

# Unsung hero of the railway celebrated with upgraded listings

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The County Durham residence of pioneering railway engineer Timothy Hackworth (1786 – 1850) has been upgraded to Grade II\* by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on the advice of Historic England, giving it greater protection and recognition.

**Soho House** in Shildon, part of the railway museum at Locomotion, was built for Hackworth by mid-1833 as his main residence. It was originally listed at Grade II in 1986 but has now been elevated into the top 10% of England's most important historic buildings in recognition of Hackworth's huge contribution to the success and international influence of the Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR).

As the first Superintendent of Locomotives for the S&DR between 1825 and 1840, Hackworth played a vital role in developing steam engines that met the significant demands of freight and passenger travel. By sharing his experience with visiting engineers and rail promoters he also directly influenced the development of railways on both sides of the Atlantic.

When the S&DR was formally opened on 27 September 1825, it marked a crucial step towards the birth of the modern railway network. This was largely thanks to the vision and skill of George Stephenson who

designed *Locomotion No.1*, the first locomotive to run on the S&DR and his business partner Edward Pease, the main promoter of the railway.

Together with Michael Longridge of Bedlington and Robert Stephenson they set up Robert Stephenson & Co to build locomotives, which they hoped to sell to emerging railways both in Britain and abroad. However, Stephenson's locomotives were not initially up to the task of running regular long distances and kept breaking down.

It was Timothy Hackworth who came to the rescue. Born in Wylam, the same Northumberland village as George Stephenson, Hackworth began his career designing and maintaining locomotives at Wylam colliery as the pit's blacksmith. Hackworth's engineering skills came to Stephenson's attention when he worked as a relief manager at his locomotive works in Newcastle and he was offered the role as Superintendent of Locomotives at the S&DR on Stephenson's recommendation.

Hackworth rebuilt *Locomotion No.1* to make it more reliable and designed the *Royal George* in 1827. This model firmly established the supremacy of the locomotive over horse-driven haulage and paved the way for the general adoption of steam. The original *Locomotion No.1* is on public display at Locomotion.

Hackworth's later locomotives include *Sans Pareil*, also on display at Locomotion, which took part in the 1829 Rainhill Trials for Liverpool & Manchester Railway, and the *Globe* (1830), the S&DR's first dedicated passenger locomotive, said to be able to reach 50mph.

As the success of the Stockton & Darlington Railway spread far and wide, Hackworth helped to promote steam locomotion internationally by sharing his expertise with visitors from across Europe and North America.

In 1833 Hackworth established Soho Works in Shildon. Here, he built Russia's first steam locomotive (1836) for the Tsarskoye Selo Railway, as well as three of the earliest locomotives used in Canada (1838) including *Samson*, which ran on the Albion Mines Railway in Nova Scotia.

### **The Soho Engine Shed and Locomotive coaling drops**

The only surviving building associated with Hackworth's Soho Works is the **Soho Engine Shed**, which has also now been upgraded to Grade II\*. Originally built in 1826 as a warehouse for an iron merchant, it is one of the earliest railway-associated industrial buildings in the world. In 1842 it was leased to Soho Works which lay immediately to the north. An 1850 plan of Soho Works depicts the building but as it is unlabelled, its exact purpose is unclear. The building only became a locomotive engine shed sometime after it was purchased by the Stockton & Darlington Railway in 1855.

A third site also upgraded to II\* is the **Locomotive coaling drops**, a very early and rare example of a purpose-built facility for refuelling steam locomotives.

The three listing upgrades form part of the work of the Stockton and Darlington Railway Heritage Action Zone. This five-year, heritage-led conservation and economic development scheme is a partnership between Historic England, local authorities and other stakeholders. It is part of the build-up to the 2025

bicentenary of the opening of the S&DR, using heritage to bring lasting economic benefit to the region.

Veronica Fiorato, Listing Team Leader for Historic England in the North, said: “Timothy Hackworth is one of the true pioneers of the railway. His designs helped to convince the world that the future of freight and passenger travel lay in steam locomotion, making the Stockton & Darlington Railway the template for the development of the modern railway. It is only fitting that Soho House and the Soho Engine Shed should be upgraded to Grade II\* to reflect his huge contribution.”

Niall Hammond, Chair of the Friends of the Stockton & Darlington Railway CIO, said: “The Friends of the Stockton & Darlington Railway are delighted that these new and upgraded listings not only recognise the significance of this group of fantastic early railway buildings, but also the seminal role of Timothy Hackworth and the S&DR in creating the modern railway which changed the face of the world. This is the result of a successful partnership between members of the Friends, utilising their expertise and enthusiasm, and the professional staff at Historic England.

“We look forward to continued working with Historic England and our other partners in the Heritage Action Zone to ensure all the heritage of the S&DR ‘The Railway that got the World on Track’, is protected, conserved and accessible to visitors and communities for the bicentenary in 2025 and the lasting legacy beyond.”

Sarah Price, Head of Locomotion, said: “I am pleased that Soho House, the Soho Engine Shed and the coal drops are receiving further recognition, which reflects their national importance in the development of the railways. The buildings are of real historical significance and together, they tell the story of Shildon’s role as the world’s first railway town.”

The historic buildings at Locomotion have recently been given an external restoration as part of a £1.8m project which was joint funded by Durham County Council with work carried out by VEST Construction of Bishop Auckland. The project included repainting the outside of buildings in authentic period colours, replacing damaged or missing brickwork and roof repairs to make them watertight.

*Photo credit: Historic England*