Railway music in the United Kingdom in the nineteenth century

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1 Broadside ballads, navvies on the line

The opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway in 1830 signalled a huge landmark in railway history; it was the world's first inter-city railway, it carried both passengers and goods, and it travelled in both directions. Designed and built by George Stephenson (1781 –1848), the Liverpool and Manchester Railway was the culmination of decades of experimentation with tracks, engines and locomotives. Its construction is widely recognised as the beginning of the development of the railway network, not just in the United Kingdom but across the world.

Trains were faster and cheaper, passengers and goods could now travel between Liverpool and Manchester quicker than ever before. They aided economic and social development, and by changing concepts of time and distance, they altered people's horizons and increased their opportunities. In effect the new railway sparked a revolution in trade and travel. The immediate financial success of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, along with new developments in locomotive design, led to a rapid expansion in railway construction and the UK network developed very quickly. This boom in railway building is often referred to as 'railway mania'. In 1844 there were 104 railway companies, and then over the next six years another 110 were added.[1] Between 1833 and 1843, 2,300 miles of track had been built.[2] By 1870, with over 15,000 miles of track, the main line network was almost complete, and by 1912, there were 23,441 miles of track open to traffic.[3]

The massive undertaking of building the railways fell to huge numbers of itinerant workers known as navvies. Their travails are recorded in some of the earliest railways songs in the form of broadside ballads, long rhyming ballads written in part to spread the news, and in part to entertain.

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The connection between music and the railways can be traced back to their construction with some of the earliest music being found in broadside ballads: songs such as 'The navvy boys' tell of the building of the railways; the highs and lows of 'railway mania' are recorded in such broadside ballads as 'The rail, the rail'; and railway openings are celebrated in, for example, the 'Newcastle and Carlisle Railway'. Some songs welcome the railway. The 'Western Railroad' of 1863 celebrates the new railway coupled with the downfall of the stage coach business. Others criticise it, such as 'Shillibeers Original Omnibus versus the Greenwich Railroad' which instead extols the virtues of travel by omnibus. There are also many ballads that are bearers of bad news, news of some of the many tragic accidents brought about by the railway.

Broadsheets or broadsides (single sheets printed on one side) were among the earliest products of the printing press and date from the sixteenth century. They were sold on the street and were designed to entertain and inform the masses, spreading the news, whether of national events or local scandal. Such street literature included ballads (sometimes known as slip songs), and chap books which were made by printing a large sheet of paper and folding it into a small booklet. Broadside ballads covered a wide range of subjects from murders and executions, to deaths of the famous and local gossip. The themes speak of contemporary issues, struggles and poverty, political events and communal tragedy as well as local tittle tattle and bawdy stories; as such they are a valuable and entertaining social record. Rapid technological advances in steam locomotive design in the late 1830s led to a huge expansion in railway building which accelerated in the 1840s and 1850s. The world was rapidly opening up; eventually anyone who could afford the train fare became free to travel longer distances for work or leisure. Naturally railways were a hot topic.

The ballads were printed on cheap paper sometimes with a woodcut or engraving heading the sheet. Music notation was rarely included; the ballad writers assumed that their customers had a repertoire of popular melodies which had been passed on orally. So instead of notating the melody, a well-known tune was often suggested on the broadsheet, hence many different ballads were sung to the same, usually repetitive and rhythmic, melody. At other times melodies were written especially for a new ballad – in an earlier century the composer Henry Purcell was a prolific writer of ballad melodies. The ballads were sold in large numbers on the street by travelling ballad singers who would perform them on street corners, town squares

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and fairgrounds drawing a crowd of potential customers and singing them through a few times giving the buyers the opportunity to learn the tune. The peddler would sing them, stopping before the last verse so that 'they didn't give away the end of the story'.[4] The ballad was a 'successful product tailored to accommodate the largest possible readership. At the price of one penny, ballads were affordable to many of the poor, and when sung aloud they could be experienced even by the illiterate.'[5]

Broadsides would be pasted on top of each other onto the walls of homes and ale houses, church doors and other public places. They were 'sung, read, memorized, collected, quoted, copied—or met more ignominious ends as kindling for a pipe or paper for the privy house.'[6] Because of their ephemeral nature and the fact that the paper was thin and cheap, many did not survive. Nevertheless, some were collected and can still be found in libraries in the UK and North America.[7]

Here is a selection of broadside ballads about the railways. There is a degree of overlap between broadside ballads, folk songs and songs found in the music hall. Many of the early ballads were derived from folk songs previously transmitted orally, and some broadside ballads became so popular that they were taken up by music hall performers.

50 broadside ballads about the railways

SONG TITLE	DATE
Building the railways	
Bold English navvy	1839
The navvy Boy	1839-41
Paddy on the railway. *Come landlord fill the flowing bowl*	1840
Paddy works on the railway. *In eighteen hundred and forty-one*	1840s
Hull and Holderness Railway, 20th. October, 1853	1853
Paddy on the railway	1858-1885
Paddy on the railway. *Paddy one day from Greenock Town*	1860
Battle of the navvies	1864
Irish harvestmen's triumph	1867
Navvy on the line	Unknown
The Irish navigator	Unknown

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The navigators	Unknown
Dashing navigator, A new comical song called the	Unknown
The navy boys	Unknown
Railway mania	
The rail, the rail	1845
Railway mania	1846
The Railway King	1849
Railway openings	
Newcastle and Carlisle Railway	1835
Jim Crow's description of the New Greenwich Railroad	1836
A new song on the opening of the Birmingham and Liverpool Railway	1837
The opening of the new railway	1837-38
The railway	1838 -
The New London Railway	1839
Glasgow and Ayr Railway	1840
Pennyworth of fun; or, Opening the Oxford Railway	1852
Impact of the railway	
Liverpool improving daily	1828
Manchester's an altered town	1830s
Liverpool's an altered town	1830s
Shillibeers Original Omnibus versus the Greenwich Railroad	1838
The Great Western Railroad or, the pleasures of travelling by steam	1840
Wonderful effects of the Leicester Railroad	1840
The railway	1850
Kendal Fair	1850
Western Railroad	1863
Glasgow is improving daily	1860s
Halifax, Thornton and Keighley Railway	1870s
Accidents	
The falling of nine arches and fifteen lives lost at Ashton, April 19th 1845	1845
Awful catastrophe at the Clayton Hill Tunnel on the Brighton Railway, on Sunday August 25th 1861	1861
Awful railway accident between Peterborough and Huntingdon	1876
Lines on the railway collision at Burscough Junction	1880
Awful railway accident. breaking of a bridge over the River Tay	1880
Railway outings	
Johnny Green's trip fro' Owdhum to see the Manchester Railway	1842
Kendal Fair	1850

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The Cockneys trip to Brummagem	Unknown
Riding in a railway train	Unknown
Railway workers	
Jessie at the railway bar	1884
Signalman on the line	Unknown
Shunting pole inspector	1898
The Muddle Puddle porter	Unknown

These broadside ballads come from four collections: the Bodleian Library, *allegro* Catalogue of Ballads, the University of Oxford; the Sir Frederick Madden Collection, Cambridge University; the National Library of Scotland, English Ballads Collection; and the website songsfromtheageofsteam.uk

Navvies building the railways

The word 'navvy' was used to refer to those men building the railways in the nineteenth century. It comes from 'navigator', the name given to the canal builders of the eighteenth century.[8] There was plenty of employment for navvies from the beginnings of the railway until the onset of World War 1, not just constructing the first lines but also making improvements to existing lines. It is estimated that there were 200,000 men working on the construction of the railways during 1846-7, the period of 'railway mania' - and they were all men. Women often joined their husbands on the shanty encampments built next to the construction sites. They did not find labouring work there although it should be noted that there were three women listed as 'railway labourers' in the 1851 census and in the 1850s Elizabeth Ann Holman worked on the construction of the Great Western Railway in Cornwall as a navvy by 'masquerading as a man'.[9]

It would be wrong to give the impression that the navvies were merely labourers, although in later years this is often how the term has been used; many of the men were skilled as miners, masons, carpenters and blacksmiths, for example. As Simon Bradley writes in T*he Railways: Nation, Network and People*, 'Drunk or sober, the men faced deadly risks at work'.[10] The work was arduous and dangerous: navvies excavated, blasted and tunnelled their way across the countryside; 'shifting 20 tons of earth was a normal day's work'. Many

navvies were killed by explosions and collapsing tunnels and 'three accidental deaths per mile was considered an acceptable average'[11]. However, the work was well paid, particularly in comparison with the wages of an agricultural labourer, the employment that many of the navvies would have done before the days of railway construction.

A gang of navvies near Haddenham, Buckinghamshire take time off from their work on the Great Western & Great Central

Photo by S W A Newton, 1903. Reproduced with permission of the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland

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Navvy on the line

I am a Navy[12] bold that has tramped the Country round sir
For to get a job of work where any can be found sir
I left my native home, my friends and my relations
To ramble up and down the Town, & work in various stations.

Chorus
I am a navvy don't you see, I love my beer all in my prime
Because I am a Navvy that is working on the line

I left my native home on the first of September,
That memorable day I still do remember
I bundled up my [illegible], put on my smock and Sunday cap sir,
And wherever I do ramble, folks call me Happy Jack sir.

I have got a job of work all in the town of Bury
And working on the line is a thing that makes me merry
I can use my pick and spade, and my wheelbarrow;
I can court the lasses too, but never intend to marry.

I worked there a fortnight and then it came to pay day
And when I geet my wages I thought I'd have a play day
And then a little spree in Clerke Street went quite handy
And I sat me down in Jenkinson's beside a Fanny Brandy

I called for a pint of beer and bid the old wench drink sir
But while she was a drinkin she too at me did wink sir
Well then we had some talk, in the backside we had a rally
Then jumped over brush and steel & agreed to live tally

They called for liquors merrily; the jugs went quickly round
That being my wedding day, I spent full many a crown, sir
And when me brass was done, old Fanny went a cadging
And to finish up me spree, I went and sloped me lodgings

Oh now my chaps, I'm going to leave the town of Bury
I'm sorry for to leave you chaps, for I've always found you merry
So call for liquors freely and drink away me dandy
And cry out here's health to Happy Jack, and Fanny Brandy

Terry Coleman gives a fascinating and detailed 'History of the men who made the railways' in his 1965 book *The Railway Navvies*. In many ways the broadside ballad 'Navvy on the line' encapsulates the life of a navvy as described by Coleman. It tells the tale of the itinerant existence of many navvies where they tramped around the country in search of railway employment. This hard-

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drinking lifestyle is introduced in the first verse and the chorus. The song is not dated but several references are made to the town of Bury. The first line to Bury was built in 1846 on the East Lancashire Railway running north to south. It was an extraordinary feat of engineering. There was a shortage of labour in the summer of 1845, men were asked to work on Sundays and consequently seven labourers were charged with breaking the Sabbath. In 1848 the line between Bolton, Bury & Heywood running east to west opened on the Lancashire & Yorkshire railway, another challenge with the last three miles taking two years to complete.[13]

In the second verse we are given some details of the clothes that the navvy wore, 'the smock and Sunday cap'. This is corroborated by Coleman when he writes

> The dress too was distinctive. They wore moleskin trousers, double-canvas shirts, velveteen square-tailed coats, hobnail boots, gaudy handkerchiefs, and white felt hats with the brims turned up. They would pay fifteen shillings, a great price, for a sealskin cap, and their distinct badge was the rainbow waistcoat.[14]

Bradley writes that 'Men even abandoned their old identities, picking up vivid new monikers as they went from place to place'.[15] This is reflected in the line 'And wherever I do ramble, folks call me Happy Jack sir.' We hear of Happy Jack's pay day drinking in Verses 4 and 5 where he has a 'spree in Clerke Street'. As Coleman writes 'The navvies were paid once a month, sometimes not so frequently, and usually in a public house, and then for days afterwards they drank their pay, sold their shovels for beer, and went on a randy.'[16] He explains that a 'randy' was a long drinking bout, often lasting four or five days until the money ran out, 'devoted to a celebration of drunkenness, fighting, poaching, robbery, and, occasionally, high-spirited murder.'[17]

Verses five and six tell of Happy Jack's marriage to Fanny Brandy where they 'jumped over brush and steel & agreed to live tally'. It would appear that such an unofficial ceremony was not uncommon for navvies at the time.

> At Woodhead in 1845, where 1100 men were camped in shanty huts, they even had their own marriage ceremony: the couple jumped over a broomstick, in the presence of a roomful of men assembled to drink upon the occasion, and were put to bed at once, in the same room.[18]

The ballad concludes with a call to cheer 'the health to Happy Jack, and Fanny Brandy.'

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Paddy works on the railway

In 'Paddy works on the railway' an Irish navvy describes his itinerant career building the railway in the 1840s.

In eighteen hundred and forty-one
Me cord'roy breeches I put on,
Me cord'roy breeches I put on,
To work upon the railway.

Chorus I was wearing corduroy breeches,
Digging ditches
Dodging hitches, pulling switches,
I was working on the railway.

In eighteen hundred and forty-two
From Hartlepool I moved to Crewe,
And found myself a job to do
A-working on the railway

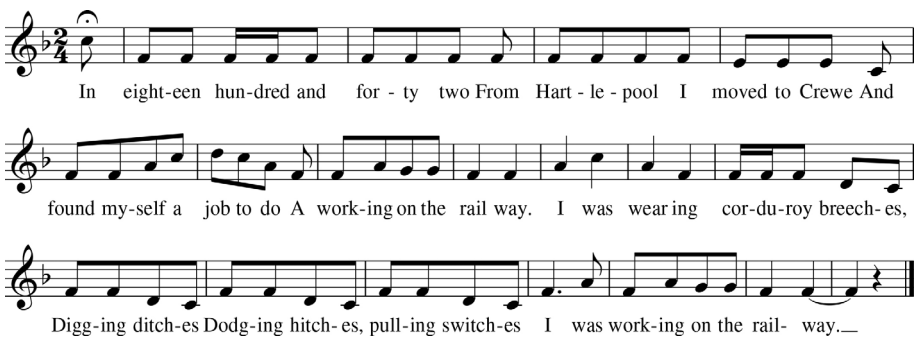
In eighteen hundred and forty-three
I broke me shovel across me knee
And went to work for the company
On the Leeds and Selby Railway

In eighteen hundred and four-four
I landed on the Liverpool shore
My belly was empty, me hands were sore
With working on the railway.

In eighteen hundred and forty-five
When Daniel O'Connell he was alive
When Daniel O'Connell[19] he was alive
And working on the railway.

In eighteen hundred and forty-six
I changed me trade from carrying bricks,
I changed me trade from carrying bricks,
To work upon the railway.

In eighteen hundred and forty-seven
Poor Paddy was thinkin' of going to heaven
Poor Paddy was thinkin' of going to heaven
To work upon the railway.



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To encourage the widest audience, ballad tunes were usually fairly easy to sing without any awkward leaps and having simple harmony. Notice the way in which the first two lines of the verse to 'Paddy works on the railway' fall mainly on one note and the way in which the lyrics 'digging ditches', 'dodging hitches' and 'pulling switches' repeat the same catchy melodic phrase. The song also uses the same three chords throughout.

The song is sometimes sung to another melody and there are several variants on the lyrics. These include the following verses which were sung in the USA where there were large numbers of Irish immigrants building the railroads. It is included in Carl Sandburg's 1927 collection, *The American Songbag*.[20]

Poor Paddy works on the railway

Oh in eighteen hundred and forty-three
I sailed across the sea (twice).

Chorus
To work upon the railway, the railway,
I'm weary of the railway;
Oh poor Paddy works on the railway.

Oh in eighteen hundred and forty-four
I landed on Columbia's shore (twice).

Oh in eighteen hundred and forty-five
When Daniel O'Connell he was alive (twice).

Oh in eighteen hundred and forty-six
I changed my trade to carrying bricks (twice).

Oh in eighteen hundred and forty-seven
Poor Paddy was thinking of going to Heaven (twice).

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Objections to proposed railways

In 1844, the Kendal and Windermere railway line was proposed. The then poet laureate William Wordsworth was outraged, seeing this as a violation of the Lake District, the place where he lived. He wished to preserve the rural beauty of the area and launched a literary campaign against the line. He wrote in protest to William Gladstone, at that time President of the Board of Trade, on 15 October 1844 asking that 'When the subject comes before you officially, as I suppose it will, pray give it more attention than its apparent appearance might call for…'.[21] He backed up his plea by enclosing an anti-railway sonnet: "Is there no nook of English ground secure from rash assault?

> And is no nook of English ground secure
> From rash assault? Schemes of retirement sown
> In youth, and 'mid the busy world kept pure
> As when their earliest flowers of hope were blown,
> Must perish; - how can they this blight endure?
> And must he too his old delights disown
> Who scorns a false utilitarian lure
> 'Mid his paternal fields at random thrown?
> Baffle the threat, bright scene, from Orrest head
> Given to the pausing traveller's rapturous glance;
> Plead for thy peace thou beautiful romance
> Of nature; and, if human hearts be dead,
> Speak, passing winds; ye torrents, with your strong
> And constant voice, protest against the wrong!"

Wordsworth also published the poem as a pamphlet and wrote letters to the *Carlisle Journal* and the *Morning Post* arguing that there were no manufacturers, quarries nor a substantial agriculture base to justify the intrusion and, more controversially, that it would open up the area to the poorer classes who would not have the capacity to appreciate its beauty and secluded character. Furthermore bringing many visitors into the district would destroy the beauty they had come to enjoy. His opposition was 'largely ridiculed', although the part of it that he especially objected to was never built, with the line stopping short of Lake Windermere. Nevertheless the Kendal and Windermere Railway Act authorised construction and it opened on 20 April 1847.[22]

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Kendal Fair

You servant lads and lasses gay come listen for awhile,
I'll sing to you a verse or two that will cause you for to smile,
Now Kendal Fair is come again both young and old so thrifty,
Will run with glee to have a spree in 1850.

Chorus
So to Kendal Fair let's haste away to see such lots of fun,
The lasses romping with the lads and playing at tiddle de bumb.

From Burnside and Stavely, the people will come
From Ambleside and Windermere by railroad they will run,
From Stonecroft and Under Barrow, they will come with glee,
Poll and Fan swear they'll have a man for to have a spree

There's Greyrig and Tebay, and Orton likewise,
Milnthorpe and Natland, they'll come of every size,
From Kirby Lonsdale they will come in all their frills and ruffles,
At Kendal Fair I do declare they'll have such stunning bustles.

Now when they come unto the fair they'll wander up and down,
They'll take view of every place that is in Kendal town,
Some to copper lone will steer for to get a glass of beer,
But soon from there they'll retire for fear their bobbins should get fire.

Then to the hirings they will go all for to look for places
Some will hire to milk the cows, some to make cheeses,
Some will hire to hedge and ditch, and some to milk and mow,
And Sally Brass she's the lass to milk her master's doodle doo.

There's black eyed Fan with her frying pan will cook your eggs and bacon,
With beef and mutton roast and boil'd if I am not mistaken,
She'll make the puddings fat and good, all ready for the table,
But if you grumble when she's done, she'll black your eyes with the ladle.

So to conclude and make an end I have not detained you long,
I hope there is no one offended that's heard my little song,
So lasses when you are going home pray with the men don't rustle,
For if they shove you in the hedge you are sure to spoil your bustle.

Kendal is a Cumbrian market town in the south of the Lake District. Its station opened on 22 September 1846. The song 'Kendal Fair' dates from 1850 which is evident from the lyrics. It is printed on the ballad sheet alongside a song called 'Exhibition of all nations!' which looks forward to the Great Exhibition of 1851. The lyrics describe Kendal hiring fair and the people attending. The

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annual fair matched up labourers with employers and hired them for a fixed term. Such fairs were held in many market towns and they secured work and board for both male and female agricultural servants for a year. As well as acting as an employment agency, the events had all the usual trappings and ribaldry normally associated with fairs. The villages listed all lie within a few miles of Kendal within the historical boundaries of Westmorland. Greyrig (Grayrigg) and Tebay have noteworthy railway connections. The population of Tebay, what was once a small village, expanded to over 1000 with the coming of the Lancaster to Carlisle railway. In 1846 it became an important railway junction housing engine sheds and marshalling yards as well as becoming the home base of banking engines that supplied the extra power needed to climb to Shap summit which has a 1:75 gradient.

Regrettably Grayrigg's history is marked by two major train crashes. In 1947, a 13-carriage London Midland & Scottish Railway service from Glasgow Central to London failed to stop at the signals for Lambrigg Crossing and collided with a locomotive. 33 people were injured, three of them seriously. 60 years later in 2007, Lambrigg Crossovers was the site of the Grayrigg derailment, a fatal derailment, the result of faulty points, involving a Virgin Trains West Coast service from London Euston to Glasgow Central.

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Shillibeers Original Omnibus versus the Greenwich Railroad

Wordsworth was by no means the only person to object to proposed railway plans. In 1829 George Shillibeer introduced the first horse-drawn omnibuses to London having picked up the idea on a visit to Paris. His omnibuses travelled between Marylebone and Bank, they were drawn by three horses and carried 18 passengers. Until about 1850 the vast majority of people walked to work. Although the omnibuses were slow and quite expensive for most, they were cheaper than cabs and stage coaches, and 'provided the first instance of public transport that made it possible for workmen to live more than walking distance from their work.'[23] So it is not surprising that Shillibeer objected to the plans for the London and Greenwich Railway Company which received parliamentary approval on May 17 1833 (thus dating this ballad to 1834). The ballad 'Shillibeers Original Omnibus versus the Greenwich Railroad' served as a piece of commercial advertising which extolled the virtues of the Shillibeer omnibus.

Shillibeers Original Omnibus versus the Greenwich Railroad

By Joint Stock company taken in hand
A rail-road from London to Greenwich is plann'd;
But they're sure to be beat, 'tis most certainly clear
Their rival has got the start – George Shillibeer

I will not for certainty vouch for the fact
But believe that he means to run over the Act
Which Parliament passed at the end of last year
Now mad null and void by the new Shillibeer.

His elegant omnis, which now throng the road
Up and down every hour most constantly load
Across all the three bridges now gaily appear
The Original Omnibus – George Shillibeer

These pleasure and comfort with safety combine
They will neither blow up nor explode like a mine
Those who ride on the railroad might half die with fear
You can come to no harm in the safe Shillibeer

How exceedingly elegant fitted inside
With mahogany polished – soft cushions - beside
Bright brass ventilators at each end appear
The latest improvement in the new Shillibeer

At the same time it warns of the dangers of travelling by train: draughts, bursting boilers, explosions that might make passengers 'half die of fear'.

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These pleasure and comfort with safety combine
They will neither blow up nor explode like a mine
Those who ride on the railroad might half die with fear
You can come to no harm in the safe Shillibeer

Her no draughts of air cause a crick in the neck
Or huge bursting boiler blows all to a wreck
But as safe as at home, you from all danger steer
While you travel abroad in the gay Shillibeer.

The ballad closes with more fulsome praise for Shillibeer's elegant omnibuses and a plea for the new London and Greenwich Railway to disappear.

That the beauties of Greenwich and Deptford might ride
In his elegant omni is the height of his pride –
So the plan for a railroad must soon disappear
While the public approve of the new Shillibeer.

Shillibeer's ballad was written in vain. The first section of the line opened in 1836 running from Tooley Street (London Bridge) to Deptford: it was the first steam railway in the capital; the first to be built specially for passengers; and one of the first lines to offer season tickets, helping to establish the habit of commuting.

In praise of the new railway

There is no shortage of ballads that welcomed the coming of the railway. 'Glasgow is improving daily' describes the demolition of buildings in central Glasgow to enable the construction of the Union Railway. The first section of the City of Glasgow Union Railway opened in 1870 and included the first railway bridge built across the Clyde.

Glasgow is improving daily

Our city is improving
Every day we all do know
So long may Glasgow flourish
And her sons where'er they go

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'Liverpool improving daily' similarly welcomes the benefits of the city's redevelopment because of the railway. It includes the lines 'But now tho' roads are all the go / Railways beat them I've a notion'.

Broadside ballads were sometimes re-workings of earlier ballads. This is certainly true of the ballads 'Liverpool's an altered town' and 'Manchester's an altered town'. Both describe the city's expansion and the consequent changes it had brought about. The Liverpool song includes the lines 'There's Gloucester Street and Nelson Street, have had an alteration / They've pulled the most part of them down to make a railway station' similarly the Manchester song proclaims 'There's Newton Lane I now shall name, has had an alteration / They've knocked a great part of it down to make a railway station'. However it is difficult to establish which came first. Both songs were printed by Harkness of Preston. They both mention new police forces; Liverpool's force was established in 1836 and Manchester's in 1839, and both mention Zoological Gardens. Liverpool's zoo opened in 1833 and Manchester's in 1836.

Railway openings

By 1850 over 6000 miles of railway line had opened, increasing year on year until 1900 when there were almost 20,000 miles of line. In the earlier years the opening of a line was a major event and companies celebrated the event with a grand ceremony. Church bells rang, bunting hung in the streets, canons were fired and there was usually a procession of local dignitaries and railway company representatives, an inaugural train journey, and a massive banquet. Celebrations were attended by large crowds providing an ideal market for ballad peddlers who took the opportunity to sell songs especially written for the occasion.

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The Newcastle and Carlisle Railway - A new song

On the ninth day of March in the year thirty-five
The railway was crowded with people alive
From Blaydon to Hexham the engines did move
With all the subscribers united in love
In one hour and ten minutes on that noted day
They returned back on the Newcastle railway

The grand locomotives from Newcastle came
How quick is their speed, how great is their fame
The brilliant Comet she could not well lead
For Rapid came in with abundance o' speed
The air it did ring with the cry of hurra
When they came to open the Carlisle railway.

The hills were all clad on the south side of Tyne
To view the procession along the new line
The drum they did beat and the colours did fly
To cheer the spectators as they passed by
The men will rejoice and the women will pray
For all that subscribe to Newcastle railway

The masons they are the first workmen in town
And some by hard labour can earn a full crown
The blacksmiths and joiners all work to their plan
I can scarcely tell you who is the best man
Let none of these workmen have reason to say
They cannot live by the Carlisle railway.

There is Squire Beaumont, for the sake of his heirs
It is well known that he owns fifty shares
Long may he live with his own darling son
So let us praise him for what he has done
He will hear the birds sing in the sweet month of May
When he travels along on Newcastle railway

There is Mr Blackmoor a worthy young man
To forward this line he will do all he can
In two or three years he will finish it well
And make a through passage into the canal
Long may he live and still carry the sway
And set out more work on Carlisle railway

When you see the steam coaches and all things complete
For four or five shillings you may take a seat
You may dine at Newcastle and then take your flight
And sup at Carlisle on the very same night
The new Expedition she will not delay
As long as she runs on Newcastle railway

The cannons were planted upon the low ground
They made all the vallies to ring with their sound
The drums they did beat and the music did play
Before they went back to Newcastle that day
Both the young and the old may remember that day
When they drank success to the Carlisle railway

When you see the waggons move on at full speed
Well laden with liquor, provisions and lead
You may fill a glass with good rum or strong beer
And then drink a health to the head engineer
I hope he will live to see that happy day
When they have completed Newcastle railway

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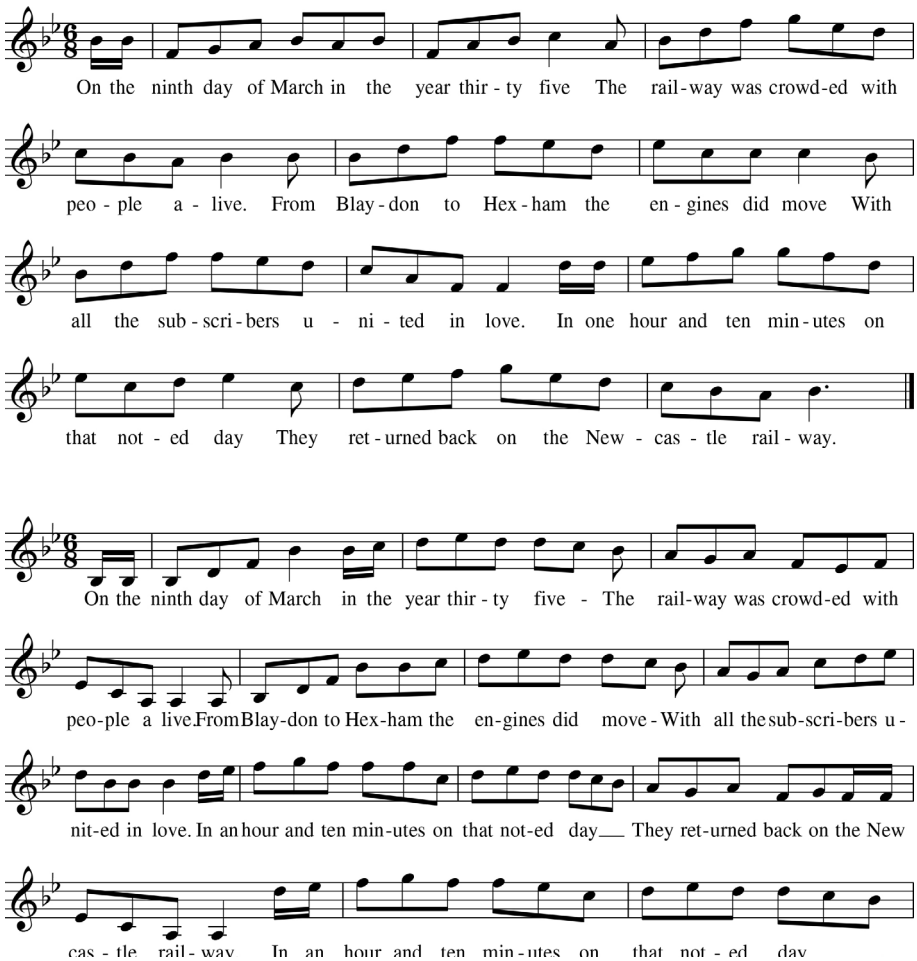
The tune suggested by the broadsheet is 'Patrick O'Neil'. There are several different variants on this tune, two of them are given below. Notice how both melodies fall into short two-bar phrases. The first variant is 12 bars long and the second is 16 bars long, both use repeated phrases. This is typical of ballad tunes and it meant that they could be adapted to different ballad lyrics. In this way the same tunes were constantly recycled and put into different contexts. Ballads were often connected with dancing and both versions of this song below use the rhythm of a jig.



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The 60 mile long Newcastle & Carlisle Railway was the first line to be built between the east and west coasts of Britain. The Newcastle-on-Tyne & Carlisle Railroad Company was formed in 1825 and construction began in 1830. The line opened from Carlisle to Blaydon using horse traction in 1834. The company then decided to adopt steam traction and the first locomotive, No. 1 "Comet," was delivered by the Newcastle locomotive builders R. & W. Hawthorn in 1835.[24] The line had 'some notable engineering features: very fine stone bridges at the western end, and the big elegantly handled Cowran cutting, 2,270 ft long and up to 110 ft deep.' Isambard Kingdom Brunel applied for the post of engineer of the line as did George Stephenson but the job, was given to Francis Giles (perhaps not coincidentally a substantial shareholder in the company).[25] Although Giles completed the design he 'neglected his duties in favour of other railways and was eased out in 1834 in favour of his able assistant John Blackmore'. This is no doubt the Mr Blackmoor mentioned in the sixth verse.[26] 'There is Mr Blackmoor a worthy young man / To forward this line he will do all he can / In two or three years he will finish it well / And make a through passage into the canal.' Since 1794 there had been various plans to construct a canal from Tyne to Solway but these had come to little; in 1829 a company was authorised to build a railway as an alternative. It finally reached the canal at Carlisle in 1837 thus creating a connection between the River Tyne and the canal basin at Carlisle. The line opened for passenger traffic on 10 March 1835, but before this it had been used for freight transport and had already shipped over 500 tons of lead by the end of 1834. The Squire Beaumont mentioned in verse 5 was Thomas Wentworth Beaumont Esq. MP who was the owner of the T.W.Beaumont Lead Company.

The 1835 opening of the first section of the Newcastle & Carlisle line was clearly a happy smooth-running celebration, but this was not always the case with such ceremonies. As Jack Simmons writes 'every sort of misfortune might attend these functions' and goes on to cite the 'exceptionally violent storms' that ruined the later ceremonies organised by the Newcastle & Carlisle, and the Newcastle and North Shields Railway in 1838-40 and the collision between trains at the opening of the Durham Junction Railway in 1838.[27]

Holmfirth is a small valleyed mill town in West Yorkshire surrounded by moorland. Its railway station opened on July 1, 1850 serving a branch line of the Huddersfield to Penistone line.

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> …the first Holmfirth branch train was scheduled to leave the terminus destined first for Huddersfield. From early in the morning the church bells throughout the Holme Valley tolled to signal the importance of the day… and the Holmfirth Band played a series of melodies on the station platform. Despite the shortness of the journey a locomotive and 14 carriages left the branch, with the band now placed in two open carriages. They played all the way to Huddersfield ignoring the torrential rain and only pausing when the train ran through the various tunnels encountered en-route[28].

In later years the opening ceremonies tended to be quieter events and fewer in number.

Accidents on the railway

The Office of Rail and Road is unequivocal when it pronounces that during the first decades of the nineteenth century 'our pioneering railway system was unregulated, uncoordinated and to be honest, downright dangerous.'[29] By 1860 certain precautionary measures had been put in place on the railways, notably the creation of the HM Railway Inspectorate by the Board of Trade in 1840. However, although the Board of Trade investigated accidents they did not have much power, they wrote reports and made recommendations but they had no control over the outcome. Rolt in his book *Red for Danger*, an account of railway accidents through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, refers to the 1870s as "a black decade in railway history"[30]; it had an average of nearly 41 passenger deaths in railway accidents per year - the highest level reached on the UK network between 1860 and 1914. It was not until the Regulation of Railways Act in 1889 that the Board of Trade was given the power to require railway companies to adopt the block system of signaling along with the use of continuous automatic brakes and the interlocking of all points and signals, the absence of which had resulted in many tragic accidents and fatalities.

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Awful railway accident between Peterborough and Huntingdon

You feeling Christians I pray draw near
And a sad disaster you shall hear
That has caused much pity, distress and woe,
Thirteen poor creatures they are laid low
Upon the railway that fatal night
It must have been a heart-rending site
The Flying Scotsman to London bound
Destruction caused and death around

By the Scotch Express, what an awful sight
Thirteen poor souls were killed that night
Their last death cries were heard around
Has(sic) they died on the snow covered ground

She reached Newcastle that fatal train
And was joined by many a well-known name
They little dreaming what was in store
That many friends they would see no more
Mothers and daughters are parted now
The stamp of death is on their brow
In Heaven we hope they'll meet again
Free from sorrow grief and pain

She reached Newcastle that fatal train
And was joined by many a well-known name
They little dreaming what was in store
That many friends they would see no more
Mothers and daughters are parted now
The stamp of death is on their brow
In Heaven we hope they'll meet again
Free from sorrow grief and pain

To Abbots Ripon it dashed with speed
And there a coal train was ahead
Not able to stay the steam in time
It caused destruction upon the line
The carriage into pieces flew
When a second danger appeared in view
'Ere many scarce could draw their breath
Their eyes forever were closed in death

The Leeds express with a fearful crash
Rushed into her like lightning's flash
The dreadful cries were heard around
From the dying ones on the snowy ground
The cries for help did rend the air
From husbands, wives, and children dear
Who were cut down in a moment time
By that sad disaster upon the line

Poor Mr. Sanderson's grief we fear
For his two daughters is hard to bear
To think those poor girls are no more
Their untimely fate he does now deplore
No more his daughters in life he'll see
His wife's heart is broke with misery
For the loss of those whom they loved well
Their sorrow is more tongue can tell

In many a home there's a vacant chair
For some daughter or husband dear
Wives and mothers in grief now? Mourn
For the loss of those who are dead and gone
In heaven they hope they again will meet
With the King of Kings at the mercy seat?
Them prap(sic) for those beneath the clay
Who were killed that morn on the railway

The Abbots Ripton rail disaster occurred during a fierce blizzard on 21 January 1876 on the Great Northern Railway line. The Flying Scotsman, the *Special Scotch Express* train from Edinburgh to London, was involved in a collision with a coal train; the King's Cross to Leeds express 'at full speed in a flurry of flying snow' travelling in the other direction then ran into the wreckage.[31] 13 passengers died and 53 passengers and six train crew members were injured.

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The initial accident was caused by over-reliance on signals when travelling at high speed in adverse conditions, coupled with systematic signal failure owing to accumulation of snow and ice. The signal 'automatically dropped back to "all clear" because of the weight of the frozen snow on the long signal wire'.[32] The subsequent inquiry into the accident 'had a permanent influence on railway practice[33] and led to fundamental changes in British railway signalling practice.

Broadside ballads began to decline in popularity towards the end of the nineteenth century when they could not keep up with other, newer, forms of cheap print resulting from technological innovations in printing. At the same time the invention of the telegraph transformed the way that journalists and newspapers conducted business leading to a demand for up-to-date accurate news rather than long rhyming ballads sung in the streets.

Endnotes

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2 Dyos, *British Transport*, 129.
3 Dyos, *British Transport*, 155.
4 BBC. 'Broadside ballads: When the news was spread through song', September 16, 2016. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-37386026
5 Paxton Hehmeyer. 'The Social Function of the Broadside Ballad; or, a New Medley of Readers'. 2007 https://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/page/social-function-of-the-ballad
6 Ibid.
7 Manchester Library has several thousand ballad sheets dating from the seventeenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. The Bodleian Libraries also houses a digital collection of ballads.
8 Terry Coleman. *The Railway Navvies*. (London: Hutchinson, 1965): 26.
9 Helena Wojtczak. *Railwaywomen*. (Hastings, East Sussex: Hastings Press, 2005): 1.
10 Simon Bradley. *The Railways: Nation, Network and People*. (London: Profile Books, 2015): 337.
11 National Railway Museum. https://www.railwaymuseum.org.uk/research-and-archive/further-resources
12 The spelling varied until the 1870s.
13 Jeffrey Wells. *An Illustrated Historical Survey of the Railways in and around Bury*. (London: Challenger, 1995).
14 Coleman, *The Railway Navvies*: 28.
15 Bradley. *The Railways:* 337.
16 Ibid.
17 Coleman. *The Railway Navvies:* 105-6.
18 Coleman, *The Railway Navvies:* 22

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19 Daniel O'Connell (1775 – 1847) was an Irish political leader and campaigner for Irish independence.
20 Carl Sandburg. *The American Songbag*. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1927): 356.
21 British Library.'Poem by Wordsworth, Suggested by the Proposed Kendal and Windermere Railway'. http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/kinggeorge/p/027add000044361u00278000.html
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23 Philip Bagwell and Peter Lyth. *Transport in Britain. From Canal Lock to Gridlock*. (London: Hambledon and London, 2002): 105.
24 By 1870 over 1,000 locomotives had been built by R. & W. Hawthorn.
25 https://spellerweb.net/rhindex/UKRH/NorthEastern/NewCarRly.html
26 Jack Simmons in 'Opening ceremonies' in The Oxford Companion to British Railway History. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): 357.
27 Jack Simmons in 'Newcastle & Carlisle Railway' in T*he Oxford Companion to British Railway History*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): 345
28 Alan Earnshaw. *The Holmfirth (Summer Wine) Branch Line* (Appleby-in-Westmorland, Cumbria: Trans-Pennine Publishing Ltd., 2005): 21-22 .
29 Office of Rail and Road blog. https://orr.gov.uk/news-and-blogs/orr-blog?result_23585_result_page=19
30 L T C Rolt. *Red for Danger. The Classic History of British Railway Disasters*. (Stroud: The History Press, 2009): 61
31 Rolt. *Red for Danger*, 87.
32 Ibid.
33 Rolt. *Red for Danger*, 88-9.

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