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"50 Years of the NLSME"

In 1950 the North London Society of Model Engineers was six years old and was a thriving society that had gained recognition outside the region in which it was situated. The membership, although smaller than today, had grown significantly over the years and stood at over 150. Like all democratic organisations things did not always move quickly but the News Sheet of the period reflected a solid club with a friendly atmosphere although one not without its troubles – in fact much as it is today.

Competition, Confusion and Contention

An important decision for the Society's future was taken in 1950 concerning the introduction of competition within the Club.

Competition was a contentious issue and had been discussed extensively in 1949. The discussions culminated in December 1949 in a formal case 'for' and 'against' being presented in the News Sheet. Lawrence Sparey (author of 'The Amateur Lathe' and a founder member of the NLSME) put the case for competition and Alf Bradley (A long time and very successful editor of the News Sheet) stated the case against introducing competition.

A sense of urgency was injected into the discussion when a so-called 'mix-up' occurred at the 1949 Society Exhibition at Ewan Hall. Members attending the exhibition were surprised, to say the least, to see that certain models were labelled as 'prizewinners'. Bert Mead's 31/2" model of a LSWR Paddle Box 4-6-0 was labelled as the 'Cup Winner'. Bert White a founder member (who later wrote the book, Maintenance and Management of Small Locomotives, published in 1955) had apparently made an offer of a trophy to be awarded for the best model by a member of the Society. Jim Crebbin and Rolleux Wuidart (two prominent NLSME members) spontaneously offered cash to accompany it. The idea of a competition had in fact been submitted to the Council earlier by Mr White but he 'heard nothing to the contrary' and went ahead with his plan. In January 1950, however, he was 'invited' to attend a Council meeting with an 'intention of clearing the position'. At this meeting Mr White formally offered his cup to the Council 'to be awarded annually for the best passenger-hauling locomotive'. In return the Council made a somewhat guarded offer to 'consider' his proposal.

At the January General meeting a debate took place. On this occasion the case 'for competition' was presented by Bert White himself and the case 'against competition' by Mr Pinnock. The membership present backed Mr Pinnock by 31 votes to 18 but somehow this was not taken as a final verdict. (Presumably the 'for' camp would not take no for an answer!)

The matter was finally resolved, however, at the General meeting of 6th June 1950 when a further debate and vote took place. The outcome was not in favour of competition and so the competitive element within the Society was never adopted. Had the vote gone the other way and competition within the Society taken hold, one wonders if the Club would have thrived for over 55 years with such a spirit of friendly co-operation amongst its members.

Whether or not it was connected I do not know but Bert White resigned from the Society next month. Such was his stature in the Society his decision to go was announced in the News Sheet and the Editor, Alf Bradley, expressed his regrets although no reason for his resignation was given. But

his departure would have been a loss to the Society.

And Bert Mead never did receive the cup and he thinks it was later given away to the Chingford Society.

Curly's Corner

For several years LBSC had conducted 'Curly's Corner' in the News Sheet. Curly was of course patron of the Society and his 'Corner' had been instituted so that members could have their queries answered by the master himself. Although in the early years Curly received, through the Editor of the News Sheet, many requests for explanations and tips, at times the questions became fewer and LBSC gave general advice on topics he felt suitable. Two examples of 'Curly's Corner' from 1950 were printed in the newsletter and soon will be re-scanned and included here.

A Society Scrapbook

Members even at this time were mindful of recording the history of the Club despite the fact that it was young. Mr AA Ward (the Librarian) announced that the Society was starting a scrapbook devoted to press cuttings, pictures, handbills and any other material relating to the development and progress of the Society. I wonder if that scrapbook still exists today and if so where it is.

The Aero Section Takes Off Again

The Society had been founded in 1944 by a group of aero-modellers but the Aero Section for some reason did not prosper and by May 1948 had pulled down the shutters. In December 1949, however, nine members met at Mr Rippon's home to discuss the re-formation of the Section and officers were elected. Ernie Simes was Leader. Over the early months of 1950 the Section started to make strides and a radio-controlled plane was started as a Club model. A Mercury Cossor transmitter was purchased and a receiver was built. The aircraft was called 'Rudder Bug' and one gets the impression that radio-control was the 'latest thing' amongst aero-modellers.

Frozen!

We had no permanent home in those days and meetings of the Society and its Sections were held wherever possible; venues were a constant problem. The Miniature Railway Section (OO to us today) met in the Potters Bar Community Association's Hall at Elm Court in Mutton Lane. All members of the Section had to become members of the Association in order to use it. They were on occasions 'frozen' in this hall until some bar heaters were provided by the Association. (Incidentally the Club layout in those days was a model of Wood Green Station.)

The Loco section was no warmer! Ted Moon was leader of the Section at the time and he reported that meetings which were held in the Society's workshop (situated on the corner of The Avenue and The Drive off Wood Street in Barnet) were poorly attended because it was "too cold in the winter" and a proposal was made that next winter St John's Hall should be used.

The Congregational Hall at Whetstone was used for many of the Society's meetings including Feature Nights (see below) and the AGM. However, some of the Society's problems with venues were solved in the last months of 1950. The Barnet and District Gas and Water Company had been a major influence for good in the Society from the very beginning and one of the many ways in which the Company helped was that they allowed meetings of the Society to take place in their offices. For

some reason this had not been possible at the end of the 1940's. By 1950 the old Company had been broken up by nationalisation and a section of it had become part of the Eastern Region Gas Board. From November onwards, much to the delight of NLSME members, they allowed General Meetings to be held again at the offices in Station Road, New Barnet.

On the subject of meetings, the Council were concerned that General Meetings of the Society were becoming a bit of a problem because the time taken up by business was often unpredictable resulting in invited speakers being kept waiting and not knowing how much time they would have available for their presentation. A remedy was suggested whereby General Meetings would concentrate on discussions, exhibitions, rummage sales and short lectures. Separate monthly 'Feature Nights' were proposed for invited speakers where they had whatever length of time they required for their talk.

Arkley

No review of 1950 would be complete without looking at what was happening at Arkley. The Barnet District Gas and Water Company had a sports ground there and in 1949 offered a part of it to the Society for use as a permanent site for a Loco Section track. Other Club activities were held there including on occasions the resurrected Aero Section's flying. But in 1950 Arkley as a Society site was in truth just at the planning stage. It was decided to set up the portable track (which had been used for exhibitions and fetes etc) on a concrete base at the site and it was proposed that as a result less fetes should be attended because more running could take place at Arkley where all members of the Society would be welcome. Better still, in the summer the decision was taken to build a permanent track on the site. And so the name of Arkley and its track was to become etched in the soul of the Society.

To be continued next month. . .

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50 Years Ago Part Two

NLSME Exhibition on Cinema Newsreels!

Exhibitions were a feature of the Society from the early days and in 1950 the 5th was held. As so often before it was held in Ewan Hall in Barnet. Mr Vaughan was appointed exhibition manager and it was planned to hold it in September over a period of 7 days! This was the longest exhibition that the Society had staged and it drew attention not only from the lay press but was even featured on cinema newsreels.

A Visit to a Risque Show?

Another feature of the early days was social occasions and on 6th March 108 guests attended the Society's annual dinner and dance ('the best yet!') held at the Salisbury Hotel, Barnet. The band was George Brown's and the cabaret was by Reg Williams (comedian) and Jack Brockton (singer). Mr Nutter who was Section Leader of General Engineering was an accomplished performer in his own right and was the MC.

Another enjoyable social occasion was a visit to Swindon Works which was so 'perfect in every way' it served as a standard for future outings to emulate. A discussion on the subject of future events was held at which Joe (no surname given) suggested the Society should visit the Windmill Theatre. But the social organiser, LW Hill said that it was not quite the sort of thing he had in mind!

Science and Research

One of the Sections of the NLSME in 1950 was 'Science and Research'. As a Section it made things for other Sections and in the News Sheet of the day it was reported that it had made a stroboscope for the use of all Sections. In addition to counting high speed revolutions, valve gears for example, could be 'studied in motion and irregularities noted which would otherwise be overlooked. 'Unbalanced propellers can be rectified by noting which blade is out of balance. In fact any moving mechanism can be studied in detail. Advice on its use will be gladly given. It will give us pleasure to assist.'

The Section also made a "round the pole" timing device which was used for the NLSME Regatta in April (see below) and a propeller testing tank. The latter was tested at the Section's March meeting although to do this someone had to hastily construct a propeller since no-one had remembered to take one along!

Boats and Yachts

One of the most important events of the year was the Society's regatta which was held at Victoria Park (East London) on Sunday 23 April. It was held under the auspices of the Model Power Boat Association and included a nomination event, "round the pole" for A, B, C and D class boats and a steering event. Cyril Drayson was in charge.

Marine modeling was catered for in the Society by the Boats and Yachts Section of which Cyril was leader. The Section suffered a blow in 1950 when Southgate Council decided (without any consultation with the NLSME) to ban the use of 'all model power boats using petrol vapour or other combustible substances' in its parks. This affected Broomfield Park which the Society regularly used and indeed had a special arrangement with the Council for a roped off section for its exclusive use on Saturday evenings. The reason for the ban was a desire to reduce noise in public parks. Unlike today when

electric motors and r/c are usual, diesel engineered craft were the norm in 1950.

Model Cars

The Model Car Section in 1950 had spent quite some time constructing a “rail track” where diesel powered (eg 1-5cc) cars could be raced. It was portable and consisted of 4 parallel tracks each with a “rail” and the cars were prevented from leaving the track by the rails. The Club track was christened ‘Nordromo’ and it was formally opened at St John’s Hall on 20 May.

The track was in the form of an oval banked at each end and was 100 laps to the mile (measured on the 2nd rail from the inside). The design and construction of it was the work of Mr Kedgley.

Nordromo must have seen much use before the official opening because 6 months later in December members felt it was getting worn out and decided to build a new one.

No doubt mindful of the complaints about noise that had curtailed the operation of diesel powered boats in Broomfield Park, the Section decided not to build a concrete one at Arkley because of the possibility of causing a noise nuisance. So plans were mooted for a new Nordromo consisting of a figure of eight with fly-over. It was intended that it would have four rails correctly banked and be limited to 1cc engines.

More Trouble!

Behind this successful and encouraging activity, however, there was trouble! And it was big trouble. Although the true nature of it is not apparent in the News Sheet it resulted, in December, in the resignation from the Society of GH Woodhouse (the Model Cars Section Leader), LC Strong (Public Relations Officer), S Palmer, S Kedgley, GH Pearce and HC Miller ‘to avoid further embarrassing the Society’. The Editor of the News Sheet commented, ‘with a large organisation such as ours we are bound, sooner or later, to draw together people of conflicting personalities and that seems to have been the root of the present trouble’.

In September the parties concerned had appealed to the Council, and to the best of their ability, the Council tried to find a solution – although it was clear that ‘a state of incompatible relations existed’.

Our Badge

But we can end this review of 1950 on a happier note.

Who designed the Society’s badge I do not know but I think most would agree it is both distinctive and attractive. It appeared in the early years of the Society but in 1950 it was discussed at the October General Meeting with a view to changing it. Criticisms were that the design ‘lent itself to confusion with a political badge’ (I wonder what political badge the critics had in mind) and another speaker pointed out that the ‘micrometer was the wrong type for measuring tubes’. As it happened ‘the great majority of members were not in favour of changing the design’ And so thankfully it has remained unchanged to this day.

by Grahame Ainge