



# Romsey Signal Box Project

## "THE SIGNAL"

Dear Reader

No 12 - February 1996

### GET IT FIXED IN '96!

A comprehensive programme of work to take the Signal Box Project through to the end of the summer has been agreed by the committee. The main thrust of this year's efforts is quite simply to finish what we've started. As it says above, let's get it fixed in '96!

One major conclusion from the AGM was the desirability of completing all the unfinished work around the site. So many tasks are 80% or 90% finished. One of the factors in our failure to win the Ian Allen Signalling Award may well have been this sign of a project which is almost there but not quite.

There is a strong suspicion that completing the site to a higher standard would attract new members who were solely interested in operating the box as opposed to restoring it, and who might be put off by its lack of complete authenticity. Creating the correct atmosphere could make all the difference. This was where the winners of the Ian Allen Award scored over us.

The work on the structure of the box itself has at last been completed by the Trust (report elsewhere), so now lets go forward with a comprehensive programme to do the rest of our work.

Dick Hewett

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### A LOOK BACK TO THE FUTURE

*Annual general Meeting report by new secretary Alan Gilmour:*

A bakers' dozen of 13 "Friends" attended an informal Annual General Meeting at Romsey Signal Box on Sunday 7 January. Notable amongst those present were John Prytherch (all the way from Warrington), Alan Gilmour (London), Ken Rye (Thatcham), Simon Cooper (Chippenham), and Richard Cobbold, with Adam and Steve Rapley (all from Basingstoke). Supporters are spread far and wide and their presence was much appreciated by the more local members such as John Read. Apologies were received from George Pryer, Peter Jordan, Jack Rapley and Derrick Palengat.

Official business was minimal as the main purpose of the meeting was to review the achievements of 1995 and to set objectives for 1996. Two of the most significant developments of 1995 were the reinstatement of a positive working relationship between the Project and the Infants School, and the external repair of the Signal Box by the Romsey & District Buildings Preservation Trust.

With these issues resolved, the active members of the Project were able to make great progress in the tasks they enjoy best - the

internal restoration of the box and the development of the site. Enhancements included the mounting of a colour light signal in working order; the installation of new level crossing gates; and the installation of a new signal box diagram inside the box.

Major projects to be completed in 1996 would be the provision of new visitor display boards and the restoration of the first meat van as a visitor centre. Time and money is also to be spent on the electrical locking of the lever frame and the provision of telephone lines inside the box and around the site. Cowley Bridge miniature signal box is also to receive a new look for 1996.

Concern was expressed about the need for new active members, as existing volunteers gain other commitments and thus have less time available to devote to the box. A recruitment drive is overdue.

A report on the finances showed that the major sources of income include open day donations, subscriptions, marathon weekend sponsorships, and local authority grants. Expenditure is concentrated on materials. Book and sweatshirt sales generate a small profit. The balance may appear healthy at £700 but our needs for materials far exceed that, and fundraising remains critical.

A new Management Committee was elected at the AGM. Ian Maxwell has now moved away from the area, and whilst he will still be involved on an occasional basis, he can no longer contribute to the committee and has stood down. Present and re-elected were Dick Hewett (Chairman/Project Manager/treasurer), Bill Lyndall (Cowley Bridge), Richard Read (deputy site manager), and Chris Hack (technical). In place of Ian, the AGM agreed to two extra members: Alan Gilmour (secretary) and Ben Penny (construction) (both present).

The most important tasks for the new committee will be to control funds whilst co-ordinating and implementing a programme of work for 1996. They will also organise a programme of open days and events. The box will continue to open on the first Sunday in every month, when the emphasis will be on working rather than operating sessions. A range of other special occasions was outlined.

The meeting closed after 2 hours of extremely valuable discussion. For the second year running, the AGM gave a tremendous boost to anyone who needed reassurance that their activities were taking the Project in the right direction. Thanks are due to everyone who attended (without reminders), especially those from distant parts.

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## NEWS FROM THE SIGNAL BOX SITE

### Signal box structure

As reported at the AGM, the most important development since September has been the virtual completion of the restoration work funded by the Trust. Their builder Ian Payne has repointed the brickwork, and added a new support under the corner with the sink; he raised the corner by nearly 3 inches before fitting it!

The other major addition has been a second skin to the exterior of the wooden boarding facing the school (southwards). This exterior panel was the one suffering the most water ingress. A decision to add a second skin to the west elevation (facing down the site towards the canal) has been put off for the time being, but, if it becomes obvious that elevation still has problems, it will only need the finances to be found for the work: a precedent for the means by which the problem could be resolved has been set.

#### **Meat container vans**

Progress on the first meat container van has been spectacular, including the arrival of an almost complete set of floorboards, and the completion of the internal timber structure. In January, Richard Read reported that he and Ben Penny had almost finished all of the main woodwork, put a felt roof on and started to screw the outside metal work back on. Since Richard's report, most of the metal panelling has been completed, and the doors refitted.

#### **Access gates and other items on the site**

The new double gates to the site have already proved very useful, not just during Open Days when visitors arrive right by the signal box steps, but also for deliveries. The new floorboards for the van were delivered right to the site entrance, thanks to the new wider gate access, when Rod Hoyle and Dick Hewett rescued them from a shop in Salisbury at an hour's notice one evening in October.

Various other items have been more permanently placed around the site, including the colour light signal, authentic railway signs, troughing for cables, and a wiring box. Work inside the box has been minimal, in contrast, but this should be addressed in 1996.

Overall much progress has been made, and, with the year-long struggle to get the structure of the box restored now over, the Friends can look forward to completing the restoration of the inside without the fear of the building collapsing around them.

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#### **WORK PROGRAMME FOR 1996**

Our target now is to complete the existing items on the site by late Summer (September/October). The work involved is a mixture of technical and manual, so there shouldn't be a problem involving all volunteers on the site in beneficial work at any Open Day.

#### **Inside the box**

A number of items need to be completed if we are to meet our target. Firstly, within the box itself, a concerted effort is to be made to fit the locks and controllers, with the necessary linking rods. If necessary, we will purchase relevant materials rather than continue the fruitless search for freebies. The operation of the box will not be authentic until this work is complete, a critical requirement to attract new operating members.

The second major work inside the box involves the telephone concentrator and its links to phones both inside and outside the box. Chris Hack hopes to complete this work by Easter.

The third activity inside the box is the completion of the painting of the walls, windows and doors; the completion of floorboarding behind the frame; and the addition of suitable lino flooring cover. The latter will have the effect not just of improving the authenticity, but will improve insulation and cut out the draughts which rise up through the floorboards.

#### **Exterior of box**

Outside the box, we have agreed with the Trust that we will undertake the painting of the exterior surface of the restored box on condition they provide suitable scaffolding. We have been able to locate the correct paints and will progress this work throughout the spring/summer. At present the new wood has only been primed.

#### **Visitor centre (meat container vans)**

Work to finish the first meat container van includes completing the floorboards, finishing the exterior metal panelling, adding suitable insulation, a marine ply interior facing, and protective boarding around the interior base. Final work will include repainting of the exterior to as near authentic colours and lettering as can be achieved from the limited knowledge available.

It is hoped to finish the basic interior of the van by Easter. From then until October it will be used as a temporary store, enabling us to sort out much of the downstairs of the box. Richard Read reports: "We intend to have the visitors centre ready for the October Open Day. The visitors centre will have the new display boards and many railway relics in. This will create much needed space in the top and bottom of the signal box.

"We will still be using the downstairs of the box as a storeroom and workshop until the second meat container van has been rebuilt. It has rotted badly inside and we are looking at replacing all the wood. The cost commercially would be around £600, with about £200 for bolts and screws, but we hope we can find free or cheap sources for these items. Estimated completion date is now 1999!"

#### **Other work around the site**

Elsewhere on the site, tasks to be completed include:

- Repairs to the concrete mounting for the plate outside the box;
- Finishing the level crossing gates;
- Connecting the ground signal to the ground frame;
- Mounting the first three exterior display boards;
- Mounting six telephones (to be connected to the concentrator).

#### **WORKING SESSIONS**

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

In addition, however, there will be our regular Easter weekend working session, which this year will last for five days (Maundy Thursday to Easter Monday), including the Easter Sunday Open Day (it being the first Sunday in the month).

A form is enclosed with this newsletter inviting attendance during the weekend. Any time you can spare would be much appreciated. Many of the tasks can be shared between several people, so even a couple of hours sometime would be welcome. One out of Richard Read, Dick Hewett or Chris Hack will be on site to assign work.

**PLEASE FIND SOME TIME TO COME AND HELP IN THIS REWARDING WAY AT EASTER. IT WILL BE CRITICAL IN HELPING US "GET IT FIXED IN '96"!**

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#### MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The first full meeting of the new committee (with Chris Hack's comments gathered at a previous sub-meeting) was held on Saturday 3 February. The work programme for 1996 was agreed, as well as issues connected with publicity, open days, and operating sessions.

A major discussion centred around plans to rebuild the Cowley Bridge mobile miniature signal box. It was noted that many existing members became Friends of Romsey Signal Box as a result of seeing Cowley Bridge at Railway Shows. It was suggested that few new active members have been recruited recently because Cowley Bridge has not been exhibited as often. It was therefore agreed that the re-launching of Cowley Bridge was essential to coincide with a campaign to attract new members to the Project. Complete refurbishment, involving the construction of smaller block shelves, a new signal box diagram and the re-mounting of the signal repeaters, will enhance its appeal and also make it more portable when it tours the railway exhibitions throughout the country.

The next committee meeting will be held on Sunday 24 March when the details of the Easter work programme will be top of the agenda, as well as plans for our visits to Crewe (see elsewhere). One other important task which the committee will be addressing is the introduction of a formal constitution for the "Friends". This is required by Lloyds Bank in support of our bank account. Other organisations' constitutions will be used as a model to follow.

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#### NEWS OF "FRIENDS OF ROMSEY SIGNAL BOX"

It is time for membership renewals and 1996 subscriptions are now due. The AGM agreed to continue the current subscription levels.

A form is enclosed with this newsletter. Please return with the relevant payment with cheques made out to "Friends of Romsey Signal Box". Subscriptions form a very valuable part of our limited income sources, and everyone's financial support is very welcome, whether active or armchair members.

At the same time, why not try to recruit another member - a friend, or a member of your family, or a railway enthusiast at work? Remember, if every existing Friend recruited a single member, our membership would double overnight. Have you done your bit?

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## SHOPPING LIST!!

A new regular feature - and one where any member (or even non-member) can possibly help, even our armchair supporters.

The sudden availability of the floorboards for the container van (at no expense) was a good example of a significant saving made through a member's alert action (thanks, Rod Hoyle). Available funds are insufficient. To complete work, we must acquire all sorts of things either cheap, on long term loan, or, best, donated for free. Collection can be arranged from anywhere in the country!

All members are asked to see whether they have direct access to any of the following currently required items, or to a man who can:

- Concrete troughing and concrete supporting blocks.
- Floorboards (ordinary household 5-7" boards would be fine).
- Roof insulation material (a couple of rolls).
- Marine (3-ply) sheet boarding.
- Strips of thicker boarding (perhaps 1 foot wide).
- Large amounts of quality timber (for the second container van).
- A small fan heater which can be used with
- A thermostatic control, to maintain a minimum temperature in the box, thus protecting the equipment.
- A diesel or petrol generator (for our room at Romsey station).
- Plastic exterior waterpipes for drainage.
- Sheets of perspex (to cover signs and the locking tray).
- A quantity of lino, together with
- A similar quantity of underlay.
- White paint (lots of it!)
- A pair of ordinary drop bolts for the level crossing gates.
- Up to 50 metres of external mains electric cable (ideally armoured cable, but this is extremely expensive) to connect up the exterior lights and visitor centre to the supply in the signal box.
- Any historic railway photographs/cine film of the Romsey area.

We also need a qualified electrician who could undertake some urgent work on the box, and then maintain all 240 volt supplies.

**PLEASE READ THROUGH THIS LONG LIST CAREFULLY, AND SEE HOW YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP!** Any offers: Dick Hewett, 01794-522979.

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## SOCIAL EVENING AND BARBECUE

It is a while since we gathered members together for any sort of social event. When Audrey Gebbie retired, we hosted a barbecue on the site which was a very pleasant evening's gathering.

We plan to repeat this formula in the summer and hold an informal barbecue after one of the Open Days. Provisional date Sunday 7 July, with Sunday 1 September as reserve. Keep both dates free in your diary and watch this space. All members (and their guests/partners) welcome. Likely cost around £3 per head.

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#### EXETER WEST GROUP, CREWE

We were unsuccessful in our entry to the Westinghouse Ian Allen Signalling Award 1995, but were joint runners up with the Bideford and Instow Group. The winners were the Exeter West Group at Crewe, and our congratulations go to Peter Jordan and his team.

#### Exeter West 48-hour marathon, May 1996

Peter was with us for much of our 48-hour marathon in September. As a result of his experience, Peter has now persuaded his Exeter West colleagues to do the same (mad fools!), and we are hoping to attend and help them out, including another Exeter West stalwart, John Prytherch, who travelled down from Warrington for our AGM.

The marathon at Crewe will start at around noon on Saturday 4 May and finish around noon on Bank Holiday Monday 6 May. Any members who are interested in attending should get in touch with Alan Gilmour, on 0171-331 3265 (daytime), or 0181-554 3072 (evenings). Alan's address is: 14 Endsleigh Gardens, Ilford, Essex, IG1 3EH.

#### Signalling gala, Crewe, October 1996

Exeter West Group are hoping to host a signalling gala to be attended by representatives from all similar groups around the country, and we have been invited to take the Cowley Bridge miniature box up to Crewe for Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 October.

If you would be interested in attending and helping to operate Cowley Bridge at any time over that weekend, get in touch with Bill Tyndall, 77 Station Road, Romsey, Hants, SO51 8DD; 01794-512410.

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#### DISPLAY BOARDS

The old display boards currently stored in the signal box and with Cowley Bridge are showing signs of their age and usage, and need to be replaced. Dick Hewett has been able to obtain some discarded display boards on long loan from work. These new boards will be much more suitable for the new visitors centre, whilst some other boards are being investigated to replace the Cowley Bridge display.

As part of renewing the boards themselves, the displays thereon will be revised. Target date for completion is the October Open Day, when we aim to open our new visitor centre.

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## PRESENTATION COURSES

A number of members would like to feel more competent to talk confidently to visitors but few have ever practised the skills necessary to do an effective presentation. As a result the entertaining is left largely to Dick Hewett. Dick is trained in presentation techniques and on a regular basis undertakes presentations as part of his job. He has offered to give training to those who would like to improve their skills.

We hope to run two training sessions, with the necessary video facilities, at the "Potters Heron" Hotel at Ampfield (about four miles east of Romsey), in the evening after the Open Days on Sundays 4 March and 2 June. Numbers will be limited to a maximum of six people per evening. Those interested should contact Dick.

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## DIARY DATES

Lots of dates have been mentioned in this issue, so here's a reminder of them all, in date order:

- 3 March (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm. Followed by:
- 3 March (Sunday): Presentation Training, Potters Heron, 8-10pm.
- 20 March (Wednesday): Transport Heritage Committee meeting, Romsey Infants School, 8-8.45am.
- 24 March (Sunday): Cowley Bridge at Fareham, followed by:
- 24 March (Sunday): Committee Meeting in evening (Sun Inn, 8-10pm).
- 4-8 April (Thursday-Monday): Easter working session. Including
- 7 April (Easter Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm.
- 4-6 May (Saturday-Monday): Exeter West 48-hour marathon, Crewe.
- 5 May (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm.
- 2 June (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm. Followed by:
- 2 June (Sunday): Presentation Training, Potters Heron, 8-10pm.
- 7 July (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm. Followed by:
- 7 July (Sunday): Barbecue on Signal Box site (5-9ish).
- 4 August (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm.
- 2 September (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm. Possibly followed by:
- 2 September (Sunday): Barbecue (5-9ish). (Reserve date.)
- 6 October (Sunday): Open Day and Grand 12-hour Operating Session (completion of internal restoration and visitors centre).
- 19-20 October (Saturday-Sunday): Cowley Bridge at Crewe Gala.
- 3 November (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm.
- 9-10 November (Saturday-Sunday): Cowley Bridge at Lordshill.
- 1 December (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm.
- 5 January 1997 (Sunday): Annual General Meeting, Signal Box.

*So - Let's get it fixed in '96!*

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The next Issue of "The Signal" will be in May.

*Contributions from members would be most welcome!*