



29 August 2022

THE SIGNAL BOX AT WYMONDHAM ABBEY STATION NEWSLETTER
Number 5

Welcome to Newsletter number 5. I know a bit of a wait since the last one, but lots of exciting news to report as there has been some significant progress. From a personal perspective, things paused while I planned and managed, for the railway, a stand at the Royal Norfolk Show, an opportunity that came our way at short notice.

With regarding the box however I am pleased to say that the sole plate beam has indeed been now fitted, this in turn has meant the brackets to fit the wooden top half of the box to the brick locking room base have now been fitted meaning the signal box is now one complete structure.

Most recently the railway's S&T department has fitted the lever frame and work on the exterior box has also begun. All of which means that significant progress has now been made, despite it not yet being that visible, but I think that will change soon. There is still much however to do. The target is for the work to be complete by the start of the MNR's running season next year. This is currently planned to be 4 March.

Sole Plate Beam

It was obvious when the box arrived at Wymondham, that the major wood issue was the rail side sole plate beam. This beam is integral to the whole wooden structure as effectively these beams form the basis on which the whole wooden structure is built. Fortunately for the MNR, Network Rail had replaced these beams on three sides, in the relatively recent past, The rail side however was badly rotten and in urgent need of replacement, a job that had not been done by NR, due to the requirement for a line closure and of course the box also becoming redundant with the resignalling of the line.

Now thanks to Philip Bannister and the Thuxton Station construction team, the line side sole plate beam has been replaced. There is still an area of rot immediately above the new beam that needs attention and this will be rectified later.

Once the beam was in place, the box was lowered onto the locking room base. This allowed the new securing straps to be fitted by Chris Brett of the railway's S&T team. The signal box is now one structure at long last.

Lever Frame

Once the sole plate beam had been fitted and the box fixed to the base, the next important job was to fit the lever frame. From your scribe's perspective the main reason for doing this, at this stage, was the frame filled the large hole in the box floor. This therefore means the obvious danger for others working on the fabric of the box, of falling down the hole was removed.

Over the last couple of Saturdays therefore the railway's S&T team under the leadership of Richard Pike and Owen Stratford have descended en-mass to fit the cradle, frame and levers.



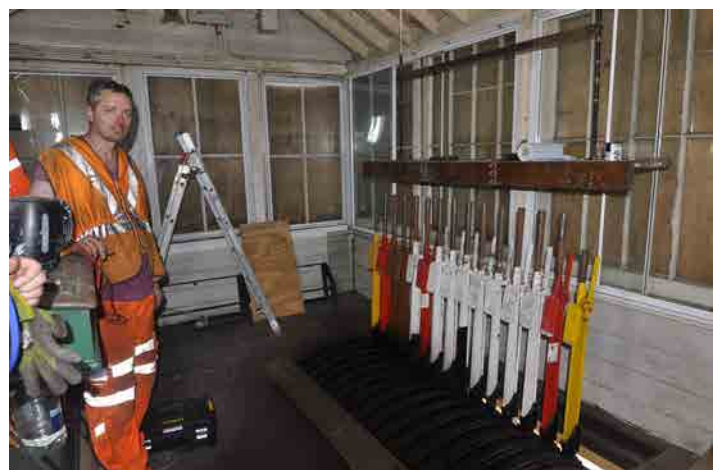
Top left: The frame cradle is installed in the locking room.

Top right: The frame is ready to receive the spacer bars

Bottom left: Work begins to install the frame and levers

Bottom Right: The S&T Department in full flow.

Right: The lever frame and levers are in with Owen looking on.



After much heavy lifting and dirty work the task was successfully completed. Once again the frame was mounted in the box. All that remains to be done is the floor boards and their new supporting beams for the area between the levers and the wall to be installed. All of which are in the box and will be addressed soon.

This in your scribe's view is a massive step forward and my thanks are due to the S&T Dept for this phase of the project. The next step for the levers will be painting to signify their future roles.

Frame History

For the technically minded, your scribe is informed that the frame is a Mackenzie & Holland 15 lever frame. That was originally recovered from the box in 2012 by the railway and has been in storage ever since, waiting this day.

This frame had also replaced an earlier Saxby Rocker frame. The frame now fitted was rebuilt at the Great Eastern Railway S&T workshop at Leyton and as such is therefore an important part of the heritage of the box, that has now been restored. It will of course, also in due course once again become a working frame, once the signals and point motors at Wymondham are installed.

While the lever frame was being installed, the opportunity to connect the wiring that will provide power to the box was also taken. The box when recovered from Spooner Row still had the modern distribution box installed and this has now been reconnected. The cable will now be connected to the wider railway electricity supply in the near future. All in all a significant step forward to the day when the box will be commissioned as a working box once again.

Painting

One of the big jobs that needs doing and which will be one of the most obvious elements for the refurbishment of the box is the painting of the exterior.

The current paintwork both inside and out could best be described as 'tired'. That however is going to change and I am delighted to say MNR working member Steve Robertson has taken on the role of coordinating this part of the project. Together we have made a start with the sanding, but it will take some time!

The paint scheme will be British Rail (Eastern Region) green and cream. The paint colours will be accurate as thanks to another of the project team, Steven Ashling, who at one time managed the region's signal boxes for Network Rail, I have the original paint specifications.

The paint has now been ordered and so the day of new paint appearing will not be far away.



Steve Robertson, hard at work on the southern end of the box

What is in a Name

We know the box was known as Spooner Row, but now it is located at Wymondham, what is it to be called. Turning to Owen Stratford, who amongst other things is a signalling historian for the region, we know the correct name for the crossing next to the Signal Box. This crossing is often referred to as Cavick Road by MNR members, however in official railway documentation, that reaches back to the mid 19th Century, it is actually officially known as Church Lane Crossing.

Similarly, when the railway was first built there was a station on the site of the Signal Box. The building is now a private residence, and the footings of the platform are still in evidence where the signal box now is. This station was also called Wymondham Church Lane.

The oddity here is that there is no Church Lane in Wymondham. The road that runs eastward into Wymondham is Becketswell Road and once it crosses the crossing, running west, the road becomes Cavick Road.

The box could therefore be named several different ways, however after discussion amongst the S&T Dept and the project team, the decision has been made to name the box Wymondham Church Lane, to reflect the railway heritage of the area. The station will however remain as Wymondham Abbey.



The former Wymondham Church Lane Station building

The Members of the S&T Dept have the equipment required to manufacture the new name boards and in due course they will appear on the North and South facing sides of the box. The style of naming will be using a font and style of name board correct for signal boxes such as this one.



The proposed Signal Box Name Board ¹



The Wymondham South Junction box showing the style of name board

1 Thanks to Own Stratford for design work

Roof

One of the specialist jobs that needs tackling is the eight holes in the slate roof that were made when the box was lifted from Spooner Row. This was unfortunate, but must be rectified. I am delighted to say that the roofer who has been doing such excellent work on the restoration of Kimberly Park Station, has agreed to take on the task and so by the next newsletter I hope to be able to report this work has been completed.

Volunteers

Your scribe fully realises that many who will read this are not in a position to volunteer to do the actual work, or in some cases are already involved, if however you wish to join the team please drop me a line. I am particularly interested in hearing from somebody with woodworking skills who can take on this aspect of the refurbishment.

This is all for now but look forward to the next edition where I hope to be able to show pictures of painting progress.

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