



# Outside the Box

St Albans Signal Box Preservation Trust

www.sigbox.co.uk

email:[info@sigbox.co.uk](mailto:info@sigbox.co.uk)

Tel: 01727-836131

## Light as a Feather!



The 'feathers' or direction indicators now sitting on top of one of the four aspect signals in the garden

Like most walks of life railways have their colloquialisms and slang expressions. Signalling is no exception; my copy of 'The Railway Dictionary' lists 137 terms and no doubt there are many more. These include 'bacon slicer', 'dolly', 'double pegging', 'round the benders' (a London Underground expression) and, of course, 'feathers' or 'lunar lights' (or a number of other phrases). Having seen our 'feather' up close it is clear that it is anything but light in weight, the frame on which its signal now sits has had to be extended to take the extra load and prevent it toppling over. In the near future we are hoping to link up all four of the colour light signal heads now sitting on the patio behind the Box and be able to display to visitors the normal sequence of the signals and to compare these with the older semaphore signalling demonstrated elsewhere. The lights in the feather will also be illuminated.

**Signal box opportunity:** members have been offered the possibility of a visit to the redundant signal box on the Circle Line at Liverpool Street underground station. Any members who are interested are asked to contact Keith Webster at the above email address or telephone number.

**Trustee resignation:** it is with regret that Peter Chatfield has decided to stand down from being a trustee due to work commitments. We all thank Peter for his support, hard work and enthusiasm and wish him well for the future.

Richard Kirk



Pictures of the members' visit to Romsey signal box

## Visit to Romsey Signal Box

February 20<sup>th</sup> was not the brightest of days but it remained dry for 19 members to make the trip, and was not too cold.

We left St.Albans around 10.15 and 2 hours later convened at The Malthouse with some of the Romsey volunteers. Having lunched handsomely here we descended upon Romsey Signal Box and split into 2 groups for the demonstrations. This is a smashing, cosy, signal box with 24 levers in a Stevens frame.

Unlike our simulation there is a second signaller in the locking room, and he plays the part of the 3 adjacent signal boxes. This means that all sorts of trains can be run rather than a procession of 3-1 stopping passenger trains.

The visit has given everyone far too many ideas of what we can do! The external ground frame connected to the distant signal was popular as were the operating points. Signage was brilliant and the layout of the museum room was much admired.

Our thanks to Peter Chatfield and the members who made us feel most welcome. A reciprocal visit looks highly likely.

Peter Hunt



Winners of the 2008 St Albans Civic Society Award



Newsletter produced by Richard Kirk. Please send items for inclusion to me at [richardnkirk@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:richardnkirk@hotmail.co.uk) or contact me on 01727 860047



A most interesting photograph of the Box courtesy of Geoff Eldridge. It was taken on 14th July 1979 just 5 months before the Box closed. Items of interest, apart from the Heath & Heather building in the background, are the new colour light signal sitting behind signals 9 and 10 for the up fast line (close examination of the picture shows it to be on its own post tucked behind the semaphore post), the ground signal on the right now reduced from 3 discs to only one and the edge of a ground frame alongside it that presumably had been put in to control the siding catch points and would have been released by the signalman in the Box. If any members have any information of when these latter changes took place please let me know. (As previously mentioned I am always looking out for photographs of the box taken over the years together with any shots of the station area generally—please keep them coming in!).

### HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

Saturday and Sunday 11th and 12th September

Once again the Box will be open to the public on both days of the weekend from 10.00am to 4.00pm. In addition St Albans is running its Monopoly trail on this weekend and the Box is on the longer trail. We are hoping for many visitors and as in previous years will be organising a rota to man the Box and grounds before, during and after the events. Members who wish to volunteer to help, even for an odd hour or so on either day, are asked to contact Keith or Mary by email or telephone. It's a fantastic weekend so please do come along even if you can't volunteer and let your friends and neighbours know about our opening.

### TOMBOLA

Please dig out any items for a tombola prize (good condition but it doesn't have to be new). Items can be brought to the signal box or can be delivered to 5 Ridgmont Road if that is easier. If we do not get enough items we will not be able to run a tombola during the Heritage Open Weekend. Items are requested before the weekend as they need to be ticketed up ready; so the sooner the better please.

### SIGNAL BOX POLO and SWEAT SHIRTS

The Trustees have decided to order polo shirts and sweat shirts carrying the signal box logo and text. The shirts will be Bordeaux colour with yellow embroidery. These shirts will enable volunteers to stand out during open days. However, as we are asking members to pay the costs of the shirts they order, wearing them will NOT be compulsory! The costs are approximately £15 per polo shirt and £15 per sweat shirt. The costs will be finalised once we know how many we are ordering. Please let me know as soon as possible and I will confirm with you what size to order. I intend to place the order early in September.

Mary Webster Membership Trustee 01727 836131

### COMMENTS on EARLIER ITEMS

A couple of members have written in about items that appeared in the last Newsletter.

John Hinson has commented on the editorial about station and signal box names:

**Naming of signal boxes** - it wasn't usual to include station suffices in the signal box name, so normally you would not expect the box to be called St Albans City South. But there is no hard and fast rule and there are exceptions that can be found. As far as not dropping the "South" when the north box closed, this was certainly done at many places - perhaps 50% of the time. The failure to do so on the other 50% could possibly relate to costs - if the wiring is all labelled "South box" a lot would need modifying. And just modifying the nameplates takes time and money. As far as Harpenden was concerned, that was a new box "Harpenden Station" replacing the old Harpenden South and North so the circumstances were slightly different there.

Mike Lloyd has speculated that the dropping of 'City' from the station name in 1988 may have been due to the ending of long distance trains calling at St Albans during the era when these were promoted by the 'Intercity' sector of the old BR.

John Hinson has also added his thoughts on the Napsbury item:

**Keep 'em Rolling** - there wasn't actually a track circuit on the approach side of the Down Fast home at Napsbury, judgement as to when to clear the home signal under Rule 39 was entirely visual. Relating to Howard's comments on the brakes, train crews and signalmen on the Midland had an understanding that continued well into diesel days whereby if a train was crawling forward having been checked at the home, the crew would look out for the "tip" from the signalman to say the starter was off, which consisted of a hand raised above the head and the hand twisted back and forth. At somewhere like Howard's example - the Down Fast at Napsbury - the starter would have been clearly visible from the home, but curiously they would still always look to the signalman rather than open up. Thanks for awakening the memories, Howard.