



Romsey Signal Box Project

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"THE SIGNAL"

Dear Reader

No 18 - February 1998

NEW PROJECT MANAGER SOUGHT

(Open letter from Dick Hewett, Project Manager)

Dear member/friend

This open letter is intended to put all of you in the picture as to the current situation vis a vis the Friends of Romsey Signal Box.

Many members will be aware that, as a result of certain developments (explained below), the AGM on 4 January was postponed indefinitely. Apologies to anyone we didn't contact and who turned up. Instead I convened an emergency meeting of the somewhat dormant committee the same weekend. I was very grateful that Ian Maxwell, Chris Hack and Alan Gilmour all travelled long distances to join Bill Tyndall, Craig Philips, Ben Penny, and myself for a long but frank discussion on the long-term future of the Friends and the Project. Two other existing and prospective committee members (Richard Read and Simon Cooper) have been briefed subsequently. The team believe the only other co-opted committee member (Peter Cattermole), who has not been consulted, will not disagree with the conclusions reached at the meeting.

In addition, Ted Mason from the Romsey & District Buildings Preservation Trust has been fully briefed, and this newsletter is being sent to all the members of their committee prior to my addressing them at their next meeting on 11 March.

All Friends, but particularly those who were planning to attend the AGM on 4 January, are asked to advise whether they would be able to attend a replacement AGM on Saturday 21 March at 2pm in the Signal Box. Please ring first (01794-522979) to check the meeting is still on! If you can't attend, please feel free to ring/write with your views. The committee need to consult more widely on the latest developments in the Friends of Romsey Signal Box.

Current situation

I have long been aware that the key members of the project have become increasingly unavailable, for perfectly understandable reasons. The final straw came when Richard Read announced he was moving away to north Wales. This means that none of the key active volunteers, or technical experts, live in the Romsey area, and this places too high a reliance on one individual (namely me).

Most groups like ours consist of 10% active members to 90% armchair supporters. With around 70 members, the seven at the committee meeting (plus two absent) suggested a fairly healthy state of affairs at face value. However in practice, only a couple of us are now local and available for active involvement at short notice. The sorts of problems which arise as a consequence include:

Agents of the Romsey and District Buildings Preservation Trust

- unavailability of staff to cover for illness or other commitments for Open Days, or for schools visits;
- when mechanical or electrical equipment goes wrong at Open Days;
- inability to adequately staff the box during operating sessions;
- when new volunteers arrive there is rarely anyone there to advise on the tasks which need to be done;
- the difficulties of making any real progress towards our goals (the work list has hardly changed in more than a year);
- and the difficulty of getting even the committee together to discuss progress and policy.

Having acknowledged the problem, the committee considered the options, which ranged from continuing with the current fairly ambitious plans for developing the site and Cowley Bridge Junction, through to complete abandonment of the project by the current team (including winding up the Friends and handing the keys of the signal box back to the Buildings Preservation Trust). In the event, none of those present was prepared to take such a drastic action, but felt they wanted to bring the project to a logical stage and mothball it, in readiness for transfer to a new team.

Work which will be suspended indefinitely includes the major tasks of making/repairing and fitting the locks and controllers, connections to the telephone concentrator, plumbing connections, and the acquisition of further items of interest for the site.

Work which will be undertaken if resources are available include moving the simulator from the bottom of the box to the visitor van, completion of the promised video, and other sundry tasks.

A high priority will be given to tidying the signal box; fitting a new lino floor covering; simplifying the electrics to make them more reliable and easier to maintain; completing and erecting the final display boards around the site; and reconstruction of the older parts of Cowley Bridge Junction. A roster for staffing the box on Open Days will be established, and work on open days will concentrate on keeping the site tidy and presentable for visitors.

The very few "experts" who visit the box will realise there is much yet to do, but it needs an injection of new enthusiasm to make the change from the relatively cosmetic restoration we now plan, to one which is complete in its authenticity and functionality. We need to encourage such "experts" to tackle the task!

Project Manager post

Apart from Project Manager, I am currently filling a whole range of posts (including Chairman, Newsletter Editor, Membership Secretary, Treasurer). Whilst willing to continue some of this involvement, I no longer wish to have overall responsibility for the project.

I intend to step down as Project Manager at the end of 1998, and am seeking an enthusiastic replacement. I will have performed the role for nine years (since January 1990). A tremendous amount has been achieved in that time, from a building and unrestored lever frame sitting in an open field, to an attraction quite suitable for

the general public and schools to visit, and I have thoroughly enjoyed my involvement. But I feel I have reached my limit, and now it is time to let someone else take the project forward.

The requirements of the post of Project Manager include an interest in railways, an ability to manage people and resources, an ability to get assistance and materials for little or nothing, some spare time, residence in the Romsey area, a desire to put something back into the community, and an abundance of patience and enthusiasm! Interested parties please contact me soonest!!

Dick Hewett

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

One of the reasons for postponing the AGM was the anticipated absence of virtually the entire committee. In addition, with virtually no progress on the planned work programme, and the committee not having met for some months, there would have been little to report to members. As a result of the meeting on 3 January, the committee remains intact albeit pretty dormant.

The next meeting has been set for Saturday 11 July: however this may not be convenient. Can ALL committee members please advise me of availability at weekends from mid-June to early August, so that an alternative date can perhaps be found (Note: the first weekend in July is definitely NOT convenient for me).

In the meantime, I hope as many committee members as can attend will be at the revised AGM in the signal box on 21 March. And any new volunteers for the committee would be very much welcomed!

NEWS OF VIDEO

Work has been suspended on the promised video for the project, but we are still seeking 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.

NEWS OF "FRIENDS OF ROMSEY SIGNAL BOX"

Thanks to all those members who have already renewed.

To those who haven't yet sent their 1998 subscriptions - all funds will be gratefully received. Despite the current developments, we still need and value your membership and subscriptions!

First priority for expenditure will be the lino flooring. Renew now and help us complete the modest programme of work we have set ourselves for 1998.

COWLEY BRIDGE JUNCTION MINIATURE SIGNAL BOX:

THE APPEAL!!

Thanks to those members who have already sent a donation to our Cowley Bridge frame fund. At the January meeting, the committee decided to divide the work into two separate parts. The most immediate work will involve the construction of a new lever frame. Interlocking will be added at a later date as the second stage.

Nevertheless we still need funds even to help us complete stage one. Please forward contributions to Dick Hewett, clearly marked "Cowley Bridge Junction Appeal" (cheques payable to "Friends of Romsey Signal Box").

OTHER NEWS OF COWLEY BRIDGE JUNCTION

Meanwhile, Bill Tyndall will begin regular training sessions for Cowley Bridge operators, starting on Tuesday 10 March at Romsey Station. Subsequent frequency will be discussed at the AGM. Training starts with the most basic of principles. If you've never operated Cowley Bridge and want to learn, or you're just out of practice, why not give it a try?! Most of our current operators had no experience whatsoever before getting onto Cowley Bridge. Ring Bill on 01794-512410 for more information.

Finally, operators are invited to go to Crewe on 24/25 October for the Exeter West gala, but we also need several volunteers to take Cowley Bridge to Bideford for their Open Day on Sunday 9 August (neither Dick nor Bill are available for that event).

DIARY DATES

Open Days (Sundays, 10am-5pm): 1 March, 5 April, 3 May, 7 June, 5 July, 2 August, 6 September, 4 October, 1 November, 6 December.

AGM: 21 March 1998 (Saturday), Signal Box, 2-4pm. (Check first!)

Committee meeting: June/July/August (date to be confirmed).

Cowley Bridge Junction operating:

10 March (Tuesday), operating practice, Romsey Station, 7.30pm
(check with Bill Tyndall first - 01794-512410).

22 March 1998 (Sunday) at Fernham Hall, Fareham.

9 August 1998 (Sunday) (provisional) at Bideford.

24/25 October 1998 (Saturday/Sunday) at Exeter West Signalling Gala, Crewe Heritage Centre.

The next issue of "The Signal" will hopefully be in the summer, after the next major committee meeting.

Contributions from members would be most welcome!