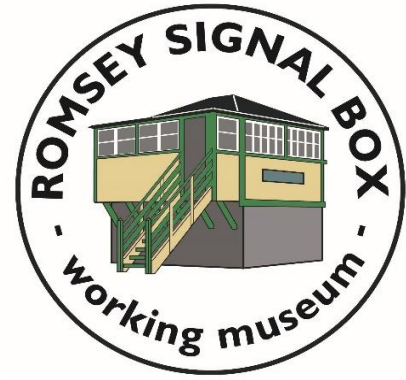


The Signal

| Newsletter of the
Friends of Romsey Signal Box

| No 68 - February 2023



A pair of Mayors!



When we invite local dignitaries, we get two for the price of one!
We were delighted to welcome the Romsey Town Mayor, Cllr Neil Gwynne, in late November, and then the Mayor of Test Valley, Cllr Alan Dowden, with Charlie Wainwright as guide, during the latest Open Day



From the Editor....

Peter Chatfield, Newsletter Editor/Co-Chairman

Welcome to our first newsletter of the new year and, as usual, there's a lot going on....

So, let's start with new news! At last, we have a report on the Education Building and several of you have rallied round to kick-start this important addition to the attractions of the signal box site. As Malcolm reports, it has been quite a business to take forward work on multiple exhibits, many with an 'interactive' or with technical elements that pose a challenge for us to complete in a fairly short time frame. Still, we are now making progress....

The other new news is that March sees the first 'full operating' timetable day when the signal box will be open to the public. Colin has been training members to operate and demonstrate (with public interaction offered) the box to this timetable, and we look forward to the first session on Saturday 4th March. There is obviously a limit to what can be demonstrated during the 'standard' demo; whilst that satisfies many of our visitors, there are some visitors – and members – who will enjoy the experience of operating 'as it really was' and, indeed, working levers and using bell codes beyond the basic operation.

This year also sees the introduction of School Holiday extra open days - these are due to commence in June.

As usual, we have a chairmen's report and Neil's membership report with a few nature notes....

Dick reports on open days and events, including recent open days when we were pleased to welcome the local Mayors (yes, there are two!).

Knowing Me, Knowing You returns in this issue with one family/two faces who will be familiar to all who regularly attend the site....

Finally, we would be grateful if all members will please read our briefing below on Health & Safety. We want to make sure that we keep the signal box site safe for volunteers as well as for visitors - thank you all for acting responsibly to do so.

Wishing you all a happy 2023....

Very best wishes
Peter

...



The frost remained on the track where the sun hadn't reached it, on a cold first Open Day of the year



Health & Safety – Important! Please read....

Dick Hewett and Peter Chatfield write:

Volunteers will notice a new sign *Work Safely!* on the signal box site. We are committed to a safe working environment, and we'd like to remind all volunteers that everyone must follow our agreed policies and procedures. Thank you to nearly all of you who are following safe Health & Safety practice by wearing suitable PPE (protective personal equipment) where this is required for the work task, and risk assessing tasks where you're unsure how to safely proceed.

The PiC (Person-in-Charge) is the supervisor at open days and working days. Please don't hesitate to ask the PiC if you are unsure of anything to do with Health & Safety, PPE etc, on the site – they will be very happy to assist.

Here's why this is important! –

- 1) A few instances of poor H&S practice and not wearing suitable PPE have been noticed, picked up with the volunteers concerned, but some poor practice has continued. Your committee have discussed this – hence, the *Work Safely!* sign and this article.
- 2) Over the years, accidents have occurred at the signal box, several due to poor H&S/PPE practice. We're not preaching at you! – we have personal experience of this.... For example, Peter saw a volunteer fall off a ladder from height; fortunately he had a soft landing and wasn't injured. Peter and another volunteer failed to co-ordinate moving a rail, which crushed Peter's finger causing a double fracture; fortunately now healed up. Yes, your co-chairman has learnt the hard way to improve his H&S practice!
- 3) Accidents and injuries on site are reported in our Accident Book – some of these have to be reported to the HSE (Health & Safety Executive) – please note that *the HSE have the power to close the site if we don't follow good H&S practice.*
- 4) We have a duty in law to keep volunteers safe. This is especially important for our younger volunteers, some of whom are left in our care by their parents. We must ensure that they don't pick up 'bad habits' if they see others not following good H&S practice. We hope to resolve all issues by the cooperation of everyone, or by discussing with individual volunteers any issues – but we will take further action if we have to, such as when a volunteer refuses to follow safe practice.

So - For your own and others' safety you MUST:

- **be aware** of our policies and procedures - they apply to everyone on this site.
- **follow** those policies and procedures at all times - if you are unsure about them, please speak to the PiC who will assist.
- **encourage** others to do the same.
- **report** to the PiC any concerns about any volunteers not following our policies or procedures - despite your encouragement to do so.

Folks, let's make sure we all get the basics right, so we can all get on with the many rewarding jobs we're doing at the signal box. Thanks for your cooperation.



Update and News from the Co-Chairmen

Dick Hewett writes:

As Peter suggests in his editorial, there's plenty going on at the moment – these are very exciting times indeed! Given the hiatus of Covid, and then the slow-burn return to normality, the sudden burst of energy and progress is all the more astounding and pleasing. We have such a great team of volunteers whose commitment knows no bounds. It's actually a challenge reining them in sometimes!

We have explained previously how we are moving forward with several major projects in parallel. That gives us a challenge in itself, as inevitably they impact upon each other, so managing the overlaps and timing is essential.

Firstly, the committee went through a full tender process to appoint a project manager for the structural works to the signal box itself. The successful bidder was James Lafferty, who is of course one of the Trustees of the Romsey & District Building Preservation Trust (RDBPT) and a member of the committee of the Friends. That made it all the more important to ensure that the process to appoint him followed proper tendering rules, and our legal adviser is satisfied the appointment has been made appropriately and within Charity Commission rules.

James has now started planning the works, with initial surveys in hand at the time of publication. The first consists of a measurement survey to establish the precise dimensions of the box. The opportunity has been taken for a precise survey of the entire site, which could be of benefit in the longer term. We now have measurements and 360 degree views around the site.



Contractor Ian has been measuring and recording everything on the site for a comprehensive plan – including the garden railway and Strongs sign!

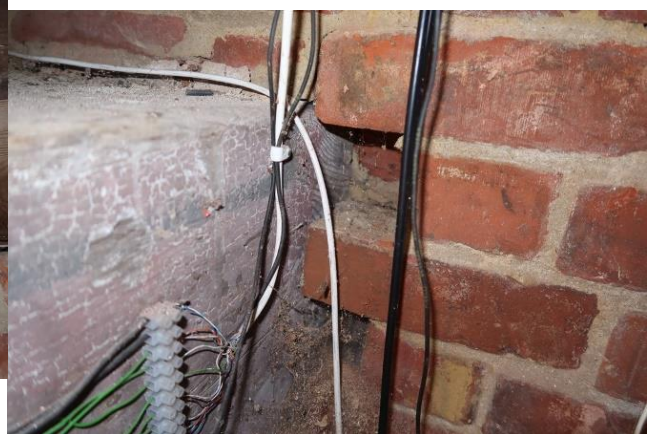
The second is a structural survey by a professional structural surveyor, particularly to understand how the lever frame rests in the brick structure and why we have until now required acro props to maintain its stability. These two surveys will result in a schedule of works which James will prepare with likely costings and dates, after which the actual work needed will be put out to tender. Fortunately, as members will be aware, we now have the funds for all this work to be undertaken by professionals, which will mean it will be done to a high quality by skilled tradesmen to a specific schedule. Hopefully by the next newsletter, this work will be well under way, towards completion in the late Spring.



The locking room has been cleared to facilitate the full structural survey and the subsequent repairs (this photo Dick Hewett, other photos by James Lafferty)



Under the lever frame which is supported at both ends by acro props. What will happen when they are removed?



More views under the frame



Alongside this will be a need to review all the wiring under the box. It has become increasingly clear that the current set-up is unreliable, and faults are hard to resolve. In parallel with the structural works, the opportunity will be taken to significantly upgrade the wiring. At this stage we don't know how much work this will entail: that will doubtless become clear once this project gets moving. Every effort will be made to maintain the ability to operate the box whilst it is done. We have advertised Open Days and must be able to provide the visitor experience.

In the last edition of *The Signal*, we reported on the intention to progress work in the Education Building. In practice, since November, this progress has been stunning. Jamie Brooker delivered various materials which had been acquired for the displays he was planning, and then briefed a team of volunteers in early December. Malcolm Moore has taken on the project management of the development of exhibits, and swiftly reviewed the plans with the new team. Detailed plans began to be developed, and activity has been frenetic on Wednesdays ever since. Malcolm reports briefly elsewhere on progress, but suffice to say it is amazing what has already been achieved, how thoroughly the team are considering all the proposals, and how professional a range of exhibits are likely to result. We hope to have Phase 1 ready for visitors by the summer.

Our project to review all our signage is also now making progress. A small team consisting of myself (as leader), James, Malcolm and Kelly Combeer has assessed the signage we have and what we believe we need, and we are now firming up a style guide including rules on fonts, type size, colours, presentation, and so on. We are keen to avoid a plethora of signage around the site and have several proposals for alternative means of providing information to visitors with enquiring minds, of all ages. Again our target is for new signage and associated facilities to be available by the summer.

You will notice a theme here: a grand completion of all these projects by the summer of 2023. An ambitious target – but at the rate things are currently progressing, an achievable one.

Finally we have our programme of Open Days with full operation starting on 4th March. More about this below in the “Open Days” report.

Exciting times indeed!

Open Days and Events

Dick Hewett writes:



We're proud of the continuing involvement of our younger members, who regularly staff both Romsey box and Cowley Bridge Junction. Here's Charlie on the Cowley Bridge computer, with new member Josh on the frame, watched by his grandfather

Since the last edition, we have had just four Open Days. Nevertheless they have all been well-attended – and we have been graced with the attendance of two Mayors! Some members may be wondering how this is possible – but not only do we have a Mayor for the Borough of Test Valley, the town of Romsey is also entitled to a Mayor as a consequence of it's original charter. When both are present at an event, the Town Mayor takes precedence in the area of Romsey Town, but the Test Valley Mayor takes precedence in the rest of the Borough (which includes Andover). So now you know!

Our Romsey Town Mayor, Cllr Neil Gwynne, came to the box accompanied by his consort (wife Kathrina) on 19th November. Both were very impressed. Neil is also the Chairman of the Plaza Theatre nearby so is familiar with our existence – yet had never visited previously. He was given the usual tour and demonstration, plus welcome tea and cake in the Buffer Stop.

Then on our most recent Open Day on 5th February, we had the pleasure of hosting the Mayor of Test Valley, Cllr Alan Dowden and his mayoress, Cllr Celia Dowden. Both were extremely impressed, never having been even into Brick Lane previously. They both commented, as do so many of our visitors, that they were surprised and delighted by the amount things to see and do on the site: they had anticipated just a signal box. Their planned 1-hour visit turned into a 2-hour stay as they likewise enjoyed the delights (and warmth) of the Buffer Stop Café.

On this latest occasion Charlie (more about him later) did the honours in explaining the workings of the signal box to the Mayor and encouraging him to pull a few levers and ring a few bells. The delight on the Mayor's face was only too plain to see. Meanwhile Hayden was on the simulator downstairs, and then James and Noah were working Cowley Bridge Junction when the Mayor went to see this. The enthusiasm and abilities of our younger members made a deep impression on both the Mayor and Mayoress: as a retired teacher, the Mayoress could see the enormous benefits volunteering at the signal box can give to young people, with their increased self-confidence being a particular impact (as Charlie's dad Lee observes later).





Charlie guiding the Mayor of Test Valley, Cllr Alan Dowden, through a signalling demonstration in Romsey Signal Box



These visits are important as the Mayors, who change each year, are selected annually from all the councillors, so over time we are influencing all the members of the two local councils. This helps raise our profile, gives us greater likelihood of support (financial and otherwise) when needed, and reinforces our position as a key attraction for the area.

Our Open Days now continue with increased dates and the ambitious plans for full operation of the box on selected dates, the first of which is on Saturday 4th March, in association with the local Romsey & District model railway exhibition. The biggest challenge is proving to be the rostering of all the enthusiastic volunteers. I know I am having to disappoint some people on occasion, but this is inevitable with the number of offers I am getting. I don't want the site to be over-staffed on Open Days because that leaves volunteers with nothing to do and doesn't give a good impression to the public, so it's a fine balance, and I hope everyone appreciates the situation. But please don't stop volunteering – it's a nice problem to have!

Full Operation Training



Colin in full flow to an attentive audience – Neil, Byron, Charlie, Lee and Aaron

Dick Hewett writes:

Our plans are well in hand for the full operation of Romsey Signal Box on selected dates through the year, and an enthusiastic team are geared up for the first of these on Saturday 4th March.



Aaron focused on his work (photos by Byron Horne)

Colin Varney and Neil Kearns have produced a timetable which lasts for 43 minutes, starting at 43 minutes past the hour, and this has been road-tested by all those who are going to be operating. Starting just before Christmas, Colin and Neil have run several training sessions, with a good attendance giving us a sufficient number of suitable staff to fulfil our aims. We are all delighted at how quickly we as operators have picked up the details of operating Romsey correctly, with changes to routes, bell-codes, messaging, timings, local rules, and much more.



The images here show training in progress. In the next edition of *The Signal*, we will give a fuller report on how things have gone.

*Charlie watches as Hayden maintains the train register
(photo by Byron Horne)*

Work on Education Building Back on Track!

Malcolm Moore writes:

After a long, frustrating pause through the pandemic, we have cleared signals to progress our overdue “Education Building”. Volunteers are working enthusiastically to develop hands-on displays so our visitors will enjoy a new learning experience at Romsey Signal Box in 2023.



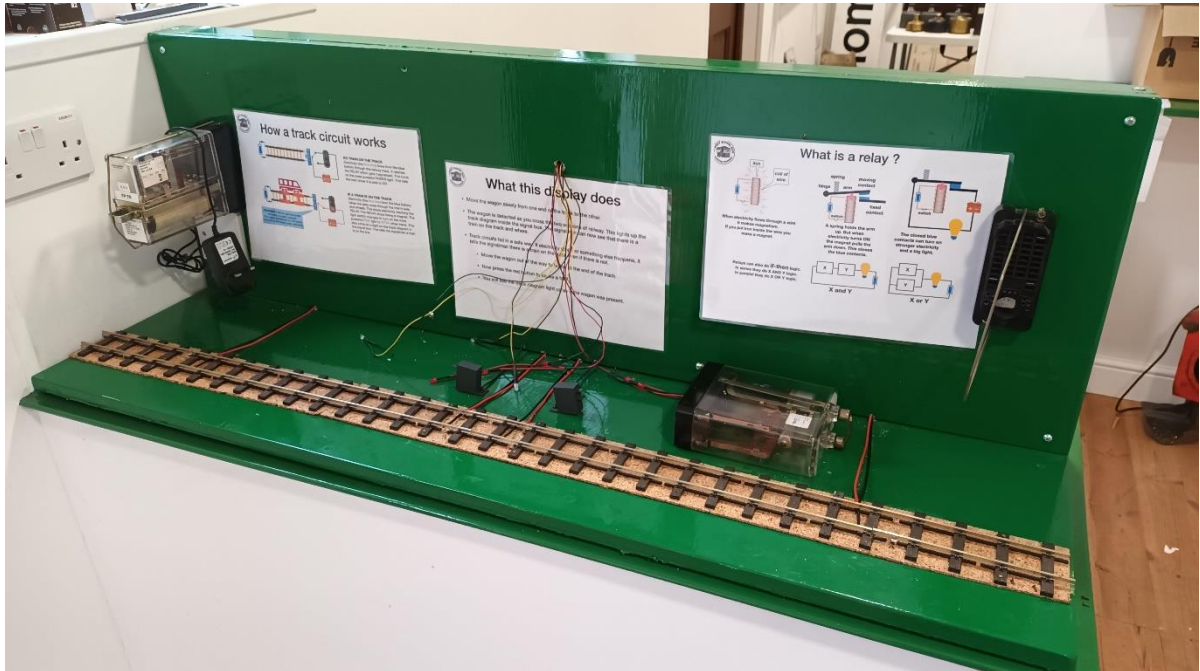
Adrian and Derek discuss fine adjustments to the wagon



*Alan, Adrian and Derek test our
“track circuits” display
(photos by Malcolm Moore)*



We're going to build our displays in phases starting with basic concepts like "track circuits", "bell codes" and "interlocking". Later we'd like to show how these work together to provide a safe and timely way to move passengers and freight across our railway network. We are also developing a model railway giving a driver's or track-view of signalling.



The first display about track circuits is nearing completion. Signage is targeted at 12-year-olds, and explains the basic science as simply as possible



Malcolm explains the plans for the Education Building to the Mayor and Mayoress of Test Valley during their recent visit. The Mayoress, a retired teacher, took a particular interest

We have been lucky to discover hidden skills of our regular volunteers but could always use more help. If you would like to know more or get involved, even part-time or at distance, please get in touch.

Knowing Me, Knowing You....

Our regular feature returns, this time with father and son Lee and Charlie Wainwright.



It was Charlie's 15th birthday on 21st January, the first Open Day of the year. Dave did him proud with this chocolate cake, which we all thoroughly enjoyed, thanks to Charlie generously deciding not to eat it all himself!



*Charlie at Swanage station with
The Flying Scotsman (photo by Lee)*

Charlie

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

I'm fifteen and mad about trains and all things railway!! I came to Romsey Signal Box a couple of times and really enjoyed it, so I decided to start volunteering.

What attracted you to volunteer?

I'm really interested in trains and railways in general. I'd been volunteering at Swanage Railway, and visited Corfe Castle Signal Box, which particularly interested me and furthered my interest in railway signalling.

What do you do at the signal box?

I give demonstrations, help with the operation of the simulator, and operate Cowley Bridge. Generally, I help with the signalling exhibits on site.





Charlie operating Cowley Bridge

Is there anything you particularly like about RSB?

I'm really into signalling, I love doing it and I'm keen to build up a good knowledge of signalling.

What interests do you have other than the signal box?

I'm a member of the Swanage Railway junior group, the Sygnets, and go to their

monthly meet. This builds up my knowledge of railway operations, which includes ... you guessed it, signalling!

Any thoughts about the future?

I've started doing volunteer work at Model Railway Solutions (model shop in Poole), and I'm hoping to get a job there. At RSB, I want to do the full operation timetable and am doing the training for this.

Lee

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

I have a career in IT in computer networking and currently work for Cisco. Previously, I did an aeronautical engineering degree, worked as an engineer in the defence and aerospace industry, which lead to my current job via a project delivering a deployed network for the British army. Charlie was born in 2008, he always had a key interest in trains, and so he learnt about Romsey Signal Box. My involvement has essentially been in supporting Charlie in his interests.



What attracted you to volunteer?

We received a warm welcome from Dick, Dave and the team – they took an interest in Charlie's interests, and I felt he would benefit from being involved. We are happy volunteering here.

What do you do at the signal box?

My primary job is manning the gate, but I'm also trained to do the Buffer Stop café, and training on running through the demo in the signal box.





Is there anything you particularly like about RSB - or dislike?

It's a nice, friendly place to come to and Dave's cakes are a highlight! It's also very educational. I'm always finding out more about the history of the railway and signal operations. Mind you, if it's a really cold, wet day it gets a bit chilly....!

What interests do you have other than the signal box?

I like running and hiking in the hills, for example in the Purbecks and on trails. Also, eating out or a quiet pint!

Any thoughts about the future?

Well, I'd like to stay involved for the time being. Charlie is really the key to my involvement.

Is there anything else you'd like to say?

The signal box has really helped to improve Charlie's self-esteem and confidence. He's been doing more and more here on his own initiative. It's helped with his confidence at school. At the Swanage Railway he also found new friends. A big credit to the team at RSB!

(Photos supplied by Lee)



The box in the pastille shades of a winter's afternoon



Membership Matters

Neil Kearns, Membership Secretary, writes:

All is quiet with the Signal Box membership at the moment. The renewals will hopefully start coming through at the end of March (this is a reminder to you!) for the first of April renewal date.

From a birdlife standpoint, the SB has been quiet over the last few months, just foraging flocks of finches and tits along the embankment. Where the river authority has tidied up the canal again, there has been a loss of habitat for smaller birds. Luckily, Network Rail are not so proactive and we still have our bank of brambles as security and a wildlife corridor.



Our feathered friends – finch and tit in habitat.... (Flickr)



Open Days and Dates for your Diary 2023

Please see our website for up-to-date information: romseysignalbox.org.uk.

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

Month	Normal Opening	School Holiday Extras	Full timetable demonstrations
February	Saturday 18th		
March	Sunday 5th; Saturday 18th		Saturday 4th
April	Sunday 2nd; Saturday 15th		Monday 10th
May	Sunday 7th; Saturday 20th		Monday 1st; Monday 29th
June	Sunday 4th; Saturday 17th	Thursday 1st	
July	Sunday 2nd; Saturday 15th	Thursday 27th	Saturday 1st; Sunday 9th
August	Sunday 6th; Saturday 19th	Thursdays 3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th & 31st	Monday 29th
September	Sunday 3rd; Saturday 16th (Heritage Open Days weekend – free admission)		Sunday 17th (Heritage Open Days weekend – free admission)
October	Sunday 1st; Saturday 21st	Thursday 26th	
November	Sunday 5th; Saturday 18th		
December	Sunday 3 rd *		

* The leaflet incorrectly show this as Dec 4th.

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

All photos in this edition by Dick Hewett unless credited

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