

BUILDING WORKSHOP

By Robbo

The 2 Old Mills on the Canal

A “Potted” History

The original water mill was built in the mid 1700s and was used by the local farmers to grind their wheat and grain crops. When first established it proved to be a very profitable operation and was run by “Scruff” Pendlegast, the miller and local identity.

It stayed in the family for over 100 years, but eventually it was becoming more and more run-down and then around the 1850s there was a devastating fire and explosion.

Evidently the miller at that time was very partial to his mulled wine and would often come home highly inebriated, to which his rather portly wife would never allow him anywhere near her bed, and so our tipsy and ruddy faced miller would go on up to the loft and settle down on the empty flour sacks.

Well, this particular night he could not find what he had done with his new delivery of sacks and so promptly started to empty two ready filled sacks of flour, aided with the light from a naked candle resting precariously on the sill of the window nearby.

The small room was filled with flour dust, which our friend took not a blind bit of notice, unfortunately, in his rather addled state of mind, he overbalanced and when the flame came into contact with the flour dust it ignited and caused a rather devastating blast, killing the miller (and the cat who was “mousing”) and destroying the building.



Fortunately his rotund wife had left her warm bed, having to answer a call of nature and had gone down the backyard to the outside privvy, thus surviving the blast. The only one that she felt sorry about was the cat, who usually kept her feet warm during the night!

The millers wife decided she had had enough of living in a drafty old mill and promptly took up with an itinerate canal boat deckhand who she found loafing around on the mill’s nearby wharf, and so leaving the property vacant for the next 50 odd years or more!

The “new” mill was not built until 1908 and was owned by a miller and his wife who had just arrived from the Black Forest area in the south western parts of Germany. The new mill had architectural aspects copied from his home there and these were incorporated into the building of his new mill giving us the “look” as it stands in the 1930s, the period of which this scene belongs to for my diorama.

Reference Points

Before I start any of my building projects I always search extensively through Google Images for the subject matter in question. I wanted initially just photos of existing water mills and water wheels, not as many photos as one would think!

It wasn’t until the main Mill building was almost complete that I then had to search for derelict mill photos as well.

The images below and next page show the inspiration for my finished scene.





Reality — The Build, the Old & the New

This project was started well over a year ago and has progressed very slowly in that time. In fact, it sat idle with nothing being done for well over 9 months.

A new lady had come into my life and everything else just “STOPPED”! Funny what the opposite sex can do to a man and his hobby — fortunately she is very understanding and so now I am back into the swing of things!

I had bought 2 of Tony Turner’s water wheels — the “undershot” version as well as the “overshot” version and wanted to do something in the way of an old mill to be incorporated into the ongoing “Canal” saga — of which most of you are aware of from my previous dioramas; buildings and “blogs”.

I also wanted to use some of Martin’s “tudor” style moulds for part of the building and combined those with stone and red brick, as well as “old style” timber framing — I really wanted this to be a mixture looking like something from the 1600s, but being built in a “modern” period. After all, a “Water Mill” needs some form of distinguishing appearance, apart from the “wheel” itself!

Once I had the basic size figured out — I never work from a plan as I stated once before in a blog — I did have photos of a similar building that I



found on the internet. I used this as a rough guide only to how I wanted it to appear (see image on the page 1).

The next part of the project was to build the base for the canal. This diorama was to be on a bend in the canal and had to incorporate all the desired features that were "sitting" in my brain. It also was the last section before the final "straight" section of the canal, leading into the town at the end of the line of my existing Narrow Gauge railway.

I wanted to incorporate a "mill pond"; sluice gates with the water wheel; a "mill race" joining into the canal and to have the mill positioned alongside; as well as a loading area and a canal-side "dock" for loading and unloading produce and materials.

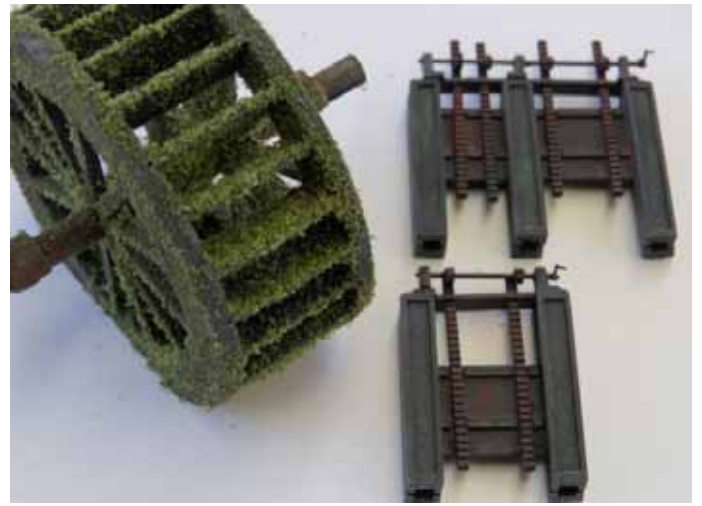
I followed the same practice as before, using perspex as the base for the canal water, and cut pieces accordingly to follow the contour of the existing canal sections. All timber-work was done using "scrap lumber"!



Once that was finalised I started on the assembly and painting of the mill (see images on page 2) as well as the water wheel and the sluice gates. The sluice gates were from the Wills/Ratio kits available.

These were assembled and painted and then positioned roughly to see how things looked.

I decided to "weather" both these units BEFORE finally fixing in place as it would be somewhat

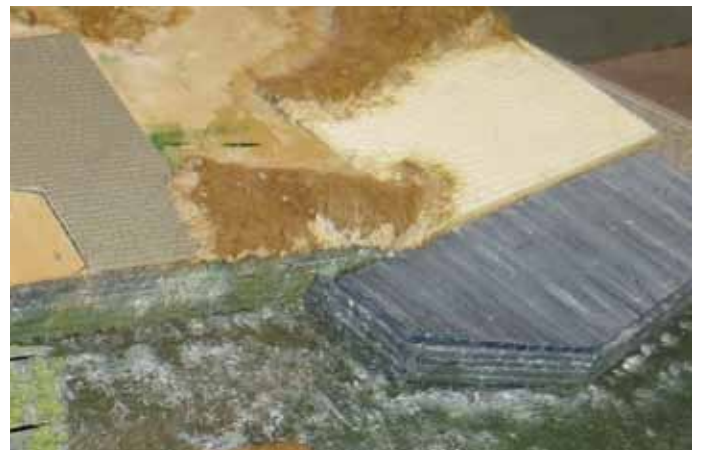


awkward if I did it after final positioning and gluing. The "water effects" in the mill race were done using the Woodland Scenics "Water Effects" materials (see some of my earlier "blogs" referencing this product).

Also I used some of the Linka "stone" moulds for the walls and bridge across the mill races and sluice gate areas.



The wharf was built using the Linka "wooden palings" mould; the granite setts outside the mill used the Wills kit product and the ones near the wharf used the new Linka mould. I had to use the Wills leading into the mill because the thickness would have made plaster ones too fragile.



I realised there was rather a large empty space on the opposite side to the mill. What could I use to fill this area? Hence the "Derelict Mill" building.

The Derelict Mill

One of the internet image also had an old stone walled building on the opposite side to it so I “adapted” the idea for my old disused mill (and broken water wheel, a Wills kit).

Again, the Linka “stone” moulds were used for this building in its entirety, along with the excellent “roof shingle mould” that Martin had produced in his range of wonderful new moulds last year.

Before I assembled the building I gave the walls and windows etc. a “broken” look by snapping off pieces — very carefully — with a pair of pliers and side cutters.



I found if I was slow and careful, I could “nibble” away with the side cutters to produce the effect I wanted for the walls, and the shattered look of the shingles — the pliers were used for breaking off larger pieces of the building sides around the top of the building.



Once that was done the outside walls of the main building were painted in the usual manner prior to final assembly. Often it is much better to paint walls before assembly, particularly window and door areas because of their “finicky” nature!



I did not want to see the joints inside from each Linka “tile”, so once the walls were assembled I used the same method as I had used on the outside walls of my “Thatched Cottage”. This was an artists Moulding Paste compound heavily applied to hide all of the tile joints and then painted suitably and weathered accordingly (*see below*).

Because it was possible to see “inside” my mill I needed some form of floor and floor joists showing — but in a really “destroyed” state (explosion/fire/age). I used a Walnut stain as the base for these rafters/floor joists/floor boards, etc. and then heavily weathered them with chalk powders.



The shingle “roof” was created with old offcuts from a previous project — moral of the story here is “never, ever throw away small unwanted pieces”! Because of the derelict look to the building I also wanted to show some of the roofing battens, etc. as part of my roof build.



The roof structure was again painted and weathered before attaching to the main building — by the nature of the build, it was very fragile, so much care had to be exercised!

Once all this was done I joined the roof structure onto the main building with a very strong, fast setting glue. The whole thing was quite spindly and fragile — much “cussing” here, often it would be good to have another pair of hands — but finally it was done. I gave it a day or two for the glue to really adhere before attempting the next stage — the end wooden sheathing going from the top of the stone walls and into the roof areas.

This was to be very dilapidated and weathered. The material that I chose to use was the thin top veneer skin off a piece of water damaged ply rescued from an old china cabinet.

I find this excellent for projects where I want real timber and don't want to use plastic sheets, balsa or other like materials. This has a really good "grain" on the GLUE side of the veneers, I don't use the "finish" side of the ply though!

The only problem is that the thin veneer is very prone to splitting along the grain so it is important to cut with a very sharp blade, and even then be careful handling it once it is cut — it wants to "break" into small pieces!

I gave these ends a base coat of a "dirty" dark green acrylic paint and then broke pieces away to give the effect of ancient timber and missing boards — then weathered it with the chalk powders to give it the final finished appearance. I was quite happy with the end result.



The end pieces were glued onto the structure and the completed unit was finally "dressed" with appropriate foliage — vines, ivy and bushes with mosses on the roof shingles and walls. Any areas needing to be "feathered" into the surrounds are touched-up with weathering powders!



I had originally made a "mill stone" that was going to stand outside the main mil, but after building the "derelict" I thought it would look much better "abandoned" in the top floor of the old mill.

This was done by pouring my Hydrocal/dental stone mix into a plastic tube, allowed to dry and then I had to cut the solid piece out — the compound dries hard like cement and was very hard to cut, even with a good saw blade!

I had found an image on the internet and liked the "grooves pattern" in the mill stone for grinding. I created this with a needle file.

The mill stone was painted and weathered and "dressed" in the usual way!



Often with model railway layouts shown in the various magazines you can see very plainly the "gaps" between the base of the buildings and the "ground". Maybe I am being overly "picky" here but I don't like seeing those gaps — the building has to look as if it is part of the surroundings.

I always have my buildings/structures "sitting" (glued) onto a base of thick artists mounting board, and then I hide any unwanted gaps with earth or grass scatter. Also I never glue this base to the underlying baseboard structure, but I screw them onto it using small gauge wood screws.

I have found over the years that often a building has to be relocated for one reason or another and if they are glued down then something is going to be broken in the moving process! Much easier to undo a few holding screws than try to "unstick" a

fragile building — I do this with all my structures in a diorama or on a layout!

Once this “base” is firmly held in place I then use my scenery “scatter” materials to hide unsightly gaps or bumps with the surrounding areas. Done properly it looks as if it has been “built” into the scene and NOT just sitting on it!



I have covered how to “scenify” your models in some of my earlier blogs so I won’t go into this here. I have included small cameo scenes into different areas of the diorama to add some form of “meaning” and “life” to an otherwise still landscape — again the diorama should reflect a “scene from life”, which hopefully I have achieved here.

What is the next project you ask? Probably I am being over-enthusiastic but I hope it to be a “small town” diorama with shops and a railway station incorporated using as much Linka as possible. Maybe!!! It would be very ambitious!

I am spending all of August and September (2016) in the UK so hope to be “inspired” by all that beautiful scenery and those gorgeous old buildings that we don’t seem to have here in Australia. Of course I’ll be taking masses of photos for reference — and seeing my good mate Martin (a few pints down at the local, and lots of talk)!

Rushed pics below — not quite finished, but more fotos once back from the UK!

Happy Modelling, Rob

The Old Mill Gallery



