

THE BISLEY BULLET BITES THE DUST

Iain Wakeford 2017

In July 1952 the branch railway from Brookwood to Bisley was closed and what was affectionately known as the 'Bisley Bullet' ran for the last time. Built originally in 1890 to serve the new National Rifle Association ranges, to begin with the line was only in operation for a couple of weeks a year, but with the outbreak of both World Wars the tracks were extended to Pirbright, Deepcut and Blackdown Camps and the 'Bullets' flew up and down the little line at the incredible speed of 10mph.

The slow speeds were very much to do with the fact that it was in truth little more than a simple tramway, although built by engineers from Aldershot Camp and operated by the London & South Western Railway (and its successors). From its junction with the main line at Brookwood Station the line gradually descended the embankment behind what would eventually be the houses of Connaught Road (although in 1890 few, if any, of these had yet been built). Near Pirbright Lock where the road tunnels under the railway, you can still see the brick abutments where the track crossed towards the canal, and by the canal itself the massive iron pillars that once carried the iron-girder bridge over the waterway can still be found.

From the canal the line descended further to go under the road to the camp, and whilst that bridge is no longer there, it is still possible to see on the common side of the road the cutting where the line once went on towards the camp.



In the spring of 1917 the War Office extended the line from Bisley to Blackdown camp (under the control originally of the Longmoor Military

The Bisley Branch Line was constructed by Engineers from Aldershot Camp.

The trains operated by the London & South Western Railway and their successors

Railway), but in July 1918 the London & South Western Railway took over operations until December that year. By then, of course, the





armistice had been signed, signalling the end of the 'war to end all wars'.

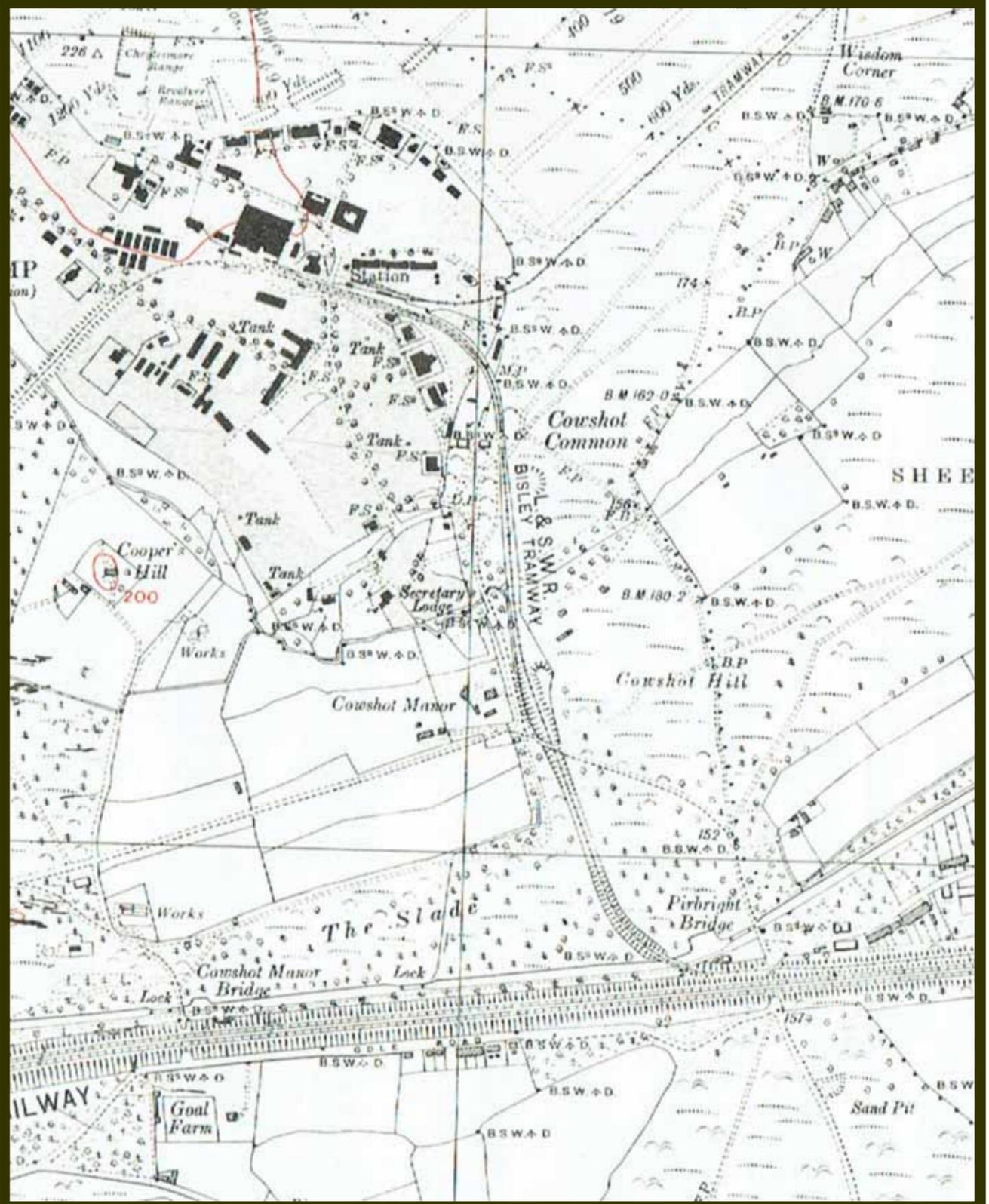
It took another decade, however, before the extra line to Blackdown was dismantled, prematurely it seems as in 1940 the Bisley Branch was again requisitioned by the military who then re-opened the section as far as Pirbright Camp. In 1950 that too was decommissioned and dismantled and by then it was clear that even the original section to Bisley Camp was no longer required, many people now attending the annual Bisley Shoot by car and coach.

The last train ran on the line on the evening of the 19th July 1952. A 'farewell ceremony' was conducted by the Cambridge University Rifle Association and the Gloucestershire Regiment, their regimental band playing 'mournful music' as they proceeded to Bisley Camp Station. The engine was (for those that need to know these things) a '0-4-4T class M7' number 30027, and was adorned by flags. Rather alarmingly perhaps 'fog signals' had been placed along the track so that as the train went along a series of mini explosions could be heard – as well as a series of volleys fired by members of the Gloucestershire Regiment.

Contrary to popular belief, however, this was not the last train to travel on the line as on the 23rd November 1952 the 'Railway Correspondence and Travel Society' arranged a special trip along the line – and it is this 'last' train that is pictured here. Soon afterwards work started on dismantling the tracks (although the part nearest Brookwood Station was retained for a time as a siding).

The iron bridge over the canal was finally removed in 1979, but at what stage the structure over the road at Pirbright Arch was dismantled, I have so far been unable to establish.

Ordnance Survey 6" map from 1938 (published in 1944).



This is the last train that ran on the line in November 1952. Soon after the tracks were removed