



June 2023

NEWS LETTER

GENERAL MANAGER

Update: It is with disbelief that I am sitting in Whitehead contemplating having taken up employment with the RPSI exactly 4 years ago. So much has happened in such a short period. When I accepted the position, I was in my forties. Not so now!

I knew very little about the mechanics of trains or the workings of operational excursions. Now I can certainly tell a fire bar from a brake block, have undertaken a shunting course, have fired No.131 and No.3BG (don't worry, in the confines of the yard and under strict supervision), have expanded the excursion portfolio, and have made enduring friendships along the way.

I have seen staff come and staff go and continue to keep in regular contact with most of the leavers. I have had two Chairmen to date, both of whom I have immense respect for and I thank them for both of supporting my opportunity to have such a unique job.

When I started in 2019 I was able to operate 'normally' for just over 10 months, giving me time to get to know everyone and understand the core elements of the business. Then

everything changed and my focus turned to company survival during a pandemic. This was probably the most challenging period of my working life but, with your help, we came out the other side remaining solvent.

Then we get to 2023 and the start of what we hoped would be a year of further recovery. In the northern jurisdiction, that was not to be with the sudden and tragic death of our driver, Noel Playfair.

So, I enter a third incarnation, trying to maximise our on-site offering and working on ways to get back to mainline activity with the support of Translink. This is likely to be a prolonged exercise, but our Dublin operations are continuing to offer a strong and exciting mainline programme for which I am profoundly grateful.

Lisa

TRAINS & EVENTS

The Midlander: The first public mainline operation of the year ran successfully behind No.85 on Sunday 26th March, with two trips to Maynooth.

The Phoenix: This Saturday 1st April tour was arranged to facilitate the transfer of No.131 from Whitehead to Dublin.

A lot of communication and dialogue took place between the RPSI, NIR (Translink) and Irish Rail to make sure that this transfer took place as NIR have no passed steam drivers.

The Irish Rail steam crew - Robert Jolley, Keith Farrelly and Inspector Mark Reck - were on the early morning Enterprise. At Whitehead they met up with NIR driver (and steam fireman) Anto Dargan, who acted as conductor driver to Dundalk.

GM 074 was in charge of the train from Dublin and after arrival into Dundalk the set was shunted into the loop opposite the platform to await No.131's arrival from Whitehead. This was met by a large crowd and a lone piper playing on the platform.

The return to Dublin was without incident, although late due to flooding.

Easter Bunny: These were very successful events over three days (8th, 10th & 11th April), with well over 1,100 passengers sampling train rides and Museum tours.

No.3BG "Guinness" was the locomotive throughout.

Easter Eggstravaganza: On Monday 10th April, there was a repeat of the Midlander operation with No.85 - only with Bunny and Easter eggs. All went according to plan.

Sligo Leitrim: This tour, on Saturday 22nd April, was originally to be Dublin Connolly to M3 Parkway - Dublin Docklands - Sligo - Dublin Connolly -

Grand Canal Dock (bay platform). However, due to signalling issues at Docklands and Grand Canal Dock, we were prohibited from Docklands and the bay at Grand Canal Dock Stations. There were many disappointed passengers on board who had wished to traverse these sections of track.

216 in Belmond livery was at the head of the train to Sligo and return, 075 powering the returns from M3 Parkway and Grand Canal Dock.

Cú Chulainn / The Boyne: These specials on Sunday 23rd April were organised at short notice to enable the Locomotive Department to give No.85 more running-in mileage after its recent repairs.

The itinerary was a run to Dundalk, with a local trip back to Drogheda.

Steam Whitehead: On Monday 1st May No.3BG "Guinness" was in action again on train rides for May Day.

Not as busy as Easter but, with a very healthy number of casual visitors, there was plenty to keep volunteers and café staff on their toes.

The new system of ticketing, based on train ride and museum joint entry, has certainly brought an encouraging number of visitors around the locomotive and carriage galleries and it is great to hear the excitement of children inside.

There will be more dates throughout the summer, but the next are on Sunday 18th June (Father's Day) and Saturday 24th June (Doggy Day).

Steam Dreams: This was a major week-long charter.

Pre Tour: Society representatives met with both Steam Dreams and Locomotive Services Limited on a number of occasions during the past year. The original contract was with Steam Dreams UK and they had been taken over by Locomotive Services Ltd.

The tour required a higher standard of carriage so, to match the other two upgraded carriages, it was necessary to change the upholstery in 1523 to a matching blue. The carriage had to be wired to take lamps on each table. New curtains, antimacassars and floor carpet had to be purchased and fitted.

The set consisted of 3173 (van), 1523, 1505, 1532, 1514 (bar), 1522 (diner), 1506, 1541.

Thursday 4th May: No.85 “Merlin” hauled the train to Portarlinton where No.131, which had run light earlier, took over for the section to Galway. No.85 continued south to Limerick.

Saturday 6th May: No.131 was tender-first from Galway to Athenry, then chimney-first down the Western Rail Corridor. Water was taken at Gort from the water tanker which followed the train all week. In Limerick, both steam locomotives could be seen together. No.85 took over the train and ran to Killarney, where it would be based for a couple of days.

Sunday 7th May: No. 85 pushed the train out to Killarney Check, then forward up the bank for a return trip to Tralee. On arrival back in Killarney the rear two coaches were dropped for the next day’s run to Cork.

Monday 8th May: This was a return trip to Cork via Mallow. In Cork, with the passengers all off, the train was taken

back into the tunnel before being propelled around the back of the station to the depot for servicing. This was repeated in reverse before departure up through the tunnel.

Tuesday 9th May: No.85 hauled the train to Limerick Junction. There, No.131 was waiting, having run light from Limerick, and it hauled the train tender-first to Waterford. Meanwhile, No.85 departed light for Dublin.

No.131 came off in Waterford and ran light to Kilkenny to stable. GM 076 hauled the train forward to Bagenalstown, where the passengers disembarked; the train continued to Carlow empty and the locomotive ran round the set and shunted it for stabling overnight.

Wednesday 10th May: The RPSI crew took the early service train from Kilkenny to Carlow, boarded their train in the siding and prepared it for departure empty to Bagenalstown behind 076. Here the diesel ran round the set and headed off northwards. No.131 arrived from Kilkenny and hauled the train to Kildare, then ran light to Dublin Connolly, having finished its scheduled participation on the tour.

GM 076 came on again and hauled the train from Kildare to Wexford via Connolly. The train continued empty to Rosslare Strand - it’s easier to run round there - then ran back to be shunted into the siding at Wexford for stabling.

Meanwhile, back in Dublin, No.85, which should have preceded the train light to Wexford, was found to be leaking. The decision was taken to

cancel its involvement and instead send No.131 south after it had been serviced.

Thursday 11th May: To again run round, No.131 hauled the empty train to Rosslare Strand, before arriving back in Wexford, the carriages having traversed the Quays for the fourth time in two days. No.131 then finished the tour with a fine run up to Dublin.

Feedback from the passengers exceeded all expectations. Both the locomotives behaved magnificently, until No.85’s problem on the last day. But we need not have worried as No.131 was in great form.

Dinosaur Express: Despite having no possibility of mainline steam out of Whitehead, it was felt the Dinosaur Express would be readily transferrable to CAF railcars and so it transpired.

On Sunday 7th May set 3018+3023 was immaculately turned out, inside and out and over 300 passengers in Belfast were greeted by four hand-held highly realistic puppet baby dinosaurs of assorted species, held by their ‘rangers’. It has to be said the rangers were somewhat swamped with youngsters eager to see and be photographed with the dinosaurs - and feed them crackers!

Once the train departed, two dinosaurs went through each of the two 3-car sets on the way to Whitehead, before swapping sets for the return journey. That way everyone got their chance to get up close to each baby dinosaur.

At a misty Whitehead, an interactive show for the kids was staged on the platform and the full-size dinosaurs - raptor Blue and triceratops Gorm

(‘blue’ in Irish) - stomped around impressively and were available for photographs. Platform 3 provided teas, coffees, snacks and more substantial meals, whilst a dinosaur-orientated sales stand was in operation. As if this was not enough, No.3BG “Guinness” was brought to the Larne end of the platform and proved very popular, with footplate tours by the crew.

The whole thing was repeated in the afternoon for what was a very positive day for the Society. Thanks to Translink who facilitated us on many levels.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.3BG “Guinness”: The Guinness engine was unusually steamed up midweek on Wednesday 15th March to pull No.131 out of the Dunleath Workshop and reunite the latter with its tender. As well as working the Easter train rides, it was busy moving bits of No.171 around in the over many weeks.

No.85 “Merlin”: The locomotive received its new middle big end brasses, which were cast towards the end of 2022. Early indications were good after the running-in in March and April.

The extensive running on the Steam Dreams charter in early May went well until the last day when leaks were found and it was decided to withdraw the engine.

No.131: Entered the Dunleath Workshop on Sunday 5th February for a ‘mid-term’ retube, necessary approximately every 7 to 8 years as the boiler tubes deteriorate over time. In

preparation for the move, spark arrestors, grate and brick arch were removed and the normally dry and sooty firebox and smokebox power-hosed. Once in the workshop, the tender, chimney, dome, smokebox door, and all the smokebox pipework and other accoutrements were removed.

Next for removal were the superheater elements. No.131 has a "Robinson" type superheater, where the elements are expanded into a very substantial superheater header, accessed through three panels in the front of the header.

This is unlike any of our other superheated locomotives which have "Schmidt" type elements with a spherical end which are much easier to remove and replace. The workshop crew had to develop a new-to-us technique to remove the elements without damaging them. As one wag pointed out, at least it wasn't as bad as dismantling a "Phoenix" type superheater (see Norman Johnston's "Locomotives of the GNR(I)" if you don't get that reference!).

Next, the smoke and flue tubes were removed and relocated to the scrap skip, where the site squad spent a few productive hours chopping them into shorter lengths - apparently the scrapman pays more for smaller chunks.

While this was going on, all the usual annual inspection tasks were underway, such as refilling the fusible plugs, calibrating the pressure gauges, overhauling the safety valves and so on.

The boiler received its first (of three)

inspections with the tubes removed, and the new tubes started to go in at the start of March. To give access to the firebox for the larger boilermaker, the ashpan was partially dismantled to allow access though where the firebars normally sit.

By the end of the second week of March, the new tubes were all in, expanded and getting beaded over at the firebox end. The hydraulic test, where the boiler was pressurised with water to check for leaks and distortion, took place the following week and then a few days of reassembly took place, including the replacing the previously mentioned Robinson superheater elements.

By the middle of the month, the locomotive was assembled enough to light a warming fire, so No.3BG appeared at the workshop door with tender No.37 to shunt No.131 out. The fire was lit that afternoon.

In the following days, the final boiler examination took place, the safety valves were set, and the brake and AWS / TPWS exams completed. A new brick arch was built, and finishing touches such as electrification warning notices, a deflector over the safety valves, and a touch up of the paintwork followed.

The locomotive was also turned to face Dublin - we think this may have made Saturday the first time No.131 has left Whitehead chimney first. She would have returned from her "Portrush Flyer" turns facing Dublin, but of course was turned to face Larne before being sent out again, each time.

No.131 moved light engine to Dundalk

on Saturday 1st April, then hauled 6 carriages and a van to Dublin, to be in position for the "Steam Dreams" tour.

The locomotive excelled on the latter tour, even standing in for No.85 on the arduous South-Eastern route. It will remain in Dublin for the summer.

No.171 "Slieve Gullion": Work on No.171 slowed as effort was diverted to make No.85 and No.131 ready for the 2023 season. Now that both are in Dublin, the focus returns to No.171.

The locomotive was placed back on her wheels at Whitehead on Tuesday 23rd May by the workshop team working with the site squad.

A lot of work has happened since No.171 was lifted off her wheels when her overhaul was restarted back in 2019.

The bearings have been examined, with the 4 axle-boxes for the coupled wheelsets melted out and refilled with new white-metal, machined and then fitted to the axle journals.

The coupled wheelsets also had their tyres turned back to the correct tread profile on the wheel lathe.

The bogie was dismantled back to its component parts and each of the components of the spring gear examined and tested, and replaced or repaired where necessary.

The locomotive was moved back into the Dunleath Workshop immediately after being placed on its own wheels, and will have springs and brake gear refitted over the next couple of days.

After that, the motion and pistons will be reassembled - all very convenient to

access with the boiler not yet in place.

Some other smaller parts - lubrication fittings, etc., - were taken home by locomotive department volunteers during the Covid lockdowns to clean up in their garages - and will be refitted over the next couple of weeks.

The very similar locomotive No.131 has a simple gravity fed lubrication arrangement for the axlebox bearings, while No.171 was fitted with a mechanical lubricator which pumps oil into each bearing automatically. Sorting through the assortment of fittings and flexible hoses for No.171's arrangement has led at least one engineer to question why the GNR went for such a complicated system when No.131 and her sisters did perfectly well without!

No.184: The small team working on No.184 have started to reassemble boiler fittings into the cab of the locomotive. The front of the engine now looks much more like itself with various fittings and bits and pieces which were on shelves being returned to their positions.

FILM CONTRACT

Freud's Last Session: There had been rumours of a film contract at Whitehead for several months, and this came to fruition on Tuesday 18th April, with the filming of scenes for "Freud's Last Session".

The section for which filming was conducted at Whitehead relates to this sentence of the script summary: "Set on the eve of WWII and towards the end of his life, Freud's Last Session sees

Sigmund Freud (Anthony Hopkins) invite iconic author C.S. Lewis (Matthew Goode) for a debate over the existence of God."

Having taken up the invite, 'C.S. Lewis' was present at Whitehead - suitably dressed as a rural Oxfordshire station - in order to catch the train to see Freud. Also present were many extras, including a platoon of soldiers, a class of primary school children dressed for evacuation, and some of their 'mothers' to see them off.

The train assembled at the platform for 10am commencement of filming was (from Belfast end) No.461 (long out of ticket of course and so fitted with smoke machines), NCC First/Second 68, UTA Diner 87, NCC Brake Third 91, UTA Brown Van 697, No.3BG "Guinness". The latter was of course the motive power, and ultimately destined to be edited out of any scenes. A very attractive little train, on a bright sunny day.

It is worth noting that the original ambition of the film company had been to have No.85 as the train engine, which would have done away with the No.3BG requirement, but the day that all this was initially discussed turned out to be the day Noel Playfair died (16th January), and things necessarily spun out somewhat differently thereafter.

The film train was assembled on Sunday 16th April, and stored, minus No.3BG, in the original section of B-Road.

The train had to be filmed in 3 main positions:

- Sitting stationary at the platform

whilst passengers and evacuees embarked and disembarked.

- Departing with C.S. Lewis aboard (in daylight).
- Arriving back with C.S. Lewis having met Freud (in the dark).

The weather was impeccable for filming throughout.

The train sat at the platform for about 5 hours from 10am whilst the stationary scenes were filmed. Around 3pm, No.3BG was called into action to propel the train towards Belfast and reset it perhaps seven or eight times until an adequate departure scene had been captured.

Shifting a train containing a large locomotive, and particularly perhaps the never free-running No.461, with No.3BG at a realistic mainline departure rate of acceleration is something of a challenge, hence the need for so many takes.

Copious quantities of sand were laid on the rails for much of the length of the platform as the necessary adventures into the 'big valve' would result in slipping and interrupt the smoothness of the shot. It is exceptionally rare to experience No.3BG properly unleashed!

Daylight departure scenes filmed, the next requirement was to turn No.461 and re-position it on the Larne end of the train, with No.3BG retiring to the Belfast end from where it could propel the train into Whitehead for the 'arrival' scene.

The locomotive was coaled and watered in this interval, whilst everyone waited for darkness to fall. A

large floodlight was rigged on top of the signal cabin to represent the moon.

Once darkness did fall at 21:30, it took just two takes to film the arrival scene, following which a camera rigged to the Atlas road/rail excavator did some runpasts on the non-platform side of the train. All was completed by 22:30 and a cheer went up from the cast and film crew. The Atlas runpast shots were the last takes of the entire film.

The film is currently expected to be released around December 2023. It provided a very useful lift in revenue for the RPSI, as well as an interestingly different day for the Whitehead operations crew, at this challenging time.

CARRIAGE & WAGON

Transfer: Brake second 1916 and Diner 2421 were transferred to the Connemara Railway in Maam Cross in early May.

GENERAL

Paddy O'Brien: It is sad to have to report the passing of our member Paddy O'Brien, who died peacefully on 17th April.

Paddy became involved with the Dublin/Mullingar side of RPSI operations in 1976. On those trips he was always well turned out, forever in a suit even when crawling between carriages. So much so that those not in the know always assumed he was a railway company official! This became even more the case when Paddy turned up with one of the first ever 'Del Boy' brick mobile phones - mind

you, it was put to great use when the powers that be needed to be contacted from somewhere in the wilds of the west.

In no small measure, Paddy helped to establish the RPSI's good name in the south of Ireland, taking it from what was mainly a northern based operation to an all-island body.

Frank Dunlop: Former NIR Locomotive Inspector Frank Dunlop (97) passed away in May.

From the foundation of the RPSI Frank was a firm friend of this Society. On our earliest day tours he was more than just the inspector on the engine; he managed the entire day's operations and even took his own turn on the shovel as well as the regulator. A particular favourite of his were the Dublin "Steam Enterprises" of the 1980s.

It is fair to say that without Frank's help and guidance during our first couple of decades, the RPSI would not be what it is today.

Nationwide: The Irish heritage railways were featured on the RTÉ Nationwide programme on 17th, 19th and 21st April.

The RPSI in Whitehead and Dublin featured significantly. These programmes may still be available from the RTÉ website.

Sales News: A new book has been added to the online shop:

"The Adventures Of A Fighting Railway, The Belfast Central Railway Company 1864-1885" by Robert Phipps, paperback, 26 x 18 cm, 65 b&w photos, numerous maps and diagrams, 292 pages, £25 / €29.

YouTube: The Society's YouTube channel has been updated with 24 new videos.

These are short introductory films produced by Peter Carson. They feature many of the activities happening at Whitehead.

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