

131 Years old

1892 to 2024

OUTSIDE



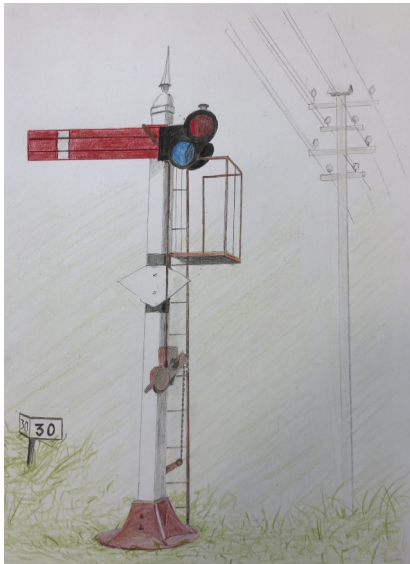
THE BOX

Newsletter February 2024 Issue 75

A Box of Many Uses

A preserved signal box has many uses and St Albans South is no exception. In recent months the Box has played host to a local art club, provided volunteer placement for a large company and has been the base for a photographic course sponsored by Thameslink. There will be more about the latter in the next issue. Below are a selection of images from the members of Luton Art Club. Eight of their number visited the Box led by Trust member John Knock. In the autumn Michael Wright's daughter Liz Bell joined Trust volunteers undertaking regular gardening activities at the Box. Her report to her colleagues at Churchill Cleaning is included below.

Richard Kirk



Chairman's Words

Every good wish to all our Members for 2024! In a matter of days we've heard of substantial announcements in our railway preservation sector, thus this year may well prove momentous!

The Winter term is our quietest time of year, with incessant rain and more recently the very cold period. No heated workshop space: rather freezing hands; paint that won't dry; and seized metal bits that won't shift. Fortunately we've had little storm damage apart from the felt disappearing from our shed!

A number of our loyal volunteers have continued with health challenges, including my own pre-Christmas stay in Watford Cardiac Ward. Although we've had some success, a further quest for volunteers is required.

Tony and Co., have pressed on with restoring the LNWR Signal, along with an LNER ground signal kindly loaned by Andy Buckley, our Beds and Herts Community Rail Partnership Officer. Adrian has installed CCTV monitoring in the 'Box and facing the gate. Some recent incursions are a cause for concern and BT Police have been advised

Our 2024 AGM approaches – see below – so if you can make it you'd be most welcome

John Telford



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

2024 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 2025. 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.

Please note: a small number of members have not renewed for the last year or two, and we really would encourage you to consider continuing your support of the Signal Box. If you decide not to continue your membership this will be your last newsletter.

Rob Little

Welcome

Welcome to the following who have joined or rejoined the Trust since the last newsletter:

Lorraine Harding of Harpenden
James Ivell of London Colney

Marton Hodds of Bishop Stortford
Derek Pattenson of Watford

We hope they all enjoy their membership and will visit the Box as often as possible.

Progress at the Box

The weather seems to have been against us over the last few months thanks to the passing of several named storms; thankfully most caused us no problems except for Storms Henk and Isha, which resulted in the toppling of the St Albans station sign in the garden and the loss of the felt from the tool shed roof. The St Albans sign was quickly fixed, unfortunately the same can't be said for the shed roof, which is still awaiting repairs.

Despite the poor weather, our team of volunteers have still managed to get a lot of work done around the grounds.

As detailed elsewhere in this issue, an LNER ground signal has been installed alongside the NER slotted signal and connected to the Midland ground frame (well worth a visit if you've not been to the box recently), replacing the Southern ground signal. This will in turn be re-positioned elsewhere in the garden with the aim of connecting this up to lever No. 28, giving us a second signal operated from the signal box.

Similarly the 'Triple Dolly' ground signal has been reconnected, via several wheels, to the LNWR ground frame, making all three levers fully operational.

Restoration of the double arm LNWR signal has continued, with associated metalwork and the signal post being rubbed down and re-painted. Several coats of paint and more elbow grease (available from all good stockists!!) are still needed but hopefully installation is not too far off.

The lamp to the Midland Railway signal at the north end has been refurbished and repainted and now gives a much brighter red / green aspect.

Gardening and repainting of artefacts, garden seats, etc has continued, regardless of the weather.

Sadly, we have had a couple of unwanted 'overnight' visits to the box recently, which resulted in one of our signs - a tin plate 'Coal' sign - being removed from our sleeper wall and stolen. The visitors were spotted on the CCTV system that was installed last autumn. As a result we have now decided to install additional lighting and anti-climb spikes to the level crossing gates at the southern end of the site. The loss has been reported, but if any of our members see the item for sale anywhere, or indeed are offered it for sale, please report this to the police (see photo below).

Finally I would like to welcome Derek, who has recently joined us as a regular on the weekly maintenance days.

Adrian Wootton

My Volunteer Day

by Liz Bell

Yep, you guessed it I spent the day at The St Albans South Signal Box which is located just next to the St Albans City Train Station.

This Signal Box was built by the Midland Railway in 1802 - closed by British Rail in 1979, - when the electrification of the line to Bedford became operational and the semaphore signalling was replaced with electric signalling. The Box, then abandoned by BR, became derelict and stayed hidden from sight by large advertising hoardings. Residents, in the adjacent road, held a meeting and formed the St Albans Signal Box Preservation Trust. It was the Trust that negotiated with what became Network Rail for a lease to access and the restoration of the dilapidated Signal Box. There are photographs in the Box today showing the state in which it was found. Restoration took place from 2003 following the agreement of a 25 year lease with Network Rail. This is run and looked after by local volunteers mostly of a retired age but with lots of passion for trains and the signal box itself.

My day was spent helping them with the grounds for the Signal Box, getting ready for winter. This was a lot of hard work with a few thorns in the fingers and a broken nail or two 😊 but hey it was all for such a good cause. We got lots of waves and toots from the train drivers and an amazing look at a brand new South Western Rail Train being pulled by another train so it can be tested fully before starting to take passengers.

This is such a great place to go for any keen Train Spotter or even a fun place for children to go and see the trains, learn some history on trains and even get some hands-on experience. **The Box is opened to the public regularly - Sunday afternoons, on the second and fourth Sundays from April - October, whilst from November - March, only the second Sunday of these months. Opening hours are from 2:00pm until 5:00pm. Admission is FREE. Donations, however, are always welcome to maintain the premises.**

There have been over 5000 visitors to the Box since it was opened to the public and organised parties of 10 - 40 can be arranged for daylight visits. The ground floor is a museum, with videos, photographs, and artefacts, whilst the first floor is the 'Operating Level', where there is the chance to pull the levers and ring the bells. It also gives an excellent view of all platforms and passing trains.

The Signalman's Garden associated with the Box is an ideal picnic area for the summer months or soup in the chilly weather. Demonstrations of how the semaphore signalling system operates are given during open afternoons, with the opportunity to use the levers.

In the grounds is also a mini train station and tracks (needed some leaf clearing carried out on the tracks).

That's it from me and the team at the signal box and would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to Churchill for allowing me to help with such a great cause in St Albans.



Liz included a number of pictures taken around the site. The two reproduced here show Liz hard at work in the garden and joining with some of the other volunteers at the end of her stint. The Trust is very grateful to Liz and Churchill Cleaning for allowing this to happen.



GROUP VISITS

We regularly entertain groups of visitors outside of the normal public open days. These vary from the very young – beavers, cubs, etc – right through the age ranges to include U3A and pensioner groups. The visits usually take place during the week with some in the early evenings especially between spring and autumn.

These visits can only take place if there are sufficient volunteers to accompany the visitors around and demonstrate our working artefacts.

There are a number of members who are regulars in undertaking these duties organised by John Telford.

If you would like to take part in showing our visitors around please contact John and he will add you to the circulation list. No specialised knowledge is required and involvement is, of course, optional.

John can be found at: jtelford@btinternet.com



The two ground signals mentioned in 'Progress at the Box'. On the left is the repositioned triple 'dolly' now on the lawn and linked up to the recently installed third L&NWR lever. To the right is the BR Eastern Region/LNER signal that was originally at Chesterton Junction north of Cambridge. This now works off the green lever of the MR ground frame.



On the left is the sign that has been stolen from the Box garden. If any members spot it or see it offered for sale please contact one of the Trustees or the Police. On the right is an unusual visitor that passed the Box recently. This is Class 153 single DMU No.153311 a Network Rail Video Inspection Unit running from Reading to Derby.



And finally....

Don't forget the Trust's AGM at St Pauls Church Centre, Hatfield Road on Monday 4th March beginning at 7.30pm. This year we will be in a downstairs room and not the usual room on the first floor. After the formal business and refreshments there will be an illustrated talk by local resident and recently retired railwayman, Bob Kemp. Amongst other activities Bob was involved in the acceptance into service of the Thameslink Class 700s. Not too many hard questions about the seating to Bob please!