

friends on track

Adventures and experiences on the Settle–Carlisle line

We get onboard with the early travellers

Concerto for two: how Elgar came to Settle

The inside track on the Horton quarry connection



1876 – 2026

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February 2026

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friends on track

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William Powell Frith,
The Railway Station c.1862-1909

Friends on Track is the members' magazine of the Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line

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Our front page image pays homage to those first travellers on the S&C and is clearly a caricature of Victorian rail travel. But is it so far removed from the present day social milieu at stations like Euston today? Or any airport departures terminal on a busy Saturday? Or, dare we say it, the coach parties trying to find a seat on a 2 car train from Settle?

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150th Anniversary

Settle–Carlisle Railway Friends President, Michael Portillo, supports launch of 150th Anniversary of passenger travel on the line

2026 marks 150 years since the first passenger train ran along the world famous Settle–Carlisle Railway line, often described as the last mainline railway built by hand and running across some of the harshest terrain in England.

Starting our 150th anniversary year by operating as the diversionary route for the West Coast Main Line reminds us all of the important role this line plays, not just as a tourist or heritage asset, but as an operational mainline rail artery linking north to south and connecting rural communities.

Seeing the much larger, faster, bi-mode Class 805 Evero trains sweeping through the stunning landscape offers the perfect connection between its history and the past, with enduring Victorian engineering feats and preserved heritage infrastructure and the possible future options for the line which continues to thrive following its saving in the 1980s.

Michael Portillo, Minister of State for Transport at the time of the campaign to save the line and the man whose name was on the letter of reprieve, became the Honorary President for the association known as the Friends of Settle–Carlisle Line and has been a supporter and follower of the line's progress ever since.

Michael says, **“In April 1989, I wrote to the Friends of the Settle–Carlisle Line, announcing that the proposed closure of the Settle–Carlisle Railway Line would not take place, and the line was reprieved.**

At that time, I charged the Friends to work to support and promote the line, and suggested the formation of a registered charity (The Settle–Carlisle Railway Trust) to help raise funds to preserve and restore this magnificent line. Both organisations have worked

tirelessly since that time to achieve those aims; and I am delighted to see the extensive programme of work and celebratory events that they have planned for the 150th Anniversary in 2026.

As Honorary President of the Friends, I am very pleased to extend my support, and to thank all those involved in the 150th Anniversary. I would encourage everyone to make time to visit and ride the line to experience the spectacular setting and fascinating heritage, and to witness the wonderful dedication and passion of its splendid volunteers.”

The Settle–Carlisle Railway is a strategic asset with a role to play in developing integrated transport for rural communities, increasing sustainability in the tourism and leisure industry and promoting educational and social opportunities for thousands of visitors from across the UK and abroad who come to experience the unique journey, location and history.

Our family of supporting organisations – The Friends, The Trust and the Settle–Carlisle Railway Development Company are working together to deliver a comprehensive programme of activities and events throughout the year to celebrate, commemorate, improve and develop the Line including refurbishing key sites on the line starting with the famous Ribbleshead Visitor Centre and Tearoom, offering free walks, talks, heritage events and days out, meeting partners in transport and tourism to forge better links for the future and working to bring more people from near and far together to enjoy all that the line has to offer. **For full details of events visit www.settlecarlisletrust.org.uk or follow [FriendsSettleCarlisle](#) on social media.**



Welcome

A welcome note from our chair, Allison Cosgrove, as we head into a year of celebrations...

Dear Members, this year is a very exciting one for us, as it marks the 150th anniversary of passenger traffic on our Line. Our opening press release has been endorsed by our President, Michael Portillo, and published in a wide range of journals – you can see it opposite.

Jill Tiernan and Anna Jackson have been working in conjunction with the Development Company, to arrange a large number of events over the year, beginning with a Stakeholder Breakfast and an exhibition stall at Keighley Model Railway Show in February, with other events planned all through the year. We hope to issue monthly emails to members to keep you all informed of these events and would love to see as many of you as possible there.

Coincidentally, the year has begun with two weeks of Avanti train services along the Line, while works have taken place on the West Coast Main Line and the M6. It has been wonderful to introduce our Line to potential passengers and visitors, and we hope that some of them will return in better weather! The photo below shows an Avanti Evero exiting Blea Moor tunnel, courtesy of Avanti.

Whether your interest is in model rail, anniversary walks from different locations, a special cycle event or just in getting around the Line to visit in this special year, please do come and help us celebrate.

Alison



The first passengers

Graham Bocking, a Trustee of the Midland Railway Society, focuses on the social strata of those early passengers in 1876. This is just a snippet based on a book he hopes to publish on the sociological aspects of those 19th century travellers.

The first day of regular services

As a general observation, the first passengers were people who most likely finalised their arrangements at short notice, having been quite unable to plan much further ahead. Following the two postponements of the opening date earlier in 1876, there was exceptionally bad weather over the Easter weekend in mid-April, with a mixture of rain, hail and snow over many parts of the country, continuing until the end of the month. There was flooding as close as the Eden Valley, and several mainline railways elsewhere in the country were temporarily blocked. This wasn't the time to plan a railway excursion through the challenging environment along the S&C route! Furthermore, there was uncertainty due to a Midland guards' strike, and the possibility of it spreading to other staff, including those on the S&C.

The Midland's publicity campaign, announcing 1 May 1876 as the opening date, only commenced on Saturday, 15 April, with the majority of press advertisements being published towards the end of the month. The company made considerable efforts, covering newspapers from Caithness to Cornwall, Kent to Kerry, but this and the wording, headed "New Route to Scotland" and referring only to the new services of Pullman cars and the company's own luxurious new carriages for the long-distance passengers, more than confirms the Midland's focus on long-distance

passengers. From the beginning this included through carriages and or connecting services to and from South West England and the West Midlands, Liverpool and Manchester as well as parts of Northern Scotland.

Even articles in the Craven Herald in Skipton and the Penrith Herald made little mention of local services; in Carlisle there were evidently conflicting loyalties, with at least one local newspaper paying less attention to the S&C opening than to improvements in West Coast services to meet the challenge. This deliberate concentration on Anglo-Scottish traffic rather than local services provides an interesting comparison with the current situation, and talk of reintroducing longer-distance services over the S&C. At the Yorkshire end of the S&C, there was competition for attention, with the NER (Leeds,) Crossgates & Wetherby line opening on the same day.

Long-distance services

Amongst the individual travellers heading south were the Lord Provost of Edinburgh, James Falshaw, made a Baronet in 1876, who was coincidentally a railway engineer, ironically for the Lancaster & Carlisle and Caledonian, and North British Railway Director, later Chairman; Falshaw originated from Leeds and used the new service for a visit there. He was accompanied by John Walker, NBR General Manager, James McLaren,

MIDLAND RAILWAY.

NOTICES for MAY, 1876.

OPENING OF THE SETTLE & CARLISLE LINE.

The Settle and Carlisle Railway will be opened for Passenger Traffic on Monday, May 1st, when an entirely New Service of EXPRESS and FAST TRAINS will be established between the Midland System and Scotland.

The Passenger Train Service will be revised throughout the whole of the Midland System.

For particulars of Alterations see Time-Tables for May issued by the Company.

The Night Express Trains between England and Scotland, leaving London for Edinboro' and Glasgow at 9.15 p.m., Glasgow for London at 9.15 p.m., and Edinboro' for London at 9.20 p.m.; and the Train leaving Edinboro' at 4.30 and Glasgow at 4.35 p.m., Carlisle at 8.5 p.m., and Leeds at 11.30 p.m., arriving at London (St. Pancras) at 5.15 a.m., and at Bristol at 6.0 a.m., WILL COMMENCE running on the Evening of Monday, May 1st, and where these Trains are shewn as passing over the Line between the hours of 12.0 midnight and 8.0 a.m., the times WILL NOT apply to the morning of Monday, May 1st.

TOURIST ARRANGEMENTS, 1876.

First and Third-Class Tourist Tickets, available for TWO MONTHS, will be issued from June 1st to the 31st October, 1876.

IN CONSEQUENCE of the Opening of the Settle and Carlisle Line, the 1st Class Tourist Fares to Scotland by that route WILL BE REDUCED.

For particulars see Programmes which will be issued by the Company on the 20th of May.

JAMES ALLPORT,
General-Manager.

Derby, April. 1876.



“Coming South, Perth Station” Painting by George Earl 1895 showing passengers waiting for a train south to London. Image credit: National Railway Museum / Science & Society Picture Library

Passenger Superintendent and Dugald Drummond, Locomotive Superintendent. The NBR representation contrasted with that of the Midland, whose Superintendent of the Line, Needham, was alone in representing the company on his return from Edinburgh, having accompanied a pre-opening special carrying the Carl Rosa Opera Company on its tour to Scotland.

Although there is no record of high-ranking Glasgow & South Western Railway officials on the first train south from Glasgow, it was reported that both the Day and Night Expresses from there and Edinburgh towards London were well patronised. It was however noted that many passengers from Edinburgh had only booked to stations along the Waverley route or Carlisle, only 8 in total were travelling through to the South, and given that the West Coast route was also trying to attract additional passengers with its competitive publicity

and fare reductions, it seems unlikely that the first new trains over the S&C were completely full.

There are press reports which confirm that on the first day many journalists were travelling in order to experience the new level of comfort and service in the trains and the scenery through which they passed. The Railway News, Railway Times, The Times, The Graphic, Glasgow News, Derbyshire Times and Chesterfield Herald all referred to their reporters having been on one of the first trains and included their personal impressions. It did not escape their notice that the first Day Scotch Express was quite lightly loaded as it left St Pancras, however in time this evidently changed. On 1 July, after only 2 months' operation, the Midland limited the use of the Scotch Expresses to longer-distance passengers; the trains were no longer available for short journeys between most intermediate stations, for example Bedford-Leicester

or Sheffield-Leeds. Evidently the Midland was attracting sufficient custom from long-distance passengers, so needed the space for them, and this is reinforced by the trains having continued to call at these stations to pick up or set down, otherwise stops could have been omitted entirely, except for operational purposes – taking water or changing engines.

A further indication that many passengers travelled over longer distances can be gained from reports of accidents, of which there were unfortunately three serious examples on the Midland main line during 1876, one at Ormside on the S&C itself. These reports often listed the names, origins and occupations of those killed and injured, and whilst not statistically significant, they tend to confirm the picture already presented.

Local services

Whilst there was great interest in the new long-distance trains even at intermediate stations which they just passed through, the celebrations at towns along the way, notably Appleby, Kirkby Stephen and Settle, show the interest in the new possibility to travel. Traffic was heavier on market days in larger towns, or when a local event was celebrated. At the ends of the S&C places such as Carlisle or the towns of Yorkshire and Lancashire suddenly became more accessible for business, culture and sport, although inhabitants of small towns and villages along the line could not always afford to travel far. Nevertheless, the line also opened up the area for outsiders, for example market traders or entertainers, sportsmen, or simply people wanting to visit the area to enjoy its environment, hopefully leaving their money in the area in local shops or inns.

Another group who feature in reporting of early trains, particularly in the North, were the local clergy, who later also made suggestions to the Company as to timetable improvements; it may therefore be assumed that they had travelled on the services. The Diocese of Carlisle extended as far southwards as Kirkby Stephen, while the then Diocese of Ripon stretched northwards up the line via Skipton and Settle, and travel over the line would have been necessary for church business, also because a local vicar or curate was often representative of his community on local issues, for example as chairman of the Parish Council, and travelled in that capacity, not as a cleric.

Similarly, the Court system brought traffic, with circuit judges and lawyers travelling the country more easily using the railway instead of road coaches. Other occupations who feature more often in the reports, suggesting that they travelled regularly, included members of the armed services, aristocrats and politicians, professional people, skilled tradesmen and commercial travellers, not surprisingly all those who could afford to travel, or whose employers would have paid their fares.

Passenger statistics

The Midland was no better than its competitors at market research, although during the first months of operation over the S&C, the company's Board received fortnightly reports on Scotch Express traffic, which have sadly been lost in the course of time. However the National Archives still hold the Midland's station-by-station records of passengers numbers and revenues for 1876, as well preceding and subsequent years, and these shed light on how travel patterns developed.

Apart from S&C and Airedale stations, St Pancras in London witnessed the greatest increase over the period 1875-1877, +19.7% in passenger numbers and 21.6% in average receipts per passenger, and a positive trend was maintained through to 1880. Bedford, Kettering, Loughborough, Leicester and Derby all saw more modest, 4-12% increases in passengers, but only minor increases in receipts per head. From Nottingham and Chesterfield through to Leeds and Bradford passengers numbers were lower, but receipts per head higher, pointing to a modest increase in longer journeys. At Keighley, Skipton and Hellifield passenger numbers saw substantial increases, as did receipts per head except at Hellifield, where however there was a dramatic leap in 1810 with completion of the link from Clitheroe and Blackburn.

West and East Coast company records confirm how the Midland's increased London passenger traffic affected their businesses. On 19 May the LNWR General Manager, George Findlay, reported to their Traffic Committee that Euston-Glasgow passenger revenues had been substantially reduced by the S&C opening; at the Half-Yearly Meeting on 19 August, the Chairman, Richard Moon, noted with resentment that "they had had a very large proportion of the Scotch traffic taken away from them". The GNR was similarly concerned. Whilst the companies on both routes responded to the challenge in due course, the Midland had already secured a market share which its Chairman, John Ellis, cautiously noted was "fully equal to our expectations".

The statistics and the exclusion of intermediate passengers in England from the Scotch Expresses from July

1876 show that the Midland remained true to its objective to develop its own, independent Anglo-Scottish services using the S&C, whilst providing services to local communities along the line which, if not particularly economic to the railway, were important to the places served. Hopefully the S&C will again be able to offer both types of service to passengers living or passing along its route in future.

Bibliography:

It can be invidious to select individual works by previous authors as references, not least in the case of books about the S&C – the subject of so many – but in this case three books in particular need to be acknowledged, which have been consulted in writing this article, and which I can recommend without hesitation:

The Midland Railway North of Leeds, Peter E Baughan, David & Charles, 1966, ISBN 0-7153-8852-8 (first published under the title, North of Leeds, Roundhouse Books, 1966)

Rails in the Fells, David Jenkinson, Peco Publications & Publicity, 1973 ISBN 10 0900586427

The New Railway to Scotland David Occomore, Hayloft Publishing, 2020 ISBN 978-1-910237-43-4

Extensive use has also been made of the online British Newspaper Archive, a search of which reveals Midland advertisements for the new services in literally hundreds of newspapers published across the country, many of which then also reported on the opening itself.

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School Pack

USING THE SETTLE-CARLISLE RAILWAY IN EDUCATION – 1994

By Tony Gill

John Lassey (Head of Hellifield Primary School) on the extreme left of the picture. Tony Gill on extreme right and Rob Rimmer is next to Tony with Christine Brown in the middle.

In 1994 I worked for Cumbria Training and Enterprise Company as Manager of the South Lakes Education Business Partnership. As the name implies, the aim was to work with local businesses to develop and implement resources that would support the delivery of the school curriculum at Primary and Secondary levels.

Rob Rimmer from the Settle-Carlisle Railway Development Company contacted me to ask if we would be interested in helping with the development of a Primary School Resource Pack based on the building of the Settle-Carlisle line. This was to be a joint enterprise between SCRDC, South Lakes Education Business Partnership and North Yorkshire Business Education Partnership [NYBEP]. The NYBEP involvement would be managed by Diane Christon. To ensure educational relevance, the development of the actual resources would be supported by teachers from local schools who also had a personal interest in the history of the

line. They were Christine Brown, Head Teacher of Dent Primary School, John Lassey from Hellifield Primary School and Richard Warham from Settle High School. Rob Rimmer would manage the whole project. Bill Mitchell spent a lot of time with us and gave incredibly valuable insights into the building of the line.

Initial meetings took place at Watershed Mill where SCRDC was based. The format of the Resource Pack was decided, and it would be produced as a series of separate A4 sheets that could be photocopied. Each sheet would focus on a particular aspect of building the line and there would be emphasis on local places that could 'bring the project to life'. These local places included the Ribbleshead viaduct itself, the Ribbleshead shanties, The Hoffman Kiln at Langcliffe, Arten Gill Viaduct, Chapel-Le-Dale Church and Blea Moor Tunnel. There would be a timeline and quotations from original sources to support the social history aspect.

The draft resource sheets were all written and illustrated and a presentation format put together. To ensure accuracy and relevance, the development team visited the sites referred to in the resource sheets so that, as teachers, they could put together guidance notes on how best to link them to the curriculum.

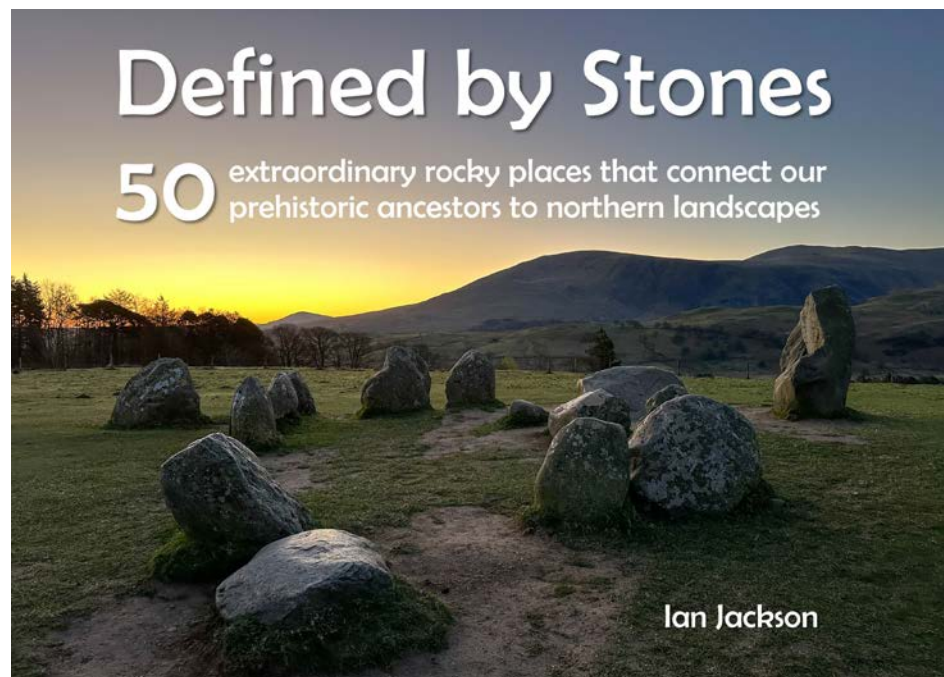
The next stage was to publicise the Resource Pack. This was done by bringing teachers on the Teacher Placement programme from Cumbria and North Yorkshire to Watershed Mill for a day to work with the materials. These development days were led by the teachers who had put the pack together and included site visits, particularly to Ribbleshead, and also included a background talk from Bill Mitchell. The teacher feedback from these days was extremely important and allowed the resources to be fine tuned before going to publication.

The final Resource Pack had fifteen individual sheets all with an individual

title and focus. Every Primary School in North Yorkshire and the South Lakes area of Cumbria received a free copy of the Resource Pack. Once the packs were distributed, further Teacher Placement days were arranged so that as many teachers as possible were able to use the Settle-Carlisle Railway as a resource and they could also liaise with SCRDC to organise school visits.

Bill Mitchell also produced a publication '*How They Built the Settle-Carlisle Railway: A Special Schools Edition to accompany a Teachers' Resource Pack*'

As a follow up to the original pack, in 1995 a Technology Pack was developed by Geoff Howard, a Design Technology Adviser from North Yorkshire. This was for Secondary Schools and designed to be used by Design Technology teachers and covered topics as wide ranging as the design of stations to the design of seating in carriages. It was launched to a group of teachers on Hellifield Station.



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Born of the Railways: Cowans Sheldon and the Cranes of Carlisle

By Matthew Johnston, Human History Curator, Tullie House Museum

Like many other cities, Carlisle benefitted hugely from the coming of the railways, and its status as a railway city is an important part of its history.

The first line to enter the city, the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway, came about essentially because it was less than a third of the cost of plans to extend the Carlisle Canal – linking the city to the Solway Firth – to Newcastle. An Act of Parliament authorised the building of a railway along the route in 1829, and at the time it was the longest line approved by the Government. Carlisle was to officially enter the Railway Age.

The full line was completed in 1838 and plans were put in place to have an official opening ceremony. Trains would take passengers from Carlisle to Newcastle, where breakfast would be provided. Passengers from Newcastle would then join the return journey to Carlisle for dinner, before a final trip back to the north-east. This would be a celebration of the new mode of transport, making a return journey in one day where until this point it would have taken two. In actual fact it turned into something of a comedy of errors, with passengers being inadvertently dumped into the Tyne while being ferried across from the station at

Gateshead, and then falling victim to the British weather while travelling in open carriages on the return journey. None of this, however, appears to have dampened enthusiasm for the railways, and by 1877 the network had grown further and seven different rail companies were operating out of Carlisle's Citadel Station.

The railways opened Carlisle up to the rest of the country and beyond, and were a huge benefit to the new industries that had been set up in the city in the 19th century - including Carr's biscuit factory, still going strong today, and Dixon's cotton mill, the chimney of which remains an iconic part of the city's skyline. The railways themselves also created new industries, and chief among these was Cowans Sheldon, which became an important and longstanding employer in the city.

Founders **John Cowans** and **Edward Pattinson Sheldon**, in partnership with brothers Thomas and William Bouch, set up an iron works at the former Woodbank Calico Works at Upperby in 1846, taking advantage of the railway boom to produce parts for the locomotive industry. All knew the industry well, with Cowans, Sheldon and William Bouch having started their careers together as apprentices to Robert Stephenson in the north-east. Additionally, Cowans had experience working in Carlisle on



The last crane leaving the St Nicholas works before its closure in 1987.
Credit: Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery Trust.

the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway, and Sheldon had been the driver of that first locomotive that entered the city when the line was completed in 1838. Between them they had connections with many different rail companies, which helped to bring in orders and grow the business.

By the 1850s the company had, in fact, outgrown its original site. Forging

operations were relocated to Darlington in 1852, then in 1857 the company purchased the St Nicholas engineering works of George Davy Richardson on London Road, named for the site of the old leper hospital on which it stood. It is thought that Richardson's works had also manufactured cranes, and Cowans Sheldon subsequently added this to their



1930's mural depicting Cowans Sheldon cranes. Credit: Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery Trust.

own repertoire, supplying their first crane in 1858. This was a turning point for the company, who were to become experts in the field, producing cranes for railways and dockyards that were sent all around the world.

A product of the railways upon which it had built its success, Cowans Sheldon's fortunes were subsequently linked to those of the industry itself. While the railway boom continued, business was good and the firm continued to grow, finding particular success in the

manufacture of turntables. By the end of the 1800s, however, and after the deaths of both of its founders, expansion of the rail network had slowed and the company began to concentrate more on its overseas orders, as well as expanding into the production of maritime equipment such as dock cranes. The first half of the 1900s was also a period of ups and downs, with economic depression and strikes alternating with wartime contract work, including repairs to rail infrastructure following the Second World War. A

logbook of new starters to the company covering the years 1923 to 1934, in the Tullie collection, marks many names as 'restarted', indicating periods of layoffs when business was slow and rehires when things picked up again. Despite this, the company still managed to accumulate success stories, including the building of the largest floating crane in the world – 350 tons – in 1933. Rather unfortunately, this was commissioned by Mitsubishi and sent to Nagasaki where it was used for manufacturing Japanese warships.

Aside from being a major employer for Carlisle, a closer look through the archives here at Tullie shows that the firm was also rooted in the local community – no doubt another reason why it is still remembered so fondly in the city. It was a Cowans Sheldon employee, Billy Templeton, who made the '**chain of office**' for the Mayor of Upperby, now in the museum's collection, in 1897. This was part of a long tradition across the country of electing mock mayors as a way to make fun of authority, and is perhaps particularly appropriate given the company's origins in Upperby. Employees also took part in local sporting life through **Cowans Sheldon AFC** and its accompanying **apprentices team**, which are both represented in photographs in the collection, while a 1957 telegram from the company's Chairman to a former employee and his wife on the occasion of their golden wedding anniversary gives an impression of Cowans Sheldon's relationship with its workforce. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that when a series of nine **murals** of working life in Carlisle were commissioned in 1931 to adorn the walls of the reference library – then based at Tullie House – Cowans Sheldon cranes were chosen as one of the scenes. Recently restored, this piece took pride of place in our new Carlisle Gallery when it opened in April 2025, in a section celebrating iconic Carlisle industries.

Perhaps the firm's most visible legacy in the city is the **Market Hall**. During its construction in the 1880s Cowans Sheldon stepped in to take over work on the steel roofing after problems with the original contractors. Unsurprisingly, given their experience making pieces for the railway industry, the end result is something reminiscent of a Victorian train station, and the building has been

described as the greatest railway station to have never held a train.

In 1961 the company was merged with the Glasgow firm of Clyde Crane & Booth, but was still able to pull in some major orders. The 1960s saw the construction of the largest railway recovery crane that Cowans Sheldon ever built. The 250 ton **Ursa Major** was destined for North America and was used by the Canadian Pacific Railway for rescuing trains that had derailed on frozen tracks. Understandably proud of their achievements, a model of the crane stood in the company's offices and this, along with framed photographs showing off more of the company's success stories around the world, are now part of the collection here at Tullie.

The company faced another merger in 1982, this time with John Boyd (part of the Clarke Chapman group), becoming Cowans Boyd. This was to mark the beginning of the end for crane-making in Carlisle, however, with the St Nicholas works closing down in 1987. Another look through the collection here shows that the significance of the closure was

clearly understood at the time, with a series of photographs documenting the exit of the **last crane** from the works – on its way to India – and more images capturing the subsequent demolition of the site shortly after.

Today the site of the works is a retail park, with little indication of its past activity now visible. A pub opposite still bears the name of The Cranemakers, after the firm and its most famous product, but even this has recently closed. Many in the city, however, still remember Cowans Sheldon, either through having worked there themselves or through family connections, and it is our job here at Tullie to help preserve these stories of Carlisle's industrial past.

For anyone looking to find out more about the history of Cowans Sheldon, Alan Earnshaw's book *Carlisle's Crane Makers: The Cowans Sheldon Story* provides an excellent, in-depth account.

The model of the Ursa Major will be on display in Tullie's Border Galleries until 22 February 2026.

Into the landscape



A NEWCOMER'S VIEW FROM THE TRAIN

By Meg Daly

What does an American make of the Settle-Carlisle Railway? That was the question posed to me soon after I arrived in the village of Burton-in-Lonsdale.

My British husband, Mark, and I had recently relocated from the U.S. to Burton. Fellow villager and *Friends on Track* Magazine editor David Owen asked if I'd like to take a journey and share my impressions. I jumped at the chance. A few years prior, I had taken a day trip with my husband's father from Settle to Carlisle and loved it. I welcomed the opportunity to revisit the incredible views. Plus, I couldn't wait to introduce Mark, who, though he grew up in the region, had never been on the train line.

We chose Ribbleshead station for our departure, a few days after Christmas. It was to be a short trip, just up to Appleby for lunch, then back again. A ride simply for the ride's sake, to travel over the iconic viaduct and enjoy the beautiful Yorkshire Dales scenery.

We arrived early for our 10:38 train. The sky was grey, but in that milky not-so-bad way. No rain, and we could see for miles. Being mid-week of winter holidays, people were out in droves walking the trails around Chapel-le-Dale and Wharfedale. The wind was up, so we stayed in our car until the last minute to avoid getting too chilled on the platform.

The Ribbleshead station could be said to be in the middle of nowhere. The rolling vastness of the hills and valleys reminds me of my home state of Wyoming, USA. The topography is different – sage flats and dusty hills formed from lava flows – but the lonely, frontier feeling is similar. In the American West, only a few train lines exist and most of those are for carrying cargo. You would never find a station like Ribbleshead out in the high desert steppeland of the U.S. You might find a worn-down old depot, but not a well kept station complete with tea service and quaint leaded windows.

As our northbound train approached, I took a last glance at the viaduct. Even on a grey day, the structure emanates grandeur. As an art history aficionado, I'd done a bit of homework about viaducts and other arched bridges. Those big curved arches forming the Ribbleshead Viaduct were not chosen at random. Not only do they provide a sturdy distribution of weight, curved forms in architecture and design mimic curves found in



nature. As bridges and viaducts often connect the modern world to the natural world, these arches couldn't be more apt.

Artists like Paul Cezanne, J.M.W. Turner, and Georges Braque knew this. In the mid 1880s, Cezanne painted *Mont Sainte-Victoire* and the *Viaduct of the Arc River Valley*. According to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, his intention was to “reveal the inner geometry of nature.” The way Cezanne has composed the painting, the viaduct serves as one of many pleasing lines winding through the landscape. The mountains and trees are what loom large.

Visitors to Ribbleshead Viaduct understand this perspective, where even a huge, impressive piece of engineering is dwarfed by nature. I think of the bridge as a beautiful punctuation within the larger novel of the fells. Of course that perspective changes when you walk up close to the structure's base. Or when you travel over it, suspended for a minute above the land.

Out of Ribbleshead Station, the train is almost immediately atop the viaduct. I was amazed by how few people in our packed carriage looked out their windows. The views were breathtaking: from the russet tones of acres of bracken to the Belted Galloway cows and derelict stone farm buildings, the land pulsed with life and history. But for most travellers that day, the journey was a means to an end, their noses buried in books or phones or bags of crisps. Nothing wrong with that, getting from one place to another without having to drive, the gentle rocking motion relaxing us all.

If you did look out the window, as I did, you might catch sight of walkers waving

at the train. I felt a sense of camaraderie with the walkers; we were each adventuring across the terrain in different ways. While the walkers will have their eyes trained on the rocky trail, mine were attuned to the curves in the landscape. I noticed how stone walls undulate with the natural shape of the land. Rivulets of water, narrow becks, curving country roads. Even sheep horns curve round on themselves. Everywhere I looked I saw roundness.

In Wyoming, the landscapes are more jagged. Sharp points of pine trees, sheer granite mountains, spears of sagebrush jabbing at the sky.



Mont Sainte-Victoire & the Viaduct of the Arc River Valley, by Cezanne.

However wild Northern England is, it still feels soft to me, given where I am from.

Also, train travel itself is foreign to me. Even my journey from Ribbleshead to a small town felt part of a larger tradition of English and European travel. In England, you can board a train and be in London, or even Paris, the same day. Modernity and countryside are directly linked, and with that link comes a connection to history and culture. In Wyoming, there is no equivalent. It is, for all intents and purposes, the Wild West, even today. Where I come from, there is no train to take me to see a Cezanne painting.

Mark and I had a simple pub lunch in Appleby, then caught the next train back. The light was lower in the sky by then, but brighter. Patches of sunlight illuminated the patchwork of farmland in an impromptu symmetry. Soon we passed through

Blea Moor tunnel, and I took note that we had entered the earth - not only does the train take people over the land but also actually inside it.

On this return trip, there was a couple seated next to us who were clearly on the train to take in the sights. As we approached the viaduct, they each stood and took photos, hoping to catch the moment the engine started over the bridge. I liked seeing the delight in their eyes, as it matched my own.

My journeys that day got me thinking about belonging in the countryside. There are those who live in it, and those who pass through. I hope to become the former, even if for now I am still a traveller. The benefit being that each soft curve of land, each hulking fell or tiny stream, feels new to me. And a ride on the Settle–Carlisle feels like a cultured adventure!

Meg Daly has been writing about art and culture for many years. Her journalism and essays have been published in a number of American publications. This essay is her first in the UK.





A GBRf class 66 emerging from the Ribble Valley mist near Settle, hauling empty stone wagons for Arcow quarry. Photo courtesy of Richard Gardner.

Running in the Wild and Wonderful



By Ellie Parker,
Wild Ingleborough
Community
Engagement Officer

As I write this from the relative warmth of the Wild Ingleborough office, a few hundred hardy souls are currently passing through the area on the Montane Winter Spine Race – a formidable challenge in which competitors take on the whole 268 miles of the Pennine Way in one go, through all the worst weather winter can throw at them.

While few have the resilience to undertake such an extreme endeavour, adventure challenges in our remote landscapes have seen an explosion in popularity in recent years. One of the most popular is the Yorkshire Three Peaks, with tens of thousands of visitors attempting to conquer Pen-y-ghent, Wharfedale and Ingleborough in under 12 hours. Several miles of the route pass through the Ingleborough National Nature Reserve, offering weary walkers the chance to see Wild Ingleborough in action. On the north side, the limestone pavements of Southerscales give way to the steeper slopes of High Lot, where we've planted mixed native broadleaf trees in the gullies – in the future they'll provide shade and shelter for a pit-stop before tackling the summit. On the final leg of the challenge, the limestone grasslands of Sulber in springtime are tinged pink with beautiful



Wild Ingleborough – Red Pole cattle are a hardy breed. Photo courtesy of Dwayne Martindale, age 5.

bird's-eye primroses. On both sides of the mountain our conservation grazers are hard at work – hardy native breed cattle such as Red Polls and Belted Galloways keep the landscape in optimum condition for wildflowers, invertebrates and birds to thrive.

Maintaining a nature reserve on one of the busiest footpaths in the country is both a challenge and an opportunity. Heavy footfall has the potential to disturb wildlife and livestock, especially when dogs are brought into the mix. The impact on the land and the soil is undeniable – the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority has a Three Peaks ranger

team dedicated to maintaining the footpaths and minimising erosion along the route. And while most walkers behave responsibly, litter can be a problem too. But at the same time, what a golden opportunity to show people the best our landscape has to offer – and imagine if just a fraction of those Three Peaks Challenge walkers were inspired to take action for nature and wildlife?

As we look ahead to the warmer months and make plans for the year ahead, the Wild Ingleborough engagement team is thinking about how we can help these walkers deepen their connection to, and be inspired by, the nature and wildlife

around them. Using social media and face-to-face events, we'll be encouraging people to lift their eyes from the path, and see Ingleborough not just as a playground, but a living, breathing, working landscape that needs all of us to help care for it.

What to look for this month:

Towards the end of February the curlews start returning to the Dales – listen for their distinctive, mournful call and be reassured that spring isn't far behind!

To find out more about Wild Ingleborough and Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's work in this area, visit www.wildingleborough.org.uk and follow us on our social media channels.

Membership Update

With an exciting programme of events planned to celebrate 150 years of passenger trains on the Settle–Carlisle Line, there has never been a better time to get on board and join us in supporting this fabulous railway.

For existing supporters, you will have already received a renewal reminder as Membership Subscriptions are due on or before 1st March. We are delighted to share that rates of subscription remain unchanged, with members continuing to enjoy a wide range of benefits and discounts.

Did you know you can also buy gift memberships for others – individuals, couples or families? These make an ideal gift for a birthday or anniversary and encourage new supporters into our organisation whilst also giving them access to the discounts and benefits for members that they could then enjoy on a visit or day out on the line.

How to Make Payment

For any member that has yet to renew, we value your support and continue to offer a range of payment methods to meet the needs of our members. With the continued increases in postage costs and the ever reducing personal services offered by the Banks, most of our members are choosing to renew and pay online. Subscription rates are the same as last year and are detailed at the foot of the inside front cover.

Online is the most popular option as it is quick, easy and cheaper for our members. Simply pay your membership at www.membermojo.co.uk/foscl.

Standing Order continues to be used by approximately 18% of our members and no action is required if you have a valid standing order in place.

BACS may also be used by crediting the following account: Friends of the Settle–Carlisle Line, Sort Code 20-78-42, Account No 93121526. Please quote your membership number as reference.

Cheques should be payable to 'FoSCL' and sent to the Membership Office (details below). Due to the ever increasing costs of postage and bank processing, we encourage payment online as this is quick, easy and cheaper for our members.

Membership Benefits

Besides knowing your membership fee is helping deliver the extensive programme of activities undertaken by the Friends including continued development and improvements along the line and at stations, there is also an extensive list of benefits for you as members, including:

- 10% Discount* in our shops at Settle and Appleby Stations and via our web shop <https://shop.foscl.org.uk> by using the discount code VOLFOS23
 - 10% Discount* on purchases from the Refreshment Trolley Service whilst travelling the Leeds–Settle–Carlisle Line
 - 10% Discount* on food and drink purchases at Ribbleshead Station Cafe & Horton in Ribblesdale Station Cafe Bar
 - 10% Discount^ when you stay at any of the iconic station cottages at Dent, Horton, Kirkby Stephen and Ribbleshead by quoting FOSCL10
 - Optional Dales Railcard currently offering 1/3 discount off fares on the Leeds–Settle–Carlisle, Leeds–Morecambe lines and Manchester–Clitheroe–Ribbleshead (The Yorkshire Dales Explorer)
 - Quarterly magazine featuring news of the line, available as traditional printed paper copy, or in digital format direct to your email
- * Discounts are available along the line on production of your valid membership card
^ Discount cannot be used in conjunction with other offers at our holiday lets.

Membership Cards will continue to be sent to all members with their renewal packs. For all Life Members and those who require a replacement card, simply download your card from <https://membermojo.co.uk/foscl> or by contacting the membership office below.

Contact Details

If you have a query about your membership, please contact:

Membership Office:

Email: membership@settle-carlisle.com
Phone: 07436 159110
Address: Friends Membership Office,
Railway Station, Clifford Street, Appleby,
CA16 6TT

Membership Website:

<https://membermojo.co.uk/foscl>

If you have a query about your payment or as an alternative contact for membership queries, please contact:

Treasurer:

Damian Smith
Email: treasurer@settle-carlisle.com
Phone: 07850 329097

Help us to Grow our Membership!

We are asking for your support to help grow our membership and please encourage friends and family to join the Friends to help us secure a strong future for the line and build on our proud achievements of the last 45 years!

Joining is easy at <https://membermojo.co.uk/foscl>.

Thank you and best wishes for 2026.

Letters

This month's letters show just how closely members continue to follow, question and care about the S&C.

Short-formed trains

In the November edition, Martin Pearson is the latest to highlight the disappointment and problems with short-formed trains.

Spare a thought also for the 'feeder' service onto the line. I refer to it by its original name 'Lancashire Dalesrail.' I can only conclude that the Manchester Depot at Newton Heath has no experience of the rich scenery or distance involved when, far too often, a 2-car Cl150 unit is sent out with poor seat visibility, noisy and packed in Summer. The previous set up from Blackpool ran at least a Cl158 unit. I have enjoyed the Dalesrail led walks from around 2005 but due to costs and health, I'm not a regular, but feel my comment is valid.

To expect state-run Northern to offer a service appropriate to the needs of this special service, at least with a Cl156 and its centre tables together with a Cl150 for summer loadings, would be fair for the fares paid. I have no faith the State can do anything well. Excepting that it is wasting plenty of public money on nothing worth having. The frustrating thing is when taking issues up with such as Northern, the expected public sector refrain is that they know best and anyway, nothing can be done to change things. Sums up the modern UK perfectly.

Simon Pearce
(member 11329)

A traveller's initial thoughts on the Avanti Evero shuttle service.

I am no railway engineer or technical expert, but from a passenger point of view I travelled on the shuttle service on two occasions (Carlisle to Preston return) and enjoyed the experience immensely. Using a Class 805 bi-mode train gave a much more comfortable, and surprisingly quieter ride (even though the train was in diesel mode), than what we are used to with Northern's Class 158 units.

Some of the improvements that could be made would be as follows:

- a. the line speed to be increased.
- b. the signalling along the route to be improved.
- c. the trains themselves to be more reliable and robust.

I was delayed for over 4 hours in Carlisle on Monday 5 January. On the second journey we were delayed leaving Carlisle by over an hour. The organization at Carlisle station could be improved. At times the platforms at Carlisle seemed chaotic. There were plenty of staff on duty but often appeared unsure of what to do. I said earlier that I am no expert and I suspect I've missed a lot of relevant points but despite the drawbacks mentioned, this 2-week shuttle service showed that our line can be used in this way – as it was originally built to be. Well done to Avanti for doing this. Let's all learn from it, not forget about it and keep this area of through services/diversions at the front of our agendas.

Paul McVittie (Carlisle)

A Line That Needs Leadership

In the August issue of the magazine, we had two outstanding contributions, both based mainly on fact rather than opinion. Firstly, by Phil Hinde on 'A Crossrail Engineer in Settle' and then by Stephen Abbott 'Lining -Up for the Future'. The latter being a very well researched article on the S&C markets and station footfalls. Both articles illustrated, in various ways, what must change if the S&C is to continue and prosper. The subject was concluded by a very good letter from David Ward in which he postulates that the only real hope for the future is for the S&C to have a dedicated Line Manager – albeit only for maybe a couple of years or so.

I could not agree more with David on this point. The S&C needs an experienced Manager (A Ron Cotton Mk 2?) whose sole duty is to sort out the S&C and produce a more attractive and economical railway fit for the future. There is plenty to keep him busy as described in the two articles I've mentioned earlier. He would really have to be a GBR man otherwise train operation and engineering aspirations would still be inclined to continue in their own introverted ways.

We then come to the November issue with the news that the S&C is to be used once again for WCML diversions 7 days / week in January. This is great news to hear that at long last the regular mantra from both NR and the TOC's: 'We know from industry research that during planned disruptions that customers

prefer to stay on trains and avoid lengthy bus replacement journeys.' A phrase that is regularly repeated throughout the country – but then nothing ever happens. The easy way out – 'Bus Replacement' continues.

It is, however, disappointing to learn that N R have been unable/unwilling to carry out any route improvements before the diversions start. Speed improvements would have been an obvious start as would some heavy maintenance of the line's old mechanical signalling. It would be a great shame if appalling performance meant that the 'experiment' would not be repeated in the future. Speed improvements would, of course, benefit all users of the line – not just the Avanti diversions.

Perhaps in due course we will learn why there have not been any Line Speed increases back to what existed pre-1970? Particularly as the basic infrastructure of the S&C today is probably in better condition than it has ever been since WW2. Would a dedicated S&C Line Manager have helped or is it simply that NR would have had to employ expensive Engineering Consultants to tell them what to do. An expenditure they simply could not afford?

Roger Bastin (York)

Quarrying, it Rocks.

By David Owen

The recent completion of the Horton quarry rail connection between Heidelberg Materials UK and Network Rail was featured in the November issue, but I wanted to delve a little deeper into the project itself. The quarry has been operating since 1889 and I'm indebted to Tom O'Boyle, site Project & Engineering Manager, for kindly taking time to give members the background.

Tom was quick to point out that Heidelberg Materials' core belief is sustainability. And this isn't a company with a tick-box attitude to it either. It's perhaps best summed up by a quote from Clive Mitchell, Industrial Minerals Specialist at the British Geological Survey who writes, *"Sustainability is not just about environmental protection, it also concerns biodiversity, community relations, competence, employment, geodiversity, health & safety, resource efficiency, restoration and stakeholder accountability."*

Key performance indicators – combining sustainability & economics.

The advantage of rail over road is clear. Each train hauls 22 wagons of 75 tonnes, compare that with road haulage (and a trailer limited to 32 tonnes) and we have more than double the number in HGV vehicles taken off the road. Instead of one or two movements by rail per day (along a linear rail path), numerous random truck movements radiating out through Settle and the local villages are avoided.



Aerial view showing the new conveyor system and feeder house for the rail wagons. Thanks to Richard Gardner of the Phoenix Photographic Circle for this drone image.

Becky Murphy, Aggregates Regional Director at Heidelberg Materials UK, said:

“The reopening of the Horton quarry line will allow us to supply high-quality aggregate to major construction projects by rail, reducing vehicle movements on the wider road network and cutting associated CO₂ emissions.”

Let’s not forget that this makes good business sense for Heidelberg Materials – the more they can substantiate their sustainability credentials, the more they can help their customers hit their own targets towards net zero. The simple fact is that it makes Heidelberg Materials a more attractive supplier. Vertical integration (the consolidation of both raw material and end product within one group of companies), is also part of Heidelberg Materials’ holistic approach. Transporting more material by rail is just one of the levers the company is using, and improvements are being made across the business, not just in aggregates. For example, in September 2025 it reached a Final Investment Decision (FID) with the UK Government to build the world’s first carbon capture facility to enable fully decarbonised cement production at its Padeswood cement works in north Wales; coincidentally another rail-linked site. The carbon captured at Padeswood will be compressed and transported via an underground pipeline for secure, permanent storage under the seabed in Liverpool Bay, allowing Heidelberg Materials to produce evoZero carbon captured near-zero cement, which will help the construction industry to decarbonise.

Between a rock & a hard place – Horton is special.

The gritstone at Horton is renowned for its exceptional performance in road construction and maintenance thanks to its high Polished Stone Value (PSV) – a measure of how well the stone provides adhesion. In simple terms, it’s grippy stuff, making it ideal and safe for airport runways as much as for road surfaces.

What truly sets Horton quarry apart is the distinctive local geology. The site naturally features two key mineral types: limestone at the upper levels and gritstone lower down. This geological arrangement allows the quarry to supply materials for multiple applications. Limestone is used in cement and concrete production, as well as several other uses such as agricultural lime, a valuable product for local agriculture. Meanwhile, gritstone is perfect for roadstone products, ensuring high-quality surfaces for modern infrastructure.

This natural combination of resources makes Horton quarry a vital contributor to both the construction and agriculture industries in the region.

Acknowledging a team effort

A rail connection between a private site like Horton and the Network Rail system clearly requires a lot of early coordination. **PBH Rail of York** did the design work and became involved as early as 2019. Jose Galvez designed the layout and shared some insights with me. One of the biggest challenges was grading the site for the two track sidings. Jose said that “excavation work was needed to reduce the gradient to 1:160 – any steeper would be too challenging for the locos to control such a vast tonnage of product. The original scheme for 3 sidings was changed to two, simply by lengthening

THE GEOLOGIST’S VIEW

Thanks to Ian Jackson, Geologist, for this insight. Please see page 14 for news of his new book *Defined by Stones*. His previous books include *Cumbria Rocks & Northumberland Rocks*.

Horton quarry has worked limestone for many years. These rocks are Carboniferous and are approximately 335 million years old. They are the same rocks that form the wonderful characteristic Dale’s limestone landscapes. Like all limestones they were once the limy mud and broken debris of animals that lived in a tropical sea when the bit of the Earth’s crust we live on today was much closer to the Equator. Below the limestones are different, older, rocks. Siltstones and sandstones, deep ocean sediments from Silurian and Ordovician times between 430 and 480 million years ago when our tectonic plate was much further south. Geologists call the gap between these older and newer rocks an unconformity. It represents a long period of erosion when no sediments were being deposited.

the track into the quarry. Groundwork changes also presented some issues with the topographical survey team as their survey data points could be affected, which in turn would affect where material could be removed. Some optioneering was required to connect the line in the optimum position when existing infrastructure like a cable duct at a strategic point needs to be assessed.”

VolkerRail began their involvement in 2024 after Sheffield based rail specialist Linbrooke Services went into administration in September 2023. But arguably the key enabler for the project was the completion of the new footbridge at Horton station. Simon Marshall, Senior Project Engineer at Volker Rail, told me that “Without it walkers would potentially

find their route off Ingleborough blocked by one of the quarry trains ‘parked’ across the existing low level rail crossing.” Volker’s brief was to install 120 metres of plain line track and a right-hand turnout, along with associated signalling, power, minor civils and telecom works. This included the installation of:

- Four set of points – two powered points on Network Rail infrastructure and two hand points in the quarry
- Location cases
- Two track circuits
- A new ground frame switch panel and ground frame telephone
- A points heating control cubical
- A new points heating system
- A new 230/110V signalling transformer.



A view inside the new rail loading building.

VolkerRail also extended the axle counter section. For those not familiar with the term, axle-counters detect the presence of trains on the line for the signal operator. The age of the existing Siemens system also presented its own challenge, given that parts were tricky to source. Volker also completed all associated points heating works and associated changes to Settle junction signal box panel, as well as all testing and commissioning work. Throughout the project, VolkerRail utilised key rail plant machines including its Kirow 250 crane, Beaver tamper and its new T8000 tracked Colmar excavators.

Niall McCreanor, VolkerRail's director of specialist businesses, said: "This project showcases VolkerRail Specialist Businesses. Utilising the in-house expertise and end-to-end project delivery experience available through our railway systems specialisms; a brilliant example of collaboration and synchronicity, enabling efficient delivery to ensure a high-quality result."

My special thanks to Tom O'Boyle, Heidelberg Materials; Simon Marshal, Volker Rail & Jose Galvez, Associate Designer at PBH Rail for their help in drafting this article.



The Men Who Built the Settle to Carlisle Railway

By David Occomore

David Occomore's new 108-page book draws on extensive research sourcing contemporary accounts from newspapers and many hours spent checking census material.

He ranges across the myriad construction skills that the Engineers, Surveyors, Contractors, Sub-contractors, Stonemasons and, of course, the ubiquitous navvies brought to the project. Especially striking are the accounts of how those employees and contractors led a peripatetic life, moving from one project to another – and not just across the UK during railway building mania, but also how some moved across international boundaries. David chronicles the hardships that went with living in huts, sometimes with families in tow and the effects on the local population from such an influx of labour, whilst shining a light on the ever-present class structure of the time.

The book has a good selection of contemporary photos and drawings, with later chapters covering the construction of the line, including techniques used - especially for the viaducts, embankments, tunnels and cuttings. It's a landscape that many of us know very well. We can imagine the rude awakening as the peace was shattered, one contemporary rambler quoted as saying, "the navvies were at work on the line and their shots as they blew up the hard limestone rebounded through the dale with many a sounding echo."

By studying the census returns, David provides evidence of the navy's



movements from contract to contract by the birth of any children. Sometimes local papers reveal both engineering success and personal tragedy. Like much research, the trail can go cold, but David has done a magnificent job of writing the story of their lives. He references an extensive bibliography but if I'm being picky, it would have been good to have an index of names to help future researchers find connections. Overall, this is a major contribution to the historiography of one of the UK's many railway accomplishments.

The book is self-published by David Occomore Books and is available at a cost of £15 including P&P. ISBN: 978-1-0369-6262-3. Please email David at: d.occomore@btinternet.com

Dark Skies Festival

13 FEBRUARY TO 1 MARCH 2026

The Yorkshire Dales National Park Dark Skies Festival is a great opportunity to explore the beauty of the night sky and learn more about the universe we live in. With its stunning landscapes and clear skies, the Yorkshire Dales is the perfect place to celebrate dark skies and appreciate the wonders of the universe.

The stunning dark sky of the National Park, free from light pollution, is one of its very special qualities. And we are thrilled to have been designated a [Dark Sky Reserve](#) by DarkSky International (formerly International Dark-Sky Association). Each year we host a free [Planet and Constellation Trail](#) in the

woodland at Aysgarth Falls (13 Feb – 01 Mar). These self-guided trails offer a unique experience where you can walk among models of the planets, learn fascinating facts, and even take part in a quiz to test your dark skies knowledge! Local businesses in and around the Yorkshire Dales National Park are hosting

various events to help visitors get under the starry skies and experience the best of the Yorkshire Dales by night. Events and activities include stargazing talks with expert astronomers at some of the best locations in the Park, night-time fell running, astro-photography and canoeing in the dark. There are also plenty of

family friendly fun such as rocket making, nocturnal wildlife talks, planet trails and dark skies crafts. Check out this calendar of interesting astronomical events to look out for during the Festival, and even throughout the year. You can check out all the dark skies events online at: www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/events

Aurora Borealis from Nine Standards Rigg. Photo Courtesy of Matthew Turner.

Taking it slow and steady



BUT CAN FREIGHT OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES OF SPEED & CAPACITY?

By Philip Smart

The reported speed of the first train was a mere 15 miles an hour, doubtless impressive for the emerging technology of the time, but it is worth reflecting on progress since then, and how the experience of passenger and freight customers has diverged considerably.

Progressive speed records have been achieved with passenger trains as the various railway companies vied with one another to offer faster journeys on competing routes. Speeds of over 70 miles an hour were becoming commonplace by the 1930's and today main lines offer up to 125 miles an hour, a 9-fold increase since 1825!

Freight in the slow lane

Freight on the other hand has had a top speed of 75 MPH since the 1960's, a mere 5-fold improvement on 1825! This is partly due to the aerodynamics of freight trains and the potential risk of turbulence when passing through stations at speed. It is also perhaps the product of a lack of priority given to freight on the network. Why, after all should it matter? A consignment of freight on a container train has probably spent six weeks or more sailing halfway round the planet before arriving in the UK. What

does it matter if it takes a few hours more to travel from one of our deep-sea ports in the south to a terminal in Liverpool, Manchester or Scotland?

The answer lies in how we make best use of our rail network. As long-distance passenger trains get faster, they catch up with stopping passenger services and freight, presenting a headache for those charged with drawing up the timetable. Letting the fast train leave first is obvious, but the slower ones soon get caught up by the next fast train as increased service frequency responds to growing travel

demand. So, what is the solution? One is to build an entirely new route for faster trains, such as HS2. With hindsight, it may have been a more popular project if it was sold on its capacity rather than speed

benefits. If completed in full, it could have released enough space in the timetable for up to 15 extra freight trains on the West Coast Main Line. That is a lot of avoidable lorry miles taken off our congested road

“It is this decay in productivity that does little to make rail competitive with road”

network! However, we now have the worst of all worlds, more services on HS2 vying with local and freight services north of Handsacre junction on the West Coast, and planners trying to work out how much needed extra capacity can be found. On a four-track line, it is easy. Put the fast services on one pair of lines and everything else on another. But north of Stafford on the West Coast and north of Doncaster on the East Coast, there are few places where this capacity is available.

Too often, the solution is to find a short section of loop line or siding where a freight train can be parked out of the way until there is another suitable gap in the timetable. With timetables mostly having a repeat pattern throughout the day, freight trains can be held for up to an hour at a time. Even then, we often find that the loop line is not long enough to accommodate a 775m freight train if the loop has been designed for the slower trains of the steam age and the turnouts have speed restrictions.

This all impacts on the cost of running the freight service. The longer it takes to complete the end-to-end journey, the more drivers it takes as they will need to change shifts along the route. If a train takes a whole day to travel from one end of the country to the other, it is unlikely that its wagons and locomotive will be ready to make the same journey again for 3-4 days once it is loaded and unloaded and returned to its point of origin.

Is greater productivity the key to unlocking potential?

It is this decay in productivity that does little to make rail competitive with road and has exercised the minds of timetable planners to see what might be possible if freight trains were allowed to run a little faster. A speed increase of

up to 87mph has been shown to provide enough benefit to reduce the number of stops the train has to make along the route with a saving of up to four hours on the overall journey time. This would be enough to save a shift. If the train can return to its originating depot in two days instead of three or three instead of four, more services can run using the same fleet. These higher speeds rely on having sufficient power supply for freight to use electric locomotives. These achieve better acceleration than diesel and can maintain higher speeds when tackling gradients, such as those on the West Coast Main Line. Modelling has shown that two class 90 locomotives could maintain the required power output, and that the new class 99s could be configured to achieve this without multiple working. Increasing demand for power on the network will present another challenge, but this should be measured against the greater challenge of charging the batteries for the 8,000 lorries that use the M6 north of Preston every day.

2026 is a significant year for the railway as we look forward to rail reform under Great British Railways. Essential to the government's missions for growth and decarbonisation will be an enhanced role for rail freight and our industry needs to look to the future with the same appetite for innovation that inspired the pioneers of the past.

Philip Smart is the Policy Manager for the Rail Freight Group. Philip played a key role in the proposals for the Ipswich freight Chord, a £60 million scheme to carry trains from Felixstowe to the north avoiding Ipswich yard.

This article first appeared in the 2025 Handbook published by the Rail Freight Group.



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PROGRAMME

ride2stride is a festival of walks, talks and music along the fabulous Settle-Carlisle railway line.

All walks are free and all walks will start and finish at a railway station.

It's a week long celebration of the wonderful culture and landscape of the western Dales & Eden Valley.

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ride2stride is for everyone who loves the Yorkshire Dales. Whether you travel to an event by train, live along the line or book your holiday to take advantage of the festival, we're sure you'll have a great time.

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ride2stride

28th April to 4th May 2026

The Settle-Carlisle Walking Festival





No trains today until that rain goes away...

A NEW LOW FROM THE GREAT BOOK OF EXCUSES

By Paul Salveson

Severe weather was forecast on Sunday December 14th and Monday December 15th, with ‘amber’ warnings across Cumbria. As a result no Northern services ran on the Cumbrian Coast (Carlisle – Carnforth via Barrow), Oxenholme – Windermere, Lancaster – Skipton (Bentham Line) and Skipton – Carlisle (via Settle). However, West Coast Main Line services (Avanti and TransPennine Express) did run from Preston to Glasgow via Shap.

Presumably it was a decision taken with Network Rail, but if so, why permit trains to run via Shap but not via the S&C or Cumbrian Coast? Trains were running through Oxenholme but the Windermere branch was closed.

I’m not the only person to question the decision of Northern to run no trains in Cumbria, even though it won’t make me popular in some quarters for saying it. Sometimes you have to speak truth to power. I value having a good relationship with all the train companies, Northern above all as it’s ‘my’ operator having worked for it, used it and supported it through thick and thin over many years. Similarly with Network Rail. But blanket withdrawal of services on the basis of forecast bad weather (and not even a ‘red’ warning) isn’t something I can sit back and condone and ‘say nowt’. As it turned out, the rain was far less severe than forecast, though some areas e.g. Keswick and Ambleside, got a drenching.

The harm done to people’s daily lives was immense, to say nothing of the safety risk of people being forced to use their cars instead of the train. No immediate damage was done to railway infrastructure on Sunday and Monday though on Wednesday there was a landslip on the Cumbrian Coast Line, resulting in withdrawal of services north of Millom. However, this doesn’t justify the original decision – quite the opposite in fact. Selective speed restrictions (which appear to have been the case on the WCML for those two days) would have been a more sensible response combined with checks on locations known for problems. I don’t claim to be an expert on these things but generally, common sense would suggest that heavy rain has a less immediate effect on railways than on the highway network, with a more cumulative effect on railway embankments and cuttings, as shown by the recent events near Drigg.

A friend made the comment that “it shows how they shouldn’t rely on weather forecasts to cancel train services. There were no problems south of Corkickle when they stopped services for two days. Today (Wednesday), when all services were running, an actual landslide between Seascale and Drigg has stopped them! Far worse rain fell today than Sunday or Monday.”

I’m sure the decision of Northern and Network Rail management was taken in good faith by conscientious railway people whom I respect. But we can’t

get into a situation when every time bad weather is forecast trains should stop running. It needs a measured response which balances the need to run a railway – with all the obvious benefits it brings – with safety. As things stand, the balance is far too much on being completely risk averse. There are always risks in running trains. The safest way to run a railway is not to run any trains at all. But the wider risks to society far outweigh those considerations. Sorry guys, it was the wrong decision.

No 4 SALT LAKE COTTAGES

Ribblehead, Yorkshire Dales

Enjoy a self-catering break at this Settle-Carlisle Railway cottage, situated at the heart of the Three Peaks area of the Yorkshire Dales. The row of six cottages has spectacular views over the surrounding limestone scenery and is close to the Ribbleshead viaduct and station, and Ingleborough National Nature Reserve.

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SETTLE TO
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7 DAY STAYS





Elgar strikes the right note with Dr Buck in Settle

By Clive Lane

One of Settle’s finest buildings, a Grade II listed Georgian merchant house built around 1787, has an intriguing connection to Britain’s musical history.



Dr Buck's House, Settle (Photo: H.E. Lane © NCBPT) – the former NatWest Bank

Standing on the north side of the Market Place, this former branch of the NatWest Bank was acquired by the North Craven Building Preservation Trust (NCBPT) in August 2023, after it had stood empty for over five years. In the closing years of the 19th century, it was the surgery and home of Dr Charles Buck, a skilled amateur cellist, Settle’s GP and a close friend of Sir Edward Elgar (1857–1934), one of Europe’s foremost composers in the period before the First World War. The popular image of the

mature Elgar, the grand, moustached Master of the King’s Music, composer of Land and Hope and Glory, is sharply at odds with the energetic, mischievous young musician who fell in love with the Yorkshire Dales in the years before he found fame. The close friendship between the two men, progressing from youthful ‘japes’ to the nostalgic reminiscence of old age, is vividly evidenced in their correspondence.

Elgar and Buck first met in Worcester, Elgar’s home city, in August 1882. Elgar,

aged 25, was the leader of the amateur orchestra that had been engaged to give a concert at the Shire Hall as part of the 50th anniversary conference of the British Medical Association. One of the delegates, Charles Buck, six years older than Elgar, was persuaded to help out as there was a ‘shortage of strings.’ The two men shared a love of music, pets (especially dogs) and a playful sense of humour and very quickly became firm friends. Within a week of the concert, Elgar wrote to Buck: ‘MY DEAR SIR! How about next week? ... There is a train to Leeds arriving at 3.40pm. I could then go to Settle by the next. Is this the correct way?’ Elgar’s uncertainty about the route was understandable. The Settle–Carlisle Line had opened to passenger traffic only six years earlier. Elgar’s first trip on the line that summer coincided with the change of the livery of the line from green to the more durable ‘Derby Red’.

Over the next few years, Elgar visited Settle every summer. In 1885, Buck gave Elgar a puppy, which the composer named Aesculapius (‘Scap’ for short) after the Greek god of healing, in honour of his friend’s profession. Elgar was unknown as a composer at this time. He taught violin (which he hated), lived with his parents and worked in the family’s music shop. He wrote to Buck, ‘[Scap] so whined, his grandmother [Elgar’s mother, Ann] let him out. He darted down the stairs, caught his leg in twenty concertinas that are piled on the stairs & rolled over with all the lot into the middle of the shop. There were some ladies there & my old father enjoyed it awfully.’

Back in Settle, the two friends explored the countryside. Elgar loved the local

waterfalls at Stainforth Foss, Catrigg and Scaleber. On his first visit, he composed ‘Rosemary’ for piano which he would orchestrate more than 30 years later. The ‘japes’ continued, often recalled wistfully in correspondence. When the thrill of ‘hunting cats on the scars’ palled, the pair were not averse to a spot of pet parrot kidnapping: returning from Settle in 1887, Elgar told Buck that a new Scherzo ‘goes with a swing which would make you dance to Pen-y-Ghent and carry a cage of parrots (do you remember our exploit?)’ The Master of the King’s Music would years later grandly declare that he had

“Over the next few years, Elgar visited Settle every summer.”

‘nothing to do with the frivolous’ but many of his early letters, especially those written to Buck’s daughter Monica (born 1893), are illustrated with cartoons of cats, mice, devils and parrots.

Buck married Emma Foote Bear in 1884, the same year in which Elgar’s intense relationship with his fiancée, Helen Weaver, ended. Elgar soon fell in love with Sarah Anne (Annie) Wilkinson Newsholme, the daughter of John Wilkinson Newsholme, a Hellifield gentleman farmer. However, the prospects of any match were swiftly extinguished by Annie’s family; Elgar was a musician without means, the son of a tradesman and a Roman Catholic. Back in Worcestershire, Elgar began giving piano lessons to Caroline Alice Roberts, the daughter of a major-general. Nine years his senior, Alice recognised the potential of the eager young musician. She ignored her family’s opposition and the couple were engaged in September 1888. Elgar marked the occasion by dedicating his Salut d’amour to her. It is his first truly memorable composition in his own

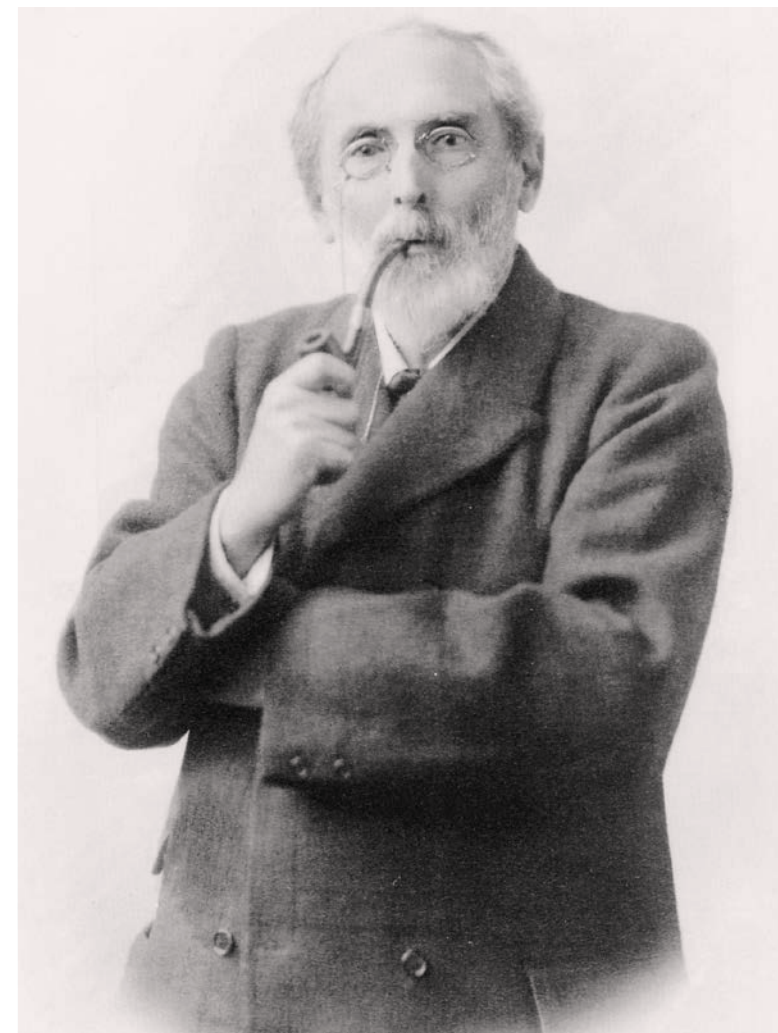
characteristic style. He had composed it in Settle earlier that summer.

Elgar's marriage to Alice in 1889 was the beginning of the end of the annual trips to Settle. Alice hated dogs and would only tolerate cats if confined to the kitchen. She viewed Elgar's japes with an icy disdain. She did, however, provide the composer with the stable emotional foundation he required in order to flourish. At last, at the age of 42, he finally found national fame with his Enigma Variations (1899). A series of masterpieces (the Dream of Gerontius, two symphonies, a violin concerto) followed. He was knighted in 1904 and is generally recognised as the first significant British composer since Purcell.

Buck and Elgar continued to exchange one or two letters a year. Buck followed his friend's career with pride, keeping all the letters he received; his own letters to Elgar have not survived. After Emma Buck's death in 1902, Charles Buck married Ella Watkins in 1904 and the couple lived in York until her death two years later. Buck retired to his parent's former home in Giggleswick and became the mainstay of amateur music making in Settle; his productions of Gilbert and Sullivan were particularly renowned. Alice Elgar died in April 1920 and with her died Elgar's inspiration to compose; the great Cello Concerto of 1919 was to be his last major work. There was talk of Elgar visiting Settle for the solar eclipse in 1927 but it came to nothing. In 1932, there was a final exchange of letters. Elgar tried to cheer his old friend, who was dying of liver disease, with talk of parrots and memories of their 'many adventures.' He recalled the 'taste of grilled Ribble trout' adding 'nothing so good in eating or company has occurred to me since 1882. Best regards – Yours very sincerely Edward Elgar.'



NCBPT is currently raising funds to renovate the house on Settle's Market Place. The charity plans to create three new apartments on the upper floors of Dr Buck's House to address the local need for long-term housing. A museum gallery on the ground floor will celebrate the friendship



Above: Dr Charles William Buck in later life (courtesy Craven Herald)

Left: Postcard of Elgar at Settle (courtesy C.N. Lane)

of Dr Buck and Sir Edward Elgar. If you would like to contribute to this important work, please contact the NCBPT Administrator at The Folly, Victoria Street, Settle BD24 9EY or consider making a donation online at: <https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/24409>
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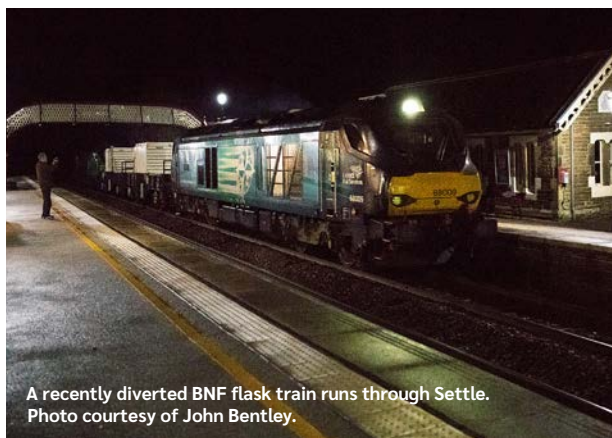


Trains on Track

WHEN AND WHERE TO VIEW SPECIAL TRAINS

By Chris Gee

The next round of Avanti West Coast diversions over the Settle and Carlisle line starts on Saturday 4 and Sunday 5 April 2026, then Saturday 11 April running through to Sunday 19 April 2026.



A recently diverted BNF flask train runs through Settle. Photo courtesy of John Bentley.

Settle Junction and Carnforth. Please bear in mind that although some of the excursions are advertised by the promoter, they can often be cancelled, so please check in advance before making travel plans.

Lots of special train workings are planned within very short timescales and the best way to look for these is using the **Realtime**

Trains website. These include engineering trains, rail tours, the inspection saloon or movements of rail vehicles for repair.

realtimetrains.co.uk/search/detailed/

- > In the location field type 'Settle Jn'
- > In the When? field choose 'All Day'
- > Set the date to a date in the future that you want to view
- > Click on the WTT and VAR filters to remove these, leaving only the STP filter highlighted
- > Click the [Search](#) button

This will give you a list of all special workings for that particular day. You can amend the location to choose somewhere else, such as Appleby or Kirkby Stephen.

The times for these are already in Realtime Trains. That same period will see diverted freight flows, though these paths have yet to be published. Of principal note was the rare occurrence of diverted nuclear flask traffic between Sellafield and Carlisle during the January diversions. It is not clear yet whether these will run in April and it will depend on the Cumbrian Coast route re-opening following the tunnel closure at Corcickle. That is expected to re-open in "Spring 2026" according to Network Rail.

Opposite is a summary of special trains expected to run over the Settle and Carlisle line over and above the regular Northern passenger service and the regular freight traffic. It does not include trains that will use the route between

Date	Train	Direction	Promoter	Locomotives
Sat 31 Jan	Winter Cumbrian Mountain Express	Southbound	Railway Touring Company	West Coast Railway Co Steam
Thurs 4 Feb	Track Recording Train			
Sat 7 Feb	Winter Cumbrian Mountain Express	Southbound	Railway Touring Company	West Coast Railway Co Steam
Mon 9 Feb	New Measurement Train	Southbound	Network Rail	Network Rail High Speed Train
Thurs 12 Feb	Cumbrian Mountaineer	Both directions	Saphos Trains	60532 Blue Peter
Sun 15 Feb	New Measurement Train	Northbound	Network Rail	Network Rail High Speed Train
Sat 21 Feb	Winter Cumbrian Mountain Express	Southbound	Railway Touring Company	West Coast Railway Co Steam
Sat 21 Feb	Settle and Carlisle Circular	Northbound	Statesman Rail	Locomotive Services Group Class 47s
Sat 28 Feb	Winter Cumbrian Mountain Express	Southbound	Railway Touring Company	West Coast Railway Co Steam
Sat 28 Feb	Settle and Carlisle Circular	Northbound	Statesman Rail	Locomotive Services Group Class 47s
Sat 7 Mar	Settle and Carlisle Circular	Northbound	Statesman Rail	Locomotive Services Group Class 47s
Mon 9 Mar	New Measurement Train	Southbound	Network Rail	Network Rail High Speed Train
Sun 15 Mar	New Measurement Train	Northbound	Network Rail	Network Rail High Speed Train
Sat 28 Mar	Cumbrian Mountain Express	Southbound	Railway Touring Company	West Coast Railway Co Steam
Sat 28 Mar	Shap Mountaineer	Southbound	Vintage Trains	60163 TORNADO
Tues 31 Mar	Ultrasonic Test Train	Northbound (early hours)	Network Rail	Colas class 37
Weds 1 Apr	Ultrasonic Test Train	Southbound (early hours)	Network Rail	Colas class 37
Mon 6 Apr	New Measurement Train	Southbound	Network Rail	Network Rail High Speed Train
Sat 11 Apr	Settle and Carlisle Steam Special	Southbound	Northern Belle	West Coast Railway Co Steam
Sun 12 Apr	New Measurement Train	Northbound	Network Rail	Network Rail High Speed Train
Sat 18 April	Settle and Carlisle Steam Special	Southbound	Northern Belle	West Coast Railway Co Steam
Sat 25 April	Settle and Carlisle Steam Special	Southbound	Northern Belle	West Coast Railway Co Steam

William Powell Frith, The Railway Station c.1819 - 1909

This painting is a small-scale version of Frith's 1862 *The Railway Station* (Royal Holloway College). The painting was set in London's Paddington Station, completed a decade early; built by the great Victorian engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel, Paddington was a cutting-edge building, constructed from cast iron and glass and lit by gas-light.

