

WEST OF EXETER

Recordings made between Exeter and Plymouth on the main line of the former Great Western Railway.

SIDE ONE

Between Newton Abbot and Totnes the main Exeter–Plymouth line of the former Great Western Railway passes through Dainton Tunnel, the summit of a sharp climb from either direction.

Approaching from Newton Abbot the line climbs for some two miles from a point near Aller Junction, past Stoneycombe on curving gradients of 1 in 56, 1 in 41, 1 in 49, reaching the steepest part of the climb, a gradient of 1 in 36, on a curve approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from the tunnel, the approach to which is on a gradient of 1 in 49.

These recordings were made during July 1957 on the lineside approaches to Dainton Tunnel at the Newton Abbot end. Here the line curves through high wooded banks, near Stoneycombe, then comes out into the open on an embankment with a bridge which crosses a small farm road, finally entering a short, steep-sided rock cutting at the tunnel mouth.

Band One

In the woods near Stoneycombe. A 'Hall' class 4-6-0 No. 6977 *Grundisburgh Hall* rounds a curve and climbs towards the tunnel with a stopping train for Plymouth as No. 6940 *Didlington Hall* heads a goods train down the grade towards Aller Junction.

A 'King' class 4-6-0 No. 6026 *King John* storms out of the woods and on towards the tunnel with the Paddington–Penzance 'Royal Duchy' express.

In the fields alongside the embankment cattle are being led away for a late milking as a Swansea–Plymouth train approaches from Stoneycombe. An up train, bound for Manchester and Glasgow, comes out of the tunnel, headed by No. 6996 *Blackwell Hall* as pilot to No. 5064 *Bishop's Castle*, and quickly gathers speed down the gradient as No. 6988 *Swithland Hall* tackles the last part of the climb, into the rock cutting and the tunnel, with the train for Plymouth. The sound of the signal arm is heard after the train has passed.

Band Two

On a squally evening after frequent heavy rain showers. A goods train has been in difficulties near Stoneycombe, slipping almost to a standstill on the wet rails.

The whistle of the train engine is heard in the distance and, with the assistance of a banking engine, the heavy train moves slowly round the curves through the woods. The driving rain has given way to a soaking drizzle and water drips from trees and bushes above the tunnel mouth, occasionally plopping on and around the microphones as the two engines plod on out of the woods.

The exhausts of both engines, No. 7905 *Fowey Hall* heading the train and 5100 class 2-6-2T No. 4178 banking in the rear, are heard mingling at times with echoes thrown back from the woods and hills.

Fowey Hall briefly loses adhesion on the approach to the cutting, then recovers, only to slip again on the greasy rails inside the tunnel. An up passenger train leaves the tunnel as, with the goods train now safely to the summit, the 2-6-2T banker comes into the cutting, shuts off and stops at the tunnel entrance to wait for a calling on signal, given by a lineside bell operation from Dainton Signal

Box. The bell rings, though its sound is masked by the hissing of steam in the narrow cutting. No. 4178 gives a short whistle and enters Dainton Tunnel, at the other end of which the engine will wait in the siding alongside the signal box.

Band Three

A 'Castle' class 4-6-0 No. 5005 *Manorbier Castle* makes slow but certain progress towards the cutting and on into the tunnel with a heavy Liverpool–Plymouth through train.

Finally No. 5339, a 4300 class 2-6-0, heads towards the tunnel with a Plymouth-bound goods train as a farm tractor whirrs away in the distance.

SIDE TWO

Band One

At Tigley Signal Box, on the main line between Totnes and Brent. Tigley Box is near the middle of the four-mile climb from Totnes to Rattery and there is a rising gradient of 1 in 52 on the approach from Totnes, easing to 1 in 74 and 1 in 90 beyond the box towards Rattery.

This recording was made on a morning in July 1957 with a strong westerly wind swaying the trees around the signal box and deadening the sound of trains from the direction of Totnes.

Tigley Box has already accepted an up train from Rattery and a down train from Totnes. The Tigley signalman now sends one bell signal to Rattery to call attention. Rattery acknowledges this by ringing one bell back and Tigley then sends four to Rattery, meaning "is the line clear for down express passenger train?" Rattery acknowledges that the line is clear by repeating back four. Then follows this by sending two, indicating that the up train, already accepted by Tigley, is entering the Tigley section.

Signal levers are set and the up train, bound for Goodrington, is heard coming down the gradient from Rattery and passing the box.

Tigley then sends two pause one back to Rattery indicating that the up train has passed Tigley Box. This code does not have to be repeated back by the recipient.

The down overnight train from Glasgow and Manchester to Penzance then comes up the gradient past Tigley Box, headed by 4083 *Abbotsbury Castle* and 'County' class 4-6-0 No. 1002 *County of Berks*.

As this train climbs away towards Rattery and the summit, Totnes rings to call attention. Having first re-set the signals the Tigley signalman acknowledges the call attention and Totnes then sends one pause four, asking Tigley "is the line clear for down express goods train?" By repeating this code back to Totnes, Tigley indicates that the down line is now clear.

Band Two

Inside the West Signal Box at Exeter St David's on a Saturday in mid-August 1958. Apart from the signalman an inspector is also on duty at this peak traffic period.

There is a distant whistle as an express from London approaches St David's. With a further warning whistle the train comes through the station and passes the box, heading for St Thomas and the west.

Points and signals are re-set and codes exchanged with the adjacent signal boxes. In the station a 'County' class 4-6-0 No. 1021 *County of Montgomery* is waiting to follow the express with another train for the west. Given the 'right away' from the platform, No. 1021 pulls forward to the signal,

stops there and whistles 'for the road'. After a brief wait the signal is pulled 'off' and No. 1021 re-starts, moving away past the box and on towards the west as points and signals are re-set.

The various codes heard in this busy box are so numerous and complex that any attempt at a complete explanation would be extremely lengthy and difficult to follow.

Band Three

At Exeter St David's station on a summer Saturday.

No. 5028 *Lantilio Castle* whistles on approach and, with a further cautionary whistle, brings a westbound relief to the 'Cornish Riviera' express through the station.

A London-bound train is being checked by carriage examiners are No. 7915 *Mere Hall* with a train for Penzance is slowed by signals outside the station. Then, given a clear road, No. 7915 accelerates rapidly away towards the West Box.

Two banking engines, running light, come down the Southern Region tracks from Exeter Central which diverge from the Western Region line near the West Signal Box. At the head of a Southern train, a Bulleid 'West Country' class 4-6-2 No. 34104 *Bere Alston* answers the distant banking engine's whistles and starts away with the train for Waterloo. Banked up the 1 in 37 gradient by EI/R class 0-6-2T No. 32135 the train curves away towards the short tunnel and the SR station Exeter Central.

A 'Grange' class 4-6-0 No. 6834 *Dummer Grange* leaves the station with a train for the west. Then there is a whistle from a Southern engine as No. 6823 *Oakley Grange*, coming up from Plymouth, is slowed almost to a standstill by signals near the West Box. The signals clear and the 'Grange' takes the Manchester-bound train on towards the station.

No. 6017 *King Edward IV* brings the down 'Cornish Riviera' express past the West Box as No. 6995 *Benthall Hall* waits in the station and then starts out with a train for Kingswear.

Finally a 5700 class 0-6-2PT No. 3677 approaches the West Box, whistles after clearing the points, reverses and, accompanied by a cheerful song from the driver, runs back towards the station.

With the exception of the opening recordings of No. 5028 and No. 7915, which were made during July 1957, all recordings on this band of the record were made during August 1958.

Note: all the WR locos heard on this record are as fitted with single chimney, with the exception of 'King' class No. 6017.