

Railway 200

A Commemorative Review

Celebrating 200 years of a
British invention that
changed the world.

June 2026



200

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Foreword

Lady Victoria Borwick,
Chair of VisitEngland Advisory Board



Travel writer Paul Theroux once wrote: “I have seldom heard a train go by and not wished I was on it.”

The quote captures the evocative and enduring allure of the railway; born in Britain and exported to the world.

It changed life as we know it. And it continues to offer adventure and opportunity, shaping future horizons.

As a national celebration of the 200th anniversary, Railway 200 surpassed all expectations. Commemorating rail’s rich heritage whilst galvanising nations and communities to take part in a year-long celebration of its past, present and future is no mean feat.

The result was an extraordinary outpouring of affection for and pride in the railway, expressed in numerous, creative and collaborative ways. The scale and variety of involvement was awe-inspiring.

I’m sure that Railway 200 will leave a positive legacy for everyone who works in the railway, today and tomorrow – and for the many people who rely on and treasure it.



“

Many congratulations to all involved. Here’s to the next 200 years!

History-Making Year

The opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 1825 marked the beginning of two centuries of rail innovation that transformed the world and turbocharged global connectivity and economic growth.

In 2025, the rail industry collaborated with heritage, tourism, community and cultural sectors to commemorate this milestone through Railway 200.

The initiative honoured rail's historic legacy, celebrated the contribution of railway workers, built excitement for the industry's future and inspired the next generation of rail professionals.

Across the year thousands of events and activities took place, from the small, like Railway 200 floral displays and school workshops, to the vast: the world's biggest rail festival in Derby and an exhibition train touring the length and breadth of Britain.

Hundreds of organisations staged festivities and this spirit of partnership helped elevate Railway 200 to become the world's biggest rail celebration.

Railway 200 did not just celebrate track and train. It celebrated the people who keep our railways running; the music, poetry and other art that the railways inspire; the lively enthusiast community and the railway family; the innovators and pioneers who made rail possible; and the unique role rail plays in the UK's success story.

Along the way, it inspired a new appreciation for railways and fostered pride in a British invention that changed the world.



“

The tracks laid long ago don't just lead to the past, they lead to the future and that future starts with young people.

Bobbie, aged 10

Year in Numbers

Railway 200 brought the story of rail to communities across the UK – and indeed the world. Here are some of our favourite headline numbers from the year:

£200k

forecast to be raised by the end of 2026 for rail-related charities

1.4m

people visited and engaged with Railway 200 and partner events and activities

100k

young people engaged with careers and STEM-based events and activities

89%

of events aimed at a non-rail audience, reaching communities and young people

70%

of partners said Railway 200 created new partnership opportunities

95%

of partners said Railway 200 created a sense of pride in their organisation

7m

people engaged with Railway 200 digital content

£1m

awarded in grants to Railway 200-related projects

89%

of partners said Railway 200 raised their organisation's profile

Our Approach



Railway 200 grew from a simple idea into a global celebration that reached millions. But how do you tell a story as rich and consequential as the railway's? Three major decisions shaped the year.

First, the campaign was decentralised, allowing people to celebrate the anniversary in their own way. The Railway 200 team delivered the **Core Campaign**: a modest number of high-impact activities (see next page) and a drumbeat of storytelling. Alongside, they tied the year together with branding, anniversary merchandise, a podcast series and a website with an events map, history timeline, rail education programme and more.

Meanwhile, partners were empowered to join in: barriers were removed, toolkits assembled and groups brought together. This democratisation of Railway 200 allowed an extraordinary network of individuals and organisations to deliver the **Partner Campaign**.

We are extremely grateful to the hundreds – if not thousands – who realised the opportunity: steering the campaign and delivering fantastic events across the UK.

Second, it was clear that Railway 200 celebrations could not be confined to a single day. An invention that for two centuries has shaped economies, societies and cultures deserved more. We therefore opted to mark the anniversary with a full year of celebrations, with the 27 September weekend as its centrepiece.

Finally, to help us tell the story of two centuries of rail, we established four guiding themes. These provided structure to the core campaign and partner campaign, while allowing for creative breadth:

Culture, Heritage & Tourism:

Building a nationwide celebration to drive tourism and support heritage railways

Education and Skills:

Inspiring young people to consider a career in rail

Celebrating Railway People:

Creating a sense of pride among the workforce and shining a light on amazing people

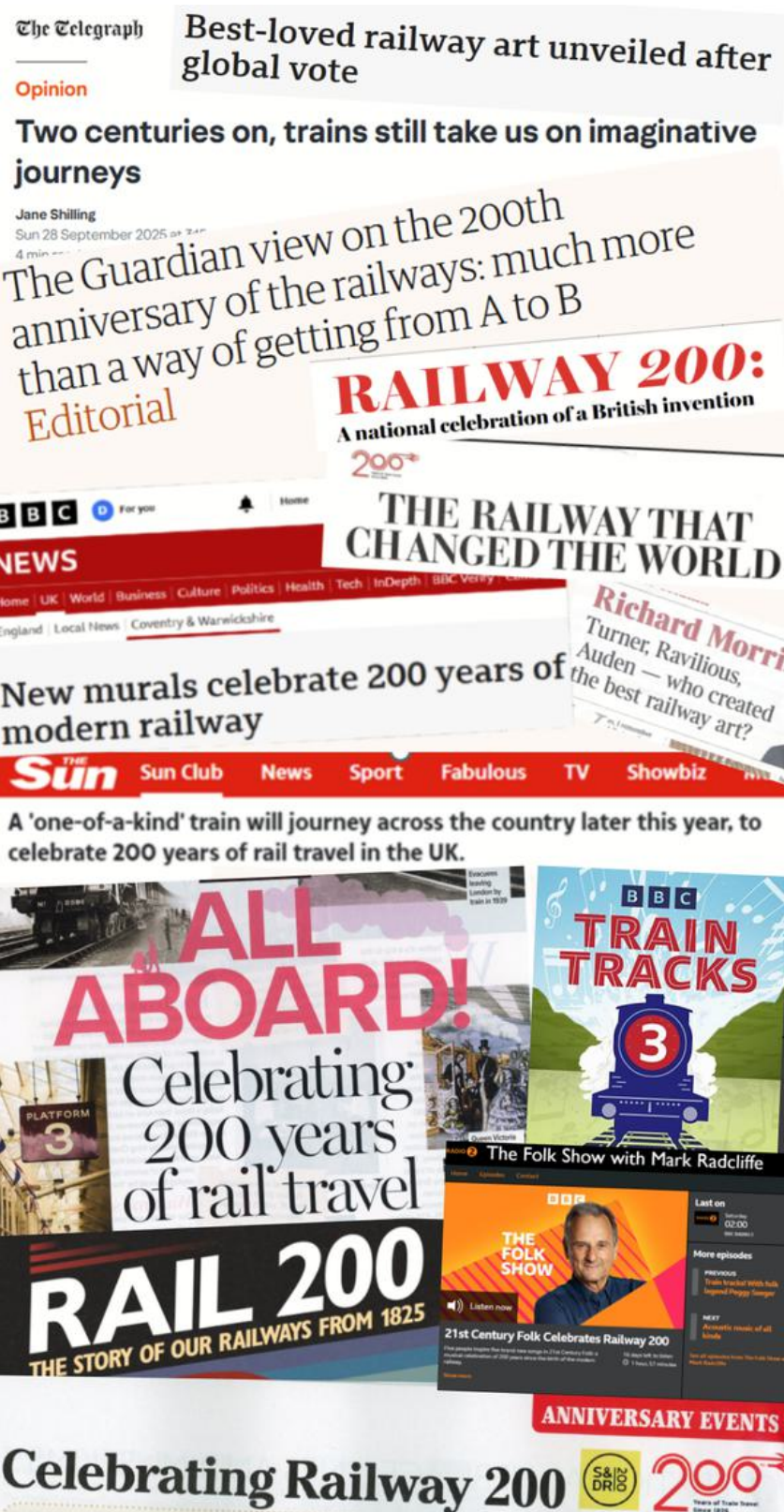
Innovation, Technology & Environment:

Fostering excitement about the future of the railway

Core Campaign



The Core Campaign was delivered by a small team within Network Rail, supported by a wide range of industry peers, including the Rail Delivery Group. Here are some of the team's achievements:



- Telling rail's remarkable story alongside partners, collectively generating **9,000** pieces of positive media coverage, worth **£76.4m** and reaching **tens of millions of people**
- **Five** new TV documentaries secured, totalling 13 hours of primetime broadcasting
- Launched the Railway 200 website, with **859,000** unique visitors, creating 2.1m page views across 200+ countries
- Created **60 videos** with **623,000** plays across digital channels
- Launched **five social channels** achieving **29,000** followers and 4.9m impressions
- Recorded **101** Great Rail Tale episodes – with 18,000 downloads in 42 countries
- Created and launched the touring exhibition train **Inspiration** - delivering hundreds of events & reaching thousands of people

Core Showcase



More than 200 locomotives across five continents sounded their whistles and horns to mark the start of Railway 200. The mass-participation event on 1 January included rural model railways and steam locos in the antipodes.

BBC Radio 2 commissioned leading folk artists to write songs about five people whose lives are entwined in the railway. The tracks were broadcast throughout a rail-inspired week.

Train Landscape by British painter Eric Ravilious was crowned the most popular UK railway artwork in a global poll with Art UK.

The Great Rail Tales podcast showcased the fascinating stories of 101 railway people. As with the rest of the Railway 200 campaign, the series aimed to showcase diversity and share untold stories.

A search for the longest-serving railway family inspired many to tell their own generational stories. Mike Lamport and son Andrew traced their rail roots back to 1846.

A time capsule full of Railway 200 memorabilia was placed at Derby College. It will be opened during the 250th anniversary.

Inspiration

UNDER



200

brating 200

Inspiration

Railway 200's exhibition train

**RAILWAY
MUSEUM**



What better way to tell the story of rail than through an exhibition inside a train? *Inspiration* explores the past, present and future of rail through interactive exhibits, rare artefacts and amazing stories. It is educational, entertaining – and inspiring.

During its year-long tour, from June 2025 to June 2026, *Inspiration* visited more than 60 destinations across Britain, many of which do not have ready access to the country's national museums. Along the way, it encouraged tens of thousands of young people to consider a career in rail.

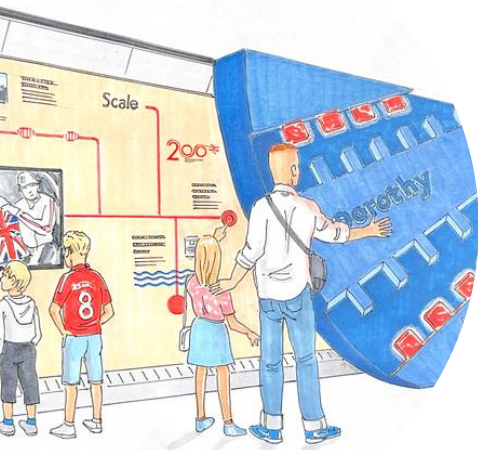
The first three carriages are carefully curated with the National Railway Museum and Network Rail. The fourth is a flexible space for local partners to tell their story.

More than 100,000 people visited *Inspiration*, including many thousands of schoolchildren, in what may be the railway's biggest ever early years intervention. Many left with a newfound love for rail and excited about a career in the industry.

Repurposing carriages into a multimedia exhibition was a highly ambitious project that would not have been possible without support from talented colleagues across the industry and funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and Porterbrook.



Making *Inspiration*



Touring *Inspiration*

Inspiration travelled 12,000 miles, stopping at more than 60 destinations across Britain. It has seen the Highlands of Scotland and the spectacular Cornish coast; the Yorkshire Dales and the busy thrum of London. Every stop has been unforgettable, but here are a few standout moments:

- 1 London Paddington:** Launch with media and local pupils
- 2 Severn Valley Railway:** First day open to the public
- 3 The Greatest Gathering:** World's biggest rail festival
- 4 East Anglia:** Most easterly visit and fully booked stops
- 5 Freightliner Doncaster Railport:** Family fun and a train naming
- 6 Locomotion:** Anniversary weekend and global visitors
- 7 Scotland:** Five stunning stops, including its most northerly
- 8 Llandudno:** First Wales stop
- 9 Southampton:** Sea shanties and a colourful *Inspiration* mural
- 10 Crewe:** Railway town sees 5 fully booked days & train's oldest visitor
- 11 Newquay:** Most southerly and westerly stop



Aboard *Inspiration*

Inspiration received rave reviews and has been hosted by train and freight operators, heritage and community railways and museums. Here is a snapshot of some of its key successes:

60+

organisations featured in The Partner Zone, engaging visitors with local storytelling

100k+

visitors attended 250 events in 60 locations

20k+

visits from young people, including 3,500 school pupils

2.5k

volunteers delivering 19K+ hours, creating an amazing on-board experience for visitors

86%

satisfaction score. 9/10 would recommend visiting to a friend

72%

of pupils said their visit has given them a better understanding of railway careers

“

I had a great time onboard *Inspiration* and enjoyed doing the careers quiz. My ideal role was a Freight Manager.

Milly, aged 10



Rail Memories

The hiss of steam, the blur of British countryside, the chatter of a busy carriage: many of us have vivid memories of our first railway experience. We asked *Inspiration* visitors for theirs:

What is your **first** name?

Noah

Describe your **first** railway memory?

Having so much fun
with the trains

What is your **first** name?

MICHAEL

Describe your **first** railway memory?

Taking the train to
the museum in
central London

What is your **first** name?

TOMMIE

Describe your **first** railway memory?

I remember going in the
underground train in London

What is your **first** name?

WAILLEN

Describe your **first** railway memory?

Going to Canterbury
to visit my brother
at university

What is your **first** name?

Sajaki

Describe your **first** railway memory?

Looking outside the
window

What is your **first** name?

Euan

Describe your **first** railway memory?

Going to Crewe with
my grandma

What is your **first** name?

Katherine

Describe your **first** railway memory?

Going to university.
What an exciting
experience

What is your **first** name?

Isabel

Describe your **first** railway memory?

I went to a train
to London and saw
Paddington

What is your **first** name?

Alesha

Describe your **first** railway memory?

A train to Kidzania
in London



Partner Campaign

Hundreds of organisations delivered thousands of events that celebrated people and communities, supported tourism and heritage and embraced art and culture.

Here are some of the highlights:



- **Thousands of events and activities** across the UK and overseas
- **1.1 million** people attended and engaged with the S&DR200 Festival over 12 months
- **30% of events** engaged with young people, including career days, workshops and competitions
- **40% of events** were community and heritage-led, including festivals and galas
- **One world record-breaking** event - a GWR train travelled 200 miles on one battery charge
- The **largest ticketed event** was The Greatest Gathering. Across three days over **40,000 people** attended from around the world
- Community Rail Partnerships organised **300 events** attended by **50,000 people**
- **Five** Train Operating Companies organised family open days, raising thousands of pounds for charity

Railway People



200
NORTHERN RAIL HERITAGE
1825 - 2025
An introduction to the social history of railways in the North of England

I've been on a 200-year journey of discovery

Change
Shaping the future, embracing digital railway of tomorrow

www.railway200

pton Central

RUGBY
Network Rail
200

200

Railway People

Celebrating the remarkable railway family

The railway has always been about more than just getting from A to B. Millions of lives have been touched by the railway, and countless employees, volunteers and enthusiasts have found a home in the railway family.

The bicentenary brought that family together, strengthening relationships within the industry and revitalising connections with the communities it serves.

Railway 200 celebrated the role rail has played in British life and helped colleagues share their stories. In a touching moment, Southeastern employee Mark Jones was awarded the British Empire Medal in the New Year Honours. The award honoured his 40 years of dedicated service and his work organising Railway 200 celebrations.

And, for the first time, railway personnel were represented at the Cenotaph march, highlighting the sacrifices made during wartime.

As the music producer Pete Waterman OBE put it: “Railway 200 is about people, 200 years of people giving dedicated public service. Railway men and women have always gone beyond the call of duty.”

Mr Waterman is pictured below with Andrew Willsher, who created a highly detailed, 1:76 scale model of the exhibition train *Inspiration*. The project took 300 hours and required Andrew to 3D-print his own custom parts and apply some 350 graphics.



95%

of partners said
Railway 200 improved
workforce pride

101

people shared their
stories with the Great
Rail Tales podcast

People Spotlight



Marking famous figures and superstar staff

200 new 'blue plaques' celebrated hidden histories and unsung heroes on the south east's railways.

Unlike official blue plaques issued by heritage organisations, Southeast Communities Rail Partnership's versions showcased both historic figures and the jobs that keep our trains running today.

It means station staff and signallers rub shoulders with famous names like Queen Victoria, Isambard Kingdom Brunel and Agatha Christie.

Modern roles immortalised include Early Careers Talent Manager, Track Maintenance Engineer and Education Officer.

The plaques are available online, with some made into vinyl stickers and placed in towns on the network.

The first plaque launched in January and events took place throughout the year. It led to a celebration at Lewes town hall on 1 August 2025 (1.8.25) to match the opening year of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 1825.

Joe Graham, Business Assurance Director for Great Western Railway, said: "At its very heart the railway is – and always has been – about people.

"It's about people and it's about communities, empowering people and connecting communities."



CHARLES PARKER SHARPE
1878-1953
**G.W.R. CARPENTER
IN SIGNAL DEPT.**
Charles was living at Lockesley, 19 Robin Hood Lane, Wincobury in 1939 aged 61.

LOTTIE MARTIN
Aged 7
**KILLED BY A TRAIN
AT LANGBOROUGH
LEVEL-CROSSING**
on Wednesday 18th April 1883 while out picking primroses with her sister Mary.

GEORGE GIBBINS
1878-1970
**ELECTRIC TRACK
LINEMAN**
George was living on Whitmore Lane, Wincobury with his wife and daughter in 1939.

ELSIE LINDSEY
1912-2003
**G.W.R. INDICATOR
BOARD OPERATOR**
Elsie was living at N's Strath, Court Gardens, Earley with her widowed mother Rosa in 1939.

CHARLES WILLOUGHBY
1872-1931
S.E.R. PLATELAYER
Charles was living on Liddell Road, Wokingham with his wife and children including Charles, a railway groomsman, aged 23, in 1921.

People Showcase



Eleven-year-old Fen had her design for the rail workers' uniform of the future turned into reality, after winning a contest by the National Railway Museum and LNER.

Transport for Wales and Network Rail colleagues carried a Railway 200 flag from south to north Wales for charity. This was one of TfW's 90 activities, involving 100+ partners.

Parliament hosted the launch of the Pioneering Muslims in Rail exhibition. Curated by Muslims in Rail, the 14 panels tell the story of UK Muslim rail workers.

200 stories from the LGBTQ+ rail community were turned into a book showcasing the industry as an inclusive place. 2,000 have already been distributed at Pride events.

Dale Bristo won best image in the Young Railway Photographer of the Year Award. Hundreds entered the contest, which had a theme of 'Railway 200'. See his photo on p30.

More than 4,000 girls were inspired to explore the world of railways and delve into STEM subjects with Girlguiding's Railway Challenge badge.

Community



Community

Rail rallies communities across the country

Railway 200 would not have been possible without the many hundreds of groups, charities, businesses and individuals who rose to the occasion and delivered thousands of events and activities.

Although large-scale events brought thousands of like-minded people together, many encountered Railway 200 on a smaller scale. Floral displays, heritage events, school workshops, steam galas, fashion shows, talks, beautiful murals, local competitions, depot open days and even a student flash mob brought Railway 200 to towns and villages across the UK.

Community was also celebrated with the Railway 200 Charity Partnership, which saw organisations and individuals raise money for five charities, to protect rail memories for the future. The charities are: Alzheimer's Research UK, Railway Children, Railway Benefit Fund, Railway Mission and Transport Benevolent Fund.

Events like Alstom's The Greatest Gathering and Southeastern's rail tour, along with initiatives like East Midlands Railway's kids' history book and microdonations (small amounts voluntarily added to purchases) on TrainPal.com, raised tens of thousands of pounds. Individuals gave generously too – and even organised sponsored walks.



300

events organised by
Community Rail, engaging
with 50,000 people including
12,000 schoolchildren

7

family friendly open days
including five at rail depots,
attended by 7,500 people

Community Spotlight

Pupils' rousing renditions are just the ticket



History was brought to life when dozens of schoolchildren wrote and performed songs about a local railway innovator.

Pupils from two primary schools near Carlisle were delighted to learn that Thomas Edmondson invented the modern railway ticket while working as a stationmaster nearby.

During workshops with local singer-songwriters, the youngsters wrote lyrics to songs featuring Edmondson and his time at Brampton station.

Along the way they learnt research skills, explored audio recording with a sound engineer and gained an appreciation for their area's rail heritage.

Some even travelled on a train for the first time, when they visited a refurbished 19th century booking hall to experience buying a ticket in Edmondson's era.

And then, the big day. The children took to the stage, dazzling the packed crowd with the rail-inspired songs. Watchers-on described it as "joyous" and "enthralling".

The project was the brainchild of Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership, which wanted to help young people develop new skills, learn about railway heritage, experience rail travel and, most importantly, have fun.



“

We knew that it would be special, but little did we know how special this part of our learning journey would be.

Clare Hutton, Headteacher of Hallbankgate Village School

Community Showcase



Five rail depots were opened to the public, giving visitors a unique peek at how Britain's railway operates. Hitachi Rail opened its Newton Aycliffe factory publicly for the first time.

More than 100 performers with special educational needs staged an eight-minute flash mob in Portsmouth's Guildhall Square, celebrating 200 years of rail through dance and costume.

239 people squeezed onto what may be the longest station seat in the world. School pupils and community groups joined in the "carnival-like" festivities in Scarborough.

More than 550 people visited BCIMO's Very Light Rail National Innovation Centre for its first ever 'Family Day'. The successful event raised £8,000 for charity.

The Beds & Herts Community Rail Partnership worked with school pupils, an offenders rehabilitation group and a museum to refurbish a bench with a Railway 200-themed mosaic.

The spectacular Chelfham Viaduct welcomed 2,000 visitors during its inaugural open day, organised by Historical Railways Estate and the Lynton and Barnstaple Railway.

Culture, Heritage & Tourism



200

Tourism

Thousands flocked to Railway 200 events

For rail enthusiasts, 2025 was a once-in-a-generation opportunity to celebrate their passion, and many made pilgrimages from the Americas, Europe, Africa and Asia to take part.

The industry's biggest rail sale to date, themed on the anniversary year, saw more than 2 million tickets offered at half-price. Many train operators provided free tickets for schoolchildren visiting the exhibition train.

Heritage railways saw an uptick in interest, and journalists and influencers trumpeted the virtues of train travel in videos and travel articles.

Railway 200 developed partnerships with tourist bodies, museums, galleries and councils, to boost the visitor economy.

And those efforts received national recognition when Railway 200 won the Outstanding Contribution to Tourism Award at VisitEngland Excellence Awards.

In the coming years, rail milestones will be celebrated the world over, and Railway 200 has been approached by groups keen to replicate Britain's success.



40k+

people attended The Greatest Gathering in Derby. One visitor travelled from New Zealand

14th

Derby went on to be listed in TimeOut's Top 14 Places to visit in 2026

Tourism Spotlight



A stunning celebration of the birthplace of rail

While Railway 200 focussed on the national celebrations, S&DR200 focussed on the regional, highlighting the North East's important place in history with a vibrant cultural calendar.

The two campaigns worked in tandem: steering each other's strategies and complementing each other's programmes.

Across County Durham and the Tees Valley, more than a million people enjoyed huge public performances, exhibitions, talks, workshops and a game created by TuCan studios.

The programme saw the first WOW – Women of the World Festival in the North East, and the opening of the S&DR200 Trail of Discovery, a walking and cycling path.

On the anniversary week, all eyes turned to the region as a replica of Stephenson's Locomotion No. 1 recreated the 26-mile journey made 200 years before. Over 100,000 people, including HRH Prince Edward, the Duke of Edinburgh, watched on. Network Rail and other partners helped make the journey possible.

To date, £57 million has been spent to boost the region's infrastructure, including a £37 million refurbishment of Hopetown Darlington, a railway attraction that opened in July 2024.

S&DR200 Festival Director Niccy Hallifax said: "The S&DR200 anniversary celebrations and Railway 200 were a powerful recognition of our legacy, the UK's innovation, the region's people and all our collective future."



Tourism Showcase



Three days, 140 iconic vehicles, 42,000 visitors. The Greatest Gathering was the first time in 50 years that Alstom had opened its Derby works to the public – and it was worth the wait.

800 people attended two days of celebrations at Chesterfield's Holy Trinity Church, the final resting place of George Stephenson, after it secured a £240,600 National Lottery Heritage Fund grant for Railway 200 events.

Floral displays, interactive exhibits and family fun took place in Dartmouth, the birthplace of steam engine pioneer Thomas Newcomen.

The Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership highlighted how rail has shaped the South West with info-boards at 12 stations and a digital storytelling campaign.

Visitors were challenged to collect some of the 139 limited edition postcards created by Blackmore Vale Line Community Rail Partnership, with Railway 200-themed prizes up for grabs.

Something rather amazing came from the grassroots in rural Leicestershire: an 8-acre maize maze featuring a steam train.



West Kirby

777 043

METRO

Culture

From plays to poetry, 2025 stirred creativity

The railway has long inspired artists, musicians, film-makers and writers. Their work has shaped our cultural landscape and enriched our lives.

During the bicentenary year, artists crafted rail-inspired plays, music, poetry and art, often performing to sell-out crowds. Among them was the Poet Laureate, Simon Armitage, who penned a poem about the anniversary called 'The Longest Train in the World'.

Five new TV documentary series explored the anniversary and the UK's rich rail past – and several radio stations got involved too.

On the anniversary day itself, BBC Radio 3 presenter Petroc Trelawny travelled from Inverness to London, broadcasting rail stories and a railway-inspired playlist. BBC Radio 2, BBC Radio 4 and a host of local BBC stations broadcast pieces too.

Collectors' editions were published, like Bauer Media's 228-page commemorative bookazine 'Rail 200'.

HRH The Princess Royal reopened The National Railway Museum's Station Hall after a £10.5m refurbishment – part of the museum's 50th anniversary celebrations.

Meanwhile, the Royal Mail produced commemorative stamps and the Royal Mint commemorative coins.



50+

Railway 200 plaques and murals now displayed at stations

45

artists involved and 14 new public artworks created for S&DR200

Culture Spotlight



Stories become art on the anniversary line

Railway 200 always aspired to celebrate the people who use and run our railways. And on the Bishop Line, which follows much of the original Stockton and Darlington Railway, it was real people who took centre stage in an ambitious art project.

A collaboration between Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership and Citizen Songwriters saw local artists travel the railway, meet passengers and turn their stories into stunning art: songs, poems, illustrations and a play.

Over two years their creative output

was shared with thousands of people online, along with 1,500 people at live performances.

Many of the stories can be heard in an impressive album called 'Passengers and Pioneers' by singer Sam Slatcher and other local artists, which is available on streaming platforms.

Their beautiful creations, all captured on the world's oldest passenger railway, now live on through films, posters and music, celebrating the anniversary and the humans at the heart of it.



Culture Showcase



A play called 'Railway 200: The Show' won awards. Created by Gard du Nord Theatre Group and supported by Avanti West Coast, it has already been performed dozens of times.

Poems by budding wordsmiths were framed on the waiting room walls of Rye station, for a competition organised by Rye Harbour Writers and Marshlink Community Rail Partnership.

The BFI screened historic railway films to a sold-out audience. It also hosted a screening in the UK's last remaining cinema carriage, which was restored to its former glory by volunteers.

Beautiful murals by artists and volunteers sprang up at railway sites across the country, including at Leamington Spa station and New Milton station in the New Forest.

Art created by Birmingham pupils celebrated local historical figures and organisations with connections to the railway. The artworks were displayed at Birmingham New Street station.

The musical Starlight Express offered 200 discounted tickets to its West End performances. The famous show follows steam locomotive Rusty as he vies to win a championship race.

Heritage

History, pride and steam train rides

Railway 200 rejoiced in rail's rich and pioneering past. In fact, the bicentenary officially began on New Year's Day with what's been called the 'biggest heritage mass participation event ever': a record-breaking 'whistle-up' of 200 locomotives, blowing whistles and horns across five continents.

Heritage railways played a vital role in bicentenary celebrations and played host to *Inspiration*, alongside organising special festivals, exhibitions and galas. Many reported rising revenues and visitor numbers.

Closer industry collaboration led to five heritage railways signing collaborative agreements with Network Rail, which will see them share resources and expertise.

Triggered by Railway 200, Historic England listed seven railway buildings, helping to preserve them for future generations, and unveiled a commemorative blue plaque at the former home of the Reverend W. Awdry, creator of Thomas the Tank Engine.

Many organisations were inspired to explore the history of their own regions and individuals discovered a newfound appreciation for the UK's rail past. Some in the North East learnt for the first time that their local area was the epicentre of a world-changing technology.



5

agreements signed between heritage railways and Network Rail

£1m

from National Heritage Lottery Fund awarded to Railway 200-related projects

Heritage Spotlight



Railway relishes anniversary with summer fun

Heritage sites across the UK raised the Railway 200 banner, seizing the opportunity to draw new audiences, tell their own stories and ride on the footplate of history.

In Sussex, the Bluebell Railway secured a £250,000 grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, for a programme of Railway 200-inspired events focussed on education and restoration of its Victorian-era stations.

More than 2,000 young people were inspired by activities as varied as workshop tours, train driving simulators, signalling demonstrations and careers talks from entrepreneurs and technologists.

A total of 42 schools visited Bluebell

during the anniversary year, the majority of which hadn't visited before but are now likely to visit again.

Jon Beardmore, Bluebell Railway Business Development Manager, said: "Railway 200 was a wonderful celebration of our heritage. The funding and publicity left Bluebell Railway in a stronger and more resilient position for the future."

Meanwhile, an ambitious restoration programme brought a platform back into use for the first time since 1914 – just in time to berth the Railway 200 exhibition train, which was visited by 2,000 people over seven days.

Over the three month festival, 40,000 people visited Bluebell Railway, a 17% increase on the same period last year.



Heritage Showcase



More than 2,000 people flocked to see the Railway 200 exhibition train when it opened to the public for the first time at Severn Valley Railway, following its launch to press and VIPs at London Paddington the day before.

New audiences were inspired to visit heritage railways. Many reported a surge in customers, particularly when *Inspiration* visited. More visitors also led to more volunteer sign-ups.

Volunteers at Blists Hill Victorian Town restored a working replica of the world's first steam railway locomotive, based on Richard Trevithick's design.

The Watercress Line brought together more than 100 talented people to intricately embroider 1-metre-tall textile panels, telling the story of rail in Hampshire. The panels are now being toured across the county.

Historic England listed seven railway buildings and unveiled a blue plaque at the former home of Reverend W. Awdry, creator of Thomas the Tank Engine.

Stephenson's Rocket was recreated using recycled drainpipes, decking and an oil drum for an event by the Friends of Wareham Station.

Global Trailblazer

The modern railway may have been born in Britain, but its impact has been global.

The bicentenary celebrations attracted worldwide interest and numerous events were held abroad, including an anniversary celebration at the Railway Museum in Madrid **6** and a careers event at a university in the Philippines **2**. The Railway 200 website and its seven translated versions had visitors from 203 countries.



Thousands of overseas tourists flocked to attend UK events, which were widely reported by international media, including in the US, Australia, the Netherlands, Japan and more.

Railways in South Africa **4**, New Zealand **1** and the US **7** took part in the New Year's Day whistle-up, which kicked off the campaign, and museums in Australia and Sweden **5** produced videos about their British collections.

A Railway 200 display featured at Expo 2025 in Osaka, Japan **3**, flying the flag for British innovation and creativity in front of several thousand people.

The Railway 200 campaign set the standard for other countries to follow when they celebrate their own national rail milestones in the years to come, and several have reached out to follow the Railway 200 model. Watch this space.

Legacy in Numbers

Railway 200 will leave a substantial and impactful legacy, with positive outcomes that extend beyond the anniversary year. Its impact will be felt in workforce development, cultural and historical heritage and the activity of the Railway 200 charity partnership. Some of the campaign's legacy achievements include:

£57m

invested in County Durham and Tees Valley, boosting local economies

£11m

in anticipated recruitment and training savings across the rail industry

100k

young people are more knowledgeable about jobs and career pathways into rail

1250

trees planted including a new woodland in the North West of England, supporting biodiversity

60%

of partners attracted new members and volunteers, helping to secure their future

£120m

of social value generated by Transport for Wales' Railway 200 programme, benefitting local communities

“

Railway 200 showed that extraordinary things can be achieved when the railway family comes together. Through collaboration, passion, pride and creativity we delivered the world's largest rail celebration and, in doing so, everyone involved became history-makers.



Emma Roberts, Railway 200 Programme Manager

Legacy Showcase



Financial and in-kind support enhanced the rail industry's recruitment website, Routes into Rail. Its new look, intelligent role discovery function and improved user journey will boost staff inflows.

More than 100,000 school pupils learnt about skills, jobs and career pathways. The rail industry will save millions of pounds on recruitment costs thanks to these STEM and careers interventions.

The industry's disparate education resources were combined into one easy-to-access page on the Railway 200 website. The site was preserved for posterity by the National Archives.

The National Heritage Lottery Fund awarded Railway 200-related projects more than £1m. The money has boosted tourism, local culture and interest in our railways.

Stunning Railway 200-inspired art now adorns stations and the liveries of trains. A reflective garden was created at Brookwood Cemetery by South Western Railway.

Renovations and listings of locomotives and rail locations will preserve history for future generations. There is also an ongoing campaign for the S&DR to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Final Reflections

Railway 200 was a once-in-a-generation opportunity to celebrate a transformative British invention. An idea by the then-Chair of Network Rail, Lord Hendy, became a record-breaking festival encompassing thousands of events attended by millions of people, across the UK and overseas.

But what will its legacy be? For many, it will be renewed feelings of pride in rail and a deep appreciation for how this British technology transformed the world. For others, it will be Railway 200's role in uniting the industry around a shared celebration, helping to bring partners together ahead of Great British Railways.

In years to come we will see the effects of bringing the railway to more than 100,000 young people – sparking enthusiasm for rail travel and inspiring the next generation to pursue careers on the network.

We'll also see other countries celebrate their own rail milestones, using the Railway 200 model to tell the rail story to millions more people. Closer to home, in 2030 Rocket: All Aboard will mark the opening of the world's first inter-city railway, the Liverpool and Manchester Railway. So in many ways the Railway 200 journey has only just begun.

We hope that excitement, curiosity, pride, ambition, collaboration and renewed purpose continues down the track – all the way to the 250th anniversary celebrations. **To everyone who played their part: thank you.**



Our Team

Railway 200's hard-working and talented core team made this year possible.

Programme Manager Emma Roberts was supported by: Christy Argyroudi, Chantel Benoit, Edmund Crosthwaite, Suzanne Donnelly, Katharine Edwards, Mark Elliott, Thomas Evans, Leevan Finney, Alan Hyde, Mike Lamport, David Leam, Rob Lowe, Kanta Mall, Philip Marsh, Elena Metcalf, Martyn Pennell, Jack Pitts, Ben Robinson, Sharna Smith and Nicole Tibby.



Credits & Data

Image Credits

Front Cover: Jack Boskett, S&DR200, Steam Co, HS2 Ltd, Unipart, 200 Years of Romance. Digital mural by Artmongers commissioned by SWR & Network Rail for Railway 200. **History-Making Year:** Science Museum Group for S&DR200 Celebrations. **Core Showcase:** Jack Boskett, Aberdeen Archives, Gallery & Museums for Art (Eric Ravillious painting). **Inspiration:** Page 11 Tom Connell | Page 12 Philip Marsh | Page 16 Jack Boskett. **Partner Campaign:** LNER for S&DR200. **Railway People:** Page 18 Institute of Mechanical Engineers, Chris Poole for Mid Cheshire CRP | Page 21 LNER. **Community:** Page 22 Southeastern with Chris Green, Transwiltis CRP, Queensborough Station Celebrations, Foainterchange at Altrich Station | Page 23 Alstom | Page 25 Curious Rose for Hitachi. **Culture, Heritage & Tourism:** Page 26 De Strandharker for Essex and South Suffolk CRP, S&DR200, The Royal Mint, Rajinda Prior, Barton Cleethorpes CRP | Page 28 S&DR200 | Page 29 Alstom. **Culture:** Page 30 Dale Bristo, Young Railway Photographer of the Year | Page 33 Avanti, Artist Nicky Judd for Friends of New Milton | Pamela Raith for Starlight Express. **Heritage:** Page 34 Swanage Railway | Page 35 SVV Media | Page 36 Gary Essex for Severn Valley Railway. **Global Trailblazer:** Clive Holliday, FEATI University. **Legacy:** South West Wales Connected. **Final Reflections:** Air Ops Scotland for Network Rail. **Final Page:** Mural at Leamington Spa Station. Created by artist Katie O'Sullivan with pupils from Earlsdon and Westgate Primary Schools. Funded by Chilton Railways Community Investment Fund and led by Heart of England CRP.

Data Sources

Year in Numbers: Railway 200 Partner Survey (issued to 1,000 organisations - response rate 40%). Young persons data: Inspiration ticketing platform, S&DR200 schools engagement programme, Girl Guide Badge sales and visitor data from Bluebell Railway and Community Rail Network.

Inspiration in Numbers: Inspiration ticketing platform, Inspiration Visitor's Post Event Survey (response rate 60%), Inspiration School Children Post Event Survey (response rate 59%). **Legacy in Numbers:** Railway 200 Partner Survey, S&DR200, Transport for Wales' social value calculation provided by Loop Social Value System, Savings to industry: Calculation based on NSAR estimates for saving to industry from a meaningful intervention (£20k - £75k per intervention) x NSAR estimate for number of young people who visit the train choosing a career in rail (0.5-1%).

1825

Richard Trevithick
(1771 - 1833)

Robert Stephenson
(1803 - 1857)

Forth Bridge
1890

1890

William Henry Barlow
(1812 - 1902)

The Rocket was
invented, 1829

1927

200 YEARS OF TRAIN TRAVEL 1825 - 2025

Wilston Samuel
Jackson 1927 - 2018

1941

Heritage,

Culture & Tourism

Britain's
First Black
Train
Driver

1960

Karen Harrison 1960 - 2011

Hannah Dadds
1941 - 2017

2019

Heart of England Community
Rail Partnership
Begins

Innovation, Technology
& Environment

Skills &
Education

2025

GREENER
FUTURE

LEAMINGTON SPA
JOURNEY
TO THE
FUTURE

LEAMINGTON SPA → LONDON MARYLEBONE

Heart of England Community
Rail Partnership

Katie O Art

INSPIRED BY ARTWORK FROM
WESTGATE PRIMARY SCHOOL EARLSDON
PRIMARY SCHOOL PRIMARY SCHOOL

Chiltern railways

