

ECCLES STATION

NEWS

JANUARY 2012

The contents of this month's e issue are as follows:

**News section, Articles, Trip of the Month, Fare tip,
Bargain fare, Book review.**

ESN sends you best wishes for the New Year.

These difficult times will require a 'chin up and carry on' attitude from some of our readers, who may need to look for opportunities that are not so finance dependent. However let's remember that some of the best things in life are not measured by Gross Domestic Product! Some are free, and we shall help you find bargain fares and days out wherever possible!

Let us all resolve to make the best of social and community lives in and around Eccles this year.

NEWS

****First of all is a correction.*** Our article on the 1941 Eccles rail crash referred to its being 60 years ago when of course it was 70 years ago. We offer apologies to readers.

The **FRECCLES 'Trip of the Month'** is to Macclesfield to shop and mooch round the market and town. There are stopping trains from Piccadilly but you can also use a Virgin Pendolino express to Euston! This trip makes use of the set of

connections at Manchester Piccadilly mentioned in our CHANGING TRAINS article.

*The next **gardening day** at the station is at 11.00 Sunday January 8th or same time and place on Sunday 5th February.*

The new timetable (Northern T.T. no 15) shows **no significant changes for January** other than the ***last train of the night*** in each direction which will be ***replaced by a bus service*** to allow the electrification workers to occupy the line overnight. The times for this replacement bus are given in the new leaflet and this is welcome.

*Members of the public joined Freccles **to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the 1941 Eccles Rail Crash** on 30th December 2011. In spite of it being a wet, cold afternoon, around 20 people held a minute's silence to remember the victims of the crash. Amongst those present were Bert and Peter Creswell, whose father Jack died in the crash, and other relatives of those who died, who were aware of the commemoration through the Salford Advertiser.*

Freccles' Heritage Group also produced a display for the station's poster cases to commemorate the crash, concentrating on the memories of the relatives of those involved. Do go along to take a look. Also ESN gives you a more detailed narrative of events in one of the articles this month.

Eccles station had another **historic steam locomotive visit** in Sunday 11th December. **Princess Elizabeth** last Sunday was hauling the The York Yuletide Express from Liverpool to York and back. It arrived at Eccles at 11am leaving at 11.30 after taking water from a road tanker parked on the bridge.

Its route was via the Calder Valley and it picked up further passengers at Victoria and Rochdale. On return it was booked at Eccles again to take water from 19.20 until 19.50 but was late on arrival and did not come until 19.56 watering again from a road tanker. This was very quick and a good job too

because it was in the Liverpool platform! Princess Elizabeth was away by 20.15 after holding up the 20.00 departure from Eccles to Liverpool, and behind that Chester express booked through Eccles at 20.05!



Princess Elizabeth is seen approaching Eccles with the York Yuletide Express last month.

This picture is courtesy of Tony Oldfield and was taken at Patricroft.

*The annual rail fares increase takes place on January 3rd. Under the current government formula of **RPI + 1%** this gives an **average increase of about 6%**. Some will go up more and others less. The latitude granted to franchisees for individual fares has been increased to five percent more than this, but the average must still be the same. It is possible that some fares will come down, as we found last year.*

Northern Rail has put up some 'thank you' to Freccles plaques at Eccles Station in recognition of our gardening efforts. This is pleasing – it is nice to have your efforts recognised!

Successful negotiations have now been completed for The Science Museum (London) to absorb The Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester. This is good news in that it should provide some protection for MOSI.

Although the government promised to protect the 'Museum Grant' the accompanying small print of that promise was for 'national museums only'. MOSI was due to lose its entire government grant next year and without any funding it was possible such a major regional museum would have faced closure. What fate awaits other regional museums is not yet clear.

ARTICLES

REGIONAL RAIL INVESTMENT

At the end of October successful bids for the regional growth funds were announced by the Deputy Prime Minister. Only a small number of these were rail schemes and locally the proposed reinstatement of the Colne to Skipton line was not successful.

However, £7,000,000 was granted to install and signal the 400 yard long 'Todmorden Curve' project. This reinstatement will allow a new Manchester Victoria- Rochdale-Burnley service with a journey time of only 35 minutes. It is not yet clear whether services will be further enhanced by the trains continuing to Blackburn or reversing to go to Nelson and Colne.

The curve will be single track and will go anticlockwise from the east end of the viaduct at the east of Todmorden station and then face north west to join the Hebden Bridge to Burnley route - known as 'Copy Pit'.

Also £1,650,000 was granted to The Moorland and City Railway Company to part finance the reopening of a goods and passenger branch from Stoke on Trent to Leek and Cauldon Low.

Tuesday, 30th December 1941.

The Signals.

Those of relevance to this crash are shown on the accompanying diagram (page 11) with the aspects they were displaying for the Pennington train. The signals were semaphore arm signals with small paraffin lamps to give the coloured lights.

The distant signal is a **caution** signal with a yellow arm. When horizontal (and therefore showing a yellow light) this indicates proceed with caution ready to stop at one of the subsequent Eccles signals. This gave a braking distance of about 700 yards before the next signal. If its arm is raised* the light shows green and this indicates that all the subsequent Eccles stop signals on the line are clear – so no need to brake. The home signals are **stop** signals with red arms and lights. If the arm is raised* (and the light green) this means proceed.

Semaphore signals are at the top of posts that could be up to 20 or even 30ft high and the dim paraffin lights are only properly visible in the dark or twilight. They would have been almost impossible to see in such a dense fog, so how could trains keep running?

Drivers would know where to look out carefully for the signals from experience of the line but there was additional protection written into the rule book. The 'fog rules' meant that the signalman must not accept a train from an adjacent box while any conflicting train movement took place in his area of responsibility. However these rules also allowed the Eccles signalman to run normal acceptance and signalling operations if there were fog signalmen on duty at the signals, and this was important to avoid congestion at busy times.

The 'fog men' were appointed temporarily from other railway duties (such as track work), to occupy small sentry boxes at the bottom of signal posts on the main running lines. They would keep a brazier of coals burning – both to keep warm and to make the spot conspicuous to drivers**. They could also see the signal aspect (although it might entail going a few steps up the ladder to see), and would be alerted to any change by the swish of the wires and the clack of

the signal arms. The job then was to show the appropriate colour on a (brighter) hand lantern to an oncoming train. In addition the fog man was to strap two large detonators to the rail, removing these only while the signal was clear and replacing them as soon as he had seen the tail lamp of the passing train. Thus a driver passing a caution or danger signal should hear two very loud sharp reports*** as warning. The rules stressed the importance of a fog man being at the distant signal.

**Or lowered in the case of lower quadrant semaphores. At this stage the LMS had begun to convert to upper quadrant signals from the LNWR lower quadrants.*

*** Would they do this even when blackout was in force? Parrington said in his evidence that his brazier was burning well at the time the Pennington train passed him, so it would seem they did. The dense fog would presumably prevent sighting by enemy aircraft anyway.*

**** Think of a loud bang at a public firework display. The clips available on the internet have very poor sound recording and would lead a viewer to think that railway detonators are feeble devices – they are not.*

The Manchester Train.

The 06.53 am Kenyon Junction to Manchester Exchange passenger train (via Tyldesley) was already running 49 minutes late as it approached Eccles. This train consisted of eight bogie non corridor carriages and the loco was No 207 a 2-6-2 tank engine. The driver, fireman and guard confirmed that the signals for crossing to the right upon departure were already clear as they arrived in platform 4 at 08.15 and they probably assumed a brisk run to MANCHESTER on the up fast line would let them lose no more time. The fog around the station was dense and it was still dark – wartime blackout regulations would be in force till 08.55 am

The stop would have been a scene of frenetic activity. Many passengers will have alighted for work in Eccles and some would probably be hurrying because the train was late: many more will have boarded to go to their employment in Manchester. It would also have been very noisy - with one slam door per compartment to be closed after all had boarded! The platform staff would rush to do this but platform duties inevitably occupied between 2 and 3 minutes at Eccles which was a busy stop.

The pandemonium would give way to a few seconds of quietness which would then have been broken by the guard's whistle sounding just before 08.18. Number 207 doubtless made a noisy start from the platform with its barking exhaust beats, because the 211ton load was quite a big one for this 74 ton loco.

The train had travelled about 80 yards, and locomotive No 207 had just traversed the crossover when another train came speeding out of the fog towards its carriages.

In the Signal Box.

Signalman Lowe was of age 51 years with 30 years as a signalman and a good record of service. He had been promoted to Eccles box from Eccles Junction box three months previously, and was now well familiar with the fifty seven levers. He reported for duty at 06.00 am at Eccles box, and he was assisted by Acton (a 17yr old lad of 10 months experience) who kept the signal register meticulously and dealt with the telephone.

The dense fog had now been continuous for about nineteen hours and this was only Lowe's second day of prolonged fog working at this box. However he did not feel that it was a particularly busy period (even though he dealt with 18 trains in the hour up to and including the crash!). When he started his shift there were no fog men at the signals so, in accordance with the fog rules, he did not accept trains from adjacent signal boxes while there was a crossing movement occurring at his box.

The fog signal men began to return for their long, cold 12 hour duties from 07.00 am and it is at this stage that confusion arose. **Patten** was to be fog man at the all important distant signal, near Weaste on the down slow from Manchester, but he was not due on till 08.30 am having worked till 23.30 am the night before.

Parrington reported to the box in person at 07.00 am and went off to the down outer home signals. Next, Acton took a phone call from Eccles Station which he logged and told Charlie Lowe that it was **Pantling*** going on duty. Unfortunately Lowe thought that Acton said '**Patten**' was going on. Lowe heard

someone who sounded like Pantling shout through the fog that he was going on duty. If signalman Lowe had looked at the register he would have seen Acton's entry that **Pantling** phoned in going to an up line signal, and realised that **Patten** had not phoned in, and had not come on duty. However he did not look at the register and now thought he had all the fog men on. As a result Signalman Lowe resumed normal working by accepting trains from adjacent boxes and protecting crossing movements by his own signals.

He accepted the Manchester bound train on the up slow from Eccles Junction box at 8.09. It was already 49 minutes late and he decided to cross this train to the up fast because of congestion on the up slow line to Manchester. He changed the crossover to do this and cleared the signals for that movement.

As the train arrived at platform 4 of Eccles at 08.15 am signalman Lowe accepted the Pennington train on the down slow line from Cross Lane Junction (this train was 27minutes late). He did not clear the signals for this train as he intended it to slow and then stop at the outer home signal while the crossing of the Manchester train took place. He received the 'train entering section' code almost immediately, and then the track circuit annunciator buzzed to show a train at the outer home signal. The next thing he saw was this train pass his box at speed.

*Note the similarity of the surnames of the fog men in mitigation of Lowe's error.

On the line from Manchester.

The 06.53 am departure from Rochdale to Pennington was a workers' train. As well as commuters into Manchester and Eccles it will probably have carried a significant number of miners to collieries at Leigh and at Pennington (just south of Leigh). The 8 non corridor bogie coaches weighed 217 tons but this was well within the capacity of the 86 ton loco. Although not large No 2406 was a quite powerful 2-6-4 tank engine designed for just such work as this train. It was running chimney first. In the cab was a Newton Heath crew: driver Mountfield (in the left hand driver's position) and fireman Ashworth, both of whom had worked the line for many years.

The train left Manchester Exchange 22 minutes late at 08.05 am to take the down slow through Eccles, and then it would presumably go via Worsley and Tyldesley. The journey started off slowly, with a 5mph engineering speed restriction all the way to Ordsall Lane, causing more time to be lost. Driver Mountfield will then have accelerated rapidly through the fog and the darkness on the straight run to Eccles.

The loco water tanks were getting low so the crew said that they decided if possible to use the troughs at Eccles to fill up on the move. This could save making a special water stop later in the run and losing even more time. For this they would need a clear run into platform 3 at Eccles. The train would have had to approach Eccles signal box at a sufficient speed for the scoop to be able to drive water up into the tanks from the trough between the rails. Sharp braking would then be required, past the box and into platform three.

As the train sped through Weaste platforms the driver asked fireman Ashcroft to look out for the Eccles distant signal just beyond and on the fireman's side. (He said that he worried he might stumble on the way back if he crossed the cab to look himself). Dick Ashcroft assured him it was green. From this information Driver Mountford would be likely to conclude that he had a clear run through all the succeeding signals. The absence of detonations at the distant appeared to confirm Ashcroft's observation, (although Driver Mountford) saw no fog man at this spot).

As a result Mountford would have kept up some speed towards the Eccles troughs. He passed the Eccles down outer home signal, claiming that he was given a green light hand signal, and that there were no detonations. Mountford did some preliminary braking after the outer home signal and says he then told Ashcroft to drop the scoop. The guard of the train also stated that he heard no detonations, and felt the braking. However on the ground, at the down outer home signal fog man Parrington was astonished by a train appearing out of the fog at speed (probably 40 to 50 mph). He saw it run past the signal at danger and it did not slow despite the loud detonation he said it caused (heard by at least one person at Eccles).

Driver Mountford continued past the inner home signal*(it was at danger) and was braking hard over the 193 yards into the platform, but the KENYON TO Manchester train was crossing his path. It is doubtful that he saw it in the fog.

**This signal did not have detonators on the track. They should have been placed there by a mechanism operated by using the detonator lever in the signal box. Even had Lowe done this it would have had no bearing on the outcome as the signal was so close to the crossover.*

At the crossover.

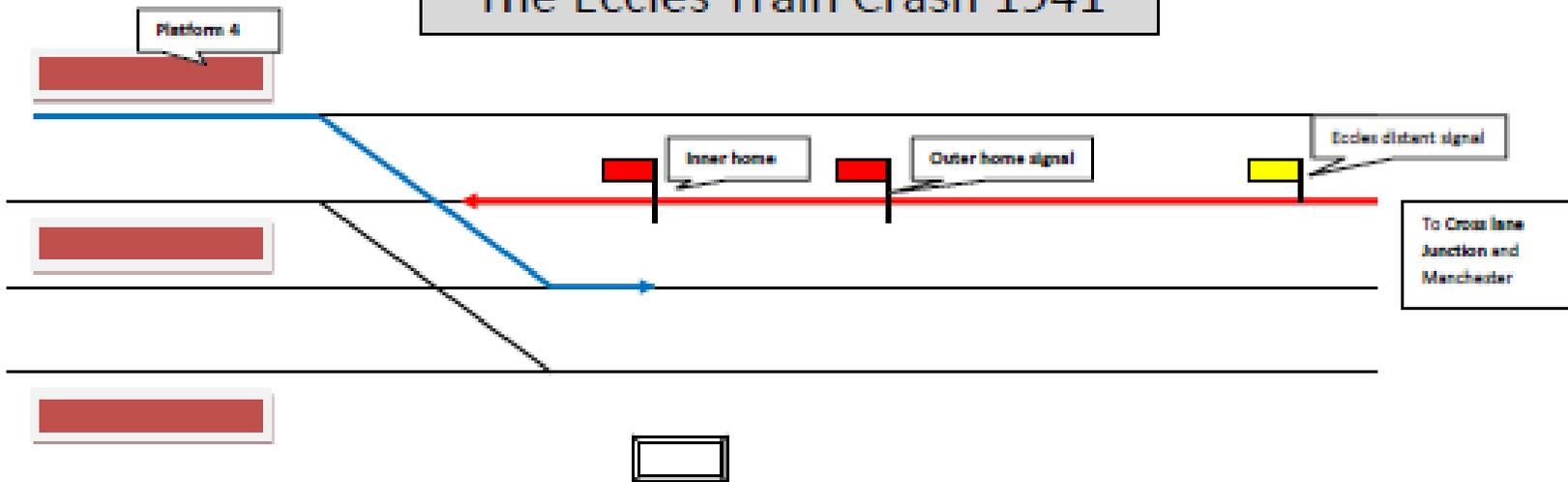
At 08.18, in the fog and the dark of a wartime morning, No 2406 at the head of 8 bogie carriages and travelling at a speed estimate to be 30 to 40 mph raked the side of the first carriage of the Manchester bound train. The destruction of the following seconds was to end the lives of 19 passengers immediately, and four more were to die later. The impact seriously injured 54 other people and caused less serious injuries (but needing hospital treatment) to another 28 people.

At 08.30 prompt, Patten arrived at Eccles signal box to report for his duty as fog man at the down slow distant, and a sense of awful responsibility dawned on signalman Lowe.

In the interval between Lowe's two shocks he will almost certainly have phoned Railway Control in Manchester to alert them to the disaster. This office would then coordinate the emergency responses needed. In addition the adjacent signal boxes of Cross Lane Junction, Eccles Junction and Patricroft would need to be phoned to halt all traffic.

Editor's notes: I have narrated the above account based strictly on the contents of Major Wilson's report, and also a smattering of personal railway knowledge to fill in details for the general reader. I hope it is clear to all where I have interpolated my understanding of occurrences for the sake of the narration. It seemed to me that the story was well worth retelling for our readers. Next month's article will deal with events taking place as a result of the crash.

The Eccles Train Crash 1941



Legend:

Path of Kenyon to Manchester train from up slow to up fast as signalled →

Path of the Rochdale to Pennington train against the signals on down slow ←

The aspects of the signals for that train are as shown on the diagram.

From top to bottom the lines are up slow, down slow, up fast, down fast. There are water troughs between the rails of each track from the outer home as far as the signal box. The down slow distant is on the right hand side of that line the other signals are in the usual lhs position.

Changing trains 11

In this second article covering train connections available from Manchester Piccadilly Station we shall deal with the **Virgin Trains' expresses to London Euston**. This is a very good service - these trains run frequently throughout the whole week. For most of the day they depart every twenty minutes (including Sundays!).

On Mondays to Fridays the first train is at 05.05 in the morning and the last departure is at 21.15. On Saturdays these times are 05.25 and 20.35. The Sunday service starts at 06.50 and runs until the 20.55 departure. The journey time is about two hours and ten minutes.

The return services from Euston are at the same frequencies but the last trains back are somewhat later. This allows day trippers to spend a very long day in London, and going to evening shows is possible. On Mondays to Sundays the late trains are 23.30, 00.30* and 01.30* from Euston station.

The really good value fares are obtained by advanced booking of specific seats on specific trains. To turn up and then pay to go immediately on one of the rush hour trains costs a lot of money. Virgin also produces a 2 for 1 offers booklet (available at Piccadilly) for your London visit. This has vouchers for 130 attractions including shows, museums and restaurants. The vouchers are valid if you show your rail tickets with them at the relevant venue.

Other principal stations served on the route are Stockport, Wilmslow, Crewe, Stafford, Macclesfield, Stoke-on Trent and Milton Keynes.

On Sundays the trains from Eccles usually run direct to Piccadilly and on to the airport. On weekdays take the train from Eccles to Victoria and transfer by tram to Manchester Piccadilly. From the tram platforms you can ascend to the main concourse for your train.

Next month we shall cover more of the express services available from Piccadilly.

*of course this is the early morning of the following day!

TRIP OF THE MONTH

This month we recommend **trip No 68** which is:

MACCLESFIELD – MARKET & SHOPS

Macclesfield is an old fashioned Cheshire market town with some fine buildings. There is an indoor market and an outdoor market on Tuesday, Friday and Saturday.

Just buy your ticket at Eccles station and off you go whenever you fancy!

For the itinerary see:

<http://www.freccles.org.uk/pdf/Railway%20trips%2068.pdf>

FARE TIP

If you have a county card or GM travel pass you need pay only from Stockport for a visit to Macclesfield!

JANUARY FARE BARGAIN

ARRIVA RETURN!

Good news is that **the club 55 ticket is back from January 8th until March 28th**. Anywhere in Wales or the Marches for £19 return and valid for up to a month! How about Pembrokeshire? It's a long way and it's beautiful – sort of Cornwall without the tourists!

See <http://www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/c55/>

BOOK REVIEW

'RED for DANGER' The Classic History of British Railway Disasters.'

by L.T.C. ROLT ISBN 9780 75094 48074.

Sutton Publishing £14.99. Available at Eccles Library.

This book was first published in 1955. This edition was republished in 2007.

The author was a well known, skilful writer on matters concerning canals and railways and able to render a technically complex subject reasonably comprehensible to a general audience. The title of the book tells you what the contents are, but the accidents are instructionally grouped by types rather than in chronological order e.g. "Blow Ups and Break Downs" & "Single Line Collisions." The period covered runs up to December 4th 1957 (Lewisham). The selected accidents seem to be ones that illustrate or caused change to significant points about railway operations. Hence the reader will find no references to Eccles in this book.

For general or particularly interest in railway topics - this should be the book to start with for anyone new to the study of railway accidents.

The book is available at Eccles Library.

Why not join FRECCLES? It is only £5 a year and this contribution helps us to improve the gardens and tubs at the station as well as to campaign for a better station and services.

To find out more about **FRECCLES** or to make contact see our **website:** www.freccles.org or e mail us at info@freccles.org.uk

