



Romsey Signal Box Project

"THE SIGNAL"

Dear Reader

No 7 - June 1994

VISITOR CENTRE ARRIVES!

Newsletter no 6 was sent out only three months ago, yet so much has happened in the meantime - and you can see it on the signal box site! After a year of relatively little apparent progress, suddenly there have been major developments everywhere. I am delighted to fill the pages of "The Signal" with details.

The most newsworthy and obvious development is the arrival on the signal box site of our prospective visitor centre. It may be difficult to envisage it as yet, but the rusty, rotting hulks now positioned in a disorganised fashion along the boundary fence by the school will eventually house our displays and possibly even an introductory video or slide presentation.

The hulks concerned are actually old Southern Railway meat container vans, without bogies or wheels, but resting on sleepers. There'll be plenty of work to bring them to a satisfactory standard, but Richard Read and Ben Penny are already leading the charge to get the work done (it's difficult to stop them)!

The team had a somewhat frustrating weekend in mid-April rescuing the vans from behind a house in Timsbury, four miles north of Romsey. They had been there since the late 1950s, when they were scrapped by BR! The new owner of the house, Mark Watkinson, was keen to see them go to a good home. Not only did Mark donate the vans, but he also helped pay for the necessary transport.

Member Chris Hack's dad Bob provided the mainstay of our equipment in the shape of a fork lift tractor. Now came the task of hauling them round a garage and onto the roadside, where they were lifted onto a crane lorry. The house was on the worst possible bend in Timsbury - half the team were on traffic duty! Unfortunately all three vans suffered some damage during this operation.

Transfer to the school car park took Friday evening and all Saturday. Sunday morning saw an only partially successful attempt to move all three vans onto the signal box site, with only the lightest van moved. To get the others shifted, we called in our old friend Andy Bott with his JCB. The following Saturday, Bob Hack and one of Andy's drivers between them completed the operation - but not without further damage being sustained by the vans.

We have been searching for some time for something suitable. Whilst there may be railway vans in better condition, they don't come cheap, and there would always be the huge logistical problems involved in getting them onto the site. These vans can perform the visitor centre function perfectly - it just needs patience, wood, a little imagination, expert guidance, and plenty of sweat!

Dick Hewett

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NEWS OF "FRIENDS OF ROMSEY SIGNAL BOX"

The "Friends of Romsey Signal Box" has been successfully launched and, at the time of writing, 42 people have paid up as subscribers, about half offering their services and/or expertise. This an encouraging number, but there is potential for an increase!

Ian Maxwell should be congratulated for having recruited the most new members, mainly from his contacts amongst professional railwaymen. Most of the regular volunteers have also returned forms. Membership cards are not yet ready, but will be sent with the next issue of "The Signal". In the meantime members will find their membership number marked on the top of this issue.

However, some long-standing supporters have yet to return a contribution to the "Friends". We hope they will see their way to putting their hands into their pockets for what is, after all, almost loose change. It could be just the amount we need to pay a minor but significant expense of some type.

The distribution list will be "culled" before the despatch of the next issue of "The Signal". With a few exceptions only, the next issue will not be sent to anyone who has not registered as a "Friend of Romsey Signal Box". This is the "last chance saloon"!

If you haven't already returned a form, please consider sending a cheque for your subscription (£5 adults, £2.50 children and pensioners), together with a short note indicating name, address, and whether you are interested in actually helping on the Project at all. If "yes", I will send you a form by return. If "no", you will simply receive a membership card with your next newsletter.

In the meantime, a very warm welcome to all our paid-up members, new and familiar! Remember that the signal box is open from 10am until 5pm on the first Sunday in every month except January. Come and help operate, or join the working party, or just come along to see how things are progressing. You will always be welcome.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE DEVELOPMENTS

Some members may be aware that the management of the project has been under some debate for the last few months. The Transport Heritage Committee has become somewhat moribund over the last year, as fewer people have been able to attend meetings.

Secretary Ted Mason and acting Chairman Dick Hewett have been discussing the problem with the Romsey and District Society, the parent body to which the Buildings Preservation Trust is attached. As a result, approval has been given to the formation of a Society sub-committee dedicated to the transport heritage project of which the Signal Box is the centre.

This development will hopefully result in a stronger, more effective management team, access to some further funding, access

perhaps to skills amongst the members of the Society, and further opportunities to promote the project. The first meeting of a provisional sub-committee is being arranged shortly to agree upon its membership, responsibilities, and relationship to the Society and to the "Friends of Romsey Signal Box".

EASTER WORKING SESSION

A considerable amount was achieved during the two-day session, even though the weather was not too kind to us on Good Friday. Of the planned tasks, the following were undertaken:

- further site planning;
- concreting the leadaway outside the signal box;
- preparation work for our colour light signal;
- various items of re-wiring inside the Signal Box;
- work to progress the telephone concentrator;
- site preparation for the container vans;
- a big bonfire!;
- various other electrical and labouring tasks.

One task not completed was the completion of the track diagram.

Longer term tasks requiring some specialist materials include:

- fitting the locks and controllers;
- connecting the ground frame to our distant signal;
- completing the level crossing;
- installing a second set of point tips, with facing point lock and ground signals;
- and of course the minor task of van restoration!

All volunteers may wish to note that, apart from Open days, *access can be obtained to the site at any time* by obtaining the keys from Dick Hewett (0794-522979), or from Bill Tyndall, Chris Hack, Richard Read or Ian Maxwell. Ken Hanks, the school caretaker, will open up for you on presentation of your membership card.

OPEN DAYS

It is planned to undertake a survey of visitors during the next few Open Days, with a short questionnaire to establish why they are visiting, where they are from, etc. Volunteers are urged to follow four basic principles:

- Give every visitor a sequentially-numbered souvenir ticket;
- Ask every family group or individual visitor to complete a questionnaire before they leave;
- Wave the donations tin before they leave;
- Encourage them to buy a Guide;
- Hand a membership application form to anyone who looks as if they might be interesting in joining the "Friends";
- Above all, make all visitors feel welcome, whatever age, level of interest/knowledge, or propensity to fill the donations tin! (Stop operating/working if necessary.)

COWLEY BRIDGE JUNCTION

1st and 2nd May, and the bells were ringing to a continuous and sizeable audience, in the foyer of Exeter St Davids Station, as part of the Exeter 150 celebrations. This was very successful, with much interest generated, several ex-Cowley Bridge signalmen reminiscing, and at least one new volunteer. We linked up with Peter Jordan and the Exeter West Group, and Peter's model of Cowley Bridge was on display. A future proposal includes exchange visits between Romsey and Crewe (where Exeter West has been rebuilt).

Over the weekend 4/5 June, Cowley Bridge was operated by a very small team down at the Moors Valley Railway. This was less well-attended, but good contacts were made. Our thanks must go to Chris Smith, who slept overnight in the mess room at Moors Valley and spent the weekend in Exeter. He was accompanied there by Alan Gilmour (thanks also to him), whilst Nick Dyer twice made the trip to Moors Valley on the bus - rather him than me!

David and Marion Canning have been regular attenders alongside Cowley Bridge with their photographs, calendars, etc., and are generously passing a proportion of the proceeds from their sales to the Project. Our thanks to them.

Just a reminder again, that from now on, *Bill Tyndall (Romsey 512410)* has taken over responsibility for coordinating the timetable for Cowley Bridge and rostering operators. Please get in touch with Bill rather than ringing Dick about Cowley Bridge.

ROMSEY STATION WAITING ROOM

At last we have taken full possession of the old Ladies Waiting Room on the Up platform at Romsey Station. New locks have been fitted, and internal shutters installed, though we still have to resolve the problem of an electricity supply.

We are now able to use the room for storage. As a result, Cowley Bridge has now been moved to its new permanent home. One of the next tasks will be to tidy the room and transfer some of the items currently stored in the signal box.

Keys for the room at the station are held by Bill Tyndall, Dick Hewett, Ian Maxwell, Chris Hack, and Robin Allwood.

Stop Press: Andy Moody has discovered an original rail signal post still in situ on the trackbed between Romsey and Andover. Negotiations have been opened for its rescue. Watch this space!

Next Issue of "The Signal" will be in September, with reports of specific tasks. *Contributions from members would be most welcome!*