

Young blood

Welcome to AGR Model Railway Store which is flying the flag for starting modelling young, before going on to own your own model shop! **Sarah Palmer** finds out more.

MEET ANTHONY ROSIER, OWNER of AGR Model Railway Store in Leighton Buzzard. He's the youngest model shop owner in the country according to Bachmann and Hornby's account records. Even arguably the world's youngest model railway store owner.

At a time when most people I speak to say that attracting youngsters to the hobby is key for the survival of railway modelling, it's heartening to find someone, aged just 26, showing what can be done when you graduate from playing with Thomas trains as a child. Anthony (set up) AGR Model Railway Store three years ago, at just 23, after working for the previous owner of the store for a couple of years.

"I initially asked the shop for a weekend job a few years ago, which then turned into weekday job and now I'm actually running the whole place. I worked here for two and half years in total before setting up the business," says Anthony.

"This was what I knew and I enjoyed it. There's also a great client base round here in Leighton Buzzard; which is near the West Coast Main Line and very close to the site of the Great Train Robbery.

Anthony is a shining example of what giving a trainset to a child can achieve. "When I was younger I had a Thomas set like many children, and when I outgrew it I started to go to my local model store. The Thomas set was what did it for me and that's what a lot of children come in to the shop for, then hopefully they then move on and grow into proper modelling."

Anthony's shop doesn't just offer Thomas sets for youngsters, he points out that they don't specialise in anything in particular and try to carry a wide range so they can offer everything for everybody.

"We have the grass, the card and plastic kits, the track, we also do magazines, Christmas cards and catalogues. Plus many more lines which we could list but even if we don't have it on the shelf we could probably get it in for you in a short space of time."

As well as offering his customers a range of products they can purchase in store Anthony and his team also offers a wide range of services including repairs, DCC and Sound installations,

also helping with fitting lights etc.

"We offer services that people can't buy on the internet. We are the only model shop in Bedfordshire, so people have to travel to us, so we try to offer services so that people don't go elsewhere."

It all sounds rosy and Anthony has seen a year-on-year growth in his business. But when the Brexit result was announced after the referendum in 2016 the shop was very quiet for the whole week but, he says, after the news scares had died down it picked straight back up again.

"I hope that when people walk in the shop they see a brightly presented and clean store that's easily laid out and easily accessible. We have it all organised into sections, so if someone asks us where the wagons or the plastic kits are, we know where it all is, it's laid out almost like a Tesco."

Something about the shop and Anthony's approach must be working. "We have people who did live in the area and moved away but come back to us or ask us to post stuff out. We've had people who've come all the way from Sheffield or even further afield just because of the service I've provided. It's not just about the price, it's about the service.

"Over Christmas we do have a lovely Christmas set that we put out in the window just to try to attract people to come in and the Hornby Santa Express sets do sell well."

After Christmas he has exciting plans for next year including possibly taking over an extra floor above the shop for extra storage or for a packing department, taking on an extra member of staff, or possibly moving to bigger premises within the area.

"We are also looking forward to taking on new manufacturers such as Oxford Rail, which is really up and coming and promising a lot more supply of locomotives. Heljan is another one, promising 009 locos, as well as expanding our DCC range / capability with DCC Concepts.

At a time when some model shops are closing it's great to hear from someone at the beginning of their modelling journey and taking others along with him for the ride!

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What does Anthony model?

"I've started to build Whitby town layout, but it's in its very early stages. I've done most of the buildings and the station is the next building to do. It's in OO gauge. I used to go there as a child with my parents and as an adult I've returned several times with my girlfriend, Stevie who also works in the shop on a Saturday, so I decided to recreate it in model form. It should be around 20ft by 8ft when it's all finished and completed, although it could take me a lifetime to do!

Anthony's tips for beginner modellers
Always go down to your local model store and see what's around.

See which scale you want to do, different shops may specialise in different scales. You may have an idea in your mind of what you want to do but if you look around you may find something more suitable.

I'd always say to buy a set to start off with too, as it's cheaper than buying it bit by bit. You just get it out of the box and it's ready to go.

I've been modelling since I was a child and one of the biggest lessons I learned was modelling on a child's budget. I learned tricks and tips about how to do things cheaper to get the most out of my pocket money not just forking out for the expensive stuff. Really just do your research and see what you like. Go along to your local club. Talk to people online and on forums or join a Facebook group. Ask the questions. There are plenty of people out there who can help.

The DCC debate

I stock both DC and DCC, at home on my layout I'm analogue but then I go to shows with a friend and help operate his DCC layout. I can see the positives and negatives of both. With DC for a lot of people it's tradition, but we are getting customers for whom DCC is the way forward, and they control their layouts from their tablet or their phone. That's what excites me; the idea of using your phone as your controller. It seems to be going that way. There are people who still use analogue, but there are a lot of people moving over to digital, especially with the prices coming down from what they used to be a couple of years ago, especially with the sound.

