

HALF CENTURY AT SUTTON COLDFIELD

Ted Jolliffe

reports celebrations culminating in the unveiling of a commemorative plaque by the Chair of Lichfield District Council.

Social historians tell us to expect a boom in the birth-rate in the aftermath of any conflict. Certainly following WW2 this was borne out as returning servicemen expressed their affection for family life and the formation of many clubs and societies. Some fell by the wayside and are but memories but not in the case of Sutton Coldfield MES. They began by way of a notice posted in a toy shop window, displayed together with a part built locomotive chassis. This led to a meeting of interested parties and the foundation of today's thriving club. Some early members came from the already established Birmingham Society. Travelling to and from meetings at Sheldon was too difficult, meetings were initially held in Erdington. Soon an Exhibition was staged in a local church hall. A track was set up at the Lucas Sports Ground and use was made of a portable track donated by a member.

In 1964 the Society acquired a lease on land at Lea Marston and there erected an elevated track, for 2½, 3½ and 5in. gauges. The society remained on this site for several years until a very handsome bequest by member Jim Balleny in the mid 1970s enabled the club to purchase the present 2½ acre



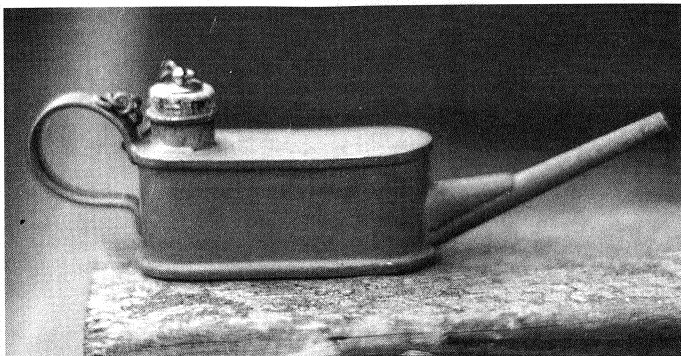
Cllr. Tony Brookes, Chair of Lichfield District Council, unveils the plaque. He followed this with a witty speech, a ride on the train and a tour of the exhibition.

site at Little Hay. This was named Balleny Green, honouring the memory of their benefactor.

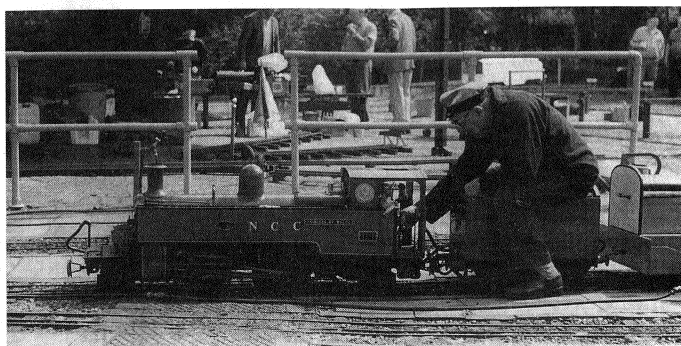
There followed a difficult period within the society, but after tactful approaches to Lichfield Council and the local neighbours, permission was granted for the erection of a track. Many more facilities have been added as the club grew from strength to strength. These facilities now include a purpose built HQ on site—winter meetings are still held at a library in Sutton Coldfield—an excellent ground level track, a cover to protect the steaming bay areas for both tracks, unloading facilities for heavy models, a tunnel and a tarmac road for traction engines.

Lichfield District Council have been most helpful to the club over the years, and a good relationship developed between the two bodies.

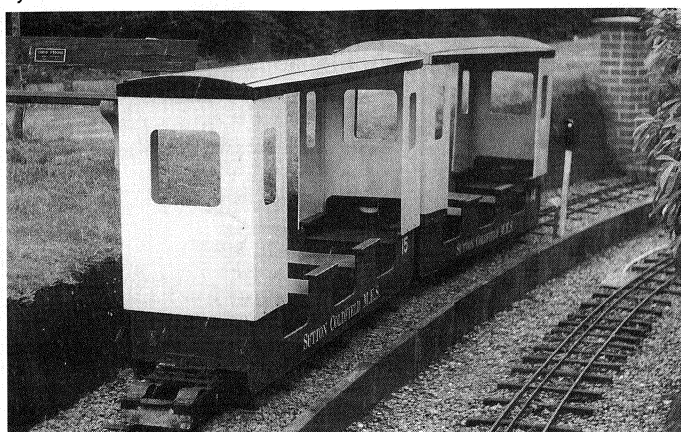
It was fitting therefore that on a squally afternoon in mid-June when a private celebration was laid on for members and invited guests that Cllr. Tony Brookes, current Chair of the authority attended to unveil the commemorative plaque on the clubhouse wall. On not too formal an afternoon, lots of engines ran on both elevated and ground level tracks, a small exhibition of members' work was staged and a bunch of model engineers gathered to celebrate a milestone in the Society's history.



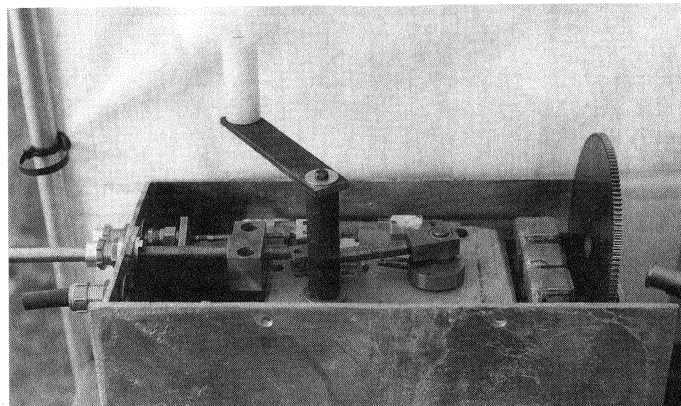
A tiny object but along with lots more from this builder it formed a significant part of the exhibition. Modelled on a full-size IOM Rly oil can this miniature is by Paul Ellis.



A view across the steaming bays as long serving member Geoff Nicholson brings his 7½in. gauge locomotive Princess of Wales into the ground level station area.



These covered 7½in. gauge carriages are for use in inclement weather.



Designed for longevity and trouble free operation this is a Mk. 1 point motor, under development by members Stuart Harrison and Peter McMillan.