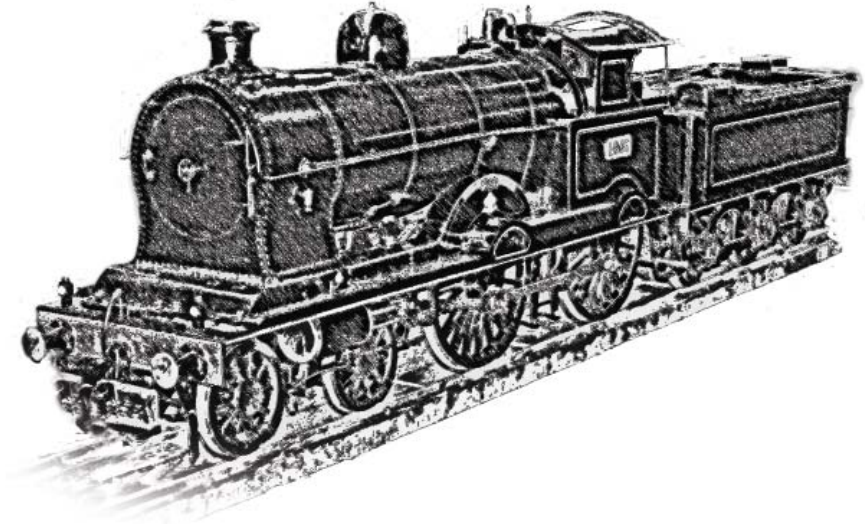




ORION at 100



The story of Orion and its builder is one of high railway romance.

The engine

Orion, 'The Heritage Engine' was completed and steamed in 1911. Albeit in miniature, it is now the last remaining locomotive of its type built at Crewe, one of the once-famous 'Webb compounds' that hauled expresses on the London & North Western Railway, the LNWR, on the West Coast Main Line and from London to Birmingham.

The builder

Richard Darroch took flying lessons from Louis Blériot, was awarded one of the first UK pilot's licences, fought in WW1, and won the coveted Croix de Guerre.

For more information on the fascinating background story of *Orion* and Darroch, read on.....

A shipwreck! - For many years it was assumed that *Orion* was named after the LNWR engine No. 1957, *Orion* – one of the 'Alfred the Great' class upon which the miniature *Orion* was modelled. No.1957, in turn, was named after a Royal Navy corvette, *HMS Orion* (1879-1909). Recent research suggests differently, however. It seems that Richard Darroch's Uncle Duncan was a passenger on board the paddle steamer *Orion* when it struck rocks just to the NW of Portpatrick Harbour entrance, with considerable loss of life in June 1850. Fortunately, Duncan Darroch was saved; his nephew naming his locomotive after the tragic steamer in recognition of his uncle's survival.

The Stephenson Locomotive Society (SLS) is perhaps, like the LNWR, 'the oldest firm in the business' since the SLS founded in 1909 is now the oldest railway society in the world. Originally, it hoped to gather, organise and share information about motive power on railways. Since then its scope has increased greatly; it is directly involved in railway history and heritage on a wide, international front. Its support for railway heritage started in 1927 with the saving of the beautiful express engine *Gladstone* (now in the NRM). In our times the SLS has saved a large collection of artefacts, most of which are on public display; it maintains one of Europe's largest railway history libraries, together with an extensive archive and a mass of over 80,000 railway photographs, all available to *bona fide* researchers; its many meetings and talks around the country are also open to the public, who may also purchase copies of its prestigious *Journal*. The Society's ambition to raise the awareness of its members and the public, and to cater for their interests remains undimmed after a century.

About the Society - Enquiries regarding the Stephenson Locomotive Society and the many facilities that it offers people interested in railways and their history should be addressed to the General Secretary, Martin Green, 3 Cresswell Court, Hartlepool, TS26 0ES, or MAGreenBq@aol.com ; Alternatively a printed brochure and application form can be obtained from the Promotions Officer, 2A Spring Gardens, PORTLAND, Dorset. DT5 1JG. The SLS website is www.stephensonloco.org.uk or www.slsnewcastle.org.uk

Latest information - 2014 season

Orion's boiler certificate expired in 2011. Following display on the Society's stand at the Warley MRC exhibition at the NEC in November *Orion* (just like a standard gauge engine) was given a thorough 10 year overhaul. *Orion* returned to steam during 2012 better than ever as operational experience gained with valve timings etc., was applied. *Orion* is normally displayed at Locomotion, Shildon, and steamed during gala events

Steaming dates [redacted]
See Web site or the leaflet stand beside 'Orion'.
[redacted]
www.slsnewcastle.org.uk



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An outline of *Orion's* history

George Richard Sutton Darroch, *Orion's* designer and builder, always known as Richard, was an Eton-educated Crewe Premium Apprentice, descended from generations of Scottish lairds. He built the engine in his spare time at the Crewe Mechanics' Institute with some help from the Crewe Works workforce. He based *Orion's* design on the LNWR 'Alfred the Great' class of locomotives, then Crewe's latest product. The full size Alfreds were designed by Francis Webb who took on Darroch as a Premium Apprentice, and later as a pupil.

Darroch left Crewe works in 1905, and later paid the miniature engineering pioneer, Bassett-Lowke, to complete the final details. Meanwhile, he took flying lessons from Louis Blériot and was awarded one of the first UK pilot's licences.

It is believed that *Orion* was finally put in steam and worked some time in 1911. The engine lay quiet whilst Darroch fought in WW1; he won the coveted Croix de Guerre for his courageous work as an ambulance driver on the Western Front, and in the Balkans. He returned to Crewe in 1917 to assist with the LNWR war effort, eventually becoming Assistant Works Manager, retiring in 1941.

Darroch built a 100-yard track in his Crewe back garden, often steaming *Orion* to the delight of friends and children who took rides on specially constructed carriages. *Orion* won further fame being exhibited at the 1930 Liverpool & Manchester Railway centenary celebrations in Liverpool and through appearances in books and journals of the time.

Towards the end of his life Darroch (who died in 1959) presented *Orion* to the Stephenson Locomotive Society, the SLS. After careful storage, the now run-down *Orion* was completely rebuilt at the expense of the SLS, generously aided by the *Heritage Lottery Fund*.

At last *Orion* steamed forth in superb condition once more at the Downs School, Colwall on 24 April 2005. Since then it has been on display, and occasionally steamed, at Locomotion, the Shildon branch of the National Railway Museum.

In 2009 the Stephenson Locomotive Society (SLS), celebrated its own centenary followed shortly afterwards by the centenary of *Orion*, 'The Heritage Engine' which had been completed and steamed in 1911. Albeit in miniature, *Orion* is now the last remaining locomotive of its type built at Crewe, one of the once-famous 'Webb compounds' that hauled expresses on the London & North Western Railway, the LNWR, on the West Coast Main Line and from London to Birmingham.

The SLS marked *Orion's* centenary with a steaming ceremony at Locomotion, Shildon (21-22 May 2011) and George Richard Sutton Darroch, its designer and main constructor, with a memorial service at St. Bartholomew's Church, Wigginton, Tring, Herts, where he is interred.

Other relevant information

The London & North Western Railway liked to refer to itself as 'The Premier Line' or 'The Oldest Firm in the Business' – it was descended, in part, from the Stephenson's Liverpool & Manchester Railway of 1830. Towards the end of its existence (1923) it was a leader amongst the UK's railways with nearly 1,800 miles of track, 3,200 locomotives, 9,400 carriages, 76,200 goods and mineral wagons. From its famous Euston terminus in London, lines radiated to Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Carlisle; it also owned railways in Wales and Ireland.

Francis Webb (1836-1906) was in charge of LNWR locomotive design and building, as well as virtually all mechanical matters, for much of the late Victorian times. Full of original ideas, most of which were successful, he was a first-rate all round engineer and organiser, albeit quite a controversial one.

Crewe Works The LNWR preferred to be self-sufficient. Its huge works at Crewe, Cheshire, produced locomotives, rails, signalling apparatus and much else besides. Over 8,000 people were employed there, with a further 4,000 at Wolverton (carriages) and 1,500 at Earlestown (wagons). With a population of 50,000 (1911) Crewe was truly a 'company town', with the LNWR organising its gas, water, fire services and schools.

Darroch's training Darroch arrived at Crewe in April 1899, on a month's trial. He later became a Premium Apprentice so that for a payment of £200 he would get a five-year training of great breadth in locomotive and mechanical engineering. A few such Apprentices (and Darroch was one such) became Pupils, of the Chief Mechanical Engineer, paying £150 per year for the privilege, half to the LNWR, half to the CME. In spite of the thoroughness of this training, there was no guarantee of a subsequent job on the LNWR, although to have passed the course gave one considerable standing in the engineering world.

What is a compound engine? *Orion* is technically speaking a 'compound' locomotive. This was an arrangement much favoured for a while by the LNWR. Briefly, the steam from its boiler enters two high-pressure cylinders, which partly drive the engine; that steam is then exhausted into two low-pressure cylinders which continue similar work. A neat and eco-friendly idea! But also one which costs more to build and maintain than an ordinary 'simple' engine. The debate about 'compound versus simple' was never really resolved.