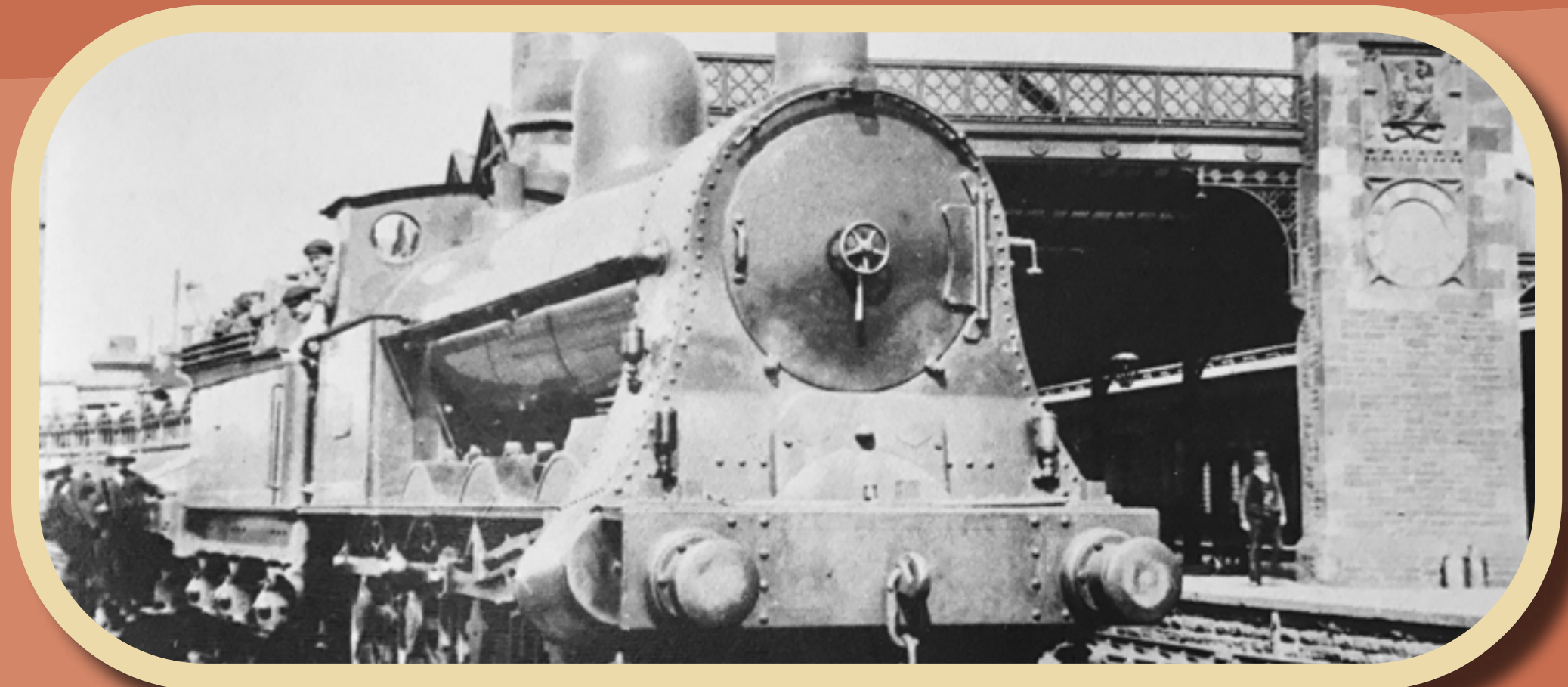


NORTH LANCASHIRE'S HISTORICAL COMMUNITY STATIONS

CARNFORTH

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CARNFORTH STATION



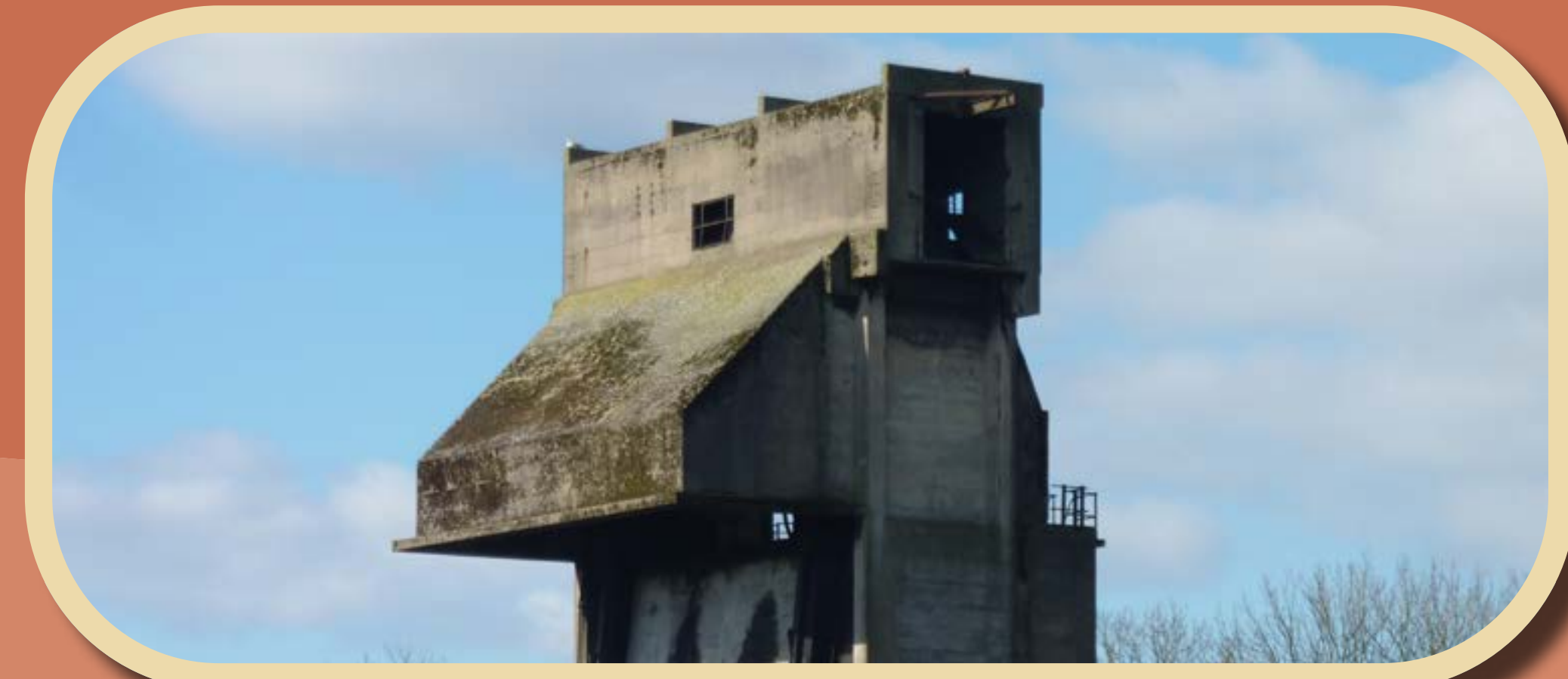
A London North Western Railway, Webb A class shunting at the southern end of Carnforth joint station in the early part of the 20th century. Photo courtesy of J. H. Wright



The grade II-listed Furness Railway signal box built in 1882 still stands proudly alongside the old Furness platforms at Carnforth in 2019. It is constructed of York stone it has two storeys and a slate roof. The tall round chimney sits on an octagonal base and carved on the north side of the building is the Cavendish coat of arms. Photo courtesy of Brian Haworth



Carnforth station took on an air of neglect once the main-line platforms were removed. Its condition continued to deteriorate and by 1990 its buildings were at risk. The Furness platforms are captured in 1990. Photo from The Gerald Townson collection



The grade II*-listed concrete coaling plant was built for the London Midland and Scottish Railway Company. Italian prisoners of war assisted in its construction. Photo courtesy of Brian Haworth



The famous Carnforth station clock which was captured in the film 'Brief Encounter', seen here in the 1980s before its restoration. Photo from the Gerald Townson collection



One of the new Northern 195 units draws into Carnforth with a service from Barrow-in-Furness. The Sheep on the Line rail-safety artwork was created by pupils from the North Road Community Primary School in Carnforth with support from the Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership. Photo courtesy of Brian Haworth



The appalling ambience surrounding the former booking office does little to attract passengers as the station reaches its lowest ebb in the mid 1980s. Photo from the Gerald Townson collection



Carnforth station following its extensive restoration by the Carnforth Heritage Trust. Seen here in 2020 in this photo courtesy of Brian Haworth

Carnforth was just a small village until the arrival of the railway when it quickly developed into a true railway town. The first railway, built by the Lancaster and Carlisle Railway Company, opened on 22nd September 1846. A small single platform station named Carnforth and Yealand was erected to serve the trains. The Ulverston and Lancaster Railway was the next arrival in 1857. The resulting junction station was renamed Carnforth. The Furness Railway absorbed the Ulverston and Lancaster Railway in 1862.

The station was enlarged during the 1870s to a design by local architects Paley and Austin. William Tite, the well known Scottish architect, designed the refreshment room. Midland Railway services began to use the station when the south to east direct curve to the Furness and Midland lines was opened. The construction of this curve created a triangular junction at the north west end of the station. The Lancaster and Carlisle Railway was taken over by the London North Western Railway and the station became a joint station with the Furness and Midland, with the station staff all wearing uniforms bearing the letters CJS, Carnforth Joint Station.

The Furness Railway built a fine stone signal box at the north west end of the station which was opened in 1882 and continued in use until 1903. It survives today as a reminder of the Furness Railway's presence at Carnforth and is a grade II*-listed building. The Furness Railway also built a small engine shed which opened in 1882 and closed in 1925. Both the Midland and London North Western had engine sheds; the Midland shed which was a roundhouse still stands in industrial use but the LNW shed was demolished in the late 1940s.

A major redevelopment of the station, funded by the London Midland and Scottish Railway, took place in 1938 and once completed the station boasted six platforms and the longest single-piece-concrete cantilever roof in Britain, which still stands today keeping intending passengers and visitors dry.

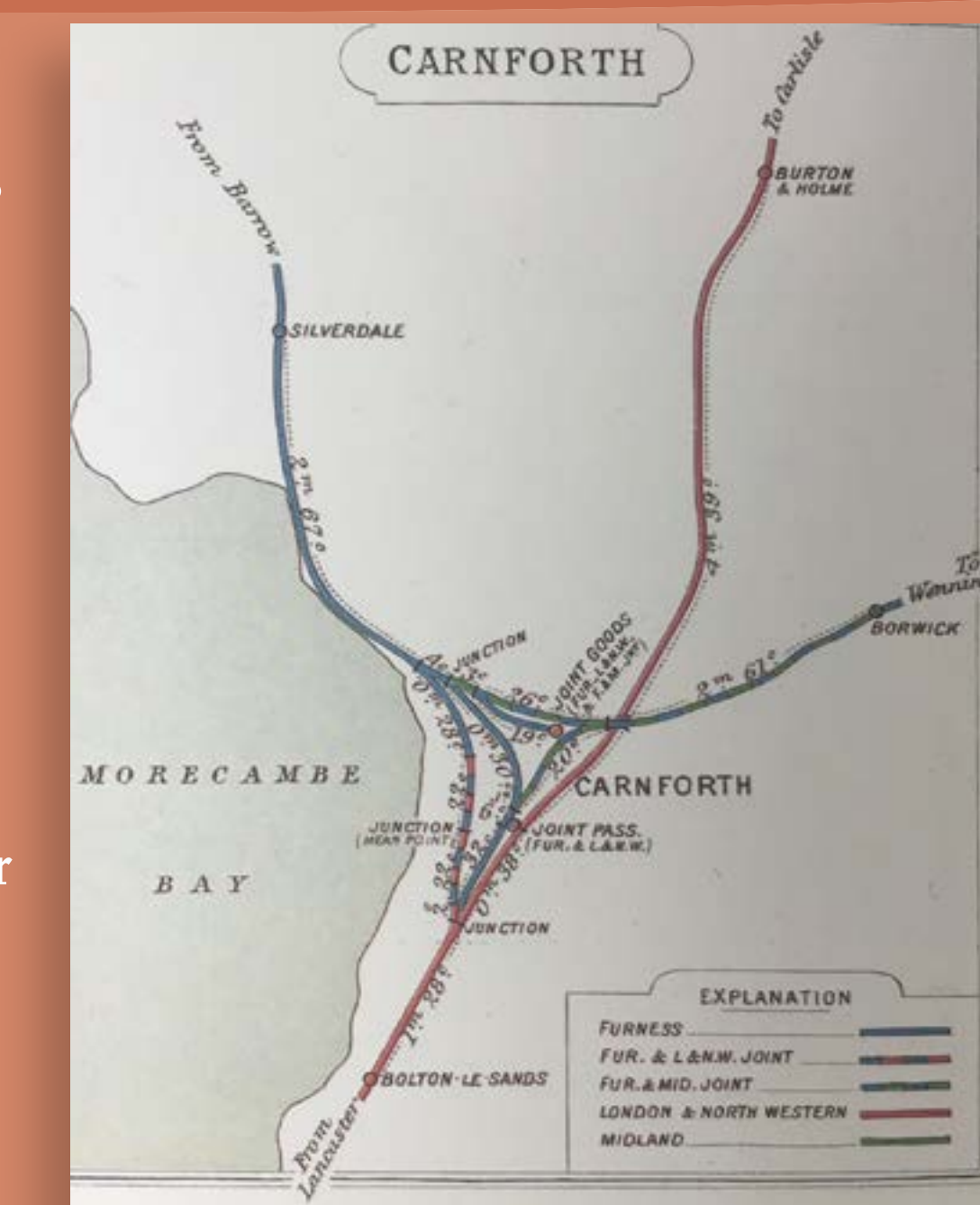
The London Midland and Scottish Railway started to build a new state-of-the-art motive power depot on the site of the old Furness Railway shed in 1938 but material shortages during the Second World War halted the build. Work recommenced in 1942 with Italian prisoners of war from the Bela Camp close to Milnthorpe used for labour. The new depot finally opened on 18th December 1944 with an allocation of 46 steam locos and by 1960 a staff of 347 were employed, 250 being drivers and firemen. Carnforth depot eventually closed in 1968. The depot survives as a grade II*-listed building and is used by the West Coast Railway Company as a base for their steam and diesel charter railway operations.

Over the years there have been seven different locomotive sheds in the vicinity of Carnforth station as follows; Ulverston & Carlisle Railway 1857 to 1867 (2-road), Furness Railway 1867 to 1927 (6-road), Midland Railway 1867 to 1874 (2-road), London North Western Railway 1873 to 1893 (2-road), Midland Railway 1874 to 1944 (roundhouse still standing in private use), London North Western 1893 to 1944 (6-road), London Midland & Scottish 1944 to 1968 (still in use by West Coast Railways). When the London Midland and Scottish shed closed under British Railways in 1968 it was transformed into a visitor centre known as Steamtown which proved to be a popular attraction for almost twenty years.

Carnforth was also a strategically placed railway junction for freight and had two goods yards; the Furness and Midland joint yard and the London North Western and Furness joint yard. In the Railway Clearing House Handbook for 1904 the London North Western and Furness joint yard is listed as having a 10-ton crane and a private siding for Watson and Hartley. The Furness and Midland yard hosted a private siding for the Carnforth Hematite Iron Works. In pre-grouping days between 10 and 15 freight trains called at Carnforth in each direction daily. Carnforth was a difficult and complicated station to operate and there have been at least seven signal boxes in the station area.

Carnforth station's fortunes began to decline in May 1970, when the West Coast Main Line platforms were taken out of use, following the withdrawal of local stopping trains between Lancaster and Carlisle. These platforms were cut back and fenced off prior to the commissioning of the West Coast Electrification Scheme in 1974. The old Midland and Furness bay platform was also removed at this time. The loss of the main line platforms reduced the stations importance as a passenger, parcels and mail interchange. The former entrance to the sorting office can still be seen at the Northern end of the up main platform.

The one surviving Furness Railway grade II*-listed signal box 'Carnforth Station Junction' still stands in use, acting as a fringe box for Preston Power Station box. By the late 1970s the then de-staffed station was suffering from a lack of maintenance and this, coupled with vandalism, made the station very unattractive and unwelcoming for passengers.



By the early 1990s large parts of the station buildings were seriously 'at risk' and following exploratory meetings the Carnforth Station and Railway Trust was set up in 1996. After much work an imaginative, partnership regeneration package was agreed which covered both the main island platform and the gateway buildings. In 2002 a ticket office and travel information facility operated by Lancashire County Council opened which unfortunately was closed in 2020.

In 2003 the award winning Heritage Centre opened its doors and visitors could see the scale of the refurbishment and learn all about Carnforth's proud railway history. Alongside and complementing the Heritage Centre, the Brief Encounter Refreshment Rooms opened and have proved to be very popular. The railway buildings on the town side of the West Coast lines have also been refurbished into commercial units as diverse as a micro pub and a model railway shop. The link to the classic Brief Encounter film, which was partly shot on Carnforth station in 1945 under the direction of David Lean, attracts many visitors to pose under the famous platform clock and there is no doubt that the various initiatives at the station have breathed new life into the station. The Furness Line Community Rail Partnership has installed an attractive collection of artwork, produced by students at the Lancaster and Morecambe College, which have been fixed to the rear wall of the platform 2 and really brightens that part of the station. The Leeds-Morecambe Community Rail Partnership has worked with the local primary schools on a rail safety initiative and as part of this initiative the children have produced a colourful rail safety poster which also has been installed at the station.

