



The railway and Wreay Station

The Losh family had an early and close involvement with the development of the railway. William Losh set up the Walker Iron Works and worked with the local engineer, George Stephenson, developing stronger rails to carry coal down to the River Tyne to the waiting ships. In 1814 they began building 'locomotive engines' for nearby collieries. In 1817 Losh and Stephenson patented new designs for 'A method of or methods of facilitating the conveyance of carriages, goods and materials, along railways and tramways, by certain inventions and improvements in the construction of the machine, carriage and carriage wheels, railways and tramways, for that purpose'. William and his three brothers all supported Stephenson's experiments.

In 1824 James Losh abandoned an earlier proposal to construct a canal between Carlisle and the port of Newcastle and established a company for the building of a railway line with horses pulling the engines, as in the coalfields. James was elected chairman and William a director.

Although Stephenson turned his back on the Walker works, preferring wrought-iron rails to their cast iron, the Loshes followed his progress with keen interest. William was present at the Rainhill speed trials in 1829 when Stephenson's *Rocket* was the only engine to finish successfully. In the same year an Act was passed to allow the construction of the Carlisle-Newcastle line and building began.

When navvies were digging their way past Corby Castle in 1831, James went with Henry Howard to inspect the progress. 'They seem to be stupendous works,' James wrote, 'and at present exhibit appearances of much confusion and difficulty, but no doubt order and usefulness will be the result.' The difficulties were the need for a deep cutting or tunnel between Brampton and Carlisle, and the necessity to build a high bridge over the River Eden at Wetheral. Sarah suggested that they erect a bridge 'similar to the Pont du Gard, a few miles from Nimes, as calculated to harmonise well with the lofty banks of the river and the exquisitely wooded scenery of Corby Castle'. Henry Howard approved of her drawings but, due to its cost, the design went no further. By 1838 the whole route from Carlisle to Newcastle was open.

The bill giving the Lancaster and Carlisle Railway permission to build was passed in 1844 and two years later the first section of 'The Lanky' up to Oxenholme was opened. The final section was to run close to Wreay, through the Losh estate, and Sarah made sure that she got good money for her land. When navvies were digging the great cutting at Woodside she insisted that a large oak tree was not felled but protected by a special retaining wall, like a flower pot, around what became known as 'Miss Losh's Tree'. It was still remarked upon in a guidebook of the 1920s. During the construction of the line in the Wreay area in 1845, two labourers were accidentally killed. They were buried at Wreay.

On the opening of the Lancaster and Carlisle Railway in December 1846, the first train left Carlisle to meet a train coming up from Lancaster. As it passed through the Petteril valley the papers recorded, 'on the borders of a vale of remarkable loveliness a high embankment passes Wreay Hall and village, noted for the beauty of its chapel'.

The first 'Newbiggin and Wreay' station was at Brisco, but after much lobbying from the Revd Jackson in 1852, this was closed in favour of a halt at Wreay itself. Originally built by the Lancaster and Carlisle Railway it was taken over by the London and North Western Railway Company. It was a passenger station, but it also handled light freight such as parcels and milk churns. It had two platforms, a weighing machine, a signal box and a coal vault. The heavy freight was dealt with at Southwaite. The complement of the station was a stationmaster, booking clerk, signalman, porter/signalman and a junior porter.

In 1923 the railways were amalgamated into four large companies and the London and North Western Railways became part of the London Midland & Scottish Company. In 1932 the vicar of Wreay, Revd. Hall, at the grand old age of 81, noted that even though he was not in good health, 'as the trains to and from Southwaite are so convenient for the 7.45 p.m. Wednesday evening services at the Institute, I hope still to take some share in them'.

In 1943 Wreay Station closed but the West Coast mainline still passes through the 'Wreay bends'.