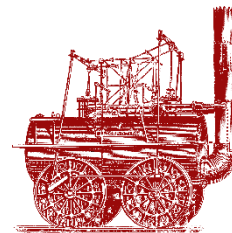


The 1825 Stockton & Darlington Railway

Fighting Cocks ‘Heritage Hub’

An Illustrated Guide to History and Heritage Conservation Proposals

May 2025



**Friends of the
Stockton &
Darlington Railway**
www.SDR1825.org.uk



Note

This guide was first published in 2021. A revision was published in 2022 to take account of some changes to the proposals and some preparatory work by volunteers. This fourth edition (May 2025), describes further changes and progress.

The Stockton & Darlington Railway.

In North-East England in 1825, 26 miles of railway track were opened which for the first time in history successfully brought together technical innovations with business vision to create the world's first modern railway; a railway which welcomed visiting engineers and businessmen from across the UK, France, Prussia and the USA and inspired them to build their own lines ushering in the railway age which changed the face of the world. Here on the S&DR the engineering excellence of George Stephenson and Timothy Hackworth came together with the economic foresight of Edward Pease and the business community of South West Durham and the Tees Valley to create the first modern railway. In the period 1825-30 the S&DR demonstrated that steam locomotive hauled railways were a viable proposition and set in motion a new industrial age. This is the railway that got 'the World On Track' and the place where the modern railway age was born.

The Friends of the Stockton & Darlington Railway are a registered charity whose key aim is to work with communities and partners along the original 26 miles and to take forward ambitious plans to conserve and promote the railway.

The Friends work through a group of trustees who liaise, campaign and work with strategic partners in local government, museums and industry; and also foster community groups along the line to help them care for their own parts of S&DR heritage. Our work and substantial new research is reported in our regular journal 'The Globe'. We undertake educational work through lectures, guided walks and in schools and colleges. We also provide advice and research to all those seeking to conserve and interpret S&DR rail heritage.

The Friends' vision is to establish a walking and cycling rail trail using the route of the 1825 S&DR from Witton Park to Stockton on Tees. This would ensure that the physical remains of the S&DR are protected, recognised and conserved and also allow a key part of the nation's heritage to be accessible and interpreted, bringing economic, education and health benefits. More information including how to join and volunteer, is available on the Friends website <http://www.sdr1825.co.uk/> or at our facebook page; where notice of regular meetings and events can be found; <https://www.facebook.com/groups/304912612980375/> The Friends hold a regular monthly meeting on the first Thursday of the month, 7:00 pm, usually at Darlington Cricket Club, Feethams. Email info@sdr1825.co.uk for information.

THE FIGHTING COCKS HERITAGE HUB

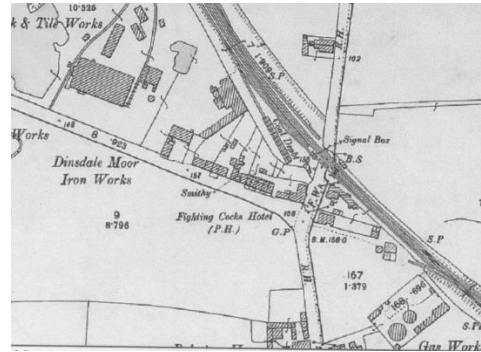
AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE

Revised Edition May 2025

This guide was first published in 2021. Several revisions have been published taking account of changes to the proposals and work by volunteers. This fifth edition describes further progress.

INTRODUCTION

The opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 1825 brought a dramatic change to the small agricultural hamlet at Fighting Cocks. A coal depot alongside the main line was followed by the opening of 'Middleton and Dinsdale' passenger station in 1830. The rest of the nineteenth century brought a variety of industries such as foundries, iron works, gas works, brickworks and other businesses. The population grew and by 1870 there were nine passenger trains in each direction stopping at the renamed 'Fighting Cocks' station. It was a busy scene with coal drops, a goods station, signal box, sidings and numerous through mineral trains keeping the level crossing keeper busy! All served by the Fighting Cocks Inn.



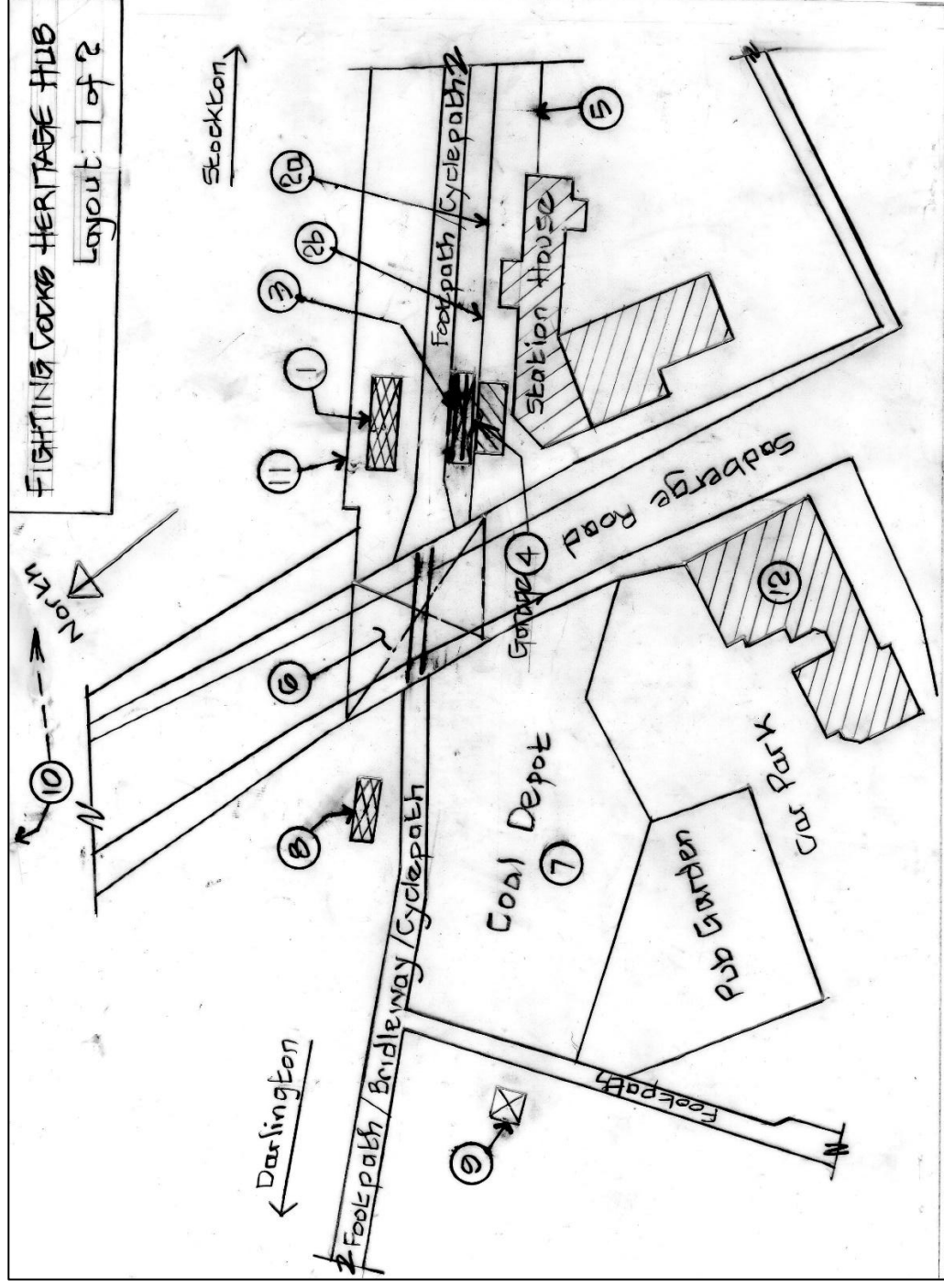
1 A print of the station (Illustrated London News 1875) 2 The 1897 Ordnance Survey map

However, the opening of the diversion of the NER Darlington & Saltburn Branch in 1887, with its station down the road at Dinsdale, took passengers and some through freight traffic away from Fighting Cocks. In the twentieth century trains generated by Paton and Baldwin's Lingfield factory and the BR Welding Depot bolstered declining traffic but by the eighties tracks had been lifted, buildings demolished and the level crossing disappeared with all the removeable trackside furniture.

But the line had not completely died. The trackbed became a well used path for walking and cycling into Darlington as well as for local recreation and it was surfaced as part of the National Cycle Route Network. General interest in the railway heritage of the area increased as minds started to focus on the approaching 2025 S&DR Bicentennial and the founding of the Friends of the S&DR in 2015. The 2016 Historic Environment Audit identified Fighting Cocks as a location of significant heritage value with several assets and remains still to be found.

In early 2020 the Parish Council and the Friends responded to local interest by establishing the Middleton St George S&DR Heritage Steering Group, now the S&DR Bicentenary Group, with the mission of delivering the Fighting Cocks Heritage Hub. This involves a number of separate projects as described below (3). Much of the work can be done by volunteers from the local community, by the Friends and by sponsoring businesses, but external funding is required for the more extensive projects.

1	Waiting shed
2a	New Fence
2a	Name board
3	Track installation
4	Railway mural
5	Old Mill wall
6	Level Crossing
7	Coal Depot
8	Loading Dock
9	Crane base
10	Roadside art
11	New Hedge
12	Ex Fighting Cocks Public house, now Sainsburys
3. The projects of the Heritage Hub	



THE PROJECTS

East of the Crossing North Side

Project 1 - the Waiting Shed

The mid-nineteenth century Waiting Shed (5) on the former east bound platform was partially demolished some fifty years ago and until recently was allowed to deteriorate.

Popular interest in saving the remains grew when developers of the adjoining housing estate, now Paddocks View, intended to demolish it as part of their site landscaping scheme. Fortunately, they agreed to retain and help restore it. The earlier proposal for the partial rebuild has been replaced by a simpler and affordable repair of the remains by Friends volunteers following discussions with the Council's Conservation Officer. Side walls have been partially rebuilt with bricks recovered from the site and capped with natural stone copings (4). The floor will be flagged with natural stone slabs and a bench seat. An access path is to be created.



4 The Waiting Shed in 2025



5 The Waiting Shed as it was

Project 11 – the New Hedge

The housing developers of what is now Paddocks View, Story Homes and Miller Homes were required to plant a new hedge, some 25 metres long next to the Waiting Shed, and to carry out works on adjacent trees as a condition of the planning permission. Responsibility for this has been transferred to the Friends, for implementation with other landscaping works at the Hub. The tree work has been completed, but the proposal for the hedge is to be reviewed.

East of the Crossing South Side

Project 2a – the Railway Fence

The owner of the former Station House has replaced some 25 metres of the property boundary fence beyond the garage in the traditional NER station style (7), but with the diagonal palings on the outer, public, face.



6 The station as it was; last day in 1887



7 The station in 2025

Project 2b – the Station Name Board

A station name board of traditional design has been attached to the new fence (project 2a) beyond the garage (7).

Project 3 – Track Installation

Concrete sleeper blocks, some with 'chairs', have been recovered from elsewhere along the trackbed. They have been installed (8) as a 10 metre long track interpretation in front of the Loading Dock Wall (see project 8). It is proposed to find rails to complete the work.



8 The track installation



9 The Old Station Wall

Project 4 – Railway Mural

The owner of the adjoining former Station House kindly agreed to allow a mural to be painted on the side wall of the garage (7). The basis of the design was approved after local consultation and it was painted by Durham Spray Paints. The image features the 1875 print (1) with a train hauled by locomotive 'Edward Pease', built in 1856 at Robert Stephenson's Newcastle works, at the station. Funding for the project has been shared between the Friends and the S&DR Community Grants Scheme.

Project 5 – the Old Station Wall

Previously referred to as the Old Mill Wall, a 65 metre length of mid-19th century brick wall, identifying the site of the passenger station platform, survives further west along the trackbed (9). It is generally in good condition but requires some repair in places, repointing and replacing lost coping stones, especially at the eastern end (10). The Borough Council repaired some 30 metres of the rear of the wall in 2017 and replaced lost copings with natural stone. The adjoining owner is repairing that part of the wall forming the property boundary with traditional methods. The western end is in within the property of the former Station House and requires repair (11).



10 Old Station wall; damaged eastern end



11 Old Station wall; damaged western end

West of the Crossing North Side

Project 8 - Loading Dock Wall

The former loading dock stone wall is now visible from the trackbed bridleway (12). Brambles and other vegetation have been removed by volunteers to bring it better into view and to allow the wall to be inspected and repaired.



12 The Loading Dock wall in 2025



13 The former coal depot site in 2025

West of the Crossing South Side

Project 7 – The Coal Depot

The site (13) is now owned by the Friends of the S&DR, having formerly been owned by the developers for the Sainsbury's Local convenience store (see project 12 below). It has significant heritage value, being the site of the original 1825 Fighting Cocks coal depot, subsequently remodelled. Some building elements do survive on site today – a stretch of 1825 depot wall (14) and additional walls and sidings from the post 1863 phase. Other archaeological remains may survive below ground. The site later became the Goods Yard with sidings and signal box (17).



14 The Coal Depot site in 2021 with original stone wall



15 The coal drop wall needing repair

The land was neglected after the railway closed and became increasingly overgrown with self-seeded trees and unmanageable undergrowth, including brambles. The planning permission for the food store requires the provision of two picnic tables, a litter bin and an information board and these is now the responsibility of the Friends to provide.

The information display will be provided and funded from the overall information and interpretation project for the whole of the S&DR line.

The Friends propose to commission a survey of the site to assess the site's ecological importance and establish a management regime in order to improve the setting of the S&DR.

An archaeological investigation is justified, with visible remains secured and the area properly landscaped, with interpretation. Invasive vegetation has been removed by volunteers. The brick and stone boundary retaining wall of the coal drops shows evidence of the coal drops but it is in need of repair (15). The foundations of the demolished signal box next to Sadberge Road may still be there and will be investigated.

Project 9 – the Crane Base

The base of the goods yard crane (16) post-dates the S&DR but it is a reminder of former activity. It is of solid construction and in good condition. It sits just inside the Borough Council's ownership. Volunteers have cleared access and cleaned the structure. Some brickwork repointing may be desirable to secure its future. A feature could be created with the nearby remains of the coal depot ramp.



16 The crane base and ramp



17 General view of the former crossing

Project 12 – The Fighting Cocks Inn

The former Fighting Cocks Inn (18), with its strong railway heritage, stood for almost 200 years. Latterly called Platform 1, the pub was closed by its owners and planning permission was secured by developers and it has been converted into a Sainsbury's Local convenience (food) store (19). This was allowed despite local objections and a bid to continue it as a community pub. The most recent extensions have been demolished but the earlier southern and eastern elevations of heritage importance have been retained. The interior has been stripped of remaining heritage features and modern extensions have created the new sales area. The planning permission for the store includes a requirement to fix an information panel on the building describing its origin and heritage importance.



18 The Fighting Cocks Inn then...



19 ...and now

Sadberge Road

Project 6 – The Level Crossing

The level crossing gates removed almost fifty years ago have been destroyed but it is still proposed to investigate the possibility of replacing the existing access gates with a more railway crossing themed design (21). The possibility of creating a traffic calming feature, with

setts replicating early sleeper blocks or with metal rails inserted into the carriageway should be explored with the Borough Council.



20. The Level Crossing in 2021



21. A possible new gate design

Project 10 - Highway Artwork

The village entrance sign on Sadberge Road was removed to enable the Paddocks View housing development to proceed and it has not been replaced. A railway heritage themed new sign in the newly landscaped verge was to be promoted by the Borough Council's Creative Darlington Officer and the Parish Council but no progress has been made. This could be either a pole mounted sign or a three dimensional carved stone block. This project should be revived.

Other Projects

Project 13 - Information and Interpretation

An information panel is to be provided on the Coal Depot site (project 7) and at Sainsbury's store (project 12). It will be put in position in 2025. Smaller panels will be provided to identify the individual projects of the Hub.

Project 14 - Car and Cycle Parking

Walkers and cyclists visiting the Heritage Hub or exploring the S&DR route in sections will need somewhere to park their cars and cycles. There is very limited on-street parking possible and Sainsbury's car park is restricted to 30 minutes for customers only. It would be appropriate to provide cycle parking with the picnic tables and information panel on the coal depot site (project 7).

Project 15 - Publicity

The first edition of this guide was widely circulated to officers of the Borough Council and the partners of the S&DR Heritage Action Zone. The Parish Council, the Local History Society and members of the Heritage Hub Steering Group received copies. This edition is available on the Friends' website and Facebook page to reach as wide an audience as possible, not just the local community. Guided tours and explanations of the projects will again be given by the Friends in order to encourage local people and businesses to become involved.

The Friends will issue a revised edition of its self-guided walk booklet no 7, 'Darlington to Goosepool' in time for the 2025 Bicentenary with funding from Story Homes. The walk passes through Fighting Cocks and the new booklet will include updated information about its assets and history. It will replace the existing version in the online library of the Friends website sdr1825.org.uk

Project 16 - Conservation Volunteers

A team of volunteers has been established by the Friends; they cut back vegetation, clear rubbish and recover bricks and other re-useable materials. An annual clearance programme

is necessary to keep growth under control. There is, however, a limit to their capabilities and outside assistance on some aspects of the projects will be needed and paid for.

Project 17 - Conservation Area

Darlington Borough Council commissioned a character assessment of the former S&DR and other heritage features between the A66 Darlington Bypass and Oak Tree Junction. Public consultation on the proposed boundary has been successful and formal adoption will be completed this year. The boundary includes nineteenth century housing built for workers in the various industries generated by the coming of the railway.

New Project- Mileposts

70 metres beyond the Waiting Shed is a replica milestone in timber, recently installed by The Friends. This marks 8 miles from the Stockton terminus of the S&DR, as measured by digital satellite surveying. A few metres to the left is the metal stump of North Eastern Railway 3½ milepost from Albert Hill Junction.

Funding

The Friends have established a reserved fund for Fighting Cocks in its accounting system. Contributions have been received from the Parish Council, the Save the Fighting Cocks Pub Campaign, the developers of the Sainsbury store and house builders Story Homes.

Funding has been obtained for the mural (project 4) and the information panel (project 7). The reserved fund is be able to pay for small projects, but external funding may have to be sought to implement the larger projects, namely the Old Station Wall (project 5), the Level Crossing (project 6) the Coal Depot wall and landscaping (project 7) and the Highway Artwork (project 10).

The Friends have set aside a sum in their budget to help defray out of pocket expenses occurred by the community and volunteers for their work on the smaller projects.

Ross Chisholm
Trustee of the Friends of the S&DR
May 2025

STOCKTON & DARLINGTON RAILWAY | 1825-1830

INTRODUCTION

Map showing the extent of the S&DR by 1830. It also went on to expand to Barnard Castle, Tebay, Redcar, Saltburn and Weardale. It was amalgamated with the North Eastern Railway in 1863.

KEY

1825 Main line and the route of the opening day on 27th of September 1825.

S&DR Branch Lines

S&DR line still in use

S&DR line still in use

Map Locations

MAP



© 2021 The Friends of Stockton & Darlington Railway
Artwork by Bright White Ltd



1 Etherley Incline



2 Gaunless Bridge



3 Brusselton Incline



4 Locomotion Railway Museum, Shildon



5 Heighington Station



6 Darlington Railway Museum



7 Skerne Bridge



8 Fighting Cocks



9 Preston Park Museum & Grounds



10 Stockton