

Newsletter of the Middleton Railway TrustNumber 4June 1965

Since the last Newsletter the M.R.T. has received some very disturbing news and unwelcome publicity regarding British Rail and a "take-over" bid.

The following appeared in the Yorkshire Post on Tuesday May 11th :-

TAKE-OVER THREAT TO OLDEST RAILWAY.

A reported plan by British Railways to take over the world's oldest railway line, the 207-year-old Middleton Railway in Leeds, and to sell one of its own lines to make way for a motorway, has angered Dr. Fred Youell, chairman of the Middleton Railway Trust.

"I am appalled at this," he told The Yorkshire Post. "As Chairman of the Trust which runs the railway I have not been consulted. I shall be extremely annoyed if there is any attempt to get us off the line."

Dr. Youell, a Leeds University lecturer, said the first time he suspected anything was happening was about a month ago, when he found British Railways engineers "raking about" the line.

"They said they had been instructed by someone at York to do something about the three level crossings. But we are already doing something about improving the crossings. I immediately wrote two letters to the railways, one to Leeds and one to York, but I have not had the courtesy of a reply."

Dr. Youell was commenting on a report The Yorkshire Post received that British Railways were planning to take over the three-mile stretch of line and use it for carrying coal from Broom Colliery, Middleton. The coal is now moved via Beeston to Hunslet Station.

The report said British Railways planned also to sell the Beeston-Hunslet line for land development and for part of the Sheffield-Leeds motorway.

Questioned about this reported plan, a spokesman for British Railways' North-Eastern Regional headquarters at York said yesterday: "We are unable to say anything at this stage."

It was Dr. Youell who, in 1960, led the successful fight to save the Middleton Railway when it was earmarked for the route of the motorway. He suggested that the line be used for the colliery traffic and that the motorway should be made on the Beeston-Hunslet line.

As a result, the National Trust stepped in with a protective covenant because of the line's outstanding historic interest Dr. Youell added. Two years earlier, he had formed the Middleton Railway Preservation Society to save the line when it seemed certain to end as scrap metal.

"We have spent much time and effort modernising the track" he said, "We turned what was a scrapheap into a railway line. We opened a new branch line to a Hunslet engineering works in 1963, to a firm which had never had a railway connection. Our railway now carries 10,000 tons of goods a year and we are carrying out a systematic relaying programme to bring it up to normal standards for heavy traffic."

Goods carried on the Middleton Railway consist of scrap metal, steel and engineering work bound for the British Railways marshalling yards in Hunslet. The Diesel and steam locomotives are manned by the Trust.

All are voluntary workers. Many are engineers studying at Leeds University. "We probably have more engineers per mile of track than most Railways," Dr. Youell added.

This record of service to a line which had been working for half a century before Stephenson's Stockton-Darlington line was opened, he says, entitles the members to consultation if British Railways have any plans to use it.

"It seems incredible that, when we are already running with Diesel power and having spent a vast number of man hours improving the line, this could be going on behind our backs."

A subsequent article appeared in the Yorkshire Post the next morning.

TRUST WILL STILL USE OLDEST LINE.

'NO DIFFERENCE' IF BRITISH RAILWAYS PLAN SUCCEEDS

The men who run the world's oldest railway- the 207 year old Middleton Railway in Leeds- will still be allowed to operate if the plan by British Railways to take over the line goes through.

Mr. S. Jones, director and company secretary of the firm which owns the railway, Clayton Son and Co. Ltd, structural engineers, Hunslet, told the Yorkshire Post:

"We own the whole railway. The proposals at this stage are that the Sheffield-Leeds motorway will, we understand, use the present British Railways line which runs across to Beeston. British Railways will use our line between Middleton and Balm Road, to take the coal from Middleton Colliery. This has been agreed in principle. At present there is no suggestion that the Middleton Railway Trust will cease to do our work." (Clayton's is one of the firms for which the Trust hauls goods traffic.)

He said that Dr. Fred Youell, chairman of the Trust, would be brought into the discussions later. At present, he repeated, the matter was still at the proposal stage. He added "It may be that under the arrangements British Railways would maintain the line."

The news was welcomed by Dr. Youell, a lecturer at Leeds University, but, he said, he was still disappointed at what he described as "unfair treatment" in not being consulted. "It seems they want to regard us as the poor relations. But if we are not going to be completely thrown

out that is something gained, I suppose."

A spokesman for Leeds Corporation Town Clerk's Department said that "tentative arrangements" were being worked out for British Railways to use the line, in addition to the Middleton Railway Trust, who were licensed to run on the track. It would not affect the Trust's use of the line, so far as he could gather.

The Yorkshire Post Industrial Correspondent in London writes :- British Railways Board in London said last night it had no knowledge of a reported plan that it intends to take over the Middleton Railway and to sell one of its own lines to make way for a motorway.

The first that the Committee heard was when the author of the first article contacted Dr. Youell for his reactions on Monday, May 10th. His reaction was that of us all, despair - and indignation that this was how we were to be informed. Several national dailies telephoned for further information. However the outcome of three days of great worry is that it appears that the original story in the Yorkshire Post is untrue and that the MRT shall continue to work the line. Neither British Rail nor Claytons will give us any further insight into the position but stress that the proposals are only tentative and that our traffic is not involved. British Railways were surprised that a representative of MRT had not been present at the meeting with the City Engineer.

One more pleasant outcome is that a Sunday Telegraph reporter came on Friday May 14th. and photographed the line for a probable article for the paper.

In the same edition of the Yorkshire Post (May 11th) there appeared the following :-

SAVED FROM THE SCRAP-HEAP

A 74- year-old steam locomotive has been saved from the scrapheap by five Teesside enthusiasts who formed a trust and borrowed £300 to preserve it.

The locomotive, the last of seven of the same type made at Gateshead in 1891 and used in colliery work for the last 30 years, is going to the privately owned Middleton Railway at Leeds, after it has been repainted in its original North Eastern Railway livery.

It has been worked by the National Coal Board who sold it to the trust for the same price that a scrap merchant offered.

The five owners, Mr Ken Cockerill, of Billingham, Mr John Boyes, of Billingham, Mr. P.W.B.Semmens, of Middlesbrough, Mr. G Jackson, of Darlington, and Mr. A Bowman, of Sedgfield, are selling photographs to help pay off the money. If they fail the locomotive might still become scrap.

The MRT Committee are delighted that the Steam Power Trust 65 have offered us this locomotive. It is hoped that the engine will arrive at Middleton soon. Please could YOU help financially and help to pay for its transport down to Leeds and the cost of putting it into working order. A donation, no matter how small will be very gratefully received and passed on to the owners. Send either to the Secretary, MRT, 5 North Grange Mount, Leeds 6 or the Treasurer, MRT, 3 William Street, Hurstead, Rochdale.

The Diesel

Repairs to the diesel are being held up as the Compressor has not yet arrived. However the painting is going ahead and the engine is slowly turning blue.

The National Trust

Owing to the alarming way in which the whole situation concerning the future of the line had developed, the National Trust were informed. As always their reaction was rapid and sympathetic. Their N.E. Area representative spent a whole day with us and inspected the line.

He was fully informed about all the worrying problems we have had. One of them was the very unsafe level crossing put in by F.R. Evans (Leeds) Ltd. to the new Beza Road, where the contractors simply knocked our wall down and marched in. Another was the well known Moor Road level crossing, where Clayton Son and Co Ltd. had vetoed any repairs being done by the Ministry of Public Works under their scheme for maintaining historic relics of public interest, the reason being that "the motorway plan is not certain yet". Mr Proud, the N.T. Area representative was very appreciative of all the hard work done in repairs and new track laid. He expressed sympathy with the fact despite Clayton's having insisted that we complete the Moor End Branch as a matter of great urgency, the new line had hardly been used in 18 months.

A full account of the events since we took over and the way in which we appear to have been kept in the dark is being prepared for our N.T. visitor who has been made an Honorary Member so that he has full rights to visit the line at any time.

We heard that the National Trust had been asked to take over railway relics like the Wensleydale route and the Causey Arch, but joined them in a caveat that to restore and maintain a railway or even its site after lifting meant either large amounts of volunteers or money or both. (The Causey Arch built in 1727 is by the way about a mile South of 1310's old home at Watergate.)

The Newsletter

This edition has been edited by Susan Youell. Due to University examinations, G.C.E., annual holidays and illness it has also been typed by her with many apologies for inaccuracies.