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## **Railways, Crime and Detection in Victorian England: A Re-reading of Edward Marston's *The Railway Detective***

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**Abstract:** The opening of the first steam-powered public railway line between Liverpool and Manchester in 1830 in Britain transformed how the public travelled and communicated. At the same time, the railways gave criminals ample opportunities in the perpetration of crimes. It allowed them a quick escape from the scene of crimes. The busy stations gave them anonymity and opportunity to merge seamlessly with the seething crowds. It helped the detectives too in the detection of crime and apprehension of the criminals. The author Edward Marston, the pseudonym of Keith Miles (born 1940), saw the possibility of setting his stories in the 1850s-60s Victorian England, when both detective policing and railways were in their early phases, and presented the “Railway Detective Series” (2004 -), the brilliant and irresistible contemporary “Historical Detective Fiction”. Meticulously researched and full of evocative period details, the series gives a vivid insight into early Victorian life and the remarkable impact the railways had on the mobility of the population. The present article, through the re-reading of Edward Marston's *The Railway Detective* (2004), the first book in the series, seeks to find out the impact the railways had in both the perpetration as also the detection of crime during the Victorian era. At the same time, it also focuses on Marston's portrayal of Victorian railways in the book. The article is divided into five sections. The first section ‘Introduction’ gives a brief history of railways during Victorian era and also introduces the author and the series. The second section titled “Portrayal of Victorian Railways” analyses Victorian railways as portrayed by Marston. Section three titled “Crime on Victorian Railways” probes how railways helped the criminals in the perpetration of crime. Section four titled “The Railway Detectives” examines the role of railways in the detection of crime. Section five, the concluding section, analyses how close to reality is Marston's portrayal of Victorian Railways with its associated crimes and detection.

**Keywords:** Victorian Age, Railways, Crime, Detection, Historical Detective Fiction, The Railway Detective.

Victorians were the pioneers of railways. The first steam-powered public railway line dedicated to passengers was opened in 1830 between Liverpool and Manchester. The trains on the line operated to a set timetable. Several other railway lines were opened in the next few years such as London-Birmingham in



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1838, and London-Bristol in 1841. But the real railway boom came in the 1840s. By 1850, over 6000 miles of track were laid which rose to about 18,000 miles by 1880. The web of railway tracks connected almost all the major cities and towns, and expanded to the previous untouched countryside. There was hardly any place left that was not accessible by the train. The introduction of railway lines faced a lot of opposition too. People, especially from the countryside, opposed it firmly fearing that it would ruin their rural geography and peace: “Landowners objected to the line crossing and spoiling their land, farmers said their cows would go dry at the sight of a steam engine, and many people dreaded terrible accidents” (Bowood 14). The development of railways had a great impact on Victorians and its effect on their lives was unprecedented in history. Britain which was already thriving due to the industrial revolution got a great push by the trains. It transformed how the public travelled and communicated. Unlike the slow horse-drawn carriages, the trains, the new ‘iron horses’, reduced the transportation time drastically. This resulted in increased trade and deepening and widening of markets. People now had enough time to go to coastal areas for fun and relaxation. It had other benefits too. Industrial and more importantly fresh agricultural and dairy products could now be sent to any part of the country within hours. Newspapers and other such materials could easily be sent to different parts on the same day. It resulted in the building of many railway towns. Many suburban towns also came into existence. The railways also aided the coal and iron industry. There was also the introduction of a standardized time across Britain based on the railway timetable. All these helped Britain to become a world power.

However, the expansion of the railways in Britain brought challenges and dangers too. More people now started moving to the cities like London for seeking employment, but they only added to the deteriorating condition of the already overcrowded slum areas. They were mostly unskilled labourers and managed only to get menial jobs with low wages in factories. Their working conditions were poor and they lived in unhealthy environments. Perhaps, this was one of the reasons to force them into the world of crime. The trains and railway stations became thriving places for all sorts of criminal activities. The railways gave criminals ample opportunities in the perpetration of crimes. It allowed criminals a quick escape from the scene of crimes. The busy stations gave them anonymity and opportunity to merge seamlessly with the seething crowds. Simultaneously, the increased mobility due to trains also made the



maintenance of law and order a lot easier. It helped the detectives in the detection of crime and apprehension of the criminals. They could also go to the scenes of crime in less time. With the introduction of telegraph on the railways, the sending of messages became faster and easier.

The author Edward Marston, the pseudonym of Keith Miles (born 1940), who also uses the names Martin Inigo and Conrad Allen, saw the possibility of setting his stories in the 1850s-60s Victorian England, when both detective policing and railways were in their early phases, and presented the “Railway Detective Series” (2004 -), the brilliant and irresistible contemporary historical detective fiction. Historical detective fiction is usually defined as a subgenre of two literary genres - historical fiction and detective fiction, which is “set in some distinct historical period” or features “a detective in the present [who is] investigating a crime in the remote, rather than recent, past”, and the central plot involves the solving of a mystery or crime (usually murder). The writers of historical detective fiction, through their research and analysis, incorporate historical facts into fiction. The reader derives pleasure from the “fictive knowledge” of the historical past. John Scaggs in his book *Crime Fiction* (2005) says that the writers of historical crime fiction employ different methods to make the setting authentic and credible. For this, they employ “a wealth of period detail. . . . through descriptions of daily life, clothes, food, houses, transportation, social activities, and more” (126). They deploy “recognisable historical figures in the fictional narrative” (126). The writers also bend source materials in order to satisfy both the narrative demands and the popular demands of the reader. Thus, the historical knowledge which the reader has gained from outside the novel i.e., from the history books, gets validated as historical knowledge by the fictional details provided in the historical detective fiction; and ‘the congruence between the two narratives gives the reader pleasure’ (O’Gorman 19).

Edward Marston, a contemporary writer, is an expert in the genre of historical detective fiction. He is the former chairman of the Crime Writers’ Association (1997–98). His historical detective fictions are based on different events and set in different periods. His “Elizabethan Theatre Series” features Nicholas Bracewell, stage manager and amateur detective; the “Domesday Series” features Ralph Delchard and Gervase Bret, who explore the crimes and misdemeanors surrounding the compilation of Domesday in the late 11th century; the “Restoration Series” features architect Christopher Redmayne and Constable Jonathan Bale, and is set in 1660s/70s London; the “Captain Rawson Series”, set during the War of the Spanish



Succession, features Captain Daniel Rawson, a soldier and a spy; the “Home Front Detective Series”, featuring Inspector Harvey Marmion and Sergeant Joe Keedy, is set in WWI; the “Bow Street Rivals Series” is set immediately after the Battle of Waterloo and follows the adventures of Peter and Paul Skillen, identical twins, who fight against the rising crime wave in London; the “Alan Saxon Series” features Alan Saxon, a professional golfer-turned-amateur detective; the “Merlin Richards Series”, set in the late 1920s America during Depression features bored young Welsh architect Merlin; the “Dillman and Masefield Series”, featuring private detectives George Porter Dillman and Genevieve Masefield, is set on board ocean liners of the early 1900s.

Marston, however, is best known for his hugely successful “The Railway Detective Series” (2004 - ), featuring Scotland Yard Detective, Inspector Robert Colbeck. There are 20 books in this series so far and the next book is slated to come out in 2022. Also known as the “Detective Inspector Robert Colbeck Series”, it deals with major crimes committed on Victorian railways. Marston uses an authentic Victorian setting, and, through his solid historical research work transports the reader into the Victorian world of crime and detection. He skillfully recreates the era and the mindset of Victorian society. Each work takes the reader to a different part of the country, sometimes also to other countries, as Detective Inspector Robert Colbeck, the protagonist and Sergeant Victor Leeming, his assistant, confront a new set of crimes related to the railways. Each case has its own flavour, nuances and styles. The author draws a continuing storyline with a particular set of individuals across the novels who become old friends to the reader as the series progresses. Meticulously researched and full of evocative period details, the series gives a vivid insight into Victorian life and the remarkable impact the railways had on the mobility of the population. It also shows the freedoms enjoyed and constraints faced by the detectives during the period. The series has also been optioned for television adaptation by Mammoth Screen. The present article, through the re-reading of Edward Marston’s *The Railway Detective* (2004), the first book in the Railway Detective series, seeks to find the impact of the railways on the Victorian Age. It examines the role of railways in the perpetration and detection of crime during Victorian era. At the same time, it also focuses on Marston’s portrayal of Victorian railways.

*The Railway Detective* takes the reader to the Victorian world of railways, crime and detection. The story is set in 1851, the year Britain held the Great Exhibition to make “clear to the world its role as industrial



leader” (Kishlansky et al. 684). The London to Birmingham mail train on the **London and North Western Railway** (L&NWR) is stopped by a group of men disguised as railway police, who rob the mailbags and a gold coin consignment of £3,000 and then forcefully derail the train. The driver of the train, Caleb Andrews, who tries to resist the robbers, is badly injured. The Detective Department of the Metropolitan Police Force in Scotland Yard is called in to investigate this one-of-a-kind crime. Superintendent Edward Tallis sends Inspector Robert Colbeck, the soon-to-be titular hero and Sergeant Leeming, his sidekick, to catch the robbers. Colbeck’s investigation leads him to the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace, which he saves from being blown off by the criminals. Next, Madeleine Andrews, the daughter of Caleb Andrews is kidnapped by the criminals to distract the inspector. Finally, Madeleine is freed, all the criminals are caught and brought to justice. The reader gets to know that the motive behind the crime is hatred for the railways. His success in this case bestows Inspector Colbeck with the eponymous title “The Railway Detective” which is also the supertitle of the whole series.

The present article adds to the field of research by examining the role of railways in the Victorian age, its impact on the mobility of people and analysing how this new mode of transport aided both the criminals in their crimes and the detectives in the detection of crimes. The article is divided into five sections. The first section ‘Introduction’ gives a brief history of railways during Victorian era and also introduces the author and the series. The second section titled “Portrayal of Victorian Railways” analyses Victorian railways as portrayed by Marston. Section three titled “Crime on Victorian Railways” probes how railways helped the criminals in the perpetration of crime. Section four titled “The Railway Detectives” examines the role of railways in the detection of crime. Section five, the concluding section, analyses how close to reality is Marston’s portrayal of Victorian Railways with its associated crimes and detection.

### **Portrayal of Victorian Railways:**

Victorian Age was “the Railway Age” (Marston, *Railway Detective*, 179). Railways brought with it a totally different notion of time, space and speed. It transformed Victorian lives completely. Trains were quicker, cheaper and a lot safer than other means of transport. Edward Marston has set the book *The Railway Detective* in the year 1851. The 1850s was the peak period for the railway industry. The parliament had



passed various acts for the development of railways in Britain and “Hundreds of millions of pounds were raised privately” (Kishlansky et al. 634) for building the railways. There were more than 7500 miles of track in use by the year 1852. The investments in railways from different sectors gave impetus to the already booming British industries: “By the 1850s, the original purpose of the railways was being realized as freight revenues finally surpassed passenger revenues” (634). The railways brought new opportunities. Investors amassed huge profits. Other industries and factories benefitted from the transportation of more coal on time. The iron and steel industries boomed as they got never before demands from railways. The railways also surpassed the textile mills in the number of workers they employed. The railways “did more than link places; they brought people together and helped develop a sense of national identity by speeding up all forms of communication” (635).

The railway stations were the marvels of the age, “the nineteenth century’s most distinctive contribution . . . the creation . . . of the most memorable and pleasing railway stations” (Richards and Mackenzie 19). Their size and spectacle denoted the spirit of the age. To celebrate this wonder Marston opens the first chapter with a description of Euston Station:

Euston Station was one of the architectural marvels of the day. Even the most regular passengers on the London and North Western Railway could still be impressed by the massive portico with its four Doric columns built of adamantine Bramley Fall sandstone, flanked by two pairs of pavilions, and standing on the north side of a large open space. The addition of two hotels, one either side of the portico, introduced a functional element that did not lessen the stunning impact of the facade. Those who passed through the imposing entrance found themselves in the Great Hall, a combined concourse and waiting room. It was a magnificent chamber in the Roman-Ionic style with a high, deeply coffered ceiling that made newcomers gape in astonishment. (*Railway Detective* 9)

Euston Station, also known as London Euston, was the first mainline station of London that connected London to other cities. The station was planned by George Stephenson at Euston Square. He was faced with opposition from the landowners there. He relocated the station to Chalk Farm to get the bill



passed. When the bill was passed, George stepped back from the project. But Robert Stephenson, his son, took over as the new chief engineer for the project. He got the authorisation to build the station at Euston Square as originally planned in 1835. The station was designed by Philip Hardwick. It opened on 20 July 1837 and saw the first train roll out on 17 September 1838 from London to Birmingham. The station was at the time owned by London and Birmingham Railway(L&BR) but was “amalgamated into the London and North Western Railway Company” (Marston, *Railway Detective* 204) in 1846 and was run by LNWR till 1923. Euston Station “was regarded not as a railway station but as a spectacle. Visitors used to flock to it in omnibuses and examine it with the careful scrutiny of sightseers.” The main entrance of the station had a massive 72 feet portico, which was supported by four hollow Doric propylaeum columns built of Bramley Fall stone. Also known as the Euston Arch, the portico was the symbol of the arrival of the new mode of transport and the dominance and triumph of the railways. As Christian Barman wrote in 1950:

The railway builders were moved by the spirit of the conqueror and nowhere is this spirit more clearly visible than in the portico of Euston . . . they built the portico at Euston to proclaim as a memorial their victory to posterity. For this portico, though designed in the manner for porches attached to buildings, is by virtue of its starkly isolated position a genuine military *arc de triomphe*.

Euston station was also the first station which had hotel accommodation. The hotel was built in 1838-9 in two separate buildings, the Victoria Hotel and the Euston Hotel, on each side of the portico. The station went through several modifications which included the demolition of the Arch and the Great Hall in the mid-1960s, resulting in the end of the Victorian monumentality. Apart from being a structural marvel, the railway stations were also the “visible proof of the way that the railways have transformed our lives” (Marston, *Railway Detective* 178). Stations had become the very centre of life, throbbing with people- trains arriving and departing from the station leaving behind the noise and steam clouds, “passengers . . . streaming off it. Friends . . . waiting to greet them . . . dozens of people . . . come to wave off their friends or family members. Porters everywhere, moving luggage on their trolleys, and several other railway employees . . . in evidence” (178).





In the first chapter, Marston also introduces the driver and fireman duo who had to take the train to Birmingham. Caleb Andrews, in his early fifties, is the proud driver of the train who cares for it like his own daughter. For Caleb a “locomotive was much more than an inanimate piece of machinery . . . . She was a trusted friend, a living creature with moods, likes and dislikes, a complex lump of metal with her own idiosyncrasies, a sublime being, blessed with awesome might . . .” (*Railway Detective* 11). His love for the locomotive shows the pride of an engine driver and his consciousness towards his responsibilities. Driving an engine was not an easy job as they had to face various hardships in different weather conditions. They had to endure “wind, rain, snow, sleet, or insidious fog” (14). Sir Francis Head in *Stokers and Pokers* (2nd ed., 1849), wrote about the responsibilities of an engine driver:

Even in bright sunshine, to stand — like the figure-head of a ship — foremost on a train of enormous weight, which, with fearful momentum, is rushing forward faster than any racehorse can gallop, requires a cool head and a calm heart; but to proceed at this pace in dark or foggy weather into tunnels, along embankments, and through deep cuttings, where it is impossible to foresee any obstruction, is an amount of responsibility which scarcely any other situation in life can exceed...

Frank Pike, in his thirties, is the fireman who “often . . . has come home with burns on his hand from the firebox or a mark on his face where some flying cinders have hit him” (Marston, *Railway Detective* 199). Both of them “wore a uniform of lightcoloured corduroy and a cap” (12). They were both on the footplate of the train inspecting everything before setting off. The engine of the train was designed by Alexander Allan at the Crewe workshop:

It was a short train, comprising an empty first-class carriage, a bright red mail coach, a luggage van and a guard’s van. The locomotive and tender bore the distinctive livery of the northern division of the company. The engine was painted green, with main frames a paler shade of the same hue. Smoke box and chimney were black. The dome was green, as was the base of the safety valve, though the casing of the latter was polished brass. Hand-rails were covered polished brass and splashers were brass-headed. Wheels were black. The front cylinder caps were made of iron, polished to a sheen.



Before she set out, she was positively gleaming. (12-13)

The train started its journey from Euston station leaving dark smoke clouds in the air. The train was moving at a steady speed into the open country but after forty miles when the train was about to reach Leighton Buzzard Junction, it is suddenly signalled to stop by a railway policeman. Marston now describes how the fast-moving train is stopped immediately:

Andrews reacted immediately. Without shutting off steam, he put — the engine into reverse so that her speed was gradually reduced. Only when she had slowed right down was the tender hand-brake applied along with the brake in the guard's van. Since she had been moving fast, it had taken almost half a mile to bring her to a halt.

Driver Andrews opened the cylinder cocks with the regulator open, so that steam continued to flow without working on the pistons. The water level in the boiler was maintained. (14-15)

This points out towards the essential qualifications needed to be an engine driver or a fireman—"sobriety, steadiness, activity, presence of mind on emergencies, and the most constant watchfulness when on duty". This also shows that the drivers were skilled individuals who had the knowledge about the mechanism of the locomotive. Thus, Caleb was able to enlighten Inspector Colbeck about the engine and its maker. He tells Colbeck that the engine he was driving was designed by Alexander Allan, the foreman at the Crewe workshop and an assistant to Richard Trevithick. Talking about the design of the engine, he points out that the locomotives by Allan had "double frames that extend the whole length of the engine with the cylinders located between the inside and outside frames" (156). He says that it was Allan who developed horizontal outside cylinders, thus ruling out the problem of cranked driving axle in case of the inside cylinders. Readers also get to know about the engines designed by Edward Bury. When asked about his knowledge of the locomotives, Colbeck answers Caleb that he is "familiar with the engines designed by Mr Bury; four-wheeled, bar-framed locomotives with haystack fireboxes, and tight coupling between locomotive and tender to give more stability" (155). Figure 1 below illustrates the 0-4-0 locomotive with tender. This design quickly became a standard and came to be known as the "Bury type" locomotive. This

locomotive had a problem with the crank axles associated with the inside cylinders. Moreover, it was too heavy to pull.

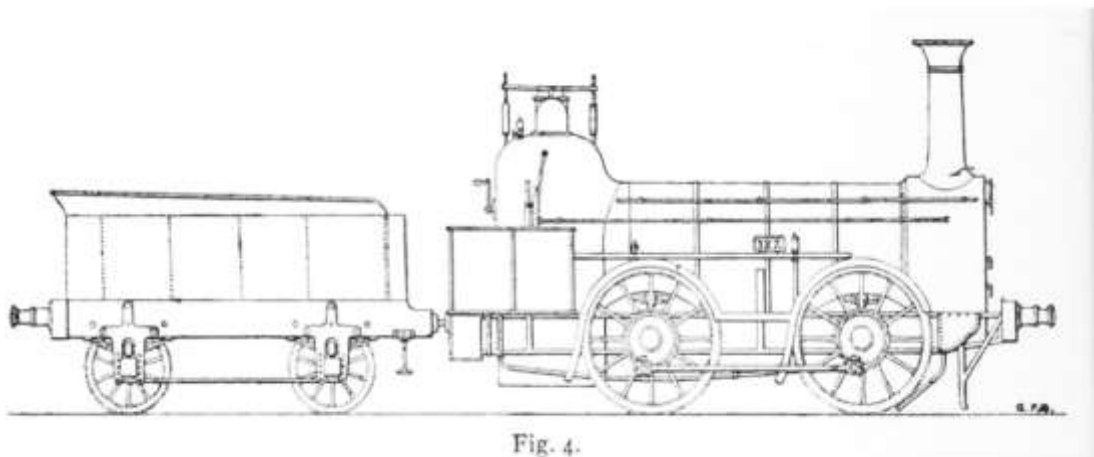


Fig. 1. Bury Type Locomotive from Cubitt, Benjamin. “Bury Type 0-4-0 Goods.” *The Great North Railway Society*. <[www.gnrsociety.com/locomotive-class/bury-type-0-4-0-goods/](http://www.gnrsociety.com/locomotive-class/bury-type-0-4-0-goods/)>.

Marston points towards ‘the battle of the gauges’ of the time: “Because it offered more stability, Colbeck preferred the wider gauge of the Great Western Railway and the greater space in its carriages but he had no choice in the matter on this occasion” (92) as he was travelling on the LNWR which had a standard gauge. Isambard Kingdom Brunel was the engineer who had constructed broad gauge rails which were seven feet and a quarter-inch apart. Brunel was of the opinion that the broad gauge provided greater safety and comfort because of the wider rails. But the other lines were built on the standard gauge having the rails four feet, eight-and-a-half-inches apart. This created problems in the movement of trains from one system to another. The problem was finally resolved after the passing of the Gauge Act on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1846, which mandated the use of a single standard gauge. The act isolated the broad gauge of the Great Western Railway in the southwest of England and in Wales, finally leading to the end of the broad-gauge system built by Brunel.



Fig. 2. Illustration of dual gauge track from Bowood, Richard. *The Story of Railways : A Ladybird Achievements Book*. Wills & Hepworth, 1961.

The railways had a huge demand of bricks for different purposes such as the construction of bridges, tunnels, and stations. Marston makes this evident when Colbeck illumines Leeming about the number of bricks used to build the Kilsby Tunnel: "... millions of bricks were used .... A steam clay mill and kilns were built on site by Mr Stephenson so that he had a constant supply of 30,000 bricks per day... The original estimate... was for a total of 20 million bricks, some of them made from the clay that was excavated from the tunnel itself" (203). Colbeck appreciates Kilsby Tunnel as "a work of art" (202) and rightly states the facts about its construction and the difficulties faced by Robert Stephenson, the chief engineer, in building it: "When he undertook the project, Mr Stephenson thought it would be relatively straightforward because they would be cutting their way through a mixture of clay and sand. Unhappily, ... much of it turned out to be quicksand so the whole area had first to be drained. It was slow and laborious work" (203). The construction of the tunnel was started in 1835 and took three years to complete and cost £320,000 to build, three times the original estimate of £98,988. Twenty-six workers out of 1,250 lost their lives during its construction. 135,680 cubic metres of clay were excavated from the tunnel, which was used for making the bricks. Around thirty million bricks were used in the tunnel, of which one million were used in the largest ventilation shaft alone.



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In the latter half of the book, the reader finds the Great Exhibition of 1851 playing an integral part in the development of the plot. Marston gives a great deal of information about the exhibition, its proposal, early preparations, its construction, people involved in the construction and organisation of the event, and the exhibits, especially focussing on the railway exhibits. The "Great Exhibition of Works of Industry of All Nations" or simply "the Great Exhibition" was inaugurated by Queen Victoria on 1 May 1851 at the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, London. Marston mentions Prince Albert as the exhibition organiser and Joseph Paxton as its main designer. Prince Albert is one of the historical characters who is indirectly present in the book. Richard Mayne is the only historical character who plays an active role in the story. Mayne was the first joint commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Force (the Met) and was also in-charge of policing at the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace. The exhibition was a defining moment for Victorian Britain. While the railways gave impetus to the already booming British industry, the exhibition established Britain as the world leader. The exhibits on display were "divided into four different classes- Raw Materials, Machinery, Manufactures and Fine Arts ... there were over 100,000 separate items on show, sent in from all over the world" (Marston, *Railway Detective* 220), by over 15,000 contributors. And the railway exhibits of Class V 'Machines for direct use, including Carriages, Railway and Marine Mechanism', displayed under section II 'Machinery', inside the Crystal Palace totally justified the role of Britain as the champion. The Class V was "a very large one, occupies a considerable amount of space, and ... the most direct representation of one of the principal sources of the industrial success and prosperity of Great Britain". There were several railway exhibits such as steam engines, locomotives, railway carriages, railway machinery etc on display. The book mentions the display of the locomotives such as the *Lord of the Isles*, *Liverpool*, *Iron Duke* and the *Puffing Billy* at the exhibition. Marston also gives the specifications of the *Liverpool*, "a standard gauge locomotive designed for the London and North Western Railway by Thomas Cramton. Built for high speed, it had eight foot driving wheels and an unprecedently large heating surface... the boiler pressure was 120 per square inch and ... the cylinders were 18 by 24 inches" (*Railway Detective* 228-229).

The glass and iron-built Crystal Palace was itself the most breath-taking exhibit of all. The building was 1,851 feet in length to celebrate the year of the Exhibition. Railways again played the most important role in making the event a success. Trains were used to bring the cast-iron framework and sheets of glass



from Birmingham to London through the Kilsby tunnel. People also travelled on train from all parts of Britain to Hyde Park and as a result, over 6 million people attended this gigantic festival, which was equivalent to one-third of the population of England and Wales.

Marston mentions in detail the difficulties faced before the exhibition came on the floor. To organise the Exhibition a commission, The Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851, comprising prominent politicians and businessmen, was formed. The commission first chose Hyde Park as the location. Out of the 230 designs or so received, Isambard Kingdom Brunel's design was chosen, but due to the timeframe and temporary nature of the structure, his design, which was primarily a brick building with a large dome on top of it, proved difficult to build on time. Thus came Joseph Paxton, "a landscape gardener ...director of the Midland Railway" (*Railway Detective* 221) whose design was finally selected by the commission. Paxton, at a board meeting of his railway company, sketched "his idea for the building on a piece of blotting paper" (222). It was a prefabricated iron-framed building with a glass exterior. Paxton in order to ensure popular support, even got the design published in the *Illustrated London News*. This move won his design a lot of praise, so much so that Punch magazine called it the 'Crystal Palace', a name that stuck to the building. After the finalisation of the design, there were concerns about the damage to the elm trees in Hyde Park. This was sorted by Paxton with the modification in the design with a high arched transept that enabled the trees to remain intact within the building. Then, there were financial problems too. But it was sorted by contributions from businessmen, especially the railway tycoons. Sir Samuel Morton Peto (4 August 1809 – 13 November 1889), civil engineer and railway contractor, and a Member of Parliament first stepped in and offered "to act as guarantor for the building by putting down £50,000. Once he had led the way... others quickly followed. Mr. Peto also put his weight behind the choice of Paxton as the architect" (222). Thus it is very much evident that at "every stage... crucial decisions have been made by those connected with the railways" (222).

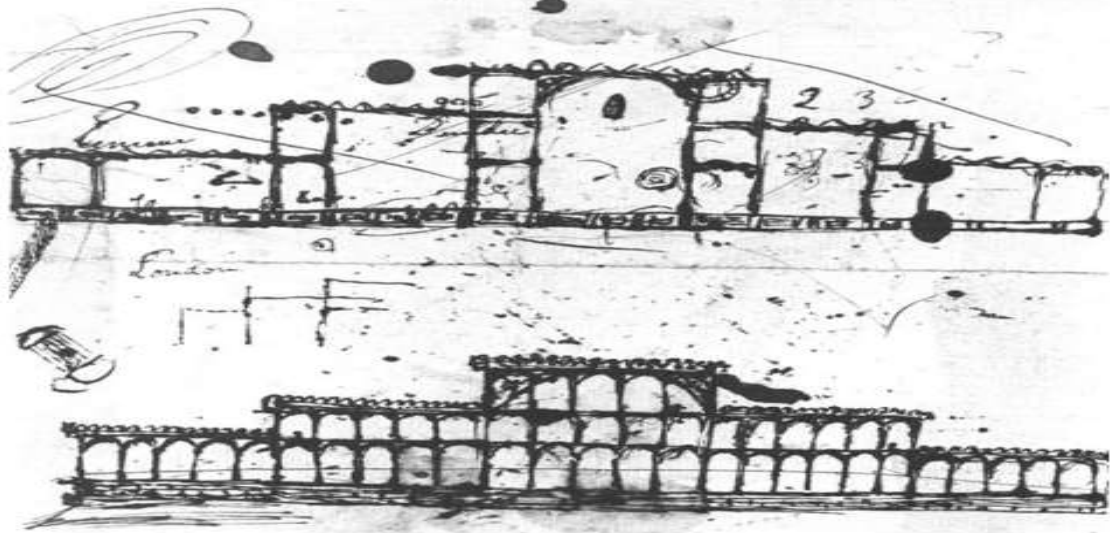


Fig. 3. Paxton's original sketch of the Crystal Palace on the blotting paper from Wenham, Simon. "The Great Exhibition of 1851." *The Victorian Web*. <[victorianweb.org/history/1851/wenham.html](http://victorianweb.org/history/1851/wenham.html)>.

Thus, Marston portrays the railways in great detail. He does so either through his authorial voice or through any of his characters. While Caleb Andrews dotes on trains as a father, Frank Pikeman cares for them as a professional. And Colbeck not only loves travelling on railways but has great knowledge about them. Then there were people like Sergeant Victor Leeming, who preferred horse driven coaches to trains. For people like Colbeck or Caleb, railways were there to defeat time, a symbol of modernity; for people like Leeming, they were an uncomfortable means of travel which could never replace the old means of travel. At the same time, there were landowners who,

would do anything to stop us[railways] if we tried to go across their property. Boulders on the line, track pulled up, warning fires lit... And it was not just landowners.... People who ran stage coaches feared that railways might put them out of business. So did canal owners. Then there were those who say we[railways] destroy the countryside. (211-212)

So, the railways had its fair share of haters and enemies. And on many occasions, this mode of travel often helped the criminals in the criminal activities and hate of railways often led many people to commit serious crimes in order to inflict damage to the railway property and halt them from running at all.



## **Crime on Victorian Railways:**

The railways at the time were also associated with many forms of dangers. There were derailments, train accidents, and then different criminal activities such as extortion, robbery, and even murders perpetrated on the railways. Trains gave ample new opportunities to the criminals. At busy stations and on the trains, the robbers, and pickpockets mingled with the crowds to extract the valuables from them. Some also found in the empty carriages with lone passengers a chance and a place to gratify their perverted lust. And taking advantage of the railways, they were able to make an easy and quick escape from the scene of crime. According to Peter Kalla-Bishop,

In the mid-nineteenth century, the railway traveller — and men in particular — often had to cope with danger as well as discomfort. Trains were frequented by cardsharps, thimble-riggers [con men who play the shell game], pickpockets, robbers and murderers . . . . These threats to the wallet and the person could not be avoided by wisely choosing a compartment occupied by a lady. In the absence of corridors many of these apparent ladies turned out to be blackmailers who, unless their demands were met, proved only too ready to march up to a porter at the end of the journey and make accusations of "improper advances." The word around the clubs was that it was safer to travel in male company while bearing in mind the advice of *The Railway Traveller's Handy Book* of 1862: "In going through a tunnel it is always as well to have the hands and arms disposed for defence so that in the event of an attack the assailant may be immediately beaten back or restrained". (14-15)

Thus, many Victorians shared a negative attitude towards the railways. They thought that the railways had disturbed the tranquillity and peace of the countryside. Many people were terrorised by the powerful and noisy rattling and roaring of the steam engine. And different derailments, accidents, injuries and crimes only added to this terror. The below tirade against the railways by Sir Humphrey Gilzean, the main villain in the book, clearly points towards the general hatred and fear which many people had during the Victorian period:

Green pastures are everywhere darkened by the shadow of the railway system. Pleasant land is everywhere dug up, defaced and destroyed in the name of the steam locomotive . . . scarring the countryside, frightening the livestock, filling the air with noise and smoke, imposing misery





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wherever they go. (Marston, *Railway Detective* 306)

In the story, Gilzean's "hatred of the railways amounted to nothing sort of a mania" (307) and his wife's death involving the railways made him some sort of "a fanatic" (307), which led him to commit one crime after another. First, he robbed a mail train of gold coin consignments and mail bags, then was involved in blackmailing, further in three murders and then in a kidnap.

As much the railways was a symbol of pride, modernity, order, speed, discipline, efficiency, advancement, it became a symbol of violence and crime too. The readers find the robbery of a mail train in the first chapter of *The Railway Detective*. The robbers in the uniform of policemen stop the train on its way to Birmingham, just before the Leighton Buzzard station. They beat Caleb Andrews, the driver of the train, almost to death and throw him off the train. They rob the large consignment of gold sovereigns worth £3,000 and the mail bags, and make the fireman, Frank Pike forcefully drive the train off the tracks just before the Linslade Tunnel. To be on the safe side, Thomas Sholto, one of the two main villains, kills William Ings, the post-office employee and Kate Piercey, a prostitute who was with Ings at the time. He also murders Daniel Slender, a locksmith in Wolverhampton. Ings had helped them by giving vital information regarding the transfer of money and Daniel Slender had made duplicate keys for the safe containing the consignment. With the letters they acquire from the mail bags on the train, Thomas Sholto blackmails the letter owners and extracts money from them for compromising letters or for some valuable and sensitive information. Next, Gilzean orders three men, Arthur Jukes, Vernon Seymour and Harry Seymour to blow off the Kilsby Tunnel to inflict damage on the upcoming train to London carrying glass and iron frames. The gunpowder they plant does not do any severe damage to the tunnel only causing a minor damage to a section of the tunnel brick walls. Disheartened by this failure, the trio is now sent to blow off the Crystal Palace by planting gunpowder under the *Lord of the Isle*, a locomotive on display at the Great Exhibition. The plan is hindered by Inspector Robert Colbeck, who catches the three criminals on time. Dejected by these two back-to-back failures, Gilzean now eyes on avenging these setbacks and kidnaps Madeleine Andrews, daughter of Caleb Andrews and the love interest of Inspector Colbeck. Meanwhile, readers also get to know that the death of Lady Gilzean involves the railways: "Sir Humphry and his wife were out riding when the sound of a train whistle disturbed the animals. Lady Gilzean's horse reared and she was thrown from the saddle... [her] neck was broken in the fall" (334) and she ultimately died. This was the reason that Sir Humphrey detested the

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railways.

The book talks about such fictional incidents of railway robbery, accidents, derailment, kidnapping and murders but there are many real incidents to prove that these were not mere imaginations of the author. Railways saw a fair share of robberies, thefts and a few murders too during the Victorian period, all of which might have inspired Marston in developing the plot for this first book in the Railway Detective Series.

Thieves and robbers found the railway stations, goods depots and marshalling yards to be their place of opportunity. It was reported that in the 1870s seventy-six passengers on the Eastern Counties Railway had lost their luggage in just one day. Lady Dudley lost her jewels worth £25,000 at Paddington station and Countess Grey lost jewels worth £2,000 at Waterloo (Brandon and Brooke 33).



Fig. 4. A busy period of comings and goings at a London station around 1840 which provided golden opportunities for pickpockets and luggage thieves, from Brooke, David Brandon and Alan. *Blood on the Tracks: A History of Railway Crime in Britain*. pp 35. The History Press Ltd, 2010.



Railway employees, too, have been involved in the theft of luggage or goods in transit. In 1849, a passenger guard on the Great Western Railway named Frost was arrested for the theft of items from the luggage van of the train (35). As in the book, so in real life too, the mail trains were a target of thieves. In 1849, two robbers robbed both the up and down Exeter mail trains on the Great Western Railway at Bridgewater but were later caught when they aroused the suspicion of a passenger waiting for the same train at Temple Meads station. The robbers were found to be involved in several other robberies on the Great Western Railway. A great hue and cry ensued in 1855 with the 'Great South Eastern Bullion Robbery'. Four people, William Pierce, Edward Agar, Burgess, and Tester were involved in this first great train robbery, the theft of a consignment of gold in a bullion van between London Bridge Station and Folkestone. Pierce was the main villain. Pierce was a dismissed South Eastern Railway employee, who planned the robbery with Agar because of his hatred towards his former employers. Agar was a famous criminal and an expert in locks. They brought in Burgess, a train guard, and Tester, a clerk in-charge of making duty rosters for the company's guards. The robbery was meticulously planned and required discipline and patience. Tester ensured that Burgess was the guard on the right train when the consignment was to be transferred. Tester had dealings with the Chubb Company, the makers of security locks for safes. He made duplicate keys for the safe carrying the gold. Agar and Pierce kept a watch on the train movements at Folkstone. Once Burgess gave the signal that the consignment was aboard, they executed their plan. Agar and Pierce boarded the train and met Burgess in the guard's van. Agar worked on the locks and filled the carpet bags with gold. They returned to London, melted the gold down and sold it to the buyer and shared the money as agreed between the four.

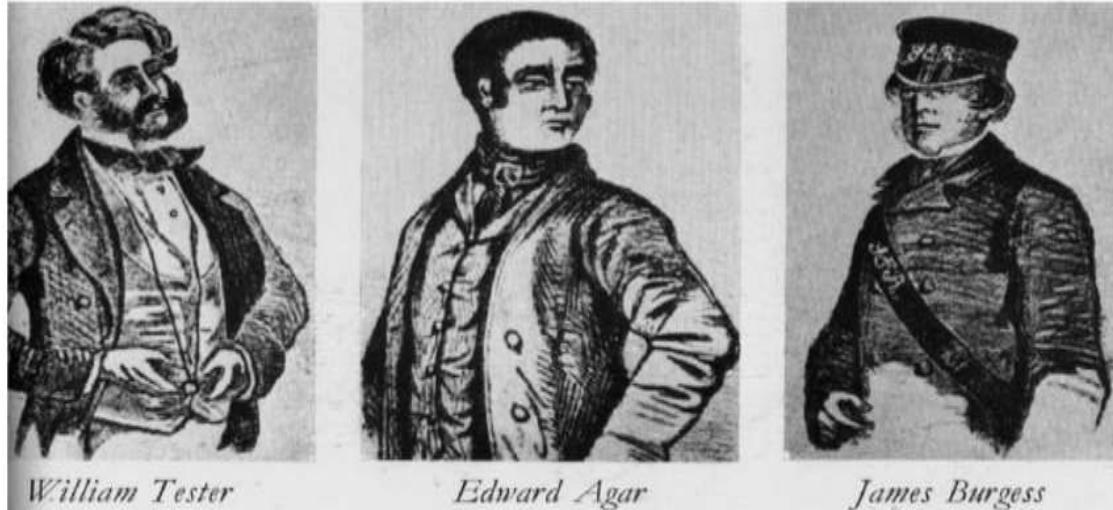


Fig. 5. Robbers involved in The Great South Eastern Train Robbery 1855 from Brooke, David Brandon and Alan. *Blood on the Tracks: A History of Railway Crime in Britain*. pp 39. The History Press Ltd, 2010.

‘The Great Train Robbery’, as it was named, was the next large-scale robbery which took place on 08<sup>th</sup> August 1963 near Cheddington in Buckinghamshire. Although this robbery historically did not occur during Victorian times, Marston as a historical detective fiction writer seems to be inspired by it. Thus, the robbery depicted in the book shows a marked similarity with the Great Train Robbery of 1963. The 1963 robbery was executed by a gang of several criminal experts in different fields. The gang halted the mail train on the West Coast Main Line at about three in the morning and beat up the engine driver, who was trying to resist almost to death. They were able to haul bank notes worth £2.5 million.

The first murder on a moving British train was of Mr Thomas Briggs, a 69-year-old clerk of Robarts, Lubbock & Co., a banking house in the City of London. He was battered to death and thrown onto the line between Bow and Hackney on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1864. Franz Muller, a German was arrested for the murder. The motive of the murder was found to be robbery. A gold watch and chain, a pair of gold-rimmed glasses and a hat (which was later established to be taken by Muller) were missing from the dead body of Briggs. The next murder on the train was of Frederick Gold, a retired businessman on 27 June 1881, on Brighton & South Coast Railway. The murderer was a small-time writer named Percy Mapleton, also called by his alias of ‘Lefroy’. Another murder on 1 May 1868 on the Dover Priory station of the London, Chatham & Dover

Railway Company involved two railway employees. Thomas Wells, an eighteen-year-old carriage cleaner shot dead Edward Walsh, the line manager because the latter had asked Wells to do some gardening activities at his house, a work that he felt was an insult to him.



Fig. 6. Franz Muller from Brooke, David Brandon and Alan. *Blood on the Tracks: A History of Railway Crime in Britain*. pp 60. The History Press Ltd, 2010.

### **The Railway Detectives:**

Crime on railways, says Detective Inspector Robert Colbeck, “is a dangerous precedent. It imperils the safety record of the railway companies. If we[detectives] do not catch and convict those responsible, then they will surely be emboldened to strike again” (Marston, *Railway Detective* 179). The previous section showed that there was no dearth of criminal activities on Victorian railways. And in most cases, it was the duty of the railway police to keep those in check. But the railway police were not that efficient and due to the shortage of manpower and resources too, they often used to seek help from the Detective Department of the Metropolitan Police Force at Scotland Yard. In the year 1829, the Metropolitan Police Act was passed replacing the Bow Street Runners with the Metropolitan Police Force. It was the first municipal constabulary in the world. And thirteen years after the formation of the Metropolitan Police, a Detective Branch was formed in 1842 in response to criticism that Metropolitan Police was unable to successfully investigate



serious crimes. The Detective Department later became the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) in 1878. The Detective Department was based at Scotland Yard. At the time of its formation, the detective branch had only eight detectives which included six sergeants and two inspectors. By 1865, two more inspectors and one more sergeant had been appointed. Apart from solving difficult cases such as homicides, they were also sent to different social gatherings or sports events, and races to keep an eye on the thieves, robbers, and pickpockets.

The setting of the Railway Detective in the year 1851 is also relevant because it was only in the previous year that Charles Dickens had interviewed seven detectives- two inspectors and five sergeants- in his 'Household Words' office in Wellington Street, Strand, London. About them, he informs the readers that,

They are, one and all, respectable-looking men; of perfectly good deportment and unusual intelligence; with nothing lounging or slinking in their manners; with an air of keen observation, and quick perception when addressed; and generally presenting in their faces, traces more or less marked of habitually leading lives of strong mental excitement. They have all good eyes; and they all can, and they all do, look full at whomsoever they speak to.

Detectives were men of intellect but they had a great amount of worldly and everyday knowledge. This knowledge they gained by interacting "with all kinds of people in all sorts of places" (Lock, *First Cases* 103) and doing a variety of works. They had to attend agricultural shows, royal events, derby races, or huge events such as the Great Exhibition to save these events of importance from any unwanted happenings. With the spread of railways all over Britain, the crimes connected to railways also grew. There were railway police to deal with smaller crimes like pickpocketing and luggage theft. But the more serious and tedious crimes often went to the detectives of Scotland Yard. There were enough crimes on railways that kept the Scotland Yard detectives busy. In the year 1851, detective Inspector Frederick was involved in the investigation of the theft of merino wool and mouselline de laine (a fine woollen material) on the London and South Western Railway. He successfully caught the foreman and other thieves involved. In August 1844, Long Melford, a constable in Suffolk followed one thief to the local railway station and was able to catch him and two more while they were examining their theft items. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1845, John Tawell was trying to escape Slough



on train after murdering Sarah Hart, his young mistress. He took a train for Paddington from Slough railway station. Upon receiving a telegraph message, he was caught by Inspector Wiggins of 'D' Division and a Great Western Railway constable. Another case where the criminal used railways as a means of escape from the scene of crime was that of the murder of Patrick O'Connor in 1849. His murder by Maria and George Manning, the husband-wife duo, was one of the most sensational crimes in criminal history and required brilliant detective work to catch them. Maria with the help of George had killed O'Connor, and buried the dead body inside their house in the kitchen. It took many detectives to catch the duo. Thrice went the police constable Wright to Manning's house to get information from Maria but she divulged nothing. Upon suspicion, he went a fourth time to find the house empty. The police made a search of the house. Soon, constable Barnes noticed something unusual about the kitchen flagstone which appeared damp. They dug it up to find the dead body of O'Connor. Scotland Yard detectives were called in for further investigation. Inspector Frederick Field went to France in search of the murderers but found nothing. Detective sergeants Langley and Thornton searched a ship sailing to America for two passengers named Mannings only to find out some different Mannings. It was Detective Sergeant Shaw who was able to detect the murderers from information provided by local cab drivers, who informed that Maria had first gone "to London Bridge railway station, where she deposited the larger boxes with notices attached — 'Mrs Smith, passenger to Paris, to be left till called for' — and then went on to Euston station" (99). Upon further inquiry at Euston station, Shaw got to know that Maria with a luggage marked 'Mrs Smith' had left for Edinburgh on train. A telegraph was sent to Edinburgh police where Maria Manning was finally caught. George Manning too was caught from Jersey.

No culprits involved in the Great Bullion Robbery of 1855 were caught for one year until Agar decided to become an approver. Four detectives Williamson, Thornton, Smith and Sergeant Richard Tanner were assigned to catch Pierce, Burgess and Tester. The detectives rounded up and caught Pierce and Burgess. However, Tanner had to go to Sweden to apprehend Tester but could not find him there. Tester had already returned to London on his own accord. The large crowds on the railways eager to visit the Great Exhibition of 1851 were also an easy target for pickpockets and other thieves. Many foreign thieves had also come there to try their luck but "Fortunately, foreign policemen arrived along with the exhibits, and ... Inspector Field



took in a posse of detectives who were familiar with the London thieves” (Lock, First Cases 126).

Detective Inspector Richard Tanner was one of the passionate detectives who with his great intelligence, perseverance and patience was able to solve the first railway murder of Thomas Briggs on a moving train. Inspector Tanner was called in to investigate the murder. Tanner took quick actions. He circulated the details of Briggs’ gold watch and gold chain to the pawnbrokers and jewellers for any details and pasted the posters of the hat found in the compartment. He also sent his team to the hatters in the town. A reward of £100 was announced from the police for any information. The railway company too announced a reward of £100. For three days there was no progress but soon a jeweller named Death came forward to report that a foreign looking man, probably a German, had come to him to exchange the gold watch and chain. With very little description of the man, Tanner proceeded further but had to wait for another week to get the next lead. A cab driver named Matthews came forward and provided the necessary details. He gave the name of the young German as Franz Muller, who was engaged to Matthews’ daughter. Matthews had recognized the hat found by the police in the compartment as the hat he had himself given to Muller. He also identified the jeweller’s box with the name Death on it as the gift given by Muller to his daughter. The cabdriver also provided the detective with Muller’s address and photograph. With a new lease life from these informations, the detective went to the address only to find that Muller had already sailed to America on a ship named *Victoria*. But Tanner determined to catch the murderer, took a steam ship named *City of Manchester*, a much faster one and reached New York three weeks ahead of the *Victoria*. Tanner had also brought Mr Death and Mr Matthew with him who identified Muller. The belongings of Briggs were found in his box. The detective returned to London with Muller and others on steamship *Etna*.

Three people were killed in a train accident in Sussex in June, 1851. Sergeant Edward Langley, a 45-year-old detective investigated the accident only to find that a ten-year-old boy named James Edward Boakes was the culprit who had deliberately placed the sleeper on the line causing the deaths.

Like these real-life historical detectives, who solved different kinds of crimes involving the railways, “The Railway Detective Series” has Robert Colbeck, a Detective Inspector at Scotland Yard. He is “tall, slim and well-favoured ... impeccably dressed in a dark brown frock coat, with rounded edges and a high neck, well-cut fawn trousers and an Ascot cravat...[his] black leather shoes were shining brightly. In the





prosaic world of law enforcement, Inspector Robert Colbeck stood out as the unrivalled dandy of Scotland Yard” (Marston, *Railway Detective* 20). The son of a cabinetmaker, he is educated in law, a brave, patient, powerful, “meticulous” (36), “experienced, reliable ... gifted detective” (90). He is handsome, in his early thirties and single. He started his career as a barrister but after the murder of Helen Millington, his love, whom he could not save, he joined Metropolitan Police as a constable to prevent crimes before they are committed. Soon, he got “his promotion by dint of hard work and exceptional talent” (71). Colbeck is assisted by Sergeant Victor Leeming who is tough, tenacious, and hardworking, with a face that had “a benign ugliness” and a “broken nose” (28). Unlike Colbeck, who likes railways and train journeys, Leeming hated travelling on trains. Instead, he loves horse-drawn coaches and wants to be a cab driver. Inspector Colbeck is summoned by Superintendent Edward Tallis at Scotland Yard to lead the investigation of the robbery of gold sovereigns and the mail bags on the LNWR. Superintendent gives him a paper with the necessary information. The moment Colbeck hears about the ambush on the train, he comes up with the notion that the robbers had some inside help otherwise they could have not known about the consignments being carried on the train. What worried him was the reason behind the derailment of the train after the robbery, as the robbers had already got away with every single penny on the train. The next worry which he had was the “ease with which the security arrangements were breached. The money was loaded in boxes that were locked inside Chubb safes... reckoned to be impregnable” but “the safes were opened and emptied within a matter of — 23 minutes. That could only be done with a duplicate key and foreknowledge of the combination number” (24). There were two keys needed to open the safe and only one was there on the train. The other key was at the Spurling’s Bank to which the money was being sent. So, Colbeck guessed that either someone had got hold of the original keys or got the duplicate ones. So, to get all the answers to this extremely well-planned robbery, Colbeck goes to the scene of crime with Sergeant Leeming alongside him. He first catches the train for Euston Station and from there another one to Leighton Buzzard Junction to arrive at the scene of crime, where he is greeted by Inspector Rory McTurk of the railway police. Colbeck sends Leeming to take statements from the guards on the train at the time of robbery. Colbeck goes inside the coach of the derailed train to examine the huge safe wherein the money had been locked. Then he meticulously inspects each part of the coach: “The search was painstaking and produced no evidence at first,



but he pressed on, nevertheless, bending low to peer into every corner. It was when he was almost finished” (38) that he found one card behind one of the tables. Now he knew one answer. The mail guards and policemen had been lax in their duties playing cards and were taken unawares by the robbers. Next, Colbeck plans to visit the Post Office, the Royal Mint and the Spurling’s Bank to investigate whether anyone from these places were involved in the robbery. He sends Leeming to the Royal Mint and he himself goes to the Post Office where he meets Herbert Shipperley, the supervisor who used to keep track of the mail coaches on various lines. From Shipperly Colbeck gets the name of three suspects, but he narrows it down to William Ings as Ings drew the lowest wage among the three. Ings was responsible for giving the robbers information about the transfer of consignment on that particular day. Colbeck sent Brandan Mulryne, a discharged policeman, after Ings to Devil’s Acre. But Ings and Kate Piercy, a prostitute, are both murdered. Interestingly, the murderers secretly send money to Maud Ings, wife of William Ings. Colbeck catches a train to Birmingham to meet the bank manager of Spurling’s Bank. Ernest Kitson, the manager, enlightens Colbeck about the Bank Charter Act of 1844. Colbeck asks Kitson to show him the key and the combination number of the safe on the train. Kitson shows him both. He inspects the key with a magnifying glass for any traces of wax and “even held it to his nose and sniffed it” (103) but could not find anything unusual. Colbeck knew that the only other key was at the Royal Mint but doubts if there was any security lapse there. So, he infers that the only place from where the keys could have been accessed would be the Chubb factory, where the safes were designed and made. Colbeck immediately catches a train of the Birmingham, Lancaster and Carlisle Railway to go to the Chubb factory in Wolverhampton. Meanwhile, Leeming meets Charles Omber, the security official at the Royal Mint. Omber dismisses the involvement of any staff member from the Mint in the robbery but Leeming presses on nonetheless. Leeming also gets to learn why the robbers chose to loot the gold coins on transfer instead of bullion as “They would need a furnace to handle gold bullion so the robbers let the Royal Mint do their work for them and waited until a shipment of coin was being made. They chose carefully” (106). In the Chubb Factory, Colbeck meets Silas Hercutt, the manager. Hercutt shows him the replica of the safe that was on the train and the Inspector learns about its specifications and its durability. Colbeck asks for the keys of the safe which when shown had minute traces of wax on it. He finds out that it was Daniel Slender, a staff member at the factory, who had the keys duplicated. Slender, meanwhile, had



got some share of his robbery money and had moved to London, where he too is killed. Now, with two suspects whose identity the detectives were able to find already killed, they feel dejected. Colbeck rethinks over their current situation and after collating all the gathered evidences deciphers three crucial things about the identity of the killer. First, the killer must be a gentleman who sends money to the widow of the person he killed. Second, he is a military man as the whole robbery showed perfect planning with military precision and also because he was able to command a group of men. And, the third and the most important thing, the criminal was “someone who hates trains” (181). At this time, a young woman named Bella Woodhead comes to Scotland Yard to meet Colbeck. She works at the Post Office. She informs Colbeck that Ings had befriended her and promised to marry her soon. Ings had come to her house to talk to Albert Woodhead, her father, about their marriage. Albert worked in the Royal Mint. So when William Ings came to their house, he was more interested in her father’s job at the Mint than the proposal and an “unguarded remark by Mr Woodhead about the transfer of money was seized on by Mr Ings and passed on to the robbers” (190). Colbeck was in his office when he hears the news of the explosion in the Kilsby Tunnel in Northamptonshire. He and Leeming take a train and go to investigate at the crime scene. There Colbeck learns that the explosion was done to “block the tunnel, destroy a train” (208), which was carrying glass panels for the Crystal Palace. He concludes that the criminals were now trying to stop the Great Exhibition “in which the steam locomotive will have pride of place” (210). Colbeck immediately rushes to catch the next train back to Euston. For the first time, he felt that he was ahead of the criminals. He returns to Scotland Yard and studies a copy of the *Illustrated London News* which talked about the Exhibition and had the image of *The Lord of the Isles*, a steam locomotive, “a symbol of excellence” (216) to be displayed in the exhibition with other railway exhibits. He guesses the next move of the criminals and goes to the Crystal Palace to lay a trap for the men expected to explode the locomotive and the Palace. They guard the Palace concealed behind *Liverpool*, the locomotive on display, for three consecutive nights. On the third night, Colbeck’s guess comes true. Three men emerge from darkness and move towards the *Lord of the Isles*. Colbeck and Leeming arrest all three of them and save the Exhibition. Colbeck gets the sketches of the three men made and goes to Frank Pike, the fireman, who identifies Arthur Jukes as one of the robbers. Colbeck tries hard to get information about their master but the three men don’t give any. He is only able to tell that these three men were in the army for



sure. After having these men in custody “he had hoped that they had taken a giant stride forward in the investigation but they had suddenly come to a halt” (271). He sends Leeming to gather information about them and the man who had commanded them. Colbeck asks Leeming to check with the regiments that have served in India and suggests that he make a list of recently retired army men who had returned from India. He gets this clue when Harry Seymour asks for tiffin, “an Indian word for a midday meal” (271). Leeming returns with the alphabetically prepared name list and informs Colbeck that Arthur Jukes, Vernon Seymour and Harry Seymour had served in India in the 10 Queen’s Regiment. Then from several names in the list prepared, Colbeck zeroes the names down to two- that of Major Sir Humphrey Gilzean and Captain Thomas Sholto, because both had “retired from the army on the same day”, “almost five years ago” (296). Sir Humphrey, informs Tallis, is a Member of Parliament and “is already being talked of as a future minister” (301). Tallis also disagrees with Colbeck saying that Sir Humphrey cannot be their man as he is still mourning the death of his wife. Meanwhile, to divert Colbeck, Sir Humphrey Gilzean orders Thomas Sholto to abduct Madeleine Andrews, daughter of the engine driver. He plans to send a letter to be delivered to Colbeck the next day with an offer to exchange the three prisoners in lieu of Madeleine Andrews. Colbeck visits the House of the Commons to get more information about the suspected MP. He reads through the bound copies of *Hansard* to look at any parliament speech given by Sir Humphrey. Soon he finds a speech delivered by the MP “on the vexed question of railways. Opposing a bill for the extension of a line in Oxfordshire, he had spoken with great passion about the urgent necessity of preserving the English countryside from further encroachments by the Great Western Railway” (306). Colbeck now knew that Sir Humphrey hates railways and was behind the crimes. He comes to the house of Sir Humphrey in Upper Brook Street in London. Carefully he inserts a master key (which he had confiscated from a burglar he had arrested) into the lock of the house and enters inside. There was no one in the house but Colbeck has the feeling that Madeleine was locked there in the house. He and Leeming search the house for any lead. Colbeck finds a secret compartment in a desk and finds a letter inside an envelope addressed to him. The letter was supposed to be delivered by a manservant the next day and contained “instructions regarding the exchange of the three prisoners for Miss Andrews in a couple of days’ time” (315). Thus, he learns that the first demand about the exchange was made just to confuse them as “Sir Humphrey never intended that he would trade his



hostage for the men in custody” (315). Colbeck meets Superintendent Tallis to tell him about Sir Humphrey’s plan. Despite Colbeck’s disapproval, Tallis takes the charge of the operation. Tallis and his team surround Sir Humphrey’s estate in Berkshire and ask him to surrender. But Sir Humphrey and Thomas Sholto take Madeleine hostage and escape the police team unimpeded on their coach. Colbeck enters the estate and finds the newspaper article about Lady Gilzean’s death. The article reported that “Sir Humphrey and his wife were out riding when the sound of a train whistle disturbed the animals. Lady Gilzean’s horse reared and she was thrown from the saddle” (334). He also finds a timetable for sailing from the port of Bristol and is able to tell where the criminals were fleeing to. Colbeck and Leeming catch a train to Bristol and wait for the two criminals and Madeleine on the ship scheduled to sail to France from the Bristol port. After ensuring Madeleine’s safety, Colbeck goes to apprehend the two criminals. He grabs Sholto’s legs and throws him into the sea. Gilzean reacts quickly by taking out a pistol but before him Colbeck “got a firm hold on his wrist and twisted it so that he turned the barrel of the weapon upwards” (339). After a violent struggle, Colbeck is able to get hold of Gilzean, who in trying to shoot Colbeck, gets himself shot on the shoulder. Finally, both Gilzean and Sholto (who is taken out of the water) are arrested to be brought to justice. Richard Mayne, the Commissioner, congratulates Colbeck and Leeming for their success. Colbeck receives two tickets for the opening ceremony of the Great Exhibition from Prince Albert. And above all these, all the newspapers christen Inspector Robert Colbeck as ‘the Railway Detective’.

Thus, it is the railways and Colbeck’s knowledge of trains and railway timetables that help him every time in the detection of crime and apprehension of criminals.

### **Conclusion:**

As in real-life historical cases, so in the book *The Railway Detective*, the readers find how dangerous a train journey could have been during the Victorian age. The railways provided various opportunities to the criminals as also various means of escape. These crimes on railways showed how vulnerable a passenger could be. But at the same time, there were railway policemen and detectives like Inspector Robert Colbeck and Sergeant Victor Leeming who with their efforts caught the criminals and sent a strong message to every



villain that they could not escape the law. Real-life detectives like Richard Tanner and Frederick Field built the trust among the public that they are safe and could travel on trains without any fear.

The readers can clearly see the similarities between the real-life crimes and the one described in the book by Edward Marston. One finds how similar the ‘Great South Eastern Bullion Robbery’ of 1855 or the ‘Great Train Robbery’ of 1963 are to the robbery portrayed by Marston. The methods and means used by the robbers in the book can be said to have been inspired by real-life historical cases like these. One also finds Inspector Colbeck and his methods of detection to be very similar to real-life detectives and their methods. Also, both in the text and during the Victorian age there were people who were against the railways and feared this new means of transportation. However, they were compelled to realise that this ‘iron horse’ was there to stay. The railways not only reconfigured Britain’s cultural, economic, political and geographical space but also changed the methods of crime and detection. Hence, Marston located at the vantage point of being an ace historical detective fiction writer, with a critical hindsight of Victorian history, portrays in *The Railway Detective* a world uncannily close to reality, perhaps more so than most fiction written during Victorian times.

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