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Ron Thirkill's Veronpilly

Building Newcastle station
Location to model: Bowmans
Project layout Pt3: Leightonwood
Reviews • Mailbag • AMRM News

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Veronpilly

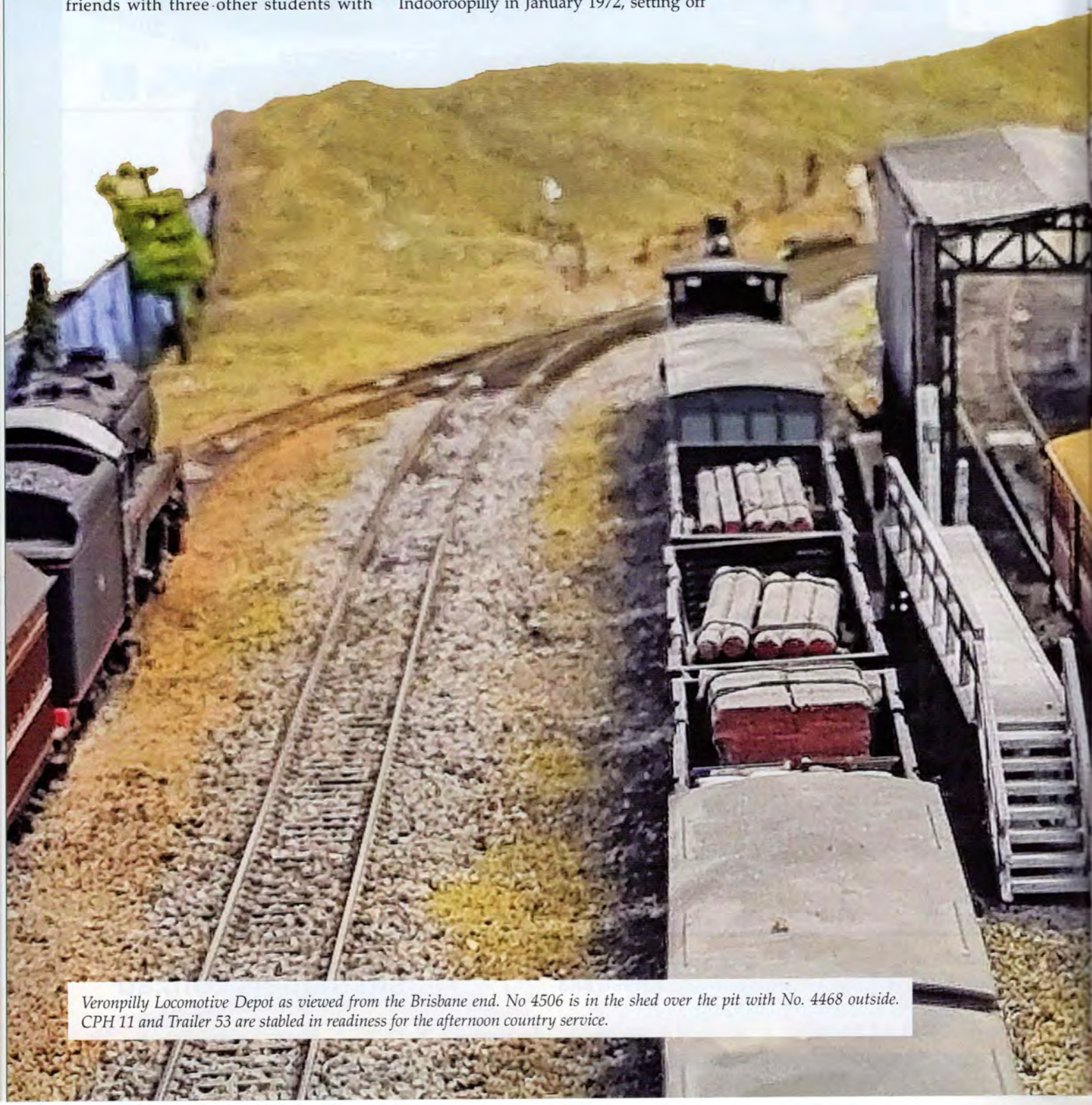
Ron Thirkill outlines his layout based on South-East Queensland, photos by the author.

My interest in trains began in 1968 at the age of 12 when my brother Ted took me on my very first Australian Railway Historical Society (ARHS) trip. The locomotive was Beyer Garratt No. 1096, and the trip was from Brisbane to Gympie and return. Over the next few years, Ted and I went on quite a lot of trips including the last scheduled steam train from Ipswich to Yarraman hauled by C17 No. 917 on 28th of November 1969.

Throughout high school, I made friends with three other students with similar interests, and we would spend our lunchbreaks talking about C17s, BB18¼s and pretty much anything to do with Queensland Railways (QR).

My early involvement in model trains came about when Ted joined a model railway club, and I would tag along to the meetings. Ted and I began building a layout under our house, but it was never completed.

After leaving school at age 15, I joined QR as a lad porter starting at Indooroopilly in January 1972, setting off on what I thought at the time was a lifelong career as a railwayman. That career finished when, at age 18, I decided to leave the railways to pursue a career in road transport. For the following forty something years I took absolutely no notice of anything to do with railways until suddenly, and for no apparent reason, about 10 years ago I started to develop an interest again.



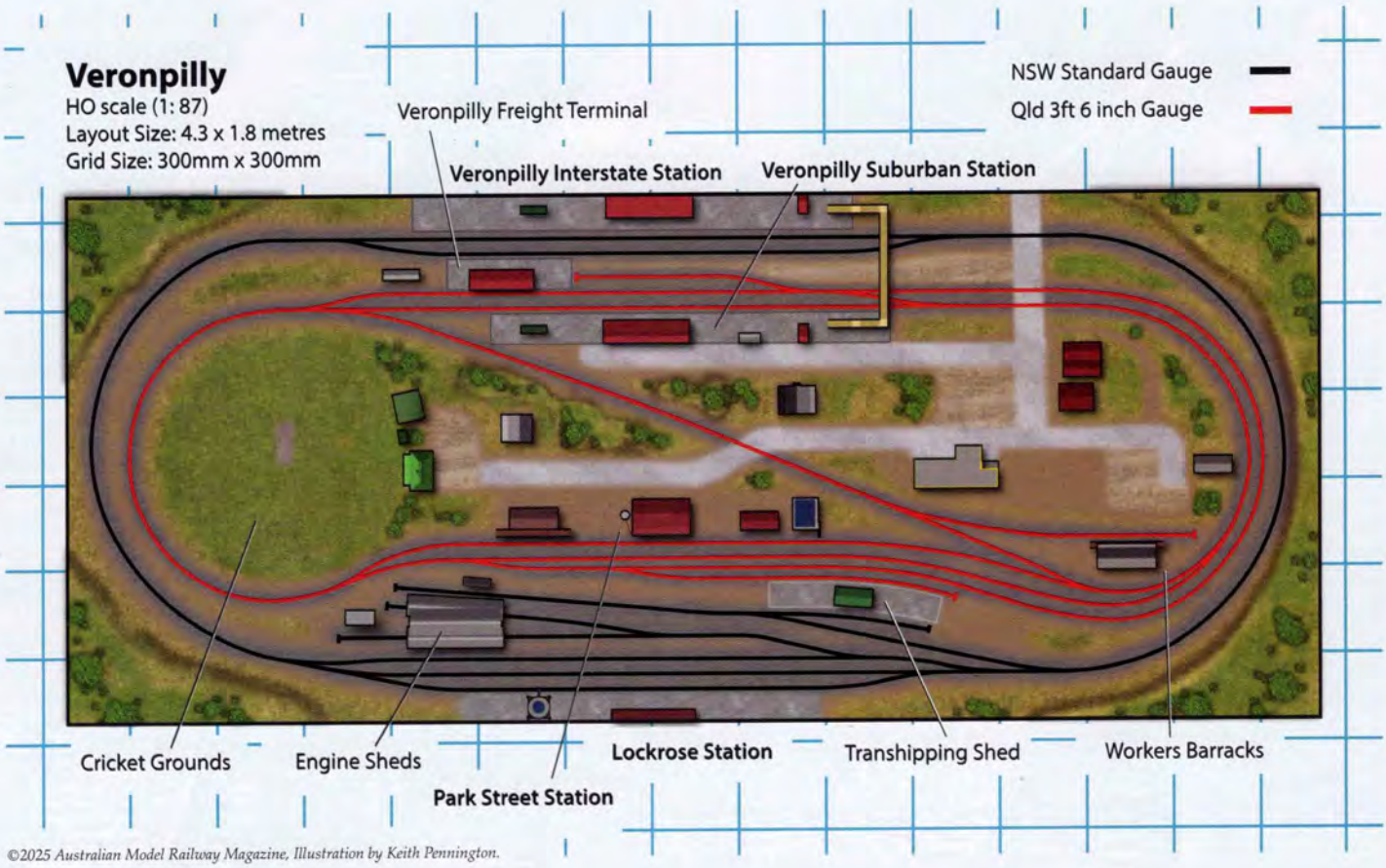
Veronpilly Locomotive Depot as viewed from the Brisbane end. No 4506 is in the shed over the pit with No. 4468 outside. CPH 11 and Trailer 53 are stabled in readiness for the afternoon country service.

The 'Golden' liveried No 1281 'Century' is arriving at Veronpilly with a suburban passenger service consisting of SX set No. 42. The prototype No. 1281 is on display at the Ipswich Workshops Museum.

The idea to build a model railway layout was a spur of the moment decision. The room was no longer being used for its intended purpose as we had wound down part of our business. I was out to dinner with my wife Veronika one night in November 2017 when I suddenly announced that I was going to take everything out of the room, store it in a container down the back paddock and build a model railway layout. The look Veronika gave me was priceless. I was 61 years old, had never built a model railway layout myself and wanted to have a bit of a go at putting one together.

My initial thought was to set the layout around the era of my interest and involvement with QR as a young employee. Nothing too elaborate, just single line working with a crossing loop and a couple of sidings; somewhere to run the trains. I was undecided whether to model Queensland or New South Wales (NSW). Towards the end of the steam era, Yeerongpilly locomotive depot still had a couple of 50 class steam locomotives stabled there. I liked the 50 class and so decided to model both systems on the one layout. The result was a fictional break of gauge location that I called Veronpilly (Veronika liked that name). The NSW section of the layout is HO scale (standard gauge) and the QR is HOn3½.

It is a bit like the line from Salisbury to South Brisbane where both systems ran



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Clyde No. 1498 hauls a set of Evans coaches across the Railway Street level crossing bound for the Northside.

▲ *Lest we forget.*

side by side, but is set in a country town with a pub, store, service station and church so there is a bit of Wallangarra as well.

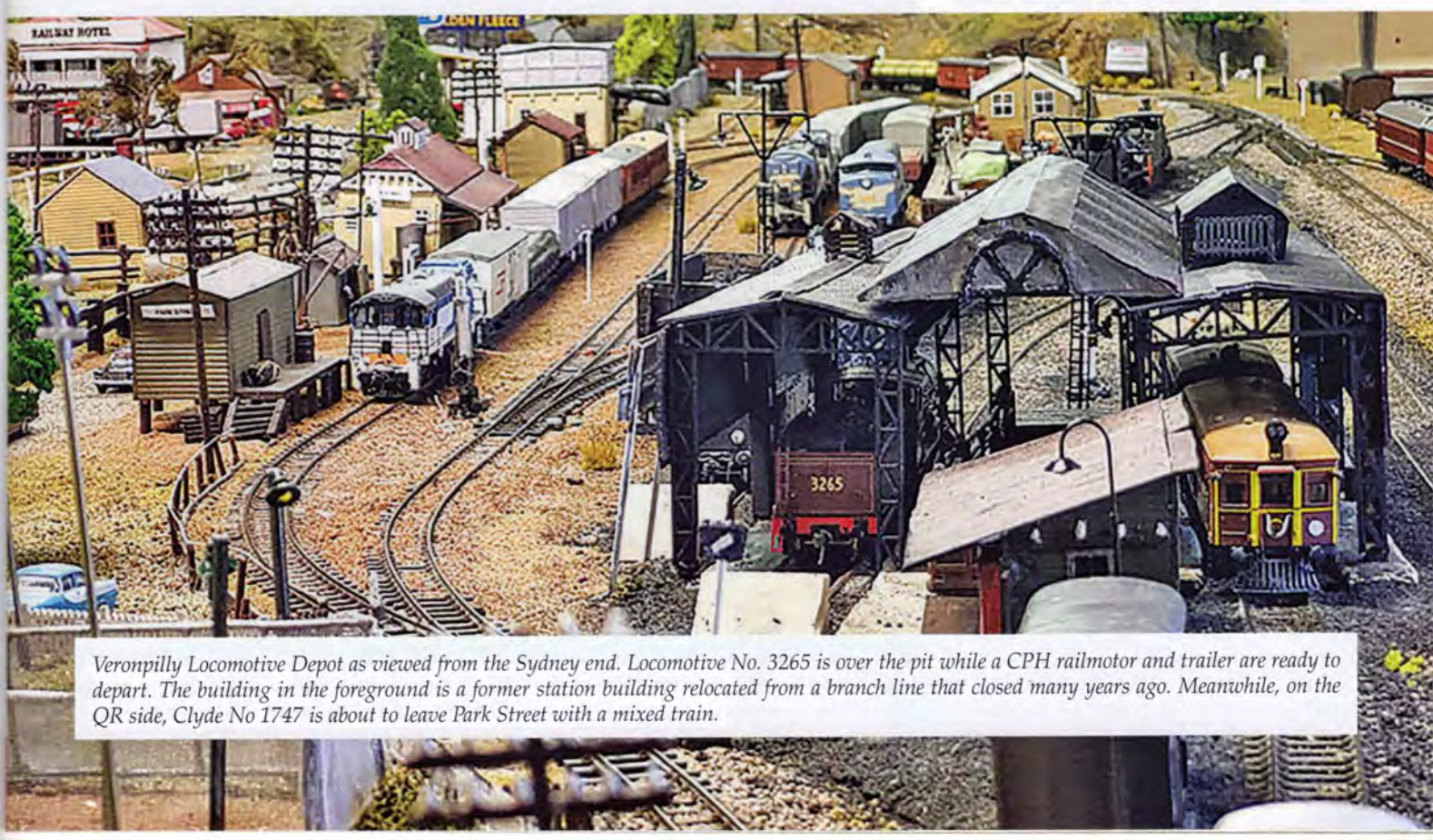
Locomotives

All the locomotives and rolling stock are ready to run, and most of the Queensland locomotives are from Black Diamond Models. I bought my first locomotive, a 1720 class, from Glenn who will continue to be my first call whenever I want a specific locomotive. Additionally, I collected various English Electric and Clyde locomotives as well as a DH class (of Walkers of Maryborough). I also have a Wuiske Models 1720 class, a Southern Rail Models 1550 class and couple 1460s from SDS Models. There is a seven coach SX set from Black Diamond Models and a set of Evans coaches from Caintode Flats. Most of my QR freight wagons are from Caintode Flats as well.

Buildings

The buildings are for the most part laser-cut kits from Walker Models. They go together without too much trouble, and provide a range of buildings that will fit into the era that I have attempted to replicate. I wanted to call the pub the Railway Hotel instead of the Royal Hotel, so I called Stuart from Walker Models and he was happy to supply the kit with the required signage.

I have had a go at scratch building, including the grandstand at the cricket ground, the awning on the Veronpilly Interstate platform, the pedestrian footbridge and the staff exchange platform as well as most of the fences. I find that things like wooden coffee stirrers and meat skewers can come in handy. Also,



Veronpilly Locomotive Depot as viewed from the Sydney end. Locomotive No. 3265 is over the pit while a CPH railmotor and trailer are ready to depart. The building in the foreground is a former station building relocated from a branch line that closed many years ago. Meanwhile, on the QR side, Clyde No 1747 is about to leave Park Street with a mixed train.

The operators' view when seated at the control panel at the Brisbane end.

once I have completed a timber kit, I never discard any of the leftover bits and pieces because they can often be useful.

Some time ago, Veronika and I were out for a drive around the Granite Belt between Warwick and Stanthorpe, and I wanted to see if I could find anything left of the Amiens branch, which branched off at Cotton Vale and was closed in 1974. While we were there, I found beside the former rail corridor an old telegraph pole, complete and still in place. I immediately decided that my layout wouldn't be complete without such poles and decided to make some. The poles and arms were easy enough to build using meat skewers and match sticks but what was I going to use for the insulators?

The answer came in the form of a hairbrush. I would cut off the tips, file and paint them, then glue them onto the arms. That all went pretty well except for the next two weeks when Veronika went 'nutso' because she couldn't find her favourite hairbrush. Oops! Eventually, when all the poles were in place I brought her into the train room and showed her what I had been working on. Once I felt that she was suitably impressed, I showed her what was left of her hairbrush. Hmmm.

The layout measures 4320mm x 1840mm. The NSW trains run around the outside and the QR on the inside. Both systems operate on single line working with crossing loops on either side of the layout. As well as the buildings previously mentioned, there is the Veronpilly station which features both suburban and interstate platforms. These are accessed by both an overhead pedestrian bridge and a subway. Both are low level platforms and the task of raising of them to standard height is on the 'I`ll get around to doing that one of these days' list.

I have a mate called Richard who is building an amazing double deck N Scale North American layout. When I decided

The main interstate line is to the left and QR No. 2 road to the right. The reinforced concrete retaining wall is there to prevent the hill from crashing down onto the tracks and causing a disruption to rail services.

It's a marvellous day for cricket here at the VCG, during the first innings of a day/night match. The visiting team captain has won the toss and elected to bat and the openers seem to have settled in well.

Its late in the day with peak hour upon us. The bus is awaiting arrival of the next train from the city. The old red AB International tipper has parked up in the parking bay opposite the pub for the night while a couple of overnighters are loaded and heading off early on their express overnight runs.

to go ahead with my project, I told Richard who strongly suggested I run a digital command control (DCC) system and explained the benefits of doing so. Initially, I started with the NCE Power Cab, and as time went by, I added an NCE Smart Booster SB5. The system allows me to run double-headed trains on both systems simultaneously without any issues.

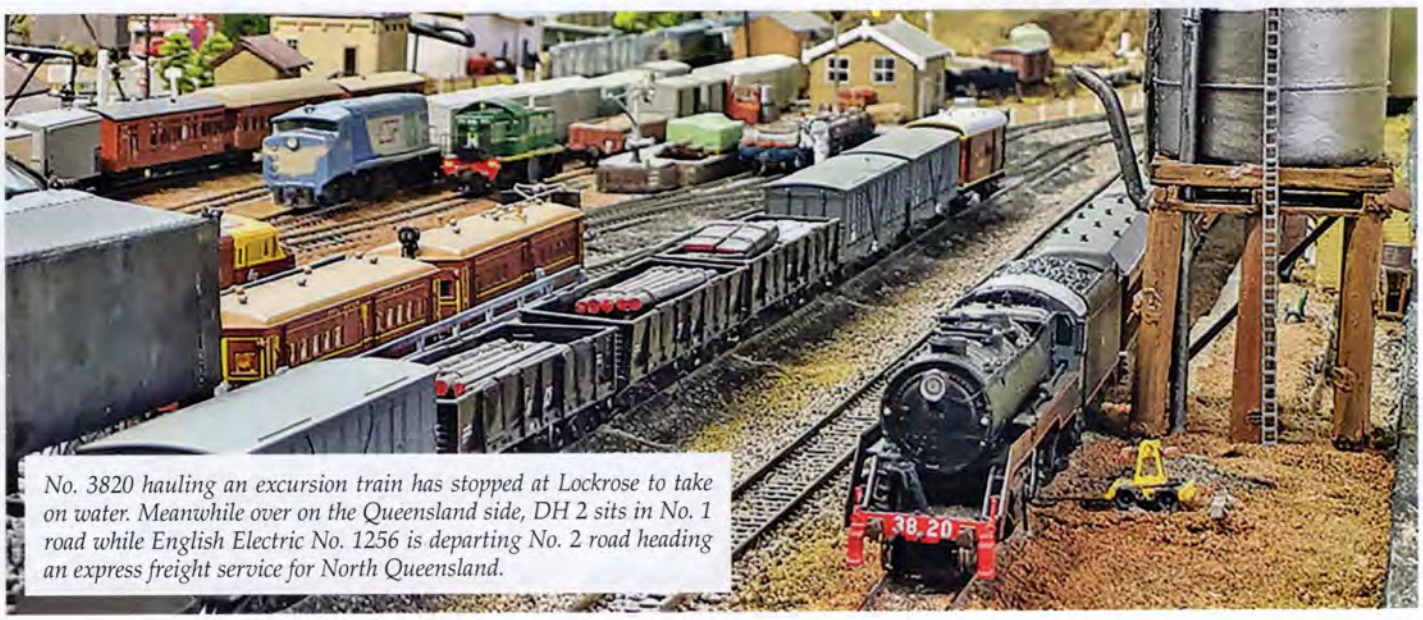
Turnouts are operated using PECO point motors, both the PL10 and side mounted varieties.

The station platforms and buildings, the pedestrian footbridge, locomotive depot, pub, church, service station, cricket nets and grandstand all have lights, and the cricket ground has stadium lights for night matches.

Between the platforms is the Veronpilly freight terminal which is for receiving freight as well as transhipping interstate freight. The terminal has a goods shed with loading dock, overhead gantry crane and a weighbridge. Opposite the freight terminal is the Veronpilly signal cabin and staff exchange platform.

On the other side of the layout is Park Street Station and transit shed. This is a bit of a play on words since there is a Park Road Station on Brisbane's South side. The station is a pagoda building by Micro Buildings. Pagoda station buildings were at terminal stations like Kilcoy, Cooyar, Brooloo Yarraman, Dirranbandi and Kunwarara (north of Rockhampton). The station has a water tank that is based on the one at Grandchester and is a Walker Models kit, as is the goods shed based on the one at Thulimbah on the Granite Belt. There is also a QR cream shed, also a Walker Models kit. Both Park Street and Veronpilly have a lamp room by Queensland Railway Miniatures. Also on that side is the Veronpilly locomotive depot. It is a two-bay shed made using a couple of kits that I bought at an online auction website with a scratch-built awning spanning the bays, one of which has a pit. The depot also has a toilet block made from an old wagon and an office that was previously used as the original Park Street station. It is a Walker Models kit based on the station at Thulimbah. I tell people that it was a re-located station building from a long-closed branch line.

One of my sons once bought me a small Queensland station building kit from Micro Buildings. Since I didn't have anywhere specifically for it, I put in a crossing loop and made a platform. I called the station Lockrose. Also, with the station is a Micro Buildings small waiting shed and a water tank. The water tank and stand were scratch built using a piece



No. 3820 hauling an excursion train has stopped at Lockrose to take on water. Meanwhile over on the Queensland side, DH 2 sits in No. 1 road while English Electric No. 1256 is departing No. 2 road heading an express freight service for North Queensland.

The control panel for Veronpilly, where it can get a bit hectic on a busy day.

of dowel, a couple of meat skewers and an old aerosol cap.

The reason for the name of Lockrose was that back in 1912, it was proposed to extend the line from Marburg a further 19kms to Lockrose, but then they worked out that doing so would require a 400m tunnel and so the idea was not pursued and the good folk of Lockrose never got their railway. When I drive through the area I sometimes look for where the line might have been laid had it gone ahead, and I imagine what the station may have looked like so the one on the layout is in recognition of a station that never was.

The layout also features a few things that relate personally to my family and myself. As well as the play on words in the naming of Veronpilly station, I can be seen at the end of the platform as the young lad Porter collecting tickets from passengers. I'm also there as the truck driver pulled up at the Golden Fleece Truck Stop checking tarpaulin ropes before going inside for a feed. I'm there again after I had given up the highway and playing club cricket as a young bloke in my early 50s.

A few years back, my brother Bill was honoured with the naming of a park; what a good idea. Also in the park is a war memorial. One of my sons wrote to the War Memorial in Canberra and was able to obtain some photos of my dad during his service in Papua New Guinea as an anti-aircraft gunner during WW2. I made a wall in the park and used a couple of the actual photos of my dad on the wall. The gun that he worked was a Bofors gun, and I already had a cannon that I had made from bits and pieces but when I saw a model of the Bofors gun online I had to have it.

Also, in Bill's early working life, he worked as a plumber with Queensland Railways. Bill would be sent all over the state and lived in a camp wagon. I had

The second innings of the day/night match is well underway. Batting first, the visitors put on an impressive total that will take some getting. Fortunately, the home side is well used to batting under lights so the run chase should be particularly interesting.

Brother Bill's camp wagon circa 1960.

been looking for a camp wagon, and then Bill showed me a photo of his camp wagon which I recognised as an old C wagon. I immediately thought, yep, I can do that and did a bit of work on a Caintode Flats C wagon and placed it on the layout as a further tribute to Bill.

For more than 30 years, my brother Ted presented a weekly Rock and Roll program called Ted's Memories on community radio. Ted had developed a huge following and in January 2021, Ted was presented with a local legend award from none other than our Federal treasurer, the Hon Dr Jim Chalmers MP. In recognition of Ted, I have made a trackside billboard as well as a sign on the side of a bus saying `Listen to Ted's Memories`. Both Bill and Ted have recently passed away within a few months of each other and so these simple tributes to my brothers shall remain permanently on the layout.

Moving forward, apart from raising of the platforms on Veronpilly, I think I would like to include signals. Certainly, electric signals are available, but I would like to use semaphore signals, specifically with lattice posts. As a young lad Porter on the Brisbane relief, I would be sent to places where you would have to walk out to the distant and advanced starter signals with a tin of kerosine, rags and wicks to go and 'do the lamps.' I'd like that. Apart from that there isn't a lot I want to do except to just enjoy it.

What would I have done differently? In the planning stage, Richard tried to convince me to go around the wall instead of the way I set it out. If I build another layout I might go this way. I might also focus on a bit more attention to detail. Certainly, some of the fences might not be to scale and there are other things I know that aren't quite right but as I mentioned, it was my first go at building a layout, so I am reasonably happy with the result.

In closing, I need to include a huge thankyou to my lovely wife Veronika who happily tells people that she didn't see me for about the first five years of construction but knew at any moment exactly where I was. She has been particularly supportive and tolerant and yes, I did buy her a new hairbrush.

On an Up passenger service RM 73 meets RM 83 on the Down at Park Street where the crews will swap and return to their home depots.

The Saturdays-only suburban service is provided by locomotive-hauled trains, to allow for the servicing of the 'weekday' railmotors. Former Central Division locomotive, 'Brown Bomber' C17 961 awaits departure. The locomotive was a kit from JH Models and assembled by Gary Pysden of Caintode Flats and runs like a dream; the coaches are from Caintode Flats.

Double-header NSWGR standard goods 50 class No. 5263 and 5271, overtake QR's C17 No. 961.