ROSCREA RAILWAY SMASH

THE INQUIRY

Officials' Evidence; Question of the Brakes

LIST OF THE INJURED

The story of the train smash on Thursday was told by the railway officials at the inquiry held at Roscrea Railway Station by Col. Von Donop, Principal Inspector of the Board of Trade, who travelled down from Dublin on Thursday morning by special train, accompanied by the chief officials from Kingsbridge.

Mr. E. A. Neale, Traffic Manager G. S. and W. Railway; Mr. A. Gordon, Permanent Way Engineer; Mr. Croker Barrington, Solicitor to the Company; Mr. E. Coey, Locomotive Engineer; Mr. H. W. Crosthwaite, Running Superintendent; Mr. Gadd, Locomotive Superintendent; Mr. P. Perry, Engineer, Limerick; and Mr. J. F. Miller, District Superintendent, accompanied Col. Von Donop in the course of his preliminary inspection, which commenced immediately on his arrival at Roscrea. The Inspector at once proceeded to make a minute examination of the two wrecked carriages, which lay at Roscrea Station. Measurements and gradients were also taken, and subsequently Col. Von Donop and party proceeded in a special saloon carriage to the scene of the accident, which was also closely inspected.

OPENING OF INQUIRY.

On their return to Roscrea the inquiry was formally opened. The evidence at the outset was taken in the saloon carriage in which the Inspector had travelled to the scene of the disaster, which had been drawn up at a siding on its arrival at Roscrea Railway Station. Subsequently the inquiry was continued in one of the waiting-rooms at the railway station, where, as in the carriage saloon, the accommodation was very limited.

The Press representatives were informed by an official at the outset that the inquiry would be conducted privately, and it was only after considerable delay that they were eventually admitted, as well as some members of the general public, including Messrs. John Dooley, J.P., Chairman Birr Urban Council; Wm. Dwyer, solicitor, and *C. J. Spain, solicitor.* Mr. Nathan Rimmer, Secretary for Ireland, represented the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, with Mr. W. Halls, Assistant Secretary.

In the course of the evidence mention was made of the "Nenagh Platform" and the "Birr Platform." These, of course, refer to the sidings at which the trains from these respective stations arrive at Roscrea—the Nenagh station being on the Roscrea town side, at which the trains from Limerick and Nenagh arrive; the Birr station side being the opposite platform.

At the opening of the inquiry Mr. Croker Barrington *expressed, on behalf* of the Chairman and directors of the Great Southern and Western Railway Company, deep regret at the occurrence of the lamentable accident, as well as sincere sympathy with all who suffered injuries.

ENGINE DRIVER'S EVIDENCE

Engine Driver Downes, who was in charge of the excursion train from Birr, was the first witness. In reply to the Inspector as to shunting operations and the addition of certain carriages to his own train, he said he first stopped short without touching the vehicles of the Birr train at all, and he then got instructions from the fireman to go up to the Birr vehicles. He did as directed. He had to touch these vehicles, and he touched them gently. The fireman informed him that the carriages of the Birr train were moving away from the platform, and that he had not locked them up. Witness got no more instructions, and he could do nothing more.

Have you ever started before with as low vacuum as 13½ inches?—Yes, sir.

Frequently?—No; occasionally.

FIREMAN MOYNAHAN

Fireman Denis Moynahan stated, in answer to the Inspector, that he had been about 8 or 9 years in the Railway Company's employment, and for about four years had been a fireman. On the 19th of July he started with Driver Downes from Birr Station. The automatic brake on the train was in good order before they started. They had something between 13 and 15 inches of vacuum at the start. That was the usual amount to have at the beginning of a journey.

Before you started did the driver call your attention to anything in connection with the vacuum brake on the train?—Yes, a defective sleeve on the train.

What did you do to it?—I tied a sponge cloth round it to stop the air from getting in.

Did that make any difference?—Yes, the result was that we had more vacuum than we had before.

THE AUTOMATIC BRAKE.

Do you know whether the automatic brake was applied at all before you entered Roscrea Station?—It was not; it was not applied until we were about to enter the station.

During the journey to Roscrea had the driver any difficulty in maintaining his vacuum?—Not exactly difficulty, but he had to make use of the large ejector occasionally.

Did the vacuum brake appear to act well?—Yes. She made a good stop at the station.

AT ROSCREA STATION.

In reply to further questions the witness said that when he came to Roscrea station the shunter came and uncoupled the engine. He did not remember anything being done to the vacuum brake then. After the uncoupling some more carriages were taken. They were first brought to the opposite platform; and there passengers got in. Then they went ahead with the carriages and backed them on to the Birr train.

Did you push up hard against the vehicles of the Birr train?—No, we went exceptionally easy.

Did you come up against them at the first attempt?—No, at the first attempt we stopped short of them.

When you did come to them did you hit them hard?—No, we merely touched them.

CARRIAGES MOVED AWAY.

What then happened to the carriages of the Birr train?—They commenced to move slowly away. I told the driver that the carriages were going back, and that he should stand where he was.

Did you do anything more?—I got no more instructions from the shunter, so I remained on the engine and did nothing more.

Did the carriages of the Birr train seem as if they had brakes on them at the time?—They seemed as if they had no brakes. They moved freely, but slowly; in my opinion there would not be a brake on them.

HEAD PORTER'S EVIDENCE

Patrick Deering, head porter, Roscrea, stated to the Inspector that on the arrival of the special train from Birr at Roscrea four carriages which stood on a siding had to be attached to it. As soon as the train arrived witness got between the engine and carriages, and he told the driver to destroy his vacuum so that he (witness) could take off the vacuum couplings. The driver did so, and witness undid the coupling.

Witness went round, coupled up the other carriages himself, and had them taken back to the Nenagh platform, from which passengers got in. Witness then instructed the driver to go ahead to the Birr siding ahead of the points, and when he saw that the points were set he called the driver back to the Birr train. The driver came back slowly against the carriages, and did not hit them hard. The carriages moved back at once, but slowly.

Did they move back freely, or as if they had brakes applied?—There seemed to be a little obstruction in the running. When I saw the carriages moving I ran to overtake the rere van of the train, and got in below the home signal.

ON THE BRAKE VAN.

What did you do when you got into the van?—I got on the brake box along with the guard, who was applying the hand-brake lever. I got up along with him and helped him.

Can you tell me anything about the vacuum brake at that time; did you notice the gauge in the guard's van?—No, I was excited, and I devoted my whole attention to applying the hand brake. At the Swallow Banks here there is a bit of a curve, I thought we might right matters.

What pace were you going at the time you got into the van?—Very slowly.

Did the hand brake appear to check the speed at all?—It did not seem to, but the wheels were skidding. The guard remained in the van with me up to the top of the Swallow Banks. Then another man, a passenger, got in along the footboard into the van, and the guard got out on the footboard with a red flag. The passenger and myself continued to work the hand brake.

Meanwhile was the speed of the train increasing. The passenger asked me if we were expecting a train from the opposite direction. I said I was not, and that re-

assured him. We kept working the brake, and we reversed it and put it on again to get a better hold. The next thing I saw was the smoke of the Birr train which was approaching.

You did not think there would be a train on that line?—No; but I was watching out all the time.

THE ONCOMING TRAIN.

What did you do when you saw the smoke of the approaching train?—We worked frantically at the brake in order to check the speed, but we could not succeed. Coming up to the Birr train I thought if the driver was able to go back from us at all we could do something, and I continued to hold the brake. I told the other man to try to save himself. I then got out on the footboard to see what was happening, and whether I was knocked off or jumped off I cannot say.

What speed were you running at when the collision took place?—I suppose 26 or 27 miles an hour.

Could you see whether the driver and fireman on the Birr engine were making any endeavour to stop their train?—Yes, they were, and I thought that they had stopped before we got up.

THE GUARD'S STORY

Samuel Byrne stated in answer to the Inspector that he had been in the employment of the company since 1897, and had been guard on and off for the last seven years.

The Inspector—Are you a regular guard?—No, I am a loading porter.

Mr. Neale—These loading porters are all experienced men who go about loading cattle at fairs, and they are generally picked men.

In answer to further questions, witness said he was at present stationed at Limerick, but went about the country. He had acted several times as guard to passenger trains.

The Inspector—Do you consider yourself conversant with all the duties of a guard of a passenger train?—Yes, sir.

Replying to further questions, witness said his instructions were to take the train to Queenstown. There were ten vehicles attached to the engine, and they were all fitted with the vacuum automatic brake. He did not know how many wheels of the various vehicles were fitted with brake blocks.

Witness also stated that his vacuum brake was in good order before starting from Birr. He ascertained that by the gauge in the van, which showed 13 or 14 inches, and increased to 15 inches on the journey.

The Inspector—Are you acquainted with the instructions for working the automatic brake?—I think I am fairly well.

THE VACUUM GAUGE.

What are your instructions as to what the vacuum should be when you start?—It would be 15 inches.

Why did you start when it was not 15 inches?—Because it was so near the mark I thought it was a fairly good brake.

In replying to further questions, the witness said that the vacuum brake was used in stopping at Roscrea station. The driver applied it then, and it worked perfectly at that time. When the train came to a standstill witness went to the stationmaster and told him that there would not be enough room on the train for all the passengers, and in reply to that the stationmaster said that there some extra carriages in the yard that could be used. When he left his van he was quite confident that the brake blocks were on the wheels, but he had not looked at the wheels, however.

Continuing, witness said he was standing on the third rear vehicle when the engine backed up these carriages, and was looking for seats for passengers. The stationmaster was on the next carriage. The carriages at that time commenced to move slowly backward.

The Inspector—Did you feel the shock of the engine coming back on the train?—I did not mind it. I was surprised, because I thought they were hooked up.

Did it appear to be a severe shock?—It was gentle enough.

Mr. Neale—Was there a shock at all?

The Inspector—Concussion, if you like, but that is all I want to know. It was not a severe shock, but I only want to verify what the driver and fireman said—that it was a gentle shock. (To Witness)—At the moment the vehicles received that shock did they commence to move slowly?—Yes. I ran to the van as soon as the vehicles began to move, and applied the hand brake.

QUESTION OF HAND-BRAKES.

Did you apply the hand-brake when you got into the station?—No.

Is it not your instruction to do so?—I never know it before.

The Inspector (to Mr. Coey)—Is that not one of your instructions?

Mr. Coey—*It is in the book.*

Witness—I did not know it was in the regulations, and I never did it before with a passenger train.

The Inspector—What was the result of *your applying the hand-brake?—It had no* effect at all.

Did it cause the wheels to skid?—It appeared to me that the wheels were skidding. Immediately afterwards the head porter got into the van and assisted me to apply the hand-brake. Witness, proceeding, said that when he saw the hand-brake had no effect he got out on to the platform and exhibited his red flag to give the danger signal.

What was the first thing you knew of the Birr train approaching?—I got sight of it at Brosna siding.

Replying to Mr. Coey, witness said he had worked some of these carriages which were in collision to Birr the previous night. There was a difficulty in getting the brakes off, and the release strings had to be pulled to get the blocks off the wheels. He also noticed a defective coupling in a saloon carriage.

To the Inspector—He did not know of any of the release strings being pulled at Roscrea on the day of the accident.

SOLICITOR AND INSPECTOR.

Mr. Spain, solicitor—May I ask through you a question as to a defective coupling?

The Inspector—Who are you?

Mr. Spain—A solicitor representing——

The Inspector—You have no status. I have admitted the public, and you are one of the public.

Mr. Spain—I only want to ask the question through you.

The Inspector—Thank you. I will refer to you if I want any assistance.

The witness, further examined, said he had acted as guard of passenger trains before, but had never been examined in the regulations for a guard.

Replying to Mr. Rimmer, witness said he was not thoroughly acquainted with the gradient from Roscrea to Birr.

STATIONMASTER HAYES

Mr. Hayes, stationmaster, who has been at Roscrea for over four years, stated that when the Birr excursion arrived at Roscrea at eight minutes after nine o'clock the driver appeared to him to have the train well under control. After the arrival of the train the shunter, who, in the meantime, had his instructions, went ahead with the engine for four extra carriages. These four carriages were taken back to what is described as the Nenagh platform, where passengers got in, after which the carriages were taken ahead and backed on to the Birr platform, where the excursion coaches were.

"All we had to do then," continued the stationmaster, "was to hook on the Birr train. At the moment the engine and four carriages backed to the Birr train I had one foot on a carriage, and could feel that the shock was a very gentle one when the carriages joined. The carriage where I was standing, however, began to move very gently, and I at once got on to it. When I found the train moving back it occurred to me that the driver intended to run out from another way instead of the way originally intended."

Inspector—What did you do?—I stuck on to the carriage which was next to the brake van at the rere, and when I saw the guard getting into his van I said to him: "Have you your brake on?" The guard at once rushed into his van, but I did not see what he did. I next tried to see the engine, but could not, owing to the curve on the line. The coaches still continued to move forward, and when I tried to see if the brakes were applied I found two pair of the wheels of the van were skidding. This didn't appear to affect the speed of the train, and I came to the conclusion that the engine was pushing the carriages. However, I soon perceived that there was no engine attached, and that the carriages were running away. I remained on the carriage step, and soon after I found the speed increase.

Did you remain on the carriage until the time of the collision?—Yes, up to a few yards from the place where the collision occurred.

SPEED OF THE TRAIN.

Could you estimate at all what was the maximum speed of the train?—I should say from 30 to 35 miles an hour.

Did you see the Birr train approach?—Yes.

Did it appear that the fireman and guard of that train were endeavouring to stop it?—Yes, that occurred to me the moment I saw it approach. They stopped it before the collision occurred.

Could you say if the brake was applied to the wheels of your carriage at all?—No, I think they were rubbing. I couldn't say anything about the brakes on the other vehicles.

SIGNALMAN'S EVIDENCE

Signalman Murray stated he was in the service of the Company for 13 years, and for four years was engaged at Roscrea. The special train from Birr arrived at Roscrea Station at 9.8 a.m., the engine stopping opposite his box. He had instructions that the engine was to uncouple and take on extra carriages. When these latter were backed witness noticed that the standing portion of the train began to move out of the station. He thereupon rushed on the platform to see if there was anyone in the brake van, and he saw the guard getting in. Witness went back

to his signal cabin and sent the "train running away" signal to Birr. When he accepted the Birr 9.15 a.m. ordinary passenger train he had so set the points that the train might run on to the Nenagh platform at Roscrea, which was then quite clear, the excursion train being then standing at the other platform.

Evidence was next given by train-examiner Hastings to the effect that some of the carriages which were injured in the accident were examined the previous evening at Limerick, and these had 17½ inches of vacuum. He was aware that the regulations required an engine to have 18 inches of vacuum.

ON THE BIRR TRAIN

Driver Timothy Broughall, who was in charge of the engine of the 9.15 a.m. train

from Birr, and who is in the employment the engine was fitted with vacuum automatic brakes, which were in good order. When he first sighted the runaway coaches coming towards him they were about 500 yards off, and he at once reversed, and just before the impact the engine was brought to a standstill. The brakes acted well.

Daniel Shortt, guard of the 9.15 train from Birr, stated that the train consisted of two horse-boxes next the engine, and two passenger vehicles, all of which were fitted with vacuum automatic brakes, which were in good order. The first he know of the accident was while writing in

his van. He saw the brake applied, and he at once ran to the window and saw the on-coming carriages. He thereupon applied the hand-brake to assist the driver to bring the train to a standstill. They were on the backward move when the crash came.

Inspector—And do you distinctly say that the train was moving backwards when the crash took place?—Yes.

Driver Downes, re-called, stated that when he left Birr he did not know that he was to take on any further carriages at Roscrea. On the run from Birr to Roscrea he had the handle of the vacuum brake in the running position, and when he arrived at the station he put the handle on the "on" position. About a minute later he put the brake to the running position in order to be ready to start again. That was done before he had got instructions to take on other carriages. About another minute later he put the handle on the "on" position in order to enable the shunter to uncouple the engine to take on other carriages.

This concluded the inquiry for the present. The Inspector announced that if the inquiry was re-opened he would again give an opportunity to the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants to be present.

Mr. Spain, solr., asked if any evidence would be taken on behalf of the townspeople.

Col. Wm. Donop—No; the townspeople would not be able to give any evidence as to the details of the working of the brakes.

PATIENTS DOING WELL

The injured being treated in the Dublin hospitals are still progressing satisfactorily. All are now pronounced out of danger, and unless some unlooked-for complications arise, their complete recovery may soon be looked for.

Those whose names are given below are being treated at their homes in Birr and Roscrea, and, except in two or three instances, the injuries are not of a very serious character:—

Rev. Patrick Nohilly, P.P., Lusmagh, Cloughjordan (severe wound on the crown of the head, several stitches).
Miss S. A. Power, Cumberland street, Birr.
Miss Fitzgerald, Moorpark street, Birr.
John Hamil, Moorpark street, Birr.
Miss Ellen Heron, Duke street, Birr.
Miss Margaret Wythe, Connaught street, Birr.
Miss A. Price, Townsend street, Birr.
Constable M. Deegan, Roscrea.
M. Byrne, Moorpark, Birr.
W. M'Grath, New road, Roscrea.
H. Waters, Limerick street, Roscrea.
Miss Kate Buckley, Mill street, Birr.
C. Mahony, Main street, Birr.
Rev. Father Cunningham, P.P., Kinnitty (injured face and head).
M. Devine, Main street, Roscrea.
Miss Mollie Meara, The Valley, Roscrea.
Miss M. Gleeson, Castle street, Nenagh (fractured ankle).
Rev. P. Flynn, Glasson, Athlone (muscles strained in leg and arm and over heart).
Rev. P. Gilsenan, P.P., Eglish, Birr.
P. Crowley, Limerick street, Roscrea.
Rev. Father Crowe, P.P., Bournea.
Rev. Father Devanny, C.C., Roscrea.
D. Coughlan, Alleys lane, Roscrea.
J. Armstrong, Limerick street, Roscrea.
Ellen Delaney, Limerick street, Roscrea.
J. Curran, Castletown, Birr.
E. Fitzgerald, Moorpark street, Birr.
J. Feehan, Duke street, Birr.
J. Deegan, Limerick street, Roscrea.
M. Larkin, Limerick street, Roscrea.
W. Wythe, Connaught street, Birr.
P. Gantly, Main street, Roscrea.
J. Molloy, Mill street, Birr.
J. Costello, Connaught street, Birr.
Miss Gertrude Lee, Townsend st., Birr.
Mrs. Gaffney, Castle street, Birr.
Miss Emily Brennan, Beech Villa, Birr.
Miss B. Bower, Main street, Birr.
Miss Agnes Connors, Castle street, Birr.
John Nelson, Mill street, Birr.
Miss Margaret Finnegan, Cappancal, Birr.
Miss K. Keaton, Mill street, Birr.
Miss Annie Fanneran, Mill st., Birr.
Edward Keehan, Summerhill, Roscrea.
D. Gorman, Birr road, Roscrea.
Porter Deering, Roscrea.
Mrs. Lee, the Bridewell, Birr.
Henry Sharpe, Knock, Carlow, Clareen, Birr.
Constable J. Flynn, Roscrea.
E. Carey, Main street, Roscrea.
J. Coughland, Knockbarron, Kinnitty, Birr.
Miss Mary Cassidy, Longford, Birr.
Martin Talbot, 3 Pound street, Birr.

Pictures showing the wrecked condition of the carriages of the Excursion Train after the collision near Roscrea.
(Photo by J. P. M'Teggart, Birr.)

had of late been a great improvement in the moral tone of the British Army, both among officers and men.

THE MORASS OF POVERTY.

At the Ladies' Conference Mrs. Sydney Webb dealt with the problem of poverty and its relief. In England every year, she said, there were 2½ millions of people destitute. On one side of this morass of poverty was the Poor Law; on the other the alms of the charitable. Neither did anything to drain the morass. The Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission was not, she mentioned, Socialistic, any more than was public health, the army, the navy, or the police.

Mrs. Higgs was of opinion that the Minority Report was impracticable on account of its tremendous expense.

Mrs. Vacher expressed the view that Mrs. Webb had not attached sufficient importance to the terrible part played by drink in making people destitute. Drink was found somewhere at the bed rock of practically every case of destitution.

FOOD PRESERVATIVES.

Dealing with Preservatives in Food Stuffs, Mr. H. Davies, Liverpool, suggested that no preservatives or treatment should be allowed in the case of milk. So long as there was no legislation the work of analysis was extremely difficult. Skilled chemists were busily employed in the manufacture of preservatives which defied detection.

THE IRISH PARTY FUND

LAST WEEK'S COLLECTION—£164 ADDED.

A sum of £164 was added to the United Irish Parliamentary and National Fund for the week ended Friday, bringing the total for the present year to date up to

£10,811 11s. 0d.

The position of the collections at the corresponding periods in the three previous years were—

1909, July 17 ... ... £3,278
1908, July 18 ... ... £4,514
1907, July 20 ... ... £5,861

The principal subscriptions received since last acknowledgment included the following:—

Kingstown (Dublin), per Messrs. J. J. Dunne, M. J. M'Alister, and L. J. Kenny, £50; A Friend, per S. Gwynn, M.P., £10; Ahinagh (Cork) U.I.L., per Messrs. J. Lehane, W. O'Connell, and W. Manning, £25 15s.; Gratloe (Clare) U.I.L., per Mr. T. Hogan, per Mr. W. Redmond, M.P., £11 8s.; Priests and people, Kilcoo (Down) U.I.L., per Messrs. J. M'Creavy, B. M'Alinden, and P. M'Crickard, per Mr. J. MacVeagh, M.P., £12 3s.; Dunshaughlin (Meath), per Mr. P. J. Mulvany, £9 16s. 6d.; Priest and people, Crusheen and Ballyruan (Clare), per Rev. J. Nolan, Adm., £13 5s. 6d.

A public meeting was held in Clonmel to inaugurate a collection, and the Mayor presided. Canon Flavin wrote in support of the project, which, he said, needed no argument, and enclosing £1. A resolution was passed, on the motion of Rev. J. J. Kelly, C.S.F., seconded by Mr. W. J. Murphy, pledging hearty support to the Party and opening the collection. Close on £20 was handed in at the meeting.

WALSH'S FORT DEFENCE

DROPPING OF THE PROSECUTION.

In reference to the "Walsh's Fort" defendants, against whom a nolli prosequi was entered by the Attorney-General at the Kerry Summer Assizes, Mr. Birrell informed Mr. Lonsdale, in Parliament this week, that no other proceedings were contemplated.

Mr. Lonsdale asked whether it was fair to the police, several of whom were seriously injured, that these men should be allowed to escape?

Mr. Birrell replied that it was a matter affecting the discretion of the Attorney-General, with whose decision in the matter he (Mr. Birrell) did not differ.

Mr. Lonsdale wanted to know why were six of the men allowed to go to America; and Mr. Birrell answered—"I should say they were persons who are very much better out of the country than in it." He promised to inquire whether the action of the magistrates in the case had been brought to the notice of the Lord Chancellor.

No reply was given to Mr. MacVeagh, who asked was not the disturbance in question much less serious than that which occurred in Armagh, in Mr. Lonsdale's constituency, on Tuesday night.