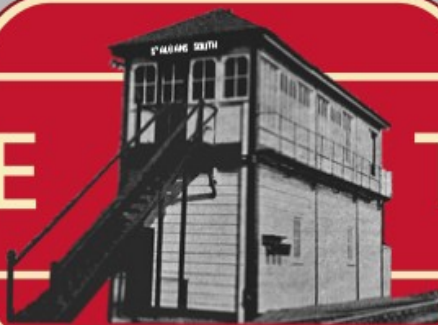


130 Years old

1892 to 2022

OUTSIDE



THE BOX

Newsletter February 2023 Issue 71



A suitably seasonal picture of the 'box taken either just before or shortly after closure in 1979. The final white and blue decoration was looking very tired. Interesting to note the large advertising hoardings still in place behind the north end of the 'box. Photo: courtesy of Peter Cane

A Busy Time

What with a change of Chairman (see below), the forthcoming AGM and a new acquisition (see page 4) there seems to be plenty going on at the 'box at the moment. This is in addition to the continued restoration of the North Eastern Railway slotted signal, maintenance of the working exhibits and the inevitable need to keep pace with the steadily re-awakening garden. These activities are carried out by Trust members who willingly volunteer their time and effort to keep the 'box and garden in good shape for our many visitors. New volunteers are always welcome on the regular Wednesday afternoon working sessions. There's always plenty of lively chatter and, of course, tea and biscuits. Why not give it a try and come along and join in.

Richard Kirk

Chairman's Words

Twelve years ago I volunteered to stand in for six months as Chairman while Keith Webster the chairman at the time took a break as he started a new project. The moral of the story is, of course, never volunteer! When I look back into the archive it is difficult to believe how bare the garden and museum were. Haven't we been lucky? Over the years we have received so many gifts, we have taken out on semi permanent loans some real gems from museums and because our finances have been well managed we have been able to purchase items to complete and enhance our displays. None of this of course would have been possible without you, the trustees, the members and volunteers who have supported me so well over this time. I know that if you had your way we would see far more of you on work and open days but just being a member and supporting what we do gives us the courage to go forward and try new displays, new technology and to engage with our visitors.

Its time for me to pass the baton on to John Telford who I am sure will enjoy his spell as chairman as much as I have. Thank you all. This has been a great ride.

Tony Furse

Annual General Meeting

The Trust's AGM will take place on Monday 6th March at St Paul's Church, Blandford Road, St Albans, AL1 4JP at 7.30pm (room available from 7.00pm). All members are invited. Formal notification of the meeting and the proposed agenda accompany this newsletter. It is not known at this stage if there will be a guest speaker.



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

2023 Subscriptions are now due

Thank you for your support over the last year. It is now time to renew your membership for the year to 31 January 2024. The cost is just a minimum of £10, so we do hope you will continue to support the work of the Trust and our volunteers.

You will have received a renewal notice by email, or by post with this newsletter. As a reminder, you may pay by bank transfer to the Signal Box account at Metro Bank - sort code 23-05-80, account number 17746944, with your name as reference. Alternatively, you may pay by cheque payable to St Albans Signal Box Preservation Trust, and send directly to me at 20 Flavian Close, St Albans, AL3 4JX.

Several members have already renewed, including some by standing order, so, thank you and you have nothing more to do.

Rob Little

My Time at St Albans – Part Three

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

Philosophical ticket collector

One of the regular ticket collectors turned out to be a great amateur philosopher! I suppose standing for hours at the barrier observing passengers come and go had honed his observational skills. I still recall his oft-repeated phrase “Tim - we are all slaves to a nefarious system”, by which I think he meant that we were all “wage slaves”, condemned to a boring existence. He was always worth a few minutes’ erudite conversation when I was passing, which was a refreshing change from some of the other staff whose vocabulary and general awareness of life around them was far more limited!

Stopping of trains by signals

Due to the age and general decrepit state of the DMU fleet, failures were common. This always seemed to happen at the height of the morning peak, resulting in long gaps in the local service to London whilst a succession of expresses would fly past on the Up Fast line. Soon, there would be a sea of angry commuters banging on my door demanding a train to London. When I was new to the job, I adopted the correct procedure and rang the Control office to request that an express be stopped to pick up my passengers. The response was always the same: “we can’t do that, it’s not allowed; they will have to wait for the next Up local”. So I soon learnt to use subterfuge; I would phone the signal box and get them to stop an Up express at the platform starting signal. I would announce over the PA that the next train to London would be on platform 2 [the platform numbering was different in those days], and a swarm of grateful commuters would scramble over the footbridge and board the train, much to the disgust of the long-distance passengers already on the train. With the train safely gone and peace restored, I would brace myself for a phone call from Control: “why was the Up express stopped at your station?”. “I don’t know”, I replied, “it was stopped at signals and people just got on, there was nothing I could do”. Control would then phone the signalman with the same question, but no doubt my colleague in the box would have his answer ready! Those were the days when a little local initiative could help the passengers with minimal effect on overall punctuality; I guess it’s much harder to do that sort of thing on today’s railway.

Progress at the 'box

‘Rain, rain go away’ has been our War Cry these last weeks! Following last year’s drought, weather patterns seem to be reversing themselves. Our lawn re-seeding at the end of November amazingly saw healthy grass growing in early December, due to the mild temperatures experienced. If the rain stops we’ll be mowing the lawn shortly!

Rain of another kind befell us after the freezing weather and thaw just before Christmas. A flexible water pipe to the upstairs sink failed and after a hefty mopping up and drying out project, John W effected a repair. We then discovered the leak had been occurring for some time and John also replaced a short piece of rotted floorboard. Amazingly it was around three inches thick – the floor presumably designed to support the weight of the lever frame.

Our film production team, headed up by Steph and Les have commenced producing some short videos on what’s been happening at the ‘box, in order to add some freshness to the Website – so have a regular look. One of them includes the craning in of part of the new footbridge at the station. This was expensively delayed when the huge crane broke down twice. Two further weekends with line possessions became necessary, and the grand opening should occur shortly.

Tony has superbly restored our St Albans Abbey ‘box sign, now displayed downstairs, and two more donated home signal arms are yet to be displayed. Les found out that we featured in an American railway group magazine – The Western Connecticut Manifest – see next page. In spite of bad weather our December public opening saw 22 visitors, and we saw 25 in January.

John Telford

Recent acquisitions



Two recently acquired artefacts have been the signal box board letters from St Albans Abbey 'box and a stop signal arm that was previously located at Neilsons Sidings at Wellingborough. The letters have been repainted along with the non original backing board and they are now on display in the museum area below the Hatfield No.2 diagram. The signal arm is yet to be allocated a permanent place. The photo below shows the bracket on which it was located – the armless post on the left. 'Peak' 45134 passing on 30 August 1982 with the signal box on the left of the shot.



Across the 'pond'

Towards the end of last year we received an email from the editor of the WestCon Manifest newsletter in USA. This is the voice of the West Connecticut Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society. The Chapter maintains the SoNo Switch Tower (signal box in our terms) Museum in Norwalk, Connecticut (formally the New Haven Railroad Signal Station No 44). Their latest newsletter contained a piece about St Albans South as one of their members had been in St Albans in 2022 visiting relatives and had found the Signal Box but not on one of our open days. The newsletter contained a number of St Albans South pictures and details of our restoration and development that closely follows their own experiences. As a result of this we will now be exchanging newsletters and have encouraged their members to contact us if they are in the UK so that we can arrange for them to visit the box. Their website is www.westctrnhs.org that also has a link to the Museum website. Another website to visit is <http://position-light.blogspot.com/2013/08/photos-ss44-berk-and-sonotomo.html> this has detailed information about the Tower and includes a video of a 16 lever movement operation that was required to move a branch train across 4 main line tracks!



A dingy view of the ticket collector's booth in the old City Station where Tim Steven's philosophical colleague would deliver his observations on the passengers and life in general.

New Haven Railroad Signal Station #44 was open in 1896 and closed around 1986 and is now open to the public as the SoNo Switch Tower Museum. Norwalk is a north eastern suburb of New York. The active railway in front of the Tower is four track like ours with the added feature of a branch line that goes north to Danbury.



New Signal Box Videos

To go with our new handle (that's a name to easily find us) on Youtube "@SIGBOX", we have now published three new short videos since New Year; one on the new passenger bridge, a second on our livestream on Railcam and a third on new acquisitions at the museum. The videos have been kindly filmed by Steph South and narrated by Tony, John Telford and Richard. These accompany the videos we have published since 2020 where we have now had over 65,000 views and gained 434 subscribers. Watch out for more videos in the future, give us a like and subscribe to our channel. It does help get our message out to a wider audience.

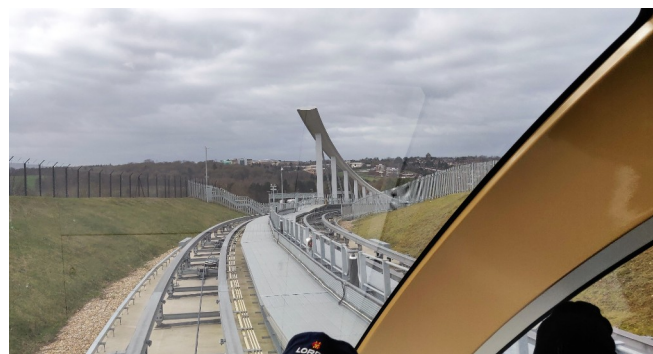
Les O'Leary

Stop Press

Two late news entries are pictured below. Firstly a double arm London & North Western Railway signal and secondly one of the newest guided transit facilities that is due to begin public service locally in the very near future.



Shown left is our new signal in its present position in a garden in Woking, Surrey. It has been left to us by an enthusiast in his will together with a sum of money to assist us in its removal and subsequent re-erection in the signal box garden. It is complete with spectacle glasses, weight bars and lamps. These signals were a LNWR economy used on minor lines especially at passing loops. The starting signal at each end of the loop also accommodated the home signal from the opposite direction. It was deemed to be local knowledge that trains in the loop stayed at the platform and did not pull forward until the starting signal was off. Had they pulled forward to the starting signal they would have fouled the points to the loop. This arrangement therefore necessitated only two posts instead of four. The picture on the right illustrates this well with the train set well back at the platform with the signal at danger. Picture copyright of *A Pictorial Record of LNWR Signalling* by Richard D. Foster.



Four pictures of the new Luton DART (Direct Air-Rail Transit) taken during volunteer testing runs on 1st February. Clockwise: approaching Luton Airport Parkway DART station alongside the railway station; closing in on the bridge over the A1081 dual carriageway; pulling into the Parkway station and the unit about to leave the platform at the Airport terminal. photos: Richard Kirk