

131 Years old

1892 to 2023

OUTSIDE



THE BOX

Newsletter November 2023 Issue 74



HELLO OLD FRIENDS!!

The picture on the right shows one old friend passing the Box last month. A rail-tour from the East Midlands to St Pancras and return is seen on its way back north. The front power car was in an Inter City livery whilst the rear was in the old Midland Main Line colours. A second old friend is due to pass the Box on Thursday 23 November when Jubilee 4-6-0 45596 *Bahamas* calls to pick-up on its way from Ealing to Nottingham. The Railway Touring Company website quotes a time of 8.31am but check carefully nearer the time as it also shows the train taking 2 hours to get from Ealing to St Albans!

Richard Kirk

Chairman's Words

Another busy year heading towards its end, and, as ever, with much having happened. David Smith has stepped down as a Trustee. We'd like to thank him for his services, and trust that he will retain his connection with the Box. Our Volunteer Day in May showed some promise, but seems unfortunately to have fizzled out, so more important succession recruiting needed. Other options being explored are to use Company Volunteer and Scout Badge work days at the Box - fancy a day's volunteering yourself? With several regulars ailing we felt it necessary to bring in outside contractors to complete some key jobs that needed doing, eg. heavy gardening and carpentry. We have approached Network Rail regarding the renewal of our Lease in 2031 and additional space for a future possible Visitor Centre, and are waiting their response.

Thanks to Tony and team we now have a fourth working signal in the garden, and they have now started work on restoring the LNWR signal. A recent breakthrough into local schools saw 60 children from Mandeville School visit on a local history project. All this keeps us young as we get older! Do come to the Christmas Social if you can.

John Telford

CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

We plan to hold the Christmas Social evening at the Signal Box on Friday 8th December from 7.30pm. All members and partners are welcome. 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



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

Heritage Open Weekend a success

Despite the exceptionally hot weather during the weekend this year's HODs were very successful for the Trust with 440 visitors across the two days. With displays of local station totems and signal box boards, a huge collection of 00 gauge Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends models running in the marquee and the ever popular ride on railway in the car park there was much to keep the adults and children engaged. Notable visitors over the weekend included Rodney Chabot from the USA and some of his family on the Saturday and local MP Daisy Cooper on the Sunday. Rodney is a member of our 'sister' organisation in Connecticut that has restored a switch tower (signal box) that is open to the public. Unfortunately Rodney fell ill shortly after visiting the Box and this delayed his return to the States. We wish him well in his recovery. Daisy Cooper could not resist the temptation to pull the yellow No 1 lever!



Welcome

A warm welcome to the following new members who have joined the Trust in recent months:

Sidney Coade from St Albans, Paul Hailes from Crawley and Phil Roberts from Luton

Progress at the Box

For once the weather seems to have been kind to us over the last few months on Wednesdays for our regular working party days, which has allowed some good progress on our list of things to do outside.

As has been detailed elsewhere in this issue, the ex-North Eastern Railway slotted signal has now been connected to the Midland ground frame and is fully working (certainly well worth a visit if you've not been to the Box recently). No peace for the wicked though, as the next job for the signal restoration team (the ex-Warrington LNWR signal) is already in the restoration area awaiting its turn for some TLC!!!

To free up the location for the slotted signal, the triple 'dolly' ground signal was moved on to the garden area, taking the opportunity to repaint at the same time. This is now awaiting re-connection to the London Midland ground frame, which has had an extra lever added (thanks to Jim and Laurie) to allow our visitors to 'pull' this signal once again. John W's attempt to re-wire the 'dolly' and the Midland Lower Quadrant signal on the lawn were thwarted initially as it was found that the electricity supply cable was not suitable, which necessitated a full re-wire back to the source, including a new 'cable tunnel' under the lawn.

For those who haven't been to the Box recently we have now acquired 3 new picnic tables for the garden area, replacing a couple of tables, which had seen better days, giving us increased space for people to sit. Martin has been busy repainting the remaining benches around the site, along with other railway signs and the level crossing gates.

In addition, the wooden ramp in front of the Box, was replaced, as the old one had become rotten and unsafe. Thanks Donato. Next on the list is the replacement of the Signal Box window balcony boards, which have also become rotten and unsafe.

Hopefully by the time you read this, our annual autumn garden clear-down will be complete. This year we have had the added assistance of Elizabeth Bell, who joined us on a Wednesday as part of a volunteer day from her day job at Churchill Group. Many thanks to Elizabeth and her employer.

As always, many thanks to our regular volunteers, without whom there would be no progress at the Box. Within this issue of 'Outside the Box' you will find the current 'To Do List'. As you can see there are many jobs (large and small) which need doing. If after looking at the list, you feel inspired and can help (even 1 hour helps to spread the workload), please come along on a Wednesday (2-4pm) or get in touch. It is only down to our volunteers and their hard work that we can keep the Box and its grounds looking as good as they do.

Adrian Wootton

THE 'TO DO LIST'

On a regular basis Adrian Wootton produces an up date of the Trust's list of job either in hand, that need doing or have recently been finished. This list is usually circulated to the small band of regular volunteers. It is now planned to include the list from time to time in the newsletter to widen its audience to the whole membership. The latest list is shown below. Although many of the items have been allocated to various volunteers to 'champion', these details have been excluded in this version. If any members would like to assist with any of these projects please contact Adrian via the Trust website or pop in on one of the open days coming up or on a Wednesday afternoon when there are usually members on site.

1st August, 2023

Indicators: **New items in red**, * = in Hand

1. *Slotted signal - Now fully restored and connected to lever frame. Needs attention to the ladder.
2. *Recondition and paint lamp top for 4th Lamp Column
3. Link speaker to Station Announcer's console, and develop script
4. *Parcel Scales need repainting
5. 'Off' + 'CD/RA' indicators + 2-Aspect Signal - to repair. Leave until 4th Lamp Post sorted
6. Ship in steel and raise platform over slope at NE end; erect shed thereon
7. Arrange for Master Clock to be repaired
8. Determine where to hang Home Signal Arm, plus another with Spectacle Plate
9. *Prepare re-print of Handbook, subject to realistic printing costs
10. Telegraph wires need tightening
11. *Two speed restriction Signs need re-painting
12. One upper light in Museum needs replacing - consider all on same bulbs
13. Restore LNWR Double Signal - Metalwork has been removed, moved to restoration area
14. LNWR Ground Frame needs re-paint
15. Treat 3 new picnic tables with preservative
16. *Replace noticeboard by gate
17. *Investigate feasibility of locating visitor centre on 2 south parking spaces - thoughts on layout requested
18. * Electrical PAT Testing required
19. Connect triple 'dolly' ground signal to lever frame
20. Clean front of Signal Box
21. *Crossing gates by car park space need re-painting - ongoing
22. Midland Ground frame needs re-painting.
23. Elstree Tunnel sign needs back board replacing and re-painting
24. Network rail lineside access signs to be installed
25. **Signal Box window sill needs re-painting**
26. **Replace gravel by museum entrance**
27. **Install London Underground junction indicator signal.**
28. **Replace signalbox balcony**

NB. Other regular jobs, eg. gardening are ongoing

Completed Recently:

Electric supply to triple 'dolly' and Midland Lower Quad signal rewired - John W

Garden Benches re-painted

Slotted Signal connected to lever frame

Road fence repaired / re-treated

Security Cameras installed and connected

New permanent supply 'double socket' installed upstairs for security cameras

Winter draws on!

A reminder that we have now entered our winter season of Sunday open days. For the four months of November to February we will only be open to the public on the second Sunday each month. With the darker late afternoons the Signal Box and garden take on a different look with all the various lamps coming into their own with a glorious display. Don't forget to come along and enjoy the sights.

The North Eastern Railway Slotted Signal – Part Two

As promised in the last edition we are now able to complete the story of the NER slotted signal now that it has been erected in the garden and is in regular use by our visitors.

A Tale of Two Signals – one up, one to go!

In April 2022 a party set off from St Albans to collect a NER slotted signal abandoned in a garden in Sheffield. With the help of trolleys and brute force the signal was finally placed on a trailer and returned to St Albans where a careful examination of its condition could be started. The metal work looked too good to be good although seized but the wood work was in far worse condition than had been anticipated. The area that supported the weight bar mechanism had completely rotted away leaving about 25% good wood on the lower 1m of the post. This was replaced by glueing and screwing new wood into the cavity. Although cosmetically good, it would not have the strength to support the post when stood vertically. It was decided therefore to hang the post between steel plates concreted into a base; in this way the rotten end of the post could be kept clear of the ground.

We had great difficulty removing the mechanism that operated the arm and eventually with great reluctance we decided to cut off the top of the post so that this could be removed and the plates holding the pivot arm released. The very worn short arm was replaced with a length of slow grown pine found in a local wood reclamation yard and painted in the appropriate colours, All the metal work was cleaned down, painted and greased ready for reinstatement and the top of the post returned and pinned in place. The broken lenses in the spectacle plate were replaced with coloured Perspex and the lamp and burner which were in an awful state were rebuilt by Rodney to an almost as new condition. The now repainted post was moved to the northern part of the site and with the aid of ropes and ladders hoisted into its metal cradle and held in place with long coach screws. It was given another coat of paint and the metal work attached. We had been lucky in having a visit from Martin Creech who offered us a NER finial from his collection and with great difficulty we mounted this four foot finial on the top of the post. Its location had been chosen so that it could be operated from our Midland ground frame but this linkage had to be reconfigured which proved to be difficult in such a confined space. However at last it was finished and just in time for Heritage Weekend. This was an amazing combined effort by all the Wednesday working crew to turn this ruin into a spectacular working signal.

We just need to do the same now to a 5.5m high LNWR double arm signal, any volunteers?

Tony Furse



The pictures above show the post in its 'as found' condition and later the reconstructed bottom. The post was removed from the garden in Sheffield and transported by trailer to St Albans. The post was gradually stripped of its metal work and slowly restored to working order. The picture top right shows Adrian resting from digging the hole for the steel plates that are seen below concreted into position. The post was then moved from the restoration site to the north end and finally placed upright and attached to the plates.