

Modelling real buildings for your OO gauge layout

by Geoff Hicks

Geoff Hicks has modelled many of the buildings that appear on our layouts, including the stunning Cannington Viaduct. Geoff's love of modelling goes back to childhood and is built around a passion for architecture. He studied graphic design at Camberwell School of Art in London and worked for many years as an art therapist within adult mental health.

When starting a new project my first task is to research the buildings I want to include, using the internet and maps. I also check if there are any historical photographs that will set a particular time period. If possible, I visit the buildings and take photographs.

I look for a front elevation if I am making a low-relief model. If the building is free-standing then information about the setting is important. I tend to use paper, thick card, acetate, mount board and MDF. Printed textures are run off on an inkjet printer on 120gsm paper.

Next, I look to see what resources I need. Most of my buildings start with a core base layer, made from mount board or MDF, which is then wrapped with a paper cover of brick, stone etc. Windows and doors are cut to size following the pattern of the original.



Geoff Hicks at work on Axminster Railway Station



The completed Axminster Railway Station

Windows need particular consideration. They can be fitted either behind the window opening or inset. The frame is cut from card or thick paper backed with clear acrylic (glazing). If more details are needed, curtains or blinds can be added.

Having made the building structure, the walls are covered with brick paper or painted before I move on to the roof and chimneys, which can be part of the end wall or inserted into the roof. Chimney pots are a challenge, being made from rolled paper then glued. I usually drill holes for each stack to provide a more stable join. I have recently found a way to 3D print chimney pots (another article on 3D printing is planned



Geoff's model of the iconic Cannington Viaduct is our centrepiece

for the future). Roof lines, be they a simple two-part sloping roof with ridge tiles or more complicated ones with gables, can be a challenge. I usually complete the main sloping roof and fit gables into it, which seems to work.



The Victoria Hotel stood next to the former Lyme Regis railway station

Having completed the main build, the model can be further refined with drainpipes and foliage, and placed in a setting with roads and pavements.

As a minimum I use sharp craft knives with a self-healing green mat. A knife with replaceable surgical blades is best. Set squares and steel rulers (both 6in and 1 foot) are key.

Glues can be Pritt, PVA or spirit glues. Glue spreaders and bone folders for making sharp creases are useful. For those with larger budgets, a laser printer is a must for repetitive accurate cutting of paper through to MDF. Paints can be either acrylic or emulsion. With printed papers, paints are susceptible to fading in sunlight, so a good fixative with a UV blocker reduces the likelihood of colour fading.

There is much information for the modeller online. You can download building plans, textured sheets and complete buildings of card, which are then easily assembled.

As with all model making, patience is needed. You should be rewarded with models that look authentic, enhance and add interest to your layout.