



ROBERT STEPHENSON

NEWCASTLE CENTRAL STATION

By 1845 many railways were converging on Newcastle and Gateshead and the need for a proper station to serve Newcastle and Tyneside was critical.

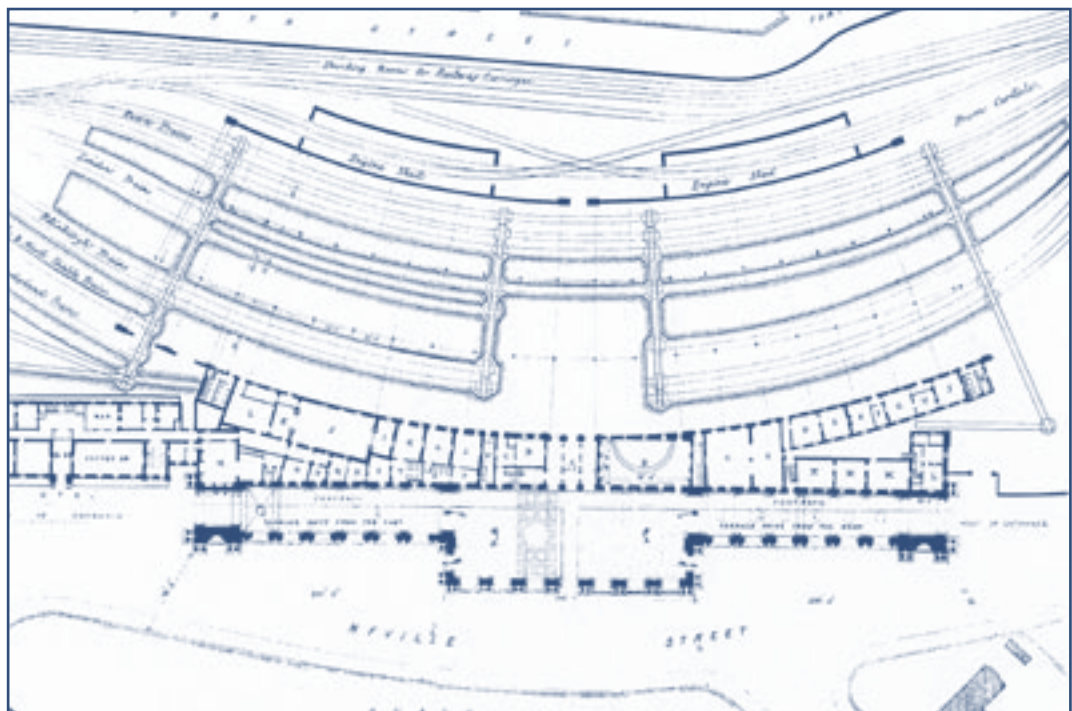
The Carlisle and the North Shields railways already had their own temporary station in Newcastle and the Newcastle & Darlington Junction railway had its new station at Greenesfield, Gateshead.

Greenesfield might have become the major station for all the Tyneside railways but Newcastle Council were determined to bid for the principal station on the Tyne. They owned much land in the Spital and Forth areas of the town just south of Richard Grainger's fantastic new town centre development. The Newcastle-Carlisle and the Newcastle-North Shields railways could join up there too. The planned Newcastle-Berwick railway would also need to join up in Newcastle to the southern line to link up with Edinburgh.

Therefore, in 1845, George Hudson, the "railway king", planned that a joint station should be built on land at the Spital in Newcastle. The new station would serve five railways: Carlisle; North Shields; Brandling; Darlington Junction and the new Newcastle -Berwick railway. Robert Stephenson was the engineer in chief for the Newcastle-Berwick Railway and would be involved with the design of the Newcastle Central Station.

The new station was built as a partnership of Hudson's Newcastle & Darlington Junction Railway, the Newcastle-Carlisle Railway and the newly formed Newcastle-Berwick Railway Company. Robert Stephenson and his assistants set about surveying and preparing plans for the route

Plan view of Newcastle Central Station



of the railway in 1844 which included the siting of the High Level Bridge and positioning of the station. This gained final parliamentary approval in 1845 and outline proposals proceeded using the considerable experience of the Robert Stephenson team in the design of train sheds and railway construction.

Robert Stephenson planned the tracks and platforms with the Newcastle-Carlisle Railway Company with the resulting layout on a curve as this was the only way all the lines could converge. This determined the whole character of the huge station complex. John Dobson, in 1846, was appointed as architect for the design and construction of the Central Station.

The train shed was designed with three spans on the curve with columns placed 28 feet (8.6m) apart and standing 25 feet (7.7m) high, using a format for stations developed earlier by Robert. The roof, constructed in 1848/9 under the supervision of Thomas Harrison, Stephenson's assistant, involved the use of the latest technical expertise of iron and glass in its design and construction.

The construction work began in September 1847 and the station was officially opened by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert with great ceremony in August 1850. Prior to this, in July, Robert Stephenson was honoured by way of a public dinner on one of the platforms. The platform was enclosed on three sides with temporary wood and draped with illustrations of his great engineering achievements.

The station building was to have a classical frontage for the railway companies offices plus refreshment rooms for passengers. Unfortunately, Hudson's company ran into financial difficulties and the design had to be modified to today's "Italianate" frontage with the massive portico, completed in 1863.

Public Dinner for Robert Stephenson in Newcastle Central Station.





Engraving of the Central Station in 1850.



The Central Station today.

SOME FACTS ABOUT THE CENTRAL STATION.

- The Newcastle Central Station covers 17 acres (about 9.5 hectares) of land.
- The front is 600 feet (183 metres) long and the Portico measures 200 feet (61 metres) by 70 feet (21 metres).
- It now has 15 platforms. In 1850 it only had six platforms: two for the Newcastle-Carlisle Railway and four for the York, Newcastle-Berwick railway. Each company had its own entrance and exit.
- In 1854 the North East Railway was formed.
- The original three lines from the High Level Bridge were split to serve eight platforms.
- The original signals in 1850 were only for entering and leaving the station. They were hand operated by “pointsmen”. By 1911 there were 74 signalmen working there.
- 1871: a new “island” platform was built under the third (south) arcade and numbered 5 to 8.
- 1893-1895: due to a huge increase in the number of trains using the station, many alterations took place – both architectural and engineering. The 1871 “island” platform was removed and replaced with two more arcades and more offices and platforms. These alterations produced the present platforms 1,2,3,7,9,10 and 11. These extensions meant that Forth Street was altered and set back.
- 1906: further extensions were carried out due to the opening of the King Edward VI Railway Bridge.

The wonderful sweep of Newcastle Central Station roof

