



Romsey Signal Box Project

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"THE SIGNAL"

Dear Reader

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AN EXAMPLE TO EMULATE

We can complete an attractive and interesting piece of railway heritage at Romsey - and we will. There is still a long way to go, but now we have a role model to follow. It just requires resource and commitment. The members will be critical to our success. We must finish what has been started, by "getting it fixed in '96"!

Four members of the committee have now seen first hand what we need to aim for on the Romsey project. A 12-hour visit to Peter Jordan's Exeter West box at Crewe for their marathon was enough to convince us there is much to do, but the potential is enormous.

Exeter West is a much larger box, yet it is all but complete and well deserved its Signalling Award in 1995 ahead of us. Elsewhere in this newsletter is a report on the visit, and a comment on the new ideas it has generated. In this editorial we would just like to congratulate Peter once again and to thank him for welcoming us to the Exeter West box.

Work has been slowed this Spring thanks to a combination of educational commitments and car crash injuries. We hope Chris Hack, Ben Penny, Adam Rapley et al will soon be through their exams and free to make more progress on the box, and we wish Richard Read a speedy recovery from his broken ankle (he was the passenger in a nasty car accident and is currently hobbling round the site!).

Saturday 1st March 1997 will be the 150th anniversary of the first passenger train to Romsey: I am hoping to encourage several local organisations to get involved in special events that weekend. We also plan to enter the Ian Allen Signalling awards again in 1997. Let's see if we can make it a year for double celebration!

Dick Hewett

IAN ALLEN WESTINGHOUSE SIGNALLING AWARDS: Correction

Apologies to several organisations and publications, but your edited was misled by another member (no names!) when he suggested we had been reported elsewhere as "joint runners-up" with the Bideford & Instow Group. We now know that no "runners-up" position was declared, merely the deserved winners (Exeter West); and that the Bideford & Instow Group didn't even enter!

Ah well, you know you can't believe everything you read in the press, and the "Signal" is now no exception!

NEWS FROM THE SIGNAL BOX SITE

Signs

Perhaps the most obvious signs of progress on the site are - indeed - the mounting of the signs themselves! Rod Hoyle's main entrance sign, and his first two visitor trail signs, have all been positioned strategically to face all visitors when they enter the site. The frame for the third visitor trail sign, to be mounted by the canal bank, will be constructed this summer, and the text for two more signs supplied to Rod. It is hoped at least one of these might be ready by the autumn.

Signal box structure

The team have started the repainting but there is much still to do. A stock of appropriate paint has been obtained and a raised boarding frame purchased. Top priority is being given to the new timberwork fitted last autumn, but the rest of the box must follow. This will be a major job and all help would be appreciated on any Open Day or other times by arrangement.

Inside the box

We have now decided to negotiate for the supply of the necessary rods to connect the frame to the controllers. A suitable source has been identified which may not cost a great deal.

Work on the telephone concentrator and its links to phones both inside and outside the box will continue.

The painting of the internal walls, windows and doors still remains to be completed, together with the floorboarding behind the frame and the addition of suitable lino flooring cover. A suitable clock is being purchased to replace the current modern battery clock, and a concerted effort will be made to clear the upstairs of all working and non-relevant materials.

These were the sorts of finishing touches which were so evident at Exeter West (see later article).

Meat container vans

Progress has been slow but the much of the outside has been painted in red hammerite prior to a proper covering of a more appropriate colour, and ceiling boards have been attached. Attention is now being targeted at the doors. We are confident the first van will be completed by the target date (late September).

Other work on the site

The finishing touches have been applied to the level crossing with the addition of red semi-circle warning boards, and drop bolts to secure the position of the gates as open or closed to the railway. All that now remains is the drilling of two large holes for the

bolts for the final authentic SR warning sign to be mounted.

Cabling for a series of telephones around the site has been laid, and some boxes mounted on appropriate signals. It is hoped to have about six telephones wired into the concentrator before the autumn, giving extensive communication around the site.

Apart from a minor adjustment required to tighten the somewhat slack cabling, the ground signal has been successfully connected to the ground frame and both levers now do something!

Our target is still 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.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The committee met on 24 March to discuss the Easter work programme and plans for the Crewe visit. Dick gave a brief report on the recent Transport Heritage Committee meeting, at which it was noted that the current healthy finances would soon be reduced by various planned expenses to progress the project. Whilst the Buildings Preservation Trust completed their responsibilities towards the repair of the box with the reimbursement of expenditure for paint (some £256), the Project funds would be used on various other materials which it was proving difficult to obtain from donations.

The committee reviewed the extensive shopping list in the last newsletter and were grateful for significant donations of electrical materials from Les Steele, a retired electrical retailer from Bournemouth, via Dennis Hickman. Approval was given for expenditure on many other items, with the result that a much reduced shopping list is included in this "Signal".

Much of the rest of the discussion revolved around presentation courses, social events and operating sessions. A revised diary is on the back page. Plans still need to be clarified.

The next committee meeting is programmed for Sunday 30 June (venue to be confirmed), with the next Transport Heritage meeting on Monday 15 July.

NEWS OF "FRIENDS OF ROMBEY SIGNAL BOX"

Most existing members have now renewed and their 1996 membership slips are enclosed. Gentle reminders are enclosed for those who have mislaid their forms! Thanks to all those Friends who sent sums in excess of the subscription fee: one donation in particular (which will remain anonymous) was received for £100.

Several new members have been recruited. In particular, the Project Manager is delighted to have recruited Robin Allwood and his son Paul (after two years' prompting), who have even paid for 1997! Welcome to the status of an official Friend, Robin!

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

EXETER WEST SIGNAL BOX, CREWE

Exeter West 48-hour marathon, May 1996

The time is 11.00pm and I am standing in the dark, when the sound of block bells are heard and the thud, rattle, clunk of a Western frame at work fills the air.

Am I dreaming of days gone by? No, I am at the corner of Sarsfield in Crewe and I have just seen Exeter West Box for the first time in many years. My first impression is one of pure delight, and I am filled with admiration of the wonderful job that has been done by the Exeter West Group.

As a member of the Romsey Signal Box Project, with colleagues Dick Hewett, Chris Hack and Alan Gilmour, I have been invited by the Exeter West Group's Chairman Peter Jordan to come and see the box and help during their 48-hour marathon weekend.

Having walked past the locking and up the stairs, introductions are made, including a warm welcome from John Prytherch, stalwart Exeter West member and regular attender at Romsey AGMs. The box is as I remember it in the 1960s, when I visited it with a party from school. The smell of the oil lamp and the fire remind me of when I was a signaller at Romsey, and of unbeatable visits made to Western boxes in my younger days.

Time is spent looking at the frame and getting a brew on. Permission is sought and granted to allow us to work the frame. What enjoyment! The weight of the levers are just right and so are the intricacies of the locking. Marvellous!

When Peter Jordan comes on duty at 2.00am, Romsey Chairman Dick goes out with him into the cold, across the tracks to an excellently restored van, in which is housed the simulator. Dick enjoys himself working the simulator, whilst Chris, Alan and I help work the frame. Some videoing is done for the archives. Several hours later, Peter and Dick exchange places with Chris, Alan and another Exeter West member who all disappear into the van.

Daylight slowly arrives and the prospect of the long journey home. By 10.00am Sunday morning, farewells are said along with thanks. Membership money is paid and forms filled in.

May I personally thank Peter Jordan for the invitation and also all his colleagues, whose names I cannot remember, who made us

most welcome and started to teach us the box (more learning to come). The Exeter West project has given us at Romsey a lot of ideas as to what we must now achieve and may the cooperation continue for many years to come.

I am not sure if this is some sort of record. Left Romsey at 5.20pm Saturday. Arrived Crewe 10.10pm. Left Crewe 10.07am Sunday. Arrived Romsey 3.05pm. Parts of return journey remembered: crossing London. Rest was asleep. Total time: 21hrs 45 mins. Well worth it!

Bill Tyndall

(The above article is based on one submitted by Bill to the Exeter West Group newsletter. Anyone who missed out on the visit and would like to join us for our next visit should read the item under "Cowley Bridge" elsewhere in this newsletter.)

Ideas generated by the Exeter West visit

Exeter West benefits from its location on a site within the Crewe Heritage centre, which includes two other signal boxes: the post-war Crewe North Junction on its original site, and a small box from Crewe station (slightly smaller than Romsey) rebuilt alongside Exeter West. The Group have only to concern themselves with the box itself (and their support van) and are able to leave the upkeep of the surrounding site to others.

The successful restoration of the Exeter West box is a tremendous achievement. Exeter West is very much larger than Romsey (over 120 levers), the building is all timber, and there is much better access to the downstairs locking room (through which all visitors must walk to reach the internal stairs to the operating floor). The Group also have their own ex-parcels van on the Heritage Centre's track outside which gives them much more storage space other than the box itself.

Nevertheless, a number of very basic features of Exeter West should be considered for Romsey. These include:

1. Upstairs in the box, there is virtually nothing apart from the authentic contents of a working signal box. Everything is in its right place, and even those items which have been added (such as the small sales stand) have been done with great subtlety. They also have plumbing, and can easily keep the kettle on the boil!
2. The whole upstairs floor is covered with lino. (We are now investigating the same at Romsey.)
3. Authentic signalling instructions, and those pertaining specifically to Exeter West, are neatly displayed.
4. Downstairs there is virtually nothing other than the working parts of the signal box. These working parts (the locking, controllers, weights, wheels, etc.) have all been painted in silver paint and are very easy to see (admittedly there is much more

natural light in the locking room at Exeter West).

5. Apart from being able to see the locking, visitors downstairs are also able to see the insides of several of the other working parts, which have been opened up, covered in perspex, and labelled.
6. A very simple demonstration section of locking (with six sliding bars) has been built and mounted next to the walkway, with an explanatory diagram. Visitors can thus see exactly how the locking works.
7. The simulator, which we at Romsey have in the downstairs of the box, is across the tracks in the separate van. This prevents communication by anything other than bells or telephone, and ensures that upstairs in the box the authenticity of the remote boxes is preserved. Visitors experience nothing but the sounds and actions of Exeter West, not the buzzes from the simulator downstairs as heard at Romsey, and certainly not the conversation which is possible at Romsey between those operating the frame and the person on the simulator. The obvious conclusion is for us to put our simulator in one of the container vans, but one disadvantage of this remote location would be the greater difficulty in doing the usual simple demonstration of the passing of a train to first time visitors, currently prompted by the simulator operator being able to hear the commentary. An obvious answer could be the availability of a discrete microphone in the box with a speaker by the simulator, when needed.
8. The rest of the parcels van at Crewe is used as a workshop. There are no tools, materials, work benches or spare equipment in Exeter West box itself: these are all stored elsewhere.
9. Outside Exeter West, the Heritage Centre have established a small grassy area with picnic tables, an idea we could easily copy.
10. In Crewe North Junction box there is a very impressive display about signalling, with many features we could usefully replicate at Romsey when we renew our own displays.

We have some advantages over the Exeter West site:

- we have a more reliable electricity supply!;
- we have control of the entire site, and can control access to it direct from the road;
- it isn't necessary for visitors to pay an entrance fee to the entire site before reaching Romsey, so the visit can be entirely free, and we probably get more impulse visitors than Exeter West;
- we have our own piece of track actually linked to the box;
- we have space on our own site for further developments;
- and we have the bonus of the canal.

What we need to do at Romsey is to combine the best of Exeter West with all our advantages. That way we can have something of which we can feel really proud.

COWLEY BRIDGE JUNCTION MINIATURE SIGNAL BOX

News of improvements

Effort is being put into upgrading Cowley Bridge to make it smaller, easier to transport, and more robust. A new block shelf has been built, and much rewiring is in hand. It is hoped to finish the work by the time of the visit to Crewe in October.

Signalling gala, Crewe, October 1996

Exeter West is open fortnightly, but special events provide a particularly interesting opportunity for visits, and we have been invited to take Cowley Bridge Junction to Crewe for their Signalling Gala over the weekend of 19th and 20th October.

All the boxes on the site will be open, with the main events being held in Crewe North Junction, including extensive displays and a programme of lectures and film shows.

For regular operators of Cowley Bridge Junction, a form is included with this newsletter to indicate availability. Anyone else who might be interested in attending and helping to operate our miniature box and/or Exeter West at any time over that weekend should get in touch with Bill Tyndall, 77 Station Road, Romsey, Hants, SO51 8DP; 01794-512410. A rota will be organised. Let Bill know if you need someone to find you accommodation in Crewe.

Other outings for Cowley Bridge Junction

We have been booked for our usual slot at Lordshill, Southampton (9th and 10th November) and at a new venue for us, Leamington Spa (26th January 1997). As with Crewe, regular operators will find a form with this newsletter. Anyone else interested should contact Bill Tyndall (address above).

SHOPPING LIST!!

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 (collection can be arranged from anywhere in the country):

- Concrete troughing and concrete supporting blocks.
- Floorboards (ordinary household 5-7" boards would be fine).
- 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.
- A quantity of lino, together with
- A similar quantity of underlay.
- White paint (lots of it!)

- 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 still 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.

SOCIAL EVENING AND BARBECUE

It is now likely that we will hold a barbecue and marathon operating session during the October 6th Open Day. This assumes we'll have completed much of the summer work programme.

Put this date in your diaries, and cancel the July and September options for a barbecue. A final decision will be taken at the next committee meeting and a separate circular will be issued by the end of August when plans have been confirmed.

DIARY DATES

- 7 July (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm.
- 4 August (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm.
- 2 September (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm.
- 6 October (Sunday): Open Day, Grand 12-hour Operating Session, and barbecue (to celebrate 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.
- 26 January 1997 (Sunday): Cowley Bridge at Leamington Spa.
- 27 January 1997 (Monday): 150th anniversary of first goods train to Romsey.
- 2 February 1997 (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm.
- 1 March 1997 (Saturday): 150th anniversary of opening of Bishopstoke-Romsey-Salisbury line to passengers. Special events?
- 2 March 1997 (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm. Special events?

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

The next Issue of "The Signal" will be in the early autumn.

Contributions from members would be most welcome!