



Outside the Box

St Albans Signal Box Preservation Trust

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Our Odyssey!

Many of our visitors on the Sunday of Heritage Open Weekend in September had previously visited the old cinema in London Road to look at its present state prior to its forthcoming restoration. During their visit they learnt that the cinema is to be known as 'The Odyssey' when it reopens. This set me wondering how much this title also related to the signal box. Wikipedia advises that 'in the English language as well as many others, the word *odyssey* has come to refer to an epic voyage'. Well our experiences since 2002 have certainly been epic! However, more to the point, the cinema website says that 'The Odyssey is not only a reference to film by honouring one of the world's greatest filmmakers, but it describes the quest, adventure and journey into the knowingly hazardous labyrinth of restoration'. That last phrase definitely rings bells for us and describes the twists and turns of our adventure and the trials and tribulations of dealing with the various authorities and the sheer effort required along the way. Hopefully the outcome for the cinema will be as successful as our odyssey has turned out to be.

Enclosed you will find some Christmas cards. These are complimentary for you to use to help spread the word about the Box amongst family and friends.

STOP PRESS: if any members would like to help man a Signal Box stand at the St Albans Model Railway Exhibition at the Alban Arena on 15th and 16th January please contact Keith on info@sigbox.co.uk or 01727 836131.

Richard Kirk



The Box open for visitors on the Sunday of Heritage Open Weekend.

Post v Email Newsletters

This is the first newsletter for some time that is being sent through the post to all members. The majority of the newsletters are now sent electronically which means of course that we are not sure that you actually receive them as the email may be directed to your spam folder. If you think you are missing newsletters do get in touch so we can rectify the problem (email Richard at the address below).

Merchandise for Sale

We have the usual and some 'new' merchandise for sale if you are stuck for ideas for Christmas presents! The stock includes mugs, cards, pencils, rubbers, books, build-your-own signal box, badges, track diagrams etc.

The new merchandise consists of a St Albans Signal Box 2011 calendar (a must have!) and 2 new Dapol OO wagons. The calendar (see over) is A4 size with a page per month. Each page consists of a picture of the Signal Box or the gardens or artefacts (half page) with the remaining half page for the dates. There is room to write a note on each day. All the photographs have been taken by members. The calendars are priced at £7.50 each with a 10% discount for purchases of 5 or more. A year round reminder of our achievements.



Our second Midland Railway lamp post has now been planted in the garden.

An archive view of our first lamp post as it was being taken from St Albans City Station in 1977 on its way to Geoff Woodward's front garden in Harpenden. Picture courtesy of Robin Hogg.

The wagons are a second run of the St Albans Coal Club 8 plank, this time fleet number 2 and a delightful T Pearson, St Stephens Brickworks 5 plank, fleet number 2 in white with mock brick load - see picture. Price £12 each plus £2 p&p.

There are also a limited number of men's and ladies' signal box polo shirts available.

Please contact Mary Webster on 01727 836131 with your orders as soon as possible.



Winners of the 2008 St Albans Civic Society Award

Newsletter produced by Richard Kirk. Please send items for inclusion to me at richardnkirk@hotmail.co.uk or contact me on 01727 860047



Another interesting photograph of the Box that again asks questions that perhaps some members can answer. The picture is undated and came from Stephen Ruff of the Buntingford Railway Society following the Society's recent visit. The toilet block appears to be in good condition and the Box is painted in two colours, so this predates the final all white colour scheme of the mid 1970s. The stock in the bay at the rear of the then Platform 1 is interesting. Is the leading vehicle a motorised unit or a driving trailer and in any case what was it doing in the bay? Close examination of the picture shows the headcode to read 3C01.

STEAM (AND DIESEL) PAST THE BOX

Two special trains are due past the Box on Saturday 4th December UK Railtours are planning to run from Bedford to Bath and back behind 'Tornado'. Pick up from St Albans is currently scheduled for 8.20am returning at 9.40pm. Details available from: www.ukrailtours.com.

Later in the morning the Hastings Diesels Limited 6 car DEMU is due into St Albans at 11.50am on its way from Hastings to Bedford and Bletchley. We are hoping to open the Box for visitors alighting at City station. The train is due to return to Hastings at 4.40pm. Details available from: www.hastingsdiesels.co.uk

CHRISTMAS PARTY!!

There will be a Christmas Party in the Signal Box on Saturday 4th December from 7.00pm. Drinks and nibbles will be served so please do come along and bring the family. There will not be a charge but be prepared to buy a calendar - perhaps! Please let Richard know if you are coming so that we can cater for the correct number - contact details on page 1.

'LOST RAILS' EXHIBITION

The long awaited exhibition at the St Albans Museum on Hatfield Road has now opened. It is due to continue until February. A number of items are on loan from the Signal Box collection as well as from some members individually. Full details on the Museum website: www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk

OPEN DAYS

As the Open Days continue over the winter, it seems opportune to remind members of the on-line system so you can sign up as a volunteer to help out. From the website click on 'members' then enter the username 'siguser' and password 'stalban' then add your name on your selected dates. If you don't have access to the internet please do come along anyway. The Open Days run from 2.00pm to 5.00pm

1958 TRAFFIC SURVEY

Howard Green has compiled a survey of the traffic booked to pass the Box in the summer of 1958. He has used the passenger and freight working timetables choosing Tuesday traffic to avoid any special or one off workings. The survey documents 255 separate movements during a 24 hour period of which only 140 were class A or B passenger trains. A copy of Howard's work is held in the Box.



The Trust's 2011 calendar - see page 1 for details.

COMMENTS on EARLIER ITEMS

A couple of members have written in about the signal box photograph that appeared in the last Newsletter.

Peter Surridge advised: The ground frame seen in the photograph on the back of the newsletter is identical to one that was installed to give access to the siding on the up side of the line. These frames were not brought into use until the commissioning of West Hampstead PSB. They each contained 3 levers and were as follows:-

Lever 1 - Release (blue over brown), Lever 2 - Main Line Points (black), Lever 3 - Siding Trap Points (black). After obtaining permission to use the frame from the signalman at West Hampstead, the operator would press a plunger that would electrically release lever 1. (This lever had a cut down handle). Once this was reversed, it in turn released lever 2 which then released lever 3. There were no shunt signals and movements were controlled by hand signals. The failings of this practise were to be shown within only a few weeks. I remember returning home after an early shift at my next box (Cricklewood Jn.), to find a class 45 loco derailed on the traps in front of the box! The ground frame on the up side together with the siding were taken out of use very soon after being brought into use. The up siding had mainly been used by the Red Star Parcels service which had been withdrawn about the same time as the re-signalling. The station staff at the time claimed that the frame had never been used since commissioning but I can not confirm this! The frame in the photo lasted a bit longer as it was used daily by the newspaper train but it was not too long afterwards that BR lost this traffic as well!

Peter Lawrence comments: The ground signal was reduced to one disc, from three as part of the changes made on 20/12/70 when St Albans North box closed. As these removed the crossover between the fast lines south of the siding points, the other two discs were no longer needed. (The newspaper platform also dated from this time, having previously been on the extreme right of the photo, needing a separate loco to shunt the van into it.) The ground frame shown was part of the colour light signalling arrangements, being released by West Hampstead box when access to the siding was required for news van movements. It became redundant when newspaper trains ceased to run in the 1990s. It was very rare to see a passenger coach in the siding; presumably it had been removed from a passing train having developed a fault. (I hope the signalbox can some time acquire copies of the relevant Weekly Notices which informed railway staff of signalling changes.)

St Albans Signal Box Preservation Trust is a company limited by guarantee registered in England No.4653488.

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