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Thoughts of Chairman Dell

I found the July News Sheet even better than ever and I particularly liked the Spotlight article on Tom Luxford. I've read the book and now look forward to the film with perhaps Mel Gibson in the starring role as young Tom!

The weather this year has been particularly awful but we still seem to cope with birthday parties, rallies and other outside events. It's alright for some Sections who operate indoors but for Loco and Marine it's 'grin and bear it'. Talking of Sections, a lot of interest is generating on the formation of a Garden Railway Group within the Loco Section. If anyone has an interest please contact me. So far ten members have stood forward.

We have recently had visits to the track from the HO and Video Groups and they all seemed to enjoy themselves. We didn't do very well on the steam. Jupiter (i.e. Bill Camp) was off song as was Tony Dunbar's B1. It was all left to Tom Luxford's City of London to keep the flag flying. The older it gets the better it seems to run. If only the same applied to us humans!

On Sunday 10th July we visited Brendan Corcoran to see his full size showman's type engine which had arrived from the west country that morning. It stood outside Brendan's house looking large and magnificent with a black but happy Donal at the controls and a mass of lights and twisted brasses. I'm sure they will enjoy themselves and we look forward to seeing them and the engine at many future rallies.

The boating pool has got a dose of blanket weed but steps are being taken to get rid of the awful stuff. The ground level Fete Section is very busy as are the birthday parties at the track. I visit the 00 and HO and Video on Wednesdays who always make me welcome with a cup of tea and biscuits – thank you lads.

At the last General Meeting we presented a bouquet of flowers and a hand bag to our recently retired secretary, Beryl Collingwood. Thankyou Beryl for your nine years hard work. You really were a splendid secretary.

Don't forget the coming Open Day for the Water Board on July 29th when we will entertain Jim McGown and our new president, David Alexander. We need as much help

as possible so do turn up.

At the 4th August General Meeting I shall give a talk on Austin 7s and early motor cycles. Tony Dunbar will also tell us of British Railways civil engineering.

Frank Dell

Slot Car News

An Adventurous Weekend in France

At some point during our annual Le Mans weekend a variety of funny, strange and absurd things happened and from this a theme for the weekend becomes apparent. This year was no exception. The theme of this year's bash was set before we even left Blighty, although we didn't realise it at the time.

Blery eyed we set off from John's house on Friday at 6.30 am. The 'Bungle Boys' tour de blunder had begun. It was a very foggy drive down to Dover but half way across the Channel the fog started to lift and by the time we reached Calais out came the Panama hat which spent most of the weekend perched on John's head at a very jaunty angle. The hat that is, not John's head.

With amazing regularity the French have a habit of building a new road to any destination you care to go to. At the moment there are four to choose from: fast, not so fast, picturesque and lost. Needless to say, faced with this choice and a six year old map we opted for the last one.

Eventually finding out where we were it was time to celebrate with a beer-stop in a small French village. They always look like WW2 had finished yesterday. I don't think there's a word in French for masonry paint. An hour or so down the road it was time for lunch in a slightly larger town. Lunch was taken at a very friendly café in the high street, sitting outside taking in the ambience, sunshine and tractor fumes. This town had heard of paint but they only owned one tin and someone must have lost it 10 years ago. By now the weather was set for the weekend – hot and getting hotter.

We set off after lunch knowing the next big obstacle we had to face was Rouen. We always get lost going through Rouen or going round it as you are now able to do. Even, paying an almost religious devotion to the 'toutes directions' signs we still got lost. For some reason coming home never creates this problem. Maybe they are glad to get rid of us.

Just after Rouen, John suddenly announced he couldn't remember what hotel we were staying at but more importantly what town it was in. **BIG BLUNDER!** All the information was sitting on his dining room table in Potters Bar. I then spent the next hour reading from the map every town, village, bus stop in a 25 mile radius to try and jog his memory. Then after my eyes had got used to squinting at the map for so long he suddenly remembered that he had also written all we needed to know in his diary which was in the glove box.

We found our hotel, showered and had a few beers. Tony appeared and announced that he'd left all his underpants at home. That, as I said earlier, was Blunder No 1 the one that happened before we had even left. We had an excellent dinner and some more beers and

decided that we would get up early so we would be in time to see the Ferrari/Maserati historic race in the morning. We retired to bed with the aroma and sounds of French plumbing.

Funnily enough we did get up early and set off to Le Mans in search of motor racing food and drink for the day and underpants. Set up for the day we went off to Arnage corner to see the historic race; that was the intention anyway. Yet again we got lost trying to find it. This always happens as well. The French operate a 20 mile one way system around the outside of the track during race weekend and every year it seems to alter slightly. This year was no different. We managed to see the last few laps. It was great to see priceless machinery being driven as hard as they were when new.

By the time of the 24 hours at 4 in the afternoon we were grateful of our covered grandstand seats as it was now very hot. Shortly after the start one of the Cadillac's burst into flames and it took a long time to put out. The Audi's were at the front followed by the Panoz. After visits to various parts of the track it was time for our evening meal. Big blunder coming up. We couldn't find the car. Well, the car parks at Le Mans are Big! We went to our usual restaurant at Ruaudin. The funny thing about this place is that there is always a wedding going on. The dinner took ages. The waitresses blundered this time. We had our usual Calvados intake and continued into the night.

We decided to bed down in the car park at Arnage as usual. This can be fraught with danger. Imagine laying on the ground in a sleeping bag in a pitch black car park. Dan nearly got squashed by a TVR in the middle of the night and I opened my eyes to a car wheel one foot from my nose. Sunday morning was bright and sunny unlike us after a night of Calvados and beer. Overnight usually settles the outcome of the race and we discovered the massed ranks of Panoz cars had major problems. This meant the Audi's were 1, 2 and 3 by Sunday morning.

By Sunday afternoon we were in our grandstand seats to see the end of the race and to get out of the heat. The 3 Audi's finished the race in formation and that was that for another year. Getting out of Le Mans requires patience as you can imagine but eventually we made it to our Sunday night stop – Bagnoles Delorne. Its famous for being a spar town, although every French person I've spoken to has never heard of it. It looks expensive. Everyone who lives there owns a tin of paint and a paintbrush. It is a very pretty place that looks like it has been lifted from a German model railway layout and plonked in the middle of France. Bagnoles seems to be much favoured by people of advancing years, much like us. They take the waters whereas we took the Calvados. Its full of chemists and old lady type shops stuffed full of surgical appliances that will definitely be us in a few years.

Monday morning saw the pantomime of re-arranging the car to make it more habitable. Loading then unloading then loading the boot again to give us room for our visit to the Calvados farm. The Farm has now become a regular stop on our trips. To the uninformed, Calvados is a type of brandy made from apples and is at least 8 years old. Monday lunch was at Le Bec Hellioun. It is a very old village south of Rouen that has an even older abbey. It was a relief to have a look round the cool of the Abbey to escape the heat. Lunch is always a pleasant experience in this very quiet part of France. Suitably refreshed we headed North, got round Rouen with no problem, discovered where we went wrong on the Friday and determined not to make the same mistake again. Some chance! Fortunately there were no further blunders on the way home. I didn't leave any cheese rotting in the boot on John's car. He finally took his Panama off and we all went our merry way, tired out knowing we had had a good weekend and already looking forward to next year.

Steve Francis

[Driving Locomotives- The Butch Way](#)

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Adam Gorski

[Tyttenhanger Gazette](#)

The July Loco meeting was held at the Track. An electric locomotive was running, a barbecue under way and boxes of engineering items were for sale. It was rather pleasant to be able to talk amongst friends at such a nice place.

A sample of ground level track had been made up, as the Tyttenhanger Site Committee are looking at the comparative cost of making the track using scale flat-bottomed section rail. This is available from Miniature Railway Services at Boxmoor. The rail is 21mm high and costs £2 per yard. The sample had mahogany-like sleepers although sleepers made from recycled plastic are also being considered. A novel method of securing the rail to the sleepers is by using a hexagon-head woodscrew with combined washer, the washer being part of the head. The rail is trapped under half of the washer on each screw. Each rail is secured to each sleeper by two screws. The wooden sleepers are 1"x 2" section and 20 are needed under a three metre length of rail. The holes for the sleepers will be jig drilled and the first experimental length of track will be laid from the ground level station to the level crossing.

Roger Bell

[Loco Section News](#)

Family Day at Colney Heath

August 29th is the day set aside for our Family Day at Colney Heath. The site will be open to all members, their families and friends.

The gates will open at 11.45am giving plenty of time for a BBQ lunch. Picnics will be encouraged so NO cars will be allowed on the upper area of the site.

On this special day junior members will be allowed to drive on the main line so patience will be required from our regular drivers. We also hope to have at least two Toby Locos on the Cuckoo Line for the even younger drivers.

Main Line Emergency Repairs

The discovery in mid July of a rotten sleeper in the main line prompted some emergency

work. We have Katie Reddish to thank for noticing the track move whilst driving near the workshop/steaming bay curve. The section was shored up for the next Sunday's running and at 5.00pm a small team of 'engineers' got to work. It was a combined effort by members from the Loco, Fete, Marine and Stationary Steam sections. It's really gratifying that it was a team effort involving so many Sections. Such was the effort that running was again possible by the following Thursday. Many thanks to all who helped.

Jim Macdonald

Letters Page

The editor received the following most delightful letter from Dick Deal:

Dear Grahame,

News Sheet for July just to hand – very good, most interesting but thought you might like to know that referring to Frank Dell's 'Thoughts', Malcolm is Malcolm Hunt, my son-in-law, not my son, although I'd have been very pleased had he been. He's a great chap as is my other son-in-law Stuart, and with their two families and their children we are really very lucky.

Both Malcolm and Stuart are modellers – Malcolm does the 'subs'. (His father Dennis was a railway modeller and a member of Harrow and Wembley Club whilst Stuart is a railway modeller and a member of Aylesbury Club at Quainton. His father is also a railway modeller and a cornerstone, if I can put it that way, of the Birmingham ME Society – he is the Brian Hughes who has done so much in the development of vacuum braking for model railways and he often writes in the ME.

How my two daughters managed, quite independently to marry two such dedicated model engineers as Malcolm and Stuart I shall never know but I can assure you we are never short of conversation when we meet. They are great lads, great pals too and they never fail to take me along if something special is going on.

Unhappily we lost Dennis, Malcolm's dad a few years ago. He too was a great friend and I do miss him. Stuart's dad lives in Birmingham so we don't see him very often but we have very lively contacts. Perhaps you could pass on my remarks to Frank and perhaps too make a comment in the News Sheet. It's very nice of Frank to mention us after all.

Regards,
Dick Deal

Was this a Britannia?

Following the recent interesting articles on the Britannias Mike Hodgson thought the following extract from an article in The Independent on the 5 May 2000 by Miles Kington was a charming, story and shows what train-spotting can lead to...

'... I used to be a train-spotter at my son's age, waiting for steam engines that ran past Gresford on the line between Wrexham and Chester on the old Great Western Railway. It's a steepish gradient there, because the line is climbing a valley out of the Cheshire plain on to the first spur of the Welsh hills, and I can remember, one frozen winter day, a passenger train coming up from Chester that started skidding on the icy rails and just couldn't make any further progress. They had to send for a second engine from Wrexham to pull it up – meanwhile, the motionless engine made occasional fruitless attempts to pull free, and I can still vividly picture the huge pillar of white smoke erupting against the cold blue sky, and the noise racketing from side to side in the valley (first very slow chuffing, then very fast as the wheels span uselessly).

Such excitements were rare, however, and most of the time the line was empty. On the other hand, the woods and fields were full of flowers, and so to stave off boredom between trains, I started spotting flowers. There were masses of bluebells in the woods, and cowslips, and lady's smock in the wetter fields, and I can remember working out the identity of ladies' bedstraw and woody nightshade, coltsfoot and kingcup, groundsel and shepherd's purse, and even the occasional orchid...'

The opinions and views expressed in this News Sheet are not necessarily those of the Society or editor.

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