



# Romsey Signal Box Project

Project Manager: R.B.Hewett

42 Botley Road, Romsey, Hampshire SO51 5AP

## "THE SIGNAL"

Dear Reader

No 19 - March 1998

### CONSOLIDATE IN '98!

Members will have read last month's edition of "The Signal" with considerable alarm and despondency, and a number have been in correspondence with me. All is not gloom and doom, however. I am issuing this extra edition of "The Signal" to update members on the latest situation at the earliest opportunity after the AGM.

Since the last newsletter, I have met with the Romsey & District Buildings Preservation Trust (who own the box), and with the headteacher and a governor of the Romsey Infants School (through whose land we need access). Both meetings were very frank yet constructive, and there was much sympathy for the Friends and our situation. The replacement AGM was then held on Saturday 21 March.

The main conclusions at the AGM were that the objectives of the Friends had to be re-focused upon those qualities which make Romsey Signal Box unique, namely:

- hands-on operation by the public;
- as a training resource for budding signalmen.

Additionally, Cowley Bridge Junction has been re-affirmed as an essential part of the project, supporting the Romsey box, with the same unique qualities, and deserves investment.

There needs to be a clear understanding of what can be achieved with the resources available (people and materials), and those tasks need to be focused on the objectives above. The membership of the committee has therefore been adjusted to focus on the team which will lead a programme of work over the next six months.

*Members should note that there will be an Extraordinary General Meeting in the signal box on Saturday 19 September 1998, in exactly six months' time, when progress, the efforts to recruit new volunteers and a new Project Manager, and the policy on further work and opening to the public in 1999, will all be reviewed.*

Meanwhile I have re-affirmed my commitment to the Friends during 1998, and will continue to manage the programme of work which is detailed later, but I have also re-affirmed my definite intention to cease my role as Project Manager after the next Annual General Meeting of the Friends on Sunday 3 January 1999.

Contrary to the statement in the last newsletter, we have concluded that with local support it may be possible for the subsequent management of the signal box site to be undertaken by someone who lives away from Romsey. Volunteers welcomed!

To all those who have sent messages of support, those who have renewed membership, and particularly those who attended the AGM, may I say a very big "thank you". It has given us a real lift.

Agents of the Romsey and District Buildings Preservation Trust

To those members who have yet to renew, or those who may have been frightened off by the news in the last newsletter, I urge you to give us your support by forwarding your subscription as soon as possible. £5 adults, £2.50 children/OAPs, cheques payable to "Friends of Romsey Signal Box".

The Friends are alive and kicking, the aim is to "Consolidate in '98", and your support (active, financial, moral) is as important and welcome now as at any time. There is a renewed determination by the new committee and regular attenders to keep the project on its tracks. Commit yourselves to being a part of that!

Dick Hewett

\*\*\*\*\*

#### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - 21 MARCH

The meeting opened at 2.15pm, with eight members present (Dick Hewett, Bill Tyndall, Simon Cooper, Adam Rapley, Peter Cattermole, Colin Meheux, Russell Lingwood and Ken Rye). Whilst John Prytherch arrived late from Warrington, and spent a mere 10 minutes with us before having to catch his train home: extraordinary dedication!

The Project Manager opened the meeting by explaining why the original AGM had been postponed. Essentially, due to changes in circumstances and other commitments arising, most committee members found it impossible to be present. In addition, there was virtually no progress to report since the 150th celebrations, and promises for the work programme then extant would have been hollow.

Meanwhile the main conclusion from the meeting with the Romsey & District Buildings Preservation Trust in March was that they will accept responsibility for the signal box building, but little else. Any objectives beyond the preservation of the actual structure, in terms of operational and visitor facilities, will require a separate group, a role the Friends of Romsey Signal Box are ideally suited to fulfil. The AGM went on to consider what these additional objectives were.

After lengthy discussion, the meeting concluded that the project needed to focus upon its unique qualities, or in marketing terms its niche market. What does the Romsey Signal Box Project have to offer that no one else can? What future direction should we take?

Developing the box as a facility for members to operate is unlikely to be sustainable. Proficient operators drift towards signal boxes on preserved railways, and this facility is by no means unique to Romsey. However, where Romsey is almost unique, is in offering the general public the opportunity to visit a mechanical signal box, pull the levers, ring the bells, and simulate a box in operation. If the public enter other boxes there are generally restrictions; either it is on an operational railway; or the aim is to simulate realistic operation and the public are merely spectators (Exeter West); or it is not operational (Instow).

Secondly, the combination of Romsey Signal Box and Cowley Bridge Junction miniature signal box provides a unique resource for training new signalmen and women without disturbance to train services or the threat of doing any real damage. Potential signalmen and women from local preserved railways could be invited to Romsey, or even Cowley Bridge Junction taken to them. In addition, involvement could be extended to training in the maintenance of the equipment - thereby giving the project a ready-made source of labour. "Hire" charges could be levied.

These unique aspects should be highlighted in more extensive publicity to the general public and other railway groups respectively. A number of ideas were tabled to increase publicity, raise funds, and gain support from local organisations and firms.

Before committing the project to such long-term ventures, we should prove our ability to achieve even simple tasks and targets. It was agreed that a six-month action plan should be put in place, which, if achieved, would be a pre-requisite to the long-term objectives. If not achieved, we should set our sights a bit lower.

The action plan (with lead individuals) includes, for Romsey:

1. Identifying the "odd jobs" (painting, carpentry, wiring, etc.) which need doing around the site. (Colin M/Dick H)
2. Completing the documentation of the wiring, to help ease of maintenance and improvement of reliability. (Chris H)
3. Connecting up the remaining equipment on the block shelf, or removing items which aren't to be connected in the near future, such that anything visible is operational. (Simon C/Chris H)
4. Removing the controllers (except no 6), boarding the gap behind the frame, and fitting lino throughout the box. (Colin M/Dick H)
5. Building a small plug-in console for the upstairs, with sufficient switches to complement the standard So'ton- Redbridge-Romsey-Kimbridge demonstration, thus saving the need for someone downstairs and increasing visitor involvement on Open Days (they could help operate the mini-console). (Bill T/Simon C/Peter C)
6. Completing the display boards around the site. (Dick H)
7. Re-assessing the equipment and selling the surplus, to save space, tidy the site, and raise funds. (Peter C/Bill T/Chris H)
8. In addition, if Cowley Bridge Junction is to be used more heavily, it requires a much more robust lever frame, so a new one will be built by the end of the summer. (Bill T/Chris H)
9. A concerted publicity campaign will be mounted, with the backing of the Trust and the Romsey & District Society, to recruit new active volunteers particularly from the Romsey area. (Dick H)

The cost of a new lever frame for Cowley Bridge will be at least

£600, whilst lino will also be similarly expensive. Members are invited to help raise the funds required for these investments.

The meeting concluded with a decision to hold a further Extraordinary General Meeting on Saturday 19 September in the signal box, to review progress on the action plan before committing the project to wider and more targeted publicity.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Four past members of the committee have found other commitments increasingly preventing active involvement, and the AGM decided not to renew their membership of the committee. We are very grateful to Craig Philips, Ben Penny, Alan Gilmour, and particularly Richard Read, for their contributions over the last few years.

The AGM re-elected Dick Hewett, Bill Tyndall, Chris Hack (in his absence) and Peter Cattermole. In addition, Simon Cooper and Colin Meheux were elected for the first time. This team of six will be responsible for the programme of work through to September, when the situation will be reviewed, and the committee re-assessed.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### NEWS OF COWLEY BRIDGE JUNCTION

Bill Tyndall has offered to conduct training sessions for Cowley Bridge operators, on alternate Tuesdays. A start date will be set once Bill has had some requests for training: ring 01794-512410.

Because of the state of the current lever frame, and potential transport difficulties, we won't be able to take Cowley Bridge to Bideford in August this year after all (perhaps 1999?). However, Cowley Bridge will definitely be appearing at the Exeter West Gala at Crewe on 24/25 October, and Bill would be delighted to hear from volunteers to help operate at Crewe at any time over that weekend.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### DIARY DATES

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

EGM: 19 September 1998 (Saturday), Signal Box, 2-4pm.

24/25 October 1998 (Saturday/Sunday): Cowley Bridge Junction at Exeter West Signalling Gala, Crewe.

\*\*\*\*\*

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

*Contributions from members would be most welcome!*