

“The Signal”

*The Newsletter of
The Friends of Romsey Signal Box*

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*Editor: Dick Hewett, tel 01794 500523, email: dick_hewett@hotmail.com
42 Botley Road, Romsey, Hampshire, S051 5AP*

The future!

It’s a whole year since the last edition of “The Signal” – and members will now be fully aware of the reasons for the lack of commitment to producing their newsletter. We are delighted to be back, therefore, with a bumper edition – and in a much more positive mood than for several years.

We hope you enjoy the following comprehensive review of the events of the last few months, and in particular the Annual General Meeting. No photographs I’m afraid – as you can see, it’s taken 12 sides to summarise the AGM and associated issues!

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Consultation with the members

The last three months have been a turning point in the Romsey Signal Box Project, and a hugely encouraging reinforcement of the desire amongst signalling enthusiasts for the Friends to continue to do what they do best – demonstrate the history and operation of railway signalling to the general public in an interactive yet authentic manner.

Members will be well aware of the discussions which have been going on over the last two months regarding the future of The Friends of Romsey Box and the long-term management of the signal box itself.

We are delighted to report that the response to the questionnaires sent out before Christmas was exceptional, with a huge majority of members returning completed forms, and most with additional comments. As an exercise in getting the views of the membership, it has been an unqualified success. We are extremely grateful for the time and effort to which so many people have gone to give their support and constructive input.

Again, as members are aware, Bill Tyndall, Colin Meheux and Dick Hewett met together and considered the report produced from the consolidated returns. This report had also been sent to the Romsey & District Buildings Preservation Trust, who own the signal box, and under whose auspices we effectively operate. Colin and Dick then attended a very constructive meeting of the Trust, where some very tough conclusions were reached which could have fundamental implications for the future of the box.

The final report from that meeting, with recommendations for both future policy and actions, was sent to all Friends, together with an invitation to the Annual General meeting in the box on 3 February. This edition of “The Signal” provides the record of that meeting and the agreed future policies and actions. It is essential now that all those Friends who volunteered active support and publicity contacts come forward to help. The future of The Friends is in our hands!

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Annual General Meeting

Held in the signal box on Sunday 3 February 2002, 3.30-5.30 pm, after that month’s Open Day. Minutes taken by Steve Hailes.

Present:

Dick Hewett (Chairman etc), Colin Meheux (Project Manager), Simon Cooper, Steve Hailes, Alan Johnston, Garth Long, John Read, Chris Rideout, Ken Rye.

Item 1. Apologies:

Nevertheless the meeting committed the Friends to supporting Romsey for so long as it remained on its current site, required volunteer involvement, and resources (including people) were available.

- 4. The Trust must accept responsibility for the structure of the box itself, presuming it remains on its current site. The Friends do not have the resources, contacts, or finances to organise or fund painting etc.**

This was emphatically agreed by all those present.

- 5. The opening of the box to the public should continue during 2002 according to current plans, but dates/times should be reviewed before committing to 2003.**

This was agreed by the meeting. Discussion then continued with some particular suggestions for the future, including:

6. Work a timetable for the benefit of certain volunteers who would prefer to do this rather than just a standard simple demonstration;
7. Keep the existing pattern as it helps explain things to the non-specialist visitor, and complex operation would confuse rather than clarify;
8. Mix the two, getting volunteer operators to attend for part of the day, operating for perhaps an hour period followed by a period of simpler demonstration.

Dick and Colin will consider all the ideas put forward and aim to introduce some during the forthcoming season.

- 9. A clearer roster of attendance for Open Days should be drawn up. Basic coaching in talking to the public should be offered. Dick Hewett should take more of a back seat.**

This was agreed, and Colin and Dick will liaise to create a roster, contacting those who have put themselves forward, and allocating them specific Sundays. Coaching will be given to those who it is felt need it.

- 10. Offers for re-wiring etc the box (e.g. from Exeter West) should be taken up in due course.**

The meeting were grateful to Alan Johnston and Peter Jordan for their offer, but agreed that action should wait until the box was either confirmed as staying at Romsey, or had been moved to a new site.

- 11. Other work on the box should be progressed as a matter of urgency (e.g. treads on stairs etc.).**

This was agreed (and indeed work had already started on the stairs during the Open day prior to the meeting).

- 12. The pavilion should NOT be taken on as a solely Friends’ responsibility. There is insufficient resource amongst the Friends to support such a commitment, given that the box, the visitor van, the surrounding site, and Cowley Bridge are already commitments. It would be better to sacrifice the opportunity of toilet and washing facilities than to take on the full responsibility for a complete building.**

- 13. If the building is restored on the signal box site, it needs professional input. It also needs a clear subsequent management plan for maintenance etc which is NOT limited to management by the Friends.**

These two conclusions were discussed together. The question of the pavilion was the one which generated contrasting questionnaire responses from the Friends, and there was a fair amount of discussion at the meeting. It was felt that the key requirement for volunteers and visitors was running water (for health and safety) and toilet facilities. It was also agreed that these could be provided by other means, such as connecting up the sink in the box itself for water, and investigating a Portaloo or equivalent (which would be authentic, as Romsey had one in the 1970s). On this basis, the meeting agreed with the conclusion above, but Dick and Colin agreed to investigate the alternatives for washing facilities and a toilet.

- 14. If the pavilion is going to be restored, it needs to happen this spring, otherwise not at all.**

It was agreed that the building should NOT be restored this Spring, but should be stored pending longer-term decisions by the Trust.

- 15. A range of publicity/recruitment efforts should be initiated, taking up suggestions made by Friends.**

The Chairman emphasised that anyone who can get publicity for the project should just go ahead and not await specific approval. The only clarification is that the box should be advertised as opening from 10am to 4pm, not 5pm, on Open Days. A number of members had offered suggestions, and the Chairman will pursue these with the individuals concerned. Dick will develop a specific, standard script, incorporating text for both general public use and for specialists. The text being developed by Howard Sprenger for “The Blower” could be used as a starting point, and the Guide to Romsey Signal Box can provide a useful source of information. Items in local newspapers such as the “What’s on” feature in the Southampton Daily Echo should be pursued: members are invited to submit further ideas.

There is an extra potential commitment for Sunday 21 July, in association with the Romsey Arts Festival, which Colin Meheux will investigate in due course.

We need to clear the room at Romsey Station which we must vacate by early May. . The Chairman will approach those Friends who volunteered to help over the Easter weekend, to confirm dates and times.

Item 7. Review of actions from previous AGM (2001).

Most actions had already been covered by previous agenda items, and very little progress was reported in the last year. This included the pavilion, re-wiring of the box, the restoration of the trollies, the exterior painting of the box, and a marketing plan.

Cowley Bridge: Alan Johnston reported on progress. It is a major project, with a considerable investment made already, so the team are keen that the rest of the fittings match the standard of the mechanical work. Alan has designed the electronics for the lever locking and so on, with etching, drilling and components. The wooden shell of the simulator has been completed by Ben Penny to a very high standard, and Alan showed the latest version of the track diagram. Cowley Bridge is unlikely to be completed before the late summer. (Afterthought: Demonstration at the extraordinary General Meeting might be an appropriate final target date?)

Meanwhile we are using the old Cowley Bridge for the very few bookings we have taken, and South Coast Training have asked to hire the old simulator for four days, giving us the first of what is hoped to be a more regular source of income once the new Cowley Bridge is available to them.

Item 8. Any other business

None raised on this occasion.

Item 9. Date of next meeting(s)

Extraordinary General Meeting: Sunday 6 October 2002, 3.30pm.
Annual General Meeting: Sunday 2 February 2003, 3.30pm.

The meeting closed at 5.30pm.

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Report from February Trust meeting

The Chairman briefly attended the February meeting of the Trust, to report back on the Friends’ AGM and to agree to the onward action programme. The Trust promised to keep the Friends informed throughout as regards developments. Meanwhile, the Hampshire County Museums service will be visiting the site on Wednesday 27th February to assess the potential for the box to be removed to another location.

Membership matters

Renewals:

All members who have not already done so are urged to renew their subscriptions. Rates remain at £5 for adults, £2.50 for children under 16 and OAPs. Membership slips for those who have renewed are enclosed with this edition of “The Signal”.

Contact numbers:

Apart from keeping the address and telephone lists up-to-date, it would benefit the Chairman greatly if he had access to email addresses. All members who haven’t already done so are invited to forward an email address such that future communications can be sent electronically whenever possible, to save on photocopying and postage, and to ensure a swifter response. Email Dick_Hewett@hotmail.com.

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David and Marion Canning

Finally, a little plug for two of our stalwart members, David and Marion Canning, who do a nice little line in photography in their spare time. They now have their own website at www.davidandmarionphotography.co.uk. Give them a visit and see what they have to offer – trains, cats, and the potential for wedding photographs amongst them!

David has published several books featuring his railway photographs, and says: “There’s lots of books left – spread the word!”

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SO! See you at one of the Open Days!

Next ones: 3 March, 7 April, 5 May, 2 June, 7 July, 21 July, 4 August, 1 September, 6 October (+EGM), 3 November, 1 December, 2 February 2003 (+AGM).

Or join us on Good Friday or Easter Saturday (29/30 March) to help clear the box, the room at Romsey Station, and tidy the site. We need all the help we can get!

And keep in contact:

Dick Hewett (01794 500523) or Colin Meheux (01425 672814).