

## Battle of Faggy Lane

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(The Wigan Observer and District Advertiser. Friday. April 5. 1867)

All Fools Day 1867, will long be remembered in Wigan as the date of the occurrence of one of the most singular and, in one sense perhaps, one of the most foolish struggles which it has ever been the duty of a journalist to record. For several hours on Monday afternoon and evening two of the greatest private corporations in the kingdom—the London and North- Western and the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Companies—waged petty but desperate war against each other, the one seeking to secure and the other to prevent the establishment of a road to the station of the former cut of the well-known thoroughfare Faggy lane, and their labours were successful in causing the destruction of considerable amount of property, and some bodily injury, while it is a matter of great astonishment that we have not also to announce the loss of many valuable lives.

It is not necessary for to say much by way introduction to describe the cause of the struggle, for not only are the facts well know to the inhabitants, but our readers have recently heard enough more than enough we should think of the action of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Company with reference to the stopping up of the road and of the steps taken by the Council which led to the abandonment by the company their proposal.

We may, however, in order to make our report complete, briefly mention that when the body now known as the Lancashire and Yorkshire Company constructed the first portion of their Manchester and Southport line they closed the old footpath through the centre of the Faggy fields, and in consequence they had to construct a bridge over their railway and to continue the path round the outskirts of their land to the bridge under the London and North-Western embankment to Faggy-lane and Queen-street.

This session of Parliament the company, who have recently purchased a large piece of land fronting the Wallgate, inserted in bill which they laid before the legislature a clause giving them the power to stop up the road in question in order that their sidings might be carried forward to the new land, but this step ultimately met with the strenuous opposition of the Council because of a circumstance which, if the applicants were aware of it before, had been prudently kept in the background.

This was the discovery of the great benefit of the road to the residents in King-street, Scholes, and adjacent parts of the town a means of access to the new London and North-Western station, for this company having extended its premises and began to compete energetically for the Manchester traffic, hitherto almost exclusively held by the Lancashire and Yorkshire, had formed entrance into Faggy-lane at the angle nearest their station, and this short cut had been found to be of great service by many passengers.

The Council, it will be remembered, suggested a compromise which would have involved the closing of the lower portion the road, on condition that the bridge over the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway should be continued to the opposite station, and this, though it had the merit meeting the wants of all parties, for the sidings could, with a little lowering of the level, have been constructed beneath the bridge, was rejected, and the clause withdrawn from the bill.

In the letter by which this fact was notified to the Town Clerk, there was phrase or two to which called special attention at the time suggesting that some such steps as those which have rendered the past few days memorable would be taken, for Messrs. Grundy and Co. wrote stating that the road was not an approach to the London and North Western station except by trespass across the land of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Company, and this trespass they could not consent to legalise.

The letter also expressed a hope that the Corporation might at a future date be induced to renew their consent to the closing of the road. The clause, however, was withdrawn, the opposition of the Town Council to the bill was stayed, and the subject which had excited much attention was gradually

losing its interest when the action of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Company has again brought it prominently forward, and has caused an excitement such as few recent events in Wigan have created.

On Friday last, we stated shortly in our edition of the following day, the employees of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Company constructed barrier of sleepers at the angle the road, cutting off completely all access to the London and North Western land.

We announced that measures would be taken to test the legality this step, but we must confess that we were not prepared for the prompt action of the blockaded company, who took the plainest and most emphatic mode of asserting their right by pulling the barrier down early the next morning.

The station master received orders to destroy the barricade as often as it was erected, and accordingly on Saturday morning it was razed. Nothing daunted by this undoing of their work the Lancashire and Yorkshire men again set to work to build, and after many hours of labour on Saturday evening most compact and substantial erection, a little longer than the first, was placed across the corner. It was constructed of sleepers which were planted four or five feet in the earth, end then bound together with nails and bands of wood and iron until an extraordinary solidity was obtained.

One end rested against the wall which supports the London and North Western embankment, and the other against the wall which formerly enclosed the garden of the house occupied by Mr. Jonathan Lamb.

On Sunday there was quietness, and also on Monday morning, but the instructions for the demolition were positive, and the delay in setting to work was only occasioned by the lack of the workmen necessary for the task.

On Monday afternoon, shortly after three o'clock, a gang of labourers arrived to pull down the stockade for the second time, and thereupon commenced a combat which raged with unequal violence, but for the whole with the most surprising good humour, for many hours, in the presence concourse of spectators, which gradually increased in number till every spot where a glimpse of the scene could be obtained was occupied with an amused and at times an excited crowd.

The attack was begun with rigour, but only two or three of the huge sleepers had been removed when the engineer of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Company, to whom information of the assault had promptly communicated, appeared on the battle-field supported by a body of plate layers armed for their task with spades and hammers.

As fast as the ashes which formed the foundation of the barrier were removed by the first party they were replaced by the new comers, each body keeping to its own side of the barricade, and fighting through the gap which had just been made.

Soon the "fun" grew fast and furious, and the men began to throw spadefuls of ashes at each other, until grimy, and even bloody, faces were now occasionally seen emerging from the dense shower of soil and cinders which darkened the corner.

But this was only at intervals, and the Lancashire and Yorkshire men in general were labouring steadily to throw soil behind the barricade, while the London and North- Western labourers either returned it or moved it along the footpath to the station.

This, however, was but slow work compared with that which followed. It will be well known to most of our readers that the sidings of both railway companies run very near to the point where the struggle was being carried on, those of the London and North Western Railway immediately over the corner, some 20 feet above the level of the road, and supported by a retaining wall about 25 feet in height, whilst the Lancashire and Yorkshire have lines of rails which are at their nearest point some 12 or 15 yards away from the spot where the barricade was erected.

The London and North-Western workmen again began the attempt to utilise the railway, and a couple of small cranes were brought up on trucks and placed immediately over the spot where the cinder pelting was going on.

In spite of the strenuous exertions of their opponents they were successful in attaching the chains from these machines to the sleepers, but the power was not sufficient, and the chains gave way amidst shouts of derision from the Lancashire and Yorkshire men, who were anxiously awaiting the result of the experiment.

A stronger crane, which it was stated would raise ten tons, was sent for, and pending its arrival the battle began afresh. The ashes were sent through the opening in clouds, and were as quickly shovelled away to the London and North-Western land by men whose endeavour evidently was to keep the inner portion of the corner free for the operations of a party who were making the attempt to raise the sleepers with screw-jacks.

The London and North-Western labourers here worked under considerable difficulty, as there were only a few feet between the barrier and the retaining wall, and they were, as compared with their opponents, very much confined.

To check in some measure these movements first a shower of ashes was sent continuously over the barricade, but the general in command of the Lancashire and Yorkshire forces soon found a better plan of attack, and the London and North-Western men were allowed to work with greater comfort for a few moments.

To give greater solidity to the barrier a number of sleepers had just been placed against it props, and these were firmly wedged against the rails which bound the footpath.

With these as a support on one side and the stout railings on the other, a foundation was soon obtained for couple of platforms, which completely blocked up the road, and upon these some score or two of men quickly threw large quantities of soil from the adjacent embankment.

Half a dozen stout fellows as rapidly sent the dirt into the small hole on the other side, and the work with the screw jacks had soon to be suspended, or men and tools would have been buried alive.

The first person who climbed the stockade to inspect the enemy's proceedings was knocked down again by a blow from a fist, but so far there was little bad feeling manifested, and occasionally a pair of friends on different sides of the woodwork were seen in friendly conversation, and once, amidst cheers and laughter, a couple of begrimed workmen shook hands, cordially, between the gap, and then commenced throwing the ballast at each other again.

Meanwhile there had been placed at the nearest point on the Lancashire and Yorkshire siding a massive crane, and this was chained to the rails and sleepers, while a locomotive gave additional solidity by wedging the truck upon which the machine stood against the buffers at the end of the siding. Shortly afterwards the removal of the two small cranes from the line above the belligerents told the arrival of the opposition crane, and this, pushed down by an immense engine, was immediately afterwards placed in position. The chain was soon attached to the barrier, and promptly the chain from the Lancashire and Yorkshire machine was handed to a stalwart labourer on the platform—who, by the way, had then toiled with unflagging energy for three hours, and still appeared heartily to enjoy the excitement—and by him linked to the first chain, a few inches above the row of sleepers.

The result was watched with some interest, for many believed that the strength of both cranes would virtually be expended on the barrier, and not a few, of more experience than the bulk of the spectators, left their posts of observation to be out of danger in case the chains should snap.

The fears and hopes of all were set at rest so far as the first point was concerned in a few seconds, for the hold on the barrier proved insecure, there was a jerk upwards, and then the chains, still coupled, and reaching together a distance of quite 20 yards, swung loosely in the air. In another

instant the driver of the London and North- Western engine, probably unaware how securely the opposing crane was fastened, began to draw away, the chains soon became taut, the cranes turned round on their pivots till they were opposite each other, and then the North-Western engine, having lost its balance weights by collision with some timber trucks, was seen flying 30 or 40 feet through the air over the narrow footpath into the Lancashire and Yorkshire land, striking down many feet of the retaining wall, and carrying with it, to the horror of the spectators, an enthusiastic workman who was standing on the truck at the time, shouting and waving his cap.

For some time the greatest consternation prevailed, as it was that believed that several of the many hundred spectators must have been killed or maimed, and when the workman, whose name was Edward Hibbert was removed to surgeon's, on stretcher, no one knowing whether he was dying or not, the workmen appeared too much shocked to renew the operations immediately. Fortunately the crane fell few yards away from the spot to which Hibbert was thrown and he, though stunned, had broken no bones, though serious internal injuries were dreaded.

Happily the fears were without foundation, for shortly after his removal home Hibbert, having recovered consciousness, was expressing his regret that he could not "once more into the breach" and his hopes that there would be no surrender.

Many persons had most extraordinary escapes, amongst others, a party of children on the footpath, who were only few inches from the bricks and coping stones of the wall when they fell. How all escaped must appear almost miraculous, and there are not many among the thousands who at this time were clustered upon every adjacent point, and hid even found their way to the roof the London and North-Western station, who will soon forget the intense excitement and horror of the moment.

It was immediately after this incident that Mr. Thomas Part inspected the platforms which had been erected at the Lancashire and Yorkshire side the barrier, end to which, we have related, completely blocked the road.

He pointed out the obstruction which they had caused to the footpath, and threatened summons if they were not at once removed. The demand was acceded to and the roadway was opened, although there were times during the day after the commencement of the operations when passengers were not able to proceed from King-street to Queen-street along the path.

For half an hour the belligerents were contented with a masterly policy of inaction,"though there had been recent re-enforcement at the Lancashire and Yorkshire side of some 30 men, and when the fight was renewed it speedily reached a point which decided the action for the day.

They unthinkingly left the field and stepped into a neighbouring tavern to refresh themselves with a pot of beer.

Now, it is true that while there were means for quenching the thirst of the London and North Western labourers there were none on the other side of the way, and whether it was that the Lancashire and Yorkshire presiding deities had naturally gone in search of a public, or whether there were some of the attacking party who were able to think and see better with their throats cleared of dust, it certainly is a fact that some one on the London and North Western side of the way found a missile which quickly caused Fortune, who had distributed her favours pretty evenly so far, to declare positively for the friends of the discoverer.

On the embankment just above the wall were lying several heaps of lime which had crumbled into dust, and when the battle began again spadeful after spadeful was sent down amongst the Lancashire and Yorkshire employees, who at last could stand it no longer, and were compelled to retreat to a point beyond the reach of the workman on the wall, who, completely master of the situation, flung the deadly stuff with unerring aim on the heads of those who dared to venture within range. The discomfited workmen, half, choked and blinded, were obliged to watch at respectful distance the hearty exertions their foes in the destruction of the barricade, and after

repeated rushes and a hand-to-hand encounter twice, the lime was admitted to be too powerful a weapon, and the men were withdrawn from the ground.

There was therefore now no opposition to the demolition, but the task was not easily accomplished.

The uprooting proved so great a labour that at last the axe was called into requisition, and the sleepers were in a couple of hours after dark all levelled to the ground.

The thousands who were congregated on the spot as long as daylight lasted, had then dwindled down to a few hundreds, but there was to the end great interest manifested in the work, especially by the large numbers of persons who unhesitatingly took the side of the London and North Western Company in the assertion of their right of road.

A guard was stationed the spot all night, and it was attempted to remove a portion of the stumps of the sleepers by burning, but the plan not very successful.

On Tuesday a powerful crane was brought up on the London and North Western siding, and after some trouble the machine which was lying on the Lancashire and Yorkshire embankment was hoisted to the spot from whence it had been pulled the previous day.

This embankment a number of spectators to assemble, but there was no disturbance.

On Wednesday the Lancashire and Yorkshire Company proved that they were not disheartened by their, discomfiture of Monday evening, and they began a new mode of attack, which was noticed at first with dismay by their opponents.

Early in the afternoon they commenced the diversion of the road, so as completely to cut off the London and North Western corner. They made an entrance into their land a few yards from the spot where the battle raged on Monday, and cut a footpath across the edge of the embankment to a point about an equal distance from the angle on the Queen-street side, and this path constructed, they erected a simple but efficient barrier at each side, so as to compel passengers to walk in the newly made road.

This was at first taken to be an acknowledgement of the truth of the statement that the barriers hitherto formed had been placed on the land of the North Western Company, and the spectators inquired with interest whether the course now taken would be allowed by the Town Council.

The step, however, was only preliminary, for shortly before daylight on Thursday a large body of Lancashire and Yorkshire employees began to erect the barricade close to the line which had been occupied before, thus showing that they still claimed the land upon which they carried on their operations.

There was no opposition; the barrier was built more strongly than ever, and it was completed about nine o'clock in the morning.

During the day no attempt to remove the obstruction was made by the London and North Western Company, who it was stated, having asserted their right, propose applying to the Court of Chancery for an injunction to restrain the Lancashire and Yorkshire Company from preventing access to their land.

The diversion of the road having been pointed out to the Mayor, he gave orders for the convening of a meeting of the Public Health Committee, and this was held early yesterday morning.

The following resolution was passed:-

“That legal measures be taken to prevent any obstruction, or diversion of, the Faggy Lane road; and that before proceedings are taken the Town Clerk write to the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Company to ascertain by what right or authority they are now obstructing and diverting the said road.”