

THE OILY RAG

The Newsletter of The City of Sunderland Model Engineering Society

February 2026



Groans from the Chairman's Chair

As this is the first "Oily Rag" of 2026, I have to say Happy New Year to all our members. Let's hope it's a good one for all of us.

I'm sure Tom will bring us all up to date with the track maintenance efforts, so I'll leave that to him. Suffice to say that on 16 January I was very pleased to see the number of members who turned out to help. Well done all.

It's a pity the weather gods haven't been on our side since!

Obviously, there is no 'playing trains' going on at the moment, so I thought I might bring you up to date on what I've been up to.

A good while ago I got all the castings and drawings for a model of Galloway's Non-Dead Centre Engine from one of our members who had started it but was unable to continue due to health problems.

I can now report that I am making good progress, although I still find drilling and tapping lots of 8BA holes is a pain in the! (there are over 100 of them).

I have now completed the cylinders and pistons, have built up the crankshaft and completed its 4 bearings. Still a long way to go and I don't think it will be ready for our June Open Day, but maybe September - if I'm lucky.

City of Sunderland Model Engineering Society

Committee & Contacts

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Section Leader: Marine	John Maw
Section Leader: General Engineering	Graham Wilson
Section Leader: Road Vehicles	Eric Lonsdale
Section Leader: Training and Health & Safety	Ian Ogle

Other Committee Members	Steve Dunn
	Ian Brown

Track Marshal	Tom Turner
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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.

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 is our preferred method to facilitate the distribution of the *Oily Rag* six times each year. Are you one of our postal or hand-delivery members who could use emails as your communication and delivery method? Let me know. Our WhatsApp Group also 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.

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

Subscriptions

Subscriptions for 2026 became due on 1st January, and the subscription is **£40** (£10 for Junior Members).

Should you wish to renew you can do so by one of three ways:

- By placing £40 into my hand if you see me at the track.
- By sending a cheque to me, Tom Turner, at 12 Weardale Avenue, South Bents, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear, SR6 8AS. The cheque should be made payable to **City of Sunderland Model Engineering Society Ltd.**
- By a direct payment into our Co-op Bank Account using Sort Code **08-92-50** and Account Number **63322453** for which the Account Name is **The City of Sunderland Model Engineering Society Ltd** but which can usually, depending on your Banking app, be shortened to **CSMES**. Please use your Surname in the reference field to avoid your hard-earned cash being put into the list of “anonymous” subscription renewals.

These account details should be used for all future payments to the Club.

Inevitably some will probably put off renewing their subscription until “tomorrow” but in my experience that elusive “tomorrow” is an ever-moving target which will morph into “at the weekend” and then “next week”, etc. In the belief just one reminder should be sufficient and to avoid lots of unproductive administrative juggling and running about I will send the “just one reminder” to those who have not yet renewed at some time in March. You should note that 30th April is the absolute cut-off for renewals.

After 30th April those who have not renewed will be removed from our Membership List, will not receive any further correspondence from the Society other than a confirmation that their membership has lapsed, and they will not then be able to participate in its events as a Member.

Track Marshal

You're probably wondering “*What on earth is a Track Marshal*”?

It's nothing more than a point of contact for members to ascertain whether the Club track is available for use at other than normal times, and a number of Model Engineering Clubs have introduced a Track Marshal. Where a member wishes to come down to the track, with a colleague, to have a test session with their engine, rather than turn up and find the track is unavailable, or get conflicting information from people who may not be quite “up to speed”, by contacting the Track Marshal it can be confirmed that the track is or is not available. Of course, in our case, we have two tracks to call upon.

First accepting that we don't get inundated by members ringing up with this type of enquiry, it may prove useful at times when we are undertaking maintenance on the facility.

If in doubt – give me a call.

Class 37

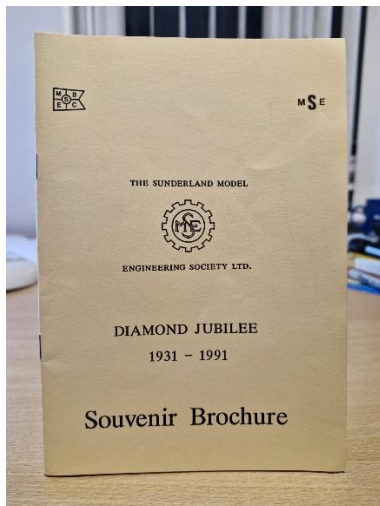
In the last Oily Rag I advised that the Class 37 was being offered for sale to our members.

It has been successfully bid for and purchased by one of our long-standing members who, I am advised, intends to install a petrol engine, driving a generator, driving the traction motors. I do hope I am kept up to date with progress on that particular project.

Closed Season

Everywhere and everything has a different interpretation of what “closed season” represents. Blackpool Tower closes its season when the Illuminations finish, but the place still remains open at selected times. Walt Disney World in Florida has umpteen seasons each year to coincide with major festivals such as Easter, Halloween and Christmas yet still remains open every day of the year. Our railway tends to regard “closed season” as when we don’t operate our public services over weekends.

As I have also stated many times, it’s also when we carry out work to the various structures and track, and this year is especially busy with renewal of some of our main track.



We get lots of questions over the gate about when the track opened, and our stock answer is 1982/83 but, according to the Diamond Jubilee Souvenir Brochure provided to me by John Maw, that date may well be the first Sunday in June 1981, so the track is almost 45 years old.

The Brochure also reveals that the top track is 888 feet long, has a minimum curve radius of 28 feet, a maximum gradient of 1:100.

About one-third of the top track was renewed in 2017 ...



... from a point near the top of the hill, through the station and down to just beyond the bridge. It’s easy to distinguish the newer track as it has been constructed in a different way.



Depending on the locomotive being used, certain rails get more use than others. In this picture of our track, four rails are shown, and we'll number them 1 to 4, left to right.

- 7¼" locomotives (and our carriages) use rails 1 and 4.
- 5" locomotives use rails 2 and 4.
- 3½" locomotives use rails 2 and 3.

Rail 3 is only used by 3½" gauge, and with locomotives of this gauge being few and far between compared to the constant use for rail 4, it is perhaps not a great surprise to learn that rail 3 is, for practical purposes, in virtually as-new condition. We do not therefore intend to replace it unless it shows other aspects of wear which require its replacement.



This photograph looks at rails 3 and 4, rail 4 being on the right. Compare the height of rail 4 (which sees the most use with everything that runs on the top track) with rail 3, barely used in 40 years.

Whereas rail on straight track sees little wear, the outer rails on curves wear due to the weight of the locomotive and its train being thrown outwards. On left curves the radius of the inside corner of rail 4 wears and, need I say, on right curves the radii of the inside corners of rails 1 and 2 show most wear.

Friday 16th January was a bit chilly, but at least it was dry (-ish) and our first work party turned up up to commence the biggest job seen on the track in almost 10 years.

Track to the original construction is in what are effectively 4 metre panels of 4 rails, and two specific areas had been identified for our initial attention:

- Panels on the left curve before the bridge, and
- Panels on the left curve near the top of the hill past the engine shed

We had no idea how long each aspect of the job would take so the first panel was literally a step into the unknown.

With a "gaffer" for the day appointed (albeit part-time since I had to leave at lunchtime) and the combined aid of a few angle grinders, hammers, spanners, release fluid, many threatening looks, and some new engineering terms uttered, we set to with great determination.



The first job was to disconnect the four fishplates or connectors at the ends on each panel, each with 4 bolts and nyloc nuts.

Steve Dunn's lightning fingers (other lightning fingers were available and were at work on other panels) had little trouble with the fishplates due to the fact that during initial construction the components had been smothered with a wonderful concoction under the title of Shell Malleus grease.

You'll not be surprised to learn that we are looking for the modern equivalent of this grease, or an alternative which will do the same job but at a price we can better afford.



The outer and inner rails are secured to every third or fourth sleeper by a small piece of angle. You can see this item on the third sleeper from the bottom in this photograph.

These provide a perfect indicator for the radius of the inner and outer rails and will be left in place.

It was necessary to exert a bit of persuasion on some of these fastenings, which had not been treated with the aforementioned concoction.

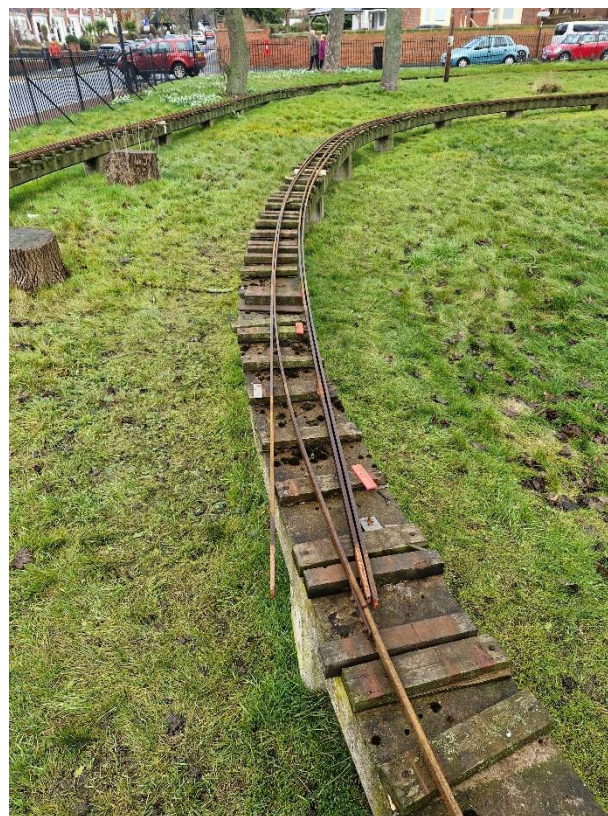
By the end of the morning session rails 1, 2 and 4 had been removed from the track panels, and after lunch attention turned to installing the new rail to see what further work would be necessary to securely fix it into place.

There's a small difference in the height of the new rails because they're now produced to a standard metric size rather than the size which was evidently available in 1980. The new rail sections are also a different length so we'll have to do a bit of cutting and welding to fit the available space.

It does look as if we are installing a point into the track, but I can assure you we are not ... we have no need for one, certainly not at that place on our track, and not least because of the considerable technical problem this would present on a multi-gauge raised track.

In this photo you can see the retention of rail 3 which continues uninterrupted to the bridge.

The material in the old rails will be used to make cross pieces to which the new rails will be welded while being held securely in the jigs prepared for us by Paul Stephenson.

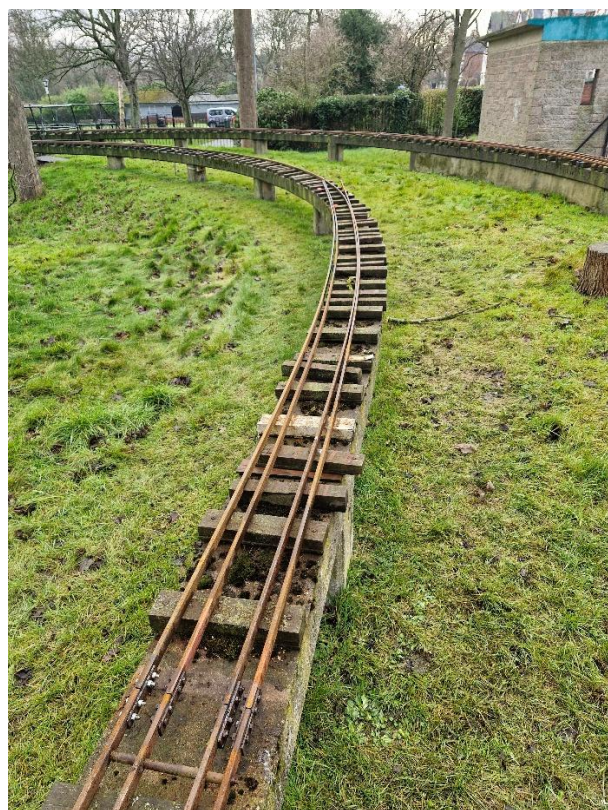


The new rails have been secured to the old rails using the existing fishplates, but here you can see new fastenings used on rail 1 because the old nuts and bolts were too worn.

I need not tell you that the weather on each Friday since 16th January has been rain, rain and more rain ... completely unsuitable for an outdoor task which requires welding to be done.

We have decided to abandon the fixed "Friday-each-week" programme and instead identify which days in each week look to offer a suitable weather window when we'll be able to carry out the various tasks in the confidence we'll not get rained off!

We also hope to have the use of at least two portable (and light) gazebos to shelter the more delicate aspects of the job, and us, from the ravages of the Roker weather.



We now have a rough idea how long each stage should take and can plan ahead accordingly. We also know how many people we can safely accommodate around each work site so it's not overcrowded, and if we have spare people they can move on to the removal of the next track panels in the program and also prepare other aspects such as the cross pieces from the old rails.

For Sale ... One Careful Owner

I have yet to receive any expressions of interest in the Club's Simplex locomotive which is currently being offered for sale to the members.



An explanation of its situation was in the October *Oily Rag*.

The Club is also offering for sale to the members another of its locomotives, a model built by Bert Stamp, a 3½" gauge two-cylinder version of the popular three-cylinder *Heilan Lassie* design.



Everything moves, and nothing appears to be seized up, jammed shut or hanging off. There is a boiler examination certificate in the file which is dated June 2018.

It is only fair to caution any would-be buyers contemplating the restoration of any steam locomotive to full working order, especially after it having been unused for a number of years, to seek expert advice how to address the boiler aspect. The rules governing boilers and their inspections may have changed since the last inspection.

If you wish to view either of them, this can be arranged on any Thursday morning, preferably one when it's not raining.

Offers should be received by the Secretary. No time scale has been set, but I would anticipate that if there is no interest by the time the next *Oily Rag* comes out in April 2026, we'll start looking at other ways to find both of these locomotives a new home.

Technology ... The Way Forward?

You'll recall my concerns over some of the unreliable and unpredictable technologies which are being incorporated into modern vehicles.

You'll not be surprised to learn that a similar level of unreliability and unpredictability also allegedly exists in some of the roadside monitoring equipment which is there to keep an eye upon us. In this instance, the fickle finger of fate is pointing at Variable Speed Cameras, the ones that sit above the lanes on our principal roads.

Let us suggest that the speed limit on a particular stretch of road has been temporarily reduced from 50mph to 40mph. The cameras adjust accordingly, but it is suggested that there may be a delay in re-adjusting when the speed limit returns to 50mph, such that drivers who are faithfully following the restored legal limit are photographed as "speeding" and fined accordingly ... oh, and also having points applied to their licence.

I'll not go into the potential ramifications further down the line in such instances, but it does nothing to encourage trust.

Once in a Lifetime ...

The statistics would suggest it had to happen at some time and happen it did ... right in front of Claire and I as we drove down the A19 on Thursday 25th September 2025 in our journey to Hull to cast a discerning eye over my potential purchase of the *Maisie* locomotive.

Yes, on that very day, a driver actually switched off a high intensity rear light!

The Future is ... ?

A few issues ago I mentioned the scrapping of perfectly good electric locomotives because it was cheaper to use diesel even on those routes which had electric string above them.

I now hear a whisper that there is an energy shortage on parts of the West Coast main line which has forced an "all electric" rail operator to run diesel trains on the line.

A Matter of Perspective

My criticism of the now-sold Compass House Class 37 in the last issue was not lost on Phil Barber who obviously applied my observations to a few other instances. I also mentioned the "horrible-looking Class 29 *Baby Deltic*" that I encountered in a park in Derby. I have now found the photograph ...



... which does nothing to improve my opinion. It was on the Markeaton Park Light Railway, a 15in gauge line which opened in Markeaton Park in Derby in 1989.

The *Baby Deltic* had been supplied new to the Steamtown Miniature Railway at Carnforth before moving to the Cleethorpes Light Railway from where it was purchased and started operating at Markeaton Park in 2003. Our visit must have been about 2007. The Railway operated for the last time in September 2016.

Where?

Here's one for you to think about. At some time around 2007 I took the family to an Open Day ... but I can't remember where! I do have a photograph of us, inevitably, on what appears to be a portable railway with the track supported on a wooden framework in turn mounted on wooden pillars.



It's a similar 3½"/5"/7¼" mixed gauge to ours, the electric locomotive certainly bears more than a passing similarity to our own *Roker Park* and the carriage looks distinctly similar to our previous generation of carriages.

Is it our portable track?

Does anyone recognise the location, the locomotive, its driver?

Back to Thursday

Some weeks ago I advised that we had temporarily switched our regular Thursday morning coffee and maintenance get-togethers to a Friday in order to spare work party members two journeys to the track each week.

In my summary of the track replacement work I mentioned that, due to shocking weather conditions each Friday, we had decided to abandon the fixed-Friday work parties in favour of picking a day which offered weather more suitable for what we were doing.

We have therefore returned to our regular Thursday morning coffee and maintenance get-togethers, effective from Thursday 5th February. Please take note, it would be unfortunate if you turned up on the wrong day.

Looking Forward

Easter Weekend

Subject to having enough volunteers available, a completed track, and favourable weather, we hope to run of the Saturday, Sunday and Monday of Easter Weekend. The Sunday may well be spiced up by the addition of a steam locomotive or two

Passenger Running Days

Easter Weekend will see the start of our Passenger Running Days and we hope to operate on each subsequent Saturday and Sunday (Members' Running Days excepted), subject to enough volunteers being available and favourable weather. Sessions (weather and Members permitting) will start at 11.00am and run through to 3.00pm and will be advertised on our WhatsApp Group and also the Friends of Roker Park Facebook pages.

Thereafter, weather and volunteers permitting, we will hopefully run each weekend on Saturdays and Sundays through to October. Details about each session will be posted through our WhatsApp Group.

Sunday 3rd May – 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 your engineering masterpieces, surely the best advert of an engineer's art. Sessions (weather and Members permitting) will formally start at about 11.00am, certainly so on the Sunday after Committee has finished.

Tuesday 5th May – 2026 Annual General Meeting

The importance of the Annual General Meeting should not be underestimated. This once-a-year formal meeting of the general membership of the Society (hence the title) conducts very formal business on behalf of the Society, including the election of the Society's Directors and Committee. The meeting will receive copies of the Society's 2025 accounts.

Sunday 7th June – Members' Running Day

As above.

Sunday 5th July – Members' Running Day

As above.

Sunday 12th July – Open Day

Roker Park is open ... all of it! All being well, all of the various elements within the Park will be opening up the doors and windows so the whole Park will be an Open Day. Our members will be displaying our models and hoping to "sell" the Society to prospective new members.

Sunday 2nd August – Members' Running Day

As above.

Sunday 6th September – Members' Running Day

As above.

Sunday 13th September – Open Day

Roker Park is open ... all of it! All being well, all of the various elements within the Park will be opening up the doors and windows so the whole Park will be an Open Day. Our members will be displaying our models and hoping to "sell" the Society to prospective new members.