

NORTH UNION RAILWAY.

*Railway Department, Board of Trade,
Whitehall, February 1, 1854.*

SIR,

North Union
Railway.

I AM directed by the Lords of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade to transmit to you the enclosed copy of a report which they have received from their inspecting officer upon the accident which occurred on the 7th ultimo at the Springs Branch junction on the North Union Railway.

The accident appears to have occurred in consequence of there not having been any night watchman at this junction; and it would appear from the inspecting officer's report, that a night pointsman has since been appointed.

My Lords direct me to express their surprise that the directors of the London and North Western Railway have hitherto omitted to place a night pointsman at a point of junction between a branch line and an important main line of railway through which it has been the custom for trains to pass in the night; and they trust that if there should be any other junctions in the same circumstances, the warning which this accident has afforded them will cause them to take immediate steps to appoint night pointsmen at such junctions.

I have, &c.,

*The Secretary of the
London and North Western Railway Company.*

JAMES BOOTH.

SIR,

York, January 27, 1854.

IN compliance with the instructions contained in your letter of the 19th instant, I have the honour to report, for the information of the Lords of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade, the result of my inquiry into the circumstances attending the collision, which occurred on the 7th instant, at the Springs Branch junction of the North Union Railway.

This portion of the North Union Railway is worked by the London and North Western Railway Company. The Springs Branch is used solely for coal traffic; it leads to the collieries of three companies, each of which has its own engines, drivers, and breaksmen; and it joins the main line about two miles to the south of Wigan.

At a quarter past 5 o'clock on the morning of the 7th instant a coal train, consisting of an engine, tender, and fourteen waggons, belonging to the Kirkless Hall Colliery Company, and with a driver and two breaksmen in the employment of that company, came out from the branch. In order to get to the down main line towards Wigan, it was necessary that they should cross the up main line. As the coal train was in the act of crossing the up line, the mail train from Wigan arrived, and ran into the four last waggons.

A pointsman in the service of the London and North Western Railway Company, was stationed at the Springs Branch junction, to control the passage of trains on to the main line by day; but there was not any night pointsman. It appears, however, to have been the practice, to a certain extent, to wake the pointsman, when trains quitted the branch at an earlier hour than usual. The pointsman states that he has been called up by the servants of one of the colliery companies, almost every morning for the last three months; but the statements of the driver and breaksmen of the Kirkless Hall Company, lead to the conclusion, that they have frequently passed the junction without waking the pointsman. It seems that on the present occasion they did not know whether the mail train had passed or not; but that one of the breaksmen of the coal train went about a quarter of a mile up the line with a light, to stop any train approaching on the up line, whilst the other breaksmen turned the junction points. The driver of the mail train does not appear to have seen the breaksmen's light, or any other sign of danger than the light on the engine of the coal train, which gave him just time enough to shut off his steam, and reverse his engine, before coming in contact with the coal waggons.

The mail train was nearly an hour behind time, in consequence of the lateness of the train from the north.

I am glad to learn that the London and North Western Railway Company have now appointed a night pointsman to the Springs Branch junction. I

would beg, however, to suggest for their serious consideration, that it would appear to be more for the safety of the public that they should employ their own engines, drivers, and breaksmen for all the coal trains run over the portion of the North Union Railway which is under their control, than that they should permit any of these trains to be worked by the servants and with the engines of the colliery companies.

The Secretary of the

Railway Department Board of Trade.

I have, &c.,

H. W. TYLER, *Lieut. R.E.,*

Inspector of Railways

MIDLAND RAILWAY.

*Railway Department, Board of Trade,
Whitehall, January 28, 1854.*

SIR,

I HAVE been directed by the Lords of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade to transmit to you, for the information of the directors, the enclosed copy of the report of their inspecting officer upon the accident which occurred on the 10th instant, at a siding near Frocester, on the Midland Railway.

*The Secretary of the
Midland Railway Company.*

I have, &c.,

JAMES BOOTH.

SIR,

Manchester, January 24, 1854.

In compliance with the instructions contained in your letter of the 12th instant, I have the honour to report, for the information of the Lords of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade, the result of my inquiry into the circumstances which attended the collision on the 10th instant, at the gravel pits, near the Frocester station of the Midland Railway.

The gravel pits referred to are about one mile and three quarters to the south of the Frocester station; and as the gravel is used for ballasting the line, there is at this point, a siding, in which the ballast trains are formed. This siding is protected by a main signal, and by two distant signals, the one at 400 and the other 700 yards from the main signal. The ballast waggons are drawn up from the gravel pits by horses, and placed, two at a time, in the siding, preparatory to their being conveyed away by an engine, when a train is formed. At the end of the siding, nearer to the gravel pits, are a pair of points, leading, either across the up main line to the down main line, or to the siding. The points are only twenty-eight yards from the up main line; they are not self-acting, but the lever, which is weighted for the siding, requires to be worked in both directions, on account of the quantity of mud which is splashed about by the horses. These points were under the charge of a servant of the contractor, by whom the ballast was being removed from the gravel pits. The signals, and the points on the main lines from the siding, were worked by a servant of the Midland Railway Company.

It appears that on the 10th instant, as the driver of the horses was taking two waggons from the mouth of the pit towards the siding, his horses were frightened by the approach of a train from Bristol; and on looking round, he suddenly discovered that his waggons, instead of being on the siding, had passed through the points in the wrong direction, and were within a few feet of the up line. He instantly, according to his own account, turned his horses' heads, and endeavoured to get the waggons out of the way, but did not succeed in preventing their being struck by the approaching train. The contractor's pointsman, whose duty it was to attend to the siding points, is now undergoing a month's imprisonment for his share in the accident, and I had not therefore the opportunity of examining him. The company's signalman states that he remarked, a few minutes before the accident, that the 7.30 A.M. up train from Bristol was nearly due; that he saw then that the main lines were clear; and, after putting on his signal lamp, saw the train approaching pretty punctually at 8.25 P.M. Hearing the driver's whistle, he looked to see that his signals were showing "all right," and did not notice the position of the ballast waggons until the train came into collision with them.