

# Foreword

**T**his book is both encouraging and interesting. It has a twofold appeal. First it is a remarkable story of disinterested enterprise. You will find in these pages the account of Mr Rolt's first visit to the Talyllyn Railway, the abrupt notice "NO TRAIN TO-DAY", and his walk along the grassy, silent track among the mountains, and his discovery of the ancient engines and rolling stock. You will read of his visit to that splendid octogenarian owner of the line, Sir Haydn Jones, sitting in his eyrie above Towyn Post Office and still wearing the pin-stripe trousers and frock coat of an old-fashioned M.P. You will hear of how Sir Haydn said that although he was losing money on the line, he would keep the summer services going so long as he was alive, and how on his death, with the help of Mr Edward Thomas and Lady Haydn Jones, Mr Rolt and his friends raised the money and the labour to put the line into working order, and how it now carries thousands of excursionists along its beautiful seven miles of track, during the summer months.

All this has happened since the war and in the teeth of official apathy. And what is heroic and encouraging about the story is the way voluntary labour and voluntary subscriptions have made it possible. Mr Rolt himself was General Manager of the line until he could no longer afford to occupy that enjoyable but unremunerative post. The Talyllyn has been formed as a non-profit-making company. Railway enthusiasts young and old, Welsh and English, have worked on the line, most of them for nothing and in their holidays. To-day among those last pages of Bradshaw where the few independent railways left in these islands are listed, you may find once again the time-table of the Talyllyn. That insertion is the result of the independent spirit which still survives in this country and refuses to be crushed by the money-worshippers, centralisers and unimaginative theorists who are doing their best to kill it.

The particular appeal of this book will be to railway enthusiasts. The engines and rolling stock, even the newer engines which have been acquired, have great historic interest. The scenery along the line, the bridges, the streams, the little stations, the tickets, the livery of the Company, have a more general appeal to all who love railways. The encouragement given by the public who travel on the line is a further testament to the growing popularity of a gentle journey on a small line, from which the country is so much more easily seen than from a motor car or bus. While those levellers, the clerks of the British Railways, are shutting down all the beautiful little country branch lines instead of devising a practical means of keeping them open, while they are killing the independent pride of the companies, while they are doing away with individual liveries and stamping their same ugly emblem on every engine, while they are concentrating only on express trains and selling the pass to the uncomfortable, unaccommodating, dangerous and hideous bus companies, the Talyllyn Railway is a working witness of the new revolution. Had the Talyllyn been included in "British Railways", this experiment could never have been made. We "own" British Railways, but we are allowed no say in them. We really do own the Talyllyn Railway. Perhaps its example will put life into the dead hand of British Railways and help to save our remaining branch lines. This book should certainly be an encouragement to such independent undertakings as the Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway, the South Shields, Marsden and Whitburn Colliery, the Snowdon Mountain, the Isle of Man Railways, the Sligo, Leitrim and Northern Counties, the County Donegal Joint, the Mumbles, the Mersey, Liverpool Overhead and the Glasgow Underground, though the last four can probably carry on without voluntary support.

*26th June, 1953.*

JOHN BETJEMAN.