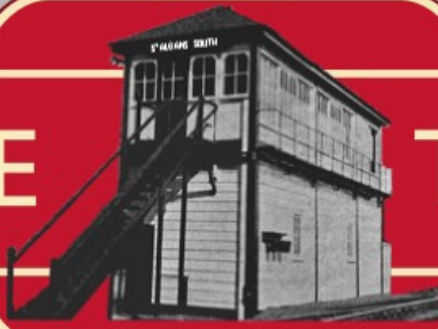


131 Years old

1892 to 2023

OUTSIDE



THE BOX

Newsletter August 2023 Issue 73

IT'S UP!!

After many months of careful restoration, the North Eastern Railway slotted post was finally moved into position at the north end of the garden on Wednesday 26th July. There is still much work to do as the mechanical parts now need to be fitted as well as the finial and ladder. Then we have to work out the geometry of the linkage needed from the ground frame to the post to enable the signal and spectacle plate to operate.



Richard Kirk

Chairman's Words

A busy Summer, accentuated by medical issues amongst some of our regulars, which again highlights our need to seek more and younger Volunteers – the next generation. Our earlier Volunteer Day did realise some newcomers for which we are really grateful, but several urgent tasks have now been outsourced, while regulars restore and erect recent acquisitions. Let us know of anyone who might like to help – training given.

We are also grateful for some outside professional help in relation to seeking advice on approaching Network Rail about the renewal of our Lease, due up in 2031. This is mainly in connection with our long-desired Visitor Centre, a large project which needs assurances about our future before making such a substantial commitment.

Again my thanks for the superb efforts put in by all who give so much time helping at the 'box. The garden has looked particularly wonderful this year, but with this comes many hours of hard work in maintaining it. Heritage Open Weekend approaches, so do plan a visit to see our latest offerings, and if possible, sign up to help - even if only for a few hours.

John Telford

HERITAGE OPEN WEEKEND

As John mentions above, our HOD opening this year will be on Saturday 9th and Sunday 10th of September. The opening will be from 10am to 5pm both days. The success of the weekend relies on members volunteering to help with the organisation and operation of the event. Setting up starts from 9am and the days will be divided into roughly 2 hourly slots. If you are able and would like to help please let Richard know as soon as possible. Please indicate which day(s) and for what hours you are available. This will enable him to establish a rota. Contact him on 07855282664 or email richardnkirk@hotmail.co.uk



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

City Station celebrates 50 years of change

15th of May this year marked 50 years since the new booking hall on the up side was opened. To mark the occasion there was a ceremony to unveil by the gate line the replica *City of St Albans* locomotive nameplate (that had been on display previously in the signal box) and a large image of the locomotive created by artist Richard Green. Representatives of the Trust, Govia Thameslink, Network Rail, Beds & Herts Community Rail Partnership and St Albans BID were present and the Mayor, Geoff Harrison, performed part of the unveiling. Also present was the St Albans MP Daisy Cooper and Siggie Cragwell who is the oldest employee of GTR. Later Siggie along with Trust Chairman John Telford formally opened a photographic exhibition in the empty retail unit on Platform 4. This shows views of the old pre-1973 station and has been collated by the Trust. After the ceremonies, those present moved on to the signal box where a celebration cake was cut and served and visitors were shown around. There was good publicity subsequently in the local media although, sadly, nothing in the railway press.



Clockwise from top left: Mayor, Geoff Harrison, Artist Richard Green, Daisy Cooper MP, Kate Cohen (St Albans BID) and Councillor Chris White in front of the nameplate and image; the Signal Box representatives with Daisy Cooper MP and GTR staff; Siggie Cragwell and John Telford open the display; Siggie remembers his time at St Albans and his visits to the signal box; visitors are shown around the 'box; Siggie and Richard Kirk cut the celebration cake.

The North Eastern Railway Slotted Signal – Part Two

As reported on the front page, the NER slotted signal is now in place but still with work to do to complete its restoration to full working order. As a result the second part of the story will be held over to the next edition of Outside the Box.



Progress at the 'box

Much of what has happened at and around the 'box in the last three months is covered elsewhere in this issue and as a result the usual 'Progress' item has been left out this time.

AI comes to the Signal Box!

The power and apparent skill of the AI based language chatbot ChatGPT was demonstrated recently when Les O'Leary requested a signal box poem. The result below was returned in 3 seconds! Members can judge for themselves the accuracy or otherwise and the literature of the words. I have used one of the lines as the title of the piece.

A Guardian of the Tracks

In St Albans, where time whispers soft,
A signal box stands tall aloft,
Amidst the tracks, where rails converge,
A sentinel of days to urge.

Weathered wood and metal bold,
Stories of the past it holds,
Through changing seasons, it remains,
An emblem of the railway's veins.

Within its walls, a history dwells,
Of trains that rang their iron bells,
Passengers with dreams set free,
Their journeys traced in memory.

Through misty morns and twilight's gleam,
Its steadfast presence, like a dream,
A guardian of the tracks it stands,
Guiding trains to distant lands.

As engines chug and wheels they clack,
The signal box won't once look back,
For forward lies its steadfast role,
To keep the trains on journeys whole.

Amidst the hustle, rush, and race,
This beacon marks a timeless space,
A place of charm and bygone days,
Where nostalgia's heart still sways.

The signal box, a silent bard,
Recalls the tales of times unmarred,
Where life's commute and fleeting glance,
Created bonds in transient dance.

In St Albans' heart, a cherished sight,
This signal box with lanterns bright,
A symbol of a bygone age,
Embedded on the railway stage.

So here's to the signal box profound,
In St Albans, it stands, renowned,
A sentinel of days long gone,
Yet still, its legacy lives on.

Midland Railway signal boxes operating on Network Rail

Over 40 years since St Albans South signal box ceased operating, there are still some Midland Railway (MR) signal boxes working on the national network today. In particular, I recently joined a visit to boxes on the Leicester to Peterborough line, including Langham Junction and Oakham.

Langham Junction is contemporary with St Albans, being built 2 years earlier in 1890, and is looking quite smart, albeit with the inevitable replacement windows. It has its original MR tumbler-locking lever frame, and quite remarkably has the original brass lever number and description plates – these are small plates, no bigger than the lever thickness and are mounted on the side of the levers; I imagine that they are quite sought after by collectors. Equally remarkably, Network Rail have provided new brass plates to match, where changes have been necessary.

By the time our lever frame was replaced in 1906, the MR practice had changed to larger lever number plates and brass description plates mounted behind the levers. And, of course, changes over the years using the style of the day, has left us in our box with a complete hotchpotch of plates.

The next box along the line from Langham Junction is Oakham Level Crossing, of iconic Airfix-kit fame. This is a listed building and as such its new windows are of a sympathetic MR style including the triangular corner pieces. And, together with the wooden stairs and fire buckets, this enables it to retain a classical appearance. **Rob Little**



The Railway Children are back in town!

Local theatre company Ovo are putting on a production of The Railway Children as part of their summer season at the St Albans open air Roman Theatre. In advance of this some of the cast recently visited the Signal Box for publicity photographs to be taken. A few of the resulting images are shown below and some have appeared in the local media.



Latest acquisitions

The Trust continues to be offered items of railwayana for display and although it becomes more difficult to find space for new acquisitions we are extremely grateful to the donors. Of the recent items, the most spectacular is a running-in board from Harpenden Junction. This has been generously placed on long term loan by new member Chris Canfield. It now compliments our St Albans City sign on the sleeper wall.



Left: the two running-in boards looking splendid on the sleeper wall. Right: an AEG Omniprinter said to have been used by the guard/conductor on the Abbey Line and 'rescued' after its final use.

Welcome

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

Chris Canfield from Harpenden
William Folker from Harpenden
Joseph Hammond from Harpenden
Noel Ford from Australia

A final view for now of the NER slotted signal complete with its tall finial.

