

# Holcombe Brook and Tottington



PETER CRICHTON, of The Lancashire & Yorkshire DCC Model Railway Group, describes this 4mm scale OO gauge layout of a well-known L&YR branchline. Photos by kind permission of Mike Wild, Editor, *Hornby Magazine*.

## Cravens Class I05 DMU waits departure at Holcombe Brook Station.

In February 2011 I visited the Pontefract exhibition and was very impressed by a layout based on the Bury to Holcombe Brook branch line exhibited by the East Riding Finescale Group. I enquired about it attending our own exhibition, then in Rawtenstall, but unfortunately it was up for sale so I expressed an interest. No sooner had I walked away when I was approached by Neil Ripley from the group and after a brief discussion I was the prospective owner of a layout based on a very interesting L&YR branch line that was local to our clubrooms in Haslingden.

## The Layout

The layout was originally built in the early 1990s by Dave Akerman and John Benson from Marlow. They chose Holcombe Brook as it would be a compact layout that presented an operationally challenging prototype with an interesting and varied history.

Originally it consisted of the 12 foot Holcombe Brook station section with a 4 foot fiddle yard. The track was hand built using phosphor bronze on copperclad sleepers. The prototype track layout was not followed slavishly for operational reasons, but incorporated all the major features. Dave scratchbuilt all the structures, using wood for the timber goods shed in order to get the correct look. Assistance with the wiring and the control panel came from Peter Noyce and Andy Wells.

The layout was operated with early LMS period locomotives and stock. It was then extended with another 8 foot section of Tottington station with a central fiddle yard. This was quickly replaced with a representation of the Tottington viaduct. Again, Dave scratchbuilt the Tottington structures,

plus - due to the sad demise of John some time earlier - he also constructed the permanent way. Peter Noyce built the viaduct and assisted with electrics and scenery.

The building of the layout and its extensions took place over a decade or more and before its retirement it had attended many exhibitions in the South East and had a couple of visits up north to Blackburn. The layout had been in store for a number of years and Dave wanted to dispose of it, so in 2007 he offered it to one of the original operating team, Steve Grantham, who had now moved up north and was a member of the ERFG.

The ERFG set about a major refurbishment of the layout, the main work being done on the scenery. The original linear layout was changed to an 'L' shape configuration with two new short 45 degree scenic breaks between each of the three sections. The inspiration for this came after a visit by Neil to a French model railway exhibition in Sedan where there were several layouts using this method. They also undertook a simplification of the wiring with the aim of making it DCC friendly.

ERFG operated the layout in a 'what if' 1960s scenario, in which the urban sprawl had happened some 20 years earlier and meant the line served this new growing commuter traffic using the then new Class 504s. Ironically I believe in real life a new housing development planned in the late 1940s for the Holcombe Brook area was due to there being a railway!

## Under new ownership

I took possession of the layout at the Shipley show in September 2011 but due to limited space at our clubrooms work did not start until we moved to a larger

unit in the January 2012. All points were manually operated, but those on the Tottington section had been motorised but converted back to manual by ERFG. I re-motorised these points using slow motion point motors but left the Holcombe Brook section points manually operated at least for the time being.

The first exhibition under my ownership was at our own MRX Model Railway Exhibition at the Museum of Transport Manchester in May 2012. Work was still needed to make it suitable for DCC operation, so with the help of fellow club member, Wayne Merridew, we completely replaced all the wiring. Power management modules were installed on each board; these prevent a short on one section affecting another section. A Frog Juicer was installed to trap potential shorts on the diamond crossing, this instantly detects a potential short and switches automatically to the correct polarity. These were later added to all points on the Holcombe Brook section as the original micro switches proved unreliable.

The two platform signals were originally operated with a very sophisticated electronic mechanism which provided a bounce, we couldn't get them to operate using DCC so they were replaced with servos which could be programmed to bounce. There was also a non-working plastic home signal with a calling on arm. This was replaced with a hand built brass signal made from a standard kit and various spare pieces of brass. Both these signals were also motorised.

The layout attended several exhibitions including Hartlepool in 2012, and then Tottington High School (a stone's throw from the original Tottington Station), Stockport and Wigan in 2013.

It became apparent the steel track on the Tottington section was unreliable for DCC operation - years of storage had taken its toll - so after the Wigan exhibition we completely re-railed the Tottington section with nickel silver rail before its next showing at the Halifax show in September. This was no easy task as it has wooden sleepers with plastic chairs, so in effect I was building new track, which was not easy in situ dodging delicate scenery and buildings.

The work was completed in time for an appearance at an open day in Greenmount Village on 7 September to celebrate the official opening of the landscaping of the original Greenmount Station sidings. The layout had now made two appearances at venues near to the original branch line! The running on the Tottington section was completely transformed and was well worth the effort and it worked perfectly at Halifax.

We operate the layout using an iPhone App called 'TouchCab' which links wirelessly to an ESU ECos DCC command station. This allows great freedom to walk around the layout controlling the trains, signals and the points all from the one handset. Having initially resisted the temptation to motorise the points on the Holcombe Brook section with the ease of operation using TouchCab I have decided they will be motorised in the New Year.

## Stock

I didn't buy the ERFG stock but I continue to operate the layout in the same 'what if' early 1960s scenario, so I have built up some appropriate stock which includes a Class 504, converted using a Bachmann 2EPB and a DC Kits Class 504 kit. There are various steam locos renumbered and weathered to represent those operated from Bury or other local sheds, including an OO Works L&YR Barton Wright 0-6-0ST currently numbered 51381. Recent additions are all the current Bachmann Radial Tanks including 1008. All locos and units are fitted with sound including the Radial Tanks using recordings from the preserved L&YR locos.

## The future

It has been a real pleasure continuing the refurbishment of the layout and updating it for DCC operation and it is testament to Dave and the original team for their craftsmanship and modelling skills that it has stood the test of time. I have learnt a lot of new skills over the last couple of years including track and signal building and so I am planning on building a new section based on Woolfold station on the branch which was the only one to have a passing loop and I hope to start work early in the New Year.

In 2014 the layout is currently booked to be exhibited at the Heywood Model Rail Group Exhibition in Middleton on 15 & 16 March; the Rail Road Exhibition in Dukinfield on 5 & 6 April and the *Hornby Magazine's* Great Electric Train Show at the Heritage Motor Centre Gaydon on 11 & 12 October.



Ivatt Class 4MT 2-6-0 No.43121 at Holcombe Brook.



Class 504 EMU No.M65439M approaches Holcombe Brook Station as a former L&YR Aspinall Saddle Tank shunts in the yard.



Ivatt Class 2MT 2-6-0 No. 46452 from Lees shed crosses Tottington Viaduct on its way to Holcombe Brook.



Bury shedded Fowler 4F No.43913 passes through Tottington Station on its way to Holcombe Brook, whilst Fowler Jinty No.47472 shunts the yard.