A Battersea Victorian Railwayman of Repute

A locally-based railway employee made a significant contribution to passenger safely in the 1880s, as *Stan Verrender* explains.

On Thursday 20 July 1893, as he had done for many years, Edgar William Verrinder (1837-93) left his home, Holly Lodge, 52 St John's Hill, and walked down the road to Clapham Junction Railway Station. As always, the Station staff were on their toes because Edgar was the passenger superintendent of the London and South Western Railway, and he was on his way to catch his commuter train to his headquarters at Waterloo Station. This Thursday was not a routine journey as he was to take charge, as was always his duty, of the royal train carrying Queen Victoria to the Isle of Wight for her annual summer visit. Sadly, on this journey he became seriously ill, and died two days later at his home from diabetes.

Edgar, like so many Victorian railway grants, had lowly beginnings, his father being a servant. He was born in 1837 at Lydney, Gloucestershire, but spent most of his childhood at Salisbury where Charles, his father, was a verger (later head verger) at the Cathedral. Charles was so highly regarded by his children that they had a full-length stained glass memorial window erected at the Cathedral.

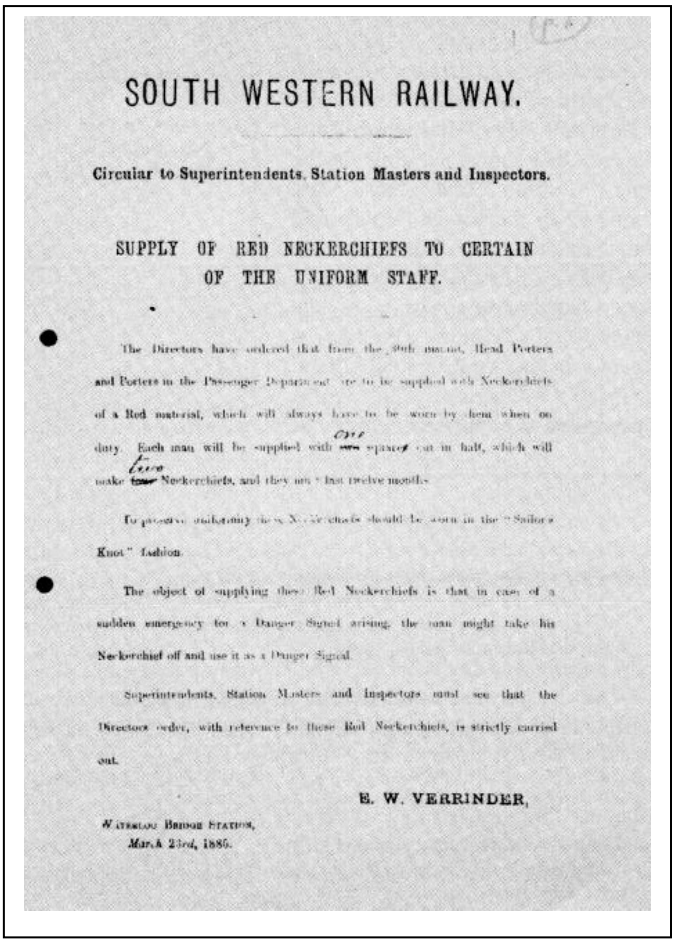
A start on the railway

Details of Edgar's education are unknown but in 1852, at the age of 14 he joined the railway at Woking as a junior clerk. Only six years later he was on the staff of the superintendent of the line at Nine Elms. Thereafter he was employed on various other duties, until in 1865 he was made superintendent of Waterloo Station, at the age of 28. Eventually in 1874 he was appointed superintendent of the line, and traffic superintendent in 1882.

One of his notable achievements was the electric block signalling and interlocking of points at Waterloo Station, which he eventually extended throughout the South Western system. Block signalling, where only one train is allowed into a given stretch of line at a time, is still the standard method in use today. It is interesting such safety measures were in being so early. However, by way of contrast, horses were being used for shunting at Waterloo Station until the 1890s.

Red neckerchiefs for danger

Strangely, the one safety feature that he is most remembered for in the railway world was the introduction of red 'neckerchiefs' to be used as an emergency danger signal. The accompanying facsimile of the original 1885 draft notice shows that Edgar was careful about the Company's finances, as he halves the initial rate of issue of these ties. A railway friend of mine recalls that, in the inter-war period, he saw letters in the press objecting to railwaymen being allowed to wear a communist emblem, the true purpose of the red tie not being known.



SOUTH WESTERN RAILWAY.

Circular to Superintendents, Station Masters and Inspectors.

SUPPLY OF RED NECKERCHIEFS TO CERTAIN OF THE UNIFORM STAFF.

The Directors have ordered that from the 30th instant, Head Porters and Porters in the Passenger Department are to be supplied with Neckerchiefs of a Red material, which will always have to be worn by them when on duty. Each man will be supplied with ~~one~~ One square cut in half, which will make ~~four~~ two Neckerchiefs, and they are to last twelve months.

To prevent uniformity these Neckerchiefs should be worn in the "Sailor's Knot" fashion.

The object of supplying these Red Neckerchiefs is that in case of a sudden emergency for a Danger Signal arising, the man might take his Neckerchief off and use it as a Danger Signal.

Superintendents, Station Masters and Inspectors must see that the Directors order, with reference to these Red Neckerchiefs, is strictly carried out.

E. W. VERRINDER,

Waterloo Bridge Station,
March 23rd, 1886.

A lengthy obituary for Edgar appeared in *The Times* on 25 July 1893, part of which read:

> The railway world suffered a severe loss from the sudden death of Mr E. W. Verrinder, who for many years has been the traffic superintendent of the London and South Western Railway…. The news of his death will be received with great regret, for he was not only an able administrator, but was much beloved on account of his general amiability of character. One of the first messages of condolence addressed to his widow was sent from the Prince of Wales. The funeral will take place at the cemetery at Brookwood, tomorrow. A special train for friends will leave Waterloo at 1.55 starting from platform 1, and will return from Brookwood to London immediately after the funeral.

There was a short report of the funeral in *The Times* of 27th July which stated that 'upwards of 3000 men employed by the company were present at his funeral'. It went on to say that two, and not just one, special trains were necessary from Waterloo. How did the Company function that day with so many absent?

The funeral report in the *South Western Gazetter* of 1 August 1893 had the following passage:

> The Clapham Junction platforms were crowded with people to witness the transfer of the coffin to the passengers' van which had been specially prepared. The sides were draped with violet and black panels. The dados were of white satin embellished with

The Directive from E. W. Verrinder for Supply of Red Neckerchiefs – 23 March 1885

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rosettes. The floor was draped in black with a white centre, whereupon rested a handsome bier.

His memorial at Brookwood Cemetery has these words on the kerb: 'Erected by the Officers and Servants of the London and South Western Railway Company'. Edgar is in good company as he is surrounded by fellow railwaymen of the L&SWR. There was, up until 1939, a twice-daily funeral train service from Waterloo (Necropolis) to Brookwood, which covers over a square mile of Surrey heathland. The Cemetery was started in the 1850s to cope with the shortage of space for burials in the London area.

Verrinder is an unusual surname, there being less than 200 of us in the United Kingdom. Yet, although my own line and that of Edgar's have both been traced to the late-1600s, no connection has been found, except that we both originate in Gloucestershire.