



Newsletter

Issue 61: April 2018 Editor: Allan Trotter
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Editorial.

To err is human.

As the saying goes, "To err is human but to fail spectacularly, the assistance of a computer is absolutely essential."

During the past month your editor had the honour to present to the Southport Lecture Society an illustrated talk entitled "The last years of the Night Ferry, Britain's first international passenger train". On checking with the host society, they confirmed that a digital projector would be available; therefore for convenience the presentation was created using a Microsoft PowerPoint show. All was well until the projector was connected to my computer and although my computer recognised it was connected, the projector stubbornly displayed the most unhelpful message "No input". Time for Plan B.

Fortunately I had brought along a memory stick with a copy of the Night Ferry PowerPoint show already installed and on insertion of the memory stick in the host's computer, the presentation performed flawlessly. Being of a somewhat cynical nature, there was also a Plan C prepared and this was the good old fashioned slide projector with spare lamps and a tray of the original Kodachrome colour slides. As it happened, Plan C was not necessary.

After the main event finished, a half hour remained and with the audience's agreement a further show was presented showing the early days of the Venice Simplon Orient Express with both the British and European trains featured. Though there was no doubt about the luxurious accommodation of the CIWL Lx sleeping cars, the audience was astonished to find that the on board facilities were very much of the 1930's when the cars were built.

Considering the elite customers that the train attracts, there are no en suite facilities in the sleeping cabins, only shared toilets at the end of the carriage. Also, there is no air conditioning and no showers on board. When these cars were built, people only took a bath once a week whether they needed one or not. No doubt the on board boutique does a roaring trade in perfume and deodorant. There are no mobile phone charging points or on board Wi-Fi so it's not all that bad then.

Finally when informed that the present day crossing of the English Channel is not in a reserved first class lounge on board a ship but is actually on a road bus, incarcerated in an fully enclosed lorry carrying freight train the audience came to the conclusion that the VSOE did not seem quite as luxurious as was first assumed. In this instance, nostalgia is not as good as it used to be.

Diary of forthcoming events.

20 th Apr 2018	Committee meeting, all members welcome
28 th Apr 2018	Spring Model Railway Exhibition, All Saints Church Hall
11 th May 2018	Annual General Meeting

NOTE. Meeting dates are still to be confirmed

Chairman' report.

For anyone who had made their way to the clubrooms during March they would have noticed that spectacular progress has been made by the contractors - the cast iron downspout by the side of the track has been fitted as has a temporary outflow from the kitchen sink. Unfortunately that has been the sum total of work. Our secretary requested a site meeting with Railtrack and the contractors at the beginning of February to discuss progress, point out work not completed and defects that need rectifying. Two months on, and even after a gentle reminder, we are no nearer to having that meeting.

About three weeks ago, I thought it might be a good idea to give the lounge carpet a good sweep with the vacuum as it was incredibly dusty. Using the trusty "Henry" seemed to make no headway so I decided to use the one with the beater. On starting it up, the lounge filled up with a fine dust. It appeared that the vacuum was effectively beating the carpet but was not sucking it into the bag. An initial dismantling of the machine could find no logical reason why it was not working so it was re-assembled and vacuuming the carpet restarted, unfortunately with the result as earlier. On further investigation it was found that there was a blockage in the hose, which was so tightly packed with bits of model trees, wire, pieces of wood, hair and other unmentionables, that a "Bandjack" was required to clear it. Eventually once everything was put back together, I am pleased to say that it now does "what it says on the tin" and more (eat your heart out Mr Dyson). So if you have a vacuum at home that does not work as well as when you bought it, check all the pipe work for blockages and perhaps save yourself the expense of buying a new one.

Back to model railway matters. 1) Club subscriptions (£35) are now overdue so please let myself, David or Jim have the appropriate remuneration. I will then let you have this year's membership card. 2) We have provisionally booked the AGM for Friday 11th May, probably in the clubrooms. Please note that only paid up members are eligible to vote at that meeting. 3) Finally, the Spring exhibition is being held on Saturday 28th April with setting up on the Friday night. Terry has done a good job in securing at least 12 layouts ranging from N scale up to O-n. **Ian Shulver.**

Secretary's report.

The Chairman and I are playing "Beat the editor at his own deadline" this month. Firstly please accept my apologies for missing the deadline completely last month, due to a combination of factors, not least the sad funeral of our late member Keith Gregory and a looming family wedding. As Ian comments,

Network Rail (Railtrack is as much history as British Rail was, Ian) are proving especially elusive and keep promising to get back but don't.

The good news is that the premises are already drying out quite a lot and are not quite so beastly cold as previously. As a result we have been able to re-commence work of Fishy Tales and the track laying on the OO gauge double track circuit is almost complete. Wiring up will commence shortly. Then there will be a call for scenic workers especially those with a sense of humour, preferably of the dark and Scottish variety.

Keith Gregory's funeral took place on Valentine's Day and was a modest but dignified affair. A guard of honour was provided by the club who met his two daughters, Viv and Nickie and his grandson Josh. We had a small gathering in our flat in Keith's honour and watched the Carson Davidson film "Railway with a Heart of Gold" which Keith featured in at the age of 17, goofing around as you might expect.

The ashes sit in our hallway (I never realised how heavy they were) for the present and I have been in touch with the Talylyn Railway about organising interment in the memorial garden at Brynglas when the weather warms up. People need to let me know if they want to attend, the family have said that they will be going. I have sent an obituary into Talylyn News and to Railway Modeller, he was an old rascal was Keith but the world will be a duller place for his passing. So it is one less membership fee. If everybody could recruit a new member, then we wouldn't need to worry about our finances, but here is another reminder to pay your subs for 2018! **Jim Ford.**

Treasurer's report.

No report received.

Exhibition Coordinator's report.

No report received.

Contributions from members and friends.

Hong Kong Tramways, Part One.



Just over 12 months ago, I received instructions from the powers that must be obeyed, that a holiday in the Caribbean was in order, preferably a cruise. After the correct paperwork was completed by the supply chain department I was granted preferred bidder status and then, duly awarded the contract to make it happen. With this heavy burden, I set out on my task with optimism to the local travel agent in Ulverston. However, whilst in the travel agents, my eyes looked in the other direction and towards the East.

After much time and searching, we found a ten day cruise with Royal Caribbean that would fit the bill perfectly. Having dipped my toe in the east on our club visit to the sub-continent in 2011! I was immediately captivated and quickly wanted to know more details. It was a cruise for ten days on a 136,000 ton ship, taking it in many exotic locations from Singapore to Vietnam to Okinawa. In the middle of all this, there was a stop in Hong Kong for a day and a half. Not just a day but an overnight stop with all the sounds and colour that would come with it. Apart from Singapore, HK was definitely on my 'to-do' list. In fact, on my map that I used at school, it was still pink. But saying that, there was still East Pakistan & Ceylon on it too, but that's another story.



All I had to do was make the announcement to my domestic line manager. Well I got away with it and we were set to go. Anyway, apart from travelling up the peak, a ferry ride across the famous harbour I fancied a tram ride and I was sure that would be at the top of Mrs M's wish list too! Hong Kong tramways operate a tour tram called the 'Tramoramnic Tour' in a 1920's built tram. It runs six times a day and lasts just over an hour and information for it can be found at tramways.com .

One of the volunteers at the R&ER has been to HK many times and was extremely helpful in offering advice on what to do in our time we had there. Also he is an avid tram fan. Thanks to our local HK expert, we knew exactly where to go to meet our tram. So our story begins with a bit of history, or as our Comrade from Eastbank would say 'Culture my boy'.

Introduction to Hong Kong

China is a country of over 4 million square miles and is about a third bigger than the USA. It is bounded on its northern frontier by Mongolia, Russia and former USSR states. On its southwest borders front mainly on India, Burma and what is now Vietnam. The remains south-east edge of this land mass is coast, some three thousand miles long except for the Korean Peninsula towards its northern end. This long sea-board pushes into the China Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Situated 500 miles along this coast from its southern extremity is the mighty Pearl River Delta. At the mouth of this river is the small former British Colony of Hong Kong, with the even smaller former Portuguese Colony of Macao 34 miles away.

Prior to colonisation, trade had arrived by Hindu and Arab vessels that had travelled up the Pearl River to Canton. The early European traders went the same way, the first being Portuguese, but soon came the Dutch and the British in the form of the 'East India' trading company. This led to a greater foothold being taken. Increasing friction between Great Britain and China resulted in the 'Opium War of 1839-1842.

After the war, the Treaty of Nanking was signed. The Royal Navy used the harbour as a natural safe place during Typhoons. This Navel need gave momentum to further expansion on the mainland at an area known as 'Kowloon peninsula' or sometimes referred to as the 'new territories'. To give greater protection and allow for further expansion if required, a lease for 99 years was negotiated and signed in 1898. On July the 1st 1997, the lease ended, the union flag came down and HRH The Prince of Wales alongside Chris Patton, the last Governor of Hong Kong sailed into the sunset on the royal yacht ending a 156 years of British Colonial rule. Hong Kong is now a (SAR) or Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China as is Macau.

In Part 2, we will look at Hong Kong tramways 1881-1901. **Peter Mills.**

Young and old – Trix Twin Railways (TTR) still holds a fascination.



Happiness personified. Seeing and holding is believing for the next generation

Although not the largest exhibition in the Southport Model Railway Club's repertoire over recent decades, the November 2017 SMRC Winter show at All Saint's Parish Church Hall, Southport during November 2017, certainly packed a big punch for the under ten's.

At the other end of the age spectrum, the super seniors of the model railway world found themselves, once again, transported back to their childhood days in looking at, and holding, locomotives and rolling stock paying little regard to fine scale detail but oozing appeal and enjoyment by the bucket load. I've never been one for either saying or instructing young visitors to 'Please don't touch'. To give youngsters the chance to touch and hold TTR items and feel the weight of the 3 rail early generation locos inevitably provokes a look of amazement they are actually allowed to hold something valuable. Sensibly managed, this might just spark an interest in model railways which could develop into a lifelong passion for a hobby much in need of new blood. This is where the show scored highest and the Club deserves a pat on the back for their vision.

Following the successful 2016 Southport Woodvale Rally when I ran a TTR 1930's to 1950's working display, Ian Shulver and Jim Ford of SMRC had extended an invitation to exhibit part of my TTR collection at their pre-Christmas show, aimed principally at children. Decades of large model railway exhibitions run by the Club have been replaced in 2017 by smaller, and nimbler, twin exhibitions this year. Club members pooled their considerable talents for the one day show, with an array of working layouts across the various scales, together with a Club sales table.

This year, I decided to present TTR from the 1930's to the 1960's with a static display of locos, rolling stock, track, controllers, Manyways station units, signals and boxed sets. A late 1920's Hornby tin plate train and track acted as a centre piece. This proved an effective conversation stimulator as I explained the shift from the larger, clockwork scales post WWI to the electric table railway introduced by WJ Basset-Lowke and Stephen Bing in the 1930's. Time and again I explained the ability to run two independently controlled trains on one track in the pre computer/DCC age, thanks to the flexibility offered by the pick-up shoes and 3 rail track. "Bakelite, what's that?" provided the opportunity to explain how this early plastic came into common use between the wars and how it was adopted to give a stable running base for the interlocked first generation track.

As visitor numbers increased, so a continuous stream of mums and dads and grandparents with children in tow stopped, looked and asked questions, intrigued by the display. Many took time to read the various items on my adjacent display stand, handily located next to the refreshment hatch, which helped to portray the evolution of TTR over the years.



Help from several people ensured the day proved not just worthwhile but highly enjoyable. Arriving at the hall early morning, thankfully dry and bright, it was readily apparent the various rooms had each been prepared with some displays already in-situ, having benefitted from the previous evening's efforts by SMRC to allow plenty of time for setting up. Shaun Finucane, who had offered his electrical engineering expertise in getting my 2016 Woodvale Rally TTR board up and running, was an early arrival. Shaun's own model railway extends throughout his basement with a master class in electrical wiring leading to smooth working points and signals, which, quite honestly, leaves me full of admiration for Shaun's exceptional skills.

Steve White supplied the impressive new TTR banner and additional copies of the companion leaflet during the week prior to the show (thanks, Steve) and with another friend, Peter Dyer defying the aftermath of a heavy cold to help

out during the afternoon and end of show dismantling and packing away, the day literally flew by.

Master model-maker, Fred Harris, who founded the Replicast world record breaking model cars and boats business several years ago, only had to walk a few yards from his home along Park Road to drop into the show. Fred, now in his 80's, has recovered well from a stroke and is continuing to model. Fred, who has recently moved, donated his breathtaking collection of World Water Speed Record model boats, including several of Donald Campbell's Bluebird, on semi-permanent loan to Coniston's Ruskin Museum Bluebird Wing. My own involvement in Bluebird K7's rebuild, which saw me join the official party on Coniston Water last January, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Donald's fatal 1967 crash, also formed an ancillary part of the display.



Fred Harris (left) and Gerard Homer help recall memories of earlier days

Another visitor was an old school pal, Gerard Homer. Gerard and I travelled miles together to various railway centres, often as part of the Northern Railfans Club (does anybody remember that?) coach trips to Crewe Works on a Sunday in the early 60's. The works were at rest and ideal to receive organised touring parties of young railway enthusiasts, some armed with cameras and everybody with their notebooks and Ian Allan ABC's. Steam repairs, together with new-build main line diesels, dominated the works, with the paint shop and exterior yard posing a stark contrast to the condemned stock. Occasionally, forays around Crewe North (5A) and South (5B) sheds were included.

Quite often, visitors to my TTR stand shared their memories of early train sets, some now long disposed of. However, occasionally a chat reveals the hope a virtual museum piece from the 1950's or even earlier, can be dusted off and resurrected. And this is another enjoyable aspect in attending these exhibitions, in being able to offer advice and, where needed, help in returning models to working order or assisting in their disposal to a collector or local model shop.

As this is penned a week prior to our annual visit to our daughter and family between Houston and Galveston in the USA for Christmas, I am looking forward to catching up with American friends, some of whom lost stock in the devastating Hurricane Harvey floods during early autumn. Hopefully, the model clubs over there will have escaped relatively unscathed, particularly the Texas City Club, whose club room, seemingly the size of a soccer pitch, is situated on the first floor of the Texas City Library. **Keith Hick.**

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