

Welshpool and Llanfair – Back to the 70s

by PAUL ROBERTS

A lifetime's appreciation of the Welshpool and Llanfair Light Railway inspired PAUL ROBERTS to scratch build a version of some of the buildings at Llanfair Caereinion and Welshpool as they were in the 1970s . **Photos by Paul Roberts.**

I was just a very small boy when my love affair with The Welshpool and Llanfair began. Like many things in life, it happened by accident.

On a sunny day my Dad was driving when I spotted steam moving in the valley and I managed to persuade him to detour our journey. So we met the source of the steam: the Earl in Llanfair station. And so began my love affair with the railway.

At the time the railway, particularly Llanfair station, was not as advanced in restoration as the Ffestiniog or Talylyn. Still, in part with a run down look that BR had left it, this only added to its appeal for me.

So when I decided to build my ideal garden railway, I based it on this period, or rather my 'idealised' version of these atmospheric early days of preservation.

I bought my house and the large garden outside my home town in Wrexham five years ago, but due to work commitments it will only be this June that I finally start cutting the first sod of the line.

Part of this garden line, (which I'm calling Woodlands and Llanfair, named after the house), will run on the original track bed of the Wrexham, Mold & Connah's Quay Railway.

Scratch building

During my long wait I've planned out the layout several times and decided on a raised area where I'll have my Llanfair station. So for the last few years rather than just dream about it, I discovered the joys of scratch building coaches and buildings.

The first scratch builds I did were of Chattenden and Upnor Railway toast rack coaches that were used in the 1960s before the Austrian coaches were bought. I used a basic wooden construction, clad with coffee sticks for wooden seats and outside planking, then bought the wheels and fittings. ►

Below: – The scratch built long shed with the Earl just in shot.





This gave me the confidence to now take on modelling three key buildings: The long shed, the storage shed in Llanfair circa 1970 and the original engine shed in Welshpool of the BR era. In this idealised railway, the original engine shed was moved to Llanfair.

The method in the madness

The design and building method for all three of these buildings are the same. First up there are no drawings I could find of any of them, so I've based all their measurements on photography I've researched and found with The Earl or The Countess next to them. Then I have

used my Accucraft models as the measuring tools on which to base the scaled drawings of the buildings.

Treated plywood was used for the basic construction of all three with various Plastikard cladding.

The Welshpool engine shed was the biggest challenge as I could only find four pictures of it. One picture of the inside revealed light hitting the right hand shed wall so there must have been three sky light windows in the left hand roof. It was great fun playing detective creating these plans.

After the basic construction was made of the walls and roof, they were all screwed together. I left a gap running down the centre of the roof for the half circular roof top feature and the two smoke vents. For these I used a plastic pipe cut in half that was supported at two ends and the middle of the roof.

The other distinctive feature of the shed was the wooden planked panel that went down the right hand side of the shed, so more coffee sticks.



The walls and roof were clad with Slaters Plastikard pre-sprayed in the original cream colour (I imagine) before it got dirty and grimy. Once the various panels were in place I sprayed them matt black where the soot and dirt would be. I then went over the whole model adding touched with various effects paints.

Drain pipes were made from drinking straws.

Spotting a similar roof with moss growing over it in patches gave me the idea that using glue and Hornby scale grass might create this effect and add to the depth of the model.



The Long shed – paint it black

The long shed was pure nostalgia for me. We know this building now as the tea rooms and shop rebuilt in Llanfair, but I remember as a young kid it being just black with pictures of the magic roundabout and Dougal being pinned to the walls inside what was a machine shop at the time. It had a great smell of oil and a huge barrel of 'Swarfega' cleaning gel. So my little added feature is a flashing blue and white LED light to represent welding going on inside.

The support for the canopy took a little time to figure out. I used two metal beams from the main building support and attached to the underside of the roof with the added support of the vertical pillars.

The shed was painted black in the 1970s which could make a boring looking building, so layering the colour was key to give the building depth. The roof's corrugated sheeting was the obvious area to work on. It was first sprayed a matt silver then when dry sprayed matt black leaving some of the silver showing: this gave the impression of the black paint being worn off.

Looking at real industrial roofs they have rust in patches and roof moss was also added.

The other buildings

The storage shed, which looks pretty similar today, has the feature of bricks supporting it, (probably to make it rat proof). Mine is supported by wooden blocks clad with real scale Domus bricks bought from Glendale Junction.

One thing I did not attempt was Banwy bridge. Instead, I got in touch with the very talented Michael Leckenby who interpreted my sketchy thoughts and what an amazing job he did. It won model of the month award. I can't recommend Michael enough.

When funds allow, I would also really fancy a steaming bay – the one currently outside the Llanfair shed would be a great feature to have.

So what next?

There's Llanfair station building itself, a standard gauge coach that was used as storage and volunteer accommodation and the signal box, (I'll probably save up for a kit for that). Maybe a plastic scratch built model of the Monarch, which I remember always in sidings and what about the water tower?

Well that's for the future, first there's a railway to build! ■



Photos on this page and opposite:

- 1 – Basic wood construction of the Welshpool engine shed using treated plywood.
- 2 – Wood panel detail using coffee stirrers and Slaters corrugated plastikard.
- 3 – Engine shed side. Note the moss effect which has been created on the roof.
- 4 – The back of the long shed.
- 5 – The long shed with the Earl in residence.
- 6 – Arc welding 'blue' light seen lighting up the inside of the shed.

