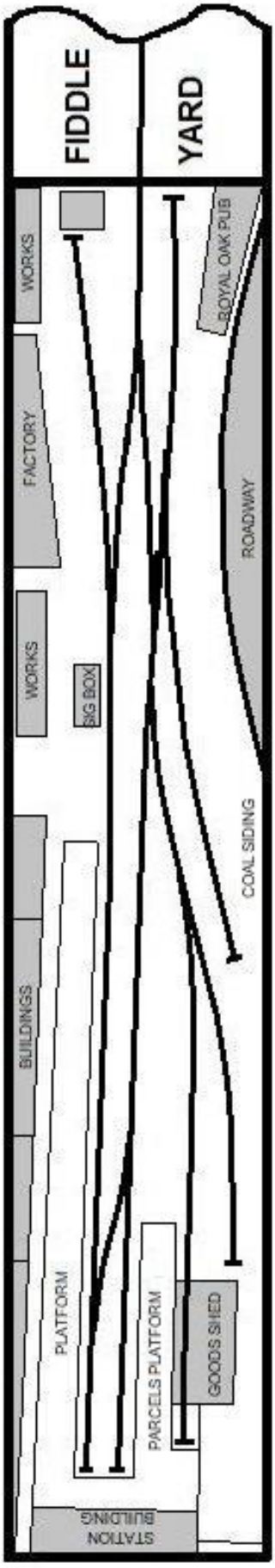

VIEWING SIDE

ARLINGHAM

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Scale 4mm:1ft EM gauge
Size 10ft 6ins x 1ft 4ins
Floor space 12ft x 5ft
Transport: 1 or 2 cars.
Operators: 3
Control: from the rear.
Lights: Incorporated
Power: One power point, from which I take a 4 way extension lead.

Other Information

Arlingham is a fictional town in East Anglia, at the end of a secondary branch of the old Great Eastern Railway. The layout is set in BR times, in the 1950s and early 1960s, towards the end of steam and the onset of the diesel period.

Locos and rolling stock are a mixture of modified ready-to-run, kit-built and scratchbuilt models. Track is a mixture of plastic chaired track and copperclad pointwork.

The background is meant to show the rear of many of the structures – the side so often seen from the railway line. While it's not as pretty as the public frontages, it's more interesting. The station building is based on Ongar, using the road side as the platform side. The goods shed is also inspired by the one at Ongar, but has been modified rather more than the station building. Most of the buildings are constructed from mountboard.

The -ingham suffix is common in Norfolk and Suffolk, being of Saxon origin. In fact there are over 50 such places. The meaning is the settlement (ham) of X's (Arl, Fram etc) family (ing). Arlingham does not exist, hence this layout is fictional. The idea is a branch off the main line in the March area.

Various structures are based on real places. The hardest was the station building, as there are very few termini with the building across the end of the line, and the ones which exist tend to be large. Ongar was built alongside the track as the plan was to extend the line. But while visiting the railway, a look outside showed it would be just what I was looking for. Some basic measurements and photos allowed for a reasonable model to be made. As is so often the case, just after that Street Level Models produced a card kit for the Epping - Ongar Railway, which would have provided me with a drawing. What effectively amounted to a reverse image meant the larger part of the building was to the rear. The adjoining gents toilet is based on the one at North Weald, the goods shed on Ongar, and the water tower on Thaxted.

The rest of the layout is meant to show the backs of many buildings. They're less attractive than the public-facing fronts, but far more interesting. They're based on various buildings near my home. There's nothing technical about them. All except the signal box are made from 1mm mountboard covered with brick paper. Scaling mortar courses to 4mm scale would mean it's flat anyway, and I just don't have the inclination to stick on all those tiles etc. The signal box is made as a clear plastic box with detail overlay. It makes it easier to build, and very strong.

One big need was to allow interesting operation or both operators and the public. To help with this it's possible to use one or two controllers, meaning the goods and passenger sides can be worked independently. If you have two operators who work together it can become quite slick. Indeed, at one show a father explained to his young son that DCC control allows such movements. In fact, it's simple analogue control. We didn't correct him (that would be discourteous unless he asked) but we did have a good laugh later.

Where scenery is concerned it's important to look at what's around, and in particular see what's normal. That takes time. As humans we probably notice the unusual, and too much unusual simply looks wrong. Look almost anywhere and it's not neat and tidy (and I'm not talking about litter and rubbish). A couple of fences broke by accident, hence the broken plank was left on the ground pending repair by the owner. Some of the rendering on the pub has pebbledash fallen off in patches. Further to this, think how sites would be accessed and make sure that's appropriate. For example, how would the dray have delivered the barrels? There just wouldn't be room for the cellar access from the pavement, so it's from the end. It would be daft to have loading bays at the rear with no access to the main road.

As far as stock is concerned, there are now three sets, allowing the layout to be run mid 1930s LNER, BR steam or BR early diesel. They are a mixture of scratch built, kit-built and converted RTR. Again we do get amused as some of the models are over 30 years old, but small modifications mean people don't recognise them. They have their original motors, and run well – that includes some older Hornby pancake type motors. It's matter of tweaking them, and in particular adding extra current collectors so they start reliably. The vehicles are 1950s based, so we turn a blind eye to them if running LNER. The vehicles are fixed to the layout to prevent damage while setting up, or the occasional little fingers wanting to push them.

There's on piece of trackwork which bemuses people. So often they comment about the double slip, then their faces show puzzlement as they realise it's not but don't know what it is. Indeed, originally it was a double slip. The problem for an exhibition layout is that if a tiebar joint breaks, it can be awkward to repair it in public. In addition, the coal siding would need a trap point to prevent wagons rolling away down the main line. Altering it (in situ!) to an interlaced type solved both problems. Access to the coal siding can only be gained from the headshunt, meaning there is no need for the trap point, the wiring is simpler, and repairing a broken joint is easy. For operation, either of the two curved roads and one straight can be used. I have since heard it is also known as a Barry slip, as that railway was quite fond of it.

I do have a few personal foibles with layouts. I draw the track plan underneath the baseboard. It make fault-finding so much easier. There's little straight track – and what there is does not run parallel to the baseboard edge reducing the geometric feeling often seen otherwise. The backscene top edge gently undulates, reducing the box-like feeling of a straight edge.

For transport, the two scenic boards are joined to make a single box, the trestles interlock. The whole layout fits into a Ford Fiesta, with space for the driver and an operator.

Colin Wilson

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