

OUTSIDE

THE BOX



Newsletter May 2012, Issue 28

St Albans Signal Box Preservation Trust www.tlr.ltd.uk/sigbox/home.eb email: info@sigbox.co.uk Tel: 01727-836131

All the world's a stage—even a signal box!

The next few months are going to be very busy at the signal box, not least next month when the Endpaper Theatre put on three presentations in the garden and 'box of their Dickens ghost story production 'Grave Expectations'. Tickets are available from the St Albans Tourist Information Office or on line—see the Maltings Arts Theatre website. Elsewhere there are details of the other events taking place during the summer. Not forgetting the Heritage Open Weekend coming up in September.

There has also been much activity since the last Newsletter and John Telford reports on this overleaf.

Since the last Newsletter and following my appeal for information relating to local railway staff past and present I have been fortunate to meet with a number of interesting people and record their reminiscences and view their photographs. All have given generously of their time and I hope to do some of this justice with a display for the Heritage Open Weekend. However, my quest for stories and information is not at any end and I would welcome the opportunity of meeting anyone else who could contribute to the collection.

Richard Kirk

Chairman's Words

It was good to meet so many of you at the A.G.M. and to hear your views as to how we should continue to develop the Signal Box both as a museum and local tourist attraction.

We have received our gifts from the National Railway Museum at York and research has already come up with the original location of the signal box shelf. It came from the Waterloo signal box on the City and Waterloo line at a time when this line was run by British Railways. The information has been passed back to the NRM so that they can complete their records. I would like to thank the staff of the National Railway Museum especially Russell Hollowood the Associate Curator (Railways) who has been a great help to us and we look forward to welcoming him to the box at some date in the future.

Work is now moving quickly to prepare our Midland Signal and hopefully if this wettest drought on record abates, we can get on with painting the box and preparing the cranks and pulleys which will eventually be used to operate the triple ground signal.

June looks an exciting month with the use of the box as a stage for a production of Grave Expectations, a series of ghost stories and also the return of our old favourite Oliver Cromwell, three visits in a very short period of time, see over and keep watching the web site for details.

I hope to see you on a Monday evening when you could learn to use the simulator, Wednesday afternoon, for a touch of painting or on one of our open days when you can chat to our visitors.

Tony Furse

120th Birthday Celebration

An extended opening of the 'box to mark its 120th anniversary will take place on Sunday 10th June from 10.00am to 5.00pm. Come and celebrate a great Midland Railway survivor and marvel at the sight of one of our signalmen operating the 'box as if trains were passing on all four lines. Refreshments will be available throughout the day.

BBQ - 7th July

This year's BBQ will be held on Saturday, 7th July from 2.00pm onwards. Food will be provided but please bring your own drinks. A donation will be sought on the day to cover the cost of the food. Friends and family are invited, but please let us know via email or phone (to Richard Kirk) how many are coming so we know how many to cater for. See you there!



Above, the display of totems from the collection of Richard Allen set up for the recent Enthusiasts' Day. Alongside these was a selection of smoke box number and shed plates and single line tokens from the Abbey Line - see below.



A close up of part of the signal box stairs showing the recently installed LMS metal plates. The aim is to source and place similar plates on all the steps. A Midland Railway plate has been placed at the top of the stairs.



Winners of the 2008 St Albans Civic Society Award



Winners of the 2010 Invensys Rail Signalling Award (Structures)

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

Steam past the 'box

Three steam specials are due to pass the 'box in the next few weeks, all booked as I write for 70013 'Oliver Cromwell'.

The first on 27th May is a returning excursion from Peak Rail at Matlock, not stopping at St Albans, due through about 8.30pm (first steam into St Pancras International). The second is on 5th June outwards to York picking up at St Albans at 9.10am (diesel return) and the final one is on 14th July outwards to Lincoln picking up at 9.00am (return into Kings Cross). All are being run by the Railway Touring Company.

Gleaned from the archives

Midland Railway Minute Book from November 1909: 'Minute 23993, that the lamp room on the down platform at St Albans be converted into a telegraph office (still in existence north of Victoria Street bridge) and that the Lamp Room be provided near the signal box at an estimated cost of £90.

Howard Green

An archive picture courtesy of Ken Allen showing St Albans 'Jinty' 47554 on one of the shed roads with the 'box in the background. Undated but probably taken in the 1950s before the toilet block was added. Note the shed exit signal on the right that was normally held in the off position

Howard Green

Why a Type 2A?

Have you wondered why St Albans South is referred to as a type 2A Midland Box and what were the other types and how did they differ from each other? If so there is a website with a very good introduction to Midland Boxes with illustrations of all the types and drawings of the window variations involved. The site belongs to Dave Harris and the home page is www.derby-signalling.org.uk. There is also a well illustrated article in Midland Record No.2 and the Midland Railway Trust house magazine 'The Wyvern' had a comprehensive survey of Midland 'boxes in issues 66—73 published between 1986 and 1988.

Enthusiast's Observation

The more observant may have noticed that Sandpit Lane bridge is Bridge 105, yet the next bridge on Sandridge Road is Bridge 107. where was No.106? This was a farm occupation bridge roughly midway between the other two, presumably for the farmer at Heath Farm on Bernard's Heath to get to his field on the other side of the track. It is believed that it was a masonry bridge and was built, like all the bridges on the London Extension at the opening of the line, to span four tracks even though there were only two on opening. It was probably demolished in the 1930s when the area began to be developed for housing. The keen eyed can still see a change in the vegetation on the down embankment where Bridge 106 once stood.

Howard Green

Progress at the 'box

Following the drought (still technically on), the atrocious rainy weather over the last few weeks has seen outside activity curtailed. This is disappointing as we were keen to make a start on re-painting the outside of the Box. Unfortunately, with all the rain we had a leak. The source has now been found and drain holes in the sliding window troughs have been bored to clear water building up. It would appear these weren't drilled when woodwork was replaced during the restoration – even though the problem hasn't manifested itself until the recent heavy rain.

Inside, however, we have been tidying up wiring, adding some more artefacts and lighting, and have re-painted the walls following the draught-proofing earlier.

The big news is that the long-awaited artefacts from the National Railway Museum have arrived. These include a Midland signal post, block shelf, finials, lever plates, and an assortment of cranks and other items of signalling equipment. The latter will help us in setting up new displays in the garden area.

The pictures show the unloading some of our new possessions, with volunteers suitably decked in hi-viz jackets and hard hats!

John Telford

Ed: the block shelf turns out to have come from the Waterloo end of the Waterloo and City Line and controlled entrance to and exit from the turn round and stabling sidings and the running lines towards Bank. The lever frame is now at the Great Cockcrow Railway in Surrey, the whereabouts of the diagram is at present unknown.

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

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A reminder of how much the St Albans railway scene has changed over the years. Compare this picture taken recently from the 'box with the one below from 60 years ago.



Above and below right the MR signal post and arm. Below left the W & C instrument shelf; the indicators were linked to points and ground shunting signals.

