



THE NORTH STAR CHRONICLES – a newsletter primarily for the model railway fraternity

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Editorial

Knysna Model Railroaders are hosting a model railway and hobbies fair on the 3rd and 4th July in the St George's church hall. The organisation of a model railway exhibition held in the UK at the end of April is featured in the NSC this month albeit that show was on a considerably larger scale than Knysna's proposed event.

The 16mm National Garden Railway Show held at Stoneleigh Park on the 25th April.

Stoneleigh Park is an 800 acre business park about 6 miles south of Coventry in rural Warwickshire. It is the headquarters of the National Agricultural Exhibition Centre and apart from the agricultural areas has 21000 sqm of exhibition halls, a conference centre able to accommodate 12000 people and an on-site hotel. The facilities are magnificent.

Departure from South Africa was on a Thursday and having survived a nerve-wracking journey north, (all my flights were late), I was particularly fortunate (as was my luggage) to catch the plane on the last leg from Zurich to Birmingham as the flight was delayed departing for 40 minutes. Upon arrival at Birmingham, the hire car was collected and the 40 minute drive to Stoneleigh undertaken.

I had volunteered to be a steward to assist set up on the Friday (the entire set up operation was undertaken by volunteers) and was one of the first to arrive at Stoneleigh, albeit as will be seen from the photograph below, the lorry delivering chairs, tables and barriers had

already arrived and marking out the position of tables and barriers on the floor according to the exhibition plan had already commenced.



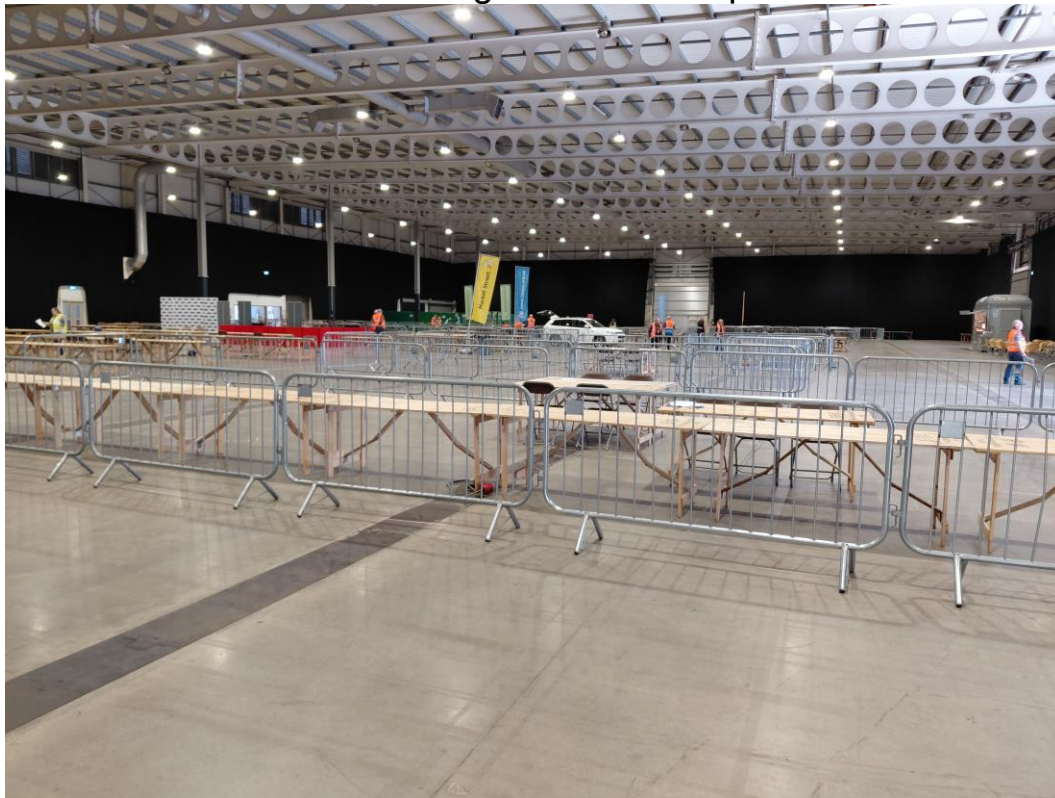
Exhibition Hall 2 10h33 24th April 2026. Note stacks of tables and racks of barriers on the front left of the vehicle, racks for chairs on the right side.

Wonder how many A380s could be accommodated in this structure?!



The scene at 12h46. Note electricity outlet on top of grey tiles.

There was quite an amusing incident early in the day. Gary Lambert a former KZNatalian who has been living in the UK for some 15 years and who I did not think would be at the show because of his work commitments, sent me a WhatsApp photograph of the hall entitled 'Guess where I am'? I sent him a reply with a similar photo headed 'Guess where I am'?! It was good to catch up.



The scene at 13h35



Exhibitors and traders started arriving at 14h30. This was the scene 2 hours later. Note the hazard vests worn by stewards.



Another shot at the same time to show the rollup entrance door to the hall. Set up by exhibitors continued for quite some time.

And so on to the big day: there was a concern among some that footfall which had been reducing for several years, because of Trump and the Iranian situation, would reduce further. Fortunately, this was not the case. Footfall actually increased by 26% to 1501 in 2026 compared to attendance in 2025.



Saturday 25th 11h31.



Another shot taken a couple of hours after opening time (09h30).

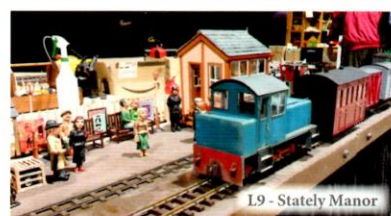
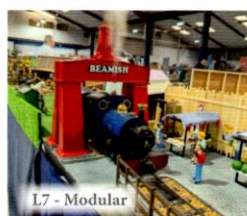
There was a significant development this year compared to previous exhibitions which had been organised entirely by the 16mm Association. Reflecting the difficulty in finding volunteers to fulfil the various functions required to run the Association, it has been outsourcing some of the roles to professionals in the field. Some years ago, an initial step in this regard was to appoint the Warners Group (the publishers of inter alia Garden Rail, Narrow Gauge World and British Railway Modelling) to collect Association subscriptions. Now a further step has been taken with Warners being responsible for booking the venue, setting the entry price, taking the commercial risk, inviting the traders and drawing the show floor plan with input from the Association. The Association organises its attractions, i.e. Member to Member Sales, the Grand Draw, Model of the Year and the Association hub. It provides and organises all stewarding. It provides and deploys all signage. It selects and organises the layouts and societies that attend the show. Association stewards mark out the hall. Whether or not the publicity given to the event in the Warners' magazines was the main factor in the increased footfall experienced at the show this year will no doubt be extensively debated at board level! Another development, probably Warners inspired, this was the first year that barriers were used to separate the public from the layouts. One can argue about the merits of this but at least we have not plumbed the depths of Australia and their Health and Safety rules. I am reminded of the late Ian Sutherland a leading light for many years in the Durban model railway community. Ian had a daughter living in Sydney that he and Lorna used to visit. The funny thing was such visits always coincided with the Sydney model railway show. After a number of years

Ian used to exhibit at the show where he discovered that he was not allowed to plug in his controller to the mains supply. In terms of the regulations that task had to be undertaken by a qualified electrician!!! A list of the 11 layouts and 60 plus traders at the Stoneleigh show follows. Unfortunately, with respect to the former it does not provide scale and gauge information.

LAYOUT LISTINGS

We have something for everyone at this year's show.

Dow Bridge.....	L1	Stately Manor	L9
Warton Road	L2	Ridgemont.....	L10
Much Grumblyn.....	L3	Dixon Green.....	L11
St Gennys.....	L4	16mm Association	
IOM Group.....	L5	Raffle Table	M1
Garden Rail	L6	Model of the Year.....	M2
Modular	L7	Sales Stand.....	M3
Anglia Roads	L8	Member2Member Sales..	M4



TRADER LISTINGS

We have a vast selection of leading manufacturers and retailers at the show this year to help you find a bargain, inspect the latest models and discover those harder-to-find products.

Accucraft UK	82	Footplate	10	RC Trains.....	1
Anything Narrow Gauge	23	Garden Railway Specialists.....	26	Resurgam Rolling Stock.....	49
Barrett Steam Models	43	Glyn Valley Tramway And Industrial		Roundhouse Engineering Co.	17
Before The Buffers	47	Heritage Museum	70b	Saddletank Books	61
Berry Hill Works	45	Harecroft.....	40	SLR Models	39
BJG Railways.....	57	I P Engineering	25	Steammodelloco	54
Black Cat Bridges.....	50	John Sutton Models.....	18	Steve Currinn Books.....	21
Bole Laser Craft	38	Kippo Models.....	41	Talylyn Railway Press Society.....	46
Boot Lane Works	8	Leamington & Warwicks MRS.....	55	The G Scale Society	28
Bowaters Models.....	7	Locoworks	72	The Gauge 3 Society	56
Brandbright	44	Mel's Models.....	42	The Marble Express	69
Brunel Models.....	60	Model Earth Design	73	The Model Railway Clearing House.....	81
Cambrian Model Rail	36	Model Engineers Laser	5	The Signal Box	37
Canal and River Trust.....	33	Model Railway Baseboards	20	Timpdon Models	15
Chalk Garden Rail.....	59	Modeltown	19	Trenarren Models	30
Coach & Wagon Works	27	Motley Miniatures	74	Warwickshire Loco Works	29
Corris Railway	13	P. S Models.....	48	Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway	12
Deraills Models	4	Peterbinnie.com.....	9	Western Signs & Printing	24
Endon Valley Decals	6	Plateway Models	80	Woodleigh Engineering	51
Evans Steam Services	34	Porterhouse Models	65	World of Railways.....	L6 & 68
Fairbourne Steam Railway	62	Prior Locoworks	66		

In previous years, the Association used to publish at considerable expense, a free comprehensive glossy guide to the layouts to see at the show and their scale and gauge, a list of traders and their major products and a floor plan where to find everything. What appeared in the May Garden Rail was a pale imitation of the former Association guide but of course there must have been a considerable cost saving. A show like Stoneleigh provides the opportunity for a lot of proverbial birds to be killed with one stone and raises issues to which we need to pay attention in this country with similar events.

The most obvious of these 'stones' is the opportunity to showcase the model railway hobby. But the hobby is multifaceted so inevitably there will be lots of associated skills and activities highlighted: some like planning layouts; some like building the associated mainly wood structures; then there is track laying; wiring and other electronics e.g. controllers, sound; to others the appeal of live steam, alcohol, gas and coal fired. The list goes on.

Accordingly, while the exhibition's primary function is to promote 16mm to the foot scale running mainly on 32mm track, other scales and gauges were on view at the show in the form of 45mm track running gauge1 and G scale equipment.



Not all 16mm scale layouts

As will be noted from the photograph at the top of page 8 below, the opportunity is taken to endeavour to increase the membership of the Association.

The next main feature is the opportunity for traders – new and second hand to sell and members of the Association and indeed the public to

buy. The participation of traders would make an important impact on the model train equipment available at the Knysna show. The traders at the exhibition at the Outeniqua Transport Museum in 2017 generally expressed satisfaction with their sales at that event.



One of delectable trader's stands at the show: Barrett gauge 1 live steam built from kits? – yum yum!



Perhaps because of the prevalence of so much former SAR equipment on the Welsh Highland, SAR has a good following amongst 16mm modellers in the UK.



Book stand at the Stoneleigh show

An issue of concern to many modellers in this country is what to do with their railway magazines and more particularly their books when they are finished with them. With respect to the former, there is virtually no market in this country and only a tiny one in the UK. Many of the magazines concerned can be viewed (and downloaded) via the internet albeit you may have to be a subscriber to the publication concerned. Books, however, are a different matter. As will be observed from the photo above, there was a book dealer, in fact two, at the show. Prices were reasonable but the problem we face is the cost of transporting books to the UK is prohibitive and once you have paid that there is not much left. The best one can hope for is the approach I adopted for my Hornby Dublo collection: find someone moving to the UK and include your books with their household effects. Even after making a contribution to cover the additional freight cost, this is a far superior option compared to shipping the books by themselves.

The 16mm Exhibition has traditionally featured a model building competition. It is sad that given the available space and the small number of modellers this could not be replicated at the Knysna exhibition.

One other feature of Stoneleigh which is being replicated by Knysna is so called M2M i.e. member to member sales.

One final feature used to boost Association funds is the operation of a raffle. However, one must not forget the small size of the Knysna market compared to the 1501 visitors who attended Stoneleigh!

A final comment on the show was the emphasis placed on security. I suppose this is a reflection on the changes that have taken place in British society but access to the exhibition hall was strictly controlled. Visitors to the exhibition had to pass through metal screening the same as that at airports.

My thanks to Chris Nobbs the show's Stewarding Co-ordinator for providing me with background information on the roles of the parties involved.

The end