



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

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Editorial

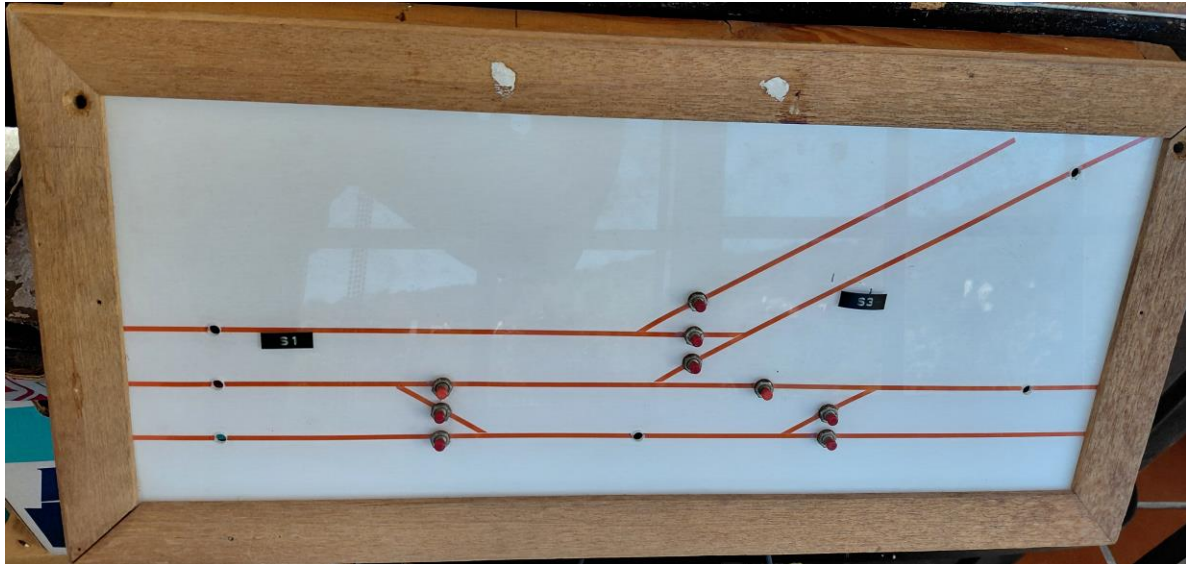
Hornby Dublo has featured at least 6 times over the years in the North Star Chronicles, the most recent occasion being in September 2025. In fact, the layout featured this month is basically the same one as appeared in the September 2025 NSC: i.e. module 1, same but different; read on.

Hornby Dublo Display Layout

There is an old joke about a tourist in Ireland who stops to ask a local for directions to Dublin. The response was “well if I was travelling to Dublin I would not be starting from here”! So it is, or rather was with the Hornby Dublo layout.

Although like Topsy it grew, the layout started life with module 1 as a stand-alone set up (the one exhibited at the exhibition in St George’s church hall in July 2025) with integral supporting legs obviating the need for separate trestles. One of the main notions behind the building of the layout was to use materials on hand (use what you have principle), mainly those left over from the dismantling of the Highway Model Railway layout which had been cluttering up our garage since we moved to the Cape. The original plan was to operate the points on the layout either manually or via push to make switches in a control panel (see photo page 2 below).

The layout was considerably extended through the addition of modules 2 (freight yard) and 3 (terminal station). Erecting all the modules each with a control panel at a public display would have become quite onerous.

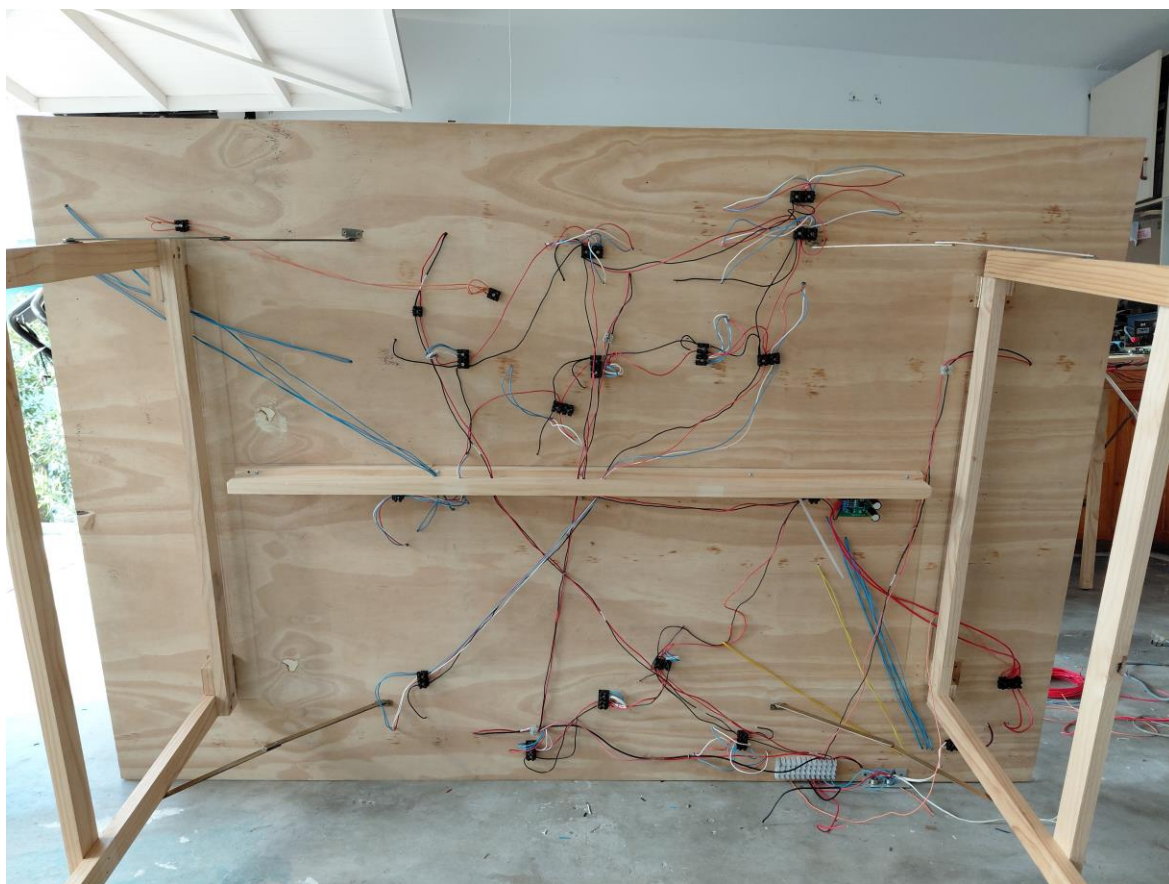


Control panel of Virginia module

In any case, the object of the exercise developed into one of showcasing as many Hornby Dublo items as possible so instead of push to make switches, points were to be operated via Hornby Dublo maroon lever but passing contact electrical switches (item no 1614). Electrical operation was also to be the practice with respect to the operation of powered uncoupling rails (item 3746) via Hornby Dublo push button switches and isolating rails – black lever switches (item no 1616). The result was a wiring nightmare. After drilling holes through the baseboard and then joining the various accessories, points, point levers etc from the top was easy enough. However, working underneath the baseboard was a different matter. I ended up sitting on a piece of foam on the floor of the garage drilling holes for choc block connectors and then wiring them up.



The original wiring of module 1 with power leads to the tracks only.



The underneath of Module 1 with point wiring including a capacitor discharge unit, isolating switch and uncoupler wiring added.

Having made the decision to operate the points with point switches, some 36 of them were required and I only had 23. An appeal to the members of the South African chapter of the Hornby Collectors Association brought forth the required number thanks to Tim Venn but some fiddling about was then required. The problem was the levers concerned had been 'banked up' into batches of six and four through the use of 'Switch Grouping Rods (item 32148 – long, i.e. 6 and 32149 – short, i.e. 4). This had necessitated the removal of all but one of the 'banked' lever's backing plates. As my plan envisaged using them singly, backing plates were required for each point lever. The problem was solved by 'raiding' my supply of black isolating switches where the backing plates were identical.



Point switch without backing plate left and with backing plate middle. Simple (on/off) isolating rail switch without backing plate right. Note three terminals for point switches and only two for isolating rails.

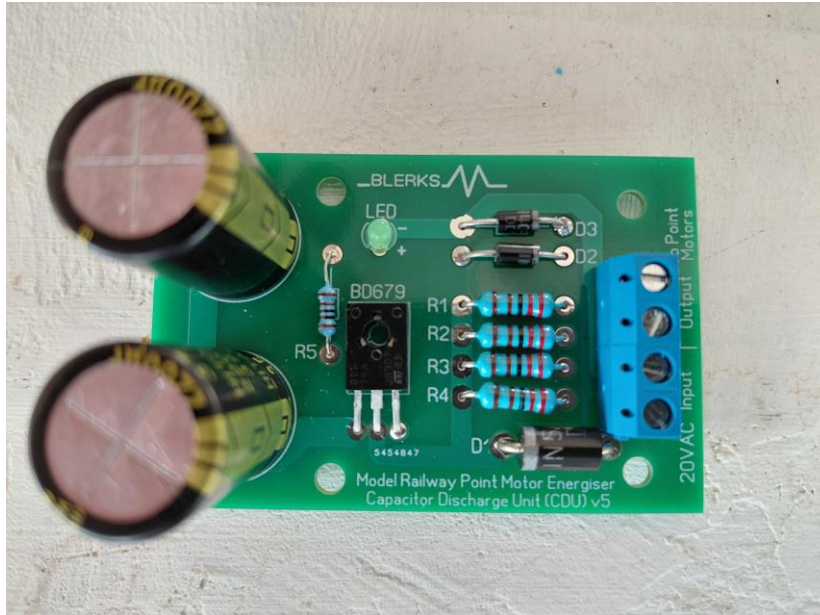
Then many hours wiring the point switches to the points ensued. Single points were simple enough but when facing points were involved life got a bit more complicated. Further complications ensued when one of the facing points would not operate and after hours of investigation it transpired that it was not the point motor or the wiring or an elderly capacitor discharge unit that was causing the problem but the lever itself!



As with most older wire wound (rheostat) controllers, this one has two outputs – variable voltage 0-12v DC providing power to and enabling control of a loco and 15v (actually 18.2v) fixed AC for accessories – points via a CDU and a TPO. Note push button switches for electrical uncoupling and black switches (on/off) for isolating rails at top right.

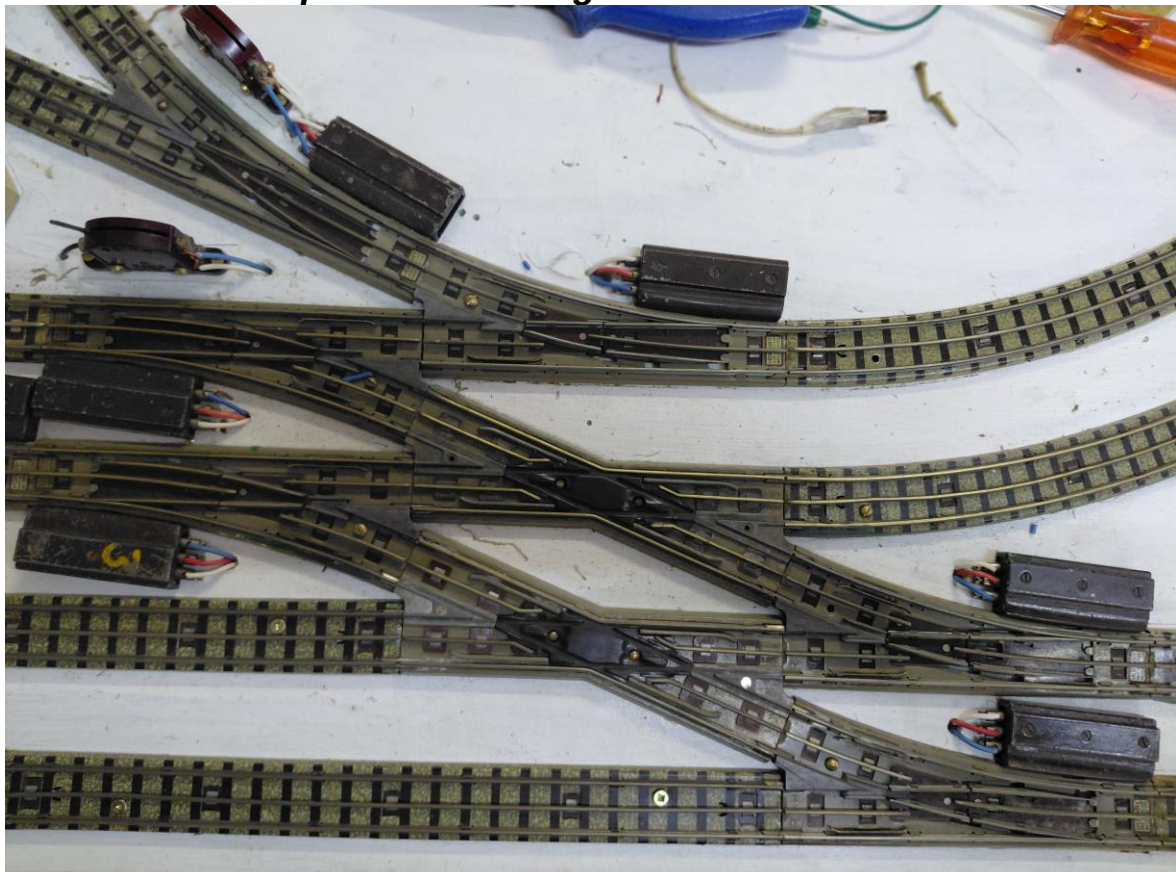
The Power Control Unit used originally to operate module 1. This is removed while the layout is being transported.

The Marshal is used to operate one loco on of the layout's two lines via DC while the plan was to use the AC outlet to power the CDU and a Hammant and Morgan hand held throttle which runs on AC or DC. Sadly this throttle expired a week before the exhibition so a Hornby III Power Control Unit was retrieved from storage and pressed into service to power the second circuit. I suppose it could be argued that the Hornby is a more authentic item than the Hammant and Morgan.

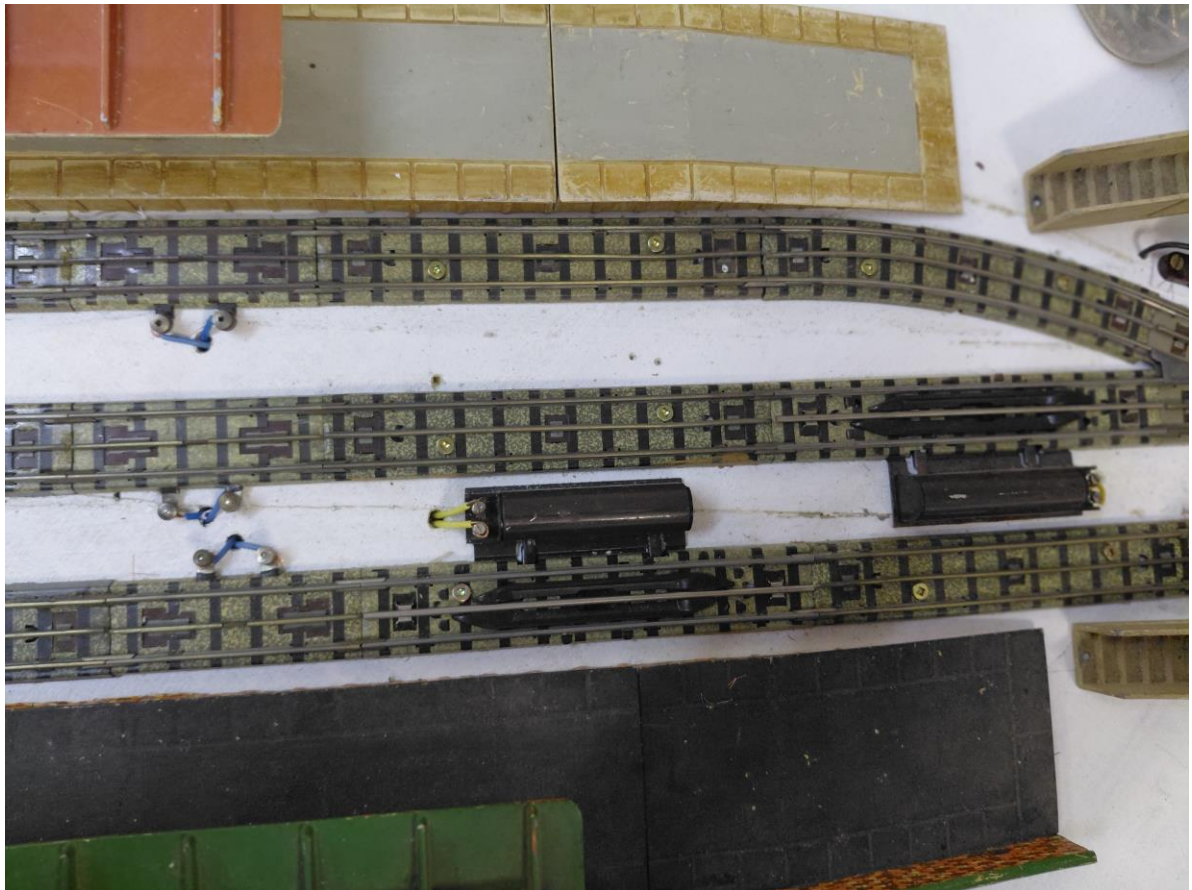


Because of ill-founded concerns about the efficiency of the original CDU, a new one costing R150 was procured from Dream Trains. In my view, this was excellent value.

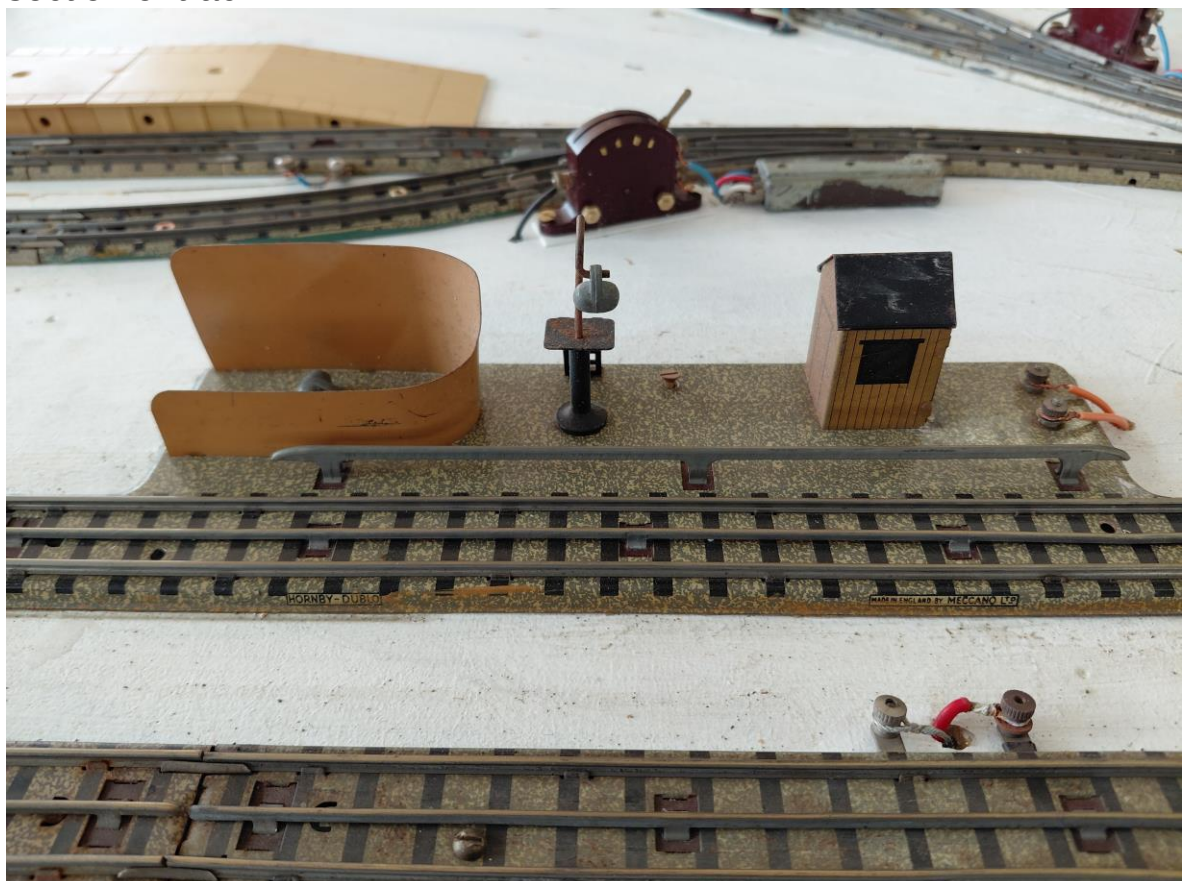
Dream Trains Capacitor Discharge Unit



What a wiring nightmare looks like! The two tracks at bottom right lead off to the bridges which join module 1 to modules 2 and 3.



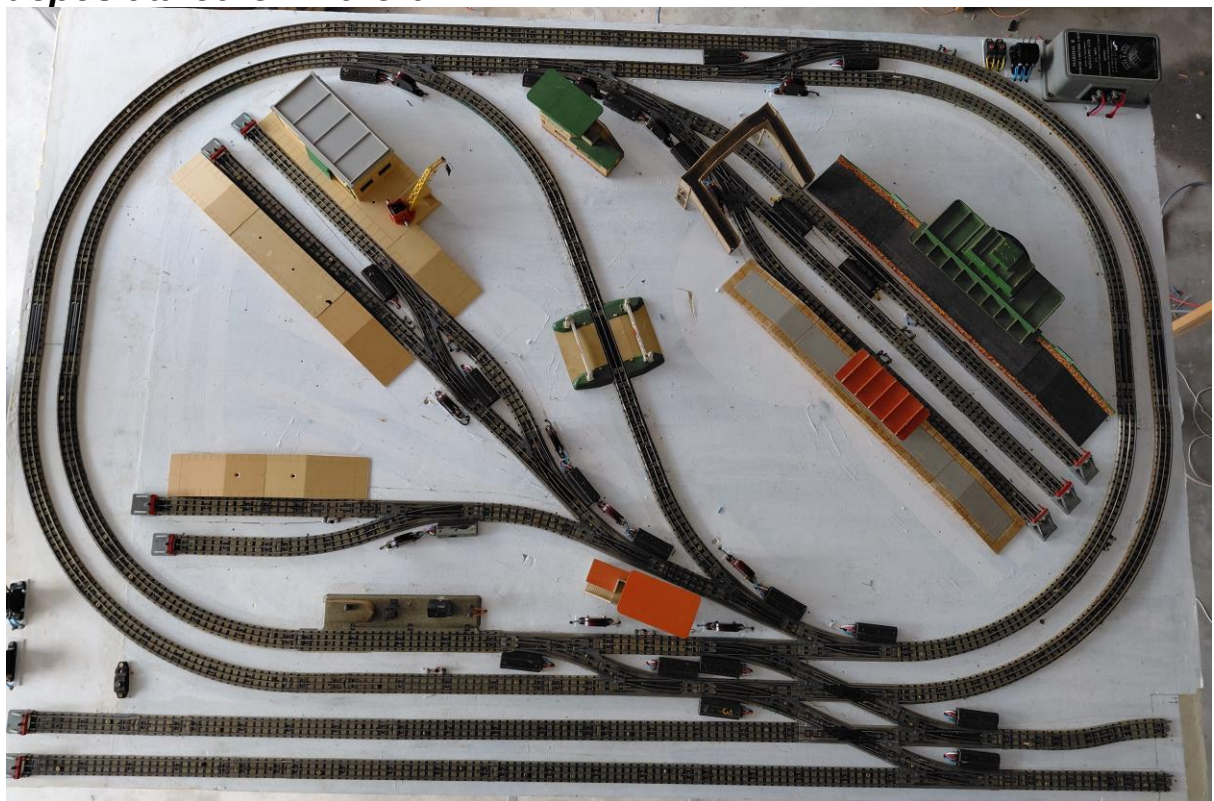
An upside down photo of two electrical uncoupling rails and three isolating rails which enable a loco to be 'parked' on an electrically dead section of track.



Travelling Post Office line-side apparatus (item 3400) with post bag awaiting collection



TPO coach (part of the 3400 set) about to uplift post bag and deposit another in the bin.

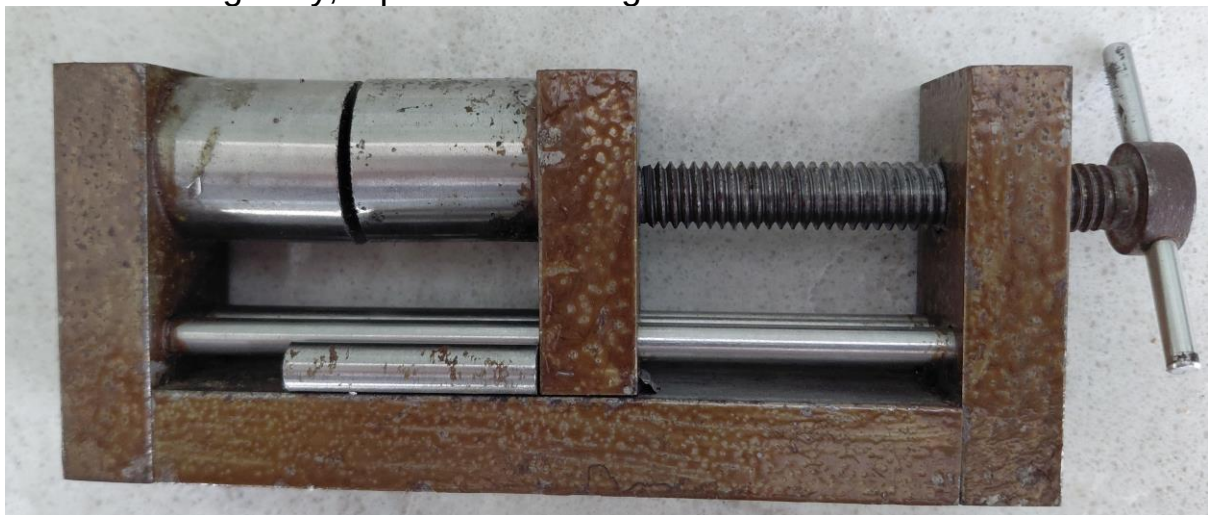


Bird's eye view of module 1 layout. Next year the baseboard will be painted!

The dimensions of the baseboard (1800mmx1200m) were determined by several factors: firstly the length was the minimum that could

accommodate a reverse curve. In fact, the original baseboard had to be lengthened by 200mm. The join is just visible on the left. The width was determined by the need to accommodate the various sidings for the freight and passenger stations. Normally, the layout will be viewed from the long side where the junction is with the other modules (the bridges) so this determined where the TPO set would be located (the inside of the inside track facing outwards).

While generally trains will be run at exhibitions with four coaches, only a loco plus two coaches can be accommodated at the passenger station. A Stanier 8F with a coal drag will generally be the freight motive exhibit. Running for two entire days is going to be a pretty demanding task for any loco but particularly ones which in some cases are 70 years old. It is a tribute to the robustness of their original manufacture that they do. While I bought some Wrenn (the successor to Hornby Dublo) armatures many years ago to have as spares when new ones had had to be fitted, in actuality this was seldom the case, albeit the Wrenn ones being 5 pole armatures give better control of locos especially at slow speeds. However generally, an oiling and re-magnetisation were normally sufficient. Originally, a permanent magnet was used.



Non electronic magnet charger – a relatively poor performer

Several years ago, a Ronald Dodd electronic re-magnetiser was acquired (see photo on top of page 9). This piece of kit involves inserting the magnet to be magnetised between two coils. While a simple tool, it has proven extremely effective and will work on virtually all Hornby Dublo locos and many others. Only the open frame Castle class, West Country, Stanier 2-8-0 freights and the 0-6-0 tank require the removal of the motors for re-magnetising while the Ringfield motors such as the 0-6-0 diesels need to be disassembled to remove the magnet before the process can take place.



Ronald Dodd re-magnetiser. Energiser in front. Compass on top is used to determine the magnet polarity. Magnet gets inserted between the two movable poles. When machine is plugged in, button on re-magnetiser is depressed for one second and that's it. Of course, another approach to the problem of older magnets losing their power (often caused by removing them from the loco) would be to replace them with rare earth magnets.



Three types of neodymium magnets for Hornby Dublo 0-6-2 tank, 2-6-4 tank and Castle class locos.
Knysna Model Railway and Hobbies Fair
A poster for this event on the 3rd and 4th July follows.

The end

KNYSNA MODEL RAILWAY & HOBBIES FAIR

3–4 July 2026

10h00 to 16h00

St George's Anglican Church Hall



ENTRY FEE: R30 • ALL PROCEEDS GO TO CHARITY

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3–12 JULY 2026