

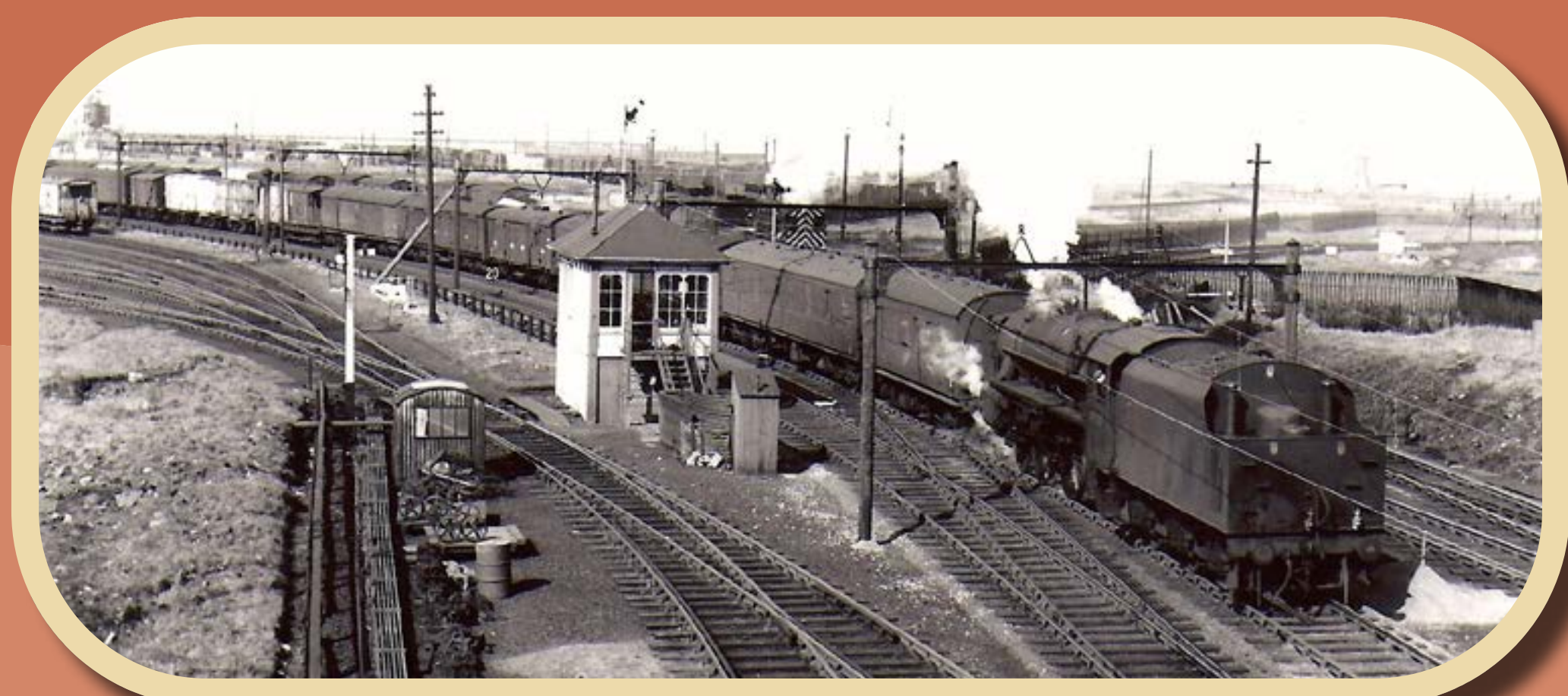
# NORTH LANCASHIRE'S HISTORICAL COMMUNITY STATIONS

## HEYSHAM PORT

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF HEYSHAM PORT STATION



An early atmospheric picture of Heysham Port station shows a busy platform as a steam hauled service arrives.



A 'Black Five' shunts an assorted collection of vans at Heysham Port station in the mid 1960s. Photograph courtesy of Noel Machell



Heysham Port station in the early 1980s prior to the station canopies being removed. Photograph courtesy of Brian Haworth



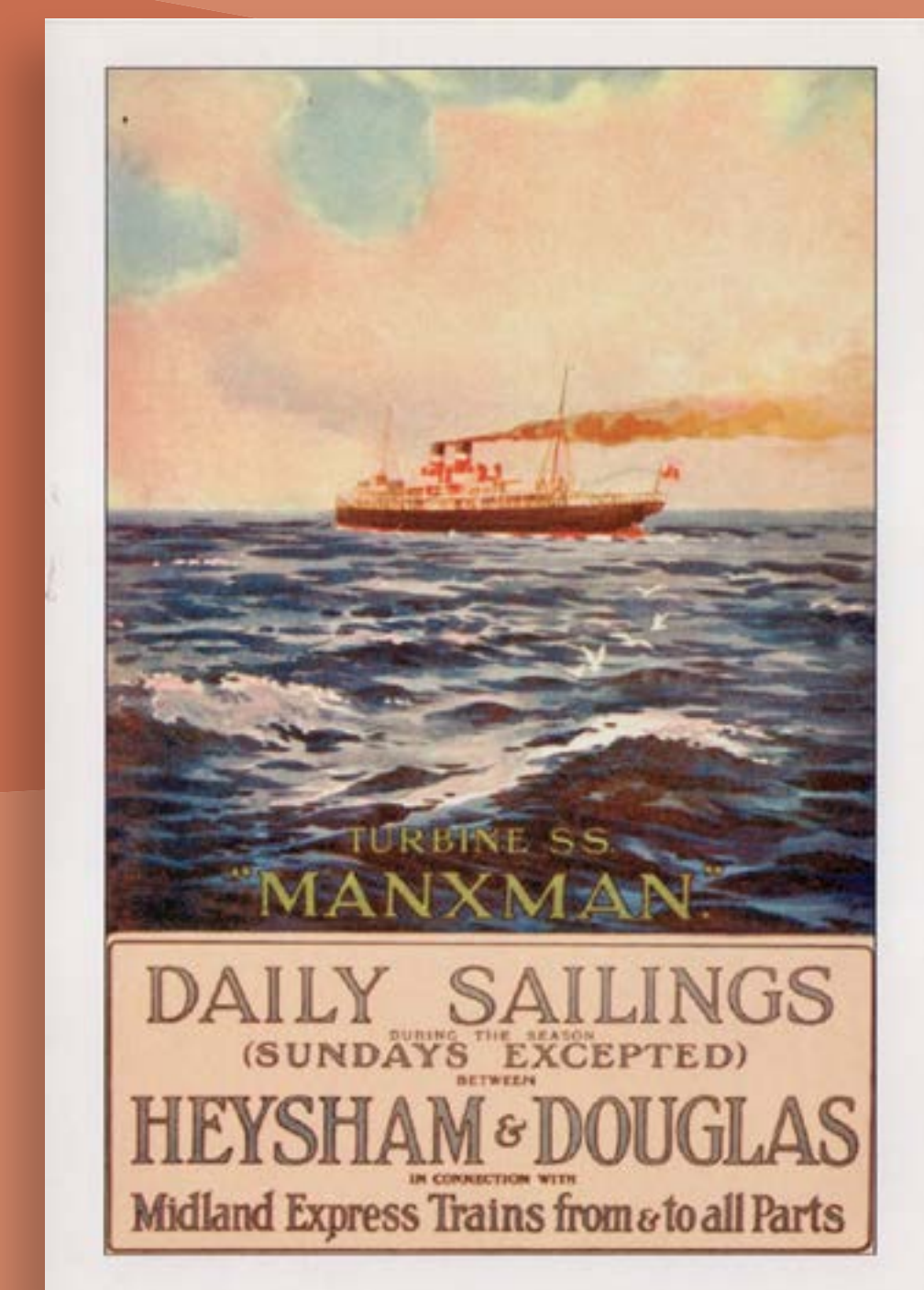
Class 156 No.421 arrives at Heysham with the 'Boat Train' service which connects with the ferry sailing to the Isle of Man. Photograph courtesy of Brian Haworth

When the 'Little' North Western Railway, (later incorporated in the Midland Railway), opened its station in Morecambe in 1848 it gave them the opportunity to run steamer services to Piel Pier in Barrow-in-Furness and to Belfast. Unfortunately, the shifting sands and strong currents of Morecambe Bay gave problems, in particular the channel used by the steamers was constantly silting up. To overcome this problem the Midland Railway's engineers searched for a site for a new harbour and eventually came up with Heysham.

In 1892 the Midland obtained powers to construct the Heysham branch with a station built on the south quay of the harbour and a station at Middleton Road. Messers Godfrey and Liddell were the contractors for the branch and Messers Price and Wills were engaged for the harbour construction. Work commenced and by 1898 there were around 2,000 men employed on site. The harbour was formed by building two sea retaining walls out from the headland of Half Moon Bay. The walls arced round and came together just short of deep water where a narrow harbour entrance was formed. Alongside this section another enclosed triangular-shaped dock was constructed which was accessed by a lock from the south side of the harbour basin close to the harbour entrance. The harbour was officially opened by the Midland Railway in 1904.

The local service between Morecambe and Heysham commenced on 11th June 1904 with two steam rail cars provided to run the service. This service was electrified in 1908 with the first electric services running on the 13th April. Unusually, the line used a 25-cycle, 6600 volt AC overhead catenary system instead of the third-rail operation which was then in common use. This route system would later prove useful to British Railways. They converted the line to 50-cycle operation in 1955/56 and used it to trial new ideas which eventually lead to the electrification of the West Coast Main Line.

Three ships were introduced on the Irish service named *Antrim*, *Donegal* and *Londonderry*. *Antrim* worked the first sailing on 1st September 1904. Each evening a boat train departed London St. Pancras at 5:00pm to connect with the 11:00pm sailing from Heysham to Belfast. By 1905 a boat service to Douglas had been introduced, as well as an express boat train which departed St Pancras at 08:30am to connect with the sailing. In 1928 the London Midland and Scottish Railway closed its Fleetwood to Belfast ferry route diverting both the London and Manchester boat trains to Heysham. Three new ships were provided for the Belfast route at this time, the *Duke of Rothesay*, the *Duke of Lancaster* and the *Duke of Argyll*.



The Heysham branch was singled during the First World War but the second track was reinstated after the war. Singling would occur again in more recent times.

Whilst not well known as a holiday destination, it is interesting that in 1934 Heysham had 3 holiday coaches located in the old mineral sidings. However, by 1939 this number had risen to 36, the highest concentration for any LMS location.

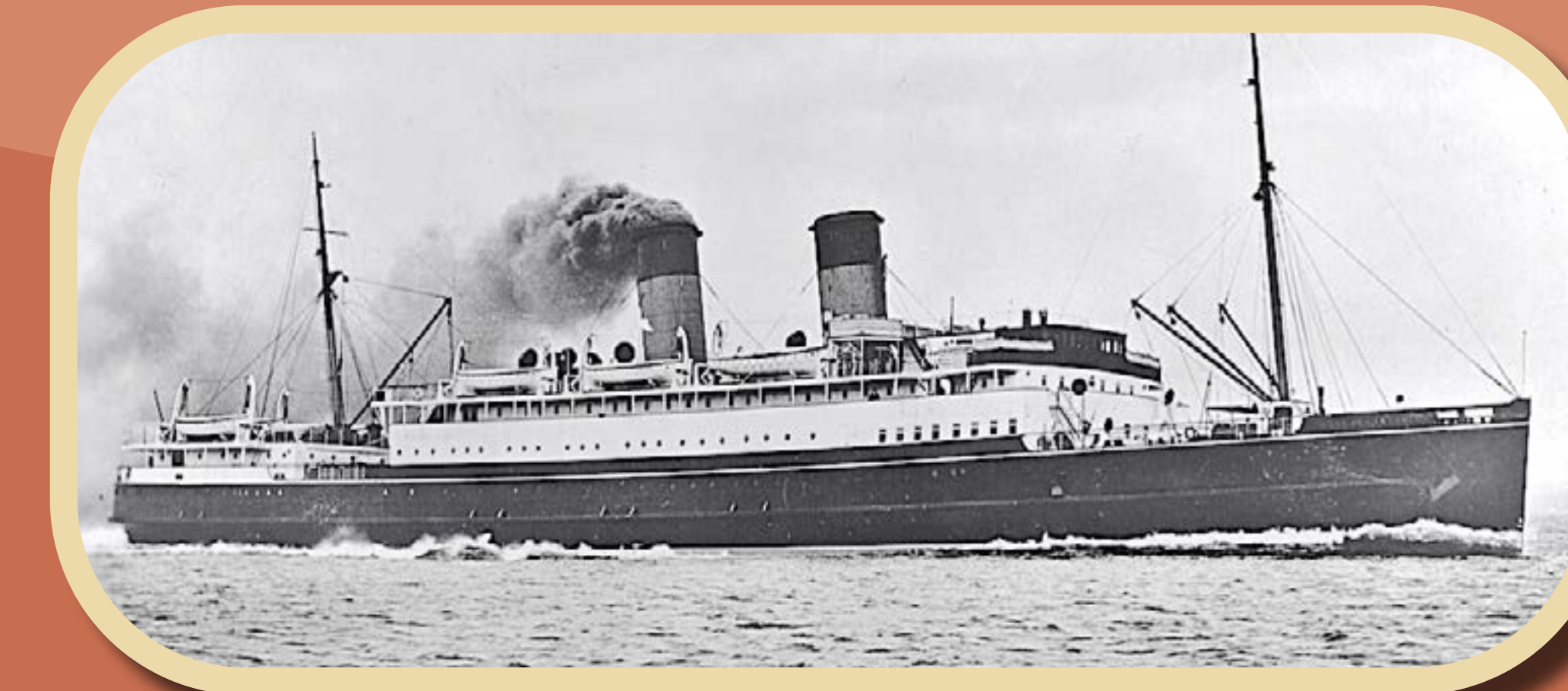
In 1958 a container service was introduced by British Railways between Heysham and Belfast and two specialised ships were provided for this traffic. In the early 1960s tourist traffic to Ireland increased and many passengers wanted to be able to take their car on board. As a result the *Duke of Rothesay* was converted to a car ferry during 1966 for use on the Fishguard to Rosslare route. The remaining two Dukes on the Heysham service were similarly converted during 1969/70. A new road link and loading span were constructed for this traffic and the railway station was relocated, the old wooden Midland Railway buildings demolished and a new station built a short distance east of its original position. The new station with three platforms opened on 4th May 1970. At this time a new Heysham to Dun Laoghaire car ferry service was introduced. By 1974 the Heysham/Belfast service was struggling to attract passengers, the troubles in Ireland had discouraged passengers and freight traffic had also declined. British Railways proposed closure of the service and consent was given. The last sailings took place on the night of 5/6 April 1975 and the connecting branch line was closed to passengers on 6th October 1975. Roll-on-roll-off freight traffic to Belfast continued but this was withdrawn in December 1980.

From 25th May 1970, because of extensive fire damage to the Britannia tubular bridge over Menai Strait in North Wales, the Irish Mail rail and ferry service between London and Dun Laoghaire was diverted to run via Heysham. This arrangement that was destined to run for the next twenty months whilst the damaged bridge was repaired. The last Irish Mail ran via Heysham on 30th January 1972.

On 30th March 1989 Sea Containers Ltd. introduced a service from Heysham to Belfast and a rail service from Lancaster was reintroduced to connect with the sailings on 29th May 2000. Unfortunately, this ferry service was withdrawn in August 2002.

In the 1990s the Heysham branch was again singled, as part of BR's reorganisation of Morecambe which saw Morecambe's Promenade station closed and a new much smaller station built further inland. Heysham Moss signal box was taken out of use and the entire single line branch reduced to being controlled by a token issued to the driver from Bare Lane signal box.

The harbour still sees a daily ferry service to the Isle of Man with which the one rail service per day connects. The site of the massive goods yard at the port now serves as a muster point for container traffic which arrives by road. In recent times, the closure of Bare Lane signal box has seen the branch controlled by Preston Power Signal Box, and the train drivers now telephone to receive permission to operate on the branch. The only freight services using the branch line are the nuclear waste trains, which run as required.



The TSS Duke of Lancaster was ordered by the LMS for their Heysham to Belfast ferry service in 1928 and worked the route until 1956 when it was replaced by a ship of the same name.



The replacement Duke of Lancaster was built for British Railways in 1956 by Harland and Wolff. In 1967 the ship was converted to a stern-loading car ferry. Interestingly this ship still survives as a rusting hulk beached close to Mostyn docks on the River Dee.



The fifth Ben-my-Chree constructed by Cammell Laird was launched in December 1965 and made its maiden voyage in May 1966. In 1978 the ship was fitted with an organ type whistle from scrapped vessel Tynwald.



The latest MS Ben-my-Chree, built in Rotterdam for the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company, is a Ro-Pax vessel which entered service in 1998. It is the sixth vessel to carry this name.

