

Princes Risborough North Signal Box



Newsletter



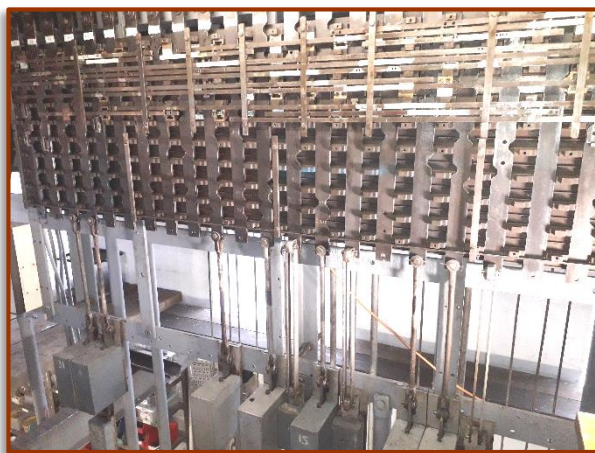
Spring 2021

Dear Supporter,

Welcome to another PRNB newsletter. Despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, work at the box has carried on albeit at a limited pace. However, the main reason for this is that work has naturally diverted to the installation of the signalling equipment outside of the box. The intention of this newsletter is to provide a progress update on its restoration but I think what the box connects to will be of equal importance and interest to you the readers. A big thank-you to Paul Ebberson and James Brannan in this edition for their contributions to the role of the PICPR.

Princes Risborough Middle Box Progresses

The task of re-instating the South end of the lever frame's interlocking, removed by BR in 1968, has continued. Since the last update the interlocking mechanism has been fitted beneath the lever frame. This is the safety device which prevents a conflict on the way the signals and points are set at any given time. This will ensure the safe movement of our trains in and out of Princes Risborough Platform 4. It's often referred to as a mechanical computer. Mechanically there are horizontal and vertical movements of the component parts as viewed in the photo below. The position of which is governed by the levers above. The movement of the component parts will either lock or unlock the movement of another lever whether to move a set of points (and locking into place) or the arm of a semaphore signal.



You can just about see the electric locks at the bottom of the photo above/left. A closer view in the photo above/right. Electric locks fitted under signal levers primarily prevent signals being cleared if the line ahead is occupied by another train, this being detected by track circuits. Electric locks under point levers are there to prevent points being moved under (or in front of) a train.

Some of the levers of the frame on the floor above have been repainted and the blockshelf above them now has instruments on it. We have also begun the task of installing cables for the wiring.



Risborough Box Group

Semaphore Signal Posts

We now have three posts planted around the Princes Risborough site. There are more to come but we will have to wait for the repair of our larger Rail Crane before we can install them. The one in the image below/left opposite the box is the Up Inner Home signal. It will be a bracket signal and is therefore much thicker. There will be two arms and a shunt disc signal mounted on it. It's perfectly vertical despite the optical illusion. The team have been busy over recent months cleaning, refurbishing and painting all the component parts to the signals as well as the posts themselves. Bracket frames painted in red oxide and other parts shown below/right.



The red or green coloured glass discs on the semaphore signal (called spectacles) as well as the arms themselves and the disc signals, above/centre, won't be fitted until the signals come into use some time in the future.

The post to the right is the Down Advanced Starter. It's function is to set the road for the passage to Chinnor as you approach the overbridge to the industrial estate. Note the absence of the original Chinnor line, our "Independent Line", the track here temporarily lifted pending relaying as funds become available.

On the other side of the bridge towards Chinnor there will be an Up Home signal installed, again when the Rail Crane is back in use.



Boarding Back

Unfortunately some window boards have had to come back to keep the weather out and sills dry. Unlike the front and rear sash windows the ones either side of the entrance door (left) are narrower and we don't have any spares to temporarily slot in. However, at the time of writing, the joinery team have been busy repairing the windows which should go back in the frame fairly soon. Some filling of cracks in the window sill will also be carried out before fresh coats of paint applied.

Upstairs Toilet

The toilet upstairs on the operating floor has now been fully restored. Saving many trips up and down the external stairs to the one on the ground floor. The readiness of hot running water to the small basin in there is also a welcome bonus.



A Day in the Life of a PICPR – By Paul Ebberson

‘Lever Snatcher’ – that’s what engine driver John Webb calls me, and he ‘passed out’* on A4 60034, a crack express loco on the East Coast Main line so he must know something about railways! It’s true, a signaller does spend some of the time pulling signal levers but that’s only part of the job. Alan Jeffries asked me to explain a little about the role of signaller at Princes Risborough so come with me to the largest surviving truly GWR signalbox for a day’s shift.



Heritage Railways are always having to balance the way things used to be done, with the modern ways of doing things. Areas like Health and Safety, Job Titles and roles constantly evolve and in the ‘big’ railways – if I may call them that, the term signaller is now obsolete, the role is now called ‘signaller’. Signallers at Marylebone control all the Signals and Points from London to Princes Risborough and beyond. Crucially they also control two ground signals which allow movements into and out of the sidings at Princes Risborough. So how, I hear you ask, do they know when a departure from Chinnor is ready to come into the platform at Princes Risborough? At that point we now need a PICPR.

PICPR is an abbreviation for Person In Charge at Princes Risborough, the PICPR (pronounced ‘pick-pea-are’) is the focus for all of the Heritage Railway activity at Princes Risborough from the end of the South sidings at Risboro’ through to Thame Junction. In particular the PICPR works with the signallers at Marylebone so that ‘our’ trains can safely go into Platform 4 – and sidings if necessary; without meeting a National Network train coming the other way. The signallers at Network Rail recognise the concept of a ‘Person in Charge’ and are able to agree a ‘Method of Working’ to enable our trains to be signalled past their signals. But we are already some way into my day, so I will back track a little and start at the beginning.

In the Princes Risborough car park I join the ‘Orange Army’ and don the bright PPE. I will be going trackside at Princes Risborough and it’s important to be seen and to stand out. A blue hat for head protection is also required and it always gets tested when I go in the signalbox locking room and hit the low beam there! The next 20 minutes are spent unlocking gates and walking to the signalbox getting keys and setting up the comms. On the way over the footbridge a quick look left to check what is in the sidings. If there is a Network Rail tamper then life may get interesting later in the day. The walk to the box is also a chance to see where all the stock is positioned, how points are set and what has changed. One day I remember I was surprised by a large platform shelter that had arrived. More recently its quite probable that I will bump into other Members who are dealing with the passengers, working on site or taking works trains out and it’s a chance to catch up with their plans and hopes for the day. On Sunday shifts the Signal & Telegraph team are invariably in – I know then there will be plenty of banter and good natured humour.

The focus then shifts to contacting Marylebone Signalling Centre and getting the Method of Working or MOW set up. There is a set of procedures to work through and if all is well we have a time for starting our operations. In effect Network Rail is allowing us the use of their tracks to run our trains as we want. The only provisos are that they retain control of the two signals and that our drivers must of course obey them as they do for every other signal. The S&T department have been steadily adding more signals and point mechanisms and these **are** under the control of the PICPR and are linked to the levers on the operating floor.



Safety of People is the number one priority and the PICPR reduces the risks of accidents by 'clipping' the points which link the Chinnor line with the Chiltern main line. This means physically clamping the rails with a 'G' clamp so that trains cannot be routed by the Marylebone signallers onto 'our' line by mistake. The PICPR applies the clip and then I like to inspect the track down to Thame Junction where I can open the gate that is normally locked across the line. It is a pleasant walk if the weather is OK and takes 14 minutes each way. Depending on what train movements are happening there may be 'Stop' boards to put out. These are miniature signals that clip onto the track with red flashing light that prevent unauthorized movement of trains. By the time I have returned to the signalbox the first train is ready to depart Chinnor.

- Passing out – the last test for an experienced fireman, was to do a driving/firing turn under the watchful gaze of an inspector and answer his questions. If successful the fireman was promoted to Driver. In the 1920s and 30s it could take 20 years.

PICPR Training – by James Brannan

Last year I began wondering what being a signaller in a 126 lever framed box would be like, albeit not all levers in PRNB are operational at the time my training and writing this. However, the frame at the station end of the box is being reinstated for use so looking forward to that once all 29 levers are operational. Until last year, I never really thought about PICPR training but after passing as signaller at Chinnor, turns at that box can go for long periods of inactivity, so I welcomed the challenge of learning a new level to signalling.

Once my training began, it began to appeal more and more and believe me, it's quite some responsibility for a 22 year old! Training was a little challenging, but my mentors Chris Tandy and Richard Fillmore offered excellent advice into the role and I passed out within 7 months of training commencing and was chuffed to bits!

Needless to say, the first solo day is always the worst; it's like when you've just passed your driving test and going on the road for the first time. In short, I now feel it's nowhere near as complicated as I originally thought on that first day alone. The important thing is to know what to say to Marylebone then the rest is relatively straight forward. Now that I've had a few months to settle into the role, I forget why I was even worried in the first place! That may change again once the new 29 lever frame is in use. If you enjoy responsibility and have confidence in controlling the movement of trains I can recommend this role! Also as a keen photographer it provides an excellent position to progress that hobby when it's safe to do so. If that appeals also keep a look out for PRNB Open Days. You won't be disappointed.



Photo: James Brannan

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