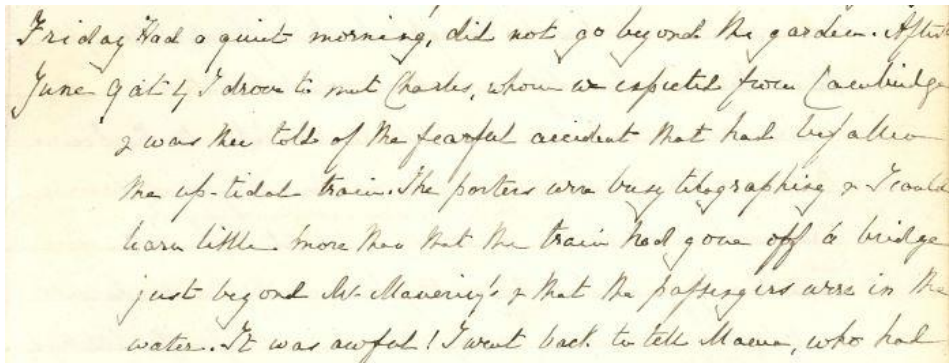


**Manuscript of the Month**  
**June 2014**

**Caroline Hoare's journal, 9th June 1865**



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Shortly after 2.30 that afternoon, the up-tidal train departed from Folkestone as usual. On board were about 110 passengers, all of whom had left Paris at 7am, crossed by steamer from Boulogne and expected to reach London by late afternoon. But just outside the village of Staplehurst, Kent, tragedy struck. For workmen replacing a section of track along a bridge had no idea the train was expected. By the time they did, it was too late. The express, travelling at the fast (for those times) speed of 50mph, ploughed into the partially re-laid track and derailed, sending ten carriages plummeting over the bridge and down into the muddy stream below. One passenger later recalled being startled by a strange noise: *then followed two terrible jolts or bumps, and in an instant afterwards, from bright sunshine all became darkness, and to me chaos...I found myself afterwards up to the knees in water, in the middle of a heap of broken carriages, amidst which the whole of the party I had seen but a short time ago on board the steamer were lying...death and destruction reigned around. The remains of the broken carriages were projecting wheels upwards, from the water, and the screams of the sufferers were heart-rending...* (BL, 19<sup>th</sup> cent newspapers, Liverpool Mercury, 13th June 1865) In all, ten people were killed, while fifty or more lay injured or half drowned in the stream. But help was quick to arrive. Local residents rushed from their houses, while frantic telegraphing brought many others to the scene, among them surgeons from Staplehurst, Frittenden, Ashford and Tunbridge Wells. Passengers too did what they could for one another. Two ladies plucked a half-suffocated girl from the mud, saving her from certain death, while novelist Charles Dickens picked his way through the wreckage, offering sips of water to the injured and dying from his upturned top hat.

To Caroline Hoare and her family, who had lived at Staplehurst Park since the 1830s, the crash must have seemed especially poignant. For just weeks earlier, while travelling to join his wife at Colkirk, Norfolk, Caroline's father Henry had leaned out of a train in the Audley End tunnel and smacked his head against a clump of telegraph wires. The various doctors that descended on the scene offered differing opinions as to his injuries – some diagnosed a fractured skull, others 'violent concussion of the brain' – but were united in their prognosis. There was little hope of recovery. When Caroline arrived the next day, she found her father conscious but oblivious to his surroundings: *We went up to him, but he took no notice; his poor face was greatly disfigured having a cut right across his right cheek & much of his face covered w[ith] tar.* Undaunted, she and the rest of the family set about making themselves useful: *The first thing we could do was to make bran bags to put hot to his feet & legs, he being so dreadfully cold & he had beef tea & wine every hour*

*after we came till 9, then every 2 hrs. A nurse had come, so she & Mama were to sit up the first part of the night while H[enr]y & Beatrice kept the kitchen fire up for the bags.* Gradually Henry's condition began to improve, although his mind continued to wander alarmingly at times – he often fancied himself at Dublin, a place he had little or no connection with – and it would be nearly two months before he was deemed fit enough to leave the local inn he had been removed to immediately after the accident. His return to Staplehurst Park, on 23rd May, came less than three weeks before the tidal train disaster.

The moment Caroline's mother heard of the Staplehurst crash, she ordered beds to be made up and dispatched her two carriages, along with a plentiful supply of sheets, to help ferry the wounded. Those with minor injuries were taken up to London by special train and either admitted to Guy's, given over to friends or lodged at the Castle and Falcon Hotel on Aldersgate Street. But a number were judged too seriously wounded to withstand such a journey. Of these, six were removed to the Station Hotel, five were taken in by the local doctor and the remaining six lodged at houses up and down the parish. The youngest victim, eleven year old Lloyd Rayner, son of a Liverpool merchant, arrived at Staplehurst Park with Caroline's brother Charles late that afternoon suffering from a broken leg and severe lacerations to his scalp. Lloyd's mother had been killed in the crash, his aunt lay injured at the Station Hotel, but his younger sister had somehow escaped unharmed. Caroline recorded that Lloyd bore the setting of his leg *most bravely*, although he remained restless and in considerable pain for some days.

As news of the accident spread, large crowds began congregating at London Bridge and Charing Cross, desperate for tidings of friends and family. One man told reporters that he expected to meet his wife, on her way home from a trip to benefit her health. Later that evening his worst fears would be realised when she was found to be amongst the dead. The accident also emphasised the random cruelty that invariably accompanies such disasters. A Hereford solicitor's bride, returning from her honeymoon, was killed outright, while her new husband, who had been sitting alongside her, emerged virtually unscathed. Other victims included a veterinary surgeon from Bolton-le-Moors, a French chef set to rejoin his master at Devonport and the wife of a Bombay judge returning to England after ten years in India. The injured too formed a miscellaneous group. Among them were the vicar of Bedminster and his wife, a French naval officer and a chandelier manufacturer from Belsize Park.

The following day Caroline and Charles revisited the scene of the accident: *It was a horrible sight & the only wonder was how any could live; the carriages were lying about in splinters almost, having been knocked to pieces to get the people out*, wrote Caroline. Over the next fortnight or so she, her mother and the family governess, Mademoiselle Richard, were kept busy distributing strawberries, jellies, flowers and beef tea amongst the injured and comforting their distraught families. On 13th June Caroline arrived home to find the Bishop of Edinburgh, a relative of the vicar of Bedminster, ensconced at Staplehurst Park – *He & Papa very good about not discussing Church questions [at meal times]*. Gradually, however, the invalids began to depart and the Hoares' carriages were put to good use once more, escorting them to the station. Caroline's mother also took care that no one left without a bouquet of flowers from her garden. One of the last to go, on 11th July, was Lloyd Rayner: *all felt very sorry to lose him & he very loath [sic] to go, poor boy; he went at 12½, having given Mama a very pretty match holder worked by himself*.

The fact that the Staplehurst crash came just two days after a similar incident at Rednal, Shopshire, had claimed the lives of 13 people – indeed questions were being asked about Rednal in the House of Commons on the very day of the Staplehurst crash – heightened both the sense of public alarm and the demand for improvements to rail safety: *If, indeed, a passenger cannot be sure of life or*

*limb in a first-class carriage in a first-class train, well appointed and well worked, on a good line hitherto distinguished for its safety, on what is the confidence of railway travellers to rest?* spluttered The Times. Critics questioned the need for daytime track repairs, especially during the summer months when nearly 20 hours of working light were available. Ultimately, though, investigation of the Staplehurst crash centred on two key points: whether the danger flag had been displayed prominently enough, and, if so, whether the driver had heeded it. After a lengthy enquiry, charges of manslaughter were brought against two men, Joseph Gallimore, the inspector in charge of the portion of line the accident had occurred on, and Henry Bengel, the platelayers' foreman. Gallimore's case was dismissed, but Bengel, who admitted both to mistaking the time the tidal train was expected and to sending the danger flag just 554 yards down the track instead of 1,000 yards, was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment. His conviction, though, did little to quell the clamour for new safety measures.

Although the tidal train's operator, the South Eastern Railway Co, emerged from the various inquiries with little blame, the accident still cost it dear. At a shareholders' meeting in September 1865, the chairman announced that despite increased earnings during the previous six months, the dividend would be cut from 4½% to 2½%. For large sums had had to be laid aside to meet claims made against the company by people affected either by the Staplehurst accident or by an earlier one at Blackheath. Amongst the former were Mrs Hampson, widow of the Bolton-le-Moors veterinary surgeon, who was subsequently awarded £7,000 (c.£584K today) in damages, and the chandelier manufacturer, Moss Defries, who received £3,500. Not that every claim was upheld. In October 1865, George Worth, alias Captain Middleton, appeared before Southwark Crown Court accused of attempting to obtain £200 from the South Eastern Railway Co on behalf of a mythical brother he alleged had sustained serious injuries in the Staplehurst crash.

Throughout this period, Henry Hoare's condition continued to give his family cause for concern. Caroline noted that he tired easily, became unduly excited over trifles and had difficulty walking at times. Yet he refused to reduce his heavy workload, attending meetings on local or church-related matters whenever possible and occasionally even venturing as far as Fleet Street. On 5th July Caroline wrote caustically: *At 10 Papa to London for what he calls indispensable Dividend work.* A fortnight later she added: *It is terrible work watching him gradually decay in strength & vitality, & we have almost no hope of improvement; poor Mama is very patient & resigned.* Over the next year, a steady stream of eminent doctors made their way to Staplehurst Park and Henry was subjected to numerous bleedings, blisterings and exploratory operations. At one point the family even consulted a homeopathist, who recommended the liberal application of Arnica lotion to his shaved head. The end, though, came unexpectedly. In April 1866, Henry spent two nights in London, the first time he had passed more than a day there since his accident. On his return, Caroline recalled: *he came right into the room so very happy & so proud of his new great coat. We were all so pleased to see him so well & quite felt that now our anxiety might be at an end; it does seem so wonderful!* But, *The next day...Mama's birthday, he did not get up, Mama thought he had a bilious headache & that he might sleep it off.* By 3 o'clock, however, Henry had slipped into unconsciousness. Soon afterwards, Charles went up to town by special train to fetch the celebrated surgeon Sir William Fergusson. Fergusson's solution was the application of leeches, but: *we knew it was too late & at 8.30 our dearest Father drew his last breath...It seemed incredible almost that our long year of anxiety sh'd have been ended thus suddenly, but we know now it was most mercifully ordered, for...had it been more gradual, the suffering w'd in all probability have been excessive.*