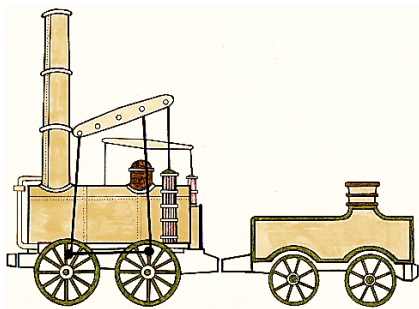


Black Country Society History Day

**8 November 2025 at the Black Country Living Museum,
10.00am to 4.30pm**

**Organised by the Black Country Society and
Black Country Living Museum**

After Agenoria: Aspects of the Railway Revolution in the Black Country



Outline

Railways were arguably even more influential than canals, in the early development of the Black Country. As well as being industrially significant the railways also transformed towns, transported newcomers to the area and brought artists and writers, who publicised the region's characteristics to a national audience. This event introduces several themes: the Agenoria, the first locomotive built in the Black Country, named after the Roman goddess of activity; railway brick building and station construction, accidents and railways travel. The history day explores the technological and cultural history of the railways and their role in shaping Black Country industry and society.

2025 sees the 200th anniversary of opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 1825, a date which marks the beginning of the modern railway. This day school and the accompanying exhibition in Dudley Archives are local events which are also part of a national commemoration, Railway 200: <https://railway200.co.uk/>

The cost of the day school includes refreshments, lunch and car parking at the Museum.

Programme: 10.00am to 4.40pm

10.00am. Tea and coffee

10.15am. **Malcolm Dick**, 'Introduction'

10.20am. **Chris Baker**, 'Agenoria, Aristocrats and Iron Masters – Railway Beginnings in the western Black Country'

This presentation will consider the early development of the rail system in the Black Country to the south and west of the Dudley ridge, where coal and ironstone deposits began to be exploited in the 1820s. It begins with the *Agenoria* on the Kingswinford Railway, in 1829, to the coming of the main line companies in the 1850s. It shows that the dominance of railways over canals took several decades to establish, and that the first railways were heavily influenced by canal concepts and technology.

11.00am. Questions

11.10am. **Elizabeth Thomson**, 'Railways and the development of the brick trade in the Black Country'

Structures associated with railways such as tunnels, viaducts, stations and bridges were initially a product of the local materials available to the building contractors, but this changed with the growth of the railway network. The focus of this presentation is on the development of the railways in the Black Country and what impact it had on the local brickmaking trade. Specific themes include the use of both red and blue bricks on the railways, the mechanisation of the brick industry and the transport of bricks by rail.

11.50am. Questions

12.00pm. Tea and Coffee

12.15pm. **Keith Hodgkins**, 'The Story of Low-Level Station, Wolverhampton'

With a small number of exceptions, the Black Country never had a particularly rich heritage of railway station architecture and what did exist has all but disappeared. The one major survival, Wolverhampton Low-Level Station was arguably the grandest in the area. Since losing its mainland passenger services in 1967, its continued existence at times seemed precarious, but it now enjoys a new life as a conference and events venue. The presentation will cover its near 150-year history.

12.55pm. Questions

1.05 pm – 2.30 pm. Lunch provided. There will also be an opportunity to see the Black Country Society / Dudley Local History and Archive Services' exhibition 'From Agenoria to Beeching: The first and last days of steam in Dudley', in the Foyer of Dudley Archives next door, or visit the Black Country Living Museum.

2.30pm. **Quintin Watt**, 'Red for Danger in the Black Country – Early Railway Accidents and their Impact'

This presentation examines several accidents in the Black Country and its 'Green Borderland' during the 'heroic age' of railway construction. It covers the period from the first known fatal accident, in 1830, to the worst to ever happen in the region, in 1858. Why did these tragedies take place? Who was to blame? What were the consequences of these disasters?

3.10pm. Questions

3.20pm. Tea and Coffee

3.35pm. **David Eveleigh**, 'From the Carriage Window – Victorian Railway Travel in the Black Country'

This talk looks at the passenger experience on the railways of the Black Country up to the early 1900s and assesses the reactions contained in the few surviving first-hand accounts. It also looks at how nineteenth-century railway companies promoted the Black Country in their literature and helped shape popular perceptions of the region.

4.15pm. Questions

4.30pm. **Malcolm Dick**, Final questions and closing remarks

Biographies of presenters

Professor Chris Baker is an engineer, Black Country historian and Webmaster for the Black Country Society. He was Director of the Birmingham Centre for Railway Research and Education at the University of Birmingham. See: <https://profchrisbaker.com/>
Email: bakercj54@gmail.com

Dr Malcolm Dick OBE, is Chairman of the Black Country Society and formerly Director of the Centre for West Midlands History at the University of Birmingham. He recently edited, *The Black Country: A History in 100 Objects*, with David Eveleigh and Janet Sullivan. Email: m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk

David J Eveleigh has held senior management roles at the Black Country Living Museum and Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust and is now Honorary Research Associate at the University of Birmingham. He has written on the material culture of Victorian Britain and has a lifelong interest in transport history. Email: d.j.eveleigh@bham.ac.uk

Keith Hodgkins is a retired architect with an interest in the local built environment. Whilst working for Wolverhampton Council in the 1980s he carried out conservation work on the Low-level Station as part of the unrealized scheme to convert the premises

into a transport heritage centre. He is a past President of the Black Country Society and Chairman of Tipton Civic Society.

Elizabeth Thomson is completing a University of Birmingham PhD on the history of local brickmaking, supported by the Black Country Living Museum, where she contributed to the Forging Ahead project. She has worked on conservation projects with the Canal & River Trust and Church of England: Email: elizabeth.thomson@bclm.com

Quintin Watt is Secretary of the Black Country Society, a former history teacher and well-known local speaker. He has MA degrees in West Midlands history and Britain and the First World War and has edited books on the Bromsgrove Guild and Wolverhampton and the Great War. Email: quint.watt@yahoo.co.uk