Chilcompton

The Somerset & Dorset in the 1950s

This club layout, set in 1955, is described by **GUY CRADDOCK**, *Secretary of Redditch MRC.*

Back in May 1997 we told of the day in 1967 when the now famous, but late, Ivo Peters drove his Bentley car on the forecourt of Gorcott station. In December 2000 we told of how in 1955 he had also visited the Somerset and Dorset station of Wincoleton.

Readers will know liberal amounts of modellers' licence were used to bring you those layouts but now we stay in 1955 and visit the station of Chilcompton on the Somerset & Dorset Joint Railway: this did really exist, somewhere that Ivo Peters visited many times.

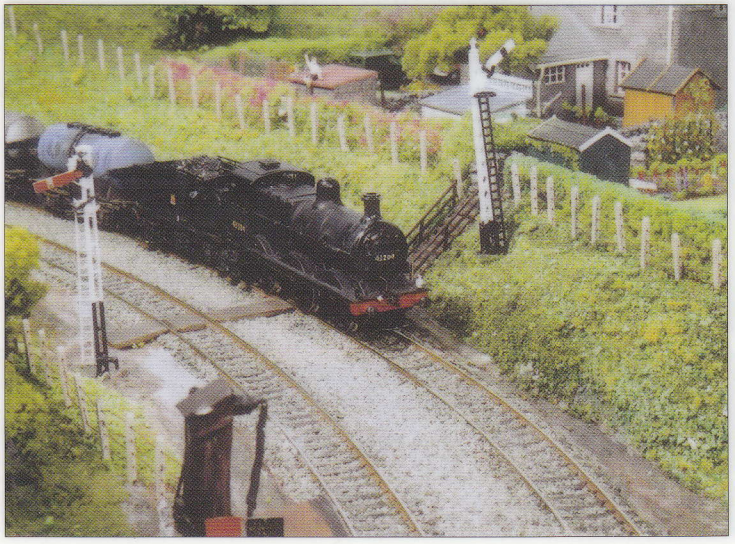
The prototype station

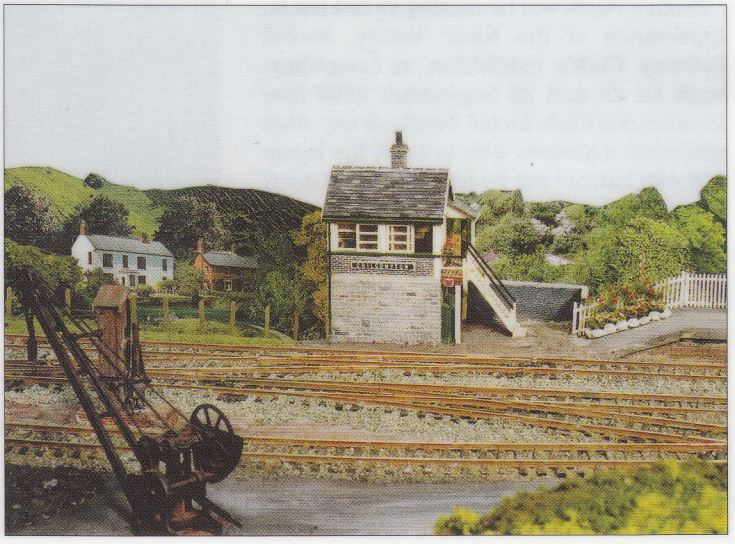
The station of Chilcompton was situated some 14 miles from Bath Green Park in the north and 57 miles from Bournemouth West in the south. This route formed the main line of the Somerset & Dorset Joint Railway. The station, which was just to the south of Midsomer Norton, was some 600' above sea level, which often caused problems with snow in the winter.

The village of Chilcompton had somewhere between 600 and 800 inhabitants throughout the life of the railway. Other than on the railway or the land the main employment was either at Chilcompton Saw Mills which was adjacent to the station or at the New Rock Coal Mine which was close by.

Chilcompton station was opened on 20 July 1874 and was situated on the south side of the valley of the river Somer. The railway through Chilcompton from Bath to Evercreech Junction was opened as a single line. Following a decision at the S&DJR Officers meeting of 21 October 1875 a passing loop was provided at Chilcompton early in 1876. This resulted in the opening of the first signalbox at Chilcompton, which was the subject of a Board of Trade Inspection report in March 1876. Progressively the section from Midford to Evercreech was doubled between 1886 and 1892. The doubling of line through Chilcompton was completed around 1886. The line from Chilcompton to Binegar was doubled in 1885, and from Chilcompton to Radstock in 1886. In conjunction with this the first signal box was closed in 1886 and replaced by a Type 2 box mentioned in a Board of Trade report dated 14 April 1886. The station was closed with the rest of the line on Saturday 5 March 1966. The last special trains actually ran the day after on Sunday 6 but the line was closed to normal traffic after service on the Saturday.

The second signal box was opened in 1886 and closed on 11 April 1965. It was built to the standard S&D Type 2 design and was equipped with a 13-lever Stevens-pattern frame with levers at 4 1/8" centres. The signalling at the station was unusual in that no ground signals were provided when the second signal box was built and all shunting was controlled by hand signals. During 1960 the signal box was open between 0640 and 2110





on Mondays to Saturdays and was closed all day on Sundays. The box had a closing switch, which meant that trains could pass through the station when the box was closed as long as access to the goods yard was not required. During the life of this second signal box brickwork was added to the upper storey under the windows. It is thought that this was due to rot or other damage and it is in this condition that we have modelled it.

The down yard was provided with a goods shed and a 5-ton crane. There were also two water towers for replenishing the tanks of locomotives used to bank freight trains up the 1 in 50 grade from Radstock to Masbury Summit. Freight trains were banked on the SDJR, and passenger trains were piloted thus providing the spectacle of double headed passenger trains.

In the 1930s the sidings at the station were extended to provide a loading dock so coal could be brought by road from the New Rock Colliery. The Colliery was opened in 1819 and was closed on 28 September 1968. It had a 4'6" diameter winding shaft and employed around 200 men. The goods yard had ceased to handle traffic on 15 June 1964.

In our period, the early 1950s, much of the freight services are still in the hands of the Fowler 7Fs that were built for the line. It is another five years before the line will benefit from the Standard 9F 2-10-0s. Passenger trains are in the hands of a mixture of Midland, LMS and Southern locomotives with streamlined 'West Country' Pacifics being used on a frequent basis following their successful trial in the early years after nationalization. The Fowler Class 2Ps are still being used on front-line duties to pilot the heavy passenger trains. Our chosen period is unusual for modelling the SDJR as many either opt for pre-grouping S&D blue stock or British Railways around 1960 with the Standard 9F 2-10-0 locomotives in use on summer passenger trains.

The model

The club has built a number of fictitious Somerset & Dorset Joint Railway-based layouts, including *Wincoleton* (RM December 2000) and *Otterly St Mary's*. For our new S&D layout we decided to base it on a prototype from the Railway's main line from Bath to Bournemouth. In order to keep the trains moving under exhibition conditions, it needed to be on the double track main line section. We drew up a short list of Shepton Mallet, Cole, Evercreech New and Chilcompton. Shepton Mallet was rejected because our self-imposed layout length restriction would not allow us to do the station justice; Cole because we would have needed fairly wide boards to model the goods yard; and Evercreech New as the freight yard was too small. This left us with Chilcompton and so this became out layout project.

Initially we pulled together all the information we had in the many books published on the line and a full-sized track plan was drawn out on the back of some old wallpaper and so the process of turning an idea into a model started. Over a period of around two years we acquired copies of as many contemporary photographs as possible of the station and made at least six field visits to the remains. Like so many stations that were closed 40 years ago, very little on the face of it remains. At Chilcompton none of the railway buildings remains but once we worked out where to look we found much of the earthworks that once made the railway still exist together with a number of the railway bridges in the area. What we did find were sections of the former platforms and, by measuring them and counting bricks we have been able to scale up the buildings that don't remain from photographs.

The layout was conceived for display at model railway exhibitions. From the start it was designed to entertain the visitors with a variety of trains constantly moving. The layout is built to 4mm scale and occupies an area of 18' x 9'. As with all the recent layouts we have created, it is a package of not just the railway but also correctly-formed trains for the era portrayed. This does not mean detailed locomotives pulling out-of-the-box ready-to-run stock. It seems strange that so may modellers spend hours constructing prize locomotives with little regard for the stock they then pull around their layouts, although the recent increase in the variety of stock from the ready-to-run manufactures is now addressing this.

The foundation

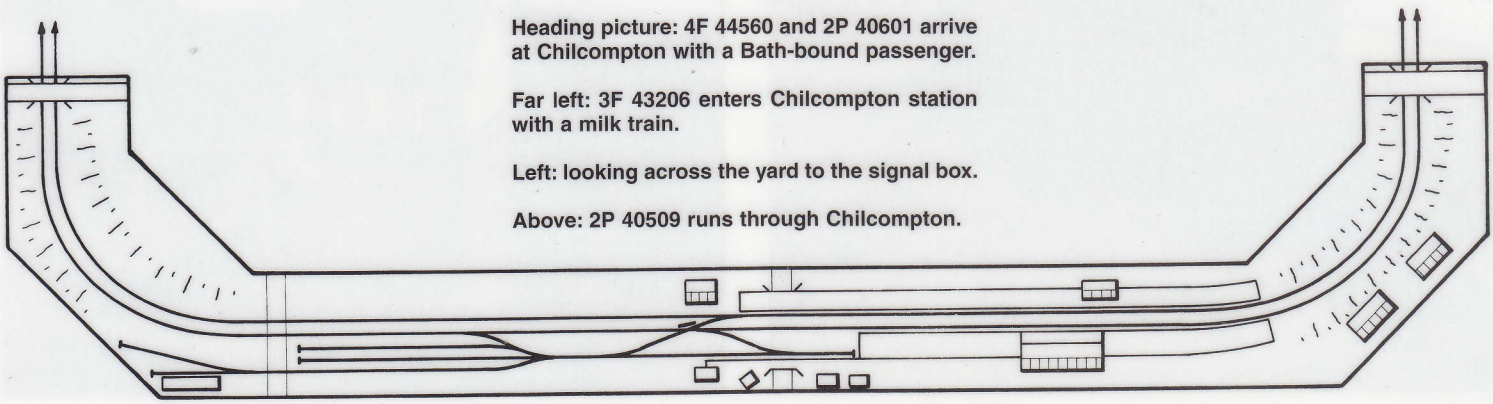
The baseboards are standard sizes. All the straight boards are 36" x 18" and are constructed round plywood frames. We have previously used the more normal method of 2" x 1" timber frames. We were keen to keep weight down so we have experimented with plywood. We paid a visit to the local timber merchant. After we convinced them we were serious they cut up an 8' x 4' sheet of red maranti plywood into suitable-sized strips. Using this method produced the cost saving over the use

Heading picture: 4F 44560 and 2P 40601 arrive at Chilcompton with a Bath-bound passenger.

Far left: 3F 43206 enters Chilcompton station with a milk train.

Left: looking across the yard to the signal box.

Above: 2P 40509 runs through Chilcompton.

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be stored at any one time. Normally we run the layouts with around 24 separate trains so as to give a variety of train lengths.

The layout is wired for cab control common return system. All the section switching is done from two panels at the front, one each for the up and down lines. Each half of the fiddle-yard has its own control panel which is wired so that one push-button controls the points at each end of the layout. This cuts down the number of buttons that need to be pressed to allow a train to move and means that two people can operate the layout if really necessary, one in the fiddle-yard and the other for the station area. All the points are motorised using rusty old H&M motors in the fiddle-yard and Peco point motors on the scenic parts of the layout as we had at the time exhausted our supply of the former motors.

In order to improve their reliability and to ensure a positive action, the H&M motors in the fiddle-yard are powered via a capacitor discharge unit run at around 30 volts and we have yet to burn out a motor! There is certainly a positive thump when the points change. The Peco motors on the front of the layout run at a more normal 16 volts. Actual control of the trains is via two Gaugemaster hand-held controllers. These are each of the feedback variety. We have found these hand-held controllers are an advantage at exhibitions as operators are not fixed to one point on the layout but are able to chat to spectators at any point along the layout, whilst still keeping the trains moving. After all it is important to remember that this is what the visitors have come to see!

was a desire to get the tracklaying out of th
way and move on to other more interestin
parts of construction? This time we decided t
ake our time. We used Peco code 100 track fo
he whole layout. This was laid onto a cor
base using double-sided tape. A cheap tip her
s to use cork wall tiles from a DIY centre. Th
sleepers on the track immediately each side o
all the baseboard joints have each bee
replaced with a copper-clad one. The rail ha
hen been soldered to the copper-clad sleepe
or added strength.

The fiddle-yard is a standard unit we hav
constructed with the intention of using it for
number of layouts. Currently the same fiddl
yard is used on our *Gorcott* layout (RM Ma
1997) and *Chilcompton*. The club is also co
structing an as-yet un-named London subu
ban-based layout and there are ideas for
modern image layout, which will both use th
same fiddle-yard. The common use of a fiddl
yard has many advantages such as keepin
down costs of new layout construction an
helps to speed up the production of layout
However it does mean that there has to b
common track centres out of the ends of th
fiddle-yard and it restricts you on the actu
length of layout that can be constructed.

The fiddle-yard is laid out as independe
up and down loop lines with eight in eac
direction. This means a total of 32 trains ca

of normal wood. With careful bracing and the use of a jig for construction we have ended up with some very stable boards.

The baseboards formed are of a conventional 'solid top' construction with the top being made of chipboard. The boards are joined together using pattern makers' dowel for alignment. These have been made specially for the club and consist of a rectangle of steel plate that has been bent into an L shape. Two of these L shape pieces of metal make the joining plate one for each board end. A peg and bolt hole is placed in one side and screw holes in the other. The plates are mounted on the boards around the bottom edge of the board frame so that the side with the screw holes is used to attach the plate to the underside of the frame. The dowels allow the layout to be assembled quickly at shows with the track being correctly aligned, every time. The whole layout is supported on trestles, each with chain to adjust the height. For transportation the three straight scenic boards are paired with the corresponding fiddle-yard boards to form a box. The two corner boards box in pairs face to face.

Buildings

All our recent exhibition layouts have featured scratchbuilt buildings and *Chilcompton* is no exception. In building a prototype there is actually normally no way of avoiding this so as with previous layouts all the buildings are based around card carcasses. The main station building is actually based on scale drawing


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Right: 7F 53806 runs through Chilcompton on a freight train.

Below: 3F and 7Fs meet at Chilcompton.

Below right: the station cottages at the Bath end of Chilcompton station.

we had for Midsomer Norton, as the building was very similar. By using the drawings and contemporary photographs of the actual building we were able to produce the model.

The signal box was scratchbuilt from drawings of the actual box in an issue of the SDJR Trust Journal. The signal box is a standard design for the line and of part-wood part-stone and brick construction. This building was also created around a card shell but the timbers were either scored on or made from balsa wood and the stone and walkway is plasticard. The roofs of all the buildings were made from strips of thin paper. This was then suitably coloured and scored to represent roof slates.

When it came to making the buildings in the goods yard there were no drawing available so we resorted to the photographs. We were lucky that the quality of some was such that by the use of a specialist photocopier we were able to enlarge the useful sections of the pictures. From these we produced a set of models of the buildings that we thought were there.

The layout made its exhibition debut in this form in February 2002 at Biggleswade but within a week of the show we had found some more photographs from the extensive collection held by Roger Carpenter who kindly printed the bits we wanted from the original negatives. This proved that our assumptions about the land behind the goods yard buildings were wrong and so by the next exhibition date in April at Derby the whole goods yard area had been remodelled based on the new photographs we had.

Scenery

The track, once tested, was weathered with the rail sides being painted rust colour. The track bed was then ballasted using a 2mm scale product. The whole track formation was then suitably toned down. The contours of the landscape were built up using a type of expanded foam that is used as cavity wall insulation by builders. The foam has the advantage that it can be easily shaped with a knife or a file, without crumbling. Once covered in either paint or DIY filler there appears to be some sort of chemical reaction and the water in the product being applied causes the foam to become very solid. Carving the foam can effectively form rock faces. The foam also has the advantage of being very light.

The greenery was added using various scenic foam compounds or foliage. In order to give some depth and variety of colour to the ground cover, several layers have been added over a period of time together with various dried mosses. These were collected in the autumn and allowed to dry out very thoroughly before use. The moss was glued to the layout with PVA and then sprayed with a cheap hair spray to help preserve it.

Trees were made both from wire or using products from the Woodland Scenics range. Much of the scenic detail is down to one club member, Derek Collett, who by his own admission admits he had not done any scenic modelling before this project. Following a conversation and some inspiration from one of the demonstrators at a Kidderminster Model Railway Exhibition and some patience, Derek is producing much of the detail seen with scenery. A speciality of his is now the rose bay willow herb, which was very prolific on the embankments of the former Somerset & Dorset. Each plant is individually made around a bristle from a broom. Colour pieces of foam from the Green Scene range are stuck on and once dry parts are highlighted with poster paint. Each one is individually 'planted' on the layout. We estimate there are over 300 plants on the layout.

A recent feature on the layout is the adding of stone walls around the two cottages at the Bath end of the layout. The construction method is the same as we used on our *Gorcott* layout and has provoked much questioning at shows over the years. It was important to portray them effectively and as realistically as possible. There are several commercially produced wall sections on the market. When about twenty feet of them was required for *Gorcott*, it would have worked out rather expensive. We therefore had to find some way of making them.

After some thought and experimentation we hit upon the idea of using cork tiles. These were broken up into small random 'stones' of a suitable size and then individually horizontally laid to make up the wall. The tops were made from more suitably shaped tile pieces laid this time vertically. Once assembly was finished the whole wall was spray painted with grey car undercoat paint. This provided a base to which the weathering colours were added

Left: still with LMS livery, 7F 13806 arrives on a Bath-bound passenger train.

Below: a Midland 3F arrives at Chilcompton with the cottage gardens in the foreground.

Photographs by Mick Clements.

to produce what we think are very realistic walls.

The backscenes also provoke a fair amount of comment at exhibitions, as they are three-dimensional. This gives a very effective sense of depth without taking too much space. Many of the pictures are taken from old calendars though there are a couple of pictures really from Chilcompton so as to portray such things as the farm behind the station as accurately as possible. Many hours were spent finding the right perspective and building the cuttings up to form a picture.

Using contemporary photographs of the time a rough drawing was made of what the backscene should look like to position any landmarks. The pictures are mounted on card and using two or three layers of these pictures, with card spacers between them, the effect is created. Once these are made up some careful painting of some pictures is done using poster paints to remove modern-looking items such as cars and so on. Before they are installed, the whole units are matt varnished to remove the shine.

The signals have been constructed from Ratio kits and are based on the actual signals at Chilcompton. All have been suitably weathered. The signals do not work at the moment, though the signal arms do move with a little human help. We are though experimenting with making them fully operational.

Operation and presentation

Having a continuous circuit of track on the layout, it is quite obvious that the trains that leave the fiddle-yard and travel round the layout will enter the fiddle-yard again at the other end. This makes the running of the layout from the operational point of view very simple. The art is to make what the spectators see out at the front as realistic as possible. To do this we have a variety of types and lengths of trains.

We aim to run a variety of trains on *Chilcompton* to represent the era from around 1950 to 1955. Extensive use has been made of ready-to-run models to represent prototypes that once ran on the line. However all have, at the very least, been detailed and weathered. There are a number of locomotives such as classic S&D 7Fs and 3F tender locomotives which have been scratchbuilt, although all run on adapted ready-to-run chassis.

Our modelling does not stop with the locomotives as the rolling stock used is all prototypically modelled. Many of the coaches have Comet brass or scratchbuilt sides to represent the more unusual types. The wagon stock is a mixture of ready-to-run with an ever-increasing number of kit-built items. As with the locomotives all the rolling stock has also been weathered.

Conclusion

We had the opportunity of exhibiting the layout at Burnham on Sea in the summer of 2005 which is right on former Somerset & Dorset country. It was nice to receive praise from those that remember the real station, which shows we must have got something right.

Further information

Whilst constructing our *Chilcompton* layout the club has found a number of sources for prototype photographs and they are all able to supply copies from their respective photograph collections.

Colin Caddy – Transport Photographer, 55b Spa Road, Weymouth, Dorset, DT3 5EP.

R.K. Blencowe – Historic Railway Photographs, 48 Cherville Street, Romsey, Hampshire SO51 8FD.

Kidderminster Railway Museum – Photographic Collection, Station Approach, Comberton Hill, Kidderminster, Worcestershire, DY10 1QX.

Roger Carpenter – Photographic Collection, 407 Highters Heath Lane, Hollywood, Birmingham, B14 4TR.

The layout can be seen at the second Birmingham Model Railway Exhibition promoted by the Redditch Model Railway Club at the Cocks Moors Woods Leisure Centre in south Birmingham on 1 and 2 September 2006. Details in *Societies & Clubs*.