

# Princes Risborough North Signal Box

## Newsletter



No. 2 - Winter 2016

Dear Supporter,

Welcome to the second PRNB newsletter. As you can immediately see from the pictures below we have reached a major milestone with the reconstruction of the staircase that was removed by Railtrack on safety grounds many years ago. There's also been lots happening during 2015 so this newsletter extends to six pages for this edition!

### Staircase Re-opening Ceremony

We were delighted when Sir William McAlpine accepted an invitation to open the new staircase on November 27th 2015 accompanied by senior Network Rail and Chiltern Railways teams. The Railway Heritage Trust was also heavily represented, and all had a chance to look at the renovation work so far carried out.



Left – Sir William cutting the chocolate & cream ribbons.

Below – Sir William views from the top of the staircase.



Right – Sir William cutting the PRNB cake.

We are grateful to Anita Coventry for making the cake (modelled on the signal box) and Sheena Woodward for the sandwiches. The small cakes being provided by Tesco at Princes Risborough



Risborough Box Group



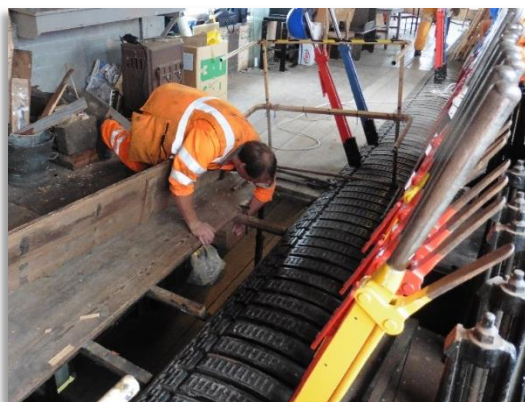
CPRRA Chairman Danny Woodward with members of the Railway Heritage Trust during the staircase re-opening ceremony.

Left to Right – Danny Woodward, Sir William McAlpine, Malcolm Wood and Andy Savage.

We are hoping the RHT may be able to help us with some funding towards the restoration in the near future.

Work to fabricate all the pieces required to rebuild the staircase started back in the summer as illustrated in the last newsletter. It is now so much easier to get into the signal box. Prior to this we had to climb a vertical ladder from the ground floor to the intermediate floor. Then crawl through a hole in the floorboards to gain access to the operation level as demonstrated by Paul Webb in the adjacent picture.

No Paul, I think you go through the other way round. Or at least put your hard hat on first!!



### Rear Wall

Network Rail provided safety supervision during September allowing us to do some vital repointing work of the rear wall brickwork. Much of the lime mortar had crumbled over the years so we were pleased to get the chance to carry out these repairs.

We also had the opportunity to erect the tower and carry out some remedial work on the outside timber around the windows and soffits.



Above – New member Peter Scouse at work from the tower.





### **Our first Corporate Volunteering Day**

On Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> December 2015 a group of volunteers from Network Rail's finance department visited the signal box to help as part of the company policy of sending out employees for "volunteering days". Nine employees were organised into two groups. As one group began working on scraping and sanding down the paintwork on the ceiling, the other was given a tour of the signal box with explanations on how it all worked. After an hour the groups swapped over which carried on like this throughout the day thus reducing any strain on the neck. Other jobs included painting sash windows and notice boards, replacing door knobs, cleaning and painting point clips, painting window safety bars and scraping flaking paint off the wall around the north chimney breast. All in all it was a productive day and learning exercise for us regulars which will help if we have additional corporate volunteering days in the future.



### **Water Supply**

The days of carrying clean drinking water to the signal box are over. Network Rail organised a trench to be dug under the main lines overnight to replace the pipe where it had become damaged under the track. See photograph. The pipework was terminated just inside the compound from which we work. We then opened up an additional trench to take the supply to a stop cock inside the downstairs toilet room. On completion, we now have fresh running water upstairs for our sink and of course one of the most important items in the signal box..... The kettle!!!



Left – Overnight trench work. Photo taken by the NR engineering team.



## Station cafe



Rain or shine, on arrival at Princes Risborough Station we can be sure of a nice hot fresh cup of tea waiting for us. Wash this down with a bacon or sausage butty/baguette with optional fried egg and you really are set up for a morning's work. Emma and Polly (shown) and Dennis (owner) have been looking after us for the last couple of years. The café opens at some unearthly time of day in time for the first train of the day, seven days a week. If you're in the area and in need of refreshment then why not pop along. Tel: 01844 274555

## Station Display Boards

We now have use of a display board inside the waiting room at Princes Risborough Station. Courtesy of Chiltern Railway who we are grateful to. To help raise the project profile the two posters below have been created to increase public awareness and promote the restoration project to the commuting passengers at large. These posters cover about half of the available space in the display boards. The other half is used for general Chinnor Railway promotions including the latest timetable and any other event we wish to promote.

**We want to return this...**

**into this...**

Princes Risborough North is the largest surviving signal box built to a classic Great Western Railway design. From 1904 to 1991 this impressive box commanded the railway through the Chilterns, but it now needs help if it is to survive. It is a "listed" building, but after closure it fell into disrepair suffering from vandalism, pigeons, weather and time.

Members of the Risborough Box Group, a team of volunteers from the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway Association, are now working to restore the signalbox from a near derelict state to its former glory, to operate the planned extension of the heritage railway from Chinnor and to be a demonstration signal box and railway museum open to the public.

There is much work to do as the building is in a sorry state. Timbers are rotten, brickwork has shifted due to failed mortar, the staircase was missing, nearly 200 window panes were broken. But it is a great example of our railway industrial heritage, and should not be allowed to collapse. Can we give it life once more as its builders intended, watching over tank engines busy on our branch as Birmingham expresses thunder by?

**Yes. We believe we can!!!**

**Would you like to help, support or sponsor this project?**  
**Contact: PRNBfund@chinnorrailway.co.uk**

For more information go to [www.risboroughbox.org.uk](http://www.risboroughbox.org.uk)

### History of Princes Risborough North Signal Box

- ❑ 1904/5 Princes Risborough North and South boxes commissioned by the Great Western Railway when the line to Bicester was built.
- ❑ 1958 Major re-engineering including renewal of the lever frame with a shorter "modern" one.
- ❑ 1968 Closure of the South box. Track singled. The lever frame shortened again and the operating floor partitioned to create a crew mess room at the South end.
- ❑ 1988 With closure rumoured, the building was "listed".
- ❑ 1989 The last BR train ran on the Chinnor Branch. Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway Association formed, with the aim of purchasing and preserving the line and signal box.
- ❑ 1991 C&PRRA purchased the branch from British Rail, from a boundary about half a mile from Princes Risborough to Chinnor (3.5 miles).
- ❑ 1991 Signal box closed and the layout was re-signalled and controlled from Marylebone. C&PRRA volunteers recovered the redundant signalling equipment. It was anticipated that the Chinnor Railway would extend into Princes Risborough in the very near future.
- ❑ 1993 Line extension still pending so interim access to the box granted by BR. C&PRRA carried out maintenance work, including roof repairs and an external repaint.
- ❑ 1998 New Railtrack safety regime. C&PRRA Personal Track Safety certification not recognised. All work suspended. Tools and signalling equipment trapped in the box.
- ❑ 2011 Following a break-in, British Transport Police requested C&PRRA attendance at the box. The full extent of degradation was apparent. Some of the structure was in danger of collapse.
- ❑ 2013 Network Rail approved access to CPRA members. Restoration resumed.



Risborough Box Group



## Sponsorship

We are very grateful that a sponsor for all our glass replacement has stepped forward. The PRNB project team owe a huge thanks to Eddie Howes who owns **Quickseal UK Ltd**, a glazing company in Aylesbury. Eddie responded to one of our posters and decided he would like to help the restoration project. His kind support has helped enormously by saving our hard earned monies from the PRNB fund so we would fully encourage our supporters to consider Quickseal for their glazing requirements.



The company's website can be found at [www.Quickseal.org.uk](http://www.Quickseal.org.uk)



## Princes Risborough Area Heritage Society

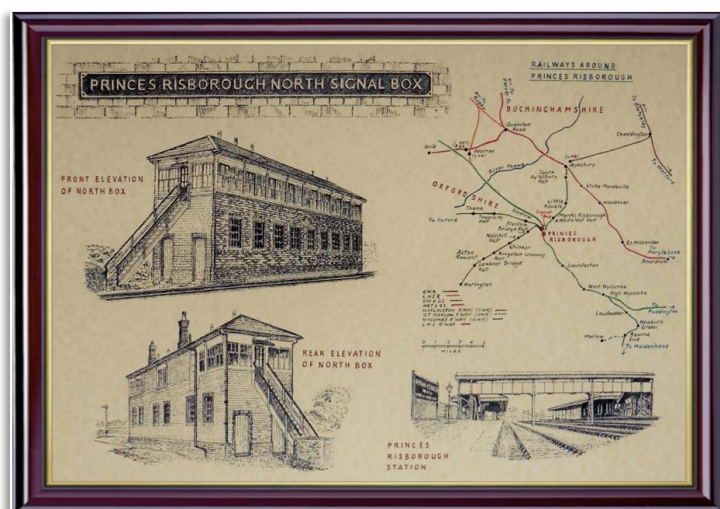
The PRNB team would also like to thank members of the Princes Risborough Area Heritage Society for making a donation to the PRNB fund.

## Fundraising

As part of our ongoing fundraising attempts to keep the PRNB restoration going forward I have some wonderful framed prints for sale. I asked one of our long standing members, Chris Yeates, to produce some very distinctive hand drawn images of the signal box. These framed prints are for sale at just £35 with all surpluses going towards the PRNB fund. See image below to illustrate what's on offer.

If you would like to purchase one for yourself or a friend/relative please get in touch with me (details at the end of this newsletter). In all cases I will try to hand deliver it if you live within (or close to) the geographic triangle of Chinnor, Risborough and Wokingham in Berkshire. If that's not possible then we can discuss a postage and packaging supplement. Either way contact me and we'll sort something out.

Remember, by purchasing one you are contributing to the restoration of the largest surviving Great Western Railway Signal Box which will be a great additional attraction to railway visitors when we are back at Princes Risborough. **Thank you!!!**



Fundraising streams for the last calendar year consisted of general donations, proportional sales of items by a member on eBay, commission on sales of models at Risex (model show), sales of the PRNB print (left) and contributions from readers of the last newsletter. Other fundraising ideas always welcome so please give this some thought and get in touch. Or with donations of course for which we are always grateful.



Risborough Box Group

### **Future Work to Carry Out**

As we enter 2016 we still have a lot of work ahead of us. There is still a number of structural timbers to be replaced which will likely be high on the priority list. Namely the vertical posts forming the window frames and the sills themselves. Fortunately we are able to fabricate the replacement timber ourselves to reduce costs. The repair of the sash windows is also an on-going exercise. We still have a number undergoing repair, painting and glazing.

We will progress the scraping and priming of the ceiling. Especially the section that the corporate volunteers started which we'd like to encourage more of. The roof itself will need some attention (it's the windy season) so we might be getting some interim repairs done to keep the rain out.

Once we have a lease we'll have to erect a fence along the access path. This will likely mean we amend the access rules making it easier to get visitors and new volunteers into the box. We might be just short of enough fence posts and wire so if you know of any going spare please get in touch. Contact details below.

When CPRRA are given permission to run trains into Risborough that will open up the possibility for more work to be carried out on the rear wall. We are also likely to begin work replacing the broken windows on the downstairs window frames and replacing the floor joists and boarding under the upstairs toilet. Supplementing the steel supports under the lever frame will also have to be considered and of course the fitting of replacement nameboards (with due ceremony). One of the chimneys is in urgent need of attention but we'll have to wait till we get track access behind the box.

### **25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Closure**

The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of closure of the signal box will be on February 8<sup>th</sup> 2016. To mark this occasion we'll be planning a members' event.

### **Future lease**

This was mentioned in the last newsletter and at that time looked like we were close to an agreement. However, as is often the case with these things it's proving to be somewhat challenging. We therefore don't have any positive news on this at the moment but we do anticipate a lease at some point in the future followed by fencing the area off. This will make access a lot easier and hopefully bring new members into our group. After all, there is still a lot of work to do both physically on site and in support tasks such as fund-raising, exhibitions, planning applications and so on.

### **Legacy**

We have recently received a donation to the PRNB fund through a legacy for which we are extremely grateful.

Once again, I hope you enjoyed this newsletter and found it informative.

Feedback on it always welcome to myself at [alanj27@hotmail.com](mailto:alanj27@hotmail.com) (Alan Jeffries)

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