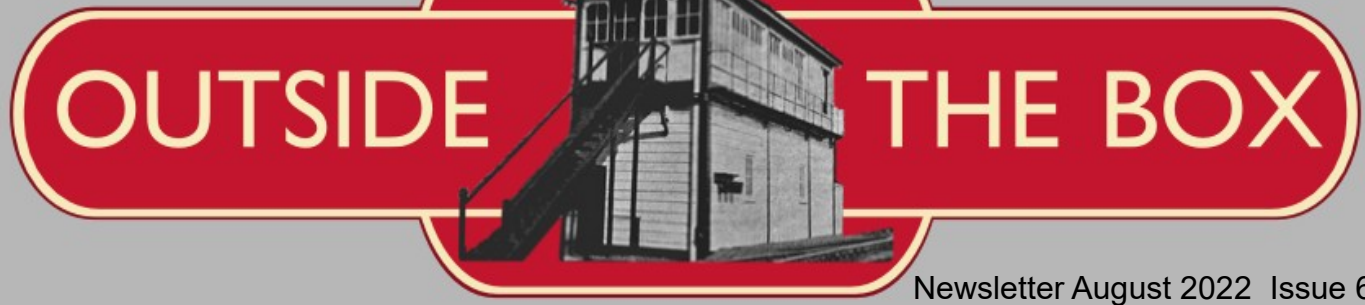


130 Years old

1892 to 2022



Newsletter August 2022 Issue 69



The replica nameplate of Coronation Pacific 46253 that is currently in the care of the Trust and is on display in the operating floor of the signal box. The nameplate will eventually be located in the City station foyer.

Our fame spreads!

Not only do we regularly have people from overseas looking at our website but many find time to visit the 'box. Recent open days have seen visitors from Hong Kong and The Czech Republic and as Tony referred to in the last edition we had a visit from a member of the Japanese Navy who is interested in railway signalling. Takagi Hideya's ship was visiting the UK and docked by Tower Bridge as part of a round the world exercise. He managed to get some shore leave and was shown around the 'box by Les O'Leary, John Webb and John Telford. Afterwards he sent a grateful message of thanks noting all the features of the 'box that he had been shown. John Webb explains: 'Our visitor was a railway enthusiast who appreciates that Japanese railways, including signalling, were strongly influenced by British practice when Japan's railways were started. He wanted to learn more about British signalling and due to our proximity to London and his ship's visit he asked to come and see us. He spent some three hours with us. Besides looking at our collection, he was also able to share examples of Japanese signalling via pictures on his smart phone; also used on occasion to translate phrases or words between the two languages!'

On the subject of visitors, John Webb has provided an up date on our visitor numbers this year so far. Up to the end of June we had a total of just under 800 visitors; 676 came on our Open Afternoons, 62 in organised parties and 58 in private visits. Of the 676, 68 came on the two Wednesday afternoons when we tried our experimental half-term openings. Looking at the last full year of opening in 2019, our figures this year, so far, are about 80% of 2019's level, which is very encouraging as that was our best year ever! Thanks to all who come to chat with our visitors and show them around.

Richard Kirk

Chairman's Words

In the last issue of 'Outside The Box' I reported that we were expecting a visit from a games company who wanted to record sounds of the railway. Well they came and recorded as many mechanical noises as they could, the levers being pulled, the bells ringing and the sound of the chains pulling the cable tensioners, it appears that these noises will be slowed down or speeded up and not used as we hear them and with very little to do with railways!

Another interesting visit was from Marcus Dawson of Rail-Net who wanted to do a live stream on YouTube of the traffic passing the box. He came with his team at 9 in the morning and by 11 they had set out their cameras and sound equipment and were ready to start, The intention was to transmit for 4 hours directly on to YouTube but an incident occurred around midday and there were no trains for a while, this created a surprise opportunity for me to show off the box. I was a little unprepared but nevertheless a bit of good publicity. In the end they recorded nearly 4 ½ hours with some interesting comments from the 2500 viewers from as far away as Australia and Singapore. If you want to see the broadcast just search for St Albans Signal Box live and follow the link to YouTube.

Work has begun again on giving the station a new footbridge with a large portion of the car park now occupied by buildings and vans only proving our point that they do not need all the car park spaces and we should be allowed a few to erect our visitor centre; one day perhaps!

Heritage Open Days are nearly upon us, 10th and 11th September, if you can spare a few hours we would be delighted to see you, no experience necessary just a willingness to show off our fantastic box.

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 10th and Sunday 11th 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 what hours you are available. This will enable him to establish a rota. Contact him on 07855282664 or email richardnkirk@hotmail.co.uk

My Time at St Albans – Part One

Following on from Terry Worrall's memories, Trust member Tim Stevens has kindly shared some of his memories of his time working for the railway in St Albans in the 1970s

Introduction

I was a Station Supervisor at St Albans City station for six months in 1977/8. The local services were in the hands of old and smoky DMUs, while the main line services were loco-hauled, usually by "Peak" class diesel electrics. The signal box was still in operation, and there was a fine array of semaphore signals and some colour lights.

A few years later, much of the atmosphere would be swept away when the "BedPan" electrification was implemented (later to become Thameslink), so in retrospect I am glad to have been a part of the "good old BR days" when diesels reigned and everywhere was corporate blue and grey!

There were two Supervisor's shifts - early and late turn. Duties included the operation of the station (except for the ticket office), train dispatch and station cleaning. We also had responsibility for train movements in the local area and would have to attend any incident as "first response"¹.

I had a small staff of various nationalities and a range of abilities, who manned the ticket barrier, the platforms and the parcels office. At night the station was run by a Chargeman - a sort of glorified porter - who for much of the night was the sole member of staff at the station. I never quite knew what went on at night; I just hoped that all was shipshape when I came on duty in the morning!

¹ The Napsbury collision occurred one evening in November 1977 when I was on duty. For details see the official Railway Accident Report. I have also written a short Note outlining the key facts from a signalling perspective.



**Left and right: Corporate blue and grey as referred to by Tim above in the form of a Peak diesel and one of the 'old smoky' DMUs. Photos: from Trust collection and courtesy of Steph South
In the middle is a picture of the old ticket barrier taken in the 1940s**

Progress at the 'box

Opening news is that the long-awaited tree surgeons finally arrived to trim our trees - for the first time. They didn't finish, so will return to complete the work and also, hopefully, fell two of the trees overhanging Platform 4. This will enlarge the space where we hope to build a platform, for an overflow shed. We have the steel and our hope to crane it over the north fence was nearly scuppered as the 2nd station footbridge contractors have returned and taken the space - but will kindly facilitate our transshipping! We have also been trimming our prolifically growing hedges. The exceptionally hot weather and drought have given us a white lawn, a need for the gazebo for Open Days and the inauguration of ice cream and lolly sales!

Our Slotted Signal restoration continues, with Michael H freeing seized metalwork and consideration being given to bolting the rear of the partly rotted post to a discrete T-shaped RSJ mounted in concrete. Our fourth lamp column with missing base, has been erected on a new brick plinth topped by Rodney. We now await finishing the lamp top to complete the job. Michael W has repaired and repainted of the NE corner bench, and John W has rewired and re-trunked our garden sound system. More importantly, he has repaired our kettle - without which we could not operate! The Johns have also re-seated the lawn colour light.

Visits, included: Beavers, the RCTS, National Transport Trust, special needs classes from Houghton Regis, the London Appreciation Society (one comment: 'Best visit ever!'), engineers recording 'box sounds for use with computer games, and others filming train movements for YouTube. Our Japanese Naval Ensign visit is reported elsewhere.

John Telford