

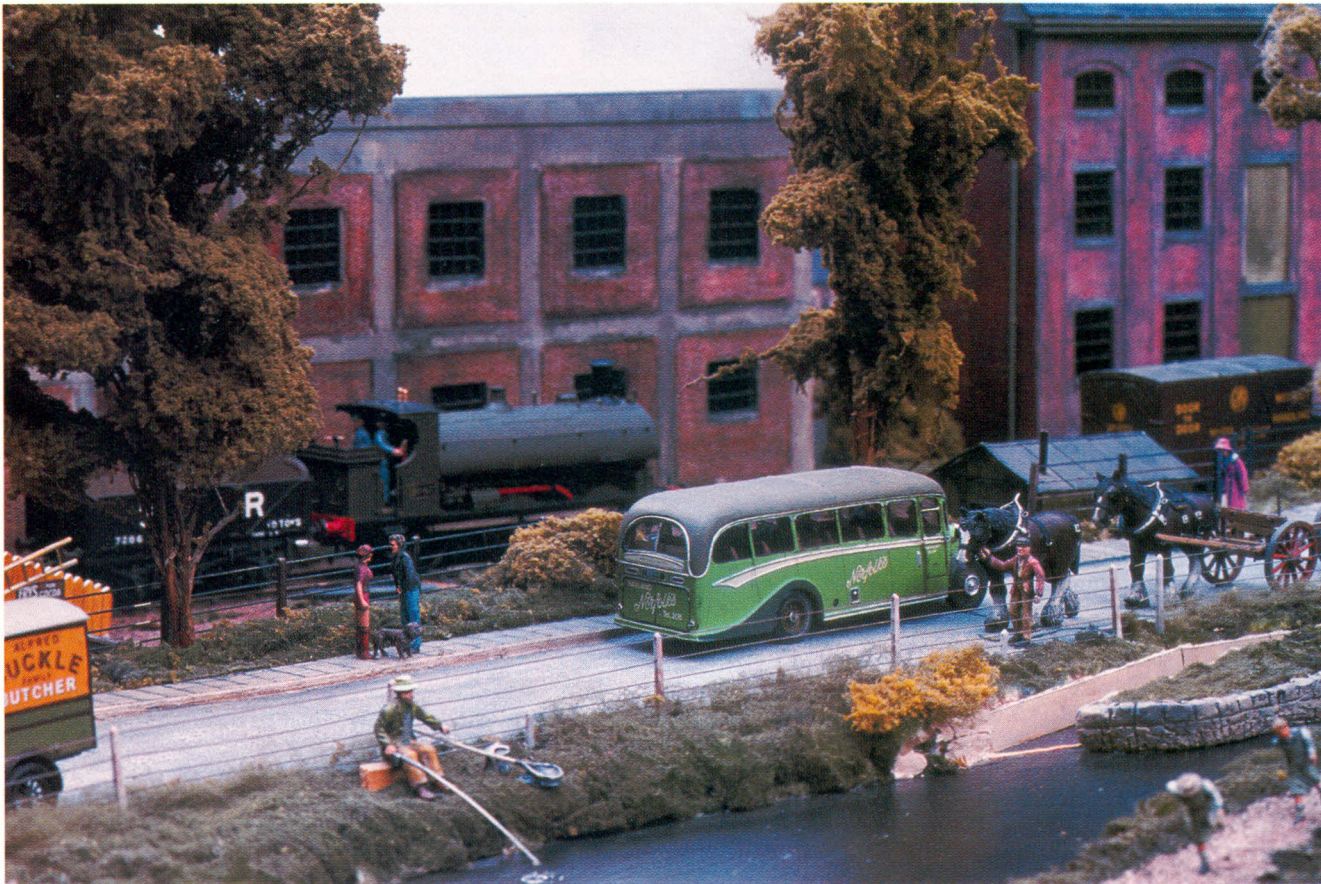
Knott's Wharf

*An O scale exhibition layout that combines
ideas from two worlds*

By Brian Fayle

Photos by the author





My Knott's Wharf Canal & Railway Co. is an unabashed exercise in nostalgia. I'm nostalgic not only for England, where I spent my first three decades, but also for a particular type of model railroad: the small exhibition layout with a built-in fiddle yard. Its design reflects the fact that space is at a premium in the typical English house, a fact of life that many on this side of the Atlantic have to face more and more.

I model in English O scale, with a 1:43.5 proportion, as opposed to the 1:48 used in North America. The slightly larger size is offset by the fact that English locomotives and rolling stock are much shorter than their North American counterparts. I figure two of my goods wagons occupy roughly the same track space as one North American boxcar, meaning I can fit a six-car train in the same space most O scalers assume will hold only three.

Left: This overview shows the left end of Brian Fayle's Knott's Wharf. The layout separates into three sections for transporting it to shows. The track plan is essentially a mirror image of John Allen's famous Timesaver switching game.

Above: Knott's Wharf recalls the industrial heartland of England in the 1940s when canals were little more than a reminder of a time and technology long past. This English O scale (7mm = 1 foot) model railroad makes great use of minor elevation changes and lots of interesting figures and details to add visual interest.

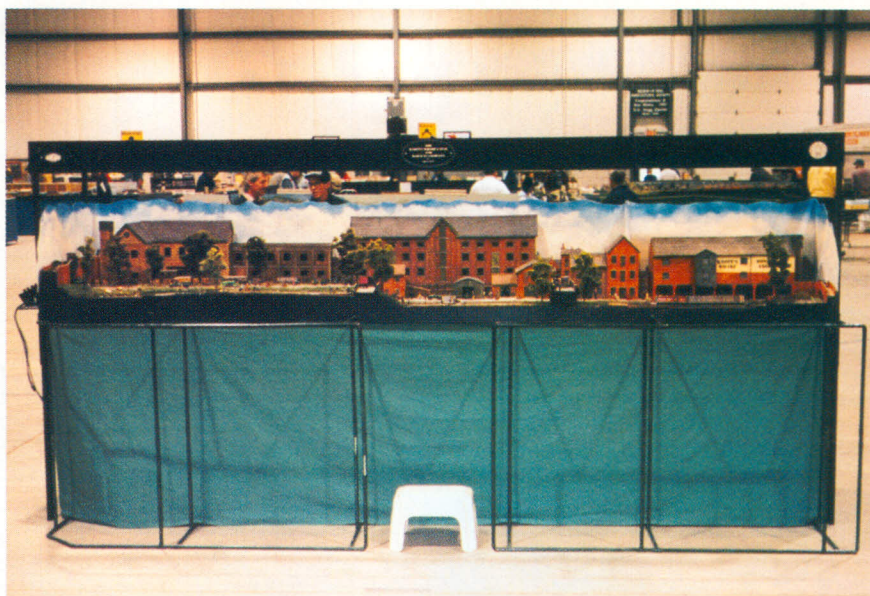
Inspiration

When planning the layout I searched for inspiration in my collection of British model railway magazines and books. In so doing I came across a track plan called "Victoria Wharf," based on John Allen's famous Timesaver switching layout. The thought of using a classic American plan as the basis for an English layout intrigued me.

When a layout has to be broken into two or more sections for transportation and storage, it's best not to locate turnouts over any joints. The Victoria Wharf plan featured stepped joints to get around such problems, but I felt my carpentry skills weren't up to that challenge and modified the plan for straight joints between the three sections. I also mirror-imaged the original plan, as I needed to put the fiddle yard at the opposite end, so those of you looking for the Timesaver will have to work at it a bit.

Tidal wharf to canal

Victoria Wharf had a tidal wharf along the front, but I envisioned the setting for my layout as the industrial heartland of England. There was an extensive 17th- and 18th-century canal system in this region built for boats averaging about seven feet wide and 70 feet long. I spent a couple of memorable weeks in a cottage overlooking a lock on one of those canals and had amassed a number photos and draw-



ings, so it seemed logical to replace the tidal wharf with a canal and lock.

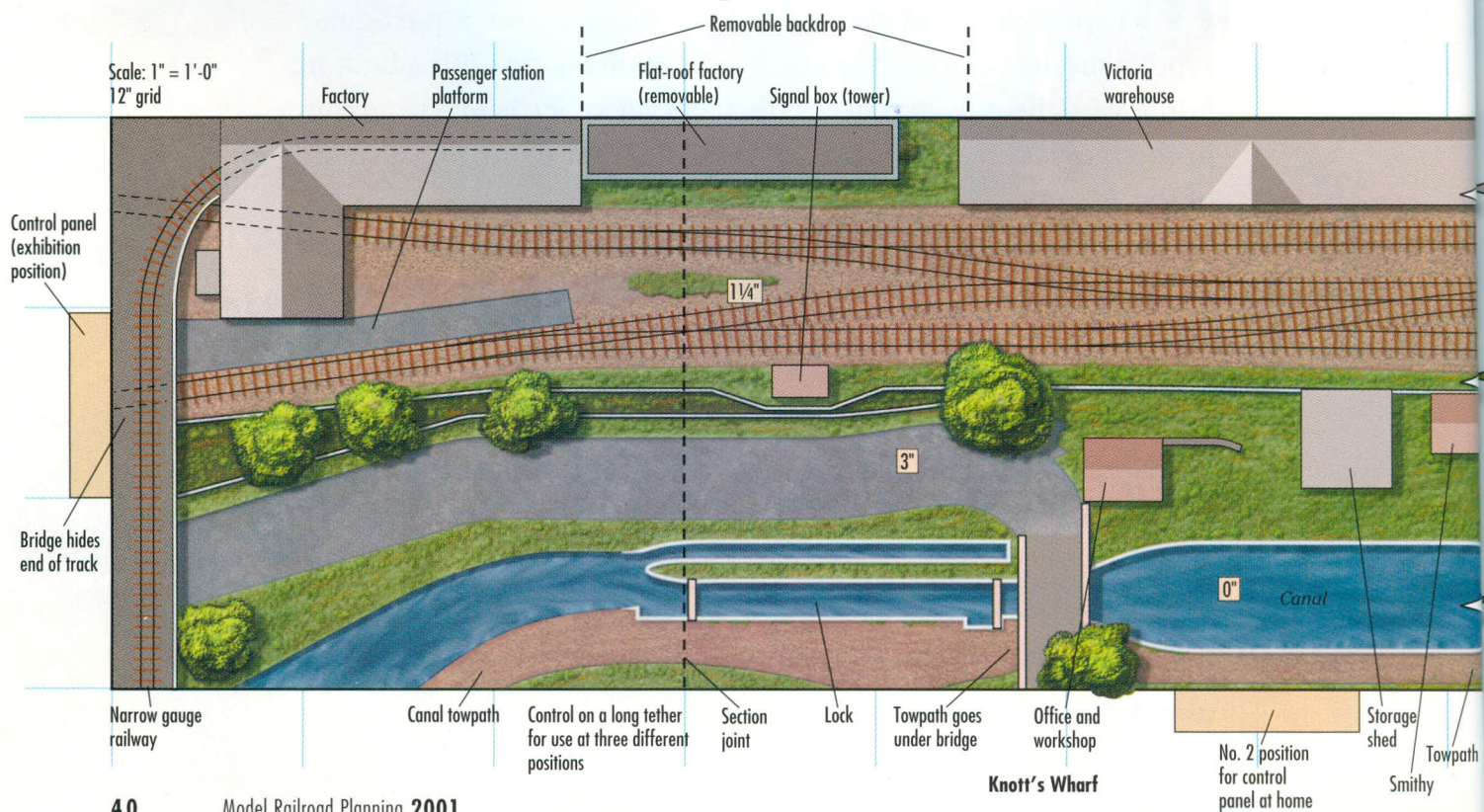
The fact that the town and canal preceded the railway meant that the latter should not dominate the scene. The trackbed is therefore level and set toward the back. The use of a lock allowed me to place the canal above track level on the left and below it to the right, introducing some vertical relief to the scene.

Where the railway is above, it's partially obscured by buildings on the lower level. A considerable amount of time was spent designing these to pro-

This is how Knott's Wharf appears when it's on exhibit, complete with railings to keep the public at bay and a step-stool for those with lower eye levels. Low-voltage halogen spot lights are concealed behind the black valance.

vide an interesting series of rooflines and gaps over which, or through which, the railway can be seen. At no one time, therefore, can you see the entire length of a train from eye level.

The large background buildings create the look of a wall of industries, with the large warehouse at the right front screening the fiddle yard from view. The interiors of it and two other build-





A small layout in a large scale allows time for a lot of detailing, which draws the viewer in and breathes life into the scenes — especially important at shows. You can see that the railroad is part of the scene but doesn't dominate.

ings are accessible from behind and offer storage for rolling stock, coffee cups, and the like during exhibitions.

Dividing a layout into scenes

An onlooker's view of the railroad is broken up by a combination of strategically placed trees and bridges that effectively break the length of the layout into four viewing segments. It is

further divided into front and back portions by more trees and the aforementioned lower-level buildings. A brick-faced embankment with two arches and narrow gauge track on top runs across the left end of the layout and adds yet another vertical level. It is complemented at the other end by a small bridge over the canal.

Life is given to the layout by numerous figures and much clutter. Even when a train isn't moving there's quite a bit for the viewer to see, and that's essential for holding the public's interest in an exhibition layout.

Hiding the joints

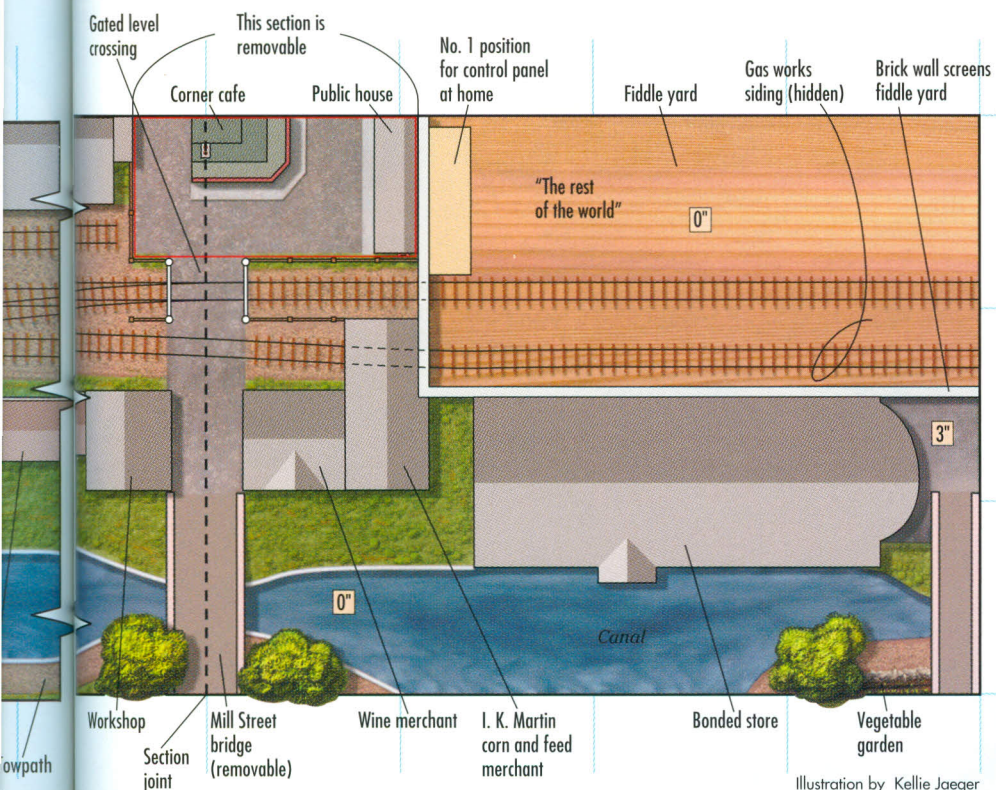
I gave considerable thought to hiding the joints between the layout sections. The Mill Street bridge and the road back to the crossing come off as a unit. The small complex with the cafe and pub are another removable unit, as is the flat-roofed factory. Short sections of backdrop behind these elements come off too. The joints between these sections are largely disguised by the buildings.

One joint in the canal surface coincides with the upper lock gate, and the other is hidden under the Mill Street bridge. All other structures and figures are firmly glued in place.

Operating potential

Thanks to its Timesaver roots, there are plenty of opportunities to switch the various industries. The fiddle yard represents the rest of the railway network, with one of the tracks representing the "rest of the world" and the other serving a coal-gas generating plant. This gives me the excuse to run the gas-works engine out onto the "main" to pick up and set out cars.

The longest train that can be conveniently handled usually consists of a small 0-6-0T engine, three goods wagons, and a guards van (caboose). Shunting — that is, switching — can be quite challenging as the headshunt (switching lead) at the platform end can accommodate only the locomotive and two cars.



The layout at a glance

Name: Knott's Wharf
Scale: 0 (1:43.5)
Size: 3 x 12 feet
Prototype: Great Western branch line
Locale: central England
Period: 1940s
Layout style: single-scene, portable
Layout height: 41"
Benchwork: 2" foam board on 1/8" x 3" grid
Roadbed: 1/8" cork
Track: Peco flextrack
Turnouts: Peco long-radius
Minimum radius: very broad
Maximum grade: 0
Length of mainline run: 12 feet
Scenery: carved foam board
Backdrop: 1/4" plywood
Control: cab control





Passenger trains are short as well. Knott's Wharf has regular passenger service provided by two four-wheeled coaches and a locomotive, a push-pull "auto train" (a steam locomotive on one end of the train and a coach, equipped with train controls for the driver, used when the train is headed in the opposite direction), or a steam-powered rail-motor car.

Some form of remote uncoupling with a delay feature such as Kadee couplers provide is essential for exhibitions, as reaching over the high back-drap and trees is difficult.

Re-reverse engineering?

Since I gave an American plan English overtones, reverse-engineering it

Above: A Great Western O-4-2T, one end of a typical auto train, pulls into Knott's Wharf for a station stop. Note how Brian used structures to partially screen the train from view, a technique that makes the layout seem larger.

Left: The Knott's Wharf warehouse and town buildings at the top of the photo surround the fiddle yard. Access to this yard is from the rear for exhibition purposes, but it could be open to the front or extended off the layout for home use.

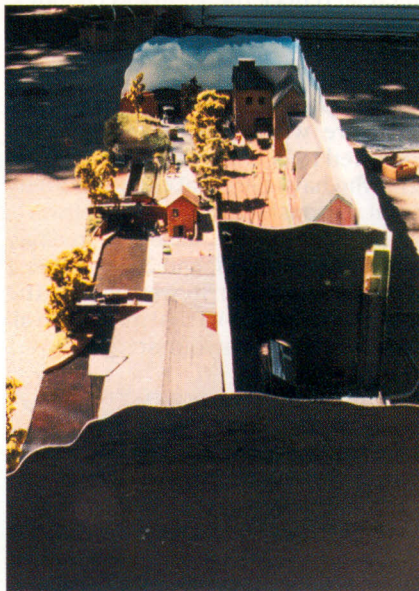
Right: The dark area behind the scenes is the location of the fiddle yard and storage space needed to keep the trains moving and varied during public exhibitions.

to put back the American flavor should be easy. And converting it from a layout designed with exhibitions in mind to one for home use, perhaps as part of a larger layout, should offer at most a modest challenge.

But for me the layout satisfies my desire to take an occasional trip back in time and space to my English homeland. Judging by the looks on the faces

of others who have viewed it, Knott's Wharf seems to have the same effect on them. MRP

Brian Fayle is a retired radiologist who was born and raised in England and came to Canada in 1957. A modeler for as long as he can recall, he freely mixes innovative ideas from both sides of the Atlantic.



Learning points

- An excellent track plan for your tastes and needs may be residing just across the ocean.
- Consider flopping a track plan end-for-end or front-to-back to adapt it to your needs.
- Small, linear plans can be used without major changes in other scales simply by scaling them up or down, as there are no aisle widths to adjust.
- Even relatively short lengths of track can be broken into several viewing areas with judicious use of foreground view blocks, but take care not to block access to critical areas where cars have to be uncoupled.