

YDSME Club's Early History

This hand written account of the Societies beginnings was copied from Mr. W Shearman's notebook. He was a founding member of the Society in 1929.

1923 A letter by Mr. H.P. Jackson was published in the Model Engineer, suggesting the formation of a Model Engineering Club in York and asking potential members to get in touch with him. However, nothing came of that early venture.

1928-1929 In the years up to 1929 a group of Model Power boat enthusiasts began to meet by the lake in Rowntree Park, Clementhorpe, York where there were also a number of Model Yachtsmen sailing models regularly.

At that time Mr. Jackson had a shop in Micklegate, which catered to modelers needs and many small boys, including yours truly had feasted his eyes on the display of locomotives from 1-1/4 to 7-1/4 gauge. Models of 3-1/2 gauge were to be seen running round a circle of rails only 5 feet in diameter.

During the summer of 1929 feelers had been put out by the Powerboat men and it was concluded that the time was ripe to try and form a Model Society. So early in September an advert was put in the Yorkshire Evening Press calling a meeting of interested people at Mr. Jackson's house in Micklegate. Date 15th September 1929. 36 people attended and "The York City and District Society of Model Engineers and Experimental Engineers" was born.

The next meeting was held in a room off Pavement where a number of models were shown and the aims and rules of the Society were defined. Subs were fixed at – Entrance fee 1 shilling and 6 pence Annual subs at 2 shillings and 6 pence. Under 18's half of the above. Subsequent meetings were held for a time at the "Pack Horse Hotel" Micklegate. It was here that the first Live Steam Night was held when Mr. Jackson's 2-inch gauge class R1 4-4-0 ran on a roller stand. Mr. Lamkinson's flask plant for his speed boat "Gee Up" kicked up a terrific din, whilst the cylinder head glowed a dull red from the heat of the superheater steam.

Early in 1930 it was resolved to open a club workshop. Premises were found at "Barton Yard" in Marygate at 6 shillings a week. This was a timber built lean to structure (Believed to be a former joiner's shop) about 40ft by 20 ft. Lit by gas and heated by a large slow combustion stove over 2 ft diameter. Windows ran full length of the lower wall and entrance wall. A substantial bench ran the whole length of the window wall with a number of drawers underneath. Several members gave loans to finance this venture and acquire some tools.

A 3-1/2inch flatbed "Drummond" lathe (center leadscrew) treadle drive by a 5/16 gut belt, a 4-inch S.C. Chuck was fitted. A 3-1/2inch vice and hand grinder, hand drill and files were installed. Mr. Tomkinson (member) loaned a bench planer and Mr. Barnes a V.C.F Stuart steel boiler 12-inch diameter by 24 inch high. To pay the

running cost of this workshop it was agreed members paid 1 shilling per month and anyone using the workshop put in 6 pence in a box at the end of the bench. Coke for the stove was laboriously hauled from Foss Bank by Fred Fisher on his bike. Small quantities of anthracite for the boiler were acquired in various, sometimes devious ways.

By 1931 it was soon realized that the workshop was not being used as fully as intended especially during the winter of 1930-1931 and the gas supply was being run at a loss. The members were loath to venture across the town in bad weather to do small jobs which could easily be done at home. In January 1931 the treasurer reported a balance in hand of only 2 shillings and subscriptions to date were insufficient to pay the rent. The membership had dropped to 12 adults and 3 juniors. A search was therefore started for a smaller workshop at a lower rental.

A suitable place was located at the rear of 51 Gillygate at 2 shillings and 6 pence per week and the move was on. The first meeting being held there on March 25th. In April it was resolved to start the construction of a Club Locomotive to a design by H.P. Jackson at a cost of about £4 The object of this being to stimulate interest in and use the workshop. In July the subscription rates were reviewed and the new rates became –

Entrance Fee 5 shillings - Annual Subs up to 5 miles of York 26 shillings – 5-10 miles from York 13 shillings – Over 10 miles 6 shillings and 6 pence.

By October it became apparent that a Society workshop was a white elephant. Largely due to members having built up their own workshops and the membership had dropped very low. (Very High Unemployment in 1931) It was decided therefore to sell up the workshop and revert to monthly meetings only.

A meeting was held early January 1932 in the “Bay Horse Hotel”, Monkbar, at which 8 members and 2 visitors were present. The Societies assets after repaying loans and other small debts were £1-12 shillings. At the February meeting subscriptions were adjusted again to become – Entry Fee 1 shilling and 6 pence Subs 2 shillings and 6 pence Juniors 1 shilling 3 pence. Members outside York Entry 6 pence Subs 1 shilling 3 pence.

It was resolved to carry on with the 0-6-0 3-1/2inch gauge tank loco. Mr. Jackson to keep members supplied with drawings as required. In September of that year Mr. Jackson moved to Southall, London to start the J.G Standard parts firm, and the club loco went there by mistake. Mr. Jackson asked if the Society wished to sell the loco and for how much. It was resolved to let it go at cost, i.e., 35 shillings. The cash was never remitted and Mr. Jackson returned to York in November 1934 and the loco came back to the Society.

1937 Proposed model loco track discussed. Estimated rent for land was £5 per annum. Cost of track around £8 - 5/16 square black steel rail. Interested members to pay 6 pence per week until capital was raised, then adjustment made to cover rent and maintenance.

In October a small cup presented by Mr. F.J. Johnson, of Mansfield, Notts was received from his daughter who was elected to Honorary Member. Rules for the cup:
- Perpetual Trophy to be awarded for best piece of work in the proceeding 12 months. Cup to be held for 1 year.

1938-39 In April contact was made to L.N.E.R. at York reference land for loco track. This came to nothing. In August the venue for Rowntree's Dining Block, Haxby Road, is free of Fees. Societies finances stood at £1-7shillings-3 pence and track fund of 10 Guineas. Meetings continued to be held at Rowntree's though after the outbreak of war the meetings were virtually blacked out, and gatherings resumed at the "Bay Horse Hotel" Here the booking was not on a very permanent basis and often we had to meet in the passage and were gradually squeezed out into the yard.

1940 In September the secretary had to leave to serve in the Forces and Mr. Jackson was elected Honorary Secretary. No records or minutes were kept during the war years.

1946 The meeting venue had by now been arranged in No.9 room at the Coop Premises in Railway Street. Mr., Shearman resumed as secretary. It was resolved to raise subs to 5 shillings -Juniors to remain at 1 shilling 3 pence. Pensioners and those in genuine financial difficulties to pay reduced subs of 2 shillings and 6 pence. About this time, it was resolved to delete the word "Experimental" from the societies name.

A site for a re-designed locomotive track was taken on rental. This was situated off Stockton Lane. At May meeting arrangements were made for members to pay into a track fund what they could afford instead of a fixed amount. Also decided to buy a Rail Container at £2 for use on track site.

A Quantity of steel for about 150 ft of straight track had been acquired. Mr. P Rosewarner obtained permission from the Shed Master at York Loco for machining to be done by members in the shed workshop. Mr. Rosewarner also arranged for storage of metal in the shed and for members to work on Saturday afternoons.

Mr. Rosewarner offered to lend the society £50 free of interest if needed to complete the track. Repayment to be from funds and later from public running days. July the Shed Master has reluctantly to stop work on the track until our arrangement is put on an official footing.

September The Treasurer was given the sack for inattention to duty and failing to report financial position regularly.

The G.M.E. of L.N.E.R. recommends York Carriage works take over the manufacture of track parts. Materials could be bought off the railway company if desired. This was wholeheartedly accepted. As Steel was still rationed it was difficult to come by but an offer by Dunlop & Rankin to supply 1 ton of 2" X ¼" flat was taken up on a loan from Mr. Jackson. About a month after delivery a permit had to be filled in and signed. The necessary jigs for rail drilling were made up and sent to Carriage works together with metal and drawings. The carriage works began making track on April 1947.

July 1948 A setback occurred when the track site was sold and the new owner wanted to plough up the field. All the track had been delivered and assembled. Through Mr. Sedman, the container with all the track packed inside was placed in Railway goods yard until a new site could be found. Subs raised to 12 shillings and 6 pence, juniors 2 shillings 6 pence.

March-April 1949 Negotiations afoot for track site at rear of Bishopthorpe W.M. Club. Bishopthorpe site acquired from 1st April at £3 per year. This amounted to only an 8ft strip around the perimeter of the Orchard. Track and container were delivered to the site by the generosity of Mr. Johnson and placed at his garage next door. Track erected and running commenced.

1950 - The first exhibition to celebrate 21 years continuous existence was held in St. Sampson's Hall, Church Street. This show made a net profit of £47-11-2. During the summer, pigs had been introduced to the track center and in due course the stench became unbearable. The Social Club were approached with a view to an abatement of the nuisance. The outcome of this was the Society taking over the whole site for £8 per year and taking the fruit crop as well from 1st April 1951.

During the summer of 1955 the club hut was erected on the site. This was built by Mr. Ernest. The Timber construction being from Ex. Railway Stock.

In November 1960, a Mr. Fossett offered to present the Society with an 8-inch Gauge 4-4-0 Locomotive and Tender together with 2 passenger trucks and a length of track. This was an unconditional offer so it was accepted.

In 1961 it had become increasingly apparent the 8-inch Gauge loco could not be put to full use owing to the lack of space at Bishopthorpe, and in December 1961 it was suggested the loco etc. should be sold and an endeavor to obtain a good 5-inch gauge acquired. In December Mr. Fossett was approached for permission to sell or exchange the Model for a 5-inch gauge loco.

In reply to our letter Mr. Fossett said the loco should go to a club like ours and should be used occasionally for the furtherance of some charity. If it were sold the money to go to some Charitable Institution. It was resolved that as the gift had not conditions attached to it, the above letter be ignored. The Secretary was to write to Model Engineer in an endeavor to contact a club who would exchange 8-inch loco for a 5-inch loco, with cash adjustment if required.

1962 – One enquiry had been received but no sale resulted. After some discussion it was resolved that an asking price of £350 be made. In February of 1963 a Mr. Phipps Walker of Canada, offered to exchange a 5-inch gauge Canadian National Railroad 5700 class loco for our 8-inch loco. He offered to bring his model along when he was to visit England in April. He was requested to do this. During March enquires were made regarding costs of transport of Model and possible customs duties charges. Freight to Liverpool approx. £40. That November M. Phipps Walker wrote to say he had sold his loco but was still interested in buying our 8-inch gauge and asking what price we were asking. After discussion it was resolved to ask for £200.

1964 – Quotations for packing and delivery to Manchester docks of our 8-inch loco to be made of James Bowen and Sons. In February a cheque was received from Mr. Walker as this was not dated it was resolved the loco remain at Bishopthorpe until the cheque was cleared. The 8-inch loco was eventually dispatched to Canada in early 1965.

During 1964 Mr. Jeff Johnson retired from the garage next door to the track and the new owner was not very amicable to the Society so a change of site for the track was sought.

1965 – 6th March an offer received of a 5-inch gauge “Speedy” (LBSC) at £160.00 No action was taken. 18th April two station seats were obtained at 30 shillings each. 31st October a gas oven was purchased for £2-10-0. At the AGM a model, in bronze of a Mounted Cannon, a gift from Mr. Walker, Canada was accepted.

1966 – In January a document was received from Mr. Walker, Canada, stating that The York S.M.E. had been registered as a member of The Limestone City & Centennial Park Steam Railway Company of Canada with a small share in the company.

1967 – In January Mr. Douglas mentioned that his firm “Wm Birch and Sons had acquired a large site near Moor Lane Bridge, Dringhouses and that part of it might be a suitable alternative to Bishopthorpe. Mr. Birch indicated that he was willing, if need arose, to assist in finding a new site and would contact the Planning Authority to ascertain their reaction to the possibility of using Moor Lane Site for our purpose.

1969 – By February applications to Planning Authority by Messer’s Birch had been approved with some provisions. Flush Toilets available to the public to be provided. A close bordered fence to be placed alongside the B.R. Line. The club hut could only be regarded as temporary. The project must conform to development plans, i.e. A Public Open Park. An annual rent of £10 would be payable to Messrs. Birch and Sons Ltd. These conditions were accepted and it was resolved to move lock stock and barrel to Moor Lane as soon as possible.

During March, after an approach to B.R. a letter was received offering assistance with the fence alongside the railway, the outcome being the Society erected the fence from materials supplied by B.R. The new site by this time had been stripped of debris ready for filling and levelling ready for track erection.

At a meeting held at Moor Lane on Sunday 5th May, the feeling was expressed by a few members who had spent a lot of time and effort on the project, who felt that as the support they were receiving from other members had dwindled so low, they were wasting their time proceeding when if they withdrew the work would fold up, thus no track and no Society. After a great deal of discussion, it was resolved to carry on. Eventually the track was completed and an official opening date was agreed as 28th September 1968. Mr. J.P. Birch, J.P. being invited to perform this function.

1970 – early in 1970 about 15 tons of rubble were obtained for surfacing of the car park. To ease the work a brick crusher was hired and a good deal of sweaty and

tiring work ensued to get the materials levelled and a roller was hired to compact the surface.

In 1971 a complaint was received regarding the access road from Moor Lane, passing the cottages. The Society was at one time asked to contribute the cost of re-surfacing. After many negotiations amongst the interested parties, it was finally resolved that the responsibility for the road lay with the City Council, who eventually did the necessary work.

The erection of roofs over the station and steaming bay were carried out between 1970 and 1974, the exact dates of which are not recorded. The coloured light signals were installed during 1981 and 1982.

This is the last entry in Mr. Shearman's notebook.

It is a fascinating and interesting account of how and why the current YDSME came into existence. Luckily, Mr. Shearman's notebook survived these past 90+ years in a dusty box hidden from view. It recently (2022) re-surfaced as the clubhouse was being organized for a more comfortable environment for our members.