

## The Liverpool & Manchester Railway: Opening and Operations

The Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester occupies much of the former Liverpool Road Station site, which was the original Manchester terminus of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway (L&MR). When the L&MR opened in 1830, it became the world's first purpose-built passenger railway. The Museum has a collection of commemorative items relating to the opening of the L&MR and its major anniversaries.

### The Opening

The official opening took place on 15 September 1830 and took the form of a ceremonial train procession from Liverpool to Manchester. The guest of honour was the Prime Minister, the Duke of Wellington, whose party rode in a special carriage pulled by the locomotive *Northumbrian* along the southern track of the railway. Seven locomotives conveyed the remaining guests on the northern track. Crowds of spectators gathered along the line and at places there were grandstands, where musical entertainment was provided. The procession stopped at Parkside for the locomotives to take on water. During this stop, there was a tragic accident which overshadowed the rest of the proceedings. William Huskisson, MP for Liverpool, had alighted and was standing by the Duke of Wellington's carriage conversing with the Duke as *Rocket* approached on the other track. Huskisson was unable to get out of the way in time and his left leg was crushed by the train. He was taken to Eccles for medical treatment, but later died.

After lengthy discussion, it was decided that the procession should continue, but in a more sober manner. A further blight was cast on the festivities by the hostile reaction of some of the crowd gathered in Manchester to the Duke of Wellington, who was perceived as an opponent of political reform. At Liverpool Road Station, refreshments were provided for the guests in the 1830 Warehouse. However, Wellington chose to stay in his carriage. The return journey to Liverpool was fraught with technical problems and the trains only arrived back at 10.30 pm, six hours after departing from Manchester. The planned evening celebrations in Liverpool were curtailed in deference to the sombre mood of the guests.

The Huskisson accident might have been expected to stifle public enthusiasm and deter would-be travellers, but this did not prove to be the case. The high level of public interest in the L&MR can be gauged from the variety of souvenirs that were produced to commemorate the opening and throughout the following decade. These souvenirs included colour prints of views along the L&MR route, transfer-printed jugs and mugs, printed cotton handkerchiefs and medallions.



Commemorative jug showing the Moorish Arch in Liverpool.

## Passenger and Goods Services

Based on existing stagecoach traffic, the L&MR Company had budgeted for a daily quota of 250 passengers. After only a month, the Railway was carrying 1,200 passengers a day, a level that it maintained fairly consistently. The rail journey was more than twice as fast and little more than half the price (at second class rates) of the stagecoach journey. Rail competition was therefore expected to have a dire effect on stagecoach trade, as shown in the above cartoon. This soon proved to be true. Prior to the opening of the L&MR, there were 29 stage and mail coaches running daily between Liverpool and Manchester; within five months of the opening, there were only four.



The novelty of rail travel provoked an almost poetic response from some passengers. The actress Fanny Kemble, who joined one of the L&MR trial journeys in August 1830, wrote:

'When I closed my eyes this sensation of flying was quite delightful, and strange beyond description; yet strange as it was, I had a perfect sense of security, and not the slightest fear.'

Dr James Johnson was less entranced, writing of 'the deafening peal of thunder, the sudden immersion in gloom, and the clash of reverberated sounds in confined space'.

The high demand for passenger services meant that the introduction of goods services had to be deferred until more locomotives were available. Goods services commenced in December 1830 and the L&MR was soon handling a wide range of merchandise. The first cargo consisted of American cotton, flour, oatmeal and malt. Livestock services began in May 1831 and by 1833 1,500 pigs a week were being transported by rail to Manchester. Livestock owners were allowed to load animals into the wagons as they pleased. This provoked complaints about the 'wanton cruelty inflicted on pigs'. Income from goods traffic peaked at £120,000 in 1838 and never quite matched passenger income.

## The Impact of the L&MR

The success of the L&MR encouraged other railway schemes. Between 1833 and 1843, 3,680 kilometres (2,300 miles) of railway were authorised. Railways then began to amalgamate to strengthen their competitive position. In 1845, the L&MR ceased to exist following its amalgamation with the Grand Junction Railway, which was then absorbed into the new London & North Western Railway in July 1846.

### *For more information:*

*Read* Carlson, Robert E. *Liverpool and Manchester Railway Operations 1831-45*. Newton Abbot, UK: David & Charles, 1972.

Ferneyhough, Frank. *The Liverpool and Manchester Railway 1830-1980*. London: Robert Hale, 1980.

*Visit* The Museum's *Liverpool and Manchester Railway Exhibition* in the former Second Class Booking Hall of the Station Building.