

Why was the railway built between Stockton and Darlington?

If you flew over the Tees Valley area in 1800 you would see a lot of countryside. Small towns and small farms everywhere with some large rivers winding between the green fields. Along the River Tees and nearer the coast you would find marshes and wide sandy mud flats that were covered by the sea twice a day.

The river was quite a busy place and the ports of Yarm and Stockton welcomed boats from all over Britain and Europe. We exported lots of products like wool, timber and coal. By 1800, coal was becoming more and more important. It was dug out of mines mainly in Durham to the North and West of Darlington and was transported by ox and horse carts to the ports to be loaded onto boats. The boats could carry several carts of coal at once but it took a long time for the carts to travel from the mines to the port. Lots of towns and cities in Britain were growing fast at the time. New factories were being built that housed coal powered machines. The machines could make products much faster than people could do on their own. Machines made some people very rich.

The demand for coal was growing every year and people started to wonder if there was a way that they could transport it from the mines to the ports more quickly. In some parts of Britain they built canals so that boats could carry large amounts of coal and other products to places where they were needed. In the Tees Valley a different idea was developed.

A merchant called Edward Pease suggested that they create a trackway that would allow carts to travel on rails much faster than on the roads. His idea was that it would allow horses to pull carts with goods in them much faster. He was then persuaded to try something different. An engineer called George Stephenson had used steam engines to pull carts around coal collieries. He suggested that a steam engine could pull lots of carts at once. It would travel faster and never get tired. Pease liked the idea and asked Parliament for permission to build his railway from Darlington to Stockton. Darlington was a large market town where coal and goods were loaded onto carts and Stockton was the port where the boats would take the goods from.

- 1) What is the name of the River that runs through the Tees Valley?
- 2) Can you name any of the ports on the river in 1800?
- 3) What sort of products were exported by boat from the area?
- 4) Why was coal becoming more needed by 1800?
- 5) Who suggested that a trackway could carry goods more quickly than a road?
- 6) What had George Stephenson used steam engines to do?
- 7) Who did Edward Pease ask permission from to build a railway?

