



Outside the Box

St Albans Signal Box Preservation Trust

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National recognition

Following on from the Trust's earlier presentation of the 2008 St Albans Civic Society's award, in December we received national recognition when Chairman Keith Webster was presented by Pete Waterman with The Invensys Rail Signalling Award at the annual National Railway Heritage Awards. Other winners included First Great Western, Settle Station and Rowsley South Engine Shed Turntable (Peak Rail). The NRH judges were very complimentary about the work carried out by the Trust and its members in restoring the box and creating the garden area for our visitors to enjoy. It is good to know that our name and achievements are being spread throughout the railway heritage world.

The number of visitors coming to the box continues to be at very impressive levels. Our 'special' openings this year for the Model Railway Exhibition and St Albans Residents First Weekend have produced over 200 and 500 visitors respectively. This month will be welcoming the 5,000th visitor to the Box since we opened to the public. These visitors have been well entertained by the duty signallers who do an excellent job in describing the workings of the Box and carrying out the signalling demonstration. At the same time other members have spent time answering visitors questions, supplying teas and coffees and selling merchandise. Thanks go to all our volunteers for their time and efforts.

Richard Kirk

Chairman's Words

As you are probably aware I am standing in for Keith while he takes a sabbatical from his role as your Chairman. What a great time to take over the role, with national recognition from our rail heritage peers, our 5,000th ticket given to a visitor and over 800 visitors already this year. I was lucky enough to be at the National Railway Heritage Awards at Merchant Taylors' Hall and the one thing that has stuck in my mind was the audible gasp from the audience when the picture on the screen behind the stage of our restored Box in its pristine Midland livery, faded into the signal box as it was before we started; dirty white paint, covered in graffiti, no stairs, an absolute wreck. It was only seeing it through other people's eyes that you realise what a magnificent job the Trust has done and you begin to realise the huge amount of work you the members have put in to achieve this level of recognition. But, of course, we mustn't rest on our laurels and as one of the visitors said to me at Residents First Weekend: ' We keep coming back to the signal box because you keep improving it'. So what changes this year? We will complete the moat around the Box and, weather permitting, may get to replace some of the flag stones with a proper wooden walkway. We will get our four aspect signal display working so that we can explain modern signalling to our visitors, complete work on our simulator so that we can run trains on all four lines, build a ground frame hut on the old compost area and look seriously at our need for greater storage. So much to do but with such enthusiastic members and our National Heritage Rail Award behind us there's nothing we can not do if we set our minds to it as we have proved already.

Tony Furse

2011 AGM Meeting

The Trust's AGM will be held on Thursday 31st March 2011. All members are invited to the County Constitutional Club, 29 Ridgmont Rd., St Albans (opposite the signal box) at 7.30pm.

Please let us know if you wish to attend as there will be snacks available.

SUBS FOR 2011 NOW DUE!

A renewal form is included with this Newsletter. Please complete and return - details are on the form.



Keith proudly displays the Invensys Rail Signalling award



Pete Waterman making the presentation to Keith, on the left is Peter Duggan, Chief Engineer of Invensys Rail.



Tony Furse demonstrating the restored Midland Railway ground frame. Note Tony's outfit that matches the Signal Box colour scheme!



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 me at richardnkirk@hotmail.co.uk or contact me on 01727 860047



Two pictures of the Midland Railway ground signal in the garden showing the direction 'hand' that indicated the track to which the signal related.

2010 Organised Visits

2010 was our first full year of Box opening, and as well as the monthly Open Days, we have begun to build up the number of group visits. Last year saw 22 organised visits, encompassing around 300 people. We saw some young people attend, including a Maple School class, and local Cub Packs. We would like to see more young visitors to the Box. Following our visit to Romsey (reported in an earlier edition of the Newsletter) it is worth noting that they run a junior section.

The groups were local with some more distant and usually between 6 and 24 people. The groups included Finchley Cyclists who, surprise surprise, cycled from Finchley to have their packed lunch in the garden, before undertaking their tour of the Box!

We already have 11 visits booked for 2011, and I would love to hear of any other groups who would like to visit. Indeed, having now slipped into a smooth routine, it may be opportune to market ourselves more to various groups in the area. I would like to thank the Signalmen who are so willing to offer their time for these visits, although I think they all love doing it – I certainly do!

JohnTelford

Midland Record

Well known railway author, Midland Railway expert and Midland Record editor Bob Essery visited the Box during 2010. As a result of this he included a page in the current issue about the Box complete with a 1950s photograph of a down express passing by. He has promised a further article about the St Albans area in a future issue.

Steam past the Box!

The Railway Touring Company are planning to run a tour on 12th March to Lincoln behind 70013 Oliver Cromwell. The tour starts from Victoria, not St Pancras as originally intended. It is picking up at St Albans at 9.40am and returns to Kings Cross. A second tour that was to call at St Albans in May is now starting from Watford Junction.

COMMENTS on EARLIER ITEMS

Two members responded to my request for information regarding the vehicle in the station dock platform shown in the last issue. Rob Crisp tells us: *'The vehicle is a Gloucester built diesel parcels railcar (Later Class 128) . One of 10 built in 1958 of which several were based at Cricklewood. It is in the parcels bay so presume it is loading/unloading.'* Whilst Peter Hunt commented: *'Regarding the old photograph of the box, my trusty Ian Allan ABC combined volume for 1960 refers to Gloucester & Cravens built Motor Parcels Vans, 3 of each, on the Midland Region. The Western Region had 6 Gloucester units but these were all gangwayed whereas the Midland ones weren't. They were self contained diesel units that could be worked in multiples or combined with other DMU's. So this looks like a Midland Parcels Van, at the parcels siding. As to the date, there are 2 guides. The first is the yellow warning bar. This is not the original design for DMU's and only became common around 1967. The other clue is the headcode board as these weren't original either. I think they were gradually introduced around 1963. So added to the clue of the box's livery, this seems to suggest mid to late 1960's.'* Many thanks to Peter and Rob.

Issue 21 had a picture of the box from 1979 showing the short lived ground frame on the down side. Peter Surridge provided some information including comments on the matching frame on the up side. The photograph below taken by Peter Butler shows the latter. The frame is called St Albans No 2.



St Albans' Other Signal Boxes No.4 Harpenden (East)

Keeping within the borough boundary and staying in Harpenden we move east to the Luton, Dunstable and Welwyn Junction Railway station. Opened in 1860 and renamed 'East' in 1950 the station closed in April 1965. The line was worked from the outset by the Great Northern Railway. The signal box was, after about 1930, at the half way point between Ayot and Luton. There was a passing loop at the station with up and down platforms although the box was switched out at night and weekends and all traffic used the down line. The station also had sidings and a goods shed at the north end. The box contained a 30 lever McKenzie and Holland frame of which approximately 20 were used. It was situated at the south end of the down platform near to the Station Road overbridge. Accommodation was spacious and there was a token instrument at both ends as well as a large range stove in the corner with the substantial chimney stack shown in the photograph. The top photograph shows the box during operational days whilst the bottom shot shows the north end and abandoned platform in 1968 shortly before demolition. The station site has now built on an little evidence of its former condition remains.

On Saturday 1st October this year the 'O' gauge section of Luton Model Railway Club will be holding an exhibition in the Royal British Legion Hall in Harpenden. The show will feature the unveiling of a scale model of Harpenden East Station including the signal box.