

A North Union carriage burnt at Wolverton and other carriage links with the London & Birmingham

The setting alight of luggage on the roof of a carriage and the subsequent destruction of a North Union first on the London & Birmingham mainline in May 1840 confirm the presence of such carriages journeying between Euston and Preston.

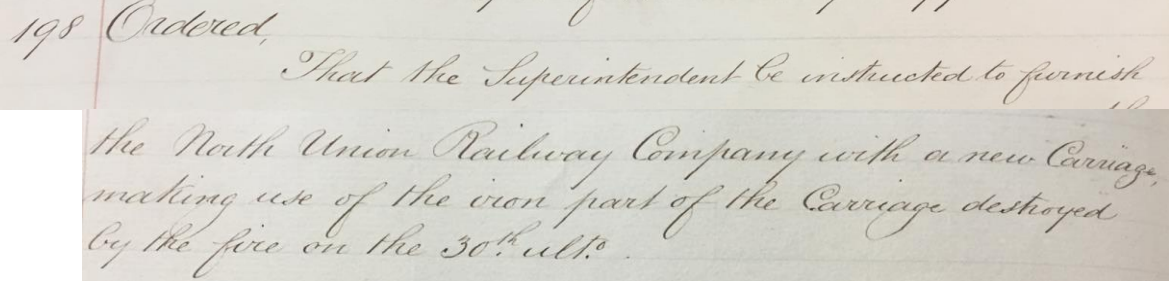
<p>LONDON AND BIRMINGHAM RAILWAY.—On Thursday evening last an accident, which was likely to have terminated seriously but for the activity and exertions of the company's servants and others, occurred to the mail train down, which leaves London at half-past 8. The following are the particulars:—Thursday being magazine night, a portion of them in addition to the passengers' luggage was placed on the top of the first class North Union carriage. When passing between Leighton Buzzard and Wolverton the guards perceived flames issuing from the top of the carriage just mentioned. The breaks were immediately put on, but, the wind blowing from the north-</p>	<p>east, and the train going at an accelerated speed, this portion of the line being on the decline, the flames got ahead before the engine could be stopped. So soon, however, as that was accomplished, the passengers, ten in number, were assisted out of their perilous situation, and and happily without any injury. Some of the property is saved, but a much greater proportion of course destroyed. The cause of the fire can only be conjectured, but it is presumed to have originated in a spark from the engine penetrating the tarpauling, or lodging immediately under it.</p>
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Derby Mercury - Wednesday 06 May 1840

As early as January of 1840 the London & Birmingham were advertising services to Preston. Whether at this early date this required a change of carriage en route is not clear but certainly by May there was a 'Preston' carriage. When the luggage on the roof of this carriage caught fire, because it was part of a London & Birmingham train, it fell to Joseph Wright to make recompense. He was instructed to reuse the remnants and build a new carriage for the North Union.

<p>The Travelling to and from the South by the Grand Junction, and London and Birmingham Railways, will be conducted as follows:—</p> <table> <tr> <th>From PRESTON to Birmingham and London.</th><th>From LONDON to Preston.</th></tr> <tr> <td>In the same Carriage, at *9 45 A.M.</td><td>In the same Carriage, at 9 30 A.M.</td></tr> <tr> <td>Ditto ditto at 6 27 P.M.</td><td>Ditto ditto at 8 30 P.M.</td></tr> <tr> <td>Changing Carriages, at *2 57 A.M.</td><td>Changing Carriages, at *8 45 A.M.</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td>Ditto ditto at *11 0 A.M.</td></tr> </table> <p>The Trains marked * will take private Carriages and Horse Boxes; the others cannot do so.</p> <p>FARES.</p> <table> <tr> <td>LONDON to PRESTON, by Day.....</td><td>£2 14 6</td></tr> <tr> <td>Ditto to ditto by Night (Mail)</td><td>2 17 0</td></tr> </table> <p>~~~~~</p> <p>ON SUNDAYS,</p> <p>From PRESTON, the Mails only will run, namely, at 2.57 A.M., and 6, 27 P.M.</p>	From PRESTON to Birmingham and London.	From LONDON to Preston.	In the same Carriage, at *9 45 A.M.	In the same Carriage, at 9 30 A.M.	Ditto ditto at 6 27 P.M.	Ditto ditto at 8 30 P.M.	Changing Carriages, at *2 57 A.M.	Changing Carriages, at *8 45 A.M.		Ditto ditto at *11 0 A.M.	LONDON to PRESTON, by Day.....	£2 14 6	Ditto to ditto by Night (Mail)	2 17 0	<p>The page for the North Union Timetable within the London & Birmingham compendium of 1841 includes this detail (left). Note the reference to '<i>In the same carriage</i>' (The North Union carriage running through) and '<i>Changing carriage</i>' – not running through. Note the 8:30 pm mail, the train in question. Ref: TNA Rail 981/244</p>
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Since the fire occurred on the London & Birmingham Joseph Wright was instructed replace the carriage.


<p>15th May 1840</p> <p>198 Ordered, That the Superintendent be instructed to furnish the North Union Railway Company with a new Carriage making use of the iron part of the Carriage destroyed by the fire on the 30th Instant.</p> <p>Ref: TNA RAIL 384/94 London & Birmingham Minutes of Carriage and Police committee,</p>

Through running arrangements

The North Union was formed through the first significant railway amalgamation in the country. The Preston & Wigan and the Wigan Branch railway amalgamated to form the railway but it was the connections and through running rights onto its connections that truly made it a Union.

The Grand Junction (1837) was already connected from the south through Warrington to the East-West axis of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway. The GJR/London & Birmingham trains with their through carriages and mail trains split east and west to Liverpool & Manchester. The North Union had a similar arrangement from the North, running from Preston it ran trains to Liverpool & Manchester. Preston was of course linked to the Lancaster via the Lancaster & Preston Junction, this enabled the TPO to reach Lancaster, its most northern point at this date. The North Union was also able to send selected carriages all the way to Euston.

By June of 1840 The London & Birmingham, GJR, North Union & Lancaster & Preston Junction had agreed both to exchanging carriages, so that passengers did not have to change, and through booking.

“Memorandum of arrangements between the London & Birmingham, Grand junction, North Union, and Lancaster & Preston Junction Railway Companies

1st – That each Company shall fund a proportion of First class Carriages according to the Milage, or failing to do so, shall allow 1d per Mile, accounts to be kept of the Milage and settle every month.

2nd – That there shall be one Railway Carriage through with each Mail Train from London and that private Carriages shall be brought from London by the 9.a.m. Trains.”

Remember Private carriages refers to privately own horse drawn carriages on carriage trucks. It would appear that the ‘one carriage’ could be from any one of the companies.

3rd – That the Lancaster and Preston Junction Railway Company shall bring up private carriages and passengers but no Railway Carriage by their Mail Trains leaving Lancaster at 2 a.m., which shall proceed and be taken on by the Grand Junction ½ past 3* Train and the London & Birmingham ½ past 8 a.m.+ Train.

This service did not have a through carriage, but should you be wanting to ride in your horse drawn carriage on a carriage truck that was possible.

4th – That the Lancaster and Preston Junction Company shall bring up private Carriages and one Railway Carriage to go through by their 8.50. am Train to proceed and be taken on by the North Union 9.45 a.m. Train and by the Grand Junction Company 10.30* and London & Birmingham Company’s 4 p.m.+ Trains.

Presumably the North Union picking up the train at Preston. One Lancaster & Preston carriage running through.

5th - That the Lancaster and Preston Junction Company shall bring up private Carriages and one Railway Carriage to go through by their 8.50. am Train to proceed and be taken on by the North Union 9.45 a.m. Train and by the Grand Junction Company 10.30* and London & Birmingham Company’s 4 p.m.+ Trains.

*Warrington +Birmingham

Ref: TNA RAIL 384/94 London & Birmingham Minutes of Carriage and Police committee, 19th June 1840

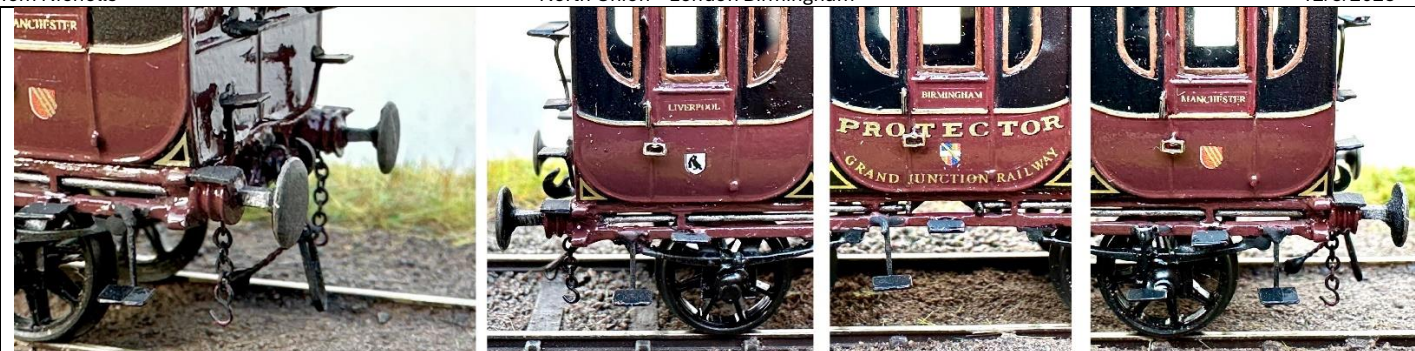
North Union First

It would appear that the North Union Board felt it was necessary to align their carriages with the designs and technology in use on the lines that they were adjoining and running services with. In the case of the Grand Junction Railway this was based on the Worsdell’s design which was also replicated on the London & Birmingham.

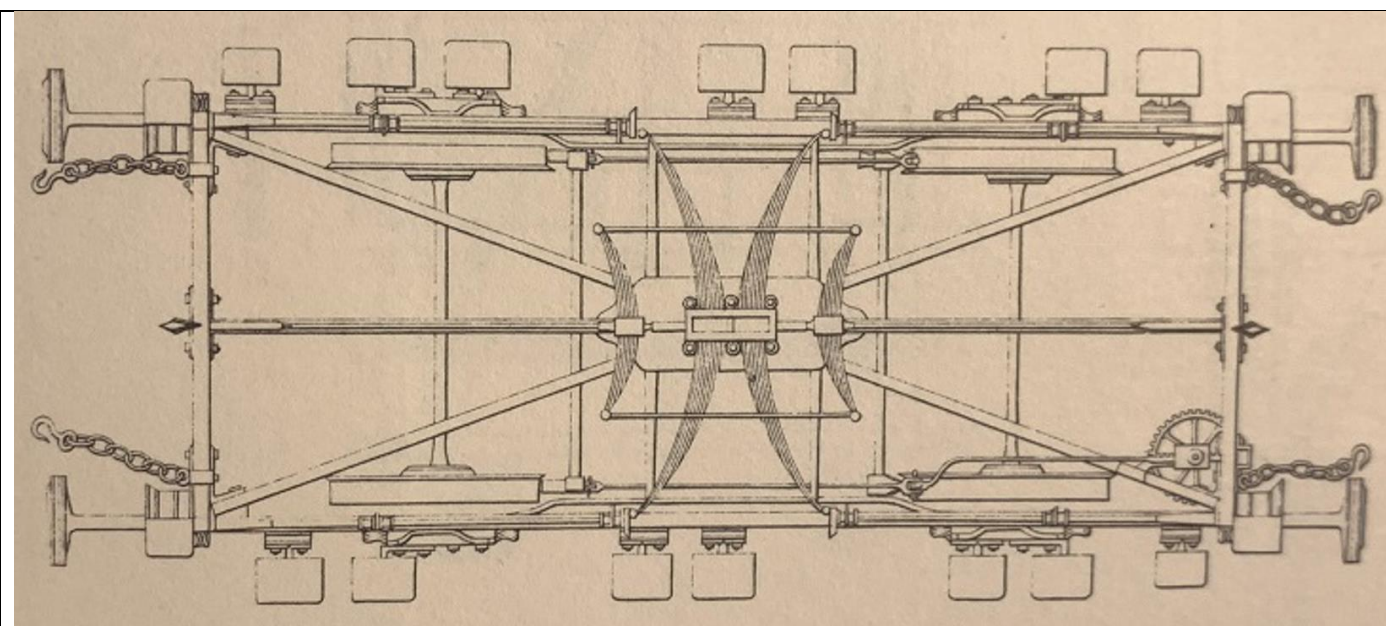
‘14th August 1837 Minute 278, The consideration of further orders for Carriages was resumed and the Secretary was instructed to direct Messrs Dunn & Wise to build the Four First Class carriages already contract on precisely on the same plan as the [GJR] ‘Chanticleer’ of the Grand Junction Company to communicate and exchange if needful with the carriages of that Company...’

TNA RAIL 534/4 Preston & Wigan Railway Co. Minutes of Proceedings of Directors

The reference to the ‘exchange’ is interesting relating to the ‘common user’ style agreement but this was the motivation of copying the Grand Junction Railway design to ensure that it was compatible.



1836 GJR First. Note square buffer rods, square door handles, step over buffer shank and stage carriage naming, upper panel destinations and city shields. Ref: Model and photographs Chris Cox



Whishaw's drawing of an early GJR first must be pretty close to the same undercarriage design as Dunn & Wise would have made for the North Union. The axle-guards were more likely mounted on the inside of the solebars. The important detail here are the horizontal back-to-back leaf springs of the pattern developed by the Worsdells.

The review of the GJR and Liverpool & Manchester carriages by the North Union was only a few months after the GJR opened. We can be fairly certain that the first North Union carriages built by Dunn & Wise were built on this model. A correspondent for the Preston Chronicle took the trouble to record the heraldry.

The carriages are 30 in number, viz., 15 of the first, and 15 of the second class. Four first class carriages were built by Messrs. Dunn and Wise, of Lancaster, and are splendidly finished with the London Arms on one end, the Birmingham on the other, and the Preston and Wigan in the centre. The accommodation in the inside is on an improved plan, having head pieces or seat divisions carried upwards to the roof, and affording every comfort for a journey.



Preston Chronicle - Saturday 03 November 1838

Speculative shields for Preston & Wigan c.1838.

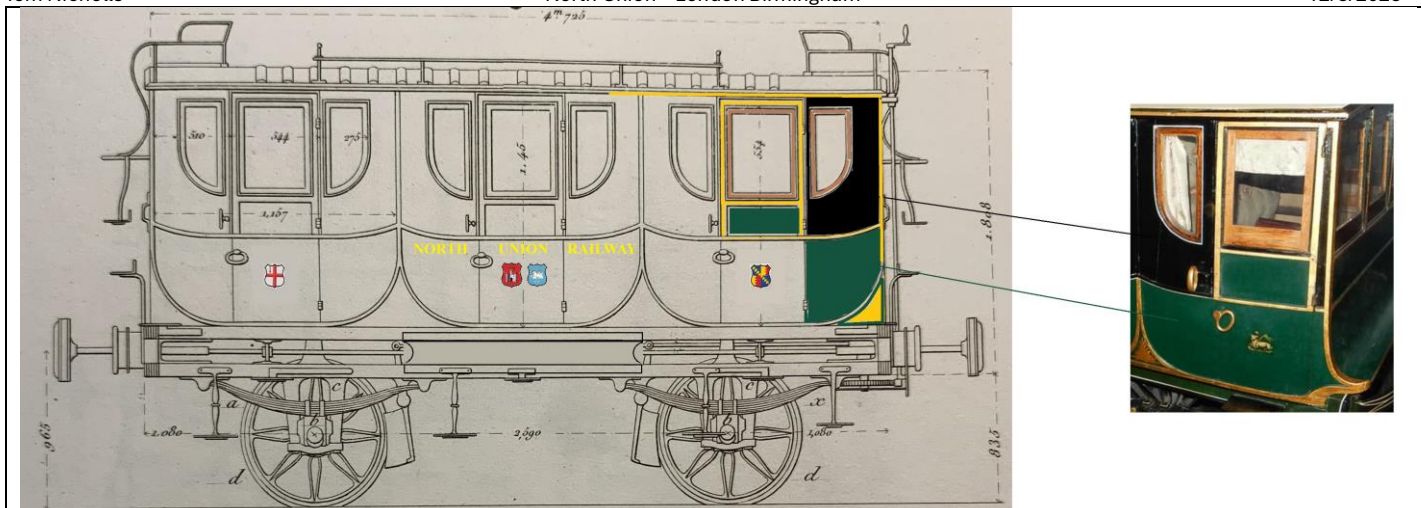


Diagram of speculated livery applied to London & Birmingham first 1837. There appear to be no details recorded for colour or upper panel lettering. Taking a lead from the 1842 'pattern carriage' model for the North Union Coupé 'mail', it would appear the livery was green and black but with gold edging. The heraldry on the model is particularly grandiose and it is likely that the shields on the first were more in line with the GJR carriage.

Ref: London & Birmingham first side elevation, edited by the author, Perdonnet l'Atlas, 1838. North Union 'mail', 1842 pattern carriage, NRM Object Number: 1975-789

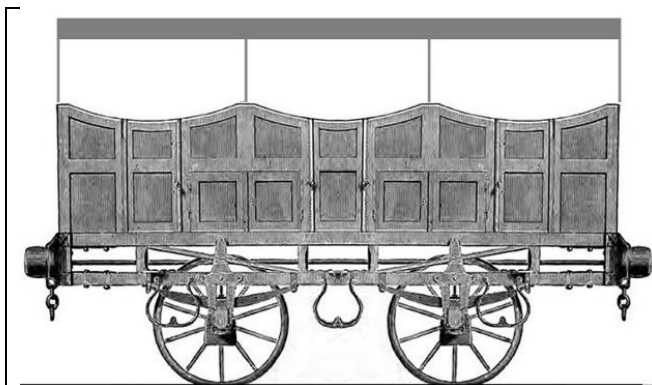
Liverpool & Manchester 'Blue boxes' and their connection for the London & Birmingham 'Green Boxes' and North Union second class and parliamentary thirds.

It is said that there are no drawings of the Liverpool & Manchester 'Blue box' open carriages and yet history has given us a sizable clue. On the 5th of September 1833, the Liverpool & Manchester Board room minutes tell us that 'four new Second Class Coaches be built by this Company to be ready by midsummer next. _____ Four of this Company's Blue Coaches, last built, being also appropriated to the Preston Traffic, to complete the number agreed on namely Eight First & Eight second Class. _____'

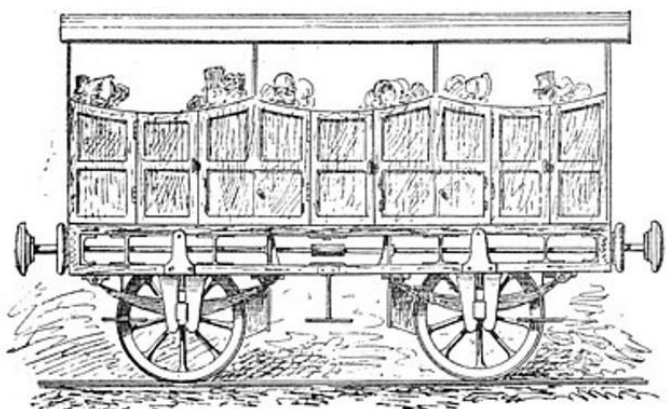
Ref: TNA Rail 371/10 Liverpool & Manchester Sub committee minutes 1833 (Mar - 1839 Aug)

This minute tells us that the North Union second class carriages, at least in relation to the Liverpool – Preston traffic, were identical to the L&M blue boxes being built at the time. When we look in the submissions for the Gladstone act of 1844 we find a carriage that looks very similar to the L&M type. The panelling, the luggage boxes, the curves in the upper body and the dimensions.

When the Liverpool & Manchester first built these carriages they weren't sprung but that had been rectified by 1837. They also had roofs and at least some had raised ends but the sides were open.



A slightly edited version of the surviving drawing, supposedly by Geo. Stephenson himself, sent to the Boston & Lowell Railroad supposedly in 1835 although this shows an early format of this carriage thought to be 1832. The second class match the length the stage coach firsts being 12'6".

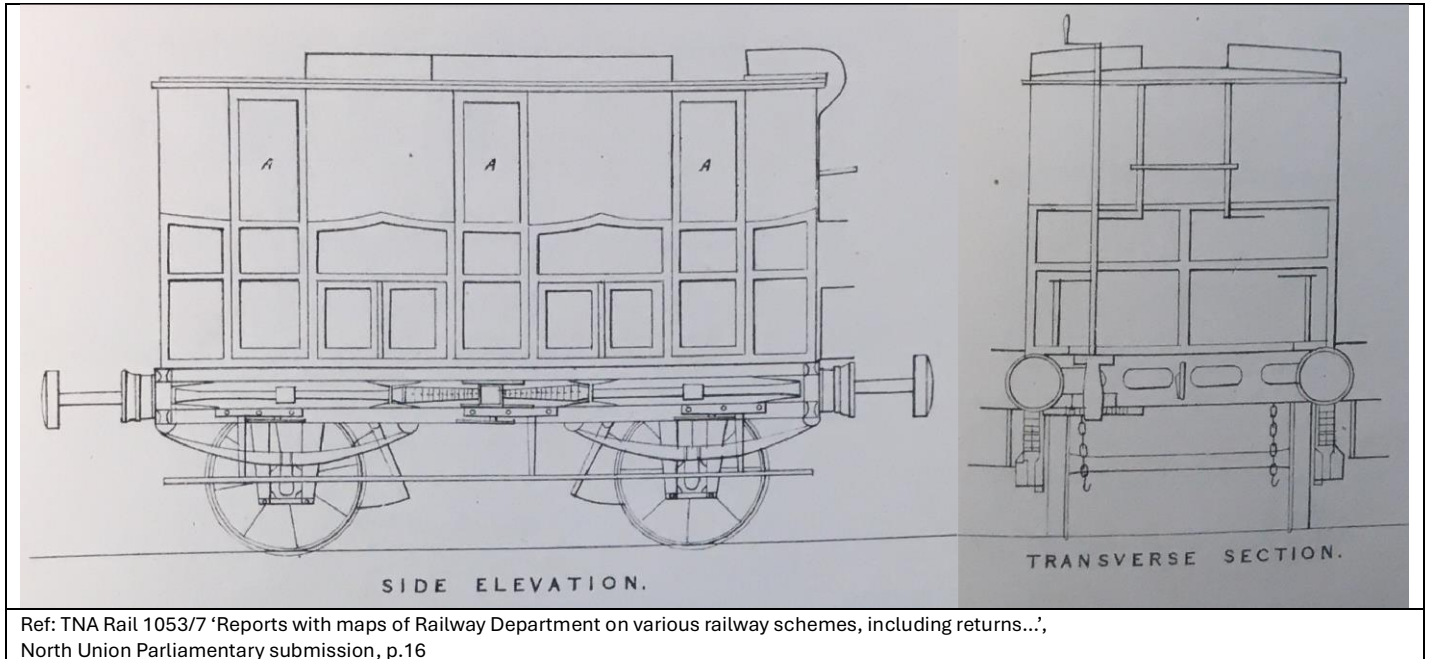


Just for visual comparison here is a similar carriage on the Bruxelles – Malines railway. Showing how the sprung buffers have been inserted into the existing framework.

Ref: Types des premières voitures de la ligne de chemin de fer entre Bruxelles et Malines. La locomotive « Le Belge » L'illustration nationale, 1880

Ref: Wonders and curiosities of the railway; or, Stories of the locomotive in every land; with an appendix, bringing the volume down to date, by William Sloane Kennedy, p11, New York, Hurst & company c.1906

When we look at the drawing of the North Union parliamentary third this is also only 12'6" long. Complaints about the 'open seconds' on railways were particularly loud in the early 1840s and it would fit that this was originally a North Union 2nd class that has been bumped down to third class duty and then had its side filled to meet the stipulations of the 1844 act.



So how close is this carriage to the L&M second. One particular feature that can be observed is the Stephenson ratio of the wheel base being half the carriage length had been dropped. The narrow wheel base would have caused considerable see-sawing and this has been rectified in later carriages.

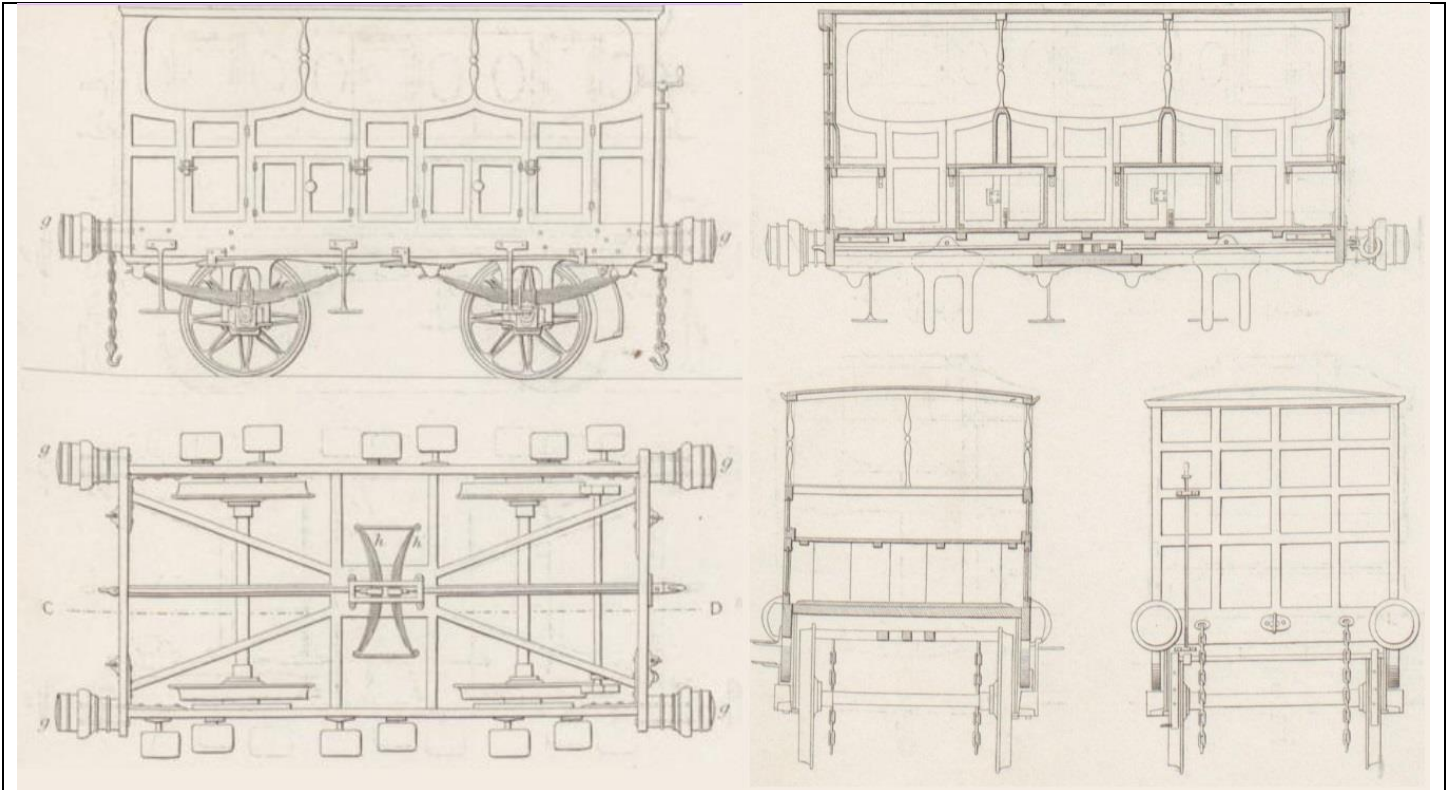
But what has this to do with the London & Birmingham?

About the same time that the North Union were gearing up for their Liverpool traffic the London & Birmingham were organising their own carriages. The distance between London, Birmingham and Liverpool ended making it difficult to convey carriages so in the end the company built their own 'Blue Boxes', as they also called them, for the opening of the London end of the line.



Chris' model of the first season seconds, following the opening on the 20th July 1837. This carriage initially served as a second class under the experimental first year opening. The foreseen third class didn't materialise under 1840. Chris based his model, with very good reason, on the London & Birmingham 'day' or 'open' second.

Note that the carriages lack any sprung buffering and although they have a solid solebar in the frame, they are otherwise very reminiscent of the original L&M design. Those at the London end were built by Ashlin Bagster in the company of Robert Stephenson at the Camden works along with an early batch of wagons. Ref: Model and photo Chris Cox



Still lacking sprung buffers SC Brees depicts the now roofed but still open 'day' second as it was most likely around 1839/1840. This carriage was much complained of in the early 1840s, especially since the GJR and Birmingham & Derby Junction railways offered enclosed seconds. Ref: Plate 2, Fourth series of railway practice : a collection of working plans and practical details of construction in the public works of the most celebrated engineers ... by S. C. Brees



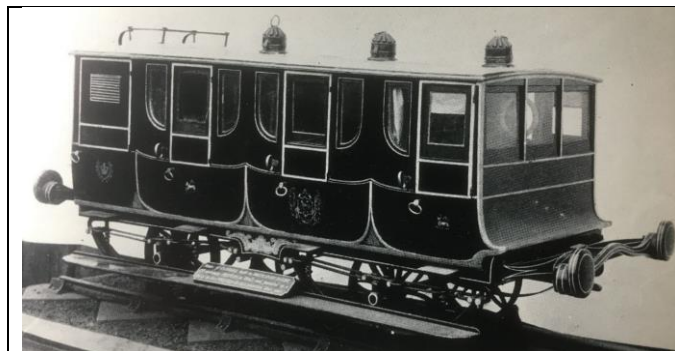
Chris' model of the North Union Parliamentary third of 1843, but this carriage was almost certainly began life as an L&M second or built to a similar design c.1837. Ref: Chris Cox model and photo

A Most beautiful and elegant pattern carriage model: The North Union Mail mystery

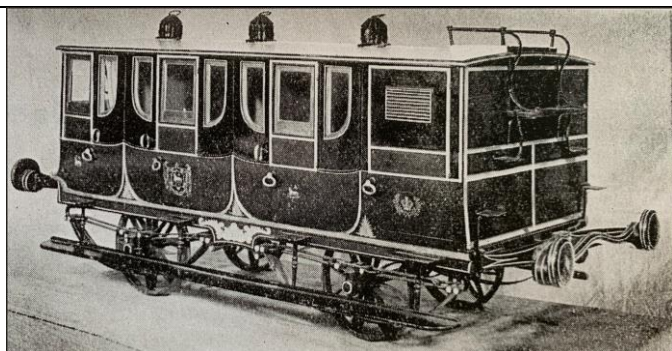
“Amongst other things, we were shown a very beautifully constructed model of a railway carriage, with bow-springs and buffers on a new and much improved principle. This model, together with very neat Dennet gig, in miniature, were exhibited in the procession of the trades on the Tuesday morning.”

Preston Guild - Manchester Courier - Saturday 17 September 1842, p3

Even on its debut this carriage captured the imagination of those who saw it. But this carriage presents a problem. Opinion appears divided as to whether a full size carriage was actually built. The design would have presented issues as a full size prototype.



Two rare views of the carriage with it being having liberated from its display case. Front ¾ view showing the full width coupe front and Adam's style buffering. Note the early form of roof mounted interior lamps. The flat bottomed compartment profile matching the date of 1842.



Rear ¾ view showing the frame cutaways to fit the Adams' bow springs and decorated cover over what appears to be a sort or pattrass block. Note also the rear facing seat for a train guard not a mail guard and the suspected 'luggage' compartment.

A proposed design for a type of carriage that might be called an 'improved mail coach', the history of this model is perplexing. This is a design of considerable elegance, perhaps even designed to show case the Preston apprentices' coach building skills. It is unlikely that the carriage, even if it was built, had any proposed connection with the Royal Mail. My thinking is that it was a proposed development of type of carriage seen as a highly elite design intended for use by royalty and aristocracy or at the very least the well to do.

Earlier 1837 the original mail coaches had narrowed bodies only seating 4 in a compartment inherited from the Liverpool & Manchester origins. These small bodies made them uneconomic in regular mainline use. The design retained popularity amongst the well to do, perhaps largely through the patronage of Queen Adelaide, who had one fitted up for her sole use on the London & Birmingham. The carriages were used initially on all London & Birmingham first class trains, with those on mail trains being accompanied by a mail guard and mail bags in the roof imperial. They were also used on other important occasions such as the opening of the Aylesbury branch so they were very much associated with high status travelling.

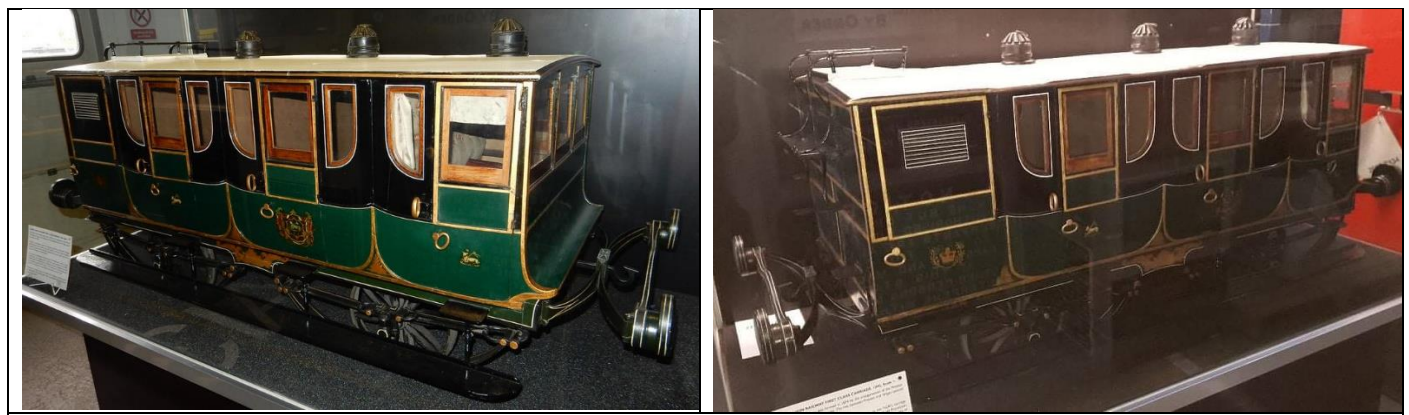
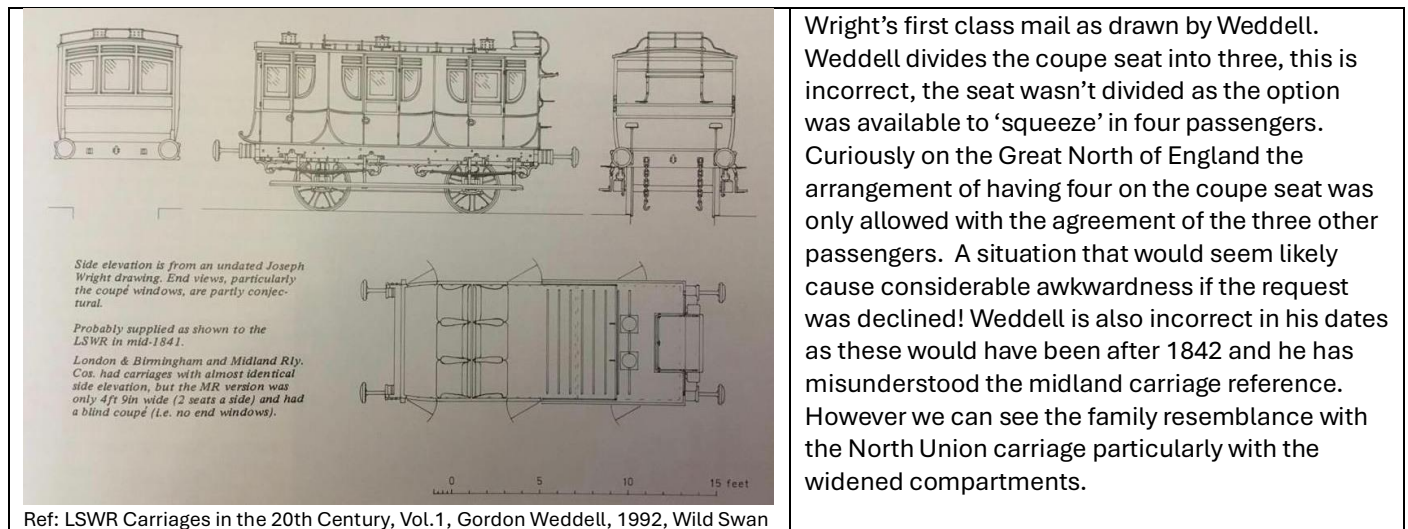


A four millimetre scale model of an 1837 London & Birmingham mail carriage by Chris Cox. Note the large imperial and the ornate guard seat mirroring the guard's position on the horse-drawn Royal Mails. Ref: model and photos Chris Cox

The North Union carriage is a full width coupé with what appears to be a luggage compartment. A coupé seat was considered a socially safe space being for example requested for ladies only travelling.

Such a carriage, with a full width, found favour at the in the first years of the 1840s. A number of companies had single and double coupé carriage designs. The model was built in 1842.

This carriage has many of the ‘improved mail’ features, looking in some ways very much like the London & Birmingham design. Protoyped in 1842 and built Joseph Wright, who’s carriage works sold them to Great North of England, the London & South Western, the Chester & Holyhead and possibly the Midland railway.



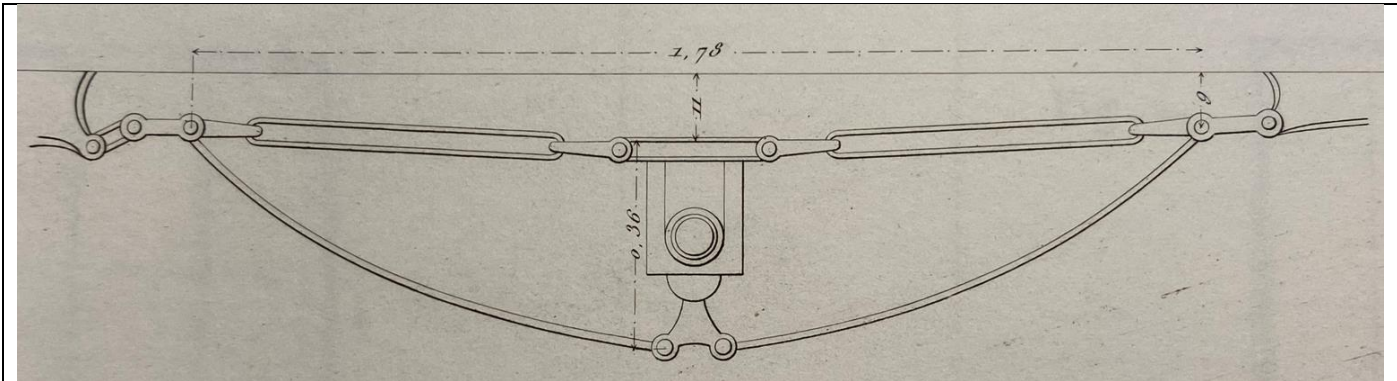
The Model on display in 'The Works', NRM Ref: all photos by Anthony Coulls

The reason why the carriage design is problematic is partly to do with the Bow Springs. These were famed in 1839 but by 1842 a body of evidence of short comings was coming to light.



Chris' model of the London & Birmingham Mail fitted up for Queen Adelaide in 1839. The bow springs were much liked by early commentators as they gave a sense 'of the finest texture and admirable elasticity'. Ref: model and photo Chris Cox

In 1839 W.B. Adam's 'bow springs' were fitted to Queen Adelaide's 'mail coach'. At the time there were a good number of publicised opinions holding these springs in high regard. Issues arose however in operation, the springs were stressed to breaking if horizontal motion became excessive, the nerves of passengers were also tested and in a number of examples those nerves failed.

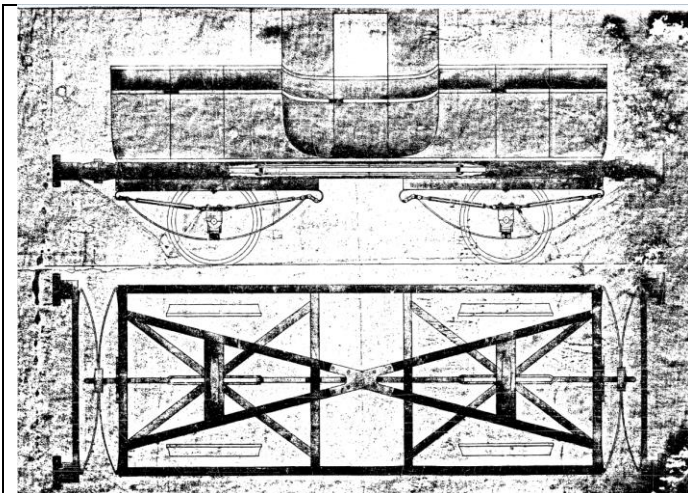


Adam's bow spring as illustrated in Perdonnet's L'Atlas (1838). Chris' research suggests that Adam's produced these in at least two different lengths.

Both Wright and Adams came up with damping suggestions to restrict horizontal wandering but, in the case of the Queen Adelaide's carriage, in 1840, Board members of the London & Birmingham still instructed them to be removed. The incident did not extinguish the appeal of the bow spring however, the Manchester & Leeds purchased them and the South Eastern applied them to their first class carriages in 1842. So it isn't so strange that the bow spring was selected for the model.


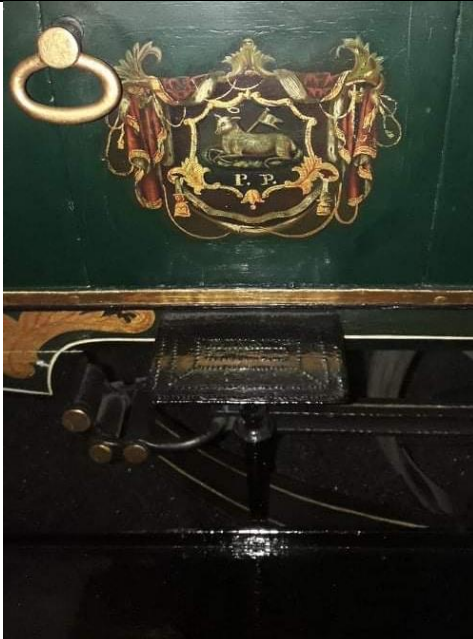

An additional a question must be raised about the design on the under carriage or frames. It is not known how the Queen Adelaide mail coach was fitted with bow springs. Adams designed subassemblies for the mounting of his springs but on the North Union carriage they appear mounted on a simple frame.

His buffer arrangement appeared to be wonderfully simple and cheap in comparison to Booth's Bergin springs and Worsdell's leaf springs. It also did away with buffer rod entirely.



The first carriage of a type called a gondola, was actually called Gondola and was built for the Manchester & Leeds as a form of excursion carriage with the 'open' end compartments being fitted up for high class 'curiosity travelling'. Later versions on the same railway and possibly on the Manchester & Birmingham and even on the Grand Junction, were built as a form of composite in the days that inside meant first class and uncovered was second class.

What interests us here are the under carriage subassemblies and the buffering. The bow spring mounts are a different form from the North Union model but the external buffer springing matches. Adam's buffer springing was trialed on the London & Birmingham but was felt by them to be inadequate, in fact the spring broke during the testing. The Manchester & Leeds models in the NRM all have this form of buffering interestingly. Ref: HMRS 1531

		
<p>The crown emblem is often used to denote Royal ascent or association but does not denote a Royal Mail vehicle without the full Royal Arms and Cypher.</p>	<p>The absolutely glorious and highly decorative arms of Preston. With such ornate backing robes this example is one of the most elaborate seen on the side of any road or rail carriage apart from the depiction of the Liverpool-Birmingham mail in a drawing Whishaw.</p>	<p>The coupé door carries a repeat of the Preston Lamb motif. First class carriages carried both Preston and Wigan arms.</p> <p>Ref: all photos Anthony Coulls</p>

One of the significant issues, I feel, about whether this carriage was actually built or not, given a lack of other evidence is the under carriage, is the design of the model's under carriage. Chris' has spotted that the already slender solebar is cutaway to fit beneath the compartments. Carriage frame development from 1840 onwards had seen a replacement of the lighter Worsdell open frame with solid solebars, but the North Union carriage appears to have the worst of both designs.

Brian Reed in his book, *Crewe to Carlisle*,¹ seems rather certain that a carriage was built, 'both the model and the original coach were built in 1842 at the NU shops at the foot of Butler Street Preston'. Unfortunately Reed doesn't give us a reference for his assertion.

Another excellent researcher, Richard Ball, shared a minute he has found from Sep 19th 1839

"470. A conversation took place in respect to the propriety of building a Carriage or two with the spare time of the men necessarily employed in the Coach Maker shop, and it appearing that 3 or 4 more First Class Carriages will be requisite for next Summer travelling the Secretary was instructed to contract with Messr Leece & Son for Two or Three Carriages, provided they will do so at reasonable price, and to permit the Coach Maker to construct one on the understanding that he does not on any account engage any additional hands for this purpose."

This minute comes two days after the carriage was shown by the Preston Guild. Is it possible that the model's appearance created such attention that the North Union decided that it should be built. This is possible. But if you built such a beautiful vehicle wouldn't you advertise it? Perhaps launch it in some way? There doesn't appear to be any press or company minute references to the completion and use of this carriage. Shame.

A staff reporter for *The Advertiser* attended the Rugby Exhibition of local art and industry on the June 13th, 1891. He observed that 'in another part of the room, lent by Mr. Park² of an old North Union railway carriage, built in 1842, which was no doubt then considered a travelling palace.' Praise indeed for that period!

¹ Ian Allan, 1969

² Then Superintendent for Wolverton