

OUTSIDE



THE BOX

Newsletter February 2017 Issue 47

What's in store in 2017?

With the weather hopefully now improving it is time to look ahead to events coming up in 2017. The Trust AGM takes place on 29th March. On the weekend of 1st and 2nd April attractions in the St Albans area will be opening for 'The Big Weekend'. The 'box will be open both days from 10am to 5pm. Thereafter our twice monthly open days start through to October. 3rd and 4th June will see the Signal Box marquee and display visiting St Albans Steam Rally at Oaklands College. Other summer events are also likely and our traditional opening for Heritage Weekend will take place on 9th and 10th September. All these events are most enjoyable with lots of interesting people to meet and talk to. All members are welcome to come along and participate.

Richard Kirk

Chairman's Words

In November we were given the chance to submit our name for the Heritage Railway Association Annual Awards. The category which seemed most appropriate was 'The Special Award For A Meritorious Project', having in mind both our Midland Railway telegraph pole run and our display of modern LED signals. Two submissions were prepared by John Webb and within a week we were notified that our entries had been combined into one and that we had been shortlisted. Through the railway press we quickly realised we had stiff competition from the other short listed entries, The National Railway Museum for the re-presentation of the worlds most famous locomotive Flying Scotsman, The Gresley Society for the statue of Sir Nigel in Kings Cross and Vintage Trains for the building of a new locomotive works at Tyseley. Were we in the wrong category? It certainly looked that way and to compound our problems the publicity from the HRA failed to mention properly what we had achieved.

Nevertheless John Telford and I travelled to Wolverhampton for the award dinner which was held in the magnificent ex-GWR Wolverhampton Low Level Station now called the Grand Station. As expected we did not win our category and the HRA had still failed to get our submission details correct. In spite of the disappointments we met a lot of people from the Heritage business and listened to a very inspiring speech from Sir Peter Hendy the Chairman of Network Rail who declared that he was in the Heritage Rail business as he was running the oldest railway in the world.

Visitor numbers so far this year have been very good with over 60 on each of the two very cold days we have been open. We have been very stretched to give these visitors the experience we would like, as we have not had enough volunteers to show them round and cover both areas of the box. If you would like to join the team please come along on an open day and make yourself known to one of the members.

See you at the AGM.

Tony Furse



For some time we have been searching for a picture of Sandridge 'box'. This shot taken from Marshalswick Lane bridge in May 1962 shows 9F 2-10-0 92105 on a southbound coal train passing the 'box and Sandridge Siding. The 'box had closed in January 1962. On the right are two slightly fuzzy blow-ups of the 'box from this photograph and another taken at the same time. Picture courtesy of Howard Green.

Invitation

Our friends from the Swindon Panel Society who are restoring the Swindon signalling panel at Didcot have arranged a private visit to the Great Cockrow Railway at Chertsey and have invited our members to join them. The visit will take place on the 27th May running from 10am until 4pm. The theme of the day will be very much signalling orientated but visitors will be able to enjoy unlimited train rides. The cost for the day is £25 payable in advance. Full details can be found at <http://www.swindonpanel.org.uk/great-cockrow-railway-visit-27-may-2017/> If anyone is interested please contact Richard Kirk by 17th March.



Winners of the 2008 St Albans Civic Society Award



Winners of the 2010 Invensys Rail Signalling Award (Structures)

Newsletter produced by Richard Kirk. Please send items for inclusion to richardnkirk@hotmail.co.uk or contact me on 01727 860047

Signalling Simulator – behind the scenes

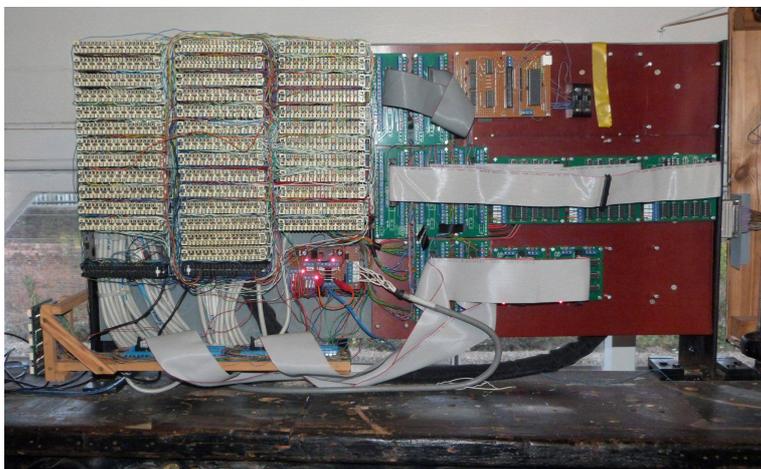
The simulator has been used happily for almost five years providing the current functionality. This includes: a simple demonstration of signalling a train for open days and group visits; training of members; and full operation of all four lines for enthusiast visits and members' edification.

For the last couple of years a program of replacement has been undertaken to ensure robustness and a long life into the future. The three main components are: wiring of the railway hardware – lever frame, bells and block instruments, signal indicators, and track circuit diagram; electronic interface boards; and the computer program.

The hardware has been re-wired to terminal blocks behind the diagram using a method devised by Jim Macdonald - about 200 connections. The interface boards have been replaced using generic electronic circuits – these condense the 200 lines to and from the lever frame etc. to just 6 wires to the computer. The computer program has changed little; small improvements have been made from experience of use, and it is able to run on various computer hardware. An outstanding task is to make the program more forgiving of small, young fingers on the bells.

The current and final task is to replace some of the switches on the levers. This involves the rather unpleasant job of working underneath the lever frame, valiantly being undertaken by Mike Hodgson.

Rob Little



The new connections that sit behind the signal box diagram on the block shelf.

Membership Matters

Subs for 2017 now due

We are more than happy (indeed prefer) for subs to be paid directly into the sigbox bank account. Details are:

Metro Bank

Sort Code: 23-05-80

Account: 17746944

Reference: Your surname, First name (important so we know who's paid!)

If you wish to set up a standing order please include the above info (particularly the reference) and a payment date of 2nd February. I would be grateful if you would let me know. Alternatively I can send you a standing order instruction form. Of course we are also happy to continue receiving cheques and cash!

Annual General Meeting

The AGM documents have been sent with this newsletter. Please let me know if you are planning to attend so we can cater for the correct numbers.

Laser Printer

We are looking for a St Albans member who can print the newsletter for us every quarter on a laser printer. As you know it's 1 A4 sheet double sided and a maximum of 30 copies are required. Paper will be provided. Please let me know. Thanks.

Mary (mary.webster@btinternet.com)



'Sherpa' Tony and John Telford repairing the finial at the north end of the 'box'.

Progress at the 'box

Autumn/Winter has been quite mild and sunny, enabling reasonable working in the garden. The annual clear-down, with professional help and our own Howard and others went well, but our two large green wheelie bins have been hard-pressed!

Tony has hung 4 oval, cast-iron signs downstairs, and two attractive imitation 'hoppers' from the erstwhile Harpenden railway footbridge have been cleaned, primed and top-coated. However, we still need to decide where to put them!

The extended model railway is a hit with children but keeping leaves off the line and little fingers off the moving trains has been challenging! A second battery and sound card were purchased for our other engine and this now audibly chuffs and hoots! The new telegraph pole run is much admired by enthusiasts but the general public are not quite so enthralled. Thus, we may power up one of the lines next Heritage Open Weekend and operate a bell tapper at each end!

After prolonged discussion about method, Sherpa Tony with me as catcher (!) finally managed to scale the 'box roof and seal and re-paint the leaking finials. The old finial bases in the ceiling of the Operating Floor were then filled and re-painted. The window drain holes have also been cleaned out again, to prevent internal leaking. To date no further leaks reported! Michael placed a metal protector on the top of the final telegraph pole during the course of which he lost his wedding ring. He also successfully trialled 'Postbuddies' to augment some rotting fence posts. So we will now repair the other dodgy posts on the handrail down to the 'box.

A substantial signalling and power failure at Luton in mid-November saw, for the first time, a 377 and a new 700 use the St. Albans turn-back siding. We waited for Network Rail to contact us to provide emergency signalling back-up along the line, but the call never came – the rotters!

STOP PRESS: Breaking news is that Michael's lost wedding ring was found after a week, with the use of Tony's dowsing rods.

As ever, if you can spare a Wednesday work afternoon, I'd happily send you our current To Do list - updated monthly. You might just have the skills we're looking for! Contact me via the website, or on 07947 345554.

John Telford