

BY ANNE EVANS (photos by Rob Tysall)



Midlands Meccano Guild

Ann Evans looks at the nuts and bolts behind one of the longest running Meccano clubs in the country. *Photos by Rob Tysall*

Who doesn't remember Meccano from their childhood?

It's one of those toys that brings back happy memories of building cranes and bridges and Heath Robinson type vehicles – at least that's how I recall assisting my brothers with their Meccano many moons ago. However, the Meccano enthusiasts of today

have honed their constructions skills somewhat, producing the most marvelous working models imaginable.

Local to my home city of Coventry is the Midlands Meccano Guild, who were founded back in 1967, and just two years ago celebrated their 100th meeting. Now in their 52nd year, the MMG is going strong with members holding two major events a year as

well as exhibiting at various shows.

The Midlands Meccano Guild was one of the first Meccano clubs formed in the UK aimed at an adult membership. It's believed that the MMG now has the longest continuous history of meeting of any Meccano club in the UK. Over the years it has grown and evolved naturally to reflect the interests, aspirations and achievements of its membership which today numbers more than 100.

Their regular meetings take place at Baginton Village Hall, just outside Coventry where they always have a luncheon for members as part of the occasion which takes place in March and October each year.

Collectors Gazette went along to the March event at

Baginton where we discovered the village hall was packed with wonderful working Meccano models of all shapes and sizes. We chatted to George Illingworth, Chairman of the MMG, John Nuttall, Treasurer and Roger Marriott, Secretary of the MMG and editor of their full colour glossy *Bulletin*.

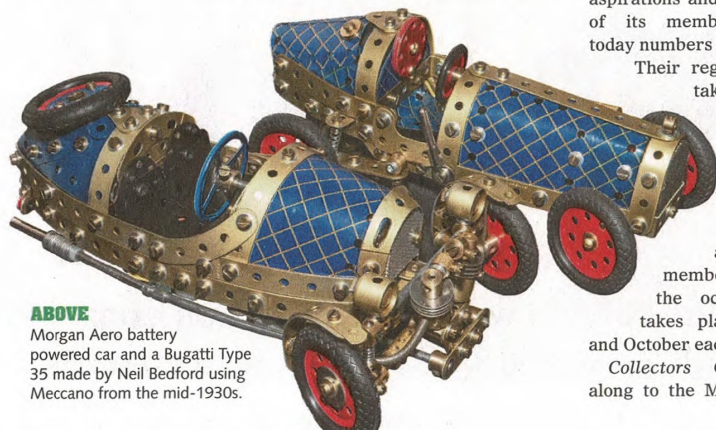
"About 60 to 70 members turn up at our twice a year gatherings," said Roger as we took a leisurely look at the amazing models. "We are one of the few clubs who operate on completely traditional lines as we do a model tour. Our Chairman goes around every model, so that no one is missed out. We do a report after each meeting and everybody gets a mention. People are also very welcome even if they haven't brought a model along."

Roger, who is also author of *Meccano* (Shire Library Series) added, "There are two sorts of Meccano enthusiasts, those who build models and those who collect complete

sets and revel in finding old parts. Some member also actively seek out the cups given as a first prize in early Meccano competitions."

The MMG's first official meeting was in October 1967 and came about through the enthusiasm of three key people: Esmond Roden, Ernie Chandler and Bert Love. Initially it was known as the Warwickshire and District Meccano Club.

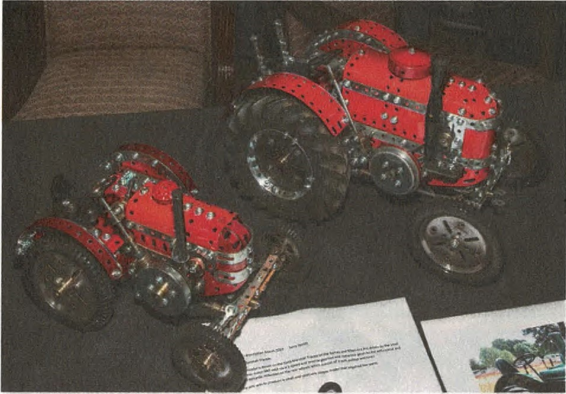
Roger also mentioned another legendary MMG member who made a significant contribution to the Meccano hobby, this being Alan Partridge. "It is to Alan that we are indebted for the iconic award of the Issigonis Shield presented to the first prize winner at the International Meccano Exhibition held annually at Skegness. The Shield was first awarded for the best Meccano model at the 50th Model Engineering Exhibition at Wembley, in January 1981: Alan Partridge



ABOVE
Morgan Aero battery powered car and a Bugatti Type 35 made by Neil Bedford using Meccano from the mid-1930s.



ABOVE Gregg Worwood's Meccano model of the Murray-Blenkinsop steam locomotive.



ABOVE Terry Pettitt's Field Marshall tractors.



ABOVE Brian Compton's coal loader and unloader needs precise engineering for all the moving parts to work together.

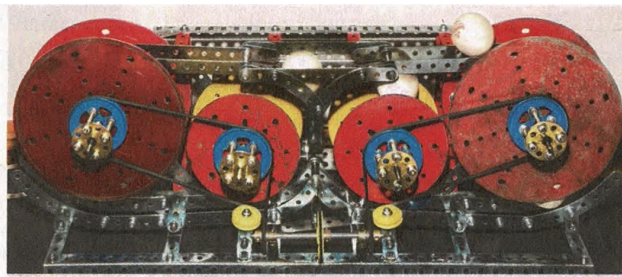


ABOVE RIGHT Stephen and Oliver Bridges.

ABOVE James, aged 13 with some of his Meccano models.

RIGHT A nice set of Meccano.

MAIN MMG members and visitors enjoying the club's exhibition at Baginton Village Hall.



LEFT
Robin Schoolar's Periphorating to Crossed Purposelessness construction.

was the winner of the Shield for his model Orrery of Jupiter and its moons. He subsequently offered the shield to commemorate the first prize winner at the Skegness exhibition. As an indication of the standard of MMG modelling over the years many members of MMG have been among the prize winners – sometimes more than once."

Most of the members have been enjoying Meccano since being youngsters. MMG Chairman, George Illingworth said that he started building 1/12 scale Meccano fire engines and now has 62 fire engines. "The wife says at least it's a cheaper hobby than golf, and you have something to show for it!" He added, "There's an eclectic mix of models here and an eclectic mix of people."

The models were indeed superb and while some replicated actual bridges, clocks, vehicles and machinery, there were others that were pure fantasy. Such as Robin Schoolar's working model that was randomly moving table tennis balls this way and that way. Robin said, "I've called it Periphorating to Crossed Purposelessness and I've deliberately made it without a purpose except to mesmerize and amuse. You can make anything with Meccano. Your imagination is your only limitation factor."

Bringing Meccano right up into the 21st century was Brian Compton whose model of a coal loader and unloader was an example of high-end microprocessor models using up to date software. It took Brian 6 months to make. "The coal loader and unloader have to be very precisely engineered. It must load and unload in precisely the right spot or you'll have coal – or in this case, small pebbles going everywhere. The reliability is 100% with the software. It's a really good exhibition model as it's perfect

for teaching children about microprocessor control."

Mike Edkins from Devon has been a member since 1984 and specializes in making Meccano clocks. He'd brought along an experimental version of a clock made by Richard of Wallingford in 1356 who was a mathematician, an astronomer and an Abbot. Mike said, "You can accurately build Meccano clocks that keep excellent time and will run for 8 days a week. This one is just experimental."

Tony Homden from Wisbech in North Cambridge had also taken a look back in time for inspiration. He'd brought along a large swinging bridge that was designed by Leonardo da Vinci in 1480. Tony said, "No one knows if it was ever built. If it had been, it would have been worked by man-power."

There were some very large Meccano models of ships built by Stephen Wilson who was accompanied by his wife Yvonne. His 120th scale models were the SS Normandie, a French ocean liner which entered service in 1935 as the largest and fastest passenger ship afloat. Also, the HMHS Britannic, sister ship to the Titanic.

While the system which became Meccano was first invented and patented by Frank Hornby back in 1901 selling in tins as Mechanics Made Easy, then evolving into the Meccano we know and love in 1907/08, the enjoyment of constructing with Meccano has continued for over 100 years.

At the exhibition, probably the youngest Meccano fan

there was Oliver Bridges aged 10. However, surprisingly, he wasn't following in his dad's footsteps. "I'm the Meccano maker in the family. My dad is just the chauffeur!" said Oliver. "Since making my first model I've had a passion for it. I build and then take apart to make something else."

Dad Stephen explained, "It all started when we were out as a family at a show and saw a stand full of Meccano models. We got talking and Oliver went on to make a Meccano Set No 1 garden bench. We do work on some models together. The people here at the MMG are really generous. People often give Oliver a box of bits."

Another keen youngster was 13-year-old James who was at the show with his granddad Dave Phillips, and finding Meccano was putting him in good stead for the future. James said, "There are a lot of different things you can build with Meccano, you just have to use your imagination. I may go into engineering when I'm older."

MMG Chairman, George Illingworth commented, "The shape of the world has changed and Meccano was produced to build things made years ago. If you look at cars and things made these days there aren't any straight lines and nuts and bolts. Shapes are more rounded. So, the newer Meccano is made from plastic. However, you still have the standard hole spacing and standard thread on the nuts and bolts. So you can mix the original Meccano with today's and they will work together." ■

Further details ...

- The club is now preparing for an exhibition over the weekend of 20/21 July when it holds the fifth annual exhibition at the British Motor Museum, Gaydon as the museum hosts the annual Ford Motor Show. Following this, the next meeting is on 12 October at Baginton Village Hall. Contact the Secretary, Roger Marriott if you would like to go along: johnroger.marriott@btinternet.com. More details on their website: www.midlandsmeccanoguild.com