A Brief Timeline:

1804 Richard Trevithick experiments with steam powered engines running on iron track in Wales. The resulting Pen-y-Darren locomotive is arguably the first locomotive in the world.

1825 The Stockton and Darlington Railway opens in the North East of Britain. It is referred to as the first public steam railway (as in open to the public) and is engineered by George Stephenson.

1829 George Stephenson and his son Robert win the Rainhill Trials with their locomotive *Rocket.* Their multi-tubular boiler becomes the model for locomotive design for the next century and a half.

1830 Off the back success at Rainhill, the Liverpool and Manchester Railway opens, connecting these two growing industrial hubs in the North West of England.

1838 First locomotives run on the Great Western Railway where Chief Engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel lays down his own gauge of track. Subsequently trains in the south-west network owned by GWR operate on a wider "Broad Gauge" until they are brought back into sync with the national network in the 1890s. Stations in cities such as Birmingham, where passengers switch onto/off the GWR, have to cater to two different types of train and track!

1840s Railway Mania grips the country as thousands of lines are proposed to Parliament and millions of pounds invested. Although railways grew in this period, many of these schemes were amalgamated, abandoned, or defrauded, and some speculators were financially ruined.

1850s Britain's railways continue to grow. Companies such as the London and North Western Railway become enormous. The LNWR, which described itself as the "Premier Line" is the largest joint stock company in Britain collecting enormous revenues.

1863 London, now ringed by major termini stations, sees the opening of the Metropolitan Railway, the precursor to the Underground system we know today.

1870s A series of major accidents, beginning arguably with the 1861 Clayton Tunnel Crash, raise concerns about safety on an increasingly busy, and fast, network. The 1879 Tay Bridge Disaster, where the rail bridge collapses into the River Tay killing c.75 passengers during a storm, is extensively and dramatically covered in newspapers.

1881 An Anglo-French initiative sees over 3000 metres of tunnel dug on both sides of the English Channel before work is abandoned in 1882 over fears the proposed Channel Tunnel will enable foreign invasion of Britain.

1888 East and West Coast railway companies compete in the Race to the North, a wildly popular competition over who can run a London-Edinburgh train fastest. A second round in 1895, London-Aberdeen, indicates just how the demand for speed and expanded services has become.

1890s Suburban railways fuel the growth of South London, an urban centre by this point growing faster than Manchester or Liverpool. Companies such as the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway, become ever more specialised in passenger and light-goods services, working with developers to create new suburbs and amenities.

1896 More than 954 million individual passenger journeys are recorded on the railways this year.

1910s Britain's railways begin to reach their zenith in terms of size. They are massive companies with massive workforces – the LNWR is now employing over 100,000 staff. The national network is well over 20,000 miles of track. In 1911 there are 32 rail journeys per head of population, up from just 0.65 per person in 1841 at the dawn of the railway age!