



A time for celebrations

At the beginning of June we will be celebrating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee; one week later on the 12th June it will be the 130th anniversary of the opening of St Albans South Signal Box by the Midland Railway Company. This date coincides with our planned public open day. Whilst at the moment nothing special is planned for this day we are proposing to mark the event on Saturday 11th with a function for members, family and invited guests. This will probably take the form of a bar-b-cue and will be instead of a late summer get together. More details to follow but make a note in your diary.

Richard Kirk

Below left: A chilly St Albans South on 19 January 1979 as a DMU arrives from St Pancras. Photo: courtesy of Steph South.

Below right: HSTs return to St Albans; two Colas owned power cars were used for driver training on the Abbey branch last month, seen here at St Albans Abbey station between runs.



Chairman's Words

Soon after the Trust was formed we applied to join the Heritage Railway Association (HRA), acceptance told us that we were doing the right thing and doing it the right way. This was reinforced in 2010 when we beat two Network Rail projects, Severn Bridge Junction SB and Weaverthorpe SB to the Invensys Rail Signalling Award, Membership of the HRA was not expensive and gave us the opportunity to mix at social and parliamentary events with the movers and shakers of the industry. The opportunity to join a Heritage Railway Insurance scheme if it ever came about and to get reduced ticket prices through the HRA InterRail scheme was of course an additional bonus. This year without prior explanation our membership fee was increased and we were denied access to the InterRail scheme. It appears that the HRA have just realised that we don't charge for entry to the box, this puts us in a more expensive category for fees and bars us from the InterRail scheme. No explanations are available. Perhaps we should now consider charging our visitors a fee, I would suggest one penny each perhaps taken from their generous donations.

On a happier note we opened the box on a Wednesday in the middle of half term for the first time and were delighted, in spite of inclement weather, to entertain forty five visitors. This was a great achievement given short notice and minimal publicity. My grateful thanks to all who supported this experiment and turned out in the rain, we shall do it again for each half term.

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

2022 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 2023. The cost is just a minimum of £10, so we do hope you will continue to support the work of the 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, thank you, including some by standing order, so have nothing more to do.

Rob Little

Terry Worrall remembers – Part Five

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

In addition to these jobs I would regularly visit St Albans South Signal Box which was a 2 minute walk from the south end of the Down fast platform. I normally went there under the guise of wanting to speak to the signalmen as I was responsible for their pay and rosters. What I really wanted to do was to work the box – the only signalman who allowed me to do this regularly, normally from around 1630 to 1800 on weekdays, was Reg Brown. He supervised me closely and got really annoyed if I put the signals back before the trains had cleared the treadles. Whenever I did this it was not then possible to give another 'Line Clear' for the line concerned without breaking the small glass cover over the 'release button' on the Midland Rotary Block Instrument and pressing it to 'release' the Block. Such an action had to be recorded in the Train Register and the only person allowed to replace the glass was the local Signal Technician – a report then had to be sent to the District Office. The Technician replaced the glass behind which he placed a small printed label which he signed and dated. Reg was an excellent signalman who assisted my understanding of 'signalling' in a way which stood me in good stead for the rest of my BR career.

As another means of 'earning' extra money in 1963 I occasionally volunteered to travel with the St Albans Abbey 'shunt loco' – a 350hp diesel with a GUV (General Utility Vehicle) – along the old Hatfield branch as far as Hill End to a lineside warehouse where, each month, we loaded bundles of the Salvation Army 'War Cry' magazines into the GUV which was then taken to Watford where the individual packages were distributed into the extensive BR Parcels network.

Progress at the 'box

Winter, with such short days, should be the quietest time of year at the 'box, but for our annual, massive vegetation clear-down, which David Smith, Richard and Adrian have majored on, with help from David Choppin. No wonder Network Rail have such a problem with leaves, given the volume that we clear away, along with cutting back dead flowers, bushes, etc. A Tree Surgeon is due to come and trim our trees – the first time since opening – when Conservation Area approval is gained from the Council, and also offered to cut the roadside hedge for free!

Some superb restorations have been completed: Michael has finished the Coffin Carrier/Bier, mentioned last time; and Rodney has repaired and restored the Shunt Limit Sign, plus two of our wooden garden chairs. We've also been replacing some of the semaphore signal lenses which have deteriorated. Adrian re-felted the shed, along with his welcome addition to the gardening team, and with his wife, Christine, helping with teas.

Tony has added some further artefacts to our near-full Museum, by removing some outside signs to the Sleeper Wall, and John Webb has re-wired the lower Lamp Column – the previous wiring having disappeared when the handrail was replaced. He's completed the work on the lamp for this column, and, once painted and affixed, this will hopefully be our next completion. We are working on a plan to restore and erect our further, but broken, Midland Railway lamp column, up near the Midland Ground Frame – watch this space!

A persistent problem immediately outside the 'box is litter – mainly fast food bags, containers, wipes, cigarette packets, etc. – dumped late evening, and some thrown over our fence. The foxes add to the problem in their food-finding efforts! Fortunately, Thameslink staff carry out regular litter-picks, for which we are grateful.

Public openings have been quieter than pre-Covid, but offering more quality time with visitors. Other events in the City on Open Days can affect our numbers. Requests for private visits are starting to come in. **John Telford**