



TRANSPORT WALK

Point 1 – Boats

Here we see the mooring point for the pedal boats that used to be available to ride around part of the lake. (Photo - Alan Jones)



Point 2 – Coal Waggonways

One of the more substantial pits that once stood within the park was Rookery Pit and here the path was once a waggonway to take wagons of coal down the hill for onward transportation to Leeds and to the River Aire. It is possible to make out a slight embankment where two routes converged.

Point 3 – Crossroads

Here the path diverts slightly off the old waggonway to a crossroads. The carriageway that served Middleton Lodge from the 18th Century was extended in the 19th Century to the former waggonway forming a path suitable for horse and carriage to the lodge house at the eastern edge of the estate and the pit village of Belle Isle.

Point 4 – The Clearings

For geological reasons this land was not used for mining and has for many years been a recreational space. Model aircraft are often flown here by the South Leeds Aero Modellers (SLAMS) and hopefully members might be flying their aircraft during our walk. In 1933 an actual air show took place here by Sir Alan Cobham's Flying Circus, though it ended in tragedy when two boys were killed by an aircraft skimming just above the ground.

Another connection to aviation, in the second world war there were searchlights and gun emplacements on the clearings, some concrete bases can be seen on the old southern edge of the clearings.

Point 5 – The Tram Stop

Between the wars there was a massive expansion scheme in Leeds. Leeds took on 2000 acres of land at Middleton, fighting off a legal challenge from Hunslet Rural District Council who had an expansion of Hunslet in mind. With demobilization taking place the government were pushing for the rapid construction of quality suburban houses. With poor roads to Middleton a temporary railway was

built, the “Middleton Light Railway” to take supplies for the construction of the new housing. This was built between November 1920 and May 1921 using unemployed labour. It was proposed that a passenger service be introduced when there were enough houses to justify it, however as the construction of the ring road advanced a bus service was introduced in 1923 and the passenger train service never happened. With one of the locomotives used being of the same type as Matthew Murray on the Middleton Railway this train might have looked very similar to the trains operating on the Middleton Railway today.



Left – Construction train on the Middleton Light Railway.

In 1923 the council were having cold feet about the expensive proposals to turn the light railway in to an electric tramway however it was deemed essential for the new community. The Light Railway closed in July 1923 and in December the materials to convert it to an electric tramway were ordered.

It opened in November 1925 and gradually extended to become a circular route in 1949 but sadly closed 10 years later.

Below – “Middleton Bogie” tram taken from the surviving steps. (Photo – Graham Spencer)

In 1932 there was a desire to introduce modern faster trams and a concern about the safety of the speeds trams were reaching running downhill on this section of route. This led to trams being designed especially for this bit of line. It used two four wheel bogies rather than the four wheel chassis of earlier trams and was the first four axle tram to use regenerative braking where the tram slows down by generating electricity to return to the wires. This system is now standard on electric trams and trains.



Point 6 – The Great Northern Railway

This was once the Hunslet Goods branch of the Great Northern Railway. Originally promoted by the Hunslet Railway Co from 1893 it was transferred to the GNR in 1894 and completed in 1899. It connected the main lines south and east from Leeds with a connection to the North Eastern Railway at Knostrop.

The line closed shortly before Broom Pit and was used to move coal from Broom Pit among others in the area.



The concrete fence posts are typical of those used by BR in the 1950s can be seen either side of the former railway line. At this point the trackbed is wide enough for three tracks, that is because this was the junction with the line in to Beeston Colliery

Point 7 – The Landfill Road

We leave the GNR railway, it continued on an embankment and across the valley on a large metal bridge that also crossed over the tram route. Part of its route is now occupied by the M621 motorway. We follow a road for a short way. This was an extension of Middleton Grove Road used to deliver household waste to the site of Broom Pit which was used as landfill site in the 1970s.

Point 8 – Park Halt



The surviving mile and a half of the colliery railway that took coal from the pits in Middleton to Leeds was the first standard gauge railway to be preserved by volunteers. It runs to this point because this is close to where the last of the mines here, Broom Pit, survived until 1968. It also has historical significance in being the first railway scheme to obtain an act of parliament in 1758 and the first to introduce steam engines in 1812.

Left – 1814 painting from the book “Costume of Yorkshire.”

Another railway scheme that didn't come to fruition would have seen the Middleton Colliery railway linked by the East and West Yorkshire Union Railway that served pits further east to the Hull and Barnsley Railway turning it into a new main line to rival the North Eastern for access to the docks at Hull.

Point 9 – Coal Waggonway

We pass the stone gate posts where the lodge house at the eastern end of the estate once stood. Close to this point was a narrow gauge railway that connected the clay pits and brick works adjacent to Broom Pit, nothing remains of this though.

We return to the visitor centre on another old coal wagonway. It is particularly clear on this one how it has been engineered to give a straight route at a constant gradient, ideal for moving the coal wagons down the hill by gravity and returning the empty wagons by horse.

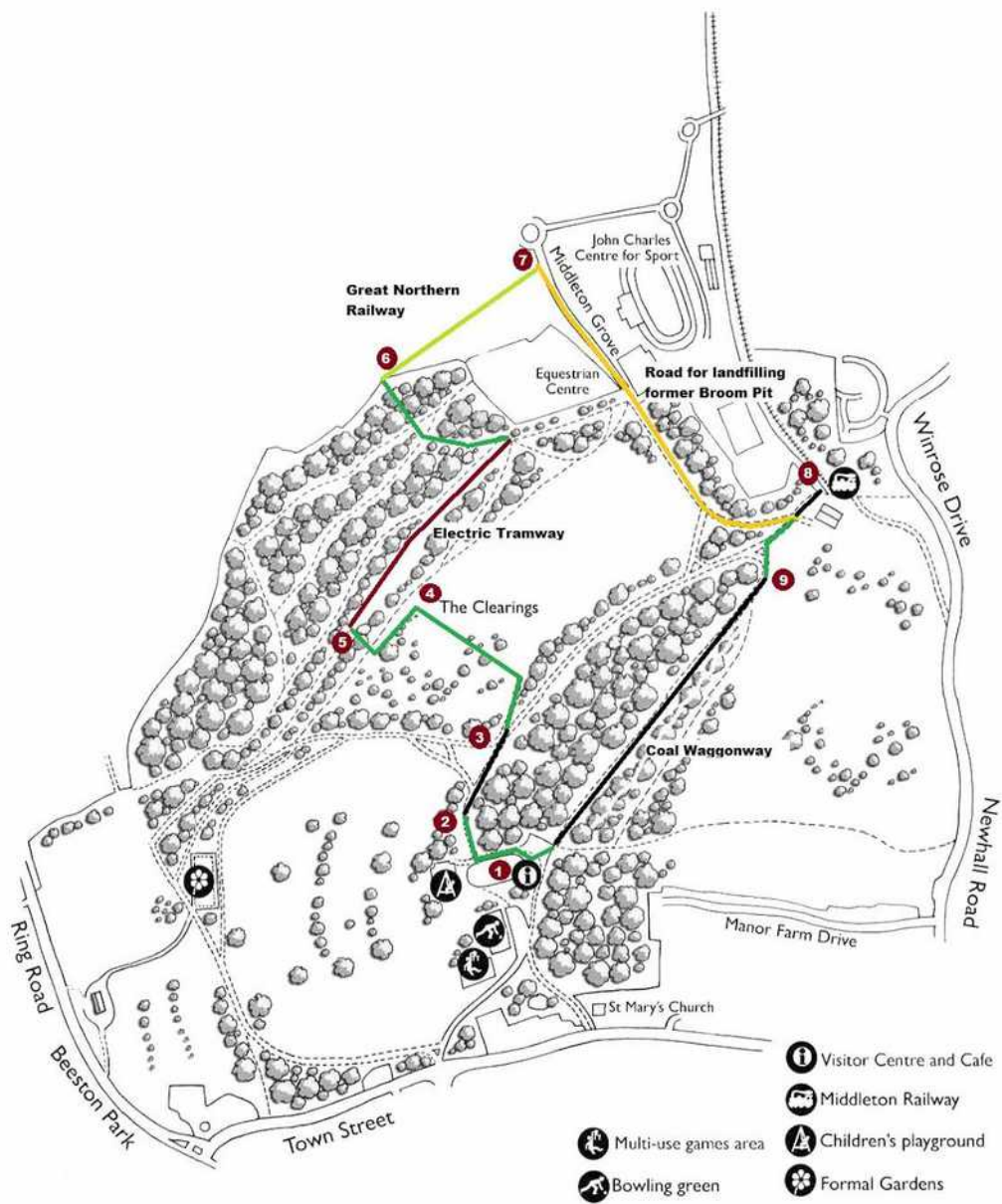
References

Leeds Transport Vol 2, J.Soper, ISBN 0 951 0280 1 4

Leeds Transport Vol 3, J.Soper, ISBN 0 951 0280 2 2

East and West Yorkshire Union Railways, D.L.Franks, ISBN 0 902844 18 0

The Engineer, 24/11/1899




www.fomp.co.uk

[@FoMP_Leeds](https://twitter.com/FoMP_Leeds)

Friends of Middleton Park are a Registered Charity no. 1112043