The Coming of the Railways

The Problems
- George Stephenson - Stockton to Darlington
- George Stephenson - The Rainhill Trials
- The First Railway Fatality
- What were the trains like?
- How did the railways affect Victorian life?

At that time, heavy locomotives broke the rails that they ran on. Designers and engineers continued to work on their ideas because they were sure that steam powered railways could be successful. It was, however, a long time before anyone was making rails stronger and less brittle.

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So far, all railways had been built to carry freight such as coal or iron to the canals or the docks. Few people thought they would ever carry passengers!

Richard Trevithick's locomotives, and others like them, proved to be less efficient and less reliable than the horses that were used to pull wagons.

One man who had faith in the locomotives was an engineer called George Stephenson.

George Stephenson designed and built the very first stretch of railway line from Stockton to Darlington. It was decided to use the steam locomotives that were being built in his factory. It was decided that the railway would carry freight, but anyone would be able to use it to transport their goods and it would be able to carry a few passengers as well.

George Stephenson was appointed engineer of the Manchester and Liverpool Railway which became the first passenger railway. Before any locomotives were ordered, it was decided to hold a trial to see which of four possible locomotives would perform the best.

Taking part in the Rainhill Trials were….

The winner of the Rainhill Trials was Stephenson's Rocket. It wasn’t long before passengers were travelling at over 35 miles per hour on the new Liverpool and Manchester Railway.

The Liverpool and Manchester Railway was the world’s first twin-track passenger railway in which all trains ran to a timetable and tickets had to be bought in order to travel.

Steam powered the locomotives and made them move.

The Liverpool and Manchester railway opened in 1830. People and goods could travel faster than ever before. It was much cheaper to transport goods such as cotton from Liverpool docks, where goods came in by sea, and the mill town of Manchester.

The railway opened in 1825.

The railway opened on the 15th September 1830.
The accident happened shortly after the train stopped to take on water. The MP, William Huskisson, got off the train to talk to the Prime Minister through the window of his special carriage. Suddenly, another locomotive, ‘The Rocket’, came towards them on the other track. Huskisson tried to clamber up into the Prime Minister’s carriage but he fell, and his leg was crushed by the oncoming locomotive. He died later that day.

It was at Parkside Station that an important Liverpool MP was killed on the railway’s opening day in September 1830. He was the very first railway fatality.

Railways and trains have changed a lot over the years. The very first trains travelled at less than 20 miles an hour and had to stop at every station to take on coal and water. To begin with, railway carriages were a lot like the stage-coaches which were common at that time.

By 1833, the carriages for second class passengers were enclosed so that they had a roof. At the same time, third class carriages were given seats although they still had no roof. It wasn’t until 1844 that third class passengers had to be carried in carriages with roofs.

Mail was first carried by rail in 1830 and soon, the expanding railways were carrying most letters. This development of the railways led to the end of mail coaches and the last regular London based coach service ended in 1846.

There were many advantages. More and more factories opened because the railways made it easier and cheaper to transport goods. Other countries wanted British locomotives and railway equipment so British engineers travelled all over the world building railways. This meant not only more trade but also more people could travel abroad.

For the first time it was possible for ordinary people to travel long distances. It became possible to go on holidays and stay trips to the seaside. People could move out of towns and cities to live in the cleaner air of the countryside, but they could still travel back on the train to go to work.

When train journeys were so much faster, food could travel longer distances and still arrive fresh and in good condition. As a result, people enjoyed a greater variety of foods.

People wanted something to do on train journeys so cheap paper back books that could be read during the journey were introduced.

By 1847 (the year before George Stephenson died) many new railways had opened and it was possible for an ordinary working man to travel from the north, all the way to London. The railways created many new jobs but also caused many workers to lose their jobs. Long distance travel by horse-drawn coach and haulage of bulk goods by the canals suffered because they couldn’t compete with the railways.

The invention of the steam locomotive was one of the greatest inventions of Queen Victoria’s reign.

The success of the Liverpool and Manchester railway led to many other railway lines being constructed across Britain.

The opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway on September 15th 1830, was so popular that the railway company decided to delay the introduction of services carrying goods (freight services) until the following December so that more passengers could travel on the new railway.

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Railways were an invention that changed not only the everyday lives of many Victorians but also changed the world. Not everyone was pleased!

"Sir, the Duke of Portland will not allow his deer to be disturbed by the daily passing of these infernal machines!"

"We, the authorities at Eton College for boys, insist that the part of the line near the school should be patrolled by your railway company to prevent any of our Eton boys wandering onto the line!"

The Eton authorities got their wish and the patrol to stop boys wandering onto the line was not stopped until 1886.

And not everyone is pleased about the proposed HS2 rail link today. The arguments go on just as they did in the past...

We are shocked that our concerns for the environment seem to have been dismissed by the Government. It means to us that the Government just doesn't care about the effects of HS2... It's all about having shiny new fast trains, not improving the railway system for ordinary people. It's an environmental disaster.

Hi2/2.2 Extended chronological study

Pupils should be taught a study of an aspect of British history that extends pupils' chronological knowledge beyond 1066.

For example: (not statutory)

a. The changing power of monarchs using case studies such as John, Anne and Victoria
b. The changing nature of social history, such as crime and punishment, from the Anglo-Saxon period to the present

The opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway in 1830 was a turning point in the development of railways. It demonstrated the technical and financial feasibility of the railway and led directly to the rapid development of the railway network in the following decades which transformed life in Victorian Britain.

2014: Chancellor George Osborne had told the BBC that a £55 billion high-speed rail link between Leeds and Manchester could create a northern growth powerhouse and lead to the creation of new towns and cities. The idea would only last. According to the BBC, Labour responded by saying that they would create a new town, "Wakefield Green Belt", on the area.