



September 2025

## NEWS LETTER

### LOCOMOTIVES

**No.171 "Slieve Gullion":** On Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> August, No.171 crept out onto the main line in the company of GM diesel locomotive 087 to continue running in in preparation for a return to main line traffic.

Slieve Gullion fans will recall that No.171 made a light engine run in April, her first on the main line since 2002, which was cut short at Clonsilla with a hot big end bearing. The locomotive, looking good in her new paintwork, but sadly unable to move under her own power, was rescued by an 071 diesel and brought back to Connolly Shed the same day.

The bearing, connecting rod, and little end were brought to Whitehead where repair work was carried out during May and June. In July, the components were returned to Connolly Shed, and the skilled work of hand scraping the bearing to suit the crankpin journal began.

Several trips to Connolly later, and after a lot of repetitive work, the Whitehead-based workshop crew declared the locomotive fit for further testing.

So it was that 087 rumbled into life at just after 07:00 on the Sunday morning, and hauled No.171 to Maynooth at reduced speed suitable for running in.

The locomotive was in light steam to keep the lubrication for the valves and pistons going (this works via steam and a displacement lubricator).

After the first trip to Maynooth, the short train went to Pearse yard to run round, and then set off again to Maynooth for a second return trip.

The repaired big end performed perfectly, and will not need any further attention before No.171 hauls a passenger train.

As usual, when testing, a number of items are added to the locomotive's 'to do' list before the next trial run.

As ever, our thanks are due to Irish Rail for accommodating our activities, and arranging the day's running in trips.

### TRAINS & EVENTS

**Whitehead Train Rides:** There was a series of five steam Saturdays in August.

Throughout, the train consisted of locomotive No.3BG "Guinness", NCC

coach 68 and GNR(I) brake van (known locally as "Ivan").

It operated at half hourly intervals from 11:00 to 15:00, with an hour-long break for lunch. The train rides fare included a visit to the museum and signal cabin.

As in previous years, there was a pleasing number of cross-border visitors from places such as Navan, Carlow and Cork.

There was also an unusually large number of international visitors from countries including Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Ukraine and USA.

Our café was kept busy throughout the season.

**2<sup>nd</sup> - Teddy Bear's Picnic:** Visitors took part in a treasure hunt to find Harvey, our special railway bear, having his own picnic. Children brought their own teddy bears along to join in the fun.

**9<sup>th</sup> - Food & Folk Festival:** It was a beautiful sunny day so, together with the Festival in the adjacent field, there was a high demand for train rides - in fact, three extra trains had to be run to cope with visitor numbers.

**16<sup>th</sup> - Rail 200:** Marketed to commemorate 200 years of railways, passenger numbers were healthy but the figure could have been higher but for lengthy traffic delays due to an accident on the M2 near Belfast.

**23<sup>rd</sup> - Music & Mind:** There was music on the platform for this event to get into the spirit of this week-long event in Whitehead. It was a quieter day than in recent weeks, but there was still a

steady stream of visitors to train rides, café and museum.

**30<sup>th</sup> - Wee Critters:** These popular events have become a staple at Whitehead in recent years. 'Allan the Explorer', resplendent in a safari type outfit, gave a presentation front of a back drop of jungle scenes. He demonstrated a variety of appropriate animals from snakes through to giant snails - some to the delight of children and to the horror of parents.

**Marble City:** This return trip to Kilkenny on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> August booked out within 90 minutes of going on sale.

The train consisted of No.131 and vehicles 3173 (van) 1532, 1505, 1522 (diner), 1514 (bar), 1506 and 1541 - we are limited to 6 and a van due to the signalling at Kilkenny. Carriage 1541 was dressed with tablecloths, curtains and antimacassars for "Whiskey On The Tracks" group.

The sound of an accordions could be heard coming from Platform 2 following the arrival of the train from Belfast. This was the "The Star of Knockagh Accordion Band", Carrickfergus. They played while marching across to Platform 3 and continued to entertain the passengers as they arrived.

This was the start of the RPSI's Heritage Week (Republic of Ireland) involvement.

The train departed Dublin Connolly at 10:25, and there followed a clear run to Kildare where a conductor driver was taken on to Kilkenny.

At Athy (11:47-12:09), we were delayed due to poor water pressure. We were further blocked at

Bagenalstown (12:40-12:58) to cross an Up Waterford. We were due to cross this train in Kilkenny. Arrival in Kilkenny was at 13:22.

While the band marched to Kilkenny Castle to play a recital, GM 073 arrived to release No.131 which ran to Lavistown to turn on the triangle there, then making its way to the station yard.

The set was returned to the platform where the carriages were watered, then shunted to the siding until both Up and Down Waterford passenger trains had departed. The set was propelled back onto the platform and No.131 returned from the yard and was watered.

The return train departed Kilkenny at 16:04. At Athy (17:23-17:55), the locomotive was watered but there was a delay due to firing issues. At Kildare (18:23), the conductor driver was set down.

From Kildare a clear run of signals had us onto Platform 2 Dublin Connolly at 19:07.

The band then marched down Platform 2 and out to the car park - the operations team wish to thank them for participating in our Heritage Week celebrations.

**Emerald Pullman:** There will be another week-long diesel-hauled charter in mid-September - a repeat of that which took place in June.

**European Heritage Open Day:** The next event at Whitehead will be on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> September. As with museums throughout Europe, museum entry will be free on that date but there will be a charge for train rides.

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## WHITEHEAD SITE

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**Whitehead:** Summer was a busy period for the Site Squad.

During the first week of July, we were asked to get a Craven bogie out of the Larne siding, but this initially required some serious bushwhacking as there had been no movement in this area for some time. Once shunted out with the Atlas, the bogie was moved round to the Dunleath workshop with the Larne forklift.

In the middle of the month Whitehead in Bloom produced a beautiful selection of flowers which were put into either hanging baskets or our platform beds.

On Tuesdays for the next three weeks, when there were no visitors, we power-hosed the visitors' green pathway which runs from the platform to the rear carriage shed entrance.

The model layout in this shed was fitted with a large perspex surround to protect its contents, but still being easily visible.

With a busy August of train rides, we inspected the track before each operating Saturday and did a major tidy of the bushes in the carpark.

The glorious weather also meant emptying bins after the visitors and watering the plants each week.

At the end of the month, with the help of a cherry picker, we finished painting the two tall shear legs gantries. This was a job we had started in May, but could only safely reach to a limited height using a mobile raised platform.

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## WINTER MEETINGS

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**New Season:** The programme is extended to 7 meetings this year!

8<sup>th</sup> October: Castlederg & Victoria Bridge Tramway by Charles Friel.

12<sup>th</sup> November: Translink NI Railways - Better Connected Today and Tomorrow by Ian Campbell, Director of Service Operations.

10<sup>th</sup> December: More Travels With Mac by Michael McMahon.

14<sup>th</sup> January: Greenore by John Martin.

11<sup>th</sup> February: Belfast Great Victoria Street Remembered by Robert White.

11<sup>th</sup> March: A Donegal Double by Joe Begley.

1<sup>st</sup> April: With Lance King In Ireland - 1958 to 1970 by Leslie McAllister.

Full details are available from our website. A poster for the meetings is also available, so please do download and print at least one copy for display in suitable public venues.

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## GENERAL

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**Whitehead Visit:** RPSI patron the Lord O'Neill and his son Tyrone paid a visit to Whitehead on 28<sup>th</sup> August.

Peter Scott of the locomotive department updated Lord O'Neill on the Mogul project and the visitors were able to observe the team carrying out riveting work on the locomotive's firebox. During the morning the team put in a total of 24 rivets, each heated to a temperature of 900°C before being inserted into the side of the firebox and hammered down from the inside.

RPSI Technical Operations Executive James Friel escorted Lord O'Neill and his son Tyrone on a visit to the Carriage Gallery where they admired the exhibition in the Directors' Saloon, including the new carpet, chairs, sofa, side tables and curtains which recreate how the large saloon looked on the 1953 Royal Train. Lord O'Neill led the funding of the vehicle's first restoration in York Road, which started in late 1978.

There was also an opportunity to inspect the Irish Presidential saloon (1972) which is now open for viewing by visitors.

Lord O'Neill then visited the locomotive gallery where GNR(I) Compound No.85 is on display. The visitors were briefed on the cosmetic restoration of No.184, built in 1880 at Inchicore and the only engine in the Society's collection built in Ireland.

**Sales News:** The following have been added to the website shop:

- RPSI 2026 Calendar.
- "Rails Through Castlerock", by Des Crockett, hardback, 18 x 24 cm, 24 colour and 31 B&W photos, 60 pages.

**AGM:** There will be a number of vacancies on the Board at the forthcoming AGM - a nomination form is available in the "AGM Details" page on the Members Area of the website.

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