



November 2022

# NEWS LETTER

## 171 COMPLETION APPEAL

**Donation Request:** A fresh appeal has been launched to complete the restoration of locomotive No.171 "Sieve Gullion". It's named "Getting to the Summit" because, like climbing the namesake's mountain, completing the overhaul has been a challenge!

However, the summit is clearly in sight!

It is not unreasonable to expect to see No.171 in steam on the mainline in its 110<sup>th</sup> birthday year, 2023. With sufficient funding and timely work, we might well have three GNR(I) 4-4-0s available for traffic at the same time.

We are aiming to raise a final £25k/€25k to complete No.171 to the point of running-in on the mainline. Many of you have given generously in the past, for which we are all very grateful. But one last push may be made by donating on our website on the "Appeals/Donate" page.

## CARRIAGE & WAGON

**837:** The coach was built in 1902 for the Great Southern and Western Railway in Dublin and, after seeing service in World War One and later as a camping coach, it was saved in the 1970s by the RPSI.

It was kept in storage in Mullingar but now it has been transported by road to Whitehead to await restoration.

After inspection it was found to be in relatively sound condition. The roof is good with only minor rot found in one corner. The vehicle was speedily cleaned out and ready for volunteers to begin work on it.

It is thought that it might be an excellent vehicle for use at the platform on busy days in the café if fitted with an open plan seating area.

**300:** On Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> October, No.3BG "Guinness" and the shear legs gantries were employed to exchange a newly-overhauled bogie on this Mk2 carriage.

**304:** No.3BG was in action again on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> October to assist with the re-bogie of this coach.

**306:** The recently acquired Mk2 coach required an essential swap of its bogies, and this took place on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> November. The Atlas was used to carry out a series of critical rolling stock shunts.

A lorry crane arrived and 306 was carefully positioned so that the northern end of the coach was lifted and the old bogie was towed from below with the JCB telehandler and then lifted away with the fork lift. The replacement bogie was rolled under the coach, which was slowly

lowered into position.

The coach was propelled northwards, using the Atlas, to the site of the lorry crane, which did not need to reposition for the second bogie swap. Once this was complete the old bogies were loaded on the lorry and removed for recycling.

## TRAINS & EVENTS

**Doggy Day:** The first ever event of this nature was held as part of a Train Rides day at Whitehead Excursion Station with No.3BG on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> August.

From Pekinese to an Irish Wolfhound, and all sizes in between, dogs of all shapes and sizes were in attendance along with their owners, of course. 228 human passengers were carried making it the second best day of the season so far.

**Steam & 80s:** On Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> September this novel venture got off to a very loud start, when DJ Jonny Seeds fitted two massive speakers into either end of carriage 303, plus a mixing desk in carriage 463. With the interconnecting doors open, the music could be heard through most of the train.

Passengers, many dressed in what they took to be 1980s costume, boarded at Whitehead and Belfast. By the time the train arrived in Lisburn the party was in full swing.

Back at Whitehead and the DJ had another desk, complete with disco lighting, set up on the platform, where the party continued. With a cocktail bar on the train and platform, thirsts were well satisfied.

No.131 did the honours throughout the evening.

**The Midlander:** After a night of heavy rain, the Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> September trip commenced with No.85 having a light

engine test run to Clonsilla.

This was followed by two well-loaded public trains to Maynooth.

**Queen Elizabeth II:** The protocol, as a mark of respect to the late Queen, was for sporting and entertainment events to be cancelled for the official period of mourning (ending 20<sup>th</sup> September).

The RPSI Board agreed that:

- Whitehead Railway Museum closed on 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> September.
- The Steam Whitehead event scheduled for Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> September was cancelled.
- The Steam & Jazz on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> September was cancelled.

**Steam & Jazz:** On Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> September there was a Jazz night with a few twists!

At Lisburn, as well as the usual jazz band, passengers were surprised by a flash-mob - swing dancers who performed and taught passengers how to dance.

At Whitehead, the swing dancers were again performing and there was also a chip van and ice cream cart. Some customers from the Platform 3 Steak Night stayed on and joined in the fun.

All ran to time, with No.131 in good form, although she was very much in the background at Whitehead, spending the whole lie-over being filmed with driver Noel Playfair at the shed for German television.

The train on Friday 30<sup>th</sup> September was lightly loaded train and seemed a little lacking in atmosphere for what was, after all, a replacement for that cancelled two weeks previously during the period of mourning.

**Steam Whitehead:** The 'excuse' for running train rides on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup>

October was the 120<sup>th</sup> birthday of GS&WR carriage 837, recently arrived at Whitehead.

**Western Liner:** This diesel-hauled trip on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> October was originally planned to start and finish at Dublin Heuston, but was changed to Dublin Connolly because of no drivers passed to drive vacuum-braked trains being based in Heuston.

The train departed Dublin with GM 085, picking up at Portarlington and with photo stops in Roscommon and Ballyhaunis, destination Ballina.

The train ran back to Claremorris, now with GM 076, which changed ends and departed for Westport at 16:41. After running round the train, it departed for the return to Dublin.

**Cú Chulainn:** As No.85 was required in Northern Ireland to fulfil licence conditions (must not be out of the UK continuously for more than three years), it was decided to run a train to Dundalk on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> October to cover the costs of the locomotive movement.

At Dundalk, the engine was watered and the set moved to the loop siding.

No.85 ran forward light to Newry to fulfil the day's requirements. Then it ran back to collect its train in Dundalk before returning to Dublin.

**Horror Express Stake Night:** There was a full house for this event on the evening of Friday 28<sup>th</sup> October. It comprised of steak and chips in the Whitehead café, followed by a screening in GS&WR carriage 837 of the 1972 cult classic "Horror Express" (certificate 15).

**Haunted Express:** The tickets for these trips were sold out within a day!

Despite Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> October being very wet and windy, with the concern that the

rails would be greasy and cause delays, the first train reached Maynooth 6 minutes early after a non-stop run.

A second successful trip followed.

**Whitehead Halloween:** Unfortunately, owing to engineering works in the Yorkgate area, the traditional Broomstick Belle trains on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> October were not feasible.

Instead, two days of themed train rides and interactive vampire hunting were organised at Whitehead.

Both days were busy, but with fewer casual visitors on Saturday because of the horrendous weather.

**Victorian Street Fair:** This traditional local community event is back again on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> November, along with Whitehead train rides.

**Santa Special:** Belfast trains will operate on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> December - reduced dates due to crew shortages.

Once again, the Charity Santa initiative is being run. It proved hugely successful in the past, and two local charities, St Vincent De Paul and Salvation Army, will have use of two carriages on the first mainline train from Belfast.

On the non-mainline dates (Sundays 27<sup>th</sup> November; 4<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> December), there will be train rides and Santa search events at Whitehead.

Dublin trains will run on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> December.

Tickets for these trains sold out within seconds as demand was phenomenal. Consequently, many were disappointed and hours were spent dealing with dozens of emails from frustrated people, making all sorts of allegations - conspiracy, ineptitude, all tickets sold in advance, etc., etc.

It is unfortunate, but there is not much we could do differently as more people are seeking tickets than are available.

## LOCOMOTIVES

**No.3BG "Guinness":** The Guinness engine, after a busy summer of train rides, had its annual boiler examination in October. A complex programme of shunts to facilitate carriage maintenance work, and occasional train rides days, kept her employed for most of the autumn.

The engine has been turned to face chimney to Larne to allow steam heat connection for the Christmas season.

**No.85 "Merlin":** Owned by National Museums Northern Ireland, the successor to the Belfast Transport Museum who purchased the locomotive from CIÉ in 1964, the locomotive was loaned to the RPSI in 1977, and has been on loan to us ever since. The loan was recently renewed with NMNI for a further 15 years - which brings us right up until 2037.

The museum's procedures meant that No.85 could travel to the Republic of Ireland from Northern Ireland, but not remain there for a period exceeding 3 years. Normally this would not present a problem as the locomotives swap between Whitehead and Connolly sheds, but Covid, and the operating difficulties that this presented, meant that No.85 spent a much longer period in Dublin. To reset the procedure, it was agreed with NMNI that No.85 would make a trip to Newry as part of the "Cú Chulainn" trip on 23<sup>rd</sup> October.

This run, which featured a reduced top speed and several servicing stops, was also intended to continue running in the big end bearing that recently received attention. It achieved both aims.

However, following the public runs to

Dundalk and Maynooth in October, the bearing required to be dismantled and returned to Whitehead for attention. A successful light engine run from Dublin to Dundalk and return was made on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> November.

**No.131:** After the big job replacing the sponge pads earlier in the summer, No.131 continues to perform reliably.

The next operations will be the Belfast-based Santa trains. As her boiler has now been in service since January 2015, although little used in the first three years as we built the tender and completed her overhaul, it is fast approaching time for a 'mid-life' retube. Boiler tubes are on order and planning is underway to tackle this job in January/February 2023.

**No.171:** Recent major progress was the completion of the hydraulic test on the boiler. This was the culmination of a lot of work to fit and bead over the new boiler tubes, and complete the process of caulking the boiler seams, where required. The boiler was successfully pressurised with water to the satisfaction of the insurance company's boiler examiner on 14<sup>th</sup> November.

Work is now progressing with installation of the boiler fittings in preparation for the out-of-frames steam test. This looks like a lot of progress in a few days, with the familiar cab fittings along with the safety valve and whistle reappearing in their correct positions, but it really is the tip of the iceberg with a lot of parts that have been worked on separately coming together.

Amongst the parts to be fitted are the firebars. Some were in good enough condition to reuse but a substantial number are new, having been cast at Ballantine Castings in Bo'ness. Now that we are reassembling the locomotive, we are discovering which bits have gone missing since No.171's journey to the

north-east of England. The firebar carriers are among the parts that either have been lost or didn't make it back from Shildon. Fortunately these are not too difficult to replace.

The boiler has been lifted onto the boiler trolley from the former Dundalk works so that it can be moved outside when the time comes to light the fire, probably in the next couple of weeks. When that happens, it will be just over 20 years since No.171's boiler last had a fire on the grate.

Work on the slidebars is now complete, with these components now assembled and aligned in their final positions. No.171 is unusual amongst our passenger locomotives in having four slidebars per cylinder, similar to the goods engines Nos. 184, 186 and 461. No.131 and 85 have two slidebars per cylinder, similar to what you can easily see on the outside of No.4 or the two saddle tank engines. This meant that there were eight in total to grind smooth, fit, align and adjust.

The slipper blocks, the component of the crosshead that slide on the slidebar, have been remetalled with new whitemetal and are being machined to suit. The slidebars are aligned to the centre of the driving axle, which meant that the wheels had to be out while this work was going on.

Now that the slidebars are fitted, the wheels can go back in. New spongepads have been soaked in oil and fitted to the spongeboxes in preparation for assembling the axleboxes onto the wheelsets. Regular readers may remember that No.131 "borrowed" two of No.171's spongepads back during the summer. We now hold spares in case we have one fail in future. These spongepads are manufactured by the Armstrong Oiler company which nowadays is a subsidiary of the North Yorkshire Moors Railway.

With the yard busy with Santa trains for the next 4 weekends, it looks like No.171 will be rewheeled shortly after Christmas.

**No.184:** The locomotive continues to receive an in-depth cosmetic overhaul. Recently the first black undercoat went onto the smokebox and chimney, with the rest of the locomotive still in primer, giving the appearance of a red J15. The safety valve caps have been polished, and the buffer beam is now being sanded down for primer.

Research into the livery is ongoing - the team are currently leaning towards the mid-1950s lined green livery that she carried before being repainted into a faux-European livery for the "Darling Lili" film in the late 1960s.

Some clear colour photos of No.184 in her 1950s elaborate lined green livery have been gratefully received following an appeal to members. These give us an approximation of the colour of green but the shade changes depending what way your screen is adjusted, or the colour of light you look at the print under.

If anyone can tell us what shade of green CIÉ used on No.184 in the late 1950s, please get in touch.

**No.461:** The mogul changed places with No.186, on display in the carriage shed, a few months back when the Guinness Van went on display. Since then, considerable effort has gone into making the cab clean and tidy for museum visitors, with boiler fittings being polished and the cab painted from top to bottom.

The transformation is nothing short of remarkable, and No.461's cab will probably be the cleanest it has ever been once the job is complete. This will allow her to fulfil one of the important roles of a steam engine acting as a museum exhibit - a cab that children (large and small) can imagine themselves driving the

locomotive from.

The deep clean was officially completed in time for the locomotive's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday party on 16<sup>th</sup> November. Present was Gill Lewis, who excelled in doing most of the work herself, making the cab presentable for museum visitors. The birthday event included a photocall with the Mayor and a cake.

**NCC Mogul Project:** Work continues on making patterns for cast parts - the latest being the bogie side control slide. It is being made now because we have a special machine on loan which can be used to machine the casting.

**Training and Competency:** One of the problems with using big machine tools to make lots of custom "one off" parts for steam engines is finding people to work the machines safely and effectively.

We have been fortunate to both employ, and have as volunteers, some very skilled individuals. They work wonders making parts, from small and relatively easy nuts and bolts, to large and complex assemblies, from blocks or bars of metal and specially made castings.

To pass on some of these skills, and get some parts made into the bargain, we have revived the idea of a special "Tech" class for volunteers. This is not a new idea, the first class having been started at Millfield Tech (now the site of Belfast Metropolitan College) in the late 1970s, and ran successfully up until about 2010, when changing priorities at the college meant that a suitable machine shop and tutor were no longer available.

This new class is taking place in Lisburn's South Eastern Regional College in a fully equipped student workshop, with 8 lathes, 4 milling machines, all types of welding, a computer controlled plasma cutter, sheet metal rolls, guillotine and folder, etc.

New lamps for No.171 are in an advanced stage of construction. An injector cone for No.131 is also in progress, together with repairs and new parts for No.171, including an oil feed union, parts of the bogie spring hangars, and other parts. Small pipe unions for the NCC mogul project are also being manufactured. Some of our venerable workshop tools are also receiving attention, with tongs from the blacksmith's forge getting new rivets, and a variety of small pins for Mk2 carriages are also being made.

## WHITEHEAD SITE

**June:** Replaced all the platform materials after the film contract in late May.

Moved the metal skip at the back of the site to make room for a delivery of 30 tons of coal before an imminent price rise.

Whitehead In Bloom put in some lovely plants and the palms on the platform were transferred to bigger barrels.

Tidied up the loco store, moving patterns to a container.

**July:** A defibrillator was mounted on the entrance gate post to the Station building and its canopy received four lovely hanging baskets of flowers.

Dismantled the home signal at the bridge end of the platform; refurbished it with new lenses and a good series of paint coats.

Sorted out some smelly drains.

Over £500 was also realised when the big skip was emptied of mostly scrap metal with some copper recycled separately.

**August:** Gardening and weed-killing on site, plus a big job being the trimming of the laurel perimeter hedge around the top of the turntable wall while the pit was

cleaned out.

The car park got a tidy up.

On 18<sup>th</sup> June a BR Mk2 standard open coach arrived on a low-loader. Unfortunately, the lorry could not access the heavy lift gantries so that meant laying 120ft of temporary rail using the Atlas. The coach was then gingerly lowered down a ramp onto this arrangement and the lorry was then able to leave.

The Bessbrook tram was moved to the back of the workshop using the forklift.

Replaced a rotten long timber in two shed road.

The forklift has a very rotten steel roof for which we are making a complete replacement with help of the HEI staff.

Preliminary cabling and internal lever work has been carried out in the signal cabin to allow the functional operation of the recently repaired home signal.

**September:** At about this time every year the Atlas road rail excavator, the JCB telehandler and the fork lift receive their insurance inspection.

A new company and inspector arrived at Whitehead to carry out the procedure. After a very thorough static and practical examination it is pleasing to report that all three pieces of essential plant passed the scrutineer's standards. He was also complimentary on the general good functionality of all the machines which, considering all are over 30 years of age, was pleasing to hear.

**October:** Over the last while the Whitehead Site Squad has been making a number of practical improvements to the existing signalling arrangements, the aim being to replicate some aspects of a working signal box and thereby enhance the visitor experience.

The lever frame, which came originally from Tubbercurry on the Claremorris to Collooney line, has been cleaned up with the levers being painted in the correct colours depending on their function, either signals or points. Interlocking is underway and should be functional shortly.

The original NCC Starter signal from Castlerock, which is on the post at the Belfast end of the Excursion Station platform, has been connected to a lever in the signal box for a while now, but lately the Squad have spent some time connecting the Home signal at the bridge to the signal box. Initially, the signal arm was restored, including replacing the glasses and repainting everything. This signal was originally the Up Home at Claremorris.

Connection to the box required the installation of pulleys and wire over 100 metres and a tubed channel up through the platform from track level. Successful completion of this work now means that visitors to Whitehead Railway Museum can pull on and off two signals from within the signal box but, thanks to the interlocking, not at the same time.

## WINTER MEETINGS

**12<sup>th</sup> October:** Rails through Pomeroy.

Charles Friel led a trip back to the days when Pomeroy was a busy railway town on the Derry Road, with direct links to Belfast and Londonderry and easy access to places like Dublin and Bundoran. In this fully-illustrated talk, with many maps and several 'new' photographs, the railway line between Donaghmore and Carrickmore was recreated, with its steep gradients, heavy goods traffic and busy excursion trains, its accidents and other incidents.

The talk included the period after closure

on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1965 when Pomeroy was the scene of one notable derailment before nature quietly reclaimed the line.

**9<sup>th</sup> November:** Enterprise Express.

John Friel recalled the life and times of Ireland's longest-lived named train with a huge selection of pictures, many of them being shared in public for the first time. Beginning with the earliest non-stop runs between Dublin and Belfast, John traced how the Enterprise Express came to be launched in August 1947 and then grew from one Belfast-based train to two non-stop trains each way daily before extending its reach all the way to Cork for a while.

Also included were today's DeDetreich push-pull operations and the Society's own Steam Enterprise trains, including our very successful 1987 recreation of the first Compound-hauled Enterprise Express.

**14<sup>th</sup> December:** Subject to be advised.

## GENERAL

**Annual General Meeting:** Held on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> September at Carrickfergus Town Hall, with over 50 attendees, it was the busiest AGM for quite some years.

Welcome back to the Board for Mark Walsh after a few years away. Also welcome to Jonathan Clinton, Martin Devlin and Jim O'Neill.

Thanks to departing directors Fergus McDonnell and Phillip Newell who both served for some number of years.

**Heritage Engineering Ireland:** From the end of October HEI ceased to be a trading body. All employees were moved to the employ of the RPSI.

This will simplify both the financial procedures and operating of the Society

and will, hopefully, make our engineering endeavours much more efficient and accountable.

**Sales News:** The following books have been added to the Shop:

- "The County Donegal Remembered", by Jim McBride, softback, 24 x 15 cm, 50 colour and 200 b&w photos, 1 map, 144 pages, £15/€20.
- "Irish Railways The Last 60 Years" by Michael H.C. Baker, softback, 24 x 17 cm, 165 colour and 60 b&w photos, 96 pages, £15.99/€19.
- "Memories Of Kerry's Railways" by A.H. Vaughan, softback, 18 x 24 cm, 52 b&w photos, 50 pages, £11.95/€14.
- "Irish Railways Line by Line - Volume 3, Dublin and the south-East of Ireland" by Jim Edgar, softback, 26 x 18cm, 98 colour and 5 b&w photos, 1 map, 96 pages, £11.50/€13.50.

Plus, the 2023 RPSI Calendar is now also on sale.

**Website:** The following vehicles now have their own pages in the Collections section of the RPSI website:

- 3076 Hand Crane
- Carriage 837
- Irish State Saloon 5408
- 303 Mk2 Standard Open
- 463 Mk2 Brake
- 304 Mk2 First Open
- 411 Full Brake
- 301 Mk2 TSO
- 305 Mk2 SO

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