

## CAMP HILL RAILWAY LINE (SOUTH) (AREA 4)

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Built in 1840, the Camp Hill railway line is a path from the past that is about to become an important path again, when passenger services are reintroduced. But currently it is somewhat of a concealed path, known only to those who live close to the line, drivers of goods trains and those of us who have been passengers on trains that have used it as a diversionary line. The photographs were taken by Jerry Tew and Alasdair Tew on a single shoot in early January 2023.

The path from Kings Norton to Moseley is defined by an upward gradient and gentle curves, often in cuttings, and its presence is marked by the bridges where it passes under roads and over the Worcester and Birmingham canal. This section was constructed through what was still agricultural land and villages, but was routed to the East side of Mosley village, thereby avoiding the Moseley Hall estate. In order to hide its presence from the inhabitants of Moseley village (and the parish church), a short tunnel section was dug at the top of the incline to take it out of sight under St Mary's Row. Viewed from the railway itself, much of the Birmingham suburbs, through which it passes, are concealed behind the sides of cuttings filled with trees. The railway was strategically important in the Second World War as it provided access for munitions production in the requisitioned Cadbury's factory in Bournville – and it was a target for German bombing. Bomb damage may have been the reason why local passenger services ceased in 1941, never to be restarted after the war. However, the track was kept intact and used for goods and as an alternative route for passenger trains when the line past the University was congested. It was only in 2022 that work started to restore this section of railway for local passenger use. When completed, this path will be opened up for many more travellers.

The start of this path is a zig-zag ramp (photograph 1) down to the platforms of Kings Norton station from which the new suburban service will depart for Birmingham New Street. Arriving on the platform opens up the view of the route towards Birmingham – with the over-bridge reflecting the evening sun (photograph 2). The Camp Hill line continues ahead and to the right at Kings Norton Junction (photograph 3) where the Birmingham West Suburban Railway (with a Cross-City train) branches off to the left.

In its early years, a siding dropped down alongside the Worcester and Birmingham canal to service Lifford canal wharf for trans-shipments of cargo between trains and barges servicing the West Midlands canal network. This was located on the far side of the canal from the

towpath in photographs 4 (looking down from the south side) and 5 (looking up at the north side). Now, the canal and its towpath have been reborn as paths for recreation, presided over by the grandeur of a brick double arch bridge – the second arch originally having passed over the canal siding leading to the wharf below.

The line then ascends in graceful curves towards Hazelwell (photograph 6, taken from the end of Vicarage Road). Here are the only surviving original station buildings which, until recently, had been used as a bathroom showroom. Photograph 7 shows the old riveted iron passenger bridge at Hazelwell station that linked the platforms - with the station building behind on the left. Work is now underway on the station so that it can be reopened for passengers – hence the line of lights adorning the platform. The next station along the line, which is being rebuilt from scratch, is situated next to the entrance to Highbury Park. Photograph 8 shows the old iron street sign marking the start of Kings Heath High Street. In the background there is a crane and other evidence of site-clearing work taking place for the new station buildings in the small triangle of land between road, railway and the backs of units on the Findlay Road retail estate.

Photograph 9 gives a trackside view looking back as the line curves in a deep cutting down towards Kings Heath. The winter sun picks out the rails including some discarded rails that have been left on the trackbed following engineering work. Photograph 10 is the final photograph and shows the tunnel portal that marks the Moseley end of this path. Above the tunnel lies the junction of St Mary's Row, Oxford Road and Wake Green Road, and a quirky little garden emporium – but the railway is completely invisible from above.

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