



September 2023

NEWS LETTER

GENERAL MANAGER

Update: It's hard to believe that we are two-thirds through 2023, and the nights are slowly drawing in. No time at all since Christmas and time to plan for the next one!

I thought it prudent that I give you a very brief update as to where we are in relation to steam operations in our northern jurisdiction. Following the most tragic death of Noel Playfair, we found ourselves in a position where we had no suitably qualified and willing steam drivers.

Knowing the impact that this would have, I immediately set up meetings with Translink senior management, including the Chief Executive, in order to plot a solution-orientated path. This is still very much a work in progress but both Translink and the RPSI are determined that the solution will not begin to age in the making.

All options are being considered and all parties that are in a position to provide assistance have committed to helping expediently. This is a complex and sensitive piece of work but I can assure you that I am doing as much as I can to get back to mainline operations from Whitehead as soon as possible. If there are any further updates, I will let you know as soon as I can.

In the meantime, I need to change the focus of northern operations to event-based income activity. Hence, we had a programme of on-site events over the summer - and into September.

Although we have no mainline train, I would encourage you, your family, and your extended phonebook to support our efforts and attend upcoming events. After all, at the moment, they are our (sterling) lifeblood. You may be particularly interested in our Home Front Festival on 30th September and, if not, check out everything else on offer at Whitehead and Dublin on our website.

I can't deny that this has been a very challenging number of months, but it is great to see that our visitor figures compared to last year are up by over one third. Please spread the word and keep this buoyancy going until we can get out on the rails once again.

Lisa

WHITEHEAD

Site News: A report of some of the work carried out around our depot in the last few months:

June

- Whitehead in Bloom supplied us with five hanging baskets of flowers for under the station canopy in early June.
- A vertical five foot piece of flat bottomed rail was erected beside the station building onto which was mounted a replica King George V Royal Mail post box.
- Trimmed some of the trees at the end of the car park which were fouling our BT overhead wires.
- Some track repairs.

- Structural repairs to the roll bar of the JCB.
- A second round of weed spraying.

July

- The Atlas moved two bogie sets from the big siding which were subsequently used to swap the Cravens bogies from under coach 306.
- Jacking and packing of the switch blades which control access to the locomotive running sheds.
- Tidying of the car park vegetation with our petrol strimmer.
- Replacement of sleepers outside 4 shed road. All was dug out and two new sleepers were fitted in the vacant space. The track was jacked and packed, the gauge checked and the area levelled with ballast by the big bucket of the JCB.

August

- Made a new wooden box for track keys from donated decking planks.
- Put up three new signs for Platform 3 café.
- Weekly track inspections prior to Saturday Steam and the Princess train.
- Watering of flower baskets and gardening of fences and car park.
- Moved thirty boiler tubes into container and two very large Mogul connecting rod steel castings into wheel drop road.

TRAINS & EVENTS

Sea Breeze: Due to the extreme dry weather leading up to this trip (17th June), and after doing a risk assessment, it was decided to replace the steam traction with diesel.

It was advertised to Wexford / Rosslare Strand or Rosslare Europort (Harbour). It was a long time since an RPSI train brought passengers onto the platform at the Harbour.

The set of 6 Cravens and van was in the charge of GM 087. The weather was dull with a little rain.

Steam Whitehead: Train rides at Whitehead continued on selected Saturdays during the summer, from June onwards.

Some were themed, e.g. Father's Day, Doggy Day, Food Festival, Teddy Bear's Picnic, Ceilidh Day, with the final two Saturdays in August being normal train rides.

As is now standard practice, admission to the event included a museum visit. Also in line with recent Whitehead events, there was a pleasing number of cross border visitors.

The number of visitors for each date varied, but it must be admitted as the season went on the general trend was downwards from a very well-supported early summer. We can only guess that the general public, like our members, are missing mainline steam!

Cluedo Murder Mystery: This was a static event at Whitehead on Saturday 22nd July, which included a themed mystery performance and a buffet supper.

Summer Jazz Evening: Another static event on Friday 28th July at Whitehead to replace the much-missed Steam & Jazz events.

Soroptimist International Convention: A private charter on Friday 28th July, it ran to Dundalk. Passengers were placed in the Enterprise waiting room until No.85 "Merlin" and train were ready.

Departure from Connolly was at 19:24. During the non-stop run to Dundalk each passenger was served a picnic meal, including bread roll, cake and wine.

At Dundalk, the engine was serviced and return departure Dundalk was on time at 21:35, arriving in Dublin at 23:25.

Marble City: On Sunday 13th August the event commenced with the Sir Henry Inglesby Fife and Drum Corps from Carrickfergus marching onto Connolly's Platform 2 and then on to Platform 3 to play for the passengers. After a fine run to Kilkenny, the band formed up and marched from the platform into the town, where they later performed in Kilkenny Castle before returning to the station.

In the meantime, having detrained all passengers the set was pulled out from the station to release No.85, which ran to the Lavistown triangle to turn. It was then watered and again vacated the platform to

allow two service trains to access the station. We left Kilkenny on time and arrived back in Connolly at 19:00.

Hero & Princess Express: On Sunday 20th August, we ran a similar event, using a Translink railcar, to the Dinosaur train earlier in the year but this time with superheroes and princesses as the theme.

However, unlike in May, when we filled two 6-piece railcars, one 3-piece set was sufficient.

That said, it was a successful event and a great morning was had by all - and the sun shone! Many thanks to Translink for supporting the event.

Sea Breeze: On the morning of Sunday 20th August, two situations delayed No.131; it was initially blocked from leaving the shed by a failed locomotive parked on the apron outside, and a railcar also blocking access. This latter had to be moved out to the Wash Road and when the line was free the failed locomotive was moved by No.131, which then allowed it to access the siding to take on coal.

We left Connolly at 11:25, 35 minutes late; Greystones was reached at 12:25, 46 minutes down. Here, a problem was found with No.131 and the locomotive was declared a failure.

It was agreed that a diesel would take the train on to Enniscorthy, but by the time it arrived the Rosslare leg would not be possible; all intending passengers from Enniscorthy were emailed with this news.

The late arrival in Enniscorthy allowed only 25 minutes there, unfortunately, and the train departed north at 17:03, arriving back in Dublin at 19:38.

No.131 was stabled in Greystones until Tuesday 22nd August, when it was towed out of steam to Connolly by GM 074.

Railway Photo-Shoot: A new venture on Sunday 3rd September, when member Martin Devlin will be hosting a day of photographic opportunities at Whitehead.

Plenty of options will be available for your camera. It will run from 11am to 5pm, and

will include a snack lunch

Home Front Festival: On Saturday 30th September we will be hosting our first ever 1940s day at Whitehead. Details are still being firmed up, but it should be a day to remember.

Liffey Leesider: On 21st & 22nd October we will be running a two-day diesel railtour, taking in Clonmel, Cobh, Cork (overnight), Drogheda, Dublin, Limerick, Midleton (not necessarily in that order!).

WINTER MEETINGS

We're Live Again: After three seasons online, we are going back to live presentations. The venue will again be the Parke Hall of Orangefield Presbyterian Church at 464 Castlereagh Road, Belfast, BT5 6BH.

As before, the meetings will start at 7.30pm sharp and will finish by 10pm. The much-missed shop, with its extensive range of new and used railway books, pictures and occasional memorabilia, will be open for business before each meeting and again at the interval.

Our usual second Wednesday is no longer available, so we will be meeting on the second Tuesday of each month:

10th October: Adventures of a Fighting Railway - The Belfast Central Railway Company 1864-1885 by Rob Phipps.

14th November: Ballycastle Station And Its Environs by Mal McMichael.

12th December: More Travels In Ireland With Mac by Michael McMahon.

9th January: Omagh Railway Station - A Journey Through Time by Tony McGartland.

13th February: The Life and Times of Berkeley Deane Wise by Mark Kennedy.

12th March: Irish Travels by Roger Joanes.

The technicalities of filming/streaming the shows are being investigated.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.131: The locomotive was inspected

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following its failure on the Sea Breeze. Nothing major was found and it is hoped to have a test steaming as soon as possible.

No.171 "Sieve Gullion": Thanks to Phil Lockett, we have posted an eighth video on Facebook outlining progress on the locomotive's overhaul.

With the work having recently ramped up, we are asking you to kindly consider the "Getting To The Summit" appeal. This will also us to finish the project without delay.

Mogul Project: Work on the project is continuing as fast as funding, manpower and other commitments will allow. The following work is recently completed or under way:

Engine

- Machining and fitting of driving horn guides.
- Smokebox saddle welding complete; it was sent to Cooke Bros for machining and returned to Whitehead in mid-August.
- Machining of buffer beam brackets.
- Patterns for iron castings including hind cylinder cover and valve chest covers.
- Machining of pony truck side control brackets and slide.
- New lathe ready for machining valve liners.
- Recent steel castings include a crosshead.

Boiler

- Fitting, drilling and riveting of dome base and top feed seating onto boiler barrel.
- Stiffening plate for throat plate.
- Riveting of front angle ring to barrel.

Planning

- CAD drawings for cab.

GENERAL

Portillo at Whitehead: The long-awaited programme in the Britain's Coastal Railways series is now available on BBC iPlayer.

Whitehead Railway Museum and the Dunleath Works feature in programme 2:12

"Ballymena to Carrickfergus". It's a fascinating programme. Watch out for appearances by Peter Scott, Jim Adams, Rebecca Laverty and a couple of shots of James Friel and James Spurle. The film was shot in October 2021, which explains why Michael Portillo is wearing a Covid mask.

Ken Pullin: We were sorry to learn of the passing of our long-term member Ken Pullin at the age of 94.

Ken was an active volunteer in the carriage and electrical departments at Whitehead from the 1970s until fairly recently. He is also credited with designing the Whitehead track layout from the Translink turnout to the shed throat, which made shunting a mainline set so much easier.

Sales News: New books have been added to the Shop:

- "Rails Through Wexford - The North and South Wexford Lines in Colour" by Jonathan Beaumont and Barry Carse, paperback, 26 x 21 cm, 9 b&w and 178 colour photos, 1 map, 4 gradient profiles and 2 track plans, 155 pages, £20/€22.
- "Omagh Railway Station" by Tony McGartland, paperback, 27 x 21 cm, 117 b&w and 9 colour photos, 1 map, 5 track plans, 112 pages, £18.95/€21.50.

Modelling News: Check out a new model of the GS&WR J15 - a number of versions are available, including the original round boiler (e.g. No.184) and the later type with Belpaire firebox (e.g. No.186).

Full details at www.oooworks.co.uk.

AGM: With the new time limits on directors, there will be a number of vacancies on the Board - a nomination form is available in the "AGM Details" page on the Members Area of the website.

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