

# A TRAGIC STORY OF A RAILWAYMAN OF GREAT BOWDEN

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Reading the history of Great Bowden in its heyday at the end of Victoria's reign, one could be forgiven for assuming that the life of the village revolved around hunting and the grazing of sheep. Certainly the majority of adults worked either for John Henry Stokes of Nether House and his hunting friends, or as graziers, but there was also significant employment on both the canal, and the railway which bisects the village.

Market Harborough had benefited from the railway boom and there were as many as six railway lines linked to the town. The principal line was the Midland connecting Leicester to St. Pancras via Market Harborough. The London and North Western Railway company (from London Euston to Carlisle) was the first to build a line extending its system from Rugby to Market Harborough. A further link was made going east from the town passing through Great Bowden to Welham, where it divided into two: one line veering north to Melton Mowbray, and Nottingham, and Newark; and the other continuing via Seaton down the Welland valley to Stamford and Peterborough. The line which headed north to Melton Mowbray was built by the London and North Western and Great Northern companies and was universally known as the "joint line. (The Great Northern Company owned the line from London Kings Cross to Edinburgh). To accommodate this increase in rail traffic a new station was built at Market Harborough in 1885 along with a group of houses on the right as you enter Great Bowden village on Station Road (just below the bridge).

Robert Herron was born in Wylam, Northumberland in about 1834. Wylam is now a small picturesque village in the Tyne valley, 10 miles west of Newcastle; but in the 19th century it was a mining village. It also happens to be the birth place of George Stephenson the famous railway pioneer! George's son Robert followed in his father's footsteps and in the opinion of many became the greatest railway engineer of the era. He was chief engineer for the London to Birmingham railway passing through Rugby.

It must be no small coincidence that Robert Herron came down to the East Midlands where he became a train driver. He married a girl from Long Lawford, Rugby, eventually settling at No 11 Station Road in Great Bowden. The colliery in Wylam closed in 1868, but we know that Robert was already living in Great Bowden at that time as his eldest child Henry was born in Great Bowden in 1866, to be followed by Elizabeth born in

1872 and Mary in 1877. Also living in this railway cottage was a John Bromwich from New Bilton also in Rugby. In 1892, Robert had been an engine driver for 34 years; his son was recorded as being a fireman. John Bromwich also worked on the railway.

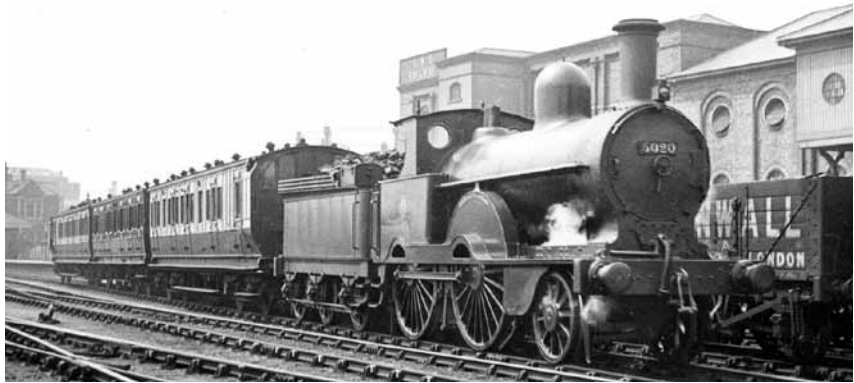
Walk down to the Dingley Road cemetery; just on the right as you enter through the cemetery gates is a memorial to Robert Herron killed in a railway accident on the 25th July 1892, aged 58.



MELTON MOWBRAY STATION IN 1920]

Robert, or "Bob" as he was known, was the driver of the London and North-Western train travelling from Nottingham to Northampton (via Melton Mowbray and Market Harborough). As the train was approaching Melton at 2.46pm the engine left the rails followed by eight carriages. Bob Herron was killed, as was his fireman. At the point where the derailment took place the line was carried on a 22feet high embankment. Only one passenger was killed, there fortunately being few passengers on the train.

A thorough enquiry was carried out for the Board of Trade by a Major Francis Arthur Marindin R.E. and a 10 page report was published on the 30th July 1892. It appears that on that unfortunate day, there was work going on involving repairs and maintenance to the track. Warning notices had been sent to all drivers, and Robert Herron's son gave a statement to the enquiry that he remembers seeing the warning notices at the Harborough depot and that his father had also read the warning.



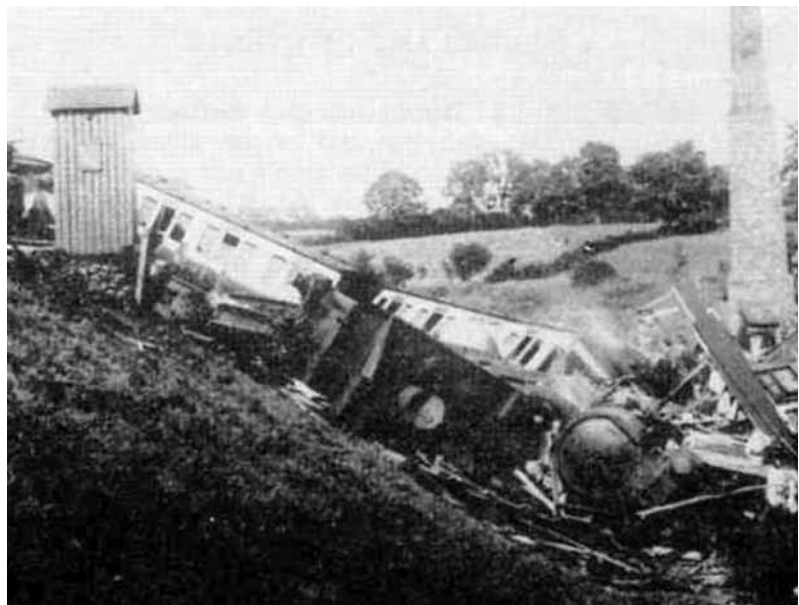
LOCOMOTIVE No 5020 "DELHI", 1920, SAME CLASS AS ACCIDENT TRAIN

Robert Herron, the driver, was initially criticised for the train travelling too fast, but the major portion of blame was attributed to a George Harwood the track foreman or ganger, for not having a flagman out to warn the oncoming trains. Subsequently, further information from the Coroner's inquest totally vindicated Robert Herron, as many expert witnesses employed by the railway confirmed that it was not normal practice to reduce speed unless specifically advised, and that anyway the train would have been derailed at any speed!

Major Marindin concluded in his recommendations that henceforth it should be mandatory when work is being carried out on the track ALWAYS to have flagmen in place to warn oncoming trains.

The report was presented to the Board of Trade on the 10th September with the addendum added by Major Marindin withdrawing any censure on Robert Herron. (In 1895 Major F.A.Marindin became the Senior Inspector of Railways and was also knighted for his work. He died in 1900 aged 61)

There is another story attached to this particular train. In the 1880's a man was leaning out of a carriage window, only a mile or two from the Herron tragedy, when his head struck a bridge and he was killed. The man's name was Jimmy Carrington and from that day local people in the area to the north of Melton christened the train the "Jimmy Carrington". As field workers in those days kept time by the passing of trains this remark became almost a legend amongst the country folk. However the oft repeated remark very quickly fell out of use after the 1892 accident.



THE RAIL CRASH NORTH OF MELTON MOWBRAY

In spite of this tragedy the family continued to thrive. John Smith also of Station Road, and an engine driver in the 1950s and 60s, remembers a Miss Herron (one of Robert's daughters) teaching at Fairfield Road infants.

Thanks go to him for background information and David Bodicoat, who obtained the Accident Report from the Leicester University Library.