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The newsletter of the Angus Railway Group.

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## Editorial :

.....and so it's the festive season again, although you might be pardoned for thinking otherwise in view of the contents of this issue of the newsletter. The bulk of this edition concerns accidents and in particular, the collapse of the first Tay Bridge. The anniversary of the fall of the bridge is not an event to celebrate, but is important historically and has therefore found considerable attention in this issue.

On a cheerier note, the following is a short paragraph as it appeared in a 'between the wars' issue of the LMS magazine.

Christmas Greetings from Dundee.

Peace and goodwill on Christmas morn

Glad tidings may they shed

With messages of hope new born

And prosperous days ahead.

This was the message which met the eyes of passengers at the East station on Christmas week. Tastefully lettered on one of the publicity blackboards, this seasonable message attracted the attention of many travellers, not a few of whom commented on the excellent spirit of the staff in establishing such a bond between themselves and the travelling public. The artist was Mr J.R.W.Young, one of the booking clerks who is the stations unofficial publicity agent and who has been responsible for much creative work on the blackboards.

Finally, and as they say in all the best periodicals, " A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all our readers"

Extract from 'A History of Wreck Covers' by A E Hopkins (pub, by Robson Lowe Ltd., London)

City Page.

A particular chapter in the above book refers to the Tay Bridge disaster and although primarily concerned with the mail, the chapter opens with an account of the disaster itself. After referring to the final salvage operations of April 1880, Mr Hopkins continues.....

A letter stated to have been salvaged from this wreck has been shown me by the Reverend John Thomson of Carnyllie. It bears the departure mark BANFF A DE 28 79 and the text of the letter inside is headed Saturday, which was December 27th. The letter has obviously been under water and the writing has run so badly as to be almost illegible. The envelope is addressed to Aberdeen and the arrival mark ABERDEEN D DE 29 79 appears on the back. It is a mystery how a letter addressed from Banff to Aberdeen could have been travelling from south to north in a train very many miles south of either place on the day it was postmarked in Banff.

A curious explanation has been put forward as a possibility. It was apparently the practice to run a van of mixed mailbags direct to Edinburgh for quicker sorting and then to load the Aberdeen and other bags into the next available northbound train so as to have the mails for each place in bulk. If the letter was posted on the Saturday and was postmarked at Banff and sent straight away to Edinburgh on Sunday morning, Dec., 28th (the letter A in the departure mark suggests the earlier sorting) it could have been included at Edinburgh with other mails for Aberdeen in time to be travelling north on the ill fated Sunday evening train. As stated above, the first salvage from the disaster was two mail bags which were washed ashore at Broughty Ferry the same evening. If therefore, these bags were taken immediately to the Dundee sorting office, the letter could have reached Aberdeen the same day. The letter D in the arrival mark suggests a late sorting at Aberdeen.

It is curious that beyond the fact that the dates coincide and that the letter has obviously been under water, there is no evidence to connect it with the Tay Bridge disaster. It might be supposed that some sort of indication as to the cause of the damage would appear and also that the Dundee or Broughty Ferry postmark would have been applied after the mail was retrieved from the river. In any case this souvenir is addressed to Mrs Thomson the mother of the present owner, and he vouches for its authenticity.

On the other hand correspondence with the Postmasters of Banff and Aberdeen and the Regional Director of Scotland in Edinburgh gives rise to consider doubt as to whether it was possible that this letter could indeed have been on the ill fated train.

This was as far as the investigation had proceeded at the time the first edition of this work was published in May 1940. Here of necessity it had to rest during the long war years. Then in October 1946, the second post war conference of the postal history society was held in Edinburgh and I was present. I gave a good deal of publicity to the Tay Bridge problem during the conference and I suggested to that able postal historian, Mr C.W. Meredith of Broughty Ferry that as he lived on the scene of the mystery he may be able to pick up some clues which had eluded me. Mr Meredith quickly got to work and not only solved the problem but managed to locate no less than six other covers which had been salvaged from the ill fated mail train.

First of all it transpired that six bags of mail were carried on the train and these were in the charge of the postal guard Donald Murray. A photograph of the watch belonging to the guard of the train David McBeth, shows that it stopped at 7.17pm which fixes the time of the accident. A Mr Smith was employed at the custom house, Broughty Ferry and according to his testimony two bags of mail were recovered from the beach at Broughty at 8.30pm and were brought into the custom house. These two bags were therefore in the water for less than 1½ hours during which time they travelled over 4 miles. It is presumed the other four bags were washed out to sea and lost.

Miss Barclay, the postmistress at Broughty sent a telegram to Mr Gibb, the Dundee postmaster advising him that two bags of mail had been brought in. He thereupon sent out a cab to Broughty and the two bags were delivered at the Dundee GPO the same evening. The contents were then sorted and laid out to dry as the majority were badly soaked. Some were not very wet and must have been in the centre of the tied bundles. All were delivered on Monday Dec., 29th in the usual way. It is on record that the Dundee postman informed the recipients of these salvaged letters that they had just come from the bottom of the Tay.

Incidentally, the delivery of these letters after their almost incredible adventures probably sets an all time record for speed and efficiency in Post Office handling. Even my American friends could do no better!

The first of these six letters which have now been traced was posted at Carlisle on Dec 28th, 1879, It is addressed to Broughty Ferry and is franked by a pair of the small halfpenny adhesives. As this envelope shows no signs of immersion, it must have been protected by being in the middle of a tied bundle. For this reason it did not require to be dried and was stamped on the back DUNDEE DE29 79. This and the Banff to Aberdeen cover described earlier are the only two which show backstamps.

The second has the Liverpool departure 27 DE 79 and is addressed to Dundee. The penny red adhesive has washed off and the envelope shows considerable signs of wetting. There is an endorsement in red pencil probably put on in the post office 'Found on the beach at Broughty Ferry about 8.30pm on the night of the Tay Bridge accident'

The third is from Bridge of Weir and the date stamp of origin DE 27 79 appears on the back. The adhesive was washed off but the major portion of the cancellation PAISLEY U DE 27 79 remains visible. It is addressed to St Andrews, Fife. Its inclusion in the Dundee bag suggests that there was not sufficient mail for a direct bag and that it was a normal practice to re-sort in Dundee for the local bag to St Andrews. This cover was well soaked and was quite open as all traces of gum had been washed away.

The fourth was only slightly wetted but sufficiently to loosen the adhesive which is a penny red so that it crushed up badly. The cancellation is D BANFF DE 27 79. It is addressed to Dundee and bears an ink endorsement apparently put on by the recipient 'this letter went down with the Tay Bridge' This cover is of special interest as it confirms the routing of the Banff to Aberdeen letter. The fifth is a postal stationary postcard addressed to Dundee. The departure datestamp is BIRMINGHAM 4.30 PM 27 79. There is no transit or arrival mark. The card shows such evidence of immersion.

The sixth is the envelope of a letter sent from Glasgow to Dundee. There was apparently no direct routing between these two places and so everything from the West went by way of Edinburgh. The badly soaked envelope had been cancelled GLASGOW DE 27 79. There were no other datestamps or markings.

These six and the first cover described make the seven known survivors of the Tay Bridge mail. No doubt others will come to light in the future.

The opening of the Tay Bridge to rail traffic in May 1878 heralded a new era in passenger and freight transport between Dundee and Edinburgh. The ferries across the Tay between Broughty Ferry and Tayport could now be avoided and the bridge connected up to the original main line with a new link from Wormit to Leuchars via St Fort. A faster service between Dundee and Burntisland was introduced by the NBR and new ferry boats inaugurated for the crossing of the Forth, this river did not receive its bridge until 1890. through London to Aberdeen and coaches were still taken around by Polmont and Larbert however as the Caledonian Railway still kept the NBR away from the highly profitable Anglo Scottish traffic.

The NBR works at Cowlares built two express engines in 1871 No's 224 and 264. The former locomotive turned out to be the motive power for the last train from Burntisland to Dundee on 23rd December 1879; the 5.27pm, a last train in more ways than one. At the time, no., 224 was in use as spare engine at Dundee and not the usual type of locomotive employed on this train. The train left Burntisland consisting of five coaches and a luggage van used to carry large items of goods, mail and passengers belongings that were to large for the compartments. Most of all, it was used for items that had been brought up from the south to Edinburgh and then brought across the Forth ferry. It started as a lightly loaded train but more passengers entrained at the Fife stations and apart from the crew of 224 there was a guard plus two other railway employees making their way to Dundee to begin work.

The weather began to worsen as the train made its way to Dundee and a cold and wet December night was setting in. As the train neared the estuary of the Tay the wind began to get stronger but these were common enough conditions in the area. No 224 hauled the train into St Fort where all tickets were checked and collected as was usual for a last train to Dundee.; all was well apart from the weather and once out of the howling gale, the station staff did their necessary job of counting the tickets and checking for any discrepancy in accounting. It was this job that was to prove of great value later on as it was those tickets that showed how many passengers were on the train that night. If the crew of the engine and train are counted then a total of 75 past St Fort but did not reach Tay Bridge station. Meanwhile 224 was beginning to receive the full force of the storm as it slowed down at the signal box at Wormit (Tay Bridge South) in order to collect the token which gave it permission to enter the single line section that crossed over the Tay Bridge. The signalman in the box by the Esplanade waited to collect the token from 224 but this wait was in vain. The train had passed onto the bridge at 7pm or shortly afterwards and vanished into the Tay with the central portion of the bridge wrapped around it like a killer python; the thirteen high girders claimed their victim cruelly and destructively, the passengers died along with the crew as carriages were crushed to matchwood, the fireman being almost burnt alive as he was thrown against the firebox of 224. Another man killed indirectly by the disaster was Sir Thomas Bouch the designer of the bridge, he died a broken man shortly after the subsequent inquiry was published. Its results were not exactly favourable towards him.

In the days and weeks following the disaster, 46 bodies were recovered, the remainder being claimed by the fast running tidal estuary and the North sea. It seems ironic that out of all the deaths and subsequent grief amongst families there should be one survivor, the locomotive and tender. No 224 was salvaged from the Tay in the Spring of 1880 with the assistance of divers, who located it, and salvage vessels. Several attempts at lifting failed but the locomotive was eventually beached at Tayport where it remained for a while.

Monday October 22nd 1979

The rarity of railway accidents in this country inevitably makes any such accident front page news. Since railways began, safety techniques have been introduced and British Rail can claim one of the best safety records in the world. Dundee has sampled tragedy in the past through railway accidents as it is ironic that almost 100 years after the Tay bridge disaster the rear coaches of another passenger train should fall into the estuary within sight of the bridge. On Monday October 22nd 1979 shortly after 11 am the 9.30 am Glasgow to Aberdeen passenger train ploughed into the rear of the 1.44 am Glasgow to Dundee passenger train. The Dundee train had left Perth 22 minutes late and shortly after leaving Invergowrie it came to a stand probably due to a locomotive failure. The Dundee and Perth branch skirts Invergowrie Bay at this point and the impact of the collision sent the rear three coaches of the Dundee train into the river bed.

The crewmen of 47 208 haulin the 9.30 were killed instantly. The driver was 52 year old Robert Dundas of Tayport who had been a railwayman since he was sixteen. The second man was Billy Hume (40) from Dundee. Both men were from Dundee West sheds. Two passengers on the Dundee train were also killed and 49 people injured.

The disaster would have been much worse had a train been due from Dundee as both lines were blocked. With the closure of Invergowrie and Fifeville Junction outcrops several years ago the section now runs from Longcross to Auchinham Junction, a distance of approx. 5 miles. How the train came to be in the same section is a mystery which only the enquiry can solve.

LINDA R. HOWE.

ANOTHER 100th ANNIVERSARY

JIM FINE

On the 5th January twenty years ago a reorganisation of rail transport took place that changed the face of rail travel in the Dundee area. On that date in 1959 the passenger station at Dundee East closed its doors for the last time after more than 100 years of service. Local Dundee to Perth trains were withdrawn from Dundee West station with the introduction of diesel multiple units on a new service between Perth and Arbroath via Dundee Tay Bridge station. It was considered at the time that Tay Bridge station and its staff would be hard pushed to deal with the extra traffic from Dundee East station yet six years later Tay Bridge was not only dealing with this traffic but also that of Dundee West where closure took place in May of 1965.

Today Tay Bridge, or simply Dundee as it is now called, deals with upwards of 150 trains every day and issues nearly half a million tickets every year. These figures are all the more considerable when the physical proportions of the station are taken into consideration. The Tay Bridge tragedy doubtless holds the place of honour at this time, but it should not be forgotten that the Tay Bridge station is also 100 years old and operates in much the same form as it did when opened in 1879.

Answers to Ian G Morris railway quiz from last issue.

1. 46202 Princess Anne (originally 6202 the experimental turbomotive) was rebuilt as a Princess Royal but had to be scrapped; it was involved in the triple collision at Harrow and Wealdstone in 1952.
2. Mallard, Bittern, Union of South Africa, Sir Nigel Gresley, Dwight D Eisenhower, Dominion of Canada. Total 6.
3. The restaurant cars were old converted pullmans.
4. The locomotive.
5. St Fort did not serve a village or town of that name and Killin Junction was an exchange station only.
6. Crianlarich Upper.
7. Hawick.

I referred to Ian as an Englishman in the last issue and have since discovered that he was only educated there. To intimate that someone is English is not an error to be taken lightly and I most sincerely apologise to him ! Ed.

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A Tay Bridge Survivor (Continued)

However the NBR were not satisfied to let it become a macabre reminder of the previous years events so it was rerailed and towed back to the works at Cowlairs. Damage was found to be of a minor nature and after repairs, no. 224 was returned to revenue earning service. From now on it carried a nickname, The Diver. No 224 or 'The Diver' continued to work efficiently until 1885 when it was rebuilt with four cylinders instead of two. This was an exercise to try and improve the thermal efficiency of steam traction and many railway companies were at work to this end at that time; indeed it was a continuous process which lasted well into modern times. The compound principle had been built into 224, with low pressure steam passing through two cylinders while steam at a much higher pressure was forced into the others. This was not a success however and the engine was converted to its original state a short time afterwards.

A further rebuilding took place in 1897 and 224 was renumbered 1192. The NBR continued to use the engine on branch lines and secondary duties as far south as Berwick and Newcastle until its final withdrawal from service in 1919. No 224 is unique in the annals of British Railway history and indeed its life of 48 years was longer than many of the disaster victims whose journey it shared a sobering thought to consider at a time when the centenary is so fresh in the mind.

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Two exhibitions depicting the Tay Bridge disaster have begun at Dundee museum and at Du dee Central library, Wellgate. Both have much originality to offer and are recommended.

A four page supplement is to appear in the Dundee Courier on Friday the 28th and a half hour programme is planned for Scottish television the same night. Other local societies and newspapers are to commemorate the centenary.

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December 28th is also the centenary of the Elliot rail disaster of 1906



Addendum to the article in the last issue on the removal of Brechin signal box and shed.

Walter Simms has been in touch to say that he has discovered that his brother, J. Simms was the last full time signalman at Brechin until 1958 when he was offered the post of porter/signalman which he turned down as it was a downgrading. This post was created as a result of closing the Brechin to Careston section (abandoned for two years) also 1958. The freight service from Forfar consisted of one goods via careston and return and one goods via Bridge of Dun returning the same way and not as stated in the last issue.

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BOOK REVIEW : CALEDONIAN CAVELCADE

As the son of a former Caledonian engine driver and collector of anything marked with the magical word Caledonian from buttons and luggage labels to platform lamps, I readily purchased a copy of this new book by A E Glen, I A Glen with A G Dunbar. I must confess, I was very disappointed with the reproduction quality of many of the photographs. Captions are most descriptive and a quick glance through same only produced one mistake; Balquhiddor without the 'h' Many of the photographs have already appeared in previous railway publications but nevertheless there are several rare and interesting examples In common with most books on railways in Scotland, photographs in Angus are few and far between although there is a good one of a snow covered Connor ".@.O. thought to be taken near Barnhill on the Dundee Forfar branch.

LINDSAY HORNE.

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CLASSIFIED CORNER

For sale; BR and LMS handlamps, all fully restored from £10 ea.  
Lindsay Horne.

Wanted; Scottish pre group handlamps and tickets, also any material or information on the Dundee & Arbroath Rly.  
Jim Page.

(Address's of the above on committee list, page one)

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COCK O' THE NORTH.....

Jan 1973; Something completely different! This issue included a book review, 'The Tay Bridge Disaster' by John Thomas.

Jan 1974 Subscriptions went up to a staggering £2 per year ! and if this proved to much, payment could be made in two £1 enstalments.

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It is hoped to iclude the following articles in the next issue of Cock O' the North;

The Carnyllie Railway,

An unusual and little known accident at Dundee West.

The Highland line.

