



Stour Valley Express

Silver Jubilee Issue

Chairman's Notes

Welcome to the commemorative issue of our Society newsletter marking the 25th anniversary of our permanent track at Brett's Fordwich site.

May I also on behalf of the Society welcome the Lord Mayor Cllr. Marion Attwood, Mr Tim Brett and other representatives of his company to our Silver Jubilee Open Day. We also extend a warm welcome to members of visiting model engineering societies and clubs and to our friends from the Heron Model Boat Club in Herne Bay to the track-site today. We hope that all will have an enjoyable day.

Inevitably as I write these notes I am reflecting not just on the past 25 years of the permanent track but on the past 33 years since the inception of the Canterbury and District Model Engineering Society.

Particularly those people who were so active in their efforts to give the Society this facility.



Paul in 1977

Regrettably some of those stalwart members such as Frank Ashton, John Pearson, and George Ovenden have now passed away. Others like Tom Boorman and Geoff Biggleston due to advancing years, have ceased to be as active as they would wish but 25 years ago they were all united in the common aim of completing our track.

In June 1977 when the foundations for the track were dug I was in the process of leaving school and beginning my apprenticeship at Chatham Dockyard.

Having at that time only my bicycle for transport I used to arrange a lift with Wally Olive over to Sturry on Saturday mornings for the working party.

The previous three years had been spent in father's workshop constructing a 3½" gauge Juliet 0-4-0 tank engine as my school metal work project. I hoped that this would be ready to take part in the opening celebrations. Unfortunately, it still sits on my bench incomplete and in no fit state to grace the track at this 25th anniversary..

Like most people, work and a young family occupy most of my time, however in an effort to get my four daughters interested I have built, from scratch, an electric powered diesel outline loco, which they can drive under supervision.



Chairman and Family, New Year's Day 2004

Now I find myself as Chairman of the Society not only involved with organising the celebration to commemorate the last 25 years but wondering how to chart the course for the next 25. I sincerely hope that at the 50th anniversary of the society in 2022 our membership will have again doubled, the interests of the Society diversified further and many more fine models will have been completed to record and promote our country's great industrial heritage.

Finally, on behalf of the Society I would like to thank Robert Brett and Sons Ltd for the continued use of the their land at Fordwich.

Paul Kemp, Chairman

In the Beginning.....

Many people will remember the little miniature railway that was popular at fêtes and other similar events many years ago running under the name of the Stour Valley Railway and which still runs today under the auspices of the Canterbury and District Model Engineering Society.

It all started with just three men way back in the mid-fifties, George Ovenden, Harold Evans and George French all shared the same interest, the building and running of miniature locomotives. They got together and built the short length of track from steel sections that could quickly be assembled at local fetes and



The late Fred Swain driving Britannia Class loco "Oliver Cromwell" with Barry Brasier as guard overseen by past Chairman Ernie Millard

events such as the Whitstable Regatta. As soon as steam was raised in the little locomotives there would be no shortage of passengers eager to take a trip of just 120 feet from one end of a fete to the other and back.



Harold Evans, Whitstable Regatta 1962/3

The locomotives were built to either 1/2 inch or 3/4 of an inch to the foot scale and later to one-inch scale or one-twelfth full size. They were all built in the three men's back garden workshops.

Their little railway was popular at-



George Ovenden

traction for some twenty years and when not in use was stored in a purpose-built trailer and towed around to the various engagements around East Kent by Harold Evans in his old bull-nosed Rover car. Regrettably George French died leaving the other two men to continue alone.

Over the years, their little railway drew the attention of other model engi-



Peter Roake in his workshop circa 1980

neers and in 1972 proposals were made to form a much larger group. Following a meeting in St. Stephen's Parish Hall which around 18 people attended, including George Ovenden and Harold Evans the **Canterbury and District Model Engineering Society**, as it is known today, came into being.

Under the Chairmanship of Peter Roake who ran an instrument and camera repair business the initial group of members that included John Cox, a Surveyor; Geoff Biggleston who ran a garden machinery company; Tom Boorman, an Engineer; Wally Olive, a Shipwright and Marine Engineer and Jack Laming met in a workshop in



John Cox surveying the site

Burgate, Canterbury. They then moved to a room over a model shop in Butchery Lane and later to Fordwich Town Hall. Other founder and early members were John Pearson and his son, Dave,



Geoff Biggleston and John Pearson

Jack Carr, Ernie Millard, Colonel Compton and Pat Kemp.

Current Chairman, Paul Kemp, who joined the Society as a teenager with his father recalls the early days "Public running was carried out at fêtes with the portable track then owned by George Ovenden and Harold Evans. I used to cycle from Whitstable to wherever the track was operating in the area to help erect and dismantle it. I



John Pearson in high spirits

was rewarded for my efforts by being allowed to drive George Ovenden's locomotive towards the end of the day." At that time monthly

meetings took place in Peter Roake's workshop amongst the projectors and cameras undergoing repair.

By 1978 membership of the Society had reached 50 from all over East Kent and meetings moved again, this time to the Barn at Kingston where they are still held to this day. By this time, the Society had enough members to be able to justify the construction of a permanent miniature railway and the search began for a suitable site. Initially Swale Council were approached to use a piece of land at Dunkirk. Eventually, however, Bretts gave permission for the use of an area of land at their Quarry at Fordwich Lakes, appropriately enough beside the Ramsgate to Ashford Railway line.

Work began on the 750-foot long track in the summer of 1977. The track is of raised construction as opposed to being laid at ground level, with driver and passengers riding astride the track on the passenger trolleys thus keeping the centre of gravity higher and making it easier to drive the locomotives.

Paul Kemp again recalls "The route of the line was surveyed by John Cox and levels set. Following that the foundations were dug out by hand and filled with concrete. The pillars and beams that support the track were cast in the Gordon Road yard belonging to Geoff Biggleston and transported to the site in a borrowed lorry."



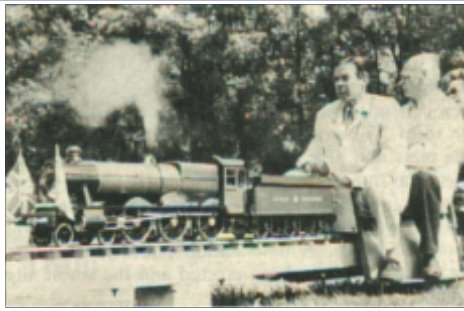
Steaming bays were constructed.....



The Official Opening in 1980 was described in Model Engineer Magazine By permission of Highbury Leisure Publishing Ltd.

The concrete pads and piers supported concrete beams onto which hardwood sleepers were placed. The three aluminium rails were secured by steel plates, 2000 in all, stamped out by Joe Liversedge, a builder of miniature steam locomotives in Herne Bay. This gave two gauges of 3½" and 5".

Steaming bays were constructed adjoining the track to allow the preparation of the locomotives and a passenger loading platform was built.



The Mayor, Robin Carver driving the inaugural train

As work on the layout progressed sections of the track were available for use and the whole circuit was completed after 18 months of work. However, the formal opening of the track did not take place until July 1980 when the Mayor of Canterbury, Robin Carver, performed the opening ceremony and drove the inaugural train.

Meanwhile, the portable track continued in use touring many fêtes and events under the stewardship of Ernie Millard who succeeded Peter Roake as Chairman.

Since its construction the miniature railway at Fordwich has seen much use by the members of the Society and although there is no formal passenger-carrying, members of the public are welcome to ride on the trains and as such the railway has become a popular local attraction when in operation on Sunday afternoons. It gives members

great pride that so many people visit us and enjoy riding on the track and taking an interest in the locomotives.

"So it really does run on coal." is a frequent comment made to members "Oh yes. There is no difference between this one and the full size version - except the size" is often the reply. "Did you make all of it yourself and how long did it take?" another question, "Yes, and too long" is frequently the answer!

Interest is also right across the age range. One six year old riding behind one locomotive turned to his father saying "I'd like to make one of these." "I think you need to be a bit older." replied Dad who then commented to the driver "We've got a Hornby train set at home, he's fascinated with it." The young lad seemed a little disappointed that he might have to wait a while before he could have one that he could actually drive.

In contrast a retired gentleman stood for some time admiring a black tank engine. Peering at it closely he commented to its builder "This looks pretty much as I remember them, I've driven many of these." He turned out to be a former Western Region Engine Driver "Yes, it looks just like the ones I used to drive!"

Chris Davey

25 Years on.....

Today's members of the Society continue to enjoy the facilities constructed by the founder members all those years ago. Indeed, thanks to the strong design, one gang of modern vandals found that stealing metal from the track is not as easy as it looks and they had to leave their spoils behind. Unfortunately, they did sufficient damage to cause us some anxiety but the engineering skills and the resources of our track team (Granville Askham, Don Barker, Roly Broadbent, Dave Claringbold, Terry Jewiss, Bob Moon and Dave Pearson) ensured that the track was not out of commission for too long.

The original portable track is still in much demand around the area and has been staffed by stalwarts: Dave and Gina Pearson, Bob Moon, Don and Phyllis Barker, Dave Claringbould, and Terry Jewiss.

In addition to these events and regular meetings at Fordwich during the Sum-

mer, when the days shorten in the Autumn and Winter, monthly meetings transfer to the Barn at Kingston. Over the

past winter we had speakers covering a multitude of subjects such as Sailing Barges, Windmills of Kent, the World-



Open Day 2004, Visiting locos

War II forts of the Thames Estuary and the Railways of Kent.

At the November club-night we hold a 'Bits and Pieces Evening' when members bring along samples of their latest projects, whether completed or not. These are most

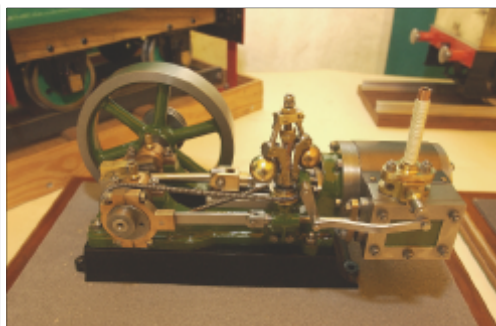
exciting events as they show that the members have a wide range of interests apart from locomotives. The pictures which follow are an attempt to capture this.



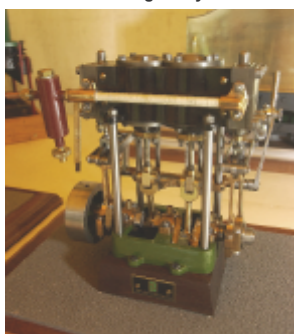
Barry Brasier with Durham & North Yorkshire Traction Engine



Beam Engine by the late Don Lockley



Horizontal Steam Engine



Vertical Steam Engine



A collection of 1/3rd scale British Infantry Weapons by Brain Waite



Donald Taylor with part of his telescope collection



Don Murray's metal toy soldiers and moulding equipment



Working water mill by John Gransden



Brian Waite's model sword collection



Burrell Showman's engine by Granville Askham showing some of the fine detail



General view of model tent Open Day 2004



Father and Son admiring a fine model locomotive



The Society's loco being built by members

Making wonderful models like these requires numerous skills, lots of time, and infinite patience. The main activity is the cutting and shaping of metal and for this, a workshop of some sort is required. This will contain a lathe and a drilling machine and perhaps a milling machine as well as a strong bench and a vice to hold the work.



The portable track at Tenham. Terry Jewiss driving



Granville Askham driving one of his locomotives

professional engineers. Years ago when the track was built, metalwork and woodwork were taught in our schools so most people at that time had some basic manual skills. In many areas, evening classes were available for adults and it was not unusual for the metalwork sessions to be devoted entirely to building models. Sadly, these facilities are no

longer available and at one time it seemed as though interest in model engineering was on the decline.

However, the introduction of new techniques such as abrasive water jet and laser cutting by computer controlled machines is enabling complex parts to be produced at reasonable cost. Thus, some of



Adrian Parker with his Polly, built from ready machined kit of parts

To the model engineer this workshop will provide the means to realise the dreams of a lifetime. It may be the place to relax from a stressful day at work or it could just be a sanctuary where creative talent can be expressed.

Members of the Society come from all walks of life and not all are



Bob Moon driving his 'Sweet Pea'

the 'metal bashing' activity is reduced and models can be made more quickly. In fact it is now possible to build model steam locomotives and traction engines from kits of fully machined parts.

There is also a renewed interest in battery driven locomotives, usu-



Children of all ages enjoy playing trains

ally models of main line diesel or electric locomotives. Some Societies have extended their tracks to include 7¼" gauge locomotives which are much larger and more powerful, others have concentrated on 16mm with really small gas-fired, radio controlled models.

Whilst the Canterbury and District Model Engineering Society has not yet decided to venture along these tracks we are, nevertheless, an active and expanding organisation with in excess of sixty members. It is pleasing to note that many of our newer members are from a younger age group and already have models which they can enjoy.

For details of our future events programme and more views of members and models visit our web site at www.cdmes.org

Peter Dennis

Full Circle - A Personal View

In the early days of the construction of the Fordwich track-site, I often walked by wondering why Bretts Ready-Mix Concrete Works were constructing a miniature Stonehenge. Little did I know how these mystery white concrete pillars were going to affect my life! Sometime later, when work was completed and engines were running. I strangely found myself passing by the track more often and many happy hours were spent standing at the steaming bay railing.

The summers passed quietly by until a visit to a neighbouring track on Sheppey, brought a break-through. By total chance I found there several people from Fordwich with their engines. A cold wind was blowing and my wife was cosy in the car with a good book. When, at the end of the afternoon I was offered a chance to run the fire out on a B1 4-6-0 tender locomotive, with a little instruction, off I set with a feeling of both elation and apprehension (sheer fear of messing up!) Out of the station I rode, round the curve, through the tunnel, and out of sight I went. Then disaster! I was being too clever and thought that I could look at the fire while on the run. I dropped the poker at the very part of the track where not

only could I be seen by the owner of the missing poker but I could not reach the ground to retrieve it. So a move to closer ground was necessary and while walking back, I was thinking how this was probably the end of my short driving career.

But I was wrong, and a further circuit was allowed. That one finished with me pushing the engine

back to its owner with no fire and little water.

My first drive at Fordwich came from a friendship brought about by sitting on the steaming bay and just chatting with anyone about anything. Alas my new found friend has since passed on but the Great Western County locomotive I enjoyed so much that day, still gives much pleasure to everyone who rides behind it, children and adults alike. Several circuits of the County in full steam were taken that afternoon and will never be forgotten.

This was the beginning of both my club membership and the construction of a 5" Sweet Pea saddle tank industrial engine. The first steaming of which, I will leave for another time!

My friendship with the club members rose to a high in the late nineties and into the new Millennium, when I joined the committee. Now, after many happy runs at Fordwich, twenty-five years have passed and again I find myself standing and watching as I did all those years ago.

I think I have gone full circle.

Paul File



Paul with his locomotive

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