

Forged In Steam

Funding: Community Rail Development Fund (CRDF), Northern, Lancashire County Council Active Travel, and Community Rail Lancashire

Budget: £10,528

Lead: Caroline Holden, Community Rail Development Officer (CRL)

Partners: Haworth Art Gallery, Lancashire County Council Active Travel, Diane Muldowney (artist), Gosha Gibek (artist), local schools and community groups



AIM:

The Forged in Steam project set out to encourage more people to walk and cycle from Hyndburn stations (Accrington and Church & Oswaldtwistle) to Haworth Art Gallery, using the Hyndburn Greenway and the former Baxenden Bank railway line.

Although the route already existed, awareness and confidence in using it were limited. The project aimed to bring the route to life through creative activity, linking rail travel with accessible, local journeys.

Supported by funding from the Department for Transport's Community Rail Development Fund (administered by Community Rail Network), alongside Lancashire County Council's Active Travel Grant Scheme, Northern's Community Fund and Community Rail Lancashire, the project aligned with wider plans to improve walking connections from these stations and promote more sustainable, healthy travel.

WHAT HAPPENED

At the heart of the project was *Forged in Steam*, a Railway 200 photographic exhibition at Haworth Art Gallery, featuring the work of Diane Muldowney. The exhibition title reflected the industrial heritage of the railway, celebrating how communities and landscapes have been shaped - or 'forged'- by steam and the development of the rail network.

The exhibition became a focal point for a wide programme of activity. Schools and community groups travelled by rail and walked to the gallery, experiencing the route as part of their visit. For many participants, this was their first time making the journey in this way.

Three school groups took part in structured visits. Each visit began with a guided walk, helping pupils understand how the station connects to the wider area. At the gallery, they took part in storytelling sessions with author Susan Brownrigg before exploring the exhibition with the photographer. Diane also created an exhibition quiz to help pupils engage more fully with their visit.



Community groups attended artist-led workshops, while free half-term sessions brought families into the gallery space. These activities encouraged people to spend time in the exhibition while also discovering the walking route and its surroundings.

A walking and cycling leaflet, developed with support from Lancashire County Council Active Travel, was used throughout. Visitors could follow the route themselves, with the exhibition providing context to the places they passed along the way.

A giant colouring puzzle, illustrating landmarks along the route, became a popular feature—particularly with families. It provided a simple but effective way of introducing the route and reinforcing what visitors had seen, and continues to be used as part of CRL's education work.

OUTCOMES

The exhibition attracted over 2,200 visitors, including school pupils, community groups and the general public.

More importantly, the project helped people experience the connection between rail and local walking and cycling routes in a practical way. By combining sustainable travel with a cultural visit, the journey itself became part of the activity rather than a barrier to it.

The gallery reported a broader and more diverse audience than usual, including younger visitors and people who had not previously engaged with the space. Community groups and families spent extended time in the gallery, taking part in workshops and activities.

The success of the programme led to additional sessions being funded independently by the gallery, demonstrating the value of the partnership and extending the life of the project.



“The gallery had a more diverse audience, particularly younger men than our core visitors... which was wonderful.”

— Haworth Art Gallery

WHAT WENT WELL

The partnership between community rail, Active Travel teams, artists and the gallery was central to the project's success. Each brought a different perspective, allowing the project to connect travel, place and creativity in a meaningful way.

Using the exhibition as a destination helped people understand the route in a practical context. Rather than simply being promoted, the route was experienced, making it more accessible and relevant.

The project also built on previous work with the Church & Oswaldtwistle Rotary Club (Friends of the Station). Through their RotaKids projects, a number of creative activities have been developed to promote the Hyndburn Greenway, which is accessible directly from the station platforms.

Further resources and activities can be found here:

- <https://communityraillancashire.co.uk/hyndburn-greenway-through-the-seasons/>
- <https://communityraillancashire.co.uk/news/to-accrington-by-train-foot-bicycle/>

UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES

The gallery noted a more diverse audience than usual, particularly an increase in younger visitors.

The popularity of the creative sessions also led to additional workshops being delivered beyond the original programme, showing how the project opened up new opportunities for collaboration.

“I came down specially to visit the exhibition... I especially loved the large landscape photographs.”

— Visitor



