

## Railway of the month

# Millport & Selfield

Bill Tate describes his famous  
7mm scale NER SYSTEM

Photos by Brian Monaghan

FROM its inception 30 years ago, the whole idea behind my line has been that it shall be as fully "operational" as within model limits it can be. After all, we are often told that one reason why we build model railways is that we cannot have a real one of our own; therefore, in Mike Rickards's famous words, "If you're going to model a railway, let it be just that!" Now we all have our own ideas of what we like best in the hobby, and it ill behoves any of us to criticise the rest of us, but for myself, however beautiful and skilfully built a model may be (and there are plenty of them today), unless they really "live" their part, like their prototypes, something is missing! There is a vast difference between a model railway and a collection of railway models, but one gets the impression over the years that so many enthusiasts have never quite realised it. You do find, however, that once a chap gets into a real operating session, pitting his wits against timetables, bells, rosters and whatnot, as part of a team, he rarely is content to go back to aimless tail-chasing. Some chaps with very limited space have achieved wonders in their efforts to reach this satisfaction of doing the job properly, and others, with ample space, have really spread themselves on it. Few indeed, however, are the clubs that have provided it for their members, and there our American friends have, I always feel, developed the real club spirit through the hobby.

The M. & S. was intended from the start to require more operators than just me, and this brings us to what has proved the most satisfying and pleasant part of the whole thing—the companionship of fellow-modellers, quite regardless of their varying degrees of skill, who frequently made lengthy journeys to be "in on things". Several of them "adopted" some part of the line or its equipment, adding to it something of themselves in a way, I suppose, and thus has the M. & S.R. always proceeded, as much a thing of people as models; though inevitably the personnel has changed over the years, the spirit remains the same.

With this background we may perhaps look at the history, as on the Editor's instruction, this has to be a description of one man's attitude to the hobby rather than of "How I done it". My first serious effort was in 1922 when, in schoolboy partnership with Harry Pilkington (still operating a sizeable layout near Liverpool), we had a layout using Bassett-Lowke track and equipment. Though in its brief 3 years' life it did not get very far, it gave us plenty of fun and a good deal of useful instruction. In the ensuing years I did little, but was introduced by the Leeds branch of the family, Stan and Geoff, to the products of the L.M.C., which they were then using on a big layout. (They have since gone fine-scale, 2-rail, but L.M.C. track remains my standard to this day, there being far too much of it to change!). Though there was nowhere to lay it, I experimented with pointwork and turned out the odd, very crude vehicle or two, all useful practice.

In 1934 I joined the M.M.R.S. (which at that time, as a matter of interest, had about forty members) and my model railway education began! One learned fast, and in due course I was invited to join the operating team on the Merton & Oakley Railway, owned and built by Mr. G. M. ("Mike") Rickards, then Chairman and now Vice-President of the M.M.R.S. and at that time Loco Superintendent at a Manchester shed. Here I really learned the fun of operating properly. The line was described in the *Model Railway News* about 1936, and it was a sad day for us when Mike got moved southwards, but we did have a proper closure ceremony!

Marriage being in view, and the prospect of my own railway room being much more definite, I began accumulating a heap of useful (and some not so useful) material. I was thus able, in 1938,

TOP LEFT: N.E.R. class E1 0-6-0 heads train of oil tankers over Long Nanny Viaduct.

BOTTOM LEFT: "Samuel Pepys", North Sunderland No. 1, shunts in the quarry.

TOP RIGHT: Millport station. E1 0-6-0 shunting.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Chathill sidings, well filled, as usual. N.E.R. class P2 0-6-0 No. 1678 passes on freight from Millport.

having selected a house with the required space for the sort of line I envisaged, and Herself having approved it from the other (not so important!) angles, to move my new wife and said heap of material in together—obviously, one could not have afforded to do this in any other manner! My wife's interest has never flagged, and she has enjoyed the company of our many visitors as much as I have. As I was general factotum of the Society for so many years, it was natural, and pleasing, that our house should become a sort of unofficial headquarters for the Society, which at that time had not got one, but she coped with all this too as amiably as ever.

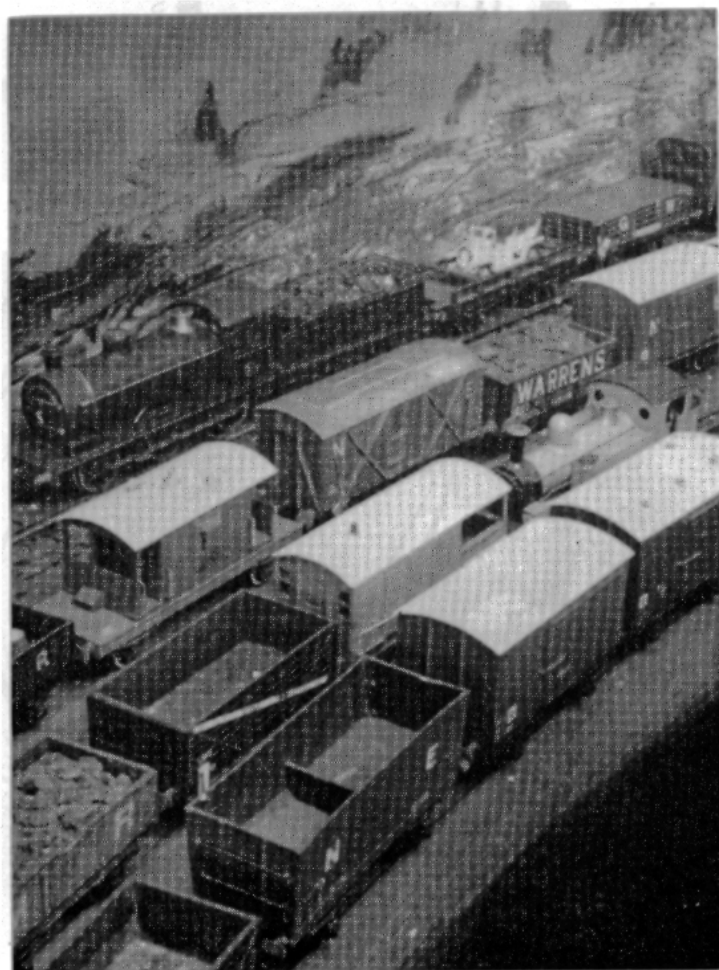
So, by November 1938, my first roomful of baseboards had been erected, and George Leech plotted and laid the first lengths of track, at the same time bashing the first tunnel through the wall (much to the alarm of the old lady next door, though she got used to this sort of thing as time went on). Jim Boyd and I pursued this work with such vigour that by November 29, 1939, we were able to stage our "Grand Opening", which lasted 6 hours and was attended by eight members of the Society, of whom Maurice Brundrett is still operating with us, and those who are left of the others are still good friends of the line, though widely scattered.

The railway was described in the *Model Railway News* for May 1942. It was not even free-lance, having a mixed bag of locomotives that were barely recognisable as their alleged prototypes, assorted L.M.C. litho coaches that would now be museum pieces, and a motley collection of goods vehicles, a few of which were hand-built. We ran to a pretty hectic timetable. The line was signalled, with signals built by Geoffrey Platt for the M.M.R.S. exhibition track which happened to be in my care at the time. (I regret to say that, despite some arm-twisting by Theo., the present layout does not boast any such refinements.) Army service looming up, the last train had to run on June 1, 1942, with largely the same "crew" who had been in at the opening. The line's epitaph was written by Jim Boyd, and was published in the *Model Railway News* for August 1944 under the title "Operational Orgy", considered by the faithful as a "classic". It certainly epitomised all the grand fun we had had! In the belief that, in the event of certain circumstances as yet unknown, it might be better if the whole thing were dismantled, this was accordingly done, and the engines' springs run down and greased, and stock carefully packed away, the track—fortunately it was on battens—bundled up, the bases scrapped, and that was the end of Phase I.

During those long, dreary hours well known to wartime servicemen, we did not lose sight of the hobby and did plenty of pipe-dreaming, though bearing well in mind Sid Stubbs's pungent comment about certain pipe-dreamers whose pipes were apparently filled with opium, and even managed to make a few bits of goods stock. Between the dreaming and the correspondence we produced a set of ideas for Phase II and much of it was eventually so built. In the interim, however, I wrote the whole detailed story of the old line in a large manuscript book, illustrating it with the numerous photographs we had luckily taken. This book went the rounds of the gang as well as several other people who knew the line, many of whom added notes, criticisms and comments of their own accord, and the whole battered volume is now a highly prized possession.

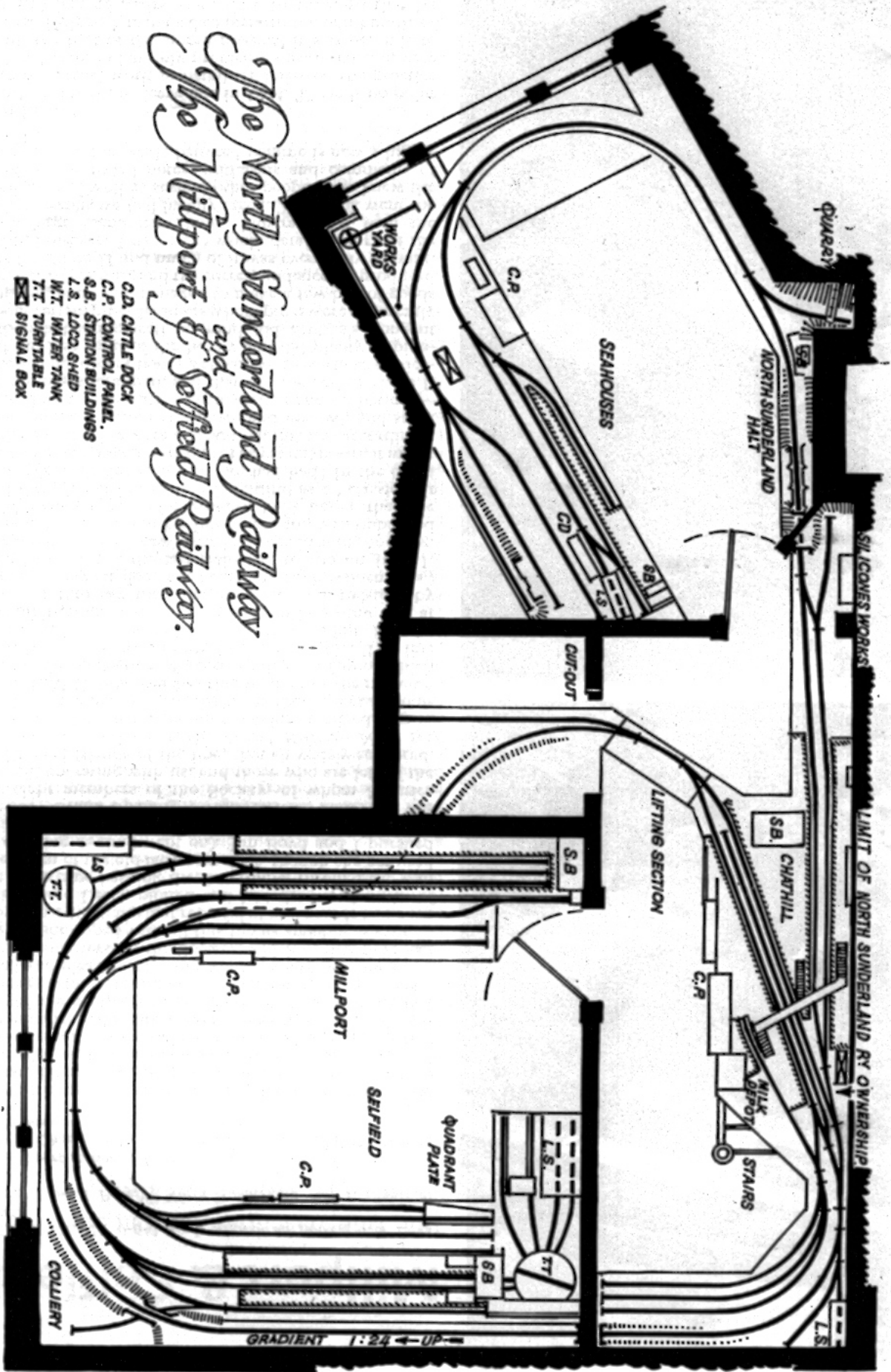
#### The present layout

Construction began while on leave late in 1944. There is no point in describing the actual work in detail. It followed the practice of the time but because of supply problems was, of course, very slow, but with the best of the stored material it was possible to keep going. Jack Holbrook managed to unearth the odd bundle of L.M.C. rail and bag of chairs from time to time, so that by



*The North Sunderland Railway  
and  
The Millport & Seafield Railways.*

- C.D. CRITILE DOCK
- C.P. CONTROL PANEL
- S.B. STATION BUILDINGS
- L.S. LOCO. SHED
- M.T. WATER TANK
- T.T. TURNTABLE
- ☒ SIGNAL BOX



Track plan by J. M. Lloyd

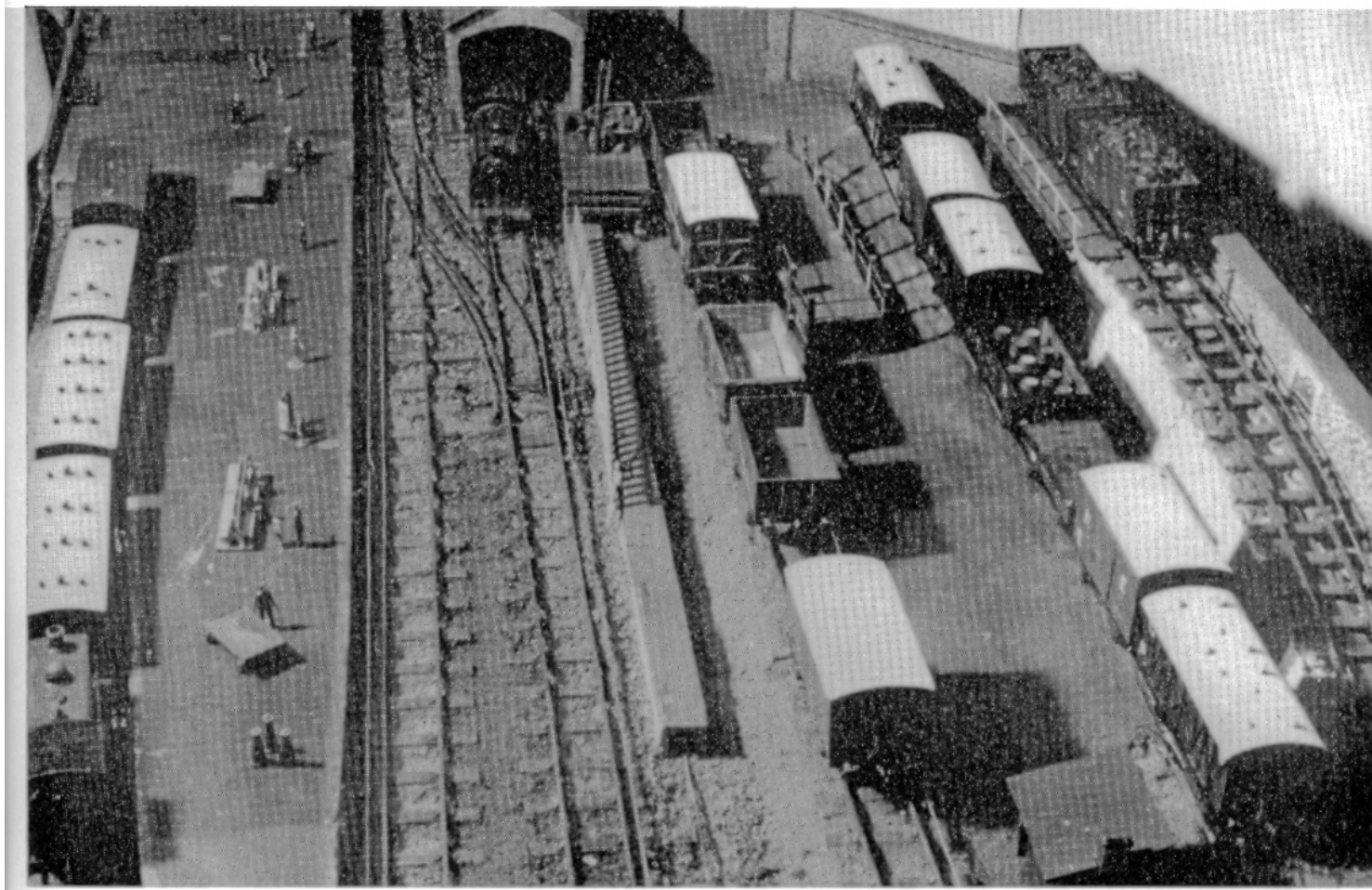
June 12, 1951, my wife was able to drive in the last track pin at what is now Selfield. While the line may look immovable it is in fact reasonably portable, though not without some labour. The bases are each of two 6ft. x 3ft. sections, which are of 1/2in. tongue and grooved matching crosswise on 2in. x 2in. longitudinals. The walls are plugged along their whole length to take a 2in. x 1in. batten; on this are placed the "outer" edges of the bases, and these are held there by cut down 4in. r.w. nails dropped into prepared holes, the "inner" edges being screwed to 2in. x 2in. uprights. The bases are identical except that at Chathill, which is an awkward shape (for access to the stairs!) and is in one piece only. However, even with 12ft. x 3ft. to go at, it was a job of some nicety to get in, in O gauge, different layouts, all equally workable, with some attempt at realism as well as simplicity, for solid masses of trackwork and complicated pointwork have no appeal for me. Over the years some alterations have been effected as they suggested themselves in traffic, more particularly at Chathill, and one hesitates to say that we have reached finality, though space is now very short indeed for much further amendment.

The bases are covered with 1/2in. "Celotex" to reduce drumming, though one does not want a silent railway—it would not sound right! Trains run on to the bridge with a satisfying roar, rail beats are audible and the chatter of an up freight negotiating Chathill pleases everyone. As will be seen, scenery and limeside effects are minimal, since there is very little space on the outer side of the line, which was placed close to the walls to allow better curves. The station buildings are the original free-lance ones, but now we have plenty of information on some suitable N.E.R. prototypes, we may eventually replace them—some day. Accent has always been on getting the best running we could, with other things, though part of the picture, taking second place.

*Seahouses terminus, North Sunderland Railway. Both N.S.R. locomotives, 0-4-0ST No. 1, "Samuel Pepys", on train of 4 wheelers in the bay, and 0-4-0ST No. 2 "Chathill" on shed are visible. The resemblance between this model and the prototype are tenuous, the bay and typical N.E.R. raised coal drops are deliberate additions.*

The change to electric traction was envisaged during the blank years of the war, but was forced on me earlier than I had intended by the fact that, during their storage, no fewer than seven engines had suffered broken springs, and springs were at that time just not obtainable. Sid Stubbs tried to work wonders with the bits, but that is another story! (However, broken or not, the engines were eagerly snapped up by parents of toy-hungry children; what they did with them I do not know—perhaps made them into free-wheelers?). Now virtually without loco power—which for some time was not very important, since the line was being rebuilt anyway—we third-railed away happily, completely ignorant of wiring laws, and using whatever we could for third rail, most of which has since been replaced with much more suitable material. Maurice's small power unit supplied the sparks, and his long-suffering class 4 became the guinea-pig. We got some astonishing results, and an unbelievable wiring mess, but eventually got trains right round the line. J. I. C. B. during the war had been developing a theme which for some years had occupied a very great deal of thought—the recording of the narrow-gauge scene while there was yet time, and this intensive activity released as surplus his O gauge equipment, some of which became part of the M. & S.R.; notably an L.M.C. 0-4-0 T which now has an honoured place as North Sunderland Railway No. 1. We had a brief essay into stud contact, with the poor old class 4 stooging for skates, etc., but eventually we dropped it as unsatisfactory (rather to my subsequent regret when, in later years, I saw how successful other workers had been with it). Two-railing was "out" because of the magnitude of the job by this time, but in the end the old third rail fits, since we run a Tyneside electric service anyway!

With the gradual emergence of the new layout as a going concern, it became necessary to avoid a second edition of the earlier "Col. Stephen's" line, and so I decided to follow as well as I may a prototype railway. While all the pregrouping lines had equal charm for me, the North Eastern, being originally my native line, was the obvious choice, though this had disadvantages from the accessibility viewpoint. However, the file of N.E. drawings, notes, letters and pictures was growing steadily, and Theo. Horn, a founder member of the M.M.R.S. and a modeller for many years of fine N.E.R. locomotives, had now been joined



in the Society by George Driver, whose superb card models of N.E.R. rolling stock are well known. With the practical help of these two I embarked on the long, slow job of "going North Eastern". It will never be finished of, course, but the general impression is gradually appearing and a very satisfying business it is proving. At this point a word of appreciation is indicated, I think. When in 1960 Bob Hunter, as Curator of the Railway Museum at York, realised the great amount of interest in the N.E.R. he suggested to a few of us the formation of a N.E.R. Association based on York; the idea was taken up enthusiastically and the membership now approaches two hundred, among whom are groups of "specialists" covering between them almost every facet of the old company. I am particularly indebted to Bob Hunter for his especial interest in the North Sunderland section of the layout.

So there it was, North Eastern and electric at the same time, and in an equally elementary state of both! Then one evening 9 years ago there came Bob Mills, railway officer as well as enthusiast, and Stanley Thompson, electrics expert, tramway enthusiast and signalling specialist, to see what we were up to. Bob decided that if "this, that and t'other" were put right, here as last was a railway that could be properly operated. Stan merely looked at the cats' cradles and said, "That lot'll have to come out" (and a week later it was, too). In due time, thanks to their advice and skills, the line assumed its present workmanlike shape. Maurice, always part of the M. & S.R. scene, Reg Dickinson and Jim Lloyd form the other members of the present team, and we like to think that we are at last obeying Mike Rickards's injunction of so long ago.

The operators are remarkably parochial. Though they will if necessary take another station, they much prefer their own! I have seen this referred to by another "operating" enthusiast some time ago anent his own team. Strange but true! I myself prefer Seahouses with Selfield as the second choice! Bob takes Millport, Reg will be at Selfield; Maurice or Jim at Seahouses and Stanley at Chathill. I will be spare man, shunter, repairer and just looker-on, in which last job I get a vast deal of entertainment listening to the badinage, hard words, the frequent sarcastic "Shunt for following train to pass" when somebody is slow clearing out the block, noting the individual ways in which trains are driven and bell-tappers used, and all that "atmosphere" which cannot be expressed in words.

#### Equipment

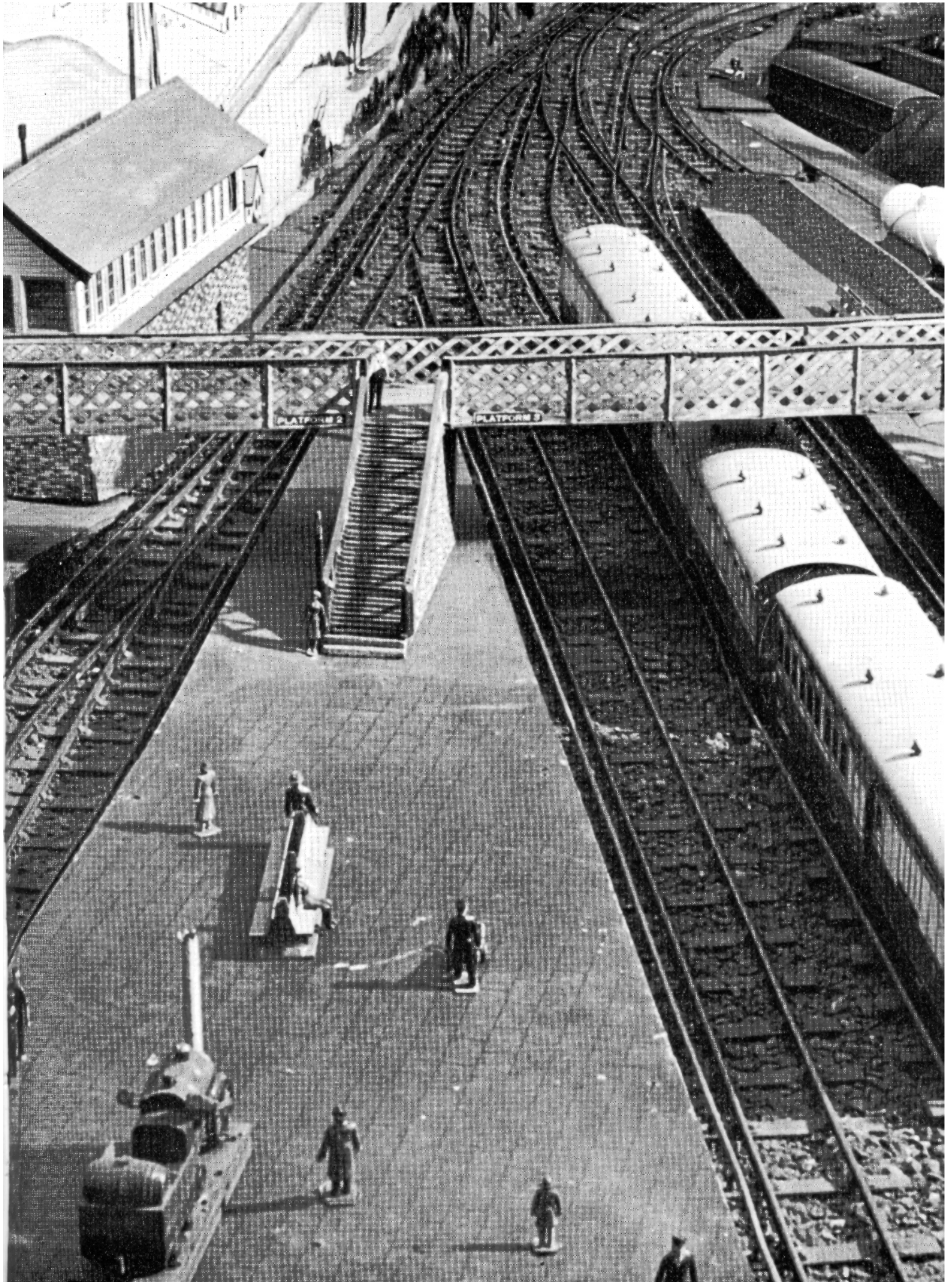
By today's standards, this is elementary in the extreme. Points are worked from frames either by tube and wire or direct rodding.

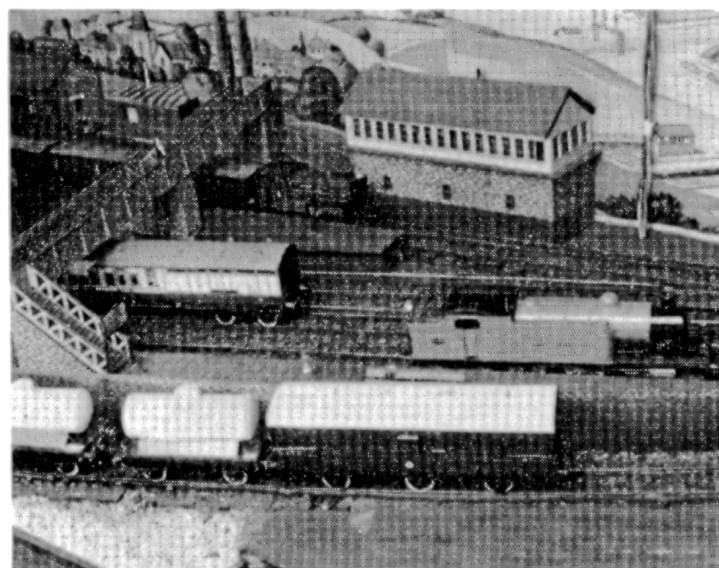
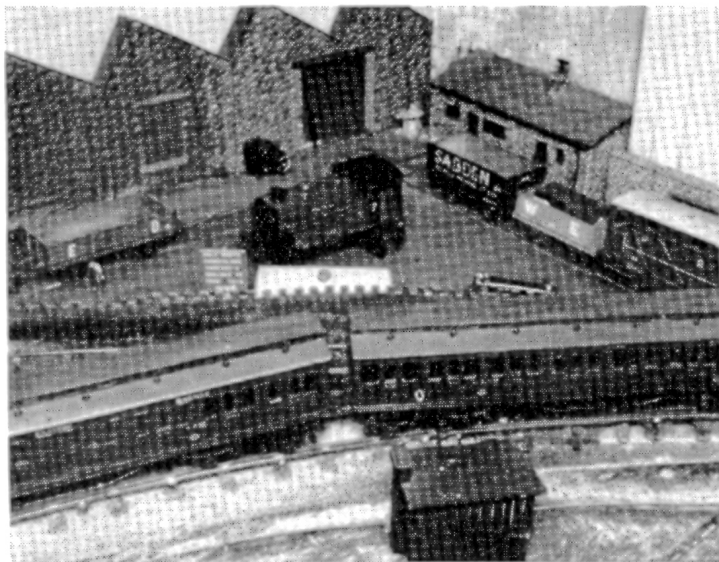
Signals are non-existent, as previously mentioned, for the usual reason—that on a model they are not essential to operation (unless, of course, they are part of the wiring circuit as on some layouts) when the S.M. is also driver, fireman, guard, shunter and all. None the less, signals are an important part of any railway scene and their absence from the M. & S.R. is both conspicuous and a constant reproach, but the N.E.R. was probably the most-signalled

BELOW: Millport. Tyneside electric set arriving, 4-4-4T class 4 about to depart with "S" clerestory set. P2 0-6-0 waits with freight in yard. H. & B.R. 0-6-2T No. 100 in goods loop.

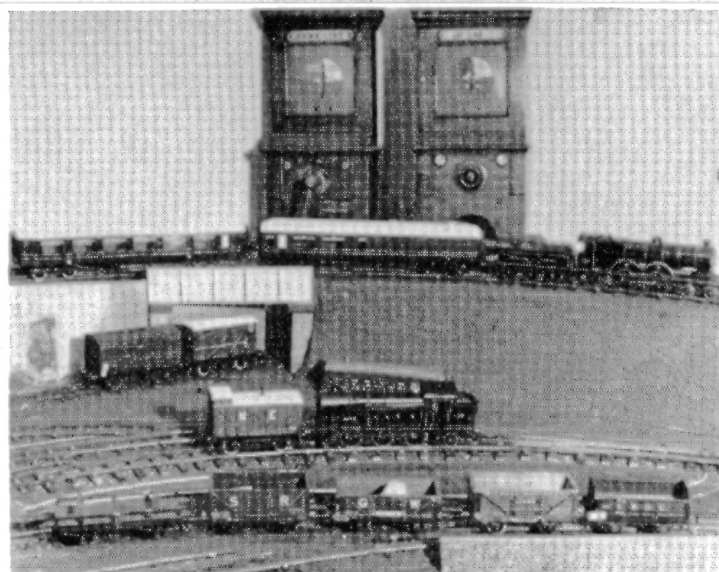
RIGHT: An unwontedly quiet moment at Chathill Junction. Main line to right, Seahouses branch on left.







**TOP:** Seahouses works. Note Sabden Treacle and West of England railway wagons on cripple road.  
**CENTRE:** Activity at Chathill. "Samuel Pepys" has just arrived with Seahouses branch train, 4-4-4T class D No. 2143 running in on Selffield train.  
**BOTTOM:** Selffield yard with H. & B.R. No. 100 shunting. L. & Y. "Highflyer" No. 1405 head "M" set into Millport..



railway of them all, and the prospect of equipping the line properly with them, using the characteristic McKenzie & Holland slotted post type, is daunting, to say the least, not to mention the construction of four new and much larger lever frames. However, perhaps some day . . .

Power comes from an ex-W.D. battery-charger which gives 10A. at anything from 10 to 24V. We run on 18V, since most of the locos are now fitted with those splendid little, round, ex-R.A.F. 24V motors. The controls are of the simplest, for, if a visitor should feel like taking over a station, he can pick it up in a reasonably short time. Nothing frightens me more than these electronic marvel control panels with everything for the whole layout on them! At each station there is a large track diagram with the section switches *in situ*, the bell-tapper, cut-out reset button, block instrument switch and reversing controller all closely grouped. The block instrument switches are of the three-way type and are necessary because, even if you could reach the handles of the instruments, you would probably pull the whole thing off the wall, such is the "twist" necessary to operate them. The bells are very important—they have tones varying from bicycle bells to tobacco-tin lids, and are struck by hammers operated by solenoids, giving a hearty clout and no mishearing. The noise is lovely at times, and the sound necessary for Chathill to pass to Millport a train that is being banked in rear up the hill is a joy in itself.

Millport and Selffield are fictitious stations. I had not heard of the pleasant little resort Millport on the Clyde when I first selected names for the stations. They follow no prototype, but Chathill does exist, on the N.E.R. main line near Berwick, though the model bears no resemblance whatever to its namesake, whose layout is in the typical lavish N.E.R. manner. What are now the North Sunderland Railway and its terminus at Seahouses were the first parts of the new layout to be built, before the decision to "go N.E.R.", but as it happens they are not so far out. There was no bay road at Seahouses, and the coal staithes, though planned, were never built. They are, however, such a feature of all N.E. stations, used in conjunction with the bottom-door hopper wagons, that we just had to have some, and Seahouses was the only place where they could go. The North Sunderland never had a works, either, but the awkward corner there, adjacent to the bench, became the dumping ground for all "cripples" as well as new work, so that a "Works" was the obvious scenic feature for it! There was a quarry on the branch, with private siding, and the Long Nanny Burn will still be found trickling near Chathill, and in the model we have both, though the burn did not boast more than a plain girder bridge; the elaborate bridge in the photos was the result of a walk under the great Cambrian viaduct at Barmouth, in my free-lance days. I would like eventually to replace it with a replica of the wooden viaduct at Ushaw Moor, Co. Durham, photos and drawings of which have been given to me by members of the N.E.R.A.

The North Sunderland was never grouped, never nationalised and never paid a dividend, and it eventually gave up the struggle in October 1951, but it had all those qualities that so endear such lines to locals and enthusiasts alike. Its own motive power consisted of a Manning Wardle 0-6-0 T named "Bamburgh" and an Armstrong Whitworth 0-4-0 diesel electric "The Lady Armstrong", but at various times numerous other locos were tried along the branch. "Bamburgh" is believed to have made history by being the only P.O. locomotive ever to run under its own steam up the L.N.E.R. main line; this was after repair at Darlington. I enjoyed many happy hours on these two old warriors. At the end, the coaching stock comprised two old N.E.R. 4-wheelers, one of them a saloon, and a G.E.R. 6-wheeler. My branch train at present consists of three free-lance 4-wheelers, my first serious attempt at card modelling, but now that my good friend Alan Wright has concluded 4 years' painstaking research into the original vehicles on the branch, I shall shortly be starting the construction of the N.S.R. train as I knew it, though whether it ever gets "Bamburgh" to match it is another question, for there are snags!

The line, then, is in three block sections: Chathill-Millport (50ft.), Chathill-Selffield (37ft.) and Chathill-Seahouses (41ft.), of which the first two form the main line and the third the N.S.R. branch. Section gaps, in the third rail only, are about half-way along the sections. The track between stations is single, which I think is more suitable for short runs, and in any case single-line working is much more interesting.

For traffic there is the fish, quarry and Silicone Works output, all off the branch. This latter is a fine piece of card modelling by Barry Paterson, who also built the footbridge at Chathill. Nobody seems to be quite sure what is made there, but it has a most varied requirement of wagons (not forgetting the horsebox on one occasion. On enquiry about this, the answer came back pat from Bob Mills: "Meat for the canteen pies"!)

At Chathill is the Ironworks, merely a long siding as yet, and there is the dairy siding behind the down platform. Selfield has the great Colliery which fortunately has not to be modelled as the block instruments stand just where it would be! Engines and stock are allocated to the respective stations, to which they return by the end of the session. Locos always move in the same direction as the handle of the controller, which saves the need for any sort of polarity tell-tale, while yet avoiding the unrealistic appearance of having all the engines facing the same way round, the effect you get when all motors are wired to the same polarity. The engines are maintained by Bob and Stan at the famous G.M.T. Works; they have incorporated one or two crafty dodges to improve the running of some of them, which some members of the N.E.R.A. have found worth copying! Track and rolling stock maintenance is my responsibility, naturally.

**Acknowledgements**

I greatly appreciate Jim Lloyd's gesture in taking precious time off from his task of doing the drawings for Jim Boyd's book, in order to prepare the excellent layout diagram; Brian Monaghan spent no less than 8 hours taking a mass of pictures which form a wonderful record of the line (but of which the Editor has, unfortunately, been able to print only a selection). My sincere thanks to both.

*We shall shortly be publishing Bill's account of the methods of operation and the rolling stock employed on the Millport and Selfield.*

**RIGHT:** Selfield loco depot. L. & Y. 4-4-2 on turntable. N.E.R. class A 2-4-2T No. 697 in shed. "Porthole" push pull coach to right.

**BELOW:** Selfield station, with Tyneside electric set and "M" set in platform.

