



March 2022

NEWS LETTER

CARRIAGE & WAGON

Guinness Grain Van 504: Whitehead Railway Museum has a new exhibit - just in time for the February half-term week. The van is now on display in the museum so visitors can step aboard and enjoy an exhibition telling the fascinating history of the 1911-built vehicle. The illustrated display, called "Going with the Grain", tells how the wagon was used to ship casks of stout from the Dublin brewery to stations throughout the system, and later on to transport grain from farms to the brewery. 504 came within a whisker of being engulfed in a malicious fire at Whitehead in 1996. But happily it survived with just scorch damage and was restored by the RPSI at Whitehead with funding assistance from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

504 was launched at Whitehead in September 2021 after the completion of its restoration. Such was the quality of the rebuild that the vehicle won a runner-up prize at last year's Heritage Railway Association annual awards ceremony.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.105: The next exciting phase of the project has been reached with the newly-rolled boiler barrel arriving at Whitehead. It was transported via Cairnryan and Larne on 20th January 2022, along with boiler flue tubes, stay bar, plus two machines which have been loaned by the Strathspey Railway - a slotting machine and a surface grinder.

Fabricated at Israel Newtown & Sons of Matlock in Derbyshire, the barrel is for G8.24 boiler (for No.4 or No.105).

No.171 "Sieve Gullion": We would like to thank all of the members whose generous donations enabled us to get new springs for No.171 earlier in the year - they arrived in the autumn. We appreciate all the donations we get, especially for specific appeals such as this.

B134: On 11th November, the locomotive's (temporary) new livery was revealed to the world. It is mostly a version of the current dark grey colour scheme used on Irish Rail's 071 GM locomotives. It will remain during testing and running-in, before the original light grey and yellow livery is applied.

TRAINS & EVENTS

Santa Special: Twelve trains operated from Belfast to Whitehead over the three weekends prior to Christmas to a new COVID-restrictive format.

On board, each child had an activity pack and material to write their Christmas letter - to be posted in a chimney from No.171 on the platform at Whitehead.

On arrival at Whitehead, Santa was in an enclosed snow globe (see Galleries and Facebook photos). Children could have their pictures taken beside the globe. Elves distributed parcels in a grotto alongside.

Complimentary tea/coffee and mince pies were served from the tea bar in the Stables. A big thank-you goes out to all involved - management, volunteers, café staff and

Translink. Many long hours were put in getting everything in place at fairly short notice. Well done all!

The charity initiative to fund a carriage on one of the Santa trains for needy families was a great success once again and the appeal closed early when the target was quickly met. The generosity of all those concerned was much appreciated.

Sadly, we were unable to contemplate trains from Dublin as the same facilities were not available to handle socially-distanced passengers at Maynooth that exist in Whitehead. This was a major loss of income to the Society!

Murder Mystery Nights: Running on 11th, 18th & 25th March, these form a nostalgic series of 1930s-themed murder mystery evenings on board our carriages at the platform at Whitehead.

Each evening has a different storyline and plot, weaving in iconic steam train related scenes from movies and literature. Included is a three course meal during the interactive, theatrical experience.

These events sold out within days!

Saint Patrick's Weekend Steam: A train rides and story-telling event at Whitehead on Saturday 19th May.

The Midlander: The first public trains from Dublin since December 2019 will run to Maynooth on 26th & 27th March. These trains sold out very quickly, so it's good to see that the usual appetite for steam from the Dublin public has not abated.

In advance of this, on Sunday 13th March, No.85 ran light to M3 Parkway then with 8 Cravens to Maynooth. These trials gave locomotive and carriages the all-clear for a return to traffic.

Mother's Day Lunch Train: On Sunday 27th March, a steam trip will run from Belfast to Whitehead, then onwards by coach to Magheramorne Estate for lunch.

East-West: This cancelled diesel railtour has been rescheduled for 2nd April.

It will depart Dublin (Connolly) and head north, operating via the running loop in Skerries and the bi-directional line to Balbriggan. There will be a passenger pick-up

stop in Drogheda and then on to Dundalk. Here the locomotive will run around before heading south again to Dublin. Along the way there will be photo stops in Laytown and Skerries.

A locomotive change has been requested in Dublin before the train once again sets off, this time heading west to Galway. There will be a number of photo stops along the route and a break of 1½ hours in Galway, before a swift return to Dublin.

Easter: The usual format trains from Belfast to Whitehead will be operating on Saturday and Sunday, 16th & 17th April.

On Monday 18th April there will be trains from Drogheda to Dundalk and Skerries, with connections from Dublin.

Province Of Leinster Railtour: This was initially advertised as a return to our annual May railtours, this year based out of Dublin. However, owing to issues outside our control, it quickly became apparent that we can not now run this tour on the hoped-for dates in May.

The Railtour Committee are looking to re-arrange for September. More information in due course.

WINTER MEETINGS

Zoom: The meetings continued online. Interestingly, the attendance figures remain similar to those of the pre-lockdown Belfast meetings. Strange, since the majority of our members now have access to the internet!

8th December: Belfast's Railways In The Blitz. After outlining how the Second World War started, Ian Sinclair told us how Belfast was well-nigh defenceless. This was largely due to money wrangles between Stormont and Westminster but also to local complacency. Many believed that Belfast was too far away for German bombers and, anyway, they would not want to cross heavily-defended Britain twice - would they? Going against the grain, though, was Major Malcolm Spier, Manager and Secretary of the NCC. Ignoring criticism, he began building air-raid shelters around York Road, Coleraine and Londonderry in late 1938.

In Northern Ireland, the first bombs were incendiaries dropped on the BCDR's Bangor station.

12th January: No.5 "Drumboe" Revisited.

This was Peter Scott's review of the overhaul of County Donegal locomotive No.5. Peter described his own first experiences of the Donegal at Killybegs and, after closure, at Strabane where "Drumboe" and "Meenglas" were waiting their fate. He traced some of Drumboe's movements before it arrived at Whitehead in 2006 as part of a cross-Border exercise funded by a grant from the European Union. Peter described the condition of the engine and outlined some of the careful dismantling needed before work could commence. All of the work was done with an eye to returning the locomotive to full working order, so everything was stripped down and either restored to specification or, in many cases, totally replaced; sometimes without the old component to use as a guide

9th February: Life & Times of Guinness Grain Van 504.

Charles Friel presented a pictorial history of the life of the GNR(I) Guinness grain van 504, beginning with its use in and around the brewery until its sad decay in the Belfast area and, ultimately, Whitehead.

Happily, that was not the end of the story, and Mark Kennedy brought it up to date with the van's overhaul and subsequent launch to the public in September 2021.

9th March: Irish Railfans' News In Pictures.

Ciarán Cooney presented a selection of picture taken by Leslie Hyland between 1955 and 1967. We were treated to an extended tour of lines all over Ireland, starting at Bangor and finishing on the West Cork at Bandon. In between we saw a vast range of lines, trains and workings, many long gone. Ciarán has brought out Les's great "eye" for a good picture and has carefully restored each image to pristine condition. He sometimes had to start with a damaged negative as was graphically demonstrated with before and after versions of Les's picture of railcars at Mourne Abbey. The steam exhausts and the delicate skies were up there with the best of them. Les included a lot of context in his

photographs, with wide shots of stations or scenery. Les also visited unusual locations such as railway-connected piers, the Irish Lights siding at Dún Laoghaire or odd corners of warehouses on Cork docks. Throughout the show, we were reminded of scenes that were once everyday happenings but have, since then, been overtaken by modernisation or closure. There were many reminders of the once-huge excursion traffic with crowds of passengers heading for the seaside, race meetings or football matches. There were even glimpses of Portrush's over-all roof and the MAK diesel on passenger duty at Youghal.

WHITEHEAD SITE

Trackwork: Following a very big shunt with diesel B142 on the first weekend in February, to put the Guinness grain van into the Museum, it was noticed that the frog which controls 1 and 2 shed roads was sinking.

Repair of this critical piece of track was then a priority over the next three weeks. The whole area had been filled to rail level with waste ash which had to be dug out with the Atlas to reveal three very rotten long crossing timbers. The associated chairs were a very interesting piece of industrial archaeology being of an ancient NCC type not used since WW2. These required special bolts to be machined to replace the badly corroded and wasted originals and were screwed down onto new 13ft timbers.

All was jacked and packed with clean, two inch ballast and successfully traversed on the last weekend in the month to move No.171's frames from number two shed road to the Dunleath Workshop.

FAREWELLS

Derek Young (1946-2021): Society founder member Derek died peacefully in the early hours of 20th December in the Northern Ireland Hospice.

Derek was involved in various Society committees over the years right up to very recently, having latterly helped with the establishment and management of the

Whitehead Railway Museum.

Indeed, Derek was at the founding meeting of the RPSI (see the first picture in gallery "Our People (1964- 2010)".

Robert Edwards (1947-2022): Former RPSI Chairman Bob Edwards passed away on 9th February after a long illness.

Bob, a stalwart of the locomotive team, was Chairman from 1968 until 1984. Subsequently, he became heavily involved with Downpatrick & County Down Railway but always kept his hand in at Whitehead. Most recently, he played a major part in the restoration of Guinness Grain Van 504.

GENERAL

Annual General Meeting: There was a disappointingly low attendance of 19 on the Zoom meeting on Monday 13th December. However, business was conducted as required and a new Board appointed, with one retiree. The special resolution to amend Article 37 of the Society's Articles of Association was carried.

At the AGM, the Chairman noted the retirement of Peter Scott, having served on the Committee / Council / Board since 1975. The Chairman said: Peter Scott MBE has been a lifelong member of the Society having been a keen member of the RBAI Railway Society many of whose members were responsible for the conception and birth of the RPSI.

As a Board member Peter was diligent in reading papers and contributing to the meetings both from his experience as an engineer but also his memory as an active volunteer. He was awarded the MBE in 2008 for his services to Railway Restoration; this was a richly deserved recognition of all that he has done for the Society and especially as its Locomotive Office for many years. Ten years later he was part of the RPSI delegation to the National Heritage Railway Association Dinner when the Society received the HRA's top award 'Manisty Award for Excellence', this was further recognition of Peter's work at the heart of the Society, and then in November he became an angel (!) - when he received the prestigious 'Heritage Angel Award' from the Ulster Architectural Society

in the 'Best Craftsmanship on a Heritage Rescue Project' category for his lead role in the restoration of GNR(I) locomotive No.131. In October Peter had the honour of showing his dream project, the NCC Mogul No.105 which is now under construction, to the well-known television presenter Michael Portillo for a BBC programme to be shown next year. Peter is virtually synonymous with the RPSI and, though he is stepping down from the Board, I am delighted that he will still be an active engineering volunteer at Whitehead and beyond, hopefully for many years to come.

Sales News: These items are available from the Online Shop:

- "Rails Through Tipperary" by Jonathan Beaumont and Barry Carse, softback, 26 x 21 cm, 180 colour and 6 b&w photos, 1 map, 5 track plans, 160 pages, £18/€20.
- "The Railways of Bord na Mona Industrial Narrow Gauge in the 21st Century" by Ted McAvoy, softback, 17 x 24cm, 84 colour and 10 b&w photos, 2 maps, 68 pages, £10.95/€13.
- "Rails Around Ireland - A Journey In Pictures", compiled by Charles Friel and Michael McMahon, Hardback, 19 x 24 cm, 83 b&w photos, 80 pages, £13.50/€16.
- 2022 Calendar - still not too late to pick one up from the RPSI Shop.
- Museum Guide Book - also still available.

RPSI Mk2 Carriage Set: Irish Railway Models have announced a limited edition set of RPSI Mk2b coaches, with proceeds going to the Society.

Grill car, FK 181 and SO 300 will be joining the previous models issued a few years ago to great acclaim.

Email Bulletin: For up to the minute Society and Irish railway news don't forget to submit your email details to the address below.

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