

The Building and Opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway

George Stephenson designed and built the first public passenger railway in the World. It started at Witton Park colliery where they mined coal and ended at the docks in Stockton. From there boats could take coal all over Britain and Europe where it was needed. The clever part of Stephenson's invention was to build a steam engine that could pull lots of carts carrying lots of coal and products all at the same time. His railway was also the first to allow passengers to buy tickets and travel on it.

On September 27th 1825, some wagons were loaded with coal at Witton Park colliery. It was early morning and the wagons were pulled by horses along a newly built rail track. They had to get over two large hills, Etherley and Brusselton. The horses were not strong enough to pull the wagons up the hills. Instead, a large steam engine had been built on the top of each hill. Each engine turned a large wheel that turned a rope. The rope was attached to the wagons and pulled them up the hills. Even the horses got to ride on a cart. Once at the top, the wagons were detached from the rope and were left to roll down the other side. Thousands of people had to come to watch this new technology being used.

The next stop after the hills was Shildon which is just near Darlington. It was here that the steam engine was attached. It was called Locomotion No.1 and all the wagons with coal were attached to it. There was also a single passenger carriage. Lots of people wanted to ride on the 'train' so they also fitted some empty coal wagons with seats. Some people just climbed on without a ticket. The long 'train' of carriages then set off for its next stop at Darlington.

The train stopped at Darlington and most people got off to have something to eat. Thousands of people had come out to watch and celebrate the train passing through. Most people had never seen such a large machine up close.

After lunch everyone got back on board and more wagons were added. The next stop would be Stockton where the line ended. A horse could pull about a ton of coal on a cart. Locomotion pulled about 80 tonnes on the first journey. One of the wagons was not full of coal. A brass band was hired to play music all the way from Darlington to Stockton.

On the way some horses tried to race the train. They lost. The train was faster and it didn't get tired. Here was proof that the train was more effective than a horse for pulling wagons.

By tea time the train arrived in Stockton. A huge banquet had been set up at the town hall. Over a hundred people were invited to come and eat. Lots of people who came had helped to pay for the railway but there were also guests from all around Britain and the World. They all wanted to have a railway where they lived.

George Stephenson was the special guest at the banquet. He had a meal but went to bed early. It had been a very long day for him. Not only had he proved that his invention was brilliant but he had also been the train driver all day long.

- 1) Who designed and built the World's first public passenger steam railway?
- 2) What was the date of the first journey on the railway?
- 3) How did the wagons move from Witton Park?
- 4) How did the wagons climb over the hills of Etherley and Brusselton?
- 5) In which town was Locomotion attached to the wagons?
- 6) Why did the train stop at Darlington?
- 7) How heavy was the train on its first journey?
- 8) Who was the train driver on the first journey?

