

# Why small and old is the best for eight-year-old Tommy

The Middleton Railway's annual Model Railway Exhibition again gathered together some impressive layouts in a multitude of gauges. **Sally Clifford went along.**

BASED in the 1950s, the model railway layout of a fictional Welsh village is more than a figment of its young creator's imagination.

The decade is an unfamiliar era for eight-year-old Tommy Morley, yet with the help of his proud dad, Peter, they have created an eye-catching layout together.

"It is entirely fictitious, entirely from Tommy's brain," said Peter, proudly.

Tommy is, quite possibly, one of the youngest exhibitors in the model railway community – certainly so at the Middleton Railway's annual Model Railway Exhibition on June 15/16, when we met. To conceive the idea for such an impressive layout – never mind bringing it to reality – is awe-inspiring.

Among the rolling stock trundling around this picturesque 5.5ft by 3.5ft layout with its lifelike buildings and odd car parked up on the sidelines for detailed effect is Tommy's personalised Peco van, signwritten with his name.

Disappearing and reappearing through the tunnel, the locomotives in action cut through the imaginary landscape painstakingly brought to life by Tommy and his dad.

It is their Oxforth East layout's second outing to the Middleton – and the culmination of a six-month labour of love.

## Steam inspiration

Other than owning a train set when he was a child, Peter had no prior knowledge when it came to building a model railway – proving what can be achieved when you put your mind to the task.

"I am learning on the fly. Tommy is the train enthusiast; I am just the

chauffeur, all learnt on YouTube," he said.

Tommy's interest in trains developed from a wooden railway at playgroup and Thomas the Tank Engine tales.

Explaining the inspiration behind the layout, Peter said that Tommy was taken by the idea of having narrow gauge trains running alongside standard gauge.

"And, since Wales seems to be the spiritual home of narrow gauge, that was why he chose Wales. The 1950s era simply comes from the fact that he favours steam engines.

"He also likes heritage diesels but isn't over-bothered about modern trains."

Peter explained the standard gauge locomotives on Oxforth East are a 3F 'Jinty', a Webb coal tank and a Beattie well tank, while the narrow gauge boasts two Hunslet quarry locomotives, a large England and a pair that are 3D-printed kits.

## 5in ambitions

Tommy was seven when they embarked on their scratch-build and since its completion, they have been able to stand back with great satisfaction as visitors admire this wonderful collaboration, which is a prime example of a traditional interest being passed on.

"From the start, I had to learn a lot so I could answer all the questions,"

said Peter, "and we have been to quite a few of the heritage railways in North Wales."

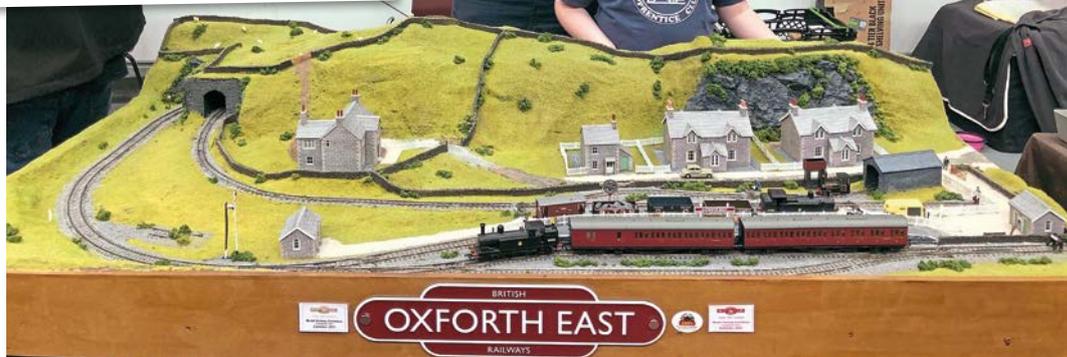
For Tommy, building is the fun part – the pair are currently in the throes of creating a 5in gauge Class 24 battery-powered locomotive based on a diesel from the 1960s and 1970s.

Tommy's ambition is to build a 5in gauge steam locomotive. "It's become our life," said Peter. "Through Tommy we are now members of a model engineering society and spend most weekends doing something train-related – either model, miniature or heritage."

Another impressive layout was Graham Burnley's T gauge 1:450 scale model based on Salts Mill in



**Teamwork: Peter Morley and his son Tommy with their impressive Oxforth East layout at Middleton Railway's annual Model Railway Exhibition. SALLY CLIFFORD**  
Inset: Hands-on: Tommy at work on his layout. PETER MORLEY



**Graham Burnley's impressive Salts Mill T gauge layout. SALLY CLIFFORD**

**Right: Members of Harrogate Model Railway Group with their Knaresborough layout.**  
SALLY CLIFFORD

**Below: Visitors flock to the Middleton Railway's annual Model Railway Exhibition.** IAN DOBSON



**Left: Knaresborough's iconic viaduct captured with a Class 110 two-car DMU crossing it.** SALLY CLIFFORD

**Below: Ian Dobson, manager of the Middleton Railway exhibition.** SALLY CLIFFORD



the philanthropic businessman Sir Titus Salt's model village Saltaire, a designated World Heritage Site in West Yorkshire.

Based on the 2018 era onwards, Graham began the layout – which also features Saltaire station following the tracks towards Shipley – in 2022. It was completed in 2023. The rolling stock features a Class 66 with hoppers, heritage steam and other diesels.

### Top-class

Graham previously appeared in *Heritage Railway* with his impressive T gauge layout of Ribbleshead Viaduct, which won Best in Show at the Loughborough Railway Exhibition in 2023.

Also gaining visitor attention in Middleton Railway's Display Hall, home to some of the engines built by Leeds' notable locomotive builders, Hudswell Clarke and Hunslet, is Harrogate Model Railway Group's impressive Knaresborough layout. Based on how the station looked

in the 1950s and 1960s during the demise of steam and the introduction of diesels, the mainly scratch-built model also features the impressive Knaresborough viaduct, where a selection of trains, among them BR J27 No. 65837 and its rake of maroon livery carriages, trundle through the impressive scenery stretching from the station, surrounded by terraced properties and colourful gardens fashioned as they would have been in that period. "It's telling a story," said Kim Dye, a member of HMRG with her husband Clem.

For fans of full-sized locomotives, the event also offered the opportunity to ride on Manning-Wardle 0-6-0ST No. 1210 *Sir Berkeley* and a footplate experience on Hudswell-Clarke 0-6-0DM D1373 of 1966 *Mersey Docks and Harbour Board No. 45*.

Running the footplate experiences were Middleton Railway's chief electrical engineer, Richard Pike, and volunteer Robert Taggart. Richard said that the footplate experience

began a decade ago and is engaging for those who participate as it gives them the opportunity to operate the diesel – generally used as a service train and shunter – a short distance up and down the yard under dual control. The exhibition is one of the biggest calendar events at the world's oldest continuously working railway.

### 'Happy event'

Organised by Ian Dobson, exhibition manager and former Middleton Railway chairman, whose wife Gill helps to cater for this special occasion, the event launched in 2007 and is a resounding success for the Leeds-based railway.

Ian said: "While it was a lot of hard work, there's a great team at Middleton who always pull out all the stops over three days to deliver an event that exhibitors, traders and visitors enjoy – which is why I do it!"

Commercial manager Janet Auckland added: "It is always a happy event, and we know Ian does a good job." 



**In the driving seat of Hudswell-Clarke 0-6-0DM D1373 of 1966 *Mersey Docks and Harbour Board No. 45* were Richard Pike and Robert Taggart, who ran the footplate experiences.** SALLY CLIFFORD