

played, paddled and perhaps had a donkey ride before catching the train home. Over the years thousands of Carlisle's children enjoyed a day down at the seaside with Sister Lillie. In 1933 she was awarded the M.B.E. for her good work.

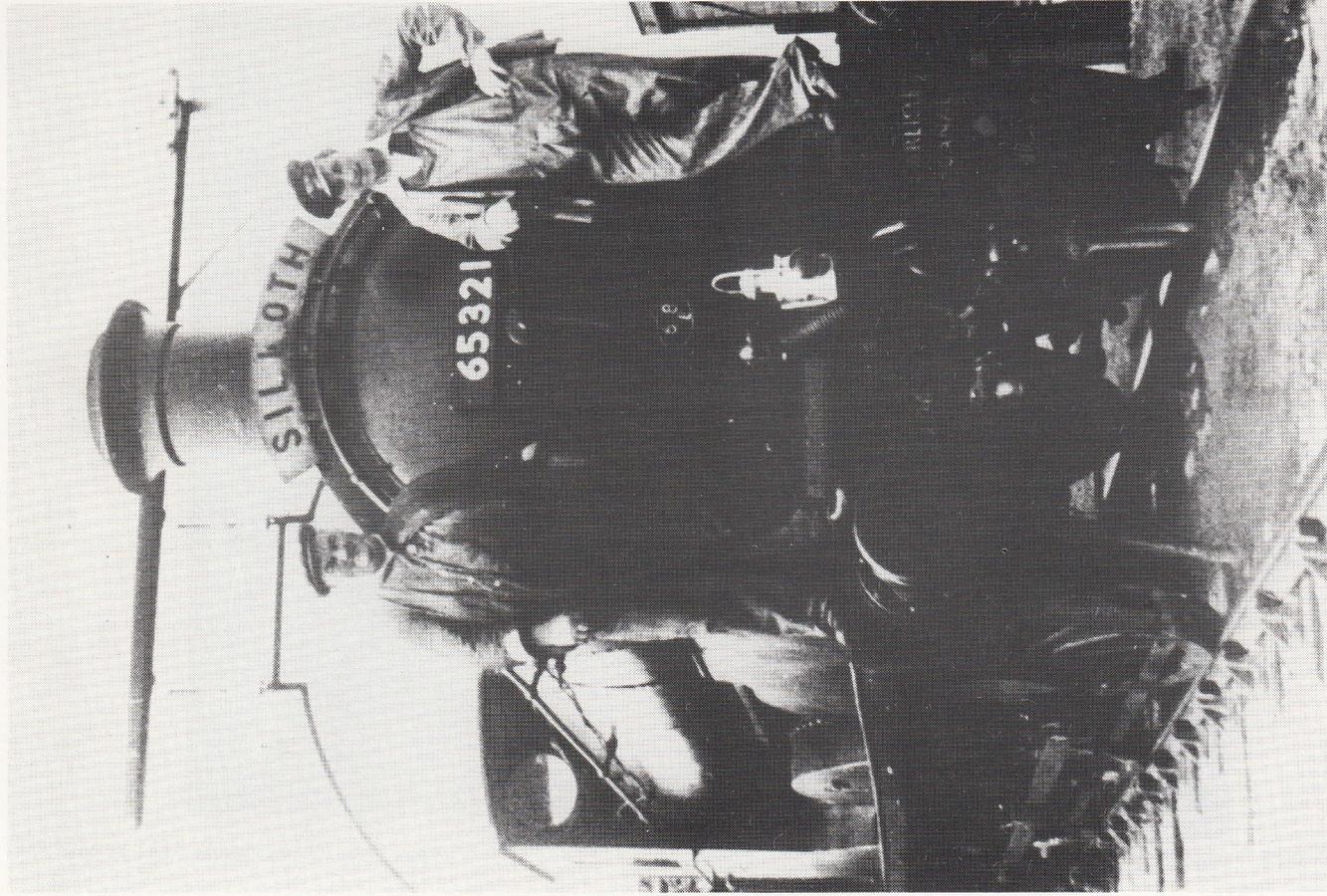
The Second World War years were a time of frantic activity at the docks and on the railway. The coal hoists worked 24 hours a day as Tyneside coal was shipped through Silloth's "safe" harbour. Three pilots worked out of the port at this time bringing boats up the channel and into dock. Passenger trains were crowded with servicemen and women from the nearby airfields. Goods trains were loaded with stores and ammunition. In this period of manpower shortage many of the stations and signal boxes were operated by women. After the war thousands of tons of unstable ammunition were brought down to Silloth by railway, loaded onto boats, then dumped in the Solway.

On 23rd October 1950 a fatal accident occurred on the line, when the 1.15 p.m. passenger train from Carlisle to Silloth was derailed at a point between Drumburgh Junction and Kirkbride. The train was travelling at about 45 m.p.h. Driver T.W. Jackson and Fireman K. Pearson were both killed. Three of the 24 passengers in the train sustained slight injuries or shock. The cause of the accident according to the official report "was undoubtedly the track which was not in a fit state to carry trains at moderately high speeds." Both the engine and the tender had left the track and rolled over into a field. The coupling between the tender and the leading coach parted, leaving the four coaches on the line. The engine, No. 64880, a J.39 Class 0-6-0 type, was built by the London and North Eastern Railway at Darlington in 1935. This

train had worked the Silloth branch for years. At the time there were 13 engines of this type at the Canal Motive Power Depot. The booked service over the line was then five passenger and two freight trains each way daily. Much of the line was subsequently relaid with concrete sleepers.

The post war years saw a sharp decline in goods traffic on the branch. The bulk of Carr's Flour Mills freight now went by road. Their monthly traffic bill which had been £7,000 before the war had dwindled down to a paltry £100. Even the coal for Carr's boilers was now brought by road. In 1950-51 the line was losing an estimated £14,000 a year. On 29th November 1954 two car diesel units were introduced on the line. This was only the second diesel scheme brought into operation in the whole of Britain — the first was in the West Riding of Yorkshire. The new units afforded considerable savings as they dispensed with the need for a fireman. There was also a great saving on fuel. Running costs were estimated to be about a third of that of a steam engine. Owing to their restricted capacity however (two-coach trains could seat only 123 passengers) the new rail-cars could not cope with the summer rush to Silloth. Steam trains were kept on to supplement the diesel service. The comfort, warmth, cleanliness and silence of the new cars contrasted sharply with the veteran non-corridor coaches.

In 1953 the engine was withdrawn from the Silloth yard. Freight traffic soon consisted only of the odd wagon for Hughes chemical works at Grinsdale, a drop at the coal merchants in Burgh and the occasional load for Osborne seeds at Kirkandrews.



The Silloth engine on an unidentified occasion. The engine was withdrawn from the yard in 1953.

(Photo courtesy of Carlisle Museum).

Doctor Beeching's axe fell in 1963. The line was loosing £23,600 per year. On top of this British Rail estimated they would need to spend on maintenance to the track and signalling equipment a further £31,570 over the next five years. Mr. Grainger, British Rail Divisional Manager at Barrow, said "We know people use it daily for business but apart from these regulars the people using the line are few indeed and are decreasing. The number of passengers using the intermediate stations on a regular basis rarely reaches double figures. Large numbers of people use the line at holiday weekends. But the fact is that a few busy weekends in the year cannot make any difference to the fact that there is a very large gap between revenue and expenditure."

The news shocked Silloth. There was strong local reaction to the proposed closure. The closure was described at a meeting in Carlisle as "The greatest betrayal of the working classes since Runnymede, with Dr. Beeching as the judge, jury and hangman." Ron Lewis, then the prospective Labour candidate for Carlisle, commented "There is a very simple solution to the railway's problems. If we stopped spending £1,836-millions on a nuclear deterrent we could afford a subsidised railway. Millions went down the drain on Bluestreak and Skybolt and many millions will be spent on Polaris. If we can afford to spend this amount on nuclear arms surely, in the name of justice, some money can be given to British Railways."

Silloth Parish Council protested that bus services would not be able to cope with the summer rush to Silloth. This point was underlined when over 3,000 railway

tickets were sold for Silloth on Whit Monday alone. Extra coaches were put on the five trains to the resort.

Protest meetings were held, petitions got up. Mr. W.S. Jones, Chairman of the Silloth Chamber of Trade, described the proposed closure as "slow death for the town." Again and again the protestors hammered home the point that buses could not possibly cope with all the paraphernalia of a family going to the seaside on holiday. Mr. G.J. Coogan, the chairman of a meeting called to discuss the closure, sounded a different note when he commented "I'm awed by the quiet resignation of the Carlisle people to this problem."

Many saw the forthcoming General Election as the only hope for the condemned line. The **Daily Express** wrote "It now becomes a race between Doctor Beeching and Mr. Wilson on this closure business. Beeching may beat the election." The **Observer** said "If the General Election holds off for another nine months or a year Dr. Beeching's operation may become virtually unstoppable by Harold Wilson."

Carlisle's apathy was gaining momentum. At a "mass" protest meeting called in the Market Hall not more than 50 people turned up — this included five members of the press.

On 2nd October the Transport Users Consultative Committee met to hear objections to the closure of the line. The arguments were gone over again. The committee listened. Cumberland County Council Solicitor Mr. G.W. Swift, pointing out that Silloth was founded by the railway company 100 years before, said "It seems like an



6th September 1964; the last train passes through Burgh-by-Sands Station.

(Photo courtesy of Carlisle Museum).



6th September 1964; the last train home.

(Photo courtesy of Carlisle Museum)

attempt on the part of the railway to eat its own children.” He charged British Railways with “sloppy analysis” in presenting the figures used to back up its case for closure. Other objectors claimed closure of the line would discourage new industry from coming to the area. Mr. Boak, a railwayman, said “We need places like Silloth for the good of the health of the community.” After deliberation the committee agreed that the closing of the line would cause hardship to people travelling to their work or school, or dependent on holiday trade.

The Transport Minister Mr. Ernest Marples was not impressed by the objectors arguments or their 8,000 strong petition. After considering the Transport Users Consultative Committee report the Minister decided that an improved bus service could provide an adequate alternative to the train. This was the final nail in the coffin. On 6th March 1964 notice of closure appeared in the **Carlisle Journal** and **Cumberland News**. Again fears were voiced about the future of the town. It seemed ridiculous that, on the one hand, the government was trying to attract industry to a Development Area and, on the other, it should try to take away one of its major assets. To many it seemed that the government was simply turning its back on West Cumberland in general and Silloth in particular. Sunday, 6th September was announced as the last day for railway passenger service between Carlisle and Silloth.

With the perfect vision of hindsight one must say that the closure of the Silloth line was one of Beeching’s least justifiable decisions. The Silloth District Plan prepared by Allerdale District Council in conjunction with Cumbria County Council in 1977 makes several telling com-



May 1961, a view from the footplate of Engine 64877, a J39 class 0-6-0 type, on Burgh Marsh.

(Photo courtesy of Peter Brock).

ments on the axing of the line. It states "The line not only provided a good access for tourists from Carlisle and beyond but also had a role as a freight and commuter route and was obviously a major transport link", and "Since the closure of the railway . . . the main link with the hinterland is by road only; the roads are very much a rural standard only. This must mitigate against the attractiveness of Silloth for the location of new industry." Concerning tourism the report states "The closure of the railway in 1964 seems to have been a major blow in this respect, and easy access to the town is now obviously only by private car." Without doubt the closure of the line had a marked effect on the town. The report comments "When the line was closed a suitable alternative service by bus was supposed to be provided. The present day situation, however, does not appear to bear this out, and the public transport service is inadequate." A survey of public transport was carried out as part of the report. When asked "Does public transport meet your needs?" one person replied "No, I have to meet its needs."

Silloth seems to have lost a lot of its character with the passing of the railway. This is perhaps just the "rose tinted spectacles" perspective that many of us take of the past. Yet one thing is certain — the railway would have provided an alternative to the procession of heavy lorries that daily pound Silloth's cobbled streets.

Coupling on at Silloth sometime in the 1930's.

(Photo courtesy of H.M. Liddell).



Rear cover: Sign of the times. Ex-Stationmaster Bob Hope outside the ex-Kirkandrew's Station. On the closure of the line in 1964, Bob Hope was transferred to Carlisle to work out his last months before retirement. He had lived at Kirkandrew's Station since he was nine.

(Photo courtesy of the Templeton Collection).

