

LONDON AND BIRMINGHAM RAILWAY 1838

Early working of the line: manning by police
and signalling.

London and Birmingham Railway. - Although the road between Birmingham and Rugby on the one side, and London and Denbigh Hall on the other, may now be said to be in the most complete working order, still there are many parts of the line as regards embellishments and erections, unfinished, particularly at the Birmingham end. The buildings in course of erection at the point where the Grand Junction, and Birmingham and London meet, are on a truly magnificent and extensive scale, and when finished will cover an area of about twenty acres of ground. This, however, will comprise a spacious enclosed yard and stores for warehousing goods, a large engine house, capable of holding sixteen engines with their tenders. At the entrance of this building are two immense tanks, which, when filled, contain two hundred tons of water, supplied by the Birmingham Water Works Company. There is likewise on this area a beautiful range of booking offices, with separate waiting rooms at either end for the passengers by the first and second class carriages. In addition to these buildings, there is a noble edifice, in course of erection at the main entrance to the station, indeed as a general office for the meetings of the Directors, and a suite of rooms on the ground floor, which is set apart for refreshment supplied to the passengers by Mr. Dee, of the Royal Hotel. One of the most striking features at the grand station (which is not more than three parts of a mile from the principal coach offices and hotels), is the magnificent shedding, supported by elegant pillars, erected by Mr. Bramah, the extreme lightness and beauty of which excites admiration. It is capable of covering not less than sixty carriages, and built on the same plan as that at the Euston-square terminus, but is more spacious; and being erected subsequently to the one just named, may be supposed to have received every improvement of which the design was susceptible. It may, perhaps, be as well here to state that the Commissioners of Birmingham intend to clear away several of the narrow and filthy streets in the immediate neighbourhood of the station, forming a grand thoroughfare to the centre of the town, and from the spirit with which the plan is taken up, there is every reason to believe that it will be conceived and executed in a spirit worthy of the body with which it originates, and the great undertaking which called it into existence.

To work the seventy miles of road now opened, the Company have already at their command about twenty-six powerful engines, a supply of steam power which, there is little reason to doubt, will obviate much of that inconvenience, and prevent many of those accidents which have marked the working of the Grand Junction line. Availing themselves of the hints which these mishaps have suggested, the Director have likewise a numerous and effective body of police, who are placed under the direction of an active, experienced, and intelligent superintendent. The men on this establishment have been carefully selected - They are dressed in a green uniform, are remarkably respectful in their behaviour, and are placed along the whole extent of line, almost within hail of each other, so that the slightest obstruction on the rails is immediately detected, and should accident or interruption occur to the trains passing up or down, the intelligence can be conveyed to the next station with a rapidity outstripping even the powers of steam.

On a great portion of the line the granite blocks upon which the rails rest are placed diamond-wise; thus giving the greatest support to the rail which the blocks can afford. Over the embankments where the ground is not as yet sufficiently firm, instead of granite blocks the rails are supported by square blocks of wood, which run across the entire breadth of the line. The wood is 'Kyanized', as it is termed, to prevent its rotting in the ground; but the motion is by no means so uniform and steady as over the granite portions of the line, where there is no spring or elasticity in the material employed.

One peculiarity in the London and Birmingham Railway is that the whole line is fenced in, and a kind of telegraphic communication by means of flags is kept up, by which the different trains are immediately apprized of any obstructions.