

### **Synopsis**

A description of the opening of the Birmingham and Liverpool Railway and of the local people who went to watch the ceremony.

**Themes:**               Railway opening ceremony,  
                                  Reaction of onlookers,  
                                  Association of steam power with sexuality

### **Text**

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July I recollect well  
What bustle there was in the morning I'll tell  
With lasses and lads so buxom and gay  
Delighted and talking about the railway

Chorus:                You may travel by steam, or so the folks say  
                                  All the world over upon the railway

To view the railroad away they did go  
Tis a great undertaking as you very well know  
It surpasses all others believe me its true  
There's tunnels for miles that you have to go through

Here's coaches and carts to accommodate all  
The lame and the lazy, the great and the small  
If you wish to ride, to be sure you must pay  
To see all the fun sir upon the railway

Colliers from Hampton and Bilston likewise  
And Wedgbury nailors are struck with surprise  
To see the railroad to be sure they must go  
Drest up in their best, they cut a fine show.

The cobbler left the old shoes in the shop  
Old men on crutches were seen for to hop  
The tailor his customers would not obey  
But rode on his goose to see the railway

There was dumpling bet with Jack the Moonraker  
There was buxom young Kit with the Butcher and Baker  
And Black Sal from Walsall with two wooden legs  
To see the railroad how she trudged on her pegs

In London I've heard there is a machine  
Invented for making young children by steam  
Such dear little creatures full thirty each day  
For young engineers to supply the railway

So now my good fellows let us be free  
Again fill the glasses now merry we'll be  
Success to all trades in the reign of our queen  
And boiling hot water that travels by steam.

**Glossary:**

Buxom	Full of health, vigour, and good temper; well-favoured, plump and comely, 'jolly', comfortable-looking (in person). (Chiefly of women.)
Hampton	The name by which people living around Birmingham, Wolverhampton and the Black Country would have referred to Wolverhampton
Wedgebury	The name by which people living around Birmingham, Wolverhampton and the Black Country would have referred to Wednesbury
naillors	Makers of iron nails
goose	A tailor's smoothing-iron. (So called from the resemblance of the handle to the shape of a goose's neck.)
moonraker	A simpleton

**Source of Text:** Palmer, Roy; A Touch On The Times: Songs of Social Change 1770-1911  
Penguin Education 1974, 0 14 08 1182 6  
Palmer cites his source as the Birmingham Broadside Collection BM 1876  
e2

**Music:** No tune given

**Source of Music:** No tune given

**Printer:** Russell

**Place Printed:** Birmingham

**Author:** Anonymous

**Date:** 1837

### **Notes of the song and Its Historical Background**

The Birmingham and Liverpool railway opened throughout for traffic on 4th July 1837. The line (which became known as the Grand Junction Railway) was connected to the Liverpool and Manchester Railway at Newton Junction via the existing Warrington and Newton Railway.

This celebratory broadside includes the names of nearby towns - probably to encourage onlookers to buy. Of the towns mentioned, Wolverhampton (Hampton) is the furthest distant, some 15 miles away. A round trip of 30 miles (48 kilometers) on foot was not exceptional at the time but it did mean that ordinary people had to give up a day's wages in order to attend the event. The opening day, 4<sup>th</sup> July, was a Monday. The "*colliers from Bilston*" and "*Wedgbury nailors*" were in the habit of taking 'St Monday' as an unofficial day of rest and recreation (as did many workers in the midlands) so there were doubtless many of them in the crowd.

This song was much reprinted and can be found in variants from London, and the north east of England, see also Bar269, Bar301, and Bar350