Mc GOVERN, Thomas 26 June 1883

Designation	Accident Location	Accident Due to
Plate Layer	Guildford	Fall from ballast train

Thomas McGovern was a young man when he apparently alighted from a slow moving ballast train at Guildford, slipped or tripped and fell under the wheels of the wagons causing two of them to derail. Thomas received horrendous fatal injuries and died instantly. A coroner's inquest determined that Thomas' death was accidental. Thomas lived at Fremantle and is interred at Fremantle Cemetery.

FATAL RAILWAY ACCIDENT.
No small degree of excitement was felt in the City yesterday morning, when it was rumored that a young man named Thomas McGovern had, on the previous evening, met with a fatal accident upon the second section of the Eastern Railway. At first all sorts of wild reports were circulated, and it was freely stated that a grand crash had occurred, that several trucks had been thrown off the rails, that and a number of men severely if not fatally injured. As we had reason to believe that an inquiry would be held into the matter without delay, we at once dispatched a reporter in order that we might be able to give the public the fullest possible particulars of, what we are glad to be able, to say, is the first fatal railway accident which has occurred in connection with the construction of the Eastern Railway. The following is our reporter's account of -

THE INQUEST,
which was held in the Guildford Court House by the Coroner of the district (Mr. G. W. Leake, Q.C., J.P.,) before a jury of three, consisting of Mr. J. Allpike (the Foreman), and Messrs. S. Chester and W. Wheatley.

James William Wright deposed: I am the contractor for the Eastern Railway between Guildford and Chidlow's Springs The deceased man, Thomas McGovern, was in my employ as a plate-layer, and so far as I knew him he was always very sober and not at all quarrelsome: He used to work beyond the Main Camp in the hills, but was accustomed to return to Guildford every evening, as he slept there. Last (Tuesday) evening we left the Main Camp for Guildford as usual at about a quarter or twenty minutes past six. I myself alighted at the Depot; the train did not stop there, but the engine was considerably slowed for the purpose. There were six trucks attached to the engine on that occasion, and McGovern was either in the last truck or the last but one. The night was very dark. About three or four minutes after I had alighted I heard the trucks bumping, but I did not hear any cry. I afterwards saw a body lying across the rails nearly opposite Johnson's boarding-house, and identified it as being that of Thomas McGovern. The lower jaw was crushed, the left arm was almost completely severed from the trunk, the left leg was broken, and the right arm was smashed. When I saw it, the body was lying face downwards, the head was cut about and the coat was torn. He was carrying a large bundle of cookery ware at the time, and trying to save it when he jumped off the train might have caused him to fall. The ground just there is about six inches higher than the rails.

John Patrick Cunningham, being sworn, said: I am a Corporal of the Police, and am stationed at Guildford. About seven o'clock last evening I was talking to Mr. Wright and another person at the corner of the Depot, when someone came up and told us a man was lying dead on the railway track. In company with p.c. Stokes I proceeded to the spot, when I found the body of the deceased lying as Mr. Wright has described. Stokes and I removed the remains to the dead-house.

Cornelius Lyons deposed: I am a plate-layer and work on the second section of the Eastern Railway. Last evening we left the Main Camp at a quarter past six. I was sitting in the same truck as the

deceased was. The last time I spoke to him was when we were about a mile and a half away from Guildford, and then it was about the sparks which were being thrown out by the engine. When I last saw him he was standing ready to jump out; I was on the other side of the truck. I jumped off before he did, so that I did not see him get off, nor did I miss him before I left the truck. The body was lying about fifty yards lower down the line from the place where I alighted.

Thomas Gibson said: I am an engine driver in Mr. Wright's employ, and last evening I started at a quarter past six with train made up of the engine and some trucks from, the Main Camp, and arrived at the Depot at about twenty-six minutes to seven. The train was almost at a standstill when Mr. Wright got off. We did not exactly stop at the Depot, as the Pilot told me to move on gently; we were going at about two miles an hour when we were opposite Mr. Wood's place, and we continued this rate of speed until I got the red signal to stop when opposite the Station-yard. Mr. Arthur Wright was riding in front of the train, to see that the way was clear ; there was a head-lamp in front. When we stopped we got off the train and found that two trucks had jumped the rails ; they were the fourth and fifth from the engine; we replaced them, again, and then went on to the Station. Afterwards we returned slowly without the engine to find out the cause of the accident, when Mr. Arthur Wright saw a piece of wood lying on the line. He and the others then got down and walked along the line; my mate Beak walked only two or three yards towards the Station, when he returned, saying, "Tom, there's a man on the line." Then I went up and found a body, which I identified as being that of the deceased. I had not seen him since the morning, and owing to the darkness I did not see him on the train that evening. I did not notice anything happen to the engine between our leaving the Depot and our pulling up opposite the Station yard; there was no jumping or anything of that sort, nor anything which led me to believe that anything wrong had happened, nor did I hear any cry. I cannot offer any suggestion as to the cause of the accident. I don't know if the deceased were quarrelsome or sober.

By the Jury: The trucks might have passed over the piece of wood without affecting the engine. The engine was in front of the train when going down to the Station. The body of a man falling across the rails might throw the trucks off the metals. Patrick Murphy: I was guard of the truck-train last night, but I do not remember seeing the deceased on the train. When between Wood's and Gould's. I noticed that Lyons was on the train. I saw someone else sitting down in the truck when Lyons jumped off it ; not recognising the man I turned my lamp upon his face, but could not tell who he was, as I could not make him out clearly ; my light was not very bright, and the man was sitting at some distance from me in the next truck. McGovern was on the train, but I do not know whether the man on the fourth truck was the deceased or not.

Arthur Bridge Wright said: Having heard the previous evidence I do not think I can add to or amend it in any way. I was riding in front of the tender when going to the station by order of the firm, and on returning I rode on the cowcatcher of the engine with the guard. I saw the body lying on the rails as described. I cannot account in any way for his death. I last saw him about noon, but I did not see him on the trucks, though I knew that he would be there. It was very dark indeed that evening. The block of wood spoken of was not lying on the rails but in the middle of the track, and I saw that the cowcatcher had caught.

To the Jury: The trucks were all coupled as usual, and seemed to be all right I did not see any man riding outside the trucks. The men are strictly prohibited from standing on the sides of the trucks, from getting off the train while it is in motion.

William Brown deposed: I am a plate-layer upon the line, and came down last evening from the Main Camp in company with McGovern, Lyons being in the same truck. I got out at the Depot, the train was going about two miles an hour at the time. Just before I got out I was sitting beside McGovern ;

he was facing Scrivener's, apparently ready to jump out on the right hand side, while I was facing the other way and jumped out on the left hand side. The deceased was quite sober, Lyons was sober too ; we were all quite sober in fact. I cannot account for the deceased not getting out at the Depot. He had a bundle with him containing tin-dishes and spoons, but no crockery. I cannot account for the accident, excepting he caught his foot in jumping out.

The Coroner : I think, gentlemen, that we have now heard everything which can possibly throw any light upon this sad accident. You have heard that at the spot where the body was found was six inches higher than the rails, and we all know that we receive a certain shock when we do or do not meet with a certain unexpected resistance. It is for you, gentlemen, to decide whether this unfortunate young man's death was purely the result of an accident, or whether anyone is to blame in the matter.

The Jury, after a short retirement, returned the following verdict, Thomas McGovern, on the 26st inst., came to his death by an accident, which resulted from injuries received on alighting from a train when in motion.

The Coroner: That means '"accidental death ;" of course you could come to no other conclusion. Poor fellow!

The place where the accident occurred is just opposite the Anglican Church, and, from an examination of the spot, it seems evident that the unfortunate young man mast have tripped against the low bank which has been mentioned in the evidence, and was thus jerked under the wheels of the trucks, two of which were thrown off the rails by the sudden shock. The track of the disrailed trucks was plainly traceable in the gravel for about twenty or thirty yards along the track before the train was pulled up. The body, which had been profusely strewn with flowers by loving hands, presented a shocking appearance, owing to the injuries which had been inflicted upon the head and face, while each limb had been either broken or crushed by the wheels of the trucks. The only consolation for the friends of the deceased is that he could not have suffered, any pain, as, from the nature of the injuries, it was evident death must have been instantaneous.

It was reported that he would be buried in Fremantle Cemetery on the following (i.e. this) day. and that a special train would be provided in order to enable his brother workmen to attend the funeral.

Source: Trove/The Daily News (Perth) 28 June 1883 Page 3.