



DOWNPATRICK AND COUNTY DOWN RAILWAY

**DOWNPATRICK AND COUNTY DOWN RAILWAY
SOCIETY LIMITED**

Annual Trustee Report

For the year to end 31 December 2023

Registered in Northern Ireland as a Limited Company Registration No. NI018685

Recognised by the Inland Revenue as a Charity No. 101640

V.A.T. Reg. No. 617 614 541

Annual Trustee Report
Year ended 31 December 2023

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Reference and Administrative Details

Company/ Charity Name

Downpatrick and County Down Railway Society Limited

Company Registration Number

Registered as a Company with Company Registration Number NI018685

Charity Number

Registered Charity in Northern Ireland Number 101640

Principal Address

The Railway Station
Market Street
Downpatrick
Co Down
BT30 6LZ

Directors and Charity Trustees as of 31 December 2023

Robert Gardiner

Mike Beckett

Norman Bodel

David Crone

Ian Cross

Niall Kelly (Appointed from 30 September 2023)

Jonathan King (Appointed from 18 January 2023)

Innis Mennie

John Noble (Company Secretary and Director)

Morgan Young

Patrons as of 31 December 2023

Honorary President, John Wilson

Vice-President, Gerry Cochrane

Banking

Danske Bank
P.O. Box 183
Donegal Square West
Belfast
BT1 6JS

Nationwide Building Society
Swindon
SN38 1NW

Accountants/Auditors

Norman Elliott Chartered Accountants.
13 English Street
Downpatrick
BT30 6AB

Structure, Governance, and Management

The Society is a limited company with charitable status and governed on a day-to-day basis by a Board of Directors. The Board of Directors are elected at the Society Annual General Meeting (AGM) in accordance with the Articles of Association.

The Society has an Honorary President and Vice- President, which for 2023 were John Wilson (Honorary President) and Gerry Cochrane (Vice-President).

The Board of Directors of the Society meet on a regular basis to set the strategic direction of the Society and have responsibility for the relevant departments across the Society.

The Articles of Association state that each year, at least one third of the Board of Directors must retire and seek re-election. It is further stated in the Articles of Association that Directors of the Board shall elect a Chairman from amongst their number following the AGM.

Whilst Directors are not elected to a particular portfolio, it is expected that Directors assume specific portfolio's following the Annual General Meeting. The portfolios are as outlined below:

Chairman
Vice Chairman
Company Secretary
Chief Mechanical Engineer
Chief Civil Engineer
Operations
Finance Officer
Marketing & Communications
Membership Secretary
Compliance
Buildings

Several Person of Special Responsibility (PSR) posts exist and include **Museum Curator, Permanent Way Inspector** and **Workshop Manager**. These are not affected by an AGM election.

In 2023 the Board of Directors were as noted above.

The Society currently has one part time employee.

Objectives and Activities

Society Statement of Purpose

The Downpatrick and County Down Railway Society Limited exists to allow visitors to experience travelling over a section of the original Belfast & County Down Railway which has been restored as a working railway museum.

To achieve this the museum collects, restores or conserves and maintains in operating condition, railway vehicles and equipment which best serve to illustrate the operation and development of Irish standard gauge railways. Research and publication of related materials is also undertaken.

Our collection includes locomotives, carriages, wagons, and other items of equipment from the second half of the 19th century and the 20th century and used to promote an understanding of our railway heritage and social conditions of that period. In addition, documents and items relating to the original Belfast & County Down Railway are collected, conserved, and displayed to allow study and research into that railways effect on the area of County Down that it served.

In making the collection available to the public, the museum also aims to promote tourism and the economic regeneration of the district.

Forward/Action Plan

In the coming years the strategic focus of the Downpatrick and County Down Railway Society Limited shall be to potentially plan, where practical, further expansion of the railway in several key areas, as previously outlined in our 2008 Future Directions document and a revised 5 Year Strategic Plan.

Ballydugan Extension

It should be noted that we remain committed to actively pursuing the extension of the railway along the former Newcastle alignment to Ballydugan and shall remain in active cooperation with officials from Newry, Mourne & Down District Council to acquire the necessary track-bed. It is noted that planned projects may need to be reevaluated within this document considering any significant breakthrough.

Downpatrick Racecourse Extension

Progress on advocating the Downpatrick Racecourse extension has stalled, however avenues to promote this as a viable scheme should be taken wherever possible, and works should be planned or designed with the potential for expansion in mind.

St Patrick Centre Extension

The St Patrick Centre extension came closest to realisation with the Carriage Gallery Heritage Lottery application, however delays in administration at the then council Down District Council led to it being shelved. Interest from other parties, such as the St Patrick Centre itself, remains high. The expansion east would also allow track realignment in Downpatrick Station to utilise the full length of the platform and so this extension should be considered for resurrection as either a standalone project or as part of a larger one.

Inch Abbey Development

As our current terminus the facilities at Inch Abbey will need to grow, through expansion of the car park, provision of toilets, as well as general maintenance and repair of the platform/or replacement of it, along with new signalling systems to make operations simpler.

Consideration shall also be given to potential for either extension of the line to the proposed new hotel on the Abbey Lodge site as per the Future Directions document, or park and ride options with this new venture.

Achievements and Performance in 2023

I am delighted to outline the achievements, challenges, and progress the Downpatrick and County Down Railway Society has made over the past year.

From diesel galas to dinosaurs, superheroes to the supernatural, and from circuses to Christmas, our calendar was certainly packed this year with brand new events and the return of old favourites—many for the first time since 2019. Add to this all the track work, carriage restorations, and locomotive overhauls (plus a mountain of less photogenic behind-the-scenes work), and we have had quite the busy year. It was a very enjoyable (if exhausting) year for our volunteers, at least until the end of October.

2023 was supposed to be our first full year of normal service since COVID, but sadly it did not turn out that way. As most of our members will know, October saw heavy rain, and by early November, the entire railway was around four feet underwater. Not only did this setback a lot of our restoration work and land us with a very hefty repair bill, but it also meant that we would not be running trains for quite some time.

Not all was lost, however, and with the generous assistance of Down County Museum, we were able to salvage a replacement Santa event to round the year out. No trains, but still, plenty of happy families, and that is the important part.

In the aftermath, the railway was visited by several VIPs, including Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Lord Caine; Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Hilary Benn; Senator Niall Blaney; our MP, all of our MLAs, and all councillors in the Downpatrick DEA, who came to see the damage and pledge their support.

Since then, the railway's efforts and resilience have been rewarded with full permission to resume public operations from the Department for Infrastructure's Rail Safety Authority. This is a testament to our volunteers and, very importantly, the local community, who rallied to our aid in the initial days and weeks following the flooding.

The year had begun so promisingly, with a highly successful diesel gala kicking things off in January with our own and the Irish Traction Group's locomotives. Between brake van rides, lineside photography sessions, and thrash-filled run-pasts, a great time was had by passengers and volunteers alike—along with the contingent

of Iarnród Éireann drivers who came up to travel on the engines they drove 'back in the day'.

This was followed by a completely revamped St Patrick's Day "Shamrock Express"—the first since 2019—which saw us abandon the Park'n'Ride concept we had been using since the Inch Abbey extension opened in 2004. Partnering with Newry, Mourne, and Down District Council and Tumbling Paddy (no, not the band), the Shamrock Express carried just over 1,000 passengers. Travellers were treated to live music on board the train, butter-making, storytelling, and freshly made soda farls at Inch Abbey. The Easter Eggspress also made a welcome return, with Superheroes NI now acting as "agent" for the Easter Bunny—another sell-out event.

Speaking of Superheroes NI, our ever-popular SuperTrain returned twice in 2023—once in May with the Marvel gang (this time with Loki as a new villain), and again in August with a DC Comics theme, when the Joker and Harley Quinn kidnapped our Company Secretary! Thankfully, Superheroes NI sent Batman, the Flash, and Wonder Woman to sort them out, and with the help of our volunteers and hundreds of mini heroes, the railway was saved. We also hosted the Downpatrick Artisan Market as our summer steam trains kicked off.

We continued to reach out to new partners, loaning the 'Derry Girls Trolley' that featured so heavily (complete with £50 KitKats) to the Tower Museum in Derry for their new Derry Girls exhibition. We also signed a new partnership with AMC Training and Consultancy, allowing the railway to be used to train apprentices for the "big railway". Our thanks go to Matt Taylor for his passion in driving this forward.

Our favourite terrible lizards also made a welcome return, with a double helping of our Jurassic Express trains in July, as well as the return of Afternoon Teas for the first time since 2019 (thanks to Mange Tout for providing the delicious food), and our first ever "Circus Train" event run in partnership with our good friends at Cirkus Kablitz.

There is almost too much to mention, but other noteworthy developments included work on Bridge 164 to install check rails and replacement metal walkways, recently acquired Tamber 5 coming into the workshop for overhaul, and power car 69's restoration advancing, as well as GSWR 90 moving to the loco shed in preparation for its return to service. Additionally, the CIE four-wheel 'Tin Van' and the Ulster Railway Saloon No. 33 entered the workshop for heavy restoration, and Rosie, the Wickham railcar, completed its brake trials after emerging from the workshops following a lengthy overhaul.

Then, of course, came the rain. But we have already touched on that. I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to our volunteers, whose dedication and passion are the driving force not only behind our successes, but also our survival over – let us just say it – absolutely crazy challenges we have been faced with since the pandemic. Their tireless efforts, enthusiasm, and willingness to adapt in the face of challenges have been truly inspiring.

A huge thank you to our volunteers, passengers, donors, members, partners, and everyone else who has supported us through what turned out to be an exceptionally challenging year. Our fingers are crossed for a happier (and drier) 2024 and 2025, with trains running through the County Down countryside once again.

There was an analogy that the US comedian Stephen Colbert used recently to describe US politics – that it felt fun again, and that while the last ten years certainly felt important, it felt more like bailing a boat rather than sailing a boat. When you are so consumed with how to keep something afloat, it is stressful. It is important, but he felt they could kind of look up and say, "Where do we want to take this thing?"

In a way, the railway has felt like that since the Covid pandemic, and while I don't underestimate some of the work ahead – for instance, the bridges will need further investigation and investment, as well as eventually replacing the platform at Inch – perhaps we can start plotting a new course for where we want to take this boat.

In conclusion, I am proud of what we have achieved together in the face of adversity. The Downpatrick and County Down Railway's legacy continues to thrive, and I am confident that, with our collective determination, we will emerge from these challenging times even stronger.

Robert Gardiner
Chairman

Marketing

This marketing report covers the period January 2023 until December 2023.

While I have only officially held this portfolio as a director since September 2023, I have been involved in marketing as an ordinary volunteer for a few months prior.

I am lucky to have inherited what I would regard as a well-oiled marketing machine and thank Mike Beckett who has looked after the marketing portfolio prior to this in addition to his countless other duties, and for his continued mentoring as I am 'let loose' with it. Mike is also the brains behind our website, and, while outside the time of this report, has been undertaking a major overhaul of the same behind the scenes, keep an eye out. Thanks, are also due to John Noble and Kathryn Casement for keeping me straight when it comes to budgets and other administrative fun.

Our Facebook page has one of the highest followership of any heritage rail group on the island of Ireland, with well over 20,000 followers by the end of 2023. Credit is due to the main Facebook team of Mike Beckett, Robert Gardiner, Jonathan King, and Morgan Young. I believe its healthy balance of friendly, informal content with some historical and enthusiast posts is key to this success.

Turn on Facebook story insights

See more

Content

Daily Cumulative
See more

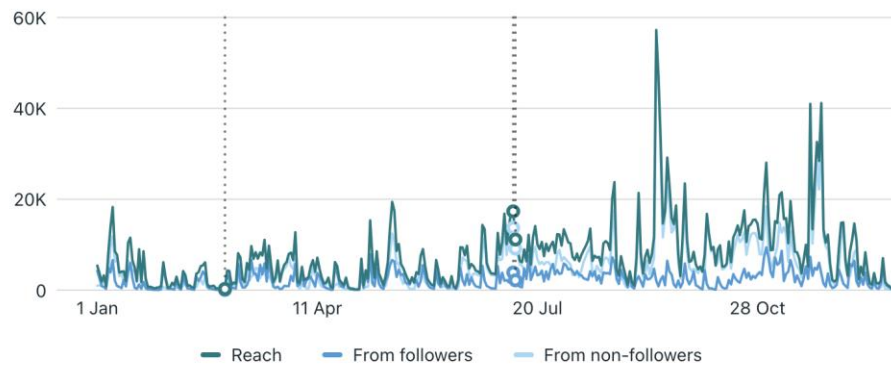
Reach
1.1M
↑ 486.3%

3-second views
255.3K
↑ 465.9%

1-minute views
24.8K
↑ 468.8%

Minutes viewed
82d 1h
↑ 559.3%

Content interactions
58K
↑ 231.7%



Reach breakdown
1 Jan 2023 - 31 Dec 2023

Total
1,080,356
↑ 486.3%

From followers
18,750
↑ 29.6%

From non-followers
1,064,954
↑ 525.7%

Audience

See more

Facebook followers
22.6K
Lifetime

Net follows
2.9K
↑ 13.3%

Returning viewers
239
↑ 431.1%

Engaged followers
--
Last 14 days

Follower growth rate
-71.17%
Last 14 days

Audience

Export

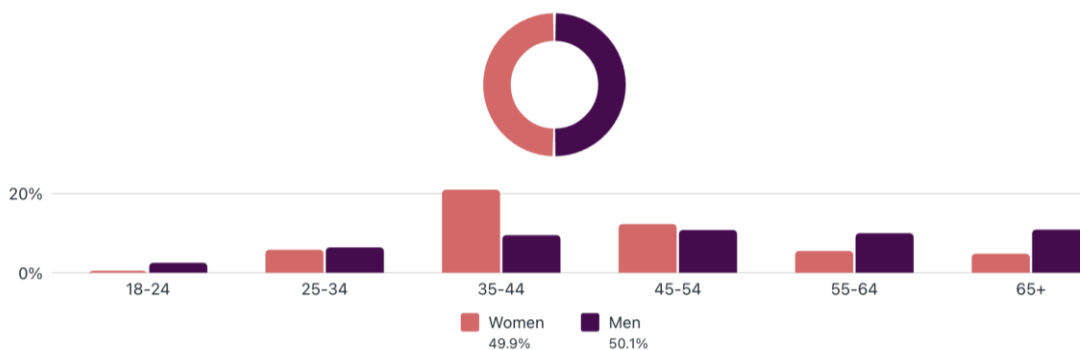
Current audience

Potential audience

Facebook followers

22,576

Age & gender



A look at our Facebook stats for the year 2023.

Since taking on the role, I have tried to expand our presence on other social media channels, on which we have had a presence to a degree but are now being updated to a similar extent as our Facebook page. This has paid some dividends; without summer 2023 bookings having discernibly come through the Instagram story function. LinkedIn might seem a bit left field for heritage railway marketing, but we are seeing quite a bit of engagement there from rail industry professionals and is proving to be an ideal platform to showcase our partnership with AMC Training & Consultancy, no doubt to mutual benefit. We have even had a potential volunteer query through the channel, so it is worthwhile.

In collaboration with our membership secretary Innis Mennie and Vice Chairperson Mike Beckett, a regular bi-monthly series of e-newsletters was launched in May 2023, and has been refined as we go. Initial feedback seems quite positive, we are conscious that not all our supporters are able to get to Downpatrick regularly, so I hope helps keep them feel informed and connected as to what is going on.

Email Marketing continues to be a major part of our Sales toolset, with our mailing list continually growing (even when we are not running trains).

We also have had a growing presence at model railway exhibitions around the island, including our attending, for the first time, the annual Dublin exhibition in October, thanks to the efforts of Jonathan King.

No sooner had I taken on the role as Marketing Director when the disastrous flooding hit us after the Halloween trains, so since November the marketing efforts were initially focused on our fundraising activities and of course promoting several 'non-train' events such as the Elves' Kitchen. I am hopeful that my report for 2024 will have more events featuring, while there are some exciting marketing plans in the brewing stage for 2025... Watch this space.

Niall Kelly
Marketing Director

Membership

This report covers membership for the period January 2023 until December 2023.

Membership numbers remained almost static from 2022, with a slight drop from 156 to 154. The number of active volunteers also remained constant, which is to be welcomed, the current number standing at 49. The flooding in November saw several new membership enquiries from people looking to assist in our recovery, almost all of whom wished to volunteer in some capacity. These new memberships will not be reflected until the 2024 reporting period.

Prior to renewals for 2024, the Board of Directors took the decision to review membership fees considering the effects of the cost-of-living crisis, and what the Society membership offered. Having examined several other heritage railways across the UK and Ireland, a reduction across all membership categories was agreed.

2023 also saw the introduction of a periodic e-newsletter to further enhance membership and share the work of volunteers with ordinary members.

Innis Mennie
Membership Secretary

Museum

This report covers museum activities for the period January 2023 until December 2023.

Throughout 2023 the Downpatrick and County Down Railway Society continued to add to its Belfast and County Down Railway (BCDR) archive. In March, the Society was able to purchase four bound BCDR Company Financial Reports covering the period 1873 - 1912 from a private collector.

In April, a collection of BCDR items were purchased from the late William McCormack's collection. This collection contained some significant items, the star item being a tender plate from BCDR loco. No.28. This was an exceedingly rare example of the original oval shaped loco plates that were used widely before being replaced by rectangular plates. Also within the collection were two cast, intertwined BCDR letter monograms of the type that adorned the gate pillars of the Queens Quay platform gates.

Also, in April a fine example of a BCDR silver plated cruet set with BCDR and Slieve Donard Hotel crest were purchased from Talisman Railwayana Auctions. In August, a BCDR Mile Post (20) was purchased from Bangor Auctions although the Society cannot verify which 20-mile post this may have been.

During 2023, work started on a new interpretative panel, to update a display panel in the Carriage Viewing Gallery. This was to illustrate the close connection the BCDR had with the Belfast City Tramway System and the close connection with the Holywood Railmotor Service. As part of this display reworking, a collection of Belfast City Tramways articles was purchased from a private collector. Within this collection were red and blue stained top light tram windows with a starburst cut design, maps, tramcar notices and many other interesting items.

As part of the new tram display, a new audio-visual screen explaining the history of the Belfast City Tramways has been produced.

All throughout 2023 many archive items were generously donated from both members and private individuals, too numerous to detail individually.

The Society is extremely grateful for these donations, enabling future generations to learn and help understand the role of the Belfast and County Down Railway and the community that it served.

Neil Hamilton

Museum Curator

Operations

This report covers operations activities for the period January 2023 until December 2023.

I am glad to begin my Annual Report by commenting on our January and Springtime operations; Events which have been missing from our calendar since 2019 thanks to the disruption caused by the pandemic. The end of the report is not quite as positive (spoiler alert) as late 2023 presented us with a brand-new set of challenges but to begin with, the year started out on quite the high note for the Operations and Events Departments.

The first event of 2023 was a highly successful diesel gala in early January. The event was fully booked, and features such as lineside photography sessions and brake van rides went down well with the passengers. Whilst diesel galas are some of the more railway enthusiast-centric events in our calendar, there was a significant family presence at the 2023's gala which suggests that they are becoming more generally appealing.

On St. Patrick's Day, we ran free trains with the support of Newry Mourne and Down District Council. With just shy of one thousand passengers, this was one of our busiest running days on record (if my records are correct, the second busiest since I took this post up in 2018). Though the sight of a queue stretching from the station building all the way back to Rathkeltair House was certainly daunting, our volunteers rose to the challenge to ensure the day ran as smoothly as possible.

After a four-year absence, the return of our Easter Eggspress trains was also an enormous success, with record passenger numbers and the use of professional actors for the first time, dramatically improving the quality of our offering. The May Bank Holidays and Summer running season saw our first ever Circus Train event, as well as the return of our now-staple themes such as the Jurassic Express, SuperTrain, DownTime, European Heritage Open Days, and the first Afternoon Tea since 2019.

The biggest success story of 2023, however, was undoubtedly the return of our Halloween trains. Whilst DCDR had been somewhat of a pioneer in running a Halloween-themed heritage railway event back in the 1980s, by the 2010s it was becoming harder and harder to get a good-quality Halloween service within our limited budget and passenger numbers had been declining steadily in the years

leading up to 2019. For a while, the Events Department was giving serious consideration to axing the event from our calendar altogether. Ultimately, the decision was made instead to partner with Avalard Productions to reinvent Halloween, creating an immersive and interactive experience which borrowed elements from our old Halloween offering but delivered them in a brand-new format. As with Easter, the use of professional actors dramatically enhanced the quality of the event, and the overwhelmingly positive feedback from our passengers means that the Phantom Flyer's place in our events line-up is safe once more.

Unfortunately, however, our biggest high of 2023 was immediately followed by our worst low. The rain of Halloween brought with it the Great Flood of 2023, and with it, the end of train operations on DCDR for quite some time. To fully describe the devastation caused by the flood would be to turn this report into a novel, but in terms of the impact it had on our events I think it should suffice to say it was pretty drastic. The first weekend of our upcoming Christmas trains was almost immediately cancelled, and in the days and weeks after the flood the Events and Operations committees held countless emergency meetings to discuss potential ways forward.

In the end, it was decided that we would be unable to operate any trains in time for Christmas and that a static event was our best hope. Down County Museum came to our aid and offered to host our Christmas event on their site - And so, the Lapland Express became the Elves' Mess Hall. Families were given the choice of a refund or a transfer to the new event and whilst some did opt for the former option, those who stayed with us were very understanding of our predicament and reported incredibly positive feedback on the reworked event.

Though the impact of the flood was (and at the time of writing in October 2024 continues to be) profound, I remind readers that this should not detract from the fact that, in Operations and Events terms, January to October 2023 was a huge success with high passenger numbers, improved events, and a return to form after years of disruption. Whilst we didn't quite get the full year of train services we were hoping for, we mustn't let that overshadow our achievements - Indeed, the fact we were still able to offer a Christmas event at all, completely overhauling it in just three weeks, is an achievement in and of itself.

Rostering for public trains did not pose any huge challenges during 2023, although I once again note that we are still reliant on a very small pool of individuals making themselves available for most, if not all, of our running days. In terms of Operational grades, we gained one new shunter during the year and our trainee steam and diesel drivers continued to accumulate hours.

Another success of 2023 was the number of group bookings with no less than six group visits to the railway during the Summer, two of which hired additional trains on top of our timetabled services. Plenty of shunting took place throughout the year as well, most notably in January to extract the Wickham from the Workshop; and in June to move GSWR No. 90 from the Gallery to the Loco Shed for overhaul as well as to move the Tin Van and Ulster Saloon into the Workshop - A shunt so complex that it had to take place over three consecutive Saturdays.

Outside of running trains, the Operations Department continued its more 'administrative' tasks throughout the year. Early in 2023, the Department created a new document library for volunteers to ensure access to key documents such as the Operating Appendix and Safety Management System. Operations Circulars continued to be distributed regularly in 2023, after being overhauled to accommodate Third Party Rail Works Contractors following our new partnership with AMC. The biennial Personal Track Safety refreshers took place during Summer and Autumn.

2023 In Numbers		Change from 2022
29*	No. of public running days	↑ (+9)
39	No. of volunteers who staffed these running days	↑ (+4)
375	No. of individual rostered positions across all running days	↑ (+59)
11	No. of volunteers who account for 50% of the total rostered positions	↑ (+1)
8	The average number of running days worked by a given volunteer	↓ (-1)
14	No. of volunteers who held or attained Ops-grade competencies	↑ (+1)

**Seven of the days were non-train events held at Down County Museum due to the flood.*

To those members reading this report who are not currently volunteers: Please consider joining us as a volunteer on running days in 2025. Even if restoration work is not your thing, you would be amazed at the difference an extra person on the platform or in the buffet car can make. The more running day staff we have, the more days we can open and the more income we can raise to keep the railway growing.

In closing, I would like to express my sincerest thanks to my colleagues in the Operations and Events Departments, especially for their tireless efforts in November and December 2023 to make sure we could still run some sort of Christmas event and keep the show on the road in the face of the most demoralising challenge we have ever come across.

And of course, thanks to all those volunteers who put themselves forward for a rostered turn in 2023, whether it was at the railway or in Down County Museum - Our events would not be possible without your work.

Morgan Young
DCCR Operations and Events Manager

Civil Engineers Track and Infrastructure

This report covers the activities undertaken to the track and infrastructure for the period January 2023 until December 2023.

This year the main priority work in January was an upgrade to the sleepers and walkways on bridge 164. Originally laid in the early days of the railway these had become life expired. As part of the refurbishment new check rails were added as well as steel mesh walkways rather than our traditional timber. The nearly new sleepers were pre-assembled in the yard with check chairs and supports for the walkways also pre-prepared. This allowed the installation to take place in a three-week gap which included removal of old materials including rails, and replacement of new installation and the work was finally completed in April. Lesson learned good preparation leads to a quick and safe installation.

An attempt to commence work laying a fourth siding beside the gallery had to be suspended due to difficult ground conditions. This will be addressed in the future. A campaign of inspection and hand tamping took place on the South line out to Magnus Grave halt ensured that there were no twist faults present, and some cant adjustment was made prior to proposed Halloween running.

Inch Platform had been showing signs of decay which required a re-enforcement of the supporting structure. "Two new long beams have been inserted into the sub structure and many of the decking planks replaced. The old ramp has been removed and replaced with safer to use steps at the platform end. A fence and gate for the guard has been added to the Downpatrick end. The gate will be used by the guard operating the new ground frame installation.

At Inch work started by preparing the foundations for the Inch ground frame and its subsequent installation in January. This has been followed up with 7 months of groundworks which has seen the installation of point rodding, cranks, and compensators. In August, the Run around loop points were connected and brought into use making life simpler for the train crew. Work continued the future connection of the Bay points with its associated rodding.

This year has been an important year for our new Geismar 07 No5 tamper. It has been under continuous refurbishment from the start of the year. All systems have been gradually repaired and brought up to working condition ready for its first trials in early November.

Other work has seen the Wickham inspection car restoration completed with a formal braking trial and test taking place in September with the vehicle having only minor snags to achieve acceptance.

A new agreement with a third-party training company AMC Training to allow our railway to be used for training courses was signed with the first courses commenced on 14th August a further follow-on course took place later in the year. This is an important initiative for us as it not only assists in track maintenance but more importantly brings us into regular contact with full time railway track professionals and consultancy. An opportunity to increase our professionalism and promote safe practices is welcomed.

A necessary replacement of our old very worn ex BCDR crossing piece on East crossover was replaced with new ex Irish Rail stock luckily purchased earlier in the year as they disposed of their remaining bullhead rail stock in October. The replacement was recommended by one of the consultants from AMC running the first training course. A good example of the positive synergy generated by the AMC partnership.

Then in November we were struck by the devastating flood which submerged the station, bridge 164, and Inch Abbey station. This was 1200 mm deep in the PW part of the yard. It affected all the permanent way vehicles and equipment not stored in the Bruff, with the tamper due its first test run that week suffering damage. The remainder of the year once flood levels fell was a recovery operation with barrow crossing temporarily repaired, Dumper and Komatsu brought back into operation. A quick post flood inspection showed no apparent immediate subsidence on the track but has left area requiring extra ballast tamping and levelling.

Finally, after a damage assessment when the water level had reduced timbers were cleared from where they had floated to in the yard and temporarily stacked using the Komatsu on its return to service. The remainder of the year was devoted to axle box and other critical items refurbishment.

In summary this year there has seen a significant track refurbishment on bridge 164. Significant repairs have been carried out on Inch platform and the long-awaited Inch Abbey signalling installation has reached a significant milestone. Significant progress has been made with Tamper 05 refurbishment alongside the Wickham vehicle. Ongoing repairs and maintenance have taken place on the South line.

Unfortunately, as the year ended a devastating flood damaged the permanent way vehicle fleet and left a legacy of new maintenance and repairs to complete on both track and vehicles in 2024.

David Crone
Chief Civil Engineer

Financial Review

The financial year of the Society for statutory reporting requirements is the 2023 calendar year. A copy of the statutory financial accounts/ report is provided separate to this financial review.

2023 started off strongly in terms of financial income with ticket sales recovering well from the previous years. However, close to the end of the year our ticket income revenue took a hit with the major flooding incident impacting severely on our popular Santa trains income.

Despite the challenge of the flooding incident in the 2023 financial year the Society saw an increase in overall turnover (£284,681), which is mainly attributed to the transfer of rolling stock and carriages to our ownership (approximately £136,800 before 25% depreciation applied), although most running day income sources were showing an increase until the flooding incident. That increase in overall turnover helped the Society increase its Net Current Assets to £406,131.

Reflecting on the cost of sales, overheads and administrative expenditure detailed within the annual accounts the overall total expenditure costs for 2023 were £161,096 (including depreciation costs), which was at a similar level as the previous two financial years.

This resulted in a final surplus/ profit for the 2023 financial year of £128,239. Although it should be noted that if the Society strips out the increase attributed to the transfer of rolling stock and carriages ownership, our final surplus/ profit would have been £23,839.

The following high expenditure cost items should be noted for 2023:

Administrative Expenses

Salary and pension costs	£15,789
Insurance	£ 6,357
Power, light and heating costs	£ 5,731
Accountancy fees	£ 1,400

Operations

Christmas presents	£4,112
Diesel	£6,283
Coal	£2,573
Superheroes actors	£4,250 (part grant funded)
Dino actors	£1,650 (part grant funded)
Halloween actors	£2,200 (part grant funded)
Christmas actors	£9,045 (part grant funded)

To summarise during 2023, the Society despite the major flooding incident at the end of the year strengthened its position financially.

As the Society entered 2024, there are new financial pressures as we endeavour to recover from the major flooding incident along with continued rising running costs. However, some of the costs shall be offset to an extent with an insurance claim settlement and funding from a council led flooding grant scheme.

I would pay special thanks to the finance subcommittee members of Kathryn Casement and Jack McIlheron for their continued hard work and support during the past year.

John Noble
Finance Director