

RAILWAY MODELLERS



Chris Harrop's fictitious narrow gauge layout, featuring period vehicles in the station car park, in a nod to the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway in Devon

# Train gang steams ahead on skills journey

**Geoff Evans and Chris Harrop** reveal the intricate process of designing and building layouts and locos at Aston Clinton u3a's Railway Modellers Group

**B**uilding a model railway requires a lot of skills, from historical research to carpentry and painting. The Railway Modellers Group at Aston Clinton u3a in Buckinghamshire was established more than 12 years ago and is still going strong today.

The 10 members model in various scales and gauges. As most of the layouts cannot be moved, each person takes turns to host a meeting every month. It is good to see what other members have been up to and also set deadlines to get a particular job done before your turn to host a meeting comes around.

Railway modelling is a very broad church, covering many skills and talents. For example, you will need to do some geographical research to decide where the railway you are modelling is located. It could be in this country or abroad. What era – post-1830, of course – is your model set in? This will lead to some historical research.

You will need to learn some carpentry skills to construct the baseboard on which your model will be built. It could be a fixed structure in a spare room or attic. Or it could be portable, as many model railways are shown at exhibitions.

What will be the setting for your railway? It could be a station in a town or in the countryside, by a canal or dock, or a factory/works/quarry setting. You will also need to design this.

Members develop craft skills to build the scenery using various materials including polystyrene, cardboard, wire mesh and Plaster of Paris. When you start to build the railway, you will need to design the layout of the track and points, either based on an actual location or a fictional plan.

Knowledge of low-voltage electrics is required to design the various circuits to power the track, operate the points, signals and so on, and the necessary wiring involved.

You can make your locomotives, wagons, coaches and buildings either from kits or from scratch. Then there is the artistic side of painting the scenery, as well as the technical side of correctly decorating locomotives rolling stock.

Each of the above can be the specific



Clockwise from left: A live-steam locomotive on an outdoor railway; members at their annual summer lunch; Geoff Evans' dockside scene featuring coal and slate as it might have appeared on the Corris Railway in Wales; Keith Robinson tackles a Hornby kit; and Geoff's fictional 1900 street featuring a flour mill



reason for building a model railway but other parts of the hobby are often involved. For example, you can be interested in locomotives and collect or build quality models, but if you want to see them running you have to get involved in planning and building a track. You may be interested in making buildings, but how much better will they look if sited on a layout with a context?

One part of the hobby tends to lead to another. Some modellers even go so far as to draw up a timetable to operate (not 'play with', you will note) their railway.

Model railways are fictional but based on historical facts. Most are long-term projects built over many years, with members joining model railway groups to acquire the skills needed. Famous model railway fans include Rod Stewart, Jools Holland and Pete Waterman.

## Why do we do it? Who knows! There are many reasons

Railway modelling scales in this country have historically been ratios of millimetres to one foot. The smaller scales, up to 7mm, modelled in our group are indoor layouts with the engines obtaining electrical power through the two rails.

Four of our members have larger-scale outdoor railways – two are powered by electricity from the rails and the other two use independent power either from on-board batteries or by live steam.

Why do we do it? Who knows! There can be as many reasons as there are modellers. With some people, it stems from childhood, either from playing with trains or perhaps trainspotting or wanting to capture the look of days gone by.

For others, it is about recreating stunning engineering, or the thrill of operating model trains.

One of the most detailed model railway landscapes is on show at Pendon Museum in Oxfordshire ([pendonmuseum.com](http://pendonmuseum.com)), which is one man's way of preserving the countryside he saw in England in the 1920s and 1930s.

Very few of us have the skills to create our own Pendon – but we can try.

**Are you a model railway enthusiast? Send your details and photos to [tam.editor@u3a.org.uk](mailto:tam.editor@u3a.org.uk)**