

Shift ... Adapt ... Succeed

HRA Autumn Conference 2026

Day 2 - Wednesday 4 November 2026

Birmingham Conference & Exhibition Centre



Programme is subject to amendment as circumstances may dictate – Last updated 26-10-26

Kindly sponsored by Steam Railway Magazine

“Adapting to change when the world around us already has”

Two days of learning, reflection and inspiration with the opportunity to take-away ideas and real-life examples to keep your railway, tramway or rolling stock group on the front foot:

- Useable ideas to adapt to our changing weather patterns
- Actionable insights and opportunities to maximise visitor spend
- Strategies for engaging, inspiring and motivating volunteers
- Expert guidance on new legislation
- Meaningful connections to collaborate and help tackle the tough issues

Agenda - Day 2

08.30 Arrival, registration and refreshments

09.00 Welcome and introduction to the day

Steve Oates Chief Exec, HRA

09.10 Change, Refresh and Grow

Paul Whiting Commercial Director, North Yorkshire Moors Railway

Six months into his role at the NYMR, Paul discusses his approach to take the NYMR forward in the current very challenging climate (both commercially and environmentally), and reflects on lessons heritage rail can learn from his experience working in other heritage and tourism sectors

09.40 How to make the railway press work for you

Tom Bright Deputy Editor, Steam Railway Magazine

In an era when making yourself heard amid the noise of social media is increasingly challenging, publicising yourself to the audiences that matter is a vital part of running a heritage railway. Steam Railway magazine News Editor Thomas Bright will help you understand what the railway press is and what it does, why it is important, and how you can make the best use of it.

10.10 Why Visit? Understanding the Changing Visitor Economy

Olly Reed Growth Director, Navigate

What the latest trends in visitor behaviour, marketing and expectations mean for heritage railways, with practical lessons from attractions across the UK.

With nearly 20 years' experience in the visitor economy, including 14 years working inside attractions and charities, Olly brings together audience insight,

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marketing strategy and commercial thinking. Now working with more than 50 UK attractions, he regularly speaks and writes about visitor behaviour, market trends and the future of the sector. He also led Navigate's national weather campaign with Chester Zoo, challenging how forecasts are communicated and highlighting the very real impact Britain's weather has on visitor attractions

10.50 Break - Tea/Coffee and an opportunity to **Connect with Colleagues**

11.15 Keynote – Lord Stephen Parkinson of Whitley Bay
Shadow Heritage Minister and Chair, Heritage Railway Association – Introduced by HRA President Lord Faulkner

As the **Railways Bill** progresses through Parliament, Stephen highlights the work being undertaken on behalf of heritage rail and mainline heritage operators ... And with a raft of other government legislation progressing through Parliament, Stephen reflects on some of the opportunities, challenges and success for heritage rail

11.45 Youth volunteering - It's not about us, it's about them!

Richard Owen Commercial Director, Telford Steam Railway

Giles Perkins Chair, Lynton & Barnstaple Railway

Richard and Giles will deliver a thought provoking presentation on their approaches to delivering outcomes for young people through railway volunteering. The session will focus on how to grow a younger volunteer base through highlighting learnings and benefits for individuals rather than volunteers simply being seen as resources for the railway.

With Telford growing it's 20-something pool and the L&B launching their teen programme in a sparsely populated area, there are insights for all in this session, including case studies on what they have achieved and their impact on the railway

12.15 Young Persons Guidance – the opportunity

Dr Robin Coombes Heritage Rail Researcher

Following the hard-fought amendment to the Employment Rights Act 2025 and the subsequent guidance for young persons volunteering on heritage railways, Robin explores and highlights the new opportunities opened-up for heritage railways and tramways

12:50 Lunch ... and the opportunity to **Connect with Colleagues**

13.50 Safeguarding on Heritage Railways

Joe Clay Safeguarding Partnerships Manager, The Railway Children
Generational abuse normalises violence. Societal norms put children at risk.
Gaps in child protection systems let the most vulnerable fall into danger.
They take away children's voices and make young people invisible.
But we see them. We hear them. And we're there for them before they turn
to the streets, when at risk and after we've got them to safety.

14.20 Young volunteers: Young leaders

Christopher McCausland Director & Compliance Officer, Downpatrick &
County Down Railway, and **Alexander Hando** Trustee, Narrow Gauge
Railway Museum, Talylyn Railway

15.00 Break - Tea/Coffee and an opportunity to **Connect with Colleagues**

15.20 Railway Heritage Designation Advisory Board

Rachael Bowers Railway Heritage Governance Manager, Science Museum
Group

30 years since the Board's establishment, it has helped secure the future of
thousands of significant railway heritage objects, from locomotives and rolling
stock to artworks, archives and railway furniture. Many of these designated
objects are now cared for by museums and heritage railways across the UK.
Rachael highlights the Board's contribution to railway heritage, explaining
how the designation scheme works and operates in practice, and addresses
some of the misconceptions that have grown up around designation over the
years and provide greater visibility of a scheme that many organisations
engage with but may not always fully understand.

15.50 HOPS

Alex Seal Managing Director

Four new directors from heritage railways and a change in control has had
many people asking what the future holds for HOPS. New man at the top,
Alex Seal, takes us through the changes and the new opportunities available
to HOPS users

16.20 Round-up and Close

Steve Oates HRA Chief Exec