

A Chapter of Accidents at Alnwick Station

By Roger Jermy

Alnwick station was built at the end of the short branch line from Bilton Junction, later Alnmouth, to link the Northumberland market town with the east coast main line from Newcastle to Edinburgh. The original station with a single platform was opened in early October 1850. On 5th September 1887 a new terminal station replaced the old one; this had two platforms and an overall roof and catered not just for Alnmouth trains but also trains on the new line to Cornhill-on-Tweed, near to Coldstream, on the Scottish Border. Passenger trains to Cornhill ceased in September 1930 but goods traffic persisted until the 1960s. Passenger trains on the line to Alnmouth ceased in January 1968 although goods services continued to serve Alnwick until October of that year.

Like most other railway lines, the Alnwick branches were not immune to accidents, incidents and mishaps. Sometimes these were serious, meriting official enquiries. On other occasions they were of lesser importance and merited just a line or two if reported to the local press. Then, of course, there were the unreported 'happenings' which were 'put right' without being reported officially!

As several references are made to the various signal boxes in the vicinity of Alnwick it is useful to list these and provide an outline of their roles in the operation of the local lines.

- Willowburn signal box was situated on the 'up' side of the Alnmouth line about one mile from Alnwick station. It opened in 1885 and closed in 1908 after some years of being opened 'only when required for excursion trains'.
- Shilbottle Colliery Junction signal box was opened in the early 1880s and controlled entry to the sidings of the Shilbottle Coal Company (which operated a cable-hauled tramway from the local colliery) and the local gas works. In 1923 it was renamed 'Alnwick East' and, in World War 2, also supervised the operation of a ground frame associated with sidings for deliveries of petrol and aircraft fuel. It closed in February 1965. **
- Alnwick's Station Junction was a very tall signalbox which controlled the routes into the station from both of the branch lines from Alnmouth and Coldstream, also the station goods yard. It opened in 1887 (on the opening of the Coldstream line) and, like Alnwick East box, closed in February 1965. Its semaphore signals, including an impressive gantry near the station throat, were removed and for the final few years of the branch replaced by colour-light signals. **
- Alnwick North signal box was located where the Coldstream line changed from double to single track; this was about 375 yards from the box controlling the station. It closed in June 1930 when its responsibilities were switched to the main station signal box.

- Summit signalbox was the first on the Coldstream line after Alnwick North. It was located in a cutting at the top of the stiff climbs upwards from Alnwick (heading northwards) or from Edlingham (heading southwards). Opening at the same time as the branch, it closed in 1911.

The Alnwick branch railway from Alnmouth, then Bilton Junction, was opened on Monday 5th August 1850. The following day, Tuesday 6th August, the Northumberland Agricultural Society's Annual Meeting was held in the town. The edition of the *Newcastle Journal* which was published on the following Saturday stated that it was the most successful event that had ever been held by the Society and had attracted thousands of visitors. Several special trains were run in conjunction with the event, originating in both Newcastle upon Tyne and Berwick. One from Newcastle carried the Chairman and the Directors of the York, Newcastle and Berwick Railway Company. A large concourse of spectators, from all parts of the district, assembled to watch the trains pass along the branch. However, as reported in the Journal, the railway arrangements were not to reflect credit on the Company!

A special train was timetabled to leave Alnwick at nine o'clock on the Tuesday evening. As a result of what the newspaper called 'some culpable neglect on behalf of the Railway Company', it did not leave until half past ten. Eventually it got under way and travelled some miles down the branch towards the main line. However, to quote the newspaper, 'an alleged accident took place at the shuntings and the train was therefore delayed until past eleven'. This, presumably, was in the vicinity of what was then known as Bilton Junction. As a result the train didn't arrive at Newcastle's Central station until nearly two o'clock in the morning. The newspaper continued: '... the strangers were cast into the streets to make the best or worst of themselves they could. The whole affair was entirely disgraceful to those having charge of the train.' The newspaper concluded that the passengers, despite having paid the princely sum of 12 shillings and 4d for their return tickets, were treated in the most indifferent manner by the servants of the company.

Details of another railway accident in the vicinity of Alnwick appeared in the *Morpeth Herald* on 28th March 1884. A labourer, by the name of William Wilson, had been working on the construction of the Alnwick and Cornhill line on 16th March of that year when 'a piece of earth' had fallen on him. He had been wheeling some soil in a barrow when the accident happened. He was released from the soil and taken to Alnwick Infirmary where he was found to have a compound fracture of the right leg, a dislocated shoulder and a compound dislocation of his ankle. His leg was amputated but he died on the 23rd as a result of the injuries he had received. An inquest into his death was held at the Infirmary before Coroner George Watson who pronounced a verdict of 'Accidental Death'.

Another incident occurred during the building of the Cornhill line. Alnwick's local newspaper, the *Alnwick Mercury*, reported, on Saturday 29th August 1885 that a

huge fire threatened the trees in Rugley Wood, a short distance out of Alnwick. Apparently a pair of locomotives was hauling a loaded wagon when a spark was believed to have ignited the flammable sleepers it was carrying and the resulting conflagration started to spread to the surrounding wood. The report said that one of the locomotives, named SAMBO, ran off the line of rails and the other (not identified) turned over onto its side amid the furiously burning fire. After the fire was extinguished the locomotive was re-railed with the help of chains but 'nothing could be saved'. Fortunately no-one was seriously hurt and the fire was contained before it could cause damage to the woods. Locomotive SAMBO is believed to have been a Manning Wardle locomotive, (works number MW427/1873), belonging to the contractors, Meakin and Dean. No one was hurt in the incident.

A frightening incident which could have had very serious consequences took place (and carrying six navvies) was involved in the construction of the Cornhill line near to Alnwick. This section of the line, between Alnwick and Rugley, was steep and when the brakes failed on the locomotive as it descended the gradient the speed of the train increased dramatically. On reaching the curve where the Cornhill line met the line from Alnmouth the speed was so great that the newly laid junction could not be negotiated and the train became derailed with its wreckage blocking the junction. Fortunately the passenger train, scheduled to pass the junction a minute or two later, had not arrived and could be stopped before it ran into the wreckage. The account of the accident appeared in the *Alnwick Gazette* of 7th August 1886.

Another accident, this time involving a fatality, happened before the Alnwick to Cornhill line was completed and opened. Mr. Frederick Barron, a mason, employed on the building of the line was found at the bottom of a ventilating tunnel at 'Lemington Hill Head' on the line from Alnwick. Barron was under the influence of drink when walking the short distance from his home (in a public house) to some lodging huts in a nearby navy camp. It was presumed that he had fallen down the relatively unprotected shaft and he suffered multiple injuries, including the breaking of his arms and legs, leading to his death. The report on the inquest appeared in the *Morpeth Herald* of 9th October 1886. Various other serious accidents occurred to men engaged in the construction of the Cornhill line. For example, in October 1884 eleven of the fifty in-patients at Alnwick Infirmary were reported as being involved in the line's construction. Accidents included men falling from locomotives (that they should not have been riding on), a navy breaking a leg when jumping off a train to retrieve his cap, and accidents associated with falls of rock or earth. Such accidents were frequent and often serious, even fatal.

Moving on nearly eight years to 28th July 1894 the same Morpeth newspaper contained two articles in the same edition with the headlines 'Sad Accident at Alnwick Railway Station' and 'Fatality at Alnwick Railway Station'. Both of the articles referred to the same unfortunate incident!

A young man, by the name of Alexander Waugh, lived in Roxburgh Place in Alnwick. He was a compositor in the printing trade but had been unable to find employment in this field for several months. He obtained a temporary post assisting in the goods yard at Alnwick station, at a time when there was much traffic associated with the Northumberland Agricultural Show which was being held in Alnwick. At about 4.20pm on the Friday of that week a rake of ten empty waggons (sic) was being shunted in the yard and Waugh was sitting on top of the penultimate one whilst the end one was fly-shunted into a siding. Two men were on the adjacent waggon. When the engine braked sharply he accidentally overbalanced, lost his hold and fell forward onto the line. The waggon ran over him 'across his bowels and fracturing his arm'. The waggon stopped and then ran back or was pulled back, passing over the body for a second time. He was taken to Alnwick Infirmary where he was attended to by Dr Burnam (Surgeon to the North Eastern Railway for the Alnwick District) but Waugh died within an hour of arrival. Burnam found that Waugh's injuries included a ruptured bladder, a damaged pelvis, and internal bleeding in addition to his wounded left arm. He had been suffering from shock when first seen by the doctor! The Coroner's jury, at the subsequent hearing, returned a verdict that Waugh had died from injuries accidentally received and that none of the railway officials were to blame in any way. Apparently riding on shunted waggons was a standard practice and the engine driver had operated in a proper manner.

It was on 22nd January 1895 when an accident happened to the 10.30am train from Coldstream which was due to arrive at Alnwick a couple of minutes after mid-day. The train had passed the summit of the line at Lemmington, near Summit signal box, when the tender of the locomotive became derailed as a result of the fracture of a spring causing two wheels to leave the track. This section of line runs steeply downhill through Rugley Woods towards Alnwick, and, despite the brakes being applied it took some distance for the train to be brought to a halt. As a result considerable damage was done to the rail chairs. The accident was immediately reported to the signaller in the cabin at the summit and he telegraphed Alnwick. The stationmaster, Mr Patterson sent out a train with workmen to carry out repairs, the same train being used to transport the stranded passengers to Alnwick. The time taken to restore the track to normal appears not to have been recorded but the 1.50pm train back to Coldstream was certainly cancelled causing inconvenience to one distinguished intending passenger, Henry George Liddell, the 2nd Earl of Ravensworth, who was returning to his home at Eslington Hall which is near Whittingham. **

The keen gradients in both directions up to the summit of the Alnwick-Coldstream line were to pose problems for much of the line's existence. Various incidences of stalling trains have been recorded, including both public timetabled trains, and for example, military specials and even a diverted A3 Pacific-hauled 'Scotch Express'! One angry passenger complained that on three days in a single week (in March 1895) his train from Wooler to Alnwick had stalled on the bank!

An edition of the *Newcastle Journal* reported briefly on an accident which happened between Alnwick and Alnmouth on the evening of the day before publication, namely Friday 11th November 1898. It stated that the accident was reported to Central Railway Station at a late hour. The locomotive of the 8.50pm passenger train from Alnwick had left the rails. According to this initial report, no other portion of the train was derailed and very little damage was reported. It also stated that no passengers were injured. However, two further reports appeared in the same newspaper at later dates adding to, and correcting, the first report. On 14th November much more detail was supplied. The newspaper reported that the train engine was number 187, running bunker-first, which was hauling a brake third carriage followed by three more carriages and a guard's van at the rear. This loco was a Worsdell-designed 2-4-2 tank engine designed for hauling branch line and suburban passenger trains and belonged to Class 'A' of the NER. Later, in LNER days, these locomotives were known as the F8 class. The loco involved in this accident became derailed in the cutting between Alnwick station and the Willowburn signalbox, about 200 yards before the location of the signal cabin. The train was, for some reason, travelling 'wrong line', that is on the 'down line' rather than the 'up'. The loco crew seemingly failed to notice this. Their train was derailed at a set of points described, in the newspaper, as 'safety points' but accurately as 'catch points' in the Board of Trade Report. (This type of point is designed to derail runaway wagons; at this point on the branch there was a downward gradient of 1 in 77 for 1½ miles towards Alnmouth). The report went on to contradict the first one in that it stated that it was not only the locomotive that was derailed but also the four passenger coaches, only the rear guard's van remaining on the rails. The engine, running bunker-first, buried itself two or three feet into the embankment and turned on its side. The leading carriage also turned on its side. The second carriage was also partly embedded with a smashed footboard and one of its buffers twisted. Damage occurred at both of its ends. The two succeeding vehicles were badly damaged, one penetrating into the other. Remarkably, although there were several passengers on the train, none received injury apart from one who claimed to be 'hurt on the head' and one other with unspecified injuries. On the locomotive footplate the driver fell on top of the fireman who was busy sweeping the cab floor at the time. Neither received injuries. Damage to the engine was limited to minor damage to its fittings on its left hand side and defaced paintwork. The breakdown team managed to restore the train to the tracks on the evening of Sunday 13th November and the trackbed, not much damaged, was fully restored. The full account of the accident and its causes are included in Report, written by the Inspector, Lieutenant-Colonel G W Addison, published by the Board of Trade on 28th December 1898.

In his Report Addison apportioned the blame for the accident equally between the signalman named Crisp and Driver Bryson. Signalman Crisp was almost certainly the John Crisp of Duke Street, Alnwick, whilst Driver Bryson appears to be the NER engine driver Thomas Bryson of Hood Street, Gateshead. Inspector Addison was critical of the procedures and duties related to the management of passenger traffic

at Alnwick. For Driver Bryson a mitigating factor for his missing the signals was that there was a very bad view of them from the footplate and it was recommended that the view of the signals be improved. The fact that signalman Crisp had admitted two blunders contributing to the accident was looked upon favourably though the Inspector recommended that the NER should alter the locking arrangements in the signalbox so that other signals could not be pulled to the 'off' position until corresponding signals on the gantry (presumably that near the station entrance) had been cleared. On the day in question the points to number 60 crossover road had been left in the wrong position and signals number 15 and 17 had been left in the 'off' position. A comment was made about train guards who should look after the safety of passengers rather than devoting all of their time to matters such as sorting parcels. In this case the guard was not named but one of the newspaper reports mentioned that he had been 'hurt on the head'. The Report was briefly referred to in the *Sunderland Daily Echo* and reported in more detail in the *Shields Daily News* and *Shields Daily Gazette*.

Above: Station opening to 1899

Below: 1900 to station closure.

In 1900 Alnwick station was the site of a further accident, when a Porter was the subject of a miraculous escape according to the *Morpeth Herald* dated the 1st December. Three days earlier, on 28th November, a Cornhill train had just started to leave the platform under clear signals when a passenger discovered that he was on the wrong train. He opened the carriage door and jumped out, knocking into Porter Thompson. His likely identity is John Thompson, described in several censuses as a Railway Porter, who lived at Longhirst village, between Alnwick and Morpeth. Returning to the accident, both gentlemen fell and Thompson slipped between the carriage footboards and the platform edge. He was dragged along for almost twenty yards until the train stopped. Before he could be released from this perilous position the upper footboard had to be released from its fastenings and a portion of the lower footboard had to be sawn away. He was attended to by Dr Clarke Burman but remarkably Thompson escaped with shock and just a few contusions to his body and legs. A lucky escape indeed!

Towards the end of May 1902 a message was telegraphed from Edlingham, the first station on the Cornhill line, to Alnwick station requesting that an engine be despatched along the line to that station. The reason that the engine was needed was that the engine of the 6.53 am passenger train from Coldstream (as it was then called), due at Alnwick at 8.22am, had blown a boiler tube close to the tunnel

between Whittingham and Edlingham. By the time that it struggled into Edlingham station the fire was almost out. However rules were rules and the rescue engine could not be sent out from Alnwick until the staff had been carried by a man from Edlingham to the Summit of the line (near to where it crosses the Rothbury road) and handed to another man who carried it on to Alnwick station. According to the *Morpeth Herald* of 24th May the train eventually arrived at Alnwick some 110 minutes late.

Robert Waite was a twenty two year old when, in August 1904, he committed suicide on the railway at Willowburn on the outskirts of Alnwick. Details of the Coroner's Inquest appeared in the *Morpeth Herald* on 27th August, just four days after the sad event

Waite was born in Newcastle and had first worked as a turner or 'steam engine maker and fitter' at Elswick Works at the side of the Tyne. In 1903 he had changed employment and worked for about twelve months at Hardy Brothers, the famous makers of fishing rods and fishing tackle, in Alnwick. He had been a boarder at number 5, Wagon Way Road, the home of railway goods guard Thomas Hall and his wife Margaret. On the day in question Margaret Hall said that Robert had first left the house at about 6am but then returned for his breakfast at about 8am, leaving again 20 minutes later. She said that he was always been in good health but that he had said that the work he was doing at Hardy's was 'too small for him' and that he had been upset for some time.

It was Thomas Grey, a North Eastern Railway driver, who was in charge of the locomotive on the 11.40am train from Alnwick to Alnmouth on the fateful day. He was keeping a lookout and standing with his hand on the regulator, when, on the overbridge beside the signal cabin at Willowburn he thought he experienced a grating feeling beneath his engine. His mate said he had not noticed this having been busy with the locomotive's injector at the time. Grey looked back and noticed something white in the four-foot which he imagined to be a piece of paper. On arrival at Alnmouth the train crew had a few minutes to wait so Grey scanned the locomotive (apart from its right hand side adjacent to the platform) but could find nothing amiss. On returning along the line towards Alnwick, Grey noticed the same white object lying on the trackbed. He stopped the train and discovered that it was actually a man's foot with no stocking or shoe. He turned and saw a man's body lying in the ditch. With his fireman he examined the body which was badly cut and with its head badly smashed. On returning to Alnwick station he discovered a small area of blood on the loco together with a small piece of brain. At the Inquest the signalman at Willowburn cabin said that though the day concerned was bright he had not seen the deceased. Examination of the tracks had shown that there were marks on the track from just before the Willow Burn Bridge and for some twenty yards past it.

It was a Police Constable Elliott who was called to the site of the accident. There were several 'local' constables with this surname and he cannot be identified positively. At the Coroner's Inquest, held at Alnwick railway station, and in the presence of the North Eastern Railway Inspector Mr Rollinson, Elliott described in rather gory details the condition in which he had found Waite's corpse but, most importantly, he told the Jury that he had found a postcard on the body with this handwritten message.

My Friends, you must try and forget me. I am fairly sick of this life; things are not as I expected for the future. Do as you wish with my carcass. Goodbye to one and all – the least said the soonest mended. – R.S. Waite.

Written as a postscript was the following:

This may be the death shot to my Liz, I know, but I cannot help it. I think too much of it. – Yours, Unhappy Bob.

In summing up to the Jury the Coroner referred to the deceased as '...unsettled with having to work at another trade than his own with his mind having become deranged as a result'. However he said that he could not understand how the footplate crew had not seen the man on the track if they had been keeping a proper lookout. Driver Grey was allowed to reply to this and said that he believed that the deceased had been hiding behind bushes at the side of the line near the bridge and had jumped out in front of the train. The Jury found a verdict of 'Suicide whilst labouring under temporary insanity'.

After this tragic event which had created a painful stir in Alnwick we must move forward to New Year's Day in 1908 when the derailment of a passenger train took place. The train was the 6.50am from Alnmouth due to arrive in Alnwick at 6.57am. It consisted of three carriages and two vans. It was derailed at the junction where the lines to Cornhill and Alnmouth parted company. Following the derailment the rails were torn up and twisted for a distance of about 50 yards. Sleepers were torn up and broken. The train itself was drawn broadside across the permanent way blocking all lines, though the newspaper reports referred to traffic being carried on up to the point of the accident, some 200 yards from Alnwick station. With the exception of the front van, which received some damage, the rest of the train escaped injury. The driver of the train, according to the *Morpeth Herald* and the *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, was a certain Mr A. Hodgkin and the fireman's surname was Blacklock. The guard was a Mr J Blyth. It has not been possible to identify these men more precisely. It took just over an hour from the time of the accident for the tool van and 'a strong crew of platelayers' to arrive from Gateshead. By eleven o'clock the same morning the line was returned to working order.

The *Herald* reported another sad accident at Alnwick station in its 12th May 1911 edition. This time no train was involved; instead the cause of the accident was a horse! A certain David MacKenley was a coal cartman (sometimes referred to as a

rolleyman or rulleymen) working for the North Eastern Railway at Alnwick. MacKenley was standing behind his horse when it 'launched out' with its hind leg. He was struck in the face by its hoof and he was seriously injured. He was taken to the nearby Alnwick Infirmary where it was found necessary to extract one of his eyes. Nothing is known about his recovery or whether he was able to return to work.

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Just over a year after this accident there was another example of a derailment at Alnwick. The passenger train from Alnmouth arrived at 8.22am hauled by what the *Shields Daily News* of 26th June described as 'a small engine'. The engine was uncoupled from the carriages and entered what was known as Number 2 siding. On passing through the points the 'middle bogey wheels' beneath to the firebox became derailed. All the other wheels of the loco remained on the rails. A telegraph message was sent requesting the attendance of the Tool Van and its crew, and this duly arrived at 11am. The engine was rerailed and 'in working order' by 11.50am. Meanwhile the 9.25am passenger train had managed to run (albeit 20 minutes late) hauled by a goods engine requisitioned from the shed at Alnmouth.

The *Morpeth Herald* of 26th June 1914 reported a strange and disturbing incident that happened on the last train of the day from Newcastle's Central station to Alnwick. This train was normally well-used by passengers. Just before leaving Newcastle the guard, Mr Richard Grey, had noticed a smell of paraffin coming from one of the compartments of an eight compartment carriage which was marshalled just behind the locomotive. In the compartment the floor was littered with paper bags and broken card boxes containing what appeared to be sand. He reported his discovery. As there was no time to remove this coach before the scheduled departure time it was locked and quarantined. On arrival at Alnwick a further detailed examination took place and further discoveries were made. A window blind had been torn down and two pieces of a lady's celluloid hair comb were found. Both of the bench seats were discovered to have been soaked in paraffin oil. The paper bags were labelled with the name of a pastry cook of Newcastle. The floor was covered with a sprinkling of resin. Also discovered was a small phial which contained methylated spirits, also a small broken up celluloid baby doll. It was believed that this was all related to an attempt to set fire to the compartment and thus sabotage the train. The attempt was attributed to militant members of the suffragette movement! On the Sunday morning following the carriage was conveyed from Alnwick to the repair shops at Heaton, Newcastle, and other inflammable materials were discovered including a dozen small pieces of candle. It is fortunate that the guard was vigilant in his duties!

Almost a year on from this incident the *Newcastle Journal* of 22nd May 1915 contained the headline 'Railway Mishap at Alnwick' and referred to an incident on the previous day. Once again it was a through train from Newcastle Central station that was involved. The train involved was the 10.27am calling at all stations between Newcastle and Alnwick and arriving at its destination at 12.18pm. After all of the passengers had left the train the locomotive was uncoupled and it proceeded to run

round to the other end of the set of coaches. Unfortunately it became derailed and all but two of its wheels left the track. The position of the derailment was such that half of the station was put out of action causing considerable inconvenience. The stationmaster, Mr Carlisle, immediately telegraphed to Gateshead requesting the tool van and crew. Their arrival was at about 7pm. They restored the locomotive to the rails and the station was fully useable by 8pm. Meanwhile all of the passenger trains, to both Alnmouth and Coldstream had to be signalled into and out of number 1 platform causing some delays to the evening trains.

The Alnwick, Newcastle and Hartlepool local newspapers of 17th and 18th December 1915 reported on the unfortunate death of James Rutherford in the goods sidings at Alnwick station. Rutherford was born in Alnwick in 1867 and worked as a blacksmith for his father George. After his father retired he changed his occupation and in the census of 1911 he is described as a 'Timber Loader' at Alnwick station. By the time of his death he was described in the newspapers as a 'Railway Porter' though clearly he spent at least part of his time in the station sidings. It was between six and seven o'clock that he was assisting John Patten, the foreman goods porter, in the shunting of some wagons. He was instructed by Patten to pull over some points as an empty wagon was required to be shunted into the Malt House siding. Apparently Rutherford neglected to do so and by stepping between the rails he was knocked over by one of the wagons and was run over by an empty cattle wagon and two empty coal trucks. He was a single man and approaching his 48th birthday when he was killed. He was taken to his home in King Street, Alnwick, by some of his railway colleagues but died as a result of his injuries. He was buried in his home town and was mourned by his brother and sisters, his parents having predeceased him by several years. He was, according to the reports, a much respected and obliging man.

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Another derailment at Alnwick was reported in the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* on Monday 16th January 1922. This took place on the previous Saturday, 14th January. Two carriages of a train became derailed at the points at the entry to one of the platforms completely blocking entry to one platform as in the 1915 incident. This did not cause a complete dislocation of the traffic, as, once again, all of the passenger trains used the 'west line platform' until the carriages were rerailed.

Wartime restrictions probably contributed to the lack of publicity given to two accidents which happened on the same, unrecorded day, at Alnwick in 1940, one involving a military train. The military train was running in the small hours of the day to convey half a battalion of the Tyneside Scottish Brigade to Alnwick after an inspection by His Majesty the King. It consisted of twenty carriages and five horse-boxes, each with three officers' horses. The passengers detrained in the platforms despite the train's overall length. The engine then ran round the train so as to deal with the shunting and unloading of the horse boxes. However the loco, at what were described as 'falling points', ran into the side of the train, causing considerable damage to a first class carriage (provided for the officers) and two of the horse-

boxes. Fortunately the horses escaped without injury though there was some considerable delay before they could be released from the vehicles. One of the men attending the horses received a blow to the forehead. Eventually the empty train could be returned to Newcastle.

The second accident occurred later in the day and involved a train of five composite carriages and, once again, two horse boxes. After the disembarkation of the passengers from number 2 platform, the engine used the release line to run towards the rear of the train. It became derailed, all but two of its wheels coming off. This resulted in half of the station being put out of action with all passenger traffic having to be concentrated on platform 1. This caused some interruption to the timings of the evening trains. The station master, Mr Carlisle, telegraphed immediately to Gateshead requesting the attendance of the tool van. This arrived at about seven o'clock in the evening and the locomotive was placed back on the rails in little more than an hour after the van's arrival.

Two other unreported incidents which disrupted traffic at Alnwick station, especially that on the Cornhill line. It was in the month of September in 1940 or 1941 that an aircraft crashed into the site of some market gardens adjacent to the start of the Cornhill branch. Two members of a family named Macfarlane were working in the market gardens at the time and they managed to successfully liberate the pilot from the burning wreckage of his plane. It was fortunate that the plane did not crash into the nearby railway line. The site is no part of the industrial estate at the edge of Alnwick. The second incident involving an aircraft took place on 10th May 1942. A twin-engined plane crashed into the track of the Cornhill line at a location known as Mossyford. Further details of the incident are not known as this incident, like the previous one, was not recorded in the local press, but appeared in the records of local railway historian and photographer, John Mallon..

Derailments in the vicinity of Alnwick station appear to have been far from uncommon and yet another such event occurred in 1953, when, during shunting activity in Alnwick station yard, a locomotive about to haul a livestock train laden with sheep (purchased at Alnwick market), left the rails. The train was destined for Newcastle. The engine picked up three extra wagons to attach to the main train and was pulling out of the siding when it jumped the points and left the track. On this occasion local railway staff, with the aid of jacks and ramps, successfully righted the locomotive within an hour, as reported in the *Morpeth Herald* of 23rd January 1953, the accident having taken place on the 21st. No persons or animals were hurt in the accident and the train's departure was only delayed for about an hour. Other lines, for example into the passenger platforms, were not affected.

Several further derailments occurred at Alnwick during the 1950s and early 1960s, some being reported in the press whilst others went unreported. On 10th July 1953 a J39 0-6-0 tender locomotive, number 64868, became derailed at Alnwick North points, the Tweedmouth crane being used to place it back on the rails. On 3rd March

1956 another J39, number 64924, was entering the station at Alnwick when it became derailed on points opposite the station's signal box. The Tweedmouth crane and breakdown gang were once again summoned but during their first efforts at rerailing the loco fell on its side. Despite this setback the loco was successfully back on the rails by the end of the day. **



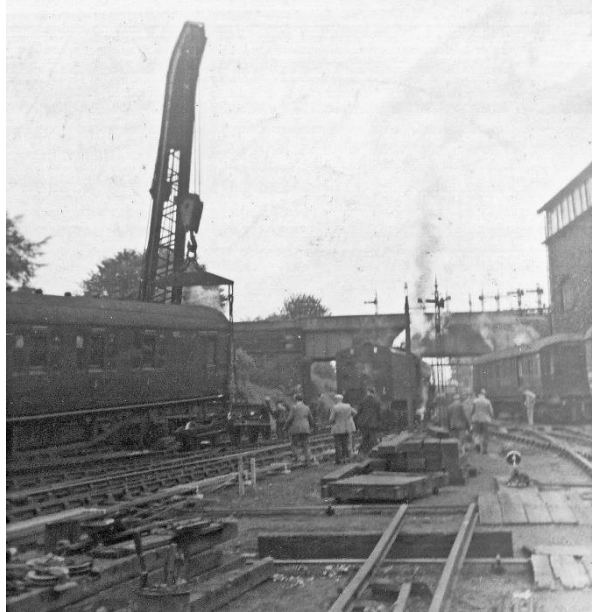
The derailed J39 number 64924

Then in 1957 a V1 2-6-2 tank locomotive, number 67646 of 52B, Heaton, shed was also derailed whilst entering the station, being successfully rerailed by the Tweedmouth crane. **



The derailed V1 2-6-2T 67646

Towards the end of the life of the branch there were two more derailments bringing 'unusual' locomotives to Alnwick. Although Pacific locomotives occasionally visited Alnwick with special passenger trains it was quite an unusual event when A3 Pacific 60040, named *Cameronian*, arrived tender-first with the Tweedmouth crane and accompanying tool van, having reversed at Alnmouth. Its visit was necessitated by the derailment of the Alnwick pilot engine, K1 2-6-0 number 62021, in the vicinity of the station whilst performing shunting duties. The date was 6th October 1963. On another occasion in the early 1960s A2 Pacific 60538 *Velocity*, of Gateshead shed, arrived with the tool van and crane to sort out the results of a heavy shunt after a rake of pigeon vans and some carriages had collided both being derailed and damaged.



Loco 60538 waits whilst the crane rerails a derailed carriage.

Onlookers would have been equally surprised when, after the cessation of steam trains on the branch, the breakdown crane and tool van arrived from Gateshead in the charge of Deltic locomotive, number 9004, *Queen's Own Highlander*. The reason for its attendance, in July 1966, was that a Clayton Type 1 Bo-Bo diesel, shunting the daily goods in Alnwick station yard, had become derailed. **

Other 'unreported' local accidents in the 1950s and 1960s included a heavy shunt in the Alnwick Gas Works' sidings which were controlled by Alnwick East box. Visits to these sidings, located on the Alnmouth side to the junction of the two routes out of Alnwick, involved the replacement of empty coal wagons with wagons laden with coal, which were coupled together during the shunt. As a result the locomotive was some way from the end of the rake of wagons. There was a misjudgement of distance and the terminal hopper wagon was rammed through the end wall of the works building, a sight clearly visible from the nearby A1 roadway! Once again this incident went unreported in the local press! However, this was not the only time that this mishap occurred, a newspaper photograph illustrating the second event! **

In compiling this narrative use has been made of the *British Newspaper Archive* and the *Railway Archive*, both available on line, and the books written about the two Alnwick branches written by John Addyman and Bartle Rippon. Ken Hoole's various books have also contributed some details, especially of the signal boxes. I must express my grateful thanks to the late Vera Mallon, the Alnwick local railway historian, who has kindly allowed me to include details of accidents which are recorded both in her own notes and in those of her late brother, John. Ken Middlemist, the last surviving steam footplateman who worked on the Alnwick branch has also provided details of incidents, one involving his father who was an Alnmouth-based driver on the line. Finally thanks are due to David Appleby who worked in the

offices at Alnwick station and who had first-hand knowledge of some of the accidents, recording some with his camera. Thank you to you all!

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