

## II.—REPORTS ON ACCIDENTS.

No. 1.

### GRAND JUNCTION RAILWAY.

REPORT of Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Frederic Smith, on the Accident which occurred on the 11th February, 1841.

MY LORDS,

Manchester, the 23d February, 1841.

IN consequence of your Lordships' instructions, I yesterday proceeded to Whitmore, on the line of the Grand Junction Railway, for the purpose of inquiring into the accident, attended with loss of life, which happened at that place on the 11th instant.

Captain Cleather, the Superintendent of this line, afforded me every facility for conducting the investigation, and I inclose his report of the accident.

It appears that at 11 h. 30 m. P.M., on the 10th instant, a luggage train from Manchester, destined for Birmingham, and drawn by the Wildfire engine, arrived at Warrington, and thence proceeded on the journey at 11 h. 50 m. And it also appears that two goods' trains from Liverpool reached Warrington at 12 h. 25 m. and at 12 h. 34 m. respectively. These two trains were formed into one, and left Warrington for Birmingham at 1 h. 30 m. A.M., drawn by the Briareus and Charon.

The train drawn by the Wildfire consisted of 22 waggons, and the double train consisted of 46 waggons. There was an interval of 1 hour and 40 minutes between the starting of these trains from Warrington, but owing, I presume, to the Wildfire being inferior to the other two engines, the double train gained so rapidly on the preceding one, that it arrived at Whitmore at only 13 minutes later, and indeed before the train drawn by the Wildfire had again started; in consequence of which a collision between the trains took place, causing the death of a person named James Neister, who was travelling in charge of some pigs.

About half a mile to the north of the Whitmore station is the top of the Madeley plane, and from that point the line falls at the rate of 1 in 390 to and beyond Whitmore.

The state of the rails on the morning in question is represented to have been very unfavourable for the trains, having been covered with a coat of ice.

I find that since the severe weather set in, towards the close of December, the Directors of the Grand Junction Railway have allowed to the drivers and firemen of each train, both by day and by night, a cup of coffee on reaching the Whitmore station; and it appears that in the day time the coffee is carried by the porters to these men, who are in consequence not under the necessity of leaving their engines; but at night the practice is for the drivers and firemen to go into the office for their refreshment. It was in doing this that Hurst, the driver of the Wildfire engine quitted his duty, which, according to the regulation, is never to be absent from his engine when on the line; and during this short absence the double train, drawn by the Briareus and Charon arrived, and ran into the train then standing at the Whitmore Station.

There is no doubt that the steam was shut off from the Charon at a quarter of a mile from the station, but it is not precisely ascertained at what point the steam of the leading engine, the Briareus, was shut off. The driver of the last named engine, Ireland, had been employed in this capacity on the Grand Junction line for several years, and was considered a tolerably steady man. However he must have been very neglectful on this occasion, for the curve of the rails, in approaching Whitmore, and the change from the ascent of the Madeley plane to the descending gradient of 1 in 390, must have clearly denoted to Ireland his precise position; and knowing as he did the icy state of the line, he ought to have shut off his steam much sooner than he did; the more especially as he was aware that the Manchester train was not far a-head of him. It is in evidence that he mentioned to the driver of the Charon that he believed this to be the case.

Under these circumstances it is obvious that the careless driving of Ireland was the chief cause of the accident, and that the secondary cause was the breach of the regulations committed by Hurst in leaving his engine. The latter will naturally justify his disobedience of a standing order by urging that he only followed the practice of all the night drivers and firemen, who are in the habit of going into the office for their coffee. But this plea is inadmissible, and both Hurst and Ireland appear to me to have been so culpable that I trust the displeasure of the Directors will be marked by their temporary suspension from their employment. I also consider the station clerk very blameable for allowing an engine driver to enter his office under any pretence whatever, while his engine was on the line, for this officer could not be ignorant of a regulation which Captain Cleather informed me had been promulgated to the servants of the Company, prohibiting the drivers from leaving their engines when on the line. I would recommend that the orders on this head should be issued in a more peremptory form, calling also upon all the officers and servants to report any disobedience of this important regulation, for this is nearly a similar case to the irregularity which led to the fatal collision at Harrow, and it is one that I think should never pass unpunished.

Appendix.

II.  
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A new and satisfactory system of night stationary signals is in process of gradual introduction under Captain Cleather's direction. It has been commenced at Warrington, and it has been extended up to the station adjoining Whitmore. Whitmore was therefore *not* provided with a stationary red signal lamp, by which the drivers of the Briareus and Charon could be warned of the Wildfire train being still at the station; but in so far as concerns the accident now under consideration this was but of little moment, since Ireland had to stop at Whitmore for water, and therefore his speed should have been slackened at an earlier period; for had the collision not taken place, there is no doubt that he would have overrun the station. It has been attempted to excuse Ireland by stating that in order to break the ice upon the rails, two pig waggons and one luggage waggon had been placed before his train, and that these might have so far obstructed his view as to prevent his seeing the tail lamp of the preceding train. This might have been valid had the collision taken place any where except at a station, at which Ireland had to stop; and it is obvious that he was either driving carelessly or without judgment.

Captain Cleather is very properly supplying every passenger carriage with a lamp on either side showing a white light to the front and a red light to the rear of the train. This plan, which also prevails on the Great Western Railway, is deserving of imitation, and I trust it will be extended, although perhaps in a limited degree, to luggage waggons.

I have, &amp;c.,

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

Inspector-General of Railways.

To the Lords of the Committee of  
Privy Council for Trade.No. 2.  
Midland Counties.

No. 2.

## MIDLAND COUNTIES RAILWAY.

REPORT of Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Frederic Smith, on the Accident which happened on the  
6th May, 1841.

SIR,

Board of Trade, Whitehall, 26th June, 1841.

PURSUANT to the instructions which I had the honour to receive from you, I have inquired into the circumstances connected with the accident that happened on the Midland Counties Railway on the 6th instant, by which a person of the name of Mr. Anthony Sewell met with his death.

It appears that the deceased and his son went to the Barrow Station at about half past 9 o'clock on the evening of the 6th May, for the purpose of joining the up train at that place, and to be conveyed to Syston.

The station house, as you will perceive by the accompanying plan, stands adjoining the down line, and therefore passengers wishing to proceed by the up-trains, have to cross over the rails.

This, although a very common arrangement on all lines, is an inconvenient, and, in some degree, a very dangerous one.

On the occasion now under consideration the deceased, and his son James Sewell, after paying their fares, were allowed to loiter on the wrong side of the line until the up-train was heard approaching, when Mr. Gibson, the Station Master, said to them "The train is coming, make haste to cross, for it will be here in a minute."

Mr. Gibson and Mr. James Sewell immediately passed over the rails to the platform of the up-line, but Mr. Anthony Sewell unfortunately continued a few seconds longer on the wrong side, and then on attempting to cross was struck by the engine, and was in consequence killed.

The verdict of the jury was accidental death, as they ascribed the accident entirely to the carelessness and wilfulness of the deceased.

There can be no question that the accident was attributable to these causes, but I think it behoves all Companies to afford the most effectual protection to their passengers that circumstances may permit, and there are few points more deserving the consideration of the managers of railways than to adopt such regulations as shall ensure safety to the passengers in crossing their rails; for neither the incautious, the ignorant, or the infirm, should be left to their own discretion in such an important point.

In my inspection of the Barrow Station, and my inquiries into this accident, I was accompanied by Mr. Yule, one of the Directors, and by Mr. Bell, the secretary to the Company, who afforded me every facility in my investigation. I suggested to them that when the up-trains appear coming round the curve, within a few hundred yards of the station, the gate of the paled fence which separates the station-house from the platform should be closed, and no person allowed to pass till the train is at rest. This regulation, which they most readily agreed to establish, will effectually prevent such accidents as the one under consideration; and it would be well if for a similar precaution, the plan of separating the platform from the station by an inclosure, such as that at Barrow, were generally followed at the stations of all Companies where the relative situation of the station-house and line of rails would permit.

I have, &amp;c.,

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

Inspector-General of Railways.

The Right Hon. Henry Labouchere,  
&c. &c. &c.