

THE RISE OF MORECAMBE (1820-1862)

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IN 1820 the village of Poulton le Sands in the parish of Lancaster, south of the sands, was known only as a small fishing village on the shores of Morecambe Bay where, it was said, so much intermarriage had taken place that frequently ludicrous pro-names had been invented to distinguish its inhabitants from one another. Its administration and legal affairs came under the Borough of Lancaster, three miles to the south, though the village was of considerable age and had been included in the pre-Conquest manor of Halton.⁽¹⁾

The oldest house in the district, Poulton Hall, probably stood on the site of Poulton Grange, though the parish, which included the villages of Bare and Torrisholme, contained several other old houses dating from the seventeenth century. These were situated mainly round Poulton Square which nestled in a hollow behind the coast and had four streets leading from it. To serve the religious needs of the inhabitants a small chapel, parochial to Poulton, Bare, and Torrisholme, had been erected in 1754, though church registers were not kept until 1813. According to the census of 1821 the population of Poulton was 363, and the population of the whole parish was 615.

It is clear that as a bathing place in 1821 Poulton, which commanded a fine view of Morecambe Bay and of the Westmorland, Cumberland, and Yorkshire hills, was not unfrequented by the local inhabitants and by a few people from further afield, as is shown by advertisements in the *Lancaster Gazette* such as:

“Sea Bathing to Let—Morecambe Cottage at Poulton by the Sands”.⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾ *Victoria County History, Lancaster*, Vol. VIII, p. 65.

⁽²⁾ *Lancaster Gazette*, 28 April 1821.

The neighbourhood was comparatively well served by communications. The Lancaster Canal, on which passenger carrying canal packets provided a regular service, connected Kendal, Lancaster, and Preston, and was made accessible to the Lancashire and Yorkshire industrial districts by the Leeds and Liverpool canal which ran a few miles to the south of Preston to which it was linked by a tramway from Whittle le Woods. Part of the original line of the Lancaster Canal had been first surveyed by Brindley in 1772,⁽¹⁾ but it was not until 1792, when the project was authorized by Act of Parliament,⁽²⁾ that Rennie was appointed Engineer and the construction begun. Communication was opened in 1797, and in 1819 a branch to connect with the Leeds and Liverpool canal was authorized.⁽³⁾ This, however, was never constructed and the two canals remained linked by the tramway. Turnpike roads connected Preston, Lancaster and the North, and eastwards from Lancaster the Lancaster and Richmond Turnpike provided communication with Yorkshire. Poulton and Bare were joined by a rough road along the shore, and the road between Poulton and Lancaster ran through Torrisholme. Responsibility for the maintenance of these roads lay with the surveyor of roads for Poulton, Bare, and Torrisholme, who was appointed by the Lancaster magistrates.

In 1820 Poulton had not achieved the popularity of the neighbouring village of Sunderland on the north side of the Lune Estuary where by 1821 the Ship Inn already possessed a bathing machine. The village had originally risen to prosperity in the early eighteenth century as a busy centre of trade and as a port of Lancaster, mainly through the commercial enterprise of Robert Lawson, a Quaker merchant.⁽⁴⁾ From Sunderland he had sent war transports to Ireland during William III's campaigns and, though he prospered temporarily, he went bankrupt in 1728. Sunderland gave way to Glasson, a better anchorage on the south side of the

⁽¹⁾ J. Priestley, *Historical Account of the Navigable Rivers, Canals, and Railways of Great Britain* (London, 1831), pp. 372-377.

⁽²⁾ 32 Geo. III cap. 101.

⁽³⁾ 59 Geo. III cap. 64.

⁽⁴⁾ M. M. Schofield, *Outlines of an Economic History of Lancaster* (1946), pp. 10-11.

river, and to Lancaster, a better commercial centre. But to Lawson's era it owed its two inns and the several fine old houses as well as its road to Lancaster.

In the early nineteenth century the popularity of Sunderland as a watering place appeared to be increasing. In 1822 and 1823 there were advertisements of cottages to let, and in 1824 a report appeared in the *Gazette of improvements* in the Lancaster-Sunderland road by rebuilding and widening the bridges. This, it was added, would be "Likely to render the village very attractive this season".⁽¹⁾ A billiard table had also been fitted up in one of the inns. Sunderland was thus already aspiring to run "a season". In the summer of 1825 a second hotel at Sunderland began to advertise accommodation and there were also one or two summer cottages available. There was also a further improvement in transport.⁽²⁾ A carrier commenced running regularly between Lancaster and Sunderland twice a week, and almost daily during the season. By 1828 Sunderland was referred to as a place "much resorted to for sea bathing" where the air was considered "particularly salubrious".

Meanwhile, nearby Poulton was beginning to receive consideration. In May 1829 it was announced that the coach "The Old Times" would commence running on 1 June and would continue during the season from the Bull Hotel, Poulton, for Lancaster, returning "to suit the time of bathing".⁽³⁾

A certain rivalry seemed to be growing up between Sunderland and Poulton. On 20 June 1829 an advertisement appeared for a regatta at Sunderland on 21 July, at which Peter Hesketh Esq. would be one of the stewards. The *Gazette* prophesied "a numerous attendance from the high respectability of the patrons of this novel amusement". The advertisement was speedily followed by an announcement on 11 July of a regatta on Morecambe Bay at Poulton by the Sands "on the day after the Sunderland regatta". The area was obviously attracting more visitors. The Hotel at Heysham, occupying an intermediary position between the two, began to advertise "Every accommodation for Genteel

⁽¹⁾ *Lancaster Gazette*, 15 May 1824.

⁽³⁾ *Ibid.*, 30 May 1829.

⁽²⁾ *Ibid.*, 25 June 1825.

Families during the bathing season. There are excellent baths and Bathing machines".⁽¹⁾

On 25 July 1829 the *Lancaster Gazette* contained a short account of Poulton Regatta, "which was numerous and fashionably attended", and the reporter appears to have been so impressed by his visit to the village that a further paragraph appeared in the next issue of the paper:

"On arriving on the ground we were struck with peculiar pleasure on viewing this village stript of all its former objectionable qualities, and presenting a maritime situation, which we think would now vie with some of the most celebrated watering-places in this kingdom . . . Many of our readers are aware, that this improvement has been going on for some time back, under the superintendence of several gentlemen residing in and near to this place. . . .

The most remarkable however is on the coast, where some spirited gentlemen of this town have erected some beautiful and excellent houses which, when we take into consideration their situation, and the commanding and extensive views they present on every side of the bay, the distant hills of the Lake scenery . . . we think we may justly predict, that this, in a very little time, will be the most fashionable resort in this neighbourhood."⁽²⁾

Who the "spirited gentlemen" were is not recorded. That they were described as being "of this town" would suggest that they were from Lancaster, for Poulton could not yet be considered a town in any sense of the word. It is quite possible that Mr. Eidsforth of Poulton Hall, after whom a later terrace was to be named, and who had entertained the chief visitors at the regatta, was responsible for a large part of the change. What is important is that Poulton was now being recognised as a future fashionable watering place, and that its wealthier inhabitants were taking steps to make the village attractive.

In the summer of 1830 both Sunderland and Poulton held regattas and Peter Hesketh, whose influence in the county was growing and who was now High Sheriff, was one of the stewards at Poulton. Once again the *Gazette* repeated its comment:

"We have little doubt that Poulton will soon become the first fashionable resort in this neighbourhood, and we cannot be astonished

⁽¹⁾ *Ibid.*, 18 July 1829.

⁽²⁾ *Ibid.*, 1 August 1829.

if it does, considering how easily it is accessible, and the beautiful and picturesque view presented from its coast."⁽¹⁾

On 31 May 1831 the *Gazette* reported that the villages on the coast had already begun to receive visitors and that the accommodations were good at both Sunderland and Poulton. The *Gazette's* praises were becoming increasingly extravagant:

"The delightful, pleasant, and salubrious village of Poulton by the Sands . . . one of the most picturesque views upon our coast"⁽²⁾

Of the regatta, on 28 July the paper declared:

"We believe Poulton was never before graced with so much beauty and fashion, for nearly all the respectable part of the community in this town and neighbourhood were there assembled."

In 1832 a new coach, "The Royal Sailor", commenced running between Poulton and Lancaster, and by the following year Poulton had established its supremacy over Sunderland. Although Sunderland continued to hold regattas, those at Poulton received the most attention, and it was Poulton which was thought of as the local bathing place.

Not a little of the credit for Poulton's popularity was due to the *Lancaster Gazette* which was also the general advertiser for Westmorland. It seems to have been the paper's policy to describe the village in the most glowing terms, perhaps because visitors to Poulton would also increase the prosperity of Lancaster.

By the middle of 1834 "this distinguished watering place" was said to be "overflowing with company". And in the same year advertising for the annual regatta was spread over several weeks, and an entire column was devoted to a description of the event. Although the village was being thought of as a bathing place, however, the main occupation of the villagers was still fishing. The census of 1831 had indeed shown the population of Poulton as 540 persons—an increase of 177 in the last ten years—but a footnote to the return said:

⁽¹⁾ *Ibid.*, 24 July 1830.

⁽²⁾ *Ibid.*, 11 June 1831.

“ Seventy-one males twenty-one years old are employed in fishing at Poulton, which is also the chief occupation of the women and children.”

In 1835 came further recognition of the village when the new steamboat *Windermere* from Ulverston called at Poulton and Blackpool. The trip must have been a success for on 5 September 1835 an advertisement in the *Gazette* announced that the *Windermere* was “ now regularly plying three times a week between Liverpool and Ulverston, calling off Poulton near Lancaster and Blackpool ”.

Regattas continued to be held in the summer, growing annually in popularity. The description of that in 1837 reads:

“ The weather was extremely fine but somewhat hazy and ‘ our English Bay of Naples ’—as Lady Wortley Montague has beautifully described the Bay of Morecambe—did not present . . . such a diversity of lovely and picturesque scenery as had been observed during the foregoing part of the week.”⁽¹⁾

Poulton, too, was becoming a better embarkation point for pleasure trippers than Ulverston, an old harbour on the far side of the Bay which, though near to the ever fashionable Lakeland, was not so well served by communications as Poulton. In the season of 1838 the steamer *Windermere* took up its headquarters at Poulton Ring, the head of the deep water channel on the south-eastern side of Morecambe Bay, and the *Gazette* announced:

“ The steam-packet ‘ Windermere ’ will positively sail between Liverpool and Poulton Ring.”⁽²⁾

A further indication of the growth of the village was that the chapel had become too small to house the inhabitants. On 11 July 1840 there was an appeal from the Rev. Edward Scott, the recently appointed incumbent, for subscriptions to build a new church at Poulton. He wrote:

“ This chapelry comprises the hamlets of Poulton, Bare, and Torris-holme, and contains a population exceeding a thousand souls.

⁽¹⁾ *Ibid.*, 19 August 1837.

⁽²⁾ *Ibid.*, 9 June 1838.

Besides which, as a sea-bathing place, it is frequented in the summer months by a considerable number of persons from distant places."⁽¹⁾

The district was shortly to be frequented by an even greater number of people from yet more distant places. In 1840 was completed the new means of communication which provided a direct, fast and cheap route to Preston. On 25 June 1840 the Lancaster and Preston Junction Railway was opened.⁽²⁾ There were to be through trains to Manchester and Liverpool, and connections to Birmingham and London. Five trains were to run regularly each day between Preston and Lancaster, and there was to be a third class coach to and from Preston once a day for as little as 1s. 6d. for the twenty miles. The new line was soon carrying an average of 400 passengers a day.⁽³⁾ It was the railways that were to bring the Lancashire coast within the reach of the working classes. With their aid, for those who cared to travel and could afford to do so, any sunny Saturday afternoon or Sunday during the summer could be spent at the seaside, and the visitor could be back at his work refreshed on the Monday morning.

Yet the Lancaster and Preston Railway was still three miles away from Poulton, whereas a little further to the south the Preston and Wyre Railway was beginning in 1840 to take passengers directly to Fleetwood. Thus the Poulton Regatta which was revived, after a lapse of three years, on 29 August 1840, "was not so numerous or so brilliant as we have had the pleasure of witnessing on former occasions." The railway did, however, provide Poulton with another immediate source of profit by marketing the catches of its fishermen and by making the famous Morecambe Shrimps even more widely known. On 14 November 1840 the *Gazette* reported:

"During the past fortnight immense catches of fish have been made at Poulton le Sands. We are happy to hear further that our Poulton neighbours find a ready market, vast loads of fish being carried daily by the railroad."

⁽¹⁾ *Ibid.*, 11 July 1840.

⁽³⁾ *Ibid.*, 18 July 1840.

⁽²⁾ *Ibid.*, 27 June 1840.

In the following summer the numbers of passengers carried by the railway continued to increase weekly. Thus during the week ending 15 May 1841 2,546 passengers travelled over the route;⁽¹⁾ in that ending 29 May 2,603 passengers were carried, 1,401 of whom travelled on the previous Saturday. In the week ending 5 June 4,551 passengers travelled. Whilst it is impossible to estimate how many of these visited Poulton, since the Preston and Lancaster railway also made easier the journey to the Lakes, it is reasonable to assume that for many the coast had been brought within striking distance. On 21 August 1841 the *Gazette* reported:

“Poulton has been a scene of great animation during the week, in consequence of the influx of persons from all parts, availing themselves of the favourable tide and fine weather to enjoy sea-bathing. On Wednesday and Thursday crowds might be seen going from Lancaster and returning in all manner of vehicles.”

In the same summer, on 15 June, the new Trinity Church at Poulton was completed and consecrated.⁽²⁾ The population of the village had by now risen to 700 inhabitants.

Throughout the seasons of 1842 and 1843 there was a steady increase in the numbers of visitors at Poulton, and prominence was given to the report that Lord de Tabley and his family would spend the summer in the village.⁽³⁾ The residents took their opportunity to associate his presence with the regatta. The account runs:

“The eclat of the thing was much enhanced by the presence of Lord de Tabley and family, his lordship having most kindly lent every assistance to promote the general merry making.”⁽⁴⁾

What improvement was being made in Poulton seems to have been localised in the village. There was as yet no thought to extend improvements along the coast or to make a promenade. Nor was there any cohesion in the three villages. Thus, when on 4 May 1844 a complaint was made at Lancaster Petty Sessions against T. Bond, surveyor of

⁽¹⁾ *Ibid.*, 22 May 1841.

⁽³⁾ *Ibid.*, 27 May 1843.

⁽²⁾ *Ibid.*, 18 June 1841.

⁽⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, 5 August 1843.

roads for Poulton, Bare and Torrisholme, for not keeping the shore road from Bare to Poulton in usable order, Bond said that the road was as good now as it had been for the last thirty years. He considered it hard that public money should be expended there when there were other much more used places needing attention. Bond was given until 15 June to make the necessary repairs.

On 18 May 1844 the *Gazette* carried a report of more positive steps to increase the amenities and accommodation for visitors at Poulton. The erection of a large hotel to cater for visitors was being contemplated:

“The building proposed is on a large scale and will be capable of giving entertainment to a great number of guests.”

By 1844 Poulton le Sands had become established as a seaside bathing place. So far there had been no comprehensive improvement scheme, and what amenities had been added to the village had been carried out mainly by private individuals acting alone. Poulton had risen to notice mainly because of its position on the coast and not because of other more material attractions. The year 1844, however, was a significant year in the history of the village. It was to prove the turning point in its development from the fishing village of Poulton le Sands to the thriving seaside resort of Morecambe. Its rise lies in the foundation and subsequent history of the Morecambe Railway and Harbour project, which marks the transition to a planned development and a planned encouragement of holiday makers.

The projection and construction of harbour facilities in Morecambe Bay inaugurated a period of prosperity and expansion for Poulton le Sands. It caused the growth of a new area of the town, a short distance from the old village, with which, from the start the name “Morecambe” seems to have been associated. The name may, as “Peter Piper” asserts in 1870,⁽¹⁾ have been considered a more suitable name than Poulton le Sands for a fashionable watering place, but it was certainly not officially renamed Morecambe during this period. In fact for all legal purposes the name Poulton

⁽¹⁾ Peter Piper, *Handbook for Morecambe*, 1870, p. 3.

le Sands was retained until 1870. The official name of the Harbour Company was at first "The Morecambe Bay Harbour and Railway Company". Gradually as the Bills and works progressed "Bay" was dropped from the Company's title, and so, in time, the town which grew up in association with the project adopted its name.

Unlike the other seaside resorts of the Lancashire coast, when the era of its expansion came the town was not primarily developed as a holiday resort. Moreover, although it seems likely that the promoters of the project had ulterior motives which were not at first revealed, the stated intention of the scheme's promoters was not to develop Poulton but to benefit "the town and trade of Lancaster". Thus, though the Lancastrians at first gave wholehearted support to the idea, when changes of plan began to be made and ulterior motives to emerge, the Lancaster merchants began to have serious misgivings and to question the desirability of the project.

On 11 May 1844 the two Lancaster newspapers, the *Gazette* and the *Guardian*, both contained a short paragraph stating that there was a report "from high authority" of a projected ship canal from Lancaster to Heysham Lake (Poulton Ring). The river Lune was often dangerous for shipping owing to its shifting sands, and for many years there had been talk in Lancaster of the possibility of cutting a ship canal from the deep water channel in Morecambe Bay straight to the town. Now that the Preston and Lancaster Junction Railway had been opened and now that there was a further project to construct a second railway, The North Western Railway,⁽¹⁾ to Lancaster from the Yorkshire manufacturing districts, the ship canal project was revived once again as the best means of taking advantage of the increased trade which had been brought by the Preston and Lancaster Railway and would be increased by the line from Yorkshire. The *Gazette* declared that "such a project appears to our view one of high interest, promising as it does to enable Lancaster yet to become a proud second town of trade and commercial importance." No guess is hazarded as to the identity of the high authority.

⁽¹⁾ 9 Victoria cap. 92.

With the construction of the railway from Lancaster to Carlisle⁽¹⁾ there seemed to be a further opportunity of developing the Port of Lancaster. Positive means of doing so became available. It was necessary for the railway company to bridge the River Lune on the western side of Lancaster at a point where the river was still navigable, and early in 1845 the company was compelled to pay £10,000 to the Admiralty in compensation for the two piers of the bridge which were built in the bed of the river.⁽²⁾ This sum was to be used for the improvement of the River Lune. The Railway Company also paid £16,000 in compensation to the Lancaster merchants. On 3 September 1845 two members of the Tidal Harbours Commission, Captain Washington, R.N., and T. Rendall, Esq., C.E., officers appointed by the Admiralty "to examine and report upon the best mode of laying out the sum of £10,000 paid to the Admiralty by the Lancaster and Carlisle Company",⁽³⁾ arrived in Lancaster to commence their inquiry.

According to the *Lancaster Guardian*,⁽⁴⁾ after preliminary investigations the inquiry was held on 13 October 1845, in Lancaster Town Hall, by Captain Washington and R. Godson, M.P., Counsel of the Admiralty, "to receive evidence touching the capabilities of our ancient port". After consulting a survey of the Lune Estuary and Morecambe Bay made by Captain Denham, R.N., in 1844, the committee turned to the development of the river itself. Captain Kennedy, master of the steamer *Duchess*, said when examined that the sands inside the River Lune shifted considerably and that there was need of adequately lit buoys. Captain Kennedy said that there was no difficulty in getting up to Poulton. When asked "would it be a means of saving vessels from wreck if that were made the harbour?", he replied: "I think it would." He said that the tide would never stop the entry to Poulton. When asked whether, in view of the great increase in railways and the prospect of a much greater traffic, it would be more desirable to run up to

⁽¹⁾ 7 Victoria cap. 37.

⁽²⁾ *Tidal Harbours Commission, Second Report* (London 1846), pp. 270-281.

⁽³⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽⁴⁾ *Lancaster Guardian*, 18 October 1845.

Lancaster with an improved River Lune, or to go to Poulton, he replied, "I should say Morecambe Bay."

Mr. Higgin, one of the Quay Commissioners and solicitor of the Lancaster and Carlisle Railway Company, though not present in the latter capacity, spoke in favour of the engineer Stephenson's plan (of 1840) to improve the Lune at a cost of £13,000. He said that the railway company had placed £10,000 at the disposal of the Admiralty for the improvement of the river. The grant did not extend to the improvement of Poulton, and Lancaster Docks should be improved rather than Poulton Ring.

Mr. J. Walker, Secretary of the Lancaster Quay Commissioners, said that in 1844 the port had been used by 35,591 tons of shipping paying £943 18s. 5d. in harbour dues. At Glasson the grain and timber trade had fallen off very much of late. He had heard it said that Glasson Docks were inconvenient. There was a scheme for making docks at Poulton. He had also heard of a scheme to make docks at Thorn Bush (in the estuary). There was Mr. Stephenson's scheme of 1840 to improve the river, and there was also a proposal from the North Western Railway Company.

Mr. J. Sharpe, Secretary of the North Western Railway Company, handed the court a written list of wrecks which had taken place near the port in the last few years. He attributed them to the lack of a safe anchorage.

Mr. E. Sharpe, a Poulton landowner with interests in the North Western Railway, said that if any satisfactory and feasible plan for improving the Lune could be brought forward, no project for carrying the Port to Poulton would be produced. If one was, and was proved satisfactory, he would pledge himself that no other should be brought forward. The meeting failed to produce evidence of any other scheme.

Mr. Sharpe said his plan had been contemplated fifty years ago, had been favourably reported on by engineers, was sanctioned by the Port Commissioners for Lancaster, had received promise of monetary aid from three railway companies, was popular with tradespeople, and would bear on its front "the names of fourteen gentlemen of the highest standing and influence in the town". The plan did not propose to remove the port from Lancaster. He wished to

make the port and the town identical. He did not propose to carry a line of railway from a new dock six miles distant to another point on another railway, but to bring a ship canal up to the town itself. In the centre of Morecambe Bay there was a deep, broad, direct channel leading to a place of shelter. There would be a pier head at Poulton and the quay at Lancaster. He recommended total abandonment of the Lune and making available the arm of tidal water at Poulton Ring. The plan would open a trade to Lancaster "such as we have never before dared to think of".

When questioned, Mr. Burrell, a shipowner, said he considered Mr. Sharpe's plan for a harbour at Poulton a very good project and that he would send his ships there gladly.

Mr. Higgin opposed, on the part of the canal company, the application of the £10,000 to the scheme.

There was thus on the one hand a scheme promoted by Poulton landowners and the North Western Railway Company and backed by Lancaster merchants who saw in it, as outlined at the time, an increase in trade; and, on the other hand, there was opposition to it by the Lancaster and Carlisle Railway Company and the Canal Company. The railway company had a good reason for its opposition. A branch of the Lancaster Canal to the sea lock at Glasson had been authorized by Act of Parliament in 1793,⁽¹⁾ though the branch had not been completed until 1826. The Lancaster and Carlisle Railway Company already had interests in the canal company and was later to take over its control—a frequent occurrence in nineteenth century railway history. Diversion of traffic from the Lune would therefore be against the company's interests.

On 25 October 1845 the *Lancaster Gazette* announced:

"Morecambe Bay Harbour—we are happy to hear that the plan for improving the Port of Lancaster by means of a ship canal, has met with a cordial reception amongst influential persons at a distance engaged in commerce."

On the following Saturday, however, the whole scheme was once again altered and the *Gazette* reported:

⁽¹⁾ 33 George III cap. 107.

“It will be seen that that part of the important project which contemplated the construction of a ship canal from Poulton to Lancaster, has been reluctantly given up owing, we believe, to the advantages which a railroad possesses over a canal in point of expense. We readily make up our mind to it because we know that if the construction of the canal had been practicable it would have been done; so bent are the promoters on doing their best for Lancaster as a port.”⁽¹⁾

The report goes on to say that should Lancaster fail to take advantage of the commercial possibilities opened by the increase in railway communications some neighbouring port would.

Once the canal project had been abandoned Mr. Sharpe's arguments would seem less convincing to the Lancaster merchants who would see in the decision an attempt to bypass Lancaster by rail and deprive the town of harbour dues and commerce.

On 15 November 1845 the Morecambe Bay Harbour Company was provisionally registered for the establishment of a harbour of refuge in Morecambe Bay and the improvement of the Port of Lancaster. The advertisement of the company stated:

“When to this traffic is added the present passenger traffic between Poulton and Lancaster, and that likely to be brought in the bathing season to this favourite place of resort by the North Western Railway from Yorkshire, it will be seen that this railway will prove to be not the least remunerative part of the project.”⁽²⁾

Here then had emerged a hitherto concealed motive. Not only was Poulton to be made the harbour but it seemed as if Lancaster's prosperity was to be neglected in favour of this “remunerative part of the project”, the further development of Poulton and the financial gain to the promoters of the scheme of whom one (Sharpe) was a landowner at Poulton. As might have been expected the announcement caused an immediate outcry in Lancaster. On 22 November the *Guardian*, obviously less well disposed to Poulton than the *Gazette*, demanded:

⁽¹⁾ *Lancaster Gazette*, 1 November 1845.

⁽²⁾ *Ibid.*, 15 November 1845.

“The Canal; The Whole Canal; and nothing but the Canal.”

The paper reported that large placards had been posted in Lancaster calling on the citizens to urge the corporation and the Quay Commissioners to seek a ship canal rather than a railway to Poulton. The placards asked:

“Can nothing be done to save Lancaster from being erased as a mercantile port from the Admiralty charts? Is there no energy? No public spirit? No wealth? No perseverance left among us? . . . Let your unanimous determination be to have a Ship Canal . . . The railways, linked as they are together, will, unless you act in earnest, do more injury than good to the town”

The paper added:

“It is unnecessary for us to say more than that we perfectly coincide with the opinions and suggestions of the author.”

Such was the intensity of local feeling that the promoters of the harbour project found it necessary to hold a meeting in Lancaster music hall on 28 November to explain their reasons for abandoning the ship canal.⁽¹⁾ The High Sherriff, Mr. Pudsey Dawson, was in the chair. Mr. Sharpe explained the scheme for the construction of a harbour at Poulton Ring and a railway from thence to Lancaster. A motion in support of this was carried. Mr. Sharpe said that a sub-committee of the sponsors of the scheme had been appointed to consider the difficulties that had arisen and, after doing so, had decided to abandon the canal project. Sixty tradesmen had protested and demanded a public meeting. Mr. Sharpe pointed out that before the projection of the scheme no other steps had been taken to improve the Port of Lancaster. He went on:

“I will venture to say that if one-tenth part of the zeal and energy that has been displayed at Fleetwood had been exhibited at Lancaster, we should not be in the position we are in at the present moment.”

⁽¹⁾ *Ibid.*, 6 December 1845.

He said that the Quay Commissioners had done nothing. A few men had got together to take definite steps for improvement, and he hoped that the meeting had but one object, the prosperity of the Town and Trade of Lancaster. Objections to the canal had been, firstly, opposition from the Lancaster and Carlisle Railway Company which alleged interference by the proposed weirs with the bed of the Lune, which might interfere with the works of the canal company at Glasson, and secondly, the estimates of Mr. Hartley, the engineer, which exceeded those of the committee by £50,000 making an estimated total of £350,000. A shortened canal would be equally expensive owing to the necessity of new dock installations. Therefore a railway had been considered "so as to afford the greatest possible facility for the discharge of vessels at the harbour, into the warehouses of Lancaster". This would also save £190,000, together with 9½*d.* per ton for every vessel sailing to the Port. Mr. Sharpe's resolution was moved. It is interesting to note that his explanation gave no impression that he had even considered the development of Poulton as a holiday resort or the profits from the passenger traffic.

Simultaneously with the report of the meeting in the *Gazette* the *Guardian* devoted the whole of its leading article to an attack on the proposed railway to Poulton. Mr. Sharpe was violently condemned as was Mr. Hinde who had vouched for the disinterestedness of the company, saying that it would have no profit but a good deal of trouble and expense:

"It is truly gratifying in this mercenary age to hear of such sacrifice of mind and pocket on the altar of public good. Mr. Hinde, nevertheless, omitted to state one fact which cannot be too widely diffused—that certain members of the committee purchased a quantity of land at Poulton before the scheme of establishing a harbour at that place had emerged from the privacy of their own bosoms. This may have been purely accidental; though it is certainly what censorious people would call a curious coincidence . . .

A railway to Poulton . . . It is only in connection with the proposed harbour of refuge that it becomes important, as threatening the maritime trade of Lancaster with annihilation."

Apart from an exchange of correspondence in the papers the Lancastrians seem to have resigned themselves to the railway project and, on 14 March 1846, the North Western Railway Company announced that the Bill for the Morecambe Bay Harbour and Railway was unopposed on standing orders. On 30 May there was a report in the *Guardian* that the Morecambe Harbour and Railway had met with the approval of the committee of the House of Commons. Captain Washington, secretary of the Tidal Harbour Commission, had said that in his opinion no harbour of the same capabilities existed between the Bristol Channel and the Clyde, and that he looked upon the project as a work of great public importance. The Bill, "an act for making a harbour and Docks at Heysham on Morecambe Bay in the county of Lancaster and a railway in connections therewith"⁽¹⁾ received the royal assent on 16 July 1846.

The promoters of the harbour and railway at Fleetwood had unwittingly stimulated rivalry at Lancaster and so assured the future development of Morecambe. In his speech to the merchants of Lancaster on 28 November 1845 Mr. Sharpe said that, in the recent inaugural speeches of the Fleetwood harbour, Lancaster had been referred to as an unimportant port. This incensed the Lancastrians and stimulated their own project.

Once the Bill was through Parliament the Harbour Company began to make immediate preparations to begin construction. On 11 July the *Gazette* reported that the work had all but commenced,

"As we have for the past ten days seen many coasting vessels lying at anchor in Poulton Ring . . . and we are informed that they all come laden with stone and other materials required in the construction of the tidal basin."

The railway company now took over the scheme completely. On 29 October 1846⁽²⁾ an extraordinary meeting of the shareholders of the North Western Railway Company was held at the Palatine Hotel, Manchester. The meeting approved "of the sale and transfer by the Morecambe

⁽¹⁾ 9 Victoria cap. 184.

⁽²⁾ *Lancaster Gazette*, 7 October 1846.

Harbour and Railway Company, and of the purchase by the North Western Railway Company, of the railway, docks, harbour, and works, authorized by the Morecambe Harbour and Railway Act, 1846, to be constructed". (The "Bay" was already being dropped from the title of the Company.) The estimated cost of a low water harbour, a dock, and seven miles of railway was £220,000.

The scheme was not continued, however. The financial panic of 1847 put an end to the harbour project and it was decided to build a jetty at Poulton Ring instead of a harbour.

Considerable interest and speculation appear to have been stimulated by the activities of the Railway Company. People began to realise that the village which hitherto had been known only to a limited area would soon become accessible to a far wider section of the community once communication with Yorkshire was improved. Thus on 22 August 1846 the *Gazette* mentioned that considerable building activity was going on at Poulton. It does not all seem to have been carried on in a spirit of *bonhomie*. The paper added:

"The rights of parties want defining. We somewhat regret that hostile feelings are beginning to show themselves. One gentleman wanted a poor man with a family to pay him a shilling a year (rent) for a small bathing house, and because he would not another machine has been started in opposition . . .

We perceive a house building so as to obstruct the view of Morecambe Bay and, as we understand the hotel is going to be considerably enlarged and conducted in a superior, yet reasonable manner, we are sorry that anything should be done to take away from so desirable an improvement."

Despite Mr. Sharpe's explanation at Lancaster at the end of 1845 it is clear that "the prosperity of the Town and Trade of Lancaster" was by no means his only concern. Nor had the Harbour Company's forecast of an increase in the number of visitors during the bathing season been made simply as an added inducement to the sale of shares. Like other coastal railway companies, the North Western Railway intended to nurse the stretch of coast it served, not only by carrying holidaymakers to it in the bathing season but also by providing accommodation and amenities for them at Poulton. Thus the *Gazette* announced:

“The Poulton Railway—We understand the company are about to build a large hotel at Poulton Ring for the accommodation of visitors.”⁽¹⁾

The first stone of the future “North Western Hotel” was laid by its architect, Mr. E. Sharpe, on 7 August 1847.⁽²⁾

The Poulton branch of the railway was quickly completed and seems to have been hurried on to be ready in time for the season of 1848. Its opening on Whit Monday, 1848, was celebrated by a dinner given by the directors of the company. After the opening the *Gazette* reported that:

“Crowds of persons availed themselves of the opportunity of running over the new line . . . With a train running every hour, a trip to the shore of Morecambe is within everybody’s reach now, and to such as desire to breathe the fresh air of the seaside . . . the opportunity is invaluable, as they may spend the evening and night at Poulton and be back to their place of business in the morning.”⁽³⁾

Here again can be seen the way in which the name of the Bay and the point to which the railway ran at Poulton Ring gradually became associated. In the same year the North Western Hotel was opened and immediately became the main centre of attraction in Poulton.

Now that there was a convenient train service to Poulton the railway company began to make efforts to attract visitors and to publicise the village. In the week during which the hotel was opened a regatta—“The Morecambe Regatta”—was held. The *Gazette* announced:

“preparations are making for this event on a scale which has not hitherto been equalled in these parts; and for placing it on a par with those of the first class on the South and West coasts . . . There will be a splendid display of fireworks in the evening opposite the new hotel, which will be opened at the beginning of the same week.”⁽⁴⁾

Mr. E. Sharpe was president at the Regatta dinner which was held at the North Western Hotel.

As usual there was little mention of Poulton in the news-

⁽¹⁾ *Lancaster Gazette*, 22 May 1847.

⁽³⁾ *Ibid.*, 17 June 1848.

⁽²⁾ *Ibid.*, 15 August 1847.

⁽⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, 2 September 1848.

papers during the winter, but in the spring of 1849 the directors of the railway company made use of their new seaside hotel and held a special shareholders meeting there on 7 April. As yet the railway line to the east of Lancaster had not been completed so the majority of visitors still came either from Lancaster or, via the Preston and Lancaster Railway, from the Lancashire industrial districts. On 2 June Poulton was visited by 2,000 people, and on 30 June the *Gazette* for the first time referred to Morecambe as a town in connection with the North Western Hotel. The printed list of visitors included some from London.

“ From the numerous applications that are being received daily for apartments, it is evident that the merits of the hotel are already beginning to be appreciated, and the improvements the railway company are so spiritedly carrying on in the shape of walks and drives, when complete, coupled with the beautiful scenery, and the easy access afforded by the railway, will, there is little doubt, render Morecambe one of the most fashionable bathing places on the Western Coast.”

The *Gazette* continued to boost the hotel and to keep its readers informed of the improvements which the railway company was making:

“ We are glad to find that this beautiful sea-side hotel continues to be well frequented by families and parties of respectability, who all speak highly of its situation and the beautiful scenery that surrounds it . . . The railway company are still going on with spirit making improvements in the immediate neighbourhood of the hotel . . . and . . . when the line of railway is opened into Yorkshire, and the branch finished to join the Carlisle line, Morecambe will become one of the best frequented sea-side places in the country.”⁽¹⁾

By August 1849 the hotel was protected by a sea wall—the first part of the promenade—which was gradually to be extended as development continued along the sea shore.

Although the *Lancaster Gazette* obviously held a benevolent attitude to Morecambe's prosperity, it is clear the the *Lancaster Guardian* still had the interests of Lancaster as its main concern and probably still resented the decision to build the

⁽¹⁾ *Ibid.*, 28 July 1849.

railway to Poulton. The £10,000 paid to the Admiralty by the Carlisle Railway Company had been used to improve the River Lune, despite the Poulton scheme, in an effort to hold the Lancaster trade. Thus on 13 July 1850, in a paragraph headed "Prospect of Improvement in the Port of Lancaster", the *Guardian* stated that the river had been so much improved that the way for an extensive trade had been prepared. By the opening of the North Western Railway—the Yorkshire line was opened on 1 June 1850—a new traffic was springing up, consisting of pig iron and iron ore from Glasgow and the north to the interior of Yorkshire. The paper had misgivings about the proposed jetty at Poulton (in favour of which the harbour project had been abandoned), which was still under construction, and which the *Guardian* felt would rob Lancaster of a considerable profit. It considered that the unfavourable position of the jetty might force the railway company to abandon it in favour of the river:

"We are afraid that without a harbour at Poulton, shipowners will not permit their vessels to be brought there except in Summer. The heavy seas occasioned by the westerly winds which set directly on shore would render the anchorage of any vessel there perfectly hazardous . . .

The diversion of this traffic, too, from the Lune to Poulton, is also to be regretted, when we consider the large expenditure of money in improvement of the navigation, which has resulted in giving a permanent additional depth of two feet of water at Lancaster."

Undeterred, the railway company continued with the construction of its jetty. At the half-yearly meeting of the company on 26 February 1850, the engineer, John Watson, had reported that the jetty at Morecambe Bay was nearly completed.⁽¹⁾ The first shipments of pig iron began to arrive at Poulton during the summer. On 3 August 1850 the *Gazette* reported the arrival of five vessels carrying pig iron and commented that:

"the carriage of pig iron will doubtless form an important feature in the return of the North Western Railway Company and also be the means of improving the trade of our port."

⁽¹⁾ *Ibid.*, 3 March 1850.

On 16 December sixteen vessels with pig iron from Glasgow were reported to be expected daily at Morecambe.

With the completion of the North Western Railway in June 1850, and aided no doubt by the publicity given by the *Gazette*, the passenger traffic to Poulton began to grow. To cater for it and to attract increasing numbers of visitors the railway company began running excursion trains. The first account of an excursion is in the *Gazette* which reported that on 22 June 1850 three hundred Sunday School children from Austwick and Clapham were taken to Poulton for the day. Shortly afterwards organised day-outings for their workpeople were arranged by benevolent employers. On 29 June the *Gazette*, commenting on Poulton's growing popularity, mentioned a report in the *Preston Guardian* that "the workpeople of Mr. William Bashall, Wellfield Mill, Preston, intend visiting this place on 13th July".

On 11 July steamer trips in *The Duchess of Lancaster* were advertised from Lancaster at the cost of one shilling to

"the gayest of miniature watering-places [where] there appears to be no lack of amusements for the inhabitants and visitors of this place during the present season."

On 20 July the *Gazette* noted a second workers' excursion for the 27 July when the machine makers of Messrs. Grundy of Preston were to be taken to "Morecambe" where donkeys had been hired for their amusement. On the same day Messrs. Swainsons of Preston took their 1,300 employees to Poulton on a day excursion. They were entertained in the grounds of the North Western Hotel where marquees for refreshments had been erected.

During the summer of 1850, following the fashion at other seaside resorts, the *Gazette* published weekly lists of visitors staying at the North Western Hotel. On 10 August thirty-three excursion carriages arrived at Poulton from Leeds and other Yorkshire towns, and there were reports of further cheap trips. Of the jetty, the *Gazette* announced:

"When the pier which is now in progress of being made, is finished for landing goods and passengers, and for promenading we have no

doubt Morecambe will become one of the most popular seaside places in Lancashire."⁽¹⁾

The railway continued to increase its influence in the village. On 7 September 1850 the *Gazette* reported that:

"between 2,000 and 3,000 yards of land at Poulton have been recently sold in close proximity to the North Western Hotel. Houses will be immediately erected on a uniform plan laid down by the company, so that we may expect a handsome terrace on the shore by Christmas."

It is evident that the railway company was attempting to extend its control over the future development of Morecambe, but though it had the means of carrying out comprehensive improvement and building projects, it was not alone in realising the potentialities of the rising village.

The death in the autumn of 1850 of Mr. Roger Taylor, owner of almost all the land in the centre of the town, between the railway station and the village of Poulton, made possible greater development by private individuals who were not slow to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the sale. The advertisement stressed the beauty of the surroundings and assumed that the buyers would require the land for the construction of private residences. The brisk sale of back lots, however, suggests that increased numbers of boarding-house keepers were beginning to appear. The notice of the sale, which was held on 1 and 2 October 1850, reads:

"Particulars of valuable freehold lands, farms, well-established public house, building sites for marine residences, with the several houses and buildings thereon, situate in the township of Poulton-le-Sands, Bare, and Torrisholme, in the county of Lancaster, and late the property of Roger Taylor Esq., deceased, divided into lots as the same will be sold by auction at the New Inn, Poulton-le-Sands, on the 1st and 2nd days of October, 1850, at one o'clock in the afternoon prompt, by Mr. H. C. Walton."⁽²⁾

The announcement added that:

"This valuable estate . . . is situate on the Margin of Morecambe Bay, of which, with the romantic panorama of mountain scenery

⁽¹⁾ *Lancaster Gazette*, 10 August 1850.

⁽²⁾ Papers of the late Mr. J. Fawcett, Solicitor, of Morecambe.

which bounds its picturesque shores, splendid views can be obtained. The lots are laid out for sites as Marine Residences, are worthy the attention of those who are in search of eligible situations for villas, from their peculiarly lovely positions, the unsurpassed combination of beautiful scenery they command, the salubrity of the air, their accessibility by rail, and their convenient distance . . . from the adjacent town of Lancaster, the capital of the county Palatinate."

The plan accompanying the notice of the sale is full of interest. It shows that the future town was, in effect, already laid out, though the only buildings actually erected were the station, the Old Terrace, rows of houses in Queen Street, Poulton Hall, two cottages on the shore, and Poulton village with the New Inn. It is noteworthy that the adjoining property was in the possession of local families of long standing and importance in local affairs—the Yates's, Richardsons, Edmondsons, Eidsforths, Dr. Gardner, and J. Lodge, Esq. These were bound to play an important part in the future development of the town and would probably, at first, resent interference by outside bodies such as the North Western Railway Company.

The report of the sale in the *Gazette* shows that building lots fronting the bay sold at an average greater than 5s. a yard.

"The width of twenty-five yards from the front wall was sold for about £1,500 . . . We are informed that Mr. Walton (who bought three lots) has signified an intention of commencing to build on Well Flat in a week or two. The bidding was spirited also for back lots . . . The result of the sale will doubtless be a considerable amount of building in Poulton."⁽¹⁾

The spring of 1851 witnessed the expansion of the township in anticipation of the summer visitors. There was also the continued arrival of shipping. On 31 May the *Gazette* reported that excursion trains were already becoming very frequent. Amongst the residents there was a growing awareness of the importance of the resort, an awareness which showed itself in concern for the security of their property. Thus the *Guardian* reported that on 21 June Mr. Pullman of Poulton le Sands presented a petition signed

⁽¹⁾ *Lancaster Gazette*, 5 October 1850.

by influential members of the township for the appointment of a resident Officer of the County Constabulary.

“The rising importance of the hamlet of Poulton demands a further protective force than the number of officers in this division can afford it. The increase in the population arising from the shipping attending this port, and the growing character of the village as a watering place, seems likely to render it one of the most important districts in this locality.”⁽¹⁾

Mr. Pullman pointed out that Poulton was paying £50 per annum to the county rates, and for that they were entitled to protection. The petition was granted.

On 2 August the *Gazette* declared:

“The North Western railway has opened a new era of existence to our Yorkshire neighbours . . . Almost daily, long and well-filled excursion trains from various parts of the quiet country arrive at Morecambe . . . A monster train arrived on Saturday last, and the two steamers now stationed at Poulton made excursions on the Bay.”

The two steamers were another of the railway company's ventures. On 16, 17 and 18 August the number of excursions to Morecambe was so great that many of the visitors were unable to find sleeping accommodation and had to return to Lancaster for the night. The population census of 1851 showed that the number of inhabitants in the entire township was 1,301, an increase of 264 persons since 1841. It is obvious that with such small numbers the accommodation question would become increasingly difficult. Of the above excursions the *Guardian* wrote:

“The North Western railway afforded the residents of the villages and towns on their line every facility for visiting the watering place of Morecambe . . . Tickets from one day to a week were issued and thousands of people visited the place. The village was unable to lodge more than a tithe of the applicants.”

Shortly after the announcement, on 13 December 1851, of the commencement of a new Irish steamer service between

⁽¹⁾ *Lancaster Guardian*, 28 June 1851.

Belfast and Morecambe, the beginning of an extensive trade in cattle, corn and flax between Belfast and Yorkshire, relations between the railway company and the Poulton landowners became somewhat strained. The railway company wished to expand its harbour facilities to meet the growing trade; the landowners wished to check the control of Morecambe's development by the company. On 20 December James Giles convened a landowners' meeting at Poulton for the purpose of taking into consideration a notice received by him from the North Western Railway Company "of their intention to apply to Parliament for powers to take certain waste lands, to construct tramroads, and to legalize the construction of certain tramways, jetties etc. already made".⁽¹⁾ The meeting decided to oppose the measures so far as they applied to Poulton. There are no available records of the proceedings or of the reasons for the landowners' decisions.

On 29 May 1852 a special general meeting of the North Western Railway Company was held "to consider the Bill now before Parliament to carry out further developments".⁽²⁾ The Company's solicitor, Mr. Sharpe, said that there had been slight opposition to the Bill but that there had been a large number of petitions in its favour. On 19 June the *Gazette* reported that the Bill had received the royal assent.⁽³⁾

Mr. Giles must have reached an amicable settlement of his dispute with the railway company for by July he was on cordial terms with the Directors over yet another shipping development. On 24 July 1852 the *Guardian* reported the arrival and sale of the first two cargoes of foreign produce at Morecambe: flax from Riga, and 4,000 Spanish quintals of logwood from Laguna de las Teroninos. Both were consigned to the enterprising Mr. Giles of the Elms. The arrival of the cargoes was described as "opening a new era in the annals of Morecambe." The logwood was sold to a Leeds firm, and a dinner was subsequently held to mark the occasion. Mr. Whelan, manager of the railway company, expressed the obligations the company were under to Mr. Giles for the way in which he had come forward as the first

⁽¹⁾ *Ibid.*, 20 December 1851.

⁽²⁾ *Lancaster Gazette*, 29 May 1852.

⁽³⁾ 15 Victoria cap. 135.

merchant willing to test the capabilities of Morecambe in connection with the railway to the West Riding. Mr. Whelan hoped that this would be a beginning of the commercial prosperity of his native town. Replying, Mr. Giles said he felt certain that it only required a few more merchants to turn their attention to the facilities offered for trade at Morecambe to ensure success. He said that he would make arrangements to bring other cargoes to the port.

On 25 August the half-yearly meeting of the North Western Railway Company was held at the North Western Hotel. It was stated that a goods warehouse, with cranes and proper accommodation for steamboat traffic, had been erected on the pier at Morecambe, and that preparations were being made for the construction of the additional works required to meet the wants of the rapidly increasing trade.

Mr. Giles was prominent in another connection in local affairs. On 23 June 1852 the Act for the setting up of a Board of Health in Poulton came into force. Mr. Giles was elected the first chairman of the new board. The Act began a further period of organised improvement in Morecambe, parallel with that which was being carried out by the railway company. The Board was able to undertake the comprehensive measures which individual residents had neither the means nor often the desire to do. Though there is little mention of the Poulton Board of Health in either of the Lancaster papers, it is evident from the type of improvements which were carried out in Poulton in the following years that the Board was extremely active in local affairs, attending particularly to drainage and sanitation and catering for the accommodation of visitors.

On 4 September 1852 the *Gazette* reported that:

“Poulton has been inundated with visitors. Notwithstanding the recent erections the accommodation at this village is still nothing near what is required, and we are led to believe that, ere another season, the number of houses will be doubled.”

Further developments were made possible on 9 December 1852, when the remainder of the late Roger Taylor's estate was sold, an excellent sale which found eager buyers for building lots. By the following summer the *Gazette* was

able to make a long report on "the new town of Morecambe", where for some months past preparations had been going on to convert the town into a fashionable sea-bathing place. It was said that the increase in the population had been very great and that building had been carried on in "a warm spirit":

"The merchants and upper classes have built themselves family residences in front of the Bay, whilst the middle class of people have erected comfortable and substantial houses for the reception of visitors suitable for all classes, from the mechanic to the nobleman."⁽¹⁾

There were eighteen bathing machines in daily use, several new sailing boats, and

"An omnibus belonging to Mr. Curtis now meets every train to convey passengers and luggage to any part of the town."⁽²⁾

A new pleasure ground or tea garden had been made adjoining the Morecambe tea room. A new and extensive hotel, the Queen's Hotel, had recently been opened by Mr. Hartley in front of the sea. A swimming bath was being built, there were donkeys and carriages in plenty, there were two bazaars, and,

"On Wednesday evening last a smart wooden house, covered with slates and containing two good windows in front, was conveyed to Morecambe, and has taken its stand in a line with the new terrace. [i.e. that planned by the railway company]. In a few days this establishment is to be opened as a confectioners shop."⁽³⁾

There were steamers three times a week between Morecambe and Belfast—the return fare was 3s. 9d.—and a daily steamer to Barrow. The steamer *Tourist* had begun to make the voyage daily during the previous summer. The excursion across the bay to Furness Abbey seems to have been a popular and frequent outing for workers and Sunday School children. There was a daily yacht to Grange (return fare 1s.).

"The old jetty has been greatly increased and new docks are being built at a cost of upwards of £30,000. Two new chapels are about to be erected."⁽⁴⁾

⁽¹⁾ *Lancaster Gazette*, 11 June, 1853.

⁽³⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽²⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽⁴⁾ *Ibid.*

The Independents were already building a chapel, and the Methodists were about to build a stone chapel. They had also a well-attended day school. A new boarding school and a cricket club, which invited visitors to play for it, had been established.

“Poulton is now so great that there is accommodation for a few thousand visitors.”⁽¹⁾

The years from 1844 to 1853 had been the crucial period in the development of Morecambe. In them had been formed the railway and harbour company, and the local Board of Health, and there had been as a result a corresponding growth in the zeal and energy of the residents. The development, which had become rapid by 1853, was continued in succeeding years. On 3 September 1853 at the half-yearly meeting of the railway company at Morecambe it was stated that the gross income of the company for the half year was £21,377, an increase of £4,538 over the corresponding period of the previous year.⁽²⁾

On 11 March 1854 the *Gazette* pointed out that the growth of the town and contemplated improvements demanded better lighting. It had been determined to light the whole village with gas; and preparations to have the lighting ready by the following winter were being made: Also

“We have heard that it is in contemplation to make a promenade from the jetty down to the old village.”

The annual influx of visitors bent on holiday-making appears to have caused a slackening of religious zeal, for on 17 June 1854 the *Gazette* reported that the churchwardens intended “rigorously to prosecute all persons found bathing or sailing company during the hours of divine service”.

On 22 July the steamer *Arbutus* was put on the Belfast-Morecambe service, thus raising the number of sailing to Ireland from three to four each week. Very heavy trains of excursionists from Yorkshire were reported on 26 August and 9 September, one on the latter day bringing twelve hundred people in thirty-nine carriages. At the end of the

⁽¹⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽²⁾ *Ibid.*, 6 September 1853.

season, however, an outbreak of cholera in Morecambe caused a sudden stoppage in the arrival of visitors. The *Guardian* on 23 September 1854 reported that:

“a very heavy train of excursionists booked for Morecambe from Yorkshire arrived on 16th September, but such was the alarm occasioned by the number of deaths from cholera in that village, that but few proceeded further than Lancaster.”

Excursions to Morecambe continued during 1855 and, on Whit Monday 1856, the Lancaster borough band paid the town a visit “to remind them of the good time coming”. On 9 August the *Arbutus* made its first trip from Morecambe to the Isle of Man with a band on board for the entertainment of the passengers, and on the same day the *Gazette* reported that parties were conveyed from Manchester to Morecambe and back for as little as 1s. 6d. per head.

On 15 April 1857⁽¹⁾ the project to light Morecambe with gas, which seems to have been shelved in 1854, was revived when a special meeting of the Lancaster Gas Company was held to discuss the question. As surveys and estimates had not been made it was agreed that an engineer should be appointed to make the necessary estimates and that a further meeting should be held in the following month. On 2 May⁽²⁾ the Lancaster Gas Company decided to take gas to Morecambe from their works in Lancaster as this was considered more economical than erecting new works at Morecambe. Pipes were to be laid under the bed of the river and were to follow the line of the railway. The work was to be commenced immediately and was to be completed before the winter.

Once again, however, the project was shelved and the newspapers do not reveal any further discussion of it during the year. By this time the anger of the Morecambe residents had been aroused and they determined to take matters into their own hands rather than depend on any external body. Thus on 4 September 1858 the *Gazette* contained a long article on “The inauguration of the New Gas Works at Morecambe”. The article gave a brief account of the rise of Poulton to its

⁽¹⁾ *Ibid.*, 18 April 1857.

⁽²⁾ *Ibid.*, 8 May 1857.

present position as "a populous and popular place". It continued that at one time it was understood that the Lancaster Gas Company would supply gas from Lancaster:

"This was given up and the matter remained in abeyance until the latter end of last year when a set of influential gentlemen . . . convened a public meeting of the inhabitants which was held in the school room on 4th December, 1857, when it was resolved to establish a Gas Company (Ltd.) with a capital of £2,000. A Board of directors was appointed. William Whelan Esq., the indefatigable secretary of the North Western Railway Company, was elected chairman."

In April 1858, after being approached once again, the Lancaster Gas Company absolutely declined to supply Morecambe with gas.

On 26 April the Directors decided that Morecambe should have its own Gas Works, which were begun in May, close to the railway. The official inauguration, fixed for 2 September, had been postponed because the final test had not been made. On the occasion the Bolton Brass Band attended the ceremony which was followed by a dinner for the Directors and their friends at the North Western Hotel.

In his speech the Chairman said he had known Morecambe for thirty-six years (i.e. since 1822) and remembered it as a small pleasant country village . . . It was occupied by an industrious body of fishermen having great objection to anything that was new. They lived in this state until 1845, when some people took it into their heads to project a railway and magnificent docks. The villagers were in arms in a moment—it was an invasion of their rights. Many an excellent house had been built but the old stagers thought the new-comers were interlopers.

Mr. Clarke said that they were "on the highroad to prosperity, and with two railways what was there to stop their onward career?" He was informed that land on which to erect a second station had been purchased.

On 20 November 1858 the *Gazette* confirmed Mr. Clarke's announcement in a report that:

"the Lancaster and Carlisle Company have given notice of application for a bill for the intended Hest Bank and Morecambe line."⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ 22 Victoria cap. 124.

The efforts of the Gas Company brought an early reward. A statement of account delivered to a meeting of the Company on 6 February 1860 showed a profit for the first year of £120 when all expenses had been met.

Early in the year there was a report of further improvements in anticipation of the coming season.⁽¹⁾ An entirely new street had been planned to run parallel with West View Terrace, from a point near the station to Queen Street. The street was in fact already being laid out. It was to be sixty feet wide. There was also the probability of a further extension of building because of the revival of the project to construct docks at Poulton Ring. "If this project be realized a great extension of the village westward will inevitably be the consequence."

Further recognition of the importance of the town came on 18 May, when in the supplement to the *Gazette* Morecambe news was, for the first time, allotted a separate column instead of being dealt with under Lancaster "local intelligence" as before. This was continued throughout the season but the old arrangement was reverted to during the winter. The *Gazette* reported the construction of new buildings

"displaying an amount of energy and perseverance unparalleled in the history of the village . . .

We find that of the building lots offered for sale, several are purchased, with a view to the erection of houses upon them as soon as the summer season closes. The principal street of these allotments, Victoria Street, is rapidly being formed and levelled . . . and drainage (the work of the Board of Health) will be commenced very soon, so as to leave no cause for delaying the operations of those who contemplate building upon it."

It was reported that several of the inhabitants had taken shares in the recently formed John O'Gaunt Building Society. And on 25 May the *Gazette* announced a proposal to establish a regular weekly market at Morecambe to save the residents and, in particular, the landladies the inconvenience of having to go to Lancaster for their provisions. During the preceding week the coastguard service had moved its headquarters from Fleetwood to Morecambe and the house

⁽¹⁾ *Lancaster Gazette*, 23 March 1860.

recently occupied by Mr. John Marr (on Morecambe terrace) was taken over for their use.

The arrival of visitors began early. On 19 May there were 1,600 visitors from Leeds, and on the 20 May 2,000 from Bradford, though as yet, as the *Gazette* pointed out, "the season for the summer visitants has scarcely yet arrived."

Local churches and chapels were once again becoming overcrowded. The village church and the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel "are crowded to an inconvenient extent and it is now in contemplation to enlarge the latter to accommodate the increased number of worshippers there".⁽¹⁾

From the lists of visitors now published weekly in the *Gazette* it would appear that the fashionable boarding houses and hotels were in the area between Eidsforth Terrace in the west and the Old (Morecambe) Terrace in the east, taking in Northumberland Place and Northumberland Street.

The Board of Health was beginning to take more definite steps to regulate the town. Under its powers to pass by-laws, granted by the Local Government Act of 1858,⁽²⁾ the Board passed a series of by-laws on 15 June 1861, which provided for the planning and draining of streets, the draining and sanitation of buildings, and the inspection of streets and buildings under construction. The by-laws also compelled the licensing of bathing machines, ordered a gap of fifty yards to be left between the machines used by men and those used by women, prohibited the approach of pleasure craft within fifty yards of the machines, and ordered the licensing of animals and carriages plying for hire—these were to have fixed stands. The annual licensing day was to be on the first Thursday in May. The by-laws were printed and published in 1862.⁽³⁾

At the same meeting of the Board an application from Mr. H. Gorton to form several new streets was approved unanimously. Although the cases dealt with at a subsequent meeting on 20 July appear to indicate that the Board was dealing actively with questions of drainage and with breaches of the by-laws, it is possible that at this time the Board was

⁽¹⁾ *Lancaster Gazette*, 20 May 1860.

⁽²⁾ 21 Victoria cap. 98.

⁽³⁾ There is a copy in the Lancaster Reference Library.

allowing its zeal to promote Morecambe's prosperity and to encourage the erection of new buildings to outrun its discretion. The need for planning was, however, a matter of concern to some of the town's residents who viewed the wholesale development with alarm. Thus, at a meeting of the Board of Health on 4 November,⁽¹⁾ Mr. Moore complained of the lack of planning in building and said that the Board should take greater care, before permitting the construction of new buildings, to see that their location was desirable.

During the summer the question of deep water docks had been canvassed more than ever. On 6 July the *Gazette* stated:

"There appears to be little doubt that they will, in a short time, be absolutely desired."

On 20 July there was a report that the greatly increased Irish trade had necessitated the purchase of two new vessels, *The Talbot* and *The Shelborne*, making a total of four vessels now engaged in the Irish trade. Morecambe fishermen also had a good season. On 19 October a writer reported the continuance of good herring catches and hoped that the increased profits from the sale of fish would replace the visitors—the last cheap trip of the season took place on the day of the report—a further indication that many of the boarding-house keepers were wives of the fishermen.

On 31 August 1861 a report in the *Gazette* indicates the beginning of the movement to extend the sea wall along the whole length of the beach. The first part of the wall had been built by the railway company, in 1848, round the North Western Hotel. The wall was not, however, continued along the entire front and there was no comprehensive plan to complete the work until 1862. In that year a new plan included a proposal for a carriage drive to run the whole length of the beach. On 21 June 1862 a report in the *Gazette* declared:

"Visitors . . . will be struck with the improvements which are going on—the new wide streets which are laid out, the new buildings

⁽¹⁾ *Lancaster Gazette*, 8 November 1861.

erected and in the course of erection . . . and last . . . the extensive improvements in the promenade on the beach opposite the Queen's Hotel and the Queen's Terrace, which has been made by Mr. Isaacs the spirited proprietor of the hotel."

Mr. Isaacs made a further improvement by railing off the green opposite the Queen's Hotel at his own expense and so drew the attention of the Board of Health to the need for improvement. On 28 June the *Gazette* reported a meeting of the Board to improve the green by laying curb stones along its edge, and said:

"We further hope, that before long we may have to announce a proposal for carrying out the fine promenade to the eastern end of the Old Terrace."

There were now two stretches of the front which were protected by a sea wall—the North Western Hotel, and the Queens Hotel. The Board of Health began to press for the joining up of the two areas. A considerable portion of the intervening front (some 300 yards) was owned by the railway company and so, on 16 July 1862, a deputation from the Board under its chairman, Mr. C. T. Clarke, met the Midland Railway directors to discuss the question.⁽¹⁾ The directors intimated that they would recommend their board to make a sea wall from the jetty to a point opposite the end of Northumberland Street, where their property ended, if the owners of property and others interest in Morecambe would continue it to the Queen's Hotel; "but this must be a sine qua non". A public meeting was appointed to be held in the school room on Wednesday, 23 July 1862.

The meeting was successful and on 26 July the *Gazette* reported that:

"We now find that other great improvements are in progress and in contemplation . . . We learn that it is intended from this point (The Queens' Terrace) to the eastern end of the Old Terrace to carry the sea wall further out on the beach, so as to allow a good and sufficient promenade and carriage drive . . . Taking this in conjunction with the project now on foot . . . the extension of the improvement westward . . . it would give a fine promenade of fully a mile and a half in length."

⁽¹⁾ *Ibid.*, 19 July 1862.

The paper pointed out that the Board of Health had not the power to authorise the construction and that the responsibility for it must rest with the property owners.

“The inhabitants and property owners must see that it will conduce to the prosperity of the place to make it as attractive as possible . . . To make Morecambe one of the finest watering-places in the North of England.”

By 9 August £300 had been raised by subscription to meet the railway company's demand for the completion of the promenade. On 16 August an obstruction, an old house on the beach near Queen Street, was demolished by Mr. Isaacs and others, “the first great step towards the foundation of the Albert Promenade.”⁽¹⁾ Thus assured of the Morecambrians' good intentions, on 13 September 1862 the Midland Railway informed the Board of Health of its willingness to commence its part of the sea wall.

At almost the same time there came the great attraction which had appeared on the south coast in the Napoleonic Wars and had continued during the summer in coastal resorts, proving so devastating to the fair sex—the arrival of the military. On 6 September 1862 the *Gazette* reported that surveys had been made for the erection of a new battery of four guns near the North Western Hotel:

“In a very short time, our neighbours at Morecambe, and the numerous visitors at that fashionable watering-place, will have the gratification of seeing a fine, soldier-like body of men among them and of enjoying the music of the excellent band belonging to the Corps . . . The Regiment (the Leeds Volunteer Artillery) will make a regular fortnightly visit to Morecambe.”

With its new promenade, enterprising inhabitants, progressive local Board, its excellent hotels, beautiful surroundings, and with this last more material attraction, Morecambe's future as a fashionable watering-place was assured.

⁽¹⁾ *Ibid.*, 23 August 1862.