

August 2022

# NEWS LETTER

## TRAINS & EVENTS

**The Midlander:** As part of the running in procedure after recent maintenance on the big end bearing on No.85, two light engine trips were arranged between Clonsilla Junction and M3 Parkway Station on 29<sup>th</sup> May. On inspection after the trips the engine was declared fit to run a passenger special to Maynooth in the afternoon.

The train had sold out within a day of tickets being available.

The set arrived onto Platform 4 at Dublin Connolly at 13:15 behind GM 088. No.85 was in the Wash Road and proceeded onto the head of the train. An on-time departure (13:30) was made with a full load of 364 passengers on board. We were privileged to have our President Joan Smyth and her husband on board, and also a corporate charter in carriage 1523 requiring white table cloths and antimacassars and the red carpet.

Excellent non-stop running on the return leg from Maynooth had us back on Platform 4 in Dublin Connolly 10 minutes early.

**Steam & Jazz:** There was/is a series of trains on Friday evenings over the summer and early autumn months.

**3<sup>rd</sup> June:** It was great to start the season

off on a bright mild night. Those familiar with the event will not have been disappointed as there were station stops, jazz music, dancing and hampers.

**17<sup>th</sup> June:** A packed train operated on a fine clear night with a glorious mid-summer sunset to round off the evening and the full load of passengers certainly appreciated it.

The only slight hiccup was a stop early in the evening to attend to an issue with No.131's brake ejector, but it was soon sorted and everything thenceforth ran successfully.

**15<sup>th</sup> July:** Unfortunately, for a number of reasons, this train had to be cancelled.

**12<sup>th</sup> August:** No one could have asked for a more perfect evening for a Jazz train! The only issue was a delay due to poor steam pressure on No.131 approaching the summit of the Dargan Bridge on the train out of Belfast. A set-back into Platform 4 was necessary and, following a blow-up, the train got away successfully. However, the passengers took it all in their stride and a good time was had by all.

**More Dates:** Further trains are planned for 16<sup>th</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup> September next trains

**Steam Whitehead:** A series of summer afternoon train rides at Whitehead, with a couple of special event days thrown in.

So far, we have had visitors from Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, the Czech Republic and the USA. One notable visitor was wearing Thomas the Tank engine trousers! As in recent years, it is pleasing to report that we have had visitors from all over Ireland, including a family from Inishboffin island, County Galway, population 120 in 2011.

As experienced in previous years, some people arrive for the train rides, having seen it on our website, but have not noticed that we also have a museum. They are quickly put right on that score, so please keep spreading the word about where we are and what is on offer at Whitehead.

**4<sup>th</sup> June:** The first summer Saturday of train rides coincided with the Platinum Jubilee, so there was a bit of a theme, with music, hampers and face painting. No.131 was in steam from the night before to head the train. The beautiful weather helped to create a great buzz (and it wasn't just from the two colonies of bees now in residence behind the carriage shed!).

**19<sup>th</sup> June:** Father's Day train rides operated and the Museum was opened specially for the event. No.131 did the honours, being warm still from the Friday night.

**9<sup>th</sup> July:** A successful volunteers day, with a number of new recruits gained.

**20<sup>th</sup> August:** A novel feature this day was an open event for dogs, with pet care advice available on the platform.

From Pekinese to an Irish Wolfhound, and all sizes in between, it was a packed platform between the showers. But our four-legged friends were all on their best behaviour.

No.3BG "Guinness" did the honours.

**More Dates:** Trains will run on Saturdays in August and on 3<sup>rd</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> September.

**Steam & Stetsons:** On Friday 10<sup>th</sup> June this new venture involved a return steam train trip from Belfast to Whitehead where a live Country & Western band entertained the participants. A hog roast supper was included in the fare and very good it was too! Also available was a pop-up cocktail bar.

The overheads were high and this was reflected in the price and perhaps that and the novelty element discouraged potential passengers - so there were places available on the night, and these were made available to members.

The outcome was a very well received event, with those present enjoying themselves thoroughly. A dry evening no doubt helped.

A further train planned for 22<sup>nd</sup> July had to be cancelled owing to issues with Covid.

**Shades of Grey:** This diesel tour on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> June was originally "The Blue Thunder" but was changed as there were some issues with the planned motive power (NIR GM 112, in Dublin for the Inchicore 175 event in May) which could not be rectified in time for the trip. The Operations Committee made the decision to continue with the tour and utilise an Irish Rail 071 locomotive.

GM 088 was the locomotive selected by Irish Rail. It was stabled outside Connolly Shed prior to the tour but, as there was no driver available to have it started and ready for the train, driver Ken Fox had to go and start it and bring it to Platform 4. This resulted in a 14 minute delay departing (09:14).

At Portarlington there was a short stop (10:29-10:33), another at Ballybroughy loop platform (11:02-11:11) to allow a down Cork to pass, followed by Limerick Junction (11:50-11:58), arrival in Cork being at 12:50.

A quick turn round allowed a departure

from Cork at 13:04. We arrived in Limerick at 14:50, 26 minutes late.

GM 074 hooked up and brought the set to the new servicing apron at Limerick. It was here that the carriages were watered. It was intended that 074 would take over the tour, but due to an issue with the locomotive it was not cleared for the tour. 088 arrived and propelled the set back into the station and departed at 16:09, 9 minutes late. The delay was due to an incident outside Limerick where an abandoned bicycle had been struck by a passing railcar and the area had to be examined and cleared.

Stops were made at Ennis (16:46-16:55), Gort (17:17-17:23), Athenry (17:51-18:00), Athlone (18:57-19:04) and Tullamore (19:28-19:33).

We arrived back in Dublin Connolly at 20:56, just 3 minutes late.

A first for Dublin trains was the use of card readers in the bar, diner and sales.

A very successful diesel tour. Great credit to all the larnród Eireann staff and our volunteers.

The weather was also kind to the photographers.

**Wicklow Steam Express:** The itinerary for these trains on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> June was Dublin Connolly to Wicklow and two local trips from Wicklow to Greystones. Tickets for these trains had sold out within twenty four hours. The set consisted of van 3173 and passenger carriages 1523, 1505, 1522, 1514, 1532 and 1506, the reduced size determined by the length of the loop in Wicklow.

It was a fantastic sunny morning as the train departed Connolly at 11:00, 10 minutes late. As the Up Rosslare was running late, there was a delay at Greystones (11:44-11:51) followed by arrival in Wicklow Station at 12:08. On board we had a corporate group of

whiskey tasters; carriage 1506 was dressed in white linen table cloths and white antimacassars for the occasion.

Water was taken from a local school for the locomotive. This involved up to eight hose lengths. Extra volunteers were required to roll out the hoses and have the engine serviced before departure on our first shuttle.

Departure from Wicklow for Greystones was at 12:46. A quick run round and we departed Greystones on time at 13:35.

Back at Wicklow No.85 was again watered before departing for the second trip to Greystones at 14:53. We departed Greystones on time and arrived back at Wicklow at 15:58, one minute early.

With our Dublin passengers on board we departed Wicklow at 16:47. The train lived up to its 'express' name on the return journey. Clear signals the whole way to platform 5 Dublin Connolly, arriving on time at 17:49.

**Enniscorthy Rockin' Food & Fruit Festival:** This trip on Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> July was run in conjunction with Enniscorthy Rockin' Food and Fruit Festival. The operation was subject to an audit by an Inspector from the CRR.

We departed Platform 5 Dublin Connolly on time at 10:55 in bright and sunny weather. Water was taken in Gorey (13:03-13:33) by a water bowser. Arrival at Enniscorthy was at 13:59, 28 minutes late due to previous delays.

We departed Enniscorthy at 14:13 with a fresh load of passengers on board for Rosslare Strand. After running light to Rosslare Harbour to turn, the train departed Rosslare Strand again at 17:26. There were issues with the turntable and the turning of the locomotive took longer than was planned.

Back at Enniscorthy, the original passengers boarded and the train left at

18:16. Water was again taken at Gorey. We were stopped by the IÉ Regulator at Arklow who directed that we be overtaken by the Up Rosslare there. However, our train length was less than half a carriage length too long. In Rathdrum (20:45-21:08) it was noticed that the locomotive was developing steaming issues. A concerted effort was made to rectify the problem and with a good head of steam we into Greystones at 21:52. Here, the IÉ Regulator directed that the train go no further than Greystones and that the passengers were to travel by service train to Dublin Connolly.

Despite the issues on the latter half of the return journey, the passengers appeared very satisfied with the two trips. The only complaint on the day was that the bar ran out of stout. Great credit to the crew who got the issues sorted and got the train to Greystones.

**Cú Chulainn:** Trains to Dundalk on Drogheda were planned for Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> August but, because of running-in requirements after attention to No.85 following its most recent outing, it was necessary to cancel this trip.

Instead, two running-in specials with a shorter train from Dublin Connolly to Maynooth and return were scheduled. However, due to the period of very dry weather in mid-August and concerns from Irish Rail and, having consulted with all concerned, the decision was made to cancel these trial train operations too.

**Marble City:** With no running-in being possible for No.85 before the trip to Kilkenny on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> August this booked out train was hauled by diesel.

Despite not having a steam locomotive, the passengers, escorted into Kilkenny city by Sir Henry Inglesby's Fife and Drum Corps, had a marvellously satisfying day out.

**Province Of Leinster:** To round up a summer of cancellations, it has been decided not to run a weekend tour this year. One of several reasons was the difficulty in securing reasonably priced hotel accommodation in Dublin.

## CARRIAGE & WAGON

**Carriage Movement (1):** Wooden carriages 813 and 837 were removed from the locomotive shed in Mullingar on 15<sup>th</sup> August - Westmeath County Council having placed a dereliction order on the building, necessitated the transfer.

For the move, each vehicle was 'topped and tailed' by two road-rail excavators and moved separately at low speed. The movement took the vehicles from the locomotive shed in the Athlone direction to the Bridge Gang Depot (the former Bretland Tracklayer yard).

The vehicles were removed by road to Whitehead (837), arriving on 16<sup>th</sup> August, and the Connemara Railway (813), arriving 18<sup>th</sup> August.

**Carriage Movement (2):** Former Ex BR/Scotrail Mk2z carriage 5188 arrived on 18<sup>th</sup> August.

It will be re-bogied and overhauled (with number 306) and used to strengthen the capacity of our Whitehead mainline set.

## LOCOMOTIVES

**No.85 "Merlin":** Has had several visits to its Dublin base from Whitehead staff and volunteers to attend to various issues.

**No.131:** The locomotive has undergone her annual in-detail examination which, as usual, has revealed several minor items to be repaired. One of the bigger jobs was the replacement of two 'Armstrong oiler' pads, usually referred to colloquially as 'spongepads'. These pads consist of a worsted wool woven pad, and a steel

spring. The pad retains and feeds oil to the bottom of the axle journal, held up by the steel spring arrangement. These are manufactured by the North Yorkshire Moors Railway, who now own the Armstrong business.

On No.4 and the NCC Mogul designs, replacing a spongepad is something to be done in a couple of hours, with 4 nuts and a dust cover removed, and the assembly slides out. No.131 was designed in the Victorian era, when labour was cheap and not so much thought was given to ease of maintenance - so the job has taken several days, and involved shunting, removal of the coupling rods, lots of pipework, and dropping the wheels on the wheeldrop by about 10 inches to get the spongepads replaced.

Our thanks are due to the locomotive department volunteers who laboured at this dirty, uncomfortable and sometimes unpleasant job on weekdays and weekends over a number of weeks.

**No.171 "Sieve Gullion":** The main steam pipe has now been refitted in the boiler, with the regulator body and valve being fitted to each other, before they too go into the boiler. This should lead to a close fitting regulator valve that seals when shut. Boiler fittings are also being overhauled, with the blower valve amongst those receiving attention recently.

The cylinder block and fittings are receiving attention, with the compression valves - basically safety valves for the cylinders, which open in the event of water-carry over from the boiler - being ground in and repaired where necessary. They will be hydraulically tested and adjusted to set their opening pressure to slightly above boiler pressure. The cylinder covers are being skimmed in a lathe to remove pitting corrosion. The rear cylinder covers are being refitted, which then allows the alignment of the

slidebars, which mount to them, to proceed. The piston valves are being cleaned and repaired where necessary, and the covers are having their faces skimmed and rebushed. One of the piston valve liners was cracked and a new one was machined several years ago - it will be fitted in the coming weeks.

The adjustable axlebox wedges, which allow clearances between the axlebox and the hornguides, have been dismantled and cleaned, with new nuts made for the special fine threads.

Tender spring hangars, brake rods, and suspension components have been blast cleaned and painted. The three pressure gauges - boiler, steam heat and vacuum - have received attention. The boiler pressure gauge was calibrated and is ready to go on the engine when the time comes, but the vacuum and steam heat gauges were in poorer condition and have been sent to a specialist for overhaul and calibration. Wooden 'pattresses' - the circular block of wood the gauges are mounted on to protect them a little from vibration - have been made from hardwood.

Ongoing work entails: slide bar alignment; make new trailing spring hangers and several other items to replace originals which failed magnetic inspection; blank off superheater header for hydraulic test; prepare tube holes for retubing boiler; bed in regulator valves and assemble regulator; overhaul pistons and valves; overhaul fittings (steam castle, compression valves, drain cocks, water gauges).

**NCC Mogul Project:** Work on the reconstitution of an NCC Mogul has continued as time and funds permit.

The boiler shell has had the front angle ring fitted and drilling of rivet holes is under way. (The angle ring was rolled by Messrs Naledi Ringrollers in South Africa, at the same time as the new tyres for

both locomotive No.4 and the Mogul.) The throat plate has also been fitted. This is an awkward shape which forms the transition between the firebox (which is square) and the barrel (round, obviously!).

The stretcher plates for connecting the main frames are being folded, and the smokebox saddle is being assembled. Most of the working parts of the locomotive are available, but two notable omissions are the leading sections of the coupling rods. Forgings for these have been made and machining is in progress - on a standby basis since the coupling rods are one of the last items required. Machining of the driving axle boxes is under way, using a slotting machine kindly loaned to us by the Strathspey Railway, since the slotting machine that we possess is just too small for this job.

Ongoing work entails: make pattern equipment for steel castings; pony truck stretchers have been cast; press and profile flanged plates (these connect the main frames together); assemble smokebox saddle (also connects the frames between the cylinders and supports the smokebox end of the boiler); machine driving axleboxes and horn guides; position boiler throat plate and drill rivet holes.

**B142:** In August the locomotive entered the Paint Shop at Whitehead.

Martin Devlin and Bill Garrioch have geared up to spray paint the locomotive.

**Help Request:** Like most of our locomotives, No.171 has carried replica name plates and works plates for most of her time in Society ownership. Typically, by the time a locomotive reached preservation someone had already made off with easily removable parts. At one stage No.171 even carried a works plate from Harland & Wolff commemorating the work done to her in the shipyard in the 1960s.

Unfortunately, when No.171 was in Shildon for overhaul back in 2014-2015 the preservation era replica works plates were misplaced and did not return home with the locomotive when the engineering contractor ceased trading.

New ones can be cast, as we did recently for No.131 - but a pattern will have to be made. In our museum collection we have several plates that we can use as a guide but none with a 1938 build date - the year that No.171's current incarnation was produced at Dundalk Works. Unless you can help!

If you happen to have a plate with "GNR(I) 1938 Dundalk" that you would be willing to lend us for a few weeks, we will make two copies for No.171 and return it to you.

## GENERAL MANAGER

**26<sup>th</sup> May:** The brave new world at the back end of COVID (we all hope) continues to be throwing out challenges but I am very confident that we are now in a position to see revenue streams pick up and we will be able to settle into a recovery phase for the Society.

To date, we have been fortunate to receive 29 grants during the darker times. We, and I personally, owe an enormous debt of gratitude to all of our funders, north and south. Without their assistance, I now am confident that we would have shut up shop a long time ago. That's not to say that we are entirely out of the woods and we need to keep a tight rein on spending whilst trying to get as many people as possible to buy tickets to our events.

There's no better way to support your Society than to buy tickets for our trains and events, so get booking and tell your family and friends. Just remember back to that time when we couldn't operate. It was painful for everyone, so let's enjoy

what we missed.

Whitehead site is currently closed to the public as we host some filming. I'm not at liberty to say too much but it is quite a big deal (and you will have noted cancellation of events on 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> May). Our platform is being transformed! The film crew don't need to use any of our rolling stock but have been very impressed with it as they have explored the site and taken pictures for their archive. I hope they will see fit to return. They will be with us until the middle of next week.  
*[This was part of a Netflix production for which the platform building became an Alpine station! - Ed.]*

## WHITEHEAD SITE

**Maintenance:** There may not have been many trains running during the Spring, but there was always plenty going on with the Site team.

### March

- Fixed the switch lever for one and two shed roads.
- Sent some copper for recycling.
- Erected shelving in the Station Café.
- Jacked and packed A Road outside the carriage shed.
- Put up two signs for Platform 3 café on the main road.

### April

- Helped with materials to make a press for the NCC boiler.
- Carried out an extensive bush-whacking of the third road siding.
- Easter preparations meant pulling out No.131, assembling the platform inflatable globe and chopping up an old garden shed for lighting up timber.
- Moved 6 tonnes of ash to the back of the site.

- Sold two small scrap tyres as garden features.
- Fixed a broken gate post at the Station.
- Installed supporting wheels for each of the big gates.

### May

- The Atlas shunted No.171's frames and the Mogul's frames out from out of the workshop to facilitate coating of foam insulation to the inside roof and walls of the workshop by a contractor. To do this job safely a cherry-picker was hired for the first two weeks in May.
- The cherry-picker was used to inspect the water tower, put up new lights in the workshop, remove dangerous guttering from the carriage shed and replace the cap on the foundry furnace chimney.
- The Atlas was given its big annual service.
- Made a new smaller wicket gate at the Station.
- A longitudinal sleeper in 4 Road engine shed was giving concern so it was removed it and replaced with a new 11ft hardwood timber.
- The end of the month was very busy removing picnic tables, signs, lamp posts and trolleys from the platform for a special event (see filming above).
- The back of the site was tidied to make more space available.

## GENERAL

**From John McKegney:** It is a very deep regret that due to pressing health issues and personal family matters I have had to resign as Chairman of the Board of the RPSI. It had been my intention not to seek re-election at the forthcoming AGM but another cancer diagnosis and other medical problems have meant that I

simply cannot give the Society the attention or commitment it needs and deserves so I tendered my resignation to the Board at its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> August.

Since my surprise nomination and election as Chairman five years ago there have been many challenges but I can honestly say that I have thoroughly enjoyed both the privilege and responsibility of being the Chairman of the Society's very dedicated and hardworking Board.

As I take my leave, I wish to thank our General Manager and all the staff and volunteers of the Society for all they do, both to keep heritage trains in public view throughout this island and for the way in which they have coped with governance changes in an increasingly regulated world.

*John McKegney  
Chairman 2017-2022*

**Board Appointments:** Following the 15<sup>th</sup> August meeting, the Board unanimously elected Peter Rigney as Chairman, Sue Harpur as Vice-Chairman and Mark Bailey as Treasurer.

They will serve until the AGM when they will be eligible for re-election.

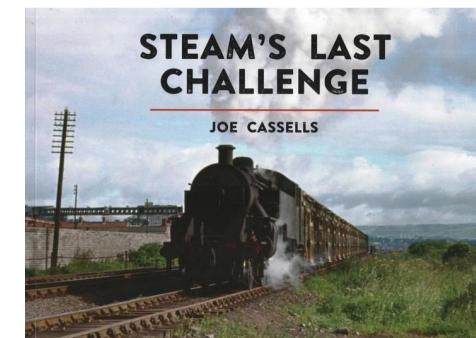
**Bill King-Wood:** Very sad news indeed - the loss in hospital on 7<sup>th</sup> June after a short illness of a stalwart of the Saturday Whitehead locomotive team.

Bill, a larger than life character and a veteran of the merchant navy, was never seen much on trains but appeared regularly on locomotive overhaul and maintenance work, including the flanging of boiler plates which involved the welding of enormous wooden mallets and was not a job for the physically inactive.

His training as a ship's master no doubt had a lot to do with it. His day job also probably contributed to his most

noticeable characteristic - a voice most suited to the bridge of a ship when you needed to be heard on the quarter deck! Bill's clear and concise (and colourful) comments left no-one in any doubt as to what he said and what he meant!

**Steam's Last Challenge:** The Museum was the setting on 23<sup>rd</sup> June for the launch of Joe Cassells' latest book "Steam's Last Challenge". The book tells the story of the NIR spoil trains, which ran from 1966-70 between Magheramorne and Greencastle, and focuses on the railwaymen who made it all possible.



The publication is being sponsored by the Society, and the Chairman said it reflected great credit on the RPSI and its volunteers.

Copies are available through the RPSI's online shop or via the postal sales form.

**AGM:** There are a number of vacancies on the Board and a nomination form is available in the "AGM Details" page on the Members Area of the website.

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