

BEECH HURST NEWS



MY CLUB

Sussex Miniature Locomotive Society

In the first of our new series Andrew describes the club he's been part of for almost three decades, inspiring him to build his own locos and to help others to do so.

BY ANDREW BROCK

Just over 70 years ago, a small group of local model engineers sought a location for a new mixed gauge track somewhere between the south coast city of Brighton and South London. The location they found was at Beech Hurst in the market town of Haywards Heath, some 12 miles due north of the coast and just over 20 miles south of London boundary.

At that time in 1951, the town of Haywards Heath was under the control of the Cardfield Urban District Council and laid to the west of far more Heath owned by the Yapp family had been bequeathed to the people of the town. The area grand house at the front of the estate (Photo 1) was largely detached and the grounds partially levelled to accommodate recreational use including horse grass, a croquet lawn and miniature railway.

With plans in place, a new club called the Sussex Miniature Locomotive Society was formed and work began on an approximate 1/2 mile long raised level track (Figure 1). This would accommodate both 7 1/2 inch and 5 inch gauge locomotives. Occupying an elevated south-facing position, the railway sits about 300 feet above sea level and with fine views towards the South Downs.

The original track of 1951 was constructed by means of wooden beams supported brick pillars with wooden sleepers and dominant rail. The 5 inch gauge was completed first according to the public in May 1951 (Photo 2). Model engineering here were located nearest to the clubhouse which at that time was a converted and slightly extended former estate outbuilding with few facilities.

Shoestring operation
During the early years, the fledgling SMLS was kept by using loans from passenger tables as well as donations from members to make ends meet. This would not be the club's standard if the club was poor. It was however

FIGURE 1: The original 1951 layout in 1951

FIGURE 2: Beech Hurst house in the grounds of which the SMLS was established.

PHOTO 1: Beech Hurst house in the grounds of which the SMLS was established.

PHOTO 2: Model engineering here were located nearest to the clubhouse which at that time was a converted and slightly extended former estate outbuilding with few facilities.

PHOTO 3: Shoestring operation

60 APRIL 2022 ENGINEERING IN MINIATURE www.model-engineering-press.co.uk

Cover picture: -

In Print: A few months ago the committee agreed for an article to be published in EiM magazine to kick off a new series called 'My Club'. The article appears in the latest edition of EiM, together with a nice overall cover picture...

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Editor's Notes

As I finalise this latest edition of the newsletter, we are on the eve of hopefully our first full season for 3 years. The weather forecast is looking pretty good for the Easter weekend and the running book gradually filling up, so fingers crossed for a fine start to 2022. In addition and more encouraging has been interest from another potential junior member who I have arranged to meet on Good Friday. Let's hope he will be another future member. Despite all that has passed us by over the last couple of years, the appeal of the club has seemingly not dwindled and we have welcomed many new members. At a time when it would be easy to look back, we should now be looking forward and to a fresh start.

Since the last newsletter, we have held our AGM at Beech Hurst and following on from that, preparations have been underway for the new season. Some of the committee and positions within the club have changed since last year, and with that aforementioned fresh start, we are looking at ways to take the club forward for each and every member in the most positive way possible. So, if you have any comments / feedback, please speak with one of the Committee when we are at the club and we will take ideas / suggestions forward for consideration.

I have kept this newsletter brief but will produce a fuller edition at the beginning of May to report on our progress as the season opens...

Andrew B

Chairman's Notes

Dear friends and fellow members, firstly I should thank you not only for selecting me to be a Committee member of our great and historic society but in having the confidence in me to stand as Chairman. To say I was surprised would be an understatement, but I am aware of the challenge ahead and difficulties that my predecessors had.

I am sure you will join me in thanking Mike Wakeling & Adam Cro for their work in leading the club over the last couple of difficult years. I know that for me the newsletters were something I looked forward to and I am sure helped those of us who were in lockdown to stay relatively sane. A huge amount of work went into them from many members, Mike & Lorema Wakeling in particular.

As the new Chairman, I will serve you to the best of my ability, and in the interests of our club and railway for as long as you allow me to do so. My key aims will be to ensure that everyone can express their views without being closed down and to encourage, through our collective friendliness, more enthusiasts to join us. Without members that we can engage, keep and encourage to take responsibility for our club, our future will be uncertain. We desperately need more volunteers to keep the railway running.

I have been told on more than one occasion by members during my relatively short membership, that they feel our club is facing a crisis. Infighting in the past has made some feel they had to leave the club and others have considered leaving. Losing members, their time, efforts, skills and knowledge harms all of us, and harms the club, putting its future at risk. We must work together, putting old differences aside if we are to survive.

We are all passionate about our club and its history. This is important and will help us to be successful in the future. We all have views about how it should be run and we all have different reasons for our interest in the club. The rest of the Committee and I welcome your ideas, but the Committee may not be able to please everyone all of the time, much as we might want to. We may have to make difficult decisions which may not be popular with everyone. Please speak to us if you have any concerns or ideas. We don't pretend to have all the answers and we need your support in order that we all succeed. If we don't hear your ideas and concerns in person, we are unable to consider them and then act to resolve them.

The Committee and I are keen to encourage younger members. They are our future. Please do all you can to support them. We have several younger members in key positions to give them the experience they will need in the future to run the club when we are too ancient to keep doing all we used to do. We need to be positive, supportive and generous with our time whilst allowing them to learn and grow to make their own decisions.

We must encourage new members. Please be as welcoming as you have been to me. Not everyone is outgoing and joining a new club can be daunting. Please openly and constantly offer your help and generosity of spirit. In the near future we will be offering pre-booked workshop training sessions where you can obtain advice or learn skills to help you with your own projects. More details will follow, but if you are interested please speak to any of the Committee members. Training will be taking place, beginning on Good Friday, to train new Traffic Controllers. Sam Hope has been a stalwart as Traffic Controller for a long time but it is only fair that he is given the opportunity to drive trains too. If you would like to help in this area, please speak to one of our Operations Managers, Andrew Brock or Sam Hope, or any of the Committee to arrange training.

We have a new season ahead of us and our first public running day will be on Good Friday. Covid-19 is still with us but thankfully vaccinations have helped to reduce the effects of this virus. Having said this, I know that some may be nervous about public running. The Committee are keen to ensure that everyone feels safe, and will keep distancing and cleaning regimes in place at the station and when loading trains. If you have concerns, please speak to the Committee members so that we can address them.

In accordance with the decision made at the AGM, Saturdays will be our main running days this year. The main concern being that there are not enough volunteers to operate on Sundays as well. Also, in accordance with the AGM decision, we will look at running on an ad-hoc basis on Sundays depending on the number of volunteers available, to ensure that we can operate safely. We also intend to invite other clubs to run on Sundays and will be monitoring this to ensure that the track is kept at a high standard for our own running.

We intend, with the help of a new track management team, that more running of smaller locomotives will be possible. Members that volunteer to help with maintenance and running of the club will have priority. If you would like to run your locomotive, please contact the Committee members. We will help you to find a role that you will enjoy and that will enable the club to flourish in the long term.

You will be fully supported and will be part of a wider team. Roy Preston has managed the maintenance of the track for many years. Our raised track is acknowledged as one of, if not the best, in the country. Roy stood down from this role but is assisting in finding a team to take over. He will continue to mentor and support the team as they find their feet. I have already spoken to some members about these roles but if you would like to help in this fun and flexible role please let the Committee members know. We would particularly like to hear from younger members. I am sure you will join me in humbly thanking Roy for his sterling work.

In my time at SMLS I have come to love it. Like any family it has occasional squabbles but together we can and will make it the fun club that we want it to be. I can honestly say that every day I spend at the club is a joy and I have found a friendly welcome each time I visit. Please take a few moments to consider why you joined, what you want from the club, what you would like to do, and how you can help us to provide what you would like. I urge you to join the regular volunteers and make SMLS the club everyone wants to be a member of.

Andrew E

In Print

A few months ago, the editor of Engineering in Miniature asked whether SMLS would like to kick off a new monthly feature called 'My Club', which aims to showcase model engineering clubs across the UK, written from the perspective of a club member. As such, the Committee agreed for me to pen a potted history about 'my club' SMLS, which has just been published in the latest edition of EiM. Hopefully the article will generate interest and the money that I have been paid for compiling this will be donated to SMLS, along with the sale of the items from Brian Joyce, for a future project. I hope you enjoy reading the article...

Andrew B

YouTube Channel

After the last edition of the newsletter, I received an e-mail from one of our new members William Ayerst. Having recently moved to Haywards Heath, William was keen to join Beech Hurst but due to Covid-19 his application was held up. During the intervening time, William started to put together a workshop at home and has been working on a project to build a 'Maid of Kent'. As part of the project he has set up a YouTube channel to show some of his work and which can be found at the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ci81aifVqJw&list=PL3a8dr5xB8bsH0UuGdXbkXNFhZm9H5Bxe>

Hopefully the 'Maid of Kent' project will progress and in the future the locomotive will grace the track at Beech Hurst.

Andrew B

Election of 'Officers' and 'Other' Positions for 2022

At the first Committee meeting following the AGM, members are elected to fill the 'Officer's' & other 'Working' positions within the Club, this list is for 2022:

President: Ray Parsons

Vice-Presidents: Geoff West & Val West

Chairman: Andrew Ellis

Vice-Chairman: Vacant

Secretary: Andrew Brock

Minutes Secretary: Andrew Brock

Treasurer: Graham Miller

Other Committee Members in Addition to the Above Officer's:

Harry Shopland & Steve Turner

Operations Managers: Andrew Brock & Sam Hope

Assistance Operations Manager: Harry Shopland & Sam Ridley

Signals Engineer: Graham Mundy

Assistant Signals: Harry Shopland

Workshop Manager: Steve Turner

Assistant Workshop: Steve Steer

House Manager: Val West

Catering Manager: Val West

Stores Managers: Nick Edwards & Steve Steer

Librarian: Stephen Hutton

Assistant Librarian: Ray Parsons

Newsletter Editor: Andrew Brock

Boiler Consultant: John Richardson

Boiler Coordinator: Steve Turner

Boiler Inspectors: Mike Porter, John Richardson, Steve Turner & Geoff West

Custodians of Wharfedale: Nick Edwards, Daniel Evans & Harry Shopland

Assistant Custodian: Sam Ridley

Custodian of LNER Tank: Steve Steer

Custodian of Club Electric Locomotives: Sam Hope

Club Electric Locomotives (Technical): Graham Mundy

Carriage Valeters: Sam Hope, Graham Mundy & Sam Ridley

Webmaster: Andrew Strongitharm

Clubhouse Cleaner: Mike Porter

Track Manager / Maintenance: Vacant (maintenance scheduled by Committee)

Truck Manager / Maintenance: Andrew Brock

Gardening Coordinator: Vacant

Exhibition Coordinators: John Baldwin & Andrew Brock

Facebook Administrators: Adam Cro & Nick Edwards

Data Production Coordinator: John Baldwin

Person of Significant Control (Companies House Register): Andrew Brock

Any changes to the above will be communicated through the newsletter.

Committee

Operations for 2022

Tomorrow, Good Friday 2022, marks the start of our first full season for 3 years. Aside some of the ad-hoc days during the summer of 2021, this will be our first taste of proper passenger hauling since the end of September 2019, which seems such a long time ago.

With the future in mind, we have a young Operations team for 2022 and I hope you will support us as we try to take the club forward and a fresh start. It is really important that younger members gain experience, so they themselves can take on the responsibility in the future; after all we were there once.

As you will have read in the Chairman's Notes, we will operate mainly on Saturdays, as well as Bank Holidays and Wednesdays during the school summer holidays with a revised fare of £2 per person. In addition, we will also run on other ad-hoc days as volunteers permit and will aim to invite a number of visiting clubs during the season to run on a Sunday. For those members who may wish to run on a day other than those listed above, please feel free to contact a member of the Committee or myself as Secretary and we will do our best to accommodate all requests for fun running or otherwise.

For those members who may require a boiler test, a sheet has been placed on the notice board in the clubhouse with due dates for each locomotive. If you are unsure of your boiler test status, please consult this sheet or check with a boiler inspector to make sure your locomotive is in ticket. Many boiler tickets will have lapsed over the last 2 years, so there will be quite a number of re-tests due.

In terms of lockers, the Committee has decided that in line with previous years, the occupier of each locker will be required to undertake 6 runs per season in order to maintain occupancy of the locker. We have also agreed a hybrid option for 2022, whereby owners who only wish to drive will have to undertake their 6 runs, however if preferred, they may run their locomotive a minimum of 4 times and top up the other 2 turns with a Station Master or Traffic Controller. We will see how this works for 2022 and review again at the end of the running season. If you have any questions then please feel free to contact a Committee member.

Fingers crossed our 2022 season will be the beginning of a brighter future after the last 2 years and through these pages we look forward to welcoming all our new members to Beech Hurst where we can showcase the operational side of the railway, which many of you will have yet to see, here's to 2022...

Andrew B

Forthcoming & Diary of Events

Future diary dates will be published in the next edition of the newsletter, which I plan to bring out after the May Day Bank Holiday weekend...

NB. Certain events may be organised at short notice and will not therefore appear in the newsletter. Please check white / notice boards in the clubhouse for details of such events.

Andrew B