Hetton Colliery Railway
Bicentenary 2022
Our plans so far

One very old Hetton locomotive survives. It was built about 1850 and worked at Hetton until about 1912. We hope to borrow it from Locomotion in June 2022 and exhibit it in both Hetton and Sunderland for people to visit, as well as at Hetton Carnival on the weekend of 25/26 June.

A series of public lectures in Sunderland will be followed by a weekend conference in Hetton from 18th–20th November 2022.

Accompanying the lectures we plan to have a travelling exhibition, prepared with the help of the Durham County Record Office. We hope to work closely with local secondary schools on cutting-edge technology, such as virtual reality, CDROMs and 3–D Printing, and run competitions and prizes for art and local history for various age groups. Much of the route of the Railway survives and we hope to mark it with explanatory boards. We hope to publish a number of books about the Colliery and the Railway.

Getting involved:
Regular meetings open to all interested parties are held every other month at ELCAP, Easington Lane, DH5 0LE.

In between the open meetings our sub-committees meet as they cover: lectures, exhibitions and publications; legacy; schools liaison Hetton Carnival 2022 liaison.

Getting in touch
Should you wish to be involved or seek further information then do visit our website at: www.hcr200.org or make contact with our Secretary at: alantaylorjackson@outlook.com

Hetton Colliery Railway 200
Celebrating the Hetton Colliery Railway, designed by George Stephenson and opened in 1822, an internationally important development in the early history of railways.
The Hetton Colliery Railway is an internationally important development in the early history of railways.

The engineer appointed to design the new railway was George Stephenson. It used only steam and gravity power, with no horses, and opened on 18th November 1822. The railway used two of George Stephenson’s steam locomotives to haul coal for the first 1½ miles. From here two steam stationary engines hauled waggons to the line’s summit at Warden Law, over 600ft above sea level.

Four gravity-worked rope inclines then took the waggons down to North Moor near Silksworth, from where more of Stephenson’s steam locomotives took them down to near the staithes on the river for shipment. In 1827 Elemore Colliery, south of Hetton, was added to the line, followed by Eppleton Colliery, east of Hetton, in 1833 and Silksworth Colliery in 1939. Although part of the route in Sunderland was put into tunnel after 1900, the operation of the Railway remained largely unchanged. With one diesel exception, the locomotives, although updated, remained steam as did two of the stationary engines which dated from 1836 and 1876.

The end came when the National Coal Board decided to sink a large ‘combined mine’ to draw coal from Elemore, Eppleton and Murton Collieries, making the railway redundant, and most of it closed on 9th September 1959, after 127 years’ service. The section from Silksworth to Sunderland survived to serve a coal depot, finally closing on 30th June 1972.

In 1820 the Hetton Coal Company led by Arthur Mowbray, a former estate manager and banker, started to sink the first ever colliery through the thick limestone stratum covering most of East Durham. A railway was needed to carry its coal to the River Wear at Sunderland for shipment to London, the main coal market.

The sinking of the colliery was begun in December 1820 and completed in the summer of 1822.