

Chapter IX

The Ambleside Railway

In 1876, when Hardwicke was working in Bristol there was a proposal that the railway which terminated at Windermere, should be extended through Ambleside to Keswick. A public meeting of local people was held in Ambleside, when the advantages of such a scheme were highlighted by Colonel G. Rhodes, one of the promoters, who intended to make available some land above the town centre on which a railway station could be built.

It was pointed out that Bowness and Windermere flourished because of the railway, which was responsible for the growth of the tourist trade, resulting in prosperity. Ambleside was a busy place, being an agricultural centre and head of the Petty Sessional Division. Each week there were two agricultural markets, plus two annual cattle fairs and a large sheep fair. It was a centre for joinery work and some of the best joiners in the country worked there. In addition there was a large bobbin and spindle factory, with several slate quarries in the vicinity, three banks and two large hotels. Previously, cloth manufacture, tanning and trade in wool took place, but for the most part these had moved to Kendal because of transport difficulties.

Ambleside had perfect sanitary arrangements, it was claimed, with many desirable building sites in beautiful locations, which business men from Lancashire and Cheshire would be eager to buy, in order to build country homes away from the industrial enterprises, in which they were engaged. Without a railway such wealthy men would not come as they could not easily travel to and from their businesses.

Meanwhile, in 1883 Hardwicke had moved from Wray to Crosthwaite parish in Keswick. During his time at Wray he had successfully organized opposition to the proposed Braithwaite to Buttermere and Ennerdale railway schemes which resulted in the

formation of the Lake District Defence Society to fight any other potentially dangerous schemes which might arise, with damaging results to the beauty of the area. This new rail proposal was a vast, ambitious scheme, which would be difficult to carry out so that by 1884, the plan to go as far as Keswick was abandoned, but the proposed extension from Windermere to Ambleside was to go ahead. At public meetings local people were enthusiastically in favour of the scheme and the Ambleside Railway Bill¹ was deposited in Parliament in December 1886.

At that time Hardwicke was engaged in the Footpaths and Rights of Way disputes. Nevertheless he again leapt to the defence of the beauty of the Lake District, doing what he firmly believed was for the public good, with no thought of gain for himself, but with scant regard for the wishes of local people.

The plan for the line was that it should go from Windermere through the Troutbeck valley by a long viaduct which involved cutting through the grounds of many private properties, often very close to the houses. Naturally, the owners objected vigorously to such a scheme, as did the people of Windermere, who saw a threat to their expanding tourist trade, although they actually said the line would, " ... interfere with the water supply to a public watering trough."²

The complexity of the project is seen clearly in the beautifully drawn plans³ by Westminster Engineers, Sir Douglas Fox and Mr. G.H. Leane and the accompanying book of reference⁴, compiled by Nelson Barr and Nelson of Westminster and Leeds and John Baker, also of Westminster. A brief account of these indicates that in Applethwaite, eighty one properties and thirteen owners were involved; in Troutbeck thirty five properties and fourteen owners; in Ambleside, fifty two properties and nineteen owners. In addition approximately sixty occupiers and sixty one others would

¹Carlisle R.O. DSQ/24/1

²Windermere in the 19th Century, Ed. Oliver M. Westall, p57

³C.R.O. Kendal, WQ/R/DP/2

⁴As footnote 3

be affected in some way. The proposed new road at Troutbeck involved eight properties, while the widening and improving of the road at Ambleside would affect a further nineteen properties.

Therefore it is not surprising that there was tremendous opposition from landowners and tenants whose properties were going to be extensively damaged, resulting in the loss of both value and privacy. Vigorous opposition also came from Hardwicke, as the moving spirit and leader of the Lake District Defence Society. This resulted in an examination of the Ambleside Railway Bill before a Select Committee on Railway Bills in the House of Commons, which lasted from the 15 to 21 March 1887. The Committee consisted of the Right Hon. Sir Henry John Selwin-Ibbetson, Bart., as Chairman and the Hon. R.P. Bruce, Member for Fifeshire, West; Mr. A. Duncombe, Member for East Riding of Yorkshire, Howden; and Mr. C.H. Wilson, Member for Hull, West. The Promoters of the Bill were represented by Mr. Pember Q.C., Mr. Rigg and Mr. Faber. Mr. William was the Parliamentary agent. Their solicitors were Nelson Barr and Nelson of Westminster and Leeds, together with John Baker of Westminster.

Mr. Pember began by stating the reasons, already stated, which necessitated the proposed extension of the Kendal to Windermere railway line as far as Ambleside, adding also the needs of Rydal and Grasmere, both of which had building sites and quarries; Elterwater, which had a large gunpowder manufactory; the Langdales with slate and stone quarries; Skelwith Bridge and Hawkshead, which had bobbin making works. There was a station at Coniston which they could use, but it was highly inconvenient because of the nature of the narrow roads. A station at Ambleside would be much better. The heavy road traffic consisting of everything from " ... a coal cart down to a pony carriage,"¹ would be eased by the railway, as well as bringing a great deal of trade and tourists to Ambleside, the ancient centre of the Lake District, having Charters from Cromwell and James II.

¹p8 of the Verbatim Report of the Proceedings

He then outlined the costs of the project, first drawing attention to the modification of Section 2 of the Lands Clauses Act which stated that if you touched part of a piece of property, the whole had to be taken. This was not the case now, under the modification. The Capital of the Bill was £165,000 in shares and £55,000 (the usual amount of one third) by borrowing powers. The estimates for the line were £155,000 and for the roads (the widening and improving of the roadway at Troutbeck) were £10,000.

There were sixteen petitioners against the railway, all landowners whose properties were at considerable risk, plus the L.& N.W.R., owners of Windermere station. Before they were called to the hearing to be questioned by the Counsel for the Promoters, Mr. Pember Q.C., Mr. Rigg and Mr. Faber, Mr. Pember launched into a scathing attack against those seeking to prevent this railway extension scheme, mainly on the grounds of the destruction and injury it would cause to the beauty of the Lake District, by referring to them as, "amateur reformers", "societies and itinerant sentimentalists", and stating that they would be " ... excluded from giving evidence here, or at all events that no particular attention will be paid to them in this case."¹ No doubt a reference to Hardwicke and the Lake District Defence Society was meant. He continued by saying:-

"I do not think we want professors of landscape of this kind to come and tell us ex cathedra what will be the consequences of making this line, nor any fanciful declaration after the manner of Mr. Ruskin - especially his later manner - against the profanity of ordinary progress. After all, this is primarily the business surely of the people in the neighbourhood. It is their scheme. The promotion is eminently local and it exposes a need which has been long felt, and which is undoubted."²

¹p4 of the Verbatim Report of the Proceedings

²pp4-5 ibid

Later in the proceedings he refers to " ... the agitation ... even in the London Papers,"¹ meaning Hardwicke's letter writing propensity and of the Defence Association he said, "There is a society called the Lake Defence Society, which instead of being a 'defence' society is an 'offence' society to the whole district. They are always creating trouble."²

The main concerns of the hearing were Windermere station and the position of the L & N.W.R. as its owner; road traffic; the possibility of increased trade and prosperity for Ambleside and its environs; injury to the beauty of the Lake District and the private properties which were involved, plus the costs to be incurred in carrying out the project.

The first petition to be heard was from the L & N.W.R. Company concerning its station at Windermere, which at that time dealt with all the rail passenger and goods traffic for the area. The new line posed a threat to the station, especially as it involved the compulsory taking of some of its land. In replying to this, Mr. Pember pointed out that the station was under used and that it would be ridiculous to have two stations and dismissed the suggestion that the line was not necessary, saying that local people were greatly in favour of the project. Later in the hearing, when it became evident that the L & N.W.R. would not take on the running of the new line, discussions centred on how to overcome the problem of two stations, the taking of land for the new station and the possibility of back shunting, together with the extra cost involved.

Col. Dunlop,³ with Mr. Jeune as his counsel, was the first of the landowners to have his petition considered.⁴ He owned the Holehird estate, consisting of one thousand acres which Mr. Leane, one of the engineers, described as a very beautiful and valuable property. The proposed railway would cut right through the

¹p12 *ibid*

²p20 *ibid*

³Sometimes he is referred to as Mr and Captain Dunlop

⁴pp10-11 of the Hearing

property on an embankment fifty feet high, running four hundred yards from the residence, between the lodge and the house, as well as between the lake and the house. It would cut the carriage drive in two, which would cause considerable damage to the drainage and the bathing pool, in addition to the inconvenience of cutting off access to the house and distress to the horses. Mr. Pember said that the line would be mostly hidden in a cutting screened by trees. Eventually, much later, Col. Dunlop withdrew his opposition, although the reasons for doing so were not stated.

Lord Bradford's estate, St. Catherine's, in the parish of Applethwaite, within the ancient parish of Windermere, was the next to be considered. The railway would pass very close to the house. Estimates of the distance varied from ninety to twenty five yards. Mr. Pember tried to make out that it was a rather small, unimportant property and that Lord Bradford did not live there. His Counsel explained that the house had been for sale in 1857 and in the catalogue it was described as a "cottage orné". The house was not sold, but seventy acres of land were bought, leaving sixty acres. From then until 1881 Lord Bradford lived there all the time and intermittently afterwards. The engineer said that the line would interfere with a delightful summer house from which there was a beautiful view of the lake and suggested that the line should be routed around the back of the property, while the land agent said there should be substantial compensation. In addition to protesting about damage to his property, Lord Bradford said that he did not think the railway was necessary as there was already sufficient public transport. Mr. Pember pointed out that he had not taken into account the expansion of local trade and the increase in the number of visitors to the area. When it was put forward that the railway would damage the beauty of the scenery so that, " ... the better class of summer visitor",¹ would be deterred from coming, Mr. Pember exploded in a torrent of scathing remarks directed at the wealthy. "Do not make the Lakes common to everybody, if you do you will vulgarize them,"² he said. Earlier he had added, " ... this is what

¹p12 of the Hearing

²p12 *ibid*

an extremely noisy ... a somewhat effective but certainly very selfish band of objectors really object to",¹ pointing out that working class visitors had very little time or money and were not used to walking long distances, yet they wanted to see and enjoy as much of the Lake District as possible. Without the rail extension they were very limited and restricted. Since Hardwicke and the L.D.D.S. were campaigning for the protection of the beauty of the Lake District, his words were directed at their opposition.

James Wrigley, who owned the property known as Holbeck, which consisted of thirty acres, claimed that the railway would go through his land on a seventy foot high viaduct, one hundred and seventy yards from his house. This was disputed by Mr. Leane, the engineer, who said that the line would be much further away from the house and that the seventy feet figure had been arrived at by measuring from the bottom of the ravine. It was not a viaduct, but an embankment which would be well below the windows. The line would pass over six chains of his property and one rood eighteen perches of land would be taken. Mr. Holme, a surveyor and land agent denied that the house would be damaged.

Col. Joseph Withers of Briery Close, Troutbeck, followed with his claim that the line would cut right across his property, including the drive and run eighty five yards from his house. The engineer, Mr. Leane, said that two acres three roods of his land would be taken and that there would be a cutting twenty seven feet deep under the drive which would go over the cutting. The windows of Briery Close were thirty feet above the railway, therefore, he concluded, there would be no interference with the view.

Col. John Hutchinson, who owned the twenty two acre property known as Broad Oak, also at Troutbeck, petitioned against the taking of two roods of his land, right in front of the house, for the line and about an embankment and a two hundred and forty eight foot long viaduct. In reply to this, Mr. Leane said that trees would screen the former, which would be only ten foot long, while the

¹p5 *ibid*

viaduct would be of light lattice girder construction. Later discussion revealed that the rail line and the new section of road would seriously interfere, not only with the views, but also with the property itself, thereby lowering its value. In answer to this allegation, Mr. Holme, the land agent, said that Col. Hutchinson would receive fair compensation.

Mr. John Bore and Mr. William Lister were Benson's Trustees for the Dove Nest estate which consisted of three cottages which were usually let and fifty acres of land in a beautiful situation. It was proposed that the line would go across seventeen chains of the land and take two acres two roods and eight poles of land. The Trustees considered that this would destroy the value of the estate for building and residential purposes. Mr. Holme denied that much damage would be caused, as the railway would go round the back of the estate and only be seen on one side.

Miss Emma Wrigley who owned twenty acres and a house called Wansfell in Ambleside, said that the line would extend for eleven chains through her property and one acre two roods twenty nine perches would be taken from the wood. She claimed that this would interfere with her water rights, but Mr. Leane said they would ensure her water supply. He also said that she would not be able to see the line as it was a long way from the house, but later this was debated as not correct, as the line would be one hundred yards from the house, which would be overlooked. Mr. Holme dismissed this by saying that Miss Wrigley would not be affected, since the line was at the back on a hill.

A number of landowners had put forward a joint petition containing their grievances. Mr. Edward Gibson, the first of these, owned the Chapel Ridding Estate in Applethwaite. It was proposed to take three roods eight perches of his land and the line would go right through his garden within sixty yards of his house. When Mr. Leane had visited the property, Mr. Gibson had indicated a route at the back of the house which would be the least objectionable. The line would be in a cutting, on average fifty feet deep, cut through rocky land and would not interfere

with the view. In the debate which followed, it emerged that the house was for sale and if there was depreciation in the selling price, he would be adequately compensated.

Mr. Rigg owned part of Windermere Hotel and leased the rest from the L & N.W.R., but occupied the whole. It was described as an excellent railway hotel. The railway would go for eight chains through the garden in a covered tunnel about ten yards from the front of the hotel, underneath the coach houses, so that they would have to be rebuilt. He claimed that the depth of the covered way below the ground was slight, thereby causing danger and annoyance, as well as rendering the garden useless. It was said in refutation of these claims that guests would not be disturbed since there would not be any night trains, at least, at first, but it was pointed out that there would be goods trains. Sir C.D. Fox felt that the situation of the hotel would be improved by their rail plans, because they could improve the entrance to the hotel, which he felt was out on a limb, with regard to the town. Compensation would be paid for inconvenience caused during the work. Referring to the work under the coach houses, Mr. Pember hoped it would not cause earthquakes, such as the Mentone hotels had been suffering!¹

Henry, Frances Lucinda and Clara Elizabeth Webb jointly owned Cleeve How near Windermere. As the line would go through the property for three and a half chains and take twenty four poles of land, within thirty yards of the house it was felt that it would be destroyed for residential purposes and that it would be better to buy the estate. At that time the house had been empty for some time, being to let, without success.

It was proposed also to take two acres and sixteen poles of land belonging to the Brow Head estate in Appiethwaite, owned by Mrs. Turrill.² The house and grounds had recently been built and

¹Mentone on the shores of the Mediterranean, approximately 15 miles east of Nice in the Department of the Alpes Maritimes in S.E. France, had suffered an earthquake in 1877

²Later in the Hearing she is called Miss Turrell

laid out, but the line would go through the whole length of the ornamental pleasure grounds at the back, within thirty yards of the house. Mr. Leane thought these difficulties could be overcome by covering part of the line and making bridges over the small footpaths in that area. There would be no interference with her view at all. Later, it was agreed that the line would cut off the archery, tennis and croquet grounds, as well as the drying ground. The house, which was a very good one, was then put up for sale. It was stated that if its selling value was affected there would be compensation.

These were the main petitioners and from this brief account of their claims may be seen the complexity of the undertaking and the damage and distress it would cause if the Bill was passed.

The prime mover of the project seems to have been Col. Rhodes, who offered to provide land at Ambleside on which a railway station could be built. He was a substantial landowner and active in local affairs as a member of the local board. Since 1871 he had spent summer and autumn at his house, Rothay Holme, in Ambleside and the rest of the year at Westhaugh, near Pontefract in Yorkshire, where he was a magistrate for the West Riding. Under cross examination, it became apparent that he wanted to sell plots of land to gentlemen for the purpose of building houses, away from their businesses in Lancashire and elsewhere. Prospective buyers were deterred because there was no railway to Ambleside, which made commuting too difficult. All the suitable land around Windermere station had already been taken.

He admitted there were objectors to the scheme, whom he called "aesthetic people". "Those sort of people I think are in the moon so far as we are concerned. I think they have no standing in the matter."¹ This was a reference to the opposition activities of Hardwicke, the Lake District Defence Society and their supporters.

The questioning of the promoters and those in favour of the railway scheme continued in a thorough and detailed way. Some

¹p15 of the Hearing

of them were concerned with quarries and mines for slate, stone and copper. They wanted the railway because of the difficulties which they experienced in getting their products to Windermere. In dry weather, the narrow winding roads were very dusty and in bad weather they became so muddy that carts got stuck, while in snow and ice, movement became impossible. In addition, cartage was costly and good building stone, left over from slate production, was too heavy to move for sale. The slate was of very good quality, especially that from Elterwater and much in demand for use on important buildings, such as the Bradford and Manchester Town Halls, Marlborough House, St. Thomas' Hospital, the Natural History Museum and the Guildhall in London. Of the quarry owners, Arthur Jackson and Thomas Newton, in addition, were building contractors, while Isaac Williams, who managed the Hall Garth and Elterwater green slate quarries, in addition, managed the Green Barn copper mines. James Bell was the Chairman of the last named, owning about seven tenths of the Company. He actually opposed the Bill although he was in favour of the railway commercially, he was against it on sentimental grounds.

Another flourishing industry which suffered because of transport difficulties concerned bobbins. The father of Mr. Alfred Horax, one of the promoters, was the owner of the Stock Ghyll Bobbin Mill, while Mr. W. Atkinson Fell, another promoter, carried on business at Troutbeck Bridge as a manufacturer of agricultural and bobbin machinery. His father had a large bobbin making business. Bobbins were much in demand, being necessary for the expanding worsted, cotton and silk industries. For the bobbins, wood was needed from Sweden, Norway and Russia, as most local wood was not suitable. Bobbins were exported to Italy, India and many other countries. Transport was difficult and cartage added to the cost of the bobbins. This caused concern as there were three bobbin mills at Staveley, which was near to the Kendal and Windermere railway, resulting in the production of cheaper bobbins, putting other manufacturers at a disadvantage.

Two of the promoters were hoteliers. Mr. Joseph Cowperthwaite had a large hotel at Grasmere and Mr. Michael Taylor was the landlord of the two chief hotels in Ambleside - the owner of the Queen's Hotel and the lessee of the Salutation. The latter also owned a valuable shop and house at Windermere, where he carried on the largest provision business in the district. He also ran six four-in-hand coaches during the holiday season and two saloon omnibuses, which met every boat in and out of Waterhead to take passengers to and from Ambleside. Mr. Taylor was a member of the Lake District Association which was often at odds with the L.D.D.S.¹ of which Hardwicke was a leading member. The aims of the L.D.A.,² centred on the popularizing of the Lake District and making it accessible to all who wished to come, without impairing its beauty, but encouraging the prosperity of trade. He also owned one hundred and fifty acres at Ambleside and four hundred acres at Low Wood, in Troutbeck parish. Transport and cartage costs, again added to prices and discouraged visitors.

Farmers were amongst the promoters. James Cowper and James Overend farmed in the Hawkshead district; James Rigg and Moses Bowman at Wray. Their problems mostly arose in getting their produce and animals to markets and auctions, mostly in Kendal. Coniston station was not much use to them, because of the narrow winding roads leading to it. The ferry to Windermere was sometimes useful, but not so in stormy weather. It was also difficult to fix reliable times for the crossing if they were meaning to catch a train. Most animals had to be walked to the auctions,³ with resting places on the way for animals and men, which had to be paid for and the animals did not look at their best on arrival. If the auction was held on a Monday, it involved travelling on Sunday which was not very acceptable. The animals were often sold at a loss if the trade was bad, rather than undertake the arduous task of walking them home again. Further costs were incurred in getting feeding stuff for the animal and lime for the fields.

¹L.D.D.S. Lake District Defence Society

²L.D.A. Lake District Association

³This was usual in remote country districts until after World War II

James Rigg was a tenant farmer at Jock How, Wray. His landlord was Mr. Preston Rawnsley, a relative of Hardwicke with whom he agreed in opposing the Bill. Moses Bowman also farmed five hundred acres at Wray and also owned a shop and house in Ambleside, where he had a photographic business. He thought the scenery in that area very tame. Another supporter of the Bill who did not rate the Lake scenery of much importance was William Heysham Overend, who lived at Haverstock Hill at Hawkshead and worked as an artist, mostly for the *London Illustrated News*. He said that the Lake District was unpaintable, not that he painted landscapes.

At that time there was a large trade in wool. Kendal was the centre of this business together with leather. Carpets and boots were made with these products, which came from sheep and cattle in the region. The two chief business men connected with wool and leather were William Bindloss, the Mayor of Kendal at that time; and John Edward Hargreave, who was the sole partner in Whitwell, Hargreave and Co., wool brokers and merchants, also a magistrate for Westmorland. They supported the proposed rail extension since they felt their trade would increase if transport was easier and cheaper. Hargreave would not have supported the Bill if he thought the scenery would be damaged.

William Watson Cowperthwaite was the grocer and provision merchant in Grasmere, where he had lived all his life. It was an extensive and efficient business, in spite of the difficulties he experienced both in getting his stock and in dispatching it to his customers, because of transport difficulties. Not that he wanted the railway to extend to Grasmere, as he thought that would be too expensive. He would be satisfied with the line ending at Ambleside. Commercial travellers never visited Grasmere, but came as far as Ambleside. This would be a great help in ordering goods.

Another, whose business suffered from transport problems was George Henry Perks who lived at Elterwater Hall and managed the

Elterwater Gunpowder Company. It was nine miles to Windermere station, by way of very poor roads. They had even tried to improve the roads to Coniston station, spending a considerable amount in the process, but it had not proved successful. Urgent orders received by telegram were difficult to execute quickly and business was lost to competitors, who operated in more accessible places. He did not think the scenery would suffer if the railway was extended.

William Barton had lived in Ambleside for thirty nine years and was an agent for the Bank of Westmorland, as well as surveyor for the Ambleside highway. He was questioned closely about the local roads, especially about the chief users and the heaviness of the traffic. The proposed line would go through about a quarter of a mile of his own land at Strawberry Bank. He did not think the scenery would be damaged, in fact he would not support the scheme if it did. Rather, he thought the proposed line would bring more people to enjoy the scenery.

Two promoters who seemed reluctant to reveal their identity, by evading questions, were eventually revealed as Joseph Mitchell and Joseph Fleming Green. The former was a shareholder of the Mitchell Main Coal Colliery Co. and was connected with the Naylor Brothers, who were contractors for building railways. None of them had any connection with the Lake District. In spite of Col. Rhodes pretending that he did not know him, Joseph Fleming Green was discovered to be the second promoter of the Bill, who lived at Grasmere.

Others connected with Col. Rhodes in the proposed railway project were two land agents, John Holme of Owlet Ash, Milnthorpe and John Fleming of Ambleside who was the agent for Col. Rhodes.

As a man involved in official work, George Fothergill, who lived at Allan Bank, Grasmere (later the home of Hardwicke when he retired), thought it would be very convenient to have the railway brought to Ambleside. He did not want it to come to Grasmere or too near his property. His posts included being Chairman of the

Grasmere local board, which was very much in favour of the scheme; magistrate for Westmorland and Chairman of the Petty Sessional Division of Ambleside. In this work he found there was difficulty in moving prisoners to the gaol which was in Kendal and also in getting himself to all the various meetings connected with his official duties.

The Rt. Hon. George Augustus Frederick Cavendish Bentinck was the M.P. for Whitehaven. His constituents were in favour of the Bill. He thought the scenery would not suffer, but he said others thought differently. It was just a matter of opinion.

The Hearing revealed that there was a need for better transport facilities in the district for inhabitants and visitors and although the majority of the promoters insisted that the beauty of the scenery would not be injured in the building of the proposed line, it also became equally clear that much damage would be done to some beautiful estates, for which no amount of money would adequately compensate for the distress and inconvenience to the owners.

During the intense questioning it also became apparent that the line would be very expensive to build and run, while little real thought had been given to the problem of how the money could be raised and as to whether the line would be able to run at a profit when it was built. It was also discovered during the Hearing, that the L & N.W.R., contrary to popular expectation, was not interested in running the line.

Although Hardwicke and the L.D.D.S. had campaigned vigorously against the scheme, the Bill was rejected, not because of their efforts, but on the grounds of insufficient and satisfactory proof that enough money could be raised to fund the project, or that the line, if built, would run profitably.