

**S**O WHAT IS LINKA, and what does it have to do with trains? The important thing is that it is true 4mm 00 Scale, but could also be used in some 0-scale adaptation.

First introduced into the toy market in 1979 by Thomas Salter Ltd, and launched at the Earls Court Toy Fair with a huge TV and Press promotion, it was hoped it would be an answer to Meccano.

There was a great amount of interest in the product and it was also launched in Europe and America; there were millions of boxes, components and instructions produced for the different countries and their languages. However, unfortunately there was no market research done prior to release and the general public were somewhat misled into believing it was intended for the younger generation, who found the whole Linka process far too complicated.

The following paragraphs are from the Linka Newsletter:

“So instead of the popularity of Linka spreading by word of mouth, as all successful products must, the reverse was happening. The word on the street was, ‘Linka is crap!’”

At the same time, the 1980 overseas launches were not going too well either. In Germany (quite apart from setting up a deal with Noch where Salter’s could hardly ever make any money anyway) sales were going poorly — the German modeller liked his nice clean Faller models, thank you very much. And in America, the situation was even worse. For by the time the distributor, sub-distributor, and sub-sub-distributor had taken their cuts, the price ruled out any huge popularity — even if, as was never researched, the American modeller was prepared to spend the kind of time Linka demands.

By the end of 1980, things were in a sorry state — a huge investment committed to sets and packaging, coupled with dwindling sales in any part of the globe you looked.

Consequently, at the start of the 1980s and after some serious negotiation with Salter’s, an agreement was reached with Stuart Manley to take over Linka and attempt a re-marketing.

Excerpt:

“So manufacture moved to Alnwick in late 1982.

## MY INTRODUCTION TO LINKA

by Rob Tossen HRCAA 51

But with sets on the High Street selling at 99p, there was little immediate prospect of getting it back in the shops at full price. The next two years were spent designing new packaging for Linka’s re-launch, as well as producing the Linka Manual (still the ‘bible’ for this kind of modelling). In fact, the Manual alone required sending out hundreds of letters to modellers, who kindly sent back their tips and ideas, so that at last the old Salter’s instructions could be swept aside forever. Then, in January 1984, Linka was re-launched at Earls Court toy fair, with a greatly reduced fanfare



compared to the previous Salter’s introduction.” The sales and distribution continued with rises and falls in its popularity, until finally the factory closed down in September of 1993. During this time there were quite a number of Railway modellers who had great success with Linka.

By the mere nature of its design, with care a great number of buildings could be built to all kinds of specifications. There are a series of different rubber moulds allowing the production of brick, stone and timber sidings. Combined with a plethora of windows; doors; arches; all of differing designs and sizes.

It was even possible to build castles; cathedrals (see Linka Online site) and round towers — all from the great variety of moulds available.

Well, I am glad to say that Linka is now readily available again!

I was introduced to Linka in the middle of last year by another HRCAA member, Ian Watkins. He was gracious enough to loan me his extensive collection of moulds.

Admittedly, at first, it seemed as if it was going to be more trouble than it was worth — but I persevered — and darn glad I did. The problem was finding a *suitable* casting compound.

Ordinary plaster-of-paris is virtually useless, it does not have the strength needed to produce a satisfactory ‘tile’. By the nature of the moulds

(see illustration), once the plaster has hardened it has to be removed carefully from the moulds, and here is the problem! The small ‘tongues’ have a tendency to break away.

Also some of the window moulds have a very narrow surround around the opening and if not treated correctly will easily break or crumble — hence the need for a stronger and more resilient casting compound.

I have been using a casting compound called Hydrocal 105 — readily available from Aldax, a store in Sydney (<http://aldaxstore.com.au/>) who will supply and post materials speedily and reasonably priced.

I buy the Hydrocal 105 in 5kg tubs for \$19.95 plus postage of approximately \$9 — Australia Post will deliver up to 20kg via post. It is also available in 22.5kg packs, but will have to be courier delivered.

My success rate in pouring and extracting the castings is now at about 99.9%. Hydrocal

105 is a good strong mould material, commonly known as “buff stone”, an off-coloured stone ideal for sculpting prosthetics such as dental stones with controlled expansion.

I have now produced a number of railway-related buildings and would now prefer using Linka as

Above: Linka moulds

Below: Linka station





*Above: Linka engine house*

opposed to buying plastic building kits. A number of us Hornby or Hornby Dublo collectors might prefer to have our layouts free of external decoration, other than the products of Binns Road. But also, there are those of us who do like to add scenery and 'other' buildings to make a layout more realistic in its appearance, and it is to these modellers this article is aimed at — as well as sharing a very useful and interesting train-related product to the other HRCAA members! Over the past few months I have been producing articles on 'weathering' and 'scenery-building techniques' which are on the Linka Online web site and find that there is a growing interest in the revival of Linka buildings.

This article shows some of the buildings that I have made, none of which have been done from plans, but have been created to fill a definite need on my layout.

They may possibly inspire other members to 'join in' the Linka Revival!

The enjoyment in constructing these models has been truly satisfying, even though quite time consuming, but then again — that is what a hobby is all about!

The persons who are now doing so much work in the promotion of Linka are Martin Stancer in the UK, who is the driving force behind Linka modellers, and here in Australia we have Tony Turner, a retired tool maker who is now producing Linka compatible items using a 3D Printer.

To see more on Linka there are three places online that you can go to and see what others are saying and building, these are:

<http://www.linkaonline.co.uk/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Minibuildings>

<https://www.facebook.com/Linkamodelsau>

Hopefully I may have whetted your appetite with this article. I can remember my old Bayko building set and the fun I used to have constructing items to put alongside my Hornby Dublo, although very 'out-of-scale' a child's mind doesn't look at that aspect so much.

Now, I find that I am receiving as much enjoyment in creating architectural pieces for the trains — as 'playing' with the trains!

#### **Credit**

Excerpts of this story were gleaned from the Linka Newsletter, published in 1995 and written by Stuart Manley, the last owner of Linka when it was written. The full version of this newsletter can be found on the Linka Online website at <http://www.linkaonline.co.uk/> (highly recommended viewing).

*Above: Linka lighthouse*



*Above: Finished canal lock. Below: the start of the canal lock*

