

London & Birmingham Railway and Prince Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex (17th September 1838)

The Royal Duke, a cousin to Queen Victoria's, attended the opening of the London & Birmingham Railway (throughout) in September of 1838. It would seem that the occasion of the opening somewhat outranked his presence but it was nevertheless recorded in the press. 'The Directors of the London & Birmingham Railway, in addition to the satisfaction of having completed their undertaking, had this day the honour of conveying his Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex on his way to Newstead Abbey. His Royal Highness alighted at the Rugby station, where several of the young gentlemen at Rugby school were in waiting, in the hope obtaining a sight of his Royal Highness. The Captain of the school presented himself, and requested his Royal Highness to intercede with the headmaster for a holiday ; which his Royal Highness with his usual condescension and affability immediately granted, and was heartily cheered by the assembled scholars, both then, and upon his leaving the station.' It is not recorded what the Headteacher of the Rugby School, Dr. Arnold (1828 to 1841) thought of the despatching of the polite note' however 'The request was of course complied with.'¹



Prince Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex by Thomas Phillips, in the robes he wore for the Coronation of George IV. (1828)

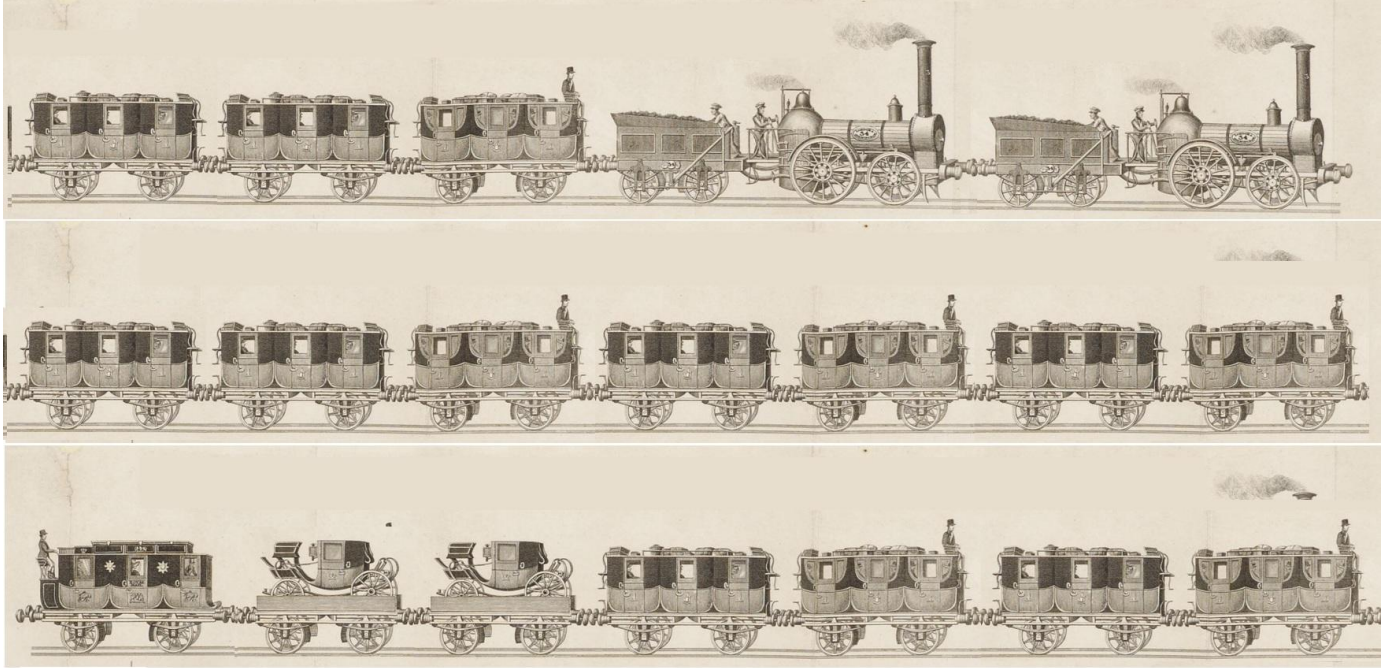


Thomas Arnold by Thomas Phillips (1839).
Headmaster of Rugby School from 1828 to 1841

The train was unusual but not surprising given the circumstances, it consisted of 16 first class carriages and mails. We can confidently assume I think that the Duke would have ridden in one of the company's exclusive mail carriages or remained in his own carriages of which he brought two with the train. The Prince was visiting Colonel Thomas Wildman, a friend who was in the ownership of Lord Byron's home. He 'appeared throughout the whole of the journey to be highly delighted with railway travelling'²

¹ Opening of the London & Birmingham Railway - Northampton Mercury - Saturday 22 September 1838 p3

² Opening of the London & Birmingham Railway - Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard - Saturday 22 September 1838 p4



A manipulation of Samuel Williams etch for Osborne's guide in a rough representation of the opening train



Carriage of Prince Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex, uncle to Queen Victoria, in Queen Victoria's coronation parade. With escort of Life Guards, grooms in livery, carriage drawn by six bay horses. Handcoloured aquatint engraving from Fores' Correct Representation of the State Procession on the Occasion of the August Ceremony of Her Majesty's Coronation, June 28th 1838, published by Fores, Sporting and Fine Print Repository, Piccadilly, London, 1838.



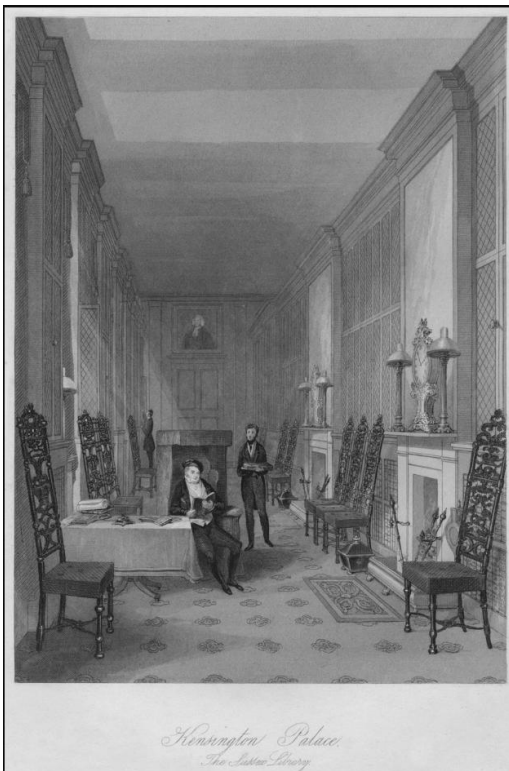
According to the owners of this, The Buccleuch State Coach, 'it was built in 1830 for the 5th Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry by Samuel Hobbs of Barker & Co in 1830. The Duke was Controller of the Household of Queen Victoria and escorted newly appointed Ambassadors in this coach to Buckingham Palace to meet the Monarch.' While not the same coach it is included here due to the many shared details it seemingly has with the Duke of Sussex's carriage pictured in the Fores representation from the Queen Victoria's Coronation (above).

The Prince repeated the journey a year later but this time via the Birmingham & Derby Junction railway in 1839, where he transferred to road at Derby taking Post horses from the King's Head. Apparently touring a number of country seats with a Lady Cecilia Underwood. The B&DJ had a junction with the London & Birmingham at Hampton where the train had to wait 40-50 minutes for the Duke!



(left) Cecilia Underwood, Duchess of Inverness (c. 1789 – 1873) born Lady Cecilia Gore married Prince Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex,[1] the sixth son of George III, at Great Cumberland Place, London, on 2 May 1831. The Duke of Sussex had already married Lady Augusta Murray in 1793, but that marriage was annulled in 1794 as it contravened the Royal Marriages Act 1772, which required that all members of the British Royal Family seek permission of the sovereign before marriage. However the Duke of Sussex's second marriage also contravened the Act for failure to seek permission, making it also legally void.

As the marriage was not lawful, Lady Cecilia could not take the style and title Her Royal Highness, The Duchess of Sussex. Instead, she assumed the name "Underwood", her mother's maiden name, by Royal Licence and was known as Lady Cecilia Underwood. The couple resided at the Duke's apartments in Kensington Palace. However, Lady Cecilia was not accepted as a full member of the British royal family. Royal protocol restricted Lady Cecilia from being present at any functions attended by other members of the Royal Family, as she was unable to take a seat beside her husband due to her lower rank. To compensate for this, in 1840 Queen Victoria created her Duchess of Inverness, in her own right, with remainder to the heirs male of her body lawfully begotten. This recognised her husband's subsidiary title of Earl of Inverness.



(left) The Sussex Library credited by John Melville, engraving from J Mead "London Interiors", 1841, with what appears to be the Duke of Sussex reading.