

the ditchlight #157

the newsletter of the thameside sub-division, nmra british region

march 2026



From the Head End Part 1

From the Editor

I guess this is the final format for The Ditchlight. In this issue you will find an article by Lance Mindheim taken from his latest newsletter, with his kind permission. It just proves that if you don't ask.....

Cover Photo: BNSF SD70MACs #8907 and #9518 pound uphill at Belmont over Crawford Hill, NE in September 2003 with a southbound Powder River coal train.

Mike Arnold, Editor - email: tunnelmotor@tiscali.co.uk



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From the Head End Part 2: From the Chairman

Happy new year and welcome to the first Ditchlight of 2026.

Since the last issue we have had our AGM and Christmas lunch at the Green Dragon at Youngs End near Braintree. We had a very enjoyable meal and social get together. We were very pleased to see Rai Fenton, Allen Sewell and Mike Arnold, who due to distance or circumstances cannot get to many of our St Osyth meets.

Also in December Paul Harman, Chris James, and myself attended the inaugural Clacton Train Show organised by Dawn Quest and Grumpy. Paul and Chris looked after the N gauge D'Ikea Kato Dioramas while I manned the NMRA stand. American outline layouts were well represented by Geeksville an HO layout depicting a locomotive maintenance facility and Hells Glen an N gauge layout depicting a power station and coal mine linked by a ninety degree curved viaduct crossing Hells Glen. There were approximately eight hundred visitors to the show which was very good for any event of this size especially noteworthy as this was the first show in Clacton. We

had a steady flow of visitors to the NMRA stand and the D'Ikea Kato Dioramas exhibit, with children showing a particular interest. We gave out quite a few Thamesider leaflets which led to a few members of the public and a couple of past members visiting us at St Osyth in January.

Dawn plans to hold the show again in 2026 where I hope Thamesiders will be able to exhibit a layout.

Our Open House will be on Saturday 16th May this year with set up Friday evening from 5pm. This is also the Region's summer event. We will have the N and HO Modular layouts, a T-Trak exhibit, Orwell Models/Coastal DCC, the Regional Library and the NMRA stand. As well as cakes we also hope to offer some hot snacks such as burgers.

The Region will be having a stand at the London Festival of Railway Modelling. So please visit if you are attending the show, or better still volunteer to help man it. Get in touch with Peter Borchers vicepresident@nmrabr.org.uk if you are able to help.

In October we are co-hosting the British Region Convention with Seaboard Southern. You can find more details of this elsewhere in this issue.

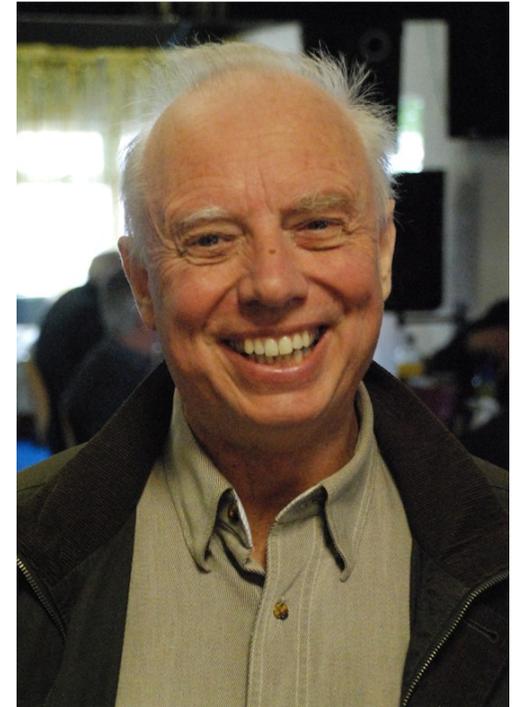
We round off the year in November hosting a Quiz Night at St Osyth village hall. More details on this later in the year.

I have finished the repairs/improvements to the Reversing Loop and have gone back to working on the Urban scene on another reversing loop. I hope to bring this to St Osyth later in the year. I also need to go through my stock boxes to replace missing couplers and wheels.

That's it for now hope to see you at St Osyth on the 14th March, earlier than usual due to maintenance work being done in village hall which also means there will not be a meet at St Osyth during April. However there will be Zoom Meets in March and April where we will be able to discuss any issues regarding the Open House.

David

6 March 2026



Note to all

Please note it is now NMRA membership time - you should have received your Roundhose for March/April with renewal prompt on the envelope by the address panel. Please log onto the Region website and chose your option:

<https://www.nmrabr.org.uk/amember/signup>

THAMESIDERS NEWS

UPCOMING MEET DATES ETC

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NEXT FIVE MEETS

SATURDAY 14 MARCH 2026

Physical Meet at St Osyth. Usual timings but please be there from the start to help set up the layouts. It always takes longer than hoped for and the more hands make lighter work.



SATURDAY 28 MARCH 2026

Virtual Meet at 10..00am. Watch for an e-mail from David Ammon with log on details/weblink.

APRIL 2026

No physical Meet as hall is under repair

SATURDAY 25 APRIL 2026

Virtual Meet at 10..00am. Watch for an e-mail from David Ammon with log on details/weblink.

SATURDAY 5 MAY 2026

Virtual Meet at 10..00am. Watch for an e-mail from David Ammon with log on details/weblink.

FRIDAY/SATURDAY 15/16 MAY 2026

Open house weekend. Watch e-mails for set up instructions.

DATES FOR THE REST OF 2026

As a general trend all meetings will be on the 2nd and 4th Saturday of each month so as not to clash with Region's "Brew & Natter" sessions on the 1st and 3rd Saturdays. Virtual meets are on second weekend and physical at St Osyth on the fourth, unless otherwise posted. The latest 2026 dates were circulated by Alan Sewell on 2 November. Please delete all earlier versions.

Thamesiders
Model Railroad Group

Presents our

Summer Open House

St. Osyth, Essex

16 May 2026 (10am - 3:30pm)

St. Osyth Village Hall, Clacton Road, St. Osyth,
Clacton-on-Sea, CO16 8PE

In conjunction with NMRA British Region Summer Meet
Supported by Coastal DCC and Orwell Model Railways

Admission, tea, coffee, and cake with donations. The hall is accessible for wheelchairs.

Featuring:
Bring and buy (as well as traders listed above)
Both HO and N Scale Modular layouts with
Lynneton Yard HO shunting puzzle, D'Ikeakato Dioramas,
and T-Trak demonstration boards.

The hall is accessible via public transport however parking is available on site or the nearest side street, Longfields.

this summer with the Thamesiders MRG

thamesidersmrg.org.uk

REGION NEWS

EVENTS ON 2026

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Winter Meet 2026

At the Annual General Meeting in Derby it was announced that because the hall hire costs at Stokenchurch had been increased substantially for 2026, the local team has decided that there will be NO Winter Meet 2026.

For the future Region will be looking for a group to find a suitable venue and offer to stage the event. Could there be a return to Benson in 2027 - the coldest place in England on occasions.....????

Spring Meet 2026

Mech Models in Burton-on-Trent will be hosting the Spring Meet 2026 at their premises. See the flyer on next page. The dates are 25/26 April - see opposite.

Summer Meet 2026

As last year Thamesiders will be hosting an Open day on Saturday 16 May, earlier than last year to avoid Bank Holidays and Summer day tripper traffic to Clacton. The venue will be the Village Hall in St Osyth, Essex. More details in later issues.

Region Convention 2026

The same team that put on the 2024 Convention in Cookham is doing a repeat performance at the same venue, the Chartered Institute of Marketing, in 2026 on Friday, Saturday and Sunday 23-25 October 2026. "Berkshire Returns" is its name.

Plans are well advanced for the same combination of layouts, traders, demonstrations and clinics including a return of "Modeling With The Masters®" with some new exciting subjects to enhance your modelling skills. There will again be a guest speaker at the Saturday night awards dinner. See David Ammon's article on pages that follow, including photos from the 2024 event.

The flyer features two American flags at the top corners. In the center is a logo for 'MECH MODELS' with a steam locomotive illustration. Below the logo, the text reads 'Americana Open Weekend (In conjunction with Black Diamonds) Sat. 25th & Sun. 26th April 2026 10am to 5pm Sat. 10am to 4pm Sun.' There are two photographs: one of a model railway layout and another of a trading table with people. Text below the photos lists 'Layouts Traders Refreshments Free Parking' and '£3 Entry (includes a Tea or Coffee) Children must be supervised at all times'. At the bottom, there is a photograph of a yellow Union Pacific locomotive and the text 'Venue: MECH MODELS (a division of MECHATRONICS International Ltd)'. Contact information is provided at the very bottom: 'Unit 9, Lancaster Park, Newborough Road, Needwood, Burton on Trent, Staffordshire. DE13 9PD tel: 01283-575444 email: admin@mech.co.uk web: www.mech-models.com'.

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REGION CONVENTION 2026 - "BERKSHIRE RETURNS"

Good news, the band is back together! The team from Thamesiders and Seaboard Southern are back again to organise the 2026 Convention at Cookham in Berkshire, with members of the team taking on the same tasks as they did for the 2024 Convention. For Thamesiders that means that Dean will be allocating space, and dealing with traders. Neal will be taking care of publicity. Mike will be organising Clinics, and I will be chairing.



The venue, as last time is the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) Conference centre, at Cookham in Berkshire. It is more like a small university campus than our usual hotel or other conference centres. There is an accommodation block a restaurant block and a number of blocks housing the conference rooms set in nine acres of gardens.

The committee has met a number of times, and as you can imagine a lot of work is going on by individual members between meets.

More good news the Registration and day visitors rates have been kept the same as 2024 that is £18 and £6 respectively. Non-member day rates also remain the same at £8. Room rates have been agreed at £80 per night, including breakfast.

All rooms are doubles and an additional person can be added for an extra £20 for the weekend.

Dean has been working hard to give us a good range of traders, which include some regulars such as Neals N Gauging trains and some new to the Region like Orwell Models/Coastal DCC. We are also hoping to give more space to members sale items. This has been fixed at £10 per table, but members will have to man it themselves.

Regarding layouts, due to other commitment, the absence of FreeMo this year has given Thamesiders the opportunity to exhibit a larger layout than originally anticipated. The EBL group are currently working with Dean on the exact configuration. Other layouts include Geeksville an HO layout by Daniel Bonham, L&B Blackmore a 009 layout by Ian Lampkin, and a new layout Glenfield an N Gauge layout by Bob Norris. Thamesiders member Stu and others will be showing their T-Trak modules.

REGION CONVENTION 2026 - "BERKSHIRE RETURNS" (Continued)



drive visits to Maidstone and Windsor. The village of Cookham has the Stanley Spencer Art Museum, and walks along the Thames. The Pendon Museum is less than an hour away from the CIM, which depicts village life in the 1930's and will be interesting to both railway modellers and their partners, and if you are in that area the Didcot Railway Centre is nearby where steam locos should be running that weekend.

The last event at Cookham was very well received, but based on that experience and the feedback we received this promises to be an even better event. You can register on the Convention website <https://convention.nmrabr.org.uk/> where you will also book your room and see the latest information on layouts, traders, and events.

Mike has been working on clinics for the convention. We will be having Modelling With The Masters, which was very popular at the 2024 convention. This time we hope to offer a clinic on track building, and other MMR clinics are being planned. Another practical clinic is expected to be assembling a laser cut kit, and a T-Trak module. We are also hoping that Jonathan Small will do a presentation on the last National Convention that took place in Novi. Mi.

Peter Borchers has confirmed that he will be opening up his home layout to members and we hope to arrange other rail related self drive visits in the area.

Jenny Latham along with Lesley have been working on events and visits that will be of interest to partners attending the convention. This includes a film and quiz on Friday night and self



INTERNATIONAL NEWS



2026 NMRA NATIONAL CONVENTION AND TRAIN SHOW - SCENIC CITY EXPRESS

The 2026 National Convention will take place on 27 July thru 2 August 2026 in the city of Chattanooga, TN.

The all activities of the convention itself will be held in the Chattanooga Convention Center, including the National Train Show. Accommodation will be in the Chattanooga Marriott Downtown which is connected to the Convention Center.

Early Bird Registration is now open, See the website at : <https://www.nmra2026.org>

The 2026 NMRA National Convention will also be hosting the National T-TRAK layout in their attempt to set a world record on the largest T-TRAK layout, currently held by the 2018 National Train Show layout at 28.4 scale miles. We will have 10,000 square feet of space to assemble the largest layout we can – and we need your help to do it!



Head over to the National T-TRAK website at <https://nationaltraklayout.com/chattanooga-2026> and register your modules to be a part of this layout. There is plenty of time to build a module if you don't already have one!

More details will appear as we [progress towards the dates in 2026.



WHAT WAS ON MY WORKBENCH - TOWER 17 GETS A ROOF



be a dark red rather than brown or grey (or should that be gray?). I found a source on the UK that would pass muster as shingles, N scale weathered red tiles from Scale Model Scenery. I bought two sheets as I was not sure how far one pack would go. That proved to be a good call as I needed more than one sheet for an HO model!

But we are getting ahead of ourselves as we need to construct the roof first! Fortunately I have a lot of photos of the tower from different angles but the most important was one that was virtually full on the front face. I justified the perspective to make it square.

In the last issue's "From the Caboose" I hinted at further work to be done this Winter at Rosenberg Yard. This is how Tower 17 has looked for too many years, with me daunted by the prospect of constructing a roof of the right proportions and the correct appearance of the prototype, with no plans to work from. I took the plunge.

In typical SP fashion the roof overhangs the sides by some measure, to provide a shaded view of the tracks and signals from inside the tower. The roof appears to be wood shingles, which have appeared to be different colours over the years. As I was modelling the tower in its final form before closure and removal to the Rosenberg RR Museum site the colour appears to



Side views gave an idea of the height of the roof relative to the size of the end wall so I extrapolated from that the length of the

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WHAT WAS ON MY WORKBENCH - TOWER 17 GETS A ROOF (Cont'd)

central hip and its overall height. The next step was to create a false roof that would sit on the top of the walls of the tower. I will confess that this was a bit of trial and error but we got there, inspired in part by components in a craftsman kit for an SP interlocking tower I purchased some years ago mail order from a store in California. I will add the dimensions were not the same!

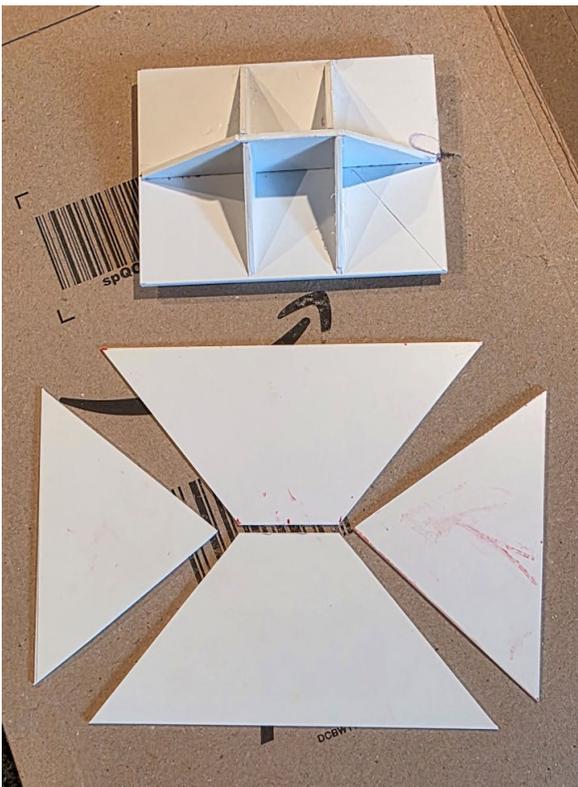
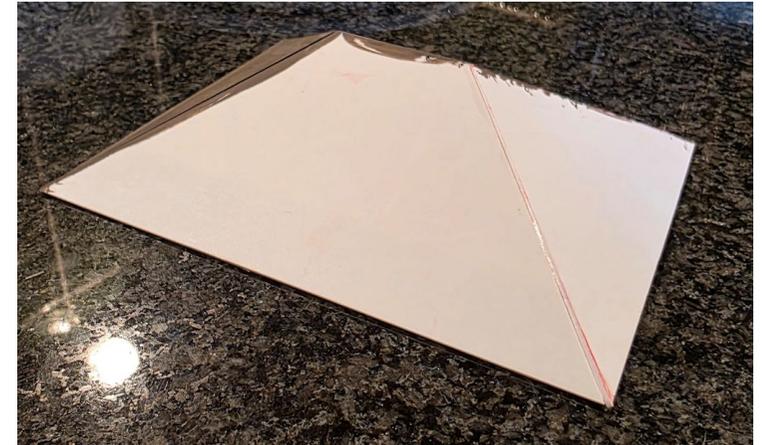
Here is the completed false roof onto which the actual roofing sections would be added.

dark matt brown colour to disguise the while plasticard and then it was ready to receive the shingles.

I made the mistake of ordering OO scale tiles first - too large. N scale was a perfect replacement for HO scale shingles. I used Deluxe Materials "Roket Card Glue" sparingly to apply each row of tiles/shingles from the bottom edge upwards. Left to dry and then the excess was cut off carefully with a newly installed scalpel blade. When all four sides were completed ridge tiles were cut out, folded and applied with the same adhesive.

I used 80thou plasticard cut to shape and size to fit at left. With ribs added on the underside to locate against the inner face of the top of the walls of the tower. The roofing sections were cut from 60thou with sufficient extra length to create the overhang referred to above.

The roofing sections were then glued in place tentatively with a few small spots of liquid glue to allow for removal if it did not all fit together squarely. After a little filing and repositioning all was secured in place, painted a

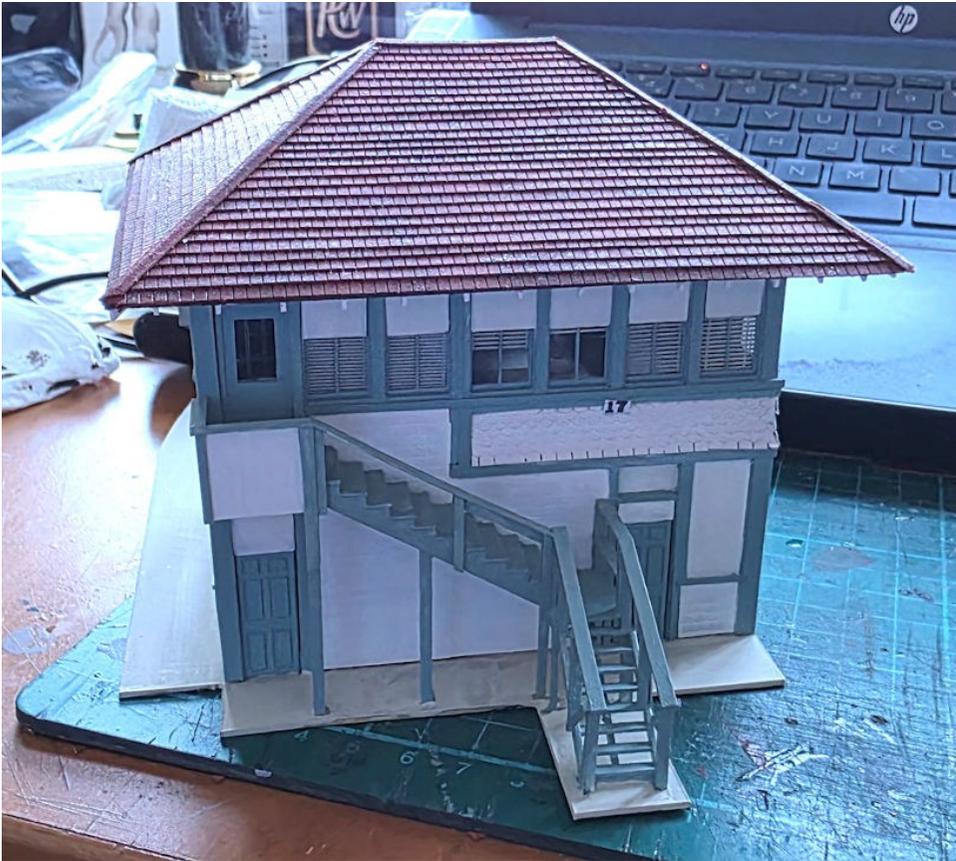


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WHAT WAS ON MY WORKBENCH - TOWER 17 GETS A ROOF (Cont'd)

This is how the finished article looks.



As you can see from this photo I did add support beams to the underside of the roof at appropriate intervals gauged from the photos. They were not spaced regularly!

The roof is removable so that the interior details can be viewed,

primarily for assessment for the Achievement Program. However the work did not stop there. There are various pipes and ducting that passes up through the roof and these needed to be added from plastic and brass rods. There is a whole host of electrical cables that are all over the left hand side as you view the cabin at left. I reproduced as best I could from the photos. Everything was touched up with the relevant colours. The pity is that the left hand side actually faces the back of the layout and cannot be viewed without a mirror!



More work was then carried out in the area around where the tower is sited on the layout to complete its installation. Ground cover and grass tufts were added to make it look like it lives somewhere. Various poles were added to the layout behind the tower to represent its power supply and its radio connections with the rest of the SP empire.

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WHAT WAS ON MY WORKBENCH - TOWER 17 GETS A ROOF (Cont'd)

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A few details were added here and there including the ice box below the stairs, the rack for end of train devices and the 17 plate on three sides of the tower per the prototype.

Interior details were added following as much information as I could glean from photos. Some of the posters are 1/87th reproductions of posters actually pinned to the walls, not that you can read the information conveyed! Some items like the the interlocking machine and phones are scratch-built but others are 3D printed or from a Kibri kit for an office interior. Needs must.

One final panic was the roof overhang - did foul the right of way? No, thank goodness.

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WHAT'S ON MY WORKBENCH - THE BLACKSMITH'S SHOP by DEAN HALLS

Just when you think you've got it cracked sometimes it goes all pear shaped, or in this case you realise you've now got a spare roof for a slightly smaller building!



The kit is basically lots of lengths of scale timber, 8 Metal cast windows together with other cast metal components to make up the interior detail. There are template drawings which I used in most cases.

I've been enjoying building my first O scale (1:48) craftsman wood kit of a Blacksmiths Shop from Western Scale Models (M-16), taking my time and watching it all come together with a few tweaks along the way to the 40 pages of instructions only to get to a point where I realise now that I've not made the roof sides long enough. Oh for 6 inches of extra length!!

The body of the building went well excepting I took the option of cladding the outside with horizontal lengths rather than vertical placed boards, I felt it looked better (Rule 1) so no problem.

The roof trusses were made as per plan although having built them I realised I had used 6" x 2" rather than 8" x 2" for the crossbeam ele-

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WHAT'S ON MY WORKBENCH - THE BLACKSMITH'S SHOP by DEAN HALLS



ment but again it looked fine. I also opted to make all 9 trusses with a crossbeam rather than half of them and also decided that I would glue the trusses in place across the tops of the walls rather than fixing to the underside of the roof. The idea is that the roof is removable so that you can see the Blacksmith at work at his red hot glowing Forge and see all his tools of the trade.

I veered off piste again by deciding to use some thin greyboard as the main roof sides and then glued timber lengths to the inside where the plan showed a different arrangement. This is where I went wrong in that I didn't cut the grey board pieces deep enough to create a suitable overhang over the sides of the building - shame I didn't realise that

at that point.

The kit supplied card based Shingles for the roof covering, however I again choose differently and settled on creating Corrugated Sheet using some foil cooking containers from Sainsbury's (there are other Supermarkets available) suitably cut up and smoothed out and then put through a scale jig that I'd bought from Australia through the wonderful web.

These were fitted to the greyboard roof sides using double sided tape and then a length of masking tape was used to represent a tarpaper strip across the top. A coat of primer later the roof assembly was

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WHAT'S ON MY WORKBENCH - THE BLACKSMITH'S SHOP by DEAN HALLS

ready to fit. This morning I glued the trusses on the building and they all lined up nicely however when fitting the roof it comes up short on both sides.

So I now have a roof for a slightly smaller (width) building and I'm now ordering my scale lumber to start on another roof. □

Having made the decision to create a new roof I did so using the same method as previous although this time I lined the underside with a photo copied print of the stained wood 6" x 2" planks rather than use the actual planks.

I decided to again cover it with my hand crafted Corrugated sheeting (made at the Thamesiders NMRA(BR) Meet this time as there's only so many trains you can run!). Once the roof was completely covered I decided to paint it a base Green Grey (Vallejo 70.886) as my back story for both my On30 and N scale layouts heavily lean towards the local businesses using pilfered army paint from nearby camps and it helps (I think) to blend it into the rural scenery as well.

A bit like weathering pristine rolling stock and motive power I was a bit nervous about weathering the corrugated roof and even after watching numerous artistic modellers it was with some trepidation that I ventured forth with bits of sponge and craft paints in Burnt Umber and Burnt Sienna. I didn't want a heavily rusted finish, just enough to show that even regulation army paint cannot hold the climate back so I concentrated on the corrugated sheet edges. Having let it dry for a bit I then gave it a light wash using Army Painter Quickshade Light Tone. I think it helped blend it into the "rust" but it did give it a bit of a shiny finish so maybe I should have let the craft paints fully dry.

I'm going to leave it as is for now but do intend to fiddle with it at a later date to add some further weathering and probably a splash of dull cote.

I wanted opening doors, at least at the front so I decided to use Engine House Door hinges by Grandt Line (3524). Using 6 per door, 3 as the main hinge across the door and 3 cut and glued in the frame, I fiddled (cos it was!) my way to having doors that opened and closed albeit with handles yet to be fitted. I fitted a flickering red/ yellow Led in the forge bed and 4 roof hung LEDs together with an external lamp above the door.

All the fiddly but nicely produced metal components (including Jack the Blacksmith) that came with the kit were duly constructed and installed inside the building. The kit doesn't come with a floor per se so I used a piece of 3mm Greyboard which I covered with tile grout as the dirt floor surface inside the shop.

For now I think I'm done although I'm toying with scribing board lengths and potentially nail holes to the walls but to be honest I'm keen to start another build.

Happy modelling



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WHAT'S ON MY WORKBENCH - AMERICAN CAR SHOP OFFICE by DEAN HALLS

Another day, another kit, although I have had a break in between. This time it's a relatively simple laser cut wood 1:48 O scale kit of an American Car Repair Office made by Crystal River Products (#114-31).



the lower half (below window sill) and all the trim with a lighter green (Vallejo yet to be chosen) on the larger upper half.

Before ploughing on I chose to ask a question on Facebook across the groups I "belong" to to see if I could gain some know how:

"Can I use Army Painter Acrylic Grey Brush on Primer and / or Vallejo White Brush on Primer before top coating (by brush) the TCP paint without any real time poor reaction?" Disappointingly only two people across all the groups responded with advice alt-

I've got so far with building the elements, shell, windows etc and now need to apply paint before finalising the build. The external colour scheme I've picked is a two colour horizontal scheme using True Color Paint (TCP-102) MEC Pine Green on

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WHAT'S ON MY WORKBENCH - THE BLACKSMITH'S SHOP by DEAN HALLS

ough I did get a lot of likes ☐. I think my mistake was I asked the question at the end of the post whereas I think I might have done better if it had been the first and only paragraph☐

Anyway I undertook a test paint on some scrap wood and found that no ill effects occurred using either primer with a top coat of Tru-Color Paint (TCP-102) MEC Pine Green so one step forward.



I do have to say though that the TCP paint is highly noxious and once it had dried I realised that I didn't really like the colour anyway. So after creating a green paint "palette" from my stockpile I chose Revell Patina Green (36365) for the lower half (below window sill) and all the trim with Green Stuff World Yoda Green (3232) as the lighter green on the larger upper half. Both Acrylic and definitely not needing a mask!

After the walls and windows were painted appropriately I chose to stick (pun intended) with using the kits self adhesive paper based wood shingles for the roof covering. These were cut into strips and laid as per text book across the roof sides. I then applied a couple of coats of homemade ink wash and then brushed on three different colour chalk pigments to weather it.

I chose to add internal LEDs as well as an over door external

MORE REGION NEWS

REPORT FROM THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY CONVENTION IN DERBY

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lamp together with internal furniture, some chairs and a table from Petite Properties Ltd, a resin pot bellied stove from stock, a couple of scratchbuilt bookcases, a notice board and a desk which seemed to fill the room sufficiently (especially as having added tissue paper blinds to the windows limits the view!)

It still needs books for the bookcases and leaflets for the notice board and a newspaper for Frank who seems to just likes sitting in the warm office. As the floor is still not permanently fitted and the roof has been designed to be removeable these little additions can be fitted once I have figured out how to create them! The entrance door will be stuck in the open position once I've decided where to place it on the layout.

The final addition to the build was more a convenience (yes another intended pun) for Frank. A resin based kit of four walls, a roof and a floor from Foothill Model Works (FMW-1514) was a very simple build and for once I managed to get the superglue to work for me. Grey Primer and then the same three chalk colours saw it completed.

All in all another enjoyable build.

Happy modelling



MEMBER NEWS

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TALES FROM THE CLYMAN SUB-DIVISION - LAYOUT ROSTER Pt 2 by Ian Watton

In the last instalment I spoke about the layout roster we keep on our layouts, but of course this hardly scratches the surface of our hobby, and probably not even the room we keep our layout in.

If like me, you have stock squirreled away in a multitude of boxes, then you're not alone. At the last count I have 12 drawers of US freight cars, 6 drawers of US locos and at least 13 boxes of UK outline equipment. Boxes range in size from a shoe box, which holds 3 carriages (in their original boxes I might add) or around 6 wagons. Most of my UK wagons are considerably shorter than their US counterparts, which means I can get more wagons in a similar sized box than US freight cars. Moving up the size range, in terms of box, the largest was supposed to be "for your linen" from a well-meaning relative many years ago. Being the perfect length for steam locos with tenders it was quickly repurposed, currently there are 4 locos and a decent rake of UK Southern Region passenger coaches in it.

I'm one of these people that can't throw a box out, not because I might sell the model later on (ha ha ha, me sell something, get real!) But because every carriage, freight car and locomotive will need storing correctly. Mainly so that it doesn't get knocked about, especially important if I take things on the road to a model railway club or exhibition. My oldest engine was purchased by my Grandad in the 1960s. It is a Hornby Dublo 2-6-4T in its original box, with all the original packaging, labels and instruction pamphlet. I've never seen another one like it. A Hornby Dublo trader at an exhibition many years ago stood with mouth open wide at the description of my loco's box, he had a similar loco to mine for sale in only a plain blue box, whereas mine is the lovely colourful version in the photo below. This box probably explains my obsession with keeping every piece of rolling stock in its original box from the mid-1980s onwards. My parents in their wisdom threw away countless number of boxes for carriages and wagons when I was too young to care, but see-

ing as some of the Lima boxes are now practically falling apart there must have been a time that a very young me rebelled and refused to throw out another box.



Above is a sample of a one of the drawers with freight cars in them. There are the odd few cars which were bought second-hand at exhibitions and

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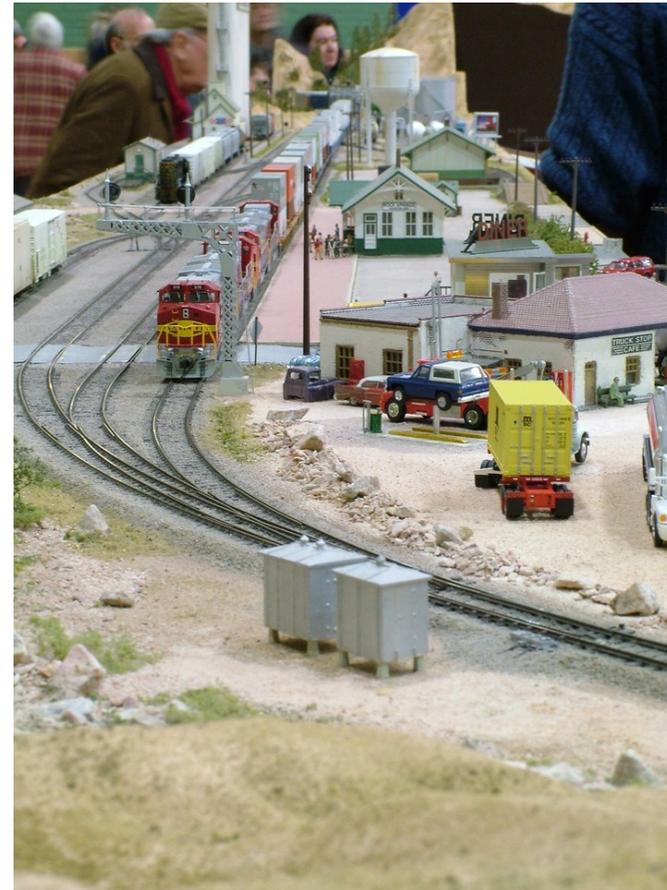
TALES FROM THE CLYMAN SUB-DIVISION - LAYOUT ROSTER (Continued)

Above is a sample of a one of the drawers with freight cars in them. There are the odd few cars which were bought second-hand at exhibitions and don't have boxes (who throws away boxes??) These wild-cars are wrapped in bubble-wrap and fill the spaces in the drawers; since no two manufacturers seem to be able to sell cars in the same size boxes, there is always the need to play train Jenga when removing or adding a box to the drawer. There are even a few drawers which contain solely empty boxes, for all the of the roster currently occupying the layout.



This is my Cabeese drawer (plural of Caboose, if it's not a word it should be), again a rogue freight car al-box has infiltrated the drawer. Overall this is the exception to the rule, that any drawer may contain any type of freight car; if it fits it sits.

Half my US loco fleet manages to squeeze into 6 drawers, plus a few empty boxes in drawers, the rest is stacked in their boxes (note a common theme here) alongside the drawer tower. Some like my 4-6-6-4 Challenger have a box footprint which exceeds even the "for your linen" box dimensions, and so that one and others like it are stacked together.



Layouts we have loved...who remembers Rock Springs AZ in HO? This was the precursor to RS Tower (more on that next time), built by the same group of individuals including Bob Phelps of PECO fame. It captured the arid nature of Arizona and railfanning out West on the BNSF or UP Transcon lines. Photo by Martyn Read.

LAYOUT PLANNING TIPS by LANCE MINDHEIM

How the "Pros" Design Track

The best guidance for designing a model railroad can be as simple as copying what the pros do, or at least relying heavily on them for guidance. "Pros" being defined as the actual railroads. Going hat in hand with this is how the prototype typically approaches things from an operations standpoint. The two are linked. Over decades, they've become clear on the most effective way to do things, and their "track plans" are designed accordingly.

If you compare the design approach of model railroaders versus that of the prototype, you'll see a vast difference. Model railroaders often employ multiple runarounds, numerous switchbacks, turnouts facing every which way, as many switches as possible, and highly compressed scenes. They also lean towards artificially inserted operational gimmicks, complexity, and gotcha's.

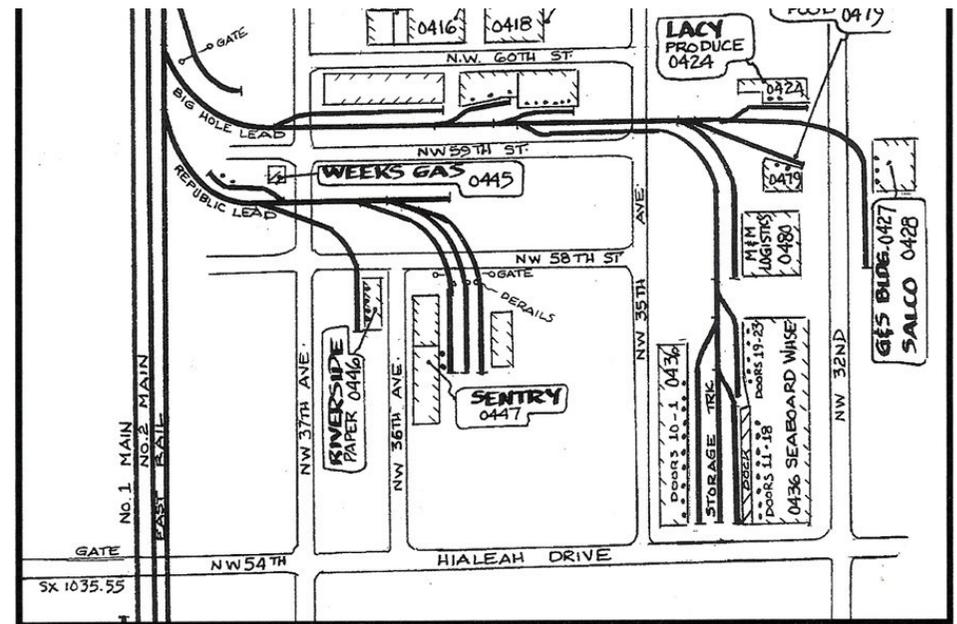
"Professional" Design Criteria

The pros? The total opposite. Any railroad design team that employed a "model railroad" approach would likely be fired in short order! The goal of the pros is maximum efficiency, not entertainment and artificially created operational problems.

Let's take a look at how prototype designers (typically) do things. As an example, we'll use an industrial park fairly close to the yard, say a mile or so. A professionally designed arrangement (i.e prototype) is generally typified by:

- All turnouts face in the same direction.
- No runaround in the park or en route (the run around is done in the yard).
- No switchbacks.
- A minimum number of turnouts.

Here's a diagram of CSX's East Rail industrial park. It would be worked when the local is heading northward (running from bottom to top of page on the diagram). The train backs into the park and switches the industries using push/pull moves. There is no runaround in the park, per se. There is one outlier in terms of turnouts. Weeks Gas faces the other direction. The solution? Just work it on a different day when the train is heading in the opposite direction.



GUEST ARTICLE

LAYOUT PLANNING TIPS by LANCE MINDHEIM (Continued)

march 2026

A Track Plan

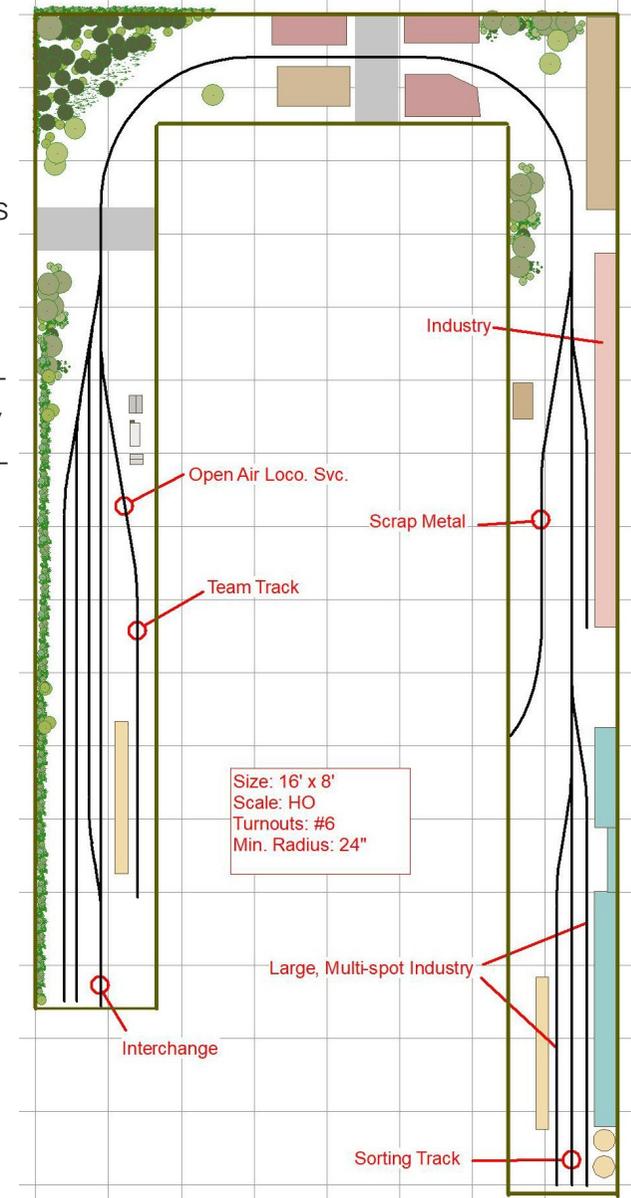
Here's a track plan that leans heavily on the "pros" way of designing things.

Here's how an operating session would likely unfold:

- The crew builds their own train. They begin by pulling cars from the yard and building the train on the siding. All cars are blocked in the correct order in the yard before leaving.
- Once the train is assembled, the loco. runs around the train.
- It then pushes the train towards the industrial park.
- If there are no gates at the grade crossings, they likely slow or come to a complete stop.
- Once in the industrial park, they then use a series of push/pull moves to set the cars out.
- The large industry takes a variety of cars that need to be placed at designated locations or "spots". If not all of the cars have finished unloading, they need to be temporarily pulled and then re-spotted.
- A "sorting" track is provided at the end of the line to help with keeping the cars in order as the crew works
- When complete, the empties are pulled back to the yard .

If you're in the mood for a shorter session, you could do some relaxed blocking in the yard, take some cars to the interchange track, or work the team track.

Bottom line, if you're struggling with a design an easy out is to simply copy a prototype track arrangement and operations format.



For more on Lance Mindheim see
www.shelflayouts.com

DIESELS IN DETAIL

UNION PACIFIC EMD SD40-2s

Probably the most successful and populous locomotive designs in North America, EMD's iconic SD40 and later version SD40-2. Union Pacific owned 686 in total, bettered only by Burlington Northern who owned 769. Throw in Chicago & North Western, MKT and Missouri Pacific and the UP total balloons to 1089. Most of the UP's original fleet was re-engineered in the 1990s and became designated SD40-2Rs.

As can be seen from the photos there were detail variations across the UP roster not least of which was the brake type and nose length. In latter years some acquired cab rooftop air conditioners and some were converted to radio control. See individual captions for those details. All but one photo was taken at Roseville Yard, CA in July 2011 of a complete line of stored locomotives, many of which were later upgraded to SD40N status with enhanced electronics.

The lesson here: for a true model of a prototype get good photos.

Top right: UP #3155 built in February 1972 with 88 inch nose, ratchet brakes, drop step and chicken wire radiator grilles

Bottom right: UP #3155 rear view. #3155 would become SD40N #1958.



DIESELS IN DETAIL

UNION PACIFIC EMD SD40-2s (Continued)

march 2026



UP #3334 with corrugated radiator grilles, 123" snoot nose and drop step on nose, with a yellow shield over the exhaust port, Red sill stripe.



DIESELS IN DETAIL

UNION PACIFIC EMD SD40-2s (Continued)

march 2026



Left: A contrast in radiator grille styles - chicken wire on #3148 on left and corrugated on #3334 on the right.

Below right@ roster shot of #3148, a January 1972 build with air conditioner unit on roof and later yellow sill stripe. This loco would become SD40N #2038.

Bottom left: August 1979 build #3598 with 88 inch nose and hand wheel brake. The white painted roof might indicate it had been in the Houston area where they did this to try to keep heat down. No air con unit!



DIESELS IN DETAIL

UNION PACIFIC EMD SD40-2s (Continued)

march 2026



Left: April 1975 build #3302 with 123" snout nose, handwheel brake, drop step (no anti-climbers on UP locos) and corrugated radiator grilles. Repainted in the lightning strip scheme and yellow sill stripe. Became SD40N #2026.

Below right: March 1979 build #3542 with corrugated radiator grilles and air conditioner unit on cab roof. Note ditchlights on rear pilot - must have been used on yard and local duties for bi-directional running. Became SD40N #1704.

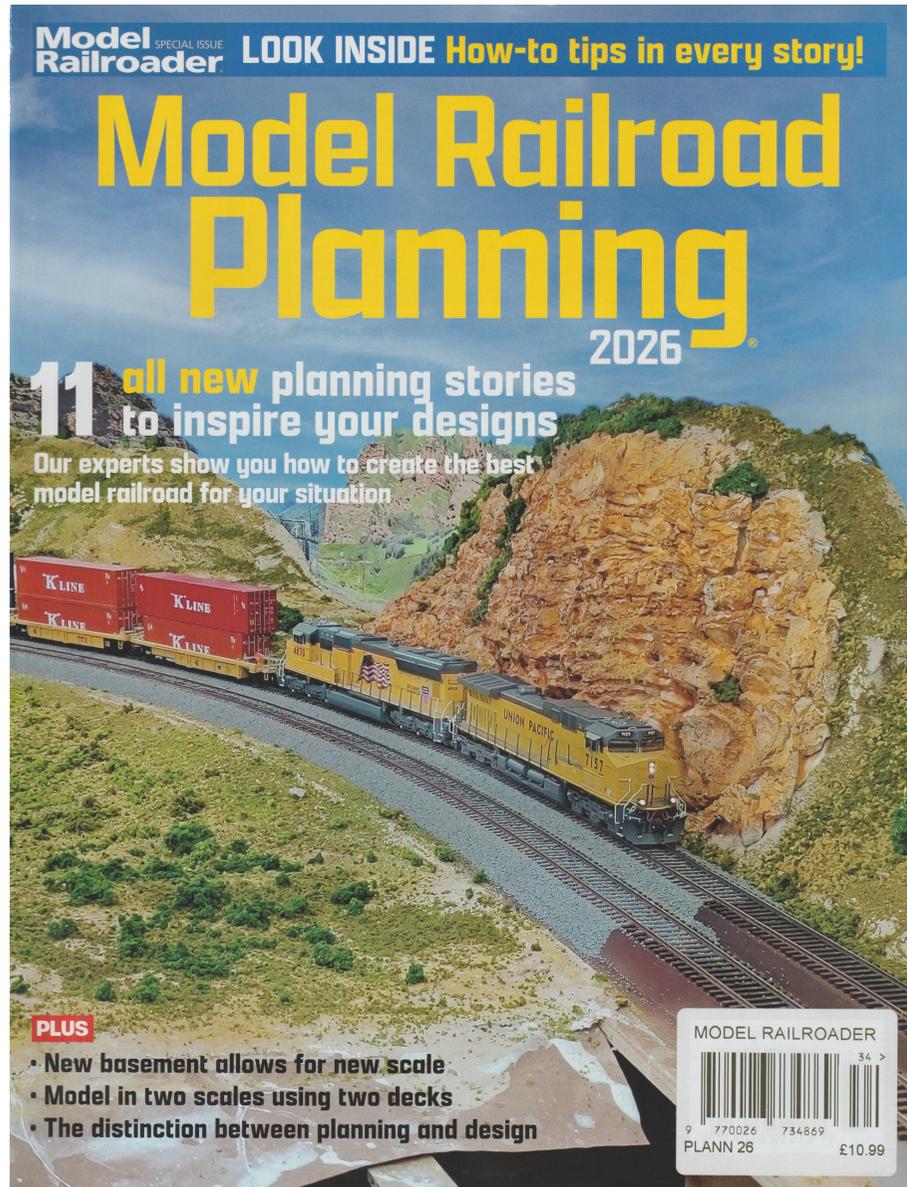
Below left: SD40N #1751, former #3697 of 1980 vintage, switching Albina Yard, Portland OR in August 2015 on radio control!



BOOK REVIEW

MODEL RAILROADER MODEL RAILROAD PLANNING 2026

march 2026



There's not a year goes by, usually, when I do not buy this inspirational annual publication from Kalmbach/Firecrown. My copy was £10.99 from TG Jones (remember WH Smith on your High Street??). Any article by Lance Mindheim is worth that. His latest N scale magnum opus is featured.

There are 11 stories being told of layouts large and compact, from N to HO to S and On30; from depression era to the current day. Essentially there is more than just something for everybody. For me a modern era modeller this issue has a good number of modern feature layouts and their stories. One of the layouts I have even visited and the owner is a friend of mine on Facebook (Steve Goaring's Illinois Terminal layout).

The large layouts are immense but neither has filled the room but rather gone around it and put in lots of countryside/prairie in between the focal points. Sometimes too much is simply too much. Less is more. Who coined that phrase?

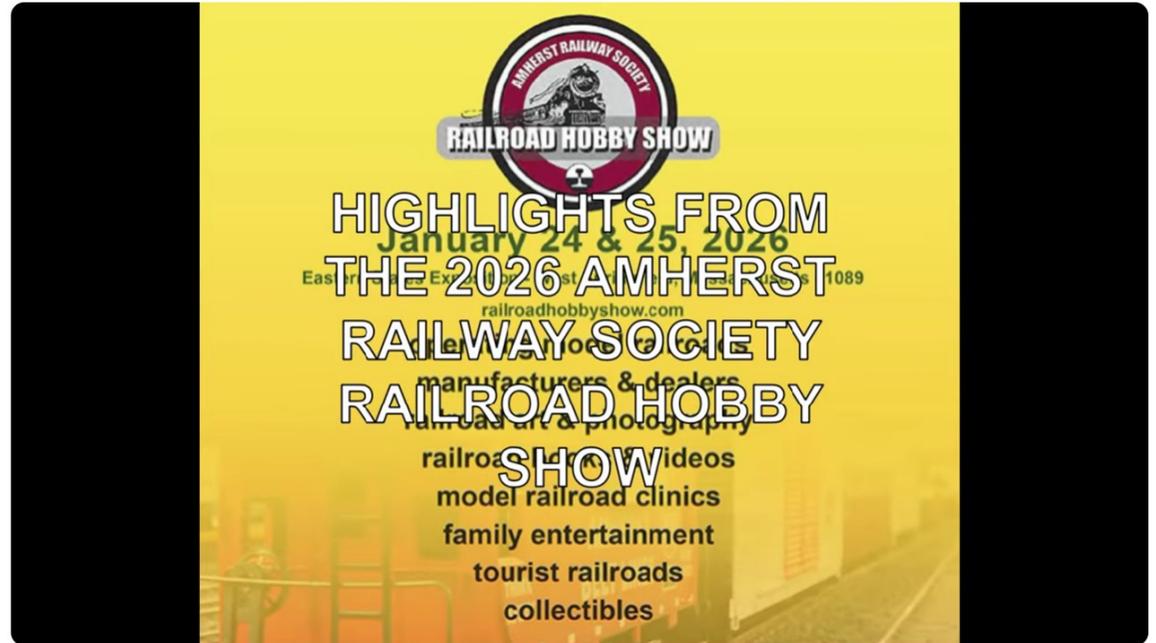
The annual is available through your local TG Jones and possibly come independent newsagents that carry Firecrown publications. The irony is Model Railroader no longer ships to individuals outside North America! Get your copy while you can, be inspired.

YOUTUBE VIDEO SUGGESTIONS

march 2026



Trains at Tower 17



Highlights From The 2026 Amherst Railway Society Railroad Hobby Show



Modeling With Dan! CSXT Railgon #708218

Top left: Found the video that inspired by model railroad, Trains at Tower 17 - 24 hours at Rosenberg GTX in 1999. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zp--8efWTpM>

Top right: Highlights of the Amherst Show 2026. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kg_FULcib1g

Bottom left: Modeling with Dan (Dansrailroad2011). See <https://www.youtube.com/@DansRailroad2011/videos>

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NMRA RENEWALS SEASON

If you had not realised it will be the NMRA membership renewal season very soon. Renew on line at :

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Or send cheque to the Membership Director at:

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your portal to more fun in scale model railroading



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FROM THE CABOOSE - Mike Arnold

december 2025

First this time I want to say sorry to Dean Halls for overlooking some articles that he had previously sent it. I also want to congratulate him on being what must be the most prolific model builder in our group. He has a phenomenal amount of energy to produce models in multiple scales/gauges and to keep on doing that as well as commanding a leading role in organising the upcoming 2026 Region Convention. All I can say is WOW, sir.

I know what it takes to get things done, either for yourself on your own layout or as part of a group effort. This Winter, as it was quite mild, saw me ploughing on with adding scenery to the remainder of the Rosenberg Yard. I was spurred on by finding on-line a copy of the video that so inspired me to build this part of the layout in the first place—see page 23.

As you can see I also managed to finish the Tower 17 feature structure (see pages XX to ZZ). It seems that the months of December through February are the ones where I really hit the layout. Two winters ago I finished off scenery at the other end and ran a BNSF coal train in celebration. I wonder what I will run this year around the new scenery?

The only downside to doing scenery in winter is the time it takes for white glue (and I have used a load of it) to dry out enough to proceed to the next level. I have used static grass again but also lots of grass tufts of varying sizes and colours. The real challenge though was placing trees and shrubs in a convincing manner between the two major running lines leaving Rosenberg to the West. Although I had stocked up over the last many years some were very wrong in colour and look. Some that looked good individually because they were a better quality looked dwarfed. Nonetheless I ploughed on with lots of shrubs made

from horse hair sprayed with glue and sprinkled with mid-green “stuff” and Woodland Scenics “fine leaf foliage” in light and mid-green. It is fun. Perhaps I will do a clinic on it at Convention.

I decided that I needed a scenic break at the west end of the layout - the back right hand



corner of the layout. So I built a road bridge which is what there is on the real thing, using plasticard from scratch box and parts of the old style bridge kit by Rix Products.

Finally a tip about wet water: be careful which colour washing up liquid you use to drop into your water spray. I had started using the citrus flavour and wondered why the grey ballast was turning brownish. I reverted back to the green one (Fairy!) and hey presto the ballast stayed grey.

See you all soon.

Mike Arnold

5 March 2026



NEXT MEET

march 2026

**MONTHLY MEET AT ST. OSYTH VILLAGE HALL, CLACTON ROAD,
CO16 8PE**

**THE END OF TRAIN
DEVICE**



A view of Steve Goaring's Illinois Terminal O'Fallons Branch layout featured in Model Railroad Planning 2026 - see page ZZ)

Take the A133 towards Clacton (past the Frating turnoff) until reaching the St Johns roundabout where the fire station is. Take the B1027 St Johns road exit towards St Osyth. After a few miles just after the Pump Hill BP filling station take the left turn towards St Osyth and the village hall is a little way along on the left set back from the road. Follow the one-way system around the hall and park in one of the marked bays at the front. You will come in from the right on the map on B1027 - Clacton Road is the yellow road running off the B1027 in a WSW direction. The Hall is circled.

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