



Risborough & District Model Railway Club – The First 50 Years



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Risborough & District Model Railway Club

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Introduction

In 1971, two separate groups of modellers pursuing the railway hobby came together to put on Model Shows in the Risborough area.

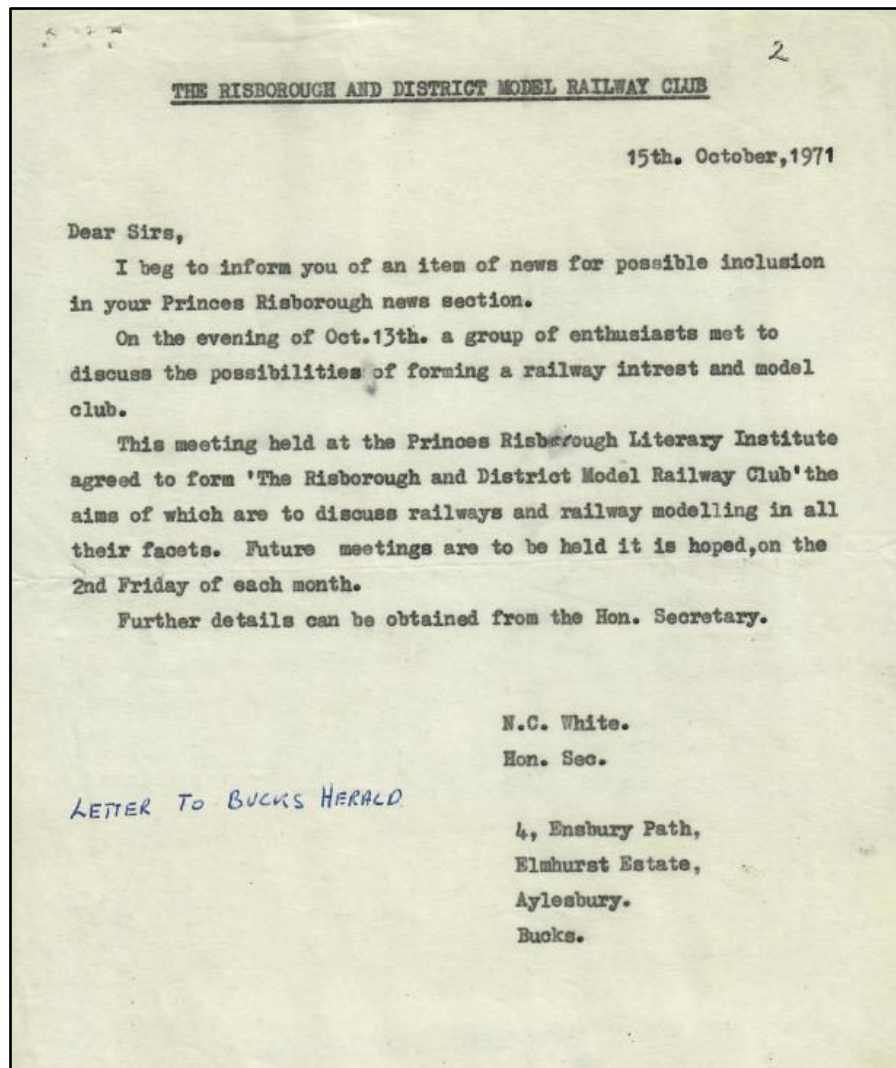
John Hanham, an active member of the Boy Scout Movement, organised model shows in the Princes Risborough British Legion in aid of Scout funds, calling on friends and acquaintances to exhibit their achievements. At the same time, Clive White, an active member of the Aylesbury & Halton Branch of The Royal Air Force Association, instigators of a revival of the Wendover Fete, called upon his friends to put on a show at the Fete. John and Clive invited all their friends and acquaintances, who they knew were interested in some aspect of railway modelling, to attend a meeting at the Princes Risborough Literary Institute where on 13th. October, 1971 John Hanham had booked a room¹.



Princes Risborough Literary Institute (courtesy of Buckinghamshire Family History Society).

In response to their invitation, eleven men met and discussed the formation of a Club or Society, which resulted in the following letter and notice to the Bucks Herald:

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Letter to the Bucks Herald dated 15th October 1971¹.

A further announcement of the creation of the Club, was placed by Clive White (now Honorary Secretary) in the January 1972 edition of the *Railway Modeller*. In the summer of 1973, the Club was accepted as an affiliate of the *Model Railway Club*, the world's first model railway club, formed in 1910 in London¹.

Exhibitions

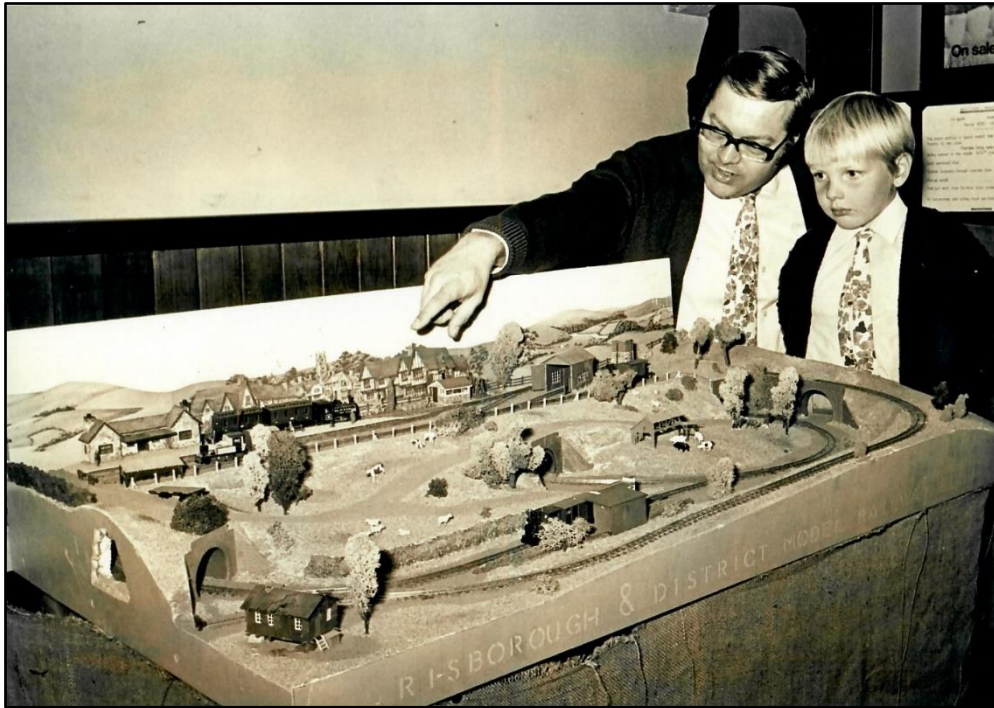
Despite its humble beginnings, the original club members were extremely active in the early months after the creation of the Club. On 4th December 1971, members organised a Model Exhibition at the New Centre for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing, St. Ebbe's in Oxford¹. The exhibition featured model railways, steam engines, model aircraft, war games and miniature soldiers at an entrance price of 10p for adults and 5p for children and OAPs. Members also participated in the Wendover Fete, the following June¹. The Club presented several exhibits including Clive White's own OO gauge layout based upon the Southern Railway around the Brighton area. Other exhibits included scale models of locomotives and rolling stock.

The first exhibition under the banner of the Risborough & District Model Railway Club, was held on 7th October 1972 (shortly before the Club's first anniversary), in the original meeting

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place of the Club, the Literary Institute¹. The exhibition welcomed around 500 visitors and helped to raise funds for the Club which now boasted 25 members, from the surrounding areas of Aylesbury, High Wycombe, Wendover, and Princes Risborough².



The Club's first layout at the inaugural exhibition on 7th October 1972.¹

Success of the October 1972 exhibition prompted the Club to hold another show the following March. The 10th of March 1973 exhibition also attracted 500 visitors and featured two 'OO' gauge layouts including the Club's 'Gowerslym' layout, John Hanham's 'N' gauge layout, a 'TT3' gauge layout and a '009' narrow gauge layout³.

At the time, the Chairman, Rod Squires, stated that the Club membership was increasing and hoped that many more would join, following the exhibition. In fact, the Club's calendar for 1973 showed several meetings featuring talks, film shows, demonstrations and visits to places of interest. Rod also stated that the Club were looking for a permanent home, an issue that challenges the Club, even today⁴.

On 10th November 1973, the Club hosted another exhibition, this time in the larger premises of Thame Town Hall. The change of location proved successful, with 750 visitors, takings of around £70 and the potential appointment on new members⁵.

During the early seventies, the Club held two exhibitions each year at Thame and Princes Risborough. The April 1974 exhibition held at the Princes Risborough Parish Hall attracted a record 900 visitors¹. For the first time, an exhibition programme was produced. The exhibition featured eight layouts in varying scales and a small selection of local traders. Furthermore, according to the programme, the Club had now established a Junior Section, for young enthusiasts aged 13 and over¹.

By 1976, the Club's membership had grown to 35, 10 of which were junior members¹. April 1976 also marked a change of exhibition venue, to the Aylesbury Congregational Church Hall.

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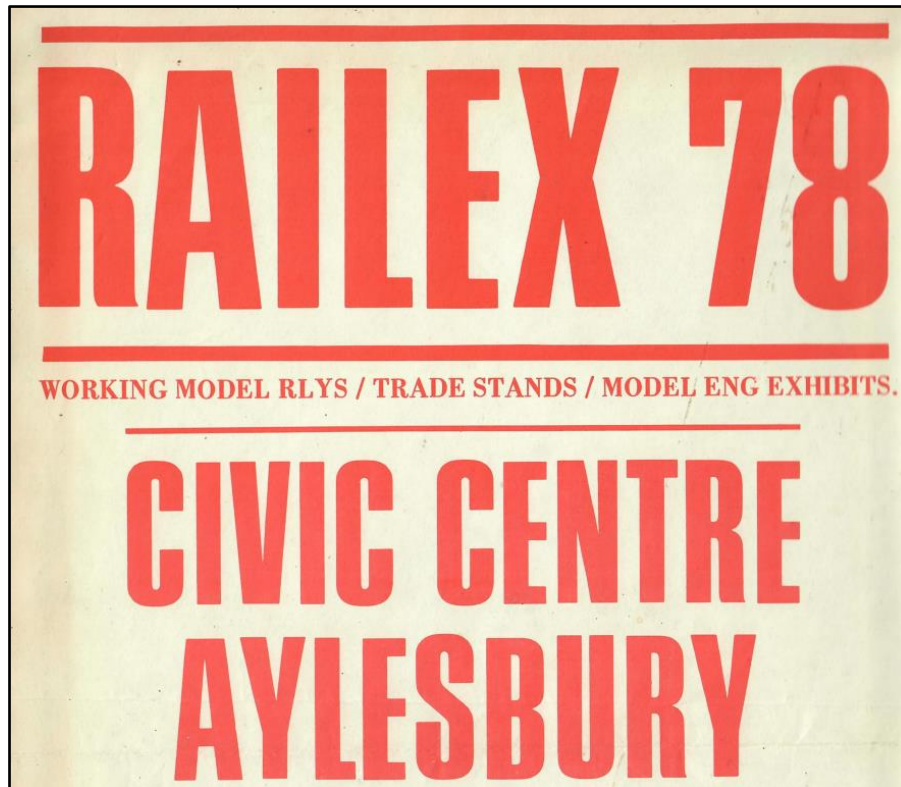
The Aylesbury exhibition was much larger compared to previous shows and boasted 9 layouts and 12 trade/display stands⁶. By the late seventies, profits from a single exhibition equated to approximately £100, which helped the Club to reinvest into future modelling projects and the upkeep of the Clubhouse.



Princes Risborough April 1974 Exhibition¹.

1978 marked a significant turning point for how the Club exhibitions were presented and set the standard for how the Club would be showcased in the future. The poster read 'RAILEX 78'; the Club teamed up with the Vale of Aylesbury Model Engineers to present a joint model railway and model engineering exhibition in the recently constructed Aylesbury Civic Centre. The exhibition held on 8th April, featured 25 stands, including ten layouts. Traders and societies were also represented including the Quainton Railway Society and even an Ian Allan books stand¹. It was the most ambitious project the Club had been involved in since its inception seven years prior, it was a tremendous success, far outstripping previous attendances. 2,890 visitors attended the one-day event and despite an entrance fee of 35p for adults and 15p for children and OAPs, £500 was generated for the Club and the Vale of Aylesbury Model Engineers. The demand was so high, one Club member was sent on a mission to buy more tickets⁷.

As well as its own exhibitions, the Club also presented its layouts at other Club shows including, Beaconsfield, Oxford, Chesham, and High Wycombe.



Poster for Railex 1978¹.



Crowds gather at Railex 78¹.

The 1979 Railex exhibition spanned three halls and boasted 16 layouts with visitors topping a record 4,000⁹. The Bucks Herald noted that the exhibition was the fifth largest in the country⁹. Whist the Club still held local exhibitions in Princes Risborough and Thame, the one-day

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Aylesbury Railex show would become the Club's main event, the format for which continued into the 1980s. However, the 1980s also marked a decline in the number of visitors from the 1979 record, with attendances hovering around 2,500: nevertheless, still impressive for a one-day event. The Risborough exhibitions were also recording a regular 900 plus visitors.

By the early 1990s exhibition attendances began to recover along with the Club's membership which had now peaked at over 70. Due to concerns about the potential development of the Civic Centre, 2004 marked the last exhibition in Aylesbury. After thirty years of successful one-day shows at the Civic Centre, the Club took the significant decision to move to a much larger and now 2-day show. The first new format Aylesbury Railex was held at the Stoke Mandeville stadium on 28th & 29th May 2005¹.



Railex 2005 at the Stoke Mandeville Stadium¹.

The modelling scene in the UK had improved remarkably with respect to the detail and quality of products. The Club replicated this improvement with its own quality of modelling, and this change of direction was highlighted in the opening statement in the Railex 2005 programme. David Lane, the Railex Exhibition Manager remarked, *"We aim to become a top model railway exhibition in both size and quality for scales up to and including 7mm and aimed at the finescale modeller¹."* The increased floor area offered by the stadium allowed for 76 stands, which included 21 layouts.

Railex is always eagerly awaited by the model railway fraternity and continues to provide a mix of top-quality layouts and traders to this day. Attendances peaked for the 2016 show, boosted by model railway media and local BBC news coverage, when the Club exhibited the late Geoff Williams' renowned EM gauge layout, Aylesbury High Street. That year saw Railex voted in the top three of UK exhibitions behind Warley and BRM's Peterborough shows. Unfortunately, due to COVID19, Railex for 2020, 2021 and 2022 had to be cancelled. However, the Club did put on a virtual Railex in 2021 in lieu of the real exhibition at Stoke Mandeville. Most of the videos from virtual Railex 2021 can be found on the Club's YouTube channel.

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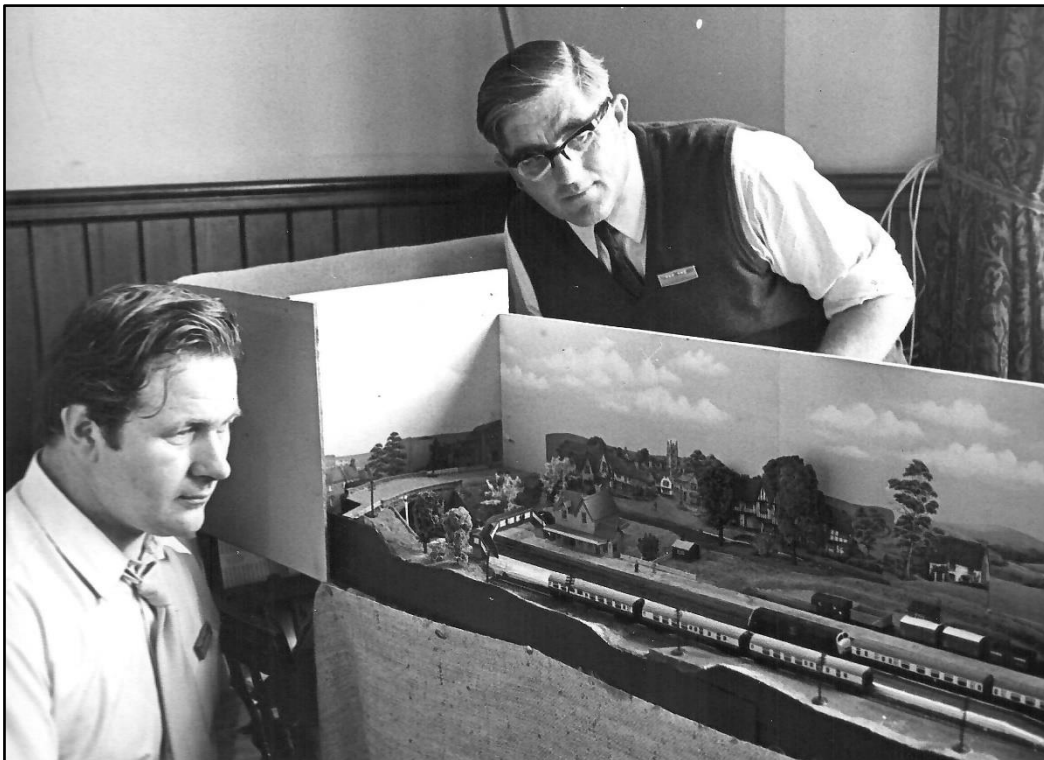
The Club has always strived to encourage interest in the hobby with a wider audience. In recent years, the Club has expanded its social media activities through its Facebook and YouTube channels. Since 2019, the Club has advertised its exhibitions on YouTube. The public Facebook page currently (2022) has over 100 followers, and the YouTube channel has over 300 followers:

<https://www.facebook.com/Risborough-District-Model-Railway-Club-103436715224270>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4eltEY8bcGpEXRGBNedvlg>

Layouts

The Club has always been active in its modelling, this is reflected in its output of model railway layouts, both Club and member owned. The Club's first layout, *Lein Bach*, led by Pete Marlow, was a rather modest affair. Proposed in December 1971, it measured approximately 2 feet by 4 feet in 009 gauge and was exhibited at the inaugural exhibition on 7th October 1972 (see photograph on page 4). The layout was modelled on two levels with a branch line terminus and fiddle yard on the upper level with an oval circuit below. At the time, the Club hosted the local branch of the 3mm Society and had a 20 foot by 3 feet TT gauge layout called Ashburton led by Dave Tickner with support from a young Phil Hutchings¹⁷. The layout represented the Totnes to Ashburton branch line and was constructed with scratch built rolling stock and buildings. By Railex 1981, members of the 3mm Section of the Club had moved on to construct 'Chiltern Road', once again, a Great Western based layout incorporating Sonning Cutting, the entrance to Box Hill and Twerton tunnels and Taplow Station.



John Hanham supervising the operation of his 'N' gauge layout¹.

The second Club layout was a bit more ambitious. Named '*Gowerslym*', this 'OO' gauge layout measured 24' long by 6'3" wide and consisted of a through station with tunnels at both ends which led to a fiddle yard in the rear. Whilst the layout had leanings to the Great Western,

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Club members ran a variety of stock from other companies including LMS, LNER, SR and British Railways. *Gowerslym* was made available for the November 1973 exhibition in Thame, although not in its completed state. The early exhibitions were also supported by Club members' layouts, including John Hanham's 'N' gauge layout.

By the late seventies/early eighties, the Club's Junior Section became active in the construction of several 'OO' gauge layouts, culminating in model of Aston Rowant Station (located on the now closed branch line from Princes Risborough) and Mill Lane (fictional location on the West Coast Main Line in the London suburbs).

The Club created two new layouts in the 1990s. First up, was *New Mills*, a 'OO' gauge main line layout, set somewhere north of the Midlands. The other layout, the Club's first endeavour in 'N' gauge was *Chiltern Parkway*. The layout depicted an intersection between an established mainline and a newly built continental line. As the name suggests it is set in the Chilterns and uses several local features to give a realistic setting. The Aylesbury canal ran along the rear of the rail lines. Buildings were '*borrowed*' from Bulbourne BWB workshops and relocated to Marsworth. Set in the late 90's there was a variety of passenger and freight stock, both diesel and electric.

At Railex 2003, the Club presented its first finescale 4mm P4 layout, *Saffron Street*, measuring 15 feet by 2 feet. *Saffron Street* was a model of a fictitious station in northwest London in about 1964 where diesels had replaced most of the steam workings. The layout had been constructed to see if a small layout built to P4 standards within an urban location using diesels as the main motive power could be achieved, as this was thought to be something that was rarely modelled at the time. All stock was either kit, scratch built or heavily modified and re-wheeled ready-to-run, which was either compensated or sprung using tiny leaf springs, which was now the favoured method for any new stock built. Alex Jackson automatic couplings were used on each rake of two or four wagons, these were operated by electromagnets. Control was via two Pentrollers and turnouts were operated by both mechanical linkages and slow acting point motors from a 12-lever frame

The success of *Saffron Street* spurred the Club on to produce a more ambitious finescale layout of a real location. Staying close to home, the location chosen was *Aylesbury Town*. Setting the layout in the BR Era of the 1950s/60s will allow a mix of stock from the Great Central, Metropolitan, LNER and GWR, through to BR, comprising both through trains and stopping services (north & south). Local trains for Amersham and branch line trains to Princes Risborough will provide further interest. Measuring 32 feet by 12 foot the layout is a *circular* design. At the time of writing (2022), most of the hand-built track had been laid and several buildings constructed, including the engine shed, signal boxes and the main station, all scratch built using the Club's newly acquired laser cutter.

Even more ambitious was the Club's first outing in creating an 'O' gauge layout of Oakhampton. The concept for Okehampton was to build a layout which all members can be involved in, both in construction and operating. The size of the layout was dictated by several factors. The main one was that a layout should have space for the longest train to come into the layout, be in the layout, and exit. Therefore, the entrance space, the central space and the exit space should each be roughly the same as the longest train. In 'O' gauge, an 8-coach train and a Bulleid pacific is about 13 feet long, so thus a reasonable layout should be 39 feet

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at least. Okehampton fits this criterion with a length of over 40 feet along the main line. The width of the layout is a result of the depth of track and required a board width of some 6 feet. Currently, both Oakhampton and Aylesbury Town remain unfinished, progress being hampered by the pandemic and the availability of permanent Club premises.



Club members enjoying the operation of Oakhampton¹⁹.

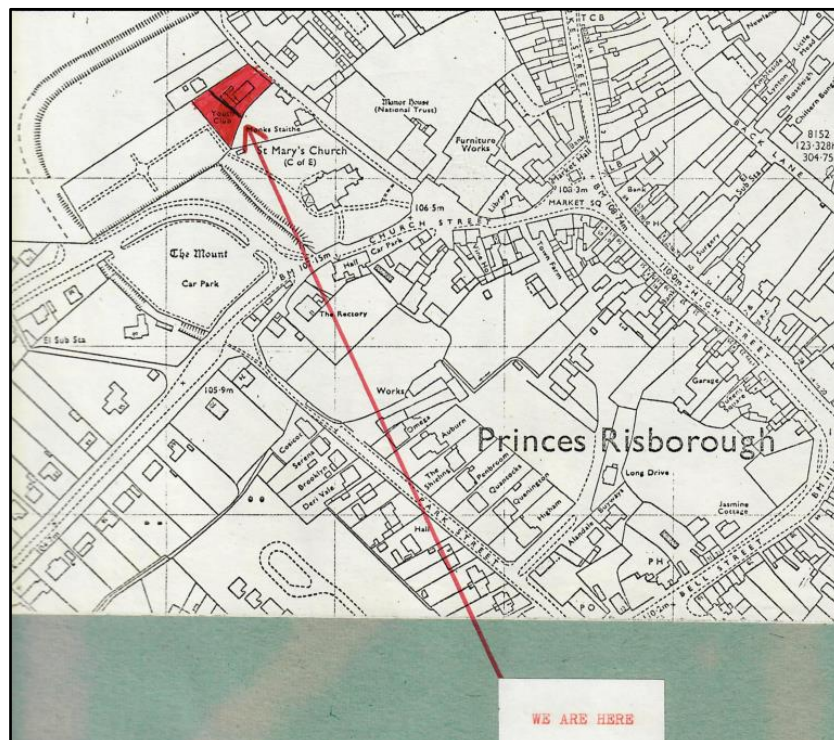
In 2012, the Club proudly took custody of Geoff Williams' exquisite ground-breaking EM gauge finescale layout of Aylesbury High Street (LNWR). The layout was built in the 1970s and has featured in numerous appearances in the model railway press over two decades after its creation. Built before the advent of CAD, laser cutting and even embossed card, the 36 feet by 7-foot layout contains some exceptional handmade trackwork and buildings, some of which even include a forced perspective, giving the impression of visual depth. From a scenic point of view, the Club had to do very little to make the layout functional, although we did convert the control to DCC operation. The Club acquired the layout with a view to it being put on public display, in fact its first and only showing was at Railex 2016, to an eager and receptive audience. Its operation over the two-day event was exceptional considering that the rolling stock was 55 years old, and it had been in storage for 20 years¹⁸. Once the Club establishes a home, it is hoped that Aylesbury High Street will be presented on permanent display, for crowds to enjoy for time to come. A video of the Aylesbury High Street can be viewed on our YouTube channel:

[Aylesbury LNWR - A layout by Geoff Williams - YouTube](#)

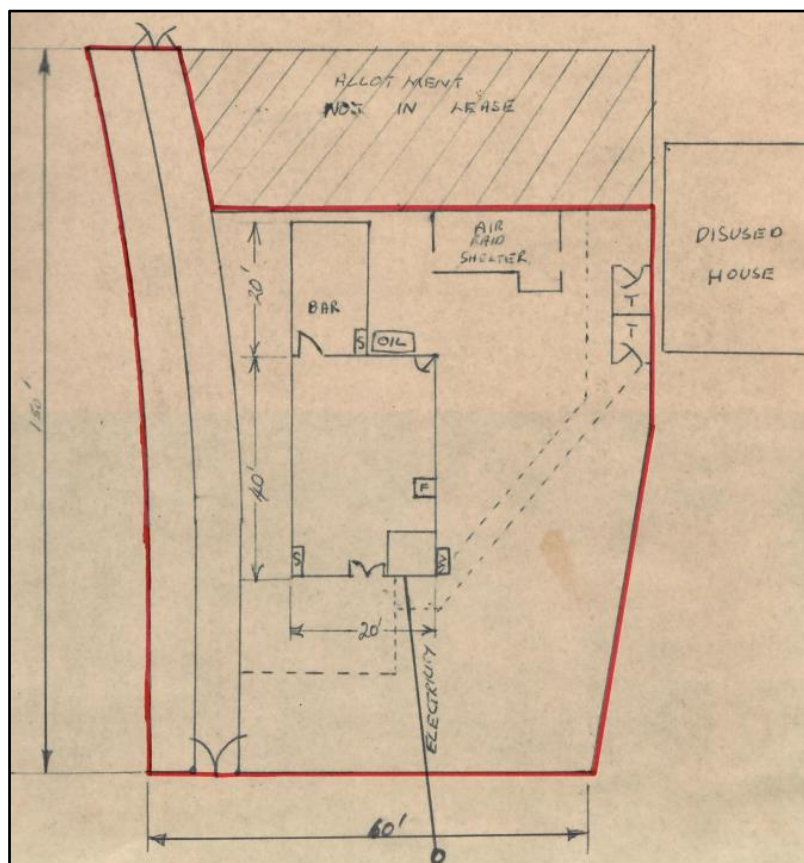
Club Premises

Since its early beginnings, the Club members were actively sought to secure premises it could call home. On 22nd August 1973, the Club Committee met the Princes Risborough Parochial Church Council (PCC) to discuss and agree terms of a lease of the Church Hall, for use by the Club as a Clubroom and Headquarters¹. On the 12th of October 1973, a lease was agreed for period of 12 months at a rent of £165 per annum, effective from 1st February 1974¹.

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Church Hall Location¹.

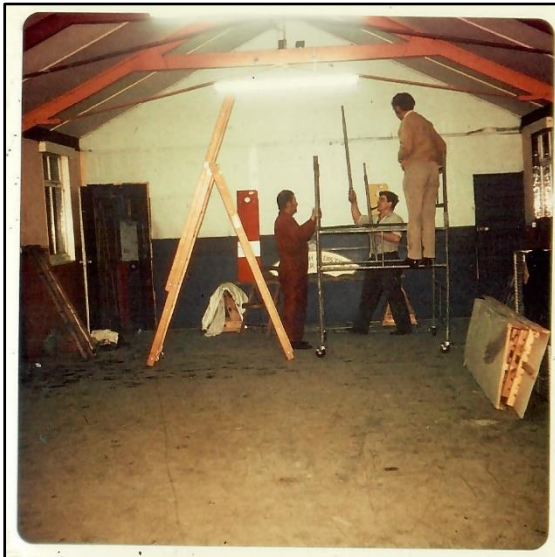


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Agreed Lease Plan (12th October 1973)¹.

The 1st of February moving-in day was a hive of activity. By the time the local vicar arrived in the evening to formally handover the premises, the floor had been sanded, and the walls and ceiling painted¹.



Clubroom refurbishment and official handover – 1st February 1974¹.

Having its own premises helped the Club tremendously to build layouts for future exhibitions as well as act as venue for congregating and socialising. However, by 1978 storm clouds were gathering relating to the future of the Club's premises. The rent was increasing due to increased insurance premiums and there were rumours that the PCC were considering the possibility of disposing the land on which the Clubhouse stood¹. The Club Committee considered exploring new premises and put out a request to members to propose prospective sites. One such site was Haddenham Village Hall premises. However, before negotiations had even started, the Hall was badly damaged in a fire which swept the premises⁸. In the end, the search for new premises was academic, as the lease on the Clubhouse was extended for a further year.

The Club's search for new premises also brought other benefits. One of the options the Club investigated was the possible use of the redundant Great Western North signal box at Princes Risborough station. The closure of the signal box occurred in February 1991. At the time, there was a general concern that the building may be demolished. Club members Pete Joels, David Lane and Francis Gomme were instrumental in putting the case for listing the signal box to English Heritage. Some weeks later a post card was received from English Heritage confirming that the Risborough North Box had been granted Grade II listed status. The potential Club room in the signal box never materialised but the structure is now undergoing extensive renovation by the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway.

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Church Hall - 1996¹.

In the mid-1990s, the PCC, attempted to give the Club six months' notice to vacate our leased premises, as they intended to sell the land for development. They omitted to look at the small print of the contract which required three years notice! Nevertheless, by 1996, we had vacated what had been our Clubhouse for 22 years. Fortunately for the Club, the land development by the PCC coincided with the construction of a new Community Centre by the Town Council. As the Club had built up a healthy 'war chest' in anticipation of the move, it took the opportunity to part fund the Community Centre development in return for a 25-year occupation of a storeroom and use of one of the halls every Friday night at a reasonable rate, the agreement for which commenced on 1st of September 1996.

This Chapter in the Club's history ended in 1997, with the departure from the Church Lane Club Room to the Club's new base for modelling for the next 25 years: the Princes Risborough Community Centre Carrington Room and 'our' large storeroom conveniently included in the specification for the new extension. Furthermore, the large new storeroom not only had wide double doors into the Carrington meeting room, ideal for wheeling out layouts, test track, etc. for Club nights, but also had been built with its own external access, again with wide door. There was also a standard door leading to the entrance lobby to the extension. This meant that the Club could have 24/7 access to its storeroom and attic, without interrupting other users of the meeting room. Moreover, the wide external door came into its own for loading up all the pack-ups of cables, layouts etc. for exhibitions elsewhere, such as Railex at Aylesbury.

According to Richard Neil, when it came to the actual move, some of the larger items/layouts, such as the *New Mills* layout, were hand carried the relatively short distance from the redundant Club Room to the Club's new base. David Waller (*Ddault*) and Richard Neil carried *New Mills* round to the Community Centre one Friday evening. Apparently once they had lifted each storage rack and were both facing the same way this was relatively easy task. David Lane's *Saffron Street* moved from the old Club room to its new home in the Storeroom via an exhibition, looking a bit lost laid on the floor of the once busy now empty Clubroom. The Club marked the move to the new premises with an Open Day in July 1997¹.

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With the expiry of the 25-year occupation of the storeroom looming in 2016, the Committee decided to step up its search for permanent Club premises. Following an extensive review of potential premises in the surrounding areas, club member Gary Day, suggested the idea of building a new Clubhouse at Risborough School. Tim Peacock and Roy Norton initially met school representatives on 26th September 2016 and were pleasantly surprised by their enthusiasm for the project. So much so, the school had even identified a potential plot within the school grounds. The proposal was to buy a two-storey second hand modular building measuring 12m by 15m and site them on pad foundations in the proposed plot.

Gary, who had worked in the construction industry for over 30 years, used his contacts to arrange a 3-dimensional site survey and draft plans free of charge. Roy had managed to agree an annual lease charge with the school, which was commensurate with what the Club was paying at the Community Centre and proceeded to develop a Heads of Terms and associated lease documentation. Following agreement by Club members to proceed with the planning application at the November 2016 AGM, Roy, Tim, and Gary met with the local Planning Officer on 20th January 2017. The meeting was extremely amicable and allayed a lot of fears regarding building close to an area of outstanding natural beauty. Understandably, the main concerns of the Planning Officer related how the aesthetics of the building complimented the adjacent properties.

Whilst the Club continued to battle the nuances of Local Planning, the Committee also decided to seek charitable status, which would also reduce the rates paid on any leased property. Following some excellent preparatory work put in by the Secretary, Roy Norton, charitable status was awarded to the Club on 3rd July 2017.

At the time of the initial discussions with the Local Planning Officer, Buckinghamshire County Council were planning to extend the school premises and during initial investigations, the Club discovered that a proposed bus turning circle was sited where we wished to position our building. Fortunately, the School did not agree with the positioning of the turning circle on the grounds of safety. However, this issue caused a twenty-month delay to our planning application, as the turning circle design was detailed in a previous planning application and had to be formally rescinded. The full planning application was eventually submitted on 12th September 2018. Unfortunately, the initial application was rejected as we only served notice on the school's legal representatives and not the Education Authority. We also had to produce an arboricultural report. Both issues were addressed, and the Planning Application was duly resubmitted. However, the Planning Application was objected to by the local Youth Club, supported by Risborough Council, who challenged the lease of the land to the Club, which they used during the summer months. Unfortunately for the Youth Club, they had no legal right to use the land and were offered alternative space by the school. Despite the objections, after two years of deliberations, the Planning Application was finally approved on 3rd January 2019.

With the Planning Application approved, the Club's attention turned to the Heads of Terms and lease agreement. These discussions became protracted and continued for a further twelve months and now involved the Education & Skills Funding Agency and the Department for Education (DfE) both of which needed to approve the details of the lease. Furthermore, the Club now had to arrange a professional valuation of the proposed rent. Fortunately, the Club managed to get the valuation free of charge. Given that the proposed plot had no residual value and the impact that COVID19 would have on the real estate market was an unknown factor, the proposed rent of £2,500 per annum was justified by the valuer. Then in February

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2021, the bombshell hit. New guidance was issued by the Department for Education relating to the disposal of grassed areas. With respect to our proposal, the department decreed that, *“no school land is to be leased unless it is shown that it is required for alternative use, with the priority being used for continued educational use”* and *“no disposal/change of use of existing playing field can take place within 10 years of the school having maintained school status (2011) and where the freehold interest in the site is held by a council.”* The DfE concluded, *“This proposal would be highly unlikely to be acceptable to the department”*¹³. Whilst it was debatable whether the plot was considered a ‘playing field’, after five years and several thousand pounds spent by the Club, the scheme was dead in the water. It was a bitter blow to the team and Club as a whole, and a harsh lesson in local bureaucracy and politics.

The blow was made even worse by the fact that Risborough Council were unwilling to extend the lease on the storeroom in the Community Centre. Even though the Community Centre had now been significantly extended, the Council were also unwilling to offer any permanent base to the Club in the new development. The Club along with several other local organisations chose to use other locations for its regular meetings, the Club now using St. Mary’s Church Hall.

Nevertheless, not all was lost. The Club had gained charitable status and had learned a great deal about the process and pitfalls associated with planning and building development. Later in 2021, the team approached the Quainton Railway Society (QRS) about building on their land. Like the early meeting with Risborough School, QRS were extremely enthusiastic about our proposal. The difference now being that both parties had common aims and the proposal would not be fraught with local politics and planning constraints. A large plot (bigger than the school) was eventually proposed by QRS and once again, a 3-dimensional survey was undertaken, although the Club had to pay for the service this time. Roy once again set about developing the Heads of Terms and the lease agreement.

It is a great shame that after 50 years, the Club will have to move away from its roots in Princes Risborough but given the absence of potential locations and engagement from Risborough Council, the Club is left with no real alternative.

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Three-dimensional Image of Proposed Clubhouse at Quinton.

Club Events

Since its inception, the Club has always organised visits and other events for its members. Initially, this involved local events such as visiting the Beaconsfield Model Railway Club and talks by Club members on specialist subject such as electronics. The Club members regularly met on a Friday night, a tradition that still occurs today. Visits further afield were in the pipeline.

The first organised outing took place on 3rd June 1973 to the miniature railway at Chertsey, Surrey, known as the Great Cockrow Railway. Two carloads of Club members took the 37-mile journey to Chertsey. At the time, the Great Cockrow was a 7¾" railway extending over half a mile of track¹. By all accounts, a great day was enjoyed by all.

In 1975, the Club had started producing 'Footplate', a regular magazine containing relevant articles, which kept members up to date with events of the day. According to the first issue, the production of Club layouts was extremely active, including work by the newly formed Junior section¹². The production of *Footplate* continues to this day.

On 20th June 1976, the Club organised a trip to the Bluebell Railway in Sussex. Some twenty plus members were collected by coach from Aylesbury, Haddenham, Thame and Princes Risborough and taken to Sheffield Park on the Bluebell Railway. A return steam hauled excursion was booked to Horsted Keynes, where opportunities for lineside photographs were afforded to members. The locomotive was fitted with a Club headboard, a feature that would be used on future train hauled excursions.¹

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Bluebell Railway – 20th June 1976¹.

In 1977 the trip venue changed to the Seven Valley Railway and followed a similar itinerary to the previous year. As well as trips to the West Somerset Railway and the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway, the late seventies also showcased several presentations from guest speakers including the Reverend W. Awdry, of *Thomas the Tank Engine* fame.¹

1978 saw the introduction of the '*Wheeltapper*' trophy. This was a competition, open to all members to produce the best wheeled vehicle of the year. The first trophy was won by Phil Hutchings for his GWR Dynamometer Car.¹

1981 marked the tenth anniversary of the formation of the Club. The event was celebrated with an Anniversary Dinner at The Royal Hotel in Tring and was attended by 30 members. Guest Speaker on the day was Cyril Freezer, editor of *Model Railways*¹. Other social events were organised during the 1980s including barbeques, photographic competitions, and Christmas functions.

In 1987, Club member, Peter Joels, witnessed A4 Pacific '*Sir Nigel Gresley*' pass through Risborough station carrying a headboard for the Gainsborough Model Railway Club. Inspired by this sighting, Peter wanted to do something similar for the Club. After gaining tentative approval from the Committee and an initial outlay of £700, Peter made initial enquiries with British Rail, who at the time were open to the idea of chartered excursions. Over 1,300 leaflets were printed, to spread word of the forthcoming event on 23rd April 1988, a steam hauled 200-mile return trip from London/Princes Risborough to Tyseley. This clearly worked, as all 390 seats on the train were sold, without any advertising in the railway media; thus, the '*Risborough Venturer*' was born¹.

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Armed with one of the Club's new cast alloy headboards, Peter was invited to Old Oak Common depot by British Rail's Bob Pamment, Area Mechanical & Electrical Engineer, to try it for size on several locomotives. A Class 47 was appointed to head the train on the London leg of the journey. Unfortunately, the Class 47 only had one lamp iron. Our headboard would not only obscure the driver's view, but the headboard was likely to come off a high speed. A new headboard was hastily constructed with the help of David Lane and Francis Gomme and was tried for size during another visit to Old Oak. Indeed, Peter was not alone in organising this epic adventure, David Powell organised the insurance and the on-board Tannoy announcements, Tony Green the then Club treasurer processed all the financial aspects and Roy Palmer produced the '*Risborough Venturer*' badges, which not only helped with the profits but also as goodwill toward the train staff. Kevin Wood, Richard Neil, David Lane, and Mick Smith ensured that the headboards were in the right place at the right time¹.



Class 47, 47500 Great Western at Old Oak Common Depot¹.

The Class 47 (47483, a grimy Gateshead allocated locomotive) hauling eleven coaches, arrived at Princes Risborough 40 minutes late. The stewards under the leadership of Dave Wellington and Roy Palmer did a sterling job to load the catering and allocate seats, while the headboard team applied a bit of gentle persuasion with brick to ensure that it fitted the locomotive prior to its departure to Marylebone. The return journey from Marylebone to Tyseley was headed by LMS Black Five number 5305, which performed superbly, resplendent with one of the Club's cast headboards. The train arrived back at Risborough to take on water and passengers. Further water stops were taken at Banbury and Tyseley. The journey to Tyseley was punctuated with many lineside photographers. The headboard ensured great publicity for the Club. On the return journey, during a further water stop at Banbury, a raffle was held, the prize being one of the cast headboards. The prize was won by Terry Dormer of Aylesbury¹⁰.

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Don Boreham presenting Terry Dormer with his raffle prize¹⁰.

The then Club President, the respected local narrow gauge modeller and author Don Boreham described the trip as the most important day in the life of the Club since its inception. All in all, the trip was a tremendous success for the Club. Due credit should go to all those involved, which was practically every Club member at the time. A special mention went to Peter Joels, whose meticulous planning, which included a schematic of the whole train with every seat numbered and bearing the name of its occupant, ensured a great day was enjoyed by all.

The *Risborough Venturer* tour was repeated the following year, this time with a trip to the Severn Valley Railway. However, engineering improvements on the Chiltern Line had drastically restricted steam workings on the line through Princes Risborough. The train was therefore diesel hauled to Kidderminster, by Class 47, 47552¹. The Club's headboards were nevertheless used on steam traction on the Seven Valley line. Access to steam traction on the Chiltern Line was eased in 1990, when the *Risborough Venturer* ran a steam special from Marylebone to the Midland Railway Centre in Derby¹.

Not all the *Risborough Venturer* tours were successful, however. In 1992, the Club planned a trip from Aylesbury to Alton on the Watercress Line. Following several iterations, the timings for the train were not finalised until a week before departure. This resulted in some hastily prepared mailshots to the train's passengers. On the day of trip, Pete Joels arrived at Aylesbury at 06:20, in readiness for the 07:08 departure, only to be told that the train was still at Clapham undergoing repairs. In the absence of the *Venturer*, a decision was made to cram the 200 plus passengers on the 2-car Class 165 Chiltern Turbo worked 07:32 as far as West Ruislip to meet the train there. However, by the time the 07:32 arrived at Princes Risborough, the *Venturer* was declared a 'total failure'. Passengers were advised to continue to Marylebone and then the Bakerloo Line to Waterloo, where a replacement train would be waiting. The replacement train's route, on board facilities and promised refreshments were seriously curtailed. The return journey was not with incident either, as the train failed to stop at Princes Risborough. After some persuasive intervention by the organisers with BR, the

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train was sent back to Princes Risborough to allow those that had been inconvenienced to alight, albeit an hour late.

Club visits during the 1990s were relatively sparse. However, on 12th July 1998, a few members did visit the Amberley Working Museum in West Sussex. The visit coincided with a railway gala held at the venue, which featured the museum's collection of 2" gauge engines.¹⁴

After a somewhat barren spell for excursions, a visit was arranged to Banbury North Signal Box, on 12th August 2016. A group of about a dozen Club members were shown around the box by the local signalling supervisor. Banbury North was the last remaining mechanical signal box in the Club's local area. It was a large Type 7 standard ex Great Western box in immaculate condition. The Banbury area had recently been upgraded to modern signalling now based in the centre at Saltley near Birmingham. In the week before our visit, the South box had been decommissioned and demolished and the North box disconnected. Attempts to secure funding for preservation of the North box were not successful. Most of the internal equipment was sent to the Worcester area for reuse as mechanical signalling will continue there for a few more years. Part of the frame and some items will be retained in the Banbury Museum. Club members were given plenty of time to look round, pull levers and take photos. There was a demonstration of bell codes between the two boxes and a hectic video clip showing the box in full working order – Those present were regaled with amusing anecdotes including the stunt of putting detonators into the lit stove to 'welcome' a less than popular relief signal man¹⁵.



Club Members inside the Banbury North Signal Box.

In June 2019, Peter Joels organised for Club members to visit the Severn Valley Railway over two days (11th & 12th June), to try their hand on a '*Footplate Experience*'. Most of the first day participants turned up at a very soggy Bewdley on Monday evening to ensure a punctual 08.30 start on an even soggier Tuesday; but the rain-laden depression that turned up over the region a couple of days earlier seemed to have had no adverse effect on the intrepid bunch. Nobody was going to let a British Summer downpour spoil this adventure, even if it chucked it down all day (which it did)! In fact, that endless day of rain enabled the locomotive to generate a

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wonderful atmospheric smoke and steam effect no hot sunny day could ever produce! Traction for the two-day event was Churchward's 101-year-old ex-Great Western '8F' No. 2857, duly fitted with a 'Risborough Venturer' headboard.

At the start of each day, an obligatory 10 minute or so safety film preceded a 15 minute or so 'footplate controls familiarisation' for all participants jammed in together on the locomotive hoping to learn something, care of a very patient volunteer SVR driver and fireman crew. Most had somehow found out where the regulator, gear lever and braking devices were by the time they set off for Kidderminster; the rest of what was needed to know would be discovered while on the move when the cab population of ten was reduced to just the driver and fireman, along with two Club members. Day 2 followed much the same pattern as the very wet Day 1 and neither day went without incident. The first run on Day 1 between Bewdley and Kidderminster began with not enough coal in the firebox. Consequently, 2857 lost steam pressure and vacuum in the train brake pipe fell away causing the train brakes to drag on. The train ground to a halt after the tunnel exit towards Kidderminster. A ten minute 'blow-up' restored steam pressure, enabling the brakes to be released. Every train on the SVR ran ten minutes late all day as a consequence. An 'unscheduled stop' happened on Day 2 too. A door in the leading coach flew open a mile or so before reaching Bridgnorth. Those lost few minutes were easily recovered as was the delay to the train held up at Bridgnorth by the late arrival. Day 1 ended at Bewdley about 16 minutes late; Day 2 ended at Bewdley a few minutes early; but in the end nobody cared¹⁹.



Barry Cossins & Keith Bishop with the Risborough Venturer.

The trip to the Severn Valley Railway was shortly followed by a visit to Fawley Hill Railway and Museum on 11th July. Prior to the visit, the event organiser, Barry Cossins was given a ticket for one of the party to have a footplate ride on the day. Names of the visitors that were interested each donated £10 to enter a draw which was picked by Paul Wright on a club night with the winner being David Lane. The donations summed to £200 which was part donated

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to the club funds. The engine used was a Hunslet Saddle Tank pulling a planked wagon and brake van. The train departed from the station down a 1:13 incline towards a sharp left bend. With the brakes on, round the corner, down the hill past all sorts of salvaged architecture to one end of the line. Forward again across a set of points (another signal box) to the other end of the estate. Then past the signal box, points switched and up the hill. Stop first though and whistle to get the deer of the track, full throttle gets us up just and back into the station. What a ride, it's the steepest incline of any railway in the UK. The train was packed all day running every 30 minutes and while the weather was sunny most of the day, late in the day there was a brief but heavy shower. The passengers riding in the penultimate trip in the open planked wagon were soaked¹⁶!

The final outing of 2018 was on 30th September to the Romney Hythe & Dymchurch Railway. The first part of the journey was by luxury 'executive' Heyfordian coach from the Community Centre to New Romney Station, Kent. The steam hauled '*Risborough Venturer*' departed for the first non-stop run of the day from New Romney to Hythe Station. The day's schedule allowed participants over 2 hours to enjoy a leisurely lunch, either in the Hythe station cafeteria or the pub or restaurant in Hythe town. In the afternoon, the steam hauled '*Risborough Venturer*' departed to run non-stop via New Romney and Dungeness and arrived back at New Romney, which left enough time to visit the engine shed and locomotive works area

The Future

The Club has come a long way since its humble beginnings in 1971. It is very clear that the quality of modelling has improved considerably over the years. This is demonstrated in the quality of the models presented for the annual *Wheeltapper* competition. This excellence is not only down to the quality of products from suppliers and the latest innovative modelling techniques but principally down to the expertise that is present within the Club. Rather than being '*armchair modellers*', Club members are proactive in their modelling. This is demonstrated by the intense activity witnessed on the Friday Club nights. However, the Club is not only about modelling, but also a forum where likeminded individuals can meet, socialise, and create long lasting friendships. Certainly, what has not changed over the years, is the commitment of Club members to give up their time, to progress and promote the Club, be it by organising events and exhibitions or acting in the capacity of committee members. It should not be underestimated, the effort that individuals put in to organise and deliver these events, for which we are extremely grateful. The Club, however, cannot afford to become complacent. Given its aging membership and competition from other pastimes, the Club must continue to evolve and develop. The Club continues to advertise itself through its website and social media and is receiving praise for its efforts in promoting itself and our hobby. It is only by embracing change and new technology that the Club will continue to attract new members and survive as an entity.

Our exhibitions have gradually evolved from local shows, to what is now one of the premier events on the railway modelling calendar. Whilst Railex cannot compete with the magnitude of the Warley exhibition, it continues to offer a show of exceptional quality with respect to its layouts and traders.

The biggest problem that has troubled the Club since its inception, is having a place to call home. Whilst the Risborough Community Centre served us well over the years, having limited access and storage, restricted the Club's ability to progress with respect to layout building and attracting new members. Over the years, the Committee has strived to secure and establish its own premises. The set back with our plans for premises at Risborough School was extremely disappointing, not only for the Club but also for the school in offering extra-curricular

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activities for its pupils. All efforts to secure premises in the Risborough area have been in vain. This has led us to cast the net further afield. We are currently in discussions with the Quanton Railway Society (QRS) to secure premises on their site. Whilst it will be sad to leave our established home, this new venture offers mutual benefits to both parties. Having a permanent building will assist us to progress our exhibition layouts including Aylesbury High Street, attract new members and promote our hobby. QRS will also benefit by expanding its attractions to its many visitors.

Despite COVID, the Club's finances are in healthy order. Furthermore, the Club has continued to retain a core membership despite the pandemic and not having a place to call home. In summary, with a robust financial strategy in place, the return of Railex and the Club's plans for permanent premises, the future is looking bright for the Club. The Club can therefore look forward to celebrating another fifty years serving the local community and our beloved hobby.

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