

"The Signal"

*The Newsletter of
The Friends of Romsey Signal Box*

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Our beautiful historic shed!

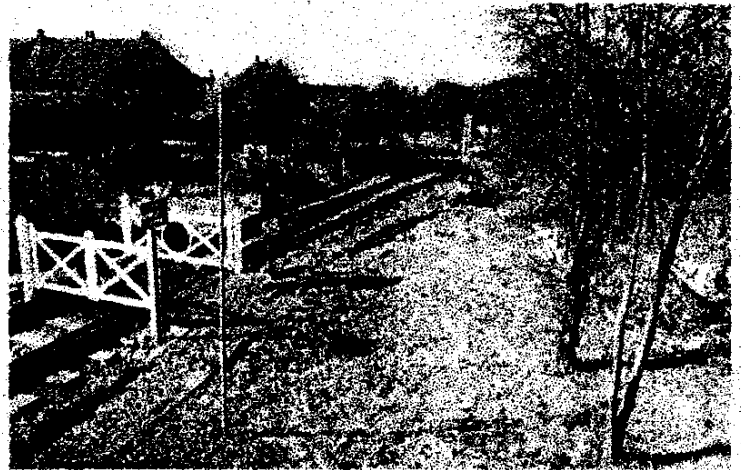


No! It's not a description of the signal box – with its brick base, that surely classifies as a proper building! – but rather the next edifice to find its way onto the site. For we will shortly be the delighted recipients of this beautiful wooden 1920's shed!

Perhaps the word "shed" does it a disservice. It is, after all, about 30 feet long and 10 feet wide, with a small verandah and two rooms, one of which is at least the size of

the signal box. It currently sits in a garden at the other end of Romsey, but the owners wish to dispose of it and are keen for it to have a safe new home. They offered it to the Romsey and District Buildings Preservation Trust, who have decided that it ought to be preserved as a fine example of a typical prefabricated wooden shed of that era.

So the next question was – where would they put it? And naturally one obvious site immediately came to mind – next to the signal box. Urgent inspections, discussions, estimates of cost, and planning, has culminated in a decision to move the shed to the signal box as soon as we can after it becomes available at the end of April. We plan to put it in front of the signal box, parallel with the railway-side fence – behind the signal in the left-hand picture, and on the right of the right-hand picture. The two thorn trees nearest the box will have to be cut down and the path moved across (though the planner from Test Valley Borough Council has recommended removing the willow tree instead – we will need to consider this carefully).



The Buildings Preservation Trust have agreed to fund all the dismantling, transport, rebuilding, and re-roofing. There won't be any immediate cost to the Friends – which with our financial situation, we were obviously keen to avoid any financial burden. We have offered to help with some labour for the rebuilding, and are happy to undertake basic maintenance once it is finished (such as painting windows and occasionally treating the woodwork).

What will we use it for?

For starters, we have always wanted another room where visitors can go when it is raining. School visits, which usually involve 30-35 children, are difficult as we cannot take more than half the children into the signal box at a time. The remainder are limited to the cramped space in the visitor van (no more than 6 at a time) or staying outside. We will be able to fit at least the rest, if not the whole, of the class in the larger of the two rooms in our shed.

Secondly, we would like to welcome disabled visitors. Quite clearly it is impossible for some visitors to climb the stairs up to the first floor operating floor of the box. If we can fit a small camera in the box, and a monitor in the shed, we can allow such visitors to observe what is going on upstairs.

Thirdly, we have also become increasingly frustrated at the lack of washing water and toilet facilities on the site. A water supply has long been planned, and is not seen as a great difficulty (only constrained by money), but fitting a toilet with proper drainage has seemed like an impossible task. Suddenly we can consider fitting a washbasin and toilet cubicle in the back room of the shed, with a drainage connection to the school drainage system. With one or two other simple amenities in the shed (such as a cheap mobile phone, the fridge, and simple cooking facilities), we will be largely self-sufficient.

Opening events and Heritage Open Days, September 2000:

Once we have got our building and have completed Cowley Bridge, we shall want to celebrate. It would be nice to do this in conjunction with an extra special activity in the box. We are therefore considering joining in with Heritage Open Days 2000, an event we have taken part in before, whereby we would receive national publicity along with many other locations, in return for making special opening arrangements.

In the past we have had a signalling marathon (48 hours). That might be a bit ambitious, but we could certainly open for the two relevant days and have the new Cowley Bridge operating in our new building. Obviously it will be subject to good progress being made on both Cowley Bridge and the building.

The relevant weekend is Saturday 16 and Sunday 17 September 2000. We shall need good attendance from volunteers, and a firm decision needs to be made before the end of May, by which time we will have a better idea of the likelihood of meeting our target. But in the meantime, put the weekend in your diaries, and expect an approach later in the year seeking volunteers to operate.

Membership subscriptions:

If you have already renewed your subscription with the Friends for 2000 and have not had your membership slip yet, you will find one enclosed with this edition.

I am delighted with the number of members who have renewed for 2000 despite not doing so in 1999: welcome back! I am also delighted to thank all members who have included a donation with their subscription. In fact, the donations received have

averaged more than the subscription itself. Donations are not explicitly acknowledged in "The Signal", as we are sure many prefer to remain anonymous – but you can all assume your generosity is recognised and extremely welcome.

For those few members who have still yet to renew, please note that this will definitely be the last newsletter you will receive until you send in your subscription for 2000. Forms were issued with the last newsletter, but don't worry if you can't find them - just forward the £5 for adults, £2.50 for juniors and senior citizens. Every penny helps towards the maintenance and development of the box, and you know it is all going to a good cause!

Annual General Meeting

This was held on Sunday 6 February 2000, in the signal box, at the end of that month's open day.

Present:

Dick Hewett (Chairman, etc.), Colin Meheux (Project Manager), Simon Cooper, Steve Hailes, Paul Allwood, John Read

Despite the low attendance, those present agreed that the meeting should continue, as more than 10% of the total membership were present. The meeting opened at 1613.

Apologies received:

Bill Tyndall, Neil Kearns, John Prytherch, Adam Rapley

(Ken Rye and Ted Mason both apologised after the event!)

(The Chairman apologises to anyone else who sent their apologies for absence but who is not listed!)

1. Officers of "Friends" – elected as follows:

Dick Hewett: Chairman, Treasurer, Membership Secretary, Archivist, Newsletter editor, Marketing/publicity.

Colin Meheux: Project Manager (including Operations and Mechanics at box)

Bill Tyndall: Cowley Bridge Junction.

Simon Cooper: electrical fittings at box.

Paul Allwood: youth development.

Ted Mason: ex-officio member of committee with special responsibility for the link with the Romsey & District Buildings Preservation Trust (our "parent" body).

2. Report from Project Manager Colin Meheux:

During the past year, the box has continued to open regularly, with a core staff of Colin and Dick, and several other members attending on a less frequent basis. It is important to encourage new volunteers to help.

A key problem remains the maintenance of the grounds and the box. A number of initiatives were explored, with only one success.

- The proposed weekend with members of the Buildings Preservation Trust fell through partly due to confusion amongst those who had signed the "interest sheet" at the Trust's AGM.
- It was also hoped to have involved members of 79 Railway Squadron from Marchwood, but they were sent to Kosovo during 1999. This link may be explored during 2000. [Afternote: Contact has been renewed.]
- The local Horticultural group inspected the site with a view to maintaining it, but seem to have been put off once they saw mare's tail growing extensively.
- However, Colin has made contact with the local Community Service, who will attend on a regular basis from 10.00am until around 3.00pm every first Sunday in the month from March 2000 onwards, for at least a year. Steve Hailes commented that it would be all the more important for there to be more than just Colin present as his time would be divided between the public and the Community Service volunteers. But all agreed this was an important initiative which could be of huge benefit to the project. [Afternote: A party of about 8 people from the Community Service attended for the March Open Day, and made major progress on site clearance.]

Colin would like to aim for the heritage competitions in 2001. To do this, we really need to attend to the grounds, the box, the fitting out and the electrics during 2000.

Action: Simon Cooper to complete the electrics.

Action: Colin to sort out the installation of the small box controller upstairs.

Action: Colin to attend to the signal box floor and to fit lino (funds are available).

Action: Colin to compile a list of tasks for the Community Service and volunteers.

[Afternote: It would be particularly good if we can get the work done before the proposed special open weekend in September.]

Open Days were generally successful during 1999 in visitor numbers and donations, whilst the two extra days in July when the box was opened in association with the Romsey Arts Festival brought over 100 visitors and nearly £70 in donations. Having committed ourselves to opening throughout 2000, it is essential the box is maintained. Volunteers on Open days will be essential. **Action:** All members to consider spending even one day per year at the box.

3. Report on Cowley Bridge Junction (from Bill Tyndall):

Owing to the fact that key members of the production team had a lot of problems, progress has been slow. This has caused the target dates to slip. This may have a beneficial effect as we still have the problem of where we will store and train people.

Action: Friends to consider a suitable location for storing and training.

Bill reported that as of 3 February, all the mechanical work has been done, i.e. all tappet blades have been made and fitted to the frame, and the electrical solenoids are mounted. All Chris Hack and Bill have to do is make up brackets, and complete the fitting of the micro switches. Then it can all go to London for electrical fitting.

[Afternote: Still current at time of going to press.]

We realise that the cost of this project has gone beyond what was originally estimated, but all those who saw the frame will know that it has all been worth it. We still have to raise further funds to complete the project: as was said in the last newsletter, the sum is around £600. The main expense is the Lever Description plates. There are two ways to do this: either do them on paper, laminate and stick on; or have them done now on ivories. This would be more authentic but would cost around £400. We are going to trial the first option. We also need to build carriers for the blockshelves.

We had hoped to complete the new Cowley Bridge by this Spring but quite clearly that is not going to happen. As a result, the old Cowley Bridge will continue to be used. We are minimising bookings until the new set is ready, but we have undertaken to be at the Copythorne Carnival on Sunday 18 June: we need volunteers for this date. If you can give any help, ring Bill on 01794 512410.

Our new target date for the launching of the new set is the summer. We are considering taking Cowley Bridge down to the Bideford and Instow Group's annual open day on Sunday 20 August and would hope it to be the new set. Beyond that, we want to start booking through next winter, with one provisional date of Chippenham on 21 and 22 October for the Wessex Model Railway Group's annual meeting already planned. *Action:* Friends to consult diaries and volunteer as operators.

Then we need to investigate bookings through 2001, perhaps even the major event at Warley. Publicity needs to be obtained, through model engineering and railway signal engineering magazines, and the like. *Action:* Dick to investigate.

Completion of the new set in the next four months is therefore a must! *Action:* Bill Tyndall and Chris Hack to complete the new Cowley Bridge Junction miniature signal box by July 2000.

4. Treasurer's report:

As at 31 January 2000, combined funds in the petty cash and bank account stood at £766.93. Commitments in the pipeline include lino for the floor, new security lights, and materials to repair the door at Romsey Station. This will take most of the remaining funds, so fund-raising to pay for Cowley Bridge and other developments remains a high priority.

Membership had fallen during the year, which was to be expected, given the relatively low level of activity with Cowley Bridge. However a number of members had already renewed for 2000, and paid up totals as at the AGM stood at 33 full members and 10 associates (juniors and senior citizens).

We need to consider applying for further grants. However, whilst Romsey Town Council only need a letter, Test Valley Borough Council need a specific project to fund, and nothing could be suggested at the AGM. *Action:* Dick to write to Romsey Town Council for June 2000 handouts.

The accounts, which run from April to March, are fully audited and then presented as part of the accounts of the Buildings Preservation Trust to their AGM each November. A full set of accounts for the year ended March 1999 is available on request from the Treasurer.

5. Actions from last meeting and any other business:

Richard Beton had offered a computer simulation in 1999, but this had not yet been pursued. Someone was aware of another computer simulation containing Romsey box. *Action:* Colin to pursue.

The Strong's sign had been mounted, but now needed attention. *Action:* Dick to contact Rod Hoyle. [Afternote: Damaged section now with Rod for repair.]

Questions were asked about the effectiveness of the marketing of the box, and it was agreed a survey should be undertaken to decide whether the investment being made for an advert in the Test Valley Guide was really justified. *Action:* Dick to pursue a survey and subsequent marketing plan.

There had been no further progress with negotiating the rent of a room at Salisbury Station, and the room at Romsey had been renewed for a further year. With 6 months' notice being necessary, the Friends are committed to hiring Romsey until at least May 2001. Whilst the rent is very cheap (£12 per annum), there is expenditure

in maintenance, particularly with the continuing vandalism and break-ins. *Action:* Colin and Dick to decide during summer on renewal of Romsey beyond May 2001.

A checklist of actions for opening and closing the box still needs to be completed, to enable those other than Colin and Dick to start and finish Open days. *Action:* Dick and Colin to produce.

Insurance needs to be checked once more. *Action:* Dick to pursue.

Toilet facilities need to be investigated. Various ideas were put forward. *Action:* Colin to pursue. [Afternote: Our new building may be the answer of course!]

6. Date of next AGM:

Agreed as 1600 hours, Sunday 4 February, 2001.

The meeting closed at 1715 hours.

Engineering Works

The Community Service volunteers started on 5 March on a regular basis, and soon had a significant pile of vegetation ready for disposal. One of those attending took the initiative to paint the level crossing gates.

Work in April and May will concentrate on preparing the area for the new building and tidying the rest of the site. Work will also start on regrading the paths with plastic sheet laid an inch or so below the surface to suppress the weeds.

Open Days:

Remember: we need volunteers to help us on Open Days, particularly now Colin needs to concentrate on liaising with the Community Service personnel. Dates:

2 April	4 June	6 August	1 October	3 December
7 May	2 July	3 September	5 November	

Important note: Please note the editor's new telephone number (01794 500523), and apologies to any member who has tried to contact him since December on the old number. He was too miserly to pay the transfer charges!