

TWO TRAIN CRASHES IN WOKING, 1955-6

Iain Wakeford 2017



The crash perhaps looks worse than it was, as the passengers and crew sustained only slight injuries.

In 1955-56 a couple of accidents occurred on the railway in our area. Thankfully nobody was severely injured, although judging by the official reports from the time, it was lucky that that was the case.

The first accident occurred near the Maybury Arch at almost 8.30 in the evening of the 23rd December 1955. According to the report on the collision (produced for the Ministry of Transport six months later) 'the 7.50pm, multiple unit, electric passenger train from Waterloo to Portsmouth had been standing for a few minutes at the Woking Down Through home signal, when it was struck at the rear by the 7.54 pm steam passenger train from Waterloo to Basingstoke'.

Fortunately the steam train was not going too fast and the main damage was 'confined to the front end of the locomotive and the rear coach of the electric train'. Luckily too the guard's and rear driver's compartment was unoccupied when it was crushed by the steam train - part of the unit being pushed towards the 'up through line'. Here a passenger train from Bournemouth 'which had started from Woking on this line as the collision happened, scraped past the derailed bogie and was disabled by it'. By sheer good fortune it was not derailed, because if it had, it is clear that the casualties would have been much higher. As it was twenty-one passengers and the guard on the electric train had slight injuries (and there was some damage to the track), but overall the incident was not as serious as perhaps the photographs from the time seem to show.

Again according to the official report 'although the Up and Down Local tracks were not obstructed by the collision, traffic was stopped and the electrical pressure removed from all lines in order to facilitate the movement of passengers to Woking Station. The two lines were re-opened for traffic at about 10.15pm and normal working on all lines was in operation before 8am on the following day'.



MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT & CIVIL AVIATION

RAILWAY ACCIDENTS

REPORT ON THE COLLISION

which occurred on
23rd December 1955

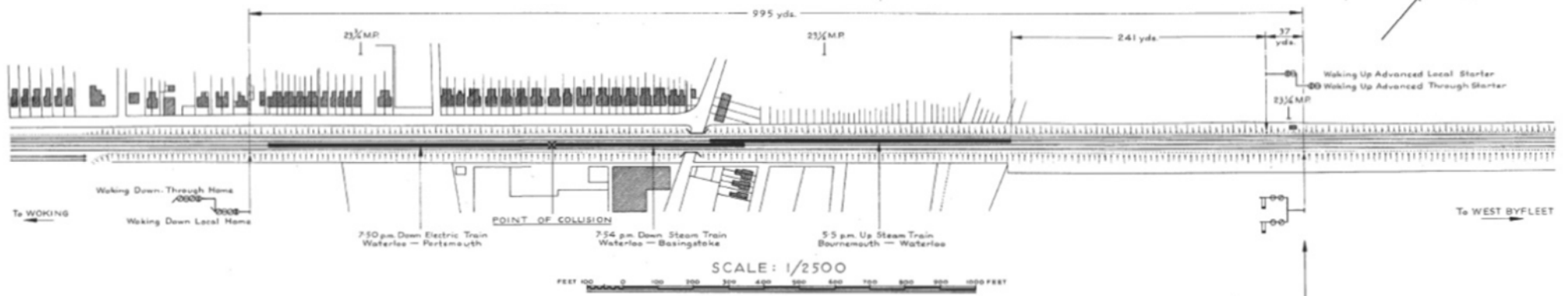
near
WOKING

in the
SOUTHERN REGION
BRITISH RAILWAYS

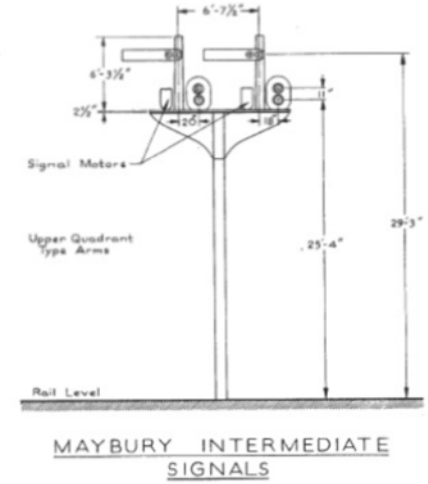
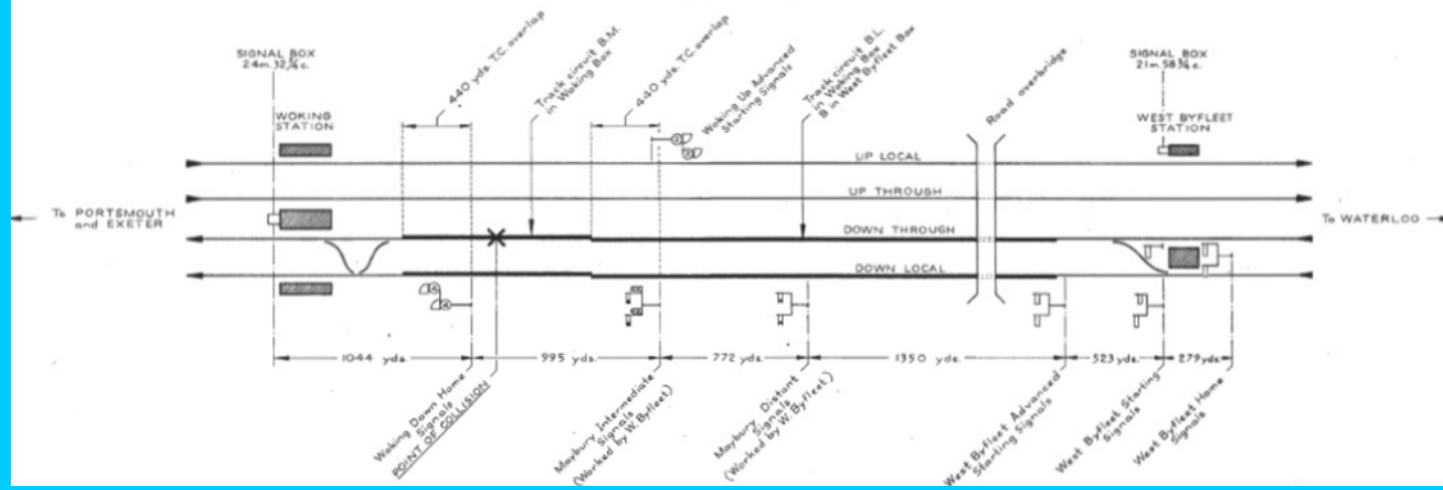


SOUTHERN REGION COLLISION AT WOKING ON 23rd. DECEMBER, 1955

PLAN



DIAGRAM



The layout of the Woking Crash from the Inspectors report, showing that the accident happened close to the Maybury Arch (beside James Walker's Lion Works - now the site of the Lion Retail Park).

The fault on this occasion appears to have been human error. The inspector found that although the driver of the steam train 'had a long service with the Railway and his record is very good, I can only assume that, despite his evidence to the contrary, he missed the Maybury Distant signal and overlooked the semaphore red light of the Through line Intermediate signal'. The guard too 'should have watched for this signal' but failed to, although the report did conclude that if some of the signals on this stretch of line had been clearer, the accident might have been averted. He also noted that 'if the tail lamp on the Portsmouth train had been brighter, Driver Hopkins might have picked it out sooner from the other lights of Woking Station and thus

have stopped his train in time to avoid the collision'.

The second accident, at Brookwood on the 22nd November 1956 was caused by a broken rail. This incident also involved both an electric train and a steam engine, when at just after 6.30 in the evening the last coach of the 5.37pm Waterloo to Ascot service via Woking became derailed and 'slightly obstructed the Down Through line'. Unfortunately there was not enough time to warn the '6pm steam passenger express train from Waterloo to Plymouth' which 'grazed the derailed coach as it ran past about 4 to 5 minutes later at diminishing speed with the brake fully applied'.

On this occasion there were no injuries to passengers and after separating the last two coaches of the electric train it was able to continue on its journey. The steam train was only slightly damaged and also able to

continue, although there was 'considerable delay to traffic until the repairs to the Down Local line were completed at 8.25am the next morning'.

Apparently it was a very cold night and there were patches of fog, but none of the drivers or guards were at fault and even the Ganger (W C Stocker) who had inspected the line earlier in the day was not blamed as it was found that the fracture could have occurred after his inspection and any fatigue in the rails would have been extremely hard to spot.

As a result the maintenance schedule for replacing the rails on the line was brought forward and the chance of any more accidents on the line averted - for the time being at least!

As a result of the Brookwood crash maintenance on the old rails was brought forward.



MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT AND
CIVIL AVIATION

RAILWAY ACCIDENTS

REPORT ON THE DERAILMENT

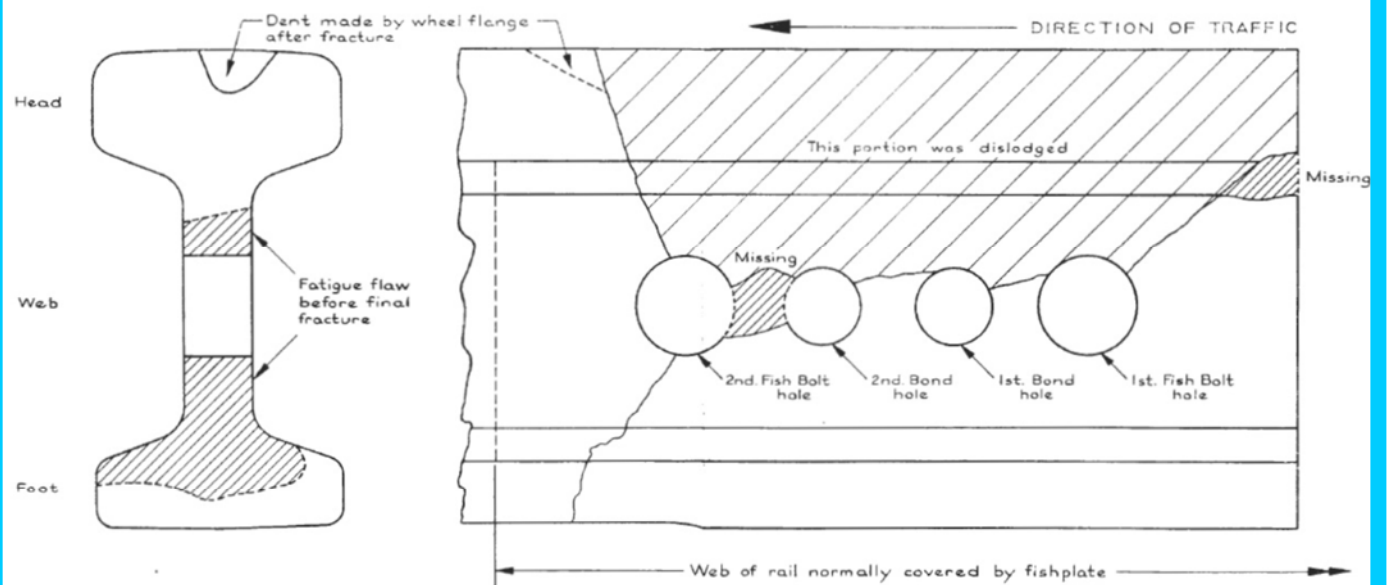
which occurred on
22nd November 1956

BETWEEN
BROOKWOOD and FARNBOROUGH
in the
SOUTHERN REGION
BRITISH RAILWAYS

DERAILMENT NEAR BROOKWOOD

22nd. NOVEMBER, 1956

SCALE: 3/4 FULL SIZE



SKETCH OF BROKEN 95 lb. BULL HEAD RAIL IN DOWN LOCAL LINE AT 28m. 38 1/2 ch