

Geography Report – April 2025

Jane Harrison

Tim Meacham, a great railway enthusiast, came to talk about the Tees Valley line, which ran from Barnard Castle to Middleton-in-Teesdale between 1868 and 1965. He began by outlining how the town first became connected to the rail network. The opening of the Darlington and Stockton Railway, in 1825, was the beginning of passenger transport however local interest in freight transport predated that. In 1765, George Dixon, the brother of the more famous Jeremiah Dixon, proposed a scheme to link Cockfield Fell to the river Tees using rail and canal, but it never came to fruition.

There was great enthusiasm in the 1830s for establishing a rail link between Barnard Castle and Darlington but progress was slow as the Duke of Cleveland opposed the building of any line across his land. It wasn't until 1854 that two competing bills went before Parliament and the Darlington to Barnard Castle Railway, promoted by Joseph Pease, was approved. Tim showed us some fascinating old black and white photographs of the stations, including that at Broomielaw, which was originally privately owned and had covered steps from the platform to the road where horse-drawn carriages could wait to take the gentry to Streatlam Castle.



The next line – the South Durham and Lancashire Union Railway – was opened in 1861. It ran westwards, until 1962, over the now demolished Tees Viaduct, towards Bowes and Kirby Stephen. The existing station in Barnard Castle could not be reached because of the required tight curvature of the track, so a second station was built. This has long vanished beneath Glaxo's car park, but the first station building (see photograph) can still be seen off Montalbo Road.

Two years later the Stockton and Darlington Railway opened the line from Bishop Auckland to Barnard Castle, which ran through Evenwood and Cockfield. By then there was no longer opposition from the sitting Duke of Cleveland. The company took over full ownership of the other two lines that year and everything was merged into the North Eastern Railway.

Unfortunately, a technology malfunction at the start left Tim little time to talk about the Teesdale line, apart from the first section to Cotherstone. The station there employed 15 staff in 1892 and was the destination of North Eastern Railway's Sunday excursion trains, earning it the nickname "Little Sunderland". We are looking forward to welcoming Tim back on a future occasion to hear second part of his fascinating talk.



Lartington Station

Next meeting: Thursday 19th June. 2pm in The Witham. Phil Ramsden from the Environment Agency will talk about work on rivers in Cumbria.