Documenting your model railway

This page has been added to the web-site to give some guidance on documenting your model railway layout/collection. Whilst the documentation can be useful in managing your layout/collection, the time it will be really valuable is when someone has to sort out the layout/collection when you no longer can.

What and why?

Why bother? You know what you have, how it works and how it has all been put together. You may have a reasonable idea of how much it all cost, even if that's "Classified Information". Unfortunately, when the time comes the person who has to deal with it all may know little or nothing about model railways and even if they can find someone who does to help them, they won't know about your railway.

The most important part of the documentation is a list of all the items. If your railway is insured separately (i.e. not just as part of the Contents in your House Insurance) you probably have at least part of the list already. A complete list is extremely helpful as it allows the scale of the collection to be assessed; it may be that only 10% of the locomotives and stock are on the layout with the other 90% stored in a collection of unmarked boxes… If this is the case and some of the boxes are stored somewhere else then documenting where they are is also helpful.

If you have a layout, you may also have documents relating to the wiring for fault finding purposes. This is obviously useful if someone needs to rebuild the layout after a move. If there is information which might help with dismantling the layout – how many boards, how they are joined together etc. then so much the better. Information on controllers (particularly DCC which have relatively high values compared to analogue ones) should be included.

Most model railways in the UK are OO or N gauge and these are relatively easy to deal with as there's a lot of it around. If your railway is anything else it will probably need specialist knowledge to deal with. If there are contacts you can list where specialist advice can be sought, then list them. Similarly if you have specific wishes about what and or how the railway is to be dealt with, record them.

Cataloguing locomotives and stock

Whilst a simple list of locomotives and stock is helpful the more information the better. Boxed items are easier to sell (and can command a higher price) than unboxed items. If the stock isn't in the boxes but you have them, the manufacturer's reference number (e.g. for Hornby Rnnn) is useful for getting the right item into the right box. Noting any items which are non-standard or modified in some way is also useful; one example would be a locomotive bought as "DCC Ready" and which has subsequently been DCC sound fitted – not obvious from the outside but absolutely critical when trying to sell! There is no standard for cataloguing items but the more information the better. If you don't feel confident in creating your own, there is some model railway database/catalogue software available – look online.

It's obvious stuff but can make things so much easier. As a Club, we receive calls for help in sorting out model railways fairly regularly. We have dealt with cases ranging from simple layouts/small collections which are relatively easy to deal with to a very large collection which took the best part of a month just to catalogue and then required specialist contacts to dispose of. Part of this collection was US HO Brass locos, which are unusual in the UK.). At the other end of the problem was a large layout which itself appeared to be part of the structure of the double garage that it was in and included professionally constructed buildings including an accurate model of a specific church.