



The Settle and Carlisle Railway Trust

Caring for Historic Railway Buildings along the Line

Ribblehead Station Building - Details of the Restoration

The Decline and Fall

Ribblehead, along with all the other stations on the line (except Appleby and Settle), became an unstaffed halt from the 2nd January 1967. A little over three years later the station was closed, on 4th May 1970, with the withdrawal of the local trains from Skipton to Carlisle. Like many others, the building was subsequently used as office and messroom accommodation for Permanent Way staff.

The Dales Rail services, which started as a limited summer weekend service in 1974, marked a turning point in the line's fortunes. This was reinforced when permanent reopening to scheduled passenger trains came about from Monday 14th July 1986.

However, the line was still under the threat of closure and in the meantime the station building at Ribblehead fell into almost complete disuse. Only the waiting 'shed' remained open to protect prospective passengers from the elements. Steadily the building became derelict, the final indignity being the theft of part of the roof, leaving much of the fabric of the building exposed to the elements.

Not surprisingly, few original external features survived. Bargeboards, ridge tiles and guttering had been replaced over the years with inappropriate designs and materials, as had some of the windows and doors.

Although the interior of the building was in a very poor state, some original fittings had survived. Most of the fitted wooden bench seating in the Booking Hall existed, as did the fitted cupboards in the Booking Office. The internal doors to the Ladies' Waiting Room, Booking Hall and Booking Office were all in good condition and were retained.

Railtrack Takes Over

With the formation of Railtrack in 1994 came a programme of 'Backlog Maintenance', which included the restoration and repair of station buildings that had been neglected over the years. Ribblehead was included in this scheme and work was undertaken in 1998. However, with the Trust's plans for the building in the pipeline, the work was restricted to renewing the roof in order to make the building weather proof.

Other work under this scheme included raising and resurfacing the platforms and installing lighting.



The Trust's Project

Since its formation in 1990, the Trust had been involved indirectly in various schemes, such as the repairs to Ribbleshead viaduct and the new Down side platform at Ribbleshead station. But the Trust was keen to take on a project of its own and the perilous state of Ribbleshead station building provided the opportunity to fulfil this goal.

Plans for a scheme to convert the building to a Visitor Centre and caretakers' flat were drawn up in early 1994, but it wasn't until 1999 that a long term lease agreement was struck with Railtrack and the Train Operating Company. This tripartite lease of 125 years was completed in September of that year.

With a full maintenance, repair and renewal obligation, the building effectively came under the ownership of the Trust. The lease also included the land to the rear of the building, used as a car park.

Despite its poor condition the structure of the building remained sound, but, apart from the new roof, it was little more than a shell.

In the meantime plans had been drawn up for submission to the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority to obtain Planning Permission for the structural work and change of use.

The former Booking Office and Hall would become the main Visitor Centre housing displays and artefacts depicting the history of the line in the context of the environs of Ribbleshead. The old Porters' room would become the shop selling books, souvenirs and soft drinks.

The former Ladies' Waiting Room would become the main living/dining room for the flat, with a new door opening into the former toilet block which would become the kitchen and storeroom.

In order to create space for a bedroom and bathroom it was necessary to rebuild the ceiling at a lower level to create the headroom in the roof void. In this regard a puzzling feature unique to Ribbleshead worked to the scheme's advantage.

All the other Type 3 Small pattern buildings on the line have the classic 'Midland Gothic' arched lintels above the main gable windows. This feature would have presented a similar problem encountered at Kirkby Stephen as the lowered ceiling would conflict with the line of the arch and cause a visual clash. For reasons that have yet to be satisfactorily explained the left-hand gable window at Ribbleshead possesses a flat lintel, which neatly solved the problem.

These plans in more detail included:-

- creation of a new first floor in the roof void above the Ladies' Waiting Room to accommodate additional space for the caretakers' flat bedroom and bathroom;
- a new staircase access to the first floor;
- new electricity and water supplies, the latter coming from an existing borehole serving the former Stationmaster's House;
- new drainage and telecoms connections;
- installation of power sockets, light fittings, heating and telephone points, with all the attendant wiring;
- installation of damp-proof membranes under the stone and concrete floors in the Ladies' Waiting Room, Booking Hall and Waiting Shed;
- creation of a toilet facility for visitors;
- creating and fitting out a new bathroom facility for the flat;
- creating and fitting out a new kitchen for the flat within the former toilet block;
- relining the chimney flue in the Ladies' Waiting Room and installing a multi-fuel stove;
- internal redecoration throughout and fitted carpets in the flat;
- improved passenger waiting accommodation with lighting and replica MR pattern 'rustic' seats;
- replacement ornate bargeboards to an original pattern;
- replica ridge tiles and ornate cast iron rainwater hoppers;
- new windows and doors to original MR design;
- full external repaint in the maroon, cream and black scheme adopted for the S&C line.

The seating and fitted cupboards referred to earlier were retained and refurbished. A section of the fitted seating that had been removed was rebuilt and the cupboards received new doors and drawers to replace those missing or damaged beyond repair.

New cupboards to a similar style were fitted in the shop area.

All the new windows were hand built to the original pattern, but the existing main arched window in the Booking Hall was good enough to repair and was therefore retained.



Work Begins

Full Planning Consent for the restoration and reuse of the building was granted in 1997 by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority.

A detailed specification was drawn up with the accompanying working drawings. Once the statutory Building Regulations and Railtrack approvals had been obtained, the work was put out to competitive tender and the contract was awarded to R.A.Wheeler, of Middleham. Work commenced on site on Monday 27th September 1999.

After the initial works to set up the site, the first task was to tackle the structural work such as removing the ceiling in the Ladies' Waiting Room and putting in a new lower floor and staircase. New door openings and some internal demolition work was also required.

Given that the work started in the autumn and hence headed into the winter, the weather, especially by Ribblehead standards, was generally kind and not too much time was lost as a result. However, the author does recall one particularly uncomfortable site meeting huddled in the contractor's tin hut in sub-zero temperatures and a howling gale - echoes of the conditions the pioneers who surveyed and built the line had to endure!

As with all old building restoration jobs there are always hidden surprises. When the ground beneath one of the contractor's vehicles began to subside, the old brick-lined septic tank, long since abandoned, was discovered. Fortunately the vehicle was rescued without any damage and the void was filled.

Work was finally completed in March 2000.