

Crowdfunding for New Roof After Vandals Visit!

A society that has been offering families memorable days out on its miniature railway for 70 years is fundraising for a new roof after vandals caused more than £10,000 of damage. People have been spotted jumping on top of Maidstone Model Engineering Society's (MMES) main club building in Mote Park and now the whole roof needs replacing.



The roof of the Maidstone Model Engineering Society building needs replacing. Picture: MMES

As Covid-19 has exhausted funds and halted operations, the group has turned to crowdfunding otherwise it could be forced to close. It is hoping to raise £5,000, just half of what is needed, to support the costs.

Committee member Tom Parham said: "We would be so grateful if anybody was able to help us. It would be such a shame for us to be forced into closure from this incident. "About 20 years ago we had a new fibreglass roof put in, but from time to time we see people jumping around on it, sometimes with bikes up there. There has also been damage caused by tree branches hitting the roof and it was a small leak to begin with, but it has now made the wood underneath it soft.



MMES offers rides on the miniature railway in Mote Park. Picture: Andy Jones

So far, the total has reached £2,200. This is not the first time the club has had to fork out because of the actions of others. Mr Parham explained that, in the past, lights on the outside of the building were regular targets for vandals to smash and a fence was once bent by people jumping on it.



***The track opened to the public 70 years ago.
Picture: 'Images of Maidstone'***

The society was founded in 1929 as a Meccano club by Mr Wicks. He created it for his two sons who were interested in the construction sets. As new members joined, the interest soon spread to include railway modelling. After the Second World War, the name was changed to Maidstone Model Engineering Society to reflect the wider growing interests.

Before the move to Mote Park, the club had to hold regular meetings in members' workshops as well as at the former Maidstone Technical School workshop, now Oakwood Park Grammar School. At this time, the track was portable and was used at various events to help raise money to build a more permanent fixture. In 1949, the milestone was reached, and the miniature railway was built in Mote Park in 1949 but it wasn't until a year later it was able to open to the public. At first it was just a small oval track but in 1961 it was transformed into the shape families know and love today.



***The Codwood family from Bearsted once hitched a lift
with Santa. Picture: John Westhrop***

Members often build the locomotives used on the railway at home. The majority are coal-fired steam engines, while others are petrol or electric powered. For the last 20 years, rides have cost only 30p per person, per ride, making it a family favourite destination through the generations. The money raised through the rides is put straight back into the club and is used to fund improvement projects. The group has only ever charged enough to cover the running costs and hopes this tradition can stay despite the financial burden brought on by Covid-19.

