

The Flamborough Light Railway

We owe the very existence of the railway system in our area to the foresight and forward planning of George Hudson, an "opportunist and reprobate", as he was unfairly reported to be in the press of his time. It was due largely to the vision of Hudson that we had the large group of railway companies under the blanket title of the "North Eastern Railway Company". Railways continued to be the main means of transport throughout the country until the end of the 1800's and early 1900's. Such was the extensive nature of the railway system that had evolved over the previous 50 years, that virtually every village seemed to have its own station. The railway proved to be a very efficient means of moving high volumes of merchandise over long distances.

This set the scene for plans for the Flamborough Light Railway to develop. The railway was never built, but features of our town today owe their existence to it, as you shall read below.

In the Bridlington Quay Gazette of November 16th 1887 there is an announcement that, "On Friday last, vestry meetings were held at Flamborough and Sewerby both of which declared unanimously in favour of the "Flamborough Head Tramway Bill". The advantages of having a tramway link to the North Eastern Railway at Marton station was explained to the meeting by the various interested parties. They said that for years Flamborough had been cut off from the outside world, but the steam tramway would give a good and quick connection with the rest of the kingdom. Within the prospectus is a glimpse of life in the last quarter of the Victorian era. They said that many thousands of tourists were visiting the rocks and caves of Flamborough, increasing annually in spite of the difficulty of access to the "town", meaning Flamborough, and when the Tramway is completed the traffic will be more than doubled. Marton is a first class station, all trains stop there and the Tramcars will meet every train."

From this we see that the plan was for the passengers to dismount at Marton station to journey to Flamborough and not to be transported from Bridlington. So the general benefit of the scheme was that it would increase trade to Flamborough and enable the fish to reach the markets quicker. General goods would cost less to the populace because of reduced transit costs. They were also promoting the idea that more

lodging houses would have to be built to accommodate the rising number of visitors who wanted to stay and sample the quiet serenity of Flamborough. In support of the 1887 scheme it was stated that the trackway for two thirds of its length would be over private land. For the rest of the journey the grass verges of the highway would be used. There would be only four crossings of the metalled road, and because of this, the cost of maintaining the railway would be small. The promoters of the scheme were forecasting that the railway could be opened in less than a year from its commencement. But then from documentary evidence it appears that the first scheme, which had been authorised in 1887, was abandoned on 31st January 1891 by a repeal of the Bill.

Then in 1896 the plans and visions for the Flamborough and Bridlington Light Railway were born to transport both goods and passengers. The fishermen of Flamborough still wanted the ability to quickly transport their catches of fish to the lucrative markets that were now available throughout the country. But more importantly certain leading local citizens saw the need for a good local transport system linking the "two towns, Burlington and the Quay" and also there was the need to cater to the ever growing tourist trade provided through the North Eastern Railway system. The Whittaker brothers who had built the New Spa obviously saw the scheme as having potential for bringing even more visitors to their new sea front complex. Thomas Whittaker of the Whittaker brothers is described as the promoter of the new scheme. He was also an acting agent for the N E Railway and made an application in December 1896 to the Light Railway Commissioners in London for the construction of a Light Railway to Flamborough. In the following year the commissioners backed the order for the "Flamborough and Bridlington Light Railways 1897". The next stage was to be the placement of the order before the Board of Trade on the 21st March 1898. We learn from the Parliamentary Agents Baxter and Company of Victoria Street, London, that the Board of Trade has approved the Flamborough and Bridlington Light Railways Order.

This is the time to look at the routes proposed for the Light Railway. The Act describes the various routes advocated for the tramway in great detail and splits the railway into four sections. Section one started at the junction of Prince Street and Garrison Street near the harbour top. It

progressed along Prince Street, Queen Street, Bridge Street and turned left into South Cliff. It picked up the defunct branch line behind Windsor Crescent, turned into Hilderthorpe Road, along Station Road, and ran up Quay Road and St. Johns Street. It then followed Kirkgate, Pinfold Street and Marton Road as far as Sewerby Heads. Section two joined to section one at Cross Street and ran up Promenade, Flamborough Road, Fortyfoot and Sewerby Heads to rejoin section one. The third and fourth sections ran to Flamborough North Landing with a connection to the NE Railway at the Flamborough Station at Marton, as proposed in the original scheme.

The Act then proceeds to tell us some interesting facts about the properties that are affected by the construction of the railway. Here are some examples. The New Inn, belonging to Theodosia Harrison, at the corner of Cross Street was to be shortened to make a wider access through the street into Promenade. Clough Bridge was to be widened. A piece of vacant land is required on the East side of Pinfold Street, near the Green Dyke on High Green, to provide a passing place. A portion of a field at the corner of Pinfold Street and Marton Road, belonging to Robert Baron, is required to allow the curve of track into Marton Road.



Widening St Johns Street. High Street end.

The portion of St John Street extending from Bateman's Entry (Baptist Place) to Bayle Gate was to be widened.

There is a lot of detail in the Act and we can assume that there had been a very intensive, in depth survey carried out along the route of the proposed railway. These physical alterations were necessary to give clearances for the tramway and sufficient room to pass and to turn around corners.

At this point you will realise that if we consider Bridlington as it now is, we see that the conditions of the Act, in terms of building clearances, were met in the very early 1900's, as if the Corporation really intended the rail system to be laid. Cross Street was widened in 1904-5. Clough Bridge was rebuilt and widened at the same time. Further up towards the Old Town, houses were being demolished to widen Quay Road and St. John's Street in the same period. The area just south of Brett Street had been completely cleared; this was where the passing loop was to be constructed. Was the coming of the railway to the Old Town one reason for the clearing of all the property on the West side of St. John's Street?

The motive power for the railway was set out in the Act to be either horse, or steam, or electricity, but most attention was given to the laying and transmission of electricity. The generating station at Brett Street was opened in 1905; the same period as the St. John Street widening, Bridge Street reconstruction, the widening of Cross Street and many other subtle improvements to our town.

On 6th March 1897 the Chronicle reports that the railway's future is now in the hands of a public enquiry by the Light Railway Commissioners. This was held at the concert hall in Victoria Rooms, situated on the harbour top. The question of what eventually happened to the scheme and why it was never constructed has been partially lost in the mists of time. The main clues lie in the reports from the Public Inquiry. The listed promoter is Mr T. Whittaker, and the opposers of the Scheme are the Urban District Council. It seems from the enquiry the Council were putting up every objection imaginable to the proposal.

The main reason for the impasse was a re-purchase clause. This allowed the Council to take all the benefits of the scheme at the end of 21 years, by being able to buy the tramway at a knock down price. The promoters were taking all the risks of this undertaking and they felt the clause would not be fair. The end result was that there was no agreement between the Council and the promoters. There rested the Flamborough and Bridlington Light Railway Scheme, dormant but not

altogether dead.

Seven years later on 29th January 1904 the Bridlington Gazette Minutes of the Town Council say a St.John's Street improvement committee had been set up to deal with the widening of the street. Also the chimney for the new generating station on Brett Street was being discussed. The corporation was also considering the use of the generating station to burn household rubbish as a form of fuel. Thus the height of the chimney was of paramount importance. The most relevant comments within this discussion were, "The surveyor said the other chimney was to have been erected for a threefold purpose - the electric lighting, electric power and also refuse destructor". The chimney as reduced would do for the electric light and a refuse destructor but would be of no use for Tramway purposes. Later on in the discussion Alderman Sawdon supported the amendment for a higher chimney because, though the reduced chimney would serve two purposes, it would not serve three and he was "anxious to be able to come from the Old Town down here by electric Tram". Councillor Grimshaw in support said "We want electric light and cars but not a refuse destructor". Sometime later in the council minutes we find the Council instructing their Parliamentary Agents in London to oppose the next reading of the extension of the "Bridlington and Flamborough Light Railway" so that it was "talked out" of time when it was presented to Parliament. The corporation wanted the shareholders to finance all the foundation parts of the scheme and then after 21 years they would step in and buy the system for a nominal sum. The Corporation at a later stage were intent on becoming major shareholders, but according to comments of the time, as a newly created Municipal Borough Council, they couldn't be shareholders with the legislation as it then was.

Even as late as 1922 there was still talk of the light railway. Captain Arthur Becket, Borough Electrical Engineer, said publically he would be pleased to quote for powering a light railway to Flamborough as he would be glad of the substantial daytime load. So the railway was talked about for over thirty years, roads were adjusted to suit but, as we know, it never happened.

From the research of Bro John Walker

This article was previously published in our journal "The Chartulary" in 2010.



Map showing the Flamborough and Bridlington Light Railway Routes



Preparing to widen Cross Street. The New Inn is sliced through and a new gable end erected. Soon after this photograph was taken the left hand side was demolished.