



Friends of Darlington Railway Centre and Museum

c/o Head of Steam
Station Road
Darlington DL3 6ST

Membership Renewal 2018

Dear Friend of Darlington Railway Museum

Firstly, may I wish you all the best for 2018 on behalf of the Friends' Committee and the staff at Head of Steam – Darlington Railway Museum.

Secondly, I must apologise for the lack of communications to Friends in 2017. I hope that this letter will go a little way to making up for that, and that you will feel confident about renewing your Friends membership for another year.

As you may have gathered, 2017 was a rather turbulent year for the Friends. Up until the AGM in April there was a real possibility that we would have to close down. Members were not willing to volunteer for committee posts, thus increasing the workload on the remaining committee members, who as a result wished to stand down, but could not be replaced as no new volunteers came forward, and so on into a downward spiral. A major blow on top of this was the sad death of our Chair Gillian Wetherell in March, after a long period of illness.

However, following a heartfelt appeal at the AGM from our President Bill Ferguson, enough members stepped forward to create a functioning committee for 2017-2018. Your new committee have been working hard to sort out the Friends' finances, maintain our website at www.friendsofdrbcm.org, re-establish a good working relationship with the museum staff, and put together the 2018 meetings programme set out in the enclosed membership leaflet. I hope that you find at least some of these talks of interest. **However, your committee is still very short-handed, and if you would be interested in helping us please contact me at chairman@friendsofdrbcm.org for a no-obligation discussion about what's involved (you only need to be able to spare about an hour a week).**

Despite this 2017 has been a year of success for the Museum. Visitor numbers and positive feedback are increasing steadily to the highest levels for ten years. These include significant numbers from overseas as recognition of the international importance of Darlington's railway heritage grows as we approach the Stockton & Darlington Railway bicentenary in 2025. Head of Steam was awarded full museum accreditation in February (the national professional quality standard for a museum: vital for future funding bids). Progress continues to be made in improving the care of the collections, with the museum receiving £1,080 from the Museum Development North East Small Grants Scheme to purchase an archival quality plan chest to store the poster collection.



The Friends were pleased to be able to support this work by donating £400 to buy play equipment for the Friday "Station Scamps" pre-school family activities, and £500 to buy display shelves for four large-scale models of Darlington-built LNER locomotives. With your help and renewed membership, we want to continue this level of financial support in 2018 to improve both visitor numbers and care for the collections.

As well as our meetings, the Museum has an exciting and varied programme for 2018 including exhibitions on Railway Women, the Vintage Vehicle Rally, Model Railway exhibition, and hosting the Stockton & Darlington Railway 193rd

Anniversary Event on 30th September. Remember, Friends get free entry to all exhibitions and most events with a current membership card.



(...continued overleaf/)

Mentioning the Stockton & Darlington event in September leads naturally on to possibly the year's biggest developments in relation to the future of Darlington Railway Museum.

In recent years we and the wider "railway-minded" public have been very concerned about the lack of forward vision and support for the museum from the various local and heritage authorities in the area. It's gratifying therefore to report that a new attitude is now in evidence.



Over the summer Historic England conducted a public poll to "tell the story of England in 100 places" and the S&DR Skerne Bridge in Darlington near the museum was chosen as one of the 100 (see www.historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/in-your-area/north-east/skerne-bridge/). This was quickly followed in September by the unveiling of a Transport Trust Red Wheel plaque to the bridge and simultaneously the opening of a cycle path from the town centre via the bridge to the Museum.

These proved to be only the curtain raisers to the main event: the announcement in December by John Glen, Minister for Arts, Heritage, and Tourism, that the route of the Stockton and Darlington Railway has been chosen by Historic England as one of the eight new Heritage Action Zones in the country.

Heritage Action Zones are a nationwide scheme "to support local authorities to unlock untapped potential in places that are rich in history and historic fabric to help them thrive, and improve quality of life or communities and businesses." For the Stockton & Railway, the aim is to refurbish heritage features, like bridges and old railway buildings, along the 26-mile route to attract new visitors and boost the local economy for the railway's bicentenary in 2025. Central to the Zone is, of course, the historic cluster of buildings and structures in and around North Road Station and the Railway Museum.

Historic England has committed £6m to the Heritage Action Zone scheme so far and in spring 2018 it will announce the funding to be given to the second wave of Heritage Action Zones (including the S&DR), once their delivery plans are finalised. The Stockton and Darlington Railway project will be led by a partnership including: Darlington Borough Council, Durham County Council, Stockton on Tees Borough Council, the Tees Valley Combined Authority, Friends of Stockton & Darlington Railway, and Historic England.

As part of these plans the Tees Valley Combined Authority are now recruiting for a Heritage Capital Project Manager who will be responsible for developing the museum and visitor attractions at North Road in Darlington, and Darlington Borough Council has established a Rail Heritage Steering Group for the site. And in addition, Northern Rail has now greatly improved the train service to North Road Station!

With all this going on across County Durham and the Tees Valley it's more important than ever to have a strong and active grassroots supporters' organisation for Darlington Railway Museum to make sure that the voices of those who care for the museum and for Darlington's railway heritage are heard by the "movers and shakers."

I hope therefore that we can count on your continued support as a member of the Friends of Darlington Railway Centre and Museum into 2018. If so, please send your renewal form, cheque, and SAE to our Membership Secretary today! And please let us know if you have an email address as we would like to make more use of email to communicate with Friends as postage charges continue to rise.



Best wishes

Richard Taylor, Chairman, FDRCM
chairman@friendsofdrum.org
www.friendsofdrum.org