

## 1869: A Horrible Train Accident

With the arrival of the railways, people had to adjust not only to much higher speeds of travel than those to which they had been accustomed, but also to machines much larger and more powerful than any they had ever met on roads.

Soon after the London & South-Western Railway reached Axminster in the middle of 1860 there was an accident in which John Creedy, the employee of a contractor, was killed while cleaning rolling stock in the shunting yards. Other local accidents early in the railway's operational life endangered life and limb, but none was as horrible as the one which occurred on 2 August 1869.

That accident resulted in the death of William Loveridge, aged 51, the landlord of the Red Lion Inn on Lyme Street, Axminster.

According a report in the 'Taunton Courier & Western Advertiser' (TCWA) of 11 August 1869, the inquest, which "*... was held on Thursday by N M Loggin Esq, coroner for Dorset, and a respectable jury, of whom the Rev Mr Brine was foreman ...*", was told that William Loveridge had "*... left home to join a fishing party on the Axe; he was perfectly sober and in good spirits*". Another report, in the 'Salisbury & Winchester Journal' (SWJ) of 7 August 1869 gave the time of his departure from home as "*... about two o'clock in the afternoon*".

The TCWA report stated that the inquest was actually "*... held at Axe Farm, Chardstock, near where the accident took place*". At that time the parishes of Chardstock and Hawkchurch were still in Dorset, which is why the coroner for Dorset was responsible for running the inquest.

The SWJ states that in order to join up with the other members of the fishing party, William Loveridge "*... had to cross the railway, and immediately he got upon the line the down express came up and dashed against him. His body was frightfully mutilated, one leg being carried by the engine for more than a quarter of a mile. The line was strewn with the remains.*" The TCWA article reported that the train driver "*... saw a man try to cross the line, but there was not time to blow the whistle until the accident occurred. The train was travelling at the rate of about 45 miles an hour.*"

A second report in the TCWA of 11 August (covering the accident rather than the inquest) is considerably more graphic, but also tells us that the wind was blowing hard at the time, which would have masked the noise of the approaching engine. As might be expected, several other papers carried reports, including the Bridport News of 13 August 1869, which included various witness statements.

The jury returned a verdict of 'accidental death'.

William Loveridge left a widow (Eliza), three sons (Lisle, James and Isaac Drayton) and a daughter (Mary Margaret).