

Friday 31st December 2021 (New Year's Eve)

Apart from running the locos occasionally very little has happened to the layout this year as my railway activity has been with the larger stuff. I did decide to thin out my collection of OO gauge locos as I had far too many for the more limited track since the middle section became my 'n' gauge layout.

However Christmas brought me one of the Hornby HM6000 blue tooth controllers which I mentioned last year. They did not finally become available until mid 2021. However, Santa forget to include a power pack so I had to wait until today for the one I ordered on 27th to arrive. However, it did give me time to carry out the necessary wiring changes so it was not an issue. The HM6000 has now replaced the analogue controller for the OO track and the latter has been moved to the 'n' gauge track for reasons explained later.



Connecting it to the existing power cables was straightforward and the device provides two circuits, one connected to the outer track and the other to the inner. Control is done via an App downloaded to an Android device. I put it on my phone and my tablet; the latter is better as you can see both circuits at the same time whereas on the phone you need to scroll down. First impressions are favourable as you have much of the flexibility you get with DCC in terms of being able to control the locos whilst standing anywhere in the room and it does provide a choice of Steam, Diesel and Electric sounds (via the tablet speaker). I have only tried the steam sound option so far and it is not overly impressive though it is speed responsive. I am hoping it will be possible to download better sound files at some point. One drawback is that there is no power connection for the points, you need to buy the accessory controller version HM6010 to get that and I would need two to cover all the points on the OO layout. Which brings me neatly to why I moved the old analogue controller to the 'n' gauge layout.

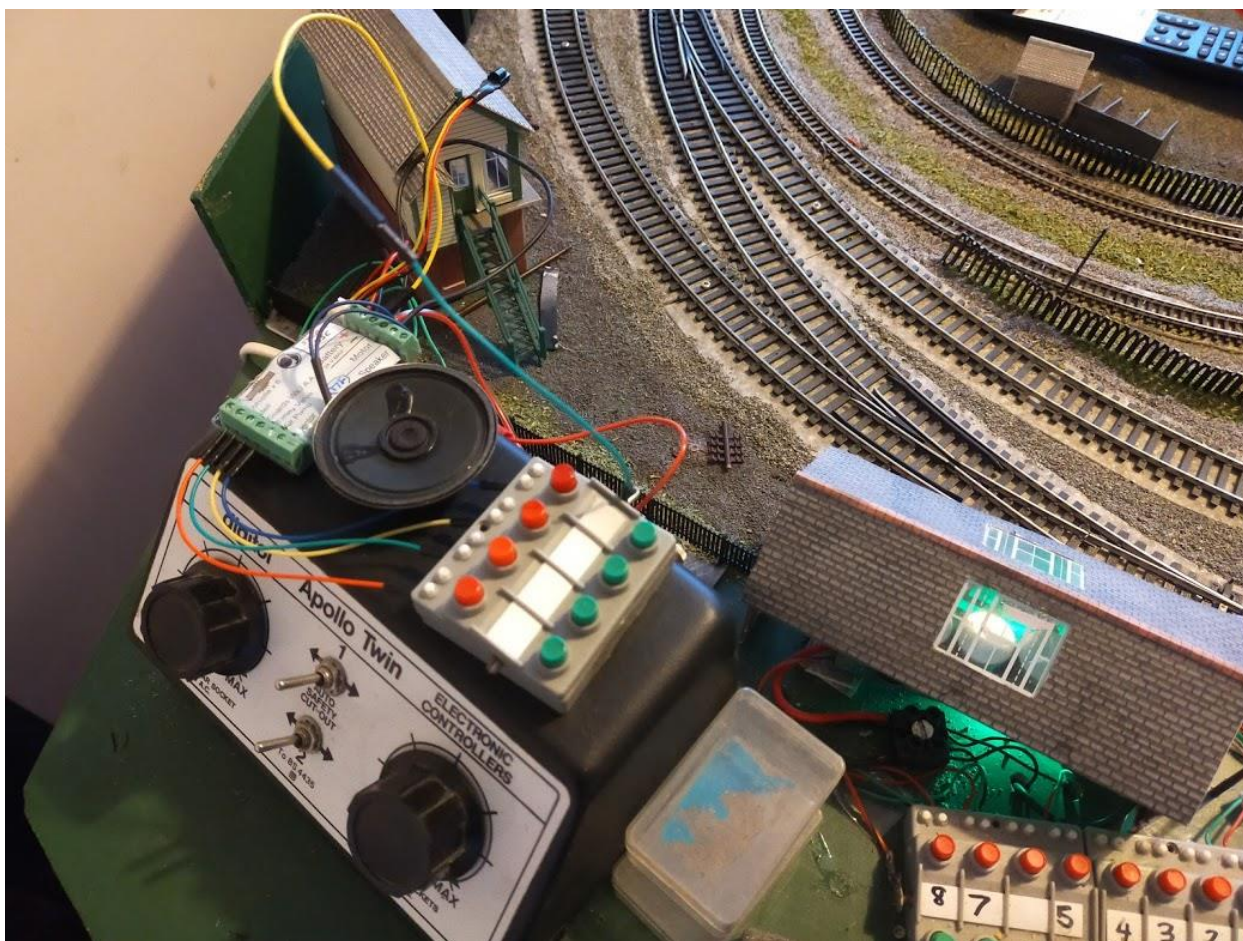
The accessory power supply on the old Hornby controller used for the 'n' gauge track is a bit feeble and would not properly support the sound card I had moved from the OO gauge layout. However the new one is powerful enough to drive both the 'n' gauge accessories and the OO gauge points controller. All I needed to do was extend the wiring to the OO gauge points controller. It's also half the size so a win-win. I now have a sound option on both layouts though the 'n' gauge only has a steam option. Incidentally, the points switch block sitting on top is in fact wired to provide the various sounds (whistle, guard etc) provided by the card by pressing the appropriate button. Happy bunny, I wonder what Santa will bring for the layout next year.



Saturday 26th December 2020 (boxing Day)

Just look at how long it is since I updated this blogg . I did say it would not be the autumn but in fact its been over 18 months so two autumns have passed and in the interim the world has been in the grip of the Vovid-19 pandemic. However, that is not the real reason, if you look at my Garden Railway blogg, you will find that during mid 2019 I got hooked into larger scale railways. Truth was that I had pretty much run out of ideas and challenges for the OO and N gauge layout. It has been played with very occasionally, still works fine and looks good. The only thing that was missing was sound which adds so much realism to a layout. I had pinned my hopes on a new product being developed by Hornby which shows great promise and I placed an advance order for the device last winter with an expectation it would be shipping by June '20. Still no sign of it going into production so clearly they have problems with it – pity.

Anyway, I have installed a sound card in one of my garden locos and this inspired me to investigate using a similar on the OO system. I hinted to my wife that such a card would make a very acceptable present and yesterday it was under the tree. In anticipation I had already done much of the preparation work making up suitable cables and connectors and by late morning it was working. The wiring itself is quite messy at the moment but when I have completed my experiments, I plan to fit most of it into a box. The system only works on one track at present, I intend to try connecting it to a second track but the sound card is for steam locos so it would only sound right if I limited running to steam locos. There might be a way round this and I do have a diesel sound card that can be used for experimenting. There is of course the n gauge layout to think about as well. This will most likely need a separate sound card – maybe next Christmas.



I am using a 'MylocoSound' card which takes its power from the AC feed on the controller via a bridge rectifier. The power output to the track is connected to the card and the engine noise (chuffing) increases in volume and beat as speed is increased. The switches are wired to give two variants of horn, a guards whistle and the brake system. A couple of other sounds are available but I only have a 4 port switch for now. All the sounds can be invoked using a remote control to a built-in infra-red pickup.

If you click on the picture you get a brief video. Perhaps not as elegant a solution as the one proposed by Hornby and I still plan to buy one when (if?) they start shipping them. In the interim it makes a real difference to the enjoyment of using the layout.

Tuesday 26th March 2019

Finally settled the layout of school, café and cottages as you can see in the pictures below. I have also put down ballast and grass over the remainder of the layout but that is about it. Really the railway has taken a back seat and I am unlikely to do much if anything more until next winter other than occasionally play trains. I still need some more animals to populate the fields and this has proved problematic. The cows I ordered back in January still have not arrived and the sheep I ordered a few days later turned out to be disappointingly small so have been discarded. The cows were from the same supplier so I imagine they would also have been too small. I will search for some replacements but it's no longer a priority. Could also do with some people as well according to my wife. However considering that this layout only started in January '19 I think it has come on well.

I have also cleared out all my remaining 00 track and a couple of the 00 gauge locomotives. Really I still have too many so a few more will probably go. The money I get goes into my railway project fund. Updates suspended until the autumn unless something really special comes along.







Friday 8th March 2019

I seem to have spent a lot of evenings fiddling with the layout but initially looking at the latest picture, not a huge amount to show for it. However, a more detailed examination will show that large oval space on the RH side of the layout is now quite well populated. I have laid a road from the bridge ending in a level crossing over the n gauge and 00 gauge tracks. Two small platforms replace the previous station/platform which I felt was too large for this part of the layout. One of the halts is Semington and the other Beanacre, both quite good replicas of the originals.

On one side of the RH oval, as well as Beanacre halt I now have the church and the Railway Arms pub. The churchyard has a seat and a selection of gravestones and the pub has some 'wooden' tables with umbrellas. Still festering about these. They are a Metcalfe item and the packet contains one small piece thick cardboard, pre-cut with the parts for the four tables and a small sheet of paper printed with a selection of umbrella tops which you have to cut out. You have to provide your own umbrella poles (paper clips in my case) and figure out how to attach them. They look ok but £4.50 seems like a rip-off when you consider that the school building on the other side and the café/shop which are both far more complex cost under £9 each. Felt so strongly, that I sent an email to Metcalfe complaining – well it made me feel better anyway.

Not sure yet exactly how I am going to layout the 'north' side of the road so everything that side is still moveable. I am also seeking inspiration on how to populate/decorate the area between the n gauge track and the grey platform on the 00 track. Was thinking of a coal yard but not sure the shape lends itself to that.

Saturday 16th February 2019

I had a major change of plan just after my last update. I decided to decorate the part of the layout behind the Holt Station backdrop. To get better access I removed the backdrop and the larger backdrop at the back of the layout. This opened up all sorts of possibilities and in the end, I have dispensed with the centre backdrop altogether so that I

can integrate the whole layout. The rear backdrop will be replaced eventually though I may use the panels from the centre section. Since then it has come on rather well and I am well advanced on the modelling of the LH side and centre section. Still no clear idea of what to do with the RH rear section other than to link it with a bridge but inspiration will strike in due course. Probably next winter as bikes and the garden are beginning to demand more of my time.

The pictures give a good idea of how it is progressing. In one of them you may be able to see the Castle class locomotive I bought last week. This now completes my wish list of locomotives. Not able to do much running of trains as the mess from the construction could damage the rolling stock. Still a lot to do but in the main it is adding fine detail rather than major construction. The only sad part is that I have yet to think of a way to use my lovely canal boat model – but...





Tuesday 29th January 2019

I have made a few more purchases in the last week or so. Some are just additional modelling supplies but I have bought some more rolling stock, a set of three mineral wagons which I will fill with coal in due course, plus a couple of GWR goods vans. More excitingly, I have bought a rather nice Farish 2-6-2 Prairie loco which you can see in the picture hitched up to the B set of carriages. In the siding is the black 0-6-0 PT (which is still on loan from Paul T) hitched to my collection of mineral wagons. In the background is the railcar waiting at the up platform and the GWR 0-6-0 PT is in the yard with hitched to a set of goods wagons. Quite a pleasing display. To complete my collection I would like one more loco ideally a Hall or similar but I have not yet found anything suitable either at the dealers or on eBay.



On interesting experiment which seems to have paid of is my shunter shown below. This is actually a home-made creation using a Kato 11-103 motorised chassis bought from Japan for the extortionate sum of £12.99 inc delivery. Its only an 0-4-0 (actually the basis of their trams) but all 4 wheels are powered and it will happily pull a full rack of wagons. The body is a from an American style caboose wagon (that was unusable as it had strange hitches) and needed very little trimming to make it fit. The two level design makes it look shunter like and the three holes I drilled at the back just about completed the illusion. I always run it backwards as it looks more realistic that way; very satisfying. It was bought mainly to provide a cheap & simple platform to experiment with radio control at some time but I think I will have to buy another for that project.



Friday 25th January 2019

Having more or less finished the main part of the n gauge layout, I have been giving attention to the 00 layout over the past couple of weeks. The picture below shows the RH end of the layout where the 00 track has been fenced and ballasted and a backdrop added. The corner by the controller now has a small row of terraced houses with a road in front and at the rear corner on the 00 layout is a small platform. There is also a platform and station on the n gauge track though I am not sure at this time if it will remain. My pride and joy is a very nice model canal boat which I picked up at the Calne MR show last weekend



The next picture shows the LH end of the layout which I am really quite pleased with. The OO track is ballasted and has a hedge along one side (running under the bridge past the station) to another small platform on the branch line. A fence runs along the far side of the layout. The mess of wires for the n gauge layout has been tidied and what remains is hidden under various sheds or under the tunnel. The inner circle of the n gauge track has been fully fenced and is a park area with a collection of horses and donkeys; sheep are grazing on the top of the hill. I did originally intend to put my model church up there but the sheep are far more appropriate. This certainly improves the appearance of the back part of the layout but in effect this only deals with 1/3rd of the area. For the moment I have run out of inspiration over what to do with the centre and RH sections of the rear of the layout. This is made slightly more complex as I have to mix OO and N gauge scenery. However, this seems to have worked ok on the LH side



Monday 14th February 2019

My unlucky streak over purchases has continued. The rack of 5 mineral wagons arrived on Saturday and looked really good all in new unopened Dapol boxes. However, when I tried them on the track they just would not run properly. Investigation revealed that 3 of them had axles that had far too much side play such that they either fell out or dropped and jammed against the base of the wagons. The other two seemed ok in this respect but kept derailing periodically. They have now been sent back and the vendor has given me a full refund. I also heard from the vendor of the 0-6-0 tank this morning who agrees the loco is faulty and is also giving me a full refund including the return postage.

There is some better news though, I ordered a replacement 0-6-0 from Hattons along with a B set of carriages in GWR cream/brown and a rather nice mechanical horse in GWR colours. They arrived today; the loco runs fine and the mechanical horse looks great in the goods yard. I need a few more 'ornaments' and some models of people to populate the layout now

Having given more thought to the actual running of trains on the layout, I concluded that getting power to some of the sidings just by setting the points was pretty tedious so I have wired three of the sidings which form a logical unit via switch so that they can be live when required. This allows trains to run on the main track and shunting activities through the good shed and milk shed. Pretty neat in theory. Apart from that the layout has just been left to harden off before I start adding other features.

Wednesday 9th January 2019

Busy week. The goodies from Track-Shack arrived on Saturday and the telegraph poles are already installed. Did this first so that the grass and ballasting can be applied round them. The ballasting has been progressing steadily – it's a slow task so I do a bit then get on with something else. I found I had diluted the PVA glue significantly more than was

recommended and I had not added the washing up liquid which helps to make it soak in better. My latest mix is to the correct formula though results are still a bit patchy. Sometimes it will harden overnight with the first application, some bits seem to need 'topping up'. Still it is coming on as you can see in the picture. You can also see the backdrop and my 'canal' at the RH end as well as the rail type buffer stops on the sidings.



Also in the goodie pack are some signals but these turn out to be plastic kit form and look so tiny and delicate that I doubt my ability to build them satisfactorily – a job put off till I am really in the mood.

On Sunday Paul Taylor and myself went to a model railway show in Frome. Amongst other minor things I bought a Dapol 0-6-0 pannier tank in GWR green which was on my bucket list. It was supposedly new and looked good but when I tried it out at home it was very jerky in operation and had very little performance compared to my other two locos. It is now on its way back to the vendor who has offered a full refund. Bit sad and it does tend to reinforce my preference for buying only new items from established dealers. Even more sad is that there is a dearth of the locos that I need at present. They need to be pre-war GWR colour schemes to fit my theme – some of the right 'hardware' is available but mainly in BR colours. Just have to be patient.

I did have one small success and bought a rack of 5 new GWR 20 ton mineral wagons on eBay for a good price. All I need now is a suitable locomotive to pull them.

Friday 4th January 2019

Frustratingly the parts I ordered from Track-Shack on Monday have not yet arrived so progress has been limited. I have put up all the fencing and made a start on putting down 'grass' for the fields and the bank where the signal box will sit. This was my first attempt at using PVA adhesive and it has taken me several goes to get it right. Possibly I put the 'grass' down too thickly or I did not water the PVA adhesive down correctly. The liquid seemed reluctant to soak into the 'grass' and took ages to dry; even then the top was still loose. It took several applications over 3 days before it finally hardened off. Hope the ballast I have on order is a bit easier to work with as there is a lot more of it to do.

Flushed with success over my canal feature, I have now done the same thing at the other end but this is a bit wider allowing for a towpath as well. The original feature will now stay as a single track railway. In the longer term I might actually connect both ends and run a train across the back. At a model show I attended last year someone had set up a tram to run backwards and forwards across his exhibit. Don't know yet how it was done, but the tram triggered a reversing switch at either end. That could be quite a nice feature.

The auction of surplus OO gauge stuff went well and everything sold at more or less what I was expecting. Took me all day Wednesday to sort out the paperwork, pack and post everything. The 'profit' won't be around long though as I have my eye on an N gauge locomotive and some rolling stock.

Thursday 27th December 2018

Christmas has limited my railway therapy time but I have managed to cobble up a backdrop board. I used some surplus plastic boarding used for signs by estate agents and the like. Please don't ask where it came from but it is light, easy to work and best of all free. I had to cut holes to allow the locos (OO and N gauge) to pass through. And I was just going to tidy them up by building dummy tunnel entrances. However, I had an epiphany and thought that is what I have done for now at one end, the other end is more ambitious and features what will eventually be a canal crossing. As I don't have a canal boat at present, I have put some rolling stock up there, indeed this may become a permanent feature if I cannot find a suitable canal boat. I have found some excellent backdrop picture rolls by Gaugemaster and intend to buy a couple to decorate the otherwise very blank wall. I have also started putting up the fencing for the station area. Coming along nicely.

Items needed: Ballast, telegraph poles, backdrops, buffer stops and signals, - all now ordered but will not arrive until early January due to the holidays.



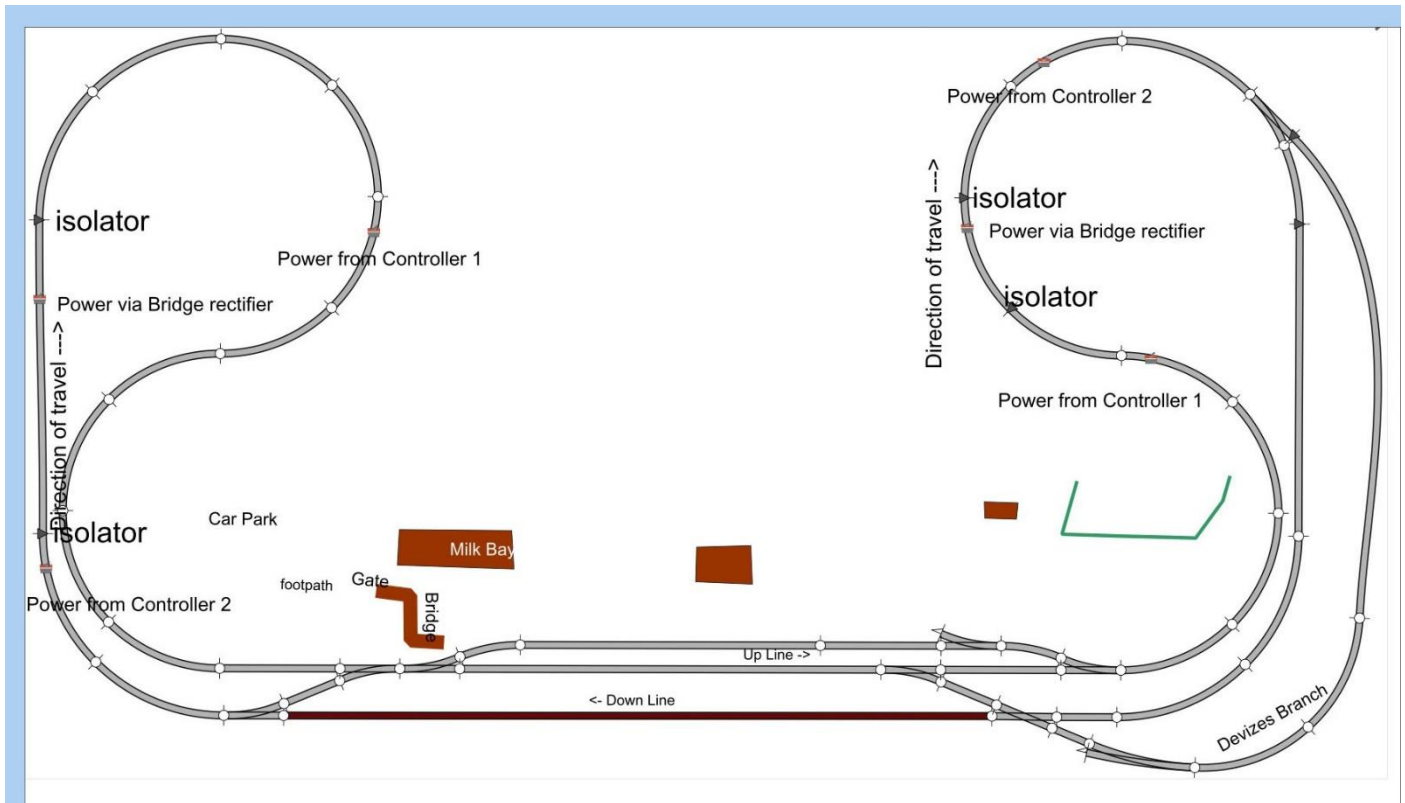


Sunday 23rd December 2018

The connectors and the fixing pins arrived by post on Saturday morning, excellent service given it was so close to Christmas. Having got the bulk of the track laid out I had to cut some flex track to join up various sections. The nature of the layout precluded using just preformed sections and flexi track is a lot cheaper as it comes in 36" lengths, ideal for long runs. With the 00 layout I used very fine screws to fix the track, ideal because it was easy to remove and re-lay as ideas developed. The n gauge track is so small there was no ready source of fine enough screws so it would have to be fixed using Pecos track pins. When I belonged to the model railway club I saw members there using a small (toffee) hammer to tap in the pins but I did not feel confident using that technique. Instead I drilled holes of the same diameter as the pins (about .5mm) but not quite to the full depth. The pins are 14mm long and my bit was set to about 10mm. I then used a tool I had made to push the pins into the plywood base. The tool is just a 6mm piece of s/s rod pushed into a handle for comfort. The business end is hollowed slightly to keep the head of the pin centred. Worked like a charm with no damage to the rails. Moreover, by not pushing the pins in too hard, you can get small sidecutter pliers underneath to lever it out. Had to do this a couple of times to reconnect rails that had not engaged the fish plates properly.

With the track firmly fixed down I could tidy up the wiring which had been all surface mounted for ease of adjustment initially. All the connections to the rails are soldered as I was not impressed with the Peco connectors I had bought. Very small holes were drilled along side each wire so that it could be routed under the board. The final connection to the controller power lines are still made above the board for now but eventually all will be moved underneath when I am 100% confident about the wiring.

The diagram below shows the how the power is applied to the track and the isolator sections. Note that The track layout itself is much simplified so far as the station itself is laid out.



The next step is to create a backdrop board which will effectively hide the loop section leaving just the station itself visible for modelling. It will give me a very large free space behind the backdrop board which can be used for storing spare rolling stock and locomotives for both the 00 and n gauge layouts. At present I only have two locos and a small amount of rolling stock all on loan from a friend so that is something on the wishlist when funds allow. In the interim I have plenty of work to do so this is not a priority matter. Unlike the 00 layout where I went overboard buying locos, I don't expect to need for than 2 or 3 for the smaller track.

Thursday 20th December 2018

I had been agonising for some time over the design of the baseboard for the n gauge project and practical difficulties over collecting a suitable sized plywood sheet. In many ways my prevarication was a good thing as last Sunday I had a Eureka moment. My 00 layout has a double outer loop and a complex arrangement of points and reversing loop in the centre and sits on a board that is 8ft x 5ft. You can see this in the LH picture. A check with the measuring tape suggested that if I removed all the centre track, the n gauge layout would fit neatly in the space created. Though it would be sad to loses some of the features of the 00 layout, what remained still allowed for two train operation and realistically it made a lot more sense to have only one room dedicated to model railways – finding space to keep a second 78" by 42" track board was not proving easy or popular. So 3 hours later I had my vacant baseboard – see RH picture. Spin off benefits include a built in controller and being able to sell off surplus track etc to buy n gauge stuff.



Building the new layout was then fairly straight forward and by the end of Monday we had the track all laid out but it did just fit. I was unsure how best to fix the track so initially it was all held in place with drawing pins whilst I did the preliminary wiring and checked out the connectivity.



This was where I hit snag as nothing worked to start with. As I gradually disconnected parts, eventually it did work but only as discrete sections not when wholly connected. So I traced the rails and found to my surprise that the inner rail eventually became the outer rail and vice-versa. No wonder the trains would not run, they were seeing a zero voltage regardless of how much I turned up the power. I thought I had checked this possibility out when I first designed the layout, but clearly I got it wrong!

Anyway, the solution was pretty easy once the problem had been identified. Fortunately, the essential item – a bridge rectifier – was part of the equipment made redundant when I removed the centre of the OO layout. All I needed was to isolate a piece of track on each loop and then feed power to these section via the bridge rectifier. To my intense relief, when I cobbled it up temporarily it worked fine. The solution does have two ‘features’. Firstly, the locomotives can only run through the isolated section in one direction. This is not really a problem as I have set it up so that the locos run the down line, then appear back at the station on the up line. The second ‘feature’ is that you need two controllers (which I have) one for the down loop and one for the up loop. In fact, you could do it with just one controller but then you would have to reverse current as the loco left the isolated section. Sounds complicated but in practise it is very easy to operate certainly easier than the reversing loop I set up for the OO track using one controller.

The next step is to sort out all the temporary fixings and spaghetti wiring. For that I needed some isolating track connectors (fish plates) and fixing pins. In the interim, I cut up strips of kitchen floor laminate (glorified lino) to simulate ballast and to cut down some of the noise when the trains are running. Very tedious job and took a couple of evenings but well worth doing as I found with the OO layout. You can see the result in the picture above.

Sunday 16th December 2018

Despite the lack of update, I have made a significant amount of progress with the n gauge layout. For 2 weeks I kept the layout as shown below on a temporary baseboard (6ft x 18") whilst I experimented and made up some of the Metcalfe models. One disappointment was the station kit. In itself it was superb but it was really too wide for my platform. Holt had only a single platform sandwiched between the up & down lines and is relatively narrow, plus of course that you cannot put the station buildings to the side. Everything has to fit within the width and leave room for passengers to pass either side. I rearranged the track to allow for a wider platform but it created a number of difficulties. When I re-checked the measurements my original width was correct so in the end I built my own station building from scratch. Quite pleased with my first attempt. I had also made a milk shed from scratch the design based on one very poor picture. I later found some better pictures and realised some of my key features were not correct so I made a second, much improved in my view model. Both plus my scratch built bridge are shown in the picture.



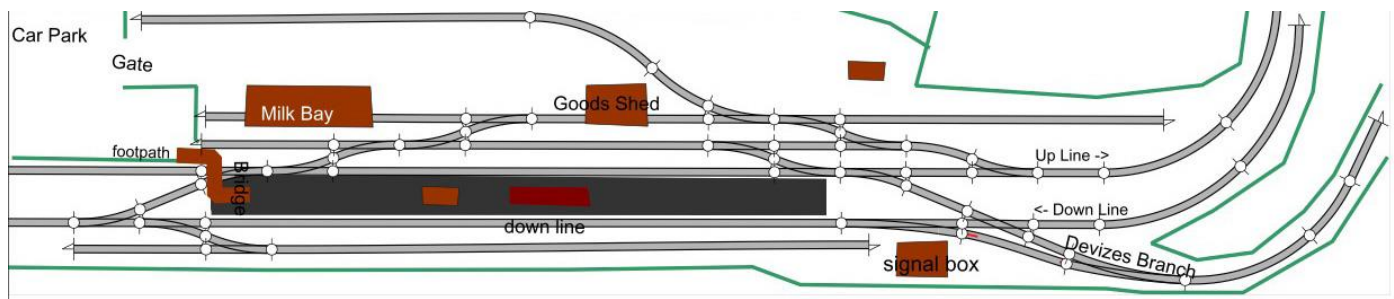
3rd December 2018

A friend loaned me a large amount of n gauge track and rolling stock so that I was able lay out a substantial part of my plan which did through up a couple of wobbles. These changes were incorporated into the AnyRail document and a shopping list was produced. The items were ordered on Friday afternoon and arrived on Saturday (from the Isle of Man). There was a slight hiccup as the parcel appeared to be damaged so I had to wait until Monday to discuss this with the supplier. Fortunately, none of the parts inside were damaged so all was well. The track layout shown below is now loosely assembled so that I can measure up for the platform and other items I have to build from scratch.

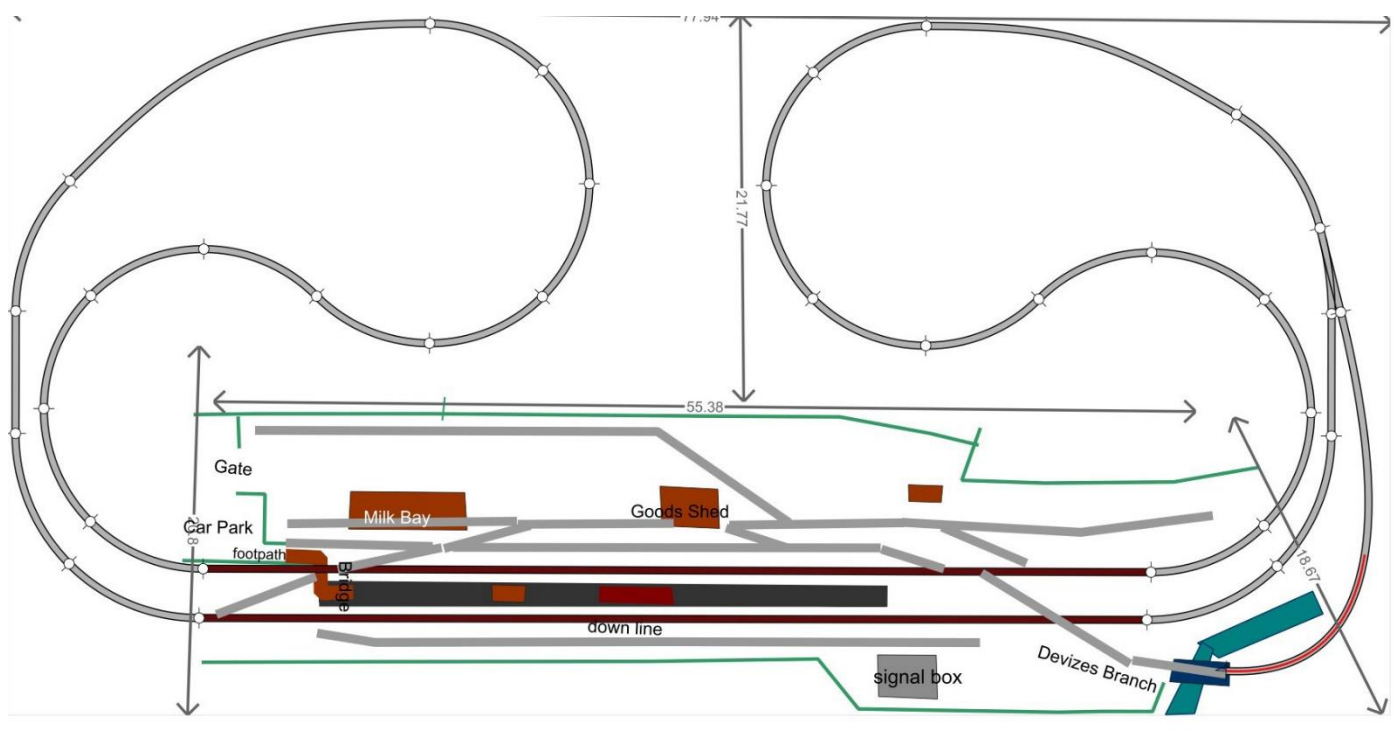
Some of the building will be made from Metcalfe kits which are a very good replica of the actual buildings. I will not be fixing the track to the current baseboard as it would almost certainly get damaged trying to unpin it.

26th November 2018

I spent a couple of weeks trying out various layouts using the Anyrail software before setting on something that was reasonably close to the real thing but which could be built using standard Peco n gauge track and would fit in my conservatory. The design below requires a 72" x 15" board baseboard (which just so happened to be spare in my workshop) and is an interim layout to get started.



Medium term I want to extend the layout as shown below to include loops so that the trains can run from the up platform and reappear at the down platform. The idea is to wall in the station site itself as the area to be decorated. The loops will be hidden behind the walls and left largely undecorated. This concept is pretty standard in the model railways I have seen at exhibitions though in these the back area is normally the fiddle yard. The overall size of the layout would then be 78" x 42". Hopefully small enough and light enough to be moved around and stored when not in use.



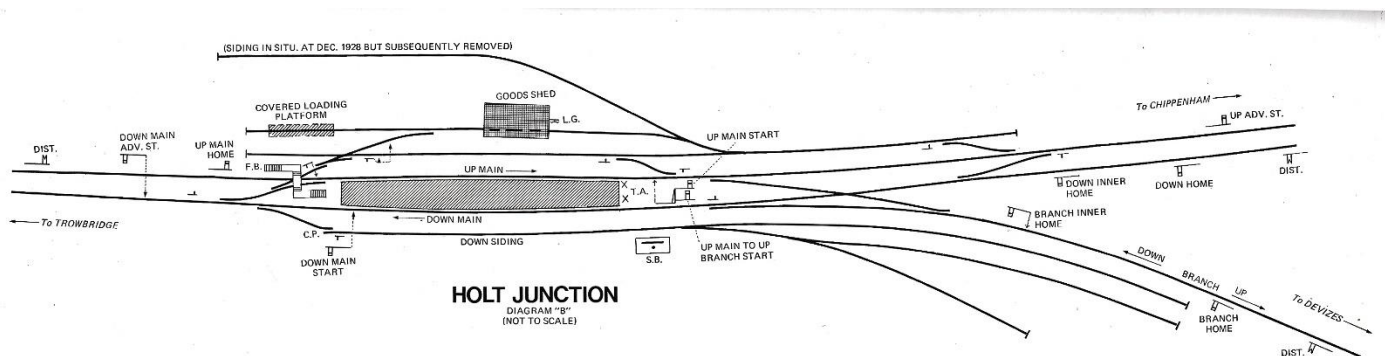
14th November 2018

With winter pretty well in place and motorcycling no longer quite as appealing, thoughts have returned to model railways. I am happy enough with the OO layout I built last winter and it gives a lot of pleasure – no regrets about abandoning DCC. Really its more of a large train set than a purist model railway but I don't have any plans to extend or develop it further for the moment. Instead, I have been revisiting some earlier ideas about building a scale model of one of our local stations.

Initially I intended to do Trowbridge as it was in the 1950's and I did quite a lot of research both on-line and in books. The drawback I quickly found was just how large it would need to be if I wanted to included the engine sheds, good

shed and marshalling yards. It was definitely a nono in OO gauge and even n gauge would have required far more room than I had available. So sadly, that idea had to be abandoned.

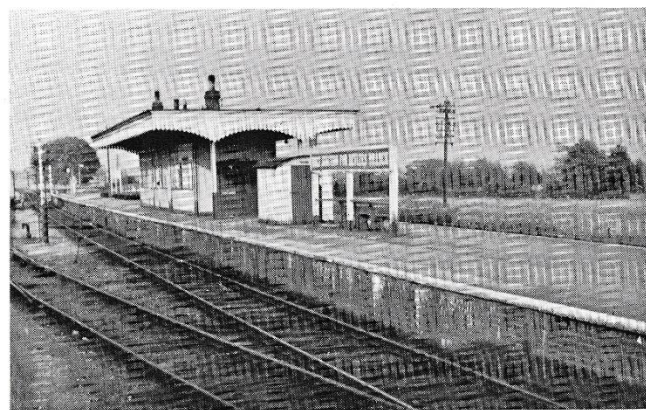
However, my wife suggested Holt station as we have a family connection to that – my father-in-law was a goods clerk there in the 1920's. This proved to be much more promising prospect as it is relatively simple and compact but was of course the junction for the Devizes-Patney line until the 1960's. The more I thought about it the better I liked the idea so that is what I am now working on. The picture shows the track layout and a couple of shots of the station.



Holt Junction.

Towards Chippenham. 1955.

Lens of Sutton



Holt Junction.

Towards Chippenham. 1955.

Lens of Sutton

Thursday 8th March 2018

Over the last weekend I stripped out all the DCC chips from the locomotives I wanted to keep and rounded up all the spare decoders I had yet to install. Before doing this I set up the Railmaster system one last time and tested everything, making video clips of the DCC fitted locos in action. I also reviewed my collection of locos and decided that two could be added to the 'for sale' list. One was Ketley Hall which has the TTS sound decoder fitted and the other was the 0-4-2T Tank locomotive with the Hornby decoder I bought recently as part of an Autocoach set. Ketley Hall was really only special because of the sound chip and without a DCC setup it was nothing special. The 0-4-2T because I already have one and frankly neither runs very well on my layout. They are very sensitive to track configuration due to the poor design of the pickups. I was surprised by how much stuff became redundant and how much it was worth even at second hand prices – its now all on eBay and most has already reached my reserve prices. I will be surprised if it does not all go. The trick now is to try and ignore how much I paid for it all in the first place.

The revised layout I described below has worked well in practise but I did find one limitation. The outer track has no passing loop or sidings so can only hold one loco at a time. In fact when I originally designed the layout I did include a passing loop but removed it to make space for a platform. I Then used the points to provide an extra passing loop on the inner track close to the station. Fortunately, it was very easy to reinstate the passing loop though I did have to buy one extra point to complete the change. This now allows me to have two longish trains on the outer circuit and to switch them between the loops. The remaining task is to re-install the points motors which are in the spares box.



Thursday 1st March 2018

Over 6 weeks since I last wrote up the railway blog. Mainly because I had rather lost interest for a while and apart from the very occasional play with the trains I have done nothing with it.

With the current and protracted cold spell, there has been no incentive to work outside or in the garage so the railway room beckoned. As usual, I had some new ideas to try out to improve the layout some of which worked and are now implemented; one failed miserably and has been abandoned but did spark of one permanent change. The failure concerned an attempt to run the track up to the hill in the corner. Sadly, the slope was too steep and though some of the trains could climb it unladen most either lacked the power or developed wheelspin when pulling a load. However, adding an extra point did give me an additional in the marshalling yard so not all was lost.

The other changes concerned the electrics rather than the track layout. I have rather lost faith in the DCC side of things. To be really useful it needs remote control rather than having to rush back to the computer to make changes. The failure to get the handheld tablet software to work along with the failure to integrate the accessory controller for the points did not impress and made me feel that the Railmaster product was not really the way to go. It's main benefit for me was the ability to use sound but since I only have one sound equipped loco and adding sound to the others would be both complex and expensive, I have decided to abandon DCC for now at least. One fringe benefit is that I can continue to use some of my favourite older locos which were unlikely to be convertible to DCC.

The decision was made easier in part because I have rethought the power connections to the track and added another controller so that I can operate 3 locos independently and transfer locos between various sections of the track. Frankly three is as many as I can comfortably operate simultaneously with my layout and some sections would probably have been very complex with DCC. As part of the change, I moved the main controller for the two outer loops so that it is adjacent to the point switches – previously they were at opposite ends of the table. The new controller controls the inner reversing loop and is sited where the original controller was located and has its point switches adjacent as well.

It took quite a lot of trial and error to get it all working properly but everything now seems to work well. One of the things I found helpful was to include some paired LEDs so that I could see the polarity was correct when transiting

from one controller to the next. Visually, above ground there is not much to see apart from the relocated controllers. Most of the changes are only obvious when you look at the rats nest of wires underneath.

A couple of pictures are below to give an idea though they are not particularly clever and I now realise I should have tidied up a bit and replaced the buildings and accessories before taking them. One of the future tasks is to remove the DCC chips from the locos so fitted. Not strictly essential for the ones fitted with Hornby chips as they can be set to both DC & DCC operation but chips tend to be fragile so best to take them out if not needed. The Gaugemaster chips are DCC only so have to be removed for DC running.





Tuesday 23rd January 2018

Work on the layout has been spasmodic due to other pressures including fitting new cooker hood which inevitably turned into a "while your at it why not decorate the kitchen... and we could do with a new...". I did manage a couple of hours at Calne Bentley Club's model railway exhibition on Saturday 20th. Lots of very nice layouts on display, rather more than last year I thought. I managed to limit my spending to £2 to buy an engine shed and a small church. The latter is really 'n' gauge but sat on top of my 'hill' and with some appropriate other decoration it will look ok.

For a few days I have been thinking about the layout and how to improve it. One of the issues has been getting the points set correctly when entering the reversing loop section. It had all got a bit busy because the point also provide access to one of the marshalling loops and I kept getting it wrong. One evening I sat down with the design program and figured out a new route using the branch line. This actually saved me one point and a motor which will no doubt get used later and I finally re-arranged things last night. The revised layout worked very well and its much easier to control. The reversing loop section is still isolated from the remainder of the track and with its own controller so I can run two locos independently. At least that was the theory but last night things only partially worked and other things were very confused.

I spent a couple of hours this evening tracing all the wiring and the power connections and frankly found nothing wrong. Isolating sections did not solve the problem. Finally, after removing and remaking the main section power connectors everything started working properly again. No real idea what I had fixed but possibly one of the connectors was a bit loose. Anyway it now all works fine.

Saturday 13th January 2018

The 2-6-4T model 4P sold on eBay today for about a fiver less than I paid for it which is a bit sad. Anyway its been paid for so I packed it up and took it to the Hermes drop-off shop early afternoon. The buyer should get it Monday according to the tracking info. Flushed with the cash I started a search for a church to go on top of the hill but of

course nothing suitable can be found at the moment. You can get a kit but I am being lazy and trying to find one already built; they don't fetch lot more than buying the kit as far as I can see. I have a prototype in mind based on the church at the top of Chosen Hill in Churchdown where we used to live. Anyway this is the picture of the hill and tunnels so far. Still a lot to do but the structures provide the framework.



Thursday 11th January 2018

Two areas of progress. The first is an extension of the tunnel enclosure over the inner reversing loop partly to add feature and partly to allow the creation of a roadway up to the top using part of the road bridge I built for my last layout. I'll take a picture shortly which will make it a bit clearer. The idea is to provide access to the church which is intended to sit on top of the mound. Which reminds me that I have still not found a suitable kit or assembled model; must resume an eBay search when I have updated the notes. I think this will look quite good once completed.



The bridge rectifiers I ordered from China arrived yesterday and I have now rewired the reversing loop using one of the rather than my home built rectified. This has tidied up the rats nest of wiring you can see in the picture below as most of it is now under the layout.

Monday 8th January 2018

One of my favourite locos is the Lima Diesel railcar (the banana as it's know) and to my dismay it was having difficulties negotiating the points onto the branch line station

which would be its natural destination. Odd really as I also have the Hornby Express Goods version which is identical in terms of its running gear and which seemed to have no problem with that section of the track. Anyway the more I investigated and thought about the more I realised that I had not planned that part of the layout properly. Indeed it was not planned at all; it just sort of grew like topsy. Overnight it occurred to me that I could rearrange the track to simply the transition and to create a longer branch loop. This proved very successful and both railcars now run perfectly onto the branch line – result.

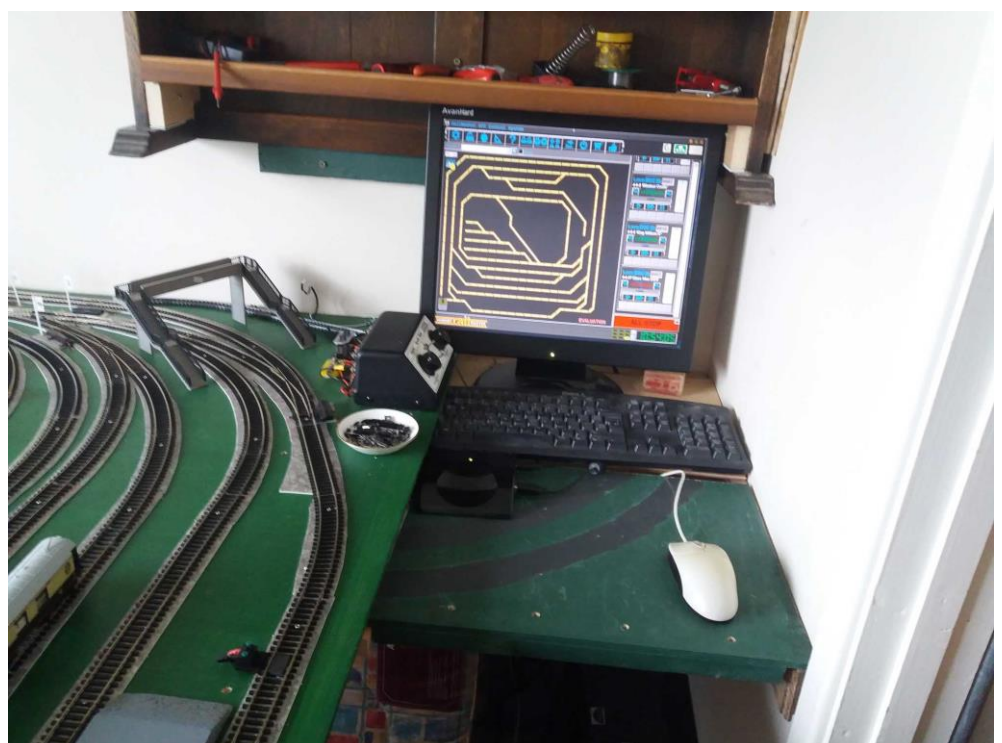
Glad this is sorted as otherwise I had considered selling the Lima Railcar along with the 2-6-4T model 4P which is now on eBay. I was desperate to have one but it has never lived up to my expectations. It's not a model ever used by GWR and its in BR black livery and that alongside its poor running characteristics on my track made for an easy decision to dispose of it.

The new computer seems to have settled down and fires up the DCC system very reliably and is certainly much handier to work with than the laptop with its tiny screen, keyboard and touch pad. I have resumed some trials with hand held devices which enable you to control the DCC system without needing to be at the computer. Unfortunately, though I have managed to get it all installed on an old tablet it does not work terribly well. My initial reaction was that I had not set it up correctly but after consulting the experts on the Hornby Forum, it would appear that the product does have problems and Hornby, or rather the Railmaster software developers do not seem overly interested in sorting them out. Some bits do work and it is marginally useful. You can operate all the sounds and the stop button works. You can also make the loco reverse but not alter its speed from whatever was initially selected. Getting it to go forward is tricky dicky stuff. It will never start directly that way but sometimes if you get it going in reverse then press the forward button it will slow, stop then go forward. However, I am not sure this is a safe practise. If it was an integral part of the licenced Railmaster package I would probably live with it but you have to buy a separate licence and I am jibbing at paying the money for something offering such limited functionality and with no likelihood of improvement if the Forum is to be believed. I have about 60 days left on the evaluation copy to continue with my experiments before making a final decision.

Thursday 4th January 2018

I have worked my way through the track and found that at least two of the ne points are faulty in terms of current flow. One on the marshalling yard I was able to fix quite easily. The other is one of the curved points on the main line and so far I have not been able to fix it satisfactorily. I had to resort to a work round by removing the isolator fish plates on that loop to avoid creating a dead spot. There is also an issue on one of the power clips which I am wrestling with in slower time. Anyway, the new 0-4-2 now seems to run ok both in DC and DCC. I do have another couple of locos which are glitchy but as far as I can recall they did not behave well on my old layout either. They are not my favourites so I may well simply move them on. I have plenty of locos to play with now and it would free up some cash to replace them with something else that takes my fancy.

I have finally got the new computer working correctly, had to borrow an old PS2 mouse from a friend as it would not run reliably with a USB mouse when the Railmaster system was also running. Seems to get conflicts on the USB port I could never resolve. As soon as I switched mice everything seemed to work ok. A picture of the computer corner is below. I have an old kitchen high stool in the shed which should fit nicely in this corner when I need to sit down. One slightly



irritating thing when running under DC is that fact that the controller is 7ft away from the points switches. There is no obvious place to relocate them and of course I would have to redo all the wiring which would be a pain. Under DCC I could control the points via Railmaster – indeed I bought a new accessory decoder for £10 at the club open day and Ron had another which is likely still available should I decide to go that way. In any event, with DCC you can use a mobile phone or tablet as a remote wireless controller. I will most likely go down that route.

Sunday 31st December 2017

New Year's Eve so this is my last update for 2017. We've had visitors for the last couple of days so not a lot of actual work completed but my two grandsons had fun playing with the trains and the electric points. As you may be able to see in the picture I have now numbered all the electric points with flags so it's easier to identify which switch does what. Still make the odd mistake but not nearly so many. The base structure of the tunnel can be seen. The house on top is not a permanent feature, I plan to have a church and to build a roadway to provide access.



The Autocoach set I bought on eBay turned up on Saturday and is very nice. It has a Hornby decoder chip already fitted and I have tested it on both DC and DCC. However, I do have a small problem which I am currently investigating. It runs perfectly in reverse but is jerky at slow speeds running forward. Having done some testing and tried my other 0-4-2 loco, I am beginning to think that it is a problem with this style of loco as it too struggles particularly over certain points. Two of the wheels have traction tyres and I think it is not picking up current properly though why this should only be a problem running forward is a mystery.

On Saturday I spent the afternoon helping at the model railway club open day as they were short of volunteers for the OO layout. First time I have been let loose with the layout in fully operational mode and it took a while to get the hang of it. Great fun and I am beginning to regret my decision not to renew my membership. The gauge side had plenty of participants but their layout is not yet fully functional. It was late afternoon before they had any trains running and even then it was just short trips, no complete circuits. Their layout is huge and looks fearsomely complex, I just hope they are able to complete it and operate it successfully.

Thursday 28th December 2017

Work on several fronts over the last few days though not all totally satisfactory. I wired in the eLink controller initially using the desktop computer I recently acquired. This worked in fits and starts but the mouse kept freezing – they are both USB devices and they seem to be clashing. A search on the internet did not help and I am now on the hunt for a PS/2 fitting mouse which should avoid the problem. Trouble is they are virtually extinct so it may take a while. In the meantime I reverted to the laptop and was able to get some of my DCC locos running. However, there are intermittent dead spots mostly associated with points and the locos either stopped or ran very slowly at various points. Some locos were better than others but all had the problem to some degree. I am unsure how to fix this at present, it was not a problem I had with my previous layout even though it had pretty mixed bag of track compared to the all new track on this layout. Problem on back burner for now.

I have now turned my attention to scenery and started experimenting with placement of key features such as stations. I am currently using some of my original platforms -suitably modified where necessary as a starter. I have also made up a couple using some ½" veneered chip board where special shapes are needed. Tapered at each end and sprayed gray they don't look too bad and even if I don't use them in the long term, they will make excellent templates. I felt that a tunnel feature was needed so I have created a template for this as well. I am thinking of putting a church on top of tunnel structure and building an approach road to it.

Whilst testing the tunnel entrance sizes with coaches and large locos, I found a problem with the siting of the point



on the new branch line I installed recently; the motor was snagging the bodywork in some cases. I realised that I had installed it on the inside curve of the point, moving it to the other side cured the problem. I should have realised as a couple of other motors had to be moved earlier for the same reason.

Saturday 23rd December 2017

The rails and the wire both arrived today – last post before Christmas. The rails were soon installed as all the preparation work had long been done. A quick test run showed the reversing loop layout to be working fine. I have this whole section on a separate controller, partly to prevent any possibility of polarity issues and partly because it will allow me to operate a locomotive in this section with another locomotive running concurrently and independently on the outer loops.

The wire enabled me to complete the cabling of the remaining points though it was touch and go. Two of the Hornby points motors appear to be faulty. They work when tested on their own but will not operate a point reliably, normally working in one direction only. I tried them on both on a number of other points and got the same result so it seems unlikely that it was a faulty point and using another new point motor got things working. However, that left me with a pair of points without motors. Fortunately, I had a couple of Peco points motors which possibly could have been made to work with the Hornby points. To be safe I dismantled part of the marshalling yard section within the reversing loop and swapped two Hornby points for a pair of Peco points I had used in this area. These are all hand operated so don't need motors -job done.

The remaining task is to devise a way to label the points and switches so I can easily identify which ones I want to set. The wiring underneath is also pretty untidy so that needs sorting as well. The other task on the electrical front is to connect up the new computer and eLink controller to see if I have DCC as well as DC. That will probably have to wait a few days as Christmas is now upon us and I am not sure how much railway time I will get.

Thursday 21st December 2017

Not as much progress this week, I am still waiting for the set of 1st radius rails I ordered on 9th December. Looks like the guy did not actually post them until 14th and the parcel is now mixed up in the Christmas postal chaos. Really irritating because as it turns out I could have bought them for rather less and had them delivered a week ago from one of the established model railway retailers. I am also still waiting for the wire so that I can complete the

installation of the points. I didn't order that until Monday so I don't really expect it before Friday or Saturday. One positive thing was the arrival of the additional capacitors for my CDU. They have been soldered in and now all 4 points in the quad group work first time every time. The other positive thing was the arrival of the autocoach I won on eBay last week. Looks really good. I also own an autocoach set consisting of the 0-4-2 loco and two coaches (the loco sits in the middle and in real life could be driven from either coach. This is a DCC fitted Dapol model. I am undecided whether to keep two autocoach setups or sell my existing one which is an Airfix model and not DCC compatible.

Other than that, it has just been a case of tidying up odd and ends. One thing I want to do is put leds on all the marshalling yard section of track so that I can see which ones are live. I plan to use the standard Hornby power connectors for this and I know I have (or rather had) several but so far only one has emerged. I could solder the leds directly to the track but the power connector is neater and can be moved around.

Given the lack of progress with construction, I worked through the box of goodies that John Hill brought up last week. The rolling stock seems to fall into two categories. Category one is stock which was bought ready made and in the main matches well with my existing Hornby etc stock. Category two is rolling stock which John has assembled from kits and many date back to the 50's and 60's. These are looking a bit tired and some are in need of repair. Paradoxically, John thinks some of these are now collectible so I don't want to do anything that reduces their value as the idea is that anything I don't want I sell on John's behalf. Trouble is I cannot remember which were the valuable ones. However, they all share one common feature in that they have the earlier type of Hornby/Triang coupling which does not mate well with the modern coupling. Mixing and matching is not therefore a realistic option and to connect them to one of my locomotives I have modified a wagon so that it has both couplings. I also need to do the same thing to a guards van when I can find a suitable one to modify.

Sunday 17th December 2017

Visually the layout does not look a great deal different to the Tuesday picture. However, that belies a considerable amount of time that has been invested. Mainly wiring in some of the points. This is a tricky and time consuming process especially since most are operating in pairs and one set are in a quad configuration. This latter threw up a new problem, or rather resurrected an old problem of lack of power from the CDU. Took a while to figure out the problem as initially I suspected my wiring and spent a lot of time double checking everything before isolating the cause. I had a chat with the supplier of the CDU and he is sending me a couple more capacitors to boost the power – hopefully this will sort the problem. In the interim I have to monitor the track very carefully otherwise I sometimes get some unexpected results when running a test loco. About half the points are now wired up, the rest will have to wait until the extra wire I had to order arrives. I have managed to create some isolation spots on the track (which will prevent derailments on the main loop). These in turn required additional power connections otherwise some parts of the track would be permanently dead but all now seems pretty good in this regard.

I did make one alteration to the pictured layout and put a passing loop on the top (LH side in picture) section. This was in the original design but I had run out of points. The arrival of the replacement for the faulty one made it possible to add this loop. I have also done a lot more work on the reversing loop section of the track. The sound insulation has been made up and the track lightly screwed down to allow some more extensive testing (the replacement track I bought has yet to arrive; a bone of contention). Anyway, this whole section is now fully isolated from the rest of the layout and is wired through the second controller on my power supply. This means I can be playing with the reversing loop and marshalling yards whilst trains are running on the rest of the layout. Realistically this will only be one at a time whilst using DC but can be more when I convert the system to DCC (or dual DC/DCC more likely).

The other thing I have been experimenting with is controlling the reversing loop which is tricky due to the propensity of such systems to create short circuits. I have done a lot of reading over the last week and I have yet to find a simple and/or inexpensive system to make the transition fully automatic. There do appear to be some electronic gadgets on the market but it is not overly clear from the descriptions whether they are truly fully automatic or still need some manual assistance. My research continues and in the interim, I have come across a very cheap and simple system which is about 90% of the way there. This involves isolating the reversing loop and powering it using a bridge rectifier from the main loop. Works wonderfully up to the point where the locomotive tries to leave the loop unless

you have remembered to reverse the controller setting. Otherwise it just stalls at the isolation point as the loco is seeing conflicting power. The other issue is that you can only go one way round the reversing loop since the bridge rectifier means that the power in the loop is always the same direction regardless of how the controller is set. For the moment it is satisfactory and cost me nothing as I managed to find 4 diodes in my electronics box to build the unit. I have ordered a couple of tiny integrated circuit units from China at the vast cost on 98p so that the whole thing can be hidden away neatly. The second rectifier can be a spare or possibly I can figure out a way using relays to allow bidirectional running through the loop. Looking back its exactly a week since I first set up the baseboard for the new layout so things are moving pretty quickly. A lot of this is due to the experience I gained with the first layout and the time I spent planning this new layout. The old one just evolved over the months as I experimented. Looking back to the start of this blog its exactly a year since I renewed my interest in model railways – time flies.

Tuesday 12th December 2017

Things have moved on apace. The weather was dry on Saturday until late on so I was able to cut the second half of the baseboard to size and give it a couple of coats of green paint. I moved it into the garage overnight. Just as well as shortly afterwards we had heavy rain followed by sleet and then snow. On Sunday I was able to fit the second half of the baseboard and finally see how much space I had to play with; it looks huge. On Monday I laid out all of the track, the rehearsal I did last week paid dividends as it all went together fairly easily and to my relief it fits perfectly with about 1.5" of clearance all round. I was not overly happy with the 1st radius track I bought a while back. I had not realised that it was steel rather than nickel silver and needed a lot of cleaning to get it to work when tested. I checked on eBay and found an auction for a set (8 pieces) of new track which was about to finish and put in a quick bid which I won. It should be here in a few days and I can then re-lay the reversing loop and marshalling yard in the centre of the layout.

Today I spent fitting the sound insulation (basically kitchen flooring) under the track and screwing it all down (bar the reversing loop). The track wiring is very simple at present and using only a single controller. I hope to be able to figure out a wiring system which will allow two controllers to operate simultaneously under DC but first I need to work out the wiring plan for the points as many will have to be linked to allow safe operation. Due to the complexity of my layout, I am not sure if I will be able isolate all of the points to avoid derailing the locos. This is where we are today:



Friday 8th December 2017

I have really bitten the bullet over the last couple of days. The baseboard of the old layout has been cut down to 62" by 48" and will form half of the new layout. I have a new 8'x4' sheet of 9mm ply (don't you love the mix of metric and imperial) which will supply the other half and leave me a spare roughly 4'x3' sheet for use later. Today I built the framework and mounted the old baseboard at one end. Tomorrow weather permitting I will cut and fit the remainder of the baseboard. The final size should come out at 92" by 62" which just leaves me enough room to access 3 sides of the layout reasonably comfortably. Once it's all up I need to fit some shelving and perhaps find some cupboards on wheels so that they can be moved around under the unit when I need to gain access for the wiring etc. The baseboard has been given a coat of green garage floor paint to freshen it up and there is plenty left to do the other half. It gives a nice clean uniform look compared to raw plywood.

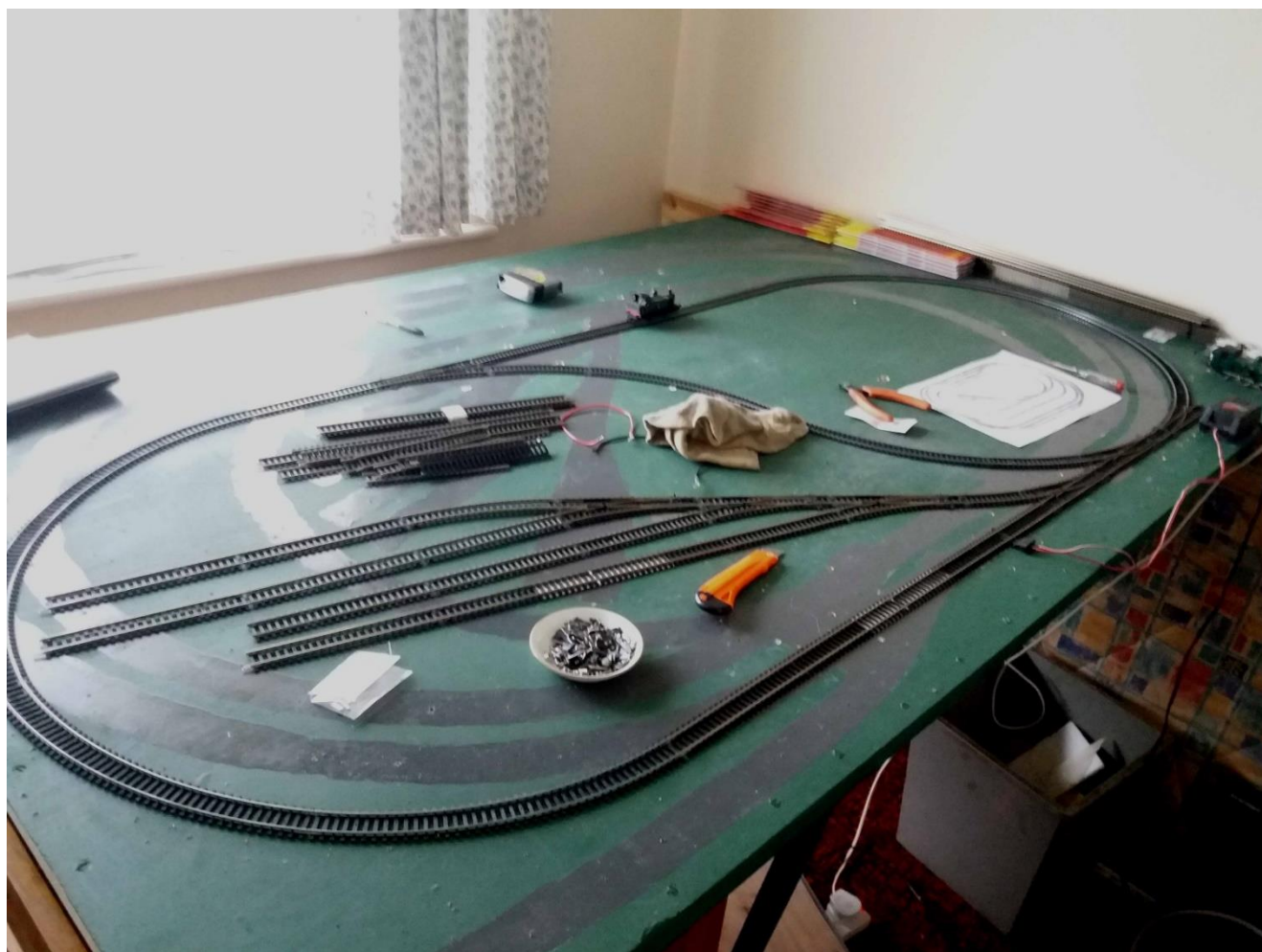
John Hill came to visit yesterday mainly to look at the progress I am making with the Velocette. However, kind man that he is he also brought a box of railway wagons from his loft. Some of them date from the 1950s when most rolling stock had to be built from kits. With metal chassis they are amazing heavy compared to modern primarily plastic rolling stock. He also brought some books one of which covers modelling the GWR. It may well provide some inspiration most likely for a long term project to build a layout modelling Trowbridge station as it was in my train spotting days of the mid-late 1950s.

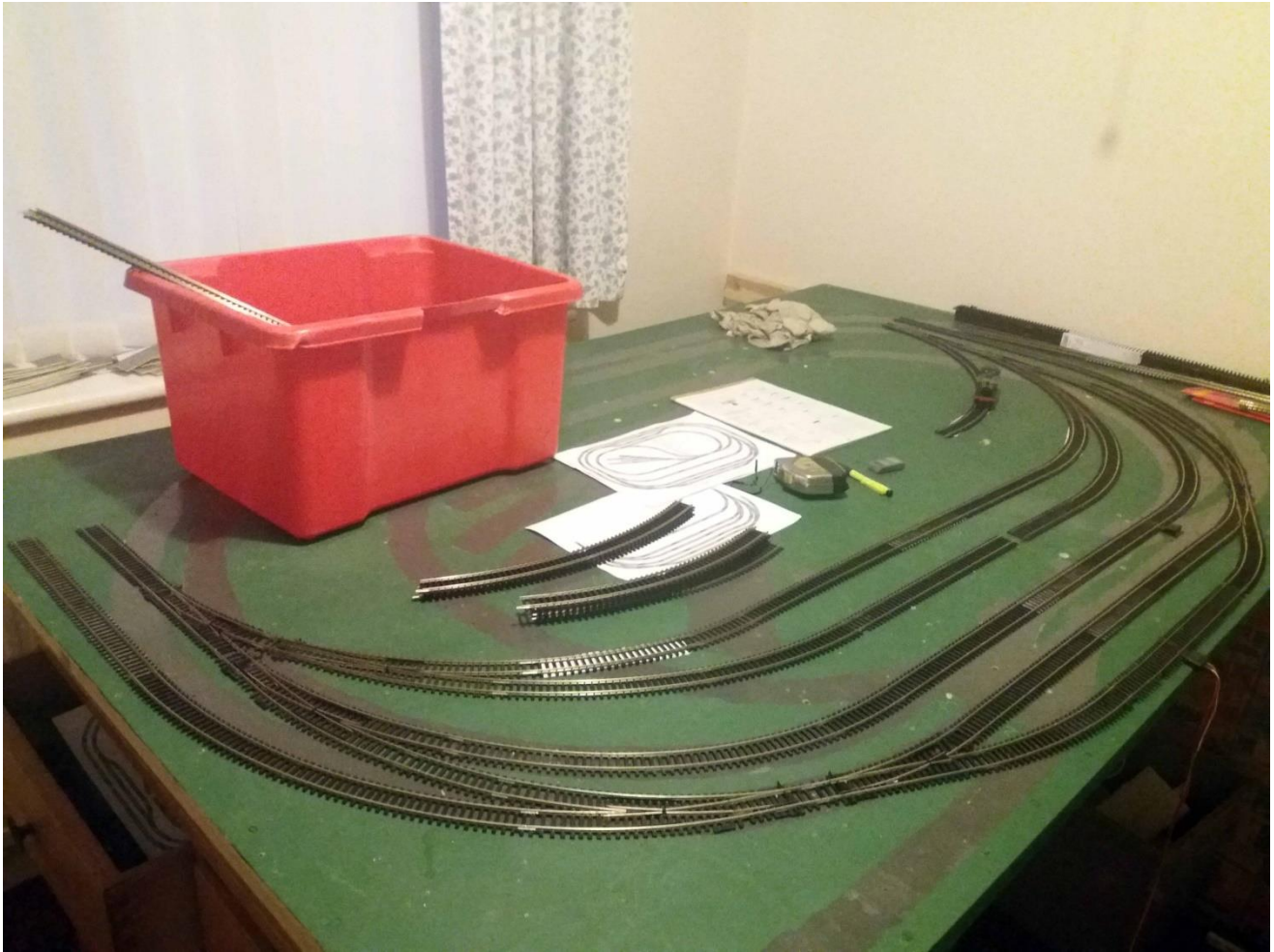
Tuesday 5th December 2017

Surprise surprise, I did not hear from either of the people who said they would come to view the old layout on Monday but really I was glad. I stripped it all down and sorted the track into a pile that might be usable with the new layout (Hornby and Peco items) and things that were unlikely to be of further interest – mainly Lima and Joueff plus older Hornby stuff which had steel rather than nickel rails. The former went into my useful tarck box, the rest into my disposal box. Doubt it has any real value but you never know. Strangely enough, the Lima stuff seems to be identical in design and shape to the equivalent Hornby stuff so might get pressed into service.

I have left the old baseboard in place for now so that I can do some practise assemblies of the proposed new layout. I can only get parts of it up due to the smaller size but I have been able to adjust things like the long runs so that the tricky bits can be assembled. So far I have completed the reversing loop and the complex bottom end of the track and hit no major snags. In fact in a couple of cases I was able to experiment and resolve problems the software had identified. Seeing it in the flesh also opened up some possibilities for adding a couple of additional loops making use of the points which I had rescued from the old layout. What a lucky decision that was since buying the replacements would have cost near as much as I would likely have got if the layout had sold. Another benefit is that I can use part of the old layout board for the new larger layout making the design and assembly much simpler. I will probably wait until my son Richard visits near Christmas to give me a hand with the fabrication of the tops. I should be able to do the base framework myself.

Below are the pictures of the first two trial assemblies. The first is the reversing loop and marshalling yard in full size, the second is the bottom section truncated by about 2ft and without the top loops or reversing loop due to lack of space on the smaller work surface:





Sunday 3rd December 2017

Things have moved on quite a lot over the last 3 weeks though mainly on the thinking rather than activity front. I have decided to try and sell the existing layout as I have nowhere to keep it and until its moved out I cannot build the new base unit. I have removed all the points motors and wiring and simplified one part of the track. It will be sold with an old controller and the Lima diesel locomotive I bought as part of my initial startup kit last year. The advert was put on Gumtree last weekend and got no response. Looking on eBay I realised I may have been overly optimistic about price and I reduced it significantly on Thursday. Since then I have received requests to view from two people; both wanting to come tomorrow (Monday). If they don't buy then I will simply strip the baseboard completely and re-use the timber. The track etc can go on eBay I don't plan to use any of it for the new layout.

As the van was due to be SORNED from 1st December I paid a visit to Wickes and bought the large pieces of timber needed for the new layout. Any smaller bits will either fit in the car or will come from the existing base unit if it does not sell.

I did spend an evening with a tape measure, pen and pencil exploring the option of making my study the railway room as its rather bigger. However, in the end I decided it was not worth doing as the shape of the room means that you could not get a significantly bigger layout in place and it was simply not worth the hassle.

Alongside this we have been acquiring some new lounge furniture and this sparked off a major review of practically the whole house resulting in a lot of stuff being junked including stuff that had been cluttering the railway room. It won't give me a bigger layout (unless I go for multi-level) but it has given me a lot more cupboard and shelving space. I also forgot to mention that I have acquired an old XP based desktop computer to supersede the laptop I have been using as my DCC controller. The laptop is on borrowed time as the battery is dead and I have to keep it powered on all the time – one day soon its going to go toes up. In addition, the screen is tiny and control is by a touch pad which I am not comfortable with; preferring a mouse.

So things are looking good for the 2nd generation layout.

Saturday 18th November 2017

Almost two months since I wrote up this blog which is indicative of the fact that I have not actually done very much on the railway project. I have managed to relocate the baseboard so that I can now comfortably get at three sides

with a maximum of a 2ft reach. The picture shows the difference from the previous arrangement. It all looks very sad as I have yet to put back all the buildings pending decision on how to proceed.



Moving it round did throw up one major snag with my plan to increase the baseboard size from 6ftx4ft to 8ftx5ft. I had overlooked the need to be able to get into the room and the location of the door is causing me some head scratching. I may have to remove it altogether and perhaps use a curtain. I also need to put up some shelving as the large book case which used to provide a lot of my storage would also have been in the way and has been moved elsewhere.

I can get the 8ft length in ok, it's the extra width which is the issue and without this my proposed layout simply won't work. In the interim, I have simplified the existing layout, removing some of the features which did not really work. I may well simplify it further by converting all the points back to manual now that they can all be reached and removing the DCC wiring. This will release some expensive components which can be used on my next layout. This is really in anticipation of the fact that I will probably have to sell this layout as I don't have enough house room for both and electrics apart I have enough track.

The nights are drawing in and the weather is making the garage a less attractive option for working so my attention is slowly shifting from restoring motorcycle back to railways. Looks like I have regained ½ a day to commit to it anyway as I have not renewed my membership of the model railway club. Bit sad as I enjoyed the company and learned a lot but the annual subs are very high and I could not justify them given the limited ability for me to get to the meetings.

Saturday 23rd September 2017

The replacement Dean Goods arrived on Friday which was a remarkably quick response. It was clearly a new one as the old box had a small crush mark in one corner, the new one was pristine. My initial reaction was disappointment as this loco was just as sluggish as the first one for the first few laps, then it slowly picked up speed so I left it running for an hour by which time it had achieved a satisfactory speed. Still not quick like some of the Hornby models, but probably realistic for a small goods loco of that era. Moreover, when I tried it this morning, though a tad sluggish starting, it quickly regained a suitable cruising speed. I have given it another hours running in and am now content with it. Certainly the slow speed running is outstanding making marshalling yard work a doddle. I have been thinking about some of my other models which I have not run for a while. Even with the planned new layout, I cannot see my Cock o' the North train set getting much if any use. Seemed like a good idea when I bought it but now I am not so sure. I had fitted a DCC decoder which I removed today - just in case I do decide to sell it. Strangely I don't have any desire for any more locomotives at present but I do need some better rolling stock, what I have at present is a mish-mash with no real theme. Trouble is I have not actually decided what theme(s) to develop. Time to look at some of the magazines I have been collecting. Something else which occurred to me today was deciding what controller to use on my new track. I could go wholly DCC in which case it's a no brainer but that is a bit restrictive and I think I would like to have DC as well just like my present layout. However, though I have loads of DC controllers, most are very basic types with no auxiliary power for points etc. I do have an old H&M Duette system but the guy from Oxford Rail was pretty scathing about those so not sure I should risk using it as it's at least 30 years old. Something else to think about.

One thing I want to do now the bed is removed from the railway room is turn the layout through 90 degrees so I can get at some parts more easily. Not sure I can do this on my own and it will require all the loose items to be tidied away (and the rubbish which has accumulated underneath. Probably best to wait until one of the children decides to

visit. No panic as I am off to Spain for two weeks at the beginning of October for our annual trip to the Colombres Rally so plenty to do in the next few days anyway.

Wednesday 20th September 2017

I spent Saturday at Steeple Ashton Village Hall helping out with the Model Railway Club annual show. I was surprised how many people turned up and from how far away as it was quite a small show by the standards of such things, only one trade stand and perhaps 8-10 other exhibitors. Nevertheless, there were some really nice layouts mostly n gauge. I manned the 2nd hand stall along with William – bought a couple of Hornby track items which may be useful. Some of the stuff was the club's (mostly donated items) and some was being sold for members on commission so we had to carefully record each sale. An enjoyable day and I got to meet a lot of the other members who only go on Wednesdays.

The saga of the sluggish dean goods has rumbled on during the last week. I reported the problem to the supplier who suggested it needed running in for an hour. I did this and it did speed up a little by the end. However, I found it was as slow as ever next morning so I repeated the running in session two more times with similar results. Eventually I had a call from someone at Oxford rail on Monday to discuss the problem. He quizzed me about my controller and we agreed that I should take it to club on the Tuesday and try it on their layout. This I did and we got exactly the same results - moreover Barry and William both agreed that the loco did seem very sluggish even when warmed up. They have now agreed it is faulty will be replaced. I posted it back to Time tunnel this afternoon.

Also today the parcel of track items I ordered from Malta for my new layout arrived. I opened it to check the contents which were correct and it is now in the cupboard awaiting the start of the new project.

Wednesday 13th September 2017

Not long been back and still awaiting the parcel of track from Malta but not in a desperate hurry as there are lots of other things on the go at present. I have not ordered the wood for the track base yet as storing it in the dry presents a problem so this will be delayed until I ready to start. Realistically this will not be until November – possibly December.



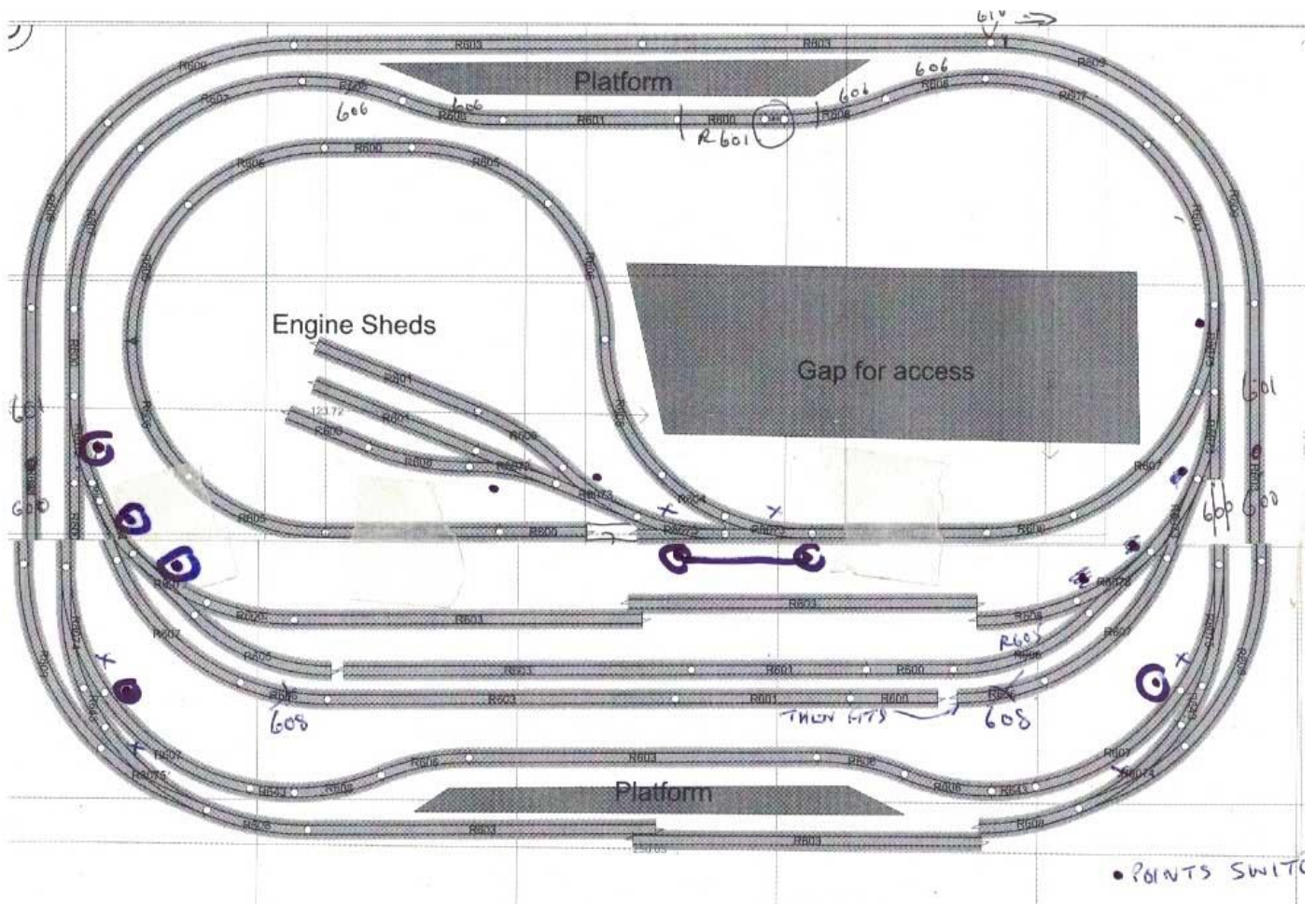
However, I have bought another locomotive, a new Oxford rail Dean Goods as I found one at a very good price at Time Tunnel Models a company I have previously had good service from. Ordered on Monday and arrived this morning along with a sound decoder chip for the King Class loco I bought a while back. These chips have been promised for ages and finally became available a few days ago. Cute little engine which I have hankered after for a while. I finally went for new because most of the 2nd hand ones are tender drive and they never work well on my layout. Only the Hornby version is loco drive and 2nd hand prices for these are very close to the new price of the Oxford Rail model. First

impressions are very favourable. The detailing is very good and it's a very quiet smooth runner. Only thing that concerns me a little is that it is very slow even at maximum power. However, this may be a design feature as they do make great play about scale speed.

This Saturday is the model railway club's exhibition in the Village hall at Steeple Ashton. I only found out about it yesterday. They are short handed so I have volunteered to help out though no idea what I will be doing.

Tuesday 29th August 2017

Work on the railway project has not stopped completely, but time to write up the blog has been difficult to find. Now I am struggling to get the events being recorded in any sort of chronological order. The layout itself has been simplified slightly as some of the associate points were giving me trouble and the sidings they served were perhaps a bit OTT. In addition, I have just decided to build another larger layout. With the agreement of Mrs F I have dismantled and stored the bed that used to be in the railway room so I now have a 10 x 8 room to work with. My new layout will be 8 x 5 ft and at 90degrees to the present layout. This will allow me easy access from all sides even without having a hole in the middle (which I may include anyway). This design incorporates what I have learned from belonging to the model railway club and my own experience with the first layout. I found a software tool on the web called AnyRail which is absolutely brilliant. It includes a Hornby library so you can build a layout using their track and be confident that it will all fit together. The only drawback is that it costs £50 for a licence so I am using the demo version which has a limit on pieces of track. I got round that by designing it in two sections. If it was a bit cheaper, I would have paid up but it's something I am only going to use once so £50 seemed a bit much. I tried to interest the model railway club in buying a copy to hire out to members but no joy. I'll include a picture of my design in due course. I had a lot of the necessary track left over from the first layout but I will need a substantial amount more especially long straights (due to the larger size), points and points motors. The order has been placed but won't be shipped until 11th September as I am away on holiday until then. I will also need to order the timber for the frame



and baseboard.

I have bought a few more locomotives in the intervening period as well. In no particular order, a Mainline 4300 Class 2-6-0 Mogul (saw one at the Club and was very impressed), a Dapol 4-6-0 County of Chester (to supplement my early 4-4-0 County of Devon) and a Black Class 4p 2-6-4T in BR colours. This was bought because it was a model I wanted badly when I was a youngster with a Hornby-Dublo layout and I could never afford one. They were never used as far as I am aware on the Western Region – or not in GWR colours anyway – so it will just have to make guest appearances from time to time like Mallard and Evening Star.



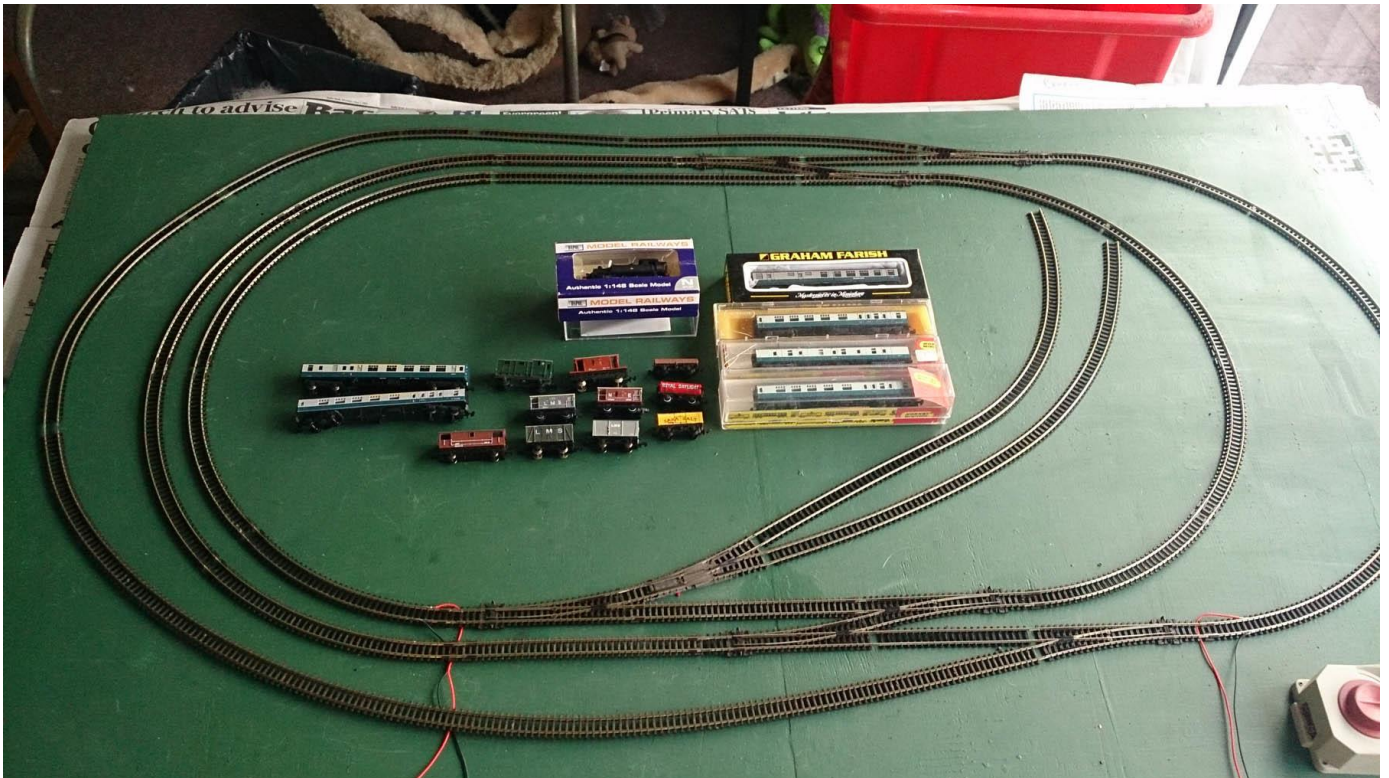
One other new arrival is a Triang 0-6-0 pannier tank which Ray Cattle from the MZ club kindly gave me a few weeks ago. After a service and a tweak of the wheels, which were out of gauge, it runs very nicely.

I also fell for a Dean Goods 0-6-0 (Make unknown) being tested at Club – sweet little loco and bought one from my local shop. It turned out to be a tender drive model and though it appeared to run ok in the shop, I had all sorts of trouble with it on my layout. Fortunately, they did not quibble and gave me a refund. I should have done my homework first as subsequent investigation indicated that most people experienced similar problems to me. Moreover, the Dapol and later Hornby versions were all tender drive as well. I still want one and Oxford Rail have recently brought out a rather nice loco drive version of the Dean Goods but being brand new it is of course quite expensive by my standards. All I have to do is convince myself that I deserve one. For sure, I will always check future loco purchases to see if they are tender drive as I have never got one to run properly. Sellers often conveniently gloss over this point.

Saturday 13th May 2017

Well I did say when I started this blogg that my model railway activity would taper off once the riding season started and this is proving to be the case as I have barely looked at my 00 layout let alone made any improvements or changes. I have bought a few n gauge items and last weekend I took advantage of my wife's absence to experiment with possible layouts. I stripped the layout I had bought completely as it was never going to be the basis of a satisfactory track and then painted it green to make it look tidier. The result I came up with is shown in the picture below. OK nothing startling and the main object of the exercise was to see how I felt about n gauge modelling. In this respect it was entirely successful as I convinced myself that for me 00 was far more satisfactory than n gauge. It's just too small, fiddly, fragile and frankly track apart it's much more expensive with a very limited choice on eBay compared with 00 stuff. As it happens my friend Paul is slowly building a collection of n gauge railway items so he has bought the lot and I shall use the money to enhance my 00 layout in due course. It was an interesting exercise

and at least I know that the potential advantages of the small n gauge footprint do not outweigh its downsides for me anyway.



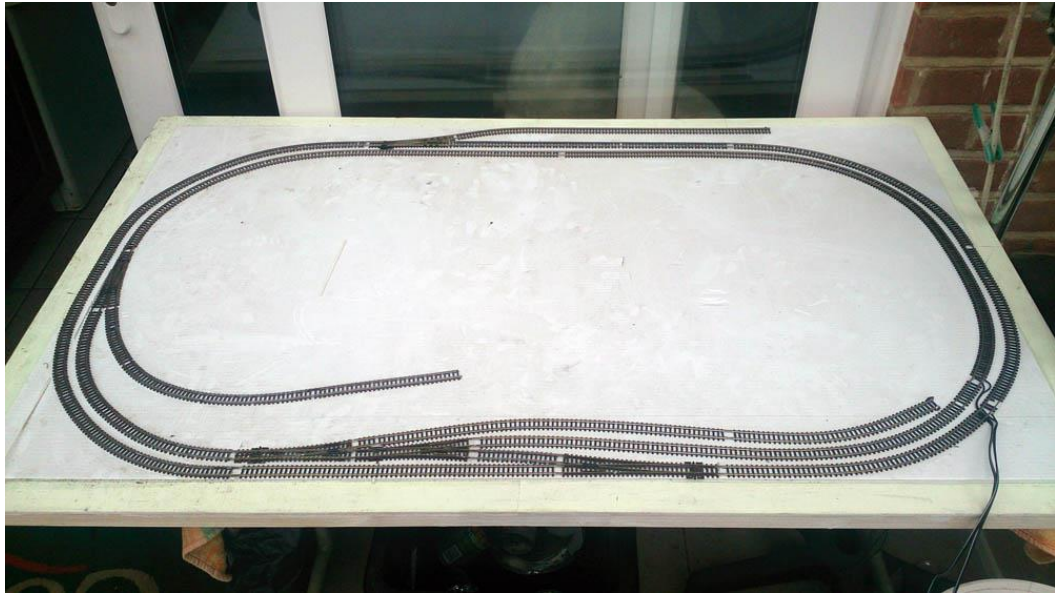
Wednesday 19th April 2017

Apart from playing trains with the grandchildren over the Easter holidays, there has been very little railway activity with the 00 layout and none at all with the n gauge track. I am watching eBay to find some more n gauge items to add to the collection but so far all my bids for engines have failed. Really at this point I am just trying to get a feel for prices which are proving quite a lot higher than 00 gauge locos. I did have a minor success with a collection of 8 points (4LH and 4 RH) which are due on Friday and am hopeful about winning a useful assortment of track items later this week. I don't expect to do anything serious with any of this stuff until next winter so I am just buying when the price seems right.

Tuesday 4th April 2017

Nearly two weeks since I wrote up this blogg. The express goods diesel railcar I ordered arrived a while back and has been duly test run under DC. I have bought a couple of decoders one for the railcar and one for the Evening Star but have not fitted them to either yet. I am part way through a book on the Somerset and Dorset Railway which ran from Bath to Bournemouth via a somewhat convoluted route. It seems that Evening Star was used extensively on that route. I imagine because it had the power to cope with the severe gradients. Double headed running over the Mendips was very common apparently. My friend Simon who loaned me the book also told me about a very useful source of old OS maps. These can be downloaded from the National Library of Scotland. By picking maps of appropriate age (they have them going back to the 19th Century) I was able to find the exact routes of all the old railways I have been tracing. Great fun and most interesting.

My model railway has taken something of a back seat recently as the motorcycling season has now begun. However, I visited a chap in Melksham last Friday to look at a motorcycle he had for sale. I didn't buy the bike, but he did have an n gauge layout plus rolling stock and other items which I did buy. The layout itself is very basic and frankly not particularly well designed but the rolling stock is good as are the two engines and there is a load of other stuff included. The price was very low and when I took it to club today it would appear that I got a bargain. I don't know whether I want to move into n gauge or not but this will give me enough bits to get a feel for the concept. The layout and the rolling stock are shown below the board is 48" x 30":



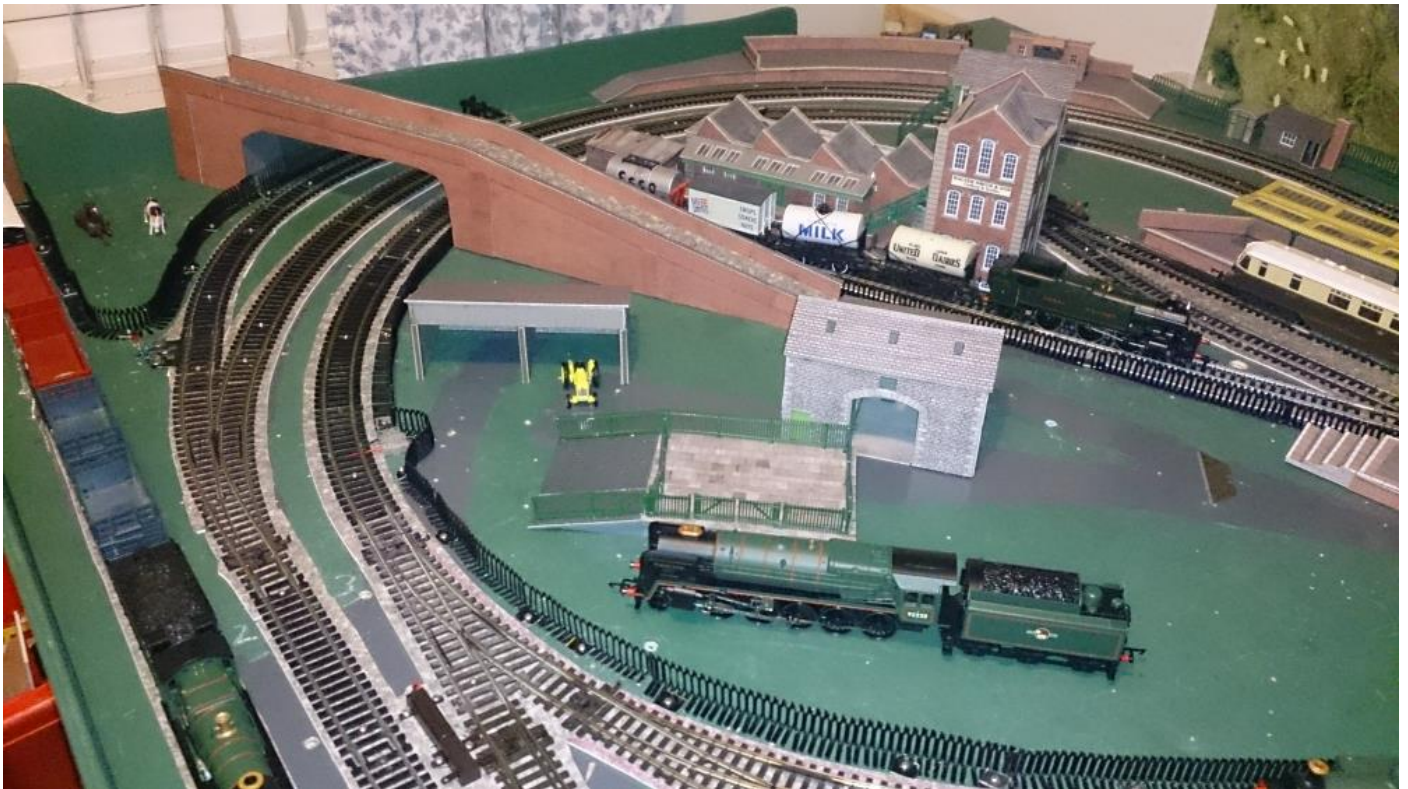
Wednesday 22nd March 2017

Oh dear, over two weeks since I wrote up the blogg and I am struggling to remember what I have done in that period or more correctly the order in which things got done. The buying spree has continued funded in part by a windfall from my credit card provider who discovered that they actually owed me a chink of money dating back to 2011. Thank you Halifax, you have just bought me a brand new Hornby model of the 2-10-0 Evening Star which was the last Steam locomotive built by British Rail in 1960. Technically well outside the Era 3 GWR timeframe I am concentrating on but it is such a handsome beast that I justified it on three grounds. Firstly, it was built at Swindon in the GWR workshops, secondly it is finished in BR green which is adequately close to GWR green and thirdly I have a picture of it running on the Westbury to Bath line in the 1960's line so I could well have seen it as a lad.

I have also sold three of my other engines which I felt were surplus to my needs. These were all Mainline models as it happens but that was co-incidence rather than significant. First to go was the Patriot Class Old Contemptible which though a handsome model had a number of faults and being in LMS livery was never going to sit comfortably on my layout. The 0-6-2 pannier tank and 0-6-0 Collett Goods were both impossible to convert to DCC and I have other DCC locos which fill the same niche so they went as well. This put enough money in the PayPal account to buy a brand new Hornby version of Diesel Express Goods Railcar no 34. I do like these models and the Hornby version is DCC compatible unlike my Lima version. This was only ordered today so won't arrive for a while.

On the layout front I have decided to go for a farming theme to decorate the central area. I have ordered a selection of livestock models from China – goodness knows when they will arrive. In the interim I have built a cattle dock (all my own work from scrap material) a barn and a tractor shed (Metcalf). You can see these in the picture below

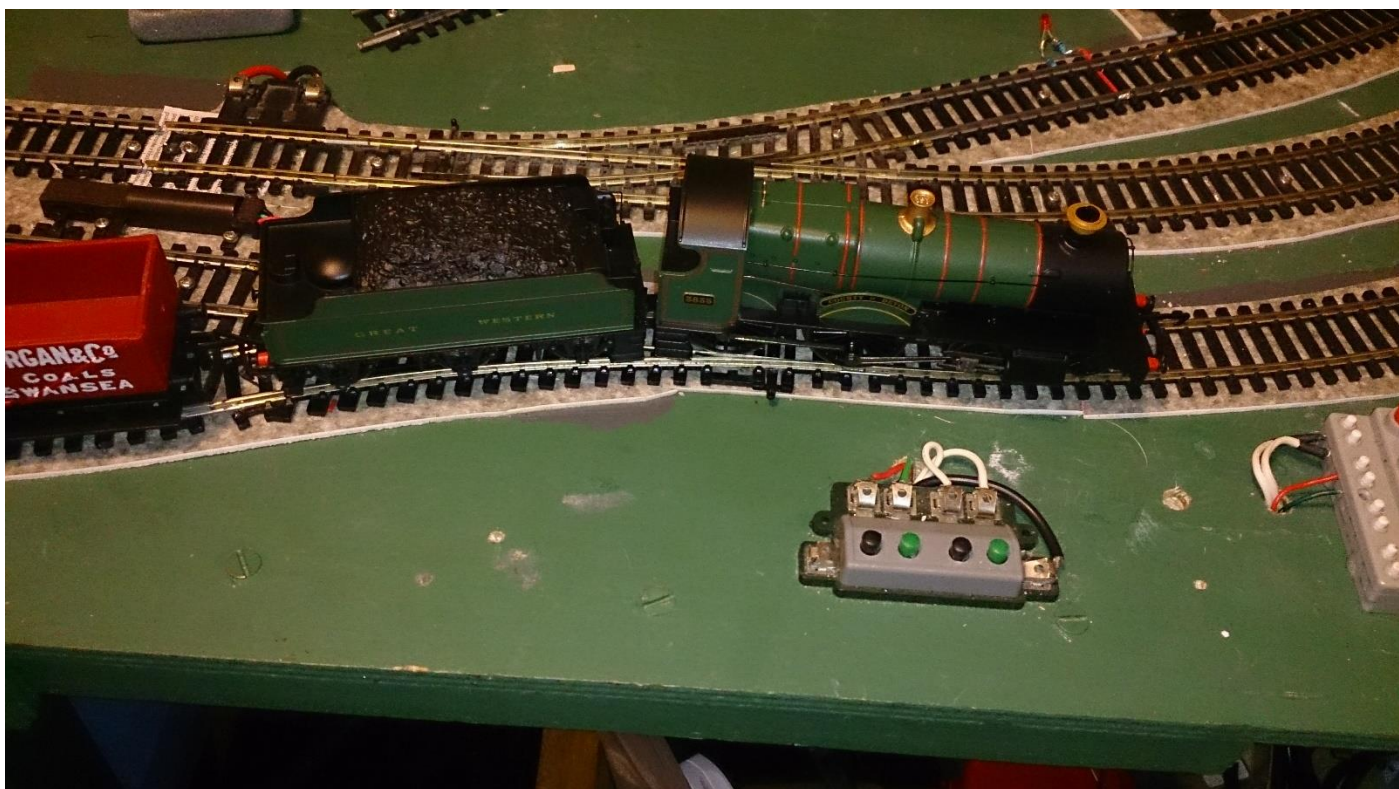
though they are not laid out as I intend. In the background you can see the bridge I built a while back which has now been decorated to look more realistic. Evening Star is in the foreground.



Last Sunday there was a Train and Toy show at Devizes so I paid a brief visit on route to a motorcycle grass track meeting. I bought a few items and learned a lesson at the same time. The tractor you can see above was a good buy as was one of the cattle trucks. The other cattle truck turned out to have only one set of wheels, I should have queried why it was carefully wrapped and the long wagon I bought to hold my sound module turned out to have old style Triang wheels which have flanges that do not sit comfortably on modern rails. Still I paid very little for them so not too expensive a lesson. In fact I borrowed a set of wheels from a truck I don't plan to use to fix the cattle wagon.

Tuesday 8th March 2017

Not much actual work on the layout or anything else as I have been laid low with a really nasty virus but glad to say I am feeling a bit better today so spent few minutes playing with the new trains and the sound capsule. The 4-4-0 County Class is shown below and is great:

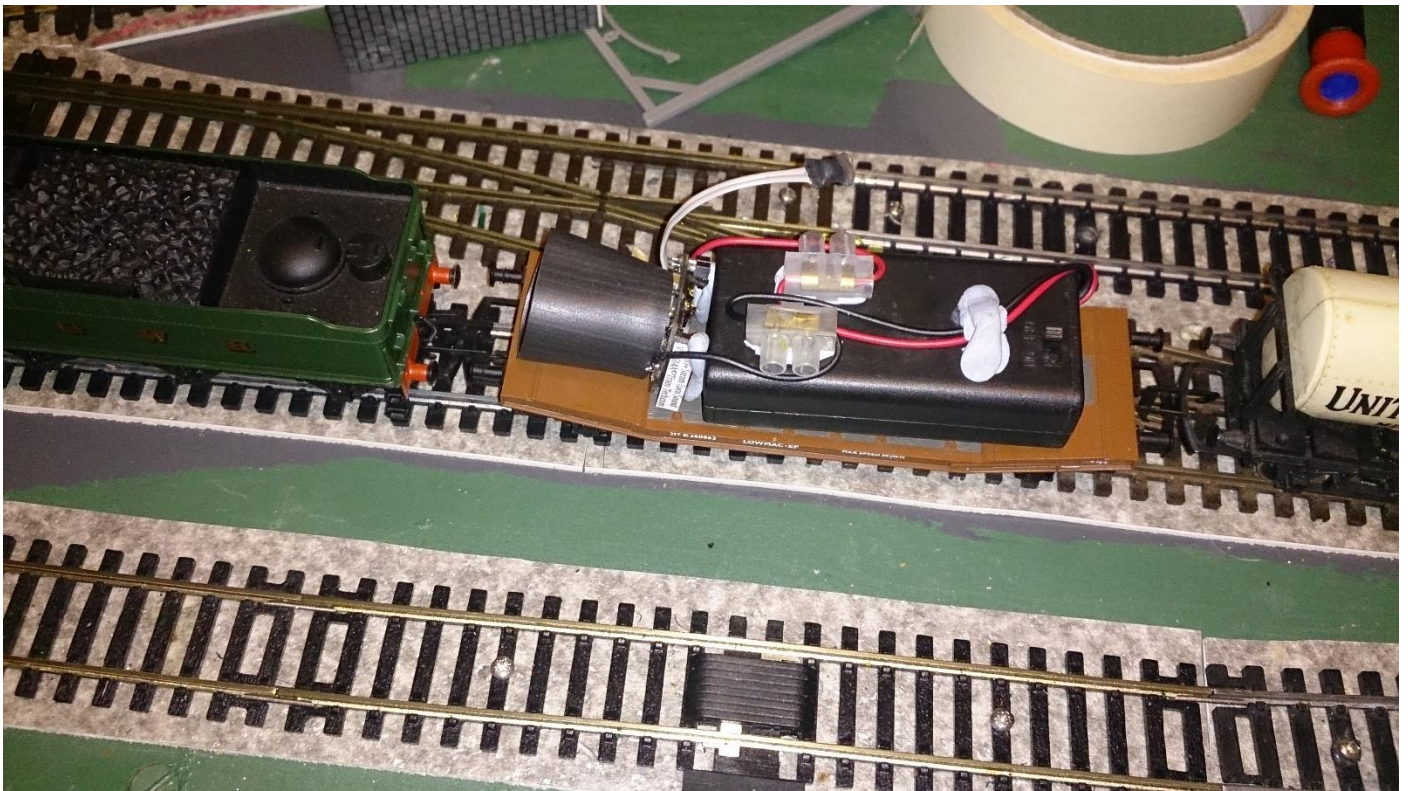


The Limited edition King Class also arrived and is an absolute beauty and best of all it seems to cope with even the tightest sections of my track though I don't intend to run it on these very often. It is DCC ready but I will not bother to fit a chip until I can buy the new TTS sound module:



Last picture for today is the train-tech sound capsule which also arrived on Friday. The actual device is tiny – and is just the small sliver of pcb at the front of the wagon sandwiched between a hollow black sound tube and the battery box. It can be operated from a CR2032 wafer battery but this does not last long so I have rigged it up with an external supply and made it look like a load on the wagon – I have made a cover which is not shown in the photo. It works by detecting movement through a sensor in the black nob on the end of the grey wire. If there is little movement it just makes steam at rest noises with the odd toot from a whistle. As the loco moves it begins chuffing

slowly then more quickly. It is not really sensitive to actual speed so at times it can be out of sync with the model especially if you stop too quickly but mostly it works surprisingly well. The good thing of course is you get sound from any or all of your locos (well steam ones anyway). In some cases you don't even need to hitch the wagon to the loco, the vibrations of a train running round the track can be enough to set it off even if the wagon is parked in siding. Not a substitute for on board loco sound for sure but better than nothing especially under DC and even under DCC since many of my locos cannot be fitted cost effectively with sound chips anyway.



Friday 3rd March 2017

Over the weekend I got carried away and ordered two new locos an early 4-4-0 County Class fitted with a decoder and a new DCC ready limited edition King Class. Hattons have confirmed that this can be fitted with the TTS chip and speaker when the kits become available – not till June sadly. I also ordered a Train-tech sound capsule – more about this later. The wiring in of the remaining points was also completed so I now have remote control of all the points which I cannot reach from my operating position – which is limited by the layout of the room and the fact that it also contains a bed.

The P2 did not perform very well on the WWMRC layout on Tuesday. It proved capable of pulling a huge load of carriages and trucks but only on certain sections of the track. Part of the problem was a glitch on the track itself but even when this was resolved it would not run reliably over some of the points, derailing the front bogie and then the whole train. Bit disappointing but it still ran fine on my layout when I got it home.

With the actual track layout now pretty much finalised thought has been given to decorating the remaining areas. I built a model road bridge out of scrap material really just to see if I could. It still needs painting and embellishing as you can see in the picture but the end result was a pleasant surprise. I now plan to lay a roadway to the footbridge steps with some parking bays. The bulk of the remaining area is going to be farmland with a barn and grazing animals – just ordered a set from China for pennies.

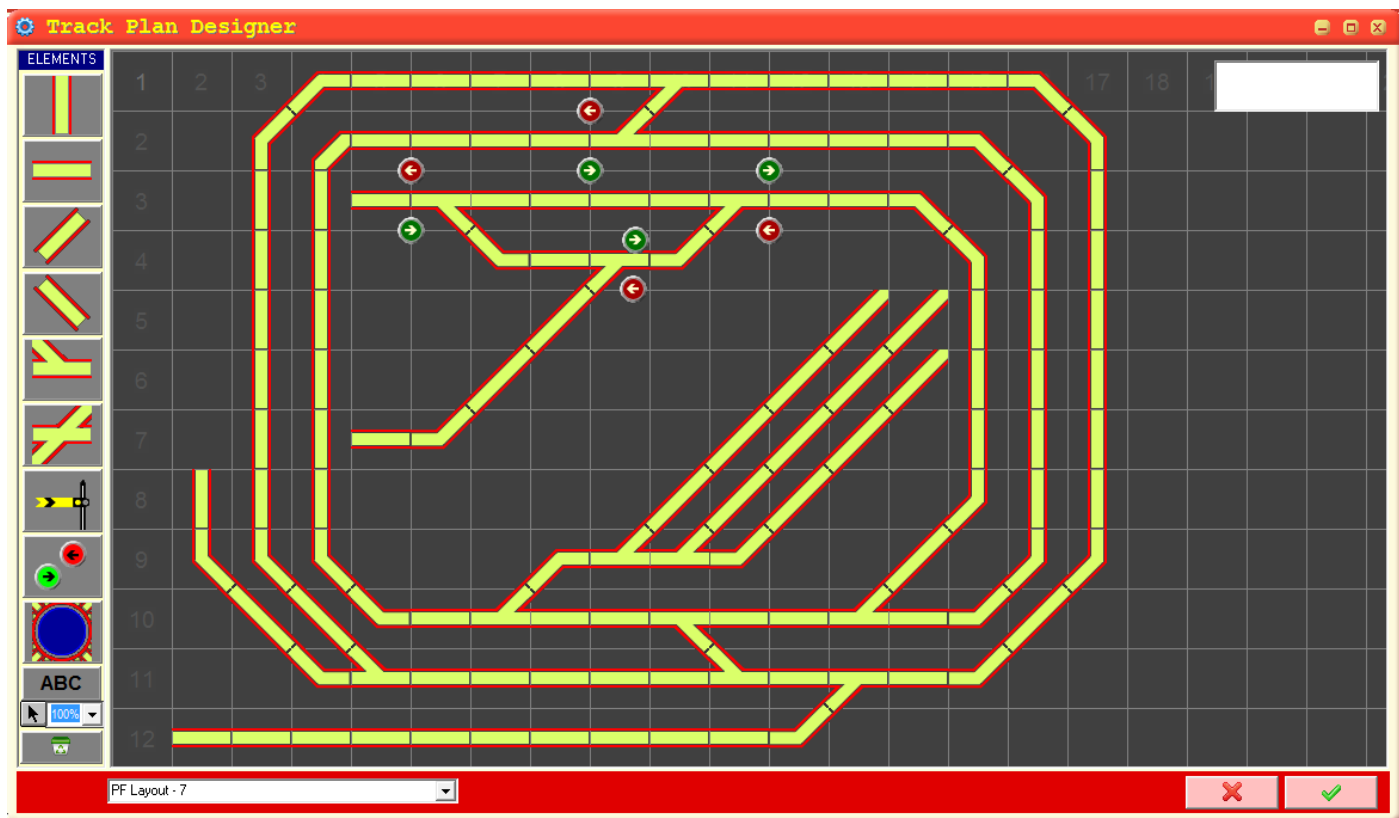
The County Class loco arrived on Thursday and is a beauty. I have only run it under DC so far but its very smooth and very quiet and will be a welcome addition to the collection. Looking forward to receiving the King Class loco next week.



Sunday 26th February 2017

Quite a lot to catch up on regarding the model railway. I did get over my sulk and have made it up with Peco who actually rang me up to talk over the problems. I found a CDU on eBay for only £7.95 which was stated as capable of operating 6 points simultaneously and this arrived on Wednesday. Don't know if it really will operate 6 points but it works fine on my pair of Peco points and they are now fully wired in. Flushed with confidence I ordered another pair of Peco surface mount point motors from Track-Shack on Thursday afternoon and these arrived on Friday – excellent service.

During the week I had also been thinking about my layout and concluded it needed a further revamp to simplify some aspects and to provide a better set of sidings. Some of the Jouef points were imposing restrictions for DC usage as they were the non isolating type. So today I dismantled about 50% of the track to fit my second pair of Peco points to provide a second link between the inner and outer circuit, to remove one siding and recreate in effect three new ones which were more accessible and to replace the Jouef points. Took me all day but I have just finished testing and all seems well. The Railmaster track plan looks as follows; I'll take a photo tomorrow when I have tidied up and replaced all my layout buildings etc.



Tempting providence to say that's the final version but I don't think there is much else I can do within this particular concept and it does mean I can have up to 7 locos parked up in various siding and another two actually on the main tracks if I wished. Time to start actually playing with the trains and see how it all works out.

I have sold a number of items on eBay recently so have accrued a reasonable Paypal balance which is burning a hole in my pocket (metaphorically speaking). I am very tempted to buy another of the Hornby TTS sound locos if I can find a suitable model. There are some nice ones but not much choice of GWR liveried models (just one in fact, a King Class) so I am torn. I have already strayed once with the P2 and am in danger of going down the slippery slope of mixed eras. Speaking of which I got it out for a trial run on Friday and the darn thing would not work (on DC anyway). My heart sank as I thought I had blown yet another decoder chip and this seemed to be confirmed when the loco ran fine after I fitted the blanking plug in place of chip. Putting it on the DCC programming track seemed to confirm the diagnosis when Railmaster could not read the chip. However, I then found that it would not read the chips on any of my other DCC locos either. Rebooting the PC and the E-link controller got things working again and confirmed the P2 chip was ok – indeed it then ran fine under DCC but still would not run under DC. I rang Hornby expecting the worst and after a short wait got through to one of their support team. He reckoned there was a programmable CV (Control Variable) on the chip which could be set to enable or disable DC running and would email me with the settings. Well that still has not happened but given this clue I found a website which listed the chip setting and found that CV29 was the one. Bingo, loco now runs DC and DCC again. I plan to take the P2 to club on Tuesday to give it a running-in session and see just how powerful it is.

Saturday 18th February 2017

The Peco PL-35 Capacitor Discharge Unit arrived on Friday so that evening I carefully wired everything up to try it out. Initial results were encouraging in that each point worked perfectly in isolation. However, when I wired the two points to operate together there was buzzing and clicking and one or other might occasionally move but never together. I was gutted and wrote to PECO to tell them of my disappointment with their product. During the ensuing dialogue it emerged that what I had bought was the Mk1 model of the PL-35. However, they now have a Mk2 model, still called PL-35 which is more powerful and is what I should have been advised to buy for 2 point operation. I only found one shop selling the Mk2 model, with a comment that this would support two points unlike the earlier model! All the other shops including the one I bought my points motors from are still selling the Mk1 model without mentioning the single point performance or the fact that there is a newer version. To say I was not impressed was

the understatement of the year. I have wasted nearly two weeks because Peco and possibly dealers could not be honest about the performance issues with their points/motors/CDU.

Fortunately, the dealer I bought my PL-35 from has agreed to take it back and refund so I will only be out of pocket for the postage – he does not have any of the Mk2 versions. In the interim I am researching alternative CDUs looking for one guaranteed to have the power to operate two or more points simultaneously. Most unlikely it will be a Peco product after this experience. I expect I will get over my sulk by tomorrow. Be interesting to see what the guys at the model railway club have to say about this matter.

Thursday 16th February 2017

Wow nearly 3 weeks since I wrote up the blogg; smack hands. This does not imply any lack of interest or commitment to the railway project simply diversion of time on a variety of things and even the motorcycle blogg has only just been updated after two weeks. Need to get my brain in gear to think what I have done with the layout over this period. I have made some further minor amendments to the track to simplify it and create fewer but longer sidings. The fencing is now all painted and pretty much completed. I have also bought a few buildings on Ebay which have begun to populate the layout nicely but this has created a slight problem over how to develop the remainder. I was going to build a couple of terrace house kits and create a small street scheme backing onto the line but I am not sure there is enough room for this and I have effectively marooned this area with no sensible access path. So in normal fashion I have left it until inspiration strikes.

I had a very pleasant lunch time session with my friend John Hill and some of his model engineering friends – mostly they are into railway related stuff and all are very knowledgeable. I gave Simon Bowditch for Frome a lift down and we talked a lot about my layout and suchlike. He kindly loaned me a load of books covering various aspects of things we had talked about. One set covering much more details about the rail routes and stations in Wiltshire which has enabled me to plot quite successfully the 'missing' lines onto my OS maps. One of the books covered the railway services into Devizes which was very local and most interesting especially when I found reference within to my Father-In-Law who started his working life as a goods clerk at Holt Junction in 1919. Sadly he died many years ago but my wife was thrilled to see her Dad's name in print. The other two books covered the development of Steam and later Diesel Railcars in the GWR. The former was interesting but not overly exciting but I reall developed an interst in the AEC diesel Railcars and managed to buy one on Ebay last week. It is a cracking model and really fits in well with my layout both functionally and in terms of era. Railcars of this general type were in use widely in the GWR from mid 30's until the late 1950's. The picture shows my new Railcar at the small station and some of my new buildings and fencing plus the open space I have yet to develop a plan for.



My major hiccup recently has been trying to electrify my nice new Peco express points. I bought new Peco PL-11 surface mounted points motors which in isolation work fine and will operate Hornby points quite happily. However, I cannot get the motors to work a single point reliably and when I couple two together, which is the primary reason for needing electric points, they don't work at all. The problem seems to me to be the strength of the Peco spring which gives a lovely firm action when operated manually, the Hornby points feel feeble in comparison though they do work well enough. Anyway the motors do not seem strong enough to overcome the friction of the spring. Much consultation has taken place with the supplier, Peco and at the railway club. The end result is that I seem to need a thing called a CDU which gives the motors an extra jolt. So I have ordered one and time which should be here quite soon, just hope it's the solution otherwise my lovely express points will have to be replaced with inferior types.

Friday 27th January 2017

Just realised that I have not written up the blog for several days; just didn't seem to get the time. Although there is not a lot to see, I have made what I think are a number of improvements to the layout. In no particular order I have:

Replaced the 4 points which made up the loop line connection to the inner track with 2 of the long express points I bought at the show last week. This enabled me to lengthen the external siding so that it can now hold a large loco with tender and 3 carriages. I also rewired the track and put some isolating sections in so that the loco will stop if the points it is approaching are not correctly set. This worked quite well though it does have one weakness. Since I only have one set of points onto the inner track a train has to be reversed one way or the other. In reverse the length of my isolating track is not long enough such that the wagons have derailed before the loco hits the spot. I need to examine the track to see if it is possible to extend the isolated section(s).

I have been pondering how to put up some fencing around the layout as this does add much to the appearance. You can buy kits but these are quite expensive given the quantity needed. You can also make fences from matchsticks or similar shaped bit of plastic and cotton or fishing line for the wire. Typically these 'posts' are fitted into holes drilled in the baseboard and glued in place. I was reluctant to something so permanent and eventually I had a brainwave after clearing out some rubbish from the garage. I found some perforated aluminium mesh which could be cut into strips and looked like iron railings when in position. They are a bright gold finish but I will paint them eventually. At the moment I am part way through the process of fitting the fencing and the beauty of this solution is that it is screwed down so can be removed if required. The section at the back is fitted to a thin strip of wood so that it can be removed in its entirety if the layout is folded against the wall. Pretty pleased with this and it does make a huge

difference to the overall appearance. Quite time consuming though which is why I have not got round to writing up the blog for a few days.



Sunday 22nd January 2017

Great fun at the Model railway show yesterday though it was not quite as big as I had expected. There were perhaps 15 exhibit layouts, some huge and some tiny, almost small enough to put on top of the sideboard. Paul was mainly interested in the N gauge layouts and there was one layout even smaller Z gauge I understand. What did impress me was the power and traction of these smaller gauges, some of the inclines were very steep but the locos seemed to

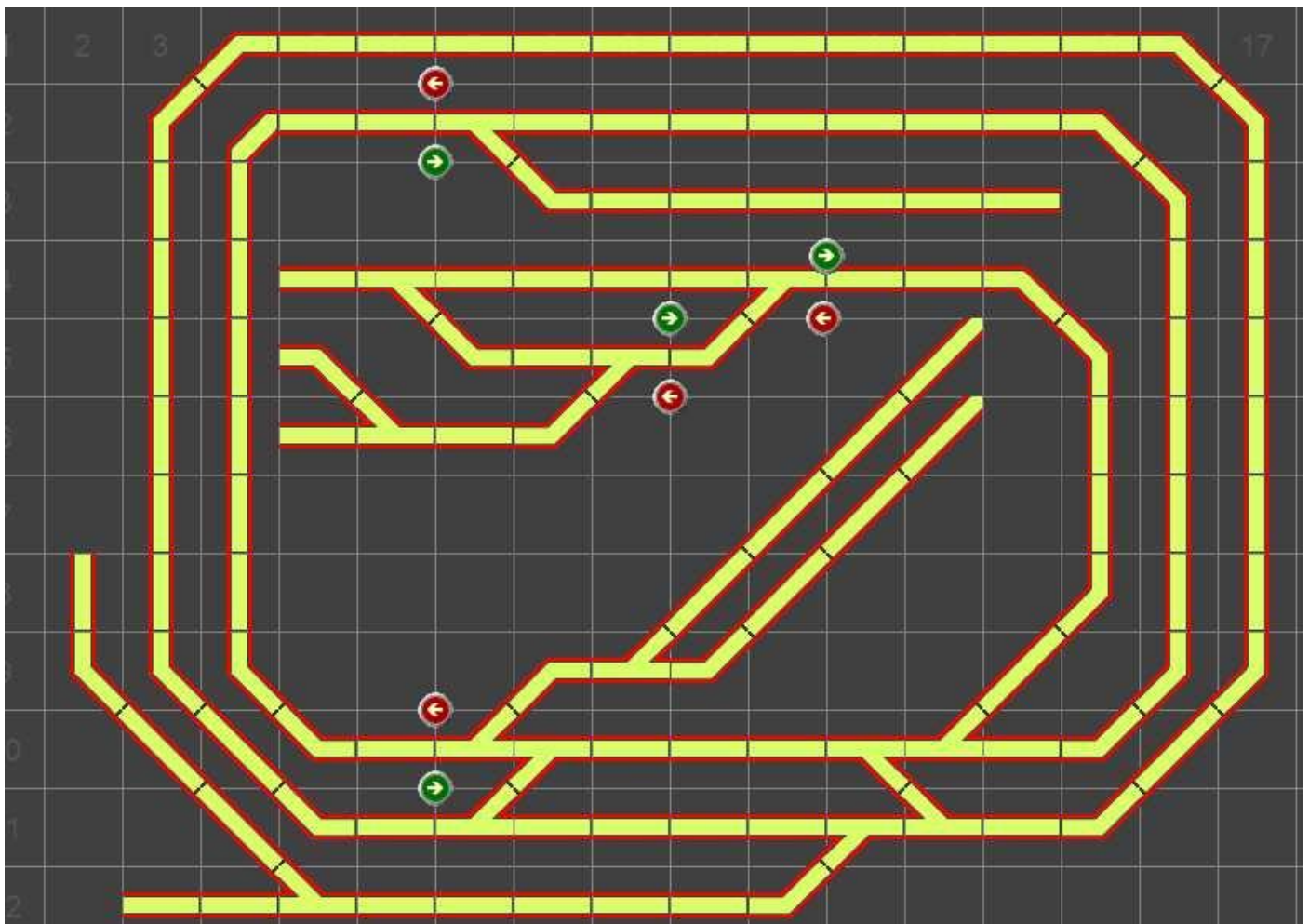
cope with ease both climbing and descending. There were a number of dealers on parade several selling second hand stuff alongside the new. I managed to find a pair of RH and a pair of LH Peco express points for a good price so I can stop searching eBay for bargains on these items anyway. I also bought two Metcalfe cardboard kits, one to make platforms and the other to build a signal box. Overall it was a worthwhile visit and has given me a few ideas. I suspect I will be visiting a few more shows. One thing I liked but resisted was a nice looking 0-6-2 pannier tank loco in GWR colours with decoder chip fitted. On reflection, I should possibly have bought it as it turned out to be much cheaper than similar models I found on eBay when I got home; though do I really need another loco?

Back home I was in for a disappointment as despite having measured up, the express points will not fit in my current layout. The board would need to be at least another 6" longer. Back to the drawing board! The cardboard kits were much more successful. The instructions for the signal box suggest it's a fairly advanced model so I have started with the platforms to get some practise. I now have three platforms built. One fairly long curved one which will be my mainline station and two smaller ones (one of which is also curved) for the branch line. Not the neatest job in the world but all three are on the far side of the track and the imperfections don't show up too badly. I have enough material left to build at least one more platform though no idea at present where it would go. Since I don't have a grand design, I am just making things up as I go along to gain experience. Maybe the next generation project will be a bit more disciplined if I stick with the hobby. The instructions recommended Uhu glue and I bought a tube at the show but I could not get along with it. So I used superglue as the adhesive which worked fine but is b****y difficult to get off your fingers. I'll take some pictures tomorrow and maybe start on the signal box.

Friday 20th January 2017

More parcels arriving by every post over the past 2 days. The mallard turned up on Wednesday and the 0-6-0 pannier tank came back from repair on Thursday and on Friday the missing rail from the P2 kit turned up along with a set of eight Hornby 2nd radius rails. The latter are part of a longer term plan to build another larger layout once I have figured out where to put it. The Mallard is DCC fitted and it was quickly changed from the default No3 setting to something else (9 I think – must keep a record of this though it's in the Railmaster config files). On the track the mallard went like a dream, very smooth and very quick if required but equally happy to crawl at shunting speed. The pannier tank was not so smooth unlike the other one. It does work and I am not taking any more chances with it. For now I will only use it on DCC. However, having two of the same type is possibly overkill on such a small layout so I may remove its decoder and make it a DC only loco – then use the chip in the Windsor castle model as you still cannot buy the X9659 chips anywhere.

Running the new larger trains showed up a weakness in my track design, none of my sidings were long enough to hold a 3 carriage train. I have now extended the external siding and modified my inner circle to make one part a longer siding and the other part running direct to the station. This all seems to work quite well and even under DC I can have 4 assembled trains lined up ready to run plus a couple of locos in the shed.



I also had a serious look at my collection of locos – 7 DCC fitted and 9 DC only. Far too many so I have put three of the DC only locos on eBay to raise some cash for things I don't have like scenery. Paul Taylor a dive club buddy gave me some DVDs for old magazines plus a couple of cardboard kits. One these I built last night – quite straightforward but not sure superglue was the right choice as I did get into difficulties once or twice even when using tweezers to hold the tiny bits. On Saturday it's the Calne mode railway show so Paul and I are going for a look.

Tuesday 17th January 2017

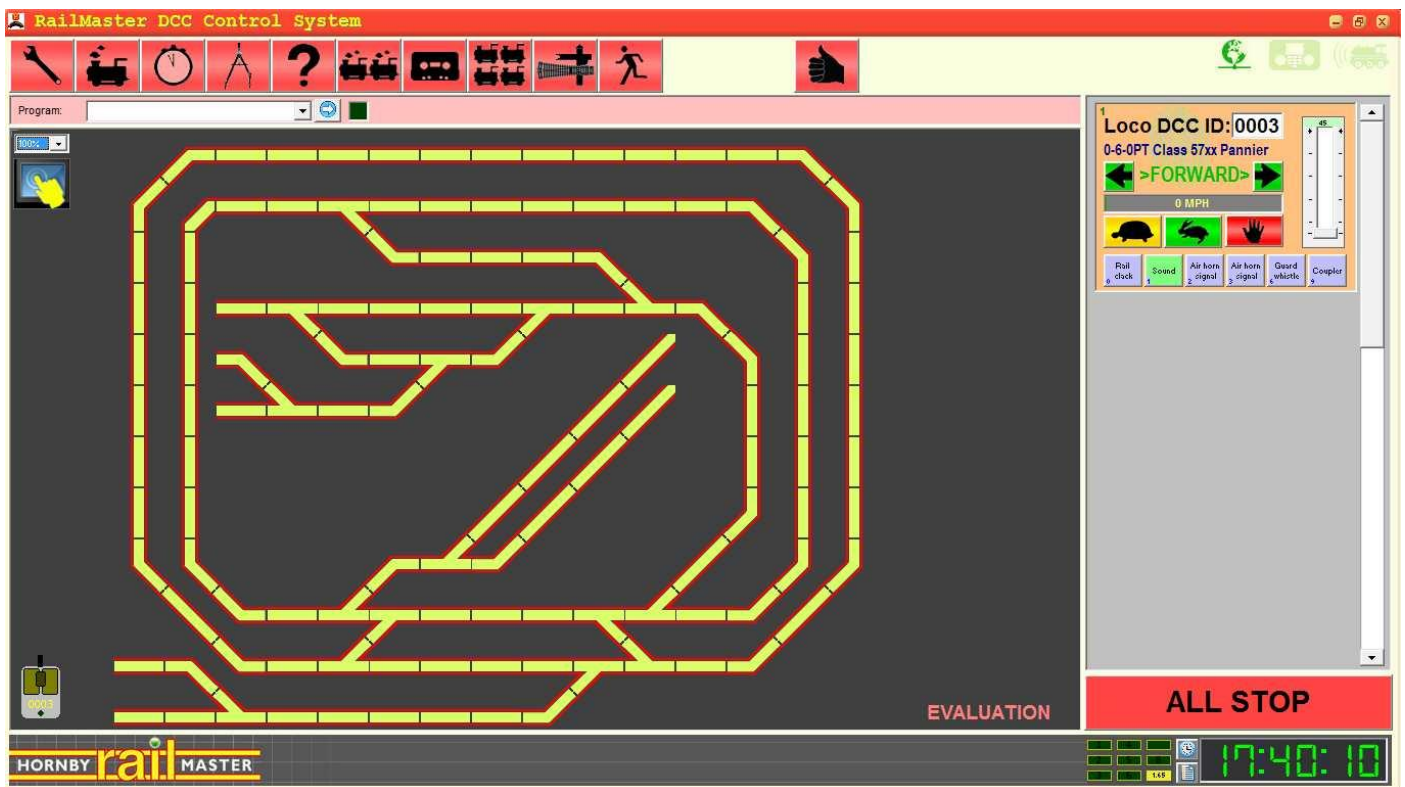
It was like Christmas today. I spent the morning at the model railway circle and when I got home I found two parcels had arrived. One was the Ketley Hall loco with the TTS sound decoder, the other was the P2 train set. First up was the P2 which ran really well and is a seriously heavy and powerful 2-8-0. S delivered it was only DCC ready but I had an R8249 decoder chip in stock which, after struggling to get the body off, was duly fitted. Once programmed (CV8) it ran well under DCC. The rest of the train set will be put on the back burner for now. Only slight hiccup was one missing item of track but this has been notified to the vendor and hopefully will get sorted in due course.

Next to be tried was the Ketley Hall. This already has the decoder fitted but I tried it under DC first to make sure it ran ok. Then onto the programming track where I set the loco number to CV2 and selected some sounds to link to the function keys on the control pad. Back on the running track and bingo we had sound; what a difference. The dog came running and sat on the bed watching in amazement. She probably thinks it's a rabbit or a mouse and would chase it given half a chance. So we now have two more DCC fitted locomotives up and running. The Mallard should be heard on Thursday and hopefully the O-6-0 tank will be back from Hornby very soon which will give me 6 DCC locos. There is also the Windsor Castle which is awaiting one of the 4 pin decoder chips to come back into stock. As I have two O-6-0 pannier tanks I may well rob one of its chip and leave it as a DC only loco. Quite a satisfying day.



Monday 16th January 2017

I have drawn up the layout in the Railmaster software and schematically what we have is shown below though in reality is more stretched out as the board is 6' x 4'. It is possible to code the points into the system as well and control these from program. However, this requires the electric points to be wired into a special decoder box which is quite expensive and I don't have one of these as yet. For the moment, I have to set the points manually.



Over the weekend I went a bit wild on eBay and have bought some more equipment. I have had a hankering for a Mallard. Every boy should have one and saw a DCC fitted BR colour scheme (Green and very like GWR colours) Mallard at a good price that I could not resist. The other purchase was a complete train set called Cock o' The North with a massive DCC ready P2 locomotive (2-8-2) and 3 carriages. It's really too large for my present layout but the price was remarkable and I felt it just had to be done. Blows my GWR theme wide open but what the heck. As I said on day one of this blogg, I am more a train set person than a model railway person and I'll get loads of fun running the locos whatever their origin. Third purchase was some more Hornby track which was dirt cheap. I am trying to build up a stock so that I can lay a larger temporary track from time-time to give the bigger locos a proper airing. Not sure where I am going to lay it just yet. May well have to wait until Mrs F is away for a few days and I can take over the whole lounge which gives me over 20' to play with. Just wish the loft was more accessible, there is acres of room up there.

In terms of decorating the existing layout, I am holding back until I have gained some more experience with the model railway club and to make sure that the track layout itself is in its final form. My next task will be to get underneath and tidy up the rat's nest of wiring. It works but it is not robust. To do this I will have to remove everything on the track which is not screwed down and hinge the baseboard upwards to give me easier access. Crawling around underneath is too much like hard work.

Saturday 14th January 2017

Busy week and no time to write up the blog until tonight. I paid a visit to the West Wilts Model Railway Circle at their Steeple Ashton club room on Tuesday. Very friendly and welcoming and I picked up a lot of useful information including a hands on demo of track ballasting. They are well into building a huge layout which will be already pretty impressive. I guess if I join I will have to get involved with the project as well though what skills I have which would be of use is unclear. The pannier tank loco which has been giving me grief has blown a third decoder and is currently back with Hornby. Annoying but at least they seem willing to sort it out under warranty.

The track has been modified yet again primarily to remove the reversing loop. Great shame as I was quite wedded to this but it is clear that if I want to run under DCC it had to go. There was too high a risk of creating short circuits which could well damage the controller or the loco decoder chips and I could not figure out how to make it operate under DCC anyway. The net result is actually an improvement because it gives me a lot more isolated track sections to park trains. In fact I have now reorganised the power wiring with double pole switches so that I can have either DC or DCC depending on which way I throw the switches. Actually double pole switches is a gross exaggeration. They are actually a pair of MZ indicator switches with a metal collar so that they have to be moved together, simple

and cost nothing as they were in the spares bin. This is the layout as of tonight. I don't think it will change greatly now, I have been through virtually every other possibility and my testing tonight proved very satisfying both with DC and DCC. Now The emphasis is likely to shift to actually decorating the layout. One thing I have not got right is the location of the laptop – this needs more thought and won't be an easy fix.



I have also been a busy boy on ebay and bought a brand new GWR Hall Class loco fitted with the TTS chip which provides sound effects. Saw one demonstrated on Utube and just had to have one. Cost me nothing as the money I made from selling all my surplus items covered its purchase. There was enough left over to mostly cover the cost of another complete train set which includes a DCC ready loco (I have a spare decoder chip). Bizarrely, the cost of the set was less than the cost of buying a similar loco on its own and I will have a set of carriages, a track with points and some other odds & ends spare. There is an enormous difference in price for the same product on Ebay so you have to shop carefully. I have been looking for DCC fitted locos for some time but the second hand one's seem to fetch near as much as buying a new one and given my experience so far I would prefer to have then under warranty.

Saturday 7th January 2017

Cannot believe how much has changed in a week. I quickly found out some of the limitations of my modest layout size and had to abandon some ideas. The major one was to abandon the electric turntable which I have just sold on ebay along with some other items I was certain I would not use. This helped to fund the acquisition of some locos and I now have a nice selection of GWR models including a Castle Class, a Hall Class, a Collet goods Loco and a couple of Prairie class locos.

In the interim, the design of the layout has changed almost on a daily basis as I refine and experiment. Having abandoned the turntable I was keen to include a reversing loop but these are tricky to wire up if short circuits are to be avoided. Finally I cracked it and the layout below is my current favourite.



A couple of things to note. Firstly the laptop which runs the Railmaster software to program the e-link controller (the black box beside the laptop). The layout is still running under DC or analogue mode as I have yet to get to grips with the DCC side of things. Secondly the track is now mounted on kitchen flooring to simulate ballast and being soft absorbs some of the noise made by the trains when running – quite proud of that idea. The reversing loop runs behind the laptop and up to the engine shed at the top left. One of the difficulties was getting power to all sections of the track but only when it was needed. Some of the points pass power regardless of setting, other are isolating type which only pass current in one direction. This is good in some ways because under DC it's helpful to be able to isolate parts of the track to park a train whilst playing with another. This became quite confusing so I had another good idea and wired in LEDs to various sections of the track which light up when it is live. That way you can see easily which bits are live and which are dead. In theory once I get DCC up and running this will be irrelevant but I am still some way from that stage yet – partly technical and partly because I only have one operational DCC locomotive.

I actually have 3 DCC locos and have had problems with two of them. Fortunately one of them is under warranty and has just come back from Hornby for the second time. The issue is that it keeps blowing the decoder chip. I feel it must be something I am doing but on the other hand I have another identical loco which gets used extensively and (fingers crossed) so far has caused no problems either under DC or limited running under DCC. The third loco also has a decoder problem but was dead on arrival. I am waiting for Hornby to get more stock of the particular decoder it uses; in the interim I have fitted a blanking plug so it runs under DC.

Sunday 1st January 2017 – Background

For several years I have been keeping a written record mostly about my motorcycling activities. Initially they were specific project diaries but I found this tedious when I had a number of projects on the go at the same time (which was most of the time). So I switched to a single diary of blogg which was updated as and when there were things to record. Sometimes it was daily; lately it seems to be weekly as there has taken up a new hobby – model railways; though in truth I am not much beyond the train set stage yet.

Anyway I have decided to keep a record of this activity as well. If you are reading it I obviously decided to put it on my website alongside the other blogs but that's a decision I have not made at this time.

The urge to play with train sets started just before Christmas 2016. First thing I did was get the kids only railway stuff out of the loft. There was quite a lot of it including 4 locos all of which I managed to get running in the end. The track was pretty much toast as the rails were mostly steel and rusty but I did manage to salvage a couple of points and a few buildings. It was enough to wet my appetite so I look in the local free ads papers and ebay to see what was

available. My first idea was to buy a complete layout but though some were available at very tempting prices there were also too many complications of size, style distance and suchlike. In the end I concluded it would be better to build something from scratch. First thing was to identify a room where I could set up a permanent layout as this would dictate the maximum size. I opted for a small guest bedroom which was about 8 x 10ft – to allow it to still be used when required, The baseboard would have to be hinged and fold against an end wall. This meant a maximum size of 6.5ft by 4ft and also imposes a height restriction of about 3-4" so any building or other structures will have to be removable. Things like bridges tunnels and flyovers are a definite nono sadly. I did consider the loft, plenty of space but to many downsides like loft ladders and lack of heat; the garage – cold and what would I do with the bikes and the conservatory behind the kitchen but this is in constant use and is unheated as well. So a good old British compromise but at least my chosen location is warm and convenient.

A trip to Wickes provided an 8x4ft sheet of 9mm plywood and I already had a stock of 2x1" timber to make up a frame work. Two days work, a lot of which was waiting for the paint to dry and we had a basic platform on which to play trains shown below:



In the interim I had found a guy down near Wincanton who was selling a shedload of assorted railway stuff, locos tracks points, buildings, controllers and more. This gave me a head start in experimenting with layout options. I had also done some research on the internet and visited a couple of the local model shops. Two conclusions came from this – the first was that I should select a theme if I was going to be serious about a layout – so I opted for GWR as I knew it when a train spotting teenager. This did help to focus the mind when looking for stuff on the internet. The other conclusion was that I liked the sound of computer linked loco control – something called DCC. I was lucky enough to buy at a very good price a new train set which included the Hornby e-Link controller and a DCC fitted locomotive. Only a modest pannier tank but it provided the ingredients to try things out. As of today the layout looks like this:



Everything is loose on the board at present but I plan to screw it rather than nail it down as this will enable me to move things around easily without damaging the track.