



# “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, SO51 5AP  
[www.romseysignalbox.org.uk](http://www.romseysignalbox.org.uk)*

## *Sponsorship of “The Signal”*

This edition has been brought to you courtesy of Kestrel Railway Book Publications, whose flyer advertising their Andover-Southampton book (amongst others) is enclosed. We are grateful to Howard Sprenger for this generous support. You can do your bit for KRB Publications and for the Signal Box by ordering a copy of the book through the Friends. More information inside.

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## **2005 – and celebrations due!**



Seven months ago I reported on “slow progress”. That slow progress has continued – but progress it has been. The minutes of the Annual General meeting in June are reproduced later in this edition, so the focus here is what has happened since that meeting. And as we approach the new year, let’s get ready to celebrate: 2005 **WILL** be the year when we see the completion of so many key projects!

### **Those faithful and essential volunteers....**

The number of volunteers at the site each Open day remains encouraging. Some stalwarts regularly attend just to keep things ticking over, whilst others plod on with planned developments. Ken Hale, Bob McCann, Peter Chatfield, Neil and Martin Kearns, Ken Rye, Garth Long – all have been regulars to a greater or lesser extent throughout the year – and of course Colin Meheux continues to open the box every month for the rest of us all. It has been good to see a number of other members appearing on occasions. Every little bit helps – even for the shortest visit to the site.

And then there is our pavilion. Virtually single-handedly, Quentin Meheux has constructed the floor, framework, walls, and roof for our building. He has worked tirelessly through some pretty awful weather this year. Without him it just wouldn’t have happened. And now we’re not far short of the final goal.

### **Signal box itself**

There haven’t been many developments to the box itself, and sadly we suffered one attack from vandals during the summer. Someone broke into the Infants School site, causing damage there, and moved onto the signal box site, where our ladder was freed from its secure site, raised up to the box, and about five panes of glass smashed. However, I’m delighted to say they didn’t get in, and we had no other damage.

Beyond that, it has been a year of consolidation in the box itself. The future project is to adjust and fit all the rods we have acquired to complete the mechanical restoration. It is hoped this can be achieved during the spring of 2005.

### **Pavilion**

Anyone who visits the signal box site from hereon will be surprised to see a new structure rising from the ground. Quentin Meheux has constructed the new frame and roof, including a complete new floor and new timbers for the framework within the walls. We are extremely grateful to Quentin for the many hours lonely labour he has put in, during a pretty frustrating summer and autumn weather-wise.

After much assessment, the only original features likely to be reused in any quantity are the windows. The doors will need to be wider to provide access for the disabled, the floor needed to be strong enough to take all the weight, and the roof needed to be sound. In addition, by the time the walls were stripped down to the bare materials, it became clear that making a new framework would be much easier than trying to restore the old. It has meant a little more money being spent, but the building will be structurally more sound, and have a chance of a longer life as a result.



Work continues to finish the structure (roof and windows), then will follow all the internal fittings (internal walls and toilet/washing facilities), followed finally by a simple CCTV system to relay pictures from the box into the new building.

We would really like to get the whole task completed early in 2005. The box will be open for a special event on 16-17 July 2005, and we hope to have the pavilion fully operational by that time, so we can mount a special display of historic railway photos. Maybe a grand opening will be organised!

### **Cowley Bridge Junction**

Progress on our new version of Cowley Bridge has been slower than anticipated, and much work still needs to be done before it is ready for bookings. Sadly we heard at the end of November that Alan Dyke, who had come to our rescue to do the necessary soldering, had passed away suddenly at home. We have sent our condolences to his widow. Bill Tyndall and Alan Johnston will now tackle the completion of the new miniature unit. Again a new target date of Spring 2005 has been set. Can we get it available for the opening of our pavilion?

### **Long term future – closure of school**

Local readers from the Romsey area will be aware of the plans which have recently been announced to close Romsey County Infants School after August 2006. The signal box is of course behind the school, and we have a right of access through the school grounds so long as it functions as a school.

Your Chairman has had several discussions with the committee of the Romsey & District Buildings Preservation Trust (who own the box and land) about the implications of this decision. At this stage, we don't know what the long-term plans are for the school site. In theory it could be very good land for low-cost housing, though access is not good (with such a narrow entrance next to Plaza Parade). If it did become housing, it could be good for the signal box project (greater security with more local people constantly watching over the site); it could also bring problems (access, parking, greater threat of vandalism and break-ins to a more visible site). It might also be that the land which the signal box stands on could itself become much more attractive for development (at present it is effectively school/railway/canal-locked). On the other hand, the school site might be retained for community use of some type, in which case the issues become quite different for the Friends of Romsey Signal Box.

The view of the Trust is that the Friends should continue to push ahead with developments on the site (such as the pavilion), but that close liaison with Hampshire County Council needs to be instigated to protect our interests when decisions are being taken about the school site. The aim would be that any development there would take our needs into account, either in access, security, etc; or alternatively the Trust could decide to sell the land to developers, and look to an alternative (perhaps more suitable long-term) site for the signal box and associated items, with the proceeds from the sale helping to fund the costs of moving to such an alternative site.

At this stage we only know that the school will close in 20 months' time. Until we know the long-term plans for the school site (which would then take several years to come to fruition), it is pointless making too many plans ourselves. We have perhaps 4-5 years before the situation is resolved, time enough to plan and enact our own strategy with the help of the Trust and Hampshire County Council.

We will of course keep members posted on developments. What is certain is that the aim would be to keep the signal box in Romsey, on the current site or an alternative. Romsey Town Council see it as a definite asset and do not want to see it leave the town, unless there really was no alternative means of saving the box long-term.

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## **Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Friends held at the signal box site on Sunday 6th June 2004.**

**Present:** Dick Hewett (in the chair), Peter Chatfield, Steve Hailes, Ken Hale, Stuart Jones, Neil Kearns, Garth Long, Colin Meheux, Andrew Moody, Adam Rapley, John Read, Ken Rye and Howard Sprenger.

**1. Apologies:** The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting and commented on the good attendance. Apologies for absence had been received from Peter Cattermole, Clive Collier, Simon Cooper, Rod Hoyle, Chris King-Smith, Ted Mason, Quentin Meheux, John Meredith, Chris Rideout, Jim Russell and Bill Tyndall.

### **2. Minutes**

Minutes of the Extraordinary General Meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2003 were confirmed as a correct record on a proposal from Howard Sprenger, seconded by Colin Meheux.

### **3. Matters Arising**

3.1 Agreement with Romsey Infants School: This was now signed.

3.2 Health & Safety document: Work on this was ongoing. **Action: DickH/ColinM.**

3.3 New sleepers: Following a visit some weeks ago by a representative of Network Rail, some replacement sleepers had been promised but not yet delivered. Bill Tyndall was dealing with this. **Action: DickH/BillT.**

### **4. Chairman’s Report**

The Chairman referred to his summary of recent development in The Signal of May 2004 and highlighted the following:

#### **4.1 General**

- There has been good membership activity, with a minimum of 3 or 4 members at Open Days, and double figures in March 2004.
- The Committee met twice in 2003, but not in 2004. This needs to be tightened up.
- The Heritage Open Days 48-hour marathon in September was a big success (thanks due to Danny Scroggins for organisation).
- The Mid-Hants visited in January 2004 for a successful day’s signalling.
- On advice from the school, we are not proposing to use Community Service people on site.

#### **4.2 Signal Box site**

- Rods and links have been acquired, which, with some modification, will enable connection of the lever frame to the block shelf. There is a need to find a blacksmith for this work. **Action: DickH/ColinM.**

- The storage area under the box has been tidied and a key found for the cabinet. The Chairman wished to keep it that way.
- We have received two notable sponsorships in the year:
  - Hampshire Brewery (£200 for the restoration of the Strongs sign);
  - and Borcombe Printers (for the new edition of the Guide Book).

### **4.3 Pavilion**

- The Chairman referred to the comprehensive report in The Signal. The key activities since the EGM were the connection of drainage and a water supply, and the laying of foundations. Timbers had been sorted, with reusable items sorted from scrap. The floor and most outside panels would need replacing. **Action: ColinM/QuentinM.**
- The available funds would be sufficient to complete the timberwork, but would not cover the fitting out. The aim is to finish the building by the autumn. The Chairman will talk to the Trust about the costs of fitting out. **Action: DickH.**

### **4.4 Future of site**

The Chairman referred to the possibility of the Infants School being closed on its present site and transferred to the Junior School site. The site would be ripe for housing development. This would have considerable implications for the Signal Box. However the Trust had advised that the development of the Signal Box site should proceed as planned. Any change in circumstances would be considered in due course.

### **5. Treasurer’s Report**

The meeting had before it a statement of account for the year ended 31 March 2004. The Chairman said that £1,500 was available for completion of the pavilion structure, plus a further £150 from Romsey Town Council for the restoration of the container. There was over £1,500 in the general funds. The accounts were adopted on a proposal from Colin Meheux seconded by Garth Long.

### **6. Membership**

6.1 Howard reported as follows: Eight new members; one resignation; one rejoined; twelve yet to renew. A net loss of four members, leaving a current membership of 53.

6.2 Though the Chairman commented that a rise in subscription rates was not likely in the foreseeable future, Ken Hale pointed out that subscription levels were at present laid down in the Constitution, so could not be altered without altering the Constitution. Also the membership year should coincide with the financial year (i.e. 1 April-31 March). It was agreed these anomalies should be referred to the Committee in order to bring forward proposals to the next AGM for changes. **Action: KenH/DickH.**

### **7. Cowley Bridge**

Following an appeal in the local and specialist press, two people in Romsey had come forward (Alan Dyke and Chris Norvall), and the soldering which had been holding up progress had been done. A full programme to complete the new frame was underway and should be completed by the autumn. On this basis, bookings were being taken for model railway exhibitions in 2005. It was hoped to design a trolley to make transportation easier. **Action: BillT.**

### **8. Election of Officers/Committee**

The Chairman reported that Bob McCann had asked to step down for personal reasons. Colin Meheux had agreed to cover maintenance.

The following Committee was unanimously re-elected:

Chairman and Treasurer:	Dick Hewett
Operations and Maintenance:	Colin Meheux
Membership:	Howard Sprenger
Cowley Bridge Junction:	Bill Tyndall
Secretary:	Ken Hale

It was agreed that Quentin Meheux should be co-opted onto the Committee to liaise on development of the pavilion. **Action: DickH.**

### **9. Other responsibilities**

Other duties are to be allocated in accordance with the Duties List published in The Signal of May 2003, or on an ad hoc basis as necessary.

### **10. Open Days**

Open Days for the remainder of 2004 were published in the current edition of The Signal. The same pattern would be followed in 2005.

The following additional events were agreed:

- Open Days during Romsey Arts Festival weekend, 16/17 July 2005, to include a display of old railway photographs.
- An invitation to the box to delegates to the Action for Market Towns conference in Romsey in September 2004.
- An event to celebrate the opening of the pavilion.
- A members' event, including the new Cowley Bridge when completed.

**Action: DickH.**

Further operational events, such as that for the Mid-Hants in January 2004, would be considered and developed. **Action: Peter Chatfield/Garth Long.**

### **11. Any other business**

We have been offered new signage for the site and Open Days. **Action: Neil Kearns.** The Romsey station sign would be mounted in the pavilion when it is completed.

### **12. Date of next Annual General Meeting**

Agreed as Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2005, 3.30pm, at the Signal Box site.

There being no further business, the chairman thanked all those who had attended, and the meeting closed at 5pm

Ken Hale, Secretary

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### **Membership and the Constitution**

One action from the AGM was to review the Constitution to bring our membership year into line with the financial year. It was also agreed that we should delete specific reference to the actual cost of membership from the Constitution so that the latter didn't need changing every time we decided to change the subscription rate.

The Committee would like to propose the following change to the Constitution, to be tabled for agreement at the AGM on 5 June 2005. Anyone who wishes to see the existing Constitution should contact the Chairman for a copy.

- Delete Article 3(b). Substitute:  
"3(b) The annual subscription shall be such sum as may be determined by the members in General Meeting, and shall be deemed to apply to the financial year from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> March in the following year."
- Add to Article 3(c): "and on payment of any outstanding membership dues."

A related resolution will be tabled at the AGM:

"That the annual subscription in respect of the financial year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006 shall be £5.00 for adults between the ages of 16 and 59 inclusive, and £2.50 for persons under 16 and over 59."

(This resolution confirms the subscription reminder just issued, but extends the period covered by three months to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006, making it a 15-month subscription year.)

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### **Signalling Event – 22 and 23 January**

Garth Long and Peter Chatfield are planning a signalling event at Romsey on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> and Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> January, to which Friends are invited. An edited version of Garth's invitation to members of the Mid-Hants and Swanage Railways is reproduced below. Any Friends wishing to attend should contact Garth.

### **THE GREAT JANUARY 2005 ROMSEY SIGNAL BOX OPERATING EXTRAVAGANZA**

Dear All



Some of you will recall that a group of MHR signalmen and others experienced an operating day at Romsey Signal Box last January. Well due to its success we are going to do it again. To accommodate what might be a larger group than last year, we intend to run the event over two consecutive days. This will be from 1000 to 1700 on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup>, and 1000 to 1600 on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> January. (Please note should there be limited interest we will run on the Saturday only).

Each person operating will get 60 minutes on the frame and another 60 minutes of excitement completing the train register. By rostering in pairs this also gives opportunities for peer support.



Please contact Garth Long on 023 8031 5075, or by e-mail ([garth.long@ntlworld.com](mailto:garth.long@ntlworld.com)) before Christmas Eve. Please indicate your preference stating either morning or afternoon, and the day you would like to attend. If you want someone you know to work with you across a two-hour slot, let Garth know. If you just want to come and observe then that's fine too, but still let Garth Long know you are coming. You will need to bring your own refreshments, though there is water and a kettle!

There will be a charge of £5 per person to those who are also members of the Friends of Romsey Signal Box, and £7 for non-members. This will be collected on the day. Can I therefore invite you to join us in what should be another great event. Do please spread the word as the event is open to anyone not just signalmen. I intend to send out

the final confirmations and roster between Christmas and New Year. We look forward to hearing from you. And if this is successful, we'll run some more similar events!

Best wishes, Garth

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**Special Open days – Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2005**

We have been asked to open the signal box for a couple of days during the Romsey Arts Festival once again. To link into the arts theme, we have offered to mount a display of historic railway photographs in our new pavilion. It would also be good to operate the box during the two days, rather like Garth is proposing to do in January. Please put these dates in your diary – it would be good to get as many members along during the weekend as possible. Hopefully we will be combining it with a grand opening of the pavilion, the connection of the rods and controllers inside the box, and the completion of Cowley Bridge Junction. "My, that will be a good cause to celebrate!", said your Chairman with much feeling!

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**Andover to Redbridge: 'The Sprat & Winkle line'**

Your Chairman is not experienced as a book reviewer, and he has to declare an interest at this stage: every copy of this book sold through the Friends will raise some well-needed funds for the continued development of the site. Our Membership Secretary Howard Sprenger is one of the people behind KRB Publications, and he too deserves to see this book sold in vast numbers.

But putting these issues aside, is it a book for the Friends to buy? Well, on this issue there is no doubt whatsoever: this new book from KRB Publications is an absolute must for anyone remotely interested in the fascinating story of the lines through Romsey. The books we have on sale at Romsey provide a little insight into this history: this book provides a far more comprehensive narrative.

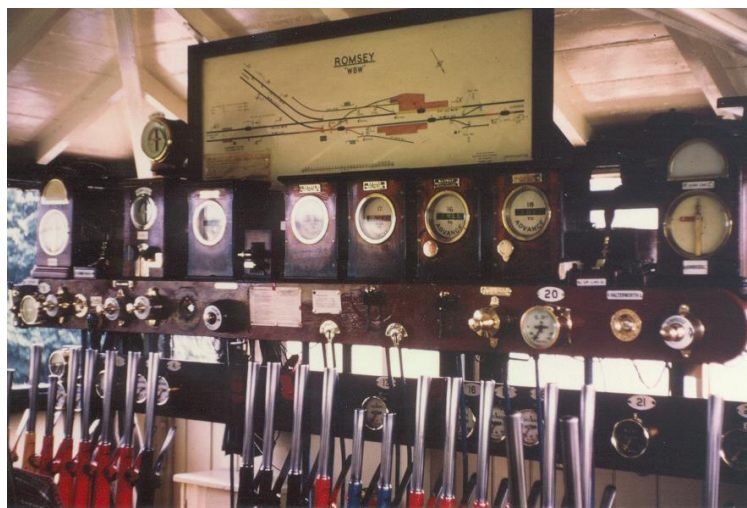
The rival scheming of the Great Western and London & South Western railways, the implications of converting a canal to a railway suitable for cross-country expresses, the folly of Victorian optimism, the dedicated service provided to the local community for almost 100 years, and the final demise in the era of the car: it's a story repeated elsewhere, but author Nigel Bray has captured it most effectively for our local line. It is of course possible to retrace a considerable amount of the line north of Romsey by walking the Test Way. Your chairman has explored the route on many occasions, and

evidence still exists in many locations – old platelayers huts, signal cabling and ducting, station platforms, paintwork on bridges – there's plenty for a railway archaeologist to find. The book has more than enough high quality photographs to invite comparison with the present. It will doubtless be taken out on walks along the Test Way, to explore and locate yet more of the railway's history on the ground.

The book retails at £17.95, but Friends of Romsey Signal Box can make a saving of £1.80 by buying it at the box at a discounted price of £16.15 (exclusive of any P&P). KRB have generously agreed to supply copies at an even lower price, enabling us to generate some funds from sales at the same time. Orders are accepted from hereon at all Open Days, or in advance by email/phone to your Chairman. This book is an essential addition to your bookcase. Don't miss out!

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### Old photographs and memorabilia



Your Chairman was unexpectedly contacted by email by an old resident of Romsey who now resides in far off western Canada. Richard Courage, an old friend of Andrew Moody and Neil Kearns, was surfing on the net when he found our website. Rummaging through his belongings, he has managed to find a considerable number of railway photographs taken when he lived in Romsey, including this one taken inside the box in the 1960s. Our thanks to Richard for his generosity in getting prints made and sending them to your Chairman. Many will be displayed at our special July event.

If anyone else has old railway photographs from Romsey and the surrounding area, of whatever vintage, we would be delighted to receive copies. The archive continues to grow and we are keen to have as complete a record as we can of railways in this area.

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### Finally, a reminder! Membership, and see you at one of the Open Days!

**Membership reminders** have been sent out by Howard Sprenger. Please respond!

It's great to see so many members continuing to attend **Open Days**. There's always odd jobs to be done, if only burning up the wood from the old pavilion (there's plenty more yet to handle!) or weeding pathways. You've heard of the Forth Bridge syndrome – well, Romsey's not far behind on that count!



**Open Days 2005:** 6 February, 6 March, 3 April, 1 May, 5 June (with AGM at 3.30pm), 3 July, 7 August, 4 September, 2 October, 6 November, 4 December.

**Special Operating Event:** 22 and 23 January (contact Garth Long, 023 8031 5075).

**Special Open Event:** 16 and 17 July.

**And keep in contact:**

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