

KINGSCOTE'S OLD SIGNALBOX—A MEMORY IN PICTURES

Amid the justifiable enthusiastic welcome to the new signalbox at Kingscote which, undoubtedly, will attract much attention from those with an interest in signalling for its uniqueness in the heritage sector—as well as for the fantastic standard of the execution—more than a few Bluebell signalmen will quietly mourn the passing of the old box.

It may have been a “temporary” arrangement, but it was one that nonetheless lasted for 22 years! Not only that, its unique charms from the signalman's point of view were definitely appreciated. It was warm and cosy in winter, cool and airy in summer, and a haven for those who enjoyed wildlife.

The bird-feeders hanging from the eaves at either end attracted many varieties of feathered visitors, including woodpeckers and birds of prey. There were the deer in the woods (which sometimes crossed the line, causing anxious moments when trains were about). There was no more tranquil setting to enjoy a quiet read in between the far from arduous duty of attending to signalling trains.

Yes, there were downsides too—a walk along the cess after dark could be hazardous as various creatures were wont to leave unseen scrapes in the cinder path, risking a twisted ankle for the unsuspecting. Also, the luxury of running water only arrived within recent memory. Before that it had to be fetched from the station in an authentic but rather unwieldy galvanised water carrier, and then it had to be boiled before consumption. Careful planning also was needed to schedule “personal breaks” such that no disruption to the trains was incurred through signalman absence from duty because a walk back to the station was necessary (not forgetting to take the key when working out of hours! Visitors were a rarity too—but not all signalmen considered this to be a problem!

Finally, the decommissioning of the old box has seen the demise of the only remaining mechanically worked points on main running lines controlled from signalboxes on the entirety of the Bluebell Railway, which some purists lament.

Myself and my colleagues are, of course, excited to be entrusted with the use and care of the fantastic new signalbox, which will be much commented upon in enthusiast circles I'm sure. But let's share a few photos of the 'old job' before it fades from memory. All were taken during the last days prior to decommissioning ...

By Chas Melton









