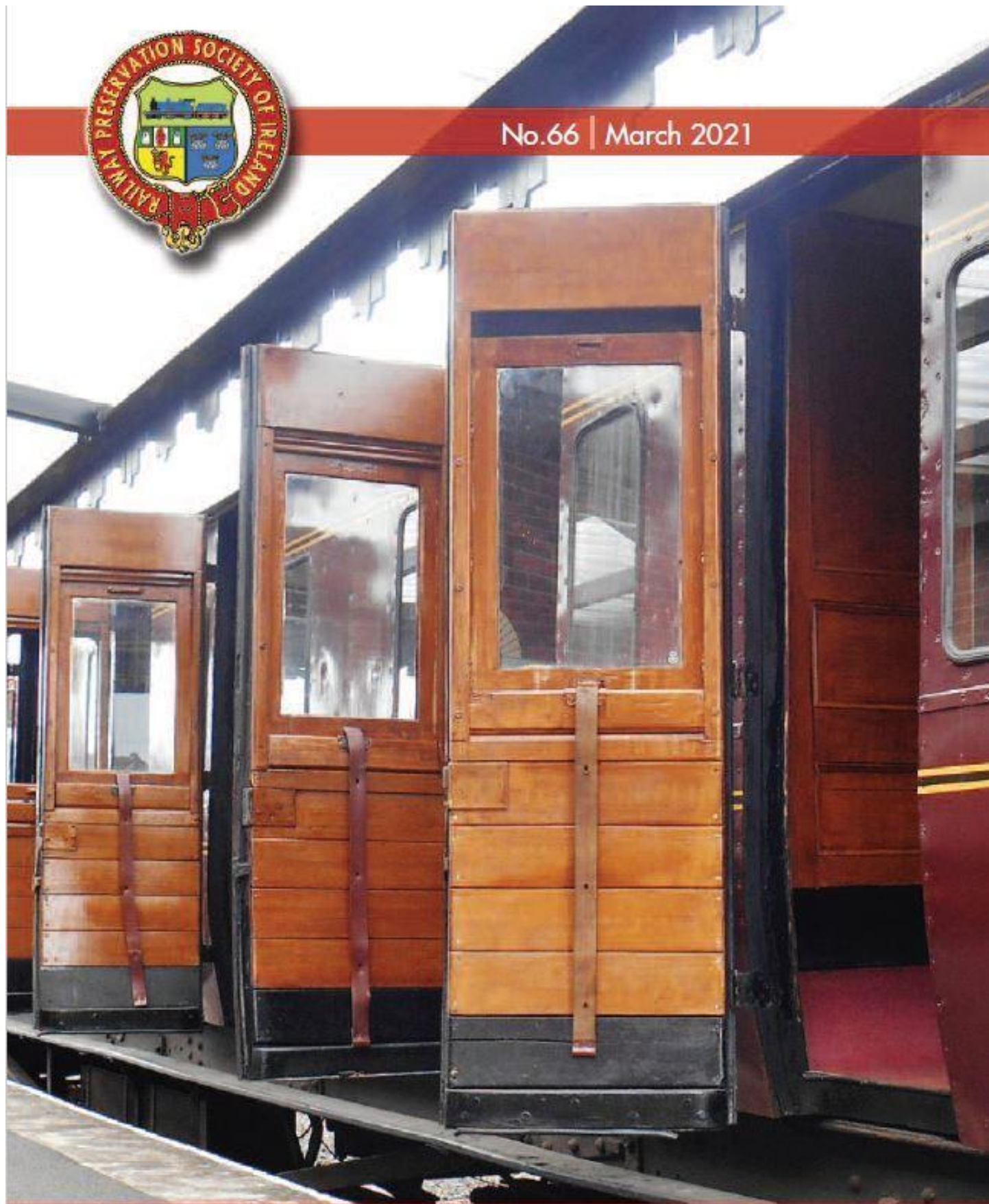




No.66 | March 2021



FIVE FOOT THREE

The Magazine of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland



	Page
Editorial	3
Chairman's Report	5
News From the Board.....	9
General Manager's Report	12
Steam Locomotives	16
Whitehead Diesel Locomotives.....	22
B134 Large and Small.....	23
Dublin Area Operations	25
Dublin Carriage Report	29
Belfast Area Operations	30
Whitehead Carriage Report	32
Whitehead Site Report	34
Heritage Engineering Ireland	38
Whitehead Railway Museum.....	40
Curatorial Report.....	45
Connolly Turntable Restoration	48
Volunteering to Guide and Curate	52
Volunteering – A Rewarding Experience	54
Volunteering in Challenging Times	55
Dublin Santa Trains	57
Dublin Santa, as a Steward	59
Boxes & Beggs.....	62
Drumboe: A Remarkable Survivor	69
Ride on the Footplate of The Enterprise Express of the G.N. Railway	74
Return to Portadown.....	78
A photo of Moira Canal Bridge.....	81
Magheramorne: Half a Century Ago	83
Book Reviews.....	88
Letter to the Editor.....	91
Nelson Poots Obituary	92

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FIVE FOOT THREE
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James Friel photos our two No.3 shunting engines as they pose on 19th January. 3BG (left) has hauled Harvey out from A-Road in the Carriage Shed, where it was being painted, and will shortly place it in the Railway Museum display area in C-Road. The year is 2020 unless otherwise stated.

(Photo: Editor)

COVER: 68's compartments to the rescue, 16th August. (Photo: Editor)

INSIDE FRONT: No.85 testing Dublin Connolly's refurbished turntable on 05th June.
(Photo: G Mooney)

Well, 2020 was not the year we had planned for. Instead of marking fifty years since the end of mainline company steam trains on these islands by running some preserved ones, we found ourselves running virtually nothing at all. The coronavirus Covid-19 was of course the reason and the Editor extends greatest sympathy to any member who has been affected by it.

Whilst creating the last edition of FFT, the Editor commented to some of his peers how some day he may just produce an edition without any photos of trains in it and instead just focus on members working behind the scenes. For example, a department head scratching their head trying to work out a budget, people stuffing envelopes with newsletters, someone with a trolley at the wholesalers. Someone on the phone ordering coal, another staring at a colour chart during a medical, yet another ironing their steward's shirt.... All the essential stuff that builds up to the end result of a nice photo of a train. Now, having had to fill a magazine with (virtually) no train photos from a year which instead produced an avalanche of images of increasingly shaggy colleagues working on Zoom, he's gone off the notion!

Whitehead activities continued apace until mid-March, with No.4 and additional Mk2s making serious progress towards re-entering traffic to partake in some very interesting runs. But society collapsed so rapidly from there that the Editor found himself thinking he must have drunk some stale Guinness on St Patrick's Day and stumbled through a wormhole into a parallel universe where the RPSI never existed.

We can be grateful medicine has moved

on from the following treatment for respiratory illness. An operative named Billy Shannon describes in 'By the Banks of the Lagan' (Ben Simon, 2011) how, in Belfast Gasworks - "There was a big pit down there where the extract of the tar went into. When I first started, people used to bring their youngsters down who had the whooping cough. If they put their head over they could get the fumes coming up which was supposed to help people... A big round tank of tar... hot coming out of the furnaces, it was steaming up like a bath". Despite the NHS being in existence in 1960, old habits die hard in Belfast. David Bellamy in 'A Natural Life' (2002) confirms that this treatment was also popular on the big island in the 1930s and mentions an alternative for pneumonia, also a symptom linked to Covid-19 infection - "Bowels must be opened every day, come what may to cleanse the body of the waste products of the disease if not of the medicines that still included arsenic, antimony, mercury and many other poisons. They certainly opened you up in an explosive way... five years later my kidneys collapsed due to acute nephritis, caused.... by toxins as of arsenic, mercury etc." The Editor quotes these 'remedies' to make you feel more positive about today's prospects in a pandemic... and because he has little to speak about that is RPSI related. Prior to 2020 one suspects 1832 to have been the last calendar year in which no steam locomotive operated on the Irish mainline network, construction on the Dublin & Kingstown starting in 1833.

The lowly Guinness Engine, 3BG, was built during the last great pandemic, the so-called Spanish Flu, and proceeded to guide us capably through this one. The Society's first engine was the vital cog in keeping Whitehead ticking over through



A perfectly normal start a year which soon turned out to be anything but normal: Adam Lohoff and the Editor in conversation with the crew of the well turned-out 3BG, which sits on GNR(I) tender 43 in 2-Road during a shunt on 19th January.
(Photo: J Clinton)

2020 but special mention must also go to ex-NCC compartment coach 68: what luck to possess such a vehicle in service at this time.

Thanks to everyone who contributed to keeping the spirits up during the pandemic; those who created colouring-in pages for children, calendars and Christmas cards, those who compiled quizzes and other brain teasers or those who responded to the Desert Island Engines series featured in the Bulletins. Thanks to the people who conducted fundraisers: even more thanks to those who purchased said Christmas cards, calendars, books, merchandise, B134 models, No.171 tubes, takeaway meals in the new Platform 3: all contributed to vital funds.

Thanks to Translink and Irish Rail for, although only one mainline train ever ran during 2020, a frankly enormous amount

of behind-the-scenes work has been carried out with both. The RPSI shall emerge the better for it in the years to come.

Thanks to the RPSI and HEI staff who found themselves on furlough and faced uncertainty. Thanks to those who worked to find ways to bring them back and to those volunteers who kept the Society's vitals functioning. The Editor will break new ground and specifically thank our General Manager Lisa Adair for everything she has done over the past year. She has been frankly exceptional: ever positive, ever can-do, ever driving forwards.

Finally, a last salute to our very dear departed friend Nelson Poots, Editor for many years. To me this still feels like his magazine and so, just once more, Nelson shall fill much of it.

As I sit down at my laptop to write this letter, I have just finished putting the Christmas decorations back into the roof space from whence they came about a month ago. This year I have had no new decorations because, as a vulnerable person, I have had to eschew pottering round shops due to Covid-19 pandemic precautions and assorted lockdowns. *[I bought one of Santa, Rudolph and an Elf with little 6' arrows between them and masks on off t'interweb. Someday we'll wonder! – Ed]* Little did I think that would be the case when I put them away a year ago. Today I reflected on what the situation might be next Christmas and whether I can avoid catching the virus, being ill or dying of something else altogether! At my age it makes sense to think about such matters. In the meantime, I am fine, enjoying life and eager to wish all 'Five Foot Three' readers a happy, healthy and enjoyable 2021.

I wrote my introductory paragraph because it is a situation common to many of our members and especially volunteers in the RPSI. Your Board has a duty of care for all RPSI Staff and members, many of whom fall into a variety of vulnerable categories. This has to be our primary concern at all times but especially as the nation is gripped by an insidious, invisible virus which can cause huge harm. Like everyone else I look forward to an end to restrictions and a return to normality; I will have no hesitation in being vaccinated.

A year ago, I had never heard of Zoom though I had heard the word furlough. It was used by church missionaries when

they came home for extended periods before returning, refreshed to their work overseas. Yet, even as I write, I have Zoom dates for assorted RPSI and other meetings, our 'Orangefield' meetings and several of our staff are again on furlough. These are indeed strange times. As other reports from Whitehead, Belfast and Dublin outline operations this year have been minimal. It is a story of cancellations but for many it has been an extremely busy year.

The year started well with our first two Orangefield meetings which were well attended – I was on my way to the March meeting when it was cancelled due to the increasing prevalence of the Coronavirus. This was a harbinger of what lay ahead. Thankfully that wasn't an issue on 1st February when we held something completely new, a Dinner and Awards Evening. This was held in Carrickfergus and was both well attended and great craic. It proved to be a fitting and most enjoyable end to a day of intense discussions with Blue Moss Consultancy on the way forward to the RPSI – though a pandemic was not on the agenda. Hopefully, the Blue Moss report will be revisited as we get back to what we used to call normal.

In early February an RPSI group attended the Heritage Railway Association's Awards event in Birmingham at which our entry, "Fifty Years of the Two Day Tour", received a Runner Up award in the Special Events Category. This is a major event attended by representatives from across the Heritage Railway world and is a very useful place to meet others and share

experiences. One experience not on the programme was Storm Ciara which gave us rather hairy flights home! As Covid-19 began to spread it was apparent that we could no longer run trains or open our Museum at Whitehead. We were entering uncharted territory. It was then that our General Manager, Lisa Adair, showed her sterling qualities by taking control of the situation and, in full consultation with the Board, furloughed staff and sought the various grants and support measures offered by the UK and NI Governments, the HLF and the Local Council. In her report Lisa outlines the support we received.

As Chairman I wish to state formally and officially that if it were not for Lisa's untiring efforts in securing funding the RPSI would probably have had to be wound up as most of our usual income streams had dried up. We owe Lisa an immeasurable debt of gratitude. Thank you, Lisa. Despite a lack of visitors or volunteers on site in Whitehead our facility was kept safe and prepared by the untiring and positive actions of Ivan McAteer, our - allegedly part time - Technical Operations Manager. Thanks so much to Ivan - another Whitehead Hero.

For most of the year, although normal activities were impossible, we had small but dedicated groups of volunteers who worked on site to keep everything fresh and to

complete various projects including the Guinness bogie Grain Van. This was not easy as they had to socially distance and take all the necessary hygiene precautions even to get on site. We are delighted that our nomination of this van for next month's Heritage Railway Awards has been accepted. Here's hoping for another award at what, this year, will be an online Event.



Challenging year. This RPSI Tweet featured in a BBC NI website article in November detailing how short notice, off-again-on-again, Covid-19 lockdowns were playing havoc with everybody's Santa plans. It was a restrained person who, on the cancellation on the same day the tickets sold out, of the thoroughly-planned, Covid-secure, Whitehead Santa event, which promised a healthy shot of desperately needed revenue, only posted the word 'banjaxed'.

Many thanks to Robin Morton for meticulously preparing the submission for the ceremony.

Despite the restrictions we had some distinguished visitors to the WRM in the shape of Joe Mahon of UTV's "Ulster Giants" series, the Mayor of Mid and East Antrim who visited one of our few Steam Saturdays with his family and the DAERA Minister, Edwin Poots, who used the WRM as back drop to launch a new rural initiative. All this gave us good positive publicity.

Our ever-active Dublin team also managed to run our Cravens set to Galway as part of a film contract under very strict lockdown conditions. Not only did this provide valuable income but we look forward to seeing our coaches in action on the screen in due course. All grist to our mill. Also, in Dublin, work continued on the restoration of ex-CIÉ GM Loco 134 while a superb 4mm scale model was launched by Murphy Models. A special limited edition of 300 of the RPSI version of the loco sold out quickly with all profits going to the Society. Their 2021 Calendar was also a sell out as were our Christmas cards produced with a lovely depiction of our Guinness engine by Debra Wenlock.

One positive outcome of the various lockdowns has been the use of Zoom, initially for Board and Committee meetings. As we are an all-island Society it can be difficult for Board members to find time to travel to a meeting whether north or south. Valuable volunteering or operating weekend days have to be used and some end up spending more time travelling than attending the actual meeting! With Zoom mid-week evening meetings are more easily arranged. This

allows for more rapid decision making though we do miss the pre-meeting craic and banter. In the future, post pandemic, we plan to meet physically from time to time but to conduct most business on Zoom.

Just before Christmas our first 'Orangefield' meeting was held on Zoom and it proved to be a great success; not least because it allowed members from north and south to attend easily but also from around the world! Charles Friel is rapidly developing an excellent on-screen presence which began with his enthralling talk on the Derry Central Railway.

I don't want to repeat what appears in other reports but I cannot finish without paying credit to my colleagues on the Board who have worked so diligently to keep the RPSI buoyant in this uniquely challenging year. Special thanks are due to our Board Secretary Paul McCann who never seems to flap no matter how much is on his plate and who is always prompt and helpful at responding to questions and queries about Society matters. In 2020 we have had two Treasurers, but our newly appointed Treasurer, Ian Eagleson, had only got on top of our Finances when he was head-hunted and made an offer he couldn't refuse. He did not leave us in the lurch; he asked his colleague Graham Coulter if he would take over and this happened seamlessly. We are most grateful to Ian, and now Graham, for putting our books in order and satisfying the needs of our new Auditors, Finegan Gibson. In this they are very well served by our small but perfectly formed and active Finance Committee. They have reported a steady stream of generous donations to help the RPSI's funds through the pandemic safely; if you are so inclined,

I can honestly say they never tire of receiving money!

Due to the various issues surrounding both H&S and HR we have been well served by our external Directors Michael Guest and Dermot O'Hara. Their advice has been invaluable in the past year. Our Dublin based members never cease to amaze me. As we are a Train Operating Company in the Republic, they have a huge amount of documentation to process for the Commission for Railway Regulation but they do this reliably and efficiently as well as maintaining cordial relationships with our fellow operator Iarnród Éireann! In Northern Ireland we are most grateful for the support and ready cooperation given to us by Translink to allow our trains to operate on its network. It is a very positive relationship on which we hope to build in the future.

Alongside the Board there are the other committees all of which do excellent work. This year I will only mention two; the Belfast and Dublin Management Committees. They were established in response to restructuring our governance procedures proposed in the Courtney Report of a few years ago. After a few hiccups, they have become the driving forces for running the Society allowing the Board to focus on H&S, HR, Finance and overall planning as is right and proper. Thank you to all those who serve on all our committees. As you are reading this in 'Five Foot Three' we owe special thanks to Mark Walsh for doing such a fine job as your Editor. He is believed to have had a weak turn when someone suggested that we should have four issues of FFT a year! Well done, Mark.

Thankfully an encouraging feature of

recent years has been an increasing number of younger active volunteer members. This was reflected at our Awards Dinner in February. Hopefully this will continue and increase as we get back to normal and more young people seek a change from laptops and smart phones.

On a personal level I wish to pay tribute to our President, Dr Joan Smyth, for her unflagging interest in the Society and her wise counsel founded on wide experience. I extended my sympathies late last year to our Vice President, Nora Owen, on the death of her husband, Brian, who she had lovingly nursed through a prolonged illness. I am glad to report that our Patron, Lord O'Neill, is in good heart after his recent illness. Sadly, almost every month, we are asked to remember a long serving member who has died. This is a reflection on the demographic of the Society's members but each death gives us a sense of loss as well as evoking many memories. Perhaps we should create a 'Roll of Honour' board at Whitehead so that our earlier stalwarts are known by future generations. I extend my deepest sympathy to all those who have been bereaved in the year that is past.

We now come to a new year and a new future for the RPSI. I believe we are in a good position to get fully steamed up and back on track once the pandemic is over but for us to be truly effective it needs the involvement of as many members as possible. I pay tribute to all our volunteers; you make the RPSI what it is today – one of this island's great success stories. Let us keep it that way.

My very best wishes for a happy, freer and healthier 2021.

What is there to say about 2020 that hasn't already been said?

For the Society, it was a year that:

- **We couldn't run mainline trains (and only a few train rides).**

This was the main consequence of the various lockdowns, north and south. A series of Steam Saturday train rides at Whitehead and the opening mainline tour, to Maynooth, had already been advertised when the implications of the virus became apparent in early to mid-March. In the event, the Saint Patrick's weekend train rides took place on 14th March. But shortly thereafter all events were

cancelled for the foreseeable, and Whitehead closed up.

By early summer things were looking more promising and, following significant work on risk assessments and expenditure on signage, the Museum opened again in August, followed a few weeks later by Saturday train rides. However, as we now know, a second infection surge was looming and this caused closure again in early October.

In October, there was a film charter (crew-only and strictly socially distanced) to Galway with a diesel. This helped keep the finances ticking over.



Mark Kennedy, on the right, with a Radio Ulster technician, broadcasting from the site car park for Your Place and Mine on 29th February, the seemingly strange location brought on, apparently, by the inability of the van to see the necessary satellite from the Museum itself. (Photo: CP Friel)

We thought that a Christmas season, albeit internally at Whitehead, would be feasible but, again, surge number three appeared, and everything was cancelled.

And that's where we find ourselves at year end – not too sure how things will play out in 2021.

- **We learned how to hold meetings by Zoom. Had anybody even heard of it this time last year?**

The earliest casualty of the pandemic was the 11th March Belfast meeting at Orangefield, cancelled at very short notice. This prompted investigation into the use of online meeting software, both for the public meetings and for internal communication. Zoom proved to be quite useable and has been the tool of choice for all Board and sub-committee meetings since.

Also, our first public meeting was held by Zoom in December 2020 and, hopefully, the rest of the winter meeting season will be produced in this fashion. Well done to Charles Friel and his team for making it possible.

- **We gained a new Treasurer.**

During the year, the Board said goodbye to Ian Eagleson, who stepped down as Treasurer after only being with us a short while (he took up a professional post which was too good to turn down!). We were fortunate to find a suitable replacement in Graham Coulter, who has so far done a great job in a trying year.

Thus, at present, the governing board is:

Chairman:	John McKegney
Vice-Chairman:	Vacant
Secretary:	Paul McCann
Treasurer:	Graham Coulter

Directors:	Eileen Armstrong Mervyn Darragh Mark Kennedy Fergus McDonnell Joe McKeown Phillip Newell Peter Rigney Peter Scott
External:	Michael Guest Dermot O'Hara

- **We lost our auditors.**

Only a short while after taking over, our new Treasurer was faced, mid financial year, with the resignation of our auditors. A new firm, Finegan Gibson, was eventually appointed, but this and the virus issues led to significant delays in auditing our 2019 accounts. It was fortunate that Companies House and the charity regulators north and south, both of whom we are registered with and must report to, had extended reporting deadlines because of the issues companies and charities were experiencing during the year.

- **We understood the benefit of having a General Manager.**

Some section titles of this report from previous years are Developments, Governance, Volunteers and Finance.

For the first three we have very little to report as Board and Management minds were focused on matters elsewhere during the year, Finance being one such.

Apart from the accounts and auditing issues already alluded to, the small matter of lack of income had to be addressed. The idea of a formal appeal to members for financial support had been suggested but it was felt that the members, and the public generally, had enough on their plates without being asked to support the Society.

Lisa, our General Manager, however, despite having to deal with preparations at Whitehead and furloughing of staff, etc., managed to successfully apply for several grants from various lottery and government schemes. This helped keep the wolf from the door and allowed the retention of staff, albeit furloughed. Note that overheads remained much the same as, for instance, the significant insurance bill still had to be paid.

Another successful fundraising scheme was the selling of models of our diesel locomotive B134 during the year. We knew it would sell well, but there was much soul-searching early in the pandemic as the Board was unsure if it would be wise to commit the significant up-front investment needed to fund the venture. In the end, the money was spent and, at the time of writing, the models are all but sold out.

- **We struggled to stay in touch with members.**

To be fair, this only applied to members who have no online access, about 250 of the total membership.

After the lockdown there has been only one News-Letter, that as soon as our printers reopened. In late summer and into the autumn, the accounts were expected 'soon' on so many occasions, so the next News-Letter kept being put off so as to have the accounts included. In the end, the audit was not completed until the week before Christmas – and what happened that week? A new severe lockdown was imposed in Northern Ireland and the printers were closed just as the News-Letter was ready to go to press.

Hopefully, we will be back on track with the accounts and AGM early in 2021.

Members with computer access though were kept well informed - indeed more so than usual, with quizzes, discussions, etc., by email Bulletin. Also, the information available in the Members Area on the website saw substantial improvements, with virtually all past railtours having photo galleries added. Plus the "Our Collection" pages have been significantly extended. Still a work in progress though!

- **We lost quite a few members**

We lost a number of volunteers and otherwise well-known members during the year. Unfortunately, our age profile is tending much more to the 'senior', that category being 54.5% of the total in 2019 but 58% in 2020, a trend that is upwards in recent years. Past reports have asked what can be done to 'pad out' the younger end of the membership, but without answer!

The total membership fell from 1,006 to 951 over the year but we are hoping this is only a COVID 'blip'.

- **We needed to thank everybody more than ever.**

As always, thanks must go to all who have served on the Board throughout the year. It was nearly as busy as any other year, mostly non-train running work behind the scenes, and the various sub-committees operated to a greater or lesser extent.

The Posts of Special Responsibility to the Secretary for the year were: Charles Friel (Belfast Meetings); Ciaran McAteer (Legal Advisor); Barry Carse (Dublin area membership queries).

Despite no public mainline trains, we were in regular contact with the management (if not the crews) of the railway companies, NI Railways and Iarnród Éireann. Thank you to them.

This time last year I was compiling my 'Five Foot Three' report in blissful ignorance of the year that lay ahead. There had been some rather inconsequential murmurings from China of a troublesome virus but nothing that seemed much to fret about. As it stands today (16th December), in Northern Ireland there have been 59,121 positive cases of Covid-19 and 1,135 deaths. In the Republic of Ireland the situation is as grim with 76,776 positive cases and 2,134 deaths. The inconsequential news from China turned into an all-consuming global pandemic. We were all locked down, told to avoid unnecessary travel, queued for essentials whilst maintaining social distance, began to wear masks, washed our hands endlessly, and saw little of our nearest and dearest other than by virtual means (or in my case, over the gate). It has been, for everyone, the most unpleasant of years.

My role as General Manager altered profoundly as the year progressed. In January I was preparing an Operational Readiness Review as was required by our funders, NLHF. This gave us a very nice set of performance indicators to work through and the basis of a Business Plan for the year. Alongside this, Blue Moss Consulting were employed to do a final evaluation of the entire Whitehead project which also provided great information to assist with Plan development. Blue Moss also facilitated a Business Planning away day on 01st February which afforded members a say in the future of the Society. Immediately after this exceptionally well attended session we held our inaugural members

dinner and awards evening. Voted for by their peers, all award recipients were most deserving. A special mention to Peter Scott MBE for being awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award. Peter has been a tremendous advocate for the Society for many more years than I'm sure he cares to remember and his knowledge, skill and enthusiasm are beyond compare. I personally would like to thank Peter for all of his efforts and implore him to continue with vigour as he works towards completion of his Mogul project.

Towards the end of February, the management team went across the water to meet up with other Heritage Rail providers. This extraordinarily useful trip, organised for us by Ben McDonald, saw us visiting the Severn Valley and North Yorkshire Moors railways as well as a wonderful exploration of the National Railway Museum in York. By the end of the three days we had not only soaked up many ideas, both in regard to train operations and technical operations, we had made some very useful connections and were bursting to get back to begin to implement some of them, many of which would see more efficient ways of working.

Then came March. The word 'pandemic' had begun to be used more widely by media outlets. The first Covid-19 case on the island had been confirmed on 27th February. In Whitehead, we took the decision to run our St Patrick's Day Steam Saturday on 14th March. That day also saw the production team from Ulster Giants shoot on site. At this time, no restrictions had been implemented. By the Monday of



Pictured at the inaugural member's dinner and awards evening in Carrickfergus on 01st February are: John McKegney, Karen Braithwaite, Rebecca Laverty, Lisa Adair, Joan Smyth and Zoë Latimer. (Photo: CP Friel)

the following week, it was clear that restrictions on movement would be inevitable and staff began to get the site ready for closure. The following Monday, 23rd March, the lockdown began in earnest and my working life began its metamorphosis. I had to quickly get to grips with the technicalities of furlough. All staff, full time, part time and casual, were placed on furlough, unable to undertake any of their duties, required to stay at home, and receiving 80% of their pay. I remained in post to undertake the mammoth tasks that were required to stabilise the business and chart a way

through the pandemic, whilst not being in a position to generate income. Ivan McAteer, our Technical Operations Manager was also kept on (part time as before) in order to ensure that the site was monitored and to do essential works. Business Plans for 2020 were cast aside in favour of striving by whatever means to get cash injections into the organisation. I also kept going with regular meetings, albeit via Zoom at my dining room table, with our current funders and partners. Regular Committee and Board meetings also provided me with much needed support and encouragement. I made a

point of sending out daily updates at the beginning of lockdown which I hope members viewed as settling. These became somewhat of a comfort to me in that my ramblings often evoked comment back, most especially when my greenhouse disintegrated! At this point I want to thank profusely our Secretary, Paul McCann. Paul has not only made sure that my bulletins reach the members quickly, but has collated information, quizzes, photographs and all manner of things to keep everyone interested. I also need to thank everyone who contacted me during lockdown. The support, stories and general encouragement certainly eased the sense of isolation. Not that I had much time to be in any way bored. Swathes of funding application lay ahead. To date, the result of this effort has yielded over £115,000. An earmarked appeal to raise money for small tubes for No.171 brought in approximately £5,000. Some members made substantial donations and a charitable trust in England, having read about our 171 appeal on the website, gave us an astonishing donation. I continue to hunt down more assistance and hope that I will have further good news to report in 2021. In the meantime, on behalf of the Society, I would like to place on record our gratitude to the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the National Lottery Community Fund, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, the Charities Fund and the Northern Ireland Museums Council. Without their support we certainly would not be able to look to the future with positivity.

As restrictions eased in July, we found out that we were in a position to reopen to volunteers and the public. Before anyone

could set foot on site, we needed to have all associated risk assessments complete, additional hand washing facilities and sanitising units in place, Covid signage erected, Covid documentation and training in place, and one-way systems developed in pinch point areas. When all this was in place, I was able to apply for the industry standard 'We're Good to Go' which we were fortunate to attain. Nervous but prepared, we opened to the public, offering bookable slots for museum entry and for train rides. It was extremely interesting to see many more families enjoying our offering and we were very busy, making a good amount of money. Many thanks to our loco crews, especially Mark Walsh who did a sterling job rostering. However, apparently you can have too much of a good thing and, as the R number gradually rose once more, we had to close again on 03rd October. Since then, there has been no public activity on site. The café was able to remain open and continues to operate for now. We have rebranded it and it is now Platform 3. It is also under new management. Rob Davies has many years' experience of catering and has a great menu of fresh local food available to tantalise your taste buds. Please come down and try yourself. Takeaway only for January, but definitely worth supporting.

An enormous stride was taken just before the end of the year when the Orangefield meetings resumed. The technical wizardry was undertaken by Phil Lockett and James Friel and resulted in a virtual meeting using Zoom. It was my first attendance at one of these and I thoroughly enjoyed the evening. More are to come and I would recommend attendance. Charles is engaging, highly knowledgeable and

uniquely placed to deliver the most fascinating, beautifully illustrated, talks on our railway heritage. I just hope we don't lose him to the BBC!

Now we are entering another phase of restrictions. Unfortunately, that means

that we will not be in a position to permit volunteers to come to site until at least the end of January. It feels like we are back to the start but, with news of the rolling out of the vaccine, at least we can look forward to 2021 with a little more hope. Stay safe for now and take care.



Joe Mahon and Peter Scott recording Ulster Giants at Whitehead on 14th March. Wheel-less No.171 frames on well-wagon on left, under the wheeldrop such that the hoists can lift up and down axleboxes for measuring.
(Photo: CP Friel)



Coach 68 is turned on 16th August to put the compartments on the platform side.
(Photo: Editor)

At the time of writing, I have just spent two weeks in isolation due to the latest Covid lockdown – who would have predicted such a circumstance this time last year? The pandemic has played havoc with the Society's operations and with its maintenance work. We usually get 10 years maximum service from any engine's boiler, and a year's total lack of operation means we've lost 10% of the time we can operate the "in traffic" engines. However, as usual here is a resume of the current status of the Society's steam locos and recent work done.

No.4 LMSNCC WT-class 2-6-4T mixed traffic loco, 1947.

No.4 has operated briefly since renewal of its tyres. It returned to Whitehead with the intention of renewing small boiler tubes, which had been showing up leakage, and the old tubes were removed. However, the Covid shutdown caused a re-think, and it was decided to withdraw the loco for more extensive overhaul before any return to traffic. The last time the boiler was removed for "10 year" overhaul, the minimum of mechanical attention was given, with a view to getting the loco back into action quickly. A number of postponed jobs are now requiring attention. Overhaul of No.4 is therefore next in line after completion of the current work on No.171.

No.85 GNR(I) V-class 4-4-0 compound express passenger loco "Merlin", 1932.

Following lifting of the first lockdowns, No.85 has completed its annual boiler exam, however the steam test showed up

a sticking vacuum cylinder which requires attention before the loco operates. Subsequent Covid shutdowns in the Republic have prevented this from happening to date.

No.131 GNR(I) Q-class 4-4-0 express passenger loco, 1901 rebuilt 1920.

With boiler certified and ready for action just before the initial lockdown kicked in, No.131 spent the year only waiting for the green flag, which unfortunately never came with the very limited exception of one day's Train Rides. Acceptance for operation on Irish Rail is still under way, but is in abeyance pending Covid resolution. Following apparent success with 3BG, No.131's boiler has been given a dose of water treatment to help it sleep.

No.171 GNR(I) S-class 4-4-0 express passenger loco "Slieve Gullion", 1913 rebuilt 1938.

Now the Society's priority engine. The extensive job to renew the crown stay bolts is nearly complete. As well as this, two wasted areas of the door plate lap seams were cut out and new sections welded in. This involved a specialist welding procedure. The renewal of the lap seam rivets with patch screws is continuing. After that, the boiler should be rotated back to its right way up for re-tubing and minor repairs. The generosity of the members who purchased the tubes is noteworthy.

Mechanical overhaul has progressed with the re-metalling and machining of the driving axle boxes. The bogie was re-assembled before the initial lockdown and



Adam Lohoff in No.4 having installed the new rocking grate in the confined space with the Editor, 15th March: try risk assessing that two weeks later. No.4's grate takes as much effort to put together as the rest of our engines grates put together... but seems incapable of withstanding the same level of punishment. The saving grace on this day was the rare absence of the brick arch.

(Photo: Editor)

it felt like momentum was building behind the overhaul. Progress quickly picked up again in August and September and again the situation became encouraging. Unfortunately, the resurgence of the virus and a most strange series of unpredictable on-again, off-again lockdowns took the wind out of the sails once more. Snooker players can do nothing when forced to sit in their chairs, as it were and returning No.171 to steam will be all the sweeter when it happens.

No.3 Guinness 0-4-0ST shunting loco, 1919, aka "3BG"

The Guinness engine, when in working

order, is used for shunting, crew training and for "Summer Steam" train rides within the site. The locomotive's 90th birthday was celebrated with a cake on one of the "Summer Steam" open days in August 2009.

Apart from a brief appearance of No.131, the Guinness engine has the doubtful distinction of being the only main line [main line if you count Kingsbridge-Inchicore for repairs perhaps... - Ed] loco in Ireland to have recently hauled a train in anger, albeit within the confines of the yard at Whitehead.

The loco has been fitted with a steam

heating connection for pre-heating coaches and for train ride duties. It has put in many a day's shunting, with much moving other stock to combat against "static bearing damage", plus servicing the maintenance needs of the Carriage Department.

Boiler G8.24

Rebuilding of the spare boiler is continuing. The inner firebox has had the crown sheet welded to the sides, and the door plate and tube plate are being fitted in place – so it now looks a bit more like a firebox. The welding referred to was done in Scotland, and was the same process as

used for No.171's lap seams. (It was convenient to send the firebox to the coppersmith's premises in Scotland, but not the complete 171 boiler!)

No.105, NCC Mogul project

New work and refurbishment of existing components has continued, as other work and Covid has permitted. The cylinder blocks have been cast and are now at a contractor's premises for machining.

The main frames have had most of the drilling completed and have been turned over for access to the inside surfaces.

Machining of attaching parts is continuing



Three fireboxes in the workshop on 27th September. On the boiler rotator in the background, new crown stay bolts can be seen in the firebox crown sheet of No.171. In the foreground is no gross miscalculation, for the inner copper firebox on the left is not destined for the inverted tiny steamboat boiler on the right, but for the possible boiler for No.105. (Photo: Editor)



Nathan Lawrence paints one of No.171's driving wheels on 27th September at the second point in the year where it felt momentum was building behind the overhaul. (Photo: Editor)

– spring and brake hangers, horn guides.

The driving wheelsets are having the journals skimmed.

The “Covid” lockdown has had an unintended consequence – once Whitehead work was suspended, it was still possible to progress pattern making. Pattern equipment is needed for all the steel castings, items like spring hangers, horn guides, motion brackets etc. So several patterns were made that were not intended at this stage, and the parts duly cast. One example is the six driving axleboxes, which are now at Whitehead for machining. Patterns are usually made in wood or something easily fashioned.

Photographs have already appeared on the website, prompting the remark that a wooden loco would not stand up well in service! The pattern is of course only the means of forming the desired shape in the moulding sand, into which the molten metal is poured.

(Wooden locos in common with other projects were sometimes built as a mock-up to ensure that the proposed design was satisfactory).

[Anybody out there can write an article on NCC Moguls and their performance? If so, The Editor would like very much for you to do so and send it to him forthwith!]

LOCOS IN STORE

No.461 DSER K2-class 2-6-0 goods engine, 1922.

No.186 GSWR J15 class 0-6-0 goods loco, 1879, rebuilt with Z class boiler.

No.184 GSWR J15-class 0-6-0 goods loco, 1880.

SLNCR 0-6-4 mixed traffic loco "Lough Erne", (UTA No.27)

No.3 Londonderry Port and Harbour 0-

6-0 shunting loco, 1928. (Popularly "Harvey")

OTHER LOCOMOTIVES

County Donegal Railway Class 5, 2-6-4T No.5 "Drumboe", 1907.

Work is now progressing as a Heritage Engineering contract to rebuild the cab and bunker and to reassemble the loco sufficiently for return to Donegal Town for display purposes.



Photos such as this are normally in black and white and of places like Harland & Wolff a hundred years ago. But this is at Taylors foundry at Hamilton, Scotland on 06th August and shows Peter Scott, in yellow, with the two cylinder block castings for No.105 fettled up, blast cleaned and ready for despatch to Whitehead. Remarkable.

(Photo: c/o P Scott)



*These are the newly-rolled barrel sections and joining plates (called "butt straps") for boiler G8.24, which may end up in No.105, at Israel Newton, Derbyshire, on 12th January 2021. Again, remarkable.
(Photo: c/o P Scott)*



*As the first lockdown was tentatively lifted on 26th June it was found that 3BG, normally very well kept these days and still wearing her St Patrick's bunting from her last outing on 14th March, had unfortunately been heavily pigeoned. The offenders perch on the beams from the old smoke hood above. When it became clear in December that another prolonged lockdown was looming, precautionary measures were taken on 22nd, when 3BG had cooled down from her last shunt of the year on the 20th.
(Photos: Editor & Jonathan Clinton)*

2020 has not been a great year for B142 but things are looking up, much like the current pandemic. In December 2019 there was a failure of the engine. On closer inspection the engine oil had transformed into a consistency not unlike mayonnaise. An EMD 645 type engine is not a solid block, rather a fabricated crank case into, and onto, which all the individual engine components are supported. Each cylinder, piston and valve make an individual assembly, known as a power assembly. Each of these are fed by the oil and

coolant pumps from a circuit and then into each power assembly, eight in all.

Not wasting COVID-19 lock down time, volunteers started the process of learning engine power assembly maintenance, contacting the manufacturer EMD UK and other railway operators with experience of the EMD 645 engine. EMD 645 diesel engines remain fully supported by EMD, therefore supply of parts, tooling and procedures would not be a problem. The problem was funding.

With no funding available, as lockdown



On one of the very few days post-March where it felt like a meaningfully large job was achieved in the yard on a weekend, Ryan Downey operates the sheer legs to lift B142's hood off on 19th December.
(Photo: A Lohoff)

eased, the focus became preserving the engine by removal of remaining contaminated oil over several days and suppling fresh engine oil into the engine. The engine turned over freely.

Through the effort of the General Manager, funding was secured through the generosity of the UK National Lottery

Community Fund. Without this funding preserving the engine would have become doubtful over a longer term. May 2021 bring progress.

If you would like to support this project in any way, please contact: dieselloconorth@steamtrainsireland.com

B134 LARGE AND SMALL

Gerry Mooney

In 2020, not many projects escaped the impact of Covid-19 and the restoration of B134 in Inchicore works was no exception.

The year began with a comprehensive meeting between RPSI and Irish Rail CME

the result of which provided a clear map for the year ahead. A new fabrication company was identified for the production of the various doors and other items. All was going well until March and



B134 Large: It's 'Taps off' for the diesels again. On 04th August, B134's bonnet sits on a wagon behind the loco, the cab of which is being refurbished. (Photo: G Mooney)



B134 Small: By 03rd January 2021 this B134 model had taken up residence in Sam Hall's garage. Come to think of it, model railway or not, going out to the garage was about as adventurous as last year got.
(Photo: S Hall)

then it all came to a halt. After a period of adjustment, work behind the scenes recommenced on the design work needed for the fabrication of structural and bonnet items. The drawing office in Inchicore Works made sure every last detail was covered for the fabrication company.

When the initial lockdown eased, work recommenced on the installation of the new platework to the locomotive cab and the cab floor. A new safety addition to the locomotive is the additional DRA device for drivers which assists in the prevention of trains passing signals at danger. The device was trial fitted in the cab for both cab and bonnet first operation. In the last quarter of the year, a large quantity of

fabricated items arrived ready to be added to the locomotive. These will be fitted once the remaining items arrive from the fabrication facility.

This year (2021) marks 175 years of Inchicore Works and the plan is to have the body overhaul of B134 complete and a plan ready for trials ahead of mainline certification. It would be hoped that B134 will take up operation at the head of our trains in 2022.

In a strange twist, 2020 did however see B134 appear complete in various places, throughout the island and beyond, operating many different types of trains, albeit in model form!

Thanks to the generosity of Paddy

Murphy of Murphy Models in Dublin, the RPSI were able to produce a limited-edition model of B134. These models not only gave modellers and collectors a unique addition to their collection but in the year when our mainline operations ceased, they provided a chance for people to support the society. The models were produced using the artwork provided by Irish Rail in Inchicore. It was a bit strange to be completing artwork for the real

locomotive while it was still undergoing rebuilding!

Sincere thanks to Paddy Murphy for making the production of the models possible and in turn providing the society with vital funds in our most challenging year yet.

Also the team at Irish Railway Models who took on the job of processing and distribution of orders at zero cost as a gesture of support to the Society.

DUBLIN AREA OPERATIONS

Joe McKeown

On 01st February we had the first Volunteer of the Year Awards and Inaugural Dinner for the Society held in the Loughshore Hotel, Carrickfergus, County Antrim. This event was the brainchild of our General Manager, Lisa Adair. John Harcourt, our first Chairman (1964-1966) was present. Those from Dublin Operations to receive an award were Alex Duggan, John Richardson, Joe Mc Keown, Nicky Cox; and 'Team of the Year 2019' were Dublin Fundraisers, Martin Hoey, John Richardson, Gerard and John Owens.

On the 22nd February we held our Annual Safety Forum in the premises of the Irish Railway Records Society, with a very impressive attendance. Presentations were provided by Denis Mc Cabe, Peter Rigney and Joe Mc Keown.

On the 11th March we had our first of two film contracts for the year. This consisted of four hours filming on the Cravens Set at Inchicore Works. Liffey Productions was the Film Company involved and the film

was 'Codgers – Pilot'; written by Frank Allen.

As a result of the Coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic we made the decision on the 12th March to cancel our first train of the year, The Midlander. We also cancelled the Diesel Rail Tour, East - West Rail Tour; and our Easter Trains. A statement from our Chairman on the 18th March cancelled all trains.

On our Facebook page we ran a Children's Art Competition. Adam Buckley, age 8, was the winner with his great drawing of Locomotive No.85 Merlin. Adam won a Family ticket to travel on a Dublin Ops. Train (when we get back operating). There were many fantastic drawings submitted.

On the 01st July we announced the production in model form of our 121 Class Locomotive B134. This locomotive was later released in the grey / yellow original livery. It was packed in a specially branded box with the RPSI Crest. All proceeds from this Locomotive go the restoration of the B134 in Inchicore Railway Works. The first



Inside the charter train on 12th October. Toplight windows have been removed to permit the cameras to peer out of 1506. At €10,000 a camera, the Editor is told, offers to help with loading and unloading them by RPSI staff were politely but firmly declined. (Photo: D Kinsella)

models arrived on the 01st September.

Dublin Operations ran a special Film Charter train to Galway on Monday the 12th October from Inchicore Railway Works and returned on Tuesday the 13th October into Platform 6A, Heuston Station.

There were no passengers on board the set, only the basic RPSI Service Crew and Stewards, the Film Company's Camera Operatives and Irish Rail Staff. There were strict instructions in place that only rostered personnel were allowed on board. A series of risk assessments were in place covering all the staff and briefings of all personnel took place prior to departure.

This charter was not advertised as we did not want people breaching the Government's guidelines on Covid-19 Level 3 instructions. The film name cannot be printed at time of writing. The carriages selected for this charter were BR Van 3173, Cravens 1541, 1506, 1532, 1514 and 1522. Cravens Carriage 1506 was selected for the filming. Some sliding windows, seats and tables had to be removed, both sides and tri-pods mounted on the floor.

Monday 12th October 2020

At 8am the carriages were internally sanitised. We departed Inchicore Railway Works at 11.35, 15 minutes early with driver Brian Curley (Athlone Loco Shed) in charge of GM Loco 080. There were two signal stops before getting on the move,

with Hazelhatch passed at 11.52 (6 early), on time passing Kildare, then checked approaching Portarlinton where we were put into the Down Loop, arriving at 12.29, departing at 12.37 only to stop in the platform. We were held there until branch clear and departed at 12.59 (32 late). Delay attributed to down freight running out of path with knock-on effect on other services and were 35 late arriving in Geashill at 13.11, to cross up freight. Departure was at 13.15 (25 late), clear then to Clara where we crossed up Timber. Arrival there was at 13.33 (24 late) with departure at 13.41 (22 late) with a clear run then to Athlone, passing Clonydonnin at 13.49, and arriving in Athlone at 13.59 (18 late). We changed drivers here and Driver Alan Muldarry, also from Athlone Loco

Shed took over, with departure just 5 late at 14.16. We ran as booked nonstop to Galway, passing Ballinasloe at 14.31, Athenry at 14.51 and arriving in Galway at 15.10 (13 late). The set arrived on the main platform and was then propelled out; the engine ran round and propelled the set onto the Freight Line Siding adjacent to the station.

Tuesday 13th October 2020

At 8am the set was again sanitised. Departure from Galway was at 13.52 (booked 14.10 - 18 early). Our driver today was again Alan Muldarry; Athenry arrival was at 14.17 (12 early) departing at 14.18 (19 early), through to a crossing stop at Woodlawn where arrival was at 14.37 (19 early). We were held until a down train



Cleaning Cravens at Inchicore are Kieran McShera and Denis McCabe, 17th December.

(Photo: S Comiskey)

passed and got under way at 15.09 (2 late). Ballinasloe was reached at 15.23, departing at 15.24 (5 early) whilst Athlone arrival was at 15.40, departing at 15.44 (3 early). With Athlone Loco Shed driver Davy Molloy now in charge, the next stop was Clonydonn arriving at 15.55, departing at 16.05 (4 late). We had a clear run then through to Portarlinton, passing Clara at 16.14, Tullamore at 16.20 and got through Geashill, passing at 16.28. Arrival in Portarlinton was at 16.40, departing at 16.41 to the Up Loop arriving at 16.43. Departure from the loop was at 17.02, just 4 late and as booked we ran nonstop to Heuston, although we were checked approaching Kildare, passed at 17.13. Sallins was passed at 17.26, Hazelhatch at 17.36, and Heuston Platform No.6A reached at 17.49, just 2 late.

In the yard at Heuston Station was GM Loco 075, she arrived and hauled the set back to Inchicore Railway Works. Our Irish Rail crews for the two days were DTE (Inspector) John Sinclair (Connolly Station, Dublin) and Guard Noel Enright (Westport Station, County Mayo). We are very grateful to these two very professional IE Staff who made the two days run so smoothly. We are also indebted to our working members who volunteered for this trip. This was a very successful charter and the Film Company appeared very satisfied.

It was a very challenging year for all of us involved in the running and maintaining of our Dublin based Heritage Trains this year.

Our Thursday Team, Management and Administration teams worked very hard and, keeping within the Government Covid guidelines, maintained the running set in excellent condition. Some work was also done on the Wooden Heritage Set.

The only income Dublin Operations received this year was from the two film contracts, Loco. 134 Models and the Heritage Railway Calendar. Gerry Mooney has to be congratulated for organizing that fabulous B134 product and Paddy Murphy for making it all happen. Congratulations too to Martin Devlin for putting the masterpiece calendar together. A special thanks to all the photographers who supplied Martin with the brilliant photos. Without yourselves it could not be done.

We had a number of Virtual Meetings with both Iarnróid Éireann and the Commission for Railway Regulation throughout the year. Our Dublin Management Committee also held Virtual Meetings during the year. We also remember the passing of two of our former colleagues; Tony O'Shaughnessy, 06th February and Billy Walters, 04th June. May they Rest In Peace.

Coach maintenance in Inchicore is carried out by Thursday and Sunday work parties. On 2nd March, a set of overhauled bogies from Whitehead had been placed under diner 1522. However on Thursday 12th March, shortly after arriving in Inchicore, we heard the Taoiseach's announcement that the country would be entering into a period of severe restrictions due to the coronavirus outbreak (not known as a pandemic until later). This set the scene for a much-restricted coach maintenance programme.

In June restrictions were eased, and we applied the measures in the national Return to Work Protocol to resume operations. Tasks were risk assessed, and those incapable of being carried out under social distancing rules were deferred. A number of tasks were carried out, and a lot of small niggling jobs were crossed off the to-do list. Martin Devlin undertook the spray painting of all the coach vestibules.

Ultrasonic testing of coach axles commenced in September.

We lost a number of our volunteers in September when a ban on inter-county travel was imposed, but work continued until December when activities shut down for Christmas. The strict Level Five measures imposed in late December means that a resumption before March 2021 is unlikely.

Our thanks are due as always to the Chief Mechanical Engineer for the facilities accorded to us in Inchicore, and to the day-to-day cooperation we receive from IÉ and OCS staff at all levels.



Diner 1522 in fleet casualty repair shop Inchicore on 02nd March (with some tasty jacks Whitehead would really like). The refurbished bogies will shortly be fitted. In the background is an 071 undergoing body work repairs and a MkIV coach.
(Photo: P Rigney)

The 2020 operating season promised much with plans for our Easter Eggspress trains in hand until Covid-19 reared its ugly head. With a summer lull in Covid incidence there was thought of recommencing operations at Halloween, then being pushed back to Christmas, but as it turned out on health grounds neither was possible.

Thankfully we were able to operate a number of successful in-house train ride days from August to early October using Guinness BG No.3 and No.131 on one occasion.

Looking forward to 2021 the introduction of the vaccine should enable trains to operate later this year. As the NIR steam

drivers and acting firemen are outside their biennial competency compliance the first main line trains will be re-assessment operations, hopefully to take place in the spring. Once footplate crew competency has been restored and Covid is suppressed we will aim for something akin to a normal as practical operating season for the second half of the year. Let us trust that comes to pass.

Train Rides Notes (a Roster Officer)

Six Train Rides operated during the year, the first, for St Patrick's Day on 14th March, just about getting under the watertight door as it was closing. That was it for any passenger-carrying operation until 05th September, the length of that time



Jim O'Neill and John Williams sanitise 68's "touch-points" on 19th September, between one allocation of passengers and the next.
(Photo: J McKegney)



Jonathan Clinton (on a rare occasion when a lockdown easing allowed him out of County Louth in the Republic) prepares to analyse two tubs of boiler water from 3BG on 20th December. A titration of sulphuric acid and indicator in one pot will quantify the level of tannin treatment remaining from the last treatment, and hence he will know how much to get the Editor to add to the engine's tank this time. The second pot will be subjected to a test from the combination meter, which will test pH, Total Dissolved Solids and Conductivity. A mild base pH indicates boiler corrosion is being minimised. The other two will indicate when the boiler is reaching unsustainable levels of dissolved impurities, and thus when a blowdown is required to reduce the concentration before scale can form.

(Photo: P Lockett)

surprising me still as I type.

14th March used 3BG and 2xMk2s, as regular carriage 68 required maintenance work following annual inspection. It became obvious, as knowledge of Covid work-around increased, that 68, with its compartments, was the ideal carriage with which to run socially-distanced, family bubble Train Rides, and so 68 (along with the lapsed annual boiler test of 3BG), became a key project when personnel first cautiously returned to site in late June / early July. 68 was ready to perform Train Rides at the same time as the site was. A

trial train was run on 29th August for management, marshals etc. to get their heads around the practicalities and verify risk assessment.

This allowed five more Train Rides to operate from 05th September until 03rd October when the bottom again fell out. 3BG worked most, but, with the prospect of mainline Santa trains still not totally ruled out, No.131 worked that on 29th September, just to see if she was OK, her first duty since December 2019.

Thanks to those who contributed.

As you will no doubt have read in every report before this one and will read after, 2020 has been nothing short of disastrous for Irish mainline steam, costing the RPSI many thousands in lost revenue and skilled labour.

The year started well with the Mk2 rake having been split, examined, defects rectified, paperwork completed and coupled back together in time for the NIR audit. The audit never happened and the only passenger service that the Mk2s saw was the St Patrick's Day train rides which, for the record, involved 3BG, 303 and 463.

Then, as we all know, the world was turned upside down and nothing was achieved again until the middle of summer. Coupled with other complications it became clear in August that mainline steam was not going to happen for the remainder of the year and the opportunity was taken to get stuck into jobs that usually cannot be undertaken during the running season.

Tasks included undertaking additional preventative maintenance to the bodywork of the Mk2s, repainting 547 and accelerating the brake gear overhaul programme. To assist with the overhaul of the brake gear a new high lift trolley was purchased that will live in the A-road pit to make the process of lowering and lifting vacuum cylinders much safer, quicker, and easier.

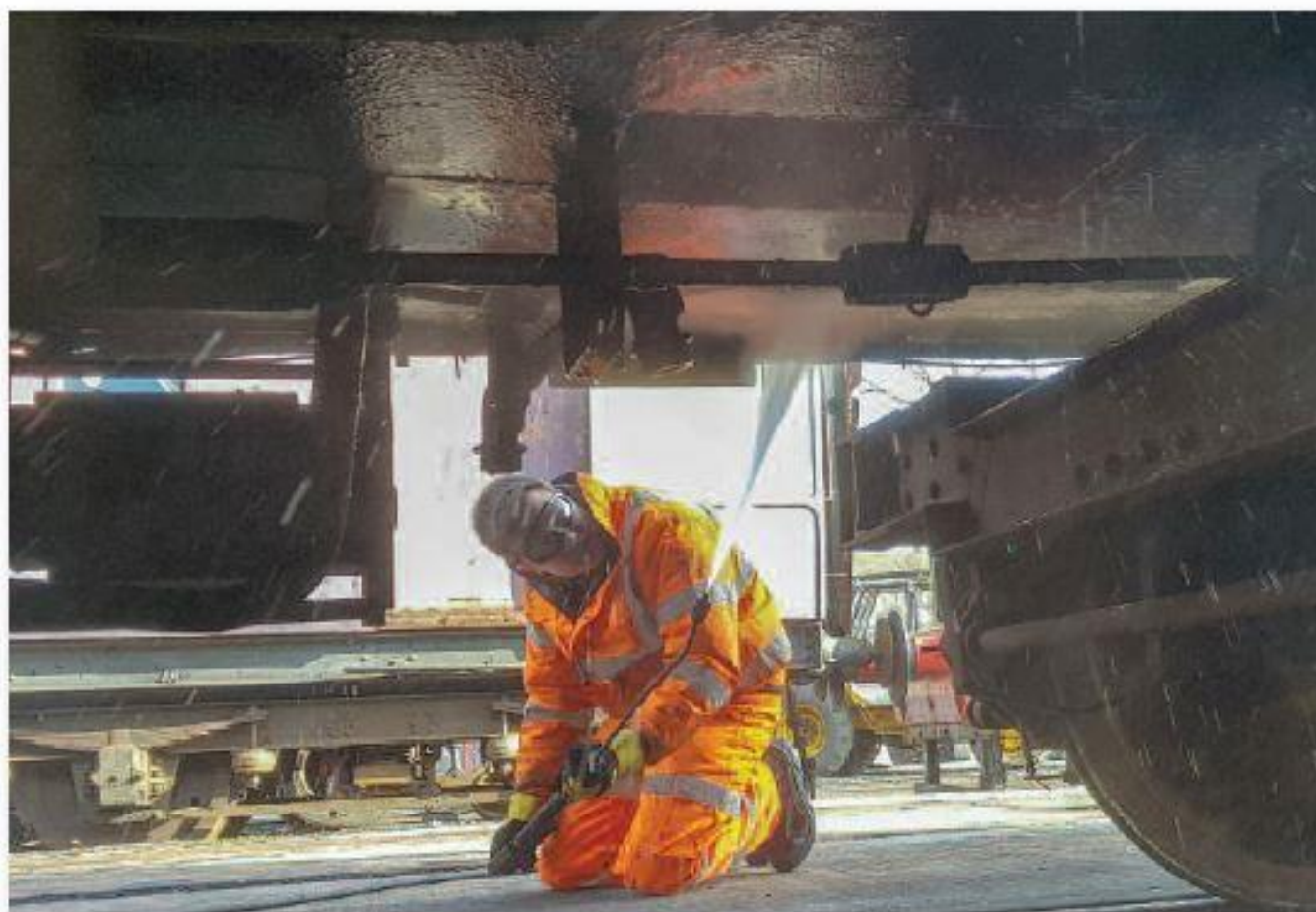
Throughout the year the running set was moved periodically to ensure that no bearing damage would occur to the roller bearings and that the grease redistributes

itself within the axleboxes. These exercises were very worthwhile as it allowed the current operations volunteers to retain their competence throughout the year, in addition to reducing the maintenance schedule.

During the year we managed to progress the overhaul of 302, given the challenging circumstances. All internal work is now complete with the exception of some plumbing and changing some light bulbs. Externally the vehicle has received its topcoat of gloss and lining/decals as required. Major jobs remaining are the reinstatement of the Belfast end gangway and a bogie swap. Work has also progressed on 181 in the background to a point where it is very close to re-entering into traffic – just in time to replace 180, which has been withdrawn pending major overhaul.

Interestingly, this year the wooden bodied vehicles have earned their keep and the reader could be forgiven for thinking that they are about to read a C&W report from the 1980's!

Following a very thorough risk assessment we were able to recommence train rides with Ex-LMS NCC No68 and Ex-GNRI van No81. This was only possible due to the side corridor and individual compartment doors of 68. This ensured no mixing of passengers and to make it more controllable and efficient the vehicle was turned on the turntable so that the compartment doors faced onto the platform. In order to prepare for the train rides season both vehicles were given a thorough examination as per usual. Jobs



Adam Lohoff power washes the underside of 463 on 16th February.

(Photo: J Clinton)

undertaken to 68 involved replacing neck glands on the cylinders, adjusting and lubrication of brake gear and attending to a few vacuum leaks in the train pipe. The two vehicles behaved themselves throughout the running period and nothing of note was logged. As time marched on, thoughts turned to Christmas and at one time it was looking hopeful that we could, at the very least, operate something at the platform. With this in mind, the original steam heat fittings for 68 were located, reinstated, and then tested on a cold November afternoon. Despite the passage of time the heating on the vehicle operated faultlessly. In addition, the Electrical Squad were able to recommission the lighting in the vehicle. This involved decommissioning the Stones Lighting

System, replacing several runs of cable and fitting a charging socket for the new batteries and charger.

Great progress has also been made with the HLF-funded Guinness Grain Van 504 which is in the final throes of completion and I believe, has been entered into the HRA Awards. The standard of overhaul and workmanship is a credit to those to have been involved in the overhaul of the vehicle.

Unfortunately, the planned mitigation work to Ex-GNRI 114 was not achievable due to other pressing demands and limited time periods within the year, though we were able to retrieve it from the long siding to properly assess the vehicle and take some measurements. As part of this shunt, we also recovered one

of the three open wagons that the Society has within its possession. Each wagon is structurally challenged in its own unique way and as such we are in the early stages of investigating the restoration of at least one of them. Contact was made with the Isle of Wight Railway who were most helpful and informative, and we are now in possession of enough information to rebuild one of the wagons in due course when time, money and resources are in abundance.

At last, due to the pause in mainline operations, the Society was able to progress the overhaul of Ex-GSWR 861. This year has seen the corridor side external panelling and beading completed from the 1st Class end as far as the guard's

compartment doors and the rebuilding of the 1st Class end wall and gangway end support pillars. The gangway itself was in extremely poor condition and a substitute gangway has been located which will require minor modifications, so that it resembles a GS&WR-style scissors gangway. In the coming months, when the current situation has hopefully improved for us all, the plan is to turn the vehicle to facilitate easier access to the corridor side panelling and framing with the aim of completing all external and structural repairs this year.

As always, my thanks go to those who volunteer their free time to come down and lend a hand to ensure that mainline steam is a reality across the island.

WHITEHEAD SITE REPORT

Dermot Mackie

Following a busy December 2019, with the Santa operations, the Site squad started the New Year by taking down and storing the large Christmas tree from outside the Station. We also dismantled the big sledge in the grotto in the Stables and rebuilt it in its normal resting place in the brown van in the Museum. With no major train movements for a while this allowed us to get on with a major drainage job on the tracks. Waterlogging of the track and sleepers has been an ongoing problem for some time and preliminary work last year established suitable outlets. By hiring a mini digger, we were able to excavate a deep channel in the six-foot gap between the platform and middle roads. This was then lined with 150 metres of perforated plastic, land drain piping by John Williams,

Roy Wilson and Robin Morton and back filled up to level with 12 tonnes of clean, 2-inch stone. We also took the opportunity to connect the drainage from the signal box into the system where previously this had just emptied onto the tracks. The benefits of the system were soon clearly seen and it coped easily with the exceptionally heavy rainfall from Storm Brendan on 13th January.

The following week David Lowry recycled copper and lead scrap which netted £235 and at the end of the month we replaced five 20-foot lengths of very old rail at the bridge crossing. These, together with the switch timbers at the signal box, were highlighted in last year's track survey. This was a big job occupying most of the workdays in February. Six large timbers



Tom Mathers and Colin Stewart flank Dermot Mackie, in a hired in digger, as they start to dig a new drain between the platform and loop roads on 07th January. The results were both instant and exceptionally good. (Photo: G Hunt)

were replaced, all the fishplates standardised and bolted up with an impact wrench kindly donated by Colin Stewart.

March started well with £460 generated from scrap steel. All the fishplates on the platform road were dismantled, greased

and bolted up but Saint Patrick's Day turned out to be the last workday at Whitehead with the Covid pandemic looming. I fortunately was able to give the whole site a spray of weedkiller before complete shutdown on Monday 23rd.

We returned to WDX in June, after each

Site squad member had completed an online Covid awareness course. All volunteers had to book a day when they would be available and separate tasks were allocated to ensure biosecurity and social distancing. Only 2 persons were allowed in the changing rooms at any one time and meal breaks were taken outdoors. Tasks completed were a white line painted on the platform edge, by George Smyth and Tom Mathers, and David Orr made a new and fully painted arm for the Castlerock signal, which also received a painting of its pole. In addition both the Station and Stables entrance canopies were sanded down by Roy Thompson and Colin, and repainted. The signal box steps were given a fresh coat of paint by Willie Hollinger as were the window frames of the Station building and the Signal box.

The platform was tidied up with removal of the small green container and the old palms. A new parcel trolley and bedding tubs were planted with flowers, courtesy of our old friends of the Whitehead in Bloom group. In addition, we made a large planter from old railway sleepers which was also beautifully filled. Over 60 fire extinguishers from all the buildings were gathered together, by Peter Lindsay, for their annual inspection and 3BG was pulled out for her major steam boiler test.

We had a couple of weeks holiday at the start of July and on return made preparation for the re-opening of the Museum which included gardening duties and power hosing the station canopy roof. At the end of the month, we dug out the mud between the long sleepers at the crossing opposite the signal box, this being the last piece of our major drainage works. The first week in August we put 3

tonnes of clean ballast between the sleepers and lifted the main driving wheel axle boxes into 171. I purchased a second-hand lorry curtain side which we hung on the unsightly parcel van in the third road and a number of picnic tables in kit form were assembled in time for the first Museum day on the 13th.

Despite storm Ellen we were able to finish the tables the following week and lift off and store the cylinder castings for the Mogul project which had arrived from Scotland. The last week in August was very wet and windy with heavy flooding throughout the province but we managed to put up canopies for the tables, pull out 3BG, and 500 litres of waste oil from B142 were recycled.

Early September saw us giving the track a complete inspection before the start of train rides. Some parts needed jacking and packing afterwards which we did the following week, despite the Tuesday being the hottest September day in 29 years!

We also took the opportunity to move the cab and bunker bits of Drumboe round to the workshop area where they are to be used as reference pieces for the rebuild. The next move was to bring the boiler on its flat wagon out of the third road and, to facilitate this work, we spent a day bush whacking the undergrowth. The 25th of September was the day for the annual insurance inspection of all our plant and I am delighted to report that the Atlas, Telehandler and Larne forklift all passed. Several 3BG operations had by now highlighted a weak rail joint outside the concrete apron on 2-road which we rebuilt on 1st October with new plates and bolts and jacked and packed. The following week we cleaned out the

turntable pit and gently lifted the fire box end of Drumboe's boiler on its flat wagon, which was now in 1-Road outside the shed, for cleaning. We also dismantled the canopies on the platform and stored them away for the Winter. During the second week we built, with the help of a professional coded welder, a steel frame which the Larne forklift can use to safely lift a complete carriage bogie. Now that the loco priority is No.171 it was felt that the new tubes which had been set in place in No.4 pre lockdown, would be better removed from the boiler. We took them out on 20th and they are safely stored for future use. Gordon Hunt came down at the end of the month and distributed his booklet of Track Squad Memories, a compilation of many photographs from the last 10 years.

November commenced with tidying of fallen leaves and emptying gutters of same. We helped put the workshop plate bender on a lorry and on 17th I gave the

Telehandler its big annual service. A lot of old wasted rail was cut into handy lengths and together with other steel scrap was recycled and brought in a tidy £840. We rationalised the shelving arrangements in the workshop stores and built a large pallet racking system. Six large jumbo bags were filled with brick sized wooden blocks and were moved from the top of a container to a new, more convenient location in the yard.

The first two weeks in December, with a lockdown circuit breaker, meant we did not return to Whitehead until 15th when we helped Peter Scott turn the large Mogul frame plates in the Dunleath workshop.

The morning of the last Thursday was spent doing minor track repairs after which we retired to Platform 3 for our traditional Christmas fry and mincepies.

Despite Covid, a productive year all round. Lets hope for a better New Year in 2021.



The socially distanced Site Squad on 22nd October are Alastair Maxwell, Willie Hollinger, Robin Morton, Gordon Hunt, Dermot Mackie, Davy Orr, Roy Thompson and Richard Armstrong. Gordon is handing to Dermot a copy of his photographic booklet 'Track Squad Memories'. Certainly a close-knit team.

(Photo: I McAteer)

2020 was no less disruptive and difficult for HEI as any other organisation. The first quarter of the year was relatively typical, with a focus on inspection and general maintenance of the operational main line engines and carriages, and some time was spent on carriage 861 restoration. A contribution was made to the Guinness engine No.3BG steam heat apparatus fitting, Loco No.171 TPWS installations and the Mogul project.

The effect of Covid-19 on HEI activities,

however, was significant with the entire workforce being furloughed from March through to the end of August. A positive was that by the time of their return to work at start of September, HEI had won a contract to carry out cosmetic restoration of Co. Donegal 2-6-4 tank engine No.4 Drumboe, for the Donegal Railway Heritage Centre. This loco has been residing at Whitehead for a number of years, having in the past had some restoration work carried out by the RPSI.



By 19th December, new cabsheets had arrived for HEI to be fitted together for "Drumboe". Unfortunately they stayed on the pallet as, by this time, it was clear another large-scale lockdown was imminent and HEI were furloughed again in preparation for a further site shut-down, and so 2020 went.

(Photo: P McCann)

The current funding is for boiler condition assessment, re-building of the cab, bunker, boiler and cylinder cladding, assembly and repainting. It is without doubt that this contract is playing a major role in getting HEI through the current situation.

Also during the furlough period, detailed financial planning in conjunction with limited RPSI budgets and requirements was undertaken, resulting in the decision to return to work on reduced hours. For the final quarter of 2020 a list of projects with strict budgets were agreed, the major jobs included No.171 boiler work, carriage 861 restoration, various carriage maintenance jobs, and several trips to Dublin for attention to loco No. 85 were also undertaken.

2020 saw significant changes in the HEI staffing, culminating in a significant reduction of employees. Kerry Irvine, who carried out the bookkeeping and managed the HEI office, left at the end of February to pursue other opportunities. John Ferguson, who had been the longest standing employee of RPSI/HEI

(considering his employment with the RPSI before the formation of HEI) left in April after long term sickness. Ernie Clark was the final employee to leave us at the end of the summer. We thank all the above for all of their efforts over the years and wish them well in the future. We close 2020 with a long time low of four employees, two full time, one part time and one apprentice.

Jim Adam's role as foreman has been developing, and he has taken on some of Kerry's responsibilities around managing the staff. Kerry's other roles have been split between the accountants for payroll, and the volunteers for the bookkeeping.

There has been the desire in recent times for HEI to focus more if not entirely on RPSI work, which before Covid was starting to materialise. However, with continued uncertainty in income and RPSI budgets, external work may remain necessary in part to get through the current situation so that HEI remains ready and prepared for a return to supporting normal RPSI operations.



*HEI's Billy Clements making crown stays for No.171, 28th October. See Page 18 for where they'll end up.
(Photo: RPSI)*

In January 2020 Whitehead Railway Museum seemed ideally placed to scale new heights. Our visitor figures for 2019 had climbed year on year by 26% to a record of 19,454, and we had great plans for new events and attractions during the year. But sadly our hopes were to be dashed. As a result of pandemic restrictions the museum remained closed for 33 weeks during this challenging year. Closed more often than it was open, indeed.

That said, we had hit the ground running in January and on February 20th we played host to Councillor Maureen Morrow, the Mayor of Mid & East Antrim Council, for the launch of a much-needed glossy Museum Guide booklet which had been produced by the Curatorial Committee. But the storm clouds were gathering and a St Patrick's steam train rides operation on March 14th proved to be the final event prior to lockdown. The same day, before the shutters came down, we also managed to squeeze in a filming session with Joe Mahon from UTV for an "Ulster Giants" programme.

But then everything ground to a halt. Most staff were put on furlough while committees such as Events became dormant. Bit by bit, though, we realised that the lockdown was providing us with opportunities. Events Committee meetings were moved, seamlessly and safely, onto Zoom. Our social media presence was enhanced to remind the public that although we were closed, things were going on behind the scenes. We wanted to retain as much of our

profile as possible.

One example of this strategy was the "Last Days of Steam" video produced by Ian Sinclair of the Curatorial Committee. It marked the 50th anniversary in May of the final steam train operation in Northern Ireland in 1970 – the spoil trains from Magheramorne to Belfast. The online launch of this video provided valuable PR on radio and in the newspapers and helped to keep the flag flying while the museum doors were closed.

Another opportunity of which we took advantage was the virtual Industrial Heritage Week which was run by Mid & East Antrim Council in May. To mark the occasion, we went online with an absorbing film of the "ring of fire" in the locomotive workshops – the heating up and removal of a redundant tyre from one of No.4's driving wheels. It caught the eye and gave the public an idea of the sort of heavy engineering projects which take place behind the scenes. It is something we could build on.

The weeks ticked by and various events such as Steam Saturdays, a schools competition with Translink and a proposed spoil train anniversary exhibition went by the board. But as the restrictions were eased in the summer, plans were made to re-open the museum. Risk assessments were carried out, staff and volunteers received training and PPE, and new systems were devised to keep everyone safe. For example, we switched to online booking and time slots to reduce social contact.



A scene familiar to many in the Society in 2020, this is what a meeting being held on Zoom looks like. This is an Events Committee meeting on 12th October, Christmas tree notwithstanding. Those with no name given are, from top down, Zoë Latimer, Richard Kenny and Tom Mathers.

(c/o Z Latimer)

The great day dawned on August 13th and we opened our doors again to the public. After a slow start, numbers increased and by September we were actually having more footfall than at the same time in the previous year, assisted no doubt by the operation of Saturday steam train rides for the entire month. We also detected a changing demographic – a greater percentage of young families and a reduction in retirement associations. *[By the time it got to late summer and having suffered homemade entertainment for many months, the mini-Editor had compiled quite the bucket-list, which included “See 131”. Daddy took this one for the team and duly found himself at*

Whitehead, but on the cushions. There was a good feel about the place: if anything, the whole operation was much slicker than usual – Ed]. Hearteningly, we also noted an increase in the number of visitors from the Republic and Britain, many of them opting for Northern Ireland at a time when travel further afield was still hazardous.

We switched from conducted tours to self-guided, and our volunteer guides positioned themselves at strategic points throughout the museum to monitor visitors, answer questions and keep everyone safe. Visitors to the tea room were required to complete a track and trace contact form so that we could reach

them in the event of someone on site testing positive for coronavirus. Happily, we did not record any such incidents.

We entertained two VIPs during separate visits in September – first Councillor Peter Johnston, the new Mayor of Mid & East Antrim and then Edwin Poots, the Agriculture Minister. Both found their visits so fascinating that they stayed longer than they had anticipated and left singing the praises of the RPSI and Whitehead Railway Museum.

With mainline operation in abeyance Whitehead Railway Museum became the shop window of the RPSI, and also one of the few income streams. The feedback in the visitors' book and on social media was overwhelmingly positive, and many museum visitors were so enthused they vowed to come back and travel on one of our steam trains when they resumed.

The museum offering itself was enhanced by several projects carried out by the Curatorial Committee. These ranged from the mounting of enamel signs with period advertising on the walls of the station building to the installation of lights and furniture in the GNR(I) Directors Saloon. Curatorial members also assisted with restoration work on the Guinness Grain Van 504. No.186 was meanwhile given a facelift by a dedicated group of museum guides, with footplate controls being polished up and then labelled for the benefit of visitors.

Outside on the platform our friends in Brighter Whitehead paid regular visits to refresh the planters which provide much needed colour. And thanks to the site squad, a new planter was constructed from redundant sleepers. In addition, the site squad assembled outdoor seating

which enabled customers at the Edwardian Tea Room to sit outside while they enjoyed their refreshments.

The tea room itself underwent a change in November. Sam Millar, who had been with us since the museum opened in 2016, decided it was time to move on to his parents' café in Whitehead, and we express thanks to him for all his hard work over the years. The new caterer is Rob Davies and to mark the changeover the café got a new name – Platform 3 – the rationale being that Whitehead NIR already has platforms 1 and 2. The interior was repainted and we wish Rob all success with the venture.

Sadly, though, the incidence of Covid across Northern Ireland increased and it was decided to close the museum in mid-October. As it happened, the Executive followed a week later by imposing a lockdown which included museums, so we felt we had done the right thing. At all times we were conscious of our duty of care towards visitors, volunteers and staff.

The greatest disappointment of all was having to pull the plug on an initial Santa Experience steam train ride which had been planned for the weekend of November 28/29. Tickets sold out within an hour of online sales starting but with less than 48 hours to go a new lockdown was introduced. Once bitten, twice shy, and our plans for the rest of December were shelved. One silver lining was that the popularity of this proposed event showed that a Santa train event could be marketed at Whitehead in the future, with no need to incur the overheads of a mainline operation.

Although the museum closed, Platform 3 remained in operation on a takeaway basis

and has been proving popular with visitors enjoying a walk on the Blackhead Cliff Path, which re-opened during the year. Our thanks to Rob Davies for keeping the lights on.

As the Christmas lockdown took effect, we sought to finish the year on a virtual high note with the launch on social media of "A Christmas Ghost Story" by Ian Sinclair. This seasonal offering was well received by the public and had clocked up more than 300 views by Christmas.

Our profile is helped by the fact that Whitehead Railway Museum is represented on the Causeway Coastal Route Cluster, which is run by Carrickfergus Enterprise. The group comprises various organisations in the hospitality and accommodation sectors and our participation provides an

opportunity to beat the drum for WRM and network with colleagues in tourism.

Thanks to the sponsorship of Mid & East Antrim Council WRM continues as a member of the European Route of Industrial Heritage. Thanks to the wonders of Zoom, Whitehead Railway Museum was able to be among the delegates to the annual conference of this organisation, held in October in Oberhausen in Germany. Again, this is a marvellous chance to gain access to groups throughout the Continent and further afield.

And we continue to add to our tally of plaques to display on the walls of Whitehead Railway Museum. In February, the RPSI won a runner-up certificate in the Heritage Railway Museum annual awards in Birmingham. Our entry was a



Launch of Whitehead Railway Museum guidebook (buy yours today), 20th February, with Charles Friel, Debra Wenlock, Mark Kennedy, John McKegney, Councillor Maureen Morrow, Joan Smyth and Lord O'Neill.
(Photo: R Morton)

celebration of 50 years of The Two Day Tour. For the 2021 awards – this time it will be a virtual ceremony – our nomination for the restoration of Guinness Grain Van 504 has been shortlisted.

Whitehead Railway Museum was joint winner of a commendation in the Marsh Awards for Volunteers for Museum Learning, run by the British Museum and Marsh Christian Trust. We were part of a joint entry by Mid & East Antrim Council for the successful Shaped by Industry, Shared with Pride initiative in 2019.

The receipt of such awards assists our profile and status. This recognition is helpful when it comes to applying for grant funding, something at which our General Manager Lisa Adair has become

something of an expert during lockdown. Thanks to her efforts, a number of sizeable grants have been received which keep our heads above water and give us grounds for hope as we look forward to the day when the Covid threat is no more – and when the RPSI and Whitehead Railway Museum can return to full operation.

Thanks go to Lisa for her continuing commitment and to staff members Ivan McAteer, Rebecca Laverty and Zoë Latimer, whose expertise has helped guide Whitehead Railway Museum through the various lockdowns. Thanks too to the members of the RPSI's Events Committee and for their support for and involvement in the museum. Better days lie ahead.



No.131 barely registered in 2020, but was steamed three days running in September for various reasons, one being to check it over in case mainline Santa trains could be salvaged. The Covid risk assessment required masks on No.131, due to the footplate being significantly less than 2metres across (unlike 3BG's), and so Jonathan Clinton wears one on the 27th. (Photo: Editor)

Physical activity at Whitehead was limited for much of the past year but we were still kept busy throughout. There are exciting plans for 2021 although everything is subject to what can be achieved within the limitations of budget and volunteer time. We kicked off 2020 with the launch of the Souvenir Guide book which was selling well before lockdown.

The last of the Belfast Winter meetings at Orangefield was cancelled at short notice as a precaution due to the coronavirus.

The physical Belfast Winter meetings had an average attendance of 100 people. Charles has now reinvented these meetings online utilising Zoom technology with technical support coming from Phillip Locket and James Friel. The first online meetings attracted an average of 60 people including one member tuning in from the USA. More meetings are planned for January, February and March 2021.

Tony Ragg, Brian Griffith and Richard Kenny erected a selection of enamel signs at Whitehead during the summer brightening up the station building. Brian and Richard cleaned and erected the Last Stone Train headboard on NCC locomotive No.4 and Macha Film Studios provided old cine footage to Ian Sinclair who put together a video of the Stone Trains to run beside the engine on an AV screen provided by Johnny Glendinning and the electrical squad.

John White completed his painting work on the interior of the North Atlantic brake carriage and is now helping with

paintwork on the Guinness van. We are assisting with finishing touches to the Guinness van restoration and possibly display panels within.

Some furniture donated by Brian's mother-in-law was placed in the GNRI Directors' saloon No50. This involved the temporary removal of a large window as the furniture was wider than the doors. The committee is continuing to develop a display of royal/state trains in the Director's saloon.

We purchased some outdoor Christmas lights in anticipation of making an illuminated train at Whitehead in December. Unfortunately with the cancellation of Christmas trains we didn't get the opportunity to try them out. The hope is that the lights will be powered from 24-volt batteries on board the train.

Ian has recorded two railway ghost stories, one for Christmas and one to be released next Halloween.

We hope to move the GSWR carriage from Mullingar to WRM and have it restored for use as a tearoom extension and corporate hire space.

We are working with Queen's University Belfast to facilitate a student interviewing and recording both railway workers and RPSI members memories in a digital audio format. This is planned to take place in March. We are also interested in anything members may have on Suffragettes in Ireland, especially if they travelled by train. Please get in touch if you can help.

Joe Cassells has been writing up his



Richard Kenny, Mark Kennedy and Tony Ragg prepare to fit enamel adverts to the station building on 17th September. (Photo: R Morton)

memories of the Stone trains. Charles Friel and the curatorial committee have been collecting photographs and artefacts to illustrate this work. We would like this to be the next RPSI publication. Charles is also researching photos on Whitehead and the Blitz. This may take the form of an event and physical display at Whitehead but may end up solely as an online exhibition. Charles has been spending much time at home providing information and photographs in support of Paul McCann's development of the Members' pages on the RPSI website, including pages on the GNR Guinness van, GNR steam crane and GNR carriage No9.

We had hoped to put on another model

railway day in 2021 but are now considering a Whitehead model railway event in either Spring or November 2022.

We remain badly in need of a Curatorial Store and Conservation/public research access space. A conservation needs report was commissioned in 2020. This needs to be followed up this year with an accurate assessment of the building costs.

We would also like to put new tarpaulins over the specimen vehicles that remain outside.

A new nameplate display on NCC Moguls at top of the lift in the gallery and a selection of cast iron plates on "back" stairwell, appropriately beside the

foundry, are on the back burner.

In December we developed an exhibition proposal submission as part of the Northern Ireland centenary events in 2021. If the grant application is successful, we may be able to carry out a cosmetic restoration to enable NCC railcar No1 to be placed on display. Finally, if you have

not already done so, I would ask all members to please buy a copy of the WRM Souvenir Guide Book. This is an inexpensive way that you can help the society to raise income during these difficult times and help show that future planned publications would be viable. Thank you.



Ex-NCC Railcar 1 has spent many years under this blue tarpaulin. Normally these days it sits in the Larne Siding more or less opposite the station building, but on 27th September was temporarily shunted out to permit 3BG access to retrieve a wagon carrying Drumboe's boiler. (Photo: Editor)



*A new arm for the Castlerock signal, 27th June.
(Photo: Editor)*

There are a number of infrastructure items (water columns, turntables) on the Irish Rail network which are important to the continued operation of our steam trains. One of these items, which is pretty much out of sight and out of bounds to the general public, is the Great Northern turntable next to Connolly shed. This turntable is vital for the continued operation of steam not only from Dublin but also for trains operating between Dublin and Belfast.

The turntable was constructed and installed by Cowans Sheldon & Co. Ltd in 1947. It was of a more modern articulated

design to the traditional turntable and allowed locomotives to be placed on the turntable without the need for balancing. As well as having manual turning handles, the turntable also had the ability to turn a locomotive using the vacuum created from the ejector. This would involve connecting the brake pipe from the locomotive to a pipe on the turntable and using the vacuum created to power the turntable.

Over the last number of years, the turntable became increasingly difficult to operate and was temperamental to say the least. On one occasion when



Before: Connolly Shed's recalcitrant and filthy turntable in October 2019. Unseen by the passengers, some heroics were performed here turning engines in tight timeframes in recent years.

(Photo: G Mooney)



During: Spring 2020 and the filthy, somewhat oily, pit has been cleaned out, the obstructive fence on the right has been moved back from the brink and work progresses on the table itself.

(Photo: G Mooney)

locomotive No.85 was preparing to leave the shed and head out for an operation it got stuck mid-turn and had to be abandoned. *[There is a story of it getting stuck on a crisp packet – Ed]*. Fortunately, on that particular day locomotive No.4 was also in steam scheduled for a return to Whitehead and stood in for the marooned No.85.

A number of factors caused this unreliability (including but not limited to) dipped joints in the turntable pit rail, poor rail condition, unreliable electric motor and control. The whole turntable and surrounding area was very much in bad repair.

In 2019 an approach was made to Eddie Quigley, Regional Manager for the Chief Civil Engineers (CCE) department, to see if it was possible for something to be done

with the turntable to improve the condition of the rail and general condition of the turntable. Nobody could have predicted what was going to happen. A number of site visits took place between the RPSI and CCE which resulted in a detailed plan which covered the various items that were to be addressed.

Work began in the second half of 2019 with the replacement of rail fixings in the turntable pit and the profile and radius of the rail measured. A specially created rail was produced by the rail plant in Portlaoise and subsequently transported to the site. The bridge gang were tasked with the job of the turntable structure itself. Under the expert lead of Declan Murphy, the highly skilled and enthusiastic bridge gang took on the task. The turntable was stripped right back to the main frame and everything was

completely refurbished or replaced. Gone were the buckled and broken deck plates, structural supports replaced, missing and damaged handrails along with the turntable wheel covers and the rotten sections of the control cabinet cut out-all replaced with new. The complete turntable structure was then given a coat of fresh paint to protect it.

Various setbacks to progress due to Covid-19 restrictions were experienced during the work but the gang remained focused on completing the task. Pat Butler and Kathy Kissane ensured everything on the Per-way and design side ran like clockwork.

The whole area around the turntable also received attention. All the vegetation in

and around the turntable and shed area was removed and the turntable pit completely cleaned and power washed. The ground next to the shed had a covering placed over the ground and stone deposited to prevent the return of vegetation and to make the area safer. The fence that was installed some time ago and was right at the edge of the turntable, was moved back to allow for safer operation and also to allow clearance for a certain NCC tender locomotive. The area around the turntable was then resurfaced with new concrete. The siding leading from the points to the turntable was rotten. This was lifted and replaced with new panels and the section next to the turntable finished off with level crossing matts for a smooth and safe



*After: No.85 on the refurbished turntable on 05th June. You can see how No. 85 takes up the full length of it and thus how a fence up to the edge of the pit presented a problem. Next would be work to spruce up that shed. A little note that other turntables are also available for refurbishment.
(Photo: G Mooney)*

surface.

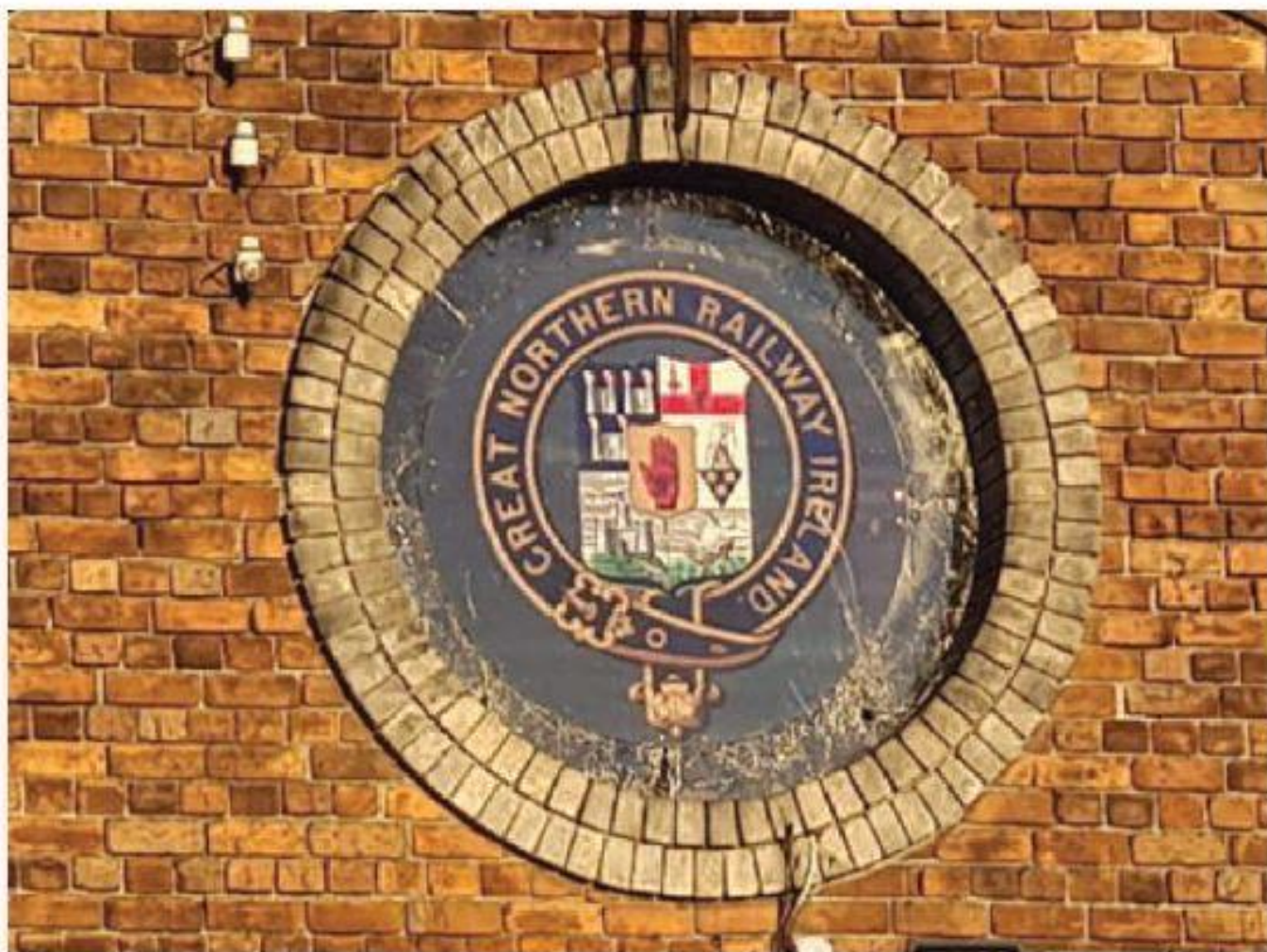
Some nice touches to finish off the area included the production of replica shed windows and doors to cover up the previously blocked up windows and entrances. Replica builders plates with works numbers were cast and attached to the turntable along with reproduced operating plates on the turntable control tower.

Since the RPSI became resident in the shed back in 2015 a schedule of rehabilitation works was created and this continued as part of the job. The gutters and down pipes on the shed itself were replaced along with those on the annex building. One nice touch to the project was the installation of the Great Northern

Railway crest in the aperture of the south facing gable of the shed.

At the time of writing the work has paused yet again due to Covid-19. When conditions allow the final few outstanding items will complete the job. The electrical motor which has been refurbished will return and a newly constructed electrical control panel will be fitted. Lighting of the area will also be replaced.

The work on the turntable will result in reliable and safe operation and also the preservation of this vital piece of railway heritage and infrastructure for many years to come. The Society greatly appreciates the support and enthusiasm from Irish Rail and the close cooperation to see this project through to the end.



GNR(I) Crest on the tidied-up gable of Connolly Shed.

(Photo: A Dooner)

My mother's family made a significant contribution to the Great Northern Railway. Her uncle Samuel was a driver, another uncle was a signaller and one of her cousins worked in an office at Great Victoria Street where timetables and free passes were arranged. Her father, William Webb, worked in a squad which was responsible for bridge maintenance. One of his former colleagues was a signaller at Balmoral and there are photographs in our Museum Guidebook of Grandpa in the cabin, with his grandson counting levers! My father, Edgar Griffith, also lived close to Adelaide and remembered 'Merlin' and her sisters, when new, lined up outside the shed. So I suppose you might

say an interest in railways is in the blood!

My daily commute from home in Whiteabbey to school in Belfast reinforced this and there Paul Newell introduced a group of us to the RPSI. Young people often carry out rash deeds; I joined up and have been a member ever since.

At the time I was able to travel on a few of the steam specials, notably Lough Erne's visit to Larne Harbour and the Guinness engine's famous/infamous tour around the dock lines of Belfast. I also recall a few visits to Whitehead to help with the early Open Days. Student summer holidays were happily spent as



Brian Griffith explains the Armagh Disaster and its consequences to visitors from the International Railway Safety Council on 25th October 2018. (Photo: C Friel)

relief clerk in the NIR Booking Office at York Road.

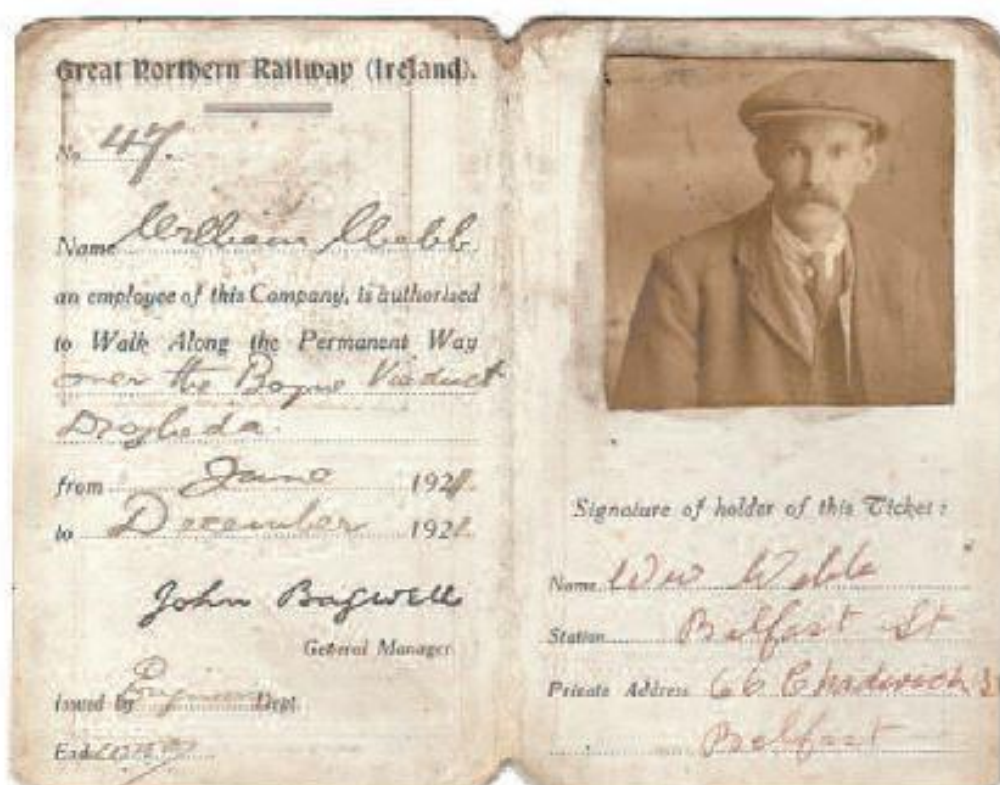
However, a full-time teaching job in Ballyclare High School took me away from the railway. Responsibilities of work and family meant something had to take a back seat, and while I maintained my interest, I was not an active RPSI member.

My retirement from full-time employment roughly corresponded with the development work at Whitehead so I applied for a position as a tour guide. Having passed the interview, I have found my niche on Thursdays escorting members of the public around the museum. No two weeks are the same, with visitors old and young, from near and far. It has also been great to renew old friendships within the Society and to make new ones.

Not content with selecting me as a guide, John Lockett also volunteered my services to the Curatorial Committee! Our aim is to channel the Society's responsibility to

care for the railway artefacts in our possession and preserve them, in working order where possible, for generations to come. Under Mark Kennedy's leadership we have produced the Whitehead Railway Museum Guidebook, helped with the Model Railway Day and restoration of the Grain Van. It is not possible to show the public everything at once, and so purchasing the Guidebook from the Society's shop is recommended. Being a tour guide has helped, as sometimes visitors will bring along items which they wish to kindly donate to our collection and often they can give background information on the artefact.

Museum tours usually start at the signalbox and end at the carriage shed, adjacent to which sits the Great Northern steam crane waiting its turn in the long line of refurbishment projects. In his working life my Grandpa must have accompanied that crane to many GNR bridges!



William Webb's pass, now from 100 years ago, permitted him to walk on the line over the Boyne Viaduct during the second half of 1921. The viaduct would at that time have been the more plain, double-track version.

(c/o B Griffith)

VOLUNTEERING – A REWARDING EXPERIENCE

Alex Duggan

Like many, exposure to Thomas and Friends at an early age started a life-long love of railways. At the start of September 2018, I took a trip out to Mallow and saw Merlin for the first time, I found the steam and sound intoxicating. At the end of October I then took a trip up to Whitehead for the 'Steam Saturday'. While there I offhandedly picked up a volunteer form. Later rediscovered in mid-November, finding myself with too much free time, I threw it into the post expecting not to hear anything soon. Within about a week I had been asked to help on the Dublin Santa trains which I eagerly accepted.

Those first trips were stressful trying to get to grips with what needed to be done and where, while also dealing with passengers. However, it was amazing experiencing the Cravens for the first time and learning so much. I also met so many new and friendly people, whom I had so much trouble remembering the names of. By the end of those first three weekends, I was eagerly looking forward to the next trip.

During the summer I started working with the carriage presentation team in Inchicore and got to see the hard work and clever thinking that goes into keeping the carriages in good condition. A great way to spend a few hours, a bit

of work, good company, and good talk.

I have also gotten to try my hand at oiling Merlin and No.4, both with quirks of oiling. While it may be a dirty, oily task it is an enjoyable enough way to kick start the morning.

When I started, I did not expect anything. I just tried to do the job I was given, as well as I could, most of the time, only sleeping on the job once. I took up every offer of a new experience I could, from watering in Waterford to oiling in Killarney. So, it was a great surprise then in February to be nominated and win 'New Volunteer of the Year' (South), a great honour and a standard I have now to try beat.

In the coming years I would like to continue my work on the carriages, but I would love to spend some more time with the locos. I would also like to get a better idea of the work and effort that goes into deciding and planning out the trips though out the year.



Alex Duggan receives his 'New Volunteer of the Year' award from Joe McKeown
(Photo: c/o J McKeown)

As I bid farewell to 2020 and hope for better things to come, I can't help but look back and say that being a volunteer with the Dublin Operations section of the RPSI has made my life so much more enjoyable and productive since I first joined five years ago. It has even helped make 2020 more bearable.

As 2020 began there were lots of plans and things organised to do. My Society year began attending the first Volunteer of the Year awards where, as a former professional photographer, I made good use of those skills, along with others, in helping record the event for posterity.

In March I received the good news that the photoshoot project, which I had proposed and planned for Whitehead, had got the go ahead. This was to be a series of photoshoots where amateur photographers would be offered the opportunity to partake in a 40's, 50's & 60's styled fashion and rail travel photo session which would take place in Whitehead Station and Museum. Each participant would pay £100 for six hours of tuition and photography with a number of models dressed for the relative period, all revolving around the glamour days of rail travel post-war. Two other well-known photographers had agreed to provide their services (free) to get this project off the ground. Both were keen to be involved as Whitehead is the only facility on the island of Ireland where such a shoot could take place. All proceeds would go to the Society and this project has the possibility of generating up to £30,000 a year for the RPSI.

Lisa Adair, her team and I had finalised the date of the event, the next thing on the agenda was to shoot the promotional photos for the project. Within days I had twelve people signed up for the event and then the Covid pandemic brought all our plans to a halt. However, when we return to some sort of normal, almost everything is ready to reorganise at a new date.

As I'm a member of the Inchicore Carriage team, fellow Richie Moran and I got on with the planned repainting of all the internal gangways on the Cravens. It had also been planned to paint all the vestibules, where the light fittings had been upgraded to low energy units while maintaining the look in keeping with the year of manufacture of the carriages. However, this upgrade had left areas of the ceiling in need of repainting, so the decision was made to spray-paint the upper walls and ceiling the same colour (soft cream). This colour had been successfully used in the upper part of the toilets the previous year. As 2020 draws to a close I'm happy to report that I have only three vestibules left to be spray painted out of a total of sixteen.

The comradeship and craic that we share in Inchicore as we go about our many and varied tasks maintaining the Craven set has kept all our spirits up, even though lockdown has forced us to suspend operations on a number of occasions.

To end my year, I was asked would I produce a reduced print run of our RPSI Calendar for 2021. As we were in lockdown again, I was happy to be

productively busy. The call was sent out for images to be submitted for consideration and the calendar went on sale at the beginning of December.

So as you can see the RPSI has kept me productively busy during 2020 and helped

maintain a degree of sanity in what can only be described as the craziest year I have ever experienced in my 71 years on this planet.

Stay safe and well everyone, but most of all be good to yourself by keeping busy.



Martin without his protective wear.

Uncannily setting the scene for the rest of the year, for he need do no more than swap the paint in his sprayer for sanitiser, Martin Devlin is spray painting the toilet compartment in a Craven carriage on 27th February.

(Photo: c/o M Devlin)

For years, the Society has run Christmas Santa trains where children come and travel on our trains and get to meet the big man himself. However what people often forget is the other helpers on the train. Yes, we have the musicians, we have the stewards, the catering staff and the support crew, but who are we thinking about. Well, it's the elves that this article is about. The elves are a big part of the experience and without them a lot of jobs wouldn't be done.

Did you know that the position of elf on the Santa trains is highly sought after and that, of Santa's hundreds of elves, only a small handful of about ten in total have been lucky enough to travel? We asked one of the elves about their experience and what they do on the train. Jingles elf is sitting down after a long Sunday and tells us about her day.

"Well, firstly I get up real early and put on my best elf suit. I have some candy cane for breakfast and join the other three elves and Santa for the trip to Dublin. When we arrive in Connolly, we firstly have to find Joe McKeown to let him know that we are there. Then we help load all of Santa's presents onto the train and ensure Santa has a nice cup of hot chocolate before he meets the children. We then watch all the families boarding the train and say hello to loads of children, who are often amazed to see us. Next we accompany Santa through the train, handing him the children's gifts and posing for never-ending photographs. Santa sometimes uses us for his questions to children, especially ones like "Who's the

chief elf in the North Pole?", which of course is Bernard, and "What football team do the elves play for?", which is Elves United, obviously!

When we arrive in Maynooth, Santa goes out to the platform to his little area for pictures. *[Ed has seen pictures from the '80s. Ed knows Santa's 'little area' used to be just out of sight, next the bar.]* We accompany him, and sometimes Mrs Claus comes as well. It is great seeing the queue of happy families who want a picture with Santa and us: but it is us elves they really want. When the train leaves Maynooth, we then often go and help John Richardson out with the raffle and also join the singers in their sing-along.

When we arrive back in Connolly, we get out and say goodbye to all the families before re-boarding and getting an elf-tastic drink and sandwich before doing it all again for two more trips.

At the end of the day, we return to the north pole very tired and worn out. In fact, our pedometers often have gone all the way around the clock and back again the amount of walking we do.

This is my third year of travelling and some of the other elves are very jealous. Every year we all hope that Santa picks us for this job as we love travelling behind the steam train, plus we get out of the toy workshop for the weekend. Santa often shares sweets and cakes that children give him with us as he knows how hard we work."

I leave Jingles alone now and discover some of the other names that have

travelled with us, including Mischief, Twinkly, Bubbly, Shinning, Bossy, Snowball and Joyful elf and many more. This time, in fact, we had an elf in training and a junior elf was been tried out. The amazing thing is that our elves often join us on other trips during the year out of uniform to assist with sales and fundraising which Santa has decreed are good for the elves

to do.

The Society is grateful to the work done by these tireless individuals whose one role is to brighten up our journeys and ensure that every child is seen by Santa himself. We hope that Santa will always allow us to use his elves as we know they are very busy all week long and then have to give up their weekends as well.



Santa, Elves and GM 082 in Dublin Connolly after completion of the third, diesel-hauled, run of a Santa Train day, obviously in a year prior to 2020. (Photo: M Hoey)

[Extract from Paddy Kilduff's Life Story – A Work in Progress. This is 2017]

I have written previously that as a member of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland, I have volunteered for the past number of years as a Steward on the RPSI Steam Trains. The most satisfying, but tiring part of the activity is the Santa Trains which operate over the three weekends before Christmas with three trains on Saturdays and two trains on Sundays.

As well as performing the role of Steward, I also do the Announcements on the PA on the train. To give a flavour of the trip this was the official initial Announcement (with some additions I slip in in brackets).

Welcome Announcement

(Good morning Boys and Girls, Mammys and Daddys, Grannys and Grandads) may I have your attention, please?

On behalf of the RPSI you are all welcome on board our Santa Train Trip to (the North Pole which may look more like) Maynooth today.

The following is a health and safety message.

I would ask that parents and guardians of young children to pay particular attention to their safety whilst on board this train. I am referring to the carriage doors and windows. It is extremely dangerous to lean out the carriage door windows; also the gangway area between the carriages.

Whilst we will do our very best that you get the photographs that you really want,

please obey the stewards on the train and on the platforms.

As this is a heritage Train, all doors are operated manually. There are RPSI Stewards allocated to each carriage and these Stewards will open the carriage doors for you at all times. When getting on or off the train please mind the gap between the Platform and the Carriage. Please note, while the train is stationary at the Platform in Maynooth the toilets will be locked off and out of use until the train has departed the station.

The steam engine on this train today is Locomotive No. 4 a 2-4-6T Tank Engine built by The London Midland and Scottish Railway, known as The LMS, in Derby, England, in 1947 for the LMS NCC of Northern Ireland. NCC stands for Northern Counties Committee. She was withdrawn by Northern Ireland Railways in 1971. The engines are commonly known as "jeeps". The engine was owned and run by the following Railway Companies: LMS NCC, UTA, NIR and the RPSI. The engine has been totally restored to full working order by the RPSI volunteers.

The carriages that you are travelling in were built for CIE in the very early 1960's by Cravens Carriage Builders, UK. These carriages are now maintained and serviced by RPSI volunteers.

Facilities on board this train today consist of a Buffet Car, serving Teas, Coffees, minerals and freshly made sandwiches. You can also avail of a Mulled Wine or Tea/ Coffee and a Mince Pie on presentation of your Cardboard ticket. If

you have an electronic ticket, the Steward will give you a "Complimentary" Cardboard Ticket which you can bring to the Dining Car.

The bar is serving draught Guinness and draught O'Hara's Craft Ale and Heineken; with a large selection of bottled O'Hara's Craft Ale, beers ciders wines and spirits.

While we are on the platform in Maynooth Santa will be available for photographs at the centre of the train with the girls and boys.

We hope you enjoy your trip and hopefully we will see you again.

Check us online at Steamtrainsireland.com

Before Arrival back in Connolly

We will shortly be arriving at Dublin Connolly Station. I would ask you to make sure you have all your personal belongings with you. For those of you who have left a buggy or pram in the Van Compartment, this carriage is now situated at the back of the train.

On behalf of the RPSI I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for travelling with us, and we wish you a very Happy and Peaceful Christmas.

Please mind the gap between the Carriage and the platform.

Safe Home (agus Nollaig foai shéin is faoi mhaise agaibh go léir).

The Train and Crew

The 10-unit train consists of

- An engine. Mostly Steam but sometimes Diesel
- 8 carriages, including the Bar Car and the Buffet Car, all done up with

Christmas decorations

- A Brake Van (for heating and buggy storage)

The Volunteer Crew includes:

- 1 Santas [*Mind yerself - Ed*]
- 4 Elves (to help Santa distribute Selection Boxes)
- 6 musicians and singers
- 12 Stewards including the Announcer, the Photographer, and Platform Protection
- 1 Raffle Ticket Seller (a retired Magistrate from NI) with 4 helpers
- 2 RPSI Calendar Sellers
- 2 Bar Staff
- 5 Catering Staff (mulled wine, mince pies, etc)
- 1 Carriage Officer
- 4 Watering and Support Crew

Irish Rail provides the Engine Driver, the Fireman and an Inspector on the train.

The duties of the Stewards include welcoming passengers on board, collecting tickets, carriage tidying and cleaning, assisting passengers on and off the train, thanking them for coming with us and telling them that we hope they will be back again.

The Schedule and Operation

Departures from Connolly were at 10:20, 13:52 and 16:35 on Saturday and 10:50 and 14:05 on Sunday. The trip takes about 45 minutes each way to and from Maynooth with a turnaround at Maynooth varying from 25 to 50 minutes. The engine "runs

around" while the train is at the platform in Maynooth.

The Blanchardstown Brass Band played on the platform in Connolly for the first train on Sunday morning, travelled to Maynooth in the baggage area, with an upgrade to the crew compartment and then played on the platform in Maynooth. On return to Connolly they then played for the second departure.

Over the first weekend this year, 2nd and 3rd December 2017, there were just over 400 passengers on each train, with a

total of 2032 for the 5 trains; 219 RPSI Calendars were sold and the "Every one's a winner" Raffle brought in €3060 for the Diesel Loco Fund.

The Santa trains are very popular and tickets sell out very quickly when they go on sale around August.

On 15th December, Santa made a special visit to the RPSI Loco Shed in Dublin's Connolly Station to meet the Nolan family from Rathcoole in Co. Dublin. Pictured with No.85 "Merlin", complete with it's Santa Headboard are Brian, Katie (10) & Sandy, while Alex proudly wears an Irish Rail Cap which he was presented with by DTE Brian Fitzgerald.

(Photo: M Devlin)



Although the title might suggest a pugilist whose earnings are insufficient, what follows concerns articles vital to the functioning of our locomotives. Some allowance must be made for local pronunciation whereby weemin carry hanbegs, sweeties may come in begs, while I still remember a schoolteacher who routinely told us to 'put our begs on the floor' although she didn't go as far as calling it the flure.

Starting with boxes, however, the most obvious is the **smokebox**, right at the front and surmounted by a chimney. (I've seen this referred to as a funnel but, as far as I'm concerned, funnels, like stokers, belong on ships). On opening the smokebox door a variety of items are encountered, the first being the blastpipe which directs the exhaust steam from the cylinders up the chimney and whose correct alignment is essential to the working of the locomotive. It produces the "puffs", each of which draws air through the fire and hot gases and smoke from the fire through the boiler tubes. Encircling the top of the blastpipe is the blower ring, a perforated pipe through which steam can be directed to produce the same effect when the engine is not "puffing". Also present will be the exhaust pipe from the vacuum ejector and often superheaters and varying types of spark-arresting equipment.

Thus it can be seen that the smokebox is actually quite a crowded place, something that becomes only too obvious when there is a need to enter it for such jobs as removing washout plugs from the front tubeplate of the boiler. I have read somewhere that before entering one

should set about the outside with a hammer in order to dislodge nasty sooty flakes. However, even if this is not curtailed by adverse comment from the Chief Mechanical Engineer, one can be sure that sooty material will still find its way down one's neck – the only difference will be the quantity. *[Smokebox soot is uniquely sticky, persistent and invasive. For those who wish to know more before they wish to know less again, search for "Chimney Sweep's Carcinoma" for what dealing with this stuff 24/7 and before proper sanitation was available, could mean - Ed]*

Attached to the other end of the boiler is the **firebox**, whose function is again obvious. It is actually a box within a box, the intervening space of 3 – 4 inches being filled with water. The space above the inner box is much greater but it is vital that it be covered with water at all times when there is a fire in the box. How the fire is disposed of at the end of the day depends on the type of grate. On some, with fixed bars, it must be shovelled out through the same hole that it went in. Others have a small drop section through which unwanted material can be pushed to the ashpan whence an accomplice will rake it out. No.4, our most modern engine, has a grate which can be rocked slightly to clean the fire, or fully to dump it into the hopper ashpan through which it will hopefully fall unaided. In theory, this is an ideal arrangement but in practice it can give problems and its seven rocking bars are massive heavy things. The fireboxes of all our main line engines contain a transverse brick arch designed to extract as much heat as possible from the

products of combustion before they are whisked off to the smokebox. No.4 is unique in that its grate slopes up towards the back which means that whilst it is easier to clamber in and out of the firebox, there is less room under the arch to wrestle with the heavy firebars. The slope makes it easy to fire coal to the front of the grate, so long as it is not thrown in carelessly, thereby building an obstruction under the arch.

Next in magnitude would be the **axleboxes**, one pair per axle and of size and weight in proportion to the wheels. Obviously the largest are those of the driving wheels. They are basically a cast

metal arch, partly lined with a thin layer of white metal and sitting on the axle. They are designed to move vertically between guides in gaps in the engine's main frames, to which they are connected by springs which can be adjusted to ensure that each axle bears the correct proportion of the engine's weight. In addition to carrying weight the driving axleboxes also have to cope with alternating fore and aft thrusts from the pistons so their life is not an easy one. It is said that their bearing surface should not be interrupted by holes or grooves and to that end most receive their lubrication from a pad mounted in an oil bath beneath the axle. One can sometimes read in the non-railway press



The superior, spacious smokebox of the Jeep with its self-cleaning screens removed. You even get a little seat to sit on when removing washout plugs. 'Superior' as compared to shorter, cramped GNR(1) and No.461 smokeboxes with their enormous, inevitably rusty and thorny, overall-shredding, wire-cage spark arrestors. Getting to a washout plug in these has been described as 'like getting up the beach at Normandy, except nobody is shooting at you'. They even flood for extra effect if you are not careful with your washout hose.

(Photo: Editor)

that a locomotive had “a problem (or more likely nowadays: a train had an issue) with a hot box”, thereby suggesting that the trouble might be something to do with the fire. However, what it means is that an axlebox has overheated, usually due to lack of lubrication. This is a most unwelcome occurrence as, in addition to the problems of actually extracting and repairing it, a driving axlebox is of similar weight to one of No.4’s firebars!

Sand boxes come into play when the driving wheels are losing their grip on the rails. This problem has become more prevalent on modern vehicles fitted with disc brakes rather than the old-fashioned arrangement of blocks bearing on the treads of the wheels and thereby cleaning them. Apparently a high-powered research team has discovered that this could be counteracted by guess what –

sand! There seems to be no end to such bodies discovering things that lesser mortals have known for years. Sand originally dropped onto the rails by gravity but this was unreliable and it is now blown by steam or air. On British-designed locomotives, sand boxes are not obvious since nothing was allowed to detract from a graceful outline. Thus sandboxes and their filling orifices tended to be tucked away in awkward places where sand could be spilled onto the motion or water get into the boxes. Unhampered by such inhibitions, American and Continental designers used – horror of horrors – additional domes on top of the boiler where the sand could be kept warm and dry. Although they didn’t go quite that far the designers of the British Railways standard classes finally threw caution to the winds and had shamelessly exposed



James Friel melts white metal out of a No.171 driving axlebox on 12th January.

(Photo: Editor)

pipework leading to components outside the cabs.

Also – at least with No.4 - on top of the boiler could be found **clack boxes**. On other engines these could be at a lower level on the boiler or forming part of the injectors and are non-return valves through which water is fed into the boiler by the injectors. British sensitivities about visible plumbing featured here also and so injectors were often mounted on the firebox backplate, feeding directly into the boiler. Here, as motoring magazines used to put it, controls came easily to hand – but at a price, as injectors prefer a cool environment and unreliable injectors are probably the greatest bane of a fireman's life - while bad coal is a nuisance it doesn't have the same safety implications. When No.171 returns to service firemen will find that the injector on their side is as simple to operate as their kitchen tap, being mounted below the cab where it is cool and doesn't have to suck water uphill. A clack failing to seat properly allowed steam to blow back and out through the injector overflow, leading to an engine being shrouded in steam and unseemly language. Sometimes the clack could be persuaded to function by re-starting the injector although here and there one could see signs on its housing of a hammer having been used to bring it to its senses.

Unseen, by necessity, is the **drag box**, a substantial casting at the rear of the locomotive, between the frames underneath the footplate and connected to the tender by the drawbar and a pair of safety links. Not having a tender, No.4 has a different layout, while on our two shunting engines the strains of haulage are simply borne by their buffer beams.

Often not obvious but vital to the

wellbeing of an engine are **oil boxes**, usually consisting of a brass casting of one or more compartments with tubes leading to various moving parts. In addition to not always being obvious they are not in the same location on every engine so local knowledge is important. Trimmings consisting of strands of wool attached to wire feed oil into the aforementioned tubes by capillary action. This continues until the oil is all gone and is thus a source of mess in the pits at Whitehead. To prevent that, the trimmings can be removed from the tubes and this would be done if an engine was not going to be used in the foreseeable future. However, for intermittent use the potential damage resulting from omitting to replace trimmings would outweigh the inconvenience of a messy pit.

The **Toolbox**, mounted at the front of the tender on most engines, needs no explanation, except to add that it tends to become cluttered or have tools pinched from it for other engines and is apt to become contaminated by oil and spilled coal – or by rain if the lid is left open.

Turning now to the “**begs**”, I'm reminded of a former NCC driver known to his colleagues as “Moneybegs”. This might be assumed to refer to his place of origin – I've travelled with an Englishman known to one and all as “Ilford Man” despite living in Romford! However, our local man's name was bestowed on account of his alleged thriftiness. All of which only confuses the issue as in its present context the term bag/beg appears to be applicable to all flexible non-metallic tubular structures with an internal diameter of not less than half an inch. Hence a quarter inch tube conveying oil to a bearing would not appear to qualify as a bag.



Coll-yum bags can be scallywags. This one at Ballymena makes every attempt to soak the operator rather than supply No.85 on 12th August 1995. Coach 9 at right. (Photo: C Friel)

Not part of a steam locomotive at all, but essential to getting it from place to place, is the **column beg**. Whilst there may be a danger of the name being mistaken for that of a small Irishman, the fact that in some areas column is pronounced "coll-yum" should avoid that. The term column bag appears to include those leading from water tanks as well as those attached to free-standing columns and their use is an unfailing source of interest to our passengers. The more cautious observe the proceedings from a safe distance in order to avoid contact with the several gallons often remaining in the bag when it is thrown overboard. Stopping his train with the engine's tank filler convenient to the bag tests a driver's skill. One reads of column bags made of leather but any I have encountered were canvas or, more recently, plastic. In times past few stations of any size were without a water column, some even colour-coded to denote the

suitability or otherwise of their water. Like turntables, very few now remain and it appears that using road tankers or distant hydrants is preferable to maintaining them (and requires less precision when stopping!) The column at Whitehead came from Barrack Street yard, Dundalk, to replace the original broken by the mishandling of the JCB by a former volunteer who was quite clever in some subjects but hadn't much sense.

On board the engine may be found the **spray**, or **slacker, bag**. Predictably, other parts of these islands have different names for it but its basic function is to clean the footplate and wet the coal in order to keep down dust. Especially on No.85, the dusky faces of crews would suggest that it is being under-employed. It is fed from a valve on the injector on the fireman's side and can sometimes be used to encourage this injector to start when reluctant. This requires some care as if the

valve is opened too much the bag, if not correctly restrained, may thrash about in all directions, spewing hot water – as one of my feet can testify! *[It will not take long looking through Irish railway books for the reader to realise that, when footplates and linesides were less crowded than today, “correctly restrained” meant “Left hanging out the fireman’s side of the cab” - Ed].*

We must now leave our warm cab and look underneath, where we will find **water bags**, **steam heating bags** and **vacuum bags** connecting the engine to the tender – or vice-versa in the case of the water, which is destined for the injectors. The latter two bags will reappear elsewhere. En-route one may notice the injector overflow but this, being metallic and inflexible, cannot be classed as a bag.

At the rear of the tender may be found an assortment, chief among which, and resembling a monster caterpillar, is the vacuum bag on its way to operate the brakes of the train. One may often hear this referred to as the **veckum beg** and I sometimes facetiously described veckum as a substance used for stopping trains, whereas a lack of substance, i.e. the vacuum created by the ejector on the engine, is actually the basis of the system. The vacuum bag is reinforced internally by coiled wire, the remarkable length of which may be observed in the event of uncoupling not being correctly completed. Since the Armagh disaster, a continuous automatic braking system has been a legal requirement. The fact that a disruption will cause the brakes to be applied makes a nonsense of movie scenes in which someone disconnects train from engine and both sail on unimpeded. The nature of the couplings between bags requires that the bags be

attached to their respective vehicles with the correct orientation, otherwise coupling them will require musculature like that of King Kong. The open end of a bag should be seated on the plug, or dummy, fitted for that purpose. If this is not done the driver will be unable to create vacuum in the system, leading to “popping” of the whistle and waving of arms.

Air bags, on the other hand, are of smaller bore, connect more conveniently and pull apart without damage. Little more need be said since we don’t have any, all our running vehicles being vacuum-braked. In the days of steam a number of cross-Channel railways used air braking, requiring an engine-mounted pump, and I recall visiting Liverpool Street in my teens and wondering why all the engines were going tish-tish. More recently in GB I have heard similar sounds emanating from unexpected engines which have had to have pumps retro-fitted to work air-braked trains.

The **heating bag**, as its names suggests, has to do with supplying warmth to the train. It is of less complex construction than the vacuum bag and conveys steam from the engine via a reducing valve which keeps pressure down to about 30psi. In older systems the steam simply passed through a series of radiators below the carriage seats. However, technology hasn’t stood still and in our Mk.2 carriages the steam now goes to heat exchangers whence warm air is blown to various outlets. This requires fans which require electricity which is something that steam engines tend not to produce, so it has to come from somewhere else – nothing ever gets simpler. When an engine isn’t doing too well for steam, the crew could feel that the steam going for heating

would be better employed elsewhere and would shut it off – oh dear, surely not!

That seems to complete the “begs” but I’ve just remembered another important box – the engineman’s **piece box**. In the days before takeaways, coffee shops and all manner of plastic structures, almost every working man had one of these light metal boxes, usually coloured cream and green, in which to carry his piece. The term piece didn’t just refer to a single-slice jammy piece such as one might give to a child but rather to all the edible contents of the box, hence “What’s in your piece the day?”. In Yorkshire he would call it his snap and doubtless other areas have their own names for it. For added security of the lid a rubber band made from a slice of

a car’s inner tube was often used and the reduced demand for these seems to have mirrored the increased use of tubeless tyres. In order that its owner could make tea the piece box could also contain a small double-ended tubular box containing sugar and loose tea, while milk as often as not would be in a miniature whiskey bottle. And no, even though loose tea is almost a thing of the past, in this context tea bags don’t count as begs!

[The Editor has found this year somewhat unique for studying what people from his part of the world do to words. Never were “coronavirus”, “pandemic” or “Covid” uttered by anyone here before 2020: now they are “coromavirus”, “pamdemic” and “The Covert”.]



3BG's new steam heat is tested on a Mk2 on 09th February. In the foreground is the coach's veckum beg; 3BG's is behind her heat beg. (Photo: Editor)

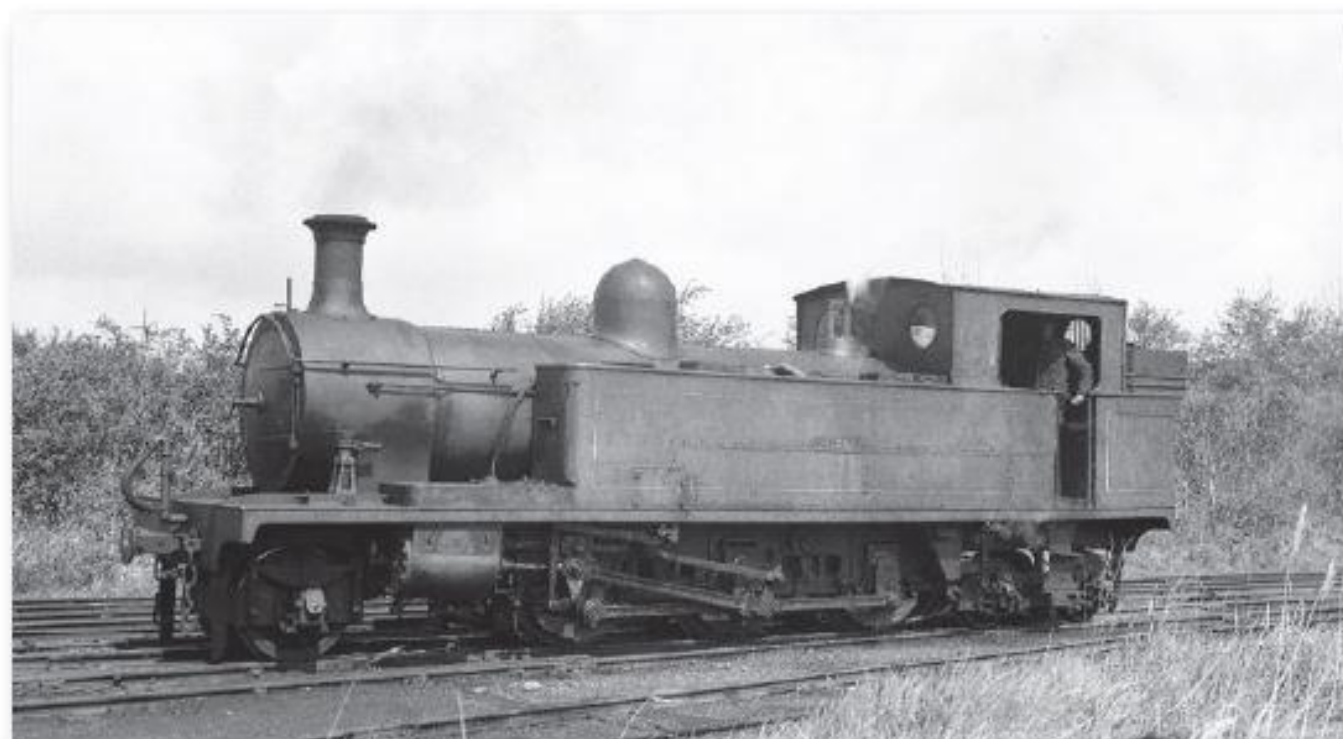
Over 100 years ago there were over 225 miles of narrow-gauge railways in County Donegal run by two very different railway companies. These were among the largest narrow-gauge railway networks in Western Europe. The largest of these networks, at almost 125 miles, was operated by the County Donegal Railway, with their lines running from Derry/Londonderry to Killybegs.

The Donegal Railway Company was taken over in May 1906 by the Great Northern Railway and the Midland Railway of England. They formed the County Donegal Railway Joint Committee (CDR) to run the railway they owned on an equal basis. The new owners decided that their new railway required larger and more modern steam locomotives, which were

quite unlike what the other Irish narrow-gauge lines were building at this time, with the possible exception of the Londonderry and Lough Swilly.

In 1907 the CDR ordered five modern steam locomotives to deal with growing levels of freight traffic, in particular. Nasmyth, Wilson (NW) of Manchester, were given the order for the Class 5 2-6-4T locomotives. They were delivered between 1907 and 1908 as listed below, with their original names and numbers.

- 17 (5) "Glenties" NW 829 built 1907; after 1937 "Drumboe"
- 18 (6) "Killybegs" NW 830 built 1908; after 1937 "Columbkille"
- 19 (7) "Letterkenny" NW 831 built 1908; allocated "Finn" but not carried



"Drumboe" waiting to take water at Donegal Town station in 1956. The former West Donegal Railway station building at Donegal Town was opened in 1889 and has been the home of the Donegal Railway Heritage Centre since 1995. (Photo: c/o J McBride)



"Drumboe" leaving Strabane on a special goods working to Stranorlar, crossing the CDR bridge over the River Mourne 07th June 1956. The GNR(I) line to Omagh can be seen on the left and until July 1894, when the line from Stranorlar was converted to the 3-foot gauge, CDR trains had shared use of this bridge over the Mourne. The photo is taken from the Lifford Road bridge, frequently known as the "Camel's Hump", which later became a major border checkpoint. Today the A5 cuts through between the two trackbeds. (Photo: c/o J McBride, Ernies Irish Railway Archive)

- 20 (8) "Raphoe" NW 832 built 1908; after 1937 "Foyle"

The Class 5 tank engines were based upon the Class 3 4-4-4T, built in 1902. The new CDR locomotives were the first 2-6-4T locos in Ireland and were only the second locomotives of that wheel arrangement built for use in the British Isles. These new locos weighed over 43-tons and had 4-foot diameter driving wheels. They cost £2,475 each and they were not superheated. When they were placed into service, they quickly proved to be a success on both goods and passenger trains on the CDR. They had one minor problem, which was their restricted coal and water capacity when working heavier trains. These problems were rectified when the Class 5A tanks were built in 1912,

with superheaters, extended water tanks and enlarged coal bunkers.

In May 1923, GT Glover, the GNR loco engineer, carried out a survey of the steam locomotives of the CDR. The Class 5 locomotives had been in service for about fifteen years, many of them were due soon for their first heavy repairs and most locos would also need new fireboxes as well. The GNR, as part owners of the CDR, had responsibility for their locomotives and rolling stock. As part of his report, Glover recommended that superheaters would be fitted to members of this class at their next heavy repair. The cost of fitting a superheater, at £89 each, would be quickly recouped by savings in fuel and running costs. Between 1924 and 1929, all members of this class were fitted

with superheaters, except No.19 "Letterkenny". This improved their performance, as well as bringing them into line with the Class 5A locomotives.

During the 1930s, the CDR started to introduce railcars on some of their services as part of an economy drive by their legendary manager Henry Forbes. By 1937 the CDR had withdrawn any steam locomotive built before 1904, leaving 12 steam locomotives from three different classes in service, from 1937 until closure. The Class 5A locos had already been renumbered in 1928, now the Class 4 and Class 5 locos were renumbered in October 1937. The Class 5 tanks also took some of the names of the former Class 2 4-6-0T engines. This meant that, for example, No.17 "Glenties" now became No.5 "Drumboe" in October 1937. This engine

had been superheated in 1929. From October 1937, most surviving CDR steam locomotives received a new Geranium Red livery. Not all the Class 5 locos received this new red livery and No.19 "Letterkenny," was withdrawn in the previous black livery without receiving its new name or number. With just four of the Class 5 locomotives left in traffic, there would be no further withdrawals of them until 1955. When "Letterkenny" was scrapped after 1940, the frames of this loco were used to create a new turntable for the railcars at Killybegs.

"Drumboe" and "Meenglas," were both named after the homes of former Chairmen of the railway company. Whilst "Columbkille," was named after the patron saint of Derry, the last loco in this class, "Foyle" was named after that important



Drumboe (1958) at the north end of Strabane station alongside GNR(I) S2 Class, No 192 "Slievenamon". You can see the trans-shipment shed for traffic between the County Donegal and the GNR(I) behind "Drumboe". The Class 5 CDR tanks locos, were large superheated locomotives with a weight of over 43 tonnes. You can see a small shunting signal in the foreground and the shunter making up a goods train that includes a GNR(I) P Van, behind 4-4-0 No 192.

(Photo c/o J McBride, c/o Donegal Railway Heritage Centre)

river after 1937. During the 1940s the County Donegal was still a busy railway and, by the end of that decade, the diesel railcars they had introduced had taken over most of the regular passenger services. Steam locomotives were still required for the goods trains and the special excursion trains that ran during the summer months. The only line that remained operated by steam only for all services was the line from Strabane to Victoria Road, which was owned by the UTA after April 1949.

In 1952 the CDR branch to Glenties had closed completely and the mounting losses facing the CDR could not be sustained in the long term. With less traffic, and with more railcars available, the CDR were able to withdraw two of the Class 4 tank engines that had not been used for a number of years in 1952. The other steam locos had to be retained by the CDR: in 1954 on weekdays the timetabled goods services required four steam locos daily. When extra trains were being ran on days during the summer months up to six locos could be required on those days. With the closure of the branch to Victoria Road in December 1954, the CDR only needed at least two steam locos from Mondays to Saturdays for the regular goods services.

This meant that the number of CDR steam locos could be reduced after 1954, which allowed some engines to be withdrawn such as the Class 4 tank "Eske" in 1954. In 1955 another Class 5 loco, "Foyle", was withdrawn from service, parts from this locomotive were used to keep other CDR locos in service such as "Columbkille" and "Blanche". It was around this period, whilst the other locos were withdrawn, that "Drumboe" received a final heavy

overhaul, which allowed it to continue into service until 1960. "Meenglas" was overhauled in 1954 and "Columbkille" as late as 1958, in Stranorlar works. The last three of the Class 5 tanks were operating up to the end of 1959, when the remaining CDR lines closed to passenger services. On the last day of services on 31 December 1959, the last train from Stranorlar to Strabane, which was normally a railcar, was replaced by a special train. The special train of five carriages was hauled by "Drumboe" to Strabane. When it returned to Stranorlar that evening, at 8.30pm, it was welcomed by a large crowd as the County Donegal Railway passed into history.

For six weeks from January 1960 to mid - February 1960, the CDR still operated regular goods trains between Strabane and Stranorlar. Some trains still ran up to March 1960 moving rolling stock to either Strabane or Stranorlar. By April 1960, "Drumboe" was now stored at the CDR goods yard in Strabane but it was not used for any of the CDR lifting trains. In March 1961 an auction of CDR rolling stock was held in Strabane and Stranorlar. Amongst the rolling stock purchased by Dr Cox from the USA, were the two locomotives stored at Strabane, "Drumboe" and "Meenglas". Plans were announced to ship these ex-CDR locomotives to the USA but instead they were to remain abandoned and unwanted at the former station in Strabane until 1989.

The North West of Ireland Railway Society (NWIRS), which had already rescued some former CDR railcars and steam locos, were informed that a road scheme was planned for the former Strabane station. Contact was made with Dr Cox who agreed to donate "Drumboe" to the NWIRS, if they

could rescue both locos from the scrapman in Strabane. Within weeks both locos were moved and put into storage in Derry, with "Meenglas" stored outside the newly opened Foyle Valley Railway Museum. There was no place at the Museum in Derry for "Drumboe", which was stored elsewhere. In 1991, a new preservation group was formed in Donegal Town and they asked to take "Drumboe" on loan. An agreement was quickly reached and "Drumboe" was placed in store at Ballybofey in late 1991. Some limited restoration work took place here, before "Drumboe" was moved to Donegal Town in November 1996 and Donegal Railway Heritage Centre in January 1997.

After some grants were achieved in 2006, "Drumboe" was moved for some restoration work, to be carried out by the RPSI at Whitehead. Since then, "Drumboe" has made Whitehead her new home. Thanks to the LEADER grant from Donegal County Council and funds raised by the Donegal Railway Heritage Centre, the next stage of the restoration work to mechanical standard, started in September 2020. Hopefully by Easter 2021, "Drumboe" can return home to the Donegal Railway Heritage Centre.

• *The Author is a committee member of the Donegal Railway Heritage Centre.*



"Drumboe" arrives at Whitehead, 30th April 2006, and will be lifted onto a modified flat wagon. Many shiney and readily-removable parts had went walkies down the years and a sewer pipe substitutes as a cosmetic chimney, above wooden smokebox doors. Whilst much work was done in the following years, including a new smokebox and chimney, what was really required was a second tranche of funding, which has thankfully now arrived.

(Photo: Editor)

RIDE ON THE FOOTPLATE OF THE ENTERPRISE EXPRESS OF THE G.N. RAILWAY

J. Macartney Robbins

[What follows is a summary from a footplate trip on the return leg of the first "ENTERPRISE" on or near to its inauguration on 11th August 1947. On 01st August 1947 Aer Lingus started an air service between Dublin and Belfast. The flight time was 45 minutes between Dublin Collinstown (as Dublin Airport was then known) and Belfast Nutts Corner, three miles from Aldergrove. The GNR(I) introduced the "ENTERPRISE" to compete with the air service, and no doubt this played a large part in supplanting it. The train provided 272 seats as opposed to the 30 or so available in a DC-3. John McCartney Robbins was secretary of the Irish Railway Record Society. He secured a footplate pass for this trip which has survived in the archives of the IRRS. We thank them for their permission to reproduce the document which needs no further comment. – Ed]

Punctual to the minute the "ENTERPRISE" left Amiens Street station at 5.30pm with many interested sightseers taking their fill of engine No 83 appropriately named, which was at the head of the train. The EAGLE looked majestic in blue paint and with the brass fittings sparkling in the sunlight. The steam pressure gauge showed the needle as registering close on 200lbs of steam in the boiler, the figure at which the safety valves should emit a column of superfluous steam skywards. A toot from the whistle by Driver Joseph Donnelly, a movement of the regulator handle and quickly the seven spotlessly clean coaches glided smoothly from the platform with the compliment of some

270 passengers on their 112½ miles journey to Belfast. Just 2¼ hours, giving an overall average of 50mph, and what a welcome change with no stops en route. Off we went, passing Howth Junction exactly in 8 minutes, the time allowed. Speed by this time had risen to 60mph, but shortly we were to go even faster, as on passing over the causeway beyond Malahide this figure had increased to 66mph. After passing Donabate there is a stiffish rise of 3½ miles to a point a mile or so short of Skerries Golf course. Naturally the EAGLE relaxed her speedy flight to some extent, but despite the rise we were still rushing through the countryside at over 53mph. Then followed a magnificent dash through Skerries, past Ardgillan Castle and alongside the coast with Lambay Island away out to sea. Our speed was now up to 69mph so there was not much opportunity to study the landscape. So we rushed along at well over the 60mph mark until Driver Donnelly applied his brakes for Drogheda, which we passed about half a minute before time.

With his customary care Donnelly brought his precious cargo quietly round the curves at Drogheda station and over the Boyne viaduct and bridge some 100 feet above the river. The next 4½ miles are steeply inclined to Kellystown box, a solitary lookout point, where the traveller may see the signalman watching for the train to pass. As speed had been reduced at Drogheda to 20mph there could be no rushing the long bank. Nevertheless No 83 went up in fine style, speed being a consistent 46mph. Once over the top



In the photograph used for the public timetable of the service, No.83, pre-Belpaire forebox, and the 7-Coach Enterprise train race through Knockarney, near Poyntzpass. (Photo: R Clements Lyttle)

there is a magnificent stretch of falling gradients lasting for about 10 miles. A great place for really fast running. On this stretch the EAGLE was allowed freedom of movement, and so the high figure of 77.6mph was attained, the highest during the journey. In days gone by it was no uncommon feat for these lusty machines to achieve speeds well over 80mph, the highest speed known to the writer being 88mph. However on this occasion there was no need for anything so spectacular, for despite cautions running through Dundalk the ENTERPRISE went by almost a minute before time.

Now comes the really gruelling part of the journey, after crossing the Castletown River, the line rises sharply up through the "Gap in the North" [SIC, "Gap of the North" normally – Ed] to a spot about 11miles distant. So at the commencement of this arduous climb, Fireman Peter Rogers got busy to keep the locomotive well supplied with fuel and water. Never

being short of steam she soared upwards at a good steady 40mph. Soon after passing Mount Pleasant – an attractive name surely – we passed over the Border and across the wild country lying at the foot of Slieve Gullion, which rises majestically a few miles from the railway track. Just about this time a low hum was heard and there appeared the competitive service tearing through the air to Nutts Corner, but it is a moot point whether those travelling above ground would be in Belfast sooner than the ENTERPRISE. After passing the Summit, at Mile Post 65½ from Dublin, we glided swiftly but surely down to Goragewood, speed never exceeding 62½mph. Before passing through this station over on the right was a view of Newry lying in the hollow with the Mourne Mountains away in the distance. A few moments after we were crossing the Craigmore Viaduct, the highest in Ireland with its eighteen arches, through one of which passes that

fascinating small electric tramway connecting Newry with Bessbrook.

So Goragwood was passed some 2½ minutes early, a wise precaution in view of the bad slacks ahead of us, the first being near Tanderagee. Little chance was afforded for any high speeds on this stretch as within five minutes of passing Goragwood brakes were applied for the sharp curves at Poyntzpass. After this speed again had to be reduced, this time to 20mph for relaying. Thus we passed through Portadown a minute late. Our troubles were not over as a similar slowing down took place on approaching Lurgan. Once clear of this Donnelly urged his machine forward. By Moira speed had risen to 69mph, the mile a minute rate

continuing for some miles, though it dropped slightly through Lisburn, but the fast running continued until the brakes were applied close to Belfast, reached in 136½ minutes from Dublin, just 1½ minutes late, no bad feat considering the two formidable slacks for track work. It was inspiring to watch the way Donnelly handled the EAGLE and Rogers attended to her wants. Never once was the locomotive short of steam, and on several occasions during the journey there was a plume of superfluous steam soaring upwards from the safety valves.

The passengers – how do they fare? All seats both in the first and third class compartments are most comfortable. The thirds have a corridor down the centre,



No.83, feathering at the safety valves, on the down Enterprise after Bells Lane Bridge, Lambeg. Interesting, to the Editor, to see the attractive field on the right, which unfortunately became a dump and is now a somewhat ugly mound, park on top notwithstanding.

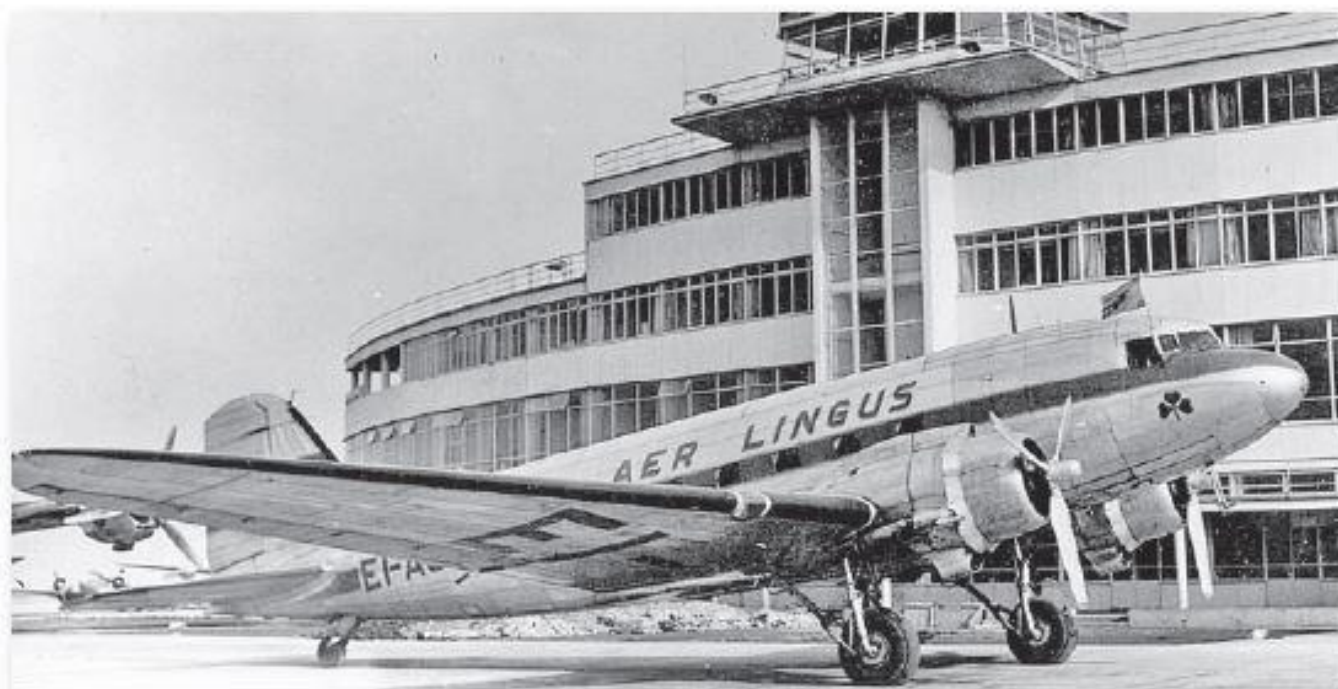
(Photo: Tom McDevitte, CP Friel collection)

whereas the firsts consist of separate compartments and at either end of each coach is a lavatory, one for men and the other for women. The latter has the added convenience of a full length mirror and a chair. For those requiring a meal there is the buffet car, surely the most popular coach in the train. The food is excellent and one must admire the enterprise to provide fruit salad and ice cream, a magnificent gesture in hot weather.

This is the first time this company has instituted a regular non-stop service between Belfast and Dublin. Many travellers must be offering up a prayer for this enterprising experiment to be extended. One fervently hopes that soon the G.N.R. Coy will place in service a similar express to leave Dublin in the morning to return from Belfast about tea time.

[Something worth noting generally is that you had to be at the relevant railway station 30 minutes before departure to go through Customs or you didn't get on, although presumably something like this also applied to the airfields. Bearing in mind the out-of-town locations of both airfields compared to the central locations of both rail termini, one can see how the GNR(I) fancied their chances.

Which perhaps leads to... It is oft mulled as to why the GNR(I) ordered the VS-Class steam locos for delivery in 1948 to operate the "ENTERPRISE" when putting that investment into diesel modernisation would appear to have made more sense. However, diesel locomotives at that time were not well known for their reliability (witness CIÉ in the 1950's) and, if air competition is forecast, one speculates they had to be certain they were going to give it a fight. – Ed]



When they gave the Compounds their bird-of-prey names, it likely never crossed the GNR's mind that they would end up facing down air competition. Here is that competition, an Aer Lingus DC-3 at Dublin airport in the late 1940's. It is EI-ACD and, built in 1943, it has previously served in North Africa and Europe for the US Air Army Forces. Having seen off the Axis, it can't have been concerned about No.83.
(Photo: c/o Irish Historical Flight)

The first time I can remember seeing a steam train I must have been very small and I reckon it was about 1951 or 52. I know it was at Neill's Hill station on the BCDR at the level crossing and I still have a vague impression of a huge black engine steaming past. Looking at this from road level and in my pushchair it was enormous and obviously etched itself on my wee brain as it started my love of trains thereafter. Although I grew up in east Belfast, my mum and dad were from Banbridge and Portadown respectively so when we visited grandparents and relatives it was, until closure prevented us, by train. That meant the GNR and starting with Banbridge, where my grandparents lived in Victoria Street with a house whose garden sloped down to give a superb view of the station and goods yard. Many's the time I'd sit by my Granda's shed and watch the seemingly complicated and interminable process of shunting and assembling trains, but the highlight of our visits was Grannies "dinners", usually of steak and onions.

Granny always knew, when she heard the train blowing its whistle at Mullafernaghan, to put the spuds on to boil so they'd be ready when we walked up from the station, where we'd usually see Railcar A in the bay platform waiting for its departure to Scarva.

The last time we went by train to Banbridge we came home on the last railcar service and were sent on our way to the sound of detonators exploding on the tracks. From then on it was UTA buses but I can remember going fishing in the

Bann with my cousin and seeing the GNR railbus with Howden wheels trundling past towards Katesbridge where track was being lifted!

Portadown was a different kettle of fish altogether and that's what my title's all about. We'd go there regularly also to see my dad's family, especially at Christmas, and coming home on a winter's evening while waiting for our train I'd get excited seeing the big blue GNR locos rushing through with trains from Derry, Dublin and other, to me, far off destinations of which I could only dream.

My dad had a cousin Hannah, who my sister and I called Aunt Hannah. She was married to a chap called Sam Adams and he was an engine driver on the GNR! Well in my eyes he might as well have been a fighter pilot or an astronaut. He had driven the Enterprise; no greater accolade as far as I was concerned!

Well one Christmas, knowing that I was enthralled by trains, he asked my dad if I would like to go on the footplate with him. Not surprisingly, dad agreed and I didn't need to be asked twice.

So it was that one winter's evening in 1961 just near my thirteenth birthday, my mum and I took the bus into town and walked round to Great Victoria Street station where she bought a platform ticket and for me a "Return to Portadown."

The train was of six carriages, as I remember, and at its head not a blue GNR S, V or VS but an ex-LMS/NCC Mogul No.93 "The Foyle"! But I wasn't in the least bit disappointed as on the platform stood

Sam with a big smile on his face. He said "hello" to mum and then asked her to slip away as we didn't want to draw attention to ourselves!

I climbed up on to the footplate and met the fireman who, with Sam, showed me around, pointing out gauges and levers as I looked on in awe. As time for departure drew nearer, Sam told me to stand by on the regulator and look back along the platform waiting for the guard's whistle and swinging green lamp to give us "the off". The platform was quite dark as it was January but I could clearly see the green light and hear the whistle. Sam told me to ease the regulator down to a position he pointed out and then slowly and very smoothly we glided away from the platform and into the night. Well, I was full of adrenalin by now with this great machine getting into its stride beneath me. Under the Boyne Bridge and past Murray's tobacco factory with its distinctive aroma and on towards Central Junction. Just before we reached it Sam told me to open the regulator and we

picked up even more speed. Next stop Lisburn!

As we passed through all the familiar suburban stations, Sam showed me how to apply the brakes and said I could try stopping the train at the right place in Lisburn station. No pressure then! Nearing Lisburn we eased off the regulator and on Sam's instructions I started to slow the train which I thought was going well until Sam pointed out that we were going to stop about halfway up the platform! So I stood down and left it to the expert.

Leaving Lisburn and powering out past Knockmore into the countryside, we could see that a thin layer of snow covered the fields. The sky was clear and No.93 sent showers of sparks up into it with each beat of the engine. We were like a mobile firework display and to add to the excitement Sam told me to blow the whistle a few times as we passed The Maze as he had family there and always let them know when he was passing. I might have been in heaven, it was amazing. The euphoria was tempered a bit as we neared



Mullafernaghan - with switched-out signals – UG-Class No.81 on 4.55pm Belfast to Banbridge on 29th September 1955.
(Photo: RM Arnold c/o CP Friel)



No.93 "THE FOYLE" strikes for Portadown with the 3pm to Londonderry, pictured at the M1 bridge between Finaghy and Dunmurry on 01st July 1962. Scene now much altered by construction of a sliproad and dualling of Black's Road.
(Photo: Des FitzGerald, c/o CP Friel)

Lurgan, our next stop, as Sam explained that the stationmaster there was a stickler for the rulebook and I'd have to make myself invisible in the far corner of the cab behind the fireman. We got away with it though and set off across the level crossing to our destination, slowing down past Seagoe to finally glide into Portadown's imposing station. As passengers left the train we set back a bit to uncouple and made our way to the water crane to refill No.93's tender. *[Just magic! – Ed]*

Sam and I climbed down to trackside where I thanked the fireman and left him to finish taking on water while we walked back up the ramp to the platform for my return train. I thanked Sam profusely, as much as a rather gauche thirteen-year-old could, and off he went back to his job while I waited for the train home. I was still shaking with excitement as my train arrived, a BUT set on the fast service from Derry.

As I got on this brightly lit, clean train I noticed that my hands were sooty black. I

wasn't the only one because when the guard came to see my ticket he said "I know where you've been young fella." Talk about putting the fear of God into me, I was also a bit scared when he walked away with my ticket in his hands leaving me with the thought that I was going to be apprehended by the RUC when I got back to Belfast. However as there were no stops until Gt. Victoria St. I realised that everyone's tickets were collected on the train to ease our departure.

My dad met me as he'd finished work and I think I must have talked non-stop on the way home in the bus. What an unforgettable experience which you can see, having read this, is as vivid to me now as it was that evening. I had another ride with Sam on an AEC railcar set but it wasn't half as exciting as my trip on No.93.

I'd like to dedicate this to the memory of "Sammy" Adams and all the railway men of the GNR thanking also the RPSI for keeping steam alive in Ireland today and in the future.



No.171 leaving Moira, southbound and crossing the 1883 bridge over the Lagan Navigation, with the Power to Move train of 10th June 1973.
(Photo: Charles Friel)

It will surprise the Editor's colleagues, not, that the Lagan Navigation makes an appearance in this Edition for, finding himself with no Whitehead or Rostering, this is what he put his time into finding out a bit more about. He has been familiar with this bridge approaching 25 years and it has all that time seemed to him to have a few anomalies, which he thinks he can now explain.

The canal first appeared here in 1792 when it was opened to Aghalee, 3 miles further on. The Ulster Railway opened to Lurgan in 1841 so the first bridge at this point would have appeared then, but interestingly does not appear in an 1842-dated survey of the waterway. The first

bridge was not the current bridge, as this is dated '1883' in the keystones. The Editor's question is does anyone know what the first bridge here was made of or looked like?

It seems possible to the Editor that this 1883 bridge is narrower than the original, as the track gauge would have switched from the original 6'2" to 5'3" and there is evidence of additional stonework of different alignments incorporated into this bridge both under No.171 here, and on the diagonally opposite corner. In both these corners, the tracks are exceptionally close to the edge as they cross the bridge on a skew. The bridge cost one half-year tranche of £760, plus another of

“considerably more”.

Charles is standing on the humpbacked Lady's Bridge, with Moira about half a mile to the left and Moira station level crossing just to his right. Slightly beyond that was the Railway Tavern, which certainly retained this name into at least the mid-1980's and later became The Chestnut (aka “Chesters”), then The Tannery and now, seemingly, The Alchemy.

Behind Charles, on the opposite side of Lady's Bridge, and across the canal from the railway station, was one of Moira's two quays, now Ballycanal Guesthouse. The canal not generally being wide enough to swing a 62' lighter, basins tended to be provided at or near to quays such that empty boats could be conveniently turned to go back whence they came.

The basin for turning lighters which had discharged at the quay at Lady's Bridge was just the other side of the railway bridge on the left, Co. Down, side as we look at the photo. This put the basin on the opposite side of the canal to the towpath which is directly below Charles, on the Co. Antrim bank, grassed over here, but now stone-covered. The towpath goes under the railway bridge directly underneath No.171.

Basins also provided out-of-the-road overnight moorings for lighters, and so a second walkway is provided under the railway bridge. This permitted lightermen to come through this way from the basin, to access said village or Tavern, and allowed the hauler (who led the horse) to go through from this side to the moored lighter in the basin for the night. Such a second walkway seems to have been unique on the Lagan.

Commercial traffic ceased on the Lagan Navigation above Lisburn in 1947 and it was officially abandoned through here in 1954. The railway today crosses what is only a 3-mile remnant of the 11-mile summit level of the Navigation which stops - or commences as the Editor tends to view it - abruptly at the A26 road, in line with the Belfast end of Moira station's platforms. From there to Sprucefield, the remaining 8 miles of the summit, 8 more humpback bridges, a considerable aqueduct and the lattice-girder Newport railway bridge, on the Banbridge line, are lost due to the A26 and M1 roads.

Today, the water depth in the remaining summit is reduced by about 20" from its original 6'6" optimum - a precaution against bank breaches - by a concrete weir, that much lower, installed in the 18th lock chamber at Aghalee. This is why the walkways under the railway bridge appear so high up today.

Three quarters of a mile ahead of No.171, just beyond the small wood at Drumbane crossing, the railway embankment and the adjacent M1 will run through a very boggy field. This was originally a mill pond, the outlet of which fed mills on the Drumbane Road before discharging into the Navigation. This was considered for enlargement in the early C19th into a supplementary reservoir for the 11-mile summit level, but this was not carried out. Quite probably because, when tallied up, the extra water from even the enlarged dam would have added little to the long summit level, a mile of which was already a substantial lake reservoir. The railway bisected it around 1840 after which, at some point, it was drained entirely.

MAGHERAMORNE: HALF A CENTURY AGO

Railway lines had closed on the small-scale in Ireland before, but 1950 was the start of 25 years of relentless, often apparently negative, change before the situation stabilised and positivity again began to reign. Much of this change involved mass-closures and the demise of steam. The Magheramorne Spoil Contract artificially prolonged the use of steam locomotives in Ireland from 1966 to 1970. The Contract involved the WT-Class 2-6-4Ts taking 'spoil' (otherwise useless waste stone) from Magheramorne quarry and dumping it on the foreshore at Greencastle, on the approaches to York Road terminus, in order that the M2 motorway could approach Belfast.

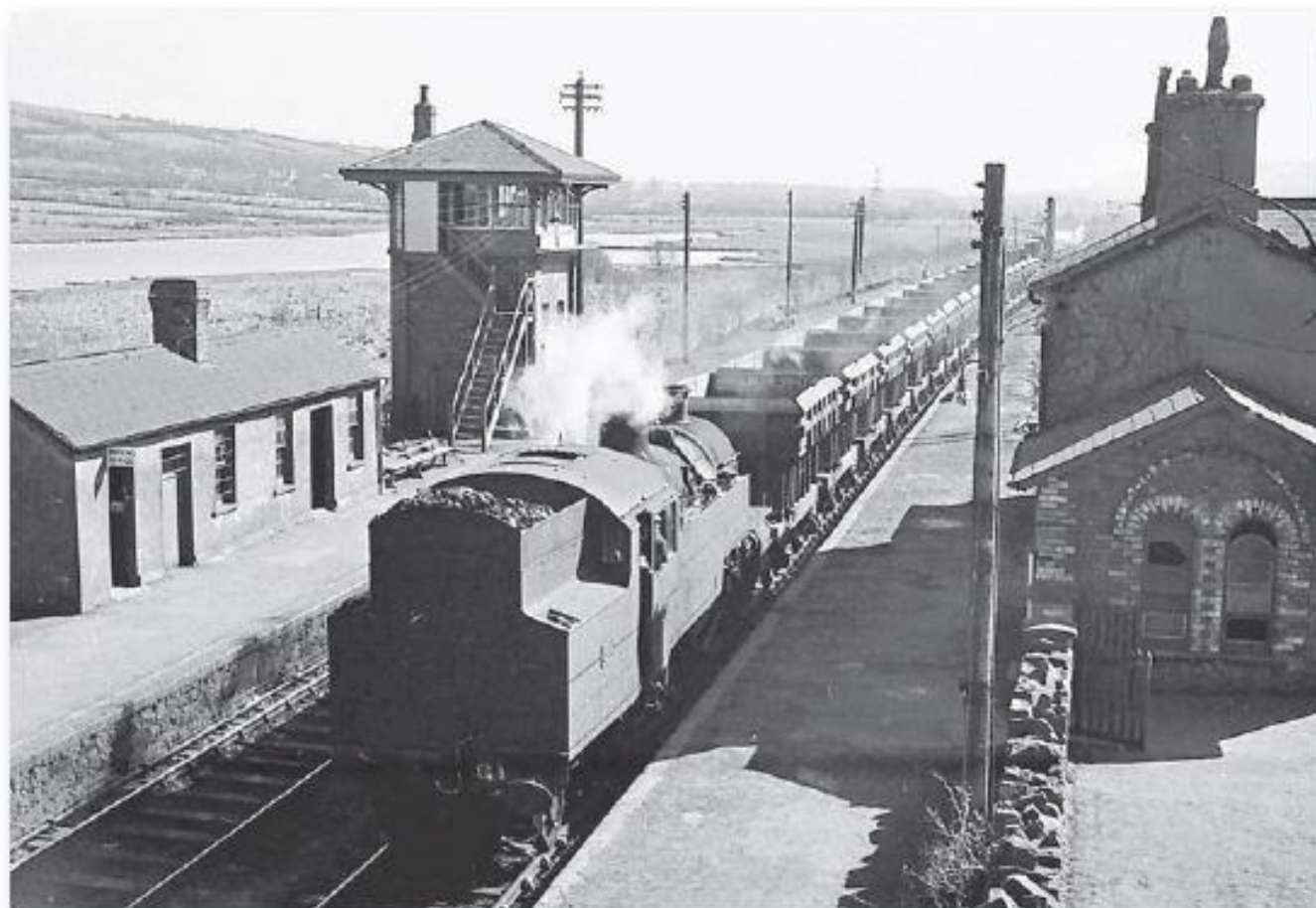


The first mass-closure was of the bulk of the Belfast & County Down in January 1950, although here and there some rails remain 70 years later. This is Andrews Mill siding, Comber, in August 2020. It runs through the Bundling Room where bundles of yarn were loaded into wagons and despatched. The lower arches beyond were coal stores and boiler rooms: incoming coal was discharged on the far (mainline) side of the building where a goods crane survives. The arches above are the drying loft, where the wet-spun yarn was dried with the boiler heat prior to bundling. To the left is the engine house with the arched, probably once stained-glassed, window. (Photo: Editor)

This is No.53 at the north loading bank at Magheramorne, the south being infrequently used at best. Brake vans were used until 17th April 1967, after which engines routinely topped-and-tailed instead of double-heading. No. 53 is placing this one on the Larne end for the trip back to Belfast.

(Photo: c/o RPSI)





(Above) – Nos. 51 & 56 arriving at Ballycarry on 04th April 1969 with the 1415 empties from Greencastle. They are apparently being looped into the Down loop, the Up line, in NCC single-line fashion, being the straight through fast road. (Unaccredited photos are c/o J Cassells)

(Below) – Whitehead. Here are Nos. 10 & 6 on the 1045 from Magheramorne, crossing Nos. 51 & 55 on the 0915 from Greencastle, the line at this time being double from York Road to Whitehead throughout.





(Above) – Trains at first ran empty from York Road to Magheramorne, then loaded up and came back to discharge onto the foreshore from the up main line. After discharging, trains continued empty to York Road to reverse, until such time as enough track could be laid on the reclaimed land to create a loop at Greencastle. Here's an interesting view of the ancient and the modern at York Road. The coach is a flat sided BNCR centre brake bogie third. When the Spoil trains started, this venerable coach was 70 years old and in use as a ballast brake. The spoil wagons were of course state of the art 1960s.

(Below) – Here's a shot at Greencastle Joe Cassells got when the work was well in progress and they had lights erected for night-time work. A temporary signal cabin was built to control the sidings and loop. Look at the size of some of the boulders in the foreground! In the original contract specification, the Cement Company was careful enough to say that although they would take every reasonable precaution, they could not guarantee that every load would be perfectly graded. In the background, a bulldozer is about to level out the new discharge.





(Above) – By August 1967 Greencastle was in regular use. Here's a train in the first original service siding at Greencastle, and you'll see that the next siding across is ready to be connected up. So for a short time there was actually a bit of quadruple line in this area... Worth noting, as the tip head moved out from the mainline, the first siding started off as gauntleted track until it got far enough to become an independent siding.

(Below) – Jeeps aside, Ex-Sligo, Leitrim No.27 was in constant demand around York Road for shunting spoil wagons and is here almost certainly on a ballast train, given that two of the wagons are turned to discharge on the landward side. This was likely during the time when the first of the new sidings was being laid in, between Greencastle and Port Arthur. The original plan was for three 20 wagon sets plus 10 spare wagons (which the Ministry of Finance paid for, and not the UTA/NIR). In the event only two sets were ever used, so there was never a shortage of spare wagons to work ballast trains. No.27 occasionally also brought out wagons which had failed to discharge for tipping once the mechanisms had been freed up at the works (remember those large boulders!).

(Photo: c/o RPSI)





(Above) – Young Fireman Willie Graham with the great Driver Alan Robinson, “Charlie Alan”. No.50 was his regular spoil train engine. Two of his nephews were spoil train firemen.

(Below) – For most of the Spoil Train WT-Class the contract was of course but a delay of the inevitable: No.9 seems to have been put to death with medieval brutality, having been fixed to a cart for dragging along the road. But the contract did mean No.4 escaped the fate of her seventeen sisters and came to us. The Editor had intended to finish with a photo of No.4 in action in 2020, but that is not possible, with most of the Society’s plans that year indeed having gone the way of No.9.

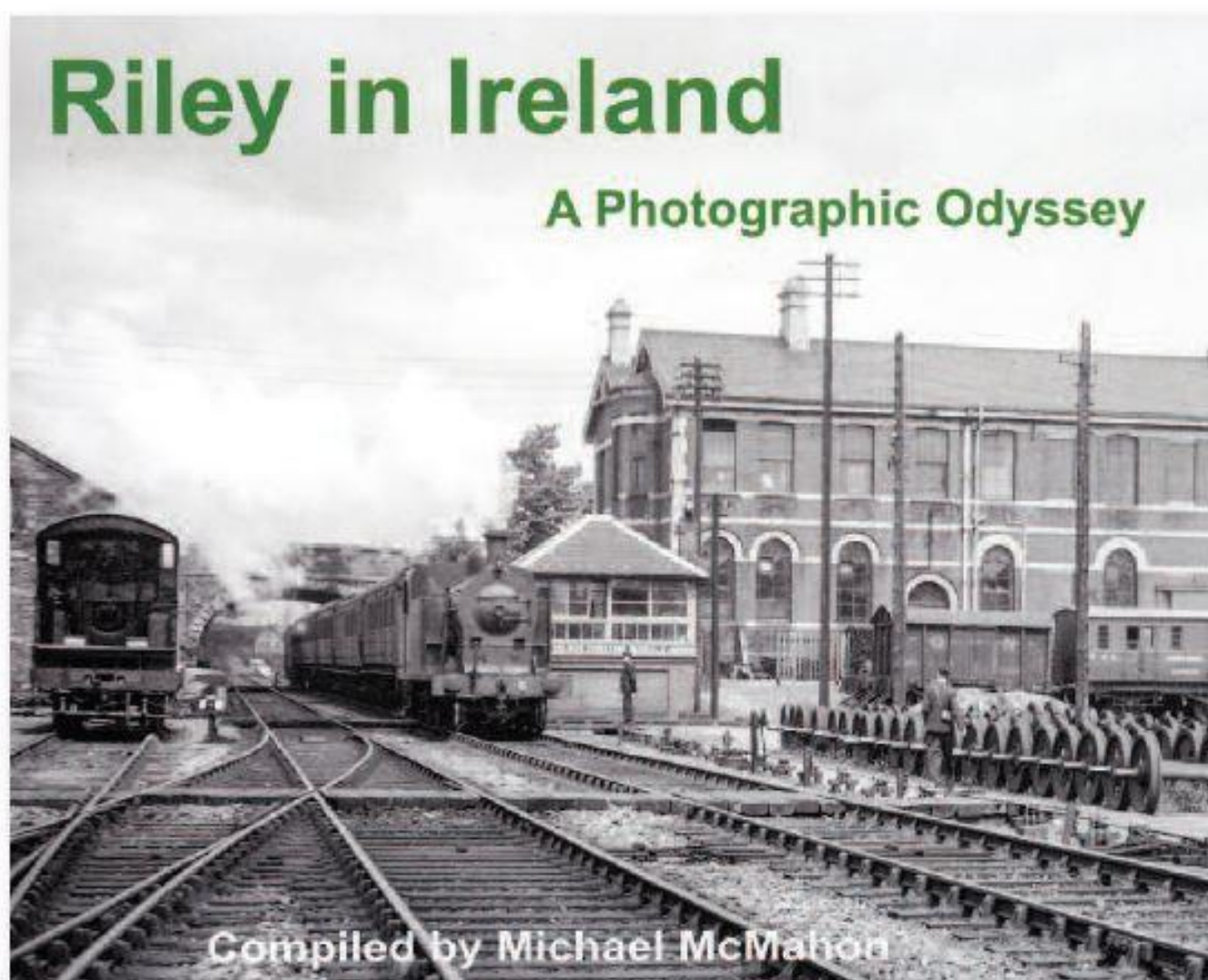
(Photo: A Wilson, c/o CP Friel)



RILEY IN IRELAND A PHOTOGRAPHIC ODYSSEY – Compiled by Michael McMahon, Transport Treasury Publishing, 2020

It came as a surprise to me that the well-known photographer Dick Riley made one visit to Ireland in May 1950. In “R.C. Riley: A Photographic Odyssey” a total of 84 of his pictures record just over a week of concentrated, and well-planned, activity. Riley’s coverage went beyond the main lines into the backwaters, recording the last days of the Dundalk, Newry and Greenore, The Londonderry and Lough Swilly and the Ballycastle line. As well as most of the main lines and visits to Inchicore and all the sheds in the Belfast and Dublin areas, he travelled the Irish North, the Sligo, Leitrim & Northern Counties, the Cavan & Leitrim and the County Donegal Railways network.

Photographic surprises begin with the front cover: I had never previously seen a Glover Tank leaving Dundalk with a Dublin train. Ex-LMS “Jinty” No.19 appears beside Harlandic Diesel 28 at York Road. Immaculately cleaned No.405 is seen at Inchicore, and Q-Class No.120 runs into Omagh past sister No.123. Riley’s travelling companions are seen beside brand new “Jeep” No.52 at Derry Waterside on the 17.30 “Derry Express” and the collection



ends with a double-header about to leave Ballycastle for Ballymoney.

Sadly, Riley left no detailed notes of his visit, but Michael McMahon has produced meaty and informative captions, written helpful descriptions of engine classes and provided succinct and pithy descriptions of each railway company mentioned. Every serious enthusiast will be both impressed and informed by this delightful evocation of a bygone era.

The book is stocked in the online shop at www.steamtrainsireland.com/shop

THE LOCOMOTIVES OF THE GREAT SOUTHERN AND WESTERN RAILWAY - Jeremy Clements, Michael McMahon and Alan O'Rourke, Collon Publishing 2021

This is one of the most important Irish railway books of our generation. The bulk of its content is a detailed examination of each GSWR class and its constituent companies. The appendices analyse the wider influences on locomotive design policy. There is even an illuminating section on the derivation of locomotive names. With a substantial summary of the GSWR's history comes a penetrating analysis of the 1924 amalgamation which created the Great Southern Railways, and there is an overview of contemporary locomotive works and manufacturers in Britain and Ireland.

The authors therefore embed the engines within two contexts: the GSWR's history and the broader picture of 19th and 20th Century design and engineering practice. The historical survey shows how development of express passenger and mail on the Cork main line and the growth of Kerry tourist traffic led to the building of increasingly powerful passenger engines. It also demonstrates how the gradual growth in freight – not least livestock – shaped the development of six-coupled goods engines. The engineering context traces the cross-fertilisation of engineering and organisational innovation between Inchicore and the major English locomotive works. And it shows the extensive networking between the GSWR's Locomotive Superintendents and their colleagues across the Irish Sea. There is particular analysis of Alexander McDonnell's contacts with F.W. Webb at Crewe, influencing GSWR design policy at a time when the LNWR was becoming an ally in the GSWR's network expansion.

There is a judicious balance of the strengths and weaknesses of locomotive development. Attention focusses on the development of increasingly powerful passenger 4-4-0s with 67" driving wheels: engines that punched above their weight and saw out the steam era on CIÉ. The last of these, No.341 "Sir William Goulding", was reckoned easily the match of E.A. Watson's 400 class 4-6-0 – though Watson abruptly curtailed further construction. J.R. Bazin's 4-6-0 No.500 is described as of "historic significance that has been rarely fully recognised" – a highly innovative mixed traffic 4-6-0 concept which was to reach fruition in Stanier's LMS "Black 5"s and Thompson's LNER B1s.

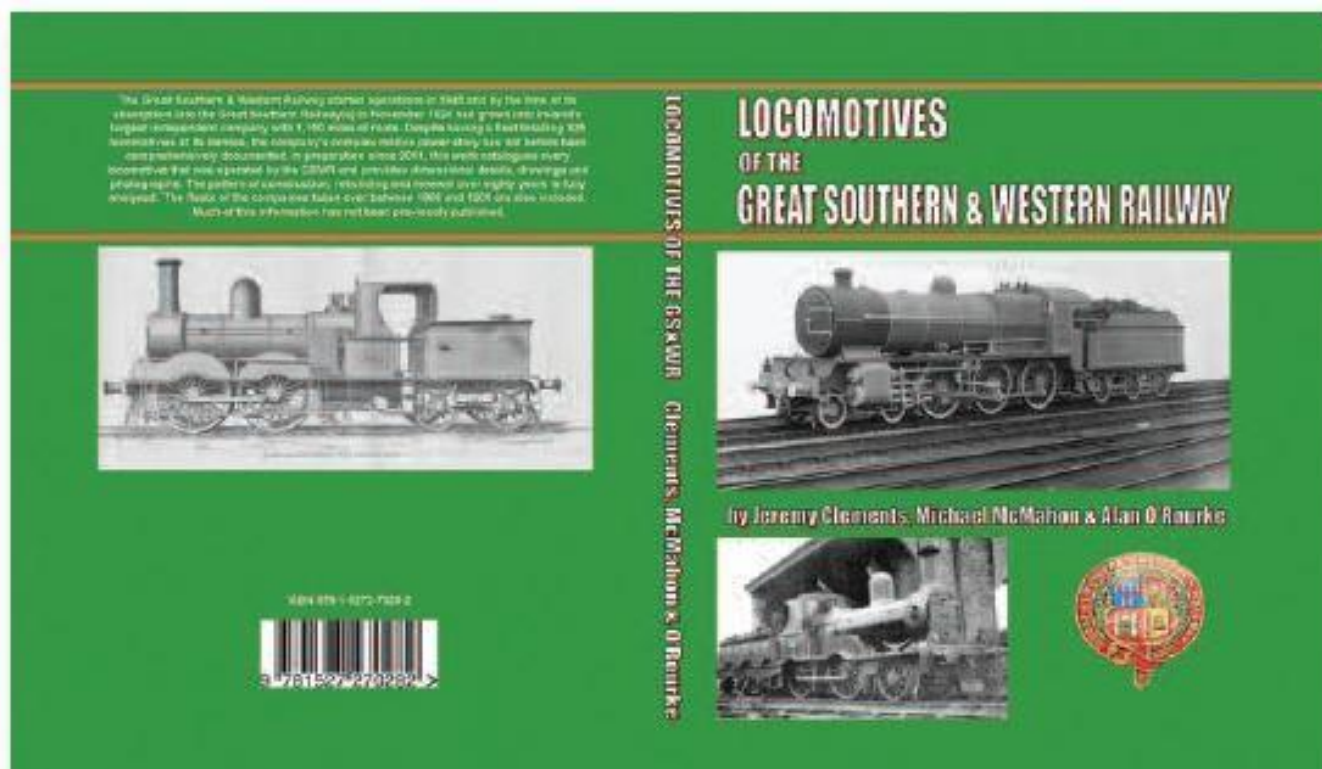
The turning point in goods engine design was the 101s – the J15s whose "muscular creation" so impressed the crews who drove RPSI No.186 in preservation on the Great Northern and the NCC. They were the first – and only – Irish example of mass production, owing much to techniques developed at the LNWR's Crewe works. After them came the solid 355 class,

the useful though not totally perfect “Long Tom” 4-6-0s, the 368 class moguls and the final goods design – the 257s, some of which, with the 101s, survived into the early 1960s.

Failures are not glossed over, particularly E.A. Watson’s dismal 400 class 4-6-0s. Though aware of GWR practice, Watson’s abrasive manner with subordinates did not help design development. Overall, the conclusion is that the last 25 years of GSWR loco development were the least successful. Inchicore never lacked a fine reputation and was directed by a line of talented engineers. Yet of the 85 engines built after 1900 the authors conclude that 49 could be considered as failing to meet expectations. The reason for this curious mismatch is explored in detail in the latter part of the book.

Readers of “Locomotives of the Great Southern Railways” (2008) will find in this book new material, new insights and many previously unpublished - outstandingly captioned - photographs from Charles Friel’s archive. This is a work of exceptional erudition, depth and clarity. Lose no time in adding it to your collection!

RPSI members should enquire about buying this book by sending an email to books@steamtrainsireland.com



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Mr Walsh,

In Five Foot Three 65 (March 2020) page 21 you ask about the origin of the term 'Mogul'.

I have a copy of The Encyclopaedia of Trains and Locomotives by C.J. Riley (Metro Books, New York 2002). On p.146 under Mogul the following statements are to be found: "The first 2-6-0 was the Pawnee of the Philadelphia & Reading. Built by James Milholland in 1850 his was a rigid wheelbase locomotive. The first true Mogul, with a swivelling pilot truck, was built by Baldwin Locomotive Works for the Louisville and Nashville in 1860. The name Mogul has been attributed to the Central of New Jersey locomotive built by Taunton in 1866, but the name came into general use with the Master Mechanic's Association Report for 1872". *[It is noted Mechanic's is SIC and may even be correct! – Ed]*

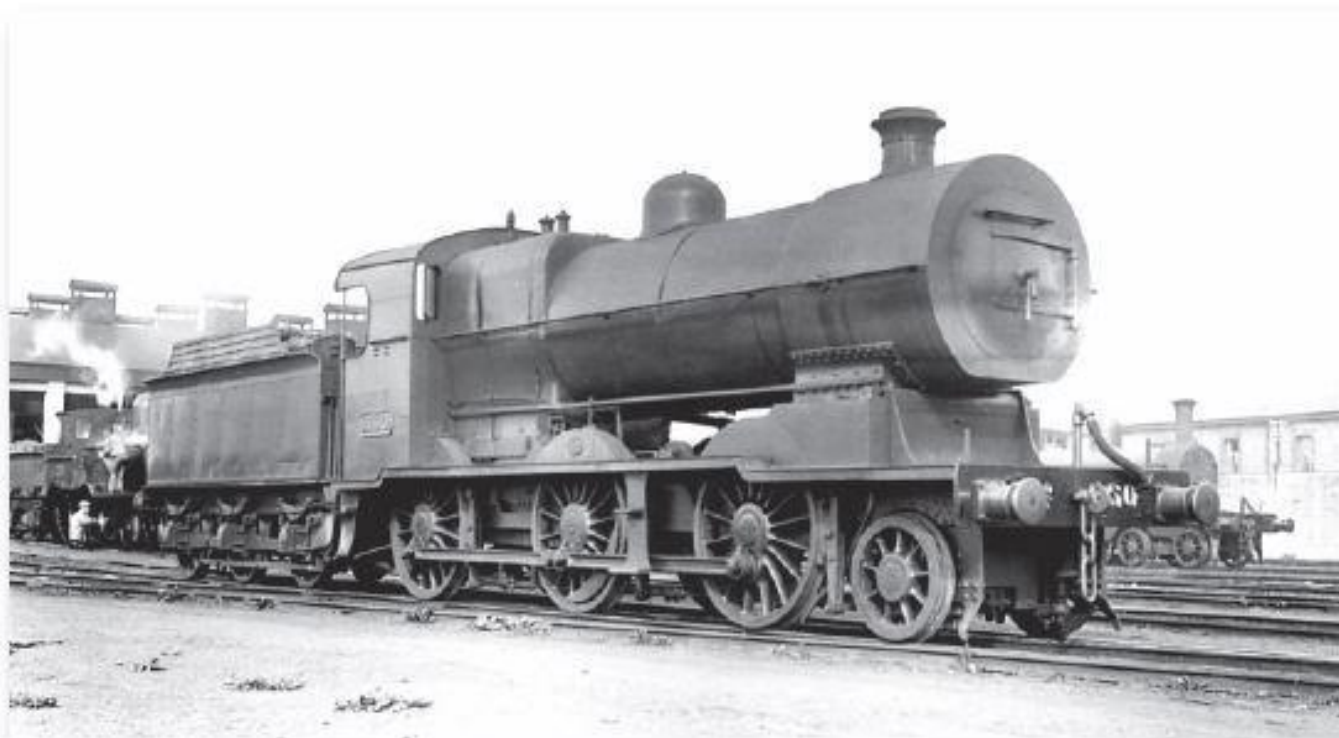
Please accept my thanks for another fine issue of the magazine. If I remember well, I have been a supporter of the Society since sometime in the 1960s, soon after I became a Professor at the Queen's University of Belfast.

Yours sincerely,

George Huxley

(Formerly Acting Operating Superintendent, Longmoor Military Railway)

26.02.2020



GSWR 355-Class or, if you prefer, K3 Mogul No.360 with extended coal rail tender, at Limerick in 1938. When is a Mogul not a Mogul? Well, in the case of this one, when it's an 0-6-0, for that is how it was built in 1903, the pony truck being a later addition. (Photo: Kelland, c/o CP Friel collection)

Unfortunately, Nelson has made the transition from the front of Five Foot Three to that space at the back which cannot be avoided forever. He wrote as Editor for twenty-three editions. Nelson was universally loved by all who met him in the RPSI and leaves an enormous hole in all our hearts. An equally enormous hole is left in the Whitehead Roster too. From at least the early 1970's to as late as the last public operation before the Covid-19 lockdown, Nelson tended to be on one side or other of the footplate. Genial, easy-going, welcoming, unbelievably reliable, and thoroughly knowledgeable, he was one of the most influential steam locomotive enginemen to those who have joined the ranks this side of the Millennium. One imagines he

may well have been to us what the Company steam men were to him all those years ago. If you needed something done, you needed Nelson.

Nelson loved to tell stories and anecdotes and it seems the most fitting way to give the measure of the man would be to turn the table and relate some of our favourites about him. Fear not, he will find improvise a comfy seat up above from which to contemplate with mild interest what we are up to.

Peter Scott recollects Nelson in the old canteen or "back room" at Whitehead locomotive shed – a dismal place with a smoky fire and few facilities. This was not yesterday and must go back to the early 1970s. The Stygian conditions that the RPSI



Nelson Poots happily shunts model trains at Kilrea Harbour, May 1979. Ken Pullin behind.

(Photo: T Ragg)



Nelson Poots concentrates on keeping Harvey at a walking pace whilst dropping ballast through Kilroot on 04th November 2005.
(Photo: Editor)

worked under in those days did not put Nelson off and ever since then he has been a reliable attendee at Whitehead for Saturday work parties – the place will not seem the same now.

Nelson was the sort of person anyone would be glad to have as a friend – reliable, good company and gifted with rugged good sense. He could maybe be just a little short when confronted with untidiness, unnecessary regulations, or inefficient procedures. “Millennials” and “Snowflakes” who would spend hours lighting up an engine without picking up a rag to clean it, or such ideas as using words like “Retail Outlet” for “Shopping Centre” would fit into these categories. He would tackle anything from driving the

locomotive to brushing up the workshop, for he was equally prepared for the mundane tasks as well as the glamorous jobs. A way into Nelson’s good books was to simply do likewise – in an idle moment, get cleaning.

If a pause in shunting looked like being a short one, Nelson would tend to start cleaning brass fittings and the like. If a long stop came along, he would start rummaging in toolboxes and produce something like a clean towel or newspaper or flatten down a cardboard box. This would then be set upon something inherently uncomfortable, such as the footstep on a B4 bogie in a siding, and on this he would sit and watch the world go by with a look of mild amusement whilst

he had a smoke. In later years cigarettes, and improvising outdoor seating to smoke them, were given up: the clean rag or newspaper instead being spread on 3BG's toolbox or coal bunker. On one occasion, an innovative fireman created a seat by stringing a plank from 3BG's fireiron holders in the back of the cab. Most of us praised him and used it: but to Nelson it was filthy and beneath contempt!

The 2005 ballast contract is where the current Editor really remembers him from as he got a great deal of time with Nelson in close quarters in an environment he obviously enjoyed very much and was most capable at. Nelson worked fifty-two turns during that, 16.25% of the total and was one of the foreman's top five Drivers.

As Firemen we didn't have regular Drivers and so worked with everyone across the board, but of course some Drivers were much more regular than others and Nelson was in the running for top number of turns. The Editor was most lucky to be highly available during that time and got so much time with Nelson, and plenty of others who are now also passed on. In fact, the only Driver still footplating from those not-so-far-gone days is Phil Lockett.

One day remembered particularly with Nelson was when we were due to ballast somewhere the Carrick side of Trooperslane. Down the hill we came from Greenisland for the leading wagon to jam against the down platform and stop us with a jolt, sending us and the contractors on the wagons scrambling. Nelson simply did as Nelson does (or did now, I suppose): said something like "Hrugh" (his cough you see), "Think we'll be here for a while.", got the piece of padding he carried on Harvey, took it to a convenient cable drum on the Up platform, carefully laid it down and sat down for a smoke. In due course a

Macalec road/rail digger appeared and prised the track away from the platform by putting the wrist of its arm against the sleepers and the elbow against the platform face to such a time as we were able to rock the wagon free.

James Friel remembers Nelson on the way home from a ballast run one time noting that a house had been demolished and the digger was sitting on top of the pile of rubble. "Do you see how the digger tears the house down and gathers it all underneath itself?" said Nelson, "It is as if it is saying Hurrhurrhurr, I've killed a house".

Nelson was the sort of guy you could spend all day with and remember little about other than a few choice stories. There was never any drama, he didn't really do anything notably spectacular things or have any remarkable personality traits. He'll be remembered for his simple laid-backness, no matter what else was going on.

Nelson spent many years as the RPSI's Treasurer and would seem to get plagued by mix-ups between "Billing Address" and "Delivery Address". On occasion he would arrive home to find such things as large deliveries of spring steel sitting in the driveway with the ubiquitous "Sorry You Were Out" note. The relevant company would be called and have to come and pick it up, possibly before the car could be parked. On hearing the spring steel story, it was remarked "It's as well it wasn't a batch of boiler tubes they were delivering, or they could have spent the next half-hour posting them individually through your letterbox and you wouldn't have been able to open the door".

Nelson was an overhead crane driver at Whitehead and also a smoker until recent times, during pauses between lifts you

could sometimes look up and see a cloud of smoke above the driving position as he had a crafty fag, followed by good natured finger wagging and shaking of heads from the ground!

As well as local railway activities, Nelson was widely travelled in search of the last remaining steam trains elsewhere in the world – as far afield as South Africa, Cuba and China. In April he wrote about some such trips in “Desert Island Engines”. Nelson seems to have gone by the name “Larne Man” on these travels and he told me a story recently when I thought to ask about his travels. This revealed several of his travelling companions went with similar geographic codenames. Thus (and I can’t remember them exactly, so I give substitutes) the story revolved around the antics of people like “Chepstow Man”, “Warwick Man” and “Tunbridge Man”. Whether they all called each other these names, or whether Nelson couldn’t remember their names, I can’t say: but what I didn’t tell him was I thought they all sounded like archaeological discoveries.

Brian Hill remembers Nelson in 1979 in a group of eight who chased steam in South Africa for four weeks in a couple of hire cars. Dawn photography included getting up before 5am so everyone usually went to bed around 9pm, except for Nelson and himself that is. They adjourned to the bar and partook of Castle beer and craic with the locals until all hours, so they soon paired off to share a double room, and still made the early morning expeditions! When driving one of the hire cars on his own heading south from Kimberley to catch up with those travelling by train, he got caught by a speed trap but in his usual style managed to talk his way out of a fine. Nelson was great company and was good at getting friendly with whoever was met

on that trip.

Many always liked a pint with Nelson. You did have to sit on the correct side to get his good ear! Paul McCann remembers when the first Wetherspoons opened in Blackrock, outside Dublin. Mervyn Darragh and he had a day-return pilgrimage, they asked Nelson along, he was very happy to go. He subsequently wasn’t too happy when he found Guinness were in dispute with Wetherspoons and he had to “Hrugh, sup some other rubbish”.

Joe Cassells remembers attending the periodic gatherings of railwaymen and enthusiasts that Nelson organised at Carrickfergus. The attendance in 2017 included railwaymen Freddie Kerr, Noel Playfair, Barney McCrory and Frank Dunlop and many “usual suspects”. The craic was mighty that afternoon and Nelson was of course in the middle of it all. Nelson also attended the annual Belfast Operations Committee December pilgrimage to the “Mucky Fowl” [*Dirty Duck*] in Holywood and would no doubt have been the main subject of affectionate discussion had one been able to take place in 2020.

Nelson complained of a twinge back towards the start of the year and when asked was it serious, he answered “Naw, naw, I was just playing Horsey with the grandchildren”. If we can all do that at his age, we’ll be doing something right.

Nelson’s last day at Whitehead was March 14th, just before the Covid lockdown stopped RPSI train operations, when he did what he loved doing – driving the locomotive. A wreath in Nelson’s memory adorned 3BG on the first day train rides resumed, 05th September 2020. There is every probability the man himself would have been on the footplate, given the chance.



In one of Whitehead's most familiar scenes, Nelson Poots drives 3BG off-shed. But this time it is for the train rides of 14th March 2020 and it will never be repeated. (Photo: CP Friel)



3BG carries a wreath for Nelson on Whitehead's first train rides operation since lockdown, on 05th September. James Friel, Adam Lohoff, Nathan Lawrence and Jonathan Clinton, suitably socially distanced. (Photo: J Cassells)



Nelson Poots, 12th January 2020. Engine driver, friend, editor. (Editor)



Film charter on Lough Atalia bridge, Galway, 13th October. (N. Enright)