

Topics of the Week

THE NAILSWORTH - STONEHOUSE RAILWAY

WE are greatly indebted to Mrs. D. Hill of Oldends Lane, Stonehouse, for the old photographs of Nailsworth Midland Railway station and engine in 1873, six years after the opening of the line. Early in 1863 a committee consisting of William Playne, S. S. Marling, J. G. Frith, Isaac Hillier, A. S. Leonard, J. E. Barnard, George Ford and Charles Payne (of Dunkirk Mills) had been set up to sponsor the Act by which "the Stonehouse and Nailsworth Railway was incorporated and was authorised to make and maintain a Railway from the Bristol and Birmingham line of the Midland Railway at Stonehouse to Nailsworth, in the County of Gloucester, and for that purpose to raise a capital of £65,000 in shares of £20 each, and to borrow on mortgage not exceeding £22,000 . . ."

In February 1864 there was great rejoicing in Nailsworth when in a meadow near Egypt Mill the first sod was turned by the Rt. Hon. E. Horsman, M.P. for Stroud. The "Stroud Journal" reported: "The line, as our readers are aware, will be within a few chains of six miles in length. It starts from the Midland Station at Stonehouse . . . The line is an independent one, although it will be worked by the Midland Company. It is well understood to be only the first step in an extension on through Tetbury, Malmesbury and Chippenham."

The celebrations included rustic sports, which comprised donkey races and foot

races. At six o'clock the illuminations were lit up and the town was ablaze with light. At seven o'clock a torchlight procession proceeded up Nailsworth hill.

LANDSLIDE

Construction of the line was not without difficulty in the early days. There was a landslide which caused the downfall of a house on the hillside above the Frogmarsh cutting, while three cottages were also destroyed. E. G. Witchell's "Geology of Stroud" records that the slip ceased only when the engineer drained off the springs from the higher ground.

In January 1867 the line was opened and the "Stroud Journal" recorded that "the first train left Nailsworth at 9.40 a.m., the engine being decorated with flags and evergreens. Crowds welcomed the train as it passed with enthusiastic acclamations. Cannons were fired from High Beeches and from the Subscription Rooms and in the evening bands paraded the streets . . ."

The proposed extension to Tetbury, Malmesbury and Chippenham was never proceeded with. Indeed the service to Nailsworth had imposed such financial strain on the promoters and the Midland Railway eventually had to take it over.

To begin with there was no station at Woodchester and the vital link with Stroud from Dudbridge was missing. The latter was established in 1885. "From that time," John Libby said in his "Twenty

Years History of Stroud", "a wonderful improvement has taken place in the means of locomotion, and in the general administration of local railway affairs. The Great Western, in the face of competition, awoke to their true interest, viz, that of giving the public every facility for travelling; and, judging from the number of people one sees arriving and departing, it seems as if both the railways had doubled their passenger traffic. Omnibus travelling, too, between Stonehouse, Stroud and Chalford has largely increased, thus proving that the people are not slow to avail themselves of improved locomotion, when liberally and cheaply provided."

In 1887, S. N. Adam wrote in an essay published in the "Stroud News and Journal" in November 1964, there were nine passenger trains daily from Nailsworth to Stonehouse and ten in the reverse direction. The Stroud branch was always worked as a separate entity and passengers to and from Stroud had to change at Dudbridge.

Fares to Gloucester in 1887 were 1s 6d from Nailsworth and 1s 3d from Stroud.

By 1913 the branch boasted of no fewer than eighteen passenger trains a day, nine goods trains and five mixed trains.

Today in contrast to this busy line there is dereliction. Omnibus travelling, far from increasing as in Libby's day, is declining. The industrial scene with its ups and downs rarely remains settled.

