

# THE BALLENY BLAST

Happy New Year

SANTA BACK



Issue No 55



Winter 2004/5

# MEMBERS OF BOARD

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	Peter McMillan	0121 308 2957
	Stan Jones	01827 63983
	Barry Kefford	0121 350 5743
	Richard (Dick) Smith	01827 12758
	Neal Harrison	0121 378 3992

N.B. Should you require the services of a boiler inspector, please contact one beforehand. Please do not simply arrive at the ground and assume that there will be one available.

## **End of an Era**

The last regular meeting to be held at the library in Emscote Drive, Wylde Green, took place on Tuesday, 14<sup>th</sup> December, 2004.

Despite several requests for a member to take on the role of Social Secretary, no one was forthcoming, resulting in no programme being arranged after 14<sup>th</sup>

December 2004. The combination of falling attendances, making the current meetings financially unviable, and the lack of a programme led to the inevitable decision to cease the bi-monthly meetings at Wylde Green.

The Society's thanks are extended to both Roger Edmonds and Barry Kefford who did their utmost to produce an interesting and varied programme over the past years. It is hoped that members will now meet at least once a month at Balleny Green.

## **RATE RISE SHOCK**

Following the structural completion of the North East Corner project, and the final passing off by Lichfield Council, the Society received a visit from the local Rating Officer, complete with tape measure!!

In early September, we were advised by letter that a new rate had been set at 3000 – an increase of 1700 above the original rate – or 130%. In actual cash terms, this gave an increase from £296.00 p.a. to £684.00 p.a. – both figures taking into account our 50% discretionary allowance.

The Secretary contacted the Rates Dept. and requested a breakdown of the assessment. This was received some days later, and on studying it, appeared to include several anomalies. An appeal form was requested and has subsequently been received.

We are currently paying the new rate and cannot appeal until early in 2005.

In the meantime, the Secretary is establishing the perimeters imposed on the rating of certain types of building in order to form the basis of our appeal.

However, as the area of the north East Corner is approximately double that of the clubhouse, and even allowing for different usage, the 3000 figure is unlikely to be significantly reduced.

An increased outlay is, therefore inevitable for the future, and will inevitably impact on the 2005/6 subscriptions. (See treasure's Notes) The above should also be taken into account when proposing any further building at Balleny Green.

## **NEW RAIL TO BE TESTED.**

The original proposal to purchase all the rail necessary to re-lay the entire ground level track was rejected at the EGM on 23<sup>rd</sup>. November 2004.

However, a proposal to accept the recommendations of the working group – Stephen Hodgetts, David Moseley & Garry Tyso – in respect of the type of rail and fixings etc., but also to lay a trial length first, was passed by a majority vote.

It is anticipated that, dependant on tooling availability, a length of track starting from the point at the exit of the station throat, through the tunnel and extending to the point at which the inner loop connects with the outer track - a distance of 160 yards – will commence assembly and installation towards the end of April/early May 2005.

Any member who feels that he can assist with press tools, drill jigs, gauges, fixtures etc. is requested to contact one of the above group.

The initial budget for the initial trial length, including all tooling, is £2000.00.

## **A BLAST From The Past**

Some of you will have seen the memorial seat at Balleny Green situated near the entrance to the tunnel with the name “**Chris Strong**” and wondered who he was. Recently, looking through some old material, Stuart Harrison found a photograph of Chris Strong at Lea Marston which he gave to Iris Strong, as a result of which she writes:-

“Chris was a member for approximately 25 years, and he was Treasurer for many of those years. He went to the auction on behalf of the society to bid for and purchase the land that is now “Balleny Green”.

He built quite a few steam locomotives and an electric one “Pandora that is in the care of Barry Wincott.

One of his ambitions was to learn to fly, and so he took lessons at Coventry Airport, passing out as a pilot shortly before he died. He went to the bonfire night at Balleny Green in 1982 on the Saturday and died in the early hours of Monday morning. He had awakened with chest pains and died on the way to the hospital of a massive heart attack.

Chris also had a big interest in antiques – especially guns. He helped build the tracks at Lea Marston and was there most Sundays. I also was there with him making tea for everyone. He had his own business for many years selling and repairing televisions and electrical goods. In the last few years of his life he concentrated on computers with the help of his son Jonathon”.

## ***ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES***

Regrettably, annual subscription rates will have to be raised considerably next year in order to cover the continued increase in costs of running the Society and the Balleny Green site.

The total amount of income from membership renewals this year fell short of running costs in the last twelve months by almost £400. We have recently been informed that the rates for the site are to be increased by over 130% with immediate effect. We also know that the auditor's fees at the end of this financial year will rise by almost 50%. Similarly, an increase in the cost of utilities and consumable supplies is inevitable.

For the benefit of those members who think that the shortfall can be met by holding fund raising events, I will say this: - We are having to **decline** requests to hold birthday parties because insufficient numbers of able bodied members are willing to give up their free time at weekends in order to help man these events.

As I understand it, the day-to-day running of the Society is dependent upon membership subscriptions, whilst funds raised from parties etc are intended to finance capital developments and improvements.

From my own brief calculations it would appear that next year's subscription rates will have to be increased by an average somewhere between £10 and £15 per member. The board has yet to decide how this will effect the various categories of members, so watch this space – you have been warned!

Chris Green  
Treasurer

## THE TUESDAY “HORTICULTURAL & MAINTENANCE” TEAM

The team has been busy since the last report but with holidays and consequent reduction in Tuesday numbers, only the priorities have been dealt with. However, the good news is we are very pleased to welcome new members John Wooley and Bill Coleman. Bill has been very helpful and brought along a lot of his personal long reach and power tools which have made it easier for us to tackle a number of jobs. The bad news is that we have lost Mike Can- who left as a result of moving home to Clevedon, near Bristol. Mike played an important part in the maintenance of the site over the years and with Grenville did the actual laying of the 'goat hedge'. We wish him well with his new life.

The final bit of the boundary hedge, adjacent to the Maintenance Store, had to be left last year whilst the roof and bits of external building work were completed. That has now been remedied with a significant amount of overhanging Hawthorn and Holly cut back to the boundary. The work is now complete round the NE corner to the old oak tree, where it meets up with the 'goat hedge'. This has provided a clearer and better access down the left hand side of the Maintenance Store and will in due course

allow a proper path to be constructed. FYI, the old oak tree forms the boundary corner of our two neighbour's properties and ours.

During the past weeks all hedges have been trimmed and tidied. This included the first trim for the 'Goat

Hedge' since it was laid at the beginning of the year and its rewarding to see the amount of vigorous new low- level growth helping to improve the quality and health of all the hedges. The removed wood is burnt and the ashes spread along the base of the hedge were they act as a very good fertilizer.

As I've said before, when the site was obtained some 20-25 years ago it was basically just a meadow with fencing and hedges that had not been well maintained for a number of years. The work done established an excellent facility, was and continues to be, a credit to all those who put in so much effort. However, in terms of nature nothing stands still for very long and 20/25 years later we have to deal with some of the plantings that are now becoming a problem because of size, affecting the growth of other trees or becoming dangerous. Ideally, we should move towards larger historic specimen trees, like the Horse Chestnut behind the steam bay, to enhance the visual appearance of the site and in the process encourage more wildlife.

Information has been obtained from Stafford County Council, the Forestry Commission, The Royal Forestry

Society {of which I'm a member about trees and hedges that will in due course assist with working out a way forward. Trees, the Forestry Commission I can hear you saying, but yes. You may not realise it but we have well in excess of 100 trees on the site and almost half a mile of hedging on and around the site. About 300 yards of hedge down the left hand boundary (looking from the gate) and round to the old oak tree belongs to our neighbour, but never the less requires a lot of maintenance on our side. How many of you have neighbours with hedges (or yourselves) where the other side is left to you to look after and dispose of the resultant rubbish.

It has become a feature with the

Tuesday Members that they have a lunch every quarter at the Ivy Bush. The last one, on the 12th October, turned out to a surprise for me because my wife Jane had had words with Ivor and arranged it to be a 70" birthday (actually 13th) party; lunch with all the trimmings and a splendid cake for the members and some of my friends. To hear 18, mainly senior, members and friends sing Happy Birthday in the pub was nice but 'Oh Dear' a little embarrassing!!! My special thanks to my wife Jane, Ivor, all those who shared the day with me and to Bill Coleman for his subsequent letter.

In the last edition of the Blast I asked for comments and your views on the site and its horticultural management. The response was less than I expected but having summarized the results I presented them to the Board in August.

## **REPORT TO THE BOARD**

## RESULTS FROM THE BLAST HORTICULTURAL QUESTIONNAIRE

This short initial report is merely to inform the board about the response to the questionnaire in the Summer

2004 edition of the Blast. I had not anticipated being able to report so soon but here it is. I know one should not be surprised about apathy levels but three responses from around 120 members even surprised me. The real explanation I hope, other than 'they don't care; is that what has and is being done together with the views expressed in the 'Tuesday Horticultural Reports' meets with the broad approval of the majority of you as members.

	<b>Example Question Posted in the Blast</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3*</b>
<b>A</b>	Should all grass areas be mowed and kept short (that is mowed)	Y	Y	Y
<b>B</b>	Are the silver birch trees becoming too tall and dangerous, in need of topping (pollarding)	Y	Y	
<b>C</b>	Should areas within the small silver birch copse be left wild or short as picnic areas?	Y	S	
<b>D</b>	Do the Laurel bushes need to be cut back, are there too many	Y&N	Y&N	
<b>E</b>	Should the silver birch trees be replaced gradually with more traditional English varieties, e.g. chestnut, oak, beech etc., as already proposed	Y&Y	N&Y	
<b>F</b>	Should more trees be planted, if so where and what sort (Historical English YES)	Y&Y	Y&Y	Y&Y
<b>G</b>	Agree that trees need to be thinned to allow individual ones to reach full potential	Y	Y	
<b>H</b>	Should we continue to leave a margin of uncut grass along hedges for, say 15-18 inches, as we do now for the benefit of the wildlife	Y	Y	Y
<b>I</b>	Should the banks and mounds be left wild or Strimmed?	Y	Y	S

**Y= YES, N= NO, S= Strimmed**

NOTE:- 3\* limited answers deduced, other information concerned historic planning with reasons and some suggestions.

The Board has agreed that the team now including three board directors, two of whom are the most senior, should proceed with the maintenance and management of the site consistent with the above results. The team will continue to seek advice and guidance on any major issues by reference back to the main board. Advice and guidance will also be sort/accepted from authoritative arboreal sources and authorities who may have an interest, e.g. the electricity authority for trees which are close to or are a threat to overhead power lines.

The Secretary has already had to contact the Electricity Board about trees interfering with the overhead power lines. Unfortunately the line maintenance people have been taken over and have no budget to undertake anything except emergency work until next year. They already have in excess of 700 matters to deal with, now including ours, but did recently carry out limited remedial work.

As I started to put this together we were getting ready for bon-fire night on the 13th November with the usual unwanted and damaged furniture from St Giles Hospice Warehouse but most importantly a 7-ton lorry load of old pallets organized by Peter Robinson. The lorry turned up during my birthday lunch at the pub and three of us had to go and unload it half way through the proceedings. Many thanks go to Peter and his dad for this contribution, without which making the fire would have been a much more difficult job.

Bonfire night has now gone and didn't it go well, a tribute to those who worked hard and made a contribution in one way or another. With that over we have now restarted on the green stuff, dealing with the winter work and catching up with that put on hold because of other priorities during the summer months.

Unfortunately, I've heard 'that word' mentioned in the clubhouse again, that word 'vandals'. It concerned trees and it is with regret that I have to say I consider the 'real vandals' to be those who have failed to take the necessary action in the past. The result is that the more valuable slower growing historic English species of tree, like the Oak and Chestnut, etc., have had their growth damaged to such a extent only a few of them are now worth trying to save. You only have to spend a few minutes walking round the site looking to see trees with branches only growing on one side, trees planted to close, trees growing off the vertical and poor specimens due to the lack of light resulting in stunted growth — just a few of the problems needing attention.

Equally, it's sad to hear members saying 'Ill not be here in XX years time so I don't won't anything done'. Some of the very same members who twenty or so years ago worked very hard to create the wonderful asset members enjoy today. The 'Tuesday

Team' is a good team whose sole endeavour is to improve and maintain the site for the benefit of all current and future members.

I feel that some mention should also be made of the 'Other Tuesday Team', primarily consisting of Anthony, Colin and Stuart who are currently working to complete the Maintenance Store and Carriage Storage amongst other activities, e.g. constructing the partitioning for the Santa events. One final mention this time, Ivor, he of the soup and Gluwien helping keep out the winter chill.

**WARNING.** The society has been warned that no person may leave rubbish for disposal-burning. To do so would be contrary to Waste Disposal Regulations and leave us open to prosecution. Therefore, on **NO ACCOUNT** should any member bring any materials to the Balleny Green site without first obtaining approval from the Board.

**Eric Davies**

**1st December 2004**



## A Little Photo Gallery

I was asked to supply a few Photos from the last 2 Santa Specials days, so here are a few of the 78 I took over the 2 days. Can I thank all the driver's for their support on all the events we have done and rest assured I will be back!!

Stephen Hodgetts







I wonder if the pubs still there!!



## **EDITORIAL**

Communication – not a buzz word for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, but courtesy and common sense. All too often we act on what to us seems a good idea – and it may well be- but omit to seek the opinions of others or consider how our lone actions will impact on them.

This happens every day in every business and household throughout the world, even in our Society.

In the first issue of The Balleny Blast of September 1990, the editorial was about dissatisfied members who thought plans of action had been made without their knowledge or consent. This was not so, but only underlined the need for a regular newsletter to update them with the facts – **communication**.

Regrettably, we do not seem to have become any better at our communication skills, as there is still criticism of both the Board and members for carrying out projects without the knowledge or overall consent of the members.

In an attempt to rectify this situation, an EGM was held to discuss the replacement of the ground level track. This is what should happen when large, expensive, projects are proposed so that the whole membership can express their views. It is the Blast's intention to keep the membership fully informed of what has happened, is about to happen and what is planned for the future. To be successful in this, it is up to you, the members, to correspond with the Editor, so that a balanced view can be presented.

Whilst your Board can take day to day decisions and direct the Society in what they collectively feel is the right direction, they need input from the membership on future projects, improvements etc. – **communication**.

The Blast can only be successful in its aims if you communicate with it. Write, not phone or give verbal opinions as these can later be denied, to the Editor with your ideas, criticisms etc. Only in this way can our Society become a more cohesive unit – **COMMUNICATE!**

It is intended to have reports on events with photographs, and the editor would appreciate any input members can give in this respect, also, there will be a **Sales and Wants** column, as well as a **Hints and Tips** column so that you can pass on any useful ideas to your fellow model engineers.

NOTE: Any opinions expressed in this newsletter are solely those of the Editor, or the contributors, and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Board.

## **And Finally**



Digging begins on new cellar for club house by Mole & Son's Lichfield Division PLC



# Sutton Coldfield Model Engineering Society Ltd

## PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS & EVENTS FOR 2005

(All Tuesday Evening meetings start at 7:45pm unless otherwise indicated)

<u>Date</u>	<u>Subject / Title</u>	<u>Speaker</u>	<u>Venue</u>
Sun 26 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2004	Boxing Day Steam Up		BG
Sat 1st Jan 2005	New Year's Day Steam-Up	(10:00am onwards)	BG
Sun 6th Feb 2005	First Sunday of the month Steam-Up		BG
Sun 6th Mar 2005	First Sunday of the month Steam-Up		BG
Sun 27th Mar 2005	Easter Sunday Steam-Up		BG
Mon 28th Mar 2005	Easter Monday Steam-Up		BG
Sun 3rd Apr 2005	First Sunday of the month Steam-Up		BG
Sun 1st May 2005	First Sunday of the month Steam-Up		BG
Mon 2nd May 2005	Bank Holiday Monday Steam-Up		BG
Mon 30th May 2005	Bank Holiday Monday Steam-Up		BG
Sun 5th Jun 2005	First Sunday of the month Steam-Up		BG
Tue 14th June 2005	Annual General Meeting		WGL
Sun 3rd Jul 2005	First Sunday of the month Steam-Up		BG
Sun 7th Aug 2005	National 2½" Gauge Association Rally		BG

**Key to Venues**

WGL = Wyld Green Community Hall

BG = Balleny Green

Last updated: 22 Dec 2004 by SJH