

“The Signal”

*The Newsletter of
The Friends of Romsey Signal Box
President: Dick Hewett*

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September: THE Event

Dick Hewett writes:

Firstly let me say a big “thank you” for the honour of election as President of the Friends. I’m sure there’ll be plenty of occasions to wheel out the old boy for publicity opportunities and prestigious events!

And then in my position as President, let me urge all of you to attend the next prestigious event at the Signal Box. The weekend of **9th and 10th September** sees our latest entry in the nationwide Heritage Open Days organised by the Civic Trust to highlight the more unusual places of interest around the country.



Meanwhile, during the July Open Day, we were delighted to play host to reporter Richard Jones and his colleague John on camera who were filming for Meridian TV. They hope to broadcast a little item about the signal box and the special opening on Heritage Open days during one of the 6pm programmes during August. Watch out for it!

So, during the second weekend in September, we plan to operate the box continuously, certainly during the daylight hours, and if possible even overnight. At the same time we will welcome the public and will want to explain to them what is going on. To do all this, we need plenty of resources.

We have over 50 members. If even only half of you offer to come and spend even just a couple of hours each at the box, we will have more than enough people to cover all duties and look after the public. We need:

- Signalmen to do all or part of a shift on the frame, the book or the simulator;
- Staff to give a laymen’s commentary to the public;
- Staff to be working around the site and answer any questions from the public.

It is highly likely we shall also have several special milestones to celebrate:

- We shall have the official opening of the pavilion;
- We anticipate our 5000th visitor (since we started issuing tickets in 1992).

And if you don’t have enough time, or you’re not keen to help over the weekend, why not just come along to see the progress made over the last year or so. Things really have moved on with the enthusiasm of the new team, motivated by Peter Chatfield who cajoles and encourages at every opportunity. We are definitely moving forwards!

So please put aside the time, mark it clearly in your diaries, and tell us as soon as possible when you hope to attend.

Dick

Awards For All success!

News reached the team in early July that we had again been successful in getting a grant from the Lottery Awards For All scheme. This time we applied for £650 to cover the cost of a wireless CCTV system and new display boards. The CCTV cameras will be in the signal box, with the monitor in the pavilion. This will enable those who cannot climb the steps (the elderly, those with disabilities, and very young children – as well as those who are just too scared!) to watch what is going on in the box in the comfort of the ground floor pavilion. The display boards will also be very welcome: the existing boards have served us well but are now definitely time-expired and need replacement. Receipt of the whole amount we requested has been particularly welcomed. It is possible we may have the CCTV and display boards in time for the grand September weekend.

Recent work at the box

Work on the pavilion has continued. All the interior wall panels have been fitted, together with most of the interior ceiling panels. Insulation has been put in the cavity between the interior and exterior walls so it should be relatively snug in the winter. The principle tasks left are to finish the ceiling panelling, tidy up the edge of the roofing, and most significantly hang the toilet door and re-hang the external door next to it such that it opens outwards, not inwards as at present. Then with some decorating it will be virtually complete.



Not that it isn't already serviceable, and indeed the display boards have been moved out of the old Visitor Van and into the pavilion where they will be much better illuminated. We hope to replace the boards with much more portable ones eventually, but in the meantime it has enabled us to clear the Visitor Van.

This is now being used as storage for the project, which has in turn enabled us to have a major clear-out of the ground floor locking room of the box. What a transformation! Led by Mike Walshaw, a small team has been repairing the electrics between the simulator and the block shelf upstairs. Thanks to Simon Cooper, Garth Long and Stuart Jones in particular: the task included moving, sorting and cataloguing a whole lot of materials which are now stored neatly in the van. But it also included getting a number of repeaters, lights and instruments to work which have been faulty for some time. Meanwhile, here's this edition's version of "Spot The Difference"!



So things continue to move along. What we need to do now is keep the momentum going....

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Friends held at the signal box site on Sunday 4th June 2006

Present: Peter Chatfield (in the chair), Steve Hailes, Dick Hewett, Rod Hoyle, Alan Johnston, Neil Kearns, Garth Long, Roger Pleasant, John Read, Ken Rye, Howard Sprenger and Bill Tyndall.

Apologies: Frank Akerman, Simon Cooper, Bob Hailes, Ken Hale, Clive Jackson, Stuart Jones, Chris King-Smith, Ted Mason, Andrew Moody, Chris Rideout, Barry Sherratt, and Mike Walshaw.

1. Appreciation

Before the formal meeting commenced, Bill Tyndall announced his resignation from the committee, due to his imminent retirement from Network Rail and subsequent house move from Romsey to Worcestershire. In thanking Bill for his huge contribution to the Project, Dick Hewett explained to members how Bill had been present at the outset when the box was being saved, had been instrumental in getting Dick involved, and had played a major part in the restoration of the operating capabilities of the signal box. Latterly Bill had focused his efforts on Cowley Bridge, but there was no doubt that the project would not be where it is today had it not been for Bill's efforts over the last 20+ years. The meeting wished Bill well for the future. Bill promised to keep in contact, and he hopes to be able to operate the new Cowley Bridge when it is finished.



Bill then left the meeting before any further business commenced – as he was still as yet employed by Network Rail, and was due on duty in Salisbury box at 6pm that evening!

Dick Hewett and Bill Tyndall a bit tied up with railway business! Track laying at the site in 1990...

2. Minutes

Minutes of the AGM held on 5th June 2005 were confirmed as a correct record. Acceptance was proposed by Steve Hales, seconded by Howard Sprenger.

3. Chairman’s Report

Structure of the Friends and our Direction

If you cast your mind back to this time last year, we had just lost our chairman who had served for 16 years. We were temporarily leaderless. So we did the next best thing to having a lead: we set up a holding group to take forward the business of the Friends. We duly had a meeting in July 05 at which the officers of the HG were established and, at that stage, Dick Hewett continued in an honorary capacity as President and also agreed to continue as Treasurer. Ted Mason was liaison officer to the Trust. I became coordinator of the HG. Neil Kearns inherited membership secretary from Howard Sprenger. And Garth Long took became lead for Operating Days and also took on site maintenance. We quickly set up regular email contact between the officers, and this proved to be a real boon in moving things forward.

Having given it much thought, I decided to offer my services as an acting chairman from September; more recently, in February 06, Roger Pleasant joined the HG as member without portfolio, though he has since taken on liaison for the Cowley Bridge miniature signal box. Steve Hailes has continued as Webmaster, whilst Rod Hoyle has contributed with restoration of the external displays (as well as keeping the level crossing gates clean!).



Rod Hoyle dons his marigolds to brighten up the crossing gates for the cameraman, supervised by Peter and Dick

Meanwhile, Ken Hale continued as Secretary, but announced he did not wish to continue after the AGM, and this role has now been discontinued. Bob Hailes (H&S) and Bill Tyndall (C Bridge) are also now no longer involved: our thanks go to all three of them for their support and contributions.

In summary, since last summer we have successfully established an active team to take things forward. I think we have communicated and worked together well, and have produced an Action Plan to underpin the disparate areas of work.

Areas of work and people involved

Pavilion

An obvious place to start! This time last year, we inherited from Quentin Meheux this superbly constructed building. We have thanked him before, but we could remind ourselves that he spent many hours of single-handed labour working on the building, and we are truly indebted to his endeavour. Internally, last June it was still a shell. It is now very close to completion, and so I thank everyone who has toiled to get it to the stage its at now - Ken Rye was involved in some heroics at the May Open Day!, Neil Kearns spent much time on the long job of preparing and putting the windows, and Rod Hoyle was also involved. And, having rekindled what had perhaps been a waning enthusiasm, Dick has done a superb job with many hours of work on the interior structure and cladding, and on his pet favourite of which he is justifiably proud - the shutters. At this point, I would like to highlight that Dick has continued to play a big role in the Project: everything from opening/closing the box, to buying wood, many discussions and supporting me, a key local political role, other practical work such as digging holes and cementing, etc., etc.... I also thank Ted Mason for his help, and his daughters' partner Alex, who constructed the framework for the loo.

Operating

The last year has been notably successful re operating events. Garth did a great job making the January Event a very enjoyable occasion - incidentally, our first weekend event outside of the 'marathon', and the most visited - 15 people (not including the press photographer!) on the Sunday. Danny Scroggins revamped the operating timetable and provided multiple phones, which greatly enhanced the atmosphere. We also had an event in May, and after meeting Dick in Wales, members of Imperial College Railway Soc. made two operating visits to Romsey.

Site maintenance

Together with our progress on the Pavilion and re operating events, I feel we have done a very good job with maintenance of the site this year, and in keeping the



dreaded weeds under control. Thank you to everyone who has helped in this regard at Open Days. It is often more gardening that gets done than signalling, but regular use of the strimmer is very much part of keeping the site looking attractive.

Garth Long on strimmer duties

Hidden work

There are a number of ‘hidden’ jobs essential to the running of the Friends. So, thanks to Neil for keeping the membership side of things ticking over, and to Steve for updating the website, and making changes to enable e-contact and e-membership registration. Garth and Neil have also worked on getting media coverage this year.

Cowley Bridge

Despite various problems, we have also tried to kick-start the Cowley Bridge demonstration frame/simulator. A meeting was held at Dick’s in January, and Alan Johnston has today kindly brought along a computer presentation which will show us how this project has progressed. I am grateful to Alan and all involved with C Bridge, particularly as it has been a great recruitment asset for us in the past.

S&T Maintenance Team

I cannot round off thanks without mention of a very significant new area of work recently launched. Garth Long and Mike Walshaw got together earlier this year, the result of which is that Mike has kindly set up this working group, which includes Garth, Simon Cooper, Stuart Jones, and Clive Jackson. This is very kind of Mike indeed, as he is already very busy with S&T at the Swanage Railway - which, incidentally, is an inspiration to us all given the quality of their restoration work which has won many awards. The S&T work at Romsey will, firstly, much enhance operating sessions - many of our signalmen have said how nice it would be to see the repeaters and all the various lights working - and, second, is part and parcel of the proper restoration of a historic mechanical signal box. Mike, I thank you very much indeed.

Recent developments - Romsey Historic Buildings Trust

As you know, the Buildings Trust owns the box and the site. For some time, the Trust has experienced an increasing financial squeeze, and this has led them to want to shift a greater responsibility for the Project to us. Dick and I attended a meeting with the Trust in May, with Ted Mason and Frank Akerman, who are both Trustees and Friends, at which the Trust made it clear that they wish to see significant movement on our part towards ‘greater responsibility’. How far we would need to become an independent organisation, e.g. apply for charitable trust status, is at present unclear. The other uncertainty, of course, which we have lived with for years, is whether the site here is of value to developers in connection with the forthcoming closure of the infant school - this also remains uncertain for the moment. I propose to do a piece of work looking at the possible future scenarios which face us, and to outline some robust options for the best possible future for the continued preservation of the signal box. This will be in full consultation with external bodies including the Trust, and with the membership of the Friends.

Summary

So that in a nutshell is my picture of our last year - a good year, very good in many respects, though clearly some challenges, as always, remain ahead. However, with the continued input and enthusiasm of the Friends, there is every reason to be optimistic about the future. Thank you all.

4. Treasurer’s Report/Membership

Dick Hewett, Treasurer, presented the financial statement for the year ending 31 March 2006, which had yet to be audited by the Trust’s auditors. Key issues:

- The relatively low level of donations at Open Days during the year;
- The major expenditure (on materials for the pavilion) which was due to be refunded by the Trust shortly;
- The insurance premium which had yet to be paid;
- The Town Council grant (£1,100) which would be used for the steps.

At the end of the year, both the Friends and the Trust had reviewed the total income and expenditure each had generated and incurred. Since 1983 the Trust had spent over £30k, some of which came from grants. Meanwhile since 1991 the Friends had raised over £20k in grants, donations, subscriptions and sales, and had spent nearly as much. The Trust’s expenditure was mainly around the initial investment in the signal box, and the development of the pavilion, with relatively little expenditure on ongoing items, insurance being the main regular commitment. If the Friends were to go it alone, we would need a regular income of at least £1k per annum just to cover insurance and other regular commitments.

Finally, the Treasurer mentioned the application to Awards For All for CCTV equipment (news still awaited at the time of the AGM), the approval from the Trust for the remainder of the costs of the new steps to be covered from their funds (and also repairs to the signal box itself), and the availability of various sales items (including t-shirts and sweatshirts, DVDs and secondhand books).

The draft accounts will be passed to the Trust’s auditors for approval during the Trust’s AGM in November.

Membership Secretary Neil Kearns reported that there were currently 44 members, with another 21 renewals awaited.

5. Election of Officers/Committee

The meeting resolved that the post of President be created. Dick Hewett was duly elected to this Honorary position, having been proposed by Alan Johnston, and seconded by Peter Chatfield.

The new President took the chair for the election of a new Chairman. Peter Chatfield, being willing to stand, was proposed by Garth Long and seconded by Howard Sprenger. Peter was elected unanimously.

The new Chairman resumed the position of chair of the meeting, and five other committee members were elected en bloc, proposed by Steve Hailes and seconded by Howard Sprenger:

- Treasurer: Dick Hewett
- Membership: Neil Kearns
- Operating and site maintenance: Garth Long
- Cowley Bridge: Roger Pleasant
- Trust representative: Ted Mason.

Other non-committee responsibilities recognised included webmaster (Steve Hailes), and the role of S&T adviser (which Mike Walshaw had informally assumed, much to the Friends’ gratitude). Alan Johnston would continue to work on the development of the new Cowley Bridge, assisted by others.

6. Diary Dates

Open Days as previously advertised were confirmed. The key event this year is the weekend of 9/10 September when the signal box will be opened specially for Heritage Open Days, with operation during daylight hours at least (if not for 48 hours continuously). Dick agreed to plan the event with Peter (including promotion), whilst Garth offered to look after the operating roster.

Garth proposed to hold further operating days in January 2007.

7. Promotion

The meeting discussed a number of issues related to promoting the Friends.

- Neil Kearns and Garth Long reported that we have been trying to get into Heritage Railway (unsuccessful) and Railway Magazine (still possible). Entries in Hampshire County Magazine and The Echo had not yet appeared.
- Roger Pleasant suggested getting into the Swanage and MidHants magazines.
- Steve Hailes has a contact for the Institution of Railway Signalling Engineers – Action: Peter Chatfield to pursue.

8. Action list

The Chairman highlighted what he saw as the key actions for the next year:



- Completion of the pavilion;
- Replacement of the steps into the signal box;
- Repair and repainting of the timbers of the signal box;
- His report on future scenarios for the Friends;
- Completion of the new Cowley Bridge miniature box.

In 2007 it was agreed we should:

- aim to get more publicity, in both the local and railway press;
- consult with members about the future;
- target local groups and schools for visits to the box;
- train up more people to be capable and confident of talking to the public, not

just Dick and a couple of others.

9. Any other business

- A name should be chosen for the pavilion. Rod Hoyle will make a sign.
- The re-framed display boards around the site are to be mounted.
- Rod Hoyle mentioned that 2006 is the centenary of John Betjamen’s birth, and the Betjamen Society could help with publicity for September.

We need to consider security of the site. Peter Chatfield recommended a new risk assessment.

- The operating manual which has been put on the website was welcomed.
- Dick Hewett is to check the value of the cover for contents on the insurance.
- On the S&T side, Garth Long reported that the aim is to get everything in the signal box working properly, rather than putting in new items.
- Bill Tyndall is chasing up a potential contact for the work on the rods and controllers.

10. Date of next Annual General Meeting

Agreed as Sunday 3rd June 2007, 3.30pm, at the Signal Box site.

There being no further business, the formal meeting closed at 5.10pm, after which Alan Johnston gave those present a demonstration of the computer simulation he had developed for the new Cowley Bridge miniature signal box.

Dick Hewett, Minutes Secretary for the AGM

Membership:

Membership Secretary Neil Kearns writes:

Thank you to the 44 members who have already renewed their membership of the Friends for the year April 2006 until 31 March 2007 and for the generous donations which accompanied many of the renewals.

There are, however, over 20 members who have not yet renewed their membership for 2006/2007. After the next edition of "The Signal" the committee will assume that the memberships not renewed have been allowed to lapse intentionally. If you're not certain whether you have renewed your membership, please ring me on 02380 618 167 (evenings or weekends) or e-mail me on membership@romseysignalbox.org.uk. Subscriptions are £5.00 for members aged between 17 and 59 years and only £2.50 for those up to 16 and 60 years and over. If your membership does need renewal, please post your subscription to -

Neil Kearns,
38 Arundel Road,
Boyatt Wood,
Eastleigh,
Hants, SO50 4PQ.

Many thanks.

Alternative sales items...

Member Mark Fry has written offering to sell some of his various DVDs and Videos for the benefit of the Friends. Subjects cover a variety of Southern Railway topics. Visit Mark's website at www.steamage.co.uk for more information.

Next edition

The Editor would be delighted to receive articles, letters, or photographs from any members on any topic which they think would be of interest to other members. All contributions welcome!

Next Open day: 6 August 2006. Contact Neil Kearns, 023 8061 8167.

Subsequent Open Days 2006: 3 September, 1 October, 5 November, 3 December.

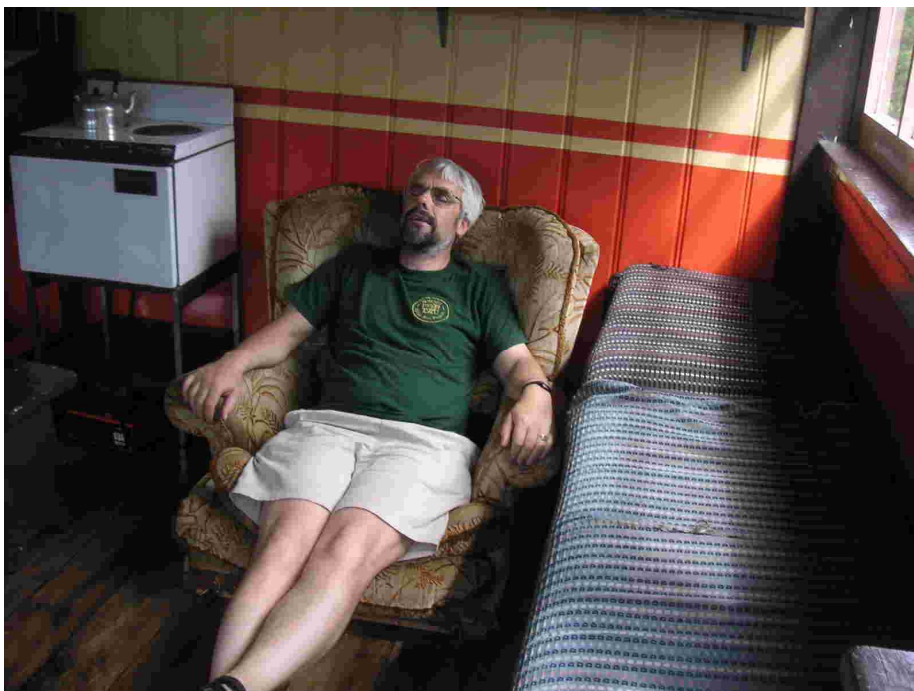
S&T Working weekend: 19/20 August. Contact Garth Long, 023 8031 5075.

48-hour Marathon/Heritage Open Days: 9-10 September 2006.

ALL MEMBERS REQUIRED TO ATTEND IF AT ALL POSSIBLE!

Further operating days: Jan 2007. Await news from Garth Long, 023 8031 5075.

The Epilogue



After 16 years as Chairman, Dick Hewett actually decides to make the most appropriate use of the chair. Sweet dreams everyone!