

Robert Stephenson Trust



Forming the Trust, Securing the Future

The founder of the Trust was Vicky Haworth, who was following a career as a History researcher and later for a short period, a History teacher. From an early date she had been indoctrinated into all aspects of the railway system, including its economic implications and its associated structures. In 1966 she was involved in an effort to save Robert Stephenson's Euston truss type station roof at York.

It was in this period that she came to work in the North East of England. It was coincidental that she eventually came to live in 5 Greenfield Place and later found that Robert Stephenson had lived there, 1829-33.

It came to Vicky's notice in 1981 that the Post Office had applied for permission to demolish the Grade II listed building 18 South Street, part of the factory built for Robert Stephenson & Co. Over the next 3 years, aided by Graham Snowdon of the Tyne and Wear Planning Department and other professional help from Brian Jobling, Peter Smith, Martin Orchard and David Lovie she attempted to overturn the planning decision. Unfortunately she did not succeed, but in January 1986 she received a letter from Alistair Sinton, Clerk to the Hospital Trust of St Mary the Virgin, the freeholders of the Forth Banks site, asking her if she would be willing to try to save the buildings adjacent to the one demolished. The experience gained from her previous campaign led to her setting up, in January 1986, The Robert Stephenson Trust in embryo to save 20 South Street, also listed Grade II, from a similar fate.

Over the next 2 years, with initial funds donated by the Post Office, the Civic Trust, Board members, HRH The Prince of Wales and others, Vicky Haworth (Chairman of the Trust until 1993) and 6 other Trustees, saved 20 South Street from demolition. In 1988 the Trust gained Charitable Status and was incorporated as a Limited Company. A lease was taken on the building until 2054 and then the Trust was able to take possession.

The key stimulus for the Trust was to contribute towards the preservation of the industrial buildings south of Forth Street, by ensuring the significance of the distinguished industrial history of the Robert Stephenson & Co founded in 1823 and world famous as the first factory to be erected specifically to build steam railway locomotives. Many of the company's buildings had been demolished between 1960 and 1985 as being inconsequential. *Stephenson's Works*, the epitaph given by the Trust to the offices and boiler plate shop at 20 South Street, formed part of this factory and were the last remaining part of it to be in a largely unaltered condition.

The first task was to research the history of the building to establish when it was built and what relationship it had to Robert Stephenson himself. The original listing information, provided by Bailey, stated that the building was erected in the 1867, after Robert's death in 1859. It was shown by Vicky Haworth that both offices and work shop were in fact built in 1848, well before Robert's death and hence had a direct link to him. This fact alone justified a re-listing to Grade II* being granted in 1990. This listing has been rarely given to an industrial building and is the only one in the North of England. Equally important, it enabled the seeking of funds for restoration and ensured the security of the building from further threats.

Initially fundraising was difficult as the building had degraded badly since its last occupation and the photography carried out by the Royal Commission for Historic Monuments on 23 August 1984. It was not possible to open the building to the public due to its unsafe condition and consequently at this stage there was little public awareness of Newcastle's railway heritage.

The site remained like this until 1993 when funding was put in place through English Heritage, Sir Wm McAlpine and Newcastle City Council to make the site wind and watertight in Phase I of the restoration.