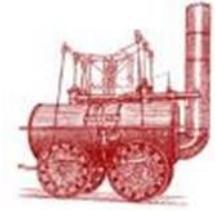


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Chair's Report/activity for April 2022

Another month of meetings, although many are now in person rather than via zoom which makes them more pleasant!

The continuing work with Darlington Council on the second stage of the Heritage Lottery Fund bid goes on, and Julia Holberry Associates have now been appointed to write the activity plan. This will be an important document in providing support to volunteer groups along the line over the next five years. Julia, (and Anna Salaman her associate), both of whom have previously worked on earlier stages of the S&DR project, will need over the next few months to talk to as many people along the line as possible to capture ideas and aspirations to feed into the final report. I know many are tired of talking to consultants who seemingly ask the same questions, but please give them your time or come forward, as this is crucial to making sure we have the right amount of resources in the next few years

Comments from many members and our area groups have shown growing and considerable disappointment and exasperation with some aspects of local authority support and delivery on matters S&DR. This is matched to a genuine fear that with less than three years to 2025, many large projects such as the restoration of larger structures such as Heighington Station or the creation of the walking/cycling route may now be short of time. The question of on-going day to day care of features such as the Brusselton Incline is also of considerable worry, with several years of volunteer effort not at present being matched by local authority action to support this in the long term. With this in mind I have been writing to local MPs and meeting with the leadership of Durham County Council in particular. I've tried to get across in no uncertain terms that we need action and support now, not just for the success of 2025, but to encourage and motivate our fantastic volunteers.

With regard to 2025, finally a working group on live steam has been set up and we have been asked to join. I'm pleased to say our trustee Norman Hugill with his considerable experience of operational steam railways has agreed to help me represent the FSDR on this group.

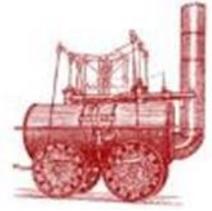
We still await the result of the Durham 2025 City of Culture bid (for which Durham are now in the final four), and we understand the assessment panel will be visiting the area on May 9th with a decision due by late May. If you see some worthies standing by the railway on May 9th, be cheerful and nice to them!

We are about to enter the final year 3 of our Historic England capacity building Grant. This year we have support for a number of projects, in particular a major survey and report on the condition and issues such as heritage crime along the line. This will cover every potential threat from fly tipping to graffiti, neglect to burrowing animal damage. The intention is that this will then lead to a programme of future conservation and management works. We'll be holding workshops for this and would welcome volunteers. The HE grant will also allow a 'Walking the Line' study of the Black Boy Branch line (again volunteers welcome), and a study of quaker involvement in the railways. Elsewhere we continue to

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develop an exciting project at Fighting Cocks with partners including the MSG Parish Council.

We also have a small grant from Historic England to develop school education material. We are now working with NRM Locomotion, Head of Steam and Preston Park to commission an educational consultant to look at what's currently available and produce new material and resources for all museums and schools to use when teaching and learning about the S&DR.

Historic England themselves are about to commission two pieces of work; firstly a study on long term management of the S&DR along the 26 miles; and secondly a study of Early Railway Stations and passenger provision which will build on work by our own Brendan Boyle, Caroline Hardie and others and set what the S&DR was doing in a national context. More on these soon once we have further detail.

Archives and collections are a key part of our work, and while larger objects will nearly always be passed on to one of the museums, we are keen to acquire a good range of S&DR published material to build our own library. A regular flow of such material is offered to us each month, often as a result of a legacy or an elderly collector wanting to ensure their material is not lost. We are always very happy to discuss such legacies and help treasured collections find the right home. We are hoping that the wider archives of the S&DR, held by such bodies as The National Archives and County Durham Record Office amongst others, may well justify being put forward for designation as a 'Memory of the World' and international accolade and a project run by UNESCO.

I continue to provide talks for various local and regional groups to spread the good word of our work and stimulate interest. This month I spoke to the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham & Northumberland and at the AGM of the Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership. Along with several other members I also attend a presentation by Historic England on their work on a Historic Area Assessment of Shildon, which looks like a really useful study of how the first railway town evolved and the important surviving buildings still to be seen. Once this is complete, we'll tell members how to get a copy via The Globe.

As ever I'm hugely grateful to our wonderful trustees and other keen supporters and helpers without who we would have achieved very little. In particular I'm looking forward to celebrating the 200th anniversary of laying the first rail at St John's Crossing on May 23rd and a number of other events at Stockton leading up to and including the birthday weekend in September. If you feel inspired to help out, don't feel shy and do come forward, we can always find something for volunteers to do be it little or small depending on your skills and available time.

All the best

Niall Hammond
Chair
Friends of the S&DR. 02/05/2022.

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