBAN: IE81 BOFI 9001 9917 5294 53

If you are paying by credit transfer, please email us to advise.

*In the event of this Appeal being oversubscribed the surplus will go towards the general fund of the RPSI and in making a donation you agree to this condition.*

**Award (1):** Hearty congratulations to Ian Sinclair of the RPSI's Curatorial Committee on winning the Northern Ireland section of the prestigious UK-wide Marsh Volunteer Awards.

Ian's nomination was in respect of the "Last Days of Steam in Ulster" video that he produced for Whitehead Railway Museum in May 2020.

**Award (2):** Congratulations also to Peter Scott of the RPSI's locomotive department on being shortlisted in this year's Ulster Architectural Heritage "Heritage Angel" awards.

Peter's nomination was in respect of

his lead role in the restoration of GNR(I) Q Class No.131 which of course will be hauling the Santa Special trains.

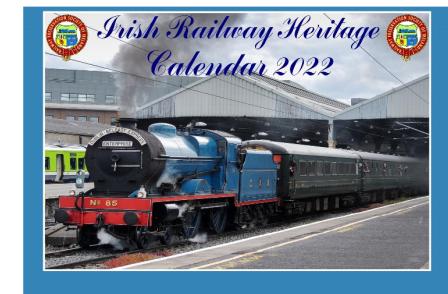
A total of 80 entries across six categories were received for this year's awards and Peter Scott has made it through to the shortlist of 18, which is a tremendous achievement. Public voting has already closed, and the results will be announced on 23<sup>rd</sup> November.

**AGM:** The annual general meeting notice is enclosed and members are asked to note the vacancies for Vice-Chairman and Treasurer.

These are vital positions and we hope that some among the membership with the relevant skills will see fit to step forward.

Nomination forms are available on request.

**STOP PRESS:** The Society's 2022 calendar is now available through the online shop.



#### 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)

(8)