

CLUB NEWS

Much of it comes from club newsletters and we are pleased to see that they are still rolling in, and especially that NAME member **Cardiff Model Engineering Society** won the Tee Publishing prize for best newsletter and a cheque for £150. Runners up were Taunton and City of Oxford, unfortunately not Northern Association members but congratulations anyway!

Scottish Model Engineering Trust do well to produce a newsletter at all given the scale of the task they have set themselves with their new track in 7 acres of woodland at Wester Pickston, near Perth. Their latest issue tells us that Graham Burhouse has succeeded Philip Newman as chairman of the Trust, and that member Gordon Buchan has been appointed trustee. Work continues with transfer of the workshop equipment from Pithleavis to the new site and continuing work on extension of the track and planning for the development of the rest of the site. They hope to arrange the official opening for 19-20th May 2007.

The Manx Steam and Model Engineering Club's 'Peveril' is always a good read and the current issue contains a re-print of Gordon Smith's excellent treatise on **safety valve design**, an account of the 2006 Great Dorset Steam Fair, and the story of Gowrie, a Fairlie built by Hunslets (their first Fairlie) for the old North Wales Narrow Gauge Railway, now part of the Welsh Highland Railway. Also news that the long established Windermere Steamboat Museum is to close for want of funding, in fact it will be no more as you read this. Sad news indeed. The Manx club's track is located in the Currags Wildlife Park near Sulby, and is well worth a visit. Your editor has two locomotives with safety valves based on Gordon's design parameters and they perform very well indeed.

Newsletters fell on our doormat also from **Furness MRC, Saffron Waldon & Dist SME, Bradford MES, Wigan & Dist MES, Erewash Valley MES, Fylde SME, Urmston & Dist SME, Northampton SME, Chesterfield & Dist SME, Cambridge MES**, and we thank those clubs for keeping us posted. If your club is

not on the list, we would be very pleased to hear from you via your club secretary, who should email the editor at alan_pb@yahoo.co.uk.

One of our clubs has been trying to inject some order into the 'varied and sometimes bizarre' forms of members' **dress code**, which make it difficult to distinguish members from public. All members attending public running at this club are now required to wear a **grease top hat, safety specs or goggles, club sweatshirt, bib and brace overalls with club logo, safety boots or shoes, and an orange Hi-Vis waist coat with club initials on back**. This may seem a little OTT for some, but there is certainly a lot to be said for establishing some sort of corporate image amongst operating staff. Something as simple as a club sweatshirt of uniform colour worn by all those involved with public running at any given time certainly works wonders for the club's image and lends an air of professionalism which we do need to project in dealings with the public.

IMLEC aficionados may remember **New Zealander Jim Woods** who has entered IMLEC twice in recent years, achieving a creditable sixth place at Leyland in 2000 with his only just finished IOM Railways 2-6-0 Peveril. Well, Jim and his mum are coming again in 2007 and we understand Jim is hoping to enter IMLEC again. They will be around during July and August. In case you fancy a return visit, the **Kiwis next annual convention** will be hosted by Manukau Live Steamers near Auckland between the 3rd and 7th January 2008. Details and registration forms are on their [website](http://www.manukaulivesteamers.co.nz). Convention organizer Mike Orange will be very pleased to hear from you. The jury is still out on whether your editor will be attending this time; the air miles take their toll. On the same tack, the **Aussies** are thinking of moving from an annual to a biennial convention like the Kiwis. Drawing people from the length and breadth of their very large island every year is proving too much of a challenge and attendances at their annual events have been falling badly in recent years.

THE WEBSITE, and shop windows generally

Our Northern Association website hit cyberspace in April 2005, and in the months following, if we got two visits the same day we thought we were doing well! Once we got the site into reasonable shape and reasonably up to date last summer, we launched a fairly intensive campaign to get our site listed on various other key sites and networks, presenting our showcase to a wider audience.

The results were impressive. By January this year we were getting over 2000 hits a month. These are not big numbers by Internet standards, but the trend is the thing, and the trend of our Internet exposure is rocketing! This makes it all the more important that everything we put on the site is of the highest possible quality. The world is watching and making judgements not only about the Northern Association, but also about the hobby at large. Why does this matter? Well, it is partly to do with the pursuit of excellence that underpins the whole of the model engineering hobby, or should. On a more practical level, it can help to show that we are something more than a bunch of anoraks. *We* know that our minority hobby requires more skill, more knowledge, more time, more commitment, and even more passion, than most, but *they* don't; we have to tell them! This is especially important where relationships and preconceptions can make or break us, such as with the local councils who give us the run of their parks, the health and safety brigade, our insurers, and others whose view in a given situation is so often preconceived. We need to make their preconceptions positive! The website can contribute to this, but more importantly every contact we have with others at every level must be conducted with courtesy and professionalism. The question of dress code and behaviour at public events is particularly important. The item in Club News (left) may well be a wind-up (we hope it is, for the members sake!), but clubs where operating personnel all wear a sweat shirt of the same colour bearing the club log stand head and shoulders above the rest for image. Northampton is an example, but there are others. It really does make a difference!

FROM THE LEGAL FRONT

A few years ago there was much debate on the merits of **incorporation** for model engineering clubs, in other words becoming a limited company. Many have gone for incorporation, but another 'new idea' is to go for **charitable status** instead. Cardiff's award-winning newsletter the Messenger contains an account of the club's deliberations on the matter, the main advantages being the ability to apply gift aid to membership fees and donations, reduction of council rates, and better access to grants and loans of various kinds. The main downside is the standard of accountancy required by the Charity Commission, and the requirement to adopt the Charity Commission standard constitution without amendment. Cardiff have been able to get their heads around this and are going ahead. May be worth looking into. A question comes to mind: can we have charitable status as well as limited liability?

We have often railed in our newsletter over the **rise of the ambulance chasers** and their impact on our hobby. It is refreshing to hear of the success of the Irish government in cracking down on this problem. A recent newspaper report (FT 23.12.06) tells how Dublin used to be the lawsuit capital of Europe, and how during the run up to Christmas litigants would crowd the pavements outside the Law Courts to settle personal injury claims out of court in time to pay for the excesses of the festive season. A change in the law in 2004 saw the establishment of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board, a tribunal system that now assesses claims three times faster and at a quarter the cost of the old adversarial system. Legal costs have fallen from 46% of the compensation awarded to 7%. Tough on the lawyers, true, but it has to be good for society! New Zealand has operated a similar scheme for many years.

We were led to believe that our own UK government was considering some serious restraints on this miserable trade, but recent reports suggest that 'action' will amount to no more than a requirement for the registration of the touts who stop us in the street to interrogate us on accidents we may have suffered in the last three years. How disappointing! But what did we expect from a government composed largely of lawyers? Maybe we should campaign for a re-United Kingdom under Irish rule, they

do seem to have enjoyed success on many fronts in recent years!

A recent magazine editorial expressed concern at an EEC proposal that would allegedly make illegal any mention of **imperial units** in any form, in packaging, catalogues, magazines, etc, from 2009. There are apparently no exemptions for model engineers or heritage interests generally, things American (like exports and imports) or anything else. We are directed to a government website <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/metrication> where we may sign an electronic petition seeking derogation for the UK.

However, we are advised by one of our Northern Association gurus that this is all a red herring and there is nothing to worry about. Like with the boiler code?

On the same government website is a petition <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/FAIRCOUNCILTAX/>. We make no apology for mentioning this given that many of our readers depend partly at least on state retirement pension which is linked to the retail price index, which rises annually more slowly than average wages, and very much more slowly than council tax.

If it bothers you that **council tax** has been increasing annually at up to four times the general rate of inflation for a good number of years now, and is set to continue partly as a result of deliberate government policy, then you may like to sign this petition. If it doesn't bother you, and you don't have bottomless pockets, then you need to be working out how you will pay your **council tax** in ten years time.

In any event, the website is worth a look, there are petitions on the most unlikely topics! One against **road pricing** (a very likely topic!) recently clocked up nearly two million signatures, leading to a serious re-think on the part of Government.

That is 'people power'!

CONTACT US!

Our website includes a facility to contact us by email, or you may email the editor directly at alan_pb@yahoo.co.uk. A side effect of our success has been a substantial increase in our email traffic, most of it either asking for links to other sites, or complimenting us on the quality of our own site. All very welcome of course, but an increasing workload for your editor, who has looked after the email service so far. Now that we are up and running the various officers will hopefully be

able to respond directly to those emails relevant to them. This will save yours truly the task of relaying messages. To this end, it would be helpful if emailers could indicate in the subject line of their email who the intended recipient is and the gist of their request or comment. Your editor would particularly like to hear of ideas for improving the website.

APB