

The Bristol Mercury, Saturday, 10th June 1865

SERIOUS RAILWAY ACCIDENT NEAR KEYNSHAM

A collision of a very serious character occurred on the Great Western Railway near Keynsham at midnight on Tuesday. It appears that the driver of the ordinary passenger train, leaving Paddington at 8.10pm., had pulled up on an embankment half-a-mile east of Keynsham – between Keynsham and Salford – about twelve o'clock on Tuesday night, for the purpose of examining the crank-axle of the engine, as from something that had occurred he believed that it was damaged, or that an obstruction of some kind interfered with the proper action of the machinery.

It is stated that on the train being stopped a guard was sent back some distance with a danger-signal because it was known that the special mail train leaving London at 8.46 could not be far behind. He shortly afterwards came back, the driver having discovered that the engine was all right, but the passengers by this time were getting very anxious about the stoppage, and fearing that the mail would soon be upon them, many begged the guard to open the doors.

There was fog at the time, and the apprehensions of the passengers were just being allayed by their seeing the train again about to start, when the noise of the approaching mail train sent a thrill of terror through their frames. All their apprehensions of danger immediately returned. In vain the several doors were tried by the now frantic inmates, who repeated their requests that they should be opened.

The driver, hoping to get up speed in sufficient time to escape from the approaching train, used his utmost efforts to get his train away, but it was now too late. The passengers, almost maddened by the assurance of approaching danger, were in a fearful state of excitement, and many leaped out of the windows, regardless of the lesser danger to which they thus exposed themselves.

Immediately behind the engine and tender was a passenger's luggage van, next came a second-class carriage, with 25 or 30 passengers, then a first-class carriage, with several occupants, and lastly, a horse-box, with two cows and a pony in the stalls.

In the last compartment of the first-class carriage was a commercial gentleman, supposed to be Mr. G. E. Martin, of 2, Melbery-terrace (town not known). Fortunately, he was in possession of a key with which he opened the door of his compartment, and with three other travellers he got on to the embankment with those who had leaped from the second class carriage windows in time to see the mail dash past them and run with fearful violence into the carriage from which they had just made their escape so happily.

In the dense fog the engine-driver and stoker of the mail could see nothing of the passenger train until they were also close upon it, and dashing into the horse-box it smashed the last compartment of the first-class carriage to splinters. Strange to say the other compartments of this carriage escaped almost uninjured.

Scarcely had five minutes elapsed when a third train of empties, returning from Bath, came on, and in the darkness this also dashed into the mail, smashing the ends of some carriages, and breaking the lamps used by officials in the mail vans into a thousand atoms.

The stoker of the mail train (Edgar) was thrown violently back on the tender, and received such severe contusions of the face that he was obliged to be taken to the Hospital in Bristol. The driver escaped without injury.

In the last compartment of the second-class carriage was Mr. Lowe, traveller for Messrs. Crowe and Co., of Bristol, and having extricated his legs from the splinters of the crushed seats and finding the roof off he got out through the top of the carriage, and was followed by his five or six fellow-travellers in that compartment. He immediately hastened to help those in the other compartments. In the next to that in which he had been were Mr. and Mrs. Floyd, and several others.

They were all more or less suffering from their legs being jammed between the crushed seats, and their heads being contused with the blows from the upper partition of the carriage. Mr. Floyd had severe bruises about the thighs and legs, and was too much injured to render his wife assistance.

Mrs. Floyd was so tightly jammed between the two opposite seats that Mr. Lowe only succeeded in extricating her by leaving her dress, crinoline, and skirts amongst the shattered seats, and she was got out in an almost naked state. In this condition she had to remain for a considerable time before the fragments of her clothes were obtained for her.

Mr. George Reeves, of 13, Bryanstone-street, Portman-square, London, and Mr. Percy, of Queen's-road, Hammersmith, were also amongst those in this compartment, and they received some severe contusions. In the next compartment were Mr. Vowles, brush-maker, of Castle-street, and several others. Mr. Vowles received some severe injuries on the head, and one of his legs was broken; the others escaped with minor injuries.

A rather singular incident occurred with regard to the horse-box. After the collision the cows were found uninjured, with the exception that one of them lost a horn; and not long afterwards they could be seen quietly grazing at the bottom of the embankment. The pony, however, was not to be found, but on the carriages being taken to Bristol, the animal was discovered on the top of the first-class carriage, quite dead. It appears that the force of the collision knocked out the end of the partitions of the box, and carried the pony on to the top of the carriage.

The station-master at Keynsham, Mr. Owers, who sleeps on the premises, was immediately aroused, and the station, which had been in total darkness, was quickly lit up, the danger signals hoisted, and one of the engines despatched to Bristol for assistance. Messengers were also despatched to Saltford and Bath to apprise the railway officials of the disaster.

The porter of the brass works at Keynsham (Cooper), P.C. Fry, and others, exerted themselves in getting brandy, &c., for the injured and affrighted passengers, amongst whom there were fortunately very few ladies.

On Mr. Graham, the efficient general superintendent at the Great Western Railway Terminus in Bristol hearing of the accident, he hastened to the spot, taking with him Messrs. Gardiner (Redcliff-hill), and Barrett (Bath), two medical gentlemen, the latter of whom he was fortunate in finding at the Bristol station.

The passengers were attended to by the medical gentlemen, and sent on to this city, when they were taken to the George Inn, Temple-gate, George Inn, Narrow Wine-street, and other places. Mr. Vowles was taken to the George, Narrow Wine-street, where he received every attention. A message was sent for his medical man, Mr. Humpage, but, in his absence from home, Mr. Gardiner and Mr. Barrett attended and set his fractured leg, using splinters from the carriage door or seat on which Mr. Vowles had been brought to Bristol.

He remains at the George Inn, and we hear that he is still in a very bad state. The injuries to the other passengers were of a minor character, and mostly consisted of badly-contused thighs and legs. The most valuable assistance was rendered to the passengers by Captain Vansittart^(see Research Note), of the Achilles, Plymouth, and we must also mention the untiring exertions of Mr. Graham, and the coolness and skill with which he superintended the arrangements requisite on such an emergency. The mails and officials of the post-office were sent on to Bristol as quickly as possible.

On visiting the spot on Wednesday morning, we found the permanent-way men busily engaged in repairing the slight injury which had been done to the rails and sleepers, and in removing the wreck of the passenger train. The engine and damaged carriages of the mail train were also there, the engine bearing some signs of the collision in the loss of its funnel. In some cases the sleepers and longitudinal transoms of the permanent way had been ploughed up, and these having been replaced, the down line was pronounced to be clear between one and two o'clock on Wednesday, and the traffic on it was resumed.

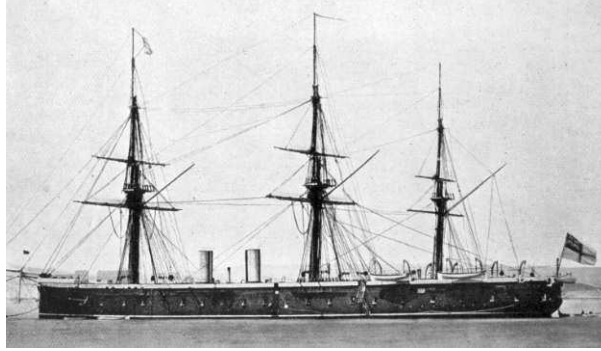
It may be considered a fact that some interest that both of the iron-built parcel and luggage vans came out uninjured. Robert Bryant, a collier, living at Mangotsfield, and who was in one of the carriages, lies at the Hospital suffering severe injuries across the knees. The stoker, George Eggon or Edgar, who lives in St. Philip's, is also detained at the Hospital.

RESEARCH NOTE

Captain Edward Westby VANSITTART (1818-1904)

Captain Vansittart of *HMS Achilles* was travelling on the train in June 1865 and his "*most valuable assistance was rendered to the passengers*". He entered the Royal Navy in 1837 aged 19 and rose to the rank of Vice Admiral (Retired). In command of *HMS Bittern* on the China Station from 1843 to 1855, he was constantly engaged in the suppression of piracy, and was honourably mentioned in despatches.

During the war with Russia his vessel was attached to the squadron blockading De Castries Bay, in the Gulf of Tartary. In September 1855 he destroyed a piratical fleet of 40 war junks and the pirate stronghold at Sheipoo, rescuing a party of English ladies who had fallen into the hands of the pirates. For that successful naval exploit he received the official thanks of the Chinese authorities and received a testimonial and presentation from the English and foreign merchants. He was made a C.B. in March 1867, and awarded a good service pension in Nov. 1869.



HMS Achilles

HMS Achilles, later re-named *Hibernia*, *Egmont*, *Egremont* and then *Pembroke*, was a 20-gun broadside ironclad frigate launched in 1863 and was the first iron ship to be built at a Royal Naval dockyard. Commissioned at Chatham in 1864 *HMS Achilles* was first commanded by Captain Vansittart (until 1868).

Information source for this research note:
www.pdavis.nl, en.wikipedia.org, en.wikisource.org (28 June 2016)

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