



September 2024

NEWS LETTER

GENERAL MANAGER

Welcome: The Society's new General Manager, Yvonne McIlree, took up her post on 1st August and spent her first day meeting staff and volunteers and familiarising herself with the Whitehead site.

Mrs McIlree was welcomed to Whitehead by outgoing GM Lisa Adair along with directors Paul McCann and Peter Stark, who gave her a detailed briefing.

Mrs McIlree has extensive experience in the hospitality sector and has worked in several locations on the Continent. Her latest role was as Director of Sales and Marketing at the Titanic Hotel in Belfast.

Married with two children, she originally hails from Glasgow. Her main leisure activity is running.

Hello: Thank you to everyone for the very warm welcome and support so far. It's great to be a part of the RPSI's onward journey to future growth, and I look forward to meeting with you all in due course, if I haven't done so already.

Thank you also to Lisa Adair, outgoing General Manager, for supporting my

induction into the role. I wish her all the best in her retirement.

See you soon!

Yvonne

LOCOMOTIVES

Mogul Project: 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.

Machining of cast parts, most notably the six driving axleboxes is ongoing.

No.171 In Steam: On Saturday 27th July, the locomotive made its first movements under its own steam since July 2002 - in fact the first time in Society ownership, as the locomotive was only finally purchased from the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (successor to the GNR(I) and the Ulster Transport Authority) in 2003!

The locomotive was lit up at 7a.m. on the Friday morning and brought slowly into steam for a series of static tests. The hydrostatic lubricator, the vacuum brakes, the main steam pipes and superheaters and, of course, the whistle were tested with the engine

sitting statically. The injectors were tested and both worked satisfactorily. The locomotive was left under the shear-legs gantry overnight.

The next morning, the steam-raisers were in at 7a.m. and relit the warm engine. As No.171 raised steam, the shear-legs pit was put to good use for brake adjustments and final work on adjusting oil pipes, splitting split pins, and oiling up oil boxes that had not been filled in over 20 years.

Then, with all the static tests complete, and once the crew had had their lunch, the great moment came. As shutters clicked and to cheers from the assembled crowd, driver Phil Lockett moved Slieve Gullion just far enough until the parts of the motion he wasn't able to reach earlier moved into view from behind splashes and other impedimenta came into view. While No.171's polished upper works look lovely, they do get in the way of preparation and maintenance.

Whoever designed No.4 might have had the right idea after all! The final oiling items were quickly attended to.

Now, with all preparations complete, it was time to make the first movements - No.171 moved up and down the platform road, blew her whistle, and gave everything a thorough test. Finally, No.171 reversed roles with B142 and this time the steam locomotive put the diesel engine to bed and tidied up the yard.

What's next for No.171? Surely that is her finished? Not so fast - there are plenty of things still to be done - two of the major items are painting and the electrical work - and of course working through the list of about 30 minor defects, things still to be finished off, and items for attention that were

noted during the test. Some items can be sorted in a matter of minutes with materials already to hand - others will require skilled attention with expensive materials. Even filling up No.171's tender with six tons of coal for the first time will cost about £1,920!

The RPSI is very grateful to those who have generously donated to reach this point. If you can, we would really appreciate and encourage more donations of time or funds.

The Launch Of No.171: It was a busy and important day at Whitehead on Friday 13th September as our former Great Northern Railway (Ireland) 4-4-0 looked resplendent as it announced its return with a toot on the whistle and a cloud of steam.

At the regulator was our VIP guest, HRH Prince Richard, the Duke of Gloucester, who was in Northern Ireland for a two-day visit.

Following a tour around the Museum, during which all our activities were outlined, the Duke made his way to the footplate.

The crew, James Friel and Chris Ragg, equipped the Duke with a new set of gloves and invited him to take the driver's seat. After a close look at the footplate, the fire and all the fittings, and a chat with the crew, it was time for shunter Adam Lohoff to give the signal for the locomotive to move forwards.

With the Duke leaning out of the cab from the driver's seat, and several dozen visitors watching from the platform, No.171 made an impressive sight as she burst through the tape.

There followed a short ceremony, which took place beside No.171 on the

platform, where photographs were taken of the key guests and souvenirs presented.

TRAINS & EVENTS

Train Rides: Saturday afternoon train rides took place at Whitehead during August:

- 3rd: Teddy Bear's Picnic
- 10th: Food & Folk Festival
- 17th: Wee Critters
- 24th: Train Rides

The Midlander: On Sunday 4th August, No.131 hauled two sold-out return trips from Dublin Connolly to Maynooth in what is now a traditional format.

Marble City: This return trip to Kilkenny on Sunday 18th August behind No.131 was notable for Carriage 1523 being dressed with tablecloths and antimacassars for "Whiskey On The Tracks" group charter.

Also of interest was music by "The Star of Knockagh Accordion Band" from Carrickfergus which entertained the passengers, plus the folks of Kilkenny during the layover there. This included a procession through the town to Kilkenny Castle.

GM 074 travelled from Waterford to Kilkenny to shunt the train and to allow No.131 to run to the Lavistown triangle to be turned.

Once again, the trip was sold out.

B142 Launch: On Saturday 31st August, it was the turn of our heritage diesel to take a starring role.

Starting in the Café, we were treated to speeches by the mayor of Mid & East Antrim Council and by the High Sheriff, introduced by our President

Joan Smyth.

This was followed by Jonathan Clinton (Diesel Locomotive Officer) outlining what had been involved in getting B142 back into traffic.

Then, our member Jim Corr, musician and former Dundalk resident, gave a short speech followed by leading the party to the platform and to the footplate for photographs. He then drove the locomotive through a red tape - tied on one side to the platform canopy and on the other to No.171 "Sieve Gullion" which was in steam on the adjoining track.

The volunteers present were invited back to the Café, where Dr Smyth made a presentation to our outgoing General Manager, Lisa Adair, thanking her for helping the Society, particularly to survive the COVID years.

The rest of the day was open to members of the enthusiast fraternity who had purchased tickets for tours of the B142's footplate and innards. There was music and a barbecue to accompany these goings-on.

Dublin Riviera: There was an intensive service of trains on Sunday 1st September

The itinerary was Dublin to Bray; Bray to Wicklow; Wicklow to Greystones, followed by the return of each leg.

Smart platform work took place at each stopping point to disembark one set of passengers and to board the next.

The set, behind No.131, was limited to 6 and a van due to the signalling arrangements at Wicklow.

RPSI 60 Special: To mark the Society's 60th birthday at the end of the month, a special train ran on Sunday 8th

September to Dundalk behind No.131, and then a further return trip from there to Drogheda.

As the specials were a celebration, the diner was dressed with antimacassars for invited guests, who partook of bubbly and canapés.

On board were the Society's President and Vice-President, along with six founder members of the Society. The late NIR driver Noel Playfair was represented by his daughter Rebekah and her family. We also had members of The Dundalk Railway Heritage Society.

European Heritage Open Day: Saturday 14th September was the annual day for museums to throw open their doors to the public, and the RPSI was no exception.

Guided tours were suspended for the day but instead, museum guides were stationed at key points in the museum to act as a point of reference for visitors, answer questions and ensure nobody got lost.

In tandem with this, steam train rides on a paid-for basis were run.

171 Special: Saturday 12th October will see an afternoon of train rides at Whitehead. No.171 will be hauling its first public train for 22 years!

Croagh Patrick: This diesel railtour on Saturday 12th October will feature 071 motive power and will be starting from Dublin Heuston and heading for the County Mayo towns of Westport and Ballina.

Scream Sunday: On Sunday 27th October there will be train rides at Whitehead with a Halloween theme.

Victorian Santa Steam: We will be repeating last year's themed train rides

at Whitehead. The dates are: 30th November; 1st, 7th, 8th, 12th, 14th, 15th, 19th, 21st and 22nd December. Note the two mid-week dates which will be evening events.

Dublin Season: Dates for Halloween and Christmas will be announced soon, and are expected to take the usual format.

WINTER MEETINGS

New Season: It is planned that the season will start on 1st October at our usual Orangefield venue. Note this is a change to the first Tuesday of each month:

1st October: RPSI - The First 60 Years

5th November: Donaghadee and the B&CDR

GENERAL

Vice-President: The Board is pleased to announce the appointment of Frank Allen as our new Vice-President.

Frank has had a varied career in the railway industry being variously former chief executive of the Rail Procurement Agency and former chairman of the Irish Rail board. He is the current chair of the Housing Finance Agency and also treasurer of the Irish Texts Society.

2025 Calendar: The RPSI calendar for next year was launched on the "Marble City" train and is now available from the online shop.

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