Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

LANCASTER RAILWAY STATION

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Lancaster railway station is a building one uses but tends not to study. You pass through it and hope everything is on time. The current railway station (Lancaster Castle Station, to an older generation) is not Lancaster's first. That honour goes to the station on South Road by Penny Street Bridge. It was opened in 1840 when the Lancaster and Preston Junction Railway reached Lancaster. The front of the building was designed rather like a gentleman's villa, facing the town, with the tracks and platforms at the rear.



The first Lancaster railway station, South Road

The building survives today as offices for Lancaster Royal Infirmary. Andrew White's book *The Lancaster and Preston Junction Railway 1836–1849* provides much detail about this station and the railway line. The station's problem was that it was a terminus: there was no obvious route directly to the north for Carlisle and Glasgow. To achieve that, a route and station to the west of the town was needed.

The Lancaster and Carlisle Railway provided this by-pass route and built the original part of today's station in 1846. The engineer for the railway line was Joseph Locke and the station's architect was Sir William Tite. Both were major figures in the development of the British railway system.

In 1846 Lancaster Station was a simple affair – two lines (the 'Up' line heading south and the 'Down' line to the north) with the main buildings on the west ('Down') side and shown below. There was a goods loop line to the east of the station, avoiding the two passenger lines, which had its own small goods shed.



Lancaster railway station's main entrance in 1846. (*Illustrated London News*, 12 December 1846, p12)

The core of the original station building has survived. This modest frontage was extended to the right by ten bays in 1852 and to the left by low outbuildings around 1900. Together these form the grandest entrance to the station.

The 1852 extension is in a style variously called Tudor, Elizabethan or Jacobean, using pseudo-battlements to try and match Lancaster Castle, which overlooks the station. The roofline is particularly interesting.

There is a turret with a pyramidal roof and tall chimneys of elaborate designs. The frontage also sports the emblems of the Lancaster and Carlisle Railway (below left) and of Lancaster itself (below centre).

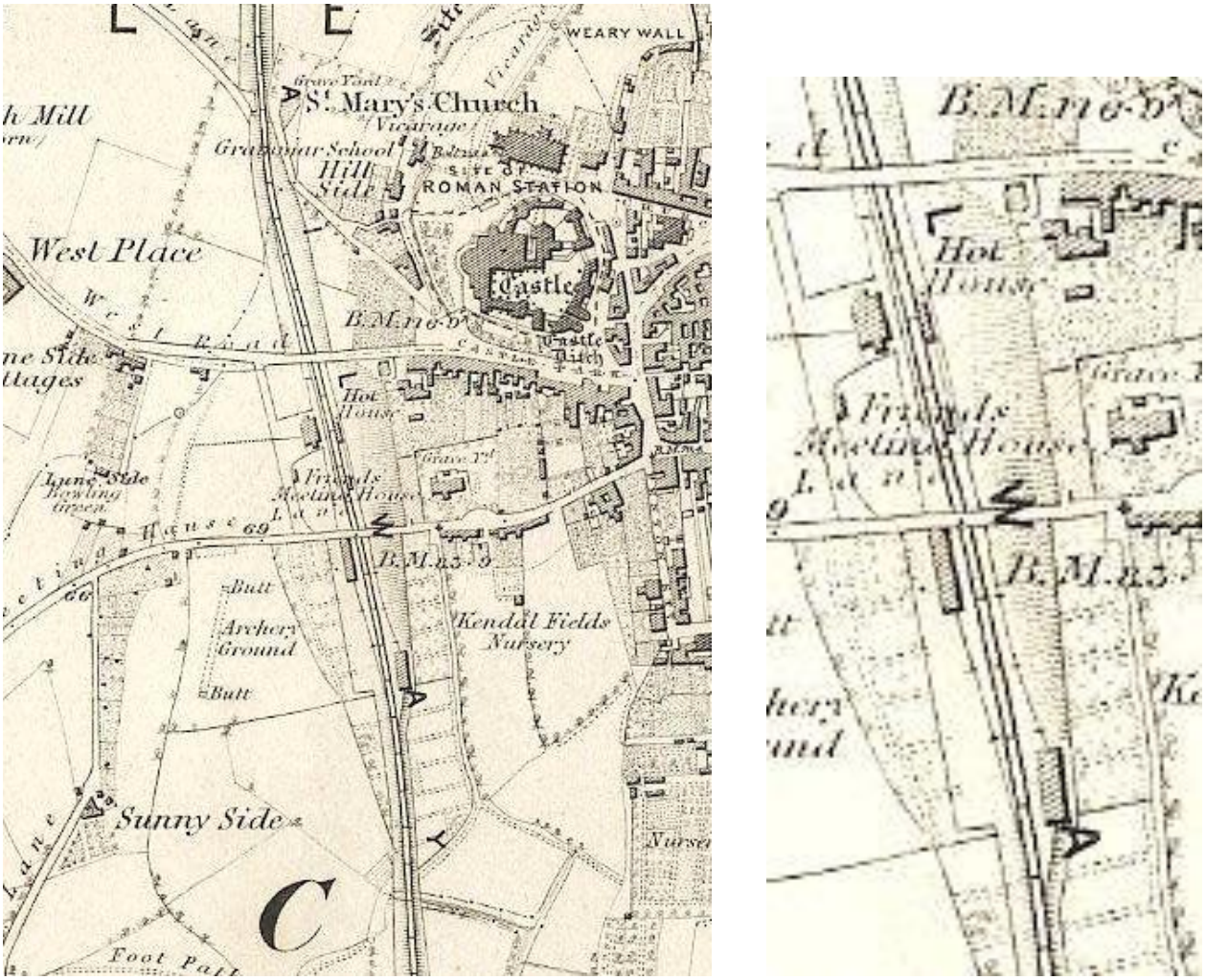


Architectural details of Lancaster (Castle) Station

As traffic expanded, a new entrance was built (1900–06) on the east side of the station. An over-bridge connects Platforms 6, and 4 and 5 (an 'island' platform) to Platforms 1, 2 and 3. The whole station is built in matching sandstone and the design is elaborate throughout in terms of doorways, windows and roofs.

Of course, a railway station is more than just the platforms and buildings for the passengers and staff.

The OS map (below) of the station area before 1848 shows the original simple buildings and tracks: the passenger entrance between West Road and Meeting House Lane was to the west of the lines and an engine shed and a goods shed was south of Meeting House Lane.



Lancaster (Castle) Station before 1848

Traffic rapidly expanded in the 1840s and 1850s. By 1850 the lines from Green Ayre station had opened to Morecambe (1848), Lancaster Castle Station (1849) and up the Lune valley to Yorkshire. Local and national freight traffic both grew. Passenger services were established to locations south towards Preston, Manchester and Liverpool. The branch line to Glasson Dock opened in 1883 and served dock traffic and the large Williamson factory at Lune Mills. Trains now called at Lancaster from Barrow and Windermere. All these new services required extra tracks. The station could not expand westwards but, next to the Down line, north-facing bay platforms (1 and 2) were built and served the Glasson Dock branch. Two fast lines were built east of the Down line for non-stopping trains, and the southbound Up line was moved east of these giving four lines through the centre of the station. The passenger facilities on the east side were rebuilt in stages between 1900 and 1906. The goods loop became Platforms 5 and 6 and focused on the service to Green Ayre and beyond. There was a short south-facing bay platform. A steep cul-de-sac road down to the

east entrance completed the station's expansion. The OS map of 1910 shows these new tracks and buildings.



Lancaster Castle Station in 1910

During the twentieth century some of these facilities disappeared. The Green Ayre branch closed to passenger traffic in 1966. The Glasson branch closed to passengers in 1930, goods traffic was limited to Lune Mills after 1964 and the whole line was abandoned in 1969. One goods shed has become the station car park (often full), another has been demolished and many of the goods sidings south of the station have been removed. The cattle pens have disappeared. Platform 6 is no longer usable.

All the traffic within and through the station was originally controlled by local signal boxes and there were four major ones – the imposing No. 4 box north of the station being the largest with 144 levers (see below). Train movements have been controlled from Preston since 1973 when the track layout was simplified. All the local signal boxes have been removed. The Green Ayre branch into Lancaster Castle Station was electrified in 1908: the West Coast Main Line in 1974.



On the left, the three-storey Signal Box No. 4 north of Lancaster Castle Station, the Glasson branch curving off to the left in front of it. (Source: Lancaster Past and Present, Andrew Reilly photographs)

To find out more about the local railway system more widely, please consult Guide 20 in this series, *Railways around Lancaster and Carnforth.*

Further reading

White A (2016) *The Lancaster and Preston Junction Railway 1836–1849*. Scriptorium Publications
Nuttall K and Rawlings T (1980) *Railways around Lancaster*. Clapham: Dalesman Books
Richardson D (2022) *Lancaster's Line to the Sea: a History of the Glasson Branch of the LNWR*. Pinner: Cumbrian Railways Association

Text and photographs (unless otherwise stated) – Gordon Clark.
Maps – Ordnance Survey via National Library of Scotland.
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