

A Brief History of Brighouse and Halifax Model Engineers

The Society was formed originally in 1932 by a group of like minded men. They met in various places, but primarily the Brighouse Co-op Café and the home of the founder member Mr. Douglas Miller.

Mr. Miller drove the society forward, holding meetings at his works on occasion. They attended various exhibitions held in those early years at the Halifax and Huddersfield Drill Halls. Several members entered models and I believe were awarded prizes.

Having no permanent H.Q. at this time it would have been difficult to model large Locomotives.

When the war came in 1939 most of the members would be drafted into the services. Mr. Miller was in the Navy and was based in Scapa Flow. In fact he was able to use his own boat, a motor yacht, during this period. The activities of the Society were severely restricted as the war effort took all the essential materials.

However when hostilities were over the society was resumed. In 1948 Mr. Miller asked the members if they would like to join him in the construction of a miniature railway. He had a piece of land that was suitable and the members willingly accepted his offer. Work commenced in earnest on building tracks. The first one was an elevated track for 3½" and 5" locos. This was made by building concrete pillars cast in place. We cast two on Saturday and two on Sunday. As you can see this took a long time. The track longitudinals were ex railway sleepers cut to length with a hand saw! Any miss shapes or adjustments were cut with great skill, using an Adze by Douglas. It was great to watch.

The rails were of aluminium and lasted for over forty years. The track running length was six hundred feet. The next job was to lay the 7¼" ground level track. This was laid outside the elevated track and was about six hundred and forty feet in length, again aluminium was used.

Locomotives started to appear, mostly 3½" gauge. These at the time were considered to be quite large. Douglas was busy building a 7¼" Duchess to be named "Duchess of Brighouse". To raise funds for these projects a portable track was made and used at local Galas and other outside events. It was not until the grounds were considered safe that public open days were started. The admission charge at the time was 3d old money and 3d per ride.

There was considerable interest in model boats at this time, so it was agreed to build a boating pond. This was I think seventy feet in diameter and about eighteen inches deep. This was a great success at the time as all the local children could sail their boats on open days.

The great day arrived to officially open the pond. Douglas made a ramp to launch his large boat down. The crowd formed around the pond and the boat was launched by the Mayor amid great cheering: The resulting tidal wave unfortunately soaked anyone who was on the opposite side to the boat.

The Society has prospered over the years but the pond had to go. It developed a severe leak which would have been very expensive to repair. Also the boating members were by this time into radio control and required a much larger stretch of water. The membership fell as a result of the ponds demise, from around 120 to 80. Also at this period the dreaded television arrived. This killed off more than our hobby as everyone knows. But we have survived to the present day. We are now in our seventy seventh year and the grounds are much more developed than in 1948 when we started our journey.

The freehold was purchased in 1966 on the death of the founder and President.

We are among the few societies in the country who have the luxury and security of owning the land.

We have just re-laid the elevated track for I think the third or fourth time over the years. We have used reclaimed plastic for the longitudinals and sleepers and hope that these will last a long time. The ground level track has been extended over the years and is now over one thousand feet long.

If you have read this history and would like to try out our facilities, then please contact the club through the "Contacts" box and make arrangements to pay us a visit. All we ask is that you have a current boiler certificate and you will be made very welcome.

This has been written from memory and I may have missed something out. For this I apologise.

David Wainwright President.