



## 7 - 5 - 5



How long before we can send the code 5 - 5 - 5? For those not familiar with all the bell codes, the headline code is 'Closing of signal box' and 555 is 'Opening of signal box'. Whilst we await the latter there is more relevance in the former than just the present lock down. May 2020 marks the fortieth anniversary of the final closure by BR of St Albans South Signal Box. The box was decommissioned as a working block post in two stages. From 21 October 1979 all workings going north of St Albans were taken over by West Hampstead Power Box and on 2 December 1979 all southwards working went the same way. The last signaller on duty was our former member Geoff Ryland and the shift before was worked by current Trust member Steve Lake (who visited the box this year before the lock down). Thereafter the box was used only by the station announcer until May 1980 when it was finally boarded up. Now, once again, the 'box is closed apart from regular security checks by Trustees but it will be ready to open its doors again to members and visitors as soon as we get the go-ahead. In the meantime, as the photo on the left shows, the garden is putting on its usual spring show without us!

**Richard Kirk**

## Chairman's Words

As I am sure you are well aware, the Signal Box has not been open since the second week of February as part of the national lock down. This period has included the proposed 'Big Weekend' usually our best weekend for visitor numbers and revenue.

We will of course survive without these additional funds but many of our friends in the Heritage Rail industry are going to struggle without the ticket sales they have become dependent on for income. Like us of course they are totally reliant on volunteers and these tend to be predominately of a certain age that may be forced to lock down longer than their 'younger' colleagues. This could be our problem with the likely hood of museums being allowed to open in one of the early stages of release as they are going to be in Italy. Could we open and staff the box with our youngsters, the under 70s? Its doubtful. Obviously we must in the future work hard at recruiting a younger membership, not an easy task and encourage our younger members to become more involved in our open days. Just one Sunday afternoon a month would be a great help and would give the Trust a more sustainable future.

Looking forward to happy times we have promises of new display items that just need to be collected when we can, the garden is looking fantastic and we have messages of support on our facebook page that say we can't wait for you to open again. Lets all be positive and look towards good late summer and autumn open days.

**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

## Membership Matters

Not the usual notes this time about subscriptions due nor, sadly, the date of the summer barbecue, but a message from our Treasurer on how he sees the current situation and its effect on our finances:

*Rob Little, says that during the shutdown we still have unavoidable costs to bear, such as utilities, security and insurance. And, added to that we have missed out on the substantial income we would have had from the Big Weekend as well as our regular Sunday open days. However, as things stand, and assuming a resumption in the autumn, We should just about manage to break-even.*

As Tony says on the front page we should be in a better position than many in the heritage movement. Sometimes small can be beneficial!



**Above: the new Midland lamp post being manoeuvred into position and then ready to receive its lantern top. Like the lamppost by the entrance gate this one originally stood outside the old station building close to Ridgmont Road. The final shot shows the new plinth with the Pig Tor Tunnel (near Buxton) milepost and Bridge 107 coping stone.**

## Progress at the 'box

Big news is the completion of the model railway re-vamp. Since inception the original wooden base had sunk and warped in various weathers, causing derailments. Tony, Jim and others have soldiered away, in the winter rains and winds, replacing the wood with several hundred cemented breeze blocks. Roofing felt glued on top looks remarkably like ballast, on which the rails have been affixed. Thomas and friends remain highly popular, with many of our visitors now being young families.

Rodney's lamppost has been erected by the lower mock level-crossing, and will be re-painted and wired up by David C and John W. A brick plinth has been built at the north bank, with a coping stone from Marshalswick Bridge (No. 107) on the top, and our tunnel mileplate fixed to it. The black bricks give the effect of a tunnel wall, and the plinth provides an attractive new addition to our offerings. Peter has been re-painting our metal Great Western finial for eventual display, and Michael has repaired the Operating Floor door.

The terrible storms and rains this Winter produced a serious leak downstairs and old towels and sheets were used to plug it. The offending hole was eventually discovered at the rear of the 'box, but the continuing rain meant that its sealing was delayed until drier weather came along. The new Station entrance off Platform 4 is in use, but passengers are routed through what will become a coffee shop (surprise, surprise!), until the rest of the building is completed with 8 barriers and ticket machines. The planting of many bulbs by David and Caroline has now paid dividends, with a lovely Spring display, but sadly not seen by the public following closure of the 'box due to the Coronavirus pandemic



To mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the closure of the 'box by BR here are some familiar images drawn from our files.





