

SUE'S SPOT

Well, I've started everything early for Christmas, including this spot before the end of October, when it's the fifth Sunday in a row that it's rained. At least our last Wednesday Afternoon Playtime of the year was fine, many of us had a good run, Mick Lister brought his steam waggon and Graham Kimber brought his lorry, so we had road vehicles in steam as well. It was even quite warm! Then the weather came up trumps for our last running Sunday at the end of October, with glorious sunshine all afternoon.



Me and my Dad, one of my favourite pictures, kindly taken by Len Connell, at the September Playtime Run.

The first November Sunday had us surveying the track to decide what we need to do to the track this winter. In the New Year we'll be redecorating the interior of the Clubhouse so don't come in and stand still or you might get painted as well! I'd just remind everyone to keep the Clubhouse clean and tidy at all times. Then there has been major financial outlay in replacing the Clubhouse roof, due to happen any day now. The old one lasted over twenty years; the new one should last fifty with any luck (and is guaranteed for twenty-five years).

BEAM ME UP SCOTTIE...yes, as our cover shows, work is now underway casting beams to replace a few that have started to crumble and need replacing. Plus we need to have a couple in hand just in case, so we could be making about a dozen or so beams. This work will take us a few months but will be scheduled so it doesn't affect the Boxing Day Run. Thanks to all our volunteers, without whom the Society wouldn't keep going. Work has been greatly enhanced by the provision of bacon butties and hot dogs for Sunday lunch, thanks to the ladies, and especially Pat Riddles, our catering queen of the committee (more of those cheesy things you make please, they're lovely!).

Forthcoming Club Nights: Got a story to tell? A few interesting slides? How about being a speaker in May or October next year? Please contact me! A small remuneration is provided for your trouble. Don't forget the Quiz Night in February – and this year we're including general knowledge questions, it won't be just steam and railways (yes, Simon, there's always a music round as well). Grand prizes to be won! All our Club Nights are great fun – and nobody goes hungry either!

In December 1981 I did my first newsletter for M.M.E.S. so some of you have put up with twenty years of my waffling (flowers, chocolates, a medal, all will be welcome!!! I'll be lucky). Enclosed with this edition is a questionnaire, as I'd like to know what you want in the newsletter for the future.

Also, for those it applies to, a subscription form is enclosed; please send that to our Treasurer with a cheque, and your membership card plus S.A.E (or just send the money). Of course, if anyone wants to make a large donation to the Society as well, that will always be welcome...

To contact the Editor (me) or Secretary (him) there's e-mail, (sueaparham@cs.com or secretary@maidstonemes.co.uk), normal mail (Alvis, 34 Spot Lane, Bearsted, Maidstone, Kent ME15 8NX) or use the dog and bone, number 01622 630298. You'll also find us at the Club whenever anything is happening (more often than not).

May we wish you all A Very Happy Christmas with lots of pressies you want, more importantly Good Health, A Super New Year, and Good Steaming in 2002.

REFLECTIONS ON THE FIRST TWO SEASONS MEMBERSHIP

By Dennis Mortimer

Having since childhood an admiration for all things mechanical, the early gift of a Hornby train set prompted an interest in steam hauled trains. Yet later in life, after the rigours of earning a living and raising a family, the opportunities were badly damaged by a certain Doctor Beeching.

Meanwhile, becoming a householder prompted an interest in gardening and someone mentioned the place to buy plants was Alan Blooms Nursery at Bressingham. After a day there flowers were forgotten and I had found the Britannia class of locomotive. I also heard talk of a chap known as L.B.S.C. and a periodical called the Model Engineer.

Yes, the bug had bitten, and badly – come the home workshop and away we went, evening after evening for two years. At last the wheels would turn on air, but would it steam? A work colleague introduced me to a wonderful bunch of lads who had a hobby under the name of Romney Marsh Model Engineering Society.

Yes, it steamed and I was offered much advice and help on how to drive it. Well, you know how it is – why don't you come visiting with your loco?

One such visit introduced me to the Maidstone Model Engineering Society. I fell for that superb track and eventually had the pleasure of being granted membership. I would mention that the first official visit to Maidstone by the Romney Club was over THIRTY years ago!



So, what are my thoughts? First and foremost would be the sound principles that were schemed out for that wonderful circuit – yes, I know it has been extended and track replaced because the original decisions were so correct. How long would last winters track replacement have taken if this were not so?

And what about trolleys? When I first tried to lift one I thought here's a hernia job if ever there was one. AND YET from day one locos as small as 0-4-0 have earned revenue year after year. Again, sound original decisions, put one behind a loco and you don't know it's there. One day someone will tell us how many revolutions those wheels have turned.

Thank you for your friendship in an ENGINEERING Society.

Joy Payne sent me this poem for inclusion in the newsletter. She says it sounds like Jack's Workshop. I suspect it sounds like a few other workshops as well!

TINS by Peter Pascoe

Got round to clearing out his shed today,
His haven of peace – six by ten,
With a carpet of sawdust, shavings and chips,
Mum used to call it his den.

Standing here now I can still hear him say,
“Nay lad, don't chuck it away
Just put it aside in one of me tins
You're bound to need it one day”.

The chisel just laid on the bench,
The wood still clamped firm in the vice;
I collect all his tools, still tidied in racks,
So orderly, neat and precise.

A half-finished toy stands on a shelf
Awaiting the touch of his hand
To instil it with magic, bring it to life
To dwell in a child's wonderland.

Boxes of hinges, doorknobs and bits,
Odd ends of pine, elm and oak,
Plywood and leather, old wire and string,
Each with a purpose bespoke.

“Have you cleared out all of his rubbish?
Have you chucked all his junk in the bins?”

Well, almost darling – almost my dear...
Except for a couple of tins.”

NEW MEMBER:

We welcome Chris Giles (pictured), from Dymchurch, who is also a member of Romney Club. He says his model making activities are desperately trying to maintain his Mountaineer!



THE FIRST CAR

Traditionally, apprentices were poorly paid, and this was accepted as training was provided in their chosen trade without the apprentice giving very much in return. Financial resources for most apprentices, therefore, were minimal, and this lack of dosh was reflected in the various activities, which they pursued. Many of the Dockyard workers, including apprentices, rode ancient bikes to work and as the 7.00am clocking on time approached, scores could be seen tearing along Dock Road heading for the Main and Pembroke Gates. To make time even more crucial, it was forbidden to ride through the Dockyard gates. It was mandatory for cyclists to dismount at the gate, walk past the security police while simultaneously 'flashing' your pass before remounting a few yards further on.

Most apprentices had a passion to own a means of transport better than the lowly pushbike and some achieved this by 'doing up' old motorbikes. The very lucky ones had motor scooters, which were probably subsidised by their well-off parents. Then there were a few car owners, of which I was one. A 1934 Morris Minor soft top, already over 20 years old, was purchased for £30 having had numerous previous owners as the old style log books used to show. As these times were prior to MOT testing, it was up to the buyer to decide whether the car was roadworthy or not. I was lucky in having an experienced uncle who was able to cast a critical eye on the pending purchase, and list the faults, of which there were many. The decision to buy rested on whether the various faults could be lived with, fixed cheaply, or preferably corrected at no cost at all.

In the mid 1950s when new small cars were costing around £500, cheap secondhand ones (now a disused term) sold quickly. So in spite of cracked windscreen, defunct dynamo, crappy headlights, non-existent shock absorbers, split rubber propeller shaft couplings, cracked cylinder head, torn seats and bent front wings, AXN 679 was bought and driven slowly home.



The next few months were spent on a steep learning curve guided by uncle who was a vehicle Test Engineer at the Ashford REME workshops. Stripping down the dynamo revealed a disaster - burnt out field coils, but fortunately the armature appeared undamaged. The remains of the two coils were carefully removed and taken into work, as one of the electrical apprentices knew a man who could rewind them (for a

consideration). After

re-assembly and with a coat of pale green paint (left over from mother's kitchen) the dynamo was excited followed by my excitement - it worked, and the ammeter showed a healthy charge when the engine was revved up.

I was presented with a pair of (ex?) W.D. headlights to replace the battered ones, the swivel mountings being similar to the old Lucas originals. Side and rear lights were sourced from the vehicle scrap yard situated along the A20 amongst the apple trees. The landowner probably got more income from the ironmongery than the seasonal apple harvest, so even in those days the farmers were diversifying. As work progressed, I was to become a regular customer at this Emporium and would memorise the location of suitable donor cars.

Many of the old cars had flat windscreens; so suitable the local glass merchant at reasonable cost could supply replacement safety glass. Original shock absorbers for the 1934 Morris Minor were of the friction disc type which like many other components on vehicles of similar age, needed regular adjustment and maintenance.

With the passing of twenty years or so, the chance of this type of shock absorber still working efficiently was too much to hope for. The alternative was to find some later Armstrong hydraulic models like fitted to the Morris Eights of 1935 onwards. So back to the apple orchard armed with spanners and Jenolite, followed by bench work to make adaptor plates for bolting them on to the chassis.

The improvement in handling after this conversion was remarkable, as now the car could be driven at maximum speed of 50 mph with relative safety. There is always a price to pay in these situations however, and I was soon to discover what that price was. Old engines don't like flogging and soon protest in one way or other. Oil supply to the crankshaft was quite basic compared with late design cars, in that all lubrication to it came from the front main bearing. As can be seen in the drawing, No.4 big end is on the end of the supply line, and in the event of oil supply failure, No.4 is the first to go. The sound of a

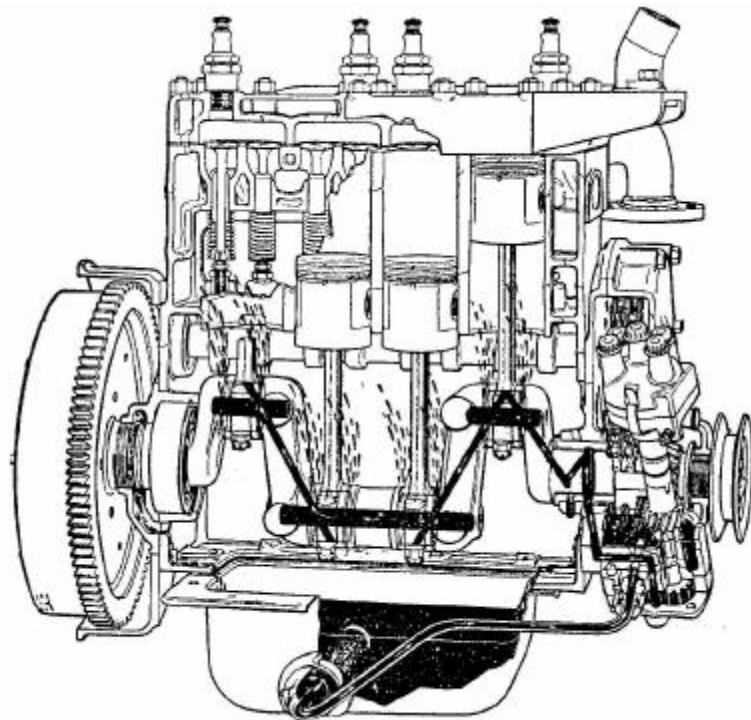


Fig.9. The Lubrication Circuit of the Early Minor Engine

'run' big end bearing is like no other and is guaranteed to turn every head within 100 yards. The first time this happened (yes it happened on several occasions) was frightening and quite unexpected, but I discovered that with gentle driving in top gear, it was possible to limp home without inflicting further damage to the other bearings. Fortunately, the rear main bearing in this old engine was of the roller type, which did not rely on a pressurised oil feed, but oh, was it noisy.

Dismantling this simple side valve engine was quite a doddle; in fact a con rod complete with piston could be removed in under half an hour by jacking up the front wheels and unbolting the pressed steel sump. Exchange remetalled con rods could be obtained from a main dealer, but the usual practice was to find a back street workshop able to carry out the task.

Controlling the suspension movement with working shock absorbers brought an unexpected improvement in the life of propeller shaft couplings. Previously, excessive deflection of the rear leaf springs had caused accelerated chafing of the rubber/fabric coupling discs, which normally would absorb any small front to back movement of the rear axle.

And so to the cracked cylinder head, which necessitated always carrying a supply of top up water, until one fine day another strange noise came from under the bonnet. This noise was simultaneous with a sudden loss of power coupled with a change in the exhaust note. Once again it was possible to limp home and advice sought from the fountain of knowledge. The favourite diagnosis was a broken valve or spring, but in any event the cylinder head had to come off. A blown head gasket between cylinders 2 & 3 was discovered rendering them almost useless. Cylinder head gaskets cost about 10/- (50p) and took about one hour to change, so that was another quick job. Following that experience, I always carried a spare head gasket with the tool kit and this precaution once saved the day on a long journey returning back from Manchester. On this occasion we were miles from anywhere when the familiar sound of a blown head gasket spoilt the afternoon run. We pressed on until a small stream was spotted near the road, as replacement water would be needed to refill the cooling system after refitting the new gasket. Those passing by probably thought it strange that someone should top up the radiator using a Thermos flask. Motoring will never be the same.

J.B.

Six Inches To The Foot

Old Codgers, like myself, have flashbacks of memory, which result in telling yarns that get embellished with out of date facts and contradicted by the younger generation cosseted in today's safety regulations. In 1942 my life consisted of air raids and the "War Effort". I was a schoolboy and had won a scholarship to a modern new secondary school in Wembley. Education consisted of 2-3 hours classroom work a week with extra work to take home. Nobody checked this work so it was usually forgotten. My main interests were in chemistry, physics and biology, so my chances of matriculation exam passes were nil. So I obtained a job at Glaxo Laboratories as Lab Assistant in the Bacteriology Department at Greenford. The work was very interesting, mostly vaccine preparation for H.M. Forces. Being fifteen years of age I was a junior dogsbody and given the important task of responsibility – checking temperatures of incubators and changing chart record sheets. Tedious hours were spent holding animals for the medical tests carried out by the doctors on the virulence of vaccine batches. I was brought up as an animal lover but during these experiments my feelings became detached. The result of this has distanced my feeling from all animals. In later life, I now believe in the sanctity of animal rights.

During this time a national campaign among scientific workers was recruitment for volunteers to join a top-secret establishment on war work. This appealed to my sense of duty so I applied: - I was duly interviewed and security vetted, and then sent miles west where digs awaited. Entering the establishment where I was to work was like going into a forbidden world, all barbed wire, soldier sentries, special passes, where nobody spoke of what they did. So I became one of these "Duffel Coated Boffins". Being a new boy, I worked under senior technicians, professional doctors and learned professors, assisting in the ongoing projects at the time, sometimes research methods, testing, and manufacturing procedures. The subject matter of all this was perfecting warfare products as a safeguard in retaliation if materials of this nature were inflicted on Great Britain. Training was carried out using harmless materials until the process was perfected so that, when experienced, more potent materials were introduced. Production was on a rota system with a senior doctor plus assistant. Material was spread onto media trays, incubated, collected during a three day cycle, followed by the sterilisation in a special room in preparation for the next cycle. This was done by us lab technicians fully gowned up and wearing the normal service gas respirator protecting us from the chlorine gas when spreading the acid hydrolysed bleach solution to walls, floor and ceiling. Bug proof respirators were later supplied to us, but it took two years before the services were issued with this pattern. All the material thus produced was stockpiled in various forms for tests, installed into equipment, etc., that was on instant call for active service if required. Tests were carried out on Ministry of Defence open land nearby. These field trials were always exciting to me because of activity during this war period, with soldiers and boffins working together which had many lighter entertaining moments.

Two incidents of "Panic" occurred whilst working. The first was using the old method of sampling using a pipette in the mouth with a cotton wool filter inserted into the glass tube at the suction end. On this occasion the filter complete with contents entered my mouth! (Nowadays they use suction tools.) The second time was the result of the glass feed tube breaking and piercing rubber glove and finger. When accidents happen there is always a first one and it was Yours Truly! The powers that be decided that I had to have (all objections overruled) serum injections intro-muscular 50cc into my rear. First time – no reaction. Second time – serum shock! This reaction came on whilst going back to my digs travelling in the Silver Star bus. My whole face swelled up, I could barely see or talk, but managed to contact one of my fellow workers before I passed out. I woke up to find myself back at my workplace in an isolation hut, surrounded by barbed wire with a sentry on the door – it was obviously organised as a contingency emergency hospital ward. Having time to get over this, with rest, my thoughts turned to what could have been a fatal result, and notification to my parents, if any!

So my decision was reached that to “die by the bullet is better than bugs”. I volunteered for the army and joined up six weeks after D-Day, much to the objections of the Head of the Department who claimed he would prevent me doing so with the direction of wartime labour. But, I knew being eighteen years of age he could not enforce this act, so a soldier I became. That’s another yarn.

All this happened nearly sixty years ago and should remain as history!

WHAT A PERFECT DAY by Paul Rolleston

Now! Just like Father Xmas and Flying Saucers I don’t believe in Ghosts, BUT. I had worked at No ?? Lower Fant Road before and enjoyed doing so. Charles and Nancy (the customers) were, and still are, very likeable schoolteachers with one young son who is a most endearing child. The parents will dispute this, but I had got to know James well as my wife had looked after him for a couple of years when she was a Childminder. Pat had looked after many other children but James was definitely ‘Special’.

The Scene

The house is a late 18th Century mid-terraced house, with the front facing south and a rear access tunnel / passageway that runs between it and the neighbours on one side. The neighbours on that side had several children and were planning to get married (?). On the other side there lived an elderly widow, Mrs Wilson who had an acute hearing problem and a yappy little dog called Montmerancy. On the opposite side of the road the ground falls away steeply towards a railway line and the river. To the rear of the house there is a passageway giving access to all the back gardens.

Right! Got the picture? Good, please read on.

I had on this occasion been asked to convert the cellar into a habitable room. This was a major job and promised to keep me in work for several weeks. For the purpose of this story, three key aspects of the job were replacing; - the tatty plaster lath ceiling with Fibrebond plaster board, the cobbled floor with one of wooden boards on joists with vented voids underneath and the window with a double glazed unit. If you believe that there is such a thing as a typical cellar then this was one, it was dusty and musty. It featured a coal chute that had not been used for years and some attempt had been made to block it up, but rain had obviously been finding its’ way past the screwed up newspaper and plaster used to fill the hole. There was, as can be expected, a small collection of junk: - a settee, a portable gas fire, a desk and resting on it, a horse’s head (no, it wasn’t Shergars, it was a theatrical prop made of wire mesh, aluminium foil, black bin liners and sleigh bells).

After dealing with the relevant building / planning regulations I submitted an acceptable quotation and arrangements were made for work to begin in October. James’ dad is tall and the plaster lath ceiling bore the scars and locks of his hair where his now shiny bonce with a wide parting had made contact to many times, so a major task was to increase the headroom. This could only be achieved by lowering the floor, and as it was to be changed from cobbles to a suspended wooden floor there was quite a lot of excavating to do. In preparation for all the hard work that this would involve I decided to fit the new cellar window first and in such a way that it could be easily removed/replaced on a daily basis. This meant that bagged up spoil from the digging could be lifted up into the cellar window well in the front garden and thence away to wherever. Replacing the window was a nice straightforward job and was completed quickly.

In contemplating the next job; floor or ceiling, it occurred to me that as I am a bit on the short side it would be a good idea to deal with the ceiling first, because I could reach it more easily before lowering the floor, rather than afterwards, and it didn’t matter too much about the mess made on the cobbled floor in trashing the old ceiling. The original ceiling had a large ragged hole in one corner, which I presumed was made when central heating was installed because there were several newish looking copper pipes visible through it. I thought that would be as good a place as any to start pulling the old ceiling down. First things

first, temporarily remove the new window, done that, and now! Where are my crowbars? Ah! They're in the van, so I toddled off to get them, up the stairs and out of the front door into glorious October sunshine. It was a beautiful, quiet, windless and very warm autumn day, so I thought I'd have a cup of tea in the front garden first and get the tools afterwards. I was sitting on the doorstep sipping my tea when I heard a train on the railway line below.

It sounded like a goods train and for some unknown reason (Anoraknophobia) I cannot resist counting the number of trucks whenever a situation such as this occurs. I stood up so that I could see and counted 40, mostly hopper wagons. At that point in time it was a significant event, (yes, I know it's double sad) but a more sinister event was to follow later.

After the excitement of the goods train I sat down again to finish my tea and watched a shiny new dark red Range Rover pull up outside Mrs. Wilsons' house and out stepped a well dressed man with a brief case and a head loaded with Brylcreem. Ah! Yes, I thought to myself, yer actual slimy, creepy double-glazing salesman but what's the point, Mrs. Wilson has already got double-glazing. He didn't seem to notice or care as he walked up the path to the front door and rang the bell. He rang it several times and banged the knocker but there was no reply except for the yapping of Monty. I sat there and let him bang away for a few minutes, not really bothered by the fact that he was getting irritated and red in the face. Serve you right Globhead, I thought to myself. My experiences with a well-known double-glazing company had made me feel very bloody-minded towards slimy creepy salesmen. 'She is very hard of hearing' I shouted, 'I hope so' he shouted back. That's not very nice, I thought, but what else can you expect from a slimy etc. Whilst this was going on I was aware that Mrs. Wilsons' voice was wafting along through the tunnel from the back alley so, eventually, I thought to do the decent thing and let her know about the slimy creep at her front door. I wandered through the tunnel into the back gardens and saw her talking (shouting) to a neighbour over her garden fence. It took a little while to get her attention, yelling 'cooee! Mrs Wilson' just didn't work, but in the end the neighbour helped by pointing at me. 'Did you want me dear' she said. 'No, I don't, but there's a man at your front door who seems to want you rather desperately'. She looked at her watch and said 'Oh yes! That will be the hearing aid salesman,' and scurried off quickly. I laughed until I choked. Now, a long time afterwards it still makes me smile to think about it and it gives me the chuckles to actually put it into writing. But what came later still gives me the shivers. To be concluded next Xmas.

Come back, I'm only joking.

I went back to the job via the van to get my crowbars, shovel, rubble bags, dust mask and bits and bobs. In the cellar the sun was beaming warmly through the window opening and I was still laughing to myself as I stood in the corner where I planned to start pulling the ceiling down. What a perfect day, thought, the sun was shining, the job was going well and I had just had a good laugh. Yes, what a perfect day. And then it happened. Out of the corner of my eye I thought I saw the horse's head move. Of greater significance than what I thought I saw, was what I know I heard and felt. I heard the sleigh bells jangle, the aluminium foil rustle and I felt the temperature drop to a comparative freezing. Oooooerr!! Said Paul to himself. I kept a tight hold of the crowbar and walked slowly, very slowly, towards the horse's head. From the way it was positioned, it seemed have turned to look straight at me. The sun was still shining into the cellar but the air felt very cold. I nudged the head with the crowbar, it didn't move easily and that fact added further discomfort to the eerie feeling of the situation. I don't recall trying to form a rational explanation at the time but on reflection, later in the day, I wanted to think that it had just moved naturally of its' own accord without some unknown force acting on it. I did then, and still do, need convincing that this was the case. Perhaps it was the ghost of Shergar, was he buried under the floor? After a little while the temperature rose again, this was quite noticeable and I felt a bit more comfortable, so I looked around the cellar to try and find something, but goodness only knows what, that could have caused the event. There was no ectoplasm running down the walls, nor for that matter was there anything else that I could connect to the event that had just taken place. I can't remember how long it was before my attention returned to the job in hand, but eventually it did, and I went back to the hole in the ceiling where I planned to start work. I hooked the crowbar onto the broken edge of the hole and started pulling and levering at the ceiling. After a couple of pieces came down fairly easily I started using a second crowbar (yup! The ole two bar technique) and more ceiling came crashing down together with a house brick which must have been laying up there since the house was built. I quickly stepped aside to save me toeses and looked around to see if Shergars' head was laughing

at me. He wasn't. My earlier thoughts about it being a perfect day had by that time been completely blown away.

I started poking around again with the crowbars and saw another brick just waiting to drop on me. Never don't, I thought and reached up to remove it by hand. The brick turned out to be heavy leather clad box of brick size and colour. Again I turned round to look at Shergar, but thankfully he was totally unmoved by my find. So I started talking to him as I put the box down on his desk. There was a thought in my mind that this box, and the prospect of me finding it, was the reason that Shergar had come back to life, temporarily anyway. I questioned him about this but was relieved when he didn't respond.

The sense of anticipation as I opened the box was intense. It was full of jewellery; - gold and silver broaches, necklaces, bracelets and rings. I remember thinking that it must have been hidden for a long time because none of it looked new or modern. I needed a drink, a proper drink, and I seriously contemplated strolling along the road to the Coopers Arms, but then I thought that I couldn't leave the scene at such a time and settled for another cup of tea in the front garden instead. I really didn't know whether I was coming going or had just gone. I sat on the front doorstep sipping my tea. It was still a beautiful, quiet and warm day outside as I watched Globhead leave Mrs. Wilson's and drive away. She stood on her doorstep and started telling me about how much her hearing aid was going to cost (£800) but I wasn't really paying much attention, in fact I didn't even count the number of coaches of a train that went by. I went back down into the cellar and found everything as I left it, so I closed the box and put it in the desk drawer and then tried to mentally put together an explanation of the day's events for Charles and Nancy when they came home.

Nancy came home first and promptly came down into the cellar to see how things were going. Despite all the effort that I had given to thinking about how best to explain things I still found it hard to start. I was struggling for the right words to use when I sensed that she had asked me a question, but I can't remember what, and was waiting for an answer so I just bluntly asked her, 'is this house haunted?' The look on her face couldn't tell me anything because she immediately covered it with her hands and groaned 'I'm sorry Paul, we should have told you about Uncle Tommy when you first came to work here. I then got some explanation, not a lot, but more than I could figure out for myself earlier in the day.

Uncle Tommy! Who is Uncle Tommy? Well, it appears that when he was much younger James was known to talk to a man that only he could see. Apparently he would smile down on James from the walls of certain rooms in the house. James had told his parents that his name was Tommy, but nothing else was known about him despite researches into previous tenants and owners. There was no record of a Tom Thomas or Tommy with any connection to the house at all. His reasons for being there were therefore an even bigger mystery. A previous builder had said that he felt uncomfortable working there and declined to do any more at that house, hence I became the chosen one. Wasn't I lucky? Having got that out of the way I opened the desk drawer and took out the treasure chest. Nancy immediately recognised it and explained that they had hidden her collection of Victorian jewellery in the hole when they went away on holiday and had forgotten all about it.

HOOBLOODYRAY! At last, a rational explanation for something in my troubled day.

When Charles came home he got the whole thing chapter and verse, and just like me he nearly wept laughing about Mrs. Wilson and her visitor, but at the same time he did seem troubled by the news of Uncle Tommy's activities because Tommy had been dormant for some time. I later learned that Charles had a lot of problems that evening with his computer, which kept ejecting diskettes when he wasn't looking. I don't think that computers can actually do that of their own accord.

As I drove home that evening I felt quite apprehensive about the next day and more particularly looking further ahead, about excavating the cellar floor. (Do you remember: Quatermass and the Pit?) The scene now changes to my dining room in the evening. The meal had just finished so I told my tale. Could matters get worse? No, of course not. 'Do you not know what day it is?' asked Pat. I must have looked puzzled. So she told me. 'It's Halloween'. Do you want to know what I found when I dug up the cellar floor? I'll tell you in the next newsletter.

What A Flap by Roy Harman

My troubles started with a breakdown on an old injury of 1955/6. It was suggested that I return to the original hospital at East Grinstead “under warranty” to see what could be done.

The first remark from the surgeon when he saw the job was “I can do you a flap”. This would involve shifting flesh from my calf to my ankle, then covering the exposed place with a graft. “A quick job.” “Little delay.” “Ten days finished”. So I went for it. “GULP!”

The first step is being registered, filling in forms about what you eat, drink, take or smoke, and sign on the line that your body is no longer yours! This is every time a person in white, green, blue or stripes presents you with a sheet of paper. How could I forget my date of birth but by some magic recite my age? Is it the smell of the place? Or have I contracted something already – my name is on the arrivals board so they must know where I belong.

My berth is at the end of a coloured line painted on the corridor floor, negotiating a body on a trolley you have missed the turning, but don’t worry – they all stop at the toilets. The bay is found, with bed all very neat, obviously assembled by computerised robots – who else could lay sheets and blankets that sharp.

Now the trauma starts; what should I do? Stand by the bed? Sit on it? Or get in it? I chose the latter; at least I become part of the scenario. Benevolent, reverent and hostile persons now appear at the bedside, carrying an assortment of clipboards and tools. They ask your name, where you come from and confounded date of birth so you become older or younger, whichever way your brain is working. Marvels of technology are placed, strapped or stuck to your body on the parts of you last seen in the bath, giving all and sundry a digital read-out. There now comes a lull in proceedings whereupon one observes fellow sufferers. All seem worse than you and older; they must have been here for years.

I now explore my own bed as to what’s in it – there are clothes and sheets, varying from napkins to bath towels, some of the bed remind one of the roller towels in public lavatories. I think the folded over one is to go over your face if you are an early expirer. The bed is expensive (looks like a Volvo – all electric movement), you quickly realise this when trying out the remote controls. It is out of place here, it should be in my workshop as an ideal engine hoist. They keep on about the bed shortage. I don’t wonder if they are as posh as this. I would like to take this one home.

A distinct cacophony of china heralds the tea lady – milk/sugar? – “Sorry, we’ve only one spoon”, she says. About this time a gentle hum of voices announces the arrival of white-coated men and women (not painters, or Mr Whippy). Here comes that name, date of birth again. They check their sheets on clipboards and scientific words are exchanged. “No Breakfast” goes up on the bedside.

So you go all night thinking, will I want to go to the toilet, am I hungry, do I have to be shaved? Can’t sleep, shall I ask for something to make me sleep? If I do, will I miss what they do to me? You toss and turn all night to the sound of trolley wheels, bottles, doors, moans, groans and coughing. Come daylight you are shaken awake to strip off and put on an artists gown without its back, dislocating your shoulders doing up the tapes. Now is the time when you reflect on whether you should have had more insurance. Trying to relax, macho and brave, another check for date of birth, any allergies etc. It’s all on the wristband. ‘Allo! ‘Allo! I haven’t got one. Panic, then see it on my stockinged foot. Perhaps they are going to do me upside down!

I prefer to ignore the next stage by asking for a pre-med, so partake of the sleeping tablets, not like the old way with pentathol: From this “peace at any price” sleep the metamorphosis happens and one awakes to the dimly lit world connected to your own refinery!

First, check under the sheet. Nothing missing. No pain. So let's go home. Where's my posh bed? Question time again, that's my name somebody is calling, "How do you feel?" Well, I need some sleep so let them find out, it's their party, not mine. I've been "done"!

Returning to the ward I try to be friendly with the other three patients. "Hello". No response. "All right then?" – vacant look. "Nice day" – a silent response. "Get lost then!" I should explain that one person was stone deaf; the others couldn't speak because of surgery! That's plastic surgery at its best. During the day bods come and go and so do the patients. I feel as if I have been here months, but it's only hours since I came in.

This bed rest is okay except they say it would be best to lie on one side. I comply with instructions but with one leg raised lying on your side gives one the insecure feeling of pitching overboard so I give it a miss. Realising the reason for this posture two days later, I explore the space-age bed and discover a side rail pops up at the touch of a button, which is a great help. Why did no-one tell me?

My consultant has quite a reputation that is not always reflected in his entourage of followers. He creeps into the ward at anytime unannounced, sometimes dressed for Ascot/gardening, footwear from golf shoes to white wellies, cloth cap/gown from the choppers. When he comes on his own I become his entourage giving the same "tut-tuts", "oohs" and "ahs", like they do. Very reassuring, I think, for him or me, I hope. This is my fifth day cocked up, so I am devising an engineering method of one leg on the bed elevated, negotiating the edge onto a commode. This should require a tape measure, as the gap twixt bed and commode has to be equal to my inside leg measurements. Its possible elevation could be the greatest obstacle before and after, which has already been experienced. For the benefit of those persons unfamiliar I pass over the design of the high-tech recycled paper bedpan, "made in Taiwan", obviously because Asians are smaller built! And risk this delicate movement without undue mishap, much to my relief!

From this time the days dragged by with jabs and pills being the excitement of the day, till told I could start lowering my legs and start to learn to use crutches. I would like to mention here that I believe "Health and Safety" is non-existent in the NHS with polished wet floors and trailing electric wires from technical equipment, so I started looking at the adverts of "No Win, No Fee" solicitors. Just in case! I managed to survive till I was discharged home into the hands of the District Nurse. I have my flap okay, but now I must learn to walk again.

Canadian Wing Number Two at the Queen Victoria Hospital has just been built to a deluxe standard. The staff, and catering service, was excellent. Having been a customer of both Wing One and Wing Two, I hope they will carry on with this standard and reputation into the future.

Finally, can anyone invent Surgical Polyfilla? It would save a lot of time and money by D.I.Y.!

September 2001.

COMPUTERS CAN GET SICK *by Ed Nutter*

Computers are wonderful things you know, they make modern life much easier and less stressful. One can see how much money there is left in the Bank, pay bills without having to address envelopes, stick on stamps and walk to the post box. You can even view albums of pictures you have taken without the need to get out cumbersome slide projectors and screens. When one is bored, one can play cards and games. You can even go flying. I frequently do a trip to Amsterdam! However computers can get sick and when they do, as I recently discovered, they can cause many problems and waste many hours trying to cure them.

My computer recently caught a virus. The virus was quite a pretty little thing really, rather like a small hairy spider, but brightly coloured and with shorter legs. I'm not sure how he got into my computer, but he certainly made a mess of many of my files and systems, which he entwined with his webs. To cap it all he then started sending out E-mails to all and sundry. For all I know everyone now knows all my intimate details.

I am intrigued to know how he got into my computer. I didn't think the house was that dirty. However I then remembered that we had recently had some decorating done and I remember on lifting the carpet tiles, many strange insects were discovered beneath. I suspect that our virus originated from here.

I didn't want to hurt him, but he was causing too much havoc so he had to go. This was however easier said than done. It seemed an almost impossible job trying to search him out from all those cables, electrical components, circuit boards etc.

I did wonder whether to give the computer case a good thumping hoping he would run out leaving the cats to do the rest. Alternatively I wondered whether to go to PC World and get a course of computer antibiotics. The first idea I discounted fearing that I could damage electrical components, the second idea was also not favoured due to the nearest store being some distance to travel.

Fortunately help came from a learned friend who told me to put in a plastic saucer like thing, a 'CD' I think he called it. He explained that this would sterilise my computer restoring it to new condition. I tried this following his instructions and hey presto my computer shined like new and the sweet little virus had gone – so had many of my files!!!!

Not being content with contaminating my computer, he then attacked my wife's. Now her computer is far more complex and I am sure he was delighted to nestle himself within the complexity of her systems.

An alternative to the silver plastic disc was sought and both my wife and I are indeed very grateful to a very learned computer expert who was able to call in remedies from the USA. Procedures had to be followed very carefully, but our naughty virus was soon eradicated and both our computers are now operating again normally.

Another lesson learned. One must regularly update the computer antibiotic system.

Not for general consumption...a bit like their lunchtime spuds! This article is sent to the MAFIA (Maidstone And Friends Interesting Activities) only – a possible track to visit on our holiday in 2002.

HI DE HI HADY HILL

The autumn Southern Federation Rally 2001 was taking place at Chesterfield Track in Derbyshire, on Saturday 16th September. We took a last minute decision to go, bearing in mind next year the M.M.E.S. holiday was going to the county and feeling it would be nice to check out one of the possible tracks. Feeling that the rest of the gang had more sense than to contemplate a 400-mile round trip in one day, we went alone. We left at 7-40am and with one short loo stop on the M1, arrived in Chesterfield just after 10-30. The church with the crooked spire was clearly visible, as we climbed Hady Hill and drove into St Peter and St Paul school grounds, where the Club was situated.

Trees surround their site, where the two tracks are situated. There is a 900 foot ground level track for 5” and 7 ¼” gauges, which surrounds the 1100 foot elevated double loop track for 3 ½” and 5” gauges, all rail being steel. The first thing we noticed was IT WAS BLEEDIN’ COLD. The northerly winds cut through the site like whirling knives, despite the greenery around us that blocked any views and you would think would provide shelter. Sunlight occasionally but briefly filtered through the waving branches. I decided I needed a hot drink filtering through me. Checked out the Clubhouse, expecting breakfast to be served as it was a weekend affair (with caravan and camping apparently in the field next door), but they hadn’t even got the tea going yet despite there being quite a few people around. What’s more, you had to pay thirty pence a cup for coffee or tea, despite the occasion, which I felt was rather steep.

As we hadn’t got a trolley with us, we initially decided to run on the ground level track, but as on the points the so-called sixty feet radius meant the radius became only thirty feet, this was not feasible, so the elevated track won the day. As there were only six steaming bays and these were filling up fast, we quickly unloaded. However, at this track they run clockwise, and had to turn Lord President round. Fox also had to with his (this took an additional three ganged) but was achieved with much trouble.

We then had to sign a list of conditions for running. These such clauses as “I confirm I am water and steam in my loco at all statement I felt a bit bold for on a strange track (the steam bit and if your boiler suddenly you couldn’t, did they sue? The chap brandishing the paper is that all their drivers had to be stopped myself quipping what

Another clause was: “I have signed the Visitors Book in the Clubhouse”. I refrained from telling them it was obvious nearly everyone wouldn’t have done that yet because they’d unload their engines in the steaming bays first and anyway there was no point in going into the Clubhouse when there wasn’t any food and drink ready. I stomped off to see if hot drinks were eventually available, and to put on every available layer of clothing I could find in the car, even though I then resembled Michelin Man.

While Martin steamed up, I took a ride round the track with David Mayall to find out what it was like. What can you say? Well, if you’re caught in conversation in the station but want to get away, no problem, just let the brake go and you’re off, gaining considerable speed, without any need to open the regulator. You grind to a halt just before going under a bridge, which, if you were more than six feet tall and sitting upright, would decapitate you. Such is the climb the other side of the bridge, all on a bend, that if you haven’t had a good run at it, then you won’t manage it.



therefore we (as Mike Britannia) men (presumably without too

terms and include able to keep times” ; some driver anyway) leaked so Chesterfield proudly took certificated for, sanity’

I'm not kidding when I say I mean both gauges of engines. Most 3 1/2" locos barely managed it (some didn't) and even the 5" ones often struggled. A good run at it would be easier if: 1) there wasn't a signal just before the bridge and, 2) a nasty kink in the track just before the signal. Possibly the idea for a fairground roller coaster ride here was conceived here. At the top of the steep climb you go under a footbridge and then through a curved tunnel, the tunnel being almost claustrophobic with its limited clearance. Continuing round the bend the track is then slightly downhill, running parallel to the first loop, over instead of under the first bridge, and round past the steaming bay into the covered station.

We had to use the Club trolleys, back to front, these being fitted with runaway brakes only due to the slope from the station, and with uncomfortable wooden bits at the front (or back) to cause maximum pain and discomfort to you legs. Unlike our society, they advocated a separate driving trolley for drivers usually. We found that we were expected, not requested, to carry passengers for them through out the day, and that the passengers were charged fifty pence each for two circuits. I was tempted to tell them to give us back a couple of the quid we'd raised for them so that we could afford their food and drinks.



I took a couple of digital pictures and some video around the track, but the freezing wind and odd spot of rain somewhat dampened my enthusiasm. A one stage Martin was being pushed by a Chesterfield member on foot up the notorious bank because the trolley brakes kept jamming on being back to front, having two trolleys and being heavily laden. These trolleys were sorted out when he got back to the station. I then had a few circuits driving, although I never, ever, got a clear run through the station, although the track was never overcrowded. This, though, wasn't due to any organisation by the Society, but simply the

numbers visiting weren't huge. Knowing the Club probably put off potential visitors. My legs were soon killing me, so I suggested we bring the loco off for lunch, and I hobbled into the steaming bays where we left the engine in a team and sitting quietly.

Arriving in the Clubhouse at 1-30, the jacket potatoes were all gone. I suggested they take down the blackboard advertising them then. The lady apologised, said they'd taken ages, and that then they were overdone and almost inedible. Looking at one being consumed nearby, she wasn't kidding. It resembled a rock from the Peak District. We settled instead for an under-filled, over-riced roll each and a cup of tea. It was nice to be in the warm, and to be fair, the catering staff were working hard with a good selection of cakes (no good to my man), but the prices bugged me, particularly given the bitter weather, and the fact they charged for tea, and never brought any out to those on the track who were earning them revenue. I



felt it was a cheek. Not everyone there had a wife to fetch and carry for them (or to tell them “get it yourself!”) Outside, every so often someone trundled by on the ground level track, but they did seem to be out of event somewhat. There was a junk stall selling bits nobody wanted, not even model engineers. The site really was limited in every way although they had made good use of the space they had, you certainly wouldn’t be able to drive a bus in. The toilets were situated a short distance outside the Club facilities, being children’s due to the nearby school, and therefore bringing out the limbo dancer tendency in the men.

After our limited lunch we went back to the steaming bays so see if Lord President was simmering in steam nicely or had the fire gone out. It was halfway between the two, so we turned up the blower and let the engine decide if it wanted another run. It obviously felt that as it had come so far it ought to make the effort, so the fire recovered. I threatened Martin that we needed to leave the track at a reasonable time, as we wanted to be home before it was too dark. So he took just one trolley and I was passenger some of the time, as we didn’t feel too inclined to passenger haul Joe Public. I went to get more tea, and was flattered to find they were selling bundles of Model Engineers and one bundle had the copy on top where I was cover girl. The woman in charge said lots of people had pointed to it, but no, she had not been inundated with money or offers for it. My pride fell. At three thirty I ordered a not too reluctant Martin off the track, and asked an obliging John Walker from Birmingham to move his beautiful model of the Princess of Wales so that we could have the prime steaming bay for loading.



Mike Fox was also ready to load early, having a similar opinion of the track and club trolleys. I also knew that we would know if Lord President was in for the Australia Award, as we’d be stopped loading if so. We were fairly certain not, as a season’s wear and tear was showing on the P2, with the varnish running, a boiler band incomplete and a couple of other bits and pieces not right – winter works needed. We’d spotted a Jersey Lily with beautiful paintwork when we arrived, and thought this would win – which it did.

We stayed long enough to see the presentation, and I’m sure Martin’s loco was in the three or four considered, but that wasn’t our aim in attending the rally. It still kept trying to rain, and so just before four thirty we decided to head for home. By seven thirty we were home, cosy and warm indoors.

Sue Parham
September 2001.

