

West Side Story

The Forgotten History of the Stockton & Darlington Railway in Cumberland, Westmorland & Furness

September 2025 marks the bicentenary of the opening of the Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR) which operated the Stainmore & Eden Valley Railways until 1863. Major celebrations are being planned for the North of England but, until now, all previous celebrations in 1875, 1925 & 1975 have focussed exclusively on the North-East.

In March this year, following two years of extensive preparatory work behind the scenes, Stainmore Railway Company (SRC), and our colleagues in the Locomotive Conservation & Learning Trust (LCLT), were jointly awarded a £213,108 Project Grant by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) to mark the bicentenary and finally tell the story of S&DR operations west of the Pennines. With the value of volunteer labour, the total project value is approx. £700,000.

In addition, to undertake all the components of the Project Activity Plan, we need to raise a further £60,000 in match-funding by the end of 2026. The Activity Plan is very much community-orientated with some 44 separate organisations involved. The key items include:

- Rebuilding the remains of the original 1861 S&DR signal box to full operational order. From our research, we believe this will be the oldest working signal box anywhere in the world making it a structure of major historical significance once completed.
- A wheelchair-accessible, all-weather footpath to / from the station car park to the signal box and footbridge providing safe access for all to the rebuilt S&DR structure and the superb vantage point the bridge provides. This will augment Kirkby Stephen's 'Walkers are Welcome' status.
- A travelling Photographic Exhibition covering the approx. 100 years of the railway. Eleven separate locations covering the area from Darlington, Kirkby Stephen, Tebay & Penrith have expressed an interest in taking the exhibition during 2025.
- August Bank Holiday weekend 2025 – a major five-day Steam Gala marking the bicentenary which, based on our 'Stainmore 150' event in 2011, is likely to attract 5,000 -10,000 visitors to the town bringing significant economic benefits.
- A programme of regular events at the East station for local community groups (i) working with individuals living with dementia and (ii) supporting young and adult carers throughout Eden.
- A programme of regular events at the East station for children with autism / ADHD.
- A programme with 6 Primary Schools (including Kirkby Stephen, Brough & Warcop) to produce an S&DR 'Rail Trail' for the East station.
- A study into the role of women in the Stainmore & Eden Valley Railways involving Nateby & Wharton WI, Upper Eden History Society, Kirkby Stephen Family History Group and Ravenstonedale Parish History Group.

We would be most grateful for any financial assistance the Town Council could provide to enable us to raise the match-funding we require to produce the maximum benefits for the community from this exciting project – THANK YOU.