



August 2025

## NEWS LETTER

### GENERAL MANAGER

**Goodbye:** Unfortunately, we have to report that our GM, Yvonne McIlree, has moved on. She has returned to the local hospitality sector, where she previously worked, as an opportunity has arisen which was too good to turn down. We wish her well.

**Hello:** An interview board has appointed Rachele Crawford to the post of General Manager - she started on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> July.

Rachele is a graduate of Queens University Belfast and joins us from her previous position at The National Trust, where she has held a key management role.

The RPSI's new General Manager says she sees enormous potential for both Whitehead Railway Museum and the RPSI as a whole.

Rachele Crawford was speaking during a visit to Whitehead for a series of familiarisation and handover meetings with Yvonne McIlree, the outgoing GM.

Rachele (33) comes from Comber but has relocated to Ballycarry in order to live more conveniently to Whitehead.

A graduate of Queen's University, Belfast, Rachele's previous job was as Experience and Visitor Programming Manager with the National Trust at Castleward.

She has also worked as Visitor Experience Manager with the RSPB at Window on Wildlife in Belfast and at the Rathlin Island Seabird Centre, and has also done stints with Titanic Belfast and the Crescent Arts Centre in Belfast.

She said she was excited to be joining RPSI as GM and said the role brought together her lifelong interest in history, her professional experience in heritage management and her passion for creating unforgettable visitor experiences.

She added: "I have always believed that preserving and sharing our collective heritage is vital - it connects people, communities, and generations. The RPSI's work embodies this mission, not only by

restoring and running historic trains but also by welcoming thousands of visitors to the museum where volunteers bring the story of Irish railways to life."

### SIR KENNETH BLOOMFIELD

We are saddened to report the passing of our former Vice-President on 31<sup>st</sup> May.

Some links to obituary and Sir Ken in action:

[www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cjrnzg-gw949o](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cjrnzg-gw949o)

[www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/railway-men-steamed-up-over-threat-to-network/28208335.html](http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/railway-men-steamed-up-over-threat-to-network/28208335.html)

A message from our President:

*Sir Ken Bloomfield was a strong supporter of the RPSI and rail transport in Northern Ireland. As Chair of the Transport Holding Company, I was delighted to be a guest at the RPSI 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary dinner and to hear his strong words of encouragement at a time when we were fighting to retain the rail network in Northern Ireland.*

*Subsequently, he was able to provide assistance to the RPSI as a Vice President and I hosted a lunch to thank him for his support when he stood down. As we mourn his passing, I send my deepest sympathy to Elizabeth and his family at this sad time.*

Joan Smyth

### WHITEHEAD RAILWAY MUSEUM

**Museum Entry:** Don't forget that you can get free entry to the Museum with your membership card for the current year.

If you take all your communications digitally, you can still request a card by sending in a stamped addressed envelope to the address on the bottom of the News-Letter.

### LOCOMOTIVES

**No.4:** We are pleased to announce that the Heritage Council, under their Community Heritage Grant, has kindly offered funding of €6,440 towards work on new valve liners for the locomotive.

Firebox copper side stays are being drilled out for replacement.

Planning to remove pony truck and wheelset - steam cleaning in progress to facilitate this.

**No.131:** The usual minor repairs, including sponge pads on bogie trailing wheelset to be renewed.

**No.171 "Slieve Gullion":** Big end brasses machined for fitting. This follows their failure on a running-in trip in April.

**NCC Mogul:** The inner firebox is now almost fully rivetted. A trial fitting to the boiler has taken place.

Work is progressing on tank brackets which will allow this boiler to be used with No.4 should the need

arise in future.

Reports detailing recent work on the frames and boiler get added to the News page of the Members Area on the website from time to time - have a look!

**Help Request:** The team rebuilding the Mogul at Whitehead are making progress.

We have umpteen classic three-quarter view photos of NCC moguls, but none of these show in between the frames, the rear buffer beam of the locomotive (usually has a tender attached) or how the cab floorboards slotted in.

We know No.97 sat boilerless at York Road for a while in the late 1960s. There was even a photo in the press which showed a young RPSI member standing on the footplate of the boilerless, cabless locomotive. Unfortunately, the member named in the press article says it wasn't him - and he doesn't have any photos of it himself.

Do you have any photos of a Mogul with the boiler removed from the frames, or showing an unusual angle? Have you happened across a photo of a Mogul showing some apparently inconsequential detail on a photo gallery such as Flickr? If so, we'd like to hear from you.

If you can help with any photos which would help the team, please get in touch.

**Special Delivery:** On Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> July, the engine and several auxiliary

components from a GM diesel locomotive arrived at Whitehead on a hi-ab lorry from Inchicore.

The engine from 141 class locomotive 162 was purchased by the RPSI some time ago, as it had been identified as being in good internal condition, with relatively low hours.

The CME's staff at Inchicore arranged to have the engine removed from the locomotive, and loaded it on to our contractor's lorry using the impressive overhead cranes at Inchicore works.

At Whitehead, the engine and the other components have been placed on a flat wagon and moved into the wheel-drop shed pending a decision on where they can be best put in long term storage. This isn't the sort of item that gets left outside under a tarpaulin.

This "too good to miss" tranche of spare parts is the GM equivalent of someone coming along in 1975 and producing a complete spare Jeep boiler with recently installed boiler tubes. Our thanks are due to the CME's staff who facilitated the removal of the engine and loading.

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## CARRIAGE & WAGON

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**Bogies:** Work on Cravens bogie CR54 in the Dunleath Workshop continues, including pins and bushes now mostly completed. The bolster is beyond economic repair and will be replaced with one from the next bogie for repair - the next will get a

new bolster.

**Mk2:** Minor work to have coaches ready to operate is ongoing - painting, scheduled examinations, etc.

**Stored Coaches:** NCC full brake 411 is in the final stages of painting; it will be swapped with GNR(I) brake 114 when painting complete, for a similar paintwork job.

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## TRAINS & EVENTS

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**Easter Eggstravaganza:** Ticket supply continues to outstrip demand for many Dublin trains - we sold 660 tickets in 19 minutes for these trains on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> April.

The day started with No.171 "Slieve Gullion" on a trial run to Clonsilla. However, a big end bearing had heat when examined and the loco had to be put in a siding at Clonsilla and later rescued by diesel and returned to Connolly Shed.

The public train consisted of No.131 with 7 Cravens and a van.

The first train departed at 11:12 as the Easter Bunny proceeded to hand out Easter eggs to all children on board. We were blocked outside Maynooth by a late running Up Sligo, and we arrived in Maynooth at 11:52, 5 minutes late. The return trip set off at 12:05 and reached Dublin Connolly at 12:43.

Train 2 was on time at 14:27 for a repeat trip, arriving back in Dublin at 16:02.

**Easter Steam:** Trains at Whitehead on 19<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> April saw two very busy days with the Easter Bunny handing out Easter Eggs while both parents and children partook of train rides behind No.3BG "Guinness", followed by Museum tours.

**Sea Breeze:** This train operated on 27<sup>th</sup> April.

We had taken the decision to cancel steam traction with No.131 due to possible fire risk as a result of the high level of dry weather in the country over the previous number of weeks.

GM 220, newly turned out in heritage-livery, was the motive power used instead.

Carriage 1532 was chartered by our regulars from "Whiskey on The Tracks". The vehicle was dressed in white antimacassars and white tablecloths.

We departed on time at 10:45 from a sunny Dublin. Wexford was reached at 13:42, two minutes early. There was an on-time departure at 13:54 with a new compliment of passengers for Rosslare Strand / Rosslare Europort.

After the return stop at Wexford (17:03-17:15), a non-stop run had us on Platform 5 at Dublin Connolly at 19:43, 3 minutes early.

**Wee Critters:** On 10<sup>th</sup> May, this was a repeat of the successful event.

No.3BG "Guinness" and various animals did the honours.

**Premier Branch Line:** On Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> May GM locomotive 077 started this diesel trip from Dublin.

At Waterford, locomotive 071 took over, but some issues with the vacuum pressure required the strings to be pulled on each carriage.

After running non-stop to Limerick, locomotive 081 arrived and coupled up.

There were photo stops at Birdhill and Cloughjordan, arriving at Ballybrophy Platform 3 (bay) where all passengers had to detrain for the set to propel out and put back on Platform 4, from where we departed for Thurles. Here the set was placed in the loop and the engine ran round. Issues with the signal at the Dublin end of the loop necessitated paperwork to be completed before the train could leave the loop.

Dublin Heuston was reached at 20:59.

**Heritage Charter (1):** On Monday 12<sup>th</sup> May there was a one-way charter from Limerick to Dublin on behalf of Odyssey Travel, who had 125 American guests booked.

After the previous Saturday's diesel tour it was an all-out rush to get three carriages dressed with carpets, curtains, antimacassars and table lamps. Crews washed the carriage windows and undertook a full clean of the kitchen and bar.

With GM locomotive 81 at the front, we departed empty from Dublin Heuston at 09:42. There was an on-

time arrival onto Platform 3 Limerick at 11:49.

Following a change of locomotive (071), the passengers boarded and we departed on time. Dublin Heuston arrival was 15:02.

**The Midlander:** On Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> May, in fantastic weather, we departed Dublin Connolly at 11:02 to Maynooth.

The second train departed at 14:35, arriving back at 16:14.

**Heritage Charter (2):** Another one-way special ran on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> May.

The set departed the siding in Inchicore, hauled by GM locomotive 083, and made an on-time arrival in Killarney at 09:43.

After the locomotive had changed ends our passengers boarded - each with a packed lunch.

We departed Killarney on time at 11:00, arriving in Dublin Heuston at 14:26.

**A Busy Day At Whitehead:** On Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> May a number of events took place.

In the morning, the Dromore Mothers Union enjoyed elevenses in the Stable education room and then had a conducted tour.

At 1:30pm the East Antrim Old Vehicle Club hove into sight, having completed a sedate lap of Slemish from their meeting point at Corrs Corner. There were some 20 cars

and 33 visitors to the Museum.

While the cars were judged for the best presented vehicle (prize awarded at the dinner that evening in Whitehead Golf Club) Club organiser split the party into three groups to facilitate the museum tour. One group started at the station building, a second at the Stables and the third at the Carriage Gallery. A bit of a Le Mans start, perhaps.

Some of the visitors relaxed in Cups & Carriages and by 4pm it was time for the cavalcade to set off on a tour of Islandmagee en route to the golf club.

In addition to the organised groups we had around a dozen walk-ins, including a tourist from Switzerland. Feedback from our visitors was, as ever, most favourable!

Thanks go to our guides for making everything run so smoothly.

**Emerald Pullman:** For this mammoth tour, five carriages had to be dressed with carpets, curtains, antimacassars, four with table lamps and three with table cloths. As RPSI dining car volunteers were doing the catering, menus had to be agreed and a lot of shopping was done.

Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> June: A champagne reception was arranged on the platform at Dublin Connolly and the passengers, who had just arrived, enjoyed a glass of bubbly or orange juice.

We departed Dublin behind GM 086.

After Kildare, lunch was served to the passengers. On arriving in Waterford, the passengers travelled by road to Waterford Crystal.

We departed Waterford behind 083. Afternoon tea was served on this leg of the tour. There was a quick photo stop at Tipperary for the passengers to pose in front of the railway station sign (it's a long way!). It was then on to Limerick Junction, before heading south and west to Killarney.

Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> June: We departed Killarney on time at 09:00 for Mallow, arriving at 09:56. Here, the passengers had the option of travelling by coach to Blarney Castle or to Cobh by rail - all chose Blarney!

In Cork, the set was serviced and we went to Cobh hauled by 223. On regaining our Blarney passengers, we departed, after which tea/coffee and pastries were served. The train arrived back in Killarney at 18:50.

Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> June: We departed on time at 08:25am for Galway. After Limerick, following a change of locomotive, with 081 now up front, tea/coffee and pastries were served. The locomotive ran round in Athenry and the train reached Galway at 13:21.

The set was propelled out onto the loop, the locomotive ran round and we departed for Athlone empty. We left there at 17:12 before reaching Westport at 19:53.

Friday 6<sup>th</sup> June: We departed Westport at 11:40, and lunch was served between here and Athlone.

The train arrived into Platform 5 Dublin Connolly at 15:33.

The locomotive ran round and we departed for Dundalk. Tea/coffee and snacks were served. At Dundalk we said goodbye to our passengers as they waited to join the Down Enterprise travelling behind us.

The carriages were shunted onto the Down loop and were watered, before returning to Dublin.

The total mileage for this extensive tour was 965.

**The Midlander:** Another successful Maynooth operation ran on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> June.

We had an on-time departure from Connolly at 11:01 resulting in an arrival into Maynooth at 11:55. We departed Maynooth at 12:07 and arrived back at Connolly at 12:44. The train was propelled out to the wash road and the locomotive returned to the shed for servicing.

We again departed Connolly on time and arrived on time into Maynooth. Departure was at 15:27, but we were held outside Connolly for a time which resulted in our arriving onto Platform 4 at 16:13.

**August Steam Whitehead:** Each Saturday in the month will have a steam train rides event:

- 2<sup>nd</sup> - Teddy Bear's Picnic
- 9<sup>th</sup> - Food & Folk Festival
- 16<sup>th</sup> - Train Rides
- 23<sup>rd</sup> - Music & Mind
- 30<sup>th</sup> - Wee Critters

**Dublin Riviera:** Our annual steam trains to Bray, Greystones and Wicklow, planned for Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> August, have had to be cancelled because of non-availability of crew.

We apologise for this inconvenience.

**Upcoming Dates:** We are planning to run on:

- 17<sup>th</sup> August - Sea Breeze
- 24<sup>th</sup> August - Marble City
- 13<sup>th</sup> September - European Heritage Day

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## WHITEHEAD SITE

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**Trains and Drains:** The video of this name was part of the submission by the RPSI for the 2025 Industrial Heritage Week being run by Mid & East Antrim Borough Council. We were delighted to be involved in the event, which ran from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> June.

The video has been produced to illustrate the work of the Whitehead site squad. It focuses on a project which took place this spring, designed to make a 200ft long section of our platform road more horizontal and to improve the track drainage.

This objective was accomplished by jacking and packing around 60 sleepers, and it involved scooping out the old ballast along with the underlying ash and mud sub-base and replacing it all with fresh ballast.

This in turn provides much better support for the sleepers and rails,

and the new stone will help the track to drain more efficiently. The result is a smoother journey for our train ride passengers and a more comfortable ride for our footplate crew.

Thanks go to site officer Dermot Mackie for acting as our "star presenter" and to Ian Sinclair for turning raw footage into a video short. The film is now available to view on the YouTube page of our website.

**Name Game:** For some time now, we have attempted to cultivate the sloping bank to the rear of the Stables, but have been defeated by the lack of good soil and stones. We decided to make a railway feature of the area with a station style name which would be seen by our visitors.

Over the month of June, we constructed a plinth using old sleepers and mounted white letters on the sloping part.

The wings were set out with redundant fire bricks and all was finished in time for a photo shoot with our new General Manager.

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## WINTER MEETINGS

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**Dates:** A return to Wednesdays for our meetings at Orangefield in Belfast.

We will be meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> October, 12<sup>th</sup> November, 10<sup>th</sup> December, 14<sup>th</sup> January, 11<sup>th</sup> February and 11<sup>th</sup> March.

We hope to include shows on the Burtonport Extension, Last Days of the CDR and what's happening in Translink.

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## GENERAL

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**Five Foot Three:** Those of you with internet access will have received an invitation to take your magazine as a download.

However, a number of members have not yet replied with their preference.

Please do respond to any email reminder you may receive.

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