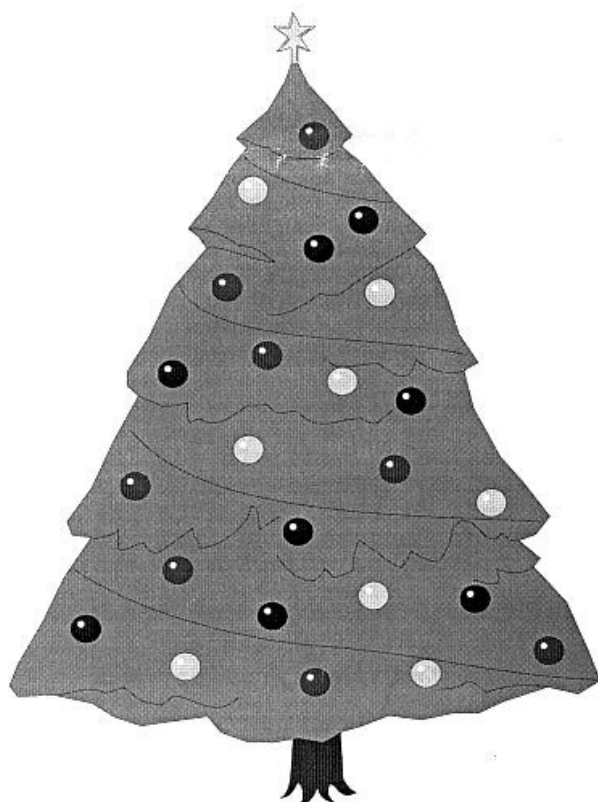


**Maidstone
Model
Engineering
Society**



Christmas - 1995

BOILER TESTING.

THE FOLLOWING CERTIFICATES HAVE EXPIRED OR WILL EXPIRE BEFORE THE END OF JUNE 1996. :-

| NAME | MODEL | EXPIRY DATE |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| MR P.CHISLETT | 5" GAUGE 0-6-0T TERRIER "ROLVENDEN" | 04/12/95 |
| MR P.CLARK | 5" GAUGE 0-4-4T | 11/04/95 |
| MR N.F.CLARK | 5" GAUGE 0-6-0 "BUTCH" | 30/05/95 |
| MR N.F.CLARK | 5" GAUGE 0-4-0ST SWEET PEA | 07/05/94 |
| MR N.F.CLARK | 4 1/2" SCALE BURRELL TRACTION ENGINE | 16/04/96 |
| MR F.DEEPPOSE | 5" GAUGE 0-4-0 "POLLY 2" | 11/04/94 |
| MR D.DELLER | 3 1/2" GAUGE 0-6-0 ROB ROY | 11/12/95 |
| MR D.A.DELLER | 3 1/2" GAUGE TICH | 26/02/96 |
| MR T.FRISKEN | 3" SCALE ATKINSON LORRY No.2 | 26/07/95 |
| MR T.GREGSON | 5" GAUGE 0-6-0T BUTCH | 22/07/91 |
| MR T.GREGSON | 5" GAUGE GWR 2-6-2T | 30/06/92 |
| MR T.GREGSON | 3 1/2" GAUGE CONWAY 0-4-0 | 24/04/95 |
| MR T.GREGSON | 3" SCALE ATKINSON STEAM LORRY | 30/06/92 |
| MR A.E.GURR | 5" GAUGE LNER 2-6-2T | 29/01/96 |
| MR R.HILLS | 5" GAUGE 0-4-0T NARROW GAUGE | 19/06/95 |
| MR R.HODGKINS | 5" GAUGE 0-6-0 SIMPLEX No.1270 | 12/03/96 |
| MR L.HULBERT | VERTICAL STATIONARY | 15/09/92 |
| MR P.KINGSFORD | 5" GAUGE 4-4-2 JERSEY LILLY | 02/04/96 |
| MR F.LAROCHE | 5" GAUGE 0-6-0 3F | 12/09/94 |
| MR A.D.LEWIS | 5" GAUGE GWR 0-6-0 PANNIER TANK | 20/03/95 |
| MR J.LEWIS | 5" GAUGE 0-4-0 SWEET PEA | 28/05/96 |
| MR R.J.LINKINS | 5" GAUGE 2-6-0 | 07/07/92 |
| MR K.P.LINKINS | 5" GAUGE 4-6-0 CLASS 5 | 02/10/95 |
| MR P.MARTIN | 3 1/2" GAUGE BLACK FIVE | 05/10/93 |
| MR D.OSBALDSTONE | 5" GAUGE GNR 2-8-0 "CONSOLIDATION" | 05/06/95 |
| MR M.N.PARHAM | 4 1/2" SCALE ROAD ROLLER "BARBARA" | 25/06/96 |
| MR A.H.W.PAYNE | 3 1/2" GAUGE 0-6-0 FOWLER TANK | 23/05/94 |
| MR A.H.W.PAYNE | 5" GAUGE LMS 4-6-0 RED FIVE No.5020 | 10/04/95 |
| MR M.STARNES | 5" GAUGE SIMPLEX | 12/03/96 |
| MR J.A.WINSER | 5" GAUGE 0-6-0T "SIMPLEX"NO.5548 | 10/04/95 |
| MR M.WREN | 3 1/2" GAUGE 0-4-0 "TICH" | 23/02/93 |

If you have a boiler on the above list that you no longer intend to have re-tested by the Society, please inform the Hon.Secretary.

NEW MEMBERS IN 1995:

Brian Hope, Precision Engineer from Yalding, completing a Southern Schools Class 4-4-0

Mick Lister, Retired, from Aylesford, currently building Minnie

Andrew Holbrook, Engineer, from Maidstone, into steam traction engine construction

WELCOME TO THE MAIDSTONE MODEL ENGINEERING SOCIETY.

A TRIP ON EUROSTAR

Eurostar trains have been purring past our factory at Staplehurst since last summer, with a passenger service to Paris and Brussels starting just before Christmas. As a died in the wool gricer it obviously would not be long before I donned the woolly hat, anorak and duffel bag to investigate. In the event the outfit just described was vetoed by my better half in favour of my Oxfam coat, Rupert Bear tartan scarf and flat cap. At a bleary eyed six thirty a.m. on Waterloo station the overall effect was the same.

Waterloo international is more like a small airport than a station, even the luggage trolleys are streamlined and look as though they have just escaped from a Buck Rogers film set. Twenty minutes before departure the passengers are called to board the train and we were afforded our first close look at Eurostar. With eighteen coaches and two power cars this is a very long train, only Waterloo has platforms long enough to accommodate it in this country. A large loop had to be put in at Headcorn, over the site of the old Kent and East Sussex Railway, in case they needed to park a Eurostar out of the way. The coaches are articulated, that is two coaches share one boggy as used by Sir Nigel Greasley on the London North Western Railway in the thirties but in this case the suspension extends right up between the coaches to give a ride quality second to none.

At the appointed hour we slide smoothly out of the station snaking our way along side suburban trains. We pass through Vauxhall station on the line I always remember as being full of milk tank wagons in my train spotting days. It takes a painfully slow thirty minutes to clear Bromley and the London suburbs with Staplehurst (the well known centre of railway activity) passed in fifty five minutes. As we roll along I muse on how the world's most modern train finds its self running on our antiquated third rail system, the reason lies squarely with the Underground.

When electric traction was first introduced at the turn of the century its attractions for the underground system were obvious, in fact the deep level tube could not have been powered by any other means except possibly cable as on the Glasgow underground. Electricity was so successful that the other underground lines soon adopted it, spreading to outer suburbs where stations were sometimes shared with the main lines. The main line companies realised that to compete with the Underground and the electric tram ways they would also have to electrify and they needed something that would mix with the Underground system already in some of their stations. The L.M.S. used the full Underground third and fourth rail system on their lines from Euston to Watford. This is a safety feature as anyone being unfortunate enough to make contact with either conductor rail and the running rail receives only half the power, it is necessary to touch both conductor rails for the full belt. This is a bit like asking if you want to be eaten by a small lion or a large one, the fact is that one still remains eaten. The London South Western railway obviously considered its customers more discerning when it comes to conductor rails and decided to use the cheaper third rail system which would mix with the Underground on its Wimbledon line and thus the Southern's third rail system was

started, destined to become the largest third rail system in the world.

The London Brighton and South Coast railway did start off with overhead but this was converted to third rail when the Southern Railway took over in the early nineteen twenties. The first main line to be converted was the line to Brighton in the early thirties with Tonbridge, Maidstone and the Medway Towns reached before the war. The Kent coast line which we are travelling on had to wait till the end of the fifties before it received the third rail treatment while Hastings to Tonbridge, Tonbridge to Redhill and the Weymouth lines have only recently been converted.

Why is this system not used for main line electrification in the rest of this country, or even the world? The answer lies in the problems of using a low voltage D.C. supply. Most traction motors use D.C. current at a relatively low voltage, the temptation is to send D.C. current straight out to the train at the right voltage. A single overhead cable will supply enough current to drive a tramcar but it takes more power to move a train and so an extra rail can be used which will carry more amps and be easier for clearances in tunnels. This is fine for a suburban system and is common throughout the world. It is only when distances become longer that the problems of voltage drop and the high ampages required become apparent. To overcome these problems much higher voltage is used, fed to an overhead cable which is now able to deliver much more power. Alternating current helps overcome the voltage drop problems and this is why all modern electrification on main lines is done on overhead cable. The down side of this system is that the train now has to be equipped to transform the high voltage A.C. to low voltage D.C. This is why electric locomotives are still commonly used on main line trains while on a low voltage D.C. system the motors are the only large items required and they can be fitted directly to the wheels, ideal for the multiple units seen so often on suburban services.

Our poor Eurostar has to cope with three electrical systems found in Britain, France and Belgium, hence the need for the two large power cars with their distinctive hum when in action. Drivers have to be careful not to exceed a certain power setting when on the third rail as full power would blow out the circuit breakers in the substations feeding current to the line.

Soon we come into the Sheriton tunnel terminal where the overhead starts, it is very peculiar to see French electric locomotives and German diesels all standing in the sidings on this side of the channel. As we dive into the tunnel our driver reminds us to put our watches forward an hour to French time and assures us that we will be in France in twenty minutes. I was never nervous about the tunnel as the Swiss have been running train tunnels of similar length since before the first war, with car carrying services since before the second war so it is nothing new. I have also travelled on what was the longest railway tunnel in the world many times, London Transport's northern line. This is so much like the underground that you expect Charing Cross or Embankment to come up any time, even though we are travelling much faster it feels the same. It is not possible to see the large caverns where the trains can change tunnel in the darkness.

Sure enough twenty minutes later we pop out into the daylight and head for the high speed line to Paris. You can tell the high speed line by the way the train cants over on the curves as we begin to gather speed. Soon the flat landscape of northern France begins to slip smoothly past our window and I was just beginning to wonder when we were going to go really fast when a French voice comes over the speakers "Allo, allo ze train she is doing one hundred eighty four miles an hour" a ripple of conversation runs down the carriage the general consensus of which is "core blimey I did not think we were going that fast!" (substitute "great scott" for "core blimey" in the first class section of the train.)

The only time that you really get an impression of speed is when you look at the cars on the nearby autoroute, even when they are in the fast lane they are very rapidly left behind as we are travelling some one hundred miles an hour faster than them. As we travel I think about highspeed rail services, the French were always keen on high speed with world records of over two hundred miles an hour set in the nineteen fifties. It is obvious that even if you have lines straight enough for this sort of speed you cant mix trains travelling at this pace with local trains stopping at every station. It was the Japanese who first took the plunge with a complete new line in the late nineteen sixties with trains travelling at the then breakneck speed of one hundred and twenty miles an hour. We matched this with our diesel HST sets in the seventies, still world class for diesel traction. The Italians have a tilting train capable of one hundred and fifty miles an hour running on a mixture of new and up graded old track, but it is the french with their TGV trains that have led the way to speeds of over one hundred and eighty miles an hour.

These have been so successful that not only is there a growing TGV network in France but the lines are being extended to Germany, Switzerland Italy Holland and Belgium with new TGV equipped lines running in Spain and planned for the U.S.A. The top speed achieved on a special TGV unit was over three hundred miles an hour with an increase in service speeds of over two hundred miles an hour expected soon. This is a very far cry from the rolling stock we enjoy on the Kent coast routes, some of which was built in the fifties to a basic design dating back to the beginnings of electrification. We may have been the birth place of railways but there is no reason why we should still be using the original rolling stock!

All to soon we are slowing down to join the ordinary main line into Paris Gare Du Nord which we reach in just three hours travel time from Waterloo. What is the first thing you do in Paris? why have a look at the TGV units in the Nord station of course. The gricers guide to Paris includes such delights as riding a rubber tyred metro train on a combined road and rail bridge past the Eiffel tower, or following the left bank of the Seine on a double deck suburban train (a bit boring as it is mainly tunnel) not forgetting trying out more of those streamlined luggage trollys on the escalators of the Eurostar terminal. (Its lucky we are on holiday or I would never get away with it, but perhaps it is considered better than the delights of the Paris night life.)

COMPLETING THE FIRST CIRCUIT

It all seemed to come together in the Autumn. Before taking to the rails, your loco must have the necessary paperwork, i.e. a boiler certificate. Our President had agreed to do the honours, so on a Sunday morning in September, the boiler was prepared for the pressure test with the usual bevy of unofficial observers. It had been decided to run the Simplex at 80 p.s.i., well below the designers recommended maximum, so our initial test pressure had to be 160 p.s.i. The test condition was met without a problem followed by the instruction to reduce the water level in the boiler and get the fire alight.

For the novice, even lighting the fire can be a trial, as the boiler draught requirements for your particular loco are not familiar. It was soon obvious that the induced draught provided by the old Smiths heater blower would have to be considerably reduced for the best effect. A welcome volunteer held the suction pipe just clear of the chimney to achieve this. At about 60 p.s.i. the steam blower valve was opened and the electric fan removed, working pressure being reached shortly after.

The safety valves needed fine tuning only, but the discharge of steam caused quite a rapid fall in water level at the gauge glass. Yet another volunteer (or was he the same one?) got busy with the hand pump which had not previously been used in anger. Thankfully, it worked efficiently and a safe margin of water was quickly regained. Jack, meanwhile, was preparing the Test Certificate and before long all were satisfied that the criteria of the test had been met.

After mastering the balance of blower, feed water supply and stable fire, it was time to prepare for the first run. Steam and bearing oils were topped up and the regulator cracked open to warm the cylinders. D.D. had offered to act as co-driver for the initiation of the new learner driver who had never before taken to the rails. By the time we had transferred from the steaming bay to the running track and coupled up to the passenger trolley, more hand pumping was called for. Another quick check of the fire and then we were at last ready to roll.

Two hundred yards had been covered before it was noticed that the drain cocks were still open, letting valuable steam escape, such was the concentration on driving. The first circuit, now completed, had been at a pace best described as leisurely rather than brisk. After a stop at the station to regain a healthy head of steam, a second lap was done before going solo on the third. Following several further laps, a rest was long overdue and some good advice sought.

Although the beast was running, performance was not exactly sparkling, either due to mechanical inefficiency or poor driving technique. In particular, two suggestions were made, surprisingly neither of which involved the lake situated not far from the railway. A reduction in blast nozzle bore from $\frac{1}{2}$ " to $\frac{7}{32}$ " made the fire more lively and keeping it well stoked up avoided firing between station stops. No other adjustments were needed apart from the addition of some holes in the ashpan sides to improve the draught. After some weeks on the learning curve, during which time the art of continuous firing / driving had been mastered, more or less, the challenge of passenger hauling was faced.

With Oliver, as Simplex is now named, well into his third running season, among the many passengers and their comments, one always comes to mind and perhaps illustrates the complete lack of understanding of many of those outside 'our' hobby. I was asked "Don't you get bored going round and round all the time?" Well, what do you say in the few minutes left to complete the ride? No time to explain the joy of driving a locomotive that took about seven years to build from scratch using many skills you didn't know you had.

"No Miss, after controlling the regulator and the water level, watching the steam pressure, state of the fire, the lubricator, the track ahead and the passengers behind, there's certainly no time to get bored".

A DYING HOBBY

The cycle of life seems to revolve around attending weddings with other children for one's parent's friends and then later in life attending the friends' and relatives' weddings, their children's christenings and then their children's weddings. Sadly comes the time, all too soon, when the attendance is at the funerals of family and friends, a circumstance that occurs with increasing frequency as age creeps on. In my mid fifties, I seem to have reached that stage and the recent loss of another good friend has tended to focus my mind on the circle of life which seems to reflect itself in virtually everything we do.

Moving away from the morbid topic of the frailty of life I find myself focusing upon the frailty of the potential future life of the hobby in which we indulge ourselves.

I have access to neither the Club records nor, perhaps more importantly, the records of model engineering clubs and societies throughout the UK but it would indeed be very interesting to plot a graph of the number of active model engineers against their age and even more interesting, to compile such a graph each year for the past 25 years, to look at the trend. How many of you reading this article are under 30 or even under 40? I feel certain that the majority are over 50. So where is the new blood, the Chairperson and Committee Members for the year of 2010?

It would seem that there are multitudinous reasons for the decline within the hobby and with a wish to avoid any suggestion of political bias, it must be relatively obvious that the "easy option" which has found its way into all aspects of life and in particular the development of children, has taken away, not only ability but indeed the incentive towards anything mechanical. After all, why fiddle with small nuts and bolts, why learn that triangulation makes things rigid, why discover about bearings, gears, eccentrics etc, when you can open a box of Lego and simply click it together and probably restrict learning to the strength it needs to pull Pirate Pete's arm off? What boy (although I must of course now say "child") did not have a carpentry set by the age of 6 or 7 and learn to make something? No matter how frail, inaccurate or out of square it may have been, it was a substantial achievement and taught the rudiments basics of skills, co-ordination of eye and hand, and created the confidence that ultimately led to higher achievement.

I doubt one can even buy a child's woodworking set now, the "Nanny" state probably dictates that it is far too dangerous for a child to have a hammer unless made of hollow plastic and the thought of a child having access to a rudimentary saw or, heaven forbid, a semi sharp chisel would defy current imagination! What use would it be anyway, why bother to make anything when it is easier to go out and buy it, current interest span of a child is probably only 5 minutes, so it can then be thrown away. Early basic skills were developed in the home; most families did not have the financial resources to call in the repair man when anything went wrong and Dad and Granddad would possess rudimentary skills, undoubtedly somewhat higher in quality than today's "professional" builder with a battered Transit van and standards commensurate with his previous employment as a double glazing salesman. Those skills, in woodworking, mechanical repairs, metal working and in particular, soldering, were passed down not only by the encouragement to children to "watch Dad in the workshop" but a genuine desire to be involved.

School staff recognised that skill training did far more than simply train the skill and accordingly skill training in wood and metal working formed part of most school curriculums.

Whether or not it was the attitude of the mid to late 1960s that the sexes were so equal that it would be better if boys were to learn to make a pavlova whilst girls donned overalls and honed their skills with hacksaw file and lathe, I do not know. Perhaps it was the bureaucrats that decided that the UK no longer needed any skills for the future in its industry, so we did not need therefore to train anyone or may be it was decided that the tools involved in working timber and metal were not safe enough to be used by anyone under 21. May be it is the computer revolution; after all, why need to think, or get off one's butt, why need even to pick up something as simple as a saw (and probably need to read the instruction to know not to hold the jagged edge) when you can sit in an armchair glued to a cathode ray tube and hone your skills at button pushing, after all you will be able to probably get that last lemming home during your years of retirement!

Fewer people enter the hobby because few even appreciate that we make anything, as you will all have probably experienced, the usual question is "where do you buy one of these?" or "how much do these cost?" To the current younger generations and I do not mean only children, everything is made in a factory and the human presence is confined to pushing a button.

Undoubtedly we in the south are worse off than our more northerly neighbours, where there remains at least a modicum of our manufacturing industry and which is skimmed by those with an interest in our hobby. It is with few exceptions therefore that we see very much news of new tracks, track extensions or the like in the south east, excepting where it may seem that money rather than membership dictates the abilities to improve.

I believe that individually we can only play a very small part in the matter of new blood, personally I have had little success in encouraging my own off-spring, where I found myself working in total opposition to the education system, which actively discouraged any participation in such forms of skill training. My son would be most happy to have a locomotive but it would have to be provided or, if it needed to be built would have to be produced simply on the lathe or milling machine and/or within a few days. He would enjoy driving it, in fact he can and a number of years ago did so on a Sunday mornings at Maidstone, but firing up and cleaning afterwards, well that is a bit of a bind.

Do we have a long term future? Sadly my feeling is that I fear not, for it takes a great many members with the ability to give a high level of commitment to keep a club running and, if the level of young blood does not replace the diminishing old, then the laws of diminishing returns will make itself increasingly felt.

Perhaps we should be running on a totally different format, like a golf or flying club. Would members be prepared to pay a substantial membership fee each year, of say £500-£600? Pay for tea, coffee and cakes? Pay to use the Club workshop and, say £20, for an afternoon's steaming on the track and perhaps £10 for trolley hire; coal sold by the shovel full and water on the meter? We could then employ full time people to keep everything in nice running order and even clean the locos down when we have finished. Any takers?

There are of course other problems that make clubs less accessible or curtail their operations seriously, the actions of local authorities for example, which frequently control the freehold of track sites and usually perceive model engineering activities at very low level of priority, and although seem to accept nominally the community benefits of public running, ignore them in practice. At Maidstone we are denied casual access to our track and have to be dependent upon being at the gate at a set time. Arrive early or late and one must park up and walk to the club house for the key, with similar problems on leaving. Does this put members off? The answer is, yes, I can be categoric in this, as it puts me off and I would suggest that it also puts off others. I cannot guarantee to arrive at the allotted time, and even when I have arrived on time, the gate has not always been open. On more than one occasion, being delayed in my departure to Maidstone, or on not being able to go until lunchtime, I have decided that I did not want the aggravation. On one occasion when I had walked to the club house and back I was virtually involved in a fist fight with a boat owner, who had been unable to get in because I was blocking the gate, he of course had a key. On another occasion, by the time I had returned to the gate, two youths had taken the trailer cover off and a few moments later I would have been absent my tool box. I will not go now unless I can be certain that I will arrive at a time when there is someone on the gate. Members of the Boat Club, some would say irresponsibly and others would say more in the good interests of their members, leave the gate unlocked.

Tonbridge has seen their track decimated by a local authority who considered that the siting of a new swimming pool took precedence over a track which was well supported and had been established for many years. Not only is the ambience of the Tonbridge track now lost but it suffers increased difficulties with access and is virtually cut off from its public presence, with the resultant affect, not only on its revenue but on the membership. On a recent visit made on a hot summer day when one would expect a noticeable gathering of running locomotives, there were two locomotives, only one of which was to run, although with a passenger potential of less than 4 persons, there was not a problem in meeting demand! Not surprisingly, Tonbridge members do not feel too confident in the future of their track.

So is this a dying hobby? A personal view is that it will not die but it will become severely withered and that the number of clubs with tracks, will over the next 10 to 15 years, become much reduced, with the emphasis being on those tracks that can offer more to their membership. Maidstone has an enviable history, a good location and a lengthy track but its continued success may well depend on it being able to offer more. More interest on the track, such as signalling and a tunnel, more access for solving the gate problems and perhaps Saturday access for non public running. If Maidstone does not solve these problems, another track will and in 10-15 years' time I suspect that we will be travelling elsewhere, in our nuclear powered people movers with built-in loco transporter, for the afternoon run.



Roger R Stagg

KEEPING THE PEACE WITH AN OLD
SCREWDRIVER

by

Laurie

At odd times, perhaps once or occasionally twice a year, I will call on an acquaintance, a fellow m.e., usually in response to his "How do I ...?" Bill is quite a good machinist, but no great thinker; his wife, Bet, is a very good cook and she is a thinker - mainly about filling Bill's stomach, keeping him happy (she's old fashioned, you see) and she thinks about the garden. But even after forty years of wedded bliss, they still have the odd difference or two.

Thus it was, in answer to Bill's call for "How do I ...?" I arrived at Chez Bill and heard the sound of raised voices. That was very unusual but it was mid-September and I should have known. As far as I could make out, the reason for the raised voices was threefold; but perhaps I should set the scene first. Bill's workshop is in an extension to the rear of his garage and necessitates him walking several yards from the house side door, round the back of the house and across part of his lawn to get to it. Bet does not really care for wet or, at times, muddy footprints on her kitchen floor - she is not obsessively houseproud, but has not managed to train Bill to use the doormat thoroughly - even after forty years.

Now, Bill is inordinately proud of his lawn and, unlike his untidy workshop, keeps his grass in the pink (or green) of immaculate billiard table condition.

Bet likes to see spring bulbs flowering in the lawn, especially in that part she can see from the kitchen windows and she has two special bulb-planters, one large for daffodils and the like and one small for crocuses etc. Bill tolerates this 'desecration' of his treasured lawn - he has to! When I arrived, it appeared Bill was objecting to bulbs being planted in that part of the lawn he crosses. Bet had told him to use the front entrance to the garage to get into - I was pretty well lost at that stage. What I could not understand was why Bill had not put down paving slabs for a path to the workshop. Bet said she had told him to do that years ago but the dimwit (!) had used the money to buy some lump of old iron (her words). Bill seemed to think it would spoil the symmetry of his lawn if he put down paving across one side and, anyway, the casting he had bought was a bargain. Apparently, he begrudged his Bet spending 'all that' money on bulbs EVERY year and that was dismissed scornfully by Bet saying she did not begrudge him spending 'all that' money on expensive fertiliser/weedkiller (only the best!) for that d***d grass she practically had to beg to be allowed to walk on.

Continued

I offered to call again when things were a little less fraught, but Bet had lunch lined up for me and did not want me to disappoint her. Over lunch I tackled satisfactorily Bill's problem of mounting and machining a casting on his lathe saddle and that saved him sending it back and paying extra for a fully machined one. Bet fastened on that at once - she wanted her own way, of course! Heigh Ho! we were off again. I tried to duck out of that. She threw that one at Bill - saving money on a casting was all right, so he could now buy some paving slabs and there would still be plenty left over for her bulbs.

I quietly mentioned she need not buy new annually; I did not do so and, in fact, my crocuses were over ten years old and had multiplied greatly. The secret was not to - I saw a pleased look on Bill's face, but only for a second as I went on - not to use weedkiller on the lawn. Bill nearly choked over his steamed treacle sponge and custard. Now, Bill's lawn is about eleven yards or so by about thirty-two yards and there is not so much as a single alien leaf in any square inch (centimetre or whatever) of it. "How did I ...?" Bet was very pressing, "How did I ...?"

Simple, said I; don't use a combined fertiliser/weedkiller, use fertiliser only. I dig out weeds, if any, with a home-made weed extractor. Bill nearly erupted at the thought of going over his hallowed lawn on his hands and knees, but we managed to get him to listen.

Many years ago at a SMEE rummage sale, Auctioneer 'Crick' held up a long hefty screwdriver with a badly mangled business end and I got it for my usual starter bid of "fourpence" (4d); it had possibilities unrecognised by experimentalists there, and by the following day, I had converted it into a weed extractor. I heated the end to red to anneal it; trimmed that end square; gave it an extra thump with a hammer to shape it a little more; cut it down the middle of the flat about half to five-eighths inch depth; opened out or splayed the two 'ears' and gave them a dose of filing to something like a tack-lifter; re-tempered the thing and, in use, all one does is push it down vertically as close as possible (very essential - vertical and close) to a weed of the dandelion or plantain type (with a longish tap root - the roots grow straight down) lever back a little to pinch a low point of the tap root and hoick out the offender complete while it is still held by the tool. An enlarged sketch of the business end is appended.

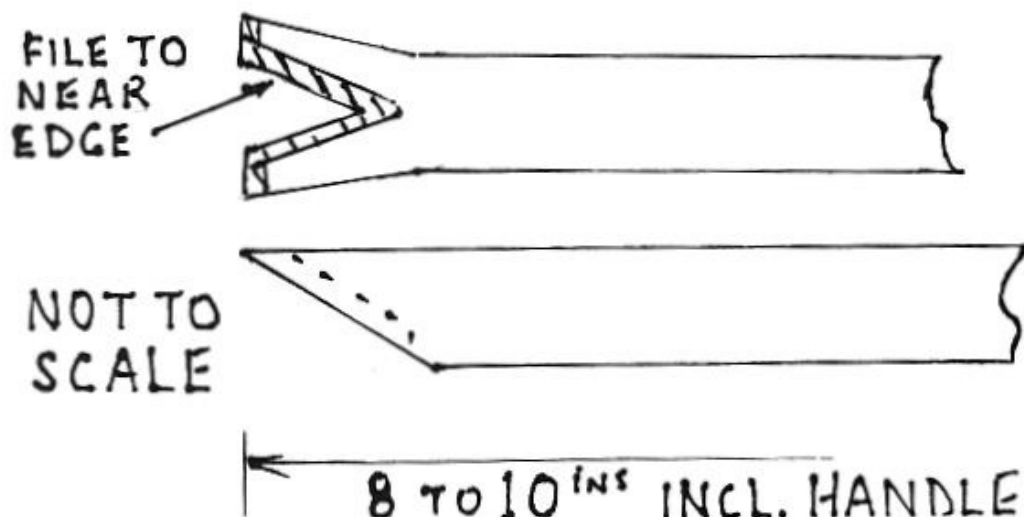
"There," said Bet, "it is so simple."

Perhaps not too simple for Bill; in his view he could buy some systemic weedkiller and spray any weed which had the diabolical impertinence to try to establish itself in his sacred lawn. Whereat I had to point out that any sprayed weed would leave a nasty yellow patch on its decease in his lawn and - Bill gave in.

Continued

I ladled out a little further advice to the lawn lover - never cut the grass until Pentecost, I don't and that is old country wisdom, you need time for Spring grass to grow strong roots and, by then, any crocuses and daffs and the like should have died off. Never, but never, put on weedkiller if you have bulbs in the lawn, not even the most selective one, any such chemical will destroy the bulbs in it and the result will be no flowers next year and raised voices about buying new.

Bill has made himself a weed extractor out of a spare bit of seven-sixteenths diameter H.T. steel rod and an old file handle. Bet has offered to rub his back with embrocation if need be and he has laid some paving to his workshop, repeated on the other side of the lawn to maintain symmetry. And I have been invited to view the flowers that bloom in the Spring tra-la. I believe Bill has had to rub Bet's not so young back with embrocation and she states it is surprising how many bulbs you can buy for the price of a lump of old iron (her words). Peace reigns again at Chez Bill and Bet. Bill grins knowing that any savings on next year's bulbs can find their way into lumps of old iron.



DIARY DATES INTO 1996

TUESDAY DECEMBER 26TH : BOXING DAY RUN

FRIDAY JANUARY 5TH : VIDEO NIGHT

**FRIDAY FEBRUARY 2ND : BITS & PIECES/FISH
& CHIPS**

**FRIDAY MARCH 1ST : ANNUAL GENERAL
MEETING**

SUNDAY MARCH ^{31st} ~~1st~~ : FIRST PUBLIC RUN

**FRIDAY APRIL 5TH : HOT CROSS BUN &
NATTER NIGHT**

FRIDAY MAY 3RD : GUEST SPEAKER

**CLUB NIGHTS :- ENTRY ACCESS AVAILABLE
BETWEEN 7-15 AND 7-45**

BOXING DAY :- ENTRY ACCESS 11 TO 11-30

**ANY OTHER TIME PLEASE ARRANGE WITH A
COMMITTEE MEMBER**

SUE'S SPOT

Welcome to the Christmas newsletter. I have now been compiling this for fifteen years so if someone fancies having a go at being editor please be my guest! Many thanks to those who have written an article - Laurie, John Barrow, Andy Probyn, and Roger Stagg (I've saved the eight page entry from Roger for another time!) Closing date for next issue will be 8th April.

So a quick look back over the year then. Two charity runs this year, raising £150 for Imperial Cancer Research and £70 for the St Johns Ambulance. Dillwyn and his team completed the mammoth task of guard rail painting, well done chaps, Dillwyn is now thinking of starting it again! Don't stand still when he's around with a paintbrush, you've been warned! Our coach trip to the Midlands Model Engineering Exhibition was a big success with almost every seat filled. In November Sam celebrated his 60th birthday, and at the end of the month Reg and Louie celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary, quite an achievement these days.

Winter works are now progressing, with various repairs and improvements, and Graham is to give Galloping Gertie the Club Loco a much needed overhaul ready for next season.

So Have a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year Everyone!





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- Committee Members: Bob Hodgkins, Don Paterson, Geoff Riddles,
Mick Starnes, Chris Williams, John Winsor.



**SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1996 ARE NOW DUE.
PLEASE NOTE THESE HAVE NOW INCREASED.
ORDINARY MEMBERSHIP IS NOW £10 PER YEAR
(O.A.P.S, UNEMPLOYED AND JUNIORS ARE £5)**

I enclose herewith the sum of £ being my subscription for 1996 *plus £1 for personal accident insurance* (delete if not required)

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name and address
.....

PLEASE SEND TO THE TREASURER PETER ROOTS AS ABOVE.