

The
VIRTUAL MUSEUM
of the
LANCASHIRE & YORKSHIRE RAILWAY

Accident Reports.

9 October 1871

BoT Report into Accident at
Miles Platting.

(1 Page).

LANCASHIRE AND YORKSHIRE RAILWAY.

Board of Trade,
(Railway Department),
24th October 1871.

SIR, IN compliance with the instructions contained in your minute of the 10th inst., I have the honour to report, for the information of the Board of Trade, the result of my inquiry into the circumstances attending the collision which occurred on the 9th inst. on the incline leading from Victoria Station, Manchester, to Miles Platting, on the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway, between a pilot engine and a passenger train.

At the date of my inquiry four passengers had complained of having been bruised.

The incline leading from Victoria station to Miles Platting is a rising gradient of 1 in 59; it is worked upon the absolute block telegraph system, and is divided into three sections, the first, next the station, being 620 yards in length, and the second 330 yards; the cabins for the different sections are provided with the usual out-door signals and telegraphic instruments, the latter consisting of bells, (single stroke), discs, and semaphores. The general printed rules provide that every train or engine, *without exception (sic)* must be signalled in its progress from cabin to cabin and that no more than one train or engine shall be running between any two signal cabins on the same line at the same time.

In No. 2 section, between cabins No. 3 and 4, there are a large number of empty carriage sidings lying on the north of the line, which can be entered from the up line either by a crossing, the points of which are 53 yards east of No. 3 cabin, or by points at the upper end of the section close to No. 4 cabin.

A passenger train, consisting of engine and tender, composite carriage, break-van, and two other coaches, left the Victoria station for Leeds at 7.48 a.m. on the 9th inst., three minutes late. It proceeded up the incline as far as No. 4 signal cabin, where it was stopped in consequence of a goods train occupying the section in advance. It had been standing here about two minutes when it was run into by a pilot engine. The blow was a sharp one, but none of the vehicles were injured or left the rails, and the train was able to proceed as far as Rochdale. The morning is described by some of the witnesses as having been rather foggy, by others as very foggy.

The driver of the pilot engine, Jonas Copley by name, who had served in this capacity for 25 years, during which time he had been concerned in only two accidents, had followed the Leeds train up the Victoria incline to bring down some empty carriages from the New Town sidings to form the 8.15 train for Southport. The engine was running tender first, and there were on it, beside the driver and fireman, two shunters, and a carriage inspector. On arriving at the points near No. 3 cabin leading to the New Town sidings, Copley stopped, as was usual, in order to cross and enter the sidings, a goods train at the same time passing along the other line. Just as he had stopped, one of the shunters, seeing that the carriages were not accessible from this point, said, "Top end, Jonas, for the Southport train;" upon this Copley, without reference to the signalman in No. 3 cabin, went on, and his engine had attained a speed stated to be about 10

miles an hour when the tail of the Leeds train suddenly came in sight through the fog, not more than 30 or 40 yards off. There was just time to shut off steam, reverse, and apply the tender break, before the collision occurred at a speed of about five miles an hour, the shunters and carriage inspector previously jumping off. The engine received no damage.

The signalman in No. 2 cabin states that, according to custom, he allowed the pilot engine to follow the Leeds train while the latter was still in the section, telling the driver to be cautious, and informing the signalman in No. 3 cabin by two beats of the bell that he had done so, No. 3 giving one beat in acknowledgment.

The signalman in No. 3 cabin states that the pilot engine was signalled on to him from No. 2 while the Leeds train was still in the section, and that it arrived at his cabin as he heard the engine of the train blowing off steam by No. 4 cabin, where it had been stopped. The pilot engine after stopping for a moment at the points, where it was customary for it to cross into the sidings, started again without any communication between the driver and himself, and he soon after heard the sound of the collision. This signalman also acknowledges to the custom of the pilot engine and passenger train being allowed to travel in the same blocked section at the same time.

The immediate cause of this collision must be ascribed to the carelessness of Copley in driving his engine on a foggy morning at such a speed and with so little vigilance that on a rising gradient of 1 in 59 he was unable to stop it in time to avoid overtaking a train which he knew could not be far ahead of him.

This collision would not, however, have occurred had the block telegraph rules for the safe working of the incline been adhered to, instead of being, as was admitted in the evidence, systematically broken. Nothing can be plainer than the words with which these rules commence, viz., that "the object of the system of electric train signalling is to prevent more than one train or engine from running between any two signal cabins on the same line at the same time." And again further on, "every train or engine without exception must be signalled in its progress between cabin and cabin." If a driver is regularly allowed to follow a passenger train into one blocked section (as in the present case between Nos. 2 and 3 cabins) it is not surprising that he should see no great difference in continuing to follow it into another blocked section (between Nos. 3 and 4), and though Copley's carelessness must be blamed on the present occasion, I hardly think he can be found fault with for a breach of block telegraph rules which he was daily allowed to transgress.

The real fault lies in the want of proper discipline enforced by vigilant out-door supervision; without this, irregular practices are sure to creep in and result sooner or later in accident.

I have, &c.,
C. S. HUTCHINSON,
Lieut.-Col. R.E.

The Secretary,
(Railway Department),
Board of Trade.