

THE LITTLE NORTH WESTERN'S HISTORICAL STATIONS

CATON STATION

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CATON STATION

In 1961 Caton lost its railway station, a station that had served its community since the 'Little' North Western Railway built the line in 1849-50. (The Leeds-Morecambe line was constructed from west and east, the final stretch being that between Bentham and Clapham.) There were teething troubles in the early months: the first carriages were too wide; the telegraph system was imperfect; and in January 1850 the 5 p.m. train from Lancaster derailed at Caton, for which the station master was rebuked. However, a regular service soon established those close links between Morecambe and Leeds and (especially) Bradford which continued until the closure of the route from Wennington.

Caton station, unlike a number of the country stations on the line, was close to the centre of the village and so was well used, had a relatively large staff, a substantial goods depot, cattle pens and a signal box, amongst other things to control a level crossing necessary to this rural community to maintain access to the river and the meadows on its plain. The station buildings were generally in the 'Tudor' style typical of stations on the line, but it is sometimes difficult, in early photographs to distinguish what is 'Little' North Western and what Midland Railway architecture.

In the 1850s Caton, (which had a population of about 1,500 and was home to several mills including one that was reputed to be the oldest cotton mill in England), had 4 trains a day each way and 2 each way on Sundays. By 1910 this had increased to 7 trains westwards and 9 eastwards, with 2 on Sundays. By 1938 this had increased to 9 trains westwards and 10 eastwards, but still only 2 each way on Sundays. By 1955, however, this had been reduced to 7 trains per day each way and 8 on Saturdays with no Sunday service. Not all westbound trains stopped here as they rushed eager holidaymakers or day-trippers from the West Riding to Morecambe Bay. But on Saturday there was always a late train back from the lights and noise of Morecambe returning locals to their quiet village before midnight.

Apart from day-to-day goods handled at all stations on the line, Caton also handled the products of its mills and cattle from the farmers in the wider area.

Usage diminished in the 1950s and both the service and staff were reduced until the station closed in 1961, before the Beeching axe fell on the entire line from Wennington to Lancaster Green Ayre.

Little now remains of the station but the backing walls to the platforms. The stationmaster's house still stands with some modifications, as a private residence, and the goods shed has become a Catholic church thanks to negotiations between the parish priest of Hornby and British Rail. The 'Little' North Western's affection for arched windows meant that the goods shed was uncommonly well suited to its new ecclesiastical function. What a blessing a station here with a rail link into Lancaster would be for today's commuters.



Caton station looking westwards towards Lancaster, in Midland Railway days, c.1900. Both platforms appear to have a good array of lighting. Courtesy Alan Young Collection.



Heading down the Lune valley towards Caton, in this photograph from the 1960s, is a Stanier 'Black Five', No.44758, (one of the last from its class to be withdrawn in 1968), with a Leeds to Morecambe stopping service. Courtesy John Robinson Collection.



After closure Caton station building was converted into a private residence. The bay windows and garage being subsequent additions. Courtesy Gerald Townson.



Photographed in March 2014, the old goods sheds eventually became Caton Catholic Church. Courtesy Gerald Townson.

