

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Newsletter November 2014 Issue 38

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Mum's the Word!



Two shots from Heritage Weekend. The top one shows the model railway in the car park and Peter's traction engine and in the bottom one visitors are seen examining the poster and photo display

According to Wikipedia the above expression means to keep quiet and say nothing; not so in our case! The power of modern social media has been demonstrated with recent visitors numbers to the box on Open Days. This was particularly noticeable over Heritage Weekend when notices posted by our Chairman's daughter-in-law on the *mumsnet* website during the preceding week produced convoys of mums and dads pushing buggies and pulling little children along Ridgmont Road towards the 'box! As a result we had the fantastic total of 618 visitors over the weekend. Once again we are grateful to all those who helped over the weekend including members of the North London Model Engineers Society displaying some of their locomotives, Albanrail for providing a large scale model railway in the car park and Peter Macdonald for bring along his miniature traction engine and trailer to give the children rides. Thanks are also due to the many Trust members who helped out both before and during the weekend.

Now that we have entered our winter schedule period with only one Open Day per month until next April (EXCEPT of course January with openings on the 10th and 11th for the model railway exhibition and 24th and 25th for Residents' Weekend—volunteer helpers requested!) it is interesting to reflect on our successes in 2014 in spreading the word about the signal box. There have been over 20 organised visits to the box, nearly 10 talks given or exhibitions attended; a new publicity leaflet has been produced and Trust members are involved in two projects with the National Railway Museum. In addition we continue to add to the items on display both in the garden and inside the 'box. There is certainly no need for us to keep quiet and say nothing. We can be proud of our efforts so far and continue to promote our unique offering.

Richard Kirk

Chairman's Words

As Richard has already said we had a really good Heritage Open Weekend. The success of these open days of course is dependent on the hard work put in by members showing visitors round, serving to their needs and demonstrating our equipment, so thank you to all those who volunteered and gave their time so generously.

Recently I was given the opportunity to help clear the house of a Harpenden man who had spent a life time working on the railway. He had sadly passed away but his sister generously offered us anything from the house that we could add to our archive or sell to boost our funds.

We now have some fascinating LMS cards giving the dimensions and cost of building of most of the main LMS engines, £2,700 for a Jinty, a lot of accident reports including some of the finest on the DMUs going in and out of St Albans and a whole lot more. We were also given a lot of model railway items most of which we were able to display over Heritage weekend and all of which will come up for auction in December with Special Auction Services in Newbury. Watch especially the Hornby Dublo SR boxed goods set which the auctioneer tells me is very rare and should make upwards of £500. Total auction estimate for our lots is £1500 - £2000, a very welcome boost to our funds.

I hope to see you at the Christmas party but if not I hope you have a great Christmas.

Tony Furse

Christmas Party !!

There will be a Christmas Party in the Signal Box on Saturday 13th December from 7.00pm. Drinks and nibbles will be served, please do come along and bring the family. Please let Richard Kirk know if you are coming - contact details below.



A sure sign that autumn is here; the Rail Head Treatment Train makes one of its 4 times a day trips past the box.



Sunday 9th November 2014, a fine sight past the box!



Winners of the 2008 St Albans Civic Society Award



Winners of the 2010 Invensys Rail Signalling Award (Structures)

Newsletter produced by Richard Kirk. Please send items for inclusion to richardnkirk@hotmail.co.uk or contact me on 01727 860047

Digging up the Past from John Webb

No – we've not taken part in a Time Team programme, but during a recent holiday in Yorkshire I spent two days in the "Search Engine" at the National Railway Museum. I was able to look through some of the Midland Railway's "Weekly Notices to Staff" (WNs) for various years when we know there was serious activity at the box. The Chronology written for us by members of the Signalling Record Society last year was of great help in deciding which years to look at. The older WNs in particular had to be handled with care – it was obvious the MR had used cheap paper, and it was badly yellowed and falling out of the bindings (Photo1). Pages had to be photographed rather than copied as the bindings would not allow easy copying, and the Search Engine copier was not in good working order at the time – it also saved 10p a copy! The latter factor was important as I came back with over 70 images of various WNs from 1892 to 1915.

Returning home, I then had to run each image through 'Photoshop' to improve the contrast and put date and page details on each image for future reference. (Photo 2) I then had to sort out the information in the WNs and add it to the Chronology. An updated version of this will be put on the website shortly for members to access.

Some particular moments in history I picked up:

12th June, 1892: The present box was erected and opened for use – in a day!

3rd June 1894: The Up and Down goods lines came into use south of St Albans with a new junction between goods and passenger lines brought into use a week later.

23rd June 1895: New tunnel for the goods lines opened south of Elstree Station, and from St Albans South into London the goods lines now become the 'Slow Passenger Lines' and the passenger lines become the "Fast Passenger" lines.

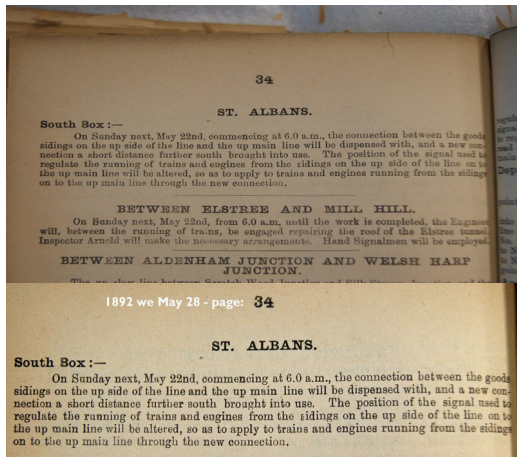
9th November 1902: Alterations to the 'Up back platform' line (which formed a bay line) and changes to interlocking, signals etc at both St Albans boxes.

15th April 1906: Box closed at 3am on a Sunday morning for a new lever frame to be installed.

1st July 1906: Goods lines from Harpenden to St Albans become the Slow Passenger lines.

12th December 1915: Track circuits are brought into use at South and North boxes.

John Webb



Photo's 1 and 2 referred to in John's article. Apologies for the small print but the image does give some idea of the nature of the documents that John was handling at the NRM.

Levers to a place in rail his



Midland old signal box
Waiting for the end of the day, Paul Hicks, aged 18, looks at the lever frame in the Midland old signal box. The apparatus is the last of its kind and is being preserved in a place of honor at the NRM. Photo: Paul Hicks.

A photograph that accompanied an article in the Post-Echo of October 9th 1980 entitled 'Levers to a place in rail history' shows Paul Hicks the 18 year old station announcer contemplating the removal of the box to 'the new Crystal Palace railway centre'!

Whatever happened to that plan?

Progress at the 'Box

Whilst the late Summer weather has been good, a number of volunteers have taken their annual holidays, so progress has been a little more limited than usual this quarter. Work has been further curtailed by the clocks going back in October, with darkness falling much earlier. However, the garden never ceases to demand attention and the Autumn clear down progresses, as well as the need to cut the grass later and later each year!

Amazingly, we seem to have worked through many of our artefacts needing restoring, so more small maintenance jobs have been done and others have risen up the to-do list. Michael continues to restore our collection of finials and has scraped much rotten wood from our large Radlett example. The guys upstairs soldier on with the upgrade of the simulator and we are assured the back of the work is now broken.

The latest gradient and Milepost 31 signs are now erected along the lower path down to the 'Box and Jim did a brilliant job creating a shaped, reinforced concrete post for the latter. Various other cast iron items have been painted in black metal paint, which makes them look much better for display, including the stair treads up to the Operating Floor. Our two static signal arms have been restored by Tony, ready to attach to a signal post when obtained.

John Webb has reconfigured the lighting upstairs and introduced a new timer control, so the automatic switching on and off of the night display lights now operates from one of the switches by the door. A new website sign should be delivered shortly. This will replace the aged version which hangs on the fence facing the tracks.

Still to commence, on a dry day, are the re-paint of the shed with preservative; the cleaning up and re-painting of the Midland Ground Signal; the repairing of the cable trunking and the inevitable gardening – so come on down and lend a hand!

John Telford

More steam past the 'box

Ever hopeful! The Railway Touring Company are once again running a trip on 20th December from Victoria to York hauled northbound only by A4 Pacific 60009 Union of South Africa. This train is due to call at St Albans at 8.00am.

St Albans Signal Box Preservation Trust is a company limited by guarantee registered in England No.4653488.

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