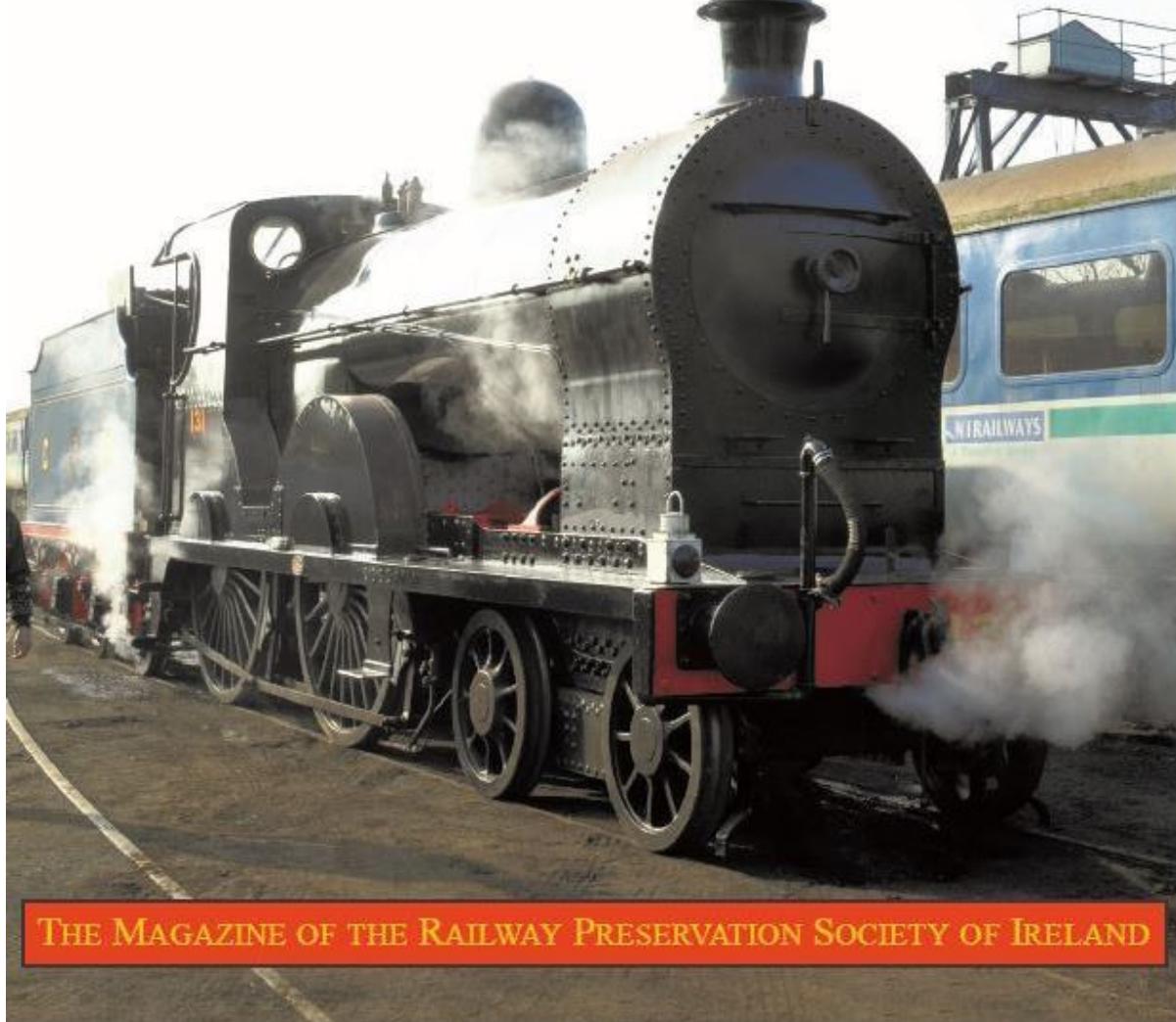


FIVE FOOT THREE



No.61 April 2016



THE MAGAZINE OF THE RAILWAY PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF IRELAND

FIVE FOOT THREE

No.61

April 2016

Editor: Edward Friel

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Front Cover: No. 131 steaming up for her official launch event on 18th March 2015.



No.85 with a gathering of RPSI volunteers and staff, celebrating the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service at Portrush on 26th July 2015. Footplate: Noel Playfair, Mark Buchanan, Anto Dargan. Platform: Colin Gault, Garruth Reid, Phillip Newell, Christine Friel, Terry Conway, Fiona Gault, Edward Friel, Tom Little, James O'Neill, Peter Lindsay, Adam Lohoff, Unknown, Richard Armstrong, Ian James, Denis Campbell, Paul McCann, Roy Thompson, James Friel, David Houston, Nuala Green, Philip Lockett, Norman Close, Mark Walsh, Alastair Maxwell, Ryan Downey, Wesley Chapman, Dermot Mackie, Geoff Moore, Lord O'Neill, Don Wildy, Edmond Creamer, Denis Grimshaw., Thomas Charters, Matthew Tennis. Kneeling at front left: Robin Morton.

EDITORIAL

Edward Friel

It is a busy time for the RPSI. I know that's what I always say, but it's especially true just now as the '2020 project' goes through its most crucial stage. New buildings are shooting up at Whitehead at an astonishing rate, as the 2020 rollercoaster propels us towards a future that hopefully includes financially secure, self-sustaining main line steam, alongside better preservation and conservation of our historic collection and a degree of public access that can enthuse and inspire more supporters and volunteers for the future. Elsewhere, access to Connolly shed gives us a fantastic locomotive facility in Dublin, which we must hope rekindles the initial enthusiasm for putting GM diesels on the main line. Commercially, new opportunities are opening up too, with the Steam Dreams operation pointing to a new market for selling main line trains. The future is uncertain, but hopeful, as we work for an RPSI that can run a sustainable, self-sufficient main line operation, and needs grants and donations only for special projects.

As always, the volunteer workforce is spread thinly, and in part I'm telling you all this to explain, although not excuse, why this magazine continues to appear at such irregular intervals. I know some of you look forward to its arrival on the doormat, and I hope you find this issue worth the wait.

However, a small number of strongly worded letters indicate that others feel quite differently about Five Foot Three, so I would like to take a moment to consider its role and its future.

Once, it was the main source of news for the membership, and particularly of photographs. Today in

this role we have the excellent email bulletins to members which, thanks to Secretary Paul McCann, arrive about 100 times more frequently. And then there is the website, the Facebook page, and the Twitter account, where news, photos and videos are available not only promptly, but freely and to members and non-members alike. What, then, is Five Foot Three's place in all this?



No. 131 moves under her own steam for the first time in preservation on 31st January 2015, with the editor firing and Brian Hill driving.

It is my belief that the biggest threat to the RPSI, particularly in these times of change and upheaval, is that its members can often lose touch with what it is doing. That may seem an odd statement, when there is so much news available, but information and understanding are not the same thing. This magazine is aimed primarily at RPSI members and, by taking time to review the events of the past year, gives you, the members, the broader context of what's going on. It is my ambition that it should tell you not only what has happened, but why, and what's planned to happen next, and why. You are not an insider looking in, you need to understand what's going on so you can take part in it, influence it,

object to it, or take charge of it. So I make no apology for the continuing emphasis on RPSI current affairs. The society is changing, and moving into new areas of activity, and we can't afford to leave anyone behind. Besides, a shelf full of Five Foot Threes will preserve all this information for future reference when Facebook and Twitter die out - as well they might: remember MSN groups and Fotopic?

Meanwhile, of course, Five Foot Three has also always been a source of historical information on Irish railways, and in this issue we present three (or at least two and a half) articles on the heyday and the declining years of steam, on which, of course, there is always more to be said. Indeed, while it is sometimes impossible for me to find interesting news photos that have not already been published online, it is still sometimes possible to find fascinating photographs from 50 or 60 years ago that haven't yet made their way into print. Apologies to Michael Baker for the insertion of the drawing on page 45 - it isn't entirely relevant to his article, but I've been looking for an excuse to present this particular oddity to the public. I promise it's not an April Fool!

On the subject of letters, I would welcome more, hopefully constructive, feedback on the magazine to the editorial e-mail address, 5ft3magazine@gmail.com, or to the postal address on page 1.

Please also get in touch if you feel you could contribute an article of a quality to rival those in this issue on your own specialist Irish railway subject.

If you want to contribute recent RPSI photographs to the magazine, please do so using the editorial address. If you send them somewhere else I won't necessarily receive them, and I do have to think twice about reusing pictures already published elsewhere.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Denis Grimshaw

Just around a year ago - although it feels more like a lifetime! - we were at the end of a very extensive programme of construction works at Whitehead, mainly funded by GROW and Ulster Garden Villages. The facilities provided comprised a new inspection/ash pit and concrete apron in front of the Loco sheds, the car park, secure new fencing along the back of the platform and elsewhere - and last, but far from least - the station building (or station house as it is often called).

But - no rest for the wicked! - the brakes weren't applied, and the regulator is now fully open for the main phase of the overall development, with final confirmation of the funding from Tourism NI to match that of the Heritage Lottery Fund. We are extremely grateful to all our funders, whose joint contributions have enabled our entire "2020 Vision" project to go ahead - with completion expected well before the eponymous year.

For the record, financial contributions - some in six and seven figures - have been received from:

- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Tourism NI (formerly NI Tourist
- Board)
- Generating Rural Opportunities
- Within South Antrim (GROW)
- Carrickfergus Council (now amalgamated with Larne Council as
- Mid & East Antrim Council)
- Ulster Garden Villages
- Various RPSI members and other
- private contributors

In this last category, we must particularly thank the significant number of members who have made substantial loans to the Society to help our cash-flow situation during the building programme, as grants are only paid up to two months in arrears, placing a huge short-term strain on the Society's finances.

Whilst most of the works associated with the above funders have been undertaken by external contractors, many significant projects and tasks have been carried out to very professional standards by our own volunteers and small team of HEI employees - such as the shifting or removal of stored equipment and vehicles of all types, as well as track laying by our "Thursday site squad".

The extent of site clearance required for the main building works also entailed moving four of our Mark 2 carriages to Dundalk station for storage, courtesy of Iarnród Éireann.

All this has enabled the main contract to be awarded to MSM Ltd, with site works starting in September 2015 and completion due by May 2016. After that, however, there will still be a lot of effort required from ourselves to get everything "up and running".

Other vital tasks include the selection and appointment of a General Manager and a Marketing Manager - as required (and financed for the first three years) by HLF. The role of these managers will be to bring our site and train operations up to a standard and extent that will enable to Society's operations (including maintenance) to be self-supporting in the future. We will have to quickly learn how to maximise the benefit of our employees, whilst retaining all the help and input of our volunteers.

Whilst most of the above narrative relates largely to our Whitehead-based activities, we are still actively exploring potential options for a Dublin operating base, where we could undertake significantly more restoration and maintenance work, and provide secure covered accommodation for all our Dublin-based carriages. Despite a couple of setbacks we are still actively pursuing some possible opportunities. In the meantime we are very grateful to Iarnród Éireann for the continued use of their property and facilities at Inchicore and at Connolly Locomotive Shed. The licence to use Connolly Shed in particular has transformed the safe storage, light maintenance and operation of our Dublin-based locomotives.

Whilst this report has concentrated largely on current and proposed premises, equipment and facilities, we must ensure that the Society continues to operate our train and premises safely, and enthusiastically promotes and manages our operations so as to retain and enlarge our volunteer base, and to successfully and safely keep our trains running in both the short and the long term. The most important assets are our volunteers - in all fields.

Meanwhile, our usual programme of main-line steam (and now also occasionally diesel) railtours has continued apace - in fact at an even greater pace, with new ventures in the form of the Charter Train market, whereby established external companies charter a complete train from the RPSI and sell seats on it in the open market. This has been quite common in Britain and much of Europe for many years, but is new to Ireland. Not all potential passengers are particularly interested in steam traction, and the external scenery and internal ambience and catering are of major importance.

Such operations require a high-quality product, particularly in terms of reliable comfort and service. As the RPSI is now effectively the only organisation able to provide such facilities anywhere in Ireland, there appears to be scope for several such ventures per year - usually of several days duration. We do need to ensure, however, that we do not undermine our own RPSI "Railtour" programme and its long-established market, particularly as all such operations can place considerable strain on our limited base of volunteers.

As well as our "front line" volunteers who are often visible on our locomotives or at work in our trains, there are many more involved in administration, finance, communication, planning and other more

general, but nevertheless vital, duties.

In the next few months we will also have to learn how to maximise the benefit of professional administration staff (courtesy of the Heritage Lottery Fund), and work with them to the best overall advantage of the Society.

This also highlights the ongoing commitment in many guises and roles, and the huge manpower (and womanpower!) input, long hours worked (often at unsocial times) and general support and assistance from our own members, both North and South, whether on our Board, as designated “Posts of Special Responsibility”, as other regular or occasional volunteers for particular tasks such as administration, finance, planning and communications, or just as ordinary members.

Without their ongoing support the entire RPSI operation would simply cease.

Keep up the good work!

NEWS FROM THE BOARD

Paul McCann

Over the past two years the Board has been absorbed, not so much by the running of trains but by the administration of grants, being caught in the middle of political manoeuvring outside our control and being forced to meet ever tighter deadlines.

On the bright side, we have had money spent on facilities at Whitehead which is beyond what our founding members could ever thought possible.

Board: This is probably where we need substantially strengthened. Since the AGM in Dublin in January 2015, when we were unable to fill a couple of vacancies, we had two further departures, when Francis Richards sadly passed away in March and Niall Kelly resigned in June; Mark Healy will not be standing in 2016. We seriously need to boost the Board with high quality people who will bring business acumen to the table. At present, the governing board is:

Chairman: Denis Grimshaw

Vice-Chairman: (vacant)

Secretary: Paul McCann

Treasurer: Bill Garrioch

Directors: Mervyn Darragh

Mark Healy

Dermot Mackie

Fergus McDonnell

Joe McKeown

Phillip Newell

Peter Scott

Mark Walsh

The vital Vice-Chairman post remains vacant, plus there are three Director posts to be filled, so please ask yourself if you could make a contribution to the Society’s management.

2020 Project: This has been the most significant development during the year, with contractors coming on site in September to start work. Suffice to say that hundreds of lorry-loads of earth were removed from the Larne and seaward sides of the site, and the buildings went up very fast in the good weather up to the end of October. At the time of writing, the buildings are mostly complete externally, although there is still significant internal work to be completed.

The exterior of the NCC-style signal cabin on the platform is mostly complete. The only significant

feature not yet started is the turntable, although work has started by HEI to overhaul the parts recovered from Belfast Central Service Depot and which have been lying neglected in the open for 20 years. Full marks to the contractors, MSM, who have responded magnificently to a very tight schedule.

The above work has left Society finances in a precarious state. Yes, the work is funded but the nature of grants in these times is that the money has to be spent in advance and reclaimed. This was only possible by taking out a huge short-term loan and also negotiating a large overdraught facility. But to be doubly covered, an appeal was put out to members for loans to cover against cashflow problems over the short period from September 2015 until spring 2016. We are extremely gratified with the response - which was magnificent, at approximately £140,000 to date!

Finance: Money problems have been alluded to above but, as always, costs didn't come down any during the year. Fortunately, our railtours were for the most part fully booked and with a second season of the Railtours Ireland diesel tour accompanied by the first Steam Dreams tour of Ireland the outlook is good for tour income.

Volunteers: The new charter operations are a severe burden on our volunteer base, as are the month-long Santa campaigns, and a strengthening of the pool of volunteers would be no bad thing - we don't want to be paying for staff if it can be avoided. However, it must be recorded that, since the information day at Whitehead in November 2014, a steady trickle of new volunteers has emerged. It has also helped that Alastair Maxwell has taken on the post of Volunteer Co-ordinator. So, if any of our members can encourage another to join or better still volunteer, then please do get in touch with Alastair.

General: One of the consultants engaged as part of the development funding has described our website as 'archaic'. While this may be true in terms of its visual impact and compared to fancy 'bells and whistle' sites which are all show and no substance, I think that it can stand on its own in terms of content and of its information being up to date and informative. Along with the Twitter and Facebook pages and email list (over 5,000), it is the main means by which we get our trains booked out for free. Anyway, it looks like it will have to endure a makeover in the near future.

Members: For the past few years the membership numbers have stabilised and in 2015 it was 1,029.

It has been a hard year for the Society as we have said goodbye to quite a number of members and friends who have passed away, some who were with us from the very start. Please remember them, as their vision in harder times helped make possible what the Society is benefitting from today.

Thank You: As always, thanks must go to all who have served on the Board throughout the year. The burden remains onerous (even more so in 2015) so thank you to all who served there or on one of the various subcommittees.

The Posts of Special Responsibility to the Secretary for the year were: Charles Friel (Belfast Meetings); Mark Kennedy (Curatorial Adviser); Philip Lockett (Web Manager); Ciaran McAteer (Legal Advisor); Barry Carse (Dublin area membership queries); Mary Glendinning (answer-phone). Charles Friel has taken on the role of Museum Curator and has spent an inordinate amount of time this year on helping to develop, among other things, the display interpretations for the new museum and on-train apps!

As usual, thanks to the railway company management and crews for their indulgence.

LOCOMOTIVE REPORT

Peter Scott

No.3 LPHC 0-6-0ST loco "R H Smyth". Whitehead. In store.

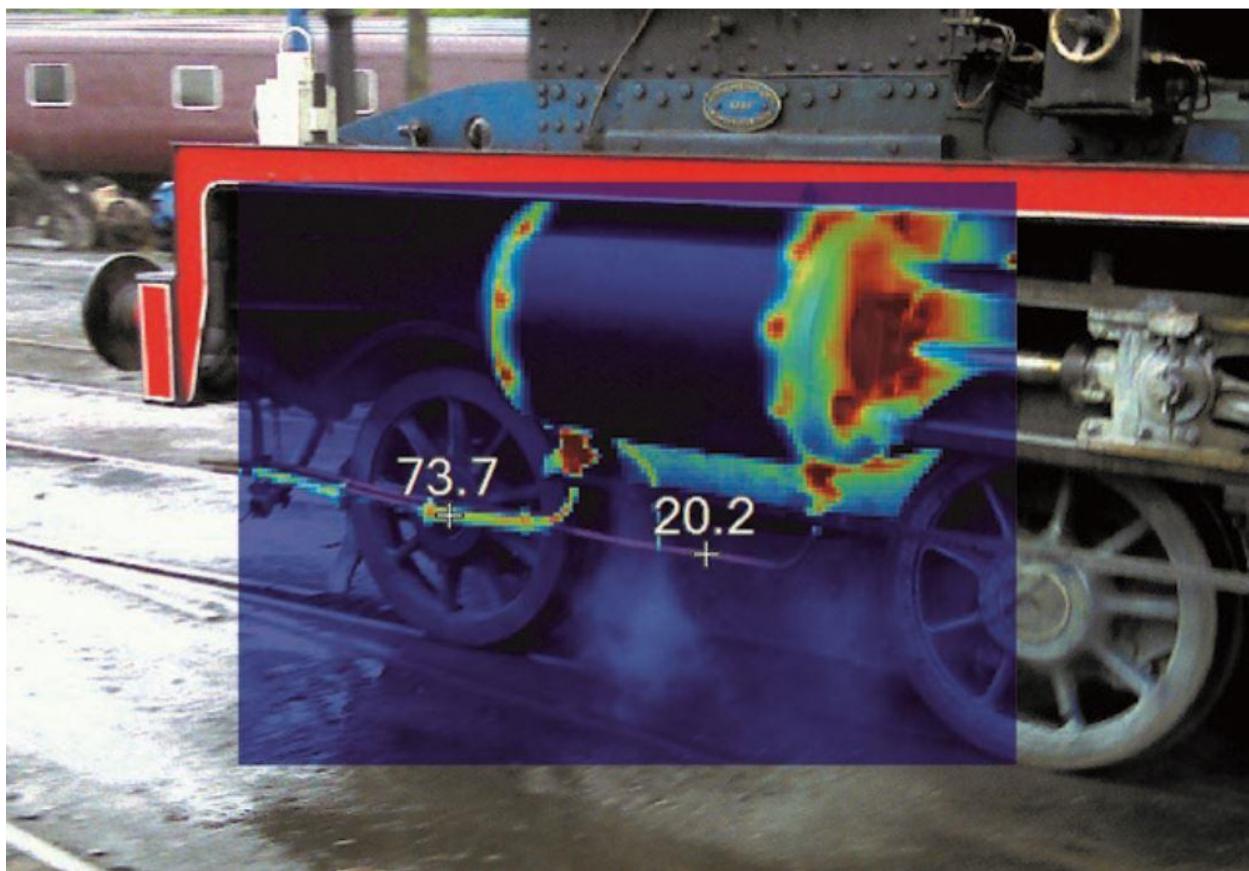
Boiler repairs required, including renewal of crown stays.

No.3BG A Guinness, Son and Co 0-4-0ST shunting engine. Whitehead, overhaul.

Work on No.3BG was delayed while all resources - both HEI and RPSI volunteers - were concentrated on the No.131 overhaul, which was subject to time constraint. The work on No.3BG has now resumed, the boiler has had some platework repairs together with retubing and it has now passed its hydraulic test. The coal bunker (which forms part of the cab at the fireman's side of the loco) has been renewed. Other minor mechanical repairs are being carried out, and the smokebox is to be renewed. The object is to have No.3BG ready for train ride and shunting duties when the redeveloped site reopens to the public.

No.4 LMS NCC 2-6-4T mixed traffic engine. Dublin, in traffic.

Returned to traffic on 14th June, following its 10 year boiler overhaul and minor mechanical repairs. The loco worked light engine to Dublin on 2nd August, where it is currently based. One gratifying discovery has been the avoidance of "Hot Axlebox Detector" false alarms - a problem which had plagued the loco in the past. No.4 operated the Dublin-based "Santa" trains.



As part of the investigation into causes of false warnings from trackside hot box detectors, a thermal imaging camera - which works on the same principle as the detectors - was brought in to identify hot spots on the locomotives.

No.85's drain cock pipes were found to be an issue, but the solution is simple - Brasso!

In this picture, parts of the pipes have been polished, lowering their emissivity so that, as far as the camera is concerned, they appear to be some 50°C cooler.

No.27 UTA 0-6-4T loco "Lough Erne". In store, Whitehead.

Major overhaul required.

Peter Scott inspects No.85 Merlin during the water stop at Dundalk en route to Dublin on 7th May 2015, the first day of the 'South Munster' Railtour.



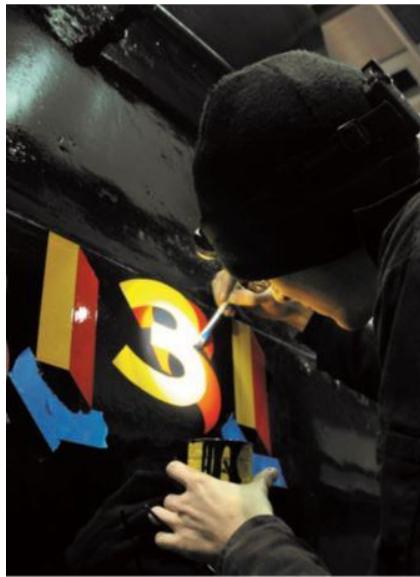
No.85 GNR(I) 4-4-0 compound express passenger loco “Merlin”. Whitehead, in traffic.

Operated the “Mince Pie” special to Dublin and back on Sunday 27th December, and is now out of traffic for annual boiler exam and minor repairs. In contrast to No.4, No.85 proved troublesome with the hot axlebox detectors. The problem has been largely solved by fitting of insulation to vulnerable hot surfaces and other means to reduce the influence of hot pipes. It is the Society’s policy to “engineer out” such problems rather than to seek exemptions.

No. 131 GNR(I) 4-4-0 express passenger loco.

Overhaul of the locomotive was completed and the locomotive was steamed on Saturday 31st January 2015 - for the first time in 50 years. Recommissioning then proceeded sufficiently to enable one test run from Whitehead to Carrickfergus, which took place after normal traffic on Sunday 22nd February 2015. The loco has been temporarily paired with No.171’s tender. To operate in traffic, No.131 will need its own tender, also AWS/TPWS, OTMR and other electrics. Tender No.37 (“E” class, built in 1948 for a U or UG class loco) is being overhauled and new bodywork constructed. The existing “E” class tank and coal space were too small and also inappropriate in appearance for No.131, which ran for most of its life with a 3,500 gallon “D” class tender similar to that fitted to No.171. Tender No.37 is being rebuilt in this manner. The work funded by GROW South Antrim was complete at the test run

stage and did not include the tender, so the rebuilding of the tender, fitting of electrics and painting is being funded by the RPSI and will be done as quickly as possible - an appeal for funds has been made. A date for return to traffic cannot really be predicted, it depends upon the success of the appeal.



James Friel painting the cab side numeral on 16th March 2015.

No. 171 GNR(I) 4-4-0 express passenger loco "Slieve Gullion". Whitehead, overhaul.

The locomotive had been sent to a contractor based at Shildon for overhaul. The work was partly completed and the tender was returned to Whitehead on 22nd December 2014. Following the insolvency of the contractor, the loco and its detached parts were recovered and returned to Whitehead on Thursday 12th March. The GROW funding has been used to best effect to complete some of the outstanding overhaul and render the loco fit for static display in the short term. Because of the delay incurred with No.171, advantage has been taken to bring forward the return of No.131 to traffic instead. The plan is now to have No.171 available in several years. This will avoid the problem of too many locos with their boilers "in ticket" at once and nothing available for overhaul. The outstanding work on No.171 is principally completion of boiler repairs (patch screws, crown stays and retubing), also attention to cylinders, valves and mechanical reassembly.



The trusty shear legs in use to fit No.131's boiler on 21st December 2014.

No.184 GSWR 0-6-0 goods loco. In store, Whitehead.

Major overhaul required.

No.186 GSWR 0-6-0 goods engine. In store, Whitehead.

Requires 10 year boiler overhaul.

No.461 DSER 2-6-0 goods engine. Dublin, in traffic.

In traffic, Dublin. No.461 has suffered steaming problems and some investigation has been carried out - with nothing identified so far.



In this view from March 2015, the GROW funding deadline has passed and at close of play the score is Whitehead: 1, Shildon: nil. Having completed No. 131, the HEI team will have to be called upon to work the same magic on No.171 before we can turn out three GNR engines together.

B134 General Motors Bo-Bo diesel electric loco (single end). In store, Inchicore.

Move to Connolly Shed intended, then assessment of condition.

B141 IÉ General Motors Bo-Bo diesel electric loco. In store, Inchicore.

In store, Inchicore. Move to Connolly Shed intended, then assessment of condition.

B142 IÉ General Motors Bo-Bo diesel electric loco. In traffic (yard only) Whitehead.

Shunting duties at Whitehead. Bodywork repairs required. To operate on the main line, loco would require AWS/TPWS fitted, together with general refurbishment.

B175 IÉ General Motors Bo-Bo diesel electric loco. In store, Inchicore.

In store, Inchicore. Move to Connolly Shed intended, then assessment of condition.

No.1 CSÉ Carlow Ruston and Hornsby diesel mechanical shunter. In store, Whitehead.

Needs gearbox repairs.

No.23 Irish Shell “Planet” diesel mechanical shunter. In store, Whitehead.

In store, Whitehead. Needs engine and gearbox overhaul.

Unilok UTA Road-Rail shunter. Whitehead, in store.

Connolly Shed

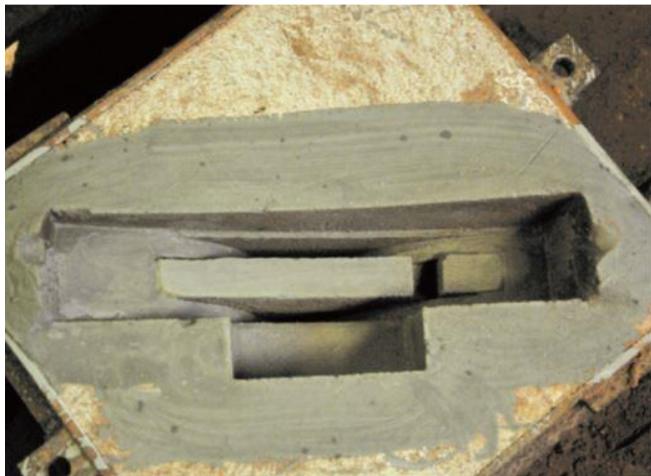
A major development is the use of the loco shed at Connolly, which has now been fettled up and made secure. Locos 4 and 461 are based there. There is only basic equipment to date. However this is a major step forward in providing essential facilities, which were seriously lacking at Connolly. Ever since the possibility of the Society gaining use of the shed was first mooted, it has been the intention to house both steam and diesel locomotives under the one roof at that location. A project is now underway to plan and execute the transfer of diesel locomotives 134, 141, and 175 from Inchicore to the shed. It is hoped that the locomotives will be in their new home during the first quarter of 2016.



Nos. 461, 4 and 85 in the cavernous Connolly locomotive shed on 27th December 2015, with plenty of room remaining for the three GM diesels expected to move there in 2016. No.85 was visiting to take water before returning to Whitehead with the ‘Mince Pie’ train. (S. Comiskey)

Whitehead

We have lost the use of the foundry during the development work.



Casting brake blocks in the old Whitehead foundry, January 2015. Top left: making moulds; above: pouring molten iron; top right, the resulting rough casting. The foundry - a lean-to building behind the engine shed - has now been demolished to make way for a much larger workshop building, which will incorporate a new foundry.

WHITEHEAD CARRIAGE REPORT

Phillip Newell

The past year has been a reasonably challenging one though, with new and improved maintenance procedures and a greater emphasis on preventative maintenance, I hope that we will gradually start to see an increase in internal and external appearance over the next few years.

The year started with some corrosion repairs to Nos 180 and 300 as well as some minor paint work. Unfortunately the paint used for the carriage roofs reacted with the undercoat layer and we are now, 6 months later, back to square one. A lot of time and money wasted though not to be repeated again.

During this time the electrical squad were extremely busy rewiring Dining Car No. 547 to remove many peculiarities (to put it politely) that had been added to the original wiring over the years. The Electrical Squad continued to work away on the rake attending to all the issues that arose during the year. In addition, one major project that was completed was the reconfiguration of the heating system. In the past the air warmed by the steam was blown around the coaches gradually heating the coaches up. However, when the loco was disconnected the fans continued and undid all their good work by blowing cold air around the coach, dramatically decreasing passenger comfort. Now the fan units are controlled by a thermostat that will only operate when there is steam in the heat exchanger. This involved wiring in the old thermostats as well as removing the old DC motors and replacing them with new lightweight, more efficient fans driven by the AC supply from the generator.



Open brake No. 460 undergoing heavy repairs to the end and floor areas in the engine shed. When it returns to traffic 460 will provide useful van space on the train, as well as carrying passengers and a generator.

Steam heat has been a general talking point over the last year so the decision was taken to overhaul the Dutch Van and carry out some general improvements. This again involved the Electrical Squad who have done a tremendous job rewiring the vehicle. The boilers have now both been examined and it is hoped to have both available by Easter to provide heat for any diesel charters that may come our way in the future.

For a long time secondary door lock (SDL) panels were a cause for concern. However, a company across the water has been employed to overhaul and service the panels, so we now have a satisfying supply in case of a failure. There was only one door lock failure this year though thankfully it was easily renewed and the train was not shortened by a coach!

In general the running set behaved itself - however, life is never easy and the coaches have gained several wheel-flats during the year which all need to be attended to, delaying the overhaul and subsequent return of other vehicles. We swapped one bogie in 547 in October and we hope to change another in the New Year as we work through the fleet.



Generator / heating van No. 462 also received attention in 2015.

On the overhaul front, open brake No. 460 has finally progressed, with end sheet repairs now complete, new generator overhauled and fitted, new floor installed, and is now having its running gear attended to. It is hoped this coach may make an appearance in the second half of 2016.

Work is shortly to begin on former IÉ Mark 2d, RPSI 304, which will allow us to eventually increase our seating capacity. The intention is to keep the vehicle as is with electric heat and air conditioning.

One final note is that the new shed extensions are rapidly taking shape at Whitehead, allowing the rake to finally be under cover. This will hopefully cut routine maintenance as well as allowing us to undo 10 years of exposure to the elements.

BELFAST AREA OPERATIONS

Mervyn Darragh

The reporting period covers the period from late May 2014 to December 2015.

Having worked the 'Saint Canice' Monday train operation to Belfast, No.461 returned to Dublin light engine on Thursday 29th May.

As part of North Down Council's Seashore Festival the Council chartered the train on 7th and 8th June, with two return trains to Bangor each day hauled by No.85. The Saturday was a wet dreary day but the train running was excellent. The Sunday was a fine sunny day but the running was the opposite. The first train came to a halt just short of topping Craigavad bank. A combination of steaming and/or brake problems resulted in the train stalling. Unfortunately, delays occurred and when the train managed to reach Bangor a decision was taken by the Company to fail the train. The carriages were returned to

Whitehead behind a GM diesel and No.85 returned light engine.

The ever popular Steam & Jazz trains hauled by No.85 worked to Portadown on four consecutive Friday evenings from 13th June. The Society on Saturday 9th August again assisted the Whitehead Festival, centred at the adjoining football field, with the popular afternoon in-house train rides performed by No.85.



No.85 at Great Victoria Street, the starting point for the Portrush Flyer, on 27th July 2014.

The 2014 Portrush Flyer had an appropriately powerful locomotive available, in the form of No.85. The trains operated on Sundays 27th July, 10th and 24th August and 14th September. The first train was unique in that it started from Great Victoria Street. This was due to the planned Garth Brooks concert in Dublin; a number of special trains were due to operate in connection with it, meaning that Belfast Central Station would not have suitable 'platform dwell time' available for the Flyer. In the event the concert was cancelled but the train started as planned from the former Great Northern terminus. The last Flyer was run later than normal to facilitate a large contingent from the Railway Heritage Association who attended the Society's 50th Anniversary dinner in Belfast City Hall the previous evening. With a two-hourly Sunday passenger train service operating, water was taken from a tanker at Ballymena in both directions.

On Saturday 13th September the Society opened its site and performed train rides in connection with the European Heritage Weekend.

The next main line operation was a Steam Enterprise worked by No.85 to Dublin on Sunday 12th October. Unfortunately despite fine running, over-sensitive hot axle box detectors south of Dundalk and near Laytown were triggered, affecting the timings and reducing passenger time in Dublin.

Halloween produced the ever popular Broomstick Belle with two fully-booked passenger return

operations to Whitehead. No.85 again performed the honours on Sunday 26th October.

In-house train operations again took place at Whitehead on Saturday 29th November in connection with the Whitehead Victorian Street Fair. Good weather for the time of year saw large family groups visit and partake of the train rides.



It was back to normal on 31st August, with the Flyer departing from Belfast Central. Niall Kelly, Stephen Comiskey and Edward Friel with No.85.

The 2014 Santa Train programme followed the tried and trusted pattern, with 6 operating days, commencing on Sunday 30th November and ending on Saturday 20th December. Thirteen trains operated Belfast Central to Whitehead while on Sunday 7th December two trains operated from Portadown to Lisburn. All of these trains were fully booked and were worked by No.85.

The year closed with the now-traditional Mince Pie train to Dublin on Sunday 28th December 2014. This was a fitting end to the Society's 50th Anniversary Year. No.85 and the crew were in excellent form, although once again running was marred by enforced hot axle box detector checks. (Through 2015 this triggering problem hopefully has now been resolved.)

The early months of 2015 were set aside for our annual maintenance programme. This was quiet period was broken early on Sunday 1st February when NIR GM 112 delivered four of the former Gatwick Mark 2f carriages 8941 to 8944, acquired by the RPSI from NIR. The remaining four, 8945 to 8948, and Mk2b generator 8911, remain at Lisburn, kindly stored temporarily by NIR for the Society.

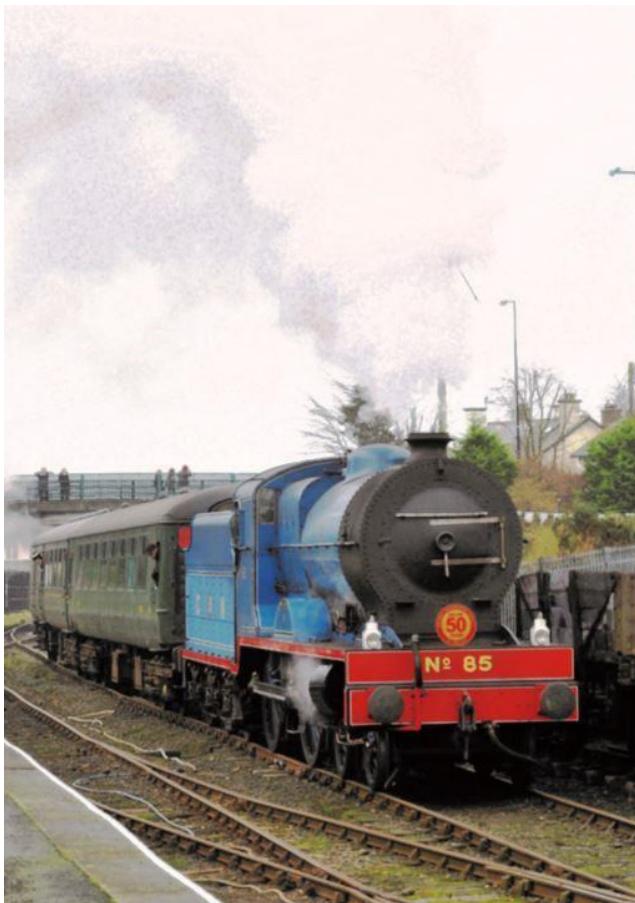


On 22nd February 2015, the Qs class returned to the main line as No. 131 made a late night test run to Carrickfergus. The restoration of No. 131 by our subsidiary company, Heritage Engineering Ireland, in a tight timescale, is a remarkable achievement.



No. 85 takes water at Thurles, southbound with the Cravens carriages on 9th May 2015.

Following the rebuilding of No.131 to meet funder's terms that the locomotive must be steamed and operated within a prescribed timescale, with the agreement of NIR the locomotive was allowed onto the main line late on Sunday 22nd February, under a full possession of the line. It worked Whitehead to Carrickfergus and return. Not unnaturally some teething issues were identified, but the operation was deemed successful.



No.85 operating rides at Whitehead on 29th November 2014. It seems the compound can turn her hand to anything... although the Guinness engine would be more economical!

Now a familiar addendum to the steam railtour weekend, 'The Strand' diesel railtour operated on Friday 8th May to Rosslare Strand. This was hauled by GM 084 and first worked to M3 Parkway on the reinstated line between Clonsilla Junction and the new station, north of Dunboyne on the former Navan line, and included the rarely-used line from Newcomen Junction to Connolly. Unfortunately the rain started while working south through Dublin and what can only be described as a very wet day then ensured. Planned photographic opportunities were a virtual wash out but, as a plus, on-train retail outlets virtually sold out of stock by the time of our return to Dublin!

Immediately following the May railtour, in connection with a 'Bangor 150' event, No.85 worked two return trains to Bangor on Sunday 17th May to commemorate the opening of the line from Holywood to Bangor on 18th May 1865.

To test the passenger market a 'Steam Enterprise' was organised for Sunday 7th June behind No.85. This was very popular. It had a full train of passengers, and operated to time - with no hot box detectors

The Easter Eggspress trains hauled by No.85 were operated on Monday and Tuesday 6th and 7th April and fully sold. The opportunity was taken to engage Ron Smith of West Coast Rail who carried out successful biannual tests on Gary Moore (driver) and Anto Dargan and Barney McReynolds (firemen).

The 2015 May railtour, the 'South Munster', worked over the extended weekend of 9th to 11th May. The participants travelled Dublin Connolly - Midleton - Cork on Saturday 9th, followed by Cork - Cobh - Killarney - Cork on Sunday, and finally Cork - Dublin Connolly - Belfast Central - Whitehead on Monday 11th. No.85 and No.461 were the railtour engines.

The highlights were the first steam trains in nearly 40 years to work the re-opened Youghal Branch to Midleton; No.85's first ever visit to both Midleton and Cobh and the excellent running of No.85 on both the Cork and Belfast main lines.

Preceding the May railtour No.85 worked the increasingly popular stock positioning train from Whitehead to Dublin on Thursday 7th May.

triggered. Hopefully this issue is now resolved.

The month of June proved to be very busy with Steam & Jazz trains, participation in the Steam Dreams operation and the reintroduction to traffic of No.4 following overhaul.



No.85 pauses at Portlaoise loop while working from Cork to Dublin on 11th May 2015. (M. Tyrrell)

The Steam & Jazz trains for 2015 operated on Fridays 12th, 19th and 26th June and 3rd July. These operations featured jazz band playing interludes at Lisburn, Whitehead RPSI, and Carrickfergus platforms. No.85 worked the first train on Friday 12th June.

Following her latest overhaul, No.4 carried out successful main line tests on Sunday 12th June. The engine ran light engine from Whitehead to Carrickfergus and return, and then to Belfast Central and return with carriages.

On Thursday 18th June No.85 worked a single passenger journey Belfast Central to Dublin Connolly for Steam Dreams. The carriages returned empty behind an NIR GM diesel, a working which marked our last visit to the loop at Butlin's Mosney, which has since been lifted. With No.85 in Dublin, it had been proposed that No.4 would work the 19th June Steam & Jazz train but unfortunately the NIR approval process did not work to the hoped-for timeline. In the event, NIR kindly provided a GM locomotive to cover the absence of a steam locomotive. On Thursday 25th June No.85 returned light engine from Dublin.

On Friday 26th June approval was received from NIR for No. 4 to enter passenger service. That evening the Steam & Jazz operation was shared between two locomotives, with No.85 operating first to Lisburn and return, then No.4 working from Whitehead to Belfast Central and back. On Friday 3rd July No. 4 worked the Steam & Jazz operation throughout.

Meanwhile, with the building contractor due on site at Whitehead in late August/early September, we found that because of the need to move stock out from the back of the site, there was no longer space

for the 4 Gatwick carriages. Thanks to the cooperation of both NIR and Irish Rail it was agreed the carriages would be moved to Dundalk for temporary storage while the building work at Whitehead takes place. The transfer was GM-hauled early on Sunday 19th July.

The Whitehead Festival committee again asked the RPSI to provide in-house steam train rides on Saturday 25th July. The opportunity was taken to use No.131, although yet to be fully painted.

Three Portrush Flyers were organised for Sundays 26th July and 9th and 23rd August with No.85. Now, with an hourly passenger train service and the Company working almost to the limitations of its available track infrastructure, a path could not be provided to facilitate the taking of water at Ballymena.



No. 4 returned to passenger duties for the first time since 2011 with the 'Steam & Jazz' on 26th June 2015. Her unpainted appearance would have been better suited to Halloween, but at least it was dark!

Service trains cross at Bleach Green, Ballymena and Ballymoney (and Bellarena when that loop is commissioned). To facilitate the Flyer and possible other traffic an ingenious path was suggested and adopted. This allowed a virtually non-stop run to Portrush (no passenger pick-ups or set downs), by taking water at Belfast Central instead. This was done by means of a road tanker brought in adjacent to Platform 1. The train crews were up for the challenge and it is pleasing to report that running was very close to time throughout.

Meanwhile with our Dublin colleagues selling heavily loaded trains, it was decided that No.4, having proved itself capable, was dispatched light engine to Dublin on Sunday 2nd August.

An autumn Steam Enterprise was organised for Sunday 27th September. Most unfortunately, at lunch time on Friday 25th September, word was received that all was not well in Dublin in relation to

receiving this train. Urgent phone calls were made and it transpired that, due to a misunderstanding within Irish Rail, a full engineering possession had been granted at the 'wash road' at Dublin Connolly. This meant that while No.85 could operate to Dublin there was no access to the turntable.

To complicate matters, access to the Inchicore turntable was ruled out due to another engineering full possession on the Phoenix Park tunnel line. Passengers had to be urgently advised that a decision had been taken to operate the train partly with an Irish Rail GM diesel. The plan as of late Friday was to operate No.85 to Dundalk and there hand over the train to the GM to work to Dublin and back to Dundalk. No. 85 would then take over the train again and work back to Belfast and Whitehead tender-first, at reduced speed.



Noel Playfair, Ben McDonald, Mark Fletcher, James Friel and Edward Friel with No.85 Merlin at Dublin Connolly working the Mince Pie train on 27th December 2015, drawing to a close a successful year of RPSI operations.

On the Saturday it was agreed within NIR that, instead of lying over at Dundalk, No.85 would work light engine and tender-first to Belfast so that it could be turned on the Great Victoria Street triangle, before running back (still tender-first) to Dundalk. This meant that when the train arrived (hauled by GM 078 as it turned out), No.85 was able to take it on to Belfast chimney-first, meaning we could run at full speed and so keep to the original timetable. A special thanks to NIR and especially the locomotive crew for facilitating this extraordinary effort to ensure the day was disrupted as little as possible. Although disappointed, the passengers appreciated that the situation was wholly outside the Society's control.

The next operation was the seasonal Broomstick Belle trains to Whitehead on Saturday 31st October 2015. These popular trains were again both fully booked. The opportunity was taken to do the remaining biannual tests on drivers Michael Hamill and Noel Playfair; now all are approved until 2017.

Train rides operated in conjunction with the Whitehead Victorian Street Fair on 28th November, but the atrocious weather made it a bit of a wash-out.

The 2015 Santa train season worked again to the usual format on 6 days, with 14 trains (one fewer than in 2014), starting on Sunday 29th November. All trains were fully booked.

A long operating season concluded with the seasonal Mince Pie train to Dublin on Sunday 27th December, aimed mainly (but not exclusively) at the adult market. Passengers enjoyed a convivial atmosphere in the post-Christmas wind-down, with the train operating near to time.

In conclusion once again a big thank you to NIR and Irish Rail for their co-operation and understanding. To the train crews and our on train support staff, without whose participation the trains would not operate.

DUBLIN CARRIAGE REPORT

Joe McKeown

2015 was a significant year for the carriage department, with two vehicles returning to traffic from overhaul, two being repainted, and a general upgrade of interior facilities being undertaken. This was driven in part by the move towards commercial charters such as Railtours Ireland and Steam Dreams railtours. The charter operators put resources into the upgrade work.



RPSI Cravens carriages are now receiving a new livery reminiscent of the latter days of the GNR(I), as seen here at Limerick on 22nd March 2015. (S. Comiskey)

The following are the details of each coach with the estimated end of year mileage in brackets.

3185 (1,136): Her final train was the three day tour - now awaiting overhaul.

3173 (3,023): She entered traffic from overhaul in Mullingar with final painting in Inchicore. The standard of finish is far superior to that of 3185, as are the crew facilities. The John Deere generator has proved reliable after a few initial glitches.

1508 (2,178): With 43 seats, she is our spare coach and can act as a general or catering car. First entry into traffic 22nd March.

1505 (3,836): Repainted and reupholstered.

1506 (2,456): In Traffic.

1514 (4,160): In Traffic.

1522 (4,160): In Traffic.

1523 (2,456): In Traffic.

1532 (3,836): Repainted and reupholstered.

1541 (2,102): In Traffic.

1539: She has moved into the shop. Preparatory work has commenced prior to overhaul and repaint. Seat cushions removed preparatory to re-upholstering. It is hoped to significantly progress 1539 in 2016.

Consideration will also be given to reupholstering one other coach. Our thanks are due to Peter Smith CME Inchicore for facilitating us especially in the matter of repainting and in particularly John and his team in the Paint Shop.

DUBLIN AREA OPERATIONS

Joe McKeown

Our Operations for 2015 began on 15th April 2014 when we had a meeting in Dublin with the management of Steam Dreams UK, a charter company, who wished to hire the Cravens carriages for a 6-day steam-hauled tour of Ireland in June 2015. This was to be the biggest charter ever taken on by the RPSI since its foundation. A railtour like it had not been seen since 1964. There were a number of major requirements - carpets on floors, lamps on tables, curtains on all windows, and antimacassars on all seats. Toilets had to be upgraded and some carriages had to be painted both inside and outside.



*No. 461 working a private charter train at Kingstown on 11th April 2015.
(S. Comiskey)*

It was necessary for Norman Foster (Treasurer), Joe McKeown (Dublin Operations) and Fergus McDonnell (Business Development) to travel to the UK and do an in-depth study into the Steam Dreams operation to establish what the requirements would be. It was now over to the Carriage

Department to put a programme in place so that all works would be completed by June 2015.

Our first 2015 outing was a steam charter to Drogheda with Fingal Libraries on 5th March. Next was our “Marble City” steam train to Kilkenny on 22nd March.

The Easter Bunny was on Easter Monday 6th April.

The first of the charters by Joe O'Reilly was on the morning of Saturday 11th April from Dublin Connolly to Bray, and empty back to Connolly. We then ran an afternoon local trip to Maynooth.

The annual railtour was from 8th to 11th May, Dublin Operations being heavily involved with the tour.

Sunday 31st May and we were involved with the Balbriggan Town Festival. Dublin to Balbriggan and two local trips from Balbriggan to Drogheda.



No.461 at Galway, suitably adorned for the ‘Emerald Isle Explorer’ on 21st June 2015.
(S. Comiskey)

19th June to 24th June was the Steam Dreams “Emerald Isle Explorer”. This involved locomotives No.85 and No.461. Saturday 18th July was the Irish Railway Record Society diesel tour, Dublin Connolly to Westport and Ballina, with two 071 locos. Sunday 26th July and we were back on the South Eastern with a steam trip to Bray and two local trips to Wicklow for the Bray Festival.

Back on the Great Northern on 9th August with steam trips to Drogheda and Dundalk and a local trip to Skerries.

Our first ever “Radio Train” took place on Sunday 23rd August. A DJ’s compartment was set up in the van of 3173. Music, requests, interviews and information on the surrounding countryside was relayed to passengers. We also had a fabulous band from Northern Ireland, Baillies Mills Accordion Band, who

played on Platform 3 Connolly Station before departure, on the train and at Athy during watering and in Kilkenny on arrival. The band then marched to Kilkenny Castle to perform a recital there.

28th September to 3rd October saw us on the “Emerald Isle Express”, Railtours Ireland’s diesel tour of Ireland. This time it was the RPSI doing the catering and waitering. It was a pleasure to see these young volunteers doing superb work. A magnificent team.

Halloween arrived on 1st November and the train was fully decorated for the occasion. We were back on the South Eastern for these two trips. The tunnels were perfect for the scary carriages. The reason we travelled to Greystones was to test the paths for the Santa trains. Ongoing works at Grand Canal Dock prohibited us from running round there and it would be necessary to travel empty to Connolly for servicing. We feel that the sight of the train arriving in Pearse with Santa ringing his bell and waving at the children from the first carriage door is so spectacular. Santa trains began on Saturday 28th November and ended on Sunday 13th December. There were three trains on Saturdays and two on Sundays, the third train on each Saturday being diesel due to driver hours.

On all our trips, other than charters, we had our on-board raffle with John Richardson and his small crew. This is one of the most successful means of gaining revenue for essential RPSI projects. In 2015 John made a total profit of €10,764.

The success of the Dublin operations would not have happened if it was not for the support we receive from Irish Rail. Management / Operations, Amiens Street; CME Peter Smyth, Inchicore Works; Brinks Security at Inchicore Works; Stationmasters; CTC; Infrastructure Management; railway staff in all stations; our top link steam crews, Dublin Connolly and Cork Sheds; the Loco and Traffic DTEs, and the guards for all our trains.

For the year we carried a total of 10,490 passengers.

Sadly, we lost two good friends during the year, David Seymour and Eddie Murphy, both on-train volunteers.

WHITEHEAD SITE REPORT

Dermot Mackie

Late in November of 2014 I acquired, on behalf of the Society, a second-hand JCB 530 B telehandler. This machine has excellent extendable fork-lift capacity, something we have been missing at Whitehead, and an easily attachable, large capacity, front shovel bucket. The latter facility made easy work of coaling all the Santa trains and its ease of use soon proved very popular.

January 2015 saw the Site squad attempting to make space for the forthcoming arrival of Gatwick coaches. We stacked six Mark 2 coach bogies, in 3 pairs, and moved three other spare bogies for wooden-bodied coaches. A property insurance survey was carried out by Braniff Aviva and their representative was very pleased with the comprehensive nature of our intruder, fire and CCTV alarm systems.

The last two weeks of January saw a concerted effort on the part of the squad to further improve the storage potential of the sidings by moving bogies off the third road siding. By cutting down two old steel gateposts we were able to place 6 bogies in the space between B and C roads. In addition Garruth Reid and I shunted the Mark 2 running set away from the platform road to facilitate the examination, on the seaward side, for the annual inspection. All these movements meant that the site was more than ready for the arrival of the 4 Gatwick coaches at the end of the month. We assisted in weighing the axle loadings on No. 131 and she, together with No. 85, was pulled out by the Atlas prior to steaming for inspection purposes. Coach 114 was also shunted into the third road siding.

As part of the GROW contract, monies were available to fit out the new extensions and I was allowed to purchase heavy duty steel rack shelving. In total 48 units were purchased, each two metres high, one

metre long and 60cm deep. They had 4 shelves, each capable of carrying 600kg, greatly improving our storage capability within both the carriage shed and loco workshop extension.



The Telehandler assists with the removal of a redundant gatepost on 20th January 2015.

Unfortunately the old JCB 3C backhoe loader suffered a leaking radiator and water pump in the space of 2 weeks at the end of February. Following local repairs to the radiator and purchase of a new pump, all was working well. The newer JCB telehandler was crucial for the off-loading of a full lorry load of palleted bits from No. 171 on Thursday 26th February. David Lowry took a batch of scrap copper and old electrical wire to the recyclers which produced £370.

The first week in March was used to sort out the laneway, which had degenerated into a mass of very large potholes. The imminent arrival of No.171 on a large flat-bed lorry was reckoned to be a risk and therefore 10 tonnes of mixed aggregate was spread to make a more even surface, with the help of a good squad including Willie Hollinger, Gordon Hunt and the telehandler's large coaling bucket. Later in the day the same machine swapped the wheel sets for the VS and No.131's tender, the former being set up on the heavy lift for re-instatement on the following Saturday.

April was a busy time when we emptied 'E' carriage road of 12 wheel sets including 3 large Jeep coupled axles in glorious weather and then lifted E road completely. All made possible with great help from John Williams, Trevor Taylor and Denis Campbell.

At the end of the month I gave the Site its first weed spray application.

We emptied all of the contents of one of the containers at the back of the Site which contains carriage spares and moved them into the new shelving in the carriage shed extension. By now almost all the other materials at the back of the Site had been either scrapped or relocated to the car park or other areas which would not block any future contract work. A second container with Mark 2 spares was emptied into the carriage shed with extra help from Robin Morton and Nigel Spiers.

The Atlas was given its annual service at this time.

A second fill of the ferrous scrap metal skip netted £230 pounds, while old aluminium produced £110.

The skip was by now in need of running repairs which were neatly done by supervised HEI apprentices. It was noted that the track into No.1 shed road, next to the water column, was being spread by No.85. Investigation revealed two rotten wooden sleepers which were replaced on a blistering hot day with help from Tom Mathers and Alan McRobert, nicely in time for the start of the Steam & Jazz season.



The Site Officer at work on 14th December 2014.

During this time two good second-hand containers were delivered to the car park and one of the better containers at the back of the site was also put in the car park. These were needed so that stores could be relocated from the stables building. More tidying up produced aluminium and copper scrap to the value of £108. In addition 800 litres of waste oil was removed for recycling.

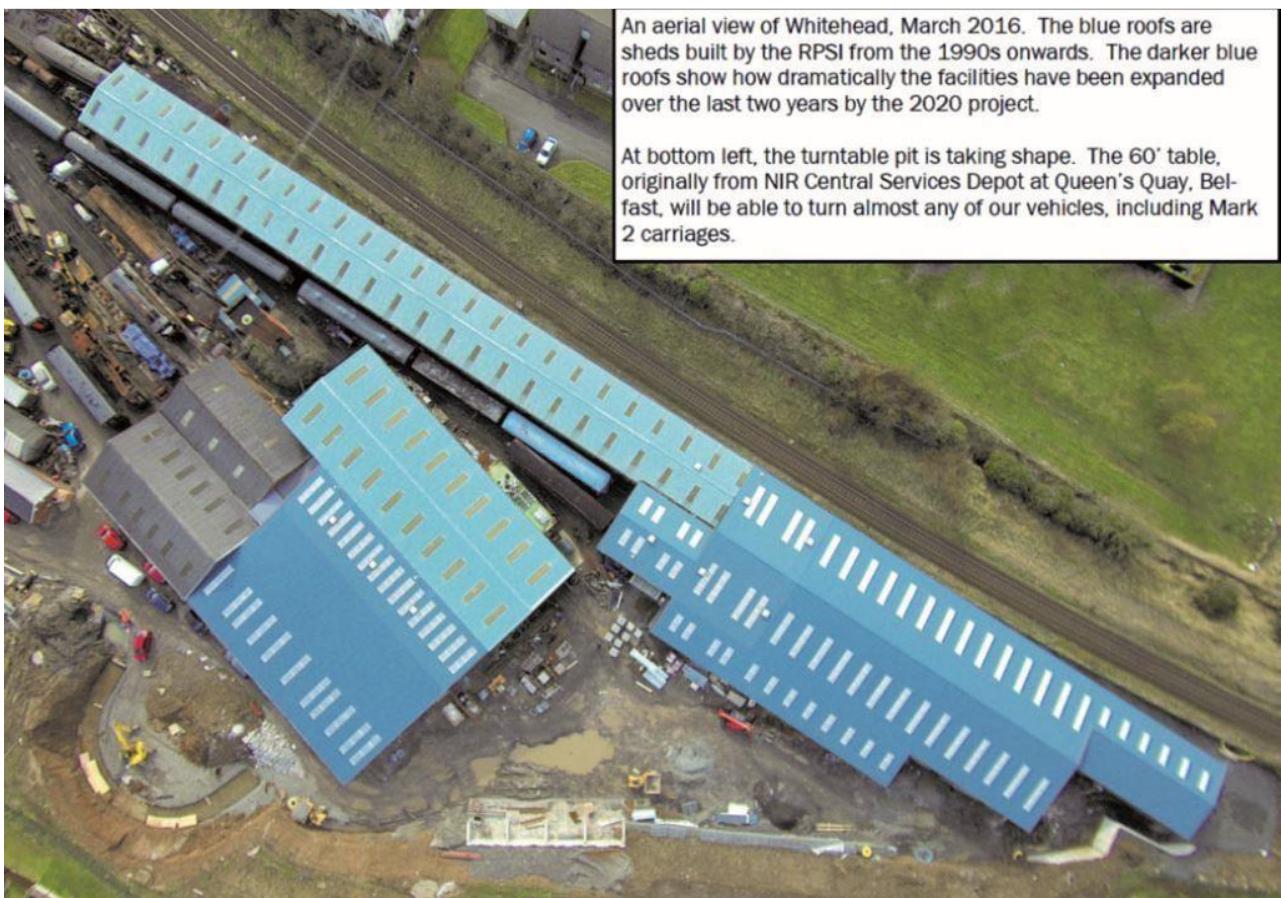
The first two weeks in August were occupied with the movement of the steam crane, initially towards Larne, after lifting a wagon to make room, and then, following re-alignment of D road, movement of the steam crane into the carriage shed. A shunt then moved the steam crane, hand crane, railcar No.1 and other items, clearing C and D roads. Two remaining containers at the back of the site were removed for scrap. This left a small rake of wagons on B road, which was shunted the following weekend, making all of the rear site empty and ready for the contractors.

Further tidying at the back of the site produced 10 turntable rails ex York Road and two 30ft lengths of Belfast tram rail together with a large quantity of scrap timber. Late in June we brought over a spare Mark 2 bogie for an intended swap for Diner 547, which had developed a flat on a wheel after the first Steam & Jazz train.

The first Thursday in July saw a good Site squad bag and pallet over 20 tonnes of scrap cast iron which, up to then, had lain outside the foundry. All was easily moved by the Telehandler to the car park, as were the dismantled components of the Portrush cast iron water tank. (This tank was, until recently, one of two at Portrush, but was removed by NIR due to the state of its concrete supports. Phillip Newell acquired it for the RPSI so that it can be reassembled in the future somewhere where locomotive watering facilities are lacking.) After a well-earned break in early July and the removal of the Gatwick coaches to Dundalk, the Site squad was back in action repairing the crossing between carriage C and D roads. This was vital if we were to be able to safely empty these roads beyond the sheds in time for the contractors, due to arrive on site in September. The crossing was lifted and 3 large timber sleepers were replaced and the track re-aligned and bolted up by the end of the month.



An overview of the site from 27th July 2011, making an interesting comparison with the picture below. (A. Houston)



At around this time a site visit by MSM (the contractors) was conducted and they were pleasantly surprised with the progress we had made. They brought portakabins during the last week in August and put them in the car park. The Unilok was moved from its home next to the Tarry to accommodate a temporary toilet block which was connected to the adjacent sewer.

MSM started on site on Monday 7th September. Priority items were a new temporary perimeter fence and the mass excavation of the area, starting at the extreme Larne end of the site. A lot of effort was put

into emptying the old foundry and its contents were put into one of the new containers in the car park and a smaller container set beside the Tarry. The stables block had also to be cleared and a start was made with the electrical and carriage stores being put into their respective containers in the car park.

It was with great sadness that we learned, on 21st, of the sudden death of our volunteer Garruth Reid. His enthusiasm and general good company will be sadly missed by all who were fortunate enough to have worked with him.

A ferrous skip was sent for recycling and another was ready for emptying. A rubbish skip was also filled in the final clear out of the stables. Piling for the carriage shed and the workshop extension got underway and a ramp was built to gain access to the platform for the signal box and excavation of the foundations started.

October was a busy month on the Site front as we attempted to keep one step ahead of the contractors. They made very good steady progress all month, in near perfect dry weather, and over 20,000 tonnes of soil was removed, all piling was finished, all the shed foundations completed and the steel work erected for the carriage shed.

The signal box foundations on the platform were finished and fenced off securely in time for the Broomstick Belle. After a lengthy shunt, greatly helped by Thomas Charters, the flat wagon bearing the ex-Central Services Depot turntable was retrieved from the third siding, using the Atlas. A large quantity of surplus timber and sleepers was recycled at no cost to the Society.

By the second week in November the secure perimeter fence was in place. Alastair Maxwell, Colin Stewart and myself cleared the vegetation behind the coal bunker to allow the new security fence to be installed here.

All the roofing on the carriage shed was by now in place and the steel work for the workshop extension was up. All brick work for the signal box was up to platform level and a steel frame in place for the superstructure. All window and door openings in the stables have been opened and the plumbing and sanitation piping was in place, ready for the new floor. The excavations for the concrete pit in D carriage shed road had finished, as had the concrete block walls. The floor for the bunkers and retaining wall at the back of the site had been poured.

On 1st December a large crane was at Whitehead to remove the parts of the CSD turntable that we could not reach with our own plant. The Site squad had to remove a 30ft length of the third road siding to make this possible. Early in the month also saw the roof completed on the workshop extension and a concrete floor poured for its first floor. The inner and outer brick walls of the carriage shed were also finished as was the brick work for the signal box which had its roof timbers installed.

Many thanks to all those who made such a hectic year of Site work enjoyable.



Take a look back at issue 60, where we saw the wheel drop in use for the first time in 1978. Thanks to GROW, the wheel drop is now contained in a 110 foot extension to the engine shed.



As seen here in November 2014, ex-BR Mark 3 sleeper 10651 was brought indoors for renovation work, also funded by GROW. It will continue to be used for overnight staff accommodation at Whitehead, now painted up as 'NCC Caravan Coach No. 26'.



In late 2014, the first phase of the carriage shed extension, funded by GROW, was completed. The glass doorway on the left will be the visitors' entrance.



The next phase, funded by HLF and TNI, getting underway in October 2015.



Progress continues in January 2016. 'A' road on the left, with a total length of 600 feet, will be the home of the main line running set; 'D' road (where the yellow digger is) will be the carriage workshop, while 'B' and 'C' in between will house a static display of historic vehicles.



This was the view in January 2016 facing Belfast, with an inspection pit in place under road 'D'. As we go to press, the temporary wall with the 4 doors has now been removed and a new partition is being built to divide roads C and D. The area to the left is the carriage machine shop, which will contain tools for the overhaul of carriages in road D. A viewing area at the far end to the left will allow visitors to see the workshop in action.



Inside the new workshop building currently under construction beside the wheel drop shed. Behind the wall to the left is a new machine shop; on the floor above, the new changing and canteen facilities, replacing the venerable 'Tarry'. In the centre of the picture, the walls around the new foundry are going up.



Meanwhile up on the platform, the replica station building has now been joined by a signal box.

All photographs are by the author.

My first visit to Ireland in 1959 was restricted to the Republic, not least because, as an impecunious student, most of my travelling involved liberal use of my right thumb, and neither funds nor time really allowed me to venture north of Galway. Two years later a holiday job as a porter at Victoria station, London, assisting passengers with their luggage had left me financially sound, a unique and pleasing situation. The most profitable aspect of portering centred around the Pullman Golden Arrow and the Wagons-Lit sleeping cars of the Night Ferry and, although competition between the regular and the student porters was fierce, low cunning enabled me to hit the jackpot one afternoon with a tour group who had enough luggage to fill a four-wheel barrow, which I guarded for several hours, resisting all attempts by others to muscle in on the transaction, and was rewarded with a tip of £10 which just about doubled my weekly average income. Thus, by the end of my six weeks' employment I was able to treat myself to an all-Ireland 7 day ticket.



SG3 No.33 at the North end of Omagh station in 1961.

I approached Northern Ireland by way of the west coast, taking the train from Limerick to Galway, and, although the Burma Road to Sligo was still open to passenger traffic, the sparse timetable seemed to be designed to discourage connections from the south. Anyhow the SL&NCR had gone four years earlier, forced to give up the unequal struggle when Stormont announced the closure of much of the GNR including the line through Enniskillen, so I resorted to hitch-hiking. A friendly commercial traveller picked me up on the outskirts of Galway, obligingly drove past the remains of Enniskillen station, remarking that 'it was a terrible shame' that the trains had all gone, at the same time admitting that it was many years since he had travelled on one, and deposited me at Omagh. Here there were still trains. First to attract my attention was No.33, performing a little light shunting. Reasonably clean, with its yellow lining relieving its otherwise all-black livery, this was an SG3, dating from 1920. Built by Beyer Peacock, the 15 SG3s were the GNR's most powerful goods engines. In GNR days it had been number 20, being renumbered on passing to the UTA in 1958. It would be withdrawn in 1965. I don't think the GNR ever built an ugly engine and the SG3s were purposeful looking, very much in the tradition of sturdy British built 0-6-0s seen the world over. It was paired with one of the post-war tenders with inward curving sides and would not have looked out of place behind a Stanier locomotive.

(I hope no-one will be offended by my allusions to British links and connections, I am writing of first impressions and inevitably one looks for similarities with what one is familiar, as well as being aware of the differences of being across the water!)

Passenger traffic was mostly in the charge of GNR diesel railcars and I duly boarded one of the late 1950s vintage Park Royal/BUT units assembled at Dundalk. Two years earlier I'd travelled on one of the original GNR units on a suburban service out of Dublin but this was my first run in one of the later main line ones, with corridor connections in the driver's cabs, rather like the Southern Railway electric Portsmouth express units. It was pretty full, but there was room for all, the seats were comfortable, it retained its attractive blue and off-white GNR livery, and I enjoyed the run through the pleasant countryside as we headed north. A number of heads turned at Strabane to stare at the lines of County Donegal locomotives, carriages and wagons, gently rusting and rotting away, their labours having ceased some 20 months earlier. Dr Cox was supposed to be taking them across the Atlantic but, of course, never did, and when I next visited Strabane, all of 17 years later, their remains were still there, the carriages and wagons reduced to skeletal underframes, travelling people's caravans parked nearby, their washing hung out to dry, despite all of this being no-man's land between the Republic and the Six Counties patrolled by armed British soldiers, some of them looking scarcely older than the 13 year olds I taught in Swanage. Running along the west bank of the Foyle we were back in the Republic until re-crossing the border beyond Carrigans and drawing to a halt at Foyle Road, Londonderry.



Londonderry Waterside station, with an ex-GNR BUT railcar at the platform. One of the ubiquitous ex-NCC 'brown vans' can be seen on the left.

Finding lodgings, I crossed the Craigavon bridge, noted that the County Donegal station at Victoria Road was still intact, had a quick look in Waterside station, checking the timetable for trains to Belfast in the morning, but finding nothing much of interest other than a pair of former GNR BUT railcars painted in sombre UTA dark green, climbed above the city and, opening my sketchbook, did a series of drawings of the wide, dramatic sweep of the Foyle until the light began to fail, pausing a couple of

times to watch short goods train arrive at Foyle Road, each hauled by former GNR 4-4-0s, probably Qs.

Next morning I boarded a Belfast-bound UTA railcar. These original multi purpose diesel multiple units, the MPDs, formed between 1957 and 1962, were quite unlike any other railcars I had ever come across, or indeed ever would, here or abroad. Their carriages were an extraordinary mix of the old and new, the old dating back, believe it or not, to 1925. The 1950s and '60s was a period which drove supporters of railways in the Six Counties to despair. John Coulthard, a career railwayman, became Managing Director of the UTA in January, 1966, and immediately ran into confrontation with the government. In a letter to me in September, 1970, he wrote: 'It was clear to me during 1966 that the Northern Ireland Government, which had already savagely hacked away most of its railway system, had decided to run the railways down and abandon them. There is nothing which they would have liked better than a recommendation from me to limit the life of the railways to ten years.' Coulthard was popular with the UTA employees and when, in May 1967, the Railway Board dismissed him, under the pretext that he had granted the conciliation grades a five day carriages east of the Irish Sea. The answer usually was pretty closely but seldom exactly.



A motley collection of carriages at Belfast York Road station. Nearest the camera is a 70 class power car, followed by a purpose built 70 class trailer; the remainder are non-corridor NCC stock. An MED waits at the platform in the distance.

The journey from Derry to Belfast, especially the celebrated section along the Foyle estuary and between Umbra Gates and Castlerock, was picturesque in the extreme, whilst the final section along the edge of Belfast Lough was full of interest, past the loco depot, ships, and, of course every time I have subsequently come that way or sailed in or out of Belfast one always thinks of the Titanic. One of my 9 year old pupils at Swanage Middle School told me her great grandfather survived the Titanic and, of course, you think 'yes, really?' But it was true, he was a steward and next day she brought in four telegrams, one from the White Star Line to say he was lost, the next from him from New York saying he was in the last lifeboat picked up by the Carpathia, the third, also from New York saying he was on his way home and the fourth from Plymouth saying he would be back next day. I photocopied them but stupidly long ago lost them. She was a bright girl and went to university in Wales, her dad was the

mechanic for the local Swanage coach company, South Dorset. I hope they kept the telegrams, I'm sure they did they would be pretty valuable today.



Belfast city centre in 1961. On the left is an ex-London Transport Daimler bus passing two Belfast Corporation trolleybuses.

And what of Belfast itself? York Road was not the most impressive of stations but then it had got horribly knocked about in the war and there was a wonderful collection of carriages of NCC, UTA and GNR origin in residence. It struck me that Belfast was quite unlike any other Irish town or city I had seen, with its visible roots set firmly in the Industrial Revolution, reminiscent in some respects of both Liverpool and Glasgow, with some grand Victorian architecture, as well as plenty of back to back, red brick terraces, extensive docks, the great gantries of Harland and Wolff, and no shortage of smoking chimneys. Yet the accents alone marked it out as different again, whilst its dramatic setting with the hills running down to the shores of Belfast Lough added to its grandeur. In those days the railways still played a vital part in dock business. I came across the familiar sight of a standard LMS 0-6-0T shunting and the much less familiar one of a former GNR 0-6-4T similarly employed. I had just the afternoon and evening in Belfast before I headed south to Dublin the next day and, as I wanted to see as much of the city as possible, I paid a very short visit to Queens Quay where I watched yet another variation of the diesel railcar theme depart for Bangor. This was a three-car Multi-Engined Diesel, very different from the MPDs across the city at York Road. Painted dark green with black and yellow striped front and not, I thought, with its corrugated effect sides, a particularly pretty sight. This was very poor judgement on my part for the MEDs were actually just about the most up to date units then at work, with their recessed sliding doors under the control of the guard, and open interiors, ideal for the busy route with frequent stations on which they were employed. The locals, until then used to ancient Belfast and County Down, low roof, wooden bodied carriages, many of them six-wheelers, must have thought them wonderful. Belfast also still possessed Ireland's only trolleybus network and I became reacquainted with old friends which used to run past the bottom of our road, some austerity former London Transport Daimler double-deckers which Belfast Corporation had bought and fitted with new

Harkness bodies.

Next morning I presented myself at the most impressive of Belfast's three termini, Great Victoria Street, and was delighted to find waiting a long rake of wooden-bodied GNR built carriages, nearly all of them pre-war corridor compartment stock, with, at their head, a NCC built WT 2-6-4T. Ideally I would have preferred a blue 4-4-0, for these were still about, although others had been painted UTA black, and we passed VS No.207 'Boyne' on Adelaide shed as we left Belfast, but steam was steam and I settled down to enjoy what turned out to be my only main line steam-hauled run in Ireland in pre-preservation days. However, at Dundalk our WT came off and was replaced by what I initially took to be a grey and yellow painted diesel shunter employed to remove or add some carriages. How wrong can you be? This was my first sight of what would become one of the best buys in the history of CIÉ, a 121 class single cab 950hp General Motors Bo-Bo, bought specifically for main line work, and which had charge of our train for the rest of the journey.



Belfast Transport Museum, Witham Street, in 1965. No.800 Maedhbh looms over the narrow gauge collection, including, in the foreground, CDR No. 3 Blanche. Today the collection can be seen at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum at Cultra.

It would be six years before my next visit to the North, this time by road. I had brought my father's Ford Anglia across to meet my fiancé Maeve who, waiting on the quayside at Dun Laoghaire to greet it and me, remarked that having one front wheel painted bright blue and the other grey was an interesting feature. She nevertheless consented to be driven to Belfast, quite an adventure, for she had never before crossed the border in all her 22 years, and even allowed herself to be photographed beside her namesake at the old Transport Museum in Witham Street. No praise can be too effusive for those pioneers who ensured so much of Irish transport history was preserved in the North. Officially the Republic seemed to have no interest, although of course there were individuals, within and without the RPSI and the Irish Railway Record Society, who certainly did. The fact that active preservation got going in the North just in time to save many narrow gauge examples, as well as much else from the broad gauge, resulting eventually in the incomparable Transport Museum at Cultra, leaves us all deep

in debt to those far-seeing individuals.

On a cold December day in 1968, now married, Maeve and I did the journey again from Dublin, hauled by a Metropolitan-Vickers A class with its original, highly unsuitable Crossley engine, which would have been fine installed in a reasonably sized motor boat but was never intended for a shuddering locomotive bumping over rail joints. The UTA had now become Northern Ireland Railways, Great Victoria Street was still in operation but the Belfast Central Railway had gone although a section of it remained and as we swung past Central Junction we passed a pair of former GNR 0-6-0s, withdrawn and awaiting scrapping. These would have been Nos.37 and 49, formerly Nos.97 and 149, the very last GNR steam locomotives to remain in service.

1970 was the last time I would see ordinary steam at work in Ireland. We were returning to England by road from Dublin by way of Belfast, Larne and Stranraer, and we turned away from the city centre intending to take short cut to have a look at York Road only to find ourselves confronted by a row of burned out terraced houses and a road block. The scene was unpleasantly reminiscent of childhood memories of my home town of Croydon during the Blitz. The Troubles had begun, as I knew well enough from the media, yet I had somehow not quite connected what I had seen on television with reality. Two balaclava-clad men approached us, asked perfectly politely where we were headed and could they look in the boot. Not a request one refuses. They advised us, still in a courteous manner that the street was impassable and gave me alternative directions. York Road was by then the sole remaining active steam depot in the entire British Isles, and, whatever the security situation elsewhere in the city, no-one objected to my wandering about it at will. The carriage situation was still as varied as ever, many of the MPD carriages brightened up by applications of red and cream paint, locomotive-hauled ex-GNR and NCC ones still in dark green, with a number of the inevitable four-wheel brown vans. A new variation on the railcar theme was the class 70 English Electric sets, which primarily worked the Dublin and Derry routes. The carriages themselves were handsome, visually very much in the LMS tradition, although rather let down by the driving car fronts. The designer seemed to have taken the day off when these were being considered, the result being a plain, flat expanse with three small windows cut into it.



No.27 Lough Erne pauses for water while shunting at York Road in 1970.

Locomotive-wise there were a number of WTs sitting about, looking rather forlorn, their chimneys covered over, one being broken up, and just one in steam. But, a great surprise this, shunting was being carried out by none other than the very last active former Sligo, Leitrim and Northern Counties

locomotive, No.27 'Lough Erne'. A modernized version of the SL&NCR's time-honoured 0-6-4T, 'Lough Erne' was actually the last new steam locomotive to enter service in Ireland. It was completed by Beyer Peacock in 1949 but the cash-strapped railway was not able to talk its bank manager into providing funds for its purchase, and that of its companion, 'Lough Melvin', until 1951. The 0-6-4T had never been a common wheel arrangement and by World War II was distinctly outdated, yet, in 1970, two years or more after the last Bullied pacifics, the last Stanier Black 5s, the last GWR panniers, et al had all passed into oblivion, or at any rate either to scrapyards or preservation, here was an 0-6-4T pottering around Belfast, going about its business, shunting wagons as though time and progress had completely passed it by. It was withdrawn later that year, passing into preservation with the RPSI; I wonder if we shall see it in steam again one day?

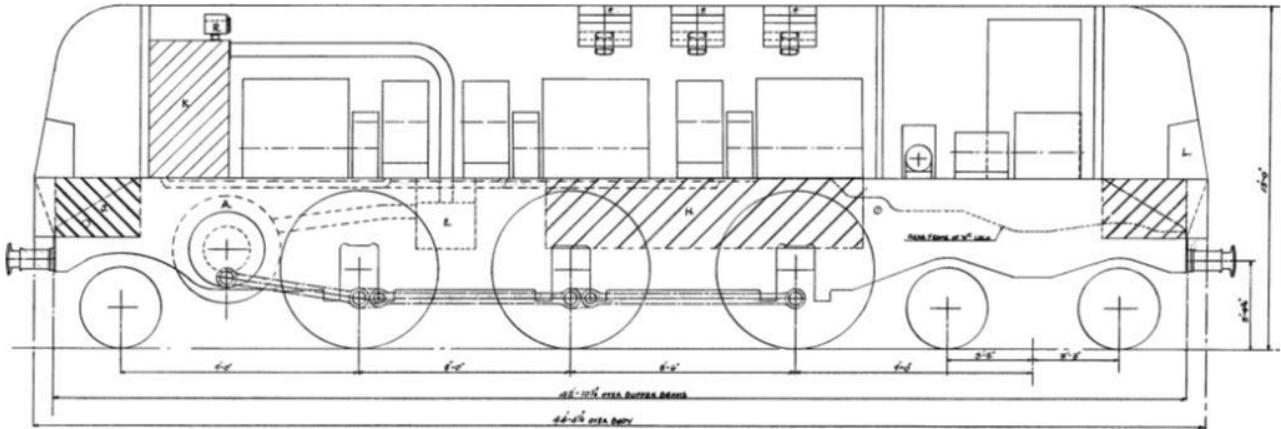


'Jeep' No.4, still in passenger service at Larne in 1970.

We drove on to Larne, arriving around 5pm, where we were staying the night being booked on the early morning ferry. Steam surprises were not over. Standing on the bridge with an excellent view of the station I could see an MED about to depart for Belfast, but turning westwards smoke could be seen and, around the edge of the inlet on the landward side of the harbour, there came a WT 2-6-4T, none other than No.4, hauling a rake of former NCC carriages. I watched it pass the only upper quadrant signal bracket in the six counties into the station. Passengers alighted, the locomotive ran around its train, the driver climbed down and walked around the engine checking the motion. The leading vehicle was one of the beautiful corridor carriages built for the North Atlantic Express in the 1930s, tri-composite No.92 (UTA No.240). The brake coach from the North Atlantic set is preserved by the RPSI, as, of course, is No.4. The other four carriages were a mixture of corridor and non-corridor wooden bodied vehicles with a brown van at the rear.

The tank-engine-hauled local passenger train was a peculiarly British and Irish institution and here, again, was a journey back into the past. I was living in Lancashire in 1968 where the last steam passenger trains still operated on the BR network but even here the last tank engines and non-corridor

carriages had ceased work by the end of 1967 or shortly afterwards. A mix of corridor and non-corridor carriages was often a feature of the stopping passenger train and here one was still at work at the beginning of the 1970s. It's a feature which few of the preserved railways in England have found possible to recreate authentically, for most of their carriages are Mark 1 corridors and a whole rake of such vehicles almost never formed stopping trains. So No.4 and its train of pre-1939 wooden bodied carriages was a sight to savour and one which down all the years remains a vivid memory.



If you thought the MPDs were 'modernization on the cheap', take a look at this little-known UTA drawing, on which the date is sadly illegible. It shows a proposed design for a double-ended diesel-hydraulic locomotive, to be created by mounting what appear to be six bus engines on underframes salvaged from the class WT! Thankfully this monstrosity was never built, or No.4 might not still be with us today.

A SMALL CENTENARY

Conrad Natzio

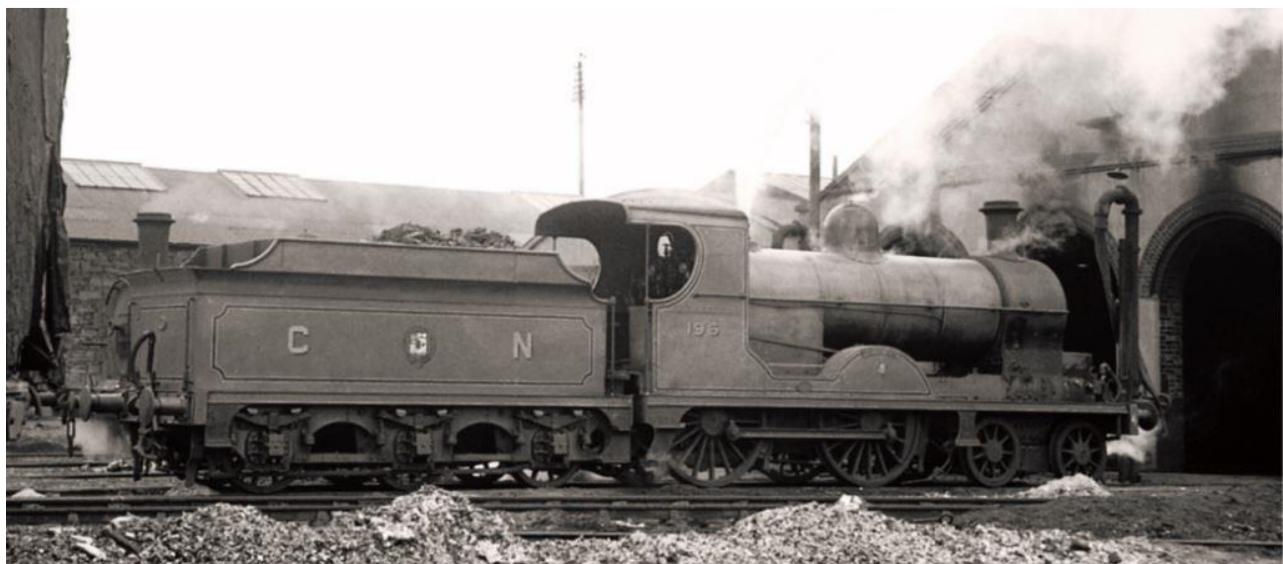
All photographs are by E.M. Patterson unless stated.

As I write this in May 2014, the fiftieth year of the RPSI is being celebrated, and moreover we are looking forward to a full-scale GNR(I) revival. The promise of a V, an S, and a Qs all taking once again to the main line is an alluring prospect, particularly perhaps for those of us with a soft spot for a Q, and who had possibly given up hope of seeing No.131 running again without some unforeseen development in geriatric medicine.

Maybe less likely to be noticed is a centenary, involving another once-familiar GNR(I) type. In 2015 it will be a hundred years since the appearance of the U class of small 4-4-0s, and fifty since the withdrawal of its last representative (and also, perhaps not coincidentally, since the end of the Derry Road). The Us were written up in "Five Foot Three" (now of course readily available, without recourse to a dog-eared copy, on the RPSI website) by the late Irwin Pryce [Pryce, I., "5 Foot 9", *Five Foot Three No.2, 1966*], and since then we have had Norman Johnston's fine book on Great Northern locomotives [Johnston, N.: "Locomotives of the GNR(I)", *Colourpoint*, 1999]. Nevertheless a few further thoughts may still be appropriate.

As is well-known, the Us arrived in two batches of five, separated by 33 years; the differences were minor, relating to the design of the cab, spacing of the cylinders, and the higher (by 2½") pitch of the boiler. Principal dimensions were the same. The 1948 engines were intended to work at 200 rather than the previous 175 lbs pressure, though it is doubtful if they did so for long, if at all. A close comparison of photos of examples of the two batches (for instance of Nos. 199 and 202 on page 151 of Johnston's book) suggests that the later engines were also given slightly deeper frames, possibly the main reason for their increased weight (46 tons as against 44t 6cwt). This development would be unsurprising;

frame troubles had plagued some earlier GN passenger engines - the QL and Q classes in particular - and it will be remembered that in the S/S2 renewals, heavier frames were the only significant change to the original design. However, there seem to be no published references to such a change in the case of the Us, and no weight increase is mentioned in either Johnston's or Patterson's books [Patterson, E.M.: *"The Great Northern Railway (Ireland)"*, second edition, Oakwood Press, 2003 (page 135)], even though the latter separates the two batches in his list of locomotive classes and dimensions. But Bob Clements and Macartney Robbins quote the different weights in their very useful little 1949 booklet [Clements, R.N. & Robbins, J.M.: *"The ABC of Irish Locomotives"*, Ian Allan, 1949 (page 36)], and I think are likely to be authoritative. Incidentally, this early Ian Allan production was originally priced at 2/- (10p), and has been republished twice in facsimile, latterly in 2000 at £5.99!



No.196 Lough Gill at Dundalk Junction running shed, 27th March 1951. No. 196 was of the original 1915 batch, and is seen here with the original type of tender, the 2,500 gallon type B4.

The raison d'être of the five 1915 Us is perhaps not immediately apparent. In 1915 the main line was very adequately catered for by the eight superheated S/S2s backed up by another eight handsome if sometimes heart-breaking QLs, besides thirteen Qs - the latter two classes of course saturated at that time. That left a further forty-one assorted 4-4-0s, some of quite recent date, for secondary passenger services, as well as a handful of 2-4-0s and tank engines; on paper, therefore, the light trains of the extensive, if hardly intensively-worked, secondary network of the Great Northern mostly lying south of the Derry line (the "Irish North") should not have been short of motive power, yet the Irish North proved to be the lasting home ground of the Us. How did this come about?

The class is rightly said to be descended from the five T class 4-4-2 tank engines of 1912 whose principal dimensions they share with the addition of superheating. The tanks might reasonably have been expected to be allocated directly to suburban services at one or both ends of the main line, but curiously enough their initial distribution suggests that they were intended for the Irish North. In fact it seems likely that they proved unsuitable, as might have been predicted; they had a high axle loading, water capacity was limited for the sometimes quite long runs on the Irish North, and perhaps above all in their saturated state coal consumption was high. R.M. (Mac) Arnold [Arnold, R.M.: *"The Golden Years of the Great Northern Railway, Part One"*, Blackstaff Press, 1976 (page 134)] gives figures for the coal consumption of the five tanks (admittedly in 1918, presumably by then reallocated to suburban duties) ranging from 43.8 to 49.6 lbs/mile - but for the five Us only 31.3 to 32.9. So perhaps the tender engines were in effect built as replacements for the tanks, subsequently superheated and joined by their

later sisters of class T2, mainly on suburban duties. At all events the Us, 197 - 200, and their later successors will always be associated with the Irish North, where they continued to scuttle about with their short trains until the lamented closure of that system in 1957. A lively picture of the Irish North in its last days can be found in Norman Foster's account [*Foster, N.R.S.: "A Teenager's Holiday", Five Foot Three No 37, 1990/91*] of a week spent there in August 1957, a few weeks before the end, in the course of which he travelled behind eight of the ten Us (including all the 1948 engines).



At Belfast Great Victoria Street on 21st July 1958, No.201 Meath (left) is preparing to work the 1:30PM to Warrenpoint, while No.203 Armagh is on the 1:50 to Dungannon. Both are of the 1948 batch and are running with the E type tender that was newly designed for them.

The appearance of new engines of the same type after a gap of 33 years may seem surprising, but doubtless neither the Great Northern nor Beyer Peacock were inclined to expend limited resources to replace an admittedly obsolete design if the existing examples were performing adequately.

Obsolescence is anyway a relative term; British Railways were still building 'Castles' at Swindon in 1950, merely enlarged versions of the superheated 'Stars' of 1910, and it would have been bold then, if not risky, to describe 'Castles' as obsolete (though only in the 21st century has their true potential belatedly emerged). Still, it is instructive to compare a 1948 U with what Crewe was turning out at that time, of similar size for similar duties: the Ivatt Class 2 Mogul, replete with every modern refinement, as different from a U as chalk from cheese, and proving capable, on test, of sustained steaming with a 15-coach train [*Powell, A.J.: "Living with London Midland Locomotives", Ian Allan, 1977 (page 48)*].

A long time ago, Mac Arnold wrote [*Arnold, R.M.: "Steam Over Belfast Lough", Oakwood Press, 1969 (page 3)*]: "When I see a steam locomotive or a picture of one I begin to wonder what kind of services she worked and how she performed on them", an approach I share. The Us were intended for secondary services from the outset, and in no sense as main-line express engines. It should be remembered that these charming little machines (Norman Johnston chose as the frontispiece for his book a posed portrait of 197, of irresistible appearance even in black-and-white) were indeed very small. They might have scraped into Class 2 of the LMS/British Railways power classification, but the first batch were almost 10 tons lighter than the LMS 2P and over 7 tons less than the NCC 'Castles';

they approximated in size to the NCC 'Whippets'. With grate area almost 7 square feet less than the 'Castles', sustained hard running with a substantial train could leave them gasping for breath. However, operations on the Irish North, or to Newcastle, involved light loads and, for the most part, all-stations trains. True, the "Bundoran Express" demanded non-stop running for about 75 minutes from Clones to Pettigo (and a similar run, broken by a single stop at different stations depending on the day of the week, from Dundalk to Clones), sometimes with seven or even eight coaches. But as there were no staff catchers on the Irish North, slowing at every block post gave a chance to recover steam or water; hand exchange of the big and heavy GN staffs at any speed above single figures was no joke. The "Express" was usually a job for a U, though the PPs, by then superheated, were also numerous on the Irish North, and despite their 6'7" driving wheels were no less capable.

In 1958 came the final demise of the GNR, and the division of the spoils. The UTA and CIÉ each received five Us, of course, which then proved useful on local and semi-fast services at the two ends of the line as older engines were withdrawn; perhaps this gave them a better chance of mile-a-minute running than had come their way in their youth. 60 mph was commonplace though opportunities for anything much faster were limited, and I'm not aware of any speed higher than the 71 mph noted by Irwin Pryce behind 202, scurrying through Lurgan with five coaches and a van. At the Dublin end, the chances of anything much over 60 were less, though that speed was not unusual, and I'm happy to recall descending Rush bank at 62 behind my own favourite, 199, tender-first.

Possibly my most vivid memory of the class, indeed of that particular engine, is of a warm Saturday evening in May 1960. A trip to Drogheda and back started with the 17:35 down, an A class diesel and three coaches, with which Peter McCourt made the first stop at Malahide in 9'46" for the 9 miles. But he had a very different proposition for the return: on the 21:00 up local he was provided with 199 for a 9-bogie train, the extra stock being needed for Sunday seaside services the next day. I cannot pretend that the rather tight diesel schedule, 63 minutes for the 31.7 miles including 12 stops, was kept, but it was an exhilarating experience, travelling in the first compartment of the leading coach. Over the low tender the regulator could be seen to go right over from the start, the cut-off was pulled up a bit after the first few yards, and 199 was left barking furiously away until shut off and a brake application made for the next stop.

As the final years passed the locomotive stock dwindled, unlikely engines found themselves undertaking surprising duties, and it's worth giving one or two examples of Us having to be extended. The lineal descendant of the "Bundoran Express", conveying Lough Derg pilgrim traffic, was the 09:00 Dublin - Omagh and return, and in CIÉ days this appeared in wildly varying formats: BUT railcars, AEC railcars (at one stage including the antique ex-DSER diner 74D, an incongruous 50-foot vehicle in the diesel set), loco-hauled trains with A class and, later, GM diesels running round at Portadown and working throughout - and, from time to time, changing from CIÉ power (diesel or ex-GN steam) to UTA ex-GN steam at Portadown, as described below.

So it's fitting, at the fiftieth anniversary of the closure of the Derry road, to show a U giving its best on this difficult line. No.205 (UTA 68) "Down" was, I suppose, the very last ever to be built of that long, long line of inside cylinder 4-4-0s, the classic type of British and Irish passenger locomotive, starting with Wheatley's No.224 of 1874 for the North British Railway (better known to posterity as The Diver, surviving by forty years its plunge with the Tay Bridge) and including so many famous classes - 'George Vs', 'Claud Hamiltons', 'Directors' ... On this occasion 68 backed on at Portadown, relieving 207 at the other end of the pilgrim train - seven bogies, to be worked forward in diesel timings of 25 minutes to the Dungannon stop and 40 on to Omagh. The table below shows what was done, outward and return, and I doubt if a U has ever recorded better uphill work.

		(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	
Miles		m:s	mph	m:s	mph	m:s	mph	m:s	mph
0.00	Portadown	0:00	-	0:00	-	22:57	-	24:24	-
0.50	Portadown Junction	2:17	-	2:01	-	21:32	-	22:24	15*
4.00	MP 4	9:20	42/50	7:40	52/57	16:49	48/52	17:16	46/52
6.70	Annaghmore	13:21/14:15	signal	11:37	15*	12:55	27*	12:59	15*
						PWS	33*		
9.20	Vernersbridge	20:01	43/30*	15:42	52	8:55	42	9:25	44/57
		PWS							
10.80	Trew & Moy	22:38	43/25*	18.10	10*	6:23	28*	6:39	15*
12.00	MP 12	24:59	37	20:54	32	4:48	55	4:34	56
14.00	MP 14	28:23	34/35	24:42	31/32	2:27	43	2:15	46
15.00	Dungannon	30:45	32/	26:54	33/	0:00	-	0:00	-
0.00	Dungannon	0:00	-	0:00	-	51:03	-	50:49	-
0.60	Dungannon Junction	2:14	-	2:06	30	49:37	-	48:26	-
2.70	Donaghmore	5:31	42/48	5:18	46/33*	46:41	40*/45	45:27	35*/44
4.00	MP 19	7:15	44	7:28	42	-	53/55	-	52
6.25	MP 21 1/4	10:27	38	10:49	39	-	50	-	46
7.50	MP 22 1/2	12:35	34	12:46	37	40:33	40/37	35:48/35:08	signal
9.00	Pomeroy	15:10	40/28*	15:45	41/10*	37:53	22*		
			34		31		45		41
11.50	MP 26 1/2	19:44	32/36	21:05	30/31	33:53	28/30	29:57	25/26
14.00	Carrickmore	23:03	44*/55	25:17	46*/58	29:45	50	25:12	47/43
17.80	Sixmilecross	27:40	42*	29:59	41 *	24:42	42	19:49	40
19.20	Beragh	30:00	44/24*	32:35	45/10*	15:38/20:54	signal	13:14/16:03	signal
21.00	MP 36	33:10	45/50	35:44	45/52	11:30	36/45	9:58	41/48
25.00	MP 40	37:56	55/49	40:30	56/48	5:15	26/42	4:07	34/45
		PWS 19*				PWS 20*			
26.60	Omagh	42:14	-	44:14	-	0:00	-	0:00	-
Net (mins):		27 + 41		27 + 44		44 + 22 1/2		45 + 24 1/2	

Table 1: 11:10 Portadown - Omagh and 12:55 return

Runs (1) & (3): 11/7/1960, 68 “Down” + 7 bogies, 212/220 tons down, 212/230 tons up

Runs (2) & (4): 6/6/1960, 62 “Lugnaquilla” (pilot) & 66 “Meath” + 11 bogies, 327/335 tons down, 327/360 tons up

The bank up to Dungannon is mostly at between 1/124 and 1/103, with short steeper bits; up to Pomeroy, mostly steeper than 1/137 with short lengths as severe as 1/76 (to MP 22½); and at 1/84 - 1/145 to MP 26½. In the other direction the problem is Carrickmore bank, 1/75 - 1/72 easing to 1/100 for a half-mile at the top. 68’s climbing was very good indeed for such a small engine, though no high

speed was run downhill; even at the best of times, much over 60 mph was rare on the Derry Road. I'm not sure if by the time of this run the UTA had clapped on to this line an overall restriction to 45 mph for steam, but in any case this seemed, right up to the end, to be regarded by drivers merely as an unnecessary hindrance to timekeeping. The following day I travelled with the same engine and load, but only outward, between Dungannon and Omagh, with very similar results - very slightly slower uphill but touching a mile-a-minute in the Camowen dip. The enginemen, alas unidentified, were also probably the same. The pre-war timings, with the benefits of haulage by the much larger Qs and of mechanical staff exchange (long gone, of course, by 1961) were 20 and 40 minutes for the two sections.



UTA No.68 Down (formerly GNR(I) No. 205) pauses at Dungannon on 27th July 1961.

A month earlier I had had my first experience of this train, also involving a U, shown alongside; in this case an 11-coach train was the remarkable feature, very unusual by that time. An A class diesel worked from Dublin but came off at Portadown. Unsurprisingly with this load, 201/66 "Meath" needed a pilot, an S2, the notorious "Lugnaquilla", (190/62) - perhaps the work of the engines could be divided roughly in the proportion of 210/150 tons; the train was packed with returning pilgrims on the up journey, hence the increased gross load.

In 1962 "Down" appeared from a York Road overhaul looking smart in UTA black, and turned up in Dublin on the unusual duty detailed in the second table. The holiday month of August saw a long-standing tradition continued, a weekly excursion from Bangor to Dublin; normal practice was for a small (originally BCDR) engine to work the train over the 'shaky' Lagan bridge to Maysfields to be replaced by a main-line locomotive for the run to Dublin [Arnold, R.M.: "Steam Over Belfast Lough", Oakwood Press, 1969, (page 6 - "...surprisingly often Q class No.135" but see also page 23)]. The UTA was, inexplicably, suffering a shortage of motive power in summer 1962, and the Bangor excursion was accordingly worked throughout by the same small engine, a U or once even by a UG 0-6-0, 47 ex-82. I thought this was probably unprecedented, but a 1938 photo has recently been published [Crockart, C. & Patience, J.: "Rails Around Belfast", Midland Publishing, 2004 (page 26)]

depicting 197, with a 3,500-gallon tender “useful for the long run ahead”, crossing the ‘shaky’ bridge with what was described as a “return special from Bangor to Dublin”. The UG, even with load down to four bogies, found this outing a struggle, and indeed the 275-mile day’s work (including the empty-stock working to/from Bangor) was a formidable proposition for such small engines. With careful handling, however, driver Billy Bateson (of the Adelaide top link) and 68 managed the remarkably well-judged performance tabulated, and was evidently in no trouble at any point. Interestingly, however, driver Murdie, with the same engine and load two weeks previously, worked 68 a little harder uphill, and it seemed clear from the shutting-off that followed that boiler capacity was being exceeded.



No.202 Louth at Dundalk Junction, 27th March 1951. No.202 is of the 1948 batch, distinguished by the rectangular cab cut-out and the more modern, Stanier-esque tender design.

It's hardly likely now that a U will join the list of new builds under way or in prospect, but we still need to be reminded of the strengths (and weaknesses) of the little engines which carried out the railways' less glamorous duties.

Miles		Schedule (mins)	min/sec	mph
0.00	DUBLIN Amiens Street	0	0:00	-
0.70	East Wall		2:30	-
2.40	Killester		6:00	33
3.70	Raheny		8:17	41
4.80	Howth Junction		9:43	50
6.70	Portmarnock		11:50	55
9.00	Malahide		14:24	50/58
11.40	Donabate		16:59	54/57
13.90	Rush & Lusk		19:46	47
16.00	MP 16		22:40	42
17.90	Skerries		23:59	58/52
21.70	Balbriggan		29:03	60
24.00	Gormanston		31:26	57/60
25.80	Mosney		33:21	55
27.10	Laytown		34:41	61
30.00	MP 30		38:03	48
31.70	DROGHEDA	41	40:56	22*
33.00	MP 33		43:27	41
37.30	Kellystown		49:54	39/41
41.70	Dunleer		54:38	62/66
43.60	Dromin Junction		56:29	62/59
47.20	Castlebellingham		59:58	64/60
50.00	MP 50		62:51	57/61
52.00	MP 52		65:01	51
53.70	Dundalk South		67:00	32*
54.30	DUNDALK	69	68:58	15*
56.00	MP 56		72:14	39
59.00	MP 59		78:08	27
62.50	Adavoyle		85:11	32/29
65.25	MP 65'/4		89:22	46/34
69.20	Bessbrook		93:47	63/55*
71.90	GORAGHWOOD	97	97:22	58/

Table 2: 19:40 Dublin (Amiens Street) - Goraghwood (for Bangor) 2/8/1962, 68 Down + 5 bogies, 155/165 tons. Driver W Bateson (Belfast Adelaide)

(And if anybody should wonder how Dublin-based timers could get home to their beds after a 21:07 arrival at Goraghwood, the answer is a belated acknowledgement to David Laing, prepared to undertake a 145-mile drive on a fine summer's evening!)



Early in the summer of 1959, UTA No.64 Lough Gill (GNR(I) No.196) passes through Belfast Central Junction with a Bangor to Dublin Excursion. As on the 1938 occasion mentioned in the text, the engine is paired with a higher capacity tender than was usual for the U class, a 3,500 gallon type D1 or D2. (A. Donaldson)



The end of the line for No.204 Antrim in the scrap line at Dundalk in 1960, along with VS class No.209 Foyle.

Photographs by E.M. Patterson

A recent bid in a postal auction produced a little volume advertised as a Belfast and County Down Railway working timetable, issued to come into force on Monday 16th September 1940. On arrival, it appeared that the company only required three tables for its services, one for the mainline and the country branches, one for the Bangor line and one for some extra local Belfast-Comber services, and the rest of the booklet's thirty-two pages contains various instructions on working, more akin to the content of an appendix to the working timetable. However, put together, the tables and the notes provide a fascinating insight into operation in the era when the railways were still common carriers for just about every commodity from kitchen stoves to gramophone records.



0-6-4T No.29 shunting coal wagons at Queen's Quay in May 1943.

One tends to think of the BCDR as predominantly a passenger line, but the first thing we find in the mainline timetable are three early morning goods trains from Queens Quay: a 3:45am fast to Downpatrick, allowed three-quarters of an hour there to shunt, before serving all stations to Newcastle, getting there at 7:40am; a 4am which picked up most of the station work between Ballygowan and Downpatrick, which it reached at 7:10am; and a 4:15am which went down the Donaghadee branch, getting to the end at 6:35am. The up goods were from Newcastle at 8:30am, which had forty minutes at Downpatrick, and additional stops at Crossgar and Ballynahinch Junction, and might also serve Ballygowan, Saintfield and Comber if required, scheduled to reach Queen's Quay at 12:15pm; and the 8:30pm from Donaghadee. The Downpatrick goods seems to be balanced by a 7:10pm light engine and van from Downpatrick to Comber. The up and down Newcastle goods were to have all wagons double-coupled, except East Downshire Steamship Company coal wagons.

The Donaghadee branch had ten services from Belfast, between 7am and 6:18pm, plus a portion off the 7:55pm Newcastle train. On Saturdays, this combined set was double-headed to Comber. There was also an evening short working to Newtownards, 8:55pm from Belfast, 9:30pm back, six days a week.

Running time Belfast-Donaghadee was between 42 and 55 minutes, the best time being by the 6:18pm,

despite the fact that it called all intermediate stations, as did most services. Two managed to get to Comber calling only at Dundonald. Up, there were eleven services between 6:45am (noted as calling at Fraser Street Halt, specifically for the convenience of workmen, going to places such as the Harland and Wolff shipyard or Davidson & Co's Sirocco Works), and 10pm from Donaghadee. Again, most called all stations, but the 8:30am went flying through Comber, to get the best time for any branch train, of 41 minutes for 22½ miles. On Saturday there were three extra down services: a 12:10pm, fast to Comber, then all stations on the branch; a 12:15pm all stations to Newtownards and a late night 11:15pm all stations to Donaghadee. These were balanced by an up passenger service from Newtownards at 12:50pm and an empty carriage working from Donaghadee at 3:35pm. Another Saturday oddity was a light engine from Donaghadee at 11:50am to Comber, whence it worked a Saturday Only 12:40pm to Downpatrick, provided by the rear four coaches brought from Belfast by the extra Saturday Newtownards train. The only station on the branch which did not get a full service was Ballygrainey Halt which had four down trains, plus three other by request and an extra service on Tuesdays, and six up services.



No.15 at Downpatrick on 3rd March 1950. Although the two leading vehicles are 'goods and cattle' wagons, in this case they are attached to a passenger train about to leave for Ardglass.

On the mainline, most trains called all stations Comber to Downpatrick except Shepherd's Bridge and King's Bridge Halts. These halts had only two up morning and one down daily services. Saturdays, Downpatrick Fair days and the Downpatrick Hiring Fair in November brought extra calls to Kingsbridge and also a limited service to Ballykinlar Halt. Regular crossings were at: Crossgar, Newtownards, Saintfield, Ballygowan, Comber, Downpatrick North and South Junctions and Dundrum.

Down mainline services from Belfast were:

7:45am, Newcastle arrive 9:7am

10:50 am, through to Castlewellan arrive 12:20pm

12 noon, the Saturday Only Golfers' Express, fastest BCDR timing, direct to Newcastle in 57 minutes,

not serving Downpatrick

1:50pm, Newcastle arrive 3:20pm

4:45pm, through to Castlewellan arrive 6:52pm

5:40pm, the week day replacement for the Golfers' Express, through to Castlewellan, arrive there 6:52pm, fast to Crossgar, but could also be stopped at Tullymurphy to allow military personnel to alight, by previous arrangement with the Belfast station master

6:14pm: another Saturdays-exceptioned train, but all stations Comber to Downpatrick, arriving there at 7:9pm

7:55pm all stations Bloomfield - Crossgar except Shepherd's Bridge Halt, Downpatrick arrive 9am, extended to Newcastle on Thursdays and Saturdays only, with a request set-down stop only for Tullymurphy, and an empty train back to Downpatrick.

There were also a few "short" workings on the mainline: a Monday, Wednesday and Friday only 3:50pm Downpatrick - Newcastle (using a light engine and van which came up from Newcastle at 3:30pm) and a 12:40pm Saturdays only Comber - Downpatrick all stations (arrive 1:24pm, taking connection from a Saturday only Belfast - Newtownards working), and a Saturdays evening only Ballynahinch - Comber and back jaunt for the branch set, which also provided a good set of connections to and from Donaghadee.

Up mainline services ran at:

6.45am from Downpatrick, a slow train calling at all intermediate stations except King's Bridge and Dundonald but serving Fraser St, reaching Belfast at 7.48pm;

7.40 am from Downpatrick, arrive Belfast 8.45am;

8.5am from Castlewellan, omitting Comber, arrive Belfast 9.30am;

9.35am from Newcastle, arrive Belfast 10.49am;

1.0pm Saturdays only from Downpatrick, arrive Belfast 1.54pm;

2.10pm mail from Castlewellan, Belfast 3.46pm (On Castlewellan Fair day, cattle went out in vacuum-braked wagons by this train);

4.20pm Saturdays excepted from Newcastle to Belfast, arrive 5.52pm, with an extra stop at Knock;

5.35pm Saturdays only up Golfers' Express, direct via the loop at Downpatrick, arrive Belfast 6.32pm;

7.0pm Newcastle to Belfast, arrive 8.12pm.

The Ardglass branch seems worked by one engine based at Downpatrick which began with a goods, timed to leave after the arrival of both the goods trains from Belfast, and then provided four return passenger services, running time 20 - 22 mins. The addition of an afternoon up goods must have meant some juggling with the passenger stock, or borrowing an extra set at Downpatrick and running a larger up last train. On Saturdays, there were some minor timing changes and an extra up early afternoon service, balanced by an engine and van. Only one train a day each way served Coney Island Halt on the branch.

Ballynahinch had eleven down passenger trains plus one mixed, eleven up and a separate goods, and several extra Saturday workings and re-timings, although Creevyargan Halt only had four or five services each way depending on the day of the week. A slightly unusual working was a 1:5pm from Ballynahinch (Saturdays excepted) through to Comber, with a connection to Belfast, and by 1949 this service also had a connection to Donaghadee. The empty coaches worked back at 1.40pm, but goods and coal traffic for Ballynahinch could be attached to this train. On Saturdays, instead, the branch set

got an evening return passenger working through to and from Comber. All told, the branch engine was active from 6.55am to 8.50pm, although the section running was only six to ten minutes and fifteen for one goods train, with some very sharp timings for run-round at the Junction, although in practice there was some slack for shunting and catch-up at the terminus.

Not appearing in the mainline timetable were a series of Belfast - Comber locals, running between 8am and 11pm, six return services on weekdays, three down and four up on Saturdays, a Monday - Friday Belfast - Knock and return service and a few light engine and empty train manoeuvres to keep everything in the right place.

For the joint services between Newcastle and Castlewellan, a table is probably the best summary:

Down	GNR psr	BCDR goods	GNR psr	GNR psr	GNR psr	GNR psr	BCDR psr	GNR goods SX	GNR psr SO*	GNR psr (ThS)*	GNR psr SO*
Newcastle	7.25am	7.33am	9.40am	12.13pm	1.50pm	5.0pm	6.45pm	7.15pm	8.5pm	8.30pm	9.30pm
Castlewellan	7.33am	7.43am	9.48am	12.20pm	1.58pm	5.8pm	6.52pm	7.25pm	8.11pm	8.38pm	9.36pm

Up	GNR goods	BCDR psr	GNR psr	GNR psr	BCDR mail	GNR psr SO*	GNR psr	GNR psr	BCDR goods	GNR psr (ThS)*
Newcastle	6.45am	8.5am	8.53am	12.51pm	2.10pm	2.44pm	3.28pm	6.36pm	7.2pm	6.36pm
Castlewellan	6.55am	8.12am	9.0am	1.0pm	2.17pm	2.50pm	3.35pm	6.43pm	7.12pm	6.43pm

SO: Saturdays only, SX: Saturdays excepted, TS: Thursdays and Saturdays only

** Ceased to run after 22nd September. Some GNR passenger services ran to slightly altered times after this date.*

Being a winter timetable, Sunday was much quieter, with one slow Castlewellan train, 9.30am from Belfast; 6.45pm up, all stations except Neill's Hill, Dundonald, Shepherd's Bridge and King's Bridge allowed about 100 mins each way; a Newcastle service up at 9.15am, setting off back at 8.15pm, and serving all local stations to Comber each way. A few light engine and empty coaching stock workings were needed between Newcastle and Castlewellan to keep things straight. For the branches, there were three return working to Ballynahinch and one for Ardglass.

Donaghadee had a more complex pattern, with early morning up and mid-afternoon down workmen's services; three other down and five up ordinary passenger services; and an empty carriage working each way.

The Bangor branch also had an early morning goods, 5.30am from Queen's Quay, back at 7.5pm, except on Saturdays. The rest of the timetable looks rather complex to modern eyes, used to regular interval all stations services. For instance, Ballymacarrett Halt had only one down and three up services. Bangor had twenty-nine return workings, including the various Saturday only or Saturday excepted services. There was also an extra Wednesday- and Saturday-only early afternoon service, and an extra Saturday teatime train each way until the end of October. First and last services were 6.25 am from Belfast; 6.55am from Bangor; and 11.15pm from Belfast and 11.10pm from Bangor. Patterns of stops also varied, from slow services (all stations except Ballymacarrett and Victoria Park, (usually 32 minutes) to the 7.33am, non-stop Belfast-Bangor in twenty minutes.

There were also the Belfast-Holywood railmotor push-pull services, with the usual revised timings for Saturdays, but nine daily services each way, plus two more which ventured as far as Craigavon and

back, and two extra Saturday services. Craigavon also had an orthodox loco-hauled loco working which terminated there about 6.40 each Monday-Friday evening, and worked back to Belfast, and there were a few light engine movements to keep things straight. Again, these railmotors varied from non-stop services to Holywood (eight minutes), to all stations in eleven minutes. Even on the suburban section, there were a few stops by request, and the 2.47pm up railmotor from Holywood was required to stop at Tillysburn on Tuesdays and Fridays to allow the Holywood porter to alight there.



No.6 watering at Ballynahinch Junction on 3rd January 1950.

On Sundays, there was an early morning workmen's train each way, 7.15am from Bangor, 8.0am from Belfast, and then twelve return passenger services, with rather variable patterns of stops, last services from each end at 10pm. As on the Donaghadee branch the early morning trains for labourers were noted as experimental, and the company admonished the guards to log numbers joining at each stop to see if the service was worth continuing.

In part 2, Alan will continue his study of the working timetable with a look at the BCDR's signalling arrangements and other operating rules.

THE STORY OF A TABLE

George Dempsey

As told to David Humphries.

The story of the table from Irish State Coach 351 started for me one evening in May 2014 when I received a phone call from my fellow member David Humphries. He explained that a member of the public - a Mr John Graham - had contacted the RPSI to say that he had what he believed was a table from the Irish State Coach. His father - who had passed away - had come into possession of the table

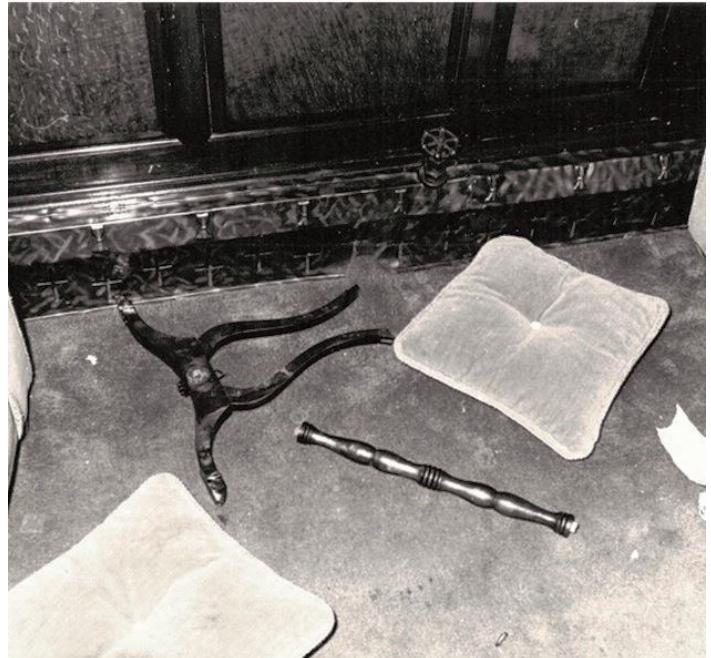
during his time as a member of An Garda Síochána stationed at Kilmainham. John further explained that his father had told him that only the table top was original. His father had engaged a carpenter to replace the missing parts copied from what was left of the original ones.

Having obtained Mr Graham's address I set off one very, very, wet May evening to collect the table. I was very cordially greeted by John and invited into his home to see the table. We talked about the history of the Coach and also how the table came into his father's possession. I could help by explaining that the area of Inchicore/Kilmainham was home to many railway men. It was the practice that one could purchase Scrap material from the railway and this might be a case of such a transaction when it was decided to withdraw the State Coach from service and ultimately scrap it. I gave him a brief history of the Coach from the time it was built up to the present day which he found to be quite a story. It was then time to procure the table and, on seeing it, my reaction was 'yes, it's right, I've seen a similar piece of furniture before'.

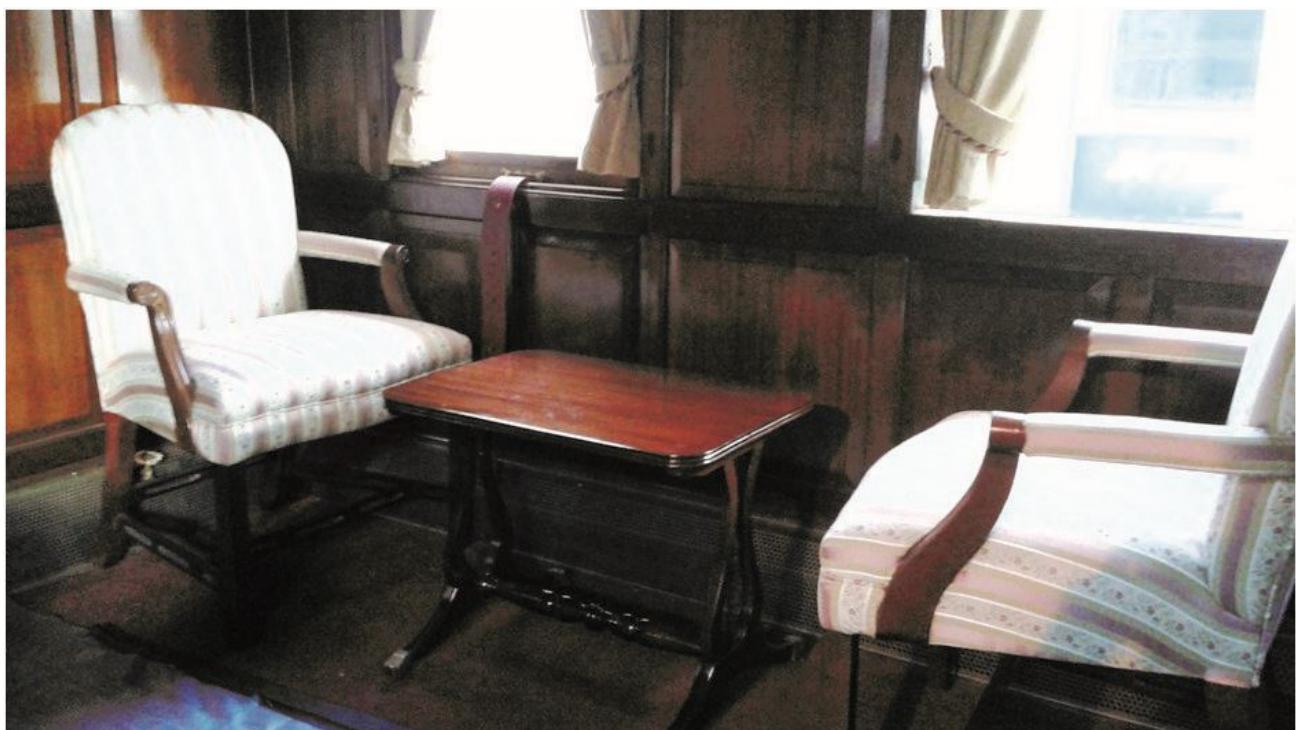
My thoughts went back to April 1961, when the manager of the Carriage Shop detailed me to carry out restoration work in what was called the 'Smoking Room' in preparation for it going into service for some special upcoming event. I had never seen the inside of the carriage until then so I had to satisfy my curiosity by viewing the interior and its fittings, furniture, etc. Some of the items left a lasting mark in my memory. The Table undoubtedly did because the 'legs' reminded me of a musical instrument - a lyre. Later I recalled seeing the tables being spruced-up by the French Polisher in the Paint Shop - a real character by the name of Ernie Gerrard.

Armed with this knowledge, I phoned David to bring him up to date on the story. During our conversation he suggested that amongst the photos I had there might be at least one that could authenticate the piece of furniture now in our possession. Working on that suggestion I searched through all the material I had accumulated over time and, to my pleasant surprise, I found one that, in my opinion, answered the question. The photo was obviously taken when the Coach had been set aside for scrapping and it shows pieces of furniture etc. strewn around the floor. Clearly visible is a 'leg' and the turned cross rail of a table similar to the one we now had in our possession.

I made another call to David to bring him up to date on progress made and to decide our next move. It was agreed that I should contact the firm E.V. Kidd, whom we had employed to do the French



polishing, etc., on the total refurbishment of Irish State Coach 351 a few years ago and to request a quote to restore the table to its original appearance. I subsequently met with Declan Kidd and discussed with him our objective regarding the table. In time a quote for the work (very modest) was received by the Society. I instructed Declan to proceed with the restoration. In due course I collected the finished product and I was pleased with the outcome - of both the restoration work done on it and the fact that it was now destined to be placed in the Coach where life first started for it. As a postscript to my narrative I recently spent a weekend in Cahir, County Tipperary. One doesn't visit that town without visiting its historic castle. It was there that I heard about another historic building associated with the castle - namely the Swiss Cottage, a romantic cottage orné or ornamental cottage dating from around 1810. It was built by Richard Butler, the first Earl of Glengall, to a design by the famous Regency architect John Nash. During the guided tour, in what was described as the Main Reception Room, where VIPs were entertained, my attention was drawn to a table standing in a small bay window. I was thrilled to see that the legs were identical to those on our table. The thing that interested me was that 16 pieces of furniture in the room were described as belonging to the 18th/19th century. Suddenly our table had taken on a new dimension.



OBITUARIES

Francis Richards

Whitehead Carriage & Wagon Officer Francis Richards passed away on 6th March 2015.

Although a proud Londoner, for decades Francis was a regular passenger on RPSI May railtours, who became an occasional volunteer. Then, at the age of 62, Francis decided to retire from his IT business and move to Whitehead to become a full time volunteer, and achieve his dream of becoming an engine driver - a transition that was featured in a 2007 documentary for Channel 4!

Francis joined the RPSI Council as Whitehead Carriage & Wagon Officer in 2005, and continued in that post for the next ten years. He became deeply involved in the management of the RPSI and of Whitehead in particular - it was often said that he worked an eight day week!

Apart from his love of steam, one of Francis' main passions was education and preserving skills, and he was a great proponent of providing apprenticeships at Whitehead.



Francis (right) receiving a GM driving lesson from Noel Playfair, 28th April 2010.

Francis was also deeply involved in setting up and running our subsidiary company, Heritage Engineering Ireland, as well as being our representative on the Whitehead Community Forum, showing around tour parties, arranging outside contract work and of course keeping the Mark 2 running set on the main line.

Francis will be fondly remembered by a great many people both in the RPSI and the wider community.

Walter Sullivan Boomer

Sullivan Boomer, one of the RPSI's best known and most influential figures, passed away suddenly on Sunday 13th April 2015.

A railway enthusiast from an early age, Sullivan joined the RPSI on day one and was a regular Whitehead volunteer.

In his professional life, Sullivan had a career in the Northern Ireland Water Service, while also working part time as an announcer for the BBC. He became a familiar voice to the public, often reading the evening news on TV or radio. (Sullivan was fond of remarking that he "said goodnight to more ladies in Northern Ireland than anybody else"!)

Sullivan was chairman of the RPSI from 1984 to 1997, while his wife Heather served as Northern Operations officer from 1994 to 1999. Together they were at the forefront of the RPSI's activities during a period of great changes, and indeed crises.

Sullivan always advocated that the RPSI should think big and long term. During his tenure we secured a lease on Mullingar shed and began efforts to gain recognition as a museum (efforts that were finally

rewarded in 2007). Whitehead's facilities also developed dramatically with the addition of the carriage shed and planning begun for the Henry Dunleath Workshop.



Sullivan and Heather greeting the guests for the RPSI 50th anniversary dinner at Belfast City Hall, 13th September 2014.



A youthful Sullivan captured in the front row of the RPSI's inaugural meeting on 30th September 1964. (Photo: Belfast Telegraph)



Sullivan reading the news for BBC TV in 1974.

After his period as Chairman, Sullivan continued volunteering in a wide variety of roles, including being a steam driver and Whitehead Safety Officer.

Sullivan dusted off his BBC announcing skills in 2014 to provide the commentary for Mike Beckett's anniversary DVD, RPSI 50. There was only one line for which he needed a second take.

But Sullivan will be remembered less for the things he did than for his personality. His enthusiasm for tall tales and funny stories made him the life and soul of any party.

Stories told by - and about! - Sullivan are still told at the BBC decades after he left. In the RPSI, where he was such an influence for all of the first half-century, his memory will surely always be with us.



Irreplaceable characters: Francis and Sullivan sharing a yarn on 10th October 2009.



No.85 Merlin raising steam at Killarney to work the 'Emerald Isle Explorer' train to Limerick Junction on 23rd June 2015. (S. Comiskey)



No.85 Merlin at Cork on 10th May 2015 during the 'South Munster' railtour. The 'Enterprise' headboard is carried turned upside down on the smokebox handrail, which was common GNR practice - it's quicker than taking it off properly!