

MIDDLETON AND THE RAILWAY AGE

At a time when we are being warned by the scientific community of global warming and traffic congestion is a growing problem it is annoying to think that fifty years ago Middleton had a transport link that enabled a person in the village to make a short walk to the station and with the necessary connections access the national rail network. But sadly it was lost. In her book "My Story" Winnie Cook recalls walking across two grass fields from Lund and along the railway track to take the train to Market Weighton and then to York and onwards to Kings Cross.

The railway was a late arrival in Middleton but when it appeared, it together with the telegraph provided a taste of the forthcoming age of communications which were to make such changes to the life of the country.

At the time of the death of the Rector in 1904 a local newspaper reflected on the changes that had occurred in Middleton in the last forty years in the following:

"Forty years ago Middleton had no means of communication with the outside world, except by a carrier's cart which went once a week to Driffeld ten miles distant. It is perfectly true that Mrs Blanchard (the Rector's wife) being apparently at the point of death, and the carrier's cart being about to start, orders were sent by it for a coffin, funeral cards and other paraphernalia of mourning. The lady did not die, but the coffin and other things arrived, and were long kept as an example of the isolation of the place before the railway. Now that there is a train service between Driffeld and Market Weighton and a telegraph office in the village, two posts daily and an evening newspaper, nobody can deny that progress has been made".

The existing railway network of the East Riding, some of it the product of the George Hudson scramble, was expanded with the opening on 11 April 1890 of the Market Weighton to Driffeld branch line. At the time it was thought that this section, which linked up with the existing lines from the West Riding would eventually boost the prosperity of Driffeld and Bridlington. It was felt that Bridlington which already had the holiday trade was poised for expansion as a port in connection with the fishing interest and as a potential trade link with Scandinavia and Hamburg.

Construction commenced in October 1888 and was carried out by John Fraser and Sons of Leeds at a cost of £230,000. It was a double track line and was taken over on opening by the North Eastern Railway Company. There were four stations on the section: Enthorpe, Middleton-on-the-Wolds, Bainton and Southburn and although there were some heaving cuttings and extensive embankments, the engineering difficulties had not been onerous with no tunnelling being required. It is said that a family involved in the construction work resided in part of the property now known as "Quackers" near the pond. Another construction worker was David Bradley Soanes. He was born in North Dalton in 1859 and served as a carrier in his father's business.

In 1891 he bought a grocer's and draper's shop and later opened a sand pit and sold sand. He died in September 1960 at the age of 101.

The first Station Master at Middleton was George Julian of Lund.

During the excavations between Enthorpe and Middleton bones and rusted iron were found in a deep cutting which were considered to be part of an Iron Age chariot burial. It is believed that only one of the items found, a linch pin, was preserved.

For a description of the Station area in the early days the following extract from a local newspaper reporter's article of 1913 can be quoted:

"I make my way to the station. On my way I am amused at a youth feeding pigs to the accompaniment of "rag-time" music and as I stand on the station platform and view the trim and tidily kept farmstead adjoining, near the drowsy hum of the village, and watch the smoke lazily curling upwards from the many firesides, which mean as many busy housewives preparing for the return of the lord and master from the doing of his "daily round and common task" I think how fortunate are the dwellers in this rural scene of quietude and contentment and how much nearer such a scene and state is to the divine ordination and plan of life than is the rush and scurry of city life and the "madding crowd" to which the arrival of my train bids me now return".

Older people in Middleton look back on the railway with affection and probable took it for granted as a permanent local facility. However as far as the management were concerned it did not fulfil its early promise and it was closed to goods traffic in 1954. The passenger side clung on precariously for a few more years finally closing in 1965.

In an article in the Driffield Times of the 18th June 1965 Tim Healey contrasts the high hopes and aspiration for the line on its inception and its sad demise. He states "In the intervening years people of the West Riding have travelled this route in hundreds and thousands as an escape to the sun and undeniably Bridlington has felt the wind of good fortune. Now all is silent, no longer will the rabbits go scurrying across the fields at the sound of approaching trains, the intermediate stations, already out of use, can no longer serve as a reminder that a new age has taken full toll".

The viaduct at Warren Dale lingered on for many years but was demolished a few years ago.