

Wetheral and Great Corby

Wetheral is a pleasant village on the banks of the River Eden. It faces Great Corby, home of Corby Castle – for 383 years the home of the Howard family. The wooded gorge of the Eden is a beautiful and historic landscape. If you are lucky you may see otters, kingfishers and herons. The Eden is a fishing river; it still contains historic salmon traps, or ‘coops’, said to be built by the monks of Wetheral Priory. The coops are the only remaining working salmon traps in England; they are grade 1 listed. However salmon are said to be rare hereabouts these days.

Wetheral Priory was founded in 1106 by Benedictine monks from St Mary’s Abbey in York. The priory was dissolved in 1538. All that survives is the gatehouse, now in the care of English Heritage, and some intriguing riverside caves used as hermit cells and later for storage.

The Carlisle – Newcastle railway crosses on a viaduct built in 1830 – 34. Its architect was Francis Giles. The five arches have 80ft spans and are 93ft high. The viaduct was briefly the largest railway bridge in the world. You can walk across the viaduct on a footpath alongside the rail track. Until the 1960s a toll was charged to cross it, unless you were going to or from church.

Wetheral station opened in 1836. It brought Wetheral within easy range of Carlisle, encouraging wealthy Carlisle families to build large houses in the village. The station closed in January 1967 but was re-opened on October 5, 1981. The derelict platforms were cleared by a job creation team from the Thatcher Government’s Youth Opportunities Programme. In Great Corby, not far from the station, there is a small estate of eight cottage homes built by the North Eastern Railway Employees War Relief Fund. They were opened on July 17, 1925, by Viscount Grey. In 1972 most of the houses were sold to non-railway employees.

In Wetheral Woods, south of the village, are Wetheral Cells: three ancient vaulted stone rooms carved out of the solid rock face. They were also called St Constantine’s Cells, Constantine’s Hermitage or Wetheral Safeguards. They may have been used as hermitages but it’s more likely that they were used for storage by the Priory or as refuges against Border raiders. Near the cells there are carvings by Captain William Mounsey of Castle Street, Carlisle. One is an extract from *Llywarch Hen*, a 9th century Welsh poem. The other, dated 1852, is a verse signed by ‘Yesnuom Sumleilvg’, which is ‘Gulielmus [William] Mounsey’ backwards. Genuinely ancient inscriptions have been found: a Roman one MAXIMUS SCRIPSIT [Maximus wrote this] is now in the Tullie Museum, Carlisle.

Another Roman inscription reads LEG. XX. V V CONDRAUSISIUS ['Condrausisus of the 20th Legion Valerie Victrix'].

Opposite Wetheral Woods, across the River Eden, are the grounds of Corby Castle. They are normally closed to the public but you can see the restored Baroque cascade, constructed mainly in the 1730s, which flows from a cascade house (about 1720) down to the river where a classical statue of Admiral Lord Nelson stands.

Holy Trinity church, Wetheral, is mainly 16th century but it was restored in 1882 by R J Withers. It has an attached Gothic chapel (1791) built for the Howards. This contains a very fine memorial to Lady Maria Howard who died in childbirth, age 23, with her infant daughter. The memorial was sculpted by Joseph Nollekens who felt it was one of his finest works. It shows a draped figure of Faith stooping to aid a mother and her child. When Nollekens heard that it was to be placed in Wetheral church he burst into tears since he felt that few would see it there. It took ten years to make and cost £1500. Nollekens is buried in Paddington church, London, where his tomb shows him re-united with his famous work.

Bus times from and to Carlisle on Sundays: dep. Carlisle bus station at **13:00**, arrive Wetheral **13:21**. Leave Wetheral at **16:43**, arrive Carlisle at **17:10**. On Sundays there is a train from Wetheral to Carlisle at 16:35 (arrive at 16:47). Not all Newcastle – Carlisle trains stop at Wetheral. **Bus and train times correct at June 2015.**

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