

North East London Meccano Club

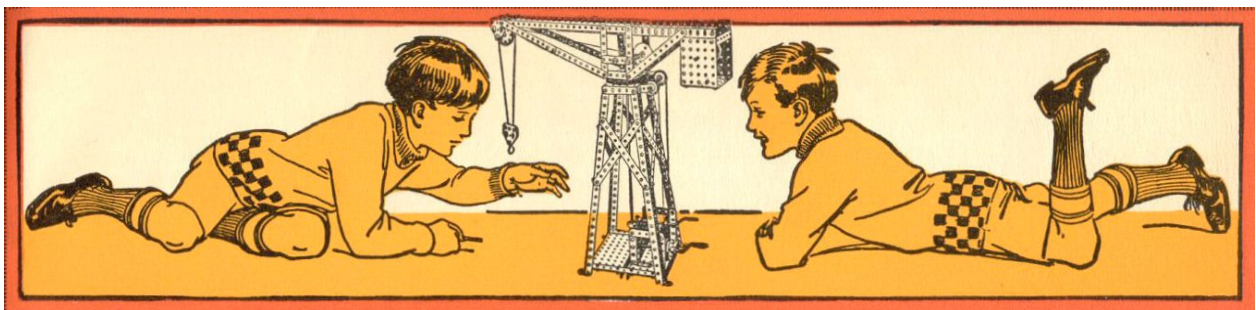
Newsletter - April 2005

**The 66th meeting of the North East London Meccano Club will take place on
Saturday 7th May 2005 at Hainault Baptist Church Hall, Franklyn Gardens,
Hainault, Essex**

The doors will open at 11 a.m. for setting up the meeting. Help is needed with moving the tables, and also with clearing away at the end of the meeting. All members and their guests will be very welcome.

In this Newsletter . . .

Model report from the February meeting
Random jottings of a new Secretary, by Mike Tebbutt
Meccano restoration, by Allen Berman



CLUB NEWS

You will no doubt have noticed that this issue of the newsletter is in colour! Allen Berman has kindly agreed to print this and future issues in colour but don't worry, your subscription will not be going up as a result. We are all grateful to Allen for enabling us to brighten up the newsletter in this way, which must surely make our subscriptions the best value of any UK Meccano club.

We welcome several new members to the club this year, especially Colin Smith from Arizona — hope to see you at one of our meetings, Colin!

Dave Taylor has confirmed that this year's Exhibition will be at the Dunmow Day Centre 10am-5pm on Sunday 11th September, with setting up on the Friday evening. A booking form is enclosed, and be sure to get your request in early because of limited space at the venue.

Thanks to Simon Greatrex and Brian Maunder for providing the refreshments at the February meeting.

MODEL REPORT - 12 February 2005

Brian Elvidge

Brian brought three models: Roundabout (SML 8) rebuilt using a replica geared roller bearing, driven by an E20R; battery-powered car, rebuilt from a previous model using dual power sources with a differential from Paul Joachim's "Everything Automotive" (MW Models); a propeller-powered three-wheel car from the 10-model Motion set of 1999-2001.

Tony Parmee

No. 10 set Railway Crane, first shown last December but with some improvements. A well at the end of the Match Truck accommodates the hook pulley block, which hangs just clear of the track; rollers (worms) now support the jib when on the cradle, allowing free movement during travel. Both improvements were inspired by Terry Bullingham's smaller scale version. Tony has also added a Safe Working Load gauge on the side of the jib; all improvements are still within the limits of the No. 10 set.

David Smithers

In response to the SELMC Secretary's challenge to build a model using as many as you like of just one part (plus nuts and bolts), David's railway bridge was built from 236 5 1/2" strips, with a Gauge O loco and wagons to complete the realism.

Chris Warrell

Two miniature versions of well-known models. A 1/5 scale version of the 1930s Super Model no. 35 Automatic Grabbing Crane, with a hook instead of a grab, using the same built-up ball race as in Chris's mini block setting crane but with a smaller

tower, just 2" square; all movements are hand operated. Also a mini Stiff Leg Derrick: a 1/4 scale version of the 1930s Super Model no. 6.

Roger Little

An intriguing Marble Run Clock; every time a marble reaches the end of the run an electrical contact is made for 5 seconds, and this interval is used for the timekeeping.

Kevin Southgate

Funicular Railway from the 1963 4/5/6 manual, with a few modifications, and driven by a clockwork motor.

Dennis Backler

The 1/10 scale model of the steam engine "Caroline" is well under way: the steam chest is complete and the valve gear is still under construction.

Geoff Carter

Concorde, the Empire State Building and a Radio-Controlled Car, all from new sets acquired at Christmas! Geoff also showed a 1930 000A set: these were only available to special order from the factory — are there any others still in existence?

Peter Clay

A factory-built Calais motorcycle; a mortar mixer from a 1935 MM powered by a modern Calais motor; caterpillar tractor powered by a magic motor and using sprocket chain as tracks; an overland vehicle from 1990s Calais set.

Geoff Hall

Geoff brought his loco “Hereward the Wake”, possibly for its last showing before the parts are recycled!

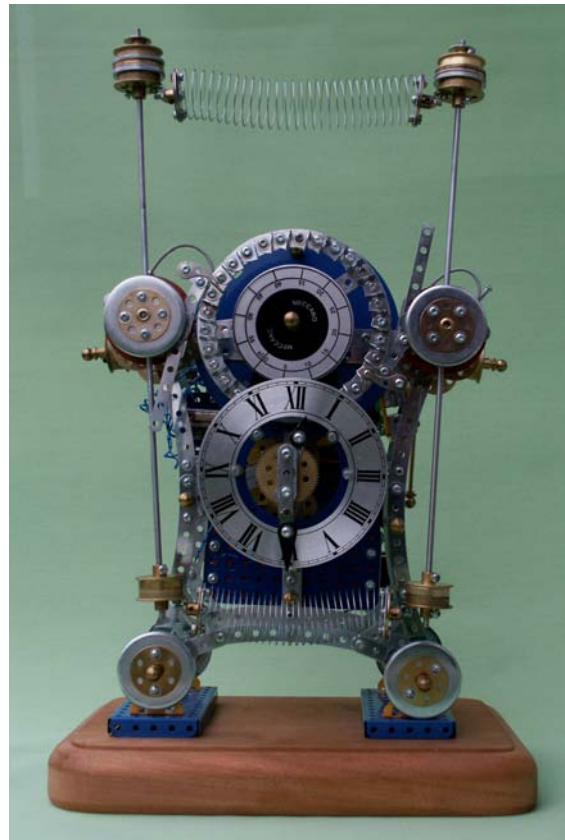
Ivor Ellard

A scale model Grader with 4-wheel drive, steering, blade and rake control; the model is powerful enough to grade soft sand.

Colin Davies

A model inspired by John Harrison’s 1735 H1 Marine Chronometer, and based on Michael Adler’s Modelplan 139 of the Sinclair Harding chronometer. Colin has made various modifications including adding springs at the top and bottom of the swinging arms, just as in Harrison’s original H1 which can be seen at the Greenwich Maritime Museum.

Eddie Oatley brought a display of Meccano literature and other books; **Geoff Wright** had a display of literature for sale, and **Dave Taylor** managed to persuade most of us to part with our pocket-money in exchange for his ever-growing range of spare parts.



Harrison H1 chronometer by Colin Davies

RANDOM JOTTINGS OR RAMBLING THOUGHTS OF A NEW SECRETARY (OR, MAKE THE MOST OF IT BECAUSE IT MAY BE ALL YOU GET)

by Mike Tebbutt

It has been suggested by some malevolent pixie that it might be a good idea if I said a few words to you in order that I might introduce myself. The fewer the better I hear you say, and I totally agree. Quite honestly, I don't know what to say or what is expected. As my old acquaintance, Brendan Behan used to say, “just say hello and have a drink with the man.” The implication being that all would follow and fall into place naturally. So let's imagine we are in some cosy four-ale bar for a few minutes.

I returned to Meccano through Hornby Dublo, which in itself I had taken up again after the usual period of absence and for the usual reasons. It was in the HRCA magazine that I saw the NELMC Exhibition at Chappel advertised and to be quite honest we turned up there because it was a nice day and we fancied a day out to look at some railway layouts. Being in one of our favourite parts of the country was an added incentive.

In actual fact, Meccano was a bit of a frustrating disappointment to me as a boy, and I don't suppose that I was alone in feeling that way. One was always haunted by those huge cranes on the covers of the instruction manuals, but could never afford enough parts to build anything worthwhile. All available pennies, which weren't many in those days, were spent on my first love, Hornby Dublo, when it was obtainable. Our local supplier, E. G. Hatch of Loughton High Road ran a rationing system according to what he could get delivered. This was in 1948 when industry was slowly attempting to get back into peacetime production. Word would get around that old Hatch had a delivery and every schoolboy for miles around would gather there with hard-saved pocket money and paper-round earnings. Each had the mistaken impression that he would be able to “pick and choose” and perhaps come away with those vital missing parts for the completion of the current construction. Oh, if only! The first half dozen or so in the queue might have fared reasonably well but, in reality, you got what you were given, which was what the man had. The disappointing alternative was to go away to fight another day or spend your readies (by now burning a large hole in your pocket) elsewhere. You may have been seeking a couple of girders but come away with a Dinky or length of railway track. Times were tough for Binns Road devotees! Thus one soon saw the hopelessness of the construction situation and went back to wooden swords and tree climbing.

I did get a sporadic supply of Meccano from an unusual source as it happens but, instead of being a welcome pleasure, it put me off even more. My Dad had become friendly with several Belgian families at the end of WW II. I think it was something to do with the fact that when he was wounded after D-Day, he was put in charge of a bunch of other wounded squaddies and some German POWs. He was then given the task of running a large supply depot just inside the Belgian border with France. Evidently this was stocked with an Aladdin's Cave of items that might be required by a modern army at war. The trouble was that the push through Europe by-passed them and they were gradually forgotten about, the advancing allies using more convenient depots nearer to the front it seems. Our intrepid lads couldn't allow all that food etc. to go to waste with people outside going hungry, could they? Anyway, that's how I got my Meccano — presents from a grateful Belgian population! The trouble was, it was all in blue and gold!! Cranes and things weren't painted blue and gold, not that I had ever seen anyway! The world I grew up in was grey, smoke-stained, rust-coloured and khaki. Later, most of the blue and gold was swapped for battered Hornby Dublo. Today I love those colours on certain models. How one's tastes change!

To make a long story even longer, what we saw at Chappel, bowled the three of us over. Dave Taylor's Dunmow Flyer, which we do not see enough of, George Foard & John Cowdery's micro models and poor old Cyril Huggins' Jazz Band to name but a few models. Not exactly a St. Paul and Damascus but a conversion of some sort occurred. I might explain here that in the past, Andrea and I had done a bit of antique dealing in the big London antique markets and from this had developed a love of toys (never really grew up I hear you say) and especially automata. So, what better than to construct one's own, out of Meccano? Anyway, we purchased a small boxed set for Jessie from Dave and toddled off to the restaurant car for refreshments, Jess clutching her box and eager to make a start on it. It was there that we fell into conversation with Cyril and chums. We asked about other exhibitions and were told that the best thing to do was to turn up at their next meeting, which we did. The rest, as they say, is history.

I'm sorry to say that the attraction has persisted, cemented by the friendliness and helpfulness of the membership as much as the Meccano itself. As with many of you, we now belong to a couple of other clubs, where we often see NELMC faces, giving the whole thing a more "at ease" feeling, it's a bit like putting on a comfortable old sweater. However, I always think of NELMC as "home base" and the best. We, as a family, are into Meccano for fun and relaxation. I don't think that we shall ever aspire to any great works of engineering, but that does not mean that we will not have a go some day or that we cannot appreciate the wonderful works of others, we just have a lot of catching up to do. At the moment we are happy to fill the "fun and simplicity" niche. What we do want to construct one day is a good ping-pong ball machine, or so Andrea says! In the same way we do not want to get involved in the "complementary parts" argument that seems to be casting a divisive wedge between some advocates of the hobby (in other clubs I might add, not having come across the problem in ours). I must admit that at home we have adapted, mangled and used parts from other systems, as well as fabrications from India and Thanet in order to get out of tight corners and to create a reasonable model. And, more importantly of course, to create one that works. Of course there is a place for Tradition and Purism but it should not develop into Puritanism.

Red and green looks great, in my eyes at least, on some of those old and simple models from the past. It always delights me to see these antiques at exhibitions amongst the gleaming nickel technocrats of the more modern Meccano. What if they are made of slightly faded, wrinkled or rusty parts? That's called character and charm.

Everything in Meccano has a place, that's the beauty of the system. Everyone can find a niche for their own speciality if they want or otherwise can go along the mainstream path. Here I should like to express my sad regrets at the passing of Gordon Leavis. It is a loss to us all. I did not know him very well, if at all really, but I do know that, in his own way, he was pushing our hobby forward. This is something it needs to survive the onslaughts of other systems and the indifferent sales promotion on the part of Meccano's ownership. I had several conversations with Gordon on the subject of his introduction of radio control to his models, which is something I would dearly like to get to grips with. He was able to give me a great deal of advice and subsequently, I have adapted my Renault F1 with that view in mind.

Why did I volunteer to become your Hon Sec? I don't know, I obviously haven't got enough to do or am soft in the head perhaps. Basically it was because nobody else volunteered. I have worked on committees and been club secretaries etc. in the past so I know how arduous and frustrating the job can be (not this one I hope). I put it to the committee through David that I would stand for one year only if nobody else volunteered and that a lack of offers might put our club in danger. Obviously they saw a danger, and I was asked. A club needs two things to exist, a viable membership plus officers. Without either, it cannot function. As I see it, this is a nice and friendly club, and one of the more successful ones around. We certainly have more meetings than any other, probably more members, and active ones at that. We also run one of the better exhibitions. It would be a great pity and loss to the Meccano world if anything happened to our club. I was once Secretary of a Sea Angling Club, which I very reluctantly (I had been a founder member ten years previously) had to "wind-up" with something in excess of 130 active members. The whole thing fell apart simply because of a lack of officers and

the membership's failure to understand that it could happen. Sorry about the lecture, but it needs to be thought about!

Some of you have been somewhat embarrassed and surprised in the past when commenting to my wife, Andrea about her change of hair-style. So this is really for the benefit of the others. There is no need to feel you have put your foot in anything. The fact is that the change from her long, light brown hair was not by intention. What you saw for a few months after Christmas 2003 was a wig. She contracted cancer in the lymphatic system through the tonsils and was having chemotherapy from October until Easter 2004. The busby she has grown since is all her own. Evidently to return darker and curly is quite usual. If they could only isolate and bottle the ingredient in the 'chemo' that is responsible for such luxuriant growth, they would make a fortune from the likes of me! No, there is nothing to be embarrassed about, we are quite happy to talk about it now that the big scare is over. If any of you has any anxieties on the same score or needs reassurance, then don't be backwards in coming forward. We have been there and know a little of what it's about and we might be able to help in our own small way.

Before I close, I would just like to congratulate one of our members, Colin Davies on getting his model of Trevithick's 1804 locomotive put on the reverse side of the new £2 coin. Well done Colin - what a coup! Shame about the flywheel though: when did it fall off?

There, that wasn't too bad was it?

MECCANO RESTORATION *by Allen Berman*

When I built the SM4 Giant Block Setting Crane, shown at the NELMC last December, I was asked many times about my methods of Meccano restoration. So, by popular demand, here is the story...

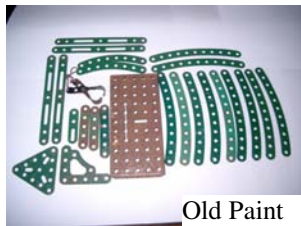
Objective:-

Nothing in my Meccano stock that is :-

- Bent
- Rusty
- Scratched
- Odd colours
- Any combination of above.

Stage 1 - Sort items into:-

- Older painted colours (reds, greens, yellows, golds, blues (cross hatch))
- Zinc-plated
- Newer painted colours, bright yellow, blue, white, black etc.



Note. Older nickel-plated parts are not covered in this article as I have not found a chemical way of removing nickel plating yet; nor is brass because I have not found a chemical way of removing tarnish yet.

Stage 2 - Getting rid of old paint

Suitable for all older paints (Binns Road products). Soak in caustic soda (B&Q 1kg bottle of granules costs about £3.00). Mix 3 heaped capfuls in about 3 litres of hot water from your hot tap. I use an old turkey roasting dish (ATWF). Stir for a few seconds to ensure that the granules are dissolved (wear rubber gloves) and place items to be stripped in the solution. I use some chicken wire as a basket to make it easier to remove the stripped Meccano at the end of the soak period. Leave for about 2 hours and gently agitate with an old washing up brush (ATWF). Remove from the solution and place in an old plastic bucket (ATWF) of cold water to wash off the caustic soda. The items should now be bare metal, so it is important to dry them thoroughly. If you have very long parts that will not fit into a turkey tin, such as 18 ½ and 24 ½ inch girders, the following suggestion works well. Visit a B&Q and buy a 2m length of square guttering, along with 2 end caps. Cut the guttering to the desired length and fit the end caps. This type of plastic is not damaged by the caustic soda and can be used for both paint stripping and washing the items afterwards.

You can reuse the caustic solution several times, but each time will take a little longer. Since caustic soda is sold as a drain cleaner, I pour the old stuff away down a toilet. Don't use it for stripping paint from alloy parts, it attacks the aluminium (as I found to my cost, when restoring a flywheel from a Mamod steam engine!).



Stage 2a - Getting rid of newer paint

Newer paints are not affected by caustic soda, so commercial paint stripper is used, such as B&Q Paint and Varnish Remover (something based on Dichloromethane and Methanol). Wear rubber gloves and old clothes. The instruction say dab the items to be stripped and keep them from drying out. This is too fiddly for small pieces, so I pour some of the paint stripper into an old glass jar and just soak the parts in the gel for an hour. The paint usually just falls off. I retrieve the parts with a magnet on a bit of string and wash them in cold water before drying. The paint stripper can be used again and again, but you need to get rid of the resulting paint flotsam by using an old 4" strainer (ATWF). Follow the makers' instructions for disposal of the stripper when you have finished using it.

Stage 3 - Getting rid of old Zinc-plate

Old zinc-plated parts that have zinc rot can be stripped ready for painting by the following method. Zinc will dissolve in most mild acids. My preference is to use a mild solution of Spirits of Salts (sold in most hardware stores as a strong lime scale remover, about £3.50 for a bottle). You need to dilute this; I use one part spirits of salts to five parts water. This stuff is very strong and the following precautions should be taken:

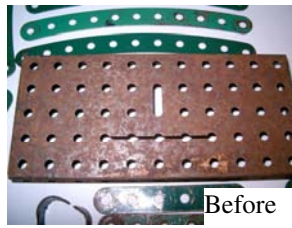
- Only use it outdoors
- Don't breathe the fumes
- Wear rubber gloves and eye protection
- Pour the acid into the water (not the other way round, remember your chemistry lessons at school)
- Wear old clothes
- If you splash any of the solution on your clothes or skin, wash it off at once with cold water

Having said all of the above (and probably scared you off using this stuff), it is a common household cleaner for removing lime scale from toilets etc. It is also used by builders for dissolving dried concrete and mortar from the face of bricks and for cleaning tools. I usually keep a solution of this stuff in an old glass jar (clearly labelled), it can be used over and over again. Since Spirits of Salts is sold as a toilet lime-scale remover, I pour the old stuff down the toilet when it is no longer required. Leave the zinc parts for a few hours and agitate occasionally. Remove the items from the solution and wash thoroughly in the plastic bucket of clean water. I said before that any acid will do, I have used vinegar (ATWF), but it takes 2 or 3 days to do the job. Probably best not to use it on your fish and chips afterwards though!



Stage 4 - Getting rid of Rust

You now have the parts that were painted or zinc-plated, back to bare metal, but they still might be rusty and/or bent. The next stage is to chemically remove any rust. I use Phosphoric Acid. This is sold by Machine Mart in 1 litre bottles as rust remover (about £3.50 per bottle). It can be used over and over again and is very effective. Pour the rust remover in a shallow container (plastic trays from supermarket meat work well, check there are no holes in it first), and soak all of the bare metal Meccano bits for a couple of hours, agitate occasionally. Once again, wash thoroughly in water. Using a magnet on a bit of string to pick up the items and dunk then in the water works well. Dry the items individually or with an old hair drier (ATWF).



Stage 5 - Metal Bashing

The final stage of preparation before repainting is straightening any bent or dented bits. My method of doing this is to use a lump of metal (fixed in a vice or Workmate) as an anvil and a small hammer to gently persuade the Meccano back into shape.

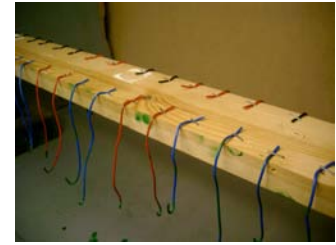


Stage 6 - Painting

Painting is a matter of personal preference. It depends what you want to do with the Meccano. If you are looking to have authentic colours and restore a collectable set, the method I use is not suitable. I wanted my Meccano collection to be robust, but easy to maintain. I chose to use Humbrol model gloss enamel for several reasons: -

- It is widely available from most toy and model shops
- Humbrol thinners are sold at the same outlets
- It requires no undercoat or primer
- You can hand-paint the items because it does not leave brush marks
- The number 2 Emerald Green is a close match for Meccano mid green
- The number 19 Red is a close match for the Meccano light red
- It dries quickly and is non toxic
- If it gets scratched in use, it is very easy to "touch-up"
- It is available in several different size cans
- It is available as a brushing paint or as spray aerosols
- It's not expensive

I use a pair of forceps to hold the Meccano item while I am painting it, the paint flows between the jaws and still covers the area where it is gripped. I prefer to thin the paint with 20% thinners, this helps any surplus paint to drip off the item while it is hanging on the rack to dry. My hanging rack is simply a piece of wood suspended between several bricks. On the wood I have stapled about 50 short lengths of wire, which are bent upwards to form a hook. As each item is painted, it is placed on the hook and the forceps released. After about 10 minutes, you will see a paint drip forming on the bottom of the Meccano. I find that just touching the drip with a small sponge will get rid of this surplus and the item will dry (in about 2 hours) without any blemishes or brush marks.



My preference is to use a paint pad rather than a brush. Large ones can simply be cut up to the desired size and held in a pair of forceps. This has the advantage of not needing to clean brushes, simply throw them away at the end of the painting session. It is also convenient to soak up the drips of paint on the Meccano that is on the hanging rack.

Stage 7 - Hardening the paint

It is probably best to leave the Meccano to dry for 24 hours before taking it off the rack. Although it is dry, it is not yet hard. You can either leave it for 6 weeks to fully harden, or bake it in an oven (**ATWF**). Ten minutes at 150°C is sufficient. There will be some odour, but the paint is non-toxic and the smell disappears quite quickly.



Conclusion

The methods of restoration I use are not perfect, but they do give a very good overall result and build aesthetically pleasing models.



By the way, if any of you were wondering what **ATWF** stands for**A**s**k** **T**he **W**ife **F**irst

For more information and some great ideas on restoration, visit the following web-site (part of the Meccano web ring) <http://www.mecworld.co.za/cmnp/>