

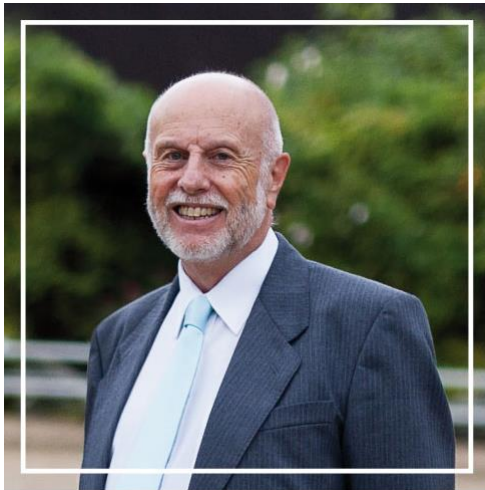


# Smokebox

The Newsletter of the **Bedfordshire Area Group** of the  
Association of 16mm Scale Narrow Gauge Modellers

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## Brian Chidwick



It was my sad duty on on 9<sup>th</sup> June to email all members for whom I hold an email address advising that Brian had sadly died. The funeral was the following Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> June, which Garth Bridgwood and Carol East were able to attend. One of Brian's other passions, that of vintage cars, was also represented, with many owners driving to the funeral in their prized motors. Some of you will remember the open-top Triumph TR3A that Brian would sometimes use to come to Eaton Bray. Another of his passions, music, was also to the fore, with songs during the service from Bob Dylan, Fleetwood Mac and The Traveling Wilburys. He truly had many and varied interests, as the reading from his funeral service shows.

Brian was until his illness an energetic member of the group and a regular contributor. He described how he got into garden railways and his own Black Squirrel Railway in the [October 2021](#) issue of **Smokebox**. If you read this again perhaps you'll pick up that Brian was fully and actively supported in his rail hobby by his wife Lynda, who also helped in the kitchen at a Steam In Beds pre-Covid. He was invariably at meetings until the end to help put the layout under the stage at Eaton Bray. He like me was not so tall, so we were very welcome under the stage. Brian was better at wearing the hard hats that Chris purchased than was I! He worked on Eaton Downs during the first lock-down on the alterations which Ted designed, using baseboards built by Bob, trial-assembled in a garage to which Garth arranged temporary access. Truly a team effort! Ted and I also worked one of his locos which suddenly stopped working. We had it fixed quickly (the Roundhouse R/C regulator was closed too far against the O-ring), which underlines one of the benefits of being in a club of like-minded individuals. We will probably get involved with moving Brian's railway assets on to new owners, but this will come later in the year and at Lynda's initiation.

I wrote to Brian's widow Lynda on receipt of her email. I finished off by observing this, bearing in mind that she was alongside Brian as he built and enjoyed their line:

### *Reading*

WRITTEN BY NAOMI GRUZELIER

Today for me is the End of the Line  
I've had a great life but it was sadly my time  
Don't be sad, dry those tears, for I am now Forever Young  
I have lived a full life, I really had fun  
The smell of petrol, the roar of the engine  
Driving and driving, with no destination  
A meet at the pub, and picking up tips  
Of something that was knocking, that I needed to fix  
When my head wasn't in an engine, I was walking the fields  
I could be gone for hours, mother nature, my only need  
A faithful dog at my side, Like a Rolling Stone  
We ambled along, I was never alone  
I know there have been tears, and you will miss me dearly  
I have a message for you, so please, listen clearly  
Don't think of me as gone, I will still be around  
You will be reminded of me in so many sounds  
Blowin' in the Wind, as it whistles through the trees  
In the song of the birds and the buzz of the bees  
I will stay in your heart and in your mind  
I will always be with you, until the end of time

*I think that railways are in your blood, or not as is the case. Playing trains, for let's face it, that's what it is, on a summer's day in the garden is about as close as it gets to the Real Thing. I'm glad that you both got a lot out of your line and I hope it's given you many happy memories to draw on in the future.*

Brian was an asset to the group and a genuinely nice guy. He will be sadly missed.

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## From the Editor

Thanks to all who have enquired as to the outcome of the eye surgery which I referred to in the last issue. It went well and I now have clear vision from my left eye, more than adequate to drive, so I do plan to be at the July meeting, albeit I won't get to Eaton Bray until around 12:30. I won't find out when the right eye will be similarly treated until my next consultation at Moorfields, which is on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> July, i.e. after our next meeting. Hopefully it will follow in the late August or early September timeframe, then I can be fitted for glasses, which hopefully I'll only need for close work. However, vision even now is good enough for all day-to-day needs and importantly, railway modelling!

Some of you may have noticed that the W&LLR's Franco-Belge loco number 10, 699 Sir Drefaldwyn, has returned to service. The tanks and cab are still in green primer and may not be painted back until after the main running season is over, but she is a welcome addition to the fleet. There are still a number of jobs to do on the loco, but if you've thinking of attending the W&L's Gala from 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> September, there's a good chance that it will be in use.



Copy deadline for **August 2023 Smokebox: Friday 28<sup>th</sup> July 2023**

Alan, **Smokebox** Editor

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## From the Chair

It was a great shock when Alan phoned me on the 9th June to tell me that Brian Chidwick had died. Alan cc his condolences email to Lynda Chidwick to me. I thought his wording was an excellent response. I believe he will use this as a basis for his leading article in this Smokebox. We didn't know

Brian for that long, but he proved an invaluable member and was particularly helpful when rebuilding Eaton Downs during semi lock-down. I mention a tool he recommended to me in my ramble later, tragically written just a few days before his death.

Ted sent me a photo of the completed extension boards to Eaton Downs and I must say it looks very impressive. There is now a good length of run and plenty of room inside the track when the width extension boards are added. My thanks to Ted for his dedicated work, I don't think he has run very much in the way of locomotives recently!

**Bob, Chairman**

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## West Herts 16mm Group "Train Fun Day"

The Beds Area Group has been invited to a "Train Fun Day" organised by the West Herts 16mm Group. The event will be held in the High Street Methodist Church, Harpenden on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> September. I am pleased to report that John Kitchenman will take his "new" portable track and Garth will collect steaming tables from Eaton Bray and return them on the Sunday. I don't know how many runners John needs for the session or set up times, I hope to be able to share this with you in the next issue of Smokebox.

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## Meeting Dates

Here are all meeting dates until the end of 2023. **We have access to the hall from 10.30 and need to have the layouts packed away and be out of the hall by 16.00.**

- July, Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup>
- August, Sunday 6<sup>th</sup>
- September, Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup>
- October, Sunday 1<sup>st</sup>
- November, Sunday 5<sup>th</sup>
- Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> for **Steam in Beds Show**
- December, **note: no meeting this month**

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## Committee members

The members of the BAG committee are as follows:

Bob Gamble	Chairman	<a href="mailto:chairman@bag16mm.org.uk">chairman@bag16mm.org.uk</a>
Garth Bridgwood	Secretary/Treasurer	<a href="mailto:secretary@bag16mm.org.uk">secretary@bag16mm.org.uk</a>
Mark Cresswell	Membership	<a href="mailto:membership@bag16mm.org.uk">membership@bag16mm.org.uk</a>
Ted Robinson	Track Manager	<a href="mailto:trackmanager@bag16mm.org.uk">trackmanager@bag16mm.org.uk</a>

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## Running on Eaton Downs

*Ted Robinson has provided the following update:*

Eaton Downs is now capable of running in its enlarged form. The final two boards of the original plan to improve the layout were added to the formation at the last meeting (Sunday 4th June) and the first trains to run round the enhanced layout was provided by Ron Fincher and Steve Cook.

Future work planned is to convert a straight board to provide a lift-up access flap, to add some support battens under the curved boards, and to fit upstands to the sides of the straight boards.





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## Modelling matters

Three items this month, two from Bob and one from me. Garth has something in preparation for next month. What about the rest of you? Surely others are doing modelling that can be shared with others. Please send anything you have to [smokebox@bag16mm.org.uk](mailto:smokebox@bag16mm.org.uk) and I'll include it in the next edition.

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### CHEMICAL BLACKENING

*Bob mentioned the following product whilst we were chatting about other things and I thought it would be good to share this with the group:*

Alan has encouraged me to share my method of chemically blackening metal (brass, copper and steel but not stainless steel or nickel). For some time, I have been using a product called "Antiquing Fluid" by Curator. I purchased my supply from:

<https://www.hswalsh.com/product/antiquing-fluid-black-150ml-t92086>

at £8.95 per bottle.

Antiquing fluid is available in different colours, but I have only used black. It can be applied by dipping but I find that a cotton bud soaked in the fluid and then rubbed into the surface of the part gives better results and a deeper finish and goes much further! The rather dusty photo below shows a grit blasted gas tank and the matt finish resulting from the blackening fluid, by contrast the glimpse of the chemically blackened engine behind shows how a coating of engine oil brings out the colour. I have no doubt that the gas tank will acquire a film of oil in due course! The metal to be blacked must be chemically clean because any greasy fingerprints will slow or stop the colouring although a particularly vigorous scrub with the cotton bud may save the day.

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### DID YOU KNOW YOU CAN DO THIS WITH A DREMEL?

*Bob shares a tip on using a tool that many of us have for a new purpose:*

Brian Chidwick introduced me to this excellent tool – the Dremel "speedclick" cutting disk. Previously I had used the very fragile cutting disks held by a screw in the end of a shaft in my hand held Proxxon drill/grinder. Needless to say the mortality rate on these very brittle disks was high.

The Dremel “speedclick” has a cutting wheel which is tough and, importantly, quick to change. The link explains the function:

<https://www.dremel.com/gb/en/p/dremel-ez-speedclick-starter-set-2615s406jc>

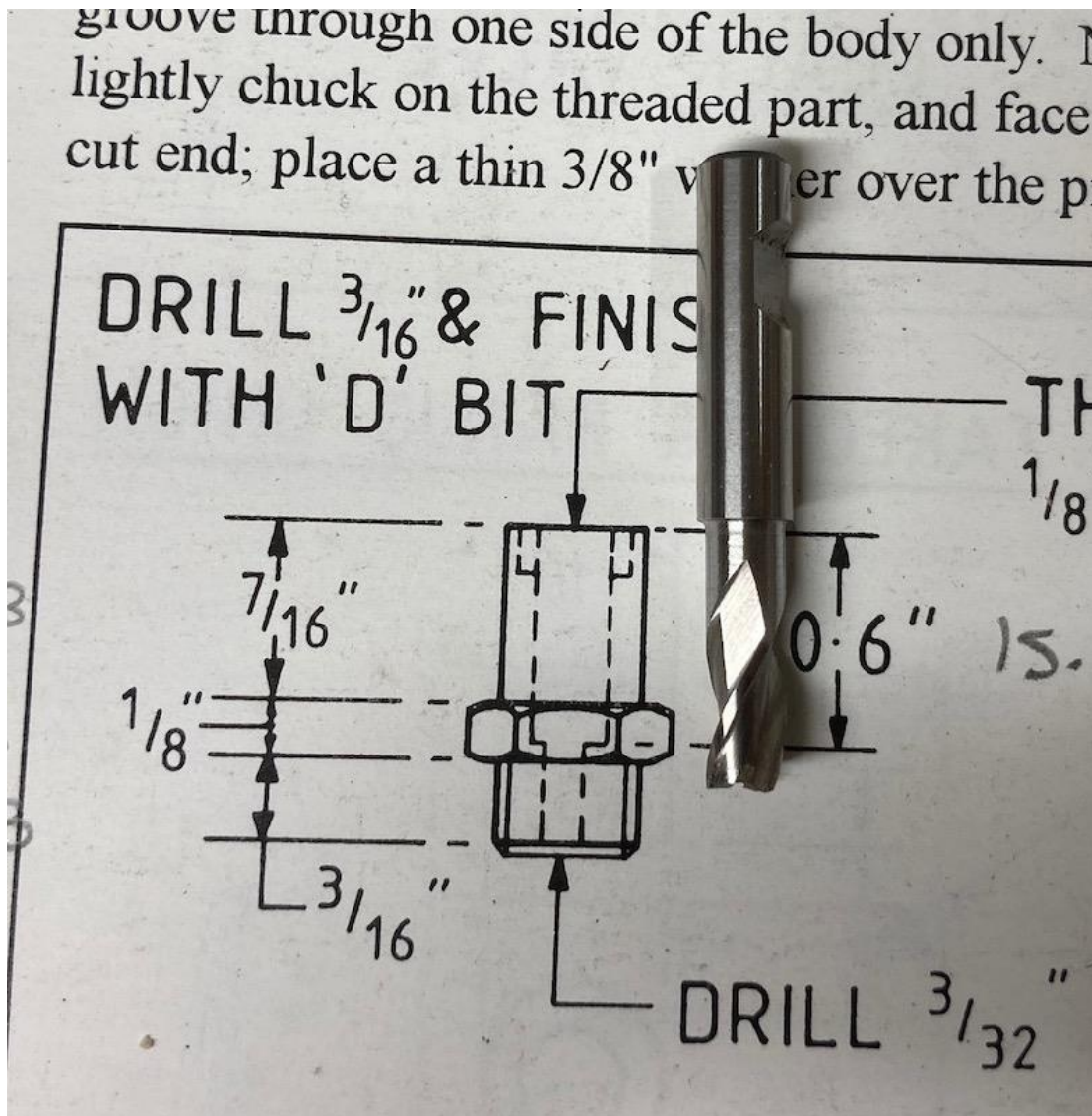
From my point of view the toughness of the disk outweighs the extra thickness and this function allows the disk to cut sideways: The photo below shows my lathe set up as a grinder. The Proxxon drill/grinder has been mounted in a quick-change tool post holder, the Proxxon is set in motion and the grinding disk is fed along the very hard and tough milling cutter to reduce its diameter, all the time the lathe chuck is rotating.

(I wanted a flat bottom cutting tool to give a good seating for a safety valve ball, bore diameter 4.8 mm but I only had a 5 mm milling cutter).



The Proxxon was set to 20,000 rpm and the lathe spindle to about 800 rpm, both shown stationary in this photo. The sparks when cutting were caught by the paper towel placed on the bed of the lathe.





The photo shows how the Proxxon with speedclick cutting disk has ground the 5 mm dia cutting edge down to 4.8 mm dia and on into the 6 mm dia shank of the mill to give depth clearance. The end result is a rather satisfying smooth surface.

#### A FOOT CROSSING

*The editor describes the construction of a foot crossing:*

The through station on my railway has had three through roads and three platform faces since a major remodelling in 2012. Two faces are either side of an island platform, which is a fraction above rail height, and the third is a more conventional platform, which is about the same height above the rails as is the platform at Llanfair Caereinion, which some of you may be familiar with. I made a foot crossing linking the platform as part of the remodelling, at the west end of the station, where two tracks come together and are secured to a breeze block, enabling me similarly to secure the barrow crossing. I wanted one at the opposite (eastern) end but there was nothing suitable to secure it to. There the matter lay for a very long time, eleven years in fact!

Then came a bright idea. If I put a flat piece of recycled plastic board under the tracks to be spanned by the crossing, I could secure to it more recycled plastic to create fixing points, just above sleeper height, to secure the crossing timbers to. The crossing was unlikely to lift from the underlying support and one would move with the other, because I'd have in effect created a sandwich. I had a suitable offcut of 12mm Filchris board, a little over 72mm wide, which would support a foot crossing

a scale 4'-6" wide. I also had offcuts of a denser Filchris product, which I would machine in the bandsaw to make blocks the width of the gap between two sleepers and a tad over their height. These could be screwed with #6 brass countersunk wood screws to the 12mm board, thus creating a continuous, uniform flat surface onto which hardwood crossing timbers could be pinned.

The first task was to lift a panel of track adjacent to the lower of the two platforms and dig out enough ballast to slide the flat board under the track adjacent to the other (higher) platform, which I didn't want to lift if I could avoid it. The fact that one of the platforms was at rail height meant that the angle I needed to push the board under the other track was shallow and with a bit of fiddling I got it under and into position. I was then able to move ballast under the board so that it was firmly supported across its entire length, fitting up snugly against the bottom of the sleepers on both tracks. Next, I machined a number of strips of the denser plastic wood so that they would fit between the sleepers and have a height very slightly greater than that of the sleepers. I wanted to clamp the sleepers between the flat board and the crossing timbers, but to be sure that the timbers would sit on the fixing points I was making and not limit on the sleepers. I'd already calculated that if each crossing timber was 9mm wide (just over a scale six inches), I could get a whole number of timbers between the rails and between adjacent tracks. This gave me a spacing for the screws used to secure supports for the crossing timbers so that they didn't fall right in the middle of a fixing point for each timber.



The picture (left) shows the crossing site once all the supports were in place, with three timbers trial fitted to confirm the integrity of the design. You can see that unfortunately the sleepers didn't line up on both tracks, so some staggering of the supports was necessary. The holes in the supports were drilled with a tool called a Screw Sink, which makes a countersunk hole exactly the same size as the head of the screw. I set them 1mm below the surface so ensure that they weren't proud of the support. Toolstation sell then for various sizes of screw.



I then machined the hardwood crossing timbers from an offcut of oak I'd had since our kitchen was renewed in 2010. It was from a solid oak door and was very hard. I was fortunate that the gaps between the tracks and the platforms allowed 9mm wide strips to be used throughout and set the height to be just below rail height to ensure no fouling on low hanging components of rolling stock. Where the strips abutted rails clearance needed to be allowed for chairs and track fixings. The wood was hard enough that I could machine it in the mill. The picture below shows one such piece with clearance for the sole plates and track bolts. The picture also illustrates the brass pins used to secure the timbers to the plastic supports. I turned the head of each one down in the lathe to 2mm diameter and slightly countersunk the fixing holes in each timber to ensure that they finished flush. I drilled a pilot hole in each support 0.2 less in diameter than that of the brass pin and pushed each pin home with the head of a flat-bladed screwdriver. Solid though I'd made the underlying base, there was enough give in it for hammering pins home to be ineffective.



Picture #3 (next page) shows the different pin positions needed due to the staggered nature of the supports. They will be less visible as they discolour naturally. The oak was untreated at this point. I used a stained preservative after all the timbers were fixed and picture #4 (page 10) shows the final effect. The stain has been absorbed to differing degrees, probably because the oak had been kiln-dried prior to being turned into kitchen cupboard doors. I will keep applying stained preservative over the summer and am pretty confident that a more uniform finish will appear over time.





*Picture 3: note the differing positions of the pins used to secure timbers to supports.*

A lot of effort for a simple foot crossing? Perhaps, but when we had our first open day after its installation, it was the first thing a non-railway-oriented visitor noticed in the station. Another friend has commented that he remembers them from his childhood, the station porter struggling across the one at his local north-London station carrying armfuls of wood for the station shelter on the island platform. Sadly my island platform is much too small for a shelter, so that will have to remain the product of imagination. And a final comment: the whole lot was made from scrap materials or in



the case of the pins, things I'd had for years and years. It cost me no more than the power used for the machine tools.



*Picture 4: the completed foot crossing, the station is dress for an open day.*

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## Sales & Wants

A table will be placed at the back of the hall for members to place any items they have for sale.