



# Romsey Signal Box Project

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## "THE SIGNAL"

Dear Reader

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### MARATHON WEEKEND SUCCESS

Good news to report again! We can add the marathon weekend to our growing list of initiatives which are worth repeating. As a direct result of the success of this event in gaining publicity, attracting visitors, and bringing members to the box, we can reach only one conclusion: *WE MUST DO IT AGAIN IN 1996!*

So we are now proposing a calendar of three major members' gatherings per annum: AGM in January; working session at Easter; operating weekend in September. These three will be in addition to the regular working/open days on the first Sunday in each month.

It has to be said that none of the major tasks listed in the editorial of the last "Signal" were completed before the great event, but circumstances prevented access for key members of the team, and a slower timetable is necessary. (More inside.)

However this did not detract from the weekend. The weather stayed dry for all but a few brief minutes, so the shelter for displays which the restored van was due to provide was not required.

The successful weekend coincided with the introduction of the new access route into the signal box site, which was formalised when the superb new double gates arrived a couple of days later. Now our new access arrangements are complete, and access past the school nursery block is no longer possible, to the school's relief.

I keep reporting that the Trust have agreed to undertake the necessary repair works to the signal box structure - and I keep getting told after successive Trust meetings that approval has been given for the work to proceed! So I make no forecasts as to the date when all this will happen. But I am assured it will...

Finally, therefore, to look ahead - and an important invitation to all members to attend our Annual General Meeting. The aim is to hold this in the new visitor centre - if Ben Penny and team can get it finished before Christmas!

So - Date of AGM: Sunday 7th January. Time: 2.30pm. Venue: Somewhere on the signal box site! We had a good turn out last year, and held a very valuable meeting. The minutes can be made available in advance to anyone who wants them - otherwise you will be given a short time on the day to read through them before the formal proceedings commence.

Please attend. We want your support, your views, and your encouragement. A strong organisation is more likely to have a thriving future. Let's build that future together!

Dick Hewett

Agents of the Romsey and District Buildings Preservation Trust

## NEWS FROM THE SIGNAL BOX SITE

Other than the changed access arrangements (undertaken by a professional fencing contractor and funded by the Romsey & District Society), regular visitors may not have recognised much change on the site since June. In practice, progress has been mainly behind the scenes or, more accurately, under the covers.

Work on the restoration of the first meat container van has been slower than hoped as it proved difficult to provide carpenter Ben Penny (only 15 years old) with much supervised time on site. However Ben and Richard Read have almost completed the rebuilding of the wooden frame, and plan to restore and re-cover the roof next. Final work will involve floor boards and internal boarding.

**AN APPEAL:** We are loathe to have to spend significant funds on floorboards. Does any member have access to, or knowledge of, a building which is being demolished/refurbished and which could supply a suitable source of floorboards?

The other obvious sign of progress at the marathon weekend was the appearance of the first two visitor trail signs from Rod Hoyle, to cover "Romsey's Railways" and "Romsey Signal Box". These absolutely superb hand-painted perspex boards will stand by the foot of the signal box steps. Rod has clearly put a lot of time and effort into the boards and we are grateful to him.

In contrast, there has been little or no progress on the other items listed on the front of the last "Signal":

- Completion of the level crossing and ground frame works;
- The fitting of at least five locks and controllers;
- Completion of the painting inside the box.

Nevertheless, we must report the comments of more than one member who had not been to the box for several years. They were astounded at the progress made, both inside and out. It takes someone who hasn't been so close to the action to remind the regular members that we are making steady and, in some people's views, spectacular progress. Every little bit of work counts, and everyone who has done even the least work should feel proud of themselves.

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

Work will be concentrated on the meat container van and the structural work being funded by the Trust, but we should also mention the imminent delivery of a third display board from Rod Hoyle, covering the history of the canal.

In addition, once the Trust have added the second layer of boarding to the southern face of the box, we will be responsible for the final painting.

As ever, work will be concentrated around the regular sessions on the first Sunday of each month.

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## MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Your committee hasn't met since the last issue, and is unlikely to do so now before the AGM. The Friends will need to be put on a slightly more formal footing from January, as we will have greater responsibility for the finances associated with the box.

In addition it is highly likely that we shall be seeking at least one new committee member, as work, college and family commitments continue to impinge on available time.

Anyone interested in serving on the committee (in practice it's not exactly an onerous task) should let one of the existing members know before the AGM, when elections will be held.

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## NEWS OF "FRIENDS OF ROMSEY SIGNAL BOX"

I am delighted to report that a recruitment drive by your Project Manager in July resulted in a number of people who have been instrumental in the project getting off the ground joining up as Friends, and we have smashed through the 50 barrier with ease.

As of 25 September, we had 40 paid up full members, with 9 paid up pensioners and 10 paid up "child" members, a total of 59. Our next target should be 75 from 1 January!

Remember, if every existing Friend recruited a single member, our membership would double overnight. Have you done your bit?

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## THE 48-HOUR SIGNALLING MARATHON: THE FACTS AND THE FICTION

Richard Read did manage the most hours down at the box (around 30) but Ben Penny didn't manage to stay awake for the Friday night session! Peter Jordan, Chairman of the Exeter West Group in Crewe, did make it down from Birmingham for the weekend, but Bill Tyndall had to travel the other way (to Bangor) and didn't manage to attend. And the Rapley lads from Basingstoke did stop talking for much of the Saturday operating session, but Dick Hewett didn't.

So what did really happen between 8.30pm Friday 15th September and 8.30pm Sunday 17th September?

Well, members kept up a continuous operation based on Chris Hack's fictitious timetable, though the booking boy occasionally went off duty. In total, over 20 members made an appearance sometime during the weekend, either to operate or just to view.

The first shift (8.30pm Friday to 8.30am Saturday) was manned by Chris Hack, Alan Gilmour, Richard Read and Ben Penny. David Canning had hoped to attend but had to drop out a few days before. The night shift were relieved on Saturday morning by Chris Smith and Richard Faithful (operators), and Dick Hewett (talking).

Mid-morning saw the arrival of the Rapley lads (Adam, Jack and Steve), whilst Peter Jordan joined us at noon.

Saturday saw the greatest influx of visitors, and whilst most of the members concentrated on operating, Dick kept up a continuous commentary pitched at the audience - which matched his knowledge!

By 8.30 that evening, the Rapleys had left, but further members had gathered in the form of the Saturday night shift (Chris Hack, Nick Dyer and Richard Read), and several other members (George Pryer, and David and Paul Hewett). The night shift departed Sunday morning, to be replaced by Dick, Peter, Alan, and Craig Phillips. Ken Rye arrived late morning to complete the day's team.

The police called in at 3am Saturday to make sure all was well, whilst Dr John White from the Trust and Romsey & District Society arrived at the very end (8.30pm Sunday) to congratulate the team.

Most of the operators were sponsored, raising useful funds (a gentle reminder to submit forms and moneys by 5 November). And we cleared virtually the entire stock of sweatshirts to members.

The Romsey Advertiser photographer (Pat Billence) called on the Saturday and snapped away merrily, with the result that the Advertiser for the following week carried not one, but two pictures alongside the extensive report submitted by our press officer.

And what about the visitors? Well - there were 140 individuals in total, less than might have been expected but still a good number, who donated over £50 to funds. Each group was invited to complete our visitor book. From this, we know that, of 57 entries made: 40 groups came from Romsey; 10 from Southampton/Chandlers Ford and the rest of Hampshire; and 7 from further afield (Hereford, Cardiff, Canterbury, Weston, Hastings, Poole, Salisbury).

We also know that, despite the wide publicity through the local press and broadcast media, Heritage Open Days, posters, the railway press, and leafletting, the most effective way to attract visitors remains the signs outside the gate (14 groups), followed closely by family/friends (10), the advance coverage in the Romsey Advertiser (10), and the banner strung across the Hundred in Romsey all the previous week (10). Posters in Romsey attracted 7, and the Romsey & District Newsletter, only a certain proportion of which were distributed in time for the event, brought in 5 groups.

But let's forget the visitors: the fact is - the members who were involved enjoyed the weekend. And it meant the box was actually being operated, which is what it was restored for. Isn't that sufficient justification on its own for repeating the event?!

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The next Issue of "The Signal" will be in January, after the AGM.

*Contributions from members would be most welcome!*