

Investigators to look at Locomotion No. 1's heritage

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An investigation has started to unearth the heritage behind an iconic locomotive.

The project, headed by Dr Michael Bailey and colleague Peter Davidson, is looking into the preservation of Locomotion No. 1.

They hope to deepen public understanding of the historic locomotive. As part of this, they will uncover evidence to date its components and understand how much of the engine has survived from the original construction in 1825.

This is not the first time Dr Bailey has embarked on this kind of investigation. He has carried out several similar studies on locomotives such as Rocket, the Hetton Lyon, and Killingworth Billy. In doing so, he has both proved and disproved long-standing theories and stories associated with these engines through his investigations.

This is the first time a project of this type has been attempted on Locomotion No.1.

Speaking ahead of the project, Dr Bailey said: “Locomotion No. 1 was the first locomotive to be preserved out of sentiment and as a result shows that there was some understanding that the railway industry had been very successful, despite it only being 1857. Ever since, it has been on display in Darlington in various locations.

“However, what is not clear about the engine is how much of what we look at today has survived since the day it was made and how much has been altered. We already have a number of theories that have formed, and this investigation provides us with the opportunity to test those theories so that we can help the National Railway Museum and Locomotion best inform their visitors about what they come to see.”

Dr Bailey and Mr Davidson’s investigation will involve a detailed in-person study of the locomotive but also in-depth archival research, with Dr Bailey planning trips to the National Archives in Kew as well as archives in Newcastle, Durham and Darlington to gather as much information as possible.

The investigation is estimated to take between 6-8 months to complete.

Most of the time will be used examining drawings that will be completed primarily by Mr Davidson, intertwined with visits for the physical investigation of the locomotive.

Locomotion No. 1 was the first locomotive to be used on a steam worked public railway on what turned out to be a momentous trip from Shildon to the port of Stockton back in September 1825, beginning its journey near to the current Locomotion site.

The engine has been at its new home at Locomotion in Shildon since March last year after a deal was agreed between the National Railway Museum and Head of Steam in Darlington to relocate the engine. As part of the deal, the engine will return on loan to Head of Steam for the first half of 2025 as part of the bicentennial celebrations of the Stockton & Darlington Railway.

Dr Sarah Price, head of Locomotion, said: “We’re delighted that Dr Michael Bailey and Peter Davidson are beginning their investigation of Locomotion No. 1. This engine has such a rich history associated with it, and we are intrigued to see what they uncover in order to better our understanding of our collection.

“The investigation is happening during an exciting time for the museum with our Vision 2025 project starting to take shape. Our plans for a new collection building have recently been unveiled and show the planned transformation of our site. Celebrations for the bicentenary of the Stockton & Darlington Railway are also around the corner, and Locomotion No. 1 will form a key part of those.

“Durham is bidding to be the UK’s City of Culture in 2025, and as a museum, we are proud to support that through our historical exhibits and cultural impact.”

Visitors will still be able to see the 197-year-old locomotive during its investigation at Locomotion, Shildon, and the engine will not be damaged by any physical investigation of it.