



# Outside the Box

St Albans Signal Box Preservation Trust [www.sigbox.co.uk](http://www.sigbox.co.uk)

## A Late Taste of Winter!



An up Thameslink train passes the box on one of the recent snowy days. The box really is now a stunning sight on the way in and out of St Albans.



Members selecting sites for speed restriction signs.



The interior decoration of the operating floor is nearly complete



## The value of our volunteers

One condition of our sponsorship is that there has to be some contribution from the Trust and this can come in the form of unpaid volunteer labour. The Trust has recently reported to the Heritage Lottery Fund that the total amount of hours of work given by members over the last year was in excess of 226 days and equated to a value of over £25,000. This represents a tremendous effort on our part and something of which we can be proud. As mentioned elsewhere in the Newsletter there are still plenty of jobs to do, so please do consider coming along to help.

Richard Kirk

## Chairman's Words

A great deal has been achieved since the last newsletter and thanks are due to all who have been painting, wiring, and digging! I'm sure all those that attended the AGM and saw the track diagram will be pleased to know that the trains now move along it as far as the station with the help of a microcomputer. Wiring micro switches to the lever frame is going to be a challenge, but they currently won't get past the signal without a push.

The painting on the operating floor is all but complete, with some small touches to finish off. Our thanks go to all who braved the dangers of the scaffolding especially Peter who paid with an injury to his foot.

Downstairs has had its first coat of fire guard paint - please come and help with the second coat if you can.

The remaining ground works have started, and again a final push is needed before we can allow safe public access and organise the 'GRAND OPENING'. The date for this will be set when all safety work and disabled access have been completed.

So a positive few months where much has been achieved. Many thanks to all

Keith Webster

## Ground works progress

There are three main jobs left to be carried out. Firstly we need to build a wooden moat around the box to allow for drainage and give proper support to the stone wall at the rear. Secondly we have to build a ramp over the moat to give access to the ground floor. This will have to permit wheelchair access. Finally the area around the box steps and in front of the box will need to be levelled off and

boarded or a hard surface provided again to allow access including wheelchairs.

A quote has been received for this work but was more than we can afford, so the plan is to continue to use volunteer labour.

Les O'Leary



**STOP PRESS:** Possible steam hauled train passing the Box! Britannia pacific 'Oliver Cromwell' is provisionally booked for a run from London Victoria to Manchester via St Albans on Saturday 26th July. For more details check on [www.uksteam.info/tours/trs08.htm](http://www.uksteam.info/tours/trs08.htm)

Don't forget to visit the Trust web site regularly for information on working days and up to date news of developments.



Midland Railway coat of arms

## The Signal Box Garden

My daily working life as a gardener is often a solitary existence, with only the ubiquitous robins for company, so it makes a refreshing change to work in the grounds of the St Albans South Signal Box. A team of half a dozen volunteers can achieve quite a transformation of an area in a short time, even allowing for the essential tea breaks and chatting! The regular passing of trains makes life more interesting as well and I find time passes far more quickly than when I'm trying to earn a living!

The only original vegetation that survived was a small group of trees at the north end of the site plus a few primroses salvaged before the ground works contractors moved in. Hence we had pretty much a blank canvas to work with and the only really planned planting was the perimeter hedge of hawthorn, oak, ash, willow, holly, rosa rugosa, laurel, hazel and pyracantha.

The rest of the planting to date has been a random selection, dictated not by an exotic detailed plan but rather by what happened to turn up. I found that once people know that such a community project is in need of plants, they are only too keen to offer something from their own gardens. Dozens of donations have been gratefully received, from seedlings to shrubs, bulbs to trees and from as far afield as Derbyshire! Nature has of course lent a hand by filling in any bare areas of soil. The resulting garden is I think a pleasing mixture, with something of interest to see throughout the year.

We have been fortunate to inherit a good loamy, well drained soil, albeit liberally sprinkled with pieces of glass, metal, concrete and plastic of railway and other origin, so most plants seem to grow well. Last year the vegetable area produced good crops of potatoes, garlic and Jerusalem artichokes, the latter being sold in aid of Trust funds.

It is said that a garden is never finished and this certainly applies to the signal box grounds. Some areas can not be planted until certain hard landscaping projects are completed but in the meantime there are numerous regular maintenance jobs to be done, so volunteers are always welcome.

Rod Woodward

## AGM

The Minutes of the AGM on 9th April can be found on the Trust's website giving full details of matters discussed.

## Tombola Wins!

Last Heritage Open Day, Rod Woodward organised an extremely popular tombola. We intend to run this tombola again on open days and are asking for prizes to be donated. Items that are new/almost new, large/small, awful/wonderful are required as the prizes range from being your heart's desire thru to making you laugh! Please bring along to the signal box (clearly marked as tombola prizes) or phone Rod on 01727 853623. Time to de-clutter!

## Memories, Photographs and Artefacts

Further memories from local resident Howard Green and an accompanying photograph.

'to the extreme left of the picture is a bank of three shunting signals-'dollies'. These controlled the reversal of a train from the down mail line (Platform 4) to the up slow, the up main or to the two down carriage sidings immediately in front of and to the south of the signal box. They had a red band on a white disc which tilted 45 degrees to the clear position when the points were switched over and locked. We are seeing the back of the signals. Interestingly, just in front of St Albans South there was a yellow-barred dolly which could be passed when the bar was horizontal. This enabled a locomotive to go from the down carriage sidings into the parcels dock to the north of the signal box—the signal tilted to 45 degrees only to indicate when the points were set to go back on to the down main line.'

The bank of three dollies is now in the signal box garden almost back in its original position! A picture of the front is below Howard's late 1950s view.

All memories, photographs and artefacts gratefully received! Please contact me on 01727 860047 or richardnkirk@hotmail.co.uk

## Membership Matters

Thanks to everyone who paid subs and donations so promptly before the budget deadline - the chancellor promptly extended the 22% gift aid for 3 years a matter of days after my reminder. Obviously I have not got my finger on the pulse of the government.

The last £5,000 has been received from the Heritage Lottery Fund so I can categorically state that we do NOT need to record volunteer hours anymore. Thanks to all who came up with their figures at such short notice.

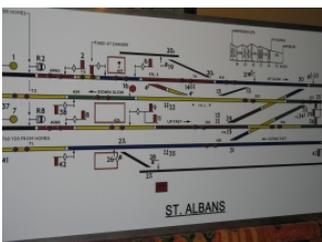
Mary Webster



Howard Green's photograph from the 1950s



The Ground signals in their new position in the garden.



The signal box diagram destined for the operating floor