

“The Signal”

*The Newsletter of
The Friends of Romsey Signal Box*

Message from the Chairman/Treasurer/Membership Secretary

Annual General Meeting:

Please try to attend our AGM which will be held in the signal box on

Sunday 6 February 2000, at 4.00pm.

This has been a year of consolidation. Next year will be a year of development.
Come and help us prioritise our plans!



"The Signal" itself

Colin Meheux and I send our apologies for the very late arrival of this edition of "The Signal". This is only the second newsletter since the AGM in February, but it has been an extremely hectic time for both of us beyond the signal box.

Colin and I have also agreed that I will resume the editorship of the newsletter, especially now I have acquired a new computer and ancillaries! This will permit Colin to concentrate on the management of the signal box and its site. Colin will still contribute, of course, but any other contributions (always welcome) should be sent to me once more. Keep them coming!

Membership subscriptions:

If you renewed or took out a subscription with the Friends in 1999, you will find enclosed with this edition a membership slip. My apologies for the late arrival of this confirmation.

Once again it's that time in the year when membership fees are renewed. All recipients will also find an invitation to renew for 2000. We hope that even those members who did not renew in 1999 will do so in 2000. The amount is not large but magnified by 60 or so becomes a significant base upon which to build. I hope that even if you cannot spare any time for the project you will at least support again financially this year.

Funds:

Funds were extensive at the time of the AGM last February, but as anticipated these have now fallen significantly as we have invested particularly in the new Cowley Bridge Junction frame. With committed forthcoming expenditure on finishing the frame, installing external lights, covering the floor with suitable lino, and repairing the door at the station, our funds will be virtually wiped out. Hence it is particularly important that members renew their subscriptions at the start of the year, to give us a cashflow for other unexpected expenses.

Cowley Bridge Junction developments:

Bill Tyndall reports elsewhere on the very exciting developments with our new Cowley Bridge Junction miniature signal box frame. We hope to make quite a splash when we launch it at the traditional TRPS Wessex Area model railway exhibition at Fareham in March 2000, and Bill and I are starting to plan the calendar of appearances throughout 2000.

What we need now is for existing and new operators to come forward. It will be great to operate, highly impressive to the visitor, and hopefully will enable us to recruit a whole new wave of members – just like so many of our existing members were attracted to the project originally.

On the downside, we have suffered a major break-in to our room at Romsey Station, and until we can get the doorframe and door replaced, we cannot take the risk of storing any valuables in the room. Investigations are in hand for an alternative location – but if you know of anywhere, please let us know. It is essential we find somewhere secure for the new frame, which will be a significant asset for the project.

Open Days:

Finally, can I support Colin's appeal in his bit regarding more volunteers for Open Days. It was my intention to withdraw as far as possible from attendance at Open days in view of other responsibilities I have now assumed (like running around football pitches with a whistle on regular occasions). However, with a few notable exceptions, the support of other volunteers has been frankly disappointing in my view, and I have found myself more than once torn between the box and other commitments. I am acutely aware that Colin has on more than one occasion been left to staff the box for much of an Open Day on his own.

This is unacceptable from a health and safety angle, and also has its security risks, as he cannot keep an eye on the site whilst he is entertaining a particular group of

visitors. Given also the number of children who attend, I am not happy for a singleton member to be responsible for meeting the public.

Please do review the Open Days list in this edition and see when you could possibly offer your services. Even a couple of hours on one of those days could help. Being there, and keeping an eye on things, is as useful as talking to visitors or doing odd jobs around the site.

Looking forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the AGM, and to receiving your subscriptions!

Dick Hewett (01794 522979)

Call Attention!

Project Manager Colin Meheux (01425 672814) writes:

Volunteers:

I should like to reiterate my comments of the last newsletter. The aim of the Friends was not just to restore the box but also to provide a continuous capability for the public to see and appreciate the highly skilled and vitally important job of the "bobby". The response to my letter asking for a commitment of one morning or afternoon a year was not as good as I had hoped for, and there have been occasions when only Dick or myself has manned the box on an open day. Two of the three volunteers who have attended on more than one occasion come from Chippenham and Leighton Buzzard (thanks to Simon Cooper and Steve Hailes). I do hope some of the nearer volunteers may turn up next year.

Finally the new Cowley Bridge Junction frame is finished and very good it looks too. It's now being prepared for mechanical and electrical interlocking and will be on show as soon as possible next year. More on this from Bill elsewhere in the newsletter.

Operating Timetable

It still remains the aim of the committee to continue with the open days but it depends upon the level of volunteers and their commitment.

Open Days	5 December 1999	
AGM	6 February 2000, 4pm	
Open Days	6 February	6 August
	5 March	3 September
	2 April	1 October
	7 May	5 November
	4 June	3 December
	2 July	

Engineering Works

The problem of grounds maintenance may be solved. It is intended to get the help of Community Service volunteers on a regular basis. This will include the paths being regraded and plastic sheet laid an inch or so below to suppress the weeds etc.

I mentioned in the last newsletter that I was hoping to involve 79 Railway Squadron RLC who are based at Marchwood Military Port. In fact Kosovo has meant that the whole Squadron deployed to the province to reorganize the railways there. They have promised as a minimum to come and see the box and assess its value to them as a training simulator.

Dick has always wanted, as do I, a couple of telegraph poles to simulate the omnibus connections that all the old boxes possessed.

In addition it would be nice if a track circuit and facing point lock could be installed and connected up to the levers in the box and the signal diagram. We wait and see what will turn up in the Millennium Year.



The "You are now in the Strong Country" sign has been erected together with the old Romsey town sign. Both have been given publicity in several of the local papers. Thanks to Rod Hoyle our regular sign writer, and to Test Valley Borough Council who funded their restoration and erection.

Signal Box visitors register: Summary of the Year so Far

Since the start of the year we have had average attendances throughout the summer. The surprise was the Romsey and District Arts festival in July when the box was open for both Saturday and Sunday. We made over £70 in donations over the two days.

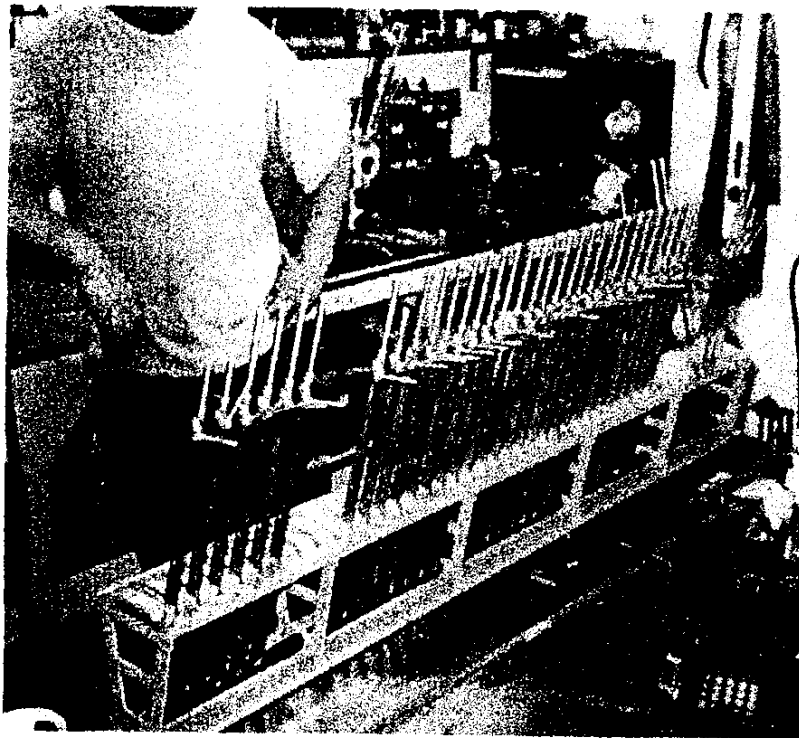
Cowley Bridge Junction

Bill Tyndall writes:

At the Open Day on 7 November, the new frame for Cowley Bridge was shown to various members. The general view is that we have a superb product. I was able to tell Dick and Colin exactly the stage we have reached and they have fully endorsed the final part of the project.

For those of you who have forgotten what has happened, here is a brief resume. For a while, we have felt that the old frame and block shelves were becoming very tired. I spoke to the committee and agreement was reached to start a rebuild. The first part was the block shelves, which Ben Penny completed some time ago.

Chris Hack and I then set about seeing if we could get a new frame made for the project. Chris found Joe Nemeth who agreed to build a quarter size frame (shown here in the final stages of construction).



After considerable debate about the value of having Cowley Bridge and the cost of a rebuild, the committee endorsed our proposal and an appeal was launched to raise the necessary money. Building then started, which involved several journeys to Joe's premises at Severn Beach to sort out various problems. We had hoped we might have the frame ready this year (1999) but various commitments meant that I was not able to get things done as fast as I would have liked.

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However the frame is now completed and painted. All that is left is to fit the electric locking. Alan Johnston (contacted originally through the Exeter West Group) is providing the expertise for this. Chris and I hope to get the locking done in the next couple of weeks, and Joe's last task on the frame itself is to help provide the 35 miniature nameplates which are needed for the levers. Joe is also building a trolley to move it around and also to act as a base at shows.

As part of our link with Exeter West Group, we have decided to work Cowley Bridge to the same rules and regulations as them. To this end, I have rewritten all the timetables to use the proper bell codes in use at the time. These will be sent out to existing operators in the near future, together with all the various operating tips. The new timetables have been used at two shows with the old Cowley Bridge frame and everyone says they are easier to use. Thanks to Neil Kearns who set out the layout on my computer.

We still have some way to go and we still need some more money to complete the project. The current figure needed is about £600; so if you can spare any cash, over and above subscription renewals, please send it to Dick a.s.a.p.

It is our intention to relaunch Cowley Bridge at the TRPS Wessex Area Exhibition on 19 March 2000. If anyone can help with woodwork, wiring or painting, please contact Colin or me. It is my intention to train people on the new frame, but the break-in at our room at Romsey station means we currently have nowhere suitable in which to store the new frame when it is complete, or in which to provide training sessions. The need for another secure room is pressing, as the new frame is too valuable to allow it to be damaged at all. If anyone knows of, or can offer, a room with easy ground floor access, please contact Colin, Dick or me.

That's about all from me, hope to hear from you all soon – existing operators and new ones!

Bill Tyndall (01794 512410)

So: The next edition of "The Signal" should be in February, after the AGM.
DON'T FORGET TO ATTEND: SUNDAY 6 FEBRUARY, 4PM!