The Chairman's Notes

John Old has planted two trees at Colney Heath in memory of his wife, Pat, who passed away on 23rd April. On behalf of the Club I would like to extend our sympathy to John and his family on their sad loss.

We have had an electrical safety audit at both the Club sites this month. As a result finance has been agreed for a good deal of work to be carried out to the wiring at Colney Heath which will improve site safety. Any electrical equipment used on Club premises must meet current safety standards and I must ask members to comply with the testers' requests. Unsafe tools or equipment must not be used or left on our premises.

There are still quite a lot of outstanding subs so watch out for rampaging Treasurers and Membership Secretaries.

Skill at nagging is a great asset in a chairman, and the Fete Section Leader has sent the Council accounts for the year 2000 fete season. Alex James has very kindly offered the use of his 5" aluminium ground level track for Fetes. It is about 100 feet long.

The loco section entertained Colchester Society of Model and Experimental Engineers on 17th June they bought up some magnificent engines. Congratulations are due to Frank and Mrs Hills and their helpers for the splendid spread they put on for our guests. It is nice to see visitors running on our railway.

The Garden Line goes from strength to strength and money has been given to the Section to purchase more rail and so complete the 0 gauge and gauge 1 layouts. Thanks are again due to the Society bridge builder, Mr Ron Todd, for the new set of handrails on the brick bridge.
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The HO section took the Young Street Yard switching layout to the Enfield Model Railway Exhibition and the Council agreed to finance the completion of their Digital Control Project.

On Saturday 16th June the Stationary Steam section laid a dense smoke screen between Colney Heath and Botany Bay (Enfield). We used two archaic steam road vehicles with one tractor, a series three Land Rover and a Jaguar in attendance at an average speed of 5mph in heavy rain, but we all enjoyed it-I think!!

Preparations are now under way for the LBSC Rally (Curly Bowl) which is being held on 2nd September. A committee is being formed to run the event. Clubs will be invited and there will be a limit of 8 entrants.

Finally don't forget our auction at 8pm at Colney Heath on Friday 6th July, even if you don't buy anything but tea. It's always worth the visit to see and hear auctioneer Chrisp in action.

Lets all hope for some nice warm dry weather over the next couple of months.

John Squire

From the Secretary

There's even less to report this month as I've been away on holiday! Actually it was a canal cruise by the 'WUT' Navy on parts of the Trent and Mersey and Shropshire Union canals taking in Chester on the way. Plenty of water in the canals everywhere we went but the rain largely held off until the Thursday afternoon – but it was cold!

"HELP!"

As many members will know the lease on Headquarters runs out in 2002. It appears that we 'enjoy the security of tenure rights under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954', quote from London Borough of Barnet letter dated 11/6/01. Is there anyone among us who can explain the workings of the Act in plain English?

Tony Dunbar

From the Membership Secretary

New Members

Welcome to four new members
The Council approved four new members in May:

John and Robert Ryan

Andrew and Nicola Caldwell

Ron Thorogood

North London Society of Model Engineers Family Day

Invitation to all Members, Their Families and Friends

Bring your friends neighbours etc on **Saturday July 28th** to our Family Day at Colney Heath.
11.00 am – late.

Bring your own food.

A barbecue for cooking it on will be provided. Juniors will be able to drive on the mainline under supervision.

Loco Section News

From Jim Macdonald

The summer weekends have so far produced some good weather at Colney Heath. We have seen many visitors on Sunday afternoons at the track. Saturday children's' parties have been very popular raising money for our Section to maintain our site during the winter. More helpers and reliable locos are required please especially on 7th July when we have the Potters Bar brownies - approx 100 of them coming.

Recently the first of three visiting clubs came to Colney Heath. This visit, arranged by Frank turned into a great success despite the rain threatening weather. Twelve engines and twenty-five members from the Colchester Society attended.

There is concern from some members that other societies will turn down our invites because we insist on the fitting of spark arrestors even during private running. We are, it seems, the only club in the country to insist on this. It is to be raised at the next Track Committee meeting where I expect to get confirmation from the Southern Federation on the countrywide situation. Anyone wishing to comment on the present situation please contact me. I have made no secret that because of increased pressure at work I am finding it difficult to dedicate the time required to the duties as Section Leader. I have decided to stand down at the end of the running season, and have informed the Track Committee of my intention along with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Society. My views on the appointment of members of the Track Committee are well known. As a traditionalist I believe the tried and tested ways have served us well; the captain of the ship should pick his crew, so I would be at odds with some newer members of the Society who prefer an open election for the Committee posts. I have enjoyed my two years in charge and hope I have served the section well. I wish my successor well and hope he will enjoy the same support from the members that has been given to me.

Don't forget we are holding the Curly Bowl on Sunday September 2nd and planning is well under way. We are still looking for members to act on the planning committee as advisors and helpers. Please contact me if you are interested.

Treasurer Twittering

As your new Treasurer I intend to put an occasional item in the News Sheet. This month I thought to explain how our finances are organised for those who don't already know.

There are two separate accounting centres in the Society, the Central Fund (my bit) that looks after the Society's overall affairs and the Tyttenhanger Site Fund (Jack Edward's bit) that looks after the day to day running of the Tyttenhanger Site.

The Central Fund can be divided into two –

First is the Subscription Fund that receives subscriptions (and an occasional donation) and pays for the normal annual running costs of the Society. On current form it's income and expenditure are approximately equal.

Second is the Contingency Fund that carries our reserve capital against a 'rainy day'. It receives any unusual items of income and pays for any unusual items of expenditure. Current expenditure includes various exceptional items for some Sections and the impending cost of rewiring our premises (mainly the Tyttenhanger Site). On current form this fund is diminishing and we must reduce the rate of spend or seek some unusual items of income.

A third Fund exists but is not relevant to the Society's everyday affairs. This is the Cyril Rylett Bequest Fund that consists of money left to the Society for specific Loco. Section purposes. It is administered by the Treasurer but controlled by Trustees appointed in the Bequest. The Society Auditors are responsible for auditing all these funds.
The Tyttenhanger Site Fund gets income from public running days, birthday parties and other profitable site activities. This money is spent on Site maintenance and improvements. Apart from a small working reserve the income is fully spent each year as the demand for improvements exceeds the available income. The Society Treasurer is responsible for auditing this fund.

I hope that some of you now know more about your Society's financial arrangements. I have not mentioned any specific figures as I do not think this is appropriate in the News Sheet but if any of you have a genuine interest in our finances please grab me and ask questions.

Bernard Lambert

Obituary

It is with great sadness I have to announce the death of my wife, Pat, who passed away on 23rd April after a 12 year battle against cancer.

She was a wonderfully caring wife and mum and never complained despite the pain she endured.

She is sorely missed by myself and our three children, Malcolm, Ian and Denise, who have been a great support to me during this sad time.

Many thanks to all those who sent messages of sympathy and donations totalling nearly £600 to Edenhall Hospice who took such wonderfully caring trouble to ensure Pat was as comfortable as possible in her final days.

John Old

Slot Car News

Le Mans
By Steve Francis

To win at Le Mans it is all about stamina, endurance and pacing yourself, and so must the competitors. With the help of Calvados we lost! We, John, Tony, Dan and myself left London bright and early Friday morning looking forward to an exciting weekend with the British entries of Bentley and MG and a host of teams from Europe and America.

After our experiences of first class on the ferry last month we decided to repeat the venture with wine, women and song for our crossing. OK I lied about the women and as none of us could sing we settled on smoked salmon and a cheese salad for the Tupperware Kid. (That's Dan- he's got a plastic car. Thanks to Tony we had a new map. It was only four years old, rather than the Mappa Mundi. We had last year.

The weather was quite good for the drive down to Alencon for the overnight stop before heading off for the race on Saturday.. We got ourselves into the swing of things Friday night with beer, wine and Calvados – oh and something to eat as well.

Saturday morning arrived dry and bright – all right wet and dull, but not enough to dampen the spirits. We raced off to Le Mans for the historic sports car race in the morning and got lost trying to find Arnage Corner. Fortunately the organisers held up the start of the race for us so we got there just in time. It was an excellent race, won by David Piper in his gorgeous green Ferrari 250LM. From a Lister. Also racing was Sir Stirling Moss in a 'C' type Jaguar looking and driving exactly like he did in his heyday.

After the race we went to the local supermarket to stock up for the day. Back at the track we had lunch in the car park, all washed down by fine wine, beer and Calvados. Then we went off to our grandstand, or should I say the grandstand which had our seats in it.

As is normal now the cars are flagged off with a rolling start. It is an impressive sight seeing 48 modern sports cars charging off down the main straight. Before long it started raining on the far side of the track and very shortly some very bent racing cars hobbled back to the pits, bathed in sunshine (the pits not the cars). This put the teams in a real quandary about tyre choice. A quarter of the track was very wet but the rest was dry. With all this activity in the pits the positions kept changing, so, for the first time in 70 years a Bentley was leading. The beer kept flowing, the rain kept raining and we kept dry in our covered grandstand. A very interesting race was unfolding as were a lot of umbrellas! For the first five hours it was a great race but now dinner intervened. Our usual Saturday night venue had yet another wedding going on so we ventured into town to eat. John had started on a mission of getting stuck behind Berlingo vans. I don't remember if they are Renault or Peugeots, but they are definitely French and he doesn't like them. Our waiter was a hoot and took the

mickey out of Dan for being a vegetarian. In fact this waiter took quite a liking to Dan. Dan thought the same about this waiter as John does about Berlingos.

After much wine and Calvados and something to eat we headed, sorry – staggered, off to the track to watch the racing at night. John proudly announced he was going to stay up all night; his bravado no doubt influenced by our old friend in a dark brown bottle. By 3am we went back to the car-park to settle down for the night. John then thought better of his earlier rash statement and got out the 'call that a groundsheet…' During the afternoon Dan had introduced a new item to our trip – marinating the melons. Although this does sound slightly dubious it actually involves cutting a hole in a melon, scooping all the pips out and filling it to the brim with Calvados. You then leave in the boot of the car all afternoon, pour the contents into a glass, cutting your hand open; then cut the melon up and finally eat and drink the contents at three o'clock in the morning. We then retired to our sleeping bags under our umbrellas and Tony expired in the car.

I poked an eye out in the morning, saw blue sky and thought, 'Good it's a nice day'. I should have thought, 'Where's my umbrella gone?' Thank you Tony for retrieving it. I was then rudely awakened by the very loud sound of a car horn being blown about three inches from my ear. Looking round there were three inane grins from inside the car. As usual on these trips everyone else has this annoying habit of getting up far too early and refusing to let me wake up in my own good time.

The excesses of Saturday had taken their toll and four very sore heads thought about breakfast. No Sunday morning would be complete without the ritual of the strange metallic object. It involves John kneeling in front of said object, filling it full of water and putting his head in it. Being the 'master,' he alone is allowed to partake in this ritual. Our only part in it is to take the mickey. After we rolled up our sleeping bags, folded the 'call that a groundsheet…', put our collective hangovers in the car, we went to find breakfast. In the meantime there was still a motor race going on. We knew that because there was the sound of noisy engines in the distance. It could of course have been the sound in our heads. Breakfast was had in a bar near the track. I nearly had mine in the kitchen as I nearly fell through a door leading to it.
What really started then was a sub-plot to the weekend, the main one of course being, 'four go crazy on Calvados.' This sub-plot only became obvious to me when we got back. We seemed to spend the whole time away reliving great comedy sketches, funny sayings and impressions of comedians, ranging from Ali G to Benny Hill, stopping of at Monty Python, Dad's Army, Allo Allo etc. Dan was responsible for most of the impressions – Bruce Forsythe being a great favourite. Tony was responsible for Benny Hill as he spent all weekend looking like Fred Scuttle.

In the meantime the Audis had moved into an unassailable lead. The one remaining Bentley was third and the MGs retired. We then spent the afternoon in the grandstand watchjing the deluge flooding the track, nodding off, and watching Audi coming home one and two and Bentley a magnificent third.

Monday saw another ritual 'clear-up the boot of the car'. There is only one reason for this – to make room for the Calvados to take home. Monday's lunch was had in a little place we had come to know and love called Bec Hellouin. The sun came out as it always does there: The swifts were flying in and out of the church belfry: A horse and

cart trotted by and we were enjoying a fine lunch. It gave us time to reflect on a great weekend and how we hit the Calvados too soon and promise to return next year and do exactly the same again. So Fred Scuttle, the Tupperware Kid, Johnny the Sundial (ask him yourself!) headed off to find the Calvados farm and home.

On the subject of endurances, NLSME had a fine win in the 16hrs race at Riverside, Newcastle. Recently our other team, Walmington-on-Sea were second after leading the race up until the night section. Well done to Ian, Paul and Greg. Both teams should be heading off to Belgium soon for a 24hr race. Good Luck!

Calendar for July

5th Saloon
12th F1
19th Sports
26th 1/24 th GP12

Tyttenhanger Gazette

By Roger Bell

The June Loco Meeting was one of the summer series held at the track. A barbecue was under way and during the evening the Club's Class 37 battery electric loco and Mike Foreman's familiar Rob Roy were running.

My attention was drawn towards the new garden railway. A group of members sat chatting in it's midst whilst a loco hauled three trucks around the large circuit. I watched the loco's characteristic exhaust puffing from the chimney and wondered how it could run on it's own with live steam and not require constant attention. I contrasted this to driving a 3 ½" gauge loco: One would have raised steam on the steaming bay and be already to go. I would wheel the traverser to my bay, push the loco and truck onto it, move the traverser over the main line, fit the ramp, push the loco and truck back onto the line, wheel back the traverser, fit the stirrups and climb on only to find the pressure was down, more water was needed in the boiler and the fire had nearly gone out. It takes practice to get it right.

The little engine at the June Loco Meeting was an 0-4-2 Exelsior made in China by an American company, Accucraft. It is a multigauge loco. The wheels can be moved out by releasing a grub-screw and the model comes with a larger gauge pony-truck. It was running on gauge-1 track. The gas tank is refilled using a large butane gas refill cartridge as one would top up a cigarette lighter. Having filled the loco with gas, water and steam oil the burner is lit with a gas match from the chimney. The stainless steel gas burner is a tube with slots in the bottom and is known as a poker burner. Looking through the smokebox door the flame can be seen burning around the bottom half of the tube. The design is such that it runs out of gas before it does water and runs for 25 minutes on a gas filling. The steam pressure is 50psi and the boiler is fitted with a pressure gauge.

The loco has piston valves and whilst it is controlled with a regulator and a reversing lever, it can be radio controlled with one servo connected to the reversing lever linkage which controls direction and speed, the regulator being left fully open. The loco is modeled on a 2ft 6ins gauge engine by Kerr Stewart which runs on the railway at Whipsnade Zoo. The cost is £485 new and it is ready-to-run.

The other loco on the garden railway during the evening was a 'Roundhouse' built by the Roundhouse Engineering Co in Doncaster. It was an 0-4-0 and now ten years old. This was also a gauge-1 and based on a 2ft 6ins gauge full size. It is superheated and gas fired. It will run for 45mins on one gas filling and is capable of hauling 40 trucks. To convert to radio control, two servos would be needed, one for the regulator and one for the reversing lever. This loco has slide valves.

The layout at Colney Heath has two track gauges, gauge-1 and 'G' scale. Gauge-1 is used for two scales, narrow gauge 2ft 6ins which is 16mm to the foot and standard gauge 4ft 8 ½ ins which is 45 mm to the foot. This is also the old Hornby '0' gauge.

'G' scale or garden gauge is also used for two scales, American narrow gauge and British standard gauge.

There are steam and electric locos available for all sizes. With electric, if the track is electrified the points have to be of the insulated type. One method of electrifying the rail is to have one rail live and studs like drawing pins fitted to some sleepers for the return. A spring loaded shoe on the loco keeps contact with the studs. Continuity with the live rail is provide with a wire soldered from one rail to the next, rather than relying on the fishplate. The current is 12 or 24 volts. On-board power and control can all be accommodated in the gondola car of the American narrow gauge 'G' scale. This would be two 12 volt sealed rechargeable cells, a special controller, a receiver and a battery pack for the receiver. The motor draws 3-5 amps at 24 volts and would run all day. The radio control frequency is 27Mhz AM and 40Mhz FM as with model boats.

I have heard it said that good engineers make good gardeners and on that basis there may be some amongst us that would consider packing up gardening and converting the area into a railway. To start the hobby an '0' gauge 16mm to the foot 0-4-0 side tank loco, meths-fired is £250. This runs extremely well straight out of the box. A 'G' scale 0-4-0 electric loco, standard gauge, track powered loco is £65 ready to go.

On the rolling stock side, a 'G' scale American narrow gauge passenger coach is £45 and about 20 inches long. It is lettered and lined with full interior. High volumes of these are produced in America. Freight cars are £33 upwards.

So there we have it - time for a complete change of direction. Instead of endlessly traipsing round some garden centre in search of a pyrocanthia or a clematis one can make a selection from the lineside catalogue of station buildings, signals, people and bridges and watch trains running from the comfort of your conservatory. At last a therapeutic solution is with us.

Links with the Past

By Peter Kearon

It's been a cause for celebration that one of Britain's most famous locomotives, Pendennis Castle, was brought back last year from 'down under'. Peter explains how, more than 50 years earlier, he went down under a sister engine and suggests that the opportunity soon to be available to take part in this special experience at Swindon Museum is too good to be missed.

Only members of NLSME born in pre-war days, will remember the cruel winter of 1946 when frozen snow remained along the edges of pavements until the following Easter; an Easter which ushered in the glorious summer of 1947.

In those far off days locomotive water supply tanks were generally supported by four or more hollow cast iron columns. By some chance water had leaked into one of the legs of a tank situated at Cadoxton (Barry) sidings. In the icy conditions the trapped water cooled and finally expanded and split the leg from top to bottom. This damage remained unsuspected until the thaw came, melting the ice and allowing the trapped water to escape leaving behind a rusty crack running the full length of the column. A year elapsed before a solution was reached: With some inspiration it was decreed that a one inch hole should be drilled at the bottom of each leg of every water tank in the South Wales Division to ensure that any trapped water could harmlessly escape. Whether or not the split column was ever replaced remains unknown.

At that time ,spring 1948, I was an apprentice at Barry Locomotive Works but serving a three months spell in the Water Service Department. This disparate team looked after hydraulic machinery on Barry Docks as well as all water handling equipment sited in the Vale (of Glamorgan) along the railway which ran, and still does, albeit without local passengers, from Bridgend to Cardiff and affords a 20 mile diversion on the Swansea – Paddington main line. A sad aspect of the Water Service was the innate fear that the 'big boss' from Cardiff would arrive unannounced, find men hanging about and realise that the Department was grossly over-manned and under-used. This fear was seized upon by the usual jokers who constantly claimed that they had heard that this ogre had just left Cardiff heading for Barry: Thus panic fed upon fear. However during my short spell in the Water Service never once did any official take the slightest notice of that backwater. Everyday, unless there was a specific requirement, such as digging out and replacing hydraulic piping, tasks would be found aimed at keeping the hands well away from the workshop. Commonly listed were station toilet ball valves, tap washers and, for some historical reason, oiling the bearings of small hand-operated cranes found on many ex-Barry Railway stations. Clear off and don't come back before five was the unspoken order.

The new work of drilling lots of holes was seized upon as a way of keeping me gainfully employed and away from feared management inspection. I was allocated a fitter's mate – a sure sign of authority – and given the task of drilling a one-inch hole

in every column of every water tank in the Barry district of South Wales. Equipped with a hammer, ratchet drilling machine, rope, a couple of drills, a list of some 40 tanks and an unlimited train pass we set off each day to a selected location. A centre was made four inches from the column base, the drilling machine offered up and secured by the rope which formed a Spanish windlass and then after 150 or so ratchets the drill broke through. One surprising result was that small animals were immediately attracted; field mice would climb vertically to inspect these safe (mouse) holes and in no time at all tiny creatures were carrying grass and straw into their new found homes. Human presence was virtually ignored. One hole per hour, eight holes per day before collecting our gear and joining a passenger train or the guard's van of a goods train to Barry in time to catch the evening train home to Cardiff.

One morning we attended the six column tank positioned years earlier by the Taff Vale Railway at Penarth Curve (South) and just opposite Canton (Cardiff) sheds which offered an ideal opportunity to visit this attraction with every excuse for being there. An hour long walkabout took me first to the cavernous coaling structure where coal was shoveled from wagons into steel trucks then wheeled across onto one of the several cantilever structures and tipped into the tenders or bunkers of waiting engines. No high coaling towers for soft Welsh coal. Despite the dark and dusty conditions the grimy gang of handlers were a happy bunch and even happier when I was induced to fill a truck, wheel it across to a coaling stage and tip it. One such loading was enough for me; these men kept at it for eight hours or more per shift. No wonder such men as these along with fire and smokebox cleaners became impossible to recruit in post-war years.

On to the turntable to see 120 ton locomotives being turned, with apparent ease, by the fireman unaided by any form of servo power. The four dark roundhouses each with its own turntable offered little except the smokey, sulphurous smell we all knew so well. These led to the running shed proper where engines were prepared over pits – essential for oiling inside motion, GWR style. As I remember there were just two engines outside the shed roads, a Saint and a Castle. The Saint was the near time-expired Canton veteran 'Lady Macbeth' of 1904 and restricted to working semi-fast passenger trains. To think that just 40 years earlier this same engine had doubtless been in the top link at either Paddington or Laira working premier expresses such as 'The Cornish Riviera' non- stop. It could be thought that by using Hall-Class boilers, standard cylinders and Collett tenders these veterans could go on forever but hauling trains for perhaps two million miles over jointed track caused unacceptable stretching of Churchward frames - with consequent bearing failure. How delightful to be able to see Bert Mead's superb Saint and remember the days when Canton was a haven for these classics.

But to my youthful eyes the other engine was the more exciting. (Of the dozen or so long-term resident Castles at Canton, three are memorable. 'Landovery Castle' was the only four-cylinder Collett engine ever to be painted black despite war conditions, 'Earl of Ducie' which took part in the 'high speed' Castle run in the mid 60s and was then promptly scrapped and of course the one which escaped the torch, 'Defiant'). The Castle was fresh from a Swindon overhaul and was being prepared by the driver, to me an elderly man dressed in dungaree trousers, jacket (buttoned at the neck) and a flat cap, the very hallmark of GW drivers. Peaked grease-proof caps with badge remained an LMS prerogative. On my approach he showed some suspicion but when I

explained I was an apprentice from Barry Loco and therefore 'one of them' his attitude softened and soon he was telling me his own background. As I remember he had begun work as a cleaner back at the beginning of the 1900s – when Dean/Churchward 4-4-0s took pride of place. Then a long spell at Bristol working through the goods and passenger links before returning to Canton eventually to become the senior driver on the No.1 passenger link: Hence his allocation of the shed's finest engine. But, he told me, shortly he would reach his 65th birthday and no longer, legally, be allowed even to step on the footplate. That day he was taking out Cardiff's best engine; soon just a pensioner's life. It seemed such a waste of his vast experience and skill.

'Come and have a look around a real engine', he said.

'Cheeky bugger', I thought. First the tender which surprisingly had four parallel axles, LNER style, with outside axleboxes and, I was told the only such tender ever built at Swindon. ('The Great Bear' was attached to a narrow inside-bearing tender with eight wheels grouped in two sets). The cab shone with polished copper pipes and shining brass fittings – a finish adopted by Caerphilly Works but sadly not by the Barry factory.

From the outside, Castles are deceptively simple. Churchward introduced (with the Saints) high running boards which expose coupling and connecting rods, crossheads and even outside valve drive but he carefully kept hidden all that lay between the frames. I am sure that members who have looked over the frames of a Castle standing at a station will remember that, apart from the top of the two links nearly touching the boiler casing, nothing can be seen.

It is no excuse to admit that up to then I had failed to take the trouble of considering the valve layout of these engines; Walschaerts valve gear was completely alien to me. With the exception of a few long-defunct steam railcars Stephenson link motion was the only valve gear used by the railway companies of South Wales, and so far as I know, no single engine with Walschaerts valve gear ever entered the Barry Works; thus I never worked on this motion. It follows that when I accompanied the driver down into the pits the very sight of inside Churchward-Walschaerts gear seen from underneath came as a total shock. In the few minutes available I could do no more than gaze with total lack of understanding at the mysterious rods and links above my head. To have remained there long enough to make any worthwhile investigation was not an option; I thanked the driver and set off back to my drilling work disappointed with myself for having failed to grasp a wonderful unexpected opportunity which was surely never to be repeated. On apprentice 'educational' visits to Swindon Works I did have the chance to see over the frames of four cylinder engines where the boiler had been removed. At such near places as Bristol and Swansea there were plenty of Walschaerts geared LMS engines on display while a study of the available 'valve and valve gear' books let me understand the theory.

But always I have regretted my youthful failure – until now. I understand that Swindon museum is arranging for a King (or Castle) to be positioned over a pit with access for visitors. It's taken half a century to be given this second chance and I can only hope that this time I will have the sense – and time – to understand what I see, a

superb example of Churchward design worked out in the distant Victorian era. May I warmly recommend a visit? It will surely be worthwhile.

Postscript

From my new home I regularly travel by train into Cardiff and pass over the same Penarth curve (South). Canton shed remains but is now a dreary depository for rusting BR relics awaiting the scrap yard with a handful of EWS Canada-built diesels which appear to handle all the goods traffic. Surprisingly the water tank still stands but now supported by four braced RSJs rather than cast iron columns. How fascinated my wife would be were I to show her a hole I had drilled as an apprentice. But on second thoughts – perhaps not.

Standard Gauge

The following is one of those amusing E-mails I receive from time to time on the Internet (most of which are unprintable in the News Sheet) which seem to arise in the US. (Ed)

The US standard railroad gauge is 4 feet 8 ½".

That's an exceedingly odd number. Why was that gauge used?

Because that's the way they built them in England, and the US railroads were built by English expatriates.

Why did the English build them like that?

Because the first rail lines were built by the same people who built the pre-railroad tramways, and that's the gauge they used.

Why did "they" use that gauge then?

Because the people who built the tramways used the same jigs and tools that they used for building wagons which used that wheel spacing.

Okay! Why did the wagons have that particular odd wheel spacing?

Well, if they tried to use any other spacing, the wagon wheels would break on some of the old, long distance roads in England, because that's the spacing of the wheel ruts.

So who built those old rutted roads?

The first long distance roads in Europe (and England) were built by Imperial Rome for their legions. The roads have been used ever

since.

And the ruts in the roads?

Roman war chariots first formed the initial ruts, which everyone else had to match for fear of destroying their wagon wheels. Since the chariots were made for (or by) Imperial Rome, they were all alike in the matter of wheel spacing.

The United States standard railroad gauge of 4 feet, 8.5 inches derives from the original specification for an Imperial Roman war chariot specifications and bureaucracies live forever. So the next time you are handed a specification and wonder what horse's ass came up with it, you may be exactly right, because the Imperial Roman war chariots were made just wide enough to accommodate the back ends of two war horses. Thus, we have the answer to the original question.

Now the extra-terrestrial twist to the story...

When we see a space shuttle sitting on its launch pad, there are two big booster rockets attached to the sides of the main fuel tank. These are solid rocket boosters, or SRBs. The SRBs are made by Thiokol at their factory in Utah. The engineers who designed the SRBs might have preferred to make them a bit fatter, but the SRBs had to be shipped by train from the factory to the launch site. The railroad line from the factory had to run through a tunnel in the mountains. The SRBs had to fit through that tunnel. The tunnel is slightly wider than the railroad track, and the railroad track is about as wide as two horses' behinds. So, the major design feature of what is arguably the world's most advanced transportation system was determined over two thousand years ago by the width of a horse's ass.

And you wonder why it's so hard to get ahead in this world...