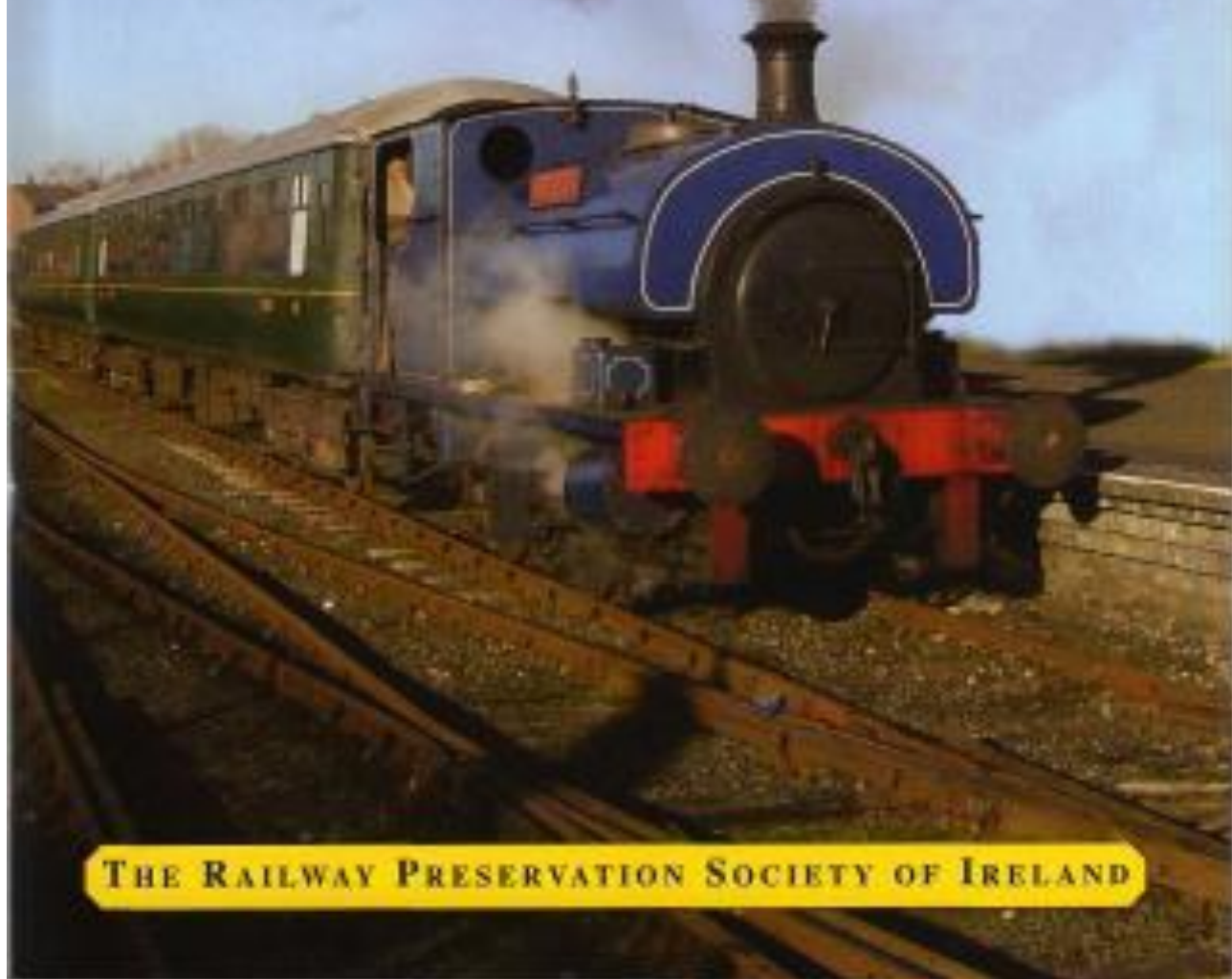


# Five Foot Three



THE RAILWAY PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF IRELAND

# FIVE FOOT THREE

## No.54

### Winter 2007/8

Editor: Nelson Poots

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Opinions expressed by contributors do not necessarily represent those of the Editor or the Council of the Society.

*Front Cover: It's a long time since the Guinness engine made it to the front cover. The location is nowhere more exotic than Whitehead, with some unphotogenic material removed by computer trickery. (J.J. Friel)*

#### EDITORIAL

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A regrettable fact of life in these islands is the long-standing tendency to denigrate or poke fun at the railways. Think of the numerous derogatory mis-translations of companies' initials, or compare our railway ditties with their American counterparts. The rare occasions when people are killed or injured in railway accidents produce something of a media feeding frenzy, with lurid headlines such as "Driver jumped red light" produced by persons who know little or nothing about the subject. Whilst a railway driver might inadvertently over-run a danger signal he will certainly not deliberately disregard it in the manner seen daily on the roads.

Despite railways being demonstrably the safest form of land transport a similarly negative attitude appears to affect the minds of the legislators. One of the results - inevitably accompanied by much paperwork - is the requirement to fit railway vehicles with various complicated devices, some of which might be seen as more applicable to aeroplanes which, unlike rail-guided trains, have to be steered through the skies from which they occasionally fall. However, like it or not, we are stuck with this situation and you will read of its financial and labour implications elsewhere.

A less obvious but potentially more serious problem is that of getting paths for our trains among the more numerous and faster trains now operated by the respective railway companies, and this is not helped by the imposition of an overall speed limit. It is difficult to fathom the reason for this, since our vehicles are those which used to run the public service and are inspected and certified as fit for purpose by an independent body.

Whilst substantial progress has been made with driver training on IÉ the same cannot be said in relation to NIR where things are moving, in the words of our Secretary, “very slowly”. If, as suggested by our Chairman, we may be expected in the future to run regular weekend trains in the summer months this may have a bearing on our ability to do so. We run an intensive series of operations north and south at Christmas so it should not be beyond the ability of the RPSI to provide volunteers in more agreeable summer conditions but, with only one certified steam driver at present, can NIR guarantee a loco crew?

Our “Youth Team” continues to labour mightily and one can only hope that when they are inevitably subjected to the attractions of the fair sex (or should it be gender nowadays?) it will be possible to convince the ladies of the attractions of railway work. Why not - it happens across the water.

In this issue it may not go unnoticed that many photos are credited to Charles Friel’s son, James. Although Charles, unfailing provider of FFT photos - and perhaps Ireland’s last black & white railway photographer - has certainly not retired he has shown recent signs of going digital. So while James may have supplied the photos, they could well have been taken by any member of the Friel family - or even by a “Youth Team” colleague. Your Editor, still not entirely converted even to carrying a basic mobile phone, is struggling to keep up!

## **CHAIRMAN’S REPORT**

**Johnny Glendinning**

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The Society has, thanks to the hard work of its dedicated members, achieved a lot this year. In Dublin, because of our “Guest Operator” status on Irish Rail and because of our Railway Safety Case, instead of Irish Rail inspecting our stock for use on their network, Alliance Cornhill Engineering now inspects and issues annual certificates for our Dublin based stock in the same way as they have been doing in Whitehead. Also in Dublin, like Whitehead, we now carry out all our own pre-trip maintenance and safety checks of both locos and coaches. This is thanks to the commitment of our Dublin locomotive and carriage reps who completed the necessary training.

As a result of the introduction of new legislation in the North, we are now required to either fit our locomotives with a device called Train Protection & Warning System (TPWS) or seek an exemption on the grounds that our locomotives always have two drivers and an inspector on the footplate. An exemption would be cheaper than fitting TPWS, but with an exemption comes a maximum speed restriction of 40 mph. The same legislation also requires us to fit Central Door Locking (CDL) to any passenger carrying vehicles that we wish to operate on NIR. This time there is no exemption to be sought. These two new requirements have given the Loco and Carriage Departments a number of problems to solve. TPWS is more or less an off the shelf product but it still has to be fitted, calibrated and commissioned - all of which does not come cheap. CDL for slam door carriages is no longer an off the shelf product as all new trains now have automatic doors. However we have managed to get some recovered slam door CDL equipment and have redesigned it to be able work on our vacuum braked Mk2s. All of this redesign work has taken a lot of time but hopefully once the first carriage is working then duplication of the others will be a bit quicker.

In June, due to the deteriorating condition of the track north of Ballymena, which resulted in a number of temporary speed restrictions that increased the section times, and also because of NIR’s wish to run an additional train from Belfast to Portrush, NIR informed us that they would not be able to operate our Portrush Flyer until the track has been repaired.

This extra Portrush train is part of NIR's present strategy to prove to the government, the politicians and the general public that if you provide a frequent, reliable and affordable service then people will use it. Their strategy has started to pay off which can be seen by the numbers now travelling on the trains.

This increase of trains now being operated by both NIR and IÉ means spare paths on the two networks are becoming harder to find and we, the RPSI, are going to have to take a hard and long look at what we can and cannot realistically do.



*The Unilok, which earns its keep by moving NCC No.74 "Dunluce Castle" whenever space is required for a function at the Ulster Transport Museum. (J.J. Friel)*

If we are to make the case to the Railway Companies and the government that there is a tourist market for heritage steam trains, similar to that in GB or mainland Europe then we need to be able to offer a Portrush Flyer every Saturday or Sunday in July and August and not just on three random Saturdays as at present. This would require a big commitment from our volunteers and/or the use of more paid staff and we would need to have two operational locomotives and one or two spare carriages. This is something I would like the members to give serious consideration to.

Another issue the Society needs to address is the shortage of people with heavy engineering skills looking for work. There are no longer people with the sort of knowledge and skills required to maintain steam boilers, engines and carriages waiting to be employed. If we are to keep these skills alive, we must provide the training required and once we have someone trained we need to keep them by being able to pay them a reasonable wage and provide them with work to do. Otherwise we will be forever recruiting and training people for the benefit of another employer who will pay more and who will also be able to guarantee a full week's work.

After forty plus years, the time has come for us to review what we do at Whitehead and consider how to make the most of our site, especially now that we are an accredited museum. With the Project

Planning Grant which Derek Young and his team have achieved for us from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Whitehead and the RPSI activities will be looked at by consultants whose report will hopefully lead to a Heritage Lottery Fund Grant to improve the storage workshops and make our site at Whitehead a more visitor friendly location.

As always I must thank IÉ and NIR for their continued help and support over the past year.

## NEWS FROM COUNCIL

**Paul McCann**

As always, the first few months of the year are reasonably quiet as our volunteers get stuck into preparing the locomotives and carriages for the forthcoming season. The first big event was the announcement on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2007 that negotiations had been concluded with Carrickfergus Borough Council for the purchase of our Whitehead headquarters. A press launch and official signing took place on that date, but shortly afterwards it was noted by the Borough's legal team that the boundaries on the sale agreement were incorrect. To date, we are still awaiting a final agreement between the two legal teams.



*A little light relief after the site purchase; l-r: Bill King-Wood, Johnny Glendinning, Mayor of Carrickfergus, and RPSI member and benefactor Peter Montgomery. (C.P. Friel)*

There are big plans proposed for the Whitehead site, and in November it was announced that the Society, following negotiations between Derek Young and the UK Heritage Lottery Fund, had been successful with an application made for a Project Planning grant. £37,800, 90% of the required total has been granted to enable a number of documents to be prepared by consultants which will inform any decisions going forward about the shape and scope of any subsequent projects for Whitehead. The plans to be prepared are: Conservation Management Plan; Access/Audience Development Plan; Training Plan. Phil Lockett will be taking the plan forward as project manager.

The engineering departments had to consider a number of new requirements during the year, namely

fitting of Train Protection & Warning System (TPWS) and Automatic Warning System (AWS) to locomotives and Central Door Locking (CDL) to Mk2 carriages, all stipulated by NIR to be in place for trains operating from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2008. It is not clear yet what, if any, derogations may be allowed but CDL is certain to be required and fitting has started on diner 547. Suitable TPWS/AWS equipment is being costed. In Dublin the new CME has introduced a system of certification for locomotives and rolling stock similar to that operating in the north. The introduction of the scheme was fraught with delays which meant that Easter trains unfortunately had to be cancelled. It also had knock-on effects which have added to the delay in getting a certified set of Cravens coaches into traffic.

Operations in the early part of the year were less than satisfactory, but from June onwards things improved immeasurably and booked out “Steam & Jazz”, “Sea Breeze” (last steam locomotive to Rosslare Pier), “Broomstick Belle” and “Santa Special” trains were the norm. A feature of the Halloween and northern Christmas trains was the first use of internet booking through the Belfast Welcome Centre. It was a successful development and investigations are being made to ascertain whether Dublin trains can be sold through the same system. A contributory factor in this success was the display of posters at Dublin stations, on Darts and railcars thanks to Irish Rail, posters at Belfast locations thanks to Debra Wenlock, and on a display trailer thanks to Peter Marsden.



***NIR drivers Noel Playfair and Gary Moore flank RPSI loco reps Gerry Mooney and Brian Hill.  
(J.J. Friel)***

The improved performance of northern operations highlights the need for a larger locomotive to be available, especially as the diner and generator van are expected to be added to the train in 2008. This will require extra funding so that Society projects can be expedited, having suffered as external contracts have taken priority in recent years.

Hopefully, the Cravens set will be certified thus allowing steam operation on a wider variety of southern routes, but again extra funding may be required.



Early in the year Irish Rail announced a ban on charter trains due to their on-going programme of driver training for new railcars. When it was discovered that the ban did not affect the Society the internet chat groups went mad with conspiracy theories, and all sorts of rumours were circulating. The simple answer is, however, that the RPSI has jumped through all the hoops and met all the legislation and health and safety requirements that allow us to be a guest operator. As such, Irish Rail has certain responsibilities towards us and that is why we can continue to operate while diesel groups can not.

Those risk assessments and related safety documentation continue to be progressed - in March, owing to excellent work by Denis McCabe, a certificate of acceptance of the RPSI safety case was received from the Irish Railway Safety Commission. During a follow-up by IRSC representatives on the Sea Breeze train on 8<sup>th</sup> July, a few minor issues were recorded but no major problems.

Driver training actually happened in 2007, although not to the extent anticipated. In October and November, for 19 days over a period of 4 weeks No.186 operated a daily trip between Dundalk and Mosney, No.4 taking over near the end. The trips were not sufficient to allow the trainees to be passed so extra training took place on the Christmas trains, and further runs are expected in the new year. Progress on arranging training on NIR is being made - but very slowly! Thanks to FAS and the UK Lottery Awards For All scheme we have funding in place for both these training programmes.



***Trainers and trainees at Dundalk in November 2007; l-r: Joe O'Meara, Hughie McCarthy, Robbie Jolley, Tony & Dan Renahan, Fergie Creagh, Ken Fox & Mark Tyrrell. (P. Lockett)***

At the AGM in Whitehead, there were a few changes on Council - Nelson Poots was able to take up his much-anticipated retirement from the Treasurer post. Phil Lockett, having served the 3 year term as General Officer, also stood down. They were replaced by Stephen McAteer and Mark Walsh, respectively. Later in the year Stephen had to resign from Council when he took up a part-time contract to provide professional financial administration for the Society. With an increasing financial workload due to external contracts, grant and employee administration, it was agreed there was no option but to

employ a person solely for this purpose. Peter Marsden has been co-opted as Treasurer until the 2008 AGM.

On the Council front things were again quiet in 2007. There was still lots of work to be done and Council members continue to deal with items as diverse as Irish Rail turntables, child protection policies, museum committees, grant agencies, etc.

It had been hoped to report to members by now on how the Council structure could be improved to make its proceedings more business-like and efficient but, to date, a combination of circumstances has prevented the proposed meetings taking place.

During the year, Council approved the expenditure on a limited edition set of OO scale Mk2 coaches to be sold exclusively through the Society. They will be produced by Bachmann and are 180, 301 and 460 in full RPSI livery. April 2008 is the anticipated availability date.

In November, Council was able to announce that the Society had been granted full Museum Accreditation status by MLA (Museums Libraries Archives Council).



*If you want the job done right, do it yourself - Carriage Officer shunts carriages. (J.J. Friel)*

A part of museum responsibilities is the audited disposal of artefacts and this was undertaken during the year when Hunslet locomotives 101 and 102 were offered for sale in the Museum Journal. The RPSI made a bid for the Hunslet locomotives a few years ago because they were both at Whitehead anyway and probably whatever body had obtained them they would have stayed there for some time (and might still be there now). An attempt was made to encourage diesel enthusiasts to work on 102 without detracting from the work being done on our steam fleet but that movement failed. It was felt that now was the time to ascertain interest from other bodies. A number of expressions of interest have been received - some ridiculous and some serious, as is normal with anything to do with railway preservation. The wheels are turning very slowly but hopefully at least one of the locomotives will get



a good home.

2007 was the centenary year of Whitehead Excursion Station and one of the train ride events in July celebrated this. There was also a major article in the October issue of Heritage Railway magazine - although they suggested our original buildings were 10 years old!

The Society's website continues to play a major part in the marketing of the Society and in the provision of useful information to members and to the public. It had been hoped to have an internet ticket booking system in place by now but the cost and the administration requirements were beyond our means. However, as noted above, on-line booking is available through the Belfast Welcome Centre and it is hoped that the more extensive use can be made of the facility in future.

The number of members receiving the email Bulletin continues to increase but, as in previous years, it is very difficult to get contributions from Dublin. I would very much like that situation to change in 2008. News of 'Ivan', the GNR brake van, was very much to the fore in the Bulletin, mostly because the youth wing of the Society are very savvy in this regard but also because I feel their contribution to the Society should be highlighted as an example to other members of what can be achieved with a bit of enthusiasm.

One of Council's own had a personal television show this year. Back in May, Carriage & Wagon Officer Francis Richards appeared in an episode of Channel 4's "Life Begins Again" which documented his move from England to retirement (?) in Whitehead.

Charles Friel continues to organise the very successful Belfast meetings and the 2007/8 season is up there with the best. The number of new books each year on the sales stand remains high and is a steady source of income for the Society.

Membership statistics, my dear reader, I know you enjoy - so here they are:

	<b>2007</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2001</b>
NI	399	391	386	380	379	378	383
RoI	387	380	375	375	388	371	347
GB	299	290	294	284	305	277	279
Overseas	35	34	35	32	38	38	31
Adult	688	676	685	696	748	728	721
Senior	298	289	275	247	227	207	196
Junior	33	29	31	24	28	25	22
Student	8	8	6	5	1	n/a	n/a
Family	14	15	14	21	25	23	18
Life	57	58	58	59	61	62	64
Societies	4	4	5	5	5	6	5
Honorary	18	16	16	15	15	13	13
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,120</b>	<b>1,095</b>	<b>1,090</b>	<b>1,071</b>	<b>1,110</b>	<b>1,064</b>	<b>1,040</b>

The trends mostly speak for themselves but the total requires explanation - it is the highest membership total ever and is due to a number of past members returning to the fold after a successful mailshot sent out between the summer and end of year. To all those repentant members - welcome back!

The membership procedures enjoyed the dubious honour of being selected by Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs for an audit of the Gift Aid rebates. I can report there were a few minor issues but the auditor was very satisfied with how claims were processed. There are a number of UK members who have not completed a Gift Aid form and I would urge them to do so as it increases the value of contributions by 28%.

It is once more very satisfactory to be able to report that the annual insurance costs have had another reduction - the third in a row - so thanks to Karen McLaverty of Marsh for that. Ashgrove House in Dun Laoghaire and Wilma Cairns in Larne continue to provide excellent service in the areas of ticketing and phone answering.

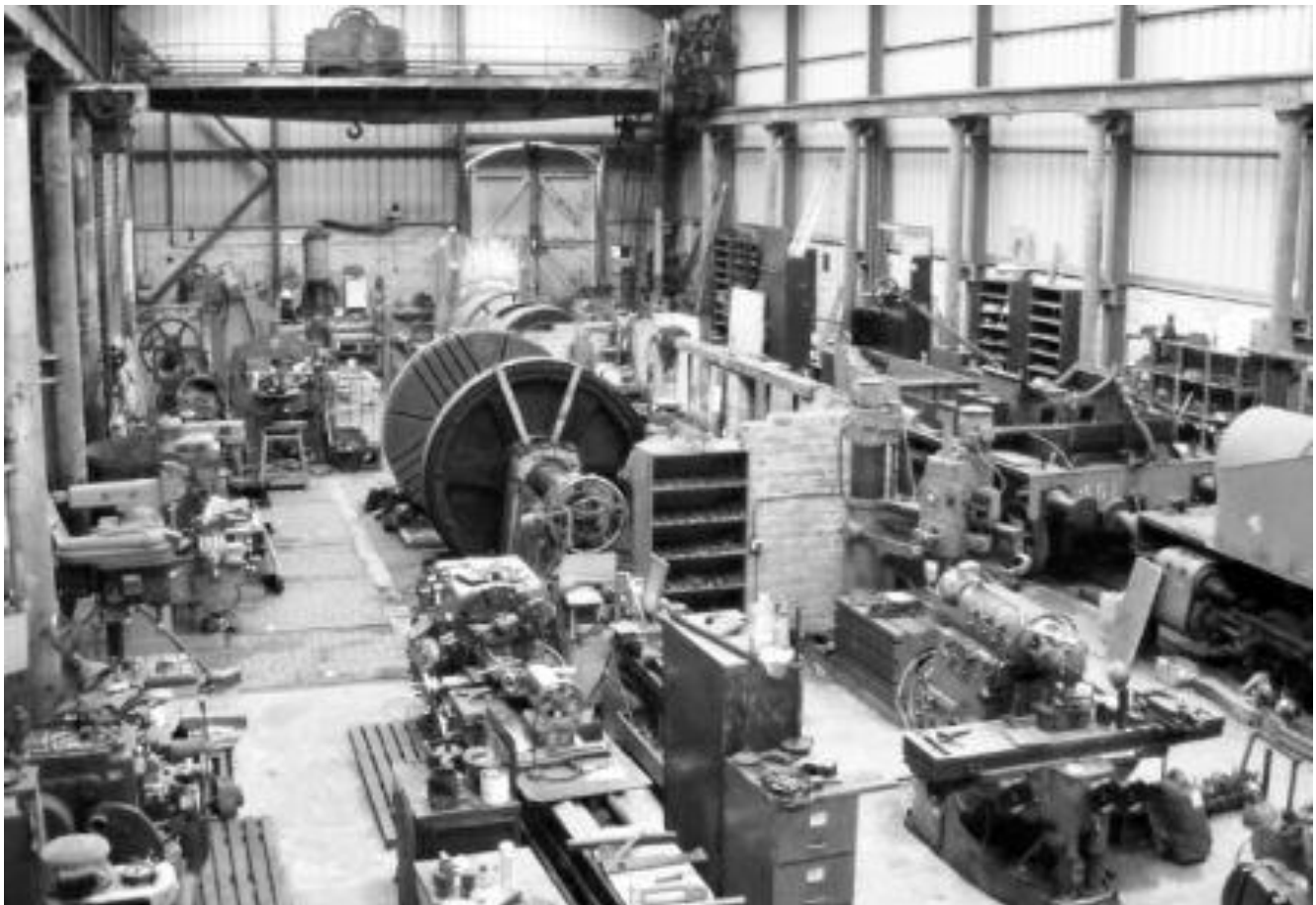
Within the Society, the Posts of Special Responsibility to the Secretary for 2007 were: Charles Friel (Belfast Meetings); Johnny Glendinning (Museum Curator); Mark Kennedy (Curatorial Adviser); Philip Lockett (Web Manager); Ciaran McAteer helped with legal issues; Barry Carse, Dublin area membership queries; Nelson Poots ("Five Foot Three" Editor).

Also, thanks to those members who serve on the various sub-committees - you know who you are, and your efforts are very much appreciated.

And finally, as always, our thanks to the management and staff of Iarnród Éireann and Northern Ireland Railways for allowing us to indulge our hobby and to keep heritage trains operating in Ireland.

## LOCOMOTIVE REPORT

Peter Scott



*Whitehead Loco Works. On the right can be seen the frames of No.461 and the front of the O&K loco. (J.J. Friel)*

### **No.3. LPHC 0-6-0ST shunting loco "R H Smith". In traffic, Downpatrick.**

The loco is still based at Downpatrick. As well as the normal DCDR operations, it has been used for RPSI crew training and experience purposes.

### **No.BG3. A. Guinness, Son and Co 0-4-0 ST shunting loco "Guinness". Boiler Inspection,**

## **Whitehead.**

The Guinness engine sees occasional use for shunting and train ride duties.

### **No.4. Ex LMS NCC 2-6-4T loco. Minor work, Whitehead.**

The tank engine is to be fitted with improved batteries and other equipment to make it acceptable for operation on the NIR system, including compliance with recently introduced railway safety legislation.

### **No.186. Ex GSR 0-6-0 standard goods loco. In Traffic, Dublin.**

As mentioned in last year's report, part of the reason for re-commissioning No.186 was to have a suitable loco available for crew training. This has actually come about, and No.186 spent October and November based at Inchicore and then at Dundalk for the training of four Irish Rail drivers in steam loco operation. Because of the Santa train motive power requirements, No.186 then came north and No.4 went south towards the end of the crew training exercise, thus giving the trainees experience on both locomotives. The actual passing out of the people is planned to take place in the new year.

No.186 unfortunately had to be substituted by a GM loco for the Whitehead-Dublin leg of the May Tour. This came about because of unusually sluggish steam raising, the explanation for which was not obvious at the time, and the replacement loco was requested rather than face delays on the journey. Part of the problem was sooting up of the spark arrester in the smokebox during steam raising. Both the spark arrester and the loco's blower have since been adjusted to combat this. On a far more positive note, No.186 again went to Dublin and was swapped with No.4 on 30<sup>th</sup> December. It was pleasing to see not only a full train but a first rate performance by No.186.



*Strange bedfellows. No.90 and No.85 “Merlin” survey the scene at Whitehead. (P. Lockett)*

### **No.461. Ex DSER 2-6-0 goods engine. General overhaul, Whitehead.**

The outer firebox repairs are now complete, with the new plates riveted and the foundation ring ready for assembly. Inner firebox repairs are under way. The flue tubes are having their ends reduced. The

big end journals have been trued up and the brasses are being re-metalled and fitted. The valve liners, which were removed for machining, have been “shrunk in” by freezing with liquid nitrogen.

### **Steam Locos In Store**

#### **No.85. Ex GNR(I) 4-4-0 compound express passenger loco “Merlin”: In store, Whitehead.**

Barring anything unforeseen, No.85 should be the easiest of the larger locos to return to traffic. The boiler needs to be removed for 10-year inspection and minor repairs, and there is a fair amount of mechanical work to do including, for example, a new blast pipe. What is needed is suitable traffic for the loco to operate - No.85 is not the loco for short “Santa” type operations with 50% tender-first running. A recent encouraging sign was the success of the “Mince Pie” loco swap train from Whitehead to Dublin and back on 30<sup>th</sup> January - there is certainly a market. But unless we are assured of a turntable at Connolly and possibly even one at Whitehead, such an operation cannot happen other than as a “loco swap”!



*Apart from its boiler, No.131 seldom sees the light of day but here the rest of it is being moved out of the loco shed to make way for Diner 547. The headboard would suggest that the Youth Team may have played a part in the operation! (J.J. Friel)*

#### **No.171. Ex GNR(I) 4-4-0 express passenger loco “Slieve Gullion”. In store, Whitehead.**

Requires extensive boiler and mechanical work.

#### **No.184. Ex GSR 0-6-0 standard goods loco. In store, Whitehead.**

Requires major repairs. Now stored inside the carriage shed.

#### **No.27. Ex SLNCR 0-6-4T “Lough Erne”. In store, Whitehead.**

Also a resident of the carriage shed.

**No.131. Ex GNR(I) 4-4-0 express passenger loco. Awaiting overhaul, Whitehead.**

Although physical work on this engine has been limited so far, a major step forward has been taken with the acquisition of the material required for rebuilding the firebox. Having these materials to hand effectively moves the restoration of the loco into the medium-term achievable category. No.131 is known to have received attention fairly late on at Dundalk Works and cursory inspection indicates that the mechanical condition is reasonable - although some bearing damage can be expected as a result of lengthy inactivity. The Dundalk overhaul clearly avoided the boiler, which will require the lion's share of the work. Most of the boiler fittings are available, and our thanks are due to the Irish Rail Heritage Officer Gregg Ryan for their safe keeping.

**Diesel Locos**

**No.23. Ex Irish Shell "Planet" diesel shunter. In store, Whitehead.**

The Planet needs engine and gearbox repairs.

**No.1, "Carlow" Diesel. Ex CSE Ruston & Hornsby diesel shunter. In traffic, Whitehead.**

The "Carlow" suffered a sudden inability to maintain air pressure and when dismantled, its main air compressor proved to be in a lamentably deficient condition. The cylinder bore was barrel shaped by  $\frac{1}{8}$ " and the rings were jammed and broken in the aluminium piston - probably the result of old age plus failure of its rather primitive splash lubrication system. Spare parts are fortunately available and, together with a new cylinder liner, should enable rebuilding to proceed.

**Unilok ex UTA road-rail shunter. In Traffic, Cultra.**

The Unilok has now returned to Whitehead from Cultra, for servicing and minor repairs.

**No.101 Hunslet Bo-Bo diesel electric loco "Eagle". In store, Whitehead.**

Awaiting decision on future action.

**No.102 Hunslet Bo-Bo diesel electric loco "Falcon". In store, Whitehead.**

Awaiting decision on future action.

**Foundry And Contract Work**

**62M, ex-MGWR 6-wheel coach**

This vehicle is to be loaned to the DCDR. The running gear has been overhauled including repairs to bearings, suspension, brake gear and buffers.

**No.90, ex-GSR 0-6-0T loco**

No.90 was transferred to Downpatrick on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> September, after completion of all the essential re-commissioning work. Minor jobs are being completed including replica lamps and number plates.

The re-designed regulator mentioned in last year's report proved very effective. As with the "Derry engine", a single-valve regulator was replaced by a double-valve version, the main advantage of which is easy and controllable initial movement for shunting and light train operation.

**No.1. Ex CSE Orenstein & Koppel 0-4-0 loco**

Work completed so far on this DCDR loco includes renewal and overhaul of return cranks, truing up of left side crank pins and complete renewal of right hand side crank pins which were much more severely worn. Coupling and connecting rod bearings are being refurbished. The mechanical lubricator has been rebuilt and a new whistle made.

**No.5 "Drumboe". 3ft gauge ex CDR 2-6-4T loco**

Refurbishment work as originally planned for this narrow-gauge loco is well advanced. The bogies

were freed up and dismantled, the wheelsets overhauled and the bogie bearings renewed. Corroded platework has been renewed. The driving wheel journals have been trued up and machining of the crank pins is under way. With new side tanks and smokebox door, the loco was temporarily reassembled and taken to Donegal Town for an exhibition on 19<sup>th</sup> May. It then returned to Whitehead on 3<sup>rd</sup> June, where further dismantling has been carried out. The boiler has been removed and the frames lifted off the wheels. The extent of repairs required is being assessed at the time of writing.

My thanks are due to our friends at the IRRS for locating and loaning us the full set of original drawings for the class 5 loco. This is proving a great help in establishing obscure details and missing items. (The drawings show some interesting details - a full kit of tools for example, including a kettle. Some of the terminology is unusual - the loco sports such novelties as “crinolines”, “steps” and an “awning”, where we would normally refer to boiler cladding, bearing half brasses and cab.) The term “awning” conjures up visions of luxury and idleness - hardly appropriate for a steam loco - but the Oxford Dictionary gives “a shelter” as one of the meanings, which is certainly applicable.



*How many preserved railways do this? Return cranks for “Drumboe” forged and machined at Whitehead. (J.J. Friel)*

### **Carriage Work**

A program of B4 bogie refurbishment has been started for the Mk2 coaches, the plan being to be always one set ahead and replace the bogies under each vehicle in turn.

### **Central Door Locking and Train Line**

Recent Northern Ireland railway legislation requires the fitment of secondary door locking to slam door stock. The only slam-door stock still running on NIR are the RPSI Mk2s, the NIR Gatwicks and the 80 class sets which are to be retained.

In order to comply, the RPSI is fitting the standard Mk2/Mk3 secondary door-locking system, the only difference being that it operates with a vacuum braked train. In order to provide pit access for fitting underfloor equipment, the carriages are to be moved in turn into No.5 loco shed road. The “Dutch Van” is also in the loco shed for attention to brakes and bogies.





*The boiler of “Drumboe” is lifted out of the frames prior to being placed on works trolleys.  
(J.J. Friel)*

## **CARRIAGE REPORT**

**Francis Richards**

There is not a great deal to be added to the information already circulated in News Letters.

The running season went well with no problems other than the lighting in 301, which was not up to the standard of the rest of the train. Apart from routine maintenance of the running set, our priority is now to have Central Door Locking fitted to comply with the requirements of NIR.

Allied with the introduction of CDL on the Mk2 set is the need for a generator and electric train line. The original plan was to fit corridor brake first 463 with a generator but unforeseen problems with the vehicle resulted in work switching to 462, a steam and electricity generating ‘Dutch’ van. Both diner 547 and 462 are scheduled to be submitted to the NIR acceptance procedure early in 2008.

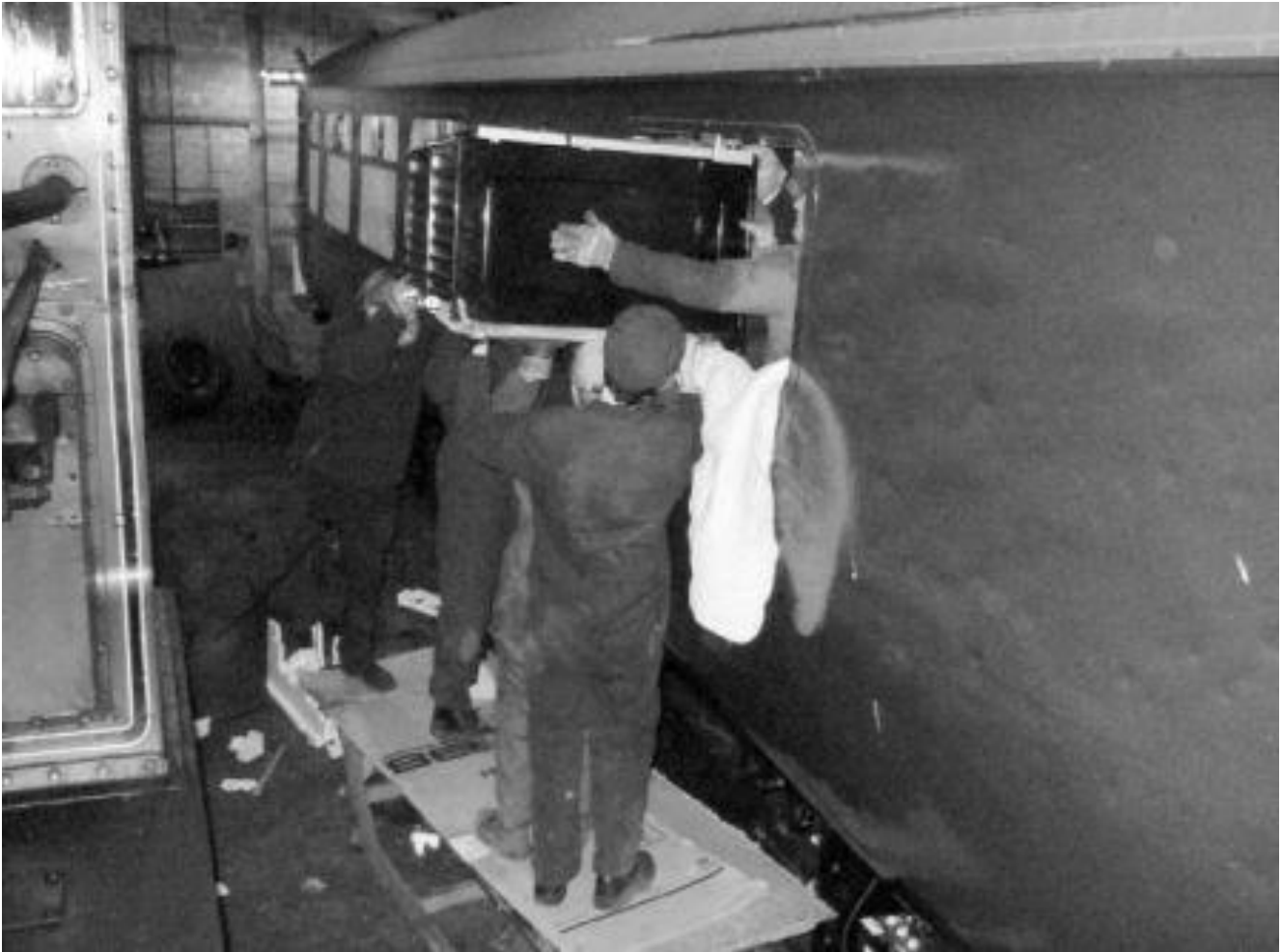
CDL is being fitted on Dining Car 547 prior to installation on the rest of the rake. Train line electrics are fitted and ready for testing and the cooker and refrigerator are now in place, along with other culinary requirements. In order to have pit access this vehicle is temporarily housed in No.5 loco shed road.

Another temporary resident of the loco shed, the “Dutch Van”, has been painted inside and out and is in No.3 road for bogie inspection. Its train-heating boilers have been reassembled and will be hydraulically tested in the very near future.

The restoration of GNR brake van No.81 is dealt with elsewhere in the magazine in a comprehensive article by Mark Walsh.

A brake test of all eight passenger vehicles will be undertaken by NIR as part of the planned increase in permitted line speed for our stock.

My thanks to our staff and volunteers who have kept the rake clean and operational throughout the season.



*Doorways being too narrow, the Diner's new fridge enters by an unorthodox route. (M. Walsh)*

## **NORTHERN OPERATIONS**

**Mervyn Darragh**

The 2007 operating year was fulfilling despite some reversals; 21 workings required the use of an NIR steam crew, with one GM diesel-hauled. The season commenced with the ever popular (but renamed) Easter Eggspress trains to Whitehead on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> April. Both trains were 100% loaded.

Meanwhile, the Garavogue International Railtour extended weekend over 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> May had been at the planning stage for some time but axle-load issues with the Shannon Bridge curtailed the use of No.4. No.186 could have been used to Sligo had not its limited carriage haulage capacity and the lack of a turntable prevented it being used as a substitute.

The Garavogue sequence started with No.186 due to haul the Society's Mk2s from Whitehead to Dublin on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> May. To coincide with Europe Day the European Commission offices in Belfast and Dublin had each hired a carriage. Unfortunately, despite the locomotive being lit in sufficient time, steam raising was unusually sluggish and since the reason for this had not been identified a diesel replacement was requested rather than risk delays to the journey. Ironically, by the time the replacement GM locomotive was leaving with the train No.186 was blowing off and ready for the road.

Prior to news about steam curtailment on the main portion of the Garavogue Railtour, it was decided as an experiment to alter the Friday format with heritage diesel haulage planned to Limerick. This was to take the form of a pair of Irish Rail small GMs - outward via Limerick Junction and return by the Nenagh Branch. As a first, this proved popular with participants and bookings only marginally increased when it was decided to use No.4 to the Junction as a compensation for the steam curtailment to Sligo. For the record, GMs 184 and 189 were used from the Junction onwards.



*No.4 with the last train to use Rosslare Pier, 12<sup>th</sup> August 2007. (C.P. Friel)*

A partial compensation was the use throughout Saturday and Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> May of the Dublin heritage carriage set with State/Royal Saloon 351 resplendent in the formation. The small GM locomotives used between Mullingar and Sligo were 152 and 190. Sunday ended with a bonus steam-operated extension to Bray and Monday saw No.4 return the Mk2 set to Whitehead on this ever-popular leg of the railtour. Competent train crew work saw time cut at booked stops, so much so that by the time the train reached Whitehead it was around one hour up on the slack schedule. At Whitehead extra interest was provided by GSWR No.90 shunting. The Society is indebted to the large number of participants who, despite changes to the railtour itinerary, supported all aspects of the weekend.

The Society was pleased to release its Mk2 set to the Modern Railway Society of Ireland for their very successful railtour from Belfast to Westport on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> May; a mammoth day for the Society stewards and carriage watering crews.

NIR advised the Society that regrettably they could not accept our planned Portrush Flyer programme due to a number of severe speed restrictions between Ballymena and Coleraine; the track is planned for upgrade work. The restriction was to apply to all steam operations north of Ballymena with the exception of a church charter which had been planned from 2006. This took place on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> June, one of the hottest days of the year. No.4 took the train - the first steam church charter to Portrush since 1969! Timing was impeccable throughout. An on-time departure from Portrush in glorious weather was halted at Coleraine where, after some uncertainty, word filtered through that the line had been closed north of Cullybackey due to severe buckling of the track. After a period of some confusion the excursionists began to be bussed to Ballymena for onward train travel home. No.4 and train were

stabled at Coleraine and, after track repairs, worked empty to Whitehead on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> May.

As No.186 was unable to feature in the extended Garavogue weekend it worked light engine to Dublin on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> May.

The Steam and Jazz trains are becoming ever more popular, with three full trains operating on Fridays 15<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> June. Plans are in hand to increase the programme to four trains in 2008.



*As with most modern traction, 230's engine is probably roaring while No.186 sits quietly alongside at Belfast Central. (P. Lockett)*

A need to return No.4 to fulfil Dublin train commitments meant a further locomotive swap. To help cover the working cost a Steam Enterprise was organised for Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> June. The train was a light load of two open carriages and the half brake and they were comfortably filled. No.4 easily improved on the schedule and with slick station work was able to arrive early in Dublin. No.186, too, was equal to the challenge and performed especially well - one seasoned timer reported that the climb out of Dundalk was one of the best ever! Despite a slightly delayed start from Dublin, arrival was dead on time at Belfast.

Following the rigours of May and June our normal peak operating months of July and August were devoid of mainline activity. A planned Steam Enterprise organised by our Dublin colleagues for Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> August did not happen as suitable carriages were unavailable. It fell to the northern operations team to organise a locomotive swap at short notice for 9<sup>th</sup> September. This permitted No.4 to return to Whitehead while No.186 worked south to facilitate a planned autumn driver training programme. No.186 had been sought by Irish Rail. Accepting that advertising was at very short notice (electronic notification only) it was disappointing that only 87 passengers travelled; their fares did, however, assist with reducing the transfer expenditure. Many missed an excellent day's running, provided by a very competent footplate crew.

The Society was invited again to participate in the increasingly popular Portadown focused Country

Comes to Town event on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> September. Translink kindly supported the event again by waiving its train operating charges and for that the Society is grateful. Two full trains to Lisburn carried 620 passengers, at competitive fares.

The Society was delighted to secure a charter from Rockport School, located close to the Bangor line. The school wanted a family day out, so on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September in very fine weather No.4 headed to Bangor with pick-ups there and at Seahill. A heavily loaded train proceeded to Whitehead where the participants had an on-train picnic and children's entertainment. The train returned to Bangor, arriving at 18:15 before returning empty. An excellent day out was acknowledged by all.



*A surprise for those who stayed on the Monday of the May Tour was No.90 in action at Whitehead. (C.P. Friel)*

A short respite and we were again into our popular Broomstick Belle trains. On Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> October there were two return workings to Whitehead hauled by No.4, both 100% loaded with very contented family groups. Focused marketing provided that extra impetus where we found that customers had to be turned away, no doubt also helped by the first ever internet bookings for Society trains.

As the Irish driver training programme based in Dundalk approached completion a light engine loco swap from and to Whitehead occurred on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> November.

With steam temporarily prohibited north of Ballymena it was unfortunate that the large Coleraine customer base built up over a number of years had to be lost at Christmas. The sight of the Coleraine platform thronged with excited children's faces - and adults' too - was badly missed.

The Santa season had to be modified with morning operations from Ballymena (to Antrim) and Portadown (to Lisburn) on Saturdays 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> December respectively. Each afternoon a Belfast Central to Whitehead train operated. The Portadown train was booked out within a few days of tickets going on sale and all indications are that a second train could easily have been filled. The established pattern of trains also operated to Whitehead on 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> December. All trains were fully

booked out by early December. No.186 worked faultlessly throughout. The early filling of the trains was helped by getting train paths approved early, a vigorous marketing campaign and the further use of on-line booking from our principal ticket outlet, the Belfast Welcome Centre.

After working the heavy Dublin trains the need to return No.4 to Whitehead for operational enhancement work resulted in yet another locomotive transfer operation. This took place on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> December, prior to the introduction of the Central Door Locking (CDL) requirement on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2008. The website was updated and the operation was marketed as a Mince Pie and Mulled Wine train. This worked, and around 220 travelled! This is something to seriously consider again for next December - a time when a lot of people are off work and looking for something positive to do.



***No.4 storms up Rathdrum bank with the 8<sup>th</sup> July Sea Breeze. (B. Pickup)***

Mention should be made of the season's Whitehead train rides, this year commandeered by the Youth Wing, temporarily relinquishing their 'Ivan' duties. Various themed Open Day events took place on 8<sup>th</sup> July (Whitehead Excursion Station Centenary), 4<sup>th</sup> August (Whitehead Community Festival) and 8<sup>th</sup> September (European Architectural Heritage Day). The youthful team were more than able for the job and were justly rewarded by large attendances.

2008 should see the Mk2s out-shopped with CDL. Should we continue to have to turn away customers BAOC will be urging both its Carriage and Locomotive Officers for increased passenger capacity and a locomotive capable (no matter how good No.186 has proved) of hauling an increased train load.

In closing, a special word to that close team which has assisted in turning out and manning the train in all manner of ways. Without that help, some giving up all available weekend days prior to Christmas, a lot less would have been achieved - many thanks. A special word also for Translink, NIR who have been most co-operative.





*The loco swap of 6<sup>th</sup> November. No.4 arrived at Dundalk, awaited the arrival of No.186 and train, then coupled on at the Dublin end and shunted the train to the stabling siding. No.186 meanwhile had scurried off in a northerly direction - a neat operation. (C.P. Friel)*

## WHITEHEAD SITE REPORT

**Dermot Mackie**

After the excesses of Christmas and the New Year, we had a big shunt in early January to partly dismantle the County Donegal engine, “Drumboe”, and to carry out a bogie swap under coach 923. In early February I ran a shunter training school and am pleased to report that all passed with flying colours. A scrap drive later that month, together with laneway repairs, was done with the help of Robin Morton.

Early March took us to the former “Back Line” at Greenisland to release and separate track panels which had been given to the Society. At Whitehead we then had to repair damaged track following a derailment possibly caused by stiff points. As a result, we dismantled and serviced all the point levers in the yard with the help of John Lockett. This made the pre-Easter loco swap shunt a lot easier. In April, after the holiday, we had a bonfire, emptied the ferrous skip and I took £190 of scrap aluminium to the recycling depot in Francis Richard’s van.

Over the “Two-day tour” weekend Alan McRobert and I fixed several broken tiles on the shop roof and, with the help of John Wolsley and John Williams, we re-laid sunken track outside Number 1 shed road with four concrete sleepers. This work was packed on the first Tuesday in May as part of the mid-week summer programme and the site got its first weed spraying. In June a water leak in the yard required attention and a further scrap drive, mostly from old bogies, filled our ferrous skip again for more cash.

On 4<sup>th</sup> July Messrs Wolsley and Williams rallied again to Greenisland where eleven panels of concrete-sleepered track, mostly 45 feet long, were lifted onto lorries (see photograph) and transported to Whitehead to be stacked on the platform. Imminent centenary steam train rides meant that this storage option was only temporary. The track panels all had to be dismantled, the rails stacked under the

platform edge and sleepers put into bundles of six which could be lifted with the hand crane. They were then moved by the Carlow diesel and neatly stacked on the opposite side of the tracks. In all, 22 rails and almost 200 sleepers were shifted in a combination of Saturdays, one filthy wet Friday 13<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday night work gangs, boosted by James and Edward Friel, Paul and Philip Newell, Maurice Moore and Bob Skingle and the task was completed ahead of schedule. All this activity meant that the JCB had earned a good service and general overhaul with new diesel and air filters.



***John Williams keeps a watchful eye as a track panel is lifted at Greenisland in March 2007.  
(J. Wolsley)***

In August a contractor removed spoil and mud from the back of the site and filled the resulting hole with 200 tonnes of stone which was then levelled in preparation for the final positioning of the Mk3 sleeping coach. In addition, conduit was laid to supply services. Laneway drainage at Whitehead has been a problem for years and the wet summer highlighted the situation. What should have been a drain at the stables never seemed to work properly but, following an initial examination with a water jet by Ken Pullin and the Thursday squad, it appeared that there could be a pipe in place that was blocked. In September Michael McCann helped to break the concrete overlying the drain trap and we were amazed to find that the outflow pipe actually did a right-angled turn to disappear under the stables, emerging in the main trap area at the back of the tarry. The pipe was blocked with that modern curse of all drainage systems, the dreaded plastic bag! Following extensive rodding and flushing the problem appears to be cured at last. Further hand excavation of the designated sand-blasting area was done with the help of Raymond Burgess and the spoil was loaded onto a flat wagon to be taken for dumping on the open ground opposite the platform. In October the alarm system was extended to include the stables and fire alarm points were fitted in the workshop.

In November, with the help of Thomas Charters and Adam Lohoff, temporary track was built from the back of the workshop road over the recently stoned excavation in order to move the sleeping coach. This was very unusual in that no sleepers were used, the rails being simply mounted on chairs and held

to gauge with tie-bars. As parts of “Drumboe” were due to be placed in the workshop it was essential that the sleeping coach be positioned prior to this. This was achieved in the course of a monster shunt with No.3BG when a window of opportunity arose on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> December. Hopefully the New Year will see the coach commissioned for overnight use by steam raisers.



*Many years ago someone pronounced the JCB as fit for scrap. Dermot Mackie disagreed and the JCB celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> birthday on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2008. A team of well-wishers assemble around Dermot and the birthday cake; they devoured the latter very soon afterwards. (M. Walsh)*

Late night Santa Steam Trains have necessitated the revival of the old platform lights, suitably overhauled by Johnny Glendinning and much appreciated by both passengers and those of us who have to shunt in the dark.

Over the years we have managed to do an interesting variety of outdoor jobs with the help of people who turn up and work in all weathers. Without these hard working members nothing would be able to cross the yard and onto the main line in safety. These lads need help and we would be very pleased to see anyone prepared to get their hands dirty in a good cause.

## **24 HOURS AT BALLYMENA CABIN IN 1957**

**J.A. Cassells**

Although much has appeared in various sources about Irish railway signalling, little has been written about an average day ‘in the cabin’ in the days of steam. What follows is based on a study of the cabin registers at Ballymena for the final winter before dieselisation of the main line in early 1958. I have also included some detail - which to my knowledge has never before appeared - about the general operating environment and also about the first few weeks of the accelerated timetable of February 1958, when steam replaced MPD railcars for a few days on the fastest schedules ever to appear in an NCC timetable. Although the 24-hour timetable was not introduced until 1967, I have used that system for trains and traffic movements throughout.

Fifty years ago signal cabins were a self-contained world of their own. The sparkling condition of

levers and block instruments was legendary - indeed, signalman Charlie Morrow at Portrush would hardly allow an engineman to cross the threshold, lest his boots should dirty the sacred polished oilcloth on the floor - and woe betide any trainee signalman who failed to wrap 'the cloth' round a lever handle before pulling it! The registers were kept with total precision and a daily time-check was sent down the system each morning from Belfast. Indeed, on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> February 1958 there is a note that at 09:53 the cabin clock at Ballymena was discovered to be fast, and was put back by one minute!



*Interior of Ballymena Passenger signal cabin. (J. Cassells)*

Ballymena in 1957 was still an exceptionally busy railway centre, situated at the end of the 31 mile double line section from Belfast York Road. The half-mile from Ballymena Goods to Ballymena Passenger, worked by Tyer's three-position absolute block instruments, was possibly the shortest section on the system worked by absolute block. The three miles to Cullybackey, commencing the single line which continued through to Londonderry and Portrush, was worked by a Tyer's Single Line instrument using circular tablets. Cullybackey station had its own small claim to signalling fame, being the first station on the main line to have one loop laid out for fast running in the 1930s as the legendary Major Spier strove to tighten schedules even further. To avoid mistakes, tablets for each section had a differently shaped slot in the middle. On the NCC main line these alternated round and square, Ballymena to Cullybackey being round, Cullybackey to Glarryford square, and so on. On the branch lines, some sections had triangular cut-outs. Each tablet also had a number stamped on it, recorded in the register when the tablet was withdrawn from the instrument. Tablets were kept inside two different types of leather pouches which occasionally needed repair or renewal. On 18<sup>th</sup> November 1957, 6 pouches were sent up from Macfin, to replace 6 old ones which were sent to Belfast Stores Department on 21<sup>st</sup> November and replaced by 6 new ones on 9<sup>th</sup> December. There was apparatus for the mechanical collection of tablets at speed, but since no trains were normally scheduled to pass non-stop it was rarely used here and the lineside catchers were normally covered by protective canvas bags. For

hand exchange, tablets were put into a pouch attached to a metal ring which, when new, had a leather covering which tended to get worn away by rough handling. Such pouches are still in use in some places today.

The mechanical exchange equipment consisted of a sturdy metal device, mounted horizontally with heavy leather-padded tapering jaws at one end and lighter springy jaws at the other. The latter contained the tablet for delivery, enclosed in a stout square-shaped pouch. In use, the engine- and ground-mounted equipment faced each other with the heavy jaw leading, the tablet on the engine hanging below the clip and that on the ground equipment pointing upwards. This achieved the simultaneous pick-up and release of tablets but obviously the equipment on the engine had to be some inches higher than that on the ground and if this distance was incorrect the result could be either a missed tablet or damaged equipment. Up until the Moguls the engine's catcher was fixed to the cab-side and lowered into position by a lever but on the Jeeps it had to be placed manually into a socket. This, on top of his other duties, would suggest that on a line with numerous block sections the fireman had little time to admire the scenery.



*As the date is 1965 this heavy train, including a "brown van" and banked by Jeep No.4, is obviously a special. Note the Up line tablet exchange pedestal on the right; when the catcher was fitted the top assembly was moved forward by a lever to line up with a locomotive's. (A. Donaldson)*

Ballymena station cabin was manned continuously in three 8-hour shifts, but Ballymena Goods had switching-out apparatus and was normally closed between about 10pm and the arrival of the 01:20 goods from Belfast. Long section working was either Ballymena to Kellswater (a rare example of a double line switch cabin controlling a level crossing) or Cookstown Junction, which was always open and at this time was still the junction for the remaining part of the Derry Central line as far as Kilrea.

Kellswater was rarely opened, and the small cabin was actually contained in the booking office on the down platform. For many years, signalman T. McDonald was also crossing keeper, booking clerk and porter! The frame was slotted to allow the gate signals to be operated when the section was switched

out. There was a gatehouse here and at Kellswater South. The crossing gates were secured by key locks, and after both sets of gates had been locked, and the relevant stop signals cleared, the distant signals (electrically powered) could be operated. There was also a siding which could be opened by an Annett's Key. To this day an Annett's Key - possibly the last in use in Ireland - is still used to release the frame at Portrush cabin when it needs to be opened.

There was a bank staff for the climb out of Ballymena - a metal key which, on withdrawal, locked the Ballymena-Cullybackey instrument. The tablet was given to the train driver, and the key to the driver of the banker. After 'train entering section' had been acknowledged in the usual way, the Ballymena signalman sent 2-2 (banking engine in rear of train) to Cullybackey. The banking engine was not coupled to the train, and normally dropped off at Galgorm crossing. On its arrival back in Ballymena the key was returned and 4-3 (bank staff returned) sent to Cullybackey. Stern warnings were given that the key was to be kept clean, and not handled roughly or thrown across to the cabin - it would not have helped matters if a bent or dirty key immobilised the instrument! If for any reason a train needed assistance through to Cullybackey, the crew of the banker had to obtain a conventional tablet to allow them to return to Ballymena. It was not unknown for a fumbling fireman to drop the bank staff as his engine stormed past the cabin. If this occurred, the instruction was that the banking engine should not stop, but its driver should give two crow whistles to indicate to the train engine that the banker was going through.



***Ballymena shed, probably late 1940s/early 50s, with A1 class Nos. 58 and 69 "Slieve Bane".  
(R.M. Arnold)***

On arrival at Cullybackey, where of course the instrument for the section was still locked, the Ballymena signalman would be informed that the train had arrived, and could put the bank staff back into its slot in the instrument before the Cullybackey signalman released a tablet to bring the banking engine back to Ballymena. If a train stalled between Ballymena and Cullybackey, the arrangement was that the train fireman walked back to Ballymena with the tablet, showed it to the signalman, obtained the banking key, gave it to the driver of the bank engine, and went out on its footplate to where his own train was sitting (protected, of course, by detonators in the rear).



In the days of its dual-gauge glory, Ballymena Passenger cabin had 78 levers, reduced to 42 (latterly with 9 spare) when the narrow gauge finally closed. The yard was slimmed down even further in 1967, and later became (and remains) a permanent way depot. The redundant part of the frame was later used at Antrim, where the cabin was re-sited at the Ballymena end of the station during the 1970s. There were formerly two turntables, the narrow gauge one being in front of the engine shed. The yard contained some named sidings: the dock road, for transshipment from the narrow gauge; the gantry road where narrow gauge tipper ore wagons could be brought over broad gauge wagons and their contents tipped in, and the turntable road which gave access to the shed and the narrow gauge turntable. A broad gauge turnout from this siding ran behind the station to Bonar & Henderson's factory, and one lever in the old frame was lettered "B&H siding". The siding behind the up platform (which engines had to use coming off or going on to the shed) was known at the Cushendall siding - quite a historical throw-back!

Ballymena Goods was a smaller cabin with 22 levers, none of them spare. One siding here was known locally as "The Engine Line", along which shunting was prohibited while down passenger trains passed by. An electric bell at one stage was used to warn shunters of an approaching train and signalmen were instructed not to pull off down signals until this had been done. Although Ballymena Goods handled most of the freight traffic, coal wagons for the town gas works - cleared to a lorry below by labourers who at one time earned a shilling for each ton they shovelled - was handled at the passenger station. Bread containers would also be tripped round off the early morning goods, or sometimes detached from the 05:55 ex Belfast. These account for a number of the short workings between the two stations at Ballymena through the day and the evening. It should be added that the 05:55 usually conveyed bread containers to Ballymoney, which were dealt with by the engine of a local goods from Coleraine. At the Belfast end of Ballymena station, beside the water column, was a shunter's hut which, I gather, ended its days at Cullybackey. The shunter was kept busy throughout the day. The signalman could attract his attention by ringing a bell from the cabin to find out - among other things - whether trains arriving from Belfast had a tail lamp. (It was not unknown for the shunter to brandish the lamp in the direction of the cabin before he put it back on its bracket!)

In 1957 Ballymena was still a fairly significant shed. There was a wheel-drop, and running repairs could be carried out on engines. In earlier days the shunting had been done by the smaller 4-4-0s, and Frank Dunlop recalled Nos. 24, 34 and 62 on banking duties in the 1940s. The crews of those days often had interesting backgrounds of service. Davie Warwick, for example, had begun on the narrow gauge at Doagh. Working out his last days at Ballymena, a couple of bottles of stout from the men on heavily-loaded goods trains was enough to guarantee particularly vigorous rear-end assistance when necessary! Before 1955 the engine crews had thirteen daily diagrams mostly covering goods and local passenger services between Belfast and Ballymena, with some local turns to Cullybackey usually worked by the ex LMS NCC railcars. (The unique Ganz railcar made occasional appearances too, at one stage working a morning Portrush-Belfast diesel service to Ballymena, where passengers transferred to an MED set which had been brought out from Belfast by a Larne driver.) Steam turns were, however, drastically reduced in 1955, and the 1958 dieselisation would trim them down even further. As to the engines latterly used, Mac Arnold's researches in "NCC Saga" indicate that between 1955 and 1957 'Jeep' No.50 and 'Scotch engines' 74, 81 and 84 spent varying periods here, while 71, 73 and 77 were brought to Belfast for scrapping in 1956.

### **Shift 1: Midnight - 8am**

Residents of the Waveney Road fifty years ago would have had to be sound sleepers, for there were seventeen train movements between 02:20 and 07:20 on most weekday mornings, beginning with the opening of the goods cabin at 02:20, and the despatch of a light engine thereto at 02:33. About 03:30 the 01:05 goods from Belfast was due to cross the 02:05 goods from Coleraine, hauled by the Coleraine mogul which would later return north heading the 08:25 Londonderry express. After dieselisation in

February 1958, the up and down goods trains changed crews at Ballymena, and the Coleraine men went back with the down goods as far as Coleraine, where they ended their day on a local goods to Ballymoney and back. Sometimes, though, the up train ran early enough to get into Ballymena Goods before the down train left. Thus on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1957 the up goods left Ballymena Passenger at 03:28, while the down train arrived at 03:44. Very occasionally, the night goods would have a full load of wagons for stations beyond Ballymena. Although it never happened during the period covered by this cabin register, Ballymena would sometimes be advised that the goods was “all north”. On nights like these the engine would be put on to the big valve through Kellswater and the tablet taken at speed running through Ballymena to avoid having to stop for a banker. Whether this happened or not, the 01:05 goods regularly loaded to 60 wagons, and the bank staff was out almost nightly. On 20<sup>th</sup> November 1957, the banking engine was coming back past the box at 03:58 (about 15 minutes seemed to be average time the bank staff was out). A light engine (possibly the one which had just worked up to Galgorm?) then left for Ballymena goods at 04:09, returning with wagons (possibly bread or coal off the 01:05 goods?) from the Goods Yard at 05:05. This was followed by another light engine back to the goods yard, then a further engine returning from the goods yard at 05:39.

Next up the hill was the 05:55 nominally empty carriages to Cullybackey. The Working Timetable noted “wagons may be attached if required” and, sure enough, the cabin register on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1957 records “Cges & wagons” leaving 16 minutes early at 05:39. As soon as this train arrived the road was set for the 06:15 empty railcar to Cullybackey, which was supposed to have a steam engine as pilot for traffic purposes. Today, though, a light engine left Ballymena as soon as the railcar arrived in Cullybackey, and this ran smartly out to cross the 06:30 up railcar at Cullybackey. Closely following this came the 06:48 local passenger ex-Cullybackey, and on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1957 the eagle-eyed signalman noted - and no doubt informed the Goods Cabin - that it had departed without a tail lamp! The 06:48 crossed the first train of the day from Belfast - the 05:55, whose weary passengers took fully 3 hours and 20 minutes on their virtually all-stations journey to Derry.

The block bell was now ringing for another run of wagons from the goods yard (some of them possibly off the 02:55 from Belfast, booked to arrive at Ballymena Goods at 05:40?). This short working would have drawn up at the calling-on signal 38, to the rear of the 05:55 which was ready to leave for Cullybackey. When this goods train was offered, the Ballymena Passenger signalman would have sent 3-5-5 to Ballymena Goods, indicating “section clear but station or junction blocked”. After the goods left, the man at Ballymena Goods would have placed a lever collar on his starter (signal 19) until he received 3-3-5 from Ballymena Passenger to indicate that its signal 38 had been pulled off following the departure of the passenger train. All this had to be smartly done, since an empty carriage working (of which I can find no record in the Working Time Table) departed in the Belfast direction at 07:18, and was closely followed by the 07:17 Cullybackey-Belfast which arrived at 07:23 and departed on time at 07:30. Unusually, on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1957, this train changed engines at Ballymena - possibly due to a failure? It might be noted that, whereas today the Christmas holidays continue interminably, in 1957 the only exception to the above pattern was on Christmas Day and Boxing Day when not a single entry appeared in the register during the early shift. On 27<sup>th</sup> December 1957 a full programme of passenger and goods trains resumed, and the 01:05 goods was so heavy on New Year’s Day as to require a banking engine.

## **Shift 2: 8am - 4pm**

After so much hectic activity, the middle man had a rather more straightforward shift. In the down direction the 07:40 railcar was due in at 08:35, followed by the 08:25 down express, due to run non-stop from Belfast in 42 minutes, and the steam-hauled 09:25 Ballymena local which arrived at 10:13. Each of these trains was normally followed by an engine from the goods yard, typically arriving just after the passenger train’s departure. After this came two Londonderry trains, then a railcar, which had

left Belfast at 10:55, 12:00 and 13:15 respectively. At this time the first of the MPD power cars were under test, and a 10:35 test train was running daily, clearly to a fast schedule. The register records that on most days it arrived at Ballymena in around 31 minutes from Belfast, continuing north after only a brief stop.

In the up direction the 07:10 ex Portrush (by this time a MED set) left Ballymena at 08:09, followed by a Cullybackey-Ballymena railcar service at 08:49. Next came the 08:00 Portrush-Belfast steam service at 09:03 and the 08:30 ex Londonderry (at that time the first train of the day from Derry) at 10:05, which was followed at 11:35 by a railcar to Belfast. The 11:10 ex Londonderry left Ballymena at 12:43 after crossing the 12:00 ex Belfast, following which the middle shift signalman dealt with no other up trains except the 12:40 ex Londonderry at 14:42 and the 15:50 railcar to Belfast. There were runs of engines to the goods yard, usually around 09:30, 11:40 and 12:50. One at least would have been for the 11:40 goods from Ballymena Goods to Belfast, which detoured from Cookstown Junction to Randalstown and arrived in Belfast at 15:05. The MPD test train was timed to leave Derry at 15:03, and seems to have had a clear path - mostly arriving at Ballymena in about 72-75 minutes, though I do not have access to its scheduled stops.



***No.71 "Glenarm Castle" outside Ballymena shed. Missing fittings suggest that scrapping may not be far away. (C.P. Friel collection)***

The 08:25 was probably the crack train of this shift, running non-stop from Belfast in 42 minutes, and the registers record that it was a rare thing for it to arrive at Ballymena more than a minute behind time - even when the load was heavy enough to require a banker, and had probably meant stopping at Kingsbog to detach the pilot engine. Thereby hangs another tale, for signalmen like Tom Montgomery in Kingsbog box were experts in working with enginemen to avoid delays. A train piloted from Belfast would stop well back from the signal at Kingsbog. While the driver held the train on the steam brake the train engine's fireman (on the ground before the train stopped) would split the vacuum bags, put them back on the plug so that his driver could make a brake, and uncouple the pilot. As the pilot got the ground signal and shot through the crossover, the train would be moving slowly up to the starter.

Before it got there the pilot engine was safely across, the points were reversed, and the road was cleared. On 26<sup>th</sup> November 1957, though, the 08:25 took nearly an hour to get to Ballymena, and it was no surprise that the bank staff was required. (Diesel was not doing so well that day either, for the 07:40 was cancelled, and replaced by a steam train which, instead of terminating, arrived in the path of the 07:40 and continued north.) Friday 29<sup>th</sup> November 1957 must have been a tricky morning too, but although the fog signalman was called out at 8am, delays to trains were minimal and the 08:25 arrived at 09:05 by the cabin clock.

Intensive movements sometimes called for sharp co-operation between signalmen. On 20<sup>th</sup> December 1957, for example, there was a trip goods from Ballymena Goods to Passenger at 11:23 (just close enough ahead of the 10:55 to show how much confidence the signalman had in the loco crew!). A few minutes later an engine and van from Cullybackey was sitting at the outer home at 11:42, marginally delaying the departure of the 10:55 ex Belfast which left at 11:46. Next came the 11:35 Ballymena-Belfast railcar. When this had passed it was followed by two workings: a run of wagons from the Passenger to the Goods at 11:46 and an engine and van at 12:01. More wagons from the Goods to the Passenger came in at 12:47, following the 12:00 from Belfast and held outside until it had departed. A 12:55 light engine from the Passenger to the Goods completed a highly intensive hour and a half's work. I wonder was anyone in the vicinity of Harryville Bridge to see such intensive to and fro movements?

Now to some of the things that occasionally go wrong in a day's work. A mishap clearly occurred on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> December 1957, when the 10:55 arrived 17 minutes late and required banking assistance up to Galgorm. While this was being organised a trip working from Ballymena Goods was standing outside the station, arriving at the platform two minutes after the 10:55 had been pushed away up the hill. On Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1957 the shed may have been empty when the 08:25 needed a push, for a light engine scurried round from Ballymena Goods right in the block of the 08:25 (accepted under regulation 5). It must have been brought right in behind the train and coupled up by the shunter at the Belfast end, as the bank staff was issued only a few minutes after the engine arrived.

On 7<sup>th</sup> January 1958 the 10:55 was followed by a special empty railcar, and the register duly noted that the 10:55 was correctly carrying an extra rear lamp to indicate 'special following'. On the same day the engine of the 12 noon must have been giving some concern to her driver, for although the train arrived on time, the signalman noted that water was taken whilst awaiting the crossing with the 11:10 ex Derry. On 21<sup>st</sup> January 1958 there was very heavy snow, and Mac Arnold's "NCC Saga" records that Driver Hannon had great difficulty restarting the 08:25 up the hill. Signalman Anderson (father of Jimmy Anderson who fired and later drove from Ballymena shed) vigilant as ever, noted in the register: "engine slow at starting - train passed cabin with wheels of rear coach skidding". Since the engine was already well out of sight, he correctly carried out regulation 17 and sent "stop and examine train" to Cullybackey. On 24<sup>th</sup> January 1958, the 11:10 ex Londonderry arrived at Ballymena 12 minutes late - carrying both the Glarryford-Cullybackey and Cullybackey-Ballymena tablets! One suspects that either the snatcher at Cullybackey had failed to do its job, or the fireman was negligent in doing his. The errant tablet was returned to Cullybackey by the 12 noon train, and all the details noted in the register for further action. I should add that Frank Dunlop told me about a similar incident in his firing days, when the same train became temporarily possessed of both the Derry-Lisahally and Lisahally-Eglinton tablets. The train was brought to an emergency stop at Culmore, and a p.w. man working on the platform ran back to Lisahally cabin with the over-carried tablet. The signalman at Lisahally reported the matter, and in due course the men were interviewed by Inspector Sam Bacon. He told them that it was a sin to over-carry a tablet - but as long as they had one for the section ahead, it was not a capital offence. The Great Northern tended to be more severe, though, and I have heard about a similar incident on their Derry Road where a fireman was awarded two days suspension - and charged for the taxi that had to be ordered to return the extra staff to its signal box!

In general, though, punctuality on these trains seemed good. I chose two weeks at random in November 1957 and studied the arrival times of the 08:25, 10:55 and 12 noon ex Belfast. On the ten weekdays there were only two occasions when lateness of more than ten minutes occurred, and indeed on four out of the five days in each week, these trains came into Ballymena within three minutes of their booked times. The 10:35 MPD test train was obviously being pushed hard in preparation for the 31-minute schedule of the February 1958 timetable: on almost every day of the period covered by this register it was arriving at Ballymena at around 11.06.



*No.56 with an Up stock special in August 1958. The make-up of this train, with passenger coach at rear, might indicate that its destination was the Royal Dublin Show. (A. Donaldson)*

### **Shift 3: 4pm - Midnight**

In the down direction, this shift handled the evening peak-hour trains from Belfast. The 15:40 ex Belfast arrived at 16:27, followed by the 17:15 local from Ballymena to Cullybackey, and 35 minutes later by the 17:10 railcar from Belfast, which also ran to Cullybackey. Next came the 17:25 ex Belfast - the last down service of the day to go through to Derry - at 18:11, followed at 18:20 by a local railcar working to Cullybackey, which waited there to form a 19:06 Cullybackey-Dunloy local, connecting out of the 18:00 steam train from York Road to Cullybackey. The last two trains of the day were diesel: the 18:35 to Coleraine, which left Ballymena at 19:31, and the 22:00 from York Road to Ballymena, arriving at 22:45 and offering a bus connection to Coleraine. The registers show few other regular movements in this direction. Four light engine workings from the Goods were recorded each day at varying times, generally one around 16:00, another an hour later, and two more between then and 20:00, to suit traffic requirements. One would certainly have been the engine off the evening local goods from Cullybackey, mentioned below. On 18<sup>th</sup> November 1957, a special goods arrived at 23:25. Since Ballymena Goods had been switched out since 21:50, the wagons lay at Ballymena until 02:40 the next morning and were worked back to the goods yard as soon as the Goods Cabin was switched in at 02:25. On 6<sup>th</sup> December 1957 the signalman noted that No.20 points (giving access to the down main siding) were stuck - but this didn't prevent the 18:35 Coleraine diesel from departing right on time.

Signalling problems sometimes led to slight delays, and on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1958 the 15:40 (one of the few remaining steam-hauled passenger trains following mass dieselisation the preceding week) was delayed when tablet No.5 was damaged while being withdrawn from the machine. They must have thought that the instrument was jammed, for pilot working was established at 16:35 - but only for one

minute, as some means had been found of releasing tablet No.9 from the machine! Tablet 5 was sent to Belfast, and returned in good order two days later. On 17<sup>th</sup> February 1958 the 15:40 again featured in the register, this time in relation to a brake problem which led to an involuntary stop halfway up the platform and a ten minute delay before the brakes could be leaked off and the engine got to the column for water. The most interesting entry in the register shows the passage of the steam crane at 20:52 on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1958, returning from the Derry direction three afternoons later at 12:56. The signalman recorded that the crane required water here - I wonder did anyone photograph the column being used to fill the crane's water tank.

In the up direction, the first train the new signalman dealt with was the 15:15 ex Londonderry, which detached a through portion for Larne Harbour at Ballyclare Junction. This was followed by the steam-hauled 17:30 Cullybackey-Belfast, and an 18:00 Cullybackey-Ballymena railcar. Next came the 17:30 up express, which crossed the 18:00 ex Belfast at 19:02. There was a 19:35 goods from Cullybackey to Ballymena Goods, due to arrive there at 19:48, and the 19:45 railcar from Dunloy which terminated at Ballymena at 20:07, connecting into the last up train of the day - the 20:26 diesel local to Belfast. In contrast to the present day, Ballymena folk were not expected to stay out too long in the evenings! The generally punctual pattern of events was occasionally disturbed. On 20<sup>th</sup> December 1957, for example, the 15:15 ex Londonderry arrived 10 minutes late due to the tablet being dropped at Cullybackey, and on the same night the following 17:45 was delayed ten minutes waiting for the GPO mails.

To finish with, some insights into a short period of NCC history, often mentioned but until now never fully recorded. From 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1958 the four main Derry expresses went over to MPD haulage. Timings of 110 minutes, with stops at Ballymena, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Castlerock and Limavady Junction, were the fastest ever known on the NCC. However, they proved to be rather too tight to guarantee punctual operation throughout the day and by the month of June they had to be relaxed. I have analysed the arrival times of all the weekday down and up trains for the first three weeks of the accelerated diesel timetable, and it has to be said that the statistics make rather grim reading. In the down direction, an ambitious 31 minute schedule was laid down non-stop from Belfast, and only once in a total of 72 entries did the cabin clock show that this was kept. (It should be repeated that the clock kept good time and the signalmen recorded the register with total accuracy.) 32 to 33 minutes seemed to be the average time and indeed the non-stop timing was later relaxed to 33 minutes. In the up direction, things were worse since each train made at least one crossing on the single line. Not one of the 72 trains covered arrived in Ballymena 'right time'. The 17:45 ex Londonderry was a particular culprit, being at least 15 minutes late on 12 days of those first three weeks. Similarly poor statistics were recorded for the 08:30 and 11:15, though in fairness the 14:50 was a much better timekeeper, being on average only 3 minutes late. Most interesting, though, was the appearance of steam on these trains on nine consecutive days when the new MPD cars were giving particular trouble. Mac Arnold's "NCC Saga" gave some detail, but since Mac would have been at work during the week, I suspect that not even he had the full picture of what happened. Between 11<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> February 1958 the cabin register indicates that steam replaced MPD cars on a total of 26 different down and up express trains. (In a practice that lasted until the end of steam, the diesel multiple units were invariably recorded as either "Railcar" or "MPD" in the register, and steam as "Passr".) Assuming a right-time departure from Belfast, 10 of the 14 down runs produced very creditable times of 37-39 minutes, while the other three ran to Ballymena in 36 minutes or better. The 14:45 ex Belfast on 11<sup>th</sup> February was quite the most astounding of all as it was recorded as having arrived at 15:19. In the up direction, I have noted 12 occasions when steam appeared. Allowing for the generally poor state of timekeeping by up trains, steam was actually no worse than the diesels. The 14:50 ex Londonderry was steam five times (one of these runs is described in detail in NCC Saga) and on each occasion arrived in Ballymena no more than 5 minutes late. Work of this order had not been seen on the NCC since the 1930s, and was especially praiseworthy at a time when the UTA management had already committed itself to phasing steam



engines out altogether.

In the preparation of this article I am greatly obliged to a number of good friends. Ian Stewart and Shaun Martin, both experts on Ballymena and its railways, made many helpful comments and additions. Frank Dunlop provided a fund of memories and stories from his own days on the footplate in the 1940s and 1950s. Denis Grimshaw provided helpful timetable information. Charles Friel proof-read the text with his customary thoroughness, purging it of many errors, and both Charles and Irwin Pryce turned up useful photographs from their collections.

## **MARINO STATION 1943**

**Randal Cave**

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Marino Station may very well have had the youngest Station Master, ever, of any station on British or Irish railways.

In the Spring of 1943 the sun shone brightly on Marino Station, giving new life to the horticultural displays which, ‘for such time as the memory of man runneth not to the contrary,’ had won for Marino the much-prized designation as the prettiest and best maintained station on the Belfast and County Down Railway. This hard-won honour was confirmed each year by the Railway’s board of directors during its annual inspection of all stations on the system and was jealously guarded by the Station Master, Mr O. Patterson (known by his associates as “Tut-Tut Patterson”). Also proud of the floral displays, immaculately trimmed shrubberies and shady arbours, were the many local residents who commuted regularly to Belfast, many of whom were accomplished horticulturists in their own right.

However, dark clouds were gathering which, all too soon, would shatter the tranquillity of this pastoral setting. Mr. Patterson would reach mandatory retirement age in a few months. In those war-time days of manpower shortages, who could be found to replace the expertise and dedication he had acquired over many years of successful discharge of his most important responsibility? Anyone can run a railway - but how many people can transform a deep, dark, damp ‘railway cut’ into a sylvan setting, pleasant to the eye and refreshing to the spirit? What possible answer could the ‘Powers that be at Queen’s Quay’ come up with?

One can’t be sure of just what considerations were taken into account in addressing this thorny issue, but subsequent events suggest that the appointment of another Station Master did not rank very high in their list of possibilities. After all, look at the money that could be saved were Marino Station to become a ‘Halt’ - as had been the case with Cultra Station a few years previously. The station house could be moved from ‘cost centre’ status to that of a ‘revenue producing unit’ (the dream of every executive) by renting it out at the high rates obtainable in those days of severe housing shortage. Also, the removal of salary and wage costs for a Station Master and Porter, with associated expenses for uniforms and other benefits, would be significant.

Back in 1943 the railway had two employees known as Relief Clerks, whose responsibility it was to fill in for staff absent due to illness, vacations, etc., and to help out in any emergency situation that might arise. While on duty beyond a prescribed distance from their ‘home station’ they were paid a per-diem amount to cover expenses for food and board while away from home. Because of their required breadth of knowledge and expertise they were among the higher paid employees, and also because there were only two of them, it didn’t seem to be a good move to assign either one of them to Marino Station for an indefinite time. (It’s not known whether their horticultural expertise would have been up to the job requirements.) So what to do?

In Belfast Goods Office there was a 17 year old junior clerk who, for some reason not quite known to the author, had acquired a reputation of being somewhat smarter than average. That junior clerk was me. I had worked in the goods office for about 18 months, had never worked at a passenger station, and knew nothing whatsoever about gardening. With such an impressive display of breadth of knowledge

and expertise I was the inevitable choice to step into the breach at Marino and was therefore appointed to a newly created position of Junior Relief Clerk. My salary reflected emphasis on the 'junior' part of my title as it remained at the same level. However, despite the fact that I lived in Holywood, Belfast Goods was still my 'home' station and, as there was no train service early enough to enable me to open the station at Marino for the first train or to return me after I had closed the station, I did qualify for the per-diem expense allowance. Agreed with the Railway Clerks Association, this allowance was a standard amount not based on actual expenditures; it required no receipts and was automatically added to my monthly salary.

So I arrived at Marino Station and, after a few days of indoctrination under the supervision of 'Tut-Tut', assisted by his always helpful teenage daughter, I was left with the awesome responsibility of running the station to the satisfaction of the 'Powers that be at Queen's Quay' (which was comparatively easy) and to the expectations of the Marino passengers (which was virtually impossible). I'm sure the local community was appalled at finding a neophyte, not yet dry behind the ears, in charge of their beloved station. Passengers lost no time in reminding me that the annual inspection of stations would be coming up in July and that Marino never lost out on first prize so I had better start digging, planting, pruning, clipping, fertilizing and all other obvious activities incumbent upon any sensible Station Master. My pleas that I, in fact, was not a Station Master, carried no weight.



***BCDR 4-6-4T No.22 at Marino. As it was re-numbered 222 by the UTA in 1948 and withdrawn in 1953 the date must be somewhere in that period. (C.P. Friel collection)***

When they left off plants, shrubs, etc., on their way to work, they expected them to have been carefully planted and tended on their return in the evening. Many of these passengers, such as Lord North, were wealthy enough to employ one or more full-time gardeners so one can imagine how high their expectations were. I found myself working like a navvy during early shifts and longing for the late shift when the Senior Porter (there was only one Porter at Marino) would have to carry part of the effort, but not the responsibility. I had some difficulty in convincing him that gardening was indeed part of a Senior Porter's job as he had the silly idea that the National Union of Railwaymen thought otherwise.

However, as time passed, and the once reluctant effort started to result in glorious bloom and pleasing fragrance, it became a labour of love. My sights, too, were now firmly fixed on the prize of having the prettiest and best-kept station on the railway. My main task during day shift, and during daylight hours on late shift, was gardening. The rest of the day was needed for recovery.

In those days the station lighting consisted of gas lamps situated sparsely on both the 'up' and 'down' platforms and which were lit individually after the gas supply was turned on in the small waiting room on the 'down' platform. Fortunately the gas flow was sufficiently slow that, provided one acted with sufficient alacrity in getting to the more distant lampposts, a major explosion could be avoided. Of course there was no problem in turning off the lights as all one had to do was turn off the gas supply at the meter. This proved to be a very useful feature as there was always enough gas left in the pipes to keep the lamps burning for quite some time, and allowed me to carry out a scheme which was contrary to railway regulations and, in retrospect, was certainly quite dangerous. Because I lived in Hollywood there was no problem in walking or cycling to and from Marino if there was no suitable train service available, provided the weather was not too inclement. The only problem arose when the weather was bad and I was working late shift. I had to be on duty until the last train had been dispatched and the station was securely locked up, then make my rain-drenched way to Hollywood at well past midnight. The last train for Belfast always arrived some minutes after the final train to Bangor so that, having sent the Bangor train on its merry way, and having locked up the station, I could give the signal to dispatch the Belfast train, then board it for my trip to Hollywood.

But what about the gas lights which had to be left burning until the last train had cleared the station? This was a problem since the meter and supply lever were located in the waiting room of the 'down' platform. Having carefully timed the interval between turning off the gas at the 'down' platform and getting over to the 'up' platform to start, and board, the Belfast train, I determined that there was sufficient gas in the pipes to burn until well after the train was on its way. I used this scheme on many occasions and never really asked myself the obvious question of what would happen if some exigency occurred following my turning off the gas, on the approach of the Belfast train, and its actual delayed departure from Marino Station. (So much for the wisdom of putting a 17 year old kid in charge of a railway station!)

Such an exigency did occur one cold, rainy night. That evening I had seen the Bangor-bound train on its way and had checked, or thought I had checked, to make sure that any arriving passengers had left the station - so I turned off the gas supply. I was just about to cross the tracks to the 'up' platform when I noticed a man, who must have alighted well down towards the front of the train. The exit, where I was standing, was towards the end of the train. In those war-time days of blackout it was hard to see the full length of the platform, but I could see well enough to tell that this passenger may have dined and wined well, but certainly not wisely. As he weaved and stumbled his way up the platform the gas lamps closest to the exit began to dim ominously. To compound the problem, the sound of the approaching Belfast train was becoming unmistakable. Worst of all, just as the train screeched out from under the overhead bridge at the Bangor end of the station, the inebriated idiot jumped down onto the tracks to cross over ahead of the train. The last I saw of him, before I closed my eyes in horror, he was teetering on a slippery rail, a few yards in front of the on-coming train, trying to get enough purchase to jump up onto the platform. I rushed around towards the 'up' platform, using the overhead road bridge but, before I could get down the path to the station, the train started off towards Belfast. I expected to find his mangled remains scattered across the track but what I found, instead, was a cold sober passenger sitting on a bench, holding his head, and muttering, "Never again! Not a drop!" To this day I don't know how he made that desperate leap which saved his life - probably neither does he. Needless to say, a good rain soaking never again seemed to be such a bad thing.

High adventure was not typical of life at Marino Station and, in fact, the late shift tended to be quite a

lonely experience, especially during winter. As the station was located in a deep cut with fairly steep embankments on both sides and overhead road bridges at both ends it became a little world of its own after dark, separated from sight or sound of any other part of the universe. When the commuters had returned from their daily toil in Belfast, or elsewhere, there was virtually no passenger traffic to or from Marino Station. There was a good-sized waiting room adjoining the office but for some reason it was never used and had remained locked all the time I was at Marino. This suited me fine as passengers waiting for trains used the office with its warm welcoming fire, and the craic was always good. I was thankful for the company of some young girls who frequently came to the station in the evenings but puzzled by the fact that they rarely boarded a train to go anywhere. In fact when the girl I fell in love with and who subsequently became my wife started to show up regularly, the volume of potential evening traffic fell off dramatically. I did much of my early courting in the station, adding a dimension to my 'labour of love' that certainly was not in my job description.



***1940s photos of Marino seem to be scarce, so here is a later one of Jeep No.10 approaching Marino from Holywood in July 1952 with the 10:15 from Belfast. (S.C. Nash)***

Tricia and I became very friendly with a couple in Marino and had arranged to picnic together at Clanbrassil but the weather turned ugly and left us with food to eat but no place to eat it. I recalled the unused waiting room and thought that would be a good place for our picnic. On arriving at the station, soaking wet, I found the key to the waiting room and prepared to enjoy our picnic. However, I soon discovered why the waiting room had been unused for so long when one of my guests fell through the rotten floor boards, up to his knees!

Back to the efforts to maintain Marino's unblemished record as the best maintained station on the Belfast and County Down Railway. 'I-day' dawned for the inspection by W.F. Minnis, General Manager, other senior railway officers, and Board of Directors including such dignitaries as Mr James Hurst, JP, chairman; Lt Col Gordon, DSO, DL, MP; Sir Thomas Dixon, Bart.; Mr Martin Perry, JP. Faced with the responsibility of shepherding this awesome group around the station to avoid broken floor-boards in one of its waiting rooms, on the one hand, while carefully highlighting the best of its horticultural achievements on the other, I was so terrified that I couldn't remember much of what was

said or done. I do have a vague recollection of one Director confiding in me that, having achieved the rank of Station Master at such a youthful age, there was no saying how far I could go on the railway if I 'stuck to it'. I didn't want to disillusion the well-intentioned gentleman by pointing out that I was not a Station Master and that, at that particular moment, not only was I not anxious to 'be stuck to it' but, indeed, would not have minded being as far away from the railway as my youthful legs could carry me.

However, on departure of the special train carrying the group of dignitaries on its mission of terror to the next station and, while looking around at the undeniable beauty and the unmistakable marks of a well maintained station I began to feel that there was no way we could be denied the well-earned results for all our efforts. Every passenger alighting from the trains that evening had the inevitable question, "How did we do?" I, of course, conveyed my optimistic feelings thus generating a comfortable feeling of euphoria throughout Marino, while we awaited the decision due the following day.

'D-day' dawned for the decision we had all worked so hard for and now awaited with bated breath. Imagine the horror with which I received the awful news that Marino had received an "Honourable Mention". Honourable Mention, indeed! What could be honourable about a decision that denied the evidence of one's eyes and could only have been based on the first opportunity in many years to award first place to another station, without having to hurt the tender feelings of Tut-Tut Patterson. How about my tender feelings? How about my once-tender hands, now made rough and calloused by prolonged manual toil? I dreaded having to convey this patently unfair verdict to the many Marino people who had been so generous with their gifts of flowers, etc., and had been even more generous with their advice.

Actually the disastrous news was received - as most such news is - in a variety of ways. There was some recrimination, some disbelief, some well-voiced if somewhat earthy expressions of disgust, and some much appreciated encouragement with thanks for a valiant effort and confidence in our success next year. There were even some who had had the foresight to have their donations of flowers and shrubs planted in flower-pots, so that they could be recovered and put to better use back in their own gardens where they could be appreciated. In time life in Marino returned to normal. The sun shone again and the sky did not fall. Trains came and went and life for the 'Junior Relief Clerk' became more rewarding than he deserved.

I mentioned earlier that my position at Marino carried with it a generous allowance for 'away from home' living expenses which, in fact, were never incurred because I didn't live away from home. My income was such that I could impress my first and only lady-love not only with convincing ardour but with lavish spending on dinners, theatres and various other means of riotous living. Not many boys of my age (I was now 18) could afford dinners at the best restaurants in Belfast followed by visits to the Empire Theatre. I have fond memories of those carefree days but of course those times were too good to last.

Someone among the 'Powers that be at Queen's Quay' also wakened up one day to discover that, with my living allowance, I was being paid more than any Station Master on the Belfast and County Down Railway. The obvious solution to this anomaly was to appoint me Station Master of Marino, pay me the rate applicable at other small stations, and gamble that at 18 years of age I would not quibble over the perks normally associated with the position of Station Master. These were such things as residence in the stationhouse and, a new uniform each year including a hat with the words Station Master emblazoned amid gold braid. The gamble paid off; I didn't quibble and I became 'Station Master Incognito' at the unripe young age of 18 thus giving Marino the unique distinction of having the youngest Station Master on any British or Irish railway. (The people would much rather have won at the annual inspection.) I held the position until Marino Station was made a Halt, soon afterward. So ended my short career as the youngest Station Master. Come to think of it, it had to end sooner rather

than later, otherwise I would no longer have been the youngest - would I?

## THE GS&WR 52 CLASS

W.T. Scott

After 18 years of good service as Locomotive Superintendent Alexander McDonnell left Inchicore to make what turned out to be an unhappy move to the North Eastern Railway at Gateshead. He had brought order and discipline to Inchicore and his 101 class became a classic design which served the GS&WR and its successors for almost 100 years until superseded by expensive and unreliable diesels. The 52 class were designed while McDonnell was in the chair but appeared after Aspinall had taken over and so, by custom, were credited to him. They were a bogie version of McDonnell's 64 class 2-4-0 express engines.

52 class dimensions	52 class	X class
Cylinders (2)	17" x 22"	
Driving wheels	6'7"	
Max axle load	13 tons	
Tractive effort	11,000 lbs	
Total weight	39 tons	
Adhesive weight	25¾ tons	
Boiler Diameter	4'1"	4'5"
Tubes	163 x 1¾"	111 x 1¾"
Heating surface (tubes)	735 sq ft	767 sq ft
Heating surface (firebox)	96 sq ft	110 sq ft
Heating surface (total)	831 sq ft	877 sq ft
Grate area	17½ sq ft	16 sq ft
Boiler pressure	150 psi	160 psi

Two types of boiler were used on the 52 class: the original which was unsuperheated, with a raised round-top firebox, and the superheated X class, designed by Morton in 1929, which had a Belpaire firebox. This boiler was primarily designed for the MGWR J18 & J19 classes, for which the Z class boiler meant for the 101 class was too long. The X class boiler was 9'7¾" long, only ¾" more than the 52 class and thus was an easy fit. The four engines superheated by CIÉ in the 1950s (see below) would have received boilers from scrapped members of the 52 class or J18/19s.

### 52 Class Chronology

No.	Built	Superheated	Withdrawn
52	1883	1931	1949
53	1883	-	1925
54	1883	1930	1959
55	1883	1932	1955
9	1886	1951 (CIÉ)	1955
16	1886	1933	1959
97	1887	1930	1930
98	1887	1954	1954
4	1888	1933	1957
11	1888	-	1949
14	1888	1932	1957
18	1888	1933	1959
56	1888	1932	1951
57	1888	1950 (CIÉ)	1957

58	1888	1950 (CIÉ)	1953 (58 for a time carried a MGWR573 class boiler)
59	1888	-	1955
1	1890	-	1955
3	1890	1952 (CIÉ)	1957
12	1890	1932	1949
20	1890	1941	1959

Progress overtook the 52 class early as in 1885 Aspinall's much larger 60 class started to appear (see FFT No.10) and of the 52 class only Nos.52-55 got much work on the Mails for which they were intended but, being a sound design, they easily moved down to the longer branch lines and, with the exception of 53 and 97, the class survived World War II.



***Bearing the lowest number although one of the last of the class to be built, No.1 is seen here at Limerick in 1952. She still retains the double smokebox doors. No.219, a 201 or J11 class 0-6-0T, can be seen behind. (A. Donaldson)***

Modern readers may wonder what a 2 class or a 52 class was as they are referred to in other publications as D17 and D19. These titles meant nothing to a railwayman as the GS&WR classification system used the number of the first engine to denote the class. Hence to a railwayman the J15 class, e.g. No.186, would have been known as the 101 class. The letter classification was adopted by Inchicore in 1924 and involved a letter denoting the wheel arrangement followed by a number for the class. This appeared similar to the system used by the GNR and LNER in England but the number aspect was the direct antithesis of it. In the English system the smallest engine of the wheel arrangement had the lowest number and the numbers rose with increase in power/size. The Inchicore system, on the other hand, started with the highest powered engine and this (predictably, one might have thought) eventually caused problems. The 500 class was originally designated B1 but in 1939 the more powerful 800 class appeared and had to be called B1a.

There was a further complication in that the GSR introduced a (separate) load classification in 1925 and revised it in 1931. This, according to S.J. Watson, was based on tractive effort, which meant that



the large Midland 4-4-0s with a 6'3" wheel were Group J because of a T.E. of 400 lbs. more than the very competent Coey 321 class which had to be Group M, although they were later raised to J. This system also meant that No.461 was Group C, the same as the 400 class which in their 2-cylinder form were far more capable than the weight-handicapped DSER loco.



*No.59 crosses the Lough Atalia bridge at Galway c.1953. (W.T. Scott collection)*

The 52 class and the 60 class which followed them seem to have been very small engines for a Mail train on the Cork line. However, Ahrons gives the weights of the 6-wheel main line carriages of the time and they average about 10 tons. Thus the Day Mail probably weighed less than 100 tons, so the 52 class could cope with the not over-fast timings - 39 mph was the best average between Ballybrophy and Limerick Junction. Fortunately Drew Donaldson recorded some of their performance between 1939 and 1955 and the following snippet gives some idea of what they could do.

**Unrebuilt 52 class No.11. Load: 2 bogies, 1 6-wheel van, 4 horse boxes = 100/115 tons**

Station	Mileage	Time	Speed
Limerick Junction	0.0	00:00	
Oola	3.6	10:47	54 before Oola
Pallas	8.1	15:35	61 before Pallas
Dromkeen	10.4	18:50	52¾ before Dromkeen
Boher	14.1	24:45	50 before Boher
Killonan	17.8	28:57	52½ before Killonan
Limerick	22.0	34:58	(scheduled 35:00)

A very sound effort for a 50-year old veteran. The log also illustrates the older method of timing, with station times only and maximum speeds between stations. The taking of every milepost started in the 1950s.

Joynt, in his notes on Inchicore locomotives, gives examples of No.52 during her brief tenure of the Mail commonly running the 42 miles from Portarlinton to Kingsbridge in 47 minutes - a very

creditable average of 53½ mph, especially considering the climb to MP40 and the 4-mile rise from MP34 to Kildare. He also states that the boiler was very small and that the engine needed “coaxing” and careful firing. No.52, incidentally, was awarded a Bronze Medal at the Dublin Exhibition of 1883.

The 52 class were no stronger than the 64 class 2-4-0s which they replaced but their bogie gave smoother running and the Civil Engineer was happy because they were less severe on the track. No.53 was for some years fitted with Sevre flue tubes - 111 of 2½” diameter giving a heating surface of 716 sq. ft. These tubes were a French idea and had internal ribs, but the idea was not perpetuated although it was also tried by the Great Eastern in England. During their spell on the Mails the 52 class had 2,700 gallon tenders but when the 60 class appeared they got these and the 52 class reverted to the 1,800 gallon type.



*No.16 at Ennis on a Limerick-Sligo train in 1952. 3ft gauge wagons of the West Clare Railway, then still steam-worked, can be seen on the right. Note straw-insulated water column. (W.T. Scott)*

Sharp running was not just the prerogative of the saturated engines; No.16 was a regular performer on the Limerick-Athenry road and on one occasion reached 66 mph between Ballyglunin and Tuam. By the mid-1950s the 52 class were becoming scarce, ousted by the 101 class and by the menace of the diesel railcar. The last I had runs with were 16 and 59 in the Tuam area in 1954, 18, based at Birr, in 1955 and 3, which was a Waterford engine and worked on the Macmine line, in 1954. 4 and 58 finished their days as Inchicore pilots and the last survivors were 54, 16, 18 & 24.

Thus, only 6 years separated the scrapping of the last of Ireland’s first express 4-4-0s, with 70 years’ service, from the cutting up of Ireland’s last express 4-4-0s after only 18 years of work. Such was “progress” in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century!

## **BY STEAM TO SKIBBEREEN**

**K.P. Pilley**

The journey from Cork’s Albert Quay station in June 1953 proved to be the last time I left the city for West Cork on a steam train. The long line of stock for the daily train included one side-corridor bogie coach, several six-wheelers and even four-wheel brake vans. Making my way out to Rocksavage depot

I was given a large wad of cotton waste and permission to wander at will.

Three of the B4 tanks were in steam: 463, 467, her green livery still quite smart, and 468. Also in steam were WLWR C5 269 and MGW J26 551 which was the yard pilot. 'Up the quarry' were parked J26 552 and 557, GSWR C7 37, DSE G1 423 and F2 432, T&C Argadeen and J28 299. All seemed fit to run except for 299 which hadn't been steamed for years. Whilst wandering around I stood in the tunnel and watched GSW J11 208 arrive with the 5am goods from Drimoleague. There was not time to poke about the loco or C&W works.

The driver of the selected loco for the passenger train, No.468, invited me to climb aboard and we backed down to the departure platform. A dash to collect my luggage and hurl it into the guard's van, then onto the footplate of 468 whose safety valves were getting noisy. We got the 'right away' at 5:35, a possible compromise as the public timetable said 5:30 but around this period the working timetable stated 5:40 in case there were any passengers hurrying from Glanmire off the short-lived Belfast-Cork Enterprise.

A toot on the whistle and we were off, the tracks of the extensive layout converging from left and right to become a single track through the tunnel and up the cutting past the suburbs to open ground at Ballyphehane Junction where the weed-grown line to Macroom peeled off to the right. Still used by monthly cattle specials, the line was under sentence of death by drowning by a new reservoir.



***B4 class 4-6-0T No.468 at Bantry on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1954. (A. Donaldson)***

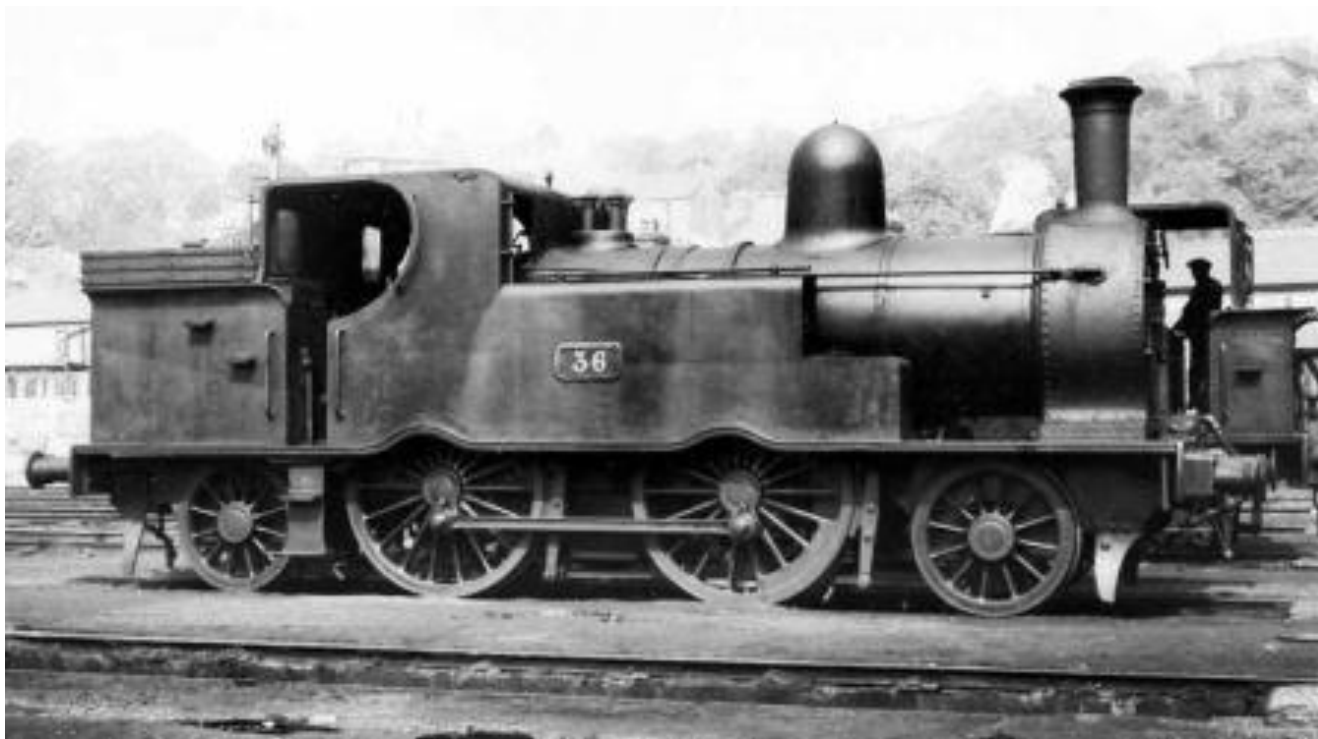
The main line climbed, twisting and turning to gain height for the Chetwynd viaduct and as we threaded the foothills a stiff breeze of fresh mountain air mingled with the heady mix of steam and warm lubricating oil smell in the cab. By this time the fireman was busy with the shovel in a graceful rhythm - load shovel, open fire-door, throw coal in, close door, repeat. I mentioned that some British engines of my acquaintance seemed not to mind some cool air over the fire while being stoked, but the driver was adamant that 468 would not accept such treatment.

We pounded on up the grade, over the viaduct at MP 4½ into Waterfall for a brief stop before tackling

the rest of the climb to the summit at MP 8¼. Now the engine was eased as we descended towards Goggins Hill tunnel, one of the longest in Ireland. No.468 had been fired with such enthusiasm that the safety valves lifted as we entered the tunnel and the noise in the cab was deafening.

The line now descended for 10 miles into Bandon and the fireman could rest his back, though the roomy cab had no seats or lockers for the crew, just the covers over the rear coupled wheels. The B4s were steady riders over the sharp curves as the line wove through the hills giving fine views of the landscape; sights now lost to the traveller. After crossing Innishannon viaduct we descended on a curve through the woods to the stone embankment above the road and river. We paced but failed to overhaul a lorry, the only vehicle on the N71.

No.468 was driven in different fashion from the Great Northern method, i.e. with the regulator largely untouched once open and constant adjustments to the cut-off wheel. The B4s had lever reverse which required the regulator to be closed before moving the lever, hence No.468 was driven on the regulator rather than the reverser. This feature, combined with their good adhesion, meant the B4s were very popular as pilots over at Glanmire after Rocksavage was closed.



***F6 class 2-4-2T No.36 at Cork Glanmire Road on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1938. (C.P. Friel collection)***

B4 No.464 was waiting in Bandon yard at the head of the 12:45pm Bantry-Cork goods (6:55pm off Bandon) and here the crews swapped. The friendly Cork driver said I must leave the cab as the Bantry man was “a miserable old fellow”, so I was ‘on the cushions’ for the rest of the journey.

Next stop was Clonakilty Junction where we left coaches for ‘Clon’ but sadly no longer for Timoleague and Courtmacsherry, now served only by excursions and winter beet specials. At Dunmanway and Drimoleague the stations were near the main street and half the population turned out to see the train (and who was on it!). The watchers at Drimoleague had more entertainment as here the train divided, No.468 leaving with the bogie coach and a brake for Bantry, still signalled on the down starter as the branch, though long regarded as the main line.

The Baltimore coaches were now collected by Ivatt F6 No.36. A cross-channel author described the

class as “neat suburban” tanks: wrong on both counts! Designed for the Kerry branch lines, their large (5ft 8½”) coupled wheels in an overall length of just over 31 feet gave them a squashed look, but they were good engines and very popular with the crews. They were strong and could haul 6 (short) bogie coaches to Baltimore regatta, but this evening 36 trundled two 6-wheelers gently to Madore and Skibbereen where I had time for only a glance at the moribund narrow gauge stock before hurrying to catch the CIÉ bus from Cork to complete my journey.

Soon afterwards I spent two years in Germany and by the time I returned to Cork the Bantry service was railcar worked, though I enjoyed steam on the Skibbereen service for a while longer, Sadly all regular steam finished on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1957 and in 1961 the whole rail system south of Cork was closed. The closure proposal had caused such fury that a public inquiry was held, but the railway was doomed. Local legend believes that CIÉ won because their Counsel established that not one of the ‘supporters’ of the railway had used the train to attend the inquiry.

The harsh truth can be found in Five Foot Three No.50 which contains the final part of the sad and moving report on CIÉ steam by the Running Superintendent for the CME. He urged the retention of the B4s on the assumption that diesels would only arrive on the Cork and Bandon section at a very late stage “because of the poor mileage return in respect of the workings on that section”. In fact the diesels arrived quite soon but failed to save the line for the service was so sparse that it could never pay its way.

## **SOME EARLY EXHIBITION MODEL RAILWAYS**

**Alan O'Rourke**

I recently came across a copy of the Railway Modeller, for June-July 1950 (Vol.1, No.5). On the cover and on p.141-2, it features a 7mm (and I assume O-gauge) display model built by CIÉ for the 1950 Spring Show. The layout included automatic operation, smoke effects on the locomotives and working semaphore signals. It depicted a single track branch, which the illustrations suggest used centre-rail electric supply, and was arranged as an oval with about half hidden behind the scenery, and a passing station on the visible portion. Two trains operated: I3 class 0-6-2T 670, with three of the GSR steel suburban coaches (1331, 2116, 1900) and J15b 710 (hardly a design Inchicore could be proud of!), with two 12t open wagons, two 12t ‘covered and sheeted’ wagons, two timber bolsters, a cattle wagon, grain hopper (illustrated, No.16400) and a 20t brake van.

Above the hidden section was a length of double track (probably not electrified) with static model of Maeve and a Cork Mail set of steel coaches. However, the driving wheels of this engine were suspended just above rail level, in slow motion to show the working valve gear. The layout also included several static road vehicles. I put a request for further information in the RPSI e-bulletin, and I am grateful for material supplied by Charles Friel (who supplied all the photographs), John Brennan and John Towers which provides the text of the rest of this item.

It appears that this model railway was the main feature on the CIÉ stand at the Royal Dublin Society (RDS) Spring Show and Industries Fair for a number of years in the early 1950s. The models were all from the Fry collection. The use of three-rail, and the special effects were typical of his work; he developed locomotive smoke units long before anyone else and ended up in dispute with Tri-ang over the patent. His wife was the foundry expert and produced many of the specialised castings needed. His (few) diesels made appropriate engine noise when the loco was stopped at the station. Fry’s system included two magnificent models of the Irish Mail commissioned by the LMSR in 1947 for a display the following year to commemorate the centenary of this train: one was a model of the 1848 train, the other an early twentieth century model in full LNWR livery. His first displays at the RDS for the Irish railway companies (which then carried much traffic to these shows) were in the late 1940s, when for the GNR(I) stand he had a double track line that became interlaced for the main span of the Boyne viaduct, which he had as feature of the collection in his home. The viaduct was the entrance point for

staff serving on the stand. The system featured both GNR named trains: a Glover V-class three cylinder compound 4-4-0 hauled The Enterprise while an S-class 4-4-0 hauled The Bundoran Express. There were ATC signals that ensured that only one train had access to the Boyne bridge at a time, and static displays of GNR diesel railcars F, and possibly C.



*The GNR stand in 1946. The back of the print is stamped "Independent Newspapers 30-445", with "Aug 1946" in biro - this may have been added, in error, by Harold Houston from whose estate the original came.*

The decline of the fortunes of the GNR meant that their stand at the show disappeared about 1950, but CIÉ had obviously been impressed and commissioned Fry to do something similar. There may have been at least one show where Fry's models were working on both of the railway companies' stands simultaneously. The CIÉ stand went further than the GNR in that it featured the models working in a typical rural landscape complete with station. The model was a single track branch line which meandered around the rectangular stand which had space in the centre for CIÉ promotional staff to hand out leaflets. As described in the *Railway Modeller*, the two working trains were a Dublin suburban passenger train and a branch goods train. On the stand, the station had a passing loop, and the passenger and goods trains ran in opposite directions with one of them waiting at the station while the other completed its circuit: it seems that Fry had wired it up for automatic operation. Along one side was a straight section of double line on an embankment on which was mounted Fry's magnificent model of the 1939 Bredin B1a 4-6-0 No.800 Maebhdh drawing a train of CIÉ steel coaches. In fact he once claimed in the *Sunday Independent* to having had a hand in the design of the 800s! The train was static but the loco was supported and wired so that its wheels and motion rotated, giving the impression of the Cork Mail travelling at speed. Drew Donaldson also built a model of 801 which was once

exhibited in the CIÉ offices in Bachelor's Walk, although he did not build models with the wheels that could rotate freely while the locomotive remained static as on Fry's engine. *[Since Drew was dedicated to clockwork power his models would not have been suitable for such operation. - Ed.]*

The last two shots were taken by R. Clements Lytle, a commercial photographer with premises at 12 High Street in Belfast, and were part of a packet of thirty-two photographs bought from Harold Houston's collection, labelled "Balmoral Show 1948" and "GNR, NCC, BCDR & NIRTB took part." The first is an elevated view, showing a three-rail system, with a track for road vehicles, both typical of Fry's work.



*This may be the back of the same stand. The print came from Harry Wilson in Dundalk and is stamped "GNR(I) Loco Carr & Wagon Dept 15 AUG 1946." There is also C.L. Fry's stamp, with the added note "Model and Photo by me."*

In about 1950-2, the CIÉ office at Bachelor's Walk in Dublin included a static model - probably in 0-gauge - of a double track section with scenery and a signal and two trains, with both locomotives in CIÉ green livery. One was a 4-6-0, the other a 2-6-0, possibly an inside cylinder design. Sometime about 1949-50 the Irish Times pictorial supplement carried a report on a model railway in Dublin, including a picture of a GNR engine, probably a UG. There is also the large-scale model of the GNR SG3 class, for many years on display at Great Victoria Street station, with a 'penny-in-the-slot' mechanism to make the motion operate. I gather that this model is now in the care of the RPSI. *[Yes, Peter Scott is working on it - when he can spare the time from his other commitments. - Ed.]*

As with so many early Irish models, if anyone can provide any further information on these layouts, I would be pleased to hear from you. I assume that the track was dismantled after the shows, but some of the models of the locomotives and rolling stock may have survived, or as mentioned above, gone back to the builders like Fry.





*The North Atlantic Express on the upper level: a clue as to the fate of the rolling stock was that Harold Houston's collection included an O-gauge North Atlantic Express coach. Hopefully, all Fry's stock made it home, and has now passed on to the Malahide collection.*



*The same layout from a different angle. You can also see the rare "RE (Railway Executive) NCC" in the background!*

Not being particularly interested in railways before then, I visited the RPSI Steam Gala in 2001 and decided to become a member. However, at the end of that summer I was off to University in Glasgow and so could not follow my new interest, except via Paul McCann's email bulletins. Becoming a bit homesick I started Queen's in autumn 2002 and replied to a Bulletin asking for help on the Santa Trains. From that time I worked at just about everything going on with the trains or at Whitehead, taking on Northern Crew Rostering and becoming a member of the Belfast Area Operations Committee in the process. However, I didn't have much interest in the basics of what the RPSI does - restoring pieces of old and dilapidated rolling stock.

Making similar journeys of discovery through the RPSI at the time, James and Edward Friel had settled into the electrical squad, whilst Ben McDonald and David Orr had just joined the locomotive department. By the time the 2005 Ballast Contract was through we'd all become friends and in the early part of 2006 were mooching around Whitehead wondering what we could be at and playing with various ideas from installing mechanical signalling at the point under the King's Road Bridge (we found all the bits - they just didn't work!) to restoring No.131. At that time I was 22 and the others all under 20. Into this walked Philip Lockett with some mad idea that we restore a wagon.

As the Whitehead Youth Project to restore GNR(I) Brake Van No.81 nears completion it's probably time that readers knew Ivan's story and what it is hoped a humble goods brake van will do for the Society. This is the 'Ivan Project'.

So - why did a small group of 'approximately Twenties' choose to work on a wagon? Well, in the opening months of 2006, whilst trying to find something we could usefully 'be at' we settled on the idea of restoring something that would contribute to Whitehead as a visitor attraction whilst simultaneously developing our minimal skills. The signalling project was not making much progress, and it would clearly be too much to try and start out by restoring an engine - it had to be something in between. So we looked at various carriages and wagons around the yard with a view to doing one up, but only one stood out - and with unanimous agreement. It would not be the easiest one to do, but the choice came down to the derailed, burnt and extremely dilapidated ex-GNR(I) goods brake van No.81, which before too long acquired the pet-name 'Ivan'.

The reasons for picking this vehicle over the also popular oil tank wagon, brown van, etc., were what we viewed to be its inherent usefulness. As a bi-directional, manned brake vehicle it will allow us to run any given carriage (including wooden ones) within the confines of our yard on open days AND allow the Train Rides engine to always pull the train chimney first from the Belfast end. At present both our useable brake carriages, 91 and 460, have the brake at the Belfast end. This means the engine has to be at the Larne end for the guard to see what's going on during propelling moves and as 3BG faces Belfast it unfortunately ends up being presented to visitors bunker-first. It is worth noting at this juncture that the annual Whitehead 'Train Rides' open days have now also been taken under the wing of the Youth Group.

With its warming stove and bench seats it is also possible that Ivan could contribute to possible future ventures such as Footplate Experience Courses by giving an authentic (if not completely comfortable) place to educate the relatives of those who are crewing the engine. But educate them in what? Most importantly, Ivan was a manned vehicle and therefore represents an aspect of our social history. People lived and worked in it and it is their story we wish eventually to tell once restoration is complete.

The Ivan Project's official name is "The Guard's Life". It is hoped that through being in the van visitors will experience accounts of what a railway Guard's working conditions were like: some of the serious and difficult duties that were expected of him as well as the ever present lighter side of life. Can you imagine gripping a handbrake wheel with white knuckles at the back of a loose-coupled goods

train hurtling down the Wellington Bank, not even able to see out? We forget that it was par for the course at one time.

Here we'll take a short look at what we now know from our van's history (short because it's all we know!). No.81 is a Great Northern Railway (Ireland) 20-ton goods brake van built at Dundalk to Diagram 158A. It emerged into traffic on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1945.

Between entering traffic and restoration there is not a lot of information available, but two photographs in which No.81 can be positively identified have come to light. One shows it sitting outside Portadown goods shed around 1956, as part of an interesting background to the intended subject - S-class No.174 "Carrantuohill" departing on a train to Derry.



*Ben has landed a nice warm job, freeing up parts of the brake gear. (J.J. Friel)*

The second photo appears on page 51 of Norman Johnston's *The Great Northern Railway (Ireland) in Colour* (Colourpoint Books, 2005) and is a 1959 Des Fitzgerald shot of No.81 in the company of SG3 No.49 (UTA No.36) on a lifting train at Stone Bridge on the Portadown-Armagh line. Nothing is perfect it seems ... were this line ever to re-open perhaps Ivan could help put things right on an RPSI steam ballast train?

Between 1959 and 1983 nothing is known for sure. A few others of the class were retrospectively fitted with vacuum pipes and application valves (but no brake cylinders), but 81 remained without this equipment to the end of its working life. It is fairly certain that the van would have been used in the early stages of the Magheramorne spoil trains and that it arrived at Whitehead in 1983, according to Five Foot Three No.29.

As an aside, we thought we'd got Ivan's Whitehead arrival date as being the same time as No.85 Merlin in May 1982, behind a NIR diesel-hydraulic loco. But photos of this event show the van in question to be NIR C461 - a van that, as you will discover, was destined to cross Ivan's path for a final time 25 years later. So we trawled Five Foot Three instead and found that Ivan was bought in 1983 by then Carriage & Wagon Officer (Northern) Alan Edgar using money specially donated to a coach appeal (yes, he did buy coaches, three in fact!). Some work was done on it by NIACRO (Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders) who at the time did loads of C&W work for the RPSI. A Charles Friel colour picture from 1983 shows that a red 'X' has been painted on Ivan by NIR to indicate it was to be scrapped; subsequently this was painted over in yellow and 'RPSI' written clearly next to it.



*Adam and James excavating the ballast tanks. (J.J. Friel)*

Hastily fitted with a crude vacuum pipe to apply the brake to Train Rides coaches, the van seems to have been used for a few years. The next mention on paper of No.81 in RPSI ownership marks a sad event; it was one of the casualties of the 1996 arson attack in which three coaches were totally destroyed. In no fit state to be seen by the public, the van was relegated to the very back of the site and, in a moment of inattention on the part of the driver, took a dive off the end of the rails.

In July 2006 the Youths re-railed Ivan at the back of the yard, from where it was hauled back to civilisation by No.186 the following week. Photos show Michael McCann helping with this, along with Peter Scott, Thomas Charters, Francis Richards and Dermot Mackie giving advice on the use of hydraulic and screw jacks together with chain hoists. Ivan then sat at the front of the loco shed for the next 4 months as the Youths, now joined by Philip Newell and Aaron Wilkinson, undertook something of an archaeological dig in the ballast tanks.

These under-floor tubs had the sole purpose of raising the van's weight to 20 tons, giving it the

adhesion needed to create a massive braking force. The ballast tanks contained whatever Dundalk had going as scrap at the time, but 60 years later, with no protection from the roof or floor, the drainage holes in the bottom of the tanks had become blocked with compacted rust and the tanks had filled with rainwater. Amongst the vast quantity of waterlogged swarf we removed were three locomotive big ends, numerous axlebox covers of different sizes (some from 1889), smashed platform seat ends (intact examples can be seen at Dundalk and Drogheda), gear wheels, a diesel engine flywheel (from a railcar?) and what turned out to be Q-class superheater blanking plates (they fitted No.131 perfectly). But what was really needed to progress the overhaul was money.

Into the breach stepped a generous member who had no particular interest in the van itself but who had the foresight to see what the expanding Youth Team might be capable of were they given the chance. We are ever grateful for the donation that allowed Ivan to move to the Henry Dunleath Locomotive Workshop for some serious work in November 2006, the first time it had been inside in many, many years. At this time too, our application for a grant to the Northern Ireland Museums Council (NIMC) came to fruition; their assistance came to 65%. Further success with an application to BT has ensured enough for a complete refurbishment to running order.

During its two-month stint in the Workshop, with Youths undertaking or being shown the process at all times, Ivan's seized brake gear was removed before the van was de-wheeled and the axleboxes taken out for examination. One box in particular lacked any white metal on the bearing and had a badly scored journal, symptoms of a hot-box. In turn the wheelsets were craned to the wheel lathe and the journals polished up by resident lathe-master Brian Hill. The Youths participated in re-metalling the offending bearing and, after it had been machined, smoothing it to fit snugly on the journal using a bearing scraper and 'Engineer's Blue'.

We now realised we were in serious trouble as the underside of the van was extremely rusty; the brake gear was jammed solid, with no chance of moving without serious work, and the leaf springs were all rusted solid at different levels due to the angle Ivan had derailed with only one wheel left on the track. The leaf springs were too far gone to be re-conditioned, whilst to add insult to injury it was found the springs of the Larne-end buffers had punched clean through the buffer beam. The buffers were hastily removed to allow inspection of the buffer beam.

At exactly this time, word arrived from the Downpatrick & County Down Railway that they had an identical GNR van which they would allow us to take parts from ... on condition of course. During negotiation with the DCDR it was agreed that we could take the parts we needed (the four leaf springs, a buffer spring, most of the brake gear, veranda and cabin doors and fittings such as hinges and latches and many photos of details) if the RPSI re-metalled a bearing for one of their ballast hoppers. On our last foray to Downpatrick this van was identified from a single battered piece of wood as NIR number C461, the very van that accompanied No.85 Merlin to Whitehead in 1982. C461 was of less historical interest since it had been modified - probably in NIR times - to have roller-bearing axleboxes while Ivan had retained simple bearings, the footsteps also differed from the original design, some of the doors had been removed and large parts of the outside had been sheeted in steel. It is difficult to say which van was in the worse state overall, but Ivan could only be restored with the parts from C461. Between the two vans we've now got an Ivan that sits comfortably on its reconditioned donor springs and which has functional brakes - if you pull a rope, as the pedestal isn't installed yet!

Ivan's spell in the Workshop taught us how to re-metal bearings, polish journals, the use of oxy-acetylene both as a cutting tool and, less viciously, for heating and re-shaping metal. Much less stressful was the process of labelling everything that came off the van to ensure that it went back in its exact position on re-assembly. Outside the RPSI James, Edward and Ben were attending an evening tech class in Belfast from where they churned out, week after week, the large pins needed to hold on the brake gear and other useful items.



*Although it looks as though he is preparing to tackle some kind of delicacy the author is about to apply a scraper to one of the axle bearings. (J.J. Friel)*

Re-wheeled with four refurbished axleboxes, but still lacking brake gear and with wooden blocks in lieu of springs, Ivan was moved over a pit in the Locomotive Shed in January 2007 and the dirty work really began. The sheer number of man-hours that went into preparation for painting between January and July 2007 cannot be counted - it was LOTS!!! Most of this was done on our backs or cramped in confined spaces with needle gun, dust mask, ear defenders and goggles which had a tendency to steam up. Hammerite was used to protect the floor girders whilst surfaces exposed directly to the elements got four coats of paint, finishing up with gloss black.

In between (and mainly when we daren't produce dust as the nearby No.90 was being painted for the DCDR) we stripped the brake gear and springs acquired from C461. Finding one of these to need several bottom leaves replaced we dismantled the best original Ivan spring and cut and shaped new small bottom leaves from the large top leaves. These, together with the salvageable leaves from the C461 spring needed heated, re-shaped and tempered before the buckle could fit back on. Members of the NIMC visited the site on this day and were much impressed to see us lugging around red-hot pieces of metal, some of which were longer even than the roaring furnace being used to heat them, and then quenching them in a bath of water!



*Spring fitting day, with James & Edward Friel, Phil Lockett and, peeping coyly, Bob Skingle. (J.J. Friel)*

In the locomotive shed Ivan's useable brake gear was combined with that donated from C461, re-conditioned and reassembled. The ballast tanks were finally emptied with the aid of a Kango hammer and found to be in perfect condition. The underside of the van was de-scaled and thoroughly painted, the Larne End buffers were overhauled and replaced onto steel plate bolted on to seal the holes in the buffer beam. A new vacuum through-pipe was fitted along the bottom of the van, curving under the ballast tanks, with a bag and connection for an application valve at each end. During Train Ride operations this will allow the guard, in Ivan, to operate the vacuum brake in the attendant coaches,



although the van itself will remain fitted solely with a handbrake. Simultaneously in the Workshop the four springs from C461 were being re-conditioned and were almost ready for fitting. During this time Adam Lohoff, currently tackling his GCSEs, joined the Youth Team.

On Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> July 2007, exactly one year after the start of the Project, No.3BG was steamed and Ivan emerged from the loco shed after 6 months of serious work. This was the day the springs were re-fitted. Borrowing the very capable Bob Skingle from Peter Scott's team for the day, we lifted the van one end at a time with the sheer-legs. Following several hours of struggling with crowbars, chain hoists and hydraulic jacks, the springs were inserted and the hangers and fasteners put in place. Ivan then moved (very smoothly!) to the carriage shed for the third and final stage of its overhaul - fitting the wood.

Due to Train Rides, holidays and other commitments, work stalled somewhat until the end of August when a large order was placed for wood to cover the floor, roof and side planks. Odd pieces such as doorposts were left to a later stage and are expected to arrive in the near future. All of the measurements required had come from the remains of the original wood on 81 and C461, catalogued before removal - a painstaking task for the Friel brothers. The wood was delivered on a vintage Bedford flatbed lorry, complete with Brian Kelly and assistant from Scrabo Timber Merchants, Newtownards, in mid-September and was soon stacked in the carriage shed.

Since then the pile has steadily diminished as the wood is measured, shaped and painted into ever larger and more complicated components. This has required the aid of just about everyone on site with some knowledge of woodwork since none of us had the first idea - as evidenced by the occasional mangled plank No.186 got for breakfast over the Christmas period! But we are particularly grateful to Ernie Clarke, Francis Richards and Billy Brown whose knowledge and advice have been there when asked for. We are now dab hands at the Jigsaw, Router and Sander, not to mention the invaluable but humble wood chisel and rubber hammer. Mention must also be made of Mark Kennedy who has helped us tremendously with the bench-mounted Circular Saw, not least by resurrecting it after I broke it.

As a final skill to add to the list, late 2007 saw some of the Youths engaged in hot-riveting angle irons to Ivan's verandas. The rust in these areas had forced the metal apart and broken the heads off some of the rivets, so the entire assembly had to be dismantled, cleaned, and re-attached. This is one heritage skill that is not found anywhere else in Ireland and was surely the culmination of over a year of mechanical work to Ivan.

And so as 2008 dawns GNR(I) Brake Van 81 has two walls completed, and much more wood has been cut to shape and needs only its last few coats of paint before fitting. After so many months it is a great relief to have proper steps to climb in and out with, and very shortly there will be (oh, what luxury!) a floor as well. It will probably be years before we get out of the habit of stepping around holes in the floor that will no longer be there! The exterior paintwork livery is slightly bluish grey wood, with white stencil markings on black metalwork. The wood inside the verandas will carry a bright reflective cream finish as will the cabin interior. Suitably, the only artificial light will be from oil hurricane lamps, one of which has been restored from the bonfire pile. The whole thing now looks very smart and is hopefully not too far from authentic. Our thanks must go to Joe Galbraith for keeping us in paint.

It is hoped that Ivan will be complete by July 2008 and enter Train Rides duty at this time. Between now and then there lies the completion of the woodwork and the daunting prospect of casting a stove. Member John Richardson kindly donated his own incomplete brake van stove for our use. It's spent a prolonged time in storage at Whitehead but the next few months should see it used as a template for mould forming and casting replicas. The one thing we do know Ivan's interior had was a stove, and it will be one of the most complicated parts of the van to replace. But, then again, we've learned a lot of new skills in the last year and a half, all of which will be transferable to work on mainline locomotives and carriages in due course. With an average Youth Group age in the early twenties, these skills should

be around for many years to come.

You can view the progressive stages of Ivan's restoration in the 'Photonews' section of the RPSI website. This, combined with a private photonews the Youths keep for their own reference, may well form the most comprehensive record of the restoration of a goods wagon yet seen. As evidenced in the Photonews section we've all pitched in and have gained many new friends in the process. If you're somewhere loosely between the ages of 14 and 30 and fancy some carpentry or metalwork on what we hope will be proved a very worthwhile project then why not get in touch through the website or turn up in person at Whitehead where you will be put in touch with one of us?



*Despite its lower parts being hidden the van shows the advanced state of its restoration. (J.J. Friel)*

And Finally - a few questions someone reading this may be able to help with.

- 1) What was inside a GNR goods brake van, furnishing-wise?
- 2) Do you have any photos of the interior of one of these vans or general photos of No.81?
- 3) Does anyone know an ex-GNR Guard or have any stories involving these vans or the day-to-day work of the Goods Guard or photos of a Guard engaged in his ordinary duties?
- 4) Does anyone know the original GNR number of NIR-numbered van C461?



*And so to bed - for some - as No.4 prepares to leave Central for Whitehead. (J.J. Friel)*



*Showing how well a clean black engine can look, No.4 at Dublin Connolly. (J.J. Friel)*



*No.186 crosses Craigmore viaduct on the Steam Enterprise, 9 Sept 2007. (B. Murphy, Irish News)*