



On an Impulse **The History of my Engine**

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I had often wondered if I might own a railway to run round the garden. In 1996 I was reading the local weekly paper, the Hampshire Chronicle. It was published then on a Friday, and after finishing work on that Friday evening I looked at the classified ads. Suddenly my eyes saw "Garden Railway for sale". On an impulse I dialled the telephone number. A quiet man answered the phone and he told me that he had had the train for a number of years but had not run it since the great storm in 1987. He invited me to go and see it.

Next day I drove to Romsey in Hampshire and met Ralph and Mrs Brewer. They had a lovely garden through which the railway once ran. Sadly, the hurricane of 1987 blew down many of their trees and wrecked the railway track. Soon after that Ralph Brewer, who was even then an elderly man (late 70s possibly) started to develop "shakes" in his hands which was to prevent him from doing any detailed work with his fingers. He told me that he had owned the train for a number of years having found a half finished loco in a model shop in Fareham. He bought it and was able to get it completed. He had joined the Gauge '3' Society and said he was given much support by many members. He was interested he said in radio controlling a train as it ran through his garden, and had fitted home made radio controlling gear in the tender to operate the Regulator, and reversing gear and whistle. I was hooked. Without having any idea what I was getting into I decided to buy the train.

I took it all home. The loco and tender just fitted in the back of my car together with some slate wagons and some battered and broken track. A couple of weeks later, by arrangement, Ralph took me to visit Mike May and see his track and talk to him. I was very impressed. I joined the Society

Ralph Brewer was, I think, a scientist interested in electronics. He was a delightful companion and although I only met him a couple of times it was a real pleasure to know him. He was imaginative and creative in his train ownership. He built the carrying boxes, and made the stands on which he could carry out maintenance. He designed and built a track running through the flowers and shrubs and trees of his garden. But mainly I think he experimented with radio control. The tender was a mass of wiring and cogs and batteries and gearing to provide power to operate the controls. His track was a masterpiece as it flowed around his garden. He had used wooden sleepers and Society Brass Rail. It was a labour of love and attention to detail. The track was a single line with no loops, and his idea was, I understand, to have the loco and wagons running round and round the loop.

Although I bought the loco in 1996 and John Shawe refitted the loco for me in 1997, I did not do much for 10 years, and only recently, after I became an OAP last year, have I had the time to devote to doing a proper job. I have received enormous encouragement from our Chairman Tim Casserley to get going again, and as a result of his advice the loco has been pressure tested by Alan Marsden, and I have steamed it on the tracks of Geoff Rumble and Ian Driver. I am building another track, and this one I plan to be a complete oval. I am told that the loco is slightly "overscale", and although Ralph Brewer described it as based on a "Lafayette" I have been told by Dick Allan that he thinks it was and "Ayesha". I do not know who is right, but I do know that when it is steaming my loco is the most beautiful small loco imaginable. I lost contact with Ralph Brewer and he is no longer listed in the telephone book at Romsey, so I fear the worst. But he started me off and for that I am more grateful to him than I can say.