

Princes Risborough North Signal Box



Newsletter



Autumn 2020

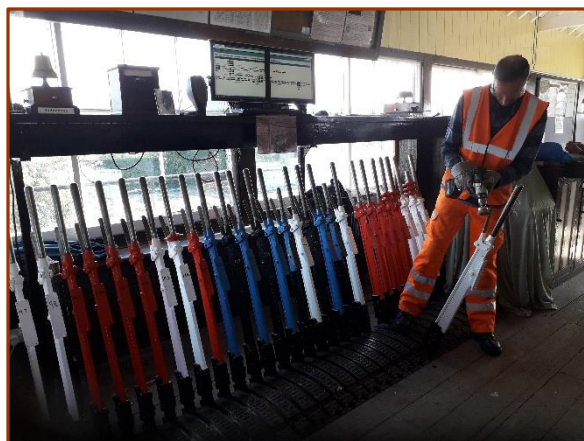
Dear Supporter,

Welcome to another PRNB newsletter. What a year it has turned out to be for everybody so far. Work ceased on the box when the initial country-wide lockdown came into place in March but once the lockdown regulations were properly understood volunteers returned to carry on the work albeit in slightly reduced numbers. We have also recently successfully completed our first public open day of the year after implementing Covid-19 precautions. More on that later. As I complete this edition of the newsletter we have just entered into another lockdown.

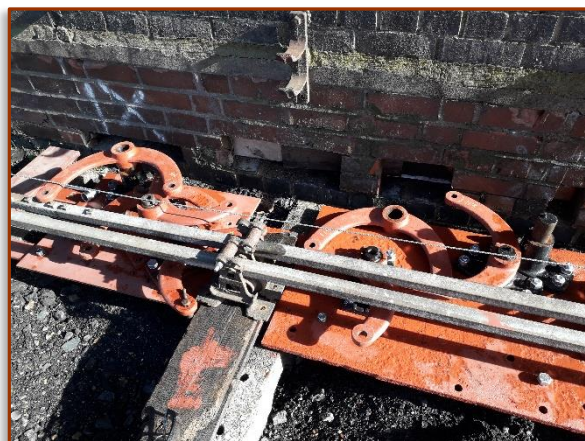
Princes Risborough Middle Box Progress

The task of reinstating the South end of the lever frame and interlocking which was removed in 1968 has continued. With the levers earlier reinstalled by us some years back, we erected steel legs and framing to support the installation of the cast locking trays. The kit for this had been collected over the years, and was assembled using parts from Radyr Junction and Banbury North. They were different height frames, so some modification was required and much "fitting"! The heavy "cam boxes" which translate the horizontal lever movement into the vertical drive for the interlocking have also been fitted. The many different permutations of tappet bars (the vertical sliding bars in the locking frame) have been catalogued so we can identify which ones to use in the design for the new PRMB interlocking in an attempt to minimise the effort of cutting extra notches.

The pedestal cranks and wheels underneath the levers on the ground floor of the box are now all in place on steel supports, and the down rods, hangers and wire adjusters are in place. The cranks and wheels move in the vertical plane and transfer the pull from the lever tails to a horizontal movement for rods and wires going outside the box via the "letterbox" slot. We are now working on the "lead-off" just outside the box, which supports cranks and wheels in the horizontal plane to turn the throw to left or right alongside the track.



Above - Andrew Taylor de-rusting middle box lever handles with soft brass wire brush.



Above – New cranks painted in red oxide. The two grey rods are current connections.



Semaphores Arising

Progress on the Middle Box runs in parallel to the installation of semaphore signals at Princes Risborough. One of the signalposts is already in place with another three being prepared on the ground as can be seen in the photos below. Some would have originally been in use here while others may have been recovered from Radyr. The restoration typically involves stripping all components (many of which would be seized), the post itself, and removing the pre-cast concrete base sections. The ladders are similarly restored along with all their fittings. The signal parts have to be serviced and re-assembled. Often bolts etc. have to be replaced with new, the remains of the old ones having to be drilled out and re-tapped. The posts are planted "bare", then ladders etc, affixed afterwards. The section to go in the ground is coated with a bitumen compound. The ornate finial would then go on last.



Windows & Timberwork

Various window sashes have continued to be repaired, made to slide freely, painted etc. The timber framing around them has also required more restoration work. For the first time over the last year or so we have also been able to get all the way around the upper timberworks of the box (between the upper windows and the gutter level) sanding and painting.



Photos - Peter Tilbury

The three images above show the various stages of one of the support pillars. The first you can see some rot exists. The second shows the full extent by the amount of rotten wood removed. The final one where the repairs have been made and awaiting numerous coats of paint.

To the right, one of dozens of sash windows that have gone through the repair process, with many needing to have the glass replaced of course.



Upstairs Toilet Wall and Floor

Before and After views of the wooden external wall of the toilet room. From the images it's clear that there has been a long standing leakage which has run down the outside wall staining the bricks. At some point we will have another go at cleaning them. The hand basin in the toilet room and sink in the kitchen area also now have hot running water. This is the first time since 1993 when the over-sink heater froze, burst and flooded the place!! At the time of writing Jeff Skull was working to finish off the plumbing inside the toilet room.



Communications

After laying nearly half a mile of underground cable ducts and cables under our own site, we've finally got a telephone connection with the outside world. Openreach took a number of months to get a telegraph pole planted outside our land so getting connected took a little longer than expected. However, the line has now been connected to our internal telephone exchange at Risborough. This line has broadband on it, and it is hoped that we will eventually get direct dialling between Chinnor and Risborough station extensions using Voice over Internet Protocols (VoIP). The broadband also provides for commercial applications in the ticket office (via a clever data link - SDSL for those interested) and even private WIFI in the box! The adjacent photo shows the various phones we have in the box. From left to right, the first phone will be a direct connection to Chinnor Box once a physical wire has been laid between them. Next the grey phone is an extension off the main internal exchange. The third phone will connect to phones mounted on four signalposts (in the future) and the final phone is to be a direct connection to Chinnor via the internal exchange.



Signal Box Open Day

On 10th October we successfully opened the signal box to the public after having to cancel the two previously planned open days due to Coronavirus. With guidance from Stanley Hart, our H&S expert and Chairman, we were able to put in place all the safety precautions as required by the Government Regulations. We had a steady stream of visitors spread over the whole day which meant we did not have to have too many people queuing outside due to the strict maximum number of visitors inside the box at any given time. In total we had 39 adults and 5 children visit which was a manageable number to deal with. In addition to this opening, on the 6th October, we had a private viewing by ex railwaymen who had requested a visit as part of their day out in the Chilterns.

Other News

Relatively minor joinery repairs were made to one of the staircase strings which showed some rot. Some of you may recall that we obtained these large timber pieces second-hand. They used to support the North end ramp of Chiltern's timber deck platform 3, erected as part of their "Evergreen 1" upgrade. They became available when the platform was later extended in concrete sections.

A start has been made on new mains wiring, initially for signalling supplies within the relay room, subsequently providing power sockets within the box and to feed a new water heater. More work is ongoing.

By moving equipment around and some to our storage container we've finally managed to access and clean/paint all the internal walls in the locking room. However, all our ongoing work has created more dirt and dust so they will need doing again before we can hopefully open that section to the public in the future.

Fundraising

We still have a few limited edition PRNB prints for sale at £35. They are mounted in a wooden A3 frame (see image) and originally sketched by Chris Yeates, a member of our railway. By purchasing one you are contributing directly to the PRNB restoration fund. If you would like one please get in contact. Details at bottom of this page.



We also have a limited number of PRNB mugs for sale at £5 .



With Christmas coming maybe consider as a special present for somebody?



Any comments/feedback to myself at news@risboroughbox.org.uk (Alan Jeffries)

Donations welcome. Cheque payable to CPRRA

Postal Address: PRNB, 27 Bedfordshire Way, Wokingham, Berkshire, RG41 3BA

www.risboroughbox.org.uk



Risborough Box Group is a team within the Chinnor and Princes Risborough Railway Association