

This article was written for the Middleton Railway's members' magazine "Old Run" to commemorate the Queen's Diamond jubilee and the 170^h anniversary of the first royal train, as well as to note the fact that the a locally built engine did the honours

A Train Fit For A Queen

The first train to carry Queen Victoria, or indeed any reigning monarch in this country, ran on 13th June 1842. The locomotive to do the honours was *Phlegethon*, built at the Round Foundry in the Holbeck area of Leeds, the same factory that had just 30 years previously built the first commercially successful freight locos in the world for the Middleton Railway.

It is said that Victoria was nervous at first of rail travel herself, though Albert was a great believer in this new technology. This may explain the fact that it was nearly five years since she had ascended the throne before she had taken to the rails. Recent attempts on her life whilst travelling in her carriage however may have been a factor in the decision to use the railways.

Below – Illustration of Edward Oxford's 1840 attempt on Victoria's life whilst riding in her carriage.



It was at quite short notice that the royal train was prepared and in great secrecy. Not until Saturday 11th June were the authorities of the GWR at Paddington informed of the planned trip from Slough to Paddington, however on the Monday morning the Royal Train was ready for the Queen to make the first train journey of a reigning monarch in the country.

The Morning Chronicle of the 15th June describes the event in some detail.

"Immediately after the departure of the day mail-train from Paddington, at a quarter past ten o'clock, the royal train, consisting of the Phlegethon engine and tender, drawing the Royal saloon in the centre of two Royal saloon carriages, preceded by a second-class carriage, and followed by three carriage-trucks, started from the terminus at Paddington for Slough"...



Above – Firefly replica at Didcot. Twenty of this type were built by the Round Foundry of Fenton, Murray & Jackson in Leeds including the one that hauled the first royal train. (Photo Kris Ward)

The arrival of the royal train in Slough was followed by a typical meet and greet common to most of these Royal occasions where the Queen met members of the management from the Great Western Railway. The driving of the first royal train was entrusted to a couple of the key personnel of the Great Western Railway, the names of which will be familiar to many.

... "precisely at twelve o' clock the train left Slough for Paddington, Mr. Gooch, the principal of the locomotive department, accompanied by Mr. Brunel, the engineer, driving the engine"...

As well as their important duties building and running the GWR, Gooch and Brunel did the odd important footplate turn too, newspapers of the time also record them at the regulator and the shovel during the gauge trials in 1845 which used *Ixion*, another of the Round Foundry built Firefly locomotives.

At Paddington meanwhile preparations were being made for the arrival of the Royal party. There would be great crowds to police, especially following the recent concerns for her security. A detachment of the 8th Royal Irish Hussars were also present, adding to the security as well as the spectacle of the occasion.

"At Paddington, by eleven o'clock, the centre of the wide space apportioned for the arrival of the incoming trains was parted off for the reception of the royal and illustrious visitors and covered by a crimson carpet"...

"Precisely at twenty-five minutes past twelve o'clock the royal special train entered the Paddington terminus, having performed the distance in twenty-five minutes, and on her Majesty alighting she was received with the most deafening demonstrations of loyalty and affection we have ever experienced."

The Queen was happy with the journey *"We arrived here yesterday morning [Buckingham Palace], having come by the railroad, from Windsor, in half an hour, free from dust and crowd and heat, and I am quite charmed with it."* she wrote in a letter the following day. Albert however was unhappy at the speeds at which they were travelling. The couple made many journeys by rail, including annual trips to Balmoral in autumn. One of the conditions the Queen required in future though was that the speed of the train would not exceed 40 mph during the day or 30 mph at night.

170 years later and the royal family still make regular use of train travel; in fact this is featuring quite highly in the Queen's jubilee itinerary with one of the royal train locomotives painted in a special livery for the occasion.

The running of the royal train has changed a lot over the years, a dedicated train designed for extra security is used and trips are now planned well in advance by a dedicated team of railway and security personnel. Steam locos do still get royal train duties even in the 21st Century, the Prince of Wales being quite an admirer of steam power.

Below – 21st Century steam on a 21st Century royal train, 60163 Tornado hauling the Prince of Wales' train through Leeds 19/2/09 (Photo Kris Ward)

