

A history of the Central Southern Gauge O Group (CSGOG)

Compiled by David Coasby, with information provided by Ian Coane, Mike Goodwin, Chris Hillier, Ray Jewell, Nigel Stevens, Adrian Swain and Roy Wood.

The Group started on 15th August 1979 in Mike Goodwin's lounge at Flintlock Cottage, near Sixpenny Handley. Ray Gardiner, Alan Elliot, Adrian Swain and Mike Goodwin were the initial founders of the Group. For the first few meetings wives also attended regularly, with June Goodwin being very active in supporting the Group from its earliest times until ill-health prevented her from participating. Around this time David Smalley and the then Gauge O Guild President, Roy Turner, also played some part in the setting up of the Group.

In those early days Mike hosted outdoor events in his garden where he had an O gauge railway. This was coarse scale, with clockwork/steam propulsion and no electrics anywhere!

The first Group test track produced was on a plank of wood with two parallel coarse scale tracks and a crossover, which sufficed until the circular test track was built later on.

Mike recalls that the early numbers attending at Flintlock Cottage were manageable, but with new members joining it was time to look for somewhere larger.

The actual sequence of locations is a little unclear, but Adrian Swain reckons that after Mike's home the Group met at the Griffin Hotel. David Smalley was then instrumental in procuring a room at the Teachers' Building Society.

Ian Coane recently found a CSGOG programme for 1979 and 1980. It starts on 20th, June 1979 with "Discussions on our new surroundings and running track". This suggests we were having our first meeting at the centre that month. There was a meeting every month to the end of the year including a Christmas social; "19th Dec, Bring rolling stock and bottles" – no mention of food!

Roy Turner gave the 1st part of a talk on Loco Kit Construction; Mike Goodwin gave the 2nd part of a talk on Coach Construction; there was a film night and a whole evening devoted to "Running Track Discussions".

1980 had a full programme and started with the 2nd part of Roy Turner's talk; Dave Smalley gave a talk on "The Swanage Project and Preservation Scene"; Ray Gardener gave a talk on building Exhibition Layouts and Mike Goodwin gave one on "Fine Scale Rolling Stock Construction". There were 2 Film Evenings and no less than 5 Open Evenings on "Running Track progress discussions and future programmes". There was no mention of Christmas, just an "Open Evening and Running".

Ray Jewell reported that by April 1981, there were 20 members. Most of the meetings were DVDs, slides or speakers with only a few track nights. Meetings had an interval of 20 minutes, when tea was available at 10p per cup. This was made by two stalwarts of the Group, Derek Hart and Mike. Roy Wood recalls there were many discussions at AGMs about whether we should keep charging members for tea/coffee at meetings. It was deemed very important in those days!

One highlight each year was our annual auction. Frank Wigglesworth was the auctioneer for quite a few years, always with hilarious (frequently unintended) results.

Speakers in the past have included Jack Ray, Jim Oatway and Martin Finney. Who can forget seeing Martin trying to show us that his resin boilers were indestructible (he was right too)!

Some speakers have not been as interesting as the aforementioned, one on giving a talk on Joy's valve gear, was so boring that at least two members fell asleep. Another speaker gave a talk on the LSWR. He started off in London, but by 10.30pm had only got 45 miles down the

line! As we had overstayed our allotted time in the room, we had to close up promptly with the speaker having only reached Basingstoke!

By now we were meeting in the Canford Room at the Allendale Centre, but by the end of 1982, with over 25 members attending regularly, it had become very crowded. It was apparent that the Group had outgrown the space available despite occasional forays being made, perhaps twice a year, into one of the other larger halls at the Allendale Centre for a running session. There followed discussions with the Allendale Management who made available the Quarterjack Suite to us for our monthly meetings, so this became our 'new' home and there we have remained ever since. Apart from the large area and tea/coffee making facilities the Quarterjack Suite has first class audio and video facilities which visiting speakers can use.

Ian Coane has a members list for 1983 which consists of 30 people. 4 of them are still active members; Himself, Mike Goodwin, Ray Jewell and Adrian Swain. Some of the others are around but most have passed on (to the perpetual test track in the sky!)

Adrian Swain, Proprietor of ABS Models, who was an original member of the Group, had just moved back home from Weybridge. Prior to this he had been a founder member of the Guildford group, which is now very much a force to be reckoned with.

Having also joined the Poole and District MRC, but with no other members interested in O gauge at the time, Adrian was delighted to join the Central Southern Gauge O Group that was just starting up at the time. It was not long before it was large enough for members to start asking why we did not have our own test track?

Having helped build a previous test track Adrian 'volunteered' to help with one for the new Group. This was, of course, much approved by the members with many volunteering to assist. The funds at that time were somewhat less than the enthusiasm, so to get things off the ground he largely financed the purchase of materials for the track and started looking for cheap baseboard materials and electrical plugs and sockets. He knew where to get 'surplus' 8-pin plugs and sockets, having used them on his own layout and he visited the local reclamation yard where he found a good number of very high quality but old floorboards. One member had a circular saw and cut these boards exactly in half to form the side members of the layout as well as end pieces and cross members. The design was carefully worked out with 12 boards forming a circle and a couple of straight boards. To best use the yard lengths of Peco track the diameter was calculated so as to use each yard of track cut so that two slightly less than 18" pieces plus two just over 18" would reach the ends of the boards. This gave just under 6 foot radius inside and just over on the outside – if only Peco had been in metre lengths!

The Group had to find somewhere to build the boards, so Adrian suggested the Poole and District MRC clubroom. This was agreed, provided we kept it to a minimum. Initially there were quite a number of members helping but this decreased alarmingly and it soon became a labour of love with just Adrian and one or two others helping. The baseboards were finally finished but costs prohibited a quality ply surface, so chipboard had to be used. The boards were heavy but worked well and could be erected quickly. Everyone was delighted when it came into use.

Roy recalls this test track was initially kept at Basil Hone's house and brought to the Allendale Centre in and on top of his car. Later it was kept in an outside garage at the Centre. Neither of those things were too good for it as it tended to be a tad damp in the garage and of course the journey on Basil's car was rather weather dependent.

Basil had a lot of stock and was a very keen runner on the test track at our shows. He was also generous in hosting the Group at his extensive outdoor railway at Parley – but he could be a bit 'difficult' at times. Roy recalls one year that, for some reason, he had set the test track for the show at a bit of an angle across the hall rather than parallel to the walls. Basil stormed off saying that there was no way he could operate with it like that...

Adrian says this first test track lasted for many years, but the ravages of continued dismantling eventually began to show. However, its life was extended by repairing damage on many occasions.

Roy remembers that in the summer of 1996 the Group organised a special exhibition to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Gauge O Guild (GOG). In those days we were one of the groups of the GOG – this was before they became a limited company. Various regional groups were encouraged to celebrate the 40th anniversary but whether any other group actually held an exhibition is not known.

The CSGOG show was quite a bit bigger than our current exhibition and was definitely a one-off. We held it in Ringwood and had several coups. It was the first time Martin Welch held a demonstration of painting and weathering and he was extremely nervous – he had no need to be! Gordon and Maggie Gravett were there with their Ditchling Green layout. Amongst others, we had Slaters and Home of O Gauge with their trade stands. Roy had to intervene in a very intense falling out between Slaters and Home of O Gauge. Slaters, understandably, complained that HOG were selling Slaters products cheaper than Slater themselves were! The then owner of HOG was, to put it mildly, a very abrasive character and Roy had to exercise his diplomacy skills to the full!

When the Group eventually had sufficient funds, the decision was made to build a new test track, with Adrian carefully keeping his head down this time! Chris Hillier recalls the design and build of the new test tracks was overseen by a Committee, consisting of Roy Wood (Chairman) Chris, Bob Donaldson, Brian Andrews, John Grisley and Peter Lovell. Chris did all the drawings and a great deal of the basic design, whilst Peter was very instrumental in its construction – with his very exacting standards – which shows in the quality of the build. The boards were professionally made by a local wood working company and the metalwork by a firm known to Peter. Peter and Bob laid most of the track work, with Peter building the points and most of the wiring, assisted by Ian Coane and others.

The layout was constructed with 4 tracks, which permit two-rail, three-rail, coarse-scale, fine-scale, 16.5mm and 14mm gauge trains to run. When in use all 4 tracks are often being utilised with a very varied selection of O gauge models. An incident recalled by Chris occurred when shortly after completion John Grisley left a partially full cup of tea on the track. The cup was struck by one of Bob's Bulleid Pacifics moving at some speed. The amount of damage is not recorded, but one can imagine the mess!

The new track is far more versatile than the old one and a major asset to the Group. A test track like this is an important part of the Group's activities. Whilst many of the members have their own model railway at home, many do not and a test track enables them to give their models a run and discuss them with other modellers.

We are still an active group of friendly, like-minded enthusiasts and are proud to have recently celebrated the Group's 40th anniversary. We continue to enjoy our monthly meetings and annual exhibition and always keen to welcome visitors or new members. Our meetings are held in the evening of the second Wednesday of each month in the Allendale Centre, Hanham Road, Wimborne BH21 1AS.