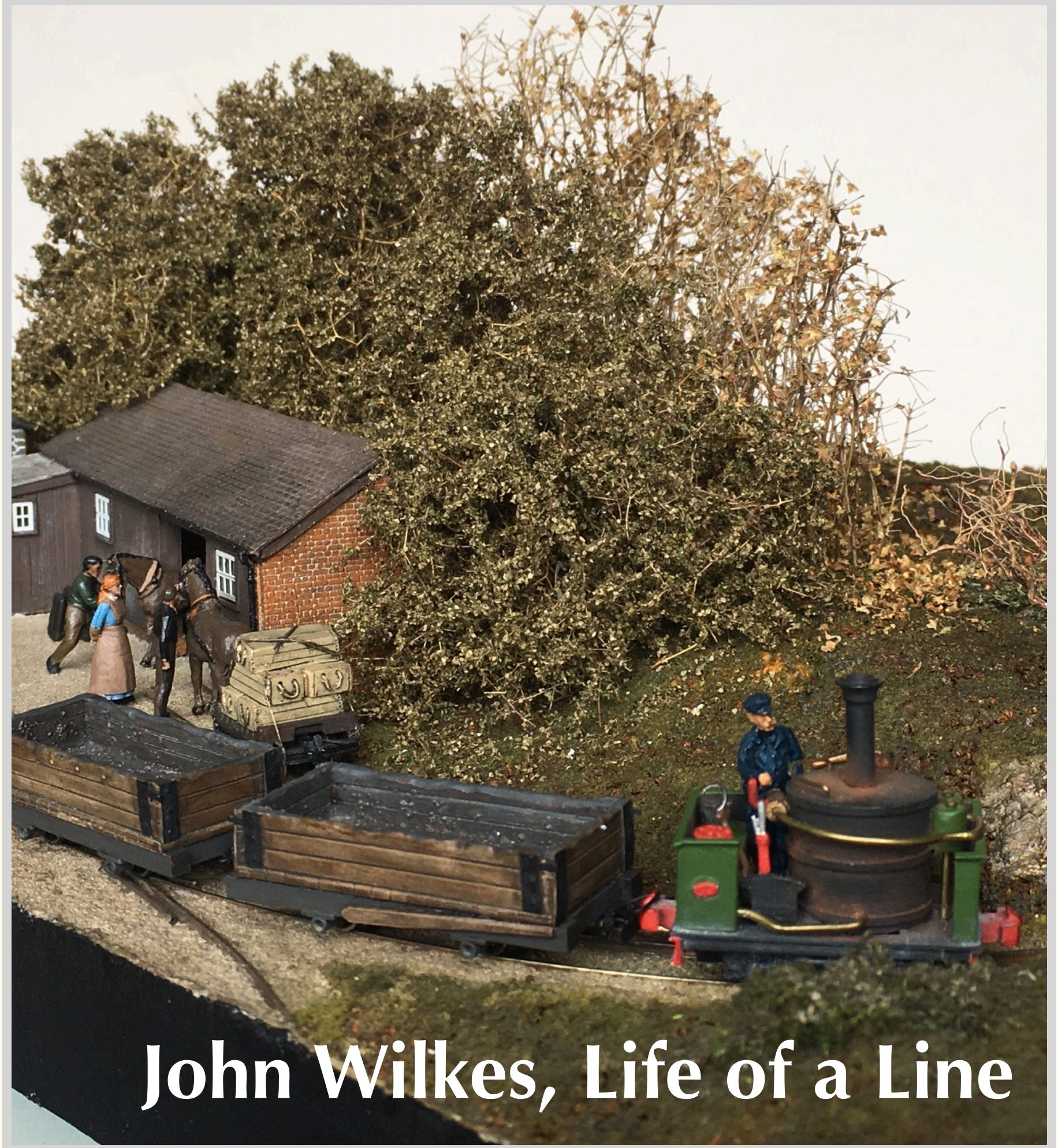
The Micro Model Railway

Dispatch

For the Micro Layout enthusiast

Issue 20. Winter 2025



John Wilkes, Life of a Line

The Micro Model Railway Dispatch

For the Micro Layout enthusiast

Christmas is back upon us. Another year has passed and as tradition dictates, it's time to reflect on what has happened in the past 12 months. **The Dispatch** keeps on going. I am, as always, so grateful for all your support in keeping this little corner of the hobby alive. Even more so this issue, as there was a time when I thought that there wasn't going to be one. The next issue sees a very special anniversary. Perhaps some sort of celebration is in order.

At the start of October, I fulfilled a long held ambition, to ride the Ffestiniog Railway Gravity Train. I'm sure you all know that I am a member of the Ffestiniog Railway Society and the Heritage Group, and I was very lucky to be invited to experience the down hill train ride at Heritage weekend. (If you haven't seen the video, It's on my Micro Model Railway Dispatches YouTube channel.) Yes it was wet, so wet that some of my clothes took a couple of days to dry out. But wouldn't have missed it for the world.

Something else I wouldn't have missed was attending Trainfest in Milwaukee at the start of November. The show went very well indeed. Bonftofts operated almost perfectly. The wagon loading and unloading systems seem to be well bedded in now. We have systems and methods and they work very well indeed.

I was gratified to meet so many YouTube channel watchers and Dispatch readers. One person going so far as to say that they only came to Trainfest to see me! A honour indeed.

Trainfest 2026 is November 7th and 8th at the Baird Center in Milwaukee again. We expect to be there. Bontofts however may take a little break. It deserves it.

What will take its place? Well, I have a few ideas… Watch this space.

See you in 2026 for the 5th anniversary of **The Micro Model Railway Dispatch.**

Contents

"Micro layouts are small model railroads, usually less than three or four square feet in area that nonetheless have a clear purpose and excellent operating capability."

Carl Arendt

Life of a Line – the story of a railway through time

John Wilkes

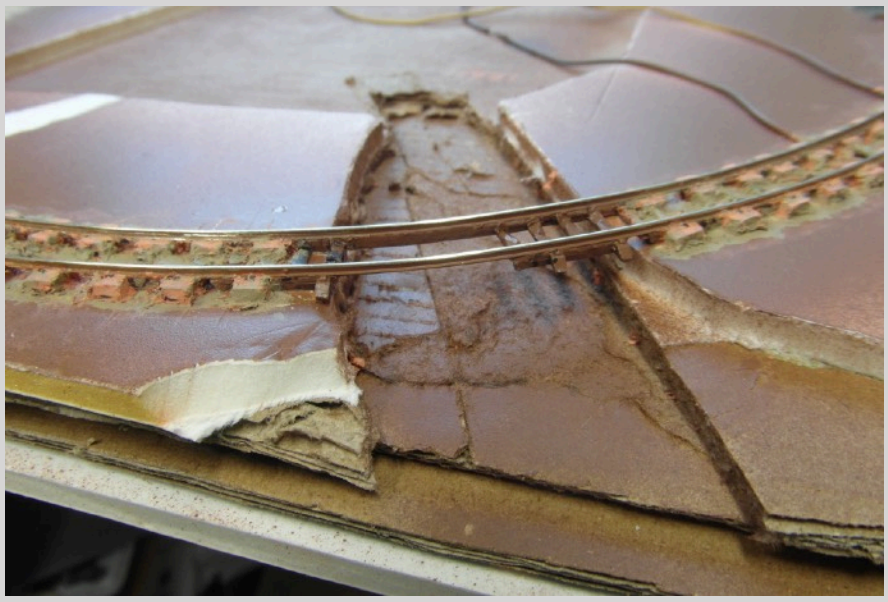
Scale 009: Size. 20″ x 12″ 500mm x 300mm

Life of a Line depicts the stages a railway line might go through during its existence. Its beginning, its end, and if it's lucky, its preservation. Each stage is represented by a scene showing things that are hopefully typical of the stage. There's no marker between each stage, but I hope they're clear.

The layout was constructed as an entry in the Dave Brewer challenge at ExpoNG, a major exhibition in the world of narrow gauge modelling in the UK. It has a small footprint measuring just 30cms x 50cms, and is a very simple circle of track. I built it to try out a few experiments in its construction, as well as having a bit of fun while I prevaricated over the next big project. I wanted to represent different types of track fitting into the timeframe of each stage, and to use some new scenery techniques to see how they worked.

Baseboard

The baseboard was an area I wanted to try out a new idea. My previous baseboards have been of very traditional wood and chipboard construction, and quite heavy. I wanted to use lightweight material, and so used several layers of foam board, mount and cardboard to see if it maintained its rigidity and strength. This was after all a very small layout, and it has been successful: it would be interesting to know how large a baseboard could be made in this form.



Baseboard layers of foam and cardboard

Looking down on the layout showing the stages a railway might go through during its life

Trackwork

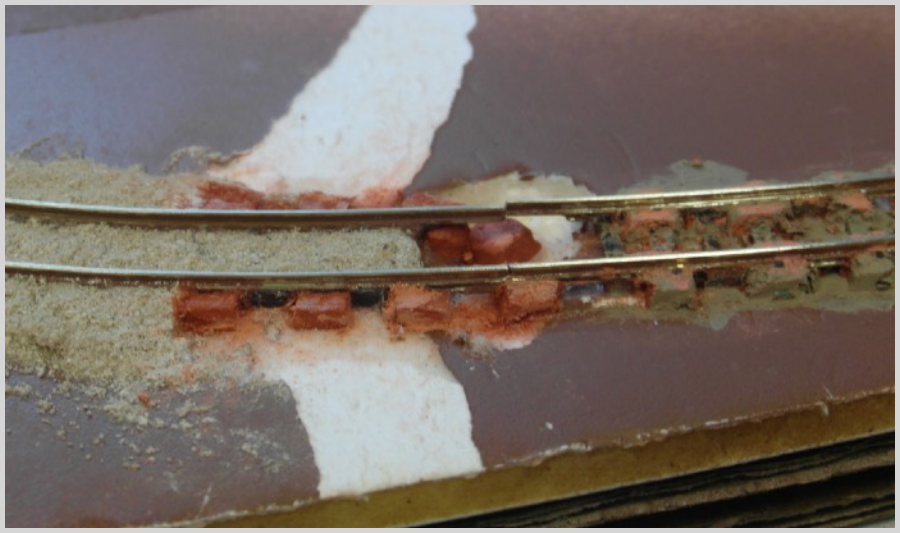
The first type of track, when the line was first built, has ballast covering the sleepers, a practice that was common in early railways. There's a small section of mixed gauge track and a suggestion of "more" off the layout. There is also a layover point, quite often seen in narrow gauge industrial railways. To operate, the point blades are simply laid over the running rails of the main track, and men or horses pushed waggons from the main onto the new track. The model works too, and has to be manually operated, which seems appropriate.

The representation of buried track

The track represents early practice of laying the rail on stone chairs. This was built around Peco code 55 N gauge track, as I liked its low profile, but the method I used was quite labour intensive. The track itself was mercilessly abused by cutting away all of the webbing between the sleepers and most of the sleepers themselves. Enough was left to hold the rail in place and to maintain the gauge between the rails. The remains of the sleepers were then spaced out as appropriate for stone chairs in 4mm scale. The stone chairs were formed in clay around the remains of each sleeper. The bottom 25mm of the rail, which is normally buried in the plastic webbing in this type of N gauge track, was filed away in between some the stone chairs. The result was then painted up and lots of weeds planted.

In preservation days, the track is the more normal transverse sleepered track. The webbing between the sleepers was removed in most cases so there could be air beneath the rail, something I am quite keen on seeing.

Layover pointwork in operation



Scenery

As befits new starts, the trees at the start of the railway represent spring with new, full leaves. The armatures are made from the flowers of a Smoke Plant, which look quite delicate, but when dried are surprisingly sinewy and strong. They are covered in dried Duckweed gathered locally, held in place with liberal amounts of strong hair spray.

The "end" of the line is set out in the moorland. Moorland is often very boggy and uneven, and the usual scenic techniques of scatter and/or static grass laid on top of a smoothish surface won't do. So I looked elsewhere and lighted on the idea of using natural materials. I used Alder catkins, which when thoroughly dried form small uneven balls of about 3mm in diameter. They are quite brittle and can be crushed easily if wanted. It is plentifully laid and held in place with copious amounts of PVA glue.

As it's laid, it can be formed into rough shapes and unevenness that characterises bogs. They are already a natural colour of course and don't need painting, even visible glue might represent pools of water. But I did run over a series of washes of various colours to give a bit more depth to the appearance.

The scene is an autumn one, reflecting the line being on its last legs, and so the trees are autumn too. The leaves this time are made from Silver Birch catkins, which have a fingered leaf shape. This is not a new technique, and has been mentioned in several modelling books. The problem is often cited with their size; they are usually too large for 4mm scale. But I struck lucky. I was on holiday in the Scottish Highlands and noticed that the Silver Birch trees grew a lot smaller than I had seen. Sure enough, the catkins too were smaller and very suitable for 4mm. I have also since discovered what must be dwarf varieties of Silver Birches back down south. They can only really be used for autumn trees though, as the shape of the leaf is directional, and if put onto tree armatures at random angles they do not look realistic.

Trees made from a Smoke Plant and Duckweed

Scenery formed using Alder catkins

Autumn leaves use Silver Birch catkins of a suitable size

In preservation days, there are a couple of ornamental trees which have been made from dried elderflowers, shaped to suit different types of trees. The rock face into the old mine is a suitable piece of tree bark.

I do like a bit of humour on layouts providing it's not too obtrusive. So, the toilets on the preservation area are a little basic, to say the least … The Ladies Powder Room is a small portable loo and the Gents toilet is a bush.

Conclusion

A small project like this is fun to do while contemplating the next, big layout. But it can also just extend the prevarication! It is good to have a reason to try out some experiments and to see if the results are convincing. I have to say it's a relief to have a continuous run, even if it is very small.
A video of the layout can be seen on YouTube

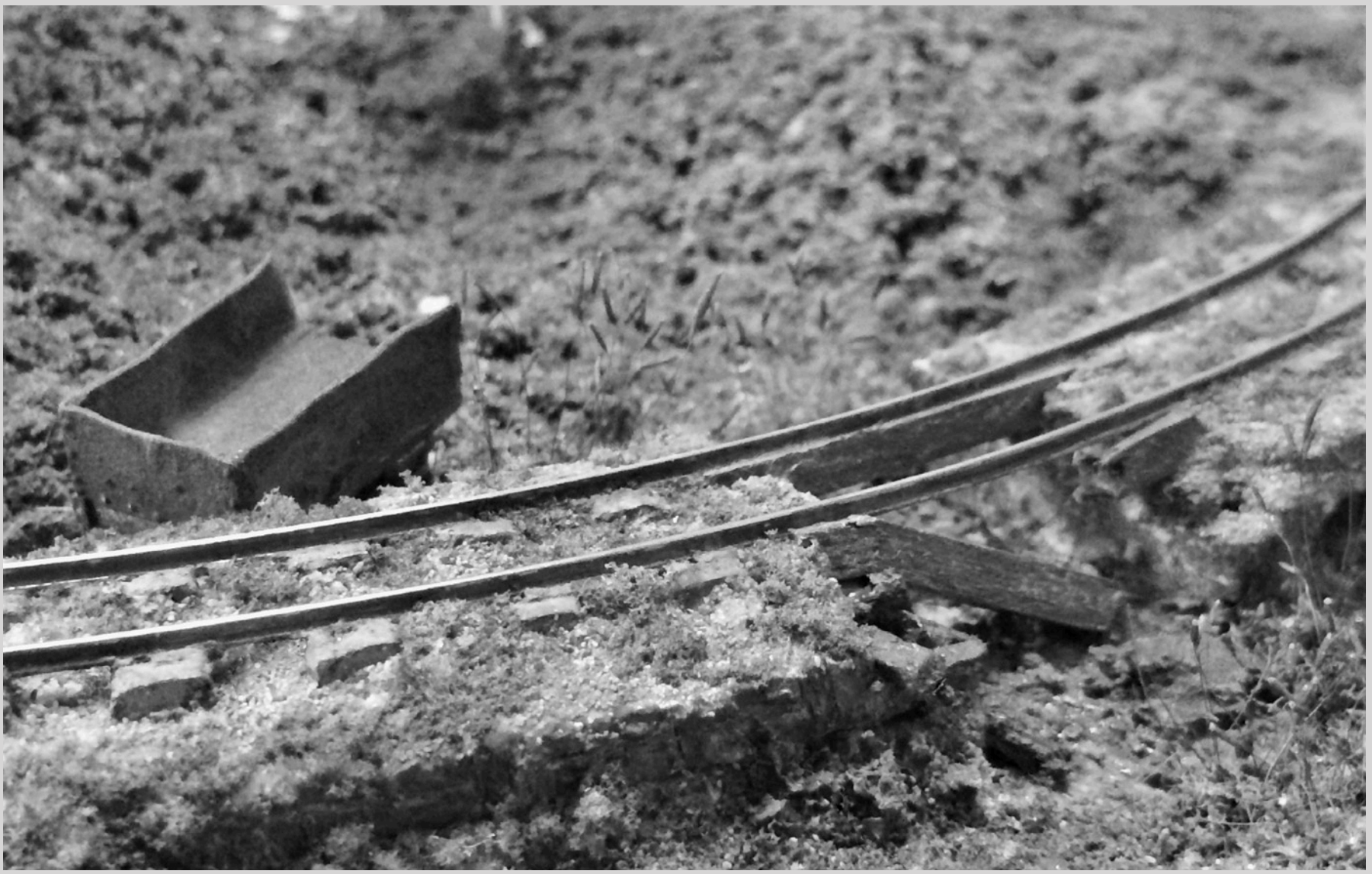
https://youtu.be/VkuGkogBvSs?si=oZgweiD3cct0IIGN

(Editor says: It's one of my favourite micro layout videos on YouTube

The toilet facilities are a little, how shall we say, "basic".

Now, lets take a look at the history of the line from success to dereliction to becoming a tourist attraction…

In the beginning, the line was a horse drawn tram road. There is a stable at the end of the line near to the processing buildings. I've been deliberately vague about the exact industry, but it is the extraction of some mineral and transporting it for basic processing before being transhipped.



The next stage shows the layout closer to the end of its life, out on the moorland, a short distance away from the processing plant. The track is now in a bad state of repair, with most of the ballast having been washed away or become overgrown. A small bridge has collapsed, although it is still usable.

Before the line can move into preservation, it has to pass Destiny Junction! At the end of its life, the railway plunges into a metaphorical Pit of Oblivion, unless it is fortunate of course, and heads towards preservation. There is a static stub point here fixed in the direction of preservation. The Pit of Oblivion is simply a tangled line heading downwards off the baseboard, painted red and yellow.

The preservation scene is set in the happy days of summer with crowds of tourists who come to see the railway and the old mine. This is the early days of preservation where old railway buildings are repurposed and there is much work still to be done.

Budleigh Beach

Paul Corkrum

Scale:00. Size:58.5″ x 6″ 1485mm x 150mm

Budleigh Beach: Simple but effective, and with Thomas and Clarabel running, a sure fire winner with the children

I was asked if I could provide a layout for a Church flower festival to fit in with the theme "the seaside and travel to it". The location and hence size was specified as long and thin, unattended operation was required. The festival date preceded a number of holiday and work commitments, so I only had 4 clear days in which to construct a layout including baseboard.

The result is "Budleigh Beach" (as the festival was in Budleigh Salterton in East Devon).

The accumulated items store was raided (including the cows which were purchased in a model shop in Bratislava), and a single track using Gaugemaster foam ballast for speed was laid with the required breaks for a simple auto reversing module.

The main scenic elements were identified to be a a hill at one end for the train to "hide in" (using insulation foam as the former), a level crossing at the midpoint, and a station platform at the other end for the train to arrive and depart from.

Non-working signals were fitted to "protect" the level crossing, and Triang platform units and station building along with a signal box, used for speed of getting it finished, were added, along with a small wood.

Although a small green 4-wheel coach and a representation of an E4 tank engine were intended to be used, the sight of "Thomas" (the 0-4-0 version) and "Clarabel" in my stock box generated a request to use those from the organisers.

I hope the campers don't get bothered by the cows in the night!

Simple, yet effective treatment of the tunnel mouth

The old Hornby signal box is an ubiquitous design

Purves Halt

Ken Jones

Scale:009. Size:13″ x 38″ 300mm x 400mm

Purves Halt is my new layout, well not exactly new more like resurrected. It's an 009-layout built many years ago by the late West Midlands Narrow Gauge Club member Derek Purves in a plastic wheel clamp box, the clamp being bought to protect his caravan from theft.

The main layout shows a small terminus on probably a narrow-gauge line. Not surprising as Derek used to drive locomotives on the Welshpool and Llanfair Railway, spending time with his wife, Pam, in their caravan near the railway. He was also a member of the West Midlands 009 group and people remember him building this layout some 20 or so years ago.

They remember meetings in his house and the cakes his wife made. Does that sound similar to other model railway groups.

*(**Editor says:**I remember groups like that!)*

As you can see, the original labels are still under the layout

A view of the station. You can see that the walls of the container have been cut away to allow the the tracks to pass between the two halves of the box

The main board with buildings in place is 13in x 38in and still has the original artwork / label for the wheel clamp underneath. Some may remember this at early exhibitions we did like the Wonderful World of Trains and Planes.

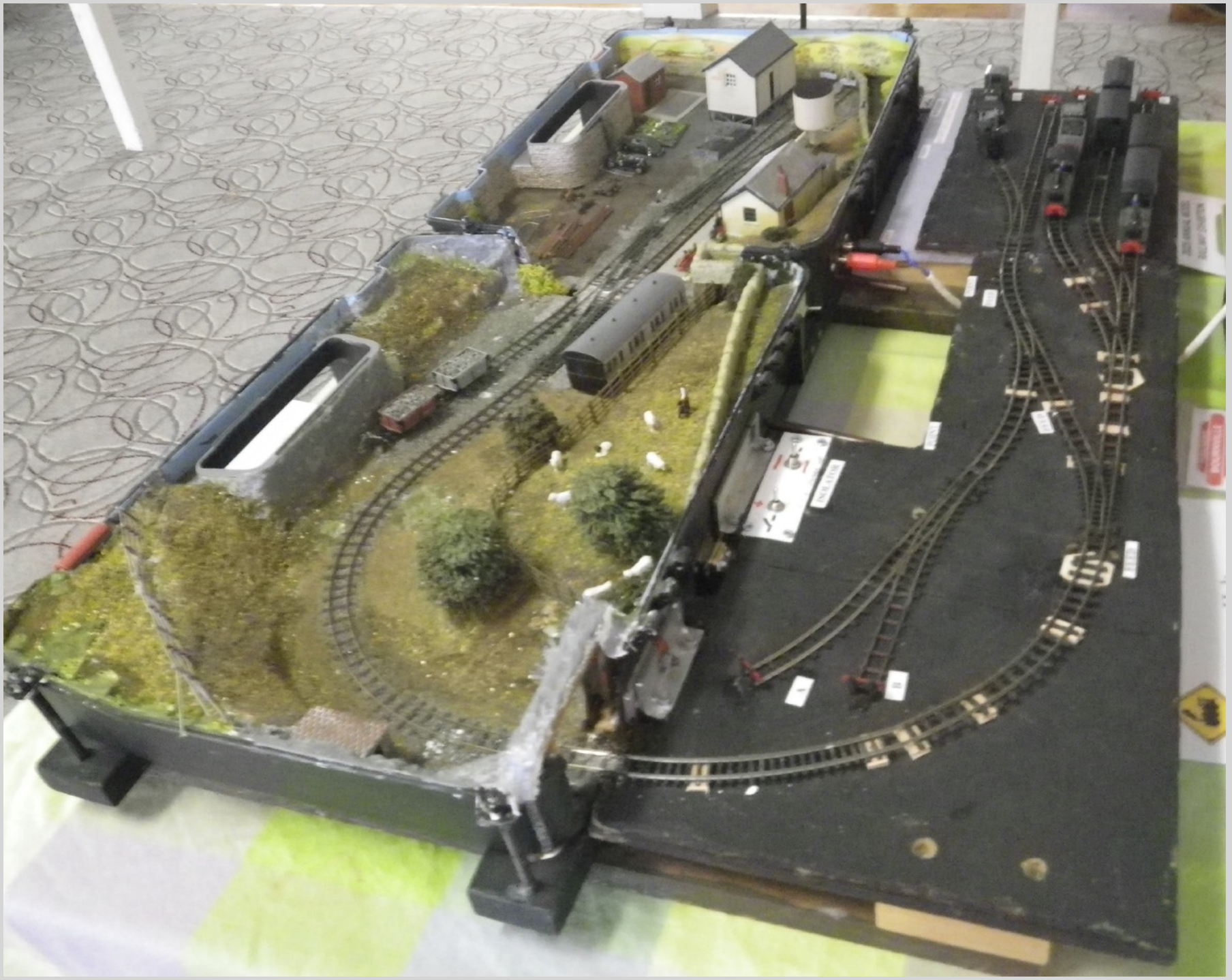
I've tried to keep much of this as Derek built it adding just a bit of scenery and a couple of cars. His widow in late 2024 said his family would like me to have it. Since those early days he added a rear board which held a small fiddle yard.

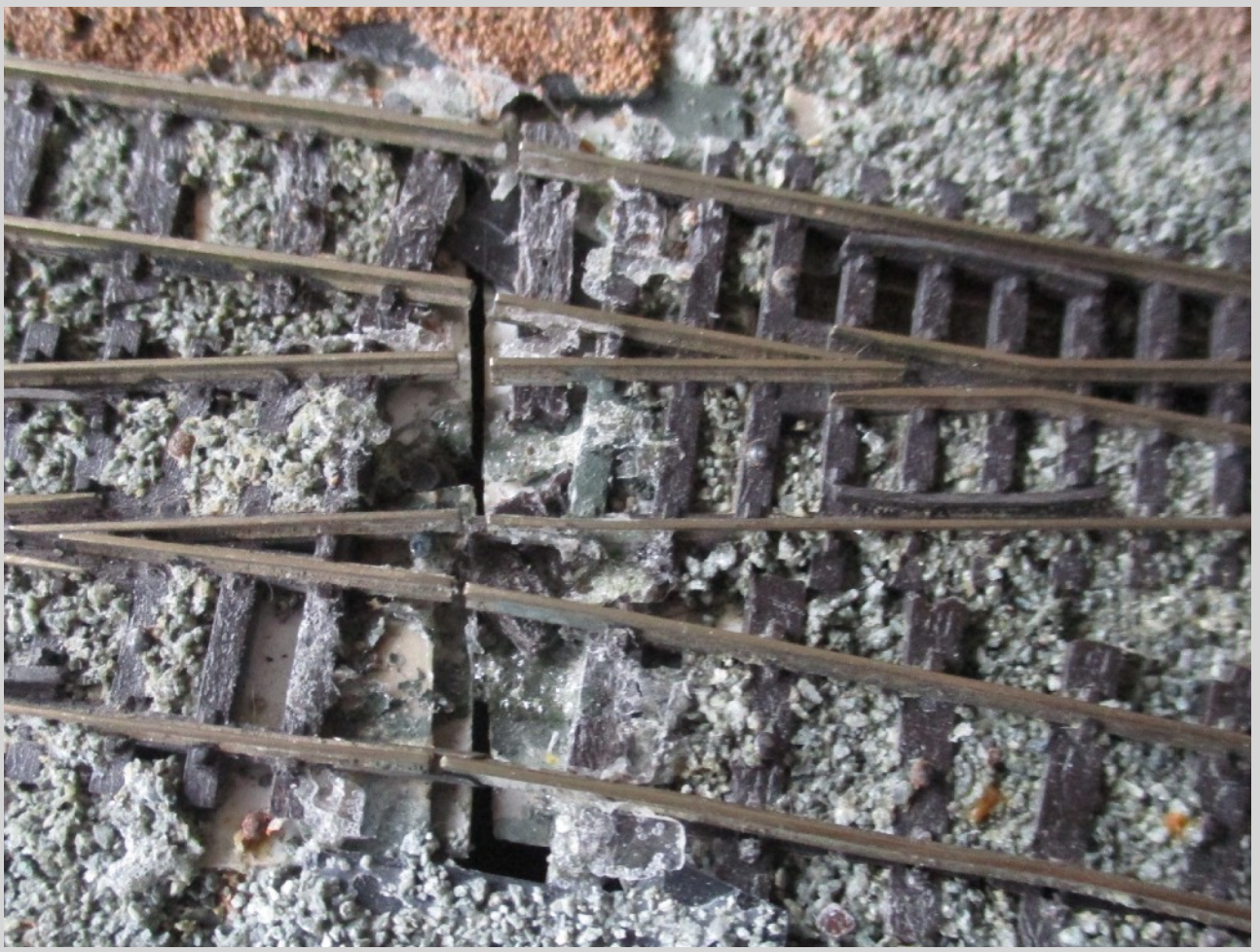
The points at the station are all manual operated by push / pull rods. In 2024 /5 I extended the fiddle yard to utilise self-isolating points and isolating switches with the help of Vince Painter which now means the extended fiddle yard is operational.

The layout and fiddle yard now measure a total of 51 cm x 97 cm [22in x 38 in]

I like the fact that Derek built it in a wheel clamp box whereas most people would have thrown the box away. The layout came with no controller or rolling stock, so second-hand rolling stock has been acquired some dating back nearly 40 years, mainly Egger Bahn, but all similar to what Derek ran when he built the layout.

The refurbished station. Ken tried to keep as much of the original as possible





The short stock from the German Egger Bahn range is perfect for a tiny layout like this one

Hiding the awkward moulding in the container that formed the carrying handle, called for some creativity.
In the countryside section (top image) a rock race was created using plaster bandage.
In the station area, a much clever approach was needed.: atall stone wall using textured paper.
Also of note in this image are the period automobiles and the station garden.

Averton Tramway

Peter and Clare Averill

Scale:On30 Size: 36″ x 12″ 915mm x 305mm

Arthur Averton, the great-grandchild of Thomas and Annie Averton, left Australia in 1914 to serve in the first world war. He was one of the lucky ones and returned to Australia in 1919. Having seen the French 2ft gauge railways used during the war, he was determined to create the missing railway link between Averton and Beechworth. As it requires an Act of Parliament to build a railway, he bypassed this requirement, creating the Averton Tramway.

By this time the Victorian Railways had only built 4 of the proposed 2ft 6″ narrow gauge railways. None of these railways covered costs, let alone returned a profit, and it wasn't long before their operations were being scaled back. This meant that Arthur was able to access surplus to requirement equipment at good rates and this decided that his tramway would be 2′ 6″.

Due to the region having large tree plantations, steam operations were never a practical proposition and the original motive power was provided by rail conversions of road vehicles, mainly Model T Fords. These railmotors were limited in the amount of produce they could transport and it wasn't until the 1930s that a suitable locomotive was found.

In 1935 a 2ft gauge 0-6-0 diesel hydraulic locomotive manufactured by a Springvale based engineering firm Kelly & Lewis entered service at the timber tramway from Alexandra to Rubicon. This was the first diesel locomotive to be built in Victoria. It was such a success that the Averton Tramway immediately placed an order with Kelly & Lewis for three similar diesel locomotives. They differed from the Alexandra ones being 2ft 6″ gauge instead of 2ft which allowed the transmission components to be within the frames as opposed to external connecting rods and to be of an 0-4-0 configuration allowing tighter curves. The added axle loading was not an issue as the Averton Tramway's ex-Victorian Railways rail was of a heavy weight.

A new day dawns at Averton Yard

The Tramway was used for exporting all the local produce as well as transporting goods needed by the locals. Right from the beginning there was an element of tourist traffic due to the scenic beauty of the region, so some passenger wagons were sourced.

During the 1970s a local preservation society set about restoring and preserving the Averton Tramway as a tourist operation. The area now heavily relied on tourism, boutique orchards and gourmet produce. The preservation society was successful in obtaining state and federal grants and built up a large volunteer workforce. This operation is working to the present day.

Averton Yards Micro Layout

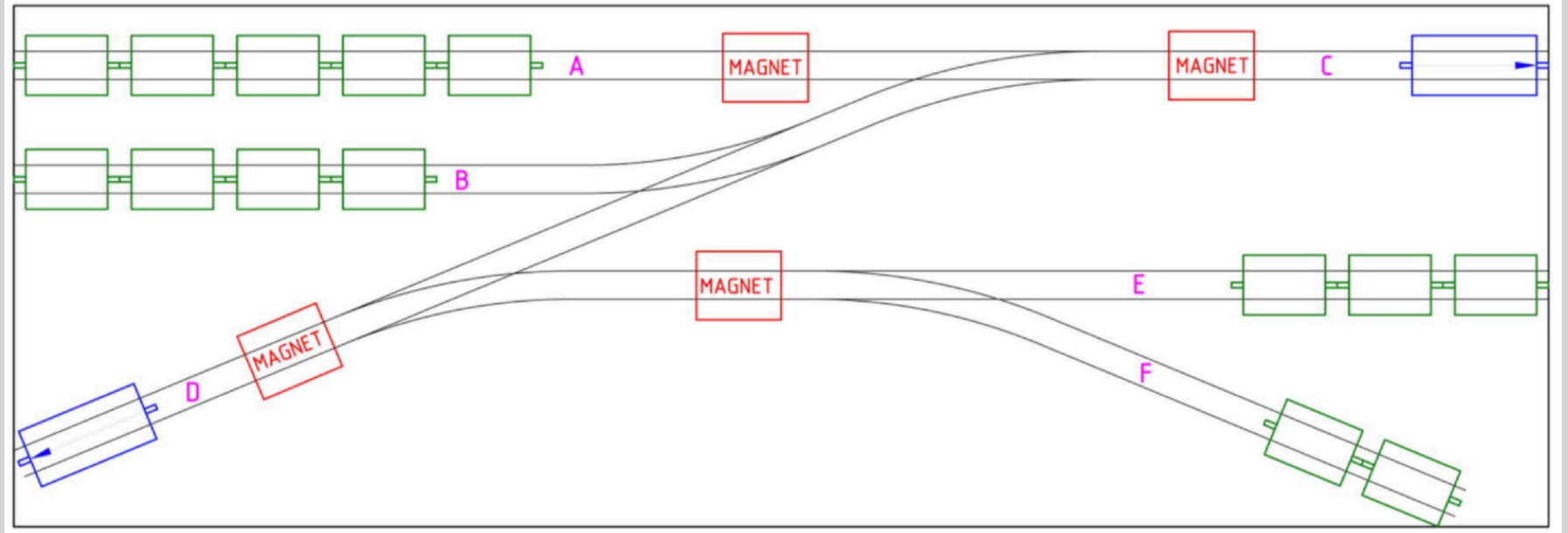
The layout is 3 square feet in area and was started in 2021 but has only recently reached this stage.

Not completed yet but usable. Everything is scratch built including the locomotives, rolling stock, buildings and the DCC control system. Turnouts and sounds are controlled as DCC stationary accessories. All the rolling stock are the same length so that they can be utilised in any location on the layout, allowing the shunting puzzle to work. The layout disassembles and fits into the carry case (see video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLsCVfqCMO4) One shuffle of rolling stock tokens takes two operators around 45min to an hour to shunt, sometimes longer.

Averton Yards set up ready for operation

Atmospheric night time shot

Operating Averton Yards



Track A = Maximum capacity 6 rolling stock
Track B = Maximum capacity 4 rolling stock
Track C = Maximum capacity one locomotive + 2 rolling stock
Track D = Maximum capacity one locomotive + 2 rolling stock or 2 rolling stock only
Track E = Maximum capacity 4 rolling stock
Track F = Maximum capacity 3 rolling stock
Starting and finishing position of rolling stock (green) and locomotives (blue) as shown.
Delayed magnetic uncoupling magnets (red) – no "hand of god" allowed.
The final position of all pieces of rolling stock are determined by random selection. This means that there are 14 factorial combinations giving a staggering 87,178,291,200 possibilities.

Damems A micro layout for watching the trains go by

Ben Bucki

Scale:00 Size 42″ x 12″ 1050mm x 305mm

Damems is a very distinctive station. The view captures the essence of the location perfectly

My local preserved railway -of which I am a member- is the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway in West Yorkshire. Considering it's a relatively short line at under 5 miles length, the stations of the preserved KWVR demonstrate a surprising amount of variety, but my favourite is probably Damems; not only the smallest on the KWVR, but it has a claim to being one of the smallest operational manned stations anywhere in the country.

It oozes eccentricity, with the short platform having a proper wooden station building, a compact signal box for the manually-operated gated level crossing, the former stationmasters/crossing-keepers house right beside the line, and very well-tended gardens. With a cobbled lane winding down the wooded hillside to cross the railway, the composition of the site is pleasantly photogenic. What's more, this is no mere wayside halt; the proximity of the main passing loop for the KWVR means that Damems tends to be a hive of activity even on a normal timetable day. During galas, it's almost ridiculously busy.

What a delightful view!

That's all there is!

The Layout

Given all this, Damems really appealed to me for a build. I was looking to create something for my growing collection of 00 gauge (until recently, I'd mainly built photographic dioramas in this scale) and Damems ticked a lot of boxes. I wouldn't have room for anything large though when I built it; if there's a downside to Damems, it's the linear nature of the site. To the north, the gentle S-bends and the trees where the line runs parallel to the River Worth would provide a possible way of screening the exit on a really long layout. To the South there's Damems Loop, interesting enough in itself of course, complete with its Midland Railway signal box, but no natural scenic break until the curves in the cutting at the far end. Overall, it's a bit long, even with some compression of the site. I only had a board a few feet long to work with, for storage reasons. What I've ended up with is a shelf layout that has the main features of Damems, which hopefully can be extended now I've moved house.

The Sidings

Because I was forced to just model the station area, I took a historical liberty with the site. These days Damems is on a stretch of plain line, but in the industrial heyday of the valley the station had a kick-back siding just past the house. I thought that re-instating it as a fictional engineers storage siding would add a bit of interest, allowing a little bit of shunting. It's a touch short, but that does impose an operational constraint on the plan which makes it more engaging to run.

If I'm operating the layout as a gala day timetable, then one thing I like to do is use the siding for a loco and brake van shuttle. A small tank engine and one or two brakes can just squeeze in whilst the main services run past. If the layout is being run as a 'normal' Saturday, then having an excuse for a diesel shunter to collect or drop-off a random wagon gives a break from passenger trains trundling about.

The Structures

When I built the layout, it was for an article in the Hornby Collectors Club magazine, and so I set myself the challenge of just using products form their present and past ranges wherever possible, which resulted in something a little more in the spirit of Damems than a strictly accurate build. The main features are the single-track level crossing (I used the venerable Dapol, ex-Airfix kit which lent itself to shortening of the gates to two panels (better than the Hornby one), the platform-level signal box -(a near prototypical resin model) existed in the Skaledale range-, the platform shelter/ store, and the former railway house.

I scratch built the wooden station from scraps and bits from the spares box, and I'll admit it's a bit crude. Most of it was card with detail parts from a damaged 'Town and Country' range kit, with wooden stirrers for the timberwork. Really, it needs replacing at some point with something a bit better. The Station-masters house was kit-bashed from another old Hornby 'Town and Country' kit, a "Bell Inn", which I had bought damaged second-hand. Cutting and re-arranging the walls to better reflect the window placing of the prototype, it was faced with sandpaper to represent the rendered/pebble-dashed finish of the real thing. Again, it's a little on the crude side, but worked within the constraints of the project.

Editor says: I love the way that Ben has composed this shot. Seeing the station building framed by the house and the coach makes for a very naturalistic image.
It's a simple detail but it's something all micro layout builders could work towards.

Another very realistic view

Scenics

Damems can give the impression of being miles from civilisation, and I wanted to represent that in the model. Being limited as ever by budget, the scenery was very much a mix of upcycled and second-hand products. A mix of static grass sheets and scatter materials provided a scenic base atop the carved foam and papier-mache landforms. More scatters, and the venerable techniques of moss and flock were used for bushes. A hint of the well-kept gardens came through the use of some coloured scatters, which were sourced from a dolls-house shop. Trees are a mix and frankly a bit crude, being mainly from a big box bought second-hand at a show, but they fill the background nicely. Finally, resin walls and the standard Hornby platform fences were used, though with colour-washes to tone them down a bit.

Operational Potential, and Stock

At the real Damems on a normal Saturday, things often kick-off with a DMU or railbus operating the first two full-line-return services. It also tends to be the day when the engineers are out on the line, so the unit may end up crossing a goods train at the nearby loop. Throughout the day, this engineers train will frequently travel through Damems, running alongside the passenger diagram in the spare path, with it either working light-engine, on engineers stock, or moving freight wagons or empty carriages between yards, giving a legitimate excuse to run non-passenger workings on a layout set in the present day.

Passenger diagrams outside of the peak season tend to be of 3-4 carriages hauled by one of the varied fleet of steam locomotives; anything from the vintage 'Coal Tank' no.1054, through various BR Standard-types, up to giants like the 2-8-0's. For variety, summer weekends often feature a large diesel (classes 20 or 37) on a passenger set with the on-train bar, instead of the unit. Sundays usually feature two-train passenger workings, out of season it's a DMU on the second diagram but summer holiday weekends frequently feature steam haulage and vintage carriages.

My collection of 00 stock is a bit varied; to be honest I tend towards tank engines and diesel shunters, which isn't bad at representing the pioneer days of the KWVR but doesn't match well with the modern era of the line. That said, such a wide variety of motive power has been on the railway at some point or another, you can excuse just about anything appearing at Damems. "Flying Scotsman" has been a few times, Class 50's, Deltics, High Speed Trains, Class 66's and 70's, GWR tender locomotives, even vintage machines like the Liverpool and Manchester "Lion" have all appeared.

I was able to acquire the Hornby model of ex-Midland Railway 0-6-0 4F 43924, which handles most of my trains, as well as a Lima class 101 DMU. This latter machine is going to need a bit of modification; it's not quite in the right livery for the body style, but mine's due an upgrade with a new chassis so it'll probably get a repaint.

Het Tuinhuis (the garden house)

Albert Winkel

Scale:00 (4mm:1ft) Size 27″ x 20″ 700mm x 520mm

It all started with my first scratch built boxcar. I wanted to replace it because it hardly was a model, I did not use drawings as a reference in those days. When the chassis was removed for reuse, I was left with the wagon body, wondering what to do with it. I could not throw it away because it was one of my first scratchbuilts ever... Then I got the idea to turn it into a garden shed. It's been extensively renovated and painted a different color, but it still reminds me of my first scratch built project.
The next question was what to do with a model garden shed. So I needed a small layout. I had pieces of track from another project and I had rolling stock. What I did not have was an idea for a layout. But I had a piece of 70x52 cm plywood with a picture frame. I've always wanted to do something with contradictions. And I like videos about building table top wargaming industrial scenes and medieval buildings and so that's what I wanted to build on this diorama. The scale is 1:45 on 16,5mm track. A derelict wall with a gatehouse to divide the diorama. On the green side the garden shed and on the other side a kind of chemical plant.

The wall with the gatehouse is made of foam, cardstock and wood. The plant is out of two empty beer cans and some piping made of plastic tubes. In the fuse box is a little Lipo battery for the LEDs in the gatehouse and the plant. Next to the garden house is a pump to drain the polluted area. It is a 3D printed device I once got from a friend. It contains a little motor and to show it really turns I invented the pump out of a piece of tube, wire and a little disc from cardstock. Way too big for a normal pump so I call it a drainage pump.
The rolling stock is radio controlled. The Diema industrial loco I made out of plastic. No 3D and no kits. Just plastic and a sharp knife. The chassis is an old Bachmann Underground Ernie inspection vehicle. It ran on 12V. The receiver only took 3V so I replaced the N20 motor with a 3V version. The Diema contains the drive unit, a lipo battery, a receiver with speed control, a LED on/off indicator, a loading plug and a reed switch as an on/off switch. All you need to run the train is a transmitter acting as back- and forward and speed controller. No wiring, no rail cleaning and no stuttering.

Poachers Hill

Bob Hughes

Scale:0:16.5 (7mm:1ft) Size 15″ x 4″ 400mm x 100mm

Poachers Hill is a case of repurposing. Built in the door pocket of a discarded refrigerator. It was designed for dead-rail puppetry *(see **The Dispatch** issue 6 Autumn 2022),* but is capable of normal two-rail analogue power if desired. The low relief building was constructed using foamcore board with corrugated card for the wriggly tin roof. Windows and doors were from my scrapbox. There are no permanently dedicated wagons or locos for the micro layout. When using puppet rod power the usual loco allocated to Poachers Hill is a Jouef/Playcraft inspired Decauville(ish) engine and magnetically coupled rolling stock borrowed from my San Fernandez WRD micro. For conventional two rail operation a small diesel or steam engine and Kadee fitted wagons can be borrowed from the FCPyF.

The deceptive simple tuning fork track plan

Great atmosphere in this overall view

Details, details, details! Something that Bob excels at.

Stella Jones

Chris Mears

A Micro layout prototype from the sketchbook of Chris Mears

Truro is easy to get to. Why does that matter? Narrow gauge. Stella-Jones's wood treatment plant to be specific. You could see it from the road. Just far enough inside their fence line. Too far for the well-mannered railfan.

One day, in 2012, I crossed that line.

The process is straightforward: ties are bundled and loaded onto narrow-gauge tram cars, which are pushed into pressure cylinders for treatment. Once sealed, the cylinders are filled with preservative—typically creosote—under high pressure. After the cycle, the ties are pulled out, unloaded, and stored for shipment, with the tramway handling the heavy work in a compact, efficient loop.

Narrow gauge tracks once crisscrossed Stella-Jones's yard, but today, front-end loaders deliver ties and poles to the tramway. This short stretch of rail serves as the "last few feet of the last mile," and despite its modest footprint, it echoes the essential elements of a great railway—evoking the spirit of the logging lines that captured our hearts.

When I visited in 2012, my first stop was their office. There's always that awkward moment when a train fan admits their fascination. But curiosity soon overtakes hesitation, and even without stepping into the yard, the chance to spend time with the people who know it best and learn about this neat tramway—what a treat!

It may sound like a conveyor belt made from a length of flex track but it isn't. Trams are assembled into blocks of cars and then push-pull towed around by rubber-tired tractors. They are heavy so the actual track layout features runarounds and stub-ended spurs. Nothing is extra track and it's easy to see how very essential it all is. It's a small railway - shelf ready.

Even on this small railway, track bedding varies by function: paved pads surround rails at loading zones, while absorbent mats are placed between the rails closer to the plant to catch runoff from treated ties. Most preservative drains before unloading, but these measures help prevent ground contamination. They'd be super-easy to model and they're a crucial detail.

There are dozens of small tramway cars, built in two types depending on the load. Both use steel frames with mounted cradles: tie cars have cradles at each end sized to fit standard railway ties, while pole cars resemble disconnect log cars, with a single pivoting cradle spaced so pairs of cars lift at each end of a long pole. If, like me, you are learning to scratchbuild rolling stock it would be useful to need so many of these trams—early attempts will look great collected at the repair shed while perhaps refined iterations are used on the working layout.

It would seem that they don't mix loads so trains are either full trains of ties or full trains of poles.

I've always pictured my model using a locomotive but today's advances in miniaturised radio-control vehicles does make it hard not to wonder: maybe that's possible too? Maybe if not to model loading and unloading by tractor maybe you could cheat with a tractor moving along a Faller-style embedded track and used to move our trains of ties or poles across the scene. Secret, between times hands, loading and unloading poles when no one's looking.

It might seem like not enough railroad to be interesting but the density of operations and heavy use of the track that is there proves the prototype's design. That efficiency becomes synonymous with the operating interest we crave. Modeling the plant at full scale is tempting—its 900-foot length translates to roughly ten feet in HO scale. That's well beyond a micro layout, making it just as compelling to explore selective extracts from the plan.

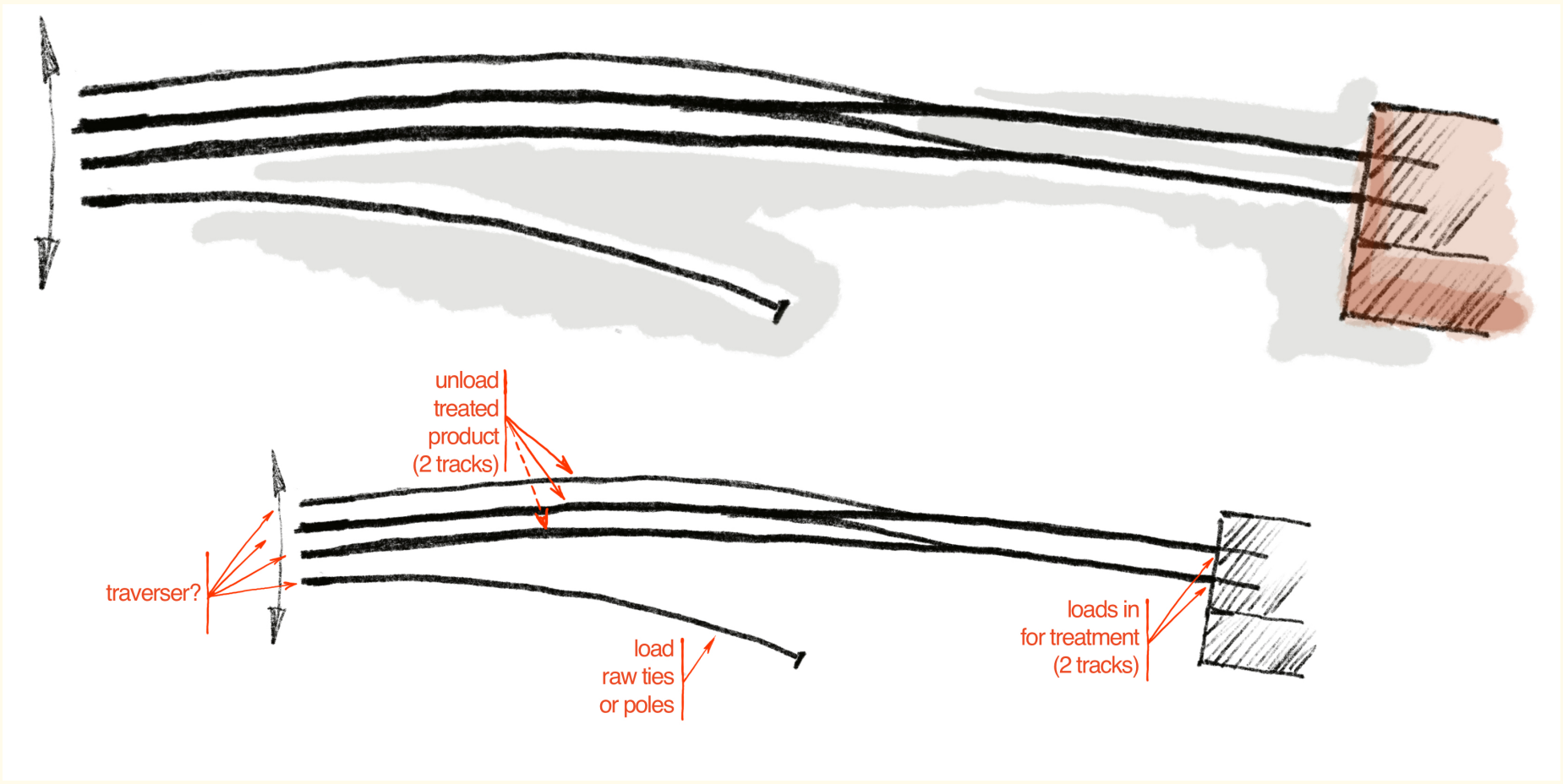
Small cars and short trains tempt us to shrink layouts to fit a shelf, but the prototype's long proportions reflect the need to handle lengthy telephone poles. These plans preserve turnout sizes and use shorter trains or selective extracts to trim space without losing function.

Our model of modern narrow gauge really isn't so removed from classical narrow gauge logging. We don't go deep into the wild woods - CN delivers carloads of untreated ties and poles to us but they still drop into a log yard. We don't have the spindly temporary tracks but depend on a core of permanent tracks outlining the heart of why a railway is the best thing here.

Major structures will need to be scratchbuilt, but their basic forms are simple enough to mock up in paper or cardstock and refine over time. The tram cars also need to be scratchbuilt, though their real-life simplicity makes them ideal for quick builds using jigs to cut parts and assemble a fleet fast enough to get trains running before sunset.

The track itself tells a story—Stella-Jones appears to use salvaged standard gauge rail, likely paired with cut-down ties. Much of the track is buried, especially near turnouts, so standard gauge model turnouts could be repurposed and buried too, saving time on handlaying while still capturing the look of the yard's storage tracks.

All at once a familiar scenario but something that can be visited in real life to recharge. Forgive the pun, but instead of a "preserved" by "preservationists" a railway that is for preserving. Just waiting to be discovered.



Brocolitia

Julian Cockshott

Scale:N (2mm:1ft) Size 31″ x 12″ 780mm x 305mm

Brocolitia is a split-level layout in a suitcase purchased un-romantically off the 'Bay some time ago.

It has an oval of Kato track heavily disguised. I like Kato track for micro layouts as it's my least favourite part of the hobby – tracklaying. Also Kato track is very reliable and you do get a sense of what will run round those tight curves.

The large land-locked space in the middle of the layout was a problem which I was a little stuck on how to develop.

Enter my friend Roger who commented – "Build a ruin! Ruins predate everything!" Top idea. So, a quick Google search led me to the Temple of Mithras. A ruin along Hadrian's Wall in the North East of the UK.

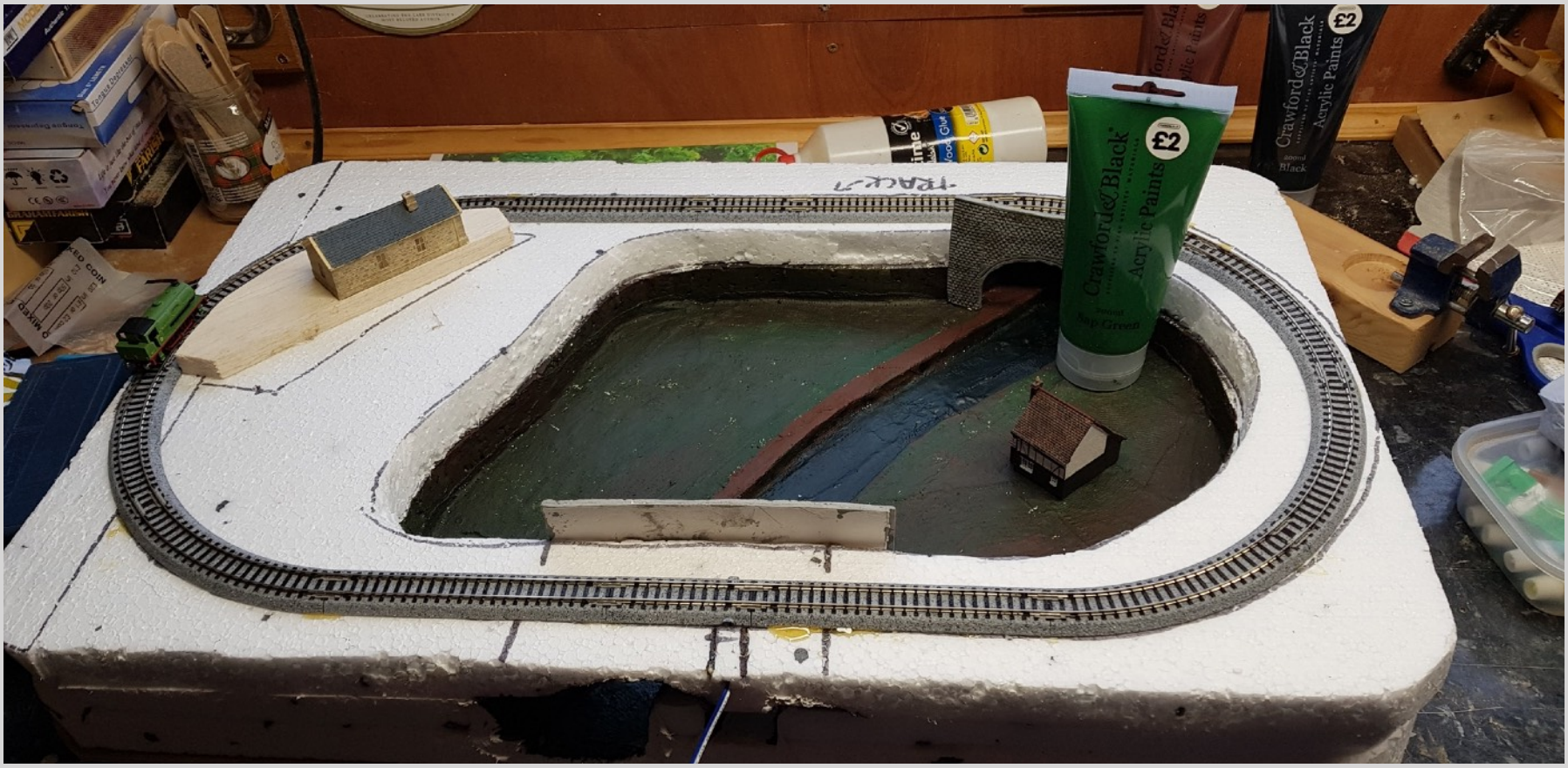
Brocolitia has my own fencing technique with single strand wire in two layers, rust painted and bedded in with foliage. All the stone work (apart from the station) is hand modelled in Das clay and scalpel blade. This makes the canal tunnel portals look effective even though the viewing public rarely see this side.

One aspect of the hobby that I DO like is achieving ridiculously small things in N Gauge. So the layout also features hand painted white metal ducks from Langley models as well as the canal boat mooring points made from painted white pin heads and even the tillers on the 3d printed and white metal canal boat are modelled in very thin wire.

Figures on the layout are an assortment made by Preiser, Model Power and Noch. It did take me a year or so to source the farmer's wife and daughter hanging out the washing in the heavily modified Hornby Lyddle End 'Stricketts Lodge' building. But if you look VERY closely you might see proper material sheets being hung out with, as near to 'scale' as I could get them to stick, N gauge clothes pegs!

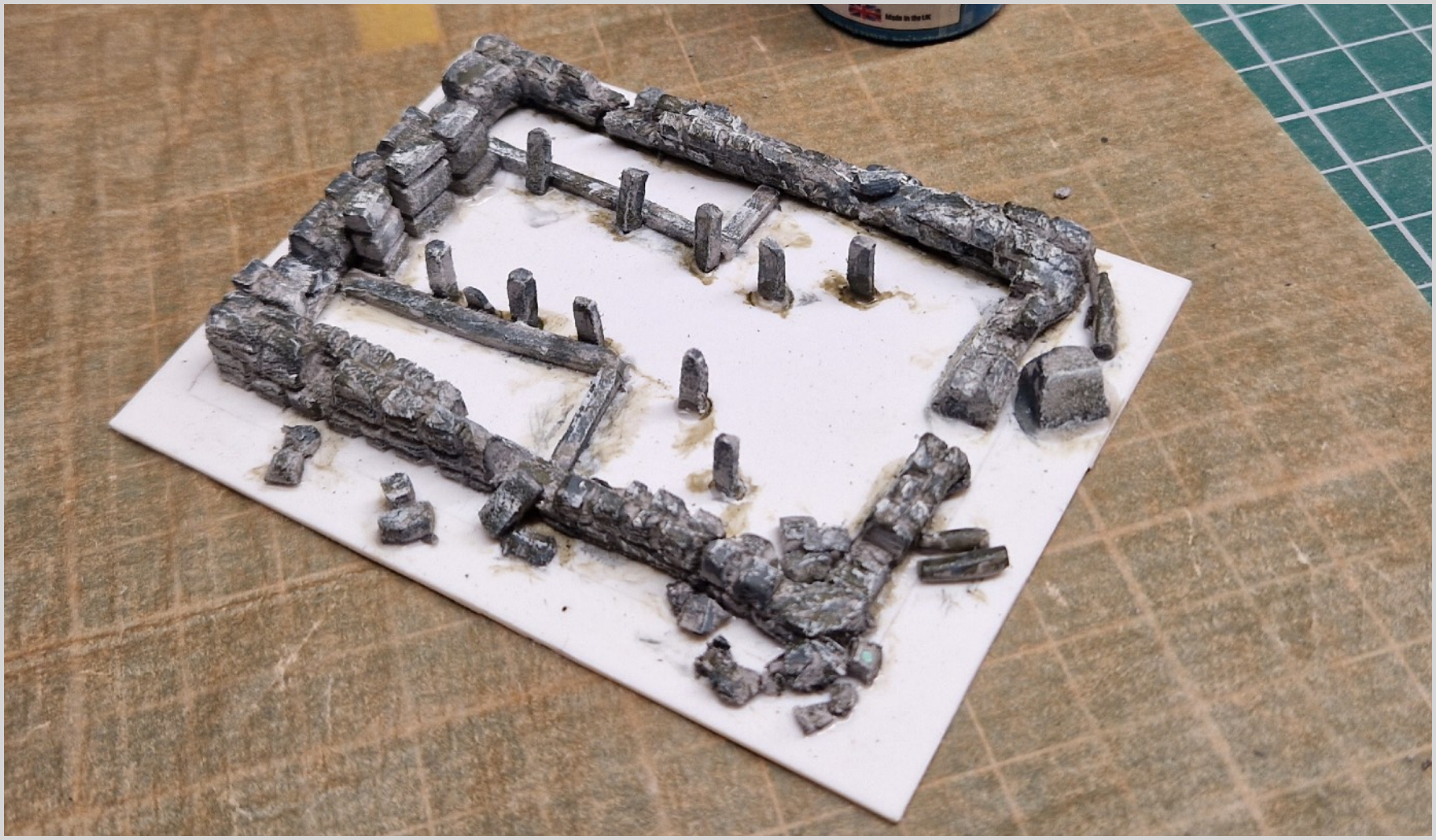
I have the full build video for Brocolitia on my YouTube channel. Just search 'Small World Layouts' on any social media platform (I like social media!) and you will find a great abundance of time-losing material to wade through.

A layout in a suitcase. Ready to be taken anywhere.



I initially used polystyrene for the three layers of construction to help create depth and perception.

The canal in the base is often commented on at exhibition as the resin pour came out so clear and 'still.' For me the trick was the flaming of the resin with the kitchen torch to completely obliterate any air bubbles.



Modelled in Das clay complete, then 'ruined' by picking out the blocks and bricks with a scalpel. Those blocks and bricks lie around the walls just as the original might have, had they not been stolen back in the day for other construction in the area! [Pic 3]

Brocolitia is lit by street lights from 'Layouts4u' as is the Lodge. It creates a lovely atmosphere on the layout within the darker exhibition halls.[Pic 4]

Winter Loop

Robert Collins

Z scale:2mm = 1ft. Size 18″ x 24″ 450mm x 610mm

After building my first Z scale loop layout in 2021, I learned more about the scale as well as about 3D printing. I decided towards the end of 2022 to build a new layout.

I didn't want the second one to look like the first. I'd seen a couple of winter-themed layouts, and thought that might be worth trying. However, I didn't have the money to buy lots of
snow scenery. That led me to wonder if paint might work instead.

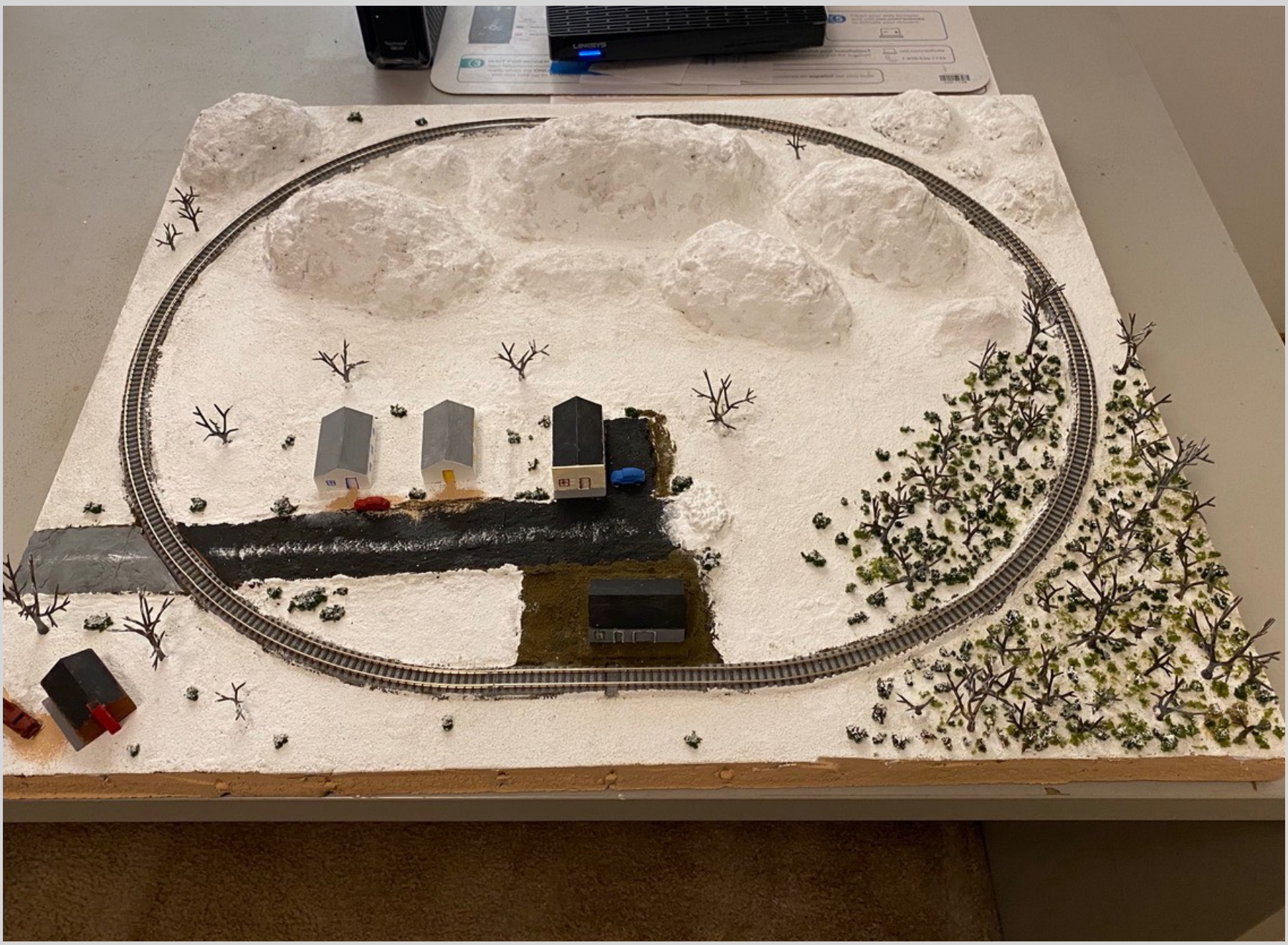
The base of this layout is a sheet of 1-inch insulation foam-board. The size of the layout is 18 inches by 24 inches. Before setting down the track I painted the base a tan color. Next I glued down the track and the land forms. I used cardboard for the roads and building bases. For the hills I used packing material. The idea came to me from watching the Budget Model Railways YouTube channel. I didn't quite cut the levels as close as I should have, and ended up using quite a lot of spackle to round out the hills. Also, I didn't like that there were several hills instead of a few larger and longer ones. Trains didn't quite disappear around the back as I'd hoped.

Once the hills were made I laid down ground cover and painted the roads. That was followed by painting. I used three or four bottles of Apple Barrel white paint on the layout to cover everything. I think the effect worked quite well, especially on the flatter areas.

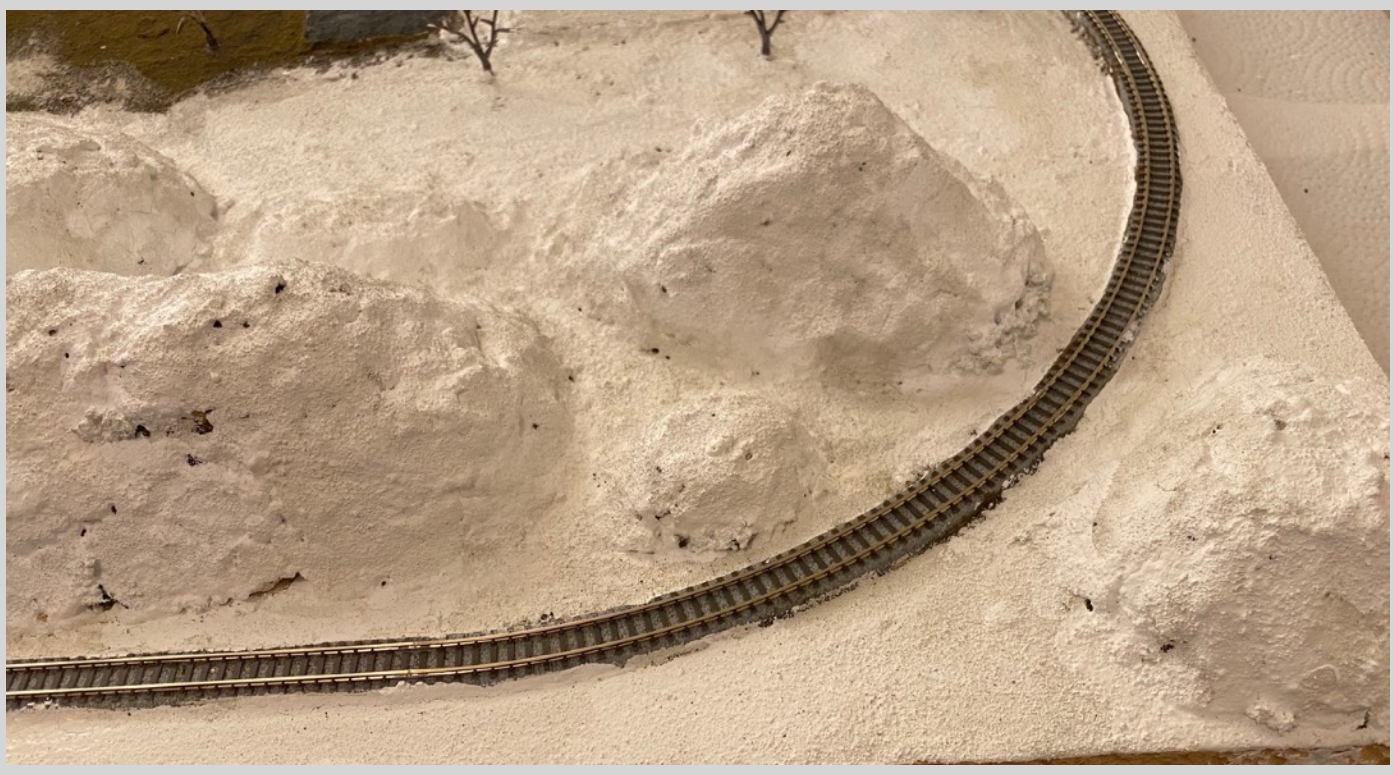
I had plenty of leftover Woodland Scenic plastic tree armatures from earlier projects. I decided they'd make a good wintery forest. I did some dry-brushing of white and light gray paint on the armatures, bent them to form tree shapes, and glued them into the ground.

Another bit of scenic material I had on hand was a couple of shades of clump foliage. I glued those down, put down white paint where I could, and they filled out the forest quite well. I placed more around the town.

As for the town, I designed and 3D printed the structures. By the track is a Frisco-style depot. Across from it is a small false-front store. Completing the town are two houses and a cabin. In seeing how the prints came out, I refined the designs further. Those newer models are what I have for sale.



Snowy landscapes can be very simple



Construction photo gallery

As I was also designing passenger cars for Z scale, I used Rokuhan 220mm curves. These worked out very well for passenger cars. Unfortunately, I laid the track a little too quickly and didn't quite join two pieces together well. It caused some minor problems in running trains on the layout.

If you see pictures of my freight and passenger car models on design websites, most were posed on this layout. While the layout featured in videos I made for my own YouTube channel through 2023 and into 2024, the problem join and look of the hills never quite sat well with me. I got rid of the layout early in 2025.

I'm definitely happy with using the method of ground cover and paint for making scenery. It's not that expensive and can allow for more color variation. I used it on my current Z scale tuning fork layout. If I make another winter layout, I'd go with that method over buying any snow product.

This was a fun build. I got some enjoyment from it, and I expanded my skills at making scenery and designing for 3D printing. It didn't work as well as I hoped it would, but as they say, every layout you build is a learning experience.

Bridgefoot Estate & Farm

John Davy

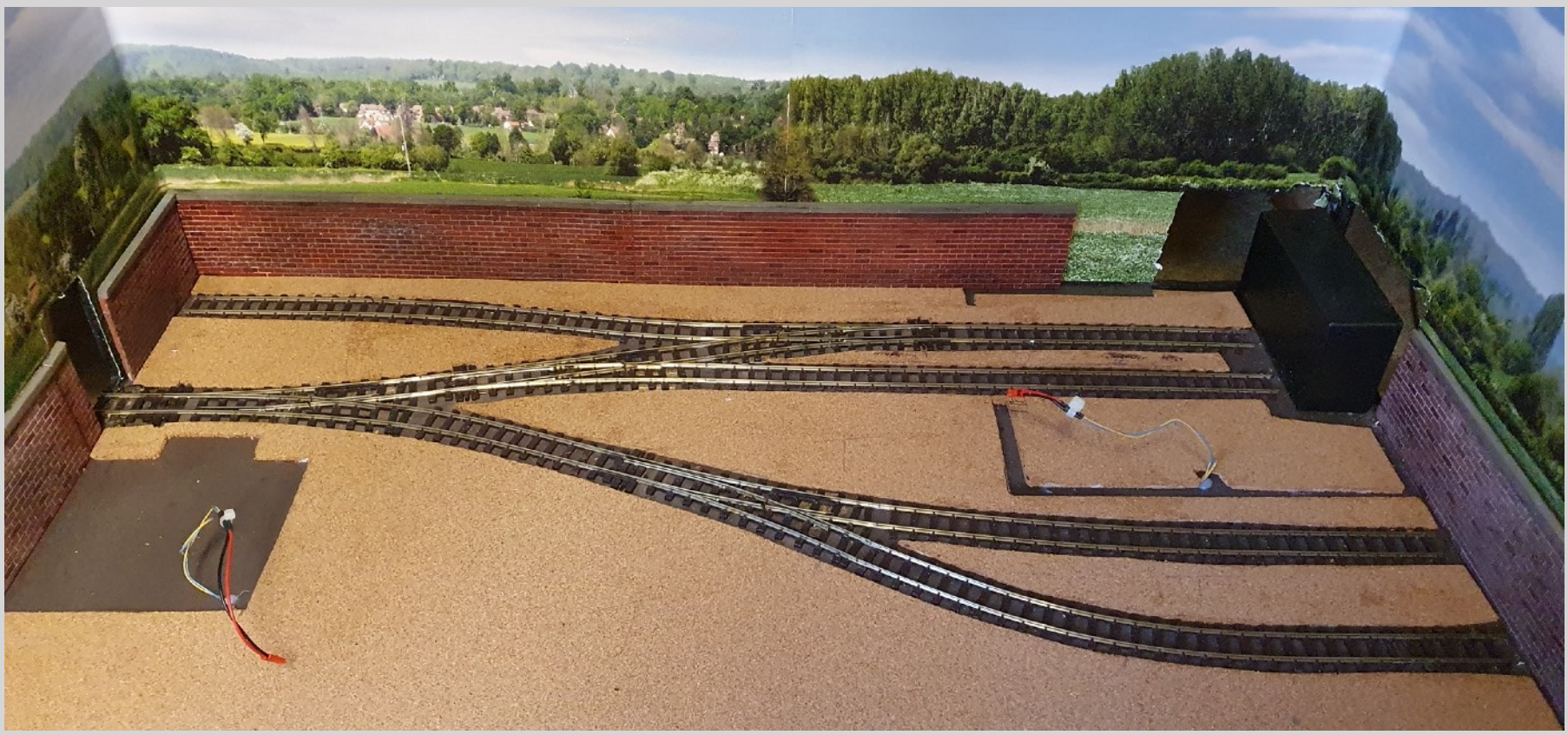
Scale:Gn15. Size 31″ x 17.5″ 787mm x 445mm

Amazing overall view of Bridgefoot Estate Farm

After virtually completing my standard gauge in 7mm layout (no layout is ever really finished!) based on an imaginary Ex Midland Railway branch line in the Peak district, I fancied a project which was a little different. Having more than a passing interest in narrow gauge, being active in my local model engineering societies 16mm garden railway I thought a Gn15 layout might be an ideal candidate.

I have always been fascinated by estate railways in the past such as the Sand Hutton and Eaton Hall light railways but thought I might create one that was based in the present era.

So Bridgefoot Estate & Farm came into being. I have never had a layout that I have been able to exhibit so despite being built in my loft, when completed it had to be able to come down through the loft hatch. So by necessity it had to be a micro layout!



Track laid and ready to start scenic work

It consists of just one commercial laser cut ply base board kit with combined backboards, though I made a proscenium arch with incorporated LED lighting to frame the layout, and it all sits on a purchased folding table which has extending legs. In turn this stands on a self made plinth which means the layout is of a good height for comfortable viewing.

The track work is Peco 0-16.5, the points being modified so the frog polarities are fed from the change over switch in the Cobalt point motors that control the points and not dependent on electrical contact through the point blades themselves. I hope the photograph taken early on in construction shows the layout plan, not exactly complicated!

In a reversal of usual practice the track is laid straight onto the ply baseboard then cork is laid on the rest of the baseboard just up to the track so when ballasted the track looks like it is set into the ground, hopefully representing poorly maintained permanent way just like the real thing.

Also the cork was cut away to the footprint of the buildings so when installed no dreaded gap between building and the ground. Buildings are resin kits from various suppliers and also a certain amount of scratch building, the engine shed/workshop, loading platform etc.

The vast majority of the rolling stock, Locos, figures and scenic items have been sourced from Narrow Minded Railworks and extremely satisfied I am with them too. The loco chassis are all from Tenshodo and have proved very reliable.

The scenery breaks no new ground, just the usual static grass and ground cover from various sources with shrubs and trees made from sea grass covered in Woodland scenic foliage . The modus operandi of the layout is that a train enters the layout from the fiddle stick which is just behind the office shed, enters the processing shed where the produce from the fields is sorted, then a loco backs onto it andbrings it in turn to the loading platform on the front of the layout for forward despatch presumably by a lorry. Then off the train goes to the fields to repeat the process. To be honest, I'm not exactly sure what the produce is. Is the green stuff cabbage? The small brown things, Potatoes? Who knows, I'm no farmer!

I have thoroughly enjoyed building the layout and have embarked on a very micro 09 layout so back to 7mm scale. I hope this will also feature in this wonderful community that Ian has created here in the near future. As I always say in my clubs newsletter articles.... enjoy our wonderful hobby!

An overall view of the cabinet style presentation of Bridgefoot Farm.

Bridgefoot Farm contains many delightful scenes to entrance the layout viewer take a look at some of the next couple of pages


NOTICE
ALL PERSONS FOUND
TRESPASSING WILL BE
PROSECUTED
BY ORDER

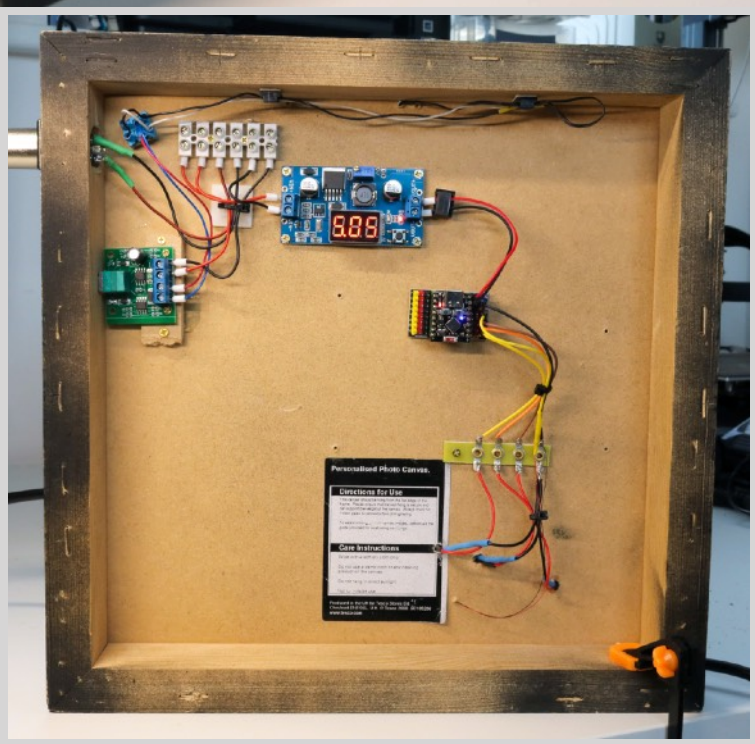
Crooked House Line

David Churchill

N scale:Size :12″ x 12″ 305mm x 305mm

The Crooked House Line is my smallest layout yet, and the most enjoyable to build with start to completion, being a very short time compared to the years of other layouts. The Crooked House was a pub in South Staffordshire, England that was affected by mining subsidence resulting in its distinctive appearance. The 3D printed model for the building came from Inoxion Models, I have tried to paint the brickwork to look like the patchwork of repairs of the original.

The oval of track came from Jelly Models and fits nicely on an old canvas photo frame. Short wheelbase engines work best on the curves, train control is done by a PWM module with a small ESP32 device controlling the lighting for the pub. Sadly the pub was gutted by fire and then illegally demolished in 2023. There are plans to rebuild it but for now it lives on in model form.



A head-on view of the layout, and close up of the remarkable “Crooked House”.
The Crooked House pub was a famous, tilting pub in the Black Country region of England, known as "Britain's wonkiest pub" due to a noticeable slant caused by 19th-century mining subsidence. It was destroyed by a suspected arson attack in August 2023, followed by an unauthorized demolition, which sparked a public outcry. The local council has since ordered the owners to rebuild it within three years.

Micro Madness - from the pages of Railway Modeller Australia

Trevor Gibbs: Editor, RMA

An antipodean Micro Layout special feature

Railway Modeller Australia is a reincarnation of the Rail Modeller Australia magazine which was started in June 2020 by Robyn Taylor. I contacted Robyn after seeing her first issue offering a couple of articles and some advice from a couple of publishing friends.

During our phone conversation, she asked if I would write a “beginners column” which I accepted as a challenge. I also wrote to a few friends and acquaintances and submitted a couple of extra articles which found their way into the magazine which Robyn both printed and sold as well as creating an on-line magazine.

We developed the magazine including changing the point of issue to the odd/even months with a real rush to do the December 2020 issue.

Robyn sadly lost her partner Bill in early 2022 then with a series of unfortunate events losing computer files and lack of income from the sales to pay for the printing, she produced her last issue in March of 2022. She had asked me to take over about 12 months before which I felt I could not do with the business model of the time.

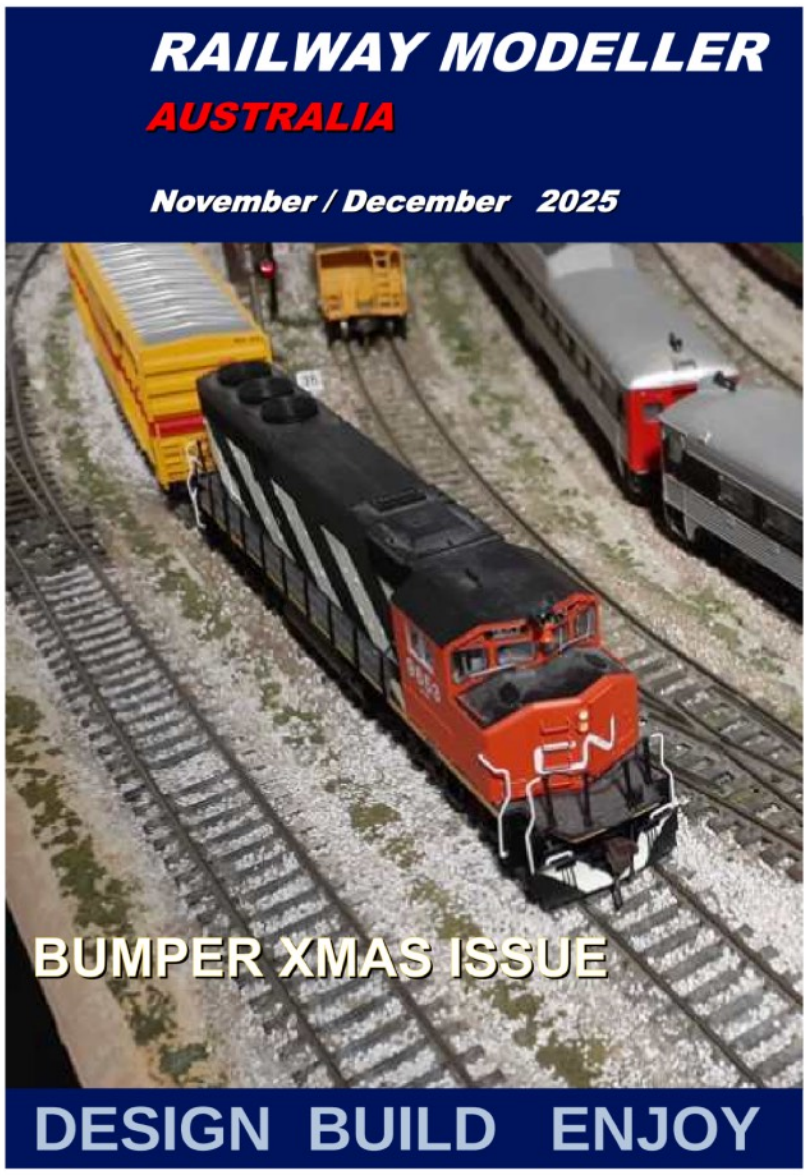
I also felt that it would not have been fair to capitalise on her disappointment that her rendition of the magazine thinking that the general public would "latch on" and support her efforts but it needed time. She certainly was ambitious with how she started and that effort should have been rewarded more than it was.

With that ceasing to publish, I rebadged the magazine as Railway Modeller Australia and started RMA in July of 2022 as an online magazine only. I aimed for publishing 40 pages which I have been able to do for the most part, With the November/ December 2025 issue, the size has been increased to 44 pages.

I would increase it in size yet again, but it would be good to have a constant supply of articles (Hint, hint!) to ensure consistency and reliability of delivery. Older Australian modellers would remember the Australian Model Railroad Magazine (now Australian Model Railway Magazine) being incredibly spasmodic back in the days of typewriters, type setting, snail mail for articles and designs and artwork made purely by hand. AMRM was heroicly delivered by one man at the typewriter while holding down a full time job at the same time as well! When a new AMRM was available in the hobby shops, it was almost cause for a public holiday… well among modellers anyway!

I have worked ahead with the magazine now a few issues in front, the internet making that task easier than it could have been then and drafts which are acceptable to the original authors can be readily exchanged and verified in literally minutes from almost anywhere in the world. I have had quite a few international authors from Scotland, England, Canada and the US contribute to the magazine and I hope most of you feel that there is a good balance of model layouts and reporting of them, how to build articles and prototype information with photos.

The Railway Modeller Australia Magazine is freely available on https://sites.google.com/view/rmahome and all back issues are available. I am currently making a page with the earlier RaIl Modeller Australia downloads. Hope you



Editor says: Recently, the pages of RMA featured a plethora of Micro Layouts. The work of Phil and Kelly Lowery, “Micro Madness” is a selection of Micros that have delighted exhibition goers in Australia for a while. Professor Klyzlr and other antipodean Dispatch readers have shared pictures of these layouts with the magazine in the past, intriguing many of us. So I was very pleased when Trevor got in touch and offered me details on all of these layouts. Which I share with you here, as they were shared in Railway Modeller Australia. Enjoy!

Phil and Kelly Lowery's MICRO MADNESS

Phil and Kelly have built and amassed a number of Micro layouts which they take to shows.

They display these small layouts which have been built to various scales to showcase what is possible in small spaces.

Fig. 1 – We saw John Smithers' "Dis-a-pier-ing Wagon in the March/April 2022 issue of Rail Modeller Australia. Phil has since bought that module and converted to an On30 module with the same theme about the Geelong Pier incident on the old Victorian Railways. Projects like this are fun in the building, particularly when non commercial items have to be made.

Micro Madness is all about having Fun. Anyone can build a micro layout. All you need is a bit of inspiration. At exhibitions I like to engage and encourage people to have a go, and come join the hobby of model trains. The Motto of Micro Madness is simply: 'You are only limited by your imagination.'

I regularly get asked about where I get my inspiration for the Micro Madness creations. Honestly, I get ideas from the real world, train shows and hobby shops and what ever else piques my interest at the time.

Building layouts for me is a hobby, and it will not happen if I am not in the right frame of mind, On the other hand I can start something and still be at it 6 hours later. I have several Micro layouts in varying stages of completion, just waiting for the right idea, the right building, or the right time to finish!

THE PIER LAYOUT

I acquired the Pier Layout from John Smithers. I loved the concept. John has some fantastic ideas, and I really want to pay tribute to him, and not just copy it.

Originally the layout was HO scale, but I thought it looked over scale. This was confirmed when I stood a HO figure next to the Bollards on the layout, and these were almost as big in height.

I placed an O scale (1:48) figure next to it, and it looked spot on! I use mostly Bachmann On30 locos and wagons, but the steam crane draws most of the attention.

Fig. 2 – "Rockatwo Valley Station" is a box type diorama with a T class shuttling a wagon backwards and forwards on a regular time line to an off stage extension. There is a lot of scenic detail in such a small space here.

ROCKATWO VALLEY

The HO Scale, Rockatwo Valley was named after its' Rocks and its Cockatoos! It features a flat top T Class pushing a KMQ wagon carrying a DeLorean trying to get up to 88miles per hour on a Circuitron Automatic reverse circuit.

The station building is a Bachmann Crookwell Station. The cockatoos are made by"Kerroby" and are actually O Scale(1:48). .However nobody seems to notice the size, but rather comment on the dogs disturbing them.

FRISBEE

For the Frisbee Round n Round layout featuring the Thomas character James, I found the N Gauge Hornby Skaledale English windmill in a hobby shop. I was determined to make it a centre piece of a layout.

Using Number 1 radius Peco set track mounted on foam. I tend to run either Bachmann or Tomix N scale "Thomas and His Friends" engines to entertain the children at exhibition. This layout also serves as a useful N Scale test track at home.

Fig. 3 Left – A familiar loco to many of us is James the Red Tender engine shown here with some trucks around a farm scene on the Frisbee layout.

The track plan is a simple circle but there is much detail even in this scene.

Multiple grass tones in the scene tp make the ground look believable.

Fig.4 Right – A typical small English Saddle Tank with Tender loco running on the "Wally's Circuit" an historic park type loop is the basis of this layout.

WALLY'S CIRCUIT

My inspiration for the HOe Narrow Gauge, "Wally's Circuit" was found near Castlemaine in Victoria. In a town called Vaughan Springs, there is a fenced miniature railway in a beautiful, treed park

By using the smallest available Kato N Scale Unitrack and burying it I was able to get the required tight curves. The track was much smoother than I can bend flexi track myself. In order to portray a park on a busy weekend, there of lots of people, a Birthday Party, kids flying kites, courting couples and the park resident Stegosaurus, all mingling with "Wally" of the "Where's Wally" fame. Have you Seen Him?

RE-EWNIAN

The HOe Narrow Gauge "Re-Ewenian" (Reunion) Layout was made in a serving tray from the craft section of Bunnings. It was just a bit of fun, and a real hit with the kids. The Minitrains Bagnall 0-4-0 loco usually hauls a wagon with 2 sheep and a Portaloo.

As always, there is a black sheep in every family!

Fig. 5 Below – Another rural scene on the Re-Ewenian layout with a Welsh Narrow Gauge type engine on a simple oval.

Figs. 6 - The Planter Tray layout. Together with the Construction Site layout below, these Narrow Gauge scenes are not much bigger than a pizza box size in HOe.

HOe is a scale used by modellers in Europe to construct layouts portraying narrow gauge railways with a prototype track gauge of between 650mm/25.6" and 850mm/ 33.46".

The original makers of such trains was "Eggerbahn" hence the "e"

THE PLANTER TRAY LAYOUT

The Liliput 0-4-0 blue loco HOe layout ahown in Figure 6 was made by fellow Micro Madness member Jason Hobbs. He used a planter tray from Bunnings and Jouef (a French brand of model trains) steel track.

It was completed in less than a week, as a looming train show deadline approached.

to the finished point in four stages.

It is constructed in a clear plant saucer, using Styrofoam, Spakfilla, tile grout and uses different types of PVA glue to achieve different effects.

There are 140 individual tufts of grass, and a dead stick obtained from a lavender bush was used to simulate a dead tree.

THE CONSTRUCTION SITE LAYOUT

My Construction Site Layout in Figure 7. The layout was built to demonstrate how to build a layout. People were always asking me how I build my layouts. It is built in various stages of completion, from bare foam

It is usually displayed on a rotating display turntable. In order to simplify the operation, the layout is powered by 8 AA batteries in a control box hidden under the hill. **- RMA**

Fig. 7 - A narrow gauge construction scene showing what is involved in building a micro layout.

Like the HOe layout in Figure 6, it is not much more than a pizza box size but fun to build.

Phil is obviously a fan of micro layouts as promoted by the late Carl Arendt.

Carl's site has been kept on line at carendt.com by a group determined to keep up his legacy - RMA

Poison Street Parcels

Alan Monk

Scale:H0 Size :4′ x 1′ 1220mm x 305mm

Having made, and continuing to make far too much 1:87 scale Non-Passenger Carrying Coaching Stock (NPCCS) for Dounreay, I felt that another, dedicated parcels layout was needed to provide somewhere to run it all! Researching BR parcels depots proved a worthwhile exercise and I also recalled the triangular parcels platforms at Oxford and Worcester Shrub Hill, regularly passed whilst enroute to my partner's folks in Hereford. A fortuitous change of trains on one trip to the 'out-laws' allowed some further photos to be taken. Also of use were various views of the long-gone 'Milk Dock' sidings behind Kings Cross station in the center of London.

Worcester Shrub Hill (author image)

Focusing my research on these produced several usable photos on-line, along with large scale maps from the ever-useful National Library of Scotland's website, where a vast selection of pre-1970 Ordnance Survey maps have been digitized and available to view.

The Oxford parcels platforms have now been demolished and sit under the new Chiltern bay platforms – the Internal User Mk1 GUV and CCT that resided here for at least 25 years were scrapped on site. The Worcester bays saw use into the mid-1980s but are now devoid of track and the platform used as a covered staff car park.

Further inspiration came from some friends' micro layouts: Stu Davies' OO 'Albert Street Parcels', Dave Tailby's EM gauge 'Victoria' and Stephen Farmer's O Gauge 'Knype Bridge'. All 3 featured elements of what I wanted to achieve and shared a common theme of a parcels depot adjacent to a sizeable mainline station.

Of the 3, Stephen's 'Knype Bridge' is the closest to what eventually became Poison Street Parcels, with 3 long and 1 short tracks, fed from a 2-track sector plate.

All 3 had been kind enough to allow me operating stints on their layouts at exhibitions and I was very taken with just how much fun could be had shuffling and reforming parcels trains around. Also, I had provided Stephen with a couple of my Silhouette-cut 1:87 Mk1 coach sides to use as part of the backdrop on Knype Bridge, giving some forced perspective.

So, my 'givens and druthers' were:

- Triangular island platform with overall roof as per Oxford/ Worcester Shrub Hill
- Each platform capacity to be 2 x 57ft BG/GUV or 3 x CCT minimum
- Additional full length track plus a shorter spur to hold a locomotive
- Overbridge to disguise exit to sector plate
- Parcels depot to appear to be adjacent to a major station, retaining walls, etc
- Analogue DC operation, with isolating sections
- Manually moved/aligned sector plate
- 120cm x 30cm x 30cm maximum board size for ease of (public) transport, as lightweight as possible
- Ideally self-contained to avoid having to also carry fiddle support/display shelves

I did mock-up various arrangements before finalizing the plan with 2 tracks at the front, the triangular island platform, the 3rd track and the short loco spur towards the rear. I'd also decided that, rather than use my customary Ikea Lack floating shelf as a baseboard, this time I would build my own baseboard from plywood. This was for a couple of reasons:

The 110cm's Lack's dimensions are quite constraining, a few more centimetres each way would allow a more open feel to the layout and/or provide more 'play' value. Could a ply board be lighter to carry than a Lack-based layout? Important for a non-driver reliant on public transport to exhibit. I had already a stock of 120cm x 30cm sheets of decent 4mm ply in hand, as I've usually used such for the display box I build around the Lack-based layouts. I adapted an old Maidenhead club method of building ply boards, with a double-skin outer frame, the inside layer 4mm narrower to provide a recess into which the track base top would sit. The fascia, backscene and end plates were all 23cm high, the track base sits 4cm up from the bottom edge. The fascia has 2 viewing/access 'windows', a 60 cm longer one for the scenic section and the shorter 40cm one to provide access to the sector plate.

Baseboard Construction

As standard for my micros, the layout is front-operated/viewed. The blank panel between the 2 openings would provide a suitable place for the track and lighting feeds, plus the nine isolating section switches (2 each for the 3 long tracks and 1 each for the short track the two sector plate roads), allowing locos or units to be isolated on this analogue dc-operated layout. The whole layout is self-contained within the 120cm x 30cm baseboard. I also built in 2 cross-members underneath, plus a full-length strip along the top ends of the fascia. The latter also provides somewhere to attach the LED strip lighting.

The board proved rigid enough whilst weighing just over half what one of my completed Lack-based micros weigh. Winner! The entire baseboard used 4-off 120cm x 30cm sheets of 4mm ply.

The whole board was then primed and painted my usual mid-grey, a carrying handle attached to the fascia and the holes plotted and drilled out for the various switches and sockets. I also fitted battens to the underside to enable use of the folding ply risers common to all my layouts. This raises the layout up from a standard, venue-supplied 2m table and allows a better viewing height at shows, providing inclusivity for everyone to view the layout, including the wheelchair-bound and children. I usually operate seated, as this is much more comfortable than standing for a whole weekend!
With the board complete and painted, I fitted a track base of 5mm foamcore sheet and plotted the curve for the sector plate. The sector plate itself is a ply offcut with a layer of thin EVA foam sheet to match the track level with the scenic section.

Trackwork is Peco Code 75 and only plain track was needed, as the layout is completely pointless!

With the sector plate temporarily attached via its screw pivot, I marked out where the track centers would be. I started by fixing the 2 sector plate tracks in place, fixed down with PVA and allowed to set. These 2 tracks curve inwards slightly towards the middle of the sector plate to ease alignment onto the scenic tracks.

Sector Plate track alignment

Before fixing the scenic tracks down, I made two blocks from 80-thou plasticard, accurately cut to 16.5mm width and about 50mm in length. I could then use these to guarantee the scenic track pair would align with each scenic pair as they were fixed in place whilst the PVA went off. The 3 main tracks were cut on the inside rail only in the middle of each length and an isolating fishplate fitted. All 4 scenic tracks can be accessed from either of the 2 sector plate roads to allow maximum flexibility in operation.

Once the track was firmly set, the layout was wired up. A common return feed was soldered to each 'outside' rail and fed back to one side of the power feed socket. From each 'inside' rail, a feed came back to the center panel and soldered to outer pin of the relevant SPST (on-off) toggle switch mounted on the fascia. From the other side of the power socket, a common feed then linked all the second switch pins to provide a power feed. For the sector plate, as I felt this should be removable for maintenance, a 3-way plug/socket was provided to carry the 3 wires to the sector plate. With wiring done, the layout was thoroughly tested and attention turned to the scenic side of things.

For the triangular island platform, I first worked out clearances using the Roco Class 11 – I need to make sure the platform facings did not foul its over-width outside cranks. I could then be confident that any of my stock would freely pass along the platforms.

The island platform, along with the 2 smaller sections of platform to the rear were all constructed from 2mm greyboard that I had to hand. Suitably braced internally and all glued together with 'Rocket' card/paper glue, I ended up with a strong but light structure.

Platform under construction

I mocked up the overall roof for the island platform in card to check height, overhang and general appearance. This is supported on 10 pillars of H-section Evergreen channel and is based on the arrangement at Worcester. Holes were cut in the platform surface for the pillars to drop into as a tight fit once the 'proper' roof was complete. This 'proper' roof was constructed from Evergreen I-beam, plain plasticard and clad in about an acre of Slater's corrugated sheet, again based on the roof at Worcester. I made sure to keep the roof removable, so it was packed safely out of the way whilst ballasting and general detailing took place.

The platform was faced along the sides with Scalecenes 'dirty brown' brick, printed at 1:87. The top was a mix of 'tarmac' and 'concrete flooring', also from Scalescenes – I took advantage of one of their occasional offers to buy and download their 'Scratchbuilders Yard' pack of 50+ texture sheets which I can print on the home laser printer. The final touch was to paint a grubby white line along the platform edges.

Ballast is 'extra fine' N gauge ballast from GreenScene (now part of the Squires empire) and fixed in place with old-formula Kleer floor polish, then weathered down. Buffer beams were added to the bay platform ends using bullhead rail offcuts mounted on plasticard strip and suitably painted. A dummy red lamp sits atop each buffer stop.

For the platform, I wanted a selection of BRUTEs and older mail trolleys, bundles of parcels, crates, bundles of newspapers and the usual detritus I recall from my 1970s spotting days. Most of the items are 4mm scale 3D-printed from various sources – Scale Model Scenes, Westhill Wagon Works and others. These were all painted up and fixed in place. There are 2 suitable vehicles, the Eko Royal Mail Morris van that also sees use on Dounreay, plus a bargain 1:87 Bedford TK box lorry in BR Express Parcels branding

Platform detailing

The overbridge spanning the scenic exit was constructed from a Wills 'Vari-girder' kit bought cheaply second hand, on Slaters embossed sheet and plasticard abutments. The far side abutment also has a staircase down to platform level, into which some 'erbert has painted some 1970's-style graffiti relating to the layout's name[1]

The final touch is the layout nameboard, created in MS Word, printed on decent card and laminated. This has cream Gill Sans lettering on a maroon background to represent a London Midland Region enameled sign. I did draft a selection up covering Eastern Region (blue), Western region (brown) and Scottish Region (light blue) with the thought to swap the sign out from time to time.

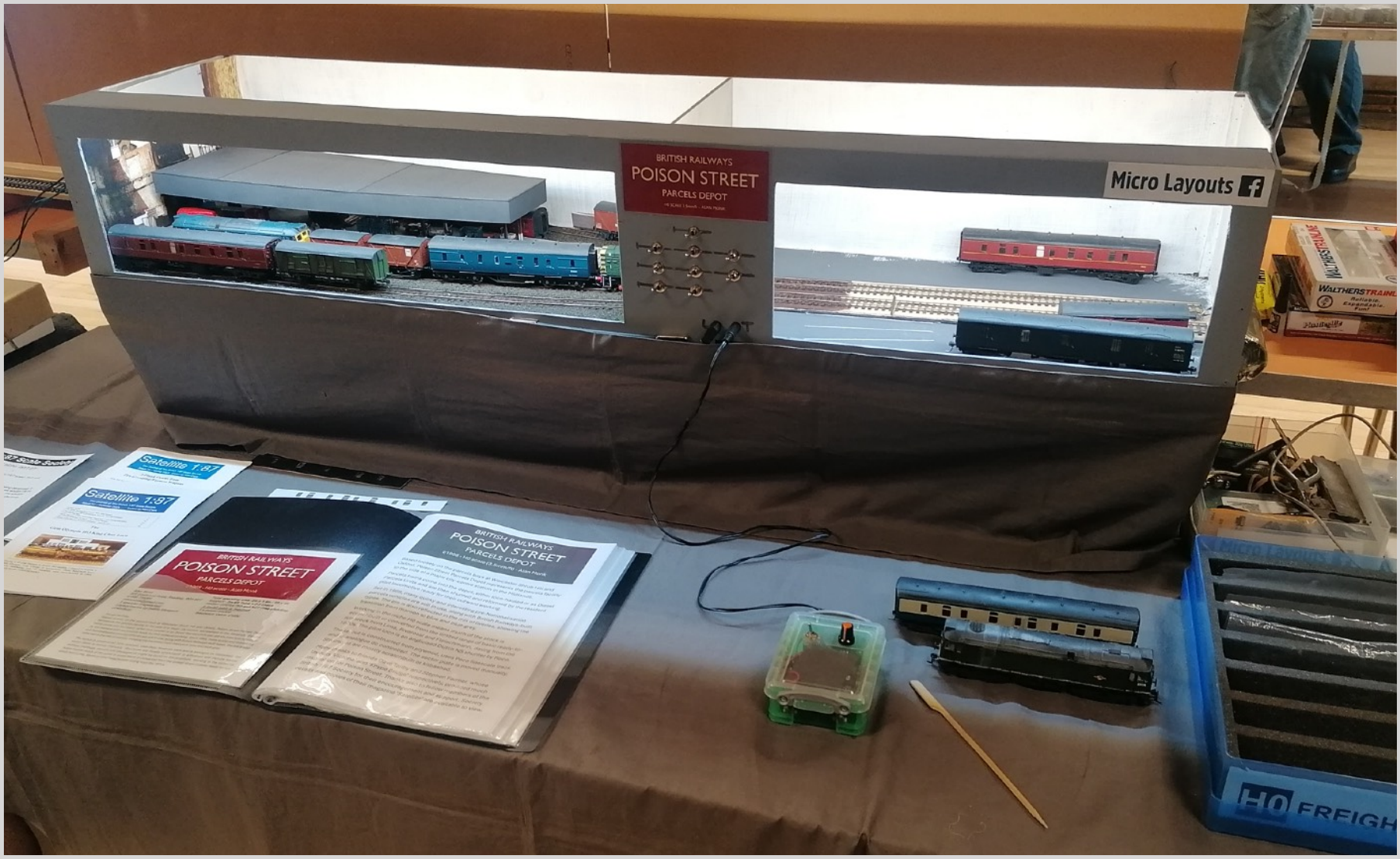
Nameboard

There is some work to do around the backscene. My initial plan was to source and print colour photos of the rear environs of Kings Cross around the old Milk Dock, but getting the perspectives and colours to work together proved a tough challenge, so that is still a work in progress. One likely idea will be for the section down behind the roof to be a retaining wall with openings through to a main station concourse – I found some views of Broad Street's concourse which will work very well, I just need to tie it all in together.

In operation, I use a dozen or so assorted parcels vans, some 12t vans and the Class 11 shunter, along with a couple of mainline locos to bring trains in or haul trains away. Having 2 sector plate roads means there is capacity to keep something moving and the loco spur road allows a mainline loco to be shunt-released from an inbound train, then back onto a outbound train and depart to fiddle. In due course, some Parcels DMUs will be constructed (a GRCW Class 128 and a Cravens Class 129) which will add to the shunting 'fun' with tail loads to be shunted. Stock is all fitted with Kadee scale-head couplers, uncoupling done manually using a simple skewer.

The quantity of NPCCS is ever-increasing with a couple of ex-GW designs currently adorning the workbench: a Fruit D long 4-wheel van, a Siphon G and a P24 Monster. These will be followed by a couple of ex-LNER vehicles, a Thompson 'matchboard' full brake and a Gresley steel-paneled full brake. The ex-SR bogie Van B still needs finishing too…

Poison Street Parcels debuted at the Maidenhead club's summer show earlier in 2025 and already has exhibition bookings into 2026. The layout is very portable, sized to fit the overhead luggage racks on most modern trains. Stock and all the supporting stuff goes in either a small, wheeled case or a rucksack.



The layout on display at a show

A quiet moment at Poison Street Parcels Depot

Hankov Signal Box

Jan Krejčíř

Scale:TT Size :4′ x 1′ 1220mm x 305mm

Travelling through the Czech countryside.

I have been involved in model railways for over 10 years. I have always liked small layouts, which I follow on the internet, and I have always been attracted to build them. My role models in this field are the late Carl Arendt, whose small layouts I have studied carefully, and James Hilton, whose work I continue to follow.

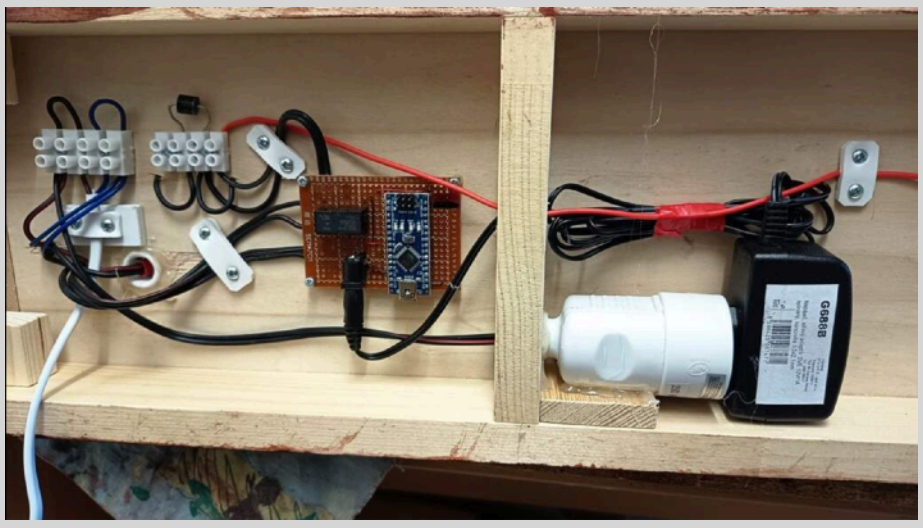
Most of you may not have seen a layout like mine before. It is inspired by the Czechoslovak State Railways (ČSD), 4th era, in the 1980s. It is built to TT scale 1:120.

I decided to build this micro layout because I find small projects very enjoyable. They don't require much space, time, or money. So the idea was born to build a small layout in a box, in the style of Cameo, like those of James Hilton. The size of the entire layout is 800mm x250mm x280mm, of which the visible part of the scene is only 440mm long. There is a single track on the scene, dominated by the St-1 signal box with the fictional name Hankov. There is also a stone culvert and a wooden shed. The printed background depicts a typical Czech landscape.

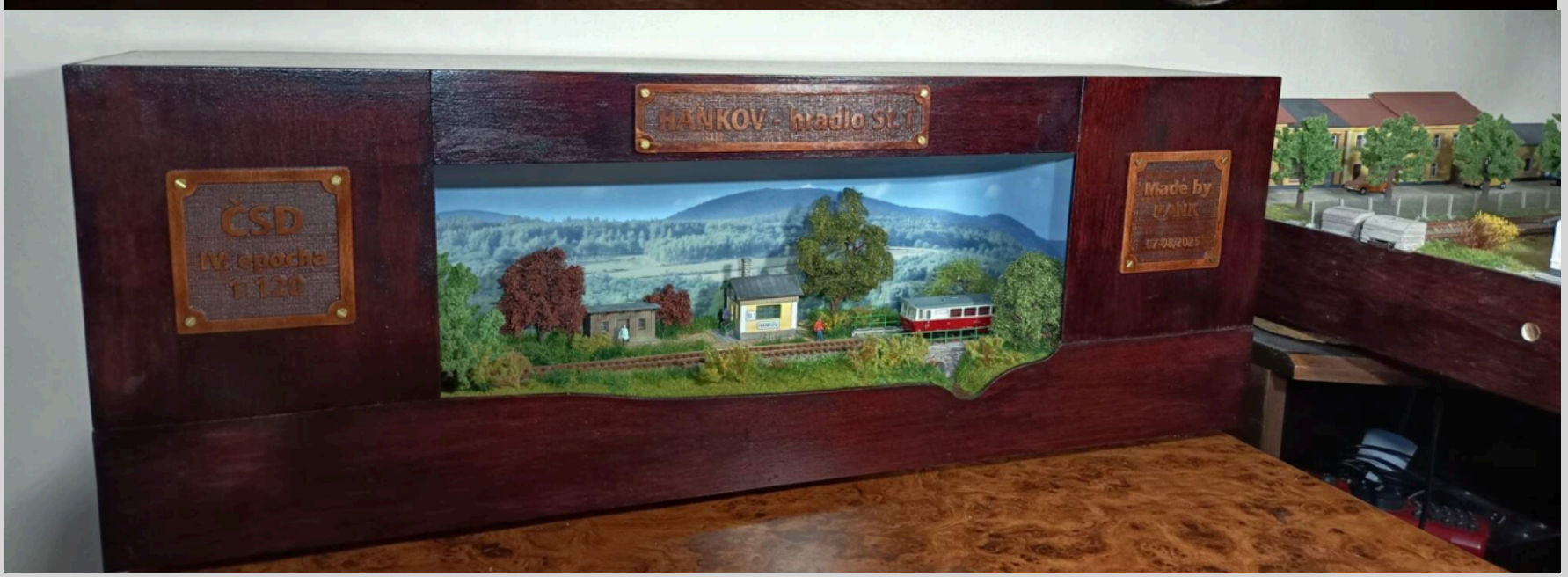
The hidden part of the track layout contains electrically separated sections and complete electronics. The automatic shuttle service of the M152 railcar is provided by Arduino electronics. The speed of the railcar can be set using a PWM controller. The scene is built into a plywood box with installed LED lighting.

The whole thing looks very good indoors. I use it on my desk both for operation and as a static illuminated decoration.

Under Construction



The electronics underneath



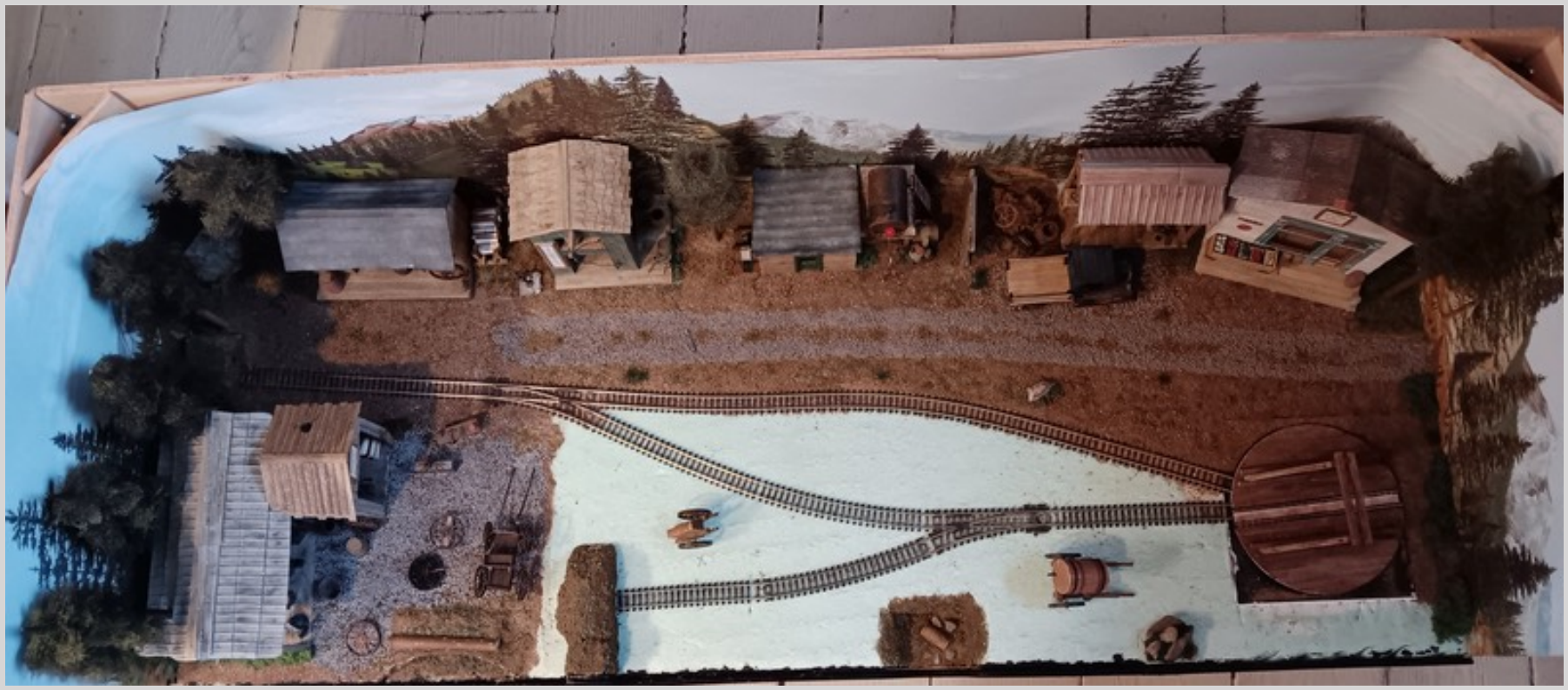
Scenes on Hankov

Jacob's Landing

Larry Cypher

Scale:On18 Size :34″ x 14″ 1220mm x 305mm

Jacobs' Landing is set sometime in the 1950's. Its primary purpose is to supply materials and goods to the business located within. This is an area that time forgot with people still using horses and wagons who live in a nearby town down the road a piece or two. About the only modern conveniences that can be seen is one of those new fangled center cab diesel engines and Mr. Jacobs' 1928 Ford TT pickup truck. Business is good for everyone making Jacobs' Landing very prosperous.



The trackplan at Jacob's Landing. Using the turntable as the end of the passing siding is a great space saving dodge

Closer view of the turntable

Overall view of the layout.

The General store. Much detail to be seen both inside and out.

The wheelwright

The barrel makers (Coopers)

Fiddle Yard

Ian Holmes

My Micro Layout book is on sale!

It's Here! My Micro Layout book is now for sale! It's not a textbook on micro layout design. It's a collection of personal thoughts and observations about designing building and operating micro layouts.

It has taken me quite a while to work on. I have built so many micro layouts. It was difficult to choose them.

Some of them you have liked and have been very popular. Layouts like Purespring Watercress, Bontofts, and Wingetts Recycling. Incidentally, all those layouts feature new, or never before seen photographs. As far as I can tell they are never before seen. Wingetts recycling has been gone for so long, it's difficult to remember, what has and hasn't been seen. The photographs for Wingetts were found in a folder on an old external hard drive that I had forgotten about.

I also believe that the failures are as important as successes, so there's a selection of layouts that I had problems with. However, they all had some little redeeming point. Each one of them was a valuable learning lesson.

If you are a newbie to the micro layout world there's a section explaining all the terminology associated with micro layout building, and even a short history of very small layouts going back to the 1940's.

Finally I share with you some pages from my sketchbook. Hopefully some of the schemes I have concocted will help give you come ideas too.

The book will be a download and will cost $10. You will able to purchase it through my bymeacoffee shop https://buymeacoffee.com/iholmesgbj there will also be a link through the Micro Model Railway Dispatch homepage.

Ian Holmes

A Journey Into Micro Layouts

Personal thoughts about designing and building very small model railway layouts.