

THE GREAT WESTERN

The Great Western Railway engines at work: on the Paddington–Birmingham main line at Hatton and Princes Risborough; on the Castle Cary–Weymouth line at Evershot; on the Newport–Hereford line at Abergavenny Junction; and in the West of England at Plymouth, Exeter, Newton Abbot, Chalford and Stroud.

Band One

From the Avon Valley, at Warwick, the Paddington–Birmingham main line climbs to a summit about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile beyond Hatton North Junction. Gradients of 1 in 108, 1 in 103 and 1 in 110, for some three miles, are followed by a short level section through Hatton Station, after which the line continues to climb, for about another $\frac{3}{4}$ mile, on a gradient of 1 in 177 towards Birmingham.

On a fine spring evening in April 1962, a double-chimney 'King' class 4-6-0 approaches from Birmingham with the up 'Inter City' Wolverhampton–London express. Whistling past Hatton North Junction, No. 6000 *King George V* dashes through Hatton Station and heads the 'Inter City' down the 1 in 110 gradient towards Warwick, Leamington and London.

In the distance a down express, having passed through Warwick on its way from Paddington, begins the climb out of Avon Valley. Distantly the powerful exhaust beat of a double-chimney 'King' merges with the spring birdsong, but soon drowns it as No. 6027 *King Richard I* brings the 13-coach train steadily up the gradient, into the cutting and under the road bridge. Pounding deafeningly past, through Hatton Station, the 'King' takes the express on towards Birmingham while, nearby, a signal arm crashes back to the on position.

The up signals clear and '5100' class 2-6-2 T No. 4176 starts away from Hatton with a trainload of cars. Another engine, hissing gently at the head of a goods train in the down loop, whistles as No. 4176 takes the car train on down the gradient towards Warwick.

Band Two

On a frosty February night in 1961, on the Birmingham–Paddington main line near Princes Risborough, double-chimney 'King' No. 6002 *King William IV* waits in the station with the Sunday night Birkenhead–London express. Long echoes come back from the hills as the 'King' whistles in answer to the 'right away' and majestically starts the heavy train out of the station, for the last lap of the journey to London. The 'King' slips momentarily on greasy rails, then blasts under the road bridge and on into the single-line cutting which, on an easier gradient of 1 in 167, takes the up line away from the down at this point. As the train swings away through the cutting, towards Saunderton Tunnel, the red tail lamp disappears into the deep darkness which follows the passing of the lighted carriage windows.

A '2251' class 0-6-0 No. 2243 starts out from the loop with a goods train from Banbury, on a January morning in 1957. As the 0-6-0 heads towards Saunderton Tunnel, a '6100' class 2-6-2 T No. 6146 comes past with a goods train from High Wycombe on the down line, which has a falling gradient of 1 in 88.

Band Three

In June 1956 the 7.10pm Paddington–Wolverhampton express still included a slip portion, detached at Princes Risborough to provide connections for the branch lines and an 'all stations' service to Banbury.

Beside the down line, near Saunderton Summit, 'Castle' class 4-6-0 No. 5088 *Llanthony Abbey* comes past with the 7.10pm Paddington–Wolverhampton express, from which the slip coaches have just been detached. The two-coach slip portion falls back from the main train and passes by in its wake. *Llanthony Abbey*, accelerating rapidly, whistles distantly through Princes Risborough station while the slip coaches roll on, independently, down the 1 in 100, 1 in 88 gradient towards the station.

On another evening near Princes Risborough station, at the points where the down through and down platform lines diverge, 'Hall' class 4-6-0 No. 5901 *Hazel Hall* tears past with the 7.10pm Paddington–Wolverhampton express, now reduced in length after detachment of the slip portion. The signal arms clatter back to the on position after the express has passed and the slip coaches, now approaching down the 1 in 88 gradient, squeal to a stop at the signals. As the slip guard, who controls the operation of the slip coach, climbs down from his compartment to join the waiting shunter, an 0-6-0 PT whistles distantly and moves out from the down loop, running 'wrong line' towards the waiting coaches. Having coupled up, the '5400' class pannier tank No. 5409 takes the two coaches on into Princes Risborough Station, from where they will be taken in the path of the express, calling at all stations to Banbury.

Band Four

On a March morning in 1964, platelayers stop work as '1400' class 0-4-2 PT No. 1451 approaches Chalford Station with a single-coach push and pull train from Gloucester. After a brief wait in the station, No. 1451 pulls out towards the sidings to take water and a short rest before starting the return journey, down the valley to Stroud.

A '4300' class 2-6-0 No. 7322 brings a goods train slowly up the 1 in 82 gradient from Abergavenny, on a September morning in 1958. Finally stopped by the adverse signals, the train comes to a halt in the deserted Abergavenny Junction Station, closed to passengers earlier in the year. As the goods train stands waiting, an express, headed by 'Castle' No. 5055 *Earl of Eldon*, comes tearing part, down the gradient towards Abergavenny and Pontypool Road. As soon as the signals clear, No. 7322 makes a clean start, despite the 1 in 82 rising gradient, and takes the goods train slowly out of the station to tackle the long and unbroken 1 in 82, 1 in 95 climb to Llanvihangel.

SIDE TWO

Band One

At Evershot Tunnel, on the Castle Cary–Weymouth line.

Trains from Castle Cary and Yeovil, travelling towards Dorchester and Weymouth, are faced with an almost continuous climb of some 5½ miles, the last 1½ miles of which are on an unbroken gradient of 1 in 51 through Evershot Tunnel to Evershot Station, just beyond the tunnel.

Above Evershot Tunnel, on a hot August night in 1961, an occasional whisper of a breeze stirs the trees which, on one side, line the top of the deep cutting leading to the tunnel mouth. In the far distance the Bristol–Weymouth Channel Islands boat train is approaching from Yeovil and down below in the cutting a signal clears for it. Hidden from view on the curve beyond the cutting the exhaust of the 'Hall' class locomotive echoes back from the woods, then sharpens as No. 5948 *Siddington Hall* brings the train into the cutting and blasts on into the tunnel. When the echoes of the train have died away, there is a moment's silence, broken only by the drone of a motorcycle on the main road, before the 'Hall' emerges from the tunnel, heading the train through the now darkened Evershot Station and on down the gradient towards Dorchester.

Down in the cutting, near the tunnel mouth, on the following morning. No. 6951 *Impney Hall* leaves Evershot Tunnel with a Weymouth–Wolverhampton train and heads down the gradient towards

Yeovil. Meanwhile, another 'Hall' is tackling the climb from Yeovil with a Bristol–Weymouth train. No. 5940 *Whitbourne Hall* comes round the curve, into the cutting and the bark of the exhaust slams back from the high facing as, with a long cautionary whistle, the 'Hall' takes the train into the tunnel towards Evershot Station.

Band Two

An impression of a Great Western mainline station.

'Castle' No. 5079 *Lysander* whistles shrilly and pulls out of Plymouth (North Road) Station, with an evening train for Exeter. An 0-4-2 pannier tank, with a push and pull train, runs past in the background as the Exeter train is leaving (recorded in December 1958).

'1400' class 0-4-2 pannier tank No. 1451 leaves Stroud Station with a push and pull train for Gloucester (March 1964).

'Castle' No. 4086 *Builth Castle* whistles distantly from the Taunton end of Exeter (St David's) Station, accelerates through the station, pounds past the West Signal Box and on towards Newton Abbot, with a Wolverhampton–Penzance express (August 1958).

'Hall' No. 4939 *Littleton Hall*, running light, comes out from St David's Station towards the West Signal Box, pauses briefly, then moves off towards the sidings (August 1958).

'4500' class 2-6-2 T No. 5524 leaves Newton Abbot Station with a train of empty coaches, bound for the sidings (December 1958).

'Grange' class 4-6-0 No. 6863 *Dolhywel Grange* whistles through Exeter (St David's) Station with a Plymouth–Manchester express, while '5700' class 0-6-0 PT No. 3794 runs past, light, waits briefly, then moves back towards the station (August 1958).

Band Three

At Abergavenny Junction Station, on the Newport–Hereford line, in September 1958.

'2800' class 2-8-0 No. 2828 brings a heavy goods train up the 1 in 82 gradient from Abergavenny and stops at Abergavenny Junction.

'7200' class 2-8-2 T No. 7251 rattles past, down the gradient, returning from Llanvihangel after banking a train to the summit.

Double-chimney 'County' class 4-6-0 No. 1016 *County of Hants*, having just left Abergavenny at 6.25pm with a Newport–Hereford passenger train, heads purposefully past Abergavenny Junction and gradually accelerates on away into the distance on the 1 in 82, 1 in 95 climb towards Llanvihangel and Hereford.

'4300' class 2-6-0 No. 7309 heads a goods train up the gradient, through Abergavenny Junction, with powerful assistance from the banking engine, 2-8-2 tank No. 7251. The exhaust beats of the two engines sometimes synchronise, sometimes separate as the train climbs slowly on towards Llanvihangel in the now fading light of a beautifully golden autumn evening.

Note: all engines are as fitted with single chimney, unless otherwise stated.