

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Newsletter November 2015 Issue 42



Llandudno Station Signal Box pictured in the summer of 2014. Inset left: Steve Lake on the left with fellow relief signalman from 1979, Geoff Ryland. Inset right: the interior of Steve's box, the frame only extends about half the length of the box and has a number of spare white levers.



Above: the donated bridge sign on the garden fence. The missing right hand panel carried the legend 'Luton'. Below: a delightful Ian Allan postcard found recently in an antique shop in Whitby showing the Midland Pullman 'near Bedford', artwork by Vic Welch.



Two pause One!

'Train out of Section' or Signalman goes into retirement! After 40 years of railway service our member Steve Lake has retired from the railway. He was one of a number of relief signalmen that were drafted onto the Midland Main Line in 1979 to work the boxes in their last days. Steve was billeted at The Pea Hen and worked the next to last shift at St Albans South in December 1979. More recently he has been pulling the levers at Llandudno station box in North Wales. We wish him well and hope to see him regularly at the box in the future.

From time to time we have had items donated to us anonymously and wonder about their source and motive. A recent example of this is the large BRITISH RAIL sign that is now on the fence in the north east corner. The mystery of this one was solved during one of our open days when one of the visitors recounted the tale of having to attend a bridge strike a few months ago in Luton and had to dispose of a large sign that had been dislodged. A moment's thought resulted in the sign being slipped over our fence and left for us to display. There was a second part of the sign but this had been too badly damaged in the strike to be of any use.

Richard Kirk

Chairman's Words

The year has seen a lot of visits from serving and retired signalmen all of whom without exception have sung our praises and especially commented on the enthusiastic way the signal box is presented by the volunteer staff even if their knowledge of signalling is limited, The attitude of 'I don't know but I will find somebody who does' really goes down well with the professionals.

As a tourist attraction we have done very well with ever increasing numbers both on open days and on group visits. The groups span the ages from The University of the Third Age at the upper end to the Beavers at six or seven years of age at the lower end. It is a testament to the volunteers that both groups can leave having had an enjoyable experience. Our use of MumsNet for publicity prior to Heritage Open Weekend once again brought in large numbers of families, a total of 630 visitors, many of whom were returning from earlier visits in the year and one or two who came both days. It is a hard weekend for those manning the box but satisfying when you see the happy faces at the end of their visit.

An extra this year was our support of the Smallford Station group who celebrated the 150th anniversary of the opening of the Hatfield to St Albans railway line. Our contribution was a stand at London Road Station along with local residents groups, bands, singers and dancers, a good day was had and we wish them well on the attempt to save the station building.

May I wish you all a very happy Christmas and I look forward to meeting you all again in the New Year.

Tony Furse

A selection of Signal Box cards is being sent to our paid-up members. Please use them to spread the word about the Signal Box. If you don't want to receive them in the future, please let Mary know (mary.webster@btinternet.com)



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 richardnkirk@hotmail.co.uk or contact me on 01727 860047

Christmas Party !!

There will be a Christmas Party in the Signal Box on Saturday 12th December from 7.00pm. Drinks and nibbles will be served, please do come along and bring the family. Please let Richard Kirk know if you are coming - contact details overleaf.

Steam past the box

The Railway Touring Company are once again running their pre-Christmas trip from Victoria to York via St Albans. This year it takes place on Saturday 19th December calling at St Albans at approximately 8.00am. At the time of writing the train is booked to be hauled northbound by 46233 Duchess of Sutherland (the return is diesel hauled). For up dates please check their website.

Spotter's Observation

Regular as clockwork Bedford's Stanier 8F 48177 would clank through the up slow platform at 9.13pm with the 7.35pm Wilshampstead to Brent Loaded Wagon Sidings brick train. However one winter's evening it passed through on the up fast piloting a Jubilee on the Thames-Clyde Express. Presumably the Jubilee had failed and 48177 was commandeered to provide the traction whilst the Jubilee continued to produce steam heating for the carriages.

Howard Green



The completed finial display mentioned in John's report below. The far right finial came from Radlett station and the others are signal tops.

January openings

There will be a change to our opening dates for January. We will be opening on the weekend of the 15th / 16th to coincide with the Chiltern Model Railway exhibition at The Arena and the following weekend, 22nd / 23rd, for the Residents First event. Because of these events the box WILL NOT be open on the 2nd Sunday (10th). We will revert to our normal opening dates in February.

Recent Events

The new tent set up on the lawn at the start of Heritage Open Weekend with photographic displays, posters and model railway equipment.

The tent once again in use, this time underneath London Road bridge for the Hatfield to St Albans Railway 150 years event.

Trust members recently enjoyed a special open day at the North London Society of Model Engineers railway at Colney Heath. A repeat visit in 2016 is planned.



Progress at the 'box

After a busy season, it's that time of year again when the garden needs a good clear down. This year we've had it done professionally by a Member, who was also able to arrange for the considerable pile of cuttings to be disposed of – much more than would go in our two wheelie bins! We will also obtain advice on what else needs to be done during the year and ways in which we can ensure a colour display over a longer period from Spring to late Autumn. We will continue to cover the regular garden maintenance ourselves.

As it's now some years since the inside of the 'box was originally painted, we have obtained the special (and expensive!) fire resistant paint and started a re-paint upstairs. Downstairs will follow. This is a useful inside job when outside work gets colder during the Winter! However, the roof finials have leaked a little and we still need to shin up the roof to seal them before we can finish painting inside.

Michael has now finished the outside finial display, which looks great and colourful by the gate. Work on the simulator soldiers on by Rob L and Jim. The rest of us are convinced they are losing it as they keep referring to (what they say are) highly technical terms like the 'raspberry pie'!

Further pictures have been displayed in the loo downstairs, which increasingly looks more 'museum' than toilet. Work continues progressively on restoring lamps, and yet another was presented to us whilst displaying at London Road Station during the recent event to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the opening of the St. Albans – Hatfield railway line.

A mini celebration took place on a recent Monday evening when wi-fi seems to have become available to us via the station! This will help us keep track of any 'special' trains passing the 'box.

Feel free to join us any Monday evening from 7.30pm for our Members' night, or Wednesdays from about 12 noon onwards, for our work/maintenance party.

John Telford