

S&DR FIGHTING COCKS HERITAGE HUB

AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE

Revised Edition February 2022

Some preparatory work and changes to the projects described in the first edition took place in 2021 and the descriptions of them have been updated in this revision. Some of the illustrations have been changed accordingly. The introduction below remains the same.

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.

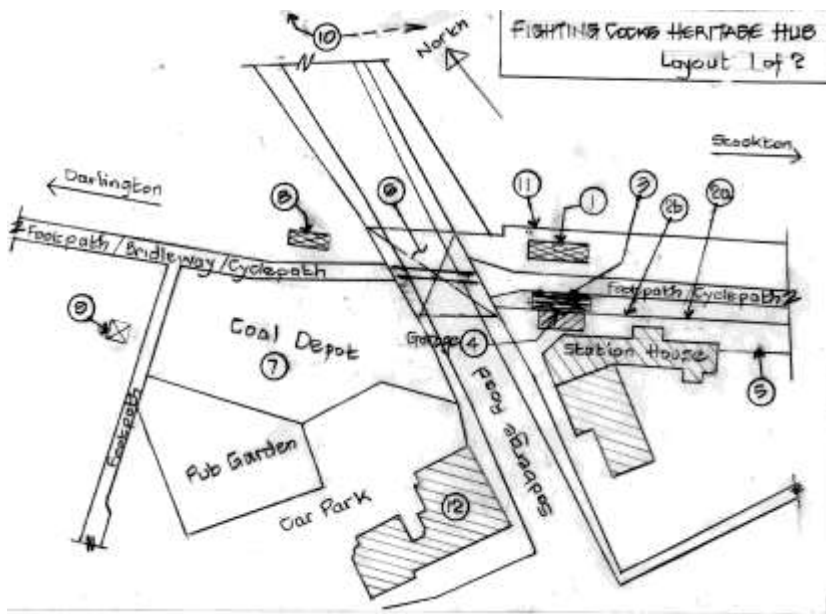


1 A print of the station (*Illustrated London News* 1875) 2 The 1897 Ordnance Survey map

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 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 funding will be required for the more extensive projects.



- 1 Waiting shed
- 2a New fence
- 2b 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 Public house

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 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 of 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. Details of a partial rebuilding are being drawn up and the ground around it will be excavated to assess the stability of the structure. It will be an appropriate location for an information board and seating. It will be suitably landscaped and be wheelchair accessible.



4 The Waiting Shed in 2021



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, are required to plant a new hedge, some 30 metres long behind the Waiting Shed, and to carry out works on adjacent trees as a condition of the planning permission. This has been deferred until the completion of the Waiting Shed project, although some of it could be done in advance.

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 2022

Project 2b – the Station Name Board

A traditional design for a station name board is being researched. It is proposed to fix it to the new fence (project 2a) beyond the garage (7).

Project 3 – Track Installation

Concrete sleeper blocks have been recovered from elsewhere along the trackbed. They will form the base for a 10 metre long interpretation of the original 1825 track in front of the garage wall (see project 4 below). An original stone sleeper block will be included. An example on display in South Park, Darlington, is shown below (8). The verge between the installation and Sadberge Road will be replanted as part of this project. Alternatively it may be more appropriate to install it as part of proposed works on the former Coal Depot (see project 7 below).



8 The South Park installation



9 The Old Mill Wall

Project 4 – Railway Mural

The owner of the adjoining former Station House has kindly agreed to allow a mural to be painted on the side wall of the garage (7). The Steering Group has agreed the basis of the design and the project is being carried forward by the Parish Council and the Borough Councils' Creative Darlington Officer, Stephen Wiper. Part funding will be available from Darlington Borough Council, with contributions from the Parish Council and the Friends.

Project 5 – the Old Mill Wall

A 65 metre length of 19th century brick wall, the former boundary of the Fighting Cocks Mill, 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 some lost copings with natural stone. The owner of 6 Haxby Road 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 reinstating (11).



10 Old Mill wall; damaged eastern end



11 Old Mill 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 as necessary.



12 The Loading Dock wall in 2022



13 The former coal depot site in 2021

West of the Crossing South Side

Project 7 – The Coal Depot

The site (13) is owned by the developers for the Sainsbury's Local convenience store (see project 12 below) and they are seeking to dispose of it to the Friends. 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).

The land has been neglected since the railway closed and it is becoming 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, an information board but no landscaping. The Friends will need to commission a survey of trees and other vegetation, assess its 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 should be removed from the brick and stone retaining boundary wall and its north-western end made good (15). The proposed picnic table area alongside the trackbed path and Sadberge Road frontage could become a public garden.



14 The Coal Depot site in 2021 with original stone wall



15 The retaining wall needing repair

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 is difficult to identify the precise boundary but it appears to sit 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. Its surrounds could be cleared and a feature created with other remains nearby.



16 The crane base



17 General view of the former crossing

Project 12 – The Fighting Cocks Inn

The former Fighting Cocks Inn, 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 to convert it into a Sainsbury’s Local convenience (food) store, 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 will create the new sales area. The developer is required to affix an information panel to the building describing its origin and heritage importance.



18 Fighting Cocks Inn 1901



19 Fighting Cocks Inn in more recent years

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 traffic calming features at all the former level crossings along the line, including at Fighting Cocks, with setts replicating early sleeper blocks or with metal rails inserted into the carriageway has been proposed as part of the Heritage Action Zone line-wide interpretation plan and this is to be explored with the Highway Authority.



20 The Level Crossing in 2021



21 A possible new gate design

Other Projects

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. It is now proposed to install a railway heritage themed new sign in the newly landscaped verge. This could be either a pole mounted sign or a three dimensional carved stone block. The Borough Council's Creative Darlington Officer has offered to promote the project with the Parish Council. This replaces the earlier proposal for an artwork on the A67 Mill Lane roundabout.

Project 13 - Information and Interpretation

This will be provided as part of the HAZ project for the whole line. HAZ consultants Bright White have identified Fighting Cocks as an important point for interpretation and information; details to be announced later. PH Land, the developers of the former Platform 1 pub into the food store, have offered £5000 towards the cost in lieu of implementing the requirement of the planning permission. It is understood that Story Homes have a commitment to contribute a sum required by condition of the planning permission for Paddocks View.

Project 14 - Car and Cycle Parking

It is expected that walkers and cyclists will explore the S&DR route in sections or visit the Heritage Hub and will need somewhere to park their cars and cycles. Parking bays or a lay-by could be created on Sadberge Road. Cycle parking rails or stands should be provided in a secure location.

Project 15 - Publicity

The first edition of this guide was widely circulated to officers of the Borough Council and the partners of the Heritage Action Zone. The Parish Council, the Local History Society and members of the Heritage Hub Steering Group have received copies. A version of it appeared in the April 2021 edition of the Friends magazine, The Globe, which can be viewed on the FSDR website; sdr1825.org.uk. This new edition will be similarly circulated and be made available on social media to reach as wide an audience as possible, including the local community. Guided tours and explanations of the projects will again be given in order to encourage local people and business to become involved.

Project 16 - Conservation Volunteers

A team of volunteers has been established by the Friends and they have cleared vegetation and recovered 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's Conservation Officer has completed his survey of a possible Conservation Area along the trackbed within the Parish. An investigation into designating one conservation area for the whole of the former S&DR main line is in progress and public consultation on this is proposed to take place this year.

Funding

The Friends propose to submit a bid for Heritage Lottery funding for the Hub, including projects 1 (Waiting Shed), 5 (Od Mill Wall), 8 (Loading Dock) and other work. It would be appropriate for the Borough Council to make a contribution, as owners of the structures.

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

Ross Chisholm: Middleton St George S&DR Heritage Steering Group: February 2022