

THE POWER OF STEAM

Steam locomotives at work at various locations on British Railways between 1959 and 1961 and a British-built Garratt locomotive at work in 1982 in Zimbabwe

SIDE ONE

Band One

At Steele Road, a lonely cluster of cottages and station buildings beside the former LNER Carlisle–Edinburgh line, the ‘Waverley’ route, which climbed continuously for ten miles from Newcastleton, past Riccarton Junction to Whitrope Summit, more than 1,000ft above sea level. Steele Road Station was about halfway up the unbroken eight-mile, 1 in 75 climb between Newcastleton and Riccarton Junction.

On an afternoon in early May 1961 a mother and children have come out to attend to her chickens which scratch around a hutch on the bare hillside above the line. The children chase the chickens while mother scatters the evening feed and collects the eggs.

A strong, cold northerly wind blows down from Whitrope, humming through telegraph wires and scattering smoke which rises in the distance above a heavy Carlisle–Edinburgh freight train, now slogging up through Liddisdale on the 1 in 75 gradient from Newcastleton. The train soon appears from behind the station and the powerful exhaust beats of V2 class 2-6-2 No. 60827 echo from buildings and hillsides as the train passes by and are carried back on the wind as the V2, maintaining speed on the curving gradient and even accelerating slightly, climbs away towards Riccarton and Whitrope, finally disappearing into the distance, behind the 1,500ft high Arnton Fell, while the contentedly clucking chickens feed nearby.

Band Two

At Ardlui on the West Highland line, at 7.30 on a calm morning in May 1961, the London –Glasgow – Fort William sleeping car train is waiting to leave Ardlui Station. By special arrangement for a BBC ‘Railway Roundabout’ TV film the train is double-headed by two ‘Glen’ class 4-4-0 locomotives No. 62496 *Glen Loy* and No. 62471 *Glen Falloch*.

The two engines, with *Glen Loy* leading, start the heavy train, head it out from behind the trees which surround the station, into the open valley and, with coupling rods ringing characteristically, take the train past and away on the 1 in 68 rising gradient. Just after the train passes, a lone photographer’s car dashes past on the empty road nearby, in hot pursuit of the two ‘Glens’ which are by now tackling the long climb through Glen Falloch, towards Crianlarich.

Band Three

At Scout Green, between Tebay and Shap Summit, on a wild, rainy afternoon in April 1960.

A strengthening westerly wind from the Lakeland mountains gusts across the line, bringing frequent heavy rain showers which send sheep scurrying for shelter behind dry stone walls. At first unheard in the driving rain and unseen until clear of the cuttings above Greenholme, the down ‘Royal Scot’ approaches from Tebay, headed by a ‘Coronation’ class ‘Pacific’ No. 46256 *Sir William A. Stanier FRS* which, powerfully attacking the 1 in 75 climb, thunders past the lonely little signal box and heads the express away through a cutting on the continuing climb towards Shap Wells and the summit.

A Stanier ‘Black Five’ 4-6-0 with a good head of steam rushes past, down the gradient towards Tebay, with an up passenger train, while increasingly heavy rain plops on and around the microphones.

A freight train, as yet unseen and hardly heard, is climbing out from Tebay. The exhaust beats of 'Jubilee' class 4-6-0 No. 45723 *Fearless*, at the head of the train, fitfully mingle with those of the banking engine and then are heard separately when *Fearless* emerges from the cutting and heads past, over the level crossing by the signal box. The banker, a Fowler 2-6-4 tank engine No. 42404, blasts past at the rear of the train and disappears into the cutting beyond Scout Green Signal Box, from where there are two more miles yet to go, through the lashing rain, on the 1 in 75 climb to Shap Summit.

Band Four

A 2-8-2 + 2-8-2 Garratt articulated locomotive of the NZR 16th class, British-built by Beyer-Peacock & Co., hauling a freight train on the West Nicholson–Heany Junction line in Zimbabwe.

Between Mbalabala and Bushtick this 3ft 6ins gauge line climbs sinuously through the Mulungwane Gorge and then, on equally sharply curved and even steeper gradients, climbs away across open bush country towards Heany Junction.

In the scrubby, rocky countryside, high above the line near the exit from the gorge, insects and birds are busy in the fierce early summer sunshine of an October morning in 1982. A strong wind blows towards the gorge, easing the heat, rustling through bushes and deadening the distant sounds of a freight train, now climbing through the gorge.

Some colourfully dressed women, with bundles perched on their heads, walk past the nearby track while the approaching train snakes through the gorge, temporarily lost to sight and almost to hearing, surmounted by a dense cloud of black smoke as the three-man crew urge their engine to maximum effort.

The 155 ton, 81ft 8ins long locomotive, No. 609, soon drowns all other sounds as, whistling out from the gorge and then slowing on the curving, steepening climb, it heads the heavy train past and away, into the wind which carries back the sounds of the receding engine for some while until, accelerating briefly on an easier gradient, the engine whistles into the distance and takes the train away, past Bushtick, towards the Gweru–Bulawayo main line at Heany Junction.

SIDE TWO

Band One

At Bromsgrove, at the foot of the Lickey Incline, on an August afternoon in 1959.

The Lickey Incline, on the Bristol–Birmingham line of the former LMS, rises on a gradient of 1 in 37½ for just over two miles from Bromsgrove to Blackwell. Most trains towards Birmingham were assisted on the climb by one or more banking engines.

A 'Jubilee' class 4-6-0 No. 45589 *Gwalior*, impatiently hissing steam at the head of an express for Leeds, waits in Bromsgrove South Yard where a banking engine has come on to the rear of the train. The banking engine's distant whistles are answered by the 'Jubilee', which then starts the train out of the yard. The train rapidly accelerates as the banker, a double-chimneyed class 9F 2-10-0 No. 92231, takes up more of the load, blasts past at the rear of the train and, in a crescendo of sound, roars away through the station and under road bridges.

As the Leeds express climbs on towards Blackwell, two banking engines coupled together, 0-6-0 Pannier tanks No. 8406 and No. 8405, running light down the incline, approach through the station and with a brief burst of full regulator from the leading engine, run past towards the far end of the yard to wait for their next duties.

Band Two

On the Lickey Incline, a short distance below Blackwell, on a bright June morning in 1959.

A motor cycle passes along the lane which runs under the line nearby while, in the distance, a Birmingham-bound passenger train approaches up the incline from Bromsgrove. A 'Crab' 2-6-0 No. 42788 heads the train past with somewhat breathless assistance at the rear from the banker, 0-6-0 Pannier tank No. 8404. Sparrows in a lineside hawthorn bush chirrup excitedly as the train climbs on into the cutting which leads up to Blackwell Station and then, soon after entering the cutting, the banker suddenly gives a remarkable and unexpected show of strength to help the train on its way through the station, where the banker drops back from the train and drifts to a stop.

Band Three

On the Settle–Carlisle line at Dent Station Signal Box on a morning in mid-November 1961.

A strong breeze, blowing down from Blea Moor, hums and sighs through the lineside telegraph wires and in the signal box the signalman attends to his instruments, speaks on the telephone and through the open window to the stationmaster who is chatting to a coal merchant in the yard below the signal box.

The signalman acknowledges bell codes and then expresses some strong opinions about the driver of the 11 o'clock fitted freight train from Leeds, which is running "about half an hour before its time".

Signal levers are moved and the offending freight train, now approaching with the wind from Blea Moor, whistles in the distance. 8F class No. 48283, allegedly moving "faster than blooming Scotsman" on the 1 in 264 climb towards Dent, soon rattles past the signal box, shaking it to its foundations, tears on through Dent Station and swings away under a road bridge and through a cutting towards Rise Hill Tunnel.

Band Four

At Basingstoke on an August Saturday in 1959, at the eastern end of the station, where the WR line from Reading joins the SR lines from Bournemouth and Salisbury. The gradient here is 1 in 249, falling towards London.

A 'King Arthur' class 4-6-0 No. 30764 *Sir Gawain* moves slowly past and squeals to a stop in a siding near the A Signal Box to wait until required.

A 'Lord Nelson' class 4-6-0 No. 30856 *Lord St Vincent* whistles past with an express from Bournemouth while 'King Arthur' No. 30805 *Sir Constantine*, intermittently hissing steam, stands waiting to leave with a train for London and a WR train for Portsmouth is held by signals on the line from Reading.

The signals clear and 'Grange' class 4-6-0 No. 6861 *Crynant Grange* brings the Portsmouth train across the main line to the down platforms. Points, pneumatically operated, change position and a signal arm clatters off, giving *Sir Constantine* the right away to head the London train out from the station, past and away under a road bridge.

Points and signals change again and 'Battle of Britain' class 'Pacific' No. 34064 *Fighter Command* heads a London–Bournemouth express slowly past, whistling as it approaches the station. A WR engine runs by in the background, whistling as it moves into a nearby siding and *Fighter Command* whistles in the distance.

No. 6819 *Highnam Grange*, running light, whistles and moves past from the station while a 'Merchant Navy' class 'Pacific' No. 35007 *Aberdeen Commonwealth* dashes past with an express to Salisbury and the West. Then a class 5 4-6-0 No. 73041 whistles through the station and roars past, towards London, with an express from the West of England.

Band Five

On the Hawick–Whitrope section of the Edinburgh–Carlisle line, in a clearing in the woods, high above Stobs Station, on an April night in 1961.

The after-midnight silence is broken by a dog barking somewhere down in the valley and then by a high-flying aircraft, the sound of which mingles with the sounds of a freight train, approaching through the valley on the 1 in 77 climb from Hawick and indicating its progress by twin trails of flowing cinders shooting high above the trees.

The V2 class 2-6-2 which heads the train slams round a curve and crosses a viaduct, climbing now at 1 in 80. Passing behind the station houses, the V2 heads the train into a cutting and through the deserted station while, at the rear of the train, a J36 class 0-6-0 No. 65315 gives powerful banking assistance on the 1 in 65, 1 in 80 climb through the station and into the deep cutting beyond it.

From the pitch darkness of surrounding woods the sounds of the train echo loudly back as it climbs away, under a bridge and is briefly muffled in deep cuttings. The two engines are heard again in the distance as the train moves into the open and climbs away towards Shankend. Now more than 700ft above sea level, the train still faces a further five-mile climb, much of it at 1 in 75, past Shankend and on across desolate moorland, through the tunnel to Whitrope Signal Box, over 1,000ft above sea level at the summit of the unbroken 11-mile climb from Hawick.