

REPORT OF INQUIRY

into

ACCIDENT ON RAILWAY SYSTEM OF CORAS IOMPAIR EIREANN

at

BALBRIGGAN STATION

ON 28th JUNE, 1963.

Department of Transport and Power,

DUBLIN.

REPORT OF INQUIRY INTO A RAILWAY ACCIDENT

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1. By direction of the Minister for Transport and Power I have made an Inquiry into the causes of an accident which occurred on the Córas Iompair Éireann railway system at Balbriggan Railway Station, Co. Dublin, on the 28th June, 1963. I have the honour to report as follows:

DESCRIPTION 2. At about 1.50 a.m. on 28th June, 1963, the dead body of a man was found on the railway line at Balbriggan Station. The body was badly mutilated. The body was identified as that of William Potter, 30 Upper Rutland Street, Dublin. Mr. Potter was aged 43 years, had been employed on the railway and had served as a guard since 1946. He had acted as Guard on the 11.15 p.m. railcar passenger train from Amiens St. to Balbriggan on 27th June.

The 11.15 p.m. railcar train is scheduled to run as a passenger train from Amiens Street to Balbriggan and to return as an empty train. On 27th June the crew consisted of Patrick Breslin, driver, and William Potter, guard. The train consisted of railcar No. 708 at the north end, carriage No. 24 (brake), railcar No. 706, carriage No. 79 and railcar No. 704 at the south end.

The train arrived at the down platform at Balbriggan shortly after midnight on 28th June and it was met at the platform by Bernard Duff, signalman at Balbriggan. In addition to his signalling duties, Bernard Duff also performs certain general station duties at Balbriggan. According to the evidence given to me the sequence of events at Balbriggan was as follows.

The passengers alighted from the train and left the station, the train shunted from the down to the up platform, the signal box was closed down and the signalman boarded the train in order to travel as a passenger to Skerries. The train then started and arrived at Skerries at about 12.30 a.m. During the run from Balbriggan to Skerries the signalman looked for the guard on the train but could not find him. At Skerries the driver and signalman searched the train but Guard Potter was not on it. A message was sent to Drogheda signal cabin and, as a result, the crew of the 12.40 a.m. up goods train from Drogheda was instructed to stop at Balbriggan to look for Guard Potter. This train arrived at Balbriggan at about 1.50 a.m. and the body of Guard Potter was found on the down line in the station. Blood marks were later found on the railcar train and on several wagons of the 10.35 p.m. down goods train from Dublin which passed through Balbriggan at about 12.50 a.m.

DRIVER OF  
RAILCAR  
TRAIN

3. Patrick Breslin is aged about 40 years and has been employed on the railway since 1940. He has been driving railcars since 1960. Mr. Breslin said that he came on duty on 27th June at 5 p.m. He was the driver of the 11.15 p.m. railcar train from Amiens Street to Balbriggan. He saw William Potter, the guard of the train, at Amiens Street before the train started but did not speak to him. The train stopped at the down platform at Balbriggan with its front end opposite to the water column. Breslin shut down the engines, turned off the head light, left the driving compartment and walked back along the platform, beside the train, to the driving compartment at the south (Dublin) end of the train. As he was entering the driving compartment he met Guard Potter, Breslin asked Potter to give him a signal when he was ready to have the train set back. Guard Potter did not say anything in reply. Breslin then entered the driving compartment and started the engines. The driving compartment was located on the off side (away from the platform) and from his seat he had no view of the platform, the line or signals in the direction (north) in which he was about to move the train. About four minutes after he entered the driving compartment he heard a whistle: one blast on a mouth whistle. He took this whistle as a signal to him to start the train. He then started the train, in reverse, running north. There was no light on his end of the train at this stage, but the carriage lights were on. The station platform lights were on when he entered the driving compartment; they were off as he backed the train.

He backed the train to a position clear of the north crossover points, stopped, and turned on his headlights. He saw by the light of the headlights that the crossover points had been set for the movement to the up line. He started the train again, drew forwards over the crossover to the up line, and stopped with the front of the train a little on the Drogheda side of the 'down' water column. He observed no signals when backing from the down platform to beyond the north crossover. He saw the signalman in the cabin when he stopped the train beyond the crossover. He did not remember receiving a signal from the signalman or anyone else to start the train and move it across the crossover to the up line.

He did not notice anything unusual when backing the train from the down platform and he did not notice anything on the line; the night was dark and he had no lights on. He did not notice anything when drawing forward to the up platform; he had headlights on at this stage but they were not very powerful and did not illuminate the down line and platform.

He remained stationary at the up platform for about five minutes. The signalman, Patrick Duff, then crossed the line in front of the train, jumped up onto the platform, called to him "right Paddy" and entered the train by a door near the driving compartment. Breslin stated that he did not speak to Duff. Breslin then started the train and proceeded towards Skerries. Breslin received no proper signal to start the train from the up platform.

When the train arrived at Skerries, Breslin stopped to let Duff off. Duff told him that he had looked for Guard Potter and that he was not on the train. Breslin thought that Guard Potter had been left behind at Balbriggan. He asked Duff to telephone to the signalman at Drogheda from the Skerries cabin to report that the Guard had been left behind. Duff did this and the train then left for Dublin with Duff acting as guard. He arrived at Amiens Street at about 1.10 a.m. and reported the occurrence to the platform foreman.

SIGNALMAN  
AT  
BALBRIGGAN

4. Bernard Duff, the signalman at Balbriggan at the time of the occurrence, is 35 years of age and has been employed on the railway since 1946. He has been a signalman at Balbriggan since 1955. Mr. Duff said that he came on duty on 27th June at 4 p.m. He was on the down platform when the 11.15 p.m. railcar train came in soon after midnight. He collected the tickets from two or three passengers and closed a carriage door. He saw Guard Potter walking along the platform from the south end of the train towards the north end, carrying a lamp. He said 'hello' to him, but had no other conversation with him. He had previously seen Driver Breslin getting out of the driving compartment at the north end of the train but he could not remember whether he had had any conversation with him.

Duff then locked the station door, turned off the platform lights and went to the signal cabin. He said that it was not very dark on the platform, as the carriage lights were on. When he reached the signal cabin he heard a whistle; a single blast. He thought that the sound came from the direction of the down platform. He did not see any person there. He thought that the whistle was a signal from the guard to the driver. He then pulled off the starting signal and the train started to move in reverse towards the north crossover. The advance starting signal controlling entrance to the section ahead remained at danger. The train carried a red light on the north end (the front during the reversing movement) and the carriage lights were on. When the train had cleared the north crossover he 'made' the crossover and he switched the cabin lights off and on to indicate to the driver that the points were made. The train then crossed to the up line and stopped near the beginning of the platform.

Duff then gave 'train out of section' to Malahide in respect of the railcar train and offered the 10.35 p.m. down goods to Drogheda and it was accepted. He offered the railcar train to Malahide and it was accepted. He then exchanged the necessary closing signals with Malahide and Drogheda, pulled off the signals and switched out the cabin. He turned off the cabin lights, locked the cabin and crossed the tracks to the railcar train. He went around the front of the train, got up on the platform and entered the train by a door just behind the driver's compartment. As he passed the driver's compartment Duff said that Breslin asked 'if he was ready' and he replied 'yes'. The guard was not mentioned.

The train then started and Duff walked back through

it, looking for Potter whom he assumed was on board. He did not find him and when the train stopped at Skerries he told Breslin and they searched the train together. At Breslin's suggestion Duff then opened the Skerries signal cabin and telephoned to signalman Matthews at Drogheda to inform him that Guard Potter had been left behind at Balbriggan.

Signalman Duff travelled in the train as a passenger in order to get home to Skerries. He had been in the habit of doing this for some time and it involved leaving his post at Balbriggan before the proper time.

ACTION WHEN  
GD. POTTER  
REPORTED  
MISSING.

5. When Signalman Duff reported to Drogheda that Guard Potter was missing and presumed to have been left behind at Balbriggan the information was forwarded to the Rail Control Office at Amiens Street. It was decided to hold the 12.40 a.m. up goods at Drogheda until the arrival there of the 10.35 p.m. down goods as it was thought that Guard Potter might flag the latter train at Balbriggan and travel on it to Drogheda. When the 10.35 train arrived at about 1.10 a.m. and Guard Potter was not on it, the crew of the 12.40 up goods train were instructed to stop at Balbriggan to pick him up.

10.35 p.m.  
DOWN GOODS  
TRAIN.

6. Edward Donnelly was driver of the 10.35 p.m. down goods train from North Wall. The train, composed of diesel-electric locomotive A33, 45 wagons and a van, left North Wall at 11.50 p.m., passed through Balbriggan Station at about 12.47 a.m. and arrived at Drogheda at about 1.10 a.m.. Driver Donnelly said that, passing through Skerries, he noticed a railcar train standing at the up platform; its head and carriage lights were lighting. He passed through Balbriggan Station at a speed of about 40 miles an hour. His headlights were on and he was looking out. He did not see any person on the platform or anything on the track and he did not notice anything unusual. The night was dark and his headlights were not very powerful.

12.40 a.m.  
UP GOODS  
TRAIN

7. Francis Carty was driver of the 12.40 a.m. up goods train from Drogheda. His train left Drogheda at 1.25 a.m. and he had instructions to stop at Balbriggan to pick up Guard Potter. His locomotive was fitted with powerful headlights and coming into Balbriggan Station he saw a body lying in the down road between the rail and the platform. He stopped the train and, accompanied by his Guard, Desmond Kelly, reported the matter to the Stationmaster, Mr. Bennett.

EXAMINATION  
OF TRAINS.

8. The railcar train was examined at Fairview Shed at 2.30 a.m. on 28th June. Blood marks were found on a driving wheel and tyre, on a thrust bar and on the enclosure of the cardan shaft of Car No. 706. The marks were on the side of the car which was the platform side at Balbriggan. No marks were found on any other part of the train.

Wagons of the 10.35 p.m. down goods train were

examined at Dundalk at 10 a.m. on 28th June. Traces of blood, flesh and brain matter were found on the axle boxes of the seven wagons which had been marshalled next to the locomotive. The locomotive, A33, was examined at Dundalk at 12 noon on 28th June, after it had been to Ardee. No marks were found on the locomotive.

ACTIONS OF  
GUARD POTTER

9. It appears that Guard Potter's actions after the arrival of the train were as follows: He dismounted from the train immediately, probably from carriage No. 24 which contained the guard's compartment. He walked to the south end of the train and took off the tail lamp. He met Breslin as the latter was getting into the driving compartment at the south end, and Breslin spoke to him. He walked to the north end of the train, meeting Duff on the way, and fixed the tail lamp on the north end. The fact that a tail lamp was fixed on the north end of the train was established by the evidence of Duff and of the signalman at East Wall Junction.

It has not been possible to establish definitely how Mr. Potter came to be on the line. He could have slipped and fallen in front of the train while fixing the lamp but, if he had done so, marks should have been found on the front railcar. If he had fallen at this stage it is unlikely that he could have blown the whistle which Breslin and Duff said they heard later.

It is more probable that, having fixed the tail lamp in position, he returned along the platform intending to board the train by the guard's door in the middle of carriage No. 24, near which the bell push for signalling to the driver is placed. He may then have blown his whistle as an indication to Duff that the train was ready to move as soon as the fixed signal was cleared. He may have slipped and fallen between carriage No. 24 or railcar No. 706 and the platform when attempting to board the train either before it started or when it was in motion.

The clearance between the stepboard of carriage No. 24 and the edge of the down platform at Balbriggan is about 10 inches; the clearance between the side of railcar No. 706 and the edge of the platform is about 9 inches. It would be possible for a man to slip into an opening of such width and be dragged down.

That he received his first injuries from Railcar No. 706 after it had moved a very short distance seems probable from the marks found on the railcar and the location of the remains. A leg was found between the rails near the position where Car No. 706 had been standing and it would appear that it was severed by the leading wheel of the rear bogie of that railcar. The body was found about 40 yards further north and was lying between the inner rail and the platform. The body may have been moved partly by the railcar train and partly by the 10.35 p.m. down goods.

There was no evidence to suggest that Guard Potter was in the habit of using a whistle signal to the driver to start his railcar trains. Driver Breslin stated that on the three previous nights that week he had been with

Potter on the same train and Potter always gave him bell signals: two bells to start. No whistle was found at the scene of the accident but it may have been disintegrated by the passage of trains.

The fact that the platform lights had been turned off may have contributed to the accident but I do not think that an experienced railwayman would have been in any danger on that account.

According to the information I obtained Guard Potter was in normal health at the time of the accident and was sober.

MOVEMENT OF  
RAILCAR  
TRAIN.

10. It was necessary for the railcar train to transfer from the down to the up line for the return journey to Dublin. There are two crossovers, one at the north and one at the south end of the station and the transfer could be made in several ways. As already stated, the transfer was made by backing the train to the north crossover. It appears probable that there was a tacit understanding between the driver, guard and signalman that the movement would be effected in that way.

RULES.

11. According to the information given to me railway operations in the Northern Section of C.I.E., in which Balbriggan is situated, are governed by the Great Northern Railway (Ireland) Rule Book, 1949; the Regulations for Train Signalling, 1952; the Appendix to the Working Time Table, 1930; and Rules and Regulations for the Working of Rail Cars, 1932. The latter document contains special provisions for the starting and stopping of rail cars; two bell signals from the guard to driver to start and one bell signal to stop.

Special instructions were issued by C.I.E. in November 1958 regarding the control of shunting movements with diesel-electric locomotives and diesel rail cars. These instructions provide, inter alia, that when the driver drives from the cab which is the trailing one in relation to the direction of movement (sets back) and the guard travels on the train, he must travel in the leading cab and control the movement by hand signals to the driver. These instructions do not, I was informed, apply to the Northern Section.

I consider that the movements of the rail car train at Balbriggan Station were shunting movements and for these the Rules require hand signals from the guard or shunter to the driver, who must be in a position to see the signals. I was informed, however, that the normal practice in such movements was for the guard to signal to the driver by means of the bell system installed in the rail cars: two bells to start, no distinction being made between going forward and setting back, and one bell to stop. The construction of rail cars is such that it is difficult for a person to see hand signals from the driving position, and this is understood to be the reason for the practice.

Passenger Guards are required to carry whistles, but the Rules do not provide for the starting of trains by whistle signals. It is the practice to use the whistle to call attention but the prescribed signals for starting are hand signals and, in the case of railcars, bell signals.

The use of the whistle for signalling to drivers engaged in shunting operations is provided for in the Rules. The code is: one blast -- go ahead, two blasts -- set back, etc. It is understood, however, that this code has not been in use for a considerable time.

COMMENTS ON  
ACTIONS OF  
DRIVER  
BRESLIN.

12. At Balbriggan on the night of the accident the driver did not receive either a hand signal or a bell signal to start. The single blast of a whistle which he and the signalman said they heard, and on which he started the train, was not an authorised signal for the setting-back movement which he made. Later, when coming across the cross-over and when leaving the up platform he started without having received any authorised signal. Driver Breslin could give no explanation for his actions.

COMMENTS ON  
ACTIONS OF  
SIGNALMAN  
DUFF.

13. Signalman Duff changed the crossover points and restored them to normal without signals from the guard to do so, as required by the Rules. He failed to look for and exchange signals with the guard during the crossover movement. He went off duty before the appointed time (12.45 a.m.) and travelled without permission on the empty railcar train to Skerries. His boarding of the train and the words which passed between him and Driver Breslin may have contributed to Breslin's lapse in starting the train from the up platform without a proper signal.

CONCLUSIONS.

14. I consider that Guard Potter's death was caused by his being run-over by the 11.15 p.m. railcar train, Amiens Street to Balbriggan, and the 10.35 p.m. down goods train from North Wall. There was no evidence to show positively how he came to be on the line, but it is probable that he slipped and fell accidentally under the railcar train.

The clearance between the rails and the down platform at Balbriggan is about two inches greater than the standard for the section and this results in a corresponding increase in the clearance between the carriages and the platform. The clearances are not abnormal, however, and experience has not shown such clearances to be unsafe.

The fact that the platform lights had been turned off may have contributed to the accident but I do not think that an experienced railwayman would have been in any danger on that account.

I consider that the improper manner in which the movements of the railcar train were conducted at Balbriggan could have contributed to cause and delayed the discovery of the accident. The driver of the railcar train and, to a lesser extent, the signalman at Balbriggan must bear responsibility for this.

I do not think that the driver of the 10.35 p.m. down goods train was in any way to blame for the accident.

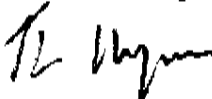
The railcar train was improperly lighted for the backing movement from the down platform to the north cross-over. For this movement it should have carried a white light at the north end and a red light at the south end. The driver and guard are responsible for seeing that the correct lights are exhibited.



8.

REVISION OF  
RULES

15. The Board's Rules have been amended from time to time to suit changing conditions but I think that their interpretation presents difficulties particularly in relation to railcars and diesel locomotives. Furthermore, the rules are not uniform over the whole system. Although the matter had no direct bearing on the accident I consider that a revision of the Rules to clarify their application to current operating conditions is desirable.

  
T. L. HOGAN

Railway Inspecting Officer.

30 November, 1963.