

# FIVE FOOT THREE

The Magazine of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland



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**FIVE FOOT THREE  
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**RAILWAY PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF IRELAND**

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No. 171 shunts carriages on 14th September. Unless specified otherwise, all photographs are year 2024.  
(Photo: N Lawrence)

**Cover:** No. 131, Dublin Connolly, 18th August. (Photo: P Lockett)

**Inside Front:** No. 171, Whitehead RPSI, 12th October. (Photo: CP Friel)

**Inside Rear:** 3BG on Santa Duty, 1st December. (Photo: J Cassells)

**Rear Cover:** Steam-less mainline, Whitehead area, Santa Season. (Photo: JJ Friel)



In its 60th year, the RPSI continued to be an organisation in transition. Like an oil tanker, the organisation can be difficult to steer and takes some time to change direction. General Manager Lisa Adair left us in August to be replaced by Yvonne McIlree, a worthy successor.

In Northern Ireland, the work to get the RPSI back on the mainline continued, picking up pace in late 2024 as a conclusion appeared within reach. Hopefully 2025 will bear fruit.

In the Republic of Ireland – and that could be geographically narrowed to Leinster for 2024 – steam continued with No.131

carrying the standard. The performance on the GNR mainline in September was particularly noteworthy and a suitable marker of the RPSI's 60th year. That the RPSI survived these last two years at all is due largely to Dublin Operations who, at last pre-covid calculation, made over three quarters of the Society's income even with Belfast operations in full swing.

No.171 emerged from the workshops after a somewhat protracted overhaul and received a Royal seal of approval.

Whitehead engineering and operations crews continued to support Dublin operations, contributing significantly to



*When there's no steam on NIR ... The Editor on Ivatt Class 2 Mogul No.46464, affectionately, but perhaps unofficially, known as the "Carmyllie Pilot" on her first week in service at the Strathspey Railway, 2nd August. What a magnificent machine it turned out to be!*  
(Photo: I Smith)

most of them in 2024. Indeed, the Whitehead operations roster continues to expand, with a significant intake of younger volunteers who have proved most enthusiastic and capable. In recent years, much of the training at Whitehead has contained such caveats as 'You'd see that better on the mainline', 'It's hard to explain without seeing it on the mainline' or 'Really you'd need some turns on a [non-existent] big engine to cover these points'. Simply the presence of No.171 at Whitehead in steam-able form has increased morale, even if she is not steamed that often. There is definitely something psychologically missing without a functional mainline engine on

site, even if it is simply slumbering in the shed.

Some new trainees have been to Dublin to meet No.131 in Connolly shed and this – as it should – has greatly aided training and only increased the enthusiasm. Used to Train Rides in Whitehead with 3BG, they find what No.131 does on the mainline to be remarkable. When – and I do believe it is when – the RPSI resumes mainline operations from Whitehead, they will hopefully find the step change much to their liking.

Thanks to Iarnród Éireann, magnificent as always, and, yes, also to Translink with whom new links continue to be forged.



*No.171 and 3BG together outside Whitehead shed on 12th September.*

*(Photo: A Lohoff)*



I'm going to keep it short this year and just give an update on the basics to avoid duplication with the reports of others.

Some highlights from the year:

## • **General Manager**

We said goodbye to Lisa Adair in August as she retired to spend more time in her garden. Yvonne McIlree, with a successful career in the hospitality industry, stepped in and she took no time to find her feet in heritage railways.

## • **Operations and Events**

Dublin trains remain popular and the Society relies ever more on the income from them. Train ride days continue at Whitehead, along with a number of themed events.

We are hopeful that 2025 might provide good news on mainline trains from Whitehead, but time will tell!

## • **Charity**

As in previous years, the generosity of members has allowed us to make seats available on our Whitehead Santa trains for needy families. This year two sessions were made available to the Salvation Army. Thank you for your support!

## • **Winter Meetings**

Meetings returned to the live venue of Orangefield in Belfast. Attendance has not recovered to its pre-Covid levels - will it ever? - so a number of sessions were recorded and made available on our website. We hope to continue this as and when manpower is available.



B142 and friends, 31st August. Front Row L-R John Williams, Ryan Downey, Jonathan Clinton, Peter Stark, Bill Garrioch, Martin Devlin. Top Row L-R Sam Hall, Rory O'Keefe, Matthew Wilson. Nathan Lawrence in middle.  
(Photo: CP Friel)

### • *Changes at Board*

In November the Board said goodbye to Dermot O'Hara, and our thanks to him. There were no new faces apart from Peter Stark who had been co-opted earlier in the year.

The Board is now:

**Chair:** Peter Rigney

**Treasurer:**

**Directors:** Jonathan Clinton  
Martin Devlin  
Sue Harpur  
Rachael Harris  
Paul McCann  
Joe McKeown  
Mark Parker  
Peter Stark  
Mark Walsh

### • *Membership*

The number of members decreased marginally, which is a disappointment - the lack of mainline attractions in NI or just old age?

### • *Online Facilities*

The website resources continued to expand as and when new information appears. If you can help with additions to what is available then please do get in touch.

### • *Thank You*

As always, thanks must go to all who have served during another busy year on the Board.

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); John Linehan (Dublin area membership finances).

Regular contact was maintained with the management of the railway companies, NI Railways and Iarnród Éireann. They continue to be supportive, so thanks to them.

As always, our volunteers rarely disappoint and they continued to help where possible. New volunteers are welcome - so give us a call!



No. 171 shunting at Whitehead on 12th October.

(Photo: D Tartaglia)



Time has certainly flown by since I took over the General Management of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland on 1st August 2024, with many key events taking place along with the 60th anniversary of the RPSI in October. A thank you to my predecessor, Lisa Adair, who did a fabulous job of leading the society over a 5-year period, particularly during the challenging times of the Covid pandemic. I wish Lisa well in her retirement and I am sure she won't be a stranger.

August is always a busy time for events, which was a great learning for me and helped me get settled quickly into my new role. It started with our annual 'Teddy Bears' Picnic' event, always a firm

favourite with the family market. Thankfully the sun was shining and there were lots of beaming smiles from the children who came along. Another family favourite in August was our 'Wee Critters' event. Wee Critters NI are one of our event partners who provide a mobile and interactive animal education experience. They were able to set themselves up in our education room, housed in the original Stables building. Its is great to have this additional private space so that we can keep the other spaces free for the public. We also welcomed many special interest groups throughout August, some of whom had private catering as part of their visit. August ended with the signature event of the summer season - the one which many



Yvonne McIlwee with Mrs Claus at Whitehead.

(Photo: R Morton)



*HRH Duke of Gloucester talks to James Friel on 13th September.*

*(Photo: CP Friel)*

had been waiting for in anticipation....the launch of our diesel engine B142! This locomotive arrived at Whitehead without ceremony in April 2010, and the extensive work done by volunteers and staff has been remarkable to ensure its continued operation. Already it has proved invaluable to some of the onsite activity. The launch of B142 was attended by local dignitaries and celebrities, and was also a thank you to our dedicated team of volunteers. It was also a formal farewell to my predecessor Lisa, who was one of the special guests for the occasion. Before Lisa departed, she had sourced a grant from Mid and East Antrim council, which meant we were able to provide a BBQ and a Jazz Band. Luckily again, the sun was shining, and the platform was literally buzzing with excitement. We even offered a VIP footplate experience as part of the occasion, an experience we hope to develop further in 2025.

We then sailed into September with the successful launch of B142 still lingering, and another launch event impending... the launch of our iconic No.171 'Slieve Gullion'! The public launch for No.171 was yet to come in October however we had the pleasure and privilege of hosting a private ceremony at Whitehead for The Duke of Gloucester, an avid supporter of railway heritage and patron of Severn Valley Railway. Our volunteers were thrilled to meet The Duke and take him on a tour of the museum and workshops, with The Duke enjoying his own VIP experience on board the footplate! This was a great PR opportunity for the Society and was in conjunction with the RPSI 60-year anniversary. With the schools resuming back to normal service again, we hosted a couple of school visits in September and hope to expand on our education partnerships and offering in the coming months. In particular, we are looking to reach out to special needs



groups and create an experience that fits in with their specific requirements.

October was the month of the official RPSI 60-year anniversary and celebrations took place over lunch at the Ulster Reform Club in Belfast. This was well attended with founder members receiving recognition and certificates from the VIP guest Lord Faulkner, President of the Heritage Railway Association. Two of the younger volunteers also gave a short speech, which inspired the room to hear that the next generation will continue the success in years to come. October ended with the annual Halloween Train events in Dublin and Whitehead – both sell out events and spookier than ever!

In November we hosted a cinema event in the Whitehead Museum Carriage Gallery in conjunction with The Strand Arts Centre. A showing of 'Runway Train' was projected on to a large screen, and a pre theatre meal was offered beforehand in our Cups and Carriages Tea Room. This was a really unique experience, and we hope to do other similar events in the New Year. By the end of November, we were all geared up to start Santa Season with the teams both North and South ready to go 'full steam ahead' and finish the year on a high!

The Santa trains out of Dublin were even bigger and better than ever, with the fundraising team smashing their targets. The Dublin tickets sold out almost

immediately after going on sale in record time – it really is the event of the season. Back up in Whitehead we operated our Victorian Santa Experience onsite with the added addition of The Grinch character! The Grinch was the extra surprise this year on the train ride, and probably more photographed than Santa himself! Unfortunately, we had to cancel one day in Whitehead (7th December) because of the horrendous storm but this did not dampen the spirits and the weather on all other days could not have been better.

It's going to be an exciting 2025! For the past 2 years we have only been allowed to operate train rides within our own site up in Whitehead. Thankfully though the mainline operation out of Dublin has been thriving and has generated a considerable income to supplement this. The engineering team across both sites have been working extremely hard behind the scenes on a number of projects, of which you will soon see the benefit of.

All of the staff and volunteers – both back of house and front of house – have supported me incredibly on my journey so far. I have been really amazed at the display of teamwork and dedication – thank you!

Lastly, in 2025 we will celebrate 200 years of Rail Travel! Keep up to date on our news and events at [www.steamtrainsireland.com](http://www.steamtrainsireland.com)

## Operational locomotives:

**No.3 BG. A. Guinness, Son and Co 0-4-0ST. In traffic, Whitehead.**

The “Guinness” engine was retubed during the early part of 2024, with the job carried out entirely in-house by our full-

time workshop staff, supported by loco department volunteers. The ashpan was removed to give easier access to the small firebox, but as it was dropped out, it became apparent that it was only fit for going into the scrap skip! A suitable piece of plate was bent and a new ashpan



*Jameses Spurle and Friel, having produced – with many others of course - No.171 for launch on 13th September.*  
(Photo: J Cassells)





*No.4 vaguely resembles a Mogul as she is shunted by 3BG towards the sheer legs for boiler removal on 2nd November.*  
(Photo: D Tartaglia)

assembled, complete with new damper doors. The locomotive returned to traffic in time for the St Patrick's Day train rides.

No.3 BG has also received a new runner for her firehole doors, the operating mechanism repaired, with worn out holes built up with weld and redrilled and new pins fitted. The welding and machining all took place at the tech class on Thursday nights at SERC's Lisburn campus. The doors now operate much more smoothly than they did before, and the doors coming right out of their runners and jamming is now a thing of the past.

The Guinness engine's rear buffers were extended before the Santa season. There was always a large (approx. 5 inch) gap between 3BG's rear buffers and those of a Mk2 coach, which resulted in a lot of uncomfortable shuttling between the

locomotive and carriage. We also took the opportunity to adjust the tension in the buffer springs.

### **No.131. GNR(I) 4-4-0 Qs class express passenger loco. In traffic, Dublin.**

No.131 ran reliably during 2024, performing particularly well on the demanding "Santa" trains on the steeply graded line to Maynooth, loaded with 8 coaches and a van.

A blowing piston gland was replaced during the year, but apart from routine jobs such as adjusting brakes and boiler washouts, No.131 was trouble free for 2024. She remains in excellent mechanical condition, having run only limited miles since her return to main line service in 2018.

No.131 will be withdrawn for a boiler lift

in December 2025, immediately after the last of the santa trains. The boiler was internally examined and fitted with new tubes in March 2023, so this boiler lift will be for an external examination only, and should be completed in months, not years.

**No.171 “Slieve Gullion”. GNR(I) S class 4-4-0 express passenger loco. Running in, Dublin.**

No.171’s boiler was lifted back into the frames on Valentine’s Day 2024, and attention turned to assembly of the motion, boiler insulation, cladding and cab. As usual, the fiddly jobs of getting the small-bore pipework assembled and the boiler cladding in place took just as long as the “major” jobs such as tubing the boiler or machining the big ends. She was coupled to tender No.12 for testing in the yard. She moved under her own

steam for the first time since 2002 on Saturday 27th July.

No.171 was officially launched back into service by HRH Prince Richard, the Duke of Gloucester, in September, and she then hauled her first passenger trains on Saturday 12th October on “Train rides” duty.

The locomotive moved to Dublin on Friday 17th January 2025 to be coupled to tender No.73, and commence running in.

**Locomotives out of traffic:**

**No.4 LMS (NCC) class WT 2-6-4T mixed traffic loco. Under Overhaul, Whitehead.**

As the work on No.171 started to wind up into the autumn of 2024, dismantling started on No.4. The cab, tanks and boiler



*No.171 on steam test and CAF 3007 on 27th July. Neither has perfect paintwork! (Photo: N Lawrence)*



were removed (in that order), giving the impression of an NCC W class mogul, before the boiler was lifted. The initial boiler examination has taken place. It looks like we need to replace all the crownstays and the sidestays under the brick arch, amounting to about a quarter of the sidestays in the firebox. Needless to say, purchasing copper to make sidestays is not a cheap hobby!

The overhaul is likely to include work on pistons and valves, including new valve liners, remetalling all 12 axleboxes, and examining and rebushing the motion where required.

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

No.85 last steamed on the 17th December 2023 Santa trains, and moved back to Whitehead on 18th January 2025. At the time of writing she is stabled in No.4 engine shed road. This feels like a sort of poetic closing to her time in traffic to the author, who can well remember starting to dismantle the locomotive in this road in August 2009.

What next for 85? We have her on loan from National Museums Northern Ireland until 2037. The intention will be to return her to service when time and

resources allow, probably after No.4's recently started overhaul starts to wind up in a couple of years. Her boiler is in good condition, and according to the crew, the locomotive was running better than ever on her last weekend in service in December 2023. She has run relatively few miles during her “ten year” ticket, including two Covid years with no miles beyond short movements to keep bearings in good order. So No.85 will not require extensive mechanical work either.

In the next few months she will be cleaned out and cleaned up, and greased and oiled to prevent deterioration during storage, and of course be coupled to tender No.12.

**No.186. GSWR 0-6-0 J15 class standard goods loco. On display, Whitehead.**

**No.184. GSWR 0-6-0 J15 class standard goods loco. On display, Whitehead.**

**No.461. D&SER 2-6-0 K2 class goods loco. On display, Whitehead.**

**No.3 “R H Smyth”. LP&HC 0-6-0ST loco. On display, Whitehead.**

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

Reading last year's article, in January 2024 B142 had just left the workshop painted back to the original delivery livery of 1962. Following repairs to the locomotive brake system and testing completed, the letters and numbers were placed back on the locomotive.

B142 returned to its usual and valuable shunting duties at Whitehead, this year due to the increased activity of the locomotive and carriage department as effort continue towards a return to mainline operations the locomotive has had a busy year with nearly 4,000 litres of diesel fuel and a complete set of brake pads worn through, with a new set installed by staff in the latter quarter of the year.

In September, the erstwhile Modern Railway Society of Ireland contributed a significant donation to the RPSI Diesel fund as part of their winding down process. This was entirely unexpected and hugely appreciated. These funds have been ringfenced to further the Society's goal of returning heritage diesel electric traction to the island's mainline railway network.

Efforts by the former General Manager Lisa Adair resulted in funding becoming available from Antrim Council so that the Society could mark the work completed on B142 over the last number of years.

With the major works completed it was decided that B142 should have its own day in the spotlight and an event was planned for September. Some more paint work was needed on the bogies and the insides of both Cabs were painted by Gill.

B142 was officially launched (or relaunched) by musician and Society member Jim Corr MBE at Whitehead on the morning of 31st August 2024 also attended by Mayor Beth Adgar MBE and Mrs. Patricia Perry, High Sherriff of

County Antrim.

After speeches were completed, Jim, under the supervision of the Diesel Locomotive Officer took to the driver's seat and cut the ribbon in the traditional RPSI manner.

The event also provided an opportunity to present the outgoing General Manager with a retirement gift and for everyone to wish her well. The work on B142 over the last number of years could not have happened without Lisa's support and successful fundraising efforts securing grants.

B142 last operated train rides as part of an IRRS tour in March 2017. As part of the event two train rides were provided. B142 is now available to be used on Train Ride operations when needed. B142 operated the final Santa Train of 2024.

The event funding also meant that the boat could be pushed out. A barbeque was provided for all guests and volunteers were invited to partake in some free food and enjoy live music on the platform – Driver Ryan Downey decided it was best to shut down B142 at this stage.

As part of the event tours of B142 were provided by Ryan and Sam and guests had an opportunity to sit in the Driver's seat and have photographs taken with a demonstration of the locomotive brake and train vacuum system (Moving levers and pressing pedal causing the engine revolutions to increase and decrease).

The list of small jobs needed on B142 is now a lot shorter than other years but there are always more things to do, which is part of an operating locomotive.

Next year hopefully work can be completed on the brake system gauges and wind screen wiper motor fitment (there is only one operational on each





*B142 works a train ride at Whitehead on 31st August.*

*(Photo: J Cassells)*

end), the Cab 2 heater also needs attention – during the winter months when B142 is busy with numerous shunting tasks, drivers at Whitehead are commonly seen in a tee shirt in Cab 1 and a large coat in Cab 2!

While B142 gets much of the attention and indeed requires time to keep on top of running maintenance there are the other Diesel Locomotives at Whitehead.

No. 23 “The Planet” arrived at Whitehead in 1971 acquired from Irish Shell and was used at their Alexandra Road premises in Dublin for shunting oil tanks, following the acquisition of No. 1 “Carlow” this locomotive was placed under cover in Carriage Shed ‘B’ road.

Funding permitting, project planning is in progress to undertake a cosmetic restoration of No. 23 “The Planet” which was fished out of Carriage Shed ‘B’ road during the year so that the locomotive can be properly assessed.

Similarly, its successor No. 1 “Carlow” needs attention to the compressor and repair to the engine bay doors which are badly corroded in places. Regrettably indoor space is always at a premium in Whitehead with so many different mainline operation and conservation / restoration projects on the go at any one time.

Lastly, I would like to thank the staff and volunteers who have supported the Diesel Department throughout 2024.

The project to reinstate an LMS NCC 2-6-0 locomotive or Mogul has continued steadily in 2024. The following is a summary of progress since the last Five Foot Three Report

## Frames

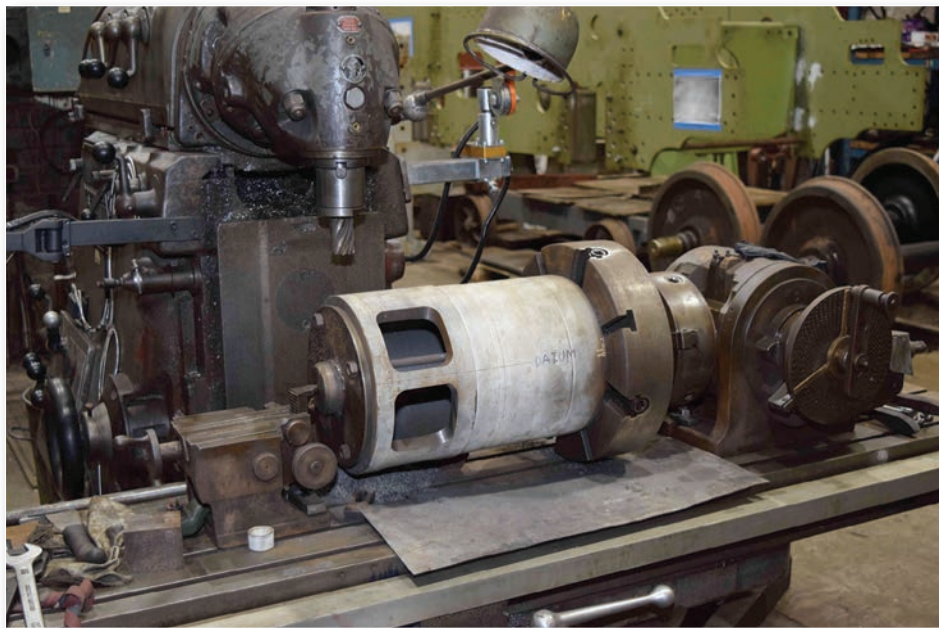
As well as the stretchers that connect the main frames together, work is progressing on other attaching parts. The pony truck pivot casting has been machined and fitted. The front and rear buffer beams of any locomotive are obviously highly stressed locations, and on the Mogul they are reinforced by a series of plates, channels and brackets to take the drawbar and buffing loads. These are being drilled and assembled. The pair of buffers of the correct type which we were fortunate to acquire have been overhauled. The axlebox guides and horn

stays have been machined and are being assembled.

Incidentally, the WT class tank engine No.4 is currently being dismantled for overhaul close by, and it is interesting to compare the differences in design. Externally, the two types look very similar and much of the working parts use the same drawings. However, the layout of the frame stretchers, horn guides etc is different and reflects the more up to date design of the tank engine, together with the desire to reduce the weight of the latter while adding the extra side tanks but avoiding an increased axle load.

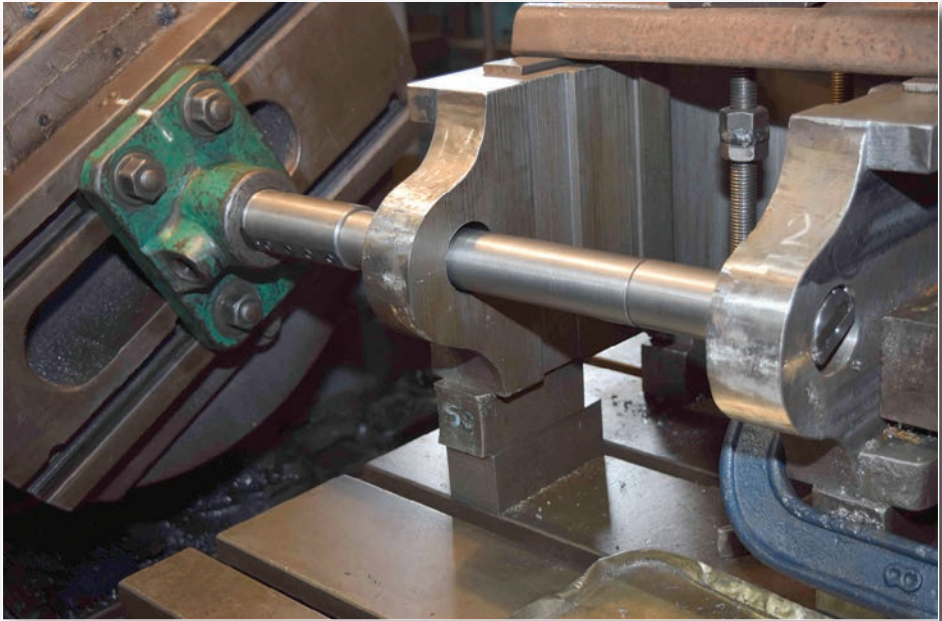
## Bearings

The six coupled wheel axleboxes have been machined and the bearings have been cast. Pattern equipment for the two pony truck axleboxes is under way.



*Milling apertures in a mogul valve liner on the Huron machine on 20th December. It's worth a note that No.4 has lately also been found to need new valve liners.*  
(Photo: RB Hill)





*Boring an axlebox for its spring hanger pin on Horizontal Boring Machine on 18th August.*

*(Photo: RB Hill)*

## **Motion**

Work is progressing with some of the missing parts of the motion. The two front sections of the coupling rods have been forged and are being machined. We are fortunate that many of the components are available, a major factor in making the project possible.

## **Cylinders and Valves**

The valve liner castings have been roughed out, the first one has been machined and is having its steam ports milled out. Piston rod gland parts are under way.

## **Pony truck**

Machining of the pony truck centre casting and the two bolster supports is complete. The pony truck bolsters and bolster cups, which carry the weight of the front end of the locomotive, are under way. The bolster has a flat friction

surface which slides sideways as the locomotive negotiates a curve, the friction material providing damping which steadies the front of the locomotive and combats "hunting". It also has a spherical surface which engages with the bolster cup. An adjacent notice on the locomotive frame advises "DO NOT OIL BOLSTER SLIDE". This is presumably to discourage over-enthusiastic enginememen with oil cans, who might have compromised the intended friction properties of the bolster – but the entire area on these locos became covered in oil anyway, so the notice was somewhat futile.

## **Boiler**

Assembly of the firebox throat plate, door plate and outer wrapper is now complete and the plates have been drilled for riveting. Riveting up is well advanced, including the mounting pads on the boiler backhead for the water level gauges,

injector steam valves etc. Marking out, drilling and riveting has been made easier by mounting the boiler on a rotating

frame. This enables the boiler to be quickly turned onto its right or left side so as to bring any part of it into the most



Two “NCC” boilers in the Dunleath workshop on 2nd February 2025. On the left, on the rotator, is the mogul boiler complete with several rows of nice new rivets, added during the Christmas break. Directly beyond it, the front tubeplate is being worked on. Directly beyond that again, the copper inner firebox may be seen. No.4’s boiler, with dome-cover removed revealing the periscope-like regulator valve, is on trolleys on the right: just at a very useful time to provide cross-referencing. (Photo: PA Scott)

favourable position for the work in hand. The front tube plate is being drilled for riveting to the front angle ring of the boiler barrel – although final assembly will only be done when other work requiring access to the interior has been completed. The inner firebox is also ready for riveting.

### Fittings

Small but essential components like pipe unions, gland parts, bushes and studs are being progressed. Most of the boiler fittings are available but some for example the whistle valve are missing and patterns are under way. (By the way, we do possess the actual whistle - although there is an argument for fitting the alternative "Caledonian hooter" which was carried by at least one of the NCC Moguls. Does anyone know the loco number, or any more details? It would have been an unusual sound on the NCC system.)

On a general note, the above progress represents many hours of work and substantial expenditure – in the short term, the drawback is that the locomotive does not look appreciably very much different. But that will change!

As always, I would like to acknowledge the support and dedication of all who carry out practical work, or assist with administration and planning, and - very importantly - those who provide funding. Contributions, however small, are welcome and will speed up progress. All materials now carry a formidable price tag!

Someone with an interest in organising and storing engineering records, certificates and documents would be most welcome to assist the project. As the locomotive takes shape, so the amount of paperwork increases!



*13th September, with mogul firebox in the background with Peter Scott MBE, Duke of Gloucester, Joan Smyth CBE and James Friel.*  
(Photo: CP Friel)



After a very busy 2023 season it was back to work early in January for our volunteer Carriage Presentation Team, who gave each carriage an intensive deep clean, which involved removing each and every seat. The bar and kitchen areas in the catering cars received similarly thorough treatment. Meanwhile the Carriage Maintenance Team was toiling away under each of the carriages attending to the running gear.

On February 10 our Fundraising Team travelled to The Heritage Railway Awards Ceremony in Brighton. The team came home with a well-deserved Highly Commended award in the Team of the Year category. They have certainly done the RPSI proud.

The first trains on our calendar were two Midlander trips to Maynooth on Sunday

March 24, hauled by steam locomotive No. 131. Whiskey on the Tracks had chartered a full carriage on the second train, which was suitably dressed with antimacassars and table cloths. On the platform the charter passengers were given a red carpet on the platform with a red rope and two shrubs. Some 680 passengers were carried.

On Bank Holiday Monday April 1, we were on the the Great Northern line with our “Easter Eggstravaganza” trains to Drogheda, Dundalk and Skerries. The Easter Bunny handed out Easter Eggs to all children on board and for the day we carried 1,092 passengers. Our newly produced RPSI 60th Anniversary badges went on sale on this trip.

On Sunday April 21 we were out on the DSER with a Sea Breeze special to



No. 131 at Kilkenny on 18th August.

(Photo: J Cassells)

Rosslare Harbour. "Whiskey on the Tracks" had chartered a full carriage. All told we had 290 passengers on board. However, due to issues with lineside fires, the train was terminated at Rathdrum. We were not expecting this, as the weather in preceding days had been appalling, with rain on most days. On the morning of the trip there was also a heavy dew on the ground. In the event diesel engine GM 082 was despatched from Connolly to haul us back. It was a disappointing end to what had been a much-anticipated outing.

On the April 26 Dublin Ops was saddened to receive the news that Denis Grimshaw had passed away. He was a tower of strength to our Society and we are so appreciative of his achievements.

As a result of an Irish Rail request to suspend steam hauled operations we switched traction for our next tour, the Cú Chulainn specials to Dundalk and Drogheda on Sunday May 12. Every cloud has a silver lining and among the 499 passengers on board the special, hauled by GM 082, were many of our diesel enthusiasts.

To mark the anniversary of the arrival of the first GM 201 Class diesel locomotives in Ireland 30 years ago, we ran the 201@30 diesel rail tour to Kildare and Rosslare on Saturday June 15. It was intended that a 201 loco would take the train to Kildare but there were issues with loco availability and so GM loco 084 hauled the train from Dublin Heuston to Kildare. GM loco 219 then arrived from Inchicore and brought the tour back to Dublin Connolly and on to Rosslare Harbour. With 230 passengers on board several photographic stops were made, and everyone enjoyed a fantastic day of diesel running.

Next up was a private charter for the Heritage Council of Ireland with No. 131 on July 18. The train ran to Drogheda and

continued empty carriages to Dundalk and return to pick up the group later in the day. The carriages were dressed with antimacassars, tablecloths, curtains and carpets, with tea and coffee with scones being served. Government Minister Malcolm Noonan was among the guests for the trip, the purpose of which was to launch Heritage Week.

For this trip, members of the Carriage Crew operated on two fronts. Our stewards responsible for safety and managing the doors, while other volunteers tended to the needs of the guests, providing the refreshments. We had 97 guests on board and it was great to have a steam engine at the front of the train once again.

On Sunday August 4 we operated two Midlander trips with No. 131 to Maynooth. The weather was good and the 665 passengers enjoyed the day out – and some spirited running by the footplate crew.

The Marble City steam tour is always a highlight of the season. This year it took place on Sunday August 18 with No. 131 at the head of the train. Once again, we had some musical accompaniment. The popular Star of Knockagh Accordion Band from Carrickfergus, led by the RPSI's own John Richardson paraded down Platform 3 at Dublin Connolly prior to departure.

The band entertained our passengers and travelled with us, playing on the train and again in Kilkenny Station and City. Band leader Ken Stewart presented a commemorative plaque from Mid & East Antrim Borough Council to the Society. Whiskey on the Tracks had chartered carriage 1523, so there was a tremendous atmosphere on the train, which carried 291 passengers.

Due to the signal location at Kilkenny station we were obliged to reduce the



*No. 131 climbs towards Coolmine with the first Halloween train of 28th October. (Photo: G Mooney)*

train size to six carriages and a van. GM Loco 074 arrived from Waterford and hauled the carriages out to a siding to release No. 131 which turned on the triangle at Lavinstown Junction before returning for servicing.

Our RPSI 2025 Calendars went on sale during this trip and once again the calendar is a fantastic publication by our own Martin Devlin. Thanks to the photographers who provided the excellent pictures for each month. A collector's item so if you've not already got one, don't delay.

On Sunday September 1 we were back on the DSER with the Dublin Riviera steam tour which carried 825 passengers on three separate fully loaded excursions. The day started with a run from Dublin to Bray, where the Dublin passengers disembarked for the day. Then No. 131's train collected a second trainload for an excursion from Bray to Wicklow, where

the Bray passengers detrained to visit the town. Then the third group of passengers boarded the train for a round trip from Wicklow to Greystones. Finally, the Wicklow passengers were ferried back to Bray and the Dublin-Bray passengers returned to Connolly.

With the Society celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2024, we ran an RPSI@60 steam special with No. 131 from Dublin Connolly to Dundalk and a local return trip to Drogheda on Sunday September 8. Among the 532 passengers were a number of guests, including RPSI founder members Eddie Lewis, David Houston, John Lockett, John Richardson, Robin Morton and Norman Foster, who travelled in carriage 1522. We were delighted also to welcome on board RPSI President Dr Joan Smyth, Vice-President Robert C. Guinness and Chairman Dr Peter Rigney.

Next...



In preparation for her return to Whitehead Railway Works, Steam Loco. No.85 Merlin was transferred to Inchicore Railway Works on the 18th. September.

On Saturday the 12th October we had The Croagh Patrick Diesel Rail Tour. Dublin Heuston to Claremorris, Westport and Ballina County Mayo. Diesel Locomotives consisted 079 and 084. Numerous photo stops. For the tour we carried 143 passengers, this was a disappointing amount due to the late advertising as a result of the difficulties obtaining diesel drivers.

After the diesel tour, our Carriage Appearance and Display Team began decorating the carriages for the Halloween trains on the 28th. October.

On the 26th, October we had our Annual Safety Forum for our Working Volunteers in the premises of the Irish Railway

Record Society, Heuston Station.

Our Halloween Steam Trains took place on Bank Holiday Monday the 28th. October. Dublin Connolly to Maynooth. Two steam specials. Some of our volunteers dressed up for the occasion. Passengers were requested to wear Halloween costumes and we had a winning family from each train. Prize was a family ticket for one of our Dublin Operations Santa Trains. We carried 721 passengers.

Our Carriage Appearance and Display Team began removing the Halloween Decorations and replacing them with the Christmas decorations. They did a fantastic job, the carriages looked amazing.

Organising 18 Santa Trains was a huge commitment for our volunteers. Train Paths, Ticket printing, organising Santa and his elves, Musicians, Stewards, Carriage



Joe McKeown, Gerard & John Owens and John Richardson on presentation of the on-train sales team cheque in December.  
(Photo: J McKeown)

Maintenance team; Loco. Dept. lighting up and preparing the engine, crews from both Dublin and Whitehead. Ordering Mulled Wine, Mince Pies. Selection Boxes; Foodstuffs for the Dining Car and drinks for the bar. Fund Raising Team sorting all their stock. Ticket sales and the allocating of seats for every train.

Tickets went on sale at 12 Noon on the 9th. November. All Steam Trains were sold out in 90 seconds.

Our trains began on Saturday 30th. November. Three trains each day Saturday and Sunday, last train is diesel hauled.

Once on board the musicians play and Santa visits each family, each child gets a selection box for Santa. Tea, Coffee or a Mulled Wine and a Mince Pie with cream for the adults. Christmas themed music was played over the public address system as passengers boarded and leaving the train.

At Maynooth families had their photograph taken with Santa and his elves.

All 18 trains ran very smoothly. Storm

Darragh did not have any effect on our operations on the first weekend.

Our final train was the diesel on Sunday 15th. December.

We carried 7,343 passengers on our Santa Trains. Fund Raising Team brought in €34,505.

For the year we carried 13,413 passengers on all our trains. Fund Raising Team brought in the amount of €64,912. A fantastic amount of money and a huge effort by the team. Some of which will be allocated for the manufacture and purchase of two steam injectors.

Dublin Operation use Social Media to advertise all our trains. Our Face Book account has over 28,000 followers.

Dublin Management Committee would like to praise and thank all our volunteers. They exceeded all expectations with such dedication and hard work. Going above and beyond and delivering such outstanding results.

Special thanks go to Irish Rail for their assistance and support, right across the Network.



*No. 131 approaches Kellystown on a storming run from Dublin Connolly on 8th September. (Photo: CP Friel)*

After the 2023 Santa season it became apparent that the track at the start of number two shed road, where 3BG is stored, was spreading. In the second week of January, we examined the track and found 6 old, very rotten, NCC chair type, sleepers. Once removed these were replaced using good quality second hand sleepers which we had acquired from the Dargan bridge relay. Unfortunately, the holes in these were for modern flat-bottomed track and not the traditional bull nosed type we have throughout Whitehead. A special metal jig was made with holes at the right gauge for GNR chairs and the sleepers were drilled using a vertical, magnetic based drill. Once the sleepers had been slid into place under the rails the new chairs were bolted down making the track now to gauge. Despite the extreme cold and snow, the sleepers were packed with clean two-inch ballast and the site levelled ready for

traffic.

At the start of February we recycled the contents of our steel skip for £1200 while a small amount of copper netted £132. We positioned the sheerlegs so that Loco 171's boiler could be fitted in its frames. Her cab and boiler cladding were moved for sand blasting and we subsequently painted the under coat on the cab. About this time we fitted new flexible pipes on the water pump connections for the turn table pit and the signal box sump.

In the first week of March we moved Loco 171 in the workshop and then started to paint the toilets in the Station Cafe. This was part of a refreshment exercise when the Cafe changed management. In the second week we finished the painting and used an industrial rotary floor polisher to clean the floors. The outside aluminium chairs and tables were given a complete clean.



*David Linton, Roy Thompson and George Smyth pack track on 2-Road.*

*(Photo: D Mackie)*





*Colin Stewart, Roy Thompson, Dermot Mackie, Davy Orr and John Williams replace sleepers.*

*(Photo: R Morton)*

For the entrance driveway we made wooden planters in the bank, in which we put wildflower seeds and we repaired the platform fencing. At the end of the month Colin Stewart fixed the faulty fuel gauge in the JCB and we emptied the stables of tables in time for the 'Wee Critters' event. We also put some quarry blasters into the potholes in the approaches to the turn table.

After the Easter train rides it was found that the track was too wide near the point for the engine shed roads. Fortunately we got two dry days on the 9th and 11th of April to sort out the problem: something unique for this very wet month. Three very old and rotten NCC sleepers were found and removed and on the second day were replaced with good second hand hard wood

versions and the track pulled into gauge.

During the following week we painted the trellis fence at the Station and made extra shelving in our 5-road shed area. I took the opportunity of a dry Saturday to give the Site its first weed spray and strim the kerb edges in an empty upper car park.

In the last week of the month we cleaned out the turn table pit which produced a jumbo sized bag of weeds and soil and uncovered a sleeping hedgehog. It had fallen into the pit and was removed to the bank in the driveway whence it promptly disappeared.

The first week in May we pulled out Loco 3BG for the May Day train rides and painted the wicker fence at the Station entrance. That Thursday was the warmest day of the year so far and we had our

lunch outside after some jacking and packing of rail joints on the platform road. The following week we gave the Atlas its big annual service and also greased all the joints on the JCB. Now that the weather was improving we turned our attention to gardening duties and watering plants. We also helped move two Craven bogies to the workshop for overhaul.

On D-Day we helped with the Mogul boiler and the cables on the heavy lift gantries were given a good coating of grease. Whitehead in Bloom came to us in the second week in June and produced four beautiful hanging baskets and planted out our platform beds with a lovely array of flowers. I obtained a second-hand lorry curtain side which we put on the Larne end of NCC No. 1 railcar. On the longest day of the year we put up the new "Cups and Carriages" signs in Castlevue Road for the relaunched Cafe at the station. On the last working Thursday of the month we fixed the point switches on the platform road at the signal box and scrapped 2 old large steel gate posts. The front yard was given a tidy up by removing some large sleepers to the back of the site and cutting up numerous items of scrap wood for fire lighting.

The first week in July we carried out a complete track inspection and points oiling before the big Loco 171 shunt. We took time off in the Twelfth week and returned on the 18th to assemble 3 tall cupboards for the carriage shed with help from Gordon Hunt and Roy Thompson. In the last week we did some serious bushwhacking in the upper car park to uncover large items to be scrapped. In August we painted the windows in the Station building and each week we pulled out Loco 3BG for the Saturday Steam events using the Atlas. The moves highlighted dropped rails outside No.2 shed road which we jacked and packed.

A major scrap drive saw the large items

going to T Hamill & Sons on 5th September which netted £4k while the contents of our ferrous skip produced a further £1K. On the 13th we had the official launch of Loco 171 by the HRH The Duke of Gloucester who toured the site with his son. We had set up a small demonstration of drilling wooden sleepers which intrigued the Duke who was not aware of the Irish gauge! The heat wave at the end of the month kept us busy watering plants and preparations were made for a Shunter Training School which was held on Saturday 28th.

Thankfully the weather was kind and John Williams and I carried out a practical assessment of all six candidates using B142 and a MK 2 carriage with Board members Peter Stark and Mark Parker as observers. Following this all the students completed a written examination and I am delighted to report that all were successful in both aspects of the training. They have gone on to be key players in the 2024 Santa Season.

In October we replaced 2 sleepers in No.2 shed road and a further sleeper on the platform road with good help from Peter Lindsay and Robin Morton. David Lowry took several small items of copper and aluminium for recycling which netted £340. I removed the concrete lining from Loco No.4's smoke box using our jack hammer and we repaired the gates at the Station. We spent the last week preparing for the Halloween weekend.

A wooden planking pit cover at the inside end of No.4 shed road was skilfully made from donated decking timber by David Orr and Willie Hollinger at the start of November. Later in the month we cleaned the stable gutters of leaves and I gave the JCB its big annual service. We also put 120 old boiler tubes into the steel skip. The Allianz safety inspection of our mobile plant on 21st was successful, all items passing with only a few minor

issues. The seat belt in the JCB was defective and a new one was installed by George Smyth and David Linton.

The last week in the month was a busy one with preparations for Santa Claus including putting up the tree, sorting out presents and moving items for the grotto in the stables.

December involved track inspections before every busy operating weekend despite the damage caused by storm Darragh. Luckily, this was limited to the large Whitehead Excursion sign on the outside of the signal box which had to be

remounted with thunder bolts. On Thursday 12th we had our big Christmas lunch at 12 noon in the Station Cafe but not before we had put in a new concrete floor in the smoke box of Loco 171 which gave us all a healthy appetite. Our last jobs of the year were on the following Thursday when we cleared out the ash from the pit outside No.1 shed road. There followed a gathering up of storm leaves and rubbish from the turntable pit alongside our normal bin emptying duties.

Another great year in good company - a big thank you to all the Site Squad.



*A substantial turnout for Shunter School on 28th September, Dermot Mackie at left. (Photo: R Downey)*



A busy year at Whitehead Railway Museum was crowned with a visit in September by HRH the Duke of Gloucester, who was accompanied by the Earl of Ulster and the Lord Lieutenant of County Antrim, David McCorkell. The Royal visit was primarily to mark the RPSI's 60th anniversary and to launch No. 171, but it afforded the Duke a long overdue visit to the museum itself.

The Duke, a self-confessed railway enthusiast and patron of the Severn Valley Railway, took the opportunity to visit the museum's Carriage Gallery where he inspected several vehicles, including the Royal Saloon in which the late Queen – his first cousin – had travelled in 1953.

A Royal visit created an opportunity for some useful marketing both within Northern Ireland and in the GB railway press. The guest list included the Mayor of Mid and East Antrim Council and other

influential people, so it was a valuable opportunity to show off the museum.

Perhaps it was no coincidence that the following day, September 14, we welcomed an unusually large number of 250 visitors to the museum as part of the European Heritage Open Day initiative. There was a good level of awareness of the Duke's visit and this showed that the museum's profile had been raised.

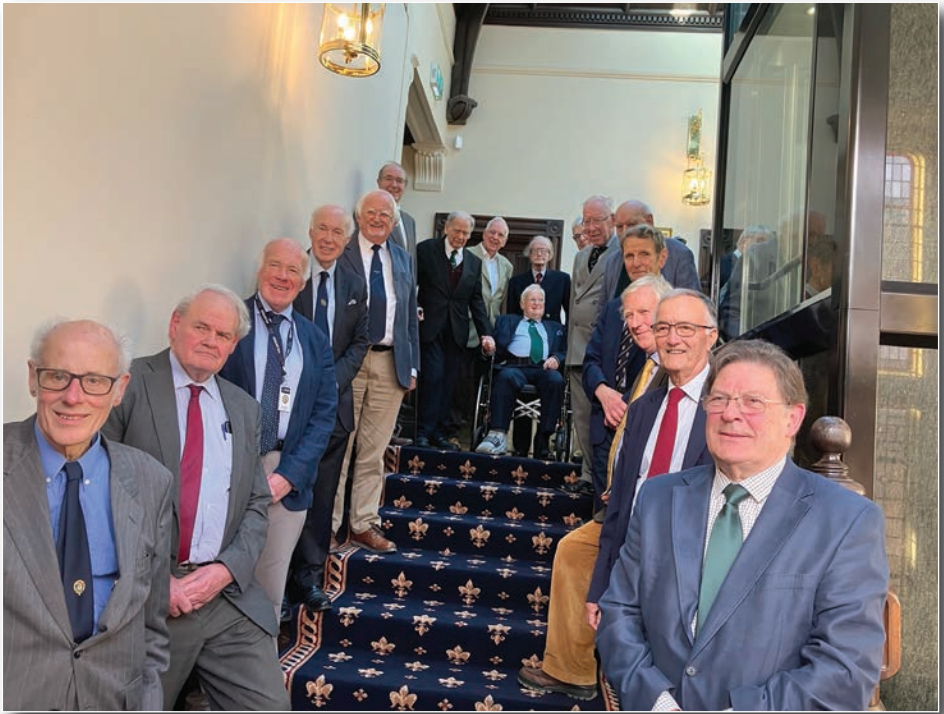
Marketing is all-important to Whitehead Railway Museum with reliance placed on social media outlets and other channels of free publicity. That said, our flagship is Welcome Belfast, the tourist information centre, which handles bookings for all RPSI events at Whitehead. The RPSI website plays a useful role too, in publicising the museum and providing a link to Welcome Belfast.

With mainline steam activity still at a



Lisa Adair and Yvonne McIlree, Whitehead, 31st August.

(Photo: CP Friel)



*Founder members who attended the RPSI's 60th anniversary luncheon at the Ulster Reform Club on October 19 were (from left) Peter Scott, David Houston, Robin Morton, Tim Morton, Leslie McAllister, David White, John Harcourt, John White, Lord O'Neill, Johnny Glendinning, Charles Friel, John Richardson, Eddie Lewis, Joe Cassells, Will Glendinning, John Lockett and Stephen Rottger. (Photo: CA Friel)*

standstill on NIR the museum plays an increasingly important role in keeping the RPSI in the public eye. It is the primary interface between the Society and the public and we are gratified that visitor numbers have kept up – a matter of great import to the Society and our funders.

That said, WRM's footfall is still down from its pre-pandemic high, in common with museums elsewhere. This simply means we must work harder to gain visibility and secure favourable feedback. Word of mouth remains probably the biggest single marketing tool and to this end we are gratified when visitors tell us how much they have enjoyed the museum and go home singing our praises. There are two key factors to all this. One

is ringing the changes in the museum display to keep it fresh and pertinent. The second is rolling out the welcome mat and ensuring that those who engage with visitors, particularly the museum guides and our café staff, create a really memorable experience.

We had a change of management in the café in April. Keeley Brown and her team at the newly rebranded "Cups & Carriages" provide a friendly welcome and ensure that customers enjoy their visit. The level of repeat business shows that the formula is working.

Experience has shown that headline events bolted onto steam train rides prove more attractive than standalone steam train trips. To this end a

programme of attractions was developed, ranging from an Easter Bunny event to a Wee Critters Day where children were invited to handle a range of creatures. From Blooming May Day we progressed to the ever popular Teddy Bears Picnic followed by a Summer Jazz event. We then teamed up with Whitehead Community Association to participate in the Food & Drink Festival in the summer.

Along the way the museum hosted a Murder Mystery Night and a pop-up movie night at which the film *Runaway Train* was screened, this being in conjunction with the Strand Arts Centre in Belfast.

As ever, the Museum's busiest time of year was Christmas when we played host to 2,300 excited visitors at the Whitehead Victorian Steam Santa Experience. This year we expanded the offering by running a midweek Schools Day and broke new ground by operating on two midweek evenings. Everything went well – apart from having to cancel on December 7 as a result of Storm Darragh – and we were delighted by the support we received from the public.

In February we were delighted that both entries for the Heritage Railway Association awards were shortlisted. The submissions were on behalf of the Dublin Sales Team in the hotly contested Team of the Year category, and on behalf of Whitehead volunteer Sam Hall in the Rising Star category. Both came home with "Highly Commended" certificates.

This year we are delighted to learn that the RPSI's entry in the Team of the Year category has been shortlisted. It is entitled "Bright Sparks" and has been submitted on behalf of the Whitehead e-squad, the volunteer group which attends to electrical work every Wednesday. The camaraderie is tremendous and the work they carry out saves the Society time and money. By the time Five Foot Three is

printed we will know how the squad has fared at the awards ceremony in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Another entry was submitted in the summer of 2024 to the Marsh Trust Volunteer Awards for Museum Learning, run by the Marsh Trust and the British Museum. This was on behalf of the RPSI Curatorial Committee, which has done such impressive work in enhancing WRM by displaying all sorts of artefacts on spare walls in various galleries. The items range from locomotive number and nameplates to wagon plates and lineside furniture. All the items have been carefully curated and interpreted to broaden the knowledge of visitors and make their visit all the more meaningful.

Curatorial Committee members have also been busy in the erstwhile store in the foyer of the Station Building. The objective is to return the room to its original purpose, a station style booking office with traditional ticket window. Appropriate items of furniture such as a period-style armchair have been placed in the room along with an Edmondson ticket stamping machine. The plan is to create a more authentic railway scene for visitors coming to buy tickets for the museum or the train rides. The booking office complements the Cups & Carriages café which is so redolent of the railway refreshment room in the classic movie "Brief Encounter".

In the Carriage Gallery members of the Curatorial Committee have been busy fitting out the saloon in coach 5408, the former Irish Presidential Coach which is on loan to the Society from Irish Rail. This stylish carriage is now open to the public and its story complements that of the adjacent Royal Saloon, aka the Great Northern Directors carriage. The occasion of the Duke of Gloucester's visit was likely the first time that a member of the Royal family had set foot in the Irish



Presidential carriage.

Our co-operation with Mid & East Antrim Borough Council continues, and we are grateful to the council for including us in the annual Industrial Heritage Week initiative in June. For WRM this was a virtual event and we got kudos for a video short explaining the work of the midweek track squad in replacing a redundant sleeper on the track at Whitehead. Now everyone knows what a track gauge looks like and what its purpose is.

In August Yvonne McIlree succeeded Lisa Adair as RPSI General Manager. Our thanks go to Lisa for all her endeavours and for keeping the Society afloat through the pandemic lockdown. With her background in marketing, Yvonne has taken to her new role like a duck to water and has got her head round the various issues. The museum is benefitting

hugely from her input and commitment and we wish her continuing success. Thanks too to Graham Nortje, the RPSI's finance and administration officer, who handles group bookings for the museum and organises the museum guide rota – among many other tasks.

Our customers – especially those who live locally – find the size and scale of the museum incredible. What looks like a series of industrial sheds turns out to contain a treasure trove of Irish railway heritage. Members are entitled to a free visit every year on production of a membership card – so if you've not been to see us in a while, resolve to put this to rights in 2025. The displays are regularly changing so you'll see something new. And the locomotives never seem to sit still as various overhaul projects progress. Don't miss this gem – and why not bring friends and family?



No. 171's first day back in steam at Whitehead, 27th July - loco department volunteers (L-R) Tyler Playfair, Phil Lockett, Daniel Tartaglia, Nathan Lawrence, Peter Scott, Sam Hall (on buffer), Bob Skingle, Brian Hill, James Friel, Jonathan Clinton. It has to be said one sees no evidence of fire or steam... a classic case of 10 steam raisers and no steam? (Photo: CP Friel)

Esquad work in 2024 has consisted of more fault clearing and some new provision work.

One very annoying issue has been the interruption to the power supply for the security alarms. This is caused by the alarm equipment boxes being supplied from the distribution board for that building. However, these distribution boards are occasionally tripped by a faulty workshop tool being plugged into a socket feed from the same distribution board. The loss of power causes the alarm system to report a fault to the monitoring station. Our solution to this problem is to provide an independent supply to the alarm box. Six out of the eight alarm equipment boxes on the site are now modified in this way, this work will be on going when money and time allow.

Compared to last year we have changed very few discharge lights to LEDs, again due to the purchase cost of the new lights.

Due to the safety implications, we provided a light switch at the Larne end of the Wheel Drop Shed. Up to then the only switches were at the Belfast end, so for someone locking up and wishing to exit by the Larne end of the shed, had to use a torch or, worse, walk in the dark through the shed. However, to enable this to happen we had to erect a cable tray to secure the cables on. This cable tray later proved very useful when we were asked

to provide power to a pipe-threading machine which was also situated at the Larne end of the Wheel Drop Shed.

The Esquad also spent time prepping coach 837 to be wired for smoke detection alarms, lighting and power. This involves installing galvanised conduit along both sides of the coach and fitting a fuse box at the Belfast end. When the internal sheeting is fitted, we can progress with the wiring, install the fittings and carry out all the testing.

We are now designing a CCTV monitoring system for Museum Galleries. This is now important as visitors can now choose to be self-guided around our museum

We have also been active fitting Emergency Stop buttons to powered workshop tools, in the interest of improved safe practice. On the issue of improving safe working, we recently provided a lock off switch on the Sheer Legs lift.

If we get the go ahead, we would like to replace the remaining discharge lights in the Old Carriage Shed with new LED lights

Our team meets once a week on Wednesdays, they are a happy group who have recently been nominated and short listed by Heritage Railway Association Annual Awards as the Team of the Year.

To be nominated and then be short listed is, I think, an achievement in itself!

My name is Martina Hand, I joined the RPSI in 2014. I started off as a carriage steward. Maintaining, caring and looking after both the coaches, and the passengers. As my experiences grew. I made great friends and received the training I needed. I came from a media / film background. Alongside stewarding, I started the Radio Trains. I was able to bring different broadcasters, from radio stations on board. To assist and share the

experience on board. We sang all the way to Kilkenny!!

There are lots of themed events on board, lots of different departments to try. I now volunteer with the Bar Car. I recently celebrated my 10th year on board with all my railway friends. I encourage anyone to volunteer, as there's lots of opportunities on and off board. A joyous occasion on any occasion.



*Celebrating Martina's 10th year in the RPSI - L to R back row - Bethany Emmet, Nicola Emmet Byrne, Ryan Downey, Matthew Wilson , Martina Hand. Dublin Connolly Station 2024. (Photo: M Hand)*



*"This is a place of culture, you know! That's c-u-l-c-h-e-r if you didn't know how to spell it." - RPSI volunteer.*

I've heard it all in my first year at RPSI: the

sweet dulcet tones of a steam whistle; the carefully and tastefully curated playlist booming from Tyler Playfair's speaker; the light and gentle tapping of a pneumatic



*Matthew Simpson passes his Steam Raising Assessment on 30th August.*

*(Photo: Editor)*

hammer or two whilst riveting; an occasional verse recited by Bob Skingle; not to mention a few choice and colourful words along the way from many people on the oh so rare occasion something has gone array.

My first experience with steam engines had been on the Swanage Railway aged 3 or 4. They had painted a tank engine just like Thomas the Tank Engine and even put Thomas' face on the front of the smoke box door. Whilst ever so slightly disappointed that this engine had refused to speak to me (even though I knew he could because I had seen him do it on TV) I had been, like any sensible and self-respecting child, enamoured by the sights, sounds and smells of a steam locomotive. I would watch VHS tapes of steam engines chuffing up and down the countryside. For me, it was magical (even now, after being "told" how injectors work, I still suspect some magic is at play).

As a young teenager, I was taken on a few steam days run by the RPSI and once again loved it but underlying all these experiences was an unspoken assumption that this was personally unattainable: I would never be on a footplate operating an engine, shovelling coal, pulling levers, sounding the whistle whilst covered in soot, grease and oil. And then, life moved on, as it so often does.

A few years ago, as a youth worker in Carrickfergus I was out one night doing some street work when I saw a man with a camera and tripod pointed at the bridge on the North Road near Carrickfergus train station. I asked him what he was doing and he said he was making a German documentary about steam trains in Ireland or something along that vein. I thought it all a bit odd, but it reminded me of the old VHS tapes I used to watch. So, I waited, and although it was brief, I

saw the steam engine and was reminded why I once loved them so much as a kid. I made a mental note that I must actually go down to Whitehead and have a look around the museum.

Eventually, I did (and not even on purpose). It was 29th July 2023 and the Whitehead Summer Festival was on. I went down to have a nosey at it and lo and behold in the background, I saw that a steam train was running. As soon as I smelt the steam, I simply had to go over and see it and then it happened. It seemed like only minutes, but the General Manager at the time must have smelt the weakness off of me and before I knew it I had multiple volunteer forms in my hands.

Now I have passed as a Steamraiser and a Shunter. I have had my first turn as a trainee fireman and I have been loving it. I would say it was a childhood dream come true, but in my childhood dreams the steam engines didn't spend nearly as much time trying to outsmart me. I have also spent some time in the workshop where I have been amazed at how much I've been able to have a go with. I haven't found my area of expertise yet, but I am enjoying working together and solving problems with folk. It has been good for the body and the mind in equal parts.

The folk at RPSI have been very generous and welcoming. So many people have taken the time to teach me things and I can tell they are genuinely happy to share what they can with me. I have been made to feel comfortable about asking questions and have been encouraged when giving things a go and this has meant a great deal to me. The opportunities and the community have been wonderful, and it's been good fun. I look forward to being a part of things for a long time.

*Part 1 is in FFT 68, March 2023*

The two-day tour of 1977 was the ‘Cú na Mara’ to Limerick and Athenry. Inchicore’s only involvement was to work Jeep No.4 from Kingsbridge (Heuston) to Limerick and travel home passenger. We booked-on at 07.00 to prepare No.4. We had the same crew, Morgan D’Arcy and Joe Murphy, but Loco Inspector Johnny Maguire accompanied us.

First thing we learned was that the Holyhead Mailboat was two hours late so we stood on the train on No.2 platform and kept No.4 quiet. After a long time Morgan decided to top up the lubricator. He shut off the steam valve and loosened

the filler plug. He then removed it. As he lifted the oil can, a sound like a crude fellow clearing his throat preceded a large dollop of hot oil. It narrowly missed him and splattered the cab. Luckily nobody suffered injury. I had noticed No.4 had a leaking regular valve and this had obviously built up back pressure. I learned a lesson that day. Never, ever, stand in front of a luber filler plug when open!

We eventually got away at 10.34, two hours late. No.4 required a different method of firing. An LMS product, it required a heavy fire. The UTA men always had a deep bank of coal just inside the fire doors and many firemen would use



*Heuston, No.4 on the Cú na Mara, 11.06.1977 - Insp Johnny Maguire and Morgan D’Arcy.*

*(Photo: CP Friel)*





*Limerick Junction with Nos. 186, 184, and 4, 11.6.1978.*

*(Photo: CP Friel)*

the shovel to push the top layer forward, the semi-baked coal igniting almost immediately.

Joe had 4 on full regulator and well out on the lever. We climbed up the 'Gullet' in fine style while we hurried coal into the 'box'. As usual he made a great show passing Inchicore shed. But Inspector Maguire had not the sensitivity of Ned Comerford. He jumped across the footplate and yelled 'For f\* sake Joe, you have emptied the boiler. Shut off'. (No old-time driver would ever flog an engine so early in the journey). Joe sat like a chastened schoolboy. We got both injectors on her. Steam pressure rose and the boiler filled. By the top of the bank (MP4) we were able to continue. We had a good run but that modern menace, the hot-box Detector, stopped us at Cherryville Junction. All being well, we went on. I cannot recall where we took water except Ballybrophy.

As we were heading for Limerick, No. 186 was also heading for Limerick via Athenry. So, when we arrived via the Direct Loop, 186 took the train back up the WL&W to Ennis and Athenry. Our relief took No. 4 LE to Galway via Portarlinton and Athlone. We made two cans of tea and took a long seat in a Park Royal on the Up afternoon Dublin train. A lady sat opposite and soon she was supping strong tea and eating soda bread, completely at home with several Dublin Loco-men.

### **1978**

Once again this year Inchicore had little to do with the Two-Day 'South Wexford' railtour except to work from Dublin to Limerick Junction on Saturday and back up on Sunday afternoon. I was told by Ned Comerford to join the crew of No. 4 on the Saturday morning but our Foreman Walsh claimed he knew nothing about it and tried to cancel my

involvement. I soon sorted this out with our Loco Superintendent, N J Whalley, and Walsh was put back in his box.

On Saturday morning, 10th June 1978, I cycled across a sleeping city to book-on at 05.00 with Driver Gussie Leonard (Blinking Gussie his strongest expletive) and Joe Murphy. A taxi re-traced my route to Fairview shed. (I lived just up Malahide Road from Fairview). Steam raiser Jimmy Judd had No.4 lit-up and the fire just nice for preparation. Ned Comerford checked over No.4 as though he himself was to drive it. We checked the water tanks, filled the luber and spread the fire. Having checked the brake and whistle we rang out at 06.40 and ran light over the up road to Amiens Street and across the Loop line to collect our train in Boston yard. Our shunter/guard had the train ready and we set off for Kingsbridge. Gussie took her easy up to Cabra and down to Islandbridge Junction. Being empty, we backed down into Kingsbridge

station.

Just after 08.50, Gussie took the six-piece train away. This time our departure was more sedate with no fireworks. Gussie was so much more experienced steam driver than to push an engine with a 'green' fire. We passed the usual crowd outside the shed at about 25mph and Gussie let No.4 find her own way. The boiler had steam and water, firing was easy and Ned Comerford beamed appreciatively. We topped the bank at just over 30mph and Gussie gradually worked up to 40mph running through the dip at Hazelhatch. By Sallins, speed was tipping about 50mph (we had no speedometer) and we topped the Curragh at 40mph.

Gussie went easily down to Cherryville Junction, (remember that HBD!) and set off for Portarlinton. But not long after passing 'Hybla' Bridge (MP35) three detonators exploded under our loco. Then just after this, a PW look-out man



Bray 22.09.1979. No.184 departs on a Dublin Bay shuttle.

(Photo: CP Friel)



*No.171 on the North Kerry return run near Ráth Luirc, 18.05.1980.*

*(Photo: CP Friel)*

came rushing out of the hushes pulling up his trousers and trying to wave a Red flag. When the poor fellow caught up with us it was to warn us of a PW gang working at Monasterevin.

We had a good run forward getting up to 60mph near Mountrath. Water was taken at Ballybrophy. After that we ran on non-stop to the Junction, only a PW slack at Goolds Cross slowed us down. We were relieved at the Junction by Waterford Crew Jack O'Neill and Jimmy Browne. We were rostered to lodge and, as the Junction Dormitory was closed, (the ghost that was said to haunt it had eventually won!) we travelled passenger on the special into Waterford. After washing up, the late Tommy Dorian offered us something to go with our sandwiches and we enjoyed his hospitality. At some stage we smelled hot metal and suspected a brake was rubbing. It later transpired that the steam brake had

applied on No.4 and caused a greater use of water, so No.186 was summoned out of Waterford to meet us at Carrick. We lodged over in Waterford Dorm where Mrs Harvey kept the place spick and span. The evening was spent in the Bridge House with fellow enginemen.

Sunday morning saw us book-on at 11.45 and re-trace our steps to the Junction. Here was J15 No.184, soon joined by 186 for Cork. The RPSI crew said they would clean the fire in the Jeep so we made tea and sat on sleepers enjoying the hot sun. But when we re-manned No.4 our hearts sank. Somebody had turned over the rocking grate thus dumping the fire. A mad scramble ensued to collect any timber lying about. Luckily, the hard coal caught alight on contact with the firebars. We went out against our train with thick, black, smoke rolling from the chimney.

Joe Murphy was to drive us up. We set off



at 16.30, Joe yanking the regulator full open but Inspector Comerford laid a restraining hand on him. We had a 'green' fire barely alight. 'Take her easy to Dundrum' Ned cautioned. By the dip at Ballyrobin, steam pressure was rising and the fire was burning through. We passed Goolds Cross at 60mph and ran easily through Thurles and Templemore at a steady 55 mph. Castleflemming Bank gave us a 60 and we stopped in Bally for water.

Gus Leonard took No.4 onwards at a steady pace but we lost time in Kildare for trains to overtake. Thereafter speed rose gently and we touched 65mph at Sallins, 75 at Straffan and 70 at Lucan. Going easily over Islandbridge Junction, Gus stood up to open the regulator at Liffey Bridge. The Inspector's hand went up between Gussie's legs. Startled, he look around. Ned shook his head! The regulator was put on the small valve and we went sedately up to Cabra and on to Amiens Street. Signals due to no available platform delayed us and we arrived at 19.55. Later we took 4 out to Fairview and stabled her for Monday. After washing up we adjourned to my old watering-hole, Kavanaghs, on Malahide Road.

## 1979

The 1979 'Croagh Patrick' raitour of May that year had no Inchicore involvement, in fact it began with Diesel haulage to Mullingar and Nos.184 & 186 onwards. The only steam trips we got were in September, when we fired on the 'Dublin Bay shuttles' to two Midland men Drivers Jimmy Tennant and Peter Harrison. Later relieved by the Mullingar crew of Joe Byrne and Paddy Reeves. We went to Mullingar to stable No.184 and travelled home on the Up night mail. The RPSI Dublin rep left us home on the back of his builders truck. With little steam work offering, my wife and I went off to a very rustic and rural French hotel on the Atlantic coast for a holiday.

## 1980

Inchicore had a major involvement in the 1980 'South Kerry' tour. Again we had Loco No.171 with Gussie Leonard and Joe Murphy but a new Loco Inspector, Barney Curtis, appointed Inspector in 1976. This was his first steam RPSI trip. Barney had service dating from July 1942 and had a lot of steam-driving experience.

I arranged to meet them at Fairview shed (just down the road). Steam-raiser 'Snacky' Daly (ex-Broadstone), brother of Jack, the last steam driver on the Loughrea Branch, had 171 just nicely burning through. We oil-up and checked the water level and injectors. Gussie tested the brake and we whistled out. Loco No.184 had gone ahead to collect the passengers off the Mail Boat arrival at Dún Laoghaire. But things did not go so well and Driver Nicky Moore was not happy to arrive late.

So the Tour proper was 30 late departing Amiens Street, 08.40 instead of 08.10. Gussie took No.171 away nice and easy and we travelled easily along the main line to Kildare where we stopped to pick up passengers. The Yorkshire coal burned well and gave lots of heat so we had no trouble for steam. The Hot Box Detector at Cherryville Junction was approached cautiously but I cannot recall if it went off. Our next stop was at Ballybrophy for water. The long stand did our fire no good and the base cooled. So it was hand to mouth to Limerick Junction. Here, Barney, perhaps warned by Ned Comerford, insisted that we clean the fire while other trains overtook.

On a clean fire, 171 romped away to Mallow, Barney himself having a wee drive for old times sake. We arrived Mallow at 13.30. Barney asked us to continue to Killarney with relief crew of Johnny Flynn of Cork and Tommy Collins of Tralee. Both Southern men, they could not understand our light fire and Fireman

Collins insisted on adding un-necessary coal to the fire. At Killarney we filled the tank then left them to their own devices. We returned to Mallow, washed-up and had our dinner. A great night was enjoyed in the Nazi Bar (nothing to do with Hitler or his ilk). *[Does seem to be an explanation that there was a dam being built by Siemens in the Cork area and the locals gave that name to the establishment where the engineers lodged – Ed]*

On Sunday morning we booked-on at 11.00 and relieved Tralee men Driver Moss Hogan and Fireman Tom Collins at 11.55 when they arrived. As we expected they had a huge, black fire in the 'box'. We would have tidied it up a bit but Inspector Curtis decided to go on. In my opinion this was a mistake. We left Mallow with black smoke rolling out of the chimney. The climb to Two-Pot House was painful. We kept pushing the coal around in a vain hope of burning some of it. By Buttevant the game was up. We stopped to clean the front of the grate an old trick to keep an engine going. This got us on the Charleville and to the Junction. We just kept pushing coal from the back of the box towards the burning front.

Again at the Junction we properly cleaned the fire and when all was ready we whistled up. I stood down to let RPSI member Peter Rigney have a run to Ballybrophy. As I supped tea, 171 tore away up into the high sixties.

Water was taken in Bally, the Luber was topped-up. We departed at 15.25 from Amiens Street. Two signal checks on the way up and a stop at Sallins to pick up a Pilotman to take us to Hazelhatch caused further delay. We rolled into Amiens Street at 17.00 – 20 minutes late. Loco 184 with Driver Tommy Lacey took the English contingent away to Dun Laoire for the Mail Boat. We washed-up and went across to Graingers Pub opposite to slake our parched throats. As we supped

Dundalk crew Driver Joe Tippen and Ned Muckian were heading north on 171.

## 1981

The 1981 Two Day tour was the 'Ben Bulben' to Sligo, so no Inchicore loco man was involved but on Thursday 24 September, just as I was about to pull away with a Goods train (Loco 055), Inspector Curtis swung up on to the footplate. Athlone had requested the two of us to assist their crews on locos Nos. 171 & 184.

We booked-on at 08.00 on Saturday and joined Athlone crew Val Horan and Tadgh Curley on 171 at the Boston yard. We coupled on and stood ready to depart. We were routed via Newcomen Junction and Whitworth Road and Val Horan, thinking of this heavy pull, ordered us to fill up the firebox. We suggested less fire. He insisted, he was the driver.

So we lorried in coal and at 08.20 we departed Westland Row. A stop was made at Amiens Street Loop line to pick up. But when our signal cleared it was out via the Link line and Drumcondra. We started away black smoke rolling up over the cab. We were stopped at Reilly's Crossing for horses on the line. This allowed us to fill the boiler and for some flame to appear in the black coal. Climbing Coolmine Bank, we just pulled back coal from beneath the brick arch.

By Lucan North, the fire was alight and we sprinkled a few light shots across the front. But our progress was not as good as it should have been. Topping the tank in Enfield we continued on to Mullingar, where another Athlone crew of Sean Nally and Mickey Bartley (not to be confused with Inchicore's Bartley) took over.

Loco 184 came on to the train manned by Sean Clynes of Athlone and Mullingar's Joe Byrne. Loco Inspector Eamon supervised the Loco Crews. We climbed

out of Mullingar over the canal and past the Northern Bank. By Lough Owel we were going well, then we fell down Multyfarnham Bank to Inny Junction and on west. After Mosttrim we ran easily down Longford Bank and into the station. As usual a great crowd gathered to see the two steam engines. The plan was to split the train, each engine to proceed with a portion to Boyle as double-heading was not allowed over the Shannon Bridge.

The left-hand injector steam valve was blowing through slightly. We had left this securely alone for good reason. Along comes a RPSI support crew member and gives it a great belt. The inevitable happened. The valve tread stripped and, with a tremendous roar, the valve blew out. Steam filled the cab and surroundings. I never saw a crowd take off so fast. Luckily ex-Dundalk fitter Pearse McKeown was in the train and together with Peter Scott, they rigged up a temporary bracket to keep the valve closed.

As they worked, Loco 184 took the seven-coach train forward. John Clynes was just the man for this, no hurry, no fuss, John let 184 take her time. Of course, every rise in the road took her back but she plugged on. The left-hand piston gland began to blow further reducing our power. At Boyle we filled the tank and the boiler. Pressure rose and we set off to tackle Boyle Bank, 6 miles of 1-100/200. The Schoolhouse Bridge (MP109 ½) was our target. The old drivers said 'If you get here, you are there!'. Sadly, just before the bridge, No 184 stopped.

Old John just sat down and waited. After a while we had steam and water. 'I'll go on' says John and off we went. Slowly but surely up to the summit at MP111 ¼. From there it's all downhill to Sligo. At Ballymote, 171 caught us up. Drizzle began. Both engines re-coupled and went

on to Collooney. Here a ribbon-cutting ceremony marked the RPSI traversing all of CIE route mileage. We arrived in Sligo at 17.45, the Mayor turning out to welcome us. Both engines were turned and stabled in Sligo shed. We went to the Dormitory to wash up and cook our evening meal.

Sunday morning was dull and drizzly, we signed-on at 08.00, Drivers and firemen reversing roles. We departed Sligo at 09.00 to go down the Quay line and both engines made a grand sight as they climbed back up and away from Sligo station at 09.40. The sun came out at Kilfree junction.

I fired 171 back to Longford for Sean Nally, Tony fired for Joe Byrne on 184. Again, we split our locos at Carrick for the Shannon Bridge. At Longford we re-coupled and made a great climb of Longford Bank to Quinns Bridge (MP70 ½). Sean Nally was content to let me continue firing to Mullingar while he enjoyed what might be his last steam trip. It wasn't.

At Mullingar Driver Joe Ledwith and Paddy Reeves replaced the Athlone crew and 184 went to her home shed. We made cans of tea and enjoyed lunch. We departed at 15.20 to the famous Town Band and many detonators. Joe was another experienced steam driver and let 171 make her own way. Paddy Reeves was content to let us continue firing. He watched the road and took the ET staffs. We had a good run to Liffey Junction where we were turned down the MGW Liffey Branch.

At Newcomen Junction the signals were out. We had to await a flagman who instructed us to pass the signal and proceed at caution up into Amiens Street. With 6' 7" wheels and from a standing start we had no chance. We got about half of our train on to the steep, check-railed bank and stuck. A gloating Driver Jim



Keirnan came down with 054 to haul us out. I found out later that Jim tried to claim the up trip; from Mullingar and was refused Hence, his gloating remarks to us. What a sad end to an otherwise great weekend.

I finished up in Inchicore on 16th January 1982. Acting Forman Ken Walsh (ex GNR) held the Night Mail engine for me so that I could transfer my equipment bag etc to Amiens Street shed. I had to report there on Monday 18th at 08.00. So I left the Premier Depot of 94 drivers, many drivers' sons and steeped in Inchicore history and lore – I had loved every minute of it.

I was transferring to what was now Connolly 2 (Canal Street and Broadstone of earlier times). We shared the Mess room with Connolly 1 (Amines Street depot). This was a much more cosmopolitan depot of about 100 men. These came from Enniskillen, Clones, Dundalk, Drogheda, Sligo, Cavan, Athlone, Waterford, Rosslare Harbour, Bray and even Inchicore. About half were steam men. A whole new adventure opened up

to me. I could continue writing but I don't want to hog the Five Foot Three magazine!

### Corrections to Part I, FFT 68

Page 51 – Ned Dunphy was 'Young Earful': his father was 'Earful'.

Page 52 – No.4 did indeed leave Cork bunker-first, it being considered less likely her pony truck would further derail if it was trailing. In Limerick, the pony derailed as No.4 ran forwards in the yard. She was then turned to run back to Dublin bunker-first, via the then-new Direct Curve at Limerick Junction, meeting up with No.171 and train and double-heading back to Dublin from Ballybrophy. No.4 later returned light to York Road for attention.

Page 54 – Inchicore Driver Neville was called 'I Go', not 'Igor', which I unfortunately picked it up as. This is because each year he drove the annual weedspray train from Portrush to Fenit, Rosslare to Sligo and all between. Thus he once declared 'Anywhere there's rails, I Go!'



Longford Nos.171 and 184 depart Longford, 27.09.1981. Compared to 1979 at Bray, No.184 now has No.186's tender.  
(Photo: CP Friel)

# DENIS GRIMSHAW OBITUARY

Robin Morton

The name of Denis Grimshaw runs like a thread through the 60-year history of the RPSI. A founder member, he was one of a small group behind the inaugural meeting which led to the Society being set up in September 1964 and served as the Society's first secretary. He was insistent right from the start that the RPSI should be an all-island organisation, rather than just a Northern Ireland body. He remained involved in the Society and committed to its activities until ill-health started to take its toll in 2017.

But his organisational skills had come to the fore prior to 1964. His passion for public transport had its origins in his daily trolley-bus trip from his home in north Belfast to school in the centre of the city.

At the Royal Belfast Academical Institution he met like-minded pupils and he was involved in the establishment of the RBAI Railway Society. The RBAIRS was to become one of the key building blocks in the formation of the RPSI, with several Old Instonians becoming influential members of the Society.

Denis' transport interest flourished most when it came to trains. In April 1962 he was involved in the organisation by RBAIRS of a special steam train with SG2 class No. 177 from Drogheda to the soon-to-close Oldcastle branch. He realised that such a train could be facilitated by using the Drogheda pilot engine, which was available on a Saturday afternoon.



*Denis Grimshaw timing the train on the Cork & Kerry Railtour of 2018.*

*(Photo: R Morton)*

Even though he was still a schoolboy, he led the organisation by RBAIRS of a hugely ambitious railtour in 1963 from Dublin via Athy to the Ballylinan branch with J.15 No. 151. This was an all-day trip which returned to Dublin via Palace East, Macmine Junction and the Dublin South Eastern. With the assistance of a small group of senior RBAIRS members, Denis planned the trip, worked out the schedule, negotiated with CIE and organised the marketing of the outing and the selling of the tickets.

In many ways it was to be a template for succeeding RPSI trips and Denis was involved with the then operations officer Craig Robb in running the Society's inaugural outing in September 1964 with UG No.49, S Class No.171 and – as a surprise to the passengers – VS No.207 on what would prove to be her final passenger run. In later years Denis did a stint as operations officer himself.

Denis led one notable RBAIRS trip to Derry on the final day of operation of the Derry Road in February 1965. He organised a group from the school to travel on the morning train from Belfast via Portadown and Omagh, and back on the final passenger service from Foyle Road to Belfast. Denis being Denis, a side trip was organised to fill in the time in Derry, by taking a Lough Swilly bus for a trip to Fahan to inspect the remains of the former L&LSR station and trackwork.

After A-levels, Denis enrolled at Queen's University engineering school in 1963 and graduated with an honours degree in civil engineering in 1967. During his time at QUB, he acted as chairman of the university's Engineering Society. Despite stepping back from the RPSI committee at this stage, his transport interest endured and during one summer vacation he worked as a bus conductor in Bournemouth.

Denis' railway career opened when he

was appointed as a graduate trainee with British Rail in Scotland, but in 1971 he moved back to Northern Ireland to join the staff of Rendel Palmer & Tritton on the Belfast Central Railway project. In 1975 he joined NIR and in 1976 was appointed Chief Civil Engineer. He successively served as Operations Executive, General Manager (InterCity), General Manager (Projects & Safety) and General Manager (Operations & Safety) until his retirement from NIR in 1995.

During his time with NIR, Denis was closely involved in the regeneration of the railway network. He left his mark, having spearheaded major schemes ranging from the opening of the Belfast Cross-Harbour Link in 1994 and the re-opening of Great Victoria Street station in 1995. At Great Victoria Street he devised the track layout on the approaches, which gave huge operational flexibility and stood the test of time, only being dismantled last year (2024) when the station closed.

It was perhaps no coincidence that the bridge across the Lagan was named Dargan Bridge in honour of the pioneering 19th century Irish railway engineer William Dargan. Denis lobbied unsuccessfully for the Cross-Harbour Link to be made double-track. His one regret was that his campaigning for the re-opening of the Comber line did not bear fruit. He was a man of vision who was quite capable of thinking outside the box.

Denis Grimshaw deserves to take his place in the annals as one of the leading Ulster railway civil engineers. At a time when some in government and in particular the civil serviced had reservations about the value of trains, Denis proved to be a doughty and dogged proponent of the rail network. He battled on with regeneration proposals even after others in senior management at NIR had given up on them. The current



success of NIR owes much to him.

But while Denis was a professional railwayman, he never failed to spot an opportunity for collaboration between NIR and the RPSI. In 1985 he organised a special train for the Permanent Way Institute, whose delegates were holding a conference in Portrush. Inspirationally, the diesel-hauled train included the RPSI's dining car, which was serving a full breakfast on departure from Portrush at 7.45am, something which was appreciated by the international visitors. As Denis noted, it was probably the first time since the operation of the North Atlantic Express in the 1930s that breakfast had been served on a train leaving Portrush.

And it was thanks to Denis that in August 1987 NIR asked the RPSI to organise a special steam train to run from Belfast to Dublin to mark the 40th anniversary of the Enterprise. Denis drew up a path which worked perfectly for V Class No. 85 Merlin, which was hauling the RPSI train of heritage wooden bodied carriages plus the Directors' Saloon. NIR chartered the train, which ran non-stop and covered the 115 miles from Belfast Central in a slightly better time than the 1947 train. As a precaution, Denis also arranged for S Class No. 171 Slieve Gullion to run from Whitehead to Dundalk. In the event everything ran like clockwork, but No. 171 was used to double-head the return run from Dundalk to Belfast. It was a memorable day.

In 1989, he persuaded NIR to mark the 150th anniversary of the Ulster Railway by using the RPSI steam train to operate a week of early morning and late afternoon commuter trains on the lines out of Belfast. Regular passengers were pleasantly surprised to find a steam train substituting for the usual diesel service – and overjoyed to find that the RPSI buffet car and bar were open for business.

One of Denis' primary talents was

timetabling. He meticulously worked out the schedules for a large number of RPSI trips which were then approved by the railway professionals, usually without any changes. And if a railtour encountered problems, leading to a delay, it was Denis who was quickly out with the working timetables to chart an alternative schedule for the rest of the trip.

Not surprisingly for someone who prided himself in keeping records, timing was a major hobby for Denis. He was habitually to be seen with stopwatch and notebook, recording speeds and times. Another interest was in the composition of each train. He noted down not just the engine and the name of the crew but also the numbers of all the carriages on the train. Indeed, keeping a note of the rolling stock numbers was his practice on every train, steam, diesel or electric, upon which he travelled.

After Denis departed NIR his talents were then utilised as a consultant, working in Athens from 1997 to 1999, interspersed with several shorter stints in Hong Kong and Mumbai. From 2000 to 2010 he was based in York as a consultant, with a secondment to the Isle of Man where he was engineer in charge of the Manx Electric Renewal from Douglas to Ramsey.

Denis also found time to be a family man. In 1971 he married Jean and in the 1980s they had two daughters – Alison who is now a GP and Caroline who works with PWC. The Grimshaws set up the family home at Craigdarraigh Park East in Seahill, near Holywood in 1975 and it was perhaps no coincidence that the house had a view of the ferries plying up and down Belfast Lough and was also within walking distance of Seahill railway station.

In retirement, Denis played a leading role in the Society's development of its Whitehead base. He was involved in the funding negotiations, design and

construction of a station building on the platform at Whitehead Excursion Station. Thanks to his influence the new building was modelled externally on the Lanyon-designed Whiteabbey station building, which had long ago been demolished.

The RPSI's Whitehead station building was opened in 2014 and was to be a cornerstone of the long proposed Whitehead Railway Museum. Again, Denis was closely involved in the funding negotiations and design stage of the museum and its five galleries.

From 2014 to 2017 Denis served as RPSI chairman, and perhaps the crowning moment of his role with the RPSI came in June 2016 when he welcomed Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh onto the RPSI steam train to transport them from Coleraine to Bellarena for the official opening of the station there. NIR had chartered the train but it was Denis who had made all the arrangements, with his usual attention to detail. Everything ran perfectly and it was a red-letter day for the RPSI.

There were so many aspects to the life of Denis Grimshaw. He was an inveterate traveller and had an intimate knowledge of many overseas railways. He and Jean

undertook many railway holidays which took them all over the world. One claim to fame of which he was justifiably proud was a trip in the 1980s – entirely by rail – from Belfast York Road via the Trans-Siberian Railway all the way to Hong Kong. It was to prove a unique achievement. At home Denis developed a model railway at Craigdarraigh Park East and on occasions used the model carriages to test out possible new liveries for use on NIR.

Denis Grimshaw, who was 79, died peacefully on April 26, 2024, and tragically this was just eight days after the death of his wife Jean. Jean's funeral took place at Glencraig Parish Church in Seahill on April 29, while a Service of Thanksgiving for the life of Denis was held in the same church on May 4. The coffin was escorted from the church by a piper, a nod to Denis' achievement in learning to play the bagpipes. The RPSI owe a huge debt of gratitude in so many ways to Denis Grimshaw and Jean and expresses heartfelt sympathy to their daughters Alison and Caroline.

Thanks are expressed to Ian Sinclair and Tim Morton for their input into this article.





