



May 2022

## NEWS LETTER

### CARRIAGE & WAGON

**Sleeping Car Is No More:** Much needed space has been created at the RPSI site in Whitehead with the disposal of the sleeping carriage which was surplus to requirements. Mark 3 sleeper 26 was cut up on site and removed in two portions by scrap merchants T Hamill & Sons from Ahoghill.

The carriage was built by BREL at Derby in 1981 and saw service on BR's Eastern Region before being sold off. The RPSI bought the carriage in 2004 with a view to using it as a dormitory for operation department members who were obliged to stay on site overnight to attend to early-morning turns. The vehicle was re-gauged and positioned on an isolated section of track at the rear of the site.

Upon arrival at Whitehead the coach was repainted in an LMS-NCC unlined maroon and was renumbered 26 as the next in the series of NCC seaside caravan coaches, none of which survive. In BR days, the carriage was numbered 10651.

Although the carriage was used by a dormitory in its early days, its popularity waned and more recently it failed a fire safety risk assessment. Accordingly, the Society took the decision to dispose of it

and put the space it was occupying to better use. In addition, the disposal of the 35-tonne vehicle will produce some much needed income for the Society.

Hamills, with whom the RPSI has a long-standing relationship, arrived on site on the morning of St Patrick's Day and by lunchtime the two portions of the coach were safely on their way to Ahoghill for dismantling and scrapping.

The Society is mandated to go through a checklist before disposing of any items of rolling stock but in this case the vehicle was of no historic or heritage value, was no longer of any use and was taking up space. The Board agreed that disposal was the best option. The carriage was then advertised for disposal through official channels prior to sale by the Society.

### TRAINS & EVENTS

**St Patrick's Steam:** Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> March was a very busy train rides day at Whitehead, so much so that an extra carriage had to be added to make it a 3-coach Mk2 train, with No.3BG "Guinness".

**The Midlander:** Tickets for the Maynooth trains on Saturday & Sunday, 26<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> March sold out within a few

hours of going on sale.

Over the weekend the IÉ steam crew were assessed, after a break of over two years, by an inspector from West Coast Railways. Also, the Commission for Railway Regulation (CRR) were doing an audit on our whole operation.

Full trains ran throughout without issue. It was great to be back!

**Mother's Day Lunch Train:** On Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> March, a beautifully sunny day, a sold-out train ran from Belfast to Whitehead with onward coach travel to Magheramorne House Hotel where a fine dining experience afternoon tea was served.

The only fly in the ointment for this event was that it was diesel-hauled (NIR 112) because of an issue outside the Society's control. No.131, however, was in steam to shunt the carriages out and back into the shed and posed for photos at Whitehead when 112 arrived with the train - so the passengers at least got to see the steam engine.

As part of the (grant-aided) set-up costs, an opportunity was created for the Society to purchase items such as table lamps and fine crockery, which will be of great use for similar events in the future.

Our thanks go to Mid & East Antrim Borough Council and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for their support in facilitating this venture.

**East-West:** Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> April saw the first (planned) diesel rail tour in almost two years.

The first leg of the tour departed Connolly for Dundalk behind GM locomotive 081. At Skerries, the train

operated via the Up road to Balbriggan using bi-directional signalling.

After Dundalk, there was a non-stop run through Drogheda before a photo stop at Laytown, followed by a visit to Skerries Loop.

The train departed Connolly again with retro-liveried GM 071. The first photo stop was on the branch at Clara, and then on to Galway.

From there it was a direct return to Dublin Connolly, reached at 20:33.

Not a bad day out!

**Afternoon Tea:** A pleasant afternoon was had by all who visited Whitehead for afternoon tea on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> April, catered by our Platform 3 staff.

**Easter Eggspress:** No.131 was the motive power for the Easter Saturday (16<sup>th</sup> April) trains. The seven-coach train did two round trips from Belfast Lanyon Place to the RPSI base at Whitehead Excursion Station, with a 45 minute stop there.

The train was booked out for the first trip and was about 95% full for the second one. At Whitehead, the weather was thankfully dry. Passengers received Easter eggs from the Easter Bunny and a candy floss stand did a roaring trade. There were circus performers on the platform, including a magician and a Mad Hatter walking on stilts! Children took part in an Easter egg hunt.

**Easter Eggstravaganza:** The carriages for these Easter Monday (18<sup>th</sup> April) trains consisted of all the running vehicles; this was due to such a high demand for tickets, even for the connection from Dublin!

The weather was perfect, the sun shining and No.85 looking resplendent attached to her 9 bogie train

On arrival at Drogheda, water was taken at the north end of the station.

At Dundalk an issue with the motion oil feed was discovered. This delayed departure for an hour while volunteers rectified the problem. There was a check of the motion again at Castlebellingham, and then on to Drogheda, and the next trip to Skerries Loop and return.

A quick turn-round at Drogheda soon had the train on its way back to Dublin.

**Inchicore 175:** This was not a Society event, but did have significant RPSI involvement.

Planning for the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Inchicore Works began in 2020, in the optimistic assumption that Covid would be over by then. A co-ordination committee, chaired by Peter Smyth. CME, Inchicore Railway Works, was set up.

The RPSI was represented by Peter Rigney and Kieran Marshall represented the Irish Railway Record Society. The committee met monthly, and then more frequently from March 2022.

Working in the background was Gerry Mooney, who brought forward the RPSI side of our GM locomotive B134 project.

In preparation for the open day on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2022, a work plan was developed and implemented. This involved volunteers at Inchicore Works and Connolly Locomotive Shed.

As the exhibition was to include our State Carriage (Royal Saloon) 351, Side Corridor First 1142 and Cravens Open

Standard Carriage 1532, it was necessary to give these vehicles a thorough cleaning and polishing. The vehicles were lined up with an IÉ Mark 4 Carriage; this was a combination of 100 years of carriages in The Works. 1532 had a display of four bays set for dinner. There were also two bays set for one of our charterers "Whiskey on the Tracks".

The RPSI was requested to provide catering in 1522 (dining car) and 1514 (bar). Supplies had to be purchased, delivered and placed in the carriages. Perishable food was obtained early on Saturday morning. Both carriages were cleaned and polished and looked extremely well. Steps were placed at either end for the customers to enter and leave - a one-way system in operation. Fergus Mc Donnell and his team had an exhausting day in the kitchen. Sean Clancy operated the bar. Soft drinks only on the day.

Two locomotives from Connolly shed were to be exhibited - GM locomotive B141 and ex GNR(I) locomotive No.85, and a locomotive department team was organised to clean and polish them. A visitor to the shed, Translink NIR GM 112 arrived in the preceding week. It too was cleaned and polished by our volunteers. 112 hauled the other two engines to Inchicore a few days in advance.

The American Ambassador Claire Cronin unveiled the name plate on the newly-refurbished (and splendidly painted) B134. Peter Smyth, Jim Meade and Gerry Mooney spoke on the B134 project.

**The Midlander:** Following repairs to No.85 after Easter, it was decided a gentle running-in would be preferable to the originally-proposed "Sea Breeze" on

29<sup>th</sup> May.

It is an afternoon-only trip as the morning will be a light-engine running-in operation to M3 Parkway following the big end work.

**Steam & Jazz:** The first of the season's jazz trains will be on 3<sup>rd</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> June.

The music will again be provided by the "Legendary Crescent City New Orleans Dixieland Jazz Band", one of Northern Ireland's best jazz bands.

If demand warrants, there will be further dates later in the summer.

**Steam Whitehead:** Train ride dates are scheduled to start on 4<sup>th</sup> June, then Father's Day on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> June, followed by July and August Saturdays.

**Steam & Stetsons:** To try to broaden our appeal to a new audience, we are trialling a new train on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> June, themed as country & western.

The fare will include return travel from Belfast followed by a concert and hog roast at Whitehead Excursion Station.

**Shades Of Grey:** On Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> June we hope to run our second diesel trip - to Cork, Limerick, Athenry and back to Dublin. We have requested 071 class locomotives to haul the train throughout, with a swap at Limerick.

The railtour was originally to be operated by NIR GM 112 but, due to a technical issue, that was not possible.

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## LOCOMOTIVES

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**No.3BG "Guinness":** The Guinness engine has worked train rides, shunts and the popular "Murder Mystery" evening events, which ran in March, so

far this year.

A leaking boiler tube that made itself known on the first "Murder Mystery" evening was replaced in the short period between that event and the second "Murder Mystery".

The fireman's side injector has been fitted with a slacker bag, so the footplate is now easier to keep clean.

**No.85 "Merlin":** The locomotive is now out and earning its keep again, hauling the very successful "Midlander" and "Easter Eggstravaganza" trains, the latter making a return to the GNR main line.

A big end carrying more heat than was comfortable became apparent on the Easter Monday train. It was stripped in Connolly Shed and the brasses brought to Whitehead, where the whitened metal was removed and refilled before machining. Then followed two days of scraping, fitting and reassembly in Connolly Shed, before No.85 left for the Inchicore open day.

Thanks to all the RPSI volunteers and HEI staff who helped with this job.

**No.131:** A quiet 2022 so far, the Easter Saturday "Easter Eggspress" has been her only main line turn to date. She is next due to work the "Steam and Jazz" on 3<sup>rd</sup> June.

The only work of note this year so far has been fitting a new set of brake blocks, and the usual fitting and adjustment work on leaking valves.

**No.171 "Slieve Gullion":** Work has continued on No.171, although mostly on small, but important, items not immediately obvious to the casual observer.

The boiler had some copper plate welded in place and has now had the relevant patch screws fitted, rivetted over and seams caulked. The steam pipe from the dome to the castle has been replaced with a new pipe, with thanks to a particularly skinny volunteer who wormed his way past stays and pipes to guide it into place. We look forward to the increased reliability this new pipe will bring - the previous pipe suffered from scale and this was carried through to the brake ejector which needed frequent cleaning.

The main steam pipe from the dome to the superheater header is being prepared for refitting, with the seat being machined on the regulator head to ensure a good joint. Various small parts have been replaced including washout plugs and studs for boiler fittings.

Firebars have been ordered to make up a full set. While similar to No.131 in many respects, the firebars are not interchangeable between the two 4-4-0s. The superheater header has been examined and the ball joints for the elements cleaned up. The boiler smoke tubes have been cleaned ready for tubing the boiler. The firedoor has had parts of the catch and flap renewed.

The frames and cylinders are currently on a flat wagon in the Dunleath Workshop. The cylinder block has received new studs for the rear cylinder covers, which have been ground in, ready for refitting. The slide bars, which have been ground flat and straight, are next to be fitted once the covers go on, and once these have been fitted and aligned the frames may go back on the wheels. The slipper blocks for the crossheads have had their whitemetal

lining removed and new whitemetal is ready to be poured and machined.

A frame stretcher revealed some cracks during non-destructive testing, this is being repaired. Spring hangers and other safety critical components have been tested for cracks. The new piston heads have been machined and fitted to the new piston rods.

The tender has received its 6 new springs, generously funded by donations from members. Work is in progress to assemble a full set of spring hangers from Tender 12 (usually paired with No.171) and Tender 43 (currently stored without a locomotive to run with). The rubber auxiliary springs all needed replaced and the steel plates for these have been laser cut before being dispatched to a specialist rubber moulding company in Dublin.

The electrical systems have had various long lead time items purchased, the next big job is to have the various enclosures, reservoirs, etc., fabricated and fitted. No.171 took advantage of a generous offer from Thales Ground Transportation Systems to have the front TPWS antenna tested at the same time as No.131's several years ago, so one job that always takes ages to arrange is already ticked off the list.

The wheels have had a trip to the wheel lathe to true off wheel profiles and polish journals. The axleboxes were remetalled and have been scraped and fitted to the journals. The big end brasses have recently been scraped and fitted to the crank axle. All crankpins, major motion components and axles were ultrasonically tested for cracks. One big end bolt exhibited a minor crack and is in the process of being replaced.

The next big step is to place the locomotive back on its wheels - the bogie, not mentioned above, was dismantled, examined and reassembled to verify the work carried out at Shildon just before COVID struck. Then we will start into tubing the boiler, while reassembly of springs, brake gear, and motion takes place on the frames.

**No.184:** The locomotive has had old paint, oil and grease cleaned off and is currently being painted in a primer coat before further reassembly of the cladding, boiler fittings and handrails for cosmetic display purposes.

**B134:** As reported elsewhere, the GM has been turned out in its original 1961 retro livery at Inchicore.

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## WHITEHEAD SITE

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**Dunleath Workshop:** The workshop recently received a large slotting machine and a surface grinder on long term loan, both of which have been made operational and expand further the range of jobs we can carry out 'in house', for example machining axleboxes for the NCC mogul project, or making shims for slidebars, or grinding regulator valves.

Thanks to a grant intended to combat climate change, we have had the single skin workshop cladding insulated with spray-on foam, which will make a more pleasant working environment, and hopefully tame the internal microclimate which sometimes produced rain inside the workshop as warm air condensed on the cold steel roof. The foam is a light cream colour, which has increased the light levels in the workshop, but not as much as the new LED lights fitted at the same time.

These are 200W each, replacing older units rated at 400W each. The new lights are nominally the same light output as the old, but they seem brighter, so we are getting more light for half the cost of the electricity.

**Engine Sheds:** The foam insulation in the Dunleath Workshop was applied by contractors using a mobile elevating work platform. The opportunity was taken to use this machine to access the leaky roof of the 'old shed' - Nos. 1 and 2 shed roads. More than 20 leaks were plugged at the Belfast end of the shed, and the puddles on the floor of the shed on rainy days have disappeared. We still need to figure out how to safely access the other half of the roof that was outside the reach of the MEWP.

The drains and traps for the engine shed pits were cleaned by a specialist contractor who removed about 4 tonnes of oil and contaminated water from the grease traps, alongside 8 tonnes of general sludge - mostly ash mixed in with shotblasting grit, boiler washout scale and mud, etc. Steel capped wellington boots are now no longer essential when using the engine shed pits!

**End Of An Era:** No.1 Muir-Hill loading shovel, which has been a feature of the RPSI depot at Whitehead since the 1970s, has been sold, and finally left the premises on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> March.

This machine dates from the 1950s, and consists of a heavy frame and front loader with a large bucket for handling coal, based on a Fordson Major tractor. It was the first major item of plant acquired by the Society, and its primary duty was loading coal into the locomotive tenders. It was particularly suitable for coaling locomotive No.4

with its high bunker.

As well as handling coal, it saw many varied activities lifting heavy items about the yard - anything, including locomotive wheelsets.

No.1 shovel also spent time away from Whitehead; it was located at Central Service Depot (Queens Quay) during several "Steam Enterprise" seasons. On the first such occasion it was actually driven from Whitehead to Belfast and back - a slow and perilous journey that we decided not to repeat, and employed a low-loader the next time.

It was later joined by a second Muir-Hill loader, No.3, which performed similar duties. No.3 had the distinction of being based at Lisburn for coaling No.186 while the RPSI train was based there during the Belfast Central Railway relaying around 2004.

Both loading shovels were superseded by the more modern JCB Loadall. No.3 was the first to be disposed of - by all accounts, it still exists and has been restored. No.1 will hopefully share a suitable future. Old tractors have a following as well as steam locomotives!

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## GENERAL

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**RPSI Does The Double At HRA:** The Society landed two runner-up awards at the annual Heritage Railway Association ceremony which took place in Birmingham on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> March. The Society was represented by Alex Duggan who himself was named as a runner-up in the Lord Faulkner Young Volunteer of the Year category. Congratulations to Alex (23) from Cork, an electrical engineering student at Munster Technical University, who is a

regular volunteer with the Dublin squad.

The second runner-up award was in respect of the restoration of Connolly locomotive turntable in Dublin, a joint enterprise between the RPSI and Irish Rail's civil engineering department. The project reflects the close working relationship between the RPSI and Irish Rail. Well done to all concerned.

The winner of the Coiley Locomotive Engineering Award was the Strathspey Railway for its restoration of LMS Black Five No.5025, a project led by former RPSI volunteer Nathan Lightowler. Congratulations to Nathan.

**Sales News:** Some new items have been added to the RPSI Shop:

- "Five Foot Three", issue 67 from March 2022, £5/€6.
- "Ireland's General Motors Diesel-Electrics" by Philip Horton, softback, 17 x 24 cm, 119 colour & 5 b&w photos, 4 track plans, 64 pages, £11/€13.
- "Irish Railways Line By Line Volume 2" by Jim Edgar, softback, 26 x 18 cm, 104 colour photos, 1 track plan, 1 map, 52 pages, £11.50/€13.50.

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