



## West Midlands "N" Gauge Club

# Newsletter

Volume 15 Issue 2

June 2012

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### HEADCODE

#### Welcome to the Special Jubilee Collector's Edition for June 2012.

I can't help thinking that Her Majesty would have been more comfortable, and a great deal warmer, in a station watching trains go by rather than boats on a wind and rain swept river.

Anyhow, this issue, we feature a constructional project for all of you who have been toying with the idea of upgrading your scenery. There are also the regular updates on the Club layouts, updates on club members various activities, and the regular 'Tail Lamp' column. You never know, in another sixty years or so this issue might be worth a bob or two? *TB*

**Volume 15 Issue 3 should appear in early September 2012.**

#### Copy deadlines for the next four issues are:

Sept '12 Issue:	11 <sup>th</sup> August
Dec '12 Issue:	12 <sup>th</sup> November
Mar '13 Issue:	9 <sup>th</sup> February
June '13 Issue:	5 <sup>th</sup> May



### FROM THE CHAIRMAN

If we ignore the rain we have been having recently then summer is just around the corner and railway modelling often takes a back seat in the summer months, although our club will be open for business as usual. In fact we have had good attendance figures throughout the first part of the year and hope this continues.

Come rain or sunshine you are always welcome at our meetings.

Best wishes

*Ken Jones, Chairman*

**Chairman: Ken Jones**

0121 777 7062

Email: [westernsultan@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:westernsultan@hotmail.co.uk)

**Treasurer: Edgar Mason**

### THE CLUB LAYOUTS

#### Waterstock . . .

Driver training continues apace and in fact has thrown up some interesting issues...er ...'design features' which we had not realised we had.

I mentioned last time that shunting the shed area needed practice? Well, the chaps set to cracking this like men possessed. During operations however, it was discovered that power to the shed area was lost if the shed headshunt was in use. That is, moving from the turntable (say) to the shed itself was only possible when the headshunt was set *against* operations (I think I've got that right guys?). I also seem to recall that running the shed area sterilised one of the running lines - or maybe I dreamt it? Either way, it was clear we had a problem. I don't think it should be too difficult to overcome though, not for Len anyway.

The biggest hurdle at this point is getting hold of Len who has a great many irons in other fires as 't were, and is understandably much in demand. If you get to read this Len, please find half an hour to come and see us (bring a cake). If you have not got the bandwidth to fix the problem then maybe you can impart the necessary solution such that we can have a crack at it in your absence?



## **THE CLUB LAYOUTS *Cont'd***

### ***Tipton Hills...***

The club is getting this layout ready for the Chasewater Exhibition on July 7th and 8th which this year is a two day event instead of its former one. David and others have laid two loops which will act as storage sidings each having breaks to hold 3 trains. Rodney is designing a park to go on these extra boards contrasting with the hills on the original layout.



Not many clubs can boast an autoballaster. Ours is called Edgar. Here he is in action on Tipton Hills. Set him up and off he goes...



Mike T in action glueing the trackbed to the baseboards on Wartson Hall. Haven't seen him for a while, I wonder whether he glued himself to it. Mike?... Mike?...

### ***Wartson Hall...***

In the last newsletter we described our start on a new layout called "Waton" and many people contacted us pointing out that an exhibition layout of this name already exists so we have changed the name to Whartson Hall - a GWR variant on "warts and all".

The layout is at the stage of getting the legs ready and of the correct height to support the layout, although some track has been laid towards the front to show members what the layout might look like.

## **CLUB MEMBERS**

**Ken Jones** has updated the news page on his website [www.kenjonestrains.co.uk](http://www.kenjonestrains.co.uk) to show dates he will be exhibiting his layouts for the rest of the year.

Ken is appealing for help completing his list of commercially produced N gauge buses to British outline. The list is on line at:

[http://www.modelbuszone.co.uk/tmb/lists/Models\\_N\\_Buses.htm](http://www.modelbuszone.co.uk/tmb/lists/Models_N_Buses.htm)

If you can fill in the blanks, add to the list or can circulate the above link that will all help.

**Tony Minchin** has had a short stay in hospital but is out now and looks much better. We all send our regards and best wishes for his continued improvement.

**Mike Turner** has updated the club's website at:

[www.ngaugewmg.co.uk](http://www.ngaugewmg.co.uk)

before having technical problems with his computer and graphic cards. He has also updated our club flyer.

**Rodney** has received certificates for the models that he entered into the N Gauge Society AGM Modelmaking competition.

He received:

Very Highly Commended for;

- Steptoe's Yard a 24"x18" Diorama
- Heritage Railway Repair Yard a 10"x10" Diorama
- Walsall Trolleybus a Modified PD Marsh Kit
- Open Air Double Decker Bus Modified PD Marsh Kit

And a BRONZE for DAN'S GARAGE, A Country garage with Landrovers.

All will be featured in the next issue of the N Gauge Journal.

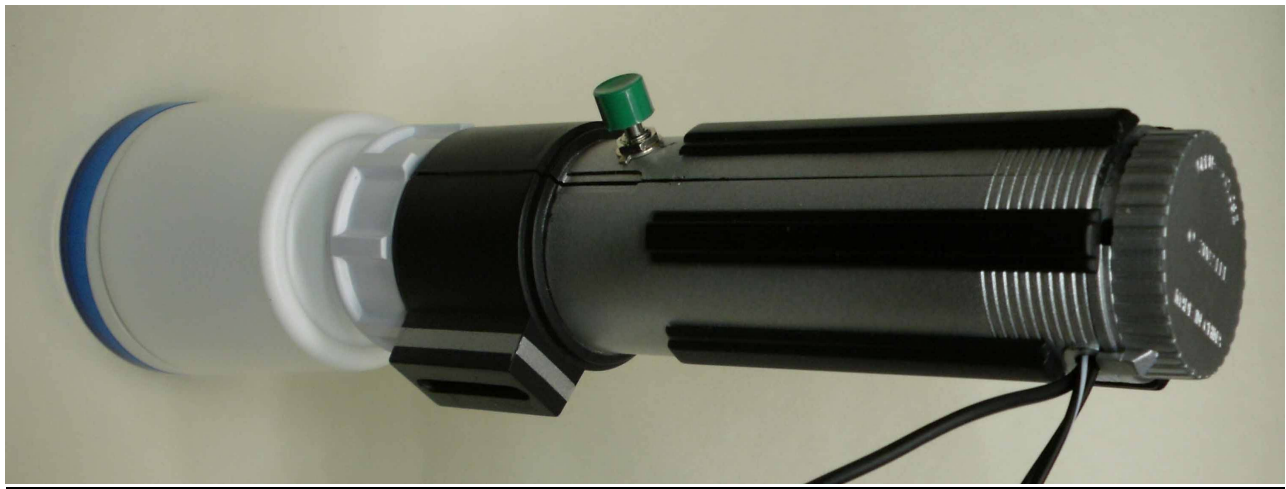
[Excellent work Rodney!](#)

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## **CONSTRUCTIONAL FEATURE**

# **THE GRASS-SABRE**

**By Tony Butler**



If you have yearnings to become a scenery Jedi, sooner or later you are going to take a long hard look at your ground cover and notice that flock can only go so far in representing grass, even in 'N'. Ground foam flock *will* work for a reasonably cared for domestic lawn for example, but ground foam either coarse or fine is not the best material to use to represent all types of grass. Other materials come into play here such as carpet underlay (if you can still find the old fashioned stuff), fake fur, dyed lint is good as a base and finally static grass. By modelling the texture of grass correctly, you can push your scenery realism up to new levels.

It is the application of static grass I'm dealing with here.

Static grass is essentially coloured Rayon fibres available in various lengths and shades. The idea is to apply them as ground cover in such a fashion that they stand up and give the fuzzy effect we are looking for redolent of tall or un-mown standing grass.

Static grass can be applied by:

- Simply sprinkling it on.
- Puffing it on with a plastic bottle that also imparts some static charge to help the grass stand up.
- Blasting or 'shooting' it on with an electronic tool.

### **I'm getting an ache in my wallet**

The use of an electronic tool is really the best method of the three but the tools can be rather pricey. Perhaps not to a large club who could consider the purchase of such a tool as a good investment given the number of members and layouts that may be 'on the go', However, for a small group like ours or for singleton modellers, neither the justification nor the funds for such a purchase are easy to come by. The Noch product for example is running around £130 – That's a brand new loco in my book!

So, in best '[Blue Peter](#)' tradition (Google it overseas readers...), and keeping in theme with our shoestring layout project 'Wartson Hall' I decided to make one.

### **Credit where credit is due**

Coming up with the idea wasn't difficult of course as Noch and others have trod the path before me. Particularly I am indebted to Joe Fugate of Model Rail Hobbyist <http://model-railroad-hobbyist.com/>

He has a downloadable article which describes in video how to make one at: <http://model-trains-video.com/MTV-0011.php>

Indeed, the idea wasn't new to Joe either. Joe credits an article by R.A. Cooke at [www.racooke.com](http://www.racooke.com).

### **Modifications**

A modification I *did* make however was to make the grass cups detachable. My reason for this was that I figured that the large cup size on the Noch product may be OK for large areas of scenery, particularly in the larger gauges, but for 'N' it is likely that the scenery areas could be smaller and anyway, many of us have small layouts. To this end I have made a range of cups from a pepper pot size to something approaching the size of the commercial product and all stations in between. This enables me to detail small areas well *and* do the big sweeping prairie stuff.

Furthermore, although these things are generally made out of scrap plumbing pipe, I used an old and broken children's toy Star Wars Light sabre just for fun. I think it looks just great☺.

### **OK, enough of the waffle, let's get on with it....**

First find your pipe, or light sabre if you prefer and collect some bit and pieces.



In the meantime, here is some music...

### **You will need:-**

#### **Supplies**

- Offcut length of waste water pipe
- Stop end fitment for the above or something suitable from the scrapbox to make 'ends'
- Various small tubs with lids.
- A switch or pushbutton of your choice.
- Negative Ion generator (see text)
- Phono socket
- Phono plugs (1 per plastic tub used).
- Wire mesh
- Various odds and sods as required
- Cyano cement



The original motley collection. One light sabre (second hand, one elderly Jedi owner), two plumbing stop ends to suit your waste pipe diameter (from a well known orange coloured DIY shed) and one Negative Ion Generator. This is the heart of the unit really; it generates a stream of negative charges at around 15KV and is usually used for air purification systems, air health units and 'bug zappers'.

### 15KV? Isn't that a bit dangerous?

All this high voltage sounds scary, but it is at a very low current and has **no** direct connection to mains electricity so it won't kill or seriously hurt you. It will however cause you to do a funny dance if you touch the wrongs bits!

### Electrical Warning!!!

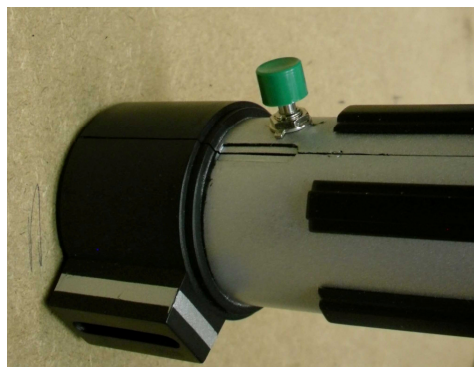
When the power supply is on, mild electrical shock *is* possible if you touch the screen with one hand and touch the ground lead with the other hand.

1.



I decided that my light sabre was a bit too long so I cut it down. If you are using plumbing pipe I suggest you probably want a piece around 150mm long.

2.



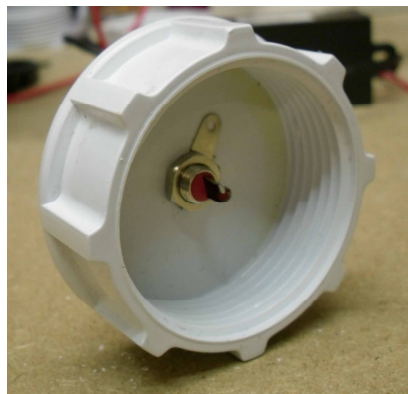
I fitted a switch. Most people tend to use a toggle or slide switch somewhere near the rear end (see other articles) but I wanted a push button somewhere nearer the business end. I found this smart green one in my scrapbox.

3.



Take one of your plumbing end fittings, unscrew the cap from the barrel and glue the barrel into your light sabre with Cyano or Araldite. There is a proper solvent available for PVC pipe but I don't like the fumes and anyway, I wanted to use what I'd got already and avoid further expense. If you are using PVC pipe, do NOT do the other end just yet or you will find that you may not be able to get the internals in.





4.  
Take the screw end of the pipe cap and find the centre. Drill a 9mm hole, clean up any burrs and fit a Phono Socket into it. Do the nut up so that the socket doesn't move. Now we need to turn our attention to the internals.



## The Gubbins

### 5.

The electrostatic charge is generated by a Negative Ion Generator. This is a small device around 58mm L X 29mm W (plus mounting lug (10mm)) X 23mm H, fixed into a small plastic box with potting compound. Its three connecting wires are 300mm long. The Red (+) and the Black (-) wires connect to the battery, and the pale Red silicon covered wire provides its -EHT output.

They are available from Oatley Electronics for around £12 or so. I ordered mine on t'internet as Oatley's are in Oz.

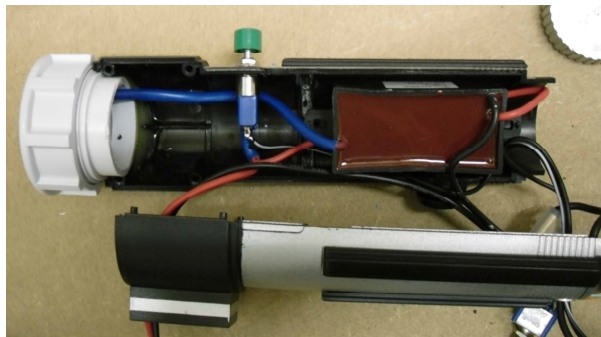
Find them at [www.oatleyelectronics.com](http://www.oatleyelectronics.com)

The one you'll need is a 12volt item, known as 'IONB2'



### 6.

Mount the Ion unit into the body. I used a little silicon sealant to just keep it from sliding about. Connect up the wires to the switch and a small terminal block to connect to the supply cable. Connect the HT wire to the centre connection of the Phono socket.



I also used pieces of heat shrink sleeving to cover the soldered connections. This is particularly important for the HT connection to the phono socket as the solder lug has square edges and ions will be released from any sharp point so try to make a nice smooth round soldered joint there.

You will need a metre or so length of insulated flexible wire, black is a good choice, to make the ground lead. Connect a crocodile clip to one end and connect the other end to the black lead from the Ion unit and the negative power lead.

After this I assembled the two halves of the sabre. If you are using PVC pipe you won't have two halves of course, but NOW would be a good time to fit the opposite end cap that you left off earlier.

## The Grass Cups

7.

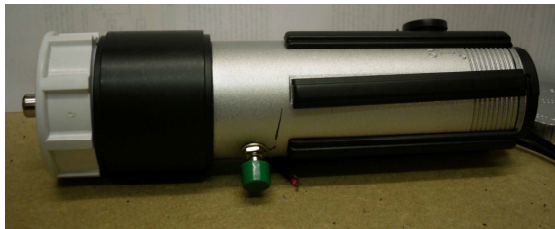


Having collected your tubs, and perhaps helped to empty one or two of them (Betty Crocker Cake Mix!) you will need to do a couple of things first:

Take a Phone Plug and solder on to the centre tag a length of insulated flexible wire. The length needs to be about 1½ times the depth of the tub.

Find the centre of the base of the tub, drill a 9mm hole – just as you did for the end caps – and mount the Phono plug in the base of each tub with the wire inside the tub. A little Cyano will help.

Cut a circle out of the lids in order to support the mesh screen. This was quite easy with the two lids in the photo – cake mix and fish food – but actually quite hard with the white pepper pot and the Cosmetics tub. I had to drill lots of tiny circles for those and then take the Stanley knife to them to join up the holes. After cleaning any rough edges with sandpaper we are ready to mount the screen mesh.



The main body of the Grass-sabre. The grass cup will plug onto the small silver coloured socket on the left.

8.

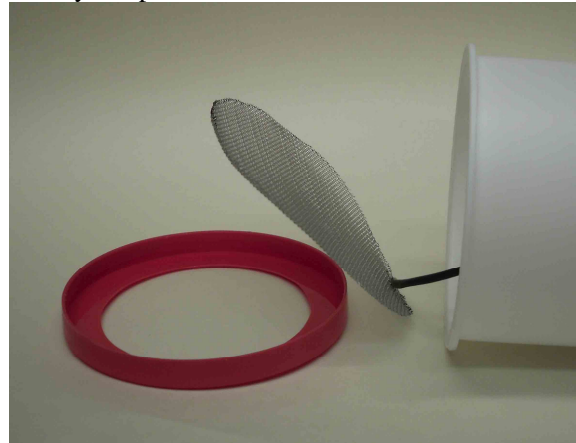


The screen mesh is cut from a frypan splatter screen I picked up at a Pound Shop for... well... a pound. Please don't get caught using the Memsahib's best sewing scissors for this; it won't do them any good at all.

Additionally I would suggest cutting the circles of mesh outside or out in the shed or somewhere where there isn't carpet. The little slivers of stainless steel get everywhere.

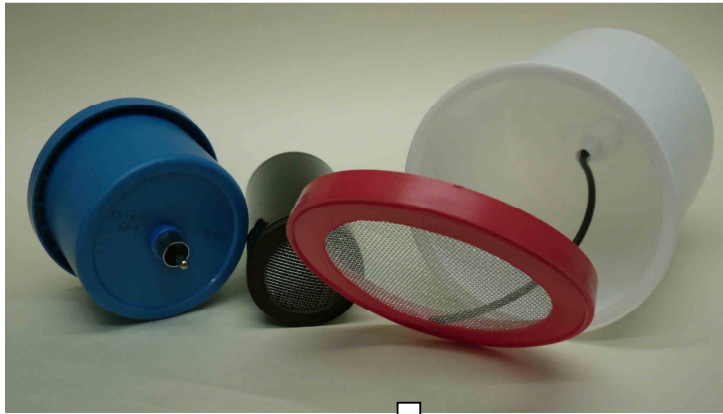
You will need to cut the mesh to fit in each lid. It's probably best to draw on the mesh around each lid with a marker to give a cutting line. It worked for me. The mesh will need a little further trimming but ultimately should be a good friction fit *inside* the lid.

Next, separate the strands of the free end of the flexible wire and stuff them into the weave of the mesh at one edge. Solder this connection so that the solder flows into the interstices of the mesh. Finally, snap the lid on.



## Final Assembly and Testing

9.



I made a range of grass cups as you can see to cover varying areas of scenery. They are all made in basically the same way. The grass cup just plugs onto the body and can be changed in seconds.



10.



I power my unit from a 12volt DC 'Wall-Wart' type of power supply. 12volts DC will give the Optimum charge, but a usable charge will result from 9VDC or even 6VDC at a pinch. Just use what you have available, wall warts seem to accumulate in our house as the items they originally came with are replaced or finally give up the ghost. When powered up, all being well, pressing the button will power the device. You may be able to feel the 'Ion wind' blowing out of the cup. Moving the croc clip near to the screen will reward you with the buzzing noise indicating that the static discharge is occurring.

Anyway, turn off and unplug for now and let the device rest for a minute to let any remaining charge ebb away. Whilst you do that, go and look out your stash of static grass.

## 11.

Get your static grass and put a small handful into the cup. You can test this on a piece of scrap plasterboard, polystyrene or whatever.

Paint an area of your test surface about 150mm square or whatever with pva glue, or a mixture of pva and water if your pva is a bit on the gloopy side. Something with the consistency of thin cream ought to do it.

Now, push in a pin or small nail into the wet area and connect the croc clip of your ground lead to it. Switch on and shake the grass-sabre above the surface at a distance of a couple of inches. The grass flock will start to fall from the grass cup and, in the presence of the static field will line itself up as it falls to hit the surface standing nicely at attention. Keep at it until you think you've got the sort of coverage you want and switch off. If your pva mixture is not too thin you will find that the grass fibres stay standing.

You can create the effect of rougher, slightly trodden grass by now poking the grass with some suitable implement – a cocktail stick will do, or failing that the Mk1 index finger.



Well that about wraps it up. I think it works well and, for the money is easily the equal of the commercial offering. That's not to say you shouldn't use other means of course if you prefer them, or your budget will stretch, but personally I enjoy the challenge of being able to make something and I've enjoyed making this. I think I might give it a lick of paint here and there though, just for fun.

I reckon that between my description here and further reference to Joe Fugate's or R.A. Cooke's original articles you should be reasonably well equipped to have a go yourself. You can also find further information in the March/April 2010 Issue of Model Rail Hobbyist which features three, YES THREE! Static applicators. <http://issuu.com/mr-hobbyist/docs/mrh-2010-mar-apr-01?viewMode=presentation&mode=embed>

If you think I've missed anything or if you have any questions I'd be happy to field them from the editorial address. Or e-mail me a [glasspusher43@btinternet.com](mailto:glasspusher43@btinternet.com), or then again, just grab my elbow at the club or another show.

I'm donating my prototype to the club as a sort of 'contribution' to the shoestring layout project as I've got enough bits to make myself another. It also helps me feel like I'm 'putting something back' as they say.

Now where did I put that other light sabre?

T.B.

## **TRIP WORKINGS**

We will be exhibiting Tipton Hills at the Chasewater show 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> July.

Ken's Suitcase layout will be making an appearance at the International N gauge show in September.

Waterstock is booked for the Warley Show at the NEC in 2014.

## **2012 PROGRAMME**

All meetings are held at Tipton Green Methodist Church Hall, Park Lane West, Tipton, West Midlands, DY4 8LD, on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturdays in each month, from 2pm to 5pm.

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There may or may not be a meeting on December 15<sup>th</sup>  
<sup>2012</sup> Watch this space.

Meeting dates for the rest of this year:

June		16th
July	7th	21st
August	4th	18th
September	1st	15th
October	6th	20th
November	3rd	17th
December	1st (AGM)	15th?

Any changes to these dates will be notified on our website or in our quarterly newsletter.

For more information, contact  
Ken Jones: tel: 0121 777 7062  
Email: [westernsultan@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:westernsultan@hotmail.co.uk)  
Website: [www.ngaugewmg.co.uk](http://www.ngaugewmg.co.uk)

Please use the **rear entrance** to gain access to the church hall. If you are in doubt, please ring first, especially if you are travelling any distance.

## **TAIL LAMP** by TB

I have often thought that there is something odd in the way that many clubs handle their new and potential membership. Club committees generally go to some deal of trouble to attract this membership by means of notices in journals and publications, local exhibitions by the club themselves or by participating in larger shows, use of leaflets and other flyers, arranging displays in public places, libraries perhaps and even supporting local charities. However, when Mr Newbie turns up, feeling exactly the same as he did when he presented himself before a new class at school – apprehensive and then some – quite often he finds that

the only character desiring conversation is the hon. Treasurer, and he's got an ulterior motive.

Now, if this first appearance should coincide with a 'talk' night or a film show, our poor palsy stricken candidate may consider himself lucky; it is relatively easy to lose oneself in the flickering half light of a tv screen or a slide projector. More often than not, our novice will enter the glittering scene on a track night.

Now, it is only natural for those of similar interests to group themselves, and, to be perfectly fair, it can be difficult to make an introduction into such a group, but one solution, that *almost* solves the problem of the newcomer, is to greet him or her (you never know!) with a hammer, point to a nail, and tell them to hit it. If the newcomer is going to be a good egg, he will soon be labouring quite contentedly for a member who knows his way around the club project.

I say 'hammer' but of course if the club project is at a more advanced stage, weathering say, a hammer would of course be quite inappropriate so maybe a small brush would be the order of the day, though I'm sure you get my drift.

I also said 'almost', please realise that this is not a cure-all for some are happily quiet, and why not? - if that's what floats your boat. I must add that here in the WM area group we are lucky to have an extrovert for a Chairman who will lead the new or prospective member 'by the hand' as it were introducing them to the other members, but I do think early involvement is key all the same.

Of course, in some clubs of my acquaintance the project never leaves the talking stage. Perhaps in that case the hammer could be used for some other purpose?

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, the Chairman or indeed any individual club member. On the other hand - they might.