

OUTSIDE



THE BOX

Newsletter August 2012, Issue 29

St Albans Signal Box Preservation Trust www.tlr.ltd.uk/sigbox/home.eb email: info@sigbox.co.uk Tel: 01727-836131

Our reputation continues to grow

They say that all good things come to he who waits. However it does no harm to try and move things along a bit. An example of this is our current relationship with the National Railway Museum (NRM). Following the delivery of the items mentioned in the last Newsletter expressions of thanks have been sent to the NRM and we have also been able to advise them that amongst the loaned items was the instrument shelf from the Waterloo end of the Waterloo City Line (their labelling indicated that they did not know where it came from). Not only has the Trust been thanked in turn for completing their records in this matter but we may now be offered the instrument shelf from the Bank end of 'The Drain' as well as a signalling diagram and a number of ground signals from the line. In due course these extra acquisitions will be wired up and made operational and some of the signals placed in the garden to enhance our outside displays. This is a clear demonstration of our improving status in the railway heritage scene. All we need now is a bigger 'box to display the growing collection of artefacts!

Richard Kirk

Chairman's Words

At last the rain has stopped and we can belatedly get on with all the maintenance tasks we had set ourselves to do this summer plus some of the many projects which have accumulated over the long winter. The arrival of gifts from the National Railway Museum have added to the tasks and now we could really do with additional help to get as many completed before the Heritage Open weekend on the 8th and 9th September.

The Midland signal post is nearing completion and getting close to the difficult task of standing it upright in its slot. This of course will create more work when we remove the lattice signal, refurbish it and place in the centre flower bed so that it can be operated from the ground frame with a distant signal arm.

The Midland ground frame needs moving to the NW corner and connecting through the cranks and pulleys from the NRM to the triple ground signal. In addition we want to get some of the signal post telephones dotted around the site working and the platform scales refurbished and capable of weighing our visitors.

Two notable events this quarter have been the successful, in spite of the rain, visit by The Endpaper Theatre Company and their performance of 'Grave Expectations' which may lead on to a full production of Charles Dickens 'The Signal Man' some time next year and our stand at Highfield Park Fete which led to the discovery of the 'unknown fireman' from Richard's engine shed display. Who would have thought that a village fete would bring to light an unknown face from a 1940s photograph.

If you are available over the Heritage weekend please come along and help, you will really enjoy it as our visitors are so appreciative of what we have all done and if you would like to get involved in one of our projects just drop me an e-mail or better still, come along on an open day or on a Monday evening and lets talk about what you would like to do.

Tony Furse

Last Man Standing!

The early August Open Day saw a special visitor welcomed to the 'box. Geoff Ryland who now lives in Kidderminster was the last signalman on duty at St Albans South back in 1979 and this was his first visit since that time. Geoff recalled the last days of the 'box when he like others in the area had been drafted in as a relief signalman in the run up to the introduction of colour light signalling controlled from West Hampstead. He remembers writing 'Absolute Block Rules OK' as the final entry in the train register before handing over to the engineers and bringing to an end the 87 years operation of St Albans South. Geoff has promised to join the Trust!

Newsletter produced by Richard Kirk.
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Two pictures above of members enjoying the very wet conditions during a recent visit to Sir William McAlpine's museum and railway at Fawley. Note the Midland Type 3a 'box from 1905 in the background.



Geoff Ryland pulls the levers again!

Winners of the 2008
St Albans Civic
Society Award



Winners of the 2010
Invensys Rail Signalling
Award (Structures)

Heritage Open Weekend

Once again the box will be open for the Saturday and Sunday of the Heritage Open Weekend on 8th and 9th of September. To make sure that this is once again a success for the Trust, members are asked to volunteer to help over the weekend. We need sufficient members to be present to show visitors around, answer their questions and ensure that they have an enjoyable and safe time inside the box and in the garden. If you can help even for just a few hours on one of the days please contact Mary Webster on mary@sigbox.co.uk or 01727 836131. Mary will be drawing up the rotas and will allocate you a role.

Polo shirts and sweat shirts

Only a few left! Maroon St Albans South shirts available to members priced £17 and £23 respectively. Please contact Mary Webster for details.

Steam past the 'box—what a let down!

The last issue gave details of three expected steam hauled railtours that were booked to pass the 'box. Sadly none of them managed to make it. Two were diverted to Kings Cross instead and the third was, very belatedly, diesel hauled. This seems to follow a familiar pattern and whilst we will continue to notify members of any planned steam runs it is important to keep watching the organisers' websites for late changes.

Howard Green

Progress at the 'box

Our main project for the Summer was intended to be re-painting the south end of the Box. This was postponed time and time again due to the unprecedented, continuous rainy weather we have seen. However, summer has at last arrived and work has started and progressed. If the weather stays dry we should be able to finish the job quite quickly – and even perhaps start on another side!

In addition to the never-ending gardening, we have been stripping the signal we received from the National Railway Museum and painting the Midland post we purchased, in preparation for the new lower-quadrant signal. The base is already down and waiting. There is also a plan to progressively paint and erect a number of our cast iron signs.

A new, double-sided banner has been purchased announcing Sunday and weekend openings and this will be adorning the fence on the preceding Wednesdays. Another banner has been ordered with our logo on. This will be useful in announcing who we are when we attend open-air events/fetes, etc. Additionally, one hundred white T-shirts have now arrived, in various sizes and displaying the line drawing of the Box in maroon. They will not constitute 'uniform' for Open Days, but can be worn for working parties and will be on sale to Members shortly at a modest price. (Ed: £3.99 each)

The sleepers we received from the NRM have been positioned at the NW corner of the site and the cranks and wheels are gradually being cleaned and painted before re-assembly. Eventually they will be worked from the ground frame as another hands-on experience for the public.

Upstairs a working party has been set up, chaired by Rob Crisp, to look at the ongoing development and maintenance of the 4-track signalling demonstration, now it is completed. The group will also look after the 4-aspect demonstration and a proposal to light up the Waterloo and City line block shelf – also received from NRM.

As ever, if you can spare any Wednesday afternoon (work party) or Monday evening (Members' night) you would be most welcome.

John Telford

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The man in the video

A foot note to Geoff Ryland's recent visit. He was watching the video of the 'box from 1979 that is shown downstairs to our visitors. It took him a little while but eventually he realised that he was the signalman that had been filmed. Apparently he had a bit more hair back then as well as noticeable sideburns!

Gleaned from the Herts Advertiser

1. Apparently the long down south carriage siding which curved from the South 'box towards London Road was originally a refuge siding. In the 2 track days the Midland Railway used to shunt the slow freight trains out of the way of the following passenger trains. On 2nd August 1873 they did just this but a coupling broke and the guard's van and three trucks ran away, went through a heap of ballast acting as a buffer stop and ended up on the Great Northern embankment. The guard fortunately was not in his van!

2. When they built the second bridge over the GN branch for the quadrupling, the contractors built a temporary wooden bridge to the east of the structure to get materials down to the working level. Obviously this temporary bridge was on a steep incline and on 6th March 1893 a train of 6 trucks and the locomotive 'The Princess Beatrice' ran away and crashed on to the opposite embankment of the GN line. Fortunately nobody was injured. Apparently the brakeman had forgotten to apply the brakes or put 'sprags' in the wheels of the wagons.

Howard Green



The archive shot this time comes from our member Peter Hunt who photographed various lineside objects in 1978 whilst he was commuting between Luton and St Pancras. This shot taken from an up DMU shows St Albans South down home signals set against the backdrop of the Heath and Heather building.



Two of the restored cast iron signs that have recently been erected near to the 'level crossing' gate. Both are familiar track side signs from earlier times many of which can still be seen around the network today.