

**Synopsis**

A description of the opening of the railway and of the people who went to watch the ceremony.

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

**Text**

Now folks I will tell you although I'm no clown  
By steam you may ride with speed up and down  
Now that's all the go, and I'll tell you for why  
The people are eager for to learn to fly

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

On opening the railway you all know 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

There'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

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

The colliers from Hampton and Bilstos likewise  
And Wedgebury nailors are struck with surprise  
Dress'd up in their best, they cut a fine show.  
To see the railroad away they do go

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

What a treat for young lovers to Gretna Green  
The blacksmith will tie the knot for them by steam  
With his hammer and anvil he'll make them obey  
And pack them off snugly upon the railway.

In London I've heard there is a machine  
Invented for making young children by steam  
Such dear little creatures full 30 per day  
For young engineers to supply the railway

Talk of ships on the sea – that is all stuff  
 By water or land you may ride far enough  
 If you have got money, your passage to pay  
 You may ride far and near upon the railway

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

To see them come in how the people do flock  
 To accommodate all there's lots of fine pop  
 And the ladies dress'd up in their costume so fine  
 Partake of good ale and whiskey so fine.

**Glossary:**

- Buxom - Full of health, vigour, and good temper; well-favoured, plump and comely, 'jolly', comfortable-looking (in person). (Chiefly of women.)
- Hampton - Wolverhampton the name by which people living around Birmingham and Wolverhampton and the Black Country would have referred to Wolverhampton
- Bilstos - An erroneous rendition of Bilston a town in the Black Country
- 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
- Gretna Green - A village on the Scottish side of the border with England famous as a destination for elopements. English law stated that if both parties to a marriage were not at least 21 years old, then parental consent was required. Under Scottish Law, it was possible for boys to marry at 14 and girls at 12 years old without parental consent. The village blacksmith was empowered to officiate at weddings.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gretna\\_Green](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gretna_Green)
- Stuff - Worthless ideas, discourse, or writing; nonsense

**Source of Text:** Bodleian Library, *allegro* Catalogue of Ballads; [Harding B 13\(45\)](#)

**Music.** No tune given

**Source of Music:** No tune given

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**Printer:** J. Catnach  
**Where Printed:** London  
**Author :** Anonymous  
**Date:** 1837-38

**Notes of the song:**

The London to Birmingham line opened in 1838 and was the first railway line to be built into London. The first part of the line between Euston Station and Hemel Hempstead opened on 20 July 1837

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London\\_and\\_Birmingham\\_Railway](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_and_Birmingham_Railway)

The use of Midland geography and the erroneous spelling of Bilston (see Glossary) suggest that this is a copy of the song from Birmingham (Bar030) written to celebrate the opening of the Birmingham and Liverpool on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1837. This variant has three additional verses

The printer Jeremy Catnach was famous for the speed with which he could produce copies newly published work. In 1820, he produced a pirate copy of the first instalment of Pierce Egan's *'History of Tom and Jerry; or the day and night scenes of life in London'* less than 12 hours after it was published. The 15 days between the opening of the Liverpool-Birmingham on 4<sup>th</sup> of July and the opening of the first section of the London-Birmingham on 20<sup>th</sup> would have been more than sufficient for his purposes; even if we allow five days for a copy of the source ballad to be carried from Birmingham to London.

This song includes three verses not found in Bar030, about the Birmingham and Liverpool Railway.

The first verse mentions flying:

Now folks I will tell you although I'm no clown  
By steam you may ride with speed up and down  
Now that's all the go, and I'll tell you for why  
The people are eager for to learn to fly

This may be an allusion to the feats of the pioneer balloonist Charles Green who made 200 ascents between 1821 and 1835. In 1836, he set a major long distance record in the balloon "*Royal Vauxhall*", flying overnight from Vauxhall Gardens in London to Weilburg in Germany a distance of 480 miles (770 km). [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles\\_Green\\_\(balloonist\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Green_(balloonist))

The eighth verse mentions Gretna Green:

What a treat for young lovers to see Gretna Green  
The blacksmith will tie the not (sic) for them by steam  
With his hammer and anvil he'll make them obey  
And pack them off snugly upon the railway.

The association of steam power with sexuality is a common theme in songs touching on the railways.

The tenth :

Talk of ships on the sea – that is all stuff  
By water or land you may ride far enough  
If you have got money, your passage to pay  
You may ride far and near upon the railway;

Suggests that from the outset, railways were seen as an attractive alternative to ships.

This song was much reprinted and can be found in variants from London, and Sunderland; see also Bar030, Bar269, and Bar350.