

ATR 7034

ECHOES OF ENGINES

Steam locomotives at work on British Railways between 1958 and 1964 at: Gresford, Evershot Tunnel, Scout Green, Arrochar, Montrose and Steele Road

SIDE ONE

Band One

The Chester–Shrewsbury line climbs on a continuous, curving gradient of 1 in 82½ for 3½ miles from Rossett to a summit just beyond Wheatsheaf Junction, near Wrexham. Roughly midway between Rossett and the summit, at Gresford Halt (for Llay), which was closed in 1961, a wooded hillside rises steeply above the line, towards Gresford village and, on the other side of the line, drops equally steeply down to the River Alun.

In the twilight of a May evening in 1964 a 5700 class 0-6-0 Pannier Tank engine No. 3789, running light up the gradient, approaches round a curve, gives a subdued whistle of warning for the footpath crossing at Gresford Halt and runs past and away, homeward bound for Wrexham.

Later, in the now cloudy darkness, a BR standard 4-6-0 approaches round a curve, whistles a warning and clanks past with a passenger train from Wrexham, strictly observing the speed restriction necessitated by colliery workings and line curvature. The sound of the engine's whistle echoes across the Alun Valley as the train goes away into the distance, down the gradient towards Chester.

Band Two

After midnight a thin drizzle is falling as, away in the distance and at first hardly audible, a freight train approaches up the gradient from Rossett. The engine seems to be making strangely little effort to tackle the climb towards Gresford and intermittently the injector buzzes angrily. From a glimpse into the cab, as the engine staggers past at little more than walking pace, the crew appear to be having trouble with the injector, which perhaps explains the apparent lack of effort.

'Grange' class 4-6-0 No. 6861 *Crynant Grange*, driving wheels slipping on damp rails, drags the heavy train past at eye level and climbs away round a curve through the woods while the last of the squealing trucks rumble over a nearby road bridge.

The sounds of the train echo back from the woods and merge with the sounds of Gresford Colliery as *Crynant Grange* climbs slowly and uncertainly away into the open, towards the colliery spoil heaps and buildings. A solitary car moves past down a lane and in the village, high above the line, the church clock strikes half past midnight as the sounds of the labouring engine, slipping almost to a standstill, gradually disappear in the distance.

Band Three

By morning the clouds have cleared and birds in the elder and hawthorn bushes at the lineside are in full spring song as, punctually at 7.30am, the permanent way lengthman rides down the steep approach road to the site of Gresford Halt, parks his motorcycle in the yard and walks past to collect his tools.

'Castle' class 4-6-0 No. 5091 *Cleeve Abbey* now approaches on the climb from Rossett with the morning express from Chester to Shrewsbury and Paddington, the engine whistles a warning and heads purposefully past, taking the train away round the curve towards Wrexham while the lengthman, having waved a greeting to the engine crew, walks away to begin his morning inspection.

Band Four

On the Castle Cary–Weymouth line at Evershot Tunnel, which is approached from the Castle Cary direction by an almost continuous climb of some 5½ miles, the final 1½ miles of which are on an unbroken gradient of 1 in 51 to a summit at Evershot Station, just beyond the tunnel.

Down in the deep cutting near the tunnel entrance, insects buzz around lazily in the heat of a sultry morning in August 1961. Approaching in the distance with a Bristol–Weymouth train, a ‘Hall’ class 4-6-0 climbs round a curve, out from the woods and heads the train past in the cutting. While No. 5997 *Sparkford Hall* whistles away into the tunnel the banking engine, ‘U’ class 2-6-0 No. 317192, blasts past at the rear of the train.

A signal arm changes position, a whistle echoes faintly from the far end of the tunnel and No. 73041, a class 5 4-6-0, accelerates into the open and scuttles away down the gradient with a train from Weymouth.

In the far distance a Reading–Weymouth train, as yet unseen, raises echoes from the woods and climbs slowly but steadily round a curve into view. Class 5 4-6-0 No. 73080 *Merlin* heads the train past in the cutting, raising echoes from the walls, and whistles away into Evershot Tunnel.

SIDE TWO

Band One

Early on a May morning in 1960 a strong wind blows across the line at Scout Green where the distant sounds of a freight train, approaching on the 1 in 75 climb from Tebay, echo around the fells. ‘Black Five’ 4-6-0 No. 45397 heads the train past and another ‘Black Five’, No. 45109, gives banking assistance at the rear of the train. Skylarks and peewits climb and wheel excitedly overhead as the two engines take the train away, in a shallow cutting, on the continuing 1 in 75 climb towards Shap Summit.

Band Two

On the West Highland line at Arrochar Station which, in the clear calm of a freezing morning in January 1958, is surrounded by deep snow.

A C15 class 4-4-2 Tank engine No. 67460, recently arrived with the two-coach push and pull train from Craigendoran, stands waiting at the near side of the island platform, gently hissing steam. A B1 class 4-6-0 No. 61340 whistles round a curve, approaches the station and squeals to a stop with the morning train from Fort William to Glasgow. When greetings have been exchanged the B1 makes a vigorous start and takes the train away on the vicious 4½ mile, 1 in 53, 1 in 57 climb towards Glen Douglas Summit.

As the Glasgow-bound train climbs away into the far distance No. 67460 moves out from the station with the push and pull train, passes by and whistles when clear of the points, over which the train will move back to the opposite side of the platform, in readiness for an afternoon return trip to Craigendoran.

Band Three

To the south of Montrose Station on the single-line section, which climbs away from the harbour on a gradient of 1 in 88½ for 1½ miles to Usan Signal Box. On an April afternoon in 1959 seagulls wheel above the shore, their cries mingling with the noises of the town and sounds from the station, which are carried by a strong wind.

Two boys prop their cycles against a fence and run to the lineside as a passenger train for Dundee sets out from Montrose Station. A single-chimney A3 class 'Pacific', No. 60089 *Felstead*, strongly attacking the steep climb, brings the train rumbling over a long bridge, takes it past on a high embankment and heads it away, with the wind, round a curve, towards Usan.

Band Four

Two years later, on the Carlisle–Edinburgh line, the now abandoned 'Waverley' route, near the lonely station at Steele Road, situated roughly midway between Newcastleton and Riccarton Junction, between which there is an unbroken 8-mile climb on a gradient of 1 in 75.

On this afternoon in May 1961 a strong, cold wind blows down from Whitrope, six miles to the north, setting the telegraph wires humming. Out on the bare moors sheep call their lambs while down in the station No. 78046, a class 2 2-6-0 which has made a brief call with an inspection saloon, whistles and, hardly heard down wind, moves away down the gradient towards Newcastleton.

A freight train headed by A3 'Pacific' No. 60089 *Felstead*, which has now been fitted with a double chimney, approaches from Newcastleton, heads the train through the station, brings it rumbling past over a road bridge and climbs away round a curve at the foot of 1,500ft high Arnton Fell. The powerful sounds of the engine's exhaust beat, at first echoing back from station buildings, are carried back on the wind for some while, finally disappearing when *Felstead* heads the train into the curving cuttings at the approach to Riccarton Junction.

Band Five

Near Steele Road Station on the evening of another, almost equally windy day in May 1961, the drone of an aircraft obscures the sounds of a Carlisle–Edinburgh passenger train which is approaching up the gradient from Newcastleton.

V2 class 2-6-2 No. 60813 brings the train to a stop in the tiny station, then makes a vigorous start on the 1 in 75 rising gradient and, with characteristic three-cylinder exhaust beat, roars past and away. A car moves down the lonely road and turns into the station yard to pick up a solitary passenger while No. 60813 climbs away, against the wind, into the distance towards Riccarton Junction and Whitrope Summit.