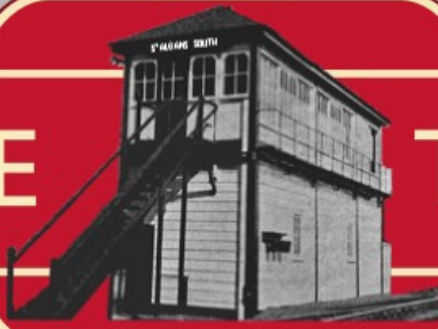


131 Years old

1892 to 2023

OUTSIDE



THE BOX

Newsletter May 2023 Issue 72

Almost unique!

Our displays and working signalling items are, by and large, good examples of standard equipment of their type and time. Some are an amalgam of genuine parts to make up a whole. However our two most recent major acquisitions have claims to be almost unique (*dictionary definition: being the only one of its kind; unlike anything else*). In the world of signalling there are many variations from the norm hence the cautionary use of the word 'almost' to describe the new items. What are they?

Mention has been made in recent newsletters of the arrival from Sheffield of a North Eastern Railway signal and we have now taken possession of a London and North Western Railway signal that previously resided in Surrey. Both have unusual (almost unique?) features and fuller details of these and the stories of them, as much as we know at present, will appear in the Newsletter. This time we begin with the NER slotted signal – see pages 3 and 4.

Richard Kirk

Chairman's Words

I was honoured, if not a little humbled to be taking over from Tony Furse as Chairman at the recent AGM. Tony served for many years and substantially grew our offering of artefacts and visitor numbers – particularly via the model railway – during his tenancy, let alone see us through Covid. He is due our gratitude for this tremendous stint of service, and I only hope that I, along with the other Trustees – still including Tony thankfully – can continue this progress.

So, the future! The Trustees spent a Brainstormer Day in April considering where we are and our plans for the future. The restoration and erection of our two latest signals is at the top of the priority list for 2023, and is progressing well. We are holding a Volunteer Day shortly, see below, to hopefully seek the next generation of custodians of the 'Box; and continue to look at possibilities for a Visitor Centre. We are still held at a stop signal in our quest for more space outside our current boundaries for a Centre, so are looking to see if it might be possible to do this on our existing, busy site. We will update you with any progress.

Thank you for your continuing support of our cherished heritage outlet, and we look to further progress in the coming months.

John Telford

Volunteer Day

With our longer-serving Trustees growing older, and given several have experienced health issues recently, we decided to take up King Charles' Coronation request to hold a Volunteer recruitment day, with ours on Sunday, 21st May, from 2-5pm. at the 'Box. We will take folk around to show what we have; what we do; and explain the help we need and skills that would be welcome. Tasks range from welcoming and entertaining visitors, catering, gardening, repairing and restoring artefacts, painting, electrical, woodwork, and general maintenance. So, if you know anyone who might be interested, ask them to register on our Website, or come along on the day. Several 'possibles' have already registered, and we look forward to a successful initiative.

Summer BBQ

This year's summer barbecue for members and family will be held on Saturday 12th August from 2pm. Once again we will be employing outside caterers to prepare the food. To defray the costs we ask for a donation of at least £5 per head. Bring your own drinks. Please let Richard know (contact details overleaf) if you are going to attend.



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

2023 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. Alternatively, you may pay by cheque payable to St Albans Signal Box Preservation Trust, and send directly to me at 20 Flavian Close, St Albans, AL3 4JX or by cash to me or one of the other Trustees at an Open Day.

Rob Little

My Time at St Albans – Part Four

Trust member Tim Stevens concludes his memories of his time working for the railway in St Albans in the 1970s

An alarming ride down the siding

The closest interaction the Supervisor normally had with the trains was to close the doors and give the right-away on the platform and to change the tail lamp of a terminating DMU. However one day a train arrived on the Down Fast line with a defective parcels van on the rear. The train crew had decided it must be detached at St Albans. There was a Down Siding into which the vehicle could be placed, and the train could then be on its way with only minor delays.

The Guard had a clever idea - the van would be uncoupled and loose-shunted into the siding, and I would ride in the van, ready to screw down the handbrake when the vehicle was in the siding. That sounded simple, but I had no experience of operating a handbrake on that type of vehicle. Apply the brake too soon and the van would still be partly on the main line; apply it too late and it would be through the buffer stops and down onto London Road below! Fortunately I judged it right and the van glided safely to rest in the siding.

That was one of the scarier moments of my railway career, but like everything in those days, it was good to learn by experiencing life at the “sharp end”. These days we have become too risk-averse and a lot of the old railway operating expertise has been lost.

I moved on in Spring 1978 to join London Transport, and later became a signaller on BR, but I will always look back on my time at St Albans as an important and enjoyable part of my railway experience.

With grateful thanks to Tim for sharing these memories with us. If any other members have interesting or amusing recollections of working on the railway please feel free to jot them down and send them to the Editor.

Progress at the 'box

A welcome to 2023 and a positive start to the year. Good to report some progress on the eternal list of things to do.

In general, the weather over the autumn and early winter period has not been good – extensive spells of rain in late 2022 and 2023 have seriously compromised any external work in the garden and the box generally.

Turning to the garden area, extensive autumn bulb planting and careful vegetation clearance (when possible!) has resulted in a fine and colourful display (more planned), and sowings of wildflower seeds will assist the diversification of the area. Great attacks in advance on the bank bound buddleia should pay dividends – thanks to David C and Adrian for this. Much appreciated. The lawn has been treated without pesticides and patch seeded which has (so far) turned out very well.

Removal of 2 sycamore trees was carried out by contractors, sourcing a welcome pile of sawn logs for future domestic use.

Bad weather allowed some heavy cleaning inside on the operating floor and in the museum area, and the normal polishing of the brass work and oiling of the lever frame has been done. The long period of none / limited use due to pandemic measures has resulted in some niggling “signal” failures on the electrics, but this has been faulted as dirty electrical contacts which are being attended to. A perhaps, a slightly awkward job to do has been dealing with some floor rot inside (under the upstairs sink) and now outside on the cleaning gallery which will require some careful repair by a hand-picked team of “volunteers”.

“Major” projects involving the ex-North Eastern Railway slotted signal has been moving on very well in recent weeks and the delivery of the donated ex Warrington LNWR signal from Woking (a semi-heroic tale of craneage and the M25) has allowed restoration on this item to be commenced. Assembly and installation of both in the garden, with commensurate re-location of the other items, will require some careful consideration and not the least, some planning and thought, let alone project delivery.

Finally, the immediate externalities of the car park area has seen some repairs to broken (and potentially dangerous) cast iron drain covers by Network Rail (after some chasing up !), and the identification by John Webb or no less than 44 fencing slats needing renewal or repair. Always plenty to do.

David Smith

The North Eastern Railway Slotted Signal – Part One

Original location

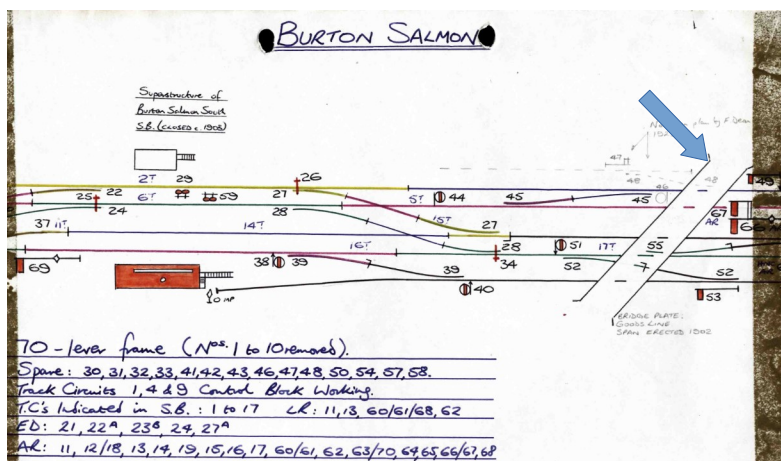
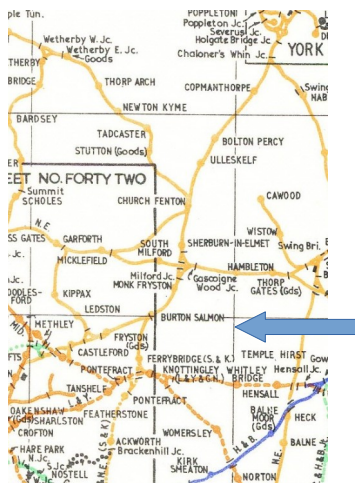
Our signal was originally located at Burton Salmon which is a village now in the Selby district of North Yorkshire, close to the border with West Yorkshire, approximately 3 miles north of Knottingley and 20 miles south west of York. A station was opened in 1840 by the York and North Midland Railway and was where the line from Normanton (on the Midland) to York was joined by a line from Knottingley. The Y&NMR merged with two other companies in 1854 and became part of the North Eastern Railway (NER). The signal (No. 49) was located at the end of the down (to York) platform but faced in the up direction and controlled access to a siding as well as a crossover onto the up line. It possibly dates from around 1900. We know that it was in position in 1944 but had been removed by 1959 and replaced by a ground signal. Burton Salmon station closed to passengers in 1959.

Subsequent ownership

Prior to the Trust's acquisition, the signal was part of a large collection of railwayana built up by Stuart Furniss of Sheffield. The signal was in the garden of his house. We do not know if he acquired it directly from BR when it was taken down or purchased it from another party. Following Stuart's death the majority of his collection was sold at an auction that took place in 2016 at Fawley Hill. A few items were retained including our signal. This was subsequently put up for sale and came to the attention of the Trust via Trustee and Sheffield resident Richard Allen. After purchase it was successfully removed by a gang of Trust members and brought to St Albans.

What's special about this signal

Burton Salmon was in the Southern Division of the NER. The NER did not manufacture its own signals and the Southern Division purchased equipment from McKenzie and Holland (M&H), Signalling Contractors of Worcester. Many of the castings on our signal bear the names of the railway company and M&H. The signal arm is located in a slot cut in the post and when in the 'clear' position part of the arm disappears into the slot. What is unusual with our signal is that the spectacle plate and the lamp are placed well down the post instead of being in front of the arm and behind respectively. This is despite the signal being described as having a 'short post'. The reason for this, we believe, is that because the signal was close to an overbridge and the controlling signal box was some distance the other side of the bridge the signalman could not see the arm and needed to see the position of the spectacle plate (or the back blinder plate) to confirm its aspect. (Other reasons may apply of which we are unaware at present.)



Clockwise from the far left:

map showing location of Burton Salmon station; part of a signal box diagram from 1944, our signal, No.49, appears on the edge of the dark line on the right hand side; the photograph is a view from the overbridge alongside the signal but facing south west and showing the earlier signal box on the right and the later and larger box on the left (if only we had a photograph taken looking the other way and showing our signal!).



The Finial

M&H produced some very large finials for its tall signal posts. Although our 'short post' may have had a modest sized M&H finial we have been fortunate to acquire one of the large ones that measures almost 4ft from top to bottom. This has been donated to the Trust. The donor has advised us: "This was originally recovered from the NER line at Copmanthorpe, to the south of York by a local railwayman called Ernest Sanderson. He had been born in 1912 in the Leeman Road area of York, the son of a crossing keeper. He worked on the permanent way for 50 years, retiring in 1977. The NER finial was eventually sold by Ernest Sanderson and has spent the last few decades in the care of two signalling enthusiasts before being donated to the St Albans South signal box trust".

The Lamp

As the photograph shows the lamp has suffered from being left out in the open for many years and will need much careful work to restore it to working order. This also applies, of course, to the rest of the signal and its post.

In the next newsletter Tony Furse will tell the story of the restoration of this artefact and our plans for its display and operation.



Clockwise from above: the signal in its Sheffield home; dismantling begins; the newly donated McKenzie & Holland 4ft finial; the very weather beaten lamp; and finally, Trust members begin the process of moving the signal to St Albans.



Welcome

A warm welcome to the following new members who have joined the Trust in recent months:

Tim Amor from Melton Mowbray
John Beesley from Berkhamsted
Giles Bridger from St Albans
Alan Burton from Watford
Scott Dance from Brentford
Robert Macmillan from Crawley
Florence Morgan from London
Frederick Rowntree from Windsor
Graham Taylor from Kettering



The north end of the old Platform 1 before rebuilding