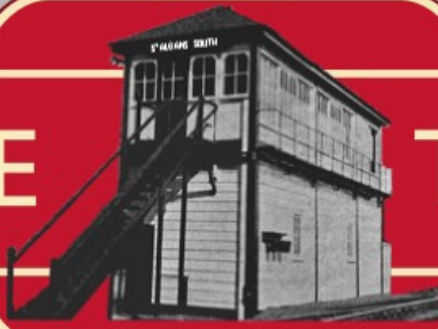


130 Years old

1892 to 2022

OUTSIDE



THE BOX

Newsletter November 2022 Issue 70

What is the right colour?

Colour schemes for liveries will always be surrounded by debate and controversy; for example the recent repainting of a steam locomotive in purple to celebrate the Jubilee generated much heated discussion (the loco is now to be repainted in matt black another colour scheme that it never carried previously). Similar debates have recently taken place amongst volunteers at the box regarding a newly donated artefact. We have generously been given a board with the original letters on from St Albans Abbey signal box. These were rescued after the box was demolished and mounted on a new board as the original had rotted. The donor had painted the letters maroon and the backing board white as that was his interpretation of how he found it. However subsequent investigations threw up the likelihood that the letters may have been white on a black or maroon back board. There is also the possibility that during its lifetime the colour scheme was something different as seen on boxes elsewhere on the LMR of British Railways. What to do? The majority verdict was for white on maroon but others may differ! The board will shortly be on display in the box and a picture will be included in the next newsletter.

Richard Kirk



The new RailCam cameras in the south eastern corner of the site as mentioned below by Tony.

Chairman's Words

A few years ago a visitor to the box suggested that we would be an ideal location for a live video feed for a company called RailCam. I contacted them but as we did not have an internet connection and our box was a listed building they were not interested. Earlier this year we were contacted by Railnet who subsequently ran a four hour live feed from the box in August which I hope some of you were able to watch. The internet connection was not a problem as they brought their own, their cameras and microphones, of which there were a lot, were not permanent and so did not compromise our listing and surprisingly some 2500 people from around the world logged in to see trains passing the box. This success and improvement in the internet, especially 4G and 5G, encouraged RailCam to come back to us with a proposal to put up two cameras mounted on a post attached to our boundary fence with their own internet connection. This has now gone live and can be seen if you subscribe to their web site at a cost of £30 per year. We had hoped that at least one of the cameras would be free but alas not. They have over 100 cameras spread across the country including many heritage lines, looking at them makes you realise how busy the Midland Main Line at St Albans is compared to the other lines radiating out from London particularly those going Northwards. As part of the package we are now able to display in real time the departure board at St Albans Station and the track diagram from Radlett to Harpenden with real time train information, something new for our visitors.

Once again this year we opened on a Wednesday afternoon in half term and what a success it was with nearly 100 visitors. We will do this again.

If I don't get the opportunity of meeting you before Christmas I hope you enjoy the break and look forward to a better new year.

Tony Furse



Winners of the 2008 St Albans Civic Society Award



Winners of the 2010 Invensys Rail Signalling Award (Structures)



Winners of the 2017 Mayor of St Alban's Recognition Award



Peter Parker, Chairman of BR from 1976 to 1983. Tim refers to him in his extract below.

CHRISTMAS PARTY TIME

We will be holding a Christmas Party at the box this year, the first time since 2019. All members and partners are welcome. It will take place on Friday 9th December commencing at 7.30pm. In view of the limited space on the operating floor we may have to limit the number of attendees. Therefore if you would like to join in the festivities please let Richard know as soon as possible and in any case by 30 November.

Email him on: richardnkirk@hotmail.co.uk

Or phone on: 0755282664

My Time at St Albans – Part Two

Trust member Tim Stevens continues with his memories of his time working for the railway in St Albans in the 1970s

Chairman's visit

One of the highlights of my time at St Albans was the visit of the BR Chairman Peter Parker. I was privileged to meet him when he called in one evening at the height of the rush hour. I thought then, and have confirmed my view in later years, that Parker was one of the best - if not the best - Chairman that BR ever had. He skilfully steered the organisation through difficult and cashstrapped times.

Parker boarded the prestigious "evening commuter flyer" at St Albans. This loco-hauled train from St Pancras to Bedford called only at St Albans and Luton, and it carried many influential passengers who were not slow to complain about any little defect. Rumour has it that Parker entered a compartment and asked the passengers if they were happy with the service. One commuter said "no - the seats are always filthy and covered in dust". Parker politely asked him to rise from his seat and proceeded to beat the seat cushion vigorously, producing very little dust. "Well, that seems to be nice and clean" said Parker (we heard later that the train had been specially cleaned!).

"BBC slow"

Talking of fussy commuters, I recall one morning when a train pulled out of the station just as a passenger ran frantically down the stairs. The furious passenger rounded on the Polish porter and accused him of letting the train go early, pointing to the clock as evidence. The porter mumbled something to the effect that the clock was wrong, whereupon the passenger said "the train went early by my watch, and I always set my watch by the BBC in the morning!" "Ha ha ha ...BBC slow!" exclaimed the porter in response. It was little incidents like that which made us laugh and helped the team spirit, although we wouldn't get away with it today when customer service is (quite rightly) paramount.

Progress at the 'box

These updates started in 2011, so 11 years of Progress at the 'Box, and we're all 11 years older, but hopefully still active!

Gardening continues with David and Adrian planting new items, and a number of us hacking back this year's production. Michael H, Tony and Michael W continue work on the Slotted Signal, risking life and limb as acorns descend on them from the growing oak tree above the work area! Rodney has continued expertly reforming the broken base of our fourth lamp post.

Our tree surgeons have not reappeared, and the Station footbridge builders continue, so no progress on importing the steel for our additional shed platform. The wooden base of the 'Beware of Trains' sign rotted, so a concrete replacement was postcreted in and Martin has repainted the sign. Jim continues upgrading the 'box wiring, now including power for our new Railcam cameras. John W has been mending various electrical items.

Our exhibition photo displays disappeared from Platform 4 cycle shed. Detective Tony hunted and eventually found them hidden on the Station. Apparently BT Police chased a gang of robbers (complete with drugs) who they eventually found and arrested hiding behind our photos! So, any hope of window vinyls is probably scuppered in the interests of crime prevention!

A bunch of us recently spent a happy day at the Epping Ongar Railway, including visits to their 'boxes. Hopefully we can have a further outing next year. In addition to Open Days, private visits to the 'Box included a moped club, more cubs and guides, special needs groups and a Luton U3A Transport Group. Private Visits have now been completed for 2022, so thanks to all who have volunteered. Anyone fancy giving me a break from organising them?

We've been re-ordering some of our merchandising: Corporate wear, T-shirts; baseball caps; pencils; souvenir tickets and Train Driver badges. Oh, and you won't be relieved to hear that the cess pit has nearly filled up again!

John Telford