The Quintinshill Disaster and Britain's Railways During the First World War

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Abstract

Although the Home Front in Britain during the First World War has received a great deal more attention in recent years, the role of the railways has been largely overlooked. Yet the railways were crucial in maintaining the war effort and wartime economy, transporting not only weaponry and troops, but food items for both the domestic population and the forces; mail travelling to and from the front lines, and essential commodities such as coal for the nation's navy. This dissertation considers the impact of the early stages of the war, through analysis of the worst disaster in British railway history at Quintinshill on the 22nd of May 1915. Five trains were in involved in a catastrophic collision leading to the loss of 226 military and civilian lives. By utilizing documents detailing the coordination of the railways by the Railway Executive Committee, and exploring the events at Quintinshill using the official report into the disaster, as well as newspaper reports and company documents, the operation of the railways under wartime conditions is examined. Using the Quintinshill disaster as a prism through which to analyse the issues, the extreme pressures faced by the railways and the people that operated them during this crucial period have been examined, showing how normal protocols dictating safe operations on the railways were being neglected during wartime.

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Contents

Introduction
The Importance of the Railways to Britain's War Effort

The railways were crucial to enabling Britain to fulfil her First World War aims and maintain the war effort of the entire nation. The transport system, originating in the first decades of the previous century, had by the beginning of the Great War expanded to the extent that virtually every centre of population across the nation was serviced by a rail connection.

Over the course of the previous decade there has been an upsurge in interest in the role of Britain's Home Front during the First World War, and this is undoubtedly linked to the centenary commemorations of the war as a whole. This renewed focus however has centred on aspects of the war that directly influenced the course of hostilities, be that the politics behind the British war machine, the increase in munitions production, and the changing role of workers.

Although it is widely accepted that the railways were a vital part of Britain's war effort, little focus has been placed on the role they played during the conflict and how it was the railways that allowed Britain to wage a truly mechanized war. Any focus that has been placed on the railways appears to fall into one of two tendencies. The first being passing reference to the role the railways played in wider histories about First World War which, although interesting, inevitably focus on the home front during the war, or the military campaigns of the front. The second line of focus comes from the more specialized 'Railway History' sphere of enquiry. Whilst this line of research is much more detailed than the first line of focus, specialized railway histories prefer to investigate either the staff who operated the railways, or the place of the railways on the front lines with the War Department Light Railways sector of the Royal Engineers. This leaves

the railways of mainland Britain vastly underrepresented in the histories of the railways at war, being relegated to only a handful of texts and the occasional few pages of information written in the last five decades. Furthermore, texts which do contain reference to the railways rarely acknowledge operations on the network beyond the establishment of the Railway Executive Committee as a subcommittee of general wartime governance, meaning that an entire element of Britain's wartime story has been severely underrepresented.

Invariably when investigating the role of the railways during the First World War, the term 'Quintinshill' is going to arise. To a non-rail enthusiast, this term can seem quite obscure, but to individuals whom hold an interest in the history of the railways, this term is the shorthand for Britain's worst rail disaster in the long history of the transport network. Yet this disaster, the only near comparison of which being the Harrow and Wealdstone disaster of 1952 in terms of fatalities; and the Hawes junction disaster of 1910 in terms of overall damage to rolling stock, is by and large forgotten by members of the general public. Yet this disaster provides an interesting angle in which to examine the operations of the railways, both in general terms surrounding railway practices of that period, and in the more specific sphere of the railways during the First World War. In recent years, there have been a small selection of texts written focusing on the disaster itself and the significance that it plays to the story of 1915, but these texts have not used the disaster as a means of exploring and investigating operations on the railways during the First World War, and the complexities that operating a network designed in peacetime had when the wartime conditions took full precedent.

Given the period of 1915 in which the Quintinshill disaster occurred, it is perhaps easy to see why general histories of the First World War may overlook this event. Happening

on the 22nd of May 1915, the disaster came at the height of the so called 'shell crisis', wherein British forces were suffering from a severe shortage of munitions at the front lines, as well as being only weeks after the torpedo attack and subsequent sinking of RMS Lusitannia off of the coast of Ireland, with the result being 1,198 deaths on board with only 761 survivors. As well as this, the events that unfurled at Quintinshill came shortly before the collapse of the Asquith government and the establishment of the wartime coalition, as well as happening during the infamous Gallipoli and Dardanelles campaigns in Turkey. Evaluation of these other subject areas is far more prevalent in existing studies surrounding the First World War. Even within devoted texts however, the focus is more on the staff behind the disaster and the criminal trial of these men, the impact to the railway is not mentioned in any great detail, and this is something of an oversight on behalf of authors that have written before.

This study will focus on the events of the Quintinshill rail disaster and examine the obvious questions that have been largely overlooked, what went wrong on the morning of the 22nd of May 1915, and was this disaster a byproduct of the wider wartime situation, with regard to pressure on the railways and the people that ran them? In order to achieve this however, it is first important to place the railways of Britain into the sphere of the wider war narrative. For this reason chapter one will explore the operations of the railways under the jurisdiction of the Railway Executive Committee for the war period, examining aspects such as the transportation of troops to and from the theatres of war; the transportation of materials required for the war effort, and the provisions in place to allow the railways to operate at maximum capacity in favour of the war effort. This allows chapters two and three to focus on the Quintinshill study detailing the events of the morning of the 22nd of May 1915 and how they became possible, and the following reaction, both in terms of the general public, and in the

corridors of power, resulting in the criminal trial which took place in Edinburgh during the September of 1915.

The focus of this research project, whilst not exhaustive as to encompass the whole wartime period, is to examine the role played by Britain's railways to Britain's war effort, particularly in the early stages of the war, to detail the pressures that the rail network faced during wartime, and how these challenges were met in order to fulfil the demands being placed. As a method of conducting this examination, the events of the Quintinshill rail disaster shall be examined, focusing on how each of the pressures present on the rail network, including pressures on rolling stock; pressures on infrastructure; and pressures on railway personnel operating the network, all came together and helped to cause Britain's worst rail disaster. To assist with the undertaking of this research project a number of different documents have been consulted. These range from the official report into the disaster that happened at Quintinshill written by Lieutenant Colonel Edmund Druitt in the weeks following the disaster, a document that had been made available via the internet as a PDF document accessed through the website Parlipapers.co.uk and through documents relating to the operations of the Railway Executive Committee which are stored at the National Archive at Kew in London. Some newspaper reports of the disaster have also been utilized to help provide an indication as to the public reaction to the events, and each of these documents all have a role to play in the undertaking of this research project.

It is however first important to acknowledge what has been written beforehand, and it this that shall form the basis of the literature review in the following chapter.

Literature Review
"The Forgotten Aspect of Britain's First World War?"

Whilst conducting this study, a number of secondary literature sources will be utilized to add to the general picture surrounding the operation of Britain's railways during the First World War, and the sequence of events in the early months of 1915 which should add to the case study of the Quintinshill rail disaster that shall be undertaken in chapters two and three. These texts can be considered to deal with one of two issues, these being wider First World War literature and literature referring to the history of Britain's railways. Although limited in their usage towards completely detailing the role of Britain's railways during the First World War, general texts on the British experience do help provide a gateway into the wider context of Britain's First World War, and this backdrop is crucial to completing an understanding of the railways and the role they played. In order for a more complete analysis to be achieved it is first important to identify each of the key themes running throughout the operation of Britain's railways during this period of time, and to examine each of the key texts that have helped form the background information. To do this, the two categories of texts, these being railway specific literature and First World War literature, will be handled separately so as to allow for deeper analysis of each of these categories to be achieved. Perhaps the logical area in which to start this analysis of secondary literature is in with the general First World War literature, and how these texts help to contribute towards the backdrop in which a study of the railways is to be conducted.

What becomes apparent from some of the secondary literature, particularly those with a longer period of focus, is that war period is referred to simply as a paragraph[1] of

[1] Hugh Kearney, *The British Isles: A History of Four Nations* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1989) pg. 195

information contained in a longer chapter on the twentieth century as a whole, whilst others make reference to the First World War as a passing mention to wider subjects, such as the history of British trade unionism.[2]

Trade unionism, although not prioritized as a focus within this research project, is perhaps the first of the major themes which have been explored by authors examining the war period, and this can be seen to link in with two types of focus that has taken place in scholarly works, this being political focus and focus on workers. Whilst these texts are by nature very limited in their usage in a study devoted to the First World War, they do help to signify the differences in focus that can be presented between different authors writing about similar subject areas. Other authors examining the issue of British trade unionism have gone slightly further in elaborating the role of the trade unions during the course of the conflict, stating that due to the war, trade unions gained political recognition in areas they hadn't before[3], before then detailing the actions of some shop stewards in calling strike action during the war against the wishes of the union leaders and their agreement with the Government to not strike for the course of the war.[4] The main element to extract from this extended information on the role of trade unions during the war is that unions began to be recognized on a political level, something which would have applied to the two railway specific trade unions, however there is no specific mention of either contained within this extended text.

One particular trend that has been noted in the First World War specific literature is the tendency of authors to examine one particular theme of the war. As the war

[2] Henry Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism: Fifth Edition* (Basingstoke; Palgrave Macmillan, 1992) e-book, accessed: 16/12/2018; Rosemary Aris, *Trade Unions and the Management of Industrial Conflict* (Basingstoke; Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998) pg. 99
[3] Fraser W. Hamish, *History of British Trade Unionism, 1700-1988* (Basingstoke; Macmillan Press Ltd.., 1999) pg. 128
[4] Hamish, pg. 129

became more prolonged and the British focus became established on total war these specific trends become slightly blurred, as per the course of a state with the primary focus being to win the war. For ease of analysis however, these trends will be separated out so as to provide a more rounded framework in which to investigate each trend.

The first of these themes is the political dimension of the war, and the significance of the British political dimension upon the wider elements of the conflict. The initial focus of the British government can be observed as attempting to maintain the premise of 'business as usual' as much as possible, as exemplified by the subcontracting of munitions contracts from the government to private companies. This approach however was unsustainable, and resulted in what became known as the 'shell crisis'. The shell crisis will prove significant to chapters two and three, due to the timing of the event, occurring as the backdrop to the Quintinshill disaster, and the implications and consequences that arose out of this shortage in the nations munitions to the rest of the British war effort. It is noted by several authors examining the political dimension of the war, particularly in the early period of the conflict, that the shell crisis was the result of a lack of planning and slow reactions on the behalf of the British government.[5] In addition to this, focus has been drawn to the idea of internal division within the government also being both a contributing factor behind the shell crisis, as well as the first coalition government led by Asquith in May 1915, and the later formation of the Liberal/Conservative coalition government in December 1916[6] following Asquith's resignation. A continuation of this line of argument that has been explored is the

[5] Ian Cawood and David McKinnon-Bell, *The First World War* (Oxon; Routledge, 2014) e-book, accessed: 28/08/2019 pp. 42-43

[6] Cawood and McKinnon-Bell, pp. 42-43; John Turner, *British Politics And The Great War: Coalition and Conflict 1915-1918* (London; Yale University Press, 1992) pp. 56-61

significance that the shell crisis and the establishment of the first coalition government had on the state of the British political war machine. To support this line of thinking, it has been asserted that the split of the government and the establishment of the civilian led Ministry of Munitions[7] are interlinked, with David Lloyd George, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer being appointed at the head of the Ministry.[8]

However, something that becomes clear from some authors, most notably Alan G.V. Simmonds, is the apparent lack of communication between the different departments of the British war machine. Simmonds argues that due to manpower shortages, one of a handful of subject areas in which there is an overlap with themes which shall be covered in the examination of operations on the railways, Lloyd-George had to approach the Army High Command for the release of some new recruits so as to send them back to work in the munitions factories on the home front and help to maintain supplies. [9] However, Ian Cawood and David McKinnon-Bell have pointed out that the resupply of the British armed forces was something of a slow process, pointing out that despite the passage of the 'Munitions of War Act' which became law in July 1915, something that allowed the government to both award munitions contracts to private firms as had been the practice before the establishment of the ministry, as well as set up its own state owned munitions factories in attempts to keep up with demands, ministry produced war equipment did not come into active use and availability until October 1915, and only in significant quantities in the spring of 1916.[10] What becomes clear is that despite the lack of communication between government branches in the beginning stages of the war, the shell crisis helped to exemplify the importance of a government which worked

[7] David French, "'A One-Man Show?' Civil Military Regulations in Britain during the First World War" in Paul Smith (ed.) *Government and the Armed Forces in Britain 1856-1990* (London; The Hambledon Press, 1996) pg. 92
[8] Cawood and McKinnon-Bell, pp. 42-32
[9] Alan G.V. Simmonds, *Britain and World War One* (Oxon; Routledge, 2012) pg. 56
[10] Cawood and McKinnon-Bell, pp. 42-43

together rather than as different entities focusing on one area of policy. This line of thinking can be extended to the formation of the coalition as the importance of cooperation between different individuals became key to the ideas of total war, leading to a truce between the political parties as it was accepted that broadly they were all working towards the same thing.

Additionally, with regard to the political dimension of the war, some authors have taken a different approach, in that they have not placed the First World War as an isolated period of time, instead using the First World War period in conjunction with the pre-war period of political unrest. Of particular note is Kenneth O. Morgan, who in his chapter detailing the twentieth century, states that "After the initial disasters […] the nation and its leaders settled down for a long war. Vital domestic issues such as Irish home rule were suspended for the duration of the hostilities. The political parties declared an indefinite truce".[11]

Additionally in texts referring to the economic theme of First World War study, there is some mention as to the activities of the government in handling big aspects of the British economy, and this is of significance to the study of the railways during the First World War. Peter Dewey makes reference to the government's interventions in wartime critical industries, actually citing the railways as an example to help demonstrate his point, stating that "In spite of the general predisposition of the government to leave private enterprise to supply the needs of the war economy, there were some early official interventions. The most notable was the government's assumption of control of the railways (although companies were not nationalized) the day after the war was

[11] Kenneth O. Morgan, "The Twentieth Century (1914-1991): The First World War" in Kenneth O. Morgan (ed.), *The OXFORD History of Britain* (Oxford; The Oxford University Press, 1993) pg. 583

declared. In exchange for carrying troops and supplies free of charge, the companies were guaranteed their income of 1913 (a good year)."[12] Although this information will prove useful to the study of the railways, this is only a passing reference to the railways in a larger text referring to Britain during the early part of the twentieth century and as such is, by its very nature, limited in scope, meaning that the extent in which this information will prove useful may be somewhat limited.

However, despite the problems being faced by the government throughout the course of the war, it has been argued that the government's mobilization was such to maintain public morale and support for the war effort. Jon Lawrence has argued that because the British government was not attempting to lower the pre-war domestic living standards for the civilian population, although it was recognized as being impossible to maintain everything for the duration due in part to high inflation on products for the civilian population, support for the war was actually maintained throughout some of the most difficult events of the war, citing the difficult period of 1917 and the short lived German breakthrough in the spring of 1918 as examples of this maintained support.[13] The interesting note to take from this comes from the environment of bad periods during the war in which morale was maintained, something that will prove a key factor in the aftermath of the Quintinshill disaster. This is additionally linked to texts and authors who prioritize reference to the mental torment the war presented on the people that fought it, which helps combine with other works examining the medical impact of the war on both the armed forces and the civilian population.[14]

[12] Peter Dewey, War and Progress: Britain 1914-1945 (Oxon; Routledge, 1997) e-book, accessed: 22/10/2018 pg. 26
[13] Jon Lawrence, "The First World War and its Aftermath" in Paul Johnson (ed.), *20th Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change* (Harlow; Longman Group Limited, 1994) pp. 157-157
[14] J.M. Winter, *The Great War And The British People* (London; Macmillan Education Ltd, 1987)

The economic aspect of study of the First World War is the next major prism in which authors have studied the period. Most notable in the economic strand of study is David Stevenson, whose book helps to provide some statistics for the period as a whole, particularly statistics relating to the amount of Gross National Produce to which was being devoted to the war effort in the form of shells for each year of the war.[15] Whilst such statistics are not entirely relevant to the matter at hand, they do help to provide an indication as to the nature of industrial produce during the war, something that is a side note, and perhaps the closest parallel to the subject of the railways that is possible to derive from this period of time. As railway workshops were turned over to the production of heavy artillery, and particularly tanks following their introduction in 1916, the figures as to total production help to provide a sense as to exactly the types of pressures that industry was under. Indeed, there have been authors who have devoted their works exclusively to the examination of industry during the First World War. Most notable amongst these is Anthony Burton and his book examining the workers of the First World War.[16] In addition to devoting a chapter to the subject of the railways during the First World War, detailing a general picture of the state the railways found themselves in for the duration of the hostilities, Burton provides a dedicated chapter to each of the major aspects of British industry during the war period, such as the production of munitions as well as the building of ships.

However, what is also apparent from some texts investigating the issue of economics is the seeming fragility of the British economy to deal with the costs associated with the war effort. Morgan makes reference to an almost collapse of the British currency and credit in the initial weeks after the war, and that this was only prevented by “dramatic

[15] David Stevenson, *1914-1918: The History of The First World War* (London; Penguin Books Ltd., 2012)
[16] Anthony Burton, *The Workers’ War: British Industry and the First World War* (Stroud; The History Press, 2014) e-book, accessed: 20/11/2018

measures by the Treasury and the Bank of England".[17]

Other historians have approached the First World War using the theme of social conditions during the period. Most prominent of these social historians is Arthur Marwick, who has written numerous books covering the period. For the purposes of this research project, two of these texts were consulted. The first of these texts was a broader examination of the social standards within twentieth century in Britain, ranging from 1914 to 1970. The principle argument running throughout the text is one of gradual improvements in social conditions throughout the century, all of which appear to emanate from the experience of the First World War at the beginning of the century.[18] Included in this is some reference to the changing role of women within Britain, a factor that this research project is not focusing on in their roles on the railways, but is important to acknowledge within the wider sphere of the First World War on the railways. Additionally, Marwick also makes some mention of the situation in Ireland and the state of Irish politics which, although interesting when investigated separately, has little use when examining the railways of the home front within Britain.

The second book written by Marwick that has been used is far more specific in assessing the period of the First World War. Contained within this text is several different stands of focus contained within the First World War. These strands include such themes as the public support for the war; the role of labour during the war; the role of women during the war and the role of science and technology to the course of the hostilities.[19] Of these themes, perhaps the only one which can be considered to

[17] O. Morgan, "The Twentieth Century" pg. 583

[18] Arthur Marwick, *The Explosion of British Society 1914-1970* (London; The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1971) pp. 5-32

[19] Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge (Second Edition)* (London; Macmillan Press Ltd., 1991)

have any influence on the situation on the railways is the role of labour during the war, with the rest of Marwick's focus being related to elements of the war that are unlinked to the railways, although Marwick does make a small amount of references to the political situation of the railways, particularly in the early period of the war. The reasoning behind the role of labour being useful to the successful conduction of research into the operations on Britain's railways during the First World War is the state of the labour situation on the railways following the initial call up. The railway is and was by default an industry that required large amounts of workers to ensure the successful, and more importantly safe operation, and as the call up saw large amounts of railway workers leaving the domestic railways to fight in the forces, the staff that were left became ever more overworked as the pressures of the railways continued to mount.

Additionally, other authors have followed down this theme of investigating social standards during the First World War, however this has broadly been a solitary paragraph contained in a longer narrative surrounding the beginning of the twentieth century in Britain focusing mainly on the question as to how much impact did the war have on Britain's social standards, or were the changes that were to come later in the twentieth century merely something that were accelerated, rather than caused by Britain's involvement in the war.[20]

Interestingly, the literature specifically focusing on the railways of Britain tend to have limited mentions of the First World War period, citing the period of the First World War as either a solitary chapter in the longer story of British railway history, or to simply

[20] John Stevenson, *The Penguin Social History of Britain: British Society 1914-45* (London; Penguin Books, 1984) pg. 78

gloss over the whole aspect of operations on the railways during the First World War entirely. Multiple texts seem to agree on the immediate background to the events[21] of the war, and whilst this is useful in providing a sense of the backdrop against which the railways were operating, this does not help to provide any information as to operations on the railways for the duration of the war. Additionally there is limited mention of the formation of the Railway Executive Committee within wider secondary literature handling the subject of Britain's railway history. However, what has been written will prove extremely useful in helping to chart the crucial part Britain's railways played during the First World War. David Ross, asserts that the government had imposed on the railways the task of conveying troops in the case of national emergency in 1842[22], and that this was expanded in 1855 during the Crimean War when the railways had been identified and recognized by those in authority as being of strategic importance as a means of transportation for supplies to and from the forces.[23] In 1865 a War Railway Council was established[24], from then on expanded under the 1871 Regulation of the Forces Act, which allowed provisions for the creation of the Railway Executive Committee[25] (REC) which officially formed in 1912 to coordinated operations on the railways during a time of national emergency, such as a war[26]. This information will prove useful due to the factors of dates, in that the government can be seen to be recognizing the railways to be of strategic importance from quite an early date in the development of the transport network.

[21] Adrian Gray, *Crime on the Line* (Penryn; Atlantic Publishers, 2000); Simon Bradley, *The Railways: Nation, Network & People* (London; Profile Books Ltd., 2016) pg. 397
[22] David Ross, *The Illustrated History of British Steam Railways: The Legacy of the Steam Locomotive* (Chester; Amber Books Ltd., 2004) pp. 259-260
[23] Christian Wolmer, *Fire & Steam: How the Railways Transformed Britain* (London; Atlantic Books, 2008) pg. 206
[24] Ross, pp. 259-260
[25] Philip S. Bagwell, *The Transport Revolution, 1770-1985* (London; Routledge, 1988) e-book, accessed: 24/10/2018 pp. 224-225
[26] Jon Mountford, Tom Dodds, Tony Evans & David Adams, *British Steam Engines: The Ultimate Guide To The Greatest Steam Engines* (Sywell; Igloo Books Ltd., 2010) pp. 146-147; Ross pp. 259-260

Of the authors who have written on the subject of the railways during the First World War, it is clear that the initial period of the mobilization, especially the initial effort involved in getting the troops and supplies to ports such as Southampton and Portsmouth for embarkation to the continental theatre of war, has formed part their primary focus when discussing operations on the railways, and how the operation was undertaken.[27] Whilst this detail on the initial mobilization effort will prove useful, particularly when evaluating the role of the REC in the early period of the war, this focus fails to maintain focus on the railways within Britain, instead investigating the scene faced by troops on the continent.

Over pressure on the railways is something that has had minor coverage within railway specific literature, and of this it appears to be focused towards the overpressure on staff rather than overpressure on infrastructure and rolling stock, although it is important to note that there have been a handful of texts written on the subject of overpressure on infrastructure and rail vehicles, and these will prove useful in conducting the Quintinshill case study during chapters two and three.

In addition, there has also been limited coverage of the role of the railways as a means of transportation for the wounded heading to hospitals across the country, and as a means of transporting letters to and from the soldiers at the front. Only a handful of texts have pointed out that it was soon realized that the rail companies would need to convert some older stock to accommodate becoming the first hospital trains, before beginning a program of building specifically designed vehicles to act as hospital trains.[28]

[27] Colin G. Maggs, *Great Britain's Railways: A New History* (Stroud; Amberley Publishing, 2018) pp. 260-263; Michael Foley, *Britain's Railway Disasters: Fatal Accidents From The 1830s To The Present Day* (Barnsley; Pen and Sword Books Ltd., 2013) pg. 6; Mountford, Dodd, Evans & Adams, pp. 146-147; Ross, pg. 117; Stuart Hylton, *What The Railways Did For Us: The Making of Modern Britain* (Stroud; Amberley Publishing, 2015) pp. 117-119

[28] Mountford, Dodds, Evans & Adams, pp. 145-147; Wolmer, pp. 210-211

Additionally, the role of postal conveyance on the railways is another area that has been somewhat overlooked, although it is important to mention that little bits of information have been covered.[29] Domestic transportation for the duration of the war is something else that has had brief coverage, and domestic movements by rail is something that shall need to be explored in further detail when examining the role of the REC. Most specific of these domestic movements by rail is the movement of coal from South Wales to the base of the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow, and this is something that has not had sufficient coverage to formulate a complete argument about. The coverage that has been completed[30] however will prove helpful not only to the operations of the REC, but also to the Quintinshill case study, and allow for a more rounded image of these train movements to be formed. This will tie into some works examining specific railway companies, in this instance the Highland Railway, and their own experience of the war effort.

The role of women on the railways is also an area that has witnessed some coverage in secondary literature, and although not forming the primary focus of this research project, it is important to acknowledge that this aspect of the railways and their service has received limited coverage within secondary literature[31], although the role of women during the conflict is far more prevalent in secondary texts investigating the munitions industry. Texts which do refer to women on the railways appear to have the main focus on the roles they were allowed to perform, not being permitted to act as driver and firemen of locomotives which was considered a reserved occupation and remained specifically a male role.

[29] Burton, pp. 18-19
[30] Wolmer, pg. 210
[31] Dewey, pg. 26;

There is an argument contained in secondary literature that the main reason the railways were able to cope with the increase in traffic was due to their main problem before the war. The competition and rivalry between companies often led to locations being served by more than one railway company. This meant that there was frequent doubling, and even tripling, of routes and freight yards, something that in the pre-war peacetime was hugely wasteful, but a factor that became hugely beneficial upon the commencement of hostilities. An example of this pre-war wasteful practice and an example that will prove useful to the case study contained within this research project would be the railway junction at Carlisle. In the years before the war the town had been served by seven different railway companies, operating nine freight yards across the immediate area.[32] Such concentration of railway activity in one location before the war would have been considered a wasteful enterprise, and some such as Philip S. Bagwell have argued that "A Country at war could not afford such extravagance"[33], however this over capacity would allow for the railways to fulfil their wartime role of transportation for the nation to a far greater extent. Bagwell's text is referring to the larger revolution in transportation across the country starting in the 1770s, but he does help to provide some key information to a study of the railways during the First World War, which have usefully been framed in the wider context of transportation needs in general for a country at war.

In addition to the wider general texts dealing with the history of Britain's railways during the First World War, there are three books which will be crucial to the completion of the Quintinshill case study undertaken in chapter two. These texts do however prioritise exploration as to culpability and responsibility for the events that

[32] Bagwell, pp. 224-225
[33] Bagwell, pp. 224-225

unfolded, rather than understanding the disaster in the wider context of the railways at war. This being said, these texts help to provide useful information about the sequence of events, and it is in this capacity that these texts shall be utilized. The first of these texts focuses specifically upon the disaster itself, although frames exploration of the events through the prism of investigating any blame for the disaster on the Caledonian Railway company.[34] Although aimed at a more general audience, this text does however contain incredibly useful information about the sequence of events, and the criminal trial that was to follow and as such will help to form the backbone of the case study for which the primary resources will then expand upon. This text also follows the line of argument that the responsibility can not only be laid at the feet of the two signalmen, and that some of the blame must be placed upon the Caledonian Railway company itself. Whilst this is not an argument that this research project aims to answer, it is interesting to compare this line of thought when compared with the two remaining texts, which both fall into the more traditional line of thinking on the subject of Quintinshill, this being that the signalmen were wholly responsible for what happened.

In his chapter detailing railway accidents during the First World War, Michael Foley states "The accident was caused by the actions of two signalmen, George Meakin and James Tinsley".[35] Critical to the use of this text is the mention of problems and dangers of the types of rolling stock used in the train makeups that fateful morning, and this will prove incredibly useful when conducting the case study as problems with rolling stock is one of the major themes that this project aims to address. The final of the three crucial texts being used by this project is O.S. Nock's work on the history of British railway disasters. Nock, a widely accepted railway historian writing in the 1950s

[34] Jack Richards & Adrian Searle, *The Quintinshill Conspiracy: The Shocking True Story Behind Britain's Worst Rail Disaster* (Barnsley; Pen & Sword Books Ltd. 2015)
[35] Foley, pg. 157

and 1960s, focuses a whole chapter to the Quintinshill accident[36], and examines a number of different themes, such as rolling stock provisions and the high demand usage on the railways, both of which form key themes throughout the course of this project, and as such this text helps to provide the case study in particular with details in areas in which gaps occur in the primary sources. Additionally, Nock has written a book detailing the history of the railways in Scotland, in which he devotes a substantial section to the disaster and the implications that it had for the railways in Scotland.[37] These texts will also help to provide details of other railways disasters happening at around the same time so as to provide a comparative element to the Quintinshill case study.

One final text that shall be utilized whilst undertaking this study focuses mainly on a description of how the brakes used that morning worked. Colin Magg's populist book examining the correct procedure for operating steam locomotives on the railway contains a section detailing exactly how the Westinghouse system of air braking operates on a railway locomotive, and this description of operation has proven crucial to gaining an understanding around how such brakes work, so although of no use for detailing the events and their significance, this text does allow for greater understanding behind the instrumentation fitted to the locomotives involved in the disaster at Quintinshill to be reached.[38]

To conclude, secondary literature coverage of the railways during the period of the First World War has unfortunately been something of an afterthought within the two main

[36] O.S. Nock, *Historic Railway Disasters: Fourth Edition* [Revised by B.K. Cooper] (Shepperton; Ian Allan Ltd., 1987) pp. 88-95
[37] O.S. Nock, *Scottish Railways* (Edinburgh; Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1950) pp. 182-183
[38] Colin Maggs, "Brakes" in Colin Maggs (ed.), *Train Driver's Manual* (Stroud; Amberley Publishing, 2014) pg. 271

camps of study. Texts with a focus on the First World War period tend to prioritize examinations of either the political, the economic or the social impact of the conflict on both the civilian population and individuals serving in the military. Political and economic focused texts do contain some mention of the impact of the war on industry and these help to provide a framework for examining the railways during the course of the conflict, with some providing limited information about the state of the railways during the war, mainly from the stance of the politics behind operations. Of the railway specific literature there is little coverage of the First World War period outside of a general overview of the task facing the railways immediately upon the outbreak of hostilities, and the role of railway workers during the course of the war. Understandably given the centenary commemorations of the conflict, there has in recent years been a renewed interest in the subject of the First World War. However, operations on Britain's railways, and the role that they played in the wider story of Britain's First World War experience have been sadly overlooked in favour of exploratory works examining the lives of the civilian population at home, or rather the politics behind maintaining the British war effort. More specific texts have been written surrounding railway disasters, and as such these texts invariably make mention of the Quintinshill disaster which will prove useful when examining these events during the completion of the case study contained in chapters two and three, and help to provide a sense of the intensity in which the railways were being used during the course of the war. It is only by using all of these small pieces of information in conjunction with each other, as well as evidence which has remained contained within primary documents, that a more coherent analysis of the situation the railways were facing during the First World War will be able to be obtained, and by so doing, help to bring coverage to a significant piece of Britain's First World War story that has remained something of an obscurity.

Chapter One:
"Britain's Railways During the First World War – The Role of the Railway Executive Committee"

The Outbreak of War

Upon the outbreak of the war in August 1914 the railways of Britain were taken into Governmental supervisory control. This was achieved through the establishment in 1912 of the Railway Executive Committee (REC), and the remit of this committee covered operations on the entirety of the railway network within Britain. This was not nationalisation along the same lines as would occur in 1948, but supervision of the rail companies by the government so that all train movements undertaken during the conflict could be considered as working for the good of the national war effort. Information taken from a number of documents held in the National Archives helps to place the role of the REC into a specific area of First World War study, whilst also placing the operational aspect of the railways, often overlooked in the study of the First World War, into the sphere of the wider war. Although the remit of the REC has been examined in secondary literature elsewhere, this discussion of the REC aims to be far more detailed about the operations of this subcommittee of the government, and how the incentives of the REC were translated into operations on the railways during the beginning stages of the war.

The Railway Executive Committee

Over the course of the conflict, the Committee itself met at least once a year to discuss the operations that needed to be undertaken, and following these meetings the minutes of discussions was stored by the Committee so as to allow them to be referred too at a later date should the necessity arise. In this there is evidence that the Committee itself, acting on the behalf of the government, was determined that the pre-war Liberal

disciplines continued, in that they were determined to leave private business alone.

The REC itself was formed of the chairmen of the largest rail companies in Britain, and by March 1919 was comprised of 14 individuals[39] including Sir Arthur Stanley; Sir Herbert Walker; Sir Alexander Kaye Butterworth; Sir Sam Fay; Sir William Forbes; Sir Francis Dent; D. A. Matheson; I. T. Williams; C. H. Dent; F. Tatlow; A. Watson; F. Potter; Major G. S. Szlumper and, most notably, H. W. Thornton, chairman of the Great Eastern Railway (GER). Thornton is the most notable individual on the committee at this time due to him being an American citizen, and several papers exist showing the great displeasure amongst railway chairmen from the other companies that a non-British national was being considered for membership on the committee[40], although letters between Thornton and Mr. Runciman of the Board of Trade confirm that Thornton was accepted onto the committee in February 1916.[41]

At the start of the war, the number of railway companies in Britain totaled 120[42], each of which operated its own network stretching to destinations across the country. To name a few examples the most obvious would be the Great Western Railway (GWR) working from London to Plymouth, the West Country and South Wales; the London and North Western Railway (LNWR), the Great Northern (GNR) and North Eastern (NER) railways, and the Midland Railway (MR) all operating services northwards towards Scotland. This almost duplication of network had naturally led to fierce rivalry between rail companies in the years before the First World War, as each company competed for

[39] Railway Executive Committee List of Members, 24th March 1919, MT 6/2587/1 (The National Archives)
[40] Private Letter to Llewellyn Smith, 28th February 1914, MT 6/2587/1 (The National Archives)
[41] War Office Letter from B.B Cubitt, 27th December 1915, MT 6/2587/1 (The National Archives); Letter between HW. Thornton and Mr. Runciman, 7th February 1916, MT 6/2587/1 (The National Archives)
[42] David Ross, *The Illustrated History of British Steam Railways: The Legacy of the Steam Locomotive* (Chester; Amber Books Ltd., 2004) pg. 117

traffic, however this was to change with the outbreak of war.

It has been pointed out that one of the key impediments to the rail network before the war was a vast over capacity of rail lines, this being due to several different companies running lines to the same destinations as their rivals.[43] This however became one of the main operational benefits to the railways during the time of war, and really allowed the railways to act on behalf of the national war effort. This overcapacity of the peace time era became a fully utilized advantage in the wartime period, and this was supplemented by the orders of the REC, designed as they were to increase available capacity on the network.

On the 4th of August 1914 Britain declared war on Germany. The following day, provisions established in Section 16 of the 1871 Regulation of the Forces Act[44] enabled the government to obtain overarching control of the railways of Britain[45], something that was confirmed by R. Stuart Wortley, the Director of Transport and Movements on the REC in a series of letters sent to the directors of railway companies across the nation.[46] This immediate governmental takeover of control over Britain's railways enabled the initial mobilization effort to take place without unnecessary hindrance from the individual private companies, and as such within the first month of the conflict mobilization through the ports of Southampton and Portsmouth managed to take place ahead of time, the railway companies being allotted 60 hours for the initial mobilization effort but achieving this in only 48 hours, embarkation beginning on the 9th of August and the

[43] Philip S. Bagwell, *The Transport Revolution, 1770-1985"* (London; Routledge, 1988) e-book, accessed: 24/10/2018 pp. 224-225
[44] Letter between the General Manager of the London and South Western Railway and the Board of Trade, 24th October 1912, MT 6/2844 (The National Archives)
[45] Jon Mountford, Tom Dodds, Tony Evans & David Adams, *British Steam Engines: The Ultimate Guide To The Greatest Steam* Engines (Sywell; Igloo Books Ltd., 2010) pp. 148-150; Ross, p. 117
[46] R. Stuart Wortley letter on behalf of the War Office, 4th August 1914, MT 6/2844 (The National Archives)

first stage being completed by the 31st of August.[47]

At the same time as this written instruction to the directors of the railway companies, the REC issued a booklet of specific instructions to the operating departments of these companies detailing the expected protocol for all operations on the rail network. This document, comprised of several different instructional paragraphs, was designed to act as the overarching template for operations on the railways, superseding the individual models that each of the companies had in effect before the war. By utilizing this document as the template of operations, it became possible for the government to coordinate operations across the different rail companies, and by so doing ensure that the war effort was being put first.

Contained within these paragraphs of operation is the instruction that priority must be given to military and naval traffic over civilian, and that this must be overseen by the Quartermaster General to the Forces stationed at the War Office.[48] In order to allow this change in priority from express passenger traffic to wartime supplies to take place, some of the fundamental accepted practices on the railways needed to be changed. Of these practices, the first that needed to be adapted was the territorial nature in which rolling stock was administrated. As soon as the war was declared, every piece of rolling stock that was available and able to be pressed into service was to be utilized, regardless of railway company of origin. It was also this rolling stock share scheme that meant that rolling stock which had recently been earmarked for withdrawal and replacement was instead pressed into service supplying the national war effort. This scheme stretched across both passenger carrying vehicles and privately-owned goods

[47] Colin G. Maggs, *Great Britain's Railways: A New History* (Stroud; Amberley Publishing, 2018) pp. 260-263
[48] Instructions to the General Managers of Railways in Great Britain as to the Working of Naval and Military Traffic on Mobilization, 4th August 1914, MT 6/2844 (The National Archives)

wagons, although it stopped short of locomotive stock which remained on the railway company of origin. This was due in part to slightly differing loading gauges across the country. The loading gauge refers to the amount of clearance that needs to be left to either side of the trackwork infrastructure so as to prevent any rail vehicle striking an obstacle. The most notable example of this was the GWR with its slightly broader loading gauge which allowed for the building of locomotives with slightly larger cylinders. This was a hangover of the conversion from the 7ft¼ inch broad gauge to the 4ft 8½ inch standard gauge which took place in the 1890s[49], and meant that locomotives built by the GWR could, although able to run elsewhere in country due to the same wheel gauge being adopted, have been liable for striking elements of railway infrastructure such as station platforms on other companies networks wherein such a conversion had not taken place and the loading gauge was slightly tighter. It was this factor of different company rolling stock being spread across the network that meant that aging Great Central Railway (GCR) passenger carriages ended up in the train makeup of the Caledonian Railway (CR) troop train service involved in the Quintinshill Rail Disaster as will be explored in chapter two.

Although the REC gave priority to military traffic, there were instances wherein this priority was unable to be fulfilled, and this is due in part to the paperwork surrounding different consignments heading for the theatre of war. In minutes for a REC Goods Managers meeting dated 6th October 1914, it is stated that on the 22nd of September 1914 companies were having trouble in identifying different consignments due to inadequate labelling on packages passing through the docks[50], and as such refusing to take the consignments. This shows that, although under the supervisory control of the

[49] Rosa Matheson, *The GWR Story* (Stroud; The History Press, 2010) pg. 49
[50] Minutes of Special Meeting of Goods Managers, 6th October 1914, RAIL 1080/246 (The National Archives)

REC and whilst theoretically working towards the war effort, railway procedures from the pre-war private companies era still needed to be observed. This indicates that, given the date, the full extent of the requirement of the war effort had not yet been realised. Coming only a month after the declaration of war, the prevailing attitude would still have been one of a short European conflict that would be over before Christmas, and so by maintaining the practice of refusing packages with inadequate labelling, it can be argued that the private companies were inadvertently frustrating the mobilization, an argument that would again indicate that private enterprise was not yet recognizing the need for the country to be on a total war footing in order to fight the conflict.

The REC also had the powers to curtail the competitive passenger traffic which before the war had been the prerogative of the individual companies. In a private memo detailing the outcome of subcommittee meetings of the REC dated the 4th of February 1915, the committee recommended that the competitive passenger trains of the various companies should be curtailed and, in some cases, withdrawn as of Monday the 1st of March 1915.[51] The reasons provided for this recommendation were threefold, including to facilitate and improve the workings of goods and mineral trains; to economize on coal used for railway locomotives; and to enable more trained men to be available for work relief.[52] The timing of these orders, and one of the reasons for their existence proves interesting and insightful for investigating the wider state of Britain's railways in the early months of 1915, and how this is indicative as to the state of Britain at that time. The state of the nation in the early months of 1915 was that of a country in crisis. The initial war effort of late 1914 had placed the country on a footing to supply a war effort until Christmas 1914, along the line of the general belief that any conflict would

[51] Curtailment of Competitive Passenger Train Services, 6th February 1915, RAIL 1080/149 (The National Archives)
[52] Curtailment of Competitive Passenger Train Services, 6th February 1915, RAIL 1080/149 (TNA)

be a rapid affair on the continent. When however it became clear that the war was going to prolong well into the new year, the changeover to a total war footing proved to be slow, and as such production of key war materials such as shells and munition was also slow to keep up with demand and ultimately led to shortages.[53] In addition to this, the German U-Boat campaign in the North Atlantic, wherein German submarines would sink all merchant ships coming into British waters, was beginning to effect the nation as a whole, particularly in regard to food stocks coming from the rest of the empire as well as the United States.

The U-Boat campaign also proves significant with regard to the coal situation of the nation, and the vast increase in coal traffic using the railways. Before the war coal supplies for the Grand Fleet, based at Scapa Flow off of the northern coast of Scotland, was shipped from the South Wales coal fields along the coast as this was considered to be the most direct and efficient method of transporting the fuel supply. When the U-Boats began interfering and sinking British shipping however, this practice became too risky to maintain for the course of the war.[54] The chosen alternative was to send coal via the railways from South Wales up the West Coast mainline via Carlisle and Glasgow to a point wherein the Highland Railway (HR) could take charge of the traffic for final transportation to the nearest point of disembarkation, this being Scrabster Harbour near Thurso. This placed much greater operational strain on the railways of Britain as they commenced the task of transporting fuel for the naval fleet protecting the nation from any potential invasion, and as such the instruction contained within the memo that

[53] Jack Richards & Adrian Searle, *The Quintinshill Conspiracy: The Shocking True Story Behind Britain's Worst Rail Disaster* (Barnsley; Pen & Sword Books Ltd., 2015) pp. 211-212; Ian Cawood and David McKinnon-Bell, *The First World War* (Oxon; Routledge, 2014) e-book, accessed: 28/08/2019 pp. 42-43; David French, "'A One-Man Show'? Civil Military Relations in Britain during the First World War" in Paul Smith (ed.) *Government and the Armed Forces in Britain 1856-1990* (London; The Hambledon Press, 1996) pg. 92

[54] Mountford, Dodds, Evans & Adams, pp. 146-147

competitive traffic on the railways was to cease so as to free up capacity[55] can be seen as the REC attempting to ease the demands on the railways, albeit only in a slight way.

Perhaps this moment is opportune to mention the situation facing the HR at this stage in its existence, whilst also showing exactly how demanding this extra traffic was for the railways at large. The HR before the war had followed along similar lines to the MR, this being to operate short, light, frequent services along its network, thus negating the need for large locomotives. Although they had been the first railway company in Britain to adopt the 4-6-0 wheel arrangement in 1894, an arrangement that was to become something of a standard for mixed traffic locomotives across Britain later in the century, the company itself only had 32 locomotives of this wheel arrangement on its books during the war, the rest of the company stock being comprised of lighter locomotives of mostly 2-4-0, 4-4-0 and 0-6-0 wheel arrangements. Given the situation of this railway before the war, being situated in a region with less population than some of the other rail companies in Britain faced, it is clear as to why this small engine policy would have been adopted as passenger trains would not require heavy haulage, and goods traffic would have also been relatively light. Additionally, the HR itself had been engineered with lighter axle loadings on its principal structures, meaning that larger locomotives were not possible without considerable strengthening of bridges and viaducts.

This was the network that the traffic for the Grand Fleet needed to navigate, and the HR locomotive fleet proved to not be sufficient in handling the traffic alone.[56] This, combined with large amounts of locomotive repairs being required due to the overtaxing of locomotives, required the HR to hire in some 20 locomotives from other railway

[55] Curtailment of Competitive Passenger Train Services, 6th February 1915, RAIL 1080/149 (TNA)
[56] Anthony Burton, *The Workers' War: British Industry and the First World War* (Stroud; The History Press, 2014) e-book, accessed: 22/10/2018 pp. 13-23; Mountford, Dodds, Evans & Adams pp. 146-147

companies, principally the North British Railway (NBR), which also operated similar services in the same region. This action appears to have been undertaken off the back of the HR in collaboration with the NBR, although it is important to note that such action would have been easy to facilitate at a state level and general coordination from the REC may have assisted with this hiring process, although it is not clear if this happened. Additionally, the desire to cut down on coal used by railway locomotives can also be viewed as a way of diverting materials away from the private industries and focusing more on the wartime industries, in this case being to redirect coal to power the nation's navy.

In addition to the curtailment and cancellation of competitive passenger traffic, the REC also had, and exercised, the authority to curtail the vehicles being used in the makeup of trains. Contained within the recommendations detailing the withdrawal of competitive passenger traffic, the REC also recommended the withdrawal of through carriages and dining cars in all services.[57] Through carriages were a means of transporting people from one place to another, using a train that was destined for another location. An example of a through carriage working would be a service for the Lyme Regis branch line originating at London Waterloo and using an express train travelling to Exeter. Upon arrival at Axminster the train would split into two portions, the first potion being the continuing express to Exeter and the second portion being the through carriages for the branch line. This was not the only example of through carriage working on the rail network, but is a useful example to use to help demonstrate the practice. This practice was halted presumably to allow for greater capacity to be had on the rail network through the prevention of unnecessary delays of services. The withdrawal date contained within the recommendations is Monday 1st of March 1915, although it is noted on the

[57] Withdrawal of Competitive Passenger Train Services, 6th February 1915, RAIL 1080/149 (TNA)

same line that some companies had by this point in the war already withdrawn through carriages and dining cars from service[58], and as such the orders from the REC appear simply to bring the rest of the nation's rail services into a new standard mode of practice. The withdrawal of dining cars can be seen as a method used by both the private rail companies and the government of discouraging unnecessary travel on the railways by members of the civilian population, and by so doing increase the capacity to allow military traffic to take priority, as well as being a tactic employed by the rail companies to allow them to cope with the loss in the workforce that they experienced within the initial stages of the war from August 1914 through until around June 1915.

This loss of railway personnel is something else that is worthy of note. At the beginning of the war occupation on the railway had not been considered an essential occupation, and so people working on the railways were permitted to join the thousands of men also enlisting for military service.[59] So bad did the situation get with the manpower shortages on the railways in the initial stages of the war that government ministers had to instruct Haig and the generals of the British Expeditionary Force that they were required to send railway servants back to their jobs on the railways at home until alternative sources of labour could be acquired, this coming in the form of women who joined the ranks of railway workers in the capacity of cleaners, guards and station staff from towards the end of 1915.[60]

In addition to the withdrawal of specific types of rolling stock from passenger trains, the REC also ordered the removal of excursion and cheap fare facilities from the rail

[58] Withdrawal of Competitive Passenger Train Services, 6th February 1915, RAIL 1080/149 (TNA)
[59] Maggs, pp. 260-263; Bagwell, pg. 226; Burton, pp. 13-23
[60] Jeremy Higgins, *Great War Railwaymen: Britain's Railway Company Workers at War 1914-1918* (London; Uniform Press Ltd., 2014) e-book, accessed: 08/11/2018, foreword

network. One of the recommendations of the REC dated 12th of February 1915 was that the excursion traffic, which up until that point had been permitted to run, was to be curtailed in the instances of civilian traffic[61], and this can be seen as another example of attempting to free up capacity on the rail network, something which became even more critical to the ability of the nation to continue the fight in the early months of 1915. The curtailment of cheap fares of travel is an interesting policy that the REC followed and can be seen as a deterrent to members of the public against travelling. By using higher fare prices, the REC can be seen as influencing the affairs of private business, but using methods that would have been accepted by the private companies, the REC using their prerogative as supervisory controller of the rail network to determine the terms at which the private companies could operate.

The REC also took over control of the transportation of troops from their bases to a port of embarkation to the battlefields, as well as the transportation of troops from the ports to their bases in cases of troops being on leave. Reference is often made to the factor that soldiers must not be allowed to travel without tickets[62], perhaps a method of the REC attempting to bridge any gap between state supervision and the interests of private companies, as well as potentially being an example of the REC attempting to keep track of the numbers of soldiers travelling on the rail network at any one time, thus ensuring no irregularities in the armed forces. Reference is also made to the government subsidy provided to troops to enable them to use rail tickets. This subsidy, accessed through a 0.1800 army form, allowed soldiers to purchase return tickets at the rate of a single journey fare, but in the absence of this form the ordinary full fare must be charged.[63] Although the government was subsidizing the transportation of the troops

[61] Excursion and other cheap fare facilities, 12th February 1915, RAIL 1080/149 (The National Archives)
[62] Conveyance of Military Forces, 16th March 1915, RAIL 1080/149 (The National Archives)
[63] Conveyance of Military Forces, 16th March 1915, RAIL 1080/149 (TNA)

through the 0.1800 forms, the factor that fares were still being charged by the railway companies shows that the intention of the government was to act only on a supervisory basis. This can be argued to be the government attempting to keep private industry on side for the duration of the war, as depriving the private companies of some of their revenue would not have been acceptable to the companies themselves. These guidelines also apply to the processes to be undertaken in the event of any soldiers being found at stations or on trains travelling without a ticket. Should this happen, the guidelines dictate that the soldier needs to be referred to a Railway Transport Officer or to the local military authority so as to ensure that the necessary warrant be obtained.[64] This guideline can be seen to have several different factors behind its creation, the first of which being to ensure that all travelling troops are accounted for and as such try and prevent any desertions within the ranks of the military. In addition to this, one factor behind these recommended processes can also be seen to be the government's desire to work with the private companies so as to maintain the mobilization throughout the course of the conflict, and so by having these recommended processes contained within the official guidelines the government was allowing the railway companies to maintain a version of the pre-war practice of removing travelers found without tickets. In addition to this, the REC also allowed the individual rail companies to maintain the practice of refusing refunds to travelers who had lost their tickets, regardless of whether these travelers were civilian or military.[65]

Perhaps an interesting regional difference with these cheap fares is that adopted in Scotland, as well as the measures present on the London Brighton and South Coast (LBSCR); the Great Eastern (GER); the London and South Western (LSWR) and the South

[64] Conveyance of Military Forces, 16th March 1915, RAIL 1080/149 (TNA)
[65] Conveyance of Military Forces, 16th March 1915, RAIL 1080/149 (TNA)

Eastern and Chatham (SECR) railway companies. In records of meetings held on the 7th of October 1915, reference is made to factors that the railway companies operating in the south of the country were using a different system for the issuing of tickets in order to allow the companies to cope with the high demand that they were facing due to their strategic location and importance to the war effort, and this appears to have been acceptable to the REC, although details as to the differences are not contained within these documents.[66] In Scotland however, details as to the differences are made, albeit briefly. Unlike in the rest of the country, wherein war workers could travel on standard passenger trains to their places of work and have their tickets subsidized by the government, this appears to not have been the case for the Scottish companies, who only acknowledge the cheap fare scheme on trains that were considered to be 'workers specials'.[67] In other words, the Scottish rail companies were only prepared to charge the lower rate of travel for munition workers on specific trains. To counteract this, the minutes detail that the Scottish companies had opened up large amounts of trains to fulfil this 'workers trains' purpose, as well as producing tickets at a higher rate in bulk, and these appear to have been purchased by the management of munitions companies and then issued to the workforce, these tickets being valid on all trains. This helps to symbolize the huge regional differences facing the REC and its operation, and the pressures that a national board had trying to coordinate private industries and private interests. Although working towards the war effort was considered a necessity, it appears that across the nation this overarching goal was interpreted in different ways, and without appearing to the private companies as attempting to nationalize the network, the REC and the government had to operate with the systems in place on the private

[66] Minutes of Meetings of Superintendents' Representatives of the Companies forming the Executive Committee, 7th October 1915, RAIL 1080/149 (The National Archives)
[67] Minutes of Meetings of Superintendents' Representatives of the Companies forming the Executive Committee, 7th October 1915, RAIL 1080/149 (TNA)

networks throughout the war.

Movements by Rail

Important to note is the sheer amount of people and goods traffic moving on the railways during this period. On the GWR alone it is estimated that 376,787 military personnel; 33,101 horses; 355 guns and limbers; 264 ammunitions wagons; 2,034 bicycles and 804 two wheeled wagons were transported, all on 846 special trains dedicated to the war effort in the first four weeks alone.[68] These numbers help to demonstrate exactly how critical to the war effort the railways became almost instantaneously, and that without the railways, the mobilization effort would have taken considerably longer to implement.

In addition to the conveyance of passenger traffic on the railways, the REC also had jurisdiction over the conveyance of goods and materials that were to be used in both the war effort and the civilian population. The first example of the committee exercising authority over the non-military goods carried on the railways can be seen as a side note contained within the document recommending the withdrawal of competitive passenger traffic, as well as through carriages and dining cars. Contained within this document is a section relating to fish traffic between Scotland and England. In the pre-war period, fish traffic from Scotland to England travelled on both the West Coast mainline and the East Coast mainline, travelling under the authority of both the CR and the NBR. The recommendations are that each route continue serving as routes for fish traffic but that this should be staggered month by month.[69] This arrangement would mean that all fish traffic would be concentrated upon one route for a period of a month before the

[68] Matheson, pg. 22
[69] Withdrawal of Competitive Passenger Train Services, 5th February 1915, RAIL 1080/149 (TNA)

competing route would take up that traffic the following month. This focus of traffic would allow for capacity to be freed upon on the alternate route, which in the case of the recommendations that the East Coast route should begin this arrangement commencing on the 1st of March 1915 would allow for the West Coast route to have some capacity freed up, something that was greatly needed on the West Coast route for the first few months of 1915 as shall be discussed in chapter two with the significance that overuse on the West Coast route had on the events that occurred at Quintinshill.

The REC also commissioned the railway companies in the conveyance of food items for the forces on the front lines. These consignments were principally meat and jams, although other food items were included. Here however, the REC shows that the respect for the private companies still existed in a time of war. In the orders detailing these train movements, reference is only made to specific rail companies being commissioned for food conveyance. These companies are the GCR; the GWR and the LNWR.[70] This factor is somewhat unusual considering that the main ports on the south coast of England for the embarkation of all military traffic was either Southampton or Portsmouth, Portsmouth being served by the LBSCR, whilst Southampton was served by this and the LSWR. Although any embarkation from Plymouth would have been covered, this port being served by the GWR, the lack of the two main rail companies of the south east on this list of companies selected for the conveyance of military food suggests that the REC was attempting to even out the military workload between separate private companies, so as to avoid any accusations of prioritizing one company over any other, indicating that the REC was aware that the cooperation of the private rail companies was still something in which they needed to consider, despite the

[70] Government Traffic Tendered Without Carriers' Note, 6th October 1914, RAIL 1080/246 (The National Archives)

wartime situation and circumstances at the time.

Parcel transport on the railways was also of vital importance to the REC. Unlike the wider trend of Britain's railway during the period of the First World War, wherein express traffic was downgraded in priority to allow wartime supplies to run ahead, the mail trains retained their 'special' status and priority in movement, and as such ran much the same as express passenger trains had done before the war. To this extent, although the private companies were still permitted to charge for the conveyance of mail, both letters and packages, the companies were not permitted to charge commission as had been the practice before the war, and that all military mail needed to be conveyed at the same charge as the civilian equivalent.[71] There are several factors behind the REC's decision to keep the mail traffic running as a matter of top priority. The first of these factors can be seen to be the desire to keep the troops morale up, and therefore ensure that they were capable of fighting on the battlefields. One of the main methods for which morale was maintained was through the receiving and sending of letters and packages between the front lines and their homes. In order to allow this objective to be fulfilled, the government, through use of the REC, needed the cooperation of rail companies in order to make mail conveyance on equivalent priority to that of explosives and munition, also travelling to the front lines. By fulfilling this, the government would have been seen by soldiers on the ground to be working for the good of their morale, and as such would have been more inclined to keep fighting despite the terrible conditions that were having to be endured. Another of the reasons as to why the mails were run as a matter of priority can be traced back to the desire of the government to use the network as a strategic link for the military. All military mails sent by rail needed to get to recipients as a matter of urgency, and by having the

[71] Packed Parcels Carriers Commission, 10th December 1915, RAIL 1080/150 (The National Archives)

railways running mail trains as a top priority, delivery of the mail could be guaranteed to occur within a few days of sending, and in some cases the following day. This meant that, although the telephone and telegraph would be used for urgent correspondence with the front lines, document reports from the front to the war office and orders travelling in the opposite direction were able to be received relatively quickly, thus enabling the war to be coordinated in a more detailed way.

One area of railway transportation that was as equally dangerous as the transportation and conveyance of munitions was the conveyance of Anhydrous Ammonia. This substance, a highly corrosive gas used in the manufacture of the new weapons being trialed on the battlefield and thus recognized as a potential hazard for conveyance, needed to be transported by rail from ports on the west coast of Britain, such as Liverpool following import from north America, to munitions factories across the nation, an example of which would be the munitions factory at Gretna. The REC itself appears to have recognized the danger in the conveyance of these consignments, and as such before the war provisions had been made by the Dangerous Goods Committee in minute 1542 dated 19th June 1913.[72] These provisions included extra checks of the cylinders containing ammonia before they were transported and the rejection of any cylinders that did not meet the standards required for transportation. This date proves interesting, occurring as it does before the commencement of hostilities and it must be presumed that new weapons were being envisaged for use in the immediate pre-war period, and as such provisions for the safe conveyance of the raw materials were being established well in advance. As well as this, only firms that had been approved by the War Office were permitted an import license, and it was these firms alone that the

[72] Minutes of Special Meeting of Goods Managers, 6th October 1914, RAIL 1080/246 (The National Archive)

railway companies were to deal with.[73] The strict nature behind regulations pertaining to the conveyance of this substance can be seen as the government being keen that no individuals in the supply chain of the new weapons and the necessary materials used to manufacture them were to be accidentally injured, thus maintaining ideals relevant in the reporting of munitions factory accidents, this being that reports are to contain as little details as possible so as to not dampen public morale and spirit for the war effort, although it is not explicitly stated that this policy should be adopted.

Pressures on the railways: Accidents other than Quintinshill

Whilst this case study is aiming to utilize the Quintinshill disaster to examine pressures being faced on the railways during the First World War, it is also important to note that the events at Quintinshill were not the only examples of railway accidents occurring during the course of the conflict, and in particular during the course of 1915. It has been argued that 1915 was the worst year for rail accidents for a decade[74], and whilst it is arguable that this is due in part to the death toll emerging from Quintinshill, other rail disasters occurring at around the same time are also indicative of the pressures being faced by the railways. The year of 1915 started off with the occurrence of a rail disaster, this being a collision between two trains at Ilford station on the GER on the 1st of January 1915 with the result being 10 fatalities. The cause of the accident was found to be problems with the signaling of train movements, in that a local train originating from Gidea Park and bound for Liverpool Street was moving across main lines, as was regular practice at such junction stations, when an express from London heading for Clacton collided with the local as the crossover manoeuvre was being undertaken, effectively slicing the carriages of the local train into two separate portions. All of the

[73] Minutes of Special Meeting of Goods Managers, 6th October 1914, RAIL 1080/246 (TNA)
[74] Michael Foley, *Britain's Railway Disasters: Fatal Accidents From The 1830s to the Present Day* (Barnsley; Pen and Sword Books Ltd., 2013) pg. 155

fatalities were from the carriages of the local train, which had been full of commuters travelling towards London.[75] Whilst signaling issues have been attributed to the causing of this accident, it is important to note that it was believed that the signals were set for the local train leaving Ilford, and so confusion on the behalf of the express train driver and a misreading of the signals were also contributing factors. The Liverpool Street train usually followed the Clacton express in departure times but on that morning, the local train was running ahead of the Clacton express[76], and so a lack of knowledge of this factor on the behalf of the express train driver could have helped contribute. In this, as with the events that unfolded at Quintinshill just five months later, troops were involved in the rescue efforts, although in this case the soldiers were from the territorials and had been tasked with either guarding the line, or employed in the immediate area of the railway station.

After the events of Quintinshill, the next major rail accident to occur happened on the 14th of August, when the London Euston to Holyhead express was derailed on a section of line between Stowe Tunnel and Weedon station. Seven of the derailed carriages rolled down the lineside embankment and the fifth and sixth carriages in the train makeup telescoped, a factor that led to the majority of the ten deaths. The cause of this accident however helps to indicate the pressures being felt by the rolling stock being used on the network, as the locomotive at the head of this train, an express for Ireland, had been struck by the metal connecting rod of a passing express train from Rugby to London which had become loose and flown out of its proper place whilst the train was in motion.[77] Whilst this type of problem on railway locomotives was not unheard of, both before the First World War and in the subsequent years in which

[75] Foley, pp. 155-156
[76] Foley, pp. 155-156
[77] Foley, pp. 161-162

steam locomotives were being used on the railways, the factor that a defect in the crank pins, the piece of metal holding the connecting rod onto the drive wheel of the locomotive, had not been detected by the driver of the Rugby to London express before he took his train out onto the mainline shows that pressure on the rolling stock, in the desire to keep every available piece of rolling stock running for as long as possible, was being mirrored by the staff who had to operate the locomotives, and the ultimate need to keep the trains running during the war period. The final major railway accident to occur in 1915 happened on the 17th of December at St Bede's Junction near South Shields on the GER. The accident, involving the 7:05am train from South Shields, a light engine which was on the same line, and an empty passenger stock working from Jarrow, resulted in 19 deaths and large numbers of injuries. It was found that fire was a major cause of the death toll.[78] After 1915, 1916 surprisingly witnessed no major railway accidents, and as such the next major accidents to occur on the railways happened during the course of 1917 and 1918, the first being on the 3rd of January 1917 and mirrored what had occurred at South Shields in December 1915, but instead happening at Ratho station near Carlisle, and involving the 16:18pm express between Edinburgh and Glasgow. 12 people were reported to have been killed.[79] The final accident to occur on the railways during the First World War period occurred at Little Salkeld, 15 miles south of Carlisle on the Midland Mainline and involved the London to Glasgow express running into a railway cutting in which part of the structure had collapsed onto the line, and resulted in seven deaths.[80]

These accidents are the ones to occur involving non-railway personnel, and when the minor incidents involving railway personnel is included, the list becomes far too long to

[78] Foley, pp. 162-164
[79] Foley, pg. 164
[80] Foley, pp. 164-166

do justice to each and every case.[81] However, by including these as accidents to happen on the railways, combined with the cases outlined above, it is possible to come to the conclusion that life on the railways during this period was being made more difficult because of the war. Whilst accidents on the railways before the war were not unheard of, due to the complicated and potentially dangerous nature in which railways operated, the pressures that the railways faced during the war, both in terms of pressures placed upon railway personnel, as well as pressures place on rolling stock and lack of maintenance on infrastructure, all show that the railways, as well as the rest of the nation, were struggling to carry out their First World War service, but still managed to keep the trains moving, and by proxy, keep the British war effort moving.

Conclusions: The role of the REC

Operations on the railways during the First World War became almost entirely dependent on the authority of the Railway Executive Committee. The REC itself, acting in a supervisory capacity to the rail companies across the nation, had and exercised authority over complete operations on the railway network, and as such every rail movement needed to be seen to be working towards the national war effort. Before the war, such governmental supervision on rail operations, even down to the extent as to withdrawal of specific types of rolling stock from individual train services, would have been considered completely unacceptable, but at for the duration of the conflict Britain became almost dependent on her railways to maintain supplies heading for the front lines, and as such some sacrifices from the rail companies needed to be made, and this

[81] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1914, 1914, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk; Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 31st December 1914, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk; Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk; General Report to the Board of Trade upon the Accidents that have occurred on the Railways of the United Kingdom during the year 1915, 1916, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk

took the shape of coordination and supervisory control from the government through the REC. Other strategies adopted by the REC were focused specifically on deterring unnecessary travel on the railways, and this was achieved through the removal of excursion traffic and cheap fares for members of the public. For members of the armed forces however, the REC's policy of supplementing the costs of soldiers' travel showed that the government was working with the railway companies, rather than merely controlling them. The concept of nationalization was at this point in the history of Britain's railways unpalatable to both the private companies and the government, despite the railways being in a severely run-down state by the end of the conflict and in dire need of mass investment. It is notable that the governmental supervisory control of the railways did not merely end in 1918/1919, and instead continued well into the new decade, only completely ceasing with the grouping of the 'Big Four' railway companies at the end of 1922 and into 1923, and this goes to show how important the railways, and by proxy, the REC had become to the British economy by the end of the conflict and following peace settlement.

Chapter Two:
"22nd of May 1915 – The Quintinshill Rail Disaster"

On the morning of the 22nd of May 1915, Britain's railways faced the worst collision to occur on the network since their invention. In addition to presenting the railways with a tragic human cost when the systems controlling the network went wrong, the events that unfolded at Quintinshill, just north of the Scottish border on the West Coast Mainline, presented several major questions into safety implications of operations on the railways during a time of national crisis. The collision itself, although not without precedent as shall be seen, can be viewed as a shifting point, in that it was recognized that pre-war peacetime focuses could not be continued during wartime. The main document used to form this account of the events is the Summary of Railway Accidents for the three months ending 30th of June 1915 and it is perhaps worth first outlining the significance of this document to any study investigating events at Quintinshill.

Summary of Railway Accidents documents were generally published based on three months' worth of data around four times a year, and acted as the official records from the Board of Trade to the government as to the state of Britain's railways. Contained within the Summary report for the three months ending 30th of June 1915 is the full enquiry report undertaken by Lieutenant-Colonel Druitt, containing full transcripts of eyewitness testimony from individuals at the scene of the disaster. The original report document is held at the National Archives.[82] As a side note detailing Druitt as an individual, Druitt had been appointed officer in charge to conduct the investigation into the disaster by HM Railway Inspectorate, a board with its origins in 1840 and tasked with overseeing general safety on all the railways of Britain.[83] All commissioned officers

[82] Lieutenant-Colonel E. Druitt's Enquiry Report, 17th June 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (The National Archives)
[83] Jack Richards & Adrian Searle, *The Quintinshill Conspiracy: The Shocking True Story Behind Britain's Worst Rail Disaster* (Barnsley; Pen & Swords Books Ltd., 2015) pg. 83

of the Inspectorate were retirees who had been involved in some way with the railway divisions of the Royal Engineers, meaning Druitt had been involved with operations on railways for military purposes before commission.[84] Perhaps significant is that this enquiry report is not a set of criminal papers, instead supposedly being an unbiased objective record of what happened. The reason that this is only supposedly an unbiased set of records is that the enquiry findings were in fact presented to Druitt by the CR, who themselves conducted an internal enquiry into the cause of the disaster in the weeks following the event[85], with Druitt in turn accepting the findings and presenting them to the Board of Trade. Although Druitt did conduct an enquiry into the disaster, his findings appear to be heavily based on the findings he was presented with by the CR. However, despite this oversight in the report's history, the official enquiry still does provide a plethora of information and details about the disaster which are unable to be sourced from other locations. The criminal trial which took place after the disaster focused more on the questions surrounding who was responsible for what happened, rather than what actually happened and the implications for the rail network. Druitt's enquiry report does not have this issue until the conclusions and advice section after the eyewitness testimony has been presented in full.

Geographical and Chronological Context

Before dealing with the events that unfolded at the isolated signal box just north of Gretna, context surrounding both the location and the operational situation need to be explored. In 1915 the West Coast mainline route between London and Glasgow was one of three rail routes competing for the lucrative Anglo-Scottish express passenger trade,

[84] Richards & Searle, pg. 83
[85] Richards & Searle, pp. 83-103

and was managed by two separate railway companies, the London and North Western Railway (LNWR) and the Caledonian Railway (CR).[86] Of the three mainlines linking England and Scotland, the West Coast route was, and remains to this day, the most difficult to operate. The route navigates the Cumbrian hills, climbing over the summits at Grayrigg and Shap before tackling the climb of Beattock in the Scottish lowlands, yet was still able to compete with the East Coast route, which has always been known as 'the race track' on the British railway network. In addition to this, the West Coast mainline at the beginning of the 20th Century was one of the most congested in the country. The mainline between Carlisle and Glasgow was at times amongst the busiest double track sections of line in the country, due in part to no less than three separate rail companies having running rights within the first 8½ miles between Carlisle Citadel Station and Gretna Junction, these being the CR; the Glasgow and South Western (G&SWR); and the North British Railway (NBR).[87] This meant that the vast amount of freight traffic handled by each of these rail companies needed processing and storing at Carlisle before dispatch across the nation. At the outbreak of war, the freight yards north of Carlisle which became known as Carlisle Kingmoor had not yet been built, although the locomotive sheds of Kingmoor were in operation, and so all freight traffic had to be transported just to the south of Carlisle to Dentholme yard for dispatch with the LNWR, the Midland Railway (MR) and the North Eastern Railway (NER).[88] This factor meant that the Carlisle to Gretna junction section of the route became something of a bottleneck, and as such in the years before the war the CR found it necessary to install long running loops on both sides of the main line. These installations took place at the signal box at Quintinshill, 1½ miles north of Gretna and a section of trackwork that had

[86] Richards & Searle, pg. 9
[87] O.S. Nock, *Historic Railway Disasters: Fourth Edition* (Shepperton; Ian Allen Ltd. 1987) pp. 88-95
[88] Nock, pp. 88-95

a main line crossover already installed[89], and it is these loop lines that played one of the major factors in the disaster that occurred on the 22nd of May 1915.

The Beginnings of the Disaster

At this early stage of the war it can be seen that the railway companies dealing with traffic heading northwards did not completely appreciate the intensive strain that the war effort placed on the network, and as such the philosophy of express passenger traffic before all else was continued from the peacetime situation by some companies including, most significantly in the events of Quintinshill, the CR. As such, when on the night of 21st of May 1915 the 11.45pm overnight sleeper train from London Euston to Edinburgh Waverley departed London an half an hour behind schedule[90], the aim for the train crew was to regain as much lost time as possible. The late running of the overnight sleeper was something that at the time would not have seemed too significant. To the railway companies it would have been an annoyance certainly, but not something that would raise too much concern regarding the implications that it was to have on the rest of the rail network on the run northwards.

Making up time on the sleeper train proved to be an impossible task, and by the time the sleeper train pulled into Carlisle Citadel station almost 300 miles after leaving London, the train was still running half an hour behind schedule.[91] At Carlisle Citadel, the overnight sleeper was due to split into two sections, the first proceeding to Edinburgh Waverley, and the second continuing onwards to Glasgow Central. This was due before the dispatching of the 6:17am local service from Carlisle to Beattock, stopping at

[89] Nock, pp. 88-95
[90] Richards & Searle, pg. 10
[91] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk

all stations to pick up and set down passengers, however due to the late running, the decision had been taken to dispatch the 6:17am local service before the expresses[92], a decision that was taken no doubt as to avoid delaying the connection at Beattock for which the locomotive of the 6:17am was to be used.[93] The Glasgow portion of the sleeper train, due to depart Carlisle at 6.05am was dispatched at 6.37am heading northwards, the Edinburgh portion of the train having been dispatched a number of minutes before and able to proceed past Quintinshill before the collision happened.

At the same time, a train which had originated in Leith in the early hours of the morning and heading for Liverpool was making its way southwards over the southern hills of Scotland. This train, a troop train, containing 1st Battalion of the 7th Royal Scots[94], was on route to Gallipoli, the campaign in southern Turkey which had just been launched by the military. It is with this troop train however that a second factor in the disaster was to come into play. The carriages that conveyed the troops from Leith to Quintinshill were themselves relics of a by-gone era of railway travel. Comprised of wooden bodied vehicles lit by gas[95], they had originated on the Great Central Railway (GCR) during the previous century and were by the time of the outbreak of hostilities considered dangerous by officials. Five years prior to what happened at Quintinshill an accident just north of Hawes Junction, or Garsdale, on the Settle to Carlisle railway was to show the danger of having wooden bodied passenger stock that was lit by gas being used in high speed trains, and in the case of the Hawes Junction accident, the presence of flammable material and gas served only to destroy the carriages beyond feasible

[92] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk; Colin G. Maggs, *Great Britain's Railways: A New History* (Stroud; Amberley Publishing, 2018) pg. 264; Michael Foley, *Britain's Railway Disasters: Fatal Accidents From The 1830s To The Present Day* (Barnsley; Pen & Sword Books Ltd., 2013) pg. 157
[93] Richards & Searle, pg. 10; Nock, pp. 88-95
[94] Richards & Searle, pg. 11
[95] Document R 9884, 31st August 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (The National Archives), Foley, pg. 157

repair.[96] In the aftermath of this accident, the advice of the Board of Trade was that all gas lit passenger rolling stock was to be phased out of service and replaced by flame retardant, electrically lit stock. However, although this process had begun by the time of the outbreak of hostilities, it had not been completed and as such, several hundred gas lit wooden bodied vehicles remained in use on the rail network and were pressed into service to which they were unsuitable due to the need to use every available piece of rolling stock for the war effort. The rolling stock share scheme that had been unveiled in the first few months of the war meant that regardless of origin, every piece of rolling stock on the rail network, with the exception of locomotives, was now to be made use of all over the country, meaning that GCR rolling stock found its way into the train makeup of CR services[97], and gas lit passenger rolling stock found its way into inappropriate use on high speed express passenger trains.

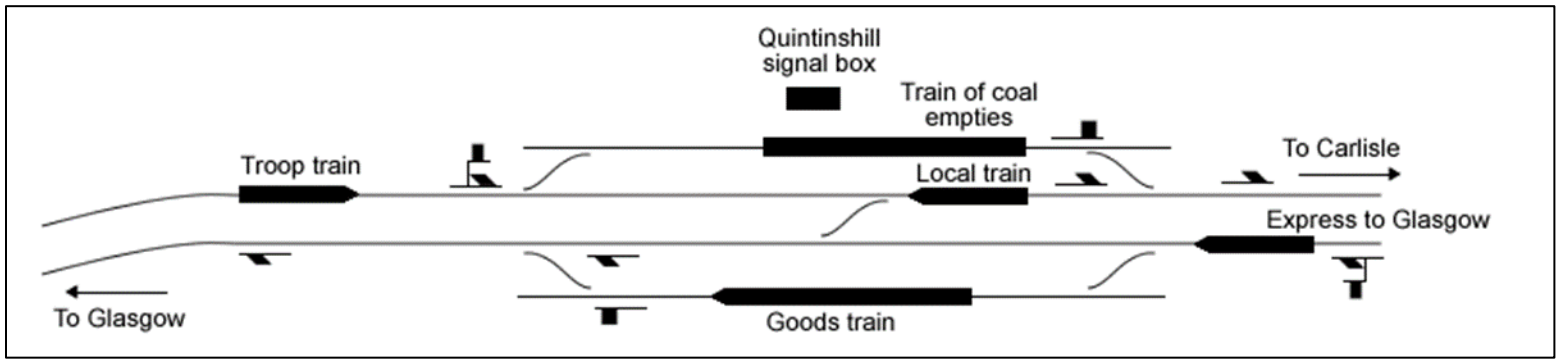
Quintinshill – The isolated signal box

The scene at Quintinshill itself in the hours before the collision proves significant in the events that were to come later that morning. Although the additional storage had been installed at Quintinshill in the form of the loop lines in the years before the war, on the morning of the 22nd of May both loop lines had been earmarked for other purposes. The down loop line, on the Glasgow side of the running lines, had been occupied by a goods train and the up loop line, on the Carlisle side of the running lines and directly in front of the signal box, was soon to be occupied by an empty coal train heading for South Wales.[98] Since the beginning of the war the traditional method of

[96] Report by Major Pringle R.E. on the Fatal Collision the occurred on the 24th December 1910, between an Express Passenger Train and Two Light Engines near Hawes Junction on the Midland Railway, 1911, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk; Lighting of Railway Carriages, 25th May 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (The National Archives)
[97] Richards & Searle, pg. 11
[98] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk

transporting coal from the South Wales coalfields to the base of the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow via sea had become no longer viable due to the German U-Boat campaign in the Atlantic and Irish seas. This meant that traffic for the Grand Fleet required sending via rail, and these workings themselves gained the nickname 'Jellico Specials'.[99] On that morning the decision was taken to side-line the empty coal train to allow the troop train to pass on the main running line.

Provided below is a diagram demonstrating the trackwork layout at Quintinshill, and the placement of trains that morning.[100]



This factor of too many trains in this one section of line proved a problem for the signalman on duty, George Meakin. Meakin had officially worked the overnight shift within Quintinshill signal box and was due to finish at 6am. In his later testimony provided to Colonel Druitt's enquiry Meakin states that the working patterns of Quintinshill's signal box was the day shift between 6am and 4pm; the evening shift between 4pm and 8pm; and the overnight shift between 8pm and 6am the following morning.[101] However, an unofficial arrangement between Meakin and James Tinsley, the

[99] Maggs, pg. 264
[100] Diagram showing placement of trains on track plan at Quintinshill, accessed via https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Quintinshill_rail_crash.png (05/09/2019)
[101] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk

signalman due to relieve Meakin at 6am, meant that the night signalman would continue working the section of signals until the arrival of the local train from Carlisle, which would have transported the relief man to the signal box from the station at Gretna. This arrangement was unknown by the stationmaster at Gretna station, Robert Killin, the man responsible for the section of track, as well as the District Superintendent for Quintinshill and the Inspector of the District, all of which is confirmed by Meakin, Tinsley and Killin in their testimony. That day, Meakin states that when Tinsley didn't turn up at the box at 6am he realized that he must be travelling to work on board the 6:17am local train ex-Carlisle, which he was offered at 6:20am and arrived at the box at 6:30am. Upon his arrival at the box, Tinsley was made aware of the situation regarding train movements, as well as being handed a sheet of paper in which Meakin had written down train movements since 6am[102], this being an attempt to prevent the late changeover arrangement being discovered due to the change of handwriting in the train register book held at the signal box being later than the regulation time of 6am.[103]

At this point, Meakin should have left the box as his shift was over. He did not do however, choosing instead to remain in the box reading a newspaper which had arrived with Tinsley.[104] Aware of the expresses heading towards Glasgow and Edinburgh, Meakin had taken the decision to shunt the 6.17am local from the northbound to the southbound running line, using the crossover before Tinsley arrived in the box, the shunting operation being completed once Tinsley had arrived at his post. Providing that the correct procedures were observed, this movement should not have been the one

[102] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk
[103] O.S. Nock, *Scottish Railways* (London; Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1950) pp. 182-183
[104] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk

that would cause disaster, and indeed in the months before the events of the 22nd of May, this movement of switching the local between running lines had been undertaken 13 times without issue.[105] The obvious question in this instance should be what happened that resulted in the disaster? Part of the reason must lie with signalman James Tinsley. In his testimony, Tinsley claimed that he had simply forgotten that the local train was standing on the wrong line as he busied himself with catching up on writing train movements in the register book.[106] This, combined with the additional factors that Meakin had not been using the signal lever collars as protocol dictated, a simple safety feature which required the signalman to place a metal collar on a signal lever for which operated a line blocked by other traffic, or given a blocking back signal to the Kirkpatrick signal box to the north of Quintinshill indicating an obstruction was now present on the main running line[107], meant that Tinsley, already preoccupied and seemingly not looking out of the signal box window, pulled the levers allowing the troop train into the section and directly into the front of the locomotive at the head of the 6.17am local train.

As well as being preoccupied, later revelations surrounding Tinsley's mental health, these being the possibility that Tinsley was suffering with epilepsy and may have had a mild epileptic fit whilst in the box resulting in a lapse in memory[108] all add to the plausibility of Tinsley's testimony to Druitt. As well as lowering the signals for the troop train approaching from the Kirkpatrick section to the north, Tinsley had been offered the second of the two expresses from the Gretna signal box, and accepted the train into his

[105] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk
[106] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk
[107] Nock (1987) pp. 88-95
[108] Richards & Searle, pp. 73-82

section of signals, lowering the signals to allow the express to pass through without stopping.[109] With the second express now signaled to proceed through the section, Tinsley continued copying train movements from the scrap paper into the register book, all the while breaking another of the CR's regulations, this time relating to the numbers of railway personnel being present within the signal box. By the rule, the only person that should have been in the signal box at that time was Tinsley himself, possibly to be joined by George Hutchison as the fireman of the local train to ensure that the 6.17am local had been protected by signals, being as it was in a place of potential danger, carrying out rule 55 of the CR. Hutchison, in accordance with rule 55 , signed the signal box register stating that he had visited the box. Although Hutchison did sign his name, he later confirmed in his testimony that he did not ensure that his train had been properly protected, signing the book merely as a formality. This, combined with a shunter of the already stationary goods train sitting in the down loop, and Meakin who had not immediately left the box after his shift had finished, all added to the possibility that Tinsley had been further distracted from his work. Although all men swore under oath that there had been no conversation happening between them at the time of the collision, Meakin admitted that he may have made Tinsley aware of news of the war from the paper, and that he could not be certain because of the speed at which events unfolded.[110]

The Head On Collision

Hutchison claimed that after signing his name in the register book he left the signal box and headed back towards his engine underneath the wagons of the empty coal train,

[109] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk
[110] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk

something that although dangerous, was not a violation of railway regulations at that time.[111] Whilst back on his engine's footplate, he prepared to take a snack break by opening his piece box, taking advantage of the few moments rest before continuing the journey upon the steep gradients towards Beattock. Hutchison told Druitt that he glanced upwards out of the cab window and noticed the signals set for the road ahead of him, these being all clear. According to the testimony provided in the report, Hutchinson immediately made driver, David Wallace, aware of this and Wallace looked at the signals to check, to find the locomotive of the troop train heading straight towards his own stationary train at an estimated speed of around 70mph.[112] Unable to do anything to prevent collision, both Wallace and Hutchison claim to have leapt from the footplate and taking cover underneath the wagons of the goods train standing to the side of them.[113] The driver of the troop train, Francis Scott, once considered the premier driver of the Caledonian Railway and a man who had previously driven locomotives on royal train duties escorting Queen Victoria, King Edward VII and King George V[114], must have spotted the stationary local train standing directly in his path and immediately slammed on his brakes.

The brakes used on the troop train prove significant to the overarching events. As a principle, the CR fitted its locomotives with the Westinghouse system of air braking. The Westinghouse system, developed in the USA by George Westinghouse, required the locomotive to be fitted with an air pump, an air-pressure regulator and an air reservoir, and the vehicles in the train makeup needed an air reservoir, brake cylinder and triple

[111] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk
[112] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk
[113] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk
[114] Richards & Searle, pg. 14

valve. When the system was being charged, the triple valve vents the brake cylinder and charges the reservoir until the pressure in both the cylinder and the reservoir are almost equal. At this point the brakes release. The application of the brake reduces the pressure in the train pipe and isolates' from the reservoir, which in turn admits air into the brake cylinder in proportion to the reduction in pressure in the main pipe. This allows the system to be powerful and quick acting.[115] This is significant when looking at the train makeup of the troop train because, although the locomotive and a small number of the vehicles in the train were fitted with the Westinghouse system, not all the vehicles were so fitted. As the carriages had originated on the GCR, they were fitted with the vacuum system of braking. The locomotives of the CR were fitted to deal with this system, the so called dual braking fitment wherein both air and vacuum brakes were able to be operated from the locomotive, but the vacuum system was not as fast acting as the air braking system[116], meaning that a proportion of the troop train may still have had brakes released at the time of the collision.

Although they were able to slow the troop train, the brakes were not capable of bringing it to a stand in the allotted space, and as such Scott's locomotive, CR Dunalastair VI class No. 121[117], ploughed into the locomotive at the head of the local train, CR Cardean Class No. 907[118], recently outshopped from the workshop of St. Rollox, Glasgow and working its first running in train before returning to premier express duty. This locomotive, sister engine of flagship locomotive of the CR, was shunted back some 40 yards and derailed, along with its tender, suffering severe damage to both

[115] Colin Maggs "Brakes" in Colin Maggs(ed.) *Train Driver's Manual* (Stroud; Amberley Publishing, 2014) pg. 271
[116] Maggs, "Brakes" in Maggs(ed.) pg. 271
[117] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk
[118] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk

locomotive and tender, the latter of which had its tank ruptured at the rear.[119] No. 121 of the troop train was itself separated from its tender and thrown to the right, the tender being thrown to the left[120], and the crew were killed instantly. The leading vehicles of the troop train were catapulted over the locomotive and tender whilst the remainder stayed on the rails but were disintegrated except for the CR vans at the rear of the train.[121] The troop train, some 213 yards in length before the collision, was compressed into measuring just 67 yards after the event[122], and the wooden bodied coaches lay splintered over both running lines. The local train fared slightly better as with the rupturing of the tender tank at the rear of the locomotive, the coupling attaching the carriages to the locomotive snapped, allowing the four coaches to roll backward some 100 yards[123] and to relative safety of what was come in the aftermath of the second collision still to take place, although it must be noted that on board the local there were two fatalities.[124]

The Moments After and The Second Collision

Due to the speed at which events happened, accounts of the moments between the two collisions are somewhat hazy. The testimony of Meakin and Tinsley both corroborate the main details of actions undertaken in the signal box once it was realized what was happening. Meakin states that he had got up and proceeded to leave and had reached the steps leading down from the box cabin when the first collision occurred. Meakin then claims to have rushed back into the box and, after asking what Tinsley had done, instructed Tinsley to put all signals to danger and send the danger

[119] Damage to Engines at Quintinshill on 22nd of May 1915, May 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (The National Archives)
[120] Damage to Engines at Quintinshill on 22nd of May 1915, May 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (TNA)
[121] Richards & Searle, pg. 17
[122] Nock (1987) pp. 88-95
[123] Nock (1987) pp. 88-95
[124] Schedule of Names of Persons Killed or Fatally Injured in Railway Collision at Quintinshill, 22nd May 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (The National Archives)

signal to the boxes in both directions, both realizing that the second express had not yet passed by.[125]

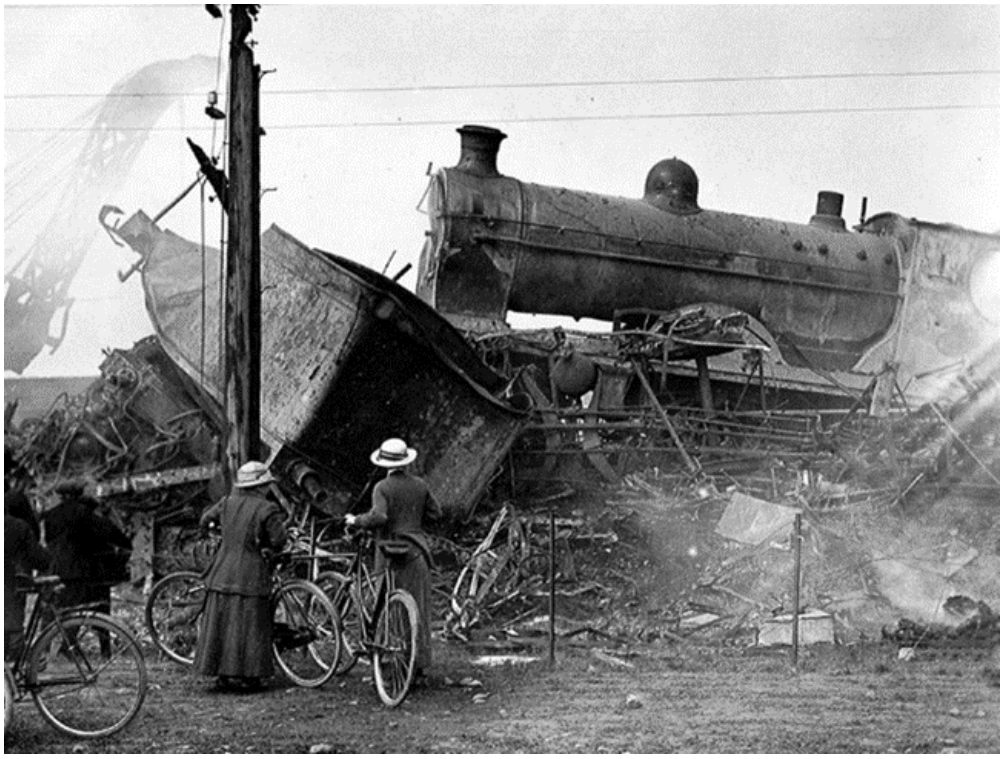
According to testimony provided to Druitt, at the same time as actions in the signal box, the guard of the local train, Douglas Graham, had managed to alight from the carriages down to the track bed and, also having remembered that the second express had not yet passed, proceeded to run back along the line waving his arms in the hope of attracting the attention the express train's crew.[126] He had been joined by the crew of the empty coal train, driver James Benson and fireman John Grierson.[127] It has been estimated that Graham, aged 46 years, had managed some 167 yards from the rear of his train's carriages[128], which had themselves rolled 100 yards backwards after the collision. This was commended as, although it is not known which area of the track Graham ran down, either the center of the track, otherwise known as the four foot, or by the side of the track, neither presented an easy route for running back along the line. The second express was hauled by two locomotives, Nos. 140 and 48[129], and it was hoped that with two locomotives heading the train, it might be able to regain lost time.

The accepted principle of railway operation at the time, and even to this day, was that if in doubt stop all train movements, and the waving of arms by Graham, Benson and Grierson would have signaled danger. These hand signals were first sighted by the fireman on the leading locomotive, David Todbunter, who alerted his driver, John

[125] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk
[126] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk
[127] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk
[128] Richards & Searle, pg. 18
[129] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk

Cowper, before Cowper proceeded to apply the brakes. The driver of the second locomotive, Andrew Johnstone, also applied the brakes on his locomotive at the same time as Cowper, having also been made aware of the signals being given by Graham.[130] Despite the efforts of both, the express was travelling too fast and was too close to the wreckage for a second impact to be avoided, and less than two minutes after the initial impact, the express train collided with the wreckage of the troop train scattered across both running lines. The braking of both locomotives had managed to reduce the speed of the express from an estimated 50mph to around 40mph.[131] In his testimony, Cowper stated that the initial impact was soft, with his locomotive striking the splintered wood and smashed glass remains, but that this soon changed to a sharp thud which almost brought his locomotive to a stand as the tender of the troop train locomotive was struck.[132] His locomotive, No. 140, mounted the remains and rode into the air, and this can be observed in the following photograph taken during the clear up operation.[133]

[130] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk
[131] Richards & Searle, pg. 18
[132] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk
[133] Photograph of the wreckage taken during the cleanup operation, Photograph of the Wreckage, accessed via https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/quintinshill-tragedy-families-gather-remember-5712184 (05/09/2019)



The result of this was that Cowper found himself pinned in the left hand corner of the cab and buried up to his neck with coal from the tender, his back facing the locomotive firebox and boiler backhead.[134] Cowper escaped with the help of Todbunter and Johnstone, as confirmed in their testimonies, and suffered considerable bruising and burns below the neck. These injuries were tended to in the field alongside the railway, and Cowper, a man in his sixties and himself suffering, joined in with the rescue efforts. In contrary to Cowper's injuries, Johnstone and Graham on their locomotive were relatively cushioned from the impact and escaped almost entirely without injury.[135]

With the presence of the two trains standing in both loop lines the result of this second collision was a five-train crash as the debris of the three-train collision spread

[134] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk
[135] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk

into the stationary goods and empty coal trains standing either side.

Gas Fueled Fire

One of the significant lines of enquiry undertaken by the Druitt enquiry was the significance of gas canisters used to light the carriages of the troop train. Although it is noted that the presence of gas alone did not cause the outbreak of fire, instead the outbreak occurring due live coals from the firebox of the overturned troop train locomotive escaping and igniting the wooden frames and debris of the troop train carriages[136], the violence of the collision caused the gas cylinders to explode and allow gas to escape. The cylinders had be fully charged at Leith before departure, so by the time they reached Quintinshill they would still have been relatively full, meaning that the escape of gas into the already burning debris caused the fire to intensify. Eyewitness testimony of several individuals states that the cylinders not ruptured by the collision exploded when the fire reached them.[137] For some of the soldiers on the troop train who had survived the initial impact it was the fire that was to prove fatal. When the express had collided with the wreckage it cut off the escape route for many beginning to climb out from the debris. It must be noted here though that those soldiers who had been able to escape and assist in rescue attempt did so instinctively, and many of the survivors who awoke later did so because of the efforts of their comrades and locals from the area surrounding the crash site.[138] The scale of the fire can be observed in the following photograph.[139]

[136] Document R 9884, 31st August 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (TNA)
[137] Railway Accidents: Summary of Accidents and Casualties reported to the Board of Trade during the three months ending 30th June 1915, 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk
[138] Richards & Searle, pp. 42-58
[139] Photograph of the fire, accessed via https://www.itv.com/news/2015-05-22/quintinshill-rail-disaster-remembered-100-years-on/ (05/09/2019)

Local help is discussed further in chapter three, but it is worth briefly stating here that the efforts of locals acted as the first response, with local doctors and nurses rushing to the site and providing immediate medical treatment where possible. Further treatment was to come in the form of emergency trains rostered by the CR company itself, consisting of several ambulance trains the likes seen on the southern coast of England for the return of injured soldiers from the front.[140] The first of these arrived at the scene at 8.10am, and this relatively quick arrangement was commended as the organization of such train movements were under normal circumstances a lengthy affair. Throughout the rest of the day, several trains made the trip from the collision site to Carlisle for evaluation and treatment.

The fire took slightly longer to deal with than the transportation of the injured. The morning following the disaster the remains were still smoldering, and the Carlisle fire brigade were still working on dampening down the wreckage. When they were certain

[140] Richards & Seale, pp. 42-58

the wreckage was safe enough to move, work began on the clearing of the main lines, with the remains of the rolling stock, along with the remains of the locomotives placed unceremoniously on the side of the line. All of the locomotives involved were transported to St Rollox works for evaluation and it was deemed that all apart from No. 48 were beyond repair, meaning that the locomotives were broken up for scrap[141], supposedly much to the dismay and reluctance of the workers at St. Rollox.[142] Heavy lifting cranes were dispatched from Glasgow on the Sunday night to assist with the clear up operation whilst the damaged track was replaced, before being cleared for normal operation by the passage of the limited mail train from Glasgow, due into Carlisle at 8:14pm.[143] This turnaround was remarkable by the standards of the day, especially for a country which itself was amid a manpower shortage crisis.

The events of Quintinshill: Conclusions

The events that took place at Quintinshill were without comparison in terms of scale, if not in terms of nature. For a country that was already in the grips of a national crisis with the munitions shortage; at the beginning of a disastrous military campaign and mere weeks after the sinking of an ocean liner, itself considered a disaster; what unfolded at that small, seemingly insignificant signal box just to the north of the Scottish border can be seen as a horrible end to a disastrous month. When Druitt was tasked to conduct his enquiry, he is likely to have been instructed to establish just how a disaster of this magnitude could have occurred on homeland soil. As such, the focus of Druitt's enquiry centered mainly on the sequence of events beforehand, whilst in his summarizing conclusions present at the end of his report, Druitt provided his own personal comments on what he perceived as being the core causes. He seemingly lay

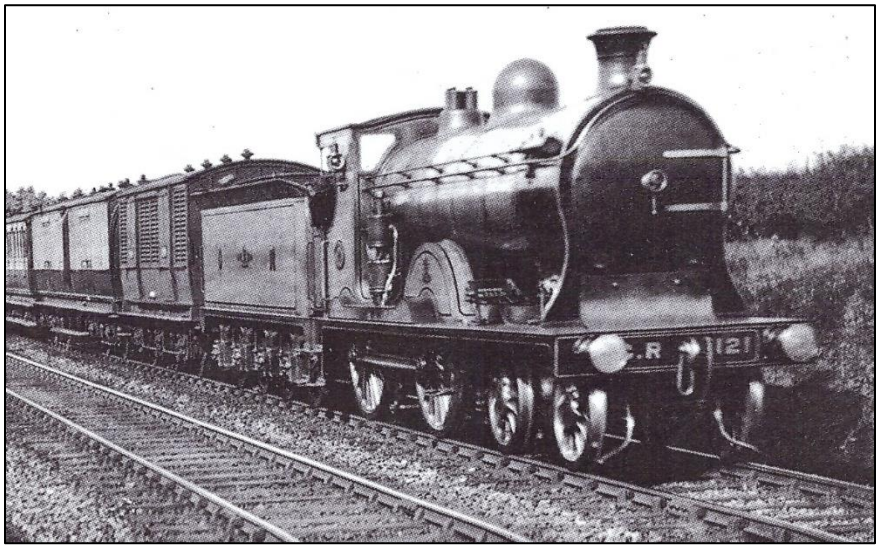
[141] Damage to Engines at Quintinshill on 22nd of May 1915, May 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (TNA)
[142] Nock, pp. 88-95
[143] Richards & Searle, pg. 48

sole blame for the events at the feet of Meakin and Tinsley for not using the signal lever collars and the late changeover arrangement causing a distraction, as well as the presence of too many people in the signal box. He also states that all future carriage construction was to be of steel and lighting provisions were to be electricity due to the presence of gas acting as a factor behind the intensity of the fire, apparently aware that the use of outdated rolling stock was an issue that was facing the railways.

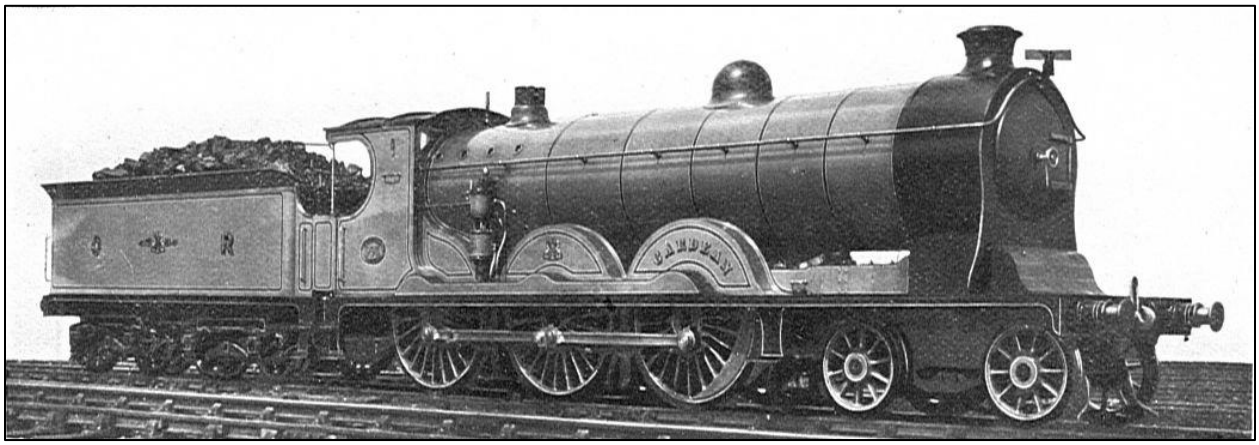
The events of the Quintinshill disaster may upon brief examination appear to end following the clear up operation, but this does not take into consideration the wider public reaction and the subsequent desire for answers, and this is something that is focused on in chapter three.

Example Photographs of Rolling Stock

Locomotive No. 121, the troop train loco, taken before the collision.[144]



Promotional image of CR 'Cardean' class locomotive. The sister engine of this locomotive was hauling the 6.17am local train.[145]



[144] Photo of No. 121, accessed via https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/15/Quintinshill_rail_disaster_-_Caledonian_McIntosh_220-121.jpg (05/09/2019)

[145] Promotional Image of CR No. 903 'Cardean', accessed via https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/40/Caledonian_Railway_4-6-0_locomotive%2C_903_Cardean_%28Howden%2C_Boys%27_Book_of_Locomotives%2C_1907%29.jpg (05/09/2019)

Photograph of restored GCR carriage. This was the main type of vehicle used in the train makeup of the troop train.[146]

[146] Photograph of restored GCR carriage, accessed via https://images.stv.tv/articles/w768/614971- restored-train-gretna-rail-disaster.jpg (05/09/2019)

Chapter Three:
"Aftermath and Significance – The Forgotten Disaster?"

The main purpose of this chapter is to establish the period after the events of the collisions at Quintinshill, examining the immediate aftermath on both a local and national level. This chapter will also examine the subsequent criminal trial to unfold at Edinburgh, and what this tells us about the attitude towards responsibility and culpability for the disaster on the behalf of both the government and the general public. The main text that is used throughout this chapter is Richards' and Searle's book investigating the disaster. This is due to events in the aftermath of the disaster being somewhat unclear in primary documents. Whilst Richards' and Searle's account of the events after the disaster are framed very much upon the angle of establishing responsibility for the disaster, their account of the events that followed does provide the most complete image of what was to come after, and as such is helpful to use in examining the aftermath.

The Immediate Aftermath

Before examining the public and political reactions to the events that unfolded at Quintinshill, it is first important to briefly acknowledge the fates of the survivors and the final resting places of those not so fortunate. Not all the men of the 7th Royal Scots had been on the troop train. B and C companies had in fact been on a second troop train to depart from Leith later that day and, with the events happening at Quintinshill, been re-routed using the Glasgow and South Western Railway's (G&SWR) Lockerbie to Dumfries branch line, before being routed back onto the West Coast Mainline at Gretna Junction, utilizing the G&SWRs own mainline to bypass the

obstruction.[147] At 4:30pm in the afternoon, the men of A and D companies were taken to Carlisle Citadel station to masses of onlookers, all, it appears, determined to give the soldiers the warmest and most sympathetic of welcomes. The men were allowed to wash and eat before having a medical examination and being ordered to rest whilst stationed temporarily in Carlisle Castle. So admired had their actions been in the rescue effort at the scene that when paraded at 2am on the Sunday morning they saluted a passing Lieutenant General travelling in a car. The officer stopped the car, got out and returned the salute to the surviving men, before they were then marched back to Citadel station to board a train comprised of only first class carriages, before continuing the journey through the night towards Liverpool.[148] The total number of soldiers on board this train was seven officers and 57 other ranking men. Perhaps in an act of small mercy, the troops of the 7th Royal Scots were disembarked from the ship expected to transport them from Liverpool and taken, by rail, back to Edinburgh before being sent back to base at Leith and granted 14 days worth of leave to spend with their families and the relatives of those killed in the disaster.[149] Over 200 of their initial number had been killed, with approximately the same amount being in hospitals across a distance of 200 miles of northern Britain. These men had been transported from the scene on one of the several ambulance trains to run to and from the scene throughout the day, the first of which arrived in Carlisle at 10:12am, followed by two additional ambulance trains which had been dispatched from Carlisle to the scene during the course of the morning, and arriving back in Carlisle by noon. Once in Carlisle, the injured were then taken on board some of the undamaged coaches of the express train to Canal sidings for disembarkation and transferal to the Cumberland Infirmary[150],

[147] Jack Richards & Adrian Searle, *The Quintinshill Conspiracy: The Shocking True Story Behind Britain's Worst Rail Disaster* (Barnsley; Pen & Sword Books, 2015) pg. 47
[148] Richards & Searle, pp. 44-58
[149] Richards & Searle, pp. 44-58
[150] Richards & Searle, pp. 44-58

although as shall be discussed later in this chapter, this initial allocation was not sufficient to handle the numbers of injured.

Once back in Leith, a parade of the victims' coffins was transported through the streets in the weeks after the disaster before dedication of memorial to the men of the 7th Royal Scots at Rosebank Cemetery on the Edinburgh/Leith border. Those killed on the local train, Mrs. Rachel Nimmo and her baby son Dickson were buried in a private family funeral at Elswick Cemetery in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.

A Local Issue?

Initially, the public reaction to the events that unfolded at Quintinshill were limited to the response of local people in towns that became required to accept the injured into their hospitals. It soon became apparent that the Cumberland Infirmary and other hospitals in Carlisle did not have the capacity to deal with all the wounded from Quintinshill due in part to two factors. The first of these being that the infirmary had only a short time before admitted large numbers of wounded servicemen from the front lines in France, and so already had reduced capacity. When this was combined with the second factor, this being the vast and sudden influx of wounded from the scene at Quintinshill, meant that the building of the infirmary became so congested on the morning of the 22nd of May that people with only superficial wounds from Quintinshill were treated outside the hospital on the pavement by the side of the road, and that this practice had been utilized for around 180 cases by noon. This statistic helps to both demonstrate the scale of the disaster and the problems facing the Cumberland Infirmary with under capacity and overdemand.[151] Due to this under capacity, the decision was taken early in the day that the Cumberland Infirmary was to act as

[151] Richards & Searle, pp. 44-58

accommodation to only the most serious of injuries, and become the main reception and coordination center for the wounded which were subsequently sent to other hospitals across Carlisle. In addition to this, the military commandeered other accommodation, including hotels, to act as reserve spaces to accommodate the injured. This was coordinated from a separate emergency headquarters to that at the Cumberland Infirmary, established by the military authorities in the County Hotel.[152]

This undertaking was something of a coordination and logistical challenge which the Carlisle authorities had not faced before. 20 individuals were transferred to Carlisle's Chadwick Hospital but again this was soon found to be insufficient. To make room for the injured some of the men injured in France were transferred to private homes, including most significantly the local vicarage, as well as to places such as the Central and Viaduct hotels, Carlisle Castle, Chadwick school and Fusehill workhouse, all of which within a few hours of the disaster were acting as makeshift hospitals and having their own capacity pushed to the limits, at which point smaller buildings began to be utilized.[153] By the afternoon it became clear that the capacity within all of the separate facilities within Carlisle was not going to be able to meet the demands being placed upon them by the sheer numbers of injured arriving in the city from the Quintinshill site. This meant that hospitals from wider afield were required to begin accepting soldiers who had lesser injuries and were considered fit to travel to wider locations.

These wider locations were not only limited to northern England and indeed the locations to which troops were sent to covered both travelling north and travelling south. Some of the injured were sent to hospitals in Glasgow, presumably using the

[152] Richards & Searle, pp. 44-58
[153] Richards & Searle, pp. 44-58

G&SWR's diversionary route to Scotland's second city to bypass the obstruction on the West Coast Mainline, whereas other troops were sent to hospitals in Penrith, Lancaster and even as far south as Preston.[154] The first of the transfers, those heading towards Penrith some 20 miles away from Carlisle, left on the Tuesday evening after the hospital authorities in Carlisle had contacted their counterparts in Penrith and instructed them to make arrangements for receiving and temporarily accommodating large amounts of injured servicemen in some of the city's hotels.[155] It is noted that upon arrival of the injured men from Carlisle, the local townspeople of Penrith assembled in large numbers to watch as they were transferred from the railway onto three motor ambulances which were used for taking the men to the accommodation arranged across the city. As well as this, general coordination of the injured from the continent was also a logistical challenge that needed to be undertaken, with some 24 of the men from the battlefields in France being transferred as far south as the Liverpool suburb of Fazakerley in order to ease congestion in Carlisle.[156] However, these attempts at easing congestion in Carlisle could be viewed simply as one way traffic, when in fact this was not the case. Particularly with the transfer with Liverpool, the authorities in Fazakerley were only willing to allow troops to be transferred there with the condition that the Cumberland Infirmary would receive some of the more seriously injured troops in an exchange.[157] This factor, although understandable on the behalf of the Liverpool authorities, would have been something of a headache for the authorities back in Carlisle who were faced with having to accommodate wounded soldiers from Liverpool whilst at the same time still ensuring that the injured from both the continent already under their jurisdiction, as well as the injured from Quintinshill which were now spread across not only Carlisle but

[154] Richards & Searle, pp. 44-58
[155] Richards & Searle, pp. 44-58
[156] Richards & Searle, pp. 44-58
[157] Richards & Searle, pp. 44-58

some 200 miles of northern Britain, were receiving the correct care and attention applicable to the nature of their injuries.

There is however a gruesome factor behind the numbers arriving from the Quintinshill site, and being looked after by medical teams must not be overlooked, regardless of how easy it might be too loose sight of when presented with the larger statistics. This factor is that the numbers in Carlisle were not only being depleted by the transfers across the north, but were also being depleted by soldiers succumbing to their injuries and dying whilst in medical care, including one fatality who died on the ambulance train heading too Carlisle, and some 11 people who died under the medical care of the city authorities.

Press Coverage

Reporting of the disaster is something of an interesting angle in which to examine the disaster, and although not forming the main basis behind this research project, it is perhaps worth mentioning the press coverage as a side note to the wider public reaction. Even within a few hours of the accident occurring, reports were beginning to appear in both the local and national press. The first angle in which was explored by the press was the 'heroism amongst horror' trait of reporting which proved popular with reporters as it was almost guaranteed to sell to the general public, as well as helping to humanize the disaster to an audience who perhaps were not as interested in the significance that the disaster played for the railways of Britain.[158] It is undeniable that the immediate aftermath of the disaster brought about the best in humanity at both the site and in Carlisle, as locals immediately began searching the debris field and assisting where possible with the rescue operation.

[158] Richards & Searle, pp. 49

However, one element behind the whole disaster that has only been covered in select texts, such as Richards' and Searle's account of the events, is that the disaster also managed to bring about the worst in humanity as in some instances human curiosity gave way to greed and the desire to own a souvenir from the scene. Richards and Searle provide in their book an account from a Carlisle local named Harry Frost, taken from him as an 80 year old during the 1965 50th anniversary commemorations, in which he states "It was a terrible affair," when he arrived at the scene on the Saturday afternoon, and that "When I got there in the afternoon there were billy cans and all sorts of things strewn about the fields. People were picking up souvenirs but I didn't touch anything".[159] Richards and Searle mention that it is thought that the people doing this 'souvenir hunting' were not the local residents of Gretna, who by all accounts were commended at the time for their efforts in assisting with the rescue effort, but were in fact middle class people from Carlisle as well as other places who had come to the scene to see what they could salvage for themselves. It is important to note that the general attitude in the locality of individuals who partook in this activity was one of being no better than graverobbers.[160]

The Scottish papers in Edinburgh and Glasgow broke the news of what had happened at Quintinshill shortly after, and the reporting in the wider Scottish press featured less detail than the press within the border region, but was sufficient enough to convey to the wider Scottish public the severity and the scale of the disaster. The public reaction in Scotland was one of stunned astonishment that such a disaster could happen to Scottish troops before they had even left their homeland, and for the community of

[159] Testimony of Mr Harry Frost in Richards & Searle, pp. 49-50
[160] Richards & Searle, pg. 50

Leith the news of the disaster was to act as a hammer blow the likes of which had never been felt before. Almost every person living in Leith were either related to, or knew someone involved in the numbers of the dead from the troop train, and the idea of their relatives being considered either dead or missing in action before they had even left Scottish soil was something that many struggled to comprehend. Shortly after, the relatives from Leith were transported from Leith to Edinburgh Waverley, before then being conveyed to Carlisle Citadel, wherein upon their arrival the relatives assembled on the platform to hear an officer from the 7th Royal Scots read out the names of all those either known to have been killed, or whom had been classified as missing in action. As a side note, it has also been detailed that Queen Mary approached the Caledonian Railway (CR) company requesting advice on what they thought would be suitable gifts from the royal household to the troops injured and in hospital. The CR referred the information request to the hospital authorities who advised the Queen that cigarettes, chocolate and fruit would be most acceptable, and this action mirrors what the Queen had done over the previous Christmas in sending cigarettes to the troop in the trenches as a token of royal appreciation.[161] Whilst this token of royal acknowledgment would have given the troops in hospitals across the north some comfort, the major gift that would have given the most comfort and solace to the people of Leith was a memorial statue dedicated to the victims and erected a year later in May 1916, most notably after some £4,000 had been raised through public subscription. This however was not the only gift for the people in Leith as also contained within the provisions behind the statue was the providing of a hospital in Leith, and a separate fund designed to help the relatives of the victims whom may have been experiencing financial hardships.[162] In a pre-NHS era and in an period of time in

[161] Richards & Searle, pp. 44-58
[162] Richards & Searle, pp. 44-58

which the majority of the general public was struggling financially due to the war, this outpouring of generosity by the public goes some way to show that this disaster was felt by the whole nation, who were determined to help look after those left behind. It is notable that the press coverage of the disaster appears to have disappeared from the national press, although not from the local press, who at all means attempted to keep the tale of Quintinshill alive and beating in the minds of their readership. One potential explanation for the apparent disappearance of Quintinshill from the national press is the issue of censorship during the war. Although mentioned in the papers at the time, the press was heavily censored throughout the course of the war so as to not dampen wider public morale and keep the nation willing to fight. To have such a disaster happen on home territory, and so many of the victims be active servicemen in the army would have been a huge blow to public morale, and the timing of the disaster, happening during the height of the shell crisis and the failing campaigns in Gallipoli and the Dardanelles, would have been seen, by those in authority, as a potentially disastrous combination amongst the wider British public. Any mention of the events that took place on the 22nd of May 1915 in the national press after the immediate aftermath period referred mainly to the publication of Colonel Druitt's inquiry report into the disaster[163] or the following criminal trial[164], and this is demonstrated in an extract from 'The Manchester Guardian' dated the 20th September 1915. This newspaper extract states that "Lieutenant Colonel E. Druitt, the Board of Trade Inspector, issued on Saturday his report of the inquiry which he made into the causes of the double railway

[163] *The Scotsman*, "The Gretna Railway Disaster: Inquest Opened in Carlisle", 24th July 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (The National Archives); *The Railway Magazine*, "The Gretna Disaster", July 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (The National Archives); *Carlisle Journal*, "The Gretna Catastrophe", 14th September 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (The National Archives)
[164] *Hull Daily News*, "Troop Train Disaster: Close of the Carlisle Inquiry: Manslaughter Verdict", 24th June 1915. MT 6/24234/11 (The National Archives); *East Anglian Daily Times*, "Troop Train Disaster: Manslaughter Verdict by the Jury", 25th June 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (The National Archives); *Pall Mall Gazette*, Short Cutting, 1st October 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (The National Archives); *The Nottingham Guardian*, Short Cutting, 20th September 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (The National Archives); *The Carlisle Journal*, "Gretna Disaster: Railwaymen Charged with Manslaughter", 17th September 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (The National Archives)

collision which occurred on May 22 between passenger trains at Quintinshill on the Caledonian Railway".[165] Also contained in this newspaper cutting is the statement "The Inspector finds that this disastrous collision was due to want of discipline on the part of the signalmen" indicating that it was expected by the public that Meakin and Tinsley would take sole blame for the disaster. This factor is interesting to mention, as it is perhaps one method behind exploring the widespread blaming of George Meakin and James Tinsley for the disaster, and could potentially be seen as a contributing factor in the events that were to follow the disaster.

The Reaction of the General Public

The public reaction to what unfolded at Quintinshill was something that was unsurprising, this being that there was utter disbelief that an accident of this magnitude could happen on the railway network which was considered to be the best in the world. Patriotism was one thing that the British war effort was not in short supply of, and this was fueled by the coverage on war news in the press which, although was subject to censorship in order to safeguard public morale, was keeping the general public informed about the major aspects of the war. Only two weeks before the events that unfolded at Quintinshill, the Cunard Liner RMS Lusitania had been torpedoed and sunk eleven miles off of the coast of the Old Head of Kinsale in Ireland by German U-Boat U-20, with the loss of 1,198 civilian lives.[166] As such, patriotism within the general public was being fueled by the press coverage, in particular cartoon images which appeared in the 'Daily Mirror' with the tag line "The Huns carry out their threat to

[165] *The Manchester Guardian*, "The Troop Train Disaster: Due to Signalmen's Want of Discipline", 20th September 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk
[166] Richards & Searle, pg. 73

murder"[167], referring to a warning message that had appeared in the 'Brooklyn Daily Eagle' from the Imperial German Embassy to the United States on the day of the sailing from New York, stating that the ship was a target for the German navy and that any passengers travelling did so at their own risk.[168] In the instance of the sinking of the Lusitania, public opinion was very much in the mindset that there was a clear villain in the tale, this being the German Imperial Navy, yet when the events at Quintinshill unfolded only a fortnight later the finger of blame was not so easy to point, as this was very much a home grown tragedy. Given this atmosphere of increased patriotism, it was natural that the public wanted someone to blame, fostered in the belief that such an accident could not have occurred on the British railway network accidentally, and this was fueled by the press who almost immediately began speculations that this latest disaster to strike during May 1915 was the result of enemy action. These speculations however soon proved incorrect, at which point the focus shifted to the failings of the signalmen on duty, and particularly on the actions of James Tinsley. Somewhat unwisely, Tinsley had agreed to an interview with the local press in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. Although this report contained a number of inaccuracies, such as stating that Tinsley was 35 rather than his actual age of 32, the report went some way to fueling the public desire for details from the scene of the disaster.[169] Of particular interest was operational information about actions undertaken in the signal box relating to the placement of trains on the mainlines. In addition to this, the report, contained in Carlisle's own 'Carlisle Journal' did dispel one wrongly held belief surrounding the disaster, this being that Meakin and Tinsley had been a arrested immediately after the

[167] *The Daily Mirror*, "The Huns carry out their threat to murder: Famous Cunarder sunk off the Irish Coast", 8th May 1915, Accessed via https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-1915-daily-mirror-front-page-reporting-rms-lusitania-72279161.html

[168] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, "Notice", 1st May 1915, Accessed via https://www.newspapers.com/clip/25025323/warning_from_germans_about_traveling_on/

[169] Richards & Searle, pp. 73-82

disaster, although it appears that they had been escorted from the scene by the police.[170] According to Scottish law of the time, investigations in preparation for a fatal accident inquiry had to be opened almost immediately, and this task was undertaken by the Dumfrieshire Depute (deputy) Fiscal, a man by the name of James Kissock. The practice involved Kissock taking eyewitness statements which were not to be used in evidence in the event of a criminal trial, but were to be provided to magistrates so they could gain background knowledge on the case and the types of information that could possibly be discussed in court. The result of these initial enquiries was to lead to the arrest of Tinsley, Meakin and Hutchinson.[171]

Arresting James Tinsley and the Criminal Trial

The arrest of James Tinsley is the main arrest that has been written about in a handful of texts about the disaster and the aftermath. The arrest was not to happen until the 28th of May, a full six days after the events themselves, and was to see the first warning signs that perhaps Tinsley was not of sound mind during the time he was working in the signal box, as well as the questioning of Tinsley's mental health by authorities other than the CR.[172] The duty of arresting James Tinsley after the approval of the Crown Counsel fell to the Depute (Deputy) Procurator Fiscal for Dumfrieshire, James Kissock, as well as Inspector Morrison from Annan. The two travelled to Tinsley's home in Gretna to arrest him on the charge of culpable homicide, but were unable to arrest Tinsley outright on the basis of concern surrounding his mental stability. Both officers later wrote that when they reached Tinsley's home, they found him unwell. Tinsley's family also informed the two detectives that Doctor Carlyle of Kirkpatrick, an individual whom himself had aided with the rescue effort at the scene on the day of

[170] Richards & Searle, pp. 73-82
[171] Richards & Searle, pp. 73-82
[172] Richards & Searle, pg. 77

the collision, had been tending to Tinsley in the days following the disaster, and that he had left clear instructions that Tinsley was not to be interviewed or spoken to by anyone, the reason given for this was a concern that if care was not taken with Tinsley "his brain might be affected".[173] This is one area of the Quintinshill story that has been overlooked by most authors, and has only recently entered the secondary literature discussions on the subject due to an oversight of authors examining documents. What has been written subsequently states that Tinsley was escorted from his house on the evening of the 28th of May by ambulance and taken to Dumfries for further medical treatment, the reasoning given for this medical worry surrounding Tinsley is the noting of him suffering from epileptic fits.[174] The issue of Tinsley potentially suffering from epilepsy has been touched upon briefly, but it is perhaps important to stress the importance that this medical condition could have had for the public opinion of one of Britain's main rail companies. Had news about Tinsley's mental wellbeing been made public, it is likely that the public opinion as to attributing responsibility for the disaster would have shifted away from Tinsley and become aimed more towards the CR for allowing someone with such a medical condition to be involved in a role in which such high safety demands were being placed upon the individual. Without a specific diagnosis about Tinsley's mental wellbeing it is difficult to state whether or not Tinsley was suffering from epilepsy, and the subject has been sufficiently examined in Richards' and Searle's book on the disaster. What is important to note for the purposes of this study about the reaction of the public to the events of Quintinshill is that by the time of the criminal trial in Edinburgh, Tinsley was perceived to be of sound mind, meaning that he was allowed to stand trial in the dock alongside George Meakin and George Hutchinson.[175]

[173] Richards & Searle, pg. 77
[174] Richards & Searle, pp. 77-79
[175] Richards & Searle, pp. 132-176

It is perhaps important to mention the significance the Druitt report played in the proceedings of the trial. By utilizing the date established in the Manchester Guardian article, and cross examining these dates with a September 1915 calendar, it has become possible to establish the exact date in which the Druitt report was published. The article is dated the 20th of September[176], a Monday, and claims that Druitt's report was published "on Saturday". This means that the date at which Druitt's report[177] was published was the 18th of September. However, the trial in Edinburgh opened a full four days before the publication of the Druitt report, and as it is mentioned in a paper dated the 20th of September that sentences had been passed on the individuals standing trial[178], it is likely that the report itself was not been used during the proceedings within court, and that instead, statements from the CR representatives in court, as well as any company documents such as company rulebooks relating to the rules surrounding the correct operation of a signal box were likely used, the main line of argument being that is was the want of discipline on the behalf of the signalmen that had resulted in the disaster occurring, although it is unclear if this was the case regarding documentation used during the proceedings.

The criminal trial is also something that needs to be looked into as a consequence of what unfolded at Quintinshill. Initially the coroner's court in Carlisle had conducted its own inquiry with the result being a triple indictment of Meakin, Tinsley and Hutchison. Although questions have subsequently been raised as too the authenticity of the information provided to Coroner Strong, the coroner in Carlisle, and the amount in which Strong relied on information provided by the CR, which naturally was attempting

[176] *The Manchester Guardian*, "The Troop Train Disaster: Due to Signalmen's Want of Discipline", 20th September 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk
[177] Lieutenant-Colonel E. Druitt's Inquiry Report, 18th September 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (The National Archives)
[178] *The Manchester Guardian*, "The Troop Train Disaster: Due to Signalmen's Want of Discipline", 20th September 1915, accessed in PDF format via www.parlipapers.co.uk

to deflect as much of the responsibility as possible. However, the Coroner's inquest in Carlisle became something of a problem for the legal process that was to unfold at the criminal trial regarding location. Due to the location in which the accident occurred, criminal charges and the subsequent trial needed to be brought before the Scottish Courts. Indeed, public reaction in Scotland was that of fury that the coroner's trial was conducted south of the border and not in Scotland where the accident actually happened. So furious was the backlash that the St. Andrew's society, a society established to promote all things Scottish in 1907, made approaches towards Prime Minister Herbert Asquith demanding an apology from the Home Office for what they viewed as unconstitutional action undertaken by an English court dealing with the affairs of a Scottish disaster and enquiry. An interesting side note to this is that when the issue was raised in the House of Commons by Scottish MP Hugh Watt, the Home Secretary, Sir John Simmon failed to acknowledge the case in Scotland, citing the factors of deaths occurring in the Carlisle hospitals as well as other hospitals across the north of England, and therefore needing investigation under the English legal system.[179] Upon his arrest, Tinsley had been charged with culpable homicide by the Scottish legal system, and as such he had to stand trial in Scotland, rather than in England. This means that by the time the criminal trial took place, the venue chosen was Edinburgh, a location that was acceptable to both the Home Office and the Scottish courts. It was an unfortunate side effect that the trial of the three men indicted after the coroner's case was to occur merely a few miles away from the community in which most of the victims had been based, and the community that was still suffering the full effects of grief.

The trial opened on the 14th of September 1915 at the High Court in Edinburgh with

[179] Richards & Searle, pg. 161

the leader of the prosecution being the Lord Advocate[180], Robert Munro, himself. Witnesses for the prosecution included Robert Killin, the stationmaster of Gretna who opened by providing an account of the events on the morning of the disaster, as well as the significant and notable presence of representatives of the CR, and this factor has raised questions as to the fairness of the trial that was conducted.[181] Whilst this angle is an interesting one to investigate, and an intriguing insight into what is perceived to have happened behind the scenes of power during a time of war, this line of argument shall not be explored further here, given the constrains that an exploration of this would involve, as well as having a limited relevance to the operation of Britain's railways during the First World War.

The result of the trial was that the judge ordered the jury to formally acquit Hutchinson due to a lack of evidence[182] and the factor that he had not been present in the signal box at the time of the collision, and guilty verdicts for both Meakin and Tinsley. The evidence used against Meakin and Tinsley was the admission of both men to the late changeover time, as well as admissions of a lack of use of the signal lever collars. Little was made of the factors that the CR, against the orders of the REC[183], was still allowing express passenger trains to take priority over the running of trains designed at assisting the war effort, and that in the months prior to events of the disaster at Quintinshill, the operation of moving trains across the crossover had been undertaken at Quintinshill several times without mishap[184], and that a factor as to the cause of the disaster must lie with the sheer amount of volume of traffic being placed into one place at one time.

[180] Richards & Seale, 161-176; Letter to the Lord Advocate, 17th September 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (The National Archives)
[181] Richards & Seale, 161-176
[182] Adrian Gray, *Crime on the Line* (Penryn; Atlantic Publishers, 2000) pp. 138-139
[183] Instructions to the General Managers of Railways in Great Britain as to the Working of Naval and Military Traffic on Mobilization, 4th August 1914, MT 6/2844 (The National Archives)
[184] Letter to the Lord Advocate, 17th September 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (TNA)

Meakin was sentenced to 18 months imprisonment whilst Tinsley was sentenced to three years penal servitude[185], a huge proportion of the trial focusing on Tinsley's lapse in memory and the lack of use of the signal lever collar, a factor outlined by the CR in the statements they provided the court as to the regulations behind operating a signal box. Perhaps a side note that is worth mentioning is the fact that neither Tinsley or Meakin served their full sentences, instead being released from prison on the 15th of December 1916,[186] 15 months after they had been sentenced, and that instead of being called up to the armed forces upon their release, the two men returned to jobs on the railway, Tinsley also being allowed to keep his railway cottage for the duration of his imprisonment, allowing his family somewhere to live. Both men however did not return to work within a signal box environment and were placed into roles of less responsibility.

Conclusions

The course of this chapter has examined several different aspects of the Quintinshill story to occur after the event itself. The initial public reaction was very much centered on the local response to the tragic events, and the situation regarding the ability of the authorities in the region to deal with the mass influx of wounded arriving from the Quintinshill scene. The following wider public reaction was initially one of shock, but this was soon followed by the search for answers and the desire to see some form of

[185] Colin G. Maggs, *Great Britain's Railways: A New History* (Stroud; Amberley Publishing, 2018) pg. 266; Jon Mountford, Tom Dodds, Tony Evans & David Adams, *British Steam Engines; The Ultimate Guide To The Greatest Steam Engines* (Sywell; Igloo Books Ltd., 2010) pp. 148-150; Gray, pp. 138-139; Richards & Searle, pp. 161-176; *Hull Daily News*, "Troop Train Disaster: Close of the Carlisle Inquiry: Manslaughter Verdict", 24th June 1915. MT 6/24234/11 (TNA); *East Anglian Daily Times*, "Troop Train Disaster: Manslaughter Verdict by the Jury", 25th June 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (TNA); *Pall Mall Gazette*, Short Cutting, 1st October 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (TNA); *The Nottingham Guardian*, Short Cutting, 20th September 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (TNA); *The Carlisle Journal*, "Gretna Disaster: Railwaymen Charged with Manslaughter", 17th September 1915, MT 6/24234/11 (TNA)

[186] Richards & Searle, pg. 209

justice undertaken. Acknowledgement of any underlying medical conditions appear to have not been made, and the focus of both the public and official blame was centered on George Meakin and James Tinsley due to the ease in which blame was attributed to them. This was due to their admission of wrong doing in the form of the late changeover and the lack of use of the signal lever collars. This focus has failed to acknowledge that both men were released from prison early and allowed to resume jobs on the railway instead of being called up into the armed forces. In addition, the role of the CR to the proceedings is also something that has had a severe lack of focus from both documents at the time, and in subsequent texts detailing the disaster, although this focus is beginning to be adopted in some texts and helping to provide a more balanced and rounded image of what happened on the 22nd of May 1915.

Conclusions:

The Importance of the Railways to Britain's First World War

To conclude, despite the recent upsurge in interest in the home front during the First World War, due in part to the centenary commemorations which have occurred over the course of the last decade, the operations of Britain's railways during the period are a severely underrepresented aspect of First World War study. Whilst general First World War literature texts that have been written previously have focused on the political, economic or social impact the conflict played in wider British society, little focus has been placed on the infrastructure which allowed Britain to fulfil her First World War aims throughout the course of hostilities. What has been written focuses mainly on the initial mobilization effort of the railways during August 1914, which although significant to the history of Britain's railways, is only one moment contained within the wider war and as such does not provide a fully rounded impression of exactly what it must have been like for the railways for the duration of the war.

Specific railway history texts are also severely lacking in their coverage of the operational dimension of the railways during the First World War period, choosing instead to prioritize coverage of the people who worked on the railways and the pressures that they faced in operating a network, designed in peacetime, in a wartime environment. It is also amongst this strand of literature that the limited studies of Quintinshill arise, and whilst these texts do place Quintinshill in its correct contextual background, none of these texts have used the Quintinshill disaster to examine and question the state of operations on the railways of Britain. Focus has instead been placed far more towards the aim of discovering the responsibility behind the disaster, with older authors maintaining the traditionally held view that it was George Meakin

and James Tinsley who were responsible for the disaster, whilst newer authors have begun to question this belief and instead apportion some of the blame at the feet of the Caledonian Railway (CR). Whilst this focus is itself fascinating, it is unfortunately limited in its ability to gain a fuller understanding of the operations on the railways during the First World War. It was this task of trying to understand the operational dimension of the railways during this period that was the central focus of this research project, and to begin to shed light on one of the more underrepresented fields of British First World War enquiry.

Research undertaken on the subject of the Railway Executive Committee (REC) has shown that to begin with, the government was struggling to balance the needs of the war effort with the demands of private industry. As the system that emerged was state supervision rather than state nationalization as would come later in the century, the demands of private industry needed to be accommodated against the backdrop of mass mobilization. What has become clear from documents held in the National Archives is that the REC was prepared to interfere with the provision of train services for the civilian population, but through the use of wider incentives, these being express passenger and local passenger trains loosing their priority over all else status and traffic for the war taking precedent. As the war prolonged into 1915 provisions such as the curtailment of non-military passenger traffic, the withdrawal of certain types of passenger rolling stock, including through carriages and dining cars, and the requirements to economize on coal used for railway locomotives, as well as the redirecting of duplicate traffic to use alternative routes enabling the freeing up of capacity on the wider network became more common as the REC coordinated the whole network to match a total war footing. The conveyance of goods is also something that documents relating to the REC also focus upon heavily. The goods vary across a wide variety of

materials, but the main ones examined in this study are the fish traffic from Scotland to London using only one mainline at any one time for a month long period, thus freeing up capacity; the conveyance of food items destined for the front lines; the supply of coal traffic from South Wales to the base of the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow, requiring use of the Highland Railway and it's network; the conveyance of mails both too and from the front, the only type of service that maintained its pre-war 'special' status and recognized as key to the maintenance of morale for both the troops at the front and the civilian population at home; and finally the conveyance of hazardous materials for use in the construction of weaponry. Each of these differing tasks help to exemplify that the operational dimension of the railways became centered on one goal, serving the war effort, and this is something that can be seen far more after May 1915, at which point the country was beginning to adopt a 'total war' strategy and realizing that things could not simply be 'business as usual'.

The Quintinshill case study contained in chapters two and three are also insightful for detailing operations on the railways during the First World War, and the pressures that the network was facing at this point of the conflict. Examining the background to the event itself, mainly in the local geographical context of the Carlisle bottleneck heading towards Scotland leading to the requirement for additional storage sidings being placed at Quintinshill in the years before the war helps to indicate that even before the outbreak of hostilities, the section of line containing Quintinshill was one of the busiest in the nation, and that this was only made more congested upon the commencement of hostilities as differing traffic all contended for running paths on a network that was itself being frustrated by existing overuse. Additionally, the situation at the Quintinshill signal box in the hours before the initial collision is also examined, including detailing the unauthorized late changeover arrangement present between signalmen George

Meakin and James Tinsley, and how this influenced the course of events in providing a distraction to Tinsley in the minutes before; as well as detailing the placement of trains on the track plan at Quintinshill, and how this led to the head on collision. By using the eyewitness testimony provided in Colonel Druitt's enquiry report, it has also been possible to detail the chain of events immediately after the first collision, and the rescue effort which took place after the second collision, hampered mainly by the outbreak and ferocity of the fire. Additionally, damage reports collected after the clear up operation help to indicate the severity of the disaster, and this is telling of the wider issues of operations on the railways in that if the correct procedures are not strictly adhered too, the result would be accidents of this nature and scale.

The aftermath of the disaster is also telling of the state of mind on behalf of the public and the state, and the responses of each to what unfolded. The immediate aftermath and the provisions provided for the wounded in Carlisle, which soon needed to be extended to include some 200 miles of northern Britain just to accommodate the numbers wounded by the collision, help to exemplify exactly how strained Britain had become by May 1915, yet despite this authorities were still able to treat the wounded against a backdrop of existing overcrowding in hospitals across the north with the return of injured servicemen from the front. This immediate aftermath also includes the initial reaction of locals living in the area, and how, for the most part, they aimed to assist in any way they could, and how in some instances people were known to take items from the scene at Quintinshill to form some kind of distasteful souvenir of the events. The coverage of the disaster in the press links in with the reaction of the wider public, whose initial shock that such a disaster could be allowed to happen on homeland soil soon dissipated into the desire for answers and the need to blame someone for the events that happened. The final aspect of the aftermath is the arrest of James Tinsley,

the subsequent criminal trial which took place in Edinburgh, and the eventual early release of both Tinsley and Meakin at the end of 1916. Here, questions of blame shifting on the part of the CR have been raised as identified in previous texts. What is clear from the criminal trial is that neither Meakin or Tinsley appear to have helped themselves by admitting to the unauthorized late changeover arrangement and the lack of use of signal lever collars as outlined in the rules of the CR, and this allowed them to become easy targets to accept full blame for the disaster, resulting in their conviction and subsequent prison sentences. It remains a question as to exactly what extent the CR wished to divert focus onto the actions of the signalmen and away from the situation facing the railways during May 1915, as well as the lack of adhering to the "war traffic before all else " rule of the REC, and whilst this research project to does not strive to provide an answer to this question, it is interesting to consider that it is possible the government, through the REC was allowing the CR to escape media attention and assisting with the imposition of the blame onto the two signalmen.

All of this focus has allowed for the disaster which occurred at Quintinshill to be examined through the prism of overpressure on the rail network, and the provisions in place used for operating the railways of Britain. Whilst this research project does not claim nor aim to be the definitive work on the railways of Britain during the First World War, the key task behind this research project of providing some coverage to the railways of the Home Front in Britain during this period has been achieved, and has begun forming an image of a previously underrepresented area of First World War study.

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