

PRESENTATION TO MR JOSEPH SEALS

44 YEARS' SERVICE ON N.E.R.

After forty-four years' service in the N.E.R. Company, Mr Joseph Seals, ticket collector, retired in the beginning of the month. During the 28 years he has been in Berwick, he has been for 25 years chairman of the Berwick & Border Branch of the N.U.R., and on Thursday evening last, in recognition of his services, he was presented with a purse containing £16 from his fellow employees. The presentation took place in St. Cuthbert's Hall, Tweedmouth, where a number of railway employees and their wives assembled, though a counter-attraction in the form of a football match at Union Park kept many of the younger men away. The prospect of the strike at 10 p.m. the following evening did not make for cheerfulness, while the coal strike was responsible for a cold hall and very poor gaslight. Proceedings therefore were not quite so genial as such an occasion would have justified under normal conditions.

Bro. Cooper Lowe, who took Mr Seals place as chairman of the Branch, presided, and in his deliberate, yet dignified, manner made a most interesting speech. They had gathered to pay a tribute of honour to a highly esteemed and respected member of the Berwick Branch of the N.U.R. Joe Seals had arrived at one of those milestones in life where it became necessary for every working man to pause and see how he stands as regards health. At this point his further usefulness as a citizen depends on the sort of life he has led; whether he has been as prudent as he might have been; whether he had been true to himself. Upon these depends a man's self-satisfaction in his declining years. By reason of his abstemious habits, his consistent principles, Joe Seals well deserved to be able to look into the future with some degree of confidence. (Applause). From his consistency and zeal in the carrying out of Trade Union principles, he had gained the respect and admiration of those around him. He had not only gained their appreciation, but had made for himself a measure of self-satisfaction in having been a useful member of society. He had fairly and squarely shouldered his responsibilities as a citizen and his sharing the battles and responsibilities of the organisation to which he was attached, had always enabled him to hold up his head proudly and fearlessly. "Joe Seals," said Bro. Lowe, "joined he railway at the same time as I did." In 1877 the conditions under which the men worked were different from what they are now. One cheering advance had been the recognition of the Union. (Applause). In those days it was not always quite safe to speak one's mind. If a man was known to be a member of

the A.S.R.S. (Associated Society of Railway Servants) and there was a chance of any favour coming along, that man knew he would be missed. They had made strides since then. To begin with, it was a big stride to get an eight-hours' days instead of the 12 hours' day, when they had to work on Sunday also for the same pay. There was no time and a half pay then for Sunday work. Just previous to 1877 the shunting stick was introduced. This shunting pole or stick was at that time longer than now, and fully three inches or more thick, sharpened off at one end to enable a man to grip it. Before this was introduced a man had to jump on to the buffers and take off the couplings with his hands. Bro. Lowe did not think nowadays men were able to realise the dangers, more especially at night time that attended this practice. The peculiarity of waggons at that time was that they nearly all had solid buffers. He knew of one instance where a guard had jumped up to couple, and when the buffers came together the man's head was between them. There were no hooks then on the shunting sticks. The hook, simple as it seemed, not having been invented, did not make its appearance till many other appliances had been tried. There was no special eyesight test at that time, no going before a doctor to pass. Many of the men employed at that time would never have got a start under the conditions prevailing now.

Bro. Lowe then remarked on the number of faces missing now, and referred to the death of David Cockburn. After knowing David Cockburn for close on 35 years, he could not give a more explicit description of him than to say that David Cockburn was one of Natures' gentlemen. (Applause). David Cockburn was a man of retiring disposition, but yet possessed of sufficient courage to do all he could to forward the principles of his Union. He was essentially a man of charity and mercy, and at the same time a just man. Like Bro. Seals, he had been constant and true all these years and now reaped his reward, though he had been taken from them.