

Wellington British Railway Modellers



January 2026

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Liverpool Overhead Railway
Contemporary Freight Trains
One Place, Seven Stations

Feel free to copy this PDF to anyone you think might enjoy it. – Editor

Editorial

Julian Lermitt

Happy New Year. My apologies for a shorter *Totem* this month, but your editor is (non-terminally) crook in bed at the moment and managed to accidentally lose some newsletter material. Better luck next month.

Liverpool Overhead Railway

Julian Lermitt

For a great maritime nation, the United Kingdom is noticeable for its distinct lack of great natural harbours. Nowhere in Britain is there a great natural anchorage such as Wellington harbour, in which, James Cook observed, that all the European naval fleets could anchor simultaneously (or something like that). Some British ports are small and cramped, like Bristol; others like Dover or Holyhead depend on massive artificial breakwaters. (The breakwater at Holyhead consumed several decades in its construction, and was notable for having what was probably the last broad gauge line, which closed in 1913.) In Liverpool the docks (like those of London) sprawled along miles of riverbank. In addition to the landing stages which rose and fell with the tides of the River Mersey, there were dry docks, repair facilities, ships chandlers, in short everything needed to sustain one of the busiest ports in Europe.

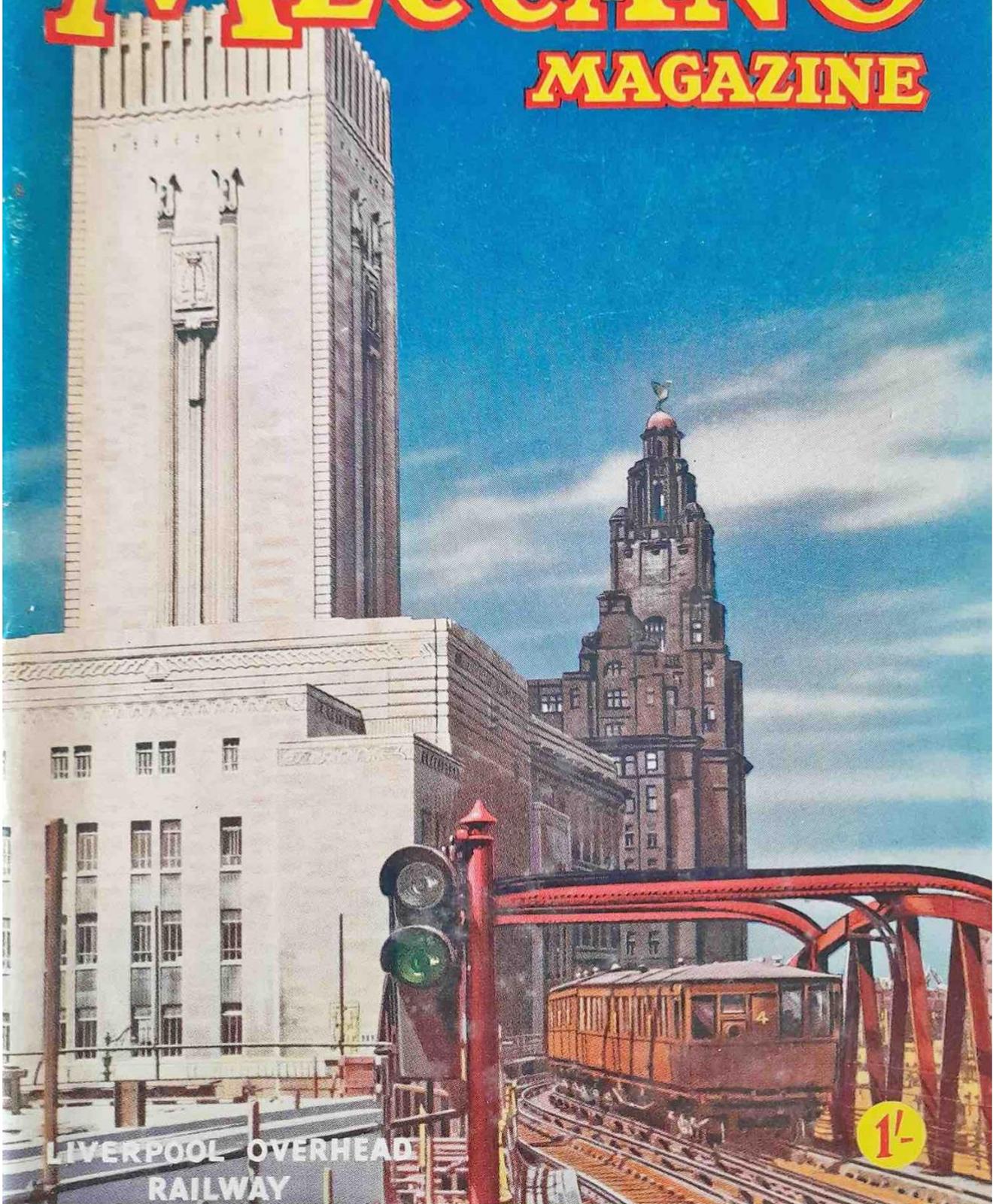
Railways were first laid in the Liverpool docks in 1852, and for many years all traffic was hauled by horses because the dock management (not unreasonably) feared that steam traction posed a serious fire risk. In 1859 an inventive London bloke called W. H. Curtiss introduced a passenger service using bimodal buses drawn by horses. These buses travelled on conventional wheels on the road, but when a lever was pulled, retractable flanges were engaged against the backs of the road wheels, which made it possible for the coaches to ride on the tracks of the dock railway.

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MECCANO

MAGAZINE



LIVERPOOL OVERHEAD RAILWAY

1/-





A section of the Liverpool Overhead Railway replicated in Liverpool Museum. Unless otherwise stated, all pictures in this article are from an excellent account on Twitter 'X':

Liverpool: Then and Now
@keithjones84

You will need to open an account with 'X' to view it. As always on that site, proceed with care.



After years of planning and negotiation the Liverpool Overhead Railway opened in 1893. The gauge was standard, powered by outside third-rail DC. The line was 6.5 miles (10.5 km) long and was double track throughout. It featured a number of world firsts: first electric overhead railway, first electric multiple units, first automatic signals. The rails were mostly 16 feet (4.9 m) above ground level and the supporting pillars were normally spaced at intervals of 22 feet (6.7m). There were a number of girder bridges where wide gaps had to be crossed.

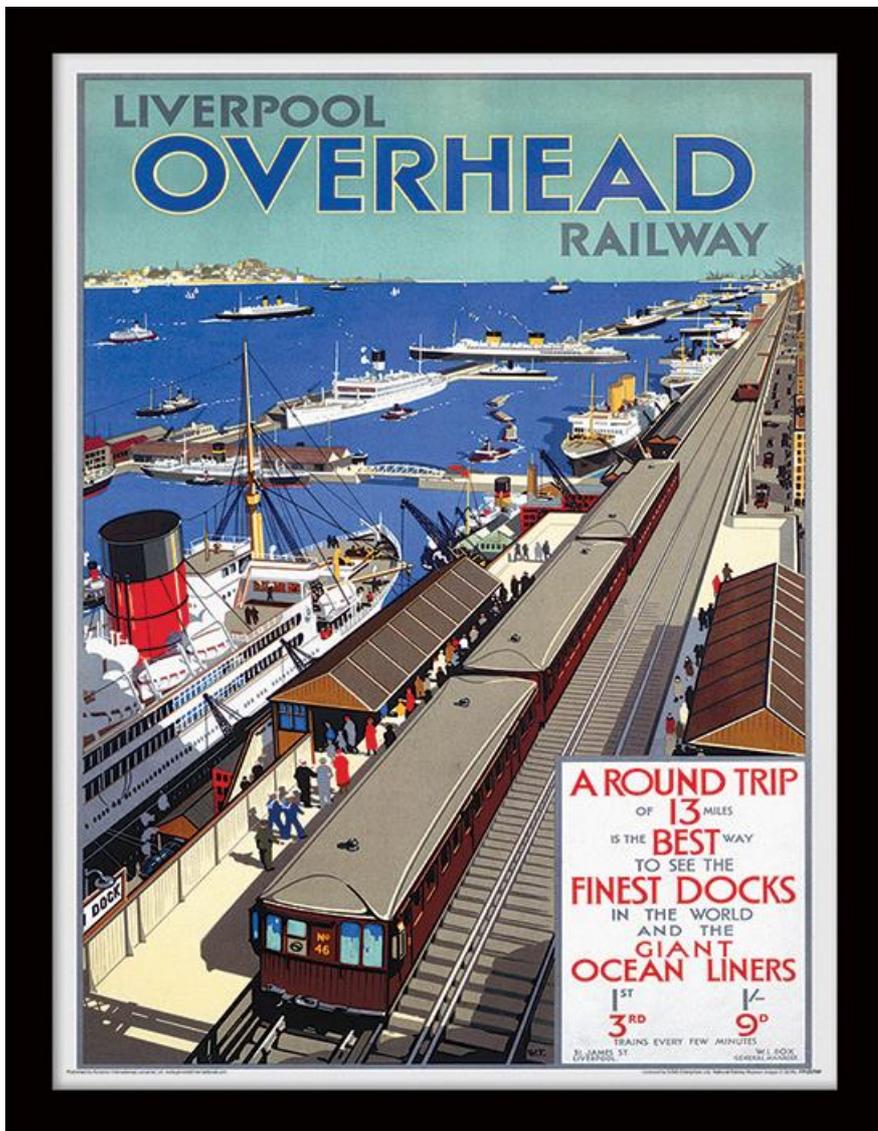
The employment of electric multiple units meant that if trains had to be strengthened the axle loading did not increase. This was in contrast to the pioneering (1877) elevated railway in New York, whose trains were drawn by 0-4-4T tank engines.



*A delightful scene for the railway modeller and a nightmare for maintenance engineers.
Photo credit: Liverpool Echo.*

For much of the route the Overhead Railway ran directly above the dock railway lines. This led to the popular nickname of “The Dockers Umbrella”. Liverpoolian drunks and derelicts found it handy to shelter under at night, and the first dock freight train of the morning needed to keep a sharp lookout for them.

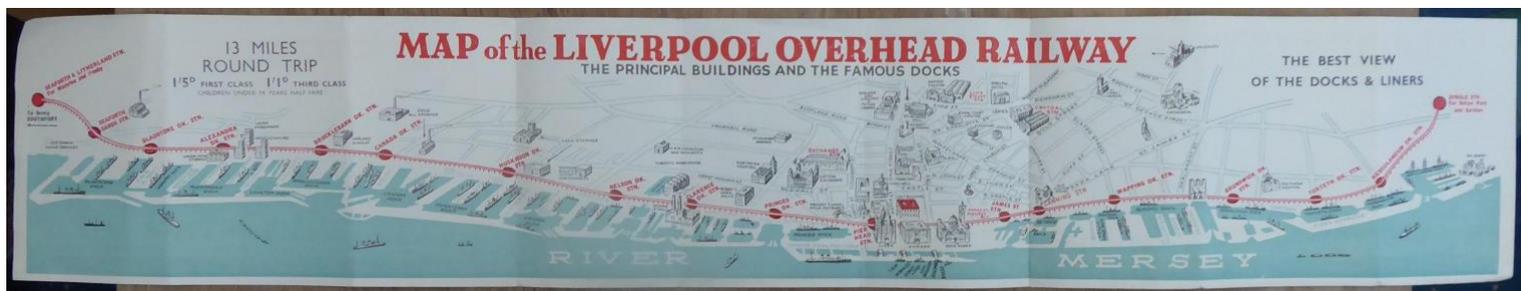
From the start the overhead line was very busy, even though it lost a major source of revenue early on when the telephone rendered legions of messenger boys redundant. A steady income was derived from tourists buying return tickets to see the passenger liners and other sights of the port.



Source: unknown.

The Liverpool Overhead Railway closed at the end of 1956. Part of the problem was that the railway started and ended nowhere in particular. If it had been connected to the Lancashire and Yorkshire at one end and the the Cheshire Lines Committee tracks at the other, it may perhaps have survived. But decades of insufficient maintenance, the corrosion of the steel structure by steam engine exhaust underneath, and the mixture of steel and cast iron components in that structure (which made welding repairs very difficult) doomed the railway. There was a strong local preservation movement but that faded when the true costs of restoration became evident.

Today the port of Liverpool handles as much freight as it ever did, but modern shipping requires only a small fraction of the dock workers employed during the existence of the overhead railway. Similarly modern ships require less maintenance and a much reduced number of crew. The last 'boat train' to Liverpool and the last passenger liner sailing from the Mersey were in 1966. This completed a decline in passenger traffic that began in 1912 when the big Cunard and White Star liners such as *Mauretania* and *Olympic* switched to Southampton because of its favourable tides. (Southampton gets twice as many high tides as other ports. While seawater streams westward down the Channel and ports such as Dover and Plymouth experience low tide, the Isle of Wight deflects some of that westbound water up the Solent.)



Source: abebooks.com



Strand Street Liverpool, in the 1930s and 2025



Mann Island, Liverpool, 1898 and 2025.

Modelling the Liverpool Overhead Railway

Plans of rolling stock are available in the *Model Railway Constructor* for June 1983. A lot of basic information about the LOR is simply absent because the railway management were bombed out of their offices *twice* in World War 2.

Scratchbuilding will be required, but scratchbuilding never killed anyone.

As for the elevated steel structure itself, it would seem an ideal subject for 3D printing. Illustrations of 3D printed Liverpool Overhead Railway models are to be found on the internet so someone out there is modelling this railway.

Imagine this on a model. An electric tramway crossing a steam dockyard railway underneath an electric railway. Breathes there a modeller with soul so dead as to resist this?



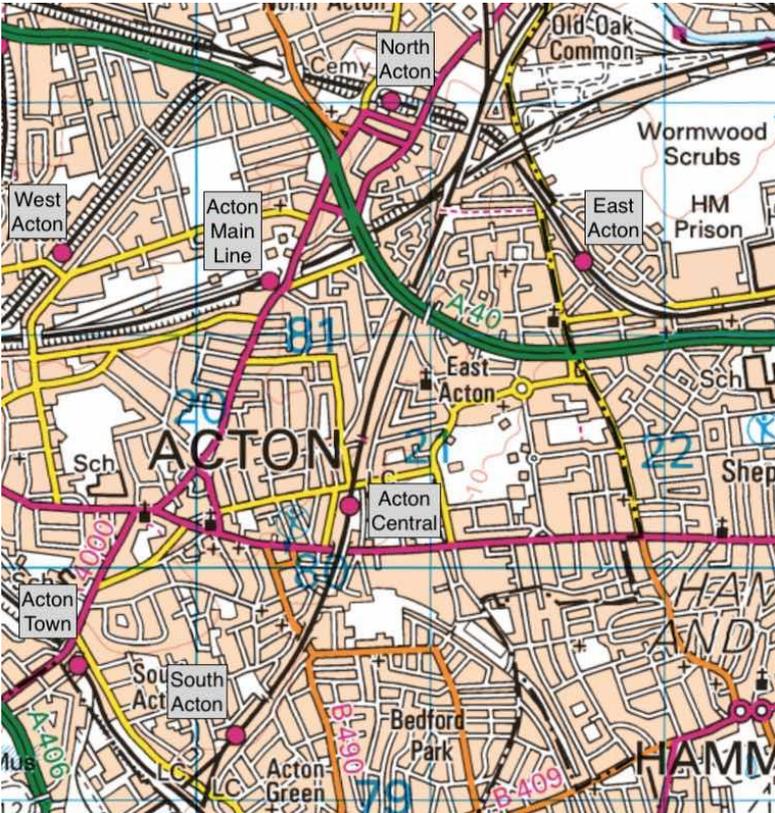
James Street station. Source: disused-stations.com

One Place, Seven Stations

From the Bus and Train User website:

busandtrainuser.com

One place with seven stations: Acton



Contemporary British Freight Trains



Left: 70003 on the 09.45 Wentloog to Maritime passing through Patchway, March 2021.

Below: the French have a phrase for these things, belle laide, “beautifully ugly”.

70806 and 70811 at Eastleigh, June 2021.



Source for both pictures: @NickCar23619332 on Twitter, 'X'.



66764 on Colnbrook to Portbury, Bristol empties. March 2021.
Source: @NickCar23619332 on Twitter, 'X'.



Northern 150108 leaving Plumley passes 66771 with train 6826 Tunstead/Rugby Up Sidings, December 2025. Source: @Steam1957Loco on Twitter, 'X'.

Modelling note: contemporary British railways often have 'overscale' cables visible. This looks like DCC with a substantial red wire apparently connected to the right hand rail, as it should be.



*66314 hauls 4L08
Doncaster IPort –
London Gateway,
December 2025.*

*Modelling note: the
track is neither
perfectly straight nor
level.*

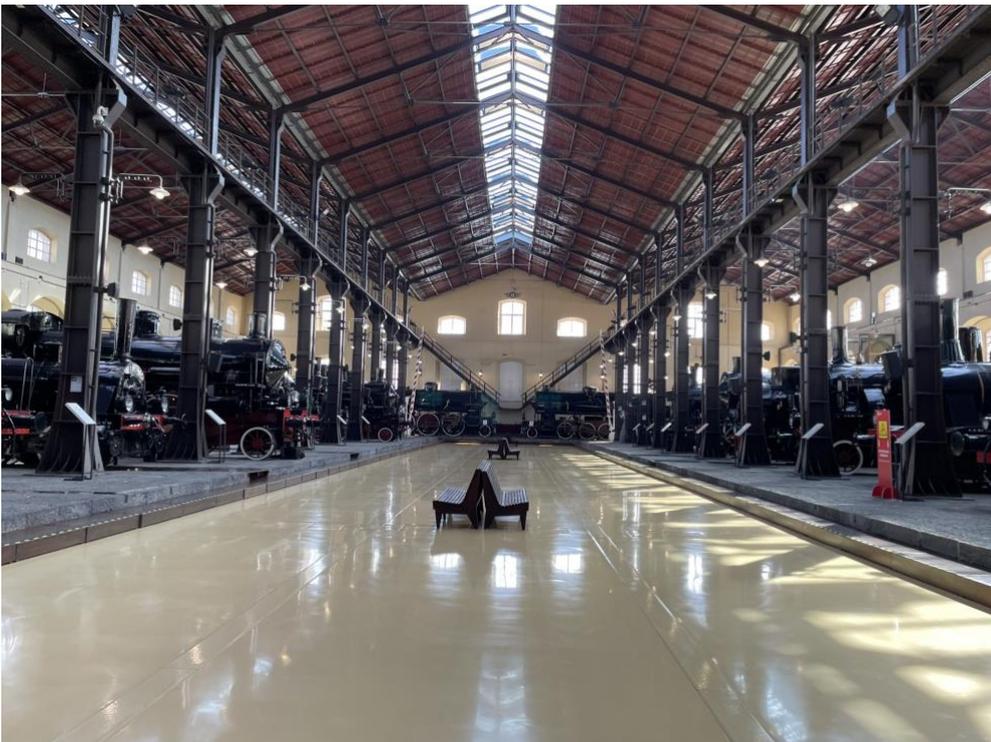
Source: @RegalEagle12 on 'X,' formerly Twitter.

Spotless



The editor's eye first came upon this magnificent English pneumatic press.

It transpired that the machine was an exhibit in the Italian National Railway Museum in Naples. From these pictures, all from @steve220459 on 'X', this may be the most spotless railway museum on earth.





Where all that Franco-Crosti stuff started.



Ahimè! The almost universal Italian flair for design is absent in their locomotives.

Magazine Articles on Line

Clive Williams

I have been pointed to this website:

djb-model-rly-articles.blogspot.com

This contains numerous PDFs with scanned articles featuring mainly GWR and Welsh Railways. Some of these articles are from magazines that are now difficult or impossible to access. Dave Bowden, the blogger responsible, has got permission from the original authors which include well known names (some of which are sadly no longer with us). Modellers of other regions will find some useful lists showing where articles relevant to them can be found. (Please note the links on the home page don't work yet, others do!) The club holds copies of some of the relevant magazines. *[There are about 170 PDFs in blog at the moment. Many are from*

Model Railway Constructor articles from the 1930s and 1940s, including about thirty of Ray Tustin's articles on pregrouping coaches from the constituent companies of the Southern Railway. – Editor]

LNWR in Difficulty



Coventry, 1904
Albany Road bridge

Coaches had been left standing on a temporary siding which lacked buffers or even a stop block.

Source:
@TrainStations23 on
Twitter 'X'





Photographer unknown. Posted by @trainsongbook on Twitter 'X'



*The Model Railway Club's 2mm/foot finescale layout, Copenhagen Fields.
Photo credit: Model Railway Club.*



Semaphore at Garsdale, 5 January 2026. Source: @semaphoria.co.u

Traders in Secondhand Model Railway Equipment

These traders in model railways are even more important now that the number of model shops is dwindling. If you are aware of other traders who handle models of British railways, please let the editor know.

MARCUS LECKY

<mailto:marcuslecky47@gmail.com>

TRAINMANIA©

A reminder that Trainmania's new shop is now open in Warkworth.

022 605 5415

<mailto:lionel@trainmania.co.nz>

<http://www.trainmania.co.nz/>

TONY DRAGICEVIC

027 872 3630

<mailto:tony.dragicevic@gmail.com>

JOHN HESLIN

Invercargill

021 188 9049

<mailto:tootroom@gmail.co>

Next Totem

The February 2026 edition of *The Totem* will be published on 20th February. If there is anything you would like to contribute to the editor, Julian Lermitt, email:

<mailto:kiwiscrooge@xtra.co.nz>

Events of Interest

2026

January 2026

- 7 Gold card group meet at clubrooms. (Everyone else welcome.) Bring lunch and a project to work on.
- 18 Monthly club meeting in clubrooms.
- 17 – 19 Tauranga Model Railway Club Annual Show, Tauranga Boys College, Devonport Road, Tauranga. Entrance off Devonport Road opposite 14th Avenue.

February 2026

- 4 Gold card group meet at clubrooms. (Everyone else welcome.) Bring lunch and a project to work on.

Date to be announced

Annual General Meeting of the Wellington British Railway Modellers Club (Inc) at the clubrooms in Waterloo Station (Lower Hutt, not the other one!) Pizzas at 1pm, meeting commences at 2pm.

The above events are those which in the editor's judgement will go ahead, in the absence of interruptions outside the control of the organisers.

Events of Interest is compiled from a number of sources, the principal ones being the What's On page of the New Zealand Model Railway Guild website: <http://nzmr.org.nz> and the Model Train Shows website <http://trainshow.co.nz/>. Information is published in good faith but no responsibility can be accepted. Always check with organisers before travelling long distances.

Club Officers

Chair: Roger Simmons email <mailto:rogersimmons.nz@gmail.com>

Deputy Chair: Julian Lermitt email [kiwiscrooge @xtra.co.nz](mailto:kiwiscrooge@xtra.co.nz)

Treasurer: Clive Williams email <mailto:treasurerwbrm@gmail.com>

Secretary: John MacDonald email <mailto:secretarywbrm@gmail.com>



More of the Model Railway Club layout, Copenhagen Fields.

Photograph from the Model Railway Club.

