

A black and white photograph of a steam locomotive, likely a tank engine, viewed from the front. The locomotive is heavily weathered and appears to be in a museum or storage yard. The front buffer beam has the words "NOT MOVED" painted on it in large, bold letters. Below this, the number "50" is visible on the left side. The locomotive has a large, rounded smokestack at the front and a cylindrical boiler. The background shows a building with a gabled roof and a corrugated metal wall.

The driver of the train had mistaken the line he was on when he left Taunton and only realised his error just before the derailment when another train going in the same direction overtook him at Norton Fitzwarren. Although the driver immediately applied the brakes it was too late to prevent the accident.

The night of the 3rd November was very stormy and dark, with a gale blowing and heavy rain and mist at times. The weather was so bad that the Luftwaffe was unable to launch bombing raids against Britain – this was the first time in 57 days that London had not been bombed.

Three hours after the passenger train departed (at 00.50, now the 4th November), another 'King' class locomotive left Paddington for Penzance. This express train carried newspapers for a limited number of towns and cities on the route.

The approach to Taunton comprised four tracks: the Up and Down main lines ('Up' to London, 'Down' towards Exeter) and the Up and Down relief lines. The four track layout ended at Norton Fitzwarren where the line continued as an Up and Down main line only.

The locomotive and tender were diverted off the tracks and travelled along across the ground, coming to rest on its side 40 metres beyond the last rail of the trap points.

The rest of the train remained on the track and sustained little damage. Of the 900 passengers on board 27 were killed and 56 seriously injured.

Signaller Coles at Norton Fitzwarren immediately sent an 'Obstruction: danger' message to the signal boxes at Victory and Silk Mill to make sure the line was protected against other trains entering and colliding with the crashed train.

The landlord and landlady of the Railway Inn (Fred S V Bailey and his wife Edith), were woken by people banging on their door calling for help. Edith organised a human chain across the railway to get injured passengers safety across to the Inn. The Baileys gave all their sheets to be used as makeshift bandages. Fred's mother made tea for the injured and helped bandage the wounded, as did their son (Frederick George, 19). He had won a St John's Ambulance award in the Boys' Brigade, but probably never expected to have to apply his skills on such a scale.

One railwayman described how an 11 year old boy insisted on going back to the train to get the family luggage after he had been carried out from a wrecked coach.

