



FOR A WHILE NOW, the overall scenic treatment has been applied, basically a layer of fine sand, woodland scenics ground foam 'soil' and layer of HEKI grass mat. While this creates a good overall impression, it always seemed to lack that little 'extra'. Pondering this one wet Sunday afternoon I decided it was a lack of flowers.

It is, of course, one thing to determine this, quite another to bring to reality. I'd tried flowers in 1:32 scale, on my old 'Crow'snest' layout. These were successful in providing colour – but rather lacking in subtlety – being simple blobs formed at the end of fine drawn plastic sprue. For 'NG Sand & Gravel' I wanted something better – much better.

The stalks were easy, I had a large bundle of natural bristle material to hand. For the flower heads I thought something likewise 'organic' in nature would be best and experimented with punched disks from very thin paper. Any matt paper will do, as long as it is around 0.04mm thick. Plain disks, being very uniform, looked crude and rather obvious, I realised I needed something that would create a more random effect, preferably with some sort of pattern. After musing about making some custom punches – and gone off the idea very promptly, once the tiny sizes were truly appreciated – I was doing another job using small dental burrs and noted the flat end face was something like a flower head. I quickly sought out some fine parallel burrs – and the rest, as they say, was history...



BATCH PRODUCTION

In practice, you need the aforementioned bristles and paper, some small dental burrs, a block of hard rubber and a small hammer. I use a little rectangle of vulcanised rubber to punch out the paper shapes. A sharp blow from a watchmaker's hammer is more than sufficient. Too heavy a blow will drive the paper too far into the rubber block and removal will be difficult, often resulting in the destruction of the delicate 'flower head'. You can see in the photo at the top that, if you have it right, the punched paper clings lightly to the surface of the block, coming cleanly away from the paper but remaining easy to lift using a scalpel point or very fine tweezers. I usually create a few dozen 'heads', collecting them in a plastic tray (old box lid or similar).

The next step is to take a strip of plastic sheet. I use black styrene, 0.75mm thick, cut to about 25 x 100mm. On to this is laid a strip of double sided tape. Some bristles are selected and cut to about 30-40mm long. Bristles can come from a variety of sources but I use those from scenic supplier Heki, their item HK3112 'corn/reed'. Place the cut bristles along the double sided tape, about 10-12mm apart. I cover the tape with a strip of paper once this is done.

Using neat white PVA, attach the paper 'heads' to the tips of the protruding bristles. This is easier said than done. The best technique I have discovered is to apply the adhesive only after a 'head' has been picked up (lightly) on the tip of a scalpel blade. The tiny amount of glue dries very quickly, so speed and accuracy in placement is essential. Once all the 'heads' are in place, I use dilute PVA to run a sealing coat up underneath to really secure the head to the bristle.

After the adhesive has dried thoroughly, the bristles and underside of the heads are painted a suitable green colour. I use Humbrol No.76 – 'matt uniform green'. When this is dry, the faces of the heads can be picked out. Here some caution is required and you need to mix colours with care. Colours neat from the tin or tube are far too bright. If using yellow, let it down with a little white, likewise with red or blue. However, white requires cutting with either a dash of green or blue, just sufficient to break the 'glare' of white pigment on its own.

Once dry, the 'flowers' can be snipped off the plastic strip and placed on the layout. A dab of white PVA is fine for this. I add 'foliage' with Woodland Scenics foam, etc. Throughout the process, try to avoid, at all costs, any obvious uniformity. The 'flowers' should look similar, but never identical. To this end I use as many sizes of burr as possible to punch out the 'heads'.

