

THE OILY RAG

The Newsletter of The City of Sunderland Model Engineering Society

August 2025



Och Aye the Noo from the McChairman's Train

We've recently had a very pleasant holiday in Scotland. Even the weather was good. We were based in Fort William on the shores of Loch Linnhe and very close to Ben Nevis.



For me, the highlight of the week was a trip on *The Jacobite* from Fort William to Mallaig; something I've had on my bucket list for a very long time.

As many of you will know, I'm not an expert on steam locomotives, but when we got onto the platform and I saw the engine, I was pretty sure it was a Black 5. Subsequently, our guide (who turned out to be a driver on NYMR) confirmed that it was, so I was pretty pleased with myself!

The journey was great, but unfortunately we were on the "wrong side", so I couldn't get a photo of the Glenfinnan Viaduct.

As for Ben Nevis, the locals will tell you that the top is only visible for very few days throughout the year, being clothed in cloud most of the time. Well, we were lucky and we could see it clearly for two whole days! No, I didn't try to climb it.

As a sort of compensation, we did visit the Ben Nevis distillery and the samples were very nice.



(As a footnote to Peter's notes, I have been up to the West Highlands on at least thirty occasions, have never managed to visit even one of Scotland's 152 distilleries. My highlight visit was to Baxters' Soup Cannery at Fochabers!)

City of Sunderland Model Engineering Society

Committee & Contacts

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Society Records: All members should know that the Society records, e.g., membership list (including name, address, telephone number, e-mail) are maintained in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 by the Secretary. The data records are accessed and used by the Secretary and Treasurer for the normal administration of the Society.

Contributions to Newsletter

I welcome any "outside" contributions. Just email them to me at secretary@csmes.co.uk

Change to Bank Account

Before I launch into the Annual General Meeting stuff, something even more important is to advise you of a change in our banking details.

Our current account with Lloyds Bank is now closed, effective from 21st July, and has been replaced with a new current account with the Co-operative Bank.

The new account details are:

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Sort Code: | 08-92-50 |
| Account Number: | 63322453 |
| Account Name: | The City of Sunderland Model Engineering Society Ltd <i>which can be shortened to</i> CSMES |

The “Payee” field on your mobile phone or PC is probably limited to 20 characters at best and, like mine, will probably have a fit at being asked to accommodate 52 characters, so the shortened form should work, and I am assured by the Co-op Bank Help and Support Unit that the important items are the Sort Code and Account Number.

Please use this new account reference in all future payments to the Club.

Annual General Meeting

Now to the AGM stuff, the Forty Fifth Annual General Meeting of the Company (Ninety Fourth of the Society) was held in the CSMES Clubhouse on Tuesday 10th June.

Three **Apologies** were acknowledged, the **Minutes** of the 2024 AGM were agreed, the excitement was at fever-pitch for the **Directors’ Report**, almost identical year on year. This year it was slightly different, for the audited out-turn for 2024 was not yet available, an aspect explained in the first “proper” Report – the **Financial Report**. Derived from the information which had been provided to the Auditor, an income / expenditure sheet for 2024 was made available with the various entries explained.

In his **Chairman’s Report**, Peter Russell reflected on our relationship with the Council under our 25-year Lease, and the fact that we had been waiting ages for the Council to undertake repairs to the Council-owned fabric of the top workshop, and how different it would likely be if we were the ones apparently ignoring numerous requests. The repair is now “completed” (*of which more elsewhere in this Oily Rag ... Tom*) such that we no longer have a leaky roof. The rejuvenated and updated traverser is a source of much positive comment. Our open Days were successful, but the Chester-le-Street Steam and Vintage Fair fell victim to the weather. The Schools’ Meccano Challenge at Shildon was a delight, and some of the “professional” models were very impressive. On the whole, not a bad year, but Peter continues to worry about the ageing demographic of the membership.

My **Secretarial Report** followed my usual format in that the meeting did not get a tally of what the Secretary has actually done. I chose to first include pieces from a financial perspective. Calendar-wise, our financial year and Club year are a bit out of sync, for where the former ends on 31st December the latter ends whenever the AGM happens to take place. So, taking the AGM as its reference point, our Membership stood at 51, of which 45 are regarded as Seniors (including Engineers), 1 Life Member, 1 Junior, and 4 Honorary.

About 62% of our members pay their subscriptions by Direct Transfer, and you’ll recall

from last year's report that during 2023 we started openly advertising our bank details which has progressed from a little card to a notice hung next to the donations box. Over our 2024 year we received 21% of our total donation income through direct payment. It may not actually increase the level of subscriptions but is an easier and more convenient method of payment for some and it also reduces the work placed on the Treasurer.

Our operational days continue to generate essential income and are also the most visible aspect of the Society. It is often only by conversation "over the gate" that enquirers get a full picture of the scope and depth of the Society's activities. Unfortunately, our gallant team of volunteers who attend on operational days continues to diminish as the years pass, and just as Peter launched his appeal to the Sunderland Echo in September 2022 to prevent us running "out of steam" it may be appropriate to use our "over the gate" discussions to seek the involvement of those who just want to assist us "run trains" and in so doing perhaps eventually foster a greater interest in the supporting aspects.

My posts on the Friends of Roker Park Facebook page regarding our operational weekends – or not, as the case may be – have pushed a certain green steam engine into the public eye, and we have questions at the gate of "when will we see the little green steam engine" again. If that is sufficient to ignite interest, so much the better.

It is also to be hoped that our tie-in with Sunderland College will encourage a greater involvement with the younger element. The perception of "oldies" that the young uns' cannot put down their phones or see beyond them and need everything to be controlled through them may well be right, but equally it may be misplaced and we should offer every opportunity for them to roll their sleeves up and get involved. A recent article in *STEAM Railway* magazine explored how to attract young people, how to make working with a railway interesting and, most important, make such involvement an attractive alternative activity in which to be involved.

My missionary work into deepest Durham and other places continues, and I assess what I see, what appears good or not-so-good, which can potentially assist us in our Club.

AGMs are always permeated by thank you sentiments, but it is right to do so. Yes, a small few do many of the operational aspects, maintenance aspects and most of the other aspects and we must be grateful to every member who shows a willingness to bring along models of whatever variety, either for static display, moving display or to run on the track, to roll up sleeves and get hands dirty in whatever capacity to assist in any way, for without that help, this Society simply would not be able to continue.

The **Elections** were swift and efficient. Peter was elected as Chairman for the next three years, three of the Lead Members were re-elected unopposed to their previous positions, the position of Lead Member General Engineering remains vacant for the time being, Ian Ogle has taken up a challenging new role as Lead Member for Training and Health & Safety, aspects with which he was tasked in his latter years in the murky world of work (*my apologies at using a filthy four-letter word*) with yours truly taking over as Treasurer for the time being. We also welcome Ian Brown's election to the Committee, having been co-opted for the last couple of years.

Arthur Wakefield and Bryan Bellamy have stood down from the Committee, and we must thank them for their help and assistance in recent years. Paul Davidson and Ken Chicken were re-elected to their arduous roles as Examiners of the Society Accounts.

And that was it, papers returned to briefcase, pen put away, only for a wonderful discussion about membership subscriptions to commence ...

Subscriptions

One aspect which was abundantly clear from the financial aspects discussed at and after the AGM is that our Subscription income of some £1500 is insufficient (by about £800 for 2025 - this current year) to cover our insurance costs alone which, being absolutely honest, is the main essential expenditure item which safeguards you in your engineering activities both at home and at the track.

Being a Limited Company, we must have our Accounts properly and professionally audited and then there's the amount apportioned by the Accountant for depreciation of assets, which together add a further £900 to that expenditure. We have not yet turned a wheel or switched on a light, but we're up to a deficit of £1700.

The Club has been very fortunate in that donations income for many years was more than sufficient to offset the difference, but that income used to include the considerable contribution from the Illuminations Nights, an income which has not been there for 2023 and 2024 and, without being profligate in our spending, over those two years we have incurred an overall loss.

I would suggest that it is a little unreasonable to expect our gallant little band (ever diminishing in number) who undertake the running days to spend a considerable proportion of their time over the year simply making up that shortfall. Don't forget, on top of that we must also include all of the expenditure borne by the Club which include Utilities, Maintenance, Repairs and various other Fees, etc. We still have some funds to fall back on, but our second Club Simplex might need a new boiler, and the Class 37 needs its wheels and bogies fettled, and there's a bit or track renewal to do, and ... and ...

Returning to my main point, Insurance is probably the most important aspect for you as a member, so is it unreasonable to have a greater proportion paid through subscriptions? I would suggest not. Is it realistic to move to a point where we cover the whole lot in one jump? To do so the subscription would need to be £46 so, if not, how far do we go? Do we go to £36, or £40? You are our membership, let us know.

Experience suggests no-one ever responds to any such questions ... but let us see what happens this time.

Can't Park There, Mate

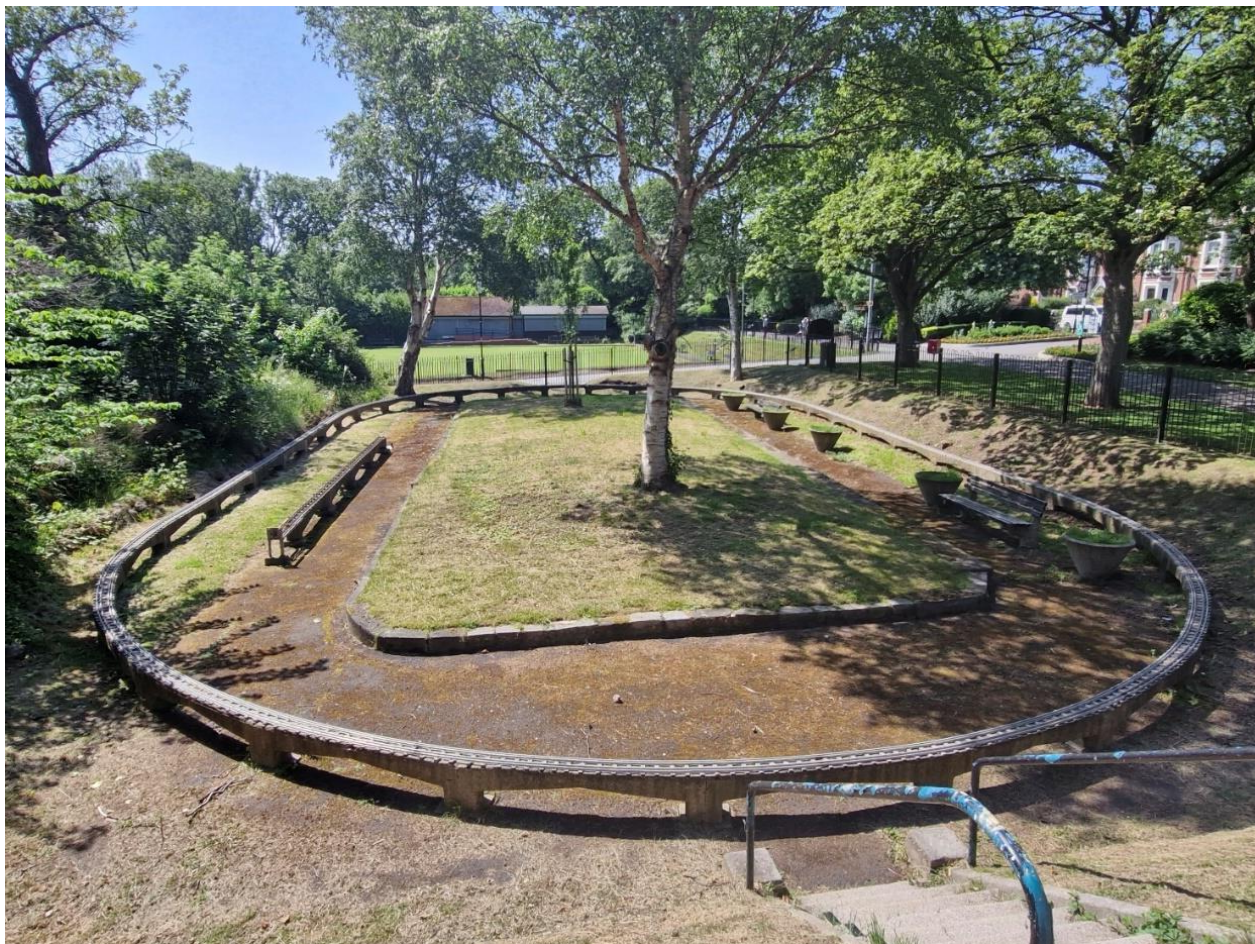
The Council has recently received a complaint regarding vehicles being parked within the park grounds (not necessarily us or our vehicles) and we are asked to remind our members that vehicles are permitted to enter the park strictly for loading and unloading purposes only, and once this activity is completed, all vehicles should be promptly removed and parked in designated areas outside the park.

I have acknowledged our awareness of the "rules" which relate to loading and unloading but have pointed out to the Council that some of our members are holders of Blue Badges, who may need to have their vehicle close at hand. I have also highlighted those occasions – admittedly limited in number – where vehicles may represent a vital support unit to an ongoing activity, such as providing a servicing base to a traction engine as part of an event, and it is desirable that they can remain.

I would hope that members would always seek to park so as not to cause any obstruction and would hope that access and parking arrangements can be relaxed in relation to these two aspects. Let us wait and see ...

VJ Day ... Friday 15th August

I am sure the country will be bedecked with bunting and Union flags to celebrate the day when, 80 years ago, the war with Japan was ended. It may not have made the worldwide headlines, but it was also on that day when a former tennis court in Roker Park commenced its transformation into a miniature railway facility and introduced the skills of a small band of model engineers to an unsuspecting Sunderland.



The article by Colin Meddes in the June *Oily Rag* set out the history and use of the track very nicely and I will not seek to add to what was stated.

In the belief that any 80th birthday cannot be overlooked we are intent on marking the occasion by opening the track to a bit of intensive use on Friday 15th August – the very day – when we hope a number of our members will turn up with their steam engines to simply use the track in the way it was intended to be used, and also to assist in the display of our other models on display in our gazebo.

I'll provide an update nearer the event, but I expect the day to be similar to an Open Day, with a display in the gazebo, traction engines, trains running on the top track, trains running on the bottom track (*make a note ... need to get the riding truck fettled!*) with others being steamed. It should start at about 10.30am but the actual “celebration” of the Anniversary will be highlighted for about 1.30pm (*give or take a half-hour*). I'm not expecting a long speech from the Chairman but I would hope to have the occasion marked with a few appropriate words and some other activity commensurate with an Anniversary.

We'll be contacting the local media as well so if you come along, make sure you look suitably swish, as befits an 80th birthday party.

Sunday 15th June ... Fathers' Day

Why would I single out this day and date as unusual? Following a damp and drizzly Saturday 14th June where we all sat at home and watched the passing clouds through the window the Sunday, whilst being an operational day, would surely be pretty much like any other? No, far from it.

That Sunday was, in my opinion, one of the most enjoyable operating days I have yet experienced. It was a fairly quiet day from the perspective of passengers and donations, we've had many which were far more productive.

Ah, but this day had added attractions, in the form of Stan Fisher and Steve Dunn doing a steam test of their / Stan's / Steve's *Precursor* locomotive "*Etna*", under the eagle-eyed gaze of Eric Lonsdale, and also Ken Chicken and the two lads (Ogle and Brown) fine-tuning the two stationary boilers and their respective attached machines.



"*Etna*" had recently had its successful hydraulic test on its new boiler and so, now fully assembled, Stan and Steve were presenting it to be steam-tested, which apparently has to start with lots of talking, pointing and standing back at a suitable distance.

Talking, pointing and standing concluded, the steam test was successfully passed such that Stan could now take a few moments to enjoy his coffee while it was left, er ... entrusted, to Steve to "dispose" of the day's activities and to restore the external appearance to its former resplendent condition.

Having this additional activity prompted a great deal of enquiry and discussion amongst our passengers and the occasional fence-supporter, some of whom took the opportunity to view the activities at close quarters, suitably chaperoned throughout.



As I said at the AGM only days earlier, these “over the gate” discussions and activities stimulate further interest in our activities, perhaps getting the involvement of those who just want to assist us “run trains” rather than a deeper involvement.

Plain and Simple Terms Explained

Engineer ... someone who does precision guesswork based on unreliable data provided by those of questionable knowledge.

Theory ... when you know how everything should work but nothing does.

Practice ... when everything works but no-one knows why

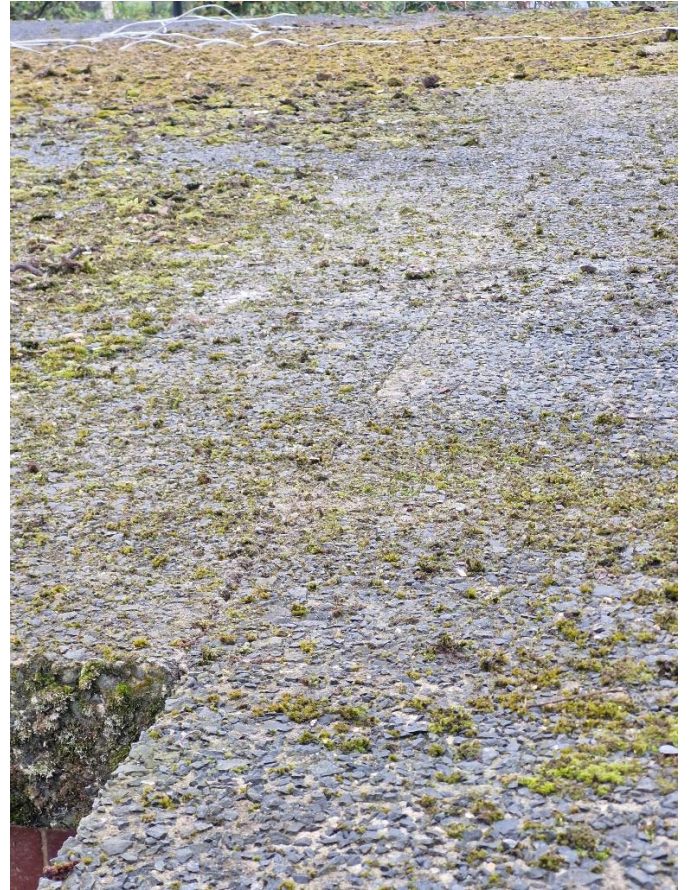
Clart ... the process by which theory is translated, interpreted, minutely adjusted and fine-tuned to make something work in practice

So-So ... an approximation of the degrees of adjustment required during the process of Clart

**“There are holes in the sky where the rain gets in,
but they’re ever so small that’s why the rain is thin”**

Ah, the genius of Spike Milligan, but thin rain is exactly what was troubling us in our top workshop, specifically the bits of thin rain which managed to get through the roof and form puddles on the storage cabinet and floor.

The workshop roof is actually two rather large concrete slabs, with the joint running side to side across the middle.



Viewed from the inside the location of the leaks was readily apparent and has created some damage to the ceiling. Viewed from the outside the joint is visible, but also visible is the moss growth which is also retaining some of the water on the roof.

As you all know, the top workshop was originally the Gents Convenience, and whilst the Ladies Convenience next door was retained in use by the Council, the Gents was handed over to the Society for use as our workshop, being included in the 25-year Lease which we have with the Council and which is now in its second term, having been renewed a few years ago. Under the Lease the Council retains responsibility for the upkeep of the fabric of the building, obviously including its roof.

Since I joined the Club in October 2022, almost every Committee meeting has heard an update from Peter regarding his “contact with the Council” regarding having the leak fixed and his efforts to find that elusive Council person who holds that responsibility. Having worked for a local authority I know this problem from both sides!

Imagine Peter’s surprise when he found the very person, and who in turn promised to have the Council’s appointed roofing contractor come out to inspect the job. Said contractor was provided with photographs of the ceiling on 3rd April, and on 15th April two roofing persons turned up to do the job.

Up they went, complete with a roll of suitable material and a big gas bottle ...



... and after a half-hour the repair we now affectionately call “Peter’s Patch” is done, although the lads did state that the whole roof needs doing and that a report will be submitted to that effect. Will it ever get done? We’ll wait with interest.

We don’t need to plug it in!

Fortescue, an Australian mining company, has just debuted a battery-electric locomotive that never needs to be charged – it does it itself via regeneration and, in their particular application, it certainly makes sense.

Their new battery-electric locomotive’s daily chore is to descend hills with its heavy load of iron ore, using regeneration to recharge its batteries, and then after unloading (at the “bottom” of said hill) climbs back up with its now-empty train to restart the process. The key fact in this whole matter is elevation, and there’s a 1000 foot difference in elevation between the iron ore hubs (where it comes from) compared to the destination at sea level where it is delivered and discharged.

For those who love the maths and physics which supports the project, as long as the descending train is significantly heavier than the ascending train it all stacks up. The maximum energy which the regeneration can recover is the train’s gravitation potential energy which, as you all know, is its **mass** times the **height of the hill** times the **gravitational constant** – $M \cdot g \cdot h$. No regenerative braking system is 100% efficient, but in this instance there is no problem because the energy needed to get back up the hill is $(M_2) \cdot g \cdot h$ where M_2 is significantly lower and g and h are the same ... as long as you have the payload capacity to create a large enough “delta” (a term familiar to followers of F1) and a big enough battery to capture the energy.

Fortescue’s reasoning is sound. They have 54 diesel-electric locomotives that pull 16 mining trains, each up to 1.7 miles in length. These trains can carry over 34000 metric tons of iron ore across 244 loaded cars, burning about 21.6 million U.S. gallons of diesel fuel. The \$50 million budget to develop the battery-electric is bound to make quite a dent in their emissions ... and also the diesel fuel bill.

Where to find us

Our regular visitors have no problem finding us in the north-west corner of Roker Park, but casual day visitors may miss us. Indeed, depending upon which entrance a visitor uses to come into the Park, they may miss a number of attractions.

The Park now has a new sign, funded by the Friends of Roker Park and the North Area Committee of Sunderland City Council, is situated at the entrance to the Roker Marine Bowling Club.

Our full title would take up half of the sign, so we've settled for "miniature railway" which is clear enough in its meaning.

It could be argued that the Park could do with a number of these signs but the cost of just one is considerable.

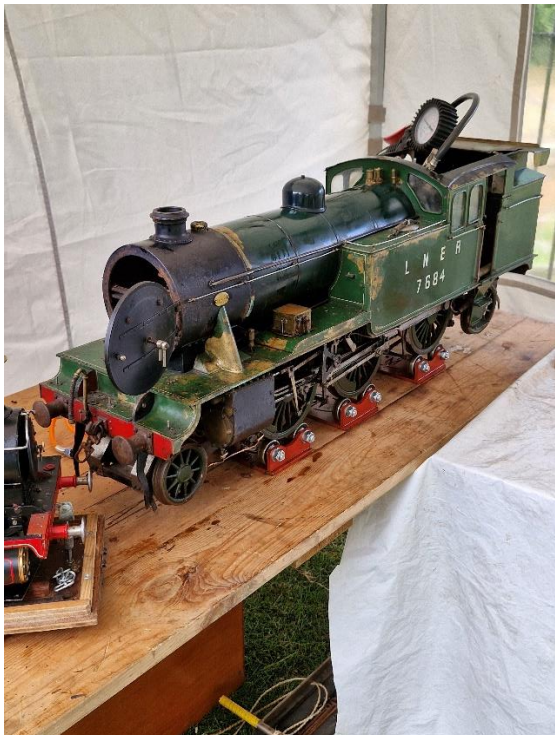
The Friends Group even had to obtain full Planning Approval for the sign, but that's a whole story in itself.



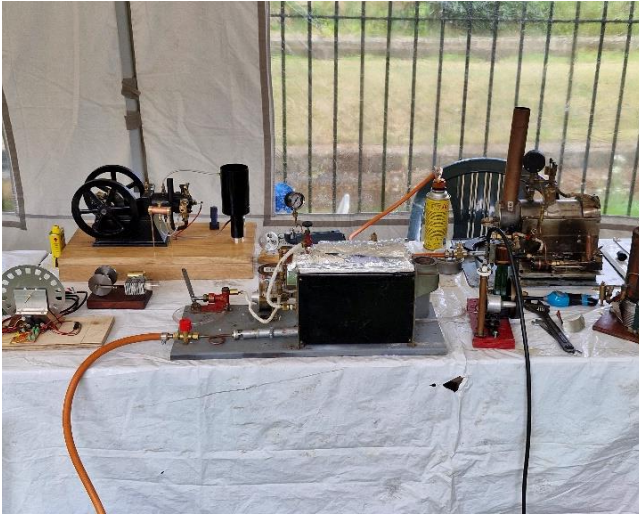
Open Day (Number 1) – Sunday 6th July

Depending on which weather forecast you looked at, the rain would arrive at any time between 11.00am and 7.00pm, which basically meant we would get wet, it was just the "when" that was in doubt. As it happened, we didn't get wet, nor did it rain until we were all packed up and back home with our feet up.

Fearful of a downpour, many of the other Park activities planned by the Friends of Roker Park were postponed until the Sunderland BID event on Saturday 19th July, but our gazebo went up as planned and was stocked with exhibits of all shapes and sizes.



At one end of the benches, Ken Chicken had coaxed Ernest Parks' magnificent 53-year old V1/V3 into operation running on air, sitting high on its rollers, while the smaller engines on the main benches also provided something for the visitors' eyes to study.



Eric Lonsdale's *Ajax* sat on the other end bench with a flavour of our nautical side alongside it, giving Ken Chicken an opportunity to point out to our younger visitors the similarities between a steam locomotive and a steam launch.



The main eye candy outside the gazebo was the two magnificent traction engines brought along by Paul Stephenson and Eric Lonsdale, the latter beast being ably managed by Eric's grandson, Daniel.

Paul kindly (*foolishly?*) invited me to have a go at driving his *Royal Chester*. The hair-trigger regulator and the vague nature of the steering, not as accurate as I am accustomed to, took a bit of getting used to as I threaded the red machine along the park's pathways which, due to said steering, suddenly appeared to be a lot narrower.

Kidney Stones

No, I have never had them and I hope I never do, but the Simplex has had a repetitive problem with blockages in its plumbing, specifically the steam injector, which result in it not working. The latest blockage during running on Sunday 13th July prompted yet more investigation. Yes, the locomotive still has its hand pump and its axle pump to fall back on, but it's obviously better to have all three working.

Prompted by Dr Stephenson, the tanks were flushed and the detritus within the flow captured. Their previous flush (first time in years!) was in early 2024 when tiny specks of brass were evident, probably a result of the hand pump having been loose on its mounting until the big overhaul, but this time it was mainly limescale and bits of what looked like sand.

The next running session will judge the effectiveness of the action.

SUNDERLAND BID Event

... and that session should have been on Saturday 19th July as part of a Sunderland Council initiative to promote local businesses through an arts event along the Roker seafront.

Our participation was wisely called off on the day before the event due to the atrocious weather forecast which was reasonably accurate regarding what we would receive and also when it would land.

Stephenson Trials 2025

The Stephenson Trials for 2025 have been arranged for Saturday, 20th September 2025 at the track of the Carlisle and District Model Engineering Society, Hammonds Pond, Upperby Park, Carlisle, CA2 4PS.

I have circulated (on Wednesday 30th July) the Entry Form and relevant instructions to those of you on emails but should any non-email members require the Entry Form and instructions please let me know and I'll get a copy to you in good time.

I would remind you that 12 entries will be accepted, on a strictly first come – first accepted basis.

Communication

At a time when it has never been easier to communicate, we use as many ways as possible to get the message across to our members.

Email, post and hand deliveries facilitate the distribution of the *Oily Rag* six times each year, with the instant convenience and economy of email being the much-preferred option. Are you one of our postal or hand-delivery members who could use emails as your communication and delivery method? Let me know.

We also have a WhatsApp Group which keeps members up to date on other interim aspects, such as whether we are running or not each weekend, and frequently provides a wonderful forum for discussion on all manner of subjects. Could you use that? Again, let me know.

Looking Forward

Passenger Running Days

Our Passenger Running Days will hopefully operate each Saturday and Sunday through to October, subject of course to volunteers being available and co-operative weather.

The sessions will be advertised on our Web Site to start at 11.00am and run through to 3.00pm.

Sunday 3rd August – Members' Running Day

An opportunity for our modelmaking members to get all steamed up and run, polish, photograph, talk about and generally celebrate their models. Get nicely dirty and oily whilst having a good natter about all aspects of the engineering masterpieces, surely the best advert of an engineer's art. Sessions (weather and Members permitting) will formally start after Committee has finished at about 11.00am.

Friday 15th August – 80th Anniversary – our Small Track

As detailed inside, we hope to make an occasion of it, so if you can bring along your steam engine or a model to display, so much the better.

Sunday 7th September – Members' Running Day

As above

Sunday 14th September – Open Day

Not the whole Park this time, we're teaming up with our Model Boating colleagues on this occasion.

Saturday 20th September – Stephenson Trials (Carlisle)

See article within Oily Rag

Saturday 27th September – Steam-only Passenger Running Day

If all goes well, a throwback to many years ago when steam was the norm and the use of electric locomotives was but a dream for the future. I would hope we have the availability of sufficient steam locomotives to run a first-class service without recourse to anything electrical.

Sunday 5th October – Members' Running Day

As above

Thursday Mornings:

Don't forget about our regular Thursday morning get-togethers. Various aspects of maintenance get carried out each week, as well as a host of problems being solved by our ever-varied panel of experts.

We usually open up at about 9.30am and leave after 11.00am, according to the maintenance activity or the number of problems occupying our minds ...