

THE
HORNBY
RAILWAY COLLECTOR



August 2011, No 465



A few Hornby Boys, p20

Refurbishing Dublo Locos Robert Finley (7900)



Some two years after acquiring replacement transfers for some of my Dublo locos I have finally got around to some refurbishment and I thought others may be interested in the results achieved and the techniques used.

I do not pretend for a minute that the result is perfect – it's not – but you do have to look fairly closely to see any defects. It was also my first attempt, and all the experts say you improve as you go!

The first project was one of my BR 0-6-2Ts, No 69567. After removing chassis and handrails, I dipped the body in caustic soda; about a tablespoon in an ice cream tub, just enough to cover the body. I left it for 30 minutes or so, gave it a stir, took it out, rinsed and toothbrushed it, then dipped it again for 15 minutes, all the while keeping my flesh (and everything else) well isolated from the caustic soda!

A thorough rinse and dry and it was time to clean off all the casting dags and mould joints kindly left by Mr Hornby. For the most severe I used a fairly small but very sharp chisel on the soft metal. After that, fine emery cloth worked wonders. Before priming, I covered the buffers with a short length of drinking straw to leave them in brass.

For primer I used a Plastikote Red Oxide spray can. The spray technique is something you learn as you go – better to do several thin coats (at least two) rather than run the risk of paint running. Already the model looked good! Some little blemishes get filled with the paint, others you might put up with, or for bad ones you could probably use some filler and then re-prime, but I did not need to do this.

For top coat I used the Plastikote Matt Black – same as before, at least two coats. By now the model looked brilliant – particularly after brush painting the buffers with the bright red enamel.

But now came the tricky bit – getting the transfers on! I obtained them from Dennis Williams, the Dublo Surgeon, in Cheshire. They are of the stiff backing paper and tissue variety. He recommends three methods of fixing:– meths, or varnish or a gum and water mix. The first two did not work well for me – maybe my technique – so, on the advice of my neighbour Chris Cameron, I contacted Elsdon Arnold who was most helpful and emphatic:

“Use Arabic Gum!” The sort of gum we've all used for school projects – you know, comes in a little bottle with a wedge shape rubber cap

with a slit in it. “Use it 1:1 with water,” said Elsdon. Well, so I did and it worked a treat. It didn't even seem to leave any residue – if it does, a very gentle rub with water on a cotton bud should remove it. But the final varnish would probably hide it too. This is the method Dennis recommends for beginners.

These particular transfers have backing paper, tissue and image in that order. Peel off the paper first and fix it with image side down – yes, that's right. You are then left with the tissue paper on top. Leave it to dry thoroughly, maybe overnight, and then soak in lukewarm water for five minutes or so and the tissue floats off, leaving a nice shiny transfer. Do not leave too long – I did this on my next loco, the LMS tank, and the big “L” went down the plughole leaving just the big “M S”!

Affixing transfers is a slow process, as you can really only do one surface at a time and even then the BR emblem inside the tank linings has to be done separately. The hardest bit, which of course is where I started, is fixing the bands around the boiler. Even with Elsdon's method one has to be patient and keep pressing them down. Of course it's not helped by the transfer wanting to slide off the raised bands on the casting. The LMS has no boiler bands!

So, now I had a pretty snazzy looking near-finished loco – now No 69569. Again, the experts all say one should clear varnish, so, back to Hammer Hardware, and out comes the Plastikote Clear Sealer. “Is this a matt finish, Paul?” “Yes, I'm pretty sure

it is” – though the can doesn't say. OK, off I go with it and, of course, it's not matt, more like a satin finish and, truth to say, it's probably much like the original Hornby finish. I later found that Hobby City in Auckland does have a matt spray. But here's the best part: the sealer fills up all the little gaps under the edges of the linings around the boiler bands!

But it is still very soft and has to be handled with kid

gloves for a few weeks I reckon. I am not game enough to put it into an oven! Should I be?

Shown is the finished BR loco and progress on the LMS (not yet varnished). It is only recently that I noticed the small oval protrusion on the front wheel wells. These were never painted by Hornby (except I think for the Southern Region version) and Dennis tells me they were maker's plates, so a bit of gold on these I think will look good – will have to raid my wife's cake decorating kit!

Following my (relative) success in refurbishing these two 0-6-2Ts, I felt brave enough to attempt one of the 2-6-4Ts, after



Photos by Richard Ashenden.

A Chat with John Gahan in 1995

Albyn Austin

It's now 2011 – good heavens, how time flies – and sadly John Gahan is no longer with us. Back in 1995 I had a very long chat with him. He was never keen for us to publish anything about that lengthy conversation, but I found it a fascinating insight into what it was like to work for Meccano Limited, so I copied up notes I made at the time and sent a copy to the HRCA archives.

In July I was talking to Bob Field at the Train Collectors Society's annual Sandy exhibition, where Bob had his Dublo stand and our chairman was drumming up new members with the HRCA stand. Bob remembered the article, and suggested to me that it was now time that its contents were published.

I like to think that John would not be too upset with my taking up Bob's suggestion. In the past fifteen years, considerably more has come to light about Meccano's problems, especially in its later years, and I think the HRCA has grown up too over the years. Most of us don't look on the company any more through rose tinted spectacles, and have a much more realistic appreciation of the business. Though sad in some ways to lose one's naivety, it's fascinating in others to have a much wider view of the Meccano business and the thinking behind some of their decisions. Like growing up – you can't go backwards, at least not for long. I hope that what follows (which is firmly based on what John told me back in 1995) is of interest to readers.

John Gahan at Meccano Ltd

Early Days

I was brought up near to Binns Road, and as a lad I often went to the Empress Cinema, but it was some years before I learnt it was the site of Frank Hornby's factory in Old Swan prior to the firm's move to Binns Road in 1913.

As a lad I was always interested in trains and model railways. When I left school in the late 1930s jobs were hard to come by, and I was lucky to find one in a grocer's store at 10 shillings (50p) a week.

One of my aunts worked at Binns Road (she left after her marriage) but Meccano Ltd were recruiting very few people and she couldn't get me a job there. However, after the war started and employees began to be called up into the services, a few jobs became available. During January 1940 I replied to an advert in the Liverpool Echo for an office junior in Meccano Ltd's Advertising Department. The advert said that applicants should have an interest in railways and preferably knowledge of both Hornby Trains and Hornby-Dublo. In my application I told them I had a Hornby train and had won a prize in a Meccano Magazine competition. This secured me an interview with a man in an Auxiliary Fire Service uniform. He introduced himself as Les Norman, and he was to be my boss for most of the next 23 years.

Mr Norman was employed by the Advertising Department, and was the company's expert on railways, both full size and model. It was he who wrote in the Meccano Magazine under the pseudonym of Tommy Dodd. Too old for the armed forces, Mr Norman had joined the fire service and worked at Meccano in the quiet periods between air raids. In his spare time he cleaned out ash pans at Birkenhead engine shed. Other Meccano employees had similar split jobs at this period. Two weeks after that first interview, I was summoned for a further interview with the Assistant Editor of Meccano Magazine and was then told I had the job. Mr McCormack, the advertising manager, told me my wages would be 25 shillings (£1.25) a week. I was lucky in that the factory was only a five minute walk from home.

My career

I had been working at Meccano Ltd for just over a year when, in July 1941, I was called up to join the Pioneer Corps, and was demobbed in September 1946. During those five years of

war service, I was able to contribute occasional articles and competitions to Meccano Magazine. I worked with army trains, and was involved with the Normandy landings, later supporting a forward casualty clearing station.

I returned to my old job at Binns Road in September 1946, and stayed with the firm until February 1963, by which time it was apparent that the firm's Advertising Department was being run down and my job was likely to disappear.

On leaving Meccano Ltd, I worked for Littlewoods Stores, but railways and model railways remained my hobbies. Since my retirement I've expanded my model railway at home, though most of my locos are more modern than Hornby-Dublo. I've written five books on Liverpool's railways (published by Countywise Ltd of Rock Ferry), lectured regularly on Liverpool's railway history, and carried on with some researching. I'm a member of the local model railway club, help out at Birkenhead Transport Museum on Sunday afternoons, and am kept busy by my grandchildren, none of whom share my interest in trains.

Meccano Ltd

When I joined Meccano the Advertising Department employed about 30 people, and at its post-war peak the factory had a workforce of about 3,000. Around 500 were employed in the train room, where final assembly and packing took place of both trains and Dinky Toys. Post-war the main business appeared to be Dinky Toys, with 40,000 a day being produced. Initially the working week was five and a half days (including Saturday mornings) but in about 1953 a 5-day week was introduced. This meant that office workers had an earlier start, 8.30, instead of 9 o'clock. In the run up to Christmas a lot of people were taken on part time as casual workers and worked a great deal of overtime. There were about 100 people employed in the main office, paying bills etc; many of them being young ladies. This was an additional attraction to the job, especially for a teenage lad. In fact it was at the factory that I met the lady who was to become my wife.

My job

I was given a broad remit, from answering letters to providing advice on technical details of new products. There were also lots of one-off research jobs in response to particular queries from, for example, the New Products Committee.

Another of my tasks was to take visiting parties around the factory. I was one of the guides used to escort technical groups such as model railway clubs or a bunch of engineers. Two ladies generally took round school parties. I still have the sketch I made of the factory layout and the notes I compiled.

When I went away to war in July 1941 some Dinky Toys and some Hornby Trains were still being made, but which models they were I cannot recall. The firm was also still producing Meccano parts, though mainly in army green paint for use by the government, but for what purpose I do not know. The model department was also being kept busy making Meccano and other models for government work. Before I went off to war, I recall helping to build a huge model of a marshalling yard, which was then photographed, to help train bomber crews.

When I returned to the factory in September 1946, the firm was already back to producing a few Dinky Toys and also some Gauge O trains. To do this, the stores were searched methodically in an effort to find part-finished items or components that could be used to create something sellable. Improvisation was often necessary and supplies were rationed. This explains the numerous variations in post-war O gauge trains, and the small orders for items such as No. 1 GWR coach sides reported by Ian Layne in his HRCA articles on the tin printing orders from Carlisle. I found Ian's articles of great interest, and never cease to be surprised at the prices collectors will pay for minor variations of trains or Dinky Toys that would hardly have caused a ripple or raised an eyebrow on the production line at the time.

A Reversal of Honours at Barrow upon Soar

*Meccano and O Gauge Sections
Chris Graebe (384)*

The April HRCA auction having been a most successful sale, it was nonetheless thought that the O gauge section had been the greater triumph, with Dublo producing fewer sensations.

For the June auction, however, the honours clearly went to the H-D buyers. Such variability is inevitable given the random nature of the goods commissioned for sale.

The sale started with a short section of Meccano products from the collection of a deceased member. These proved popular, with all the cars and aeroplanes finding homes. The sale started with a No. 2 aeroplane which sold for £280, while the unboxed No. 2 car made £360, and the boxed No. 1 set £240.

The boats fared fractionally worse, though not all were in the best condition. Nonetheless the X46 Naval Launch from the sought-after late 1930s range sold for no less than £320, despite its declared faults. Lot 989, however, which proudly bore the name "Hornby", sold for just £35, though the rust which is the enemy of these items was to blame, despite attractive appearance.

A truly lovely Meccano No. 1 outfit from the nickel period had no such corrosion problem, and sold for £40, which seemed good value. Equally good value – if weight of metal was to have been the criterion – Lot 997, a huge lot catalogued as too big to post, but which sold to an absentee bidder, who had arranged for our Chairman to make a personal delivery to Cornwall. Are there no limits to the service offered?

The train section started with some remarkable B-L items. The Merchant Taylors loco was unsold, perhaps unlucky on the day; the electric Duke of York was, however, of very fine quality, and sold for £500. A group of signals sold well, but a boxed selection of very interesting Winteringham electric rails sold only at their lower estimate (LE) of £50.

Post-war French Hornby (lower right) was popular, with a TZB steeple-cab at £190, a TBB DC loco at £140, and an OBB AC loco (miscatalogued but recognised by viewers) at £50.

Getting on to the Hornby boxed sets, there came the best lots of the O gauge section: an export Flying Scotsman set (£720), and a really fine E502 LMS Passenger Set in 20V, for export to Canada in this case so without space for transformer.

Left: Auctioneer Barry Potter greets our columnist Douglas Baldock, flanked by committee members Geoff Brown (left) and auction computer wizard Adam Heeley (right). Right: From top, TZB (£190), TBB (£140) and OBB (£50). The coaches worked out at about £30 per piece.



A Meccano No. 1 Car Constructor Outfit, quite properly restrung on a new card, was adjudged as £240 worth.



Above, a Meccano set sold for £40. Below, the late 1930s X46 Naval Launch sold for £320, with a monoplane bought for £120.



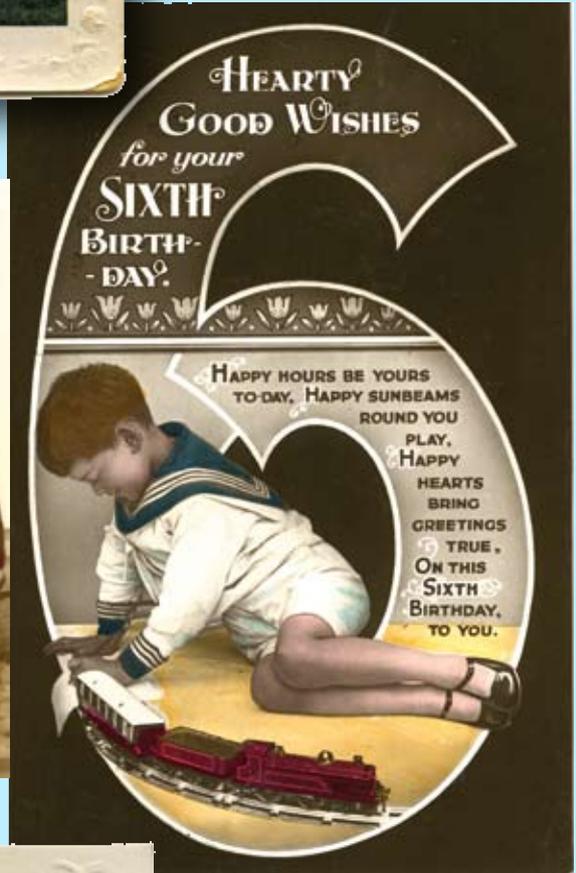
A happy purchaser – of one of the items from the collection she played with as a youngster. Our Chairman arranged for a repair by Nat Donelley, so that she and the next generation (of whom only the boot is visible) can play with it again.



A Few Hornby Boys in Old Pictures

The picture on our front cover shows how it should be done: though carefully posed, it looks natural, and conveys a real enthusiasm. The 1930s photo is by a talented amateur photographer, Sidney Garbutt; we will come back to a little more of his work another time.

By contrast, much of the commercial work of the time was quite dreadful. Hornby Trains featured quite frequently on picture postcards like those shown here, most of which suffer low artistic and poor technical quality, the latter being the best achievable at low cost.



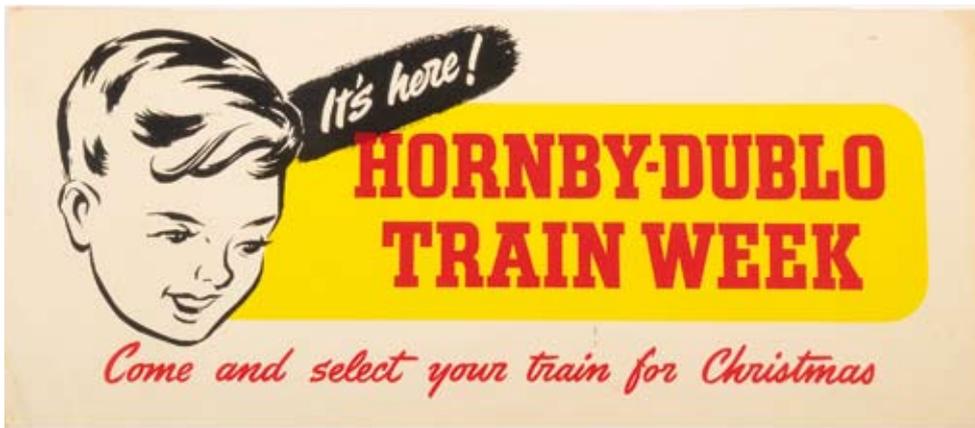
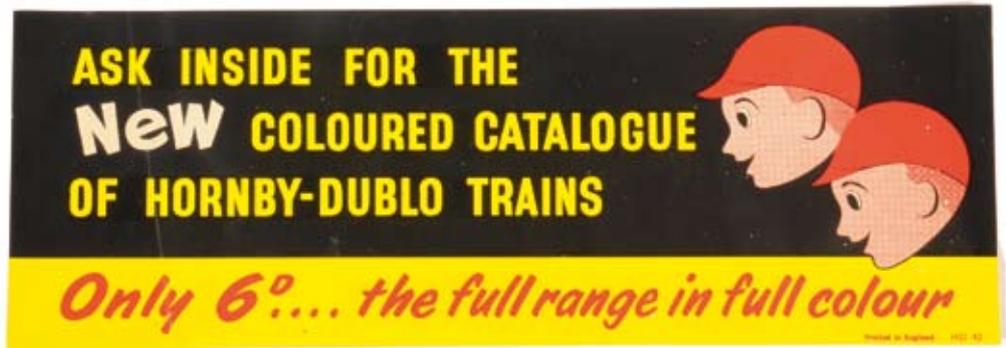
Most were birthday cards, carrying awful greetings; but at least they show our trains! At the top is a well known card, truly remarkable for depicting the hyper-rare GE wagon. The photo is quite charming, unlike the 7th birthday card where the lads appear in pain; possibly because of the foreign signal. The non-Hornby loco is marked "LMS" on the bunker side, though the photo has been printed back to front. At least the Hornby wagons are nicely loaded. The date is 1938-39.

The lad on the left looks a bit wistful, perhaps because his No. 2 LNER loco has been tinted pink, and has no tender. Perhaps he had better luck the next Christmas.

**Photo Feature:
More Hornby-
Dublo Point of
Sale Display
Material**

The May 2007 issue of the Hornby Railway Collector carried an article on Dublo display material based on Bob Field's collection. We have now been able to photograph a further selection of items, from Bob and (mainly) from another important collection.

Top right: This attractive design with arched Hornby lettering (echoed in this Journal's masthead) is usually found as a paper poster. Unusually, however, this particular example has been supplied mounted as a showcard. It measures 17" by 8".



Above is a late poster, from circa 1961, which has lost none of the strength of image that characterised the earlier display material. It is 13" by 4½". Coded HD42.

Christmas was always a time when retailers were expected to make a little extra effort. This poster was intended for use only in Hornby-Dublo Train Week. 15" by 6½".



A strange choice, perhaps, for a showcard advertising only a single product, and unfortunate to have included the word "New", which meant replacing the card with a new version shortly afterwards! Strictly, of course, this is not a Hornby-Dublo showcard; Purchase Tax legislation meant that no mention could be made of the trains, with which there was supposed to be no connection.

The views of the reverse sides show that the card could be either hung by the hole provided, or made free standing by using the fold-out flap.

