



“The Signal”

*The Newsletter of
The Friends of Romsey Signal Box*

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Your box needs you!

Welcome to the latest edition of “The Signal”, and an especially warm welcome to all our new members. How pleasing it is to have to increase the distribution of this newsletter to a wider readership! (Note that hard copies are only being sent to those who have not provided an email address.)

We have a full report of the Extraordinary General Meeting on 6th October, and give advance notice for the Annual General Meeting on 2nd February. Please note that this will be the only reminder of that meeting: no further reminder will be mailed, so please put the date in your diaries now!

Over the last month or two there has been a concerted effort to raise awareness of the reliance the Project has had on one or two individuals – particularly Dick Hewett and Colin Meheux. Appeals through the signalling press (particularly the Signalling Record Society) have generated some new help, followed by excellent coverage in the local Romsey newspaper, the Romsey Advertiser. This was in association with a public meeting hosted by Romsey Town Council – from which seven new local volunteers have come forward – great news indeed.

This edition reports on the latest developments – and summons your help to build on the progress being made. Yes, we have had some new volunteers coming forward – but we can always do with more.

As a result of the EGM (reported below), action is now in hand to spread the load amongst many more people. Howard Sprenger, Steve Hailes, Peter Chatfield, Colin Meheux and Dick Hewett are drawing up a list of duties and seeking volunteers to fill the posts. We want to fill the list in time for the Annual General Meeting on 2nd February 2003.

So – what do we need? The list is quite lengthy, but with the duties shared between a big team, it shouldn't be much effort for any one individual.

On the Administrative front, we are seeking people to fill the following posts:

1. Chairman; Secretary; *Treasurer; Fund-raiser; *Membership Secretary.

We need people to take charge of the following:

1. Site management; Community Service Liaison; *Site caretaker; Electricians; *Mechanics; *Carpentry/joinery; Sign painting; General painting; *Cowley Bridge Development Manager; Pavilion rebuilding project.

On the operational front, we need:

1. *Open Day Roster Clerk; *Cowley Bridge Co-ordinator.

On publicity and contact with members, the following jobs need filling:

1. Publicity manager; Newsletter editor; *Website manager; Archivist/librarian; Displays co-ordinator; Sales officer.

Several of those who attended the EGM have already put themselves forward for roles amongst those listed (duties shown as * above), but we need more people to come forward. If the list is not filled and duties not spread between a wide number of folks, the Project will continue to rely on one or two key individuals and we will not have solved our resourcing problem.

We also need to build a bigger team of guides to host visitors on Open Days. No expertise in signalling is necessary, and coaching will be given – indeed, it could be an advantage to have limited knowledge, as you won't be tempted to blind the public with science!

And of course we need people to provide general labouring support on the site. The technical leaders can't do it all themselves: they need volunteers to help.

So- VOLUNTEER NOW! You will have skills to offer, even the most basic. Your signal box needs you!!

Extraordinary General Meeting, 6 October 2002

14 Friends of Romsey Signal Box met in the box on 6th October:

Dick Hewett, Colin Meheux, Danny Scroggins, Pete Chatfield, Howard Sprenger, John Read, Ted Mason, Simon Cooper, Neil Kearns, Steve Hailes, Garth Long, Bob McCann, Bernie Peel, Ken Rye.

Apologies were received from:

Frank Akerman, Clive Collier, Peter Cattermole, David & Marion Canning, Charlie Tallis, John Meredith, Bill Tyndall, Dave Lyons, Andy Moody, Martin Cooper, Ian Maxwell, Richard Sanderson, Barry Sherratt, Derrick Palengat, Chris Rideout, Les Swanborough, Alan Johnston, David Keightley, Mike Curtis, Richard Young, Kevin Ford, Ken Hale.

1. Dick Hewett reported on the developments since the Annual General Meeting in February, as highlighted in the agenda for the meeting. He then reported on the interest from Romsey Town Council and the Deputy Mayor Mike Curtis, who had suggested holding a public meeting. Excellent press coverage in the Romsey Advertiser resulted in seven new people attending the public meeting, held in the Town Hall on 26th September. All had now offered to assist with the Project in some capacity or other (two were in attendance at this EGM, and two had visited earlier the same day).

2. Dick explained that there were three bodies with an active interest in the box:

1. The Romsey & District Buildings Preservation Trust, who own the box and the site. Their interest is in preserving the building as a historic building. They are not particularly concerned about its operation. However, Ted Mason, who reported from the Buildings Preservation Trust's perspective, observed that the box is the one building the Trust owns, and has probably been visited by more people than any of the other buildings the Trust has ever had an interest in;
2. The Friends of Romsey Signal Box, whose interest is in the operation of the box, preferably in its current format. It's location (Romsey or elsewhere) is of lesser significance. Only a small proportion of the members of the Friends live in the Romsey area. The box has a wide (potentially national) appeal;

3. Romsey Town Council, who do not want to lose a local tourist attraction.

3. The EGM continued with a discussion about the pros and cons of retaining the box where it is, offering it to the Mid Hants Railway in its current form, or to the Swanage Railway for use as an operating box on the lineside. The key conclusions were:

1. Whatever happens, Dick wants to reduce his commitments to a minimum with regards to management of any aspects of the Project.
2. For the box to remain at Romsey, a much broader team was needed to relieve the pressure on Dick and Colin for the many facets of managing the Project.
3. This team would need to include some people from Romsey, for sound "political" reasons. These were twofold:
 - a. A Project run entirely by people from outside Romsey was unlikely to command so much support from other Romsey organisations, and could be a critical problem were difficulties to arise ("Why are we supporting this Project, it's not for Romsey people");
 - b. Only someone from Romsey would have an understanding of local "politics", i.e. the relationship between the Friends and the Infants School, the Trust, the Town Council, etc.
4. Local membership from the Romsey area would also be important for practical reasons, to avoid the need for significant travel on special occasions:
 - a. If there is any sort of emergency, someone needs to be available at short notice.
 - b. Short, one-off evening visits could be hosted by a local guide.
5. If the box were to go to the Mid Hants, that would preserve the philosophy of opening the box to the public, could give a wider audience, and could bring it under an existing management structure. However, if at any time the Mid Hants were struggling to find volunteers, they would quite naturally give priority to ensuring train services were run, rather than opening up an extra (and probably free) visitor attraction.
6. If the box were to go to the Swanage Railway, it would be assured of use and care, but it would become just another box on a preserved railway. The box is fairly interesting in controlling a double-track junction, whereas at Swanage it would be merely a block post on a single-track line.

4. After discussing these options further, there was unanimous support for retaining the box at Romsey on the current basis, opening it to visitors 11 times per year (on the first Sunday of the month) plus on other occasions by appointment. The main justifications were:

1. The box has been developed as a unique facility for educational and demonstration purposes, with a fairly complex and interesting layout for a small box. This facility should not be lost. (Several of those present expressed this in particularly forceful terms.)
2. The key issue at Romsey was ensuring the resources to manage it. There must be enough resources amongst the Friends to spread the management load, such that the load for each would not be cumbersome. Duties should be adopted by those with the relevant skills and experience.
3. If the box is to be retained at Romsey, the pavilion should be built on the site as a matter of urgency, to provide washing/toilet/etc facilities.
4. It is now well known that the signal box opens on the first Sunday of the month. To change this would confuse regular visitors. Indeed, on this Open day, even without the signs being displayed on the roadside, 18 members of the public visited thanks to general publicity and awareness that “the box always opens on the first Sunday of the month” (quote one family).
5. Opening only 11 times per year is not too much of a burden on volunteer resources, and concentrates the visitor numbers on a few (busy) days, rather than spreading them more thinly. (Visitors numbers each Open Day vary between anything from 10 to 60, and we have consistently averaged around 400 visitors per year since opening on a monthly basis in April 1993).
6. The important role of talking to the public requires good (layman’s) communication skills. It must be possible to identify a core of members who would have the capability of fulfilling this role, with adequate training.
7. Completion of the miniature signal box Cowley Bridge Junction, and its hiring out to rail training contractors, could bring in a source of income to make the Project financially independent, and reduce the burden on the Buildings Preservation Trust’s finances.

8. The risks, costs and logistics associated with moving the box elsewhere far outweigh the risks associated with retaining the box at Romsey.
9. Those present undertook to take on the management of the Project and relieve the pressures of duties from Dick and Colin. The following action plan was agreed:
 10. A small Working Group (Dick Hewett, Howard Sprenger, Peter Chatfield, Steve Hailes and Colin Meheux) will identify the various duties which need to be filled, and seek volunteers to fill those duties. This will be done by email and phone during October.
 11. Dick Hewett offered to continue with one role at least – that of undertaking the liaison between the Friends and other interested local organisations (the “political” element).
 12. Howard Sprenger and Danny Scroggins will develop a roster for Open Days, identifying what duties each person attending would be there to fulfil.
 13. During the November Open Day, Dick Hewett and Colin Meheux will document the procedures for opening and closing the box each Open Day.
 14. Dick Hewett will record a couple of his talks during the November Open Day for use by others as a training guide.
 15. The Membership Secretary (once appointed) will circulate a full membership list to all members, with addresses, phone numbers and email addresses.
 16. Dick Hewett will advise the Buildings Preservation Trust, and Swanage and Mid Hants Railways of the current situation. [Afternote: Actioned.]
 17. Active new members will continue to be sought.
 18. Plans will be re-activated for the rebuilding of the pavilion.
 19. The Working Group (with the exception of Steve Hailes) will meet during the November Open Day to review progress.
 20. Dick Hewett will arrange a meeting with the headteacher at Romsey Infants School before the end of the current school term, review the current agreement with the school, and update the list of keyholders.

- 21. Dick Hewett and Bob Hailes will review the Constitution, and develop a separate Constitution for Cowley Bridge Junction, to separate the two parts of the Project. New documents will be tabled for ratification at the Annual General Meeting of the Friends on Sunday 2nd February 2003.
 - 22. Likewise recommendations for a new management structure and specific personnel to fill posts will be tabled for ratification at the AGM.
1. A final decision on the future will be made at the AGM when the action plan now being put in hand will be reviewed.

6. The meeting closed at 5.35pm – with a positive determination.

Membership matters

New members:

We are delighted that a number of new members have joined us as a result of publicity in The Signalling Record, BranchLine News, publicity in The Romsey Advertiser, the public meeting, and our own website (www.romseysignalbox.org). We welcome:

Tim Bourne (Hemel Hempstead), Derek and Jane Buckles (Kings Sombourne), Peter Chatfield (Tunbridge Wells), Mike Curtis (North Baddesley, Romsey), David Green (Dibden Purlieu), Bob Hailes (Southampton), Ken Hale (Romsey), David Keightley (Romsey), Bob McCann (North Baddesley, Romsey), Bernie Peel (Romsey), Danny Scroggins (Hungerford), Anthony Sturgess (Romsey), Les Swanborough (Romsey), Richard Young (Romsey).

We are also delighted to have received advance payment for the next four years from Eric Romaine, the leader of the original demolition team, who was instrumental in working with Audrey Gebbie (the headteacher of the Infants School) to save the signal box in 1982-3. This is virtually life membership!

Renewals:

We had 51 paid-up members in 2002. All members who have not already done so are invited to renew their subscriptions for 2003. Rates remain at £5 for adults, £2.50 for

children under 16 and OAPs. Membership slips for those who have already renewed are enclosed with this edition of “The Signal”.

Advance notice of Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the Friends of Romsey Signal Box will be held in the Signal Box on Sunday 2nd February 2003, commencing 3.30pm. Agenda:

1. Apologies
2. Acceptance of record of EGM (October 2001) (as published in this edition of “The Signal” No 27, October 2002)
3. Financial and membership statements
4. Future of Friends: Report from Working Group
5. Revised Constitutions, Agreement with School, and Health & Safety Policy
6. Election for Committee/Officers of the Friends
7. List of other responsibilities
8. Diary of Open Days 2003
9. Revised action list
10. Any other business
11. Date of next AGM

Dick Hewett, Chairman, 20 October 2002

SO! See you at one of the Open Days!

Next ones: 3 November, 1 December, 2 February 2003 (+AGM), 2 March.

And keep in contact:

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