

New on the web

New this month are our November News Bulletin and Snippets; an update on our loan-aided projects; reports on the Young Engineer of the Year award and on the Model Engineer centenary show at Ascot and our showing there, on next year's centenary of the start of tethered hydroplane racing; and a new quiz from our itinerant and irrepressible quizmaster Muriel Baxendale, to keep your minds active over the Christmas break. We also have a request for information on a Reed lathe of wartime vintage. So, if you don't have the internet (and who could blame you!), then get yourself off to the local public library to take a look at our website www.normodeng.org.uk on the screens there.

The delegates' meeting

The latest delegates' meeting was held once again at Ockbrook on Saturday 20th October 2007. It was well attended as ever, and was chaired for the second time by our new-ish chairman Frank Cooper of Evergreens Miniature Railway.

The first item after the usual preamble was the question of **finance and loans**, and Treasurer Mo Stephen reported that all loan repayments due had been paid except for one club requesting deferment of their final payment following severe damage during the floods of June and July, which had been agreed by the officers. She reported that the finances were in good shape, augmented recently by the receipt of commission from our insurance broker. She also announced revised arrangements for transactions that would be operative over the coming months.

Insurance broker Tony Wood then reported on the insurance scheme. Most details of his report are confined to the official minutes, but he reminded delegates that risk assessments would need to be reviewed, including those for fire risks in line with recent legislation. Details have already been circulated on this. An important matter of general interest concerned the involvement of officialdom following an accident; the club should make sure that if the **Health and Safety Executive** are to be involved then the matter should be referred to the Glasgow office, not to the local H&SE office. This follows an incident where the local H&SE office incorrectly brought in the Railways Accident Investigation Board following an incident at a club, and with it the full weight of the 'big railway' protocols. The RAIB's role is to investigate accidents on railways over about 15" gauge, but it seems that if they are approached then they have the option of taking on issues arising on our gauges.

Next year's **Annual Rally** will be hosted by Bradford MES coincidentally with their open weekend, with Leicester SME following in 2008. This year's event at Chesterfield was not well attended despite notices being sent out by our Hon Sec. Oswestry delegate Glyn Davies reported on another successful narrow gauge efficiency competition at his club, with 20

entries from 16 societies. As with IMLEC we have a 'past winners' class, but very few of the past winners turned up this year (for reasons we can only speculate on!). Glyn proposed a separate class for 3½" gauge engines, and this met with general approval. A host is still needed for next year's event, and Erewash Valley have offered their facilities for 2009. There was some discussion on the use of brakes to artificially increase the dynamometer car readings, but the only agreement reached was that it was rather difficult for the observer to distinguish between brake applications for this purpose from those for safety reasons.

The Chairman reported on the **Model Engineer of the Year Award** to Matthew Hainesworth of the Rochdale club in August. He urged clubs to make every effort to promote the award by seeking out and putting forward suitable candidates. He went on to report on our support of exhibitions at Harrogate, Ascot and Leamington this year, and on plans to support more if possible in future years.

Boiler Registrar Alan Reid reported on a phone call had had received proposing a test to destruction of a boiler which had failed its hydraulic test. Subsequent discussion soon produced a clear consensus that such a test would be inconclusive and therefore pointless. Nigel Thompson reported that the boiler committee have looked at this in the past and are of the same view.

Next on the agenda was the matter of the Association holding a further **exhibition** of its own, following the tradition of many years past. The last was held in March 2004 at Warrington, and was widely regarded as one of the best to date. The officers had investigated a wide range of possible venues for a further exhibition, most of which were far too expensive given the likely gate income offset by other costs. The owners of the Warrington venue had declined to host us following damage to one of their carpets at the last event, and the only two offering reasonable costs were one at Bakewell and the Staffordshire Showground. Even their costs were marginal in terms of the likelihood of making a loss on the event. Another factor was the ongoing reluctance of clubs to make a firm commitment of support in terms of taking stands as well as other matters. When put to the vote it was decided to forego plans for an exhibition of our own for the foreseeable future. Instead we will mount a bigger presence in more of the already established venues, including the National Railway Museum (now a member of the Northern Association), Shepton Mallet, and others. (*Bristol and Alexandra Palace come to mind. Ed*)

The **Safeguarding of Vulnerable Groups Act 2006**, coming into force in 2008, was discussed at some length, and its relationship with the existing Protection of Children Act. Little new information was available but the Chairman drew attention to a government website containing details. It seems that we simply

need to recognize that our well-debated stance on the latter Act now applies to a much wider range of people. Basically, each club will need to consider its own circumstances and respond accordingly.

A reminder on the new **anti-smoking legislation** that came into force on 1st July has already been circulated to clubs, and the Chairman referred to an incident involving a stranger in a grey suit visiting a club recently. He didn't ask about membership so he didn't want to join, he wasn't interested in the trains so he wasn't a 'puffer nutter', and he wasn't interested in the children, so he wasn't a paedophile! Eventually he left, under the wary eye of the members present. Delegates were reminded that the fine for 'failing to prevent smoking' on premises is up to £2700, payable by the person responsible for the premises.

Under 'any other business' one delegate expressed shock and horror that an elderly member and regular driver at a club had neglected to mention that he had had to give up his **driving licence** due to failing eyesight. There were murmurs of concurrence until some brave soul reminded those present that the medical requirements for driving a car at high speed in busy traffic were rather more stringent than those for driving a miniature train at little more than a walking pace along a fixed track! It was agreed that each club would have to make its own judgement in particular cases! A few clubs operate varying elaborate systems of driver 'licensing' and progression up the career ladder, while most seem to get by pretty well without such formalities. Again, each club must adopt the system it feels is best suited to its circumstances, and its bureaucrats!

Another delegate asked if there were any guidelines for the **qualification of boiler inspectors**, and again the consensus was that each club should make its own judgement. The general requirements are fairly obvious given the various roles the average club boiler inspector undertakes.

Nigel Thompson, a member of the boiler committee, referred to the **seminars planned for boiler inspectors** and other interested parties, and indicated that venues could be spread around the country, including The NRM and Stapleford Park, as well as Sheffield already mooted.

The Hon Sec announced **applications for membership** from the Belfast and County Down Miniature Railway Society, Edinburgh SME, and the Midlands Steam Model Society. All were proposed and accepted.

Finally, delegates were asked to make sure their website, club secretaries' email addresses or contact phone numbers were listed on the Association's website in the list of clubs. This could best be done by emailing the Webmaster using the 'contact us' button on the website.

The meeting closed about 5pm.