

# Keys to the collection— Stories

## William Frith

“The greatest British painter of the social scene since Hogarth.”

—William Powell Frith: *Painting the Victorian Age*,  
Harrogate Borough Council, 2011

**1918** William Frith was born in Aldfield, North Yorkshire, UK.

**1835** After early studies in art at Saint Margaret's School in Dover, he moved to London where he began his formal art studies at Sass's Academy, before attending the Royal Academy school.

Frith painted in a traditional style, favouring scenes and events from everyday life and panoramic narratives of Victorian life.

At that time people liked paintings that told stories about everyday life, so Frith painted scenes that showed characters from all levels of society. He painted them going about their everyday lives in public places like Paddington Station. The novels of Charles Dickens influenced him greatly.

**1890** Frith retired from the Royal Academy but continued to exhibit his painting there until 1902.

**1909** He died in St Johns Wood, UK.



### The railway station—

This black and white engraving was made after Frith painted a vast canvas of this spectacular new railway station that went on show at a gallery in the Haymarket, London, in April 1862. Over 21,000 visitors paid a shilling each to see the picture, many of them ordering the prints to hang in their homes.

Nearly 100 people can be counted in this painting. On the left, a porter is trying to stop a woman from taking her dog to a passenger carriage of the train. Whilst a family hurries to the train with the help of a porter who is making a path for them through the crowd. In the centre, a family farewells two sons heading off to boarding school. A rich tourist is in dispute with a taxi driver over his fare. Departing soldiers hug loved ones and newly-weds cry as they say goodbye to their families. On the right of the painting, two detectives nab a man who had escaped from prison, as his wife looks on in distress. This work tells many stories and the people who visited the exhibition enjoyed the drama it portrayed.

**Geelong  
Gallery**

AusVELS level 2 to 6

[geelonggallery.org.au/learn](http://geelonggallery.org.au/learn)

William Frith  
*The railway station* (detail) 1866  
engraving  
Collection: Geelong Gallery

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### William Frith

British 1819–1909

*The railway station* 1866  
engraving (engraved by  
Francis Holl; printed by R  
Holdgate; published by  
Henry Graves & Co.)  
52.0 x 111.5 cm  
Collection: Geelong Gallery  
Gift of Mrs ED Keighley, 1965

#### Questions

How many people in *The railway station* are railway employees? What are their jobs and what tasks do they perform?

#### Research

Access the internet to research the artist William Frith. Which popular work of art did he complete prior to *The railway station*? Explain why that painting was so popular and how it affected the creation of *The railway station*.

#### Activity

*The railway station* includes many small scenes of activity and interest. Select one of these, then choose one of the following activities:

1. Write a creative short story about what's going on, who is involved and why?
2. Using the same points as 1, create a storyboard of your chosen scene.
3. Design a poster for Paddington Station as it was in the 1860's. Include a catchphrase to promote the rail service and use the style of poster design that was popular at this time.