

13 Dalton Men who died in the Norton Fitzwarren¹ train crash 11 Nov 1890

Norton Fitzwarren is a small village on the Great Western mainline just north-east of Taunton in Somerset. It was the site of two significant railway accidents, in 1890 (ten dead) and 1940 (twenty seven dead). *Recently (July 2019) I learned that there is a memorial to both accidents at Norton Fitzwarren Village Hall – see the end of this document.*

On 11th November 1890, "A special train, which consisted of a tank-engine, running funnel in front, two eight wheeled composite carriages, and a brake-van with the guard at the tail of the train, ran at full speed into a down goods train, which had been placed on the up line on the Taunton side of Norton Fitzwarren station. Ten passengers in the front coach were killed, and nine others as well as the driver and fireman of the special train were seriously injured. The guard of the train was also hurt, but not seriously." ²(from original report, published 15 Nov 1890)

Of the ten killed, three are buried in Dalton cemetery. They are John Bradley of Marton, whose family had moved to 39 Ashworth Street, Dalton; Matthew Benson from Ulverston Road, Lindal, and Thomas Smith from Cobden Street, Dalton. All are listed as labourers in the Cemetery log. They were returning to Dalton from South Africa where they were miners. The contemporary news account below is very explicit in its account of the victim's condition. Following the accident it was recommended that signals should have telephones attached, enabling the locomotive crew to contact the signal box if kept waiting for more than 3 minutes.



A John Bradley 17/04/14



B Matthew Benson 24/04/14



C Thomas Smith 24/04/14

Where are the graves?

The graves are in 2 different locations:
(A) Bradley is the furthest west headstone in the Cemetery, to the right of the end of the wall heading west from the South Chapel.
(B) Benson & (C) Smith are in the large adjacent plot, heading back to the South Chapel. One is vertical, the other flat.

In loving memory of John Bradley of Marton, who was killed in the Norton Fitz-warren Railway Disaster near Taunton, Somersetshire, while returning from South Africa 11 Nov 1890, aged 53 years. Also Elizabeth, wife of the above, died Feb 13th 1924, aged 86 years. Also Martha Jane, daughter of the above, who died April 13th 1873, aged 1 year and 10 months. Also Elizabeth Ann Airey, daughter of the above, who died Decr. 22nd, 1898, aged 30 years.

In loving memory of Matthew Benson of Lindal-in-Furness, who was killed in the Norton Fitz-warren Railway Disaster near Taunton, Somersetshire, while returning from South Africa 11 Nov 1890, aged 49 years. Also Lucy, his beloved wife, who died March 8th 1932, aged 82 years.

In loving memory of Thomas Smith, of Dalton, who was killed in the Norton Fitz-warren Railway Disaster near Taunton, Somersetshire, while returning from South Africa 11 Nov 1890, aged 48 years. Also Mary, wife of the above, who died Feb, 7th, 1920, aged 73 years. Also Thomas Sheperd, son of the above, who died March 29th 1889, aged 20 years and was interred at Kimberley Cemetery, South Africa. Also Bertha Gertrude, daughter of the above, who died July 11th 1898, aged 17 years. Also William Percival, their son, who died in Vogelfontein Hospital, Oct. 28th, 1910, aged 32 years. Also Ronald Thomson, their adopted son, killed in action at Delville Wood, July 17th, 1916, aged 17 years. Also Agnes Eleanor, daughter of the above, who died July 3rd 1932, aged 60 years.

Thy will be done.

¹ <http://spellerweb.net/rhindex/UKRH/GreatWestern/Broadgauge/BristolExeter/Norton.html>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norton_Fitzwarren_rail_crash_%281890%29
<https://sites.google.com/site/hazeldakers/family-history-stories-and-articles-by-hazel-dakers/newspapers-tell-the-story-of-a-train-crash>
<http://www.tauntonian.com/railwayaccident.html>

² http://www.railwaysarchive.co.uk/documents/BoT_NortonFitzwarren1890.pdf

The *Barrow News* of Saturday 15 November 1890 carried the following account:

TERRIBLE RAILWAY COLLISION
A MAIL TRAIN WRECKED
SHOCKING FATALITIES AND INJURIES
THREE FURNESS MEN KILLED AND ONE INJURED
ARREST OF A SIGNALMAN

A terrible collision, resulting in the death of ten persons, and serious injury to ten or a dozen more, occurred on Tuesday morning on the Great Western Railway near Taunton. The disaster is the most serious that has happened on the Great Western Railway for nearly sixteen years, and it was accompanied by the additional horror of fire, which happily is almost unique in the history of British railway catastrophes. The scene of the collision, Norton Fitzwarren Junction, is about two miles from Taunton, and two branch lines to Barnstaple and Minehead³ there join the main Bristol and Exeter roads. The traffic is consequently very large, and the station was considered an important one. George Rice, a signalman, who has been in the service of the company for many years, went on duty at nine o'clock on Monday night in the principal signal box, situated on the south side of the station, a post which he has occupied for twenty years past. He was, therefore, an exceptionally experienced man, and every confidence was placed in him. Rice was aware that after the ordinary passenger traffic had been disposed of a couple of special trains, carrying the mails and passengers from the Donald Currie South African steamer *Norham Castle*, would pass through Norton Fitzwarren, but there was nothing unusual in the information, as in the course of his service he had dealt with hundreds of similar trains. The first of the two specials, containing the mails and only two passengers, who had left the rest at Plymouth to follow them later, passed through before midnight without incident, and nothing occurred to distract Rice's attention until shortly after one o'clock, when he had to deal with a slow down⁴ goods train.

For some reason, which doubtless the Great Western Railway Company will be able satisfactorily to explain, this slow train had to be shunted at Norton in the interval between the passing of the two specials, and the risk was further increased by the fact that it had simultaneously to be got out of the way of an express down goods train bound for Plymouth, which passes through Norton without stopping. Rice shunted the slow goods train on to the up line, and the express goods passed through all right. The slow goods train stood on the up line about 100 yards from the signal box, and incredible as it may seem, Rice admittedly forgot all about it. The men in charge of the slow goods, knowing that they were in a position of danger, chafed against the delay, but, as far as is known, they did not attempt to attract Rice's attention, because they had naturally expected every moment to receive the signal to move on to the down line. The engine of the slow goods train was facing the signal box, and, of course, stood right in the way of any up train which might be allowed to pass the box. A fine rain was falling, and the night was very dark, but all signals could be seen plainly. Suddenly a dull, rumbling sound broke the stillness of the night, and simultaneously the electric bells in the signal box rang out sharply. Rice had received the signal that the second special was nearing Norton, and, oblivious of the slow goods train which still stood on the up track, lowered the home signal, which until then had stood at danger, and formed the only barrier between safety and disaster, and replied 'line clear'.

A few minutes later the roar of the special, approaching at the rate of nearly 60 miles an hour, and the glare of its head lights told without other warning of the catastrophe which was at hand. The driver, fireman, and guard of the slow goods train shouted in mad affright, and setting their locomotive whistle blowing, jumped from their posts, where otherwise certain death awaited them, and Rice frantically gripped his levers. But it was too late. The special dashed into the goods train with the tremendous momentum begotten of its great speed, and in another instant the line was blocked with the awful wreckage. Dowding, the goods fireman, who had scramble in his fright under a truck standing in the siding, was almost stunned by the mere sound of the collision. The shock was so terrific as to make the earth tremble and to waken some officials sleeping at the adjacent station. Both massive engines reared up with the impact, and for a moment it seemed that the special train would be hurled bodily over and upon to the goods trucks. But this, which would have terribly enhanced the magnitude of the disaster, was averted, for the stationary dead weight of the long heavily laden goods train resisted and sustained the shock of the engine and three comparatively light passenger carriages, with the result that the locomotive and tender of the latter were forced back and telescoped into the next carriage. But both engines were smashed and twisted out of shape, and the first and second passenger carriages wholly wrecked, were piled up into a heap 30 feet high. (*sic*)

The instant the collision occurred there arose a confusion of unnerving sounds, which those who heard them will never forget – the roaring and hissing of escaping steam, the frightened shouts of the uninjured, and the loud shrieks and pitiful groans of the wounded. The pitch darkness of the night, the flickering lights of lanterns, the fiery glow of the scattered embers of the engine furnaces, the dull red glare of the signal lamps, and the steady fall of the cold rain all

³ The Minehead branch is now (2014) the West Somerset Railway from Bishops Lydeard to Minehead. The section from Norton Fitzwarren to Bishops Lydeard is not currently in use. More information can be read at <http://www.wsra.org.uk/activities>

⁴ 'down' in this case means travelling away from London i.e. towards Exeter.

combined to make up a scene of terror and confusion probably unequalled in the railway history of England. It cannot be said that help was forthcoming as could have been desired, but the circumstances were bewildering for the coolest heads. Men were eager enough after the first dreadful feeling of panic and helplessness but they were few in number and in their haste they scrambled over the treacherous rails and slippery sleepers and ran in each other's way. Ere long however, passengers and officials recovered their nerve, and thenceforward every one worked with praiseworthy devotion and zeal. Their best qualities and strongest efforts were soon needed.

Now came the crowning horror of fire. Burning coals from the special engine had fallen among the splintered woodwork of the first passenger carriage, pinned beneath or among which were eight or ten men. Most of these were killed in the first instance, but there must have been more than one poor wretch still alive when the smoke and flame began to rise from the ghastly heap. Their sufferings, however, could not have been of long duration, and their agonised moans and cries had ceased long before the flames had been extinguished.

Mr. Kemp, the Norton station master, arrived on the scene within a few minutes of the collision, and took charge of the workers, volunteers, and officials. By his direction efforts were first made towards rescuing the injured, whose screams were heartrending. Some maddened sufferers seemed to think that gold could give priority in help, and panted out lavish offers of money as they were approached. Others were inarticulate with agony, and some were found unconscious amid their awful surroundings. The front carriage was one shapeless mess of iron and wood, beneath which the dead and wounded were pinned in all sorts of extraordinary positions difficult to reach. The work of rescue was in consequence very slow, for great care had to be exercised in moving beams and bars, and the appliances for doing this were at first quite inadequate, although supplemented by strong and eager arms, but as the morning wore on the numerous telegrams which had been early despatched by Mr. Kemp bore fruit in the arrival of breakdown gangs, and physicians and surgeons from Taunton, Exeter, Bristol, and other places on the Great Western system. The telegrams to Taunton met with an exceptionally prompt response in the person of Mr. Robinson, locomotive superintendent, who collected all the available men at the station, and started for Norton on a pilot engine.

Most of the passengers in the second carriage were removed with a little assistance, and the badly injured were rescued with comparatively little difficulty. The latter were then taken to Norton station, and received first attention from a German surgeon, who had been a fellow passenger with them. But several hours elapsed before all the occupants of the front carriage could be extricated from the wreckage. The massive remains of that carriage had to be, in fact, literally broken to pieces to enable the rescuers to get at the victims who lay beneath.

When the first alarm of fire was given it seemed as though the only course would be to let the flames have their way, but the thought of fellow creatures being slowly burned to death without some effort, however apparently futile, to save them, was entertained, if at all, only for a moment. As it turned out, the fire was more terrifying than serious, and water being abundant at the station, and even nearer the scene, the flames were subdued more readily than had thought to be possible. While the fire lasted, however, the heat was very great, as was proved by the ghastly condition of some of the bodies that were subsequently recovered from the ruins. The face of one man, subsequently identified by papers found on the body as a Mr. Bradley, was charred out of all semblance of humanity. Near by the rescuers came upon a more dreadful sight, that of a charred, headless corpse. The decapitation had been performed by a heavy beam, which had been crushed on to the man's throat at the moment when the engine telescoped into the front carriage, in the second compartment of which the victim was sitting with his face towards the locomotive. This mutilated trunk was one of the early discoveries made by the rescuers, but it was not until eight o'clock, several hours later, that the missing head was found almost at the bottom of the heap of wreckage. The remains have been identified as those of the Rev. Titus Bayley, a coloured missionary, who was on his way from the Cape to his native land, America, after several years arduous service in Africa. One of the survivors informed a reporter that he and five other men were in the second compartment of the front carriage, and he alone escape with his life. By one of those strange freaks so frequently remarked in railway collisions he was only slightly injured, while his fellow passengers were not only killed, but crushed and mutilated in a shocking manner. Another miraculous escape was the fortunate lot of a lady and gentleman and five children, who were travelling in the last compartment of the second carriage. The whole of the compartment was wrenched bodily off, and other damage was done, but the entire party escaped unhurt save for the shaking and some bruises. Three of the occupants of the first coach, which was telescoped into one shapeless compartment, attracted early and special attention by their cries and groans and pitiful appeals for help. By the time they were extricated, however, their wounds combined with the heat and smoke from the fire, had left but little life in them, and all died soon after they had been rescued. It has already been stated that it was necessary in order to get at some of those pinned beneath the wrecked carriages to chop through beams and other heavy wreckage. Several poor fellows narrowly escaped the axes of their would-be saviours, and one man actually received an ugly scalp wound in this manner, but he still survives. As quickly as could be the wounded and the dead alike were removed to an adjacent temperance hotel, where the former were most assiduously attended to by Drs. Farrant, Wilcox, Low, and other medical men, the value of whose services cannot be over-estimated.

LIST OF KILLED AND INJURED

As far as could be ascertained up till a late hour on Tuesday afternoon, ten passengers were killed, eight very seriously injured, and about a dozen injured in a minor degree.

The following is a list of those killed:

John Bradley, Dalton-in-Furness.

Arthur Carroll, Southsea.

John Reed, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Louis Cohen (German).

Matthew Benson, Lindal-in-Furness.

J G Morris, Wallsend-on-Tyne.

Titus Baglis (or Bagliol).⁵

Max Heinman (German).

Robert Walker, Highland Common, Yorkshire.

Thomas Smith, Cobden-street, Dalton-in-Furness.

The following are amongst those seriously hurt:-

F Shaw, Rickerby, Bishop Auckland, dislocation of the foot.

Joseph Bradley, Huddersfield, fracture of the thigh.

J Hall, electrician, Kimberley, much lacerated and severe shock.

Mr. Renwick, Essex bruised back.

Mr. Geddes, Aberdeen, internal injuries with acute hemorrhage. (*sic*)

Mr. Raymond, Sheffield, broken leg.

Mr. Benson, jun. Lindal-in-Furness, fracture of both legs.

Mr. G Mackenzie, Aberdeen, severe lacerations.

There were 47 passengers in the wrecked train.

The signalman, George Rice, is an old, trusted and experienced hand, 65 years of age, having been 35 years in the company's service, and 22 years of that time at Norton Station. He is a widower. About seven months ago, it appears, he met with an accident, being knocked down whilst crossing the line by a pilot engine. He received injuries to his head and ribs on that occasion, and has at times seemed unwell, but quite fit to perform his duties. He had been resting since Saturday, and did not go into the signal box till a few hours before the accident. The disaster caused the greatest excitement in the neighbourhood, and throughout the day the station was surrounded by a large crowd of the curious, whilst the adjoining thoroughfares were lined with vehicles of all descriptions. The dead-house seemed to form a never-failing attraction, and the police had great difficulty in preventing the unauthorised visits of the mob who sought an entry. The interior of this building presented a ghastly spectacle, the features of the dead being frightfully disfigured, whilst whole limbs were detached from some bodies.

It is stated that the Mr. Morris who was among the passengers killed was returning to his wife and three children at Walsall (*sic*) after three years at Johannesburg.

At Taunton police station, on Tuesday afternoon, George Rice, aged 64, signalman, was charged with neglect of duty as a pointsman at Norton Fitzwarren Station. He was formally remanded on bail until Saturday.

The news that three men from the neighbourhood of Dalton-in-Furness had been killed in the railway collision near Taunton, and a third (*sic*) had been seriously injured, created a very painful sensation. Smith, one of the killed, emigrated to South Africa about three years ago along with his son, but the latter died from fever shortly after his arrival. The father was returning home, and on his arrival at Plymouth he, along with the others who were going to Dalton, telegraphed to their relatives intimating their arrival, and saying they would be home sometime on Tuesday. The relatives met nearly all the trains arriving at Dalton, and the first news they had of any accident was the paragraph which appeared in the evening papers on Tuesday. This caused them great alarm, and further information was awaited with painful anxiety. Telegrams arrived realising their worst fears. Great sympathy is felt for them.

A SAD HOMECOMING

On enquiry at the residence of Mrs. Benson, Ulverston-road, Lindal, on Wednesday evening, our reporter was informed that her husband, Mr. Matthew Benson, left Lindal for the South African Gold Fields in March 1889, a year and eight months ago. Her son left 12 months last August to join his father in the Transvaal. A few weeks ago they received a letter from Mr. Benson announcing his intention of coming home by the steamer Norham Castle, which was expected at Plymouth Monday last. Mrs. Benson received a letter this week, which was as follows: - 'Bay of Biscay, s.s. Norham Castle, - My dear wife, - Just a line to let you know that we are both well, and we hope that you are all the same. The boat is playing at pickaxes with us now, but we expect to land at Plymouth to-night if all be well, and you can look for us the morning after. There will be a wire for Mrs. Smith saying that we have landed all safe. So no more at present from your dear loving husband, M. Benson.'

⁵ Called Bayley in the newspaper account above the list.

On Wednesday morning a letter was received from the Great Western Hotel, Norton Station, Somersetshire, written to the dictation of Mr. Benson's son, which stated that there had been a shocking accident on the railway, and his father, John Bradley, and Thomas Smith had been killed, and he himself had had both his legs fractured. Mrs. Benson's brother, Wm. Hurst, proceeded to Norton on Wednesday morning to identify the body and to see the son. Deceased leaves six or seven children. Mrs Benson expressed sorrow for the signalman in his position, and thought, as many others do, that Rice ought to have been pensioned off after the injury to his head. Much sympathy is expressed in Lindal and district, and throughout the Furness district, with the bereaved ones, when such preparations had been made for their home coming after a year or two's absence from the family hearth.

The Donald Currie Shipping Company have made numerous enquiries from Mr Blake, Government Emigration Agent, regarding the accident and the identification of the deceased. The Great Western Railway Co. have, we understand, officially sent for representatives of the deceased men to go to Norton and identify the remains.

On making enquiries we found that John Bradley left Marton for South Africa in January, 1889, along with several other Furness miners, and a few weeks ago a letter was received by Mrs Bradley, who had removed (*sic*) from Marton to 39, Ashworth-street, Dalton, stating his intention of coming home. On Tuesday morning about 7 o'clock, she received a telegram from her husband announcing his arrival at Plymouth, and stating that he would be home in the course of the day, and naturally the anticipations of seeing him after nearly two years absence were great, but suddenly all hope was doomed to disappointment, as the evening papers announced the terrible railway calamity, giving the names of the killed and wounded. Deceased leaves a family of three, the youngest being a lad of 15 years of age. Thomas Smith left Dalton about three years ago and was subsequently joined by his eldest son, who unfortunately was attacked with the typhoid fever, to which he succumbed at Kimberley. Mr Smith also telegraphed the safe arrival of the Norham Castle at Plymouth, and intimated that he would be home in the course of the day. He leaves a wife and family of five children. On Wednesday night Mrs Bradley and Mrs Smith journeyed to Somersetshire, accompanied by a Mr Dixon, for the purpose of identifying the bodies, which were enclosed in shells.

REPORTED DEATH OF ANOTHER FURNESS MAN

On Thursday, a report was extensively circulated in Dalton, that Thomas Benson, of Lindal, who had both his legs fractured, had succumbed. On inquiry, however, at Lindal the same night we were informed that the report was entirely without foundation. The young man's uncle (Mr W Hurst) telegraphed on Thursday morning that he had sat up with him all night and he had been very uneasy, but he again telegraphed in the afternoon, saying that Benson was nicely.

CONDITION OF THE INJURED

On inquiry at the Great Western Hotel on Wednesday morning, the nurses informed a correspondent that the whole of the injured, with the exception of Mr Thomas Benson, of Dalton-in-Furness, whose case is very serious, had passed a comfortable night and were progressing favourably. The line has now been cleared and traffic resumed. A number of people reached Norton Fitzwarren on Wednesday morning, but there is, however, but little to be seen as the wreckage has been piled in a heap by the side of the line. The dead bodies were in the charge of the police, and as far as could be ascertained none of the relatives had arrived, and uncertainty still prevailed as to the address of one or two of the deceased.

A BRAVE FURNESS MINER

An heroic incident is reported in connection with the disaster. Four compartments of the first carriage were occupied by miners from Furness and the north, who were returning after successful operations in Kimberley and Johannesburg. After the collision one of the miners, who was under a lot of *debris*, noticed one of his companions not far from him, and asked him to look after his wife and children. Just at this time the rescuing party came to the aid of the man who had been appealed to, when he said, 'Never mind me, go and help my mate there. We have been chums together, and worked in the mines, and made a little pile. I am single, while he is married, and has a wife and five children depending on him. Look to him first.' Other willing hands came to the rescue, and both men were got out in a deplorable state. There is, however, a sad sequel to the story, both men, who came from Dalton-in-Furness, expiring shortly afterwards.

Amongst the passengers' narratives we find that a passenger, named Charles Urich, said he was travelling with six others, including a black man, and John Bradley, said to belong to Liverpool, but supposed to be from Dalton. He felt the collision, and the whole carriage was immediately doubled up like a concertina, and inside the wreckage were five bodies jammed together, including the black man and Bradley. The train then took fire, and the wounded were screaming for assistance, but none could be rendered until the flames were subdued.

OPENING OF THE INQUEST

The inquest on the bodies of the ten persons killed in the railway collision near Taunton, on Tuesday, was formally opened on Wednesday and adjourned till this morning. It is alleged that Rice, the signalman, whose mistake caused the disaster, was recently laid up with concussion of the brain for three months, and that the Great Western Company

took him back without doing anything to test his capacity for his exacting duties. The defence to be put forward on Rice's behalf is that he was in such a condition of mind as not to be responsible for his actions.

The inquest on the bodies of the ten persons killed in the railway accident at Norton Fitzwarren Junction was concluded at Taunton on Thursday, so far as the taking of evidence was concerned, but owing to an oversight of the Coroner, who had come without the necessary documents, the jury were unable to record their verdict. Rice, the signalman who caused the collision, gave evidence. He admitted that he forgot the goods train was in the way when he signalled the line clear for the express. Since the accident with which he met a short time ago he had felt pains in his head, and on Monday night he was very unwell. The Great Western Company had offered him an easier place, but he had declined to accept it.

Rice, the signalman, is out on bail. The charge against him at present is neglect of duty. The police arrested him on the strength of his own statement, that he altogether forgot that the goods train was on the up line when he gave the signal for the mail to pass. He will probably be sent to trial for manslaughter, and Mr Tauli, who is retained for the defence, will, it is believed, call evidence showing that the man was physically unfit for the work, and that the injury he met with a few months ago had affected him in the head. His daughter states that on the previous Sunday Rice had complained he could not do the work, and had intimated his intention of resigning. All the bodies were placed in shells on Tuesday.

VERDICT – THE COMPANY CENSURED

The Coroner's jury at Taunton, yesterday, inquiring into the recent accident, gave practically a verdict of accidental death. They made no criminal finding against the signalman, but censured the Great Western Company for insufficient siding accommodation.

LATEST PARTICULARS

Mrs. Smith, Mrs Bradley, and others, who had been to Norton Fitzwarren, returned to Dalton yesterday afternoon. The bodies of the three men who were killed were left at Carnforth, and arrived at Dalton by a later train. The funerals will take place today. Mr Benson, jnr., who had both legs fractured, is doing nicely.

Barrow News 18 November 1890:

THE TAUNTON DISASTER

George Rice, 63, was charged before the Taunton divisional magistrates on Saturday with causing the death of 10 persons in the railway accident at Norton Fitzwarren, on November 11, by negligently signalling the up line clear to the Cape mail train when that line was obstructed by a goods train. Mr Pauli, (*or Tauli?*) appeared for the prisoner; Mr Clifton, of Bristol, for Noble, the driver, and Lowe, the guard of the goods train; and Mr Bowen, of Paddington, for the Great Western Railway Company. Frederick James Tovey, telegraph clerk in the employment of the company at Exeter, proved apprising all stations on the line between Exeter and Taunton of the despatch of the special ocean passenger train on the night of the accident. It was also sent to Victory Crossing, near Norton, on the Exeter side of Norton Station, and was acknowledged. Albert Allen, signalman at Victory Crossing, proved signalling the train as it passed his crossing at about one o'clock. After further evidence Rice was committed for trial at the assizes on a charge of manslaughter. The assizes open on Saturday next.

FUNERAL OF THE FURNESS VICTIMS

..... On Saturday afternoon the main streets were crowded to witness the funeral procession. Hundreds of persons had congregated in the cemetery, and large numbers followed the remains to the grave. The first to arrive at the cemetery was the funeral of Mr John Bradley, aged 53, who was interred in the Nonconformist ground, the burial service being read by Mr A. Brown, an evangelist from the Christian Meeting Room, Kirkby, who delivered a very earnest exhortation to the large crowd assembled. Suitable hymns were sung. We understand that the deceased, previous to emigrating to South Africa, attended the Christian Meeting House at Lindal. A very large concourse of people attended the funeral of Mr Matthew Benson, aged 49, of Lindal, the service being conducted very impressively by Rev. L Owen Lewis, vicar of Lindal-in-Furness, the choir from St. Peter's Church singing several appropriate hymns. The rev. gentleman offered at the grave side an exceedingly earnest prayer that God's blessing might rest on the widow and fatherless, and that He would let them want for nothing. There were several audible 'Amens' as the vicar concluded the prayer, and many tearful eyes and sorrowful countenances were noticeable. The Rev. T H Baines, M.A. curate-in-charge of St. Margaret's, read the burial service over the remains of Mr Thomas Smith, aged 48 years. Much sympathy was expressed by the spectators for the bereaved families. The coffins were literally strewn with the choicest bunches of flowers, wreaths, and crosses, sent by relatives and sympathetic friends.

On Sunday reference was made to the sad accident in most of the churches and chapels of Dalton and immediate neighbourhood.

THE TAUNTON RAILWAY DISASTER
NARRATIVE OF ONE WHO ESCAPED

On Thursday one of our reporters had an interview with Mr Richard Jardine, who was in the train which came into collision with a goods train at Norton Fitzwarren, last week, with such disastrous consequences. Mr Jardine, who at present resides at Staveley, near Kendal, resided some years at Dalton, where he is well-known. He is quite a young man, and about three years ago emigrated to the Cape, and returned, along with many others, on the Norham Castle, for the purpose of spending Christmas at home. His description of the accident, which he speaks of as being of a terribly trying and painful character, will be read with interest. He says:- We embarked at Cape Town, and had a very pleasant passage as far as Madeira, when it began to get lively. In the Bay of Biscay we experienced very rough weather, and we passed some vessels with their sails torn and a steamer with a broken mast. On landing at Plymouth there was much rejoicing amongst us, but those who were not in a hurry to get home stayed there to get a little rest. The rest of us, having passed the Customs officers, went to the station, and everyone seemed over-joyed and full of exuberance at having got home, some exclaiming 'Old England for ever,' 'Home at last,' and such like. They all seemed to think that now they were in England they were safe, and no accident could happen to them. It is hard to think, continued Mr Jardine, that their pleasant anticipations should be so soon put an end to, and that some of them should be smashed up so soon. We had very comfortable carriages indeed, all of them being wither first or second class, and well and comfortably cushioned. I was in the first compartment of the second carriage, and in the same compartment there was Cookson Britt, a minister, a Roman Catholic I think; a young man named Mackenzie, and a Miss Melville, who had come from South Africa, and was going to Edinburgh in charge of Mackenzie, both of them belonging to a village near Edinburgh. Before reaching the scene of the accident the train pulled up at a station to get water, I think, and one or two of us got out, when some of our companions who were in the first compartment of the first carriage, among these being Bradley, chaffed us. When the train was going at full swing we suddenly felt a jerk, and then came the smash, flinging us all about the compartment. We did not know what we were doing, but the clergyman said 'Do you think anyone is any worse?' The carriages, as I said before, were well-cushioned, and I am certain that but for this fact we should have been seriously injured. I am certain that the thick cushions saved us from the full effects of the collision. When we got out we found an awful sight. All the compartments of the first carriage appeared to have been pressed together like the bellows of a concertina, with the occupants squeezed up in a dreadful manner. The floor of our carriage appeared to have broken in the middle, and the footboard was raised as high as the window. We could not open the doors, and they were burst open, and a woman and a child was got out further on. Some of the passengers were so panic-stricken that they ran away. The sights we saw were dreadfully cruel. Many of the injured were calling out for brandy, and one man cursed me for not cutting his legs off. I am glad to say he is getting better. He does not belong to this district. There were some of them we could not get to, and we had to throw brandy to them. I stayed there till seven o'clock in the morning. During the whole of the time a little German doctor, who had been a passenger on the Norham Castle, went about with no shoes on, doing all he could for the injured passengers. Mr Jardine, when asked if he thought many lost their lives through the flames that broke out, said: No, I really don't think so. I don't think there is any truth in the statement that some of them were roasted to death. The collision had smashed them out of all shape, and they were dead or nearly so before the fire broke out. I saw the signalman – Rice; he was crying like a child and wishing he was dead. Everyone was sorry for the old man, who acknowledged it was his fault.

MR BENSON'S CONDITION

A letter was received this week by a former companion of Thomas Benson, at Lindal, which says:- 'Tom is going on very well indeed, considering what he has gone through, as no one expected him to live this long. He says you can form no idea what it was like by reading the papers, but he will tell you himself when he comes home. ...

The accident resulted in two significant recommendations:

1. That a collar or clip be attached to the signal lever signifying 'train waiting'. **Not used at Quintinshill in 1915.**
2. Rule 55: that when a train is brought to a stop by a signal, the driver must sound the whistle, and if not released after 3 minutes, the fireman or guard must visit the signalbox and make sure that all safety precautions have been taken, and sign the train register book.

Mary Hayward from the Norton Fitzwarren Village Hall Management Committee wrote to me in July 2019 providing the following related information:

You might be interested to know that the Transport Trust recently allocated a Commemorative Plaque to Norton Fitzwarren Village Hall. It remembers the role of the community in helping to save passengers in both the 1890 and 1940 railway accidents. Both happened on the same stretch of railway line, at the bottom of Station Road, Norton Fitzwarren.

The Station Inn, which took in the 1890 survivors, has been demolished and the Station is long gone. The Village Hall (The Village Club in 1940), was the Casualty Clearing Station for that accident. It is still going strong as a busy Community Centre.



Below is a link to a BBC report mentioned both crashes, filmed when the Plaque was unveiled in November 2018.

[TRAIN_TMI_SATBS_002_1653_20_11_bristol_482431.mp4](#)

The gentleman talking about the 1890 crash is Alan Rice. Alan is the great nephew of George Rice, the signalman who left the goods train on the line in the path of the 1890 'Special' from Plymouth.

George Rice and his wife are buried in the churchyard of All Saints Church, Norton Fitzwarren.

John Baker of Silver Moor Consulting www.silvermoorconsulting.co.uk carried out considerable research on the accidents, the results of which are displayed in the Village Hall, and in the News section of his website (July 2019). (See additional pdf files)