

RAILWAY MODELLING v DEMENTIA

Railway modelling is not a cure

But it can help prevent dementia

Although cases are being identified in people in their 30s and 40s, the risk of dementia is usually linked to the over 60s. Currently:

- 1 in 14 at age 65, rising to 1 in 8 at age 80.
- However, a survey of 20 model railway clubs with a combined total membership of over 1000 modellers, average age 64, found just:
- 1 case in 160 among the older railway modellers

Railway modelling involves:

- Concentration
- A range of handicraft techniques
- Some used only very occasionally



How does this help prevent dementia

Many model making techniques, some used only occasionally, require concentration to control thumb and finger movement. This is cognitive dexterity. This continues to use cells in the main part of the brain, the 'front office'.

However, for repetitive tasks, such as tying a shoelace or playing the piano, dexterity is developed through practice and repetition to replace active concentration with muscle memory. However, the move to muscle memory reduces 'front office' activity. Underused, these brain cells may begin to waste leading to forms of dementia, including Alzheimer's.

If you don't use it – you may lose it. Keep modelling, keep concentrating.

There are other pastimes which involve cognitive dexterity. As with railway modelling, these should be helping to prevent dementia. These could include: cooking from recipes, maintaining and operating heritage railways, sewing, restoring old cars, and other forms of model making etc. However, only railway modelling has been the subject of any research.

What can you do now? If you do not have a pastime which involves concentrating using a variety of handicraft techniques: Start Now. Preferably reinforced by belonging to a relevant club or group. Your local model railway club or heritage railway operation is always on the lookout for more members, new ideas and new hands.