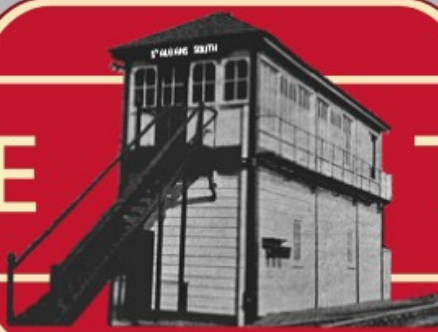




# OUTSIDE



# THE BOX

Newsletter November 2021 Issue 66

## We Remember Them



The picture on the left shows the event at the 'box on the 9<sup>th</sup> November when our remembrance wreath began its journey from St Albans to St Pancras. Members are seen standing in front of our WW1 memorial together with Andrew Chillingsworth from GTR. The following day the wreath was taken by John Telford to Bedford where other wreaths were assembled and then taken by train to St Pancras. It was posed in front of the St Pancras War Memorial and the Kings Cross poppy display and held at the station overnight before being laid at the Memorial on the 11<sup>th</sup>.

*Photo courtesy of Andy Buckley*

**Richard Kirk**



**The group assembled outside St Albans City Station on October 26<sup>th</sup> for the launch of the Symbol Spot promotion. There were representatives from the Trust, GTR, Network Rail, St Albans BID, the Community Rail Partnerships for the Beds and Herts and Marston Vale lines and Mini Map-Makers. For more details see page 3.**

## Chairman's Words

Since the formation of the trust we have tried to come together around the Christmas period to celebrate the work that you have all contributed to the success of St Albans Signal Box, now of course a part of St Albans tourist offering. Sadly last year we were unable legally to throw any party and although those restrictions have been lifted this year your trustees still feel that thirty to forty squeezed into the operating deck would not be a sensible thing to do. Hopefully next year we may be able to celebrate with a mid summer BBQ when once again we can come together en mass.

Our open days are settling back to our precovid routine with about fifty to sixty visitors each time we open, a nice number because we have time to show people around and to talk to them. Maintenance work continues at the box and display items continue to arrive. We have on offer later in the year two displays, one on the coach loading system employed by Govia on their 700 series trains and another on the automatic train control used between St Pancras and Blackfriars, where we put them will be a problem for the new year but perhaps a review of what we have on display is something we need to embark upon.

We only have one more open day before Christmas, Sunday the 12th December so it would be good to see as many of you as possible on that date so that we can celebrate hopefully the end of what has been a couple of difficult years for so many.

I know this is rather early but it is my last chance to say a Merry Christmas to you all,

**Tony Furse**



Winners of the 2008 St Albans Civic Society Award



Winners of the 2010 Invensys Rail Signalling Award (Structures)



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

## **I know that man!**

A short while ago we were approached by Ron Hall who had been looking at our photographic display in the City Station windows. He recognised one of the railwaymen illustrated, Bert Hawkes, who was his Uncle. Ron was able to give us some information about Bert.

*'As far as I am aware Bert must have been about 18 at the start of World War One. He joined the Hertfordshire Regiment and was at Mons, where the German Forces were stopped by the British Army. He was awarded a Mons Star, which was only given to those who fought in this Battle. He managed to survive the rest of the War, although he had a younger brother who was killed. Those that fought at Mons became known as the 'Old Contemptibles' because the Kaiser said that his army would walk all over our contemptible little army, which they did not because of Mons. When the war finished he was a founder member of the Royal British Legion branch in St Albans and remained a member until he died. Because of his experience in the trenches he advised his son, on the outbreak of WW2 not to join the army and as a result his son joined the Merchant Navy, avoiding being torpedoed on several occasions.*

*My Mother told me that Bert joined LMS when the war ended, working his way up to Express driver and one day fell from his cab on St Pancras Station, injuring his knees. As he was within a few years of retirement they found him a job running the local shunter in St Albans. When I was about 8 I was waving to him through the fence at Clarence Park and he waved for me to nip through the fence and climb up in his cab, whereby he gave me a ride up to the old Napsbury Halt and back. A great thrill for a young kid!*

*He was born in Fleetville, St Albans in Cape Road and spent all his married life in Camp Road, so he never moved away from the area he was born in.*

*He died in the 1970's but I do not have the dates. That is about all I can tell you and hope you find it of interest.'*



**On the left is the photograph of Bert Hawkes that appears in the station display. It was taken in 1954 with Bert sitting outside St Albans Shed. On the right Bert is sitting with the station shunter in front of the Clarence Park fence that Ron 'nipped through' for his cab ride.**

**Photos courtesy Ken Sparkes**



## **Progress at the 'box**

This issue is 'The Rotten Wood Special'. Star-rating 1a goes to Michael's near-complete re-building of the coffin carrier, with new oak wood – the old having rotted. It now looks great and with tarpaulin protection should last for many more years. Well done Michael! Star. Rating 1b goes to Tony, Jim and Laurie, for rebuilding the LNWR Ground Frame (with some RSJ help!), which seized up during HOD - again due to rotten wood! Well done guys. Rodney painted the new metal fences protecting the wires.

As mentioned above HOD went well, in spite of Network Rail dumping two huge road-railers immediately outside. We were able to Autumn-clean the Shed before putting all the tentage away. The Shed and Buffet were also retreated. Having re-built the lower handrail (the old one rotted), our contractor, Donato, has beautifully made two new mock level-crossing gates – leading to the parking spaces, and finished off by Jim. Guess what: the old ones rotted!

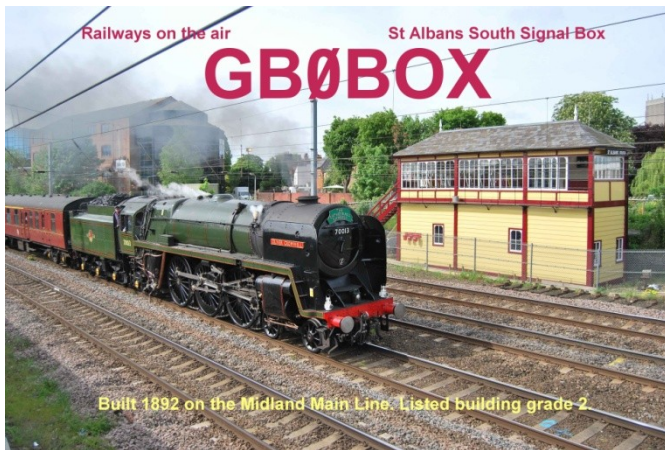
Martin has restored the upper Gradient post – with some new wood (!), repainted the fire buckets, phone post near the gate, and the S&T Box. Steve repainted the lower mile post (concrete!). David, Richard and Adrian are wading through the end of year clear down, so our green wheelies will be under siege. The Council kindly waived the new annual fees to have them emptied. David spread some grass seed earlier this year which must have come from Jack's beanstalk factory!

A recent visitor offered us a Harpenden Thameslink platform sign, which now sits under its St. Albans counterpart. Some of our exhibition displays are gracing the windows in the new Platform 4 Station Entrance, and private visits postponed when Covid descended have been completed. Members' Monday evenings have reverted to the 'box, but the first one each month is still on Zoom for those further afield – obtain the login from Richard Kirk if interested.

**John Telford**

## Signalbox on the Air

For two days every September, heritage railways take part in 'Railways on the Air'. The date celebrates the anniversary of the first steam powered passenger railway which took place on 27th September 1825.



So, following the award of a special licence by Ofcom, GB0BOX went on the air for the first time, representing St Albans South Signal Box. The station operated on the 40metre shortwave band and contacted 65 other stations over the weekend. We spoke to radio hams and railways all over Europe, with the furthest contacts in Solothurn, Switzerland and Sandefjord, Norway.

Whilst we drink tea at the signalbox, the Keith and Dufftown railway told us they pass three distilleries on their route north of Aberdeen. Their transmission was wavering slightly by Sunday afternoon! As was the signal from the old station in Cymmer, Port Talbot. Although they have no trains or track, they have turned the station building into a pub. There's an idea....

**Keith Webster**

## What is Symbol Spot?

Symbol Spot is being promoted by the Beds and Herts Community Rail Partnership to encourage exploration and travel by rail along the line from Bedford to St Albans. It follows the introduction of a similar scheme by the Marston Vale CRP on the Bedford to Bletchley line. The Symbols are in the form of wooden posts mostly painted red and white or yellow and black to resemble railway signals. On the top of each one is a plaque. Symbols have been installed at each of the stations on the line together with an extra one at the entrance to our Signal Box garden. A free booklet is available from ticket offices (with route map and stickers), guides families along the Thameslink route pointing out interesting landmarks, signs and symbols for children aged 5 and over to spot out of the window.

The intention is that children locate and take brass rubbings of the individual discs for their activity books. Once these have been completed with all eight rubbings, children can collect a souvenir certificate and coin from selected places of interest on the route.

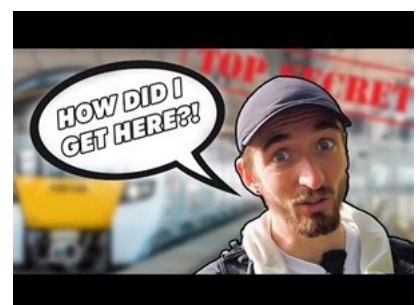
The programme was launched at St Albans City Station and at the 'box in October with representatives of various organisations as illustrated on page 1. The final plaque was placed on the Symbol Spot outside the station to complete the launch. It remains to be seen how successful the programme is both in its own right and also in encouraging more rail travel on the line. This may require some more publicity.

The launch event was 'gate crashed' by an interesting character who calls himself Runderground Matt. Having already run the whole of the London underground map above ground he has now moved onto the London and South East overground railway systems starting with the Thameslink network. On the launch day he was running from Luton Airport Parkway to Elstree and Borehamwood and stumbled across the 'box and the event. His impressions have been recorded on video and can be seen online at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uK-2Ttc8\\_d4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uK-2Ttc8_d4)



**Left: the final Symbol Spot was put in place outside St Albans City Station.**

**Right: Runderground Matt who came across the launch event and later posted his video on line.**



## Terry Worrall remembers – Part Four

Trust member Terry Worrall continues the story of his early railway career in St Albans.

Ken Bonwick's replacement as SM, was Geoff Ward, who arrived from Lancashire – he had been a Station Master in the Lancaster area – the London suburban network was completely new to him. He was an affable fellow who let me get on with my job and do what I needed to do – a really supportive family man whose family later joined him, living in the SM's house across the road from the Booking Office.

One of his early indoctrinations was a suicide event. One afternoon a man walked in front of a Down express train on the foot crossing - I called Geoff who was having a cup of tea in the Telephone Exchange – he could not handle this and merely went to his office to deal with the Press, so I assisted the Station Inspector, Jim Darnell, in dealing with the incident.

Similarly, one morning, a peak hour train was delayed in the Up Fast platform – being inquisitive I attended with the Station Inspector, Norman Groom, and our attention was called by other commuters to a passenger who was seemingly dead – we removed him from the train and placed him on a platform barrow for collection by the Ambulance service – he was dead! Before defibrillators! This way of dealing with such a situation would not be permitted or tolerated nowadays.

On a more positive note I took every occasion to 'learn' even though what I was learning was well outside the scope of my job as SM's Clerk. Knowing Don Witts, another of the Station Inspectors, from the 'Signalling' course I cajoled him on several occasions to let me join him on Saturday night/Sunday morning overnight Engineering jobs – normally track-relaying jobs. In this way I could see what he did in setting up the 'possessions' and I saw the types of machine, normally in sidings during the week, actually doing what they had been designed to do – all good experience for a 19 year old. I even connived, as I ordered staff uniforms, to get myself a spare 'black mac' to wear on site – these were the days before HV vests and orange overalls!

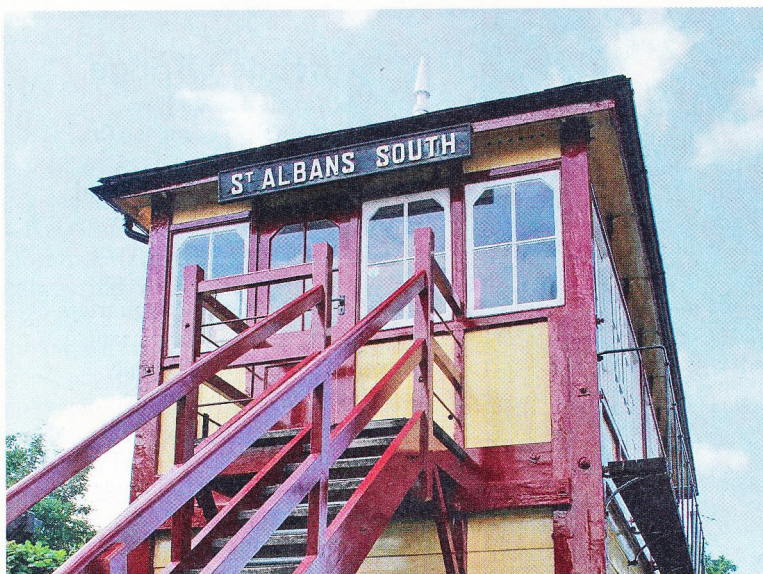


**Track relaying at St Albans City station on September 14<sup>th</sup> 1958 a few years before Terry joined the railway and began observing engineering activities wearing his 'black mac'**

*Photo by Peter Bland, courtesy of Bryan Cross*

## The Signal Box in the Limelight

Steam Railway issue No.523 in September included an article by Tim Dunn in which he selected his 'Ten of the best Signal Boxes'. St Albans South was included and the text published is shown below. Other 'boxes illustrated were Leek Brook Junction, Hebden Bridge, Princes Risborough North, Williton, Horsted Keynes, Staverton, Settle, Severn Tunnel Junction Shrewsbury and Corfe Castle.



### 4 St Albans South

"A white wooden wreck that sagged in one corner" is perhaps the best way of describing the 1892 Midland Railway box at St Albans South as it was in dereliction circa 2002. Often that is where buildings' stories end, as people look on, nod sadly at each other and say "somebody should do something", but then nobody ever does, because nodding, sadly, is easy, and doing is hard. But some local folk didn't just nod, they did. And they formed a trust, and a plan, and a proposal. And they worked with Network Rail and they got things done. Today the box is restored and it is splendid: it is a reason to visit St Albans and it makes an awful lot of people very happy indeed. It is ace; it rightly keeps winning awards and they should all be very proud.