



# Halls & Manors

In the early 1920s the operating authorities of the Great Western Railway felt that there was a need for a loco to replace the 4300 Class 2-6-0s which had been the railway's mainstay for mixed traffic use. Chief Mechanical Engineer C. B. Collett set about providing the railway with a suitable 4-6-0 and produced a prototype by rebuilding a Star Class 4-6-0 with smaller driving wheels. This Prototype, numbered 4900, emerged from Swindon in 1924 and over the next three years was further modified with changes to the boiler and the addition of outside steam pipes.

The design proved successful and in 1928 the first of the new class emerged from Swindon. The first 14 locomotives were sent off to Cornwall and, as they soon proved themselves capable machines coping well with the difficult gradients on the main line there, by the time the first batch of 80 were completed in 1930, a further order for 178 more was in place.

Officially the locomotives were the GWR's 4900 Class but as they were named after stately homes, soon became known as Halls.

Collett was replaced by F. W. Hawksworth as CME in 1941 and he began a programme of modifying locomotives to improve their performance, particularly in regard to being able to cope better with the poor quality coal available during the war.

The first Modified Hall emerge from Swindon in 1944 with a higher degree of superheating, plate frames along with modifications to the smokebox saddle and cylinders. Swindon built 71 Modified Halls before construction ceased in 1950.

Together, the original Halls and the Modified Halls the classes numbered 330 locomotives and proved themselves capable of handling all types of traffic from freight to express passenger.

1. We'll start with a recording of one of Collett's original Halls, 4930 *Hagley Hall*, working on the Welsh Marches route in February 1983.

*Hagley Hall* was a regular performer on this route in the early 1980s and found itself hauling some quite sizable trains. On this occasion 4930 had a train of 11 coaches behind the tender, far more I suspect than a Hall would have been allowed on this route in steam days.

At the start of the return journey, 4930 is heard departing from Newport for Hereford with the blower humming nicely!

2. Later during the same journey we had stopped at Abergavenny for a photographic run past.

Now, Abergavenny always seemed to me a strange place to choose for this activity. From the entertainment point of view it was excellent as it provided plenty of good vantage points to give passengers an opportunity to see the locomotive in action but from an operating point of view it was far from ideal.

Right at the end of the platform at Abergavenny begins the climb to Llanvihangel which starts at 1 in 85 then steepens to 1 in 82 before easing a little to 1 in 95 for the final mile or so to the summit.

Now with 11 coaches weighing in at over 400 tons our climb from Abergavenny was never going to be a fast one and, indeed, the speedometer doesn't trouble the 20 mph mark at any point during the climb.

However, even if the climb isn't a high speed one, there is never any doubt that we will get there and there are certainly no complaints about the noise!



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3. We are staying on the Welsh Marches route for our next recording and are not far from Abergavenny once again but this time heading in the opposite direction.

Not long after descending from Llanvihangel and passing through Abergavenny southbound trains have to face a further steep climb. Following on from a steep descent this would seem an ideal situation for drivers to take a run at the bank. Unfortunately, for certain locomotives this isn't possible as, right at the foot of the gradient there is an overbridge with limited clearances which requires some locomotives to slow to walking pace.

Our loco on this occasion was 6960 *Raveningham Hall*, one of Hawksworth's Modified Halls and as this recording begins we are just approaching the bridge.

Perhaps in view of the load, no less than 12 coaches, our driver on this occasion decided to take the speed restriction a little faster than the walking pace which was usually the case and, rather than the single figure speeds that we usually recorded at that point we are doing a little over 20 mph as we pass under the bridge.

This speed was maintained pretty well on the ensuing 1 in 80 gradient to Nantyberry where an easing of the gradient allows speed to rise. Beyond, the gradient steepens once more before another bridge slack brings speed back down to 25 mph. Recovering from this on a falling gradient we accelerate to just over 50 mph before Little Mill Jc. then speed falls once again to the low 30's on the final 1 in 104 gradient to Pontypool Road.

Although some of the train timers on board that day were less than impressed with the performance of the locomotive but, with a load of around 450 tons I didn't feel that there was anything to complain about on this section.

4. Partly due to route availability GWR locos rarely ventured far from their own territory but in more recent years things have been a little different.

Templecombe, where this next recording was made, certainly did see some Great Western locomotives as a few were allocated to the loco shed on the Somerset & Dorset Railway there in the 1960s.

Templecombe probably didn't see many Halls though and certainly wouldn't have seen many GW locos working trains on the main line from Salisbury so it may well be that the October 1986 visit by 6998 *Burton Agnes Hall* was the first visit of the class.

Steam haulage on Southern Region main lines had been tried in the early 1970s but concerns over trespass on the third rail electrified lines had soon put a stop to that and the SR had become something of a no-go area.

However, Salisbury Area Manager Gerald Daniels saw no reason why steam hauled trains should not be run west of Salisbury where there was no electrification and, after a successful steam event earlier in the year at Andover, planned on 3 weekends in October 1986 to run steam hauled trains from Salisbury to Yeovil Jc. running twice each day. These trains proved so popular that a fourth weekend had to be added.

Planned motive power for these trains was entirely ex Southern Railway, 35028 & 777. Unfortunately 777 was out of action with a cracked frame so Modified Hall 6998 was substituted.

After a good run from Salisbury with the afternoon train on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1986 we stopped at Templecombe for photographs and a run past before continuing to Yeovil Jc.

From Templecombe the line rises at a gradient of 1 in 100 to a summit near Milborne Port and *Burton Agnes Hall* sounds fine accelerating this 9 coach train on the gradient.



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C. B. Collet continued his development of mixed traffic 4-6-0s with the introduction of the 6800 Class otherwise known as *Granges*, the first appearing in 1936. These were a smaller wheeled version of the Hall and unfortunately none have been preserved. The *Granges* were able to work on most part of the *Great Western Railway's* system but there was need for a lighter weight 4-6-0.

This loco was the 7800 Class which were more usually referred to as *Manors*. The first appeared in 1938 and by the start of 1939 20 were in service. More should have followed but the outbreak of the *Second World War* forced the cancellation of an order for 20 more.

Initially the performance of these locos was poor and had it not been for the constraints of the war, they would have been recalled to *Swindon* for modification.

After the war and nationalisation the *Western Region* of *British Railways* had a further 10 built and these emerged from *Swindon* in 1950. As these were exactly the same design as the first batch their performance was no better until, in 1954, modifications to the draughting of 10 of the class were made which improved their performance considerably. The rest of the class were eventually given the same treatment.

The area that is usually most associated with the Class is mid-Wales where they worked trains on the former *Cambrian Railway's* routes where locos with heavier axle loadings could not venture and it is from the *Cambrian Coast* line that our first recordings come.

5. In the late 80s *British Railways* operated a series of regular steam hauled trains through the summer months between *Machynlleth* and *Barmouth* with the addition on some Sundays of trains running to *Pwllheli* or *Aberystwyth*.

In steam days these lines would have regularly seen trains hauled by *Manors* and among the pool of locos for these trains was 7819 *Hinton Manor*.

In this recording, with a train for *Pwllheli*, *Hinton Manor* is heard passing through *Llwyngwriil* where there is a speed restriction. Once clear of the restriction favourable gradients allow speed to rise before 7819 encounters the climb to *Friog*. On gradients as steep as 1 in 66 7819 is worked hard and makes a fine sound with this 10 coach train.

6. Further north on the *Cambrian Coast* line 7819 is heard shortly after passing through the station at *Llandecwyn*. Here the line crosses the *Afon Dwyryd* over the *Pont Briwet*, a bridge shared with a toll road.

Once clear of the bridge *Hinton Manor* is able to accelerate a little through *Penrhyndeudraeth* station before starting to climb the 1 in 65 gradient beyond.

This climb leads to *Minffordd* station where the *Ffestiniog Railway* passes overhead and the climb ends.

7. A feature of this particular day, something not uncommon in North Wales, was rain which became heavier and more persistent as the day progressed, the return journey from *Pwllheli* to being particularly wet.

In steam days there would have been a turntable at *Pwllheli* and locos returning from there would have been able to run chimney first but that facility was long gone by the 1980s. Running tender first, conditions on the footplate must have been unpleasant to say the least, the low tender of 7819 wouldn't have provided much shelter.



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The crew must have been quite glad to get to Dovey Junction and set off on the final section of the journey back to Machynlleth and, as you can hear in this recording, it doesn't sound as though the driver intends hanging around!

8. I have tried to include only recordings made on the main line in this 'Riding behind Steam' series of CDs but, for the next two tracks we will be heading for preserved lines.

The reason is two-fold; Firstly, Manors haven't been all that common on the main line and secondly, there is one Manor that I have a particularly soft spot for.

Back in the 1960s I was a train spotter (but only for a few years!). Being still at school, pocket money didn't run to long distance spotting trips but the annual School Day Trip in 1965 took us, in our own chartered train, to Chester where I saw my first Western Region engine. This was a Manor; 7828 *Odney Manor* which passed through the station light engine and which, I can assure you, caused far more excitement than educational visits to the Cathedral, Chester Zoo or a walk round the city walls! Fortunately, 7828 went to Barry scrapyards, was sold into preservation in 1981 and I have been fortunate to be able to catch up with my first GWR 'cop' at a number of preserved railways.

After being based on a number of preserved lines, *Odney Manor* eventually found a home on the West Somerset Railway, a line I feel sure that would have seen trains hauled by Manors in steam days as they were allocated to various sheds in the West Country.

The West Somerset Railway has some steep gradients and in this recording, *Odney Manor* is heard departing from Blue Anchor ready for the climb to Washford. At first the gradients are easy but after half a mile or so the climb really begins, first at 1 in 73 then at 1 in 65 for the last mile to Washford. After a gentle start out of the station, 7828 is gradually worked harder and harder until the top of the climb is reached at Washford station.

9. Among other lines, *Odney Manor* has also spent some time on the East Lancashire Railway and during a visit in 1994 I was privileged to have a footplate ride on the loco from Ramsbottom to Rawtenstall.

I've not had all that many footplate rides on steam locos but one thing that I found when recording that I hadn't expected was how muffled the locomotive's exhaust sounds compared with what I had been used to hearing from the train. The only time when the sound of the exhaust becomes a little clearer is when the firehole door is opened, then the sound of the blast in the firebox can be heard, something that you can hear in this recording.

The driver on 7828 was a fireman only recently passed out for driving duties and getting a little supervision by a more experienced man. He has no difficulty getting his train under way but gets a little advice about braking when stopping at stations!

This recording is of the complete run from Ramsbottom to Rawtenstall with a stop at Irwell Vale.

10. Both Halls and Manors were often to be seen in the West Country, Halls being used on freight and passenger trains on the main lines while Manors could be seen on lighter duties as well as acting as pilots for heavier trains on the steeply graded main lines, particularly over the South Devon banks east of Plymouth so I am going to end this CD with a recording of a Hall and a Manor double heading on the climb to Hemerdon.

I have written elsewhere about the trials and tribulations that affected the 1985 celebrations of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Great Western Railway, one of the main events of which was to be the



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running of a number of steam hauled specials between Bristol & Plymouth. ON the first of these trains we were to be double headed from Bristol to Plymouth but, suffice it to say that we were steam hauled no further than Exeter by which time both locos had succumbed to overheated tender axle boxes. We were diesel hauled from there to Plymouth and, as you can imagine, were in a rather sombre mood, especially as we had tickets for the return journey the following day!

Came the dawn. On arrival at Plymouth North Road station on Easter Monday 8<sup>th</sup> April 1985 we were delighted to discover that, not only had 7819 *Hinton Manor*, one of the two locos that had failed the previous day, been repaired but that 4930 *Hagley Hall* had arrived having travelled down overnight from the Severn Valley Railway.

What was not quite so good was the quality of the coal provided for the journey. Someone had ordered the wrong grade of coal and the small stuff more suitable for domestic use that had been delivered caused problems for the firemen. Still, we were getting our steam hauled run where 12 hours before it had seemed most unlikely.

So, just a few minutes late and in somewhat higher sprits than we had expected to be, we departed from Plymouth.

The first of the South Devon banks, Hemerdon, is encountered just a few miles from the start. Falling gradients soon after leaving Plymouth usually allow the bank to be approached at a reasonable speed but we were denied this by signal checks out to Laira and, as this recording begins, we are approaching Plympton at the foot of the gradient with speed in the low 30's.

Once on to the bank itself and on a gradient of 1 in 41 speed falls with alarming rapidity. What we didn't know was that the Manor's boiler pressure was down to 120 psi and the Hall wasn't doing a great deal better. Still, the pair soon settle down to a steady 10 to 12 mph on the gradient with excellent sound effects.

Eventually the steep gradient eases and the pair pick up speed past Hemerdon sidings.

Despite the steaming problems, the rest of the journey was completed without too much difficulty and we were not far from right time on arrival at Bristol.

**STEAMSOUNDS** *Riding behind GWR steam*  
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1. 4930 departing from Newport.  
19<sup>th</sup> February 1983
2. 4930 departing from Abergavenny to Llanvihangel.
3. 6960 climbing from Penpergwm to Pontypool Road.  
10<sup>th</sup> November 1984
4. 6968 departing from Templecombe.  
12<sup>th</sup> October 1986
5. 7819 passing Llwyngwril. 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1987
6. 7819 from near Llandecwyn to Minffordd.
7. 7819 departing from Dovey Jc.
8. 7828 from Blue Anchor to Washford.
9. 7828 from Ramsbottom to Rawtenstall on the  
footplate.
10. 4930 & 7819 climbing Hemerdon bank.

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