



July 2024

## NEWS LETTER

### GENERAL MANAGER

**11<sup>th</sup> April:** After much soul searching, I have made the decision to leave my post as General Manager with the Society.

On 25<sup>th</sup> of this month, I will have been employed by the Society for five years, during which time I have had the privilege to experience and learn about a unique and fascinating story of social history and heritage engineering.

Thank you to everyone who has added to my knowledge bank, who has volunteered in every weather, who has endured the pain of the pandemic, and who has become my friend.

On reality shows many contestants talk about their 'journey' and I certainly have been on one of my own. The job of the General Manager is complex and not without sacrifice, often requiring every ounce of resilience that I could muster. However, members have been there for me during the highs and the lows and for that I am eternally grateful.

Many of you will have listened to me wax lyrical as I welcomed two grandchildren and married off a son. We all felt the pain together when we lost fellow members. In all, it has been a right royal rollercoaster!

However, I intend to remain in the job until such times as a replacement is appointed.

**1<sup>st</sup> July:** Over the five years that I have been given control of the regulator, we have had more than our fair share of setbacks, from Covid to no northern mainline operations. This has seriously damaged our cash reserves. So, I have one last request from all of you before I exit.

As we are celebrating 60 years, could you spare £60 to donate to general funds? If not, why not consider donating a pound for every year you have been a member? Or, if you feel particularly generous, donate a sum of your choosing. This could really make a difference as we move closer to operating at full strength once again.

Donations may be made:

- In person at Whitehead.
- By bank transfer:
  - Sterling: Sort code 90-23-89, account 49087661, IBAN GB05 BOFI 9023 8949 0876 61.
  - Euro/Overseas: Sort code 90-01-72, account 17529453, IBAN IE81 BOFI 9001 9917 5294 53.
  - As a reference, please enter "60" plus your name.

- Please email to let us know the transfer has been made, [finance@steamtrainsireland.com](mailto:finance@steamtrainsireland.com).
- By cheque:
  - Make payable to: "The Railway Preservation Society of Ireland".
  - Endorse rear: "RPSI 60".
  - Send to: RPSI Appeal, 10 Mourne View, Carryduff, Belfast, BT8 8BJ.

Additional benefit may be obtained by UK tax-payers Gift Aiding their donation.

Whatever way you decide, all donations will be very gratefully received. Let's aim high and set a target of £60,000 - £1,000 for each year!

**22<sup>nd</sup> July:** As I hurtle towards retirement at the end of August, I now have great pleasure in introducing my replacement as General Manager, Yvonne McIlree.

I am confident that Yvonne will be a competent, enthusiastic, and committed asset to lead the team in Whitehead and beyond. Yvonne's latest role has been with Belfast's Titanic Hotel as Director of Sales and Marketing. She has extensive experience in the hospitality sector and has worked in several locations across Europe.

As the new General Manager I wish her every success and I am sure that she will have your unfettered support as she navigates her way through the complexities of our business. Yvonne is a keen runner and is married with 2 children. She is a Whitehead resident but originally hails from Glasgow. I believe that the baton is being passed on to someone who will bring new ideas and plenty of experience that the Society can tap into.

Now to the practicalities. Yvonne will start on 1<sup>st</sup> August and I will be providing handover support full time until 9<sup>th</sup> August. Following that I will be taking periodic leave until the end of August but will be available to assist where necessary and will be in attendance on event days, with the launch of B142 on 31<sup>st</sup> August being my final day. After that, I shall be in my garden daily, walking the dogs more than I do now, and waiting for my next grandson to arrive.

Thanks to all of you for your support, encouragement and craic for the last five and a half years. I have learnt an awful lot and will take with me a real appreciation of railway heritage. I may, after some time passes, come back and volunteer!

Finally, thanks to everyone who donated so far to mark our 60<sup>th</sup> year. If you haven't made a donation yet, perhaps you could consider giving. With limited operations for a long period, any help is greatly appreciated.

### TRAINS & EVENTS

**Steam Whitehead:** Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> March was the first train of the year at Whitehead. No.3BG "Guinness" was in steam - its first public outing after the winter boiler re-tube.

Most trains were full but the afternoon saw a fall-off in numbers, mainly due to deteriorating weather.

During the preceding fortnight, the café in the station building underwent a total re-decoration led by the new manager, Keeley. The café was kept busy all day.

On the platform, the recently constructed (from old doors) shop was

in operation. It proved its worth on a day when the weather would have prevented the outside sales tables being set up.

As on previous train rides days, we were pleased to welcome some cross-border visitors, including a family who had travelled north from Wicklow for the event!

**The Midlander:** Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> March was the first mainline operation of the season and comprised two trips to Maynooth behind No.131.

**Easter Steam:** Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> March and Monday 1<sup>st</sup> April were reasonably busy days at Whitehead, although Saturday a bit less so, despite the attraction of the 'wee Critters' in the Stables.

No.3BG "Guinness" behaved impeccably as usual on the train rides.

**Easter Eggstravaganza:** On Easter Monday, 1<sup>st</sup> April, No.131 and train departed Dublin for Drogheda, with the Easter Bunny handing out Easter eggs to all children on board.

A second train ran to Dundalk and return. And a third to Skerries Loop and return, before the return leg from Drogheda to Dublin.

**Sea Breeze:** On Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> April No.131 was in action again for a run south, destination Wexford and Rosslare.

However, the train was halted at Rathdrum after a report of fires adjacent to the railway line. This was unexpected as the weather up to a few days before had been appalling, with rain most days and a heavy dew on the ground that morning. The train was not allowed to proceed further.

A diesel locomotive arrived and hauled the train back to Dublin.

**Cú Chulainn:** This operation on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> May was operated by a diesel locomotive at Irish Rail's request.

It was a return trip to Dundalk, with a local option from there to Drogheda and back.

**201@30:** This was a (pre-planned this time) diesel tour on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> June to mark 30 years of the 201 class locomotives.

The day started at Dublin Heuston, where it was intended that a 201 locomotive would take the train to Kildare but, due to issues with some of the class, an 071 was used.

At Kildare, GM 219, following behind, travelled through the station on the Down road and returned by the middle road and then onto the Up platform and hooked up.

Following a return to Dublin (Connolly) the train continued to Rosslare Europort, with photo stops along the way. The day ended back at Connolly.

**Private Charter:** On Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> July a train was chartered by the Heritage Council of Ireland. The purpose of the trip was to launch the Council's "Heritage Week".

A number of carriages were dressed with carpets, curtains, antimacassars and table lamps. The tables were set for tea and coffee, scones and biscuits.

No.131 operated the train from Connolly to Drogheda, and then hauled it empty to Dundalk and back.

Some useful publicity followed a press photo call with Malcolm Noonan TD, who travelled on the train. He is Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

**Summer Steam (Whitehead):** On August Saturdays there will be various events centred on our normal train rides:

- 3<sup>rd</sup> August: Teddy Bear's Picnic
- 10<sup>th</sup> August: Food & Folk Festival
- 17<sup>th</sup> August: Wee Critters
- 24<sup>th</sup> August: Train Rides
- 14<sup>th</sup> September: European Heritage Open Day

**Summer Steam (Mainline):** Trains from Dublin will recommence in August:

- 4<sup>th</sup> August: The Midlander
- 18<sup>th</sup> August: Marble City
- 1<sup>st</sup> September: Dublin Riviera
- 8<sup>th</sup> September: RPSI 60

**B142 Launch:** Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> August will be a date for the diesel locomotive enthusiasts!

Join us as at Whitehead as we formally unveil our newly-overhauled diesel locomotive, General Motors B142, painted in original livery and back in full working order.

You will have a 15-minute slot with the locomotive during which you will learn all about the 62-year-old workhorse from volunteers, culminating in a visit to the cab.

You can explore the Museum before returning to the platform to enjoy a BBQ whilst listening to music provided by The Jazzmeisters Trio.

All ticket holders will receive a unique memento to remind them of their day and can enjoy a short train ride within our premises in a heritage carriage hauled by B142.

**RPSI 60 Luncheon:** As members will be aware, 2024 marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the RPSI. The Society was established at a meeting in Belfast on September 30, 1964 - and the rest is history.

To mark our diamond anniversary, a celebration lunch has been arranged in Belfast on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> October.

This was announced back in April, and is already booked out.

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## LOCOMOTIVES

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**No.3BG "Guinness":** Successfully steam tested on 7<sup>th</sup> March at the completion of her winter retubing work.

The old boiler tubes were removed, new tubes fitted and expanded into place. Then two separate examinations (one under hydraulic water pressure, and one under steam pressure) from our insurance company examiner took place to make sure that the work was correctly executed.

The work was carried out completely in house by our workshop staff, supported here and there by our dedicated team of locomotive department volunteers.

**No.4:** In April, it was "one out - one in" for the Dunleath Workshop, which now houses locomotive No.4, following No.171's departure.

No.4 requires a boiler lift before returning to traffic, along with all the usual overhaul items. The Dunleath Workshop's overhead crane will be used to remove the cab roof, smokebox door and lots of small components so that as the work on No.171 winds down, the work on No.4 ramps up.

**No.171 "Slieve Gullion":** On 27<sup>th</sup> April, No.171's long awaited return to traffic took another symbolic step forward as she left the Dunleath Locomotive Workshop. Diesel Locomotive B142 was used for the shunt, which had No.171 moved to No.1 road, in the "old shed" (built 1903).

One of the first jobs, the boiler cladding was (as usual) one of the most difficult to get right, particularly as the firebox cladding was made new in 2014 when the locomotive was worked on by a contractor in the north east of England.

As anyone who works on steam locomotives will tell you, an original part is almost guaranteed to fit exactly where it came from, with a minimum of fuss. The 'new' cladding proved the reverse of this rule, with many hours spent to get mounting holes in the right places and the top of the boiler and firebox looking straight.

The cladding on the boiler barrel is thought to date from 1913 when No.171 was built in Manchester - it still retains the mounting points for the superheater pyrometer, an early electrical temperature gauge which told the fireman how the superheater was performing. As far as we can tell, the pyrometer was removed fairly quickly - maybe in the 1920s.

The cab received remedial work before painting and lifting into place, with a myriad of redundant holes and slots blocked up and new holes made to accommodate the various rods, spindles and pipes that pass through the cab front. The brass plate that states the boiler pressure, mounted in the cab, didn't make it back from England, so a new one was cast in brass and is now ready to be fitted.

In the same vein, two new works plates have been cast to replace the ones made by the RPSI back in the 1970s, which also went missing at the same time. Buyer beware - if you're bidding on a 1938 Dundalk works plate at a railwayana auction - it could be one made by the RPSI! The nameplates, 1970s replacements for the originals,

which were sold off by the locomotive's previous owner, are safely under lock and key at Whitehead, and will be refitted when the time comes.

The very reliable underfloor injector on the right hand side of the locomotive, a favourite with enginemmen, has been refitted and the pipes put back in place. A brand new, and very solid, cab floor has been made and fitted.

Less obvious to the external observer is that the new blastpipe, which was made for No.171 at the contractor's premises, has now been finished and fitted. The electrical conduit for the front headlamps and charging sockets is well underway, and work has started on getting the various enclosures that go in the cab for switches, the speedometer, instrument lights, and the AWS / TPWS safety system, prepared and ready for fitting.

On 6<sup>th</sup> July there was a further step closer to its return to steam when B142 hauled No.171, which has been chimney facing towards Belfast for the last five years or so, to the turntable. The turntable - a museum piece in its own right - hasn't seen much use in the past couple of years. Once we get operating again, the turntable will come into much more regular use - and we might have to look again at motorising it. The locomotive was turned so that the chimney now faces Larne.

Now that the back of the locomotive's cab was facing B142, with no buffers or hook coupling - it was time to fetch the only vehicle which can couple on to this end of the locomotive - the tender.

Tender No.12, built in 1920, is actually one of two GNR tenders that No.171 has used in her preservation career - the other, No.31, being the much larger

tender originally paired with a VS locomotive.

The RPSI has five ex GNR tenders on the books, including the two in Dublin coupled to No.85 and No.131 (No.73 and No.37, respectively), No.12, now coupled to No.171, No.31 (originally with a VS class locomotive) and No.43 (originally with a U or UG class locomotive).

The tenders are all interchangeable and could swap between locomotives - even the electrical connections are common between the 3 GNR locomotives. No.85 started off with No.31 in the 1980s before swapping to No.12 during a period when No.171 was out of traffic. Later, No.73 was refurbished for her and she has been paired with this tender during her last two "ten year" periods in traffic. Strangely enough, although No.85 Merlin is owned by the Ulster Transport Museum, the museum and its predecessors never purchased a tender to go with her.

Tender No.12 was coupled to No.171 at the turntable. The coupling between engine and tender is totally different to the familiar buffers, hook and shackle arrangement you see on the front (or back) of a locomotive. Instead, a massive steel drawbar, which starts somewhere under the fireman's feet in the middle of the cab, stretches back and into the front of the tender. Then there are two smaller drawbars, which perform the duty of a safety link should something go wrong with the main drawbar. There are two brake hoses, two water hoses, and three electrical connections to connect, and a third vacuum hose - this time for the AWS warning horn in the cab, which is vacuum operated. For today, we only connected the drawbars, with the other

connections to be made later with the use of a pit.

Next, it was time to move up the yard to visit the weighbridge. This piece of 21<sup>st</sup> century kit, installed in 2013, allows the weights on each wheel to be accurately and swiftly measured - the metering equipment being in the signal cabin basement - and the information from this will be used to fine tune the adjustment of the locomotive's springs.

Finally, measurements were taken to start the process of setting the valves. This process, a mystery to all but the most knowledgeable steam locomotive fans, and a few engineers, involves inserting and removing shims on the locomotive's eccentric rods, until the piston valve opens the same distance for the ports controlling entry of steam to each end of each cylinder. The same distance in forward gear and reverse gear, in full gear and with the cut-off reduced at the reverser - not a simple task!

What next for No.171? Well, she now sits in No.4 shed road, with a "to do" list that at last count had about 70 items on it - some small, such as fitting the whistle lever and chain, and some very visible changes to the locomotive's appearance, such as refitting the coupling rods, and some complex, such as fitting the wiring and conduit for the speedometer, headlights and modern signalling systems - the TPWS and AWS.

When will it steam as a complete locomotive? Sometime in late July, hopefully.

We are very grateful to all of you who have donated time and funds to this project. If you can, we would really appreciate and encourage your further support by donating to our appeal. We

have not yet achieved the £25k target of our current appeal and it is still open for donations. There are significant costs involved in restoring No.171 in the current economic climate, so every penny you donate is very gratefully received. If you are a UK taxpayer and can Gift-aid the donation as well, that really helps. Please visit our Appeals page to donate.

**NCC Mogul:** Work continues on the new NCC boiler.

Drilling of several hundred rivet holes in the firebox is nearly complete, particularly the awkward rivet holes at door plate shoulder.

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## WHITEHEAD SITE

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**Blooming Lovely:** Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> June started unusually warm and dry and the arrival of the Whitehead in Bloom team only added to the atmosphere. These lovely people come every year and plant up our boxes with beautiful flowers, and this year was no exception. They also gave us four wonderful made-up hanging baskets which are now dangling gracefully underneath the station platform canopy.

**Curtains For Railcar 1:** In June the Site squad attached a second-hand, lorry curtain side to the Belfast end of NCC Railcar 1. This together with a similar piece put up two years ago on the outside, should give this unique piece of rolling stock some useful protection from the elements.

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## WINTER MEETINGS

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**Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> March:** Some Proposed Reopenings

Roger Joanes looked at the recent All

Island Strategic Rail Review recommendations, taking each of the report's recommended lines and, using his own pictures and those of several friends, illustrated what each had looked like when they had been open and, in some cases, more recently. Roger began with the lines most easily reopened and moved through the more difficult options towards the problematical proposed line between Londonderry and Letterkenny.

Beginning with the Limerick to Foynes line, where work is already under way and moving quickly, Roger moved to the Lisburn - Antrim line, south to the Rosslare Strand to Waterford line, west to the line from Athenry to Claremorris and the link between Mullingar and Athlone. Each of these would present few problems with track beds largely intact, as Roger showed, and, apart from relaying, would need little major work to restore trains.

Roger's second category of lines represented either new-build or substantial work needed. Starting with the recommended line from Belfast to Lisburn through Hillsborough and Banbridge to Newry, Roger was able to share images north of Banbridge only, of course, but showed what potential the line would have. The proposed line from M3 Parkway to Navan would be a reopening of a former MGWR line but the possible line from Portadown to Mullingar via Armagh, Monaghan, Clones and Cavan was much more ambitious though with many surviving and interesting buildings from former times along each route (including the Bridal Suite at the former Kilmessan station signal cabin!).

Even more ambitious is the proposed rebuilding of the erstwhile GNR Derry

Road as a double-track electrified line which would, among other problems, have to find a way through both Omagh and Strabane where roads have totally obliterated the old route. Even so, Roger's selection of pictures stirred many memories of the line's scenery and its big days with busy trains.

After considering the proposed reopening of the Limavady branch, Roger concluded with the proposals for a link linking Londonderry and Letterkenny. While each had been served by both the CDR and the Swilly in times past, which Roger illustrated splendidly, the report was vague as to the actual route. Roger speculated a possible direct route with gradients unthinkable in days of yore. Roger left us with the question of how much traffic there would be for Letterkenny - Limavady suburban trains.

**New Season:** The 2024/5 season will commence on 8<sup>th</sup> October.

Hopefully, there will be an evening on the Society's 60 years of history.

Ideas for further talks are eagerly invited.

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## GENERAL

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**Denis Grimshaw:** Our former Chairman, Denis Grimshaw, passed away on 26<sup>th</sup> April following a long illness.

Where do you start with Denis? He was founder of the Inst Railway Society, one of the founders of RPSI, the Society's first Secretary, Operations Officer, and latterly Chairman during the key years when Whitehead Railway Museum was taking shape.

In 1963 he organised the RBAI Railway Society trip to Ballylinan with J15

No.151. In 1987 he organised the Enterprise 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary non-stop run from Belfast to Dublin with No.85.

A professional railway engineer with a long career in NIR, instigator of so many significant changes, such as the GM-hauled Enterprise, the re-opening of Great Victoria Street station in 1995 (coincidentally, closing for good on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2024), and the cross-harbour link.

The list is endless. A hugely influential force within railway preservation. And also the only person to board a train at York Road and disembark in Beijing, having completed the entire journey by train.

His funeral took place on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> May, just days after the funeral of his wife Jean. So tragic and so tough on their daughters Alison and Caroline, who have now lost both parents in quick succession.

A piece on Denis's professional life appeared in local news blog:

<https://sluggerotoole.com/2024/05/04/a-quiet-man>

**Board News:** We were pleased in June to announce that Peter Stark has been co-opted to serve on the Board until the next AGM.

Peter brings a wealth of experience to the table.

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## EDITORIAL ADDRESS

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