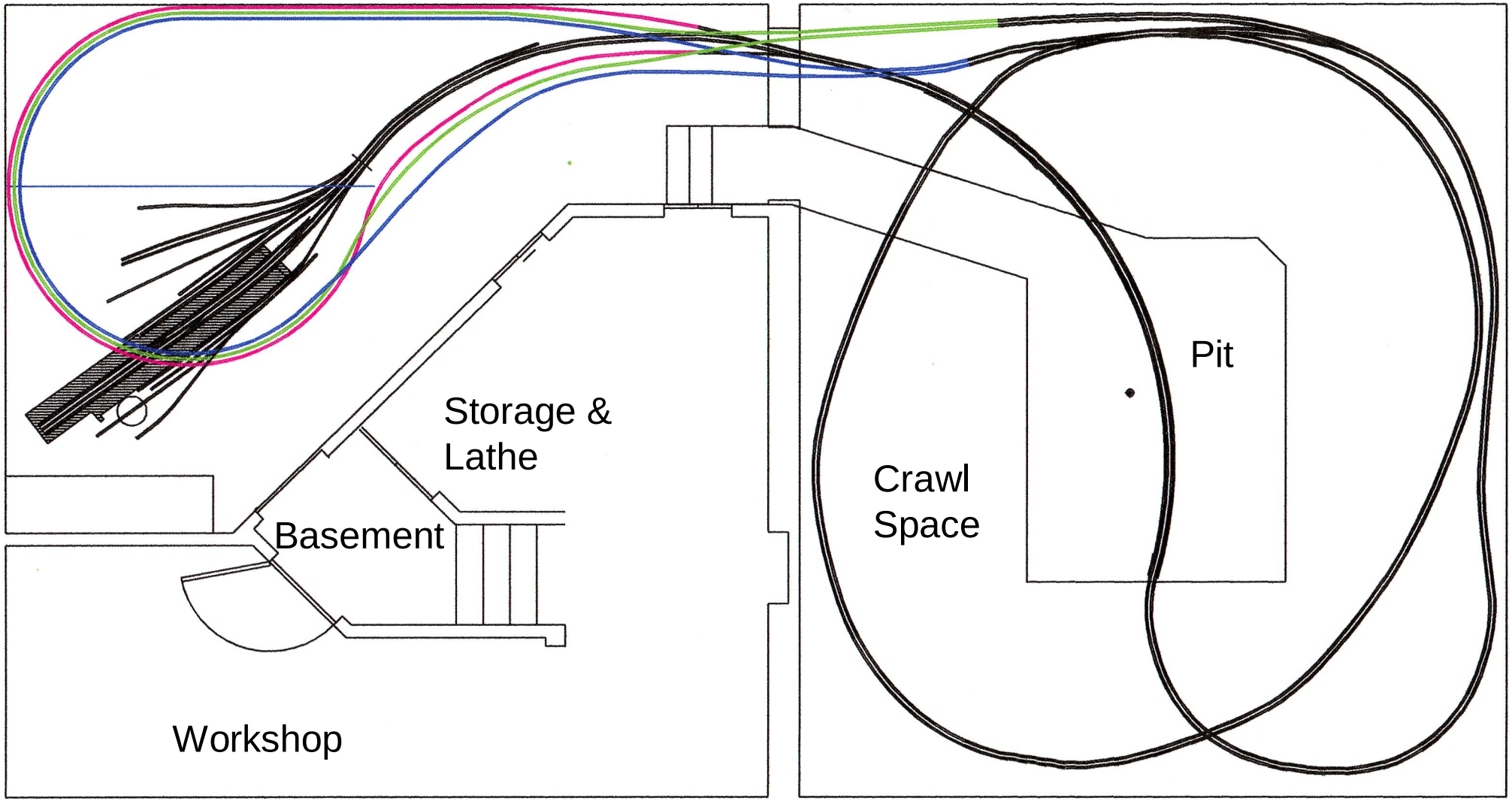
Lostock Junction and the Likely Lads.

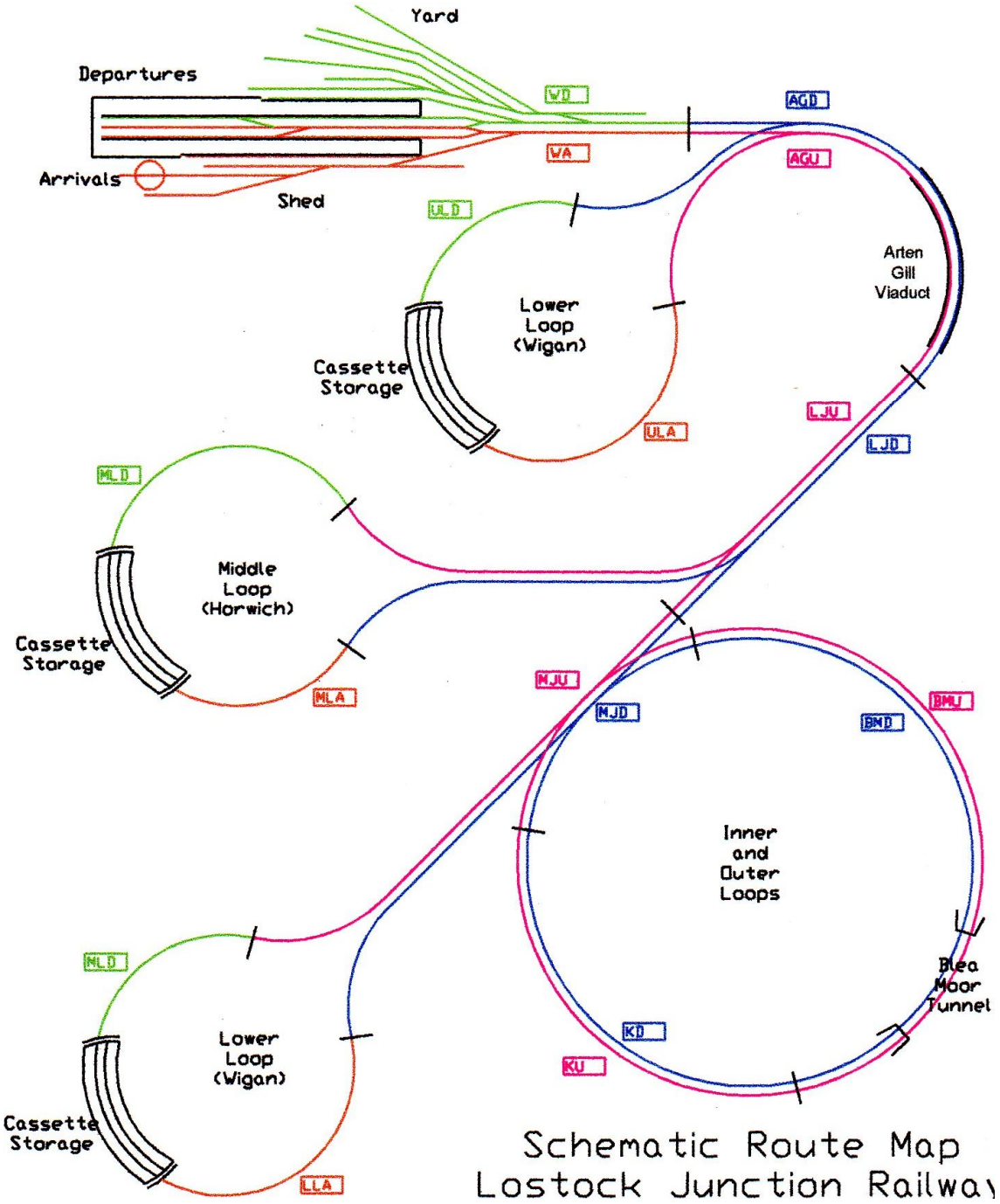
Serious construction began in 1977 with the excavation of a pit in the crawl space.

The layout is simple large, 45 feet x 24 feet with over 700 feet of track. 00 gauge was selected as keeping such a large privately owned layout operational, reliability must take priority over detail.



The schematic view on the right shows how it looks from an operational perspective.

Trains can be left to circulate around the network with trains being feed from and sent to the three storage cassettes or Windermere Station



The layout is approached through the basement where we pass a 22’ long replica of Windermere station.

Passing under Windermere are the return loops, Wigan, Horwich and Blackpool.

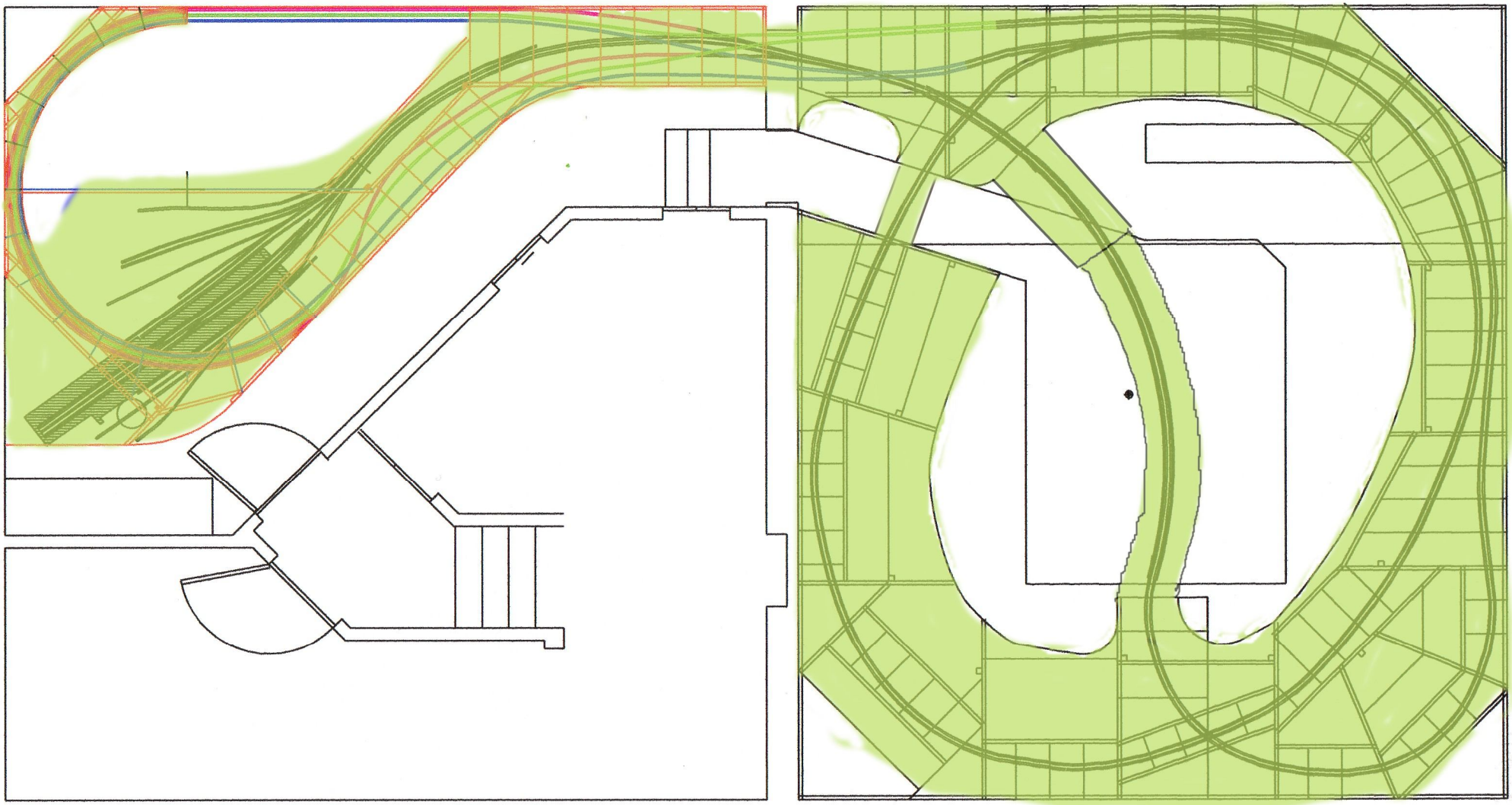
This is not quite a true replica of Windermere as the real Windermere did not have the extensive locomotive storage facilities we require to house our motive power. A major step was accomplished in January 2007 when Windermere opened to traffic.

The cassette storage facility which can accommodate over 16 trains up to 8 feet in length.

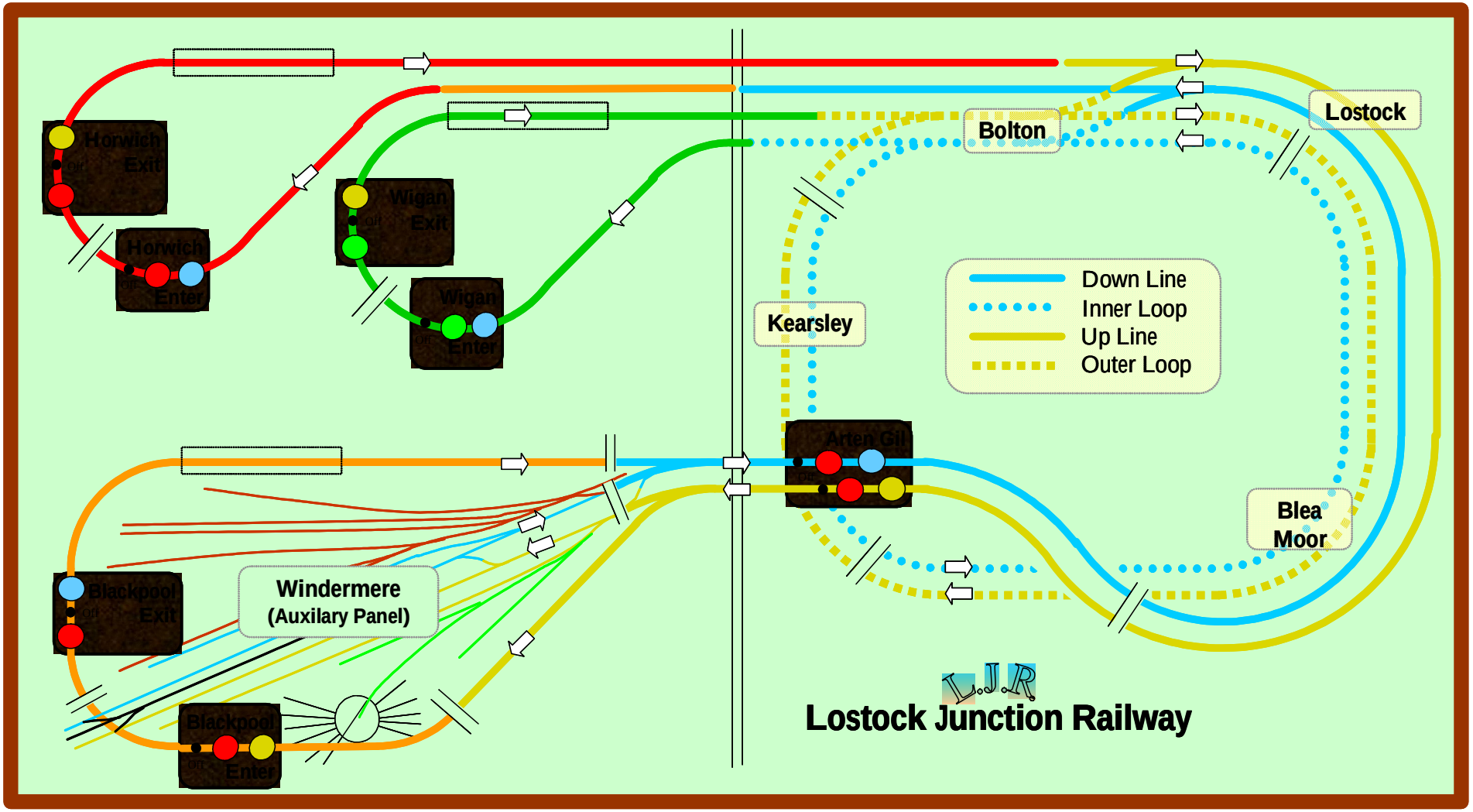
The cassettes are simply interchangeable track sections.

Passing Windermere, one steps down into the pit area. This room (24’ x 21’) reflects structures of the Settle and Carlisle mainline sweeping moors of northern England. Since the pit is 20 inches deep the trains in the crawl space are positioned nicely for viewing at eye level.

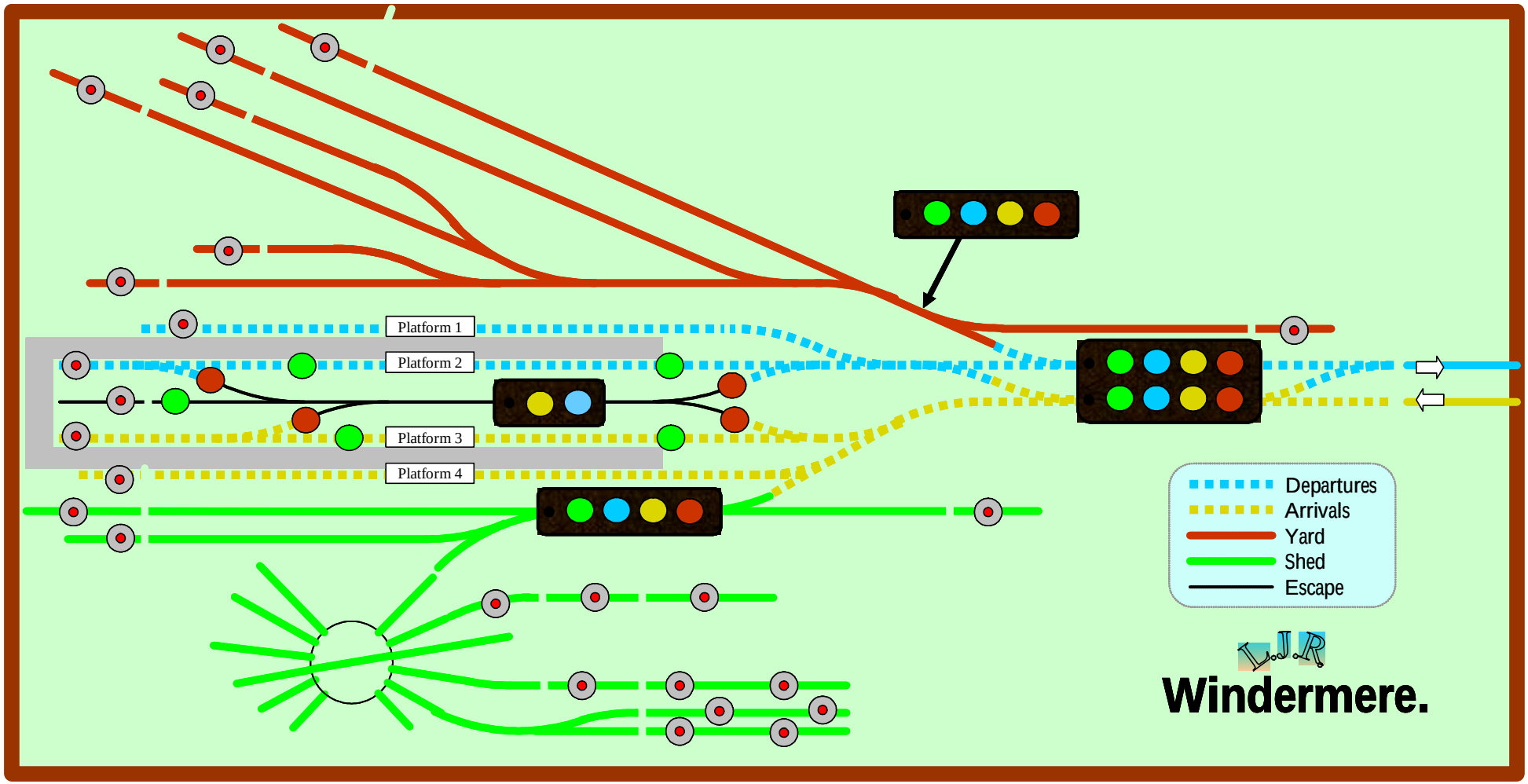
An earlier versions of the layout used wooden support structure which sagged over time. The present layout is constructed on lightweight steel studs laid out as show below. There have been no sagging problems since. The layout of the steel studs can be seen in the diagram below.



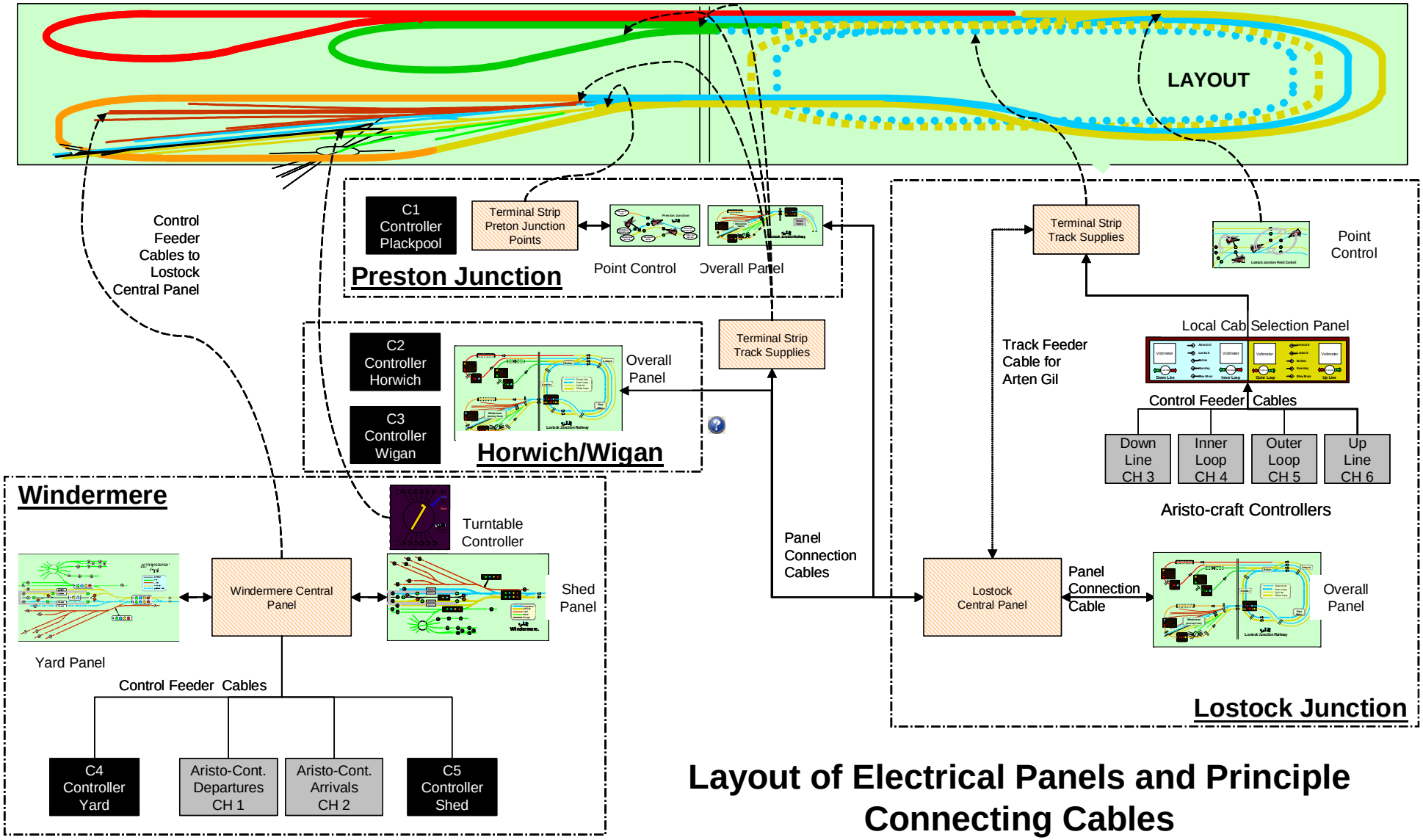
Seven or eight operators are needed to reach the fully operational potential. To enable new operators to come up to speed quickly, the control system was designed to be as intuitive as possible. Simple touch panels are used to assign blocks and set points. There a two overall layout control panels as shown below. One is located at Lostock and the other at Windermere.



The control panel for the shed operator at Windermere is shown below. There is a functionally identical panel for the goods yard operator but it is a mirror image of the one below to match the orientation of the operator.

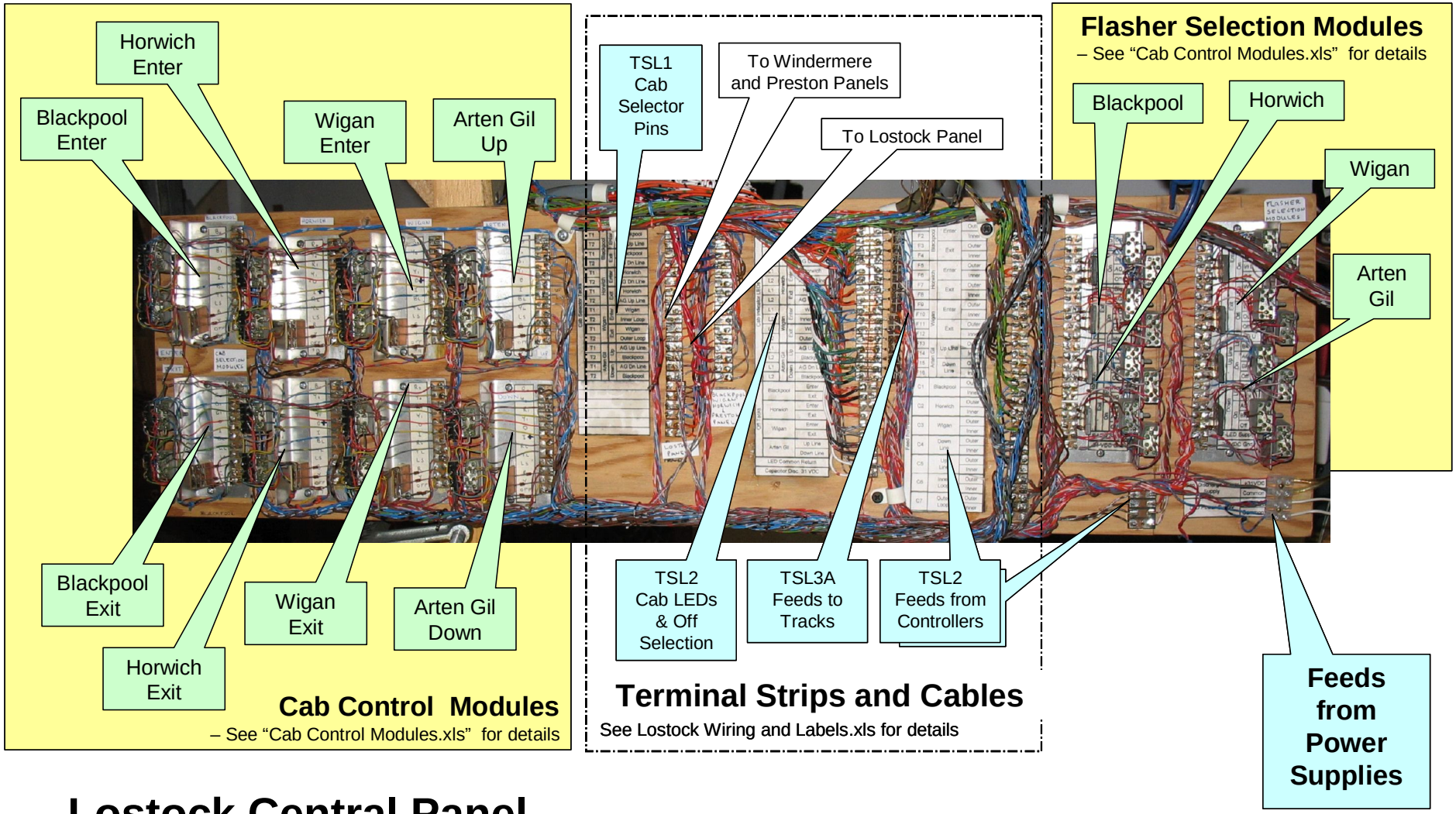


Where possible the wiring has been simplified by using modular components. Most of the electrical switching from the 11 controllers takes place on two central interchange panels to which 5 remote touch panels are connected by cable.



Layout of Electrical Panels and Principle Connecting Cables

From the start it was recognised that most visiting engines would not be fitted with DCC so standard 12 VDC had to be accommodated. While DCC control option was provided in the original planning, it was eventually dropped as unsuitable for our type of operation. Trains on Lostock are passed through a string of operators controlling a section of track they see. With this method of operation, DCC applied conventionally is impractical. There are two central panels on which all the modules are mounted and through which most cables are routed. The Lostock panel is shown below, the Windermere panel is similar.



Lostock Central Panel

Altogether there are over 5000 soldered connections to the colour coded “Bell Type” cables. The wiring configuration is conveniently maintained on Excel workbooks which are also used to print the terminal strip labels.

The layout really came to life in 2002 when operating sessions with the Likely Lads, a Platelayers subspecies, started. Since then we have had over 50 operating sessions punctuated by my breaks from work in Germany.

The above photograph of the Likely Lads was taken on the occasion of the 50th operating session on March 29th, 2007. Left to right, Greg Georgeff (visitor), Gerry Taylor, Max Smith, David Youngs, Ron Smith, Alan Featonby, Mike Walton (the Fat Controller), Brian Fayle, David Knight and Charles Clarke (visitor). Ken Sherwood is conspicuous by his absence.

While working in Germany some very interesting rolling stock was acquired under a war reparations agreement. This explains why several German trains will be seen running through the moors of Northern England.

If the Likely Lads are in full form, up to 11 trains may be moving simultaneously. Up to 9 trains will be on the grand circuit which is 380 feet in length. It takes about 10 minutes to travel the length of the grand circuit and a different train will pass a given point every minute.

The opening of Windermere at the beginning of the year presented new and unforeseen challenges. Injecting and extracting trains at Windermere into a stream of trains passing at one minute proved to be impractical with the existing distribution of work amongst the operators. To solve the problem, a new operating position at Preston Junction was created and the control system extended to support this move. This will also free up operating space near the cassette storage facilities thus allowing an even a greater variety of rolling stock to be operated.