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Engineers
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The Prospectus

February 2026



A look back at the RSME Open Day held last June. We are expecting to host the Curly Bowl for engines designed by the late LBSC later in the year. Photo John Billard

**TRUSTEES NEWS
A 5" TRAM
A SIGNALMAN'S TALE**

THE VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

John Billard

I'm pleased to say that I was able to attend the trustees meeting on the 12th of January my recovery having progressed a little further. Still a little way to go yet but I hope soon to be at the club on a more regular basis.

We started with further talk on how we deal with the actions at the AGM. A perennial one is how to improve the members toilet for the disabled. There is a problem in that the structure may not be strong enough to be able to take the necessary handrails able to take the full weight of an occupant. This remained difficult but it was decided to obtain a handrail as a trial. There was a request for a further gardening container. This is ongoing and we are going to see whether existing items can be stored better to provide improved access. More ideas have been put about improving the loading ramp for the raised track and this is ongoing.

The meeting was attended by our friend Peter Jennings who has taken over the role of bookkeeper for the club. The intention is to move to a club treasurer program with input to Peter from qualified members who have access. Software will provide monthly accounts ready for each meeting together with annual figures for the AGM. We are also looking at improving access to the Sum Up and PayPal accounts where we need more than one person access. Concluding the finance item Stuart Kidd said that he had a meeting with the accountants earlier that day regarding the year ended March 2025. All was good and a confirmation we will be provided by the accountant for production to the Charity Commission at the end of January.

On membership we have had a message from a young person who wishes to go for the Duke of Edinburgh award. We were happy to accept this.

We discussed the necessity of replacing some of the concrete structures on the raised track near the back of the clubhouse. While this was not considered critical a member was asked to prepare plans and costings in the event that it becomes necessary.

January public running was very successful and provided a good income. Club running was also well attended the following week. The track marshal roster has been updated. A necessity has arisen to make sure that any possible incident during our public runnings are effectively monitored and recorded. It is vital to have sufficient members available to provide such cover.

There was an excellent report regarding the results of the Santa Specials with a good net income. There has been numerous praises on Facebook and others from our visitors. However the need for more voluntary members was again stressed. It was decided that in future and overall person in charge must be appointed for each day. The question of volunteers also applies to the number of private parties to be held this year.

On communications it was noted that John Billard was to produce his final Prospectus in March. It is hoped that the question of a successor will be resolved very shortly.

Recounting events for 2026, subsequent to the meeting, it has been announced that the Curly Bowl will be held at our tracks on the 13th of September. This will receive national publicity in Model Engineer and Workshop Magazine. The event consists of an informal competition to consider models based on the designs of the late Curly Laurence known as LBSC.

Concluding with a trustees item, Miriam Farley was confirmed as a Co-opted Trustee.

PROSPECTUS

Readers will remember that I plan to retire as editor of Prospectus at the end of March after nearly 20 years in the job. Time for a change.

I am delighted to report that my successor will be Tom Biddle who is active in the 00 Group. Full details will be given next month.

A NEW TRAM IN 5 INCH GAUGE

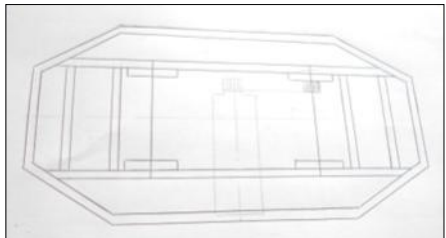
by Terry Wood

Having built various steam outline and diesel electric locos the one thing I haven't yet built is a tram and so I've now decided that it would be my latest project. I already have a spare motor speed controller from a earlier project, a 12 volt electric motor from an old cordless drill and a set of pillow bearings that I ordered from eBay last year so all I need to do is to start building a suitable chassis. I got some angle iron and sheet metal from Berkshire metals and seeing as its been snowing outside and freezing temperatures as I write this I decided to make up a drawing of the chassis before I start cutting any metal. The dimensions I have decided on are 1 ft wide x 2ft length and a height of 14 inches in order to make the tram look more to scale.

Because a tram has a curved or hexagonal front and rear I decided to use a oblong with hexagonal ends with two long girders running the entire length to support the bearings and axles. The angle iron will need to be bent a lot more times than if it were just a straight oblong with right angle bends so this could be a bit tricky getting it to the proper angles and remaining flat especially after welding all the bends up, it may take some time manipulating it afterwards in order to get it perfectly flat as I have experienced in the past. The long girders will be bolted on so that they can be altered to line everything up.

There will also be four shorter girders

running at right angles to the others in order to support the batteries one at each end these will probably be welded on in order to have a flat surface for the batteries to sit on. There will also be two girders to mount the motor but at this stage that will be determined by



the tension of the toothed belt which I have yet to purchase.

Because the electric motor came off a cordless drill there is no need to gear it down using a small toothed pulley on the motor and a much larger one on the wheels because there is a gearbox built into the motor so the pulleys can be the same size on the motor and the driving axle.

The wheelbase will also be longer than a standard loco bogies but not much longer otherwise it won't go around the curves of the 5 inch track, I've already built a steam outline electric tank loco with a long wheelbase and that goes around our track ok so I will use the same dimensions as that. The bearings and axles will be much higher unlike a locos where the wheels are seen on a tram the whole body sits much lower so only the lower half of the wheels are exposed the whole layout will be entirely different to a locomotive's chassis.



Having ordered the wheels and axles from SMR engineering I then made a cardboard cut-out of the base as it would be when it was built, this is always a good idea because it then throws up problems that have been overlooked before you start building it for real. The first thing I did was to alter the angle of the front and back because on the drawing the angles looked ok but when I cut them out they looked too

pointed for a tram so I made the angles much smaller to make the front and rear less pointed which is how an old tram looks. Once the wheels had arrived, I could try out the whole layout and see how it would look in real life.

To be continued.

The Signalman

A story from Alec Bray

Slowly, the creosoted gate in the vertical board fence creaked open. Ernie Penshaw pushed against the rusting hinges, opening it up a little further, then eased his way through the gap from the main road onto the footpath that ran along the top of the cutting. Carefully he closed and relatched the gate: from the roadside of the fence, it would be difficult to see the gate unless you knew it was there.

He walked along the narrow, uneven footpath for about a half-a-mile, to a place where the footpath started to follow the slope at the end of the cutting sides back down to track level. The pathway became a cinder-laid footway next to the railway track. Ernie trudged on for a further one-and-a-half miles or so, passed the now-empty linesman's hut, where back in the day there used to be the cheery ganger who would offer a greeting and a comment on the events of the day. On and on, until he came to the junction where the signal box stood, gaunt against the awakening sky. To make sure that there was

a good view all along the track, along the main line in both directions and down along the branch, there were no trees around: the signalbox stood alone. Slowly Ernie climbed the stairs, unlocked the door, switched on the electric lights and stood in what was now his domain: his alone. The lever handles, polished daily by the cloth, the duster, in his hands, seemed to glow in the half light.

“Ah, so different now”, he thought as he poured water into the kettle: a cup of tea, just for himself. In the olden days, he would have exchanged greetings with the signalman going off-duty from the night shift – at least that provided some form of human contact in this remote neck of the woods – except there were no woods directly around the signalbox. Just up the line, in the cutting, there *were* trees growing on the cutting sides, growing bigger now there was no need to watch out for fires started by sparks streaming from steam locomotive chimneys. There was little traffic nowadays apart from the occasional train that seemed to amble along the main line.

In its heyday, the signal box had seen many express trains and fast freight trains pass in front of its windows. There were loose coupled freight trains, some of which had to stop at the signal box, and the fireman would venture up into the signal box to ask why the train had been stopped and to remind the signalman that the train and crew were stuck at the signal. Some slow goods trains had to set back into the refuge siding to allow a faster train to pass. There were all sorts of trains going past his box and it was in use 24 hours a day, 3 eight-hour shifts a day, friends of his on the various shifts, but now Ernie was the only person running the box, and that just for the early daytime shift, as was... and if he was lucky just a few trains passing during the whole shift. It was now becoming very lonely up in the box, and Ernie had a lot of time for reflection.

It was like that with Muriel... when they were first married, he and Miriam would spend all night entwined with each other and during the day they were busy all the time. They shared everything, and they would go out and meet people, friends would drop by... but as time took its toll, somehow they had drifted apart... and now sometimes he felt like a stranger in his own house. They barely spoke: they shared the jobs, but that was mainly due to a sense of duty and because it had been a regular thing to do. But there was no longer any passion, just an occasional flash of love and understanding and that was it.

Even their conversations had a rhythm which matched the interactions in the signalbox...

“Ernie!”... Ding ... Call Attention.

“Yes, love?”... Ding ... Acknowledge.

“Ready for breakfast?” ... Ding Ding Ding Ding ... Is line clear for newspapers, milk, fruit, perishable ...?

“Certainly, ready for breakfast!” ... Ding Ding Ding Ding Ding ...
Acknowledge, yes, the way is clear...

All Ernie could do in the signalbox was to feed the cat and to tend to his geraniums in the pot by the stove. The cat was useful as it kept the rats at bay – the rats that could eat the grease on the locking bars in the locking room below - but the cat was not affectionate. Didn't even have a name. There was always the crossword in the newspaper. Ernie had thought about making a small kitchen garden by the side of the box in the triangle of ground formed by the junction, but that would mean leaving the box and nowadays he would never be able to respond to the bells in time. None of the younger men in the company's employ wanted to spend all day, every day, in a remote location with little traffic. Ernie was of the old school of intelligent, self-sufficient, independent-minded, upright signalmen who had formed the core of the service for nearly a century...

In the midst of his reverie,

Ding ... Call attention!

Ernie's brain and body, all on auto-pilot, reached up to the instrument and tapped once:

Ding ... Acknowledge.

Not usual for a train to come at this time of day...

Ding Pause Ding Ding.

That was not a bell code that Ernie was expecting! A branch-line train? That was a very strange bell code for nowadays! The branch had closed for freight over four years ago, there were no trains going down the branch: it used to lead to a goods yard near to the centre of the local town, but the goods yard had long gone. There had also been a single-platform terminal station offering a passenger service morning and evening, but the station was no more, the local auto-train stopped running more than seven years ago so why would a train be going down to the branch? The tracks were still there, luckily, they hadn't been lifted – there had been some talk of a railway preservation society being interested - but in any event it was a strange occurrence so ...

Ernie did not respond to the bell code. But in accordance with the rules, with no acknowledgement, the bell code from the signalbox in the rear had to be resent.

Ding Pause Ding Ding ... Is line clear for a branch freight train?

He was a loyal company man, so Ernie did what he had to do.

Ding Pause Ding Ding ... Acknowledge the request and accept the branch loose-coupled goods train. Ernie entered the details in the Train Register.

The branch had always been worked as "one engine in steam", so there was no need to worry about tokens or anything like that. In the old days, of course, he would have sent a bell code to the porter-signalman at the branch terminus station, to alert the staff there that there was a train approaching – but now? No one there to receive or acknowledge the call.

Picking up his duster, Ernie walked over to the blue lever to release the facing point lock, wrapped the duster around the handle, squeeze the release

and pulled... and pulled...No one had touched the point and lock rodding since the branch traffic had ceased, and anyway there were no gangers walking the line to check the wooden chair keys and to check on the lineside equipment. Occasionally the track measurement train would pass over the junction, checking that the rails were in gauge, but nothing else had been checked for years. Ernie tried again...With a creak and a squeal, the point locking lever moved across the quadrant and locked into position. Now for the black lever, to switch the junction pointwork. Again the duster around the handle, a squeeze on the release, and pull ...

Like the trackwork outside, the locking room had not had any attention since the branch had closed. The locking bars had not been checked, the pins and pinions not moved because of lack of use. Over time, all the joints, cranks, and pulleys had lost lubrication. At first, the point lever just would not move. Ernie tried again. And again. Sweat started to pour from his forehead. Bracing himself with feet firmly planted on the lever frame, he tried again. Slowly, the lever moved ... a quarter of the way... half way...then finally all the way across. Ernie used the duster to wipe the sweat from his brow. At least the junction signals pulled off easily.

The signalled train was approaching, headed up by a Gronk (the diesel electric shunters were always Gronks in Ernie's book: he wistfully remembered when the freight trains were hauled by little steam-powered 0-6-0 tender locomotives – they always looked happy to him!). Slowly the freight rounded the curve onto the branch line and headed past the signal box. The first vehicle was a Toad guard's van, followed by a number of Macaws (bogies bolsters) loaded with long posts that looked like signal poles, and there was another Toad guard's van at the rear. Ernie heard the brakes go on when the last vehicle had passed his box and cleared the junction.

Bang! The signalbox door flew open, and there in the doorway was a youth, grease-top cap pushed back on his head, jacket undone, boots filthy.

"Yo! Grandad" Ernie was speechless, but he started to feel himself getting worked up inside – no respect for his position, his age, his experience, no respect for the behaviour expected of all employees in Ernie's time...

"Yo!" repeated the youth. "What?" was about all that Ernie could splutter out.

"We're stopping here and we'll be unloading these new electric light signals onto that patch of land next to you, ready for installation shortly."

"No, no," exclaimed Ernie. "You can't do that! You should have set back into the refuge siding, and unloaded from there."

"Nah, nah," the youth replied. "Too far to carry these posts. We're OK here, just reset the points and tell everyone that we are clear. Ta, mate, ta-ra." And with that he turned, pulled the door closed and vanished down the steps.

Ernie felt shaken. This was not right. The track circuits had been ripped out when the branch was closed, but if the points were not reset, no down train could pass the signal box and that would mean passengers would be delayed,

DIARY

FEBRUARY 2026

1st	Public running	Setting up from 09.30
7th	Club running	10.30 onwards
9th	Trustees meeting	19.30
21st	Club running	10.30 onwards

MARCH 2026

1st	Public running	Setting up from 09.30
7th	Club running	10.30 onwards
9th	Trustees meeting	19.30
21st	Club running	10 30 onwa

Meetings are normally held every Thursday at 19.30 in the club house.

The Wednesday Warriors continue the hard work at the club site from 09.30.Wednesdays unless notified.

A lovely member has kindly sent me some brilliant pictures of the club lunch on 4 December. Somehow they have become lost on my computer. Sorry! If they could be resent I will include them next month.

No response so far—Ed

*Opinions expressed in PROSPECTUS are the personal views of the contributor and cannot be taken as reflecting the views of the trustees or editor. **The deadline for the February issue is 20 February***

Contributions may be submitted in had or soft copy to the editor.

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perishable goods would be affected... Reluctantly Ernie picked up his duster and grabbed hold of the black point lever. It was just as hard moving it back across the quadrant. Ernie pushed and grunted, grunted, and pushed. The lever hardly moved. Ernie tried again, pushing with all his might and weight. Slowly the lever began to inch its way across the frame, Ernie counting the transvers grooves in the iron frame separating each lever as the point lever moved past them. Less than a quarter of the way across, suddenly the lever became easier to move, and with a lot of noise completed the movement. Ernie shifted across and after a couple of failed attempts, he was able with difficulty to reverse the facing point lock lever. *To be continued*