

# Millport & Selfield Operating by the book

Bill Tate concludes his story by describing the operating techniques

Photos by Brian Monaghan

I SAID at the beginning of this article that my whole interest is operating the line as properly as it could be, that is to say, trains should be properly made up, would move with a definite purpose like the real ones, governed by timetables and block working, and controlled by a number of individuals working as a team to ensure their punctual and safe arrival. How far we have achieved this object is hardly for us to say, but quite a number of serious enthusiasts have been quite impressed and come back for more! Yet the complete satisfaction and enjoyment we get from it all are difficult to put into words. Certainly the aimless, continuous, boring running of exhibition tracks, however important to the exchequer, is unthinkable after working correctly!

The sessions open at about 7.20 p.m., and the first train moves out at 7.31 p.m. Between then and 9.35 p.m., when the last train arrives (if on time), Millport will have made precisely 50 movements, Selfield 38 and Seahouses 29, all of which will have passed through the Junction at Chathill, from which it will be seen that this station, with its own added remarshalings, is no place for the beginner. Stanley is the undoubted maestro here, since he has to act as Controller as well, yet he finds time to shout rude things to anyone putting transfer vehicles at the wrong end of a train, or switching engine rosters. If all goes well, the evening can be quite tame, with everything dead on time, and each man will at times find himself with nothing to do, as in real practice. But things can also get very much adrift, through various causes, and then the efficiency of the workers will be revealed! We do not use "hot" clocks, but real time, as the lengths of run just about warrant it. We have overrun by half an hour, trains have had to be cancelled, "specials" run to make connections that would otherwise have been missed, and have started very late but with smart working have pulled up 15 minutes in the first hour! On the M. & S. and the N.S.R. the staff subscribe to the quaint idea that *the passenger does matter!* It is all very realistic, and no two sessions are quite the same.

The timetable is built up on the well-known graph method, from which are extracted "simplified station sheets" for each station. As well as the train times, these also give the class of train, the engine duty number, coaching or other stock required, the appropriate bell code and, in certain instances, operating instructions such as "2 fish vans in rear"; "Does not convey empty milk vehicles"; "Brakevan either end" and so forth. We find that 27 codes are required, though some are used very infrequently. A short extract from the Millport sheet is given (there is no point in going right "through the card" nor yet in giving any of the loco duty roster sheets—this is merely to give an idea of the working):

Electric	3-1-2	arr. 7.31 p.m.	
B.3, S. & T.	3-1		dep. 7.33 p.m.
C.6, E	2-2-1	arr. 7.38 p.m.	
K-2	1-2		dep. 7.39 p.m. Seahouses, Quarry and Silicones only

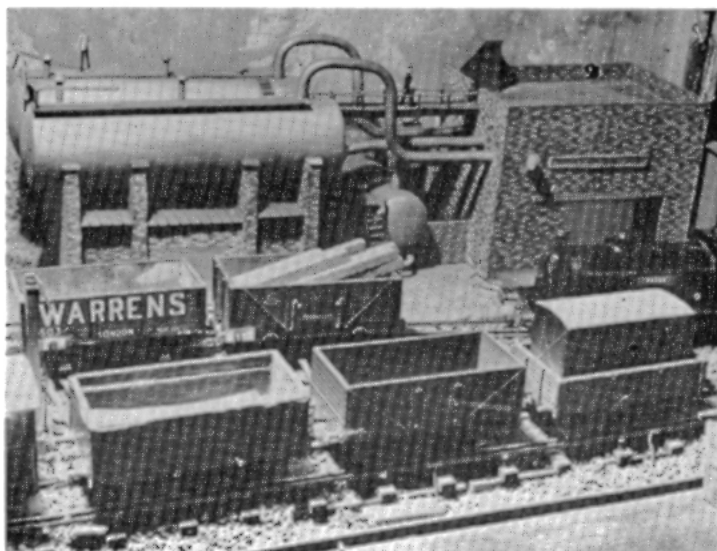
The first is self-explanatory—incidentally, this train runs each way half-hourly. The second is a class B (local train) to Selfield, with engine duty No. 3 (the 4-4-4 T) and the "S" set plus through coach, which is detached at Chathill and goes forward on the 7.40 p.m. from there. The third is the empty coaching stock from Chathill sidings, the "E" set and engine duty No. 6, the H. & B. tank. (This forms the 8.00 p.m. excursion to Seahouses, returning as ordinary passenger train, and repeats the process in reverse later in the session.) The fourth example is a freight drawn by



TOP: Ian Lloyd, Bill Tate and Reg Dickenson inspecting the stock register.

CENTRE: N.E.R. 0-6-0 No. 1678, rounding the curve into Chathill.

BOTTOM: Trafford Silicone Products Factory at Chathill. Note the paper clips for the wagon labels.



engine duty No. 2, the P-2 goods engine, for the branch. It is offered to the Junction as a "1-2" (branch freight) but offered by the junction to Seahouses as a "3".

And so on: while it looks very complex, once you know the codes (most important) the whole thing becomes clear. You must, of course, always be thinking at least two moves ahead, to ensure that your engines and stock are where they should be at the right time, and the various "traps" will be quickly learned too, such as getting the run-round loops blocked, or finding yourself with an engine fastened in at the wrong end of its train!

Freight traffic is dense, as it was on the N.E.R., and it fluctuates enormously, but passenger trains must always have priority over any freight that gets out of course. This week the first goods down the branch—our 7.39 p.m. ex Millport—may have "2 and a brake", another week it will have "15 on" which is a headache for Seahouses at the very start of the session, for the loop there only holds 8, which means cutting the train and will almost certainly delay three other movements in the process. This unpredictable loading happens thus: each station or source of traffic has a colour, and small cards  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. x  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. of these colours are supplied to all stations. Each wagon has a clip, actually an ordinary paper-clip, fixed to the sides, and in this the station-master inserts whatever he thinks may be a suitable destination for that vehicle on this particular trip.

On arrival, the station-master removes the label and inserts another, but it is a rule that every wagon must have loading and unloading time, i.e. it must not go out on the very next departure, unless, of course, it is a transfer working. As several freights may be remarshalled and/or combined at the Junction, it can easily be seen how the variable traffic loadings arise. There are certain block workings; for instance, there is a 10-wagon coal train from Selfield to the Ironworks. Fish traffic from Seahouses goes in two "sets" of fish wagons, one in the rear of an up local to Millport, and the others, as a train in itself, with brake at either end, enabling the loco to run round at Chathill and depart direct for Selfield. The return workings of the "empties" are in the first

freights of the next session. Complications arise from the fact that there is no time for running round for locos to shunt *en route*, which means that all shunting must be done by means of "back shunts", e.g. a down freight from Millport could drop or collect wagons at Chathill yard, but not at the Ironworks. Along the branch, wagons can be dropped at the quarry on the outward trip, but Silicone Works traffic must go into Seahouses, be transferred to the next up departure and be shunted into the Silicone siding off that. (Reference to the layout plan will illustrate this more clearly.) The result of all this is that Millport has become a sorting yard to ensure that vehicles get into their proper trains, and sometimes the congestion there is reminiscent of King's Cross before the Midland had its own yards in London!

A "joke" working is the "Ashpan special". Two old E.D. trucks have been fitted with removable open containers, and each one is worked to Millport and Selfield from Seahouses on the first up trains. There they remain until the very last movement of the session, during which time they act as receptacles for fag ends, pipe dottle, toffee-papers, and what not. They are worked as "specials" to the Junction, where they combine, receive Stan's contribution and then go forward to Seahouses with the P-2. At Seahouses they are emptied into the waste box, and then shunted into the yard until the next session. In the meantime, "the Junction man" has switched Seahouses-Millport into one block section, with the appropriate 16 bells, closed his box and departed downstairs to the Enginemen's Canteen, which has been duly opened by the Domestic Authorities on hearing all this bell ringing. Seahouses returns the P-2 as a light engine to Millport, who acknowledges its arrival with "train out of section" and then both give the 7-5-5 "Box closing". And so ends another enjoyable evening on the M. & S.R.

Passenger workings are much less uncertain than the freights, and are not spectacular apart from the crack train of the day "The Northumbrian" which gets the V.I.P. treatment. It loads to six coaches, which complicates platform arrangements quite a bit in itself; it runs flat out all the way on both its up and down journeys, and nothing must slow it down, let alone stop it. It is amusing to see how the staff take good care that nothing does! All the same, there have, however, been Awful Moments, such as when it arrived in the goods yard at Millport, a regrettable incident witnessed by Bill Iles, of the Chester Club, who thought fit, when speaking at an M.M.R.S. dinner, to publicise it as one of the peculiar things they do in Manchester! Or when Stanley inadvertently sent it down to Seahouses, unannounced, much to Maurice's consternation and justifying Sid's famous comment: "The train now arriving at platform 3 comes to us as a complete surprise!"

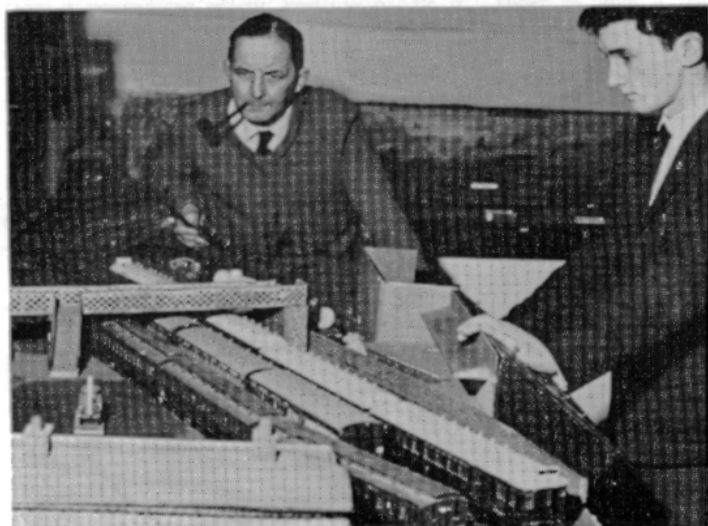
#### Locomotive Stud

The stock position is described very briefly below. It is just adequate for present traffic requirements and I have ideas about some of the other fascinating N.E.R. vehicles in due course, while the G.M.T. are toying with further N.E.R. engines when their "steam-electric" project is complete.

- 4-4-2 L. & Y.R. No. 1405. Built by Bob Mills in 1929. Duty No. 1. Selfield
- 2-4-2 T. N.E.R., class "A". No. 679. Built by G. M. T. Duty No. 4. Selfield
- 4-4-4 T N.E.R., class "D". No. 2143. Builder unknown. Duty No. 3. Millport
- 0-6-0 N.E.R., class P2. No. 1678. Built by G. M. T. Duty No. 2. Millport
- 0-6-0 T N.E.R., class E1. Builder unknown. Station pilot Chathill
- 0-6-2 T H. & B.R. No. 100. Built free-lance by Bob Inkster, rebuilt as No. 100 by G. M. T. Duty No. 6. Chathill
- 0-6-0 T L. & Y. R., "Farne". Built by Bill Potter. Spare engine
- 0-4-0 T. No. 1. Built by L. M. C.—"Samuel Peeps". Duty No. 5. Seahouses
- 0-4-0 T. No. 2. Built by L. M. C.—"Chathill". Duty No. 5. Seahouses
- 0-6-0. M.R., class 4. Built by Maurice Brundrett. Spare engine Selfield
- 4-car Tyneside electric set

As I said before, going N.E.R. is a very slow process! We have no compunction about using L. & Y. engines; after all, that company did run an excellent service to York. No doubt other N.E.R. types will replace some of the "outsiders" eventually.

The Tyneside electric set, which models the 1920 stock, came as a gift from George Driver, in the shape of four very incomplete





card bodies. Finishing them to running trim was quite an exercise, and the peculiar "cow-head" coupler beat me completely. However, Stan devised a most ingenious variation of the "link and pin cum Norwegian chopper" coupling, and fitted with these the set runs perfectly in either direction. Only one bogie of the eight is powered, again with an excellent ex-R.A.F. motor, but, suitably weighted, this is ample.

### Coaching stock

A very short note about this must suffice:

- "S" set. Three clerestory 52ft. bogie coaches (see RAILWAY MODELLER for August 1961 for constructional details). Millport
- "M" set. Six main-line bogie coaches, to various diagrams, built as "S" set. Selfield
- "E" set. Three L.N.W.R. litho coaches by L.M.C., owned by Bob Mills. Used as excursion set only. Chathill
- "L" set. The three 4-wheelers of the N.S.R. Seahouses
- N.E.R. Six-wheel milk van and three milk tanks. Chathill
- S.R. Four-wheel utility van, by Gordon Heywood.
- "TC" Ex-L.M.C., windows glazed, porthole ends for auto-car working, if necessary, but normally runs as through coach from Millport-Seahouses on the 7.37 p.m. and 9.07 p.m., returning on the 8.28 p.m. and 9.17 p.m. respectively.

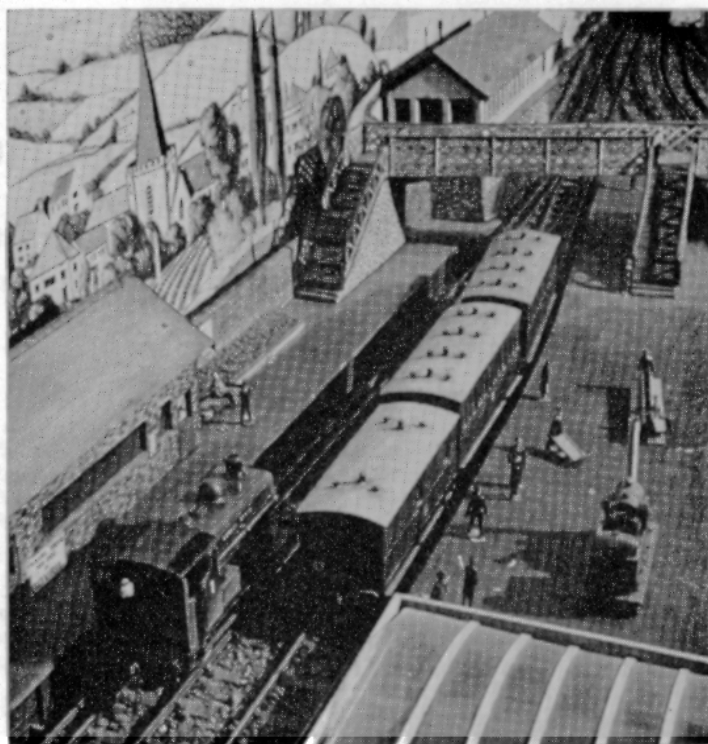
There are sixty-odd goods vehicles, including seven brake vans, and these are mostly hand-built, though they do include a few L.M.C. litho ones (which George Mellor has claimed for his Museum when they are replaced!) There is one little item that is very amusing, a small open wagon from Graham Overton's erstwhile O-gauge West of England Railway. This has dumb wooden buffers and hook-and-chain coupling, together with a bouncing brake lever, sometimes seen in real practice. This is achieved by means of cams on the axles, and it looks most realistic. Unfortunately, in its present condition, this wagon cannot be run on the main line and is therefore "Works Use Only"—which is a pity, but it would be a shame to spoil it by fitting proper running gear! Another wagon of much contention is the notorious Sabden Treacle Mining wagon, built by the "Castello Gang" as one of their numerous joke items.

All goods stock has 3-link couplings, which require out-of-scale hands to operate them, and passenger stock has single-link couplings with similar operating requirements. (So far as we know, the N.E.R. had no automatic couplings, or uncoupling gadgets in its various yards circa 1920!) In operation, one can only describe as "pretty hard" the use the stock receives, for which reason no delicate details are fitted to any vehicle. One recalls a very fine N.E.R. "large" cattle truck given to me by the cousins in Leeds; this had a complete set of scale working brake gear, which in practice survived only a short time, and the object lesson was duly learnt for subsequent new construction. Real damage, in spite of the hard work, is rare, the 3-link couplings being the chief sufferers. As they stretch and break, we replace them with much harder ones. White-metal buffers have nearly all gone now, replaced with unbreakable ones turned from roofing-felt nails! All "cripples" are worked into Seahouses Works in the correct manner and returned to traffic after repair the same way.

### Operation

From time to time various mythical characters have appeared on the M. & S.R. Perhaps the best known was Jim Lloyd's creation "old Sam'l Bridie", the station-master at Seahouses, who spent most of his time at war with "the main line"—never the N.E.R.!—over such things as unauthorised use of his branch engine for their shunting movements, for which extra mileage he was never paid, or stealing the tail lamps off his branch train, which did in fact always set out correctly equipped with them. Sam'l's lengthy letters of complaint, and his reports to *The Link*, the M.M.R.S. journal, were very popular and created much amusement.

Future developments? There are no plans at the moment, but Stan is set on having C.T.C., with an office elsewhere in the house, and mass telephone linkages! Not quite so remote is the possibility of taking Chathill yard off the station control panel and providing it with a separate one and its own operator, as yard foreman. Suitable job for the spare man, perhaps? Whatever we do, its object will still be towards correct operation, and in the process give ourselves plenty of amusement, which surely is the reason for any hobby?



FACING PAGE:  
 TOP LEFT: Bob Mills at Chathill.  
 TOP RIGHT: One of the line's treasured relics, a genuine N.E.R. coat of arms.  
 BOTTOM: Bill Tate and John Tate at Chathill.  
 THIS PAGE:  
 TOP: "Samuel Pepys" running round N.S.R. train at Chathill.  
 CENTRE: Prototype block instruments at Chathill.  
 BOTTOM: Maurice Brundrett inspects the prototype North Sunderland timetable, another prized relic.

