

**‘Place on Rail’.**  
**Transportation of the Dead**  
**by Train in the UK**



Loading a coffin at Waterloo from *Terminus* (1961)

**Brian Parsons**

## **‘Place on Rail’. Transportation of the Dead by Train in the UK**

From construction in the 1830s, the UK rail network brought mobility not only for the living but also the dead. As a technological advancement railways revolutionised the transportation of coffins through providing an efficient, swift and cost-effective mode of conveyance; wherever a station existed, a coffin could be despatched or received. It was a task that continued until the motor hearse finally triumphed. Undertakers were key to facilitating this through booking the journey with the rail company along with delivering to and collecting coffins from stations. One London funeral director consistently records this task in their registers as ‘Place on rail at...’.

Research into the movement of coffins by train has received little attention with the exception of studies into two cemetery railway services, accounts of high-profile journeys (such as royalty, members of the Churchill family, Dr Barnardo and William Gladstone) and a few brief references in biographical texts.<sup>1</sup> This is the first study exploring the domestic despatch of coffins in the UK.

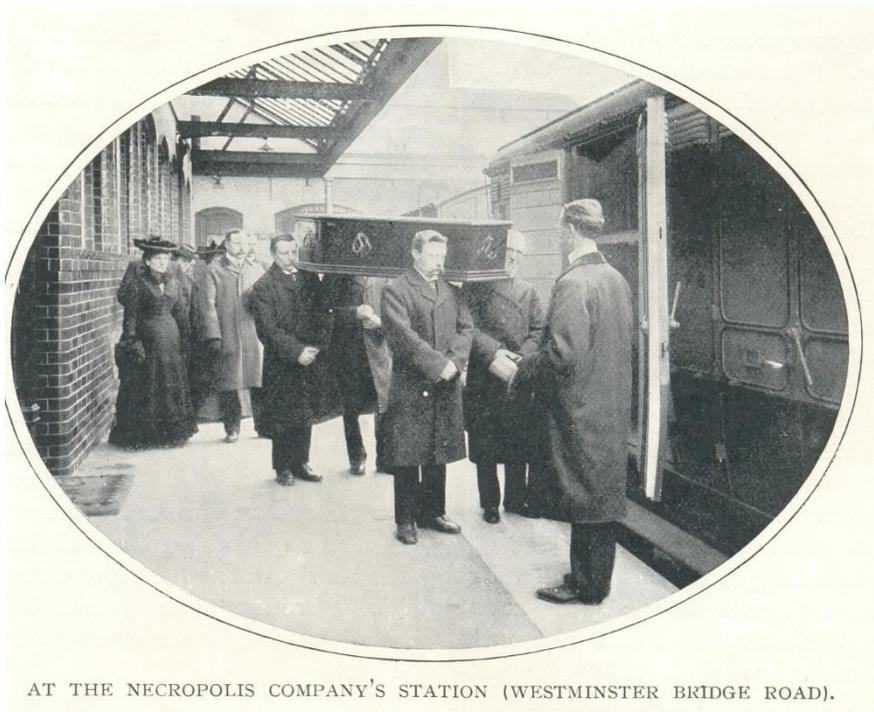
Drawing largely from funeral directors’ records, this article examines the movement of coffins in the UK from the 1850s to the late 1950s, through exploring the scope, scale and cost of transportation along with booking and conveyance arrangements.

### **Introduction**

Historically, the dead have either been buried where death occurred or returned to a location identified as ‘home’, with wealth and status being the key determinants as to whether this journey was completed. Prior to the railways, transport of a coffin was by a horse-drawn vehicle or, if abroad, by ship, both being costly and time-consuming.<sup>2</sup> Whilst the rail network stimulated mobility for business, social and leisure purposes, it also increased the potential of death occurring away from the family home. Returning the body helped fulfil the psychological need for the dead to rest near those closest to the deceased.

The building of the UK’s rail infrastructure coincided with the opening of the first wave of burial grounds, a development that effectively severed the Church of England’s monopoly on the provision of accommodation for the dead.<sup>3</sup> Joint stock companies established cemeteries in the urban areas during the 1830s, such as Kensal Green (1832) and Highgate (1839) in London along with Liverpool (1826), Sheffield (1836), York (1837) and

elsewhere. Following the Burial Acts 1852 and 1853, Burial Boards were permitted to provide cemeteries financed by the ratepayers; the interment of 'non-parishioners' (that is non-residents or non-inhabitants of the area) was deterred through penalty of a higher rate.<sup>4</sup> The opportunity to purchase a family grave in which multiple interments could take place encouraged the dead to be transported 'home' for interment. If death occurred away from the area, the coffin could be transferred to the nearest railway station and then by horse-drawn hearse to the cemetery. Although distance determined the cost, the attraction of being interred in a family grave and avoiding a surcharge for non-residency became an additional benefit of transporting the coffin 'home'.



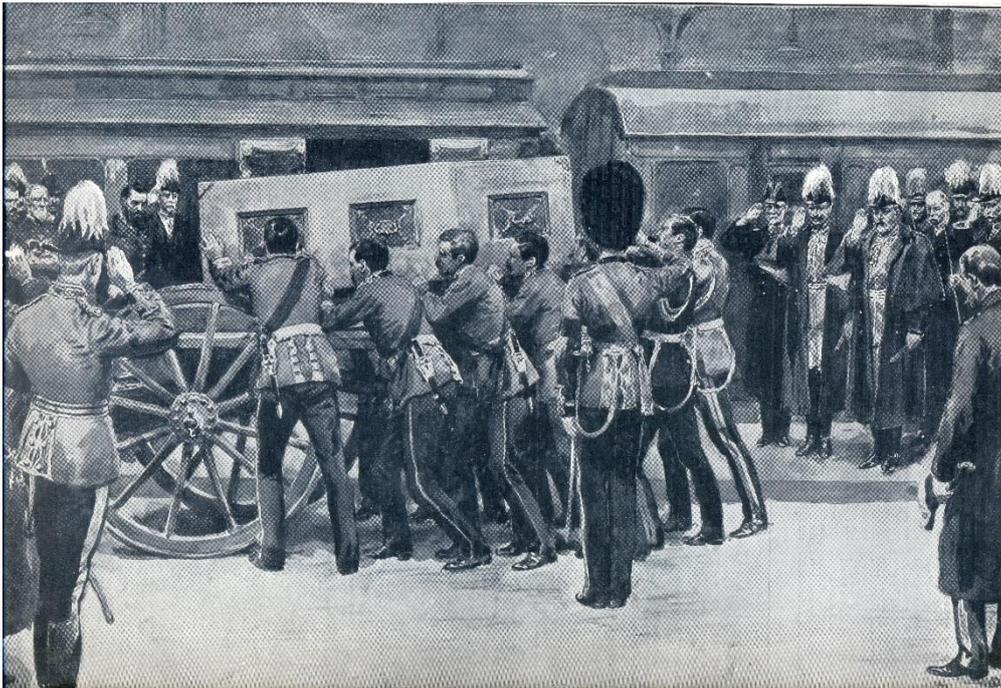
(from *Living London* 1903)

In addition to moving coffins between stations anywhere on the rail network, two services between fixed points emerged, in both cases being London termini linked to cemeteries. The London Necropolis and National Mausoleum Company transported coffins and mourners from a private station adjacent to Waterloo to Brookwood Cemetery near Woking. The service commenced in the early 1850s and continued until the station was bombed in 1941.<sup>5</sup> The second was from Belle Isle, north of King's Cross station, to the Great Northern Cemetery at New Southgate. At only seven miles from the capital, the short distance resulted in its under-utilisation and abandonment only two years after commencing in 1861.<sup>6</sup> The proposal of a third arrangement between Liverpool Street station and the City of London Cemetery at Ilford

never came to fruition.<sup>7</sup> This research stands outside these two services as it concerns the general distribution of coffins to stations often near, but not adjacent to cemeteries.

As this research further reveals, the railways transported the dead for another sanitary form of disposal that emerged in the late nineteenth century: cremation. Woking Crematorium was used for the first time in March 1885 and although attracting only modest patronage in the early years, the most efficient (and often the only) way to reach Surrey was by train. Furthermore, related investigations indicate that ashes reached their final destination by rail.

The transportation of multiple coffins, not only following accidents and disasters, but containing paupers to schools of anatomy was also a function of the railway. Similarly, specialist suppliers despatched unoccupied coffins to undertakers requiring bespoke receptacles; one manufacturer even invested in their own siding and wagons.



On Saturday 2 February 1901, Queen Victoria's coffin was placed onto a specially constructed bier secured in the centre of the Great Western first class saloon No 229. The late Queen's instructions were that the interior be hung with purple and white velvet drapes. After a slight delay to the scheduled time of 8.45, the train departed. It was preceded by a pilot engine running 10-15 minutes ahead to ensure the line was clear. The route was via Havant Junction, Billingshurst, Leatherhead, Mitcham, Balham and Clapham Junction. Time was gained during the journey and the train arrived at Victoria station at 10.58. As the train passed along the route many people knelt at the lineside.

(The Sphere)

Rail travel embraced all classes and it is significant to note that the coffins of the royalty and nobility were transported by rail until the 1970s. Queen Victoria (1901), Queen Alexandra (1925), George V (1936), the Duke of Kent (1942), George VI (1952) and Earl Mountbatten (1979) can all be cited.<sup>8</sup> Sir Winston Churchill's funeral (1965) was notable as it used all forms of funerary transport, except air travel, and with much emphasis on rail.<sup>9</sup> Although some high profile examples are mentioned, this research primarily focusses on more domestic transportations.

Whilst the rail service was utilised for moving the dead for just over a century from the 1850s, a potential challenge was provided around 1900 by the appearance of the motor hearse. However, this research reveals that both forms of transport continued in parallel for a further fifty years. With requests for international transportations increasing in the post-war years, coffins tended to be moved by air, a form of transport also utilised, albeit to a lesser extent, for transfers throughout the UK. By this time the preference for cremation had increased resulting in fewer coffins needing to be transported 'home' while the movement of caskets of ashes became consigned to the postal service.

Although not explored in this paper, in the early years of their development railways they were inextricably linked to mortality through concerns about safety and reliability. Publications such as *Punch* highlighted and ridiculed the pursuit of profits at the sacrifice of high standards of engineering and signalling. Furthermore, accounts of spectral figures having a presence on the railway, such as in Charles Dickens' *Mugby Junction*, were often woven into fiction.<sup>10</sup>

Funeral directors' records have proved ideal for researching this hitherto unexplored subject as they contain details of the timings of the journey, arrangements for transport to and from the stations, booking with the railway companies and costs. Many of these records are owned by the firms named; in cases where businesses have ceased trading, the records are still retained by a related organisation or held in a public archive. Frederick W Paine opened a network of branches in south west London and North Surrey during the interwar years and was responsible for many such transportations; their records are a particularly rich source of information. Other details have been drawn from firms in the wider London area including JH Kenyon (central London), W Garstin (central London), William Tookey (central London), CG Hatt (Kensington), Charles Farebrother (Kingston), TH Ebbutt (Croydon),

Maxwell Bros (Streatham and Brixton), WS Bond (Acton) and A France & Son (Holborn).<sup>11</sup> A few examples have also been taken from the records of HH Jordan of Worthing, WT Dunbar (Edinburgh) along with information drawn from the registers of one unidentified undertaker trading in north London in the 1850s. However, whilst these provide much information, the degree to which these records are representative of the whole of the UK needs to be considered. It is possible that the financial prosperity of the south east is likely to contrast to other areas. Regrettably, it has not been possible to locate other records to give a broader perspective. This factor will be discussed further under the heading 'scale'.

A further important source of information are newspapers as these give not only details of the rail journey, but also the funeral. Many examples can be located in both the national and regional press.

The use of the railways to transport coffins is explored under four headings: scope, scale, practical arrangements and costs. Inevitably there is some overlap, for example costs straddle a number of aspects, but are afforded comprehensive analysis under the final heading.

### **Scope: Long Distance Transportation of Coffins**

Evidence shows that the majority of coffins were transported over what can be described as a 'long distance'. Although without precise definition, this would invariably, but not necessarily, be greater than one hundred miles. Many examples can be cited from all the records surveyed; the timeframe embraces a century. The records of most undertakers/funeral directors utilised in this research indicate that they took the coffin from their premises, or from a residence in their immediate trading area, to a London station where it was placed on a train. The earliest example that has been traced dates from August 1840 when W Garstin arranged for a coffin to be transported for London to Derby.<sup>12</sup> A second more detailed example is from November 1858 when an unidentified firm of funeral directors delivered a coffin by horse-drawn hearse to the 'Gt Northern' station (presumed to be King's Cross) and placed it on a train destined for Belton in Lincolnshire. Other examples include: Charing Cross to Tunbridge Wells (Maxwell Bros, September 1871), King's Cross to Sheffield (Maxwell Bros, June 1878), Waterloo to Southampton (JH Kenyon, January 1881), King's Cross to Berwick-upon-Tweed (Maxwell Bros, January 1897), Waterloo to Salisbury (WS Bond, August 1905), Paddington to Gloucester (FW Paine, October 1912), Clapham Junction to Brighton (FW Paine, March 1913), St Pancras to Selkirk (FW

Paine, January 1928), Paddington to Plymouth, King's Cross to Bradford (TH Ebbutt, April 1937) Euston to Liverpool (FW Paine, April 1948), Paddington to Abergavenny (FW Paine, May 1949), Euston to Motherwell (FW Paine, May 1956).

As can be seen, these examples were intra-urban, that is coffins being sent from London termini to mainline or significant stations rather than branch line destinations. A full analysis of all rail transportations undertaken by FW Paine during 1918, 1928, 1942 and 1956 (see below) reveals that in the early years the place of destination and reception were not restricted to termini or main stations. For example, in 1918 FW Paine delivered coffins to stations in their trading area included Worcester Park (destined for Chelmsford), Kingston (to Southwick), Surbiton (to Salisbury), Hampton Wick (to Ferryside) and New Malden (to Keighley), in addition to mainline stations, such as Euston (to Birmingham), Liverpool Street (to Diss) and Marylebone (to Northampton). Some of the former transportations would have involved either removing the coffin from the van in which it was placed and transferring to another station or shunting the van separately onto the lines of another company. Maxwell Bros records show that the coffin was loaded at Herne Hill station (destined for Gillingham [Kent] and a second to Margate) in 1904.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Farebrother notes a coffin placed on a train at Surbiton in June 1934 for Durham.<sup>14</sup>

Until the advent of motor vehicles, horse-drawn hearses were used for transfer between station. For example, JH Kenyon received instructions to meet the train arriving at Victoria station at 10.50am on 16 September 1881 and deliver a coffin to Euston Station.<sup>15</sup> In February 1878 Maxwell Bros used their horse-drawn hearse to convey a coffin from Waterloo station to the 'Great Northern Railway King's Cross station'. Including the sending of a telegram (perhaps to confirm receipt or completion of the task), the firm charged £1 6s for this service. Such transfers were an additional expense requiring the engagement of an undertaker and his staff for the journey between termini. Following the introduction of the motor hearse around 1900 evidence shows that this vehicle was used for the initial journey to the termini and that the conveyance was completed without any further intermediate handling. Indeed, when the Coventry funeral director A Pargetter introduced his motor hearse in 1910 that, 'One of the maker's strongest reasons for having this hearse built was to do away with the great inconvenience connected with railway transit, as well as the objection of having 'the bodies conveyed in milk, fruit and other vans, used by the railway companies for

this purpose.<sup>16</sup> This was confirmed by a directive from the South Eastern and Chatham's Railway company stating that vans used previously for the conveyance of fish should not be used to transport coffins, or if they must they should be disinfected.<sup>17</sup> The issue clearly continued as it was discussed at the British Undertakers' Association's conference in 1922 when members were asked to submit examples of coffin conveyed under insanitary conditions.<sup>18</sup>

An analysis of the FW Paine data from 1928 confirms that the delivery and receiving stations were on the same line. For example, St Pancras to Selkirk, New Malden to Templecombe and Euston to Heysham (then by ferry to Co Tyrone in Southern Ireland). In 1942, deliveries were restricted to London termini and Surbiton, and only London termini in 1948 and 1956.

One entry from February 1905 in Farebrother's records show that a detour was made by road from Kingston to Twickenham as the latter station was more convenient for reaching Reading. If the coffin had been placed on the train at the closer Kingston or Surbiton stations, the coffin would have to have been removed at Twickenham and then placed on a Reading bound train.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, if the coffin had been sent to Waterloo a transfer across the station concourse would have been necessary.

Both FW Paine and Farebrother utilised Surbiton station and this warrants comment. Although not a scheduled stopping point for all trains departing from Waterloo to the south west, its location near to both firms meant that it was a convenient loading place, thus eliminating the need to take the coffins to the terminus. Prior to rebuilding in 1937-8, the station was fully equipped to deal with local freight as it had a modestly sized goods yard in addition to relatively easy access to the platform for road users. Departures from Surbiton include: Barnstaple (May 1902), Aldershot (March 1903), Parkstone (April 1912), Earley Road (January 1913), Weymouth (November 1918), Templecombe (March 1928), Portsmouth (June 1942) and Lyndhurst (October 1942). Examples can be cited from Farebrother's records: to Devonport, where the entry records: 'Put on Rail at Surbiton 6.10am, had a train stop 5.50 from Waterloo' (February 1905). A few coffins were despatched from Surbiton to destinations not on the mainline, such as Midsomer Norton (December 1906) and Badmington (November 1917).<sup>20</sup> Surbiton is also mentioned in the short distance section below.

Following despatch by rail, funeral directors were correspondingly responsible for meeting the train at the destination and the journey to the

cemetery or crematorium. Thompson argues that in general terms the role of horse-drawn transport must not be under-estimated when assessing the



Described as ‘the most prominent woman in England’, Lady Sykes died in London on 3 June 1912, aged 56. Her coffin was taken to King’s Cross station for a train departing at 6.30am on 7 June. Stopping at York to pick up additional mourners, the train then made its way to Sledmere & Fimber station. This photo shows a group of Roman Catholic clergy leading the coffin which is being shouldered from the platform before being placed on a farm waggon for the final journey to Sledmere. (Author’s collection)

importance of railways in the nineteenth century. He stated: ‘Without carriages and carts the railways would have been like stranded whales, giants unable to use their strength, for these were the only means of getting people and goods to the doors, of houses, warehouses and markets, and factories, where they wanted to be.’<sup>21</sup> Cemeteries should have been added to this list. He continued, ‘The railways had not replaced horse-drawn traffic: it had greatly increased the demand for it.’

Firms advertised the service of inter-stations transfers or completing a funeral to colleagues through trade cards in the pages of *The Undertakers’ Journal*. The section was prefaced with: ‘The following trade cards are those of the leading undertakers and funeral carriage proprietors situated near the various London stations, and in the provincial towns named, who are prepared to assist undertakers coming from distant towns by meeting them with bearers, funeral carriages, hearse or car, and every requisite.’<sup>22</sup> The central London firms in particular indicated their proximity to a terminus, such as W English at Bethnal Green being near Liverpool Street.

An early example of a collection can be found in the Maxwell Bros registers where the firm attended St Pancras station with a horse-drawn hearse to remove a coffin destined for burial in Norwood Cemetery (April 1878). There are many others examples concerning the London termini: London Bridge (departure station not given, JH Kenyon May 1881); Victoria from Worthing (HH Jordan, April 1888); Clapham Junction from Worthing (HH Jordan, April 1890); Paddington (departure location not given. CG Hatt December 1899); Liverpool Street (departure location not given. Farebrother August 1906); Purley from Brighton (TH Ebbutt, September 1907); St Pancras from Bedford (Maxwell Bros, January 1918); Paddington from Shrewsbury (FW Paine, January 1928); Paddington from Llangammarch Wells (FW Paine, April 1942) and Victoria from Sheffield (FW Paine, February 1948). The heading below covering WWI denotes the extent of soldier's coffins being received at Kingston and Surbiton stations between 1915 and 1919.

### **Scope: Short Distance Transportation**

Although the majority of coffins were transported lengthy journeys by rail, there is also evidence of what can be described as relatively short distances. Again, the definition is broad, being between approximately ten and one hundred miles. There are several reasons for this. It may be that the funeral director was not immediately available to undertake the journey to collect the deceased as staff and vehicles were already committed on funerals. The most likely explanation, however, was that it was more cost and time efficient to use rail transport rather than the horse-drawn hearse. This was particularly the case before the introduction of motor hearses. The data gives some early examples. In May 1894, JH Kenyon placed a coffin along with mourners on a train at Liverpool Street station destined for Shenfield, a journey of about 30 miles. In March 1903, FW Paine placed a coffin on the 1.30pm train at Surbiton destined for Aldershot, a distance of 29 miles. Farebrother arranged for a coffin to go the 47 miles from Liverpool Street to Braintree in October 1904.

One transportation arranged by FW Paine in July 1913 was for a very short distance when the firm engaged the Holborn-based funeral director, A France & Son, to remove a deceased from the Royal National Hospital in Bloomsbury and take the coffin to Waterloo station. It was then conveyed on a train to Norbiton, the station before Kingston. At a distance of just eleven miles, the rail journey took a little over 30 minutes.<sup>23</sup> Utilising the train for this short journey meant that staff and vehicles were not committed for a relatively

lengthy period of time on conveyance rather than funeral work. At one shilling per mile, the charge for transporting coffins was also considerably lower than using animate power, although it's possible a minimum charge applied. Regrettably, the rail charge is not indicated in the register.

The reverse can be identified in an example from June 1914 when a coffin destined for burial in the Jewish Cemetery at Plashett in east London was placed on the 12.58 train from Surbiton, which arrived at Waterloo at 1.27. It was then taken by horse-drawn hearse to the cemetery.<sup>24</sup>

At a distance of 12 miles, Surbiton was a convenient station for reaching Brookwood Cemetery and it would appear that the station was used as an unscheduled stopping point for the Necropolis train, a factor that has hitherto been unrecorded.<sup>25</sup> Examples can be found in the FW Paine registers. In February 1902 the Necropolis train was halted briefly *en route* to Woking (then Brookwood) to place a coffin on board. Three first class return fares were purchased at a cost of 17s 3d.<sup>26</sup> An entry in June 1913 reads: 'Put on Necropolis Train at Surbiton' and a fee was paid direct to the Company.<sup>27</sup> Then in July 1919, the Mother Superior of a local convent was 'Put on Necropolis train at Surbiton 12.15' for the journey to 'Brookwood Necropolis' followed by burial in section of the cemetery owned by the religious order.<sup>28</sup> However, the Farebrother records note that in April 1927 the coffin was taken to Waterloo in contrast to the more convenient Surbiton: 'Put on rail at Necropolis station and finish. Left convent at 10.20 for 11.50 train'.<sup>29</sup> When in March 1938 the firm received instructions for similar burial, the coffin was taken by motor hearse to Brookwood.<sup>30</sup> A further example of an occasional stop for convenience can be found in Maxwell Bros registers when in November 1914 the Necropolis train was halted at Vauxhall for mourners to alight on the return journey from Brookwood.<sup>31</sup> Under the 'Cremation' heading examples can be cited of coffins delivered to Surbiton destined for Woking.

Not all coffins destined for burial in Brookwood Cemetery travelled the 24 miles on the Necropolis train from the company's private station at Waterloo. Others went from the main-line terminus. For example, in January 1890 JH Kenyon took a coffin to 'Waterloo Main Line' for the 1pm train.<sup>32</sup> Five of the firm's drivers and nine men (probably coffin bearing staff) were also accommodated on the train. Although it has not been possible to support the following with examples, it likely that some coffins were sent by train from stations down the mainline, such as Southampton or Portsmouth to Brookwood. If the coffins arrived by the domestic service they would have

been unloaded onto the platform at Brookwood (main line) station and transferred to a motor hearse or horse-drawn hearse and probably on the cemetery side of the station.<sup>33</sup>

Circumstances occasionally influenced the decision to use rail. In January 1884 JH Kenyon placed their hearse containing a coffin along with two following carriages on the 11.17am train from Charing Cross to Orpington. The burial took place at nearby Chelsfield. Although time effective, it was a very costly transportation. In this case it cannot be determined why a local funeral director was not utilised.

In the FW Paine registers there is an entry from 5 February 1917 that a coffin was 'Put on rail 9.10 Charing X owing to bad snow', and 'A SH [single horse-drawn hearse] meet at Rye station'.<sup>34</sup> Clearly the decision was taken due to the '...heavy snowfall and severe wintry weather....' as noted in *The Times*.

From the analysis of FW Paine rail funerals it would appear that by 1918 most transportations were for long distances. During this year the shortest were from Surbiton to Brookwood (16 miles) and from Euston to Boxmoor in Hertfordshire.<sup>35</sup> The few rail journeys recorded in 1928 were for long distances, that is, greater than 120 miles.

### **Scope: Complex Funerals Utilising the Railway**

As the previous section noted, by around 1918 most rail journeys were between mainline and/or terminal stations at a distance from each other. Arrangements were relatively straightforward as the coffin was simply transported to and from the station by horse-drawn or motor vehicle. However, the records surveyed indicate that the rail journey was only a single component in a complex series of events that culminated with the burial (or in later years, the cremation).

An insight into the complex instructions received by funeral directors can be found in the detailed entry in a register for an unidentified north London firm. In November 1857, a member of staff travelled with an empty shell (a temporary coffin) from London Bridge station to Brighton (50½ miles) where a horse-drawn hearse was employed to take the coffin to the location where the deceased was resting. The reverse journey was then made. In London the shell was placed into a lead lined elm coffin covered in black cloth with four pairs of handles. It was then taken to the Eastern Counties' Liverpool Street station for the journey Bury St Edmunds (55¾ miles) where the interment took place. The cost of taking an empty shell to Brighton was only 12s, while

the return journey with the deceased was £1 19s. To Suffolk the charge was £3 11s 3d, while the total cost of the funeral was £32 15s 3d.<sup>36</sup>

A further example is from April 1890 when HH Jordan received instructions to arrange a burial in New Southgate [Great Northern] Cemetery in north London. The deceased was placed in a triple lined coffin (stout elm shell, a lead lined coffin within an oak case) which six men loaded into a 'corpse carriage' at Worthing station destined for Clapham Junction. On arrival, four men supplied by a local funeral director loaded the coffin onto a horse-drawn hearse. Joined by two 'coaches' (carriages), the cortege made its way to Putney to collect the family. There then followed a lengthy journey to the cemetery, the distance from Putney being approximately sixteen miles. Had it not been for Putney detour, the coffin could have been routed around London to reach a station nearer the place of burial, thus eliminating removal of the coffin at Clapham Junction and for the family to endure the long road journey to Colney Hatch. Timings for the funeral are not detailed in the register, but an estimate would be no less than two hours from Putney to the cemetery. Considering the labour and time-intensive nature of the journey it is of little surprise that the total cost of the funeral was £51 6s 10d.<sup>37</sup>

The above example indicates the length of journey that could be completed without changing horses. Further evidence of this is provided in the end pages of Farebrother 1904/1905 register where there is a list of distance funerals with timings. For example: '19 Jan 1905 King's Cross – to put body on rail for Stockton on Tees. Started from house 2 o'clock and arrived at King's Cross 4.45 train left 5.30.'<sup>38</sup> A second example reads: 29 October 1904 'Liverpool Street station. Started from New Malden 5.45. reached Liverpool Street 8.15 to put body on rail 2½ hours completion. Train left for Braintree Essex 8.55. Went down self.' With such time consuming journeys being encountered it is of little surprise that the charge for 'refreshments' could be found in some entries.<sup>39</sup>

Depending on the destination, a combination of modes of transport were often deployed. For example, in July 1948, Frederick W Paine were instructed to take a coffin by motor hearse to Euston and place it on a train destined for Heysham. A ferry then took the coffin to Belfast where a motor hearse completed the sixty-five mile journey to Five Mile Town.

In January 1888 the Marylebone firm of W Garstin exhumed the remains of the Emperor Napoleon and the Prince Imperial from St Mary's Church in Chislehurst and transported the coffins to Farnborough Abbey for reburial.<sup>40</sup>

The Emperor has been interred in January 1873 and the Prince six years later. After being removed from the sarcophagi both remains were taken Chislehurst station to London Bridge in a railway van draped in black cashmere with the floor carpeted. Gun carriages were then used to transfer the coffins to Waterloo for the journey to Farnborough.

A further example of preparation of the carriage for the reception of a coffin can be found in the JH Kenyon records for January 1892 where the entry reads 'drape railway van from 7.30am'. The coffin was placed on the train which departed at 1.30pm destined for Malvern, the cost being £9 6s.<sup>41</sup>

Another exhumation can be found in the Maxwell Bros registers when in May 1916 the firm arranged a disinterment of a coffin from St Thomas' Churchyard in Fulham followed by reburial in Lochaber in the west Highlands of Scotland. The journey from King's Cross to Roy Bridge station cost £24 9s 0d.<sup>42</sup>

### **Scope: Rail and Sea**

Railways linked with ports and where coffins were destined for locations across the sea, funeral directors made arrangements for such transfers. For example, in September 1908, Maxwell Bros took a coffin within a packing case by horse-drawn hearse to Waterloo, then by train and boat to Yarmouth, in the north west of the Isle of Wight. A member of their staff were in attendance throughout.<sup>43</sup> Ten years later the same firm arranged a further burial on the Island, at Bembridge. After taking the coffin to Waterloo by horse-drawn hearse and placing it on a Portsmouth train, it then went by boat across the Solent and was removed by another funeral director to be taken nine miles by road to the churchyard.<sup>44</sup> Two further examples of utilising both rail and boat can be cited. The first was in February 1925 when FW Paine arranged for a person dying Richmond, Surrey, to be buried at Carbury Churchyard, County Kildare in Southern Ireland. The deceased was enclosed in a shell and oak case, which was taken by motor hearse to Euston station. The consignment note shows that the destination was 'Dublin WR'.<sup>45</sup> The second was in January 1926 when Maxwell Bros took a coffin to Euston destined to Liverpool and ultimately Canada.<sup>46</sup> Although not transported by train but by a rail company, a further example in this category was in November 1949 when FW Paine delivered a coffin by motor hearse to Portsmouth Harbour station for the boat to Ryde Pier Head where a Bembridge funeral director provided a hearse for the funeral.<sup>47</sup>

Sea travel also provided a less expensive but slower alternative to rail transport. FW Paine's records provide one example from March 1913 where a coffin was delivered to the Dundee & Perth Shipping Co's warehouse in Limehouse in east London, then placed on a ship destined for Arbroath.<sup>48</sup> The company charged £6 6s 0d for the carriage, which was considerably less than if consigned by rail (see below).

### **Scope: The Distribution of coffins by suppliers**

In the same manner that the railway was used for the general distribution of freight, it was also utilised to transport special orders coffins to funeral directors, such lead lined receptacles, along with those at the higher end of the supplier's range. Ingall, Parsons, Clive & Co's 'Forward Works' was a coffin production facility located at Wealdstone near Harrow, on the branch from Harrow & Wealdstone to Stanmore. Before the sole intermediate station, Belmont, there was a siding where wood for coffin making could be unloaded and finished coffins could be despatched. The line was featured in a pictorial advertisement published in *The Undertakers' Journal* in June 1906. The East London firm of Dottridge Bros also distributed coffins and other funereal requisites by train. In April 1902, FW Paine removed from Kingston railway station an empty coffin purchased from Dottridge Bros by a Reigate undertaker. Paine's encoffined the deceased locally then transferred it in a motor van to Surrey.<sup>49</sup> Anecdotal information from a funeral director working in the Scottish Borders between 1947 and 1997 reveals that a call could be made to a coffin manufacturer in Edinburgh on a weekday morning and the finished coffin would be delivered to an intermediate station between Waverley and Berwick at 4pm on the same day.<sup>50</sup>

### **Scope: Cremation**

The history of cremation including the building of Woking Crematorium and arrangements in the early years have been extensively researched and reveal the use of railways to transport coffins to Surrey.<sup>51</sup> The progression towards cremation in the UK was very slow and between the first cremation in March 1885 and 1900 only 0.07 of deaths (444 cremations) took place at the four crematoria in operation in the UK. Initially, cremation was a costly alternative to burial as transport (by hearse to the station, then by rail and onwards to the crematorium) to the limited number of crematoria had to be factored into the costs along with the cremation fee, certification, provision of an ashes casket and the burial of the ashes. This is clearly the case from data examined between the late 1880s and 1910<sup>52</sup> For example, in October 1892, HH Jordan

arranged for a coffin to be taken to Woking for cremation, a distance of 46 miles from Worthing. The account reads: 'Arranging with Railway company for special carriage for conveyance to Woking, rail fare and sundry expenses.' A horse-drawn hearse took the coffin from Woking station to the crematorium. Including a pine coffin, hearse to Worthing station, staff, attendance and supervision by the funeral director and the cremation fee, the funeral cost £22 16s 6d.<sup>53</sup> The departure from the tradition of burial along with the costs made cremation inaccessible to those of more modest means until the 1950s.

Maxwell Bros arranged two cremations in the early years. First, in February 1895 the coffin containing a 22-year-old male was taken in a hearse with one following carriage to Waterloo. At Woking station the same combination of vehicles supplied by a local carriage master completed the journey to the crematorium and then returned the mourners to the station. The cost of the passenger fares were £2 4s 6d and the total cost of the funeral was £24 19s 11d.<sup>54</sup> Similar in scope is the second example from December 1901. The coffin went by horse-drawn hearse to Waterloo station, then by train to Woking where the local carriage master, [Mr Wood based at the Albion Hotel] transferred the coffin to the crematorium. Four second class return fares were purchased costing 18s. The total cost of the funeral was £23 0s 0d.<sup>55</sup> JH Kenyon records provide further examples of the timings of journeys from Waterloo to Woking: using the 11.45 train (January 1892), the 2.45 train (December 1893), the 3.10 train (August 1894). In all cases Mr Wood supplied the horse-drawn transport to Woking. Table 3 indicates the relatively high number of cremations managed by CG Hatt; all went by rail from Waterloo at Woking with use of horse-drawn vehicles for delivery and collection. One from 1899 subsequently involved a rail journey for the burial of the ashes in Essex.<sup>56</sup>

Such journeys to Surrey for north London residents largely ceased when Golders Green Crematorium opened in 1902; thirteen years later West Norwood Crematorium provided for those in south London. (See also below 'Scale: CG Hatt.')

Woking Crematorium was sufficiently close to the Kingston area for coffins to either be transported by horse-drawn hearse or by train. An example of the former arranged by Farebrother dates from October 1902. (This was the second cremation the firm arranged, the first being in February 1902<sup>57</sup>). The

coffin and mourners went by road, but the four bearing staff went by train from Surbiton to Woking.<sup>58</sup>

Similar journeys to reach a crematorium can be found elsewhere in the UK. Glasgow crematorium opened in November 1895 and remained Scotland's only crematorium until Edinburgh Warriston became operational in 1929.<sup>59</sup> In December 1918 the Edinburgh firm of WT Dunbar took a coffin to Edinburgh Waverley station destined for Glasgow. The total cost was £30 7s 6d.<sup>60</sup>

A trip to Woking using both motor vehicles and the train was recorded by Farebrother in November 1926 where the entry reads: 'Body taken to crematorium day before cremation [by motor hearse] to lay in chapel overnight. Friends went to cremation and service alone by train...'.<sup>61</sup>

The rail system was also used to transport ashes, although only a few examples can be traced. Following the cremation at Woking of the engineer James Nasmyth, his ashes were '...despatched to Scotland by rail wrapped in a brown paper parcel, so as to avoid the full passenger fare for which human ashes were normally eligible.'<sup>62</sup> An 'Urn and wreath' was placed on a 10pm train departing from King's Cross by W Garstin staff in April 1920 consigned to Edinburgh.<sup>63</sup> Similarly a 'Compartment for casket and flowers, and carriage for [seven] mourners' was organised by FW Paine in February 1929 with the train leaving Euston bound for Knutsford.<sup>64</sup> Funeral directors would occasionally accompany the ashes and perform the burial, such as this example. After cremation at West Norwood in February 1917, the following day a member of staff from FW Paine accompanied the ashes on the 11am train from Waterloo to Sidmouth. Arriving at 2.40, the ashes were then buried in Feniton Churchyard.<sup>65</sup>

### **Scope: Transport During WWI**

During WWI, soldiers sustaining injury abroad were transported by ambulance train back to the UK for treatment.<sup>66</sup> A proportion died and the military made arrangements for the coffins to be transported to their home town for burial. FW Paine records surveyed between January 1915 and November 1919 (the latter date being selected as war-related deaths were still occurring a year after the Armistice) indicate the number returned to Kingston: three in 1915, nine in 1916, eleven in 1917, 29 in 1918 and 23 between 11 November 1918 and 11 November 1919.<sup>67</sup> Coffins were received at Kingston or Surbiton stations from: Dovercourt, Shorncliffe, Tring,

Ipswich, Dublin, Colchester, Stockport, Huddersfield, Edgbaston, Colchester, Dover, Aldershot, Chatham, Portsmouth, Northampton, Southampton, Shrewsbury, Queensferry, Blandford, Sandwich, Brighton, Larbert, Chisledon, St Alban's, Whitchurch and Baldock. The military provided a coffin and from brief notes in the registers it would appear that they made arrangements with the railway companies to distribute the coffins. FW Paine collected each coffin from the station and took it to the family home where it was transferred onto a gun carriage. Farebrother's records also show a small number of collections, such as on 12 Nov 1917 where the entry reads: 'Meet body at Kingston Station and took home. Went into St Luke's. Semi Military.'<sup>68</sup> Another notes: 'Met body at New Malden station and took home. Military funeral.'<sup>69</sup>

### **Scope: Transport During WWII**

As mentioned above, FW Paine's registers show that by 1928 unless the coffin was being moved a lengthy distance, the motor hearse had increasingly replaced rail. However, between 1939 and 1945 there would appear to be a renaissance of rail usage in the interests of saving petrol.<sup>70</sup> For example, in 1942 coffins were taken to nearly all the London termini for despatch to York, Norwich, Leeds, Swansea and Birmingham, in addition to Surbiton Station bound for Plymouth.

Short distances were also noted, such as to Dover, Worthing, Brighton and Bletchley. Correspondingly, FW Paine also collected coffins including those in the armed forces. In October 1944, the FW Paine register contains an entry for a Grenadier Guard who died in Morrison Hospital in Swansea: 'Coffin supply by the military and putting on rail for Surbiton station'.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Maxwell Bros collected a coffin containing a 22 year-old RAF serviceman from Liverpool Street using a motor hearse which then made its way to Streatham Park Cemetery.<sup>72</sup> The Farebrother registers disclose the collection of a soldier's coffin at Surbiton and also Richmond followed by burial in Kingston Cemetery in November 1940 and December 1942 respectively.<sup>73</sup>

### **Transporting the Coffin**

Little can be traced about the formal arrangements for despatch of a coffin by train, procedures at stations and also the type of carriage or van used for the conveyance. There is a dearth of information in railway archives and it has only been possible to obtain oral history from one funeral director. Although records tend to contain only brief details, it is possible to construct

an overarching view from the time the instructions were received from a client until collection of the coffin at its destination.

The first task for the funeral director would be to book the coffin on a train. Initially, this may have been carried out by telegraph or cable, although it is possible that a personal visit was made to a station or rail company office. The records of JH Kenyon noted the costing involved in the use of cable and telegram as late as January 1934 when arranging the conveyance of Viscount Churchill's coffin from Edinburgh to London and then to Oxfordshire.<sup>74</sup> The telephone transformed the chain of communication as arrangements could be booked immediately by the funeral director. The National Association of Funeral Directors published an annual *Yearbook* and the edition for 1936 gives the telephone numbers of the enquiry offices for all the railway companies, an indicator in itself of the importance to have this information readily accessible.

As most of the rail transportations occurred in a period before funeral directors possessed refrigerated accommodation and embalming was carried out routinely (both being in the 1950s), there was a need to transport the deceased without any undue delay. In addition, once the death had been registered where it had occurred and the certificate issued, the deceased could be buried, unlike cremation where additional certificates were necessary, which had to be submitted to the crematorium in advance of the funeral. Until the 1950s/1960s when burial was still the preferred mode of disposal, funerals generally took place within four to six days after death.

The interval between death and placing the coffin on the train appears to have been kept to a minimum. Three days was not unusual, unless the death occurred at a weekend. Once the funeral director had received instructions, it was a case of measuring the body, constructing the coffin, encoffining the deceased and transporting the coffin to a station; such tasks could easily be accomplished within two days. The funeral would then take place on the day the coffin was received at the destination or the following day. There is no evidence to indicate that a funeral service took place in the location where death occurred, then a second service at the place of burial.

The coffins used for rail transportation were often from the higher end of the range. The assumption can therefore be made that if the client could afford for the coffin to be moved by rail then they had the financial resources to purchase a quality coffin. As with most coffins constructed between the 1850s and the 1980s they would have been sealed with wax or pitch to

prevent any leakage resultant from deterioration.<sup>75</sup> It would appear that there were no restrictions on despatching infectious cases; Farebrother's records note a 'typhoid' case being sent by rail in November 1907 from either Surbiton or Kingston. The coffin was 'pitched down' meaning it was thoroughly sealed internally. Additionally, 2s was given to a 'Railway Inspector' presumably to check the coffin.<sup>76</sup> Lead lining, which effectively made the coffin air tight, would have been an additional safeguard in addition to containing any odours. This was particularly important if the coffin was conveyed with any other freight and also during the warm weather. However, it added considerably to the weight. The only form of identification on the coffin would have been the nameplate on the lid.

An example from the FW Paine's registers indicates the swiftness of operation. A young male died at home in Kingston on Wednesday 16 December 1902. A plain elm coffin was prepared and the deceased was encoffined. On the Thursday evening at 6.45pm the coffin was removed from the house and taken the next evening to St Pancras Station where it was loaded at 9.45pm for the 12.50pm departure to Bedford. The coffin was collected by Messrs Clarabut & Plumbe, undertakers based in Bedford. Although unspecified in the entry, the funeral could have taken place on the Saturday or Monday.<sup>77</sup> An entry dated February 1919 where the coffin was placed on rail bound for Northampton reads: 'Put on rail Euston for funeral the same day'.<sup>78</sup> A margin note in a Farebrother register detailing a funeral in October 1898 records the very precise timings, which permitted no scope for unscheduled occurrences: 'Surbiton 10.40, Southampton 1.17, burial at 2.10.'<sup>79</sup>

Some entries give further details about arrangements. A transportation in March 1880 specifies 'Hearse and pair, 'coachman and bearers' (number not specified)' from Maxwell Bros premises at 179 Brixton Road to Euston, self and booking from LNWR to Llanfyllin Wales on Monday 17.<sup>80</sup>

Funeral directors would provide staff to move the coffin from the hearse into the railway van. The number would often be stated in the records, such as four or six, the latter being indicative of a heavy coffin. It is also likely that station porters assisted and the practice was observed of offering a gratuity; as will be detailed below, this amount was included on the invoice.



After being transported by rail from Euston station in February 1906, Lady Howe's coffin was placed on a horse-drawn hearse at Shakerstone station.

There appear to be no special requirements concerning the body and the construction of the coffin. Research at the National Railway Museum yielded no information. The only regulations that can be traced were for conveyance of the dead on American railroads, curiously published in *The Lancet*.<sup>81</sup> In the nineteenth century many coffins used for transportation would have comprised an inner shell and an outer case, some also being lead lined. For example, in February 1906 the coffin containing Lady Howe who was placed in a pine shell with lead lining which were then placed into an oak case. JH Kenyon's register are illuminating concerning the other complex and labour-intensive arrangements. Her coffin was taken to Euston where it was placed on the 7.10am train to Shakerstone station. The carriage accommodating the coffin was decorated internally with cream and violet draperies, nine of Kenyon's staff travelled on the train and the firm's horse-drawn hearse was also transported to Leicestershire.<sup>82</sup>



The coffin carrier owned by the Bluebell railway.

In the nineteenth century there is evidence to suggest that coffins were temporarily placed in a coffin carrier. These were enclosed or glass-sided compartments on a wheel base. The coffin was probably delivered to the station, placed in a carrier then brought to the platform and loaded onto the train. Such a device was probably used for reasons of discretion. Examples can be seen in the National Railway Museum and also on the Bluebell Railway



The coffin carrier used at Paddington by the GWR (Courtesy of Nicolas Wheatley)

Records are generally silent on the type of van or carriage in which the coffin was placed. However, a few examples can be identified. In 1891, a 'corpse carriage' as it was described in FW Paine's records was used for the conveyance of a coffin to Aberdeen.<sup>83</sup> Entries from 1942 include the number the number of the van:

Euston to Helmsdale Van no 34159<sup>84</sup>

Paddington to Plymouth Van no 6579<sup>85</sup>

Paddington to Llandudno Van no 34059<sup>86</sup>

Departure timings indicate that many coffins were transported overnight, which suggests the use of good trains (see below). However, they were also placed on regular passenger services particularly when family members wanted to travel on the same train. It is therefore presumed that the coffin was secured in the guard's van or in a separate wagon, as indicated above. As these trains would not have been accommodating multiple coffins, it is unlikely that vans were fitted out with shelving or racks as used on the Necropolis train.

An 'Express Parcels' was used to accommodate a coffin bound for Huntly in Aberdeenshire in December 1948, indicating that the train used did not always include passengers.<sup>87</sup>

The 1961 British Transport Film *Terminus* shows a coffin being removed from a motor hearse and carried by hand into a guard's van at Waterloo mainline station. As doubts have been expressed concerning the staging of some scenes, the authenticity of this is unclear, particularly as this article reveals that coffin transportation had largely ceased by the late 1950s.

A minimum of documentation would have accompanied the coffins. In the FW Paine records there are several invoices issued by railway companies (such as LSWR (1924), LMS (1925), GWR (1926) and LNER (1926), SR (1932) and GWR (1932)), and it is likely that a duplicate copy was either attached to the coffin or given to the guard, so he knew the destination. These documents detail the 'particulars' (usually stated to be a 'corpse'), the destination station, the sender, miles and amount to pay. A few invoices also have a receipt secured. (See also Appendix 1)

Guard's signatures

VAY COY (L. & N. W. Section) E.R.O. 21800  
O.P. 3

**MISCELLANEOUS TRAFFIC WAYBILL**

By *Corp* Train *30* Day of *April* 1937 To *Triples* Via *Holyhead Warrington*

Description	NAME and ADDRESS	Weight		Rate	Paid on	TO PAY			Paid	Sender
		c.	q. lbs.			£	s.	d.		
<i>Corpse</i>	<i>Sheehan</i>	<i>eee</i>		<i>8/11</i>					<i>27 10 -</i>	<i>Payne</i>
<i>Accompanied</i>				<i>1 -</i>					<i>1 -</i>	<i>W/T</i>

N.B.—The Guard must see that the entries on this bill correspond with the parcels delivered to and given up by him.

A Traffic Waybill for a 'Corpse' transported from Euston to Holyhead in April 1937

Other documentation or certificates may have included the Registrar's Certificate for Burial or Cremation (which would enable the final disposal) and also, as a result of the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1926, permission of the coroner to move a body outside England and Wales. This 'Out of England' certificate would have been necessary for the burial of a coffin in Scotland, Ireland or abroad. Farebrother placed a coffin destined for Dublin on a train at Euston and obtained a reference for handing over the Coroner's certificate to the LMS staff.<sup>88</sup> An entry in the FW Paine register reads: 'Disposal Certificate attached to coffin' for a transportation to Paignton from Paddington in October 1934.<sup>89</sup>

The data suggests that by the 1920s coffins were increasingly conveyed overnight with collection taking place the next morning at the destination. It is not known if conveyance away from public gaze was for the convenience of

the rail company or specifically requested by the funeral director. If the former, the coffin could be treated as freight with loading and unloading taking place in the non-public area of the station. This would contrast with a passenger train where the coffin would be 'placed on rail' whilst the train was in the platform. The FW Paine data reveals the emerging pattern. In 1918 FW Paine were responsible for 17 rail transportations with about half placed on trains departing between 9am and 3pm and remainder after 5pm. However, of the two long distance transportations in 1928 both were on trains leaving St Pancras and Euston after 5pm. (Two also took place from Surbiton to west country destinations.) In February 1932, an evening journey to Folkestone from Victoria is detailed: train departs 7.37pm and arrives at 10.41pm; burial was the following day at 1.30pm.<sup>90</sup> As the number of rail transportations increased during WWII, the 1942 data shows that trains containing coffins departed stations at all times and not just the evening. However, of the twenty-three taking place in 1948 only two were morning departures with most leaving between 5pm and 11.30pm. The records also detail that the coffins were loaded between one to five hours before the time of departure. However, this may be the time when it was convenient for the funeral director to deliver the coffin to the station rather than the time the train was waiting in the platform to receive the coffin. On one occasion a member of FW Paine's staff remained with the coffin overnight and charged 10s in February 1932 for 'Attendant in charge of remains at Euston station all night'.<sup>91</sup>

At the destination a funeral director would need to be waiting with a hearse near the platform of the arriving train to minimise the handling of the coffin. Some of the entries record specific instructions regarding the collection of coffins. In May 1881 JH Kenyon had to be on the 'Brighton side, Clapham Junction' at 12.15 to receive a coffin arriving from the south coast.<sup>92</sup> Other entries from December and August 1881 respectively read, 'Victoria 10.45 – at far end of station' and 'Clapham Junction – on the platform'.<sup>93</sup> In the FW Paine records for 1942 there is an instruction concerning the positioning of the hearse at Charing Cross station to access a train destined for Dover: 'Right hand entrance at station platform 5 & 6. Enqs [Enquiries] to Parcels Office.'<sup>94</sup> Another from the same year concerning a coffin arriving at Victoria from Ramsgate at 11.30am stated: 'Be at Stn [sic] 8am No2 Platform.'<sup>95</sup>



(Dottridge Bros advert in *The Undertakers' Journal* March 1907)

It is likely that the hearse would wait on or near the platforms; the London wholesale supplier and carriage proprietor, Dottridge Bros, regularly collected coffins from termini and delivered them to funeral directors; there is an advertisement on the cover of the March 1907 edition of *The Undertakers' Journal* showing 'Waiting for train at a London station' which has been identified at Euston. An advertisement from 1923 shows motor vehicles.

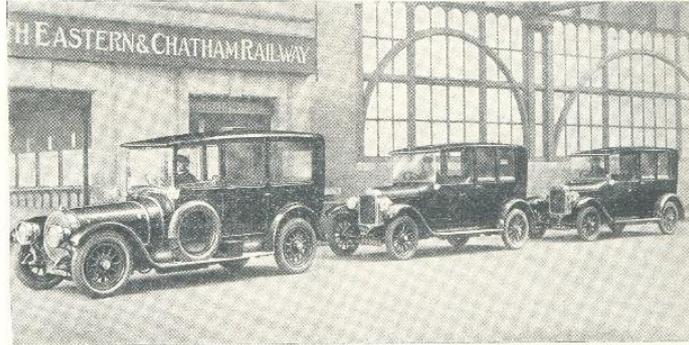
# DOTTRIDGE BROTHERS, LIMITED

## DORSET WORKS, EAST ROAD, LONDON, N.1.

### Funerals to or from London.

Please note change:  
PHONES:  
Clerkenwell 7070 (5 lines).

Telegrams:  
"Funeral London."



AWAITING YOUR ARRIVAL AT THE STATION.

### APPOINT US YOUR LONDON AGENTS.

*A few reasons why you should do this—*

**It is an advantage to deal with a firm that is entirely Wholesale, and exclusively at the service of the Trade.**

Our large Fleet of Motor Cars and Horses Vehicles (the best in London) ensure that your wants will always be supplied at the shortest notice. Our Rolling Stock is kept thoroughly smart and up-to-date.

We are daily arranging Cremations, the re-opening of Graves, removals from Hospitals, etc., and are continuously in touch with the heads of Railway Companies, Cemeteries, Crematoria and Institutions.

Bearers and Attendants are exceptionally well trained, and will be able to give you or your clients every assistance.

Our experience over so many years enables us to advise on, or carry out, any arrangements required both in this Country and Abroad. We are in touch with Agents in every Country, and can arrange for you matters which, to the Undertaker, appear insuperable.

**Our Charges** to you are the same as to the **London Trade**, and we guarantee you satisfaction in every way.

Estimates given for Motor Funerals any distance.

We place at your disposal an Office in which you can transact business at any time whilst you are in London, and the use of our Office and Telephone facilities.

**We are continually asked to recommend an Undertaker in different towns throughout the Country. We naturally recommend those Undertakers who have appointed us their Agents.**

You will have no anxiety if your business is in our hands.

Dottridge Bros Advert for funeral vehicles waiting at Waterloo

*British Undertakers' Association Journal March 1923*

From assessing the date of coffin collection and that of burial, it can be seen that any delay was kept to a minimum. For example, after Messrs Attree placed a coffin on a train at Brighton destined to arrive at London Bridge station at 11.00am on 6 May 1881, JH Kenyon provided a hearse and carriage for the trip to Nunhead Cemetery where the burial took place at 12.30pm, a distance of only 4½ miles. Meeting the 12.30 train at Victoria station for a burial at Highgate Cemetery at 3pm similarly factored in no time for any delay.<sup>96</sup> The coffin containing a 21-year-old male 'Killed at station, Kingston'

on 20 December 1901 was placed on a train at Surbiton, arriving in Bude 'Christmas morning 1.45'.<sup>97</sup> One working day elapsed when on Friday 22 July 1938 JH Kenyon met the coffin arriving from Paris containing Samuel Insull at Victoria station at 6.12am with burial taking place at 11.30am in Putney Vale Cemetery the following day.<sup>98</sup> A transportation in 1949 from Paddington to Bristol Temple Meads station details that the coffin was placed on rail at 5pm on Monday evening with J Pakeman & Son meeting the train at 11.25 the following morning and burial at 12.15 in the Unitarian Churchyard in Bristol.<sup>99</sup> Again, such timings permitted little scope for delay.

Although as mentioned in the introduction, specially chartered funeral train, such as those for royalty and others are outside the scope of this paper, reference to the timings for one such conveyance illustrates the precision. A printed notice giving details of the special train used at the funeral of the Earl of Feversham on 16 January 1915 gives the following: York 12.55pm, Coxwold 1.26pm, Gilling 1.35pm and arrive Helmsley 1.45pm. The service in church took place at 2pm and the return train departed at 3.15pm.<sup>100</sup>

### **Scope: Mass Transportation of the Dead**

There is much evidence to show that the rail system has been extensively utilised for moving a large number of coffins. One of the earliest examples is revealed in Elizabeth Hurren's investigations where between the 1850s and the 1920s coffins containing the bodies of the poor were despatched from London to Cambridge for medical dissection.<sup>101</sup> The mass transportation of coffins has also taken place after accidents. Following the Salisbury rail disaster of 1906 when twenty-eight were killed, the coffins containing Americans were taken by train to London, then to Liverpool by boat to New York.<sup>102</sup> In October 1930 the R101 airship crashed in northern France with the loss of forty-eight; the coffins were transported from Dover Marine station to Victoria. After a lying-in state in Westminster Hall, the coffins were taken by road to Euston station destined for St John's station at Bedford and then by army trucks to Cardington.<sup>103</sup> In 1948 members of the Free French Army were exhumed from graves around the UK then loaded into vans at Dover Marine station before despatch to France. Others were transported to Brookwood.<sup>104</sup>



Transport of the Free French from Dover Marine station December 1946.

(Courtesy of A France & Son)





Victims of the R101 crash being unloaded at St John's Station Bedford in October 1930  
(Author's collection)

## Scale

No information can be traced detailing the number of coffins conveyed by train each year. Data from the Clearing House records held at the National Archives do not itemise the type of freight carried over 'shared metals' and no other rail-related sources can be located. Whilst details of usage of the journey to Brookwood and the Great Northern cemeteries are available, as John Clarke's research observes in respect of the former, the service was never well utilised; prescribed to run on a 'regular' basis, it was more 'as required'.<sup>105</sup>

An insight into the scale can be gained from the records of two firms: FW Paine and CG Hatt. As a firm that expanded its network of branches in south west London and north Surrey during the interwar years, the number of funerals carried out by FW Paine shows the domination of the organisation in the locality.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, by the 1930s it was the largest funeral directing firm to be trading under a single identity in the UK, hence the importance of their

data. By contrast, CG Hatt had one office in Kensington High Street. The number of transportations arranged by W Garstin is also significant, although incomplete details in particularly the early registers have prevented a full assessment.

Using only two sources of data has limitations that may potentially distort the perception of scale. Not only are these a very small proportion of the several thousand of funeral directing firms in existence, but the number of transportations may be skewed by the relative economic affluence of south west London/north Surrey and the central west London areas. The argument goes that a number of those residing in these areas may have second 'home' away, and possibly an existing family grave, a situation unlikely to be the case in all other parts of the UK. However, the problem of locating archival material to provide contrasting data limits wider confirmation of findings.

### **Scale: FW Paine**

Table 1

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of branches</b>	<b>Number of funerals</b>	<b>Number of rail transportations</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1908				
1918	3	958	17	Motor hearse to Brighton, Fittleton (Wiltshire), Chelmsford and Colchester
1928	4	1,202	4	
1942	13	2,052	33	
1948	14	1,424	23	
1956		2,650	16	Four air transportations: two to Ireland, Belgium and Egypt

(Source: FW Paine records)

Examples of 'placed on rail' in 1918 include King's Cross to Hull, Liverpool Street to Newmarket, Euston to Boxmoor, St Pancras to Keighley, Charing Cross to Wadhurst and Marylebone to Brackley. Surbiton was used as the starting point for coffins to reach stations on the mainline such as Brookwood, Weymouth, Blandford, and Fratton. It was also used for Southend-on-Sea (no further details are given in the register about the

route).<sup>107</sup> In addition, Kingston to Brighton (52 miles), Kingston to Colchester (93 miles), Kingston to Chelmsford (68 miles), Kingston to Fittleton (77 miles).

The detailed funeral records chart not only the use of rail conveyance but also the arrival and usage of the motor hearse. The first occasion was on 22 March 1913 when a 22 horse-power Darracq hearse hired from the Walthamstow undertaking firm of William Dyer was to transport a coffin for burial at Dartford Cemetery, a journey of around 50 miles.<sup>108</sup> The firm acquired their own Ford hearse towards the end of that year, followed by a Vauxhall and Lancia. In 1914, FW Paine used their motor hearse to journeys to Laleham (February 1914, 10 miles) Reading (March 1914, 43 miles), Golders Green Crematorium (May 1914, 15½ miles) and Northwold, Norfolk (August 1914, 111 miles). As with other funeral directors, the transition from animate to motor vehicles was lengthy and the last entry in the records for a horse-drawn funeral was on 28 December 1940 (from an address in Kingston Vale to the nearby Putney Vale Crematorium).<sup>109</sup>

In 1928 there were only four rail transportations: From St Pancras to Selkirk (The annotated entry reads: 'Rly Co would only convey remains as far as Galashiels. A son went through an undertaker to arrange accordingly at that end.'<sup>110</sup> As this took place in early January, the journey may have been curtailed due to snow.); Surbiton to Templecombe, and two to County Tyrone in Northern Ireland (from Euston to Heysham, then by boat to Belfast). In addition, there was one collection of a coffin from Paddington, which had been sent from Shrewsbury. The number of road transportations is worthy of comment as this reveals distances as great as rail. For example, the motor hearse was used to reach Glasgow, Swansea, Llanbradach (near Caerphilly), Shanklin, Leicester, Plymouth, Ludlow and Barnsley. A coffin was also taken to Southampton Docks where it was placed on a Southern Railway steamship destined form Guernsey. These locations indicate that FW Paine was willing to use its Lancia hearse for not inconsiderable distances that a decade previously would have been accomplished by rail.

The increasing replacement of the horse-drawn hearse by motor transport along with rail only being used for long distances is apparent by the 1930s. Although a full assessment of FW Paine records during this decade has not taken place, the month of January 1937 reveals the following use of different types of funerary transport, as seen in table 2:

Table 2

<b>Type of transport/date</b>	<b>January 1937</b>
Motor hearse	193
Horse-drawn hearse	55
Rail	7
Carette (children's hearse)	8
Ship	2
	<b>267 funerals</b>

(Source: FW Paine records)

General observations from table 2 are that both horse-drawn and motor hearses were used for funerals to local cemeteries and crematoria. In some cases the horse-drawn hearse was followed by mourners in a motor limousine. However, the motor hearse was deployed for distance work, such as travelling to Arnos Vale Crematorium at Bristol, then burials at Bexhill, Southend, Sundridge and Ipswich. Coffins were despatched by train from/to: Euston to Barrow-in-Furness, Liverpool Street to Wroxham, Euston to Heysham (then Monaghan), King's Cross to Arbroath, Euston to Warrington, Paddington to Cardiff and Euston to Glasgow. One coffin was collected from Teddington (conveniently near FW Paine's branch) after arriving from Devonport, itself a very indirect journey by rail.

Mid-way through World War Two (1942), the situation had changed considerably as rail transport was used for all long distances and also those less than 100 miles, such as Victoria to Ramsgate, Liverpool Street to Sudbury, Victoria to Brighton, Paddington to Wantage and Surbiton to Portsmouth. In acceding to the petrol restrictions that applied to funeral directors, the use of rail to transport coffins reverted to a position of three decades earlier.

The data for 1948 indicates that rail continued to be used for long distance journeys such as to Liverpool, Bradford, Leeds, Ampleforth, St Austell, Huntly, Birmingham and Llandudno. The nearest destination to London reached by train was Coventry, indicating that the motor hearse was being utilised for trips of up to 100 miles. By 1956, rail journeys included Paddington to Paignton, Paddington to Cardiff, King's Cross to Sunderland, Euston to Motherwell, Paddington to Plymouth, King's Cross to Edinburgh Waverley and Paddington to Swindon. A coffin was also taken to Paddington destined for Waterford via Fishguard; similarly, from Euston to Belfast via Heysham. However, there were indications that the motor hearse was being

used to transport coffins to Ipswich (110 miles), Southampton (68 miles), Leicester (118 miles) with the furthest being Barnstaple (187 miles).

**Scale: CG Hatt**

Table 3

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of funerals</b>	<b>Number of coffins taken to a station</b>	<b>Number of coffins collected from a station</b>	<b>Cremations (Coffin taken to Waterloo station then to Woking)</b>
1898	154 funerals	17	Nil	2
1899	157 funerals	10	Nil	2
1900	186 funerals	13	Nil	6
1901	174 funerals	17	2	2

(Source: CG Hatt records located at the FW Paine Museum)

The data in table 3 is extracted from the surviving register for this firm based on Kensington High Street. (A second also exists covering the years 1949-1968.) Preliminary examination shows that the firm was responsible for an exceptionally high number of rail transportations and there are two reasons for this. First, this situation probably reflects the affluence of Kensington residents and that some families had a country residence with an existing grave in a local cemetery or churchyard. This accounts for the number of transfers to a station in contrast to the collection of a coffin and burial in the inner west London area. Secondly, although comparatively modest, the proportion of cremations carried out between 1898 and 1901 is unusually high, but again must be seen against the socio-economic composition of the Kensington area. Most of those cremated between 1885 and the 1930s were from the upper echelons of society. Not only did cremation coincide with a more progressive and enlightened ideology, but the cost of cremation was significantly higher than burial; transport to Woking crematorium followed by deposition of the ashes added considerably to the overall cost of the funeral.

In the four years examined (1898-1901), CH Hatt predominantly despatched coffins from London stations that served south west and west country destinations, such as Paddington, Victoria and Waterloo. Regrettably, the

name of the receiving stations and location of burial tended not to be stated in the entries.

The second surviving register covers a later period and in 1949 there was only one rail transportation, this being in November when a coffin was taken to King's Cross station bound for Harrogate.<sup>111</sup> In 1950s there were no movements by rail, a date and situation that coincides with that of other funeral directors.

### **The Costs of Transporting the Dead by Rail**

The railways were deemed to be a 'common carrier' and under the Rail and Canal Traffic Act 1854 there was an obligation to carry any and all goods offered to them. There was also a formalised scale of charges based on weight and the value of good carried.<sup>112</sup> In 1865 a sub-committee of superintendents at the Railway Clearing House drafted regulations that included a scale of charges stating that corpses were charged one shilling a mile for conveyance.<sup>113</sup> No published sources of this information can be located. However, secured into the frontispiece of a Farebrother register is a tariff of rail charges. The document is not dated, but the register covers the period 1897-1900.

#### **Corpse and Hearse Railway Charges**

London, Brighton and South Coast

	Pr Mile	Minimum
Adult's or Child (with hearse)	1s 0d	£1 0s 0d
Adult's (without hearse)	1s 0d	£0 10s 0d
Child under 12 (do.)	0s 6d	£0 5s 0d

Midland Railway

Charges in all cases as above, No 1

Empty Coffins, full ordinary parcels rates.

Empty Coffin Cases (not returned), full ordinary parcels rate

Great Western Railway

Charges in all cases as No 1.

London and South-Western

Charges in all cases as No 1.

Empty Coffins and empty Cases as No 2.

Great Eastern

Charges in all cases as No 1.

London and North-Western

Charges in all cases as No 1  
Empty Coffins and cases as No 2

Great Northern

Charges in all cases as No 1

The ashes of cremated bodies, when carried in a coffin, are charged as a corpse. Empty returned coffin cases are not conveyed by passenger trains.

Great Central

As No1. Empty coffins and cases as No 2. Returned coffin cases are not conveyed by passenger trains.

This document not only confirms the rate of one shilling per mile for adult coffins, but also highlights a minimum charge.

The majority of records consulted contain itemised costings for the whole funeral including the rail charge; most approximately or precisely coincide with the standard rate of one shilling per mile, as these examples indicate. The mileages have been taken from Bradshaw or the 1962/63 Southern Region timetable.

June 1878	King's Cross to Sheffield £7 17s (161½ to Sheffield Victoria). <sup>114</sup>
January 1897	King's Cross to Berwick-on-Tweed £16 19s (335½ miles) <sup>115</sup>
May 1901	Waterloo to Weymouth £7 3s 0d (142¾ miles) <sup>116</sup>
January 1905	King's Cross to Stockton-on-Tees £11 16 0d (235¾ miles). <sup>117</sup>
December 1906	Surbiton to Midsomer Norton £5 12 0d (126¾ miles) <sup>118</sup>
October 1905	Euston to Liverpool £10 1s (200¾ miles) <sup>119</sup>
March 1907	Waterloo to Yeovil £6 4s (122¾ miles to Yeovil Junction) <sup>120</sup>
December 1907	Euston to Carlisle £14 11s 0d (299 miles) <sup>121</sup>

Another example dates from March 1903 when FW Paine placed a coffin and mourners on the 1.30pm train at Surbiton destined for Aldershot, a distance of 29 miles. A horse-drawn hearse was used with a 'car and pair' for the mourners. The total cost of the funeral (including a lead lined elm coffin),

transport to the station, telephone calls, rail charge of £1 3s 0d and 3s for 'gratuities to railway men' amounted to £10 12s 4d. The rail fare for the coffin just about represents the mileage rate.<sup>122</sup>

In July 1948 FW Paine arranged for the exhumation of a 9-month-old child from Merton & Morden Cemetery then place the coffin on a train at Paddington for reburial in Wales (the coffin was removed at Afon Wen Junction being  $260 \frac{3}{4}$  miles from London). Despite the small dimensions of the coffin the charge was the same as an adult with the fare being £10 16s 7d.<sup>123</sup>

Some fares, however, are at variance with the shilling per mile rate, with the reason being indiscernible, apart from this first example from 1858 which was seven years before the Railway Clearing House rate was established. An unidentified firm sent a coffin from the 'Great Northern' (presumably King's Cross) station to Grantham in Lincolnshire and the 'fare for corpse' was £2 13s.<sup>124</sup> Grantham is about  $105 \frac{1}{4}$  miles from King's Cross but if calculated at one shilling per mile this only equates to about 53 miles. In January 1891 the same unidentified north London funeral director submitted an itemised invoice containing the following:

Arranging with Railway Company for corpse carriage for conveyance to Aberdeen including Rail Company's charge for telegrams and sundry petty disbursements, undertaker's rail fare, hotel expenses and attendance throughout. £5 15s 6d<sup>125</sup>

With London to Aberdeen being at a distance of  $523 \frac{1}{2}$  miles (from King's Cross), the rail company would have charged about £27. A possible explanation is that the client paid the rail fare direct to the railway company, leaving the funeral director to charge for 'sundry' items including 'telegrams.' From examining some funeral records, it is not possible to discern why certain charges were made. In May 1882, a journey from King's Cross to Thirsk cost £13 17s.<sup>126</sup> At approximately  $210 \frac{1}{4}$  miles this is charged at more than the specified rate, which should be around £10.3s. Similarly, in November 1926, a consignment note issued by the Great Western Railway details that FW Paine were charged £14 12s 6d to move a coffin from Paddington to Birkenhead, the distance being  $210 \frac{1}{4}$  miles.<sup>127</sup> This charge at one shilling per mile calculates the distance to be over 293 miles; again, an explanation for this higher charge is not discernible.

Rail charges were sometimes paid at the destination. An example from 1913 states 'Rail charges paid at Largs by solicitor' after FW Paine had placed the coffin on the 9.30pm train leaving St Pancras.<sup>128</sup>

In the late 1920s the established mileage rate was increased. Again, no official publication can be located to confirm this, but there is mentioned July 1928 edition of the *British Undertakers' Association (BUA) Monthly* periodical.<sup>129</sup> However, in March 1929 the *BUA Monthly* reported that 'Railway charge to the trade is now back to the pre-war rate of one shilling per mile'.<sup>130</sup>

Nearly all the entries in funeral records include a gratuity to station porters. This was probably for assistance with loading into or unloading the coffin from the van. The giving of small sums to those involved in manual or bodily tasks associated with funerals was and remains an established practice with mortuary staff, gravediggers, vergers, and crematorium attendants all being recipients. In the Maxwell Bros records for 1870 the 'gravedigger and man at station' received 1s 6d, then in 1891 'porters and gravediggers' received 3s. Messrs WS Bond gave 3s to the 'Porters at Railway' in August 1905, while 'Gratuities, Porters, etc' amounted to 5s in an FW Paine record from July 1912. A further example from 1912 details 1912: 'To gratuities to men and porters in London and at Gloucester' of 14s 6d.' By the 1940s the standard gratuity to porters appeared to be five shillings. One example from 1897 in Farebrother's records notes that two shillings was given to a 'railway inspector', perhaps as the person being conveyed from Kingston to Reading had died of typhoid.<sup>131</sup>

Rail companies had a captive audience until the motor hearse could be used for all transportations. The only largely convenient alternative was a journey by sea, as mentioned above. FW Paine's records provide at least one example from March 1913 when they delivered a coffin to the Dundee & Perth Shipping Co's warehouse in East London where it was placed on a ship destined for Arbroath.<sup>132</sup> The company charged £6 6s 0d for the carriage. The 490 mile journey by train would have cost over £24.

Railways linked with ports and where coffins were destined for locations across the sea, funeral directors made arrangements for such transfers. For example, in September 1907, Maxwell Bros arranged for a coffin within a packing case to be taken by a horse-drawn hearse to Waterloo, then by train and boat to Yarmouth, on the north west of the Isle of Wight. A member of their staff was in attendance throughout. Including the coffin, transport, church and cemetery fees, bearers and removing/refixing the memorial, the

cost was £45 3s 4d, with 'Railway charges for corpse and attendant' comprising £11 0s 4d.<sup>133</sup> An example from February 1925 details a journey to County Kildare in Ireland. FW Paine took the coffin by motor hearse to Euston station where it was placed on the 6.30pm destined for Holyhead. The consignment note shows that the destination was 'Dublin WR and the cost was £27 16s 6d. The total cost was £105 9s 3d.<sup>134</sup> A similar transportation was managed by A France & Son in October 1926 when a coffin was placed on a train at Euston and transported to Dublin for burial in Deans Grange Cemetery.<sup>135</sup> Although not being moved by rail, but by the rail company, a further example in this category was in November 1949 when FW Paine delivered a coffin by motor hearse to Portsmouth Harbour station at 10.00am for the 10.35 boat to Ryde Pier Head. A funeral director from Bembridge provided a hearse for the funeral. The 'rail fare' is detailed as £3 3s 5d.<sup>136</sup>

In November 1857 a central London undertaker was instructed to construct an elm shell, transport it from London Bridge station to Brighton, enclose the deceased and then return to London. From London Bridge the coffin was taken to the 'Eastern Counties Railway' for the journey to Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk. A horse-drawn hearse would have been used to take the coffin to London Bridge, from Brighton Station to the address and back, then from London Bridge to Liverpool Street station. The deceased was conveyed in a shell that was zinc lined and then placed in an elm case covered with black fabric. The total cost of the funeral was £23 15s 3d. The return fare for the undertaker to Brighton was 12s, the empty shell cost 2s 6d to transport, but the occupied coffin cost £1 19s. The fare from London to Bury St Edmunds was £3 11s 3d.

Railway companies were prepared to charter special trains to take the coffin and mourners to a funerals. In the front of JH Kenyon's diary for 1897 is the following price tariff:

### **Special Train Charges**

#### **London, Chatham and Dover Railway**

Special train. One way only 7 shillings per mile. Both ways 10 shillings 6d per mile. Minimum £5. Fares for passengers, carriages extra.

#### **Midland Railway**

Special train. One way 5 shillings per mile. Both ways 7s 6d per mile. Fares for passengers, carriages, etc extra. Minimum £3.

### **Great Northern Railway**

Special train. One way 5s per mile. Both ways 7s 6d per mile. Fares for passengers, carriages, etc extra. Minimum £3.

### **London and North Western Railway**

Special train. One way 5s per mile. Both ways 7s 6d per mile. Fares for passengers, carriages, etc extra. Minimum £3.

### **Great Eastern Railway**

Special train. 5s per mile. Minimum £3.

### **Great Western Railway**

Special train. 5s per mile. Minimum £3. Fares for passengers, carriages, etc extra.

### **London Brighton and South Coast Railway**

Special train between 6am and 10pm 7s per mile. Between 10pm and 6am 10s. Minimum £5 and £10. First class fares in addition for passengers.

### **South Eastern Railway**

Special train taking distance from nearest engine depot. 7s per mile. Minimum £3.

First class fares in addition for passengers.<sup>137</sup>

For what was described in the Kenyon registers in October 1894 as a 'Special train to Fareham' a 'rail charge' of £84 9s 6d was made.<sup>138</sup> This was likely to be a train arranged exclusively to transport the coffin and mourners, although no mention of this funeral is noted in *The Times* and no further details can be traced.<sup>139</sup>

### **Cost: Transporting the Living with the Dead**

On occasions members of the family accompanied the coffin. The records suggest that this was particularly the case when the funeral took place later the same day. Also apparent is that undertakers often purchased the tickets and added the cost to the account. This helpfully reveals the type of fare and number of passengers as these indicate:

In April 1859, William Tookey arranged a burial at Strood in Kent.<sup>140</sup> The records of the tickets purchased reveal the separation between the category of passenger:

Twelve first class fares (return) for gentlemen	£4 10s
Seven second class fares do for self and 3 men and 3 servants	£2 2s
Railway charge for corpse to Strood	£1 0s

The following detail is also specified:

Railway fare to Strood twice first arranging funeral and vault, and second day to see the vault was properly completed.

15s

As the entry above reveals, the undertaker and his staff travelled on the same train as the coffin, but in a compartment away from the family. Another early example is for a journey to Brighton from London in November 1857 where an undertaker charged for 'Fare for self' of 13s 6d. Entries in accounts detailing the undertaker travelling to the place of burial to make preparation including selecting the grave in advance of the funeral in addition to the journey on the day of the funeral continued to be a feature of funeral accounts well into the twentieth century.

In November 1891 Maxwell Bros took a coffin in a horse-drawn hearse followed by two carriages from Brixton Hill to Euston station where they met a train destined for Edgbaston. The firm's 'attendant' (funeral director supervising the arrangements) travelled on the same train.<sup>141</sup> For a funeral to Shenfield arranged by JH Kenyon in May 1894, the account shows 'Fares for mourners, and fare for conductor and 7 [seven] bearers.'<sup>142</sup> For Farebrother in October 1904 '2 [two] tickets to Braintree for self' cost 15s.<sup>143</sup>

For a burial in St George's Churchyard in Deal arranged by Maxwell Bros in June 1901, the firm purchased fifteen first class return saloon tickets costing 18s 10d. FW Paine utilised Surbiton station for briefly halting the Necropolis train and placing a coffin on board in February 1902. Three first class return fares were purchased at a cost of 17s 3d.<sup>144</sup>

Two examples from the 1912 FW Paine register show the presence of a named employee accompanying the coffin. 'Smithers went through' (Phil Smithers being a long-standing member of staff) indicated his presence from Euston to Wilmecote in Warwickshire. The second was from Paddington to Bristol for

'Howlett to go through', as detailed in June 1914. In 1915, a member of FW Paine's staff accompanied a coffin to London Road station in Manchester and paid 15s 15½d for the third class ticket.<sup>145</sup>

There is also evidence to suggest that bearing staff made their way to and from cemeteries by train rather than being conveyed in a separate horse-drawn vehicle, a factor that would add to the expense of the funeral. In December 1895, C Farebrother arranged a burial at Highgate and the ledger entry notes 'Railway charges for men 8s'.<sup>146</sup> Further details of the journey are contained at the end of the ledger and read 'I went by train. Left K [Kingston] at 10.50. Left R [Richmond] 11.23. Gospel Oak 12.00. Home from GO [Gospel Oak] 2.14. Change at Acton for Richmond. Home at 3.30'.<sup>147</sup>

In November 1904 Farebrother arranged a burial at Highgate Cemetery and organised for '2 mens fare to Gospel Oak station and return'.<sup>148</sup> The staff would have caught a train at Kingston, changed at Richmond for the North London Line, walked from Gospel Oak station to the cemetery, then made the journey in reverse.

Railways also took mourners to the funeral, even when they were not accompanying the coffin, including collecting passengers at a station for an onward journey to the cemetery, such a 'Two cars to Surbiton station for friends at 10.15'.<sup>149</sup>

### **A rival to long distance travel: Transport of the Dead by Air**

In the late 1940s a challenge to both rail and road emerged as airlines became an increasingly efficient way to transport coffins.<sup>150</sup> Whilst this was important to meet the demands of the growing number of deceased that had to be transported overseas, airlines were also used to move coffins within the UK. In June 1948 FW Paine received instructions to convey a coffin by rail and sea to Dublin. Subsequently changed to air travel for reasons that are not discernible, this became the firm's first conveyance to Southern Ireland by aeroplane. The records show that the rail journey would have been from Euston to Holyhead, ferry across the Irish Sea then by road to Dublin with the cost being quoted as £35 3s 8d. At a charge of £75, Moreton Air Service based at Croydon airport were instructed to fly the coffin the 90-minute journey to Southern Ireland.<sup>151</sup> Although the cost was double, it is likely that the need to speedily move the coffin was at the basis of this change in instruction. Similarly, in January 1949, FW Paine arranged for a coffin to be placed on a flight from Croydon airport to the Isle of Isley in the Inner

Hebrides.<sup>152</sup> The journey by rail would have involved a motor hearse taking the coffin to King's Cross, then train to Edinburgh (or elsewhere), further conveyance by road or rail and then ferry.

These two engagements heralded the start of conveyance of the dead by air to international locations; the firm's first transatlantic flight took place in August 1950 when they placed a coffin on a Pan American World Airways flight to New York City. The flight cost £237 10s 5d.<sup>153</sup> Similarly, for A France & Son, a firm with a long reputation of serving the Italian and other European communities living in London, one of the first air transportations was in November 1952 when they delivered a coffin to Northolt Air destined for Marseilles. The cost of the flight was £82.<sup>154</sup> During the 1960s the number of slights increased, but internationally and within the UK, for example from Heathrow to Stornoway.<sup>155</sup> 1966 appears to be the last year when FW Paine conveyed coffins by train; in both case from London (probably Euston) to Manchester.<sup>156</sup>

### **The end of the line for coffins 'placed on rail'**

Although motor hearses were introduced around 1900, the rail system continued to transport coffins until the mid-1960s. The last journey by rail organised by FW Paine was in July 1966 from an unspecified London terminus to Manchester.<sup>157</sup> There are a number of reasons to explain this lengthy transition. Whilst the reliability of early motor vehicles, the cost of road transport compared to rail and the pace of the journey in a pre-motorway era were all factors that maintained usage of the train, during the interwar period the data indicates that motor hearses were gradually replacing the train through deployment on journeys of up to 100 miles. A decade later this had increased to around 200 miles. By this time possession of a motor fleet was regarded by funeral directors as part of a strategy to modernise the service offered to the bereaved. This new mode of transport not only gave the funeral director the opportunity to depart from the labour-intensive and dated image of the horse-drawn hearse, but also complete responsibility for management of the dead rather than consign the element of transport to a third party, such as a rail company. Other factors in this acquisition of greater involvement included the provision of chapels of rest to accommodate the deceased in the interval between death and the funeral, the service of embalming and the mechanisation of coffin production. The replacement of the description 'undertaker' by 'funeral director' underpinned the transition of the occupation. The promotion of cremation also coincided with the agenda

being both ‘modern’ and ‘clean’ – just like motor vehicles, but unlike trains.<sup>158</sup> It can further be argued that the utilisation of road vehicles reflected particularly domestic car ownership which in London quadrupled between 1950 and 1970; in 1960 there were 1.5 million cars registered in London.<sup>159</sup>

Whilst by 1939 many urban funeral directors possessed a fleet of motor vehicles, restrictions on petrol and tyres during WWII caused a renaissance in the use of the rail network. This is particularly confirmed by the FW Paine data which details both medium and long journeys by train in the war years then just long distances until rail conveyance finally ceased. This second but shorter period of transition not only coincided with intensive rationalisation of the rail network, but also the increasing reliability and speed of motor vehicles, improved road infrastructure, the outmoded image of using trains for freight, together with the lack of facilities for conveying coffins in modern trains and also at stations. Furthermore, the dramatic shift towards cremation and the portability of ashes meant that the need to transport a body for burial had declined significantly. These factors effectively consigned to history the transport of coffins by rail. When in March 1988 it was announced that coffins could no longer be taken on the national network it didn’t even warrant mention in the trade journals. Today, conveyance of the dead by train is an activity exclusively relegated to the heritage rail sector.<sup>160</sup>

## Acknowledgements

To John Clarke and Nicolas Wheatley, staff at the National Archive, staff at the Search Engine at the National Railway Museum and staff at the FW Paine Museum.

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<sup>1</sup> For an example of the latter see Murray N (1996) *A Life of Matthew Arnold* London: Hodder & Stoughton ‘Last Honours to Mr Gladstone’ *Illustrated London News* 28 May 1898 p772. See also Matthew C (1998) ‘Gladstone’s Death and Funeral’ *The Historian* No57 Spring pp20-24. Rodrigues RE (1998) ‘The District and a Melancholy State Occasion’ *Underground News* No 437 May pp248-9. See also Jenkins R (1995) *Gladstone* London: Macmillan p630 and Skelsey G (2018) ‘Carrying them Home. Railways and State Funerals’ *Backtrack* Vol 312 No8 pp502-508

<sup>2</sup> See Parsons B (2018) *The Evolution of the British Funeral Industry in the Twentieth Century. From Undertaker to Funeral Director* Bingley: Emerald

<sup>3</sup> See Rugg J (1997) ‘The Origins and Progress of Cemetery Establishment in Britain’ in PC Jupp and G Howarth eds *The Changing Face of Death: Historical accounts of Death and Disposal* Basingstoke: MacMillan

<sup>4</sup> See B Parsons (2017c) ‘Who is your neighbour?’ Unpublished paper given at the Cemeteries Colloquium University of York 19 May 2017

<sup>5</sup> Clarke J (2006) *The Brookwood Necropolis Railway* Fourth Edition Usk: The Oakwood Press. After April 1941 it is likely that the company continued to despatch coffins to Brookwood from Waterloo mainline. Author’s correspondence with John Clarke.

<sup>6</sup> See Curl JS (1986) ‘Architecture for a Novel Purpose: Death and the Railway Age’ *Country Life* June 12 pp1716-1717 in respect of a second railway from Belle Isle to the Great Northern Cemetery. See

also Dawes MC (1999) 'The Great Northern London Cemetery and its Railway Service' *The London Railway Record* No 21 October pp256-260, Dawes MC (2003) *The End of the Line. The Story of the Railway Service to the Great Northern London Cemetery* Barnet: Barnet & District Local History Society; Kay P (2009) 'The Great Northern Main Line in London: Cemetery' *The London Railway Record* No 59 April pp182-193.

<sup>7</sup> See B Parsons (Forthcoming) 'The Railway Siding at the City of London Cemetery'. See also Jupp PC, Davies DJ, Grainger HJ, Raeburn GD and White SRG (2017) *Cremation in Modern Scotland* Edinburgh: Birlinn pp41-42 for a discussion between Glasgow's Additional Extramural Burial Grounds Committee and North British Railways concerning a siding and station accommodation adjacent to a proposed cemetery at Blackhill.

<sup>8</sup> Keat PJ (2001) *Goodbye to Victoria: The Last Queen Empress. The Story of Queen Victoria's Funeral Train* Usk: The Oakwood Press. See also Packard JM (1995) *Farewell in Splendour: The Death of Queen Victoria and Her Age* Stroud: Sutton Publishing, Parsons B (2011) 'The Funeral of Queen Victoria' *Funeral Service Journal* February pp83-90. Bland O (1986) *The Royal Way of Death* London: Constable and Hoey B (2011) *The Royal Train. The Inside Story* Sparkford: JH Haynes. See also Potts CR (1993) *Windsor to Slough: A Royal Branch Line* Headington: Oakwood Press

<sup>9</sup> Parsons B (2015) *JH Kenyon and the State Funeral of Sir Winston Churchill* London: JH Kenyon. See also 'Sir Winston Churchill's last Journey' (1965) *The Railway Magazine* March pp132-134: Croft RJ (2014) *Churchill's Final Farewell. The State and Private Funeral of Sir Winston Churchill* London: Croft Publishing, Queen's Road, Buckhurst Hill; Pigott N and Brodrick N (2015) 'The Day the People Lined the Lineside' *The Railway Magazine* January pp56-57

<sup>10</sup> See Gavin AE and Humphries AF Editors (2015) *Transport in British Fiction. Technologies of Movement, 1840-1940* Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan. For an example of a coffin being moved by train in fiction, see Oliver P (Sir Henry Thompson) (1885) *Charley Kingston's Aunt* London: Macmillan & Co

<sup>11</sup> The records of T Henwood & Sons, 7-8 New Quebec Street London W, (held in the author's collection) have also been examined, but not cited in this research. As they operated in the same areas as William Garstin and JH Kenyon, they contained little additional information.

<sup>12</sup> W Garstin register 948/3 page 112

<sup>13</sup> Maxwell Bros register 2414 & 2407

<sup>14</sup> C Farebrother entry 897

<sup>15</sup> JH Kenyon register entry No 259

<sup>16</sup> 'The Motor Hearse. Its Arrival in England' (1910) *The Undertakers' Journal* January p10

<sup>17</sup> Extract from the South Eastern & Chatham Railway's timetable from 1913-1914. I am grateful to Nicholas Wheatley for this reference.

<sup>18</sup> 'Transport of Bodies by Rail' (1922) *BUA Monthly* Vol 2 No 5 November p159

<sup>19</sup> C Farebrother register entry 50. This also occurred in February 1944 for a 'war operations' victim. See C Farebrother Entry 915 (29 February 1944)

<sup>20</sup> C Farebrother Entries 30 (December 1906) and 44 (November 1917)

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Weightman G (2017) 'Hay and Oats in the Age of Steam' *The London Library Magazine* Spring Issue 35 pp20-21. See also Thompson FML (1976) 'Nineteenth Century Horse Sense' *The Economic History Review* Vol 29 No 1 pp60-81

<sup>22</sup> From *The Undertakers' Journal* (1909) December pXVIII

<sup>23</sup> FW Paine register No 8 entry 245

<sup>24</sup> FW Paine register No 9 entry 271

<sup>25</sup> *Bradshaw's July 1922 Railway Guide: a new edition of the July 1922 issue of Bradshaw's General Railway & Steam Navigation Guide for Great Britain & Ireland with enlarged type and introduction by David St John Thomas* (1985) London: Guild Publishing; *Bradshaw's April 1910 Railway Guide: a new edition of the April 1910 issue of Bradshaw's General Railway & Steam Navigation Guide for Great Britain & Ireland with enlarged type and introduction by David St John Thomas* (1968) Newton Abbot: David & Charles; and *Passenger Service Timetable: Main line and suburban; 10th September 1962 to 16th June 1963* (1963) London: British Railways Southern Region. I am grateful to John Clarke for all mileage calculations.

<sup>26</sup> FW Paine register No 3 entry 70

<sup>27</sup> FW Paine register No 8 entry 214

<sup>28</sup> FW Paine register No 17 entry 40

<sup>29</sup> C Farebrother entry 634

- 30 C Farebrother entry 697
- 31 Maxwell Bros register entry 2929
- 32 JH Kenyon register 11 January 1890
- 33 Information from John Clarke
- 34 FW Paine register 12 entry No 493
- 35 FW Paine register 14 entry No 132 and register 15 entry no 362
- 36 Unidentified register FW Paine collection entry no 82
- 37 HH Jordan (Register held in the FW Paine collection) entry 17
- 38 C Farebrother entry No 217
- 39 For example, see Maxwell Bros register entry 2929 for 'soup, sandwiches and coffee'
- 40 W Garstin register 948/1 January 1888 pp83-88 (Westminster Archives Centre)
- 41 JH Kenyon register 11 January 1892
- 42 Maxwell Bros register entry 1439
- 43 Maxwell Bros register entry 2271
- 44 Maxwell Bros register entry 1486
- 45 FW Paine register 27 entry 287
- 46 Maxwell Bros entry 4792 (17 January 1926)
- 47 FW Paine register 71A entry 827A
- 48 FW Paine register 8 entry 93
- 49 FW Paine register 3 entry 124
- 50 Author's interview with Irvine Inglis of Reston, 11 March 2017.
- 51 Parsons B (2005) *Committed to the Cleansing Flame: The Development of Cremation in Nineteenth Century England* Reading: Spire Books pp128-131
- 52 Parsons (2005) pp128-155
- 53 HH Jordan entry 62
- 54 Maxwell Bros register entry 1595
- 55 Maxwell Bros register entry 2291
- 56 CG Hatt entry 107
- 57 Farebrother entry 165
- 58 Farebrother entry 233
- 59 See Jupp PC, Davies DJ, Grainger HJ, Raeburn GD and White SRG (2017) *Cremation in Modern Scotland, History Architecture and the Law* Edinburgh: Birlinn
- 60 WT Dunbar. University of Glasgow archive FRAS 906/7
- 61 C Farebrother entry 575
- 62 See Cantrell JA (1984) *James Nasmyth and the Bridgewater Foundry: A Study of Entrepreneurship in the early Engineering Industry* Manchester: Manchester University Press p252.
- 63 W Garstin Entry no 42
- 64 FW Paine register 36 Entry no 406
- 65 FW Paine register 134 entry 35
- 66 See <file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/ambulance-train-resource-pack.pdf>. Accessed 11 January 2017. See also link <https://inconvenientdead.wordpress.com/2018/12/01/the-mass-mobilization-of-corpses-during-world-war-i/> (accessed 9 December 2018)
- 67 'List of 'military funerals' carried out by FW Paine (Kingston) between 1914 and 1919' Document held in the FW Paine museum
- 68 C Farebrother entry 44
- 69 C Farebrother entry 209
- 70 Parsons B (2014A) *The Undertaker at Work: 1900-1950* London: Strange Attractor pp177-196
- 71 FW Paine register 650 entry 995
- 72 Maxwell Bros register entry 140
- 73 C Farebrother entry 261 and entry 476
- 74 Parsons B (2015) *JH Kenyon and the State Funeral of Sir Winston Churchill* London: JH Kenyon p6
- 75 Parsons B (2018) *The Evolution of the British Funeral Industry in the Twentieth Century. From Undertaker to Funeral Director* Bingley: Emerald p79
- 76 C Farebrother entry no 45
- 77 FW Paine register 3 entry 108
- 78 FW Paine register 16 entry 196

- 79 C Farebrother entry no 154
- 80 Maxwell Bros register entry 52
- 81 'The Conveyance of Dead Bodies on American Railways' *The Lancet* 11 September 1897 p698
- 82 Parsons (2014B) *JH Kenyon: A Short History* London: JH Kenyon pp37-38
- 83 Unidentified register FW Paine collection entry 29 Jan 1891
- 84 FW Paine register 63A entry A97
- 85 FW Paine register 63A entry A317
- 86 FW Paine register 63E entry 276
- 87 FW Paine register 70E entry 730
- 88 C Farebrother entry 898
- 89 FW Paine register 48 entry 964
- 90 FW Paine register 44 entry 417
- 91 FW Paine register 44 entry no 370
- 92 JH Kenyon register 151
- 93 JH Kenyon register 28 December 1881 entry 362 and 31 August 1881 entry 243
- 94 FW Paine register 60 entry 35
- 95 FW Paine register 63A entry 542A
- 96 JH Kenyon register 24 June 1881 entry 175
- 97 C Farebrother register entry 150. The invoice was sent to W Mansell, stationmaster at Kingston. See *Surrey Comet* 21 December 1901 and *Surrey Comet* 28 December 2910
- 98 JH Kenyon entry 22 July 1938. Entry 43690
- 99 FW Paine register 70E entry 836
- 100 Printed details in author's ephemera collection.
- 101 Hurren ET (2012) *Dying for Victorian Medicine. English Anatomy and its Trade in the Dead Poor, C1834-1929* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan pp189-190
- 102 Parsons (2014A) pp43-55
- 103 See Parsons (2014A) pp161-174
- 104 See Parsons B (2015) *Bunny France: Memoir of a Holborn Funeral Director* London: A France & Son p25
- 105 Clarke JM (2006) *The Brookwood Necropolis Railway* Fourth Edition Usk: Oakwood Press p91
- 106 For a short history of FW Paine see Parsons B (2001) *The London Way of Death* Stroud: Sutton Publishing pp114-116, and also Parsons B (2017a) *Frederick W Paine: A History* Kingston: FW Paine
- 107 FW Paine register 15 entry 55
- 108 C Farebrother's predated FW Paine's use of a motor hearse as the first occasion was in December 1912 for a funeral from Surbiton to Woolwich. See entry 226.
- 109 FW Paine register 60E entry 698
- 110 FW Paine register 34 entry 5
- 111 CG Hatt entry 42
- 112 See <http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/gansg/1-hist/hist-a.htm>. Accessed 31 December 2016
- 113 Bagwell PS (1968) *The Railway Clearing House in the British Economy 1842-1922* London: George Allen & Unwin p246
- 114 Maxwell Bros register entry 200
- 115 Maxwell Bros register entry 1684
- 116 Maxwell Bros register entry 2244
- 117 C Farebrother register entry 38
- 118 C Farebrother register entry 30
- 119 C Farebrother register entry 108
- 120 TH Ebbutt register entry 205
- 121 TH Ebbutt register entry 308
- 122 FW Paine Register 3 entry 116
- 123 FW Paine Register 70A entry 894A
- 124 Unidentified register FW Paine collection entry 209-210 30 November 1858
- 125 Unidentified register FW Paine collection 29 January 1891
- 126 Maxwell Bros register entry 733
- 127 FW Paine Register 31 entry 176
- 128 FW Paine register 8 entry 26

- 129 'Revision of Railway Goods Rates' (1928) *BUA Monthly* Vol 7 No 7 p141
- 130 'We Hear' (1929) *BUA Monthly* Vol 8 No 9 p193
- 131 C Farebrother entry no 45
- 132 FW Paine register 8 entry 93
- 133 Maxwell Bros register entry 2271
- 134 FW Paine register 27 entry 287
- 135 A France & Son 21 October 1926 entry 2089
- 136 FW Paine register 71A entry 827A
- 137 List in the front pages of the 1897 diary
- 138 JH Kenyon register entry 296
- 139 John Clarke makes the following comment about special train to Brookwood organised through the London Necropolis Company: 'On the basis the LNC charged £15 for a 'special' train (plus fares etc), considering the return mileage from Waterloo to Brookwood was 56 miles (28 + 28), then they were charging slightly more than 5/- mile (56 x 5 = 280/- or £14; rough calculations suggest they were charging over 5s 3d a mile, a rate presumably dictated by the LSWR). However, this can probably be explained by the fact the basic infrastructure was waiting to be used, and all the LSWR had to supply was an engine, its crew, and a guard for the train. Other companies would have had to find the rolling stock for the special. The Necropolis Train has been described as a 'permanent special'. (Correspondence with the author March 2017)
- 140 W Tookey 948/2 April 1859 entry 466 (Westminster Archives Centre)
- 141 Maxwell Bros register entry 1432
- 142 JH Kenyon entry 132
- 143 C Farebrother entry 7
- 144 FWP register 3 entry 70. First class returns on the Necropolis Train were 6/- each.
- 145 FW Paine register 10 entry 360
- 146 C Farebrother entry 187
- 147 C Farebrother entry 361
- 148 C Farebrother entry 217
- 149 FW Paine register 44 entry 447
- 150 Parsons B (2017b) 'Funeral Directors and Distance Transportation of the Dead' *The Embalmer* Vol 55 No 4 pp31-39
- 151 FW Paine register 700 entry 213A
- 152 FW Paine register 70A entry 919A
- 153 FW Paine Register 70A entry 855
- 154 A France & Son 11 November 1952 entry No 14474
- 155 FW Paine No 22878
- 156 FW Paine Funeral no 26832. Funeral on 15 July 1966. The name of the departure station is missing, although it is thought to be Euston, which would have been rebuilt and also using diesel trains.
- 157 FW Paine Funeral no 26832
- 158 See Jupp PC (2006) *From Dust to Ashes. Cremation and the British Way of Death* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan for a full discussion about the development of cremation
- 159 See <http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/car-ownership>. Accessed 12 January 2017
- 160 There have been some exceptions to this restriction, such as the rail union leader, Jimmy Knapp, whose coffin was taken by a Virgin train to Glasgow following his death in August 2001. Funerals have also taken place on steam preservation lines; in January 2002 *The Guardian* published a photo of a coffin of a rail enthusiast being loaded onto a train at Butterley Station (part of the Midlands Railway Centre) in Derbyshire.
- 160 FW Paine register 70A entry 213A

Appendix 1

A consignment note and an invoice for a transportation carried out by the LNER from Sheffield to Marylebone in March 1929. (FW Paine archive)

Est. 504 & Ex.—2, at page of 20—2-25.

**TO BE GIVEN TO SENDER OR HIS AGENT.**

**CONSIGNMENT NOTE AND WAYBILL FOR LIVE STOCK (OTHER THAN WILD ANIMALS) TO BE CARRIED BY PASSENGER TRAIN OR OTHER SIMILAR SERVICE.**

**LONDON & NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY.**

**LIVE STOCK WAYBILL No. 32**  
P. 2643 (R)

From Sheffield Docking Station to Marylebone Station.....Co.  
Via.....  
Full Name and Address of Sender.....  
Full Name and Address of Consignee.....  
Owning Company, No. and Description of Vehicle.....  
Train..... Date March 19 1929

No.	Description of Live Stock.	Breeds or Marks (overseas traffic when not charged by weight)	Weight, Lbs.	Rate.		Paid on		TO PAY		Paid	Stamped Traffic, Not to be Abstracted		
				s.	d.	£	s.	£	s.		£	s.	£
	<u>Cow</u>									<u>7/100</u>			
	<u>15 Stalls</u>												
Declared Value £.....				Percentage on £.....at 1 per cent. . . .				— — — —					
				TOTAL ..									

**NOTICE.**—The London and North Eastern Railway Company give notice that they are not and will not be Common Carriers of Live Stock, and that they have in certain cases alternative rates for the carriage of such traffic, at either of which rates the same may be consigned at the Sender's option: (i.) the Company's Risk Rate; and (ii.) the Owner's Risk Rate; subject in either case to the Standard Terms and Conditions of Carriage applicable thereto and, in the case of Live Stock consigned to a destination entailing carriage by water, subject as to such carriage by water to the Conditions on the back hereof.

To the LONDON AND NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY COMPANY.  
Receive and forward as per address and particulars on this Note the above-mentioned Live Stock at the.....Risk rate, upon the terms of the above Notice.  
Signature of Sender or Representative..... J. Marshall (Here insert "Company's" or "Owner's.")

Declaration to be signed when Live Stock is declared to be of higher value than is stated in the Standard Terms and Conditions of Carriage of Live Stock by Passenger train or other similar service and an increased charge is to be paid for the greater risk incurred.

I/We declare that the value of the above-mentioned.....  
is.....per head, and I/we agree to pay the Company the prescribed increased charge for the greater risk incurred.  
Signature of Sender or Representative.....  
Witness.....

To be filled up when additional accommodation is required in the Horse Box.  
I/We desire \* [the exclusive use of 4 Horse Box] [the use of two Stalls of a Horse Box] for the above-mentioned Live Stock at the usual charge made by the Company for the same.  
Signature of Sender or Representative.....

\* Delete words not required.

NOTICE.  
When Live Stock has to pass through Customs a special form of Declaration must be filled up, [SEE BACK]

# Joseph Tomlinson & Sons

Limited.

• Funeral Directors •

COFFIN SHELL  
AND CASKET  
MANUFACTURERS  
MOTOR HEARSE  
AND LIMOUSINES  
TELEPHONE:  
22122 (2 LINES)  
TELEGRAMS:  
CARS 'PHONE  
SHEFFIELD

REGISTERED OFFICE:  
BOROUGH MEWS, BEDFORD STREET,  
**SHEFFIELD**

BRANCHES:  
267, HANOVER ST  
PHONE 25924  
116, HOLME LANE  
HILLSBOROUGH  
PHONE 43116  
ECCLESALL ROAD  
PHONE 23603

March 12th., 1929.

The Exors of the late Miss Cora Comerford.

To	R.C. Dark Oak Coffin with Crucifix.	£	9	0	6.
	Removal from Royal Hospital to Station.	£	1	1	0.
	Railway Charges to Marylebone.	£	7	18	0.
		-----			
		£	17	19	6.
		=====			

No 1183      March 15<sup>th</sup> 1929  
 Received from Exors of the late Miss Cora Comerford  
 the sum of Seventeen  
 Nineteen Shillings, and Six  
 Pence.  
 For JOSEPH TOMLINSON & SONS, LTD.  
 £ 17 : 19 : 6      J. Butt.  
NO RECEIPT ACKNOWLEDGED UNLESS GIVEN ON THIS FORM.

