



THE world's oldest railway viaduct was officially declared open yesterday — for foot traffic, writes *Erlend Clouston*.

Around £1 million has been spent restoring the 185-year-old Laigh Milton viaduct (above), outside Kilmarnock, which trippers crossed as they travelled to the seaside at Troon 14 years before the better-known Stockton to Darlington service opened up in 1825.

The 220ft structure, built by William Jessop, also sup-

ported a Stephenson steam engine nine years before the more celebrated Rocket made its English debut.

"This is a piece of living history," said Roland Paxton, head of civil engineering at Heriot-Watt University and technical adviser to the trust which has rescued the viaduct from the decay which had prompted the local council to ban pedestrians from its four stone-built arches.

The 25ft-high route over the river Irvine was initially used by the Duke of Portland's horse-drawn coal-wagons

which switched to human cargo at weekends. Scotland's first steam engine, the Duke, was introduced on the line's 4ft gauge track in 1816.

The local councils, which joined the National Heritage Memorial Fund and European Union in subsidising the viaduct's renovation, hope to boost tourism. The Scottish Tourist Board estimates that the country's industrial heritage circuit attracts 1.7 million visitors each year.

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID MITCHELL