

Charity Number: NIC100280

Ulster Historical Foundation
Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements
for the financial year ended 31 March 2025

Ulster Historical Foundation

CONTENTS

	Page
Trustees' and Other Information	3
Trustees' Report	4 - 11
Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities	12
Independent Auditor's Report	13 - 15
Statement of Financial Activities	16
Balance Sheet	17
Notes to the Financial Statements	18 - 28

Ulster Historical Foundation TRUSTEES' AND OTHER INFORMATION

Trustees

Mr Douglas Bartlett
Mr John Gordon
Ms Mary Harte
Dr Myrtle Hill (Resigned 31 July 2024)
Mr John Hunter (Resigned 28 August 2024)
Dr Paula O'Hare
Dr Nick Perry (Appointed 16 January 2025)
Mr Cliff Radcliffe
Mr Alan Skelton
Mr Alan Watson

Chairperson

Sir Denis Desmond, KCVO, CBE

President

His Grace the Duke of Abercorn KG

Charity Number in Northern Ireland

NIC100280

Principal Address

Bradley Thallon House
44D Belfast Road
Kiltonga Industrial Estate
Ballyconnell
Newtownards
BT23 44D

Auditors

Muldoon
Chartered Accountants & Statutory Auditors
16 Mount Charles
Belfast
BT7 1NZ
Northern Ireland

Principal Bankers

AIB
11/15 Donegall Sq North
BT1 5GB
Northern Ireland

Solicitors

Napier and Sons
1-9 Castle Arcade
High Street
BT1 5DF

Ulster Historical Foundation

TRUSTEES' REPORT

for the financial year ended 31 March 2025

The trustees present their Trustees' Report and the unaudited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 March 2025.

The trustees have adopted the provision of the Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) effective 1 January 2015) (Charities SORP (FRS 102)), in preparing the annual report and financial statements of the charity. The statement of Financial Activities (SOFA) shows the gross income from all sources.

The charity is a registered charity and although not obliged to comply with the Statement of Recommended Practice applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland FRS 102, the organisation has implemented its recommendations where relevant in these financial statements.

Mission, Objectives and Strategy

Mission Statement

The Foundation is established for exclusively charitable purposes and is a registered charity with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, NIC100280. The Foundation is presently governed by a trust deed dated 7 October 1998, and a scheme of incorporation dated 10 May 1999, which establishes the Trustees as a body corporate. The trust deed states the objectives of the Foundation as follows:

- to promote and encourage the public study of family history, genealogy, heraldry and local and Irish history with particular reference to Ulster;
- to promote the preservation and publication of the resultant data; and
- to undertake such other activities as shall be charitable at law.

The principal activities of the Foundation include publications, lecture tours, family history conferences, events and courses (heritage activities), a historical and genealogical research and consultancy service, maintenance of a membership society known as the Ulster Genealogical and Historical Guild. The Foundation's website acts as a research portal (<https://ulsterhistoricalfoundation.com/>) with many resources that are free to the general public, 'Discover' areas to explore and advice on how to trace ancestors, plus subscriber-only online databases and digital resources. The Foundation also delivers regular educational programmes in the local community and speaking engagements to the heritage sector in UK and Ireland.

The charity's aims including the changes or differences it seeks to make through its activities

Ulster Historical Foundation was established to encourage an interest in the history of the province of Ulster; promote a positive image of Northern Ireland overseas; strengthen the links between Ireland and those of Ulster descent; broaden access to historical documents and records for Irish and Scots-Irish genealogy; and to inspire pride in Irish and Ulster heritage and culture.

The Foundation is a highly reputable research and publishing agency. It offers extensive knowledge on the sources available for tracing Irish and Scots-Irish ancestors. Services include online databases of over 2.49 million historical records (2.2 million at 31 March 2024), genealogy and history books, and personal ancestral research. Supporters subscribe to its Ulster Genealogical and Historical Guild (the Guild) – where users can share research interests, enjoy access to member-only databases, receive two annual publications, invitations to educational and social events, and product discounts.

The Foundation's website (launched January 2024) is the primary portal through which the charity provides services to members and users, and disseminates advice, information and details of online resources that it has made available to the public. As well as giving access to the millions of records the Foundation has transcribed, the website (ulsterhistoricalfoundation.com) gives free access to a broad range of resources and various former microsites dedicated to specific subjects, including the Plantation of Ulster, the Scots in Ulster, Catholics in the Penal Era, Presbyterianism in Ireland, Ulster Gravestone Inscriptions, and others in development which are all located in the 'Discover' area of the website. The Foundation continues to work to make its expertise more easily available to the local community, and for 20 years the charity has developed historical and family history workshops for adult learners and a broad range of community, heritage and historical organisations, as well as working with a series of partners to facilitate programmes with disadvantaged and socially marginalised groups. Advice is always given freely whether relating to publications projects or genealogical and local history research.

Through its charitable activities the Foundation seeks to sustain interest in local and family history, to celebrate the diversity of the cultural heritage in Ulster and to equip interested, amateur researchers with practical resources and hands-on archival research experience that will enable them to pursue their own research interests. These courses and other outreach activities with the local community help to demonstrate the Foundation's public benefit and value by giving local people access to information and expertise on historical research and also on how to get published.

Ulster Historical Foundation TRUSTEES' REPORT

for the financial year ended 31 March 2025

Objectives

The charity's main objectives and strategies for achieving its objectives for the year

The Foundation's key objectives for 2024–25 included publishing the much-anticipated *Townland Atlas of Ulster* which was launched in December 2024. It enjoyed strong subscription income and pre-orders prior to publication and continued to sell well after publication, selling out the first print run by financial year end, and make ready and launch a new and greatly enhanced web presence at <https://ulsterhistoricalfoundation.com/>. The other main objective was to continue to plough resources into creating digital content for the website. The *Atlas* demonstrated, quite significantly, that by focusing on publishing a valuable research resource that would appeal to the Foundation's core family history audience, it paid dividends. That said, it is fair to comment that there was an element of the 'stars aligning' for this remarkable publication to aid its success, not every genealogical guide the Foundation publishes would likely be so successful.

Two conferences/research programmes were held in September and October 2024 with 18 and 20 registrants respectively at each event.

The Foundation staff continued to work with officers of the Diocese of Down and Connor and Milltown Cemetery to capture the historic burial records for the graveyard, moving on to the public ground records and then the grave owner books, having completed the majority of the burial registers by 31 March 2024.

The instability and concern in the wider global environment and its impact on the macro economy also continued to impact on the charity's activities and income. Discretionary spending by potential customers and clients continued to be retarded. Though in contrast to 2023–24, the success of the *Townland Atlas of Ulster* stands out as a major achievement and helped the Foundation make up income where other activities came under greater pressure from the broader uncertainty and conservative approach to discretionary spending.

The Foundation seeks to pursue a business-orientated strategy without undermining its charitable objectives or by diluting the quality of the work for which it enjoys an international reputation. In addition, it seeks to pay close heed to the needs of the core genealogical market which it serves. In recent years the charity also sought to improve income generated through donations in support of its charitable activities. Building on the fundraising effort continued with the 'Giving Tuesday' campaign which is held on the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving each year. The Foundation also continued its public outreach activities, with a large number of engagements delivered during the year (see below). These and the free resources, access to the research library and general advice that the charity gives to individuals and groups help to demonstrate the general aims and objectives of the charity in respect of its public benefit role.

Strategy

The charity's strategies for achieving its stated objectives

In summer 2023 the organisation undertook a strategic review where a more digitally-focus strategy was adopted. While the Foundation has continued to publish specialist works of an historical nature on aspects of Ulster history it has sought to focus primarily on genealogy guides and resources.

The Foundation offers a genealogical research and historical consultancy service to individual and organisational clients, having adapted and extended the range of services to suit the needs and preferences of clients as the genealogy sector evolves. The charity has also developed the range of resources available to Guild members, and has added considerable new digital content to the website in the past 12 months (from June 2024 to March 2025 some 389,000 records were added/corrected/edited). The website has also resulted in new assets being added for the benefit of members, including a growing digital library of materials that can be remotely accessed. The charity provides access to digitised resources for the general public and members; and the expanded and enhanced guidance/advice on how to begin research greatly contributes to the charity's public benefit role. The outreach programmes locally (e.g. college extra-mural classes, local events and programmes in the members' library) and further afield (e.g. USA lecture tour) and participation at family history fairs in the UK and Ireland are now as they were prior to the Covid pandemic.

The Foundation's charitable status is in recognition of the educational value of its publications, historical research and outreach provision. In that sense its trading activities are also part of its charitable activities, which contribute to its overall stated objectives.

The change in focus adopted during 2023–24 – greater emphasis on the creation and improved access to digital resources and databases – has continued to facilitate the reduction of costs associated with producing hardcopy books. For example, by year end another 30 flipbooks had been added (building on the 235 uploaded in 2023–24). The Foundation also hosted two family history conferences and courses during the year, and the autumn/winter online virtual courses are now part of the calendar – and continuing to prove popular. There is growing evidence that the online courses are a gateway to membership, further research or attendance at the in-person conferences.

Ulster Historical Foundation

TRUSTEES' REPORT

for the financial year ended 31 March 2025

The online historic births, deaths and marriages (across the island of Ireland), performed reasonably well during 2024–25 against the backdrop of such an uncertain global environment and competition, but income declined again, perhaps reflecting the fact that the website and assets have been available for a long time and reaching new audiences is difficult in the present economic climate.

External competitors continue to take a significant slice of business in an already crowded market. These organisations have significantly greater resources and operate on a global scale, they therefore continue to make the genealogy sector a crowded and highly competitive environment.

Details of the significant activities that contribute to the achievement of stated objectives

The core activities undertaken by the Foundation, which also generate a significant proportion of the Foundation's revenue, contribute to the stated objectives of the charity. The year saw coming to fruition one of the Foundation's most significant and successful publications in years – the *Townland Atlas of Ulster* by Andrew Kane (Dec. 2024), also published in year were *Years of Trial and Terror: The Irish State and Northern Ireland, 1969–75* by Ian Wood (Mar. 2025); *Plantation Churches: Places of Worship in Early Seventeenth-century Ulster* by William Roulston and Tom McNeill (Mar. 2025); *Ulster 1912–22: Change, controversy and conflict* by Alan Parkinson and Brian Walker (eds) (Sep. 2024); a reprint of *Abercorn: The Hamiltons of Barons Court* by William Roulston (June 2024); *St Malachy's College and the Great War* (Apr. 2024). In addition, during the year two important works were brought back into print via digital print on demand (POD), including, *The Londonderry Plantation, 1609–41: The City of London and the Plantation of Ulster* by T.W. Moody, and *Colonial Ulster: The Settlement of East Ulster 1600–1641* by Raymond Gillespie.

The Foundation received 43 registrations for full ancestral reports plus 2 follow-on commissions for additional research, for which clients paid an initial fee. In addition, it registered some 19 'Z' files – specific and limited pieces of research for clients – a category of research introduced to reflect the changing needs of research clients. In addition, 66 one-to-one consultations (of which 33 were in-person and 33 were via Zoom) were undertaken for clients; and 52 preliminary assessments were registered during the year. Two new services introduced when the relaunched website went live in January 2024 included Assisted Research at the archives, with four clients availing of this in 2024–25 (same number as the prior year) and eight clients registered for the Irish Citizenship Research (compared to five in the previous year). While the number of new files registered in this year remained broadly similar as the previous year, as the hourly rate charged to clients was increased in spring 2023, as with the last financial year has resulted in the income generated from these activities increasing.

The charity continued to fulfil its public benefit role during the year by making its expertise accessible virtually or via its website, and its local public engagement continued with a significant number of talks and presentations delivered for local societies, groups and heritage events.

The Foundation maintains a database of interests of the Ulster diaspora through subscribers to the Guild, with a register of 1,480 subscribers at the end of the financial year. Staff undertook a lecture tour in the USA in February-March 2025 (last visited in 2023), delivering 21 seminars or one-one-one consultation sessions in less than three weeks. The online winter Irish Genealogical Essentials course attracted 35 registrants. These activities each in their turn, contribute directly to the achievement of the stated objectives of the Foundation.

Volunteers

The Foundation has offered placements for more than twenty years to volunteers placed by various organisations such as New Horizons, Mencap, the Cedar Foundation, and the NOW Group. The Foundation offers volunteers in-person work experience at the offices and also offers individuals the possibility of working remotely from home. The volunteers have contributed in a meaningful way to the activities of the Foundation over the years and the charity seeks to offer placements again as it had done before the pandemic.

Structure, Governance and Management

Structure

The Foundation can appoint up to 14 trustees who meet quarterly. The Board appoint a chairman and vice-chairman annually at the Annual General Meeting. There are also honorary positions of President (The Duke of Abercorn KG), and Vice-President (The Lord O'Neill). The Executive Director is appointed by the Trustees to manage the operations of the Foundation including the production of business and strategic plans and the preparation of the annual financial statements.

Trustees are recruited by selection via advertisements placed on the Foundation's website and with bodies such as the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) as well as networking. Applicants are invited to submit an expression of interest outlining their skills and experience. Applications are considered by the Trustees and appointments made following the deliberations of the Trustees based on pre-determined criteria.

Ulster Historical Foundation

TRUSTEES' REPORT

for the financial year ended 31 March 2025

Governance

New trustees have an initial meeting with the Chairman and are provided with briefing material which normally includes:

- a copy of the Ulster Historical Foundation ('UHF') constitution, scheme of incorporation and charity registration documentation;
- copies of minutes from previous meetings of the Trustees;
- copies of Ulster Historical Foundation's 50th anniversary booklet (published May 2007) and *A Vision Realised* (produced in the mid-90s), both of which give a very useful synopsis of the early history of the Foundation; and;
- copies of previous annual reports, the business plan and subsequent updates.

In accordance with the Constitution, the trustees retire by rotation and, being eligible, offer themselves for re-election.

The Trustees appoint sub-committees dealing with finance, resources and governance issues, and publications. These sub committees oversee the direction of the Foundation as well as collaboration with external bodies.

The Foundation is a member of, or signed up to, NICVA, the Irish Family History Foundation, the Fundraising Regulator, the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and some other trade affiliated bodies, however these networks have no impact on the operating policies of the charity.

In the year ended 2007 the Foundation created a dormant company, Ulster Historical Enterprises Limited (UHEL). Its intended use was to undertake certain commercial activities to enable the charity to pursue more effectively its charitable objectives. UHEL is a limited company with shares, the sole shareholder being the Ulster Historical Foundation. The company is currently dormant having not yet traded. The dormant subsidiary has not been consolidated as there were no transactions during the year or in the preceding year.

Governance and Risk Management

The Finance and Resources Committee ('FRC') considers issues relating to corporate governance to ensure that the Foundation follows best practice.

The FRC has reviewed the major risks and in addition to the obvious risks of financing and damage or destruction to the office and its contents, a further major risk is the potential abuse and breach of copyright of digital material published online, and cyber-attacks on businesses generally which have increased significantly in recent years. The Trustees are mindful of this possibility, and online systems have been developed with security of the data as the primary concern. The levels of risk from commercial competitors in potential breaches of copyright are considered regularly at committee and Board level, and the Trustees have from time to time asserted their right to protect information belonging to the organisation and will continue to do so when the need arises.

During the financial year a risk Sub-Committee was established to produce and regularly update the organisation's Risk Register, which is circulated to the Board at meetings, as well as considering emerging risks, especially in the area of cyber security, and mitigations and safeguards that might be put in place to reduce the risk or impact on the Foundation's assets and the running of its activities.

Review of Achievements and Performance

Publications

The year saw coming to fruition one of the Foundation's most significant and successful publications in years – the *Townland Atlas of Ulster* by Andrew Kane (Dec. 2024), also published in year were *Years of Trial and Terror: The Irish State and Northern Ireland, 1969–75* by Ian Wood (Mar. 2025); *Plantation Churches: Places of Worship in Early Seventeenth-century Ulster* by William Roulston and Tom McNeill (Mar. 2025); *Ulster 1912–22: Change, controversy and conflict* by Alan Parkinson and Brian Walker (eds) (Sep. 2024); a reprint of *Abercorn: The Hamiltons of Barons Court* by William Roulston (June 2024); *St Malachy's College and the Great War* (Apr. 2024). In addition, during the year two important works were brought back into print via digital print on demand (POD), including, *The Londonderry Plantation, 1609-41: The City of London and the Plantation of Ulster* by T. W. Moody, and *Colonial Ulster: The Settlement of East Ulster 1600–1641* by Raymond Gillespie.

Income from publications for the year increased from £75,912 (2023–24) to £167,255, an increase of £91,343. This very significant increase was largely due to the success of the *Townland Atlas of Ulster*, which enjoyed strong subscriptions and pre-orders and equally strong sales when it was launched at the end of the calendar year 2024.

Ulster Historical Foundation TRUSTEES' REPORT

for the financial year ended 31 March 2025

As a result of the success of this large book, expenditure on publications increased from £53,598 (2023–24) to £107,154 for 2024–25, an increase of £53,556, of which some £51,780 related to postage and shipping costs. The high costs of postage and shipping meant that while direct costs of publishing could be reduced, the costs of fulfilling orders remain significantly high (and the end user in nearly all cases is paying for all or most of the shipping cost).

Grants, sponsorship and donations

Grants, sponsorship and donations received during the year totalled £ 50,825 compared to £52,660 in 2023–24 (a slight decrease of £1,835). Restricted income received for specific projects included: £20,000 Esme Mitchell Year 3 funding (from a multi-year award in 2021–22); £6,000 from the Cooper Richardson Fund towards the *Townland Atlas*, £1,000 towards a publication on the life of Rev. Andrew Byrson, published in April 2025.

Genealogical and research services

Revenue from all genealogical and research services stood at £236,878 compared to £249,923 in 2023–24, a decrease of £13,045. Income from search fees increased from £36,985 last year to £37,211 in 2024–25, a modest rise of £226. Income from Research Consultancy increased from £19,773 in 2024–25 to £34,148, an increase of £14,375. Given that historical consultancy projects usually rely on third party funding, and in some cases the Foundation has to tender for projects in open competition, income from this nominal is prone to fluctuate from year to year. The largest portion of this consultancy income related to the work with the Diocese of Down and Connor for the Milltown Cemetery project.

Income from sales of online birth, marriage and death records declined to £55,619 from £63,971 in 2023–24, a reduction of £8,353.

Costs of research services decreased from £54,030 in 2023–24 to £45,968, a reduction of £8,062. This is partly explained by the reduction in overall research income for the year, where higher salary and wage costs would be directly incurred for delivering the services to more clients, for example, conference attendance.

Guild

Income from Guild services decreased from £52,539 in 2023–24 to £ 43,421, a fall of £9,118. Related expenditure on Guild activities also decreased as a result and stood at £17,956 compared to £22,578 last year, a reduction of £4,622. The very high cost of shipping materials overseas continues to be an issue, though the decision in 2021–22 to introduce a digital version of the *Directory of Irish Family History Research*, where members could opt for a digital-only subscription and thus forgo a top-up fee to receive a hard copy by post, is proving popular and is helping to lower costs.

The number of paid-up subscribers at the end of the current financial year was 1,480 compared to 1,348 in 2023–24 (an increase of 132), of which 934 paid an annual subscription (new or renewing) in the year (this includes basic guild, Guild Plus and Starter Kits). The number of members for calendar year January to December 2024 stood at 1,390. The total number of five-year members in the financial year was 303 (2023–24: 314). There were 241 life members (including honorary), with three new life members joining in the financial year (2023–24: one). As in recent years a number of long-standing members have either passed away or have taken the decision to allow their membership to lapse due to age.

Conferences, courses and classes

The Foundation hosted two in-person family history conferences and courses in PRONI during the financial year: a September conference and an October research programme. Income from these activities stood at £46,391 against £55,105 for last year, a decrease of £8,714.

The online Irish Genealogical Essentials course attracted 35 registrants during autumn/winter 2024/25 compared to 29 for the same programme in 2023–24, generating £12,950 (compared to £10,725 for the prior year) against which there is almost no direct expenditure other than a small amount of core staff time administering the programme and taking part in the scheduled live Q&As in which the participants take part.

Direct costs related to the conference events stood at £14,035 compared to £20,639 for the previous year, representing a reduction of £6,603 in expenditure. While there were fewer overall attendees at event in this year (38) compared to last year (70), savings were also made due to planned simplified itineraries and activities. That said, to make the programmes fresh and appealing to potential guests each year, the programmes can vary quite a bit and thus may have an impact on the variance in costs (as well as income) when compared year to year.

Ulster Historical Foundation

TRUSTEES' REPORT

for the financial year ended 31 March 2025

Outward promotion

A lecture tour took place in the USA from 28 February to 18 March 2025 with Fintan Mullan and Gillian Hunt delivering 21 programmes in the following locations: Oakland CA (2 x events); Seattle WA; Pittsburgh PA (x 2 events); Phoenix AZ (2 x events); Atlanta GA; Green Bay WI (2 x events); Minneapolis MN (2 x events); Chicago (Newberry Library) IL; Bentonville AR (2 x events); Dallas TX (2 x events) and Bolingbrook IL (2 x events). Since 2024 staff have initiated a change in the programming by delivering in most locations two days of activities: one day devoted to one-to-one consultations and one to the lecture programme. This change has proved to be a success. The consultations help to offset the decline in book sales post-Covid. In addition, it allows the team to spend more time with participants and to build friendships and relationships and is less physically onerous on the staff.

Income from the tour was approx. £23,255 for speaker fees, book sales, consultations and Guild subscriptions and other items. Direct expenditure was £9,144, giving a gross surplus of some £14,401. This does not include staff time involved in delivering the programmes. That said, experience has shown that over the longer term the tours generate further business in terms of research commissions, membership subscriptions, conference and course bookings, book sales and can lead to further invitations to speak overseas. While difficult to quantify, given that it might be several years before someone who attended a programme commissions research or registers for a conference, the additional income generated as a result of these activities is an important factor in undertaking them. They also help to project a positive image of the organisation overseas and enables the charity to publicise and promote its activities and public benefit role.

Local community engagement

Research Director, Dr William Roulston, had another busy year with local engagements these included: 25 April 2024, Waringstown Historical Society, on the Volunteer Convention in Dungannon in February 1782; 30 April 2024, Causeway Coast and Glens Branch of the NIFHS (Coleraine), on the genealogical value of the Ordnance Survey Memoirs of the 1830s; 8 May 2024, a special event organised by the Coleraine Historical Society and Ulster University to mark the former's fortieth anniversary, on the life of Dr Brian Trainor; 20 May 2024, Foyle Branch of the NIFHS (Derry), on researching farming ancestors in Ireland; 15 June 2024, Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, on the life of Rev. John Livingston (at Killinchy Parish Church); 19 to 22 June, 24th Ulster-American Heritage Symposium, hosted by the Mellon Centre for Migration Studies at the Ulster American Folk Park, on the transatlantic journeys of John James Elder from Castlefin, County Donegal; 18 July 2024, Alley Theatre, Strabane (Derry City and Strabane District Council), on North-west Ireland and North America, 1675–1775; 26 September 2024, the opening lecture at the inaugural Ballintoy History Festival organised by the Ballintoy Archaeological and Historical Society, on Ballintoy in the eighteenth century; 30 September 2024, Stewartstown Historical Society, on people and the land in early eighteenth-century Ulster; 26 October 2024, 30th anniversary conference organised by the British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa, on researching farming ancestors in Ireland (online); 21 November 2024, Portglenone Historical Society, on Hugh Gaine of Portglenone and the American Revolution; 10 December 2024, Bellaghy Historical Society, on people and the land in early eighteenth-century Ulster; 11 January 2025, New Hampshire Society of Genealogists, on researching families in Ulster, 1600–1750 (online); 22 January 2025, Ards Historical Society, on Edward Bruce and Ireland, 1315–18; 29 January 2025, Ranfurly House, Dungannon (Mid Ulster Council), on Towns and Traders in Plantation Ulster; and 18 February 2025, Ballymoney U3A, on researching farming ancestors in Ireland.

During the year Research Officer, Gillian Hunt, delivered an 8-week family history course to the Greater Shankill Community Council, which included a guided visit to use the Record Office in Belfast. The group has invited Gillian to run the course again starting in April 2026. In addition, she spoke to the Boardmills Women's Institute in May 2024, Aghalee Church of Ireland – Aghalee Parish Heritage Project (which was part of a previous wider project which involved several workshops over a longer period) and in November 2024 delivered an online presentation in promotion of the 'British Institute' held in Salt Lake City for the International Society for British Genealogy and Family History. Separately Fintan Mullan presented online for the Ontario Genealogical Society in September 2024 and, like Gillian, gave a separate presentation for the International Society for British Genealogy and Family History in November 2024.

Board membership

There were four changes to the Board of Trustees during the financial year 2024–25. Dr Myrtle Hill stood down on 31 July 2024, and John Hunter retired from the Board following the trustees meeting on 28 August 2024. Dr Nick Perry joined the board in January 2025, attending his first meeting at the AGM held on 16 January 2025 at Ballyrenan House, Newtown Stewart, Co. Tyrone. Finally, Anne Marie McAleese was invited to join the Board in January 2025 and attended her first meeting on 8 May 2025, just shortly after year end.

Financial Review

At 31 March 2025 the charity owed £33,871 in respect of the Bounce Back Loan, having repaid a further £5,590 by year end.

Ulster Historical Foundation

TRUSTEES' REPORT

for the financial year ended 31 March 2025

While running costs such as gas and electricity have reduced somewhat from the exceptionally expensive prices of the previous two years, they remain for the charity, like most small organisations, an additional financial burden. Similarly, freight and postage costs for shipping customer orders (especially overseas) remain very expensive demonstrated by the high postage costs incurred in mailing the successful but weighty *Townland Atlas*. It is to the success of the *Townland Atlas* that the Foundation had a reasonably good year, with a small surplus still showing, after the gain on revaluation of assets – donation of newspaper volumes – is set aside.

The results for the financial year are set out on page 16 and additional notes are provided showing income and expenditure in greater detail.

Results and Dividends

At the end of the financial year the charity has assets of £484,163 (2024 – £457,964) and liabilities of £77,141 (2024 – £70,042). The net assets of the charity have increased by £26,199.

Reserves Position and Policy

The Trustees have reviewed the level of free reserves, defined as unrestricted funds that are readily available to support the ongoing activities of the Foundation and not tied up in operational assets.

In assessing free reserves, the Trustees have excluded tangible fixed assets used in the day-to-day operations of the Foundation, as these assets are not readily available to meet ongoing funding needs. Accordingly, computer equipment (£44,137), furniture, fixtures and equipment (£1,249) and property renovation costs (£400) have been excluded from free reserves (total 45,786). The Trustees have, however, included heritage assets (£203,100) within free reserves, as these assets are considered readily realisable and not required for the Foundation's ongoing operations.

After making these adjustments, free reserves at 31 March 2025 amounted to £ 406,682, which represents approximately 11 months of running costs. The Trustees consider this level of free reserves to be appropriate to maintain financial resilience while supporting the Foundation's strategic objectives. The reserves policy will be reviewed annually.

Plans for the future

The Trustees' objective is to seek to continue to secure the financial viability of the organisation. The website and a greater focus on digital content will continue to be a major objective for the period immediately ahead. More flipbooks will be added to the online digital library and significant releases of new database content (for members and the public) are planned. Staff will extend the broad range of content with new subjects for the 'Discover' area of the website, with the 'A Sense of Place' section launched post year end, and work on 'Irish Migration', 'Big Houses and Estates in Ireland' and the digital *Atlas* (see below) ongoing.

With a stronger focus on digital assets and the website as the primary interface with the public, the Trustees have established a Risk Sub-Committee. A Risk Register is reviewed regularly. Cyber security is being prioritised, with a cyber security lead appointed from the staff to assist the risk sub-committee develop an incident response plan to prepare for any future incidents.

The organisation will vary the schedules for its in-person archival programmes to continue to attract overseas visitors to Belfast. These will include in 2025–26 three research-only events. In addition, staff will seek to attract participants to the virtual online genealogy courses offered through the winter months. The winter online course was re-recorded for November 2024 to be reused in 2025 but with additional 'bonus' content planned.

The Foundation will continue to work with the Diocese of Down and Connor to digitise and transcribe records for Belfast Milltown Cemetery. Work will also continue on Catholic church registers for the period 1900 up to 1930.

In December 2024 the Foundation launched the *Townland Atlas of Ulster* to almost universal acclaim. The book went out of print by the year end (and a reprint was produced post year end, in June 2025). The aim, as stated in the trustees' report for 2023–24, is to turn the *Atlas* into a digital resource hosted on the Foundation's website. Much more than simply putting the contents of the book online, this will take time and significant investment, but we believe it will be worth it for the end result will be something hugely valuable for researchers who are pursuing ancestors in the nine counties of Ulster.

Compliance with Sector-Wide Legislation and Standards

The charity engages pro-actively with legislation, standards and codes which are developed for the sector. Ulster Historical Foundation subscribes to and is compliant with the following:

- The Charities SORP (FRS 102)

Ulster Historical Foundation

TRUSTEES' REPORT

for the financial year ended 31 March 2025

Going Concern

The Trustees have reviewed their business plan, forecasts and the level of reserves held by the Foundation. After making enquiries, the Trustees have a reasonable expectation that the Foundation has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. Accordingly, they continue to adopt the going concern basis in preparing the annual report and financial statements.

Public Benefit

Acknowledgement of the Foundation's public benefit role was confirmed with the award of charity registration in August 2014. Passing the public benefit test for each objective of the charity was a crucial part of the exercise to gain registered charity status. Recognition of the Foundation's public benefit gives the Trustees confidence that its work is valued by, and of value to, the wider community in Northern Ireland.

Through its various means of outreach (within the British Isles and further afield) the Foundation demonstrates the benefit of its service to the general public. The public can visit its offices, 9:30am to 4:30pm Monday to Friday, to make enquiries, ask for general advice and pick up free resources or useful materials. Appointments for in-person as well as virtual consultations can be made via the office. The Foundation makes available many resources online free of charge, including how-to guides, free indexes to records, case studies of research techniques, and free e-Books, and they continued to be available during the year.

Since the new website was launched in January 2024 significant new digital resources have been made available to the public without charge, including flipbooks, databases and content-rich 'Discover' areas enabling individuals to explore different historical periods or topics related to Ulster history in considerable detail.

The Foundation's staff deal with general and specific queries from the public by telephone, email, and in-person visits to the office. This year also saw a return of local speaking engagements to more pre-pandemic levels of activity. During the year staff were busy, often at weekends and evenings (i.e. usually out of office hours), and contributed to the proceedings of local history societies and interest groups (see Local Community Engagement above for details). Staff undertook a USA lecture tour in February–March 2025. While some engagements were virtual or hybrid (not least those delivered for overseas organisations), the vast majority of local activities were in-person events.

The Foundation's offices have free onsite parking and direct access to a Translink route making it accessible to the general public, for locals and visitors alike. The research library is available for staff and members, though curious members of the public are always given free access to the facility should they make contact. The library can be used to host a range of free events, advisory sessions and book launches which are all open to the general public.

The Foundation gives advice and assistance to under- and post-graduate students (to whom it often also provides non-remunerated internships) and authors with advice on how to publish their project, whether or not it is with this organisation. It does similarly with those undertaking local/community-based research projects. In addition, the Foundation accommodates academic and non-academic researchers, giving them access to the databases, research library and expertise, in nearly all cases without charge.

The senior staff give of their time on the boards of other organisations, including: the Irish Family History Foundation, PRONI's Users' Forum, the Presbyterian Historical Society, The People of Plantation Ulster Project (formerly Ulster Settlers Database) Advisory Board and the Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society. General advice is regularly offered to local history groups and individuals seeking to publish or deliver a heritage-related project in their area, regardless of whether the Foundation is the publisher or delivery agent. Significant digital resources on the Foundation's websites, free or otherwise, are accessible to the public.

Approved by the Board of Trustees on 15 January 2026 and signed on its behalf by:


Sir Denis Desmond, KCVO, CBE
Chairperson

Ulster Historical Foundation
STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES
for the financial year ended 31 March 2025

The trustees are responsible for preparing the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulations.

The law applicable to charities in Northern Ireland requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the assets, liabilities and financial position of the charity as at the financial year end date and of the surplus or deficit of the charity and otherwise comply with the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

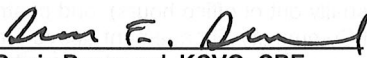
In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP
- make judgements and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether the financial statements have been prepared in accordance with applicable accounting standards, identify those standards, and note the effect and the reasons for any material departure from those standards; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in operation.

The trustees confirm that they have complied with the above requirements in preparing the financial statements.

The trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the charity's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Approved by the Board of Trustees on 15 January 2026 and signed on its behalf by:


Sir Denis Desmond, KCVO, CBE
Chairperson