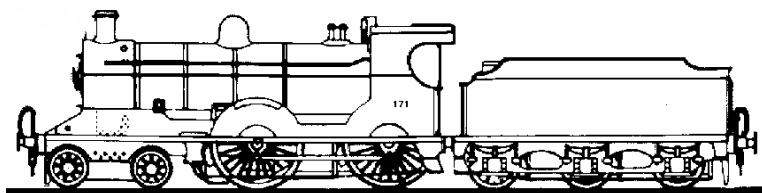


Railway Preservation Society of Ireland



December 2016

NEWS LETTER

TRAINS & EVENTS

Emerald Isle Express: The diesel-hauled charter train ran from 26th September to 1st October and was, again, a great success.

This only came about because of the great effort put in by the volunteers each making themselves available for up to a week

No.131 Award Dinner: More than 80 RPSI members and friends attended the event at the Ulster Reform Club in Belfast on Thursday 20th October.

The function was organised to celebrate the presentation in February to the RPSI of a certificate to mark the achievement of coming runner-up in the annual Heritage Railway Association John Coiley Award.

The event was a run as a fundraiser for the No.131 Restoration Appeal and a table ballot was organised. As an additional incentive, an anonymous benefactor has undertaken to match, pound for pound, donations taken, both at the dinner and up until Christmas. £2,143.75 was raised on the night.

Western Explorer: On Saturday 22nd October GM 071 looked in good nick as it backed its train (6 Cravens and van) into Platform 5 at Dublin Connolly. The months since the re-paint into the original 1970s livery hadn't taken too much of a toll.

The first stop was at Monasterevin, and the next at Tullamore. After a stop at Athlone for photos and a driver change, it was full pelt for Attymon, where this unique station got a thorough inspection. More photos at Athenry and the train then hit the real west of

Ireland. After a stop at Gort, Ennis was reached and here the train was shunted to the yard to allow Up and Down railcars to cross.

In Limerick 071 remained at the buffer stop and 084 came on the front to return the train to Dublin, via the direct curve at the Junction.

Running was to time throughout, with no significant variations. Those on the well-filled train all appeared to enjoy the day (and the complimentary 071 badges).

Broomstick Belle: On Saturday 29th October, a very busy weekend for RPSI volunteers started with the first of the annual "Broomstick Belle" trains from Belfast Central to Whitehead.

This, and the second train, both fully-booked, operated successfully with no issues behind No.85. They were the first mainline trains to bring the public into the upgraded station platform area at Whitehead.

A significant number of passengers dressed in costume and this added to the atmosphere.

Haunted Express: For the Sunday 30th October it was necessary to add 1508 to the set due to the heavy demand for tickets. Because of the extra carriage, it was decided not to run with No.461 in the afternoon as originally planned; it was No.4 for both trips. Awards were made for the best costumes.

Semaphore Finale: On Sunday 30th October, the train was fully-booked, and it was a pleasure to see so many enthusiasts take the opportunity to mark the passing of the loop at Castlerock and the decommissioning of the somersault semaphore signals there.

On arrival at Castlerock, a large crowd was waiting on the platform, comprising members of the local populace and enthusiasts who had photographed the train along the way and were keen to capture the arrival of the last steam train in the Down loop. (Monday 31st October was to be the last day in operation.)

It was ironic that the section instruments had broken down and operation over the Coleraine-Castlerock section was by pilot-man and paper ticket!

After a short time, an Up service train overtook and the chance to photograph two trains in the loop was too good to miss. No.85 hauled the train tender-first to Coleraine, where just over an hour was allowed to turn and service the locomotive.

A great old-style enthusiasts' day out!

Victorian Street Fair: On Saturday 26th November Whitehead was well packed with visitors, a significant number of whom visited the train rides. No.3BG "Guinness" was on its first public duty since the recent overhaul.

Santa Specials: All trains, Belfast Dublin and Portadown, sold out well in advance of the running dates.

No.85 was the motive power for all the northern trains.

In Dublin, No.4 and No.461 were in action, but both gave trouble at various times, a diesel rescue having to be made on 4th December, and diesel substitutions on 10th and 11th December.

LOCOMOTIVES

No.3BG "Guinness": On 9th October the locomotive was steam tested and found to work very well indeed.

This was the culmination of a three year restoration project, and thanks are due to everyone who contributed finances or manpower to this project. Also of course the Northern Ireland Museums Council who kick-started the whole project with a grant.

No.131: The locomotive was paired with its new tender for the first time on 11th December.

There is still a lot of expensive fitting out required - so don't forget our No.131 Appeal!

B141: The locomotive was successfully started up in Connolly Shed on 18th October. The work on this and the other diesel locomotives will be funded by income from diesel railtours in 2016 and 2017.

WHITEHEAD

Hand-Over: On Wednesday 5th October a ceremony took place to mark the successful completion of the construction phase of the new £3.1m railway museum. MSM Contracts from Portadown finished work on the 12-month construction contract at the start of September and the new buildings were officially handed over to the RPSI.

Turntable: At the start of October work on the connecting track to the newly-installed turntable started. On Thursday 13th October a 13-strong track gang attended Whitehead for the connection of the turntable to the rest of the Irish railway network.

The last track panel was positioned, the bolts connecting the final fishplate tightened and the yard surface replaced and compacted to rail level.

On Saturday 15th October, there was a small shunt which started with the GM B142 to get coach 300 into a position to have a door replaced, using the Atlas to lift off the old door and lift on the new one.

In the afternoon No.3BG "Guinness" took over and put the frames of oil wagon 682 into the carriage shed for further overhaul work (it's being grant-aided by the NI Museums Council for display in the new museum). The chain-operated roller-door refusing to open anything like fully caused a bit of grief, but the wagon was able to just slip in underneath to avail of the newly installed pit in A-Road.

No.3BG was then turned on the turntable in various positions on and off-centre to get an idea of how freely it could be moved. She faced Larne for the first time in 50 years. The driver's contentedness with his belief that Larne-facing locos are generally easier to shunt with at Whitehead was countered by the fireman's consternation at the bunker

now being on the wrong side for convenient coaling – she has since been turned again!

Next, No.85 “Merlin” was pulled out by No.3BG and placed on the turntable, which refused to budge. A slight re-position did the trick and the mere strength of 10 men pushed her round ... and then round again as she was the right way originally!

So a good day both for No.3BG and the new turntable, which now requires adjustment so as to be easy for 2 people to turn as opposed to hard work for 10!

General Manager: In mid-October Ruth Harper was appointed to the newly-created post of General Manager. Ruth is from Carrickfergus and was most recently Visitor Service Manager with Ulster Rugby at the Kingspan Stadium in Belfast. She took up her new position on 14th November.

Ruth said she believed the potential for the new museum was enormous, and that it would have a broad appeal to families, tourists, railway enthusiasts, school parties and corporate clients.

“We have the ability to establish and grow the business. I firmly believe we can develop this into the new must-see visitor attraction in Northern Ireland in 2017. This museum will have a significant impact on the Whitehead and East Antrim tourism offering. It will drive visitor numbers and generate job opportunities as well as bringing money and spend into the area.”

Prior to taking up the role with Ulster Rugby, where she has developed a visitor experience with a new museum in the Nevin Spence Centre, Ruth worked for more than 12 years as Visitor Services Manager at the W5 tourist attraction in Belfast. Before that she had experience as a function services and conference manager in the hospitality sector.

She is a former pupil of Carrickfergus Grammar School and an honours graduate in Hospitality Management from the University of Ulster at Jordanstown.

The RPSI plans to appoint an Events and Marketing Officer and then an Education and Interpretation Officer to work in Ruth’s team.

Fitting-Out: The RPSI has appointed specialist museum and heritage firm Marcon to carry

out the fit-out works at the Museum and Interpretive Centre. Marcon’s heritage team will be responsible for the manufacture and installation of all specialist joinery, display cases, integration of audio visual hardware, interactives and installation of graphics within the new museum space.

Working closely with leading interpretive designers GBDM and Multimedia Team CMC Associates, Marcon will transform the carriage workshop and locomotive sheds into a fully functioning museum.

The Future: In the new year, it is intended to roll out a programme of familiarisation visits, particularly for those who express an interest in volunteering to act as stewards in the attraction. We hope that members will be available at weekends to assist with tidying up the site and for training as stewards.

In advance of the formal opening, on Wednesday 1st March 2017, it is planned to hold members’ familiarisation days on Wednesday 22nd, Friday 24th and Saturday 26th February, with interested members booking slots. This will be a chance for you to road-test the attraction and give us feedback.

Funders: A reminder to members of the source of funding for the work at Whitehead:

- The project has been part funded by the European Regional Development Fund under the European Sustainable Competitiveness Programme for Northern Ireland and administered by Tourism NI.
- Heritage Lottery Fund.
- Mid & East Antrim Borough Council.
- Ulster Garden Villages Limited.

Signal: Following the closure of Castlerock as a block post, the Society took delivery of the Up Starter, formerly located outside Castlerock’s signal cabin. The somersault will become the Whitehead platform Starter for trains leaving for Belfast. The signal is in very good condition, and only needed a lick of paint.

CARRIAGE & WAGON

Carriage & Wagon Officer: Stephen Comiskey has resigned his the Dublin post, citing personal reasons, and we thank him for

the work he has done on behalf of the Society and wish him well.

That leaves a vacancy for the position and gives the opportunity for an enthusiastic member to take on the job of heading up the active team at Inchicore.

New Arrival (1): A new arrival is a tramcar trailer from the Bessbrook & Newry Tramway. It survived as a summerhouse in a local convent until recently.

The trailer is to be restored at Whitehead to its original condition, complete with wheels, funded by the Bessbrook Development Company.

It will eventually return to Bessbrook for public display.

New Arrival (2): Ex CIÉ 4-wheel 20 ton well wagon 23962 was purchased from Irish Rail and arrived at Whitehead from Portlaoise in late November.

Stock Transfer: Thanks to Irish Rail, the former valeting plant at Dublin's Heuston Station has been made available to house the wooden-bodied 'heritage' set, which until now has been in the open at Inchicore.

GM 072 moved the carriages on Saturday 3rd December. The carriages (1916, 1335, 1463, 1419, 2421, 1383, 88 and 9) were transferred in two lots of four.

BELFAST MEETINGS

Wednesday 12th October: The inaugural evening of the 2016-17 season of Belfast Meetings had an audience of 130 which is remarkably good for a first night.

Evan Connolly opened with his boyhood memories of Pomeroy in the early 1950s and his travels by train to primary school in Dungannon.

Jim Donaghy recalled the coal, sand and clay traffic of Coalisland with maps and gradient profiles, pictures and his own souvenirs of the Coalisland coal mine.

John McKegney's visit to the Ffestiniog started in Pennyburn before visiting parts of the County Donegal and Wales.

Mike Henderson's slides of his 1983 honeymoon in Austria featured visits to the 2

foot 6 inch gauge Zillertalbahn and the metre gauge Achenseebach rack railway.

Mike Stevenson's recalled the final days of steam haulage on UTA and NIR lines. Using his own and other people's photographs.

A very busy night drew to a close with a presentation by John Turner, Secretary of the Belfast and County Down Miniature Railway Society, on that society's 25th Anniversary Weekend.

Wednesday 9th November: This year's selection of ciné by Macha Film Studios covered steam events between 1968 and 1974.

Wednesday 14th December: Charles Friel describes and illustrates the many royal trains run locally between 1903 and 2016 with some of the stories behind the headlines. Includes inside coverage of our own royal train from Coleraine to Bellarena with No.85 "Merlin" in June 2016.

Selwyn Johnston and Alan Devers talk about Headhunters Barbers & Railway Museum, the unique feature of Enniskillen which opened 15 years ago as well as the highlights, challenges, and opportunities of promoting railway heritage in the West.

GENERAL

Sales News: Recently released books are:

- Dark Days and Brighter Days for Northern Ireland Railways by Edwin McMillan, £18/€24.
- Rails Through North Kerry - Limerick to Tralee and Branches by Jonathan Beaumont and Barry Carse, £16/€19.
- The Tracks of My Railway Years by Roy Carlisle, £16.99/€21.

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