



MIDDLETON RECEIVES LOTTERY FUNDING FOR NEW RESOURCE CENTRE

The Middleton Railway has been awarded a grant of £737,500 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), to be used for the construction of an Educational Resource Centre, to be erected at the Railway's Moor Road headquarters.

Society Chairman, David Monckton, said "We are delighted to have been awarded this grant, which will be used to significantly enhance public access to our growing collection of Leeds built locomotives. We will also be able to tell the story of the Middleton Railway and its connections with the Leeds locomotive building industry, together with the story of the preservation of this historic railway by volunteers since 1960. Our new building will also provide a valuable resource for the people of South Leeds, for whom it represents a massive vote of confidence and opportunity for the future."

HLF Regional Manager for Yorkshire and the Humber, Fiona Spiers, said:

"Middleton Railway is a vital part of Yorkshire's railway and coal mining heritage and HLF is delighted to be able to fund this project. The project will provide an important heritage resource for both local people and visitors to the region, offering a wealth of history that is vital to the area and also improving access to this magnificent example of our steam heritage."

Background Information

The Middleton Railway is one of the most historic railways in the World. It was constructed in 1758 by local landowner, Charles Brandling, who wished to transport coal from his mine at the village of Middleton into the growing town of Leeds. Being unable to reach an agreement with other local landowners, Brandling obtained an Act of Parliament giving him wayleaves [essentially, permission to build] to construct his "waggon way" into the town. This Act was the very first to authorise the construction of a railway in this manner. The line opened in 1758 and has continuously operated every

year since that date and this fact, coupled with the granting of the Act, gives rise to the railway's claim to be the "Worlds Oldest Working Railway".

In 1811, at the height of the Napoleonic Wars, the Middleton Colliery was becoming unprofitable due to the high cost of fodder and the poor quality of horses available to the colliery, the fittest examples being purchased for the war effort. Colliery Manager John Blenkinsop engaged local engineer Matthew Murray to build a steam locomotive to operate trains instead of using horses. The first, named "SALAMANCA" after the battle, arrived in 1812 and with 3 sisters transformed the fortunes of the colliery. It was somewhat unconventional in that it used a rack and pinion system, not to pull trains uphill, but to be able to have a small, lightweight steam locomotive able to pull a heavy load to and from the coal mine. The design was used at a number of other locations both in the UK and the continent, becoming the very first design to be exported from the UK. The Middleton locomotives lasted for 30 years and were the World's first commercially successful steam locomotives.

In later years, the railway was operated by the National Coal Board, although it was in fact always privately owned. By the late 1950's the Middleton Broom Colliery [by which name the original mine was now known] was producing less and less coal and the railway itself was in a deplorable state. The decision was taken to truncate the line and divert rail traffic onto a BR line much nearer the colliery than previously, the work being complete by 1960.

At this time, students at Leeds University led by lecturer Dr R F Youell decided that this historic railway should not be allowed to die but should be preserved for posterity in the same manner as had been done for the historic Talylyn and Festiniog Railways, in Wales. After some negotiations, the first trains were operated in June, 1960 using a diesel locomotive and a double-deck Railway carriage. These were the very first Standard Gauge passenger trains to be operated by volunteers. The students later purchased the diesel locomotive, itself a historic item, being the very first to be constructed by the Hunslet Engine Company in 1932, and operated a regular freight service for industries along the railway's route. Again this was the first ever regular service to be operated entirely by volunteers.

Over the years, the railway has developed from these early beginnings to become an established tourist attraction and part of the local community. It draws much of its custom from the local area and also many of its volunteers. It has established a core collection of historic locomotives, many of which have been built in the city of Leeds and which also haul our regular passenger trains. The new resource centre will allow these historic machines to be displayed to better advantage and its classroom & interactive facilities will allow many more people to enjoy their visit to this historic railway and take part in activities which are both enjoyable and educational at the same time.

About the Heritage Lottery Fund

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) enables communities to celebrate, look after and learn more about our diverse heritage. From our great museums and historic buildings to local parks and beauty spots or recording and celebrating traditions, customs and history, HLF grants open up our nation's heritage for everyone to enjoy. The HLF has supported more than 15,000 projects, allocating over £3 billion across the UK.

Jan B Smith
Middleton Railway Vice President