

# Hetton-le-Hole Herald

The Newsletter for Hetton Local History Group

Volume ...1..... Issue ..1..... Date. October 2009

## Summary

**.This article deals with the sad consequences of a day out in 1928 for a number of women from Hetton who made a trip to Scarborough but never returned to the village following a train crash at Darlington on their way home.**

## A Sad Day Out

On Thursday June 27th 1928 a group of ladies belonging to Hetton Mothers Union together with friends and relatives embarked upon a daytrip to Scarborough. They boarded a train at Fence Houses station together with other passengers all destined for the resort on the Yorkshire coast. The train went via Darlington, York and Malton arriving in Scarborough shortly after mid morning.

It was a clear day, sunny, but not particularly warm because of a sea breeze coming off the North Sea. On arrival at their destination the Mothers Union members and friends split up and went about their business. Some made for the lift to the sea front while others stayed in the town to look at the shops.

The group, like many others who had travelled on the train, had a very enjoyable day and at 8.30. p.m. they began to congregate at the station ready to board the train back home.

Shortly after 8.55 p.m. the excursion train pulled out of Scarborough station with a full load of passengers most of whom were in third class compartments, for the two hour journey back to Fence Houses station then on to Newcastle. On the journey to York the train was held up for a short time and was running approximately eighteen minutes late, time which the driver hoped to make up as he ran northwards.

The train achieved speeds of 60mph on the homeward run passing through Thirsk and Northallerton before approaching Bank Top Sta-

tion at Darlington. Nearing the station it passed through "calling on" signals indicating that the "down through" (avoiding line) had clear signals for the train to proceed at speed through the station. Shortly after passing the platform it collided head-on with a stationary engine and some vehicles belonging to a parcels train which was engaged in shunting.

The excursion train No. 2164 (4-4-2) had 11, 8 wheel bogie coaches attached with a total weight of 441 tons 14 cwt collided with a parcels train pulled by engine No. 2369 with 10 vehicles attached. This train was made up with 3 carriage/truck bogies, 3 horse box bogies and 6 luggage vans weighing a total of 227 tons 14cwt.

Due to the speed and the type of impetus the roll of casualties on the excursion was exceptionally heavy, owing to the telescoping of the 2nd and 3rd carriages of the excursion train. Both carriages were fully loaded at the time of impact and as a result 25 passengers were killed or subsequently died from their injuries. A further eighty-two passen-



gers were injured, of which 45 were severely injured and needed to be detained in hospital.

Driver D McNulty, with 20 years service as a driver and fireman V.R. Bryant with 6 years experience were on the footplate of engine no. 2164, the excursion train. The guard F. Hadwin who rode in the rear vehicle was in charge. They all survived the crash and were able to give a full account of the incident as they saw it.

It was some months before the inquiry was able to report and the driver gave his evidence. They passed Croft Junction south of Darlington at a speed of about 35 miles per hour and this was increased to 45 mph once the distance signal for the station showed clear. On approaching the station they heard clicking noises which must have been the train passing through points directing them on to the down line from the down through line. Within a few seconds they saw ahead of them an engine headlight and the brakes were immediately applied as an emergency. However their momentum was so great that they were unable to stop and they ploughed head on into the engine and tender of the stopped parcel train No. 2369. There were no more than 2 seconds for the driver to react to the danger.

The first and heaviest effect of the momentum of the impact was

engine and tender which was pushed back along the No. 1 platform line destroying the four vehicles behind it. Then followed the derailment and overturning of the engine (No. 2184) which finally came to rest 65 yards from the point of collision. The final surge forward of the coaches was absorbed in the three front vehicles, and resulted in the telescoping which took place between the second and third.

The collision took place at around 18 minutes past eleven and it was now dark. This fact hindered the rescue attempts which began very shortly after the event. There was naturally chaos on the excursion train as the dying and injured cried for help. It was not long before trained medical staff (but only six in number) arrived from the station. Qualified medical staff arrived on the site within 25 minutes and equipment such as stretchers, bandages and lifting equipment were soon in evidence.

It was many hours before the dead were extricated from the crushed vehicles. Fortunately the vehicles had been lit with electric lights; had they been of the old gas light type then the danger of fire would have been more apparent and the death toll much higher.

All the evidence at the enquiry indicated to the fact that the blame entirely fell on the driver of the parcels train a Mr. Bell and the shunter Mr. Morland who was in charge of the operation that night.

The shunting procedure was one which was conducted at least three times a week and which had been carried out on numerous occasions previously by Mr Morland.

The driver Mr Bell was a relatively inexperienced driver having only on one previous occasion made the journey from Newcastle to Darlington. He was unfamiliar with the shunting procedure and the signalling of that location. He admitted that he had proceeded past two signals set at danger and that points ahead had been changed to allow him to do so during the shunting process.

The shunter Morland was equally culpable since he was aware that Bell's train had passed through signals set at danger and considering his knowledge and experience in the circumstances he should have applied the brake to stop this action. This he could easily have done before the engine reached the junction with the down main line.

The only saving grace was that Bell, once he saw the other train approaching realised the danger and released the brakes of his train to lessen the impact.

The report on the accident does not tell of the actions taken against both the driver Bell and the shunter Morland. Probably both lost their jobs as a result of their actions or lack of them.

There were a number of specific groups of people on the train associated with organisations as well as

friends and families. Thus some of these people from clubs and organisations etc. Lost many of their members. Also people from the same village or town were involved in the tragedy bringing great sor-



The overturned excursion engine, No. 2164, about to be lifted during the clearing up process.

row to these communities.

The devastation and damage was much more than would be expected today since the coaches were made of wood and between 17 and 29 years of age. Consequently the design with wooden headstocks (end walls) easily sheared and collapsed from the metal bogies which carried them, once the impact took place. As the carriages telescoped and broke up much of the wood splintered, causing injury and death to the occupants.

For days afterwards the communities from which the dead and injured came were in severe shock. The effects of the disaster were felt many months after the incident. Particularly in Hetton, a mining community felt the loss of many

of its Mothers Union members.

Some time after the disaster the names of the Mothers Union victims were inscribed on a screen in the parish church of St. Nicholas. Being placed close to the altar the inscription was a constant reminder to those who came to take communion at the altar, of the great loss to both families and the community at large.

Unfortunately the destruction by fire of the church in November 2006 also claimed the screen and no visible reminder now exists except in the hearts and minds of church-goers and families.

#### The dead from Hetton-le-Hole were as follows

Mrs Hannah Todd, Barnes House aged 31,

Mrs Sarah Young, Lyons Colliery aged 46,

Mrs Sarah Maddison, 66 Station Road, aged 53,

Mrs Lily Race, 10 Rectory Road, aged 38,

Mrs Charlotte Blackburn, 23 Four Lane Ends, aged 45,

Mrs Martha Smith, Eppleton Hall, aged 65,

Mrs Alice Poulton, New Inn, Four Lane Ends, aged 38.

William Henry Gough, Solicitor, Mill House, 74 Station Road, aged 59 ,

Mrs Mary Gough, Mill House, 74 Station Road, aged 56,

Mary Ellen Harker, 18 Rectory Road, aged 24,

Mary Ellen Jones, 26 Springwell Terrace aged 43,

Ann Beckwith, 64 Four Lane Ends, aged 42,

Margaret Thompson, 20 Four Lane Ends, aged 51,

Isabella Taylor Foster, 18 Wear Street, aged 50 years,

Mrs Mary Watson, 15 Murton Street, Murton Colliery, aged 33.

In addition there were a number of dead from Newcastle, Durham and South Hylton.

The mere fact that a number of the dead were Mothers Union members meant that the organisation would forever remember the sad loss imposed upon them.

Mr Gough, the only male from Hetton to die in the crash, was a well-known solicitor. His wife also died in hospital 12 hours after the incident. They were one of three double family tragedies. The others being two brothers from Wallsend and Mrs Hannah Todd and her mother Mrs Martha Smith, both from Hetton.

Three other passengers from Hetton were injured and all requires hospital treatment. They were :- Mrs Dorothea Smith, wife of the Rector in Hetton who received serious lacerations to her legs, Mrs Hannah E Tait living at 30 Station Road who was treated for a severe injury to a leg and shock. The third person was Mrs Carter aged 34 of Four Lane Ends who suffered serious injuries to her left ear.

The news of the crash at Darlington was soon conveyed along the line to the stations at Durham, Fence Houses and Newcastle. At Fence Houses a special bus was laid on to pick up the people from Hetton and Murton and convey them to their homes. Soon word spread back to the townsfolk at Hetton even at the late hour and members of families, once they established the basic facts, made arrangements to travel to Darlington hoping that they were so see injured relatives rather than go through the procedure of having to identify dead bodies.

Three man who remain unidentified, fearing that their wives were involved in the accident arrived at Darlington by car at 4 a.m. They were taken to the mortuary where a ghastly surprise awaited them. Relatives of each lay side by side, cold in death.

It can be seen on examining the information above that four victims lived in the same close area, namely Four Lane Ends, three came from

the area of Rectory Road and four from Station Road.

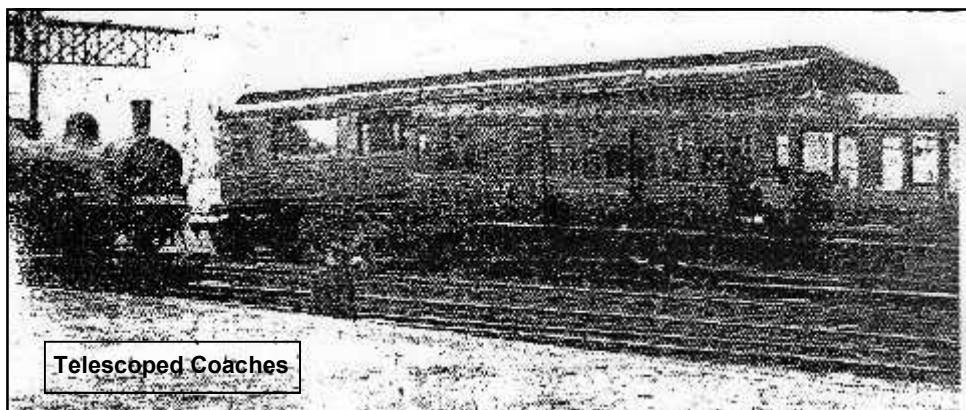
The party to Scarborough was not officially organised by the Mothers Union. It was made up of members and friends, who arranged the trip among themselves. They were accompanied by Mrs Dorothea Smith, wife of the Rector at Hetton who is an enrolled member. Mrs Maddison of 66 Station Road who died in the crash was the Secretary of the Mothers Union.

The Four Lane Ends, a street leading from Hetton to Easington Lane had four houses where husbands lost their wives. They were Mrs Margaret Thompson, wife of Frederick Thompson, a labourer living at number 20; Mrs Charlotte Blackburn, wife of Mr John William Blackburn, a tailor of number 23; Mrs Ann Beckwith, wife of John Beckwith, a colliery horse keeper, living at number 67 and Mrs Alice Boulton, wife of Mr William Boulton landlord of the New Inn at the bottom of Four Lane Ends.

News of the disaster came to Hetton little by little. At first it was reported that only five were killed. By daylight on the Friday it had increased to seven. As the day wore on the number rose to twelve and then to fourteen. It was then that the full effect of the catastrophe began to be realised.

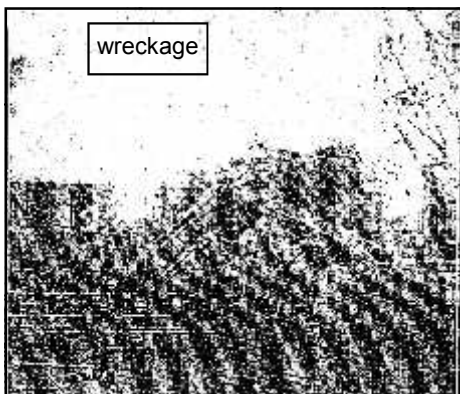
The double family tragedies were particularly difficult for families to bear. The sad case where mother and daughter were killed was particularly upsetting since it hit two generations. Mrs Martha Smith, a widow, was housekeeper to Mr. J F Bell, of Eppleton Hall, agent to the Hetton collieries. Her daughter Mrs Todd, wife to Joseph Todd, a wagon driver had previously been a nurse at Sherburn Hospital prior to her marriage.

Mr Gough was a well known solicitor in the Hetton and Houghton area and had been in practice for many years. He was the son of a former vicar of Chilton Moor, a parish between Hetton and Fence Houses.



According to the Northern Echo the day following the crash, "Darlington's last lights had been dimmed when the call went out to those trained in first aid, around the town to answer the need for medical staff. Many hundreds of volunteers arrived on the scene of the crash many men and women having dressed quickly donning clothes over their night garments. On arrival they assisted in the rescue work and continued ceaselessly throughout the night and left off only when they had to go to work in the morning."

The last body was recovered at 4 a.m. After over four and a half hours untiring rescue work, during which local doctors performed yeoman service to those who were trapped in the wreckage. Sadly many were beyond medical help. The work of the doctors and ambulance men as well as that of willing rescuers is beyond praise. One Darlington doctor worked in the thick of the stricken area for nearly five hours and others for a slightly shorter time.



Once the dead and injured had been attended to the task of clearing up the wreckage began and thoughts were turned to getting specialist cranes and other equipment to the scene.

By nine o'clock little or nothing remained of the two telescoped coaches. The ground however was covered with splinters and broken glass and a few scattered garments. The overturned locomotive was still there as were some of the damaged coaches of the excursion train. The least badly damaged carriages had been pulled clear and the parcels engine was removed later in the day.

In a nearby station waiting room were heaped handbags, umbrellas, overcoats and other luggage belonging to the victims. There were throughout the day visits by sorrowing relatives claiming the personal effects.

### Sympathy of the King & Queen

Mr William Whitelaw, chairman of the LNER, yesterday received a message from the King and Queen :-

**"The King and Queen are so much distressed to hear of the serious fatal railway accident at Darlington. Their Majesties ask that an expression of their sympathy may be conveyed to the bereaved families and also to those who have been injured, and will be glad to be informed as to their condition."**



Mrs H Todd

Mrs M E Harker



Mrs Maddison

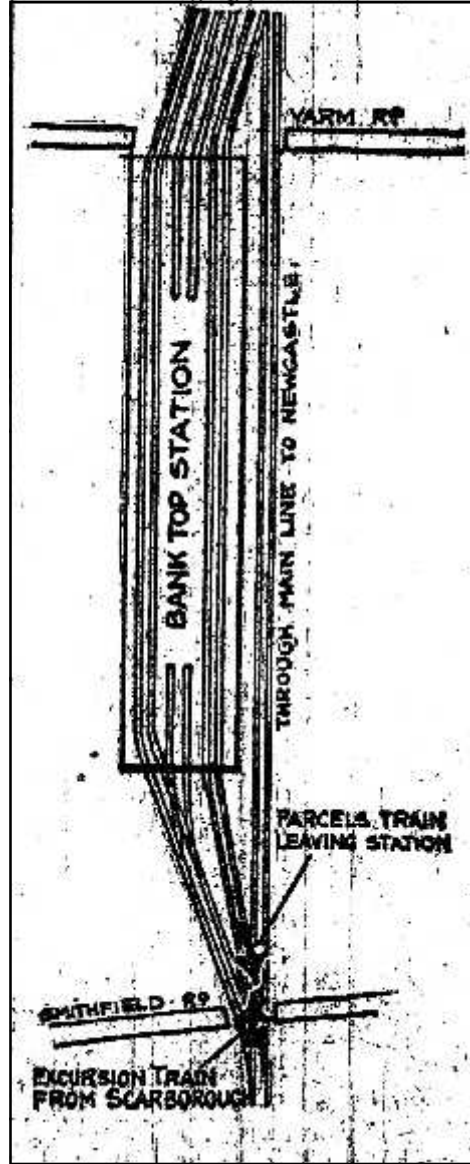
Mr Gough



Mrs Thompson

Mrs Race

Some of the Hetton folk who died in the disaster



A diagram showing the layout of the crash as depicted by the Northern Echo