



# Romsey Signal Box Project

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## "THE SIGNAL"

Dear Reader

No 17 - November 1997

### A.G.M. WILL LOG PROGRESS

Six months have elapsed since the last edition of "The Signal", two more than we planned - but it indicates such a contrast from the first part of the year! Where there was such progress up to the 150th anniversary celebrations, relatively little has happened since. Perhaps a case of a deserved rest. But in practice it merely reflects the changing circumstances of key volunteers, and how much we rely on a few particular individuals.

Several people have changed their jobs, including me (new demanding post at Ordnance Survey), Richard Read (now working the cross-channel ferries and hence not often around), Chris Hack (having graduated, now starting a permanent post on the railways at Swindon), and Craig Philips (extra responsibilities and thus a tendency for weekend working). Other key personnel (such as Bill Tyndall and Peter Cattermole) have had other commitments. The entire result is a certain inertia in the project.

And yet there are positive signs. We have been very successful this year in recruiting new members, several of whom have become active volunteers. A warm welcome is extended to latest recruits Jason Webber, Adrian Gilmour and Russell Lingwood. Meanwhile Romsey Station has now been rewired and we have a reliable electricity supply in our room there, which means Cowley Bridge can be based there once more. The signal box site has been cleared of much excess vegetation, some new signs painted, and further work undertaken on the visitor van. Unfortunately we had a break-in during August and about £175-worth of tools were stolen, but thankfully no damage was done to the display boards.

So some progress, albeit slow. And I suspect this rate of progress will continue for the foreseeable future. This very issue will be a core subject of the:

- 1998 Annual General Meeting -

which will, as usual, be held in the signal box on the first Sunday of the New Year (4 January) from 2.30pm to 4.30pm latest. Please try to attend: it is the one opportunity for the active volunteers to consult with other members, and always acts as a good motivator. Let me know if you are coming - for the catering! And bring your views and your money!

Dick Hewett

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### 150th CELEBRATIONS - A FINAL WORD

In my report in the last issue of "The Signal", I was very remiss in forgetting to mention several key people who made a very significant contribution to the success of the day. My apologies

to all the following, who fully deserve a late mention:

- Dave and Marion Canning - who acted as official "Friends" photographers on the day, and supplied a large set of photos as a result. Their continued support is much valued.

- Rod Hoyle - who constructed our superb headboard, carefully designed to fit on the front of a 158 unit, only to be refused permission to mount it at Romsey for safety reasons. It travelled with us on the train, and featured in the main mug shot photographs!

- Richard Read, Ben Penny and Craig Philips - for all the hours they spent getting the visitor van ready.

If I've still forgotten anyone else - SORRY! It was a team effort and you can assume the thanks apply to ALL concerned!

And for those who can't remember what went on, or who missed it, there will be a special display at the AGM, together with a short video covering the day's events!

ANOTHER REASON TO ATTEND THE AGM!

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MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The committee hasn't met on a formal basis since May and we aren't likely to have another meeting until the AGM on 4 January. However an informal gathering of most of the committee members was conducted over a few beers and a barbecue by the swimming pool at Chris Hack's 21st birthday party in June. No minutes were taken!

The changing circumstances of committee members has had a direct impact on plans for meetings, and will be a subject of debate at the AGM. It could affect the committee's membership for 1998.

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WORK PROGRAMME ON THE SIGNAL BOX SITE

The list from the May Committee meeting is here repeated with minimal update! All tasks on this list are outstanding, even where deadlines have passed (true of most of this list!). We will review the list in the new year at the AGM.

	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
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
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

*Plumbing:*

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

*Around site:*

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

*Displays/signs:*

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

*Cowley Bridge:*

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

*Events:*

Arrange visit to Washford box	Dick H/Peter C	30-6-97
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*Other items:*

Produce video of Signal Box	Dick H/Bill T	31-7-97
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Unless there is a sudden acceleration in activity, I can't now see us being able to enter the Ian Allen awards again and thus "Celebrate in '98"! Now prove me wrong!

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**CINE FILM URGENTLY REQUIRED/NEWS OF VIDEO**

Work has now started on the promised video for the project, but we would like to include some original footage of the box when it was

- in situ (and if possible in operation). Any offers of footage - to Dick Hewett as soon as possible. If it has already been transferred to video - all the better - but in any case we believe we know a man who can!

Note has been made of those who have ordered videos already.

*All members: BRING £10 TO THE AGM TO PURCHASE YOUR COPIES!*

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

One continued area of success. We are steadily recruiting new members and currently have 71 fully paid up members, with five of last year's members having failed to renew. If you are one of these, you will find a final reminder included with this issue: if we don't receive a response, you will be deleted from distribution lists after the AGM.

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#### COWLEY BRIDGE JUNCTION MINIATURE SIGNAL BOX:

##### *AN APPEAL!!*

Bill Tyndall and Chris Hack write:

As many people know, the frame from Cowley Bridge is nearing its life expiry date. The best course of action to keep this flagship going is to have a new frame built. Also to have it locked mechanically (similar to the one which has been built for and supplied to Railtrack). The new frame would also be built such that electrical locking could be fitted at a later date.

The advantages of doing this work are many, and include:

- The frame will be more robust;
- The frame will be locked therefore creating better realism for operators and public;
- Modification of electrics will reduce wires and power surges;
- It will all result in increased reliability.

The disadvantage is, of course, the cost. The provisional estimates are somewhere in the region of £1,500 to £2,000. Hence the reason for this appeal.

Those of you who operate Cowley Bridge Junction have seen the improvements we have made with the new shelves etc. The new presentation made a big impact at Crewe last autumn and even in its unreliable state Cowley Bridge Junction was undoubtedly one of the stars of the show.

Now here is the chance for us to finish the job properly, and have something of which we can all be very proud. It will also be a superb advertisement for the Romsey Signal Box Project as a whole

when exhibited at model railway exhibitions and other events.

We realise that this expenditure is very large, but Cowley Bridge Junction mobile miniature signal box has been and will continue to be a main source of income and publicity for the project. How many of you active members joined the project after having seen Cowley Bridge Junction in action? If we lose this means of publicity, the project will be significantly worse off.

Please send your donations, large or small, to Dick Hewett, clearly marked as being for the Cowley Bridge Junction appeal. Cheques payable to "Friends of Romsey Signal Box."

#### *OTHER NEWS OF COWLEY BRIDGE JUNCTION*

Meanwhile, the room we lease at Romsey station (on the Up platform) is now rewired with a decent mains electricity supply, sockets, and our own meter, and Cowley Bridge will be moved back there after its annual outing to Lordshill on 15/16 November.

Bill is planning to hold regular (fortnightly?) training sessions at the station for prospective and existing Cowley Bridge Junction operators. It's easy and fun, so why not give it a try?!

Ring Bill on 01794-512410 for more information.

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#### **SWEATSHIRTS AND T-SHIRTS**

Plenty of stocks are now available.

BRING YOUR MONEY TO THE AGM - when we shall be selling both Sweatshirts (£13.50) and (for the summer) T-shirts (£9.50).

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#### **OPEN DAYS - A COMMENT**

As we welcomed our 2,000th visitor during the August Open Day, I was tempted to have a quick glance through the records to see if there were any interesting trends about our regular Open Days on the first Sunday in the month. The most obvious conclusion is that it is entirely unpredictable how many people will come or at what times during the day, but they keep coming anyhow!

We get on average around 25 visitors each first Sunday, but this can vary from as few as 10 to over 40. 30-40 visitors is quite sufficient to maintain a steady flow during one day, and much more would become a problem to manage. At least half our visitors come on spec simply because they see the signs on the roadside - fewer visitors make a special journey. However some families return on a regular basis, always led by their children in the 5-10 age range.

It remains essential to find the staff to open the box every month: we advertise the box as open and people do make a special effort

~~to visit.~~ It would be bad public relations to let them down. This month when it became clear at short notice (due to illness) that no one would be available until after 11.30am, I stuck a note on the gate to that effect. This is satisfactory in an emergency, but we should try to avoid it if at all possible.

For some strange reason the Spring and Autumn open days are better attended than the summer months. Better weather tends to result in a better attendance, but this is not a direct relationship. In September no one arrived before 3pm, after which there was a flood of visitors. In total contrast, the following month (October) there were people waiting at the gate when we opened at 10.30am and after a steady flow till lunchtime we had hardly anyone after 2pm! One thing is certain - there will always be a visitor just after I have opened up my lunchbox!

The average donation is around 50p per head but even this varies widely. High attendance does not necessarily mean plenty in the Thomas the Tank tin! Visitors stay for an average of about 30 minutes, though some spend all afternoon with us - and one or two subsequently join as members! Only those stopping for a longer time make the effort to look in the visitor van.

Finally, few people as yet are bothering to buy our Guide, but I suspect that is because it is not well displayed. What is likely is that any sales would detract slightly from donations; perhaps a donations box by the gate would be a more subtle way of obtaining further funds. This will be investigated.

All told, it is certainly worth holding open days and the format of the first Sunday seems to work. Visitors genuinely appreciate the progress which has already been made and probably notice progress more than those of us who are very close to the project. Visitors also realise we are dependent upon volunteer labour. Though more than one child has assumed it is my main job, and that I live in the box! Occasionally for some of us it gets to feel like that, even outside of 48-hour signalling marathons!

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#### CONTACT WITH OTHER SOCIETIES

The Friends of Romsey Signal Box are members of several other groups, which enables us to exchange information and make other enthusiasts aware of us. Such enthusiasts are our best allies and most likely new recruits.

We share mutual membership with the Bideford and Instow Railway Group, who have restored Instow Signal box in Devon and who are developing the old station site at Bideford. They are open most Sundays, but celebrate Instow box's 125th anniversary in 1998. We await news of special events, but I have provisionally included attendance with Cowley Bridge Junction at their open day in August 1998 on the calendar (see back page).

Our mutual membership with the Exeter West Group (whose box now

stands at Crewe) has been well recorded in "The Signal". There must be at least six people who are members of both groups! Exeter West is open fortnightly. We took Cowley Bridge Junction to their signalling gala last year, and have been invited back for October 1978 (again see calendar on back page).

Several Friends are also members of the Signalling Record Society, and "The Signal" is sent to their editor. We were delighted to see a very complementary review of our new guide book in a recent edition of their journal, which resulted in five orders from SRS members, all sending generous donations as well as payment. It turns out that one of them is married to the lady who appears in a photo in our guide, operating Cowley Bridge Junction on Swanage station. Small world!

Several Friends are members of various other groups, or publicise us through their work. Neil Kearns has given us good publicity in the South West Trains magazine, and I am sure others have passed the word to appropriate people by the channels available to them. Our links with the Mid-Hants (including Andy Moody, Chris Smith and Adam Rapley), and Swanage Railways (George Pryer), not to mention the Gartell in Somerset (Bill Tyndall and Chris Hack), Talyllyn (Bill again) and Welshpool & Llanfair (Barry Sherratt - active volunteer - and Dick Hewett - armchair life member!) lines in Wales, are well established! (Apologies to anyone I've missed!)

It would be useful to know what links Friends have with other groups. They could prove very useful in the future.

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#### A FASCINATING VISIT

Talking of other groups, last week the Hewett family chanced upon the Winchcombe Railway Museum, set in the main street of this Cotswold town a few miles north-east of Cheltenham. It turned out to be a fascinating emporium - and we would recommend it to any enthusiasts. We at Romsey can learn a lot from this venture.

The Winchcombe museum has been running for about 30 years and is set in the back garden of an ordinary house. It isn't much larger in area than our own site. But there the similarity stops.

There must be hundreds of authentic cast signs mostly from pre-Grouping railways, and amazing collections of railway chairs, boundary markers, bricks, tickets, railway fire equipment, posters, pay checks, and so on.

And then in one shed there is the most amazing collection of block instruments, tablet instruments, bells, and so on - many of them connected up to ring! Visitors are challenged to count how many make a noise - it's well into double figures.

The most obvious items of all are the numerous different signals set around the site, most of them connected to some lever or other - so they can be pulled off. A very explicit sign invites

visitors to ring the bells and pull off the signals to their hearts' content. (There's even a fire bell visitors are encouraged to ring as loudly as they can - it's quite deafening!)

Where we have one item, they have 50! If I visited half-a dozen times, I reckon I'd always find something new to see.

I am suggesting to some key individuals that we might visit the Winchcombe Railway Museum in the near future. We may be able to exchange spare equipment. But in particular it is an amazing example of how a small area can be filled with a tremendous range of railway artifacts - and make it fun at the same time! A target for the future for us!

If you're in the area, why not pop in? Entrance is £2.25 for adults, 50p for children. The museum is open in the summer months but can be opened by arrangement during winter weekends - ring Tim Petchey on 01242-620641 - and mention the Romsey Signal Box!

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#### 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).
- A small fan heater.
- A quantity of lino, together with underlay.

Any offers: Dick Hewett, 01794-522979.

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#### DIARY DATES

7 December 1997 (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm.  
 4 January 1998 (Sunday): AGM, 2.30pm-4.30pm.  
 1 February 1998 (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm.  
 1 March 1998 (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm.  
 22 March 1998 (Sunday): Cowley Bridge at Fernham Hall, Fareham.  
 5 April 1998 (Sunday): Open Day, 10am-5pm.

#### Advance notice:

8 August 1998 (Sat) (provisional): Visit to Washford box, then:  
 9 August 1998 (Sun) (provisional): Cowley Bridge at Bideford.  
 24/25 October 1998 (Sat/Sun): Cowley Bridge at Exeter West  
 Signalling Gala, Crewe Heritage Centre.

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The next issue of "The Signal" will hopefully be in February.

*Contributions from members would be most welcome!*