

LONDON & NORTH WESTERN AND LANCASHIRE & YORKSHIRE  
JOINT RAILWAYS.

Ministry of Transport,  
Public Safety & General Purposes Department,  
28, Abingdon Street,  
Westminster, S.W. 1.

18th February, 1920.

SIR,

I have the honour to report for the information of the Minister of Transport, in accordance with the Order of the 26th January, the result of my Inquiry into the circumstances of a collision, which occurred a minute or two before 6 a.m. on the 16th January, at Preston, on the L. & N.W. and L. & Y. Joint Railways.

In this case a L. & Y. goods train, which was travelling north from Preston on the down Fleetwood line, came into collision with a L. & N.W. light engine, which was standing on the line waiting to set back into the engine shed road.

The collision resulted in shock or minor injury to the driver of the light engine and the fireman and guard of the goods train. Both engines were damaged.

The L. & N.W. light engine was No. 1686, 4-6-0 type, with six-wheeled tender; weight in working order 100 tons. The L. & Y. goods train consisted of 18 loaded coal, 1 loaded and 1 empty goods wagons, with brake-van, and was drawn by L. & Y. engine No. 1185, 0-6-0 type, with six-wheeled tender, weight in working order 68½ tons. This engine was fitted with the vacuum brake, working blocks on all engine and tender wheels.

The morning in question was dark, but clear.

*Description.*

The scene of the collision—some few hundred yards north of Preston Station—was the down slow Fleetwood road. The railway runs through Preston Station approximately north and south and then curves to the west. The relevant lines, starting from the west, are:—The down through, up through, down platform No. 1, up platform No. 2, up-and-down platform No. 3, down platform No. 4, and down platform No. 5. Preston No. 4, signal-box lies east of the last-named road, north of the station. No. 5 signal-box lies north of this, and also east of the running roads.

The continuation of No. 1 platform road is known as the down slow line. Nos. 3 and 4 platform roads converge to a common down road, just north of the station platforms, this common road being joined by No. 5 platform road opposite No. 4 signal-box, and being thereafter known as the down fast road. No. 2 platform road is the continuation of the up slow line.

The relevant signals, points, etc., and their distances from the centre of Preston No. 4 signal-box, are as follows:—

No. 3 platform starting (No. 4 box down home) signal to down slow line (No. 29 lever) .. .. .	148 yards South
Point of convergence of 3 and 4 platform roads ..	60 „ S.S.E.
Through crossing from 3 and 4 platform common road to down slow road ;	
facing points (No. 85) on former .. ..	40 „ „
trailing points (No. 90) on down slow .. ..	72 „ N.N.W.
Trailing siding connection on No. 5 platform road (No. 80) from Bakehouse Siding (which lies roughly parallel to the running roads south of No. 4 box)	Opposite
Point of convergence between 3 and 4 platform common road and 5 platform road, trailing points (No. 86)	40 yards N.N.W.
No. 4 box down slow starting signal (H) on post between down slow and up through .. ..	119 „ N.W.
No. 4 box down slow advance starting signals (four), on bridge astride running roads; down slow to down through (known further north as down slow Fleetwood) being the left hand signal of the four (No. 14) .. .. .	186 „ „
Preston No. 5 signal-box .. .. .	389 „ „

Worked from Preston No. 5 :—

Through crossing from down slow to down slow Fleetwood ; trailing points on latter .. ..	396 „ „
Trailing connection on down slow Fleetwood line to engine shed west of running roads, with disc signal—point of collision .. .. .	490 „ „

No. 4 box down slow starting (H) and advance starting signals (14) are slotted from No. 5 box on a single lever (No. 25).

In No. 4 box, H lever precedes No. 29, and, when drawn, locks No. 90 in both positions, as does No. 14 signal lever.

In No. 5 box, the signal pulled by No. 25 lever is selected by the position of the through crossing from down slow to down slow Fleetwood lines.

The alignment of the running roads in the vicinity is on an easy curve to the west.

#### *Conclusion.*

The case is a complicated one, and is remarkable for the conflict in the evidence of the witnesses on almost every important point.

Two light engines are involved, with one of which the L. & Y. train ultimately collided. This engine had come from Edge Hill and should have run to Carlisle. The other came from Bakehouse siding, and backed from the down Fleetwood line on to the engine shed road a few minutes before the accident. Although this Bakehouse engine was not involved in the actual collision, its presence contributed to the result, as will be apparent.

The two signal-boxes concerned in the various movements are Preston No. 4 and No. 5. Soon after 5.30 a.m.—the exact time is uncertain—the Carlisle engine approached the former from No. 1 platform road, and was, according to the evidence of Walsh and Thornton (the two signalmen on duty at No. 4 box), offered to and accepted by No. 5 box, in the normal way. There are however no entries of any kind in the train register book at No. 4 box in respect of this engine to support this evidence, or to give any record of the times at which these alleged bell signals were exchanged. Walsh, the man principally concerned, says that he offered this engine forward twice: On the first occasion he did not obtain acceptance; on the second occasion he says the engine was accepted as it “came to the starting signal” (H). Walsh was not aware that this engine was destined for Carlisle, as he had received no notification to that effect, and dealt with it therefore as being due to run into the Preston engine shed.

At about this time the second engine came from the station, where it had been carrying out shunting work, and backed a van into Bakehouse siding, where the van was detached. This movement was the last which Forrest, the driver, had to make, and Preston No. 4 signal-box was therefore told to arrange for his movement to the shed. Walsh accordingly set the road for the engine to leave the siding and move on to the down slow line, that is, the same road on which the Carlisle engine was. He intended, he says, that the two engines should be coupled and run to the shed together. As the Bakehouse engine backed past his box on the way to the down slow, via the down fast road and Nos. 86, 85 and 90 points reversed, Walsh says that he opened the window and called out: “Hook on to that chap on the down slow”; and that he “understood” the driver to say “All right.” While this was going on, he says that he saw the tail light of the Carlisle engine standing at the starting signal, and that he watched the Bakehouse engine until it reached a point about a yard or so from the first engine. He concluded his narrative by saying that, after allowing the engines the usual time to couple, “about half a minute or so,” he pulled the levers controlling the slots on his starting signal (H.) and advance starting signal (No. 14), and saw, by going to the window, that both signals had come off; he saw nothing on this occasion of either engine. This second engine is booked as a “bank engine” in No. 4 box, 5.45 a.m. being the time shown for giving the “entering section” signal to No. 5 box. Walsh states that the “bank engine” signal was sent in the prescribed manner to No. 5 box, after the “entering section” signal. The “out of section” signal was given by No. 5 box at 5.50 a.m.

In the main, Thornton’s evidence is to the same effect, and Gregson, the booking lad, adds his confirmation to Walsh’s statement in regard to the message given to the Bakehouse engine driver, and the sending of the “bank engine” signal.

In brief, the leading factors of the evidence of the men at this box are:—

(a) The Carlisle engine was stopped at the down slow starting signal, and held there until the Bakehouse engine came up.

(b) The Bakehouse engine was verbally instructed to couple up to the Carlisle engine, and the signal held against them long enough to enable this to be done.

(c) The Carlisle engine was offered to and accepted by No. 5 box some few minutes before the engines left (there are no book entries to confirm this), and the “bank engine” signal was sent, after the “entering section” signal, booked at 5.45 a.m.

Wilding, signalman on duty at No. 5 box, stated that a light engine was offered to him from No. 4 box at 5.49 a.m., and sectioned at the same time. This entry is shewn in his train register. This engine he assumed, in default of information to the contrary, to be for the engine shed, and he set the road accordingly from the down slow to the down Fleetwood line; he then pulled off the slots on No. 4 box down slow starting and advance starting signals. He denies that any “bank engine” signal was sent, or that he had from first to last any idea that two engines were involved. He then saw an engine approaching—carrying the usual single white head-light—and watched it over the junction points. Dickinson, his mate, set the road from the down Fleetwood line to the engine shed, after hearing an engine whistle, watched this engine move back, and then closed the points behind it. He looked on the line after doing so, and saw “nothing unusual,”

though he admits that there are at times several red lights in the neighbourhood, which are apt to be confusing, and that he has on occasion telephoned to the sheds to ask them to alter from red to white the lights of engines which have been standing on shed roads alongside the main line. He then called out "All right" to Wilding, to intimate that the down line was clear. Wilding then (at 5.57 a.m.) accepted the L. & Y. freight train, which passed his box a minute or two later, and came into collision with the Carlisle engine, which was standing on the Fleetwood line.

Just before the collision occurred, the fireman of the Carlisle engine came into No. 5 box, and said to Dickinson: "We are standing on the down road, for Carlisle." Dickinson said: "Wherever are you?" and told his mate to "put those signals on—we don't know which road he is on." The collision then took place, and the fireman at once left the box.

The substance of the evidence of the men at No. 5 box is therefore:—

(a) A single light engine was accepted from No. 4 box, and sectioned at the same time, viz., 5.49 a.m.

(b) No "Bank engine" signal was received, and the men in No. 5 box were quite unaware that two engines were involved.

Pitt, the driver of the Carlisle engine, gave his evidence in so confused a manner that it was difficult to collect it into a coherent narrative. It appears that he received instructions to run to Carlisle, before he left Edge Hill, and that he there asked for a pilot beyond Preston. He should, as he was aware, have given a code whistle when passing Farington, to indicate that he was due to run through Preston to Carlisle. This message would then have been passed on by telephone to the boxes ahead. This he did not do because, in his own words: "if I did, I should have been signalled through Preston, and I should not then have picked up my Pilot."

On reaching Ribble Sidings, Pitt appears to have asked there for this Pilot—though he knew in fact the road as far as the engine shed—and was told that the Pilot was not there. He therefore ran on to Preston. He states that when he first saw No. 4 box down slow starting signal it was off, and that he neither checked nor stopped at it. No. 4 box advance starting signal was, he says, also off, the signal in question being on the left of the four applicable to him, that is the one from the down slow to the down Fleetwood line. He knew quite well that from the line on to which he had been signalled there is no road to Carlisle, and says that he thought the instructions for him to go to Carlisle had been changed. It did not occur to him to stop opposite No. 5 box and tell the signalman that the wrong road had been set for him. However he came to a stand, running engine first, with his tender "just clear" of the engine shed road points, and gave two whistles. He then saw another engine coming up and taking the crossover road; he therefore moved up to give this second engine room. This engine he says came to a stand about a yard from him and gave one whistle. The disc signal was then pulled off and the other engine backed into the shed road. Pitt says that he followed, but that, before he arrived at the disc signal it was replaced to danger, and he therefore stopped. Pitt then sent his fireman, Mather, to the box, in accordance with Rule 55. Mather was delayed for a minute or two by a passing up train, and was therefore somewhat late in arriving at the signal-box.

Fireman Mather gave similar evidence, and added that, when passing through Preston Station, they were checked momentarily at the platform signal—the home signal for No. 4 box. This incident is confirmed by signalman Walsh. Mather stated that, after passing this platform signal, he is "nearly certain" that they did not again stop until they reached the engine shed road disc signal.

The essential features of the evidence of these men are that they were not stopped at No. 4 box starting signal, and saw nothing of the second engine until it came up behind them as they were waiting, on the down slow Fleetwood line, for the signal to the engine shed.

Forrest, who was driving the Bakehouse shunting engine, says that after leaving Bakehouse siding his engine was put on to No. 3 platform road, and thence signalled on

to the down slow. As he left the platform road, he saw the down slow starting signal and also the advance starting signal off. These, he says, remained off until he passed them. He saw nothing of any engine ahead until he passed No. 5 signal-box, when he noticed the tail light of the (Carlisle) engine, standing near the engine shed disc, and applied his brake sharply to avoid a collision. Forrest saw one of the signalmen in No. 4 box, as he came out of Bakehouse siding, but did not see him again, and denies that he received any message.

The points in this man's evidence are:—

(a) That he was not stopped at No. 4 box starting signal, and that no other engine was there as he reached it.

(b) That he received no message from No. 4 box in regard to coupling on to another engine, of whose presence he had no knowledge.

2. There is so much conflict in the evidence that it is impossible to say in detail exactly what did transpire, nor would it be profitable to elaborate every possible alternative. It is however feasible to pick out from a number of possibilities certain outstanding facts:—

(a) The engines were not coupled, and both travelled between the two signal-boxes under one set of bell signals.

(b) The men at No. 5 signal-box had no knowledge of the presence of two engines, and this was the immediate cause of the accident.

In regard to the evidence of the two men in No. 4 signal-box there is one fact which is I think of importance, in deciding the degree of credibility which it deserves. Both men were relieved at 6 a.m., and knew nothing of the accident until the following morning. They had therefore no particular reason to recall the exact movements concerned, with any degree of detail, and my own impression was that their recollection was not, in fact, precise. This impression is strengthened by the manner in which Walsh, the man principally concerned, gave his evidence, and by the qualification: "I am under the impression," with which he prefaced the majority of his statements.

The enginemmen, on the other hand, are more likely to have a clear recollection of the events, and there is *prima facie* no reason to question their statements—unless, indeed, one or both of the engines passed a signal at danger. Not only is there no direct evidence to support this view, but the arrangements in No. 5 box are such as to render it highly improbable. The normal lie of the through crossing points (worked from No. 5 box) from the down slow to the down Fleetwood line is for the straight run, and the position of these points decides the signal which is pulled when No. 25 lever is drawn. An engine passing the latter at danger would therefore normally take the Carlisle, and not the Fleetwood, road.

I think therefore that it is safe to make the further assumption that, after the first engine had passed the two signals in question, these remained off sufficiently long for the second engine to follow: on this point, Walsh stated that these levers were "probably not replaced in the frame until 'out of section' was received from No. 5 box."

After careful examination of the evidence and circumstances, my own opinion of the course of events is briefly as follows:—

The Carlisle engine came up to the starting signal and was, in fact, stopped there, at any rate for a short time. As it was passing No. 4 box, the Bakehouse engine was being shunted, and the latter had reached the end of No. 3 platform at about the same time as the Carlisle engine reached the starting signal. The Bakehouse engine probably backed behind No. 3 platform signal (No. 29). Walsh then pulled No. 85 and 90 points, followed by H and No. 29 levers, the last named being preceded by H. He had previously obtained acceptance from No. 5 box for the first engine movement, so that the slot in that box was probably already off. The Carlisle engine therefore started away, and the Bakehouse engine followed, as soon as No. 29 signal, 267 yards behind, was pulled. The "entering section" signal was probably sent by No. 4 box as the Bakehouse engine passed, so that the Carlisle engine was never in fact seen by the men in No. 5 box. The sequel follows from the evidence.

3. The contributory causes of the accident were, in my opinion :—

(a) Driver Pitt's failure to give the whistle code signal to intimate that he was destined for Carlisle.

(b) Slack handling of the two light engine movements in No. 4 box, which resulted in the two engines being in section together, unknown to No. 5 box.

(c) Driver Pitt's failure to stop and report to No. 5 box the fact that he had been signalled on to the wrong road.

(d) The undetected presence of the Carlisle engine, when the L. & Y. freight train was accepted.

The reason given by Pitt for his failure to give the code whistle can hardly be regarded seriously, and it is probable, either that he forgot about it, or had some intention of giving the information when he picked up his pilot. To accept as valid his excuse for failing to call attention to the incorrect signals shewn would be to impute to him a remarkable lack of intelligence, since as he had himself failed to notify his correct destination, he can hardly have expected the signalmen concerned to have guessed it. It is also remarkable that he did not, when the Bakehouse engine finally came up to him, tell Forrest that he also was to run to the shed, and arrange for the engines to be coupled.

Walsh, I consider, failed to exercise reasonable care in handling the light engine movements. He should have definitely satisfied himself, by stopping the second engine, that his message in regard to coupling was correctly received, and should have made sure that this had been done before either engine was allowed to leave. That he did not do so is clear from the sequel, and the absence of any book entries in respect of the first engine, and the incomplete and inaccurate entries in regard to the second, are further indications of a certain slackness in working generally.

I therefore consider that the immediate responsibility for the accident must be shared by Samuel Pitt and James Walsh. Both were men of long service; Walsh has 16 years' service as a signalman, and Pitt 27 years' total service, for 7 of which he has been a driver. Walsh had, as related, practically completed his 8 hours' tour of duty, and Pitt had been on duty about 4 hours.

No blame is, I think, attributable to the other railway servants concerned. I accept Forrest's contention that he heard no message in regard to coupling, and saw nothing of the second engine until he reached No. 5 box. Parkinson, the driver of the L. & Y. train, stated that he saw nothing of the standing engine, his attention being occupied by linking up his engine at the time; all signals were off for his train. Lastly, the signalmen in No. 5 box cannot, in my opinion, be held responsible. I accept their contention that they knew nothing of the second engine, and Dickinson is, I think, to be excused for failing to observe the Carlisle engine (whose presence he had no reason to suspect) on the main line, in view of its distance from his box, and the number of red lights which were probably in the vicinity.

4. The importance of Preston Station, and the very large number of light engine movements of this kind which are made, make the desirability of track circuiting so apparent that special advocacy as a result of this case is hardly necessary. It is sufficient to point out that none of the many contributory causes would have had the effect they did, had the section of line on which the Carlisle engine was standing been track circuited, and the relative signals thereby locked. The L. & N. W. Rly. Co. has already, I understand, had a comprehensive scheme of the kind prepared, and, in view of the conditions obtaining here, I suggest that its execution, at any rate as regards the section of the down Fleetwood line between the engine shed connections and the next signal ahead, should no longer be delayed.

I have, etc.,

G. L. HALL,

*Major R.E.*

The Director-General,  
Public Safety & General Purposes Dept.,  
Ministry of Transport.