

130 Years old

1892 to 2022

OUTSIDE THE BOX



Newsletter May 2022 Issue 68



The Midland Railway Society has recently acquired a few photographs taken in the 1860s during the construction of the London Extension. There are a few local to us of which this is the most interesting and shows construction of the original City station nearing completion. The photograph is captioned 'Gaul Road, St Albans' Lots of detail can be seen especially when the image is blown up. This reveals what looks like a signal box on the far end of what is now Platform 4 with a signal mounted on or close by that appears above the road bridge. Was this the first St Albans box predating the early one on our site? Intriguing! Many thanks to the MRS for sharing.

Chairman's Words

It never ceases to amaze me, that in spite of the minimal publicity we employ, we are able to reach a diverse audience across the world. Two recent requests for a visit highlight this. The first came from a Officer Cadet, an Ensign, in the Japanese Navy who having passed out of his Naval College will set out on a world tour promoting the Japanese Navy, he has two days in the UK and is hoping to visit the box on one of those days as he has an interest in the history of signalling and how British technology developed Japanese railway signalling. Les is talking to him trying to develop the contact further. The other request is quite different, it comes from a digital games company in the UK, they developed the Batman series of games and want to record sounds for use in future games. They are looking for train noises especially freight, block bells and the sound of levers being pulled. Both of these requests are good revenue earners with minimum effort.

I would like to thank Richard A, Laurie, John T, Adrian and Jim for all their efforts in recovering from Sheffield a NER slotted signal I believe it was quite a cross country haul to extract the signal from the bottom of a very steep garden. Although obviously not Midland Railway it is a good example of the way different railway companies solved signalling problems in the early days of railways. After a substantial amount of restoration we will have the happy problem of where to put it so that it can be properly operated and seen by our visitors.

I hope to see as many of you as possible at our BBQ when we will celebrate the 130th anniversary of the opening of the box.

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

2022 Subscriptions are now due

A big thank you to everyone who has renewed their subscription! There are a few stragglers, so to continue supporting the good work of the signal box volunteers please do it now - it is just £10, and the easiest way is by bank transfer to Metro Bank, sort code 23-05-80, account 17746944; otherwise by cheque or cash. Many thanks.

Rob Little

Terry Worrall remembers – Part Six

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

In Spring 1964 my SM instructed me to attend a BR/Trade Union 'Negotiation and Consultation' Course at Dillington House near Ilminster in Somerset. I was not an official Staff rep and had no involvement with Trade Unions but I was a member of the TSSA. I was never sure what motivated the SM to nominate me. It was 'over my head' as the course comprised 'seasoned' Trade Union guys who were wholly anti management – at that stage I was a clerk with no experience of such matters! However, there was an opportunity to meet the legendary Gerard Fiennes* from the BR Board who was there to espouse the benefits of the 'new' 'merry-go-round' trainload and 'Freightliner container' train concepts. Ray Buckton the General Secretary of ASLEF also came to speak – a seriously senior figure in the rail industry with a high public profile. I was overwhelmed! I am not sure the course ever did me much good although no experiences are ever a total waste!

I continued to enjoy my St Albans work and even though I worked a great deal of overtime I was able to organise my work such that I was able to socialise and not lose contact with friends. However, I knew that in May '65, after almost 2 years, I ought not to remain in this job for much longer as I need a new opportunity and wider experience.

I carried on doing many early turns – I could now leave home for work in a more flexible way as I now had 'wheels' (my blue Vespa scooter, FXE 11C, purchased in June 1965 for £180 – I passed my test in September) as did a number of my friends. None of us were associated with 'mods' or 'rockers' – a trend which dominated the mid '60s'. We were too busy working and with our social activities.

I left the job in St Albans in August 1965 to take the role of Assistant Controller, a 'shift' job in St Pancras District Control located in St Pancras Chambers.

At this point we leave Terry to the rest of his career and thank him for sharing these memories with us.

* GF was fired by BR in 1967 for publishing an outspoken and critical book, '*I Tried to Run a Railway*'

Progress at the 'box

Problems with my laptop resulted in no To Do List appearing for April. However, with laptop now fixed I can report that good work has carried on, and our gardeners' efforts have resulted in a beautiful current Spring showing. Open Days are now back to twice a month and visitor numbers are healthy, albeit not yet back to pre-Covid levels. We experimented with a mid-week, half term opening which was quite encouraging (45 visitors), and 60 on a very rainy day when volunteers became soaked! However, during this period we seem to have had a bout of volunteer maladies, but nearly everyone is thankfully on the mend.

The long awaited and delayed visit to Sheffield to pick up the slotted signal we purchased has finally happened. The erection of our fourth Midland lamp post, next to the quarry wagon, has also taken place. Both these events are reported elsewhere in the newsletter. On the tracks we've seen new South West train stock being hauled through, and a first with a Toyota car transporter train passing by.

We are working on our project to erect a platform at the NE corner of the site, in order to erect a shed, to provide much needed additional storage. As ever, in addition to gardening, regular maintenance continues to take place.

John Telford

CORPORATE WEAR

We are hoping to re-order some of our corporate clothing in maroon, with the Signal Box logo applied. Noted below are possible purchases with ball-park prices incl. VAT – I can advise actual prices when I confirm numbers to the manufacturer and receive formal quotes against order size:

Sweatshirts £25; Polo Shirts £22; T-Shirts £16*; Baseball Hats £12* (* seeking cheaper quotes)

If you can advise size: S, M, L, XL up to 5XL Please advise name, e-mail, items required and size, to jtelford@btinternet.com by the end of May

John Telford

New Trustees

Two new Trustees have been invited to join the existing board to assist in the development of the Trust. Both David Smith and Adrian Wootton are active volunteers and have contributed many hours to the Trust already. Members will be asked to confirm their appointment at next years' AGM. In the meantime both have provided a few words about themselves.

David comes from South Wales and has lived in St Albans since 1990. I spent my working life on the railways, starting as a British Rail Traffic Management trainee in 1979. The first part of my career was involved in freight operations and customer service - moving onto major project works with Crossrail as Business and Operations Manager, thence to the front line as Operations Manager (North London Railways), and various posts in OPRAF, the Strategic Rail Authority as Operations Advisor and Assistant Director, Planning Manager for the Association of Trains Operating Companies and finally to a very locally focused job with DfT Rail as Operations and Access Manager for Govia Thameslink Railway. It is very handy working at St Albans South to keep a careful eye on current operations!

Adrian was born in 1965 in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire. I moved to Hertfordshire in 1987 after studying at Nottingham for 3 years. My interest in railways started in the early 70's with many trips with Dad to Crewe. Interest in signalling began in the late 70's/early 80's when I got to know the signal men at both Mow Cop and Kidsgrove signal boxes and found that I was welcome to spend as many hours as I wanted watching and learning both boxes, with the only proviso that I should disappear when the area manager was about!!! I now collect items relating to the North Staffordshire Railway. Following retirement, I'd always intended to join St Albans South Box as a volunteer as it was a natural 'local' home to maintain my signalling interest. I help out regularly on maintenance days/open days and look forward to helping the other Trustees and volunteers to run our fabulous signal box.

Another Lamp Post!

Earlier this month an intrepid band of members erected our fourth (and final?) Midland Railway lamp post in the garden (in the rain!). The lamp had been donated to the Trust a while ago by a local resident who was getting ready to move from the area. It had originally come from Coughton in Warwickshire. Unfortunately the bottom of the post with the company lettering on had long been broken off and it has been necessary to mount it on a steel pole to be at the right height. A brick plinth will be built around it once the electrics have been installed and later a working lamp will be placed on the top.



Our latest acquisition

At the end of last month we were finally able to visit a garden in Sheffield and collect a North Eastern Railway slotted signal that we had agreed to purchase before Covid struck. The signal was one of the remaining pieces of railwayana collected over many years, the majority of which was sold at an auction at Sir William McAlpine's Fawley Hill Museum a few years ago. The signal had previously been removed from the ground by Richard Allen and a friend to prevent further deterioration. Whilst some of the wood may need replacing, much of it appears to be in restorable condition, albeit it will take some time to free up the mechanism, put it back together and locate it in a suitable spot in the garden where it can be seen and operated.

As to its history we are trying to piece this together.



**Left: the signal in its Sheffield garden prior to removal.
Centre: after being lifted out of the ground
Right: Trust members working out how to move the signal through the garden and onto the trailer parked outside.
Bottom left: safely on the trailer ready to move to St Albans
Bottom right: off the trailer and propped up at the 'box awaiting work**



A member reminisces

Following the last newsletter, member and retired signalman Steve Lake wrote that it was 42 years since he worked in St Albans South 'box. He recalled that he brought his late mother to the 2012 summer barbecue and as visitors were not normally allowed in signal boxes this was the first and only one she had visited in his 44 year railway career. She did, however, bring his 'butty box' to the signal box in Salford in the mid 70s but Steve had to run down to the road to collect it! He was glad that she had visited St Albans South as he had had a very happy time working there.

Don't forget the Anniversary Barbecue

Thank you to those members who have already indicated that they will be attending the 130th Anniversary barbecue at the 'box on Saturday 11th June from 1pm. Those who haven't yet let me know. Please note that the deadline for notification is **FRIDAY 27th MAY**. This will ensure that we can order the right amount of food for all.

Richard Kirk