



MAIDSTONE MODEL ENGINEERING SOCIETY

SPRING 2012



Best to get them started early...

Andrew's Spot...

Well, here we are at the start of another new running season. I was hoping to get this edition out to you before we began running again, but best laid plans and all that...

Also, something else that didn't go to plan was joining you for the annual dinner, but I hear that there was a good turnout as usual.

It certainly turned out to be a promising start to the year—apart from the Easter Bank Holiday weekend which was a bit of a washout on the Monday—but the first two Sundays were blessed with fine weather, a good turn out of locos and passengers. Despite the warnings of possible problems in the park due to the Sports Relief events this did not seem to give us any concerns—apart from the early start to the day (I certainly missed the extra hour in bed that day). We had our usual up and down points in the numbers of passengers, but that seems to be the norm now-a-days.

Also, I did hear reports of young hooligans leaving sticks on the line and throwing objects, unfortunately one of the hazards of our hobby in a public park, so please watch out when driving around the track. There's always someone that has to spoil it for the rest of us.

A very nice part of the day, was the celebration of Peter Kingsford's 80th birthday, where he was joined by his family and friends from the club, with a wonderful spread including two delicious birthday cakes. Happy Birthday Pete, and here's to many more...



I expect many of you will have noticed that it's a little bit quieter round the track on Sunday afternoons, a certain clanking, rattling, knocking, banging noise is missing. Yes, Lochwood is absent, and will be for quite a little while probably. She is now sitting in many pieces in my garage, awaiting work to the axle-boxes and bushes, plus a bit of a repaint. Some of those parts that should have been round were oval so that would explain some of those knocking noises. It might have been possible to nurse her through another season, but with those knocks getting louder I think the time had come.

Hopefully, it won't take too long to get her repaired, back together and looking as good as new, but then don't hold your breath, this is me I'm talking about...

2012 is shaping up to be a busy year for the Club, just see the Diary Dates page at the back of the Newsletter. Some events of note and not that far away, is an especially arranged day with the Scouts on Saturday April 21st. There will be a group of youngsters joining us for a taste of engine management and driving experience. If there is anyone that can spare some free time on the Saturday (plus a tank loco), that would be very much appreciated.

We have two charity runs being organised for this year. The first will take place on the May Bank

Holiday, and we will be raising funds for Great Ormond Street. This one has been inspired by some work colleagues of mine whose 6 month old granddaughter is currently being treated for a very rare type of Leukaemia, and is now undergoing very uncomfortable treatment. My work are also holding a charity football match in aid of Great Ormond Street and I thought it would be nice if we could also support this cause.

Our other charity fund raising day will be held during the August Bank Holiday weekend, and raising money once again for the Hospice, both very good causes.

A couple of things to note—don't forget we do have a Facebook page, which will be regularly updated with goings-on at the club. There are the two pages, one for us members, and a public page— www.facebook.com/maidstonemes -for those of you with friends on there please let them know of our existence, the more people who know about us the better, and who knows we may even be able to persuade some new young members to our ranks. I will at some stage put up some posters advertising the facebook page at the club.

Secondly, there has been a slight swap around in the duties carried out by certain committee members. As you know from past naggings (newsletters) there has always been a struggle to get people to sign up for station duties. Now although normally these duties can be covered on the day, it would be nice to know in advance that we don't have to worry about staffing and the horrible possibility that we wouldn't be able to run without them. Now, as you will notice towards the end of this letter, Sue has now taken on the task of twisting people's arms (I mean asking nicely of course) to sign up—I should know, she's collared me already, as I have no loco to run. So please if you can spare an afternoon, put your name on the list which is in its usual place on the board by the door in the clubhouse, otherwise members beware...

I think that's just about all from me, apart from letting you know that I have now changed my email address to andrewmmes@hotmail.co.uk, so I expect lots of articles for my next newsletter.

Here's to a great 2012, and I look forward to seeing all of you around throughout the year either at the park or other club related events...

Andrew



She will be missed this year—well I'll miss her anyway...

Chairman's Spot

Well, here we are in 2012, a year which has the potential of being another fine year for the club. We started the year with another well attended annual dinner, which is a great chance to socialize away from the dirt of the club, dressed in our best, with our partners at our sides, please do try to join in next year if you are able to, it is a wonderful atmosphere.

So far we have a fairly impressive itinerary in front of us, both with home events and invitations from other clubs. It would be fantastic to see as many of you as possible at these events. We are about to enter the running season, and as such I feel my responsibility to plead for volunteers to assist with traffic controller, money collector and loaders, since all of these are needed weekly in order to run. Having said that, having all of these is pointless without anything to pull the passengers with. It is good to see the faces that are running most weeks of the year, but they would feel better if others gave them the opportunity to sit back and not run knowing there are enough engines available, so come along and have a play, be it once this year, once a month, or every week, it will be appreciated... enjoy your creation for what it was designed for.

Roger and Mike are returning this year with another of their great Wallace and Grommet quiz nights, in May, come along and bring with you your other halves, and don't forget your brains... July sees the return of the Peter Roots friends and family day, which I would encourage all of you to try to get to if at all possible, it is always a fantastic day, and if you don't have a loco to demonstrate to your friends, don't worry, the club enterprise is fully operational, and longing to be driven!

If you have time, then please do take the opportunity to travel, there are many good clubs with friendly people around, with the Romney open day in May being the first. Check out the diary dates for a full list, and please come along as often as you can, if only for the tea...

So for now, all I can say is enjoy the year, and happy steaming!

Tom.



The Wednesday Gang

What happens on Wednesdays at the club? Well they just sit around, chat and drink lots of tea don't they?

Well, that IS true, but they also do many of the little and not so little jobs that help to make the club be an easier and safer place in which to do our thing. Mostly this happens after a mug of tea and very often a cheese scone or rock cake lovingly prepared by Sylvia White, who gets up early especially to bake them so Bernie can deliver them to us.

Let me describe the activities over the last year. The jobs done vary from routine maintenance to more major projects to repair or improve the facilities. The maintenance jobs are things like clearing out the drains in the steaming bays, sweeping out the bays and cleaning out the tracks for the traverser. This last running season the Maidstone Council did not spray under the track area with weed killer and the cost of getting the contractor to do it was exorbitant (i.e. they didn't want the work!) so the track was cleared with petrol strimmers, mainly by Maurice and Jack. Meanwhile the rest of the group were cutting back the vegetation along the entrance road and filling in some of the potholes. The path at the rear of the coal store and clubhouse was cleared and the enclosed areas behind the clubhouse were strimmed and sprayed with weed killer, as appropriate. Also the green paintwork on the railings and sidings was touched up, mainly by Bernie the Brush and also by Colin and Mike.

An ongoing job is the checking of the condition of the mainline. Our Peter is tireless in patrolling the track to look for loose fishplate bolts and other signs of deterioration. His attention to detail is a major reason why the track continues to run so smoothly for us. This last season he has been replacing all the old steel BA bolts in the fishplates which were secured with nuts plus locknuts and had been rusting badly and losing nuts. The new bolts (sourced by Tom) are stainless steel with self locking nuts. He has now completed this job with frequent help from Gerald and some from Jack.



Minor projects were the installation of the paper roll holder in the workshop, the brackets for the security bars for the loco doors in the workshop and the anti-climb paint on the clubhouse roofs



(thanks Jack). Also a neat latch was made for the Coal Store door to hold it back in the wind (thanks Gerald) and the workshop roof was given several coats of waterproofing (thanks Maurice, Jim and Mike). The lock on the coal shed was replaced (thanks Gerald and Jim) and also the one on the ticket office door (thanks Maurice, Jim and John Walker). Also Gerald spotted that the wooden trim on the main carriage traverser was rotting and replaced it with help from Peter and Bernie the Brush.

A bigger job was the improvement to that traverser to stop the decking boards being so slippery in wet weather. We had tried the usual anti-slip tape previously, but it had not been effective for long and had quickly detached from the boards. After much discussion in the committee meetings, the suggestion from Jack to cover the boards with chicken wire (as used in most country parks) was adopted. Graham bought us the wire and it was fixed down with a pneumatic stapler lent by John Hawkins. Gerald and John Walker took the lead in the fixing down with help, mainly from Dave and Jim.



Another job was the realigning of the guard rails on the main track. It was noticed that the passenger trolleys had been rubbing on the guard rails in several places on the exit from the first loop out of the station and just after the bridge. The guard rails were cut and bent to give clearance to the passenger trolleys, the support brackets were realigned and the guard rails were welded back into place. This was a group exercise led by Maurice with Jim doing the welding and Bernie painting the results,

A slightly bigger project was improving the drainage from the steaming bay, which is in two pipes that start from the grids next to the traverser tracks and go under the main line. From there they run straight out under the carriage sidings and into two soak-aways in the grass. For some time the rainwater had not been running away very quickly, especially down the one nearest the clubhouse, making large puddles in the steaming bay area. Some exploratory digs were made to find and expose the ends of the two pipes out in the grass where they went into the soak-aways. The other ends were also dug up and the pipes were rodded and hosed to clear them of silt and re-buried, making them slope down towards the soak-away end as much as possible (thanks to Maurice for organising it and the rest of the group who lent a hand with the digging etc).



A very major project was the repair to the water supply to the clubhouse. Beside the clubhouse is a pit where the shut-off valve is located and there was a big water leak there due to the pipes rusting through. The big problem was how to shut off the water to allow the repair and we tried first to locate a possible valve further away from the clubhouse. Initially Colin borrowed a pipe tracer and the supply pipe was tracked across the park to where it seemed to join onto the main pipe running from the A20 and down through the park to the toilets. John Walker and Jack dug a small pit over the possible T-junction and got down nearly a metre without a sign of valve or pipes.



The rest of the group (also Sue and Pat one Sunday) searched the park up near the A20 to try and find any water valves, but none of the findings seemed to be relevant to our water supply. A new approach was needed and Maurice managed to arrange to borrow a pipe freezing unit from a friend. He then spent a lot of time sorting through catalogues for possible replacement valves and discussing possible solutions with the group. A particular plastic valve was chosen and it was decided to fit two in series so that one valve could be left unused as a shut-off for any future repair needed to the valve in use. A length of plastic pipe

to join things up was procured (thanks Norman). The area round the old pit was excavated to check the pipe sizes and we found, to our surprise, that the inlet supply was in an old type of plastic pipe.

Maurice bought the valves and the special joints to connect between the new and old pipes. Finally the whole area was excavated (particular thanks John Walker), the old pit lining was removed, the inlet frozen and the old valves and pipe work were cut out (and it just fell apart at the problem joint – repair was just in time!). The new valves and fittings went in perfectly, thanks to the good planning, and a new pit was built up by Maurice and a steel rim and lid made by Jim was fitted and painted green by Bernie.



Another major project was the repair of the damage to the clubhouse shutters. The cover over the top of the shutter on the main window had been bent downwards by vandals. This cover was removed and reinforcing bars were attached to the wall to project out under the cover, which was straightened out and the two halves re-riveted before being fitted back in place (thanks especially Jim, Colin, Mick and John Walker).



The most recent big job has been the corrections to the steaming bay rails. One of them has been notorious for making locos run away on their own, including actually falling off onto the concrete. First the correction required has been measured with Maurice's water level to check the height relative to the traverser rails. Then the whole rail assembly has been unbolted from the supports and, usually, the cross plate cut off the vertical pipe. The pipe has then been shortened and the cross plate welded back on with the rails bolted directly on top and the spacers discarded. The worst track needed the end dropped by 1.25inches!





The track used by Martin was a special case because there was a 0.25inch step down to the traverser level. The rail assembly was removed and material cut from the bottom of the rails to get them level with the traverser.



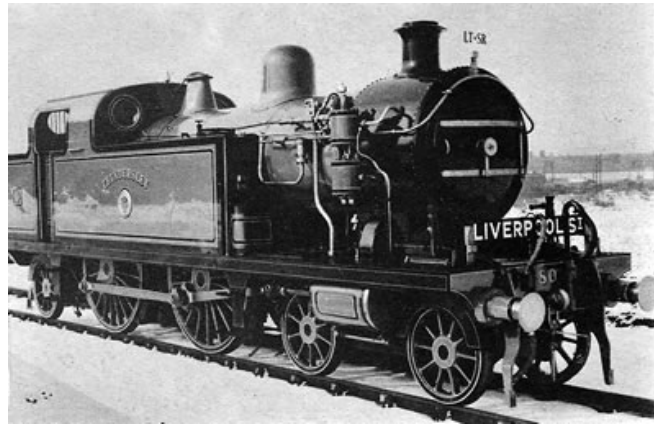
Jim has taken a major hand in this work in doing the welding and grinding with Maurice working out what was required, but they were aided by John Walker, Dave and Mike, amongst others, removing and cleaning up the bolts, cutting the rails and pipes and by Bernie the Brush painting the finished track.

In conclusion, although a few names have been specially mentioned above, we owe many thanks to the whole Wednesday Gang for pitching in and helping with these jobs, cheerfully doing the untold more menial parts of the tasks and contributing many helpful and humorous(?) remarks to keep them on their toes!

It isn't just tea drinking and chatting on Wednesdays, but it is often a lot of fun.



(All pictures taken by Jack)



London Tilbury & Southend Railway

A 4-4-2(T) Tilbury Tank in Gauge 1

The 4-4-2(T) arrangement with outside cylinders was the most commonly used on the line. They were reliable and gave good service. As far as I can see they were grouped into No's. 1-37-51 & 79 classes.

The model I am building is based on the class 79 using drawings by Paul Forsyth. The general outline has been followed, but as always I have changed some details to allow easy assembly, disassembly and manufacture.

After a long period the company was taken over by MR – LMS & BR. With these changes colour schemes changed from green to Crimson Lake to plain black, to black with red lining. There were also two examples painted Lavender Grey! I shall use MR Crimson Lake.

From my records I see ten wheel castings were supplied by Walsall Model Industries on 07/04/10. My article in the 2011 summer newsletter fully explained the machining of the cylinder castings. The motion parts were as normal. The plate work generally followed the drawing outlines but much patience was required.

The two side tanks are 1/2" inside width by 6 5/16" long. In the left hand tank a hand pump is fitted. This made to drawing has a 5/16" ram, with the feed and bypass pipes there is little room. In hindsight it would have been better with a 1/4" ram. Also the unit has to be removable for servicing. With the valve box and with the pipes there was no room to give access to fixing screws. Quite a few hours thinking time were used before an answer was found.

The end plates of the tanks were drawn as 1/2" wide x 18swg brass pieces riveted and soldered to 1/4" x 1/16" angles. I changed this and used 1/2" x 1/8" section brass holding each of the side plates with four 10BA screws. This was simple and gave good rigidity. On the outside sheets I changed the screws for hand rail stanchions. By doing this the hand rails were moved from the end of the tanks to the side

With no baseplate fitted it was easy to solder the ends. This also sealed the 10BA holes. The baseplate was soldered from the outside using a large iron aided by gentle blow torch heating of the side plates. There was no room to solder from the inside. The hand rail knobs purchased from Walsall had plain ends. I found a way of threading them 10BA easily.

The tank tops are located and held in place by spring clips strong enough to keep them in place when the loco is running yet easily removed for topping up water.

I find it quite important to look for expected problems well in advance – perhaps 2 or 3 weeks ahead. Ideas float around the mind and eventually you hopefully have an answer and you always do!

The meths tank as drawn was part of the rear bunker. This I have changed to allow the tank to be removed separately. Paint and meths don't go well together. The tank will be slightly smaller, but I don't think this will be a serious problem. Another change is to fit coal rails to the side and rear of the bunker. The supports are screwed to the bunker but the actual rails are fixed using Loctite adhesive. It may well have been more sensible to have used soft solder – time will tell!

I have mentioned before the use of a spirit level for various applications. I happen to have a mounted level 2" long. The actual sensitivity of the bubble is not greatly important – what is important is the inclination of a surface being checked relative to the movement of the bubble. I have found it very helpful when drilling holes in mainframes after the wheels and motion work are assembled.

A piece of contiboard 6" wide and 24" long is placed on the drilling machine table, the loco assembly is laid on its side and the level placed on a suitable surface. Packing is put in position to achieve a level. The whole assembly is hand held. To position correctly the assembly including the contiboard is moved as one. This works well for me and the weight of a Gauge 1 assembly is easily held.

All of my Gauge 1 locos have a small mechanical water pump. There are no drawings and there is not much space. I have used a cross head drive solely because of lack of room. The bypass valve will be attached to the boiler clack vale as an extension.

Positioning the regulator, blower and bypass controls is important – again room is limited. Also a pressure gauge is required and will face sideways.

The curved sides of the cab and roof are drawn as one removable assembly and is positioned and locate by small dowl pins in the tank tops. I'm not over happy with this arrangement although at the moment can't see anything better – we will see.

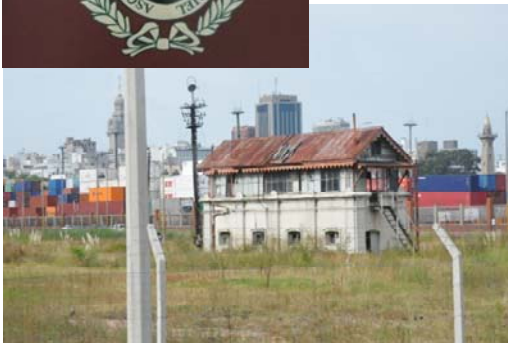
To be continued...

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In the late 1940's / early 1950's I often travelled on the LT&S Railway ferry from Gravesend to Tilbury. This was a small steam boat capable of carrying 6 to 7 vehicles. Driving away from the Tilbury terminal you passed rail sidings and more often than not you would see 4-4-2(T)s – some in steam. I am sure the Victorian method of loading the ferry hadn't changed – two reinforced planks between jetty and ferry – not much room for misjudgement. All very quaint. I don't recall any vehicle falling into the river. I wonder what a 21st century risk assessment would make of that?!!

Asociation Uruguay Amigos Del Riel

by Martin & Sue Parham



Certainly when we booked our February 2012 cruise around the bottom end of South America we hadn't actually thought about any steam railways, either that might be there or that we would have an opportunity to visit. We hadn't given much consideration to the port of Montevideo in Uruguay, the continent's second smallest country, and the poor relation to Brazil and Argentina. But when we found we could do a ship's tour that included a trip to a standard gauge steam railway we obviously didn't hesitate.

In exchange for corned beef the British built the railways in Uruguay (obviously we've been getting our corned beef elsewhere for a long time since then by the state and decline we saw). Until last year the train ran right into the docks, but now it starts from a new terminus station (finished in 2003). We arrived by bus at the train station, which is a modern stone and glass building quite out of keeping with the rather run down and neglected surroundings.

At the platform our train was waiting for us and we were able to have a good look at the loco. Before you could say "Tren a vapor" (steam train), Sue had found her way onto the footplate (signing and mime crosses language barriers) while I had a chat on the platform with the Secretary of the Association, Jorge, who fortunately spoke good English (our Spanish being very limited to greetings and thanks). He told me that the Association had been formed in 1954 as the country was changing locomotives from steam to diesel, to preserve the historic experience of steam railroading for the enjoyment and edification for all in the future. The members of the Association were, and still are, all enthusiastic volunteers who receive no outside financial help, with a dedicated few of them being the mainstay of the organisation and involved in the actual running.

The engine was an oil fired 2-6-0, built by Beyer Peacock, No. 120, built in Manchester in 1910, with Walschaerts valve gear. It had been on static display down town for over thirty years. In May 2005 some members of the Association visited and found it still had all its main parts. The government authorities agreed to their request and plans for restoration with the intention of running again.

They were given the loco, two passenger cars and two support wagons, which were transported to their site in August 2005. These were all carefully restored by the Association in their own workshop using private finance. It took 40,000 man hours over two years and finally they were ready to be put back into service. The Mogul tender (capacity 12,000 litres of water and 5,900 of heavy fuel oil) still had oil in it from 40 years previously when it was last used. Upon first firing, the oil valve had been opened and this oil lit up immediately, no problems!

The two passenger cars, Allan coaches, originated from Holland in 1952. They had been beautifully restored with cedar wood tables and dark green leather seating. Also they were fully air conditioned. Although this made the temperature nice and cool for the passengers, it meant that the windows were not able to be opened, so Sue and I were not able to hang out of them as we would have liked. Let's face it; us steam train buffs like to risk decapitation, and this just for the smell of the smoke, the sound of the loco and the risk of smuts in our eyes. Instead of these joys/hazards, entertainment seems to be the order of the day while you travel, with music and tango dancing (the tango being not just the dance of Argentina but Uruguay as well). We found that just seeing the scenery was interesting enough for us in a new country, this entertainment was secondary.

Our journey was from Montevideo to the suburb of Colon, covered almost ten kilometres nonstop on the flat, crossing many road junctions so the train whistle was in constant use. There were few bridges and no tunnels but many dilapidated buildings and overgrown grass, plants and weeds. At Colon Sue was once more up on the footplate while the driver drank his mate (the national beverage) the traditional way through a bombilla (metal straw) and from a gourd. She was then encouraged to blow the whistle. But there was the rest of the ship's tour of Montevideo to do by road, so we had to go. She kissed the driver goodbye and said "Muchos gracias" – he indicated that the pleasure was all his (doubt they get many women wanting to go on the footplate). We later found out the driver was a government politician! On leaving we gave Jorge some US\$ as a donation to help the Association with further restoration projects, and because we had enjoyed it all so much.



Colon Station



The End of the World Train – “El Tren Del Fin Mundo” – by Sue Parham



with tensions rising due to many things but not least because it is the 30th anniversary of the Falklands war, two cruise ships after us were recently refused entry into Ushuaia. In fact there is a noticeboard at the port proclaiming that since 1833 The Malvinas (Falklands) have been illegally occupied by the British!



Actually, everything here is titled: “end of the world” this, “end of the world” that, but it all sounds good for the tourists. We can say our marriage wasn’t the end of the world but 16 years later our anniversary was there!

Ushuaia was not founded until 1884 and it was at the turn of the next century that a penal colony was built. A “xilocarril”- a train travelling on wooden rails of 60cm gauge was built to carry materials, especially wood, at this time. The prisoners built, travelled and worked on the railway; in fact the convict labour force built quite a lot of the city and enabled it to have electricity as early as 1901. So, perhaps unsurprisingly it became known as The Convict Train, and that is how it is remembered.

Our wedding anniversary this year was spent on a cruise (no surprises there for those that know us) and early afternoon on the actual day we docked at Ushuaia (pronounced Oosh-why-er) known as the city at the end of the world, as it is the southernmost city before Antarctica, in South America. It is also in Argentina, and



As Ushuaia is ringed on land by the last of the Andes Mountains, sailing in – and out at night – gives striking views. As it was one of the very few days they have of warmth, blue skies and sunshine (despite being summer), it was a perfect day. More so because we were off on a tour to visit the Railway at the End of The World.



The prison was finally closed in the late 1940s. There was a huge earthquake in 1949 that did a lot of damage, and eventually the railway was needed less and less and stopped working completely in 1952. Of course in subsequent years it fell into total disrepair and items vanished.

It was resurrected as a tourist attraction by an entrepreneur called Quique Diaz who stumbled upon it in around the early 1990s. Quique had the foresight to realise that Ushuaia would become a tourist destination due to its unique position, natural attractions and closeness to Antarctica. The railway was totally rebuilt and re-gauged to 50 cm (about 20") – this was controversial at the time, but the British Engineer involved, Roger Davis, was swayed by the various



different gauges of the little railways in North Wales, and the Talylyn in particular. However, this caused many technical difficulties. A field was chosen to build the End of the World station at the bottom of Mount Susana (hey, obviously named after me!!!). All new engines were needed. So, it may still be known as the Convict Train, but it reminds me a bit of Trigger's broom in TV's classic comedy Only Fools and

Horses – he's had exactly the same broom for years, it's had seventeen new heads and fourteen new handles in its time, but he still thinks it's the same broom... (The Theseus Paradox).



After many difficulties and much hard work, in 1994 the Railway at the End of the World (the South Fuegian Railway) was reopened in time to celebrate 110 years of the city. Trains ran to Macarena Station, and a Yamana encampment was reconstructed there as an added tourist attraction. The Yamanas were the indigenous race of the area, who existed for 8000 years in the

south of Tierra del Fuego – until the Europeans turned up. Through various methods, including the diseases they brought with them, they totally wiped out the Yamanas.

In 1998, part of the railway line was extended 400 metres to run into the Tierra del Fuego National Park itself, with the final station being Park Station, close to the road to Lapataia. This boosted tourism immediately and since then, marketing, publicity and the steady building of the railway's reputation have turned it into the recognised attraction it is. The cruise ship industry has helped by running tours, such as ours, to the railway when visiting the port.

We went by coach to the station, which is eight kilometres west of Ushuaia (and just past the golf club). The train we travelled behind was named Camila, after Quique's daughter. It was built by the now defunct Winson Engineering in Daventry (yes here in England and many of you will have heard of them) in 1995 and the loco took three months to construct. Once in service it had further work done on it to improve the performance. It is so narrow on the footplate that the driver sits outside the cab, on a seat to the side when driving the train!



There are six engines in all, and the red one I have pictured earlier in this article is the latest, named Eng. H.R Zubieta. It is a Garratt, built in 2006 at the workshops of Girdlestone Rail, in Port Shepstone in South Africa. It's one of two locomotives named after engineers who worked on the railway. Another loco is named after Quique's son Rodrigo – this one was the first locomotive re-opening the line in October 1994.

The five mile line has the stunning backdrop of the Andes. The halfway stop at Macarena Station also has a picnic site, and after that you ride past an area known as the tree cemetery – the remains of the trees felled over the decades. The train tends to travel not much faster than walking pace, but that's not important. The passenger carriages are obviously small, enclosed but comfortable, and the story of the railway is played to you over speakers as you travel, interspersed with stirring music. On a beautiful day, the ride is perfect.



Acknowledgements: The End of the World Train by Hernan Pablo Gavito

A Taste of Texas

It all started in London in 1973. I had been working in the capital for a number of years and although the days were long, the work was very satisfying. Boarding the 7.33am train at Chatham, fast to Bromley South and Victoria, was much like joining a cattle truck. The train having started it's journey from Ramsgate or Dover, I don't remember which, was well full before reaching Chatham. Standing room only was usual with passengers wedged shoulder to shoulder along the side corridors. Commuters who insisted on reading the *Daily Telegraph* or other broad sheet newspapers, were very adept at folding them concertina fashion lengthwise so that the columns could be read, there being no elbow room to open up a paper of that size. A chance to get some respite from that daily crush came quite unexpectedly.

The Petro-chemical industry has always had a history of peaks and troughs when it comes to building new plants or uprating existing ones. A lot of British companies in the industry are subsidiaries of American parent companies who work to the same engineering standards and design manuals. Our parent company in New York had opened another office in Houston, Texas, and had a problem in staffing it. Some design personnel had moved south to Houston, but not enough for the work load. That was when the London staff were offered a taste of the BIG TIME. A general invitation of a temporary assignment lasting approximately three months was offered to most Designers. The assignments were phased so that groups were deployed at a time and my chance came in April.

Within most companies there are characters that you never forget, and Tony, one of our group of three was one such. Tony had done National Service and retained much of the deportment instilled upon him from square bashing days, with trousers well hoisted by buttoned braces and highly polished brown brogues. Tony was well read and had studied the Company rules, which stated that for flights over a certain distance, staff were entitled to break the journey in the form of a stop-over (not a lot of people knew that, but Tony did). He asked myself and the other member of our trio, if we fancied a stop-over in Washington? Of course we agreed and Tony said he would try to fix it with the travel department. He marched off displaying his military attitude and returned mission accomplished, a stop-over in Washington.

Apart from a short joy ride in a De Havilland Rapide in the early 1950's at Malling Air Show with Mother, I hadn't flown in an aeroplane. At that time, just after the war, Malling Air Show was a popular annual event that attracted huge crowds. It was a chance to see close up some of the aircraft that had operated from there, including the new jets, Gloster Meteor and De Havilland Vampire. The cost of the joy ride was 10/- (50p) each, and although £1 could buy a lot in the early 50's, Mum was prepared to blow it on a ten minute flight. So taking off from Heathrow in a Boeing 747 Jumbo was quite an experience. Although the wide cabin had 14 seats across, I was close enough to a window to get a good view. What surprised me was how much the wings and engines shake about, especially on landing, when the double jointed flaps dropped and it looked like half the wing was hanging down. Stress Engineers will no doubt tell us that if there was no flexibility, bits would crack and drop off, so that's a comfort.

Emerging from the airport building we were confronted by a procession of lumbering taxis, all circulating in polite order. The gurgling of the V8 engines sounded more like a flotilla of river launches nudging up to a quay side, than a queue of motor cars. We bought a visitors guide of Washington and planned a whistle-stop tour for the following morning, with an early start, and skipping the hotel breakfast.

We were advised to take a taxi to the West Potomac Park to start our tour, where the Lincoln Memorial was open 24 hours. It was a fresh spring morning with a cloudless sky and many red

squirrels scampering around the trees. From the Lincoln Memorial, and beyond the Reflecting Pool, we could see an enormous marble obelisk. That was the Washington Memorial, over 550ft, high and 55ft square at the base. For 10c fee we were able to take the lift to the lofty viewing chamber, the 898 steps alternative, not getting the popular vote. The view from the top was impressive, to the North the White House, to the East The Capitol, to the South the Jefferson Memorial and to the West the Lincoln where we had previously been. There was only time to walk past just a selection of the sites listed in the guide, before a late afternoon departure for Houston via Dulles airport. Thus thanks to Tony's initiative we enjoyed and unforgettable stop-over.

Texas is a large state (over five times the area of England) and everything is on a grand scale. Houston International is about 20 miles from the downtown area and took less than half an hour on the motorway. At Houston we met face to face our first Texans—they REALLY DO talk like cowboys. I thought it was only in films where actors drawled like that. Have you noticed how in films, cowboys are usually very polite to their womenfolk? The same courtesy was extended to us as visitors.

The Company had reserved accommodation for the first few days at the Albert Pick Motel, right next to the 59 Freeway which was overlooked by two rectangular office blocks on the opposite side of the eight lane road. One of those was occupied by our Company and both about twenty stories. The two blocks were built in an area named Greenway Plaza which at the time was still undergoing development and landscaping with sitting out spaces, bronze statues and already mature trees being planted. As the parent company operated very much like the London office, we were able to start work straight away and it was soon obvious that Texans didn't co-operate too well with the New Yorkers, no wonder there was a staff problem. One wondered whether the dregs of the Civil War were still festering somewhere.

From the first day our trio were provided with a hire car from a local rental firm, as otherwise travel around Houston because of the expense was difficult. The other two decided undemocratically that I should be the one to collect the car from the hire company situated a short walk from the office. On arrival I was offered an almost brand new Ford Mustang V8 automatic with air conditioning, power steering and L/H drive of course. Bearing in mind I had last driven a V.W. Beetle, that was like steering a battleship with the power of a speedboat, the hire man was somewhat bemused when I asked for some instructions before daring to drive it. Fortunately the office was close so I drove to the underground car park and got in some quiet practice before leaving it. The 1973 Mustang was an ugly slab design, not like the earlier model driven by Steve McQueen in the film Bullitt, and which already had a cult following. In 1973 the rate of exchange was 2.5 dollars to the pound Sterling and petrol about 33c per US gallon, making motoring very cheap. As we were mobile, that evening we sorted our apartment accommodation in a complex which resembled a holiday camp, with communal swimming pools, launderettes, informal gardens with gas fired barbeques and social drinking bars. The apartments were almost entirely of wood construction, three stories and all with individual air conditioning units. All furniture was available on rental and bed linen bought very cheaply at Woolco.

Not surprisingly, the initial driving experience in America came as a bit of a shock. A lot of the motorways were at least four lanes and if you occupied one of the middle lanes, cars were likely to overtake on either side, or even both sides at once. Strict lane discipline and use of both wing mirrors was crucial especially when approaching an interchange. Large roadside advertisements were in abundance when nearing a turn off, and those could be a dangerous distraction when you should be looking for a route direction.

Office hours were 7.30am to 4.30pm with an hour for lunch, which could be in the firm's

restaurant in the basement adjacent to the car park. Alternatively, if we favoured a short walk, Jettons a first class self-service restaurant, was only five minutes away. Breakfast could also be bought for a few dollars in the Company restaurant, that being the obvious choice on work days. As food was so cheap and eating places so numerous, there was a preference to dine out rather than cook in the apartment. The usual habit was for all the Brits to congregate around the pool for an hour or two before eating out when the temperature had cooled down. Because of the almost daily social gathering, the thought that we were there to work was almost surreal, as the environment was so unlike anything we had experienced in the UK and the climate fantastic.

The Americans didn't get as much annual holiday entitlement, so any time off they got was used enthusiastically. I suppose part of that impression is that those employed in the oil industry are further up the social ladder in the States and their relative salaries reflect that. If you have the money then it's easier to enjoy leisure time without feeling guilty about it. From mid afternoon on Fridays we could see a mass exodus on the 59 Freeway as we viewed it from the 16th floor. All lanes were almost choked with cars hauling boats or caravans and Winnibagos complete with motorbikes strapped on the back. We soon got into that spirit and planned a visit for every weekend and some evenings. Given the opportunity, everybody should see a live baseball match, and that we did one evening at the Houston Astrodome. The game was between the Houston Astros and the New York Mets, quite a spectacle, but some of the families I'm sure went there primarily to eat food from the many circulating vendors, the game being secondary.

Towards the end of May the Americans celebrate Memorial Day, so we took the opportunity to have a weekend at New Orleans, Louisiana, a distance of 400 miles each way. We had pre-booked accommodation at a Holiday Inn where we were advised for our own personal safety to limit sightseeing strictly to the French Quarter. The visit included a memorable afternoon sailing up the Mississippi aboard a traditional 'stern-wheeler' and an evening at Preservation Hall where original Dixieland jazz was offered. Back in Houston we spent a day at the NASA Mission Control Space Centre where all the equipment for a moon landing was on display. That display included a small piece of grey moon rock, of priceless value, considering the cost to bring it back to Earth.

What we had seen at NASA all happened in my lifetime, and I had never given much thought to English heritage. A visit to the local museum changed my appreciation of what we have in the UK. Scratch through the thin veneer of American history (say 200-250 years) and there's not a lot underneath. A visit to the Alamo, San Antonio, the place of Davy Crocket's demise in 1836, didn't change that opinion. Another day trip was to Austin, the capital city of Texas. In the centre we discovered an impressive building, capped by a spherical dome like a miniature Capitol in Washington. Although a Sunday, there were formal proceedings inside to which the public had access. We were admitted to the public gallery where we looked down on the meeting below. Being strangers we didn't know what the debate was about, but it was quite theatrical, with the speaker pacing up and down the central aisle while delivering his case. Along the aisle there were several ornamental stands which had the appearance of raised ashtrays, but which we were sure we had witnessed being used also as spittoons! Well we were in cowboy country.

Another unique experience occurred while we were returning from Austin. The terrain in that area of Texas is predominantly flat and it was my turn to drive. As the road dipped down approaching an underpass, I got clocked by a Vascar radar speed camera doing 85 in a 70mph zone. Texans in the office had warned us about police in helicopters, patrol cars pacing us in long parallel slip roads, but nobody had mentioned Vascar. The sensor was mounted backwards on the roof rack of the patrol car which was stationary under the bridge. There was only one other car in sight about 100 yards in front and we had been driving at 80mph for an hour or so. We were miles from anywhere significant as Austin is about 160 miles from Houston with seemingly sparse population

in between. Both cars got waved down by the two Police Officers, but as I was not a national, they wouldn't give me a speeding ticket.

The alternative was to follow their car to the next town while they radioed the local judge and I was to face him in the Court House. That was a Sunday afternoon and everything was very laid back and casual (apart from my mental state), with the judge wearing a lumberjack shirt, his Stetson occupying the end of the desk. "My officers say you've been speeding, what have yer got to say for yerself Jarn?" I made some feeble excuse about not being used to large American cars. "That'll be 25 dollars plus 2.50 tax, have yer got the money?"

That equated to about £11 in 1973, a paltry amount now, but he was so polite, it was almost a pleasure to pay the fine. After the formalities he explained that he had had his afternoons fishing disrupted so I apologised for spoiling his afternoons sport. But the entertainment didn't end there. Back in the car I was relating the proceedings with my colleagues who were relieved to see me return after about twenty minutes, when the judge came out with the two officers. Not wishing to miss a photo opportunity, I jumped out of the car with my camera and asked the judge if he would allow me a picture. He turned to the officers and said "I don't see why not, stand here for the gentleman". Now how cool was that?

Towards the end of the assignment, I among others, was given the option of an extension with a possible permanent transfer to Houston. That was an attractive offer, but during our time there we had witnessed two situations that showed how the health system worked in the States, and I didn't like what I saw. On one occasion, a member of the British contingency was rushed to the Memorial Hospital with a suspected burst ulcer. We organised a rota for visiting him in the evenings. Within a day or so the Company received a request from the hospital. Would any of Mr Smith's British friends care to donate blood to replace what had been administered to their colleague?

On another occasion someone had noticed an incident on the 59 Freeway close to the office. Not wanting to miss out, we all gazed down with a bird's-eye view and saw a man propped against the barrier on the centre reservation. Circular skid marks could be seen across the lanes and ended where a car was stationary on the hard shoulder. The traffic was still crawling past, but nobody was attending to the dazed man whom we assumed was the ejected driver. The first vehicle to offer any assistance was a wrecker. That was a sort of pick-up truck with a short jib mounted on the back and used to remove cars from the carriageway. Then the Police arrived and still nobody was talking to the dazed man. We Brits questioned that scenario with the Texans. Why was nobody attending to the driver who might be injured? "They are probably checking his credit rating, he doesn't have to have an ambulance unless he requests one. The Police may call one if they think it necessary".

So, I declined the change to prolong my stay in Texas. The taste that I've related is only a small part of the whole experience, whether or not I could have stomached the whole menu, after 39 years deliberation, I think for me the jury is still out.

JB

Funnies..



A mother was working in the kitchen, listening to her five-year-old son playing with his new electric train set in the living room.

She heard the train stop and her son saying, 'All of you B*****ds who want off, get off now, 'cos we're in a hurry! And all of you B*****ds who are getting on, get on now, 'cos we're going down the tracks.'

The horrified mother went in and told her son, 'We don't use that kind of language in this house. Now I want you to go to your room and stay there for TWO HOURS. When you come out, you may play with your train, but I want you to use nice language.'

Two hours, later, the son came out of the bedroom and resumed playing with his train. Soon the train stopped and the mother heard her son say, 'All passengers who are disembarking the train, please remember to take all of your belongings with you. We thank you for travelling with us today and hope your trip was a pleasant one.'

She hears the little boy continue,

'For those of you just boarding, we ask you to stow all of your hand luggage under your seat. Remember, there is no smoking on the train. We hope you will have a pleasant and relaxing journey with us today.'

As the mother began to smile, the child added.....

'For those of you who are pissed off about the TWO HOUR delay, please see the fat controller in the kitchen!'

* * * * *



“Erm, either somebody had a bit too much at lunchtime, or they should have gone to Specsavers.....!”

From last issue—the captions received are -

“Here he comes, the one I was telling you about, the Albert Steptoe lookalike”

Thanks Paul...

“You’re right Martin, the fire’s dead and the driver’s done a runner”.

Thanks JB



Here’s this issues thought for a caption, supplied by JB...

His caption— “Since watching ‘Time Team’ on TV, the Wednesday Gang keep searching for buried treasure”.

Any other suggestions, please let me know.

Track Duties 2012

Date	Controller	Fares	Loading
25-Mar			
1-Apr			
8-Apr			
9-Apr			
15-Apr			
22-Apr			
29-Apr			
6-May			
7-May			
13-May			
20-May			
27-May			
3-Jun			
4-Jun			
10-Jun			
17-Jun			
24-Jun			
1-Jul			
8-Jul			
15-Jul			
22-Jul			
29-Jul			
5-Aug			
12-Aug			
19-Aug			
26-Aug			
27-Aug			
2-Sep			
9-Sep			
16-Sep			
23-Sep			
30-Sep			
7-Oct			
14-Oct			
21-Oct			
28-Oct			
26-Dec			

You Know What You Must Do. Public Running is essential to raise funds for the Club, and we CANNOT RUN unless we have a Traffic Controller and Station Staff. Please check your diaries and VOLUNTEER to help out as soon as you can. This year I am the committee member with the task of ensuring we have these positions filled. Who wants to upset me by not volunteering at least once, hm hm hm????!!! Please put your name on the list inside the clubhouse as soon as possible, or contact me with the date and duty you can do and I'll put you on the list. It's not hard and Your Club Needs You! PLEASE do your bit.

Sue Parham (Telephone: 01622 630298, mobile 07850 799171,

Email: SueAParham@AOL.com)

DIARY DATES 2012

Sunday 25 March	First Public Running Day of the 2012 season
Friday 6 April	Guest Speaker: Andrew Clarke returns with another talk of local interest
Wednesday 18 April	Members Playtime Run
Saturday 21 April	Reserved for possible Scout Troop Visit
Friday 4 May	Wallace & Gromit's Infamous Quiz Night
Wednesday 16 May	Members Playtime Run
Saturday 26 May	Visit to Sutton Club—Via the pub!
Friday 1 June	Evening Run, Fish'n'Chips'n'Cheesecake £6pp
Wednesday 20 June	Members Playtime Run
Friday 6 July	Evening Run & Barbecue, bring your own food for barbecuing
Saturday 14 July	Peter Roots Family & Friends Day
Wednesday 18 July	Members Playtime Run - Reverse Running
Friday August 3	Evening Run, Pizza and Salad, £3pp
Saturday August 4	Invitation to Birchley 10¼" Railway at Biddenden from 2pm
Saturday August 11	Visit to North London Track
Wednesday August 15	Members Playtime Run
Saturday August 18	Visit to Canvey track
Friday September 7	Evening Run & Hot Dogs £2pp
Wednesday September 19	Members Playtime Run
Friday 5 October	Guest Speaker (to be arranged; any volunteers?)
Wednesday October 17	Last Members Playtime Run of the Season
Sunday October 28	Last Public Running Day of the Season
Friday November 1	Bits'n'Pieces, Fish'n'Chips'n'Cheesecake £6pp
Friday December 7	DVD & Video Night with Crumpets
Wednesday December 26	Boxing Day Run

Friday Nights start around 7-30pm at the Clubhouse, evening runs a bit earlier.

Donation minimum £1 per person for Friday evening meetings, feel free to be more generous.

Friday evening meetings are for members and associate members (their families), occasionally for members' friends, and for those who intend to join the society.

Wednesday Playtime Runs now start around 10-30am and generally finish early afternoons.

Events will only alter if an unforeseen situation means change is essential.

The Club's website is at www.maidstonemes.co.uk

Other events known about so far:

5 May: Welling Open Day

11 – 13 May: Harrogate Model Engineer Exhibition

12 - 13 May: Romney Open Weekend

19 - 20 May: Southern Federation Spring Rally at Guildford, then Open Day

9 – 10 June: Welsh Locomotive Rally at Cardiff Society

9 – 10 June: Harrow & Wembley SME Locomotive Open Weekend

16 June: Harlington Loco Rally

23 – 24 June: LittleLEC at Swansea

7- 8 July: Guildford Annual Rally

14 -15 July: IMLEC at Nottingham

21 - 22 July: Oxford Dreaming Spires Loco Rally

17 – 19 August: Bristol Model Engineering Exhibition

25 – 27 August: Harrow & Wembley SME Locomotive Open Weekend

7 – 9 September: Bedford MES Loco Rally

8 & 9 September: Martin Evans & National Locomotive Rally at Birmingham SME

15 & 16 September: Southern Federation Autumn Rally at Chelmsford, then Open day

28 – 30 September: Llanelli Autumn Rally

6 October: Welling Open Day

17 – 21 October: Midlands Model Engineering Exhibition