

Talking Points

Topical issues from the world of model railways

A layout in a weekend?

That was the challenge for a team of modelmakers at this year's Guildex event, which took place in Stafford on 2 & 3 September. Jackie Kneeshaw, Chairman of Events for the Gauge O Guild, provides the background to this live layout build and reveals how the team got on.

In November 2022 I was chatting with Steve Haynes, Peco Sales Manager, during the Warley National Model Railway Exhibition at the NEC in Birmingham. We were discussing the Peco range of O gauge Setrack and Steve remarked how many people still believed you needed lots of space, money and model engineering skills to tackle anything in O gauge; we wondered whether there was something that the Gauge O Guild could do to help to dispel this myth.

An idea was developed there and then to build a small O gauge layout using readily available components and products in a short space of time. The aim was to prove that a modeller does not have to spend a fortune to build a modest-sized O gauge layout that could be accommodated in a modern home (such as in a spare room or garden shed) and that most items required are available straight off the shelf.

The brief

I approached Nigel Smith to lead the team. Nigel is currently the Warley National Model Railway Exhibition Manager and in the past has served as Chairman of the Gauge O Guild and Chairman of the Gauge O Guild Events Committee. Amongst other things, he is known for building layouts for himself and helping others. Nigel took up the challenge and asked fellow experienced 7mm modellers Neil Podbery and Paul Bambrick to join him. They soon started meeting up on a frequent basis to discuss the initial brief that had been drawn up. It was determined that the layout should be:

- No more than 10' long and a maximum of 2' deep.
- Sized to fit into a small bedroom or shed.
- Portable for taking to exhibitions if desired.
- Designed with shunting potential for operational interest.
- Based upon a track plan from one of the Gauge O Guild Small Layouts publications, Volume 1, 2 or 3.

Paul produced a series of pencil sketches to help visualise the concept before construction started.

Planning and products used

After much discussion, a track plan was finalised. This was based on *Bankfield Road*, as featured in *Small Layouts Vol.3*. This scheme (see Plan of the Month, RM September) offered a small fiddle yard hidden behind a factory/warehouse, together with sidings for shunting and a selection of buildings typical of a small yard. The aim was that the model should be fairly nondescript in terms of era and location so that those inspired by the build could adapt the concept to suit their own preferences (such as steam or diesel).

With guidance from the build team, I started to secure the products required. It was essential that any interested modeller would be able to go out and buy the same components themselves, in kit- or pre-built form. The items obtained were:

- Two baseboards, each measuring 1350mm x 600mm, supplied assembled with legs and the over-centre catches by White Rose Model Works.
- One box of plain flexible track, one double slip, one Y-point (all bullhead rail), one ground level signal box, three packets of rail joiners, one packet of insulated rail joiners, one packet of track pins and three buffer stops – all supplied by Peco.
- Point motors (one pack of six) and levers (one pack of six) supplied by DCC Concepts.
- Various wiring and scenic materials supplied by Squires Model & Craft Tools.
- A warehouse (to hide the fiddle yard), bridge, retaining wall sections and water tower supplied by L-Cut Creative. (All of which are available as kits or pre-built.)
- A range of lineside items provided by Skytrex (2013) Ltd.
- A number of figures supplied by Northumbrian Painting Services.
- Specialist paint from Omen Modelling Paint.
- A DCC fitted Fowler 3F 0-6-0T with open wagon, van and brake,



▲ Jackie Kneeshaw,
Chairman of Events for
the Gauge O Guild.



▲ Tracklaying and wiring is under way with Kevin Wilson during the first day of Guildex 2023. Photo: Ian Kay



▲ Neil Podbery (left) adds the ballast/filler mix to the trackwork. Pictured just to the right of Neil is Nigel Smith.



▲ With scenic work at an advanced stage, Paul Bambrick sands the filler used on the front face of the layout.



WEEKEND YARD

After two days of dedicated work by the build team, the layout was largely complete. Photos supplied by the author unless otherwise credited

together with a DCC fitted Class 08 diesel shunter and later era wagons supplied by Dapol.

- A trio of Presflo wagons provided by Ellis Clark Trains.
- A layout name totem provided by Ron Connor of Totem Signs Whilst You Wait.

Presentation

A proscenium arch (a relatively straightforward item to fabricate from plywood) was designed to frame the viewing area of the layout.

It was decided to use painted, curved aluminium sheet as the basis of a generic backscene. Paul chose to paint this himself but commercial printed backscenes could be purchased and attached to achieve a similar effect.

Preparing for the show

As planning progressed it became apparent that another volunteer was required to help with the build. Three people working flat out over the two-day show would be tough going, so Thomas Hoy, a member of St Neots Model Railway Club, was recruited in May 2023. (His small O gauge layout, *Whaplode*, was featured in the March 2021 edition of RAILWAY MODELLER.)

With the whole team and Steve Robinson, Show Manager, needing to coordinate who was going to be doing what, together with establishing how much space would be required at the show, and the items which needed to be procured, a WhatsApp (phone messaging) group was set up in June 2023. This proved essential for sharing information, pictures and progress reports.

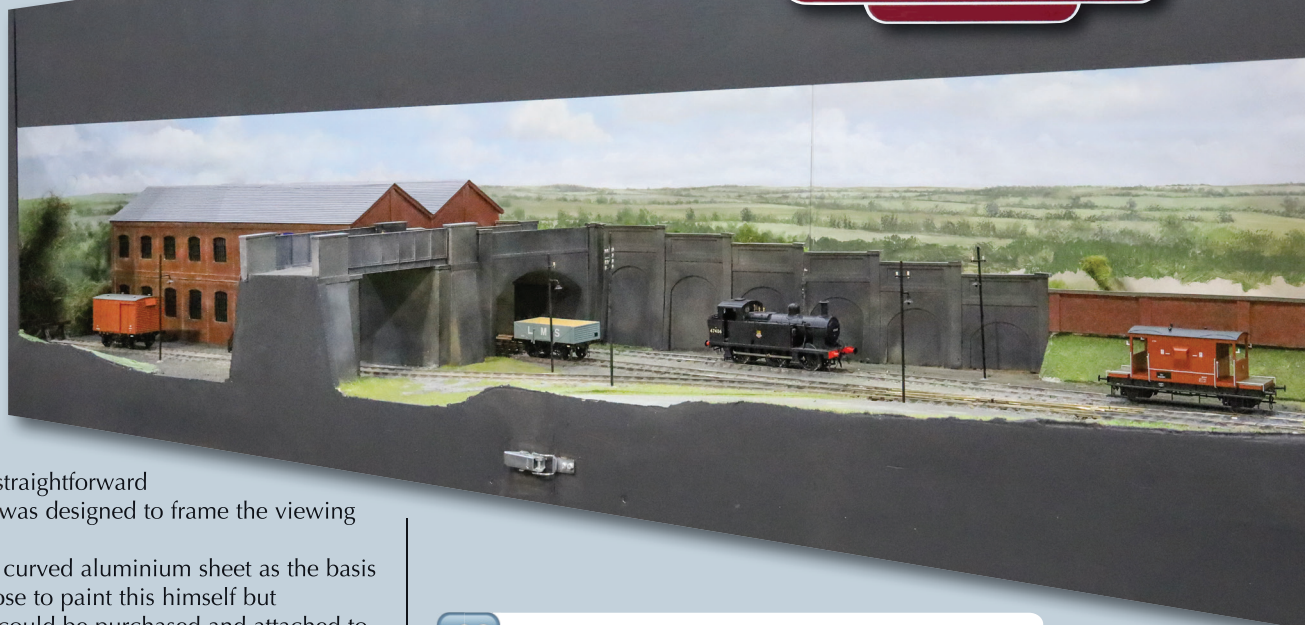
Each member of the team was tasked with ensuring that certain elements of the build would be ready to be put into use on the Saturday of the show. This was not 'cheating' because these particular components could be purchased ready to use if desired anyway; it was more a case of making sure that items such as the bridge would fit the baseboards, and undertaking the priming of the kit-built structures so that they had time to dry thoroughly before the start of the event.

Finding the equipment to do time-lapse photography from above the layout proved something of a challenge. Thankfully, Ian Allen, a member of the Guild's virtual events team, has professional TV experience, so he was able to provide me with another shopping list and fortunately Digital Direct came up trumps for us.

Visitor participation

The build team needed to arrange for a number of low-level barriers to be supplied (for health & safety reasons to keep visitors away from sanding equipment and wet paint etc.). However, the team actually wanted to encourage the visitors to get close to the action, to see what was happening, to ask questions and to help if they wanted to try some of the build techniques.

It was decided to give visitors the opportunity to choose the layout name by



See the time lapse video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1WSukA60lw>

posting suggestions in a box beside the layout. Signage was also created to provide visitors with details of where all of the products and components had been sourced from.

The build experience

Although the planning and preparations had all gone smoothly, there were a few unforeseen challenges that occurred immediately prior to the weekend of the event.

Neil Podbery got stuck in Portugal due to the Air Traffic Control system failure and had to find an alternative way home. He arrived on Saturday having journeyed via Switzerland, with a quick trip home to collect his materials. Thank you Neil.

Thomas Hoy was unwell, having contracted Covid and could not attend. As a result I travelled to Guildex via Thomas's home to collect his components, whilst Nigel Smith and Paul Bambrick managed to recruit Kevin Wilson at short notice, and he came to help the team in the absence of Neil and Thomas. Thank you Kevin.

The name pulled out of the suggestion box was *Weekend Yard*. Unfortunately, however, we don't have the name of the person who suggested it – perhaps they can let us know if they are reading this?

A successful initiative

I am delighted to report that the live layout build was a success, as was Guildex 2023. Despite the rail strike there were over 1,500 attendees and the feedback was very positive.

The accompanying photos show how *Weekend Yard* looked by the end of the event on the Sunday afternoon. Essentially complete, there is scope for further detailing and scenic work, which we plan to undertake ahead of the layout's planned appearance as part of the Gauge O Guild Village at this year's Warley show (see Societies & Clubs for further details).

The layout will also be attending all Gauge O Guild shows during the course of 2024, including the Spring Show at Kettering Leisure Village on Saturday 2 March and Guildex 2024 on 7 & 8 September – further details for both events will be available nearer the time.



The Gauge O Guild

For further information about the Gauge O Guild, including details of membership and future events, refer to the website: www.gaugeoguild.com

SEE IT AT THE WARLEY NATIONAL



Saturday 25 & Sunday 26 November