

No. 6.

SHEFFIELD AND ROTHERHAM RAILWAY.

REPORT of Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Frederic Smith, on the Accident which happened on the 3d June, 1841.

SIR,

Sheffield, June 16, 1841.

I HAVE the honour to submit the following report respecting the accident which occurred on the Sheffield and Rotherham Railway on the 3d instant, by which an engine-driver named James Bates, and a fireman named John Richardson, were unfortunately killed, and I beg to state that the information on which my report is founded was chiefly derived from the chairman and officers of the Company, who afforded me the facilities I required for conducting the investigation with which I was charged.

It appears, that in consequence of an agreement that has been entered into between the North Midland Railway Company and the Sheffield and Rotherham Railway Company, the locomotive power is furnished by the latter, not only for their own trains, but also for the trains of the North Midland Company, between Sheffield and the Masbro' Junction, the line being common to both Companies to a short distance beyond the Holmes Station, which is about half a mile from the Masbro' Junction. The engine-drivers and firemen are servants of the Sheffield and Rotherham Company, but the whole of the arrangements for the working of the Sheffield Station are under the direction of Mr. Martin, the head clerk of the North Midland Company at Sheffield, who has the general superintendence, and despatches the trains of both Companies.

In the absence of Mr. Martin, it becomes the duty of Mr. Pritchett, the station master, to start the trains.

On the evening in question, Mr. Martin, being otherwise employed, was not present when the train to which the accident occurred left the Sheffield Station, and it was therefore despatched by Mr. Pritchett.

This train belonged to the North Midland Railway Company; it was started at 7 o'clock, P.M., and consisted of three passenger carriages and eight goods' waggons.

The order in which the carriages were placed is as follows:—

First.—The tender.

Second.—The engine.

Third.—A second-class carriage.

Fourth.—A first-class carriage.

Fifth.—A third class carriage, followed by eight goods' waggons.

The goods' waggons formed a gross load of 43½ tons, and I am informed that the only "break" in the train was that of the tender, there being none to either of the carriages or waggons.

The goods' waggons were attached to the passenger carriages a short distance from the passenger platform, the train being stopped for that purpose. This is the ordinary practice of the station, the goods being under the charge of Mr. Champern, a superintendent, whose duties are distinct from those of the passenger station-master.

The regulations of both Companies prescribe that all the trains shall stop at the Holmes Station, about 4 miles and 655 yards from Sheffield, and the engine-drivers are required to shut off the steam about half a mile before reaching that point, in order that, as it is situated on a plane falling at the rate of 1 in 400 from Sheffield, the trains which have to stop at the station may not overrun it, and that other trains may pass it slowly.

There is not any evidence to show that this was neglected on the evening in question, or that there was any other irregularity in the course of the train; on the contrary, some persons who were near the spot at the time of the accident, have given it as their belief that the steam was shut off according to the usual practice.

It appears, that about half a mile short of the Holmes Station, the fore axle of the tender broke near the right wheel, and that in consequence the engine rushed upon the tender, and after detaching the tank from the frame, fell on its side between the rails. The frame of the tender was thrown across the rails, while the tank was found bottom uppermost, and on the north slope of the cutting. The second-class carriage, which had been the leading passenger carriage of the train, was thrown clear off the rails, and was found topsy-turvy on the north slope of the cutting, the roof of this carriage, with some of its seats, being thrown to the opposite side. The first-class carriage was lying on the top of the second-class carriage. The third-class carriage, and the leading goods' waggon, were also off the line, but were not materially damaged. The remainder of the waggons remained upon the rails.

Most fortunately, there were only seven passengers by this train; and although the whole were in the third-class carriage, none of them were severely injured.

According to the regulations of the Company, about 19 minutes are allowed for performing the journey between Sheffield and Masbro' including a stoppage at the Holmes Station; but although the witnesses I examined were unable to state whether this moderate rate of speed was exceeded on the evening in question, it may fairly be presumed, from the state of disorder in which the carriages were found after the accident, (which is explained in the accompanying drawing,) that the train had been moving at a higher velocity than that sanctioned by the Directors.

I understand that it is the practice, on approaching the Holmes Station, not only to shut off the steam, as I have already mentioned, but also to apply the breaks.

There can be no question that it must be attended with great risk to stop by means of a break on the tender only the progress of a train of between 40 and 50 tons, moving on a descending

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gradient, at even the moderate rate of from 20 to 25 miles per hour, and that this risk must be much increased when the tender is placed in front of the engine.

I examined the broken axletree of the tender, and it appeared to me to have been badly manufactured.

After a careful consideration of all the circumstances of the case, I am of opinion that the accident under review was produced by three causes. Firstly,—by the defective construction of the tender axletree. Secondly,—the improper practice of driving the trains with the tender foremost. And thirdly,—owing to there being no “breaks” on the passenger carriages and goods’ waggons, which might have acted in conjunction with the tender break in stopping the train.

I consider the Sheffield and Rotherham Company to blame in respect to the two first causes, and the North Midland Company in respect to the last cause; and it is my duty to state that I was informed of its being the custom of the last-mentioned Company to send all its trains from Sheffield to Masbro’ without breaks or guards on the carriages. This is a system which I think the North Midland Company should be advised to discontinue.

I was at the same time assured that it is the invariable practice of the Sheffield and Rotherham Company to send a break and guard upon the end carriage of every train.

I find, that owing to a want of proper turn tables, the Sheffield and Rotherham Company had been in the habit, for three months before the accident, to send all the trains tender foremost from Sheffield to Rotherham, but that since the accident, from a conviction of the danger of this practice, (which cannot be questioned,) temporary turn tables have been established, by which the engines and tender can be turned; it will therefore only be necessary that you should express a hope that the dangerous system of running the tender foremost may not again be resorted to under any circumstances, and I think it would be well to call upon this Company to have the whole of their present axles carefully examined, and to take care, for the future, to have new axles submitted to a proper test before they are used, or to have them made under specifications authorizing the Company to inspect them while manufacturing.

I subjoin a list of the trains that run daily on this railway, which will give you an idea of the amount of traffic, and the necessity of the line being kept in good order.

On this point I have only to remark that the mode of fastening the rails and chairs by means of iron keys, is one that cannot be recommended.

It will be observed that in the list of trains, it occurs four times that two trains are noted to start at the same hour. In practice, I am told that one train is detained for a few minutes to let the other get ahead, but I think it would be better to note them in the time table as starting with a proper interval the better to insure the safety of the passengers from collisions in foggy weather.

I enclose a letter, dated 21st instant, which I have received from a Mr. Kirkby, who was a passenger by the train to which the accident occurred. It throws no additional light on the subject, but may be considered as confirming the statement made to me, that there was no break in the train excepting that on the tender.

I do not agree with Mr. Kirkby in his objection to running goods’ waggons with passenger carriages, provided the former are properly constructed, and to this point I am of opinion the Directors should give their attention.

List of Engines and Trains which leave Sheffield daily.

Quarter-past 4.—An engine sent off with the mail guard to Masbro’ for the mail bags.

6 A.M. train.—N. Midland to Leeds, with passengers and goods.

Half-past 7 train.—N. Midland to the South.

Half-past 7 train.—Sheffield to Rotherham.

Half-past 8 train.—Ditto ditto.

Three-quarters-past 8 train.—N. Midland (North and South) to Masbro’.

Half-past 9 train.—Sheffield to Rotherham.

Half-past 10 train.—Ditto ditto.

Three-quarters-past 10 train.—N. Midland (North and South.)

Half-past 11 train.—Sheffield to Rotherham.

Half-past 12 train.—Ditto ditto.

Half-past 1 train.—Ditto ditto.

Three-quarters-past 1 train.—N. Midland (North and South.)

Half-past 2 train.—Sheffield to Rotherham.

Half-past 3 train.—Ditto ditto.

Three-quarters-past 3 train.—N. Midland (South.)

Half-past 4 train.—Sheffield to Rotherham.

Half-past 4 train.—N. Midland (North.)

Half-past 5 train.—Ditto (North and South.)

Half-past 5 train.—Sheffield to Rotherham.

Half-past 6 train.—Ditto ditto.

Half-past 7 train.—N. Midland, passengers and goods.

Half-past 7 train.—Sheffield to Rotherham.

12 min. past 8 train.—N. Midland (South.)

Half-past 8 train.—Sheffield to Rotherham.

Besides coal and goods waggons, and the return trains.

I have, &c.,

FREDERIC SMITH, Lt.-Col. R. E.,

Inspector-General of Railways.

The Right Hon. Henry Labouchere, M.P.,

&c. &c. &c.

SIR,

Swinton, June 21, 1841.

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I WILL make no apology for addressing you on the subject of the accident which took place on Thursday, June 3, by railway betwixt Sheffield and Rotherham (Masbro'), as, being the only male passenger and sufferer, I am enabled to speak experimentally.

It is the honest conviction of my own mind, that the jeopardy the passengers were placed in was in a great measure owing to the merchandize trunks attached to the other carriages, weighing, I presume, 40 tons; and although the engine-man and stoker might in any case have suffered, it is questionable whether it would have been a fatal accident had there been only passenger carriages. The passenger carriages being thus placed betwixt two antagonist forces, the wonder is that all three were not demolished, and all our lives sacrificed. I went to Sheffield on Saturday for the first time since, and returned by the half-past 7 o'clock train, and to my horror I found several merchandize trucks still continued, which frightened me not a little. I was informed, that a man is *now* sent with a break; but it is not clear that, should another accident befall the engine or tender, that there would not be time for the man to apply the break of the trucks before they would be upon the carriages. There is no safety but in abolishing merchandize trucks altogether with passenger carriages, and to allay my fears, the sooner it is ordered the better. The fact of the first carriage being broken up into fire-wood, points to the desirableness of there being attached to the tender of every train throughout the kingdom a truck laden with ballast, to break or receive the first shock, which would greatly reduce the chances of carriages containing passengers being injured to any extent. I think, too, it ought to go forth to the public, that there are periodical *severe* and strict examinations of every engine and tender, otherwise, when they first come upon the line, and are pronounced good, if they are to continue to run till an accident occurs, the lives of engine-man and stoker can't be worth more than a few years' or months' purchase. It is to be feared that those lines which have been fortunate, as it is called, that is, free from disasters, have considerably relaxed in their attention in this respect. I think that every carriage ought to be hoisted up, that a man may stand upright under them, and not to creep under and just take a slight inspection.

Lieut.-Col. Sir F. Smith,
&c. &c. &c.

I am, &c.,
SAMUEL KIRKBY.

LETTER sent to the Sheffield and Rotherham Railway Company, with Copy of a Report from Lieutenant-Colonel Sir F. Smith, on the Accident on their line of the 3rd June.

SIR,

Board of Trade, 26th June, 1841.

I AM directed by the Lords, &c., to transmit to you a copy of the report of Lieutenant-Colonel Sir F. Smith, on the accident which occurred on the Sheffield and Rotherham Railway on the 3rd instant, and to call your attention to the recommendations therein contained.

To the Secretary of the Sheffield and Rotherham
Railway Company.

I am, &c.
G. R. PORTER.

IN reply to Letter from this Office of the 26th instant, relative to the Report of Lieutenant-Colonel Sir F. Smith.

SIR,

Sheffield, June 28, 1841.

I duly received your letter of the 26th instant, and in reply have to say that the Sheffield and Rotherham Railway Company will endeavour to attend to the recommendations contained therein.

I observe a few inaccuracies in Sir F. Smith's Report and have pointed them out to his notice by letter this day: some may be clerical errors, and will be easily rectified; the most material one, and which affects our Company, is, that, although the management of the Sheffield station is under the care of Mr. Martin, the North Midland head clerk at Sheffield, (as Sir Frederic justly observes in the early part of his report,) and has been so for more than twelve months, yet the report states that the Sheffield and Rotherham Company have been in the habit, for three months before the accident, to send all the trains tender foremost, which is manifestly a mistake, and I hope Sir F. Smith will rectify it.

I remain, &c.,
THOMAS PEARSON, Secretary.

G. R. Porter, Esq.,
&c. &c. &c.