



West Midlands “N” Gauge Club NEWSLETTER

From our Chairman

It has been an exciting start to the year for us even though the popular press would have it that railway modelling is a dying hobby. Although we had one non-renewal at the start of the year, we are steadily picking up new members from social media, the website, shows and family connections.

When Ken handed over the reins to me at the end of 2020, one worry that we both had was that of declining membership and it was an issue that continued to worry me. Healthy and stable membership numbers mean financial stability and security for the club. We have always aimed to end the year with a small operating surplus and therefore have managed to build up a good reserve. Good membership numbers mean that we can keep subscription rates stable and as low as possible for members and also provide them with the service that they deserve. The basic premise is that if membership numbers dwindle, subscriptions have to rise more than they otherwise would to cover the fixed overheads of rent, insurance etc.

In 2023, we were very active on the exhibition scene locally with Whartson Hall in particular. This year our involvement will be somewhat lower; Whartson hall currently only has two bookings and Gibben Quarry will be our 'forefront layout'. It is all too easy to overexpose on layouts so we are taking a bit of a breather this year although we could end up taking up a space where someone has dropped out. We are not supporting The International N Gauge Show this year as we have been very active there in the

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past and can't offer anything new, although I know several members are booked. I will be there with a different club with a very different layout (a German terminus to fiddle yard layout).

The news that Hattons were ceasing trading, followed by the bombshell that Warley MRC were not going to run a show at the NEC did cause some shockwaves. This did seem to cause some media interest and possible 'panic' and alarm. It's a periodic reset of the hobby rather than its demise. The Warley club have very sound reasons to decide not to run the massive 'National' show at the NEC but the club is not in trouble and has some very interesting and exciting plans for the future. I hope that Warners, who have taken up the date, can put on something that the visitors will enjoy and perhaps move the concept in a slightly different direction too.

Finally I would like to thank everyone who helps to make this club the great success and friendly group that it is from fixing layouts, chatting, running trains, offering advice and help, sorting refreshments and keeping us financially sound.

Breaking News by Ken Jones

We're delighted to announce that the famed Walsall Arboretum miniature railway will be back in business for ONE DAY ONLY on Saturday 4th May 2024 from noon to 7pm to celebrate the Arboretum's 150th anniversary.

You never know... if it is a success it might return permanently, so do visit if you can.

We've brought you this news because it just missed the last MR magazine and with the frequency reduced, it's a long time till the next one. If you want to keep in touch with the latest information, you can sign up to our irregular NEWS bulletins at:

<https://atob.us14.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=5132eea853fb8388701d7f3af&id=9b97f7049d88701d7f3af&id=9b97f7049d>



Walsall Arboretum's 150th Anniversary Celebrations

**FREE
ENTRY**

Live music from

**Slady • The West Midlands Concert Band
Midnight Crossing • Inareko
The City of Birmingham Brass Band
Hosted by Dicky Dodd**

Other activities include...

**Food Stalls & Bars • Children's Rides
Miniature Railway
Plus much more!**



**SATURDAY
4 MAY 2024**

12 noon - 7pm



Walsall Arboretum Walsall WS1 2QH
Facebook: Walsall Arboretum Instagram: walsall.arboretum

Wombourne Railex in Photos

On the 2nd March, the Wombourne show was in progress. It was a winters day, driving through the snow in Sedgley before leaving it behind as you descend into Wombourne.

The show its self was a mix of gauges, stalls selling goods and a few demo stands.

I took inspiration from some of these layouts for the planning of a compact layout of my own when I find space to build it.

Below and overleaf are a collection of images from the show, not all layouts are included:









Wiring New Street for Analogue and DCC

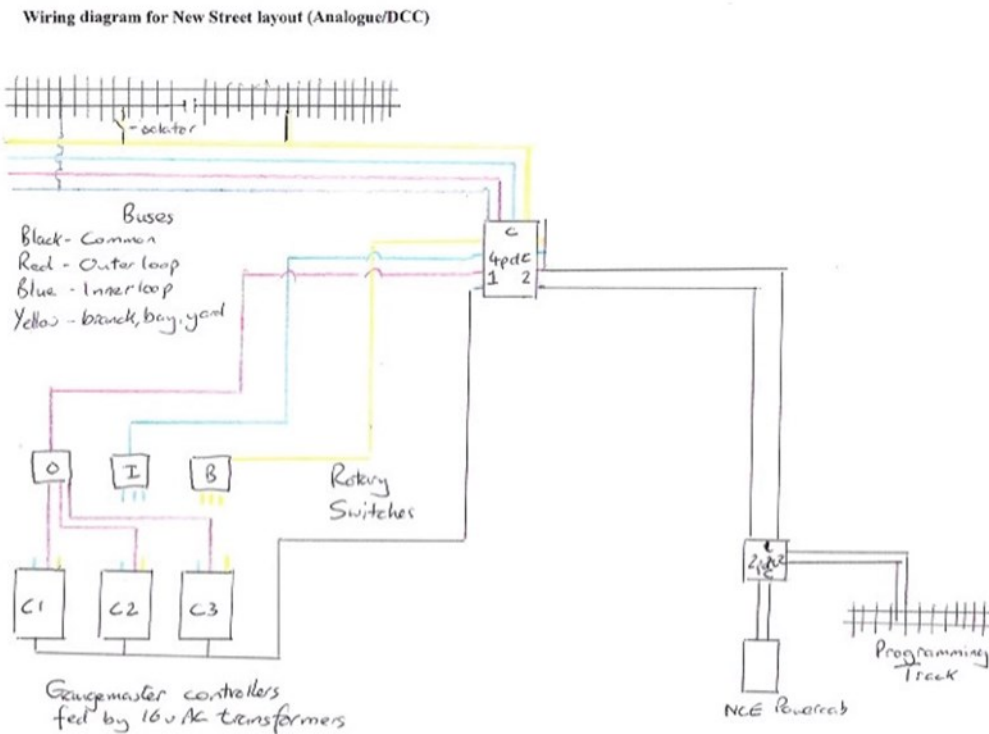
by Jeremy Edwards

When I planned New Street I made sure that it was designed to be able to be converted to DCC operation on a switchable basis. Having completed the exercise I thought that an explanation was in order, particularly as it would be useful to be able to operate Lichfield Trent Valley in this way.

Analogue operation is by three Gaugemaster controllers (a pair – with inertia – control the main lines and a single controls the branch notionally). Each section (outer, inner and branch) have a power bus and there is a common power bus as a return. The buses are connected to 4 way rotary switches position 1 is off, 2 goes to controller 1, 3 to controller 2 and 4 goes to controller 3. This means that each bus can be connected to a different controller to operate up to 3 trains at a time but a controller can also control a pair of buses or all three. This allows trains to move between the branch and the main lines.

Isolator switches are fitted to the exits from each fiddle yard siding, the bay, part of the yard and sections before 'Home' signals to hold trains while crossing manoeuvres are taking place. To ensure that DCC operation can take place, all frogs are isolated and are currently powered by point blades although eventually latching relays will be used.

DCC operation is by NCE Powercab with the option to use the '06 cab' to have two controllers. I chose this as it does not require a separate control box unlike other systems. A small panel inserts into the fascia taking the power supply and feeding the 'two wires' to the track.



The equipment required to convert to operation of either system was just one 4 pole double throw switch. However, the drawback of the NCE system is that it does not have terminals to wire a programming track into the system so a double pole double throw switch was added.

I originally wired the layout for Analogue control using the controllers and rotary switches but to add the Powercab was fairly simple. I broke into the feeds between the rotary switches and the main buses. The feeds from the track were soldered to the 'common' terminals in the centre of the switch. I then resoldered the wires from the rotary switches to one side of the switch. That restored analogue control complete with isolation.

Having fitted the Powercab panel I then connected the three connections for the power buses together on the other side of the switch. A single wire from here went to one side of the Powercab. The connection for the common return was then connected to the other Powercab terminal. I now had switchable Analogue or DCC control.

The final step was to break into this circuit and fit the double pole double throw switch; I connected the controller to the 'common' central terminals; the track was connected to one side and the programming track to the other.

I can now run the whole layout in either Analogue or DCC mode. Bearing in mind most of my locos are analogue, DCC doesn't get much of a look in until I have 'chipped' some DCC Ready locos. To switch between modes I just throw the 4 pole switch, checking the double pole switch isn't connected to the programming track. However, I do need to ensure that non-chipped locos are either off the track or in isolated sections when running DCC mode.

Unlike some operators and clubs, I chose not to run one loop – say the outer one – DCC and leave the rest analogue. Firstly all three sections are connected; the branch/bay/yard section links to the inner loop and there is a crossover between the inner and outer loops. Secondly, I chose to do this to allow me to 'play trains' rather than just run stuff round.

Revolution Trains Class 128 Parcels Unit by Jeremy Edwards

When this item appeared on the Revolution Trains schedule for manufacture, I was immediately motivated to buy one. When I first went to senior school, the now Cross City Line bisected the school playing fields and at lunchtimes and breaktimes we could see the various trains running up the line. One such train was really just a Cravens Parcels Unit – usually from memory running alone without any trailer cars. I have to admit that I was fascinated with these.

When the order book opened, I was fairly prompt in placing my order and paying the full amount (Revolution are a manufacturer that I feel I can trust in this respect but I know some people have been bitten by the DJM situation and aren't so keen). Like the Sonic ex GWR 56xx project that they were originally involved in, things seemed to get a little delayed but fortunately nowhere near as badly as the Sonic project as we had no sudden pandemic shutting down China. I think some of the delays were down to recovery from Covid, however. As a testament to Revolution's desire to produce something that they could be proud of, the last delay as PCBs were faulty is something that we can justifiably support them on.

I was really pleased to receive my package which arrived before Revolution actually told me that it was on the way. What did I receive? In my well packed box was a standard style pack of a 'jewel box' in a card sleeve. I ordered a green Western Region unit with corridor connections and speed whiskers as it fits in with my period of modelling (unlike some of my other items of stock). Also inside was a small pack of detail items – mainly dummy couplings and brake hoses – and a detailed instruction sheet.

Outwardly the model is crisply moulded with excellent paint and number details. The instruction leaflet warns about being careful handling the model as there are a number of added detail items; one example of this is the fine exhaust system at one cab end and also I must say that the under-frame detail looks good. My model has fine lamp irons at both ends and also, as it's a Western Region unit, has a pair of 2 character headcode boxes either side of the corridor connection.



Running in on Hawes Junction at Warley MRC

Mechanically it has a single power bogie at the non-exhaust end and a trailing bogie at the other end. Electrical pick up is from both bogies via tiny 'silver' contact wires. It is powered by a small coreless motor at the power bogie end and has a suitably weighty metal chassis. Reading the instructions, it comes DCC ready with a suitable speaker fitted for DCC Sound and that is something that I will investigate. The instructions tell me that it requires a Next – 18 chip.

I took the model to Warley Model Railway Club to start the running in. The verdict is that it looks good under way and is a very smooth and quiet runner. It dealt with the complex point work including slip points very well. Time precluded a full running in session so this was completed at Tipton. Technically it was a little out of place as it is a Western Region unit and Hawes represents Garsdale Road on the Settle and Carlisle. I'm looking forward to running it elsewhere.

Oxford Die Cast from Ken Jones

Oxford Die cast have released 2 new N Gauge models:



Model of the Iris Blue MGB Roadster by Oxford at 1:148 scale.

Product code: NMGB004



£6.45



Oxford Diecast Frozen White Ford Transit Connect 1:148 (N) scale - NFTC005

Product code: NFTC005



£7.45

The Digital Situation by Jeremy Edwards

Or “The Musings of Someone Embarking on DCC in N”

I think a lot of modellers may find themselves in a quandary about the DCC/Analogue issue. I certainly have been there. As a member of three clubs and a part-time operator in another Model Railway Group, I have now got experience of both types of operation and also a number of different attitudes. When I came back into the hobby in 2017, I owned a fair amount of old stock and also topped up my stock levels on the second hand market which suggested to me that DCC was not entirely for me as the idea of converting old Graham Farish stock to digital sounded a nightmare.

I think, in some ways, we N Gauge modellers are some way behind the larger scales in respect of ‘going digital’. One large club that I belong to has digital or part digital layouts in the larger scales but nothing in N and there doesn’t appear to be any interest within the N Gauge modellers to touch the subject. The Hackworth Model Railway Group that I sometimes support and is affiliated to another club that I belong to is totally digital from the power point of view although the rest of the semi automatic operations are analogue. Trent Valley Model Railway Society has a strong DCC following in 00 and since there are only really three of us in the N Gauge group two of us haven’t had anything digital to run although our new planned N Gauge exhibition layout will have the facility to run digitally in whole or in part.

Our situation, at Tipton, is somewhat more mixed. We have a few members with digital locos and for that reason we have purchased a digital controller and modified two of our layouts to run digitally (Whartson Hall – only in part). The rationale behind this is that it could be the difference between recruiting a new member or having them go to another club that is more forward thinking. I have to add that this was also part of the spur to persuade me to go down the digital route, even if only in part.

Looking at the advantages and disadvantages there are many. I’ve had experience with the three of the main systems that are commercially available. They’re pretty intuitive in the end – it’s just a case of knowing which buttons to press to drive your locomotives. The complexity comes in the programming phase if you go much beyond allocating numbers and setting speed steps. We opted for the NCE system which is probably the budget system and to be honest is probably cheaper than the current price for the 4 track Gaugemaster controller that we use on Whartson Hall. It’s easy to ‘drive’ the loco, make the basic sounds and if necessary switch to another loco on the same controller. Gaugemaster Prodigy (Trent Valley’s go-to system) and Lenz (Hackworth Group) are similar. The other readily available system is Digitrax which I have not experienced.

Why go digital?

1. You can get amazing slow running for shunting, as the track voltage is constant you don’t get the issues we have with analogue controllers where moving the controller a small amount does not make the loco move.

2. In theory you can control more than one loco at any one time (not quite but you need to switch between locos to achieve this).
3. There is sound – if you want it.
4. Some of the double heading issues can be sorted by using ‘consists’.
5. By careful programming you can build in smooth acceleration and deceleration.
6. Modern DCC chips will operate safely on 12 volts DC variable.
7. If you want to you can also control points, route setting, signals and accessories from one handset. It is noticeable that the N Gauge Society Hunslet diesel ready-to-run loco is only available as DCC; I’m wondering if other manufacturers may start to head the same way albeit perhaps not DCC Sound.

What are the drawbacks? Probably the first is cost as some of the chips are quite costly. In terms of ready fitted locos sound locos can be £100 more expensive than DCC Ready examples and it would appear that non-sound may not be available from Graham Farish on newer locos. If you have a DMU or EMU you need a chip for the trailer car to work the lights. It is not a substitute for poor tracklaying or lack of track cleaning – dirty track messes it up more than analogue. Fitting chips to older locos can be difficult or impossible (split chassis are a nightmare). Whilst all chips are compatible with all systems thanks to NMRA, all other components are system unique. You can’t mix systems. Another reason has been the world-wide shortage of chips which seems to be easing now – hence the delay in our controller arriving after it was ordered. Further research suggests that fitting chips to DCC Ready locos can be an issue when you need to remove the body; with Farish steam locos a single screw is needed but with diesels it gets fiddly with the risk of damage. Sometimes there is a space issue and the chip won’t fit. It has been suggested that for sound go for the best chip you can afford but for non-sound cheap chips are usually fine.

One other situation that we need to be aware of is that of dirty track and inconsistent pick up. DCC is not a remedy for dirty track, very much the opposite. Firstly the loco may slow down on dirty track but this may not always be noticed. However, if DCC Sound is employed, dirty track will stop the sound and once the loco is clear the sound will start again from the beginning so you may hear start-up sounds which aren’t appropriate to the situation. This can be cured, other than by cleaning the track, by fitting a ‘stay alive’ to the chip. This is a capacitor that gets charged up and then makes up for small losses of power input. The stay alive will not affect the use of the ‘panic button’, however.

What have I learned? It’s interesting to run the system and gives realistic running. Don’t be clever and try to run more than one loco off a single controller – I tried once on Rob Hambridge’s Baggies TMD and had a disaster. If you have three locos running on the system have three controllers. Very few operators run points and route setting off the handset; many use a Megapoints, MERG or even rodding/wire in tube. It makes shunting more fun as you can use two locos to make up or break down a train in tight spaces. I think following the advice of someone who has already purchased a system and buying the same system is good practice as

you can then ask about problems rather than starting from scratch; we went for NCE as both Phil Hunt and Nigel Harrold run that system.

What have I done? Firstly, some time ago, I bought a 00 gauge small Pannier for a future project; it has a built in speaker and just requires a chip for DCC operation. Secondly, my home layout that I am building can easily be converted to DCC operation. Thirdly I've actually bought a couple of DCCSound steam locos which I am about to run in and use on Whartson Hall. More of my locos and now the newer DC Ready type and can easily (and cheaply if I don't go for Sound) be converted to DCC. Modern chips will run with analogue DC power supplies – if a little slower than on DCC – and the sound will work although things like horns and whistles can't be operated. While completing my larger home layout, I am considering starting a small DCC loco shed layout to run my digital locos on.

When I came back into the hobby funds were very tight and I concentrated on building up a fleet of locos and stock as economically as I could. Matters are a little easier now and I'm prepared to spend a little to experiment. Please don't ask me about changing CV values or some of the other more complex programming issues. I know how to assign a running number to a loco and may be able to sort speed steps and sounds but there may well be others within the club who can help you. With further input from others, I could have included a lot more technical stuff but that would take several more pages. Perhaps another time or another author!

I need to acknowledge the help and advice from Dave Goodwin, Andrew Huson and Dave Rush-ton from Trent Valley MRS in checking my facts and giving further information.

Quiz Time

All the answers to the below are contained in this Newsletter :)

1. Where is celebrating their 150th Anniversary on 4th May with activities including a ride on miniature railway?
2. What DCC System in Jeremy using for his new layout New Street?
3. What year did Jeremy take over as club Chairman?
4. Did it snow on the day of the Wombourne Railex?
5. In which month is Michin Vale making its debut appearance?

Answers can be found on the final page

For those of you who enjoy a more traditional puzzle have a go at the wordsearch below:

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N S E X R A U T P H E Q           Y T L N J Y
B           H H E L W M E           B O E F
S           F I O X O O E W           M W
M           F T S F X Z B K       O I       O S
S           Y N I C P K Q E       A I       Y T
N C T O L H C H P J Q J I C I Q C Y O X R K Q F
X G D M V S I N A T P U H Y J O X L U F E O Q R V U
F T T N Y D A L B M O R A A W Q X J C U E B E S I N
L A C H E V J A D P H N K R T A V X G N T Y U S L V
X E W O U M T Q V C N W H A R S T O N H A L L Z L R
G Q N T U X E T W Y M F L I H Y L E J Z M T J R K
D T R F T L H N S Q Y Q N H L A E Z R I G A X L Q
I E X V S R A R K M I C H I N L N Z X S K A X H H
N D K U Q K P R C S P R V A L E S Q W V T Y H I T F
Q L K M H H E J D X C S X V B Z I C G A G O T J K Y X
G V C L R V P L Q Q X S V B S L P T E K T D C C O L T H
E F X O S I I A S S U L I G J O C G S Y I O P K S J C V C
      Y A H H F   K O G J T   S X X W U   O I S T E
-           U W Q           L V J           S W N           P E R

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ANALOGUE DCC GIBBEN MICHIN NEWSTREET QUARRY
TIPTONHILLS VALE WATERSTOCK WHARSTONHALL

Where to see us in 2024

Club Layouts at Exhibitions in 2024

2024	Exhibition	Layout
2 nd March	Wombourne	Whartson Hall
5th/6 th April	Sutton Coldfield	Gibben Quarry
27 th April	Blackheath	Gibben Quarry (new date)
4 th May	Bournville/Longbridge	Minchin Vale (009)
21 st July	Aldridge Road Transport Museum	Whartson Hall
24 th August	Bournville	Whartson Hall (new date)
19 th October	Wombourne	Gibben Quarry

Member Layouts at Exhibitions in 2024

Ken Jones

2024	Exhibition	Layout
Sat 2 nd March [aided by Peter Dale]	Wombourne	Fontaine Quarry
Sat 4 th May	Bournville	Fontaine Quarry
Sat /Sun 11 th / 12 th May	Syston MRS	Jones of Taunton
Sat / Sun 14th /15th Sept	TINGS	Malken
Sat 12 th October	Cradley Heath	Seen Better days
Sat 26 th October	Birmingham MRC	TBC

Full details at <https://www.ukmodelshops.co.uk/layouts/kjl.html>



West Midlands N Gauge Club

Chairman: Jeremy Edwards

jeremyedwards606@hotmail.com

07720 902490

Treasurer: Edgar Mason,

assisted by Philip Hunt

Newsletter Editor:

Claire Fisher

Catch up with us here:

www.wmngc.co.uk

YouTube:

West Midlands N Gauge Club

Scan the below QR:



Facebook:

West Midlands N Gauge Club

Proposed Meeting Dates for 2024

Saturday 6th January

Saturday 20th January

Saturday 3rd February

Saturday 17th February

Saturday 2nd March

Saturday 16th March

Saturday 6th April

Saturday 20th April

Saturday 4th May

Saturday 18th May

Saturday 1st June

Saturday 15th June

Saturday 6th July

Saturday 20th July

Saturday 3rd August

Saturday 17th August

Saturday 7th September

Saturday 21st September

Saturday 5th October

Saturday 19th October

Saturday 2nd November

Saturday 16th November (AGM)

*Saturday 7th December

*Saturday 14th December

*Operating Layouts for the Church Christmas Tree Festival

Meetings may be subject to local or national restrictions and guidelines. For information about the meetings contact Jeremy Edwards on 07720 902490 or via the website.

Any changes will be circulated via the newsletter, email, text, Facebook posts or if necessary by text or phone call

