



**DOWNPATRICK AND COUNTY DOWN RAILWAY
SOCIETY LIMITED**

Annual Trustee Report

For the year to end 31 December 2024



Annual Trustee Report
Year ended 31 December 2024

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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 2024

Mike Beckett
Norman Bodel
David Crone
Robert Gardiner
Niall Kelly
Jonathan King
Christopher McCausland
John Noble (Company Secretary and Director)
Morgan Young

Patrons as of 31 December 2024

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 in accordance with the Articles of Association.

The Society has an Honorary President and Vice- President, which for 2024 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 1/3 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 Annual General Meeting.

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

Other posts within the Society exist and include **Museum Curator, Permanent Way Inspector** and **Workshop Manager**. These are not affected by an AGM election.

In 2024 the Board of Directors were as noted above.

The Society currently has one part time employee.

Objectives and Activities

Who Are We?

Since our establishment in 1985, the Downpatrick and County Down Railway Society Limited (DCDR) has evolved from a small group of determined enthusiasts working in a field to become the only full-sized mainline heritage railway in Ireland.

An award-winning museum and recognised as Northern Ireland's Social Enterprise of the Year (2024), the DCDR was founded with the vision of restoring a section of the former Belfast and County Down Railway as a fully operational heritage railway. Today, it operates as both a working museum and a major tourist attraction, showcasing Northern Ireland's railway heritage through the operation of steam and diesel trains.

Unlike many heritage railways in the British Isles, which were able to inherit existing railway infrastructure following the closure of British Rail, the DCDR began its journey with no such advantage, starting with a derelict brown field site following the abandonment of the railway infrastructure in Downpatrick in 1950.

This unique challenge required balancing the simultaneous development of site infrastructure with the establishment of operations. This dual focus has shaped the DCDR into a resilient and innovative organisation, committed to preserving and celebrating the rich history of Irish railways while adapting to the demands of a modern social enterprise.

Statement of Purpose

The Downpatrick and County Down Railway Society Limited, as a registered charity, is dedicated to preserving and sharing the rich heritage of Irish railways. Our mission is to restore and operate a section of the original Belfast & County Down Railway as a living, working railway museum that provides visitors with an authentic and educational experience.

As an accredited museum, we collect, conserve, restore, and maintain locomotives, carriages, wagons, documents, and equipment from the 19th and 20th centuries to promote a deeper understanding of Irish railway heritage and the social conditions of those periods.

Our museum serves as a platform for study, research, and public engagement, offering opportunities for education and exploration while contributing to tourism and economic regeneration in the County Down area.

We are committed to fostering community collaboration, providing skills development initiatives in heritage and engineering, and forming partnerships that empower individuals and organisations alike.

By making our collection accessible and engaging, we strive to inspire a love for heritage railways, ensure the preservation of our cultural history, and promote Downpatrick as a thriving hub of culture, history, and connection for generations to come.

Our Values

Economic and Tourism Impact: We play a significant role in supporting the local economy by attracting visitors from across Northern Ireland, the UK, Ireland, and beyond. This activity boosts local tourism, generates revenue for businesses, and promotes economic growth in the Downpatrick area and the wider Newry, Mourne and Down District. As a cornerstone of regional tourism, we work with partners to enhance the area's reputation as a vibrant and culturally rich destination.

Community and Volunteerism: We foster a strong sense of community by involving volunteers of all ages in our operations and creating opportunities for connection, collaboration, and personal development. Through our work, we enhance community and personal wellbeing, provide a platform for inclusion, and inspire a shared sense of pride in our local heritage.

Sustainability and Future Goals: We are committed to the long-term sustainability of our railway, with projects that enhance the visitor experience while ensuring continuity of operations. We strive to preserve our heritage while embracing sustainable practices for future generations.

Safety and Compliance: Safety underpins all aspects of our operations, from train running to visitor experiences and volunteer involvement. DCDR is fully committed to cooperating with the Rail Safety Authority and other regulators to uphold the highest standards of safety and compliance.

Educational Engagement: We are dedicated to engaging with schools, educational centres, apprenticeship schemes, training academies, and the public through hands-on learning experiences to preserve traditional skills and knowledge, to make history accessible and engaging, and contributing to lifelong learning.

Inclusivity and Accessibility: We are committed to ensuring that the railway is welcoming and accessible to all, whether as visitors or volunteers. By fostering an inclusive environment, we enable people of all abilities, backgrounds, and ages to engage with and enjoy our heritage.

Intergenerational Learning: Our railway serves as a platform for intergenerational learning, enabling older volunteers to pass down knowledge and skills to younger generations. This exchange preserves traditional skills, fosters mutual respect, and promotes lifelong learning for all involved.

Cultural Enrichment: We provide cultural enrichment by offering a tangible connection to the past. Through immersive experiences, we allow visitors to engage with the heritage of railway travel, enhancing the cultural identity of the community and fostering a deeper appreciation for our shared history.

Collaboration and Partnerships: We value working with local businesses, community groups, and the wider rail industry. Through partnerships with training providers, we support skills development and workforce sustainability. By fostering connections across Northern Ireland, the UK, and Ireland, we strengthen our role in preserving heritage and driving economic growth.

Innovation and Adaptability: While rooted in preserving the past, we embrace innovation to enhance the visitor experience, improve operational efficiency, and ensure long-term sustainability.

Stewardship of Heritage: We recognise our responsibility, as a museum-accredited organisation, to preserve and protect the unique railway heritage of Ireland for future generations. Through careful conservation, documentation, and interpretation, we ensure the authenticity and integrity of our collection. We are committed to maintaining the highest standards in heritage management, aligning with professional museum practices to safeguard the cultural, historical, and educational value of our railway for the public.

Strategic Plan / Forward Work Plan 2024 - 2029

Between 2024 and 2029, the strategic focus of the Downpatrick and County Down Railway Society Limited (DCDR) will be on the sustainable growth and development of the railway, seeking way to extend the line and operations as outlined in the Society's 2009 Future Directions document and in the context of the wider town's Living High Streets Framework (published September 2023). Strategic efforts will aim to balance the long-term ambition of further expansion with the immediate need to address challenges arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and the significant October 2023 flooding incident in Downpatrick, prioritising recovery, resilience, and renewal, ensuring the Society is well-positioned to enhance its operations, deepen its community impact, and secure its future as a vital cultural and economic asset for the region.

Ballydugan Extension

The DCDR remains committed to extending the railway along the former Newcastle alignment to Ballydugan, recognising the significant potential this project holds for enhancing the visitor experience, preserving railway heritage, and boosting local tourism.

This extension will require ongoing collaboration with Newry, Mourne & Down District Council (NMDDC), local elected representatives, and the Department for Infrastructure as well as local stakeholders in the area, such as other tourism providers, to secure the necessary track bed, support and permissions.

Downpatrick Racecourse Extension

Progress on advocating 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. The extension was again promoted in the Living High Streets Framework, and the DCDR will work with the Downpatrick Regeneration Working Group to see if progress can be made in the context of Downpatrick regeneration projects.

St Patrick Centre Extension

The St Patrick's Centre extension was first proposed by the Downpatrick Town Centre Manager in 2004 and came closest to realisation with the Carriage Gallery application, however delays in administration at Down District Council led to it being shelved. Interest from other parties, such as the St Patrick's Centre itself, remains high, and has been promoted again in the new Living High Streets initiative. This 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.

One additional benefit not previously considered is that as the route is on higher ground, such an extension would allow for the evacuation of rolling stock out of flood water should another flooding incident occur. As with the Racecourse extension, the DCDR will work with the Downpatrick Regeneration Working Group to see if progress can be made in the context of Downpatrick regeneration projects.

Site Redevelopment and Potential Engineering Relocation

In the wake of the 2023 floods, it has been prudent to re-evaluate plans for new covered accommodation on site. Opportunities for the relocation of heavy engineering and storage should be examined, such as potential sites at Down Business Park, liaising with Invest NI and other key stakeholders.

In tandem with this, work should continue plans to redevelop both Downpatrick and Inch Abbey station to cope with increasing passenger numbers, including but not excluded to, new platform canopy, toilets, enhanced museum facilities and greater accessibility for buildings.

The DCDR will engage with specialists to draw up holistic proposals for potential funders, as well as engage with stakeholders such as the Inch Parish community and the Department for Communities Historic Environment Department.

In the wake of the transfer of buildings from NMDDC control to DCDR control, a plan for clearing the backlog of maintenance issues will also need to be separately developed.

Achievements and Performance in 2024

Chairman's Report

This report covers the period January 2024 until December 2024.

Normally a Chairman's Report focuses on the performance of the business throughout the year, but 2024 was not a year of normal business. It was a year of survival. It was about keeping faith when everything around us seemed broken. And yet, in the end, it became a year of triumph.

It is difficult to describe 2024 without getting emotional, and what a rollercoaster of a year that was, starting from the absolute depths of despair, rising to the thrill of bringing back public trains, and culminating in being crowned Northern Ireland's Social Enterprise of the Year.

When the flood hit us at the end of 2023, we faced what many thought was an impossible task. The water had torn through our station and yard, wrecking carriages, filling workshops with mud, and leaving behind an eerie silence and smell where the sound of trains and activity should have been. There was no guarantee that the Downpatrick and County Down Railway would ever run again. What happened next will be remembered as one of the most extraordinary chapters in our story. We did not just survive 2024. We fought, we rebuilt, and we came back stronger. Through sheer determination, thousands of volunteer hours, and an astonishing outpouring of public support, we restored not only our railway but our sense of purpose and identity.

January began with silence on the line and devastation all around us. What followed was the dirtiest, hardest, and most exhausting winter many of us can remember. Volunteers were on site in freezing weather, pumping water, clearing silt, and stripping down flooded equipment. We found everything from ballast to bicycle parts lodged in our points. Yet nobody gave up. The first milestone was simply making the site safe again. The next was testing what could be saved. Locomotive traction motors were dried out and checked, carriages cleaned, and axle boxes drained.

By February, the first cautious test trains were running, strange heavy formations assembled to put our equipment through its paces. That same month, our Assistant Company Secretary, Jonathan King, brought pride and smiles all round by winning the Lord Faulkner Young Volunteer of the Year Award at the HRA Awards in Brighton, in no small part for his remarkable work in the flood recovery across the wider town.

It is impossible to talk about 2024 without mentioning the extraordinary generosity that surrounded us. Donations and fundraising efforts came in from everywhere. The Downpatrick Lions Club held a quiz that raised spirits as much as funds, the Gwili Steam Railway in Wales organised a collection among their carriage volunteers to support our efforts, and the Strand Arts Centre hosted a charity screening of Oh, Mr. Porter!

Later in the year, the Full Steam Ahead concert at Down Cathedral filled the great building with music and hope, raising over £2,600 to help us back on our feet. We are also indebted to countless individuals who quietly made contributions, organised raffles, or simply turned up to lend a hand. You know who you are, and you are the reason we are still here.

Behind the scenes, our engineering teams worked minor miracles. The 80 Class power car No. 69 moved steadily towards completion. Our vintage GSWR 69 carriage saw major interior progress, while our CIE Tin Van's rebuild continued to restore it to its external original TPO appearance and received new timbers and sliding doors donated from the scrapped Santa's Grotto.

A major highlight came through an unexpected collaboration with Harland & Wolff, where apprentices constructed a completely new underframe for Ulster Railway Saloon No. 62, the first railway vehicle built at Harland & Wolff since the 1950s. This partnership was not just symbolic, but practical proof that heritage can inspire modern skills training and pride in craftsmanship. Meanwhile, our Permanent Way volunteers undertook heroic levels of manual work, relaying track at Inch Abbey and Cathedral Siding, and even managing to extend our system by a modest but hard-earned four metres.

Behind the scenes a lot of invisible work was being undertaken to strengthen our relationships with organisations across industry and government. A visit by John O'Dowd MLA, Minister for Infrastructure, in July was an important morale boost, and we are grateful for his recognition of our volunteers' efforts and the Department's practical assistance.

Translink, MJM Marine, AMC Training, AECOM, and SG Elite all contributed time, materials, or expertise. Their help reminded us that heritage railways do not exist in isolation; they are part of a much wider family of transport and engineering heritage in Northern Ireland. All this work was leading to one thing: reopening. One of the most critical achievements of 2024 was securing formal approval to operate trains from the Railway Safety Authority (RSA) in September. This was the culmination of months of meticulous work by our compliance and operations team, particularly David Crone and Ian Cross, who ensured that every inspection, risk assessment, and operational procedure met the rigorous standards required. Our thanks also go to the team at the RSA for their support and understanding.

After a year of silence, the sound of train whistles returned in October 2024. Following extensive inspection and approval by the Railway Safety Authority, we reopened with The Phantom Flyer, our Halloween spectacular in partnership with Avalard Productions. It was a fitting return, a celebration of life after disaster, complete with ghosts, ghouls, and plenty of rain that, thankfully, stayed outside the carriages this time.

Then came a moment I certainly did not expect when we were named Social Enterprise of the Year (Over £500k) at the Social Enterprise NI Awards. I felt a personal thrill and delight, because as an organisation that is entirely volunteer run, we have often felt we did not fit any normal business mould. But that night, it truly felt as though we had found our home within Northern Ireland PLC.

It is always important for an organisation to benchmark itself against others in different sectors to verify and demonstrate that our contribution to the economy and social regeneration is real and tangible. This recognition affirmed that social value is not measured only in turnover or profit, but in community, skills, and the power of volunteers to achieve extraordinary things. If there was any silver lining to the floods, it was that they shone a spotlight on the Downpatrick and County Down Railway across the UK and Ireland. It was also a privilege to see Morgan Young named Emerging Leader of the Year, and for me personally to be runner-up for Leader of the Year, both of which reflected the collective spirit of our volunteers. Representing DCDR at Westminster later that month at the All-Party Group on Heritage Rail felt like the culmination of a journey: from floodwater to recognition at the heart of government.

By December, the site felt alive again. We ran Christmas trains, with a 450 Class diesel standing in for Santa's usual steam service and partnered with Mange Tout to reintroduce our Afternoon Teas for the first time since 2019.

Then came an incredibly special Christmas present: the arrival of the newly completed Ulster Railway Saloon underframe, proudly delivered from Harland & Wolff to Downpatrick. It stands now in our yard, gleaming and full of promise for 2025.

Of course, all this effort took place against the backdrop of managing the pennies in an exceedingly challenging time, and the financial story of 2024 is one of careful stewardship and extraordinary generosity. Thanks to the combined efforts of John Noble and Kathryn Casement, our railway successfully navigated the complex bureaucracy of insurance claims, government flood recovery schemes, and the accounting that underpinned every stage of restoration.

The support we received from individuals, community groups, and institutions cannot be overstated. Without that external generosity, we could not have reopened. Every donation, whether a pound or a thousand, translated directly into progress on the ground. It is said that the true measure of an organisation is how it behaves in crisis. By that measure, our volunteers have proven themselves beyond compare.

There were nights when the rain was still falling and the yard lights glowed dimly through the mist, and yet people still turned up. They turned up when it was hard, when it was filthy, when it seemed endless. They showed up not for thanks or recognition, but because they believed in this place.

And as the railway roared back to life, something unexpected happened: new people started arriving. In the months after the flood, we welcomed a wave of new members and volunteers who rolled up their sleeves and got stuck in from day one. Their energy, ideas, and enthusiasm have made a remarkable difference already.

We often say, “never waste a crisis,” and that spirit truly defined 2024. Out of adversity came renewal, of people, skills, and enjoyment. From the track team to the admin office, from catering to compliance, from the veteran railway men to the newest teenage recruits, every single volunteer made a difference. You have earned not just the thanks of the Board, but the gratitude of everyone who cares about railway heritage in Ireland.

2024 was not the year we planned. It was harder, messier, and more exhausting than anything we have faced before. But it was also one of our greatest years. When the floods came, we thought we might lose everything. Instead, we rediscovered who we are.

To every volunteer, supporter, partner, donor, and friend, thank you. You carried us through the darkest days and helped us return to the light. The Downpatrick and County Down Railway stands today not just as a preserved railway, but as a living symbol of resilience and hope, and now, proudly, as part of the wider social enterprise family of Northern Ireland.

Robert Gardiner
Chairman

Civil Engineers Track and Infrastructure Report

This report covers the activities undertaken to the track and infrastructure for the period January 2024 until December 2024.

This year the main priority work in January was to commence emergency repairs to track and infrastructure post November 2023 flooding. A more detailed inspection of track and infrastructure indicated there was an immediate requirement to drop ballast in key areas where floodwater had caused erosion to embankments in several locations. Ballast was dropped in the low areas in the vicinity of West crossover and alongside the North line and tamped. Recovery of flooded permanent way assets was the next item with many permanent way tools lost.

By the end of February sufficient work on the North line had been completed to allow running of the first test train out to Inch Abbey. This comprised eight vehicles including two diesel locomotives. This allowed the locomotive team access to commence drying out traction motors. Repairs of the Ballast Regulator provided a valuable resource to increase the rate of track upgrade post flood.

A great deal of debris recovery and tidy up commenced and by midyear the worst of the debris in the station area had been cleared however vegetation clearance was hampered due to loss of heavy cutting equipment and weed killing train. Manual cutting of trees and vegetation was required with several winter storm damaged trees to be removed and fresh growth trimmed back. A couple of Sleeper stacks had to be taken down and restacked due to ground movement during the flood.

Due to a movement on the fence line an opportunity was taken to extend the Downpatrick main line another 3.5 metres out to a new fence line. This will be an extremely useful bit of extra clearance at the headhunt. Repair work at Inch commenced with damaged fences repaired and the now dried out platform surveyed and repaired. By mid-year preparation for re-opening of the North line was underway.

A formal inspection from the Rail Safety Authority highlighted the need to replace the long-demolished buffer on the Bay line at Inch. This initiated a complete upgrade of the Bay line with rail gaps and faulty joints refurbished, buffer repaired and installed followed by ballasting and tamping. The remaining Ground frame connections were made and the full installation commissioned. Additional ballasting and levelling work on turnouts and main platform line enabled the Rail Safety Authority to approve re-opening of the railway in time for Halloween.

A campaign of ballasting commenced in the Autumn to upgrade the North line with typically 50 to 100 tons a month of ballast being added to the system mostly on the North line but also on the South line mostly between the West crossover and loop platform and in the carriage sidings.

It has been a difficult year for permanent way equipment with the Regulator severely affected having its fuel tanks submerged and clutch seized due to immersion. This took priority away from No5 tamper; however, it had been returned to working order by year end and has been used to tamp the straight section out to the west crossover. The Atlas has been plagued by electrical faults following the emersion of the main controller and has been brought back into use a couple of times but is proving unreliable on track. The refurbished Wickham has also been severely affected by the flood and is still under repair. By year end we were well on the way to ordering hand tools to replace those lost in flood.

The working agreement with AMC Training to allow our railway to be used for training courses has been underway. This has brought us into regular contact with full-time railway track professionals and consultants, which has been of huge benefit and continues to increase our professionalism and promote safe practices. We were also able to acquire a substantial number of long point timbers ex Great Victoria Street which will be of strategic use thanks to some of our new contacts gained via this greater integration with the local rail industry.

In summary this has been a year of two halves. The first was one of the essential repairs to allow the railway to re-open whilst the second half saw a couple of particularly useful upgrades at Inch Abbey and Downpatrick stations followed by a major ballasting campaign. There is still more work to do given the damage to essential permanent way equipment caused by the flooding last year.

David Crone
Chief Civil Engineer

Locomotives Report

The focus of the locomotive volunteers in 2024 was the continuing recovery from the serious flooding that inundated the railway in November 2023, causing major damage across the locomotive fleet. All our diesel and steam locomotives and railcars were affected to some extent, with water levels submerging traction motors, battery boxes and axles. It was apparent very early on that not only was the insurance process unlikely to pay for full overhaul of the affected stock, but also that the fleet needed immediate attention and could not be left for many months for the insurance process to complete.

Some early successes at the end of 2023 resulted in 450 class railcar 458 and locomotives 146 and G617 being returned to service, all of which were fortunate in either their location or their design minimising the harm that was caused to them. Across all locomotives, traction motor oil was checked and replaced, brushes checked for damage, and in the Metro-Vick locomotives A39 and C231 the older style of traction motors needed much manual work and replacement of the oil wicks for the traction motors. A series of slow speed loaded test runs were carried out over many weekends to heat the traction motors and slowly build up load and speed before we could fully return each locomotive to service. In some cases, batteries were inundated and needed to be refurbished, and floodwater entered the fuel tanks on C231. We are grateful to Irish Traction Group volunteers from Carrick-on-Suir who made the long journey north to help with the recovery work.

At the end of this period, locomotives 146, A39R and G617, along with railcars 458, 69 and 90 were restored to service. Unfortunately, damage to the traction motors of C231 was too severe and the locomotive has had to be stored pending eventual full overhaul, which is likely to be many years away.

On the steam locomotive front, O&K No. 1 and 3 along with GSWR No. 90 were in the Maghera Shed during the flood, and water rose beyond the axle boxes. Some basic remediation was carried out, but access to the Maghera Shed was heavily restricted following an assessment of the state of the roof, which the storms of late 2023 made significantly worse. As a result, the railway was unable to return a working steam locomotive to traffic in 2024, and the process of replacing the shed roof was to drag on frustratingly through 2024 and into 2025.

The locomotive volunteers also carried out axle box and other remediation work across the railway, including carriages and even the Wickham railcar.

A positive aspect of the floods was a relative influx of new volunteers, including some with some very specific engineering skills which were very welcome in the aftermath of the disaster.

Careful consideration was given to when we could return to public trains, both in terms of our own preparedness and the need to be inspected by the Railway Safety Authority. In the end we aimed for and met the goal of running public trains for Halloween 2024, using the 450-class railcar, and at Christmas for the Lapland Express and afternoon teas.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the small but hard-working locomotive team volunteers throughout this challenging time for the railway - their efforts have been nothing short of remarkable.

Norman Bodel
Locomotives Director

Marketing Report

This marketing report covers the period January 2024 until December 2024.

The early part of the year was focused on keeping our followers and members informed about post-flood developments and the various fundraising activities that took place during this period.

With approval to reopen received from the RSA in September, we finally had trains to market once again. The tighter-than-usual lead period to market the Phantom Flyer made it more challenging than we are used to, but sales picked up and our first operation since the flood was well patronised. Lapland Express marketing was a bit more straightforward; one is reluctant to say, it sells itself, but of all our events, it tends to generate a lot of sales well in advance without as much advertising being spent.

Website

Mike Beckett undertook considerable work towards creating a new and improved website (with improved accessibility in mind) during 2024 (it was launched in early 2025, but the bulk of the work took place during the period under review).

Audience growth

Our Facebook page continues to have one of the highest followership's of any heritage rail group on the island of Ireland, **closing for 2024 at 24,016** (having started the year at 21,756). This represents a growth of over 10%.

Facebook audience growth during 2024

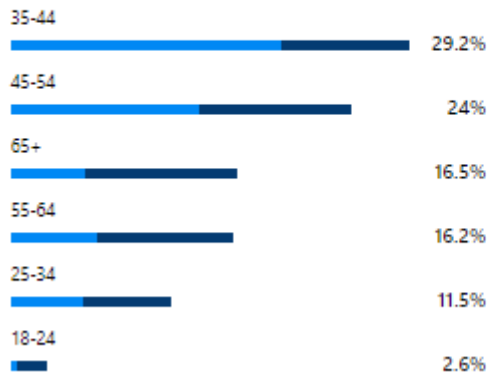


The demographic breakdown of our Facebook audience presents some surprising results, with a proportion being Women in the 35-44 bracket; this certainly subverts the stereotype of heritage railway audiences being made up of older men.

Age and gender ⓘ

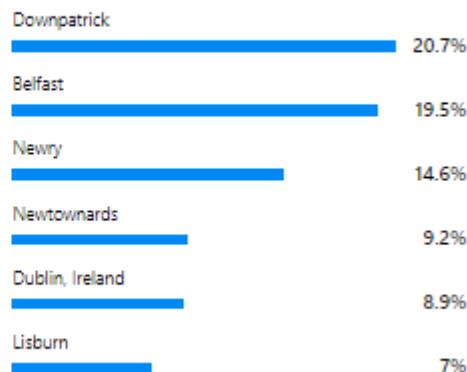
Lifetime

● Women ● Men ● Unknown



Towns/cities ⓘ

Lifetime



LinkedIn

Our LinkedIn page closed 2024 with 240 followers. While it is not really a platform for marketing trains and events, it has proven quite successful as a platform to showcase our collaborations with contractors and gives additional value to these organisations in terms of PR and endorsement. (The various PW contractors/facilitators are particularly active on the platform, more so than on B2C channels such as Facebook). Though not unheard of, LinkedIn is an unusual channel for heritage railways to use, but I believe it has been well worthwhile.

Members' E-Newsletter

Production of this continued during the year, with six regular issues and an additional Inch Abbey 20th Anniversary special. With us unable to operate trains during the anniversary month, it was felt that this would go some way towards commemorating this important milestone while also telling its story to newer members who may not have been around (or even born?) back in 2004.

Exhibitions

Largely thanks to the efforts of Jonathan King, we have continued to expand the Downpatrick and County Down Railway Society (DCDR) presence on the model railway exhibition circuit during the year; we are now a regular attendee at the annual Dublin show, which takes place over the ROI October Bank Holiday Weekend and is the largest such show on the island. These shows have provided additional income streams as well as increasing awareness of DCDR throughout the island.

Shopify

A Shopify store was launched during the period, providing an additional income stream outside of running days.

In concluding this report, I would like to thank John Noble and Kathryn Casement for keeping the Marketing budget straight and providing additional admin support; to Mike Beckett for his work on the website and ad-hoc designs. Mike, along with Robert Gardiner, Morgan Young and Jonathan King, share the social media admin with me and our strength in that field would simply not be there without them.

Niall Kelly

Marketing Director

Membership Report

This report covers membership for the period January 2024 until December 2024; I assumed the post of Membership Secretary in November 2024.

The total number of members increased to 186 by the end of 2024, up from 154 at the end of 2023. This is certainly due to increased media attention and an outpouring of support from the public following the severe flooding in November 2023.

We had forty-one volunteers as of December 2024; although this is a drop from forty-nine per last year's membership report, this is mostly due to inactive volunteers or those volunteers who had sadly passed away being removed from the volunteering list.

Membership fees remained the same from 2023-2024; they had previously been reduced to reduce the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on our members.

My thanks go to Mike Beckett and Innis Mennie for their assistance when I started out as Membership Secretary.

Jonathan King
Membership Secretary

Museum Report

This report covers museum activities for the period January 2024 until December 2024.

Throughout 2024 work progressed on building a copy stand for photographing large format documents such as architectural drawings and maps. Some of these large format documents are particularly long and to accommodate photographing them a sliding camera mount has been constructed. This allows several photographic files to be stitched together with the relevant software.

Cataloguing continued as usual on a regular basis as and when required.

Unfortunately, due to the high humidity levels in the Carriage Viewing Gallery during the floods the electronic timers that controlled various railway secondary clocks on display were adversely affected. As a result, two pulse timers required replacing.

In November 2024 at the Great Western Railwayana Auctions, an 1885 Belfast & County Down Railway pocket watch was secured. This key wound and key set, English Barrel movement pocket watch has the inside of the case engraved Kindall & Dent's Cheapside "lever full-jeweled" pocket watch featuring an "English lever" escapement. The pocket watch is in full working condition and is complete with key and is a rare early survivor as the BCDR later had a contract with Sharman D. Neill of Belfast to supply all clocks and watches for the Company.

At the start of 2024, the museum acquired an interesting document, a report by James Pinion, General Manager of the BCDR regarding a possible electric tramway, constructed and operated by the BCDR, running from Bangor to Donaghadee around the coastline.

In 1898, James Pinion, the General Manager of the Belfast & County Down Railway, produced a report for the Directors of the BCDR Board on the various types of electric tramways that could be considered for operating through the district and connecting the towns of Donaghadee and Bangor.

To facilitate this report, the Directors instructed James Pinion to visit various electric tramway systems in England and consult with others who had experience in electric tramway operations at this time of early electric propulsion. The report is a fascinating read about what might have been!

In February 2024, the museum purchased from a private dealer a collection of incredibly early Belfast & County Down Railway & Belfast Central Railway documents. These are contractors' documents setting out specifications for particular works along the railway.

As usual, the museum is incredibly grateful for donations that it has received from private individuals and indeed members who have purchased items for the collection. Their generosity is very much appreciated.

Neil Hamilton
Honorary Curator

Operations Report

This report covers operations activities for the period January 2024 until December 2024.

2024 is, regretfully, an easy year to report on in terms of Operations, because simply put for most of it there were no public operations. Due to the flood recovery necessitated by the events of October 2023, the railway was shut from January until October 2024. As a result, train movements were limited to shunting and test trains.

We were able to run a limited public service at the end of 2024, resuming operations a year to the day since the flood with our Halloween specials in October. These built on our excellent working relationship with Avalard to deliver a story-driven, immersive experience that was received very well by our passengers.

We also resumed our Christmas trains, once again utilising our positive working relationship with Kablitz Entertainment. Though we were running trains for this event unlike last year which required the temporary set-up at Down County Museum, we were still dogged by some disruption. The first day had to be cancelled due to low uptake because of the drastically reduced lead time for sales, whilst the third day was cancelled due to an extreme weather warning. As a result of the damage caused to the Maghera Shed by the storm in 2023, our steam engines were unavailable and thus the event had to be operated by the 450 Class railcar.

The year's limited operations were rounded out by an Afternoon Tea event with catering provided by Mange Tout. The takeaway from these events is that their success all stems from the partnerships we have developed with third parties, who enable us to offer a much more high-quality service. Looking to the future, we will need to seek out more partnerships if we are to remain competitive with other tourist attractions.

Rostering for public trains did not pose any huge challenges during 2024, though this is obscured by the fact that we only ran 9 days. No doubt if we had been running to a full calendar we would be faced with the usual problem of most of our running days being staffed by the same small group of people. In terms of Operational grades, we lost several guards (thankfully still at the railway but not doing operations roles anymore due to changes in circumstance). We also gained one new diesel driver which has already been a relief for our existing small pool of drivers.

Outside of running trains, the Operations Department continued its more 'administrative' tasks throughout the year - Namely the issuing of Operations Circulars both in-house and to our resident Third Party Rail Works Contractor AMC.

2024 In Numbers		Change from 2023
9	No. of public running days	↓ (-20)
27	No. of volunteers who staffed these running days	↓ (-12)
97	No. of individual rostered positions across all running days	↓ (-278)
8	No. of volunteers who account for 50% of the total rostered positions	↓ (-3)
3	The average number of running days worked by a given volunteer	↓ (-5)
8	No. of volunteers who held or attained Ops-grade competencies	↓ (-6)

It should be noted that the railway was closed to the public from January to October 2024 which had skewed all figures downwards.

Looking ahead (at the time of writing in August 2025), it is clear the big challenge the Operations Department faces going into 2026 is in increasing its staff capacity. We are now in a curious position where, for the first time, we have more trainees than we have capacity to train. This is a good problem to have, as it shows there is interest out there in our work, but it will require careful management to ensure all applicants receive appropriate and timely training.

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 2024 to get us back up and running after a year's closure. And of course, thanks to all those volunteers who put themselves forward for a rostered turn in 2024 - Our events would not be possible without your work.

Morgan Young

DCDR Operations and Events Manager

Financial Report

The financial year of the Society for statutory reporting requirements is the 2024 calendar year. A copy of the statutory financial accounts/ management information report is provided separate to this financial review.

2024 was another challenging year for the Society financially as we were closed for most of the year due to the major flooding incident in late 2023. This had a significant impact on 2024 income as our overall train running operations remained closed for the year.

Despite the challenge of the flooding incident in 2023 which impacted on the 2024 financial year the Society increased income to £505,209, which is mainly attributed to a final insurance settlement claim payment of £295,000 (final settlement was £325,000 with a payment of £30,000 received in 2023). The increased income helped the Society increase its Net Current Assets to £749,628 (mostly cash in bank) and overall Members' funds to £1,132,032, the highest financial security for the Society in recent years.

Reflecting on the cost of sales, overheads and administrative expenditure detailed within the annual accounts the overall total expenditure costs for 2024 were £224,435 (including depreciation costs), an increase from 2023 as we encountered expenditure costs resulting specifically related to our flooding recovery.

This resulted in a final surplus/ profit for the 2024 financial year of £292,919. Although it should be noted that if the Society removed the final insurance settlement claim paid in 2024, our final position would have resulted in a small loss of about £2,081.

To summarise 2024, the Society despite recovering from the major flooding incident in 2023 has maintained financial security and increased its Net Current Assets.

As the Society entered 2025, there shall be continued financial pressures as we recover from the major flooding incident along with rising day to day running costs. The Society shall need to focus on securing funding for specific projects and review our overall running operations to ensure we can maximise income from that part of our business.

I 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