



Morning passenger train ready to depart for Plymouth, composed entirely of 4-wheeled stock and headed by 517 Class 0-4-2T No. 551, painted in the pre-1906 livery with Indian Red frames.

RAILWAY OF THE MONTH

Maristow

A period GWR layout in 7mm scale

by Bob Harper

Photographs by PECO Studio

READERS who can cast their minds back to features on my previous layout, Chewton Mendip (RAILWAY MODELLER, May 1983 and April 1988), will remember that my interests were moving backwards chronologically from the 1930s, and that at that time (the early '80s) all new construction was to be stock suitable for the Edwardian period. By the late '80s I had built enough new stock for the 1900-14 period to enable me to dispose of my remaining post-World War I stock, and to start considering a replacement for Chewton Mendip, which was by now scenically well past its prime. The new layout was to provide a more suitable 'period' background for the very obviously late Victorian/Edwardian trains I was now running. This coincided conveniently with the retirement of Chewton Mendip from the exhibition circuit. Endless rebuilding and additions had brought it to the point where a completely new start was required, so its 50th exhibition (Rochdale 1990) was chosen for the grand closure ceremony; just under a year later Maristow had its first proper public showing at the 1990 Manchester Christmas show.

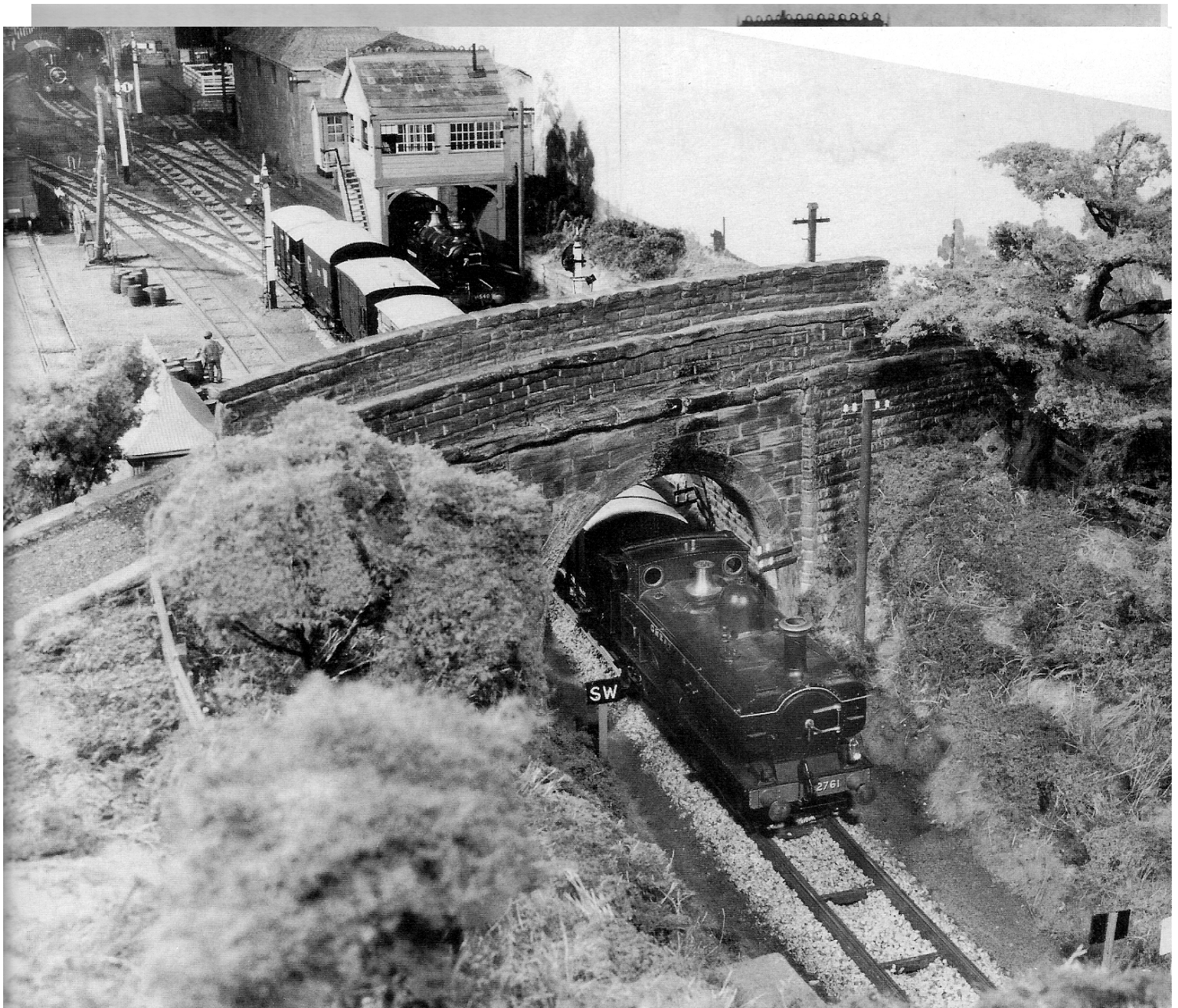
Why the interest in this far off time that I certainly never knew, when most people prefer the era of the Big Four, with its 'big trains' hauled by Castles, Halls etc? For a start, of course, I'm not old enough to have known this period (d.o.b. 1948!), and due to a prolonged period spent abroad during my childhood, I don't even have any memories of Western Region, BR either. Thus any steam prototype becomes a matter of my own personal fantasies, so why not choose what I like? Much as I admire the big locomotives, to me there seems to be too much of a uniformity about the 1930s GWR scene; and the simplified liveries and lower standards of loco and carriage cleaning meant that my imagination was not really fired by this period.

When I started modelling in 7mm scale in the early '70s, there was very little available in the way of kits and published books featuring anything other than the post-grouping era, but fortunately the late '70s saw the beginning of the explosion of (in particular) etched kits covering the older prototypes, and specialist books and articles that opened

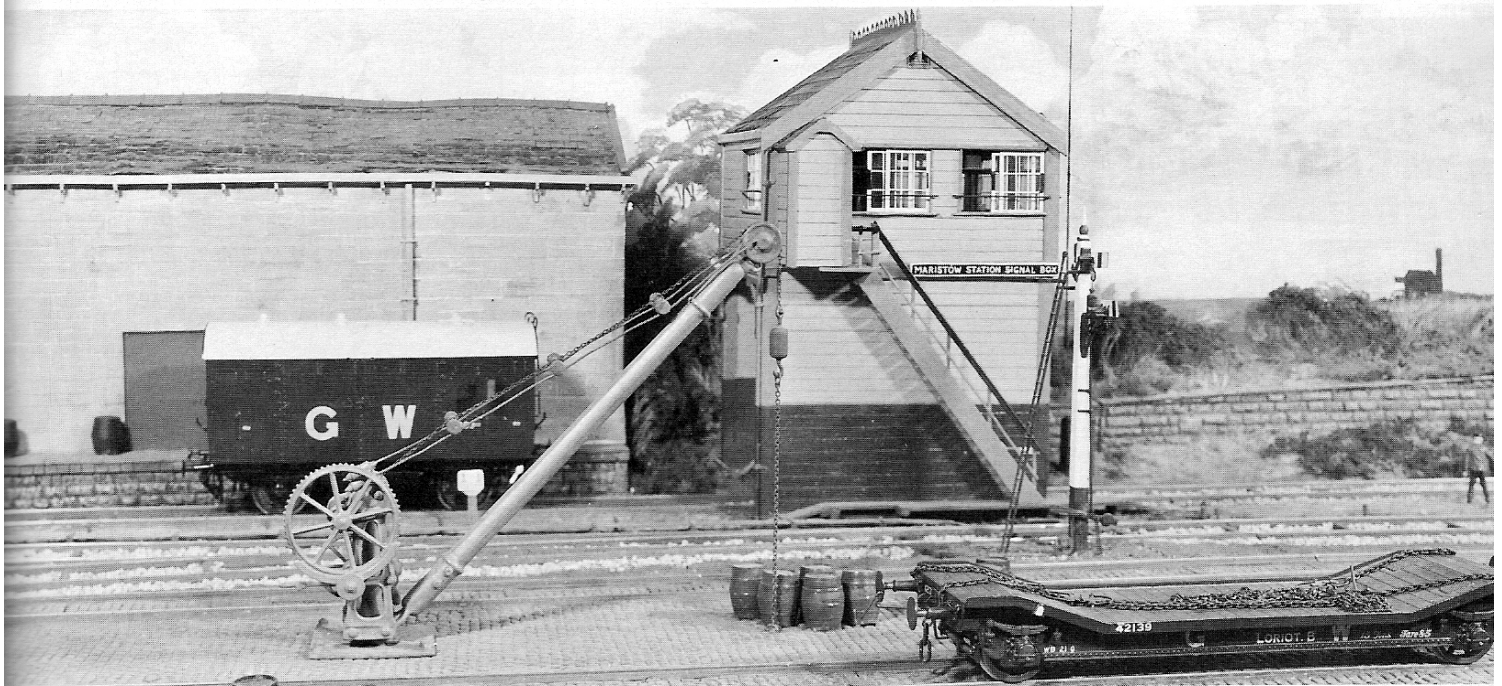
up a whole new picture of the GWR. Coinciding with my search for a prototype, I was enthralled by the picture that I found of the GWR at the turn of the century — a period when even the smallest station was neat, tidy and well cared for, the track and signalling immaculate, and the trains a wonderful variety of the old and the new — mid-Victorian designs alongside the most advanced designs of their day (for the 'Stars' must surely have claimed this honour). Even the humblest brass dome, beading, safety valve cover etc; and the coaches were a joy to behold with the invariable panelling lined out with immaculate care. The livery changes in both colour and lettering styles etc. meant that over the period 1900-1914 there co-existed a large range of different styles, just on the one railway. However, one of the biggest advantages (to my mind) of the pre-grouping era was the size of the trains, and as a result, the stations. Everything was *much* smaller than in the 1930 era; locos were much smaller, and secondary passenger services usually consisted of four- or six-wheeled coaches, and not many of them either. Even expresses were relatively short compared to later periods. As a result station platforms were much shorter — often scaling out at not much more than 6ft long even in 7mm scale — with most other facilities also suitably reduced. Compare the size of the loco yard at Penzance at the turn of the century with its replacement at Long Rock shortly afterwards.

Finally, add the rich variety of 'foreign' company vehicles that could be seen in nearly every pre-grouping scene, and you have (to me at least) a cast-iron case for modelling the pre-grouping era. Needless to say, I am well aware that this may all be fantasy, and that the reality was quite different; but to me the golden age was the Edwardian era, and not the late 1930s. This was the period when the railway network had reached its greatest extent, with connecting road links on to the few towns that didn't have a station; a period when the railway maintained a genuinely comprehensive public transport network enabling easily planned travel to the farthest point of the country.

Ironically, just as my rolling stock building programme had reached a suitable point for me to completely stock an Edwardian layout, I found



Pannier tank No. 2761 was the first model the author built to take the big step back from the 1930's to the pre-1914 era. This involved considerable alterations to the kit and added detail.



The elevated signal box gives a good view of operations.



Coal wagons are all from West Country coal merchants or South Wales collieries, though there has not been time to tie down the location too precisely.

that my prototypical interests were beginning to edge even further back, into the early 1890s and the final years of the Broad Gauge. Ironical, because at this date, few would deny that the GWR had been sunk in lethargy for years and was only just beginning to wake from its long sleep following the 'peaking' of the Broad Gauge in the 1860s; the company was hardly the picture of Edwardian progress and modellers' perfection that I painted earlier. Despite this, the classic photos taken by the Rev. A. H. Malan of 'Rover' class broad gauge singles storming down the old Bristol & Exeter main line and round the curves at Teignmouth with expresses such as the Flying Dutchman have really fired my imagination. The re-creation of such a scene has become my longer term aim, but readers will have to wait a bit longer before they can see the second phase of the Maristow project in print. However, 'Coldrennick Road' can be seen substantially complete running with Maristow at the

1992 Manchester Show in December, and hopefully there should be a 'Rover' and other broad gauge trains running on it.

But this is moving ahead in time and has ignored the main feature that jumps out of the page in almost any photo of the GWR in the West Country in the pre-1910 period, and this of course is the Brunelian track of bridge rail laid on longitudinal timber baulks with small cross transoms and tie bolts to hold the gauge at intervals. This track is the essential part of the background for pre-1910 trains on any GWR model set in the West Country whether in broad, narrow, or mixed gauge, and lasted on most main lines until at least the turn of the century, and on branch lines and sidings for considerably longer.

Enthusiasm for the broad gauge era led to membership of the Broad Gauge Society; and the subsequent availability of 7mm bridge rail opened up the prospect of a genuinely convincing (I hope!) pre-grouping branch



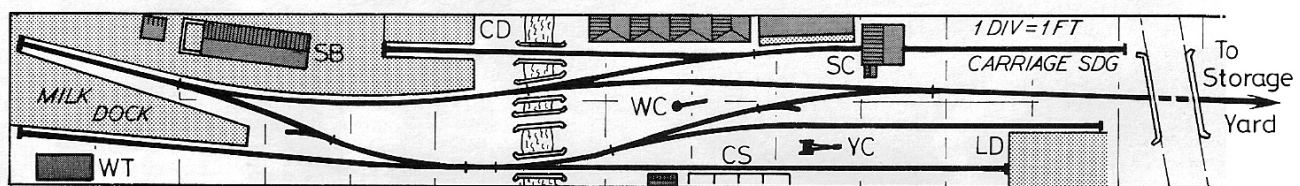
Prominent in this view are the signal box straddling the carriage siding (from Perranwell on the Falmouth branch), the warehouses (from an old photograph of Totnes Quay) and the station building (Abbotsbury).



GWR Steam railmotor No. 78 is painted in the crimson lake livery of the later Edwardian period and often pulls a 'toplight' brake/3rd when the train needs strengthening.



This picture shows well the forms of track ballasting, the rotating ground signal, and a selection of late Victorian/Edwardian passengers, staff and enamel signs.



Like all the author's locos, Dean Goods No. 2357 is powered by a Portescap RG7 motor and features a fully-sprung split-framed chassis.