

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Newsletter August 2016 Issue 45



'SEVEN HUNDRED!'

Not the score on Strictly Come Dancing but the cry that goes up at the 'box when one of the new Siemens built Thameslink units comes into view. After many months of night time and a few day time trial runs from Three Bridges Depot we are now seeing these units on a regular basis. Whilst these are novel and attracting attention it is a reminder that soon the variety that we are seeing past the 'box will be no more. Gone will be the venerable 319s, the later 377s and more recent 387s. Gone will be the old Thameslink livery, the Southern green and Gatwick Express red. Instead there will be uniform white 700s! All the more reason for us to maintain St Albans South 'box and the garden as a colourful oasis and a reminder of how things looked and worked in the past.

Richard Kirk



Our archive shot this time comes from Howard Green's collection and follows the recent passage of Flying Scotsman through St Albans. This view from Hatfield Road bridge show the loco, numbered LNER 4472, passing St Albans North 'box (closed in 1970) at 10.48am on 29th May 1965 hauling the RCTS East Midlander No 8 Railtour. This train left Nottingham at 8.20am and ran via Clapham Junction (for the Transport Museum) and Swindon (for the Works) and arrived back in Nottingham a 10.48pm.

Chairman's Words

I expect a lot of you watched the BBC4 program called 'Train Spotting Live' and were probably as disappointed as me at the poor quality, a good idea wasted. What a lot of you don't know is that the Signal box was in discussion with 'Plum Productions', the company who made the program, about having it based at the box with James May instead of Jon Snow but having seen the final result I think we had a lucky escape, although the publicity may have been good.

It was great to see so many of you at the annual BBQ at the box and once again we had the sun out all afternoon, good food, good weather and good chat. As a bonus we also received some new artefacts to display. Some early architectural pieces from Harpenden including a coping stone dated '1868' with two cast supports from the footbridge and ten signal indicators plus a plunger. Thank you very much to the donors, it is always great to be able to have new artefacts particularly if it enables us to change the displays that the visitors come to see. Still to come we have the signal box name board from Radlett on loan from Richard Allen and in October we will be putting up a row of telegraph poles complete with wires. If any of you have a spare telegraph pole we are in need of one other.

Heritage Open Weekend is nearly upon us with an expectation of some 400 plus visitors so if you think you could give some time, no experience needed just an enthusiasm for what we have achieved and an interest in railways, please let us know. We have been given an 00 gauge railway to put up over HoD and will be looking for somebody to run this over both days so come on you modellers your help will be needed.

See you over the weekend 10th 11th September.

Tony Furse



Scenes from last month's BBQ



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

Heritage Open Days

Once again the box will be open for the Saturday and Sunday of the Heritage Open Weekend on 10th and 11th of September. To make sure that this is once again a success for the Trust, members are asked to volunteer to help over the weekend. We need sufficient members to be present to show visitors around, answer their questions and ensure that they have an enjoyable and safe time inside the box and in the garden. If you can help even for just a few hours on one of the days please contact me on mary.webster@btinternet.com or phone 01727 836131. I will be drawing up the rotas and will allocate you a role; please indicate if you have a preference for any particular area or role.

Mary Webster

Commuter's Tales

I had a footplate ride on the 5.18pm St Pancras to Harpenden (see Outside the Box No.40 for earlier note on the 5.18pm) one evening (in the 1950s) and was surprised by the fireman's firing method. He had a huge lump of coal about 3 feet long which he wedged in the firehole. Periodically he would give it a kick until after several miles it all fell into the firebox. So much for the recommended method of firing the tank engines – fist sized lumps, little and often!

Kentish Town's driver Harry Edwards once brought the 10.30pm St Pancras - Bedford to St Albans in 20 minutes – but then it was a Stanier Class 5 with only 3 coaches!

Howard Green

The Railway Printers

In 1960 my active trainspotting days waned when I left school and started work as an apprentice Compositor with McCorquodale & Company Ltd. overlooking Euston Station – now the Kennedy Hotel!

The Company was started by George McCorquodale in 1841 as a stationers in Liverpool (still there apparently). In 1846 he opened a printing works in Newton le Willows, Lancs. This was on the back of the rapidly emerging railway network and increasing demand for railway posters, travel guides and timetables – which I spent much time working on – where was Kyle of Lochalsh?

McCorquodale became the main printer for a number of railways, and further factories were opened in Euston, Glasgow, Wolverton, Manchester, Crewe and Glasgow. The Company latterly moved into security and cheque printing, and still exists today in Derby under new ownership.

After my apprenticeship I was fortunate to be able to move into computer typesetting/film make-up – the first major development in printing technology since Gutenberg started printing with moveable type in 1439.



John Telford

The composing room in 1886 - a bit before John's time with the company!

The new speed restriction sign, repainted level crossing sign, and the working LED colour lights and theatre indicator



Progress at the 'box

Private visits have been in full swing, in particular with Beavers (6-8), Cubs (8-11), and Scouts (11+). Groups have been up to 27 plus Leaders, so quite a handful! We are hosting the S&T guys from the Bluebell Railway towards the end of August, and hope to be able to arrange a reciprocal visit to see their 'boxes.

Artefacts-wise much has been happening: our arrowed speed sign – skilfully amended to 25mph. by Michael Hodgson, is restored and erected in the garden and our LMS compound, highlighted in the last Newsletter, is now resplendent on its own shelf in the Museum – thanks to Michael W. The Blue Pullman horns were successfully tested at Oaklands Steam Fair - thanks to Jim and his son – and as testified to by many newly-deaf visitors! Tony was the main operator and managed to make several babies cry, albeit, it proved their hearing was OK! Highfield Country Fair and most of St. Albans also heard the horns.

We have erected and creosoted two telegraph poles to take yard lamps: one behind the 'box steps, and one in the work area between the 'box and the lamp hut. The latter will hopefully also take the Blue Pullman horns, with the workings in the lamp hut. We have now also been able to arrange for the other three poles to be erected with cross-arms, insulators and wires.

The coffin carrier, shed and paraffin barrel have been re-painted, and the wooden running board in front of the 'box renewed, including non-slip patches. The aluminium level crossing sign on the sleeper wall is also nearly restored.

Our new LED signals are now erected, wired up and showing to the public in sequence (sun glasses advised) – thanks mainly to Rob L, Jim and John W. Garden growth has been at its peak, requiring much attention. The model railway has been widened to soften the curves, enabling trains to progress easier. Time for a visit – also to see the new Class 700 passenger units.

John Telford