



Swindon Accident 1906

Runaway Tram-car Dashes down a Swindon hill and overturns.

Four passengers killed and 30 injured.

Somerset County Councillor loses his life.

Dorchester people injured.

A serious tram accident occurred at Swindon on Thursday evening. In consequence of the Bath and West of England Agricultural Show, the electric cars, which are Corporation property, were very heavily laden, and No 11 car, which is registered to carry 58 passengers, was descending Victoria-road, a steep decline connecting the old and new parts of Swindon with a load of between seventy and eighty people. Midway down the hill, the car got beyond control, and at the foot of the hill ran on to the up rails at a crossing, and overturned.

The passengers on the top were precipitated into the road like stones out of a catapult, some being thrown a considerable distance. There was a great many people about at the time, and for some moments the greatest consternation prevailed. A few cool heads were soon on the spot to render assistance. The shrieks and groans of the injured filled the air, and one spectator says that blood ran into the gutter in streams. Scarcely a single passenger escaped without injury, although one or two who saw their danger had jumped off before it was too late.

Dr. Lavery, who lives close by, came on the scene, and was soon followed by Drs. Walters, Dale, Gordon, Ducane, and the officials from the Great Western Surgery. Dazed and unconscious, the victims lay strewn about the roadway for many yards. The doctors and ambulance men rendered first aid to the more serious cases, and conveyances were summoned and the victims conveyed to the Victoria Hospital.

All the injured were transferred to the Victoria Hospital, where they were given further treatment. Unhappily, the injuries in two cases proved fatal. Mr Edwin H. Croad, proprietor of the Railway Hotel, Swindon, died on the way to the hospital, while Mr Harry Dyke, brewer's agent, of Swindon, succumbed to his injuries shortly after admission. Two other victims died later. The roll of injured contains the names of about 30 persons, and others who were merely bruised or shaken, went direct to their homes. The following is a list of The Dead:

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Harry Dyke, brewer's agent, Goddard-avenue, Swindon.

E.H. Croad, Railway Inn, Newport-street, Swindon.

Rowland J. Dunford, Nables Farm, Draycot, Cerne, Chippenham.

Charles Phippen, farmer, Weston Bampfylde, Sparkford, Bath, a Somerset County Councillor and a member of the Wincanton Board of Guardians and District Council.

The first two died soon after admission. In all cases death is supposed to be due to fracture of the skull.

The injured:

Arthur Allen, Bradford

John Sims Handcock, Ashley Down, Bristol.

Thomas Freeguard, Bremhill Wick, Calne.

Richard Townsend, The Limes, Chatford, Stroud.

Thomas Neate, 5, Church-street, Bath, (a member of the staff at the show)

Herbert Taylor and W. F. Taylor, Melksham.

L.B. James, Manor Farm, Corston, Bristol.

Arthur Barker, Archfield-road, Cotham, Bristol.

Frank Smith, Steventon.

Miss Jefferies, Side-row, Chippenham.

Miss E. Fry and Mr Arthur Fry, Sutton-lane, Sutton Benger, Chippenham.

Mr Watts, Nailsea, Somerset (one of the governors of the National Fruit and Cider Institute).

Reginald Taylor and George Taylor, Great-Western-road, Dorchester.

Frank Swan, Cardiff.

David Eatwell, Tytherton Wick, Chippenham.

H. Cramond, Lower Weaston, Bath (one of the staff employed in connection with the Bath and West Show). Injuries attended to, and able to leave the hospital.

Henry Christopher, Broadmayne, Dorchester.

Mr Frost, South Walk, Dorchester (slightly injured).

The precise number treated at the Hospital was 35. Of these 12 were able to leave for home the same night, and 23 remained – four of them, unfortunately, in the mortuary.

The injuries, speaking generally, are severe scalp wounds and dislocations. The state of Mr Watts, of Nailsea, an elderly gentleman, creates anxiety. He is suffering from severe concussion of the brain.

The Hospital was besieged by a crowd of people on Friday night, anxious to learn if any friends or relatives were amongst the injured.

The report given at the Hospital on Wednesday with regard to the injured victims was of a most favourable character. The three gentlemen – Messrs. Neate, Smith, and Watts – who have been considered to be in the most critical condition, and about whom some anxiety has been felt, cannot be considered to be out of danger, but if the rapid progress they are making towards recovery continues it is hoped shortly to be able to make this most satisfactory announcement.

How the Accident Happened

General comment is that the car was varying far too many passengers: indeed, eye-witnesses and many of the passengers declare that it was grossly overcrowded. In descending Victoria-road, the brakes either did not act, or were overpowered, and the momentum acquired in descending this steep thoroughfare hurried it along at a pace which convinced passing pedestrians, and even the passengers themselves, that an accident was inevitable. Whatever the feelings of the passengers were, no panic was displayed.

There was an absence of screaming, one and all awaiting with a grim quietness the denouement which all felt was bound to come. The car kept to the rails going down the hill. At the bottom is a sharp curve into Regent-circus. On reaching the bend, it ran on to the up line, rocked heavily, and then fell over on its side with great force. It was exceedingly fortunate that there was no car on the up line or the loss of life must have been much greater.

Lyons, the driver, stuck to his car to the last. He is said to have been an experienced motor-man. He received some slight injuries to his side, but soon recovered. The conductor, who was on top of the car, was picked up in a dazed condition, but he pulled himself together in a few minutes. Lyons declares that he put on his brakes on reaching the hill, and applied them as hard as he could. He never let his foot these until the car toppled over, and did all that he could to avert the disaster.

The trams belong to the Corporation of Swindon, and there is no doubt that the matter of compensation will have to be faced by the town authorities. The overcrowding allegations give a further serious aspect to the matters. Passengers are booked on a way bill, similar to the system followed in Bristol, the deviation being that the bill, instead of being placed in a prominent position within the car, is kept in portfolio form, and checked by the inspector whenever he mounts the platform. This way bill doubtless will be produced when require at the official enquiries which will be held, and, if accurately entered up, should show the exact number of persons who were riding. This can further be checked by the number of punched tickets issued.

This is not the first mishap which has occurred at the foot of Victoria-road, although fortunately, the previous accident was not attended with serious consequences. Warnings have more than once been uttered emphasising the necessity for special care being exercised in the descent of the hill, and at the annual dinner of the Chamber of Commerce, Mr A. E. Withey, a prominent local solicitor, expressed strong views on the question.

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