‘Eggs in one basket?’

I read with interest Michael Pritchard’s “Comment” (May RM) about the resignalling between Basingstoke and Exeter on the former LNWR main line and the “search for the lost chord”.

At the time, two things occurred to me:

1. is Network Rail “putting all its eggs in one basket”?'
2. What will the inevitable loss of infrastructure — particularly the loss of the signal boxes — mean to modellers, as those will eventually be demolished?

In the case of the latter, only time will tell, but in the case of the former, the decision to “put all the eggs in one basket” came home to roost on Thursday 24 May, when a signalling failure between Ammanford and Exeter closed that section of line for most of the day. I notice that when Hornby’s Signal Box was still operational — it would have been possible to introduce a system of “permissive block” working whereby only train was allowed through a section with permission. (Permissive Block is an arrangement between two adjacent signal boxes where a train is given permission to enter the single line block section from one end and the signals are consequently locked at the other. In certain signal boxes this was done by means of one of the levers or a special switch on the block shelf — often where this signalbox no longer had the usual block instruments. I believe a variant is the GWR colourless block system — which is the system which was in use on the line from Salisbury to Exmouth Junction until the recent changes in signalling took place.)

Sadly this option no longer exists and full cancellation of train services will now become the norm.

MARTIN JAMES

Manx railway inspiration

In the light of the Manx Electric article (last month), the Tramway & Light Railway Society is now reproducing “The Manx Electric and Snaefell Mountain Railways — a modeler’s & fanatical’s inspiration by Robin G Winfield. This contains all you need to start modelling plus examples of all the known MER and MER-style layouts. Robin also wrote the book on the 10mm scale Railway published by Peco.

GRAHAM SIDWELL
Editor, Tramfare
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The once-widespread metal advert signs

I have been occupied this spring rebuilding my model railway, which suffered damage in the gales, which were here in April, and again in February, with 120mph gales, and garage roofs don’t last! I am now in the process of starting the scenic side of the layout project, and uncovered from the old debris a packet containing a pair of men with a plain advertising Hall’s Distemper. I remember pre-war that these signs were very common beside railway lines and main roads, and were also produced as toys. We had a Hornby metal model for our O gauge layout.

The last full-size sign that I can remember seeing in the flesh was somewhere on the East Coast Main Line, in the Thirsk/Northallerton area, standing in a field on the east side of the track. This would be in the 1960s or 1970s, and the paint was very faded. Does any reader know if any more are still in existence?

G D WELLS

Bradford — the real woollen centre

I would like to raise a point regarding the June issue of RM.

Bradley — an excellent presentation, and a layout made by a talented and top-class modeller. Thanks to all for providing an enjoyable piece.

However, the last lines of the article state that Bradley was at the centre of the Yorkshire woollen industry: surely not! That accolade belongs to my home town, the city of Bradford. The mill at Woolcombers Lane was known locally as Bradley: numerous other giant mills dominated the landscape. Benson Tarns, Kasenwick, Ackroyd, T W Turner, Lister, the largest mill in Europe (Manningham Mills), Whitehead’s etc.

All the wool for the Yorkshire wool trade was bought in Australia, New Zealand, and South America, and paid for through Bradford and bought and sold again, and again, in Bradford. Tops, rots, Merino fleeces (the beef), all bought by Bradford Wool Exchange Members and sold on, then combed and woven into the finished article, usually worn for top class clothes.

More money, cheques and bills of exchange passed through Bradford’s banks each day than in the whole of the then envious neighbours, Leeds! Bradford is rightly famous for the variety club and biscuits, but please don’t try to take our history from us!

COLIN HARVEY

Coal staithes, long trains and shovelling

I’d been pondering over some coal staithes, just visible near the fish dock on a picture of Padstow station in the 1950s, when I came across Michael Sargent’s comments on Coal (Railway Modeller No 740). As I intend to incorporate this facility on my developing model layout of the terminus, I had also studied a plan from the 1950s and was surprised to find that they didn’t run parallel to the tracks. They ran at a slight angle which would have made unloading from the coal truck by hand to the stage virtually impossible.

So I reckon that you have got it right Michael and many thanks, I had been reluctant to press ahead with this somewhat eccentric arrangement without your reasoning.

This all begs the question that we are not that well informed re coal movements in general. For example, large tonnages of coal must have been delivered to Padstow and Wadebridge for the railway, domestic fuel, the clay dries and Wenford, the prison at Bodmin etc, but the literature doesn’t describe seriously long coal trains arrive/departing. Perhaps we are due for a coal special? From where and how did it arrive, how frequently and how was it dealt with?

JOHN MEREFIELD

Railway modelling is therapeutic

In the October 2011 issue, you kindly published an article on my layout, Midsummer Oxton — a permanent continuous run scheme set in a spare bedroom.

Unfortunately, I have since had a small stroke, but have revamped my layout to represent the year 1939 and the start of the war, with LDV men under Major Phelan (as shown in the accompanying photo), phoney note kitchen knives or broom handles. We also had a visit from Winston Churchill, greeted by Anna Commander General Thorpe. I have used modeller’s licence to allow City of Hurro to appear.

I detailed all the troops by hand, and found it to be very therapeutic after my stroke. I think such handcrafts would help other people who have had similar health problems, assisting them to get back to good health. It’s certainly helped me.

MICHAEL FLYNN