

The Great Railway Disaster at Norwich from *The Illustrated London News*,  
1842

On the night of Thursday week, it our painful task to state, one of the most appalling accidents that ever happened in English railway traveling occurred on the Great Eastern Railway ... A mistaken order from Mr. T. Cooper, the night inspector at Norwich station, allowed the down express to leave Norwich, while the combined mail-train from Great Yarmouth was suffered to come on from Brundall. The consequence was that the doomed trains met at Thorpe, nearly two miles from Norwich, and ran headlong into each other. The rails were slippery from rain; there was a slight curve in the line at the fatal spot, so that the lights of neither train could be seen; there was not time to apply the brakes, and the two engines rushed at each other at full speed. The engine drawing the combined mail-train (No. 54) was one of the most approved modern construction and of great power. The engine drawing the train from Norwich was a lighter one, but had acquired, with its train, a considerable momentum. In the crash which followed the collision the funnel of engine No. 54 was carried away, and the engine from Norwich rushed on top of its assailant, some of the carriages of each train following, until a pyramid was formed of the locomotives, the shattered carriages, and the wounded, dead, or dying passengers. Eighteen persons were killed, and four have since died.

... Imagination can only faintly conceive the fearful shock of two such bodies propelled with this velocity, each presenting exactly the same points of contact, and giving and receiving at the same instant the full force of each other's blow. It was, in fact, the meeting of two iron vans, of nearly equal size and power, urged on by steam, with an irresistible weight behind urging them on. The two engines and tenders weighted each forty-five and forty tons. This made some eighty tons of metal hurled almost through the air from opposite points, to say nothing of the force exerted at the point of impact. People living close by thought they heard a thunder peal.