Peter’s Railway E-xtra
A free E-Book for you to save and share
Peter’s Railway is a series of books for children who love trains and engineering. The books have a unique combination of stories and adventures, but combined with facts on how steam engines work, how to build a railway, tunnels, bridges and much more.

With 15 books in the series and a worldwide readership, these books are steaming ahead in encouraging young readers and inspiring those inquisitive minds.

This e-book Extra, gives some background on the books and provides a taste of what they are all about....
What’s inside Peter’s Railway E-xtra?

- Why did Chris write the books?
- What is in them?
- Does Fiery Fox exist in real life?
- Is there a real-life Peter’s Railway?
- The Author’s Garden Railway
- Building Bongo - In a shed in the garden
- John Wardle the artist
- The Great Railway Treasure Hunt
- Peter’s Railway Hits the Jackpot
- Activity Book and a Colouring page
- The future for Peter’s Railway and a 10,000 mile extension!
- The latest books
- What people are saying about Peter’s Railway
- Catalogue and where to buy the books

Books for children who love trains and engineering

- Story
- Technical
- History
- Adventure
Why did Chris write the books?

Since a very small boy, Chris has always loved everything mechanical, especially steam engines. The first workshop was in his bedroom where he made an electric go-kart aged 8, followed by a mini-bike powered by the engine from a petrol lawn mower. (The drive for the mini-bike involved a large and vital pulley from his mother’s washing machine.)

He spent many holidays on a friend’s farm where there was a miniature railway across a field and so started a love of making model steam locomotives. The latest is Bongo, 8 feet long and the inspiration for Fiery Fox in the books.

Chris wanted to share his love and knowledge of railways and engineering: Peter’s Railway is the result.

In this picture, Peter is driving the locomotive Fiery Fox, along the line. The engine is one eighth of full size and the driver sits on a small seat on the tender to drive. All the controls in the cab are quite easy to reach.
The five hardback books tell the charming story of Peter and his Grandpa building and running their steam railway across the farm. At the ends of chapters are special how-it-works pages with simple (but accurate) explanations of what has been happening in the story. In addition, Grandpa tells some wonderful stories from the old days on the railways.

In this picture from book 1, Peter is oiling up the engine before the first ever run on the new line.
More than just the stories, Peter’s Railway books have loads of simply explained technical information, to tell young and old how steam engines and other fascinating bits of engineering work.

These drawings from book 2, explain how the valve lets steam into each end of the cylinder to power the locomotive. (The basic concept of the piston and cylinder has already been explained in book 1.)
Often, when something happens on the farm railway, Grandpa is reminded of one of his amazing-but-true stories about the old days on the railways.

A good example was after Grandma’s hair-raising escape when he remembered a story about a train on the hill at Raven Rock in Scotland. One dark night, it broke in two and the back half rushed down the hill at 60 or 70 miles an hour. The passengers were scared out of their wits but luckily no one was hurt.....
Does ‘Fiery Fox’ Exist?

This photograph shows Chris driving Bongo at speed on the short railway in the garden. Any similarity between Bongo and Fiery Fox is entirely deliberate!
Bongo

Bongo is a miniature steam locomotive, one eighth of full size and was made over a period of eight years by Chris Vine. It is a model of an LNER B1, of which 410 were built between 1942 and 1952. (LNER - London North Eastern Railway.)

The original engines weighed 123 tons with the tender and the miniature weighs a little over a quarter of a ton. This is still heavy enough to cause trouble when taking it to exhibitions around the country. The length over the buffers is 8 feet or 2.5 metres.

The B1 locomotives were often called the Antelope class because many of them were named after different types of deer: Springbok, Impala, Gnu, Wildebeeste, Gazelle and many more. No. 8306 was named Bongo (a particularly attractive African antelope, chestnut red with white stripes), and from then on they were all known as the Bongos.

The miniature locomotive was made in a shed in the author’s garden using a lathe, drill and milling machine and many other small hand tools. It is not made from a kit; almost all the parts were made from bars, strips and sheets of metal. The similarity between Fiery Fox, in the books, and Bongo is no coincidence!

Chris has not yet discovered the top speed, but has frightened himself a few times. About 15 mph has been achieved (a scale speed of 120 mph) and Bongo was still accelerating alarmingly, with sparks flying from the chimney......
Is there a Real-Life Peter’s Railway?

The answer to this question is both yes and no. When Chris was young, he spent a lot of holidays staying at a friend’s farm. The man who owned the farm, the original Grandpa Gerald, had built a most attractive railway across two fields. It even had a small bridge over a dip in the ground where sheep would shelter when it was raining!

However this railway did not run between two different houses. The far end of the line stopped at a little station with a wooden bench which had come from an old railway station. Very comfortable it is too!
A short line in the author’s garden

Unfortunately the author’s garden is much too small for the railway from the books. However, a short up and down line was built some years ago to act as a test track for locomotives. Even though it isn’t long, many pleasant afternoons have passed with engines in steam and lots of trips up and down the line.

This picture shows the track being laid out with edging bricks to hold the ballast stones in place. Most of the ballast has been put down and raked level ready for the track. A few yards of grass still need ballasting.
A short line in the author’s garden

Here is a pile of sleepers. They have been cut to length and are now ready for drilling to take the screws to hold the rails in place.

(The junk in the background has now been cleared up.)
A short line in the author’s garden

The sleepers have all been drilled and are now soaking up some creosote to prevent them from rotting.

It takes a lot of effort to build the track and it would be a great shame if all the sleepers went rotten in a few years.
A short line in the author’s garden

There is a real life Cato and sometimes he likes to take a ride in a coal wagon. However, unlike in the books, there is nothing to stop him jumping off halfway along the line!

If fact he usually jumps off before the train has started moving....

Can you spot Cato in the lower picture?
Bongo, otherwise known as Fiery Fox, is shown here, outside the shed where she was made. All the parts were made on a lathe, milling machine and drilling machine, just like in Grandpa’s workshop in the books. The tender is being filled with water for the first steam test.

The engine has not yet been finished as there are still a few parts missing. Clearly she is still unpainted, but all the vital working parts are complete and ready to go.
About six feet further up the line from the previous picture and two years later!

Finally Bongo is painted and ready to haul trains. Painting the engine was the most difficult part of the whole project.
You will recognise many of the controls from the pictures in the books, however this is what it looks like on the miniature engine.

The main controls are:

1. Steam regulator for controlling speed
2. Reverser for selecting forward or reverse
3. Brake lever
4. Pressure gauge for boiler
5. Water gauges
6. Drains lever for cylinders

Other items:

7. Seats for driver and fireman
8. Firehole door
9. Steam valve for water injectors to boiler
10. Water valve for water injectors to boiler
11. Whistle valve for blowing the steam whistle
There is a little shelf on the backhead of a locomotive boiler. The driver and fireman keep a flask of tea hot there.

If you look closely at the water gauge, you can see how the water in the tube changes the direction of the stripes behind. This makes it easy to read.
Bongo - some small parts

This is the reverser before it was bolted into the cab. The driver uses it to adjust the valves to change the direction the engine runs.

There is a little pointer on top which tells him how it is set.
Bongo - some small parts

The oil can with fingers to show how tiny it is.

(Yes it works...)
Bongo - some small parts

One of the lamps from the front of the engine. Although the lamps are only 5 cm high, there is a real working burner inside with a tiny flame.

On the full size engine the lamps were obviously wind or hurricane proof so they did not blow out as the engine rushed through the air.

It is very difficult to copy this in miniature and although the lamps work, they are very sensitive to moving air blowing them out. A butterfly passing too close might blow the lights out!

The round “bulls-eye” lens is glass and was made from an old “cat’s-eye” which had been dug up when a local road was resurfaced.
Bongo - some small parts

Some parts from the mechanism or ‘motion work’.

Using the picture on page 16, can you work out where they are from and what they do?

Answer in very tiny writing below !! Use your browser’s zoom button if you want to read it....

The part in the middle is the ‘cross head’ which joins the piston rod to the connecting rod. You can see it in the pictures of Bongo, just behind the cylinder, between the small and large wheels. The straight bars are called the ‘guide bars’. They guide the cross head so that it goes in a nice straight line and does not let the thin piston rod get bent.
Bongo - some small parts

One of the seats from Bongo’s cab.

The two seats were small projects in their own right and took 3 months to make. They are about 6 cm high.

The leather came from a shop in Turkey where Chris’s wife was buying a leather jacket. While Katrina was choosing a jacket, Chris was hunting through the bin, looking for suitable scraps of very fine leather for the seats for a steam locomotive.
Something is missing. Where can it be?
Bongo - Finished in the dining room

Ah, there it is!

The boiler is very carefully lowered into position. It is very heavy and it would be a disaster to ruin the paint by being clumsy, especially as Chris had painted the boiler four times before getting it right....
John Wardle - Artist

John Wardle is a brilliant artist who used to work for a large supermarket. Chris was very lucky to be introduced to him while he was writing the first Peter’s Railway book and looking for someone to help with the pictures. John has now left the supermarket and spends most of his time illustrating the books.
John Wardle - Biography

John Wardle was born in Cheshire during the ‘Steam Age’. He has been a railway enthusiast since his father hoisted him onto the footplate of a steam locomotive in the early 1950’s. (What a lucky young boy!)

John has always enjoyed sketching, but it is only during the last decade that he has returned to making a living from art and illustration, working mainly in watercolour, ink and wash, and acrylics.

Previously, John worked in communications, media and training for one of the blue chip retailers before returning to his love of illustration.

As well as working on commissions, John is currently illustrating the ‘Peter’s Railway’ series of children’s books and producing a range of railway paintings which will be available as both greeting cards and limited edition prints. Available from Hare and Moon Press.

Based in Staffordshire, John is also a keen ornithologist and enjoys painting birds almost as much as railway subjects.
The Great Railway Treasure Hunt

While driving back up the M6, after a railway event, Chris had the idea of running a Railway Treasure Hunt all round Britain.

The idea was to get children out-and-about, enjoying Britain’s fabulous steam railways. If they already have an interest in the books, then the interest will be stoked by seeing the real machines in action. As someone once said, “if you can’t interest someone in a steam locomotive, they will never be interested in anything else mechanical!”

The Heritage Railway Association and Lord Faulkner got behind the plan and gave us a great quote to use. “A Great Railway Adventure for all the family this summer!”

Over 50 railways and museums get involved each year. With no cost for taking part, either for the railways or Treasure Hunters, the competition makes friends. You can enter the Great Railway Treasure Hunt on our web-page here, there are £1000 of cash prizes!

To take part, entrants have to visit as many railways/museums as possible, before September 30th, and fill in the quiz sheets. Each one has 10 questions which you can answer during your visit. Some of the questions are quite easy, others are harder!
2013 Peter’s Railway Hits the Jackpot

The idea for The Jackpot came about while finishing Book 4, (To the Rescue in 2010). The trouble was finding the time to convert a fun concept into a fully developed story.

The plot hinges around the Minister of Transport, who doesn’t understand simple science (so very true to life), with the result that Peter makes an enormous amount of money!

This book is a little different from the previous four in the series. This time, the project is so large that Peter and Grandpa cannot do everything themselves: they have to get contractors in to help.

However the two best parts of the project, digging a tunnel and building a bridge are entirely done by our two friends. And, of course, there are technical pages describing the engineering behind it.

On the following page is one of the technical pages on building the bridge....
If you were to build a flat bridge (not arched) with bricks and cement, it would certainly fail. The forces acting on the bridge put the bricks and cement in tension, along the lower edge. The forces are trying to pull the bricks apart. It is weak in ‘tension’.

Luckily, in an arch the forces are always pressing the bricks and cement together. This stops the bricks from splitting away from each other.

Peter and Grandpa have built the arch for their bridge from bricks (blue) and cement or ‘mortar’ (red). Bricks and mortar are very strong when being pressed together. They are strong in ‘compression’, so are good materials to construct an arch. Cement is a very poor glue if you try to pull the bricks apart. It is weak in ‘tension’.

Carrbridge in Scotland
The remains of this old bridge show a simple arch. You can almost see the forces holding it up!

Stoddard Bridge in America
This twin arch bridge is so carefully made that it does not even appear to need cement between the stones. It is held up entirely by compression forces, pushing the stones together.

Peter and Grandpa’s bridge
The bridge is finished by building up with bricks (pale blue) to make a flat top for the track. All the strength is in the curved arch. The top bricks are quite weak and are held up by the arch (dark blue).
2013 Activity Book

This A4 sized activity book is based on the illustrations from the series. They started out as the beautiful watercolours by John Wardle but the colour content has been carefully removed.

Most colouring books are just outlines, but the images here are a bit more helpful. The pictures have been left clear enough to colour in easily, but with a little hint for the young artist to show how John used shade and highlights.

There are some other activities too. The gears quiz could be made with toy gears as an experiment and there is a fiendishly difficult Spot-the-Difference puzzle with a special web-page to show the answers...
Boiler Explosion

A Bonus Page. This image didn’t make it into the final version of the Activity Book. You can print it out and colour it in.

This picture, from The Moonlight Express, shows a locomotive whose Boiler exploded in 1877 at Alne on the North Eastern Railway. Miraculously, nobody was hurt!!
The Future for Peter’s Railway

Since the last update of this E-Book, the fifth book in the series is now finished and thoughts can turn to the future again. Oh yes, and a 10,000 mile extension - all the way to China! Peter’s Railway is being translated into Chinese....

Chris has a huge list of amazing-but-true stories, which Grandpa is just waiting to tell. The only problem is finding the time to write them down! A few years ago there seemed to be plenty of time to sit at the computer. Now, with 10 or 12 visits to railways and museums every year and talks at schools, time flies too quickly.

The web site has been improved recently and there is now room for more video clips. A few clips of Bongo (aka Fiery Fox) are here.

There are lots of video clips in our ‘Fun Videos’ section, which might amuse young (and old) readers of the books. They are some of Chris’s favourite selection from YouTube and are all of railway or engineering interest. One of them shows two steam locomotives crashing into each other, head on! It was staged as a spectacle for a fair in America many years ago. Another shows a steam engine with the cylinder made of glass so you can see how the piston and valve works.... See them here! and many more....

(The clips do not have link/suggestions to other YouTube videos, so it should be alright to leave a young person to look at them for a few minutes.)
2014 Holiday at Lunan Bay

The latest book, Holiday at Lunan Bay is one of Grandpa’s amazing-but-true stories from the old days on the railways.

Peter is on holiday with his family in Scotland when Grandpa learns of a spectacular train crash. It happened nearby so they go exploring to find the exact spot. To add to the adventure they discover some evidence still lying on the ground - It’s a true story where a crazy mistake led to disaster, but luckily no-one was hurt. To show how easy it is to make a blunder like this, Grandpa tells another story which ends with a Bang!

It’s a paperback, but with 48 pages this time as it wasn’t possible to fit it all of the bumbling mistakes into the 32 page format of the other paperbacks.
2015 The Great Train Robbery

The Great Train Robbery is due out in June 2015. At the time of writing this, John Wardle is busy working on the pictures. However, he has completed the cover picture in advance.

Peter, Harry and Kitty foil a terrible robbery and catch the dangerous villains. Their methods are brave and unconventional, causing much damage and enjoyable mayhem. At the end they are presented with a huge reward!

The book explores how they have protected the railway, including a home-made burglar alarm. This is put to the test in the story and is also explained in a simple technical page.

Paperback, all colour with 48 pages.
What people say about Peter’s Railway

Here are a few comments from readers:

“Please could you tell me if there will be a fifth book in the Peters Railway series. I am keeping my fingers crossed. Thanks, Ben age 8”

“My grandson couldn’t wait to read (or have read to him) this new book (Jackpot), having devoured every word of the previous ones. The story was just as thrilling and with the usual child friendly technical information. I really enjoyed reading it to him.” Mrs Wilkinson

“I learned a lot from reading this brilliant book!” Toby H age 7½ (Hits the Jackpot - book 5)

“Hello. Just to say our son Alfie has just received your book Peter’s Railway for his 6th birthday and, as an avid train fan, he is very very pleased with it! He has asked me to tell you that, “It’s my favourite birthday present and because the pictures are so good I wish the whole railway was real and we could go to see it!”. Alfie’s Mum.

“Dear Mr Vine, I have read all your Peter's Railway books. They are amazing! I thought, if there is a Legoland, a Disneyland, why couldn't one build a Peter's Railway Land?? Thank you again for all these books. When is book 5 coming out - I can't wait!!” Caspar aged 10

“When will the fifth book be coming out? I have read all of the other books lots of times, over and over and saved up my Christmas money to buy the 4th book. I really enjoy reading about Peter and grandpa.” Daniel age 6

My son is absolutely enthralled by the books! As a school principal I am very impressed at both the story-lines and technical information. It’s lovely to have something that is so appealing to boys (and girls)” Wendy P Canada.
Catalogue
The original hardback series - stories, adventures and technical pages, £11.99

The five hardback books tell the charming story of Peter and his Grandpa building and running their steam railway across the farm. At the ends of chapters are special how-it-works pages with simple (but accurate) explanations of what has been happening in the story. In addition, Grandpa tells some wonderful stories from the old days on the railways.

96 pages, 24 x 17 cm, 30 watercolour pictures, 14 pages of technical drawings. Age 6 to 12 years.

A technical page from book 1
More information on the hardback series

96 pages, 17 x 24 cm, all colour. Age 6 - 12 years approximately. £11.99 each

Peter’s Railway - Book 1

Peter’s Railway is the story about a young boy who lives with his family in a cottage at the edge of his Grandpa’s farm. To make visiting each other more fun and easier, Peter and Grandpa build a miniature steam railway.

They have some adventures along the way and use all sorts of machines and tools to help them in their great building project. When they are having a rest, Grandpa tells Peter some amazing stories from the old times on the railways.

Many technical ideas are simply explained as they go along, with parts of the steam engine and railway being explored.

Peter’s Railway and the Moonlight Express - Book 2
ISBN 978 0 9553359 21 Published 1st April 2009

The story continues with Peter and his Grandpa building more track and equipment for their railway.

For Peter the great excitement of this book is learning to drive the engine, Fiery Fox. It is what he has been waiting for since they started to build the railway. Apart from one disastrous escapade, everything works as they intended.

The story finishes with the railway running at night, taking Grandma to a surprise birthday dinner.

More technical ideas are explored. Items covered are the boiler, pistons and cylinders, turntable, ball bearings, points and wheel arrangements.

Peter’s Railway and the Forgotten Engine - Book 3
ISBN 978 0 9553359 38 Published 1st October 2009

In the third book the line is extended to Yocketts Village. Along the way the two heroes discover a long forgotten engine which they put back to work and Grandma has a hair-raising escape.

To celebrate the opening of the new line, The Great Train Race is organised with lots of visiting locomotives. Who will win?

There are another 14 pages of simple technical diagrams, explaining how railways and engines work. Some of the drawings are familiar from the first two books, but the science and engineering explored is different.

If the reader has enjoyed the technical information in books one and two, they will find this book takes them further.
Peter’s Railway to the Rescue - Book 4  
ISBN 978 0 9553359 45  Published 1st October 2010

Peter and his grandpa’s miniature railway across the farm has been a lot of fun since they built it. Adventures, visits, races and near disasters have all been a part of the story so far. But now the farm is in the grip of the coldest winter for years. The tractor has frozen and the only way to feed the animals is by train.

Their great project, when summer arrives, is the construction of a watermill on the river to generate electricity. Apart from the appeal of making something useful out of scrap, it gives Peter the opportunity to learn all about electricity, energy and power.

A long rainstorm means there is plenty of water for free electricity, but the river bursts its banks. Can a small steam locomotive make it through the flood to rescue the village?

Peter’s Railway Hits the Jackpot - Book 5  
ISBN 978 1 9088970 90  Published July 2013

In their most ambitious adventure yet, Peter and Grandpa are asked if they could extend their mini railway to the village of Oaksted. It is five miles across the fields and will bring children to school, saving fuel and pollution. Of course they would love to build the new line, but how can they possibly afford to pay for it?

There is science and engineering in the story but, if the reader wants to go deeper, there is more in the technical pages at the ends of chapters. As an extra dimension in this story, Peter starts a company and becomes an entrepreneur. During breaks in construction work, Grandpa tells some more of his historic stories about the old railways.

With 10 pages of simple technical drawings, many technical ideas are simply explained as they go along: with power supply to railways, bridges, tunnels and the simple maths of squares and cubes being covered in this volume.
An adventure on a Scottish holiday which ends with a bang! Age 6 to 12 years

The children foil a robbery and cause damage & destruction!
Age 6 to 12 years

A true story about an unlucky engine and a brave fireman. Age 6 to 12 years

A crazy mistake leads to disaster. One of Grandpa’s true stories. Age 6 to 12 years

A cab-ride in a modern diesel and a story from the old days. Age 6 to 12 years

Our two heroes build a new locomotive from scrap. Age 6 to 12 years

Grandpa tries to answer a tricky question. Age 6 to 12 years

Peter saves Christmas, a gentle tale. Age 3 to 6 years

A bed-time story with a twist... Age 3 to 6 years

A railway picnic soon turns into mayhem... Age 3 to 6 years

“I have read all five Peter’s Railway books and I am on my third book again. The bit I like best about your books is where it tells you how the engine works, they make me wish that I had a railway like them.”

“Little” Peter’s Railway
Gentle tales for younger readers.
Three books, age approx’ 3 to 6 years.

From Daniel - age 6
Moving Stationery...

For young engineers we have created a unique animated notebook. As you tip it, the piston moves, wheels rotate and the fire leaps through the tubes in the boiler! Great value at £4.99

We also have an animated bookmark, showing Fiery Fox in action! £2.99

One other item for people who enjoy the books is our Peter’s Railway enamel badge, made by R.E.V. Gomm in Birmingham.
Where you can buy the books...

We hope you have enjoyed this little E-Book and that it has told you a bit more about the background to what we do. There are lots of different places you can buy the Peter’s Railway books:

A good place is at our own web bookshop. One advantage is that you can ask Chris to sign and dedicate a book to make a special gift.

Another fun place to buy is at your local preserved steam railway, as most of their gift shops now sell them. Of course you get a day out on a steam train at the same time!!

Many high street bookshops stock them and all bookshops will be able to order for you. We will keep working on them until every last one of them stocks Peter’s Railway!

Finally, you can get them on amazon.co.uk (amazon.com is not so good.)

Whichever way you buy a book, we hope you enjoy them!

Best wishes from Peter’s Railway.

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