

Research

One of the joys of our hobby is its multi-faceted nature. We can explore and enjoy the delights of all sorts of craft based activity from metalwork to woodwork; using plastics, paper and card; figuring out electronics and wiring; employing computers; painting and art and of course – historical research – the business of this article.

Now for those of you with layouts set in fictitious settings, there is still research to be done. You will want to replicate rolling stock and buildings of your chosen company and even if you are going completely whacky with say a Sci-Fi theme, some research will be necessary to produce a convincing whole.

However, this article covers the more in-depth research needed for modelling an actual location set at a specific period in time and, in particular, some of the resources which may be less familiar to you. I have found this a fascinating, highly enjoyable and very rewarding part of the hobby and there is a most exhilarating feeling when a bit of research turns up a photo, plan or reference that lets another piece of the jigsaw puzzle fall into place.

The following lists the broad categories of resource have I used to get my information.

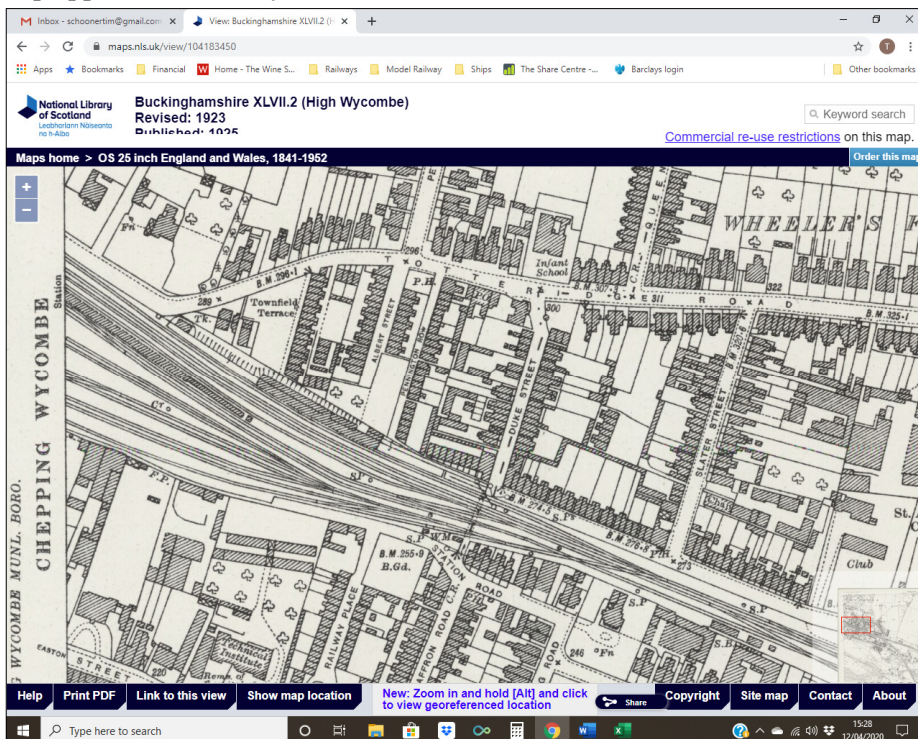
- Photos
- Articles
- Historical publications
- Books and Magazines
- Internet
- Maps
- Plans
- Word of Mouth

Photos and Maps are what I am concentrating on here. Let's start with maps. Have a look at

<https://maps.nls.uk/>

This link takes you to the National Library of Scotland that holds a vast repository of maps of the whole of the UK. It is slightly clunky until you get the hang of it. Click on find by place and a 'Help' dialogue comes up. Close that after you have read it and enter the town you are interested in – High Wycombe Station for me. The map then zooms into a modern version of that area but then go Map Series, select a map and pick OS 25" 1850s – 1960s.

Then click in the grid in which you are interested. The map will zoom in and on the right several year options appear. I selected the 1925 version and the map appears and is fully zoomable.



Now let's look at another archive that can be married to the above – namely aerial photos. Go to

<https://britainfromabove.org.uk/en>

There are hours of endless fun to be had here but remain disciplined and you can search by town. Be aware the archive is enormous and only a small proportion has been digitised. Searching on High Wycombe gives some fascinating views of the town around the late 40s which fits my period of 1950-1957 perfectly. Little would have changed in that interval. It wasn't really until the early 60s that wholesale change began to affect our towns. The images below are one of several obliques at the east end of the station. However, there was nothing further west of the station itself. I figured there must be other shots and dropped the organisation an email to enquire. The response was swift, I could pay £66 for a search done in a matter of days, or if I were prepared to wait 4-5 weeks, the search would be free. 3 weeks later an email appeared listing about 25 other images, some oblique and some vertical.

The options are to visit and see the images (recommended) or they can do simple photocopies at £1.98 a go. I opted to visit (it's in Swindon adjacent to Steam Museum in the old GWR works). It made a great day out and an excuse for a pub lunch and Gill availed herself of the shopping opportunity whilst I was in the archive. The historic buildings are great to walk around as well.



You must book an appointment and on arrival, the images are ready for you. For a tenner, you can buy a day photo licence and self-service photocopies are 20p a shot. I took photos and some photocopies for safety. Not all the images are high quality. Some are very distant and some partially obscured by cloud, so seeing them in the flesh was well worth the outing. Once home and having studied them in more detail, I went on to order some scans of three of the images I really thought were worth having. I opted for low res, but in fact these were not good enough so regrettably some money wasted there. Once we are out of quarantine, I will order some high res versions. Copyright prohibits publishing the shots here but I am happy to bring them to the club for a viewing



– in due course.

Finally, one more local resource which I think you should be aware of.

<https://swop.org.uk/swop/swop.htm>

This has the Buckinghamshire County photo archive in it. Again, it is searchable. Try searching by street, or the station or for aerial photos. Some fascinating stuff here and it has given me a real grasp of the background to the station, coupled with the maps and the aerial surveys. Other nearby towns like Princes Risborough are covered as well. The final thing to say is that patience is required. Don't expect all the information to come at once. I've been going with this for some 20 years and fresh stuff is still being found – all adding to the overall picture. Also, don't delay starting the model until you have 'all the information' – you will never start!!

Tim