



LOCOMOTION'S 'FORGOTTEN' NUMBER AND DATE PLATES. THE 'HOLY GRAIL' BACK ON SHOW!



It was an autumn morning in 2024 when Neil Booth, Director of Railwayana Auctions UK Ltd, received a telephone call from David Gray – enquiring as to whether his late grandfather’s board containing two sets of brass numberplates and date plates that had adorned the famous steam locomotive LOCOMOTION No. 1 would be of interest in consigning for a future auction.

Immediately recognising their historic importance, Neil suggested that with 2025 being the bicentenary of railways, that as many people as possible should be able to view these plates at celebratory open days and events across the UK throughout the year, prior to going under the hammer.

David thankfully agreed to the idea and entrusted the plates to Neil whereby both the public and enthusiasts alike will be able to view the plates as part of a railway relics roadshow through 2025.

Neil said: “We are used to selling hundreds of locomotive plates, both from the steam and diesel eras, but something as historic as these must beat

them all! We have also been offered the loan of a nameplate from EVENING STAR, the very last locomotive built by BR in 1960, so we can, in effect, display some of the earliest plates and one of the most recent brass plates from the age of steam next to each other.

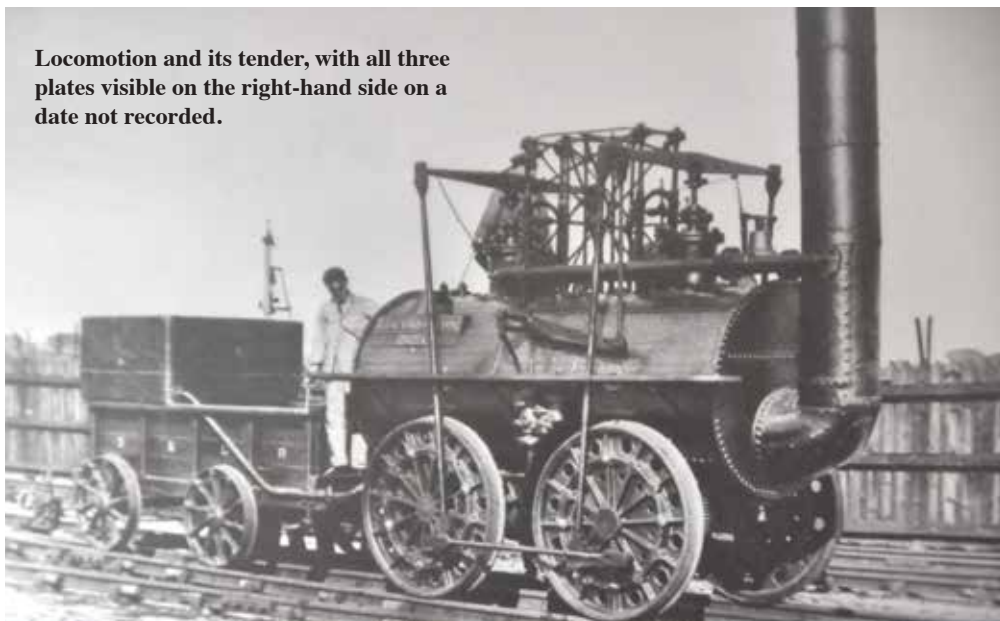
LOCOMOTION No. 1

It must be noted that these surviving brass plates were not fitted to the locomotive from the start in 1825. Indeed, LOCOMOTION may have been originally called ACTIVE but was never named as such, and the No. 1. and date plates were only added later that century to the left-hand ‘exhibition side’, ahead of the locomotive’s visit to the Exposition Retrospective du Travail in Paris in 1889, an event dominated by the newly built Eiffel Tower.

Similar right-hand brass plates were cast from the originals when LOCOMOTION was first plinthed at Darlington in April 1892.

The plates remained on the locomotive until 1961, when they were removed during its restoration at North Road Works, Darlington.

Locomotion and its tender, with all three plates visible on the right-hand side on a date not recorded.



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LOCOMOTION No.1 has always been an icon for the start-up of public railways since 1897. Its ungainly appearance, with parallel motion, has captivated railway historians and model makers since that time. However, it may now be recorded that the artefact on display at the National Railway Museum's Locomotion site at Shildon, is in fact a combination of the remains of the locomotive at the conclusion of its working life, which was then itself reformed in 1857 with replacement components to replicate a form as near to what it was believed to have been like when it first ran on the Stockton & Darlington Railway on its opening day in September 1825.

It is not thought that any of its surviving components date from that time, although there are enough early components to warrant a great deal of interest from which much can be learned about early locomotive technology. Its tender meanwhile is an erroneous replica.

Identifying the artefact has been carefully considered. Sometime after completion it earned the nickname ACTIVE - a name that gained common usage as a form of '*lingua franca*' amongst the railway's footplatemen. Even on its retirement there were those who still referred to this name.

From October 1827, the need to identify more specifically each of the railway's growing fleet, led to the introduction of numbers in the order in which they had been delivered. ACTIVE was thus given the number '1'. In the summer of 1833, the railway's sub-committee decided to name the locomotives in its fleet, with No.1 being given the name LOCOMOTION, possibly with cast nameplates affixed to the sides of the boiler.

The build

The locomotive was built by Robert Stephenson & Co. which was formed in June 1823 as a manufacturing company to meet the anticipated requirements of the growing railway industry, especially the Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR). The company began trading in the Bedlington Iron Works' premises on 11 July 1823, whilst seeking premises of its own in Newcastle.

The 1,200 square yard site in South Street, just off Forth Street in that city, was selected as the site of the new factory and, after a phased transfer of men and equipment from Bedlington, was ready for use by the autumn of 1824.

The S&DR enquired as to the terms for acquiring its first two locomotives on 16 July 1824. On receiving a satisfactory quotation of £500 per locomotive from the Stephenson Company, subsequently increased to £600, the railway ordered both locomotives on 16 September 1824. To supervise the manufacturing work, Stephenson had engaged Timothy Hackworth (1786-1850), who started at the South Street factory in the summer of 1824, but his appointment was on a short-term basis only.

Opening Day

After a few days of trial running, a special train was run from Shildon to Darlington and back for the benefit of some of the railway's directors on Monday evening, 26 September 1825. In addition to George Stephenson, the party was composed of Edward Pease, his three sons, Edward, Joseph and Henry, Thomas Richardson and William Kitching who rode in the company's carriage EXPERIMENT, which had only arrived by road from Newcastle that day.

The train was driven by James Stephenson, who went on to be the regular driver of the locomotive for the first couple of years.

Notification of the opening of the S&DR, on Tuesday, 27 September, had been prepared in the form of a printed notice, for circulation to the press and public, dated eight days before, on the 19th. On that day a special train was laid on to travel between Brussleton Plane and Stockton for the benefit of directors, guests, employees and associates, but it was soon apparent that many uninvited people would seek to obtain a ride as well, on what was seen to be a momentous occasion. The train was made up of wagons and the passenger carriage, assembled at the bottom of the Brussleton incline. The locomotive, 'looking very bright in her coat of fresh paint', on that day driven by George Stephenson himself,

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accompanied by his brother, James, and fired by William Gowland, was coupled up to the train, which was made up as follows:

Five waggons loaded with coal, with passengers sat on the top

One waggon with sacks of flour, with passengers amongst them

One waggon with 'surveyors and engineers' EXPERIMENT passenger carriage in which the railway's directors and 'other proprietors' were seated

Six waggons filled with 'strangers'

Fourteen waggons filled with workmen and others

Six waggons loaded with coal with passengers sat on top

Although only 300 tickets had been circulated, 46 the total load, with nearly 700 passengers, came to about 80 tons. ACTIVE was said to have achieved a speed of ten to twelve miles per hour on the first part of its journey to Darlington. The train was followed by 24 further waggons drawn by horses, which contained 'workmen'.

The train took two hours to reach Darlington, having been delayed three times by problems. Firstly, the wagon containing the 'surveyors and engineers' twice had a problem with an axle. The vehicle then had to be detached and left in one of the passing loops, but in doing so a bystander was struck by the vehicle and sustained a minor injury. The other problem was with the feed-water pump on the loco. which was apparently dealt with after half an hour's delay, some oakum having to be cleared out. On arrival at Darlington the six waggons at the rear were dropped off, and the coals they contained distributed amongst the poor. Two additional waggons were then attached, providing accommodation for members of the Chairmen's band, who played 'cheering and appropriate airs' between Darlington and Stockton.

The train proceeded towards Stockton at an average speed of about four miles per hour, stopping only at Goosepool, to take on more water. The final downhill gradient towards the Tees at Stockton was taken at a speed of 15 or 16

miles per hour. Arrival in Stockton was 3 hours 7 minutes after departing Darlington, the whole spectacle having been watched by an estimated 50,000 people along the trackside.

ACTIVE performed well on the opening day and other locos were commissioned subsequently with various levels of success and performance.

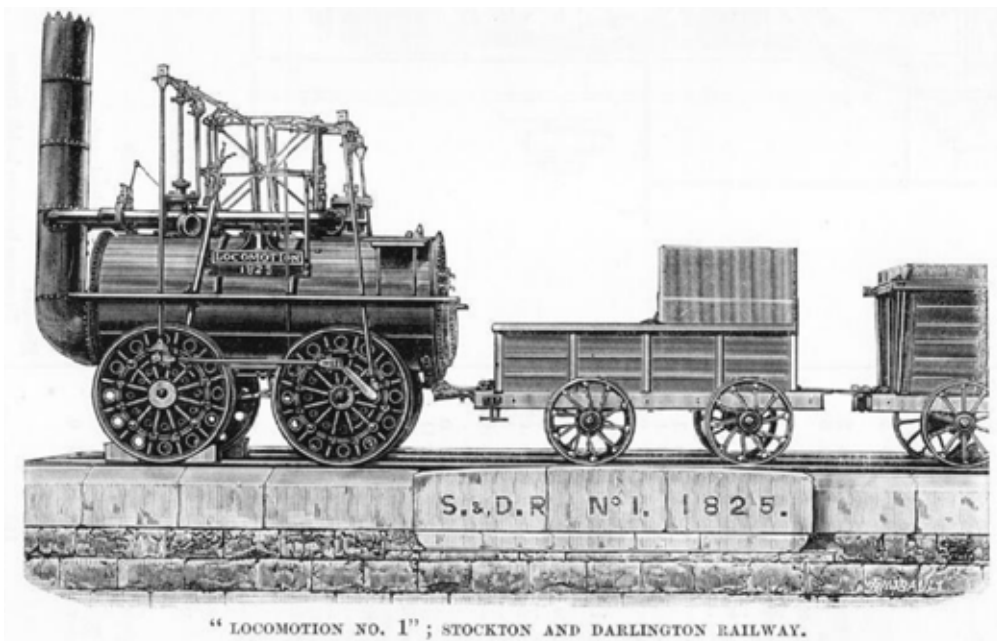
From 1836, it had become the practice for the railway to sell its redundant locomotives to other railway or industrial concerns for the maximum price it could negotiate. However, at that time LOCOMOTION was not placed on sale, indicating that either it was considered unsuitable for sale as a working locomotive, or that the railway's directors had formed a sentimental attachment to it, but had yet to make up their minds regarding its preservation. With no consideration of it being sold for scrap, the latter option apparently prevailed, thus possibly representing the first occasion where a railway asset was retained out of historic appreciation, less than 20 years after it had been brought into service.

Following its withdrawal from coal transport it was changed to be used only for occasional haulage of general goods traffic and track maintenance trains. On 24 October 1839 LOCOMOTION was derailed at Middlesbrough and John Graham reported that it had "turned on to her side ... and is much broke." There is no surviving report as to the damage caused to it with this accident, but it was repaired and returned to traffic.

How long No. 1 remained in use on merchandise traffic is not known, but it seems it was once more returned to storage in the yard at Shildon Works.

Initial Preservation

Given that the locomotive was likely to cost £50 to restore to its original working state, it was clear that the directors had decided to preserve it for display, perhaps prompted by Robert Stephenson's idea for the Great Exhibition but had yet to make their minds up as to what form this might have taken.



LOCOMOTION was prepared prior to its dispatch to the Exposition Retrospective du Travail in Paris in 1889. The new brass nameplate has been fitted showing both its number and date of manufacture, as well as its name. The locomotive is believed to have been painted olive green and black at this time. (*Engineering*, Vol. 47, (1889), p. 707)

Later in 1856 it was noted that No.1 was “Preparing for the Museum by order of Directors”, but no further reference to a museum project has been traced.

On 20 May 1857, Thomas MacNay, the S&DR’s Company Secretary, wrote to several employees and agents to say: “The Directors have it in contemplation to erect a suitable Pedestal, &c at Darlington upon which to place the Old Locomotive Engine No.1, as a memento of the past, and they think the laying of the Foundation Stone a fitting time to give an entertainment to the Company’s Agents in the several departments, as far as they can be dispensed with from their duties.”

In 1889 **LOCOMOTION** was called upon to be an exhibit in Paris at the Exposition Retrospective du Travail, which was put on to coincide with the capital’s major Exposition Universelle held

in the city between Sunday, 5 May and Thursday, 31 October, 1889, an event which was dominated by the newly built Eiffel Tower. **LOCOMOTION** was a leading exhibit and was accompanied by other early British artefacts, including the Hazledine stationary engine boiler, and the new replica of **ROCKET**, both loaned by the London & North Western Railway at Crewe, together with models, maps and plans, including early locomotive arrangement drawings made available by Robert Stephenson & Co.

No.1, now fitted with new nameplates on its left side incorporating No. ‘1’ and ‘1825’, departed Darlington on Sunday 14 April 1889 for its journey to Paris, accompanied by its tender and a chaldron wagon.

In 1890, **LOCOMOTION** was finally exhibited at the International Exhibition of Electricity, Engineering, General Inventions and Industries

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in the Meggetland district of Edinburgh. It was opened by the Duke of Edinburgh on Thursday, 1 May and closed on Saturday 1 November, during which time some 2.4 million visitors attended.

No.1 was joined at the exhibition by the North Eastern Railway's 4-2-2 compound locomotive No. 1329, to emphasise the progress made in locomotive design in the intermediate 65 years.

No.1 was also joined by 'Wylam Dilly', loaned by the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh. The Crewe replica of ROCKET was also exhibited, together with the Hazledine stationary engine boiler. The locomotives and other railway artefacts were displayed in the 'railway annex' to the Exhibition's 'Machinery Hall'.

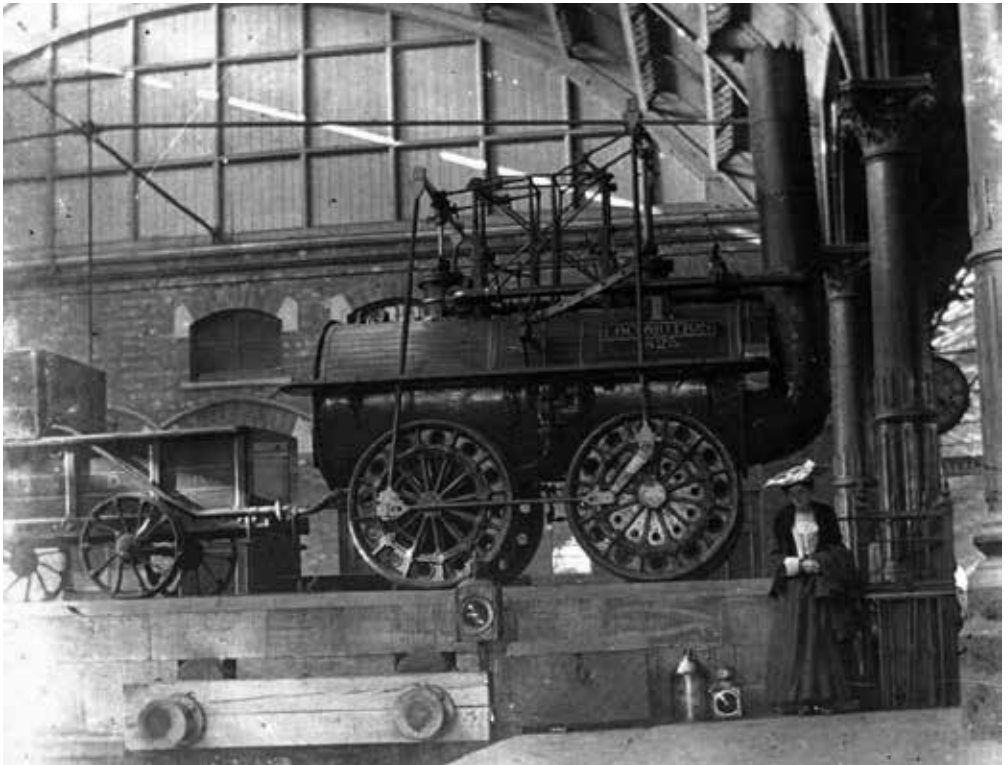
Preceding LOCOMOTION's exhibition in Edinburgh, the North Eastern Railway received 'A Humble Memorial from the Mayor, Aldermen

and Burgesses of the Borough of Darlington acting as the Local Board of Health and Urban Sanitary Authority' pleading for the railway to place the artefact on display under cover on Bank Top station, where it could be "placed in a more convenient position where it would be sheltered and would be freer from rust and decay than in its present exposed situation....".

On its return from Edinburgh, the North Eastern Railway accepted that LOCOMOTION's condition had deteriorated unacceptably.

The locomotive and its tender were restored and re-painted in the North Road Locomotive Workshops in Darlington during 1891/2. The colour scheme was altered from olive green and black, to blue, red, yellow, white and black, with brass bell and nameplate remaining unpainted.

The artefact was no longer made available



On display at Darlington North Road with all plates showing.

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RIGHT:

A 1950-view of No. 1 following its return to Bank Top station after the war.

(H.C. Casserley; as shown in Brian Reed, Loco. Profile 25: LOCOMOTION, P. 24)



for exhibition elsewhere, and in April 1892 was placed on permanent and prominent display on a new plinth under the platform roof at the southern end of Darlington's Bank Top station.

For this purpose, an additional name/number/date plate, similar to that carried on its left side, was added to the locomotive's right side. The chaldron wagon that had formerly been displayed with it on the pedestal at North Road no longer accompanied it.

It remained on the pedestal up to the second world war but, for security reasons, it was moved in June 1941 to the locomotive shed at Stanhope in upper Weardale. It remained there, greased and under a tarpaulin, until 1946 before being returned to Darlington and replaced on its plinth on Bank Top station, again with its right side facing south.

In 1961 the condition of both locomotive and tender had deteriorated, and arrangements were made to move it into the North Road Locomotive Works on 19 March for a restoration and repaint. Both vehicles spent several weeks in the works and some component replacements were made, in addition to the restoration of other components.

The restoration programme was completed in June 1961, and the locomotive and tender returned to the plinth on Bank Top station. The complete identification plaques were not, however, re-installed on the boiler sides. Only the brass LOCOMOTION nameplates were screwed to the boiler cladding. The earlier backing plates and the numbers '1' and the dates '1825' were retained in North Road Works. This had been arranged with the knowledge of the Works Manager, Peter Gray MBE, who kept them safe. On his transfer to another appointment in 1965, the staff at the works mounted the four brass sections onto a commemorative plaque and presented them to him.

Metallurgical Testing

The current owner of the two 'No. 1' and '1825' plates, David Gray, kindly made the plates available for metallurgical analysis during our study.

Samples of these plates were taken for analysis by consultant metallurgical historian, Dr. Peter Northover. These show that they were cast from an alloy with lead and a small amount of tin. Their

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LOCOMOTION being transferred to North Road Locomotive Works on a 'Weltrol' wagon drawn by J94 0-6-0ST, No. 68060. (ARPT)

BELOW: The working replica **LOCOMOTION** on the Pockerley Wagonway at Beamish Museum, Co. Durham. (Phil Barnes)



composition was the same as the **LOCOMOTION** nameplate, indicating that the latter was probably cast at the same time (i.e. for the Paris exhibition). The assembly was fitted, using lead, to a wrought iron plate which was fitted, tangentially, to the left side of the boiler with a profiled, probably wooden, backing.

In 1892, the locomotive was re-located to Bank Top station in Darlington which allowed it to be viewed from either side by users of the station. This apparently prompted the replication of a further set of '1'/**LOCOMOTION**/1825' plates for fitting to the locomotive's right side, in similar layout to that on the left side.

This second set of plates were not made to the same standard as those on the left side. The brass number and date plates are from an alloy cut from sheet brass which was either soldered or riveted to the iron backing plate. They would be a bit 'yellower' than the original cast set. Due to the location of the boiler feed-pump on the right side,



The oldest of the two date plates.



The oldest of the No. 1 plates.

the wrought iron plate and its probably wooden backing had to be fitted towards the rear of the barrel.

The cast brass nameplates were retained and fitted to the boiler cladding on both the left and right sides of the locomotive and they remain in situ.

(The above notes, taken from a survey by Michael Bailey, with grateful thanks).

Peter Gray MBE and the Darlington connection

Peter Gray received these four brass plates from LOCOMOTION in 1965 and, upon his passing in 1989, were gifted by his wife Betty to their grandson David Gray, in accordance with Peter's wishes.

Peter was a lifelong railwayman, born in 1915

in Scotland he started work as a 17-year-old apprentice at Cowlairs Works in Springburn, Glasgow.

Taking a higher education route through his apprenticeship he rose to the position of Inspector at Edinburgh during the Second World War. As befitted his position, he always signed off documents with a green pen – no one else was allowed to use green!

The railway system was still at its zenith and to chase promotion, one was expected to move around the country to different works. Aged 28, in 1943, he got a position at Gorton Works, Manchester, becoming Works Manager.

He moved down to Gorton, leaving the family back home in Glasgow and returned home once a fortnight to see them.

Two years later the family moved south to New Mills, Manchester, his son Andrew being 8 or 9 at the time. Peter stayed at Gorton for another 13 years until 1956, prior to taking the Works Manager position at Stratford Works, London, with the family living at Upminster.

From there, Peter uprooted the family to Darlington in 1961, again as Works Manager. They only stayed four years there, since Peter was instructed that the works were to be closed. He was the main Works Manager at Darlington and oversaw the closure, leaving in 1965.

LOCOMOTION had been on display at Darlington station - coming into the works for a cosmetic refurbishment whilst Peter was Works Manager. Its year and number plates were removed for safe keeping and mounted on a wooden sign-written plaque in the Works Managers office, where they hung on the wall. Upon closure of the works in 1965, Peter received these plates from the Works Committee, thanking him for his time at Darlington.

Peter then moved south to Derby Loco and c1976 moved to Derby Carriage and Wagon Works at Litchurch Lane, from whence he retired from there in 1979.

Peter got very involved in the community - becoming President of the Railway Swimming Club at Queens Street Baths in Derby. He was

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also a Patron of the Royal School of the Deaf, Derby. Such roles would be common for a man of his position in a railway town.

Whilst at Derby, Peter oversaw the refurbishment of FLYING SCOTSMAN, which had recently returned to the UK in a poor state of repair from its ill-fated USA tour with Alan Pegler.

Peter received his MBE for Services to Industry in the 1970s.

Peter died young, in 1989, from a heart attack with no warning of ill health. He had always been a fit and slim man and had been enjoying a healthy retirement playing golf in Derby.

Peter's grandson, David Gray, recalls some happy times with his grandfather: "I travelled the country with my grandfather - often going to Scotland to visit relatives. He had the privilege of a Gold Medallion and so we got to travel everywhere First Class. He would tell me stories of his railway career all the time. He was very proud of it, and he encouraged me to become a railway engineer too."

"Having looked after the LOCOMOTION plates at my home since 1989, I feel that now is the time for them to move on and to give someone else the pleasure of owning them...and what better year to do it than the bicentenary of railways... from the little locomotive that started it all."

RIGHT: 12-year-old Neil Booth at Patricroft Shed in June 1968 with No. 44777, which had been already withdrawn from service and was awaiting disposal to Cohen's of Kettering. Many years later Neil was able to acquire the original smokebox numberplate from this locomotive.

"Neil Booth has found the Holy Grail!"

Steve Davies – Former Director, National Railway Museum.

About Railwayana Auctions UK Ltd

David Gray has entrusted Neil Booth of Railwayana Auctions UK to offer the plates for auction in the autumn of 2025.

Neil has had a passion for railways ever since he was in his pram – born into what was then the smoky industrial atmosphere of Salford, Manchester, (now very much smartened up and home to BBC's Media City). He can recall being pushed in his pram down through Weaste Cemetery to the bottom of the low stone wall that backed on to the Manchester Ship Canal's main loco depot's workshop at Mode Wheel where he could watch the little tank engines working away. His father was a Salford City Police Constable who patrolled this same patch from Trafford Road and Ordsall Lane along the dock area.



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Auctioneer Neil Booth with station signs from across the five regions consigned for his February 2025 auction, prior to them being dispersed to their new owners.

A First Birthday present of an egg cup with an image of a train on is a fond high chair memory... and Neil still has that egg cup!

Steam was all around – the engine shed at Patricroft was close to his home and young Neil would wander around the shed most days as the crews knew he was harmless.

By May 1968, aged 12, he could then join the Buckley Wells Railway Society, later renamed the Northern Counties Transport Society, which allowed trips further afield. Between the ages of 12 and 19 he partook of official trips to the likes of Cornwall, Hull, London, South Wales and Scotland – enabling him to see many different types of engines across the four corners of the UK and also being catapulted into the modern diesel

and electric era, noting the different classes of locomotives.

Collecting railway relics from a young age, he developed this interest into buying and selling items with his stall at specialist railway auctions.

Leaving his trade as a builder, he launched his own railway auction company with a live auction in April 2006 at Crewe and he now hosts up to four online railwayana auctions a year. Neil still travels the UK, but nowadays it is with his van, collecting railway items that have been consigned for his auctions, sometimes within 24 hours of an initial enquiry.



Auctioneer Neil Booth and the LOCOMOTION board.

Consigning for future auctions

RAUK are now consigning all items of railway hardware for future auctions. For a realistic market appraisal and good old-fashioned honest advice Telephone Neil on 01242 620020 or 07836 225711. Email office@gwr1.com or office@railwayana.com

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Owner David Gray and auctioneer Neil Booth with the LOCOMOTION board.
(Trackside)

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TRACKSIDE magazine is proud to support the 'Railway 200 Roadshow'
featuring the 'No.1' plates from 1825-built 'Locomotion'



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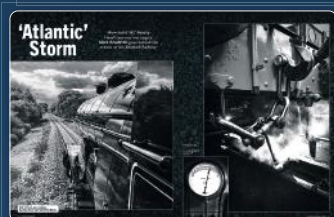
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