



ROBERT STEPHENSON

YORK, NEWCASTLE & BERWICK RAILWAY

In 1836 George Stephenson realised that there would soon be the need for a continuous railway line connecting York with Edinburgh so he began surveying two possible routes. One route would follow the coast via Berwick and Dunbar and the other was an inland route via Carter Fell and the Vale of Gala.

This project lay dormant for many years until in June 1844 the completion of the Gateshead to Darlington line connected London with the North East. The Newcastle to Berwick project was revived and the Stephensons were asked to help. Both George and Robert favoured the coast route, whereas Isambard Kingdom Brunel promoted the inland route. The arguments raged but those for the coastal route won the day.

In 1845 the Royal Assent was given to the Newcastle & Berwick Railway Bill and George Hudson, “the railway king”, set up the Newcastle & Berwick Railway Company (NBR). He already controlled the route south to York. The new line would run from the Brandling Junction line in East Gateshead, joining with the Newcastle & North Shields line at Manors, Newcastle and then north at Heaton to finally join the North British Railway at Berwick.

There were three proposed branch lines;

- a) Bilton to Alnwick - built August 1850
- b) Cramlington to Newsham – not built
- c) Tweedmouth to Kelso – built June 1851.

In 1847 George Hudson formed the York, Newcastle & Berwick Railway Company by amalgamating the York, Newcastle Railway; Durham Junction Railway; Brandling Junction Railway; Durham & Sunderland Railway; Pontop & South Shields Railway; Great North England Railway; Newcastle & Darlington Junction Railway and the Newcastle & Berwick Railway. By this year he had control of the whole of the East coast network under the York, Newcastle & Berwick Railway.

He had transformed the railways of the North East from a patchy collection of isolated lines into an integrated rail system complete with all the necessary buildings and bridges.

In 1854 the York, Newcastle & Berwick railway became part of the North Eastern Railway (NER). By 1862 the North Eastern Railway controlled all the North East railway companies except the Blyth & Tyne Railway. This finally came under NER control in 1874.

Robert Stephenson was the engineer-in-chief on the Newcastle to Berwick railway and he designed the great Royal Border Bridge at Berwick that Queen Victoria opened in 1850 on her way to Scotland. Altogether, there are 110 bridges between Newcastle and Berwick, some over and some under the tracks.



The Royal Border Bridge, Berwick-on-Tweed