

4-6 Mile Walking Group, Tuesday 13 January 2026

Eleven members of the group met at The Manor House Hotel, West Auckland to walk the Etherley Incline - following the track bed of the Stockton and Darlington Railway (S&DR) from Phoenix Row to West Auckland. As part of the 200-year celebrations marking the opening of the S&DR in 1825 much of the route of the S&DR has been developed into a multi user trail. The Etherley Incline was part of the transport development of coal in the South West Durham Coal Field.

From the Manor House Hotel the first 2.55 miles of our 4.85-mile walk took us steadily uphill following tracks and field paths (and a short stretch of pavement pounding) to reach Phoenix Row. En route we had good views across open countryside towards Cockfield and later the Gatehouse for Witton Castle.

It is thought coal would have been transported by horse drawn wagons from Witton Park to Phoenix Row where; after paying a fee, the horses were unhitched from the wagons and the wagons then hitched to a rope system to haul them up the incline powered by the engine house at the top.

Walking due south from Phoenix Row on a “massive” 40 ft high grassy embankment we eventually reached and crossed Etherley Road (the B6282) where we picked up the track bed again to walk to the summit where an information board described the former site of the Engine House and Engineman’s cottage. We then descended to cross Greenfields Road and walked along a newly installed ramp constructed to lift the route out of the existing railway cutting onto the top of the embankment thus avoiding water that had pooled on the disused railway line. The route then took us through woodland to St Helens Auckland and back to the Manor House Hotel – and refreshments.

The weather on our first walk of the new year was drizzly to start with but towards the end we had blue sky. Nothing like the dire forecast!



Report by Janet Bayles