

LOCOMOTIVE L11 & EPPING SIGNAL CABIN

by Bob Yeldham – Head of Projects – Epping

Our story starts way back in 1996 with the closure of Epping signal cabin on Sunday 28 July 1996 and with the swift decision to try and preserve the cabin and lever frame as a potential Museum. By 1998, a 'caretaker' agreement was granted until a Lease could be obtained from LU Property, and this was eventually agreed in 2000.

Although the Lever Frame had been given protected status by LU Asset Disposals, this didn't stop the recovery and scrapping of the frame. As you can imagine, this was a devastating blow to the project. However, not to be beaten, we recovered the 83 lever frame from Hainault, moved in kit form and stored in Epping relay room on 21/22 May 2005. It stayed in the relay room until 2015, but we'll come to that in a while.

Signal cabins don't like being cold and with no heat from the relay room rising into the control room, the paint soon began to peel off the ceiling – some work was carried out but too little too late and time took its toll.

In the meantime, LU Asset Disposals contacted me and asked if we could save Acton Works shunting locomotive L11 from scrapping – LU didn't want it and neither did the LTM, if we couldn't take it, it would be cut up.

I visited Acton Works in late-2003 where L11 had been stored out of use for many years and after a bit of head scratching, we agreed to take it on.

Following on from a couple of site visits at Epping by the then Metronet BCV site owners, agreement was reached with BCV to 'plinth' L11 on a section of track on the London side of Epping station, but not within the area deemed the 'operational railway'. The Loughton Permanent Way team carried out a 'training exercise' and laid a track panel for the locomotive to be stabled on.

The night of 14/15 April 2004 was selected for the move, with departure expected around 21.30. Engineering Services were chosen as haulier, having vast experience of this type of work. The assistance of the Emergency Response Unit had been secured in case of difficulties moving the locomotive – it had not moved for many years and the wheels and brakes were locked solid. The event was recorded by a film crew from Mosaic Films and featured in an episode of Carlton TV's documentary series 'The Tube', broadcast in August/September 2004.

Remedial work to halt the ravishes of the time being stored in the open was carried out, which was enough until a plan was put in place for complete restoration.

In December 2006, I departed my employment with London Underground from Wood Lane Signalling Control Centre and resigned my Chairmanship of Cravens Heritage Trains – unfortunately my departure heralded a complete stop to all work being carried out on locomotive L11 and Epping Signal Cabin.

Fast forward to 2014 and with Social Media being the 'new' way to communicate, I was browsing Facebook and came across a picture of locomotive L11 – it would have looked more at home on a Barry scrap line than it did at Epping. That one picture spurred me into action, and with the help of Facebook I set up the "Locomotive L11 & Epping Signal Cabin" page and organised a couple of Open Days to try and get some interest in getting a Restoration and Preservation Project on the go.

The task ahead was enormous but over time, a small group of volunteers was established and to this day, most have remained – we've gained and lost a few but that's the nature of preservation.

The signal cabin was in a terrible state, as during the eight years between 2006 and 2014, the original 1948 electrical fittings had been taken, lead pipe stolen, original signal cabin clock stolen, boiler vandalised, water and waste pipe stolen – and the list goes on.

A plan was put in place to restore everything to as near original to as-built in 1949 and that plan has been an outstanding success and a testament to the volunteers. The whole building has been rewired to current standards and all missing items have been sourced from the internet – it looks as good as the day it opened.

Of course, we needed the main piece of kit to complete the job and that was the lever frame and illuminated diagram. Every single one of the 47 levers required was stripped down to its basic

components, restored and painted, main frame components to be used in the build were identified, cleaned and restored to as new condition. We were ready to build.

In 2015, the main frames were hoisted up through the hole in the control room floor and for the next four years the 47-lever Westinghouse N-style frame was built from scratch, mechanical and electrical locking, block bells, frame covers refurbished, new chrome back plates for the buttons, bells and switches, telephone panel refurbished (not currently connected), testing and more testing to get the routes and locking right with a simple but effective switch panel to simulate train movements, a computer simulator is currently in the planning stage.

The relay room was being used to store seats from a 1962 Tube Stock unit and a lot of them there were eventually moved to storage elsewhere, freeing up much needed space.

There is a very impressive rack of modern and original LT style 'Fish Tank' relays which are connected to the lever frame by 3.5 kilometres of cable. This will be screened off but can be viewed through a rather large sheet of clear Perspex.

The main part of the Relay Room will be a Museum of signalling, signs and a model railway, and a replica of North Acton air-worked frame is close to being started to be built.

Yet there's still a lot to be done. L11 needed help, badly!

Locomotive L11 has also been receiving the restoration treatment but being in the open we have to pick and choose the right time to do the work – have you ever tried painting a steel locomotive when the steel is at 40°C or working inside when the temperature is 40°C-plus?

It took time and I would be the first to admit that, to get L11 to where it is today as good as the day it was constructed – well, almost.

Both cab floors were rotten but (what is now) the London end wasn't worth saving and has been cut out and completely replaced with new steel. The body was full of holes, the roof leaked, and the roof vents were in a very bad way indeed. The vents were removed and taken to a blacksmith for restoration and are back where they belong and should last for many a year to come.

The Epping-end cab has been restored with a new motorman's seat in original moquette, lighting box replaced and a new one made – this has been painted in original colours. New doors have been made from the freshly-painted electrical compartment to the middle section, although not original to L11, it's a nice touch as they would have been there on the original carriage.

The middle compartment houses the two compressed air tanks, the compressors are in the electrical compartments, one each end of the locomotive and are British Thompson-Houston.

Locomotive L11 has received externally, three coats of red oxide, two white undercoat and three engineers yellow topcoat to the main body panels in that order. The roof has red oxide x 2, bitumen x 2 and red oxide x 3, also in that order.

A domestic supply of 230 AC from the Signal Cabin has been laid to a recovered location box and is then stepped down to 110V – this supplies the lighting in the locomotive.

The above is just a small sample of what has been achieved in five years by dedicated volunteers, and it was a fitting tribute to them that on 22 September 2019, we held the Official Opening Ceremony of the Epping Signal Cabin Museum – a plaque was unveiled to commemorate the occasion.

Attendees were:

Dale Smith – Head of Line Operations, Central and Waterloo & City lines.

Grahame Scruton – Mayor, and his Wife the Mayoress of Epping.

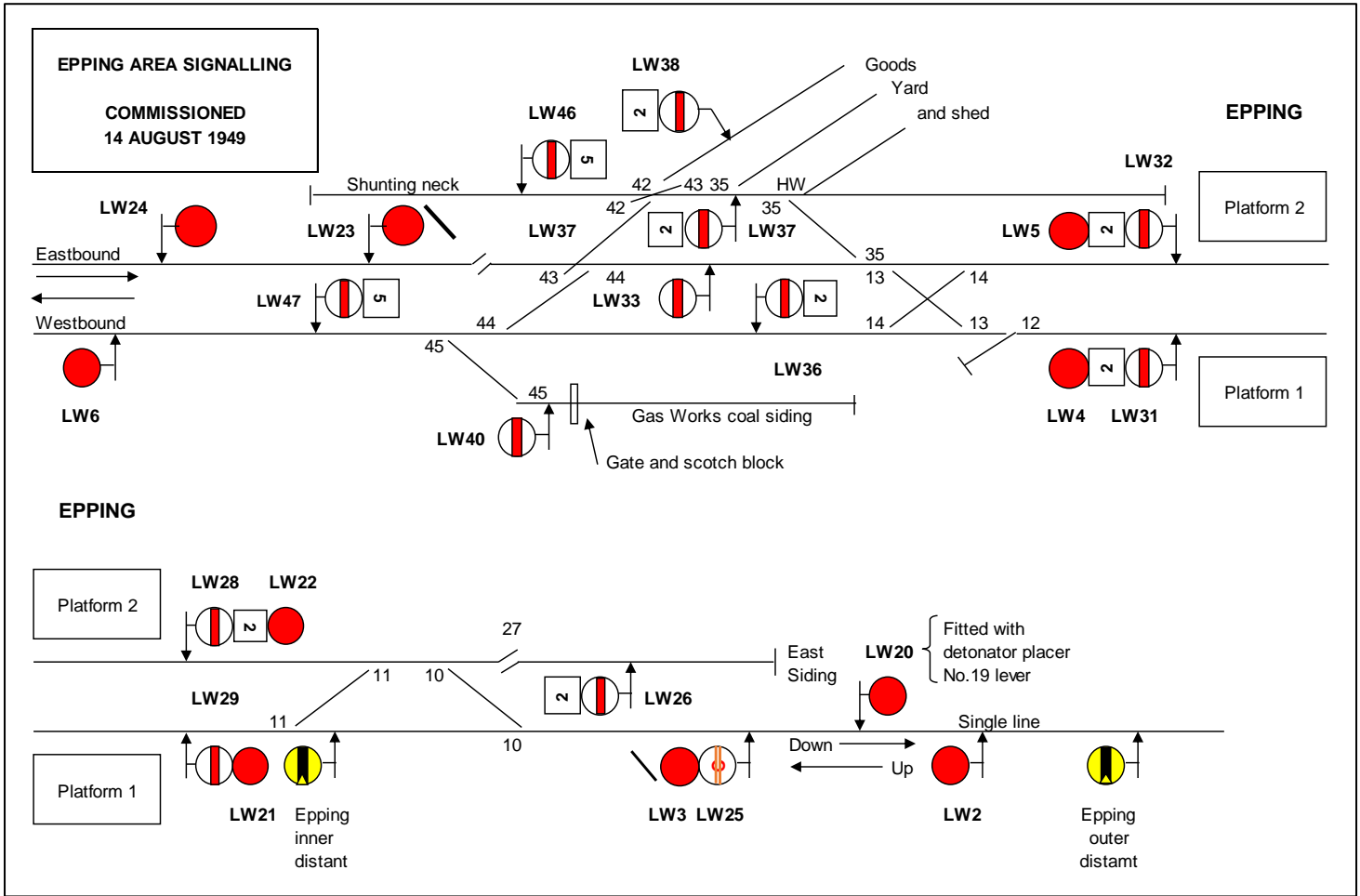
John Duffel – Royal British Legion.

Dr. Piers Connor – Railway Professional.

Jason Cross – Photographer.

Bob Gwynne – Associate Curator, National Railway Museum.

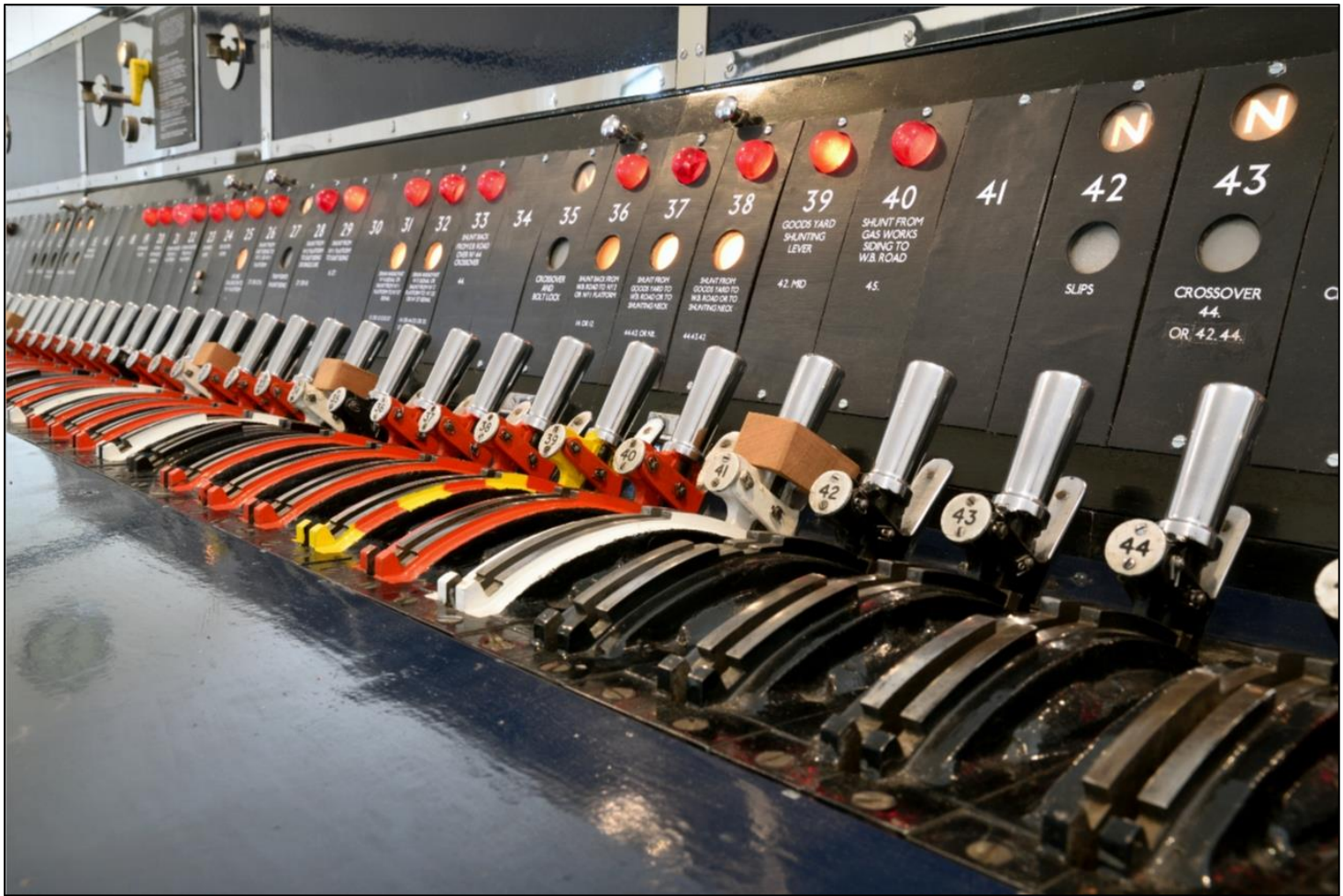
... and the volunteers from Epping Signal Cabin Museum.



Above: Diagram of signalling at Epping from the time it was opened in August 1949, showing the connections to the goods yard and sidings on the eastbound side and also the gas works siding west of the station on the westbound side

Left: The exterior of Epping signal cabin, which is located on the eastbound approach to the station. It goes without saying that the goods yard became a car park.

Photo: Jason Cross



Above: Close up of part of the lever frame in the restored signal cabin at Epping. Point levers are black, signal levers are red and spare levers are white. The red/yellow lever is to permit shunting in the goods yard. Not included (to be found in many other cabins) is a 'king' (blue) lever, to allow automatic through working, which would never apply at Epping.

Photo: Jason Cross



The opening ceremony at Epping Signal Cabin Museum on 22 September 2019. Bob Yeldham (Above, Left) make an introductory speech to invited guests and volunteers, while Nick Dent, Director of Line Services on London Underground stands by (Left) just before the unveiling of the commemorative plaque. The unveiled plaque (Above) attached to the signal cabin wall.

Photos: Epping Museum



Below: Three further views of the opening of the Epping Signal Cabin Museum.

All photos: Epping Museum



PIN BADGES

Commemorative Pin badges are sold as a Box Set at £14.50 including postage and packing.

To purchase a box set, E-Mail eppinginfo@gmx.co.uk for details on how to pay. Stocks are limited and once they're gone, there won't be anymore.

