

Transcription of a letter from John Church Backhouse describing the opening of the Stockton & Darlington Railway in September 1825

My Dear Sisters,¹

Perhaps you may not understand what that drawing at the top means, it is meant to represent the opening of the Stockton & Darlington railway which took place on the 27 of September 1825. Fig 26. Represents the Locomotive steam Engine

'1,2,3,4,5 - wagons

22 is an elegant coach called the experiment

21 to 7 also waggons for visitors to ride in

24 a flag *Periculum privatum* and *Publicum Bonum*²

23 is an other "May the Stoc[k]ton [sic] & Darlington Railway give Public Satisfaction & reward its Spirited Promoters.

25 had a painting or drawing of the L Engine & waggons

I have only drawn 21 waggons but there were 17 more +. It was a very grand sight to see such a mass of people moving; on the road from D to S 600 people were said to be in-on & about the waggons & coaches! & the engine drew not less than 90 tons!!!! There was an excellent dinner prepared at Stockton.

+ making in all 38

For the Railway gentry &c &c &c I could tell you a great many more particulars but I suppose that you are tired of it by this time

I lodge now at West Lodge & am very comfortable here – My Grandmother desires her very dear love to thee, that is to say to Ann, & is much obliged [sic] to thee for thy letter to her as also is my Aunt Ann who says she intends to answer thy letter by & by when she has time & she & I believe my Aunt Jane desire their very dear love to you. My father & mother are either at Sunderland or at Castle I do not know which; they talked something of returning home tomorrow: but I believe it is not certain. Little Anne as I suppose you have heard has been very poorly indeed with a bilious attack and my Aunt Jane was very uneasy about her as well as all of us but She is a great [deal] better now; & she came down stairs to day for the first time.

B Pease & bride arrived here at 9 o'clock last night. Give my dear love to my U & A Harris & also to M & S Bevan.

¹ Ann Backhouse (1810-1829) and Eliza Backhouse (1812-1884).

² The motto on the seal of the Stockton & Darlington Railway is actually "*Periculum privatum utilitas publica*", which could be translated as "At private risk for public good".

I hope you are both quite well. I have not heard from you for a very long while indeed I have only had 2 letters from you since we left you shame, shame,

I must now conclude

Yours very affect[ionate] Bro[ther]

Do write to me soon J C B³

Cross written letter:

My very dear Ann

I do not like this letter to go without saying how very acceptable thine was & I assure thee it gives us much pleasure to hear such good accounts of you both. We think you are very kind in writing to us sometimes as we are aware that your time must be fully occupied – Our visit to Seaton proved a most painful one the melancholy death of poor E. M*[ackie]*, who was considered almost Engaged to Sarah Backhouse (of Goole) Aunt of Sarah Jane [B?] – (EBW, 1907)⁴ involved us all in deep gloom & sorrow. We were afraid for thy d[ea]r Grandmother lest the shock would be too much for her but I think she bore it as well as any of us – she was not so immediately in the scene of sorrow as we were – my poor Aunt [Be?] appeared overwhelmed for a time after and seemed as if they scarcely could bear such a shoke [sic] We have had rather better acc[oun]ts of them tho' they will long feel this deeply affecting event. Our precious Ann has been rather severely indisposed for about 10 days. I need not tell thee how anxious we all were & especially her D[ea]r Mother. I am truly glad to say she is now nicely recovered – please to give our d[ea]r love to thy Aunt Sarah – we cannot but feel grateful to her for all her kindness to you as well as to other kind

Friends. I must conclude – farewell my beloved girl with dearest love to you all three I am thy very affect[ionate] Aunt

Ann Backhouse

It will be very pleasant to have Eliza Brown at Darlington again

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³ John Church Backhouse (1811-1858). He was thus 14 years old at the time of writing.

⁴ This italicized section is a later pencil annotation by an unknown hand in 1907.