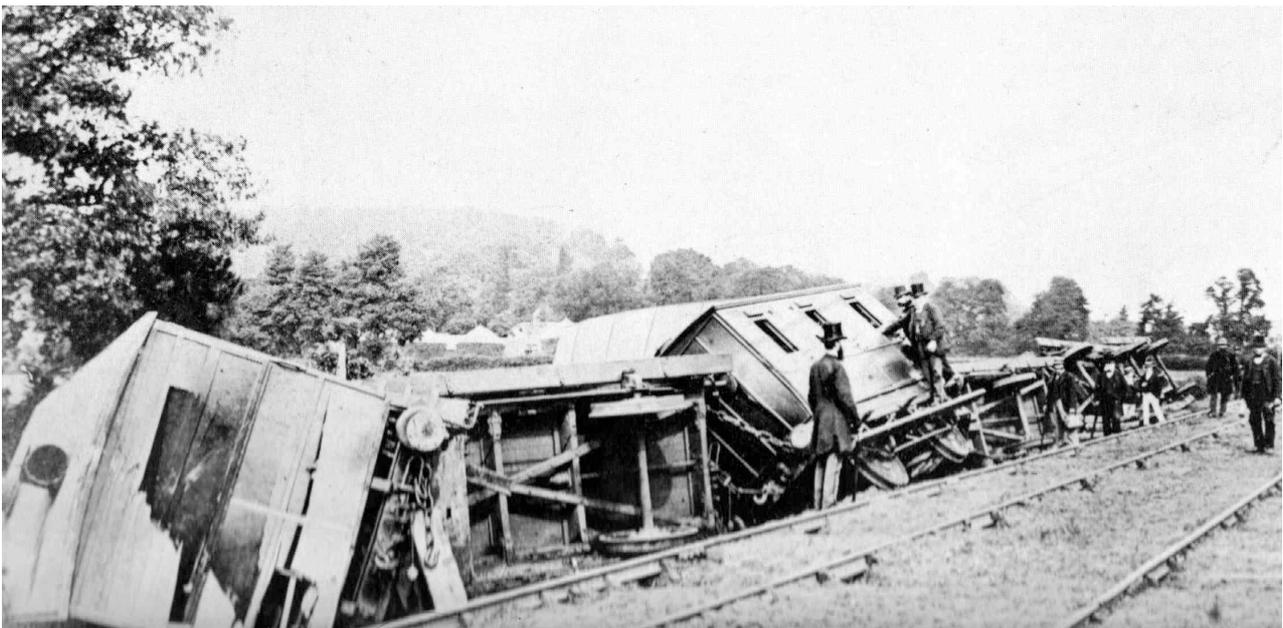


The Peasemarth railway disaster happened in the parish of Artington in 1873. While the railway line itself formed the parish boundary with Shalford, the derailed carriages fell on the Artington side.

On the evening of 9th September 1873 the Portsmouth express was approaching Guildford. About two miles south of the town, near the Peasemarth junction, the train struck a bullock that had run loose while being driven from Guildford market. The engine and tender remained on the rails, but all ten carriages were flung off, killing three of the passengers, including the daughter of the stationmaster at Milford.

The driver was able to run his locomotive on to Guildford to summon help. The inquest following the disaster returned a verdict of accidental death on the victims, but made the recommendation that communication cords and continuous brakes be compulsorily fitted to trains, a matter of great debate at the time. Despite trials of rival brake systems at Newark in 1877, little was done.



On 13th June 1879 Mr. Baxter, MP for Montrose, proposed in the House of Commons that *“it was the duty of the Government to take such measures as may be necessary to secure ... the application to all railway passenger vehicles in the United Kingdom of continuous brakes which comply with the conditions laid down by the Board of Trade as essential to public safety. I find that, between 1870 and 1876, there were 1,234 accidents which were of sufficient importance to be inquired into by officials of the Board of Trade; and of these, 952, or nearly four-fifths, might have been prevented, or mitigated, at all events ... by the use of efficient brakes. In August 1877 was passed an*

*Act which gave warning to railway companies that if they did not adopt a proper system of brakes they must be compulsorily interfered with. For twenty years the Board of Trade has been pressing on the railway companies the necessity of adopting proper continuous brakes. ... It is now the duty of the Government to take such measures as may be necessary to secure ... the application to all railway passenger vehicles in the United Kingdom of continuous brakes which comply with the conditions laid down by the Board of Trade as essential to public safety. The progress had been very slow, indeed, and meantime accidents were occurring and lives were being lost."*

Despite all this, it wasn't until after the Armagh rail disaster in June 1889, when many Sunday School children were killed, that continuous automatic brakes became compulsory on all British trains.

Matthew Alexander