

OUTSIDE THE BOX



Newsletter February 2021 Issue 63



A flash back 10 years to 12 March 2011 with Britannia 4-6-2 70013 Oliver Cromwell slowing down past the box for its St Albans stop on the way to York.

Strange Times

Strange times indeed! With only minimal activity at the 'box, empty trains and deserted platforms, the railway scene is unrecognisable from this time last year. We were looking forward to lots of visitors and special openings. Although some progress has been maintained as reported in this and previous newsletters the social opportunities have been missed. Apart from the newsletters, a group of members have kept in touch via regular weekly Zoom meetings. These take place on Mondays from 8pm and all are welcome to join. If you would like to take part please let me know and I will send out the details.

In the meantime, keep your fingers crossed that we can soon bring news of our possible re-opening. As they say, it all depends upon the science!

Richard Kirk

Chairman's Words

I hope you are all well and surviving these unusual times.

As you have probably guessed we have still not managed to open the signal box to the public and it doesn't look as though that is likely to occur until much later in the year. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you all for your continued support at a time when we can offer you so little. You missed out on the Big Weekend, the summer BBQ, Heritage Open Weekend, the day at North London Model Engineers track, the Christmas Party and now it looks as though the AGM will have to go on line. These occasions have been the opportunity for the trustees to meet the members, to talk railways and to show off the box to the public, I miss it and I am sure you do to. We owe a debt of thanks to those trustees and members who continue to maintain the site and keep the gardens to the usual high standard in readiness for an opening at some time in the future.

We are not the only ones feeling the pressure; Govia Thameslink Railways have completed the reconstruction of the west side of the station and have been unable to let the retail unit they have just completed. We are, with the help of our friends in Community Rail, hoping to gain access to the empty shop so that we can display some of our photographic collection and perhaps some of our artefacts.

I hope you will join us on a Zoom AGM, it would be good to see you again even if it is remotely.

Tony Furse

2021's AGM

The Trustees have been discussing how to hold this year's AGM. We have reluctantly concluded that we cannot have our usual physical get-together in the current restrictions and plan to hold the AGM 'On-line' instead. It is likely this will take place on a Monday evening at the end of March. Formal notice will be given at least three weeks ahead of the meeting.

We will circulate with the Agenda copies of the accounts and the various reports from the trustees. There will be opportunities for members to formally vote on the accounts and to take part in the elections of trustees. We expect to ask members who have any queries about the accounts or other reports if they can submit those queries in writing before the meeting to make it easier for answers to be prepared in advance to minimise the length of the meeting. You will appreciate this is a new situation for us and we are still sorting out the details of how we conduct the meeting.

The Trustees much regret that they will be unable to serve refreshments or provide a guest speaker on this occasion!

John Webb



Winners of the 2008 St Albans Civic Society Award



Winners of the 2010 Invenys Rail Signalling Award (Structures)



Winners of the 2017 Mayor of St Alban's Recognition Award

Membership Matters

2021 Subscriptions are now due

Members' subscriptions are a vital contribution to the development and maintenance of the signal box for the interest and enjoyment of everyone. In an exceptional 2020 we received a government grant that covered the shortfall in donations through being closed, but we still need your subscriptions to help fund, for instance, painting of the 'box this year.

Thus, I invite you to renew your membership for the year to 31 January 2022. The cost is just a minimum of £10, so we do hope you will continue to support the good work of the volunteers.

You will have received a renewal notice by email, or by post, with this newsletter. As a reminder, you may pay by bank transfer to the Signal Box account at Metro Bank - sort code 23-05-80, account number 17746944, with your name as reference. Those of you who pay by standing order have nothing more to do.

Alternatively, you may pay by cheque payable to St Albans Signal Box Preservation Trust, and this year send directly to me at 20 Flavian Close, St Albans, AL3 4JX.

Rob Little

Terry Worrall remembers – Part One

Trust member Terry Worrall retired in 2015 after a long and successful career on the railway both at home and abroad. Since then he has been recording his memories for the benefit of his family. Terry was brought up in Luton, went to Luton Grammar School, was a keen trainspotter and in 1961 joined British Railways at St Pancras moving to St Albans in 1963. He has very kindly given us access to his recollections of these early days and the first part appears below.

In July 1963 I applied for the Class 3 Station Master's Clerk job at St Albans – not a mind stretching position, but one that allowed me to learn about Paybills, Rostering and Cost Centre budgets (then in their infancy at station level!).

I was interviewed and then selected by the Station Master, Ken Bonwick, who had been a Traffic Apprentice (TA) some years earlier and had been at St Albans for two years. I had aspirations to be a TA and hoped that I could learn from him – he moved on about 4 weeks after I started, so that put paid to my 'knowledge transfer' expectation!

I took up my new post in August 1963 (at a salary of £655 per annum which, with overtime, subsequently averaged £1000+ p.a. whilst I worked there) and started by sharing an office within the old Midland Railway station building alongside the Down fast platform with Luke Parsons, the Chief Parcels Clerk (Class 2) and a lady Parcels Clerk, Class 3. Luke was a bundle of fun –late 50s, but the lady, a late 30s spinster, was very formal, 'prim and proper' and not used to dealing with 18 year olds like me or Luke – she tolerated both of us! There was always plenty of opportunity for overtime especially in the City Booking Office – a 'temporary' portakabin type building under the canopy in the Station forecourt on the Down side of the station.



(to be continued)

Progress at the 'box

Given the stilted way 2020 ended and 2021 started, I'm tempted to say in true Pythonesque: 'Say no More!' Nonetheless, with suitable signing in, sanitising hands and distancing, we managed to do some work at the 'box, even if it was a bit disjointed due to Covid, the festive season and the weather. However, some home-working took over instead, and John W did display our Christmas lights on the lawn.

David, Richard and myself managed to complete the roadside hedge clear-down, limited at times with only three green wheelies! Clearing the flowerbeds and leaves was also completed. In the absence of a railhead treatment train, Tony cleared leaves off the model railway tracks by manual broom-head treatment – snow clearing to follow! He also freed the sticking upstairs door lock with a file! John W continues homeworking on the tops of our two latest lamp post acquisitions; while Michael home-prepared some wooden planks, in order to repair the lawn bench when the weather improves. Martin hopes to finish restoring the gradient post, now removed to the lawn hedge-line.

A number of other tasks are also held over until Spring appears, including the 'bull' that will be required to prepare for eventual re-opening – whenever that might be!

The £5m Station re-vamp is now finished, including an attractive new illuminated sign over the main entrance. The second footbridge is next, but currently all the improvements to cope with increased passenger levels, including the convenience store, seem to be white elephants! Most of the long-lying discarded rails outside the 'box, have finally been removed.

Our foxes under the 'box made a return, but have now disappeared again. Local cats and the 'box robin are ever-evident, and we hope our blue tits will return to one of the nesting boxes. Wildlife doesn't seem to be put off by train noise!

John Telford