



December 2023

NEWS LETTER

TRAINS & EVENTS

Golden Age Of Railway Travel Photo-Shoot: With the experience of our first ever public photo-shoot, on Sunday 3rd September, behind him, member Martin Devlin says the event has potential for future dates.

The Midlander: After No.131's recent trouble at Greystones, it had been decided to sell seven carriages (plus van) for the Sunday 10th September trip to Maynooth as the locomotive team wished to see how it would perform on the climb up to Clonsilla.

Despite encountering very heavy rain on the first run the engine performed very well and there was satisfaction all round for No.131's first visit to Maynooth since the early 1960s.

Whiskey on the Tracks had chartered a full carriage on the second train.

Dublin Riviera: No.131 and crew were in fine form on these trips on Sunday 24th September despite the very wet conditions, hauling six carriages and a van. No more than this can be taken because of the loop size in Wicklow.

A full carriage had been booked by Whiskey on the Tracks for the Dublin

to Bray (and return) train, and we are grateful to them for their continued support. We departed Connolly just four minutes down and arrived in Bray one minute down.

A tight timetable saw us detraining our Bray passengers and board the Wicklow passengers in under 10 minutes, resulting in an on-time departure for Wicklow. We arrived in Wicklow 10 minutes late because of a stop to cross at Greystones.

Having run round and boarded all passengers bound for Greystones, we departed Wicklow for the return trip to Greystones.

We departed Wicklow again and arrived in teeming rain at Bray. Once more, passengers detrained and boarded in record time for the return to Connolly.

This was a great job done by our volunteers who worked wonders to make sure that the carriages were in good condition for boarding passengers, in spite of the quick turnaround times at Bray in both directions.

Home Front Festival: On Saturday 30th September the Society held a World War 2 era event.

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For a first time it was very successful and it is hoped that it will be repeated.

Liffey Leesider: The carriages selected for this two day tour were 3173 (van), 1532, 1514 (bar), 1522 (tea car), 1606 and 1541.

Saturday 21st October

GM 083 took the early morning train to Howth. After arrival, 075 arrived behind and hooked up to haul the train back to Dublin Connolly.

083 arrived behind again and hooked up. At Heuston West (Platform 10) a Limerick conductor driver was picked up. Stops were made at Portarlington, Ballybrough and Limerick Junction; here we picked up a Cork driver. The train reversed out to Limerick Junction Pocket Loop, then took the Waterford line, stopping at Tipperary before reaching Clonmel. Here, the locomotive ran round and the carriages were watered.

On the return leg a stop was made at Cahir and in the Limerick Junction Pocket Loop, followed by an on-time arrival into Limerick.

After a change of locomotive (GM 081), at Limerick, there was a stop at Dromkeen and Limerick Junction, then a non-stop run to Cork.

The set went to the "Slab" for servicing and to the carriage sidings for overnight stabling following a run covering 283 miles.

Sunday 22nd October

As the Midleton line was closed due to flooding it was decided on the Friday to seek a running notice to visit Killarney instead.

The locomotive for Cobh (234) had

been sent to Midleton to check the line. This delayed the start from Cork by 16 minutes. The train stopped at Glounthaune and reached Cobh, where 081 was waiting on the Up line to hook up. The route back took a non-stop run through the Back Loop at Cork and on to Mallow, running round, and arriving in Killarney.

Returning from Killarney, there were stops in Banteer, Mallow, Limerick Junction, Thurles and Portarlington Up Loop (for a change of crew). As there were a number of passengers for Portarlington and the West, a request stop was made at Newbridge. Dublin Connolly Platform 5 was reached one minute down.

081 ran round the set and the train departed for Dundalk, arriving 21 minutes late because of flooding. The final stop at Dublin Connolly was at 19:15.

Sunday's running covered 379 miles.

Steam Whitehead: On Saturday 28th October, there were train rides at Whitehead.

Festerling Murder Mystery: On the evening of Saturday 28th October there was a Halloween theme murder mystery, including buffet, at Whitehead.

Haunted Express: On Monday 30th October there were two Halloween themed trains to Maynooth behind No.131.

Victorian Santa Steam: By the middle of 2023, it became clear that Belfast to Whitehead mainline Santa trains would not operate in 2023. Except for a break due to Covid, these have run every year since 1992.

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Now, thought had to be given to providing a worthwhile Whitehead-based Santa experience. Prior to our mainline Santa trains, there had been Santa-themed steam train rides at Whitehead Excursion station. However, since the early 1990s, our premises have been transformed in many ways, including the erection of the station building and the Museum. It was decided that the theme of the 2023 season would be 'Victorian Steam Santa'.

Many volunteers fully entered into the spirit of this and dressed up to resemble characters who have just stepped out of Dickens novel! It was agreed to operate train rides on an hourly basis from 10:00 to 16:00. Trains normally operate at half-hourly intervals on Steam Saturdays, but it was felt that, after their train ride, passengers needed adequate time for their Santa visit.

Tickets for the events (25th November - 23rd December) went on sale in Mid-October. Once again, this included our "Charity Santa" operation for the Salvation Army and St Vincent DePaul, for which we are very grateful to those members who contributed towards the costs.

So far, many passengers have expressed approval of the fact that our Guinness locomotive was fitted with steam heating apparatus a number of years ago. The train consists of two Mk2 coaches, one open and one first class/brake. Some people have paid a small supplement to travel in a first class compartment. 'Ivan' the brake van completes the train and our guards are grateful that they can light a fire in the stove.

Santa, ably assisted by Mrs. Claus set up his grotto in the entrance area of the carriage shed. He brought along his sleigh with an animated, singing Prancer attached. Of course, children all get a present from Santa and lots of photographs are taken. Some life size teddy bears add to the fun.

Participants then go back to the Stables building for refreshments to warm themselves up. Before leaving, many passengers go back to the platform for a proper look at the Guinness engine and/or to visit our Platform 3 Café for more edible goodies.

As this was a totally new venture for the RPSI and bore little resemblance to our previous on-site events, it was decided to start operation on the final weekend of November. Due to the early start, trains were not full but the first weekend gave all of those involved the opportunity to iron out the inevitable problems associated with a new venture.

Santa Special: As per usual, tickets for Dublin trains, which went on sale on 4th November, disappeared within minutes.

The carriages selected were 3173 (van), 1541, 1506 and 1505, 1522 (diner), 1514 (bar), 1532, 1523, 1508.

The normal format was followed, i.e. two return steam trips to Maynooth, followed by one diesel-hauled.

Santa visits all children on the train and each adult receives a complimentary mulled wine, tea or coffee and a hot mince pie. Two groups of musicians play traditional Christmas music and entertain the passengers.

The Station Manager at Maynooth

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keeps an area cordoned off for passengers who wished to have photos taken with Santa and his elves.

For the first weekend, No.85 was in action, but the second weekend saw No.131 taking the afternoon train, coping admirably with the nine coach load!

Steam Trains In NI: A webpage of answers to some frequently asked questions regarding steam operations out of Whitehead has been made available:

www.steamtrainsireland.com/news/121/steam-trains-in-ni

WHITEHEAD SITE

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

August

- Made a new large box for track keys from good decking planks donated by a member.
- Three new signs advertising our Platform 3 Café were put up in the Castleview Road area.
- Weekly track inspections on Thursdays before each of the Steam Saturdays and the NIR Princess Sunday train on 20th August.
- Other weekly tasks included watering of all the flower baskets.
- A serious tidy-up of the vegetation in the car park and along the walkway to the stables.
- The end of the month saw us putting 30 boiler tubes into a container at the back of the site.
- Moved two very heavy Mogul steel

connecting rods into the wheel drop road.

September

- The month started with a remarkable heatwave and we moved the new saddle for the Mogul to be sandblasted and then back to the workshop, where it was given a coat of metal primer.
- The glass canopies above the museum entrances were pressure hosed to remove green mould.
- Two sleepers were replaced near the track beside the signal box.
- A side window in the Larne forklift was replaced giving a safer, clear view when reversing.
- On 19th September we moved 3 Mk2 bogies from the third road with the Atlas so that their axles could be ultrasonically tested.
- Cleaned out the side and back gutters of No.1 shed roof which had been overflowing and flooding into the Dunleath workshop.
- Painted the internal walls of the small machine shop using white masonry paint and this, together with new modern, brighter lighting, has enhanced the visibility in this work area.
- Very busy making preparations for the Home Front Festival on the last Saturday of the month which included shunting with the Atlas to pull out No.3BG and the GNR brake van.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.4: The locomotive will be next for

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dismantling, when No.171 starts its running-in trials.

No.85: Due to come out of service following the Christmas season.

No.171: Being prepared for re-assembly.

B142: The locomotive is back in traffic, having been painted and lined externally. Work continues on repainting the cab interiors.

Mogul Project: On Sunday 3rd September, the Mogul frames were transferred to stands instead of the temporary trolleys that have been used so far. The trolleys enabled the frames to be moved outside for blast cleaning, etc.

The stands will provide a firm location for alignment and further assembly, including the smokebox saddle which has been recently machined.

An update on progress of the locomotive was added to the Members Area in November.

WINTER MEETINGS

The Meetings Return: The Society has hosted regular meetings in Belfast for almost 50 years and our 'live' meetings resumed on Tuesday 10th October.

Meetings in Belfast city centre were suspended during the early days of 'The Troubles' but resumed in February 1974 with a film show in the Sunnyside Street hall belonging to St Jude's Church of Ireland where the curate was the newly-ordained Rev John McKegney. He greatly encouraged Sullivan Boomer, Robin Morton and Charles Friel to get things going again in his "peaceful suburb".

The winter meetings had to move from Sunnyside Street to the church's main hall on the Ravenhill Road from the 1988-89 season. Then, to accommodate those with movement difficulties, the meetings moved to the Parke Hall of Orangefield Presbyterian Church on the Castlereagh Road in Belfast from October 2009.

Right from the first meeting, guest speakers from all corners of Ireland and beyond have enthralled our audiences with tales of all things railway - broad and narrow gauge - mostly steam and mostly Irish. Hundreds of slide shows and miles of movie film and video have revealed every corner of the island's railway network to consistently large audiences of 100+, reputedly the largest in these islands.

But all of this came to a grinding halt when the March 2020 meeting had to be cancelled in the face of rapidly rising numbers of Covid infections and alarming stories of its effects, especially among elderly folk.

The December 2020 meeting was the first to be held online via Zoom and this continued for three seasons. Despite the best efforts of the small team organising the meetings, interactions were lost, camaraderie was replaced by isolation, and our speakers missed the audience's reactions, comments and questions.

We are delighted that the meetings are once again running 'in person' in our old venue of the Parke Hall in Orangefield Presbyterian Church at 464 Castlereagh Road, Belfast BT5 6BH. The hall, which is fully accessible to wheelchair users, can be reached using Metro bus services 5A and 31, and

Ulsterbus service 512 - the Montgomery Road stop coming into Belfast, and Orby Street on the way out.

The meetings are being recorded and the first one has been made available on the Members Area of the website. We hope that this will allow those who joined us online from all over these islands, from New Zealand, the United States and Canada, to enjoy the meetings.

One change, though, is that the hall can no longer accommodate us on the customary Wednesday night so the meetings will be held on the second Tuesday of each month.

As before, each meeting will start promptly at 7:30pm and, with a 20-minute break at about 8:45pm, will finish before 10pm.

Apart from reminders of 'dates for your diary', each meeting will have a short 'Newsreel' giving a bite-sized look at recent events on the main line, at our base, and in our workshops. It is the natural appetiser to getting involved yourself and becoming one of the volunteers who do so much behind the scenes.

The Society's shop, with its extensive range of railway books and pictures, will be open before each meeting and again at the interval. Also at the interval, refreshments (tea or coffee, and biscuits) will be available for a small extra donation.

There is no admission charge to the meetings but participants will be encouraged to make a donation, to help cover costs, as they leave the hall; any surplus goes to Society funds.

10th October: Adventures of a Fighting

Railway - The Belfast Central Railway Company 1864-1885.

Rob Phipps presented the results of his extensive first-level researches, and the subject of his new book, on this short and sometimes overlooked line which was often in dispute with its much bigger and more influential neighbours but which turned out to be a real survivor.

14th November: Ballycastle Station and its Environs.

Mal McMichael used photos, many previously unseen, to tell us about the life and death of the Ballycastle terminus of the narrow-gauge line from Ballymoney, from its first, independent, days and as part of the LMS-NCC until its premature closure by the UTA on 3rd July 1950. He included some industrial archaeology of the area immediately surrounding the station.

12th December: More Travels in Ireland with Mac.

Michael McMahon brings us another selection of mostly 'new' pictures from the camera of R.M. (Mac) Arnold whose travels brought him to every corner of Ireland - and sometimes beyond - in search of steam.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Meeting: A poorly-attended meeting on Saturday 7th October in Dublin saw the retirement of Mervyn Darragh and Mark Kennedy and the election of Rachael Harris and Mark Parker. Mark Bailey has subsequently stepped down.

Question Arising From AGM: David Humphries, and others, raised a number of finance-related questions at

the meeting. He correctly extracted some of the key figures from the accounts presented to the meeting. However, to get a fuller understanding of the Society's financial position, he needed to take two other items into account:

- Overall, the Income and expenditure account shows a small deficit of £12,701. The Society has always depended on member subscriptions and donations as well as railtour income to balance the books (the results were greatly improved in 2022 by the successful rail tours compared with 2021 when Covid precluded such activity).
- The big item that shows up in the cash flow statement is the charge for depreciation on our buildings of £130,064. Although the Society spent £81,433 on new assets the net effect of these two items was a positive cash flow of £48,631. The statement shows that overall, the Society's bank accounts increased by £54,949.

These outcomes would normally be taken as very positive.

He also asked questions concerning salary costs:

- Specifically, salary costs incurred are allocated to the activity to which they contribute.
- It is a statutory requirement to disclose whether any employees earned over £60,000. No employee came into this category hence the "Nil" disclosure.
- The statutory accounts also require the identification of key management personnel. In our case these are the General Manager and

the Engineering Manager (the latter appointed mid-2021).

- The number of employees increased by 3 as the staff of Heritage Engineering Ireland Ltd were transferred into the parent company in 2022. Hence the increase in salaries.

He noted the importance of rail tour income to the well-being of the Society. This is absolutely correct and the current problem of not being able to run steam railtours in Northern Ireland is a major concern that is being addressed urgently by the Board.

In the meantime, expenditure is being very closely monitored and only essential costs are being incurred. That said, the Society has a significant number of items that cannot be avoided such as salaries, insurance and premises maintenance.

The good news is that from a cash flow point of view the ongoing depreciation charge on the buildings of £130,000 is a non-cash item. Cash is being conserved by spending only minimal amounts on asset additions in 2023.

GENERAL

John McKegey: We were saddened to learn of the death of our former chairman, Canon John McKegey, who passed away at home early on 22nd September. He had been unwell for some time, and it was his illness which led him to reluctantly step down from the Board in August 2022.

John had been a well-known, but mostly 'armchair' (Santa), member of the Society since joining in 1972. However, in August 2017, at a time of

great change for the RPSI, he was approached by a number of Board members while enjoying a diesel-hauled trip to Sligo; to say his trip was spoiled is probably no lie.

Nevertheless, a month later John was the new Society Chairman.

For the next five years he diligently steered the Board (and Society) through troubled waters and the result was a less 'choppy' position for us all.

To his family and friends we offer our most sincere condolences.

Sales News: The following items have been added to the online shop:

- RPSI 2024 Calendar, £10/€10.
- "Memories of Co. Limerick's Railways" by A.H. Vaughan, paperback, 18 x 24 cm, 53 b&w photos, 1 map, 1 track plan, 50 pages, £11.95 / €14.
- "Rail Ramble Round Ireland" by Hugh Dougherty, paperback, 18 x 24 cm, 4 b&w and 39 colour photos, 1 map, 50 pages, £12.95 / €15.
- "The Ballycastle Railway Revisited" by Jim McBride, paperback, 18 x 24 cm, 3 colour and 67 b&w photos, 1 map, 64 pages, £12/€14.
- "Irish Railway Rover Part 1", by Michael McMahon, hardback, 19 x 25 cm, 90 colour photos, 80 pages, £17.50 / €20.
- Sheet of RPSI railway postage stamps, featuring 3 each of locomotives Nos. 171, 186 & 4, £5/€6.

Five Foot Three: The Editor makes his annual appeal for articles for Five Foot Three.

Stories (printable) from the Society, current or past, or of the Irish railways of old are invited. Volunteer stories could be particularly interesting.

Also of course, for pictures, particularly of the operations and happenings from the year 2023.

Submissions for consideration by mid-January would be timely. Please send to:

5ft3magazine@gmail.com

Volunteer Update: The Society continues to seek volunteers to undertake various duties at Whitehead and Dublin. These include museum tour guides, train marshals, workshop operatives, track maintenance, cleaners and administrators.

Most of these roles do not require specific qualifications or experience and any necessary training will be provided. There is no requirement for volunteers to commit to a set number of hours or to attend on particular days - simply to offer their services when circumstances permit.

Application forms for volunteering may be obtained from the office at Whitehead, request by email, telephone 028 9358 6202 or visit our website.

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