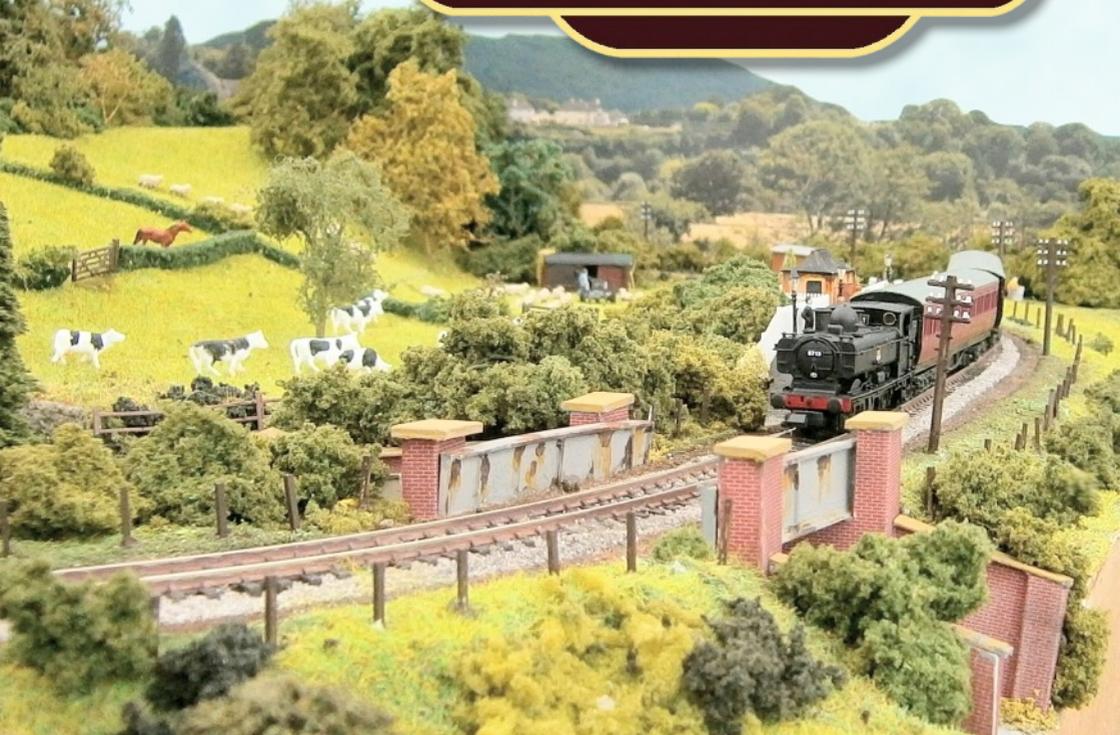


LLANSTEPHAN HALT

A Micro Layout



A Test track that became a Micro layout - by Chris Sharp (8199)

Llanstephan Halt – is it a micro layout or is it a test track? Well it's both. When I completed Vine Street (Journal 6/12 & 1/13) I knew that I would need a test track to run in new locos as well as a test facility for the maintenance of my other stock. There where two options available to achieve this need, I would have to either purchase a rolling road or make a small test track. The small test track won?

A Plan

The original plan was to have a plain board and construct a simple oval of track to enable a rudimentary test facility. That was the intention but the thought of turning it into a micro layout was too tempting to resist. With some redundant lengths of track, as well as a few turnouts left in my 'spares box' and a small board left from a previous layout, it didn't take long to start laying the track. I also had a white metal kit of a GWR pagoda style waiting room crying out to be built.

Micro layouts in most modelling scales have become one way of achieving a working layout

that is easy to store and fun to run. Because you are dealing with a small area to model then attention to detail can make for an interesting model.

Its also one way of practising and improving modelling skills without breaking the bank and when it has run its course it can be disassembled and another layout created. The plus side of creating a micro layout is that they do not take up much space and can fit into busy work and family commitments, even if you only spend the occasional half an hour chilling out.

So having decided to create a micro layout cum test track I decided that it would be rural

scene with a Great Western Halt so typical of local lines in remote country areas.

The geographical location

Llanstephan Halt lay between Builth Wells and Three Cocks Junction midway between the stations of Erwood and Boughwood & Llyswen in mid Wales with the line following the course of the River Wye as it meandered through the valley. Sadly the line was gone by 1964 as Dr. Beeching's cuts began to bite and rural lines began disappearing from the landscape.

Having taken the name only I moved the geographical location of the halt to the east side of the bridge and allowed a little artistic license with the halt and the environment it sat in. That means it is not strictly prototypical. The Halt itself was in a cutting with the adjacent road bridge passing over the line with access to the platform down a steep footpath.

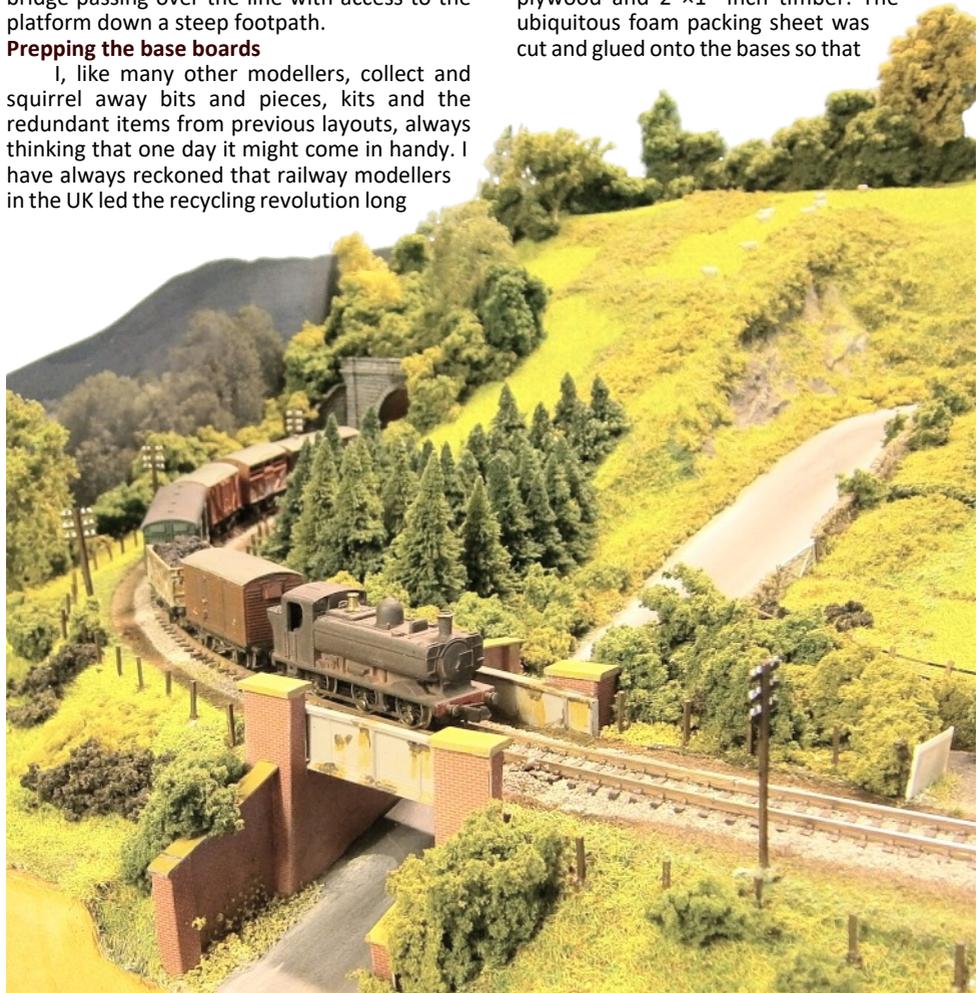
Prepping the base boards

I, like many other modellers, collect and squirrel away bits and pieces, kits and the redundant items from previous layouts, always thinking that one day it might come in handy. I have always reckoned that railway modellers in the UK led the recycling revolution long

before it became an environmentally correct thing to do.

A spare board that measured 33x24 inches plus some left over track, turnouts and my 'come in handy one day' box would supply all my needs for a micro layout/test track. I also had some spare timber to construct the simple fiddle yard wings on either side of the main scenic board.

The ready made board only required sanding down just to tidy it up. A redundant piece of hardboard made the curved back board which was glued and screwed in place and then painted a pale blue using emulsion paint. Then I glued a piece of recycled foam packing onto the base and when dry, trimmed off the surplus. The two wings (24"x9") were constructed of plywood and 2"x1" inch timber. The ubiquitous foam packing sheet was cut and glued onto the bases so that





the level would be the same as the main board. Two tunnel entrances were cut into either side of the backboard to allow access to the main line. An opening cut out at the back allowed access to the two turnouts. Cork sheeting was then glued on top of the foam base as this not only allows for quiet running but also gives firm support for the track and scenery

Laying the track and electrics

The track plan is a basic circle of ten inches radius. Two small radius turnouts lead to the two

fiddle yards. One represents trains coming from BUILT WELLS and the other from THREE COCKS JUNCTION. There are also two turnouts in each fiddle yard giving a total of six storage roads. This configuration allows me to run five different short formations with one road left empty. The track and turnouts are all Peco Code 55 with all turnouts manually operated.

The electrical side was kept very basic and has been wired for either DCC or DC with one bus wire and two sets of droppers to take power



to the track. Isolated track joiners are used to prevent any short circuits.

Once the track was laid the boards were then connected together and test runs carried out. This was done prior to ballasting the permanent way so that any problems could be fixed, especially as two of the turnouts are under the hill. When testing had been completed the ballast was laid on the main board. The time honoured method of securing ballast with diluted PVA and a couple of drops of washing-up

liquid not only bonds the ballast but also the track to the cork as well. The track on the two wings was fixed in place with full strength PVA glue. Once dry the rails were cleaned with a track rubber. Another series of test runs ensured that the whole layout functioned as planned.

Scenery and structures

Dipping into my 'come in handy box', two single tunnel portals, GWR Pagoda, lamp posts and GWR fencing were retrieved along with a piece of fencing, some stone walling, telegraph



poles and a telephone box. I also had some Heki Conifers, Hornby ready made trees and Sea foam trees going spare along with copious amounts of spare Woodlands Scenic scatter material. I have now even taken to growing my own Sea Foam from seed.

Prior to constructing the hill in the background I created the foreground embankment by wire brushing along the right of way and being careful not to get too close to the track work. I also cut away the foam base to create a gap for the railway bridge.

The hill was made from cereal box cardboard cut into strips and glued in place forming a lattice onto which I put squares of newspaper dipped in Polyfilla. When dry I was left with a hard shell. The road surface was made from framing card, onto which support risers were attached and then carefully glued into place.

To break up the uniformity of the blue sky and to give depth to such a small layout, a Gaugemaster country back scene was trimmed and pasted into position. The two chosen pieces





The halt was built from balsa wood and card, with the balsa cut to the size of railway sleepers. Wood dye was used to create the appropriate colour of older sleepers. The platform was painted with a 'Dolls House' grit paint and then dulled down to represent an ash surface. Fencing, lamp posts and the Pagoda then completed the scene.

For the fields I used a grass mat as a way to cover a lot of ground quickly. Then, with the aid of static grass applicator, broke up the uniformity of the grass mat, especially by the sides of the hedgerows and embankments. The railway fencing posts were made from plastic strip, cut to size and painted brown. Telegraph poles were added on the 'outboard' side of the track. The distance between poles is not truly prototypical but are there to give the right impression of the period the line was set in.

were located on either side of the back scene with the picture being merged into the hill side. The use of Woodland Scenic ground foam was used to disguise the joins.

The tunnel portals were placed into position having first been painted. Dried Kiln Sand was used for the drainage channels on either side of the permanent way. Acrylic paints and chalk pastels were used as appropriate. The railway bridge was scratch built from Metcalfe red brick card with the bridge sides being reclaimed from a previous model.

A country halt is a fairly quiet affair, especially towards the end of its life, and there are only two vehicles on the layout to reflect that and the rural nature of the area. The 'little people' are also kept to a minimum and they were chosen for their static poses with the exception of the horse and riders. I have also 'planted' badgers, foxes and squirrels in appropriate positions. Sheep, cattle and horses were added along with a Ferguson tractor (from Oxford Die Cast) along with a farmer.

The grounded wagon was made from spare bits left over from an N Gauge Society kit and the trees, planted in the centre of the





fields, are from the Hornby range.

Finally

I now have a suitable test track but I also have a micro layout which has allowed me to try new modelling methods and materials in creating a mini rural scene. And by recycling a lot of bits and pieces it didn't break the bank constructing it.

The layout has already appeared at a couple of exhibitions in Wales and along the Welsh Marches, so it hasn't strayed far from the real location of the halt. Llanstephan Halt is an easy layout to run, albeit quiet intensive, and does offer up plenty and varied movements. With the little cameos it has, hopefully, entertained those that have viewed it. So if you think you haven't got the time or space to create a small layout why not give a micro-layout a go.

For the future I have already started to chip my loco fleet, a feat that will take some time to accomplish especially as I will be doing most of them myself. The task has been made easier by some excellent articles in the journal on how to tackle the DCC conversion of Farish and Trix models. Why the change? Well since

Vine Street last appeared in the journal I have completely rebuilt the layout specifically increasing its width and making it suitable for DCC operation.

Rolling stock

I can now run different locos and stock to create an ever changing scene that would reflect a western region Welsh rural railway but not necessarily some of those that ran on the Brecon to Newtown branch line. The stock currently consists of:

- 14xx auto train
- 2x2MT (Farish & Minitrix) with two Mk1/Collett carriages
- 2 x Diesel Railcars (Blood & Custard and Green)
- 1 x Class 121
- 1 x Class 122
- 3 x Class 108 DMUs
- Class 45xx with B set or local goods
- Class 57xx with local goods
- Class 94XX with B set/suburban/goods

References:

- Country Railway Routes: Brecon to Newtown - The Mid Wales Line by Vic Mitchell & Keith Smith, published by Middleton Press, ISBN 978 906008 06 2, June 2007



