

The Old Run

Journal of the Middleton Railway Preservation Society

No. 1

January 1960

With a membership not confined to the University of Leeds, this Society clearly needs a news-sheet to keep members informed of progress and future activities. While this first issue is, of necessity, a bare outline of our progress in the first six weeks of our existence, it is hoped that future issues will be paid into a complete record of the Society activities. It will be circulated to all paid-up members and to certain other interested people.

Chairman's Message

So much has happened since December when the Society came into existence, that it seems impossible to review it briefly. We still do not own a single yard of track, but we have opened negotiations for either the purchase or use of the Middleton Railway.

It is very appropriate that the Leeds University Railway Society should take the lead in forming a Society to preserve a railway which has been going since 1758 and was the first to make a commercial success of steam locomotives in 1812. The University Society is relatively small in numbers, and it is clear that we must invite the collaboration of members of other railway societies and individuals, if we are to tackle so large a project successfully. Even so, L. U. R. S. forms the nucleus of the organisation, and has provided the ad hoc Committee to bring the Society into being.

The outstanding feature of the early stages of the Society to me as acting Chairman has been the kindness and cooperation shown by almost every person and organisation with whom negotiations have brought me in contact. Not everyone is likely to be wildly enthusiastic about a collection of railway enthusiasts intent on restoring a derelict line, however important historically, but the response has been most encouraging. Businessmen who might reasonably have politely shown me the way out have offered sympathy and encouragement; nationalised industries have replied by return of post; and people with no interest in railways have wished us success. Public reaction so far has been favourable and the idea of turning the M.R. into a working museum appears to be accepted as worthwhile. We have a vast amount of work before us. Our needs are members, money and manpower: members to widen the base of the Society, money (as Subscriptions and Donations) to buy essential tools, stock and materials, and manpower to turn our present ideas into future achievements. In 6 weeks we have made a good beginning. May we keep up the pace until we have the M.R. into the Railway Showpiece of Leeds.

My best wishes to all members,

R. F. Youell, Acting Chairman.

PROGRESS REPORT

In the middle of December 1959, the LURS Committee felt that there was a great risk of the M. R. being irretrievably split up and that someone ought to take the initiative in an effort to keep the line going as a monument to the part played by Leeds in the development of ~~the~~ railways. The obvious corollary was the establishment somewhere on the line of a Museum where relics and documents of the 202 year old line could be collected and preserved. At the same time, the final abandonment of Leeds Tramways had recently occurred, and apart from the possibility of one tram going to a Leeds museum, there was no prospect of preserving a short piece of tramway as a working museum piece. Leeds was the first British city to run trams with overhead pickup of current, and it was therefore decided that part of our effort should be devoted to acquiring some Leeds tramcars.

Quite naturally, our first task has been to investigate the feasibility of acquiring the remains of the MR cheaply, of restoring it and running it economically, and then to commence negotiations. Every firm or organisation on the line was approached; all received our schemes sympathetically, especially Messrs. Clayton's, the Gas Engineers, who are themselves

interested in reopening the line for their own traffic. It is not every railway that has a coal merchant's at one end and a coal mine at the other, but we must not be too optimistic about the prospects here as British Railways have an operating monopoly at present over the Colliery section of the line.

The section from Gt. Wilson St. to Jack Lane is now owned by the N. E. Gas Board who have built over part of the site. The bridge near Jack Lane over the Midland Rly. is intact and carries gas mains as well as the rails which have not been pulled up. To the south, the end of the line beyond Town St, Middleton, is now a housing estate. None of those parts appear capable of restoration, at least for a long time.

Between Hunslet Moor and Middleton Town St., the prospects are much brighter: the track remains, though in poor repair, from the Moor to Parkside Gt. Northern Junction, and also on the double line branch to the Midland line at Balm Rd. From Parkside to Middleton Pit has been relaid by the Coal Board for their outgoing coal, but there is ample room beside it for an independant line. The sidings at the fireclay works at Middleton are disconnected from the main line and in a bad state. The Middleton Fireclay Co. is in voluntary liquidation and the works are for sale. The recently incline from the works to Middleton Town St. has had the track lifted recently, but the sleepers and a vintage semaphore signal remain. A short section at the lower end is owned by the Colliery for explosives stores.

There is obviously plenty of scope for restoration on the line, limited only by financial resources and manpower. The line of the railway is hardly of scenic beauty, but even slag heaps and quarries can be disguised or covered, and Middleton Park is a bare 100 paces from the line.

We have received good wishes for the success of the scheme from the officers of the N.C.B., who own Middleton Pit, but major reconstruction there will make it difficult for them to give us much active help. The many BR officers whom we have seen or written to have been very helpful and most interested in our efforts. We might particularly mention Mr A. Blower, Assistant to the Chief Civil Engineer, Leeds, BR, who has walked the line with our Chairman, and reported on the condition of the permanent way and works. The latter include some unique iron level crossing gates dating from 1801.

The Leeds City Engineer has given very careful Consideration to our proposals to restore the line, and the Town Planning Committee will be giving its verdict shortly.

Mr M. T. Keadrick, of Messrs J. C. Kirk and Son, liquidators to the Middleton Fireclay Co., who own the railway, has been kindness itself. He has been connected with the firm for a long time and is himself very interested in railways.

Turning to the tramway side of our scheme, we acknowledge the co-operation of Major J. W. Robinson, of Hinchliff's, scrap merchants, who have sold us three Leeds trams at scrap price, and one tram to two of our members privately. The General Manager of Leeds City Transport has offered us a set of automatic point equipment, two girder trucks and a set of jacks for lifting tram bodies, at scrap price.

The advice of Mr. V. J. Matterface (former tramway works engineer, L. C. T.) now B. R. Electric Traction Engineer, Newcastle, has been invaluable and he has placed his expert knowledge at our disposal.

Mr. John Allcock, MA, Managing Director of Hunslet Engine Co., visited us, expressed his ~~with~~ wholehearted support, and gave us a most generous personal donation to our funds.

Meetings.

The Committee meets weekly at 5pm Wednesdays in the Acting Chairman's room. Work parties assemble at the Chairman's room Saturdays at 11.30. It is hoped to arrange a full General Meeting of the Society soon to elect a fully representative Committee to take over from the ad hoc Committee which has managed the Society so far. Notice of this will be given as far in advance as possible to all members.

Subscriptions.

These are one pound per annum, 5s. for members 16-18 and students, Treasurer George Colles, Leeds University Union. General inquiries and documents etc. to Peter Dean, Secretary, at Leeds University Union.