

Names of British railway companies

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Abstract: The names of railway companies display a clear structure, derived in the UK from earlier practice with turnpikes and canals. Using Donald Grant's comprehensive *2017 Directory of the railway companies of Great Britain*, the name structures of UK railway companies are classified and exemplified, with numerical and percentual tallies for the various types. Typical components of railway company names are toponyms (place names and regional names), transport mode (*Railway*) and qualifiers which may underline the size of the company (*Great Western Railway*, etc.) and clarify company ownership (such as *Joint Railway* for joint ownership), for the main traffic conveyed (e.g., *Mineral Railway*) or for a lower standard of infrastructure (*Light Railway*). Differing stress patterns and abbreviations of names are also touched on and explanations sought. The basic principles of company naming are in use in modified form to this very day.

Keywords: Railway company names, onomastic principles, industrial naming.

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Les noms des compagnies de chemin de fer au Royaume Uni

Résumé : Les noms des compagnies de chemin de fer présentent une structure claire, dérivée au Royaume-Uni de la pratique antérieure des tournières et des canaux. De l'ouvrage exhaustif *Directory of the railway companies of Great Britain* de Donald Grant (2017), les noms des compagnies ferroviaires britanniques sont classés et illustrés ; pour chaque type des valeurs numériques en pourcentage sont indiquées. Les éléments typiques des noms de compagnies ferroviaires sont les toponymes (noms de lieux et de régions), le mode de transport et les qualificatifs qui peuvent souligner la taille de la compagnie (*Great Western Railway*, etc.) et clarifier la propriété de la compagnie (comme *Joint Railway* pour la propriété conjointe), les marchandises transportées (*Mineral Railway*), ou pour un niveau d'infrastructure moins élevé (*Light Railway*). Les différents types d'accentuation et d'abréviation des noms sont également abordés. Les principes de la dénomination des entreprises sont encore utilisés sous une forme modifiée jusqu'à ce jour.

Mots-clés : Noms des compagnies de chemin de fer, principes onomastiques, nommage industriel.

Namen britischer Eisenbahngesellschaften

Zusammenfassung: Die Namen von Eisenbahnunternehmen weisen eine klare Struktur auf, die in Großbritannien von der früheren Praxis der Namenvergabe bei Kanälen und privaten Landstraßen (*turnpikes*) des 18. Jahrhunderts. Auf der Grundlage von Donald Grants umfassenden *Directory of the railway companies of Great Britain* (2017) werden die Namen britischer Eisenbahngesellschaften klassifiziert und exemplifiziert; für die einzelnen Typen werden numerische prozentuale Zahlenwerte angegeben. Typische Bestandteile solcher Namen sind Toponyme (Orts- und Regionalnamen), Verkehrsmodus (*Railway*) sowie Qualifikatoren, die etwa die Größe des Unternehmens unterstreichen (*Great Western Railway*) und die Besitzverhältnisse verdeutlichen (etwa *Joint Railway* bei gemeinsamen Unternehmungen mehrerer Gesellschaften), ferner die beförderten Güter (*Mineral Railway*) oder ein geringerer Anspruch an die Infrastruktur (*Light Railway*). Ebenfalls erörtert werden unterschiedliche Betonungsmuster und Abkürzungen der Namen. Die Grundprinzipien der Namengebung für Eisenbahnunternehmen werden bis heute in abgewandelter Form angewendet.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Namen von Eisenbahnunternehmen, onomastische Prinzipien, Namen im industriellen Kontext.

1. Introduction

Railway companies were among the first modern business concerns to be established in Britain, and indeed in the world. What names were they given? Names in a railway context are not a major research topic. [Gerstenkorn et al. \(2006\)](#) deal with various aspects of German railways' technical vocabulary; there are several studies on locomotive names ([Coates 2009, 2016, 2023](#); [Karlsson 1994](#)), a subject that is also regularly treated in the railway enthusiast press.¹ Others have investigated the role of railways in literature (e.g., [Adami 2021](#)); there have been studies on station names ([Moody 1972](#)) and route names ([Anon. 2013](#), for Germany [Rowley 2022](#)), but to my knowledge nothing yet on the titles of Railway companies.² Nonetheless names play a vital role in all railway systems. Each station and block post must have a unique and standardised name. Many locomotives bear names.³ The public relations people may want to name some of the crack express trains (cf. [Weyers 2008, 2017](#); [Coates 2016: 653](#)). But the first task is to find a name for the railway company in order to apply to Parliament for an Act to enable construction.

The *Directory of the railway companies of Great Britain* ([Grant 2017](#)) lists over 1550 names of railway companies⁴ extracted from Acts of Parliament passed before the middle of the twentieth century. There are to this very day unwritten rules for such names (cf. [Sjöblom 2016](#)), and [Grant's](#) *Directory* is the ideal instrument to investigate these. For the following remarks, using the *Directory* as my basis, I shall concentrate on Britain, motherland of the railway, where railway companies – and their titles or names – evolved largely without central planning or prominent government intervention. This resulted in a large number of companies with diverse titles. Even though many of the companies listed by [Grant \(2017\)](#) never managed to realise their projects and many others later merged into larger concerns, yet still for the first decades of the twentieth century, [Conolly \(1967\)](#) in his preface to the *British railways pre-grouping atlas and gazetteer* counts “something like 150 titles”, whereas for Germany [Nietmann \(1886\)](#) lists seventy-five, for Austro-Hungary only thirty seven.

¹ Two recent examples of many are [Lindsay \(2025\)](#) and [Anderson \(2025\)](#).

² [Wilson \(1972\)](#) discusses the choice of names for the amalgamated 1923 “Big Four” companies.

³ Cf. [Coates \(2016\)](#). [Ian Walmsley \(2018\)](#) illustrates some pitfalls here.

⁴ Because of cross-reference entries and multiple naming, the number of actual companies is 1430 ([Grant 2017: xii](#)). All percentages in my text are based on 1550 entries.

2. Precedents

There were of course precedents for naming. Some very old roads carried proper names – *Ermine Street*, which was partially superseded by the *Great North Road*, or *Watling Street*.⁵ Turnpike roads and canals and were largely established by Acts of Parliament and needed legally binding names. Turnpike roads (established in the United Kingdom by Act of Parliament in 1707) were run by trusts, whose names, dating from the eighteenth century, offered models for the later railways. The names were referential and usually described the proposed route, thus often the turnpike bore the name of the two places connected: the *Keighley and Kendal Turnpike*, the *Birmingham and Stratford Turnpike*. Sometimes one placename sufficed: the *Bath Turnpike*, sometimes several were considered necessary: the *Chester, Neston and Woodside Ferry Turnpike*. Regional names applied in Wales, where in the south trusts could cover large parts of a county, for instance the *Cardiganshire Turnpike Trust*, which had *Upper* and *Lower* divisions.

The canal companies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries generally followed similar principles. The two places connected gave the company its name as in the *Leeds and Liverpool Canal*, one sole place name sufficed as in the *Coventry Canal* or the *Manchester Ship Canal* of the late nineteenth century, deep and wide enough for ships and not just barges. A canal speciality was the use of names of the rivers connected: the *Kennet and Avon Canal*, the *Forth and Clyde Canal*. Regional names were also used: the *Glamorganshire Canal*, the *Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal*. Sometimes, programmatic elements appeared: the words *Union* and *Junction* in the *Shropshire Union Canal* or the *Grand Junction Canal* emphasise connectivity, the name of the *Royal Military Canal* described its most important function. The very first canal was named after its initiator: the *Bridgewater Canal* (from 1761) was commissioned by the third Duke of Bridgewater.

3. The basic company name: Toponyms and transport mode

Thus the railway companies had models they could follow. They too were generally empowered by Acts of Parliament, and bore legally binding names, chosen by the proposers and always in English.⁶ The most obvious choice in an age where individual groups were promoting links between two points was to name the railway after the endpoints of the route, as had been

⁵ The names derive from the names of Anglian tribes, see [Watts \(2004: 218, 656\)](#).

⁶ Irish names were only given after the Free State was founded, Welsh (*Trenau Arriva Cymru* [Arriva Trains Wales], *Rheilffordd Talyllyn* [Talyllyn Railway]) and Gaelic (*Rèile na h-Alba* [ScotRail]) bilingual names are a product of the minority friendly policies of the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries.

done for turnpikes and canals. The route name becomes the railway company's name, and the railway does, so to speak, what it says on the tin. This model is typical for early railway companies. The basic form of the company name consists of the following components: the definite article if the transport mode is in the singular, then (one to six) toponyms defining the area served, finally the name of the transport mode. Instead of the mode *Turnpike* or *Canal*, the company name contains the word *Railway*, until nationalisation generally in the singular,⁷ emphasising that the railway company, however large, was one coherent concern. Occasionally the word *Tramway* or similar might be used instead,⁸ tramway coming to signify lower demands on the infrastructure. In Grant (2017), *Tramway* occurs 27 times (1.8 % of the total), *Tramroad* 5, *Wagonway* 3 times. The *Gloucester and Cheltenham Railway* opened in 1811, the *Stockton and Darlington Railway* in 1825, the *Stratford and Moreton Railway* in 1826, the *Liverpool and Manchester Railway* in 1830, the *London and Greenwich Railway* in 1836, and a whole host of other companies – 527 (34 %) of the companies in Grant (2017) – followed this popular pattern. Many merged or were later absorbed into larger concerns, but some survived until Grouping,⁹ such as the *Maryport and Carlisle Railway* or the *Neath and Brecon Railway*. Isolated and narrow-gauge railways such as the *Campbeltown and Machrihanish Light Railway* and the *Rye and Camber Light Railway* survived as separate entities into the 1930s. The principle is once again alive today on preserved lines such as the *Lakeside and Haverthwaite Railway* or the *Bo'ness and Kinneil Railway*. One place name might suffice, as in the *Barry Docks and Railway*, later *Barry Railway*, especially when it is obvious to all what the missing second place must be. 367 company names (23.6 %) in Grant (2017) are of this type. The *Sirhowy Tramroad* (to Newport) opened in 1805, the *Oystermouth Railway* in 1806 connecting the Mumbles area to Swansea. Today's privatised *Hull Trains* runs services from Hull to London. One name alone is quite often used for branches connecting a community to a main line: the *Easingwold Railway*, the *Bishop's Castle Railway*, the *Wantage Tramway*. The single name type has also been revived for preserved lines such as the *Llangollen Railway*. Three place names were not unknown (173 companies, 11.2%), as in the *Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway*, the *London, Tilbury and Southend Railway* or the *Bideford, Westward Ho! and Appledore Railway*. When a company sought financial support from every community along the proposed route, it may have been deemed wise to use even more names, as in the *Sheffield, Rotherham, Barnsley, Wakefield, Huddersfield and*

⁷ Around twenty companies used the plural, notably *Cambrian Railways*.

⁸ Oddly, the boards running the later urban Corporation tramways usually used the plural *Tramways*.

⁹ The "Grouping" of 1923 refers to the consequences of the UK Railway Act of 1921, in accordance with which numerous smaller railway companies were grouped together into four larger companies, the so called "Big Four".

Goole Railway (authorised 1846, and absorbed in 1858 by the *Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway*); this record six place names¹⁰ was almost rivalled in Ireland by the proposed *Dublin, Rathmines, Rathgar, Roundtown, Rathfarn & Rathcoole Railway* of 1864, which sadly never came to fruition.

In what order should the toponyms appear? Capital cities and important towns and ports usually take priority; London always takes the pole position. In the case of the *Stockton and Darlington Railway*, it was supporters at the Stockton end who sought to increase the port's throughput by means of better connections from the hinterland ([Wolmar 2007: 9–10](#)). With the *Liverpool and Manchester Railway*, it was Liverpool merchants who took the initiative ([Wolmar 2007: 23, 26](#)). Against the general trend however, in 1831 the *Garnkirk and Glasgow Railway* opened carrying coal from the Monkland coalfield to the city. But it soon built an extension and changed its name to the “more appropriate title” ([Grant 2017: 223](#)) *Glasgow, Garnkirk and Coatbridge Railway*.

Regional names were a further early naming principle which has remained productive to the present day. Some go back to the very early years of the railway. The *Surrey Iron Railway* was authorised in 1801. Many later examples of this type arose through the merger and absorption of smaller concerns, so *Cambrian Railways*, the *Highland Railway*, the *North Staffordshire Railway* and others. The name of the *Great Western Railway* (with an added element *Great*, see § 4 below) survived Grouping, gaining a sister in the newly amalgamated *Southern Railway*. [Grant \(2017\)](#) contains 240 company names (15.5 %) of this type. The nationalised *British Railways* and *Northern Ireland Railways* revitalised the method (albeit with the word *Railways* in the plural¹¹), as indeed does *Iarnród Éireann* [Railway of Ireland] in the Irish Republic. Private operators such as *Northern Trains* and *ScotRail* continued the tradition in a more modern form. Two regions are connected in the names of the *Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway*, the *Kent and East Sussex Light Railway*, the *Somerset and Dorset Joint Railway* (55 names or 3.5 % in [Grant's Directory](#)). River names too can be taken to refer to a region, in that the valley is larger than an individual settlement, hence the *Taff Vale Railway*, the *Derwent Valley Light Railway*, the *Forth and Clyde Junction Railway* or today's *Merseyrail*. There are even hills and mountains with their own railway: the *Great Orme Tramway*, the *Snowdon Mountain Railway*.

A common permutation used by railway companies is to mix place names and regional names. The place names usually come first. The *Glasgow and South Western Railway* and the *Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway* illustrate the principle.¹² After Grouping, this was the model for two of the “Big Four”:

¹⁰ According to a brief anonymous notice in *Railway Magazine* (1937) 80(479): 309. There are also four companies with four place names.

¹¹ One could speculate that the plural was chosen to suggest the continuing existence of the traditions of the old “Big Four” Companies.

¹² [Grant \(2017\)](#) contains 182 names of this type (11.7 %), 132 (8.5 %) thereof with one place name and one regional name.

the *London, Midland and Scottish Railway* and the *London and North Eastern Railway*. In the names of the other two companies, the *Southern Railway* and the *Great Western Railway*, the capital is the implicit focus of the geographical name, for their networks connect not the southern or western halves of Britain; they connect London with the areas south and west thereof. On the other hand, London is often implicitly considered a world quite apart from the rest of the country, the regions or provinces, and thus the name of the present-day train operating company *CrossCountry* implies that its trains do not serve the capital, as did the term *Regional Railways* (known before privatisation as the *Provincial Sector*).

As they built further routes or acquired other companies, many concerns found their names dwindling in accuracy. Often expansion and mergers created new companies with new, broader scope geographic names. The newer titles were no longer place name fixated. When it prepared to serve Portsmouth, the *London and Southampton Railway* changed its name to the *London and South Western*; with its new route to London in mind, the *Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway* restyled itself as the *Great Central*. The *North Eastern Railway* absorbed a number of place-name orientated earlier companies. Such new names were so imprecise as to hide the huge geographical range of the companies. In any case, once the name is established, it no longer really matters whether it is entirely accurate, and abbreviations such as *GWR* for *Great Western Railway*, *MR* for *Midland Railway*, *LNWR* for *London and North Western Railway*, etc., which soon became common for every railway company, obscured the initial motivation of the name. The *London and North Eastern Railway* reached Silloth and Mallaig in the northwest, the *London and North Western Railway* had a line to Cambridge in the southeast. It was only *British Railways* which after nationalisation tried to reduce these geographical anomalies and create geographically discrete “regions” as part of a national network, symbolised in the 1968 coinage of a new, snappier title *British Rail*, once more with a singular noun but without the definite article.

Many of the naming types already mentioned contain a certain implicit programmatic element, or at least give expression to expansionist aspirations. Thus the *North Western Railway* ran, on opening in 1849, twenty five miles between the West Riding towns of Skipton and Ingleton, hardly worthy of the name *North Western*, but it had aspired to greater things and been thwarted by the competition, as was the later *Yorkshire Dales Railway*, which opened in 1902 as a not quite nine mile branch line from Airedale to neighbouring Wharfedale. Many names were not entirely accurate even from the start. The *Stockton and Darlington Railway* from the first served collieries near Shildon west of Darlington, and beyond the scope of its given name, whereas the *Hull and Barnsley Railway* never reached Barnsley. The *Lancashire, Derbyshire and East Coast Railway* reached neither Lancashire nor the East Coast, and the *Manchester and Milford Railway* never even planned to extend its line to Manchester or Milford Haven, optimistically hoping for access rights over other companies’ routes.

This then is the typical structure of a railway company name, considered to be prototypical to this day; Guardian columnist [Ian Jack \(2018\)](#) has praised¹³ the choice of *London North Eastern Railway* (albeit without the historic *and*) for a recently constituted train operating franchise as entirely appropriate, sounding “neither like a soap powder nor a bourbon”.¹⁴

4. Preceding adjective

The toponymic component of the company name may be preceded by an adjective. As railway companies grew larger, some wished to emphasise their size and high prestige, primarily with the word *Great*: beside the *Great Western Railway*, we have the *Great Eastern Railway*, the *Great Northern Railway*, the *Great North of Scotland Railway* and the *Great Central Railway*. The latter-day privatised *Great North Eastern Railway* was a nostalgic throwback to this tradition, as is the name of the new controlling authority for freshly nationalised England’s railways *Great British Rail*.

5. Interposed components

After the toponymic component and before the transport mode, descriptive elements explaining what type of railway the company ran may be interposed: [Grant \(2017\)](#) registers *Light* (133 names, 8.6 %), *Extension* (30 cases, 1.9%), *Electric* (5 cases), *Overhead* (twice) and *Pneumatic* (once). The words *Light Railway* (*Shropshire and Montgomeryshire Light Railway*) signified lower demands on the infrastructure and lower expectations of speed. The *West London Extension Railway* took over an earlier, unsuccessful *West London Railway* and extended it along the Kensington Canal and over the Thames towards Clapham Junction ([Grant 2017: 599](#)). The *Liverpool Overhead Railway* ran overhead, the *Grimsby and Immingham Electric Railway* was electrically powered, *London Underground Limited* operated the underground lines in London, and the *North Wales Narrow Gauge Railway* was built to the narrower 1’11½” gauge.

A further type of interposed description defines what type of railway company is being named. In [Grant \(2017\)](#) we find *Junction* (155 cases, 10 %), *Joint* (12 cases, 0.7 %) and *Union* (19 cases, 1.2 %). Here the names of other railway companies may feature in the company name. The word *Junction* was used to signify that a company offered a connection to other lines the *Birmingham and Derby Junction Railway* (authorised 1836) connected Derby to the *London*

¹³ See [Jack, Ian. 2018. Chris Grayling thinks nostalgia can fix the east coast mainline. He’s wrong. *The Guardian*, 19 May 2018.](#) Grayling was then the UK transport minister.

¹⁴ Such names for the author conjure up the appeal and the solidity of the old Big Four railway companies, but to some perhaps sound out-of-date; *Modern Railways* columnist [Ian Walmsley \(2021: 47\)](#) calls them “retro names”.

and *Birmingham Railway* at Hampton-in-Arden, the *Stratford-upon-Avon and Midland Junction Railway* connected Stratford to the network of the Midland Railway. One company, the *Grand Junction Railway* of 1833, eschewed place names entirely and thus highlighted its rôle in connecting the *London and Birmingham Railway* to the *Liverpool and Manchester Railway*. *Union* was used to signify a linking line, as in the *City of Glasgow Union Railway*. The *Cheltenham and Great Western Union Railway* aimed to connect Cheltenham to the network of the *Great Western Railway*. The word *Joint* signified a company set up and shared by greater companies; the *South Yorkshire Joint Railway*, for example, by the Great Central, the Great Northern, the Lancashire and Yorkshire, the Midland and the North Eastern Railway (Grant 2017: 530). Some jointly run lines were managed by a committee, whose name also served as a company name, occasionally even replacing the transport mode *Railway*, as in the *Cheshire Lines Committee*.

It is relatively rare for the traffic the railway was built for to be named explicitly. In this function, Grant (2017) registers *Mineral* (in 16 cases, 1 %), *Coal* (twice), *Commercial* (twice), *Military* (once) and *Naval* (once). Examples are the *Commercial Railway* (later renamed the *London and Blackwall Railway*), the *Longmoor Military Railway*, the *North Wales Mineral Railway* and its *South Wales* equivalent. Modern-day privatised freight operators too have chosen names which eschew geographical detail in favour of describing what the operator does: *DB Cargo UK*, *Freightliner*, *GB Railfreight*.

Today's *Fife Heritage Railway* is an example of a preserved line that uses the word *heritage* to underline its programme, and the names of the *Embsay and Bolton Abbey Steam Railway*, *Isle of White Steam Railway* and others emphasise the heritage attraction of the steam locomotive.

6. Abbreviations and acronyms

As already mentioned, abbreviations of company names soon became common currency. As a rule, the word *and* in the title can be omitted, as in *LNER* for the *London and North Eastern Railway*; in pre-grouping names it may be represented by ampersand: *L&YR* or *LYR* for the *Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway*.¹⁵ Abbreviation quickly led to popular misrepresentations, the *OW&WR* (*Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway*) was rebaptised the *Old Worse and Worse* because of its miserable punctuality, the *GWR* (*Great Western Railway*) by its detractors the *Great Way Round* because of the roundabout route via Bristol to Devon and Cornwall,¹⁶ the *MS&LR* (*Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway*) came to be misread as the *Mucky, Slow*

¹⁵ The preposition *of* is omitted in *GNSR* (*Great North of Scotland Railway*) but retained in *VoR* (*Vale of Rheidol Railway*) and *IoMR* (*Isle of Man Railway*).

¹⁶ Fans read the abbreviation as *God's Wonderful Railway*.

and Lazy. Abbreviations often gained official status, appearing on locomotives and rolling stock, but traditionally always standing for the full form of the name. Only in an age when snappy abbreviations were considered modern could free standing and totally arbitrary name *c2c* be propagated for the company running the London – Tilbury – Shoeburyness line.¹⁷ Acronyms have not (yet?) established themselves in the UK as names of railway concerns. International examples would be San Francisco's *BART* (*Bay Area Rapid Transport*) and Dublin's *DART* (*Dublin Area Rapid Transport*). There are however already route names of this type, such as *GOBLIN* (for the Gospel Oak to Barking line).

7. Owners' names and honorifics

Names of the owners of concerns, a major source of names of engineering and manufacturing firms (as instanced by *Robert Stephenson & Co*, *Rolls-Royce*, *Hawker-Siddeley* or *Siemens*), long played a minor rôle in railway names. There are only nine cases in *Grant's Directory*. Few of the gentry had the will or means to build their own railway, although the Marquess of Londonderry opened the *Londonderry Railway* by 1831, mainly to transport his coal to the docks at Seaham, and in 1854 built an extension to Sunderland, and the Duke of Sutherland had the *Duke of Sutherland's Railway* (authorised in 1870) built from Golspie to Brora and on to Helmsdale, before handing it over to the *Highland Railway* in 1884. The owner's name seems to have made a route description with toponyms superfluous. Exceptions to the no-owners-name trend were industrial owners and docks, such as the *Mersey Docks and Harbour Board*, the *Ports of London Authority* and numerous collieries and industrial plants. The nationalised *National Coal Board* was a major rail operator. And the various tramways run by civic corporations bore the names of the corporation: *Birmingham / Belfast / Glasgow Corporation Tramways* and many others. The traditional avoidance of owner names changed on privatisation, when concerns like *Arriva* and *Virgin* expanded into railway operations, adding their brand names to the railway company name: *Arriva Trains Wales*, *Connex South Eastern*, *Virgin West Coast*, *Govia Thameslink*.

Honorific names are new in the UK, but on a worldwide scale, especially in monarchies less constitutional than the UK's, they were common (see below § 11). Queen Victoria did however lend her name to several main line city railway stations. Two recent route names are honorific: that of the cross-London *Elizabeth Line*, named in honour of Queen Elizabeth II., and that of London's underground *Jubilee Line* tube, whose name marks her silver jubilee.

¹⁷ *Wikipedia* offers as readings: “city to coast or capital to coast, reflecting the nature of the route, or commitment to customers” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C2c>, accessed 2021-01-07).

8. Route names

Many of the first railway company names had been route names. As the companies expanded, route names arose, often informally, within individual concerns and among customers for particular stretches of line and the trains that served them (see [Anon. 2013](#)). They often referred to local characteristics or in-jokes and not place names. Occasionally, these may themselves again become names of companies. Thus arose the name of the preserved *Bluebell Railway*, from the route name *Bluebell Line*. The privatised *Virgin Trains West Coast* and *Virgin Trains East Coast* used route names, namely those of the West and East Coast Main Lines. A preserve of the route name is London's underground and tube network. Line names here may follow the same principles as company names – the *Metropolitan Line* and the *District Line* derive their names from those of older private companies, the *Metropolitan Railway* and the *Metropolitan District Railway*. Then there are lines containing the name of one place served: the *Piccadilly Line*, the *Victoria Line*; of two places served: the *Hammersmith and City Line*, the *Waterloo and City Line*; further those using regional names as in the *Central Line* and the *Northern Line*. The name of the *Circle Line* describes – rather vaguely – the line's geographical shape on the map and the circular nature of the train service. The *Bakerloo Line* belongs to the two-place-name group as a portmanteau: its name is a composite of *Baker Street* and *Waterloo*.

9. Colloquial usage

A few company names had colloquial short forms of the official names, notably the *Caley* for the *Caledonian Railway*, the *Lanky* for the *Lancashire and Yorkshire* and the *Met* for the *Metropolitan Railway*. The *North Staffordshire Railway* was known as the *Knotty*, from its emblem the Staffordshire Knot. In everyday colloquial usage, interspersed elements such as *Joint* or *Union*, denoting the type of company, were omitted. The word *Railway* is often dropped from the company title. Thus the *Somerset and Dorset Joint Railway* is referred to as the *Somerset and Dorset*. Equally, the last letter *R* may be dropped from the abbreviation so long as at least two letters remain; the *LNWR* (*London and North Western Railway*) may become the *LNW*, the *GCR* (*Great Central*) the *GC*, but the *MR* (*Midland Railway*) cannot be shortened. It was perhaps the frequent omission of the word *Railway*, with the main stress falling on the last element of the toponymic component, which led to the common option of stressing this last word even if the word *Railway* was included: *the Midland Railway*, *the Great Céntral Railway*. The multitude of companies will have contributed to this stress shift, as it is the toponymic component, not the transport mode, that differentiates them. This stress pattern is common practice too with the *Lines*

of the London Underground network. However, the word stress always falls on *Railway* in *Snowden / Snaefell Mountain Railway*. The tradition changed with the foundation of the nationalised *British Railways* and its later incorporation *British Rail*, in which the word *Railways* and *Rail* cannot be omitted and bear the stress in the expected manner.

10. Present-day trends

In the 21st century, rail operators compete with other transport modes – not a problem for the pioneers of the 19th century. This may lead to a stronger tendency to let the PR department help choose the company name. But the basic principles of company naming persist after the 1995 privatisation to this day, as examples quoted above have shown. Where the company, as so often, no longer uses the term *Railway* for the transport mode, the definite article is dropped; the company title becomes more like a prototypical name. Toponyms, though still frequent, are no longer obligatory, especially for Freight companies (see above § 5). *Rail* can be written as one word together with the toponymic element: *ScotRail*. Beside shortened *Rail*, and because the train operators are no longer responsible for the infrastructure, some companies use the word *Trains* as transport mode (*Northern Trains*). We find new transport modes. The *Tyne and Wear Metro* and the *Midland Metro* use the term *Metro*, originating in Paris (but inspired by London's *Metropolitan Railway*), for urban rapid transport systems. Names may try to highlight the advantages of the transport mode rail, in particular connectivity and speed. The mode *Express* suggests speed (*Heathrow, Gatwick Express*). The epithet *cross* denotes connectivity across an area, as in *Crossrail* across Greater London and *CrossCountry* across the country, and *link* is used as a suffix to express connectivity, as in Manchester's *Metrolink*, *Thameslink* and the now defunct *Silverlink*. Connectivity and speed are implied in the name of *TransPennine Express*.

11. World perspective

In this survey I have concentrated on Britain, but many of the principles are universal. They apply equally to the majority of the railway companies in the United States, typified by the *Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway* or the *Baltimore and Ohio Railroad*. Only very few further European examples must illustrate this. Early German companies were the *München-Augsburger Eisenbahn-Gesellschaft* [Munich-Augsburg Railway Company] and the *Berlin-Potsdamer Eisenbahngesellschaft*, an early French railway was the *Compagnie du chemin de fer de Saint-Étienne à Lyon* 1832.

Central planning and state intervention typically lead to geographically unified networks with a limited inventory of geographical names. In France,

by the late nineteenth, the state had leased its railways to operating companies such as the *Chemins de Fer du Nord*, *Chemins de Fer de l'Est* or *Chemins de Fer du Midi* (respectively Northern, Eastern and Southern Railways). In Germany, eight of the constituent states had their own *Staats-Eisenbahnen* [State Railways], which in 1920 were merged – with many other railways – into the single *Deutsche Reichsbahn*. A little later in the UK, the numerous railway companies were grouped by Act of Parliament into the “Big Four”.

There may be national differences in detail. In the USA, even oceans served as railway company names, as in the *Atlantic and Pacific Railroad* of the late 19th century. It has already been noted that honorifics were not usual in Britain, in contrast to Germany’s first public railway from Nuremberg to nearby Fürth, named the *Königlich privilegierte Ludwigs-Eisenbahn-Gesellschaft* [Royally Privileged Ludwig’s Railway Company] after King Ludwig I of Bavaria, and honorifics were standard in Austro-Hungary, leading to such pompous titles as *k.k. privilegierte Kaiser Ferdinands-Nordbahn* [Imperial and Royally Privileged¹⁸ Emperor Ferdinand’s Northern Railway] from Vienna to Bohemia and Silesia or *k.k. privilegierte Kaiserin Elisabeth-Bahn* [Imperial and Royally Privilege Empress Elisabeth Railway], today’s *Westbahn* from Vienna to Salzburg and Passau.

12. Conclusion

Finding a suitable name for a new railway company is a first and important onomastic task for its proponents, the basis for all onomastic acts which follow. I hope to have made explicit the unwritten rules underlying the act of naming.

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¹⁸ German *k.k.* is short for *kaiserlich und königlich*. The Emperor (Kaiser) of Austria was also the King (König) of Hungary.

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