

feasted their eyes on. They felt confident that the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway Company would be their closest ally. The two companies would be everything to each other, hand in hand linking the west and east coasts. Henry Smiles, the general manager of the N and CR, was a witness for the promoters of the Carlisle and Silloth Bay Dock and Railway at the parliamentary hearing. He said it would be very advantageous to have a wet dock on that part of the coast. Mr. Smiles noted that the proposed railway would be the shortest route across the island. Mr. Smiles' nod was not as good as a wink however.

The wary Northumbrians had committed themselves to nothing. In fact, goods traffic from the North East of England to Liverpool and Ireland was drawn off in another direction, via York, Knottingly, Normanton and Bolton to Liverpool. The North Eastern Railway Company operated this route in conjunction with the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Company.

The Newcastle and Carlisle Railway, which should have carried most of this traffic, was paid by the North Eastern Railway Company to divert this east/west coast traffic. As a consequence of this agreement no Liverpool/Ireland to Newcastle traffic passed over the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway after April 1857. In their agreement with the North Eastern Railway Company it was stipulated that for every three tons of goods which that railway carried between Liverpool and Newcastle, the sum of 6s 1d was to be paid by it to the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway Company. The Newcastle and Carlisle, in turn, bound themselves to pay a penalty of 13s 1d for every ton of traffic that they carried! They were to carry none. In 1857 the sum of £1,500 was paid over by the

North Eastern Railway Company to the Newcastle and Carlisle for nothing but connivance! (In 1862 the two lines were to amalgamate.)

Faced with this powerful combination the Silloth railway and dock were a useless extravagance. The vice-chairman of the Silloth railway, when asked, "If you had known that the traffic was to be diverted from the Carlisle and Newcastle line, what effect that would have produced upon your Silloth scheme?", gave the remarkable reply, "It would never have been started."

Even in the history of railways this is an unprecedented story of rash speculation. The desperate plight of the company came out in 1861 when the directors made one last attempt to generate traffic for their idle docks. In that year they applied for powers to build a branch from Abbey to Leegate and Mealsgate at the northern tip of the West Cumberland coalfield. At the House of Commons select committee hearing the awful financial state of the company was revealed. Company receipts had fallen short by £35,000 of covering even the interest on the borrowed money! The company confessed to a revenue not exceeding £3,380. Spending on the project, estimated at £165,000, had risen to £300,000. The estimate for the railway sidings, stations and track was overrun by £15,000. The jetty, which was intended to be 750 feet in length, was extended to 1,000 feet. This was done in order that steamboats running from Silloth to Dublin would be able to arrive and leave the end of the jetty at dead low water. The two parliamentary fights to get their Bill had cost a staggering £13,000. On top of all this was the unauthorised expenditure on "creating" Silloth. The Carlisle and Silloth Bay Railway Company was "professedly insolvent." The Bill was thrown out.

A year later the North British Railway Company came to the rescue. The two companies had been allies for several years. The Carlisle and Silloth Bay Railway Company had sold their rolling stock to the NB then leased it back from them. The Carlisle and Silloth had vigorously supported the proposed North British line from Hawick to Carlisle over the Caledonian route. In 1862 the NB leased both the Silloth and Port Carlisle branches, the lease to run for 999 years. All money, credits, and personal property and effects of the Silloth Company became the property of the North British. The rent was set at £2,000 per annum, and the lease was to terminate without notice on 31st July 2861. These were generous terms indeed to offer a broken company. The bill promoting the lease had come before the parliamentary committee on private bills on 16th May 1862. Lord Redesdale, chairman of the committee, had some hard things to say to Mr. Nanson, solicitor to the Silloth company:

- R How long have the Silloth Railway and Dock been opened?
- N A little more than two years.
- R What dividend do the Company pay?
- N Not any.
- R Not any! Are the North British Shareholders then to give you £2,000 per annum for nothing?
- N They hope to make the undertaking pay.
- R But they never will!
- N They have their eyes open.
- R It looks very like insanity . . .

Lord Redesdale had other harsh words to say.

“Oh wretched, wretched! You begin by spending your money in the erection of a town at Silloth, in order to create traffic for your railway and dock . . . But I should like to know where all your money has gone, and who has benefited by its outlay . . . The North British Company are the best hands in the world that I know of for making bad bargains, and they have certainly made a most decided hit in that way upon this occasion.”

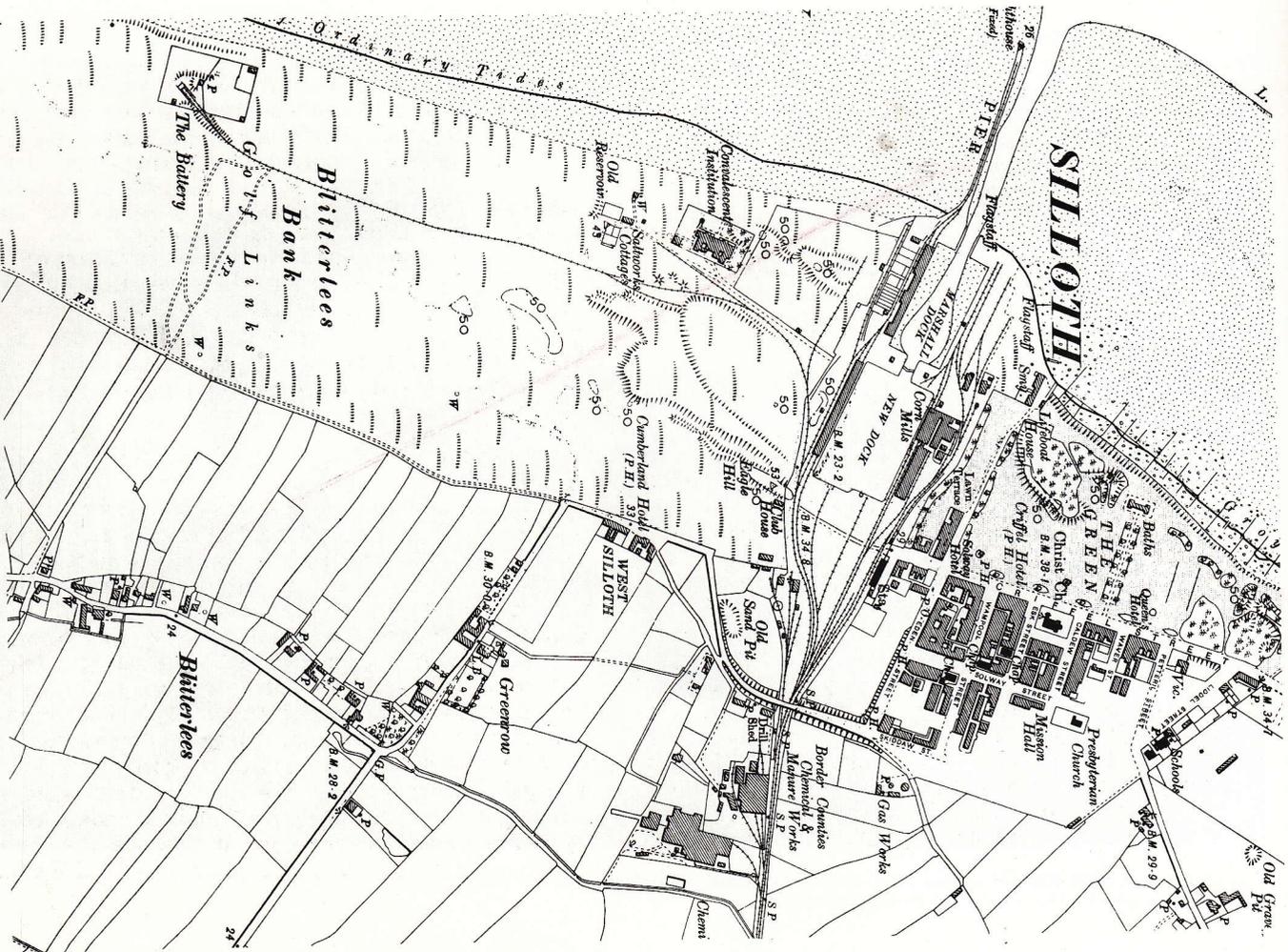
Lord Redesdale summed up by saying “. . . if the North British are so infatuated with your wretched scheme, they had better take it.” The bill was passed.

This “rotten and ruined” concern was to prove its value to its new owners. The Waverley line, the North British new road between Edinburgh and Carlisle, was opened throughout on 1st July 1862. The Caledonian and the London and North Western Railways already provided an efficient service between England and Scotland. They were to secretly combine at Carlisle against the new arrival. Traffic was deliberately diverted from the Waverley line onto Caledonian metals. Effectively blocked at Carlisle, the North British by-passed the Border City by routing freight to Silloth for shipment south. This was to prove a cheap and efficient freight line. So much so that the North British decided to form its own steam packet company. Their first ship, the Ariel, plied between Silloth and Liverpool, Dublin and Belfast.



*The scene at Silloth Battery on an unidentified occasion. The engine in the photograph would appear to be a Drummond rebuild of a Wheatley original. The flag is a Royal Standard.*

(Photo courtesy of H.M. Liddell).



Detail from a 1901 six inch Ordnance Survey map showing the track layout at Silloth. This section also shows the two branch lines to the Convalescent Institution and The Battery.

The North British enthusiastically promoted Silloth as a seaside resort. A contemporary guide to the town boasted:

"Silloth . . . is a very dry place, having the least number of rainy days of any other town in England, the air here is very bracing, in fact we do not know of any other place so well adapted for invalids and children as Silloth. That unpleasantness the smell of decomposing shell-fish and sea-weed, never assails your senses at Silloth, as the tide comes so high, that all nuisances of the sort are regularly swept away by the marine scavenger."

and

"The number of people now annually frequenting Silloth establishes its claim to be considered truly a place of pleasure. Every season augments its patrons and patronesses. The merchant, manufacturer, tradesman, mechanic, and mill worker — all hie thither, certain of joyous hours, pure air, refreshing breezes, and renewed health.

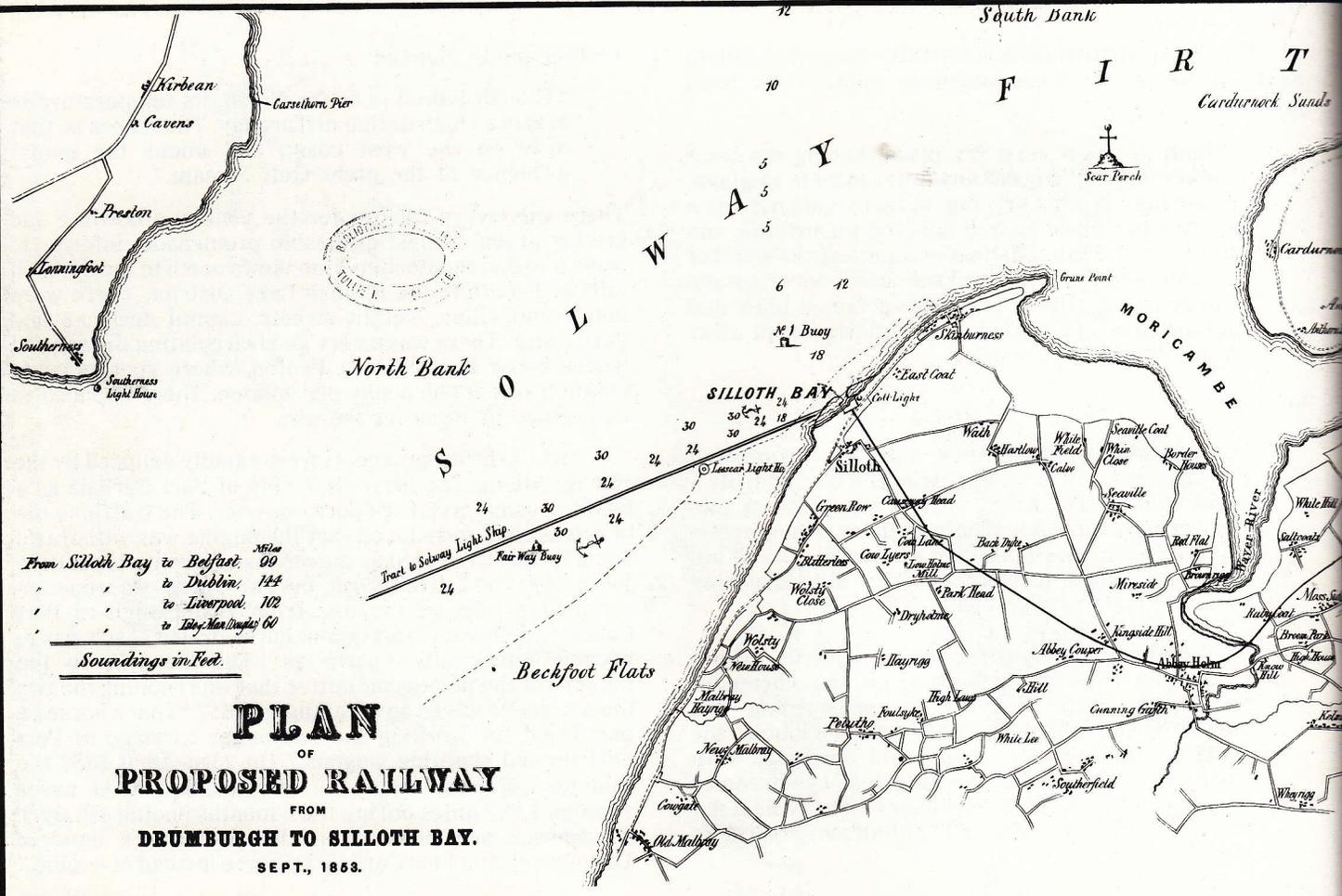
The turmoil of business is temporarily forgotten. Sunken spirits emerge from the vortex of traffic, the wearied form becomes strong and elastic. The invalid derives vigour as he inhales the bracing atmosphere — sweet and perfumed with scents from the ocean. The lustreless eye becomes bright, and the pallid cheek blooms anew. This is not mere picture — any visitor to Silloth may realise its truth."

Another guide claimed:

"Though Silloth is so far North, its temperature is nearly as high as that of Torquay. The reason is, that it is on the west coast, and under the genial influence of the great Gulf Stream."

There was every facility for the visitor: a bowling and cricket green, a most agreeable promenade, inferior to none; a baths; sanatorium, fine views north to the Scottish hills and south to the English Lake District. There were hotels and villas, well-lit streets, capital drainage and pure water. There was a very good circulating library and coffee house kept by Mrs. Fenton, where visitors could obtain books at one penny per volume. There was also an abundance of ozone in the air.

Port Carlisle's prospects were rapidly eclipsed by the rise of Silloth. The brief flowering of Port Carlisle as a bustling commercial sea port was over. The traffic to the port was soon so reduced that the engine was withdrawn and a horse introduced as the means of locomotion for the journey to and from Drumburgh. There was one intermediate stop on the line from Drumburgh to Port Carlisle at Glasson. This quaint horse-drawn coach was to become universally known as "The Dandy". In the minutes of the united committee that was running the two lines it was resolved on 14th August 1857 "That a horse be purchased for working the passenger carriage at Port Carlisle and shunting wagons." On 23rd April 1858 the minutes reported "that the engines had been saved running 1,887 miles during the 3 months ending 4th April in consequence of running the passengers between Drumburgh and Port Carlisle by horse instead of engine."



From Silloth Bay to Belfast 99 Miles  
 to Dublin 124  
 to Liverpool 102  
 to Taly, Man (troughs) 60

Soundings in Feet.

**PLAN**  
 OF  
**PROPOSED RAILWAY**  
 FROM  
**DRUMBURGH TO SILLOTH BAY.**

SEPT., 1853.

R. ARQUITE, Cartographer.

