

# The Signal

| Newsletter of the  
Friends of Romsey Signal Box

| No 66 - August 2022

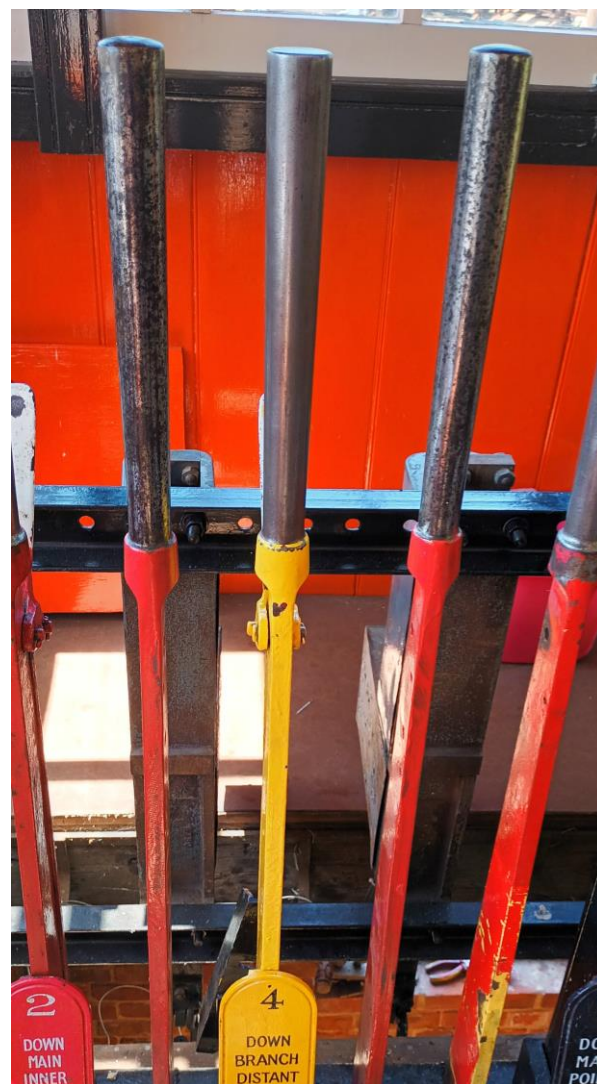


## Full size restored!

From this...



... to this



# From the Editor....

*Peter Chatfield, Newsletter Editor/Co-Chairman*

I hope you're all enjoying the summer and that it's mostly not *too hot* for you!

In this newsletter, our 'breaking news' is that the project to replace some levers in the signal box is close to completion as I write. It must be five years or more since we were able to source some 'full length' Stevens levers? So, to actually see them installed is another milestone in the restoration of parts of the signal box lever frame to reflect equipment that would have been used – and now is again used - for mechanical signals and points. Congratulations to the project team (Adrian and Derek)!

We hope that you'll be able to attend this year's Annual General Meeting on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> August. As well as some important business – including approval of our new 'constitution', and the election of your committee (again, see Dick below) – we hope members will be able to stay for a 'social' with refreshments (possibly a barbeque, to be confirmed....).

At the last Friends' committee meeting, Jamie Brooker indicated that he will not be standing for re-election to the committee. On behalf of the Friends, I would therefore like to thank Jamie for his input to the committee and, as with his period as our chairman, I think we should note, among various activities, his contributions to our financial stability, to the Education Centre, and to the development of policies and procedures to underpin members' safety whilst working on the signal box site. Jamie now continues as project manager for the Education Centre, and we look forward to opening this exciting new interactive centre in 2023.

It's good to see a group visit to another signal box! As Malcolm Moore writes, members recently enjoyed a visit to the signalling centre that sounded the death knell for Romsey in 1982! With the march of history, of course, much of the technology of the Eastleigh panel is now, like Romsey's, obsolete. Fortunately, we have Swindon Panel Society at Didcot Railway Centre preserving this type of equipment which, like mechanical signalling, is also of historic (and educational) interest. Further visits to Eastleigh are planned.

Neil contributes his usual notes on membership and wildlife activity. May I echo his plea that all members who wish to renew their membership please do so asap; your support for the signal box is greatly appreciated.

We pick up again with *Knowing Me, Knowing You* in this newsletter – so I hope you enjoy our Janet and John stories....

Once again, thanks to everyone for your invaluable support that makes Romsey Signal Box what it is today – an historic building and thriving working museum preserving our railway signalling and related railway heritage. Hope to see you at the AGM....

Best wishes, Peter.



# *Update and News from the Chairmen*

*Dick Hewett and Peter Chatfield write:*

The Friends committee met on 27<sup>th</sup> July and considered a number of matters, not least of which was the AGM / Elections / Constitution, of which more later. All members should by now have received a package of documents with a covering email from Neil Kearns.

The committee also discussed the ongoing plans for the repairs needed to the signal box itself, some of which will be quite major. We need to establish what function the two acroprops are fulfilling in the structure, consider how much of the timberwork needs to be replaced, and what repairs are needed to the brickwork. Windows, potential leaks through the roof, and the general appearance of the box are also on the list. This will be a major task, for which we will need to use professional contractors. Fortunately we can afford to make the investment, and will make every effort to plan a schedule of works which will give the signal box many years of service with the minimum of subsequent major works.

Significant work has been undertaken on Policies and Procedures in recent months, and most of these are now ready for publication. Peter explains more below.

On Monday 8<sup>th</sup> August, Adrian Birtles and Derek Grover, aided by Dick and Noah, replaced the short levers for signals 3 and 5 with taller levers acquired some years ago for the purpose. This matches our semaphore signals with the full length levers they would have had prior to the re-signalling in the 1970s. There'll be a full report with pictures in the next edition of *The Signal*.

A small team (Dick, James Lafferty and Malcolm Moore) have started a project to look at all our signage, with a view to enhancing the visitor experience. Their first meeting established the overall objectives and some key principles to follow, and identified the different types of signage required on the site. Balancing sufficient signage with a determination not to swamp the site with it will be a particular challenge which will inevitably require the use of other forms of making information available to visitors, either through modern or conventional technologies.

We are reviewing the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, with the assistance of Byron Horne who is being trained in the area for another organisation. One change is that with our increasing contact with our younger members, we now believe we qualify to undertake Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, and Dick will begin asking those volunteers who have such contact to complete applications for DBS checks.

Finally, it was reluctantly agreed that the proposed VIP launch of the new Education Building should be postponed until 2023, when hopefully the signal box itself will appear more presentable, and the signage project will be completed. It will also give time for a more complete use of the Education Building to be established. Instead we shall celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the closure, and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the re-opening, of the box on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> October with a social for members at the end of the Open Day, probably with a Barbecue. More of that in due course – but do put the date in your diaries.



# *AGM / Elections / Friends' Procedures and Terms of Reference - Update (formerly our Constitution)*

*Dick Hewett, President, Treasurer & Co-Chairman, writes:*

Members will be well aware of the discussions which the Friends' committee have been having as regards our future status. These have culminated in a firm recommendation for the Friends to be more formally integrated into the Romsey & District Buildings Preservation Trust.

There are a number of reasons for this conclusion, not least of which is that in practice we have effectively been a part of the Trust since the Friends were founded, albeit in an informal manner. The other key factor is that it is the Trust who own the signal box and its site, without which the Friends have no real purpose. Separation of the Friends into another organisation would leave us reliant on the Trust to permit us access to the building and its site, something which cannot be guaranteed. In contrast, by being an integral part of the Trust we have direct control of the box and the site as part of the owning organisation.

From the Trust's perspective, the frequent and regular access we provide to the site for the public is a key benefit, helping to fulfil one of their charitable purposes, which is to increase awareness of preserved buildings through education in the broadest sense. The signal box is the only building which the Trust can consistently use to fulfil this aim, and the Friends as part of the Trust will ensure this continues.

Members will note the change from the title "Constitution" for our ruling document. Our legal adviser has highlighted that we cannot have a Constitution for what is essentially a sub-group of the Trust which has its own constitution, titled Memorandum and Articles of Association. It is therefore proposed to re-title our constitution as Procedures and Terms of Reference of the Friends of Romsey Signal Box. This more accurately describes what the document actually does.

Since we sent the draft version to members in June, several other comments were received from members and Trustees which have been incorporated, including expansion of personal pronouns to he/she/they and equivalents, as now advised by the Law Society. Some simplification of references has also been included, and the opening sub-section completely re-worded to align it directly with the Trust's Memorandum and Articles of Association.

The Trustees of the Trust will confirm their approval of this new document prior to our AGM on 20<sup>th</sup> August. The document being sent with the AGM papers will be tabled at our AGM for formal acceptance by the members of the Friends, following which it will be tabled for more formal acceptance by the Trustees, thus confirming it as a legal document linked to the Trust's governing documentation.

There has been an enormous amount of discussion about our future over the past two years, with some fundamental issues being given much consideration and debate. We have explored a range of options, and have recognised that no option was without its disadvantages. However





we firmly believe that the option we are now taking is the most advantageous, with the least risk and fewest disadvantages for the long term.

The Friends committee therefore recommend this new document to all members, and hope you will give it unanimous acceptance at the AGM.

## *Policies*

*Peter Chatfield, Co-Chairman, writes:*

I'm pleased to report that our new Romsey Signal Box *Site Procedures* document has been approved by the Friends' Committee. This covers things like the fire procedure, accidents, near misses, and sudden illness, the PiC (Person-in-Charge role), together with specific working procedures e.g. working at height, electrics, and so on.

Like our Health & Safety Policy, and Site Risk Assessment, the *Site Procedures* can be accessed in the Mess Hut. Emergency procedures e.g. fire are also displayed in the locking room of the signal box. The PiC is your 'go-to' friend to help with any matters concerning our policies and procedures.

We will also soon have a new RSB handbook; this, together with key parts of our policies and procedures will be highlighted to new members as part of their induction on the site.

As always, the intention is to get the basics of health & safety etc right, so we can all get on with the really important things - like enjoying the signal box and the Buffer Stop cakes etc!

## *Open Days and Events*

*Dick Hewett writes:*

Our Open Days continue to see a good number of visitors, with 37, 30, 38, 51 and 57 respectively attending our last five during June, July, and last Sunday. There is no pattern to their arrival: sometimes there is a surge at the start of the day (from 1100) with the need to queue to get into the box; on other occasions there are unexpected numbers later in the day. This makes visitor management a bit of a challenge, however the establishment of the formal role of Person in Charge (PiC) has undoubtedly helped with this.

The number of volunteers also continues to rise, as we have welcomed several new members onto the Open Day team. We are giving younger members as many opportunities as possible to get trained in the various roles required, and several are becoming impressively competent on Cowley Bridge Junction. It has also been great to see several gain sufficient confidence to volunteer as a guide for the demonstrations in Romsey box. We want to give them as much encouragement as we can, and we're grateful to the older longer-serving members who are willing to step back to give the younger members these chances for development.





*Noah finds himself chatting to an ex-signalman who had travelled all the way from Cardiff for the day*

We have yet to decide whether to open on a more frequent basis from 2023, however the questionnaire survey gave some encouraging results, and the addition of further volunteers since then has strengthened the case. Our main concerns are having sufficient people to cover the PiC role, and, more significantly, staff the Buffer Stop Café. This is a popular and key part of our offering to the public, but

we cannot rely on Dave and the couple of others who stand in when he is unavailable. Opening more often will increase the need to sufficient qualified staff to provide the service whilst meeting our 5-star hygiene rating.

As mentioned in the Chairman's report, we will not be holding a special VIP event on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> October. Instead, members are encouraged to attend the AGM after the Open Day on 20<sup>th</sup> August, and then a social and barbecue after the Open Day on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> October.



Meanwhile we were invited to have a display at the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations for the Hythe Pier railway on Saturday and Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup>/24<sup>th</sup> July. The Saturday was the main focus of the event, and was much busier (and noisier). Leaflets were handed out and some merchandise sales made. An enjoyable couple of days which will have increased awareness of Romsey Signal Box in the Waterside parishes. Thanks to all those who manned the stall each day.

One outcome may be a visit to Romsey by members of the Hythe Shed, who undertake the restoration of the railway's ageing rolling stock amongst other activities. Such group visits are very welcome, and any members who belong to other organisations which might like to arrange a visit should encourage them to get in contact with Dick through the info email address.



# Visit to Eastleigh Signal Box

*Malcolm Moore writes:*

A few Friends of Romsey Signal Box recently enjoyed a brief and very interesting visit to the Eastleigh Area Signalling Centre.

Colin Varney kindly hosted this event, answering many questions ranging from the technical to the offbeat. (Q: If it were a lever frame - and physically possible - how many levers would a panel require? \*)

There are three panels, each operated by one signaller. Apart from improved communications and CCTV monitors, the technology remains much as at start up in 1981. Basically, panel one covers lines Basingstoke to Eastleigh, round to Hedge End (east) and the Romsey line (west); the middle panel covers the central area around Eastleigh and Southampton; and panel three covers lines towards Bournemouth and Salisbury and the little-used Fawley branch.

Our keen photographer Friends had excellent views over the lines and seized the opportunity to photograph an old Pullman carriage having received to-the-second notice of it passing by.

Further visits to Eastleigh panel are planned for other members of the Friends.



*Adrian, David, James and Miles watching intently as Colin explains*

\* Colin's quick estimate is 115 levers of which 70% would be signals. That's a lot - and only panel one!





# Membership Matters & Nature Notes

*Neil Kearns, Membership Secretary, writes:*

We now have a grand total of 72 members in Friends of Romsey Signal Box. There are a few well-known names and volunteers who haven't renewed yet. **If you are not certain whether you have renewed**, please contact me by e-mail ([membership@romseysignalbox.org.uk](mailto:membership@romseysignalbox.org.uk)) or by phone on 02380 618167 or 0781 8021 364, preferably in the evening, when I'm likely to be close to the membership records.

Not much of note for bird activity, as it has been so hot recently, apart from the house sparrows dust bathing in Alan's new lawn. The canal water is looking a lot cleaner now that the creation of meanders upstream has stopped. A few trout have been seen downstream of the footbridge in recent weeks, where the overgrowth on the banks has been cleared.



*The River Test – trout country – at Leckford*

## Knowing Me, Knowing You....

*Here are our next two participants – sadly, not too many photos of them submitted – we'll have to see if we can remedy that in future editions....!*

### John

*Please tell us a bit about yourself and how you came to volunteer at the signal box.*

I am John Pennells and I moved to Romsey late in 2019. My wife Linda and I came to Romsey to explore the area with a view to moving here some 2 years earlier and happened to choose a weekend when the signal box was open. A visit to the signal box plus a slice of cake did a lot to help make Romsey our choice to move to. We were then living in Harrow but I grew up on Stonegate station in Sussex, on the Tunbridge Wells to Hastings line, where my father had worked since 1944. Living on the station meant that the signal box was an integral part of our "social" life and many happy hours were spent there over the years. It also meant being involved with every aspect of station life from booking office to goods shed – who needed a train set when you had the real thing on your doorstep!







*Stonegate box in 1982 (South Eastern Railway 1893, Saxby & Farmer type 12A)*

*Lever frame: no. 14 reversed is Wadhurst Tunnel Intermediate Home & Distant (colour lights).*

*The tunnel is one of the notorious Hastings line tunnels with restricted clearance, so non-standard narrow coaching stock and traction had to be used - until single-line working through the tunnels commenced with electrification of the line in 1986*



Once the Covid restrictions ended it was only natural to get involved with the Signal Box, both on Wednesdays and on open days.

I spent most of my working life in the public library service in Harrow and before retiring was responsible for libraries, heritage and cultural services in Harrow. Preserving local heritage through local museums became an important element of my work and that the opportunity to experience and learn from the past is available to all.

*What things were you doing when you started volunteering here?*

I started off painting parts of the tool shed and moved on to working on the various buildings but am happy to take on any jobs that need to be done. I leave the technical jobs to those in the know but watch with interest as the work progresses. On Open Days I enjoy being on the gate welcoming people to the site and have also been trained to operate the panel in the locking room which is fascinating.

*What do you like about RSB?*

I would suggest that it is a unique place to get involved in. It is a very friendly and welcoming group – the willingness to share knowledge and stories is brilliant, there is always laughter but also serious thoughts on how the place can contribute to the development of young people or help people to understand their heritage. Open Days also provide opportunities to hear other people's experience and stories about railways and signal boxes which is always enriching.

*What interests do you have other than the signal box?*

I enjoy gardening and exploring the local area. I am a trustee of Amaudo UK, a charity supporting a mental health project in Nigeria where my daughter and son-in-law worked for three years. I have two daughters and a son, and four, soon to be five, grandchildren who provide a lot of pleasure.



My father in his 40 plus years at Stonegate managed to hold on to a huge range of material from signage, lamps, signals etc to paper records as they were discarded and I am still working on establishing order in the collection and researching elements of it further.

*Is there anything else you'd like to say?*

Long may the Romsey Signal box continue to attract visitors and volunteers – it is fantastic that we are now attracting young people who becoming so engaged with the project and we have a duty to grow and encourage them as they are the future. Most of all a huge 'thank you' to all for being so welcoming.

## Janet

My name is Janet Payne, and I grew up near Manchester, but headed south for university fifty years ago. You may have heard of the place where I grew up — it has the least-used station [see photo] on the UK railway network, just one train a week in each direction. It was rather busier in the 1960s!



My family were all from the south — and several of them worked on the railways. One of my uncles was a signaller, another worked in the ticket office at Hurst Green station. I remember "helping" him to sell tickets there, as a small child — good training for being on the front desk here, perhaps? The green and yellow of Southern Railway colours look OK to me!



At Southampton University, I studied electronic engineering and joined a couple of societies. The Transport Society people asked me where I was from — "Denton? Denton Junction is famous!". I have some very good memories of trips with that society, hunting down disused railway lines locally and on the Isle of Wight. Then there was our trip round Scotland, by minibus, during what turned into the long hot summer of 1976, fending off the midges. Of course, we travelled by train, and by ferry, whenever we could.

*Denton – one of England's least used railway stations – flowers, lamp posts, but no lamps! (Flickr)*

I've lived and worked in Southampton, London and Buckinghamshire over the past forty years, and also as an Open University tutor for thirty years or so. Then in 2010, we started house-hunting in and around Hampshire, to be nearer my partner's family, and my main requirement was to be close to a decent railway station, and in a small town rather than a city. I'd taken voluntary redundancy from my full-time post, but continued with the Open University.



I remember looking out from the train towards Salisbury as we approached Romsey station, and thinking — "someone's got a railway signal in their garden" — and then "they've got a whole signal box!" House-hunting, and the whole process of buying and selling took a fair few months, but eventually, we found somewhere in Romsey, not too far from the railway. Then it was time to find out more about that signal box I'd seen from the train — and Peter Chatfield was there, very happy to explain it all. I joined up, and started attending open days, helping with the general tours, or with the box, sometimes being the invisible operator on the simulator in the locking room. I brushed up on my bell codes, and read up on signalling and its history. When Cowley Junction was finished, I started working on that, and was very happy to share it with some of the younger members who really took to it. I enjoy explaining what is going on, and hearing stories from our visitors of memories of the West Country railways.



*2015 celebrations: Janet is second from the left at the back*

As most retired people can confirm, you're busier than ever once you leave full-time work, and up until the first Covid lockdown, I also volunteered as a steward at Romsey Abbey. Our role was to welcome visitors, and help them explore the building, and explain some of its history if asked. There are Saxon foundations, some stones still visible, but most of it is Norman and later. One person said "so which came first?" Then you get someone else holding Pevsner's "Buildings of England", who can tell you everything about it. I enjoyed the contrast between the stones of the Abbey, and the Victorian engineering of Romsey Signal Box. And one of Romsey's Victorian vicars was a great inventor, of course, and founded a boat-building business to provide employment for the town (Rev Berthon and his folding boats – you can see one in the boat museum in Unst, Shetland, which I visited a few years ago.)

Thanks to Covid, and vulnerable family members, I haven't been around so much in the last couple of years — but that does mean that every time I'm impressed by the changes that have happened since my previous visit.

*Members of the Romsey U3A Industrial Heritage Group in the Buffer Stop Cafe*

I also got involved with Romsey & District U3A, initially with the Birdwatching and Industrial Heritage groups, then serving as Treasurer, and after that as Chair, for a while, but since last year I've been able to concentrate more on our Industrial Heritage group — and that group has made several visits, including some for Dave's cream teas, highly recommended. We even have one or two members joining up, and getting very much involved, I'm glad to say.





Another transport-related activity that I learned about after moving to Romsey was Winchester's King Alfred buses running days — I went along one sunny New Year's Day, enjoyed travelling on various old buses — and noticed the name of the Chairman, in the programme. I emailed him — and yes, he was an old friend from Southampton University Transport Society days, so we've kept in touch since then.

"Come to Romsey — and be transported"? Well, that's railways, boats and buses, at least, and I'm looking forward to being able to catch up on my travelling, one of these days, as well as returning to meeting people at the signal box.

## *Website and Blog updates*

Members may be interested to know that Dave posted an update on our website blog, 10<sup>th</sup> June, on the garden railway. The previous update, 30<sup>th</sup> May, included a video about the Wednesday working group. Thanks, Dave, for keeping the blogs 'alive'.

Further updates were posted on 24<sup>th</sup> July about the levers replacement works and the café.

## *Open Days and Dates for your Diary 2022*

Please see our website for up-to-date information: [romseysignalbox.org.uk](http://romseysignalbox.org.uk).

Our **advertised programme of open days** is as follows:

Open Days 2022 (as at 10/8/22)	
August	Sunday 7 <sup>th</sup> ; Saturday 20 <sup>th</sup> (followed by AGM and Social)
September	Sunday 4 <sup>th</sup> ; Saturday 17 <sup>th</sup> & Sunday 18 <sup>th</sup> (Heritage Open Days weekend – free admission both days)
October	Sunday 2 <sup>nd</sup> ; Saturday 15 <sup>th</sup> (followed by Member's Social & BBQ)
November	Sunday 6 <sup>th</sup> ; Saturday 19 <sup>th</sup>
December 2022	Sunday 4 <sup>th</sup>

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

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