55 News

Journal of the 5.5mm Association Number 93 January 2016

In This Issue:-

5.5mm Association

The ideal narrow gauge scale

55 News - Journal of the 5.5 mm Association - January 2016

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Cover Photo – A scene from Tim Tincknell's excellent exhibition layout depicting the Abergynolwyn end of the Talyllyn Railway in its early days, with Dolgoch in her original cab-less form.
Photo courtesy of Mick Thornton.

From the Editor -

I hope it's not too late to wish everyone a happy and prosperous 2016. May you achieve all your modelling resolutions for this year! One of my resolutions (there are several) is to produce *55 News* on a somewhat more regular and predictable basis. Of course, it's easy to say that, and praiseworthy as it may be, such an ambition ultimately relies on having sufficient copy to fill four issues in any one year. At the moment I am in the fortunate position of having enough for this issue with some left over; so a big thankyou to everyone who has sent material for publication - this makes my job so much easier. On the other hand, I need a constant steady supply of articles, pictures, comments, and letters, anything that can fill a page, a few pages, or just an odd corner. Every contribution is welcome.

A significant proportion of this issue is devoted to a major article by Dennis Harrison. I make no apology for this as I think when you read it you will agree that we are witnessing the end of an era, as this would seem to be the final article in the story of the Towy Valley Tramway. The article itself is classic Towy Valley fare, while Dennis' final addition is a poignant reminder of a situation that will eventually affect us all in some measure or other.

Dennis Harrison and his Towy Valley layouts have been the overriding inspiration for my own modelling and my continued membership of the 5.5mm Association. His encouragement and huge generosity have kept me on this track when I might have given up the scale for something else. In addition, the long tale of the Towy Valley has provided a steady and reliable source of material to fill this publication. Thank you, Dennis – I'm sure we have not heard the last of you!

Best wishes to all,

Noel

Subscriptions!

A polite reminder that subscriptions were due for renewal on 1st January 2016.
Please send your remittance to Andy Hyde – address given at the top of this page.

Chairman Dave's Thoughts – Authentic Colours?

Malcolm circulated some absorbing info recently to the committee regarding FR loco colours, following articles in the FR Heritage magazine. We learned that Prince was intended to be painted Blue after boiler inspection in 1933, but ended up being painted Light Brown before later being finished in Olive Green, while Welsh Pony was a bright shade of blue. In the past we've had references to Boyd (amongst others) describing one of the locos as 'Sea Green'. Boston Lodge was supposedly notorious for ignoring instructions from Colonel Stephens and his successor at Tonbridge, W. H Austen.

This preamble brings up an interesting point - just what is an 'authentic' colour?

I've been reading Steve Barnfield's excellent book 'Painting and Lining in the Smaller Scales' which has some fascinating insights into livery colours of railway companies. He cited an old gentleman he met at an exhibition who as a boy was an apprentice at Doncaster before the war. When looking at two Gresley Pacifics next to each other outside the paint shop, he had noticed that they were somewhat different shades of green. On enquiry, it turned out that one had been painted by the day shift and the other by the night shift. Two paint shop foremen, who presumably mixed the paint to the same recipe, had arrived at slightly different results. No standard shades from DIY sources: paints were mixed using raw pigments and linseed oil.

Take the case of Midland Crimson. This ran from Midland Railway days right up to BR use in the 1950s. It's been reported that on the grouping in 1923, repainting LNWR locos in LMS Crimson (ostensibly identical) gave a much darker hue that those on ex MR locos. One reason put forward was that the black basis for the paint on the LNWR gave different results to the brick red (or similar) primer that Derby used.

As an aside, BR Crimson supposedly traced its hue originally from a 1913 MR Crimson sample.

Then there's the question of lining. Some people claim that Midland Red became lighter over the years. Part of that perception could be the fact that the MR used a very florid form of panelling and lining that later reverted to a more simple approach. Contrasting lining gives the effect of making the basic colour appear darker. It seemed lighter later on simply because there were larger areas on locos of the basic colour on view.

All paints weather over time, and the reaction of the various pigments with each other as well as the elements can give widely differing results. Blue can fade - which is one reason BR abandoned blue express locos after a few years in the early 50s, only to make the same mistake a few decades later with the corporate British Rail livery. Reds and maroons can weather - just look at any 'Post Office Red' car of more than a few years old, which may fade to pink in extreme cases. With Maroon, just look at any FR video from the 80s for examples of how the coaches can weather - newly shopped are deep and lustrous, those in service for a while are paler and with a hint of brown. It could be that just about every coach in a rake might be a subtly different colour.

Even greens can fade: just look at some of the pictures of the FR in the late 50s/early 60s. Some of the coaches start to fade almost to blue. FR coach No.10 seems to be the prime example of this. Even black and white pics from the 30s of two identical coaches, one fresh from the shops and another more traffic worn, can show a great amount of difference between shades.

Then there's the effect of varnishing. Did you know that the original specification for GWR coaches in the 1860s was chocolate and white? It was the reaction of the varnish to the white colour that made it end up as the cream hue that we all know. Similarly on the FR in preservation, the cream colour around the windows actually started out as off white or ivory. Discussions on the LNER forum have stated that GNR/LNER teak got darker with age due to the application of more coats of varnish.

So what can we conclude from all this? Paints have changed over the centuries, from pigments to oils and varnishes, which all affect the way they react to each other. Environmental factors also have their effect, even down to where in the country you are. Central London in the early 50s before the Clean Air Act was a very different place to rural Meirionethshire!

So don't worry too much about the exact, authentic prototypical shade of paint your railway used in the 1880s, 1920s, 1970s or the 21st century. They may all be different!

5.5mm at ExpoNG

We sometimes hear the comment that one reason that our scale is so little-known is because we hardly ever see 5.5mm layouts at exhibitions. It's difficult to argue this point, but for an Association of just 60 or so members, not all of whom will be actively modelling in the scale, I think we don't do too badly in terms of exhibition layouts as a proportion of overall members.
Here is a picture report on the 5.5mm layouts at ExpoNG in Swanley back in October.
The photos, including our cover photo this time, are the copyright of Mick Thornton and we are grateful for his permission to publish them here.

A longer view of the railway on the cover, Tim Tincknell's 'Talyllyn Railway'. This is a relative newcomer to the exhibition scene, although we can't same the same about Tim!

An overall view of the layout. For those who have not met Tim, he is the one hiding behind it!

Francis Stapleton's 'Crazy Anna Mine' draws more smiles than any layout I know. The kids love it and the scenic modelling is invariably admired by the adults. It is a real 'Last-In-First-Out' layout as it takes no more than five minutes to set up or pack up.

Our display table at ExpoNG

More photos to come next time

The Missing Corner

A Last Trip down the Towy Valley with Dennis Harrison

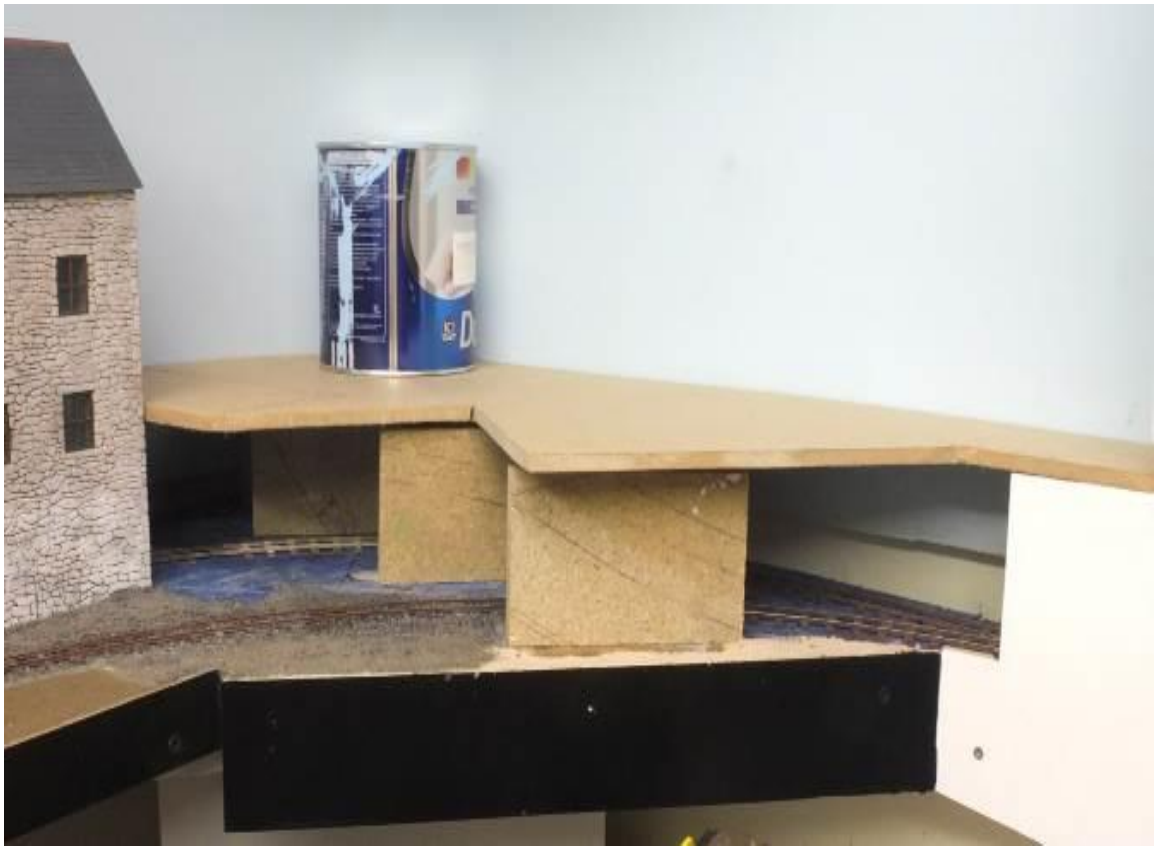
After nearly thirty years of building, we still had one small corner of bare baseboard left at Summit Station and I wanted to put a few more industrial-type buildings into that tiny space. In the end this involved more thinking and scheming time than the actual construction of the buildings.

The corner is roughly triangular in shape and is filled almost completely by one end of the Summit loop trackwork. At this level there was hardly room to fit in one building, never mind the few that I had in mind. I mulled over the options for weeks and finally decided to raise the ground level by about 100mm and to insert a high level corner board with the Summit station trains running underneath. The problem was that the resulting tunnel was going to have to be very shallow indeed and we would need to distract the eye from this unnatural state of affairs. This was solved to some extent by placing a large water tank and a water crane at the end of the platform.

The first job was to cut out a sub-baseboard, itself on two levels, which could be removed if we had an accident on the lower level loop lines. This required a fairly solid base in the gasholder area so we cut the lower piece from 9mm MDF and an upper piece from 18mm chipboard to go above it, screwing the two together. We needed some 100mm high supports for the sub-baseboard and these were cut from chipboard and glued wherever we could site them amongst the lower level trackwork. So far, so good, though I still had no idea what on earth was going to go on it.

At some point in the summer of 2014 I had installed a few gas lamps on Summit platform and a more recent visitor from Somerset declared that as I had gas lighting installed I needed a gasworks to make them go - so to speak. This seemed to fit the bill perfectly though I had no idea what was needed to model a realistic gasworks. There followed a few weeks perusal of the internet to see what would in fact be required - and if I could fit it all into the space.

Th *in whether they are supposed to be gas or oil lamps and they are a bit tricky to put together, but they make a delightful addition to the platform.*



This shows the corner to be tackled and is a good example of rough and ready scenery construction - four 100mm high blocks of chipboard as bearers plus a roughly cut piece of MDF to give an initial guide to size. This was trimmed to a better size later and a further piece of chipboard screwed to the top to give a good deep base for the gasholder stanchions. The gasholder disguised as a paint tin was the nearest I could find for the space available with the finished item being a touch larger.

So, just what are the main steps in gas production - and more importantly what buildings would be required? There now follows a potted introduction for newcomers to what was, in the nineteenth century, a state of the art high-tech operation.

At the start of the process a basic gas is produced in a building called a retort house. Coal is placed in airtight ovens (the retorts) surrounding a central furnace and heated to a high temperature. This produces the gas which is led away via flues. The residue left in the ovens is coke, which is mostly shovelled away and sold, with a portion of the coke being re-used to fire the main furnace. The gas at this stage is highly toxic and so is pumped through a variety of condensers, scrubbers, sponges, dryers and purifiers, the complexity, size, and number of which increased as time and technology marched on. The gas, at the date that I was modelling, was finally fed by a steam driven pump called an exhauster into a cylindrical tank known as a gas holder or gasometer. This holder had an open base and could rise and fall depending on the amount of gas it held. The bottom of the holder was immersed in a water bath to prevent any gas leaks. From here the by-now relatively pure coal gas was distributed to customers via underground piping. There were other by-products from gasworks, but a small works like Summit would probably just have a small output of tar from the various condensers.

It was obvious from the start that we could not model all of the buildings and apparatus required on the small plot of land available, but there was just room enough to accommodate a works office, the gas holder, the retort house, a small coke water quencher, a vertical water condenser and a weighhouse for recording the import of coal and the export of coke and tar. It was not really necessary for a small gasworks to have a rail connection, but it was envisaged that the Summit works would have rudimentary exchange sidings out of the picture with, as in most cases, facilities for local coal merchants to unload main line TVT coal wagons as well. Summit gasworks has a small man-powered tramway to help out here.

The buildings were constructed using card and Slaters brick sheet. They were artistically positioned and pencil lines drawn around the base of each building for future reference, as the whole thing was then moved to the workbench so that we could sit down to the job. The gasholder, now disguised as a lump of beech, waits furtively in the wings.

The main buildings are constructed from well braced card covered in Slaters plastic brickwork. The only interesting building of note is the retort house which displays an early version of a primary air cooled condenser on one gable end and a small chimney at the other. The small water cooled condenser to the rear of the retort house was made from a scrap of 30mm dia. styrene water pipe with a few doors added and a base and top turned up on the lathe. The gas holder was another kettle of fish altogether and many a week was spent deliberating how to make it. In the end a good friend with a woodturning lathe turned one up for me out of a block of Beech------including the necessary slightly domed top. The side was wrapped with a couple of layers of pre scribed styrene card stuck down with UHU glue. The domed top was left just as it was, covered in filler and then well sanded. Then came the tricky bit. The gasholder, as it moves up and down is guided by rollers which are positioned at the end of short arms fixed to the top plating of the tank and bear on vertical stanchions placed round the circumference of the tank. There can be other rollers or bearing plates at the bottom of the tank but these, praise be, are not in view. The stanchions and associated bracing, and the arms and rollers would be a challenge.

One photo I saw of a small gasholder used U-shaped girders for the stanchions so I did the same though in hindsight it would have been easier to use round rodding for the job. My gasholder was 120mm in diameter and this was carefully drawn on to the chipboard and the five stanchion centres drawn in, 72 degrees apart and 5mm away from the sides of the tank. These were drilled 9mm diameter and 12mm deep. The brass stanchions were cut to length and soldered part way into 22mm lengths of round brass bar, 9mm in dia. Each completed stanchion and base had to be measured to ensure that they were all the same height and then pushed into the five pre-drilled holes in the baseboard and again tested for height. When all was OK each stanchion and hole were numbered and the stanchions removed.

This shows just how small the gasworks really is. Everything is still not fixed as the gasholder was the first item to be permanently nailed down. This was built in situ and we needed a clear deck to attack its construction from all angles. This shot also shows the disparity in colour between the brickwork of the walling and the buildings.

I gave the gas holder a couple of coats of Halfords best grey primer and a touch of rusty weathering to finish off then glued it in place with dabs of PVA. Each stanchion was glued into place, also using PVA as a slow-setting glue was needed. We managed to do one stanchion per evening as they needed to be held rigidly in place with Blu-Tak so that they were the correct height, facing in the right direction and absolutely vertical. The whole thing was left for a couple of days to harden off before soldering on the latticework (Scale Link Ltd) which linked the tops of the stanchions and made a much more solid job.
At this point a copy of 'Finescale Railway Modelling Review' arrived and there in all its glory was a gasholder made by the Rev. Denny at the back of Buckingham station. This was a much finer example than mine and I would have appreciated some divine intervention right then to have a conversation with the gentleman as to how he made his gasholder. We may never know.
The roller arms came next, made from 2mm styrene cut to shape. Five thou side plates extended out to partly cover the rollers and the place where the roller bearings would be on the real thing. These took an age to make and I managed to do just one a day for five days. They were glued to the top plates using UHU - again a fairly slow-setting glue as the arms needed some adjustment to get them lined up with the tank centre and with the rollers just touching the stanchions.

Most photos of gasworks that I have seen appear to be surrounded by brick perimeter walls not far removed from those surrounding our older high security prisons. Our gasworks was to be no different and we set to and cut out several lengths of 40mm wide hardboard with the thought of covering these with brick paper downloaded from the internet (Scalescenes). By a remarkable coincidence I had just finished reading an article by Mike Lynch in the Finescale Railway Modelling Review and was very impressed by the brick paper in his engine house, so I used the same paper on the walls, topped off with stone slabs.

The gasholder was a challenge to build as every dimension had to be spot on and I think a bigger one would in many ways be easier to do. This was also the first time we had used brick paper for the walls and not Slater's plastic card, learning the hard way that once in position you cannot alter the colour or weather it in any major sort of way as any attempt just eliminates the mortar courses. The paper was fixed using a Pritt stick which proved an admirable adhesive for light jobs like this.

However, when the walls were in position there was an immediate and obvious disparity between them and the works buildings which were much darker. I tried to remedy the situation by covering the brickwork on the buildings with a lighter colour but this came to nought as the lighter colour persisted in running into the mortar grooves making matters worse, so I gave up in the end and went to bed. A week later I had this great thought - not being able to do much about the paper brickwork I attacked all the Slaters brickwork with a medium wet and dry paper which removed the worst of the grime to the point where the underlying lighter red of the styrene began to show through leaving the mortar courses untouched. Bingo - the result was much lighter and looked passable to my untrained eye.

The area between the tunnel mouth and the platform end needed some thought, so I made a large water tank as a sight 'blocker' and an interesting water crane as a distraction. The crane is a figment of my imagination turned up on the lathe in about half an hour - with another half hour spent trying to roll up some black electricians tape for the hose and then another half hour trying to thread some unbelievably fine brass chain onto a hook made from 0.4mm diameter wire soldered onto the crane arm. This one conforms to the TVT's enthusiasm for every crane on the railway being different - no two are the same.

This little gasworks was rather an emotional bit of work for me. After twenty seven years building the TVT this was the last little bit of baseboard that had remained untouched over all that time. I still have many things to do and complete like another loco or two, a couple of observation carriages and some remedial work on a few buildings - built when I knew nothing about building a building. The TVT is never still and we soldier on immersed in our little make-believe world. It is, after all said and done, just a toy train set touched by imagination and a hint of realism.

The End of the Line

This is a very special photo for me. The above paragraphs were written towards the end of 2014 and just before my health started to decline rather faster than anticipated. A family gathering shortly afterwards came to the conclusion that we must now sell the house and buy a much smaller one nearer to 'civilisation'. The TVT had to go, but before demolition started I took the last photos of salient areas of the line including some of the gasworks. TVT loco No. 2 is at the gasworks and was the very last loco to run on the TVT. Shortly after the photo was taken it was packed away to join the other locos and all the rolling stock and the process of demolishing the TVT began.

The first glimmerings of an idea for what eventually ended up as the TVT started nearly thirty years ago and involved building a dedicated railway room with insulation, heating and lighting, building baseboards and track, locos and rolling stock, scenery and buildings - learning how to do each new job as we went along. I am still a bit bemused nowadays just thinking about the magnitude of the task facing me all those years ago but there is a lot to be said for youth and enthusiasm. In hindsight I would change nothing - the scale and gauge of the TVT have proved an excellent combination.

There will not be another railway, but I hope to continue building locos and stock for friends wherever I end up - after all, you only need a small room or an eight by six garden shed to do this and all my small machines and tools are still in first class order even if I am not.

What a great adventure it has all been - I would not have missed it for all the tea in China.

Dennis Harrison
Brynawel
15.11.2015

Getting to Know our Members

It occurred to me recently that most of us know very little about our fellow Association members. Some of us meet at the AGM, of course, but even then we don't get to talk about much else but the business in hand. This is the first of a new feature that I would like to include occasionally in which some of our friends tell us a little more about themselves, their backgrounds and their other interests.
We start, perhaps logically, with our Chairman, ***Dave Etheridge***

Before and After?
What a difference a day makes!
(It's actually 30 years)

55 News -Tell us briefly about your professional life – what you do / did for a living.
Dave - I'm a professional musician; bassist and conductor of a 55 piece jazz orchestra. I also teach bass and write a monthly column for Bass Guitar Magazine.

55 News - When / how did you become interested in model railways?
Dave - My elder brother was heavily into model railways when I was young and so I gradually entered into the spirit of the thing after many years as a keen Airfix model kit enthusiast. We both went through phases: Hornby Dublo 2 rail, Tri-ang, even Lone Star Treblo Electric. I devoured Railway Modeller each month (I still have back copies to the early 50s) and Edward Beal's books. I joined the 009 Society in 1974, and started 5.5mm modelling in 1975 when I bought a collection of models from the second-hand stand at an exhibition in Enfield.

55 News - Are you mostly a model railway builder or collector?
Dave - Well, I do collect models, but have every intention of starting active modelling and exhibiting once again, when my personal circumstances have stabilised. A nasty divorce meant that I haven't been able to model for a few years now.

55 News - Do you have a current layout or layouts?
Dave - Aha! Both, in fact. I've got enough material for FOUR layouts. I own Alan Catlow's version of Towyn Wharf (acquired 1996, last exhibited 2010), I have Keith Vernon's Cadnant Valley Tramway layout (acquired 1993) and some baseboards with handbuilt track that I found in Chuffers (anyone remember that shop near Marylebone station?) in 1976 or thereabouts. That's enough layouts and stock to keep me going for decades. You can never have too many models. I happen to subscribe to the belief that 'more is more'!

55 News - Describe your approach to modelling.
Dave - Definitely freelance, as long-term Association members will realise from innumerable past articles.

55 News - Given the space, time and budget, what would you like to build?
Dave - So many ideas, so little time: A Festiniog layout, expand Towyn Wharf, a freelance layout (or two?), and then there's that pipedream of an Edward Beal style empire in Hornby Dublo 3 rail....