



# Downpatrick Rail way Museum

Railway Station, Market Street, Downpatrick, County Down, BT30 6LZ  
Telephone: (028) 4461 5779 Internet: [www.downpatricksteamrailway.co.uk](http://www.downpatricksteamrailway.co.uk)

## *Press Release*

### **Dastardly Deeds on Murder Train**

**By Robert Gardiner**

As the sun began to set over Downpatrick Railway Museum last Friday night, wicked and dastardly deeds were afoot.

For the railway was host to a 'Murder Mystery' night onboard a re-enactment of a 1920s Orient Express train, of course now running from Downpatrick to Shanghai and not London.

Around ninety guests of the Downpatrick and Listowel Linkage Group boarded the three-carriage train, all in 1920s costume for a sumptuous three-course meal provided onboard by Justine's Restaurant.

The train departed the station at 20.15 at the dot and travelled up the nearly complete Inch Abbey extension as far as the new Quoile Bridge where, in the fading daylight, dinner was served.

But as the passengers tucked in, nefarious and unscrupulous characters roamed the train, courtesy of local drama group the Downpatrick Steam Packet Company.

One of these suspicious individuals was Eugene Stranney, in full costume of tuxedo and German army officer's hat.

"I'm playing Colonel von Ludwig," he says. "We've also got a whole motley collection of characters from government agents, Chinese smugglers to English lords and ladies, all with illicit affairs going on.

"These characters are moving up and down the train, meeting the other passengers and making themselves known. The guests know that there's going to be a murder, but they don't know who it is or who'll do it."

He adds, "Thankfully we have our very own detective, Sherlock, with us who'll find the culprit."

Last year the Steam Packet Company toured Down District, playing small village halls and community centres.

"We had around one thousand people turn up," Eugene says, "The Murder Mystery is only one of our acts, but it's certainly one of the most popular – we had two Murder nights in Ballynoe alone.

"This is the first time we've ever done the Murder Mystery on a train before, and it's been very enjoyable."

Eugene also adds that while the play is not based on Agatha Christie's 'Murder on the Orient Express' novel, the train has certainly given it that flavour. "We've rehearsed of course," he says, "But a train is a very different stage for us so there's been an awful lot of improvisation!"

Local councillor Anne Trainor, who helped organise the night, and was herself in full 1920s attire, said the idea for the night came about just with chatting with the Linkage Group Chairman, John Noble, and Railway Museum members.

“Downpatrick has been twinned with Listowel for over twenty years now, it’s one of the longest standing twinnings in Northern Ireland. The purpose of it is to forge friendships between the people of the two towns, and groups from both towns regularly visit each other,” she says.

“This time we had forty-five people coming up, as well as our own guests, and we wanted something different - that’s when the idea of the murder train came up.”

With the guests having now completed their meal, the train moved its way back to Downpatrick Station before heading off along the current line past the old Loop Platform and on to King Magnus Barefoot’s grave.

One of the guests from Listowel, Michael O’Sullivan, Chairman of the Listowel and District Active Retirement group, was also getting into the spirit of things dressed in a tuxedo and wearing a sinister pair of dark sunglasses.

“We’ve enjoyed it very much,” he says, “Our group appreciates very much the benevolence of the Downpatrick and Listowel Twinning Committee, in particular John Noble, Anne Trainor, Jack McIlheron and all the other councillors who have welcomed us on any occasion we have been to Downpatrick.”

Michael also said, “We’re very impressed by the railway, everything this evening has been very good and we’d like to offer our support for the volunteers and everyone who makes it happen here.”

But the happy atmosphere of the night was soon to be shattered as the train pulled back into the Loop Platform and two shots rang out.

Passengers rushed to the windows to see what had happened, and saw Lord Tennyson (played by Bernie Small) lying on the platform, his sobbing wife (Fiona Turley) by his side, who was also hit on the arm. Sherlock (Martin Curran) was soon on the scene, but there was nothing that could be done other than taking the Lord’s body back into the train and continuing their journey.

Who could it have done it and why? Could it have been the softly spoken Dr. Fumanchu (Alan Cheetham), or his assistant, Oddjob (Jonathan Curran)? Or could it have been serious Colonel von Ludwig (Eugene Stranney), dapper Italian Alberto Guccio (Adrian Higgins), or pinstriped gangster Jimmy Kray (Joe Rogan) or even his glamorous girlfriend Polly Nichols (Karen Turley)? Even Lord Tennyson’s wife herself?

As the train travelled back to Downpatrick, Sherlock announced that everyone was to go to Justine’s Restaurant where all the suspects would be interrogated to reveal the truth behind this plot.

At the end of the night, Councillor Jack McIlheron, who also helped organise the event said everyone had thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

“It was great to see the train used in such a way,” he said. “It looked absolutely superb and the smiles on the faces of those onboard showed what a tremendous night it was.”

Railway Museum Vice-Chairman, George Legge, said he expected the Murder Mystery train to return, “I can certainly see another Murder Mystery Night happening in the future, very likely open to the public with people pre-booking seats in advance.”

George continues, “Even although I and the other volunteer staff have been working throughout the night it’s been absolutely tremendous and very enjoyable.”

So who did it? Who killed Lord Tennyson? Turns out it was that no-good Italian, Alberto Guccio, who was smuggling opium and was checking up on it when the Lord caught him red-handed.

That wasn’t the last of the surprises, for it was Polly Nichol’s alter-ego, Karen Turley’s birthday and the revellers joined together to wish her a happy birthday and see a shocked Karen blow out the candles on a huge birthday cake. And how old is she? Well, a lady doesn’t reveal these things you know...