

## The Liverpool to Manchester Railroad

Ironically, when the first steam locomotives were built in England, investors who previously sunk their money into canals and roads were reluctant to invest in something that was fast, noisy and billowed out thick, black smoke. The miles of railroad track spoiled the green, lush, British countryside.

The first British passenger trains ran in the northeast, from Stockton to Darlington. It began in 1825 and in 1830 a second line, connecting the industrial and port cities of Manchester and Liverpool, a distance of about 40 miles, was completed. What followed was “railroad mania” and by 1848 five thousand miles of railroad tracks had been laid down across England.

When first opened, the Liverpool to Manchester railroad used a steam engine built by George Stephenson, the inventor of the “Rocket.” The following testimony was written by a famous actress of the times, Fanny Kemble, who was a guest of Stephenson to ride the train on one of its first trial runs.



As you read the following testimony of her journey, keep in mind who she is, how she sees this invention relative to what she knows, and the fact that this is one of the first steam engines used, a strange, new contraption previously seen by only a few people.

Source: Frances Anne Kemble, *Record of a Girlhood*, London: R. Bentley & Son, 1878, Vol. II, pp. 160-64

“She, the engine, consisted of a boiler, a stove, a small platform, a bench, and a barrel containing enough water to prevent her being thirsty for fifteen miles; the whole machine not bigger than a common fire engine. She goes upon two wheels which are her feet and are moved by bright steel legs called pistons; these are propelled by steam. The reins, bit, and bridle of this wonderful beast is a small steel handle which applies or withdraws the steam from its legs or pistons, so that a child can manage it. The coals, which are its oats, were under the bench, and there was a small glass tube affixed to the boiler with water in it, which indicates by its fullness or emptiness when the creature wants water, which is immediately conveyed to it from its reservoirs. There is a chimney to the stove, but as they burn coke [high carbon content coal, containing less impurities] there is none of the dreadful black smoke which accompanies the progress of a steam vessel.

This snorting little animal, which I felt rather inclined to pet, was then harnessed to our carriage, and Mr. Stephenson, having taken me on the bench of the engine with him, we started at about ten miles an hour. The stem horse being ill adapted for going up and down hill, the road was kept at a certain level, and appeared sometimes to sink below the surface of the earth and sometimes rise above it. Almost at starting it was cut through the solid rock, which formed a wall on either side of it about sixty feet high. You can't imagine how strange it seemed to be journeying on thus, without any visible cause of progress other than the magical machine, with its flying white breath and rhythmical, unvarying pace between these rocky walls. When I reflected that these great masses of stone had been cut apart to allow our passage thus far below the surface of the earth, I felt as if no fairy tale was ever half as wonderful as what I saw. Bridges were thrown from side to side across the top of these cliffs, and the people looking down upon us from them seemed like pygmies standing in the sky.

We had now come fifteen miles and stopped where the road traversed a wide and deep valley. Stephenson made me alight and led me to the bottom of this ravine over which, in order to keep his road level, he has thrown a magnificent viaduct of nine arches, the middle one of which is seventy feet high, through which we saw the whole of this beautiful little valley. It was lovely and wonderful beyond all words. He explained to me the whole construction of the steam engine and said he could soon make a famous engineer of me, which considering the wonderful things he has achieved, I dare not say is impossible. His way of explaining himself is peculiar but very striking, and I understood without difficulty all that he said to me. We then rejoined the rest of the party, and the engine having received its supply of water, the carriage placed behind it, for it cannot turn, and was set off at its utmost speed, thirty-five miles an hour, swifter than a bird flies.

You cannot conceive what the sensation of cutting the air was; the motion is as smooth as possible, too. I could either have read or written, and as it was, I stood up and with my bonnet off 'drank the air before me.' The wind, which was strong, or perhaps the force of our own thrusting against it, absolutely weighed my eyelids down. 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. At one time, to exhibit the power of the engine, having met another steam carriage which was unsupplied with water, Mr. Stephenson caused it to be fastened in front of ours; moreover, a wagon laden with timber was also chained to us, and thus propelling the idle steam engine and dragging the loaded wagon which was beside it and our own carriage full of people behind, this brave little she-dragon of ours flew on. Farther on she met three carts, which being fastened in front of her she pushed on before her without the slightest delay or difficulty; when I add that this pretty little creature can run with equal facility either backwards or forwards, I believe I have given you an account of all her capacities".

