

STEAM ON THE LICKEY INCLINE

Steam locomotives at work on the Lickey Incline in the summer of 1959

The Bristol–Birmingham line of the former Midland Railway climbs from Bromsgrove on a gradient of 1 in 37¾ for slightly over two miles to the summit of the Lickey Incline at Blackwell Station.

Northbound trains, travelling towards Birmingham and needing banking assistance, stopped short of the bottom of the incline in the yard to the south of Bromsgrove Station. Here in the busy South Yard, flanked on one side by the buildings of Bromsgrove Works, one or more banking engines came on to the rear of the trains to assist them on the climb from Bromsgrove to Blackwell.

From Bromsgrove Station, at the bottom of the incline, the line climbs away under a road bridge. Then, after crossing another two road bridges and passing through some woods, it runs on a low embankment through open fields. About a quarter of a mile below Blackwell Station the line crosses a bridge over a minor road and then enters a cutting, which leads up towards the summit of the incline at Blackwell Station.

The recordings of trains on the incline were made from positions beside the embankment, a short distance down the incline from the point where, about a quarter of a mile from Blackwell Station, the line crosses the minor road bridge before entering the cutting which leads up towards the summit.

The recordings of trains leaving Bromsgrove South Yard were made in August 1959 and the recordings of trains on the incline near Blackwell were made in June 1959.

SIDE ONE

Band One

A Stanier 'Black Five' 4-6-0, No. 44662, heads a Sheffield-bound passenger train into the South Yard at Bromsgrove and groans to a stop. A single '9400' class 0-6-0 Pannier Tank engine comes on to the rear of the train to give banking assistance. No. 44662 whistles and the banking engine whistles almost simultaneously in response. The train starts slowly out of the yard, then, as the banking engine goes past, rapidly accelerates through the station at the bottom of the incline. As the train climbs away under the road bridge the sounds of shunting and hissing steam in the yard almost obscure the sounds of the two engines as they climb on, up the incline, towards Blackwell.

The heavily loaded 'Devonian' Express, double-headed by a 'Black Five' 4-6-0, No. 44981, piloting a 'Jubilee' 4-6-0, No. 45685 *Barfleur*, stops in Bromsgrove South Yard. The hissing of steam from the two engines at the head of the train almost drowns the distant whistling of one of the three banking engines, which are now at the rear of the train. There is another, more urgent, series of whistles from one of the banking engines, but the crews of the pilot and train engine dispense with the customary answering whistles and the driver of the 'Jubilee', having heard the banker's whistles, tells the driver of the pilot engine to "go on, he's called up".

The two engines start the train and the banking engines, three '9400' class 0-6-0 PTs, Nos 8406, 8405 and 8400, come past, roaring away through the station and raising echoes all around the yard where, as the 'Devonian' climbs away with the wind, shunting continues.

Band Two

'Jubilee' class 4-6-0 No. 45577 *Bengal* heads up the incline from Bromsgrove with a Bristol–Newcastle express banked by two '9400' class 0-6-0 PTs, Nos 8406 and 8402.

Traffic passing under the nearby bridge is occasionally heard in the background as the train approaches climbing steadily through the woods and out into the open with the three-cylinder exhaust beat of the 'Jubilee' contrasting with the, sometimes heard, exhaust beats of the banking engines.

The 'Jubilee' heads the train past and on into the cutting while, at the rear of the train, the two bankers push powerfully past with their exhausts beating out of step and echoing back from the cutting and from nearby trees as they climb away, finally disappearing over the summit as the sounds of a passing car and a distant factory are heard in the background.

Band Three

In the late afternoon sunshine two boys stand on the gate of a farm crossing watching the columns of smoke billowing out over distant Bromsgrove Station as a goods train starts climbing the incline.

As the train approaches, the exhaust beats of the banking engine can sometimes be heard against the stronger beat of the train engine.

A '9400' class banking engine ambles past, running light bunker first, down the gradient towards Bromsgrove and a motorcycle putters under the nearby road bridge and away up the hill on the other side of the line. '4F' class 0-6-0 No. 44290 heads the train past with a single '9400' class 0-6-0 PT slogging away at the rear and the steadily labouring beats of both engines are heard as they climb away through the cutting towards Blackwell.

SIDE TWO

Band One

A Sheffield-bound express, headed by a Standard 'Class 5' 4-6-0 No. 73068, stands in the South Yard at Bromsgrove where two banking engines, ex-LMS 'Jinty' 0-6-0T No. 47308 and '9400' class 0-6-0 PT No. 8406, have moved up to the rear of the train. One of the banking engines whistles and No. 73068, after giving answering whistles, makes a rather leisurely start, clanking past and away through the station, gradually gathering speed as the bankers push past, out of the yard and away under the road bridge, to climb on up the incline as signal box bells are faintly heard in the background.

Band Two

A local passenger train, watched by the two boys on the gate, comes bashing up the incline from Bromsgrove. Standard 'Class 5' 4-6-0 No. 73158 heads the train, with a single '9400' class 0-6-0 PT giving banking assistance at the rear. After the train has passed, the rapid beats of the banking engine's exhaust echo back from the cutting, at the far end of which the train slows to a stop at Blackwell Station.

Band Three

A morning goods train, headed by a 'Crab' 2-6-0 No. 42900, plods steadily up the incline from Bromsgrove banked by two '9400' class 0-6-0 PTs, Nos 8403 and 8400. A cock pheasant calls from the lineside cornfields as the train heads up towards the woods where the sounds of the train engine and the faintly heard banking engine are sometimes masked by the trees and sometimes echo back from them.

The whistles of another train, which is about to leave Bromsgrove, can just be heard in the distance while, on the nearby road, a car passes under the bridge and goes away up the hill on the far side of the line.

No. 42900, hissing steam, heads slowly past while, at the rear, the exhausts of the two banking engines beat more and more wildly out of step as the train climbs away, through the cutting, towards Blackwell. In the distance the second goods train, which is now climbing up from Bromsgrove, is slowed by intermediate signals until the preceding train has passed Blackwell.

A local passenger train, headed by a '2P' class 4-4-0, is now approaching from Blackwell and, with the engine's coupling rods ringing characteristically, the train rolls past, heading cautiously away down the incline, towards the second goods train which, having slowed almost to a standstill, now starts to move again while a lorry drones past under the nearby bridge and away up the hill.

Class '9F' 2-10-0 No. 92137, at the head of the second goods train, gradually accelerates and, assisted by a single '9400' class 0-6-0 PT at the rear, brings the train past and away through the cutting towards Blackwell and the summit of the Lickey Incline.