



January 2025

## NEWS LETTER

### LOCOMOTIVES

**No.3BG "Guinness":** The locomotive is now fitted with an adaptor that lets the crew plug in a hose to fill the water tank from ground level.

The firehole doors, long noted to be becoming worn, were starting to give trouble, with the doors jumping out of their runners and the operating linkage very slack. A new top runner, welded up and re-drilled operating levers, and some new pins, made both at the "Tech" class and at Whitehead, has solved the problem.

**No.4:** The cab roof came off on the same day as No.171's train rides debut, and since then the tanks and boiler have also been removed. Very briefly, No.4 looked a bit like an NCC mogul - if you squinted a bit and disregarded the bunker and trailing bogie (see News article in Members Area of the website for photographs).

The boiler lift was carried out using the shear-legs at our Heavy Lift facility. Most preserved railways have to hire in road cranes at costs into five figures to carry out a job like this, but we have had the shear-legs in place since the 1990s. It would be interesting to work out how much money we have saved on road

cranes since then! The electrical squad are currently upgrading the switchgear and enclosures on the cranes, and our thanks are due to them for ensuring the cranes were in working order on the day of the lift.

Next, parts of the boiler were blast-cleaned, and then moved into the workshop for the cladding and insulation to come off. Then the boiler inspection and testing can begin.

The overhaul is likely to include work on pistons and valves, axleboxes, and examining and re-bushing the motion where required.

**No.85:** The tender, No.73, will be paired with No.171 later this year. In preparation for swapping No.171 and No.85 by road, No.85 was moved to Inchicore on 18<sup>th</sup> October for work to begin on preparing the tender.

**No.131:** A blowing piston gland and routine inspections were attended to before the Dublin Santa trains.

The locomotive has until the end of 2025 to run before she needs a boiler lift, so we plan to get No.4 progressed as much as possible before then.

**No.171 "Slieve Gullion":** The locomotive was "launched" by Prince Richard, The Duke of Gloucester, on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> September. No.171 was resplendent in her freshly applied GNR(I) blue livery,

complete with lining, nameplates and (on one side only) works plate, GNR crest and numerals, the latter applied in gold leaf.

The Duke drove No.171 through a tape, and then made a speech, referencing dedicated staff and volunteers putting in hours on dirty and unpleasant jobs. He showed he had a real appreciation of what railway preservation was all about.

The locomotive then hauled her first public trains in just over 22 years on 12<sup>th</sup> October, with driver Jonathan Clinton and fireman Nathan Lawrence, on "Train Rides" duty within the Whitehead Site. We also, for the first time in a long time, sold footplate trips to members of the public, which went well - definitely worth doing more often.

The next steps are broadly as follows:

- Complete electrics.
- Complete new safety valve bonnet - this item, a sort of second dome that covers the part of the boiler that the safety valves mount on, is being made from scratch at the "Tech" class.
- Finish steam heat pipework.
- Adjust and test sanding gear.
- Make and fit spark arrestors.
- Minor routine jobs including brake tests, weighing and spring adjustment, completion of paperwork.
- Get the locomotive inspected an independent engineer.
- Move to Dublin for running in. This will happen most probably by road, and in early 2025.

The Society is very grateful to those who have generously donated to reach this point. If you can, we would really appreciate and encourage continued

donations of time or money as all the above still require funding.

**B142:** Our diesel locomotive continues to be used for short-notice shunts and the normal housekeeping movements which are required at Whitehead, including moving No.4 around to have her side tanks removed.

**Mogul:** News articles are regularly added to the Members Area. Recent items have focused on: the new NCC boiler being attached to a rotator for easier access; riveting; machining of smaller parts.

**Shunting School:** On 28<sup>th</sup> September a shunting school was held at Whitehead for 6 young volunteers.

There was an outdoor practical instruction session in the morning using GM diesel B142 and a Mk2 carriage, followed by an indoor written examination.

All students passed both aspects of the course and put their new training to good use when they assisted in the shunting of locomotive No.4 which was rotated on the turntable to face Larne and then returned to the Dunleath Workshop.

**Steam Crews:** After a lot of work with various departments within Irish Rail, an advert for new fireman has been signed off and was scheduled to appear in the weekly circular, weekending 12<sup>th</sup> January. It will run for three consecutive weeks and will be displayed in the various depots. The online version of the circular will be out ahead of it this week. Suffice to say this is a process with a lot of moving parts, but it is now moving.

### TRAINS & EVENTS

**171 Special:** On Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> October,

No.171 returned to public trains, with train rides and a new venture of footplate experiences.

**Croagh Patrick:** On Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> October, GM 079 headed up six Cravens and the van for a departure from Dublin Heuston.

There was a clear run to Portarlinton's Up Platform where we picked up passengers (08:39), followed by a crossing at Tullamore (08:59-09:04). There was a stop at Athlone (09:32-09:42) for a crew change, then Roscommon (10:06-10:18), Castlerea (10:36-10:55) and Castlebar (11:43-11:53), and finally Westport (12:07).

With a change of locomotive here, 084 was now in charge, departing at 12:50 and arriving in Claremorris at 12:20. After a run round, Ballina was reached at 14:37 and there was a servicing stop until a 16:43 departure. There followed a quick photo stop at Foxford (17:00-17:03).

After Claremorris (17:34-17:39) it was non-stop to Athlone (18:38-18:59); the early departure was due to a Down Galway running late because of a medical emergency at Monasterevin. This delayed all other Down trains on the single track.

Clear running had us back at Platform 2, Heuston, at 20:53, 4 minutes early.

**RPSI 60 Lunch:** Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> October was a celebration of the Society's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a lunch at the Ulster Reform Club in Belfast. More than 90 members and friends were present for the function, which was graced by the presence of guest speaker Lord Faulkner of Worcester, the president of the Heritage Railway Association.

The function was the culmination of a short season of events to mark the

diamond anniversary of the inaugural meeting of the RPSI, which took place in Belfast on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1964. This kicked off with an RPSI 60 steam train trip with No.131 from Dublin to Dundalk on 8<sup>th</sup> September. Then on 13<sup>th</sup> September HRH the Duke of Gloucester paid a visit to Whitehead to mark the anniversary and launch No.171.

Then, in early October, two RPSI 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary film shows were presented - one by Charles Friel in at the RPSI meeting in Belfast and the second by Leslie McAllister as part of the London Area Irish Railway Record Society programme in London.

To set the scene at the Reform Club, a presentation compiled by Charles Friel of "60 Year in 60 Photographs" was played on a loop on three large screens in the function room as proceedings unfolded.

As guests arrived at the club, they were served with a welcome drink and had a chance to mingle before they took their seats. Among the guests were members from the Republic and Britain, who had travelled specially to be present.

Dr Joan Smyth, the RPSI President, welcomed guests including Lord Faulkner, Lord O'Neill, the Society's Patron, John Harcourt, the first chairman, Hilton Parr, Customer Services Manager (Rail) with Translink and Frank Allen the RPSI's newly appointed Vice-President.

She then introduced the two pre-lunch speakers - RPSI volunteers Damon Brunkard from Dublin and Nathan Lawrence from Whitehead. Damon recalled how he had started volunteering with the Society in Dublin in his early teens, encouraged in part by his grandmother who worked in the buffet on the train.

Damon told how he had progressed from cleaning to becoming a carriage steward and then got involved in the locomotive department and had become a trainee steam raiser a year previously. He had been passed out and was now training to become an RPSI footplate representative on the mainline.

He expressed thanks to all those in Dublin and Whitehead who had welcomed him into the ranks and who had trained him over the years. He said, however, that the RPSI was very much teamwork. Without the carriage cleaners, the stewards, the steam raisers and the marketing team, the trains would never run.

Damon said it was encouraging to see more young volunteers were coming on board to keep the legacy going. It was important to get them all involved and pass on the knowledge and skills to a new generation.

Nathan Lawrence recalled how he had got involved in the Whitehead set-up, where he volunteers every weekend in the workshop and also covers operational turns. He said he had first turned up in December 2019, had gone into the works and had been made feel very welcome from the outset.

He said that among the feelings that were important to him was a sense of achievement, in that his involvement with the Society had greatly expanded his knowledge of engineering. He listed 15 skills he had learned in the Dunleath works. Another tip which he had learnt, for his own good, was not to wear his boiler suit in the car.

Reflecting on his memories so far, Nathan mentioned raising steam at Whitehead on a cold and starry night, his first trip with James Friel to Connolly

shed to help fit the train radio on No.85. He also referenced his first mainline footplate trip on No.85 from Dublin, recalling the sparks from the chimney as they passed through Phoenix Park tunnel.

On the restoration front, Nathan recalled seeing "Drumboe" leaving for Donegal Town and seeing the NCC Mogul project progress week by week, with the parts assembled in the workshop "like a 1:1 scale Airfix kit". And another cherished moment was watching No.171 breaking the ribbon with the Duke of Gloucester at the regulator, knowing he had made a contribution to reaching this moment.

Nathan said that perhaps his most cherished memory was acting as fireman on the Whitehead steam train rides. He said it was a joy to see the pressure gauge hovering between 150 psi and blowing off, to feel the bark of the exhaust as the engine accelerates up the platform road, and to share his knowledge with visitors, talking about injectors, gauge glasses and the firebox.

In conclusion, Nathan said he wished to thank all those who had extended the hand of friendship to him, taken time to teach him new skills and given him the opportunity to partake of such unique opportunities. He wished the Society well in the years to come and said he looked forward to continuing to be involved.

RPSI 60 committee member John Williams said grace and lunch was served. Following the meal, Lord Faulkner and Lord O'Neill were invited to present commemorative certificates to the 15 founder members who were present. They had been identified from the membership list published in the very first edition of the RPSI's Five Foot

Three magazine in 1965.

Lord Faulkner, who is chairman of the Heritage Rail All-Party Parliamentary Group at Westminster, opened his remarks by congratulating the RPSI on its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. He reflected on the challenges facing the railway system in Ireland in 1964 and commended the Society for having achieved so much.

He noted that it was at Lord O'Neill's insistence that one of the RPSI's founding principles was that it should be an all-island body. He said this principle had served the Society well down the years, and cited the existence of active volunteer groups both in Dublin and Whitehead, plus the ongoing north-south co-operation which was so vital to the RPSI.

Lord Faulkner noted that the RPSI was one of six groups in Ireland who were members of the HRA and expressed the hope that the HRA's Irish committee might be revived to enable the groups to work more closely together.

He said there were huge benefits in belonging to the HRA as many of the member groups were suffering similar problems such as rising costs, coal supplies, succession planning, tighter regulations and the rising expectations of visitors. He said a problem shared was often a problem halved and that considerable expertise was available to members through the HRA.

He said it was important for the RPSI to remain engaged with the HRA, particularly through the annual awards and noted that the Society had had some notable success in recent years. Such involvement, he said, was useful in terms of maintaining profile.

Lord Faulkner thanked Damon and Nathan for their contributions to the

event and noted that young volunteers were the lifeblood of any heritage railway group. He said it was important to recognise the contribution made by young volunteers and said this was the thinking behind the HRA's "Young Volunteer of the Year" award, which he sponsors.

Lord Faulkner acknowledged that the RPSI was going through "a rough patch" at present in terms of the suspension of mainline steam operation on NIR. He said he was pleased to hear that the issue was being tackled and said that to judge from conversations he had had, he was optimistic that a solution would be found.

He said the situation was being closely monitored by the HRA and by member organisations throughout Britain. Lord Faulkner suggested that it would be beneficial if some Northern Ireland MPs could be persuaded to join the All-Party Parliamentary Group.

A vote of thanks to the speakers and all those involved in organising the function was proposed by Peter Rigney, the RPSI Chairman. He noted that the genesis of the RPSI had been the Royal Belfast Academical Institution Railway Society, and recalled the contribution made by two senior enthusiasts, Drew Donaldson in Belfast and Bob Clements in Kildare.

He said the RPSI had overcome many challenges down the years, the latest being securing paths for steam trains on an ever more congested railway system. At present Irish Rail was carrying 53m passengers a year but aimed to increase that to 90m over the next five years.

To mark the occasion, a specially designed RPSI 60 cake - emblazoned with the Society's coat of arms - had been organised and this was jointly cut by Lord Faulkner, Lord O'Neill and Dr

Smyth. The cake was then distributed to guests along with tea and coffee.

There was one final formality to attend to. Guests had been invited to slip a donation to the RPSI into envelopes which had been left on every table. The winning envelope was pulled from the hat by Susan Humes and bore the name of Tim Morton, who was presented with two bottles of wine.

The proceeds from the envelopes were counted and reached the magnificent total of more than £2,000, with some Gift Aid to follow. Thanks are expressed to all those who supported the fundraiser.

The slides from the event, which were also shown at the Belfast Meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> October have been made into a video which is available from the "Videos (Meetings)" page of the Members Area.

**School Outing:** Whitehead Railway Museum has been in contact with a number of schools inviting them to make the museum the venue for their next outing - especially as "Travel & Transport" is on this year's P2 curriculum. The first fruits of the exercise came on 17<sup>th</sup> October when the museum played host to a group of 19 pupils - plus teachers - from Seaview Primary School in Glenarm.

The children arrived by minibus and guides Brian Griffith and Richard Kenny were on hand to give them a conducted tour of the museum. Then they repaired to the classroom in The Stables Gallery where they enjoyed their packed lunches. Lots of thumbs up and friendly waves as the pupils boarded their minibus again after an action-packed morning.

The Museum makes an ideal destination for school groups and we would invite

any members with children or grandchildren in local primary schools to float the idea with their schools.

**Scream Sunday:** Despite the extremely poor weather on 27<sup>th</sup> October, there was a reasonably good turn-out and a good spooky time was had by all.

As usual, No.3BG "Guinness" was in fine form.

**Haunted Express:** On Monday 28<sup>th</sup> October, No.131 hauling the van and 7 coaches, decorated in a Halloween theme, ran from Dublin to Maynooth.

The first trip departed on time at 11:32 for a clear run to Maynooth, arriving 12:09. After No.131 running round, departure was at 12:52.

Our second train departed on time at 15:08. We were blocked outside Drumcondra due to the 15:05 Down Sligo in front stopping at Broombridge. Maynooth arrived at 15:52. We departed Maynooth on time at 16:25, arriving back in Connolly at 17:11.

Many families made a huge effort to dress up for the occasion and a best costume winner was selected on each train and each family won 4 Santa tickets as a prize.

**Runaway Train:** On the evening of Friday 8<sup>th</sup> November, Whitehead Railway Museum (in collaboration with Strand Arts Centre) hosted a cinema screening of the thriller "Runaway Train" in the unique setting of the Carriage Gallery.

Over 30 were in attendance, some of whom enjoyed a pre-movie meal in our café.

Guests were on the edge of their seats during this action-packed film, and great feedback was received from all who attended. Some also expressed an

interest in volunteering! We hope to host similar events in the future.

**Santa Special (Dublin):** It was the usual scramble for tickets at noon on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> November, with all the steam trains sold within 90 seconds and the diesel trains within minutes thereafter.

The first trains ran on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> November, then the following day and the two subsequent weekends.

The normal format was followed of two return trips to Maynooth behind No.131, then a third behind an 071 diesel.

Usually, by arrival in Maynooth, Santa had visited all children and each adult has received a complimentary mulled wine, tea or coffee and a hot mince pie. Two groups of musicians play traditional Christmas music on board and entertain the passengers.

In Maynooth, an area was set up in the Down side carpark for any passengers who wished to have their photo with Santa and his elves. This would previously have taken place on the platform but installing of new lifts and footbridge is ongoing.

On Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> December, we were extremely lucky that Storm Darragh did not cause much disruption in Dublin - apart from the Northern line, but No.131 was going West! Because of the weather, taking the Santa photos at Maynooth was dispensed with, and Santa set himself up for photos on Platform 4 on the return to Connolly.

It was a hectic period for our volunteers and great credit must be given for the work put in.

**Victorian Santa Steam:** The Christmas season also started on 30<sup>th</sup> November at Whitehead, but ran for four weekends.

This too followed last year's format - visitors are treated to a short train ride before being escorted to the Carriage Gallery, where Santa's grotto is to be found. Mrs Claus and the man himself give everyone a big welcome and the children receive their presents. Next up is the Stables Gallery, where light refreshments, including mince pies with mulled wine and hot chocolate, are available.

The café remained open throughout the for tea, coffee, lunch and light refreshments, and also providing extra atmosphere.

No.3BG "Guinness" was the motive power each day, which included for the first time two Thursday evening sessions.

The first Saturday morning kicked off with the arrival of two parties from the Salvation Army. The RPSI had invited both the Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul to bring families along as guests of the RPSI while Translink generously provided reduced price tickets for the groups so they could travel by service train from Grand Central to Whitehead. Unfortunately SVP was unable to participate this year by the Salvation Army took up the slack. Special thanks to those members who helped make this possible by offering sponsorship.

An extra date was added on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December to allow the Society to play host to children from two primary schools in County Tyrone. In total, 111 pupils from P1-P3 classes, accompanied by 17 teachers, classroom assistants and helpers arrived by bus.

The only downside to the season was on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> December, with the weather deteriorating and with a forecast of strong winds the next day, it was decided to cancel the next day's Santa

trains. Events proved that this was a wise decision as coastal towns such as Whitehead were very badly affected. In addition, a lot of potential visitors were intending to travel a distance to get to Whitehead and many roads were blocked with fallen trees.

As previously, there was a significant number of cross-border visitors on most dates. Some of them made it a weekend event by combining their Whitehead visit with another attraction, notably Titanic Belfast and Disney On Ice.

Yet again, first time visitors to Whitehead expressed amazement at the size of our premises and promised to return when the museum re-opened in January.

**200 Whistle Up:** The new year kicked off in style with No.171 "Slieve Gullion" participating in the Whistle Up 200 event at noon on New Year's Day.

This was a nationwide event to mark the start of a year of celebration of 200 years of railways.

The whole concept is a revival of a tradition from the steam age. At 12 noon, heritage railways around the UK and Ireland blew their whistles, horns, etc.

The plan was to blow whistles for at least one full minute, letting everyone know that we are part of Railway 200.

Tyler Playfair was at the whistle and proudly welcomed in 2025 and a year of celebrating railways.

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## WINTER MEETINGS

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**1<sup>st</sup> October:** The RPSI - The First 60 Years

A presentation by Charles Friel on the theme "60 years in 60 pictures" to celebrate the Society's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Charles managed to cover a vast canvas of activities, highlights and lowlights in just 100 images, Beginning with what railway societies there were in Belfast in the very early 1960s - such as the Belfast Area of the IRRS, the short-lived NI Road and Rail Development Association, and the INST Railway Society - we saw how the wisdom of the older folk and the sheer energy of the young combined to bring the RPSI into being in September 1964. The pictures traced our first meeting, our first railtour, our first locomotives, and the beginnings of Five Foot Three, to the arrival of our locomotives at our new base at Whitehead Excursion, our first two-day tour, and our first Open Day.

A programme of railtours and open days gradually grew while the Society strove to buy the last Jeep, augment the loco shed at Whitehead and restart the Belfast meetings. There was a bit of a change of focus with the first Portrush Flyer in 1973 when we began to attract the general public and organised parties to join enthusiasts on our trains. We ran steam trains soon after the re-opening of the Belfast Central line and the new Great Victoria Street before taking the plunge into the film world and The First Great Train Robbery. The first of our Steam Enterprise trains soon joined the roster and we completed our first coverage of every line in Ireland in 1981 (though the Loughrea branch got away as even No.186 was too heavy for it).

Whitehead developments included the first Schools Days and completing an overhaul of No.4 which worked for a week on NIR as part of its running-in. Then came the huge achievement of returning No.85 to the main line in time to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Enterprise Express with a non-stop run from Belfast and an early arrival in

Dublin. Day trips from Dublin began using the newly acquired CIÉ laminate carriages and two Presidents of Ireland respectively launched No.461 and GSWR Saloon 351.

Back in Whitehead, we built the Dunleath Workshops and then had to replace our main line carriages with Mark 2s. We bought our site in Whitehead and provided No.3 “R.H. Smyth” and the crews to work on two long relaying contracts while our Youth Squad won the HRA Best Wagon award for their work on GNR Brake Van 81 aka ‘Ivan’. We began acquiring IÉ main line GMs before starting the ambitious work to develop Whitehead with a station building and a signal box while developing Whitehead Railway Museum, extending the carriage shed and our engineering capacity, including a carriage workshop.

We marked our own 40<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries and revived the long-static No.131 before running a Royal Train for Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip. We helped Translink celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and marked No.3BG’s 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. Just before Covid struck, we took part in the filming of an episode of Ulster Giants for UTV and later launched the refurbished Guinness Van 504. At the 2022 Inchicore Open Day our GM diesel loco B134 was lunched by Claire Cronin, the American Ambassador to Ireland.

All too sadly, 2023 saw the tragic loss of Driver Noel Playfair but 2024 has seen the launch of B142 and the launch of the magnificent-looking No.171 which the Society’s very first meeting had identified as a key objective. Charles’ last picture was of some of the young men responsible for No.171’s return with the caption “The future is bright.

We are in good hands.”

**5<sup>th</sup> November:** Donaghadee and the B&CDR

Charles Friel kicked off with a brief overview of the Belfast and County Down Railway system, its trains and stations before handing over to the night’s principal speaker Gordon Hunt who concentrated on Donaghadee and the 4mm model that he built during Covid.

Beginning with a 1956 Meccano Magazine cover, Gordon outlined the building of the original 1626 harbour and its 1821 replacement by John Rennie (both father and son) which included burying a time capsule whose possible recovery is now causing controversy. The harbour, though principally built for the mail boats to and from Portpatrick, was very popular with merchant vessels too and the mail packets often had difficulty getting a berth. The service was abandoned in 1849 and by 1867 the mail traffic moved to the less storm-prone Larne - Stranraer route. Using maps and photographs, Gordon described the harbour’s steam crane which was much used for coal traffic and the Pierrot shows laid on for visitors - though some of the acts were reportedly “terrible”. The B&CDR station enjoyed a lot of coal traffic, of course, but was principally a passenger terminus with many excursion trains adding to the mix, all of which Gordon amply illustrated. And the station once had both of the B&CDR’s caravan coaches though they were replaced in UTA days by ex-NCC examples.

Gordon introduced the UTA’s report on “The Case for Discontinuance of Railway Services” on all of the B&CDR except the Bangor branch. The report said that while Comber to Donaghadee brought in

£19,010 annually, the expenditure on the branch was £65,540 - or a loss of £46,530 per year (equivalent to £1,272,625 in today’s money). On foot of that report, the Belfast - Comber - Donaghadee line saw its last trains on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1950. After pictures of the last stormy day, Gordon showed how the UTA established a bus operation on the site of the station yard before the ignominy of lifting trains and the onset of dereliction.

Before the meeting started, Gordon had, with the help of Roy Thompson, had set up two panels from his award-winning layout of Donaghadee. Although there no trains operating, there were some fine models including a Great Northern U class arriving with a train of RPSI Mk2 carriages! The layout attracted a lot of attention over the extended interval.

After the break, we were addressed by Dr Des McCabe from the Public Record Office of NI (PRONI) who told us of the rich archive of transport-related material in their archives and his ideas for a model exhibition in PRONI in April next to connect modellers with research material. Watch this space.

In the second half, Gordon told us of some his early model making and his recent models of Jennymount Mill (on the Down side, leaving York Road) and his facade of Great Victoria Street station (complete with a queue for the “Smugglers Express”) before telling us how he developed the Donaghadee model - first on wallpaper and then in reality - until he was happy with the layout. Gordon has an impressive eye for detail and he showed us how he created the lighthouse, the “double sunburst” gates, the interior of the signal cabin, the quay and its railway tracks (complete with grooves from

runaway wagons) and the interior of the station with Gordon and his two older sisters working the aluminium nameplate machine (10 letters for an old penny). Most eye-catching was his representation of the water in the harbour, the properly moored boats and the boatload of sheep coming back from a summer on the Copeland Islands. The nearby houses were carefully modelled with extra details like a pile of dulse or a drying fishing net. Donaghadee’s long-gone stone-built locomotive shed was modelled on the one in Ballynahinch and the gasworks model was masterpiece of smoke and mirrors. If the branch had lived long enough, it would have had containers of Cyril Lord carpets bound for Russia or a 4000 class NIR railcar; both were modelled. Gordon gave us a quick round up of how the model had been appeared at various exhibitions, some of the awards that he has picked up and examples of how much he had learned from visitors who had their own memories of Donaghadee.

**3<sup>rd</sup> December:** The Wee Donegal In Pictures

Charles Friel began his presentation with mails being transferred at Strabane and a quick look around, we jumped to Londonderry Victoria Road, just one of the city’s termini where we saw a gather-up of all nine tank wagons while other wagons were being roped across the Carlisle Bridge. After a view from the footplate near New Buildings and a visit to Donemana and its famous derailment, we were back into Strabane and another derailment in July 1920 about which very little is known.

Then it was off to Letterkenny with a shot of a topped and tailed 19-carriage passenger train - apparently for a hiring fair. Crossing into county Donegal at

Lifford, we saw Balindrait, Coolaghey (twice!), and building work at both Raphoe and Convoy before arriving at Letterkenny where the Donegal passed over the Swilly line from Tooban Junction.

After a quick stop in Strabane, it was time to travel along the Finn Valley to Stranorlar though Clady, busy Castlefin and on through Killygordon to Stranorlar. After some views in and around the works, we saw how extensive Stranorlar station had been. The Finn Valley line had begun as a 5 foot 3 line. The line south towards Donegal Town was a 3 foot gauge line and Stranorlar station had both gauges until July 1884 when the Finn Valley line was narrowed. Charles wondered why no pictures seem to have survived from standard gauge or mixed gauge days. If you know of any, please do get in touch.

After pictures of the station and people, we left Stranorlar for Glenties over the river on that remarkable bridge reputedly designed for somewhere in Norway and on through Cloghan to the terminus and some very early railbuses. On the way back we paused at Fintown. Back in Stranorlar we saw a carriage converted to convey turf during WW2 before heading south towards Donegal Town, crossing the Finn on a mighty viaduct and skirting Lough Mourne, we saw several excursions, some of them double-headed, toiling up through the Barnesmore Gap. We continued through Donegal Town to Killybegs, passing under the three-arched bridge at Mountcharles before seeing railcars crossing at Inver by using a siding rather than a loop. We swept round the last long bend into the fishing port of Killybegs where steamers were unloading coal and the train shed gave some protection from the weather.

After a special of coal for Ballyshannon had left, we followed in a railcar but soon took a huge leap to Ballyshannon for the final leg of our trip. After discussing Hills of Donegal excursions and the problems getting passengers from the Donegal station to the Great Northern station, we headed off through Rossnowlagh, Ballintra (with railcars ancient and modern), the seldom-photographed Drumhorry Bridge and Bridgetown. On the outskirts of Donegal Town, we saw the results of a rail car leaving without the staff and meeting a goods train, with fatal results for the railcar driver and the steam locomotive, which never ran again.

Each line was introduced with a detailed map and the relevant gradient profile.

After the break, Charles covered the final days of the Wee Donegal using many pictures by E.M. Patterson who was there for the penultimate day, the last day itself and the next day. With lots of pictures of staff and trains, he travelled to Killybegs on the last day and was in Stranorlar for the final train from Strabane. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1960, he travelled (on the footplate of course) of a goods to Strabane. Indeed the Finn Valley goods trains kept running for another five weeks and, further south, railcar 12 operated a service from Ballyshannon and Donegal Town for a similar period before 'management' padlocked the car to the rails! Charles told us that some folk had doubted whether that had ever happened but he told us too that, just last summer, he had met a lady from Ballyshannon who had travelled to school on it.

After coverage of lifting trains and auctions, the talk showed how several vehicles were conveyed over the Derry Road for preservation in Belfast's new

Transport Museum and how much Dr Cox had bought with a view to shipping it to the USA. None of his scheme came to fruition and, sadly, the last Baltic in the British Isles was cut up in Letterkenny, apparently 'by mistake'. On the other hand, railcars 19 and 20 made it to the Isle of Man and the North West of Ireland society recovered much CDR stock to their first base at Victoria Road and, after a brief spell at Shanes Castle, then at the Foyle Valley Museum in Londonderry. The talk included the preserved line at Fintown and what little is left at Stranorlar before visiting the nearby graves of Forbes and Livesey. There is much happening at Donegal Town, of course, and Charles included the RPSI's work in rebuilding track at Mullanboys and operating a PW trolley there to mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the closure. The talk included with the extensive work done on Drumboe at Whitehead before going on display in Donegal Town.

After more than 260 pictures, the talk concluded in Barnesmore Gap with an evocative Neil Sprinks colour slide of railcar 12 on a Strabane to Killybegs working.

**7<sup>th</sup> January:** Modern Traction on the Great Northern

Michael McMahon presented the January meeting of the Modern Railway Society of Ireland for all of 36 years. After the winding up of the MRSI, Michael continues the tradition with this review of how the GNR(I) embraced modern technology and applied it successfully in a succession of diesel railcars and one diesel hydraulic locomotive.

The railcars brought new standards of comfort and service and the promise of brighter days ahead. Meanwhile, the

GNRB's management tried to persuade Stormont that railways really did have a future - no fairytale ending.

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## GENERAL

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**Sales News:** Supplies of the RPSI calendar for next year are still available. Get yours from the online shop or at the next Orangefield meeting.

**Barney (Brendan) McCrory:** We are saddened to announce the passing of former steam driver Barney McCrory.

Barney was a regular on our footplate over the years, both as a driver and inspector. He was a fireman on the spoil trains, and promoted to driver near the end of that project.

Our condolences to his family and friends.

**Annual General Meeting:** The AGM was held on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> November in Belfast. It was a very poorly attended meeting, being only 22 members present.

There were no contests for Board posts, and the Treasurer post remains vacant.

Some questions arose regarding the difficulties in understanding the accounts and poor performance in income versus expenditure.

We are also sorry to report that our external director, Dermot O'Hara, will not be continuing in his role. Dermot brought a wealth of HR knowledge to the Board and will be much missed.

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