

The ups and downs of signalling

To many of our members who, like me, grew up in the 1950s and 60s away from the influence of the Great Western Railway, lower quadrant signals were a rarity and we were used to upper quadrant arms reaching for the sky to announce the pending arrival of the next train. Not for us the lower version sulkily pointing downwards! However a quick look through the history books shows that once semaphore signalling developed, lower quadrant operation was the norm. This stemmed from the early days when signal arms were positioned in slots within the signal posts rather than on the outside. Many of these had three positions of which the lower, signifying clear, was wholly within the slot and out of sight of the engine driver. This was later regarded as unsafe and the two position lower quadrant arm on the front of the post was developed and used by many railway companies including the Midland.

It was not until after the Grouping in 1923 and following the work of a number of committees that upper quadrant signals were adopted by the then Ministry of Transport as the standard. These arms could be made of much lighter material as any failure caused the signal to return to danger under gravity and did away with the need for a heavy spectacle plate and balance weight. It goes without saying that the GWR did not follow the standard and continued with the lower quadrant version even into BR days!

Our Midland lower quadrant now stands proud at the north end of the garden with its post painted in authentic Midland colours with an ornate finial at the top. Congratulations are due to those members who undertook the restoration and erection of the very heavy post and associated signalling equipment.

Richard Kirk



The restored Midland Railway lower quadrant signal sits alongside the later upper quadrant home signal. The lattice post will shortly be moved to a new position on the lawn to be controlled from the L&NWR ground frame.

Chairman's Words

At this time of the year I usually reflect on the past year and our achievements, but John Telford's excellent reports throughout the year have kept you up to date with the changes we have made and so I thought I would look forward to 2013 and share with you our aspirations and bookings.

We start the year with a very busy January with the box open for two long weekends. The first is in support of the Model Railway Exhibition in which we will have a display in St Albans Arena. If you are interested in manning this display or the box please let me know otherwise we will set up a stand alone display. The second is in support of Residents First Weekend in which we hope to piggy back on the Tourist Office publicity as we have successfully done in other years. If you are available to man the box over these weekends please let me know or enter your name on the website. (Ed: see over for the dates of these events.)

There are a number of on-going projects that we will need to take on to the new year including the completion of the relocation of the Midland ground frame which will need connection to the triple ground signal after that has been refurbished. We need to move the lattice home signal to the flower bed, convert to a distant signal and attach to the LNWR lever frame. Telephones are an important part of railway safety and so we are going to establish a telephone network across the site, especially useful for those meeting and greeting in the winter to be able to order teas from the inside of the box. The Waterloo signal box shelf is to be wired up so that it looks as though it is in use and the main simulator is going to be taken on to the next technological stage to ensure that it is robust enough for the next 20 years. If that was not enough we still have to sort through our gifts from the NRM and refurbish and erect the double signal post somewhere in the garden.

If you would like to be involved in any of these projects or would like to learn how to use the simulator or just come and help on our open days please give me a ring on 07986 416472 or e-mail me on furse@btinternet.com. A Merry Christmas to you all.

Tony Furse

A selection of cards is enclosed. Please spread the word about the Signal Box.



A reminder of what the 'box looked like 10 years ago! This photograph was taken in July 2002.



An earlier shot of the 'box taken in 1983 looking south from the centre platform.

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



Steam past the 'box

Yes, it's that old chestnut again! The Railway Touring Company are running a trip on 22nd December from Victoria to York hauled northbound only by A4 Pacific 60007 Sir Nigel Gresley. This train is due to call at St Albans at 9.10am. Fingers crossed but don't blame the Editor if it doesn't run. Keep watching the RTC website.

T - shirts

The t-shirts mentioned in the last Newsletter are still on sale at the bargain price of £3.99. They are white and have the image and title of the 'box on the front in maroon. They can be purchased whenever the box is open or contact Mary Webster at the Trust address

Christmas Party !!

There will be a Christmas Party in the Signal Box on Saturday 8th December from 7.00pm. Drinks and nibbles will be served so please do come along and bring the family. Please let Richard Kirk know if you are coming - contact details on page 1.

January openings

The 'box will be opened for both days of the St Albans Model Railway Show (12th and 13th) and the St Albans Residents First Weekend (26th and 27th). Opening hours will be 10.00am to 4.00pm. If you are able to help with manning the 'box please sign up on the website or contact Tony Furse (see front page).

Regular openings

Members are always welcome at Monday evening Club nights (7.30pm.) and on the Wednesday afternoon work party (2pm. or earlier now it's dark by 4.30pm.).

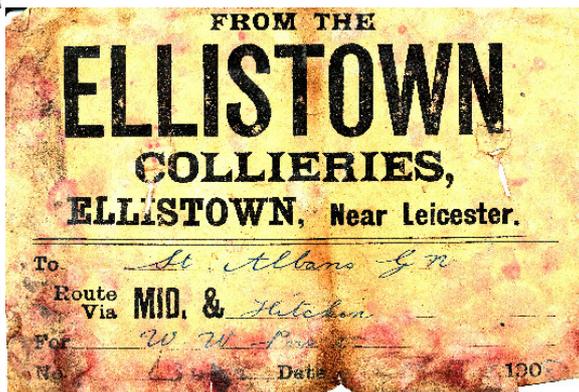
Enthusiast's observations

1.A trick the crew of the St Albans North shunter (41854 and then 41672) often performed was, whilst running at speed bunker-first back to the Shed, to suddenly brake at the St Albans South up slow splitting home signal. Usually the safety valve lifted taking with it boiler water that had surged over the firebox and spraying down-wind spotters with a fine mist of unsuperheated water droplets!

2. An unusual sight at St Albans was a 9F 2-10-0 bowling along the up fast at about 55 mph with a rake of 60 full coal wagons nodding to each other at each rail joint. Howard Green



A shot taken from the 'box probably in 1979 showing a Class 56 on an up Tarmac working using the fast line. Note the siding still in place in front of the box and the newly installed ground frame. Photograph courtesy of Geoff Ryland.



An interesting wagon label from a collection donated to the Trust. The wagon was despatched on 13th May 1908 from Ellistown Collieries that were on the Leicester to Burton line near Coalville and was consigned to W W Powell who was presumably a coal merchant based at the GNR station in St Albans.



John Telford's shot of the 'box and garden from the signal ladder.

Progress at the 'box

Well the rain finally ended and we were able to continue and complete painting the south end of the 'Box - only the other three sides to go!

Our biggest achievement has been completing the renovation and erection of the Midland lower quadrant signal, now resplendent at the north end of the garden and connected to Lever 32 on the operating floor. To ensure more visibility of the signal we thinned the trees that were in the middle of the mound surrounding the signal. This area is now much opened up and ready, perhaps, for more artefacts.

We are, as ever, grateful to our regular gardening team who did much good work during the summer. Of late a great deal of Autumn clearance has been done to the hedgerow and flowerbeds and on the embankment. The latter will enable the completion of wiring for our planned outside telephones.

The 4-lever ground frame has been moved to be adjacent to the sleepers in the NW corner and work commenced on linking it up via rods, cranks, pulleys and wires to the (still to be renovated) triple ground signal. When completed, this will be another hands-on experience for visitors. Moving the ground frame has also enabled the area between the 'Box and the lamp hut to be tidied up and the store of rods placed behind the lamp hut on a covered wooden frame.

Upstairs, the 4-track signalling demonstration has bedded-in nicely; it shows a sequence of 7 trains in a 20-minute period. As well as use for specialist visits, it has sometimes been used in quieter moments on public open days when visitors have shown a particular interest. So, do come along and see it in action and even have a go under the expert guidance of our signalmen.

John Telford

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

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The 4 lever ground frame originally located on the eastern side of Leicester station now positioned in the corner of the garden with one lever attached to some of the signalling equipment obtained from the National Railway Museum.

