



# Romsey Signal Box Project

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"THE SIGNAL"

Dear Reader

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## MARATHON WEEKEND PLANNED

The press releases are starting to go out, the banner has been organised for the Hundred, and some new sweatshirts have been collected. If that doesn't suggest plans are well in hand for our marathon visitor weekend in September, what does?!

Well, a full programme of work for a start. The Committee has agreed a number of targets for the summer, including:

- Completion of the level crossing and ground frame works;
- Completion of the first meat container van;
- The fitting of at least five locks and controllers;
- The mounting of the first display boards for the visitor trail;
- Completion of the painting inside the box.

Many other more minor items will also be attended to before the great day. Some have already been achieved (see reports inside).

And at last it looks as if the debate within the Romsey & District Buildings Preservation Trust, which we thought had been resolved some months ago (a false start), has been settled in favour of significant work being undertaken on the box and its site. Hopefully this too will be completed by the beginning of September, including:

- New double access gates by the foot of the signal box steps;
- Repairs to the cracking brickwork and crumbling mortar;
- A new supporting strut under the sink corner;
- Most significantly, a second skin of timber on the outside of the box to afford greater long-term protection;
- The primer and undercoat for a newly decorated box.

We have agreed to complete the top coats of paint if the Trust provide the materials and explicit instructions. Hopefully we will also have suitable scaffolding in place.

So what is this great weekend? Nothing less than a second 48-hour operating marathon from Friday evening 15 September through to Sunday evening 17 September. And throughout this period, the box and site will be open to the general public as our contribution to *Heritage Open Days '95*, the second of an enormously successful celebration of community heritage which offers free admission to, and special events at, hundreds of properties of architectural, historic or cultural interest throughout the country. The whole weekend is coordinated by the Civic Trust, with funding from the Department of National Heritage, and we will get significant promotional benefits.

So what can you, the Friends of Romsey Signal Box, do to help? *Volunteer to operate, or to talk to visitors; or just come along and see us at any time of the weekend.* A form is enclosed with this issue of *The Signal*. The weekend depends on you!

*R.B. Hewett*

## NEWS FROM THE SIGNAL BOX SITE

Yet more progress has been made during the three months since the last edition. The site is slowly taking its long-term perspective.

Inside the box, our superb diagram has finally been fitted into the very smart frame constructed by Ben Penny. This has transformed the internal appearance of the box.

Other work "inside" the box has included the stripping out of some of the windows and complete restoration of the runners and pegs. Thanks to Richard Read and Ben Penny, "Easyglide" windows have got nothing on ours!

Out on the site, the ground signal is close to being fitted to the ground frame, and the level crossing gates need only a few small fittings before being declared complete.

We have invested in a tarpaulin cover for the first of our vans, enabling work to progress without risk of damage from the rain. Much of the worst wood in the van has already been removed, though some of the most difficult pieces still require attention before the fitting of new pieces can begin.

There was great excitement when we had a visit from members of Romsey W.I., accompanied by Charlie Mead the town Mayor, on Friday 9 June. Not because of the visit, but because Chris Hack fitted two of the bulbs for our colour light and the unit actually worked! The third bulb followed a few days later.

The Easter weekend saw a blitz on site clearance, and a two-day bonfire. It is hoped to keep the site tidier in future.

Finally, Rod Hoyle delivered the first of our external, weatherproof boards. This one is for our new entrance gates and will look extremely smart. We will, unfortunately, have to protect it against vandalism, but that will hopefully not detract from the positive impression it will make on visitors.

All told, the last six months have seen a real upturn in progress, and there is every hope that the summer will see some long-term plans come to fruition in time for the September event.

### *Projects for completion in the rest of 1995*

The main tasks have been listed on the front page, but we should also mention the plans to produce several more display boards (covering the history and operation of the canal at the end of the site), hopefully before 15 September.

The problems with the electrics seem to have been resolved but improvements to ensure greater reliability and ease of operation are still planned, including possible changes to the block instruments. Work to start connecting up the telephone concentrator is well overdue.

Finally, it is proving impossible to get a mains electric supply connected into our room at Romsey Station, so we will try to get an old petrol generator for the few occasions power is needed.

As always, plenty of work to be done, and progress relies on a very small team of dedicated individuals, but with a bigger team progress can be accelerated! So come and help when you can.

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#### MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The front page refers to the debate in the Romsey & District Buildings Preservation Trust concerning the Signal Box, which they own. The Project Manager was invited to attend a Trust Committee meeting in May, at which the signal box was the subject of a long debate. The Trust are not as flushed with funds as they would like, and the box is a drain on their resources. Yet as owners they have a duty of care, and a refusal to spend funds would only see the box deteriorate further. It wouldn't be an easy decision.

The five members of your Management Committee, together with George Pryer and Ben Penny, were delighted therefore to welcome the Trust's committee to the signal box site on Wednesday 14 June. It was the first time some of the Trust committee members had ever visited the box. Recognising the potential significance of the occasion, Bill Tyndall, Richard Read, Dick Hewett and Chris Hack all took leave from work or changed other commitments to be available, whilst Ben Penny, Ian Maxwell and George Pryer all travelled some distance to be present.

A carefully planned tour of the site, culminating in a very swift operating demonstration, was enough to convince the Trust that the box was worth investing in for the long-term. Without any doubt, the seven Project volunteers gave the best impression possible, and removed any doubts in the minds of Trust members of the dedication and professionalism being applied in project management, workmanship (Ben Penny's carpentry was commended at the later Trust meeting), marketing, restoration to working order, and so on.

Whilst the rest of the Management Committee retired to the Sun for refreshment and a discussion about the summer's work programme, the Project Manager accompanied the Trust's committee to their meeting to discuss the signal box. The debate was not long. There was unanimous agreement that work should be put in hand (after suitable quotations had been obtained), with a target of completion by the end of August.

Now desparate for a celebratory drink, your Project Manager joined his colleagues in the Sun with the good news. The subsequent meeting was as positive as any gathering of signal box volunteers to date. The whole evening, an unqualified success for all concerned, could well turn out to be a watershed in the life of the project.

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## NEWS OF "FRIENDS OF ROMSEY SIGNAL BOX"

As of 18 June we had 34 paid up full members, with 4 paid up pensioners and 10 paid up "child" members, a total of 48. Lets see if we can crack the 50 barrier this year - only two to go!

Remember, if every existing Friend recruited a single member, our membership would double overnight. Your Project Manager did his bit when he spotted old friend Barry Sherratt on gate duty at Castle Caereinion on the Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway (of which they are both members) in Wales on Spring Bank Holiday Monday. A scribbled note with address and an invitation to send a fiver was stuffed into Barry's hand on the return journey: the fiver duly arrived last week. What about you beating that?!

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## BOOKS FOR SALE

There may be a few members who haven't yet acquired one of the excellent books featuring Romsey and the signal box. All are of course available through the Friends.

"After The Rhinoceros" was published by Test Valley Archeaological Society a few years ago but is still excellent value as a record of Romsey's railway history at a mere £2.50. We now sell more copies than anyone else!

The two Middleton Press books covering the line are also available: Fareham to Salisbury (via Eastleigh) at £8.95, and Andoverf to Southampton (including the Longparish branch) at £9.95. If you're going to buy a copy of either, do it through the Friends when you next visit - and make a contribution to the funds!

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## SEPTEMBER WEEKEND

Friends should note that an English Tourist Board "Visitors Charter" will be posted in a prominent position just inside the box for all visitors to see. Next time you visit, PLEASE NOTE THE CONTENTS AND ACT ACCORDINGLY!

And so a final reminder: The Open weekend depends on you!  
 - Come and help with the work during the summer to get things finished in time;  
 - Help publicise the weekend and get friends/colleagues to visit;  
 - Volunteer for duties over the weekend.  
 Let's make it a weekend to remember!

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The next Issue of "The Signal" will hopefully be in the autumn, soon after our marathon weekend.  
*Contributions from members would be most welcome!*