

Submitted by:- Tom & Ruth Luxford Autobiography
Submitted Date:- Originally for July 2000 Newsletter

[Back](#)

Spotlight on Tom Luxford (Part One) Over 75 Years of Model Engineering!

In the Beginning

It all started some time in the early 1920's. I was the middle one of three boys and my father had just returned from the war, so he was quite ready to entertain his brood. My eldest brother's friend had a garden railway, so of course we had to have one. It was all hands to the pump. Firstly a trip to the builders for the wood, which we had to cut by hand into the sleepers. Next the rails; I remember we went to quite a number of shops to get the T iron. I suppose it was a bit short so soon after the war. The next job was to drill the holes for the screws that hold the rail in the right place. The drilling was a long job as it was all done by hand. I thought it would never be finished. Now we had to decide where the route should go. It was decided it would have to go round the trees. We had just been given six bush fruit trees - they were planted down one side of the garden as far as the summer house, and as they were new the ground was just right for the track laying. Once again, it seemed to take forever. The T iron was joined by fishplates nut and bolted together. After testing it and finding it was alright we had to return the borrowed engine. Then the fun started; it meant we had to go into the best room and from under the pelmet hanging round the mantelpiece was our money box.

Next was a trip on a No. 21 tram to Gages to buy our own rolling stock which consisted of one loco, an L.N.E.R. tank (N.2) and 4 open trucks. It soon meant we needed more stock. Once we had the railway running and the news was out, quite a number of our uncles came to visit us. It only needed one to bring something and the others could not be outdone. Uncle Alf - he was a big fat man with a face full of whiskers and smoked big foul smelling cigars - but he was our favourite. He bought us Bowman, a real steam engine which burnt meths. He always put a half crown in my coal truck. It was about this time that Percy, my brother Harold's friend told us about his father having a real steam engine that could give us rides on his new track so we went round to see it with my father. Unfortunately, we did not get very far with it as there were too many old people there! Later, a long time later, we did manage to get a ride. As far as I can remember it must have been a 2½" gauge tender engine. It ran on a raised track alongside their greenhouse. I do not think it could have been a very good one, as it did not seem to last very long.

Improvisation!

Anyway, the boat craze caught up with us, so into the summer house to sort some suitable wood that could be transformed into a hull. We tried meat skewers and old post cards for sails without success. So it was over to the golf course to find some golf balls - then back to the summer house to see what sort of rubber was inside them. About half seemed to use the strong wide elastic on the middle part, the others had a small rubber ball filled with some white gooey messy stuff. Now for the propeller - it meant I, as the middle one of the three boys would be sent into the house to find a pair of scissors, a knitting needle and an empty tin. Our drill for making holes in the wood was a red hot nail, just a bit smaller than the hole that was required. Our heat source was a Primus stove for drilling, soldering and bending things. We got into trouble over our boats. It was about November 5th so we thought we would make our boat into a battleship by adding some guns. We were stopped from using fireworks so we managed to get some old keys, those big ones that you see only on church doors nowadays. The first job was to cut the handle off and cut a small vee near the blank end, fill the tube with gunpowder (taken from a firework) and push a ballbearing in the end. Next a bootlace soaked in saltpeter, wrap it round the vee on the barrel and light it - and away you go, or the ball does! Perhaps

I should not have mentioned this but just stuck to the bangers - they were nearly harmless. They were made with normal old keys. All that was required was a key, a length of string, a nail and a box of red matches. Tie one end of the string to a nail and the other to the key. Remove the red from a number of matches and half fill the key, put the nail in the other half of the hole. Catch hold of the string in the middle, then swing the key at a wall, making sure that the head of the nail hits fairly squarely! Having failed with most of our boats, it was time to get back to our railway, but again I was in trouble. This time it was for taking too much garden up to my bedroom. We had been given a crane mounted on a wagon so we had to find something for it to do

So why not build a river running alongside the path next to the railway and a harbour with a siding running to it. A niece of ours made a load of little sacks which we filled with sand and ran them round the track to the other end of the river where there was a water wheel with a hose that kept the river flowing and turned the wheel. Now you see why I was banned from the garden. My Uncle Alf came to the rescue and gave me a box set Hornby O gauge to run round my bedroom. It ran under the bed and round the room. There were five flights of stairs to my bedroom so it is no wonder that I had to be self sufficient and mother did not visit it very often.

School days, Scouts and a First Job

The view from my window looked out over the main L.N.E.R. on the embankment that runs from New Southgate to the Standard Telephones Bridge, so I had a good look at most of their locos. I remember when the Hush Hush ran on its first few trips. There was quite a do. The school that I went to was just below our house. The school playground backed on to our garden and had the same view that I had from quite a number of the classrooms. One of the teachers would tell us when the Flying Scotsman was running late. We moved from there in 1933 into a new house in East Barnet. It had a large garden but was no good for a railway track as there was a 12ft drop from the house to the bottom of the garden. By then I was camping with the Scouts. Next my father arranged for me to join the Barnet District Gas & Water Company which meant three nights per week at evening classes. There was not a lot of work about so I could not join the family stained glass studio as my elder brother had.

Prisoner of War

In the summer of 1939, I was called to the colours to serve for 6 months and was thrown out 6½ years later as U.S. (unserviceable as a result of being a POW) with a pension of 9s 6d per week. The mob I was sent to was the 'Tower Hamlet Rifles'. They were attached to the Long Range Desert Group and on my fourth trip I became a P.O.W. 28.12.1940. My Christmas Day rations were ½ tin of bully, a packet of biscuits and a pint of water. I did use my modelling skills while in the prison camp (a walled camp with 2,000 P.O.W.s, 1 cold water tap in the middle of a centre road – not much washing was done). Sometimes I would sit and think, sometimes just sit. Food was very short and now and again a Red Cross parcel would appear. It would contain tea, biscuits, dried fruit, porridge oats, tins of meat and veg. There were about six tins and six packets. Anything that needed cooking had to be handed into the cookhouse and if you were lucky you might get a ladle of something! – So what was wanted was some way I could cook my own. The cooks used wood as a fuel. As it arrived as tree trunks there was plenty of sawdust. Now how to build a model forge! There were plenty of tins and I had made myself a knife from a tent peg with which I could open the tins. I had seen someone trying to open his with a small pair of nail scissors. Right I thought, that is what I want so I managed to persuade him to let me use his scissors if I opened all his tins for him. Good, plenty of empty tins, most of them very well cleaned out. To start with I did not want to let anyone see what I was doing. The tins were all shapes and sizes so it was easy to make the blower; the powdered milk tin was just right as it was, squat with a lid, so was not damaged when opened. I thought the hardest thing to make would be the axles, so I made them first. One of my model trucks had tin axles so that

is what I had to make, but how! I found a useful stone to use as a knockometer, cut a narrow strip of tin as long as possible and rolled it. For this I had to remove a bit of wood from my bed, cut a groove in it as long as the strip of tin and roll it, trying not to cut myself too much. Next the fan – just the bottom of the right sized tin, cut the blades and twist them – now a hole. When I “found” the wood there were a few nails in it, just right for making holes in tin. I had a tin with a multi-bladed axle sticking out each side. Now to make it turn very quickly

This is where the army braces came in useful as I would need to make two pulleys of different sizes. These were the bottoms of two tins pushed together. This is where the use of the tongue way of joining tin plate as used on quite a number of my railway trucks came in handy. By this time I had become quite good at cutting out any shape. The slot for the tongue was made by pushing one blade of the scissors into the tin. The hob, the grate, the lay shaft support, the oven, the toasting rack, were all made, much to the amazement of my hut mates. On my birthday I baked a fruit cake and ate it all myself as food was too precious to give away.

Escape!

One night I thought that it was time to move on I took what food I had and went missing. Having been a Boy Scout I knew how to live off the country and which way to go. The camp was just outside Milan and that meant crossing the River Po which proved easy as did most of the trip. I left the hospitality of the Italians on my birthday, 9th September 1942 and arrived in Switzerland, 28th December 1942. As I arrived at Bern, in a posh suit – they treated me very well. As Scouts, we did a fair amount of mountaineering but this was real stuff. With another ex-P.O.W, we were pulled up most of the best climbs in the Alps. Another of my pre war past-times was ice-skating and dancing on ice and as the Swiss were mobilised there were plenty of partners, so a good time was had by all. Then the Yanks arrived at Genff (Geneva) and the fun was over.

Back in the army they sent me on a course. When I was captured I was M.T. Sergeant. Now they made me into a Section Leader with the rank of Corporal. My body could not stand the strain and I had a reoccurrence of dysentery and malaria and spent most of my time in hospital. The next job was exciting as a coordinator of returned P.O.W.s. They were an unruly lot, but I had more sway over them than most. After a few more trips to hospital I was discharged – ceasing to fulfil physical requirements with a pension of 9s 6d (under 50 pence) per week on 31st August 1945, complete in de-mob suit and hat.

A New Life

On returning home I went to see about my old job at the Barnet District Gas & Water Company. It all seemed so different. The two parts of the company were split up, one gas, the other water. As there seemed no place for me, I decided to accept my father's offer to join him at the studio in Gower Street. After a year of learning a thing or two, my two brothers on returning from war service, suggested that we opened a studio nearer home. We found a double fronted shop in East Barnet Road so we bought it. To start with we only worked on the war damaged stained glass windows that father did not want – so we needed a kiln to fire the painted glass. Once more I had to make something out of nothing, as it was impossible to buy one. I arranged to hire an oxygen and acetylene kit. Luckily I had used one before so it was easy to cut the air raid shelter up to sizes suitable to put together to form the frame. Next the fire bricks, I managed to locate twelve Staffordshire Reds (good up to 1,300°C). As they were a foot square, it meant I could cut them to fit into my frame. The yard also had some crusted fire bricks with which to make the roof. Half inch angle iron was used to make the runners and trays which held the asbestos covered with plaster of paris on which the painted glass was laid for firing. I made 14 of them, 18” x 24”. The kiln was fired by gas so it meant having to make 10 gas burners for the firing chamber and 2 for the warming up chamber. To make all these

things I had to buy a lathe – in fact a whole workshop. At that time there were a number of shops selling war surplus tools at give away prices

My first lathe was a U.S. lease lend one, 3½” centre screw cutting with taper ball races but with a rather slim bed. As my work took me all over London I soon got to know all the best junk shops so for very little outlay, I was able to build a very useful workshop.

This is when I first heard of the N.L.S.M.E. One of the chaps that I worked with before the war was a member and took me along to the meeting, somewhere in a house at Barnet, later at the Gas Showroom, Station Road, New Barnet. There I met up with Ernie Symes again. He was the Transport Manager of the company and known as Mr Fixit. He was also a member of the N.L.S.M.E. and ran a radio controlled coach. It was through Ernie and my old boss Mr Stace, Managing Director of the company, that we had such a number of privileges from the company. We were given permission to build a track on the company's sportsground at Arkley. I remember a young lad in R.A.F. uniform who was a keen worker and a dab hand at drilling holes on a length of steel using a jig and when they were bolted together with spacers it turned out as a length of 2½”, 3½” and 5” curved track (this lad was Dave Chisnall who is now an Honorary Member). The track at Arkley at first was about 500ft oval which later was enlarged to 1,300ft.

About this time I met Ruth – it was at a wedding of one of the Officers in our Scout Group. Ruth had come home from holiday to attend as it was the bride she knew. I was in Scout uniform as we formed a Guard of Honour. After the wedding breakfast dancing continued in the Church Hall and I met this smashing girl of 22. In between the wedding breakfast and the dancing, I nipped home on my motorbike and changed into my de-mob suit. An all night party followed at the bride's home and the two of us became acquainted – taking her home on the back of the bike early the next morning. The result of all this was a pigeon pair and 53 years of bliss! Yes, even though I have spent over 90% of my Sundays at the track!

After I returned from a 3 month business trip to the U.S.A., I brought back the idea of Bar-B-Q's and made one out of corrugated iron, which we used at the trackside. It proved good fun but no one seemed to bring along the same sized steaks as I had seen over there.

Netta and the City

In The Model Engineer L.B.S.C. started to describe how to build an 0-8-0 tender engine, North Eastern Q type and called it Netta. Strange as it may seem it was one of the engines I thought I would like to build.

Alongside the camp at Barnsley where in the War I was wet nursing our returned P.O.W.s was an open cast coal pit with one of these engines rattling up and down all day and night keeping all the poor squaddies awake. It was winter and our coal ration was very meagre – so ever ready to use my loaf I chatted to the driver and came to an arrangement to swap tea for coal. As permanent staff, we were able to go to the cookhouse whenever we liked, so tea was available most of the time.

I managed a few footplate rides. They were not much fun, but a good source of coal.

Ruth bought me the castings for my birthday and I started to work on them. All went well but as I had no idea how to use all the tools that came from junk shops, it is very surprising that it ever ran at all, although it still does!

This was taking too long, so one of our members suggested that I bought a part built one and he knew where one was for sale. They said it would run on air and the boiler was sound. I paid £12.00 for it. On looking at it when I got home I found that the boiler leaked like a sieve. When it went for a

boiler certificate they said I would have to make another boiler which I did. Since then I have made 3 more. It has had 2 new sets of axle boxes and axles. The wheels have been reformed 4 times. Both my children and grandchildren drove it when they were five years old.

As a lad my son wanted a streamlined engine so I converted from a B1 to a B17, the City of London (and it is still pulling passengers to this day).

The Netta was finished in about 7 years – as the City was running it did not matter.

I remember the first time I bored Netta's cylinder, it had a perfect corrugated look-a-like finish so I kept on until it looked passable. That is why one bore is very much larger than the other and grossly oversized.

On one of my trips up North to install a window in a church we found that we were one iron bar short, so I went to the local Blacksmith to get one – there standing looking lonely was an 18” length of copper tube – just what I wanted thought I – it looks about the right size, so for a few coppers it was mine.

My involvement with stained glass was where we made a pretty picture at 1” scale with water colour showing what the window would look like after it was passed by the one with the purse strings. We made it – therefore, it is not surprising that I read drawings in a different way to most. I am not a railway buff so as long as it looks right and performs well I am satisfied. Just to be different, I painted Netta as it was seen in service in the Great War in 1918. It was painted 'admiralty grey' with red coupling rods and R.O.D. on the tender: Railway Operating Division and driven by army personnel.

About this time Bryan was to sit his G.C.E. exam in woodwork. At school he was making a writing desk (which we still use in our bungalow). As he was building the tender to Netta at the time, we suggested he entered it for the exam as well, if possible. This was granted and he passed for both woodwork and metalwork.

When the examiner was accessing the 'unusual item of metalwork', he asked Bryan 'what it was'!!!

Fetes

Now I had two locos to play with at Arkley and also on the Club's portable track which we hired out to the local firms to give rides at their fete days. One comes to mind, after running at the Head Quarters of the Honourable Artillery Company at their barracks in City Road on the occasion of their Christmas party. After putting the track up in the morning we had lunch in the Officers' Mess, drinking a toast out of a pewter pot with the inscription something like 'in memory of Captain Bloggs, killed in action 1722'. The Lord Mayor was there in all his finery, mace etc. The Officers of the Horse and Carts (as they were known, senior regiment of the British Army) in their ceremonial armour, it was a sight to behold – with no one to see them, only the regiment and their children. I do like running at fetes. As I have always had a van available, I have attended most that the Society has run, but now we have a Fete Section and I'm a bit past it. I haven't been to one since last Autumn at Southgate.

To be continued . . .

[Top](#)

Tom and Ruth Luxford

Submitted by:- Tom & Ruth Luxford Autobiography
Submitted Date:- Originally for August 2000 Newsletter

[Back](#)

[Spotlight on Tom Luxford \(Part Two\)](#) [Over 75 Years of Model Engineering!](#)

From Arkley to Tyttenhanger

In about 1960, the Water Company decided to build a tank reservoir on their sports ground at Arkley so the Society had to move. I had a word with Ernie Symes and he thought we could have a site on one of the pumping stations.

Ruth and I went to see the three that I had worked at – one at South Mymms, one at Roestock, the other at Tyttenhanger. They were the names that the company called them.

Mymms had filter beds, Roestock was a workshop as well as a pumping station, so Tyttenhanger was the obvious choice. It was known by all the employees of the company as 'TIT' (which is the name I used, not thinking anything wrong in it). But model engineers are not the most condescending types and took exception to Tyttenhanger and insisted on calling it Colney Heath. I did get my way and called the station Tyttenhanger – after all it's on the grounds of Tyttenhanger House.

The pumping station was very interesting. The pump was a pair of tandem steam pumps – supplied by steam from a marine type boiler, fed by a dobie gravity fed stoker. The fuel was small Welsh steam coal, just about perfect to run our locos on, and I know, I tried it.

We took what we could of the Arkley track and stored it in one of the garages of the Water Company in Lytton Road, New Barnet, under the eye of Ernie Symes. The track as mentioned before was 5", 3½" and 2½" held together by bolts and apart by spacers. When we came to plan the new track we decided to use the same system that a member, John Sumpter, had used in his garden railway. It was the rail pushed into slots in wooden sleepers. They were cut to length, slotted, then put in a bath of creosote. We were told they should be boiled – which we did. It was grand fun – we were given two R.S.J.s on which to hold the bath over the fire (who said model engineers are ordinary people?!)

One of our members managed to arrange for us to have a load of secondhand sleepers. When we went to collect them from the yard, the foreman said he would get the sack if he had arranged it! But it does help to have friends in the Town Hall.

The sleepers all had to be unloaded outside the gate as it was too small to drive in. The gate was the one we brought from Arkley. As I also had a trailer, made from an old Ford van, and a Land Rover to pull it, it was used to cart the sleepers round the field to the spot where they were wanted. The plan was to run up the side of the field between the trees and back in a kidney shape, leaving a straight bit in the middle for a station.

The sleepers were mounted on a pre-cast concrete block. I managed to get 'Warecrete' ones at a discount as we wanted so many and we would collect them from their works where they were made. The construction took two years. In that time we visited quite a number of other model engineering sites. The one at Oxford we visited several times as we were made very welcome and there was Blenheim Palace for the ladies to visit and a garden shop where they could buy plants etc. The track there was divided in two places, one to let the cars into the middle and one as a means to move a loco from the steam up bay to the track. This was one of the places where the City had one of its many accidents. A young member drove into one of the gaps. It shook him up a bit but he still drives it when given the chance.

On our visits we learned a lot about how other clubs ran. In the north of England they had a federation which ran an insurance system and it was thought wise to do the same. I joined, with three other members of different clubs to start the Southern Federation of Model Engineers and it proved a success. Now there are over 200 clubs affiliated, making our insurance costs a bit cheaper and someone to represent us on all these new safety committees. It also gives us someone to blame for all that goes wrong in that direction.

When it came to laying the track, it was decided to find the gradient. One of our younger member's fathers who lived in Brookmans Park was a surveyor. He gave us the amount of rise or fall needed to maintain an even rise or fall at different points: so I made what we called the Golden Nugget. They were just brass blocks turned to the right size, plus or minus a thou or two. They were used to set the different height of each concrete block. I now have a wonderful collection of blocks and gauges.

After the railway sleepers were bedded onto the blocks we used $\frac{3}{4}$ " clouts (large headed galvanised nails), I bought $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt of them. They were knocked into the sleepers about $1\frac{1}{2}$ " apart and wired round with thin galvanised wire. On the sides of the sleepers we nailed strips of wood to act as shuttering. At the curves they had to have one side higher than the other so as to give a certain amount of super elevation. For this I made a stepped gauge that clamped to my spirit level. It had four steps so that it would produce an even flow up and down as was demanded.

The curves were set by having several posts with a nail in the top, set at the right spot and with my 33ft steel tape hooked on the nail it was possible to place the concrete blocks in a curve with a lead in and out.

The top surface was a cement mix of 1 part cement to 3 sharp sand, finished off with a laying on trowel. This took about two years to complete.

One of the tracks we ran on was at Chipperfield and it had a tunnel, so the boys decided we must have one. At my home in East Barnet there was an Anderson air raid shelter, dug well in at the top of the garden, as many were still left. We let it be known that we would dig them up and leave their gardens in good shape. Once more, with a band of helpers we managed to acquire enough shelters to build a tunnel 72ft long at the top curve. It was put there so that it was impossible to see straight through. At the halfway point we had to install a bolt hold with a seat as requested by the younger lads, as somewhere to entertain their girlfriends!

LBSC

One of our chaps was a confidant of L.B.S.C. and suggested that I should go down to Purley with him and show 'Curly' the chassis of Netta that was near completion. We found him very welcoming and pleased to entertain us. We took one of his locos from under the stairs, where they were stored, steamed and ran it on his polar route, an oval track in a small edition of his garden behind his house. I felt myself very privileged to be there and found we had a lot in common. Our attitude to the powers that be were very similar.

After his death in 1967, we were asked by his neighbour (his Executor) to sell all his engines. We collected all twelve of them and stored them in our sun lounge. We were told we could accept one for the trouble of selling them. I chose 'Harriet', the one that he built for himself, and did not publish the words and music for it. While they were in our custody we loaded them in my van and took them to Birmingham and ran them on their track. Apart from a few tracks, there are not many that have provision for $2\frac{1}{2}$ " g. We sold to our members 'Annabel', 'Betty', 'Caterpillar', 'Dyak', 'Cock o' the North', 'Fernanda', 'Harriet', 'Iris', 'Molly', 'Olga', 'Tug Boat Annie' and 'Mona'.

Water Troughs at Tyttenhanger

Again we decided to enlarge the track from the tunnel mouth, straight down between the poplar trees to the end of one, then a big loop and back again. This made the track 2, 400ft long. At this time I fitted a scoop to the City of London's tender and therefore included a water trough in the design of the track. The only level part of the track was just outside the tunnel, so it had to be there. I acquired a small copper header tank and mounted it level with the track. We ran a water supply from the 'Cuckoo Line' to it.

The trough was made from an old hot water cylinder formed at evening classes (more about that later). The trough was 70ft long. It was a bit of fun fitting the supply from the tank. It was by ½” hose pipe up through the sleeper in two places. It proved very successful. It could pick up enough water to do two laps, much to the opposition's surprise, one did not get wet feet, as long as the speed was not too excessive.

There were only two locos that could use it. The 'City' was not really a model, just a small steam engine. The other user was a real model and as Curly would say: 'You cannot scale nature!' When the superb engine went to try it out, most of the members present were there to see what happened. The tender of the North Western's had their pick up going straight up into a dome – thereby they could fill the tender that much higher. When it was tested the driver went into the water trough at quite a lick. The water rose through the pick up and hit the dome and took it about a foot high, followed by a column of water: Much to the amusement of the onlookers.

The L.N.E.R. scoop has a return loop at the top so does not have that problem, but cannot fill the tender to the top. As a lot of our keen youngsters have found out when filling the 'City's' tender at the station.

A lot of the members were against the trough, so it was pulled out, screwed up and put down by the steaming bays. When we re-laid the track the whole lot was cleared away and the water supply cut off.

Evening Classes

In 1968, one of our members was a lecturer at St. Albans College of Further Education and decided to run an evening class for the model engineer. I joined at once, looking forward to being able to use some reasonable machinery and be able to play with the casting sand. I had a wish to try my hand at making a pattern even though I hate working with wood and the mess it makes.

The thing I enjoyed most was my introduction to the Cunningham Arms. I had a daughter that supplied my lad's rugby team with home brewed beer, but here they brewed a special brew for each guest! Another advantage was that it was possible to beat the life out of a piece of copper without being told not to make so much noise and there was always the tutor who knew a thing or two about this engineering lark.

But, where I came into my own was this boiler thing. I have always maintained that it is the easiest part to build on a loco and the quickest, and the most enjoyable. You start with a sheet of copper and a length of tube and finish with the most important part.

When I was Superintendent of the Society's Workshop at Prospect Road, New Barnet, we had a 5 pint and a 1 pint blow lamp with which to braze boilers. The only trouble was that the slot cars met one night and the OO met another, in between members wanted to braze boilers.

Oh! I must tell this. When we first went there, it was a booster house, pumping water up Barnet Hill. They took all the pump and equipment out but left the big flywheel. It must have been 8ft high, a lot of it in a pit. We were told it was useless and we could get rid of it. The only idea we came up with

was to bury it under the floor, so we did! Another boiler that was a bit of fun was one for a traction engine, 3" I think. It belonged to the shed master at Top Shed, Kings Cross, Peter Townend. It was built in the railway workshop. When we came to test it for a boiler certificate we found it was impossible to fill it with water; it came out so quickly. It took three of us to make it watertight. Using two large propane torches and the oxy-acetylene gun, it cost me my eyebrows to put it right!

The evening classes are still running but at a different place and with a different tutor.

Princess Marina and Portable Track

The Society's old portable track was getting a bit past it and as we still had the Arkley track in store we thought it would be a good idea to use it to make a new one.

The Society was not interested so two of us managed to buy it and make our own tracks. Mine was made in the yard behind our studio in East Barnet Road. The other by the residential electrical engineer, John Sumpter, who worked and lived at the large gas works in the Lea Valley.

Both are now in the garage at Tyttenhanger, mounted on their trailers and can be used as required.

I had seen a very nice loco running on our track – a Princess Marina. It was about time for me to build another loco, so why not a Princess – as all the castings were available from 'Reeves'. In after-thought it was a bit stupid of me as it was built by a professional engineer. He did say it was very useful as a fete engine, although I can not see it in that guise. My lathe was a war time lease lend one, 3½" centre height but with a slim bed. It had taper roller races in the headstock. It was a bit optimistic of me to try to emulate him and build a Princess Marina as I cannot read drawings and the fact that they were wrong in a few parts and the boiler stays were inadequate and so on didn't help. I built it in my usual way, making 'B' to fit 'A', 'C' to fit 'B' and using whatever is at hand. The engine proved very successful, ran at many fetes, and earned a lot of money for the Society.

The Society ran many exhibitions in the 1950s at Ewen Hall, Wood Street, Barnet. It was there that I first drove a 5" loco. It was built by one of our famous members, Bert White, the author of the book, 'The Maintenance and Management of Small Locomotives'. The track was inside the Church Hall. The only other time I remember doing this, apart from the M.E. Exhibitions, was in the corridor of a school in Enfield (I think the caretaker must have been away at the time!)

A Sailing Diversion

One of our members was into sailing and built 'a class dinghy'. The first was a 'Vagabond'. It is an estuary sailing boat, 12ft long, with gunter rig. Once he was sailing in the sea with his wife, something went wrong and they had to be rescued by helicopter, so he decided to build a larger craft – a 4-berth yacht. We bought the Vagabond in 1962 and sailed it successfully in the River Thames, the River Lea and on many family holidays, and it's still in use. Our grandchildren took to sailing in a big way and after a number of visits to the sailing school in North Wales passed to be instructors and are now able to be paid to enjoy their hobby.

'Dot'

Our firm fulfilled a number of commissions to supply memorial windows in Wales. We grew fond of the people and its country so we spent a number of holidays there sailing and visiting the many narrow gauge railways. In Towyn Museum, there is the original narrow gauge engine called 'Dot' by Beyer Peacock. It was the first of a series of small 0-4-0 tank engines, built to run on 18" gauge track

inside the standard one to pull the large engines about the yard. It proved a success and they built a number. The first one was a well tank, the others were saddle tanks, as can be seen in the entrance of the York Railway Museum.

With a view to model a 'Dot', we spent the next five years holiday period in North Wales taking photographs, measurements and rubbings to enable me to start on a fresh project.

In 5" g it is quite heavy and being simple it is easy to build. The boiler is of the marine type with a dry backhead. It proved a good fete engine and a favourite of the youngsters as the regulator is 3" long and does not get hot. The fire hole is large and the shovel big, so it is easy to keep in steam. It was the dome that persuaded me to make 'Dottie'. My dome is 9" high and 6" wide, an elegant looking thing. Well worth the trouble of making the engine, just for that.

The Allchin Traction Engine and Clayton Lorry

My daughter-in-law preferred traction engines and talked me into building a model of 'the Allchin'. The plans and castings were available for a 1½" scale model. They are printed in book form. Once having read through it, I was hooked. Away I went into another form of modeling. This time the wheels were riveted together. Quite fun banging all those small bits of iron. On locos we use copper or brass but here they are the real thing – black iron. I was surprised how much it can pull. I made a driving trolley and it would pull two of us on grass at the Guildford Rally, which we visit most years.

In the early fifties I made a perfect model of a toy traction engine fired by charcoal. Then I found the Clayton Steam Lorry was also being built by the keen modeler. This looked interesting as they would run on hard surfaces and proved to be able to pull a larger load. It is 2" scale and easy to drive so the youngsters can manage it. When I read the information I found they were very basic so as usual I took little notice of them and fitted a clutch in the drive and brakes on the wheels. This has also performed at the Guildford Rally many times.

The boiler was quite amusing. It is a pot type with the coal fed in from a hole in the top which is also the smoke box and containing the super heater.

My grandson as a youngster won the Driver of the Year Competition at the M.E. Exhibition on the Clayton.

Model Sailing

The next 'lark' was when I had a 'frozen shoulder' so could not attempt another loco, so I joined the Marine Section as their next project was for them to build a radio controlled sailing boat. Although I was not very keen on woodwork I managed to build a reasonable model. I used hard wood in the construction but after a few years and many tears the only way to keep it watertight was to take the deck off and cover the inside with fibreglass. Now it behaves itself. The radio is the usual type, two channel, one on the rudder, the other on the sails. I made all the fittings of brass and they gave no trouble. Now I am too old to drive locos, the handling of a radio-controlled boat is just about right.

Toby and the Pump Truck

Some years ago I did start to build a 5" g L.N.E.R. N.2 but I soon found it would be too heavy for me to lift. It was a pity not to make it into some form of locomotive so 'Toby' was born. It is driven by an old 6 volt dynamo, powered by a secondhand golf trolley battery, complete with a wooden top in the guise of Toby, face and all.

In 1987, we were visitors at the Australian Live Steamers Convention held in Melbourne. We saw youngsters having a great time driving a 'pump truck' and decided to make one when the chance arose. As I had a crank axle, surplus to requirements from the N.2 that I didn't build, it was only natural to make one to my design. After all these years it is still well used. It lives in the workshop at the track and is available for all to use. Just one stipulation – let Tom know if you break it so that it can be repaired.

My Latest Project

Now that we have a sailing lake at Tyttenhanger, I decided to enlarge my fleet by building a paddle steamer. Having had a pleasurable trip down the Murray River from Echuca in the P.S. Canberra, I have recently decided to make a model of it. I am making it in copper from an old hot water cylinder. It's better than using wood as the copper is more durable and easier to work. I'm hoping to finish it so that it can sail in this memorable year 2,000.

[Top](#)

Tom and Ruth Luxford