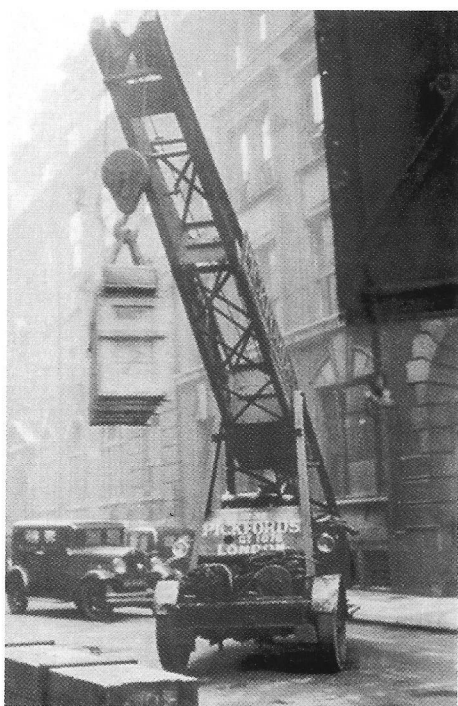




Unloading the Association Francaise des Amis du Chemin de Fer layout and the Nord Railways display stand at Central Hall prior to The Model Railway Club's 1935 Easter show. The use of a Pickford's 4 Ton Ransome & Rapier mobile crane makes present day setting up at exhibitions seem almost easy in comparison!

GP Keen/M C Shaw Collection



THE MRC EASTER SHOWS



Some of the first meetings of the MRC in 1911 were referred to as 'exhibitions', where members brought along their own models to show to fellow members. On March 13, 1912, one of these meetings was made open to non-members so can be considered the first ever model railway exhibition. A similar event was held the following year, and again on March 18, 1915. After he was elected Chairman in 1921, GP Keen worked tirelessly to build up funds for a permanent headquarters building, mainly through organising exhibitions. From 1924 these changed to a two-day show held in Kingsway Hall at Easter. In 1929 the show had expanded to a five day event with 3,000 visitors, and outgrown its home at Kingsway Hall.

The lower hall of the Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, was booked for the 1931 event. This was considered a major commercial risk, and the MRC became a limited liability company in order to protect the membership. Visitors in the 1930s included Gresley, Stanier, Maunsell and Sir Henry Wood.

After the second world war, the annual Easter exhibition continued from 1947. In 1951 some 37,000 visitors attended the show. Setting up took place on Maundy Thursday and Easter Saturday, being open to the public from Tuesday to Saturday, as no activity was permitted in the halls on Good Friday or Easter Sunday. The show moved to the Royal Horticultural Society's New Horticultural Hall in the 1960s. Due to the unavailability of the hall, the 1968 show took place in August, sustaining a heavy financial loss and forcing the MRC to amalgamate the show with the trade's 'Hobby Show'. This arrangement continued for several years until the trade eventually sold off their interests to the MRC for a nominal £46.00. During this time the show had returned to Central Hall where the queues - and profits - returned.

In the early 1980s with Central Hall bursting at the seams, Argus Specialist

Publications approached the MRC with plans for a joint venture at the then new Wembley Exhibition Centre - the International Model Railway Exhibition (IMREX) - in which the MRC would have a 51% stake. While the 1983 show was a huge success, the newly elected treasurer looked at the projections for the second show, and forecast that as it was a late Easter in 1984 the show would make a loss. The warning was not listened to and the show went ahead as an eight day event resulting in losses of almost £20,000 (nearly £50,000 at today's value). Plans to allow the exhibition company to go into insolvency were rejected and a rescue plan implemented by the MRC. A loan of £30,000 was secured against Keen House and the Club took control of the exhibition company. IMREX was held for one final time at Wembley then the show moved back to the RHS Halls. Over the next few years the shows raised more than enough to recover all losses and to also pay for much needed refurbishment of the club's headquarters.

However, these golden days couldn't last forever and by 1995 IMREX had reduced to one hall. The following year the show was pulled due to lack of trade support. Several 'mini-exhibitions' were held at Keen House, but there was little appetite to run a large show again. Towards the end of the decade Warners Group Publications Ltd, publishers of *British Railway Modelling and Traction*, approached the MRC to assist in the organisation of what was intended to be a one off show at Wembley, celebrating 100 years of railway modelling. The Club organised the 'amateur' side of the show - layouts, demonstrations and stewards - with Warners organising trade, publicity, venue and ticketing. Following the success of this show in 2000, the partnership continues to this day with the annual London Festival of Railway Modelling in March, now in the historic surroundings of Alexandra Palace.