

MARKETING THE TOURISM OFFER OF THE BOROUGH OF STOCKTON-ON-TEES

EVIDENCE FOR THE SCRUTINY BY THE ARTS LEISURE & CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE OF THE COUNCIL OF THE BOROUGH 2012

By John Fletcher

Introduction

This evidence does not seek to cover the whole topic, but rather to pull together some strands connected with this borough's railway and engineering heritage.

Although the Council's finances are under pressure, the marketing of this aspect of the tourism offer follows on logically from the work of the last few years, such as the Adults, Leisure & Culture Select Committee's scrutiny of Preston Hall & Park in 2006¹, the subsequent improvements and re-opening in the last few weeks of Preston Hall Museum, and the Council's Heritage² and Tourism Strategies.

Theme of the Evidence

In marketing the tourism offer of the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees, it is important to look for what the area can offer which is distinctive from many other places.

One such niche is the area's railway heritage, set in the wider context of the engineering heritage. At the same time, it is necessary to demonstrate that there is more to see and do, as only one of a party of visitors might be interested in railways/engineering.

The Stockton & Darlington Railway (S & DR), opened in 1825, entitles both towns to claim the title of "The Birthplace of the Railways". The essence of a railway is that it runs from one place to another. This, and the need to have a package worthwhile for people to travel to see, makes it desirable that the Boroughs of Stockton and Darlington co-operate. As Darlington Borough Council is undertaking a study of how it deals with its railway heritage, now would be a good time to seek joint working, if this has not already begun.

Stockton Borough is perceived by many of its interested residents as having largely missed out over recent decades on the larger attractions – the National Railway Museum's *Locomotion* is at Shildon, on a smaller scale *Head of Steam* is at Darlington. There is neither the opportunity nor the money to try to compete. Instead, Stockton Borough needs to:

1. Preserve what it has of physical remains;
2. Interpret them to visitors & residents
3. Spread the message of what remains.

¹ <http://www.stockton.gov.uk/resources/council/scrutinyres/artsleisure/prestonpark.pdf>

² <http://www.stockton.gov.uk/resources/council/heritagestrategy/heritagestrategy.pdf>

1. Preserving Physical Remains

1.1 Of the original Stockton & Darlington Railway of 1825 there are a few remains:

- 1.1.1.1 The line from the borough boundary (at Durham Tees Valley Airport) as far as Eaglescliffe South Junction is still in use as a passenger and freight railway.
- 1.1.1.2 Alongside Urray Nook Road, Eaglescliffe, at *West View*, there is a stone wall built with sleeper blocks from the S & DR.
- 1.1.1.3 *Layfield House*, Urray Nook Road, Eaglescliffe (at the corner of South View), is a S & DR railwayman's house.
- 1.1.1.4 There are some vestiges of the coal drops at the terminus of the former Yarm Branch of the S & DR behind *Parklands Court*, Yarm Road, Eaglescliffe.
- 1.1.1.5 There is a S & DR milepost in the grounds of *Copsewood*, The Avenue, Eaglescliffe.
- 1.1.1.6 The original trackbed is visible along the east side of Yarm Road north of The Avenue, Eaglescliffe, in the grounds of various buildings (such as *Timothy Hackworth Court*) and among the trees on the western boundary of Preston Park.
- 1.1.1.7 *Bridge House*, Bridge Road, was reputedly the World's first railway booking office.

1.2 Noteworthy on other railway lines are:

- 1.2.1 Passenger and freight trains still use the S & DR extension of 1830 from Bowesfield Junction eastwards.
- 1.2.2 The Clarence Railway of 1833 is still used by freight trains from west of Stillington to Port Clarence and along the branch from the Norton junctions to the former North Shore Junction; also by passenger trains along the stretch between there and Billingham Junction.
- 1.2.3 The former station of the Clarence Railway's North Shore Branch in Station Street, Stockton, is used as commercial premises.
- 1.2.4 The Leeds Northern Railway of 1852 is still in use by passenger and freight trains from south of Kirklevington to Stockton Station.
- 1.2.5 Remains include Yarm Viaduct (43 arches across Yarm town centre and the River Tees, 1852), the former Yarm Station (in Aislaby Road, Eaglescliffe) and Yarm Tunnel (under Urray Nook Road, Eaglescliffe)
- 1.2.6 The West Hartlepool Harbour & Railway line of 1852 from Billingham Junction north-easterly is still in use by passenger and freight trains.
- 1.2.7 Parts of Stockton Station date from 1893.
- 1.2.8 The former railway bridge under Newport Bridge Approach Road was the first all-welded portal frame bridge in the World.

1.3 Hitherto, protection for the remains of early railways has been sporadic:

- 1.3.1 *Layfield House* and Yarm Viaduct are Listed Buildings.

- 1.3.2 The wall at *West View* was formerly protected when it was in the curtilage of a Listed Building, but when the plot of *Layfield House* was divided the wall lost this protection, being protected only by a planning condition on *West View*.
- 1.3.3 When *Parklands Court* was built, there were planning conditions to protect the remains of the coal drops, but on investigation they were mostly found to be unsound and Tees Archaeology advised that they were incapable of substantial preservation.
- 1.4 When the Regeneration & Environment Local Development Document comes into force, it is proposed that there will be greater protection of the 1825 S & DR main and Yarm Branch lines³ under Policy HE4⁴, which I welcome.
- 1.5 Stockton Council's Heritage Strategy⁵ has a section on the railway heritage, but is light on how it is to be protected and promoted.

2. Interpreting what Remains

- 2.1 There is little on site to alert visitors and residents to what remains of railway history.
 - 2.1.1 Plaques in Yarm High Street on the Town Hall and the *Black Bull* record where the meeting was held in Yarm of the promoters of the S & DR.
 - 2.1.2 A small plaque erected many years ago by Yarm Civic Society gives information about Yarm Viaduct.
 - 2.1.3 A plaque recently erected next to Egglecliffe War Memorial by Egglecliffe & Egglecliffe Council records (at my suggestion) the interment in 1827 in the adjoining Egglecliffe Churchyard of the World's first recorded victim of a fatal accident on a public railway.
 - 2.1.4 A plaque erected a few years ago in Egglecliffe Memorial Park, Victoria Road, mentions the former course of the S & DR of 1825.
 - 2.1.5 For a long time there has been a plaque on *Bridge House*.
 - 2.1.6 There are various brown signs around, especially in Egglecliffe, saying "Historic Railway Trail". Some of these are very weather-beaten. They were

³ Preferred Options Draft at <http://www.stockton.gov.uk/resources/planning/RegandEnvDocs/regandenv.pdf>

⁴ Policy HE4 - Stockton and Darlington Railway

1. The Council will support development which enables the safeguarding of the line of the historic Stockton to Darlington railway of 1825, the branch line to Yarm and associated structures, and which preserves this cultural asset, its archaeological remains and setting.
2. The Council will require any proposal for development on or adjacent to the line(s) to include measures which show how the scheme has regard to the preservation of any physical remains along the route(s) and their interpretation on the ground, and otherwise respects and interprets the route(s) where those remains no longer exist.

⁵ <http://www.stockton.gov.uk/resources/council/heritagestrategy/heritagestrategy.pdf> Page 30

- in support of a booklet published in 1989⁶. This was not exposed for sale when I looked in Stockton's Tourist Information Centre this month. The directions in which they point are vague; there is no indication where to find further information. To the uninitiated they are therefore meaningless and, in my opinion they now are just unnecessary clutter of the street scene.
- 2.1.7 There used to be an interpretative board on the west side of Preston Park, but this disappeared a few years ago.
- 2.2 Off-site, the railway heritage is marked in a number of ways:
- 2.2.1 A plaque in the Council Chamber of Stockton Town Hall (not normally open to casual visitors).
- 2.2.2 Displays in Preston Hall Museum.
- 2.2.3 Stockton Council's website
- 2.2.4 Artwork, such as the railings on the Stockton bank of the river near the "Ecclesiastes Bridge" on Riverside Road, the mural in Bishop Street car park and on a Stockton High Street lamp standard. Ironically, the greatest national publicity was gained by the lamp standard, as the artwork, conceived by local schoolchildren and erected under City Challenge, notoriously depicted "the wrong sort of train" (Stephenson's *Rocket* on the Liverpool & Manchester Railway instead of his *Locomotion* No. 1 on the S & DR). This news item even made it to the front page of *The Times*.
- 2.2.5 Street names. Many years ago I secured that the *Kingsmead* estate in Eaglescliffe, then being built next to the original S & DR at Allen's West Crossing on the site of works making concrete railway sleepers, had street names on a railway theme, suggested by pupils of Durham Lane Primary School⁷. More recently, new streets off Parkfield Road have been named after places on the S & DR – and, of course, the northern part of the South Stockton Link Road (A135) was named "1825 Way". Naming of streets is an inexpensive way to commemorate, as name plates on new developments are at the cost of the developers. However, none of these areas has anything to interpret the street names to people.
- 2.2.6 Over the last 33 years I have collected publicity leaflets about the area's heritage and attractions, which I lent to Dr Hubbard (when she was at Stockton Council Museums) to copy. Many of these are about or touch on the railway heritage.

How to Market Stockton Borough to Tourists

Apart from the most dedicated enthusiast or researcher, there is insufficient railway heritage on its own to attract someone to travel to this borough from a distance, in my opinion. I therefore suggest three approaches:

⁶ Speakman, L & Chapman, R, *Stockton-on-Tees, Birthplace of the Railways, A Tour of the Borough's Rail History*, Hawes 1989: Leading Edge

⁷ Appendix 1

- A. Encouraging those visiting the area for family occasions or on business to stay longer or come back.
- B. Combining the railway heritage with this borough's broader engineering heritage as a package worth seeing, but at the same time showing to spouses/partners of prospective visitors that there are other things to see and do.
- C. Combining this Stockton Borough "offer" with attractions round about in day-trip distance.

These could include the following.

- A. Ensuring that in places where people stay when they come to family occasions or on business (hotels, camp site at the Barrage, etc.) there is sufficient attractive information about what is on offer, how people can find out more on the Internet and where to find the TIC. It would be valuable to have the people with front-line contact with guests on board.
- B. Joint publicity (and, if feasible, organisation of package holidays) for the railway heritage and the many other items of engineering interest in this borough, such as:
 - The Transporter Bridge (half is in this borough), upon which considerable money is about to be spent to make it more of a tourist attraction.
 - Newport Bridge (half is in this borough).
 - Tees Viaduct (half is in this borough)
 - Infinity Bridge – brand-new design
 - Millennium Bridge – late 20th Century design
 - Yarm Bridge – built in 1400 (an Ancient Monument & Listed Building)
 - Various structures of the former ICI at Billingham which are Listed Buildings
 - Tees Barrage & the new Archimedean screw (which would benefit from interpretative boards)

The bridges across the Tees are attractively covered in a recent leaflet issued by the Institution of Civil Engineers⁸.

The national rally of small gauge railway societies will be hosted by Teesside Small Gauge Railway Society (who operate the miniature railway in Preston Park) in September 2013, attracting members from all over the country to stay for a few days. I have already suggested to Preston Park Stakeholder Group that this would be a good opportunity to attract visitors by publicising this area's attractions for engineers and the other visitor opportunities for those accompanying them.

- C. Easily reached from Stockton are further places of interest for those interested in railways:
 - *Head of Steam* railway museum at Darlington
 - *Locomotion* (part of the National Railway Museum) at Shildon

⁸ ICE North East, *Bridges over the Tees*, 2011: <http://www.ice.org.uk/Information-resources/Document-Library/Bridges-over-the-Tees>

- Both of the above can be reached by train from Thornaby, Eaglescliffe and Allen's West Stations to North Road and Shildon Stations respectively on a line following parts of the 1825 S & DR route.
- The Middlesbrough-Whitby railway, a single-track traditional rural branch line through great scenery
- Model railways in Ormesby Hall, Middlesbrough
- Further afield, preserved railways – Weardale Railway from Bishop Auckland West Station, North Yorkshire Moors Railway from Goathland, Wensleydale Railway from Leeming Bar, Tanfield Railway (together with Tanfield Arch, the oldest railway bridge in the World) – and railway museums at Sunderland (Monkwearmouth) and York (National Railway Museum).

Stockton Borough lies at the southern boundary of the North East region for many purposes. This boundary is irrelevant to the potential visitor, who needs to be made aware of attractions in Yorkshire too, including non-railway attractions close to this borough, such as Mount Grace Priory, the North York Moors, Kiplin Hall, Captain Cook country.

The essence of a railway is that it runs from one place to another. This, and the need to have a package worthwhile for people to travel to see, makes it desirable that the Boroughs of Stockton and Darlington co-operate with each other and with neighbouring authorities and such bodies as the National Railway Museum and preserved railways.

One result of promoting this borough's railway heritage would be an increase in civic pride among residents. This would not be merely a desirable end in itself. My experience of visiting other places is that coming face to face with front-line service providers (such as hoteliers, taxi drivers, refreshment providers) who have pride in and knowledge of their area gives a very positive image, improving the visitor experience. In marketing the tourism offer of this borough it is important to get these front-line ambassadors on board.

John A Fletcher

12 September 2012

Notes on the Author

Resident of Eaglescliffe since 1979.

Stockton Borough Councillor 1987-2011, representing Egglecliffe Ward, subsequently Eaglescliffe Ward, through which the original S & DR ran.

Parish Councillor since 1983 in Egglecliffe Civil Parish, through which the original S & DR ran.

Chaired SBC Adults, Leisure & Culture Select Committee which produced scrutiny report on Preston Hall & Park

