



Romsey Signal Box Project

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"THE SIGNAL"

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Dear Reader,

BOX TO OPEN ON REGULAR BASIS

Romsey Signalbox is now sufficiently complete to warrant its opening on a regular basis, becoming the latest attraction in the southern Test Valley. It is also a suitable resource for schools to use for studies required as part of the National Curriculum.

We were delighted to celebrate the official re-opening of the Signalbox on the afternoon of Saturday 17 October 1992, exactly ten years to the day since the box closed. A full report from the "Romsey Advertiser" is reproduced on pages 2 and 3.

After a quiet period over the winter, the Project Team are now getting down to some serious work to further develop the site. Firstly, the Team, under the advice of the Southern Tourist Board, have decided to open the box to the public on a regular basis.

Romsey Signalbox will be open to the public and operating from 10am until 5pm on the first Sunday in every month, from April to October inclusive. In addition, the site will be open on any dates when steam locomotives are operating along the line through Romsey.

Secondly, much further work is needed on the site, both technical and manual. Most of this work can be undertaken whilst the signalbox is operating, and certain tasks require a significant number of people at any one time.

Regular formal working sessions will be held on the same dates as the Open Days. Could all volunteers please make a note of the relevant dates in their diaries and make every effort to attend.

We would like to make a real success of these sessions. To do so, we are very much reliant on a good attendance.

And last, but certainly not least, we were delighted to host a visit to the Signalbox last week by 90 children from Romsey County Junior School. Headteacher Adrienne Caplin said the visit, which had to be spread over two days, 23 and 25 February, provided first class material as part of two terms' thematic study on communications, a requirement of the National Curriculum.

The Project Team would be delighted to hear from any other schools who would like to consider a visit to the site. That is, after all, the main reason for the Project's existence.

Dick Hewett
Project Manager

SIGNALBOX RE-OPENS WITH A NOISY CELEBRATION

Report as submitted to "Romsey Advertiser":

The noise of a special bell code rung by two Mayors and a County Councillor signalled the official return of Romsey Signalbox to operation again on Saturday 17th October, exactly 10 years to the day since closure.

In practice the Signalbox had been back in apparent operation since 6.37pm the previous evening, when the first imaginary train was accepted from Redbridge Signalbox, at the start of Romsey Signalbox Project's celebratory 48-hour signalling marathon. But this did not detract in any way from the special sense of occasion for the official ceremony.

Romsey Signalbox Project Manager Dick Hewett was delighted to welcome Test Valley Borough Mayor Cllr Craig Lewis, Romsey Town Mayor Charlie Mead, and County Councillor Liz Brett into the box for the 4pm ceremony. They were joined by special guests from the Project's main sponsors.

Chris Gibb, Manager Regional Railways Western Cross-Country, was pleased to arrive on time on one of his own trains from Trowbridge, accompanied by Ivor Mason, ex-Rail Manager from Foster Yeoman Ltd. British Rail donated and laid the track outside the box, on top of 100 tons of ballast donated by Foster Yeoman.

The third guest was Steven Donnolly from Southern Electric's Street Lighting Division in Basingstoke, who had supplied and installed a mains electric supply from Romsey Infants School earlier in the year.

There wasn't much room in the box for all the guests and signalbox officials, especially now the box is fully furnished with cooker, fridge, sink and even an authentic armchair! All these items had been rescued from Southbourne and Fishbourne Signalboxes on the railway between Havant and Chichester, when they were closed at the end of September.

After the ceremonial 5-5-5 bell code rung jointly by the local authority guests upstairs in Romsey, the representatives from the sponsors responded in like kind from Eastleigh, Redbridge and Kimbridge Signalboxes - in practice all contained downstairs on the Project's special simulator.

The train service, which had been temporarily suspended for the official re-opening (BR's Chris Gibb denied it was due to any technical problems!), resumed with the Project Team giving a full demonstration to the official guests.

Whilst Barry Sherratt pulled the levers and operated the instruments, Alan Gilmour noted all events in the official train register. Meanwhile, George Pryer managed to spread himself across a large area of Hampshire at one time, acting as signalman at Eastleigh, Redbridge and Kimbridge on the simulator downstairs.

The passage of trains through the junction involves much ringing of bells and pulling of levers, and it was left to Project Manager Dick Hewett to give a layman's commentary to the guests. Before the afternoon was out, each of the guests had joined in the operation of the signalbox.

Much work had been needed to get the box ready for the target date. The Project Team's technical expert, Ian Maxwell, directed wiring operations which were undertaken mainly by teenagers Chris Hack, Chris Smith and Richard Read. Richard Beton ensured sufficient lighting existed both inside and outside the box to enable safe nighttime operation.

The imaginary train service being operated by members of the Project Team was maintained throughout the weekend, and the public were invited to visit at any time. Twelve team members operated in shifts to man the signalbox.

Project Manager Dick Hewett and colleague Alan Gilmour from London were foolhardy enough to volunteer for both the nighttime sessions from 10pm until 8am, accompanied on the Friday night by Richard Read (16), and on the Saturday by Robin Allwood and his 7-year-old son Paul.

Other daytime operators included Bill Tyndall, who worked the signalbox for six months when it was still open; Chris Smith (16), who has just started as an apprentice with British Rail; and Chris Hack (16), who had compiled the timetable which was one of the major successes of the weekend.

Apart from the Signalbox itself, visitors were able to study display boards about the Project, whilst the children, tired after rides up and down the track on the Project Team's trolley, watched fascinated as John Read operated his tiny model railway. Shelter for the model railway and display boards was provided by a tent loaned for the weekend by Romsey Scouts.

Meanwhile a number of children from Romsey School helped out on the site on the Saturday, digging trenches and laying pipes. The scene was one of great activity.

During the course of the whole weekend, 122 people signed the visitor's book, but the team believe this number should be trebled to over 350 to indicate the actual total number of visitors. Most came between 10am and 5pm, though there were a number of visitors as late as midnight, and Alison Gilmour drove over from Gosport to arrive at 4am on the Sunday morning! The team's greatest disappointment was the failure of the Romsey Police to make a rumoured raid at 4.30am on the Saturday!

All the operators were sponsored for their efforts, and, together with donations and sales, the team estimate that almost £300 will eventually have been raised for Project funds.

WORKING SESSIONS AT SIGNALBOX SITE

There are all sorts of tasks to be accomplished. They involve all skills and abilities, from electrical work, through carpentry, concreting and painting, to plain manual work such as path construction, raising signals and general site improvements. Work can be found for anyone aged 10 and over.

The electrical work inside the signalbox itself is being coordinated by Ian Maxwell, who has a set of keys to the site. Others who have keys include Chris Hack, Richard Reed and Bill Tyndall. Anyone keen to help on occasions other than Open Days should contact one of the above.

COWLEY BRIDGE JUNCTION MINIATURE, MOBILE SIGNALBOXProgress

The catch handles mentioned in the last issue of "The Signal" have been fitted and work well. Work on Cowley Bridge is now being concentrated on upgrading the existing equipment and wiring.

Displays in 1992/93

Cowley Bridge Junction made its promised appearance at BR's Eastleigh Works Open Day on Sunday 27 September. Over 1,000 leaflets advertising the October Open Weekend were handed out and much interest generated.

Since then Cowley Bridge has been taken to Tolworth (London) and Lordshill (both in November), Bridgwater (Somerset) and Southampton (both in January), and Witley (Surrey) (in February). It is due in Fareham in March and also in Swindon later the same month.

Generally there have been sufficient people to man Cowley Bridge, but further volunteers would still be welcome.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS UNTIL THE END OF 1993

Signalbox Open Days/Working Sessions (all Sundays):
April 4; May 2; June 6; July 4; August 1; September 5; October 3.

Cowley Bridge on display:

Contact Dick Hewett or Bill Tyndall for details.

ENQUIRIES, ARRANGING VISITS, ETC.

For any special visits or offers of assistance or materials, or for any other enquiries, contact the Project Manager, Dick Hewett, 42 Botley Road, Romsey, Hants, SO51 8AP; tel: Romsey (0794) 522979.