

➔ effectively redundant, and by 1958 it was out of use. Today, the gates remain as part of the platform and have benefited from a thorough cosmetic restoration supported by the Railway Heritage Trust.

Stopping stuff

We conclude this feature with three most unusual items of signalling infrastructure (although to many of us, the workings of all Signal & Telegraph departments might seem unusual): three systems intended to stop drivers of trains... or enable them to continue.

Following the Tay Bridge disaster of 1879, the North Eastern Railway perhaps became more cognisant of the problems that high winds might cause on exposed bridges.

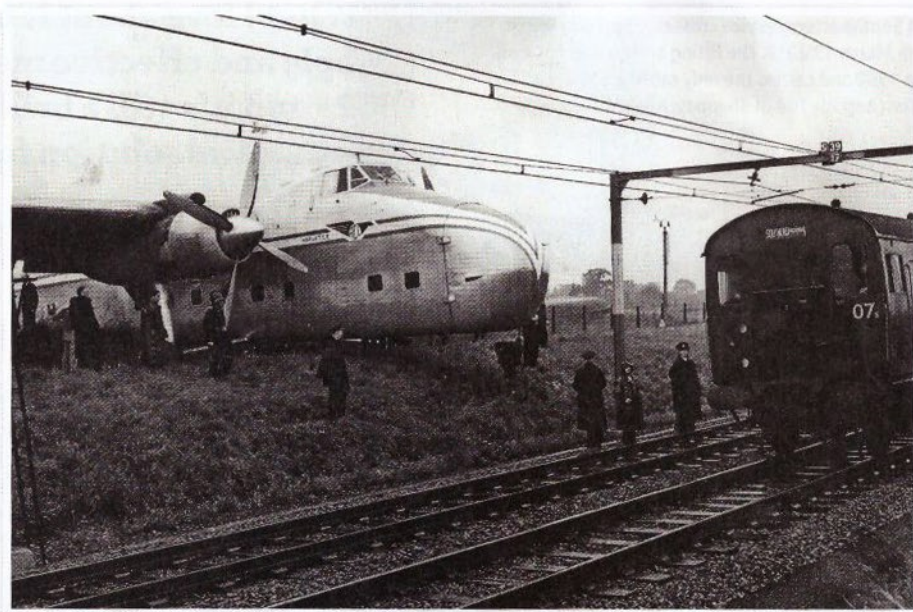
So it was that in 1884, it installed an anemometer (a wind recorder) upon Staithes Viaduct between Whitby and Saltburn. It was installed to sound an alarm in the nearby Staithes Signal Box when the wind reached a force considered dangerous to trains attempting to cross the 46-metre-high, 240-metre-long viaduct in its rather bleak position.

Incidentally, the pressure that the NER (and later, LNER) considered dangerous was 28lb per square foot. The bell was rung until the pressure dropped appropriately and a track investigation was carried out, although it was reported in 1935 that the bell had rarely been rung.

It was upgraded in 1947 with slightly more modern electrical apparatus, which presumably existed in location until the viaduct's demolition in 1960.

My final two contraptions are there to warn railway staff of objects that might have crossed onto railway land and which therefore pose a threat to the safe passage of trains.

Along the edge of the Shenfield to Southend line, where it passes the end of Southend



Thirteen people were injured in August 1957 when this Bristol freighter aircraft skidded on the runway at Southend Airport when landing with a flight from Calais. It ploughed through the boundary fence, but thankfully stopped short of the railway and the 1,500V overhead wires. A tripwire was installed on this section of Shenfield-Southend line to warn train drivers of instances such as this. ALAMY.

Airport's runway, somewhat sensibly a trip wire was installed - just in case an aircraft overshot the end of the runway and headed off down the embankment.

Well, several did just that - including on October 9 1960, when a Falcon Airways Handley Page H.P.81 Hermes aquaplaned across the tarmac. There were no major injuries, the trip wire was activated, and the aircraft was scrapped soon after.

The greatest of these systems (and perhaps my favourite) must be the one which is still in operation today - known as 'Anderson's Piano' after its inventor and the sound the wind

makes in its wires... the Pass of Brander stone signals.

Since 1882, trains on this section of what was the Callander & Oban Railway in Scotland have been protected from hitting fallen rocks by a series of 17 semaphore signals, linked across 6.5km of tripwires along this narrow route.

What I love about it is that it was a brilliantly simple and effective mechanical solution back in 1882 - and it's still a brilliantly simple and effective mechanical solution for Network Rail in 2020.

That just about concludes my round-up of mechanical oddities that I've encountered so far, having pored over archives galore. I'm always keen to learn of more, so please do get in contact if you're aware of a white elephant, iron dinosaur or mechanical marvel from the mists of railways past... or indeed present. **R**

Further reading

- *Railway Wonders of the World*. Jeffrey Wells; *Back Track Magazine* April 2012, p248-252.
- Roger Farnworth; *Rogerfarnworth.com*, and Helen Wojtczak; *Railwaywomen* (2005).
- Halesworthmuseum.org.uk.

About the author

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The Pass of Brander stone signals (also known as Anderson's Piano due to their use of tensioned wires) were first brought into use in 1882, to warn of rockfalls on this section of the Oban branch of the West Highland Line. GAVIN MORRISON.