

## George & Dragon Inn

The impressive viaduct which towers over the river at the entrance to Yarm is an apt reminder of the role the town played in the birth of the railway. It was at the George & Dragon Inn on February 12, 1821 that the go-ahead was given to build the Stockton & Darlington Railway, the worlds first public railway.

George Stephenson was born on 9 June 1781 near Newcastle-upon-Tyne. His father was an engineman at a coalmine. Stephenson himself worked at the mine and learned to read and write in his spare time. He gained a reputation for managing the primitive steam engines employed in mines, and worked in a number of different coalmines in the northeast of England and in Scotland.

In 1814, Stephenson constructed his first locomotive, 'Blucher', for hauling coal at Killingworth Colliery near Newcastle. In 1815, he invented a safety lamp for use in coalmines, nicknamed the 'Geordie'.

In 1821, Stephenson was appointed engineer for the construction of the Stockton and Darlington railway. It opened in 1825 and was the first public railway. The following year Stephenson was made engineer for the Liverpool to Manchester Railway. In October 1829, the railway's owners staged a competition at Rainhill to find the best kind of locomotive to pull heavy loads over long distances. Thousands came to watch. Stephenson's locomotive 'Rocket' was the winner, achieving a record speed of 36 miles per hour.

The opening of the Stockton to Darlington railway and the success of 'Rocket' stimulated the laying of railway lines and the construction of locomotives all over the country. Stephenson became engineer on a number of these projects and was also consulted on the development of railways in Belgium and Spain.

Stephenson died on 12 August 1848 in Chesterfield in Derbyshire. His only son Robert was also a railway engineer and worked with his father on many of his projects.

## The Railways

In total the parishes of Egglescliffe and Preston-on-Tees contained only 334 people in 1801. As late as 1871 there were still only 110 people in Preston parish.

Change was afoot, however, as early as 1825, when George Stephenson's railway from Stockton to Darlington was opened. The railway bisects both parishes. Its opening was a celebrated occasion, attended by dignitaries from both towns, and it was just north of Preston Park that the race took place between Locomotion No. 1 pulling its open carriages, and a stage coach on the turnpike road. The locomotive won, and the scene was celebrated in a famous painting which can be seen in the Green Dragon Yard museum.

The railway originally came south from Stockton on the east side of the road. The lovely row of trees alongside Preston Park mark the 1825 line. A spur line was soon built extending south from the station towards Yarm running alongside Urray Nook Road and finishing just north of the river, where Parklands garage is today.

The original railway building from 1825 (opposite) is still present on Urray Nook Road, and was the home of the coal agent for the Stockton and Darlington Railway.

There is also an interesting wall on Urray Nook Road, a little further up from the house. The wall is made with the heavy stone sleepers to which the rails were at first bolted. The slots where the bolts went are still visible on some of the stones. It was quickly realised that stone sleepers were too unyielding for the weight of the new locomotives, causing the iron rails to shatter. The problem was solved by replacing the stone blocks with wooden sleepers.

The handsome pub now called the Cleveland Bay was built soon after the coal drops were opened. It was at first called the New Inn, and later the Station Inn, and took advantage of the business created by the new railway.

It was not until 1853 that the railway actually came to Yarm itself, with the opening of the magnificent viaduct. This new line from Leeds joined the Stockton and Darlington railway beside Whiteley Springs Farm, just south of the modern Egglescliffe station. It was at this time that the original route of the Stockton and Darlington railway, running along the front of Preston Hall, was abandoned and the new route to Stockton to the west of the main road was used by both railways. 1853 was a fateful year, therefore, for the future Egglescliffe. It now has its station, although the North Eastern railway company at first chose to call it Preston Junction, perhaps in deference to the nearby Preston Hall, the only large house in the area at that time. In the 1870s the railway spent over £10,000 on greatly extending the station, called Egglescliffe Junction from then on. In its heyday it was an impressive station, with four platforms, extensive sidings, and Refreshment Rooms, which for long were the fashionable place to meet in Egglescliffe. Many famous people had to change trains at Egglescliffe, and the daughter of the station master in the 1940s remembers some of these, including the opera star, Beniamino Gigli, on his way north to a concert.

## Yarm Viaduct

Nearly half a mile long with 43 arches spanning the town of Yarm and the River Tees, this viaduct was built in 1852 by constructor Thomas Grainger.

The building of Yarm viaduct in 1848 was a remarkable feat of engineering. There were no mechanical excavators or mobile cranes to call on at that time, and the building materials for this impressive structure that dominates the Yarm skyline, had to be hauled into position by teams of horses and a pulley system. Yet the structure was completed in just over 4 years.

It cost £44,500 and is 695 m. long and was built to extend the Leeds and Thirsk Railway from Northallerton to Stockton and Hartlepool. The viaduct has 43 arches, 41 of them with a 12 m.(40 ft.) span. The two which carry the railway over the River Tees are 20 m.(65ft) high and have spans of 20 m. It took 139,000 cubic feet of stone to build. Over seven and a half million bricks went into the building of the viaduct which was designed by Thomas Grainger and John Bourne of Edinburgh.

The official opening was in May 1852. Three years after the opening, it was to claim the first of a number of fatalities. On an exceptionally dark wet night, a train overshot the platform and an unsuspecting stranger to the area in alighting from his carriage, stepped over the parapet and fell 22 m.(74 ft.). An inquest jury recommended that "some fencing be erected". Over the years there have also been a number of suicides on the viaduct. More recently there was concern by residents living beneath the viaduct when a derailment on the line above them caused debris to fall into the street below.