

## Looking back 1

# More haste, less speed

All visitors to the Manchester exhibition will have seen examples of Jim Whittaker's superb 4mm-scale G.W.R. rolling stock. In this series of reminiscent articles he not only expounds his philosophy of modelling but will be passing on his experience

Photographs by Brian Monaghan

I SUPPOSE most modellers with a genuine inclination towards self-criticism can only review their efforts over the last decade with mixed feelings. Certainly I have had my share of disappointment and pleasure, but in hindsight my main regret is undoubtedly the slow realisation of where my real model railway interests lay—i.e. the area which gave most pleasure and satisfaction. This delay must have cost several thousands of modelling hours, much of it abortive, which could have been put to better use if a little more foresight had been applied in the earlier stages. Let me explain.

Although in the middle forties before getting hooked onto this hobby, I rushed into the project with all the youthful enthusiasm of a teenager and, in an excess of zeal, decided to make everything myself, including point motors, track, buildings, rolling stock, locos, etc.—all with a perfectionist outlook and with a fair amount of detail. Time was not on my side, to put it mildly! However, the first layout gradually emerged and was designed to hinge on the dining room wall, so that when in the vertical position, it permitted the family to have a near normal meal. When lowered, it very nearly filled the entire room and you may well guess the outcome—it gradually got too heavy to restore to the vertical without undue

strain on nerves and muscle. Furthermore, there was invariably a strained atmosphere at meal times with the heavy layout towering above us, as it was impossible to sit anywhere in the room which would escape its occupied area when in the "down" position and presumably there is a limit to what No. 10 rawlplugs will stand up to. There would have been no survivors!

Following Brunel's advice to always stick to one line of approach and exploit it to the maximum before trying out another, I decided to restore the family's confidence by securing the layout in the vertical position, using 12in. long  $\times$   $\frac{1}{2}$ in. dia. steel bolts, driven right through the wall into the kitchen with suitable nuts and washers at both ends. To no avail; by this time the family even suspected the wall and with the added inconvenience of always having to remove the rolling stock every time the layout was put away, it was decided to abandon the idea and start again.

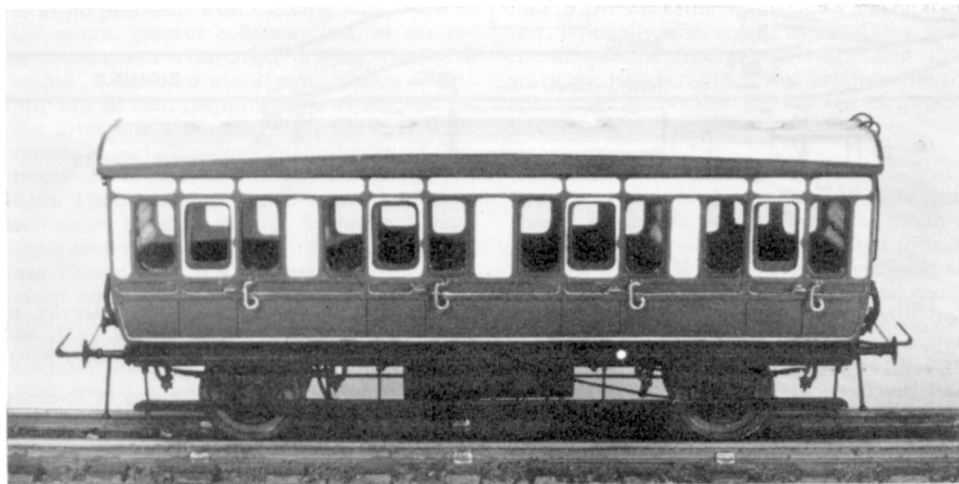
Possibly from relief, my wife then promised sole rights to the whole of the dining room, on condition that the kitchen was prepared into a more acceptable substitute. It hurts to recall the magnitude of this task—let me just state that it was a "big job". This compromise, however, meant ideal conditions and plans were made accordingly—i.e. rather too ambitious.

Over 200ft. of track was laid and ballasted, many hand-made buildings put down, including stations, goods and loco sheds and a fully automatic loco turntable, not to mention the development of a magnetic uncoupler and special switched points which guaranteed the passage of a locomotive at a really slow crawl.

Another serious error crept in at this stage. Instead of making the layout on a portable basis, which would have permitted its loan to any Society wishing to borrow it for an exhibition (I believe this is vital to promote interest in the hobby), it was virtually built into the walls. Its strength approached that of a battleship, possibly because of my unfortunate experience on the first layout, and although it gave faultless running, it was really overdone. One hundred and eight rawlplugged holes (yes, in the wall!) should prohibit any argument about this statement.

All this took considerable time, but in spite of everything it was a happy period of my modelling life and much experience must have been gained in a wide field of activities. However, the big crunch was yet to come. After all this effort I gradually began to realise that operating a large layout was emphatically not my main interest in the hobby and that a modest and simple L-shaped layout of perhaps 20ft. total length would be adequate to meet my level of interest and requirements. It was a sickening moment, looking at all that painstaking endeavour and finally realising that I could not do it justice, though presumably this is part of the price one pays for experience and, it should be emphasised, the lack of a bit of thought.

However, it was a white elephant and had to be stripped down, but at least my conscience was cleared when the dining room was restored to its normal use. I believe I am regarded in some quarters as being a glutton for punishment and maybe this is fair comment, but I do not believe I am the first who has gone



TOP LEFT: *The author, showing his allegiance.*

TOP RIGHT: *Moston Station on Jim Whittaker's now defunct OO layout.*

BOTTOM: *Two examples of early Whittaker rolling stock, very nice but, by his present standards, crude.*



up the wrong road without thinking sufficiently about where he was going. As you may have guessed, it had been realised by this time that my main interest and pleasure in the hobby was in the construction of freight and passenger stock—mainly Great Western. Why rolling stock, it is difficult to explain, but certainly Great Western because their stock in general appealed to my eye in design and character and who could resist a panelled clerestory coach in cream and chocolate or a louvred Siphon?

Early efforts were based on the Ratio wooden kits available at the time, and very good kits they were, as were the Nucro wheels which propelled them. Before long, however, came the urge to model other prototypes not available in kit form and so a start was made on the road towards scratch building. Initially, it was intended to make a model of every G.W.

freight and passenger vehicle that had been designed from about 1880 to 1948 and also, if time permitted, all the absorbed stock from other companies! Ignorance is bliss to be sure. Gradually, as more knowledge and information was acquired and it was realised that this lot ran into four figures, the target was re-adjusted to a more sensible level—and what a selection to choose from. I was soon engrossed in studying the diagram drawings and photographs of what was virtually a new language to me, incorporating intriguing code names like Python, Tadpole, Mink, Scorpion, Monster and Giant, to name but a few. Much of this information came from the Historical Model Railway Society's records and members, who freely gave their help and advice and to whom I am deeply indebted. Collecting sufficient information to enable one to attempt an

authentic model is sometimes the most difficult and time-consuming part of the whole exercise, especially if the prototype is of old design and you happen to be rather fussy about accuracy. It would appear that over the last 70 or 80 years the majority of railway photographers have concentrated on motive power and seriously neglected rolling stock, hence the dearth of reliable information. Anyway, it was decided to augment the information already collected in a more practical way by searching for and studying as many old G.W. vehicles as I could find before it was too late. To this end, most of my holidays over many years were spent exploring the area comprising the rough triangle of Shrewsbury, Paddington and Penzance, armed with a cheap Railover ticket, a 6ft. rule and a good camera.





*The loco depot on Jim Whittaker's former OO-gauge layout. The line was never fully developed but it certainly showed promise.*

It was incredible what turned up at times; in fact, it was invariably an exciting experience tracking down something previously unknown or unseen (to me) often in obscure sidings deep in the countryside and there is absolutely no doubt that this proved to be one of the most pleasurable aspects of the whole hobby. Only a few years ago, imagine the astonishment at finding a 4-wheel (ex 6-wheel) broad-gauge convertible Type 1 centre van coach in Pyle Station sidings. It was fitted with the original G.W. outside-rodged, double-clasp brakes, which I had been seeking for a long time, as it was very common on G.W. freight and passenger vehicles in the latter part of the 19th century. Needless to say, the 6ft. rule and camera were working overtime for some hours, as there is always the horrible danger of the vehicle moving on to an unknown destination before one's work is complete. Alas, there is

now little or nothing left of the old stuff, the sidings are empty and neglected, or uprooted altogether, and one is left with only happy memories and, one hopes, some useful data towards making better and more authentic models.

In latter years, a B.R. permit was obtained for access to Red Bank sidings, Manchester, which boasts several tracks, invariably filled with a motley collection of continually changing vans and coaches of varying vintage. One never knew what to expect, but it was an enjoyable pastime, especially in the summer evenings, measuring and sketching vehicles which positively radiate an invitation to model.

It was frequently exciting too, especially when measuring components underneath the vehicles, as they could be moved off at any time with little or no warning, especially if one was concentrating hard. B.R. subsequently

withdrew permits for all enthusiasts and although this was a major blow at the time, it could possibly have been in my own interest's long term.

With all this field-work and the ready help from fellow Society members already referred to, sufficient basic information was compiled to enable me to choose from a wide range of freight and passenger stock and be reasonably sure of a faithful reproduction in model form. Even so, some initial planning of the model is, in my experience, essential if high quality and accurate work is required, with the minimum of mistakes and alterations and, to this end, a routine approach has been developed which is broadly summarised below.

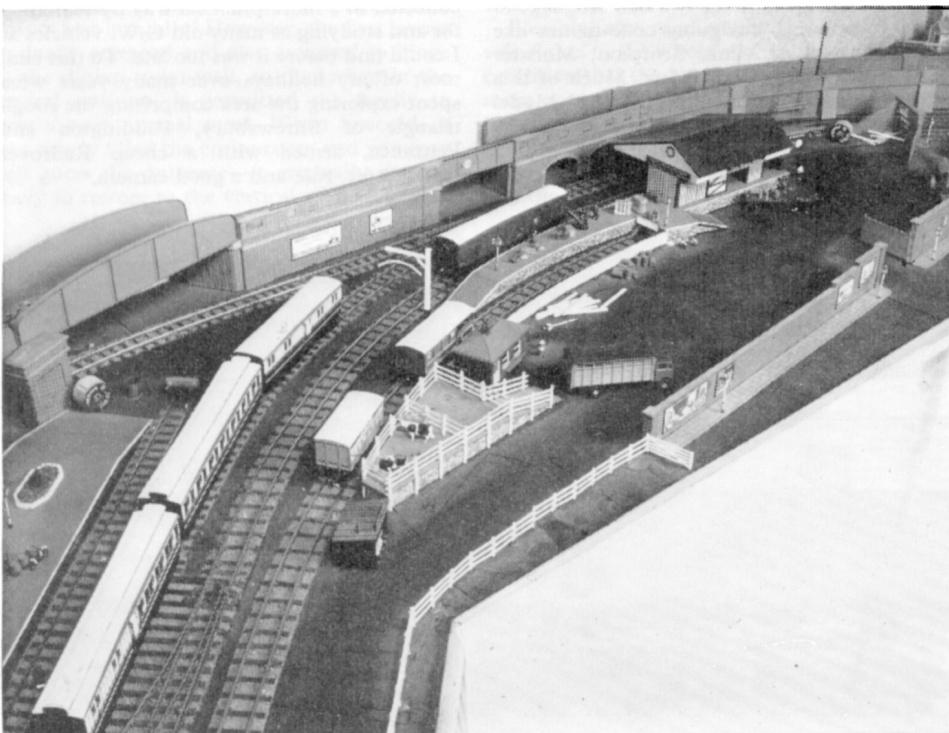
Armed with the official 1/4in. scale diagram drawing and as many photographs of the prototype as possible, the vehicle body is always tackled first. There is so much standardisation here (e.g. door and window sizes, plank widths, strapping and handles, etc.) that rough freehand drawings of the sides and ends, etc. are often all that is required. Adding the dimensions is mainly an arithmetical exercise, "balancing" all the windows, panels, and/or planks to equal the total length of the projected vehicle. The chassis often poses more problems and if it is a "first timer" a large-scale drawing of the chassis and bogies (in model form) is prepared and the method of construction and assembly decided as the drawing proceeds. There is plenty of scope for ingenuity at this stage which will reflect in the finished model, not only in terms of quality and authenticity, but in time saved overall.

During this pre-preparation stage and indeed during construction, considerable thought is given to the following points:

- (1) What is the best method to tackle the particular component being made?
- (2) Is the most suitable raw material being used measured in terms of the quickest results and the best finish?
- (3) Can the design be simplified in any way to facilitate production, without sacrificing the prototype's outline and general appearance?
- (4) Can simple tools be introduced, particularly on repetitive components where it is essential to maintain consistency of shape and size?
- (5) Can any of the operations be partly or entirely eliminated? (For example, on white roofed vehicles a good quality white card is used instead of a painted finish.)
- (6) What is the best sequence of assembly and painting operations which in turn determines to some extent whether one assembles via the use of glue, solder or screws?

It is hoped that some of these points will be demonstrated in the following descriptive notes and illustrations of various models made in recent years. It will be noticed that many of these models are of assorted G.W. Milk Vans (Code named "Siphon") but I feel sure that many of the ideas will apply equally well to your own particular favourites.

*(To be continued)*



*Jim's old goods depot. The ground is rather too clean and tidy: the layout had not got beyond basics, but what had been done had been thoroughly done.*

