

The Signal

| Newsletter of the
Friends of Romsey Signal Box

| No 78 – January 2026



On the right rails?



*Our smart new stair rails will give our visitors much more confidence
accessing (and leaving) the signal box*



From the Chairman....

Dick Hewett writes

As usual for the winter the last four months have been a relatively quiet period, with only six Open Days since the last edition at the end of September, and more incremental developments than major activities. Our financial situation means we are continuing to prioritise expenditure towards necessary health and safety matters, with the more expensive nice-to-do developments put on hold.



The most significant and obvious development has been the addition of stair rails to the signal box stairs. We realised that safely climbing, and, more significantly, returning down the stairs was challenging for many people, particularly children and those with less mobility or confidence, due to the width between the sides of the stairs, and also their size and shape which made gripping difficult. After much investigation of options, Adrian Birtles came up with a solution which has not only proven to be practical, but also aesthetically pleasing. Thanks, Adrian (*seen here doing the finishing touches*)!

Work on the site continues elsewhere in the background – and actually new background scenes for our signalling display in the Discovery Centre are being added, with hills, trees, fences and ballast painted to enhance the view of the trains as seen from the camera car. Andy Keane's fine modelling skills have come to the fore yet again (*here we see him hard at work with paintbrush in hand*), assisted by other members of the team. Meanwhile Andy Wright and Alan Clark continue work to replace the analogue simulator under the signal box with a simple digital version which should be more reliable, take less space, and require less maintenance. Mention of other recent developments is made elsewhere in this edition, but suffice to say there is always something new happening on site.



It is important for all our volunteers on site to be familiar with the most basic policies and procedures, and to that end we are issuing our Safeguarding Policy and Risk Assessment alongside this newsletter. Please do read these, long-winded as they may seem, because it is essential everyone understands the risks inherent on the site and follows all the appropriate procedures to minimise any issues. We all have a responsibility to ensure the safety of our volunteers and visitors alike, and any new issues which volunteers may spot which haven't been recognised to date should be drawn to our attention. No one is an expert on the full gamut of risks which could occur. A safe site is a more relaxed and enjoyable site.

Finally, yet again we are appealing for someone to come forward and offer to take on this newsletter. Because of the other many demands on my time, until someone else steps forward we have eased the regularity, and will be producing three editions per year, on a 4-monthly basis, in January, May and September. A much more succinct document may have to be produced, if it is to continue. But some fresh ideas and input would be very welcome to spread the load. Please give it some thought.

Very best wishes, Dick



Signal Box structure and electrics

Dick Hewett writes:

Bargain Farmhouse is still on the market, meaning the funds needed for the work on the box are still yet to be released. The work on the mains electrics will likewise continue to wait. This is frustrating for everyone, but we are reliant on the property market.

Open Days

Dick Hewett writes:

The relatively few Open Days during the last three months of the year nevertheless brought a commendable number of visitors to the site, and we were only 10 visitors short of our record total for Open Days in a calendar year, with 1124 in 2025 comparing very favourably with the 1134 in 2023 when we opened on many more days. The trend continues to be upwards, with a continuing growth in the number of visitors from further afield. Word is clearly slowly spreading, particularly through social media and by word of mouth. We do still print leaflets, but these are becoming a less important medium.

After my concerns about a slight shortage during the summer, we were also blessed with sufficient volunteers for this latest period. Indeed our first Open Day of 2026 on 17th January not only saw 35 visitors, we also had a surplus of volunteers – a nice problem to manage. Let's hope that continues.

We have a demanding schedule in March when we are opening for two extra days (7th/8th March) in association with the Romsey model railway show. To help promote that show, the model railway society are again bringing small layouts to display during our first open days. Beyond that the programme is virtually identical to 2025, albeit with only five Thursday openings during the summer school holidays.

Visitors enjoying the model railway during the recent Open Day



Finally, immediately before opening to the public on the recent Open Day, in my capacity as PiC (Person In Charge) I held a short briefing session for everyone on duty, with a couple of minutes on First Aid, followed by a short reminder about Safeguarding issues and emergency procedures (particularly fire), before agreeing on duties for the day. This was well received, and we have now decided that the benefits to be gained from such a briefing justify continuing with it at 1045 on all future Open Days. We will take the opportunities to highlight various different topics, in short discussions, to ensure everyone continues to be well on top of the safe management of the day for our visitors, as well as ourselves.

Schools visits

Dick Hewett writes:

We had one school visit in September, but will resume the programme in March, with six schools scheduled to come between then and July, including both the secondary schools in Romsey who missed out last year. Once again they are all focused on SEND (Special Educational Needs) pupils, a maximum of 12 at a time. These visits are very satisfying to pupils and our volunteers alike.



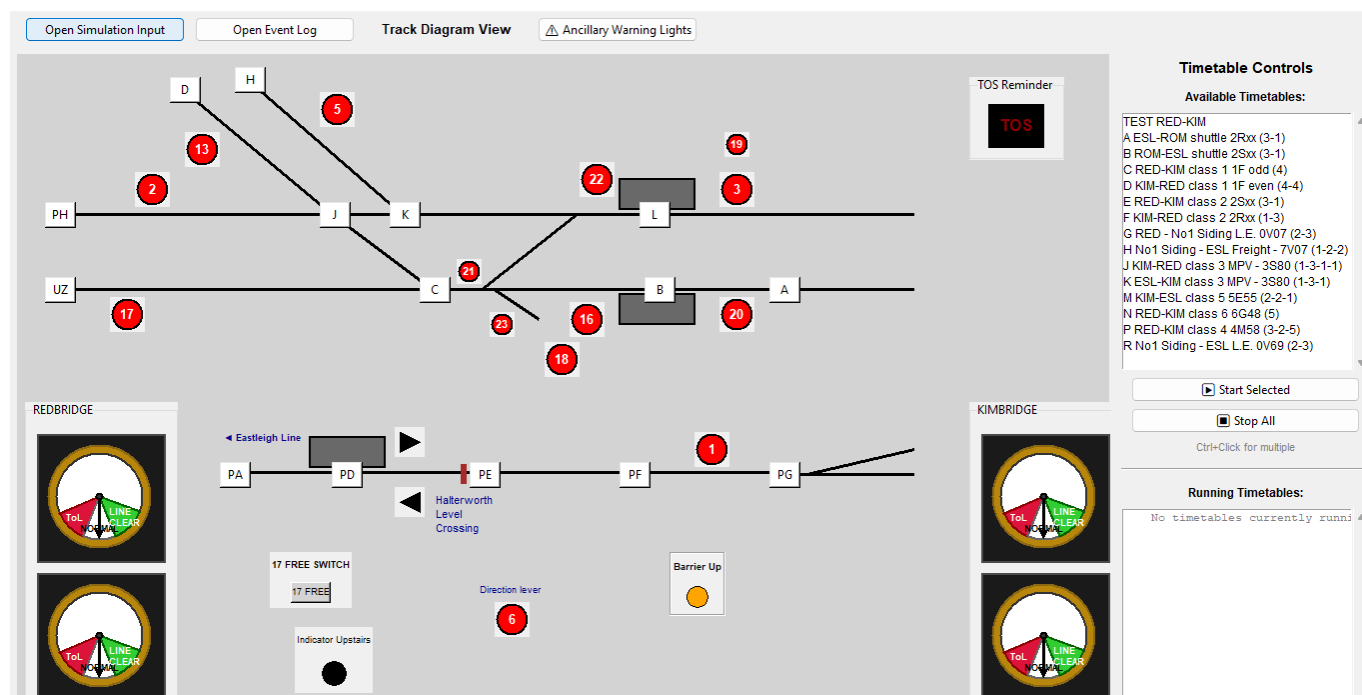
Simulator Wiring update

Andy Wright writes:



An update on the simulator project. As regular readers will know, we are presently developing a digital version of the existing simulator which is now getting old and needs regular T.L.C. The screen has been updated, recent additions include auxillary warning lights and real looking block instruments which have a swinging needle. These will shortly be wired to the 'proof of concept' project box. We have a new member of the Python team, welcome Lucy, thank you for your help and advice. Progress is being made and the light at the end of the tunnel is getting brighter.

Alan and Andy are getting to grips with the wiring – literally..



A screen shot of the new digital simulator panel. (Photo Andy Wright)

We are on the lookout for a tower computer for the simulator. Ideally it would have a power supply. The RAM and hard discs need only be on the small side with lots of space inside for the new electronics. We intend to use Linux so it really doesn't matter if your old computer runs on an old version of Windows. We are looking for a new screen: a touch screen would be good. Any donations would be welcome.

The new diagram has been installed in the signal box and looks good. It has had changes to the signals and points so that it is now a true and accurate reflection of what we have. The levers have a had a lick of paint and look good. The old George Pryer diagram from about 1987 is available to anyone who makes a reasonable donation to the signal box funds.





The new diagram is in place, and Andy is offering the old version to anyone who would like it for a small donation.

(Photo Andy Wright)

Audrey Gebbie Discovery Centre update

Graeme Hay writes:

It has been a very busy time for the Discovery Centre, over the Christmas period.

The high-level miniature railway which demonstrates signalling using Light Signals has had a painted back scene added to enhance the viewing experience. This is important because the display uses a camera to offer a "Drivers Eye View" to visitors. It would be fair to state that the entire appearance of the room has been enhanced. All of the work was completed by the volunteer team and we hope that you will be delighted with the outcome.

So, what about an introduction of scenery in the Semaphore Demonstration Room? We shall have to see, won't we?

*Views of the new backdrop, with John Pennells painting the "ballast" grey.
(Photo with Class 33 by Andy Wright)*



Buffer Stop café – update

Graeme Hay writes:

The Cafe remains a very popular place for visitors, as well as with passing walkers and cyclists enjoying the Barge canal Towpath route. The year began with a quarterly “Deep-Clean”. This operation sees the kitchen area emptied of everything, all surfaces and faces are thoroughly cleaned, as are all of the contents of the cupboards, the microwave and the refrigerator, before the whole setup is reassembled, ready for use. Its a three-hour job but it is an essential addition to the power system of cleaning before and after each open day. If 2026 is as busy as 2025 we will be delighted and I encourage you to come in and see us on an open day.

Maintenance & Site Developments

Adrian Birtles writes:

Recent maintenance jobs have included:-

- The ongoing painting of all the exterior woodwork, mainly by Maahir, guided by John Pennells.
- Fitting the last of the four repainted signal arms (to signal No 13) by Adrian Birtles and Neil Kearns.
- The annual thorough lubrication of the interlocking in the locking tray of the Signal Box, directed by Noah Moxom.
- Clearing out the Signal Box guttering and replacing a missing end-stop, by Derek Grover.

Derek (right) and Maahir with his mother Saj (below) are happy in their work during Wednesday sessions



One-offs have been:-

- Fitting of new handrails to the Signal Box staircase, led by Adrian.
- Progress by Neil with fitting “cattle-grids” in the track either side of the level crossing, to provide safety while the disintegrating crossing gates are removed.
- A start by Derek and Adrian on the preparatory work to enable colour-light signal No 1 to be dismantled for replacement of its corroded steel post.
- Noah’s work to provide “proper” interlocking via the locking tray for signal No 4, in place of the long-standing temporary arrangement. This is a very skilled piece of mechanical fitting, which no doubt explains why it has not been done before!
- The manufacture and fitting of new adjustable locking drive rods where needed following replacement of signal levers. The manufacture was made possible through the good offices of Andy Keane and his colleagues at Southampton University.

Group visits

Dick Hewett writes:

We haven't had any group visits since September, for two basic reasons: Firstly many groups don't do outings during the winter period; and secondly we are not keen to host evening visits when the dark evenings start much earlier. This particularly applies to scouts, cubs and beavers visits. At the present time there aren't any firm bookings for group visits, though a number are under discussion with groups.

Risk Assessment

Dick Hewett writes:

It is important for all volunteers to be aware of the hazards around the site, and how we try to mitigate them. In that regard, attached to this edition of The Signal is our Risk Assessment document. Please have a look through this to remind yourself of the risks inherent on the site and the procedures we have in place for your safety and that of everyone else on the site.

Safeguarding

Dick Hewett writes:

We have young volunteers on the site, as well as entertaining many younger visitors during Open Days and group visits. It is essential we do not cross accepted boundaries when with our younger or vulnerable volunteers and visitors. To that end, we have a Safeguarding Policy which everyone should follow, and which is also being enclosed with this edition of The Signal. Please read it!

For sale

Dick Hewett writes:

We have been given an O-gauge Bassett-Lowke 4-6-0 "Super Enterprise" working steam loco, no 4907, previously owned by John Dutton who had a garden railway at his home in Awbridge. John purchased it in 1987 for £450. He passed away some years ago and his widow Delia has had a clearout. She is very happy for the loco to go to a good home, raising funds for the signal box in the process.



We don't know whether it is still in working order as it probably hasn't been steamed for at least 20 years. The plan is to offer it on Ebay for S Box funds, however if you're interested in acquiring it, get in touch - any sensible offers considered.



Another local signal box project and its background

Neil Kearns writes:

Portsmouth Direct signalling.

This article was written in connection with the final steam hauled working over the Portsmouth Direct line via Haslemere, worked by 35028 Clan Line, in April 2025. It was first published in Southern Express Issue 198, the journal of the Merchant Navy Locomotive Preservation Society.

Resignalling schemes along the Portsmouth Direct route go back to the late 19th century. By modern perceptions, not much re-signalling was done in connection with the electrification in the late 1930's apart from around Haslemere and Havant.

The current Farncombe signal box (originally Farncombe West) dated back to 1896 to replace Godalming Jn signal box. The original Godalming station was demoted to a goods station when the through route to Havant opened in 1859. The line was known as the Portsmouth Direct as it replaced the original and circuitous route via Bishopstoke (Eastleigh) or the LB&SCR route via Horsham and Chichester. Godalming Jn signal box was retained to give access to Godalming goods station, but was replaced by pointwork controlled by Farncombe West. In November 1975 Farncombe signal box took over control of Farncombe East level crossing using closed circuit television monitors. Godalming Goods was closed around 1970, but the sidings were used for engineering traffic until 1978. The connections were finally abolished in 1980. An IFS (Individual Function Switch) panel was installed in 1986.

Interior of Farncombe SB (© Barney Clark, Branch Line Society): Click on link below:

<https://www.branchline.uk/reports/2023/231215GuilSB/Image09.jpg>

The remaining intermediate signal boxes between Farncombe and Haslemere and Haslemere to Havant were closed between 1973 and 1975 with the adoption of track circuit block working and colour light signals. All the goods sidings had been closed and level crossings were converted to automatic half barriers. Liphook signal box opened in 1878 and closed in 1975 and is now preserved in Hollycombe Steam Museum. Its 20 lever Stevens and Son lever frame dates from 1895 which aligns with work at Farncombe and Haslemere.



Haslemere signal box is an LSWR Type 4 signal box dating from 1895 and retains its original Stevens and Sons lever frame. The layout at Haslemere was extensively modernised in the late 1930's for the electrification and it is thought that most running signals were converted to colour light at that time. There is a project to preserve Haslemere signal box after it was abolished in November 2025 and it is now a Grade II listed building.

Haslemere SB 28 September 1981, long before smartened paintwork. (Photo N Kearns.)

The Friends of Romsey Signal Box have helped the Haslemere group with advice and ideas over the last couple of years. The Haslemere group's website is: <https://www.haslemereinfohub.co.uk/signalbox.html>



*Haslemere on 25 April 2025
(photos Network Rail Wessex)*



*Petersfield SB April 1990
(Photo by N Kearns)*



Petersfield signal box dates from 1880 and is LSWR type 3 design signal box but with an extension of the operating floor closer to the track. This was probably to improve the site lines from the signal box under the station footbridge to the station. This box originally controlled the junction for the branch line to Midhurst and took over the work of Petersfield South signal box in 1902. Only levers 17 to 26 remained in use with most of the control being done using an IFS panel which was installed in 1975. All the intermediate signal boxes between Petersfield

and Haslemere were closed in January 1970 with the changeover to track circuit block working. After closure the signal box was being retained as a Network Rail office.

Havant station was rebuilt for the Portsmouth Direct electrification in 1938 with centre through lines. Since then, the Hayling Island branch, goods yard and finally the fast lines have been removed, but the station buildings have retained some Southern Railway "Odeon" styling. The disused 1865 Saxby and Farmer signal box survives, complete with its 1938 Westinghouse A2 lever frame. This signal box is also grade II listed. There was a project to preserve this signal box as a museum, but nothing has been heard about the proposal for some years.

The final trains were signalled by Petersfield, Haslemere and Farncombe boxes on Friday night/Saturday 25th/25th October prior to a week long engineering possession to transfer control to Basingstoke Route Operations Centre.



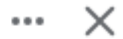
New drinks policy?

Neil supplied this, which certainly made me chuckle. Something for us to consider for the Buffer Stop, Graeme?..



Heritage Railways added a new photo. · [Follow](#)

11h · 🌐



NEW TRAIN BUFFET POLICY : Visitors to the proudly traditional Butterleigh & Mossford Heritage Railway were left confused, under caffeinated and emotionally challenged this weekend after the buffet car introduced what management are calling a "Back to Proper Drinks" policy.

The new rules strictly prohibit oat milk, almond milk, caramel syrup, vanilla foam, iced anything and "all beverages that require explaining," leaving passengers with a simple choice between tea strong enough to frighten small mammals and coffee described by staff as "brown and honest."

The policy is being firmly enforced by buffet volunteer Brenda Hawkins, 68, who has run the tea urn with quiet authority since 1997 and considers modern coffee trends "a phase that will pass once everyone has a proper biscuit."

"We do tea," Brenda said, folding her arms defensively beside the kettle. "If you want milk, it comes from a cow. If you want flavours, there's a digestive biscuit. That's the system."

The situation escalated when visitor Oliver Trent, 29, from Shoreditch, attempted to order an oat milk latte with a drizzle of caramel and "maybe a little heart on top."

Brenda reportedly stared at him for several seconds before replying, "Love, this is a steam train, not Milan."

Witnesses say Oliver attempted to clarify his order using hand gestures and words such as "artisanal" and "mouthfeel," neither of which were recognised by anyone behind the counter.

"I just wanted a nice coffee," Oliver said later while holding a mug of tea that could potentially dissolve cutlery. "She told me to stir it until I could no longer feel fear."

Several nearby passengers nodded approvingly.

"That's how tea should be," said Harold Minton, 74. "If the spoon doesn't stand up on its own, you've done it wrong."

Foam art was cancelled after a volunteer drew something that caused three passengers to apologise and look away

Biscuits remain available but are selected from what Brenda refers to as "the heritage tin," a container whose contents rotate mysteriously and may predate decimalisation.

Station manager Trevor Hainsworth, 51, proudly defended the buffet's position.

"This is about preserving history," Trevor said. "People didn't drink oat milk on steam trains. They drank tea, complained about the temperature and dropped crumbs everywhere. We're keeping that alive."



Website

Dick Hewett writes:

For many years now, Steve Hailes has been looking after our website – and a fine job he has always made of it! The site is attractive, with bags of information, and Steve is very efficient in updating things when that's required. It is one of our most important marketing tools.

However Steve would be happy to hand over responsibility for the website if anyone else is able, keen and enthusiastic to take it on. Just get in touch with me if you'd like to offer.

Membership Secretary

Janet Payne writes:

Thanks to all those who have continued to support the Friends through their membership, and welcome to our very newest members.

A reminder that subs will be due from 1 April onwards. If you want to pay early, before you forget, we'd be delighted - the usual fee of £10, or £5 for under 16s. And if you still haven't paid for 2025-26, we'd be even more delighted to receive an appropriate payment!

Nature notes

Neil Kearns writes:

Nothing for nature notes this time: it's winter and even the local small birds have gone quiet!

Website Blog

Dave Trewern writes:

The Romsey Signal Box Blog is chugging along, but I would like to make the usual request. If anyone has anything of interest to report then please don't hesitate to let me have the details. Have you been somewhere interesting, have details of an event or even have suggestions about the blog itself (clean please!)? I can be emailed at datrewern@gmail.com.

A French Connection

Dick Hewett writes:

Two paintings have appeared in the Discovery Centre which might appear at first sight to be of no relevance to Romsey Signal Box. However there is a French Connection.



Both paintings were by an amateur artist from Paimpol, Romsey's twin town in Brittany. They purport to show engines at Paimpol, though Neil Kearns suspects they were shedded elsewhere, Paimpol having only very minor facilities.

The paintings were donated to Romsey Town Mayor some years ago, and have now been donated to us for permanent display.



Open Days and diary dates for 2026

Our **advertised programme of open days** is as follows (see website for updates):

Month	Normal Opening	Extras
February	Sunday 1 st ; Saturday 21 st	
March	Sunday 1 st ; Saturday 21 st	Saturday 7 th ; Sunday 8 th (in association with Model Railway Show at Crosfield Hall)
April	Sunday 5 th ; Saturday 18 ^h	
May	Sunday 3 rd ; Saturday 16 th	
June	Sunday 7 th ; Saturday 20 th	
July	Sunday 5 th ; Saturday 18 ^h	Thursday 30 th
August	Sunday 2 nd ; Saturday 15 th	Thursdays 6 th , 13 th , 20 th and 27 th
September	Sunday 6 th ; Saturday 19th (HOD)	<i>(Possible stand at the Romsey Show on Saturday 12th September)</i> Sunday 20th (Heritage Open Day)
October	Sunday 4 ^h ; Saturday 17 th	
November	Sunday 1 st ; Saturday 21 st	
December	Sunday 6 th	

Contributions of articles and photographs for the next edition are welcome, please forward them to the Newsletter Editor at: info@romseysignalbox.org.uk



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Not an Open Day, but coffee during a Wednesday working day – with the usual discussions and banter

