

‘Just the Ticket’

**is pleased and proud to report
that it is not quite dead yet!**

One of the biggest frustrations in taking the decision to cease – or should I say suspend? production of the monthly *e*-newsletter ‘*Just the Ticket*,’ was that I knew some readers were hoping to contribute at some point. One in particular was Peter Strange. Having now discovered his article was virtually complete, I knew I had to honour my promise to circulate it, and so here it is.

It is possible the name of Peter Strange is not known to you – it wasn’t to me just a couple of years ago, but then I became aware of a curiously titled film about somewhere called ‘Duck End.’ The title – ‘Day Trip to Duck End’ resonated with me as if I had heard of it in the distant past, but wasn’t sure when, where or why. I now think I must have seen it on the TV some years ago? Intrigued, I did a little digging and eventually came across a great little film featuring period trains on garden tracks – something bound to attract as far as I was concerned. I also discovered an animated world, clearly devised with children in mind, but nevertheless very watchable as an adult, however could I buy a copy of the film? No. Thankfully, I went on to discover Peter had actually made three films in all, the one mentioned; ‘Return Ticket to Duck End’ and then the one I finally managed to get a copy of – ‘Juniper Junction.’ Peter has also produced a film specifically available on Youtube entitled ‘Seaside Dreams.’

When I spotted Peter recently registering himself onto The Classic O Gauge Forum I could not resist asking if he would be interested in telling his story and indeed he was and in his own words, here it is!

David Upton

From Duck End to Juniper Junction

Part 1. By Peter Strange

As a small child, I lived in Birmingham. In those days, it still retained much of the infrastructure of the old, Edwardian industrial city. The stone buildings were soot black and the air was heavy with the smell of coal smoke. Trams rattled through the streets and Snow Hill and New Street Stations seemed the most exciting places on earth. Walking hand in hand with my mother along a gloomy Midland platform at New Street, I distinctly remember how cosy those coach compartments appeared; their illuminated windows swathed in mists of smoke and steam. From this platform, we took the train to Duffield where my aunt lived, conveniently close to the Midland main line.



**The author and smaller friend, 'trainspotting'
on the Midland main line near Duffield, Derby in 1954**

I knew nothing of locomotive types; there were just tank engines and tender engines. The ownership of some Hornby 0 Gauge trains did nothing to enlighten me in this regard! To this day I am not especially knowledgeable about locomotive classes. My love of railways has much more to do with the remembered atmosphere of that vanished world.

When I was a little older, we moved to Worcestershire where my railway experiences were of a more rural nature. I often went 'spotting' beside a bridge where the old LMS was carried over the Paddington-Hereford line. At the age of ten, I think I thought all tender engines were either, 'Granges', 'Counties', 'Castles' or 'Halls'. At school, it was well known that 'Castles' were the pick of the bunch and that, behind a 'Grange'; you would be most unlikely to reach your destination!



**A ropey picture taken by the ten year old author (with his ubiquitous 'Box Brownie') from his vantage point near Evesham Station in 1956.
Engine 7020 Gloucester Castle.**

My Hornby 0 gauge layout was superseded by 'Dublo' and my father helped me to build quite an extensive system in that gauge. Eventually of course, the trains went the way of most childhood toys and railways were temporarily forgotten.

My first job was as dairy herdsman on an Oxfordshire farm. Lodging in the attic rooms of the rambling old farmhouse, I came upon an ancient crate containing, what turned out to be, a 'Gauge 1 LNWR Precursor Tank'. Quite extraordinarily, my early memories of those old Birmingham stations came flooding back. The farmer sold me the engine for fifteen quid and I was hooked!



My first Gauge 1 Loco, discovered in the attics of an old farmhouse in 1968.

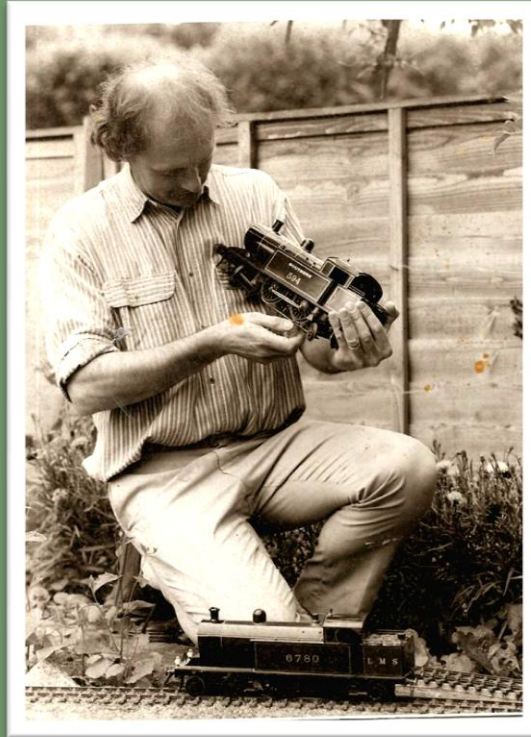
Having thus (through no fault of my own) become a collector of Gauge One vintage tinsplate trains, I made slow progress expanding my collection. The more I looked in to the subject, the more fascinated I became by those German models commissioned and marketed by Bassett-Lowke, from the early

years of the twentieth century until the outbreak of World War 2. I could not afford to buy many trains but I did acquire one or two early Bassett-Lowke catalogues. The few items I did buy came either from 'Chuffs' in North London' or 'Steam Days' in Cadogan street – both highly priced shops, but at that time, I could find no other source. I soon joined The Gauge One Association, which was most helpful.

Having never been an expert on locomotive matters, it seemed to me that the products of Bing and Carrette, working to the designs of Henry Greenly, had a remarkable aura of reality. Despite the relative simplicity of design and compromises with proportion and detail, I felt that the trains captured the spirit of the prototypes to a degree which many other models found hard to match. Of course, this was partly due to the actual age of the tinsplate trains and to the fact that they were manufactured in the same years as the prototypes themselves. Also, time and use had given the models a surface patina (dents and scratches included) which somehow added authenticity to the excellent painting of the locomotives and to the lithograph printing of the rolling stock.

I had always been anxious to run the trains for I had never been particularly satisfied by displaying stationary models. However, the necessary priorities of collecting a wife and children had to be addressed and many years were to pass before I could turn my attentions to the more serious considerations of a garden railway.

During those years of non-running, my purse was extremely slim and I spent much time scratch-building electric locomotives to Bassett-Lowke proportions. I also bought rail and cast chairs from 'Bonds O' Euston Road' (who by that time had moved to Midhurst) and painstakingly started building stud- contact track.



Me in 1988 with two of my scratch-built locos.

When, in 1982, we eventually owned a garden large enough to accommodate a railway, I made three basic decisions:

1. The track would be built near ground level so that it would blend into the garden landscape and look as natural as possible. (Initial planning had to get past my wife who was not enamoured of the 'stilt' concept).
2. The stud contact system (for which I had already built some track) would continue to be adopted to allow clockwork, steam and electric locomotives to share the same track simultaneously. I confess however, that by this time the stud contact system was already outdated, insulated wheels and axles being commercially available and 2-rail 'ready to run' locos and stock coming on to the market in increasing volume. I was anxious however, not to alter historic stock in the interests of electrical insulation.
3. Wherever appropriate, discarded prototype railway materials would be incorporated into the layout.

This last point may appear somewhat curious but I felt that a more realistic atmosphere could be engendered by using ex-railway materials, especially

since I had a good supply of old timber sleepers which looked like a good bet for making a sound track bed.

The garden was large enough to accommodate a route running around the perimeter with no radius having to be less than sixteen feet. I adopted the apparently simple system of laying the timber sleepers across brick piers, then piling soil around the whole to form embankments. I soon realised that vast quantities of top soil were going to be needed to achieve this. The garden was fairly flat but by creating beds and lawns on different levels, I could glean sufficient spare soil for my purpose. The altered levels also allowed for the natural inclusion of several bridges, a stone viaduct and a tunnel.



**A double-headed goods train crosses the rolled iron bridge.
A still from the original video 'Day Trip to Duck End'.**



A Midland 2P with clerestory stock (all by Marklin) crossing the viaduct built throughout with tiny pieces of stone & brick.

During the eleven years that it took me to construct the original layout, I made numerous trips to railway demolition sites where I bought old blue brick, timber and stone for incorporation into the model railway. For the bridge workings, I used everything from cast-iron Victorian door lintels to rolled angle bands from a discarded steam boiler. Auctions of railwayana provided lamps, notices and even sections of iron railings for strategic placement around the system. It is interesting to see how these prototype objects can fit into a model layout without the comparative scales appearing ridiculous. This is particularly true when the 'railwayana' is allowed to be somewhat subsumed by the garden vegetation.



**Garden Railway tunnel portal on extreme left.
Railwayana amongst the flowers and restored 1883 Barry/GW carriage body
(but that's another story!)**

The completed single line was some three hundred feet in length plus passing loop and sidings. The sidings have subsequently been remodelled and re-laid to form additional loops. The longest loop, at seventy feet, provides a modest operational length of double track. In consequence, it is no longer necessary to reverse any train – a sometimes embarrassing procedure when relying on old tinsplate couplings to avoid buffer-locking.



The longer passing loop with Bing for Lowke 'Atlantic' and Carette coaches entering the country station.

Theoretically, Oxfordshire weather allows me to run trains for seven months of the year. In practice, I spend much more time on maintenance, restoration of stock and development of the layout than I ever spend on actual operation. However, I do begin to suffer a bit in winter when I am deprived of the sight of moving trains.

I turned to film making simply to make a personal record of the best days of summer when trains were running free from the anomalies of weather, falling leaves and pigeon droppings.

In 1993, I consulted Peter Bicknell, a film producer friend of mine who had specialist video equipment. In the days of VHS, most cameras were too large and unwieldy to place on board the train and so his assistance was essential. I was keen to record a single journey over the entire layout but my own camcorder proved too big to pass through stations and the tunnel. My friend

reckoned that the filming would take about two hours: in the event it took eighteen months.



Peter Bicknell filming 'Day Trip to Duck End' with the large SVHS camera.

The brief excursion around the garden became a half-hour adventure travelling on a vintage tinsplate railway. 'Day Trip to Duck End' was quite literally that – an experience of riding through the morning, afternoon and evening on an LMS passenger train of the 1920's. Then, to complete the twenty-four hour journey, boarding a double-headed, semi-fast goods train to ride all through the night and into the next morning.

This little film met with some modest success and a year later, we embarked upon a sequel – 'Return Ticket to Duck End'. I still have the master SVHS tapes of these two programmes but regrettably, picture quality is not good enough to re-issue the tapes on DVD.



A 'hair-raising' scene from the sequel 'Return ticket to Duck End'.

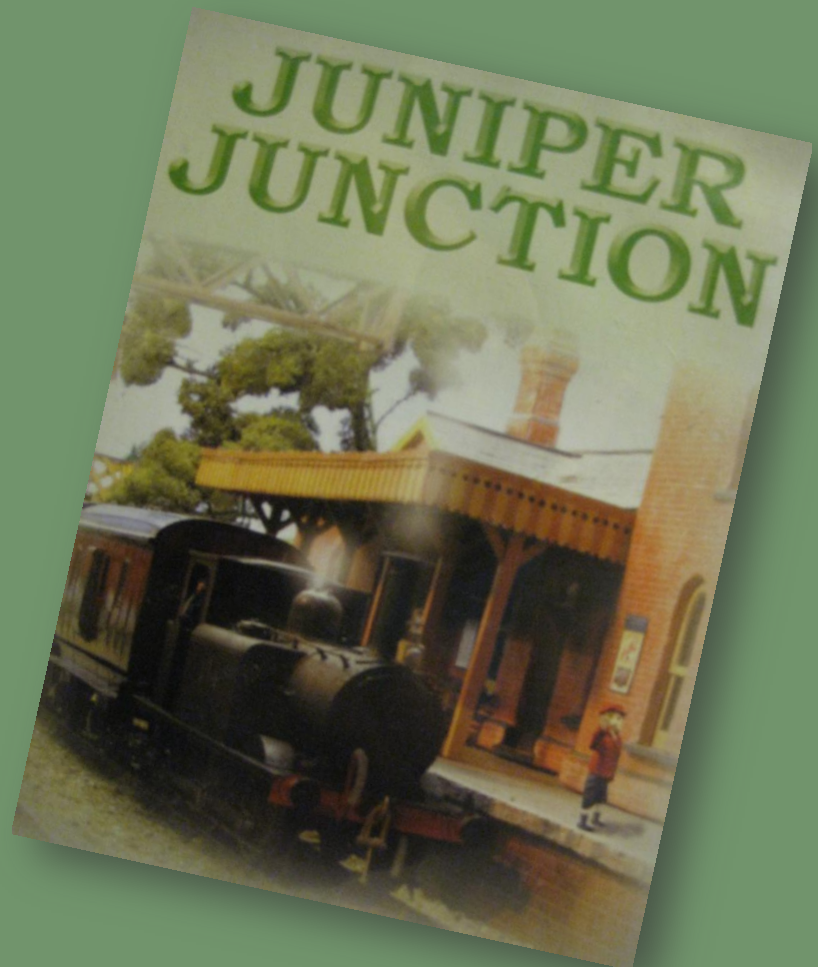
I continued to be haunted by those atmospheric memories of my childhood and

I wanted to try and capture a little of that old magic and 'bottle it' in a form which might appeal to the younger generation of today'. I was looking for romance and charm without sentimentality and rose-tinted clap-trap. A short film which might bridge the age gap between 'Thomas the Tank engine' and

The Railway Children' seemed an optimistic goal but one that, if successful, might appeal to young and old alike.

At about the same time as these dreams were running through my head, a friend of mine retired from his job as headmaster of a primary school. Paul Rhodes is a very proficient modeller in Gauges '0' and '1'. He is also, an excellent story-teller who is well aware that children do not need to be patronised when it comes to their understanding of The English Language. In fact, Paul is such a good story teller that I will hand over to him to bring you Part 2 of this article (see below).

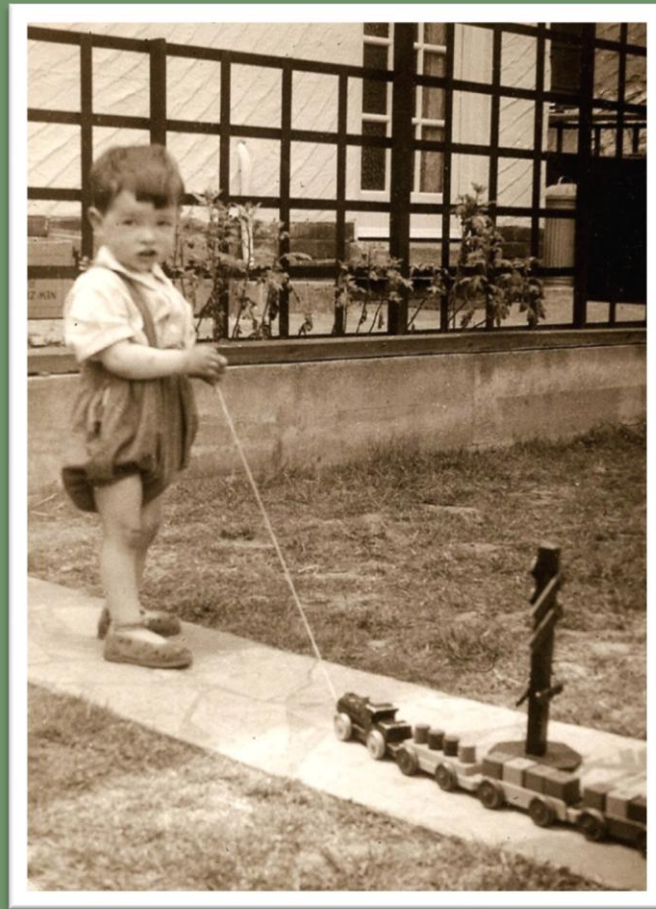
Peter Strange.



'Juniper Junction' concerns the visit of His Majesty the King and a station clock? I'll say no more so as not to spoil, but can recommend anyone with an interest in these sorts of model trains running through an English garden. See if you can find a copy – you won't be disappointed. DU

Part 2 of the story is told by Paul Rhodes.

From Juniper Junction to Seaside Dreams Part 2. By Paul Rhodes



**Peter isn't the only one to encounter trains in early childhood.
This is me in 1957!**

Juniper Junction was conceived in the car on a trip to The Bluebell Railway. Peter had made the two Duck End films, and was keen to have another go. I was newly retired and had time for a project. Peter has always liked the idea of using his model railway to create stories, and the Duck End films had been made in Peter's garden. This time, however, he wanted to have a go at stop-motion animation - a very different beast. That small idea would take up most of our creative energies for four years!

We came up with a rough plan for a story which was to change and develop hugely as we both contributed significantly to the final script. Peter's dream was to make a film which eschewed fast-cut action and took inspiration from children's stories of the past, a film with a gentler rhythm. I was keen that our film didn't patronise children with over-simplistic language, and we both wanted it to have broad appeal with humour and references which adults could appreciate. One final and important criteria was that we wanted our trains to be real trains; there would be no anthropomorphism; they would not have personalities, faces or attitudes!



**A still from the opening scene.
The Northern Express thunders through Juniper Junction
in the early morning.**

Stop-motion animation requires a controlled environment. When you are using a stills camera to shoot 12 or 24 frames for every second of film, you can't risk anything moving except the things that you want to move. We knew that we would have to make this film in a studio, and were fortunate that a good friend gave us the use of a brick shed, 12' x 9'. This became our den, and the entire film was made there. In fact, every train that you see in Juniper

Junction was filmed on the same 12' piece of straight double track, a fact which deserves explanation.

Peter's Gauge 1 models are very photogenic and deserve the dignity of realism; low angles and correct train speeds were important to us. While the animation of the figures was shot at 12 frames a second, when we filmed the trains (which are all animated by the way) we doubled the frame rate to 24 frames a second to ensure smooth running. It was important that the trains moved at realistic speeds, and accelerated and decelerated appropriately. We turned for help to my son John, who at the time was a maths undergraduate. He came up with a simple formula to show how far to move the train each shot at any constant speed, and also for speeding up and slowing down. Interestingly, although it helped initially, in the end we developed an instinct for this, and most of the train movements were filmed using our own judgement. The movement between each frame was sometimes very small as little as one or two millimetres. To do this we left trains uncoupled, moving the loco and then the stock individually, gently closing them all up. We found deceleration quite tricky, so in fact when you see a train pulling into the station, we actually filmed it backwards; the train reversing out, not coming in. We developed many such tricks over the time of filming.



The Bassett Lowke Precursor Tank in charge of the daily goods train at Juniper Junction.



**The Terrier 'Ethel' in the Livery of The Juniper Light Railway,
after the addition of smoke effect.**

Camera angle and framing was arranged carefully to allow trains the space to enter and leave the set before reaching the end of the track. With long trains, coaches were added as the train moved into the frame, and then removed at the other end, often before the train had passed completely through the scene. In fact, on some of the longer trains, the same coaches appear twice - we just re-added them to the back! We had to ensure that trains didn't cast a shadow on the backscene (usually less than two feet behind the train), and also care was taken so that the light didn't change as coaches were added or removed. We often had to remain in position for a long time to avoid kicking the camera tripod or changing the light. The hardest shot I remember was the slow goods train featured in the dusk at the end of the film - it took four hours to film that sequence and we were trapped in a tiny space behind the tripod for the whole time!

Initially, we thought our film would be about eight to ten minutes in length, but as our imaginations and ambitions expanded, the story took on a life of its own. The final edit was actually forty minutes long and on a scale unimaginable at the start. Early on, we realised that it is impractical to attempt stop-motion

animation with figures in Gauge 1 scale, so we worked in two scales; the trains were Gauge 1 of course, but the animated scenes were created in 1/6 scale, making an adult figure nearly a foot high. Peter made the figures and did all the animation, while I undertook the role of photographer and managed the computer program, including frame manipulation. I made most of the sets, although Peter made some, and we always 'dressed' them together. Peter has an eye for colour, and the beautiful lighting is entirely his work. Most of the script is my work, although the story is an equal collaboration. It may be an odd thing to say, but in some ways the characters also wrote their own stories; if we were struggling with part of the sequence of the narrative, we would ask, 'What would Porter Harris do now?' or 'How would Bronwyn react to this?' We were never quite sure, for instance, how well Mrs. Golightly got on with Mrs. Jones, both strong-minded ladies. We enjoyed creating this community of characters around our little railway station.



Filming the daily goods train, showing one end of the length of track.



And the other end - twelve feet in total! The building on its side is to keep the lighting consistent; when filming included that platform, the building dangled off the edge of the table!

Voices bring characters to life, and we were lucky to be introduced to Edward Lyon, an actor of considerable experience who also had a gift for dialect. Edward performed all the male voices, while Peter's wife Liz proved perfect for the female parts. We made trips to Edward's house on the Isle of Wight, recording the spoken parts one character at a time. I then trawled through all the recordings at home and selected the best and most consistent sections. We spent many hours recording door latches, clocks, crashes, footsteps, keys in locks, chinking teacups, sack barrows and so on; it was actually great fun. We also made a further visit to the Bluebell Railway, where we spent a day

filming trains entering and leaving stations and took long recordings with the microphone dangling out of the carriage window. We became aware that the Bluebell is not far from Gatwick Airport; it was quite frustrating at times. I am fascinated by sound, and its effect on film action; a small model train becomes a mighty steam engine with the appropriate sound effect. Likewise, little goods trucks assume a pleasing metallic mass with the addition of squeaks, clanking chains and crashing buffers. For music, we found some beautiful music which we were keen to use, but copyright is a minefield and the piece we wanted would have cost £800 which we simply couldn't afford. In the end, after much research we bought our music from a licence free website - I think the total cost was about £120 and we're very pleased with it.



Above and below, two pictures showing large sets – both the loco and the carriage were made by Peter.



Animating one of the scenes in the signal box.

We had long discussions about lip-synchronisation. The mouths do not move on any of our characters. With claymation, as used by Aardman, this can be incorporated into the initial animation process. However, our characters have ceramic heads and any mouth movement would have to be added in afterwards using computer generated imagery (CGI). We felt that this would compromise the integrity of our film. We did, however, realise that the characters' eyes look a little cold without the addition of blinks. Peter therefore spent many hours 'photo-shopping' blinks, about twelve frames for each one, and the blink sequences were then substituted into the film.

Our film was edited by a good friend, John Richards. We knew exactly what we wanted, but in the end we left him alone to fit it all together, and he has a good instinct for this work. We're not sure how many hours he spent at it, but it was probably longer than he'd care to admit! Another friend, Dave Harwood, added CGI smoke. To our eyes this was brilliantly done, and it provided the final link in the process of bringing the trains to life. We remain hugely grateful to John and Dave for their time and skill in helping us to fulfil our dream. Overall, Juniper Junction cost about £6,000 in materials to make. The major investment, of course, was in hours of work, representing about two/three days a week for four years.



The station master checks his watch with the guard of the London train



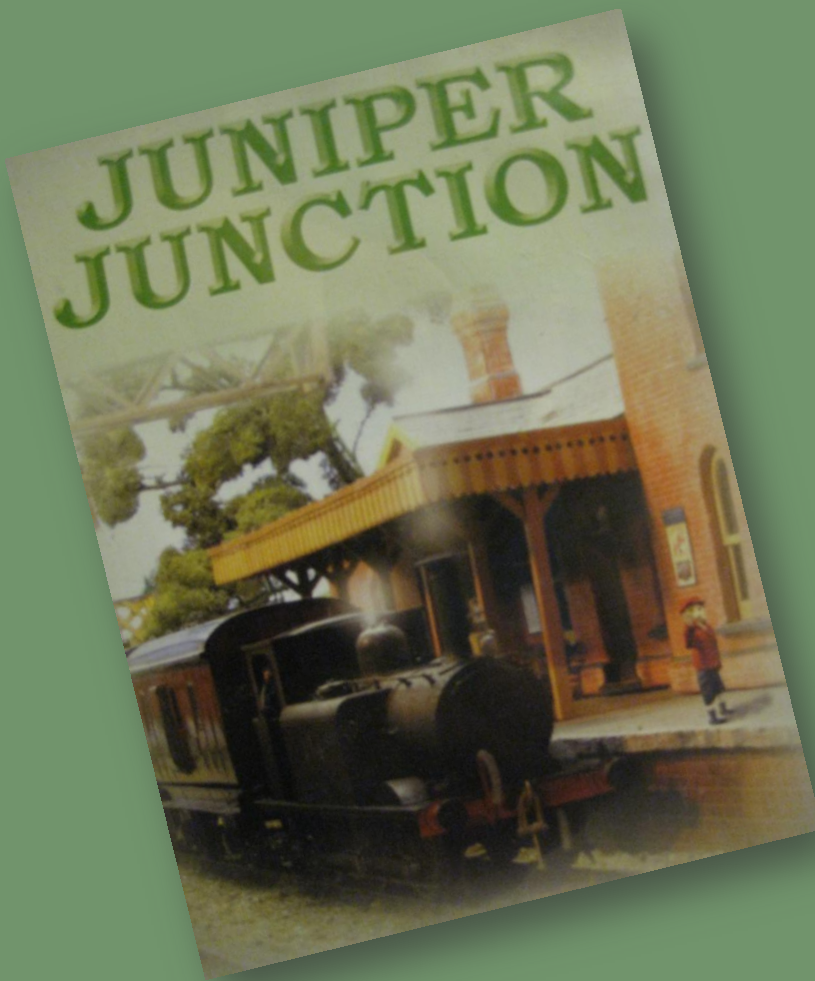
The London train in the countryside, on the same 12' length of track as all the other trains!

So - how do we feel about our film? We know that the pace is slow by the standards of modern entertainment, and we have sometimes wondered whether we should have made a shorter film with more dramatic action. However, we always come to the same conclusion - we made the film that we wanted to make, and we love it. In fact I joke to Peter that when he dies his spirit is going to reside at Juniper Junction for blissful eternity. Sadly, our skills at promotion are not good, and the film only received minor publicity with consequent low sales. It seems to have been either loved or ignored. Perhaps it's just too esoteric. It remains for sale on Amazon, where we are pleased to have a straight 'five stars', and the occasional order comes flooding in!

Peter and I have now moved back outside to his garden railway, and last year we made a short live-action film for YouTube called 'Seaside Dreams', using his tinplate trains in their natural setting. It can be seen [HERE](#)

This film has a simple story centred around Cyril and Daisy, the two characters from the earlier Duck End films. It was enormous fun to make, and this year two more films are planned. Despite being little more than an inch high, these two figures, like the characters in Juniper Junction, seem to be developing interesting personalities of their own; the wonder and joy of the imagination! We'll carrying on making stories till something stops us, a few years yet I hope!

Paul Rhodes



'Juniper Junction,' available from Amazon price £6.99 + postage [HERE](#)