

# OUTSIDE THE BOX



Newsletter August 2021 Issue 65



## On Display!

In the last issue I indicated that we hoped to be able to put some of our display boards on show in the new retail unit on the Ridgmont Road side of the station. I am pleased to report that at the end of last month we were granted access by Thameslink and three displays now adorn the windows of the unit. This will give the 'box further publicity and hopefully interest passers-by and returning rail passengers.

**Richard Kirk**

The top photograph shows the Trust's display boards in the station unit windows with Tony Furse, Richard Kirk and Andrew Chillingworth of GTR admiring the result. The lower picture shows part of the scaffolding erected at the rear of the 'box during the recent repainting. The company chosen by the painters was named WYVERN Scaffolding. The mythical wyvern dragon formed the crest of the coat of arms of the Midland Railway and this company's involvement with the work on the 'box could not be more appropriate.

## Chairman's Words

Well we finally made it, the signal box opened to the public for the first time on the 25th July after fifteen months of closure. We had 37 visitors which was ideal as it gave us all the opportunity to remember what we had to do and how we had to do it.

We had the minimum of publicity with just an announcement on our web site and the dates displayed on our notice board. The next open day I think will be different with considerably more publicity. Richard has managed to get a very good article into the Herts Ad newspaper and our announcement on Facebook has been copied across a number of groups. The visitors remarked on how resplendent the box and garden looked all thanks of course to the small group of members who have throughout the various lock downs continued to maintain the box and garden suitably separated and disinfected.

Heritage Weekend is almost upon us on the 11th and 12th September followed two weeks later by the launch of Symbol Spot a campaign to encourage children to travel by train especially on the line between Bedford and St Albans. We have a Symbol Spot marker by our entrance gate which when complete will allow visitors to copy or rub a St Albans badge with the intention of collecting a set from along the line and of course win prizes.

This week we will be in discussion about supporting a science week for schools in March next year based around Marconi and communication, the box of course being an early example of electronic communication; more details as we get them but I am sure we will need a lot of support from the membership to keep the box open all week.

I look forward to seeing some of you during our coming open days and especially over Heritage Weekend.

**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

## HERITAGE OPEN WEEKEND

As Tony mentions, our HOD opening this year will be on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> of September. The opening will be from 10am to 5pm both days. The success of the weekend relies on members volunteering to help with the organisation and operation of the event. Setting up starts from 9am and the days will be divided into roughly 2 hourly slots. If you are able and would like to help please let Richard know as soon as possible. Please indicate which day(s) and for how long you are available. This will enable him to establish a rota. Contact him on 07855282664 or email richardnkirk@hotmail.co.uk

### \*\*\* Contactless Card Payments! \*\*\*

We are now able to take contactless, or PIN verified, card payments. This is by using a small low-cost device (pictured), similar to those you may have seen in cafes or on market stalls.

Since re-starting open days, and with people less likely to have actual cash to spend, it has been important to offer visitors an alternative way to donate and to buy refreshments and merchandise.

Why not come along and try it for yourself!

Rob Little



### Terry Worrall remembers – Part Two

Trust member Terry Worrall continues the story of his early railway career in St Albans.

After Ken (Bonwick) had departed St Albans we had a succession of Relief Station Masters (RSM), including one from the L T & S near Southend. He was good value – I learned much from him but his priority as he arrived each day was to announce the train upon which he was planning to go home. A number of RSMs never got to grips with anything – they merely ‘minded the shop’ – the exception being John Cramp an excellent RSM upon whom I would seek to model myself if I ever became one!

The staff at St Albans were a varied bunch and a pleasure to work with. The oldest was Jim Randall, a curmudgeonly type, a Leading Porter in the Parcels office, never seen without a ‘rollup’ cigarette hanging from his lip. Great guy but could he moan – about everything. The two ‘Richards’ brothers, West Indians, always cheerful – they just got on with their work – really good guys. We had 11 Guards of which I recall Laurie Keach- George Broad and Harold the latter being an ex-military Guardsman. Harold lived in Radlett and one Saturday evening after there had been a derailment at Napsbury, a limited train service was being operated between Radlett & St Albans and I had been sent to Radlett to assist with the passengers. I had finished my turn, late evening, when Harold came to me asking if I would work the DMU train to St Albans – handing me his ‘traps’ (his bag containing flags, detonators and Journals) and said he would see me on Monday! I was doing my Rules & Regulations course but I had not been assessed to do a Guards job - but I agreed. Fortunately it was only an 8 minute journey and nothing went wrong!

### Progress at the 'box

Well, seeing our Amazon forest garden each time we arrive at the ‘box, we hardly need reminding by the scientists that global warming is bringing more rain! Nevertheless, four headlines this issue:

**Box Re-Painting:** Brian and Jamie did an excellent job. Quite a lot of wood rot was discovered (old and new), and carefully and skilfully repaired using two-part resin. This time, following advice from Member, David Love, we used coach enamel paint – more expensive but hopefully less fading and longer-lasting. We are grateful that David also obtained accurate colour references from our original paints, as the old references are now obsolete. With scaffolding to the rear we also replaced some missing roof tiles, and Peter Macdonald also kindly sealed and re-painted the finials.

**Re-Opening Bull:** A re-opening ‘To Do’ list was drawn up and with thanks to faithful volunteers, we worked through it: oiling, sweeping, sorting, dusting and cleaning the Buffet, Operating Deck, Museum, Toilet, and external signage, ground frames and artefacts – as well as fighting the garden!

**Handrail:** The collapsing handrail opposite the Sleeper Wall was replaced by Donato, postcreting concrete spurs (hard to get as HS2 and new London buildings are commandeering most of the Nation’s scarce concrete!), attaching wooden posts above ground level, and the actual handrail fixed on top. John Webb, Tony and Jim re-placed the signal wire, and low voltage cables into new trunking.

**Back in Business:** Finally, after 16 months, we made it back to our raison d’etre and hosted a children’s party and first Sunday Open Afternoon, by way of getting back into the swing of things. Our new card donation gismo worked well, so we are now contactless, and we slowly remembered what we are supposed to tell visitors! Thanks to an excellent turnout of volunteers, including newcomers: Philip, Adrian and Christine.

It’s been a long haul, but after patient waiting, two jabs, hard work and Michael Wright’s weekly joke, we’ve managed to survive and Box clever!

John Telford