

George Stephenson and the Bowes Railway!



Industrial heritage in Springwell Village



George Stephenson

Sunderland Male Voice Choir evolved from the former Shiney Row Male Voice Choir in July 2022.

The Choir has recorded and performed some great material over the years. Recently, it has embarked on a programme of creating new musical material. Some of this material incorporates new arrangements of traditional numbers.

An exciting new initiative is the creation of brand-new songs based upon the region's rich local heritage and its people.

The Choir has been working with The Cultural Spring, Sunderland City Council to create new music about George Stephenson and the Hetton Colliery Railway.

Thanks to a donation from the Durham Benevolence, this work is being extended.

The Bowes Railway is the world's only operational preserved standard gauge cable railway system.

This information sheet looks at George Stephenson and the Bowes Railway.

The Durham Benevolence Project

Thanks to a donation from the Durham Benevolence, Sunderland Male Voice Choir is now able to expand its musical creation project on the rich heritage of the region and its people.

This project will extend the work in Hendon and create new material on George Stephenson and the Bowes Railway.

George Stephenson – 'The Father of Railways'

George Stephenson was born on the 9th June 1781 in Wylam, Northumberland.

He paid for his own education but was illiterate until the age of 18.

After working at the Black Callerton Colliery and Willington Quay on Tyneside, he moved to Dial Cottage in West Moor with his family and became a brakesman at Killingworth Pit.

It was at Killingworth where he started some of his creative and famous work. In 1815, he started experiments on a safety lamp, later to be known as 'The Geordie Lamp', but it took until 1833 for the House of Commons to recognize his work.

Stephenson designed some of his famous locomotives while working and living at Killingworth. His first locomotive in 1814 was 'Blucher', which was designed to haul coal on the Killingworth wagonway, was constructed in the colliery workshop behind Dial Cottage. It is said that he produced 16 locomotives at Killingworth.

In 1820, Stephenson was commissioned to build the famous Hetton Colliery Railway, which opened in 1822. This line used a gauge of 4ft 8in which Stephenson had used before at the Killingworth wagonway.

Stephenson became famous for many railway lines, which included Stockton and Darlington, Liverpool and Manchester and the Bowes Railway.

He died on the 12th August 1848 and was buried in Chesterfield. His first wife and daughter were buried at St. Bartholomew's Church in Longbenton on Tyneside.

Sunderland Male Voice Choir

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Bowes Railway Museum

The Bowes Railway

The Bowes Railway is the world's only operational preserved standard gauge cable railway system.

It was built by George Stephenson in 1826 to transport coal from pits in Durham to boats on the River Tyne.

The railway was built between Mount and Jarrow via Springwell Village. The first section, between Springwell and Jarrow, opened on the 17th January 1826, and Mount Moor followed in April 1826.

There were four inclines, one from Mount Moor to Blackham's Hill and one from Blackham's Hill to Springwell. At Blackham's Hill, there was a 'hauler house', which housed stationary engines to wind the ropes. There was a long self-acting incline from Springwell and nearly 5 miles of locomotive-worked line to Jarrow where a final incline served the coal staithes.

The line was extended across the Team Valley in May 1842 to Kibblesworth Colliery and then to Marley Hill and Dipton in 1854.

The Bowes Railway was taken over by the National Coal Board on the 1st January 1974. After the 4th October 1974, no inclines were used. A 1-mile section of track at Wardley was retained until the 10th January 1986.

Sunderland Male Voice Choir Information Sheets

Sunderland Male Voice Choir is producing a range of information sheets on its new music creation and project work. These sheets will be published within the 'Project' page of the Choir website.

Preserving our past heritage through words and music!

Preserving the Bowes Railway

Tyne and Wear Industrial Monuments Trust was established in April 1975 and took control of the line around Springwell from the National Coal Board.

This included Blackham's Hill East and West inclines. In 1977, the main Bowes Railway site and collection were added to the preservation scheme. By 1975, Springwell Workshops were building replica locomotives, such as 'Locomotion No. 1'.

Bowes Railway Co. now manage the site, with volunteers, providing Workshop Tours, Rope Hauled Inclines, and exhibitions.

'We're Going on A Randy'

This is a new song which was created by Sunderland Male Voice Choir. It tells the story of George Stephenson and the Hetton Colliery Railway, and was launched for the Bicentenary of the Railway in November 2022.

The Male Voice Choir Song

It is hoped that the new song created by Sunderland Male Voice Choir will provide a musical legacy about another chapter in the career of the famous Northeast Legend, George Stephenson and his work on the Bowes Railway.



Bowes Railway Timeline