



Romsey Signal Box Project

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"THE SIGNAL"

Dear Reader

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WHAT A MEMORABLE OCCASION!

What a splendid day it turned out to be! A packed platform, the band playing, the Abbey bells ringing, numerous dignitaries, Meridian TV, local press, and numerous personnel in Victorian costumes! A day to remember, an opportunity for celebration which it would have been a shame to miss, and a joyous fun occasion at that. As so many people have said - it was a FUN event!

And then two mayors, a deputy mayor, a district council chairman, and all their wives, all there to open an old container van - who'd have thought it likely? Many far more significant openings have not been graced by such a galaxy of local civic dignitaries!

And finally, a marathon which featured so many new operators, the recruitment of a number of new members, a continuous stream of visitors, and even a mention live on local radio. Much goodwill generated and a significant contribution to funds. And all of it providing such a focus for activity on the site during the weeks leading up to the event that even the regular volunteers had to admit to seeing real visible signs of progress.

Congratulations must be offered all round. As the Friends, we did ourselves proud. The mutual thanks were being exchanged afterwards: I wanted to thank the Town Mayor for doing us the honour of opening the van, but he got in first, publicly thanking us (in the Romsey Advertiser) for permitting him the honour!

Members may have thought we'd gone into hibernation after that weekend - and certainly, after all the concerted efforts of the first two months of the year, I for one chose to take a welcome breather. In addition, other (work) pressures came to the fore. So I make no apologies for the slightly late arrival of this edition of "The Signal". It has given the committee time to rest, take stock of the situation, and assess the way forward from here.

We should certainly now be concentrating on further tasks and all those items of work which remain outstanding, and as part of that future, we now have a brand new glossy guide book. This charts the history of the project, and provides a layman's description of what happens in a signal box. Funded entirely by a local printers, it will be a very useful fund raiser in years to come.

But its final pages help us indulge in one more look back at what was a little bit of local railway history - the great day when the Friends of Romsey Signal Box were directly responsible for creating the most enjoyable of official engagements for a whole host of local civic leaders, on a unique chance to celebrate a very significant landmark in the history of a small Hampshire town.

Dick Hewett

Agents of the Romsey and District Buildings Preservation Trust

A GUIDE TO THE ROMSEY SIGNAL BOX

All members receiving this edition of "The Signal" will also find enclosed a copy of our new guide, together with an order form, asking for a contribution of £1.50 (the price we have decided to charge for the guide). I know this might seem a bit of a presumption, but it is the easiest way to get the first copies distributed to what I would hope is a broadly willing audience!

The alternative would be to have enclosed just the order form, and then send copies on request: this would have incurred extra postage costs, and probably wouldn't have generated such high sales. A deliberate marketing ploy - yes! But I hope you appreciate it is done with the best intentions. You are of course free to keep the guide and not send any contribution - since it hasn't actually cost us anything - but obviously the purpose of the guide is as a vehicle for fund-raising. So I hope you respond appropriately!

The guide has been produced at no cost to the Friends, thanks to the kindness of Borcombe Printers plc, a local printers in Romsey, who very generously compiled and printed 550 copies for us for no fee, as part of their support to the local community, in return for an advert on the back cover. If we sell all 550 copies, we'll raise over £800 for project funds. I anticipate these stocks will last us up to 5 years. Then a revision...?

I hope you will agree it is a real step up from our previous photocopied and much shorter edition. I have been keen to get a better quality guide for some time, but thought costs would be prohibitive. A casual enquiry for a quote for a 12-page glossy got the response "Borcombe Printers will pay". We had hoped to have had the copies by the marathon weekend - but once it became apparent this wasn't going to happen, I decided instead to ensure the weekend was covered in the text. When I realised I wasn't going to get all the photos and the extra text into twelve pages, I managed to persuade them to extend it to twenty!

I didn't feel I could complain about the delay as we weren't paying for it. The only "fault" with the final copy is that the plan was for a front inside page virtually repeating the front cover, but with a photo of the box (circa 1973) in place of Rod Hoyle's drawing. Somehow, between final proof and printing, this page got omitted - so the guide opens with what was intended to be page 2, and there is a (wasted) blank page at the end. But then you don't look a gift horse in the mouth!

Reviewing the text now, I think I could have mentioned one or two more members by name - but hindsight is a wonderful thing! To those who think they should have been named, YOU know your involvement, and can point yourselves out in any photos!

I hope you agree it is nevertheless a great little production, and a real asset for the project, and I hope you'll return your £1.50 together with payment for any other sales items shown on the form.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The committee met on 9 February (all bar Peter Cattermole) and again on 4 May (Dick Hewett, Bill Tyndall, Craig Phillips, Richard Read and Peter Cattermole only).

February: The main issues on the agenda related to the work needed to get the box and site ready for the marathon weekend. Certainly there was much in progress, and the committee looked forward with optimism. Other items included confirmation of the new constitution, ratification of the new agreement with the school, and the possible Easter work programme.

May: After a brief review of the marathon weekend, and observing that the Easter working weekend failed to happen this year (everybody too tired after the previous months' exertions!), the May meeting concentrated upon the work programme, and reviewed new targets for tasks to be completed during 1997. The committee are particularly concerned about the difficulties in completing the rods, locks and controllers, and the reliance upon Chris Hack and Ian Maxwell for knowledge of the wiring in the box. Those present agreed that the simulator should be moved into the visitor van as a matter of high priority, before the re-wiring was started.

The Project Manager reported that ex-committee member Ian Maxwell had now become Signal Maintenance Engineer at Newport in Gwent, covering half of Wales and the Marches: contact will be renewed.

The next meeting will be arranged for some time during the summer once exam and work commitments are out of the way and committee members' plans are clearer. Richard Read has started a new job on the cross channel ferries, whilst Dick Hewett has assumed a new role at Ordnance Survey which could leave even less free time than before. In the meantime we wish Chris Hack (finals at Bristol University) and Ben Penny (GCSEs at King Edwards School, Southampton) all the best with their examinations.

WORK PROGRAMME ON THE SIGNAL BOX SITE

An updated list from the May Committee meeting for everyone to work to! This will be reviewed at the next meeting.

Task	Responsible	Deadline
<i>Signal box structure:</i>		
Assess need for replacement windows	Peter C	30-6-97
Paint posts and stair fencing	Richard R	30-6-97
Replace stairtreads on steps to box	Richard R	30-6-97
Repainting outside of box	Craig P	30-9-97
<i>Wiring etc.:</i>		
Document problems with 12 volt wiring	Chris H	30-6-97
Identify source of rods	Bill T/Chris H/ Peter C	30-6-97

Build table for simulator in van	Richard R	30-6-97
Produce new circuit diagrams	Chris H	30-6-97
Concrete base for electric supply hole	Dick H	30-6-97
Add boxes over electric supply holes	Dick H	31-7-97
Wire in simulator into visitor van	Chris H	31-7-97
Rewire 12 volt supply - urgent repairs	Chris H	31-7-97
Box around relays on side shelf	Craig P	31-7-97
Identify work needed for phones	Chris H	31-7-97
Complete telephone concentrator	Richard R	30-9-97
Board wall and add shelves downstairs	Peter C	30-9-97
Refurbish controllers	Bill T/Chris H	30-9-97
Hang controllers	Chris H	30-9-97
Fit remaining controller rods	Chris H	30-9-97
Complete other equipment fitments	Chris H	30-9-97
 <i>Plumbing:</i>		
Ask Water Board to connect to mains	Dick H	31-7-97
Plumb in cold water tap	Peter C	30-9-97
Organise drain from sink	Peter C/Craig P	30-9-97
 <i>Around site:</i>		
New felt to be laid on van roof	Richard R/Ben P	30-6-97
Investigate lamp hut at Dunbridge	Bill T/Peter C	31-7-97
Paint outside of visitor van	Craig P	31-8-97
New external lights to be fitted	Peter C	30-9-97
Organise set of point tips	Bill T	30-9-97
Insert small heater in visitor van	Peter C	31-10-97
Collect items from Test Way	Dick H	30-11-97
 <i>Displays/signs:</i>		
Paint further green signs	Dick H	31-7-97
Produce two further signs (1995 grant)	Rod Hoyle	31-7-97
Mount two other signs (1995 grant)	Dick H	30-9-97
Restore Strongs sign (1997 grant)	Rod Hoyle	31-7-98
Mount Strongs sign (1997 grant)	Dick H	30-9-98
 <i>Cowley Bridge:</i>		
Obtain bell tapper from Geoff Mordan	Dick H	30-6-97
New plug couplers	Bill T	30-6-97
Review items, consider selling some	Bill T/Chris H	31-7-97
Lever frame renewal	Bill T	31-12-97
 <i>Events:</i>		
Arrange visit to Washford box	Dick H/Peter C	30-6-97
 <i>Other items:</i>		
Sweatshirts and T-shirts to be supplied	Dick H	30-6-97
Produce video of Signal Box	Dick H/Bill T	31-7-97
Organise wiring of station room	Bill T	30-9-97

Progress against this list is dependent on those responsible meeting the deadlines shown, and sufficient volunteers attending for the monthly open days. If we can complete this work, we can enter the Ian Allen awards again and perhaps "Celebrate in '98"!

THE "MILFORD SESQUICENTENARY" - MARCH 1ST 1997

The Project Manager and organiser describes his day:

The moment I turn the corner onto the platform at 10.10, I know it's going to be a successful event. What a great feeling!

My day starts with an early rise (for a Saturday!) and a drive into Southampton to the studios of Radio Solent. I am to be a guest on the breakfast programme. Arriving prior to the 0800 news, I am delighted to hear the re-enactment being mentioned on the news bulletin, together with a quote from me. I had previously recorded a brief comment by telephone: "Why not use a steam engine?" I had been asked. "Ah well", I skilfully responded off the top of my head, "150 years ago they used the latest technology, and today we will again use the latest technology. Steam engines look back - we're looking forwards to another 150 years!" How did I think that one up? No mention on tape, as I privately confessed to the interviewer later, that we had tried to get steam but at £10,000 just to get an engine out on the line, it was prohibitively expensive. Just turn it into something positive!

0820 and I am introduced on radio by the DJ. "150 years ago today, the platform at Romsey station was crowded with people. This morning, the platform at Romsey will again be crowded with people." I hope so, I think to myself. Would be embarrassing if there's just the dignitaries and a band. I make sure I get a mention in for Richard Read and Simon Cooper who are just finishing the night shift during the marathon - find out later Simon missed the mention! On the following Monday, several work colleagues, aware I do some radio and TV broadcasts in connection with my job, complain about being woken up by my voice on radio even in "off-duty" mode!

Leave the studio, race round to the signal box to check all is well, gather various items and then off to the station, resplendent with flags and bunting. And there they all are - children for the band, people in Victorian costumes, assorted mayors, chairmen and councillors, the local MP, senior railway staff, and the local press. Perhaps 150 people in all - one for each year!

In the distance the Abbey bells are ringing, despite it being Lent! And then Meridian TV arrive: various interviews with me, Michael Colvin MP, the mayors and so on, lots of footage taken. The band play "See the Conquering Hero Comes" several times to enthusiastic applause - and a pause for me to say a few appropriate words to thank everyone for coming. Never stood on a railway station to make a speech before! Make sure you thank the railway company, but don't miss the opportunity to mention the desire for the re-opening of the Eastleigh-Romsey line!

Watch Chris Gibb, Group Service Manager for South Wales & West Railway Ltd, nervously awaiting the delayed arrival of the train! Then the band again, and loud cheers, as it draws into the station five minutes late. Quick photographs, get the official guests on board, and wave goodbye to the assembled masses on the platform.

On the train, everyone is out to enjoy themselves. Arrival at Dunbridge is low-key, just a small welcoming party. But at Dean, where a special stop has been arranged, the platform is festooned with flags and bunting, and amongst the many villagers, a crazy Victorian farmer is chasing up and down shouting at the train: "You're worrying my sheep and the hens won't lay!" A few days later I discover he is a railway enthusiast and policeman at Dean Hill and wants to help the project.

With a few more dignitaries on board, we approach Salisbury. As the train lights go out and we enter the tunnel, Chris Gibb jokes about the way trains used to be ("Imagine the steam"). Hoots of laughter whilst we are in the pitch dark! Then arrival at Salisbury and a welcome from staff of South West Trains, the Mayor of Salisbury and her consort. And Bill Tyndall, resplendent in his orange dungarees, fresh from duties at the depot.

Across to the station buffet, and coffee and cake courtesy of SWT (a low-key celebration, this!). How surreal - Victorians drinking from plastic cups, and finding myself sitting with a whole host of mayors, council chairmen and dignitaries, in a station buffet amongst the general public, just having a good laugh. Wasn't it thus in the old days, I commented - when trains stopped for 20 minutes for the rush to the refreshment rooms?

Back on the train, more sheep worrying at Dean, then exit at Romsey and say goodbye to Chris Gibb. Lead convoy round to the signal box site - and gather everyone around the new visitor van. Give a brief introduction, making sure I mention Ben Penny and Richard Read, chief restorers of the van. Then invite Charlie Mead, much-loved Town Mayor of Romsey, to open the "Charles Mead Visitor Van" with the special plaque prepared by Craig Phillips. Charlie says some very kind words about the Friends and what we have achieved (all true!). The doors open, the tape is cut, the displays inspected, and the sparkling wine is served for all.

Final photos in and around the van and the signal box, and of course the compulsory demonstration in the signal box for all the remaining dignitaries. And then they leave and it's all over. Later that evening I see the clip which had been broadcast on the lunchtime Meridian news bulletin, with my interview and the Friends of Romsey Signal Box prominent on the screen.

And my conclusions? So often when you organise something, it doesn't go quite as you planned, or it is an anti-climax. You had been looking forward to it and the day itself doesn't come up to expectations. Not this time. This day was, in my view, a total success. Never mind the little things which didn't go according to plan - like not getting the headboard on the front of the train, not being welcomed at Salisbury by their MP, and the low-key welcome at Dunbridge. In the event these didn't matter.

As the Deputy Mayor of Salisbury put it succinctly as he left at the end of the event with his young family: "Thank you so much for inviting us. Most official duties are enjoyable but they are serious and involve some sort of work. Today it was just a fun

thing to do - and how right it was to do it!"

How right indeed. And how proud I felt. A truly memorable day.

NEWS OF "FRIENDS OF ROMSEY SIGNAL BOX"

We reported in the last newsletter that we had 62 members as at 31 December 1996. Not only have most subscriptions for 1997 been received, but we have also been successful on the recruitment front. We currently have 60 paid up members, with 13 of last year's members still to renew.

Those members who have paid their subscriptions will find a membership slip enclosed with this newsletter (except the few who renewed before or at the AGM, who have already had their slips). A reminder is enclosed for those 13 members who have yet to renew - looking down the list, I am confident all of you will send the appropriate contribution, along with your guide payment!

We set a target: "Recruit eleven in '97!" We are delighted to report that we have reached our target already! Amongst new recruits, we were delighted to receive a subscription from Eric Romaine, the BR official who approached headteacher Audrey Gebbie to seek permission for access across the school grounds all those years ago. Eric and Audrey kept in contact, and now he too has become an active member. We were delighted to have Eric with us for our 150th celebrations, which I know he thoroughly enjoyed.

In addition, since 1st January, we have also welcomed Mrs J M Lane, David Sexton, Christopher Rideout, Garth Long, Colin Meheux, Brian Smith, Ken Phillips, Barbara Phillips, Paul Kinch, and Mrs D Palengat - a total eleven new names on the list. Membership now stands at 73. Congratulations all round - let's see if we can recruit eleven more before the year's end!

But we cannot survive on the members we have. It remains increasingly difficult to maintain, let alone develop, the box and site with existing volunteers all experiencing reduced availability thanks to growing work, study, and domestic commitments.

So we must continue take advantage of our open days and make all visitors welcome. Any signs of interest in the project must be fostered (carefully), and names/addresses taken for the future distribution of the newsletter and a membership form. Interest at Cowley Bridge demonstrations must also be developed.

And another reminder to ALL members to consider who they may know - family, friends, colleagues, those at school - who may be interested in helping or just being armchair supporters. Tell them about the project, suggest they come down one Open Day, advise them to introduce themselves (we're not always as attentive as perhaps we should be), and then ask them afterwards what they thought.

Our success during 1997 to date shows what we can do if we put

our mind to it, and put on a good show for our visitors. They are our future potential members.

COWLEY BRIDGE JUNCTION MINIATURE SIGNAL BOX

In comparison to Romsey, there is very little to report on Cowley Bridge. Several trips out (to Leamington Spa and Fareham) have brought renewed interest and contributions to funds. Due to staff changes in BR, we have been thwarted in our efforts to get the room at Romsey Station re-wired. Attention this summer must remain concentrated upon Romsey, but plans are in hand for further improvements to our mobile box in due course.

SHOPPING LIST!!

Thanks to those members who responded to the previous list. Plastic pipes are due to be collected from Jim Palm imminently!

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).
- A small fan heater.
- A quantity of lino, together with underlay.
- Any historic railway photographs/cine film of the Romsey area.

Any offers: Dick Hewett, 01794-522979.

SWEATSHIRTS AND T-SHIRTS

A bulk order has now been placed for sweatshirts and T-shirts. The latter will be available at £9.50. Orders on the enclosed form.

DIARY DATES

- 1 June 1997 (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm.
- 6 July 1997 (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm.
- 3 August 1997 (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm.
- 7 September 1997 (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm.
- 5 October 1997 (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm.

The next issue of "The Signal" will be in September.

Contributions from members would be most welcome!