

1825 Year of the Railway

The Stockton and Darlington Railway is really the embryo of which all railway development followed in Great Britain and the rest of the world and really the reason why the railway was built and constructed was because of coal.

My name is Duncan Edwards, I am an explainer at the Locomotion Museum which is part of the National Railway Museum and the Museum has been open now for 7 years. My job is to work with schools and take groups around for tours and just generally talk to the public. In the Museum we have a cross section of locomotives. Probably the most famous locomotive from that competition was Rocket built by George Stephenson. George Stephenson came from a small place called Wylam, which was where Timothy Hackworth was born as well. He worked himself up working in the collieries where he taught himself basically engineering and he then went on to work developing steam locomotives. He became famous throughout the country because he built railways including the Stockton and Darlington and the Liverpool – Manchester Railways.

Coal was vitally important in the 19th century, so they had to get this coal from Shildon down to the Tees and the nearest point on the Tees was Stockton and the great and the good of Stockton and Darlington put their heads together and in 1810 there was a grand meeting in Stockton to discuss how the transport of coal could be facilitated from the coal field down to Stockton on Tees. The initial idea had been to build a horse drawn wagaonway down the Tees but on 19 April 1821 George Stephenson came down from Newcastle to meet Edward Pease and he convinced Pease to use steam locomotives on the railway. Stephenson had been involved with locomotive development upon the Tyne where there were several short railways bringing coal from pits down to the stays at the riverside, so he had quite a bit of experience in the development of steam locomotives and his argument was so persuasive that Pease and Backhouse decided that he could go ahead with construction of a line using steam power for the traction.

Locomotion No 1 was the first locomotive used on the Stockton and Darlington Railway. The inaugural journey was on 27 September 1825 and the journey started from Shildon travelling through Darlington and onto Stockton. Locomotion No 1 was built by George Stephenson at his factory in Newcastle and it was as said used on the inaugural journey.

You can see from its design that it doesn't look much like a steam locomotive that we imagine it today. Firstly, the first thing I think you would notice is that its got vertical cylinders, the cylinders go up and down like that. It wasn't a madly efficient method of powering the locomotive and very shortly afterwards you find they are moving more in the direction of horizontal cylinders such as you would find in modern locomotives today. So the cylinders and the gearing is a little bit strange where another thing that is a little bit strange the locomotive is not provided with brakes. The wagons behind the locomotive had brakes but not the locomotive itself and the only way you could actually stop the locomotive was by disconnecting the steam power and disconnecting the gears and there was a fair amount of friction and eventually the locomotive would come to a standstill.

Shildon was the starting point of the first journey of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. George Stephenson drove the locomotive and Timothy Hackworth waved the flag for the initial journey. It was the point where different railway lines converged so that steam locomotives could take the chaldron, the coal wagons from Shildon on to Stockton and so it became known as the first railway town in the world.

Ok the picture you can see is a picture of the Opening Day of the Stockton and Darlington Railway, 27 September 1825 and over on the far right you can see Locomotion No 1, which was the first engine to haul that first train. That locomotive was built at George Stephenson's works up in Newcastle and believe it or not was brought down by horse and cart to Heighington and put on the rails there. Anywhere, there it is pulling the first train and you can see a long line of wagons, these wagons were really intended for transporting coal but of course on the opening day they are full of people celebrating this great event. The train is crossing the Skerne Bridge, which is still there today. This bridge was built in 1825 and it is still in use today taking the trains from Darlington up to Bishop Auckland. Of course the surroundings in which the bridge are now situated are not quite as rural or green as they are in this picture. We are talking really here of the equivalent of present day space travel, nobody had ever seen anything like this before a machine which could pull so many people and so many wagons at an amazing speed of probably 12 mph.

We know that this locomotive did explode in 1828, so the boiler has been replaced and of course various other things will have been replaced but it is still pretty well nearly 200 year old locomotive and now it can be found in its present condition at Head of Steam in Darlington.