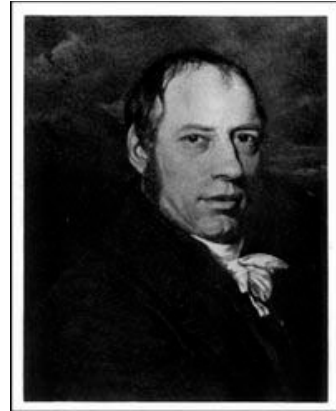


Richard Trevithick (1771 - 1833)

British mechanical engineer and inventor, and one of the pioneers of railroad locomotion.

He was born in 1771 in Illogan, Cornwall, where there were many tin mines, and he made several inventions and improvements in mining equipment. He was tall and athletic, interested more in sports than learning at school. He grew to a height of six feet two inches, and was commonly called the "Cornish Giant".



A man of prodigious strength, Trevithick was one of the best wrestlers in Cornwall. Richard worked with his father in Wheal Treasury mine, but it became obvious that the younger Trevithick had an aptitude for engineering.

In 1796 he exhibited improved models of the engines developed by James Watt. Encouraged by his success, Trevithick produced a larger steam road locomotive, the *Puffing Devil*. On Christmas Eve, 1801, his new locomotive took him and some friends on a short journey. It could not hold steam for long, which made its use impractical. In 1802 he developed a steam engine, which he used to power railway and road vehicles. Trevithick showed his designs to several leading scientists, including James Watt. Watt argued that his use of steam at high pressure was dangerous and he used his influence to get Parliamentary to ban his experiments.

The next attempt was the fancifully named *Catch Me Who Can*. This engine reached speeds of 12 miles per hour, but it, too, proved too heavy for its rails. Unfortunately, he and his inventions were forgotten when he went to South America. Discouraged by lack of financial backing, Trevithick returned to Cornwall. There he developed a new version of the Cornish engine, which was used worldwide in stationary mining applications.

For the next several years Richard Trevithick lurched from one financial failure to the next, until he finally died on April 22, 1833 in Dartford. He was so destitute at the time of his death that it took a collection by local workmen to prevent this tireless inventor from hasty burial in an unmarked pauper's grave at Dartford, Kent, where he was working when he died. Like many great men and women, Trevithick did not get the recognition he deserved during his lifetime. Indeed, his worth has only recently been recognized by many history books.