ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

The Railway Clearing House

In the British Economy 1842-1922

Philip S. Bagwell

The Railway Clearing House

Originally published in 1968, and using official records, this book charts the history of the Railway Clearing House and shows the vital role it played in the development of British railways and the growth of the economy. The Clearing House established a common classification of goods; standardized signalling systems and telegraphic codes among the 120 railway companies which operated in Britain before the First World War. It was the nerve centre of the railway for nearly a century and at one time more than 2,500 clerks were employed in its huge offices near Euston Station in London.

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THE RAILWAY CLEARING HOUSE IN THE BRITISH ECONOMY

1842–1922

BY

PHILIP S. BAGWELL

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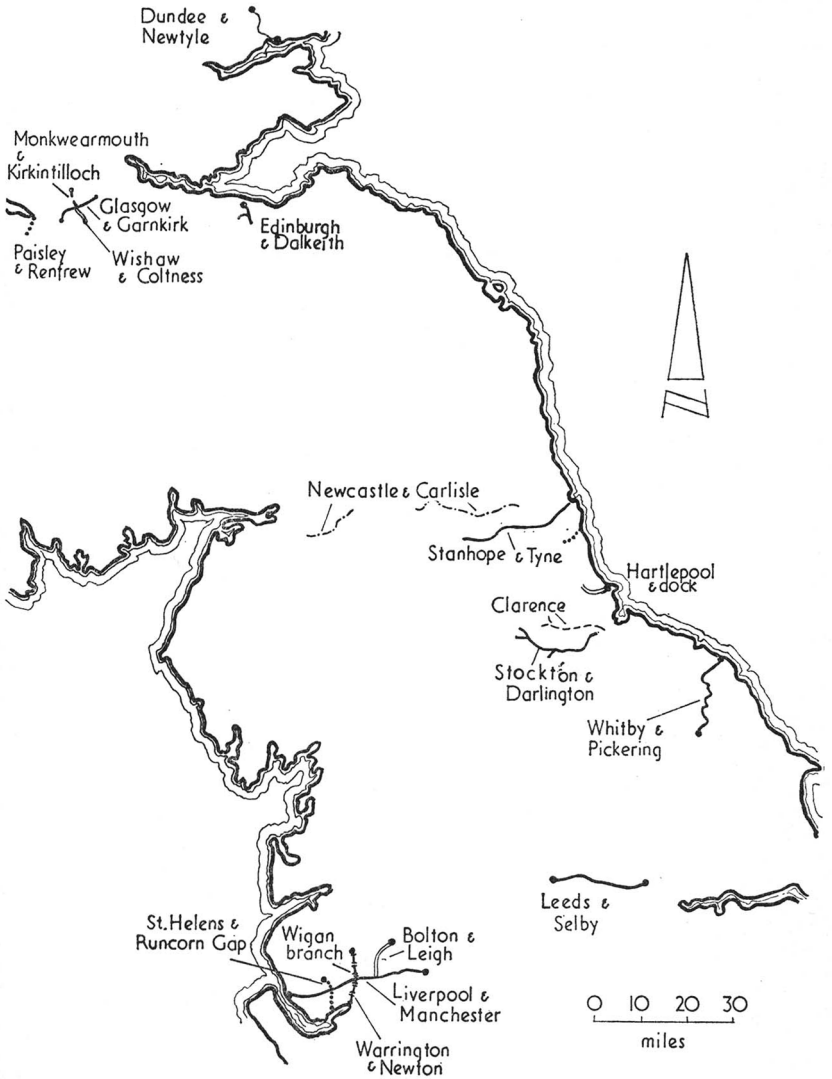
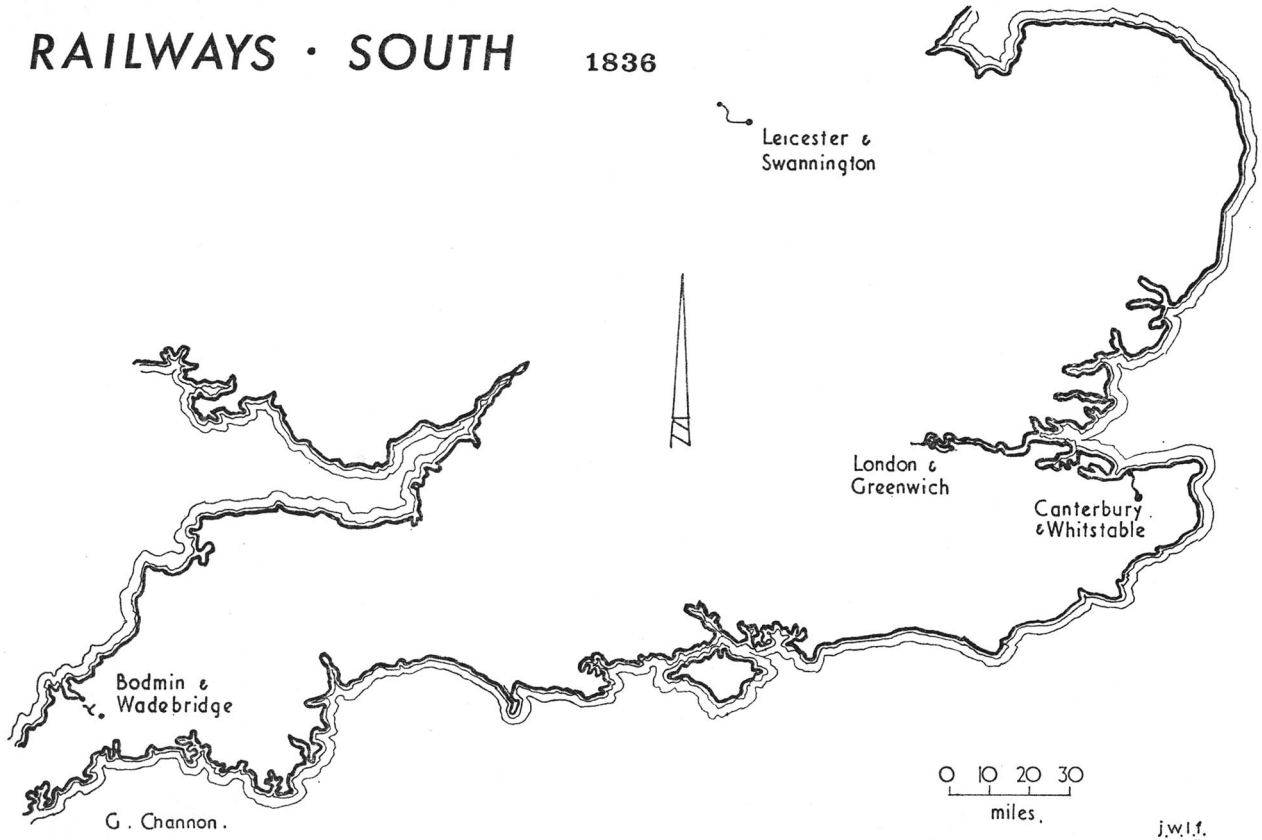


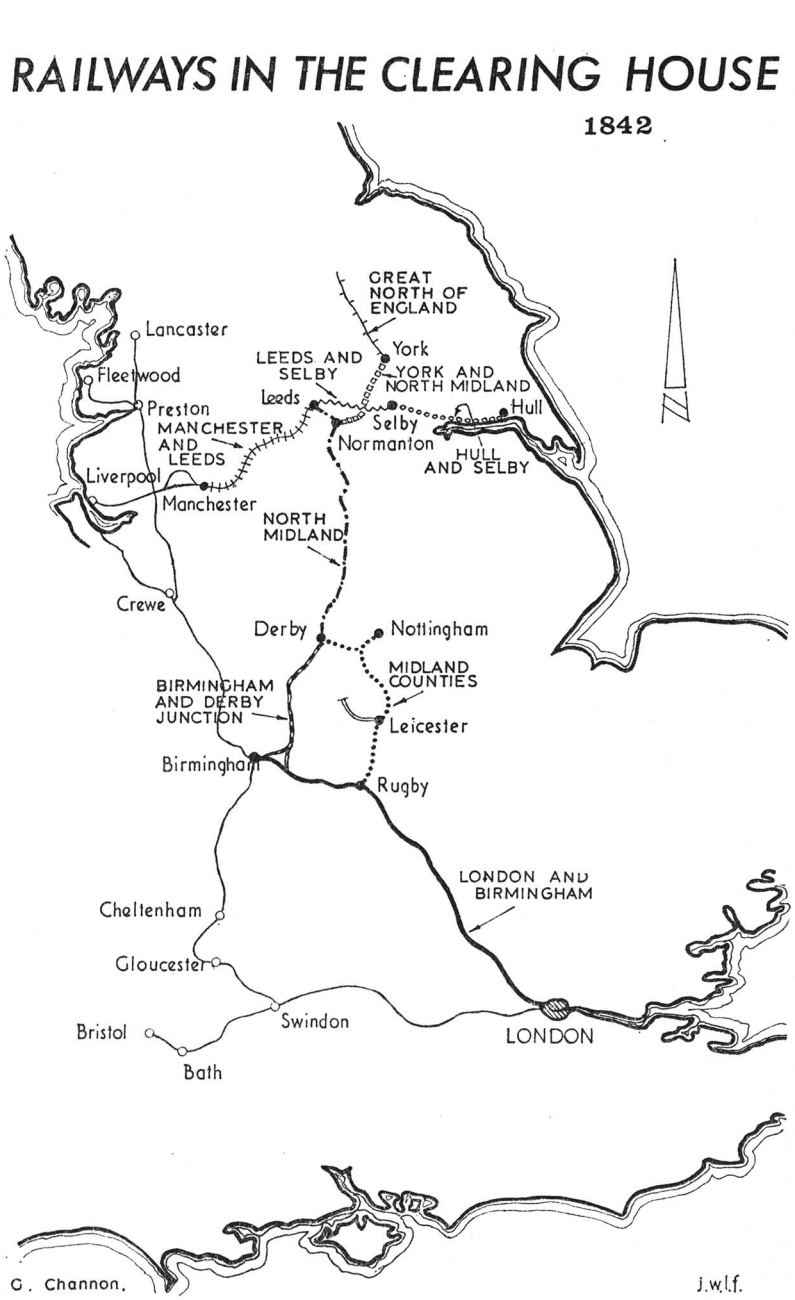
RAILWAYS · NORTH 1836

G. Channon j.w.l.f.

Note the disconnected rail networks at this date

RAILWAYS · SOUTH 1836





The names of the nine original member companies of the Railway Clearing House are printed in block capitals

PREFACE

My curiosity about the subject of this book was first aroused as a student when reading volume two of *The Economic History of Modern Britain* by the late Sir John Clapham who regretted that the early history of the Clearing House was 'obscure'. More recently Professor J. Simmons, in surveying the literature on British railway history in his book *The Railways of Britain*, commented that a history of the Clearing House was 'much needed'. With two such open invitations to the researcher it may seem surprising that no account of this remarkable institution has so far appeared. The explanation lies in the fact that only within the last five years has the opportunity been presented for filling this gap in our knowledge of British railway history. The transference of the records of the Clearing House to British Rail's Archives Department has made available to the student a wealth of material on the foundation and evolution of one of the most important business organisations of nineteenth-century Britain.

In this work I have endeavoured to place the progress of the Railway Clearing House in the wider setting of the transport services of the nation and the expansion of the British economy. Britain was exceptional among the countries of Europe in leaving the provision of railway services entirely to private enterprise. The existence of the Clearing House is seen as a major part of the explanation why this unusual state of affairs could have continued for so long. I have attempted an assessment of its importance in widening markets, overcoming regional variations in railway operation and establishing uniform standards in business and commercial practice. Since the Clearing House was also one of the largest employers of labour before the First World War it has been considered worth while to examine how the labour force was organised and disciplined and how the tendency for administrative costs to rise was countered.

The work of the Clearing House in the years after 1922 is dealt with more briefly than the earlier history of the organisation. The principal reason for this is that the official records for this period are not yet available to the student. This is not so serious a drawback as might at first appear to be the case as the four mainline railways which were created as an outcome of the Railways Act of

1921 assumed responsibilities formerly shouldered by the Clearing House.

I wish to express my thanks to Mr Atkinson and the staff of the Railway Archives Department of Paddington without whose help the preparation of this book would not have been possible. I am particularly grateful to Mr E. H. Fowkes who in 1964 first drew my attention to the minutes of the Clearing House Committee and has gone out of his way ever since to show me any records of relevance to the preparation of this book.

I wish to acknowledge the assistance given by the Governors of the Polytechnic, Regent Street, London, W.1, who agreed to the appointment of a research assistant to help me with this and other projects. Mr V. Pendred, Head of the School of Commerce has given me every encouragement and has allowed adjustments in my teaching programme to enable me to devote some time to research.

Since September 1966 Mr G. Channon has given valuable help as research assistant. He was responsible for compiling Appendices 1–3 and 6–9 inclusive, for making a rough draft of the two maps, and for providing information on the coal trade, the Gladstone Award of 1851, and the legality of railway pooling agreements. His services have always been willingly and efficiently given. I am looking forward to the time when his own study of the impact of coastal shipping competition on the Anglo-Scotch Traffic Agreement will be published.

I am grateful to my friend Mr J. W. L. Forge who has not only read through the entire typescript—in itself a sufficient imposition —but has also drawn the maps.

For assistance of various kinds my thanks are also due to: Mr S. W. Shelton, Archivist of Glyn Mills and Co. Bank, for reference to papers concerning George Carr Glyn; Mrs Ferrugia of the PO Archives Department, for information on the parcel post agreement in 1882–3; Mr Sidney Greene and the staff of the Secretarial Department of the NUR for reference to the policies of the ASRS: Mr R. F. Ayliffe of the Transport Salaried Staff Association, for showing me the records of the Railway Clerks Association; Mr P. Aldrich for a note about Post Office regulations concerning postmen; Dr J. Ranlett of Harvard, for references on railway difficulties in the early 1840s; Mr H. S. Cobb of the House of Lords Record Office, for making available the unpublished records of the House

of Lords Committee on the Railway Clearing Bill in 1859; Mr G. L. Turnbull for letting me see his work on the early history of Pickfords; Mr George Ottley, for allowing me to consult his invaluable *Bibliography of British Railway History* before it was sent to the publishers; Mr O'Brien and the staff of British Rail for guidance on the recent history of the Clearing House; to Mr D. G. Allan, Librarian, Royal Society of Arts, for information on the work of the Postal Association, and Mrs J. Lawley, and Messrs J. Hurt and F. Moxley for reading parts of the typescript and making valuable comments.

I wish to thank the Illustrated Newspapers Group for permission to reproduce prints from *The Illustrated London News* of August 17 1847.

It would be misleading of me to suggest that over the past three and a half years my wife, Rosemary, has acquired an absorbing interest in mileage payments, demurrage or even the general classification of goods. My debt to her is therefore all the greater for having typed the entire manuscript, a labour as vital for the production of this book as was that of the Clearing House clerks for the smooth working of British railways.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT

BPP British Parliamentary Papers
BRB British Railways Board
BTHR British Transport Historical Records
The following are included in the BTHR classification:
BDJ Birmingham and Derby Junction Railway
GN Great Northern Railway
LBM London and Birmingham Railway
LY Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway
Mid. Midland Railway
ML Manchester and Leeds Railway
LNW London and North Western Railway
HL British Transport Historical Letters Series
PIC Pickfords
RCA Railway Companies Association
HLP House of Lords Papers
LECWS Locomotive Engineers and Carriage and Works Superintendent. (A committee of the clearing house)
RCH Railway Clearing House
REC Railway Executive Committee
LMS London Midland Scottish (Magazine)
GWR Great Western Railway (Magazine)
MR Midland Railway

The classification of railway clearing house records is explained in the Bibliography

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CHAPTER I

THE TRANSPORT BOTTLENECKS BEFORE 1842

I

In the earliest days of the steam locomotive in Britain, before any important railway had been opened to the public, a far-sighted pamphleteer, foreseeing the dangers of piecemeal construction, advanced 'a plan for a railway from London to Edinburgh, passing near to all the commercial towns of Leicester, Nottingham, Sheffield, Wakefield, Leeds, etc., with branch railways to Bristol, Manchester and Liverpool'. If this plan was followed, the writer claimed, 'it would be productive of incalculable advantage to the country at large.'[1]

Nineteen years later, when the Liverpool and Manchester Railway had already been opened seven years, another pamphleteer, in considering Parliamentary procedure in vetting railway bills, considered that

'the great mistake . . . consists in viewing these vast projects as *local* measures, and in referring them to local committees. No one can doubt that they are far too important in a national point of view to be so considered. It is in fact this very thing, which leads to the infusion of a local, consequently a restricted and not infrequently a selfish and exclusive, spirit into these undertakings.'[2]

With a similar public-spirited aim, Captain Richard Mudge in his *Observations on Railways*[3] urged the appointment of a competent

[1] Thomas Gray: *Observations on a General Iron Railway, Showing its Great Superiority Over all the Present Methods of Conveyance*, London, 1819.

[2] 'Cautus': *Some words on railway legislation in a letter addressed to Sir Robert Peel, Bart*, London, 1837.

[3] R. Z. Mudge: *Observations on Railways with Reference to Utility, Profit and the Obvious Necessity for a National System*, London, 1837, p. 79.

body of commissioners for establishing a system of railways in England and as a necessary corollary, for Scotland also'. The Board's task would be 'to examine every bill for railways and canals laid on the table of the House of Commons' with the chief object of determining 'the best main lines throughout the country'. Only by these means would it be possible for a 'train of carriages to pursue its quick and uninterrupted course from Edinburgh to Exeter or from Giants Causeway to Kerry'.

But the advice of these early writers on railway reform was brushed aside and soon forgotten. In the important formative years of railway building in Britain the influence of the economists on Parliament was increasing and relaxation of restraints on trade was the order of the day. In 1822–24 while the engineers and navvies were laying the track of the Stockton and Darlington Railway Huskisson at the Board of Trade was supervising a plan to liberalise the tariff. While mountains of earth were being moved to build a railway from London to Birmingham, Huskisson's successors in the Cabinet were sweeping away the excise duties which had for so long hamstrung many branches of the country's manufactures. Hence it is not surprising that when Parliament came to consider railways.

'No attempt was made to establish the new channels of communication in accordance with such general principles as would ultimately give them the character of a national system. On the contrary, each company was permitted to select the locality, to run its line in the direction, and select the gauge it thought best.'[1]

After an early phase when Parliamentary committees met proposals for new railways with 'determined rejection or dilatory acceptance', during the railway manias of 1835–36 and 1845–46 they tended to the opposite extreme of unlimited concession, as a consequence of which 'railways were projected in every possible and impossible direction, under rivers, over mountains, down precipices and across arms of the sea. Three routes between the metropolis and York were not thought too many.' In these years the frenzy of speculation affected

[1] *Railway Competition*: A letter to George Carr Glyn, Esq., MP, London, 1849.

'the courtly and exclusive occupant of the halls of the great as well as the homely inmate of the humble cottage. Duchesses were even known to soil their fingers with scrip, and old maids to enquire with trembling eagerness the price of stocks. Young ladies deserted the marriage list and the obituary for the share list and startled their lovers with questions respecting the operation of bulls and bears. The man of fashion was seen more frequently at his brokers than at his club. The man of trade left his business to look after his shares, and in return both his shares and his business left him.'[1]

After James Morrison, MP for Ipswich, had failed to persuade Parliament in May 1836 that it should exercise a more complete control over railway dividends and charges, there were increasing rumblings of discontent from traders at the railways' exercise of their near-monopoly power. Early in 1839 the House of Commons received a petition against the high rates charged by the most important railway in the kingdom—the London and Birmingham. There were rumours that the Government planned to take over the railways or at least subject them to a far more rigorous control.

George Carr Glyn, chairman of the London and Birmingham railway, took alarm. He was not opposed to Government interference to promote greater safety of travel and standardised operational procedures, but he wished to be master in his own house. Equally concerned were those solicitors who had made a profitable business of drafting railway bills during the first railway mania. On January 7, 1839, Messrs Burke and Venables, railway solicitors of 25 Parliament Street, Westminster, took the initiative. With the full backing of Glyn, they sent a letter to the secretaries of all the railway companies, seeking the support of the Boards of Directors for a railway association which it was proposed to form 'with a view to the protection of railway interests against any attack which may be contemplated upon them in the next session'. The companies were urged to 'act in concert in endeavouring to repel any improper interference with their vested rights'. It was considered prudent 'in order not to excite the jealousy of the public . . . to establish the society in the first instance, nominally on a scientific principle, as a society for the encouragement of public

[1] *Railway Competition*: A letter to George Carr Glyn, Esq., MP, London, 1849.

improvements'. Prudence also dictated that the new organisation should be established 'with as little publicity as possible'.[1]

The response to the appeal having been highly gratifying, the inaugural meeting of the Railway Society was held in Burke and Venable's office on March 9, 1839, when the representatives of numerous companies enrolled as members. By the time of the next meeting, on May 15, the appointment of a Parliamentary Select Committee on Communication by Railway—the first major public enquiry into the railways of the nation—had been announced in the House of Commons, and the society therefore decided to delegate to a small committee the task of 'watching over all matters affecting railway interests'. Five weeks later, on June 20th, the secretary of the society was pleased to report that the committee had kept a careful watch 'on all proceedings in Parliament at all likely to affect railway interests' and that 'the President of the Board of Trade had recognised the Society as the organ through which in future to seek for any information required on the subject of railways'.[2]

While it would be a mistake to exaggerate the importance of this first intervention of the organised railway interest in Parliament, nevertheless the fact remains that the recommendations contained in the reports of Lord Seymour's Select Committee coincided in many respects with the policies Railway Society members advocated as witnesses before the committee or in debate in the House of Commons.

Robert Stephenson, Carr Glyn and J. Baxendale (deputy chairman of the South Eastern Railway) all agreed that a superintending Board annexed to the Board of Trade would be useful to secure uniformity of bye laws and signalling arrangements and even to arbitrate in disputes concerning through fares.[3] The committee considered that railways should be subjected to 'some general superintendence and control through some department of the executive government' and that 'every bye law enacted under powers contained in the several railway acts should be

[1] BTHR, Gen. 31A: Railway Companies Association, formerly known as the Railway Society or the Railway Association.

[2] *Ibid.* and *The Railway Times*, June 22, 1839, p. 483.

[3] Select Committee on Railways, minutes of evidence BPP 1839, Vol. X, Qs 4739–42, 197, and 5730–1.

submitted to such department two months at least before it shall be obligatory'.

On the other hand the committee endorsed the opinion of the majority of the railway directors who appeared before it, that the interference of a government Board with the promotion and routing of railways would be undesirable: 'The Board . . . should not interfere with any proposed railway before the Act of incorporation has passed.'[1] In more general terms, there was not a great deal of difference between the view expressed by Mr Easthorpe, MP for Leicester and spokesman of the railway interest in the Commons, that 'the best plan was . . . to proceed without dangerous meddling,' and the words of the committee's report:

'Your committee in framing these resolutions have been guided by this consideration, that however improductively Parliament may in the first instance have granted to the railway companies such extensive powers, it is now advisable to interfere with them as little as possible, and to limit their recommendations to a plan which may ensure the effectual administration of the laws by which each railway company is incorporated. Your committee feel, moreover, that in adopting this course they are more likely to carry along with them the good feelings and support of the railway companies and their directors'.[2]

Lord Seymour's Railway Regulation Act of August 10, 1840, which was the outcome of the select committee's reports, was a pale shadow of the kind of measure that, at one time, many railway directors and solicitors had feared might be introduced. It gave the Board of Trade power to secure returns of railway accidents and to send its inspectors to ensure that adequate arrangements were being made for the safe operation of the traffic. The companies were required to send in information on traffic, rates and fares and to submit all bye laws for approval before putting them into effect.

[1] Third Report of the Select Committee on Railways, 1840, BPP 1840, Vol. XIII, p. 172. The Committee of 1839 was reappointed in 1840 with very little change in its composition.

[2] *Hansard*, 3rd Series, Vol. 55, July 23, 1840, cols 907–8. Third Report of the Select Committee on Railways, 1840.

It was evident that by this Act 'Parliament did little to control the railway'.[1] There was to be no comprehensive planning of routes and there were no provisions for encouraging through communication on existing or future lines. The railway directors were so reassured that they failed to maintain in 1840 the society they had so carefully created in the previous year.

II

While Lord Seymour and his committees were carefully listening to the witnesses from the companies and the trading community, the railway contractors and their armies of navvies had not been idle. When James Morrison moved his Commons resolution in May 1836 the railway map showed a scattering of short disconnected lines as far apart as the Dundee and Newtyle, the Bodmin and Wadebridge, the Liverpool and Manchester and the Canterbury and Whitstable; but there was as yet no semblance of a system of railways. By contrast, the map of December 1840 suggests, no doubt, to a misleading extent, the possibility of long distance through communication. In the three years from December 1837 to December 1840 the important railways in the industrial heartland of England, in a region which formed an inverted triangle with London as the apex and the Liverpool to Hull route as the base, were opened to traffic for the first time. In April 1838, when the London and Birmingham Railway had opened the line between Rugby and Birmingham, through communication, via the Grand Junction and Liverpool and Manchester railways, was in prospect with many of the important towns of Lancashire. Five months later, with the opening between Rugby and Tring, of the middle stretch of the London and Birmingham route, London was brought into rail connection with the North West. Between June and September 1839, through the agency of the Birmingham and Derby Junction and Midland Counties Railways, both Birmingham and Derby were linked with Nottingham. By midsummer 1840 the North Midland Railway had linked Derby and Leeds; the Midland Counties line from Derby via Leicester to Rugby had been opened and the Hull and Selby Railway had closed the remaining gap

[1] E. Cleveland-Stevens: *English Railways: Their Development and Their Relation to the State*, London, 1915, p. 79.

between the Humber and Leeds. In the North West through communication extended to Preston. By the end of 1840 the rails between Birmingham and Gloucester had been laid and the contractors had only two months more work to do before completing the main line between Manchester and Leeds.

III

Physical contact between these important railways was one thing; businesslike conduct of through traffic was another. The legacy of the British Parliament's failure either to build the main lines as state enterprises as was done in Belgium after 1835, or at least to plan the main routes comprehensively as the French Government decided to do in 1842, was a medley of mostly short distance railways, whose managers had different systems of goods classification, an almost infinite variety of freight charges and an interesting but infuriating diversity of passenger accommodation and fare structures. As late as 1846 when important amalgamations such as those which brought into existence the Midland Railway in 1844 and the London and North Western Railway in 1846, had eliminated a number of the smaller companies, the average route mileage of the companies which were members of the Clearing House was only forty-one miles.[1] Hence the manufacturer or trader who wished to dispatch goods beyond a small radius from his factory or warehouse was in the majority of cases obliged to depend on the services of more than one railway, with the attendent risk of loss of his goods. The intrepid traveller, in attempting even a comparatively short journey, might well be cooling his heels on the platforms of three or four successive junctions along his route, as well as enduring—when lucky enough to be 'on the move'—that overdose of 'fresh air' which the open third class carriages of the day inevitably provided.

The minute books of the Boards of the principal railway companies for the years 1839–41 abound with complaints from passengers and traders about the numerous obstructions to through communication by railway. In some cases a company refused to allow the waggons of an adjoining company to pass over its lines,

[1] E. Cleveland-Stevens: *English Railways: Their Development and Their Relation to the State*, London, 1915, p. 178.

and goods had to be trans-shipped, with the inevitable delay and damage that resulted from such lack of co-operation. In October 1840 the Grand Junction Railway refused to allow the waggons of the London and Birmingham Railway to pass over its lines and goods had therefore to be trans-shipped at Birmingham. The Board of the London and Birmingham Company then retaliated by refusing permission for Grand Junction trucks to proceed southward beyond Birmingham. The difficulty had arisen because the Grand Junction Company was in the process of assuming full responsibility for goods carriage to the exclusion of the carriers, while the London and Birmingham merely provided the waggons, but left responsibility for goods carriage entirely to the carriers.[1] It is true that through traffic was resumed in a few weeks' time, but Pickfords were complaining early in 1841 that the Grand Junction were imposing the 'prohibitory' charge of 2s 6d per waggon per day for the use of its trucks on the 'foreign line'. The Grand Junction directors retorted that they were frequently called upon to supply for the traffic towards London double the number of waggons brought to them in exchange. From such squabbles it was the trader who suffered. *The Railway Times* reported that it was a 'subject of serious complaint' that on the two lines which formed the link between London and Lancashire there were not enough waggons available to carry the goods awaiting transit.[2]

In some instances, even though facilities for the through transit of goods were available, the charges made for the use of an adjoining company's lines were so extortionate that little traffic developed. The experience of the Birmingham and Derby Junction Railway after its opening in August 1839 is an interesting case in point. In its early years this company had a misleading name since it suffered from the serious disadvantage of having no station at Birmingham. Its customers were dependent upon the services of the London and Birmingham Railway for the short journey between Hampton and Birmingham. Although through traffic of passengers and goods was arranged, the London and Birmingham Company charged such heavy tolls for the use of its rails and terminal

[1] BTHR, LBM 1/22. *London and Birmingham Railway:* Report of the Goods Committee, November 27, 1840.

[2] *The Railway Times*, January 2, 1841, p. 8, January 16, 1841, p. 64, and March 6, 1841, p. 289.

facilities that the junior company was financially crippled. In June 1841, out of gross weekly receipts of £750 it was paying £160 in tolls to the neighbouring—but not very neighbourly—company, leaving it a revenue 'barely sufficient to cover working expenses'. Both because the route by rail to Hampton was longer and because the heavy tolls sent up freight rates, goods traffic between Birmingham and Derby remained largely in the hands of the road carriers. The obstacles which the Birmingham and Derby Junction Board had experienced in trying to increase goods traffic convinced it that it could be well worth while to incur the extra capital outlay in extending its own rails to Birmingham. The Bill authorising this extension received royal assent on June 4, 1840 and the new route was opened to traffic on February 9, 1842. Toll payments to the London and Birmingham line ceased in July of that year; but the experience of the previous three years had taught the Board a lesson. The company became a founder member of the Railway Clearing House in January 1842.[1]

From the beginning of 1841 through goods and passenger traffic from Gloucester to the Midlands and the North should have been possible, but it was not until the spring of the following year that discussions on an agreed scale of charges and division of receipts took place between the traffic managers of the Birmingham and Gloucester and the Birmingham and Derby Junction Railways. But no agreement could be reached because the Board of the Birmingham and Gloucester Company would not agree to a schedule of through charges, and in consequence much potential rail traffic was lost to the canals and roads.[2]

South of the Thames, the South Eastern Railway was having as much difficulty with the Croydon, London and Greenwich and London and Brighton Railways when it tried to arrange through traffic, as the Birmingham and Derby Junction Railway was experiencing further north. Mr J. Baxendale, the Deputy Chairman of the South Eastern Railway told the Select Committee

[1] C. R. Clinker: *The Birmingham and Derby Junction Railway, Dugdale Society Occasional Papers*, No. 11, 1956, pp. 13–16. BTHR, LBM 1/3, London and Birmingham Railway Board Minute 887, July 4, 1839. *The Railway Times*, March 7, 1840, p. 194.

[2] BTHR, BDJ 1/5: Birmingham and Derby Junction Railway Traffic Committee, June 15, 1842–October 21, 1842.

on Railways in 1841 that the company had encountered 'considerable difficulties' in making the necessary arrangements and that it was entirely dependent upon the goodwill of the Boards of Directors of the three railway companies concerned for its access to London.[1]

Undoubtedly there were companies that took the farsighted view that more was to be gained by amicable negotiations with neighbouring companies than by conflict. However, even when arrangements were made to encourage through traffic, unexpected difficulties arose. In February 1841 Captain Laws, general manager of the Manchester and Leeds railway, informed the Board that although they had a through traffic agreement with George Hudson's York and North Midland Railway, he had to write to Hudson complaining that the letters MLR on the waggons of the Manchester Company had been painted over and the waggons had been used for local traffic in York.[2] Because the difficulties over the exchange of waggons were of long standing, the Manchester and Leeds directors appointed Edward Gulliver to serve as a number taker at the junction of the two companies' lines in Leeds. It was an arrangement which offended the Board of the York and North Midland who instructed the secretary of the Company to write to Manchester protesting about Gulliver's activities.[3]

Mr Kenneth Morison, the first manager of the Railway Clearing House, was also aware of the difficulties of working an agreement for the exchange of waggons. He wrote that such arrangements were from the first 'very imperfectly fulfilled, and some of the companies came in the end to make an unacknowledged use of the carriages and waggons of others to an extent which amounted to a positive grievance'.[4]

The parochially minded outlook of the York and North Midland was, however, exceptional. Before 1842 a number of companies had

[1] Select Committee on Railways, 1841, BPP 1841, Vol. VIII Qs 1800–5.

[2] BTHR, LY 1/8: Manchester and Leeds Railway Board, February 22, 1841.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] K. Morison: *The Origins and Results of the Clearing System Which is in Operation on the Narrow Gauge Railways with Tables of Through Traffic in the Year 1845*, London, 1846, p. 6.

learned to co-operate with each other honestly and trustfully. But given the greatest good will in the world there were still substantial difficulties to be overcome, the legacy of the method of piecemeal authorisation of railway construction and of varying business practices. In the spring of 1841 the Boards of the Manchester and Leeds, Leeds and Selby, and Hull and Selby Railways, reached agreement on a scheme to encourage through goods traffic, receipts being divided in proportion to the route mileage of each company. The difficulty in this case was how to settle up financially in view of the differing systems of accounts of the three companies.[1] Mr Baxendale, who was passenger and goods superintendent of the London and Birmingham line (as well as vice Chairman of the South Eastern), told the Select Committee on Railways in 1839 that he foresaw the time when—despite the existence of five different companies on the route from London to Edinburgh—'they might find London and Birmingham carriages in Edinburgh or north of Edinburgh'. There was but one snag: 'keeping the accounts'.[2] Dionysius Lardner, recalling the days before the foundation of the Clearing House, considered that one of the greatest obstacles to through working of traffic was 'an intolerable chaos of cross accounts'.[3]

In view of the time-consuming work involved in negotiation between railways for the conduct of through goods traffic, a number of companies, including the influential London and Birmingham, transferred the entire business—apart from the provision of rolling stock—to the private carriers who collected the goods from the suppliers, loaded them on the railway waggons and unloaded them again at the nearest station to the point of final delivery. The companies which adopted this system hoped that it might simplify matters where transit over more than one company's lines was involved even though the arrangements might prove more costly to the consumer. If traffic superintendents and goods managers shared this optimistic hope it was not long before disillusionment set in. While it is true that in the circumstances of many companies at that time the arrangement had its advantages,

[1] BTHR, LY 1/8: Manchester and Leeds Railway Board, April 26, 1841. *The Railway Times*, August 15, 1840.

[2] Select Committee on Railways, 1839, BPP 1839, Vol. X, Qs 5720–1.

[3] D. Lardner: *Railway Economy*, London, 1850, p. 150.

it was certainly no complete answer to the needs of long distance goods traffic. Mr D. Stevenson, who worked as goods manager at Euston in the 1840s, recalled some of the frustrations of dealing with the carriers when he wrote:

'We discovered that the declarations of some of the carriers as to the description of goods loaded by them in the waggons were often systematically false, and we had to appoint a detective, who frequently found the real invoices of the waggons to differ entirely from the declarations given to the company. It also happened that when trade was brisk and waggons were in large demand, the carriers men would have a pitched battle for the vehicles; it was also found that loads made up at country stations where the weight could be checked, were overloaded to a dangerous extent'.[1]

In February 1841 Captain Laws was complaining to the Board of the North Midland Railway of the 'numerous frauds' committed by carriers at Leeds station.[2]

IV

Goods waggons might be left neglected at a railway siding and their contents allowed to deteriorate without fear of an immediate rumpus; passengers unceremoniously turned out of a cosy compartment on to a freezing junction platform were a different proposition. Letters of complaint from aggrieved travellers written to the railway management and to the press eventually convinced the railway companies that they must allay the criticisms by making satisfactory arrangements for unbroken passenger travel.

In the early 1840s there was mounting evidence of the inconveniences suffered by the public. The inhabitants of Lancaster might be forgiven for jumping to the conclusion that since there was a continuous rail link with London it ought not to have been too difficult to complete such a journey in a day. Their disgust when learning that this was a luxury available only to those who

[1] D. Stevenson: *Fifty Years on the London and North Western Railway, and Other Memoranda in the Life of David Stevenson*, ed. Leopold Turner, London, 1891, p. 18.

[2] BTHR, LY 1/8: Manchester and Leeds Railway Board, February 22, 1841.

were prepared to buy a first-class ticket between Newton and Birmingham 'because the Grand Junction Railway made no provision for second or third class passengers between six o'clock in the morning and six o'clock at night', may well be imagined. A Parliamentary committee estimated that this class snobbishness resulted in at least 75,000 persons a year having to travel first class when they would have preferred to use cheaper second- or third-class accommodation.[1] The inhabitants of Preston were little better served. If they wished to travel to Birmingham they were not able to book through, even though there was a rail link between the two cities.

Even worse treated were passengers wishing to pass through Preston by train. Owing to a dispute between the different companies whose lines terminated in the town, passengers passing through were obliged to detrain and walk 200 yards in the open from the carriages of one company to those of another.

Because the South Eastern and the London and Brighton Railways were at loggerheads, the two companies built entirely separate stations at Dover. Those wishing to travel through from Dover to Brighton or vice versa had to trudge half a mile through the mud from one terminus to the other.

The directors of the Manchester and Leeds Railway in negotiations with the directors of Midland Counties and London and Birmingham Railways sought agreement to a proposal for cheap through passenger fares from Manchester to London. The attempt had to be abandoned because of the belief of the Midland Counties Board that they would gain a greater revenue from maintaining the old, higher level of fares. In consequence of this disagreement, booking clerks at Manchester were not able to book passengers beyond Derby and clerks at Derby were instructed not to issue tickets to stations beyond Rugby. The much abused passenger had to queue up at three booking offices instead of one; and the services of three clerks instead of one were required.[2] London passengers wishing to travel to York were similarly inconvenienced. By July

[1] Select Committee on Railways, 1841. Evidence of Mr J. Baxendale, BPP 1841, Vol. VIII Qs 1813–15. Select Committee on Railways, Fifth report, Appendix 2, 1844, XI, pp. 20–21.

[2] BTHR, LY 1/8: Manchester and Leeds Railway Board, June 14, 1841, minutes 2474 and 2476.

30, 1840, there was a complete rail link between these places, but for more than two months thereafter rebooking at Derby and Normanton was necessary.[1] The directors of the London and Birmingham Railway appeared to be in no great hurry to aid the travellers of the brewing firms. In March 1841 the Board of the adjacent Birmingham and Derby Junction Railway requested that passengers from London might be booked through to Burton, Tamworth, and other stations north of Hampton. The reply received from Mr Creed, secretary of the London and Birmingham Railway was 'that the arrangement may be carried out as soon as the Clearing System is established'.[2] This was nine months later.

Where a passenger had to travel beyond the limits of a single company's lines there was always the risk of being stranded at some bleak railway junction through having missed a connection with another train. An incensed victim of this kind of situation wrote indignantly to *The Times* in March 1840 that the booking clerk at Derby had informed him that if he took the 4 p.m. Birmingham and Derby Junction train to Hampton he would be able to change into an 'up' London and Birmingham train which would bring him to the capital that same night at 'about ten or eleven o'clock'. Engine trouble just before the train reached Hampton, however, had caused him to miss his connection. He was offered the alternative of cooling his heels for several hours on the comfortless Hampton Station until the next train for London arrived at 1.30 a.m., or of proceeding to Birmingham to await the next 'up' express. He chose the latter alternative and did not reach his destination at Euston until 6 a.m. On another occasion when the train from Derby was late in arriving at Hampton and missed the connection with the London train, passengers were 'forwarded to Coventry by chaise and gig'. The comments on their situation made by the inmates of the chaise were, no doubt, as unprintable as those of the constant reader of *The Times*, who arrived a good seven hours late at Euston.[3] No doubt these inconveniences were no worse than those experienced by stage coach passengers, but

[1] C. R. Clinker: *op. cit.* p. 17

[2] BTHR, BDJ 1/2: Birmingham and Derby Junction Railway Board, minute 2473, April 7, 1841.

[3] *The Times*, September 19, 1840. BTHR, BDJ: Birmingham and Derby Junction Railway Traffic Committee, August 12, 1842.

the travelling public were beginning to demand a better service from the railways.

When John Smith was a victim of railway mismanagement the directors lost little sleep over the mishap; it was a different case when titled persons were inconvenienced. On August 12, 1840, the Dowager Duchess of Richmond boarded a train at Euston intending to travel to Parkside Station. Because that particular train was not one for which it had been *agreed* to book passengers through and because the Duchess's name and destination had not been entered on the waybill, she was taken to Manchester by mistake. The secretary of the Grand Junction Company subsequently agreed with the London and Birmingham railway to meet the extra expenses which the Duchess had incurred, as a result of this mistake; but it may well be imagined that incidents of this kind helped to convince railway managers of the need for improved arrangements for through traffic of all kinds.

Railway companies were notoriously reluctant to accept responsibility for the transference of animals to another company's waggons at junction points. An indignant horse owner complained in a letter to *The Times* that although he wished to send his horse from Euston to Barnsley it could not be booked through beyond Derby where the North Midland Railway had its terminus. He was therefore obliged to send a servant to Derby simply to lead the horse from one train to another. Owing to the 'unaccommodating spirit' of the railway companies the expense of sending the horse was 'nearly doubled'.[1]

In the years before the railway companies had constructed branch lines to act as feeders to their original through routes, it was a common practice of well-to-do travellers to take their carriages and horses with them by train as far as possible along their route so that they would be available for the completion of the journey by road. On the long distance trains out of Euston it was not uncommon to see fifteen or twenty private carriages attached to the waggons of a single train. The owners often preferred the seclusion of a ride in their own coaches to the uncertainties of companionship in one of the railway company's compartments. As the horses were conveyed in separate waggons the hazards of

[1] *The Times*, September 19, 1840. BRB, HL 2/14 R323: Letter from E. J. Cleather to R. Creed, dated September 26, 1840.

this procedure, when change on to another company's lines was necessary, can be fully appreciated. A situation in which coach and horses were landed at different destinations was unlikely to generate much good will towards the railway companies. On July 23, 1839 the goods manager of the London and Birmingham Railway was questioned by a Parliamentary select committee about such mishaps:

'Have you not heard that there was quarrelling in certain portions of the line, in consequence of which coaches have been left without horses?'

'I think that there have been quarrels occasionally, and that coaches have been left without horses.'

'And of course to the very great inconvenience of passengers?'

'Of course.'[1]

The existence of almost as many kinds of railway tickets as there were different railway companies and the adoption of different rules for collecting tickets from passengers was bound to lead to misunderstandings. By 1840 the Newcastle and Carlisle, Manchester and Leeds, and Birmingham and Gloucester Companies had adopted the small stiff cardboard ticket familiar to railway travellers of the present day; but paper tickets of a great variety of shapes and sizes were being issued by other companies. On the Leeds and Selby line it was customary to collect tickets from passengers before the start of the journey. On the Great Western a similar procedure was followed, except that the compartment doors were locked as soon as tickets had been collected; on the London and Birmingham and London and Southampton lines tickets were collected at the last station but one on the route.[2] Such variations in procedure increased the opportunites for fraud and evasion.

The more frequently passengers had to change trains the more likelihood there was of luggage being lost and the easier it was for the companies to shift responsibility 'somewhere up the line' to other railways over which they had no control. For the recovery of possessions mislaid in travel and independent and

[1] Select Committee on Railways, 1839, BPP 1839, Vol. X, Q. 5724–5.
[2] *Ibid.* Q. 3968–72.

impartial lost luggage department was becoming more necessary each day.

By the early 1840s differences in waggon dimensions and braking, variations in locomotive performance and divergent rules for the operation of traffic were frustrating the efforts of those companies who sought co-operation with their neighbours in the promotion of through traffic. Thus the London and Birmingham Railway had in 1841 agreements with adjacent railways to forward each others through goods traffic but 'differences in the gauge of wheels in use on the lines in connection with the London and Birmingham' made it difficult to 'bring the trains up to London in the time ordinarily allowed'. Because of these difficulties, Mr Bury, the locomotive superintendent of the London and Birmingham line was instructed to meet the directors of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway and to request that the tyres and axles of waggons used by that company should be modified to make them more suitable to run on the main line to Euston.[1]

In the autumn of 1840 a spate of railway accidents reported in the newspapers helped to draw public attention to the grave deficiencies of the companies' traffic management. No doubt experimentation in signalling had its value; but locomotive men could be forgiven a sense of bewilderment at the variety of devices they encountered if ever they had the misfortune to traverse an unfamiliar line. Most companies used the 'time interval' method as one safety precaution against accidents. Under it the signalman was not allowed to give the all clear to an oncoming train until a given number of minutes—it might be as few as five or as many as twenty—had elapsed since the preceding train had passed. Sand glasses, known by signalmen as 'egg boilers' were provided to indicate the time interval to be enforced.[2] The riskiness of this method of accident prevention at a time when locomotive breakdowns were an everyday occurrence, and the time intervals varied from company to company, is all too apparent. A leading Yorkshire newspaper gave as 'the immediate cause of most recent collisions the starting of trains too nearly together'.[3]

[1] BTHR, LBM 1/22: London and Birmingham Railway, Report of Locomotive Committee, January 13, 1842.

[2] R. Blythe: *Danger Ahead: The Dramatic Story of Railway Signalling*, London, 1951, pp. 27–28. [3] Leeds Intelligence, November 28, 1840.