

CAMP HILL RAILWAY LINE (NORTH) (AREA 3)

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Built in 1840, the Camp Hill railway line was the gateway into Birmingham from Gloucester and the South West. Its final route into Birmingham was in part dictated by powerful landowners who did not want the railway to cross their land, and the challenges posed by trying to route a railway into an expanding and densely populated urban area. The line was discretely hidden from view in a short tunnel as it came through the village and up-and-coming middle class suburb of Moseley. Thereafter it had more of a visual presence as it cut through and bounded areas that were being developed for industry and working class housing in Balsall Heath and Sparkbrook.

Originally, the railway terminated at Camp Hill (hence the name by which the line has become known). This avoided having to cut a swathe through the densely packed older streets of Digbeth and Deritend. However this terminus was inconveniently distant from the centre of Birmingham and it was not long before the line was extended around to the east of these inner suburbs to join up with the London to Birmingham line and thence into Curzon Street station. Since 1941, there have been no scheduled passenger services along the line, although it continued in use for goods services, and as a diversionary route for some cross-country passenger trains. However, funding was recently agreed to reopen the line to local passenger services, including a rebuilt station at Moseley.

The photographs were taken on two days in early January 2023.

This path begins at the entrance where work has started on the construction of the new Moseley Village station. Behind the signage on the gate on the left of Photograph 1, a ramp leads down to where the city-bound platform of the old Moseley station used to be. Viewed from the north in Photograph 2, more of the original out-of-town platform and ramps still survive to the left of the tunnel portal.

From Moseley, the railway sweeps down towards the City Centre, initially still in a wooded cutting which screens it from any sign of the housing on each side (Photograph 3). As the land falls away, the railway emerges on an embankment and crosses over the streets of Balsall Heath and Sparkbrook. For much of this stretch, the line marks a boundary between industrial and commercial premises on the west side and residential areas to the east. An impressive brick arch over Runcorn Road (Photograph 4) offers a way through to the modern commercial development on the west side of the railway. Restored cast iron railings provide an ornate

framing for the descent under the low bridge where the railway crosses Montpelier Road (Photograph 5) – then to re-emerge in a redeveloped residential area of Sparkbrook.

Taken from the track-side, Photograph 6 looks south from where trains would have originally departed from the Camp Hill terminus and started the climb to Moseley. In the foreground is evidence of upgrading work on the line in preparation for its reopening to local passenger traffic. Beneath where this photograph was taken, Kyrwick's Lane passes below (Photograph 7). Although now looking somewhat desolate, this was once the route whereby the residents of Sparkbrook would make their way home from the Alhambra cinema on the Moseley Road. Photograph 8 looks north and shows where the line would have branched to the left into the original Camp Hill terminus – now replaced by a somewhat anonymous industrial estate. To the right of the digger, the line sweeps away in a gentle curve towards St Andrews.

This stretch of the Camp Hill line finishes at St Andrews Junction where goods trains can continue towards Derby, and the new passenger service will curve around to join the mainline into New Street Station. Dominating this end of the path is the bulk of the Gil Merrick Stand of the Birmingham City Ground (Photograph 9) – familiar to away fans as well as home supporters. At this end, as at the start of the path in Moseley, access is marked by signage that restricts entry to the flight of steps that leads down to the track-side (Photograph 10).

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