

The Kildwick Rail Crash of 1875

Part 1 – The accident

Introduction

This is the first part of an investigation by Farnhill and Kildwick Local History Group into the Kildwick rail crash of 1875, which resulted in the death of 7 passengers and injuries to around 50 others.

In this part we will look at the events of the evening of August 28th 1875.

A note on Kildwick railway station

In 1875, Kildwick station was located just north of the current site of the level crossing on the Eastburn road. There were two platforms: one for Skipton-bound traffic and one for trains heading for Leeds or Bradford, the latter being much the shorter of the two in length. There was a signal box on the Leeds/Bradford platform.

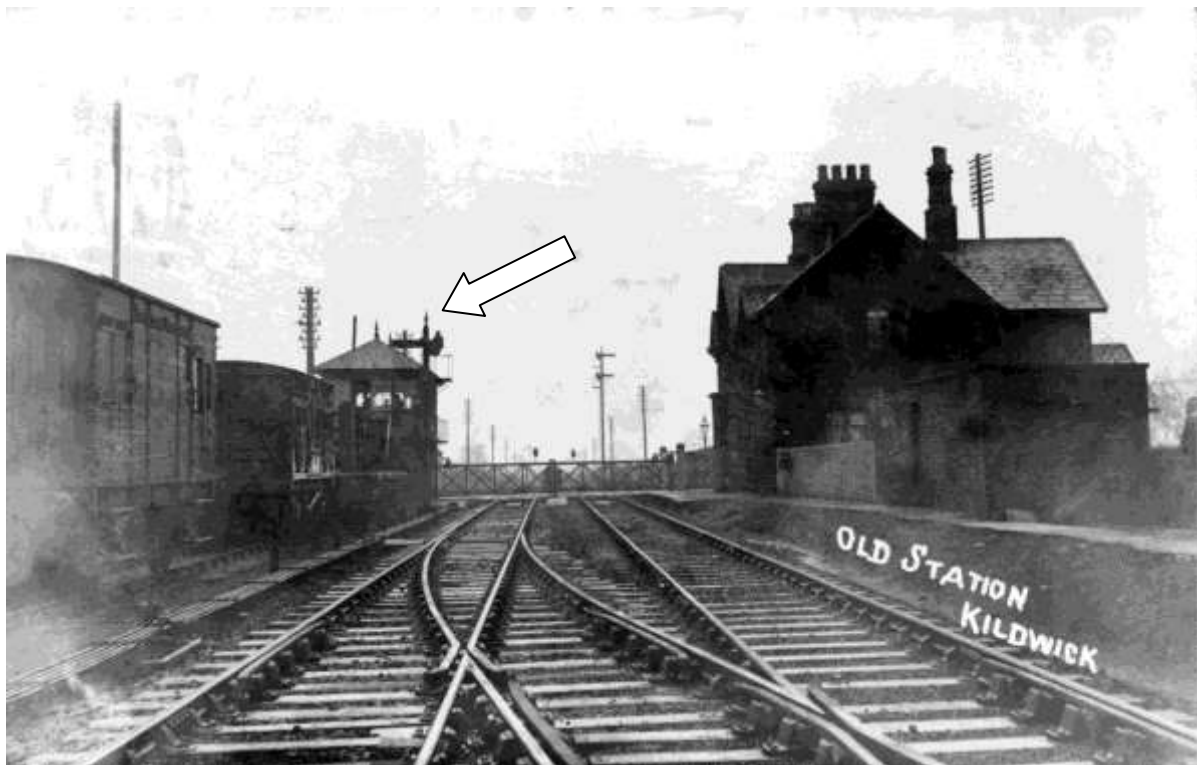


Fig 1: Kildwick railway station, built in 1846. The building (right) still stands, near the railway crossing on the Eastburn road. Also visible: the signal box; the Kildwick “home” signal (arrowed), located some 36 yards from the north end of the Leeds/Bradford platform; and the goods siding.

In 1889, the Kildwick station was moved to a site on the Skipton side of the road bridge in Station Road Crosshills. This later station closed in 1965.¹

The accident

The Bradford to Morecambe excursion

The expansion of the rail network in the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly the development of branch lines to coastal resorts, allowed many working people to take day trips to the seaside.^{2,3}

For a number of years prior to 1875, the Midland Railway Company had run Saturday day-trips from Bradford, Shipley, Bingley and Keighley to Morecambe. These were very popular and for the 1875 summer season, the service was expanded to provide half-day trips at a reduced cost.

One such trip, organised jointly by the Midland Railway Company and the quaintly-named Bradford Saturday Half Holiday Association, departed at 1:50pm on Saturday 28th August from Bradford. The weather was fine and it is estimated that between 1000 and 1200 people were on board or joined the train en-route.

The return journey

The journey back to Bradford started on-schedule at 8:50pm and the train, made up of nineteen carriages and three brake vans, arrived at Skipton station at about 11:05pm; just ahead of a five-carriage mail train from Clapham to Leeds.

Note: Early newspaper reports refer to this train as the “Scotch Express”, a description not used in later reports. The train was neither an express, nor did it originate in Scotland.

The exact time at which the excursion train left Skipton is not known, but it preceded the mail train by the minimum five minutes allowed by the traffic control system operating at the time. The next scheduled stop for the excursion was not until Keighley; the mail train was due to stop at Kildwick.

As the excursion train passed through Cononley station, at 11:17pm, the signalman noticed that the middle red warning lamps on the brake van at the rear of the train had gone out. He immediately signalled Kildwick to stop the train and examine it.

The crash

Note: See Part 2 of this article for details of the layout of Kildwick station and its approach.

At Kildwick station, the night porter, Richard Staveley, set two signals: the “home” signal, located just 36 yards to the north of the station platform (see Fig 1) was set to dead stop; the “distance” signal, 800 yards closer to Cononley, was set to advise any oncoming train to proceed with caution and be prepared to stop. He then sent the other porter, George Quincey, to meet the excursion train and advise the driver to advance slowly into the station.

The excursion came to a near-stop just short of the “home” signal, close to the railway bridge on Station Road Crosshills. Quincey talked to the driver and advised him to proceed slowly into the station, and stop on the platform in order that the train could be examined. As the train passed under the bridge, making its way towards Kildwick, he noted the absence of a tail light. By this time, however, he had also heard the sound of another train approaching and “got out of the way as fast as he could”.

Meanwhile, at 11:22pm, Staveley received a second signal, saying that the mail train had passed Cononley. At this time he was signalling the excursion to come forward into the station. On hearing the approach of the mail train, Staveley ran forward and shouted to the driver of the excursion to move forward as fast as possible. He then took cover.

The excursion train was just 70 yards beyond the bridge, travelling slowly, with the first few carriages level with the station platform, when it was hit from behind by the mail train. The sound of the collision was heard for many miles around and was reported as being like “the crushing of a lot of match-boxes”.

The damage

The damage to the mail train was restricted to the locomotive, which suffered a broken front buffer and some damage to the firebox. It would be able to complete the journey to Leeds later that night.

Apart from the shock, none of the passengers was injured. A passenger in the front carriage described the collision:

“... it was only for a moment ... [there] was a sharp shock, about eight or ten minutes after leaving Skipton. The shock was not severe, but enough to jerk most people off their seats ...”

The situation in the excursion train was very much more serious. The impact was felt throughout the train. All the lights went out and a number of the carriage doors flew open. Some of the passengers were thrown out whilst the rest were tossed around inside, receiving various injuries – particularly to the head and upper body.

The most serious damage was sustained by the rear three components of the excursion train:

- The rear brake van, manned by the guard, Thomas Doidge, took the full force of the collision, and suffered significant damage. The superstructure was separated from the bogies and the roof completely removed. The van was thrown up on one end, onto the rear-most carriage. Thomas Doidge had a miraculous escape and suffered relatively minor injuries; see later.
- The rear-most carriage was a composite, consisting of two first-class compartments, with third-class compartments to the front and rear. The superstructure of the rear-most third-class compartment was completely destroyed.
- Next was a slightly-built third-class carriage. The couplings between this and the composite carriage had been broken by the impact and the rear section was smashed in, with the roof touching the floor in places and the sides of the carriage burst out.

The rescue work

Assistance to the injured began to arrive almost immediately. A number of the passengers who were not themselves injured were also able to provide help to those who needed it.

A messenger was sent to Dr Macnab, who lived close-by, and both he and his assistants, Mr. Ravenscroft and Mr. Williams were quickly on the scene. Mr. Winterburn, the Kildwick station-master set off in person to Keighley to get further medical help, and telegrams were sent to both Bradford and Leeds. Dr. Dobie of Keighley arrived, followed at around 1:30am, by a train sent from Bradford carrying Dr. Taylor, the Midland Railway Company's surgeon for the Bradford area, Mr. Roberts a surgeon from the Bradford Infirmary, and other medical staff.

Meanwhile, the walking wounded were escorted to Kildwick railway station where they were treated by Ravenscroft and Williams and provided with tea by Mrs. Winterburn, the station-master's wife. They were then allowed to travel on to their homes. One of those who went home was Thomas Doidge, the guard who had been in the rear brake van.

Three fires were lit adjacent to the wreck of the excursion train, to provide light by which assistance could be given to those who were more seriously injured. These were built using wood from the damaged carriages, so badly were they smashed up.

Inspection of the rear carriages revealed four dead within the wreckage. Judging from the injuries sustained, which were described in some detail in contemporary newspaper reports, all four probably died instantaneously.

A middle-aged woman was found alive under the last carriage, but was so badly injured that she was judged to be beyond any medical help. She died very soon afterwards, at the scene.

Within a couple of hours of the crash, around 30 to 40 people had received medical treatment for their injuries. Two needed further treatment and were transferred to Bradford Infirmary.

Two other passengers, who were thought too poorly to travel, were carried to Junction Hotel where they received further medical treatment. The bodies of the five dead were also removed to the hotel to await identification.



Fig 2: Junction Hotel (this photograph taken much later than 1875).

Survivors' reports

Some of the injured survivors were later able to give details of their experiences.

William Muckel was found underneath a first-class compartment of the rear-most (composite) carriage, and described being trapped by a wooden partition and then dragged along the line for some distance before lapsing into unconsciousness.

John Priestley was travelling in the third-class carriage with two friends, John Liversedge and William Holston Taylor. He recalled the train slowing as it approached Kildwick and being asked by Liversedge what the time was. He removed his pocket watch and saw that it was 11:24pm. Before he could return his watch to his pocket he was thrown sideways and he then fell through the floor of the compartment, which had broken apart, and was dragged along for some distance, entangled in the wreckage. He was finally thrown clear and up against a goods wagon stood on one of the station sidings (see Fig 1). He found he was unable to walk (he had a broken ankle) but saw Taylor, conscious but badly injured, lying nearby and Liversedge half-buried in the debris. Some of the uninjured passengers subsequently found that Liversedge was dead.

Amid the horror and tragedy of that night, some of the passengers recalled rather bizarre experiences. The following extract, taken from the Bradford Observer edition of August 30th 1875, is an account given by Mr. Smith Ambler who was travelling in the rear-most (composite) carriage with his friend Mr. James Hargreaves, along with a woman travelling with her brother-in-law and a father with two sons. The reporter seems to have had an excessive concern about headgear:

All of a sudden, and without any warning, there was an awful crash, and the excursion train was bounced forward, and before the passengers knew where they were the carriage went rocking from side to side, and the woodwork began to creak and crash, as if it were splitting up. Nothing could be seen, and Mr. Ambler imagined that they were running down an embankment with an engine following them. The carriage floor seemed to open, and one after another the passengers fell through, the screaming and yelling becoming awful.

In the confusion and darkness which followed nothing very definite is remembered except that on the axle and part of the debris of the carriage some of the passengers who had got entangled in it were carried forward until the train stopped ...

Mr. Ambler, beginning to regain consciousness, found himself locked securely in the arms of his companion, Hargreaves, and with the hat of one of the young boys in his hand. How he became so possessed of it is a mystery not likely to be cleared up. He felt first whether his head was still in its place, and then whether his legs were on; and without knowing how, he and Hargreaves scrambled from under what was left of the carriage and, frightened out of their wits, ran off towards the station-master's house. Beginning to recover from the shock, Mr. Ambler returned to the scene, where he found the father and his two boys shivering in the drizzling rain. ... the groaning and screaming were such that Mr. Ambler, in his debilitated condition, had once more to go away. He returned shortly after, however, remembering that he had not seen the woman who was sat next to his companion (Hargreaves) and a search was at once instituted. ... After a considerable quantity of the wreck had been removed from the latter part of the train, Miss Redman was extricated, and was not then quite dead, but expired in a few moments in her brother's arms.

Mr. Ambler continued to assist the injured, but wishing to find his companion, he went up and met Hargreaves, who, bleeding profusely from a wound on the head, had got faint and had been taken to the station-master's house to get his head dressed. Both had lost their hats; and walked home to Keighley – Mr. Ambler with an old hat he had found, and Mr. Hargreaves bareheaded.

Track repairs

Work on clearing the line was carried on in conjunction with the rescue efforts and by two o'clock in the morning traffic was running again. The mail train continued on to Leeds; and two excursion trains from Liverpool to Bradford, that had been held up by the crash, and the undamaged section of the Morecambe excursion, finally arrived at their destination at between four and five o'clock.

By eight o'clock in the morning there was no outward sign of the crash to be seen.

Aftermath

By the time the survivors arrived in Bradford there was considerable confusion, as people searched for their friends and relatives who they thought may have been on the fatal train. This was not helped by the fact that the excursion fare was so low that many people used it to make one-way journeys. Those who were on the train returning from Morecambe were therefore not necessarily those that had set out from Bradford that morning and, as many Bradfordians took their holidays in Morecambe, almost every family had a member or acquaintance who could have been on the fatal train.

Throughout the Sunday, many of the trains leaving Bradford carried people who thought that a friend or relative may have been involved in the accident to Kildwick. Free passes were issued by the station-master for this purpose; and by the end of the day, the bodies of the five dead had been identified. Coffins were then provided by the Midland Railway Company for their removal.

Also during the course of Sunday, William Holston Taylor, one of the two seriously injured passengers who had spent the night at Junction Hotel, was taken on a special train, accompanied by Dr. Taylor, to Bradford Infirmary. He died there on Thursday 2nd September.

William Muckel remained at the hotel, unable to be moved. He died on Wednesday 1st September.

The victims

A total of seven people died as a result of the Kildwick rail crash. All were from Bradford.

Five died at the scene:

- **William Calvert (42)** and his son, **John (14)** – travelling together in the third-class carriage. William was a quarryman by trade but had recently been employed at Mr. Salmond's soap-works in Valley Road. His son, one of five children, was employed as a "taker-off" at Mr. Leather's mill. William's death left a widow and four children. Mrs. Calvert would later make a claim for damages against the Midland Railway Company; see Part 3 for details.
- **John Liversedge (single, about 48)** – travelling in the third-class carriage with his employer John Priestley, who was injured; and William Holston Taylor, who was also killed. A boot and shoe-maker, Liversedge lodged in Croft Street and worked at the home of his brother George (28), in Bower Street, for Mr. Priestley.
- **Charles Francis Martin (21)** – travelling in the third-class carriage, with his friend and former schoolfellow, H. C. Parkinson, who was among the injured. The second son of Mr. J. F. Martin of Claremont Terrace, Charles was a clerk in the employ of a cotton warp agent.
- **Julia Redman (single, 40)** – travelling in the composite carriage, she had been visiting Morecambe and was returning with her brother-in-law, William Walton (one of the injured). Miss Redman was taken alive from the wreckage but died, at the track-side, in her brother-in-law's arms.

Two men died later:

- **William Muckel (27)** – travelling in the third-class carriage. Muckel was one of the last to be removed from the wreckage, having been found underneath the debris of the composite carriage. He was severely injured and was not expected to survive. He was taken to Junction Hotel, where he died on Wednesday 1st September. He was employed at Mr. Salmond's soap-works in Valley Road.
- **William Holston Taylor (36)** – travelling in the third-class carriage, with John Liversedge (who was killed) and John Priestley (injured). A book agent of Hanover Square. Taylor was kept overnight at Junction Hotel and transferred to Bradford Infirmary, at his own request, on Sunday 29th August. He was admitted with a compound fracture of the right leg, bruising to the shoulders and back, and had also received a severe shaking. He died on Thursday 2nd September. A widower, he left a son aged about eight. He was insured for £100 by the Railway Passengers' Assurance Company (for further details, see <http://www.aviva.com/about-us/heritage/companies/railway-passengers-assurance-company/>).

The injured

The following is a list of those treated at the scene. All were from the excursion train.

Two men were taken straight to Bradford Infirmary:

- **Hudson Clough Parkinson (20)** – travelling in the third-class carriage, with his friend and former schoolfellow, C. F. Martin, who was killed. Mr Parkinson was admitted to hospital with a compound fracture of the left leg, a simple fracture of the right forearm, and a scalp wound.
- **Wadley Silson (16)** – suffering from concussion but no fractures.

The rest were allowed to go home, including:

- **Thomas Chambers** – severe injuries to knees and face.
- **Thomas Doidge (34)** – the guard in the rear brake van. Cuts and bruising to the chest, and a scalp wound.
- **Thomas Green** – injuries to side and head.
- **J. H. Hardaker (25)** – a jagged wound on the forehead, and cuts and bruises on the face and head.
- **James Hargreaves** – severe bruising to shoulder, head wound, and much shaken.
- **James Sykes Lister** – cuts to face and head; several teeth damaged.
- **William Lobley** – cuts and bruising to the right eye.
- **Mrs. Lobley** – scalp wound to the back of the head.
- **Robert Osbaldiston** – severe scalp wound and shock.

- **John Priestley (54)** – travelling in the third-class carriage with John Liversedge and William Holston Taylor, both of whom were killed. Mr Priestley was treated for a broken ankle, crushed ribs, and cuts and bruises to the right cheek.
- **James Shaw** – very badly shaken.
- **James Snowden** – cut and bruised about the head.
- **William Walton (45)** – travelling in the composite carriage, with his sister-in-law, Julia Redman, who was killed. Severely shaken and bruised.
- **S. Ambler, G. Cartman, R. Clark, E. C. Davies, R. C. Fall, W. A. Foster, Miss K. Gatehouse, Miss E. Gray, T. Goodman and two children, Miss M. Haste, J. Hall, J. Harwood, J. Holmes, J. H. Hodgson, W. Haslam, J. Kershaw, F. Kriger, F. Marryatt, R. H. Oddy, D. Pickup, Miss Ellen Potts, Miss Elizabeth Potts, J. Rawson, J. Shackleton, T. Spencer, J. A. Storrs, Miss E. Wilkinson, Mrs. E. Widdup, W. Whitaker, T. Wray** – various minor injuries.

How London saw it

News of the Kildwick crash spread through all of the local newspapers and many of the nationals, with most basing their coverage on the same agency report. In the London magazines, however, the provincial tragedy quickly formed the basis of rather less than totally tasteful metropolitan wit.

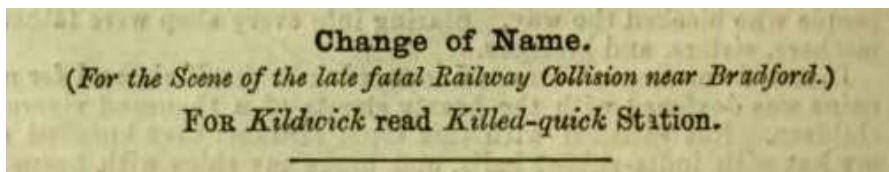


Fig 3: From "Punch" magazine, September 11th 1875

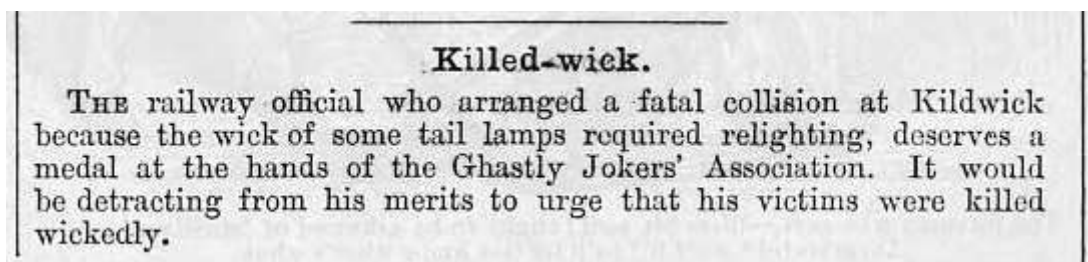


Fig 4: From "Fun" magazine, September 11th 1875

A fine pair of jokes – although not, perhaps, worth the loss of seven lives ?

However, perhaps the most disgraceful comment appeared in a report in "The Times" which referred to the dead as: "*mostly of the vulgar sort*".⁴ The Spectator called this comment unfeeling, rash and contemptuous, noting that: "*The responsibility of railway officials for life, even though it were only life "of the vulgar sort", cannot be too strictly enforced.*"

A 1910 recollection of the accident

The book "Silsden Primitive Methodism" by Rev. W.J. Robson, published in 1910, contains an account of the rail crash by John Mitchell, a member of the Farnhill methodist congregation. It's obviously a tale that Mr. Mitchell had told many times in the intervening 35 years, and it had become much embellished. Many of the incidents recounted do not equate with the facts as reported in contemporary accounts.

John Mitchell's account, as reported by Rev. Robson	Contemporary reports
<p>John Mitchell was the second man to arrive on the scene when the terrible accident happened at Kildwick Railway Station, August 28th, 1875.</p>	<p>It is unlikely that Mitchell was anything like the second on the scene.</p> <p>A remarkable feature of the contemporary accounts is the large number of people who were at or near the station at 11pm that night. There were at least three station staff, the station-master's wife, and several travellers on the platform. Other people were close by and likely to have been on the scene well before John Mitchell could have got there from Farnhill. Not to mention the people on both trains who were uninjured and are known to have rendered assistance.</p>
<p>The Scotch express ... came thundering along and dashed into the rear of the first train with a great crash which Mr. Mitchell and others heard in their homes at Farnhill.</p>	<p>The crash was witnessed by Samuel Watson, from near Airedale Mill. He described how the mail train "<i>slowed as it approached the bridge and further still as it passed under it</i>". Accounts of other witnesses give an impact speed of around 10 mph (see Part 4 of this series). This is hardly "thundering".</p> <p>It is possible likely that the sound of the crash was audible in Farnhill. It was certainly heard by a policeman on duty near the Dog and Gun at Malsis, a mile and three-quarters from the scene.</p>
<p>In one of the scenes Mr. Mitchell saw, there were two men sitting on the ground, and as the rescue party came to these, one of them said "Look to that fellow; never mind me." In a minute or two the brave-hearted soul who uttered the words was dead.</p>	<p>Four men died at the scene. All were found dead by rescuers in the third-class carriage. There was no man found alive but mortally injured who could possibly have made the brave remark reported by Mitchell.</p>

John Mitchell's account, as reported by Rev. Robson	Contemporary reports
<p>Down one of the sidings on a fence ... was sat a young man with his sweetheart on his knee and his arms around her. She was dead, and he did not know it.</p>	<p>The only woman to die in the crash was Julia Redman, aged 40. She was travelling with her brother-in-law, William Walton, aged 45. Miss Redman was removed alive from the wreckage but died a short time after, at the track-side.</p> <p>He was not young; she was not his sweetheart; and it is very unlikely, given her near-death condition, that she would have been sat on his knee.</p>

It's always a problem relying on eye-witness accounts, particularly when the incident being recalled is so far in the past.

What next ?

In the next part of this investigation we will look at the coroner's report, the official inquiries, and the Board of Trade report into the accident – and ask who was responsible for the fatal collision ?

References

- 1 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kildwick_and_Crosshills_railway_station
- 2 Bradford Observer, August 30th 1875
- 3 Craven Herald, September 4th 1875
- 4 Quoted in Keighley News, September 18th 1875