

# Monkwearmouth Station Museum

## A brief history

The new railway station in North Bridge Street, Monkwearmouth was opened on 19 June 1848. It was the new Sunderland terminus for the Brandling Junction Railway, opened in 1839, that linked Wearside with South Shields and Gateshead. It replaced a basic wooden station in Roker Avenue of which it was said: "the usual accommodation provided for civilised people was wanting at this, as at almost every other Brandling Junction station." It was also said that people at the station were subject to: "frequent breaches of public decency."

George Hudson, then chairman of the Midland Railway company and known as "The Railway King", wanted to mark his successful election as MP for Sunderland and commissioned Thomas Moore (1796 - 1869), the leading architect in Victorian Sunderland, to design the station.

Monkwearmouth proved to be a busy station

between 1848 and 1879, catering for a wide range of passengers, as well as handling shipments of cows and sheep. In 1879, when the North Eastern Railway Company extended the line across the river for the first time, Monkwearmouth lost much of its importance as a major station. By the 1950s parts of the station had become derelict and passenger numbers were dwindling. In 1967 it was closed to travellers and in 1970 all railway use ended, however to this day, trains still pass through the station from Sunderland to Newcastle.

The building was saved from dereliction by Sunderland Corporation and was reopened as a Museum by HRH the Duke of Edinburgh in 1973.



Staff at Monkwearmouth Station (circa 1910)

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## The structure

The station originally consisted of two island platforms with an arched overall roof made of iron and glass, the glass supplied by Hartley's glass works, which was close by. At that time there was no railway bridge over the river so passengers wanting to go into Sunderland, on the south side of the precipitous River Wear valley, had to walk or take a horse-drawn cab over the road bridge into town.

The magnificent portico has a colonnade 36 feet in height, with four massive columns. It is a copy of an Ionic Greek temple near Athens and is an imposing building that is designed to impress. The Sunderland Herald Newspaper hailed the building as being of great "architectural beauty with a chaste simplicity and neatness of the whole design". In 1965 the station was remodelled in connection with town centre improvements and it was formally reopened on 4 November 1965 using only one island platform for passengers.



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## George Hudson

George Hudson (1800 - 1871), was the first of a new breed of entrepreneur, using his extraordinary energy and gift for publicity to draw the investing public into his visionary schemes. Brought up in modest circumstances, and without special technical skills, he

acquired huge wealth by establishing York as the hub of an ever-growing network of railway lines. He spent his way into the highest levels of society before suffering the humiliation of the greatest business scandal of the Victorian age, following a challenge at a shareholders' meeting in 1849. Disgraced, he was later briefly imprisoned, his name synonymous with



Monkwearmouth sidings area in 1950s  
fraudulent capitalism at its most brazen.

## The present day

The museum reopened in 2007 after a restoration and redevelopment project. The Heritage Lottery Fund awarded a grant of £497,000 and contributions were also received from Sunderland City Council, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the DCMS/Wolfson Foundation Museums & Galleries Improvement Fund, the Friends of Sunderland Museums (FOSUMS) and Tyne & Wear Museums Business Partners Fund. The total investment was over £1 million.

Seven new galleries, complete with interactive displays, were created in the museum and essential repairs and modernisation carried out. The museum includes the original 1866 booking office. The first floor has been converted to provide two dedicated education spaces for school workshops, community groups and adult learners.

## Find out more about Monkwearmouth Station Museum

For more information, visit the Local History Library @ ETR, 64 Fawcett Street, which has information on Monkwearmouth Station Museum, such as:

- 'Railways of Sunderland' by Tyne & Wear Museums
- 'Steam and Speed' by Andy Guy,
- 'Railscapes Around Sunderland' by Ian S. Carr
- 'North Eastern Stations' by K. Hoole