

## Forum Historical Environment Report: April 2022

For our April talk, Tim Meacham spoke on 'Railways Round Barnard Castle'. We started with a run through the history of the arrival of the first railways. Despite a few efforts to promote a canal from Cockfield to Gainford (and then another from Gainford to Stockton in the 1760s), it was actually the construction of the Stockton and Darlington Railway between 1821 and 1825 that started Barnard Castle's merchants' serious quest for improved transport links to the coast. So in 1832 a meeting was held to promote a railway to connect with the S&D at West Auckland, costing £50,000, but this ran into opposition from the Earl of Cleveland, a recurring theme. Despite a growing desperation among the merchants who felt the town was being sidelined as the industrial revolution took its hold elsewhere, a further public meeting was held in 1839 which sent Henry Witham to Raby with a plea to the Earl, this time for a line to Darlington: this too fell on deaf ears. Following the death of the Earl in 1842, J Monkhouse, a leading carpet manufacturer from the town took up Witham's cause by leading a deputation to Raby in 1844. The new Earl was, if anything, even more resolutely opposed, talking of 'horrid railways' and firmly shutting the door.

Yet in 1846 as the merchants plotted another attempt at a Darlington line, a second West Auckland proposal was brought forwards, this time with the apparent support of the Earl (was money involved?). Parliament became involved but very soon Barney was in the grip of cholera and both railways took a back seat. In 1852, Monkhouse, nothing if not tenacious, came back with another Darlington proposal. The Earl seemed non-committal but the door remained open and the company was launched with a capital of £80,000; at this point Raby once again objected, Parliament became involved again, and to the Earl's chagrin, despite his again supporting a West Auckland counter-proposal, the Darlington scheme prevailed, the bill passed on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1854, and the line at last opened on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1856. The much-touted West Auckland route followed on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1863 and Barney had joined the 'modern' world.

The second half of the session was a photographic journey along the two lines as they are today, with a few illustrations of trains at work in the past. The West Auckland line lost its passengers in 1962 while the Darlington line lasted until November 1964. Despite the passing of more than half a century, much remains to be seen. Finally our member Simon Owens spoke on recent (so far abortive) efforts to reopen the West Auckland line for the public to enjoy on foot or cycle. Many thanks to Simon for a most interesting, if frustrating, exposition. There was time for questions but not for any reference to Barney's 'other' railways, the erstwhile Tebay mainline over Stainmore, and the Middleton-in-Teesdale branchline. These will be covered at a later date.

Meanwhile, for our next meeting, on Thursday April 14<sup>th</sup> Tony Metcalfe will talk on behalf of Altogether Archaeology. This will be at 10.00 am at Enterprise House and will cover the group's recent Archaeological discoveries in Teesdale. Anyone not already on the list who wishes to attend what should be a great session should let Tim Meacham know by April 5<sup>th</sup> at the latest.